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MIDDLE COMEDY: NOT ONLY MYTHOLOGY AND FOOD

THE POLITICAL AND CONTEMPORARY DIMENSION

Summary: The disappearance of the political and contemporary dimension in the production after Aristophanes is a false belief that has been shared for a long time, together with the assumption that Middle Comedy – the transitional period between *archaia* and *nea* – was only about mythological burlesque and food. The misleading idea has surely risen because of the main source of the comic fragments: Athenaeus, *The Learned Banqueters*. However, the contemporary and political aspect emerges again in the 4th c. BC in the creations of a small group of dramatists, among whom Timocles, Mnesimachus and Heniochus stand out (significantly, most of them are concentrated in the time of the Macedonian expansion). Firstly Timocles, in whose fragments the personal mockery, the *onomasti komodein*, is still present and sharp, often against contemporary political leaders (cf. fr. 17, 19, 27 K.–A.). Then, Mnesimachus (Φύλιππος, fr. 7–10 K.–A.) and Heniochus (fr. 5 K.–A.), who show an anti- and a pro-Macedonian attitude, respectively. The present paper analyses the use of the political and contemporary element in Middle Comedy and the main differences between the poets named and Aristophanes, trying to sketch the evolution of the genre, the points of contact and the new tendencies.

Key words: Middle Comedy, Politics, *Onomasti komodein*

For many years, what is known as the “food fallacy”¹ has been widespread among scholars of Comedy. It involves the idea that Middle Comedy was obsessed with food,

¹ For this definition cf. ARNOTT, W. G.: From Aristophanes to Menander. In BLOOM, H. (ed.): *Greek Drama*. Broomall 2004, 152 and ARNOTT, W. G.: Middle Comedy. In DOBROV, G. W. (ed.): *Brill's Companion to the Study of Greek Comedy*. Leiden–Boston 2010, 281.

On political content in Middle Comedy, see MEINEKE, A.: *Fragmenta Comicoe Graecorum*. Vol. I: *Historia Critica Comicoe Graecorum*. Berlin 1839, 274–276; KÖRTE, A.: Komödie. In *PWRE* XI 1 (1921) 1261–1262; CONSTANTINIDES, E.: Timocles' *Ikarioi Satyroi*: A Reconsideration. *TAPhA* 100 (1969) 49–61; WEBSTER, T. B. L.: *Studies in Later Greek Comedy*. Manchester 1970², 1–2, 23–49; ARNOTT, W. G.: From Aristophanes to Menander. *G&R* 19 (1972) 69–70; CARRIERE, J. C.: *Le carnaval et la politique. Une introduction à la comédie grecque suivie d'un choix de fragments*. Paris 1979, 149–150; HANDLEY, E. W.: Comedy. In EASTERLING, P. E. – KNOX, B. M. W. (eds.): *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature. Vol. I: Greek Literature*. Cambridge 1985, 404–407; NESSELRATH, H.-G.: *Die attische Mittlere Komödie*. Berlin – New York 1990, 189–200; CSAPO, E. – SLATER, W. J.: *The Context of*

which supposedly, together with Mythological Burlesque, is the genre's primary point of interest. However, many of the extant fragments are preserved in Athenaeus of Naucratis' *Deipnosophistai*, a work "whose tastes were gastronomic, not dramatic".² Athenaeus' bias leaves a partial impression of the part played by descriptions of food and drink in Middle Comedy. Nevertheless, erring too much in the opposite direction and simply accusing Athenaeus of showing us a distorted picture of the comedies he cites from is not worthwhile either. No other period of Attic comedy provided him with more material about food, gluttons and dipsomaniacs in Athens than Middle Comedy.³ It could not merely have been due to idiosyncratic interests on Athenaeus' part. However, numerous other themes and trends have been found in the texts, including an often neglected political and contemporary dimension.⁴

In addition, only fragments from Middle Comedy have survived. Although titles or fragments seem to imply political themes as major components of the plots, the complete development of the plot itself is inevitably lost and the extent to which such plays attacked or ridiculed contemporary figures will remain a question. To clarify: the political implications regarding the mockery of a famous contemporary personality are most of the time controversial. Importantly, Middle Comedy focuses on contemporary topics sometimes denied in a more de-historicized and de-actualized perspective, such as the one of New Comedy.

Yet the fragments are not the only evidence of the political and contemporary themes found in Middle Comedy. Quotations from ancient authors testify to the keen interest the comic poets had in contemporary issues. Personal invective, for instance, was apparently present in Middle Comedy. In 355 BC, Isocrates (8. 14) testifies to

