

Crops and Envy in Cilicia

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Günder and Ender Varinlioğlu have recently published the following short verse text from rough Cilicia.¹

Δεσπότηις καρπ/οὺς κομίζω, τοῖς/ δὲ βασκάνοις/ πέος

It was found at a location ten kilometres north east of Seleucia ad Calycadnum, 600 metres high, ‘in a semi-arid zone with limited pockets of soil suitable for dry farming, particularly olives and vines’. The text was written across the short face of a quadrangular block of limestone 2.2 metres high and 57 cms across; it will have been approximately at eye level when the block, which the editors identify as a doorpost, stood upright. The text is arranged in four lines, but the last contains one word only, πέος, under and around which curves an erect phallus with scrotum. It consists of what is probably best taken as a single catalectic trochaic tetrameter. The editors tentatively date it on the basis of letter forms to the 3rd/4th centuries AD.

The translation of these apparently simple lines is not straightforward. About the verb Chantraine writes ‘L’évolution du sens de κομίζω est remarquable; la notion de ‘s’occuper de, veiller sur, soigner’ a donné le sens de ‘sauver, emmener’ et, finalement, ‘transporter’, cf. Wackernagel [Wackernagel 1916], *Spr. Unt.* 219sq., Hoekstra, *Mnemosyne*, 1950, 103sq.² Thus, if the verb has its older sense, the phrase δεσπότηις καρπὸς κομίζω will translate as ‘I watch over my masters’ produce’ (so roughly the editors);³ if the newer, ‘I bring produce to my masters’. Wackernagel notes that the older sense survives into Ionic prose and tragedy (he might have added Pindar), but implies that it disappears thereafter.⁴ And this is to a large extent the case: from prose it vanishes completely, and though one might have expected the authority of Homer to have preserved the older sense at least in hexameter verse, I have found only two examples in Apollonius Rhodius (1. 166, 2. 1129) amid eighteen occurrences of the verb; none are registered in W. Peek’s *Lexikon zu den Dionysiaka des Nonnos*.⁵ Gregory Hutchinson, however, points out to me that Oppian almost always uses both the verb (*Hal.* 1.298, 5. 249, 336) and the related noun κομιδή (3. 260, 275; 5. 619, 621) in the old Homeric sense (so

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I hope that this contribution may interest Johannes Nollé, a scholar whose works are constantly in the hands of anyone concerned with the cults of Greco-Roman Anatolia.

¹ Varinlioğlu – Varinlioğlu 2016 (BÉ 2017, 572). Correspondence with Gregory Hutchinson has transformed this article, beyond the ways explicitly mentioned in the text; I thank him warmly. My thanks too for advice to Peter Thonemann.

² Chantraine 1968-1980, s.v. κομέω, 560.

³ δεσπότηις will be *dativus commodi*. I can offer no parallel for this construction with κομίζω in the Homeric sense, but it is surely possible with any verb of appropriate meaning.

⁴ Ionic prose: he was probably thinking of Hippocrates, e.g. *De Affect.* 58. In tragedy I have found only Aesch. *Cho.* 262, Eur. *Hipp.* 1069; Ellendt 1872, s.v. κομίζω, explicitly notes its absence from Sophocles. Pindar: e.g. *Ol.* 2.14, and four more instances cited in Slater 1969.

⁵ Peek 1968-1975. But I note an instance in the ‘new Posidippus’ (Austin – Bastianini 2002, nr. 56.8).

too the pseudo-Oppian for κομιδή, *Cyn.* 2.349, 3.113). Oppian, like our inscription, came from Cilicia.

I turn to the second phrase. If κομίζω means ‘bring’ it can be taken as also governing πέος: ‘to my masters I bring produce, to the envious a phallus’. πέος κομίζω taken on its own is, it is true, an odd expression, but when a verb governs two objects it may fit better with the first than the second. But τοῖς δὲ βασκάνοις πέος could no doubt also be a phrase without a verb expressed; I lack an exact parallel, but such omission is typical of imprecations in many languages, as for instance in Greek ἐξ κεφαλῆν σοί.⁶ The main force of the phrase is the same on either view.

