A QUESTION OF PATRONAGE:
SENeca AND MARTIAL

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ABSTRACT

Ludwig Friedlander was the first scholar to argue that upon his arrival in Rome Martial established ties of patronage with Seneca, and he has been followed in this assumption by all the major authorities on the poet. The idea that Seneca had been Martial’s patron holds a key position in evaluations of the poet’s life and career. Seneca’s downfall in the aftermath of the Pisonian conspiracy (AD 65) is held to have been disastrous for Martial’s chances of establishing himself as a poet, and so would provide at least part of an explanation for his late debut. Furthermore, the Senecan connection has become the starting-point for the understanding of Martial’s poems of complaint in which contemporary patrons are unfavourably compared to the grandiose supporters of literature of the past. Obviously, if Seneca had been generous to Martial during his first year in Rome, the poet would have had good reason to complain about the lack of response from his contemporaries. In this article I first re-examine the main evidence in support of a patronal relationship between Seneca and Martial, the two poems in which Seneca is remembered as a generous patron (4.40; 12.36). Subsequently I review the evidence with regard to Martial’s estate at Nomentum, which is supposed to have been the gift of Seneca himself or of his heirs.

At the close of the nineteenth century Ludwig Friedländer was the first modern scholar to argue that upon his arrival in Rome (in 64) Martial sought and acquired the patronage of Lucius Annaeus Seneca. He has been followed in this assumption without dissent by all the major authorities on

1. This article originated as a paper delivered at the conference of the Classical Association of South Africa held at the University of the Western Cape in January 1999. Farouk Grewing, Kathy Coleman and Gottfried Mader provided useful advice and support throughout. I would also like to thank the anonymous referees for Acta Classica who did a thorough job of pointing out the weaknesses in the original argument. The usual disclaimers apply.

2. Friedländer (1961: 4-5). The date of Martial’s arrival in Rome is secured by the information supplied in 10.103.7 and 104.10, in which he declares that he has been in Rome for thirty-four years. Both poems can be firmly dated to 98.
the poet. External circumstances make such a view inherently plausible. The pattern of an educated and talented provincial trying to make his fortune in the capital is well-established, and it is to be expected that his first port of call would be a group of compatriots. Spaniards were a prominent and influential group in Nero’s Rome, politically, economically and culturally, and there is some evidence from a slightly later period that they chose to seek each other’s company (Syme 1988). In view of his great wealth and enormous prestige Seneca was undoubtedly in an excellent position to act as a patron of the arts.

The main part of this study is devoted to an examination of the two poems in which Seneca is remembered as a generous patron, together with other distinguished friends of poets from the reign of Nero (4.40; 12.36). The main question is whether the speaker in each case supplies the names of illustrious patrons as evidence of the support he personally received, and may therefore be plausibly taken to have been the poet himself. I shall attempt to show that this is not the case by emphasizing the fictionality of the addresses and by focusing on the speakers’ intentions, that is, to use the reputation of patrons from an illustrious past to expose the shortcomings of contemporary patrons. Although Martial names other generous patrons from Nero’s reign, Seneca alone has here been chosen as the test-case for the conclusions which scholars have drawn from 4.40 and 12.36. The presence of subsidiary evidence allows one to move beyond the image of the generous patron and to examine a more tangible aspect of their relationship. Martial’s estate at Nomentum is commonly assumed to have been either the gift of Seneca himself or of his heirs, an issue which will be dealt with in detail in section 4.5.

4. For Spaniards under Nero, cf. Griffin (1975: 252-3). She is careful not to attribute the prominence of Spaniards to the influence of Seneca alone, but instead draws attention to the early success of Pedanius Secundus, consul under Claudius and prefect of the city under Nero (255).

5. I exclude the thematic parallels between the writings of Seneca and Martial’s satirical epigrams which have been cogently discussed by Grimal (1989). Unfortunately he uses the results to strengthen the view of a patronal relationship.

6. The final item in support of Friendlander’s argument, Martial’s relationship with Argastiana Polla, Lucan’s widow (10.64; cf. 7.21-3), can be dealt with briefly here. I agree with Peter White (1975: 256-8), who argued that there is no reason to suppose, as Friendlander obviously believed (1961: 5), that 10.64 is evidence of the continuation of a relationship established prior to Lucan’s death. However, there can be no doubt that Polla was active as a patron of the arts (10.64.1: regina).
1. Seneca’s patronage and Martial’s poetry

Seneca’s patronage is an essential item in Martial’s biography (and to a lesser degree in that of Seneca, for it gives substance to his credentials as a patron of the arts) and it forms a crucial element in the understanding of his poetry in which the social circumstances of life in Flavian Rome are highlighted. In fact, the assumption that Seneca had been Martial’s patron has provided the basis for a set of ideas which have become firmly entrenched in scholarship. The most important ones can be paraphrased as follows.

