

BITING OFF MORE THAN ONE CAN CHEW: A RECENT TREND IN THE INTERPRETATION OF JUVENAL'S 15TH SATIRE

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In his discussion of Juvenal's 15th Satire, entitled "Philosophers and Cannibals", Richard McKim (1986:58) observes that the poem "has traditionally been an object of distaste and neglect".¹ He describes the tirade against the Egyptians as "a tissue of hysterical racism, stupid morbidity, and smug self-congratulation" and concludes that "on the traditional assumption of identity between the Satire's first-person bigot and its author, it seems merely another unpleasant document in the history of bigotry". McKim endeavours to give a more palatable interpretation of the Satire's purpose, and scope for this is provided by the dichotomy which the *persona*-theory postulates between the author and his "speaker". Rejecting the assumption that Juvenal is giving expression to his own views, he suggests that Juvenal is presenting the character of his "speaker" to the reader for critical inspection and that his intention is to direct the reader's scorn "not against the Egyptians whom his speaker is attacking but against the speaker himself for his delusion that Roman society is superior" (McKim 1986:59).

The notion of a violently indignant "speaker" designed to arouse the scorn or antipathy of the audience has been accorded particular importance in the sphere of Juvenal's Satires by W.S. Anderson (1982:9-10), who sees this as the solution to the problem of Juvenal's "sincerity": by maintaining a distinction between Juvenal and the "speaker" he creates for the Satires, we can call the speaker genuinely indignant, "but we must also add that Juvenal has so portrayed him that his prejudices and exaggerations are unacceptable, and for sound poetic reasons". By way of example, Anderson points to Juvenal's universal denunciation of women in the 6th Satire and maintains that "reading or listening to such ranting, the Roman audience recognised the untruth and reinterpreted the described situations, stimulated by the Satires, more accurately". More recently Anderson (1987:211) himself has interpreted the 15th Satire along such lines: "I have tried to show that the satirical speaker in this poem acquires a definitive character in the course of his ranting speech, a character so bigoted, racist and extremist Roman (to say nothing about its inaccuracy or dishonesty with historical facts), that he alienates his audience". This represents a modification of Anderson's earlier opinion that "while he utterly condemns Egypt, he preaches a positive creed that he expects to win favorable hearing among his Roman audience, exempt from such vice..." (Anderson 1982:283). S.G. Fredericks (1976:175), influenced by the latter interpretation, maintained that Juvenal, going beyond the incident of Egyptian cannibalism, was generalising his attack against the practice: "cannibalism is by this view more important to the overall meaning of the satire than the qualifying adjective 'Egyptian'." In similar vein, D. Singleton (1983:206) has argued that "it is not the Ombites whom Juvenal wishes to condemn so much as the cruelty of men in general".

¹ McKim also draws attention to samples of the negative verdicts on the poem in A. Scobie (1973:53-63).

All the above views have the following in common: first, a reluctance to accept that, for Juvenal, the horrific deed perpetrated by the Ombites simply provided a perfect vehicle for a scathing and triumphant indictment of the Egyptians, whom he loathed so intensely; and second, a conviction that the poem was inspired by something more subtle or complex than mere xenophobia and that it was even altruistic in nature. Anderson (1987:204) suggests that, instead of assuming that the "speaker" in this poem is Juvenal, one should start from the assumption that he is an unidentified person whose character and ethical position will be revealed by what he says: "if he proves to be a bigoted and irrational racist Roman, it should be legitimate to conclude that he is not Juvenal; that he is a rather fallible character through which Juvenal obliquely conveys a more acceptable viewpoint". This, however, immediately begs several questions. Why indeed should the views expressed here not be a fair reflection of the author's own outlook?² Is it safe to assume, from a 20th century vantage point, that Juvenal's audience would have regarded his antipathy towards the Egyptians as entirely absurd?³

I would argue, therefore, that the horrific deed perpetrated by the Ombites provided Juvenal with an ideal opportunity to indulge his hatred of the Egyptians, that he set about skilfully exploiting the prejudices of his audience and that his exaggerations, manipulations and distortions - far from calling his credibility into question - made his satirical attack more forceful and entertaining. Rationality and objectivity - whatever the writer's pretensions to truthfulness may be - are not the essence of effective satire: one has only to reflect how the success of the highly entertaining indictment of the Greeks in the 3rd Satire and the savagely humorous attack on women in the 6th Satire must have depended (*pace* Anderson) to a great extent on the readiness of Juvenal's listeners or readers to forget about "fair play" and to respond positively and with smug enjoyment to his satirical license. There can be nothing more damaging to the effectiveness of satire than criticism based on *really* calm and objective reasoning - even though Juvenal himself appeals to the "rationality" of his listeners.⁴

It is also important to consider the probable expectations or "mind-set" of Juvenal's listeners or readers when they approached the 15th Satire. Those who were acquainted with his previous Satires must surely have been conscious of his consistently hostile attitude towards eastern immigrants, Egyptians in particular. Indeed, Juvenal's harping on this theme might be construed as evidence of his confidence in eliciting a positive response to his 15th Satire. The intensity of that hostility is amply demonstrated by his sneering

² K. McCabe (1986:81) makes the following cautionary comment: "The presence of this character [sc. a satirist whom the audience is expected to reject because of his objectionable and offensive ways] in Jacobean drama is sufficient evidence for Anderson to assume that the satiric speaker in Juvenal's *Satires* is of the same overly-indignant type whom the audience is expected to reject as a moral extremist. That the Jacobean writers were writing nearly fifteen hundred years after Juvenal, and in a different genre, and had no better crystal ball than we have, has not discouraged these conjectures."

