



Parthenius
Complete Works

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Ancient Classics Series

The Complete Works of

PARTHENIUS

(fl. 1st century BC)



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Love Romances

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Introduction to Parthenius by S. Gaselee

The Delphi Classics Catalogue



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Version 1

The Complete Works of
PARTHENIUS OF NICAEA



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Complete Works of Parthenius

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The Translation



Ancient ruins at Nicaea, northwestern Anatolia, primarily known as the site of the First and Second Councils of Nicaea — Parthenius' birthplace



İznik Walls at Istanbul Gate, Nicaea

Love Romances



Translated by S. Gaselee, 1916, Loeb Classical Library

Parthenius of Nicaea was a Greek grammarian and poet that flourished in the first century AD. According to the Suda, he was the son of Heraclides and Eudora, while Hermippus of Berytus claims that his mother's name was Tetha. We know very little of Parthenius' life and career. He was taken prisoner by Helvius Cinna in the Mithridatic Wars and carried to Rome in 72 BC. He subsequently visited Neapolis, where he reportedly taught Greek to the future epic poet Virgil, as recorded by Macrobius. He is believed to have lived until the accession of Tiberius in 14 AD.

Sometimes described as “the last of the Alexandrians”, Parthenius was a writer of elegies, especially dirges, and of short epic poems. His sole surviving work, the *Ἐρωτικὰ Παθήματα* (Love Romances), was set out, as Parthenius states in his preface, “in the shortest possible form” and dedicated to the poet Cornelius Gallus, as “a storehouse from which to draw material”. It is a collection of thirty-six epitomes of mythological love stories, all of which have tragic or sentimental endings. Parthenius is one of the few ancient writers whose work survives in only one manuscript, called *Palatinus Heidelbergensis graecus* 398 (P), which was likely written in the mid-ninth century.

It contains a diverse mixture of geography, excerpts from Hesychius of Alexandria, paradoxography, epistolography and mythology. As the author usually quotes his authorities, these tales are valuable in providing information on the Alexandrian poets and grammarians whose works are now lost. Parthenius was famous to the literary world of the ancients as one of the regular Alexandrine school of poets, though pedantic and obscure, often opting for the less well known legends of mythology. Yet, these mini-epic tales would play an important part in the development of the love story – especially the tragic love story – in the course of Western literature.



Apollo and Daphne, a marble sculpture by Bernini, c. 1625 – Daphne's tragic love story is one of the thirty-six romances narrated by Parthenius.

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Classical depiction of Oenone holding pan pipes; detail from a sarcophagus, Palazzo Altemps, Rome, c. AD 140 — another subject of Parthenius' romances, Oenone was the first wife of Paris of Troy, whom he abandoned for Helen of Sparta.



A third century Roman mosaic of Virgil, Parthenius' esteemed pupil, seated between Clio and Melpomene, Hadrumetum, Tunisia

PARTHENIUS TO CORNELIUS GALLUS, GREETING

I THOUGHT, my dear Cornelius Gallus, that to you above all men there would be something particularly agreeable in this collection of romances of love, and I have put them together and set them out in the shortest possible form. The stories, as they are found in the poets who treat this class of subject, are not usually related with sufficient simplicity; I hope that, in the way I have treated them, you will have the summary of each: and you will thus have at hand a storehouse from which to draw material, as may seem best to you, for either epic or elegiac verse. I am sure that you will not think the worse of them because they have not that polish of which you are yourself such a master: I have only put them together as aids to memory, and that is the sole purpose for which they are meant to be of service to you.

I. THE STORY OF LYRCUS

From the Lyrcus of Nicaenetus¹ and the Caunus² of Apollonius Rhodius

When Io, daughter of King Inachus of Argos, had been captured by brigands, her father Inachus sent several men to search for her and attempt to find her. One of these was Lyrcus the son of Phoroneus, who covered a vast deal of land and sea without finding the girl, and finally renounced the toilsome quest: but he was too much afraid of Inachus to return to Argos, and went instead to Caunus, where he married Hilebia, daughter of King Aegialus, who, as the story goes, had fallen in love with Lyrcus as soon as she saw him, and by her instant prayers had persuaded her father to betroth her to him; he gave him as dowry a good share of the realm and of the rest of the regal attributes, and accepted him as his son-in-law. So a considerable period of time passed, but Lyrcus and his wife had no children: and accordingly he made a journey to the oracle at Didyma,³ to ask how he might obtain offspring; and the answer was, that he would beget a child upon the first woman with whom he should have to do after leaving the shrine. At this he was mighty pleased, and began to hasten on his homeward journey back to his wife, sure that the prediction was going to be fulfilled according to his wish; but on his voyage, when he arrived at Bybastus,⁴ he was entertained by Staphylus, the son of Dionysus, who received him in the most friendly manner and enticed him to much drinking of wine, and then, when his senses were dulled with drunkenness, united him with his own daughter Hemithea, having had previous intimation of what the sentence of the oracle had been, and desiring to have descendants born to her: but actually a bitter strife arose between Rheo and Hemithea, the two daughters of Staphylus, as to which should have the guest, for a great desire for him had arisen in the breasts of both of them. On the next morning Lyrcus discovered the trap that his host had laid for him, when he saw Hemithea by his side: he was exceedingly angry, and upbraided Staphylus violently for his treacherous conduct; but finally, seeing that there was nothing to be done, he took off his belt and gave it to the girl, bidding her to keep it until their future offspring had come to man's estate, so that he might possess a token by which he might be recognized, if he should ever come to his father at Caunus: and so he sailed away home. Aegialus, however, when he heard the whole story about the oracle and about Hemithea, banished him from his country; and there was then a war of great length between the partisans of Lyrcus and those of Aegialus: Hilebia was on the side of the former, for she refused to repudiate her husband. In after years the son of Lyrcus and Hemithea, whose name was Basilus, came, when he was a grown man, to the Caunian land; and Lyrcus, now an old man, recognized him as his son, and made him ruler over his peoples.

