

## A Note on “*substomachans*” (Augustine, *conf.* 3.21)

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### Abstract

This brief note explains the curious word “*substomachans*” in *conf.* 3.21 from the Manichaean background of both Monnica’s bishop and Augustine. Based on this explanation, the note proposes a new translation of the phrase in which “*substomachans*” occurs. The interpretation offered seems to be backed by Julian of Eclanum’s use of “*substomachans*”. In essence, “*substomachari*” refers to the “*ructare*” during the Manichaeans’ daily ritual meal: “to belch (out)”.

**Keywords:** Augustine; Confessions; *substomachans*; Manichaeism; Julian of Eclanum

In *conf.* 3.21 Augustine uses a curious word. It is in the passage which contains the famous phrase that “a son of such tears cannot be lost”. The immediately preceding text of *conf.* 3.21 is on an African bishop who, at Monnica’s insistence that he should have an interview with her son, gives her a twofold answer. On the one hand, he says that Augustine by reading (*legendo*) will discover what an error (*error*) and impiety (*impietas*) the Manichaean heresy (*haeresis*) is. On the other hand, he imparts that he himself had been brought to the Manichaeans by his mother and after getting acquainted with their books realized that he had to leave the sect (*secta*). Literally it then reads:

Quae cum ille dixisset atque illa nollet adquiescere, sed instaret magis deprecando et ubertim flendo, ut me uideret et mecum dissereret, ille iam *substomachans* taedio: “Vade” inquit “a me; ita uiuas, fieri non potest, ut filius istarum lacrimarum pereat.”<sup>1</sup>

In preliminary translation:

When he (sc. the bishop) had said this and she (sc. Monnica) was unwilling to agree, but pressed him with more begging and copiously shedding tears to see me and debate with me, he became at last irritated and bored: “Go away from me,” he said, “as you live, it is not possible that the son of these tears be lost!”

What concerns us here is the word *substomachans*. Lexicographers have noted for centuries that we are dealing with an Augustinian *hapax*, a neologism formed by Augustine and found in Late Antiquity only with (and, I tentatively assume, adopted by) his formidable adversary Julian of Eclanum.<sup>2</sup>

The word and its context are in fact difficult to translate. The phrase in which *substomachans* occurs, reads in modern English translations: “He was now irritated and a little vexed and said” (Henry Chadwick);<sup>3</sup> “A little vexed, he answered” (Maria Boulding);<sup>4</sup> “he got a bit fed up” (Philip Burton);<sup>5</sup> “Eventually he became irritated by the monotony of this and told her” (Carolyn J.-B. Hammond).<sup>6</sup> Frequently quoted French translations read: « Alors l’évêque, ennuyé, lui dit non sans quelque impatience » (Pierre de Labriolle)<sup>7</sup> and « Et lui, un peu gagné déjà par l’impatience et l’ennui, de répondre: ... » (Eugène Tréhorel, André Bouissou).<sup>8</sup> It was and remains difficult to reproduce in a correct,

complete and also fine idiomatic translation both the hitherto unique word “*substomachans*” (partic. of *sub-stomachor*: “être un peu irrité, s’impatier un peu”; Albert Blaise<sup>9</sup>) and the noun “*taedium*” (“disgust, weariness, boredom”<sup>10</sup>) and also “*iam*” (e.g. “now; immediately, soon; henceforth; in that case, as an immediate consequence”<sup>11</sup>). With regard to this last word, moreover, a rather curious interpretation takes place in the translations: apparently to positively represent the character of Monnica’s bishop, “*iam*” is used to assert that he became “a little vexed”, “a bit fed up” or that he was “*non sans quelque impatience*” and “*un peu gagné*”.<sup>12</sup> As far as I can see, no classical or Augustinian text gives any reason to interpret “*iam*” in such a “softening” way.<sup>13</sup>

In order to possibly find a solution for all this, it may be important to pay attention to the variants in the manuscripts. The phrase “*iam substomachans taedio*” sounds rather unfortunate (because, after all, it contains two possibly redundant words), which apparently is how the scribes of the manuscripts also experienced it. The manuscript S(essorianus), famous for its variant “*de diuina domo*” in *conf.* 8.29, omits “*taedio*” and so does Pius Knöll in his formerly noted editions,<sup>14</sup> followed critically by, for example, John Gibb and William Montgomery in their also prestigious edition.<sup>15</sup> However, the most recent edition in the wake of Martinus Skutella maintains “*taedio*”.<sup>16</sup> Although it is clear that without “*taedio*” the phrase runs more smoothly, the critical principle “*proclivi lectioni praestat ardua*” remains to be preferred.

