

# The Maculate Muse. A source of sexual arousal in fourth-century AD Alexandria (Palladas, *AP* 9.395)

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Since Dominic Montserrat's *Sex and Society in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, (Montserrat 1996), where the culture of sex and the sexual history of Graeco-Roman Egypt were discussed, only intriguing trifles of this issue appeared<sup>1</sup>. However, all these fragments have to do with the general idea of sexual behavior (e.g. prostitution, marriage, homosexuality etc.), and do not concern the description of certain sexual acts (e.g. coitus, fellatio, cunnilingus, etc.)<sup>2</sup>.

In this article, I will focus on an epigram of Palladas, who was living in Alexandria in the first half of the fourth century AD, where he was a professional schoolteacher (*γραμματικός*). He was known for his scoptic epigrams on a variety of subjects, in skillfully expressed language, and smart ideas. A number of his epigrams related to women, but they did touch

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1 — Cf. for instance Cuvigny 2010, and my contributions, Litinas 2013 and Litinas 2014; in addition, Sapsford 2015; see also Manniche 2002; Quack 2016.

2 — *P.Oxy.* LXX 4762 (in Obbink 2006), where a woman's sexual desire for intercourse with a donkey is described, is a literary fragment.

on traditional matters, such as virginity, marriage, motherhood, etc. The poet focused on womanhood, stressing particularly two features, women's guile and envy. These specific feminine characteristics were the main reason that aroused anger in men, and, therefore, he described them using words and phrases such as *χόλος*, "annoyance" (*AP* 11.381) *ὄργη τοῦ Διός*, "the wrath of Zeus" (*AP* 9.165, 1), *κακὴν σφαλερὴν τε ... ὄλεθρον* "wicked and treacherous... perdition" (*AP* 9.166.1-2). Consequently, in his epigrams he rebuked both mortal women (even female figures such as Penelope and Helen) and goddesses (e.g. Hera), and furnished corroborating evidence for this view based on ancient literature. Arguably, his epigrams might not have been only misogynistic stereotypes of the type that we find in literature, but may be based on personal experience, and his treatment of women may be due to situations which are inextricably linked to his experiences<sup>3</sup>.

Since Homer was the main source for those concerned with primary education, the epigrammatist Palladas exploited words or verses of the Homeric epics in 17 out of his 168 epigrams in order to refer to situations or examples which were familiar to all his readers<sup>4</sup>. In modern literary studies, Palladas' epigrams with Homeric passages are merely listed without further comment, or are discussed in the general framework of all epigrams of the Palatine Anthology with Homeric quotations, or in connection with the expression of Palladas' misogyny. In addition, some of the ideas expressed in these epigrams are regarded as Palladas' "rationalistic interpretation" which aimed at the "desacralisation of Homer"<sup>5</sup>.

In the epigram *AP* 9.395, Palladas cited two well-known verses from the *Odyssey*, *καπνὸν ἀποθρῶσκοντα*, "smoke curling up" (1.58) and *ὡς οὐδὲν γλύκιον ἢς πατρίδος*, "nothing is sweeter than a man's fatherland" (9.34):

“Ὡς οὐδὲν γλύκιον ἢς πατρίδος”, εἶπεν Ὀδυσσεύς<sup>6</sup>.

3 — For the latest bibliography on Palladas see Litinas 2015, 242-243, and a commentary on selected epigrams (*AP* 10.54, 10.72, 10.73 and 11.378) on pp. 202-206; Floridi 2016, 51-69.

4 — See Guichard 2017.

5 — See Guichard 2017 and Vezzosi 2014, 45.

6 — “Ὡς οὐδὲν γλύκιον ἢς πατρίδος”, εἶπεν Ὀδυσσεύς; In the *Odyssey* 9.27-28 Odysseus says to Alkinoos that his eyes know none that they better love to look upon than his homeland, *οὐ τι ἐγὼ γε / ἢς γαίης δύναμαι γλυκερώτερον ἄλλο ἰδέσθαι*, and that no woman, neither the goddess Calypso (*δία θεῶων*) nor the cunning (*δολόεσσα*) Circe managed to change his mind, *ἀλλ' ἐμὸν οὐ ποτε θυμὸν ἐνὶ στήθεσσι ἐπειθον*, for nothing is dearer to a man than his own country and his parents, *ὡς οὐδὲν γλύκιον ἢς πατρίδος οὐδὲ τοκίῶν | γίγνεται* (Hom. *Od.* 9.34-35). In the epigram *AP* 9.458, Palladas presented Odysseus greeting Ithaca, and saying that he was so glad because after so much pain he managed to reach his homeland, and so he would see his father, his wife and his son. Again, Palladas put in Odysseus' mouth the same verse of the *Odyssey* 9.34, *Χαῖρ', Ἰθάκη· μετ' ἄεθλα, μετ' ἄλγεα πικρὰ θαλάσσης | ἀσπασίως τεὸν οὐδας ἰκάνομαι, ὄφρα νοήσω | Λαέρτην ἄλοχόν τε καὶ ἀγλαὸν υἱέα μῦνον· | σὸς γὰρ ἔρωσ κατέθελξεν ἐμὸν νόον· οἶδα καὶ αὐτός,* | “ὡς οὐδὲν γλύκιον ἢς

ἐν γὰρ τοῖς Κίρκης<sup>7</sup> ἔκχυτον οὐκ ἔφαγεν,  
οὗ μόνον εἰ καὶ καπνὸν ἀποθρώσκοντ' ἐνόησεν<sup>8</sup>,  
εἶπεν ἄν οἰμώζειν καὶ δέκα Πηνελόπαις<sup>9</sup>.

“Odysseus said: “nothing is sweeter than a man’s fatherland”,  
for in Circe’s isle he never ate cheese-cake.  
If he had seen even the smoke curling up from that,  
he would have sent ten Penelopes to the deuce”  
(transl. Guichard, *loc. cit.*)”.