The editors take the speaker of the lines to be the god Priapus, represented by the phallus. A different view is possible (see below), but I will first consider the sense of the lines if the god indeed speaks them. If κομίζω means ‘guard’, he is referring to his familiar function as ὄπωροφύλαξ τῶν ἀμπελώνων καὶ τῶν κήπων (Diod. 4.6.4), a function he exercised by threatening extreme sexual violence against intruders (so the Roman *Priapea*, and already e.g. Leonidas of Tarentum LXXXIII-IV in Gow/Page, *HE*). If it means ‘bring’, he is also claiming to be responsible for the growth of crops or fruits. For κομίζω in this sense compare Menander *Mon.* 539 χθὼν πάντα κομίζει καὶ πάλιν κομίζεται; Dionysius Periegetes 1102, of the Arienoι, who flourish despite infertile soil: ἄλλον γὰρ σφισιν ὄλβον ἀκήρατον αἶα κομίζει (jewels). Such a claim on the part of Priapus would square well with the understanding of his nature found in all the standard works of reference: he is, for instance, introduced as ‘deus ithyphallicus terrae animaliumque fecunditatis auctor’ in the first sentence of Herter’s still indispensable monograph of 1932.⁷ Students of ancient religion have, it is true, become suspicious of easy appeal to the concepts of ‘fertility’ and (still more) ‘fertility god’ which were so over-used in works that shaped the discipline in the late nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth. But past excesses should not lead us to over-compensate. A link between phalli or phallic deities and fertility is found not only in what may be ancient predecessors to modern theorizing (such as Augustine’s characterisation of Priapus as *fecunditatis deus*)⁸, but in sources closer to cult realities. A dedicator in Acarnania in (perhaps) the third century BC gives thanks to Priapus for his sexual potency (*IG IX I*² II 253). A character in Virgil’s *Eclogues* looks to Priapus to ensure successful breeding of his flock (7.35-6). A chaste prayer for fruits even finds its way into the sleazy environment of the Roman *Priapea* (42).⁹ These three examples take us from the human phallus to the fertility of animals and then of fields; they justify a concept of fecundity covering all three spheres. A myth (of uncertain origin) tells how the baby Priapus was exposed by its mother because of its deformity (grotesque genitalia) but was preserved by a shepherd who judged its deformity propitious for εὐκαρπία of the earth [and herds, added in some mss].¹⁰ Above all there is the iconographic type in which Priapus draws up his tunic (in the gesture of *anasyrma*) to reveal his giant erect member; the fold of his tunic

⁶ Hutchinson compares *Ar. Ach.* 446 εὐδαιμονοίης· Τηλέφωι δ’ ἀγῶ φρονῶ.

⁷ Herter 1932.

⁸ Augustine, *De consensu evang.* 1.25 (Herter 1932, 202).

⁹ See further Herter 1932, 206-7. He is *frugifer* in Columella, *Rust.* 10. 108.

¹⁰ Nonnus, *Narratio ad Greg Naz. Invect.* 2.32 p. 170 hist. 34, Migne XXXVI col. 1053 (Herter 1932, 70). On this text see Brock 1971, 3-4; Brock’s app. crit. to his translation of the Syriac, 147 no. 29, gives new information about the Greek mss: it emerges that the strange detail that Priapos’ phallus was ‘above his buttocks’ (ἐπάνω τῆς πυγῆς) is not in all.

straight above the phallus is full to bursting of fruits.¹¹ ‘Super hoc, propter hoc’ seems to be the logic of the image.

For a god to have ‘masters’ is striking, but not impossible. The speaker of the Roman *Priapeum* 56 hopes for the help of his ‘dominus’ against thieves. Priapus can speak of ‘owners’ (i.e. owners of the territory on which he is sited) because he is a ‘small god’, ‘interque cunctos ultimum deos numen’.¹²