³ Anderson (1987:204) himself acknowledges that Juvenal's stance as a despiser of the Egyptians was not unusual for a Roman and draws attention to Vergil, *Aen.* 8.698: *omnigenumque deum monstra et latrator Anubis*, as indicative of the Roman attitude towards Egyptian religion.

⁴ *si vacat ac placidi rationem admittitis, edam* (1,21). I am not convinced by Anderson's (1982:301) assertion that Juvenal is being ironic in his introduction and that he is "amusing himself" with an elaborate over-statement. A passionate and emotive speaker will often stress the "truth" or "logic" of his or her reasoning - and mean it! One need look no further than the realm of politics to confirm that.

description of Crispinus in the first Satire - "a blob of Nilotic scum, bred in Canopus", who "hitches a cloak of Tyrian purple onto his shoulder and flutters a ring of gold on his sweaty finger".⁵ It is significant that the notion of decadent *luxuria*, which Juvenal associates with the Egyptians in Satire 15 (*horrida sane / Aegyptos, sed luxuria, quantum ipse notavi, / barbara non cedit turba Canopo*, 15.44-46), is present at the very outset.⁶ While the individual Crispinus is a particular focus of Juvenal's animosity in the earlier Satires, his antipathy towards Egypt and the Egyptians in general is quite evident - even in an incidental manner, as seen in his sneering references to Rome's moral corruption being enough to earn the condemnation of even Canopus (6.84), Egyptian vinegar as a suitable dressing for the cannibalising of a son's head (13.84-85) and the grotesquely large breasts of Egyptian women (13.163). In his reaction against eastern cults, whose increasing popularity is a clear manifestation of the perversion of Rome's traditional values and customs, the Egyptian cult of Isis is a particular target of his mockery and hostility in the 6th Satire: in the same way as the *sacri fontis nemus et delubra*, where Numa used to meet the nymph Egeria, have been "defiled" by the invasion of Jewish "squatters",⁷ so another site steeped in Roman history and tradition has been "desecrated" by the outlandish and un-Roman temple of Isis, *antiquo quae proxime surgit ovilii*.⁸

Against this background, then, and in the light of Juvenal's derisive and hostile attitude towards eastern peoples in general (including the Greeks)⁹, the 15th Satire must have begun on a thoroughly familiar note for those acquainted with his earlier Satires; indeed, Juvenal exploits that familiarity with the opening rhetorical question: *quis nescit...qualia demens / Aegyptos portenta colat?* The very consistency of his xenophobic attitude throughout his Satires suggests that - allowing for the heightening effect of his rhetoric - Juvenal is probably expressing his *own* convictions and prejudices.¹⁰ It therefore seems to me rather implausible that his listeners or readers would have drawn a distinction between

⁵ *pars Niliacae plebis ... verna Canopi / Crispinus Tyrias umero revocante lacernas / ventilet aestivum digitis sudantibus aurum* (1.26-28). Translations of Juvenal's Satires are taken from Niall Rudd's translation (Oxford 1991).

⁶ It is Crispinus again who is used to set the tone of the 4th Satire: *monstrum nulla virtute redemptum / a vitiiis, aegrae solaque libidine fortes / deliciae, viduas tantum aspernatus adulter* (4.2-4). The paradoxical combination of barbarism and *luxuria*, which is a central element of Juvenal's attack in the 15th Satire, is again foreshadowed several times in the 4th (lines 22-25; 31-33).

⁷ *Sat.* 3.11-14.

⁸ *Sat.* 6.529. The reference is to the Campus Martius, where the *centuriae* were separated into "sheep-pens" for voting purposes. Juvenal's contempt for the deities and practices of the Isis cult is evident also in his mockery of the religious fanaticism and gullibility of women in the 6th Satire (lines 532-534; 539-541).

⁹ Well illustrated, for example, by a passage in the 3rd Satire: *quamvis quota portio faecis Achaei? / iam pridem Syrus in Tiberim defluxit Oronies / et linguam et mores et cum tibicine chordas / obliquas necnon gentilia tympana secum / vexit et ad circum iussas prostare puellas, etc.* (3.61ff).

¹⁰ Cf. Courtney (1980:22). G. Highet (1974:32-37) warns against the dangers of assuming that a distinction should always be drawn between the expressed attitudes of an author and the latter's actual convictions. More recently, Peter Green (1989:240-255) has argued vigorously against any critical theory "that completely removes Juvenal's work from the man himself and his historical context".

the motives behind his contempt for Crispinus or for the Jews¹¹, for example, in the earlier Satires and those behind his condemnation and mockery of the Egyptians in the 15th, finding his bigotry and racism in the latter deliberately "alienating" (as Anderson would have one believe). The difference is that the satirical attack here is far more focused and sustained. The result is a *tour de force* of xenophobia - less humorous than Umbricius' extended invective against the Greeks in the 3rd Satire, but equally effective in manipulating the prejudices of a Roman audience.

It is hard to conceive of a more damning indictment of any race or people than "incontrovertible proof" that its behaviour and practices place it outside the norms of humanity, and even of the animal world. This is what Juvenal endeavours to prove in respect of the Egyptian race as a whole, and the cannibalistic frenzy of the Ombites provides him with his "trump card". The Satire is a masterpiece of persuasive and manipulative propaganda. Juvenal skilfully ingratiates himself with his audience by laughing *with them* at the bizarre (but well known) objects of Egyptian idolatry: the first sentence, *quis nescit...qualia demens / Aegyptos portenta colat?*, is reminiscent of the comedian's opening gambit: "You all know the one about ..." The rapport established by the rhetorical question is consolidated by the mocking and emphatic *demens* and by the sneering Greek ending of *Aegyptos*, while the ensuing images of crocodiles, ibises bulging with snakes and monkey-idols are calculated to arouse the derision of a Roman audience. Furthermore, the travesty of "normal" religious behaviour is accentuated by the inappropriateness - in the context - of the verbs *colat*, *adorat*, *pavet* and *venerantur*. The ridiculous and divisive variety of animal fetishes is emphasised (*pars haec, illa ... illic ... hic ... illic*) and the catalogue of sacred creatures reaches the height of absurdity with the mention of *aeluros* (7), *piscem fluminis* (7) and *canem* (8) - creatures whose worship must have seemed laughable to a Roman audience.¹² The outlandishness of such religious practices is made even more remarkable by the fact that whole towns venerate dogs. The climax to the sentence (*nemo [sc. venerantur] Dianam*, 8) cleverly entrenches the perception that the Egyptians, with their multitude of theriomorphic "gods", are utterly primitive in comparison to the Romans, with their more sophisticated and "civilised" concept of divinity.