The poet used the Homeric Odysseus to remind us that the hero never tasted what Circe offered him. Even if he had simply tasted it, he would never have returned to his own Penelope. However, in the *Odyssey* we read (Hom. *Od.* 10, 287-308 and 316-323) that Odysseus tasted Circe’s potion, but because of the antidote (μῶλυ) he had taken on Hermes’

πατρίδος οὐδὲ τοκῆων”, “Hail, Ithaca! After all my labours and the bitter woes of the sea, right glad am I to reach thy soil, in hope to see Laertes and my wife and glorious only son. Love of thee soothed my heart; I myself know that «nothing is sweeter than a man’s country and his parents»” (Translation by W.R. Paton, Loeb 1915). In the ancient literature in another context the verse 9.34 was also cited by Lucianus, *Patr. Enc.* 1.1 and D. Chr. 44.1.

7 — ἐν γὰρ τοῖς Κίρκης that is *μεγάρουσιον*, “in Circes’ palace”, not “in Circe’s isle”, as translated by Guichard; cf. Hom. *Od.* 9.31 ὡς δ’ αὖτως Κίρκη κατερήτυεν ἐν μεγάρουσιον, “and in like manner Circe would fain have held me back in her halls”. Circe appears also in another of Palladas’ epigrams, AP 10.50 for which see Galindo Esparza 2015, 144-146.

8 — οὗ μόνον εἰ καὶ καπνὸν ἀποθρώσκοντ' ἐνόησεν: The verse refers to Odysseus’ yearning to see his homeland in the beginning of the *Odyssey*, 1.58-59 καπνὸν ἀποθρώσκοντα νοῆσαι | ἣς γαίης, θανέειν ἰμείρεται, “to see were it but the smoke leaping up from his own land, yearns to die” (translation A.T. Murray, Loeb 1919). However, in an indirect way it also refers to the *Odyssey* 10.28-30 ἐννήμαρ μὲν ὁμῶς πλέομεν νύκτας τε καὶ ἡμᾶρ, τῇ δεκάτῃ δ’ ἤδη ἀνεφαίνετο πατρὶς ἄρουρα, καὶ δὴ πυρπολέοντας ἐλεύσομεν ἐγγὺς ἔοντες, “for nine days we sailed, night and day alike, and now on the tenth our native land came in sight, and lo, we were so near that we saw men tending the beacon fires” (translation A.T. Murray, Loeb 1919), where, after their departure from the island of Aeolus, Odysseus and his comrades almost reached Ithaca. In the ancient literature in another context the verse the verse 1.58 was also cited by Max. Tyr. *Diss.* 21.8 and Men. Rh., *On Epideictic Speeches* 433.7 (Russell-Wilson).

εἰ καὶ: The content of the concessional is considered as true, so the καὶ should be meant to refer to the noun καπνόν, that is, it is true that someone can discern even the smoke that arises from the chimney of Circes’ house. The Homeric Odysseus and the Palladean Odysseus each saw this smoke from far away. The difference lies in the fact that the smoke only of the ἔκχυτον of the Palladean Circe is more inviting and seductive than the ἔκχυτον itself of Homeric Circe.

ἐνόησεν: The verb in Homer means “perceive by the mind, apprehend” (see LSJ s.v. νοέω A1 και 2), and probably an indirect reference is made to the well-known verse of the *Odyssey* 1.3 πολλῶν δ’ ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω, “many were the men whose cities he saw and whose mind he learned” (translation A.T. Murray, Loeb 1919).

9 — οἰμώζειν: See LSJ s.v. οἰμώζω A2. The verb was used in curses, e.g. Aristophanes, *Plutus* 58 οἰμώζειν λέγω σοι.

δέκα Πηνελόπαις is an indirect object to εἶπεν ἄν. Penelope also appears in another epigram of Palladas, AP 9.166, 4 and 6, as the reason for the death of many people and the cause of the writing of the *Odyssey*, καὶ διὰ σωφροσύνην Πηνελόπης θάνατοι... αὐτὰρ Ὀδυσσεῖη Πηνελόπη πρόφασις. For Penelope as she appears after Homer see Schmidt 1909, esp. 1903-1908 (in the literature) and 1912-1920 (in art). For women in Palladas’ epigrams see Henderson 2009.

advice, this drink had no effect on him. Furthermore, Homer says that Odysseus “drank this mixture to the bottom” (see Hom. *Od.* 10.318 *αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ δῶκέν τε καὶ ἔκπιον*), and, hence, the poet did not use any form of the verb *ἐσθίω*. On the other hand, in Horace, *Epist.* 1.2.23-25, it is stated that Ulysses did not drink any of the potion, because he was not foolish and greedy as his comrades were, and if he had drunk it, he would have become brutish, mindless, a prisoner of a prostitute mistress, like a miserable dog or a pig who loves to be in the mire. Palladas seems to be consistent with Horace’s version. To this scenario one could also add the view which was expressed by Palladas in his epigram *AP* 10.50, in which he states that Homer’s story of Odysseus’ men being turned into pigs or wolves does not apply. Palladas spoke in favor of an explanation that Circe was *ἐταίρα... πανούργος*, “cunning courtesan”, who just transformed *τοὺς δελεασθέντας* into *πτωχοτάτους*, “and made them who took her bait poorest of the poor”. However, Odysseus was *ἔμφρων*, “having his wits”, and managed to escape by means of his own *φάρμακον ἀντίπαλον*, “a counter-charm”, without mentioning Hermes’ antidote). It is very probable that this alternative scenario, i.e. what would have happened if Odysseus had not tasted Circe’s drink, was a working hypothesis on rhetoric exercises (*ἡθοποιῖαι*) in schools of rhetoric of the Roman and Byzantine periods, and Palladas exploited this practice<sup>10</sup>.

