



# Persius

Complete Works

DELPHI  CLASSICS

Ancient Classics Series

*The Complete Works of*  
**PERSIUS**

(AD. 34-62)



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Version 1

*The Complete Works of*  
**AULUS PERSIUS FLACCUS**



*By Delphi Classics, 2021*

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### *Complete Works of Persius*



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Contact: [sales@delphiclassics.com](mailto:sales@delphiclassics.com)



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## The Translations



*Volterra, a walled mountaintop town in the Tuscany region of Italy, which was originally an Etruscan stronghold — Persius was born in Volterra.*



*Remains of the Etruscan acropolis at Volterra*

## Brief Introduction to Persius



According to tradition, Persius (AD 34-62) was born into a wealthy equestrian family at Volterra, a small Etruscan city in the province of Pisa. His father died when he was six years old and his stepfather died a few years later. At the age of twelve Persius was sent to Rome to be educated, where he was taught by Remmius Palaemon and the famous rhetor Verginius Flavius. During the next four years he developed important friendships with the Stoic Lucius Annaeus Cornutus, the lyric poet Caesius Bassus and the epic poet Lucan. The latter would become a great admirer of all of Persius' work. He also became close friends with Thrasyllus Paetus, the husband of Arria who was his relative; over the next ten years Persius and Thrasyllus Paetus shared many travels together.

In his youth, Persius composed a tragedy based on an episode in Roman history, before he read the satires of Lucilius, which was an instant source of inspiration to the young scholar. Persius then made the decision to emulate the great satirist and he set to work on producing a book of his own satires. However, he wrote seldom and slowly and his premature death prevented him from completing the task. The surviving accounts of his life describe Persius as having "a gentle disposition, girlish modesty and personal beauty" and he is believed to have lived a life of exemplary devotion towards his mother, sister and aunt. He left a considerable fortune to his mother and sister. His great friend Cornutus suppressed all of his work except for the satires, to which he made some slight alterations, before handing the manuscript over to the poet Bassus for editing. The satires proved to be an immediate success.

The chief interest of Persius' style is his interpretation of Roman Stoicism and for his accomplished use of the Latin tongue. As well as his devotion to Lucilius, the six extant satires also reveal his debt to Horace, in equal if not a higher measure. Numerous characters, phrases, thoughts and situations appear to come direct from Horace's own poems. Persius' satires are noted for their earnestness and moral purpose, rising above the political rancour or teasing persiflage of his predecessors, including Juvenal's rhetorical indignation. Persius demonstrates how philosophy can work on minds, while preserving the depth and purity of the old Roman gravitas. He likes to censure the style of his day, although he also imitates it, with excess of detail and obscurity and a curious tendency to use "popular" words.

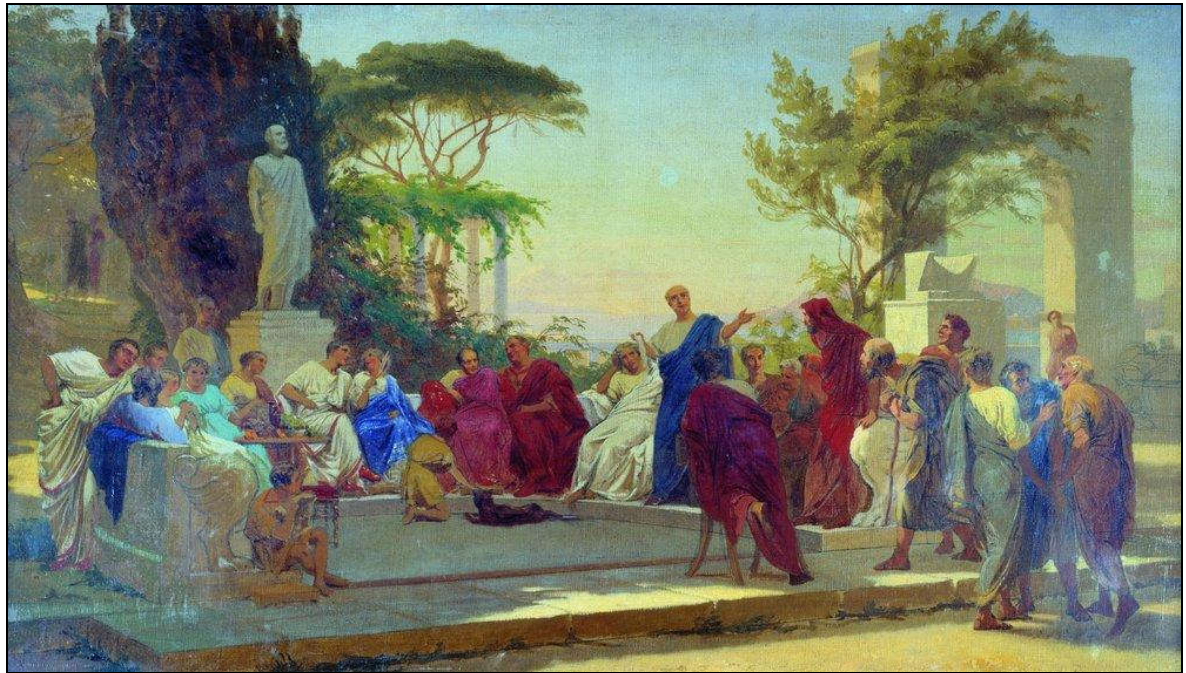
Like Juvenal who would write half a century later, Persius was the heir to the style of Latin verse satire developed by Lucilius and Horace, which were clearly aimed at a sophisticated and urban audience. He adopts the mask of an angry man, while his sharp criticism of the society in which he lives is combined with flashes of sardonic humor. Numbering just over 700 lines, the satires are composed in hexameters. The first satire criticises the literary tastes of the day, serving as a reflection of the decadence of the national morals. The vivid description of the recitator and literary twaddlers after dinner is of especial interest to the student of Roman sociology. The second satire deals with the question as to what we may justly ask of the gods; the third explores the importance of having a definite aim in life; and the fourth concerns the necessity of self-knowledge for public men. The fifth satire looks at the Stoic doctrine of liberty, which is introduced by generous allusions to Cornutus' teaching, while the sixth and final satire explores the ideal use of money.





*A seventeenth century depiction of Persius by Francesco Stelluti*





*'Horace reads before Maecenas' by Fyodor Bronnikov, Odessa Art Museum, 1863 — Horace was an important influence on the development of Persius' work.*



*End of Sample*