

A HERMETIC PUN IN MARCUS ARGENTARIUS XII G-P (A.P. 5.127)¹

Παρθένον Ἀλκίππην ἐφίλουν μέγα, καί ποτε πείσας
 αὐτὴν λαθριδίως εἶχον ἐπὶ κλισίῃ·
 ἀμφοτέρων δὲ στέρνον ἐπάλλετο, μή τις ἐπέλθη,
 μή τις ἴδῃ τὰ πόθων κρυπτὰ περισσότερων.
 μητέρα δ' οὐκ ἔλαθεν †κείνης λάλον†, ἀλλ' ἐσιδοῦσα 5
 ἔξαπίνης Ἔρμῆς κοινός' ἔφη ἠθύγατερ'.

Things seem to have proceeded fairly far when Alkippe's mother interrupts. This is particularly clear if we accept HUSCHKE's κλίνη λάλος or JACOB's κλίνης σάλος for the corrupt κείνης λάλον in 5. Even if these are set aside as uncertain, the imagery in lines 3-4 is suggestive of more than just fond caresses. The first five lines set the background for the climactic phrase Ἔρμῆς κοινός, and I would like to suggest that there is a pun lurking in the phrase.

The word Ἔρμῆς has several different meanings, besides the god himself: at least two are pertinent here. As the commentators all mention, a Ἔρμῆς is a lucky find, another name for a ἔρμαιον, at least when used in this phrase (LSJ s.v. Ἔρμῆς, II.2).² But a Ἔρμῆς is also a distinctively male statue which is both naked and ithyphallic (LSJ s.v. Ἔρμῆς, I.2): the narrator is surely both at this point in his narrative. In the tradition of epigrammatic 'Vetula-Skoptik', that is what makes him a lucky find: in English terms, he is both *hermaion* and *herm*.³

Gow and Page provide separate lists of Argentarius' punning and coarse epigrams:⁴ XII should be added to both.

¹ My text is taken from GOW and PAGE, *The Garland of Philip* (Cambridge, 2 vols., 1968), omitting the variants, since they have no bearing on the questions discussed here.

² Oddly, GOW and PAGE refer this to LSJ s.v. Ἔρμῆς, II.4. This is probably a simple error, but may suggest that they saw the relevance of the quotation from Plutarch in my next note but have garbled their own note.

³ A third meaning of Ἔρμῆς may conceivably be pertinent: that is the one used in the phrase Ἔρμῆς ἐπεισελήλυθε, "a saying used when conversation suddenly ceased" (LSJ s.v. Ἔρμῆς, II.4). Though not apparently attested before Plutarch (*de Garrulitate* 502 f), it could well be implied here, if we accept HUSCHKE's κλίνη λάλος, and assume, plausibly enough, that the 'chattering' of the bed ceases as soon as Alkippe's mother enters. On the other hand, this pun would conflict with the other two, since it makes Alkippe's mother rather than the poet a Ἔρμῆς: we would have to assume that Argentarius has gone berserk with his puns, and mixed them in incompatible ways. So perhaps the third Ἔρμῆς is a red herring.

⁴ Both lists volume 2, p. 166.