Ancient Drama. Michigan 1994, 166; NESSELRATH, H.-G.: The Polis of Athens in Middle Comedy. In DOBROV, G. W. (ed.): *The City as Comedy. Society and Representation in Ancient Drama*. London 1997, 271–288; SIDWELL, K.: From Old to Middle to New? Aristotle's *Poetics* and the History of Athenian Comedy. In HARVEY, D. – WILKINS, J. (eds.): *The Rivals of Aristophanes. Studies in Athenian Old Comedy*. London–Swansea 2000, 247–258; OLSON, S. D.: *Broken Laughter. Select Fragments of Greek Comedy*. Oxford 2007, 220–226; PAPACHRYSOSTOMOU, A.: Οὐδὲν πρὸς τὴν πόλιν; Αναφορές σε πολιτικά πρόσωπα στη 'Μέση Κωμωδία' του 4ου αιώνα π.Χ. *Hellenika* 59 (2009) 181–204; ARNOTT, W. G.: Middle Comedy. In DOBROV: *Brill's Companion* (n. 1) 279–331; KONSTANTAKOS, I. M.: Condition of Playwriting and the Comic Dramatist's Craft in the Fourth Century. *Logeion* 1 (2011) 162–175; PAPACHRYSOSTOMOU, A.: Πολιτική σάτιρα και κριτική στη Μέση Κωμωδία. In MARKANTONATOS, A. – PLATYPODES, L. (eds.): *Θέατρο και Πόλη*. Athens 2012, 326–349; SOMMERSTEIN, A.: The Politics of Greek Comedy. In REVERMANN, M. (ed.): *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Comedy*. Cambridge 2014, 299–301; HENDERSON, J.: Comedy in the Fourth Century II: Politics and Domesticity. In FONTAINE, M. – SCAFURO, A.: *The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Comedy*. Oxford–New York 2014, 184–190; KONSTANTAKOS, I. M.: Tendencies and Varieties in Middle Comedy. In CHRONOPOULOS, S. – ORTH, C. (eds.): *Fragmente einer Geschichte der griechischen Komödie*. Heidelberg 2015, 169–171.

² ARNOTT: Middle Comedy (n. 1) 281; cf. NESSELRATH: Die attische mittlere Komödie (n. 1) 65, WILKINS, J.: Comic Cuisine. Food and Eating in the Comic Polis. In DOBROV: *The City as Comedy* (n. 1) 250–268 and *id.*: *The Boastful Chef*. Oxford 2000, 38–40; DEGANI E.: L'elemento gastronomico nella commedia greca postaristofanea. In LÓPEZ-FÉREZ, J. A. (ed.): *La comedia griega y su influencia en la literatura Española*. Madrid 1998, 215–224.

³ Cf. NESSELRATH: The Polis (n. 1) 271–288, HENDERSON (n. 1) 187.

⁴ Cf. the bibliography collected by CSAPO, E.: From Aristophanes to Menander? Genre Transformation in Greek Comedy. In DEPEW, M. – OBBINK, D. (eds.): *Matrices of Genre. Authors, Canons and Society*. Cambridge–London 2000, 121–133.

the complete freedom of comic poets in broadcasting the faults of their fellow citizens to all of Greece. Plato wishes for prohibiting personal abuse in comedy (*Leg.* 935e). Aristoteles hopes to restrict the performance of comedy and iambic to mature male audience (*Pol.* 1336b). Eventually, in 346 BC, Aeschines describes that he watched onstage an exchange between a comic actor and a chorus, in which a rhetor was charged with prostitution (*Tim.* 157).

Some personalities and episodes were recurring in 4th-century plays, which, again, testifies to a strong interest in the matters. An example concerns the very famous incident in 342/341 between Demosthenes and Philip about the island of Halonnesos.⁵ The Macedonian king grandly declared that he wanted to give Halonnesos to the Athenians, but Demosthenes reacted angrily, saying that the island was not the king's to give, but could only be given *back* to Athens, since it already belonged to the city by right and tradition (cf. [Dem.] 7. 2, Dem. 12. 12, Aeschin. 3. 83, Plut. *Dem.* 9. 6). Numerous poets refer to the episode, which probably became proverbial, playing on the meaning of the verbs δίδωμι and ἀποδίδωμι. Athenaeus (VI 223d–4a) cites four passages from four different plays consecutively where the words of Philip and Demosthenes are reused in comic quarrels:⁶

Alex. fr. 7: (A.) ἐγὼ δέ δωκα γάρ τι ταύταις; εἰπέ μοι. / (B.) οὐκ ἄλλ' ἀπέδωκα σε ἐνέχυρον δήπου λαβών

“(A.) Have I given these girls anything? Speak up! (B.) No; but you gave something back, after you took it as a deposit!”

Alex. fr. 212. 5–7: (A.) ἄλλ' ἐδῶκα τε / ὑμεῖς ἐμοὶ τοῦτ'. (B.) οὐκ ἐδῶκα μεν. (A.) τί δαί; / (B.) ἀπεδώκαμεν. (A.) τὸ μὴ προσήκόν μοι λαβεῖν

“(A.) But you / gave it to me. (B.) We gave it back. (A.) Something that wasn't mine to take!”⁷

Anax. fr. 8: (A.) καὶ τὰς † παλαίστρας † δώσω. (B.) μὰ τὴν γῆν, μὴ σύ γε / δῶς, ἄλλ' ἀπόδοσ. (A.) καὶ δὴ φέρουσ' ἐξέρχομαι

“(A.) I'll also give you the † wrestling schools. † (B.) No, by Earth, don't / give them; give them back! (A.) Alright, I'm coming out with them.”

Antiph. fr. 167: (A.) ὁ δεσπότης δὲ πάντα τὰ παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς / ἀπέλαβεν ὥσπερ ἔλαβεν. (B.) ἡγάπησεν ἄν / τὸ ῥῆμα τοῦτο παραλαβὼν Δημοσθένης

⁵ Cf. WEBSTER: *Studies* (n. 1) 44.

⁶ All comic fragments are cited from the edition of KASSEL, R. – AUSTIN, C.: *Poetae Comici Graeci. Vol. I–VIII*. Berlin – New York 1983–2001. The translations of the following fr. are from OLSON, S. D.: *Athenaeus. The Learned Banqueters. Books VI–VII*. Cambridge–London 2008, 9–11. For an analysis of the fr. see ERBÌ, M.: Demostene nella commedia di mezzo. In TULLI, M. (ed.): *L'autore pensoso: un seminario per Graziano Arrighetti sulla coscienza letteraria dei Greci*. Pisa 2011, 173–177.

