In answer to the question ‘quam navem narras?’, Menaechmus replies

‘ligneam
saepè tritam, saepè fixam, saepe excussam malleo;
quasi supellex Pellionis, palus palo proxumust.’

The usual explanation, e.g. Brix (and Brix-Niemeyer-Conrad) makes line 403 refer to a weather-beaten ship (reading fissam): this does violence to tritam and involves changing fixam, and fits in ill with the rest. P. Thoresby Jones is surely right in translating tritam as ‘planed’: fixam = ‘nailed’. excussam is, I think, the older spelling of excusam.

L. 404 presents a more difficult problem. palus is undoubtedly usually ‘stock, stump’, and we could translate ‘in a furrier’s shop post is near to post’, i.e., for hanging his wares; the comparison would then be to the ribs of a ship under construction. But there is surely a third point of comparison: pellio would undoubtedly suggest to the audience Pellio, the unfortunate actor of the Epidicus (Bacch. 214 f.), and, according to the didascalia, of the Stichus. An actor might possibly hang his costumes on posts, but pegs would be far more natural and would better suit l. 404—the pegs corresponding to the wooden nails of the ship; which gives the only reasonable explanation of excussam, i.e., ‘hammered flat’ till the nails were flush with the timbers. The pegs of the skinner might then be used for stretching his skins like the fullers’ ridiculae of Seneca Q.N. l. 3.2 (v. l. tendiculae). On the whole this seems the best explanation. That palus in Plautus can mean ‘peg’ seems clear from Mil. 1140 ‘palum in parietem figere’—though in any case a riddle often purposely avoids the mot juste.

The form of the lines has attracted attention—strongly accented,
with rhyme and word-jingle and alliteration, subdivided into dipodies (versus quadratus: see O. Immisch, Z. Frage d. Plaut. Cant., 28 ff.) This led Ribbeck to suspect *paratragoedia* (Trag. Fr.2, p. 269): is it not more probably an old riddle—‘What is it that is ...'? It is perhaps not too fanciful suggest that it goes back to the first Punic War and Rome's first large-scale shipbuilding, when the novel sights and sounds would be the talk of Rome. I feel that this view is strongly supported by the words of Plutarch, *de Fort. Rom.* 321 D, quoted by Marx on *Rud.* 753, ναυτηγείται μὲν ὑπὸ πληγών καὶ βίας πολλῆς, σφύρας καὶ ἥλιως ἀρασσομένη καὶ γομφώμεσαι καὶ πρίσσαι καὶ πελέκασι.

II: PROPUDIUM (PETRONIUS 99.5)

In the presence of an unknown or corrupt word, one can only start from a natural interpretation of the context, which here runs 'stetit in limine nauta, et 'moraris' inquit 'Eumolpe, tamquam propudium ignores?,' (Straightway we collect our luggage and embark).

It would seem that some sort of signal was hoisted to warn passengers that the boat was about to sail (corn-ships from Alexandria signified their *arrival* by hoisting a topsail, *supparum*: Sen. ep. 77.1-2). Is it not likely that a flag, or other signal, might be attached to the mast or rigging (halyards)?

We do not know many technical terms of ancient rigging, but one word everybody knows, ποὐς, pes. Can we connect *propudium* with this? The πόδες consisted of two ropes attached to the *foot* of the main-sail (which was also called ποὖς), by which it was controlled. What is more reasonable than that other ropes attached to the *top* of the sail should have been called πρόποδες or προπόδια (corresponding to the πρότωνοι at the bows (forestays)? When the ship was at rest the sail was furled by being let down (Sen. l.c.); when sail was set, it would be raised by *trochleae*, and with it, the προπόδιον (or προπόδια), which could be seen from a distance by passengers.

With regard to the form: if the word is old, *propodium* might normally become *propudium*, under the influence of initial accent (cf. *tripodium*, *repudium*); if not, we may assume that either (1) the word was influenced by *propudium* 'shame'—possibly as a joke,