

## TIBERIUS THE GOAT: AN ADDITION TO CHAMPLIN’S ‘MALLONIA’

Champlin’s recent contribution to *Histos* (2015) offers a cogent and compelling argument against the historicity of Mallonia in Suet. *Tib.* 45. In his discussion, Champlin demonstrates how Suetonius cleverly employs several sexual puns in his description of Tiberius’ lascivious dealings with his would-be victim, framed around Tiberius’ predilection for oral sex.

Suetonius’ description of Tiberius possessing goat-like characteristics is less securely explained, as Champlin says that ‘[g]oats and oral sex make for a striking, in fact a unique, combination, found nowhere else in the art or literature of antiquity’.<sup>1</sup> There is, however, some evidence from the Greek world which may help us to interpret this passage. Indeed, that there was an association between goats and oral sex, perhaps cunnilingus specifically, seems to be the punch-line of Cairo’s ditty in Aristophanes’ *Plutus* 292–5:<sup>2</sup>

... ἀλλ’ εἶα, τέκεα, θαμίν’ ἐπαναβοῶντες  
βληχωμένων τε προβατίων  
αἰγῶν τε κινναβρώντων μέλη  
ἔπεσθ’ ἀπεψωλημένοι· τράγοι δ’ ἀκρατιεῖσθε.

... Hey now, kids, sing out after me loud and clear:  
bleating songs of little lambs  
and stinky goats,  
follow me with pricks unsheathed: you goats will have your breakfast.  
(Trans. Henderson, Loeb)

Furthermore, it is worth bearing in mind the comments of the scholiast in the Ravenna Codex of Aristophanes, who notes soberly (Schol. *in Ar. Pl.* 1. 295 = Chantry [1994] 67):

ἐπεὶ μετὰ τὴν συνουσίαν οἱ τράγοι λείχουσιν αὐτῶν τὰ αἰδοῖα ἐν τῷ  
ἄκρῳ μέρει.

With this commonplace observation in mind, the line from the Atellan farce quoted by Suetonius becomes more intelligible, and less unprecedented. The joke is earthy and unsophisticated: goats lick their own genitals—Goaty Ti-

<sup>1</sup> Champlin (2015) 227.

<sup>2</sup> Thus, Henderson (1991) 186, specifically on the euphemistic sense of ἀκρατιεῖσθε.

berius (like the Goat-like ἀπειρωλημένοι of Cairo's song) preferred to lick the genitals of others.

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