The mocking tone is sustained when attention is shifted to the dietary taboos of the Egyptians - a carefully contrived prelude to the cannibalism incident. The notion of sinfulness in violating the "sanctity" of leeks and onions must have struck the Roman audience as quite bizarre (*porrum et caepe nefas violare et frangere morsu*, 9), and one can imagine the laughter prompted by the wickedly satirical "punch-line": *o sanctas gentes, quibus haec nascuntur in hortis / numina!* (10-11). The Egyptians' abstention from normal foodstuffs, including sheep and goats (11-12), is made to appear absurd from a Roman perspective, and the catalogue of prohibitions creates the impression of extraordinary fastidiousness. That impression is suddenly shattered by the almost laconic observation:

¹¹ E.g. 3.13-16; 3.296; 6.157-160; 6.542-547; 8.160; 14.96-106. The latter passage is especially pertinent to the opening 13 lines of the 15th Satire, in which Juvenal mocks Egyptian beliefs and practices; there can be little doubt that both passages are infused with the same prejudicial outlook and satirical tone.

¹² Cf. Cicero, *Tusc.* 5.78: *Aegyptiorum morem quis ignorat, quorum imbutae mentes pravitatis erroribus quamvis carnificinam prius subierint quam ibim aut aspidem aut faelem aut canem aut crocodilem violent?* This passage is remarkably similar, both in content and in form, to the opening sentence of Juvenal's Satire and it is tempting to see it as the inspiration for the latter.

carnibus humanis vesci licet (13). The positive connotation of the word *licet*¹³, together with the general context of religious observance, has the bizarre effect of "elevating" cannibalism almost to the level of a divinely ordained rite among the Egyptians. The satirist sets out to convince his audience that the cannibalism of the Ombites was utterly without parallel and thus to provide irrefutable proof that the Egyptians in general are uniquely sub-human.¹⁴ Juvenal's opening strategy is to lay particular emphasis on the *historicity* of the incident; and he achieves this in the first instance by a humorous contrast between the fictional *unreality* of well-known mythical accounts of cannibalism and the horrific *truth* of the Egyptian atrocity. The listener or reader - who might well be *attonitus* at the wild improbability of *carnibus humanis vesci licet* - is put into the place, as it were, of the incredulous Alcinous and his companions who mockingly dismiss Ulysses' fantastic tales and accuse him of inventing stories of cannibalism (*fingentem inmanis Laestrygonas et Cyclopas*, 18). But, while scepticism might be justified in the case of Ulysses' tales, such an attitude is untenable as far as *Juvenal's* story is concerned, and the contrast with *solus, nullo sub teste* and *canebat* is pronounced: *nos miranda quidem sed nuper consule Iunco / gesta super calidae referemus moenia Copti ...* (27-28). Now that he has left his audience with little reason to doubt the *historical truth* of what he is about to describe, Juvenal explains why the incident of Egyptian cannibalism should be regarded as *uniquely* depraved and horrific; and the following lines are of crucial importance to his thesis that the Egyptians are utterly devoid of humanity:

nos volgi scelus et cunctis graviora coturnis;
nam scelus, a Pyrrha quamquam omnia syrmata volvas,
nullus apud tragicos populus facit. accipe nostro
dira quod exemplum feritas produxerit aevo.

(29-32)

"Mine's a *collective* story; the stage can boast nothing like it. You may look through all of tragedy's wardrobe from Pyrrha on, but you'll find no *people* guilty of outrage. Now hear this example of appalling barbarity, which has come to light in modern times."

From the very first line of this Satire Juvenal's mockery has been directed at the Egyptians *collectively* (*demens Aegyptos*); and now, capitalising on the skilfully created impression that their absurd religious practices are incontrovertible proof of their *dementia*, he proceeds to "justify" the statement *carnibus humanis vesci licet* (13). This *scelus* was not the deed of a deranged individual, but of an *entire people* - a point which is given particular emphasis, both by the repetition inherent in *volgi* and *populi* and by the comparison with the most horrific atrocities which tragedy can offer. Juvenal does not allude to any specific tragical episode; nor does he need to, because he has scored a "palpable hit" here: however dreadful the crimes of Medea or Atreus, for example, might have been, they were *not* committed by a whole people acting in unison (Geoffrey Dahmer's cannibalism horrified the world; but how would the world have reacted if *all* the

13 Singleton (1983:201) argues that the word means much more than merely "it is permitted", but rather "it is conceded by every law and observance".

14 McKim (1986:62-63), commenting on Juvenal's "unfair" inference that cannibalism was condoned in Egypt, states that, "if we read the poem as a dramatic monologue, we open up the possibility that Juvenal is satirizing the irrationality of his speaker's prejudiced mind rather than merely indulging a prejudice of his own". However, this is belied by the carefully contrived ruses (see below) to shift attention away from the irrationality of his assertion.

people in his neighbourhood had participated in dismembering and devouring the victims?). One can imagine that Juvenal must have felt well satisfied at producing this "trump card", before proceeding with the tale of Egyptian bestiality, which he has hitherto tantalisingly delayed. And to make sure that his audience sees this crime in its true perspective, he puts it in a universal context: the Egyptians represent the nadir of bestiality and degeneracy in an age which, in his estimate, has surpassed all others in decadence¹⁵: *accipe nostro / dira quod exemplum feritas produxerit aevo* (31-32).