Perhaps we understand why Augustine introduces the wording “*substomachans*” when we consider the Manichaean background of Monnica’s bishop. At the same time, we should also take into account the Manichaean background of Augustine who consciously formulates this way. As almost every Latin dictionary notes, “*stomachor*” in the sense of “to be angry; irritated; vexed” was well known by his great example Cicero. The apparently unique addition of the preposition “*sub*” to “*stomachans*” emphasizes the emergence from deep within the stomach (*stomachus*). A reader acquainted with Manichaean terminology and habit immediately thinks of the daily Manichaean meal as just described by Augustine in Book 3 of the *Confessions*: when a Manichaean *sanctus* had eaten a fig, he breathed during his prayer or when he belched out (*ructando*) parts of God.<sup>17</sup>

It is almost certain that Augustine, by speaking of “*substomachans*”, alludes to this “*ructare*”. In his work *contra Faustum*, “*ructare*” appears at several instances. In *c. Faust.* 2,5 Augustine imparts that the Manichaean Christ, who is present in the earth and all that it produces, “needs to be saved by you, by your eating and belching (*ructatis*)”.<sup>18</sup> In the same way it is clearly spoken of *ructare* in *c. Faust.* 5.10, 6.4 and 20.13.<sup>19</sup> We also hear from Ephrem Syrus, for example, that the activity of “belching out” was a standard practice in Manichaean circles.<sup>20</sup> “*Substomachans*” in *conf.* 3.21 subtly appears to recall this practice. An appropriate translation of “*ille iam substomachans taedio*” therefore seems to be: “he at last belched out in weariness”.

In a previous study I indicated how much the statement “*filius istarum lacrimarum*” is reminiscent of Manichaean terminology.<sup>21</sup> That terminology also sounds in “*substomachans*”: it recalls the Manichaean rite of “belching”.

Curiously, the term only appears once again in Augustine’s time. Julian of Eclanum, Augustine’s contemporary who was thoroughly acquainted with Manichaean doctrine and

terminology, accuses Hippo's bishop of traducianism and sees in it a "belched out" relic of his former belief:

Una vobis sunt instituta, una mysteria, unaque pericula. Et substomacheris, si senis Manis soboles nuncupere?<sup>22</sup>

Your doctrines are the same, your sacraments, your perils. And you belch out (all this) because you are called the offspring of old Mani?

Julian may have picked up the apparently new word in Augustine's *Confessions*. Earlier, he found the word "*meribibula*" there.<sup>23</sup> An (unproven) possibility is of course that "*substomachans*" already occurred elsewhere.<sup>24</sup>

What strikes me is how much the curious word again seems to refer to everyday Manichaean practice. In my view, the original occurrence of "*substomachans*" in *conf.* 3.21 is a subtle wordplay, a pun particularly understood by readers familiar with Manichaean terminology and practice. I propose to translate:

When he had said this and she was unwilling to agree, but pressed him with more begging and copiously shedding tears to see me and debate with me, *he then belched out in tediousness*: "Go away from me," he said, "as you live, it is not possible that the son of these tears be lost!"

## Notes

1. *Sancti Augustini Confessionum libri XIII quos post Martinum Skutella iterum edidit Lucas Verheijen*, Turnholti: Brepols 1990, 39.
2. See below.
3. *Saint Augustine, Confessions. Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Henry Chadwick*, Oxford: OUP 1991<sup>1</sup>, 51.
4. *The Works of Saint Augustine. A Translation for the 21st Century, The Confessions, I/1, Introduction, translation and notes by Maria Boulding*, Hyde Park, New York: New City Press 1997, 91.
5. Ph. Burton, "Augustine and Language," in M. Vessey (ed.), *A Companion to Augustine*, Chichester, UK 2012, 113–124 (120).
6. *Augustine, Confessions, Books 1–8. Edited and Translated by Carolyn J.-B. Hammond*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 2014, 131.
7. *Saint Augustin, Confessions, Livres I–VIII. Texte établi et traduit par Pierre de Labriolle*, Tome I, Paris: Les Belles Lettres 1925, 63.
8. *Bibliothèque Augustinienne, Œuvres de saint Augustin*, 13, *Les Confessions*, Livres I–VII. Texte de l'édition de M. Skutella, Introduction et notes par A. Solignac, Traduction de E. Tréhorel et G. Bouissou, Brugge/Paris 1962, 405.
9. A. Blaise, *Dictionnaire Latin-Français des auteurs chrétiens. Revue spécialement pour le vocabulaire théologique par Henri Chirat*, Turnhout: Brepols 1954, 788.
10. See e.g. the various editions of *Cassell's Latin-English Dictionary*; Blaise, s.v.: « ennui, dégoût »; « ennui, chagrin, douleur, deuil »; « maladie »; LSJ, s.v.: "weariness, irksomeness, tediousness; loathing, disgust".
11. Cassell, s.v.; Blaise, s.v.: « et maintenant, et puis; donc; comme ».
12. Better in my opinion is the German translation *Aurelius Augustinus, Confessiones Bekenntnisse. Lateinisch/Deutsch. Übersetzt, herausgegeben und kommentiert von Kurt Flasch und Burkhard Mojsisch ...*, Stuttgart 2009, 145: "... sagte er ihr *nicht ohne einigen* Verdruss." Cf. the older and also widespread German translation *Augustinus, Bekenntnisse. Lateinisch und Deutsch. Eingeleitet, übersetzt und erläutert von Joseph*

