On Plautine 'Change: Dealing with the *Mercator*
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In recent years Plautus's *Mercator* has not been on the short list of Roman comedies regularly read or taught either in Latin or in translation, but it richly deserves to be. Beginning with a prologue that rejects typical comic lovers and their monologues, Plautus takes the stock types and erotic plots of Roman comedy in novel directions by omitting both the typical *servus callidus* and the prospect of a stable romantic union at the play's end while threatening, if only in parody, a venture into tragic realms as well. Instead he stages a world of almost constant change and negotiation in which the *adulescens amans*, Charinus, who introduces himself and his trials in the prologue, must constantly improvise new strategies to try to hold onto the girl he purchased on his first voyage abroad as a merchant. That girl, Pasicompsa, though on stage only briefly, in turn proves to be remarkably adept in negotiating with other would-be owners contending for her. Other character types, including the cook and an old female slave, prove highly innovative as well. Moreover, the play's treatment of expanding trade and the wealth it generates over against the values and virtues of traditional Roman agricultural wealth offers a particularly valuable witness, even when translated to a fictional Greek world, to the concerns and conflicts of an expansionist Rome after the Second Punic War. The lack of an up to date English commentary on the play has encouraged neglect of what the *Mercator* has to show us about the range of Plautus's imagination, but a forthcoming Bryn Mawr commentary is about to remedy that situation by offering essential help for teaching the play both in the original Latin and in translation for culture courses. This panel aims to stimulate discussion of the play as both literature and historical witness, and the results should be of wide-ranging interest. The panel papers are:

1. Trafficking Pasicompsa: A Courtesan's Travels and Travails in Plautus' *Mercator*
2. A Musical Merchant: The *Cantica* of *Mercator*
3. What the Cook Knew: the Cocus in Plautus' *Mercator*
4. Syra and Stereotyping of Syrian Slaves in Plautus' *Mercator*
5. *Mercator Paratragoedans*: Plautus Rewrites Teucer's Exile

(abstracts follow on separate pages)

Trafficking Pasicompsa: A Courtesan's Travels and Travails in Plautus' *Mercator*

Sharon L. James (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill)

In *Mercator*, Plautus' Pasicompsa presents some contradictions in characterization: she is a concubine, well trained in the *meretrix*' art of flirtation (499-528), but she is also faithful and devoted to the *adulescens* Charinus (530-540). She is on-stage only briefly (499-543), but is the constant subject of conversation in the play. This talk focuses on where she must be located, in discussions both actual and putative. The traffic implicit in the title—merchants purchase and resell goods in financial exchange—predicts the actual and hypothetical transfers of this young woman's body. No fewer than five men are involved (and two more, who are fictive, or spectral) in handing Pasicompsa around, and rather unusually they are all citizens, as the play has no pimp. She is repeatedly trafficked—eleven times, far more than any other female in Roman Comedy (again, either by being actually handed over or by unfulfilled proposal). Hypothetical occupations and occupational hazards are described for her (395-99, 405-11). This paper will consider the dizzying chess game of Pasicompsa's body and its constantly changing possible ownership (about which even she becomes confused at one point). I will argue that in Pasicompsa, Plautus gives us a plausible biography for a young slave *meretrix*, who functions as an object of exchange among men, but speaks compellingly for herself when she has a chance, and thereby offers us insight into how such women might both have lived and felt about how they lived.

The first "exchange" of Pasicompsa is unrecorded, and thus is not included in the numbers above: she came to be the property of the nameless *hospes*, a friend to the family of Charinus and Demipho. At 101-102, Charinus describes how this *hospes* lent her to him for a night, as a gift (1); he purchases her from the man at 103-06 (2). They spend two years together; when they return to Athens, his father sees her and immediately begins plotting to lay hands on her. At 390-468, father and son haggle over who is to have her, and where she is to live (3). Each pretends to be acquiring her for another man, who is enamored of her (4). By fiat of paternal authority, Demipho wins the battle and takes possession of the still-unseen Pasicompsa (5), pretending he will sell her to his bidder (6). She goes instead to his neighbor Lysimachus (7), until Demipho can find a house for her (8). When she believes that Lysimachus has bought her, she flirts expertly with him, through tears, but when he tells her that he hasn't bought her, she is confused and asks him who her owner is: *quoia sum?* (528). She goes on to avow her loyalty to Charinus. Lysimachus takes her into his house, to hold her for Demipho (9). At 584, he tells Demipho to find her a place to live (10). Lysimachus' wife comes home unexpectedly and finds Pasicompsa, identifiable on sight as a *meretrix*, in her house; an uproar results. Demipho is persuaded to return Pasicompsa to his son (11), but under unclear conditions; we may probably presume that Charinus will find a house for her.

