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Centre of Humanities and Social Sciences

**MA IN CULTURAL ASTRONOMY AND
ASTROLOGY**

The Examination of the Astrology
in The Feast of Trimalchio by Petronius Arbiter.

A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

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Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation

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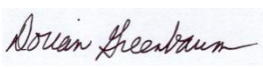
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ABSTRACT

The aim of the dissertation was to conduct an examination of the representation of astrology in Petronius Arbiter's *Cena Trimalchionis* (*The Feast of Trimalchio*), the largest surviving fragment of the *Satyricon*. Petronius presents astrology in a comprehensive manner. The paper focused on the following fragments of the *Cena*: *Sat.*26.5, in which Petronius describes a trumpeter announcing the hours; *Sat.*30.3-4, which contains a description of the board with the images of the planets used to mark fortunate days; and *Sat.*35.1-5, which concerns the zodiac dish. Additionally, *Sat.*39.5-15 presented a discourse on the nature of the zodiac signs, and *Sat.*77.1-4 addressed the prophecy of an astrologer named Serapio. The *Cena* demonstrate intertextual links with astrological works from that era, in particular to the *Astronomica* by Manilius. Moreover, the connection between the archaeological discovery of the parapegma CIL IX.5808 and the *Cena*, in the context of the utilisation of astrological planetary week, planetary hours and catarchic astrology, was also explored. The research findings indicate that the vision of astrology in Petronius' work is consistent with the realities of life in the first century BCE within the Roman Empire.

1. Introduction

The aim of this dissertation is to conduct a comprehensive examination of the representation of astrology in Petronius Arbiter's *Cena Trimalchionis* (*The Feast of Trimalchio*), the largest surviving fragment of the *Satyricon*. Petronius' tale of the extraordinary adventures of Encolpius, a young man cursed by the god Priapus, represents one of the most remarkable and unique achievements in the history of Roman literature. Although the protagonists are fictional, the author alludes to his times and incorporates the references to the contemporary history. Petronius presents astrology in a comprehensive manner, delineating its role as a discipline that measures time, determines the destiny, and in the text serves as a source of inspiration for the creation of humour. An investigation into the connections between the *Cena* and the ancient astrological texts and archaeological findings will contribute to a more complex understanding of Roman literature and will demonstrate the ancient astrology in broader context.

This paper will focus on the following fragments of the *Cena*: *Sat.*26.5, in which Petronius describes a trumpeter announcing the hours; *Sat.*30.3-4, which contains a description of the board with the images of the planets used to mark fortunate days; and *Sat.* 35.1-5 concern the zodiac dish, while *Sat.*39.5-15 presents a discourse on the nature of the zodiac signs. Finally, *Sat.*77.1-4 addresses the prophecy of an astrologer named Serapio. Furthermore, it will discuss the potential link between the archaeological finding of CIL IX.5808 and the *Cena*, in the context of the usage of astrological planetary hours. The Latin quotations are from the critical edition of the *Cena Trimalchionis*, edited by Martin Stirling Smith.¹ The dissertation, therefore, takes the form of a textual analysis of primary source, intercomparison with literature and astrological texts, and historical and literature theory research methods.

¹ Petroni Arbitri, *Cena Trimalchionis*, ed. by Martin Sterling Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).

The paper will adhere to the definition of astrology put forth by Alexander Jones.² The definition distinguishes between astronomy, which concerns itself with observed or theoretical configurations of celestial bodies and the phenomena associated with them, and astrology, which focuses on the relationship between these celestial configurations and phenomena and the circumstances of human life on Earth. Jones describes such a definition as ahistorical because it does not consider the historical and cultural changes of the field. Jones relies on Ptolemy's definition of astrology in *Tetrabiblos*. Ptolemy wrote that astronomy had a dual use and distinguished between astronomical calculations and predictions of the changes they would cause.³ Ptolemy's criteria facilitate the distinction between texts belonging to the first category (astronomy) and those belonging to the second one (astrology), or potentially both categories simultaneously. In the *Cena*, the focus is on astrology, rather than astronomy. However, as Jones observes in 'Astrologers and their Astronomy', in the ancient world, astrology and astronomy were not mutually exclusive, and a variety of terms have been in use for the description of astrologers, including 'astrologos', 'genethialogos', and 'mathematicos'.⁴ Petronius employs the latter term to denote astrologers (*Sat.*77.1).

The new approach to the *Satyricon* in the context to astrology might be significant, given that the *Satyricon* still remains an enigmatic text. In 1967 Ben Edwin Perry identified the problem of lack of consensus regarding the purpose, interpretation, and use of the literary genres in the *Satyricon* as the most baffling problem in literary history.⁵ The authorship of the text has long been in doubt and polemic. The discovery of the Herculaneum tablets in 1946 and inscriptions in 1989 provided the proof of that the authorship of Publius Petronius Niger Arbiter, proconsul of Bithynia in 62 CE.⁶ Tacitus in his *Histories* states that Petronius spent his days in bed and his nights working and socialising, yet he fulfilled his official duties effectively. Petronius

² Alexander Jones, 'The Astronomical Resources for Ancient Astral Prognostications' in *The Star of Bethlehem and the Magi*, ed. by Pieter Barthel and George van Kooten (Leiden: Brill 2015), p. 172.

³ Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, trans. by Frank Egleston Robbins (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1940), pp.173-174.

⁴ Alexander Jones, 'Astrologers and their Astronomy' in *Oxyrhynchus: A City and its Texts*, ed. by Alan K. Bowman, Revel A. Coles, Nikolaos Gonis, Dirk Obbink, and Peter J. Parsons (London 2007), p. 308.

⁵ Ben Perry, *The Ancient Romances* (University of California Press 1967), p. 200.

⁶ For a detailed analysis of the research on this topic, see: Kenneth Frank Campbell Rose, *The Date and Author of the Satyricon* (Leiden: Brill 1971), pp. 38-55 and Thomas Völker, Dirk Rohmann, 'Praenomen Petronii: The Date and Author of the Satyricon Reconsidered', *The Classical Quarterly*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (2011), pp. 660-676.

demonstrated an excellent aesthetic sensibility, although Tacitus does not mention his literary works. As *arbiter elegantiae*, Petronius advised the Emperor Nero on matters related to the organisation of parties and the promotion of fashionable artistic trends. In 66 CE., he fell out of favour and committed suicide by cutting his veins.⁷

The *Cena Trimalchionis* is a fully preserved fragment of *Satyricon*. However, the rest of the work is known only through fragments, which limits the possibility of reconstructing the complete plot. The text of the *Cena* is preserved in a manuscript Codex Tragurientis (Parsinus 7989), written in 1432, and rediscovered in 1650⁸. The *Cena* attracted scholarly interest due to the content and form of the work (a combination of prose and poetry), as well as the style of the Latin language. Although the material on astrology in the *Cena* may initially seem limited in scope, it encompasses a vast array of cultural, historical, and literary themes. To facilitate a comprehensive examination of this subject, the dissertation employs a three-chapter structure.

The chapter entitled ‘Time and astrology in Trimalchio’s house’ will undertake an examination of the astrological board, which delineates the positions of the planets, and the auspicious days of the week (*Sat.* 35.1-5). The survival of objects like this one (CIL IX.5808) to the present day may indicate that the description in the text may have depicted an everyday object that was in fact used to determine the quality of time by means of astrological methods. Moreover, the description of the board provides indirect evidence for the implementation of a seven-day week in the first century CE, wherein the days were associated with the planets (*Sat.*35.1-5 and *Sat.*39.5-15). This chapter will also address the question of Petronius' potentially allusive references to Seneca's writings, in the context of their respective discourses regarding time.

The next chapter, entitled ‘The Zodiac Dish’, presents an analysis of the astrological dish and Trimalchio's speech about the signs of the zodiac. This study proposes a broader interpretative approach, which suggests that zodiacal dish represents a symbolic representation of the cosmos in which a freedom is the leading force.

⁷Tacitus, *Historiae: Books 4-5. Annals: Books 1-3*, trans. by Clifford H. Moore, John Jackson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931), 16.18-19, pp. 363-365. Further literary evidence concerning Petronius: Martin Sterling Smith ‘Testimonia’ in *Petroni Arbitri, Cena Trimalchionis*, ed. by Martin S. Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. xxv-xxvii.

⁸*The Codex Traguriensis of Petronius, Cena Trimalchionis*, transcribed by Stephen Gaselee (Cambridge: 1915). Further details regarding the manuscripts: Martin Sterling Smith ‘Introduction’ in *Petroni Arbitri, Cena Trimalchionis*, ed. by Martin S. Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. xxii-xxiv.

Chapter ‘Astrologer’s Wisdom’ will present an in-depth analysis of the astrologer's predictions, as well as an examination of the influence of the planet Mercury on Trimalchio's life and the structural composition of the plot (*Sat.*77.1-4).

2. Literature Review

In their *Bibliography of Petronius* (published in 1977), Gareth L. Schmeling and Johanna Stuckley present a detailed list of more than two thousand titles analysing the *Satyricon*.⁹ Nevertheless, despite Petronius' compelling description of astrological practices, there was relatively little coverage of this topic within the academic research. The fragments of *Sat.*35.1-5 concerning the zodiacal dish were of particular interest to researchers, as were *Sat.*39.5-15, which present a description of the nature of the zodiac signs. In 1915, Gaselee highlighted the necessity of reading and interpreting them together and proposed revised descriptions of the signs.¹⁰ Over the subsequent years, researcher's focus shifted to an investigation concerning of whether the astrology presented by Petronius was of a professional standard. Jacques de Vreese in 1927 advanced the proposition that there were notable parallels between the descriptions set forth by Petronius and those found in astrological works and papyri. Later, Sven Eriksson in 1956 posited that an examination of astrological content suggested that Petronius' objective was to discredit astrology. The works of de Vreese and Eriksson are not yet available in English, although Denis Keyer summarises their

⁹ Gareth L. Schmeling and Johanna Heather Stuckley, *A Bibliography of Petronius* (Leiden: Brill 1977).

¹⁰ Stephen Gaselee, ‘Excurs II’ in *The Codex Traguriensis of Petronius*, Cena Trimalchionis (Cambridge: 1915), p. 17.

views.¹¹ Towards the end of the 1960s, Kenneth Rose and John Sullivan became prominent figures in the field of Petronian scholarship. In 'Trimalchio's Zodiac Dish' they analyse astrological puzzles and confirm the conclusions reached by Gaselee.¹² In 1975, in a critical edition of the *Cena*, Smith also provided an analysis of the fragments related to astrology.¹³ Schmeling's highly significant contribution, *A Commentary on the Satyricon of Petronius* (published in 2011), offers a more comprehensive analysis of astrological scenes and terms, situated within a historical context and drawing upon insights from contemporary scholarship.¹⁴ Research has tended to focus on philological and linguistic issues rather than on the role of the astrology in the *Satyricon*. Martin Korenjak in 2006 argued that the search for references in ancient works is futile due to the multitude of parallels. His perspective aligns with that of Eriksson.¹⁵ In 2010 Keyer drew attention to the intentionality of Trimalchio's astrological jokes, as well as the role of astrology in the entire text. Keyer appears to align with de Vrees's view that the astrological references in the *Cena* are deliberate.¹⁶ Thus, the discussion progresses towards an examination of the intertextuality of Petronius' work, rather than an analysis of the role that astrology plays within it.

In his study 'Astrologers and Their Astronomy,' Alexander Jones examines the astronomical tools and knowledge utilized by ancient astrologers. In his view, astrology is a discipline that requires a practitioner to have adequate theoretical training, though not necessarily the knowledge of astronomical observations.¹⁷

In the field of literary criticism, the most significant work on the *Satyricon* is *The Ancient Romances* by Edwin Perry (1967), which examines the distinctive characteristics of the *Satyricon* as an 'invented' work, rather than a product of the

¹¹ Denis Keyer, 'Trimalchio's Astrology: Naive Superstitions or Intentional Jokes?', *Hyperboreus*, 18:2 (2012), p. 265, pp. 264-294.

¹² Kenneth Frank Campbell Rose and John Patrick Sullivan, 'Trimalchio's Zodiac Dish' (Petronius, Sat. 35.1-5), *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series, Vol. 18, No. 1 (1968).

¹³ Martin Sterling Smith, introduction to *Cena Trimalchionis* by Petronius Arbiter, ed. by Martin Sterling Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. xi-xxiv.

¹⁴ Gareth Schmeling, *A Commentary on the Satyricon of Petronius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁵ Martin Korenjak, 'In Piscibus obsonatores et rhetores: Petr. 39.13', *The Cambridge Classical Journal*, Vol. 52 (2006).

¹⁶ Denis Keyer, 'Trimalchio's Astrology', p. 267.

¹⁷ Alexander Jones, 'Astrologers and Their Astronomy' in *Oxyrhynchus: A City and its Texts*, ed. by Alan Keir Bowman, Revel A. Coles, Nikolaos Gonis, Dirk Obbink and Peter J. Parsons (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 2007), p. 311.

evolution of other ancient literary genres.¹⁸ Another significant contribution to the field is *The Roman Novel* by Patrick Gerard Walsh, which posits that Petronius' work would be best understood as a form of sophisticated humour rather than a vehicle for a moral guidance.¹⁹ A third significant work is *The Novel in the Ancient World*, edited by Gareth Schmeling, published in 1996 and revised in 2003. It is noteworthy, however, that in his summary of *Satyricon*, Schmeling does not include any reference to the astrological themes.²⁰

Graham Andreson analysed the figure of the astrologer in *Sage, Saint and Sophists*. He sees the astrologer as a clever swindler rather than a sage.²¹ Similarly, Schmeling analyses the figure of the astrologer in 'The Small World of the Holy Man: a Small Beginning in the *Satyricon*', without making any significant reference to the Roman astrological practices. Schmeling assumes that Trimalchio is simply a superstitious individual due to his belief in astrology.²² An intriguing treatment of the theme of death and Mercury, as proposed by Daniel Holmes (2008), draws attention to the parallels between *Cena's* structure and Plato's *Phaedo*.²³ Holmes work made reference to the conclusions of John Bodel, who identified death as the leading metaphor for the entire *Cena*.²⁴ The proposed approach towards cultural interpretation is a promising one, and the incorporation of astrological elements could provide new insights into the analysis of Petronius. In the context of the material culture presented in the *Cena*, an important work is Darryn Lehoux's *Astronomy, Weather, and Calendars*, which offers the an in-depth analysis of the ancient tablets used for calendars and astrological calculations.²⁵ Lehoux offers an analysis of the literary description of Petronius, while Stephen Heilen has identified the corresponding object (CIL IX.5808) in a palace in the village of Potentia.²⁶

¹⁸ Perry Ben Edwin, *The Ancient Romances* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

¹⁹ Patrick Gerard Walsh, *The Roman Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

²⁰ Garreth Schmeling (ed.), *The Novel in the Ancient World* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), p. 467.