¹ A little-known Alexandrine poet, whose works are not now extant.

² No longer extant. In addition to the *Argonautica*, which we possess, Apollonius Rhodius wrote several epics describing the history of various towns and countries in which he lived at different times. The same work is called the *Kaunon ktisis* in the title of No. XI.

³ Lit. "to the temple of Apollo at Didyma," an old town south of Miletus, famous for its oracle.

⁴ Also called Bubasus, an old town in Caria.

II. THE STORY OF POLYMELA

*From the Hermes of Philetas*⁵

While Ulysses was on his wanderings round about Sicily, in the Etruscan and Sicilian seas, he arrived at the island of Meligunis, where King Aeolus made much of him because of the great admiration he had for him by reason of his famous wisdom: he inquired of him about the capture of Troy and how the ships of the returning heroes were scattered, and he entertained him well and kept him with him for a long time. Now, as it fell out, this stay was most agreeable to Ulysses, for he had fallen in love with Polymela, one of Aeolus's daughters, and was engaged in a secret intrigue with her. But after Ulysses had gone off with the winds shut up in a bag, the girl was found jealously guarding some stuffs from among the Trojan spoils which he had given her, and rolling among them with bitter tears. Aeolus reviled Ulysses bitterly although he was away, and had the intention of exacting vengeance upon Polymela; however, her brother Dioreas was in love with her, and both begged her off her punishment and persuaded his father to give her to him as his wife.⁶

⁵ An elegiac poet of Cos, a little later than Callimachus. We do not now possess his works.

⁶ See *Odyssey* x. 7. Aeolus had six sons and six daughters, all of whom he married to each other.

III. THE STORY OF EVIPPE

From the Euryalus⁷ of Sophocles

Aeolus was not the only one of his hosts to whom Ulysses did wrong: but even after his wanderings were over and he had slain Penelope's wooers, he went to Epirus to consult an oracle,⁸ and there seduced Evippe, the daughter of Tyrimmas, who had received him kindly and was entertaining him with great cordiality; the fruit of this union was Euryalus. When he came to man's estate, his mother sent him to Ithaca, first giving him certain tokens, by which his father would recognize him, sealed up in a tablet. Ulysses happened to be from home, and Penelope, having learned the whole story (she had previously been aware of his love for Evippe), persuaded him, before he knew the facts of the case, to kill Euryalus, on the pretence that he was engaged in a plot against him. So Ulysses, as a punishment for his incontinence and general lack of moderation, became the murderer of his own son; and not very long after this met his end after being wounded by his own offspring⁹ with a sea-fish's¹⁰ prickle.

⁷ No longer extant.

⁸ Just possibly "by the command of an oracle."

⁹ Telegonus.

¹⁰ According to the dictionaries, a kind of roach with a spike in its tail.

IV. THE STORY OF OENONE

From the Book of Poets of Nicander¹¹ and the Trojan History of Cephalon¹² of Gergitha

When Alexander,¹³ Priam's son, was tending his flocks on Mount Ida, he fell in love with Oenone the daughter of Cebren¹⁴: and the story is that she was possessed by some divinity and foretold the future, and generally obtained great renown for her understanding and wisdom. Alexander took her away from her father to Ida, where his pasturage was, and lived with her there as his wife, and he was so much in love with her that he would swear to her that he would never desert her, but would rather advance her to the greatest honour. She however said that she could tell that for the moment indeed he was wholly in love with her, but that the time would come when he would cross over to Europe, and would there, by his infatuation for a foreign woman, bring the horrors of war upon his kindred. She also foretold that he must be wounded in the war, and that there would be nobody else, except herself, who would be able to cure him: but he used always to stop her, every time that she made mention of these matters.

Time went on, and Alexander took Helen to wife: Oenone took his conduct exceedingly ill, and returned to Cebren, the author of her days: then, when the war came on, Alexander was badly wounded by an arrow from the bow of Philoctetes. He then remembered Oenone's words, how he could be cured by her alone, and he sent a messenger to her to ask her to hasten to him and heal him, and to forget all the past, on the ground that it had all happened through the will of the gods. She returned him a haughty answer, telling him he had better go to Helen and ask her; but all the same she started off as fast as she might to the place where she had been told he was lying sick. However, the messenger reached Alexander first, and told him Oenone's reply, and upon this he gave up all hope and breathed his last: and Oenone, when she arrived and found him lying on the ground already dead, raised a great cry and, after long and bitter mourning, put an end to herself.¹⁵

¹¹ A poet of Colophon in the second century B.C.

¹² Also called Cephalion (Athenaeus 393 D) of Gergitha or Gergis. For further particulars see Pauly-Wissowa, *s.v.* Hegesianax. Neither of these works is now extant.

¹³ More usually called Paris.

¹⁴ A river-god of the Troad.

¹⁵ For what may be regarded as a continuation of this story see No. XXXIV.

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