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PLAUTUS

AMPHITRYON

THE COMEDY OF ASSES

THE POT OF GOLD

TWO BACCHISES

THE CAPTIVES



*Translated by*  
PAUL NIXON

# PLAUTUS

WITH AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION BY

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PAUL NIXON

藏书章

AMPHITRYON  
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## THE GREEK ORIGINALS OF THE PLAYS IN THIS VOLUME

IN this and each succeeding volume a summary will be given of the consensus of opinion<sup>1</sup> regarding the Greek originals of the plays in the volume and regarding the time of presentation in Rome of Plautus's adaptations. It may be that some general readers will be glad to have even so condensed an account of these matters as will be offered them.

The original of the *Amphitruo* is not now thought to have been a work of the Middle Comedy but of the New Comedy, very possibly Philemon's Νῦξ μακρά. A clue to the Greek play's date is found in the description of Amphitryon's battle with the Teloboians,<sup>2</sup> a battle fought after the manner of those of the Diadochi who came into prominence at the death of Alexander the Great. The date of the Plautine adaptation of this play, as in the case of the *Asinaria*, *Aulularia*, *Bacchides*,<sup>3</sup> and *Captivi*, is quite uncertain, beyond the fact that it no doubt belongs, like almost all of his extant work, to the

<sup>1</sup> See especially Hueffner, *De Plauti Comoediarum Exemplis Atticis*, Göttingen, 1894; Legrand, *Daos*, Paris, 1910, English translation by James Loeb under title *The New Greek Comedy*, William Heinemann, 1916; Leo, *Plautinische Forschungen*, Berlin, 1912.

<sup>2</sup> *Amph.* 203 seq.

<sup>3</sup> Produced later than the *Epitricus*. Cf. *Bacch.* 214.

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last two decades of his life, 204–184 B.C. The *Amphitruo* is one of the five<sup>1</sup> plays in the first two volumes whose scene is not laid in Athens.

The *Ὀναγός* of a certain Demophilus,<sup>2</sup> otherwise unknown to us, was the original of the *Asinaria*. The assertion of Libanus that he is his master's Salus<sup>3</sup> is thought to be a fling at the honours decreed certain of the Diadochi, who were called, while still alive, *Σωτῆρες*. This possibility, together with the fact that the Pellaeon<sup>4</sup> merchant and the Rhodian<sup>5</sup> Periphanes travel to Athens—northern Greece and the Aegaeon therefore being pacified and Athens at peace with Macedon—would indicate that the *Ὀναγός* was written while Demetrius Poliorcetes controlled Macedon, 294–288 B.C.

Very slender evidence connects the *Aulularia* with some unknown play of Menander's in which a miser is represented *δεδιώς μή τι τῶν ἔνδον ὁ καπνὸς οἴχοιτο φέρων*. Euclio's distress<sup>6</sup> at seeing any smoke escape from his house seems at least to suggest that Plautus may have borrowed the *Aulularia* from Menander. The allusion to *praefectum mulierum*,<sup>7</sup> rather than *censorem*, would seem to show that in the original *γυναικονόμον* had been written: this would prove the Greek play to have been presented while Demetrius of Phalerum was in power at Athens (317–307 B.C.), where he introduced this detested office, which was done away with by 307 B.C.

<sup>1</sup> *Amphitruo*, Thebes; *Captivi*, Aetolia; *Cistellaria*, Sicyon; *Curculio*, Epidaurus (the Caria first referred to in v. 67 was a Greek town, not the state in Asia Minor); *Menaechmi*, Epidamnus.

<sup>2</sup> *Asin. Prol.* 10–11.

<sup>3</sup> *Asin.* 713.

<sup>4</sup> *Asin.* 334.

<sup>5</sup> *Asin.* 499.

<sup>6</sup> *Aulul.* 299–301.

<sup>7</sup> *Aulul.* 504.

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Ritschl<sup>1</sup> has shown clearly enough that the original of the *Bacchides* was Menander's *Δὺς ἐξαπατῶν*. The fact that Athens, Samos, and Ephesus are at peace, that the Aegaeon is not swept by hostile fleets, that one can travel freely between Athens and Phocis, together with the allusion to Demetrius,<sup>2</sup> lead one to believe that the *Δὺς ἐξαπατῶν* was written either between the years 316–307 or 298–296 B.C.