²¹ Graham Andreson, *Sage, Saint and Sophists* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

²² Garreth Schmeling, 'The Small World of the Holy Man: a Small Beginning in the *Satyricon*' in *Holy Men and Charlatans in the Ancient Novel*, ed. by Stelios Panayotakis, Gareth Schmeling and Michael Paschalis (Kooiweg: Barkhuis, 2015).

²³ Daniel Holmes, 'Practicing Death in Petronius' "Cena Trimalchionis" and Plato's "Phaedo"', *The Classical Journal*, Vol. 104, No. 1 (2008).

²⁴ John Bodel, 'Trimalchio's Underworld' in *The Search of Ancient Novel*, ed. by James Tatum (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1993).

²⁵ Darryn Lehoux, *Astronomy, Weather, and Calendars in the Ancient World* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

²⁶ Stephen Heilen, 'Short Time in Greco-Roman Astrology' in *Down to the Hour: Short Time in the Ancient Mediterranean and Near East* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

To obtain an accurate understanding of the meaning of a text on astrology, it is essential to have a comprehensive grasp of the practical issues that arise in this field. The subject of astrology in literature was of interest to Ernst Riess, whose brief work (1933) contains extensive references to ancient texts in which astrology is discussed.²⁷ In the work on the history of western astrology (2009), Nicholas Campion pays particular attention to the role of astrology in literature and culture.²⁸ The issue of the non-heterogeneity of astrologers as a social and professional group was examined by Pauline Ripat in her insightful study concerning the expulsion of astrologers from Rome.²⁹ Cramer examined the interplay between Roman astrology and politics in 1954; however, a full monograph on the interrelationship of astrology and literature is still lacking.³⁰ As Bodel posits, the concept of the repertoire plays a pivotal role in the interpretation of the literature, which can be defined as "the package of literary and cultural knowledge that any reader brings to a text".³¹ The incorporation of astrology into this repertoire would prove beneficial in advancing knowledge of the unique work of Petronius, which is the aim of this dissertation.

²⁷ Ernst Riess, 'The Influence of Astrology on Life and Literature at Rome', *The Classical Weekly*, Vol. 27, No 10 (1933).

²⁸ Nicholas Campion, *A History of Western Astrology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), Vol. 2.

²⁹ Pauline Ripat, 'Expelling Misconceptions: Astrologers at Rome', *Classical Philology*, Vol. 106, No. 2 (2011).

³⁰ Frederick Cramer, *Astrology in Roman Law and Politics* (American Philosophical Society, 1954).

³¹ John Bodel, 'Trimalchio's Underworld', p. 238.

3. Time and astrology in Trimalchio's house

Astronomical and astrological references in the *Cena* appear at the very beginning of the text. Encolpius and his friends arrive at the villa of Trimalchio and admire the decoration of the house. At the entrance there is a board hanging behind a lamp composed of two candlesticks. The first part of the board announces when Trimalchio is feasting outside the house, and the second part shows the course of the Moon and the seven planets, indicating fortunate and unfortunate days:

The other displayed the phases of the Moon and representation of the seven stars. Lucky and unlucky days were marked with distinctive indicators.³²

The oldest literary evidence of the classification of days in a Graeco-Roman context is *Works and Days* (*Ἔργα καὶ Ἡμέραι*) by Hesiod, written in the seventh century BCE. Hesiod writes "One time one of these days is a stepmother, another time a mother."³³, and divides the days into those suitable for various actions and those unsuitable. For example: 'The sixth day of the middle of the month is very unfavourable for plants, but it is good for giving birth to male descendants.'³⁴ This tradition has been the subject of study and development in the Imperial territories. In Rome, the days following the Kalends, Nones and Ides were inauspicious. These thirty-six days were known as *dies postridui*. In his work *Fasti* Ovid (43 BCE – 17 or 18 CE) offers insights into these terms' denotations and connotations in Roman calendar:

³² Petronius and Seneca, *Satyricon. Apocolocyntosis*, ed. and trans. by Gareth Schmeling (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), p. 177.

Petronius Sat.30.4: *altera lunae cursum stellarumque septem imagines pictas; et qui dies boni quique incommodi essent, distinguente bulla notabantur.*

³³ Hesiod, *Theogony. Works and Days. Testimonia*, ed. and trans. by Glenn W. Most (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), v. 825.

³⁴ Hesiod, *Theogony. Works and Days*, vv. 782-783.

The worship of Juno claims Ausonia's Kalends: on the Ides a bigger white ewe-lamb falls to Jupiter: the Nones lack a guardian god. The day next after all these days - make no mistake - is black. The omen is drawn from the event; for on those days Rome suffered grievous losses under the frown of Marsh.³⁵

The days of the month each had a corresponding letter assigned to them, thus facilitating the identification of the appropriate days for religious ceremonies and government offices. Jörg Rüpke highlights the observation made by Macrobius (c. 400 CE) that the Ides were associated with the new moon.³⁶ Other significant dates in the Roman calendar followed a fixed eight-day cycle, designated as *nundinae*, which demarcated the market days. In Rüpke's view, these circumstances facilitated the emergence of a day of freedom from work, analogous to the modern Sunday.³⁷ In 46 BCE, Julius Caesar undertook a reform and reordered the Roman calendar. His version of the calendar, along with local calendars, was in use during the time of Petronius. The most significant reform implemented was the decision to establish the year as comprising 365 days, with the addition of a single intercalary day every four years. This resulted in the removal of the thirteenth month from all written calendars of the time. Rüpke highlights the significance of the connection between 25 March and the spring equinox. The result was a description of an astronomical event in accordance with civil dates, which was a characteristic phenomenon in Sicily and the Greek world.³⁸ An additional significant categorization of days was based on their historical importance, frequently correlated with tragic occurrences. Such days were designated *dies Alliensis*. The most celebrated example is the day of 19 July (XIV Kal. Sextiles), which saw the burning of Rome by the Senonian Gauls in 390 BCE and by Nero in 64 CE. Anthony Grafton and Noel Swerdlow refer to *dies Alliensis* as 'the most ill-omened days'.³⁹ In his writings, Plutarch (c. 46 CE – after 119 CE) paid a significant

³⁵ Ovid, *Fasti*, trans. by James G. Frazer, rev. by George Patrick Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931), p. 7. It seems reasonable to posit that the word 'Marsh' is a typographical error for 'Mars', given the context.

Ovid, *Fasti* I.55-61: *vindicat Ausonias Iunonis cura Kalendas, Idibus alba Iovi grandior agna cadit; Nonarum tutela deo caret. omnibus istis (ne fallare cave!) proximus ater erit. omen ab eventu est: illis nam Roma diebus damna sub averso tristia Marte tulit.*

³⁶ Jörg Rüpke, *The Roman calendar from Numa to Constantine: time, history, and the fasti* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 24-26.

³⁷ Rüpke, *The Roman*, p. 33.

³⁸ Rüpke, *The Roman*, p. 112.

³⁹ Anthony Grafton and Noel Swerdlow, 'Calendar Dates and Omniuous Days in Ancient Historiography', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtland Institutes*, Vol. 51 (1988), p. 14.

attention to these matters. The work *On Days* no longer survived, but there is evidence of it in *Camillus*, *On the Glory of the Athenians* and *Roman Questions*. Grafton and Swerdlow have observed that the dates provided by Plutarch encompass not only references to historical events but also to astronomical phenomena. In determining the correct date, he employs the descriptions of the phases of the moon found within historical texts.⁴⁰

The system of *dies fasti*, *dies postridui* and *dies Alliensis* could mark the days on board as described by Petronius. However, in consideration of the description of the board, it seems reasonable to assume that the categorisation of days as fortunate or unfortunate was based on their astrological associations. Furthermore, the concept of time in Trimalchio's house appears to align with a cosmic, astrological rhythm. Rüpke asserted that characterizing the calendar as a 'symbolic portrayal of Roman history' can be regarded as a valid proposition only if one accepts that a sufficient reception existed.⁴¹ The literary evidence of Petronius provides an example of the common use of calendars with pegs and the importance of information related to the quality of the days.

According to Schmeling, this description serves to portray Trimalchio as a person obsessed with astrology, superstition, and premonitions of death.⁴² The presence of the planets on the board is open to two distinct interpretations. One possibility is that they serve a purely decorative purpose. An alternative interpretation is that the calendar is based on astrological principles and that Petronius is describing practices that were common in Roman households during the first century CE. Literary and archaeological evidence seems to point to the latter possibility. Similar objects were discovered by archaeologists and were identified as *parapegma* (from gr. *παράπηγμα* - something fixed on or hung up), which was documented by Ilaria Bultrighini and Sacha Stern.⁴³

Parapegma were calendars with perforated holes, in which a peg was moved along daily in order to track the cycle of planet or fixed stars. Lehoux has also conducted a thorough analysis of the *parapegma*. According to him, Trimalchio's board is an

⁴⁰ Grafton, Swerdlow, 'Calendar Dates', pp. 18-19.

⁴¹ Rüpke, *The Roman*, p. 136.

⁴² Petronius, Seneca, *Satyricon*, p. 117.

⁴³ Ilaria Bultrighini and Sacha Stern, 'The Seven-Day Week in the Roman Empire' in *Calendars the Making: The Origins of Calendars from the Roman Empire to the Later Middle Ages*, ed. by Sacha Stern (Leiden: Brill, 2021), p. 30.

example of a literary parapegma that combines the cycle of the days of the week with that of the Moon and the planets.⁴⁴ The earliest Greek parapegma known today is a fragment from the Ceramicus district of Athens discovered in 1929, but which dates from the fifth century BCE and.⁴⁵ It contains only a list of simple numbers, and we have no idea what cycle it was intended to track. In antiquity parapegma were used for diverse types of calculations, including establish the number of passing days. For example, Cicero (106 BCE – 43 BCE) wrote to Atticus:

Ex ea die, si me amas, παραπήγμα ενιαυσιον commoveto.⁴⁶

The following sentence, translated by David Roy Shackleton Bailey, reads as follows:

From that day, if you love me, start moving the calendar.⁴⁷

This conveys the essence of the recommended activity, but it lacks the specific indication of the object in question, which is the parapegma. *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon* translates “ἐνιαύσιον” as “of one year, annual, lasting one year”.⁴⁸ And therefore, in accordance with Cicero's recommendation, the peg should occupy the subsequent year's corresponding hole. Lehoux offers a more precise translation:

From this day, if you love me, move the yearly parapegma.⁴⁹

The parapegma problem is not a trivial matter. It demonstrates how specific meanings associated with time measurement, and consequently astronomy and astrology, become overlooked by researchers due to misinterpretations resulting from translations. Lehoux mentioned, that prior to the discovery of the parapegma of

⁴⁴ Lehoux, *Astronomy*, p. 29.

⁴⁵ Lehoux, *Astronomy*, p. 23, p 190.

⁴⁶ Cicero, *Letters to Atticus, Volume II*, ed., and trans. by David Roy Shackleton Bailey (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), Cic. Att.5.14.

⁴⁷ Cicero, *Letters*, p. 63.

⁴⁸ *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 567.

⁴⁹ Lehoux, *Astronomy*, p. 200.

Miletus in 1899, it was assumed that Cicero was alluding to the tradition in which the Pontifex Maximus drove a nail into the wall of the temple of Jupiter Optimus on the Ides of September.⁵⁰ The object and its intended application were therefore not properly understood.

But it is not only Cicero's testimony that merits consideration. Vitruvius (80–70 BCE – after 15 BCE) mentions scholars who employed the parapegma, including Eudoxus, Meton, Hipparchus and Aratos. Furthermore, three centuries later, Proclus (412 CE – 485 CE) also discussed the use of the parapegma for scientific purposes.⁵¹ *The Suda*, a text from the 10th century, defines the term parapegma as both a kind of astronomical instrument and a general rule (κᾶνών). Therefore, the parapegma served as an indicator of the cyclical process. The parapegma was an abacus, or as Lehoux pointed out, *a technology* used for calculation. This technology requires *content*.⁵² Lehoux states that the content comprised data derived from almanacs and ephemerides.

Jones has identified three standard almanac formats based on the surviving papyri. The most popular listed the dates on which the planets changed their signs of the zodiac. The research conducted by Jones revealed a significant degree of variability in the content and accuracy of calculations presented in almanacs. This is because they originate from a multitude of texts made for commercial purposes.⁵³ Simplified ephemerides, called almanacs, were popular between the first and fourth centuries CE. An almanac or ephemeris is a papyrus-based document; however, it is also possible for a parapegma construction to use alternative materials. Using simple almanac anyone interested in astrology could calculate the position of the planets in the signs of the zodiac without observing the sky or knowing how to do calculations. A parapegma is instead a kind of calendar for keeping track of the sequence of days. The production of high-quality horoscopes required the use of Ptolemy's *Handy Tables*, which contained an extensive collection of astronomical resources.⁵⁴ Trimalchio himself lacked the requisite expertise and, to ascertain his horoscope, sought the consult of a professional, as the plot unfolds. Trimalchio's encounter with the astrologer is the subject of the third chapter of this dissertation.

⁵⁰ Lehoux, *Astronomy*, pp. 200-201.

⁵¹ Lehoux, *Astronomy*, p. 203.

⁵² Lehoux, *Astronomy*, p. 23.

⁵³ Jones, 'Astrologers', p. 308, pp. 311-313.

⁵⁴ Jones, 'The Astronomical Resources', pp. 171-198.

