

SYMPHOSIUS, A NORTH AFRICAN MARTIAL?

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The late-Latin compendium known as the *Latin anthology* includes a carefully composed verse collection of a hundred riddles. It was probably called the *Aenigmata* and written by a man called Symphosius, who might have come from North Africa; but very little is known for certain. The collection was, however, to have a profound influence on later riddle-writing and deserves attention for this reason alone. It is clear, however, that Symphosius was greatly influenced by the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta* of Martial, although this further reason has not been widely appreciated. This article sets Symphosius' *Aenigmata* in its Martialian context before exploring its debts both in terms of form and arrangement and, by comparing individual riddles, explaining how Symphosius has varied, developed and extended his model. It concludes that he succeeded admirably in his self-appointed task of challenging comparison with his predecessor, and that he was a 'Martial' in his own right.

Keywords: Symphosius; Martial; Latin epigram; *Latin anthology*; riddles; Saturnalia; *cena*; lotteries; gifts.

*Symphosius and the Aenigmata*¹

The compilation known to modern scholarship as the *Latin anthology* contains a body of short poems and epigrams assembled in North Africa in late antiquity. Included in this work is the most complete collection of riddles to survive from the ancient world. This collection is made up of a hundred riddles preceded by an introductory poem of seventeen lines — although the first two of these are spurious. Each riddle comprises three hexameters and is preceded by a *lemma*, which gives the riddle's answer. The riddles are very carefully grouped according to subject matter and each is linked to the riddles before and after it, for instance by content, shared or similar vocabulary, literary allusion, or word-play and etymologizing. It would seem from the introductory poem that these riddles were composed *extempore* at a dinner to celebrate the Roman Saturnalia. As will be

¹ This article takes as its starting point and expands on Leary 2019:518; but it also draws heavily on Leary 1996, Leary 2001 and Leary 2014, where fuller arguments for many of its points can be found. See too Leary 2015. Some of the article draws also on a paper presented at the University of Uppsala in 2015. My belated thanks for the wonderful hospitality shown to me then.

explained later, this work was to have a significant influence on successive riddle-collections; yet very little is known about it: its title and date have been debated and almost nothing is known about its author.

The dates assigned to the collection have ranged from the second to the sixth centuries AD, although most would now place the work in the late fourth or early fifth centuries. It seems probable, too, that the work was called *The Aenigmata*, and that the author's name was Symposius — although the aspirated form 'Symphosius' is generally favoured in the English-speaking world. It is also clear that this author (almost certainly male) was talented and extremely well-educated. Indeed, he may have been a teacher or student in one of the rhetorical schools. He was possibly from North Africa himself (the name 'Symphosius' survives in an inscription from Dougga),² and although his work influenced later, Christian writers, there is nothing in the collection to suggest that he was not himself a pagan.³

Linguistic factors and use of vocabulary are of some help in dating the *Aenigmata*, although Symphosius' Latinity is very classical. Of more use is the influence of earlier writers or works on him, and his influence in turn on those who came later. Principal amongst later works is the *Historia Apollonii regis Tyri*, which quotes ten of the *Aenigmata*.⁴ Since this work has been dated, albeit tentatively, to AD 500,⁵ the *Aenigmata* must have been written before that. It seems likely too, that the *Aenigmata* owe a good deal to Ausonius, and in particular the *Griphus ternarii numeri*, a work which originated in AD 368.⁶ Thus workable *termini post* and *ante quem* can be identified. As for the influence of other writers on Symphosius, this is comparatively minor, being confined mostly to Horace and Virgil — with the exception of Martial, and in particular the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta*: as will become apparent, although until recently this has not been widely remarked or fully appreciated,⁷ they were of signal importance in shaping Symphosius' work.

² *CIL VIII.27333*. For the thriving cultural and literary life of Vandal North Africa, where the main substance of the *Latin anthology* was compiled, see Kay 2006:7–13.

³ Pace Bergamin 2005 — see Leary 2014:4 and n. 36.

⁴ In order of appearance, they are: *Aenig.* 12, 2, 13, 89, 61, 63, 59, 69, 77, 78.

⁵ Kortekaas 1984:101; cf. Panayotakis 2012:1.

⁶ Lowe 2013:338.

⁷ A start was made by Kelling 2010:101–105. See now, in addition, the works of Leary cited in the bibliography.

