

CONDITIONS OF PLAYWRITING AND THE COMIC
DRAMATIST'S CRAFT IN THE FOURTH CENTURY*



1. *Aristophanes' last years and the new trends of comedy*

The first few decades of the 4th century B.C. were a period of fluidity and transition for Attic comedy. During this time a number of developments were initiated, which proved crucial for the transformation of comic poetics and gradually led to the emergence of a new kind of comic drama. Aristophanes' last extant plays date from this period: *Ecclesiazusae* was most probably produced in 392 or 391, *Wealth* in 388. Both these comedies are still quite close to their author's previous, 5th-century output in terms of content, plot and dramatic structure. Their action is based on a fantastic idea put into practice by the hero or heroine, as usually in mainstream Old Comedy: women seize political authority and establish a new, communistically organized regime in Athens (*Ecclesiazusae*); an Attic farmer miraculously restores the eyesight of the blind god Ploutos, who thus becomes capable of distinguishing honest men from crooks and frequents only the former (*Wealth*). The second part of both plays comprises a series of loosely bound scenes illus-

* An earlier version of this essay appeared in Greek as “Το κωμικό θέατρο από τον 4ο αιώνα στην ελληνιστική περίοδο. Εξελικτικές τάσεις και συνθήκες παραγωγής”, *EEAth* 57 (2005–2006) 47–101. For the present publication it was substantially revised and enriched with new material. I am greatly obliged to Stavros Tsitsiridis for his valuable remarks and bibliographical aid. Comic fragments are cited from the edition of R. Kassel – C. Austin, *Poetae Comici Graeci*, vol. I–VIII, Berlin/New York 1983–2001.

trating the amusing practical results of the hero's fantastic plan. It thus has the same lax structure as the latter part of many 5th-century Aristophanic plays (e.g. *Acharnians*, *Peace*, *Birds*). The *Wealth* also includes among its cast of characters personified allegories or abstract concepts (Wealth, Poverty) and Olympian gods (Hermes), who converse and interact with the human heroes. Both comedies are intrinsically bound with the public life and affairs of Athens. Although the main focus is now on the social and economic aspects of civic life (notably on the distribution of wealth and property), at least the *Ecclesiazusae* pay a fair amount of attention to purely political matters, such as the problems of government and the political leadership of the city. The changes traceable in these two early 4th-century plays essentially concern formal aspects. The epirrhematic parts (*parabasis* and *agon*), which were capital ingredients of 5th-century comic drama, have been eliminated or severely curtailed. Also, the chorus plays a much smaller part in the action and performance than in earlier times: in the *Wealth*, in particular, apart from the *parodos*, no further choral songs are included in the text of the play. Even the chorus' involvement in the dialogue with the actors is meagre (see below, section 4).¹ In all other respects, however, Aristophanes remains faithful to his earlier practices; his dramaturgy has changed little since the 5th century.

Nonetheless, there are indications that Aristophanes was somewhat old-fashioned in these two comedies by comparison to the broader reality of his contemporary theatre — a veteran dramatist, still self-consciously or even obstinately sticking to the habits and modes of the preceding century, while the comic drama of his time was moving towards new directions. One such indication is provided by an ancient hypothesis of the *Wealth* (Hypoth. III, p. 270 Wilson) recording the programme of the festival at which this latter play was performed in 388 B.C. Aristophanes' play competed with Nikochares' *Lakones*, Aristomenes' *Admetos*, Nikophon's *Adonis* and Alkaios' *Pasiphaë*. To judge by the titles, three out of the five comedies of that occasion were mythological burlesques, i.e. full-scale comic treatments of traditional mythical

1. On these formal changes see handily A.H. Sommerstein, *The Comedies of Aristophanes*, vol. 10: *Ecclesiazusae*, Warminster 1998, 22–25; id., *The Comedies of Aristophanes*, vol. 11: *Wealth*, Warminster 2001, 23–24.

figures and stories.² This was apparently the most fashionable genre of comic drama in the early decades of the 4th century: its heyday started around 400 and lasted until the 340s. During these six decades the genre exercised enormous appeal on Athenian audiences and lots of mythological plays were presented on the comic stage by illustrious and lesser known poets alike.³ The burlesque of myth was therefore the predominant trend in the comic theatre at the twilight of Aristophanes' career. Yet, the ageing poet kept reproducing the same kind of fantastic and publicly focused comedy that he had cultivated for decades, since his early youth. His output would presumably appear somewhat out of date amidst the new wave of mythological plays that increasingly commanded the applause of the spectators and the labours of younger playwrights.

Another indication of Aristophanes' relative backwardness comes from a particular class of archaeological objects: the terracotta figurines representing comic characters, which are widely diffused throughout the Greek-speaking world. The earliest such figurines date back to the end of the 5th or the early 4th century, and their production continued until deep into the Hellenistic age. One of their most interesting features is the standardization of comic personages: the figurines clearly represent stock comic types that recurred in play after play. For instance, a famous group of statuettes, including personages of various ages and classes (old and young, male and female, free men and slaves), first appears around 400 B.C., and then specimens of it are regularly reproduced for a long time: multiple copies or variants of its figures have been found in many places, both in Attica and elsewhere, dating down to the 330s or 320s.⁴

2. Cf. H.-G. Nesselrath, *Die attische Mittlere Komödie. Ihre Stellung in der antiken Literaturkritik und Literaturgeschichte*, Berlin/New York 1990, 190–204.

3. On mythological burlesque in 4th-century comedy see Nesselrath, *Mittlere Komödie*, 188–241; F. Casolari, *Die Mythentravestie in der griechischen Komödie*, Münster 2003, 23–25, 127–183, 214–225, 249–295; I.M. Konstantakos, “Comedy in the Fourth Century I: Mythological Burlesques”, in A. Scafuro – M. Fontaine (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Comedy*, Oxford/New York (forthcoming), with further bibliography.

4. This is the famous “New York Group”, named after a set of fourteen figurines found in a grave in Athens; see T.B.L. Webster – J.R. Green, *Monuments Illustrating Old and Middle Comedy*, London ³1978, 45–60; J.R. Green, *Theatre in Ancient Greek So-*

Clearly, these widespread figurines cannot represent the cast of a specific comic play, because no single comedy could enjoy such geographical diffusion and long-standing popularity, spanning decades of time and a wide diversity of regions. They must be stereotyped, stock personages that may reappear in a multitude of plays, each time incorporated in a different plot but always retaining a permanent dramatic identity, distinguished by a core of standard characteristics and performing the same fundamental roles. This explains the capacious dissemination and long life of the terracotta figurines: they are not connected with one or the other particular play but represent the genre of comedy in general, through its sundry typified characters. Their facial traits and hair-styles are also stereotyped and point to a standard repertoire of comic masks, from which the spectator might distinguish each character's social position and dramatic role (slave or free citizen, young lover, parasite, citizen's wife or daughter, hetaira, old nurse etc.).⁵

The standardization of characters also entails, of course, a number of stereotyped plot patterns or situations, which should recur in an extensive repertoire of plays. For example, the old nurse holding an infant in her arms (one of the figures of the "New York Group") indicates that the infant has a part to play in the action and suggests certain probable scenarios (seduction of a woman, illegitimate birth of the child, and final recognition). The presence of hetairai among the terracotta characters points to a love plot, with a lover or lovers involved with the hetaira and their amorous interests and intrigues. The figure of a slave sitting on an altar (common in comic terracottas from about 375 onwards)⁶ implies that the slave has tricked his master or other persons and is now taking refuge on the altar in order to avoid punishment.

ciety, London/New York 1994, 34–38, 63, 80–81; E. Csapo – W.J. Slater, *The Context of Ancient Drama*, Ann Arbor 1994, 70–71.

5. On the stereotypic character of the terracotta figures and its implications cf. Green, *Theatre*, 34–38, 71–76, 80–81; N.W. Slater, "The Fabrication of Comic Illusion", in G.W. Dobrov (ed.), *Beyond Aristophanes. Transition and Diversity in Greek Comedy*, Atlanta 1995, 37.
6. See Webster – Green, *Monuments*, nos. AT 66, 98, 110, 111, ST 9, 23, 24; cf. AT 15 and 22 from the "New York Group", which represent seated slaves, although it is not clear if they are sitting on an altar.

It thus seems that already from about 400 B.C. comedy was evolving towards a new form and range of themes. The old, “Aristophanic” type of comic play, with its fantastic plots, freedom of invention and characters that were caricatures of actual contemporary figures, was rapidly declining. Its place was taken by a comedy of stock characters and recurring plot patterns, with themes chiefly drawn from contemporary private life (domestic or family matters, love affairs and *dolce vita*). In other words, the kind of play later associated with New Comedy and Menander was already being developed from the beginning of the 4th century. The fact that Aristophanes’ *Ecclesiazusae* and *Wealth* adhere to the model of 5th-century comedy indicates that the old poet was clinging to a rather outdated type of drama and lagging behind the latest vogues of his time.

Yet, in his two final comedies, *Kokalos* and *Aiolosikon*, produced after the *Wealth* in the 380s,⁷ Aristophanes seems to have acceded at last to the fashions of his contemporary comic theatre. Both these plays were mythological burlesques, apparently offering wholesale parody of tragic dramas. The *Kokalos* drew inspiration from Sophocles’ *Kamikoi* and travestied the story of Daidalos, who took refuge with King Kokalos in Sicily, in order to escape the persecution of Minos. The *Aiolosikon* parodied Euripides’ famous tragedy *Aiolos*, with the title-figure being a hilarious amalgam of the mythical Aiolos, the lord of the winds, and Sikon, a typical comic cook.⁸ Thus, Aristophanes ultimately took up the

7. The *Kokalos* was produced in the Dionysia of 387. The second *Aiolosikon* (presumably a revision of an undatable earlier play of the same title) must have been staged after *Kokalos*, at the very end of Aristophanes’ dramatic career. See P. Geissler, *Chronologie der altattischen Komödie*, Dublin/Zürich ²1969, viii, xviii, 2, 76–77; T. Gelzer, “Aristophanes (12)”, *RE Suppl.* XII (1970) 1412–1414; Kassel – Austin, *Poetae*, III.2, 34, 201.

