

Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*: Introduction

A) who was Seneca?

- **dates**

b. at Corduba (S. Spain) between 1 BC and 4AD; d. 65 AD

- **works** (Stoic philosopher)

- *dialogi* (10 ethical treatises: *De providentia*; *De constantia sapientis*; *De ira*; *Ad Marciam de consolatione*; *De vita beata*; *De otio*; *De tranquillitate animi*; *De brevitae vitae*; *Ad Polybium de consolatione* [written about 43 to Claudius' freedman Polybius as consolation for his brother's death: attempt by Seneca to get recall from exile]; *Ad Helviam de consolatione*; *De clementia* [recommending clemency to Nero 55/56]; *De beneficiis*; *Natural Questions*; *Epistulae morales*, tragedies

- **life**

(see e.g. Levick p188)

- Seneca banished to Corsica by Claudius 41 AD for adultery; recalled in 49 AD due to Agrippina and made tutor to Nero

cf. Tacitus *Annals* 12.8 (p255, tr. Grant) "So now she [Agrippina] secured the recall of Lucius Annaeus Seneca from exile and his appointment to a praetorship. She judged that owing to his literary eminence this would be popular. She also had designs on him as a distinguished tutor for her young son Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus (the future Nero). Seneca's advice could serve their plans for supremacy; and he was believed to be devoted to her- in gratitude for her favours- but hostile to Claudius whose unfairness he resented."

NB *ad Polybium* flatters Claudius.

NB In *Apoc.* 1.1. Seneca claims to be impartial - can we take this seriously?

- political advisor to Nero for first eight years of his reign; 62 AD withdrew from public life; 65 AD forced to commit suicide for alleged involvement in Pisonian conspiracy against Nero (cf. Tac. *Ann.* 15.60ff.)

B) who was Claudius?

- **dates**

b. 10 BC ; d.. 54 AD

- **reign**

emperor between 41-54 AD

- **manner of death**

See Cassius Dio 60.34.2; 60.34.3 "And so the victim of the plot was carried from the banquet apparently quite overcome by strong drink, a thing that had happened many times before; but during the night the poison took effect and he passed away, without having been able to say or hear a word. It was the thirteenth of October, and he had lived sixty-three years, two months, and thirteen days, having been emperor thirteen years, eight months and twenty days."; 60.35.4

“Nero, too, has left us a remark not unworthy of record. He declared mushrooms to be the food of the gods, since Claudius by means of the mushroom had become a god.”

Suet. *Cl.* 44 “Most people think that Claudius was poisoned; but when, and by whom, is disputed. Some say that the eunuch Halotus, his official taster, administered the drug while he was dining with the priests of Jupiter in the Citadel; others, that Agrippina did so herself at a family banquet, poisoning a dish of mushrooms, his favourite food. An equal discrepancy exists between the accounts of what happened next. According to many of my informants, he lost his power of speech, suffered frightful pain all night long, and died shortly before dawn. A variant version is that he fell into a coma but vomited up the entire contents of his stomach and was then poisoned a second time, either by a gruel- the excuse being that he needed food to revive him- or by an enema, the excuse being that the bowels must be emptied too.”

- ***aftermath of Claudius’ death***

cf. Cassius Dio 60.35.2ff. “The emperor received the state burial and all the others that had been accorded to Augustus. Agrippina and Nero pretended to grieve for the men whom they had killed, and elevated to heaven him whom they had carried out on a litter from the banquet. On this point Lucius Junius Gallio, the brother of Seneca, was the author of a very witty remark. Seneca himself had composed a work that he called “Pumpkinification” [ἀποκολοκύντωσιν]- a word formed on the analogy of “deification”; and his brother is credited with saying a great deal in one short sentence. Inasmuch as the public executioners were accustomed to drag the bodies of those executed in the prison to the Forum with large hook, and from there hauled them to the river, he remarked that Claudius had been raised to heaven with a hook.”

Suet. *Cl.* 45 “Claudius’s death was not revealed until all the arrangements had been completed to secure Nero’s succession. As a result, people made vows for his safety as though he still lived, and a troop of actors were summoned, under the pretence that he had asked to be diverted by their antics. He died on 13 October 54 A.D., during the consulship of Asinius Marcellus and Acilius Avola, in his sixty-fourth year, and the fourteenth of his reign. He was given a princely funeral and officially deified, an honour which Nero later neglected and then cancelled; but which Vespasian restored.”

nb Seneca doesn’t mention poison- politically incorrect?

nb Nero seems to have considered cancelling the deification but not fully done.

NB narrative set at time of Claudius’ death, given by Seneca *Apoc.* 1.1 as 13th October, AD 54 (similarly Suet. *Cl.* 45; Cassius Dio 60.34.3; according to Tac. *Annals* 12.69, this was when the death became public knowledge: (p282, tr. Grant) “At last, at midday on October the thirteenth, the palace gates were suddenly thrown open”

C) *Apocolocyntosis*

- ***authorship***

(Eden pp. 6-8; van Ryneveld)

Attributed to Seneca by Cassius Dio 60.35.3f. (above) [“Seneca himself had composed a work that he called “Pumpkinification” [ἀποκολοκύντωσιν]- a word formed on the analogy of “deification”]

Some doubt. How does it fit with serious philosophical works (and Stoic attitudes)? (but diff works). Inconsistent with flattery of Claudius in *Ad Polybium de consolatione*? (but diff context). Politically dangerous? (But how widely circulated?)

- ***title***

(Eden pp. 1-4; Coffey pp. 166-8; Hoyos; Pulbrook, who supports Currie’s *Apokolokenosis*;

Heller)

see Cassius Dio above: only instance of ἀποκολοκύντωσις. Meaning and point?

κολοκύντη = gourd. Cassius suggests word formed on analogy with ἀποθέωσις, implying transformation of a gourd, into a god

NB no mention of a gourd or a transformation (but do works have to bear a relevant title?)

Wagenvoort argued that the relevant analogue is ἀποραφανίδωσις (insertion of horse-radish into anus as punishment for adultery): Eden rejects this (p2 n.2).

Hoyos suggests gourd was a nickname and that the title means “the departure of the/our Gourd” associations of gourd? Stupidity? Coffey and Eden argue against. Vacuity of dried gourd (so Eden)? (Claudius empty shell).

- ***date of composition***

(Eden pp. 4-5; Coffey p. 168)

54 AD; written for the Saturnalia (beginning 17th Dec.; see Nauta)? Note in Saturnalia everything topsy turvy; outspokenness allowed.

NB after Narcissus’ death (late October 54 AD)- cf. 13; probably within a year of Claudius’ death 54 AD; topical works lose impact after a while.