Given the Annaean involvement in the Pisonian conspiracy of 65, Martial’s association with Seneca and other members of his family, in spite of its evident brevity, has provided scholars with an explanation for the poet’s bitter hatred of Nero and the sympathy he expresses for the victims of his reign, most notably Seneca himself and his nephew Lucan (7.21-23). Seneca’s downfall in the aftermath of the Pisonian conspiracy is held to have been detrimental to Martial’s chances of setting himself up as an established poet and would thus provide at least part of an explanation for his late debut. Most importantly, however, the presumption that Martial received considerable material support from Seneca and other Neronian senators has implicitly become the starting-point for the understanding of his poems of complaint in which contemporary patrons are unfavourably compared to the grandiose supporters of the past. Obviously, if Seneca and others had been generous to Martial during his early years in Rome, the latter would have had good reason to complain about the lack of response from his contemporaries.

cf. Nisbet 1978. Whether she had been one of Martial’s longstanding patrons is another matter altogether.

For arguments that Seneca was an influential patron of the arts, cf. Griffin (1976: 262). The most convincing piece of information is Juv. Sat. 3.109, which states that in a previous generation the gifts bestowed on poets by Seneca, Piso and Cotta (Cotta Maximus, the patron of Ovid; Griffin 1984: 148 identifies him with the Aurelia Cotta of Tac. Ann. 13.44.1) were valued more highly than offices and taxes. It may also be significant, as Griffin asserts, that in both Martial and Juvenal Seneca is paired with C. Calpurnius Piso who was well known for his generosity towards friends (Tac. Ann. 15.49.3). That the Piso of the Laus Pisonis is the Neronian conspirator has now been generally accepted, cf. Reeve (1994); Cheyne (1995). Cizek (1982: 240-3) presents a long and impressive list of members of a Senecian circle. The thrust of his argument is that Seneca resembled around him rough talent, which he then polished into a new literary movement. It is clear, however, that most of Cizek’s inclusions rest on insufficient evidence or refer to possible political protégés.

Cf. Sullivan (1991: 3). Sullivan fails to mention, however, that Martial is more positive about Nero’s qualifications as a patron and about his baths, but he is surely right in arguing that for Martial Seneca would have been an important stepping-stone to court the patronage of the emperor.


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The hypothesis of Friedlander and of those who have followed him, rests on the implicit assumption that it is possible to distil from Martial's poetry enough personal information to make up a reliable biography. This is true to a certain degree for some (though certainly not all) of the details on his personal life. However, the reliability of much of what Martial has to say about the conflicting ideologies of patron and client in Rome is in doubt because his description of social behaviour is a mixture of reflections from real life and fictional encounters with individuals who serve as emblems for a particular vice or social flaw. Real patrons are addressed side by side with fictional ones. For the latter Martial adopts a persona, a self-professed poor client who complains of the humiliations he has to suffer from haughty and miserly patrons.

2. Make-believe and misplaced trust in 4.40

Atria Pisonum stabant cum stemmate toto
et docti Senecae ter numeranda domus;
praetulimus tantis solum te, Postume, regnis:
pauper eras et eques, sed mihi consul eras.
tecum ter densa numeravi, Postume, brumas;
commem nos habet et ansa erat.
siam denere portes, iam perdere, plenus honorum,
largus opum: especto, Postume, quid facias.
nil facis, et serum est alium mihi quaerere regem.
hoc, Fortuna, placet? Postumus imposuit.

The poem is built on the rhythm of the client's expectations that support will be forthcoming and the ensuing frustrations with the patron's behaviour. The sacrifices which his loyalty have required him to make are

10. Illustrative of this somewhat outdated optimism is Colton (1991: 1), who opens his work with the statement that "Martial tells us much about himself." On the same page Straza and Lucas are mentioned as his first patrons, through whom he became acquainted with Caius Calpurnius Piso (4.40.1; 12.36.8). This claim shows how the belief that Martial's poems form a string of autobiographical snapshots remains a persistent characteristic of scholarship on Martial. That Lucas and Seneca introduced Martial to Piso must remain mere speculation.