8. On the themes and content of these plays see G. Murray, *Aristophanes. A Study*, Oxford 1933, 207–209; F. Wehrli, *Motivstudien zur griechischen Komödie*, Zürich/Leipzig 1936, 17–19; W. Schmid, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur*, vol. I.4, München 1946, 221–222; T.B.L. Webster, *Studies in Later Greek Comedy*, Manchester ²1970, 17–18; H.-G. Nesselrath, “Parody and Later Greek Comedy”, *HSPH* 95 (1993) 181–183, 187–190; Casolari, *Mythentravestie*, 169–176; T. Mangidis, *Antiphanes’ Mythentravestien*, Frankfurt a.M. 2003, 71–73; A. Bowie, “Myth in Aristophanes”, in R.D. Woodard (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Mythology*, Cambridge 2007, 195–197.

genre of mythical comic drama that was adored by audiences and enthusiastically pursued by younger poets in the early 4th century. His final plays also contained other neoteric elements. According to an ancient biography of the poet, the plot of the *Kokalos* included “a rape and recognition”, and in this way the play became a model for the new type of comedy later cultivated by Menander and Philemon.⁹ The rape indicates a love affair, perhaps an amorous liaison between Daidalos and one of Kokalos’ daughters, while the recognition possibly took place between Daidalos and his persecutor Minos. Even though its exact treatment and role in Aristophanes’ play are not known, the love interest definitely foreshadows a new type of comic composition, which was to be fully developed in the following decades. It tallies better with the rising comedy of stock characters and private affairs than anything else in the entire corpus of Aristophanes’ earlier plays. The *Aiolosikon* perhaps exploited similar motifs of love and recognition.¹⁰ In the last years of his activity,

-
9. *Vita Aristophanis*, Prolegomenon XXVIII 50–55 (p. 135 Koster): ἐγένετο δὲ καὶ αἴτιος ζήλου τοῖς νέοις κωμικοῖς, λέγω δὴ Φιλίμοι καὶ Μενάνδρω. (...) ἔγραψε κωμῶδιαν τινὰ Κώκαλον, ἐν ᾗ εἰσάγει φθορὰν καὶ ἀναγνωρισμὸν καὶ ἄλλα πάντα, ἃ ἐξήλωσε Μενάνδρος.
10. Euripides’ *Aiolos* concerned the incestuous love between two of Aiolos’ children, his son Makareus and his daughter Kanake. Makareus raped his sister, leaving her pregnant; when Aiolos discovered this illicit liaison, Kanake killed herself in shame and Makareus probably followed suit; see R. Kannicht, *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, vol. V: *Euripides*, Göttingen 2004, 158–173; F. Jouan – H. van Looy, *Euripide*, vol. VIII: *Fragments 1^{re} partie. Aigeus–Autolykos*, Paris 1998, 15–37; Mangidis, *Antiphanes*, 64–71. If this amorous affair between the two siblings was included in Aristophanes’ parody (as it was later included in Antiphanes’ *Aiolos*, another mythological burlesque based on the Euripidean drama, see Antiphanes fr. 19), Aristophanes would doubtless be obliged to change its tragic outcome, in accordance with the generic conventions of comedy (cf. Nesselrath, *Mittlere Komödie*, 208–209; Mangidis, *Antiphanes*, 73, 81; Bowie, “Myth”, 197). Indeed, the writers of mythological burlesques, when dramatizing originally grievous myths, seem to have regularly provided them with happy endings, replacing the traditional killings and suicides with reconciliation of enemies and general contentment (see Arist. *Poet.* 1453a 30–39 and the relevant remarks of Konstantakos, “Mythological Burlesques”). According to this practice, in the finale of the *Aiolosikon* the two siblings, far from committing suicide, should have been happily united with each other. For the implementation of such an ending, some kind of recognition would have been necessary. Makareus’ love for Kanake was abominable because the two of them were siblings. But if one of them was

the grand master of Attic comedy followed the vogue created by playwrights of a younger generation and adapted his productions to their novelties — perhaps somewhat like Shakespeare, who emulated, towards the end of his career, the new genre of tragicomic romance, developed and popularized by his junior dramatists Beaumont and Fletcher.

As the 4th century progressed, the new tendencies were reinforced. By the time of Menander's debut, in the late 320s, the type of domestic comedy had dominated the mainstream comic production, apparently casting out all other forms of comic drama. Now the universe of comedy is radically different from the world of the Aristophanic plays. The core of the plot consists in a love affair between a young man and a girl, and the dramatic action is fuelled by the young man's attempts to be united with his beloved. The storyline moves entirely within the sphere of the verisimilar and the humanly possible, without fantastic concepts and supernatural endeavours. All characters are ordinary men and women, like those one would actually encounter in contemporary Athenian society. The only exceptions are certain minor gods or deified abstractions (such as Chance, Drunkenness, Anger etc.), whose appearance is restricted to the prologue. They may appear as prologue-speakers and expound the background of the play in a narrative monologue, but after that they disappear from the action and do not interact at all with the human personages. The comic dramatists show considerable care for the delineation of characters, highlighting their moral constitution and investing them with verisimilitude and lifelikeness; occasionally, they may even bring out part of their personages' inner self, endowing them with some kind of psychological perspective. Playwrights also expend a great deal of en-

finally revealed not to be genuine progeny of Aiolos but a supposititious child or a foundling of different parentage, then the union between the two lovers would become perfectly viable. The same result would be achieved if one of the two siblings proved to be born of a different mother, even though Aiolos was the natural father of both: in classical Athens marriage was allowed between a half-brother and his half-sister from a different mother. So, Aristophanes only needed to engineer a recognition bringing to light either of the two aforementioned possibilities, so as to secure a happy ending for his comedy, with Makareus and Kanake celebrating their wedding amidst Aiolosikon's blessings and cooking preparations. In that case, the *Aiolosikon* would include both a love affair (entailing a maiden's rape) and a recognition, just like the *Kokalos*.

ergy in fashioning the plot, striving to make it complicated and thrilling. The loosely bound strings of incidents that characterized the Aristophanic plays are now avoided. The plot evolves through a tightly knit sequence of events, closely bound together by causality and following each other according to the principles of plausibility and necessity, until the happy ending is reached. Artfully devised intrigues, sudden reversals and surprises, or amusing misunderstandings and coincidences lend suspense and keep the spectators alert. Sometimes, the plot of New Comedy plays is exceedingly subtle and complex, so much that it becomes difficult to memorize in all its details or to summarize without doing injustice to its intricacy. Obviously, the audiences of that time enjoyed these elaborate comic complications — just as French audiences of the rococo age adored the intricate plots of Marivaux and Beaumarchais. The subject-matter of the comedy regards exclusively private affairs and does not touch upon the public life of the city. In short, by the last decades of the 4th century the new trends discussed above brought about a complete metamorphosis of the comic theatre.

The developments leading to this metamorphosis became fully operative in the period from about 380 to the 330s or 320s, the so-called “Middle Comedy”, a time of great productivity and diversity for the Athenian comic theatre.¹¹ To determine the causes of these develop-

-
11. The fullest study of the comic drama of this period is Nesselrath, *Mittlere Komödie*; the best brief overview is offered by E.W. Handley, “Comedy”, in P.E. Easterling – B.M.W. Knox (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, vol. I: *Greek Literature*, Cambridge 1985, 398–414. Other useful discussions are A. Meineke, *Fragmenta Comicorum Graecorum*, vol. I: *Historia Critica Comicorum Graecorum*, Berlin 1839, 271–304; A. Körte, “Komödie”, *RE* XI 1 (1921) 1256–1266; G. Norwood, *Greek Comedy*, London 1931, 37–58; K. Lever, “Middle Comedy. Neither Old nor New but Contemporary”, *CJ* 49 (1953–1954) 167–181; Webster, *Studies*, 1–97; W.G. Arnott, “From Aristophanes to Menander”, *G&R* n.s. 19 (1972) 65–80; M. Landfester, “Geschichte der griechischen Komödie”, in G.A. Seeck (ed.), *Das griechische Drama*, Darmstadt 1979, 375–384; R.L. Hunter, *Eubulus. The Fragments*, Cambridge 1983, 4–6, 20–30; K.J. Dover, *Greek and the Greeks. Collected Papers*, Oxford 1987, 212–216; W.G. Arnott, *Alexis: The Fragments. A Commentary*, Cambridge 1996, 18–24; B. Zimmermann, *Die griechische Komödie*, Düsseldorf/Zürich 1998, 202–215; Konstantakos, “Κωμικό θέατρο”; A. Papachrysostomou, *Six Comic Poets. A Commentary on Selected Fragments of Middle Comedy*, Tübingen 2008, 10–28.

ments in comic poetics is of course a capital issue for the history of ancient drama. In this essay it will be argued that one of the main causes lies in certain important professional changes, which affected the conditions under which comic dramatists worked, the audiences to which they wished to appeal, and generally the professional aims they were striving to achieve with their playwriting.

2. *Pan-Hellenization and its effects on the dramatists' working conditions*

The most influential process, which must have decisively conditioned the form of comic drama in the 4th century, was the “pan-Hellenization” or “internationalization” of Athenian comic theatre, i.e. its diffusion in virtually the entire Hellenic world. Already from the early decades of the 4th century, Attic comedy was widely spread outside Athens and became popular in many Greek-speaking areas. Its diffusion is first attested by archaeological finds from this period, a multitude of theatrical objects discovered in sundry Greek regions. Terracotta figurines representing stock comic characters, such as those mentioned in section 1, have been unearthed in numerous places, from mainland Greece (Delphi, Corinth) to the Aegean islands and the cities of Asia Minor, and from South Italy and Sicily to South Russia and Cyrenaica. In most cases, these statuettes reproduce types of personages first attested in Athens and must therefore be assumed to derive from Athenian prototypes: either they have been imported from Athens to the areas of discovery, or they are locally fabricated copies of Athenian models.¹² The terracottas thus testify to the great popularity of Athenian comic drama in all the regions listed above. They also probably indicate local performances of Attic comedies. Indeed, in many of these regions the terracotta figurines have been discovered in great quantities, which clearly imply a large local demand, i.e. a wide local public interested in buying them. The figurines primarily functioned as souvenirs of performances: in other words, they were destined for fans of the theatre, and so the public demanding them must

12. On these terracottas see in general Green, *Theatre*, 34–38, 64–65, 69–76; id., “Theatre Production: 1987–1995”, *Lustrum* 37 (1995) 151–153; Csapo – Slater, *Context*, 55, 70–71.

have been made up of theatre-lovers.¹³ The existence of such a public, and a large one, in any given place unavoidably presupposes a living tradition of local theatrical productions. And since the figurines go back to Athenian prototypes, representing stock personages of Attic comedy, the repertoire of those local theatrical events must have largely consisted of Athenian comic plays.

Another class of archaeological evidence comprises a large number of vases found in South Italy and depicting scenes from a kind of comic drama. These vases date from about 400–325 B.C. and were formerly thought to illustrate a local Italiote genre of popular farce, the *phlyakes* (hence their persistent, though conventional, appellation in scholarship, “the phlyax vases”). Groundbreaking research in the 1990s conclusively proved that some of the scenes depicted come from Athenian comedies: one vase-painting obviously illustrates an episode from Aristophanes’ *Thesmophoriazusae*; in others the personages are accompanied by inscriptions of their names, which are purely Attic in form, or by words emanating from their mouths, composed again in pure Attic dialect — not in the Doric dialect typical of the South Italian theatrical tradition. On this basis, it is plausible to assume that a great part of these vase-paintings are inspired by contemporary performances of Athenian comedies in various places of South Italy, given by local or itinerant troupes.¹⁴ Even if some vase-paintings are connected with local plays composed by South Italian dramatists, it is very likely that this form of regional drama has been strongly influenced by Athenian comedy. In ei-

13. Cf. the perspicacious remarks of Green, *Theatre*, 38.

14. See T.B.L. Webster, “South Italian Vases and Attic Drama”, *CQ* 42 (1948) 15–27 (a lone forerunner); E. Csapo, “A Note on the Würzburg Bell-Crater H5697 (“Telephus Travestitus”)”, *Phoenix* 40 (1986) 379–392; O. Taplin, *Comic Angels and Other Approaches to Greek Drama through Vase-Paintings*, Oxford 1993, 30–99; Green, *Theatre*, 46–47, 65–67, 70–71; id., “Theatre Production”, 143–146; Csapo – Slater, *Context*, 54, 66–67. Aristophanes’ *Thesmophoriazusae* is illustrated on a famous Apulian bell-crater now kept at Würzburg (Taplin, *Angels*, no. 11.4; Csapo, “Bell-Crater”). Attic names are written above the personages on three other bell-craters (A.D. Trendall, *Phlyax Vases*, London ²1967, nos. 45, 58; Taplin, *Angels*, nos. 9.1, 12.5, 16.16). Words in Attic dialect, presumably lines from the original play, are inscribed next to the characters’ mouths on an Apulian calyx-crater (Trendall, *Phlyax Vases*, no. 84; Taplin, *Angels*, no. 10.2).

