

A MINOR BUT NOT UNINTERESTING POET  
OF ATHENIAN MIDDLE COMEDY:  
EPICRATES OF AMBRACIA



ABSTRACT: By trying to contextualize some of the more interesting fragments of the comic poet Epicrates of Ambracia (especially fr. 3 K.-A. depicting the once famous and now considerably aged hetaera Lais and fr. 10 K.-A. vividly evoking a scene from Plato's Academy), this paper tries to show in which ways this poet was typical for his age — the so-called “Middle Comedy” with its personnel of slaves, cooks and hetaerae — but also in which ways he may have provided some unique contributions to Attic Comedy.

NOT MUCH HAS BEEN LEFT of the work of the comic poet Epicrates: *Poetae Comici Graeci* volume V exhibits a grand total of eleven fragments (one of which, moreover, is only a dubium), and these fragments once belonged to a grand total of six plays. With two exceptions (the dubium included), all the fragments are found as quotations within the vast deipnological cosmos of the *Deipnosophistai* of Athenaeus of Naucratis — so if we did not have that treasure trove about ancient eating and drinking (and everything that goes with it), we would just have a paltry four verses from just one of Epicrates' plays. Epicrates, in fact, is not the only comic poet who has thus been sort of “saved” by Athenaeus — for at least four others Athenaeus is entirely or almost entirely the only source of fragments today, and for several more, the major part of their remains is found in the *Deipnosophistai*.<sup>1</sup>

It is also to Athenaeus that we owe the explicit ascription of Epicrates to Athenian Middle Comedy (in the introduction of fr. 1). Athenaeus has probably taken this ascription from an Alexandrian source, as it was very likely in Hellenistic Alexandria that the label “Middle Comedy” was coined,<sup>2</sup> and most likely it is ultimately from the great libraries of Alexandria (perhaps through intermediary sources) that Athenaeus was able to get his (all in all)

- 
1. For names and exact numbers, see Nesselrath (2014) 669-671.
  2. See Nesselrath (1990) 172-187.

nine quotations from Epicrates. Though this number may seem small, some of these, in fact, are quite substantial (as fragments go), with the longest comprising more than 35 verses (and the second largest still 21), and we will see that thanks to these sizable chunks of Epicrates' comic poetry some interesting things can still be said about them.

A few hints at contemporary people in Epicrates' not so many fragments also give us some clues as to the times in which he wrote: fr. 3 not only mentions *Lais* — the name of probably two hetaerae (see below) that were active in the last years of the 5th and the first decades of the 4th centuries BC —, but also the important Persian governor Pharnabazus, who was something like a nemesis of the Greeks in Asia Minor during the 390s and 380s; thus fr. 3 probably belongs to a play that was written in the 380s or at least not later than the 370s. On the other hand, fr. 10 mentions not only Plato, but also his pupils Speusippus and Menedemus: Speusippus became the head of the Academy after Plato, and Menedemus almost became his successor when Speusippus died in 339/8 — thus the play of which fr. 10 once was a part (unfortunately its title has not been preserved) probably belongs to the times of the later Plato. Taken together, these dates make it fairly certain that Epicrates' plays were probably written between about 380 and 350 BC. About 25 years ago, I have tried to identify these very decades as the core period of Athenian Middle Comedy, and in fact these fragments exhibit a number of traits that may be called typical of Middle Comedy (though we will also see a few things particular for Epicrates himself). Not untypical of Middle Comedy, moreover, is surely the fact that Epicrates himself is no native Athenian, but hails from Ambracia (modern Arta), a not unimportant town in Northwestern Greece: Epicrates was far from the only non-Athenian who felt attracted by Athens to become a part of its cultural and literary scene (one of Middle Comedy's most important poets, Alexis, came from even farther away), and thus Epicrates is also proof of the growing internationalization of Attic Comedy.<sup>3</sup>

In other ways, too, Epicrates seems to exhibit fairly typical traits for a comic poet who worked in the 380s to 350s of the 4th century BC. One of these traits is the low number of plays with a mythological theme (while such plays had been a real rage during the first decades of the 4th century): Just one of the six plays attested for Epicrates treated a myth — provided that its title *Amazones* is not a metaphorical expression for a particularly belligerent group of women of Epicrates' own time (this may be a rather improbable possibility, but it cannot be totally ruled out either). In any case, the sole

---

3. See Konstantakos (2011) 153-62 and Hartwig (2014) 218-20.

surviving fragment from this play (fr. 1, containing one and a half verses) does not tell us anything worthwhile about its content.