3.1. The board with the seven planets as a parapegma

Given that the board was situated at the entrance to the house, the information displayed upon it was important to the household's members. While Encolpius is surprised by the extravagance of the house, the board does not seem to be something new to him. Petronius does not provide any information regarding the material composition of the board or the method of its attachment to the wall or lamp. The term *tabulae* used by Petronius to describe the board in question (with the singular form *tabula*), would appear to indicate that this item was of the type known as an illustration, created on a wooden board or stone slab. *The Oxford Latin Dictionary* gives the following meanings of “tabula” in English: 1. A flat piece of wood, board, plank, etc., a door panel, a metal plate; 2. A panel of wood used for painting pictures; 4. An inscribed board, notice board; 5. A painted panel, picture, and 6. A board coated with wax and used for writing, writing tablet.⁵⁵ The Greek word πίναξ (*pinax*) has a similar semantic meaning to the Latin *tabula*, as Dorian Gieseler Greenbaum and Micah T. Ross noted. The word *pinax* was a metaphorical meaning for the method of astrological interpretation using such plates.⁵⁶ Petronius does not provide any insight as to whether the planets, the Sun, and the Moon have been identified with a symbol or whether their names have been inscribed in any way. The content of the board falls into two principal categories. The first category comprises the course of the Moon and the seven planets. The second category encompasses the form of a calendar for the determination of days considered fortunate or unfortunate. Furthermore, the object included a peg which permitted the user to highlight certain days. The board provides information regarding the seven planets, a number that is inconsistent with the observable five planets. However, in astrological texts, the Sun, Moon, and planets are frequently collectively designated as the seven stars or planets. For example, Marcus Manilius, a Roman poet, astrologer, and philosopher from the first century CE, presents them collectively in a single sentence:

⁵⁵ *The Oxford Latin Dictionary*, p. 1899.

⁵⁶ Dorian Gieseler Greenbaum and Micah T. Ross, ‘Various Renderings of Πίναξ in Greek and Demotic at Medīnet Mādī’ in *Astrology in Time and Place*, ed. by Nicholas Campion and Dorian Gieseler Greenbaum (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), p. 113.

There exist other stars, which strive against the contrary movement of the Sky and in their swift orbits are poised between heaven and earth: Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, and the Sun, and beneath them Mercury performing its flight between Venus and The Moon.⁵⁷

Consequently, Petronius refers to the number seven, which may be a reference to all visible celestial bodies that traverse the ecliptic. In the English translation, Gareth uses the term *phases of the Moon*, whereas the Latin term *lunae cursum stellarumque* refers rather to the course of the Moon and the planets. *The Oxford Latin Dictionary* gives the following meanings of *cursum* in English: 5. A journey, voyage, passage, the journey of a heavenly body around its orbit.⁵⁸ The ecliptic, which is understood to be the path along which the planets move, is not represented on the preserved parapegma. The peg (or pegs) marks the days on which a particular event is to occur or the actual day. Lehoux states that the Roman astrological parapegma are morphologically similar but functionally quite different from the Greek inscriptional astrometeorological parapegma. The Roman parapegma uses both astrological and astrometeorological content, thus combining the two main functional traditions in the text or tool.⁵⁹ Lehoux highlights a crucial aspect of Roman parapegma, specifically the intercalary nature of the measured time. Roman authors integrate the influences of stars, planets, seasons, and calendar days, and intercalarity seems to play a significant role in Roman sources. Those who used a Roman parapegma could choose to follow a single cycle or to watch multiply of them intersect.⁶⁰

In conclusion, the presence of seven planets suggests that the Trimalchio parapegma may have been a device used to track the planetary and the lunar cycle together.

⁵⁷ Manilius, *Astronomica*, ed. and trans. by George Patrick Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 47.

Manilius, *Astronomica*, vv. 805: *sunt alia adverso pugnancia sidera mundo, / quae terram caelumque inter volitantia pendent / Saturni, Iovi et Martis Solisque, sub illis / Mercurius Venerem inter agit Lunamque volatus.*

⁵⁸ *The Oxford Latin Dictionary*, p. 477.

⁵⁹ Lehoux, *Astronomy*, pp. 23-26.

⁶⁰ Lehoux, *Astronomy*, pp. 23-26.

3.2. The seven-day week and astrology

The employment of the *parapegma* in Trimalchio's residence offers a potential explanation for the difficulties encountered by the inhabitants of the Empire in determining the day of the week. Trimalchio's *parapegma* contains the seven planets, which suggests that it may correspond to a system known as the planetary week, which spread throughout the Roman Empire in the first century CE. According to Michael Falk, this new custom may have related to the increasing popularity of astrology. The seven-days week was also a central feature of Jewish theology and became more popular after the dispersal of Jews over the whole Empire.⁶¹ Bultrighini's hypothesis is that the concept of a seven-day week was a purely theoretical construct within Greek astrology, and that the Romans were the ones who ultimately implemented it for calendrical purposes.⁶² In the modern era, the seven-day week has become the prevailing standard form for temporal organization. However, in antiquity, a multiplicity of calendrical systems were in use. The Roman calendar was not readily comprehensible due to the absence of distinctive nomenclature for days of the week or month. Instead, the Romans designated the days of the week by letters of the alphabet. In the month only three days had their own names (Calends, Nones, Ides). The other days had long names after their relation to them. For example, today's 16 March was the 17th day before Calends (*ante diem septimum decimum Calendas*). The working week lasted seven days, with the eighth day being a market day and together they formed a week, called *nundinae*. Such a system worked well for official documents but could not be convenient in everyday life. The nomenclature of the seven-day week was easier, because the names of days derived from the planetary deities in regular cycle, which facilitated the memory retention of the days of the week. The attribution of days of care to the planets introduces a novel dimension to the calendar.

⁶¹ Michael Falk, 'Astronomical Names for the Days of the Week', *Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada*, Vol. 93 (1999), p. 125.

⁶² Ilaria Bultrighini, 'Thursday (Dies Iovis) in the Later Roman Empire', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 86 (2018), p. 63.

Francis Henry Colson explained that the planetary week is based on the idea that divine beings control time, each hiding in turn. The number of days is seven and fixed by nature, because the number of seven visible planets.⁶³ The origins of the planetary week were Babylonian, although the influence of Jewish tradition is discussed.⁶⁴ The Babylonian month contained four seven-day weeks and became independent of the lunar cycle and named the days of the week after the deities.

In Roman History, Cassius Dio (c. 165 CE – c. 235 CE) notes that by the year 200 CE, the practice of a planetary week became universal within the Roman Empire. He explains that the planetary week can be based on the principle of proportion, whereby 'you will find all the days to be in a kind of musical connection with the arrangement of the heavens'.⁶⁵ However, the earliest surviving literary evidence of the possible use of the planetary week in Latin comes from *The Elegy (The Poet Sick - To Messalla)* of the Roman poet Tibullus (c. 55 BCE – c. 19 BCE). In fragment the poet complains about a delay in his journey:

Either birds or words of evil omen were my pretexts, or there was the accursed day of Saturn to detain me.⁶⁶

In the passage above, the action taken on a particular day is influenced by the planet that rules that day. In the planetary week system each planet corresponds to a day of the week in accordance with the following sequence: Saturn, Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus. The nomenclature of the seven-day week is rooted in the order of the planets, e.g. Solis dies - the day of the Sun. It is possible that Saturn's day may also have been the Jewish Sabbath day. It is, however, not evident why the occurrence of a Jewish festival should be an unfortunate event from the perspective of a Roman poet. An alternative interpretation is that he commenced his journey on a

⁶³ Francis Henry Colson, *The Week: an essay on Origin and Development of the Seven-Day Cycle* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1926), p. 5.

⁶⁴ Bultrighini and Stern, 'The Seven-Day Week', p. 34, p. 39.

⁶⁵ Dio Cassius, *Roman History, Volume III: Books 36-40*, trans. by Earnest Cary and Herbert Baldwin Foster, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), XXXVII.18.1-19.3.

⁶⁶ Catullus, Tibullus, *Catullus. Tibullus*, p. 206.

Tibullus, *Elegies* I.III.17-18: *aut ego sum causatus aves aut omina dira Saturnive sacram me tenuisse diem.*

Saturday, the day of the week associated with Saturn, a planet whose influence impedes the progress of endeavours. It is regrettable that we are unable to ascertain the precise day of the week on which the gathering at Trimalchio's took place. At the outset of the narrative, Encolpius indicates that the event in question occurred on the third day. However, it is uncertain whether he is referencing to the third day of the week or month, or the third day of his excursion in the city.

Manilius makes no mention of the planetary week or the assignment of planets to days of the week. However, *The Anthology* by Vettius Valens (120 – c. 175 AD), written in Greek, contains a short chapter on the subject⁶⁷. Valens instructed his students on how to ascertain the day of the week in which a given birth occurred, identify the order of the planets in relation to the days, and determine the intersection of day and night into hours associated with the planets:

About the week and the Sabbath day. (...) And the order of the [planetary] stars in relation to the days [of the week] holds thus: Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn. But the arrangement of their orbits [around the earth is] thus Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury, [and] Moon. Moreover, by this [same] arrangement the hours [of each day] are designated; and by means of the hours [is indicated the] day of the next [planetary] star.⁶⁸

It is thus possible to subdivide the time units further in accordance with the astrological sequence, beginning with the days of the week and subsequently the hours that comprise them. The quality of time was subsequently determined by the relationship between the planetary ruler of the day and the hour. The planet who rules the first hour becomes automatically ruler of the day. Valens does not offer a practical guide on how to use the knowledge of planetary days and hours. Robert Odom in his analysis of the calendar used by Valens observed that he did not utilise the Roman civil day, defined as a period from midnight to midnight, but rather a system of measurement that began in the evening, when the sun sets.⁶⁹ Additionally, Valens employed a calendrical system that had gained prominence in Alexandria, Egypt, during the imperial era under

⁶⁷ Vettii Valentis Antiocheni, *Anthologiarum libri novem*, edited by David Pingree (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1986), I.10.

⁶⁸ Robert L. Odom, 'Vettius Valens and the Planetary Week', *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, Vol. 3. No. 2 (1965), p. 112.

⁶⁹ Odom, 'Vettius Valens', p. 125.

Octavian (63 BCE – 14 CE).⁷⁰ Bultrighini observed that the introduction of the planetary week in the Roman world was at least promoted by the influence that the Egyptian calendrical system as well as further Alexandrian astronomical and astrological ideas exerted over the reformation of the Roman calendar by Julius Caesar in 46 BCE.⁷¹

However, if a day relates to a planet, it will gain the properties of that planet, as evidenced by the Tibullus poem. There was a delay on Saturn's day due to Saturn's slow movement through the ecliptic. The astrological principles dictate that the poet should embark on the day of Mercury, as this planet is associated with the welfare of travelers. By acquiring a fundamental understanding of the planet's characteristics, it becomes possible to ascertain which days of the week are optimal for a given purpose. Nowadays, the main use of astrology is mostly understood as reading a birth chart. Nevertheless, astrology is not without utility in other domains. Traditionally, there were two main branches of astrology as described by Ptolemy.⁷² The first was the general astrology which dealt with the affairs of whole nations and cities. The second was the personal astrology, which was known as natal astrology. There was also a third branch of astrology, called catarchic astrology, which deals with the problem of choosing the right time to act according to the zodiacal position of the planets.⁷³ It is likely that Trimalchio's board had more practical use than the horoscopes of the newborn slaves, and this would therefore be an example of the application of catarchic astrology to everyday life.

⁷⁰ Odom, 'Vettius Valens', p. 113.

⁷¹ Bultrighini, 'Thursday', p. 64.

⁷² Claudii Ptolemaei, *Opera quae exstant omnia. Volumen III, 1: ΑΠΟΤΕΛΕΣΜΑΤΙΚΑ* ed. by Wolfgang Hübner (Lipsiae in aedibus B. G. Teubneri, 1998), 2.1.

⁷³ Jones, 'The Astronomical', p. 175.

3.2. The planetary hour and parapegma CIL IX.5808

Jones observes that although the utilization of a parapegma did not necessitate the observation of celestial phenomena, the conceptual association between astral occurrences and terrestrial consequences remained intact. In any case, the technology of parapegma required the daily presence of an individual to operate the indicator.⁷⁴ Trimalchio maintained workers at his residence, to whom he could assign the task of monitoring the parapegma. However, one of the slaves was performing his duties in an exemplary manner:

He's a most refined man: he has a water clock in his dining room, and a trumpeter who's always in uniform, so that he constantly knows how much of his life he's lost.⁷⁵

The custom piques the interest of Encolpius and his companions, leading them to accept the invitation for dinner because any adventurer would be inclined to view such marvels. It seems reasonable to posit that the author's objective may be to create a comic effect by referencing the works of Seneca (c. 4 BCE – 65 CE), particularly in relation to Seneca's recommendation on how to use the passing of time:

Therefore, Lucilius, do as you write me that you are doing: hold every hour in your grasp. Lay hold of to-day's task, and you will not need to depend so much upon tomorrow's. While we are postponing, life speeds by. Nothing, Lucilius, is ours, except time. We were entrusted by nature with the ownership of this single thing, so fleeting and slippery that anyone who will can oust us from possession.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Jones, 'The Astronomical', p. 173, p. 182.

⁷⁵ Petronius, Seneca, *Satyricon*, p. 110.

*Sat.*26.9: Trimalchio, *lautissimus homo*, <qui> horologium in triclinio et bucinatorem habet subornatum, ut subdine sciat quantum de vita perderit.

⁷⁶ Seneca, *Epistles*, Volume I: *Epistles 1-65*, trans. by Richard Mott Gummere (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1917), p. 3, p. 5.