Demipho claims that Pasicompsa is too delicate to be a household maid, as such women must work hard and be able to take a beating (*vapulet*, 396). She can't be a lady's maid, as she is too beautiful: if she were to accompany her mistress outdoors, she would attract excessive sexual attention from men, who would harass her and follow her home, where they would make noise and write love elegies on the wall (405-10). She might attract charges of *lenocinium* against her owner (411), but to throw her out would cause a scandal (*opprobramentum aut flagitium*, 422).

Thus the play constantly imagines Pasicompsa on the move between men, as the near-constant object of male sexual attention, either actual or hypothetical. During the play, she actually moves very little, but we see how she handles her trafficking when she both weeps and flirts with Lysimachus. In addition, the play raises the specter of her treatment: as a lady's maid, both indoors and out, she would be the object of constant observation and suspicion, and would risk violence. She herself declares both her heart (530-40) and her domestic value—she is an expert weaver (519-23). The presence of this beautiful young woman engenders a crisis among the men, and a domestic disturbance between spouses: her mere existence poses a problem that must be solved, and as the men in the play try to solve that problem, they hand her around, both hypothetically and actually, in a game of musical chairs. They compete and co-operate in this peculiar, comic exercise of citizen male privilege, not of course, considering her preferences. At the end Plautus does not specify what will happen to her. But since she does not turn out to be a citizen, and Roman Comedy does not allow permanent extra-marital relationships, her reunion with Charinus can be only temporary. At some future point, Pasicompsa—still a slave—will inevitably be trafficked yet again.

A Musical Merchant: The *Cantica* of *Mercator*

Timothy J. Moore (University of Texas)

It has been observed that the contrast between accompanied meters and unaccompanied iambic senarii is a major contributor to structure and character portrayal in *Mercator* (Moore 1998, 1999). Equally important are Plautus' metrical choices within the play's four *cantica*.

The play's music begins as Acanthio enters, singing iambic octonarii (111). Plautus' choice of iambics here instead of faster trochaics underlines that for all his alleged haste this *servus currens* is more interested in complaining about his breathlessness than in reaching his master. Plautus provides a sly reminder of the more "proper" meter for the *servus currens* by having Acanthio sing just one trochaic septenarius, in a verse beginning with *currenti* (117). Charinus, eager to find out what is going on, switches the meter to trochaic septenarii again as he sings an aside (129), but iambics soon return. Trochaic septenarii take over when slave and master have finally met (141). In nearly every Roman comedy, this first switch to an extended passage of trochaic septenarii indicates that the plot is now set in motion. Here, however, Acanthio and Charinus continue their banter for another 40 verses before Acanthio reveals his news (181). The almost unparalleled delay calls attention to the pure silliness of the scene.

Charinus begins the next *canticum* with a lover's lament (335). He sings mostly bacchiacs, appropriate to his mournful state. In his distress, however, he manages very few regular bacchiac tetrameters, and he repeatedly interrupts the bacchiacs with anapests and trochaics. Particularly striking are the four moments when he interrupts the slow bacchiacs with trochaic octonarii, one of Roman comedy's liveliest meters. Trochaic septenarii dialogues between Demipho and Charinus and then Charinus and Eutychus follow the monody.

In most *cantica* where trochaic septenarii follow a polymetric section, the septenarii remain until the end of the *canticum*. Here, however, when Lysimachus and Pasicompsa replace Charinus and Eutychus on stage the meter changes to iambic septenarii (499), a response to the presence of the *meretrix*, whose character type, like love in general, is associated with iambic septenarii throughout Roman comedy.

The play's third and fourth *cantica*, like the second, begin with laments by Charinus. These *cantica* are entirely in trochaic septenarii, and in both an entrance of Eutychus follows the lament. In the third *canticum* Eutychus brings the bad news that Pasicompsa has been purchased. In the fourth Eutychus interrupts Charinus' lament with the good news that Pasicompsa is in Lysimachus' house (842). Plautus thus creates an effective musical parallel between the moment of greatest crisis and the resolution of the crisis.