We get some more promising information out of fr. 5. Its eight and a half verses come from a play with the title *Dyspratos*, “The hard-to-be-sold-one”, and it is a probable assumption that this attribute is meant to characterize a slave whose character or behaviour in some ways made it difficult to put him on the market and get a good price for him. Why would that be so? Well, the fragment itself may give us a clue, for its speaker seems to be the very slave who was the title figure: in any case we here have a rather flustered speaker volubly venting his indignation at being treated by his master or mistress (or both) in rather unfair ways:

For what’s more hateful than  
 being summoned “Boy — hey, Boy!” to where they’re drinking  
 and by a beardless youth at that?  
 And to bring the pisspot, and to see  
 half-eaten milk-cakes and bird-meat lying there,  
 of which a slave dare not eat even the leftovers,  
 as the women say. But what makes me crazy with rage is this:  
 they call us “greedy guts” if one of us  
 eats any of this food.

[transl. by Slater / Olson, modified]

These lines may well have come from the first stage-appearance and opening monologue of the title figure of the play, a disgruntled slave who complains about the haughty and insulting treatment he has to suffer from his superiors.<sup>4</sup> If we can judge from both the play title and the lines just quoted, this slave seems to have played a very prominent role in the play (one really would like to know what happened to him in the end), and thus this play of Epicrates might have made an important contribution to the development of a more prominent slave role in Greek comedy. This slave, with whose indignation we can even today sympathize, may actually have been a forerunner of the slaves of New Comedy who rather often display a more interesting (and sometimes also morally better) character than their masters.<sup>5</sup>

We meet another slave in Epicrates fr. 7 (which comes from a play with the somewhat mysterious title *The Trident or The Peddler*). This fragment is a short dialogue, in which someone (probably the slave’s owner) gives the

4. On the curious overlap of this fragment with Antiphanes fr. 89, see Nesselrath (1990) 287-8.

5. For the development of slave-roles in Middle Comedy, see Nesselrath (1990) 283-96.

order “Take trident and lantern”, and a second speaker (very probably his slave) acknowledges this command in a rather curious fashion:

I have something in my right hand — this —,  
 an iron-wrought weapon against sea-denizens  
 and the gleam of the luminescent horn lantern.

He could, of course, simply have said “I have both of them in my right hand, master”, but he chooses to affirm his master’s order with an elaborate circumscription of the two objects he is requested to carry. This is another rather typical trait of Middle Comedy: in numerous fragments coming from more or less the same decades we find this curiously high-flown diction that is rather reminiscent of the so-called Younger Attic Dithyramb. Middle Comic poets apparently loved to use this diction on certain occasions: all in all, it is present in 43 fragments and 37 plays of 12 poets from these times.<sup>6</sup> Why would a comic poet resort to such purple passages? Surely to produce a contrast, and, as we know, very often a contrast lies at the bottom of a comic effect. As far as we can still determine the identity of the speakers of these passages, in numerous cases this dithyrambic language is apparently used by slaves and cooks and thus produces a marked (and certainly intended) contrast to their low life personae. This is surely the intention, too, in this Epicrates fragment: having the slave use such flowery and stilted language adds unexpected flavour to what else would have been a most ordinary everyday scene. Possibly that slave used more of that language in the course of the play and thus came across as a witty and extravagant character, who might — like the slave in *Dyspratos* whom we just looked at — even have played a rather central role.