Martial, the Xenia and the Apophoreta

The *Xenia* and *Apophoreta* are numbered Books 13 and 14 in modern texts, but these numbers were assigned to them by editors. The works were in fact written before Martial started his numbered sequence with Book 1. They both begin with introductory poems which, as later with the *Aenigmata*, identify the occasion of their composition as the Saturnalia. These prefatory poems are followed by couplets, mostly elegiacs, each preceded by a *lemma* identifying the couplet's subject. The poems are very carefully and tightly arranged: the *Xenia* contains couplets dealing with various Roman foodstuffs grouped according to the courses of the Roman *cena*. Roman dinner-guests would have taken uneaten food away with them after the meal, these take-aways often being distributed by means of some kind of lottery: compare the punning slips or *pittacia* in the *cena Trimalchionis* (Petron. *Sat.* 56.7) or the lotteries described in Suetonius (*Aug.* 75). Martial's choice of couplets for his epigrams recalls, through their brevity, the lottery tickets that were used. As time went by, guests were also given other things as presents to take away. Initially, these things would have been associated with the dinner (cutlery, furniture, and so on), but later a wider range of gifts was distributed. The *Apophoreta* deals with these. Again, the *Apophoreta* is tightly organized, the gifts it describes being alternated according to their values — with a cheap equivalent following its expensive partner (Mart. 14.1.5) and, again, they would have been distributed by means of a lottery.

Composing works of this nature presents the poet with a significant technical challenge. Essentially they comprise lists, and lists are intrinsically boring. Martial had therefore to work at maintaining his reader's interest and to capture his admiration. Although he regularly protests as to the indifferent quality of the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta* and he describes things which could indeed be given as presents, he did not actually intend his lists to be a source of ideas for unimaginative donors. Instead, he considered them serious literary undertakings and worthy to be appreciated as such.

One of the ways in which Martial sought to secure attention was by taking up and developing or re-working the well-established tradition of catalogue poetry, perhaps the most famous example of which is the epic catalogue of ships in the *Iliad* (2.494–795). This tradition had already been exploited in poets like Ovid in a display of virtuosity (note, *e.g.*, *Met.* 3.206 *ff.*, a passage which lists the names of Actaeon's dogs) and had a clearly discernible influence on the composition of Saturnalian verse in that many poems survive which list the gifts given at the festival. Usually they make some joke or humorous comment founded on the traditional freedoms from social norms and the licence sanctioned by the festival, and the social responsibilities and reciprocity normally demanded by the Roman

conventions of *amicitia*. A good example of this is Statius *Silvae* 4.9, in which Statius teases the senatorial Gripus about the value of a gift he had given him. This close attention to material value is glanced at by the principles governing the ordering of the *Apophoreta*, but it was specifically with *lists* of gifts that Martial was chiefly concerned when writing both it and the *Xenia*. Instead of producing a single poem containing a catalogue, however, in composing each book he was putting together a catalogue comprising a collection of many different poems.

In re-casting the Saturnalian catalogue, Martial was not only inviting his readers to admire his literary originality, but, like Ovid in listing the names of dogs, also to assess his skill in presenting, arranging and dealing with an assemblage including some poetically unpromising material (such as whips, sausages, and mattress-stuffing: Mart. 14.55, 72, 159–160). For instance, although not riddles in themselves, some of Martial's couplets are riddling in nature. It has been remarked in the light of this that it is surprising that the *lemma* preceding each couplet gives the 'answer': why provide the answer before posing the riddle?⁸ Several explanations have been attempted, but one that seems likely is this: by announcing through the *lemma* a poetically unpromising object or item, Martial engages the curiosity of his readers, who want to see what he can make of a difficult subject. In addition, while, given the format of his collections, Martial could not introduce interest by varying poem length and he could not vary metre much, he strove to appeal to the reader of each poem via a range of means and devices such as word-play and etymologizing, humour, personification, and literary allusion.

The *Xenia*, at 127 epigrams, is much shorter than the *Apophoreta* (221). It is possible that, aware that he was attempting something new, Martial published the *Xenia* (in December of 83 or 84) as a sort of 'trial run' and having seen its success, went on to publish the *Apophoreta* a year later (in 84 or 85). Having brought off two difficult compositions of this nature, however, it is likely that he was unwilling to attempt a third, and therefore moved on to develop the type of epigrammatic composition for which he is now most famous.

Martial and Symphosius

The difficulty of successfully composing works like the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta* meant that they were not imitated — until, that is, the *Aenigmata*. Symphosius knew that his work would be compared, for better or worse, with that of Martial, and the task he set himself in 'taking him on' was therefore a considerable one.

