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?Bo.tiaDes o πρῶκτος: an Abusive Graffito from Thorikos


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In 1990 J. Bingen published this rupestral graffito from Thorikos which he dated to around 400 B.C.¹ The reading of the name may be in doubt,² but the form of the utterance is clear, a man’s name in the nominative (note the ending in ε) to which are appended the words ὁ πρωκτός.

πρωκτός belongs to the lower registers of the Greek language.³ It and its derivatives are found in early iambus⁴ and are very common in Old Comedy. They probably occur in mime⁵ and also appear in non-literary sources such as magic papyri and graffiti.⁶ Their occurrences in prose (including medical writings) are severely restricted.⁷

The Thorikan graffito has affinities with the kind of abusive graffito found in several parts of the Greek world which consists of a person’s name followed by a sexual insult. The insult is most commonly conveyed in such graffiti by the word καταπυγών,⁸ but we possess an example (cf. note 6) where the adjective is a compound of -πρωκτός: Δαμόκριτος ιεύροπρωκτός.⁹

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² 'La lecture du nom propre est tout à fait incertaine', Bingen.
³ See my article 'Six Greek Verbs of Sexual Congress (βινῶ, κινῶ, πυγίζω, ληκῶ, οἰφᾶ, λακείζω)', *CQ* n.s. 41 (1991), 51-77, 51ff. and p. 52 notes 11, 12 and 13. Footnote 7 below contains a modification of what was written there.
⁴ Hipponax, 104. 32.
⁷ πρωκτός occurs in Artemidorus, 5. 5 (303. 8 Pack), [Lucian], *Asinus* 56, and Aeschines, *epist*. 77. 27. It is used by Galen to gloss κῦκκαρος (Gal. 19. 116. 5 Kühn): the accent in the entry under πρωκτός in R. J. Durling, *A Dictionary of Medical Terms in Galen* (Leiden, 1993) should be corrected.
⁸ For καταπυγών (and κατάπυγως) see Bain, op. cit. 67 n. 120. Compare also for this form of sexual insult, Βότρυς πυγ[?ι]τιτικός [πυγώτος] or a passive verb is just as likely: cf. my note on *CIG* iii. 4854 in the article cited in note 3, pp. 69ff. (P. Perdrizet-G. Lefèbvre, *Les graffites grecs du Memnonion d’Abydos* (Nancy, 1919) no. 127. 3), Καρίων οἰφόλης (*IG* XII. 5, 97) and examples of female names followed by adjectives formed by derivatives of λακείζω (*IG* I² 921, Lang, op. cit. C 34: see H. D. Jocelyn, ‘A Greek Indecency and its Students, λακείζειν’, *PCPhS* n.s. 26 (1980), 12-66, 15).
⁹ λακκόπρωκτος (see note 6) is joined to a proper name in a graffito from the Athenian agora, but there it is part of a sentence containing a verb: ἔτηλη λακκόπρωκτος ὁ Συδρόμαξος.
What puts this particular graffito in a slightly different category is the fact that a noun rather than an adjective is attached to the name. \(\pi\omega\kappa\tau\omicron\zeta\) must here be used \textit{pars pro toto}, Botiades 'the arse-hole', 'known as arse-hole'. The use of anatomical terms \textit{pars pro toto} to describe or characterise persons is easy to parallel in Latin and has been the subject of extensive study by J.N.Adams.\textsuperscript{10} There are plenty of examples of this form of utterance from the lower registers of Latin literature and from graffiti. People are identified with a body part or referred to by the name of a body-part, particularly that of a sexual body part. The most notable example in literature is the renaming of Mamurra as Mentula in Catullus. Likewise we find examples of an analogous use of \textit{uerpa}, \textit{cunnus} and other expressions. The connotations, as Adams points out, vary from instance to instance. Sometimes the sexuality of the person so identified is highlighted. On other occasions the sexual terms 'deteriorate into empty terms of abuse'.

In the Thorikon graffito I believe there can be no question of \(\pi\omega\kappa\tau\omicron\zeta\) being an empty term of abuse\textsuperscript{11} (as is perhaps the case with \(\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha\pi\upsilon\gamma\omicron\nu\) in abusive graffiti\textsuperscript{12}). The application of the word in this inscription is different from what would be that of its English equivalent, 'arse-hole', whose abusive use is probably empty of possible sexual content and simply stresses that the person insulted is unpleasant, unpopular and a nuisance ('a pain in the neck/arse').\textsuperscript{13} In the context of Attica in the fifth-century B.C., if one called someone a \(\pi\omega\kappa\tau\omicron\zeta\), one intended to draw attention to his pathic homosexuality. One can parallel in Latin this kind of identification of the person with the body-part with the example of a Pompeian graffito in which someone is described as a \textit{cunnus} (\textit{cunnus} for \textit{culus}) clearly because he is regarded as a passive homosexual:

\begin{quote}
\textit{futebatur inquam futuebatur ciuium Romanorum attractis pedibus cunnus ...}\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

