

CROOM HELM  
CLASSICAL STUDIES

# PRIMAENA: POEMS FOR APHALLIC GOD

Introduced, translated and edited, with notes  
and commentary  
by  
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Stud

*Priapus ad rusticum quendam*

Rusticus indocte si quid dixisse videbor,  
da veniam: libros non lego, poma lego.  
sed rudis hic dominum totiens audire legentem  
cogor Homereas edidicique notas.  
ille vocat, quod nos psolen, 'psolenta keraunon'  
et quod nos culum, 'culeon' ille vocat.  
merdaleon certe si res non munda vocatur,  
et pediconum mentula merdalea est.  
quid? nisi Taenario placuisset Troica cummo  
mentula, quod caneret, non habuisset opus.  
mentula Tantalidae bene si non nota fuisset,  
nil, senior Chryses, quod querebatur, erat.  
haec eadem socium tenera spoliavit amica,  
quaeque erat Aeacidae, maluit esse suam.

Inscriptio g 4 cogor *Heins. edd. recentiores*: choris (coris) *AHP et codd. plerique*, constitui *CLWHzæ Ital.*, constituique *p Ald. 1517*, constitui *Ald. 1534 Burn.*, insitui *Scal.*, carpi *V* Homereas *Ald. 1534 Bentleius Meyer Voll. Clair.*: Homereacas *Scal. Heins. Burn. Muell. Baehr. Pasc. Caz2.*, mericas *ed. Venet.*, meras *Avanc. Ald. 1517*, meracas (-achas, -archas) *AHLPOWtg et cell.* 5 ordo ille vocal, quod nos psolon *Gronovius, Heins. Meyer*: psoleon ille vocal *edd. veteres* vocal] vocamus *O Ald. Scal. Burn.* psolen *edd. recent. fere omnes*: psoleon libri psolenta (ps-, s-) keraunon (ceraunon) libri *edd. veteres*: ψολέντα κεραιών *edd. recentiores* 6 et *AL Buch. Baehr. Caz2. Clair.*: id *HPSVWg et plerique, edd. veteres Muell. Pasc. culeon AHWV Ital. Ald. 1534*: culeon *Lpo ed. Mutin. Ald. 1517 Scal.*, kouleon *z*, κουλέων *edd. recentiores* 7 merdaleon (-ion) libri *Ital.*: Μεγδαλέον *Muell. Baehr. Pasc. Voll. Clair.*, smerdaleon *p*, Σμεγδαλέον *Heins. Anton Meyer Pasc.*, smerdaleos *Ald. Scal.*, ομεγδαλεος *Burn.*, smerdaliun *Avanc.* si *Weber Muell. Pasc. Voll. Clair.*: nisi *codd. fere omnes Meyer Baehr.*, visa *V*, in se *Hy*, quasi *Bueh.* 8 merdalea *LP ed. Rom. edd. recentiores*: smerdalea *Ald. Scal. Sciop. Burn. Meyer*, smerdaleum *p*, mendalea *AH ed. Mutin.*, mendalea *V*, est *om. ed. Rom.* 9 quid? *ed. Argent Sciop. Meyer Muell. Pasc.*: quid *S ed. Vincent. 1479 Scal. Burn.*, quod libri *edd. Rom. & Mutin. Ald. Voll.*, qui *Heins. Baehr.*, om. *z* [nisi] si *AGx* 11 nota] nata *Heusing Anton Scal. Muell.*

*A lewd Priapus lampoons Homer*

No scholar I, but country-bred, so pardon me  
If I be crude: trees is my trade, not books, you see.  
Yet I know this bloke Homer, for my master proud  
Spends all his time out here a-reading him out loud.  
I hear, for instance, what we rustics call a prick  
Is 'psolenta kheraunos' in that chap's Greek,<sup>1</sup>  
And arse is 'khouleos', and 'merdaleos' — 'foul'  
It means — what you'd expect of prick that's been in bowel.  
If Trojan cock had not brought Grecian cunt such fun,<sup>2</sup>  
This Homer fellow's book could not have been begun.  
If bloody Agamemnon's prick had been less stout,  
He'd given old Chryses damn nowt to moan about;<sup>3</sup>  
Nor would he then have snatched the maiden from his  
friend,  
And she'd have been Achilles' own until the end.<sup>4</sup>  
Who now upon his Pelethronian lyre<sup>5</sup> must sing  
A woeful tune, himself stretched tenser than its string.<sup>6</sup>  
And so began the hero's noble rage,<<sup>7</sup> the same  
That's the chief matter of the Iliad's tale of fame.