⁸ It is clear from Mart. 13.3.7–8 that the *lemmata* are authorial rather than, as so often with ancient epigram, the additions of a later editor.

As has now become clear, there are obvious formal similarities between the *Aenigmata* and Martial's poems, for instance the format and the careful arrangement of the material in the collection. There is also the Saturnalian context of all three works. More important than these, however, are the differences, since they allow us to assess Symphosius' originality. Again, some are formal, like the length and metre of each poem, and the length of the collection. However, there is also a re-casting of subject matter: while Martial can focus on the objects or items given as gifts, Symphosius builds on the long-established tradition of asking riddles as part of dinner-table entertainment and, although several of the riddles deal with things like smoke (*Aenig.* 7) and rain (*Aenig.* 9), that is, things which could not be given as presents, he expands on the means of gift-distribution.

Today, riddles are generally regarded with an element of tolerant derision. However, their status in antiquity and, indeed, for long afterwards, was a good deal higher: as is clearly demonstrated by the story of Oedipus and the sphinx, the ability to solve them was an indication of intelligence.⁹ Symphosius' riddles are of a high intellectual order. To illustrate his use of such riddles in expanding on and developing the customary use of lotteries to distribute gifts at dinner, one can refer to Gellius, *NA* 18.2.2–5. This describes the dinner-time entertainment of some young fellow-students of rhetoric who have assembled to celebrate the Saturnalia together and who amuse themselves by asking one another not riddles but *quaestiones*, that is, the erudite and sophisticated posers which characterized the education and intellectual life of the day. Those who answer the *quaestiones* successfully are rewarded with a book of Greek or Latin writers and a laurel wreath. These prizes were such as befitted the cerebral nature of the company, but the principles behind their distribution are similar to those governing the distribution of Martial's *apophoreta* — and those in Petronius.

Because Symphosius was writing real riddles, as opposed merely to including some material of a 'riddling' nature, the fact that each riddle is preceded by a *lemma* giving the answer is a more pressing difficulty than it is in Martial. However, while the *Aenigmata* were allegedly composed impromptu, their careful ordering indicates that much time was spent polishing them before they were published. They were also literary undertakings. And, like Martial, Symphosius used his *lemmata* to announce difficult or unpoetic subject-matter so that his readers could judge his success in dealing with it. One can, perhaps, add that by engaging and then resolving his readers' curiosity by means of the *lemmata*, Symphosius was also recalling and reflecting the long tradition of dinner-time dialogues (one thinks here of Macrobius' *Saturnalia*.)

⁹ Cf. Soph. *OT* 396 ff.: Oedipus boasts of solving the riddle of the Sphinx through wit rather than prophetic skill.

Not only does Symphosius show his originality, independence and powers of innovation by developing the ‘lottery’ and ‘gift-distribution’ theme in Martial, but, while he introduces a good many subjects or items which are not in Martial, he also includes several that are: nine in the *Xenia* and twenty-two in the *Apophoreta*.¹⁰ Since his readers would have recognized these at once, in doing so he was deliberately inviting comparison with his predecessor and an assessment of his skill, creativity and poetic craftsmanship in adapting or varying his models. In what follows, I shall explore some of his treatment and re-working of Martial’s material. While it is not possible, within the confines of this article, to examine every similarity and difference, readers may like to go on and explore further for themselves.

*Symphosius’ echoes and re-workings of specific poems in the Xenia and Apophoreta*¹¹

It is appropriate that Symphosius should begin a literary composition like the *Aenigmata* by reference to a writing-implement, a stylus:

Aenig. 1 graphium

*de summo planus sed non ego planus in imo
versor utrimque manu. diverso munere fungor:
altera pars revocat quicquid pars altera fecit.*