ther case, the vases demonstrate the vivid presence of Attic comic repertoire in the theatrical life of South Italy.¹⁵

Moreover, a few 4th-century inscriptions attest performances of comedy in areas outside Athens, at a time considerably earlier than the Hellenistic age. For instance, an inscription on a choregic monument at the Dionysion of Thasos records the presentation of a comedy at the local festival, starring the comic actor Philemon. Though once erroneously dated at the beginning of the 3rd century, this inscription was later re-examined and convincingly placed at the middle of the 4th.¹⁶ The comedian Philemon perfectly tallies with this chronology, since a renowned comic actor by that name was active in Athens at that very time: he won two victories at the Lenaia (IG II² 2325.191, probably after ca. 370 B.C.) and was a witness at the infamous trial of Timarchos in 345 (Aeschin. 1.115). He is also known to have acted in comedies by Anaxandrides, one of the leading poets of Middle Comedy (*Gerontomania* and *Eusebeis*, Arist. *Rhet.* 1413b 25–28).¹⁷ The Thasian inscription thus reveals an interesting phenomenon: a celebrated Athenian star is making a tour outside Athens, presumably playing the Attic comedies of his repertoire and bringing them to audiences in the periphery. Athens has be-

15. Significantly, even scholars that cling to the theory of Italiote farce or try to preserve some connection between the vase-paintings and South Italian creative playwriting, accept nonetheless that the local genre must have undergone distinctive influence from Attic comedy. See from among older studies L.M. Catteruccia, *Pitture vascolari italiote di soggetto teatrale comico*, Roma 1951, 7, 14, 86–89; Trendall, *Phlyax Vases*, 9–10, 14–15, 18; A.W. Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*, rev. J. Gould – D.M. Lewis, Oxford² 1968, 216–218; E. Simon, *The Ancient Theatre*, London/New York 1982, 30–31; and among later discussions C.W. Dearden, “Phlyax Comedy in Magna Graecia — A Reassessment”, in J.H. Betts – J.T. Hooker – J.R. Green (eds.), *Studies in Honour of T.B.L. Webster*, vol. II, Bristol 1988, 35–36; A.D. Trendall, “Farce and Tragedy in South Italian Vase-Painting”, in T. Rasmussen – N. Spivey (eds.), *Looking at Greek Vases*, Cambridge 1991, 164–169.

16. See F. Salviat, “Vedettes de la scène en province: Signification et date des monuments chorégraphiques de Thasos”, in *Thasiaca*, BCH Suppl. V, Athènes/Paris 1979, 155–167.

17. See A. Körte, “Philemon (10)”, *RE* XIX 2 (1938) 2145–2146; W. Burkert, “Aristoteles im Theater. Zur Datierung des 3. Buchs der ‘Rhetorik’ und der ‘Poetik’”, *MH* 32 (1975) 70; P. Ghiron-Bistagne, *Recherches sur les acteurs dans la Grèce antique*, Paris 1976, 30, 154–155, 360; I.E. Stefanis, *Διονυσιακοί Τεχνῆται*, Herakleion 1988, 438 no. 2485.

come the central theatrical metropolis that feeds the cultural life of other Greek cities. Inscriptions of this kind, reporting of Athens-based artists (comic poets and actors) that participate in dramatic festivals of other regions, become commoner in the period of New Comedy, from the early 3rd century onwards.

The picture sketched by the archaeological finds is corroborated and supplemented by literary testimonies from authors of the time or from later sources referring to 4th-century events. In his speech *On the peace* (composed around 355 B.C.), Isocrates criticizes the comic poets who publicize the failings of Athens to other Greeks.¹⁸ This is often interpreted as a reference to the presence of foreign spectators in Athenian dramatic festivals. Nonetheless, given that Isocrates' statement is made in the middle of the 4th century, it might also be read under the light of the evidence presented above and connected with the pan-Hellenization of Athenian comedy: the orator might have in mind the performance of Attic plays in other Greek cities. In addition, there are several testimonies about Athenian comedies presented in the Macedonian court, under Philip and Alexander. Anaxandrides is reported by the Suda to have "participated in the festival(s) (ἀγῶσι) of Philip of Macedon". The festival here meant must be the well-known Olympia which Philip celebrated at Dion in Pieria in 348, after his conquest of Olynthos.¹⁹ Anaxandrides

18. *On the peace* 14: "In spite of the democracy, there is no freedom of speech, except that which is enjoyed here in the Assembly by the most reckless speakers, who care nothing about your welfare, and by the comic dramatists in the theatre. This is indeed the most outrageous of all: I mean that you show such great favour to the people who publicize the failings of our city to the other Greeks, greater than you ever show to public benefactors."

19. Suda α 1982: Ἀναξανδρίδης ... γεγονῶς ἐν τοῖς ἀγῶσι Φιλίππου τοῦ Μακεδόνας, Ὀλυμπιάδι ρα'. The 101st Olympiad was at 376–372, but Philip of Macedon (born 382) was still a child at that time. The phrase of the Suda has probably arisen from the conflation of two different pieces of information: (a) Ἀναξανδρίδης γεγονῶς Ὀλυμπιάδι ρα', "Anaxandrides was flourishing in the 101st Olympiad" (with γεγονῶς denoting an artist's acme, as usually in the Suda); this can be taken to indicate that Anaxandrides won his first victory at the City Dionysia between 376 and 372; and (b) Ἀναξανδρίδης γεγονῶς ἐν τοῖς ἀγῶσι Φιλίππου τοῦ Μακεδόνας, "Anaxandrides participated in the festival of Philip of Macedon", i.e. in the Olympia at Dion in 348. Cf. Meineke, *Historia Critica*, 367–368; H.F. Clinton, *Fasti Hellenici. The Civil and Literary Chronology of Greece, from the LVth to the CXXIVth Olympiad*, vol. II, Oxford

presumably staged one of his comedies as part of that celebration. The famous comic actor Satyros, known to have been active on the Athenian stage, also performed in a comedy in that same festival (Dem. 19.192–195; Diod. Sic. 16.55). Whether the plural *ἀγῶσι* in the Suda also implies other occasions in which Anaxandrides presented his plays in Philip’s court, is open to conjecture.

Equally telling is an anecdote transmitted by Athenaeus and drawn from Lykophron’s treatise *On comedy*. Antiphanes, another leading dramatist of Middle Comedy, is presented reading a play of his to Alexander the Great, who was, however, not entirely appreciative of its themes.²⁰ As is attested by many authors, Alexander loved organizing and attending theatrical performances, both tragic and comic, both in his court and later in his camp, after his depart to Asia.²¹ The humorous tale involving Antiphanes must be read in the context of Alexander’s love for the theatre. The story may be fictional, invented by Lykophron himself or an earlier gossip-monger, but it is significant that it connects Antiphanes with Alexander and presents the king commenting on the playwright’s dramatic work. The historical background hiding behind this anecdotal tradition may well have to do with Antiphanes’ actual participation in theatrical events organized by the Macedonian king: Antiphanes staged his plays in Alexander’s festivals, just as Anaxandrides had done in the time of Philip, and this reality must have inspired the creation of tales about meetings and conversations between the comic poet and the great monarch.²²

³1841, 151–153; A. Schaefer, *Demosthenes und seine Zeit*, vol. II, Leipzig ²1886, 155; G. Kaibel, “Anaxandrides (1)”, *RE* I 2 (1894) 2078.

20. Ath. 13.555a: “The comic writer Antiphanes ... was once reading aloud one of his comedies to King Alexander, but the latter made it plain that he did not like it very much. Antiphanes then replied: ‘No wonder, Sire; for, in order to appreciate this kind of work, a man must have often dined at communal banquets, bringing his own contribution, and must also have frequently given or received blows in brawls for the sake of a courtesan’. This anecdote is preserved by Lykophron of Chalkis in his treatise *On comedy*.”
21. See e.g. Diod. Sic. 17.16.3; Arr. *Anab.* 1.11.1, 7.14.1, 7.14.10; Plut. *Alex.* 29, 72; id., *Mor.* 334e; Ath. 12.538b–539a.
22. The fiction of Alexander’s unappreciative attitude towards Antiphanes’ play may be compared with an analogous fable, also based on the historical connection between an

It is thus established that during the 4th century the plays of the comic poets of Athens were performed not only in Attica but also in various other parts of the Greek world.²³ This reality further explains the huge productivity of the major poets of Middle Comedy. Euboulos produced 104 comedies in about 45 years, i.e. on average 2 to 3 plays per year. Alexis composed 245 plays in an exceedingly long career of 70-75 years, i.e. 3 to 4 plays per year. Similarly, Antiphanes wrote 260 comedies in a career that must have been equally long; this gives again an average of 3 to 4 plays per year.²⁴ These numbers are all the more astonishing if compared with the rates of productivity of the leading comic dramatists in the 5th century, such as Aristophanes, Kratinos and Eupolis, who barely attain an average of one play per year.²⁵ It is obvious that no one of the aforementioned Middle Comedy poets could have pre-

artist and a ruler and propagated by a modern work of fiction: Emperor Joseph II yawning at the premiere of Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* in Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus*.

23. On the pan-Hellenization of Athenian comedy in the 4th century see also A. Körte, "Inchriftliches zur Geschichte der attischen Komödie", *RhM* 60 (1905) 431-433; id., "Komödie", 1266; Norwood, *Greek Comedy*, 40; Pickard-Cambridge, *Festivals*, 279-280; H.-D. Blume, *Einführung in das antike Theaterwesen*, Darmstadt 1978, 29-30, 109-110; Landfester, "Geschichte", 377; Handley, "Comedy" 398-399; Taplin, *Angels*, 1-6, 89-99; Green, *Theatre*, 67-69, 106-108; Slater, "Illusion", 31-34; Csapo - Slater, *Context*, 3-4, 16-17, 223-224; Zimmermann, *Komödie*, 211; I.M. Konstantakos, "Notes on the Chronology and Career of Antiphanes", *Eikasmos* 11 (2000) 185-186; id., "Rara coronato plausere theatra Menandro? Menander's Success in his Lifetime", *QUCC* n.s. 88 (2008) 88-93.
24. On Euboulos (active ca. 380-335) see Hunter, *Eubulus*, 7-12. On Alexis (active from the 350s to the 270s) see Arnott, *Alexis*, 13-17. On Antiphanes (active from ca. 385 until ca. 310 or later) see Konstantakos, "Notes", 173-196.
25. Aristophanes produced between 40 and 44 plays in a career spanning over 40 years (from 427 until after 387). Kratinos wrote his 29 known plays in a career that spanned more than 30 years (from the 450s until the late 420s). Eupolis presented between 14 and 17 plays in a briefer career of less than 20 years (429-ca. 411). See handily A.H. Sommerstein, *The Comedies of Aristophanes*, vol. 1: *Acharnians*, Warminster 1980, 2-5; I.C. Storey, *Eupolis. Poet of Old Comedy*, Oxford 2003, 54-66; E. Bakola, *Kratinos and the Art of Comedy*, Oxford 2010, 2-4. E. Mensching, "Zur Produktivität der alten Komödie", *MH* 21 (1964) 15-49, argues that the actual oeuvre of these poets, as well as of many other authors of Old Comedy, must have been somewhat larger than the total of their preserved titles or the number of plays recorded by later sources, because some of their comedies were lost before the Hellenistic age. Still, he does not attribute to them more than one or occasionally two plays per year.

sented all his plays in the two major dramatic festivals of Athens, the City Dionysia and the Lenaia. Even if he regularly entered a play at each one of those festivals every year, he would still have an average surplus of one or two comedies per year, for which the city competitions afforded no room. In reality, of course, although a poet might occasionally produce plays in both city festivals within the same year (as did e.g. Eupolis with *Marikas* and *Kolakes* in 421 and Aristophanes with *Lysistrata* and *Thesmophoriazusae* in 411),²⁶ it would have been practically impossible to do so continuously, especially during the 4th century. In the period of Middle Comedy, as also subsequently in the early Hellenistic age, a great number of comic poets were active in Athens and vying for a place at the Dionysia or the Lenaia. The intense competition excluded that any single one of these poets would be able to take part in both major city festivals on a regular yearly basis.²⁷ Thus, for authors such as Antiphanes and Alexis the average surplus of plays not accommodated in official Athenian *agones* may rise to as much as 3 per year.