Seneca, *Ad Luc.*1.2: *Fac ergo, mi Lucili, quod facere te scribis, omnes horas complectere. Sic fiet, ut minus ex crastino pendeas, si hodierno manum inieceris. Dum differtur, vita transcurrit. Omnia, Lucili, aliena sunt, tempus tantum nostrum est. In huius rei unius fugacis ac lubricae possessionem natura nos misit, ex qua expellit quicumque vult.*

The question of whether Petronius makes any allusions to Seneca has been the subject of considerable debate and analysis. The characters depicted by Petronius display a lack of restraint in expressing their emotions and appetites, with the sole guiding principle being the immediate benefit. This approach stands in stark contrast to the values espoused by Seneca. *The Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, regarded as Seneca's most accomplished and mature work, was composed towards the end of the author's life. One of the earliest letters provides evidence that it was written following Seneca's withdrawal from public life, and it can be dated to the spring of 62 CE.⁷⁷ If the hypothesis proposed by K.F.C. Rose that Petronius wrote his novel after April 65 is correct, then it is possible that Petronius was acquainted with Seneca's letters.⁷⁸ It is possible that *The Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium* were distributed more widely. Nevertheless, this is the first collection of letters in Roman prose. As Setaioli has argued, Seneca intended his work to belong to the epistolary genre, regardless of the content and approach taken. It is therefore evident that he was deliberately attempting something new in the literary landscape.⁷⁹ Both authors were therefore creative artists who were not averse to literary experimentation. Rose asserted that he had identified approximately eighty parallels between the two works. They include similarities in philosophical themes, condemnations of luxury, and moral standpoints.⁸⁰

J.P. Sullivan identified three distinct methods through which Petronius uses Senecan material. The first is parody, characterised by extended passages that imitate Senecan prose style (illustrated by *Sat.* 88). The second is the dramatic deployment of Senecan elements to challenge the philosophical implications of the source material (as evidenced by *Epistle* 47 on the appropriate treatment of slaves). The third type of parallel is a more subtle deployment of Seneca's themes for the purpose of providing greater amusement, thereby demonstrating Petronius's superior artistic abilities.⁸¹ If

⁷⁷ Aldo Setaioli, 'Epistulae Morales' in Brill's Companion to Seneca, ed. by Gregor Damschen and Andreas Heil (Leiden: Brill, 2014), p. 191.

⁷⁸ Rose, *The Date and Author*, p. 67.

⁷⁹ Setaioli, 'Epistulae', p. 197.

⁸⁰ Rose, *The Date and Author*, p. 72.

⁸¹ John Partick Sullivan, 'Petronius, Seneca and Lukan: A Neronian Literary Feud?', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, Vol. 99 (1968), pp. 461-463.

the description of counting down the hours is an allusion to Seneca, it would fall within the first category of examples.

Nevertheless, an alternative interpretation of the scene with the trumpeter is also conceivable. It is possible that the trumpeter had the task of signalling the start of the next planetary hours, thereby providing information that was useful to all members of the household. Unfortunately, no confirmation of such a practice exists in any other ancient sources. However, today's astrologers and customers, who benefit from knowledge of the planetary hours, use computer programs and applications to inform them of the arrival of the next hour.⁸² In a wealthy ancient house, the trumpeter could announce the start of the next hour. At the present time, only one *parapegma* is known to contain information regarding planetary hours: it is the CIL IX.5808 object. It is a fragment of a larger plaque, which is likely to date from the first century CE. Stephen Heilen conducted an in-depth study of the object, although the surviving fragment is incomplete.⁸³ On the board, the planetary hours are indicated by the letters B (*bona* - good), C (*communis* - ambivalent) and N (*noxia* - noxious). The dimensions of the plaque were approximately twenty-five by 140 centimetres. The discovery of this object provides compelling evidence that planetary hours were employed in the Roman Empire during the first century CE. Heilen sees that in later astrological texts, such as the *Calendar of the Year 354 CE*, the planetary hours are marked in a similar manner, and their influence was also examined within the context of medicine.⁸⁴ CIL IX.5808 became known during excavations conducted in the Italian town of Potentia in 1820.⁸⁵ Petronius does not explicitly identify the setting of the *Cena*. In the eighteenth century, Nicola Ignarra proposed Puteoli, a city in the Campania region of Italy.⁸⁶ Lehoux describes a *parapegma* discovered in 1928 in Puteoli amphitheatre. The fragment is of a small size and does not contain planetary hours.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, the existence of this practice is once more confirmed by an examination of the Roman literature. The poet Juvenal (55 CE – 128 CE) cautions the reader of his *Satires VI*

⁸² An example of such an application is *Planetary Hours* by Broer Apps (2023) or *Planetaro* for iPad, AppleWatch and on-line access <https://planetaro.com/planetary-hours-calculator/> [accessed September 2024].

⁸³ Heilen, 'Short Time', p. 245.

⁸⁴ Heilen, 'Short Time', p. 247

⁸⁵ Heilen, 'Short Time', p. 244.

⁸⁶ Rose, 'Time and Place', p. 404.

⁸⁷ Lehoux, *Astronomy*, p. 158.

against women who adhere to astrological principles in all aspects of their lives and seek guidance from astrological texts to determine the optimal hour for action:

‘But remember to avoid ever running into the kind of woman who you’ll see holding in her hands a well thumbed almanac like it was a clammy ball of amber. She doesn’t consult anyone else, but these days is consulted herself. She will not accompany her husband when he heads for camp or for home if the calculations of Thrasyllus detain her. When she decides to drive to the first milestone, she finds the best hour in her book.’⁸⁸

The above quote demonstrates that female users of astrology could calculate on their own the hours appropriate for action. This practice was so prevalent that Juvenal included it among an extensive list of female vices. His approach to women is misogynistic in nature. However, it is possible that his descriptions of various customs were based on reality, albeit with a degree of exaggeration. The system of determining planetary days and times exemplifies a form of astrology that does not necessitate observations of the celestial sphere. Nevertheless, it maintains reference to the planetary cycle which governs time. In this context the planets are the ‘guardians’ of the days and hours, as they impart meaning to these temporal units and oversee the activities undertaken during their span. As Plato wrote in *Timaeus*, planets ‘came into existence for the determining and preserving of the numbers of Time’.⁸⁹

The division of time necessitates the utilisation of a timekeeping device. As Bultrighini notes, the Romans began to employ the astrological tenets underlying the planetary week during a period when Roman scholars and politicians exhibited an increasing interest in timekeeping and chronology.⁹⁰ The clock is also a symbol of social status. In Trimalchio's discourse on the architectural design of his grandiose tomb, he asserts that the sundial must be in the centre of the structure:

⁸⁸ Juvenal, Persius, *Juvenal and Persius*, ed. and trans. by Susanna Morton Braund (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 287, p. 289.

Juvenal, *Sat. VI*, vv. 572-575: *illius occursus etiam vitare memento, in cuius manibus ceu pinguia sucina tritas cernis ephemeridas, quae nullum consulit et iam consulitur, quae castra viro patriamque petente non ibit pariter numeris revocata Thrasylli ad primum lapidem vectari cum placet, hora sumitur ex libro.*

⁸⁹ Plato, *Timaeus. Critias. Cleitophon. Menexenus. Epistles*, trans. by Robert Gregg Bury (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929), 38C, p. 79.

⁹⁰ Bultrighini, ‘Thursday’, p. 64.

a sundial in the middle so that whoever looks at the time will read my name, whether he wants to or not.⁹¹

It would be a misrepresentation of Trimalchio to define him solely based on his wealth; there is more to him than that. He is the head of his own time, that of his household and of his guests. Moreover, he has received an astrological prediction regarding the duration of his life and the corresponding number of remaining hours, details which will be elaborated on in the following chapter of the dissertation.

3.3. The phases of the Moon

The Moon is the only celestial body mentioned by name by Petronius. He does not write explicitly about whether the board provided information about the current phase of the Moon. This kind of information was especially important in ancient times for the running of the house and the farm. The knowledge of the phase of the Moon was part of the basic equipment of a good farmer, as evidenced by the Roman specialist literature of the period. For example, the agricultural textbook *Rerum rusticarum libri tres* ('Three Books on Agriculture'), written by Marcus Terentius Varro (116 – 27 BC), recommends the scheduling of farm work in accordance with the phases of the Moon and other astronomical events, for example:

The lunar periods also must be taken into account; (...) Some operations should be carried out on the land during the waxing rather than the waning of the moon, while there are certain crops which you should gather in the opposite phase, such as grain and firewood.⁹²

⁹¹ Petronius, Seneca, *Satyricon*, p. 215.

Petronius, *Sat.* 71.11: *horologium in medio, ut quisquis horas inspiciet, vellit nolit, nomen meum legat.*

⁹² Cato and Varro, *On Agriculture*, trans. by William Davis Hooper, Harrison Boyd Ash (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), pp. 261-262.

Varro, *On Agriculture*, I.XXXVII.1-2: *Dies lunares quoque observandi (...) Quaedam facienda in agris potius crescente luna quam senescente, quaedam contra quae metas, ut frumenta et caeduas silva.*

Varro refers not only to managing the farm, but also to take care of the body according to the phases of the Moon:

‘I learned this rule from my father,’ said Agrasius, “and I keep it not only in shearing my sheep but in cutting my hair, for fear that if I have it done when the moon is waxing I may become bald’.⁹³

In their writings, Cato, Pliny, and Columella offer comparable guidelines dependent on the phase of the moon.⁹⁴ As Eugene Tavenner points out, the Roman authors agree on the influence of the phases of the Moon on the dates suitable for certain agricultural works. Their recommendations are based on the idea that the Moon influences all sublunar objects (plants, animals, humans, and weather) in their growth and decay. The fundamental principle was straightforward: any practice intended to result in growth or improvement should start during the waxing moon, while any practice aimed at reversing a process should start during the waning moon. The period of the new moon was an optimal time for maintaining the status quo.⁹⁵ This practical agricultural knowledge applied to major industries such as wineries and oil mills, whose owners sought to multiply their profits, like Trimalchio. It thus seems reasonable to posit that the board may have contained information pertaining to the astrological position of the Moon, along with its current phase.

The design of Trimalchio's house, according to Rose, corresponds to the reality of Roman houses from the first century, which may be an important clue to the dating of the novel.⁹⁶ Rose does not focus on the planetary board, but rather draws attention to another passage in the novel that captures the reality of the Roman house:

⁹³ Cato, Varro. *On Agriculture*, pp. 261-262.

Varro, *On Agriculture* I.LXXXVII.2: *Ego istaec, inquit Agrasius, non solum in ovibus tondendis, sed in meo capillo a patre acceptum servo, ni crescente luna tondens calvos fiam.*

⁹⁴ Eugene Tavenner, ‘The Roman Farmer and the Moon’, *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, Vol. 49 (1918), pp. 68-79.

⁹⁵ Tavenner, ‘The Roman Farmer’, p. 68.

⁹⁶ Rose, *The Date and Author*, p. 28

To our left as we went in and not far from the porter's room was a wall painting of a huge dog tied with a chain, and over it in big capitals was written: BEWARE OF THE DOG.⁹⁷

A mosaic from Pompeii, bearing the inscription 'Cave Canem' (Mo. 832-52), depicts a chained dog like that of the *Cena*. The dog that frightens Encolpius is not the mosaic but a wall painting. According to Paul Veyne, the depiction of the dog on the wall, rather than on the floor, is intended to emphasise the naivety of Encolpius and to introduce a climate of illusion and caricature of reality into the plot.⁹⁸ However, if the Cave Canem theme did indeed appear in Roman houses, the same may be true of the planetary board. It is interesting to note that Encolpius knows the symbols of the planets and seems to know perfectly well what the board is for. This could indicate that such boards were in use in Roman households, indicating a familiarity with the fundamental principles of astrology among the Roman people.

In conclusion, the Petronius description of the parapegma is noteworthy for its presentation of the astrological base calendar as a tool employed in the context of everyday life. An analysis of a range of additional literary sources and archaeological findings supports this interpretation. The parapegma from the *Cena* may be an exemplar of the Roman parapegma, which incorporates both lunar and planetary cycles. The reference to the seven planets in the writings of Petronius provides evidence of the existence and popularity of a seven-day week in the Roman Empire. It is a possibility that the trumpeter scene makes a comical reference to Seneca. Nevertheless, had the trumpeter proclaimed the planetary hours, the scene would have an additional layer of humour. For the historian of astrology, it would have constituted a notable instance of the everyday usage of astrological techniques.

⁹⁷ Petronius, *Cena*, p. 115.

Petronius, *Sat.*29.1-2: *ad sinistram enim intransibibus non longe ab ostiari cella canis ingens, catena vinctus, in pariete erat pictus superque quadrata littera scriptum "cave canem"*.

⁹⁸ Paul Veyne, 'Cave Canem', *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire*, tome 75, n°1 (1963), p. 62.

4. The Zodiac Dish

Upon the arrival of the guests to the dining room, the feast began, with the service of food by singing waiters. The feast described by Wim Broekaert and Arjan Zuiderhoek as ‘the most famous (and decadent) Roman banquet’ has commenced.⁹⁹ The initial course included a selection of appetisers. Then it was time for the presentation of a striking silver skeleton. Trimalchio encouraged the guests to engage in the enjoyment of life and the servants brought in another dish:

The circular tray had the twelve signs of the Zodiac in sequence round it, and over each of them the chef had laid appropriate food matching the sign. Over Aries he had set chickpeas fashioned into rams’ heads; over Taurus a piece of beef; over Gemini testicles and kidneys; over Cancer a crown; over Leo an African fig; over Virgo a barren sow’s womb; over Libra a scale on one arm of which was a cheese cake and on the other a honey cheese cake; over Scorpio a lobster; over Sagittarius a bird that aims at the eye; over Capricorn a boar fish and horned fish; over Aquarius a goose; over Pisces two mullets. In the middle of the tray a piece of turf, hewn out with its blades of grass, supported a honeycomb.¹⁰⁰

The dish seemed modest to the guests, although Encolpius was surprised by the novelty. However, as Schmidt notes, the practice of associating foods with zodiac signs traces back to ancient Greece.¹⁰¹ Athenaeus was an ancient Greek rhetorician

⁹⁹ Wim Broekaert and Arjan Zuiderhoek, ‘Food Systems in Classical Antiquity’ in *A Cultural History of Food in Antiquity*, ed. by Paul Erdkamp (Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), p. 46.

¹⁰⁰ Petronius and Seneca, *Satyricon*, p. 127.