¹⁰ The *Aenigmata* with the same or similar *lemmata* to those in the *Xenia* are: 26 *grus*; 35 *capra*; 42 *beta*; 45 *rosa*; 47 *tus*; 52 *farina*; 83 *vinum in acetum conversum*; 85 *perna*; cf. Mart. 13.75 *grues*; 98(99) *caprea*; 13 *betae*; 127 *coronae roseae*; 4 *tus*; 8 *far*; 122 *acetum*; 54 *perna*. Those with the same or similar *lemmata* to those in the *Apophoreta* are: 1 *graphium*; 3 *anulus cum gemma*; 18 *coclea*; 23 *musca*; 27 *cornix*; 36 *porcus*; 37 *mula*; 50 *faenum*; 58 *capillus*; 59 *pila*; 63 *spongia*; 66 *flagellum*; 67 *lanterna*; 79 *scopa*; 80 *tintinnabulum*; 81 *lagna*; 88 *strigilis aenea*; 90 *tessera*; cf. Mart. 14. 21 *graphiarium*; 122 *anuli*; 121 *coclearia*; 67 *muscarium pavoninum* and 68(71) *muscarium bubulum*; 74 *corvus*; 71(70) *porcus*; 197 *mulae pumilae*; 162 *faenum*; 26 *crines*; 45 *pila paganica* and 46 *pila trigonalis*; 144 *spongea*; 55 *flagellum* and 79 *flagra*; 61 *lanterna cornea* and 62 *lanterna de vesica*; 82 *scopae*; 163 *tintinnabulum*; 116 *lagona nivaria*, 117 *idem*, 118 *idem* (and cf. 119 *matella ficitilis*); 51 *strigiles*; 15 *tesserae*.

¹¹ I have generally adopted the following texts for Martial and Symphosius: Shackleton Bailey 1982 and 1990. See, however, Leary 2014 for *Aenig.* 80.3. All translations are taken, with one orthographical alteration, from Leary’s editions (1996, 2001, 2014).

Aenig. 1 A stylus

Flat as to the top but not flat at the bottom, I'm turned
either way in the hand. I discharge a conflicting duty:
one end undoes whatever the other has done.

Compare the way the *Apophoreta* begins (Mart. 14.3–11) with a section dealing with writing equipment. However, instead of inviting a direct comparison with this section, Symphosius invites an indirect comparison with the *graphiarium* or stylus case of Mart. 14.21, a couplet which refers to the stylus in its first line: *suo ... ferro*:

Mart. 14.21 *graphiarium*

*haec tibi erunt armata suo graphiaria ferro:
si puero dones, non leve munus erit.*

Mart. 14.21 *A style case*

These style cases, each armed with iron, are for you. If
you give them to your slave, it will be no small gift.

It is not surprising, either, that in their literary undertakings both Martial and Symphosius should sound an early note of self-depreciation — for all that, as intimated earlier, this was a pose. Mart. 14.21 is too far from the beginning of the *Apophoreta* for it to strike this early note of self-disparagement. Instead, that occurs in the two prefatory poems (see especially Mart. 14.1.7–8). Symphosius also disparages his efforts in the preface to the *Aenigmata* (lines 9–17), but, as well as differing in *Aenig. 1* from Martial by describing the stylus rather than its case, he includes self-disparagement in this poem too: by noting that, while the sharp end of the stylus was used for writing, the spatulate end was used for deleting what was written, he implies that the *Aenigmata* might just as well not have been composed at all.

Another poem in the *Aenigmata* which relates to the *Apophoreta* by focusing directly on something secondary to Martial's point of interest is *Aenig. 23 musca*:

Aenig. 23 musca

*inproba sum, fateor. quid enim gula turpe veretur?
frigora vitabam, quae nunc aestate revertor;
sed cito submoveor falso conterrita vento.*

Aenig. 23 A fly

I am shameless, I confess; for what disgusting thing
 does my throat fear? I avoided the cold, who now return
 in summer, but I am soon moved on, frightened by a false
 wind.

This riddle recalls Mart. 14.67 *muscarium pavoninum* and the accompanying Mart. 14.68(71) *muscarium bubulum*:

Mart. 14.67 *muscarium pavoninum*

*lambere quae turpes prohibet tua prandia muscas,
 alitis eximiae cauda superba fuit.*

Mart. 14.67 *A peacock-feather fly swatter*

This, which stops disgusting flies from licking your
 lunch, was the proud tail of a distinguished bird.

Mart. 14.68(71) *muscarium bubulum*

*sordida si flavo fuerit tibi pulvere vestis,
 colligat hunc tenui verbere cauda levis.*

Mart. 14.68(71) *An ox-tail swatter*

If your garment becomes soiled with yellow dust, let a
 supple tail pick it up with a gentle flick.

