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Priapus

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For the ancient city in Asia Minor, see Karabiga. For a genus of sea anemones, see Actinia.

In Greek mythology, **Priapus** (/praɪˈeɪpəs/;<sup>[1]</sup> Ancient Greek: Πρίηπος, *Priēpos*) was a minor rustic fertility god, protector of livestock, fruit plants, gardens and male genitalia. Priapus is marked by his oversized, permanent erection, which gave rise to the medical term priapism. He became a popular figure in Roman erotic art and Latin literature, and is the subject of the often humorously obscene collection of verse called the

Priapeia. Contents [hide] 1 Relationship with other deities 2 Worship and attributes 3 Depictions 4 In literature 5 Patron of merchant sailing 6 Modern derivations 6.1 Medical terminology 6.2 Natural history 6.3 In popular culture 7 See also 8 References

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God of fertility, vegetables, nature, livestock, fruit, beekeeping, sex, genitals, masculinity, and gardens

**Priapus** 

Fresco of Priapus, House of the Vettii, Pompeii Symbol Donkey, flowers, fruit, vegetables, fish, bees

**Personal information** 

Aphrodite and Dionysus;

Hermes and Aphrodite; Dionysus and Chione; Zeus and Aphrodite **Siblings** 

**Parents** 

Charites, Eros, Hermaphroditos, Hymenaios, Pan, satyrs **Mutunus Tutunus** Roman equivalent

Priapus depicted with the attributes

of Mercury in a fresco found at Pompeii

Gallo-Roman bronze statuette (ca

cucullatus?) discovered in Picardy,

northern France, made in two parts. with the top section concealing a giant

phallus.

1st century CE) of Priapus (or a Genius

Priapus was described as the son of Aphrodite by Dionysus, or the son of Dionysus and Chione, [2] perhaps as the father or son of Hermes, and the son of Zeus or Pan, depending on the source. [4] According to legend, Hera cursed him with inconvenient impotence (he could not sustain an erection when the time came for sexual intercourse), ugliness and foul-mindedness while he was still in Aphrodite's womb, in revenge for the hero Paris having the temerity to judge Aphrodite more beautiful than Hera. [5] The other gods refused to allow him to live on Mount Olympus and threw him down to Earth, leaving him on a hillside. He was eventually found by shepherds and was brought up by them.

only afterwards," Karl Kerenyi observed.<sup>[10]</sup> Arnobius is aware of the importance accorded Priapus in this region near the Hellespont.<sup>[11]</sup> Also, Pausanias notes:

regarded as the patron god of sailors and fishermen and others in need of good luck, and his presence was believed to avert the evil eye. [14]

Priapus joined Pan and the satyrs as a spirit of fertility and growth, though he was perennially frustrated by his impotence. In a ribald anecdote told by Ovid, [6] he attempted to rape the goddess Hestia but was thwarted by an ass, whose braying caused him to lose his erection at the critical moment and woke Hestia. The episode gave him a lasting hatred of asses and a willingness to see them destroyed in his honour. The emblem of his lustful nature was his permanent erection and his large penis. Another myth states that he pursued the nymph Lotis until the gods took pity on her and turned her into a lotus plant. [8]

Worship and attributes [edit]

mainland Greece and eventually to Italy during the 3rd century BC. [9] Lucian (De saltatione) tells that in Bithynia Priapus was accounted as a warlike god, a rustic tutor to the infant Ares, "who taught him dancing first and war

The first extant mention of Priapus is in the eponymous comedy *Priapus*, written in the 4th century BC by Xenarchus. Originally worshipped by Greek colonists in Lampsacus in Asia Minor, the cult of Priapus spread to

Relationship with other deities [edit]

This god is worshipped where goats and sheep pasture or there are swarms of bees; but by the people of Lampsacus he is more revered than any other god, being called by them a son of Dionysus and Aphrodite.[12]

In later antiquity, his worship meant little more than a cult of sophisticated pornography. [13]

Outside his "home" region in Asia Minor, Priapus was regarded as something of a joke by urban dwellers. However, he played a more important role in the countryside, where he was seen as a guardian deity. He was