Even though the Ombite and Tentyran tribes were neighbours (*finitimos*, 33), they were incapable of resolving a *vetus atque antiqua simultas* (33); their mutual hatred is so intense (*immortale odium et nunquam sanabile vulnus*, 34) that it still rages unabated (*ardet adhuc*, 35). This inability to exist according to civilised norms is pointedly emphasised later in the Satire, when Juvenal reflects on the humane qualities inherent in communal living (lines 147-148). Both tribes are equally to blame (*summus utrimque ... furor volgo*, 35-36) and their deadly hostility stems ultimately from their bizarre and divisive religious beliefs (which Juvenal has already held up to scorn in the introduction to the Satire): *quod numina vicinorum / odit uterque locus, cum solos credat habendos / esse deos quos ipse colit* (36-38).¹⁶

Juvenal's description of the actual incident of cannibalism is also clearly characterised by his antipathy towards the Egyptians in general, as opposed to the single group responsible for the atrocity. At the outset there seems to be a deliberate avoidance of focusing attention on the latter (*alterius populi*, 39; cf. *pars altera*, 73), as if to imply that either group - given the background sketched in lines 33-38 - was equally capable of such behaviour. Not only does the occasion chosen for the aggression (*tempore festo*, 38) make it all the more reprehensible, but the blame cannot be directed at merely "rabble" elements (*rapienda occasio cunctis / visa inimicorum primoribus ac ducibus*, 39-40). Their intentions are made to appear utterly spiteful (*ne / laetum hilaremque diem, ne magnae gaudia cenae / sentirent positis ad templa et compita mensis*, 40-42); but at the same time Juvenal cleverly manages to overlay any possible sympathy for the victims with a sneer at the decadent nature of that festive occasion: *pervigilique toro, quem nocte ac luce iacentem / septimus interdum sol invenit*, 43-44). This in turn provides a platform for a mocking digression, calculated to intensify the contempt of his audience for the Egyptian race: as pointed out above, the Egyptians display (in Juvenal's view) a paradoxical and particularly loathsome combination of "uncouthness" and *luxuria* of the most decadent sort. And yet, despite the fact that the Egyptian race is *horrida* (44), it displays none of the martial vigour which Juvenal admiringly attributed to *horrida ... Hispania*¹⁷, for example: the aggressors are cowardly in relying upon the inebriation of their enemies to ensure a *facilis victoria* (46), yet the description of the victims is also full of contempt (*madidis et / blaesibus atque mero titubantibus*, 47-48). Juvenal's scorn for both parties is accentuated further in the following

¹⁵ E.g. 1.81-87: *ex quo Deucalion nimbis tollentibus aequor / navigio montem ascendit sortesque poposcit ... quidquid agunt homines ... nostri farrago libelli est, / et quando uberior vitiorum copia?*; and 1.147-149: *nil erit ulterius quod nostris moribus addat / posteritas, eadem facient cupientque minores, / omne in praecipiti vitium stetit.*

¹⁶ McKim (1986:60-61) maintains that Juvenal's "speaker" is made to exemplify the same sort of intolerance towards the religions of the two Egyptian tribes as they display towards one another's. Viewed calmly and objectively, his attitude is intolerant; but, from a satirical point of view, it is more likely that Juvenal would have elicited smug agreement from his audience rather than accusations of hypocrisy and double standards.

¹⁷ *Sat.* 8.116.

lines, where the indignity of *virorum saltatus* is compounded by the attendance of a *negro*¹⁸ musician.

The opening skirmish is presented as a laughable parody of a real battle: the latter is described scornfully as a *rixa* (52), and the signal for attack does not take the form of a trumpet-blast, but of verbal insults (*iurgia*, 51). The initial clash is described in such a way as to give the impression of the wild fisticuffs of two gangs of brawling louts:

dein clamore pari concurritur, et vice teli
saevit nuda manus. paucae sine volnere malae,
vix cuiquam aut nulli toto certamine nasus
integer. aspiceres iam cuncta per agmina voltus
dimidios, alias facies et hiantia ruptis
ossa genis, plenos oculorum sanguine pugnos
(53-58)

"Raising a common cry, they charged. In the absence of weapons bare fists flew; and scarcely a jaw was left unbroken. From the press of battle few, if any, emerged with a nose that was not smashed in. Through all the ranks you could see men's faces mangled, with unrecognisable features; cheek-bones poking through gaping wounds, knuckles covered with blood from eyes."

Yet such horrific mutilations are not enough for the likes of the Ombites and the Tentyrans; this is mere child's play (*ludere se credunt ipsi tamen et puerilis / exercere acies*, 59-60), because there are no corpses to "stamp on" (*calcent* - another indication of their inhuman savagery). All this, it must be remembered, stemmed from a resolve by one group to deny the other the pleasure of a feast (lines 38-44); now both groups are swept away by a desire to kill merely for the sake of killing (*et sane quo tot rixantis milia turbae, / si vivunt omnes?* (61-62). The violence then becomes more deadly with the recourse to weapons; but these weapons - *saxa* - are intended (like *saevit nuda manus*, 54) to exemplify further the "primitiveness" of the Egyptians, and they are sneeringly described as *domestica seditioni / tela* (64-65). This contempt for the Egyptians is entrenched in an extended and disparaging comparison with the physical strength of heroes of a different age (lines 65-71); and this passage (like lines 31-32) serves to epitomise the degeneracy of the Egyptian race, with its sardonic comparison of these "nasty and puny creatures"¹⁹ and the mighty rock-hurlers of epic²⁰ - a fitting climax to the denigration of the Egyptians' prowess as warriors. Anderson (1987:208) believes, that "the satirist exposes himself to our dissatisfaction", because "the standard which the satirist uses to condemn the Egyptians, epic and normal combat, can all too easily be turned against the satirist and his