Despite *muscarium* in its *lemma*, Mart. 14.68(71) refers in fact to a clothes brush made from an ox-tail (*cauda*, line 2), but Mart. 14.67 deals with a fly-swatter and Symphosius clearly had it in mind when writing about a fly in *Aenig. 23*: not only does he refer specifically to a fly-swatter by *falso ... vento* in line 3, but there are clear verbal parallels: compare *Aenig. 23 le. musca* and 23.1 *quid enim gula turpe veretur* with Mart. 14.67.1 *lambere quae turpes prohibet tua prandia muscas*. Symphosius does not specify the type of fly-swatter (Martial's is made of peacock-feathers), however, and he does make specific note of the seasons (line 2): flies would not have presented a problem in the winter, which they avoided by dying (*frigora vitabam*) but they would have been a prominent irritation in the Mediterranean summer (*nunc aestate revertor*). Given that the Saturnalia was a mid-winter festival, mention in the *Aenigmata* of the summer is perhaps surprising; but here it is contrasted with the provident ant of *Aenig. 22*, who lays in winter stores, and so the apparent anomaly introduced by Symphosius' extension of Martial is removed.

On occasion the *lemmata* in the *Aenigmata* which recall Martial employ the same word, but differ in number. An example is *Aenig. 26 grus*, which has a singular *lemma*, possibly to agree with the singular *lemmata* in the surrounding epigrams, while Mart. 13.75 is in the plural:

Aenig. 26 grus

*littera sum caeli penna perscripta volanti,
bella cruenta gerens volucris discrimine Martis;
nec vereor pugnas dum non sit longior hostis.*

Aenig. 26 A crane

A letter of heaven I am, written by a flying feather,
waging a bloody war in the winged contest of Mars; nor
do I fear fisticuffs, provided the enemy isn't taller.

Mart. 13.75 grues

*turbabis versus nec littera tota volabit,
unam perdidideris si Palamedis avem.*

Mart. 13.75 Cranes

You will disturb the lines and the letter will not fly
complete if you waste one of Palamedes' birds.

Aenig. 26.1 and the whole of *Mart. 13.75* deal with the story of how Palamedes invented the letters of the alphabet, or some of them (such as *V* or *U*), while observing the flight of cranes. Since it takes more than one flying crane to form a letter, this might account for Martial's plural. Whereas Martial confines himself to Palamedes, Symphosius refers also to the geranomachy or annual battle between the cranes and pygmies. This innovation allows a learned, multi-layered, and bilingual pun on *pugnas* in line 3 *nec vereor pugnas dum non sit longior hostis*: *pugna* is a fight, but is cognate with the Greek word for a fist, which is *πυγμή*. The word is also used of a cubit. The height of the pygmy (one cubit), hinted at by *pugnas*, is picked up by *longior*: although tall birds, cranes are still shorter than humans and at a physical disadvantage when fighting them — unless their opponents stand no more than a cubit high. The crane is therefore not afraid of fights, provided they are with pygmies. This difference with *Mart. 13.75* would have been noted and appreciated by the readers of the *Aenigmata*, although it does not mark a difference with Martial generally — whose intellectual understanding and command of Greek etymology is readily apparent from poems like *Mart. 14.38 aphronitrum*, which comments shrewdly on Roman concepts of *urbanitas* and

rusticitas. Similarly, although Symphosius is perfectly capable of humour, as will emerge below, or self-denigration (as was seen in *Aenig.* 1), *Aenig.* 26 does not contain the ironic wryness of Mart. 13.75 and especially *turbabis versus* in line 1: first the idea is preposterous that he should undermine Palamedes' great work if the recipient of a gift of cranes should waste a single bird (*perdideris*, line 2), but, at the same time, the suggestion is that he could destroy Martial himself as a poet: without the letter *v*, Martial could not have written the word *versus* but also, as the word means 'a line of writing/poetry', he could not have written Mart. 13.75.1 or, by extension, anything at all.

It was traditional at the Saturnalia to sacrifice a pig, and pork was a traditional dish. It is therefore not surprising to find *Aenig.* 36 *porcus* in Symphosius, and in Martial, 14.71(70) *porcus*:

Aenig.* 36 *porcus

*saetigeræ matris fecunda natus in alvo
desuper ex alto virides expecto saginas,
nomine numen habens si littera prima periret.*

Aenig.* 36 *A pig

Formed in the fertile womb of a bristly mother, I hope
for green nourishment down from on high, possessing
divinity in my name if the first letter were to pass away.

Mart.* 14.71(70) *porcus

*iste tibi faciet bona Saturnalia porcus,
inter spumantes ilice pastus apros.*

Mart.* 14.71(70) *A pig

This pig will make you a good Saturnalia, having fed on
acorns amongst the foaming boars.