Perhaps this scenario is a satisfactory interpretation of the reason why Palladas composed the epigram, and there is no need for further discussion. However, there is an issue arising from the use of the word *ἔκχυτον*, which was Circe’s potion. LSJ s.v. *ἔκχυτος* II cites this specific passage of Palladas, with the comment that it is of dubious sense. In Homer’s *Odyssey*, Circe is said to have offered *κυκεῶνα* (see Hom. *Od.* 10.290 and 316), which was prepared to make people forget their homeland. She stirred cheese, wheat flour, honey and wine, and added *κακὰ φάρμακα*, “evil drugs” (Hom. *Od.* 10.213), or *λυγρὰ φάρμακα*, “baneful drugs” (Hom. *Od.* 10.234-236 *ἐν δέ σφιν τυρόν τε καὶ ἄλφιτα καὶ μέλι χλωρόν | οἴνω Πραμνείῳ ἐκύκα· ἀνέμισγε δὲ σίτω | φάρμακα λύγρ’, ἵνα πάγχυ λαθοῖατο πατρίδος αἴης*, “and made for them a potion of cheese and barley meal and yellow honey with Pramnian wine; but in the food she mixed baneful drugs, that they might utterly forget their native land” (translation A.T. Murray, Loeb 1919)<sup>11</sup>). What Circe offered to Odysseus and his men was qualified as *πότος* by Heracleitus (paradoxographer of the fourth century BC), in his work *Περὶ ἀπίστων* 16 *ταύτην* (i.e. *τὴν Κίρκην*) *ὁ μῦθος παρ<αδ>έδωκε ποτῶ μεταμορφοῦσαν ἀνθρώπους*,

10 — See Guichard 2017.

11 — For the iconographic presentation of Circe’s offer to Odysseus see Canciani and M. Le Glay (1992).

and as *κυκεών* by another Heracleitus (of first century AD) in his work *Ὀμηρικά Προβλήματα* 72,2 *ὁ δὲ Κίρκης κυκεών ἡδονῆς ἐστὶν ἀγγεῖον, ὃ πίνοντες οἱ ἀκόλαστοι διὰ τῆς ἐφημέρου πλησμονῆς συῶν ἀθλιώτερον βίον ζῶσι*. Therefore, it seems that Palladas was the only poet who used the specific word *ἔκχυτον* to denote Circe's potion.

In this connection, we should also consider that when Odysseus arrived at Circe's island, he clambered to the top of a cliff, and in the distance saw a palace rising in the midst of a grove of lofty trees. A wisp of smoke went curling up from the chimney and he decided to go there<sup>12</sup>. However, no ancient source refers to Circe as preparing the potion over a blazing fire in the kitchen, which would produce smoke. The smoke was an indication of an inhabited place when the hero arrived in an unknown area. Similar smoke was seen by Odysseus when he arrived at the land of Laestrygon, Hom. *Od.* 10.99 *καπνὸν δ' οἶον ὀρώμεν ἀπὸ χθονὸς αἴσσοντα*, “smoke alone we saw springing up from the land” (translation by A.T. Murray, Loeb 1919), as well as when he approached the Cyclops' island, Hom. *Od.* 9.166-167 *Κυκλώπων δ' ἐς γαῖαν ἐλεύσσομεν ἐγγὺς ἐόντων, | καπνὸν τ' αὐτῶν τε φθογγὴν οἴων τε καὶ αἰγῶν*, “and we looked across to the land of the Cyclopes, who dwelt close at hand, and marked the smoke, and the voice of men, and of the sheep, and of the goats” (translation by A.T. Murray, Loeb 1919).

It is also obvious that whoever read Palladas' epigram would understand the word in the way it was interpreted in the title of the epigram, as an adjective attributed to the noun *ποτόν* (“drink”) or in the way explained in a lemma, *εἶδος βρώματος* (“kind of food”). However, the need of the ancient people who copied the epigram to explain the word, sometimes as a drink, other times as food, means that its meaning was not sufficiently clear and that it was not used in such a way in the everyday speech or in the literary tradition. It is very probable that Palladas wanted to add to this word another semantic use. LSJ s.v. *ἔκχυτος* (I1 και 2) translates the adjective as “poured forth, unconfined, outstretched” and “immoderate”<sup>13</sup>, and s.v. *ἔκχυσις* as “outflow, pouring out”. Neither word (*ἔκχυτος* – *ἔκχυσις*), nor all words that derive from the verb *ἐκχέω*

12 — See Hom. *Od.* 10.148-152 *ἔστιν δὲ σκοπιὴν ἐς παιπαλόεσσαν ἀνελθὼν, | καὶ μοι εἰείσατο καπνὸς ἀπὸ χθονὸς εὐρυοδείης | Κίρκης ἐν μεγάροισι διὰ δρυμὰ πυκνὰ καὶ ὕλην. | μερμήριζα δ' ἔπειτα κατὰ φρένα καὶ κατὰ θυμὸν | ἐλθεῖν ἠδὲ πυθέσθαι, ἐπεὶ ἴδον αἴθοπα καπνόν*, “so I climbed to a rugged height, a place of outlook, and there took my stand, and I saw smoke rising from the broad-wayed earth in the halls of Circe, through the thick brush and the wood. And I debated in mind and heart, whether I should go and make search, when I had seen the flaming smoke”, and 10.196-97 *καπνὸν δ' ἐνὶ μέσση | ἔδρακον ὀφθαλμοῖσι διὰ δρυμὰ πυκνὰ καὶ ὕλην*, “and in the midst of it my eyes saw smoke through the thick brush and the wood” (translation by A.T. Murray, Loeb 1919).

13 — For this meaning see my commentary on *AP* 5.275, 1 (Paulus Silentiarius) in Litinas 2015, 235.

can be related to any kind of food. It is intriguing to assume that behind the innovative use of the words ἔφαγεν and ἔκχυτον Palladas hid a pun regarding a certain sexual activity.