The original of the *Captivi* is quite unknown, while the war between the Aetolians and Eleans gives the only clue to the date of this original. Hueffner<sup>3</sup> considers it probable that the war was that between Aristodemus and Alexander, and the Greek play was produced shortly after 314 B.C. Others<sup>4</sup> assume that the scene of the play would not be Aetolia unless Aetolia had become an important state, and that the war was therefore one of the third century B.C.

<sup>1</sup> Ritschl, *Parerga*, pp. 405 seq. Cf. Menander, *Fragments*, 125, 126.

<sup>2</sup> *Bacch.* 912.

<sup>3</sup> Hueffner, *op. cit.* pp. 41–42.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Legrand, *op. cit.* p. 18.

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LITTLE is known of the life of Titus Maccius Plautus. He was born about 255 B.C. at Sarsina, in Umbria; it is said that he went to Rome at an early age, worked at a theatre, saved some money, lost it in a mercantile venture, returned to Rome penniless, got employment in a mill and wrote, during his leisure hours, three plays. These three plays were followed by many more than the twenty extant, most of them written, it would seem, in the latter half of his life, and all of them adapted from the comedies of various Greek dramatists, chiefly of the New Comedy.<sup>1</sup> Adaptations rather than translations they certainly were. Apart from the many allusions in his comedies to customs and conditions distinctly Roman, there is evidence enough in Plautus's language and style

<sup>1</sup> The *Asinaria* was adapted from the *Ὀναγός* of Demophilus; the *Casina* from the *Κληρούμενοι*, the *Rudens* from an unknown play, perhaps the *Πήρα*, of Diphilus; the *Stichus*, in part, from the *Ἀδελφοί* of Menander. Menander's *Δὺς ἐξ ἀπατῶν* was probably the source of the *Bacchides*, while the *Aulularia* and *Cistellaria* probably were adapted from other plays (titles unknown) by Menander. The *Mercator* and *Trinummus* are adaptations of Philemon's *Ἐμπορός* and *Θησαυρός*; the *Mostellaria* very possibly is an adaptation of his *Φάσμα*, the *Amphitruo*, perhaps, an adaptation of his *Νὺξ μακρά*.

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that he was not a close translator. Modern translators who have struggled vainly to reproduce faithfully in their own tongues, even in prose, the countless puns and quips, the incessant alliteration and assonance in the Latin lines, would be the last to admit that Plautus, writing so much, writing in verse, and writing with such careless, jovial, exuberant ease, was nothing but a translator in the narrow sense of the term.

Very few of his extant comedies can be dated, so far as the year of their production in Rome is concerned, with any great degree of certainty. The *Miles Gloriosus* appeared about 206, the *Cistellaria* about 202, *Stichus* in 200. *Pseudolus* in 191 B.C.; the *Truculentus*, like *Pseudolus*, was composed when Plautus was an old man, not many years before his death in 184 B.C.

Welcome as a full autobiography of Plautus would be, in place of such scant and tasteless biographical morsels as we do have, only less welcome, perhaps, would be his own stage directions for his plays, supposing him to have written stage directions and to have written them with something more than even modern fullness. We should learn how he met the stage conventions and limitations of his day; how successfully he could, by make-up and mannerism, bring on the boards palpably different persons in the Scapins and Bobadils and Doll Tear-sheets that on the printed page often seem so confusingly similar; and most important, we should learn precisely what sort of dramatist he was and wished to be.

If Plautus himself greatly cared, or expected his restless, uncultivated, fun-seeking audience to



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care, about the construction of his plays, one must criticize him and rank him on a very different basis than if his main, and often his sole, object was to amuse the groundlings. If he often took himself and his art with hardly more seriousness than does the writer of the vaudeville skit or musical comedy of to-day, if he often wished primarily to gain the immediate laugh, then much of Langen's long list of the playwright's dramatic delinquencies is somewhat beside its intended point.