⁷ Cf. ARNOTT, W. G.: *Alexis: The Fragments. A Commentary*. Cambridge 1996, 607.

“(A.) My master got all his father’s property back / in the same condition he got it. (B.) Demosthenes would / have been happy to take over this turn of phrase!”

Yet Callimedon, called the ‘Crayfish’ due to his avid gluttony for the kind of seafood (*PAA* 558185⁸), is the most targeted personality in Middle Comedy. He was a politician with pro-Macedonian sentiments who began his career in the 340s. He had his heyday after 322, when the formerly anti-Macedonian faction in Athens had been crushed. But his fortune, which was linked to Phocion’s, did not last for long. In 318, he was already forced to leave the city and condemned to death *in absentia*.⁹ His name appears in comedy 14 times in 13 different plays, but – interestingly – he is almost nowhere mocked for being a politician. He is mostly ridiculed for the squint in his eyes (Alex. fr. 117; Timocl. fr. 29) and because of his gluttony¹⁰ (Eub. fr. 8; Antiph. fr. 27, 77; Alex. fr. 57, 118, 149, 173, 198, 249; Men. fr. 224; Philem. fr. 43; Euphr. fr. 8). The only exception may be Theophil. fr. 4. 3–4, in which he is probably targeted for his weak eloquence, but again through a food-pun:

“τεuthὶς ἦν χρηστή, πατρίδιον. πῶς ἔχεις πρὸς κάραβον;” / “ψυχρός ἐστιν, ἀπαγε,” φησί· “ῥητόρων οὐ γεύομαι”

“The squid was excellent, Dad. How do you feel about the crayfish?” / “It’s cold and stiff;” he says, “get it out of here! I’ve got no appetite for politicians!”¹¹

The examples of Demosthenes and Callimedon show that the ὀνομαστὶ κωμωδεῖν, the mockery of individuals by name typical of the earlier comedies by Cratinus, Eupolis and Aristophanes, is still present and vivid in the 4th century.¹² The main difference from Old Comedy is the way in which this comic technique is developed. Characters are targeted for their political or public actions to a lesser extent. On the other hand, they are more stylized and modelled on the category of the stock character, especially the comic type of the glutton.

⁸ TRAILL, J. S.: *Persons of Ancient Athens*. 21 vols. Toronto, 1994–2012.

⁹ DAVIES, J. K.: *Athenian Propertied Families*. Oxford 1971, 279.

¹⁰ The *topos* of gluttony and insatiable voracity is common in 5th- and 4th-century comedies, often to signal anti-democratic behaviour of contemporary politics, cf. DAVIDSON, J.: *Courtesans and Fishcakes. The Consuming Passion of Classical Athens*. London 1997, 3–35 and *id.*: *Opsophagia*. In WILKINS, J. – HARVEY, D. – DOBSON, M. (eds.): *Food in Antiquity*. Exeter 1995, 204–213; cf. *infra* the charge of *opsophagia* against Hypereides.

¹¹ The translation is from OLSON, S. D.: *Athenaeus. The Learned Banqueters. Books 8–10*. 420e. Cambridge–London 2008, 49–51. For the adjective ψυχρός as a term of stylistic criticism, see Arist. *Rh.* 1405b34–1406b14. Referring to rhetoric, a style is ψυχρός when the text is filled with compounds, strange words, peculiar epithets, inappropriate metaphors. For the various types of ‘coldness’ in language or thought, see ZINK, N.: *Griechische Ausdrucksweisen für Warm und Kalt*. Heidelberg 1962, 65–73 and cf. the employment of the adjective in jokes at n. 26 with further bibliography.

¹² See moreover GELLI, E.: *Tracce di onomasti komodein dalla commedia di mezzo a Menandro*. In CASANOVA, A. (ed.): *Menandro e l’evoluzione della commedia greca. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi in memoria di Adelmo Barigazzi*. Firenze 2014, 63–82.

The permanence of the ὀνομαστὶ κωμῳδεῖν is found in particular in the extant oeuvre of Timocles, a poet from the late 4th century, whose works are filled with the caustic ridicule of famous personalities of his time.¹³

In Timocl. fr. 12, Demosthenes is mentioned by name and linked to the combative giant Briareus, but can actually fight only with small talks:

οὐκοῦν κελεύεις νῦν με πάντα μᾶλλον ἢ
τὰ προσόντα φράζειν. (B.) πάνυ γε. (A.) δρᾶσω τοῦτό σοι.
καὶ πρῶτα μὲν σοι παύσεται Δημοσθένης
ὀργιζόμενος. (B.) ὁ ποῖος; (A.) † ὁ Βριάρεως,
ὁ τοὺς καταπάλτας τάς τε λόγχας ἐσθίων, (5)
μισῶν λόγους ἄνθρωπος, οὐδὲ πώποτε
ἀντίθετον εἰπὼν οὐδέν, ἀλλ' Ἄρη βλέπων.