<sup>1</sup>modern editors print these words in the Greek alphabet, but this seems inappropriate to a vulgar Priapus who disclaims literacy (line 2).  
<sup>2</sup>i.e., if Helen had not been enamoured of Paris.  
<sup>3</sup>Cp. Horace *sat.* 1.3.107f: *nam fuit ante Helenam cunus iacterrima / belli causa*.  
<sup>4</sup>Chryses was father of Chryseis, a Trojan girl carried off by the Greeks and given to Agamemnon, who was forced to release her because Chryses, a priest of Apollo, threatened the Greeks with a plague.  
<sup>5</sup>Agamemnon then took her cousin Briseis, instead; but she had already been claimed by Achilles, who "sulked in his tent" at her loss.  
<sup>6</sup>called Pelethronian because it was given to Achilles by the gifted centaur Chiron Pelethronius.  
<sup>7</sup>the absence of Briseis, Priapus implies, made his member as taut as his lute string.  
<sup>8</sup>the Iliad opens with the 'anger of Achilles', the very first word being Μῆνιν or wrath.

The Priapus of this poem is a coarse and foul-mouthed yokel who reduces the noble epics of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to tales of action motivated by lust alone.

ille Pelethroniam cecinit miserabile carmen 15  
 ad citharam; cithara tensor ipse sua.  
 nobilis hinc nata nempe incipit Ilias ira,  
 principium sacri carminis illa fuit.  
 altera materia est error fallentis Ulixei;  
 si verum quaeas, hunc quoque movit amor. 20  
 hic legitur radix, de qua flos aureus exit,  
 quem cum 'moly' vocat, mentula 'moly' fuit.  
 hic legimus Circeen Atlantiademque Calypson  
 grandia Dulichii vasa petisse viri.  
 huius et Alcinoi mirata est filia membrum  
 frondenti ramo vix potuisse tegi.  
 ad vetulam tamen ille suam properabat, et omnis  
 mens erat in cunno, Penelopea, tuo:  
 quae sic casta manes, ut iam convivias visas  
 utque futurorum sit tua plena domus. 30

16 [tensior] tenuior pauci codd. deteriores Ald. 17 nobilis] nobis  
 A hinc] hic HV et pauci ed. Venet. 1480 nata AL et codd. plerique  
 edd.: nota CHPV et plerique, Ital., mota z Muell. 18 princi-  
 pium] principiumque Voll. Clair. illa] hic Baehr., ille L. 19  
 Ulixei A et codd. plerique Baehr. Voll. Caetz. Clair.: Ulyxi (Ulixi) HL  
 et plerique, Ital. Meyer Muell. Baehr. Pasc., Ulysses Ald. ed. Argent. Scal.  
 Sciop., Ulyssi C et pauci ed. Rom., ulixis pau 20 hunc HV et  
 codd. plerique Ald. Baehr. Voll. Caetz., hinc V. 21 hic AHLV et  
 codd. plerique Ald. Baehr. Voll. Caetz., hinc V. 21 hic AHLV et  
 codd. optimi ed. Mutin. Ald. Heins. Baehr. Buch. Voll. Clair.: hinc codd.  
 deteriores plerique, Ital. Scal. Meyer Muell., haec (hec)  
 GNDy aureus] lacteus Gynaldus 22 quem] quam Baehr.  
 Baehr. Voll. Caetz., quae v ed. Venet., qualem ed. Mutin. moly (bis) OSc  
 et cell., edd. veteres: molly ed. Vincent. 1479, μῶλυ Meyer edd. recentiores,  
 moli CHglx et cell., timoli (th-, um- et aliter) AHV et cell. 23 hic  
 AHL et codd. fer omnes ed. Mutin. Ald. Heins. Baehr. Buch. Voll. Clair.:  
 hinc CVW et pauci codd. deteriores, Ital. Scal. Meyer Muell. Calyp-  
 son] Calypso (-i) Cux edd. veteres 24 vasa AHLV et codd. optimi  
 ed. Mutin. Meyer edd. recentiores: iussa (iussa) Wye et codd. deteriores,  
 Ital. Ald. Scal. Baehr., iusta ed. Florent., ista ed. Nurnb. petisses  
 tulisse Cu et pauci codd. deteriores, edd. veteres 27 tamen] vir  
 Bvlg 28 mens] spes Bvlg Ital.- paucior edd. Mutin. G  
 Parm. 29 sic] sit HQR visas] quaeas cod. Ualdini Meyeri  
 Meyer 30 utque] atque Scal. Baehr. Meyer

The other book's about Ulysses and his treks,  
 And, truth to tell, here too the cause of all was sex.  
 You read about a beautiful blossom, 'molyhock',<sup>8</sup>  
 But when they speak of 'moly' they're really meaning  
 'cock'.  
 What else we read? How Circe — and Calypso too —  
 Dulichian<sup>9</sup> Ulysses for his fine tool they woo.  
 Alcinous' daughter<sup>10</sup> wondered at it next: its size  
 Was such that leafy bough could not its bulk disguise.  
 Yet, all the same, to his old woman back he goes:  
 His mind is in your cunt, Penelope,<sup>11</sup> who chose  
 To remain true, yet you'd invited many a guest,  
 So with a crowd of would-be fuckers you were blessed;  
 The idea being, I dare say, to find out who  
 Was best at doing it of all that eager crew.  
 "To firmer member", says she, "no one could lay claim  
 Than Ulysses, in strength and skill a master at the game.  
 I need to know, now he has gone and left no trace,  
 Which one of you is man enough to take his place."