18 There is more to this than the mere implication that they could not afford a skilful Alexandrian (thus Courtney 1980:600); there are several instances where Juvenal plays on such prejudices: 2.23: *loripedem rectus derideat, Aethiopem albus*; 5.52-55 *tibi pocula cursor / Gaetulus dabit aut nigri manus ossea Mauri / et cui per mediam nolis occurrere noctem, / clivosae veheris dum per monumenta Latinae*; 6.598-601: *nam si distendere vellet / et vexare uterum pueris salientibus, esses / Aethiopsis fortasse pater, mox decolor heres / impleret tabulas numquam tibi mane videndas*; 8.32-33: *nanum cuiusdam Atlanta vocamus, / Aethiopem Cycnum*

19 *malos homines ... et pusillos* (70).

20 E.g. *Iliad* 12.380; *Aen.* 12.896.

snobbish Roman ethics", and he goes on to ask: "What people had ever committed more crimes as a nation than the Roman people through their centuries of imperialistic and ruthless warfare?". This is to introduce a degree of critical introspection and balance which is quite at variance with Juvenal's *modus operandi* and (most probably) with his expectations of his audience. Would Juvenal's listeners or readers really have dulled their enjoyment of his satirical attack on the *demens Aegyptos* by soberly reflecting, like Anderson, along the following lines: "anyone who has watched TV coverage of protests and riots in any country today would recognise that stones serve any mob as weapons; nationality has no bearing"? The attitude of the imaginary god, which concludes Juvenal's digression, captures precisely the attitude of the satirist and the reaction which he hopes to elicit from his audience: *ridet et odit* (71).

As announced at the beginning of the narrative, Juvenal's tale is one of *feritas* (32), and the description of the actual act of cannibalism succeeds brilliantly in convicting the Egyptians of inhuman brutality. Most striking is the rapidity with which the horrific deed is performed:

labitur hic quidam nimia formidine cursum
praecipitans capiturque. ast illum in plurima sectum
frusta et particulas, ut multis mortuus unus
sufficeret, totum corrosis ossibus edit
victrix turba....

(77-81)

"One, as he ran in mindless panic, happened to trip,
and was seized. He was promptly chopped into countless bits
and pieces,
so that a single corpse might furnish numerous helpings.
After that, the victorious mob devoured the lot,
and picked his bones."

The unfortunate victim is dismembered and devoured on the spur of the moment - an unmistakably bestial form of behaviour, which is succinctly defined later in lines 130-131: *in quorum mente pares sunt / et similes ira atque fames*. The very spontaneity of this act of cannibalism is, of course, intended to be contrasted with the agonising soul-searching which preceded the pitiful experience of the Vascones (93ff). The peculiar inhumanity of the Egyptians' deed is that it was a *collective* act - a point given particular emphasis in the introduction (lines 29-31) - and this feature dominates the description of the devouring of the victim: the latter is chopped up *in plurima* for the benefit of the many (*ut multis mortuus unus / sufficeret*); he is eaten by the whole crowd (*turba*). Nor is this to be thought of as some communal feast in the human domain, with a semblance of ceremony. The Egyptians' remoteness from the norms of civilised behaviour is shown, furthermore, by the fact that the mob dispensed with cooking vessels and even spits and was *contenta cadavere crudo* (83) in its animalistic urge to sate its hunger instantly (how Juvenal must have savoured the appropriately harsh alliteration of this phrase!); and the sardonically humorous address to the "father figure" of human civilisation (*hic gaudere libet quod non violaverit ignem, / quem summa caeli raptum de parte, Prometheu, / donasti terris*, 84-86) cleverly reinforces the perception of the gulf which separates the Egyptians from the rest of humanity - for it was his gift of fire which brought about the fundamental distinction between the beasts' devouring of their meat raw and the civilised humans' habit of cooking it.

Singleton (1983:204) has remarked on the restraint with which Juvenal proceeds to describe the actual devouring of the victim: "The moment of death is not described at all, we do not hear the victim's pleas for mercy or his shrieks of pain ... Juvenal does not permit the victim to exist as human being. For us, as for the Ombites, he appears merely as a source of meat." The focus, indeed, is not on the suffering of the victim but on the horror of an atrocity committed by a whole *populus*. It is the *collective* guilt of the latter which is the salient feature of the description of the behaviour of the mob - and that guilt is made all the more unforgivable by the sensuous delight which every single one of them took in that ghastly feast:

sed qui mordere cadaver
sustinuit nil umquam hac carne libentius edit;
nam scelere in tanto ne quaeras et dubites an
prima voluptatem gula senserit, ultimus ante
qui stetit, absumpto iam toto corpore ductis
per terram digitis aliquid de sanguine gustat

(87-92)

"But, to the man who chewed the corpse,
that was the most delicious meat he had ever tasted.
Nor, in this horrid act, would I leave you wondering
whether
it was only the leader's gullet that experienced pleasure. The man
who had stood on the edge of the scrimmage, when nothing was left of
the carcass,
scratched the ground with his nails to obtain a lick of the gore."