The *baskanoi* against whom the phallus is directed are not identifiable persons, but unknown individuals who are imagined as, knowingly or unknowingly, turning the evil eye against the protected object; envy and the evil eye are for the ancients synonymous. The ancients’ belief in the power of the phallus against the evil eye and related dangers is well attested,¹³ even if its basis is open to dispute; most conspicuously, *fascinum*, originally bewitchment, comes to mean also ‘charm in form of phallus worn against bewitchment’ and thence even simply ‘phallus’. Priapus’ phallus accordingly protected against the evil eye as well as against thieves: Diodorus assigns him both functions explicitly, and two reliefs show him aiming his phallus at a large representation of an eye.¹⁴ Whether vineyards, orchards and gardens, the province of Priapus, were felt to be especially subject to the eye is uncertain. Any allotment holder whose promising crop has succumbed to a blight overnight could certainly sympathise with such a belief; Victor Hansen writes vividly of the envious eye with which the raisin-growers of modern California look over the fence at neighbouring holdings;¹⁵ at Rome the belief that crops could be lured from one plot to another by spells was strong enough for the practice to be actually legislated against in the Twelve Tables;¹⁶ but I can find no evidence that makes the eye a threat specifically to garden crops.¹⁷ It was a danger always and everywhere; no special connection is necessary.

So much for interpretation if Priapus speaks. But Hutchinson has suggested to me an alternative which is highly attractive if we translate κομίζω in the old Homeric sense as ‘guard, watch over’: the speaker would be the building, on this view a storehouse (or ὄριον, the late Greek rendering of Latin *horreum*),¹⁸ on which after all (not on an image of Priapus) the line is inscribed. Buildings, unlike

¹¹ Megow 1997, nos. 68-95; or the phallos can point at a fruit basket, ib. nos. 107, 112.

¹² *Priapea* 63.11, cf. 14.6-7, 53.5 ‘dive minor’. For the concept cf. Perses VIII in Gow-Page, *HE (Anth. Pal.* 9. 334). Jahn 1855, 69, has fine remarks on the underlying psychology.

¹³ Jahn 1855, 67-79; Herter 1938, 1734.

¹⁴ Diod. 4.6.4: τὰς δὲ τιμὰς οὐ μόνον κατὰ πόλιν ἀπονέμουσιν αὐτῷ [ἐν τοῖς ἱεροῖς], ἀλλὰ καὶ κατὰ τὰς ἀγροικίας ὄπωροφύλακα τῶν ἀμπελώνων ἀποδεικνύντες καὶ τῶν κήπων, ἔτι δὲ πρὸς τοὺς βασκαίνοντάς τι τῶν καλῶν τοῦτον κολαστὴν παρεισάγοντες; Herter 1932, 111, nos. 81-82 (the latter = Megow 1997, 1037 no. 107), and cf. pp. 232-3.

¹⁵ Hansen 1995, 101-102.

¹⁶ Table 8 in Ernout 1957; cf. Virg. *Ecl.* 8. 99; Tib. 1.8.19; Ov. *Rem. am.* 255; Pliny *HN* 18.41-3.

¹⁷ Livestock and children are especially at risk: Jahn 1855, 40, with sources. Pliny *HN* 7. 16 (cf. Aul. Gell. 9.4.7-8) reports threats to crops and trees, but in Africa.

¹⁸ See Lampe 1961 s.v. ὄριον. Such archaeological literature as I have found on food storage in the Greek world predictably concerns larger, usually public buildings than that perhaps at issue here: Patrìch 1996; Cavalier 2007; several papers in Chankowski – Lafon – Virlouvet 2018. Granaries needed divine protection: dedications are common within Roman granaries, particularly to the genius of the *horrea* and Heracles (Rickman 1971, 312-5, who writes ‘it seems clear that such small shrines and altars could be expected in every warehouse’).

gods, uncontestedly have owners. The evidence of Oppian shows the old sense for the verb to be conceivable at this date. (The ‘caring for’ expressed by the verb in Oppian concerns animate, not inanimate, beneficiaries, but that distinction is scarcely decisive.) Even with the modern sense of κομίζω, the speaker could be a storehouse if we allowed it to claim that it gathered produce for its masters or brought it to them. But speaking barns are too rare to allow that likelihood to be assessed! As for averting the evil eye, the editors of the new inscription helpfully collect many further examples of phalli inscribed on doorposts or lintels in the same region. Good luck phalli are so common and occur in so many contexts in the ancient world¹⁹ that the majority doubtless have nothing to do with Priapus.

