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A Note on *crura* as Used in Gerhard's Meditationes Sacrae

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In this paper I am indebted to Martti Vaahtoranta, a theological graduate who attended my Latin proseminar in 1985, who wrote one of his essays on the German theologian Johann Gerhard (1582—1637) and his Meditationes Sacrae.[1] Gerhard is generally considered to have been the most prominent theologian of the early Lutheran orthodoxy which followed on after the Reformation. While the systematizing Loci Theologici was undoubtedly his chief work, it is his more unassuming devotional book, Meditationes Sacrae, which turned out to enjoy an unusually large circulation during the centuries that followed.[2]

Gerhard's Meditationes Sacrae is introduced by a brief dedication where he declares that he will imitate those who liken theology to medicine. In this dedication there is a lexically interesting passage: *habet Medicina certa sua principia,* λόγον *sc.* καὶ πεῖραν, *quae ob id crura quaedam ejusdem appellantur.* The plural form *crura* in this passage, as *quaedam* indicates, is used in a figurative sense. ThLL (vol. IV, col. 1252) gives several instances of the metaphorical use of *crus* under the title *de infimis rerum partibus.* The biggest group, for the most part from

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[1] The title in full: Meditationes sacrae ad veram pietatem excitandam et interioris hominis profectum promovendum. When he published this book in 1606, Gerhard was only 24 years of age. It was reprinted five times during the author's lifetime, in the years 1607, 1611, 1617, 1622, and 1633: see E.R. Fischer, Vita Ioannis Gerhardi, Lipsiae 1723, 444.

[2] In older days Meditationes Sacrae seems to have been the book most frequently printed after the Bible and the De Imitatione Christi by Thomas à Kempis: see R.P. Scharlemann, Thomas Aquinas and John Gerhard, New Haven 1964, 43.

Columella's two works, is concerned with plants.[3] Next, there is the use of *crura* to denote lines forming an angle; the two relatively late instances are from Ausonius and Martianus Capella.[4] The last group — *de aliis rebus, quae hominum forma finguntur* — is formed by *crura ponticuli* (Catull. 17,3), *crus ligneum* (Mart. 10,100,6) meaning a walking stick, and the vigorously phrased *universo dogmati transeunti divaricavit crura mentis suae* (Hier. epist. 96,12).

The majority of the above-mentioned cases in which *crus* is used metaphorically, *de infimis rerum partibus* as formulated in ThLL, are concrete: the lower parts of plants (sixteen instances), the supporting piles of a bridge,[5] and a walking stick. As regards lines forming an angle, one might call this a case that is halfway between the concrete and the abstract. The only clearly abstract instance is St. Jerome's *crura mentis*, yet the verb *divaricare* makes it a very concrete expression to describe a vulgar prostitute's conduct. ThLL, then, does not give any instance of such an abstract case of the figurative use of *crus* as is found in Gerhard's dedication, where the chief principles of medicine, λόγος and πεῖρα, are called *crura*. True, Volume IV of ThLL was published as early as 1906—09, and *crus* is marked with an asterisk to indicate that not all passages where it can be found have been collected. One might, however, expect to find one or two instances of *crus* used metaphorically in an abstract case like that in Gerhard's dedication — if the word was used in this way earlier.

Gamberini's stylistic study of Pliny the Younger seemed, at first sight, to be of some use, dealing as it does with several terms which resemble *crura*, because the oratorical style is frequently "compared to a human body" (64).[6] In a section entitled "Some Lexical Analogies with Other

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[3] The thirteen instances from Columella are preceded by a reference to Varro: *pedes cruraque arboris ramos appellat Varro* (Gell. 16,16,3). The two further instances *de herbis* are from Pliny's Natural History (17,138) and Palladius (1,35,6).

[4] Auson. 336,51: *aequilatus vel crure pari vel in omnibus impar* (*de triangulo*). Mart. Cap. 6,712: *trigonus. . .* ἰσοσκελής, *quod ex tribus lineis duas aequales habet, quibus quasi cruribus insistit.*

[5] The Catullan *crura ponticuli* may be compared with our common usage of speaking of the supports for a table or a chair as legs.

[6] F. Gamberini, Stylistic Theory and Praxis in the Younger Pliny, Hildesheim 1983. See especially 60—72.

Sources" (60ff.) Gamberini describes in detail the metaphorical use of *ossa, nervi* and *tori, iubae, musculi* and *lacerti*. Just a couple of quotations from this section may suffice here in order to clarify the use of *ossa*, a term which will interest us below in another sense, and of *lacerti*, which corresponds to *crura* more closely than the other terms: "in rhetorical contexts the meaning of *ossa* seems to oscillate between references to style and structure of the oration" (60) and, as regards *lacerti*, "the reference is always to the orator's forcefulness" (61).[7] As for *crura*, I think that Gamberini would have mentioned its metaphorical use as found later in Gerhard's dedication if there had been an ancient reference to be made.

