

In the last issue of Labyrinth we saw that the Romans, like us, enjoyed the company of their pet animals. In the work of several Roman authors we can read about their feelings for animals, too. Let's look at a few of the tales these writers told.

One of the comic episodes in Petronius' Satiricon concerns three geese. Encolpius is waiting in an old priestess' hut for her return when three sacred geese appear at the door to demand their usual midday meal:

*ecce (Here come) tres anseres sacri qui impetum in me  
faciunt . . . alius tunicam meam lacerat, alius vincula  
calceamentorum (my sandal - thongs) resolvit et trahit;  
unus etiam, dux et magister saevitiae, non dubitat crus  
(leg) meum serrato morsu (with its jagged beak) vexare.*

To withstand the cackling attack of the geese Encolpius snatches the leg off the old table and beats the goose which bit him in the leg to death. By this time the two remaining geese have eaten all the old woman's beans which she intended to make into her supper, so that on her return Encolpius is forced to confess about his having killed the sacred goose:

*ubi anserem mortuum anus (the old woman) vidit, tam magnum  
clamorem sustulit ut putares iterum anseres limen (the doorway)  
intrare!*

Not until Encolpius pays her two gold pieces does the priestess stop shrieking and weeping over the dead goose. In the end, however, she cleans the goose and prepares it for dinner, not forgetting to use its liver to tell Encolpius of his future fortunes, and both sit down to a fine meal of roast goose washed down with wine. (Petronius, 136-7)

A famous fishy tale occurs in Juvenal's Satires. The fourth poem is an account of the Imperial Privy Council, meeting in haste to discuss the momentous problem of what to do with a huge turbot which a loyal fisherman has presented to the emperor. The fish was caught in the Adriatic, but the fisherman dared not sell such a royal fish--indeed, who would dare to buy it when even the seashore crawls with spies and informers, 'Inspectors of Seaweed' ready to denounce anybody for catching what must be royal property, from its size and beauty? Luckily the winter weather helps to preserve the turbot as it is rushed across Italy and presented to the Emperor, after sweeping past an admiring crowd of courtiers and senators cooling their heels outside the palace-hall. The fish is admitted at once to the Imperial Presence, but the senators must wait. "Accept this fish, sire, too large for a private kitchen", says the canny fisherman "Prepare yourself to dine on a turbot miraculously preserved through the ages until the day of your

reign dawned, when it swam into my nets of its own accord!. *Ipsa capi voluit!*" Blatant flattery--and yet the Emperor responds by swelling with pride. "*Nihil est quod credere de se / non possit cum laudatur dis aequa potestas*" (IV. 70-1) comments Juvenal wryly--when godlike power is praised, there is no flattery which it cannot swallow.

Hastily the Privy Councillors are summoned, quailing and terrified, to the council-chamber. In the coldly appalling presence of the emperor himself the business of the day is solemnly discussed. Mighty politicians, powerful informers who have slit men's throats with a mere whisper of treason intended, evil companions of a monstrous tyrant, all rival each other in expressing their admiration for the fish. One of the councillors bursts out in a prophetic utterance: "*Ingens / omen habes' inquit 'magni clarique triumphi. / Regem aliquem capies, aut de Lemone [chariot] Britanno / excidet Arviragus* (a British native chieftain)'" (IV. 123-7) To spare the mighty turbot the final indignity of being cut up to be cooked, the decision is made to find a potter who can produce a special casserole of enormous proportions--and to attach a corps of potters to the Emperor's army forthwith, to ensure against similar emergencies in the future!

Suetonius also tells us a strange tale involving an animal and the mad emperor Caligula. Apparently Caligula had a favourite horse named Incitatus who owned a marble stable with an ivory manger, purple blankets and trappings set with jewels. Incitatus also was the proud owner of a mansion fully equipped with furnishings and slaves in which to entertain people whom Caligula invited to dine in Incitatus' name! On the day before a race, the area around the stable was picketed with soldiers ordered to see that absolute silence was observed, so that Incitatus should not become over-excited. "It is even reported" says Suetonius "that Caligula intended to honour Incitatus with the consulship." (Gaius, 55.)

If emperors and the rich could afford to keep race-horses in such luxury, at least the poorer citizens could now and then attend the races and enjoy the entertainment there. Those who were unable even to find enough fun that way were amused by animals in the streets. Cockfights or performing dogs were a possibility, and Juvenal describes a wretched monkey, dressed up in a shield and helmet, and cringing under his trainer's whip. The monkey rides on a goat's back, and is being trained to throw a spear in imitation of a mounted warrior; if he's good he is thrown a shrivelled rotten apple as a reward for his pains. "No different from the dessert you get!" sneers Juvenal to the cringing client who apes his rich master's social life. Like monkey, like man! (Sat. V. 152-5) Animals of all kinds, of course, were used as sources of entertainment, especially in the animal-shows in the amphitheatres like the Colosseum. (You might like to look back at Labyrinth 7 on Races and Games, and 8 on the Colosseum).