11. On the autobiographical aspects of Martial's poetry see Straza (1966) and Allen, W. et alii. (1970). The most authoritative discussion, however, can be found in Sullivan's introduction to his Martial: The Unyearslied Classic, XXII-XXIV and on pp. 1-55 of the same work.

12. It is worth noting that in his descriptions of patronage and its disastrous state under the Flavians Martial approaches the topic from both angles, from the client's perspective as well as from that of the patron, cf. Holzberg (1986: 206); Damon (1997: 147; 159).


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illustrated in lines 5 and 6, where the use of 'brumas' serves to emphasize the hardship, while the single couch reflects poverty and proximity. Halfway through the poem it appears as if the client's loyalty is finally going to pay dividend when Postumus' financial situation witnesses a change of fortune. The speaker's response is immediate and pregnant with expectations: 'iam donare potes, iam perdere ... plessus honorum/largus opum'. Then deflation sets in. Postumus does nothing to help his poor dependant: 'nil facis'. Line 9 nicely picks up the theme of the search for a patron introduced at the beginning of the poem, although now it is beset with bitter disappointment. The poem culminates in the exquisite final line, which establishes that Postumus is an impostor.

The opening lines cannot be taken to refer to the speaker's past service in the houses of Piso and Seneca, for 'praetulimus' establishes a choice to render services to either Postumus or to people like Seneca and Piso; it does not suggest a chronological series of relationships. Furthermore, Postumus cannot be identified with one of Martial's known patrons. The repeated use of the proper name, all in all four times (including the prominent position in the punch-line), suggests that it may have a specific function within the poem. The use of proper names to embody a concept or a sentiment which enhances the impact of a joke is a frequent quality of Martial's epigrams. Elsewhere, in a poem advocating that life should be enjoyed (5.58), the name Postumus is used to good effect. One is inevitably reminded of the opening verse of Horace Carm., 2.14: 'Eheu fugaces, Postume, Postume', where the geminatio serves to add a sad and serious colour to the poem. By contrast, in 4.40, the name is repeatedly repeated to remind Postumus of his duties. Postumus has the familiar connotations of the last-born child of the family, more specifically the child born after the death of the father. It may thus be connected with compounds of post and carry the temporal sentiment 'finally/at last', or, perhaps even better: 'too late'. Martial's Postumus may be envisioned as a man who holds back on his promise to deliver support, in the meantime keeping his

14. Pierre Grimal (1989: 185) reads 4.40 as an autobiographical statement and claims that Martial left the patronage of the Annaei for the support of Postumus!

15. Postumus appears with great frequency in Martial's poetry, especially in the early books: 2.10; 12; 21; 22; 67; 72; 2.40; 5.58; 56; 61. He may not always be the same person, though. The Postumus of 4.40 is commonly recognized as fictitious, cf. Meiß in Szendő (1996: 393).

16. Otherwise Friedländer in his commentary at 4.40: "Ja, vielleicht jemand zu kennen, der sich den Namen Postumus als Nachname gibt".

17. The best general treatment of this technique is Joepgen (1987); cf. also Giegengack (1992); Grewing (1997: 47); Grewing (1998). None of these scholars discuss the name Postumus in 4.40.

dependant on a tight leash and constantly feeding his expectation that one day he will be able to respond in a suitable way. This ties in neatly with the gist of the poem, which describes Postumus’ rise from poverty to wealth and honour, resulting in an equally prominent rise in the speaker’s expectations. Now, at last, there may be an opportunity for him to expect some financial support, but Postumus still desists. ‘Mr Later’ becomes ‘Mr. Fraud!’ Postumus impoerit. 19

The addressee is therefore exposed as a fraud, but what about the speaker? Is he acting in good faith? He compares the assets of the Pisos and the Senecas with the minimal accoutrements of Postumus who possesses neither wealth nor prestige, and still decides to choose Postumus as his patron. This is flattery alright, which ultimately serves the purpose of enhancing the crime of the patron betraying his client’s loyalty. Yet there are cogent reasons for believing that the flattery also exposes the speaker as a fraud, for he engages in a fair amount of make-believe himself (v. 4: ‘pauper eras et eques, sed mihi consul eras’). In stating that he chose Postumus over Piso and Seneca (v. 3: ‘praetulimus tantis solum te, Postumus, regnis’), he may also be flattering himself by implying that he was good enough to be considered a client of these illustrious families. The gist of the poem, in my view, is that in this particular patron-client relationship both parties are at fault, the client for entering the relationship with inflated ideas about Postumus’ stature and about himself, the patron for never honouring the relationship even through he amassed great wealth. Martial here has adopted the (flawed) persona of a lowly client in order to show up the dishonest stances which patronage enforces upon both patron and client.