Petronius, *Sat.*35.2-6: *rotundum enim repositorium duodecim habebat signa in orbe disposita, super quae proprium convenientemque materiae structor imposuerat cibum: super arietem cicer arietinum, super taurum bubulae frustum, super geminos testiculos ac rienes, super cancrum coronam, super leonem ficum Africanam, super virginem steriliculam, super libram stateramin cuius altera parte scriblita erat, in altera placenta, super scorpionem (*)[pisciculum marinum], super sagittarium oclopetam, super capricornum locustam marinam, super aquarium anserem, super pisces duos mullos. in medio autem caespes cum herbis excisus favum sustinebat.*

¹⁰¹ Smith, ‘Commentary’ in Petroni Arbitri, *Cena*, pp. 75-76.

and grammarian (late second and early third centuries BCE). He quotes Alexis of Thuri (c. 375 BCE – c. 275 BCE) in his *Deipnosophistae*:

Instead, a casserole-dish was set beside us that exuded the sumptuous smell of the Seasons and represented the circle of the whole sky. Because every good thing that's up there was in it: fish and kids, and a scorpion-fish ran between them; and hard-boiled eggs cut in half suggested the stars.¹⁰²

In ancient times, therefore, the zodiac dish was served as a starter. At Trimalchio's dinner, the zodiac dish is the first course. In their analysis of the passage from Petronius, scholars have primarily concentrated on the problem of associating the dish with the symbolism of the zodiac signs. Rose and Sullivan posit that the dish served is a 'visual joke' and a rebus that alludes to astrology.¹⁰³ They identified four distinct methods for the construction of rebuses. The first is the use of verbal and visual similarity. For example, the ram (the animal-symbol of the sign Aries) has a hard head, shaped like a chick-pea. (According to Athenaeus, Theophrastus and Sophilus also called certain chickpeas "rams").¹⁰⁴ The second method is to use a partial representation, specifically a rhetorical figure known as a *pars pro toto*. Consequently, Taurus is analogous to a piece of beef, whereas Virgo is analogous to an udder. A further method is to refer to an example, such as the kidneys for Gemini, the scales with biscuits for Libra and fishes for Pisces. The fourth method of creating a rebus is by an association. In this case, the goose is associated with the sign of Aquarius due to its connection with water. Similarly, lions were from Africa and Leo is associated with the African figs.¹⁰⁵ D. Keyer points out that figs are harvested in the middle of summer, and this time is attributed to the rulership of the sign Leo, so another explanation for the attribution is possible.¹⁰⁶ It must be noted, however, that a certain fundamental knowledge of astrological principles will be required in order to engage with the game. To decode the Gemini sign, it is essential to understand that it possesses

¹⁰² Athenaeus, *The Learned Banqueters, Volume I: Books 1-3.106e*, ed. and trans. by S. Douglas Olson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), II.60a, p. 337.

¹⁰³ Rose and Sullivan, 'Trimalchio's Zodiac Dish', pp. 180-181.

¹⁰⁴ Athenaeus, *The Learned Banqueters, Volume I: Books 1-3.106e*, ed. and trans. by S. Douglas Olson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), II.54.f.

¹⁰⁵ Rose and Sullivan, 'Trimalchio's Zodiac Dish', pp. 180-181.

¹⁰⁶ Keyer, 'Trimalchio's Astrology', p. 267.

a dual nature, as described by Manilius in *Astronomica*, so the dish is the testicles and kidneys - organs that occur in pairs in the body.¹⁰⁷

However, the assignment of dishes to the three signs raises questions as to their interpretation. Capricorn was attributed to the *locusta marina* by the creator of the dish. According to the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* *locusta* is 1. a locus, 2. a cruscatean, a kind of lobster.¹⁰⁸ Rose and Sullivan propose that the solution to this enigma is the odd intrusion in the text of manuscript H: *in quo cornua erant* (in which were horns). Manuscript L omitted this phrase and had *capri cornua* instead of *capricornum*.¹⁰⁹ The horns are more consistent with the Capricorn sign. However, according to Manilius, Capricorn has a fish-like tail, which implies an element of earth combined with the element of water.¹¹⁰

Another question relates to Scorpio and his *pisciculus marinus*. According to the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* is a little fish. While the astrological sign Scorpio is currently associated with the element of water, Manilius presents an alternative perspective, suggesting that it is aligned with the element of earth.¹¹¹ Rose and Sullivan believe that there must be a glossa, or that alternatively, that *locusta* should be understood as a reference to Scorpio in place of Capricorn. This is based on the observation that *locusta* resembles a scorpion in appearance and is known for its vicious nature.¹¹² In Stephen Gaselee's view, the text should be structured as follows: *super Scorpionem locustam marinani, super Sagittarium oclopectam, super Capricornum capri cornua* and if this suggestion be adopted, an excellent sense is produced. Capricorn gets a pair of goat's horns, which equally naturally stands for men called cuckolds. Gaselee notes that *locustam* may then also be associated with Locusta, a famous poisoner, even called the queen of this crime.¹¹³ Tacitus refers to her services to Nero.¹¹⁴ Rose and Sullivan propose: “super scorpionem locustam, super sagittarium oculatam, super capricornum caprum and cornutam.”¹¹⁵ The most significant unresolved issue

¹⁰⁷ Manilius, *Astronomica*, 2.162-196.

¹⁰⁸ The *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, p. 1040.

¹⁰⁹ Rose and Sullivan, ‘Trimalchio’s Zodiac’, p. 182.

¹¹⁰ Manilius, *Astronomica*, 2.230-233.

¹¹¹ Manilius, *Astronomica*, 2.225-229.

¹¹² Rose and Sullivan, ‘Trimalchio’s Zodiac’, p. 181.

¹¹³ Stephen Gaselee, ‘Excurs II’ in *The Codex Traguriensis of Petronius, Cena Trimalchionis* (Cambridge: 1915), p. 17.

¹¹⁴ Tacitus. *Annals: Books 4-6, 11-12*, trans. by John Jackson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1937), XII.66.

¹¹⁵ Rose and Sullivan, ‘Trimalchio’s Zodiac’, p. 184.

concerns the sign of Sagittarius. The assigned *oclopet*a remains unknown. Rose and Sullivan provide an overview of the various suggestions they identified in the literature, which included the crow, the google-eyed fish, the octopus, the fish known as *oculata* or an expression *qui oculos petit*.¹¹⁶ Such an expression can be translated as something that attacks the eyes, seeks the eyes or even asks for the eyes. In her analysis, Giulia Ammannati posits the presence of a glossa within the text, which refers to a particular animal, *oc(u)lopaetam*.¹¹⁷ *Paetus* means ‘having a cast in the eye’.¹¹⁸ The animal served may have been a squinting bird or a one-eyed fish, but these associations do not evoke the sign of Sagittarius. Nevertheless, Trimalchio's guests appear to have no difficulty in solving the puzzle. The underlying rationale of the rebus leads to Manilius, who described the shapes of the constellations in the sky. He noted that Sagittarius retained one eye and lost the other.¹¹⁹ Consequently, in the next scene of the *Cena* (*Sat.*39.11), Trimalchio will call people born under Sagittarius as strabismic. The crown went to Cancer due to its association with Trimalchio.

It is intriguing that the zodiacal dish does not contain planets. However, someone was circling around, in the likeness of the moon:

An Egyptian slave boy carried round bread in a silver portable oven, and the master himself in a most hideous voice mangled a song out of the mime *Laserpiciarius*...¹²⁰

In contrast with the anticipated harmonic symphony of the spheres, there was a cacophony. The waiters engaged in singing, their voices lacking the requisite tune and harmony. Unfortunately, nothing is known about the mime *Laserpiciarius*. Schmeling posits that the title may have referred to the collector of the herb, which is currently known as *asafoetida*.¹²¹

¹¹⁶ Rose and Sullivan, ‘Trimalchio’s Zodiac’, p. 181.

¹¹⁷ Giulia Ammannati, ‘Oclopetam o Oculo Paetam?’, *Materiali e Discussioni per l’analisi Dei Testi Classici*, no. 57 (2006), pp. 231–35.

¹¹⁸ *The Oxford Latin Dictionary*, p. 1282.

¹¹⁹ Manilius, *Astronomica*, 2.258–260.

¹²⁰ Petronius and Seneca, *Satyricon*, p. 127.

Petronius *Sat.*35.6: *circumferebat Aegyptius puer clibano argenteo panem, atque ipse etiam taeterrima voce de Laserpiciario mimo canticum extorsit...*

¹²¹ Schmeling, *A Commentary*, p. 77.

According to H. Lindsay, the detailed description of the dishes in the *Cena* is unique to Roman literature. The decadence of Trimalchio leaves a lasting reflection of the extremes of first century luxury. Nevertheless, it is challenging to discern whether the humour is a parody or if it reflects a representation of reality. Lindsay makes a significant observation: the dishes are frequently not what they appear to be at first glance.¹²² The guests appreciate the idea of a zodiac dish, but it turns out that the purpose of serving it is not for consumption. The zodiac dish is part of the performance:

As he spoke, four three-step dancers ran up in time with the music and removed the top part of the tray. Once this had been done, we saw below in another dish fat fowls, sows' udders, and in the middle a hare decked out with wings to look like Pegasus. We noticed also four representations of Marsyas at the corners of the dish, from whose wineskins a peppery fish sauce ran over the fish that were swimming as if in a channel.¹²³

The zodiacal dish represented the sky and the signs of the zodiac or constellations on the ecliptic. The earth, abundant with food, was situated beneath this celestial representation. The use of the four is open to interpretation. The four dancers lifted the lid with the zodiac. The dish contains the four types of meat and four Marsyas figures. These characteristics evoke associations with the four elements. For example, fowls could symbolise air, a hare-Pegasus fire, sows' udders earth and fish water. Additionally, the four sauces drip across the image could correspond to the four sides of the world or the four winds. The appearance of the satyr Marsyas is also worthy of further consideration. Marsyas became renowned as the champion of the double flute, but lost the competition to Apollo, who subsequently skinned him.¹²⁴ Marsyas carrying a wineskin was a motif well known in Roman times. Julia Habetzeder observes that the sculpture of Marsyas stood in the Forum Romanum. In 86 CE Martial describes

¹²² Hugh Lindsay, 'Food Representations' in *A Cultural History of Food in Antiquity*, ed. by Paul Erdkamp (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), p. 172.

¹²³ Petronius and Seneca, *Satyricon*, p. 129.

Petronius, *Sat.*36.1-4: *quattuor tripudiantes procurrerunt superioremque partem repositorii abstulerunt. quo facto videmus infra [scilicet in altero ferculo] altilia et sumina leporemque in medio pinnis subornatum, ut Pegasus videretur. notavimus etiam circa angulos repositorii Marsyas quattuor, ex quorum utriculis garum piperatum currebat super pisces, qui quasi in euripo natabant.*

¹²⁴ Pierre Grimal, *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology*, trans. by A. R. Maxwell-Hyslop (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), p. 274.

that it was a meeting place for lawyers and moneylenders.¹²⁵ Habetzeder points out, however, that Marsyas was also a symbol of freedom and civic liberty, as evidenced by Servius in the second century CE.¹²⁶ This may be the reason why Trimalchio employed the figure, as he himself was in the business of lending money at interest and obtained his freedom. During the dinner, the theme of slavery and liberation from it will be a primary focus of discussion. In the world illuminated by the Zodiac dish, the rain of freedom and justice is falling from wineskins of Marsyas, and the earth is full of nourishment. The chef responsible for the preparation of the dishes is a slave. Trimalchio gave him the name Daedalus, as a reference to the mythological constructor and inventor (*Sat.*70.3).¹²⁷ At the end of the dinner, Daedalus will join guests with other slaves (*Sat.*71.1). Trimalchio will then make the following pronouncement: 'If things go my way, they'll soon taste the water of freedom.'¹²⁸

The Zodiac dish can be a highly conceptualised and designed concept, which expresses the ideal of creating an ideal world of abundance, in which justice and order prevail. Nevertheless, Trimalchio is the architect of this utopian realm, and he is formerly enslaved and devoid of both education and refined taste. Consequently, the resulting effects are of a notably inferior calibre. Walsh stated that it was 'a monumental exhibition of the prodigal gluttony which is the mark of the vulgar host.'¹²⁹ As Schmelling observes, the dishes served are still in plebeian style: modest and simple. In Trimalchio's residence there was no need to import or purchase any items, which is a notable contrast to the other feasts described by Varro, Horace, or Juvenal. Imported items were luxury for the aristocracy.¹³⁰ However, this makes Trimalchio's world a self-sustaining cosmos.

¹²⁵ Julia Habetzeder, 'Marsyas in the garden?: Small-scale sculptures referring to the Marsyas in the forum Opuscula', *Annual of the Swedish Institutes at Athens and Rome*, 3 (2010), p. 169.

¹²⁶ Habetzeder, 'Marsyas', p. 175.

¹²⁷ Grimal, *The Dictionary*, p. 124.

¹²⁸ Petronius and Seneca, *Satyricon*, p. 213.

Petronius, *Sat.*71.1: *tamen me salvo cito aquam liberam gustabunt.*

¹²⁹ Walsh, *The Roman Novel*, p. 116.

¹³⁰ Gerard Schmeling, 'Trimalchio's Menu and Wine List', *Classical Philology*, Vol. 65, No. 4 (1970), p. 249.

4.1 The Zodiac and the Human Nature

Once the guests had consumed the initial course, Trimalchio resolved to entertain the audience by presenting a brief overview of the characteristics attributed to individuals born under the influence of each zodiac sign:

This is the sky where the twelve gods live, and it transforms itself into as many figures. First it becomes Aries, the Ram, and anyone born under the sign has many flocks, a lot of wool, and moreover a hard head, a shameless forehead, a sharp horn. Very many declamation buffs and their little rams are born under this sign.” We praised the quick understanding of our astrologer, and so he went on: “Then the whole sky changes into a young bull, Taurus, when obstinate people are born and plowmen and those who provide food for themselves. Under Gemini, the Twins, are born chariot pairs, pairs of oxen, men with balls, and those who smear both sides of the walls. I was born under Cancer, the Crab, and so I stand on many feet, and I possess many things on sea and land, for the Crab fits both here and there. And therefore I earlier placed nothing over the Crab for fear of weighing down my natal star. Under Leo, the Lion, are born gluttons and potentates; under Virgo are born those addicted to women, and runaways and chained slaves; under Libra, the Scales, are born butchers and perfume sellers and those who weigh things; under Scorpio are born poisoners and assassins; under Sagittarius, the archer, are born cross-eyed men who take the bacon while looking at the vegetables; under Capricorn, the Goat, are born those who suffer and for their troubles horns sprout; under Aquarius, the water carrier, are born innkeepers and those with water on the brain; under Pisces, the Fish, are born chefs and teachers of rhetoric who fish for pupils. So the world turns round like a millstone, and always does something good or bad, so that men are either born or die.¹³¹

¹³¹ Petronius and Seneca, *Satyricon*, p. 135, p. 137.