It is possible that some of those surplus comedies were destined for the Rural Dionysia, the dramatic contests locally organized in various demes of Attica. It cannot be excluded that new, previously unperformed dramas occasionally premiered at the rural festivals, at least in the larger and most important demes (e.g. in the renowned theatre of Piraeus). However, the available indications suggest that, as a rule, the deme theatres hosted repeat performances or revivals of plays that had been successful in the major city festivals.²⁸ Thus, only one outlet is left: many plays of the leading Middle Comedy dramatists must have been intended for performance outside Attica. These playwrights wrote not only for Athens but also for a wider audience that enjoyed their creations

26. According to Mensching, “Produktivität”, 28, 31–43, 47–48, this phenomenon was not infrequent, though intermittent, among the comic poets of the 5th century. On the exceedingly rare phenomenon of a poet entering two plays in the same festival see Konstantakos, “Notes”, 183–184 with references.

27. On the intensity of comic competition in the 4th century and its impact on comic production see Konstantakos, “Menander’s Success”, 82–84.

28. On the performances in the demes see G.V. Vitucci, “Le rappresentazioni drammatiche nei demi attici studiate su alcuni testi epigrafici”, *Dioniso* 7 (1939) 210–225, 312–325; Pickard-Cambridge, *Festivals*, 42–56; D. Whitehead, *The Demes of Attica 508/7–ca. 250 B.C. A Political and Social Study*, Princeton 1986, 212–222.

in various parts of the Greek world. We may even imagine that the top dramatists of the time would receive commissions for comedies from sundry directions: Hellenic cities calling out for plays for their local festivals, or theatre-loving rulers, such as Philip and Alexander, who organized theatrical events in their courts, or travelling troupes that toured the Greek world and needed plays for their repertoire. Besides, the huge productivity of authors such as Antiphanes, Alexis and Euboulos suggests that they worked full-time as playwrights. They must have been professional men of the theatre, who made a living by selling their plays to various festivals or touring companies. This is a crucial development, radically changing the conditions of dramatic writing and the overall landscape of theatre production in the 4th century. Poets living by their trade were a known phenomenon in Greece since the ripe archaic age (consider cases like Simonides and Pindar). But a class of professional playwrights is now taking compact form for the first time and will continue holding sway in the subsequent generations of New Comedy.

The pan-Hellenic appeal of Attic comedy is also reflected in the demographics of the 4th-century theatrical world. Numerous poets from various cities come and settle in Athens, in order to pursue a career as comic dramatists there. Several representatives of Middle Comedy, including three out of the four most notable ones, were metics in Athens. Alexis came from Thourioi in South Italy and Anaxandrides from Kameiros in Rhodes or, according to an alternative version, from Kolophon. As for Antiphanes, the Suda mentions a series of alternative places of origin, advocated by different authorities (Kios, Smyrna, or Rhodes); on the other hand, an anonymous later treatise on comedy, drawing on good Alexandrian sources, makes him a native of Larissa in Thessaly who was illegally enrolled as an Athenian citizen with the help of Demosthenes.²⁹ This probably means that Antiphanes, originally an alien, was at some point awarded Athenian citizenship, presumably as an honour for his services to the theatre, after a proposal of Demosthenes — an honour not uncommonly bestowed by the Athenian state on

29. See Suda α 1138 (Alexis); Suda α 1982, Ath. 9.374b (Anaxandrides); Suda α 2735, *Prolegomenon de Comoedia* III 47–49, p. 10 Koster (Antiphanes).

prominent intellectuals and artists during the 4th century.³⁰ Further, the comic poet Dionysios came from Sinope, Epikrates was from Ambrakia in Epirus and Sophilos from Sikyon or Thebes.³¹ The poet Anaxilas bears a distinctively Doric name, suggesting again an origin from outside Attica. This phenomenon demonstrates from another angle how Athens has become the effective theatrical capital of Greece. Playwrights from diverse places gather and make a career there; however, they do not write solely for the Athenian audience but supply the wider Hellenic world with their plays.

Moreover, the oddity just noted with regard to certain dramatists (Anaxandrides, Antiphanes, Sophilos), namely the fact that later sources attribute more than one alternative places of origin to them, might be related to the new circumstances of theatrical pan-Hellenism. The confusion about a dramatist's provenance may have arisen from his theatrical activity or the performances of his plays in various parts of Greece. Let us assume that a playwright maintained a regular professional connection with a certain city or cities, supplying comedies for its festivals on more than one occasion. Such a connection could then generate a secondary tradition that the playwright originated from that particular city he had collaborated with. Indeed, the writer's professional involvement with a city's festival would no doubt be recorded in archives or public documents, e.g. inscriptions attesting the performance of his plays as part of the festival programme (analogous to the Athenian didascalie inscriptions about the Dionysia and the Lenaia). Moreover, the city might have honoured the dramatist for his contribution to its theatrical life, awarding him honorary citizenship (as Athens did for Antiphanes) or other privileges, and the relevant honorary decree would also have been publicly displayed on an inscription. If a later local historian or anti-

30. The statement about Demosthenes illegally engineering Antiphanes' naturalization doubtless reproduces a joke made by a rival comic poet, perhaps shortly after the event.

31. See Ath. 10.422f (Epikrates), 11.467d, 11.497c, 14.615e (Dionysios); Suda σ 881 (Sophilos). Generally on this phenomenon see E. Capps, "Chronological Studies in the Greek Tragic and Comic Poets", *AJPh* 21 (1900) 47; A. Wilhelm, *Urkunden dramatischer Aufführungen in Athen*, Wien 1906, 60–61; Körte, "Komödie", 1266, 1273; M.J. Osborne, *Naturalization in Athens*, vol. III/IV, Brussels 1983, 81, 87–88, 110, 113, 119, 125, 200–201.

quary stumbled on such inscriptions, he would be liable to misinterpret them and conclude that the comic poet was a native of that particular city.³² At least in the case of the most renowned and energetic dramatists, such as Antiphanes and Anaxandrides, some of the variant traditions about their origins may have ensued from such a process.

Both the pan-Hellenic diffusion of comic theatre and the full-time, “professional” activity of dramatists must have exercised a determinative influence on the development of comic drama. The playwrights increasingly realized that their plays needed to be performable outside Athens as well, appealing not only to Athenians but also to the audiences of other cities. For those professional comic writers success outside Athens would not have been less desirable or important than recognition in Athens, because the sale of their plays to other cities or travelling troupes must have been a substantial source of profits for them. These new conditions of playwriting inevitably had a strong impact on the poetics of comedy. Behind transformations such as the avoidance of purely local, Athenian-oriented elements and the rise of subjects of more universal appeal, the internationalization of comic theatre is clearly to be discerned.

3. *The decline of political comedy*

According to some treatises from late antiquity, the decline of political satire was one of the main changes that marked the development of comedy in the 4th century.³³ The lack of political interest is patent in the

32. Cf. Konstantakos, “Notes”, 186.

33. See the Prolegomena nos. I, IV, XVIIIa and XXV.1 in the edition of W.J.W. Koster, *Scholia in Aristophanem*, vol. I.1.A: *Prolegomena de comoedia*, Groningen 1975, 3–6, 11–12, 70–71, 124–125. Concerning these treatises and their sources see Nesselrath, *Mittlere Komödie*, 30–45 and K. Sidwell, “From Old to Middle to New? Aristotle’s *Poetics* and the History of Athenian Comedy”, in D. Harvey – J. Wilkins (eds.), *The Rivals of Aristophanes. Studies in Athenian Old Comedy*, London/Swansea 2000, 247–258. The explanations provided by these texts for the decline of political satire are rather mechanical and superficial, mostly attributing the phenomenon to external censorship and pressures by the political authorities. Besides, their discussion of the issue is full of factual errors and confusion. Nonetheless, at least the statement about the de-

type of domestic comic drama that dominated the Athenian stage in the New Comedy period, as exemplified in the works of Menander. But how is the enfeeblement of political elements to be understood with regard to the earlier decades of the 4th century, the time of Middle Comedy, when the foundations of the new genre were being laid?

5th-century Old Comedy, at least in the form promoted by its mainstream dramatists (Kratinos, Eupolis, Aristophanes, and a host of minor figures), was prominently political in character. This was not simply due to the fact that the plays contained plenty of mocking references to public figures of Athens: rather it was because the main themes of the comedies were political. The plays were intensely concerned with the public affairs, institutions and political leadership of the Athenian state. Turning to Middle Comedy, it is notable that its fragments still offer a considerable amount of satirical references to contemporary politicians and other celebrities of public life, as well as to contemporary events. These jokes, often quite pungent, indicate that the decline of this type of satire in the period between the 380s and the 320s must have been slow and gradual. Of course, certain playwrights appear to have indulged in political ridicule more eagerly than others. One striking such case is Timokles, who began his writing career in the 340s and remained active at least until the early years of New Comedy, at the end of the century. Timokles' fragments are full of biting taunts against Athenian politicians, and his sharp sarcasm often recalls the jokes of Old Comedy.³⁴ In this respect, Timokles is probably an extreme case. His keen cultivation of political invective may have been a conscious dramaturgical experiment, an attempt to revive or creatively interact with earlier forms of Attic

cline of political mockery must have been derived from earlier and better sources (possibly of the Peripatetic school) that knew what they were talking about. Horace (*Ars* 281–284) makes similar remarks.