“(A.) So now you’re encouraging me to say anything – / Except what’s appropriate. (B.) Absolutely. (A.) I’ll do it for you. / And first of all, Demosthenes will stop being / mad at you. (B.) Who? (A.) † The son of Briareus, / the one who eats catapults and spears, / a guy who despises words and never / uttered a single antithesis, whose eyes flash War.”¹⁴

The comic description of Demosthenes in the fragment is probably an overturning of the actual character. He is said to eat weapons¹⁵ and have a warlike gaze and loathe harangues about war, especially the complicated ones, which the comic poet considers meaningless. But it resembles a reverse portrait of the orator and it seems that Timocles insinuates that Demosthenes shows himself like a combative giant, whilst he is only capable of uttering big insignificant words.¹⁶

Demosthenes is also referred to in fr. 4, together with other contemporary politicians of the anti-Macedonian faction (Moerocles, *PAA* 658480; Demon, *PAA* 322735; Callisthenes, *PAA* 559815 and Hypereides, the famous orator¹⁷). They were charged

¹³ Cf. CONSTANTINIDES (n. 1) 49–61 for a study on the political content of Timocles’ comedies.

¹⁴ The translation is from OLSON (n. 6) 11.

¹⁵ Cf. *infra* Mnesim. fr. 7. 3–9, probably said about Philip II or a Macedon soldier; if any relationship among the two texts exists, it is probable that Timocles reused Mnesimachus’ material, cf. WEBSTER, T. B. L.: Chronological Notes on Middle Comedy. *CQ* 2 (1952) 20, 25; WEBSTER: Studies (n. 1) 45; GELLI (n. 12) 68.

¹⁶ On the “antithesis”, cf. Aeschin. 2. 4 about Demosthenes: ἐφοβήθη μὲν γάρ, καὶ ἔτι καὶ νῦν τεθορύβηται μὴ τινες ὑμῶν ἀγνοήσωσί με ψυχαγωγηθέντες τοῖς ἐπιβεβουλευμένοις καὶ κακοήθεσι τούτοις ἀντιθέτοις – “I was frightened, and am still disturbed, lest some of you form a mistaken judgment of me, beguiled by those antitheses of his, conceived in deliberate malice”. Transl. ADAMS, C. D.: *The Speeches of Aeschines. Against Timarchus. On the Embassy*. Cambridge–London 1919, 165. The antithesis to which the fragment refers is probably the one δίδωμι/ἀποδίδωμι discussed *supra*, since the fr. is cited by Ath. VI 223d immediately after the ones in which the antithesis is explicit. See ERBI (n. 6) 177–182 for an analysis of the fragment.

¹⁷ Among the politicians named by Timocles, only Demosthenes’ name occurs also in the list published by the Areopagus, by which he was convicted of taking 20 talents from Harpalus and fined 50 talents, cf. Din. I 6. 89, Hyper. I 2. 10, see BADIAN, E.: Harpalus. *JHS* 81 (1961) 31–43, esp. 42; see also OLSON: Broken Laughter (n. 1) 222–224. For the prosecution against Demosthenes, see MARZI, M.: II

with accepting money from Harpalus, Alexander's treasurer (*PAA* 204010), who fled with 5000 talents of the King's money to Athens in 324/323 (cf. D.S. XVII 108. 6). He was consequently arrested, but then released thanks to the local politicians whom he had corrupted. The charge against Demosthenes is even worse than the charges against the others: l. 2 implies that Demosthenes will only be able to hold on to the money Harpalus gave him by bribing¹⁸ the other politicians in turn:

- (A.) Δημοσθένης τάλαντα πενήκοντ' ἔχει.
 (B.) μακάριος, εἴπερ μεταδίδωσι μηδενί.
 (A.) καὶ Μοιροκλῆς εἴληφε χρυσίον πολύ.
 (B.) ἀνόητος ὁ διδούς, εὐτυχὴς δ' ὁ λαμβάνων.
 (A.) εἴληφε καὶ Δήμων τι καὶ Καλλισθένης. (5)
 (B.) πένητες ἦσαν, ὥστε συγγνώμην ἔχω.
 (A.) ὃ τ' ἐν λόγοισι δεινὸς Ὑπερείδης ἔχει.
 (B.) τοὺς ἰχθυοπώλας οὗτος ἡμῶν πλουτιεῖ
 ὀψοφάγος † γὰρ ὥστε τοὺς λάρους εἶναι Σύρους.

“(A.) Demosthenes has 50 talents. / (B.) He's a lucky guy – provided he's not offering anyone else a share. / (A.) Moerocles also got a lot of gold. / (B.) The fellow doing the giving is an idiot; but the one doing the getting is lucky! / (A.) Demon also got something; Callistratus too. / (B.) They were poor, so I forgive them. / (A.) And Hypereides the clever speech-writer got a bit. / (B.) He'll make our fish-sellers rich; / because he's enough of † a glutton † to make the seagull look like Syrians!”¹⁹

The fragment is quoted by Athenaeus (VIII 341e–2a) as evidence that Hypereides was an ὀψοφάγος, “someone who consumes more ὄψον than he should, displaying a lack of self-control and an unwillingness to behave like an ordinary citizen”.²⁰ After the fragment, Athenaeus mentions another quotation in which Hypereides is mocked by name, Timocl. fr. 17:

processo arpalico e i suoi protagonisti. *Orpheus* n.s. 2 (1981) 87–104 and LANDUCCI GATTINONI, F.: Demostene e il processo arpalico. In SORDI, M. (ed.): *Processi e politica nel mondo antico*. Milano 1996, 93–106, esp. n. 5 for further bibliography about the Harpalus Affair. Demon was probably responsible for the decree which led to the return of Demosthenes from the exile, cf. Plut. *Dem.* 27. 6; [Plut.] *Mor.* 846d. Moreover, Hypereides delivered a speech against Demosthenes about the Harpalus Affair and became one of the chief prosecutors, cf. *Hyper. Dem.* 1–39 and see WHITEHEAD, D.: *Hypereides. The Forensic Speeches*. Oxford 2000, 355–364. What they actually have in common is that all of them were probably in the anti-Macedonian party, cf. ERBI (n. 6) 165–166; on the other hand, BADIAN 42: “the only possible explanation is that, when the play was performed, the list had not yet appeared: rumour was still ready with charges against all and sundry”.