<sup>8</sup>'moly' is a herb described in the *Odyssey* (10 302) as having a black root and a milky flower (whence some have suggested *lacteus*, 'milky' instead of *aureus*, 'golden', 'beautiful', in the text); it has not been certainly identified. Priapus may have regarded it as symbolic of the penis.  
<sup>9</sup>from Dulichium, an island in the Ionian Sea associated with Ulysses.  
<sup>10</sup>Nausicaa, who came upon the naked, shipwrecked Ulysses; he covered himself with a tree branch.  
<sup>11</sup>Ulysses' home was besieged, during his absence, by a crowd of suitors to his wife Penelope, the mythological model of the faithful wife; Priapus was not alone in his scepticism (see Roscher-Schmidt 1909–10).

22. The magic *moly* plant (μῶλυ) which Odysseus used to avert the power of Circe to unman him, is really his phallus — RANKIN

It is perhaps not surprising that the phallicentric Priapus should see the phallus as the prime mover in the two epics. In the *Iliad* it was the aggressive strength of Agamemnon's; here in the *Odyssey* it is the power of that of Ulysses to attract goddesses and women.

e quibus ut scires quicunque valentior esset,  
 haec es ad arrectos verba locuta procos:  
 "nemo meo melius nervum tendebat Ulixē,  
 sive illi laterum sive erat artis opus.  
 qui quoniam perit, vos nunc intendite, qualem 35  
 esse virum sciero, vir sit ut ille meus."  
 hac ego, Penelope, potui tibi lege placere,  
 illo sed nondum tempore factus eram.

31 quicunque] qui quoque *Muell. Pasc.* 32 arrectos] erectos  
*CIL* *ed. Mutin.* 33 Ulixē] Ulysse (-i-) *edd. veteres* 34  
 sive (bis) *AHLiv et ceteri Buch. edd. recentiores*: sive/scu *LV et codd.*  
*plerique edd. veteres* erat *AH Buch. edd. recentiores*: fuit *LYWih et*  
*plerique, edd. veteres* artis] artus *cod. Vat. Chigianus HV 164,*  
*Ital.* 35 vos nunc] modo vos *Mv et cell., Ital. Scal.,* vos modo  
*V* qualem] quem iam *Muell.,* quemquem *Bachr.* 37 lege]  
 parte *hps* 38 factus] natus *Wiber Muell. Bachr.*  
*Vide appendicem p. 205.*

## LXX

*Priapus monet et minatur foribus ne comedant ficus*

Cum fici tibi suavis subbit  
 et iam porrigere huc manum libebit  
 ad me respice, fur, et aestimato  
 quot pondo est tibi mentulam cacandum.

Inscriptio *P* 2 libebit] libebit *LV et cell., Ital.* 4 quot  
*LVWg edd.*: quod *AGHY et cell. Muell.* mentulam *HWVg et*  
*plerique*: mentula *A Ald. Scal. Burn.* cacandum *AHLiv et cell.,*  
*edd.*: cacandum *PVux ed. Nurem.,* cacanda *CGpZ Ald. Scal. Burn.*  
*ordo mentula (-m) est cac.* *Wv Ital. praet. Mutin. et Pom., Ald. Scal.*  
*Burn.*  
 4. Cf. *CIL* 10 8145: *hanc* [mentulam supra pictam — Housman]  
*ego caeci.*

I should have been the one, Penelope, to fuck  
 In your mate's stead. But I was not yet made, worse luck.

He finishes with a coarse jest, which provides a fitting conclusion to the poem which is about the historical importance of the mighty members of heroes such as Paris, Agamemnon and Odysseus. But Priapus implies that his own phallus is greater than them all, for he alone could have replaced her husband to Penelope's complete satisfaction. However, it is not really the god Priapus, son of Venus and Bacchus, who is speaking, but a crude wooden scarecrow priapus set up by some Homer-reading gentleman in his garden. Gods do not have a 'master' as he does, nor are they 'made' as he was. For this reason some have wanted to read *natus*, 'born', for *factus*, 'made', in line 38. But if he had been 'born' he would not have had a 'master'. This dual identity allows the talking statue to be as lewd and coarse as he likes.

*Priapus advises a thief to take a good look at him*

Thief, when desire for fig's sweet taste you feel,  
 And stretching out your hand you think to steal,  
 Look first at me, and think how hard 'I will be  
 To rid your arse of that great bulk you see.<sup>1</sup>

literally, "and think how heavy the weight of the prick you will have to excrete". This interpretation, that of Housman, is rejected by Buchheit and by O'Connor, who translate: "Estimate how much my *mentula*, the one that will be smeared with your excrement, weighs when I pedicate you". But, as Housman wrote, *cacandum male interpretantur concacandum* — "those who translate 'to excrete' as meaning 'to smear with excrement' are wrong".

Yet another variation of the threat of *pedicatio* levelled at orchard thieves.