3. The past versus the present in 12.36 20

Libros quattuor et duas amicos agenterque tagum brevemque lenam, interdum auroras mansa crepante, possint ducere qui duas Kalendas, quod nemo nisi tu, Labulle, donas, non es, crede nobis, benignus: quid ergo?

19. Cf. the similar scenario in 5.36 of a patron who is paid a compliment but refuses to reward the poet which also insists on the idea of fraud: ‘Laudatus nostro quidam, Faustine, libello/dissimulat, quasi nil debet; impoerit’. The verb impoerit is used with the same meaning in Seneca’s discussion of ingratitude: De Ben. 4.34.2. In the form of cheating in commercial transactions it appears in Martial 3.37.1; 4.79.2. On the hypocrisy of patrons in Martial, cf. Garthwaite (1996).

20. Just like 4.40, this poem has never been the subject of detailed scrutiny. Sullivan (1991: 159) loosely places it in the context of Martial’s expectations and disappointments.

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ut verum loquar, optimus malorum es. 

Pisones Senecasque Memmiusque et Crispus male reddi, seu priores: 

fies protinus ultimus bonorum. 

vis cursu pedibusque gloriosi? 

Tigrum wince levemque Passerinum: 

nulla est gloria praeterire asellos. 

The miserly patron Labullus is the possible addressee of one other poem (11.24), and because of the fact that there Martial adopts the persona of the begging client, it is not difficult to accept the fictionality of Labullus' character. 22 12.36 forms part of an extended series of poems in which Martial complains of the stinginess of contemporary patrons. 23 The poem is driven by the discrepancy in the gifts bestowed by Labullus and those offered by patrons of the past, although there is never any question of an honest comparison, for the ma terials presented by the latter are never specified. 24 In the context of the contemporary state of patronage, so the speaker points out, Labullus is indeed performing the role of a patron better than anyone else. However, this is only true because patronage is virtually dead. Labullus is only the best of a bad lot. Compared with the illustrious patrons of lines 8 and 9 he becomes the worst of a good lot. 

Can the poem be taken to suggest that the speaker had first-hand experience of their generosity? In other words, is the speaker the same as Martial and does he mention these individuals, among these Seneca, to insist on his privileged position in the not-too-distant past? The use of generic plurals ('Give me back the Pisos' etc.) is not straightforward and matters are not made easier by the problem of whether we should read 'seu' or 'sed' in line 9. Shackleton Bailey (1958: 290) has argued persuasively in favour of the reading 'seu', for 'sed' would imply that these patrons should have to be dismissed in favour of predecessors bearing the same names ('not them, but their predecessors'), which is obviously not the alternative reading for 'seu' is 'sed', which is preferred by Friedländer (1964: 230) and, implicitly, by Circeo (1975: 144). For an argument in favour of 'seu', see below. 

The manuscript tradition is not straightforward; some manuscripts have Fabulle (cf. Kay 1985: 125), an equally fictitious patron, of Martial. 