Juvenal now proceeds to demonstrate that the utter bestiality of the Egyptian mob, which culminates in this lurid and nauseating image, is without parallel amongst human beings. He confidently shows his audience that it will simply not do to point to other historical instances of cannibalism in order to exonerate the Egyptians: the circumstances which drove the Vascones, for example, to resort to *alimentis talibus*²¹ were quite different (*res diversa*, 94). They did so merely to survive (*producere animas*, 94) in the face of overwhelming hardships; and while the Egyptians were motivated by inexcusable *dira feritas* (32), the Vascones in their misery were forced to succumb to *dira egestas* (96). Juvenal lays particular stress on the fact that, for the unfortunate Vascones, cannibalism was an agonising last resort (in contrast to the Egyptians' instantaneous dismemberment and lip-smacking devouring of their victim), that their plight excited pity rather than revulsion and that even in the eyes of the gods their action could be exonerated (unlike the Egyptians' atrocity, whose heinousness is reflected in the fact that the divine element of fire, *summa caeli raptum de parte* (85), was not tainted by it.

It seems to me highly unlikely that Juvenal intended his audience to conclude that the Egyptian atrocity was not so heinous after all, by reflecting on the fact that "the real cause of the hopeless plight was the Roman army that ringed the cities and demanded unconditional surrender" and that "this is what organised warfare can achieve, indeed, was

²¹ The relatively bland and euphemistic connotation of this phrase contrasts markedly with the Egyptians' devouring of *cadavere crudo* (83; *cadaver* repeated at 87) and *corpore* (91) - a calculating choice of vocabulary on Juvenal's part.

able to achieve two hundred years ago under Roman genius: it could force a poor people to mass cannibalism" (Anderson 1987:208-209). Quite simply, Juvenal is preoccupied with the relative culpability of the Egyptians and the Vascones in resorting to cannibalism, and it is hard to believe that the audience's attention was meant to be "side-tracked" from this central issue into a probing analysis of the ultimate cause of the Vascones' plight. This might well have been of interest to the analytically-minded observer, but for the satirist and his audience it would probably have been irrelevant.

Juvenal's intention to isolate the Egyptians from the rest of humanity in the mind of his audience is given further impetus, when he places the heinousness of the Egyptian atrocity in a "universal" ethical context. Whereas the Vascones could not be expected in *those times* to be guided by the tenets of Stoic philosophy, *now* the civilising influence of Graeco-Roman culture is the common heritage of the whole world - and Juvenal does not need to remind his audience of the shocking fact that the *dira feritas* of the Egyptians is a *contemporary* phenomenon (*nuper consule Iunco, 27; nostro ... aevo, 31-32*).

McKim (1986:65), citing evidence that the Stoics did in fact condone cannibalism, seizes upon the apparent irony in the reference to Stoic principles in this context and argues that "we are bound to suppose not, as the commentators do, that Juvenal is mistaken, but that he presents his speaker as mistaken". If the Stoics' condoning of cannibalism also included the frenzied dismemberment of one's victims (which it surely did not) and if indeed we are to assume that Juvenal and his audience were keenly aware of the fact that the Stoics numbered cannibalism among "things indifferent" (which is debatable²²), then indeed there would be a nice irony here; but Juvenal is not impressing upon his audience the horrors of cannibalism *per se*²³, so much as the unspeakable and spontaneous barbarity of the Egyptians. The Vascones are redeemed not only because it was *dira egestas* which drove them to commit cannibalism, but also because - unlike the Egyptians - they were characterised by *nobilitas*, *virtus* and *fides* (lines 113-114); and to "cap" his argument he alludes to another alleged incident of cannibalism forced upon the equally admirable inhabitants of Zacynthus (i.e. Saguntum).²⁴

22 Valerius Maximus, commenting on the cannibalism at Numantia, seems unaware of such an ethical "loophole": *nulla est in his necessitatis excusatio; nam quibus mori licuit, sic vivere necesse non fuit* (7.6 ext. 2). Courtney's (1980:604) suggestion that, when Juvenal refers to *Zenonis praecepta*, he is likewise thinking of the Stoic willingness to commend suicide, is a far more plausible deduction. It seems likely that such an interpretation prompted the probable interpolation in lines 107-108. The likelihood that Juvenal was actually ignorant of the Stoic attitude towards cannibalism, rather than indulging in deliberate and subtle irony, is strengthened by his own admission at 13.121-123:

*accipe quae contra valeat solacia ferre
et qui nec Cynicos nec Stoica dogmata legit
a Cynicis tunica distantia, non Epicurum
suspicit exigui laetum plantaribus horti.*

23 It is significant that his own attitude towards the townsfolk who were driven to cannibalism in order to *survive* (lines 93-106) is actually sympathetic and understanding, although he is obviously not advocating such conduct.

24 Courtney (1980:606) notes that there is no historical record of cannibalism during the siege of Saguntum and that it was probably "a rhetorical invention". The most likely source for Juvenal's use of the story is Petronius (*Sat.* 141). Once again we see the effective use, in a satirical context, of a statement which would probably not stand up to close scrutiny in a less licentious genre.

Throughout this passage, of course, there has been the obvious implication that the *Egyptians'* action cannot be condoned in any way and that they represent the antithesis of the "noble" Vascones and Saguntines.²⁵ Now Juvenal corroborates the feelings of his audience with a series of rhetorical questions:

tale quid excusat Maeotide saevior ara
Aegyptos?²⁶ quippe illa nefandi Taurica sacri
inventrix homines, ut iam quae carmina tradunt
digna fide credas, tantum immolat; ulterius nil
aut gravius cultro timet hostia.

(115-123)

"But what excuse does Egypt have for being more savage than Crimea's altar? (For the Tauric founder of that ghastly rite, if one accepts the poets' tradition as worthy of credence, contents herself with human sacrifice. Therefore the victim has nothing more hideous to fear beyond the knife.)"