Petronius, *Sat.* 39.5-14: *caelus hic, in quo duodecim dii habitant, in totidem se figuras convertit, et modo fit aries. itaque quisquis nascitur illo signo, multa pecora habet, multum lanæ, caput præterea durum, frontem expudoratam, cornum acutum. plurimi hoc signo scholastici nascuntur et arietilli. 'laudamus urbanitatem mathematici; itaque adiecit: 'deinde totus caelus taurulus fit. itaque tunc calcitrosi nascuntur et bubulci et qui se ipsi pascunt. in geminis autem nascuntur bigae et boves et colei et qui utrosque parietes linunt. in cancro ego natus sum. ideo multis pedibus sto, et in mari et in terra multa possideo; nam cancer et hoc et illoc quadrat, et ideo iam dudum nihil supra illum posui, ne genesim meam premerem. in leone cataphagæ nascuntur et imperiosi; in virgine mulierosi et fugitivi et compediti; in libra laniones et unguentarii et quicumque aliquid expendunt; in scorpiione venenarii et percussores; in sagittario strabones, qui holera spectant, lardum tollunt; in capricorno aerumnosi, quibus prae mala sua cornua nascuntur; in aquario copones et cucurbitae; in piscibus obsonatores et rhetores. sic orbis vertitur tamquam mola, et semper aliquid mali facit, ut homines aut nascantur aut pereant.*

The aim of the speech is to entertain rather than to astonish the audience with its astrological erudition. Nevertheless, the assembled company refers to Trimalchio as an astrologer and sage of greater eminence than Hipparchus and Aratus. This demonstrates that Petronius was aware of the work of these scholars. The reference to the poet Aratus (c. 315 BCE - before 240 BCE) is of particular significance. Aratus was the author of the work *Phaenomena*, in which he provided detailed descriptions of constellations. As posited by Gerald James Toomer, the poem attained the status of the most widely read poem in the ancient world, after the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Terentius Varro and Cicero translated it into Latin.¹³²

The astrological dish was a visual rebus, the interpretation of which necessitated a basic understanding of astrological principles. A similar phenomenon applies to the characteristics of the zodiac signs. Rebus is based on word play, associations with zodiacal symbols, but also requires at least a preliminary knowledge of the characteristics of each sign. As previously discussed, Manilius offers a key to decoding the zodiacal dish rebus.

A further examination of the Trimalchio's speech reveals additional parallels. Those born under the sign of Aries will be characterised by a hairy appearance, because sheep produce wool. According to Manilius, they will be "rich with an abundance of fleecy wool". The term "sharp horn" *cornum acutum* could be an allusion to the erotic life of Aries, as Manilius suggests that "his desires will lead him to disaster".¹³³ Schmeling posits that the scholastics (students or teachers at school of rhetoric) were here the victims of a joke with their thick heads.¹³⁴ Those born under the astrological sign of Taurus are known for their patience and ability to work the land.¹³⁵ The astrological sign of Gemini is associated with duality¹³⁶. Sullivan translated *qui utrosque parietes linunt* as 'people who do it both ways' which adds an erotica dimension to the joke.¹³⁷ In his identification with the sign of Cancer, Trimalchio aligns himself with the qualities ascribed to this astrological sign by Manilius. These include a reputation for success in business, both on land and

¹³² *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (4 ed.), <https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk> [accessed September 23, 2024].

¹³³ Manilius, *Astronomica*, 4.124-139.

¹³⁴ Schmeling, *Commentary*, p. 152.

¹³⁵ Manilius, *Astronomica*, 4.140-152.

¹³⁶ Manilius, *Astronomica*, 4.152-161.

¹³⁷ Schmeling, *Commentary*, p. 153.

overseas.¹³⁸ Schmeling points out that Trimalchio does not joke about his sign to not stress his horoscope.¹³⁹ Those born under the astrological sign of Leo are inclined to indulge in food to excess due to their predatory and insatiable nature.¹⁴⁰

Trimalchio assigns women to Virgo because the symbol of this sign is woman. Nevertheless, Manilius does not explicitly associate fugitives and chained slaves with this sign. In his analysis, Keyer highlights an earlier attempt to elucidate the rebus for Virgo by de Vreese. De Vreese proposed that the attribution of flight to Virgo was a consequence of the phenomenon of precession. Keyer posits that the incident may have been a prank directed at the fleeing women.¹⁴¹ The joke repeats later, when Trimalchio refers to the heavy gold bracelets as women's chains.¹⁴² An additional potential explanation is the association between the Virgo sign and the mythological fugitive Erigone, as de Vreese has proposed.¹⁴³

Trimalchio attributes two disparate professions to Libra: that of a perfume seller and a butcher. In Manilius the Scale is associated with weighing and knowledge of the law.¹⁴⁴ While the association of perfume with the planet Venus (ruler of Libra) is a plausible one, the rationale behind the butcher profession remains opaque.¹⁴⁵

According to Trimalchio, Scorpions do not have a good reputation, and the same is true to Manilius. It is a sign that 'rejoices in bloodshed.'¹⁴⁶ Sagittarius is cross-eyed, an association that appeared in the rebus of the astrological dish. In the case of Sagittarius, Schmeling refers to Firmicus Maternus who ascribed to this sign individuals who feign interest in cheap items with the intention of stealing more costly ones (*Math.8.27.6*).¹⁴⁷ Capricorns are sad (*aerumnosī*) because of Saturn's power over this sign.¹⁴⁸ Manilius posits that Capricorns are perpetually engaged in a multitude of tasks.¹⁴⁹ Trimalchio is making a veiled reference to the fact that bored Capricorn spouses may seek alternative

¹³⁸ Manilius, *Astronomica*, 4.162-175.

¹³⁹ Schmeling, *Commentary*, p. 153.

¹⁴⁰ Manilius, *Astronomica*, 4.176-188.

¹⁴¹ Denis Keyer, 'In Virgine Mulieres, Fugitivi et Compediti (Petr. Sat. 39.9)', *Hyperboreus*, Vol. 16-17 (2010-2011), p. 126.

¹⁴² Petronius and Seneca, *Satyricon*, p. 203, *Sat.67.7*.

¹⁴³ Schmeling, *Commentary*, p. 154.

¹⁴⁴ Manilius, *Astronomica*, 4.203-216.

¹⁴⁵ The solution to the enigma may lie in the insights offered by Dr Dorian Greenbaum, who suggested that Libra (the Scale) is attributed to the butcher due to the prevailing practice of weighing fresh meat at the butcher's shop.

¹⁴⁶ Manilius, *Astronomica*, 7.217-229.

¹⁴⁷ Schmeling, *Commentary*, p.155.

¹⁴⁸ Schmeling, *Commentary*, p. 155.

¹⁴⁹ Manilius, *Astronomica*, 7.243-254.

partners. Born under Aquarius are innkeepers because it was widespread practice to dilute their wine with water.¹⁵⁰ *Cucurbita* means ‘pumpkin head,’ so Aquarians are not very smart according to Trimalchio.¹⁵¹ It brings to mind an association with *Apocolocyntosis* (*Pumpkinification*) by Seneca, a short satirical pamphlet about the emperor Claudius (reigned 41-54 BCE) attempt to enter heaven of. The epithet pumpkin-headed also appears in Apuleius *Metamorphoses* 1.15.¹⁵² Under the sign of the Pisces cooks are born (to prepare fish, common in Roman cuisine). The attribution of rhetoric to this sign is surprising. As Martin Korenjak has demonstrated, scholars have sought to resolve this enigma by invoking parallels from astrological literature. In his view, the crucial insight emerged from Petronius' publisher, J. Burman, who observed that Pisces was a mute sign. Trimalchio is thus making fun here of an educated professional group that he seems to dislike.¹⁵³

In his analysis, Keyer distinguishes three categories of interpretation astrological theme in the *Cena*.¹⁵⁴ Scholars who align with de Vreese's perspective posit that Petronius employed the use of professional astrology. Conversely, Eriksson advocates for the incorporation of popular and individual superstitions. Eriksson posits that any astrological statement is false because it is based on both literary and imaginative sources and imagination can not to be verified, so is not objective truth. Consequently, Petronius directly denounces astrology in his work.¹⁵⁵ However, the third approach, supported by Keyer, suggests that Trimalchio intentionally crafted all the jokes by for the purpose of entertaining his guests. In relation to the audience, it is notable that the Romans also engaged in reading aloud in public, which prompted interactions and commentary.¹⁵⁶ If Petronius recited the *Cena* at a court banquet, the portrayal of zodiac the signs may have acquired a further dimension through allusions to the attendees. Anyway, it is not possible to ascertain Petronius' intentions. The references to Manilius imply that Petronius may have been familiar with his work, or

¹⁵⁰ Schmeling, *Commentary*, p. 155.

¹⁵¹ *The Oxford Latin Dictionary*, p. 464.

¹⁵² Keyer, ‘Trimalchio’s Astrology’, p. 287.

¹⁵³ Martin Korenjak, ‘In Piscibus obsonatores et rhetores: Petr. 39.13’, *The Cambridge Classical Journal*, Vol. 52 (2006), p. 134.

¹⁵⁴ Keyer, ‘Trimalchio’s Astrology’, p. 265.

¹⁵⁵ Sven Eriksson, *Wochentagsgotter, Mond und Trierkreis* (Almqvist&Wiksell: Stockholm, 1956), p. 76.

¹⁵⁶ Guglilemo Cavallo, ‘Between Volumen and Codex’ in *A History of Reading in the West*, ed. by Guglilemo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, trans. by Lydia G. Cochrane (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), p. 69.

others alike. However, descriptions combine professional information with jokes. The answer to the question of whether professional astrology can be a source of humour depends on the attitude of the researcher. The capacity for imagination and a sense of humour are also crucial for comprehending and appreciating a joke. As Keyer writes, if we assume that Trimalchio does this consciously, he is not at all naïve or superstitious, and similarities are coincidental and deceptive. According to Keyer, it would be wrong to infer that Trimalchio is satirizing astrology. Rather, astrology is a source of intended humour.¹⁵⁷ However, if the reader has to laugh, he must know what to laugh at, so Petronius expected the reader to be sufficiently familiar with the astrological system. Similarly to astrology, Trimalchio will engage with literary and mythological sources. When he begins to discuss these topics, he will interweave plots and characters. Again, on initial examination, this may seem to suggest a deficiency in erudition. Eriksson notes that for Manilius astrology is indeed the wisdom of revelation, but the star gods revealed nothing to Trimalchio, and he can only rely on his imagination.¹⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the Trimalchio's narrative creates a universe in which alternative versions of reality are possible. In discussing the role of astrology in the *Cena*, it is worth remembering that this is a satire. According to Perry, spirit of Petronius is quite different from that of the Roman satirists because Petronius has a broad and sympathetic understanding of human nature with all its frailties and its sorrows.¹⁵⁹ Walsh believes that Petronius intended for the readers to laugh at Trimalchio rather than with him.¹⁶⁰ However, the one does not exclude the other.

¹⁵⁷ Keyer, 'Trimalchio's Astrology', p. 266, p. 294.

¹⁵⁸ Eriksson, *Wochentagsgötter*, p. 76.

¹⁵⁹ Perry, *The Ancient Romances*, p. 200.

¹⁶⁰ Walsh, *The Roman Novel*, p. 126.

5. Astrologer's wisdom

A further description of astrology in the *Cena* concerns memories of how Trimalchio's life changed for the better. He had previously been engaged in commercial activities, but an astrologer advised him to pursue financial lending at interest, a decision that proved to be highly lucrative:

Actually I was tired of trading on my own account, and it was an astrologer who convinced me to quit. He happened to come to our colony, a sort of Greek by the name of Serapa, one who shares in the counsel of the gods. He told me even things that I'd forgotten. He went through everything for me in great detail; he knew me inside out; the only thing he didn't tell me was what I'd eaten the day before. You'd have thought that he'd always lived with me.¹⁶¹

Petronius' use of the term *mathematicus* for an astrologer was common in Rome, as were the *astrologus* and Chaldeans. Cato the Elder (234 BCE – 149 BCE) did the same, using the term to emphasise the exotic origins of the people who engaged in astrology. As Cramer notes, the intention was to patronise them.¹⁶² Trimalchio's astrologer was a Greek, or he called him a Greek, which, according to Schmeling, may not be a compliment. The name Serapa appears to be of Egyptian origin.¹⁶³ It is a matter of historical record that an astrologer with a similar name (Serapione, also known as Serapione Alexandrino) was active in the first century CE.¹⁶⁴ However, it is not possible to determine with certainty whether Petronius was describing an actual historical figure or not.

¹⁶¹ Petronius and Seneca, *Satyricon*, p.227-229.

Petronius, *Sat.* 76.10: et sane nolentem me negotium meum agere exhortavit mathematicus, qui venerat forte in coloniam nostram, Graeculio, Serapa nomine, consiliator deorum. hic mihi dixit etiam ea quae oblitus eram; ab acia et acu mi omnia exposuit; intestinas meas noverat; tantum quod mihi non dixerat quid pridie cenaveram. putasses illum semper mecum habitasse

¹⁶² Frederick H. Cramer, *Astrology and Roman Law and Politics* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1954), p. 48.

¹⁶³ Schmeling, *A Commentary*, p. 322.

¹⁶⁴ *Catalogus Codicum Astrologorum Graecorum*, vol. 8, part 4, ed. Peter Boudreaux and Francis Cumont (Brussels: Lamertin, 1921), pp. 225-232.