The gifts offered by Labullus to his client are not insubstantial in themselves. What seems to bother the speaker, however, is that the amount of silver might decrease over time (cf. 8.71; 10.57). It is not entirely obvious what is wrong with a chilly toga and a brief cloak, unless we are to assume that they were given in the wrong season. Or perhaps they have to be understood as threadbare and therefore 'second-hand'. For 'algentes togas', cf. 14.135, with Leary's commentary (Leary 1996: 199).
what the speaker intends to say. The general meaning of ‘seu priores’ would then be that of patrons of an even more distant generation, perhaps the patrons from the reign of Augustus. The key problem lies in the fact that, although rendered in the plural form to give them the appearance of a generic type (‘the rich and generous patron’), the names of line 8 and 9 can still be taken to stand for individuals from whom Martial received support. For ‘Memmiius’ scholars have generally agreed on C. Memmius Regulus, consul in 63. It is only Pierre Richard who thinks of the C. Memmius to whom Lucretius dedicated his De Rerum Naturae (Richard 1931, II. 459, n. 879). This can be safely dismissed for it makes nonsense of ‘seu’ (or ‘sed’) ‘priores’. But is C. Memmius Regulus a likely candidate? He is mentioned only once by Tacitus, in connection with his consulship which opens the year (Ann. 15.23). Tacitus records no activities in the course of that year and further insights about his political career are missing. He may therefore be plausibly regarded as a figure of little note, and, tentatively, as somebody who died soon after holding the consulship. Yet the speaker is giving what seems to be a list of self-evident examples. It was pointed out by one of the referees for this journal that sed could be retained in combination with ‘Crispos’ in order to distinguish an illustrious Crispus from a stingy patron with the same name mentioned in 10.15 (14). However, this relies on the assumption that this Crispus was a real individual, which is not self-evident. Friedlander (1961) is erroneously has C. Memmius Gemellus, as has Howell (1980: 3). The identification of Martial’s ‘Memmiius’ with the consul of 63 is endorsed by Groag, RE XV 1, Stuttgart (1931) (no. 28). Groag (see previous note) is unduly speculative when he postulates a governorship of Africa Proconsularis for him, an argument which is solely based on the number of Memmii coming from Africa. As Syme has pointed out (1958: 787) the family is most likely to have come from Rustica in Pachymeris.

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of generous patrons, and C. Memmius Regulus is not a likely candidate for such a role. 30

Commentators interpret 'Crispos' as referring to Q. Vibius Priscus (cos. suff. I 67; suff. II 74; suff. III 83). Born around AD 12, L. Iunius Q. Vibius Crispus, to give his full name, held a possible suffect consulship under Nero 31 and was already noted for his power and influence under this emperor. 32 He was the proverbial political survivor who never contradicted authority (Juvenal famously characterizes him as someone who never swam against the current) and served as a friend of the Princeps under Velleius (Dio 65.2.3), Vespasian (Tac. Dial. 8.3) and Domitian (Juv. Sat. 4.81-91). Syme places his death towards the year 90 (1991: 533). 33 We possess a reliable testimony on his enormous wealth (Tac. Dial. 8.3), and even though he is never referred to as a patron of the arts, he may well have been one. 34

However, this does not automatically make him a likely patron of Martial. His death around 90 affords a good opportunity for investigating the level of personal acquaintance the speaker in 12.36 might claim with all four patrons. For if Q. Vibius Crispus was indeed one of Martial's patrons we should be able to point out evidence of this in his poetry. In one poem (4.54) reference is briefly made to a historical Crispus who was extremely wealthy (4.54.7: 'divitior Crispo'; either Q. Vibius Crispus or Q. Sallustius Passienus Crispus). Even if Martial knew this Crispus personally, there is no hint that he might have been one of his patrons. Another poem (10.2) deals with the brevity of reputations and by way of illustration refers to the monument of a Crispus along the Appian way which is in a bad material condition. Given the fact that Vibius Crispus' death was recent, the reference can only be to Passienus Crispus. Two other Crispi are mentioned, but both are unlikely to refer to the kind of generous patron that Martial has in mind in 12.36. 5.32 attacks a mean individual who

30. The Regulus who appears with such great frequency in Martial's poetry as a (potential) patron is M'. Aquiliius Regulus: 1.12; 92; 111; 2.74; 93; 4.10; 5.10; 21.1; 26.6; 65.4; 66.14; 7.16; 31.
31. The year of his first suffect consulship is disputed. Some scholars prefer to date it before 60 (cf. Mratschek-Halfmann 1993: 338), while others suggest 63 or 64, cf. Colwill (1974: 306-7).
32. Tacitus mentions Q. Vibius Crispus only once in the course of the Annals, when he relates the banning of his brother Vibius Secundus for extortion in 69. The influence of his brother is said to have saved him from a worse fate (Ann. 14.28.2).
34. No record of generosity towards friends and poets has survived, and if he has gained somewhat of a reputation in this area with modern scholars, it is based solely on his inclusion in 12.36; cf. e.g. RE VIII (Stuttgart 1958), Vibius 28, 1970: 'V. war freigebig, Martial XII 36, 9, und ein großer Gunner der Literaten.'

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draws up a will in which he leaves everything to himself (cf. Howell 1995: 116). 10.15 (14) attacks a stingy patron.