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What the Cook Knew: The Cocus in Plautus' *Mercator*

J. Mira Seo (University of Michigan)

Dismissively treated by Lowe (1985) as a wholesale importation from Philemon's original *Emporos*, the cook of Plautus' *Mercator* requires further investigation. Unlike other *mageiroi* (cooks for hire) in the world of Greek New Comedy, the unnamed cook surprisingly refrains from stereotypical boasting and slapstick mock violence (Wilkins, 2000), therefore his role clearly offers more than the opportunistic humor usually provided by a *mageiros* figure. Plautus has retained the Greek free *mageiros* and not transformed him into a domestic slave cook as in other plays (*Aulularia, Menaechmi, Truculentus, Miles Gloriosus, Curculio, Casina,* and *Bacchides*). Why? His appearance precipitates a turning point in the plot: the cook's exchange with Lysimachus and his scandalized wife, Dorippa, unravels Lysimachus' and Demipho's conspiracy through an outrageous scene of recognition, misrecognition, and exposure. The cook's distinctly unRoman free status is critical to his function in the play; his connection to Lysimachus is solely commercial, and his position as an outsider to the household causes him to misrecognize Dorippa as the courtesan on whose behalf Lysimachus has engaged him for the evening. Throughout his appearance, the cook infuriatingly misunderstands Lysimachus' urgent shooing, blatantly misconstrues the situation, and finally gets the hint that he is no longer wanted. The cook's consistent misapprehension echoes the ongoing confusion caused by the son, Charinus, and the father, Demipho, who have both purchased the courtesan, Pasicompsa. In a play entitled *Mercator*, it is perhaps unsurprising that familial relationships (father to son, husband to wife) are overlaid and confounded with commercial exchanges. The perils and pitfalls of substituting commerce for family bonds are therefore epitomized in the hired cook's ignorant-- or perhaps not so innocent-- blundering into a delicate spousal situation.

The cook, arriving directly from the market laden with his wares, casts an appraising eye over Lysimachus' wife, Dorippa, and hilariously concludes, "*Satis scitum filum mulieris. verum hercle anet.*" "Nice enough type of lady—but she's showing her age, by God."(756). As a representative of the mercantile world, the hired cook offers a stark version of both father and son's attempt to buy love. Pasicompsa's slave status is left unresolved at the end of the play, as is the question of how much Demipho's wife will ever learn of the debacle (1003). If the cook's ambiguous departure is any indicator, the hurried envoi of the players (*eadem brevior fabula/ erit. eamus*, 1006-7) depicts less a resolution of the play's conflicts than an open-ended tension between lucre and love.

Syra and Stereotyping of Syrian Slaves in Plautus' *Mercator*

John H. Starks, Jr. (SUNY, Binghamton)

The relevance of *Syrus* as an ethnic marker has often been ignored as a generic slave name in Greek and Roman comedy alike, perhaps especially because prime examples bearing that name are the noteworthy, stock *servi callidi* of Menander's *Dis Exapaton* (and probably *Phasma*) and Terence's *Heauton Timorumenos* and *Adelphoe*. The female equivalent, Syra, is also frequently a typecast name, usually of a *graus/anus*, as in Menander's *Misoumenos* 555, Apollodorus' (8KA) and Terence's *Hekyra* 58, and most cleverly represented in Philemon's assignment of the gag line, "Never ask an old woman 'How ya' doing?' You can be sure she's doing badly! (117KA)" to a Syra. This onomastic formula is equally clear in Plautus' presentation of Syra, Dorippa's dutiful old slave attendant, in *Mercator*. But in light of Plautus' penchant for playing with names as character markers and his infrequent identification of specific ethnicities in his extant corpus, Syra's opening remarks and other comments about Syrians in *Mercator* suggest that the comedian employs Syra's name as a first indicator and continuous marker that she and her ethnicity embody longsuffering slavery for the Roman audience.

This Syrian typecasting first appears in Demipho's attempt to keep Charinus from knowing that he wants his son's girlfriend. That girl, Pasicompsa, cannot do real, hard work. Demipho says he'll buy 'a big, manly girl (virago), not a bad one, but a bad-looking one, appropriate to serve a materfamilias, either a Syrian or an Egyptian, to grind, cook, weave, take beatings, and bring no hint of disgrace to the house. (*Mer.* 413-17).' And Pasicompsa proves this conclusion about her in her first appearance with the neighbor Lysimachus; she 'never learned to carry heavy things, or feed herds on the farm, or nurse kids (508-9).' And a few scenes later (670ff) enters her antithesis, Syra the stereotype – accused by her mistress of slavish slowness, she delivers a sassy complaint worthy of her male counterparts about her 'burden' (metaphorical, yet real), a remarkable 84 years of *servitus, sudor, sitis*. Syra then proceeds swiftly off and on stage in service to Dorippa as the catalyst for the comic discovery of the *senex* (the wrong one). She continues as a parody of her status, 'wisely' determining beyond doubt that Lysimachus brought *his* whore home; at next appearance (788) she leaves so rapidly to get Dorippa's father to witness Lysimachus' disgrace that the old man cannot turn around fast enough to explain himself; the father wasn't home, so she's quickly back onstage to mislead Eutychus into thinking his father is a cheater. Her departing soliloquy (817-828) on the double standard regarding unfaithful men and women presents a final ironic twist when the ultimate other, an aged, foreign, female slave, states the case for new laws never to be written that would penalize male malefactors. This balanced social commentary contrasts strongly with the intentionally silly 'anti-old-men-whoring' law that closes the play.