Martial concentrates on the pig as Saturnalian fare, whereas Symphosius introduces the pig's birth and also, in accordance with the word and letter-play found earlier in Greek epigram, the joke that, after the removal of the first letter, *Porcus* becomes *Orcus*, that is the God of the Underworld, a divinity with huge power. That a lowly pig should have such great power is, of course, highly humorous. Both poems comment on the pig's diet. Martial's is fed on acorns (*Mart.* 14.71.2 *ilice pastus*) while Symphosius' expresses a hope for his (*Aenig.* 36.2 *desuper ex alto virides expecto saginas*): although pigs will eat most things, acorns are the best food for them. Martial's pig is fed *inter spumantes ... apros*

while Symphosius' is the offspring of a *saetigeræ matris*. This too is a conscious echo, although it is coloured by further humour: *saetiger* is a grand word, and Symphosius and his readers would have remembered Martial's using it at Mart. 13.93.1 as a high-flown kenning to describe the equal of the Calydonian boar; but, while recalling a fine and legendary boar, *Aenig.* 36.1 incongruously applies the word to a domestic sow.

While on the subject of pigs, *Aenig.* 85 and Mart. 13.54 both deal with the *perna* (a preserved ham, whether salted or smoked or both):

Aenig.* 85 *perna

*nobile duco genus magni de gente Catonis.
una mihi soror est, plures licet esse putentur.
de fumo facies, sapientia de mare nata est.*

Aenig.* 85 *A ham

I draw a noble descent from the family of the great Cato. I have one sister, although there are thought to be more. My appearance is born of smoke, my 'savoir' of the sea.

Mart. 13.54 *perna*

*Cerretana mihi fiat vel missa licebit
de Menapis: lauti de petasone vorent.*

Mart. 13.54 *Cured ham*

Let me have a Cerretanian ham or one, it may be, sent from the Menapians; let the sumptuous devour ham which is fresh.

Martial seems to be saying that he would prefer a preserved ham all to himself, albeit a high-quality Cerretanian or Messapian one, than to share a *petaso*, that is, a larger and fresh ham, of possibly lesser quality, with undiscerning gluttons. His stance here is somewhat paradoxical, and paradox is a very noticeable feature in the riddles of the *Aenigmata*, although it does not feature in *Aenig.* 85. Instead, Symphosius achieves punning humour by having the personified ham, and a preserved and therefore inferior type at that, claim descent from the great M Porcius Cato Uticensis. There is a further joke in line 2 on the number of hams: each pig has two (a ham and its 'sister') although one pig's look much like another's and so it is thought to have more; and line 3 is characterized by word-play on *sapientia* ('savour' and 'wisdom' — this personified pig is 'wise') and *sal*

(suggested by *de mare*), referring to the salt with which the ham has been preserved and its 'wit'. Thus, although starting with the same *lemma* and founding his treatment of the *perna* initially on its inferior status, although he does not mention the *petaso* directly, Symphosius' execution and expansion is clever, entertaining, novel, and entirely his own.

Another of the *Aenigmata* which copies its *lemma* directly from Martial is *Aenig. 50 faenum*, with which compare and contrast Mart. 14.162:

Aenig. 50 faenum

*herba fui quondam viridi de gramine terrae,
sed chalybis duro mollis praecisa metallo
mole premor propria, tecto conclusa sub alto.*

Aenig. 50 Hay

I was once grass from the greensward of the earth, but,
having been cut when tender by the hard metal of the
scythe, I am pressed down by my own bulk, shut up
beneath a high roof.

Mart. 14.162 faenum

*fraudata tumeat fragilis tibi culcita mula.
non venit ad duros pallida cura toros.*

Mart. 14.162 Hay

Let your crushed pillow swell, depriving your mule:
pale care does not come to hard pallets.

Martial describes hay used as a poor man's pillow, having been stolen from the mule it would have fed, while Symphosius describes hay stored in a barn. In both cases, the hay is subjected to pressure, but the type of pressure is different: either that of a sleeping head or that of the hay's own weight when piled-up. Similarly, both compositions address the idea of sleeping, but in very different ways. *Aenig. 50* opens with mention of a *locus amoenus*, the place where, before being cut, the hay had been greensward. While now stacked up in a barn, the hay had once been an idyllic substance on which to rest. In contrast, the poor man's crackly pillow in Martial¹² would not have been nearly as comfortable to lie on, but his poverty and the accompanying lack of responsibility meant that, as line 2 explains, he could fully enjoy his rest: *non venit ad duros pallida cura toros*.

¹² On the meaning(s) of *fragilis* in line 1, see Leary 1996 *ad loc*.