First, considering the verb ἔφαγεν, ancient authors often used the words πλακοῦς, πόπανα, ζωμός etc., as vehicles of sexual innuendo<sup>14</sup>. In Aristophanes, *Rax* 1355-57 ὦ χείρετε χείρετ' ἄνδρες, κἄν ξυνέπησθέ μοι πλακοῦντας ἔδεσθε, “hail, hail, my friends. All who come with me shall have cakes galore” (translation by O’Neill, 1938), the noun πλακοῦντας is the object of the verb ἐσθίω (also used by Palladas) and denotes the woman’s genitalia<sup>15</sup>. This sexual activity implies cunnilingus, or at least some kind of kiss on the woman’s genitalia<sup>16</sup>. The large number of allusions to cunnilingus indicate that this activity was a regular (mostly private and not in groups) pleasure for both men and women, although it seems to have been considered demeaning for the person who performed it<sup>17</sup>.

Then, considering the noun ἔκχυτον, it might imply the secretions emitted during the female orgasm or even a female ejaculation. A variety of scientific terms were used for these secretions or dew during the sexual experience<sup>18</sup>. Hippocrates in his treatise *On Generation* 4, was the first

14 — See Henderson 1991, 47 και 144, nos 171-183. Especially, p. 47 “The female genitalia are often compared to meats that are cooked (sometimes on a phallic spit, 168) and eaten: pork (168), boiled (labial?) sausages (168a), assorted dainties (169, 171), slices of fish (170). Pastries and cakes are frequent metaphors (173 ff.). Dish-licking is a frequent metaphor for cunnilingus (166 f.), and sauces, soups, and juices are used to indicate vaginal secretions (180 ff.)”.

15 — Cf. also Aristophanes, *Rax* 885 τὸν ζωμὸν αὐτῆς προσπεσὼν ἐκλάψεται, “he would soon have her done for, absorbing all her life-force” (translation by O’Neill, 1938). See Henderson 1991, 144, n° 177. An erotic fresco from the suburban baths in Pompeii (*apodyterium* 7, scene IV) depicts a man performing cunnilingus on a woman. Although the cunnilingus was thought to bring disgrace of oral impurity on the man who performed it, there is evidence of women hiring male (or, sometimes, female) prostitutes to pleasure them with cunnilingus; see Clarke 2002, Chapter 5, 149-181, esp. 164-166 and 174-175. For references in the Latin literature see Adams 1982, 139-141.

16 — Cf. LSJ s.v. ἐσθίω 4 “take in one’s mouth”, citing Philostratus, *Imagines* 1.20 αὐλοῦ τὴν γλῶτταν ἀνασπάσας ἐσθίει καὶ τὸν Ὀλυμπον οὕτω φιλεῖν οἶεται, φησὶ δὲ καὶ ἀπογεύσασθαι τοῦ πνεύματος, “he draws out the tongue of the pipe and eats it, and, thus, he thinks that he is kissing Olympus; then he says he tasted the breath”.

17 — See Williams 2010<sup>2</sup>, 218-224; Lateiner and Spatharas 2017, 25-26 and 30-31. For the attestations in comedy see Henderson 1991, 51-52; esp. 52 “cunnilingus, usually called “licking” (391), does, however, boast some revealing metaphorical terms. We have seen that cunnilingus is often compared to licking soups and sauces from dishes, or as “having breakfast” (392, 394); the vagina is popularly called a “tongue-case” (390). These usages suggest that, apart from a desire on the part of the man to give his partner special pleasure, there was also a special pleasure for the man in smelling and tasting the woman’s genitals and their secretions”. In pharaonic Egypt, there is no direct mention of cunnilingus in art or literature; see Manniche 2002, 33.

18 — See Henderson 1991, 50, where he states that “there is no specific terminology in comedy for ejaculation that corresponds to such English expressions as “come”, “blow one’s load”, “shoot”, and so on, nor is there any terminology covering male or female orgasm, although of course orgasm is implied... The one term that points to ejaculation, προσουρεῖν, to urinate upon (336)... reflects a confusion of urine and semen common not only in dream symbolism and infantile thought but also in Latin terminology (*urina* = semen, *meiere*, *mingere*, and *commingere* – to ejaculate)”; cf.

to speak about something that is released during the female orgasm, by using the verb *μεθίημι* (see *μεθίει δὲ καὶ ἡ γυνὴ ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος*)<sup>19</sup>. More specifically, he supported the idea that “in the case of women, it is my contention that when during intercourse the vagina is rubbed and the womb is disturbed, an irritation is set up in the womb which produces pleasure and heat in the rest of the body. A woman also releases something from her body, sometimes into the womb, which then becomes moist, and sometimes externally as well, if the womb is open wider than normal. Once intercourse has begun, she experiences pleasure throughout the whole time, until the man ejaculates [NB: I prefer to translate “until the man releases her”]. If her desire for intercourse is excited, she emits before the man and for the remainder of the time she does not feel pleasure to the same extent; but if she is not in a state of excitement, then her pleasure terminates along with that of the man. What happens is like this: if into boiling water you pour another quantity of water which is cold, the water stops boiling. In the same way, the man’s sperm arriving in the womb extinguishes both the heat and the pleasure of the woman. Both the pleasure and the heat reach their peak simultaneously with the arrival of the sperm in the womb, and then they cease. If, for example, you pour wine on a flame, first of all the flame flares up and increases for a short period when you pour the wine on, then it dies away. In the same way the woman’s heat flares up in response to the man’s sperm, and then dies away”<sup>20</sup> (translation by I.M. Lonie, Berlin – New York 1981). Then, Aristotle discussed the same subject in his treatise *On the Generation of Animals* 727b-728a<sup>21</sup> in the context of the question about the female

also in p. 52 “it may be that the absence of obscene language for ejaculation and orgasm in Greek can be explained in the same way as can the similar lack of such terms for urination: the Greeks were much more matter-of-fact than we about bodily secretions (other than excrement) and were not repelled, as we are, by them”. In Aristophanes *Pax* 712 οὐκ εἶ γε κυκεῶν’ ἐπιπίους βληχωνίαν, “not if you swallow a potion of penny-royal afterwards”, this potion is vaginal fluids; see Henderson 1991, 65. For the Latin *uda* see Adams 1982, 92.