If the speaker is Priapus, the line is out of place: it stands on a door, not on the image carved from fig-wood which is Priapus’ ideal form. It surely becomes likely in that case that the line was not composed for this context. An obvious parallel for a transferable formula laying claim to divine protection is the famous

ὁ τοῦ Διὸς παῖς Καλλίνικος Ἡρακλῆς
ἐνθάδε κατοικεῖ, μὴδὲν εἰσίτω κακόν

known both from literary sources and (often in abbreviated form) on stones from numerous sites between Pompeii and Kurdistan.²⁰ But it remains plausible that the line pre-existed its inscription on this particular stone even if it was composed for a storehouse. We can hope that new examples will eventually emerge that will allow the speaker to be conclusively identified.

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¹⁹ See e.g. Herter 1978, 16-18.

²⁰ See I. Mylasa 343 and I. Estremo Oriente 269 with their references; the formula lived on in Syria with Christ substituted for Heracles, SEG VII 812.

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Kilikia’da Hasat ve Haset

Özet

Günder ve Ender Varinlioğlu yakın zamanda Dağlık Kilikia’da kısa bir şiir metni yayınladı. Şiir anlaşıldığı kadarıyla bir kapı dikmesine kazınmıştır ve İ. S. 3./4. yüzyıla tarihlenmektedir. Çevirisi şu şekildedir: “Efendilerim için tarım ürünleri getiriyorum [veya koruyorum: κομίζω], ama kıskançlara, bir penis!”. Altına bir phallos kazınmıştır. Editörler konuşanı tanrı Priapos olarak tanımlamıştır. Makale κομίζω’nun tercüme edilmesindeki sorunu tartışmaktadır ve Priapos’un kıskançların kem gözlerine karşı olan gücünü açıklayarak devam etmektedir ve bahçe ürünleri ile olan bağı tartışmaktadır: onları sadece koruyor mu, yoksa büyümelerine de mi yardım ediyor? Makale, daha sonra G. O. Hutchinson tarafından önerilen alternatif bir yorumu sunmaktadır: Konuşan bu bakış açısından Priapos değil de satırın yazılı olduğu binanın ta kendisi, yani bir tür ambardır. Phallik semboller Priapos ile bağı olsa da olmasa da kem gözleri defedebilmektedir. Yeni yazıtın editörleri faydalı olarak aynı bölgede (burada Priapos öbür türlü hiç belgelenmemiştir) çok sayıda daha başka kapı dikmesine veya lentolara kazınmış phallos örnekleri toplamıştır. Her durumda şiir olasılıkla bu durum için oluşturulmamış, yaygın olarak belgelenmiş olan ‘Zafer kazanmış Zeus oğlu Herakles burada yaşıyor. Hiçbir kötülük içeri girmesin!’ ifadesindeki gibi daha geniş bir kullanıma sahip koruyucu bir formül niteliğindedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Priapos; Dağlık Kilikia; phalloslar; doğurganlık; koruma formülü; depo.

Crops and Envy in Cilicia

Abstract

Günder and Ender Varinlioğlu have recently published a short verse text from Rough Cilicia, apparently engraved on a door post and dated to the 3rd/4th c. AD. It reads 'For my masters I bring [or, protect: κομίζω] produce; but to the envious, a penis!'. A phallus is carved below it. The editors identify the speaker as the god Priapus. This article discusses the problem of translating κομίζω, and goes on to illustrate Priapus' power against the evil eye of the envious, and to discuss his relation to garden produce: does he merely protect it, or also help it to grow? But it then presents an alternative interpretation suggested by G. O. Hutchinson: the speaker on this view would be not Priapus but the building itself on which the line was inscribed, a warehouse of some kind. Phallic symbols could avert the evil eye whether associated with Priapus or not: the editors of the new inscription have helpfully collected many further examples of phalli inscribed on doorposts or lintels in the same region (where Priapus is otherwise unattested). On either view it is likely that the verse was not composed for this context but was a protective formula of broader use like the widely-attested 'Victorious Heracles son of Zeus lives here. Let no evil enter!'.

Keywords: Priapus; Rough Cilicia; phalli; fertility; protective formulae; warehouse.