As postulated by Cramer, the initial interest in astrology in ancient Rome originated from the growing popularity of Greek philosophy and the assimilation of Eastern beliefs that occurred between 350 and 150 BCE. Despite the absence of surviving Roman horoscopes from that period, the use of astrology can be discerned from the presence of astrological vocabulary in Roman writing as early as the middle of the third century BCE.¹⁶⁵ Furthermore, Campion posits that following the fall of Carthage and the occupation of Egypt, Rome assumed control of the centres where the practice of 'teaching about the heavens' was conducted.¹⁶⁶ He maintains that the role of astrology in Rome was inherently problematic, given its imported character and the difficulty of controlling it at the state level.¹⁶⁷ Although astrology was not a traditional form of Roman divination, it was nevertheless regarded as a scientific discipline based on rational principles. Cramer posits that the Roman fascination with astrology represents a conviction in the potential for forecasting the future through the utilisation of appropriate techniques. Consequently, astrology was as a scientific methodology.¹⁶⁸ Seneca in *Epistles* includes astrology in *studia liberalia*, along with philosophy, music, poetry and 'the study of wisdom, which gives the man his liberty', and these practices should not be linked to making a profit.¹⁶⁹ Seneca's perspective on astrology is characterised by a pragmatic, stoic approach: 'Whether you know these things or not, they will take place'.¹⁷⁰ It seems reasonable to posit that Petronius is once again alluding to Seneca in this instance.

It is not possible to ascertain the number of Roman citizens who sought counsel from astrologers or to determine the total number of astrologers who were active in Rome. The law not always accepted and approved of astrology and astrologers. Pauline Ripat analysed the evidence of expulsion of astrologers in greater depth. She posits that the legal status of astrologers as criminals has had the unintended consequence of granting authority to astrology.¹⁷¹ The ruler who had the most significant impact on the public's perception of astrology was Octavian, who was the first to purportedly use astrology

¹⁶⁵ Cramer, *Astrology*, pp. 44-45.

¹⁶⁶ Campion, *A History*, p. 227.

¹⁶⁷ Campion, *A History*, p. 228.

¹⁶⁸ Cramer, *Astrology*, p. 283.

¹⁶⁹ Seneca, *Epistles, Volume II: Epistles 66-92*, trans. by Richard M. Gummere (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1920), p. 356, p. 358.

¹⁷⁰ Seneca, *Epistles, Volume II*, p. 357, p. 359.

¹⁷¹ Ripat, 'Expelling', p. 137.

as a tool for creating and shaping his image.¹⁷² Nero's mother, Agrippina the Younger (15–59 CE), utilised astrological practices as a means of eliminating Lollia, the Caligula widow. Lollia, accused of using astrology and witchcraft to secure her marriage, was exiled and as a result committed suicide.¹⁷³ The birth of Nero (37 – 68 CE) was accompanied by the legend of an astrological prediction that he would first become emperor and then kill his mother.¹⁷⁴ According to Campion, Nero had a similar approach of astrology to the Babylonian monarchs: the moment of his assumption of the reign was to be determined according to a horoscope commissioned by Agrippina, he identified himself as the sun and, upon being informed of the negative implications of a comet in 64 CE, he initiated the execution of aristocrats with the objective of reversing the unfavourable outcome.¹⁷⁵ Suetonius posited that this seems to have been inspired by Balbillus, who also practised astrology.¹⁷⁶ It is a possibility that Petronius, who died in 66 CE, was aware of these events.

Pauline Ripat observes that it is impossible to define astrologers as a homogeneous group. The case of Balbillus, acknowledged as Nero's court astrologer, exemplifies this point, as he simultaneously held a number of other public posts.¹⁷⁷ Cramer also references a number of astrologers who served in the courts of successive emperors, including Tiberius, who himself engaged in astrological practice.¹⁷⁸ It can be ascertained from the writings of Cicero, Artemidorus and Livy that there were also numerous astrologers operating on the streets of Rome.¹⁷⁹ As Ripat stated, it is not possible to make a comparison between the quality of the work of astrologers of the aristocracy and the wealthy people, and that of those working on the street. The reputation of an astrologer's work was contingent upon the profile of their clientele.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷² Alfred Schmid, 'The Authority of the Roman Heavens' in *Hellenistic Astronomy. The Science and Its Context*, ed. by Alan C. Bowen and Francesca Rochberg (Leiden: Brill, 2020), p. 398.

¹⁷³ Campion, *A History*, p. 237.

¹⁷⁴ Dio Cassius, *Roman History, Volume VIII: Books 61-70*, trans. by Earnest Cary, Herbert B. Foster (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925), LXI.2.1-2.

¹⁷⁵ Campion, *A History*, pp. 238-240.

¹⁷⁶ Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars, Volume II: Claudius. Nero. Galba, Otho, and Vitellius. Vespasian. Titus, Domitian. Lives of Illustrious Men: Grammarians and Rhetoricians. Poets (Terence. Virgil. Horace. Tibullus. Persius. Lucan). Lives of Pliny the Elder and Passienus Crispus*, trans. by John Carew Rolfe (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), XXXVI.

¹⁷⁷ Ripat, 'Expelling', pp. 122-123.

¹⁷⁸ Cramer, *Astrology*, p. 94.

¹⁷⁹ Ripat, 'Expelling', pp. 124-125.

¹⁸⁰ Ripat, 'Expelling', pp. 124-126.

An intriguing detail in the description of the consultation in the *Cena* is worthy of note: Habinnas, Trimalchio's friend, was present at the consultation.¹⁸¹ In Rome, the observation and interpretation of omens formed part of state-level rites with the clear rules of interpretation. Barton points out that all forms of divination relating to state affairs were under the supervision of the Senate.¹⁸² Astrology did not fall into this category, so astrological predictions were beyond the control of the state. Consulting an astrologer could have been extremely dangerous for the client, given the edicts against astrology and magic. Almost three centuries later, the astrologer Firmicus Maternus made clear recommendations to astrologers: any questions pertaining to the Emperor and state affairs must be excluded from the consultation, and the proceedings must be conducted in a public setting with the presence of witnesses.¹⁸³ It may be posited that Habinnas' role as a witness had an additional purpose beyond that of simply accompanying a friend to entertainment.

5.1 The horoscope reading

Most scholars concur that the veracity of the horoscope is a satirical portrayal of Trimalchio's susceptibility to deceit. Schmeling in his *Commentary* recalls Anderson's words describing Serapa as "a holy-man-cum-charlatan one of a large group of sages, saints, sophists and astrologers".¹⁸⁴ Anderson suggests that Serapa's information comes from local gossip, and that Trimalchio selectively interprets it in accordance with his prejudices.¹⁸⁵ Schmeling sees in Serapa's activity a manipulation of the news that the astrologer acquired while talking to servants or inspecting Trimalchio's

¹⁸¹ Petronius, *Cena*, 77.1-2.

¹⁸² Tamsyn Barton, *Ancient Astrology* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 210.

¹⁸³ Iuli Firmici Materni, *Matheseos Libri VIII*, ed. by W. Kroll, F. Skutsch, K. Ziegler (Lipsk: B.G. Teubneri, 1913), II.XXX.3, II.XXX.4.

¹⁸⁴ Schmeling, *A Commentary*, p. 322.

¹⁸⁵ Andreson, *Sage, Saint*, p. 182.

house.¹⁸⁶ Nevertheless, an analysis of the information content of Serapa's prophecy reveals a somewhat different picture:

You made your mistress your own, using (we all know) those things. You're not lucky in your friends. No one ever thanks you enough for your trouble. You own large estates. You're nourishing a viper under your wing.' And something else that he told me and I shouldn't tell you, that even now I've thirty years, four months, and two days of my life left. Moreover I'll soon receive a legacy, as my horoscope tells me.¹⁸⁷

The prediction may appear humorous, but it offers insights into the astrological practice. Serapa's forecast pertain to matters of property, matrimony, friendship, and clandestine adversaries. Such areas of life as corresponding to distinct parts of the sky as described by Manilius. He refers to these as *locus* or *athla*, which in modern astrological terminology is equivalent to the concept of houses.¹⁸⁸ In Book III Manilius attributes wealth and great success to the first house, friends to the fifth house, enemies to the seven house.¹⁸⁹ In subsequent astrological textbooks, the concept of houses is developed in greater detail. The practice of astrological prediction regarding financial matters, relationships and the behaviour of individuals remains a common and well-established tradition in the present era. Serapa provides an account of Trimalchio's expected lifespan, a practice that finds evidence in astrological textbooks. In Book III of his work, Manilius gives a description of such a procedure.¹⁹⁰ In *Tetrabiblos*, written in the second century CE, Ptolemy also writes about the prediction of the life expectancy, not only of the owner of the horoscope, but also of his or her parents.¹⁹¹ Ptolemy declares that it is ridiculous to attach certain predictions to one who will never reach the time of the predicted events. As an introduction to explaining the procedure for calculating life expectancy, he warns that it is not such a simple matter, but a

¹⁸⁶ Schmeling, 'The Small World', p. 23.

¹⁸⁷ Petronius and Seneca, *Satyricon*, p. 229.

Sat. 77.1-2: *tu dominam tuam de rebus illis fecisti. tu parum felix in amicis es. nemo umquam tibi parem gratiam refert. tu latifundia possides. tu viperam sub ala nutricas" et, quod vobis non dixerim, etiam nunc mi restare vitae annos triginta et menses quattuor et dies duos, prae terea cito accipiam hereditatem. hoc mihi dicit fatus meus.*

¹⁸⁸ Manilius, *Astronomica*, 2.856, 3.163.

¹⁸⁹ Manilius, *Astronomica*, 3.96-160.

¹⁹⁰ Manilius, *Astronomica*, 3.565-621.

¹⁹¹ Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, trans. by F. E. Robbins (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1940), III.4.

complex issue that combines various astrological techniques.¹⁹² Petronius's fictional description draws upon astrological literature. Trimalchio received this information and regarded it with the utmost seriousness. It is not possible to ascertain whether the predictions were correct or not, or to what extent they were accurate. But as Cramer notes, the lives of members of the imperial family or influential aristocrats may have depended on what the astrologer told the emperor about them.¹⁹³ Nevertheless, it is possible that the figure of Serapa may have referred to the abovementioned Balbillus or another contemporary person. No further information is available regarding Serapa; this character is not present in the surviving fragments of *Satyricon*.

As Ripat has shown, astrologers may have come from different social classes and were not always outlaws or even referred to themselves as astrologers.¹⁹⁴ Campion acknowledges the error of attributing the practice of astrology to the lower classes exclusively.¹⁹⁵ In the *Cena* the exiles, and even those of a criminal disposition, are Encolpius and his companions, rather than Trimalchio and his astrologer. Christopher Star has noted that the text of *Satyricon* is preoccupied with outlaws and the characters' negative perception of the law, which is at odds with the conventional Roman self-aggrandizing narrative of establishing law and order on a global scale. Law in the *Satyricon* acts as a means of maintaining Encolpius's status as a refugee, as part of rhetorical training, as a tool for maintaining the subordination of slaves, and as a means of enforcing one's power after death through testamentary law.¹⁹⁶ The most affluent character, Trimalchio, lives in accordance with human law and the law of fate, which is symbolised by astrology. The prediction offers him reassurance and a sense of certainty, as he perceives the world to be a stable and predictable entity. Once more, in the context of the text, Trimalchio is the arbiter of time. This implies that although divine judgments shape the course of a lifetime, Trimalchio's awareness of these forces enables him to navigate the challenges of fate.

¹⁹² Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, III.10

¹⁹³ Cramer, *Astrology*, p. 82.

¹⁹⁴ Ripat, 'Expelling', p. 123.

¹⁹⁵ Campion, *A History*, p. 231.

¹⁹⁶ Christopher Star, 'Crime and Punishment: Law and Marginality in Petronius' "Satyricon" in *Dynamics of Marginality*, ed. by Konstantinos Arampapaslis, Antony Augoustakis, Stephen Froedge and Clayton Schroer (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2023), p. 81.

In conclusion, despite the brevity of the account given of the meeting with the astrologer, it is possible to derive from it that it has bearing on the present reality. Clients from all levels of society contacted astrologers. The accompaniment of a witness during the reading was to ensure the safety of the client, lest accusation of forbidden practices. Astrologers may have worn or adopted foreign-sounding names, such as Egyptian or Chaldean, to emphasise the origin of their field. The content of the prophecy described in the *Satyricon* concerns the areas of life that astrological textbooks identify as essential for a well-executed interpretation.

Astrology is an integral part of constructing reality in the house of Trimalchio. It serves to organise the current of time (planetary days and hours), but also sets out the life plan of Trimalchio. Astrology provides a framework for all activities and is the guarantee of a divine, and therefore regular and lawful, world order. One might posit that Trimalchio is a character who is naive, exhibiting ridiculous and undignified behaviours. However, in contrast to the other characters in *Satyricon*, Trimalchio's world is characterised by a sense of stability and well-organised structure.

5.2 The Leading Role of Mercury

Trimalchio describes his astrologer as *consiliator deorum* - one who partakes in the divine counsel. Schmelling's view is that such a description simply means 'a very clever man'.¹⁹⁷ Nevertheless, in astrological texts the discipline's roots are attributed to divine revelation. As Manilius writes in the first book of *Astronomica*:

You, God of Cyllene, are the first founder of this great and holy science; through you has man gained a deeper knowledge of the sky - the constellations, the names and courses of the signs, their importance and influences - that the aspect of the firmament might be enhanced, that awe might be roused not only

¹⁹⁷ Schmeling, *A Commentary*, p. 322.

by the appearance but by the power of things, and that mankind might learn wherein lay God's greatest power.¹⁹⁸

The term "Cyllene," as employed by Manilius, is refers to Mercury due to the deity's association with the mountain Cyllene in Arcadia.¹⁹⁹ This does not imply that the Romans universally regarded astrology as the revealed word of God. As Campion observes, it was the Romans who pioneered the sceptical critique of astrology, and most arguments against the field have been reiterated since antiquity. In the Roman Empire, attitudes underwent a shift, and the credibility of astrology came under scrutiny.²⁰⁰ Trimalchio does not doubt the veracity of astrology, as he has experienced the benefits of Mercury's influence in his own life. Upon entering Trimalchio's residence, visitors are greeted by a biographical painting on the wall. Trimalchio is initially depicted as a long-haired slave with a herald's staff in his hand. He enters Rome under the protection of Minerva and begins his career as a cashier:

Just where the colonnade ended Mercury hauled him up by the chin and was taking him to a high dais; Fortune with her horn of plenty and the three Fates spinning out their golden threads stood nearby.²⁰¹

The Roman god Mercurius was identified with the Greek deity Hermes. As Pierre Grimal notes, he was particularly protective of merchants, as the root 'merx' – meaning 'merchandise' – is found in his name. The temple of Mercurius was constructed as early as 496 BCE, near the harbour, which served as a hub for commercial activities. Its location outside the pomerium, a sacred boundary in ancient Rome, suggests that the deity and his worship may have originated from a foreign land. It is notable that there are no distinct Roman myths associated with Mercurius. Instead, these myths are

¹⁹⁸ Manilius, *Astronomica*, p. 7.