¹⁸ Similarly, the politician Callistratus (*PAA* 561575) is a glutton in Antiph. fr. 293, where he is compared to a cook. For the comic treatment of Callistratus see SOMMERSTEIN (n. 1) 300.

¹⁹ The translation is from OLSON (n. 11) 57. Note the pun at the end of the fragment: Syrians were known as people who refused to eat fish, cf. Ath. VIII 346c–d.

²⁰ OLSON: Broken Laughter (n. 1) 224.

τόν τ' ἰχθυόρρουν ποταμὸν Ὑπερείδην πέρα,
 ὃς ἡπίαις φωναῖσιν ἔμφρονος λόγου
 κόμποις παφλάζων † ἡπίοις † πυκνώμασι
 πρὸς παν ὦ – ὤ – ὦ – δυσας ἔχει
 μισθωτὸς ἄρδει πεδία τοῦ δεδοκότος. (5)

“And beyond the Hypereides River, rich in fish, / which with mild words of thoughtful speech, / blustering with constant † mild † boasts / turns towards [corrupt] ... / is paid to water the plains of anyone who hires him.”²¹

The fragment is from the comedy *Icarian Satyrs*, performed around 330 BC.²² Although the fragment is extremely corrupt, the comparison between the famous orator and politician and a river that the traveller has to cross is clear. The river is metaphorically characterized by Hypereides’ notorious political faults or personal weakness. At l. 1, the water is full of fish, because of the orator’s ὀνοφαγία. The river is also described at l. 2 as bubbling and splashing with swollen waves, which is a comic metaphor for the ranting and boisterous rhetorical style of the orator in his public speeches. Finally, the river irrigating the fields around “anyone who hires him” (l. 5), is a clear allusion to Hypereides’ mercenary character – that he allegedly sold himself and his political action to the highest bidder.²³ Aristophanic parallels for the images are employed by the poet in the vivid description. Hypereides’ metamorphosis into a river recalls the parabasis of the *Knights*, where the poet Cratinus is compared to a rapid stream due to his impetuosity against his opponents. Again, Hypereides’ bubbling with his pompous rhetoric recalls the chorus of Aristophanes’ *Frogs*, in which the frogs’ use of onomatopoeic words and aquatic sonorities signifies the magniloquence but the actual inconsistency of modern poets’ works. The twofold allusion, the personal mockery and the homage to Old Comedy, is even more explicit in Timocl. fr. 19, again from *Icarian Satyrs*:

Μ[α]ρσύαν δὲ τὸν φ[ί]λαυλον Αὐτοκλέα δεδαρμέν[ο]ν
 γυμνὸν ἐστάναι καμίνῳ προσπεπαταλευμένον
 Τηρέα τ’ Ἀριστομήδην. (Β.) διὰ τί Τηρέα λέγεις;
 (Α.) διότι τηρ[ε]ῖν δεῖ παρόντος τοῦδε τὰ σκευὴ σφόδρα.
 εἰ δὲ μή, Πρόκνη γενήσῃ, κνώμενος τὸ κρανίον, (5)
 ἂν ἀπολέσῃς. (Β.) ψυχρόν. (Α.) ἀλλὰ πρὸς θεῶν ἐπί[σ]χετε
 μηδὲ συρίζετε.

²¹ The translation is from OLSON (n. 11) 57.

²² The mention of the courtesan Pythionice in fr. 15 is a terminus *ante quem*: she is said to have an affair with Chaerephilus’ sons, thus she was not yet the mistress of Harpalus, with whom she moved to Babylon after 329 BC and had a child, dying in childbirth (cf. Plut. *Phoc.* 22. 1), cf. COPPOLA, G.: *Per la storia della commedia greca: Timocles ateniese e Difilo di Sinope. RF 5 (1927) 456–459*; see also WEBSTER: *Chronological Notes* (n. 15) 25 and WEBSTER: *Studies* (n. 1) 46–47.

²³ See APOSTOLAKIS, K.: *Στο λυκόφως της πολιτικής σάτιρας: Ο Τιμοκλής και οι ρήτορες*. In TAMIOΛΑΚΗ, M. (ed.): *Νέες τάσεις στην έρευνα της Αρχαίας Κωμωδίας*. Heraklion 2014, 112–115.

“That the flute-lover Autocles, a naked Marsyas, / stood skinned on the chimney. / And Tereus – that’s Aristomedes. (B.) Why do you call him Tereus? / (A.) Because it is necessary to keep close watch over your things when this man is nearby. / If not, you will become Procne, and you would scratch your head, / and lose it all. (B.) That is a cold joke. (A) By the gods, hold / and don’t hiss us off the stage.”²⁴

When one of the two characters on stage mocks Autocles and Aristomedes,²⁵ the other one complains that the joke is not funny (ψυχρόν),²⁶ which prompts the first speaker to turn to the spectators and entreat them not to whistle in disapproval. Similar teasing between an actor and the audience took place in Aristophanes’ comedies,²⁷ but is very rare in Middle Comedy. Moreover, the whole *boutade* is based on the myth of Tereus and Procne, which, although very known and widespread, was at the basis of the plot of Aristophanes’ *Birds*. Finally, the association of mythological figures with well-known contemporary personalities is found a century earlier in Cratinus’ works: Aspasia is called Hera in fr. 259 and Pericles is named Zeus in fr. 73.

