

The Comparison of Art in the *Carmina Priapea*

1. *CP 10**

insulsissima quid puella rides?
non me Praxiteles Scopasve fecit,
non sum Phidiaca manu **politus**;
sed lignum rude vilicus dolavit
et dixit mihi 'tu Priapus esto'.
spectas me tamen et subinde rides:
nimirum tibi **salsa res** videtur
adstans inguinibus columna nostris.

5

Why do you laugh, most witless girl? Praxiteles or Scopas did not make me, nor was I given polish by Phidias' hand, but a slave overseer hacked a log and said to me: “You, be Priapus!” You look at me and yet immediately after laugh: of course this seems an amusing thing to you, the column standing up in my groin!
[Cf. Hor. *Sat.* 1.8-1-4; Col. *De Re Rustica* 10.29-34]

2. *CP 9*

cur obscaena mihi pars sit sine veste, requirens
quaere, tegat nullus cur sua tela deus.
fulmen habens mundi dominus tenet illud aperte;
nec datur aequoreo fuscina tecta deo.
nec Mavors illum, per quem valet, occulit ensem;
nec latet in tepido Palladis hasta sinu.
num pudet auratas Phoebum portare sagittas?
clamne solet pharetram ferre Diana suam?
num tegit Alcides nodosae robora clavae?
sub tunica virgam num deus ales habet?
quis Bacchum gracili vestem praetendere thyrsu,
quis te celata cum face vidit, Amor?
nec mihi sit crimen, quod mentula semper aperta est:
hoc mihi si telum desit, inermis ero.

5

10

Cf. Call. *Iamb.* 9 (fr. 199 Pf.)

Ἑρμῆ, τί τοι τὸ νεῦρον, ὦ Γενειόλα,
ποττὰν ὑπήναν κοῦ ποτ' ἔχρινον ;

Hermes, O bearded one, why does
your prick to your beard and not to
your feet...?

(trans. Acosta-Hughes)

If you ask me why my obscene body part is without clothing, ask, why does no other god conceal his or her own weapons. The master who has the thunderbolt of the world holds it openly, and a concealed trident is not given to the sea god. Mars does not hide that sword, by which he is strong, nor does Pallas' spear lie hidden in her warm breast. Surely it does not shame Phoebus to carry his gilded arrows? Is Diana accustomed to carry her quiver out of public view? Surely Hercules does not conceal the strength of his knotty club? Surely the winged god does not keep his staff under his tunic? Who sees Bacchus cover his cloak over his slender thyrsus; who sees you, Amor, with your torch hidden? May this not be my crime, that my prick is always exposed: if I should lack a weapon, I will be unarmed.

3. *CP 20*

fulmina sub Iove sunt; Neptuni fuscina telum;
ense potens Mars est; hasta, Minerva, tua est;
sutilibus Liber committit proelia thyrasis;
fertur Apollinea missa sagitta manu;
Herculis armata est invicti dextera clava.
at me **terribilem mentula** tenta facit!

5

Thunderbolts fall under the power of Jove; the trident is the weapon of Neptune; Mars is powerful by his sword; the spear, Minerva, is yours; Liber brings men into battle with his bound thyrsis; the arrow, sent from Apollo's hand, flies; Hercules' right hand is armed with his club. But my outstretched prick makes me terrifying!

* Passages from the *CP* follow Louis Callebaut's 2012 edition. Translations are my own.

4. CP 36

notas habemus quisque **corporis formas**:

Phoebus comosus, Hercules lacertosus;
trahit **figuram** virginis tener Bacchus,
Minerva flavo lumine est, Venus paeto;
frontes *caprinos* Arcades **vides** Faunos; 5
habet decentes nuntius deum plantas;
tutela Lemni dispares movet gressus;
intonsa semper Aesculapio barba est;
nemo est feroci pectorosior Marte.
quod si quis inter haec locus mihi restat, 10
deus Priapo **mentulatio** non est!

We each have a recognizable physical form: Phoebus is beautiful, Hercules is brawny; young Bacchus has a maiden's figure, Minerva has sparkling eyes, Venus, fluttering eyes; you see the Arcadian Fauns have the brow of goats; the messenger of gods has handsomely shaped soles; the patron of Lemnos moves unequal steps; Asclepius always has an unshorn beard; no one is more strongly-chested than fierce Mars. But if any place among these remains for me, a god is not more endowed than Priapus!

5. CP 39

forma Mercurius potest placere,
forma conspiciendus est Apollo,
formosus quoque **pingitur** Lyaeus,
formosissimus omnium est Cupido.
me pulchra fateor carere forma, 5
verum mentula luculenta nostra est:
hanc mavult sibi quam deos priores,
si qua est non fatui puella cunni.

Mercury is able to please by his shape Apollo is worthy to be seen because of his shape, Lyaeus, too, is depicted as shapely, Cupid is the shapeliest of all. I confess that I lack a beautiful shape, but my prick is splendid; any girl who does not have a stupid cunt prefers this for herself over those gods aforesaid.

6. Ov. Am. 1.1.7-12

quid, si praecripiat flavae Venus arma Minervae,
ventilet accensas flava Minerva faces?
quis probet in silvis Cererem regnare iugosis,
lege pharetratae virginis arva coli?
crinibus insignem quis acuta cuspidi Phoebum
instruat, Aoniam Marte movente lyram?

What if Venus took hold of golden Minerva's weapons, while golden Minerva fanned the blazing fires? Who would find Ceres fit to rule the mountainous woods, the fields to be cultivated by the Virgin's quiver? Who would equip Phoebus, remarkable for his hair, with a sharp spear, while Mars played the Aonian lyre?

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