Manilius, *Astronomica*, I.30: *tu princeps auctorque sacri, Cyllenie, tanti; per te iam caelum interius, iam sidera nota nominaque et cursus signorum, pondera, vires, maior uti facies mundi foret, et veneranda non species tantum sed et ipsa potentia rerum, sentirentque deum gentes qua maximus esset.*

¹⁹⁹ The *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, p. 480.

²⁰⁰ Campion, *A History*, p. 229.

²⁰¹ Petronius and Seneca, *Satyricon*, p. 115.

Petronius, *Sat.*29.5: *in deficiente vero iam porticu levatum mento in tribunal excelsum Mercurius rapiebat. praesto erat Fortuna (cum) cornu abundanti [copiosa] et tres Parcae aurea pensa torquentes.*

a continuation of the traditions linked to the god Hermes. He was therefore a god of trade, but also of crossroads.²⁰² Trimalchio, a wealthy merchant, has a strong motivation to engage in the worship of his deity. But several additional passages in the text appear to warrant further examination. As the female attendees at the feast, Fortunata and Scintilla, parade their gold ornaments, Trimalchio similarly exhibits his very heavy and made of gold shoulder bracelet, which he intended to Mercurius (*Sat.*67.7). In contrast to the expected offering gold at the temple, Trimalchio wears a bracelet crafted from that gold himself. This detail has been pointed out by Schmelling, who believes that it is another example of Trimalchio's 'beloved exaggerations'.²⁰³ Smith has also looked at this phrase, considering that the suggestion that Trimalchio robbed Mercurius seems out of character, and that the phrase may have a technical meaning unknown to us.²⁰⁴ The character of Trimalchio was typically regarded as an allusion to Nero, given their reputations for profligacy and sexual excess. Petronius' literary sophistication allows for a range of interpretations, offering readers a spectrum of perspectives, including occasionally contradictory tropes. In the context of literary fiction, it is accepted that the reader is entitled to their own interpretation of the text. Petronius encourages the reader to play with both the form and the language. Consequently, it is not an abuse of literary technique to posit that Trimalchio does not offer the gold to Mercurius because he is Mercurius himself or, at certain points, he changes into Mercurius or believes that god personally lives in his house. Trimalchio's rhetorical displays, particularly about myths and literature, constitute an integral aspect of the dinner conversation. As he did with astrology, he interweaves plots and characters from disparate narrative contexts. What may initially seem to be a lack of knowledge can, in fact, be an exercise in perverse intellectual speculation, whereby an alternative world is invented. According to *The Oxford Dictionary of the Classical World*, Mercurius is the god of 'words and their roles.'²⁰⁵ In order to provide evidence in support of this interpretation, it is possible to cite the words used by Trimalchio to describe his house:

²⁰² Pierre Grimal, *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology*, trans. by A. R. Maxwell-Hyslop (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), p. 286.

²⁰³ Schmeling, *A Commentary*, p. 278.

²⁰⁴ Smith, 'Commentary', in Petroni Arbitri, *Cena*, p. 188.

²⁰⁵ *The Oxford Dictionary of the Classical World*, <https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/display/10.1093/acref/9780192801463.001.0001/acref-9780192801463-e-1405?rskey=pYbUi6&result=1404> [accessed 29 September 2024].

Meanwhile under the protection of Mercury I built this house. As you know, it was still a cottage; now it is a temple.²⁰⁶

The temple is a place of refuge, the sanctity of which must be upheld and protected. The killing of any person within its holy precincts is prohibited. Trimalchio exercises control over the lives and deaths of his slaves. Nevertheless, no fatalities occur during the dinner. He displays a disregard for the established norms of cultural behaviour, acting in accordance with his own volition and expecting others to accommodate this. But he exhibits benevolence towards those in his employ, despite issuing threats of retribution for misdeeds. However, such punishments are not consistently enforced, with some offenders being forgiven and others granted their freedom. The exception to this is Mithridates, executed by crucifixion outside the house for insulting Trimalchio's Genius - Mercury (*Sat.* 51). It can thus be stated that no one dies in the Trimalchio house-temple.

Upon the interruption of the feast by the crowing of a rooster, Trimalchio states that this is an indication of death in the vicinity or the ignition of a fire (*Sat.* 74.1, 74.2). He reverses the bad omen by transferring the ring from his left hand to his right. However, the future will unfold as he foretold, although death will not truly occur because he will merely act as if it has. The text concludes with a scene in which the characters are compelled to simulate the death of Trimalchio, an act that Enkolpius regards as distasteful. Nevertheless, later he will himself be purified of the curse of Priapus by Mercurius (*Sat.* 140.12). The release will not occur during the feast, as it will be disrupted by the intervention of the fire brigade, in accordance with Trimalchio's prediction. In this context, it is interesting that the feast takes place on the 'third day' (*Sat.* 25.7). If Petronius was writing about the day of the month, it was happening on the eve of the fourth day of the month, when, according to tradition, Hermes was born.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶ Petronius and Seneca, *Satyricon*, p. 229.

Petronius, *Sat.* 77.4: *interim dum Mercurius vigilat, aedificavi hanc domum. ut scitis, ↓cusuc↓ erat; nunc templum est.*

²⁰⁷ Grimal, *The Dictionary*, p. 209.

An alternative and more straightforward account of Mercury's function in Trimalchio's life is also possible. The horoscope description provided by Serapa does not include the positions of the planets in Trimalchio's horoscope. However, he was born under the sign of Cancer. In the astrological system, each planet is assigned the role of ruler of a sign or signs. In his work, the *Astronomica*, Manilius states that the sign of Cancer stays under the protection of the god Mercury.²⁰⁸

5.3 Astrology and the Underworld

Despite his godlike lifestyle, Trimalchio does not exhibit any trepidation regarding death; rather, he views it as a state of comfortable existence on the other side of reality. In discussing the plan for his tomb, he notes the necessity of careful consideration for the dwelling, which will be his residence for a longer period than it was during his lifetime (*Sat.*71.7). The deity responsible for guiding souls to the underworld is Mercurius.²⁰⁹ It seems reasonable to posit that Trimalchio assumes Mercure will continue to provide care for him. Bodel has reanalysed the surviving archaeological evidence and concludes that paintings with biographical content were placed in tombs to commemorate the dead, rather than in dwellings.²¹⁰ This prompts the question of whether the action is still occurring in the physical world or has already occurred in another realm. The theme of death in the *Cena* is sometimes referred to as the central metaphor of the whole episode.²¹¹ It is read as an allusion to Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedo*.²¹² As Daniel Holmes observes, the series of episodes of the *Cena* repete

²⁰⁸ Manilius, *Astronomica*, 2.440.

²⁰⁹ Grimal, *The Dictionary*, p. 209.

²¹⁰ Bodel, 'Trimalchio's Underworld', p. 242.

²¹¹ Bodel, 'Trimalchio's Underworld', p. 237.

²¹² Holmes, 'Practicing Death', p. 43.

because the piece is characterised by a sophisticated and symmetrical structure and equilibrium.²¹³ The paintings on the walls appear to come to life when a chained dog attacks Enkolpius (Sat. 72.7). There is no easy escape from this house, as the guard explains:

You're mistaken if you suppose that you can go out the door by which you came in. None of the guests is ever let out by the same door; they come in at one and go out another.²¹⁴

The house is a trap or labyrinth (Sat.72.11). Walsh comments that Petronius evokes Virgil's description of Aeneas' journey to the underworld and his encounter with Cerberus (*Aen.*6.419).²¹⁵ In Edward Courtney's opinion, Trimalchio's house can be considered a kind of hell-hole, or perhaps it would be more accurate to describe it as an abode of shadows and the Vergilian allusions are evident.²¹⁶ Bodel posits that the house of Trimalchio can be identified as the house of Hades, and that this type of burlesque description of the afterlife was characteristic of Menippean satire. Enkolpius and his friends are mere shadows.²¹⁷ In this context, Mercury represents not only the god of merchants, but also appears as Psychopompus, guide to the underworld of the dead. Bodel points out that the mural in which Mercury raised Trimalchio up by the chin shows not only his elevation from the state of slavery, but also his apotheosis or ascension to heaven.²¹⁸ It thus emerges that the protagonists are required to make their exit via the correct portal to achieve rebirth. However, this does not occur, due to the intervention of the fire brigade.

The house equipped with two doors recalls the cave of the nymphs Naiad described by Homer in *Odyssey* XIII. The cave has got two gates: the northern gateway provided a route for humans to descend, while the southern gateway was reserved for the

²¹³ Holmes, 'Practicing', p. 43.

²¹⁴ Petronius and Seneca, *Satyricon*, p. 219.

Petronius, Sat. 72.11: "*si putas te exire hac posse qua venisti. nemo umquam convivarum per eandem ianuam emissus est; alia intrant, alia exeunt.*"

²¹⁵ Walsh, *The Roman Novel*, p. 180.

²¹⁶ Edward Courtney, 'Petronius and the Underworld', *The American Journal of Philology*, Vol. 108, No. 2 (1987), p. 409.

²¹⁷ Bodel, 'Trimalchio's Underworld', p. 239, p. 243.

²¹⁸ Bodel, 'Trimalchio's Underworld', p. 248.

divine.²¹⁹ This passage was later analysed by Platonic philosophers. Porphyry of Tyre (c. 234 CE– c. 305 CE) refers to the zodiac in his commentary to *Odyssey*. According to him the cave with two entrances is an allegory of the sensual world, and gates could be identified with two signs of the zodiac: Cancer in the north and Capricorn in the south. Those who are about to be born enter the world through the zodiac sign of Cancer and the return will take place through the sign of Capricorn.²²⁰ In this context, the sign of Cancer, so appreciated by Trimalchio and honoured with a crown by the chef Deadalus, proves to be the gateway to physical life. Porphyry's text is obviously later than Petronius, but it is a context that is worthy of further consideration.

6. Conclusion

The objective of this dissertation was to conduct a comprehensive examination of the representation of astrology in the *Cena Trimalchionis*. Petronius presented astrology in a comprehensive manner, delineating its role as a discipline that measures time, determines the destiny, and serves as a source of inspiration for the creation of humour. It is unfortunate that even the most esteemed scholars of Petronian studies, such as Smith and Schmeling, regarded astrology in the *Cena* as mere superstition. However, recent research, as evidenced by studies such as those conducted by Korenjak, Keier and Bodel, suggests that a more expansive interpretation of the role of astrology in Petronius' work may be warranted.

The present study has sought to demonstrate, albeit in a limited manner, that Petronius' descriptions were grounded in the realities of everyday life and that he was familiar with the domain of professional astrological literature. The dissertation shows

²¹⁹ Homer, *Odyssey*, Volume II: Books 13-24, trans. by A. T. Murray (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919), XII.102-112.

²²⁰ Porphyri, *On the Cave of the Nymphs*, tr. Robert Lamberton (Barrytown, New York: Station Hill Press 1983) pp. 32-33.

numerous intertextual parallels with Manilius' work *Astronomica*. Nevertheless, it was not quoted verbatim, as Petronius appears to have manipulated established conventions. A comparable approach was adopted by him regarding literature and philosophy, with the introduction of plot elements from one work into another. Astrology, together with literature and philosophy, has been employed by the author as a source of humour. The potential allusion to Seneca's works, as analysed by Rose and Schmeling, can be complemented by another, astrological theme, as presented in *Sat.*26.5 (a trumpeter announcing the hours).

Although the narrative is fictional, Petronius situates it in the present day and incorporates references to reality. It may be posited that *Sat.*30.3-4 could be regarded as a potential indicator of the employment of planetary hours to signify fortunate moments and the utilisation of a seven-day week. The CIL IX.5808 tablet serving this purpose may be regarded as confirmation that such a custom existed in Roman households. Indeed, this practice is still observed by astrologers today.

The passages on astrology in the *Cena* that have been the subject of the most extensive scholarly debate are those on the zodiacal dish (*Sat.* 35.1-5) and the character of the zodiac signs (*Sat.*39.5-15). This study proposes a broader interpretative approach, which suggests that the zodiacal dish represents a symbolic representation of the cosmos in which freedom is paramount. This is indicated by the presence of the Marsyas figure, symbolising the guarantee of civil liberties. An analysis of the astrologer's predictions also shows links to themes that have been addressed by professional astrologers. Strong belief in astrology as described by Petronius is most often interpreted as an eccentricity or naivety of Trimalchio. However, it can be interpreted as an expression of confidence in a world governed by fixed cycles and cosmic order. However, due to the inherent imperfections of the humankind, it is not feasible for them to reflect this in a perfect manner. This is exemplified by the zodiacal dish of Trimalchio. The examination of the specific influence of the planet Mercury on Trimalchio's life and the structural composition of the plot (*Sat.*77.1-4) shows relationship of the Trimalchio house with the world of the dead and even his identification with the deity.

Though the findings presented in this paper show the importance of astrology to the text, they do not fully encompass the subject matter due to its extensive scope and the multitude of interconnections it possesses from a literary, cultural and historical

perspective. The incorporation of astrological elements provides new insights into the analysis of Petronius and may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of Roman literature.

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