34. See e.g. fr. 4, 7, 12, 14, 17, 18, 19, 23. On Timokles' acrid political mockery cf. A. Körte, "Timokles (3)", *RE* VI A 1 (1936) 1260–1261; G. Coppola, "Per la storia della commedia greca (Timocles ateniese e Difilo di Sinope)", *RFIC* 55 (1927) 453–467; V. Bevilacqua, "Timocle", *Dioniso* 7 (1939) 38–50, 56–62; E. Constantinides, "Timocles' *Ikarioi Satyroi*: A Reconsideration", *TAPhA* 100 (1969) 54–61; Webster, *Studies*, 45–47; G.B. Philipp, "Philippides, ein politischer Komiker in hellenistischer Zeit", *Gymnasium* 80 (1973) 496; W.E. Major, "Menander in a Macedonian World", *GRBS* 38 (1997) 47. An edition and commentary on Timokles' fragments is being prepared by Kostas Apostolakis.

comedy, in which this kind of satire played a central part. His enterprise may have been inspired partly by the violent political turmoil of his time (the age of Macedonian expansion and great political agitation in Athens), and partly by a discovery or rediscovery of texts by Aristophanes or other Old Comedy poets. The works of those past masters had long ceased to be performed in Athenian theatres, but their scripts should still have been available in Athens, whether in the hands of their descendants, or in state archives, or in private book collections. It was presumably from those same sources that the Alexandrian library obtained its copies of Old Comedy texts a few decades later. As will be shown below, other dramatists of that time also present affinities with the satirical style of Old Comedy and may have been influenced by the rediscovery of its texts.

Timokles may be exceptional for the intensity and bulk of his invective, but political jokes are widely dispersed in the remains of several other Middle Comedy playwrights. The testimonies of contemporary Athenian authors fully accord with this state of affairs. Around 355, Isocrates speaks of comic poets that trumpet forth the ills of the Athenian state (see above, section 2). Similarly, Plato in his *Laws*, composed at roughly the same period, sets down that it should be strictly forbidden to comic poets to ridicule any citizen in person, in any conceivable way, whether with earnest passion or simply in jest (935d–936a). These passages clearly suggest that around the mid-4th century comic references to public figures and city affairs were still frequent and sharp. Indeed, jokes against public personages will not be entirely silenced even in the period of New Comedy, as is indicated by a handful of fragments.³⁵

However, the presence of such satirical references does not by itself entail a full-scale political comedy. They may be no more than occasional jokes, inserted in the dialogue of a comedy with entirely different, non-political subject-matter, with a view to adding touches of contem-

35. On political ridicule in Middle Comedy see Meineke, *Historia Critica*, 274–276; Körte, “Komödie”, 1261–1262; Constantinides, “*Ikarioi Satyroï*”, 56–61; Webster, *Studies*, 1–2, 23–49; Arnott, “From Aristophanes”, 69–70; Handley, “Comedy”, 404–407; Csapo – Slater, *Context*, 166; Sidwell, “From Old”, 247–258; S.D. Olson, *Broken Laughter. Select Fragments of Greek Comedy*, Oxford 2007, 220–226; A. Papachrysostomou, “Ὁδὸν πρὸς τὴν πόλιν; Αναφορές σε πολιτικά πρόσωπα στη ‘Μέση Κωμωδία’ του 4ου αιώνα π.Χ.”, *Hellenika* 59 (2009) 181–204.

porary topicality to the script. This is obvious in many cases, in which the main theme of the comedy may be sufficiently deduced from its title and fragments. For instance, jests at the expense of public figures often occur in mythological burlesques, which had no discernible political content but predominantly focused on travesty of a traditional mythical story or parodying a tragedy. In Euboulos' *Antiope*, a burlesque of Euripides' homonymous drama, a character pungently comments on the sexual proclivities of Kallistratos of Aphidna, a prominent Athenian politician in the earlier half of the 4th century (fr. 10). Anaxandrides' *Protesilaos*, presumably a travesty of the myth about the title-hero and his wedding with Laodameia, includes a witty lampoon of the corrupt transactions between this same Kallistratos and one of his political opponents, Melanopos (fr. 41).³⁶ In another scene of the *Protesilaos* a household slave offers a lengthy description of an impending feast, presumably for the wedding between the hero and Laodameia;³⁷ the speaker favourably compares this celebration with a famous event of 386 B.C., the wedding of the Athenian general Iphikrates with the sister of the Thracian ruler Kotys (fr. 42). Another myth burlesque of Anaxandrides, *Tereus*, includes a delightful parody of a tragic *deus ex machina* scene, in which a god ominously predicts the future of the women-ridden hero (presumably Tereus or Itys). In his response to the god's words, the hero incidentally refers to a certain Polyeuktos, an Athenian profligate who had squandered his patrimony (fr. 46).³⁸ Antiphanes' *Sappho* was a kind of historical travesty evolving around the legendary poetess and her circle. Sappho was probably presented as a hetaira enjoying herself in symposia in the company of men, and fr. 194, where she plays a game of riddles with an older man, presumably comes from

36. Cf. Plut. *Demosth.* 13.3; A. Scholtz, "Perfume from Peron's: The Politics of Pedicure in Anaxandrides Fragment 41 Kassel-Austin", *JCS* 21 (1996) 69–86.

37. Cf. Nesselrath, *Mittlere Komödie*, 214–215; B.W. Millis, *A Commentary on the Fragments of Anaxandrides*, Ph.D. Diss., Urbana 2001, 169, 181.

38. Cf. Nesselrath, *Mittlere Komödie*, 216–217; Millis, *Anaxandrides*, 226–230. This snapshot of *ἄνομαστὶ κομωθεῖν* would acquire a tangible political dimension if the ridiculed person could be securely identified as Polyeuktos of Sphettos, a well-known anti-Macedonian orator active in the latter half of the 4th century.

such a context.³⁹ The man gives an unexpected political interpretation to the enigma propounded to him by the poetess: the riddling words, he claims, must refer to the corrupt politicians, who receive bribes and profiteer by deceiving the people.

In all these cases the references to contemporary personages or political affairs are only incidental jests, rather perfunctorily inserted into the mythological (or, in the case of *Sappho*, pseudo-historical) plot for the sake of an ephemeral laugh. The spectators would obviously have been amused to listen to mythical heroes talking about celebrities and affairs of contemporary Athens. This kind of comic anachronism was one of the basic tools by which 4th-century comic dramatists caricatured the mythical material in their myth burlesques. The legendary heroes were presented gossiping about the Athenian reality of the audience's own time, as though they were themselves ordinary 4th-century Attic folk.⁴⁰

Other examples of political banter occur in comedies whose plot demonstrably approaches the New Comedy type, being centred on love affairs and intrigues, misunderstandings and recognitions. Antiphanes' *Neottis* apparently evolved around a pair of siblings that were lost or abducted in childhood and sold as slaves in Athens. The description of their childhood adventure in the prologue (fr. 166) creates the suspicion that the play ended with the recognition of these two characters by their true family.⁴¹ Nonetheless, elsewhere in this same play an incidental joke is made about a contemporary political affair, the debate concerning the island of Halonnesos (fr. 167): Philip of Macedon offered this island to Athens in 342, as a gesture of goodwill; but Demosthenes and the other anti-Macedonians vociferously argued that, since the island had originally been an Athenian possession, the Macedonian king should not claim to be giving it (*διδόναι*) to Athens, as though a gift, but to be restoring it (*ἀποδιδόναι*). This famous quibble of Demosthenes is also taken up in Alexis' *Stratiotes*, in a scene where two personages dispute about the

39. See I.M. Konstantakos, *A Commentary on the Fragments of Eight Plays of Antiphanes*, Ph.D. Diss., Cambridge 2000, 157–179.

40. On this technique see Webster, *Studies*, 18–19; Hunter, *Eubulus*, 25; Konstantakos, “Mythological Burlesques”.

41. On this play and its plot see Konstantakos, *Antiphanes*, 125–145.

possession of an infant (fr. 212); this suggests that the plot of the play included an exposed or supposititious baby and perhaps its eventual recognition. A string of denigrating references to contemporary celebrities is included in Ehippos' *Homoioi or Obeliaphoroi* (fr. 16), which may have been a comedy of errors concerning the identity of identical twins or lookalikes, to judge by the title. Alexis' *Agonis or Hippiskos* evolved around a love affair between a young man and a girl, complete with an intrigue and possibly a recognition.⁴² One of its characters, however, makes a passing reference to Misgolas, a contemporary Athenian gentleman of some notoriety, and to his passion for young lads, which came to public notice during the infamous trial of Timarchos (fr. 3). As is obvious, in these comedies as well the satirical attacks are occasional jokes, irrelevant to the main action.

What is truly rare in 4th-century theatre is full-scale political comedy, the kind of play in which public life is the main focus. It is in this respect that a rapid decline of the political dimension of comic drama may be established. Very few 4th-century comedies seem to have centred on political issues or ridiculed contemporary public figures on a large scale. One such play may have been Euboulos' *Dionysios*, apparently a fully fledged attack on Dionysios I, the tyrant of Syracuse. In the extant fragments Dionysios is portrayed as surrounded by flatterers (fr. 25) and lampooned for his pretentious efforts to compose tragedies (fr. 24, 26). Whether the comedy touched on more straightforwardly political issues, such as Dionysios' manner of government or his relations with Athens, is open to conjecture. A more impressive case is Mnesimachos' *Philip*, evidently a satire on Philip II of Macedon. The speaker of fr. 7 is probably either Philip himself or another Macedonian military. He is depicted as a braggart soldier, outrageously boasting that he and his companions are super-warriors that feed on swords and pieces of broken javelins, swallow blazing torches, use shields and breastplates for cushions at dinner and wreath themselves with catapults. Fr. 8 alludes to Halos, a town in the south of Thessaly, which Philip besieged and captured in 346, ceding it to his allies, the Pharsalians. In bold comic imagery, the Pharsalians are said to be "eating up" the conquered town

42. See Arnott, *Alexis*, 52–57; I.M. Konstantakos, "Towards a Literary History of Comic Love", *C&M* 53 (2002) 148.

roasted.⁴³ The ebullient comic metaphors and exuberance of satirical fantasy bring to mind the style of Aristophanes and other Old Comedy poets.⁴⁴ Perhaps Mnesimachos' *Philip*, composed shortly after 346, was another product of the rediscovery of Old Comedy texts by the Athenian dramatists of those turbulent years. Timokles, whose pungent political lampoons also smack of Old Comedy invective, started producing plays at about the same time, in the 340s.

A further possible example is Heniochos' *Polyeuktos*, if it was directed against Polyeuktos of Sphettos, a known orator and collaborator of Demosthenes, active in Athenian politics from the 340s onwards.⁴⁵ Another, unidentified play of Heniochos dealt with contemporary political events in an allegorical manner. The prologue (fr. 5) showed the Hellenic cities, personified as members of the comic chorus, gathered in Olympia to make thanksgiving offerings for their newly acquired freedom from tribute. The prologue-speaker describes how two women, named Democracy and Aristocracy respectively, always accompany and upset the cities, making them behave badly to each other. The allegorical personifications of cities and political constitutions, as well as the use of a chorus with individualized members and a peculiar and distinctive dramatic identity, recall again characteristic techniques of Old Comedy. The most probable dates for this play are either around the beginning of the Second Athenian League (379/8) or shortly after the battle of Chaeronea (338). In the former case, the play comes from a period when the

43. On this play see Papachrysostomou, *Comic Poets*, 210–220. Following Breitenbach, she prefers to attribute fr. 7 not to Philip or another Macedonian but to Demosthenes, who would thus be ridiculed for his grandiloquent bombast against the Macedonians (cf. Timokles fr. 12). With Meineke, Webster and other commentators, I prefer the old view that the speaker is the Macedonian king or one of his militaries. Apart from the mention of catapults, which would perfectly befit a representative of the Macedonian army, the imagery and style are consistent with the satirical attack on Macedon's allies in fr. 8. If the Pharsalians can be described as eating up an entire town, their Macedonian patrons should also be portrayed in proportionately extravagant terms. In any case, even if the comedy involved ridicule of Demosthenes, it is clear from fr. 8 that Philip and the Macedonians were also satirically targeted.