And in large measure this—to hold his audience by any means—does seem to have been his ambition: if the joke mars the part, down with the part; if the ludicrous scene interrupts the development of the plot, down with the plot. We have plenty of verbal evidence that the dramatist frequently chose to let his characters become caricatures: we have some verbal evidence that their "stage business" was sometimes made laughably extravagant: in many cases it is sufficiently obvious that he expected his actors to indulge in grotesqueries, well or ill timed, no matter, provided they brought guffaws. It is probable, therefore, that in many other cases, where the tone and "stage business" are not as obvious, where an actor's high seriousness might elicit catcalls, and burlesque certainly would elicit chuckles, Plautus wished his players to avoid the catcalls.

This is by no means the universal rule. In the writer of the *Captivi*, for instance, we are dealing with a dramatist whose aims are different and higher. Though Lessing's encomium of the play is one to which not all of us can assent, and though even the *Captivi* shows some technical flaws, it is

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a work which must be rated according to the standards we apply to a *Minna von Barnhelm* rather than according to those applied to a *Pinafore* : here, certainly, we have comedy, not farce.

But whatever standards be applied to his plays their outstanding characters, their amusing situations, their vigour and comicality of dialogue remain. Euclio and Pyrgopolynices, the straits of the brothers Menaechmus and the postponement of Argyrippus's desires, the verbal encounter of Tranio and Grumio, of Trachalio and the fishermen—characters, situations, and dialogues such as these should survive because of their own excellence, not because of modern imitations and parallels such as Harpagon and Parolles, the misadventures of the brothers Antipholus and Juliet's difficulties with her nurse, the remarks of Petruchio to the tailor, of Touchstone to William.

Though his best drawn characters can and should stand by themselves, it is interesting to note how many favourite personages in the modern drama and in modern fiction Plautus at least prefigures. Long though the list is, it does not contain a large proportion of thoroughly respectable names. Plautus rarely introduces us to people, male or female, whom we should care to have long in the same house with us. A real lady seldom appears in these comedies, and—to approach a paradox—when she does she usually comes perilously close to being no lady : the same is usually true of the real gentleman. The generalization in the Epilogue of *The Captives* may well be made particular : “Plautus finds few plays such as this which make good men better.” Yet there is little in his

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plays which makes men—to say nothing of good men—worse. A bluff Shakespearean coarseness of thought and expression there often is, together with a number of atrocious characters and scenes and situations. But compared with the worst of a Congreve or a Wycherley, compared with the worst of our own contemporary plays and musical comedies, the worst of Plautus, now because of its being too revolting, now because of its being too laughable, is innocuous. His moral land is one of black and white, mostly black, without many of those really dangerous half-lights and shadows in which too many of our present day playwrights virtuously invite us to skulk and peer and speculate.

Comparatively harmless though they are, the translator has felt obliged to dilute certain phrases and lines.

The text accompanying his version is that of Leo, published by Weidmann, 1895–96. In the few cases where he has departed from this text brief critical notes are given: a few changes in punctuation have been accepted without comment. In view of the wish of the Editors of the Library that the text pages be printed without unnecessary defacements, it has seemed best to omit the lines that Leo brackets as un-Plautine<sup>1</sup>: attention is called to the omission in each case and the omitted lines are given in the note: the numbering, of course, is kept unchanged. Leo's daggers and

<sup>1</sup> It seemed best to make no exceptions to this rule: even such a line as Bacchides 107 is therefore omitted. Cf. Lindsay, *Classical Quarterly*, 1913, pp. 1, 2; Havet, *Classical Quarterly*, 1913, pp. 120, 121.

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asterisks indicating corruption and lacunæ are omitted, again with brief notes in each case.

The translator gladly acknowledges his indebtedness to several of the English editors of the plays, notably to Lindsay, and to two or three English translators, for a number of phrases much more happily turned by them than by himself: the difficulty of rendering verse into prose—if one is to remain as close as may be to the spirit and letter of the verse, and at the same time not disregard entirely the contributions made by the metre to gaiety and gravity of tone—is sufficient to make him wish to mitigate his failure by whatever means. He is also much indebted to Professors Charles Knapp, K. C. M. Sills, and F. E. Woodruff for many valuable suggestions.

*Brunswick, Me.,  
September, 1913.*

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P = the supposed archetype of BCDVEJ.

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