19 — The verb *ὑποπιπτοῦν* is considered to be used in the Greek comedy when the woman’s genitals moisten; see Henderson 1991, 51 and 164, n° 273.

20 — Τῆσι δὲ γυναιξί φημι ἐν τῇ μίξει τριβομένου τοῦ αἰδοίου καὶ τῶν μητρῶν κινουμένων, ὥσπερ κνησμόν ἐμπίπτειν ἐς αὐτάς καὶ τῷ ἄλλῳ σώματι ἡδονὴν καὶ θερμὴν παρέχειν. Μεθίει δὲ καὶ ἡ γυνὴ ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος ὅτε μὲν ἐς τὰς μήτρας, αἱ δὲ μήτραι ἰκμαλέαι γίνονται, ὅτε δὲ καὶ ἔξω, ἦν χάσκωσιν αἱ μήτραι μᾶλλον τοῦ καιροῦ. Καὶ ἥδεται, ἐπὶν ἄρξῃται μίσεσθαι, διὰ παντὸς τοῦ χρόνου, μέχρις ἂν αὐτὴν μεθίῃ ὁ ἀνὴρ· κῆν μὲν ὄργᾳ ἡ γυνὴ μίσεσθαι, πρόσθεν τοῦ ἀνδρός φάσει, καὶ τὸ λοιπὸν οὐκ ἐτι ὁμοίως ἥδεται ἡ γυνὴ· ἦν δὲ μὴ ὄργᾳ, συντελέει τῷ ἀνδρὶ ἡδομένη· καὶ ἔχει οὕτως ὥσπερ εἴ τις ἐπὶ ὕδωρ ζέον ἕτερον ψυχρὸν ἐπιχέει, παύεται τὸ ὕδωρ ζέον οὕτω, καὶ ἡ γονὴ πεσοῦσα τοῦ ἀνδρός ἐς τὰς μήτρας σβέννυσι τὴν θερμὴν καὶ τὴν ἡδονὴν τῆς γυναικός. Ἐξαΐσει δὲ ἡ ἡδονὴ καὶ ἡ θερμὴ ἅμα τῇ γονῇ πιπτούσῃ ἐς τὰς μήτρας, ἔπειτα λήγει· ὥσπερ εἴ τις ἐπὶ φλόγα οἶνον ἐπιχέει, συμβαίνει πρῶτα μὲν εξαΐσειν τὴν φλόγα καὶ αὔξεσθαι δι’ ὀλίγου πρὸς τὴν ἐπίχυσιν τοῦ οἴνου, ἔπειτα λήγειν, ὡσαύτως δὲ καὶ τῇ γυναικὶ ἡ θερμὴ εξαΐσει πρὸς τὴν γονὴν τοῦ ἀνδρός, ἔπειτα λήγει. See the discussion of the passage in Lonie 1981, 119-121; Hanson 1990, 309-338, esp. 314-315; Dean-Jones 1992, 72-91, esp. 68-70; Akşit 2013, 55-56.

21 — “Ὁ δ’ οἶονταί τινες σπέρμα συμβάλλεσθαι ἐν τῇ συνουσίᾳ τὸ θῆλυ διὰ τὸ γίνεσθαι

semen, pointing out that the vaginal secretions (*ύγρὰν ἀπόκρισιν, ἡ ύγρασία, ἔστι γὰρ τῶν ύστερῶν ἔκκρισις*) are not semen<sup>22</sup>, and that a woman's ejaculation exceeds that of a man. However, although it is certain that both Hippocrates and Aristotle spoke about vaginal secretions during intercourse, it is not certain if they implied a female ejaculation<sup>23</sup>. On the other hand, in Galenus' treatise *On semen*, 2.1, 25-26, he seems to support the idea of the existence of female semen based on the desire of women for sexual intercourse. Galenus compared the expulsion of fluids out of the vulva during the sexual tensions or at the moment of the orgasm of a woman with the act of urination, which similarity is actually the most indicative and characteristic feature of the female ejaculation: "exactly as it has been seen even now for a woman who suffered from hysterical diseases, plenty and very thick semen was discharged first to the uterus, and thence to the outside. Since she was a widow for a long time, she had accumulated it so much and of that quantity and quality. Then, some tensions seized her in her loins and hands and feet, so that she seemed to have some convulsions, and during these tensions the semen was discharged, and she was saying that she had a pleasure like that during sexual intercourse. This semen was now thick and in a large quantity, because it was not evacuated for a long time. In other women, however, this semen, in smaller quantities and as a liquid, appears to spill out from these wombs, from exactly the same place where she urinates" (my translation)<sup>24</sup>. It is more likely, if we base our interpretation of his last phrasing and observation "from exactly the same place where she uri-

*παραπλησίαν τε χαρὰν ἐνίοτε αὐταῖς τῆ τῶν ἀρρένων καὶ ἅμα ύγρὰν ἀπόκρισιν, οὐκ ἔστιν ἡ ύγρασία αὐτῆ σπερματικὴ ἀλλὰ τοῦ τόπου ἴδιος ἐκάσταις. ἔστι γὰρ τῶν ύστερῶν ἔκκρισις καὶ ταῖς μὲν γίνεταί ταῖς δ' οὐ. γίνεταί μὲν γὰρ ταῖς λευκοχρόοις καὶ θηλυκαῖς ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ εἰπεῖν, οὐ γίνεταί δὲ ταῖς μελαίνοις καὶ ἀρρενωποῖς. τὸ δὲ πλῆθος αἰς γίνεταί ἐνίοτε οὐ κατὰ σπέρματος πρόεσιν ἔστιν, ἀλλὰ πολὺ ὑπερβάλλει.* "There are some who think that the female contributes semen during coition because women sometimes derive pleasure from it comparable to that of the male and also produce a fluid secretion. This fluid, however, is not seminal; it is peculiar to the part from which it comes in each individual; there is a discharge from the uterus, which, though it happens in some women, does not in others. Speaking generally, this happens in fair-skinned women who are typically feminine, and not in dark women of a masculine appearance. Where it occurs, this discharge is sometimes on quite a different scale from the semen discharged by the male, and greatly exceeds it in bulk" (translation by A.L. Peck, Loeb 1943).