What is more, in his comedy *Orestautokleides* (fr. 27–28), Timocles probably staged Autocleides (*PAA* 238785), a contemporary politician notorious for indulging in pederasty (Harp. α 267, cf. Aeschin. 1. 52), as Orestes, the hero of Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*. But, instead of the Furies lying down as at the beginning of the drama, he is surrounded by a group of aged *hetairai*. They are probably angry and chase him because he preferred young boys to them.²⁸

περὶ δὲ τὸν πανάθλιον
εὐδουσι γῤῥες, Νάννιον, Πλαγγών, Λύκα,
Γνάθαινα, Φρύνη, Πυθιονίκη, Μυρρίνη,
Χρυσίς, †Κοναλίσ†, Ἱερόκλεια, Λοπάδιον.

“Old women are sleeping around / the miserable fellow: Nannion, Plangon, Lyca, / Gnathaena, Phryne, Pythionice, Myrrhine, / Chrysis, †Conalis†, Hierocleia, Lopadion.”²⁹

²⁴ The translation is from GIBSON, C. A.: *Interpreting a Classic. Demosthenes and His Ancient Commentators*. Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 2002, 93, modified.

²⁵ Autocles *PAA* 238940; Aristomedes *PAA* 173470.

²⁶ It refers to the joke Τηρεὺς/τηρεῖν and Πρόκνη/κνώμενος. For ‘coldness’ to denote jokes which are not funny cf. Eup. fr. 261, Thphr. Ch. 2. 4 with DIGGLE, J.: *Theophrastus. Characters*. Cambridge 2004, 189 *ad loc.* See moreover ARNOTT: Alexis (n. 7) 549 on Alex. fr. 184 and WRIGHT, M.: *The Comedian as Critic. Greek Old Comedy and Poetics*. London 2012, 108–110.

²⁷ Especially in the *Peace*, see the prologue and ll. 150, 160, 174–176, 664, 821, 877, 881, 1115.

²⁸ Harpocration quotes the other extant fragment from the comedy, fr. 28, which consists of the only word παρὰβυστον. The source specifies that it was used for the court in which the Eleven met. The fact that the same number of women are listed in fr. 27 let MAIDMENT, K. J.: *The Later Comic Chorus*. CQ 29 (1935) deduce that Autocleides was tried for his life, like Orestes in the Aeschylean tragedy; cf. OLSON: *Broken Laughter* (n. 1) 175.

²⁹ The translation is from OLSON, S. D.: *Athenaeus. The Learned Banqueters. Books 12–13.594b*. Cambridge–London 2010, 291, cf. also n. 127 for the names of the *hetairai*.

The use of mythical burlesque as an allegory for mocking contemporary celebrities in a political or satirical dimension has no parallels in 4th-century comedy. Moreover, the specific kind of mythical burlesque had not been employed in the Attic theatre since Cratinus' *Dionysalexandros* and the *Nemesis*, in which he ridiculed Pericles and Aspasia.

However, Timocles remains almost alone in employing the personal mockery and this particular kind of mythical burlesque, but his revival of contemporary subject matter is not completely unique to his era. After all, the rise of Philip caused a prolonged political turmoil in Greece and comic poets as well seemed to develop pro-Macedonian or anti-Macedonian feelings, especially in the 340s and 330s. Two sample cases will be analysed.³⁰

The first case is Mnesimachus, who wrote a comedy entitled *Philippos* shortly after 346 BC. The dating is conceivable thanks to fr. 8, which alludes to the city of Halos in southern Thessaly, which Philip besieged and conquered that very year, only immediately to cede it to the Pharsalians, his allies, again from Thessaly.³¹

τῶν Φαρσαλίων
ἦκει τις, ἵνα <καὶ> τὰς τραπέζας καταφάγη;
(B.) οὐδεὶς πάρεστιν. (A.) εὖ γε δρῶντες· ἄρά που
ὀπτήν κατεσθίουσι πόλιν Ἀχαιϊκὴν;

“(A.) Did any of the Pharsalians / come in order to eat the tables? /
(B.) None of them’s here. (A.) Good for them. Maybe, / they’re
gobbling down a roasted Achean city?”³²

The roasted city which the Pharsalians are supposed to eat is not only a bold, grotesque metaphor of destruction. The image also insinuates the shame of being allied with the enemy, which is detrimental to their own fellows.

But the most interesting fragment from the comedy is fr. 7, in which a speaker boasts in outrageous terms about his and his companions’ superhuman military qualities through a description of a weapons-gathering.

ἄρ’ οἶσθ’ ὅτι ἡ πρὸς ἄνδρας ἐστὶ σοι μάχη,
οἳ τὰ ξίφη δειπνοῦμεν ἡκονημένα,
ὄψον δὲ δῶδας ἡμμένας καταπίνομεν;
ἐντεῦθεν εὐθὺς ἐπιφέρει τραγήματα
ἡμῖν ὁ παῖς μετὰ δειπνον ἀκίδας Κρητικὰς,
ὥσπερ ἐρεβίνθους, δορατίων τε λείψανα
κατεαγόντ’, ἀσπίδας δὲ προσκεφάλαια καὶ
θώρακας ἔχομεν, πρὸς ποδῶν δὲ σφενδόνας
καὶ τόξα, καταπάλλαισι δ’ ἐστεφανώμεθα.