Besides slaves, Middle Comedy made much use of another member of the lower strata of society, who had not yet had much of a presence in Attic Old Comedy, but thanks to the efforts of Middle Comedy became now rather prominent on the comic stage and who retained this prominence also in New Comedy: the hired cook (today we might perhaps call him a party service impresario).<sup>7</sup> Among the fragments of Middle and New Comedy we

6. See, e.g., Antiphanes fr. 1 from *Agroikos*, fr. 51 from *Hautou erôn*, fr. 55 from *Aphrodisios*, fr. 180 from *Parasitos*, fr. 216 from *Philothebaios*, Axionicus fr. 4 from *Phileuripides*, Anaxandrides fr. 6 from *Aischra*, Alexis fr. 124 from *Kyknos*, fr. 153 from *Milesia*, Epicrates fr. 7 from *Triodous*, Anaxandrides fr. 31 from *Nereus*, Eubulus fr. 42 from *Kampylon*, fr. 56 from *Kybeutai*, Xenarchus fr. 1 from *Butalion*. For a survey of these fragments and plays see Nesselrath (1990) 253 n. 31.

7. For the development of cook-roles in Middle Comedy, see Nesselrath (1990) 297-309.

find many instances of what probably was the entrance monologue of such a cook: it usually consists of an exuberant self-advertisement, as the cook feels the need to draw attention to his unsurpassed excellence in cooking (so that he can draw new customers, of course). Epicrates fr. 6 (four and a half iambic trimeters coming from the play *The Merchant*) most likely belongs to such an entrance monologue, as we have here a cook boasting about his credentials and his singular achievements in cooking:

I am the successor of these people  
 in the profession of cooks. Neither Sicily will be able to boast  
 of producing a chef like me, when it comes to handling fish,  
 nor will Elis, where I have seen cuts of pork  
 — the most beautiful ones — coloured by the tips of the flame.

The boastfulness displayed here is rather typical for Middle Comic cooks: the cook claims to have had the best possible teachers, and he has no qualms about proclaiming himself the best cook alive in the expert treatment of both fish and meat. It is, of course, very much possible — and would certainly have been the source of much laughter — that such a showing-off character got his comeuppance later in the play. In the last words of the fragment (*πυρὸς ἀκμαῖς ἠνθισμένα*, “coloured by the tips of the flame”, i.e. having been roasted to an appetizing brown colour) we again find just a whiff of that same dithyrambic language that was so prominent in the fragment we have just looked at before this one.

Compared to eating, another ubiquitous human activity was surely rather pervasive, too, in Middle (and, later, New) Comedy (though it is not as well represented in the surviving fragments, due to the marked culinary preferences of our main source Athenaeus): love and sex. Epicrates provides evidence for this ageless human preoccupation in fragments from two of his plays. In fr. 8 (four iambic trimeters from a play with the intriguing title “The Chorus”<sup>8</sup>), the speaker seems to be the dissatisfied customer of a procuress; he indignantly complains that he did not get the kind of girl he was promised:

That damned bawd took me in completely,  
 swearing “By Kore, by Artemis,  
 by Persephone”, that the girl was “a heifer, a virgin,  
 an unbroken filly” — in fact, she was a regular mousehole!

---

8. Did some kind of chorus play a major role here? Unfortunately, apart from the title there is no evidence to support this assumption.

Unfortunately, we do not know what role (major or minor) this disappointment played in the course of this play. The fragment is in any case eloquent testimony that Epicrates did not leave out the seedier sides of Greek city life of his day in his plays.

And we would surely have got even more of that in a play that had the intriguing title *Anti-Lais*. This is, by the way, the only play of Epicrates of which we have more than one fragment (in fact there are three), but even these three taken together still do not make it clear what exact meaning the title *Anti-Lais* had.<sup>9</sup> It could mean “*A replacement for Lais | Another Lais*”, but also “*The | A rival of Lais*”.<sup>10</sup> In all these cases the point of reference is the name of one or two<sup>11</sup> of the most famous Greek hetaerae (or high-class prostitutes) of the late 5th and early 4th centuries BC. If in fact there ever were two historical “Laidēs”, in popular imagination they seem rather soon to have been fused into one almost mythical image of a ravishingly beautiful, but also exceedingly rapacious courtesan, who, however, with advancing age also had to cope with dwindling sexual attractiveness and thus diminishing market value. We have a number of explicit references to “historical” Greek courtesans (or prostitutes) in other fragments of Greek Middle Comedy,<sup>12</sup> but probably nowhere else in extant Greek literature has the image of the aging and once-famous courtesan found more graphic expression than in Epicrates fr. 3; this fragment also happens to be the second longest one of this poet, as it comprises 21 iambic trimeters. It begins with a rather unfavourable description of the once famous hetaira Lais, who in her old age is only a pitiful shadow of her former proud self, and this description makes vivid use of an extended (almost “epic”) simile (vv. 1-9):