44. See Papachrysostomou, *Comic Poets*, 210–212, 218–219, who detects striking parallels in the comic imagery of the *Acharnians* and the *Peace*.

45. See Kassel – Austin, *Poetae*, V 553; Webster, *Studies*, 44. The one surviving fragment is uninformative.

mannerisms of Old Comedy had probably not died out yet (cf. the allegorical personifications in Aristophanes' *Wealth*, less than a decade earlier). In the latter, Heniochos' comedy may have formed part of the vogue created by the rediscovery of Old Comedy texts in the 340s, along with the aforementioned works of Timokles and Mnesimachos.⁴⁶ Finally, the abundant and sharp political satire in Timokles' extant remains makes it plausible that political affairs occupied an important place at least in some of his comedies.⁴⁷

And this is practically all. In the entire corpus of 4th-century comedy these are the only plays that appear to have largely focused on contemporary public figures or affairs. The impression gained is that such plays are rare exceptions. In essence, political comedy is dying during the years 380–320. It is significant that most of the political plays discussed above are concentrated in the time of the Macedonian expansion, the reigns of Philip and Alexander (so Mnesimachos, Timokles, and probably also Heniochos). This period appears to have sparked off the last flashes of political comedy, as Macedonian imperialism was generating a serious political crisis in mainland Greece. Due to the heightened political conflicts and tensions within Athens, interest in politics was rekindled on the comic stage. In this warm climate of public strife, comic poets apparently took sides, attaching themselves to one or the other political camp. Mnesimachos seems to have been an anti-Macedonian, de-

46. For the possible dates see Olson, *Broken Laughter*, 126–127 with further references. Heniochos' other possibly political play, *Polyeuktos*, is also likely to have been produced in the late 340s or the 330s, if connected to the homonymous Athenian orator, whose involvement in politics is attested from 343 onwards. This would support the later dating, after Chaeronea, for the comedy of the cities. Heniochos will then have gone through a spell of political playwriting during the turbulent period of the Macedonian expansion, just like his colleagues Mnesimachos and Timokles. If so, Heniochos must have had pro-Macedonian affinities: he attacked Polyeuktos, a prominent anti-Macedonian and collaborator of Demosthenes, and speaks positively of the Greek cities' liberation from tribute after Philip's victory at Chaeronea; cf. Webster, *Studies*, 44.

47. Even in Timokles, some of the satirical attacks were clearly incidental jokes in plays with a different orientation. Fr. 7, ridiculing the orator Telemachos of Acharnai, was included in *Dionysos*, which may have been a mythological play. Fr. 32, another lampoon of Misgolas, comes from *Sappho*, doubtless a historical travesty on the legendary poetess, like Antiphanes' homonymous play (see above).

voting a play to ridicule Philip. On the other hand, Timokles had definite Macedonian sympathies, given that he scathingly and repeatedly attacked anti-Macedonian politicians such as Demosthenes and Hypericides. Heniochos may also have endorsed a pro-Macedonian attitude.⁴⁸ It was probably around that time that all these dramatists, intent on reviving political comedy as a response to the turbulent spirit prevailing in their city, went back for inspiration to that great fountainhead of political satire, the Old Comedy of the 5th century. They somehow got hold of play-scripts of that long-forgotten genre, which had disappeared from living theatrical experience decades before, studied its comic techniques, and used its satirical fantasy and sharp invective as models for their own creations.⁴⁹ However, after Alexander's death this last spark of

48 On Mnesimachos and Heniochos see above, nn. 44 and 47. On Timokles cf. Coppola, "Per la storia", 453–454, 467; Webster, *Studies*, 45–47. By contrast, Constantinides, "Ikarioi Satyroi", 60–61 and Major, "Macedonian World", 47 express doubts about Timokles' philo-Macedonian stance, pointing out that he also mocks pro-Macedonian figures such as Kallimedon. There is, however, a telling difference in this respect. Timokles lampoons Demosthenes and his like-minded companions for acts of political significance (e.g. their involvement in the Harpalos scandal, acceptance of bribes, and tirades against Philip, see fr. 4, 12, 17). On the contrary, he mocks Kallimedon simply for his squint (fr. 29). This is a more innocent jest, devoid of political colour. This kind of discrimination is significant for an author's political sympathies. Compare Aristophanes' fury against radical demagogues, such as Kleon and Hyperbolos, in contrast to his milder treatment of conservative leaders, such as Nikias and Thoukydides Melesiou.

49. It must remain an open question whether this rediscovery of Old Comedy texts is related to the introduction of the performance of an "earlier comedy" (*παλαιὸν δράμα*) at the City Dionysia from 339 onwards (IG II² 2318.316–318; H.J. Mette, *Urkunden dramatischer Aufführungen in Griechenland*, Berlin/New York 1977, 35, no. I col. 15.13–15; cf. Constantinides, «Ikarioi Satyroi», 61). First of all, the rekindling of political satire and the appearance of plays with prominent Old Comedy affinities date already from a few years before 339: Mnesimachos' *Philip* and Timokles' debut are to be placed in the 340s. Secondly, it is unknown what was signified by the term *παλαιὸν δράμα* in the Athenian comic theatre of that time. In 311 the *παλαιά* comedy performed was Anaxandrides' *Thesauros*, i.e. a play of the ripe Middle Comedy (IG II² 2323a.39–40; Mette, *Urkunden*, 115, no. III B 2 col. 1.14–15). So, in 339 and subsequent years the *παλαιὸν δράμα* revived may similarly have been a play of the earlier Middle Comedy period. All factors considered, the rediscovery of Old Comedy scripts seems rather to have started as a literary endeavour on the part of certain inquisitive dramatists, not as a generalized practice of stage revivals. If the *παλαιά* per-

political playwriting was extinguished. By the New Comedy period politics have been definitively ousted from the centre of comic drama and limited to a few occasional jokes.

The decline of the political element in 4th-century comedy should not be attributed simply to external political constraints or pressures.⁵⁰ True, its final definitive emasculation, in the early years of New Comedy, coincides with the abolition of Athenian democracy by Antipater, Phokion's oligarchy and the subsequent dictatorship of Demetrios of Phaleron. However, an appreciable decrease of political themes had begun from a much earlier time, and their disappearance after about 320 seems more a natural outcome of past developments than a product of imposed censorship. In the period of Middle Comedy the Athenian democracy was unimpeded and fully functional, and the comic poets' plentiful occasional references to public figures and affairs indicate that comic freedom of speech was not restricted. No external constraint, therefore, was responsible for the steep downward plunge of politically oriented comedy in the period between 380 and 320. The cause must rather be sought in a more general change of theatrical taste. For some reason, people were no longer fond of political comedy, and this attitude must have affected audiences and poets alike. Playgoers went to the theatre to be entertained with mythological parodies or romantic plots, not to hear about the affairs or the leaders of the city. It is commonplace to forward historicist explanations for the audience's change of heart, relating it to broader changes in the attitude of the Athenian population. After its defeat in the Peloponnesian war, Athens no longer was the uncontested leading power in Greece. This harsh reality, in combination with the overall political instability affecting the Hellenic world during the 4th century, is thought to have led to a gradual disaffection of Athe-

formed in the 330s included 5th-century political comedies, it may be assumed that the literary study and emulation of Old Comedy, initiated by those 4th-century dramatists in the 340s, inspired shortly afterwards the idea of the revival of Old Comedy plays in the context of the City Dionysia.

50. This is the explanation forwarded by the ancient treatises on comedy (see above, n. 33) and, in a subtler form, by some modern scholars: see e.g. Csapo – Slater, *Context*, 166; Zimmermann, *Komödie*, 63–64, 203–205; Sidwell, “From Old”, 254–255.

nian citizens with politics and to the loss of their interest in public affairs.⁵¹

On the part of the comic poets, however, another factor must have been of capital importance, though usually ignored by critics and historians. This was the pan-Hellenic spread of comic theatre, which created new conditions of playwriting and opened wider professional possibilities to ambitious dramatists (see above, section 2). This new reality of theatrical life must have contributed to the restriction of political elements much more drastically than is usually acknowledged. A play whose central theme was drawn from the political affairs of Athens would obviously have minimal appeal to the audiences of other cities and little chance of success there. Thus, in an age when comic playwrights become increasingly conscious that they need to address a broader, pan-Hellenic audience, and greatly count on the success of their works outside Attica, it is only natural that they avoid themes intrinsically connected with Athenian public life. Sporadic references to Athenian political issues and occasional mockeries against Athenian politicians or celebrities did not matter so much. Precisely because they were incidental jokes, with no substantial connection to the main theme of the comedy, they could easily be omitted or replaced without damage to the plot or the overall dramatic structure. Comic playwrights presumably wrote such Athenian topical jokes specifically for the performances of their plays in Athens, so as to furnish their text with local colouring and an air of seasonality. By contrast, to the festivals of other cities or to itinerant players touring the Greek world the playwrights may have given different versions of their plays, from which all jokes and references of specifically Attic appeal would have been cut out. The producers or actors undertaking to present those plays outside Athens might of course fill in new satirical remarks at the proper points of the

51. See e.g. K.J. Maidment, “The Later Comic Chorus”, *CQ* 29 (1935) 7; Lever, “Middle Comedy”, 180; P. Ghiron-Bistagne, “Die Krise des Theaters in der griechischen Welt im 4. Jahrhundert v. u. Z.”, in E.C. Welskopf (ed.), *Hellenische Poleis. Krise – Wandlung – Wirkung*, vol. III, Darmstadt 1974, 1335–1371; R. Hošek, “Die Mittlere Komödie als Quelle soziologischer Beobachtungen”, *ibidem*, 1099–1119; Landfester, “Geschichte”, 375–376; Green, *Theatre*, 62–64; Zimmermann, *Komödie*, 202–205.

text, directed at celebrities or affairs of the city in which the performance was to be given each time.⁵²

It is plausible to suppose that later, in the early Hellenistic period, the Alexandrian library acquired its copies of Attic comedy scripts predominantly from Athens.⁵³ Thus, the Athenian versions of the 4th-century plays, the ones including all the Athenian-oriented incidental jokes, were those that finally made their way to the great reference library of the post-classical world and served as the main repository and source for later scholars and excerptors. This is why the fragments of 4th-century comedy that have reached us, transmitted by later authors (from Athenaeus and Stobaeus to various ancient scholia, lexica and other collections), are replete with references to Athenian celebrities and affairs. By contrast, the scripts ceded to other cities or travelling troupes never reached the Alexandrian library and were thus lost for later excerptors (and consequently for the modern world), along with any specially prepared regional references that they might contain.

However, things would be very different for a full-scale political comedy, predominantly centred on the affairs, institutions or leaders of Athens, in the model of 5th-century plays such as Aristophanes' *Knights* or Eupolis' *Marikas*. This kind of comedy could not be saved with small adaptations such as those described above with regard to incidental jokes. Its main theme limited its appeal to the audience of Athens and destroyed its chances of success elsewhere. It is significant that already from the beginning of the 4th century, when Attic comedies started being exported to South Italy, the play picked out from among Aristophanes' output was the *Thesmophoriazusae* —i.e. a play with a more universal theme, the parody of Euripidean drama (which was also quite popular in South Italy)— and not a purely political piece such as the *Knights* or the *Wasps*. The same tendency doubtless continued and increased as the 4th century progressed, thus decisively turning play-

52. For a possible example of this practice (Antiphanes fr. 69.14) see I.M. Konstantakos, "Antiphanes' Agroikos-Plays: An Examination of the Ancient Evidence and Fragments", *RCCM* 46 (2004) 25–27.