- Bernhart..., Frankfurt am Main 1987 (copyright 1955): „da sagte er, *schon* im Ton des Überdrusses“ (135).
13. Apart from the various lexica as mentioned above, see e.g. *TLL* s.v. “iam”.
  14. See, apart from his 1896-edition in *CSEL* 33, e.g. *S. Avreli Avgvstini Confessionvm libri tredecim* ex recognitione P. Knöll, editio stereotypa impressio nova, Lipsiae 1926 (first impression of this editio minor: Lipsiae 1898), 52. Literally S reads, according to Knöll: “*substhomacans*”.
  15. *The Confessions of Augustine*. Edited by J. Gibb and W. Montgomery, Cambridge 1927, 77.
  16. *S. Avreli Avgvstini Confessionvm libri XIII edidit M. Skvtella*. Editionem correctiorem cvravervnt H. Jvergengs et W. Schavb, Stvtgardiae et Lipsiae 1996, 53.
  17. *Conf.* 3.18 (*CCL* 27, 37): « Quam tamen ficum si comedisset aliquis sanctus alieno sane, non suo scelere decerptam, misceret uisceribus et anhelaret de illa angelos, immo uero particulas dei gemendo in oratione atque *ructando* ». Cf. e.g. *conf.* 4.1.
  18. *C. Faust.* 2.5 (*CSEL* 25, 258): « unde ista sacrilega deliramenta uos cogunt non solum in caelo atque in omnibus stellis, sed etiam in terra atque in omnibus, quae nascuntur in ea, confixum et conligatum atque concretum Christum dicere, non iam saluatorem uestrum sed a uobis saluandum, cum ea manducatis atque *ructatis*. »
  19. *C. Faust.* 5.10 (*CSEL* 25, 282): « aut si melioris meriti sunt (sc. the *auditores*), in melones et cucumeres uel in aliquos alios cibos ueniant, quos uos manducaturi estis, ut uestris *ructatibus* cito purgentur »; *c. Faust.* 6.4 (*CSEL* 25, 288): « si autem occiduntur (sc. the plants), cum decerpuntur, quomodo eis inest uita, cui purgandae atque recreandae manducando atque *ructando* uos adseritis subuenire? »; *c. Faust.* 20.13 (*CSEL* 25, 553): « uobis autem per fabulam uestram in escis omnibus Christus ligatus adponitur adhuc ligandus uestris uisceribus soluendusque *ructatibus* ». One may compare, for instance, *mor.* 2.30 (*CSEL* 90, 114): « Quid porro insanius dici aut cogitari potest, hominem boletos, orizam, tubera, placentas, caroenum, piper, laser distento uentre cum gratulatione *ructantem* ... ».
  20. C.W.S. Mitchell, *S. Ephraim's Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion and Bardaisan ...*, London 1912, Vol. I: *The Discourses addressed to Hypatius*, xliii.
  21. “Monnica’s Bishop and the ‘*filius istarum lacrimarum*’: An Analysis of Augustine’s *conf.* 3.21” (in press).
  22. *C. Iul. imp.* 6.16 (*MPL* 45, 1536; *CSEL* 85/2, 342).
  23. Cf. *conf.* 9.18 and *c. Iul. imp.* 1.68.
  24. Cf. J.J. O’Donnell, *Augustine, Confessions, 2, Commentary on Books 1–7*, Oxford 1992, 202.