Lais herself is a lazy drunk,  
intent only on drinking and eating every day.  
She suffered the same fate, I think,  
as the eagles do: when they're young,  
they eat sheep and hares from the mountains,  
snatching them up into the sky through their strength.  
But when they eventually grow old, then ...  
they just perch on the top of the temples, terribly hungry,  
and then this is regarded as a portent.

---

9. Cephisodorus, a somewhat older comic poet, also wrote an *Antilais*; but of this play we only have the title and not even one fragment.

10. On such assumptions, see now Casevitz (2009) 211.

11. See Strothmann (1999).

12. See Nesselrath (1990) 319f.

The speaker now applies this to Lais and takes a look back into her “wild-er” youthful days, when in her own way she was just as rapacious as those eagles (v. 10-13):

And now Lais might be properly considered a portent:  
for when she was still a young chick,  
she was driven wild by staters [i.e. large coins],  
and you would have got an audience more easily with Pharnabazus  
than with her.

The comparison in the last verse means that the young Lais could afford to display all the haughtiness and inaccessibility of a Persian satrap like Pharnabazus (who as governor of Phrygia played a very important role in the conflicts between Greeks and Persians at the end of the 5th and during the first decade of the 4th centuries BC). This comparison also serves as contrast for the rather depressing depiction of the present state of a Lais grown old and ugly (in vv. 14-21):

But now that she's running the long-distance race in years,  
and is losing the harmonious forms of her body,  
seeing her is easier than spitting.  
She goes out everywhere to drink  
and accepts both large and little coins,  
and she lets have sex with her both old and young men —  
she's grown so tame, my dear friend,  
that she now takes the money right out of your hand.

At what point in the play and by whom were these verses spoken? As the address “my dear friend” in v. 20 makes clear, the lines are spoken in conversation with someone who may in the beginning have enquired about Lais and her present condition, because he had heard very much already about this famous woman — this might even have been the reason for him to come to this place. If this conjecture at least comes close to the “truth”, my next assumption would be that the play does not take place at Athens but at Corinth, because that was the “working area” of both the historical Laidēs we know of. Furthermore the description of Lais' current state presented in fr. 3 might be most appropriate for an early phase of the play, setting out the way things are with respect to Lais. If the man addressed in v. 20 had come because he had hoped to “meet” the famous Lais, he would have been rather disappointed

— but then he might have been alerted to the fact that he need not despair, because there was now in fact an adequate (or more than adequate?) replacement for the aged hetaera: the “Antilais” of the title! I have to admit, of course, that all of this is rather speculative, but it would at least make good sense of the title. And this “new Lais” may be the speaker of fr. 4 (just two iambic trimeters):

These are the love lyrics I’ve learned by heart completely:  
those of Sappho, Meletus, Cleomenes, and Lamynthius.

With these lines, the “new Lais” may present her “credentials” and point out that she is as fully equipped (in matters of erotic lore) as the old one, and this “new Lais” may have presented an interesting new figure of a (fictive) hetaera, which may have been a forerunner of a number of colourful hetaerae as we find them later on in New Comedy.<sup>13</sup>

So these two fragments may us give at last a vague idea how this play might have started, though what its further developments could have been must remain very much in the dark — could it be possible that the much derided Lais herself appeared at some point on the stage and proved that she was not nearly as decrepit as our speaker of fr. 3 had claimed that she was?

There remains one further fragment to explore and one further topic to discuss that every now and then surfaces in the fragments of Middle Comedy, but (as far as I can see) gets nowhere else the same amount of attention as in the last and longest fragment of Epicrates which will be discussed now and will be the highlight of this paper: philosophy and how it was tackled in mid-fourth century Athens.