53. On the ways by which comic scripts and information about 4th-century comedy reached the Alexandrians see Konstantakos, "Notes", 186–187; id., "Menander's Success", 81–82, 101–104.

wrights towards themes of universal appeal, such as parodies of myth and tragedy or romantic plots and ordinary private affairs. Political comedy was largely abandoned because it could not adapt to the new culture of “internationalized” comic theatre, travelling troupes and professional dramatists with pan-Hellenic fame and activity.

In this respect, it is worth reconsidering those few plays from the Middle Comedy period that focus on political themes. It is noteworthy that most of these plays are not strictly limited to Athenian reality or matters of exclusively Athenian interest; on the contrary, they treat topics that could have a broader appeal to other cities as well. Mnesimachos’ *Philip* was directed against the Macedonians and their king, who posed a threat for many cities of mainland Greece. Euboulos’ *Dionysios* also lampooned a widely known figure, a tyrant from Sicily that must have been known to a large part of the Hellenic world. Heniochos’ comedy of the cities presented many Greek *poleis* gathering at Olympia and being harried by political discord; it therefore probably had pan-Hellenic character. Analogous remarks are applicable already to Aristophanes’ *Wealth*, presented in the earlier part of the century: this play is not so closely connected with specifically Athenian political reality but deals with more general social problems, such as the distribution of wealth and social justice. In this respect, it might exercise some appeal in the milieu of most Greek cities of the time. By this I do not wish to imply that Aristophanes consciously designed the *Wealth* in such a manner as to be performable outside Athens as well (although I would be willing to reckon with such a possibility). Nonetheless, the “new spirit” permeating the *Wealth* may be indicative of a general trend that started prevailing in Attic comic theatre already from the 380s. As it transpires, even the few specimens of full-scale political comedy known from the 4th century show a propensity to adapt to the new pan-Hellenic theatrical conditions. However, this tendency did not prove very fruitful, probably because of the difficulty in finding such political themes of universal appeal. This must have been the reason for its ultimate abandonment.

4. *The reduction of the comic chorus*

Apart from the decline of political satire, the second main development connected with 4th-century comedy in treatises of late antiquity was the severe restriction of choral elements.⁵⁴ This is already evident in Aristophanes' last plays. In the *Wealth* the chorus of farmers, at its first entrance, sings a song (*parodos*) which has been specifically composed by the poet for this comedy. However, no more choral songs are included in the rest of the play. Instead, the manuscripts bear the indication *XOPOY* (presumably *XOPOY MEΛIOΣ*, "song of the chorus") at a number of points (see after vv. 321, 626, 770, 801, 958 and 1096). At those junctures the chorus must have performed musical interludes, which however were not composed specifically for the *Wealth* and bore no relation to the action of the play. This is why they were not included in the script. Still, the chorus continues to occasionally take part in dialogue with the actors. In the subsequent decades the comic chorus grew even feebler. The *parodos*-song specifically composed for the play (and forming an integral part of its script) was retained for some time. It is still fully operational in Euboulos' *Stephanopolides* (fr. 102–103) and even survives in the New Comedy period: in Plautus' *Rudens*, based on a Greek play by Diphilos, the long recitation of the fishermen, who enter the stage describing their hard life (290–305), is most probably an adaptation of the *parodos*-song performed by a chorus of fishermen in the Greek model. The chorus' interaction with the actors also lingered for a while. Alexis fr. 239 (in eupolideans) is apparently spoken by a character to the chorus. Similarly, Aeschines (1.157) describes a comic actor addressing the chorus in anapaests in a comedy performed at the Rural Dionysia shortly before 345.⁵⁵ Fragments of a marble relief from the Athenian Agora, dated ca. 350–325, depict a comic chorus accompanied by an actor.⁵⁶

54. See above, section 3 and n. 33.

55. On the evolution of the comic chorus in the 4th century see Körte, "Komödie", 1258–1260; Maidment, "Chorus", 1–24; Webster, *Studies*, 14–15, 58–63; G.M. Sifakis, *Studies in the History of Hellenistic Drama*, London 1967, 113–120; id., "Aristotle, *E.N.*, IV, 2, 1123 a 19–24, and the Comic Chorus in the Fourth Century", *AJPh* 92 (1971) 416–432; Arnott, "From Aristophanes", 67–69; R.L. Hunter, "The Comic

However, as the 4th century progressed, the recession of choral elements must have become increasingly evident. In Menander's drama the chorus no longer interacts with actors and the specially composed *parodos* has also disappeared. The chorus is no more than a *komos*, a group of revellers with no particular dramatic identity and no essential connection to the plot. Its entrance is announced as a rule by one of the characters at the end of the first act with a stereotyped phrase.⁵⁷ But the chorus never enters in conversation with the characters and no-one pays any attention to it in the rest of the play. It only exists for singing entr'actes, musical interludes in the intervals of the action. These songs were not included in the comic script (in New Comedy papyri there is only the indication *XOPOY* between the acts); they presumably had no relation to the plot and perhaps were not even composed by the comic poet himself. They may conceivably have been favourite songs ("hits") of the time, used to entertain the spectators in the intervals.⁵⁸ It is likely that this new type of chorus had already taken form from earlier times. The stereotyped announcement of the entrance of a chorus of revellers occurs already in Alexis (fr. 112). For some time this new type must have coexisted with the older model, the one known from the *Wealth* and Middle Comedy, until finally the latter was supplanted and ousted by the former.

Chorus in the Fourth Century", *ZPE* 36 (1979) 23–38; Handley, "Comedy", 399–402; R. Pretagostini, "I metri della commedia postaristofanea", *Dioniso* 57 (1987) 245–265; K.S. Rothwell, "The Continuity of the Chorus in Fourth-Century Attic Comedy", in G.W. Dobrov (ed.), *Beyond Aristophanes. Transition and Diversity in Greek Comedy*, Atlanta 1995, 99–118; Csapo – Slater, *Context*, 349–352, 354–357.

56. See Webster – Green, *Monuments*, no. AS 3; cf. Sifakis "Aristotle", 417–420; Rothwell, "Continuity", 113. Cf. also Adesp. Com. fr. 1032.18–26, which may contain a dialogue between chorus and actors. On the chorus of cities in a comedy of Heniochos see above, section 3. It is not known, however, how far this chorus participated in dialogue and action.

57. See e.g. *Asp.* 246–248; *Dysc.* 230–232; *Epitr.* 169–171; *Peric.* 261–262.

58. Ironically, in the 5th century successful choral songs from Old Comedy plays could be detached from their dramatic context and become popular hits in social entertainments: e.g. well-received musical numbers from Kratinos' plays were taken up by the public and sung in symposia (Ar. *Eq.* 529–530). By the late fourth century this phenomenon has been totally reversed: now it is popular songs (presumably from the symposia or other social entertainments) that make their way into comic performance.

It would be again ill-advised to seek the causes of this decline in external constraints, e.g. financial shortages afflicting the wealthy Athenian citizens that served as *choregoi*. Financial depression and difficulties were certainly experienced by the propertied class of Athens during the 4th century; but in spite of them, the institution of the *choregia* seems to have functioned well and without serious impediments during the largest part of this period.⁵⁹ The *choregia* was only abolished near the end of the century, under the regime of Demetrios of Phaleron (317–307 B.C.). It was then that *choregoi* were replaced by an *agonothetes* (“Master of Festivals”), who was now the sole responsible for the organization of performances. However, by that time the model of New Comedy had fully prevailed, totally disconnecting the chorus from the dialogue and action of the play. Therefore, it cannot have been Demetrios’ abolition of the *choregia* that led to the reduction of the choral element. Conversely, Demetrios’ reform was itself designed as a response of the state to the new theatrical reality, in which the chorus had been entirely devitalized. It was not the cause but the final result of a long process of choral decline, which had set in already from the early decades of the 4th century.

Once more, the true causes of this phenomenon are not to be sought in historicist patterns but primarily in aesthetic and professional factors. A strong influence must have been exercised by the new type of comic play, the romantic comedy of love intrigues and domestic affairs, which prevailed on the comic stage by the 330s or 320s. This kind of comedy focused on the private life and family relations of everyday people, and the chorus could not plausibly perform an extensive part in this new comic world. Being traditionally the representative of a wider community, the incarnation of the public element, the chorus did not tally with domestic and family affairs. It was an outsider, an external observer, whose participation in the action would provoke embarrassment and on many an occasion hamper the evolvment of the plot. Another factor must have been the increased importance of actors. As actors attracted more and more the attention of the audience, their role grew at the expense of the choral parts. The actors were trained professionals, capable of performing complex virtuoso roles. On the contrary, the chorus con-

59. See Maidment, “Chorus”, 5–7; Rothwell, “Continuity”, 100–110.

tinued to be made up of amateurs, selected from among the citizens of Athens, until the abolition of the *choregia* at the end of the 4th century. The amateurish performances of such a chorus would be in marked contrast with the actors' skill and technical competence.⁶⁰

Above all, the pan-Hellenic diffusion of comic theatre must have had a determinative impact on the reduction of choral parts, just as on other changes of comic drama. Of special importance in this respect must have been the activities of itinerant theatrical companies, which were provided with plays by the comic poets of Athens and toured various parts of the Greek world to perform their repertoire.⁶¹ The kind of influence exercised by these new conditions may be understood if we reflect on the way such travelling troupes must have operated. Obviously, it would not have been easy for a troupe to carry around a number of chorus-members in its tour. Rather, it may reasonably be assumed that more often than not the troupe would cooperate with a local chorus at the place it went to perform each time. Indeed, this practice is attested by inscriptions relating to dramatic festivals, though from a later period, the 3rd and 2nd century B.C., in the full bloom of Hellenistic New Comedy.

A group of such inscriptions concerns the festival of the Soteria, which was celebrated at Delphi around the middle of the 3rd century and included performances of comedy, along with tragedy and musical competitions. The inscriptions record in detail the programme of the dramatic contests. Concerning the comic performances, they list, as the case may be, two, three or four comic troupes that participated in the festival and competed with each other, mentioning by name the members of each troupe and their capacity. Each troupe is made up of three actors, one *aulos*-player and one *didaskalos*. However, no comic chorus is recorded for each one of the troupes separately. Only at the end, after the catalogue of all the participating troupes and their members, do the inscriptions list the names of seven comic chorus-men (*χορευταὶ κομικοί*).⁶² This chorus of seven was obviously common to all the troupes and took part in the performances of them all. Consequently, it

60. Cf. Csapo – Slater, *Context*, 351.

61. Cf. Slater, "Illusion", 39–41; Rothwell, "Continuity", 99.

62. See e.g. SIG³ I 424.57–84; SGDI II 2563.47–74, 2564.61–78, 2565.58–79, 2566.60–77. On the Soteria inscriptions see Sifakis, *Studies*, 72–83, 116, 156–165.

could not have belonged to any one of the comic troupes in particular nor did it accompany any one of them in its tour. It was presumably provided by the Soteria festival to the troupes for their presentations. Since the chorus-members, recorded in the inscriptions along with their place of origin, come from diverse parts of Greece, it seems that the chorus provided on each occasion was a professional one, specially hired by the festival officials. In any case, it was not connected to any one of the troupes that performed with it; the latter found the chorus on location.