22 — See Connell 2000, 405-427.

23 — See Korda, Goldstein and Sommer 2010, where a review of the ancient literature in which female ejaculation was described.

24 — *Καθάπερ ὠφθη καὶ νῦν ἐπὶ γυναικὸς ὑπὸ νοσημάτων ύστερικῶν ἐνοχλουμένης εἰς τὴν μήτραν μὲν πρῶτον, ἐκ ταύτης δὲ ἔξω πλείστον τε καὶ παχύτατον ἐκχυθὲν σπέρμα. χρόνον δ' αὐτῆ συχνὸν χηρεύουσα τοσοῦτό τε καὶ τοιοῦτο ἠθροίκει. ἀλλὰ τότε τάσεις τινὲς αὐτὴν κατέλαβον ὄσφυος καὶ χειρῶν καὶ ποδῶν, ὡς σπασθῆναι δοκεῖν, ἐφ' αἷς ἐξεκρίθη τὸ σπέρμα, καὶ τὴν ἡδονὴν τε παραπλησίαν ἔλεγεν αὐτῆ γεγονέναι τῆ κατὰ τὰς συνουσίας. τοῦτο μὲν οὖν τὸ σπέρμα παχὺ τε ἦν καὶ πολὺ διὰ τὸ μὴ κεκενώσθαι χρόνῳ πολλῷ. ταῖς δ' ἄλλαις ἔλαττόν τε καὶ ὑγρὸν ἐκπίπτον φαίνεται πολλακίς ἔσωθεν ἐξ αὐτῶν τῶν ύστερῶν, ἵνα περ οὐρεῖ.* See Connell 2000, 410-413; King 1998, 233; King 2011, 205-235, esp. 222-227.

nates” that Galenus refers to the phenomenon of squirting/gushing and not to the one of the female ejaculation<sup>25</sup>. In this context, the participle *ἐκχυθέν* was used for the fluid, and it reminds us of Palladas’ *ἐκχυτον*, since both derive from the passive aorist of *ἐκχέω*. This interpretation is in accordance with the general conception concerning the female enhanced sexual delights. Certainly, this conception is also reflected in the Hippocratic description (see above, and text in footnote 20): metaphorically, the smoke billows from Circe’s vagina, because there is a heat in the woman’s uterus such as in boiling water, *ὔδωρ ζέον*<sup>26</sup>. This heat, ἡ θέρμη, flares up, *ἐξαΐσσει* (cf. *ἀποθρῶσκοντα*) like a flame, *φλόγα*, flares up, *ἐξαΐσσειν τὴν φλόγα*, when wine is poured on it, *οἶνον ἐπιχέει*. The use of the verbs is also noticeable: wine is the male sperm which arrives (*ἐπί + χέω*) in the uterus, while flame is the hot female emissions coming from inside the uterus (*ἐκ + χέω*) to respond to the man’s ejaculation.

Therefore, apparently, in some ancient scientific treatises the two different phenomena of the female ejaculation and of squirting/gushing had been observed and there was an attempt to explain it. Palladas was not the only epigrammatist who made a creative and innovative use of it, by making a subtle use of the text of Homer. Female ejaculation or squirting/gushing were also hinted at by the ancient epigram poets. Friedrich Karl Forberg in his *De figuris Veneris*, Coburgo 1824, which was translated as *Manual of Classical Erotology*, Manchester 1884, 163-193, in chapter V concerning cunnilingus, mentioned the epigram lxxv in the *Analecta* of Brunch, vol. III (= *AP* 11.220 (an anonymous epigrammatist):

*Ἀλφειοῦ στόμα φεῦγε· φιλεῖ κόλπους Ἀρεθούσης  
πρηνῆς ἐμπίπτων ἄλμυρον ἐς πέλαγος,*

“avoid Alpheus’ mouth, he loves Arethusa’s bosom, plunging head-first into the salty sea”<sup>27</sup>. Forberg noticed the ambiguity of the words mouth,

25 — For the difference between female ejaculation and squirting/gushing see Rubio Casillas and Jannini 2011, “the real female ejaculation is the release of a very scanty, thick, and whitish fluid from the female prostate, while the squirting is the expulsion of a diluted fluid from the urinary bladder”; also, Salama, Boitrelle, Gauquelin, Malagrida, Thiounn and Desvaux 2015, “squirting is essentially the involuntary emission of urine during sexual activity, although a marginal contribution of prostatic secretions to the emitted fluid often exists”; Salama, Boitrelle, Gauquelin, Lesaffre, Thiounn and Desvaux 2015.

26 — See Henderson 1991, pp. 47-48 “The vagina, as often in myth and legend, is perceived as an oven, hearth or brazier in which the penis is “cooked” during intercourse: a man cooks his penis in hot coals (344), roasts it (346), bakes it (351 f.) or smelts it like a rod of hot metal (557)... At the root of all these fire metaphors, common to all languages, is, of course, the actual physical feeling of heat accompanying sexual arousal and intercourse, a feeling which in these metaphors is distributed equally between the men and the women”. Cf. also Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* 764a about presenting the womb as oven.