This fragment 10 of Epicrates comprises 37 verses, most of which are so-called anapaestic “dimeters” (with some iambic trimeters and anapaestic tetrameters in between). It preserves a part of a conversation from an unknown play, in which speaker A inquires about what the Athenian philosopher Plato and his pupils Speusippus and Menedemus are up to these days, and speaker B gives him (and, by extension, us) a vivid and graphic description of how Plato in his later days practises analytic dihaereses in his Academy: most interestingly, as the subject of this exercise he has chosen a pumpkin.<sup>14</sup>

Apart from its peculiar subject, this fragment stands out for a number of additional reasons. One of the most conspicuous of these is its rather unique

---

13. For the development of the role of the hetaera in Middle Comedy, see Nesselrath (1990) 318-30.

14. Nesselrath (1990) 277.

composite metrical form, consisting of some iambic trimeters, some anapaestic tetrameters and (the lion's share) so-called anapaestic dimeters. Now this latter feature is again a very typical trait of Middle Comic poets: there is a remarkable frequency of anapaestic dimeters in the still extant comic fragments of the first half of the 4th century, with 20 fragments coming from 16 plays written by poets who were active during these decades; anapaestic dimeters are, in fact, the most frequently used metre in Middle Comedy apart from iambics and trochaics.<sup>15</sup> Again it is often cooks and slaves who utter these sometimes very long series of recitative verses, the metre of which may have stood out rather conspicuously from the more low-key verses of the rest of the play. So, with such anapaestic dimeters, Epicrates would reproduce another rather typical feature of Middle Comedy, but he does so with a remarkable (and singular) twist: he uses them within a dialogue.

This dialogue begins — at least in the verses here preserved (it may, of course have started before) — with a number of questions by speaker A (v. 1-7):

What about Plato  
and Speusippus and Menedemus?  
What are they spending time on now?  
What deep thought, what discourse  
is being explored at their establishment?  
Give me an insightful account of these things, if you  
have come with any knowledge of them, by the Earth, ...

Speaker B then obliges this request as well as he can and starts with the description of a public philosophical discussion, in which Plato and a number of his pupils were involved and in which an unexpected and thus comic subject was brought up (v. 8-17):

Well, I know enough to give a clear report of these things.  
For at the Panathenaea I saw a herd  
... of youths  
in the exercise grounds of the Academy,  
and I heard unspeakably strange discussions!  
For they were attempting definitions of natural phenomena  
and trying to differentiate the life of animals

---

15. Examples: Anaxandrides fr. 42 from *Protesilaos*, Ehippus fr. 5 from *Geryones*, fr. 12-13 from *Kydon*, Antiphanes fr. 130-131 from *Kyklops*, Eubulus fr. 63 from *Lakones*, Mnesimachus fr. 4 from *Hippotrophos*. See Nesselrath (1990) 267-280.

and the nature of trees and the genuses of vegetables.  
 And in the course of these discussions it was the — pumpkin,  
 the genus of which they tried to decide.

At this point speaker A cuts in and asks for more details (v. 18-19):

And how did they define it and what genus (they supposed)  
 the plant to have? Reveal this, if you have any information!

Speaker B now gives a very vivid account, which again has an unexpected  
 and wonderfully comic twist at the end (v. 20-29):

Well, first of all they all, without a word,  
 just stood there and, bowing their heads,  
 they thought and thought for quite some time.  
 Then suddenly — while the (other) lads  
 were still bowing their heads and seeking a solution —  
 one said that it was a round vegetable,  
 another: a type of grass, and a third: a tree.  
 When hearing this, a doctor  
 from the land of Sicily —  
 farted on them for talking nonsense.

Hearing of this shocking interruption of the philosophical discussion,  
 Speaker A naturally imagines that the young philosophers were more than a  
 little upset, and therefore he asks (v. 30-31):

So, did they get they terribly angry? Did they shout they were being mocked?  
 For that is not a fitting thing<sup>16</sup> to do in such discussions!