The same state of affairs is hinted at by an inscription of the 2nd century B.C. from Iasos, recording a decision of the guild (*koinon*) of the Dionysiac artists of Ionia and the Hellespont. The guild resolves to send to Iasos a group of artists, consisting of two *aulos*-players, one citharode, one cithara-player, two tragic actors and two comic actors. These artists are charged to perform in the local festival of the Dionysia at Iasos, “so that the Iasians may celebrate their choruses, honouring the god in accordance with their ancestral regulations”.⁶³ The phrasing (note especially ὅπως ἄγωσιν ... τοὺς [χ]ορούς, “so that they may conduct/hold the choruses”) is significant. The artists sent by the guild are only actors and musicians, not chorus-members. The choruses for the theatrical performances would doubtless be provided by the city of Iasos itself.⁶⁴

63. See W. Blümel, *Die Inschriften von Iasos*, vol. I, Bonn 1985, no. 152.1–16: *Γνώμη τοῦ κοινοῦ τῶν περὶ τὸν Διόνυ[σον τεχ]νιτῶν [τῶ]ν ἐν Ἰωνίᾳ [κ]α[ὶ] Ἑλλησπόντῳ (...)* [νέμειν τ]ῶι Διονύσῳ καὶ Ἰασεῦσιν εἰς τοὺς [συντελουμέν]ους παρ’ α<δ>τοῖς τῶι Διονύσῳ ἀγῶν[ας ἐκ] τῶν ἐγγεγραμμένων τεχνιτῶν καὶ μετεχόντων τῆς [ἡ]με[τ]έρ[ας συνόδ]ου φιλίας ὑπαρχούσης ἡμῖν ἐκ παλαιῶν χρόνων, ἀλητὰς δύο, τραγωδοὺς δύο, κωμωδοὺς δύο, κιθαρωδόν, κιθαριστήν, ὅπως ἄγωσιν τῶι θεῶι τοὺς [χ]ορούς κατὰ τὰς πατρίους αὐτῶν διαγραφάς. Cf. Pickard-Cambridge, *Festivals*, 293–294, 316; L. Robert, *Études anatoliennes*, Paris 1937, 445–450; Csapo – Slater, *Context*, 252.

64. Admittedly, the exact opposite practice is attested in another late 2nd-century inscription, which refers to the festival of the Winter Soteria, celebrated at Delphi at some point between 145 and 125 B.C. This document records that the guild of Dionysiac artists of the Isthmos and Nemea sent to Delphi a number of performers to take part in the festival: apart from musical artists and lyric choruses of boys and men, these included three comic actors (one κωμωδός and his two συναγωνισταί) and four comic chorus-men (χορευταὶ κωμωιδῶν); see SIG³ II 690; Sifakis, *Studies*, 85, 117. Here, in contrast to the inscriptions discussed above, the comic chorus accompanies a particular troupe of players. It would thus seem that during the Hellenistic period the practice of comic troupes concerning the chorus was not uniform. It is of course impossi-

Unfortunately, no such inscriptional testimonies have been preserved from the 4th century. Nonetheless, certain passages in authors of the time may be interpreted as referring to the same practice, if considered under the light of the later documents discussed above. A case in point is the famous passage from Plato's *Laws*, which describes poets of tragedy coming to a city to give a performance. They are bringing with them their *ποιήσεις*, i.e. the plays they intend to present (817a, ὧ ξένοι, πότερον φοιτῶμεν ὑμῖν εἰς τὴν πόλιν τε καὶ χώραν ἢ μή, καὶ τὴν ποίησιν φέρωμέν τε καὶ ἄγωμεν). They also bring along the actors that will perform in the plays, and the technical equipment (stage construction and shacks, perhaps scenery) which they intend to set up in a public place for their production (817c, σκηνάς τε πήξαντας κατ' ἀγορὰν καὶ καλλιφώνους ὑποκριτὰς εἰσαγαγομένους). They request permission to present their works, and the city must then decide whether it will allow the performance and "give a chorus" to the poets (817d, δώσομεν ὑμῖν χορόν).⁶⁵ This passage reflects, of course, the special conditions that

ble to determine how frequent was either of these alternative practices, due to the scantiness of the available material. Nonetheless, the inscription of the Winter Soteria presents a notable oddity: the chorus-members accompanying the troupe are only four — much too few to constitute a full dramatic chorus. In the 3rd-century Soteria, as seen above, the comic chorus was almost double in size (with seven members). Perhaps the four chorus-men are not meant to make up the chorus solely by themselves, but represent only a portion of it contributed by the guild of the Dionysiac artists; they would be expected to collaborate with other chorus-members locally provided by the Delphic festival, so as to complete together with them a full choral team. In any case, it seems significant that the majority of inscriptions relating to comic performances do not mention a chorus. Many of them record a *didaskalos* or *chorodidaskalos* accompanying the comic troupe (see Sifakis, *Studies*, 34, 88–90, 117–120), but this does not necessarily imply that a chorus was also following. As known already from 5th-century theatre practice, the *didaskalos* had broader duties beyond the training of the chorus, taking care of the overall scenic presentation and *mise en scène* of the production. The *didaskaloi* of the inscriptions may have attended to these general tasks, besides training the choruses provided at each particular place of performance.

65. *Laws* 817a–d: "Now as to those so-called 'serious' poets, the ones composing tragedies — suppose that some of them come to us and pose such a question as this: 'Strangers, are we, or are we not, to visit your city and country and bring along and exhibit our poetry? Or what policy have you decided to follow on this?' What would then be the right answer to make to these inspired men regarding the matter? I think we should reply in this manner: 'Most excellent of strangers, we ourselves, to the best

Plato has designed for his model city in the *Laws*, where there is strict state control of performances and all other forms of public expression. But these conditions accord with the picture delineated by the theatrical inscriptions of the Hellenistic age. The tragic poets of the *Laws* are apparently on a tour, visiting various places to perform with their troupe of actors. They thus arrive at the Platonic city and prepare to give a show, for which the city itself must provide the chorus. Clearly, the troupe is not accompanied by a chorus in its tour but expects to cooperate with one locally, at each particular place of performance. The phrase *διδόναι χορόν* (“provide a chorus”) was already used in the Attic theatre of the 5th century as a quasi-technical term: a poet willing to enter a play in a dramatic festival was obliged to apply to the official (*archon*) responsible for its organization, and the official “gave the poet a chorus”, i.e. granted him permission to compete.⁶⁶ Plato apparently adapts this administrative terminology of the Athenian theatrical life to the new conditions created by the pan-Hellenic diffusion of drama in the 4th century. Now the city “provides the chorus” to the itinerant troupes that come to perform there. This is an indication that a state of affairs similar to that pictured in Hellenistic inscriptions was already being formed from the 4th century. The “internationalization” of comic theatre created the phenomenon of travelling companies, which toured the Greek cities presenting their repertoire. These could not carry along with them an entire comic chorus but counted on finding one at each stop of their tour, to provide the choral parts for their performance.

of our ability, are the authors of a tragedy at once superlatively beautiful and good. (...) Do not imagine, therefore, that we will ever thus lightly allow you to set up your stage among us in the marketplace, and give you permission to introduce these sweet-voiced actors of yours, that speak out louder than us, and publicly harangue women and children and the whole populace, if you intend to say not the same things as we say about the same affairs, but things that are, for the most part, exactly the opposite. In fact, both we and the whole city would be absolutely mad, if we allowed you to do as I have said, before the magistrates decide whether your compositions are permissible and suitable to be delivered in public or not. So now, you children descending from the tender Muses, you must first display your songs side by side with ours before the magistrates; and if your utterances prove to be the same as ours or better, then we will grant you a chorus; but if not, my friends, we can never do so’.”

66. See Kratinos fr. 17; Arist. *Poet.* 1449b 1–2; Pickard-Cambridge, *Festivals*, 84.

The contribution of the new circumstances to the restriction of choral parts is easy to guess. Since the comic troupe first encountered the chorus on location, wherever it went to perform each time, the period available for preparation and rehearsals of this chorus with the actors was obviously very small. The chorus-members would not have been able to learn extensive and complex choral parts, such as those that characterized the comedies of the 5th century, nor to play a large role in the action. The chorus' participation had to be limited, in accordance with the restrictions imposed by the brief training time and the working conditions. A *parodos*-song specially devised for the play and a few lines of dialogue with the actors were the utmost that could be expected from the men of such a chorus. However, it would have been much more convenient if the chorus did not participate at all in the action and simply performed interludes during the action breaks. In that case, the chorus could be trained separately from the actors and sing musical numbers already known to its members — pieces that presumably formed part of a standard repertoire mastered by the chorus-men and could be used as entr'actes in any given play. In this way, the new reality of theatrical pan-Hellenization brought about a drastic restriction of choral parts, such as occurs already in the last plays of Aristophanes, early in the 4th century. The final stage of this process was reached a few decades later, in the time of New Comedy. The choral element was reduced to the absolute minimum and the chorus ended up playing no more than a decorative part.

5. *Epilogue*

The eclipse of political comedy left free scope for other themes, which could have pan-Hellenic appeal and were thus better adapted to the new conditions of “internationalized” theatre. As noted above, myth burlesque flourished for a considerable period, from the 400s to the 340s. The myths furnishing the material for this genre were common property of the entire Hellenic population. Even comedies parodying specific tragic models would be readily appreciated in many parts of the Greek world, since Attic tragedies (especially the great works of Euripides and the other classical tragic poets) were also widely known and performed outside Athens.

However, already from the early part of the 4th century, and side by side with mythological comedy, another kind of comic drama had started to develop, which was destined to prevail on the comic stage by the New Comedy period, supplanting all other genres. This new type of play was set in the contemporary age and drew its material from the private and family life of ordinary bourgeois citizens. It laid its main stress on the fabrication of a well-made and enthralling plot, at the centre of which was a love affair between the young hero and a girl. The obstacles that the young lover had to overcome, in order to be united with his ladylove, and the intrigues and machinations devised for this purpose by the lover or his helper made up the action. The plot materialized through the interaction of a series of stock characters, distinguished by a set of stereotyped traits and comic roles. Certain dramatists, such as Menander, took pleasure in playing with such stock figures, mingling their standardized characteristics with a carefully calculated measure of innovation and enhancing their psychological perspective and dramatic lifelikeness. The comedy of characters was thus born. This genre was also ideal for pan-Hellenic diffusion, as it drew its subject-matter from the everyday experiences of ordinary people, which did not essentially differ from one city to another.

Thanks to its broad appeal and freedom from topicality, this latter kind of comic drama was the one imitated by the Roman playwrights and thus inherited by the European world from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance onwards. As a result, the New Comedy type of play ultimately determined the standard form of European comic theatre for an age-long period, almost to our own days. This course of events indicates the tremendous importance of the 4th century B.C. and of the developments discussed in the present article for the entire history of Western drama. In the words of Cedric Whitman, Old Comedy died intestate.⁶⁷ The true fathers of European comic theatre are Menander and his contemporaries; and behind them, as forefathers and primogenitors of our idea of comedy, we may discern the obscure figures of Antiphanes, Anaxandrides and Alexis.

67. C.H. Whitman, *Aristophanes and the Comic Hero*, Cambridge MA 1964, 2.