In sum, in lines 8 and 9 of 12.36 we have two individuals, Piso and Seneca, who had a reputation as generous patrons and whom Martial is likely to have known while he was in Rome, whereas the remaining two are problematic in terms of their label as generous patrons and as possible patrons of Martial. This damages the presumed coherence of a quartet of Neronian senators. The idea of a Neronian framework has obviously been adopted by modern commentators to tie in the names with the time frame of Martial’s stay in Rome. However, if the Laus Pisonis is correctly dated to ca. 39/40 (Champlin 1989: 118), Piso’s reputation as a generous patron was already well-established under Caligula, and that of Seneca must go back to, at least, the second part of Claudius’ reign. There is therefore no apparent reason to limit our search to individuals who were still alive when Martial arrived in Rome. In terms of wealth, prestige and literary interests Q. Sallustius Pannus Crispus would be a more suitable candidate for ‘Crispos’ than Q. Vibius Crispus, even though no direct instance of his generosity is available. For ‘Memmius’, rather the prestigious P. Memmius Regulus, the consul of 31, than his lacklustre son. It is true that Tacitus (Ann. 14.47.1) states that his wealth was insignificant, not sufficient at least to encourage universal envy and hostility, but he had at one time been married to the flamboyant and fabulously wealthy Lollia Paulina (Ann. 12.22.2: ‘opus immensus’; cf. the anecdote in Pliny, NH 9.117). There is therefore no need to exclude him from engaging in patronage on account of ‘poverty’.

The list remains problematic, for we possess no independent evidence which confirms that Q. Sallustius Pannus Crispus and P. Memmius Regulus, or any other candidates, which might fit the date and the requirements, were in Martial’s time regarded as rich and generous patrons, with no further explanation being necessary. However, the group is especially problematic when seen as a quartet of Neronian senators who sponsored Martial in the early years of his stay in Rome. On this basis I suggest that it is more expedient to regard them as proverbial examples of the type of generous patron which Martial finds so lacking in Domitianic Rome. The poem therefore presents no secure evidence of a patronal relationship between Seneca and Martial.

4. The Nomentan estate

The Nomentan estate is referred to frequently in Martial’s poetry (e.g. 35.

This is particularly clear in the case of Friedlander’s argument (1961: 239) for excluding Passienus Crispus as a possible candidate for ‘Crispos’ on the grounds that he died under Claudius, that is, on the sole basis that he does not fit the scheme of a Neronian quartet.
and scholars generally accept, on the ground of its mention in the early
Exempla, that it was in Martial’s possession from at least ca. 83/4.36 No
single poem, however, reveals the name of the benefactor of the Nomentum
estate, which is somewhat of a surprise in light of the well-publicized gift
of a piece of land by his Spanish benefactor Marcella (12.21; 31). There
may, of course, be a number of reasons for the omission of a benefactor in
the case of the Nomentum estate (and the most provocative one would be
that no benefactor was involved at all), but if Seneca had indeed been the
original source of the estate I can think of no convincing explanation why
his name would have been left out.

The supposition that the estate was originally Seneca’s is made by
commentators, starting with Friedländer, on the basis of the information
supplied by Pliny the Elder in his Natural History, book 14. 48-52.37 To
prove a point about the rewards of good estate management Pliny there
relates the history of a particular estate at Nomentum. It was developed as
a vineyard by Acilius Sthenelus acting for the famous grammarian Remmius
Paulemon who had bought the estate for 600,000 sesterces. After eight
years of conscientious cultivation by Sthenelus, bidding for the harvest (on
the vine) already fetched 400,000 sesterces. Soon thereafter Seneca bought
the vineyard for 2,4 million, perhaps in the early sixties, for the estate is
mentioned only in the later part of his correspondence with Lucullus (Ep.
104.1; B (vineyards); 110.1). Pliny indicates that even after Seneca had
purchased the estate, it remained highly profitable and yielded as much as
seven ‘vindices’ per ‘iugerum’. Referring to the same estate in a discussion of
high yields, Columella makes clear that the area around Nomentum was
well known for its high productivity, at least in his own time (De re rustica
3.3.3).