Long after the fall of Rome and the rise of Christianity, Priapus continued to be invoked as a symbol of health and fertility. The 13th century Lanercost Chronicle, a history of northern England and Scotland, records a "lay Cistercian brother" erecting a statue of

Priapus (simulacrum Priapi statuere) in an attempt to end an outbreak of cattle disease. [15]

Priapus does not appear to have had an organized cult and was mostly worshiped in gardens or homes, though there are attestations of temples dedicated to the god. His sacrificial animal was the ass, but agricultural offerings (such as fruit, flowers, vegetables and

In the 1980s, D. F. Cassidy founded the St. Priapus Church as a modern church centred on worship of the phallus.<sup>[16][17]</sup>

Depictions [edit]

Priapus' iconic attribute was his priapism (permanently erect penis); he probably absorbed some pre-existing ithyphallic deities as his cult developed. He was represented in a variety of ways, most commonly as a misshapen

fish) were also very common. [9]

gnome-like figure with an enormous erect phallus. Statues of Priapus were common in ancient Greece and Rome, standing in gardens. The Athenians often conflated Priapus with Hermes, the god of boundaries, and depicted a hybrid deity with a winged helmet, sandals, and huge erection. [8]

Olim truncus eram ficulnus, inutile lignum, cum faber, incertus scamnum faceretne Priapum,

Another attribute of Priapus was the sickle which he often carries in his right hand. This too was used to threaten thieves, doubtless with castration: [18][19] Horace (Sat. 1.8.1–7) writes: [20]

maluit esse deum. deus inde ego, furum aviumque maxima formido: nam fures dextra coercet obscenoque ruber porrectus ab inguine palus; ast importunes volucres in vertice harundo terret fixa vetatque novis considere in hortis. "Once I was a trunk of fig, a useless piece of wood, when a carpenter, unsure whether he should make a bench or a Priapus, decided to make a god. So I am a god, of thieves and birds

a very great scarer; for my right hand curbs thieves,

barbatum furem tertia poena manet.

as does the red pole which projects from my indecent groin;

but as for the importunate birds, the reed fixed on my head

terrifies them and forbids them to settle in the new gardens."

"I warn you, boy, you will be screwed; girl, you will be laid with;

A number of epigrams, apparently written as if to adorn shrines of Priapus, were collected in the *Priapeia*. In these, Priapus frequently threatens sexual assault against potential thieves: [21] Percidere, puer, moneo; futuere, puella;

a third penalty awaits the bearded thief." Femina si furtum faciet mihi virve puerve, haec cunnum, caput hic praebeat, ille nates. "If a woman steals from me, or a man, or a boy, let the first give me her cunt, the second his head, the third his buttocks." per medios ibit pueros mediasque puellas mentula; barbatis non-nisi summa petet. "My dick will go through the middle of boys and the middle of girls, but with bearded men it will aim only for the top." A number of Roman paintings of Priapus have survived. One of the most famous images of Priapus is that from the House of the Vettii in Pompeii. A fresco depicts the god weighing his phallus against a large bag of coins. In nearby Herculaneum, an excavated

snack bar has a painting of Priapus behind the bar, apparently as a good-luck symbol for the customers. [citation needed] In literature [edit]

As well as the collection known as the *Priapeia* mentioned above, Priapus was a frequent figure in Latin erotic or mythological verse.

In Ovid's Fasti, [22] the nymph Lotis fell into a drunken slumber at a feast, and Priapus seized this opportunity to advance upon her. With stealth he approached, and just before he could embrace her, Silenus's donkey alerted the party with "raucous braying". Lotis awoke and pushed Priapus away, but her only true escape was to be transformed into the lotus tree. To punish the donkey for spoiling his opportunity, Priapus bludgeoned it to death with his gargantuan phallus. In later versions of the story, Lotis is replaced with the

virginal goddess Hestia. [citation needed] Ovid's anecdote served to explain why donkeys were sacrificed to Priapus in the city of Lampsacus on the Hellespont, where he was worshipped among the offspring of Hermes. [23] Priapus is repeatedly mentioned in Petronius's Satyricon. William Arrowsmith, in the introduction and notes to his translation of the work, draws parallels between his hounding of the protagonist and that of Poseidon in Homer's Odyssey.

