

Roman society

criticism: e.g.

Bodel, J., 'Trimalchio's Underworld', in *The Search for the Ancient Novel* ed. J. Tatum (Baltimore, 1994), 237-59

Petersen, Lauren Hackworth, *The Freedman in Roman Art and Art History*. (Cambridge, 2006)

Petronius: A handbook : See e.g. articles by Hales + Andreau on moodle

- How far can we map details of the *Cena* episode onto reality? Often individual details can be found to have precedent but collectively we might wonder (so seems extravagant/incredible etc). Also things can appear out of context. See Prag, J. (2006) 'Cave navem', *CQ* 56: 538-47 (30.1-2); Prag compares the house of Pompeius and suggests a triumphal theme. p540f "numerous examples exist of both municipal magistrates (assigned two lictors but no axes) and *seviri* commemorated by monuments not only bearing more *fascēs* than they were technically permitted, but often also endowed with axes (and the *fascēs* almost never occur singly, but in symmetrical pairs).¹² *Prima facie*, Trimalchio is doing nothing out of the ordinary. What is striking, however, is that, as on other occasions, Trimalchio has brought elements of funerary and / or public display into a private / domestic setting. Outside of a period of office-holding, display of the *fascēs* normally occurred as a part of the commemorative tradition, not during the individual's lifetime. What is more, when portrayed on tombs, the *fascēs* commonly appear on either side of a doorway on, or into the tomb." (Prag)

- What problems might we encounter? Elements which may complicate our using it as a source include fact it is a literary work, fact that it is narrated by Encolpius, and question of what other sources we have, such as archaeological (argument can get circular when the *Cena* is used as evidence...). For tombs one can look at real tombs (e.g. Pompeii). For freedmen language one may look at inscriptions etc.

- house: dining room

Trimalchio's house and the conduct in it is wildly over the top, extravagant and excessive. The *triclinium* was an important room for the Roman – indeed due to its social function, it was often the biggest and most elaborate room in the public section of a Roman house- but we are told at *Sat.* 77 that Trimalchio has expanded his house so he has four *triclinia*. This is typical Trimalchio behaviour: trying hard to compensate for his servile background, he goes over the top and doesn't get things quite right. Petronius' description of Trimalchio's dining room = at odds with the norm. See slide for a picture of a *triclinium* with built-in cement dinner couches (mattresses would have been placed on top) , angled upward to elevate the diner above the tabletop. Places were chosen by the host (who usually sat on the low couch, *lectus imus*, along with his wife). Seating = hierarchical. The middle bed (*lectus medius*) offered a very good location (the middle seat in this middle bed was an especially honorable spot)- guests here could speak easily with the host to their right and also look out at a view of the home's courtyard or garden. In contrast, diners on the high couch (*lectus summus*) to the left of the important guests could not see the view without twisting uncomfortably. See the re-creation of dining couches in the Villa of the Mysteries near Pompei showing how guest and host beds permitted a view out the main doorway (through which the viewer is entering), and in this case also into a peristyle at right, while the less important diners could only see the opulent wall paintings that typically decorated Roman *triclinia*.

In the *Sat.* the first place is reserved for Trimalchio (31.8); more guests than the typical nine: at least 14. We could say that this bigger number is more appropriate for the kind of big dining room that appears in Pompeii in the Neronian period, which presumably caused some change in the order of reclining but, even so, Petronius is surely hinting that Trimalchio is not getting things right. See too section 70: slaves were crowding onto the guests' couches BUT slaves didn't normally recline at dinner or eat during dinner due to their inferior rank and the fact that they were busy

cooking and serving the meal. Trimalchio's lack of distance with the slaves may well be linked to his own ex-slave status as well as his topsy-turvy house.

- murals (29): depicting his rise from servile beginnings and the progress of his career. Bodel contrasts archaeological finds where the murals show the individual as public benefactor: such as the painting at a house in Pompeii showing the public distribution of bread. Trimalchio's murals are focussed on his personal and private accomplishments. T often appears a vulgar buffoon, a social upstart who is conspicuously out of place. See Bodel for analysis of murals e.g. "the disconcerting mixture of realism and fantasy here serves at least two purposes. On one level, it foreshadows the deceptions to come and alerts us to a presentation of Trimalchio's banquet that is to be both literal and metaphorical; on another it enables Petronius to sketch in deftly the social background against which Trimalchio is to be viewed." (Bodel 1994)

- tomb

The tomb T envisages is over the top: archaeological evidence shows that most freedmen built modest tombs. Scholars sometimes make connections with the tomb of Eurysaces, a baker and bread contractor, outside the Porta maggiore at Rome- notable for its unusual architectural features, grandiose size, and friezes with occupational scenes. But as Petersen says, it is not clear that Eurysaces was a freedman and the argument connecting Eurysaces and Trimalchio can get circular- the argument often goes that Eurysaces' tomb is an example of freedman art because it is like Trimalchio's and that Trimalchio's tomb typifies freedman art because it is like Eurysaces. We are best seeing Trimalchio's desire for an OTT tomb as typical of his socially inept vulgar extravagance. Mouritsen (*JRS* 95: 2005) discusses freedmen tombs and discusses e.g. p57 parallels with the monument of Naevoleia Tyche.

"Petronius is pursuing an image for Trimalchio which is at once vulgar ... and recognizable; and much of the social setting of the Roman street of tombs is revealed here" (Purcell, 'Tomb and Suburb' 1987: 25).