Plautus also includes commentary about Syrians as natural slaves at *Trin.* 542-46 and in the low-class tastes of Sangarinus in *Stichus*. Syrian slavegirls (former queens) are exotic gifts in the *Truculentus* (530-542), but more significantly, a hairdresser named Syra is central to the plot there and is tortured and interrogated by Callicles to reveal identities (775ff). Callicles wildly accuses this 'double-talking' (*bilingua*, i.e. deceptive and multilingual) slave who simply tells the truth (cf. Milphio accusing Hanno Poenus of *bisulcis lingua, Poen.* 1034). While a joke about Syrian aptness for slavery appears as early as the fourth century BCE (Timocles 7KA), Plautus appears to be tying that ethnic presumption and the character name together at a time of heightened Roman contact with Syria and Syrian slaves in the 190s-180s BCE (cf. Liv. 35.49.8 Flamininus, 36.17.4-5 Acilius, speeches set in 192 and 191 expressing this prejudice against servile Syrians). The model is there in the comic ethnic slaves before his time, but Plautus makes more of the direct ethnic identifications to express or confound stereotypes for comic effect. Syra can evoke hard slavery, can mock her status in one-liners and in behaviors, and then can speak to power effectively before she goes back to work.

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Mercator Paratragoedans: Plautus Rewrites Teucer's Exile

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In the fifth act of the *Mercator*, Charinus' farewell address to his fatherland before his exile was first recognized by Leo (1912,[2] 134), followed by Frank (1932), as paratragoedic, a parody of tragedies, such as the *Hercules Furens* (Charinus' madness) and the *Teucer* (of Sophocles and later of Pacuvius). The fragmentary nature of early Latin tragedy does not often allow for an exploration of the length and depth of parody in Plautine comedies or of the significance such parody bears for Roman comedy as a genre. Most recently, Bianco (2006) has shown that in the *Mercator* the playwright employs the tragic figure of Medea as a pre-text that lends further meaning to the comic genre through a reflection of the norms used by comedy's "nobler" counterpart. In this paper, I look at the dynamics of paratragoedic references as I investigate further Leo's suggestion and Frank's discussion for a possible parody of the Pacuvian *Teucer* in the *Mercator*, by examining the deeper meaning of such an intertextual relationship, based on the theme of exile and colonization.

Teucer's tragic story of rejection by his father results in the hero's exile and founding of the city of Salamis. Pacuvius' play combines both the Sophoclean model and Teucer's appearance in the Euripidean tragicomedy *Helen*. In Plautus, after the aged father Demipho buys the courtesan Pasicompsa, his son's most recent acquisition during his mercantile adventures in Rhodes, Charinus desperately seeks to leave Athens in a self-imposed exile, reminiscent of Teucer's. In a monologue (830-41), Charinus bids a *plautinisches* farewell to the personified *Limen*, the *Penates*, and the *Lar familiai* (cf. Sander-Pieper 2007, 141 on the highest frequency of monologues in this play, especially between father and son, perhaps another indication of paratragoedic discourse). When his friend Eutychus brings the good news that Pasicompsa still resides in Athens and is soon to be reunited with her lover, Charinus finally— and in a typical comic fashion, slowly— overcomes his hallucinations, pretending he sets foot on land again from the stormy seas (a reminiscence of Pacuvius' frs. 238-41 [Schierl], also exploited by Virgil). The Plautine twist of the tragic story, however, comes at the conclusion of the *Mercator*, when the father himself, not the son, is cast out of societal norms, by swearing that he will not repeat such indecent behavior (957-1026), after he is exposed to the public humiliation of the *flagitatio*. And finally, *pace* Leigh (2004, ch.4) who views the play as a reflection on Roman attitudes concerning the merits and demerits of the alien influences that inevitably accompany maritime trade, we can read the *Mercator* as a play that presents a rather different outlook at the colonizing aspects of Teucer's story (as also evident in Horace's famous *nil desperandum Teucro duce et auspice Teucro*, *Carm*. 1.7.27). Thus the Plautine comedy becomes a vehicle of good tidings for a new generation of Romans, who could and may explore the maritime possibilities offered to them at home and abroad.

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