Speaker B, however, can reassuringly deny this and then introduces the cul-  
 minating point of the scene, i.e. the entrance of Plato himself (v. 32-37):

It did not even bother these boys.  
 And Plato was there and quite gently,  
 not at all upset, he ordered them  
 again ...  
 to try to define the genus,  
 and they went on to make differentiations.

---

16. I follow here K.-A.'s tentative suggestion for restoring the anapaestic tetrameter in this  
 verse, the second half of which is clearly corrupt.

At this point the fragment breaks off: we might expect here either an exclamation from speaker A expressing admiration and/or wonder or even further questions on his part; but what came after that, we cannot even begin to surmise.

It is a pity that the title of the play in which this wonderful scene once stood has not been preserved (it comes from a part of Athenaeus' long work which itself survives only in epitomized form). I myself have wondered a long time ago<sup>17</sup> whether it might have belonged to either *The Merchant* or to *Antilais* because the scenic background of both these plays might possibly not have been Athens, and it seems quite clear that the same is the case in this fragment: otherwise, speaker A would not have had to ask what things were happening at the Platonic Academy — as things are, speaker B may just have arrived from Athens, where he attended the famous Panathenaea (see v. 9), and can now tell what he saw. The place where this dialogue unfolds might conceivably be a Doric-speaking town, as speaker A underlines his request to hear about the Academy's doings with the Doric formula  $\pi\rho\delta\varsigma \gamma\tilde{\alpha}\varsigma$  ("by the Earth") in v. 7.<sup>18</sup> Epicrates may, of course, have used non-Athenian background also in other (i.e. not preserved) plays, and so fr. 10 may well belong to a play the title of which has been lost. In any case it is a nice twist to give Athenian spectators a description of a very Athenian phenomenon (i.e. Plato's Academy) from a non-Athenian perspective.

There is, however, yet another thing to discover, which (to my knowledge) has not yet been highlighted in scholarly literature: the rather subtle employment of various metres in this fragment. We have already seen that the fragment belongs to a group of fragments (rather typical of Middle Comedy) that extensively use anapaestic dimeters — but in a way rather different from these other fragments, Epicrates fr. 10 uses other metres as well, and it does so apparently in a rather deliberate fashion. While speaker B always uses anapaestic dimeters, speaker A does not, but changes metres in a way that seems to correspond to his "emotional involvement" in the scene. He begins in fact with anapaestic dimeters himself, i.e. on an elevated level of speech that may signify his attentive curiosity and emphasize his eager questioning (v. 1-7 in Greek):

17. Nesselrath (1990) 277.

18. From the Doric elements in this verse and v. 28 Desrousseau (in his Athenaeus edition, ad loc.) wanted to conclude that the fragment belonged to the play *The Chorus*, because in fr. 8 we have Doric linguistic elements; but this is a very weak argument (see K.-A. ad loc.).

τί Πλάτων  
καὶ Σπεύσιππος καὶ Μενέδημος;  
πρὸς τίσι νυνὶ διατρίβουσιν;  
ποία φροντίς, ποῖος δὲ λόγος  
διερευνᾶται παρὰ τοῖσιν;  
τάδε μοι πιτυτῶς, εἴ τι κατειδῶς  
ἤκεις, λέξον πρὸς γὰς (~~ ~).

Then speaker B takes his report up to the point where he has to reveal that this solemn philosophical discussion in fact centered on — a pumpkin (v. 8-17):

ἀλλ' οἶδα λέγειν περὶ τῶνδε σαφῶς.  
Παναθηναίοις γὰρ ἰδὼν ἀγέλην  
(~~ ~~~ ~~~) μειρακίων  
ἐν γυμνασίοις Ἀκαδημείας  
ἤκουσα λόγων ἀφάτων, ἀτόπων·  
περὶ γὰρ φύσεως ἀφοριζόμενοι  
διεχώριζον ζώων τε βίον  
δένδρων τε φύσιν λαχάνων τε γένη.  
καὶ τ' ἐν τούτοις τὴν — κολοκύντην  
ἐξήταζον τίνας ἐστὶ γένους.