McKim (1986:60) detects a deliberate irony in the allusion here to Diana (in her Greek guise as Tauric Artemis) as a goddess to whom human sacrifices are made, since Juvenal earlier presented her as being worthier of worship than the strange deities of the Egyptians (lines 7-8). In his opinion the "speaker" is oblivious to the fact that his previous elevation of Diana is undermined by the second reference, and concludes that "Juvenal is playing his speaker's prejudices for laughs and plants the irony there for us to seize on". Yet *how* obvious, it must be asked again, would such an irony have been to Juvenal's audience? Are we to assume that his listeners or readers would have instantly associated *illa Taurica inventrix* with the Roman Diana? If anything, it would appear that Juvenal is doing his best to *divert* attention from such an association by means of a highly allusive reference.²⁷ It seems far more likely that the comparison was chosen, not for any subtly ironic purpose, but because it provided an example of a strange and barbaric *religious* rite involving human sacrifice, which was nonetheless less horrifying than the cannibalism "sanctioned" (*carnibus humanis vesci licet*, 13) by Egyptian religion. Furthermore, if Juvenal really is planting an irony there "for us to seize on", why is this followed by a passage whose purpose is quite clearly to establish beyond doubt the unparalleled barbarity and loathsomeness of the Egyptians? Are we to imagine that Juvenal intends his audience to dwell upon this "irony" at the expense of its enjoyment of the vigorous and sustained attack in the ensuing lines?:

²⁵ Fredericks (1976:185) expresses the contrast succinctly: "the barbarians of Spain can be pardoned since they *passively endured* to commit a monstrous act when they were forced to cannibalism, while the Egyptians *actively committed* a monstrous crime" (my italics).

²⁶ Here I follow the punctuation suggested by Courtney (1980:605) and adopted by Rudd in his translation.

²⁷ The Taurians of the Crimea made human sacrifices to a goddess called Opis, whom the Greeks identified with Artemis.

quis modo casus
inpulit hos? quae tanta fames infestaque vallo
arma coegerunt tam detestabile monstrum
audere? anne aliam terra Memphitide sicca
invidiam facerent nolenti surgere Nilo?
qua nec terribiles Cimbri nec Brittones umquam
Sauromataeque truces aut inmanes Agathyrsi,
hac saevit rabie inbelle et inutile volgus
parvula fictilibus solitum dare vela phaselis
et brevibus pictae remis incumbere testae.
nec poenam sceleri invenies nec digna parabis
supplicia his populis, in quorum mente pares sunt
et similes ira atque fames.

(119-131)

"What affliction

recently goaded them? What ravenous hunger, what army
besieging their city walls impelled them to hazard an outrage
so revolting? What more could they do, if the land of
Memphis

were parched with drought, to shame the lazy Nile into rising?
Neither the dreaded Cimbrian hordes, nor the barbarous Britons,
nor the grim Sarmatians, nor yet the wild Agathyrsi raged
with the utter frenzy displayed by that soft and worthless rabble
who are used to setting their tiny sails on earthenware vessels,
and to bending over their miniature oars in painted potsherds.
You will never match such a crime with punishment, or devise retribution
to suit such communities as these; for in their way of thinking
hunger and anger are one and the same."

Like the god who was earlier envisaged as displaying a mixture of laughter and loathing towards puny mortals like the Egyptians (*ridet et odit*, 71), Juvenal's audience is meant to react both with horror at the degree of their savagery and with contemptuous mockery of their essential unmanliness and worthlessness.²⁸ Once again the Egyptians are shown to be uniquely inhuman and despicable. The dispassionate and objective reader might question Juvenal's assertion that the Cimbrians, Britons and other outlandish barbarians were less savage than the Egyptians, but Juvenal is skilfully manipulating the prejudices of his audience - in much the same way as a witness of Nazi atrocities in the concentration camps could exploit that horrible truth to deny the German race as a whole any vestige of humanity. Propaganda is effective not only through its focus on the negative, but also through its omission of contradictory or mitigating evidence. Juvenal allows no mitigating factors or redeeming qualities in the Egyptians' favour, and thus more easily leads his

²⁸ McKim (1986:66) maintains that "non-belligerence should by rights be to the cannibal's *credit*, modifying their barbarism". In similar vein, Anderson (1987:210) argues that "war is a regular conditioner of cannibalism in the various privations, especially long sieges, that occur. To be unwarlike, then is to cause fewer atrocities such as those among the Basques and to inflict fewer casualties". This, however, is to ignore the fact that Juvenal's intention is quite clearly to denigrate the Egyptians as being essentially decadent, unheroic and "bestial" in their aggression (cf. especially lines 44-71) - a far cry from any notions of laudable pacificism and *virtus*.

audience to conclude that the human concepts of punishment and retribution are rendered ineffectual by an evil of this magnitude.²⁹

The fundamentally *inhuman* and bestial nature of the Egyptians is starkly captured in the phrase *in quorum mente pares sunt/ et similes ira atque fames* (130-131), descriptive of minds controlled by the most basically instinctive impulses. Juvenal proceeds immediately to capitalize on the resultant sense of alienation from the Egyptian race by juxtaposing a contrasting and highly emotive discourse on the nature of true humanity. Above all, it is the quality of compassion which distinguishes human beings from brute beasts (*separat hoc nos/ a grege mutorum*, 142-143). It would probably be wrong to interpret Juvenal's digression on the true nature of humanity as primarily "a positive plea for pity and fellow-feeling which represent the best human emotion" (Fredericks 1976:185-186). Its motive is essentially negative: to reinforce the perception of the gulf which separates the Egyptian race from the rest of humanity. When Juvenal reflects on the fundamental difference between man and beast, he does not need to remind his audience that the inability of the two Egyptian communities to co-exist in harmony (*inter finitimos vetus atque antiqua similtas,/ inmortale odium et numquam sanabile vulnus,/ ardet adhuc Ombos et Tentura*, 33-35) and the appalling barbarity of which one group was guilty subvert every characteristic of humane co-existence, which he dwells upon in lines 142-158.