It would be useful if someone were to follow Adams's lead and investigate the use of body terms \textit{pars pro toto} in Greek. I have the impression that it is less common than in Latin (particularly of one excludes expressions of the form 'you are just such and such a body part', 'you are nothing but such and such a body part').\textsuperscript{15} \(\gamma\alpha\sigma\tau\epsilon\zeta\epsilon\omicron\ 0\iota\omicron\nu\) (Hes. \textit{Theog.} 26) is the locus classicus. The satyrs in Soph. \textit{Ichneutae} 151 are described, among other things, as \(\phi\alpha\lambda\eta\iota\epsilon\zeta\). Another possible instance of such an identification is Callimachus fr.
689 Πάν ὁ Μαλείητης τρύπανον αἰσιολικῶν. At any rate, it is clear from his annotation that Pfeiffer takes it this way. In Longus, 4. 11. 2 the parasite Gnathon is described as being nothing but γνάθος καὶ γαςτήρ καὶ τὰ ὑπὸ γαςτέρα. One might object to including Antus ψωλή (CIL IV. 1363) in this list (for ψωλή used pars pro toto cf. CIL 4. 4142) on the grounds that the expression is a blend of Latin and Greek and that it is a linguistic calque on phrases of the type 'so and so <est> uerpa'.

All these examples differ syntactically from the Thorikon one in that they can be interpreted as sentences taking the form 'x is a y'. In this graffito, however, ὁ πρυκτός is appended to the proper name as a kind of title or nickname, a form of locution which has plenty of literary parallels.16 It was common in the Greek world to use bodily parts including sexual ones as nicknames.17 While in most instances the names was formed from the bodily part (e.g. Posthon,18 Sathon19 Psolas20 and names formed from βάλλος21) occasionally the word denoting the part became itself the name or nickname22 (e.g. Βάλλος found in Asia minor in the imperial period and earlier in the Hippocratic Epidemics (Hipp. Epid. 5. 96). Even closer parallels for πρυκτός as a nickname are the names Πύννος and Φόρυς.23

It is interesting to note that this inscription presents us with the reverse of a phenomenon common in Old Comedy where we find proper names used to denote the πρυκτός.24

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16 An early example is Χαιρεφόιν ὁ νυκτερίς (Arist. Birds 1564). In this connection Καλλιμέδων ὁ Κάρβος also springs to mind (note Athenaeus, 339ef which introduces Timocles fr. 29 K.-A, where both Athenaeus and Timocles add ὁ Κάρβος to Kallimedes' name). Compare also Ἡρακλείος ὁ λέμβος (four times referred to thus by Athenaeus: 98e, 333a, 566a, 578a). Collocations of names, one of which has the article appear also in Machon, τὸν Κόρυλον ... Εὐκρίτη (1), τὴν Αἴγα Νίκο (423), Νίκο ... τὴν Αἴγα (456): the order with the nickname first may be determined by considerations of versification.

17 On names formed from body parts see F.Bechtel, Die historischen Personennamen des Griechischen bis zur Kaiserzeit, Halle, 1917, 479ff. (cf. earlier the same writer's, Die einstämmigen männlichen Personennamen des Griechischen, die aus Spitznamen hervorgegangen sind (Berlin, 1898), 23ff.).


19 The nickname given to Plato by Antisthenes (see Athen. 220d and D.L. 6. 14) is also found in the comic poet Teleclides fr. 71 K.-A. For dialect examples see Bechtel, 482.

20 A satyr appropriately named Ψαλός appears on a sixth century aryballus made by Nearchus (ABV 83 [4]; see G.M.A.Richter, AJA 36 (1932), 272-75 and J.D.Beazley, BSA 32 (1931-32), 21).

21 For such names see L.Robert, Noms indigènes dans l'Asie Mineure gréco-romaine BEFAR 239 (Paris, 1963), 16-22.

22 For 'unmovierte Namen' see Bechtel, p. 43 and 607.


One could add to the examples I gave (ZPE 104 [1994], 35) of words denoting sexual parts becoming (via the medium of a nickname used *pars pro toto*) personal names the name Δρῆλος found on an Attic gravestone of the third century B.C. (*SEG* 32, 281). O. Masson (*MH* 43 [1986], 252ff.) is surely correct to see δρῆλος as originally meaning ‘worm’ and then developing a metaphorical sexual meaning.