On two occasions, Symphosius adopts Martial's *lemmata* but with a different spelling — at *Aenig.* 63 *spongia* (cf. Mart. 14.144 *spongea*) and *Aenig.* 80 *tintinnabulum* (cf. Mart. 14.163 *tintinabulum*). This orthographical difference is not of any significance: the *lemmata* should be treated as identical; but the content of the poems bears notice. Turning to sponges first:

Aenig.* 63 *spongia

*ipsa gravis non sum, sed aquae mihi pondus inhaeret.
viscera tota tument patulis diffusa cavernis.
intus lympa latet, sed non se sponte profundit.*

Aenig.* 63 *A sponge

I myself am not heavy, but the weight of water clings to me. All my innards swell, distended with outspread chambers. Water lies hidden within, and it does not pour forth of its own accord.

Mart.* 14.144 *spongea

*haec tibi sorte datur tergendis spongea mensis
utilis, expresso cum levis imbre tumet.*

Mart.* 14.144 *A sponge

This sponge is given to you by lot; it is useful for wiping tables when it becomes light and swells once the water has been squeezed out.

When writing about his sponge, Martial comments on its practical use in wiping tables. Symphosius says nothing of how the sponge might be used, but instead comments more fully on its water retention. Both Martial and Symphosius speak of the sponge's weight, but differently: Symphosius says that it is heavy when full of water, Martial that it is light when empty. Both agree too that the water has to be squeezed from the sponge: with *expresso ... imbre* (Mart. 14.144.2), compare *sed non se sponte profundit* (*Aenig.* 63.3). These similarities aside, however, there are also differences: although the same word for swelling is used by both, Martial's sponge swells (*tumet*, line 1) when the water is squeezed out while Symphosius' is swollen when it still contains the water (*tument*, line 2). Note, however, Mart. 13.47.2, describing *panes Picentini*, a poem which Symphosius and his readers must have known: there the bread absorbs the honey in which it is soaked *ut levis accepta spongea turget aqua*:

Mart. 13.47 *panes Picentini*

*Picentina Ceres niveo sic nectare crescit
ut levis accepta spongea turget aqua.*

Mart. 13.47 *Picene loaves*

Picene bread grows with its white nectar just as a light sponge swells when it has soaked up water.

Aenig. 90 *tessera* was also influenced by more than one of Martial's poems. Superficially, it recalls Mart. 14.15 *tesserae* but its content recalls Mart. 14.16 *turricula*. Since this is the last of the *Aenigmata* to echo Martial, however, it is therefore an appropriate poem to end the present survey. Before addressing it, however, since mention has been made of *Aenig.* 80 *tintinnabulum* and Mart. 14.163 *tintinabulum*, some attention should be given to them:

Aenig.* 80 *tintinnabulum

*aere rigens curvo patulum conponor in orbem.
mobilis est intus linguae crepitantis imago.
non resono positus, motus quam saepe resulto.*

Aenig.* 80 *A bell

Stiff with curved bronze I am put together into a wide-mouthed circle. Inside there is the moving likeness of a chattering tongue. I make no noise when set down; whenever I'm moved I sound forth.

Mart. 14.163 *tintinabulum*

*redde pilam: sonat aes thermarum. ludere pergis?
Virgine vis sola lotus abire domum.*

Mart. 14.163 *A bell*

Put aside the ball: the brass bell of the hot baths is sounding. You continue playing? You want to go off home washed in the *Aqua Virgo* only.

Mart. 14.163 is utilitarian in its interest: the bell there is rung to inform those exercising in the *palaestra* that the water in the baths is now hot enough for them to come in. In contrast, *Aenig.* 80 dwells on the nature of the bell: it is bronze, has a tongue and rings when it is moved but not when it is set down. That said, *Aenig.* 80 appears at the start of a section on food and drink (*Aenig.* 81–85) and it is possible

that, just as Martial's bell signals the opening of the baths, Symphosius' is a kind of dinner-gong: it signals that food is ready.

To turn now to *Aenig. 90 tessera* and Mart. 14.15 *tesserae*:

Aenig. 90 tessera

*dedita sum semper voto, non certa futuri.
iactor in ancipites varia vertigine casus,
non ego maesta malis, non rebus laeta secundis.*

Aenig. 90 A die

Not being sure of the future, I am always entrusted to prayer. I am thrown through varied shaking so as to fall in one of two ways, being myself neither mournful in ill-circumstances nor happy in favourable ones.

Mart. 14.15 tesserae

*non sim talorum numero par tessera, dum sit
maior quam talis alea saepe mihi.*

Mart. 14.15 Dice

A die, let me not equal the number of knucklebones so long as my stake is often higher than that for knucklebones.