Juvenal's reflection on the nature of humanity leads to a general observation on the "fall of mankind". Human beings now display less fellow-feeling and compassion than even serpents and wild beasts - another example of effective satirical licence. Yet the lack of *concordia* amongst human beings in general and their warlike aggression almost pale into insignificance in the face of what those Egyptians perpetrated. Juvenal can confront his audience with cogent "proof" that the Egyptians represent the nadir of human depravity:

aspicimus populos quorum non sufficit irae
occidisse aliquem, sed pectora, braccchia, voltum
crediderint genus esse cibi.

(169-171)

"But here is a people whose fury is not appeased by an act of simple murder, who regard trunks, and arms, and faces as a kind of food!"

With this comment Juvenal has cleverly contrived to return to - and to corroborate - his laconic observation with which he introduced his nauseating tale: *carnibus humanis vesci licet* (13); and the note of grim humour is sustained in the concluding lines:

²⁹ McKim (1986:67) sees this statement as indicative of the speaker's "lust to make them [i.e. the Egyptians] suffer" and that this therefore detracts from his extolling of the human virtue of compassion in lines 131ff. However, history has shown that human beings (and their religions) have regularly reconciled compassion for the suffering with the severe punishment of sinners. It is an all-too-human reaction, when confronted by evidence of horrific cruelty, to wonder whether *any* retribution - human or divine - can atone for such inhumanity. It is hard to believe that a 2nd century Roman audience would have confused the concept of just retribution in this instance with a "lust to make them suffer". McKim's phrase imparts a misleading connotation to Juvenal's words.

quid diceret ergo
vel quo non fugeret, si nunc haec monstra videret
Pythagoras, cunctis animalibus abstinuit qui
tamquam homine et ventri indulsit non omne legumen?
(171-174)

What, one asks, would Pythagoras say?
Would he not take flight to no matter where, on witnessing these
enormities - that man who refused all meat, as though it were human,
and denied himself even the pleasure of certain vegetable dishes?

McKim (1986:69-70) is quick to seize upon what he perceives as Juvenal's "implicit joke" here, in that he deliberately makes his speaker commit the "climactic blunder" of forgetting that at the beginning of the poem (lines 9-12) he portrayed the Egyptians themselves as selective vegetarians: "he no doubt expects us to view selective vegetarianism as equally idiotic in both cases, and this final authorial irony serves to knock the props from under the speaker's exaltation of philosophy by implying that all it did for Pythagoras was to make him eat like an Egyptian". However, this is yet another instance where one is asked to believe that an audience would have been so caught up in its detection of an apparently glaring inconsistency on the author's part, that the intended impact of Juvenal's "parting shot" would have been nullified. To an audience - already made smugly aware, from line 106 onwards, of the gulf which separated Graeco-Roman civilization from Egyptian barbarity - the dietary fastidiousness of Pythagoras served one immediate purpose: to emphasize his own civilized abhorrence of a practice which the Egyptians regarded as something normal and even divinely sanctioned (*carnibus humanis vesci licet*, 13). Furthermore, it is hardly likely that Juvenal's audience would have equated the laughable Egyptian belief in the "sanctity" of a range of vegetables (note especially the satirical force of lines 10-11: *o sanctas gentes, quibus haec nascuntur in hortis / numina!*) with Pythagoras' abstention from beans: in the Egyptians' case their vegetarian taboos are made quite absurd and meaningless by their indulgence in cannibalism; in Pythagoras' case his abomination of cannibalism is accentuated by his abstention from a particular vegetable type, because of its specifically *human* associations.³⁰

The conclusion to this satire, far from undercutting its satirical effect by diverting the audience's attention to the speaker's "climactic blunder", provides a good illustration of the opportunism of Juvenal's satirical method: he relies on the force of his humour or argument to capitalize on its *immediate* context and the spontaneous audience response, and

³⁰ Rudd's phrase "certain vegetable dishes" loses sight of the fact that Juvenal refers quite specifically to *beans*, with their special significance in a Pythagorean context. Whatever the actual reason for this dietary taboo (see J. Ferguson 1979:322) for a summary of the various theories), it seems very likely that Juvenal is playing on a popular notion that the eating of beans had "cannibalistic" overtones for Pythagoreans (e.g. their association with souls of the dead). Such an interpretation is corroborated by the context, where Juvenal quite clearly attributes Pythagoras' abstention from animal flesh to the conviction that human souls could exist in animal bodies.

not to be weakened by the dulling overlay of contemplative analysis.³¹ To the objective, thoughtful and unprejudiced listener, Juvenal might indeed have stood accused of bigotry and illogicality; but, for an audience eager for a laugh and ready to indulge its own racial, cultural and religious prejudices, he must have been the source of extraordinarily witty and entertaining satire. It is therefore hard to believe that Juvenal's real purpose in writing this satire was to present himself (or his "speaker", as others would have it), as more deserving of ridicule and contempt than the despicable Egyptians, whom he satirizes so skilfully and vigorously. To attribute a subtly self-critical motive to this Roman diatribe against the Egyptians might well satisfy modern notions of "political correctness", but it also introduces a dimension to which Juvenal and his audience would have reacted - I suspect - with *risus* (if not *odium*)!

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³¹ Courtney (1980:612) comments: "Juvenal's declamation is not concerned to arrive at a consistent moral evaluation of abstinence from meat and vegetables, but only with its application for the immediate effect of whipping up the reader's feelings in each context, even two opposite applications within the same satire." On Juvenal's habit of keeping in focus just the immediate effect he sought to produce see also the introduction to Courtney's *Commentary* (34-35) and the remarks of L. Friedlander (1969:40).