Priapus is mentioned in Geoffrey Chaucer's "The Merchant's Tale", part of *The Canterbury Tales*. During a description of a garden that the protagonist, Januarie, creates, Priapus is invoked in his form as God of gardens: Ne Priapus ne myghte nat suffise,

That stood under a laurer alwey grene. [24] (Priapus might not suffice, Though he be god of gardens, to tell Of the beauty of the garden and the well That stood under the laurel, always green.) Priapus serves to remind the reader, or listening audience, that Januarie's intentions are driven by lust and not love.

Though he be God of gardyns, for to telle

The beautee of the gardyn and the welle,

Priapus is mentioned in William Carlos Williams's poem "Paterson". Priapus is also mentioned in John Steinbeck's East of Eden: "She conducted her house like a cathedral dedicated to a sad but erect Priapus." T.S. Eliot refers to Priapus in his poem "Mr. Appolinax" (published in *Prufrock and Other Observations*, 1920):

When Mr. Apollinax visited the United States His laughter tinkled among the teacups.

Gaping at the lady in the swing. Priapus is also mentioned in Vladimir Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading*: "Or when you, with eyes closed tight, devouring a spurting peach and then, having finished, but still swallowing, with your mouth still full, you cannibal, your glazed eyes wandered, your fingers were spread, your inflamed lips were all glossy, your chin trembled, all covered with drops of the cloudy juice, which trickled down onto your bared bosom, while the Priapus who had nourished you suddenly, with a convulsive oath, turned his back to me, who had entered the room at the wrong moment."

I thought of Fragilion, that shy figure among the birch-trees,

Priap[us] is mentioned as well in Nabokov's Lolita: "She was the loveliest nymphet green-red-blue Priap himself could think up". Patron of merchant sailing [edit]

Priapus' role as a patron god for merchant sailors in ancient Greece and Rome is that of a protector and navigational aide. Recent shipwreck evidence contains apotropaic items carried onboard by mariners in the forms of a terracotta phallus, wooden Priapus figure,

and bronze sheath from a military ram. Coinciding with the use of wooden Priapic markers erected in areas of dangerous passage or particular landing areas for sailors, the function of Priapus is much more extensive than previously thought. [25] Although Priapus is commonly associated with the failed attempts of rape against the nymphs Lotis and Vesta in Ovid's comedy Fasti<sup>[26]</sup> and the rather flippant treatment of the deity in urban settings, Priapus' protection traits can be traced back to the importance

placed on the phallus in ancient times (particularly his association with fertility and garden protection).<sup>[25]</sup> In Greece, the phallus was thought of to have a mind of its own, animal-like, separate from the mind and control of the man.<sup>[27]</sup> The phallus is also associated with "possession and territorial demarcation" in many cultures, attributing to Priapus' other role as a navigational deity. [25]

Modern derivations [edit]

And of Priapus in the shrubbery

Medical terminology [edit] The medical condition priapism derives its name from Priapus, alluding to the god's permanently engorged penis.

Natural history [edit]

• The group of worm-like marine burrowing animals known as the Priapulidea, literally "penis worms", also derives its name from Priapus. • Mutinus caninus, a woodland fungus, draws its first name from Priapus's Roman name, due to its phallic shape.

In popular culture [edit] • It has been suggested by some scholars that the modern popular garden gnome is a descendant of Priapus. [28]

• In Sherrilyn Kenyon's Fantasy Lover, Priapus is Julian's half-brother, who cursed him to live in the book and only come out to be someone's lover from full moon to full moon. • Doujinshi artist Mentaiko wrote a bara doujinshi manga inspired by the Priapus mythos in 2011. The manga is currently ongoing. [29] • Nicolas Presl interprets the myth in his wordless graphic novel "Priape" (Genève, Atrabile, 2006)

• 2014 Indie Game A Date in the Park uses Priapus as a clue for the main character to find his love interest. See also [edit]

 Latin obscenity Sexuality in ancient Rome

Priapeia

 Karabiga, Turkey, formerly known as Priapus Richard Payne Knight

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