³⁰ Other fragments dealing with Philip are collected by WEBSTER: Studies (n. 1) 43–44.

³¹ Cf. Dem. 19. 163 and 174; [Dem.] 11. 1; Strab. IX 5. 8, see GRIFFITH, G. T.: Philip and the Army. In HAMMOND, N. G. L. – GRIFFITH, G. T. (eds.): *A History of Macedonia. Volume II 550–336 BC*. Oxford 1979, 282, 336 and SORDI, M.: *La lega tessala fino ad Alessandro Magno*. Roma 1958, 362–363.

³² The translation is from OLSON (n. 11) 461–463.

“So do you realize you’ll be fighting men / who eat sharpened swords for dinner / and gobble down flaming torches as a side-dish? / Then right after that the slave brings us / Cretan arrowheads as an after-dinner snack, / like chickpeas, plus some shattered fragments / of javelins; and we use shields and breastplates / as pillows, and put slings and bows / by our feet, and wear catapults as garlands.”³³

Some scholars³⁴ have thought that the speaker of the fragment was Demosthenes and the fragment itself was a mockery of his pompous harangues against the Macedonians. However, the speaker is more likely to be Philip himself or a Macedonian soldier, portrayed as a *miles gloriosus*.³⁵ The hypothesis is more coherent according to the innuendo in fr. 8 against the Pharsalians. Since fr. 8 expresses a critical attitude towards Macedonians, it is not likely that Mnesimachus mocks both Demosthenes and Philip in the same play.³⁶ Moreover, the mention of catapults at l. 9 is suggestive of the Macedonian army, since it was Philip who first introduced these military engines in mainland Greece.³⁷ As in the previous example, there is an aristophanic allusion in the description of the particular gathering. In Ar. *Ach.* 977–985 a similar combination of feasting and war is described. Again, at ll. 1097–1141, while Lamachos wears his armour and collects his weapons to face the enemies, Dikaiopolis is armed with wine-cups and delicacies to go to a banquet. Mnesimachus seems to have joined the two opposites in his description. Although in the funny *stichomitia* between Lamachos and Dikaiopolis the latter is apparently the *bomolochos*, during the whole comedy Lamachos plays the role of the *miles gloriosus*. The comic characterisation of the aristophanic Lamachos focuses on two points: his physical description and his behaviour. Lamachos is depicted, since he enters at l. 572, for his flashy appearance and the magnificent but bizarre look: the three gigantic shadowy plumes on his helmet, the armour and the spear, the Gorgon shield. Nevertheless, the main characterisation of the anti-

³³ The translation is from OLSON, S. D.: *Athenaeus. The Learned Banqueters. Books 10.420e–11.* Cambridge–London 2009, 5.

³⁴ BREITENBACH, H.: *De genere quodam titulorum comoediae atticae*. Basileae 1908, 36–37, followed by PAPACHRYSTOMOU, A.: *Six Comic Poets. A Commentary on Selected Fragments of Middle Comedy*. Tübingen 2008, 212–213.

³⁵ MEINEKE, A.: *Fragmenta Comicorum Graecorum. Vol. III*. Berolini 1840, 577, WEBSTER: *Studies* (n. 1) 64, KONSTANTAKOS: *Condition* (n. 1) 167–168.

³⁶ However, this may not be conclusive evidence, since Timocles seems to have mocked both the filo- and the anti-Macedonian parties in his *Heroes*. In fr. 12 analysed *supra* the poet’s target is Demosthenes, but in fr. 14 he attacks Aristomedes (cf. *supra* n. 25), who was charged to have been corrupted by the Macedonian King (Dem. 10. 70–73, cf. Timocl. fr. 19 *supra* and Philem. fr. 41). In fr. 14 Hermes is said to have descended on earth to help the beautiful Aristomedes, to prevent Satyros from calling him a thief. The character named Satyros seems to be a contemporary comic actor who sympathised with the anti-Macedonian faction (*PAA* 813890; he is praised by Dem. 19. 193 and criticised by Aeschin. 2. 156). Nevertheless, see GELLI (n. 11) 68: “la battuta, infatti, non sembra tanto avallare l’idea di un Aristomede corrotto dal denaro macedone, quanto piuttosto sottolineare il carattere alquanto pretestuoso dell’accanimento che l’antimacedone Satiro mostra nei suoi confronti”.

³⁷ Cf. SNODGRASS, A. M.: *Arms and Armour of the Greeks*. London 1967, 116–117; GRIFFITH (n. 30) 444–447.

hero is developed through his utterances, which are full of rhetoric, filled with pompous expressions and echoes from epic diction. The features perfectly fit the mask of the *miles gloriosus*, who tries to hide cowardice and laziness playing the bombastic braggart. Lamachos does lack real courage: he wishes to be appointed general not to serve the city or help his fellows, but only to avoid the battlefield, taking part in diplomatic missions, while ‘normal’ soldiers risk their lives. The final part of the comedy perfectly fits the comic type of the coward braggadocio. While Lamachos is going to fight a hostile group which is trespassing the borders of Attica, he stumbles upon a trench and dislocates his ankle. Unfortunately, the characterisation of the speaker of Mnesimachus’ fr. 7 and the look he had onstage are not possible to reconstruct, but a similar boastful attitude is observable from the extant lines.³⁸

On the other hand, a pro-Macedonian attitude could be found in Heniochos’ fr. 5, which consists of 18 iambic trimeters and seems to be part of the prologue of an allegorical play about contemporary political events.