"Style and structure of the oration" and "the orator's forcefulness", of course, are not what Gerhard had in mind. Admittedly, it is natural to imagine that the two principles in the science of medicine, λόγος and πεῖρα, being like the two supporting pillars of the whole system resemble the two legs of a human body. This would be all the more natural if Gerhard knew, as he may have known, that the oratorical style was frequently compared to a human body, and that the terms for the limbs of a body were metaphorically used in literary contexts to describe structure and forcefulness. In any case he must have known that the lower parts of plants were figuratively called *crura*.[8] Thus the *crura Medicinae* could be understood to mean the ground, basis, foundation of this science.

However, there is one detail in Gerhard's phrasing which seems to contradict the view presented above. If the metaphorical use of *crura* in the way Gerhard employs it should have been familiar from older usage, why does he add *quaedam*, which usually accompanies a newly coined expression?[9] Vaahtoranta's tentative suggestion was that, instead of referring to two pillars supporting the science of medicine, Gerhard is speaking of the two equally important fields, theory and practice, which penetrate through the whole system of medicine, thus resembling bones which form the supporting framework of a body. I have not so far come

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[7] Like *ossa*, also "*nervi* can refer both to structure and style (in terms of forcefulness)" (62).

[8] I formulate "must have known" in view of the large number of instances (though they are only a selection) found in ThLL.

[9] It is well known that Cicero, for example, repeatedly added this pronoun to indicate that the Latin term he used was new and self-coined.

across any ancient instance of *crura* meaning "skeleton".[10] If nothing is found it would corroborate the suggestion, based on the use of *quaedam*, that it was Gerhard himself who invented the bold metaphor (supposing *crura* is accepted to mean "skeleton"). Next it might be worth while investigating the equivalents of "skeleton" in antiquity.

In Latin, the common way of expressing "skeleton" was to use the plural form *ossa*.[11] There were also a few other occasional designations for it, above all *larva*, which normally meant "evil spirit" or "ghost". I quote in full the well-known passage in the Cena Trimalchionis: *larvam argenteam attulit servus sic aptatam, ut articuli eius vertebraeque laxatae in omnem partem flecterentur* (Petr. 34,8). In ancient Greek, too, the usual equivalent of "skeleton" was the plural form τὰ ὀστᾶ. The term σκελετός, literally meaning "dried up" (σκέλλω), was a noun mostly used to denote a mummy, and it was only in the second century A.D. that the physician Galen began to employ it to mean a skeleton.[12]

Gerhard's noteworthy use of *crura* — supposing Vaahtoranta's tentative suggestion proves correct — needs to be explained. My first thought was that σκέλος, the Greek noun for "leg", might somehow be of background importance, in other words, that Gerhard might have made metaphorical use of *crura*, the equivalent of the Greek σκέλη, owing to an etymological confusion between σκέλος and σκελετός.[13] Afterwards a more unconstrained explanation came to my mind: the German noun "Bein" (like the Swedish "ben"), which means "leg" as *crus* does, also denotes a bone (as *crus* does not), and not only a shin-bone but a bone in general. Thus Gerhard might have regarded *crura* as a synonym for *ossa*, which was the usual designation for the framework of a body.[14]

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[10] My investigations have not been meticulous, though. As regards ThLL, s.v. *crus* marked with an asterisk, see above.

[11] It cannot be a mere coincidence that *ossa* was used in literary contexts to refer to the structure of the oration (see above).

[12] Liddell and Scott (s.v. σκελετός) refer to Galen 2,221, 222, 734 al. — As regards "squelette" in the passages given by Bailly (s.v. σκελετός), it corresponds rather to the Latin *umbra*, a spirit after death, a very clear example being AP 11,92,392.

[13] According to etymological dictionaries these two words are not related to each other : see Frisk II (1970) 722—724 and Chantraine (1980) 1012f., each s.v. σκέλλομαι and σκέλος.

[14] The use of *crura* to denote lines forming an angle may have given additional support to the meaning "skeleton"(see above).

It would be interesting to look into the history of how and when the Greek σκελετός came to mean "skeleton", not only in antiquity but also later in modern languages. This might also throw more light on the possibly unprecedented use of *crura* as found in Gerhard's Meditationes Sacrae. The topic is open to investigation to anyone interested.