27 — “Avoid the mouth of Alpheus; he loves the bosom of Arethusa, falling headlong into the salt sea” (translation by W.R. Paton, Loeb 1916) with his note *ad loc.* “alluding to the story of the love

bosom (bay), head-first, salt sea that they may refer to the Alpheius River in Arcadia and the Arethusa Spring in Sicily, but also to “the mouth of a *cunnilingue*, that goes and plunges into the vulva of a woman”, and in pp. 173-174, footnote 13 cited a similar joke which was quoted in Aloisia Sigea’ book, *Dialogue*. Furthermore in p. 198, footnote 29 of the chapter VI, where he presented the tribads (lesbians), again consulted Aloisia Sigea’s book, who described a female ejaculation: a woman says that “I sometimes water his too libertine hands with an abundant dew from my pleasure grounds” and “he filled my womb with his fecundating dew, and I also shed the rivulet of white liquid”. In this note he referred to another epigram from the *Analecta* of Brunck, Vol. I (= *AP* 5.55) of Dioskorides (not of Sosipater), where after the coitus of a couple the man says (ll. 7-8):

*μέχρις ἀπεσπίσθη λευκὸν μένος ἀμφοτέροισιν,  
καὶ Δωρίς παρέτοις ἐξεχύθη μέλεσι.*

“until the white liquor ran over with both of them, and Doris unwound her wearied limbs” (“donec effusum est album robur ambo-bus et Doris solutis jacuit membris” (translation by W.R. Paton, Loeb 1916)). The Dioscorides epigram may be related to Archilochus’ fr.196a, 34 (West), for *λευκὸν μένος* (“white power”, for the sperm) of the man. Apparently Dioscorides, unlike Archilochus, attributes the white sperm to both the man and the woman (*ἀμφοτέροισιν*) and we may translate l. 8 accordingly “she poured herself out with wearied limbs” to underline that fact.

However, there are some allusions in the ancient Greek epigrams that, although the verbal dexterity in such a genre makes it difficult to guarantee that some images of the vaginal area could hint at a pun for an intense female moisture, I would like to propose this interpretation, which might be correct, strengthened by the fact that concealed sexual jokes are common in the epigrams<sup>28</sup>. In the epigram *AP* 11.329 of Nicarchus, an old woman is shared between three men, and one of them gets “to dwell in her grey sea” (an implication for the vagina), the other one gets the hateful dank Hades (an implication for the woman’s rear), and the third the heaven (an implication for the woman’s mouth). A grey sea suggests, of course, the vaginal area, but it can also be indicative of the large amount of water present there. If this image of a possible female ejaculation is not persuasive, we could refer to another epigram, *AP* 5.60, of Rufinus,

of the river for the fountain Arethusa; but this epigram has also a scandalous meaning”.

28 — In Paulus Silentiarius’ epigram *AP* 5.275, 1, we find *ἐκχυτος ὕπνω*, referring to a woman, and I interpret this phrase (see reference in footnote 13 above) as “surrendering herself to sleep”. I think that these two words should be constructed together, in which case “poured herself out in her sleep” would be wrong.

where a girl takes her bath, and the breasts are wet, and her buttocks are more supple than water (ὑδατος ὑγροτέρῳ). In the third couplet of the epigram, the text describes another part of her body:

τὸν δ' ὑπεροιδαίνοντα κατέσκεπε πεπταμένη χεῖρ  
οὐχ ὄλον Εὐρώταν, ἀλλ' ὅσον ἠδύνατο.

Her hand tried to cover her over-swollen (ὑπεροιδαίνοντα) Eurotas River, but not all, only as much she could. In an article by Regina Höschle and David Konstan (Höschle and Konstan 2005), the authors also having cited Nicarchus' epigram as a comparable example, wonder what Rufinus had described in his epigram as a river. After their thorough and convincing discussion, they conclude that “what she hides, however, is a part that is dank in another, and for the poet, less appealing way – and this too lies hidden in the river's name”. In antiquity Eurotas was considered a well-watered river, abounding in water, (e.g. Euripides, *IT* 399 εὔυδρον), and, also, it was described either as a fair-flowing river (e.g. Theognis, *Eleg.* 1. 1088 καλλιρόωι ποταμῶι, Euripides, *Hecuba* 650 εὔροον), or as having swirling tides (e.g. Euripides, *Troades* 210 δίναν γ' Εὐρώτα). Of course, as already has been observed, behind the name Εὐρώτας one could see a pun originating from the adjective εὐρύς, “wide, broad” or the noun εὐρώς, “mould, dank decay” or the verb εὐρωτιάω, “become mouldy, decay”, but I find it intriguing to suggest that the “salty or grey sea” and “river” of a woman in all these epigrams were an abundant dew or the intense flows of the female secretions, or even a female ejaculation or squirting. The girl's hand in Rufinus' epigram was placed in front of the vaginal area to avoid it from being seen.

If this implication is right, all these texts above could help to place the Palladas' epigram further in a context of literary texts which allude to male ejaculation and female ejaculation/squirting and support the interpretation I propose. We could infer that ἔκχυτον in Palladas' epigram was not the Homeric Circe's potion in a cup from where Odysseus drank, but the juices poured out from the Palladian Circe's vagina<sup>29</sup>, when this latter Circe had sexual desires and excitement. On the one hand, one may assume that this sexual joke can apply to the original Odysseus and Circe, since there is nothing in the epigram that points to the present, and no actual contemporary figure can be adduced. On the other hand, however, it seems also plausible that the Homeric heroes were revived in Palladas' epigrams as caricatures through which he presented contemporaneous figures of his city, Alexandria. Therefore, issues of the Homeric

29 — The womb was likened to a box or vessel (usually a cup, *skyphos*) in ancient thought; see my discussion in *BGU* XX 2873 (Litinas 2014, 219). Circe in the iconography is presented to give Odysseus the potion in a *skyphos*; see Canciani and Le Glay 1992, n° 5, 5bis, 8, 13-33.

epics became part of the reality of Palladas, but, since the figures were hidden behind the Homeric expressions, they were not immediately recognizable. In particular, the epigrammatist might have projected some common characteristics of Homeric women onto contemporary women, at times humorously and at times scathingly. In such a case Palladas' epigram seems to have been inspired by a special woman in fourth-century AD Egypt.