Could we imagine that this unexpected topic considerably deflated the expectations of speaker A and that he therefore now continues in a much more pedestrian metre, i.e. the iambic trimeter? Because that is what he now does, as he asks what the results of this pumpkinology were (v. 18-19):

καὶ τί ποτ' ἄρ' ὠρίσαντο καὶ τίνας γένους  
εἶναι τὸ φυτόν; δῆλωσον, εἰ κάτοισθά τι.

But his curiosity (as well as that of the spectators) is surely raised to another level, as speaker B describes the earnest efforts of the Academy's disciples to get a grip on the right classification of the pumpkin and then has to tell how these efforts unexpectedly meet with the derisive farts of the doctor from Sicily (v. 20-29):

πρώτιστα μὲν (οὔν) πάντες ἀνανδεῖς  
τότ' ἐπέστησαν, καὶ κύναντες  
χρόνον οὐκ ὀλίγον διεφρόντιζον.

*κᾶτ' ἐξαίφνης, ἔτι κυπτόντων  
καὶ ζητούντων τῶν μειρακίων,  
λάχανόν τις ἔφη στρογγύλον εἶναι,  
ποιάν δ' ἄλλος, δένδρον δ' ἕτερος.  
ταῦτα δ' ἀκούων ἰατρός τις  
Σικελᾶς ἀπὸ γᾶς —  
κατέπαρδ' αὐτῶν ὡς ληρούντων.*

By this scandalous revelation, the attention and curiosity of speaker A indeed seem to be raised anew: he seems to expect that the doctor's impudent behaviour might have incited a brawl between him and the offended philosopher-apprentices, and therefore his questions evoking these expectations are now put in anapaestic tetrametres, a metre very much used by Old Comedy and there quite often in scenes of confrontation and conflict (v. 30-31):

*ἦ που δεινῶς ὠργίσθησαν χλευάζεσθαί τ' ἐβόησαν;  
τὸ γὰρ ἐν λέσχαις τοιαῖσδε ποιεῖν τοιαῦτ' (οὐκ) εὐπρεπές (ἔστιν).*

As we have seen, speaker B's continuing report (in anapaestic dimeters) may once again have thwarted such expectations, as the expected brawl does not materialize; on the other side, the entrance now of grand master Plato himself may also have provoked some renewed expression of admiration and wonder from speaker A — but that, unfortunately, has not been preserved.

All in all, I would not hesitate to call fr. 10 a little masterpiece: not only do we get a kind of “eyewitness account” of the workings of the Academy in Plato's latter years, but we can also see that the poet has (it seems) quite deliberately employed various metres to highlight the changing moods of a speaker during a conversation.

To sum up: With six (or perhaps seven or eight) attested plays and ten (or eleven) preserved fragments, Epicrates may be a fairly ordinary representative of Athenian Middle Comedy (he certainly exhibits a number of traits that gave Middle Comedy its peculiar appearance). His description, however, of the aging hetaera Lais in fr. 3 and even more his extraordinary depiction of Plato's Academy in fr. 10 constitute some unique contributions to the wonderful world of Greek comedy, and our knowledge of it would be poorer without them.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Casevitz, M., (2009), “Sur un fragment d’Épicratès”, *Pallas* 81, 210-213.
- Hartwig, A. (2014), “The Evolution of Comedy in the Fourth Century”, in: E. Csapo / H. R. Goette / J. R. Green / P. Wilson (edd.), *Greek Theatre in the Fourth Century B.C.*, Berlin / Boston, 207-227.
- Konstantakos, I. (2011), “Conditions of Playwriting and the Comic Dramatist’s Craft in the Fourth Century”, *Logeion* 1, 145-183.
- Nesselrath, H.-G. (1990), *Die attische Mittlere Komödie. Ihre Stellung in der antiken Literaturkritik und Literaturgeschichte*, Berlin / New York.
- Nesselrath, H.-G. (2014), “Later Greek Comedy in Later Antiquity”, in: M. Fontaine / A. Scafuro (edd.), *The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Comedy*, Oxford, 667-679.
- Strothmann, M. (1999), “Lais 1 + 2”, *DNP* 6, 1067-1068.

GEORG-AUGUST-UNIVERSITÄT GÖTTINGEN  
HeinzGuenther.Nesselrath@phil.uni-goettingen.de