Playing dice was illegal at Rome, except during the Saturnalia (Mart. 14.1.3, 5.84). Of course, this illegality did not stop people from playing dice at other times in the year, but it is not surprising that a Saturnalian composition should refer to the game. Despite their similar *lemmata*, however, the interest of the two poems in question is different. Martial makes a comparison between dice and knucklebones, the methods of playing each game and the stakes involved. *Aenig. 90* concentrates instead on the uncertainty of dice-games and the prayers said by players over their throws. While the inclusion of *Aenig. 90* was influenced by Mart. 14.15, it is clear that its content is indebted to Mart. 14.16 *turricula*, a couplet which describes a dice-box. *Aenig. 90.2 varia vertigine* confirms the use of a dice-box while *dedita sum semper voto* in line 1 recalls Mart. 14.16.2 *nil nisi vota facit*:

Mart. 14.16 turricula

*quae scit compositos manus inproba mittere talos,
si per me misit, nil nisi vota facit.*

Mart. 14.16 *Dice shakers*

If the dishonest hand which knows how to throw rigged
knucklebones has thrown them through me, it achieves
nothing but prayers.

Concluding remarks

To turn in conclusion to the question posed by the title of this paper, was Symphosius a North African Martial? Did he succeed in the task he set himself in inviting comparison with his model? As to his nationality, one cannot be certain; but it is likely that he did indeed come from North Africa. Was he a second Martial? In answering this, one can, however, be more expansive.

It is true that Symphosius is not nearly as well-known today as Martial, but it is also true that the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta* are less well-known and appreciated than Martial's other works, or are not regarded as representative. For this reason, perhaps, the books are often omitted from selections of his work.¹³ Again, it is true that epigram generally was considered in antiquity as inferior to the higher literary genres like epic. Martial was fully conscious of this. Indeed, challenging the received wisdom may even have supplied some of the motivation behind his choice of literary form, and his apologetics and self-depreciation are certainly not to be taken seriously: his intentions were very decidedly literary and he was fully aware of the artistic value of his work.

As for the *Aenigmata*, it is impossible to decide how many of the riddles are original to Symphosius and how many, like *Aenig.* 31(30) *peduculus* (containing the riddle of the fisher-boys which traditionally defeated Homer) are re-workings of inherited material;¹⁴ but since the *Aenigmata* are the best and fullest collection of ancient riddles to have survived from antiquity, for this reason alone they deserve to be taken seriously. There is, however, more: they exerted profound influence on later scholars and riddle-writers, for example people like Alcuin of York, Aldhelm of Malmesbury, Bishop of Sherborne (640–709), Tatwine, Archbishop of Canterbury (died 734), Eusebius (probably Hwaetburt, Abbot of Wearmouth), and the writer of the medieval 'Exeter book'. Thus Ohl writes in his commentary¹⁵ that Symphosius 'is to [riddle-writing] what Martial was to the epigram: he gave it artistic form and set the standard for future generations' and '[h]e set the fashion

¹³ Like the Cambridge 'Green and Yellow' edition, Watson 2003. Cf. the Penguin translation: Michie 1978.

¹⁴ This riddle is further testament to the seriousness with which riddles were taken in antiquity: Homer was so angry at his failure that he died. Cf. *AP* 7.1, 14.65 and 66.

¹⁵ Ohl 1928:20.

for writing [riddles] in groups of 100'.¹⁶ It has also been observed, for example by Smolak,¹⁷ that the large number of surviving manuscripts testifies to Symphosius' popularity.

The extent of Symphosius' later influence is a clear indication that the *Aenigmata* should not be dismissed without careful consideration — despite our uncertainty regarding his biographical details and even if his imitators did not appreciate, or appreciate fully, his Martialian debts. By describing the way in which he adopted the format of the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta*, however, and also by exploring some of the ways in which he has taken up and developed the subject-matter of several individual epigrams within these books, this paper has attempted to show that Symphosius' later fame was more than warranted and that he well-deserves continuing respect: he was indeed a worthy successor to his model, being, if not an African, then at any rate a 'non-Spanish' Martial.

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¹⁶ Cf. Pavlovskis 1988:221: Symphosius' 'early successors ... apparently derive from him the concept of a well rounded group of riddles, frequently, as in his case, comprising one hundred hexameter poems that reveal an attempt at orderly arrangement and are uniform stylistically and sometimes in length'.

¹⁷ Smolak 1989:252.

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