

THE HERCULES STATUE FROM THE HOUSE OF THE STAGS, HERCULANEUM

This marble statuette shows a drunken, reeling Hercules, naked save for club and lion-skin. Comically pot-bellied, with legs a-straddle, he grasps his penis and stares at it¹). It is possible that he is supposed to be urinating, an act frequently associated with inebriation. But this interpretation fails to explain why he is peering at his penis so intently.

Euripides' satyric *Syleus* told how Hercules fell in the clutches of Syleus, a villain who forced passers-by to toil in his fields and then murdered them. But Hercules turned the tables on this bad man by getting uproariously drunk, staging a one-man banquet, demolishing the man's house, killing him, and then raping his daughter²). One fragment of this play, fr. 693 Nauck³), evidently was so well known that it became a kind of catch-word in later antiquity³): εἶτα δὴ, φίλον ξύλον, / ἔγειρέ μοι σεαντό και γίγνον θρασύ. At first sight this would appear to be an exhortation to his club made prior to braining the hapless Syleus. But the real interpretation of this fragment, as recognized by H. J. Mette⁴), is established by Hesychius IV p. 185 ξύλον = τύλον = αἰδοῖον. Hercules is exhorting his penis to stand erect as he prepares to rape Syleus' daughter.

The statuette from the House of the Stags represents Hercules just as he would appear while speaking these lines: drunken and overfed after having risen from Syleus' now-demolished table, besottedly peering at his still-flaccid penis and urging it to rise to the occasion.

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1) Illustrated in Marcel Brion, *Pompeii and Herculaneum* (London, 1960) Pl. 20.

2) The plot is given by John Tzetzes, *Prolog. in Aristoph.* Pb III 27 p. 21 Kaibel (Mb III 38 p. 33 K.).

3) This fragment is quoted more often than any other Euripidean satyric fragment, for instance by Lucian (*Asin.* v) and Suetonius (*Nero* 49), so as to show that *ἔγειρέ μοι σεαντό* served as a proverb.

4) *Lustrum* 12, 1967, 233.