We may also assume that this Circe might have been a hetaera, if we take into account Palladas' epigram 10.50 (see above), or a lonely woman, or a widow (cf. Galenus' text about the case of a widow, and, also, the fact that Circe lived alone). In the ancient literary texts we find some parallel situations. A similar example of an allusion to the Homeric fable, with a reference to a contemporary "Circe" whose victims were Philonides and his friends/parasites, was provided by Aristophanes, *Plutus* 302-315, when Karion sings to the chorus that "Circe of Corinth, whose potent philtres compelled the companions of Philonides like swine to swallow (cf. l. 305 *ἔσθειν*) balls of dung, which she herself had kneaded with her hands" (translation by O'Neill, Loeb 1938), followed by the corresponding chorus' answer. This "Circe" might have been the hetaera Lais<sup>30</sup>. Moreover, Circe was presented as hetaera in Heraclitus, paradoxographer of the fourth century AD, *De incred.* 16 ἦν δὲ ἑταίρα, "she was a prostitute", a lecherous one, as she κατακηλοῦσα τοὺς ξένους τὸ πρῶτον ἀρεσκείᾳ παντοδαπῇ... κατείχε ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις ἀλογίστως φερομένους πρὸς τὰς ἡδονάς, "who bewitched her clients at first with every sort of willingness to please... she controlled them through their lust, as they were mindlessly carried along in their pleasures" (translation by J. Stern 2003); Herodian, *Part.* p. 65 (Boissonade) Κίρκη, ὄνομα γυναικὸς πόρνης, "Circe, the name of a female whore". Themistius, in fourth century Constantinople, in his *Oratio* 27 (340b) pointed out that there is not one Circe, but many, all around us and they call men and try to seduce them: εἰ μὴ ἔχεις πολὺ τὸ ἀλεξιφάρμακον τοῦτο, ἀντὶ μιᾶς σοι Κίρκης πολλὰ τὸν κυκεῶνα κεράσουσι, καὶ αὐταὶ οὐ πόρρωθεν ἀπωκισμένα, ὥστε πολλῇ πλάνῃ παραγενέσθαι, ἀλλὰ ξυνοῦσαι συνεχῶς καὶ περιέπουσαι κύκλῳ καὶ καλοῦσαι πρὸς ἑαυτάς, "if you do not have a full supply of this remedy, not one but many Circes will mix up a potion for you, not Circes who live so far away that one has to go a great distance to reach them, but Circes who are continuously with you and surround you and summon you to themselves" (translation by R.J. Penella 2000). The heat generated in this Palladas' Circe was so intense and she felt such a surge of erotic excitement that it was like smoke that billowed (cf. l. 2

30 — See Webster 1953, 19-21. For the charm, dangerousness, and female lustful sensuality of Circe, as presented in Homer, Vergil and Ovid see Segal 1968, 419-442.

καπνὸν ἀποθρῶσκοντα) from her body's secretions<sup>31</sup>, and that this signal was easily understood even from far away (cf. l. 2 ἐνόησεν), and, thus, that the man who had already tasted her secretions, however clever and wise he was, would never want to return to his own "Penelope" or other "Penelopes"<sup>32</sup>.

To sum up, the quip about Palladas' Circe and his pun on the ἔκχυτον are not immediately intelligible. This paper specifically argues that (1) Circe's ἔκχυτον suggests her vaginal "juices", which might be intense in the form of a female ejaculation or squirting/gushing, that (2) the "smoke curling up" suggests her sexual heat, and that (3) ἔφαγεν suggests cunnilingus. Furthermore, the aim of the poet was to refer neither to Circes' magic nor to Penelope's patience, nor to Odysseus' adventures during his wanderings. It is proposed that the Homeric heroes who appear in Palladas' epigram were caricatures of contemporaneous figures of his Alexandria. The Homeric quotations work as a springboard to describe a Circe of his city, probably a warm and seductive woman, probably a prostitute. The Homeric Odysseus is a man who would never return to his Penelope, if he had tasted the potion prepared by Palladas' Alexandrian Circe. Although Palladas presented an erotic image of a woman in his epigram, this does not necessarily mean that his attitude towards women's nature fluctuated between deprecation and approval. Whichever his(?) "Penelope" is, she is still an expression of his ideals, biases and experiences, and Palladas undoubtedly uses his epigram to refer to female sexual arousal which could fascinate men.

31 — If the smoke curling up was coming from an activity in the palace of Circe, then the syntax would require ἀφ' ὧν (i.e. μεγάρων). However, the relative pronoun οὗ (l. 3) referred to ἔκχυτον. Palladas implied that his Circe prepared "the food" over "the fire" that could bewitch the Alexandrian men. In that way, he was the first to create two original parallel scenes with the image of the smoke as the *locus communis*.

32 — For Penelope and Circe in the ancient literature see Harrison 1988; Dunn, 1990.

A different interpretation of the epigram was proposed by Papanikolopoulos 2010<sup>2</sup>, 168, n. 1. According to him, the ἔκχυτον of the Homeric Circe was wrapped in fig leaves (but he did not refer to any ancient source). Thus, in Palladas, this ἔκχυτον, was wrapped with Circe's "fig leaf", and Odysseus Ulysses did not want to taste it, although it was worth as much as ten Penelopes.

Another thought of mine that I finally rejected was that the word ἔκχυτον was a mistake of the manuscripts' ἔγχυτον. The noun ἔγχυτον derives from the verb ἐγγέω (ἐν + γέω), and LSJ s.v. ἔγχυτος gives the following meaning: I "poured in, infused"; II ἔγχυτος πλακοῦς "cake cast into a shape"; III τὸ ἔγχυτον "infusion"; cf. also LSJ s.v. ἔγχυμα "instillation"; II "filling, content of a vessel"; III = ἔγχυτος πλακοῦς. If this proposal could apply, then the Palladean Circe might be considered either a famous cook in Alexandria, who prepared delicious food, or a doctor or magician, who prepared specific medical ointments or magical potions. For women doctors see Parker 1997, 131-150; for women practicing magic Wortley 2001, 289-307. In that context, there was no need for someone to taste the food or medicine or potion she prepared. Even from far away the smoke from her chimney during this preparation could bewitch him.

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