Martial’s Nomentum estate also produced wine (cf. e.g. 10.48; 13.119),
and so did that of his neighbour Q. Ovidius, connected to Seneca through
his friendship with Caesennius Maximus (7.4; 45). It is therefore tempting
to view both estates as formerly belonging to the vineyard of Seneca.
Yet it cannot be claimed that Martial’s estate is compatible with the
characteristics of Seneca’s estate as described by Columella and Pliny the
Elder. Both 7.31 and 10.94 make play of its low productivity and the poor
36. Cf. e.g. Greving (1997: 108; on 6.43).
37. Friedländer (1961: 5) and his commentary at 1.105; Cigani (1975: 201; on 1.105); Howel(l (1980:
324; on the same poem). Salee (1993: 231) endorses Friedländer’s argument about the estate, but remains silent about Seneca as Martial’s patron.
Only the Italian scholar Augusto Serafini seems to have seriously entertained the
tendency that the estate was the gift of a certain Lupus (mentioned in 11.18), quoted
in Scarnuzzi (1966: 187). Scarnuzzi presents a survey of the various alternatives
which have been offered, most of them by Italian scholars (186-7).
jokingly admits that the gifts which are supposedly originating from his estate have in fact been bought in the market. 10.48, on the other hand, intimates that it did produce some vegetables, fruit, meat and wine with which a circle of respectable friends could be entertained at an informal dinner-party. In spite of the metaphorical usage to which the individual items have been put (cf. Gowers 1993: 255-64), it cannot be assumed that Martial is in essence misrepresenting the produce of his estate. We may conclude that Martial possessed some small livestock, a vegetable garden, an orchard and a vineyard.

Martial is thus referring to what amounts to a small farm worked by a bailiff and his wife (cf. 10.48.7; 10.92.5; 11.39.5), whereas Pliny and Columella describe Seneca’s estate at Nomentum as a business-investment (for Seneca’s interest in vineyards, cf. NQ 3.7.1). Although Martial displays a keen interest in wines,38 he never seems to have developed a strong commitment to commercial wine-production. Wine is indeed a major topic of discussion between Martial and his neighbour Q. Ovidius (1.105; 9.98; 13.119), but it is clear that their levels of involvement with the industry differed considerably. Q. Ovidius is the one who is cultivating vineyards for the commercial market, not Martial. To be sure, all this is no absolute proof that Martial’s estate did not originally belong to the vineyard of Seneca, but a small farm which is solely used for the purpose of providing its owner with some meat, fruit and vegetables, and not enough at that to make him independent of the market, is difficult to reconcile with a commercial vineyard in the tradition of Remmius Palaemon and Seneca.

5. Conclusions

There are two related reasons for doubting that Seneca had been Martial’s patron in the early years of his stay in Rome. The main evidence adduced in support of such a relationship consists of two poems in which Seneca features as a generous patron. However, the context of castigating an unresponsive and a boastful patron respectively enhances the idea that Martial is not discussing patronage in the form of reflections on his own experiences, but is documenting esempla in order to prove a point about Flavian patronage in general. These poems should therefore be read as fictional scenarios designed to outline the disparities between current practices and those of an idealized past. Second, although both poems introduce Seneca as a generous patron, not here, nor anywhere else in his work, does Martial record details of any particular benefaction which he might have received from the philosopher. The one piece of evidence which

38. The wines mentioned in Martial’s poetry are the subject of two recent studies: La Penna (1999); Leary (1999).

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to many has appeared to corroborate the idea of Seneca’s patronage, the Nomentan estate, cannot be positively linked to Seneca.

It appears as if modern scholarship on Martial is characterized by both a growing awareness of the poet’s use of multiple personae and continued belief in so-called facts about his life and career which are clearly the products of one of these personae. That the two poems 4.40 and 12.36 have been drawn in as firm evidence for a patronal relationship by so many scholars is cause for some surprise. That the evidence was accepted at face value may perhaps be attributed to two factors. First, a study of Martial’s personae requires a full prosopography of Martial’s social environment, an understanding of the workings of patronage in Flavian Rome and a vocabulary that can serve as a tool to distinguish between fact and fiction in his poetry. Much progress has been made in this regard in the last two decades, but more is still to be done.39 Second, Martial’s early career (between 64 and 80) has proved a frustrating blank. Martial’s association with prominent Neronian senators, such as Piso, Lucan and Seneca, who soon after his arrival in Rome became involved in the Pisonian conspiracy, provided both a neat suggestive framework for his early expectations and a plausible explanation for why it took him so long to establish himself.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


39. I refer here to the general studies mentioned in note 13 above. Several studies have increased our knowledge of individual relationships, cf. White (1975); Pitcher (1984); Balland (1998), but what is really needed is a full-scale prosopography of people in Martial.

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