ἐγὼ δ’ ὄνομα τὸ μὲν καθ’ ἐκάστην αὐτίκα
 λέξω· συνάπασαι δ’ εἰσὶ παντοδαπαὶ πόλεις,
 αἱ νῦν ἀνοηταίνουσι πολὺν ἤδη χρόνον.
 τάχ’ ἂν τις ὑποκρούσειεν ὅ τι ποτ’ ἐνθάδε
 νῦν εἰσὶ κἀνέροιτο· παρ’ ἐμοῦ πεύσεται. (5)
 τὸ χωρίον μὲν γὰρ τὸδ’ ἐστὶ πᾶν κύκλῳ
 Ὀλυμπία, τήνδ’ ἐπὶ τὴν σκηνὴν ἐκεῖ
 σκηνὴν ὁρᾶν θεωρικὴν νομίζετε.
 εἶέν· τί οὖν ἐνταῦθα δρῶσιν αἱ πόλεις;
 ἐλευθέρ’ ἀφίκοντο θύσουςαί ποτε, (10)
 ὅτε τῶν φόρων ἐγένοντ’ ἐλεύθεραι σχεδόν.
 κᾶπειτ’ ἀπ’ ἐκείνης τῆς θυσίας διέφθορεν
 αὐτὰς ξενίζουσ’ ἡμέραν ἐξ ἡμέρας
 ἀβουλία κατέχουσα πολὺν ἤδη χρόνον.
 γυναῖκε δ’ αὐτὰς δύο ταραττετόν τινα (15)
 ἀεὶ συνοῦσαι· Δημοκρατία θατέρᾳ
 ὄνομ’ ἐστὶ, τῇ δ’ Ἀριστοκρατία θατέρᾳ,
 δι’ ἧς πεπαρφνήκασιν ἤδη πολλάκις.

“I will tell the names one by one in a moment, / collectively these
 are all cities / who are now acting foolishly for a long time. / Swiftly
 one could interrupt and ask what / you are supposed to be seeing;
 he’ll be satisfied by me. / All this place round here is / Olympia, and
 this tent you must regard / as the tent of the envoys here. / Alright!

³⁸ Cf. MASTROMARCO, G.: *Modelli greci della maschera comica del soldato fanfarone. Vichiana 4* (2005) 152–173. The comparison between Lamachos and Mnesimachus has already been proposed by KONSTANTAKOS, I.: *Politicizing a comic type: Aristophanes’ Lamachos and Mnesimachos’ Philip. 5th Panhellenic Conference of Theatre Studies: Theatre and Democracy, in honour of Professor Walter Puchner*. National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Department of Theatre Studies, November 2014 (unpublished).

What are the cities doing here? / They came once to make sacrifices
to celebrate their freedom / when they had with difficulty got free
of tribute. / Then after that sacrifice Ms Irresolution led them
astray, / feasting them day after day / and domineering over them
for a long time now. / Two women were always there to disturb
them. / One is called Ms Democracy / and the other Ms Aristoc-
racy / and they have often made the cities get drunk and act badly.”³⁹

The setting is the city of Olympia, where an assembly of Greek cities⁴⁰ gather to make sacrifices of thanksgiving for not having to pay tributes anymore. However, they have been corrupted by lodging too long with a landlady called *Aboulia* (“Irresolution”) and, most of all, they are now persecuted and burdened by two other women, Democracy and Aristocracy. The date of the comedy is unknown. Breitenbach explains the allusion by locating it in the aftermath of the battle of Chaeronea (338),⁴¹ when Philip crushed the allied forces of Athens and Thebes and the other cities would be freed from their control (cf. D.S. XVI 85–86). Therefore, the fragment could refer to the formation of the Corinthian League. Nesselrath sees a reference to the mid-350s, after the Athenians had lost the Social War.⁴² Numerous poleis were actually released from Athenian control thanks to Macedon (cf. Aeschin. 2. 70; D.S. XVI 8). In any case, Heniochus’ pro-Macedonian attitude seems explicit. But, again, it is nothing completely new: the allegorical personification of cities and types of government is a familiar technique in Old Comedy, such as the character of Demos in Aristophanes’ *Knights*. Moreover, personified Hellenic institutions also formed the chorus in Eupolis’ *Cities* and perhaps Aristophanes’ *Islands*.

In conclusion, various contemporary and political elements are still present in Middle Comedy. Moreover, the considerable debt which the sub-genre owes to Old Comedy, both in the forms (the use of the personal mockery) and in the contents (evoking plots or episodes) was highlighted. Nonetheless, the way – not the frequency – in which politicians are mocked has evidently changed. Apart from few poets, such as Timocles, Mnesimachus and Heniochus, who appear to more or less openly express their

³⁹ The translation is from WEBSTER: *Studies* (n. 1) 44, modified.

⁴⁰ Perhaps the Chorus, cf. MEINEKE (n. 34), 563, who also thinks that “Cities” would be a suitable title for the comedy; see also MAIDMENT (n. 27) 14, HUNTER, R. L.: *The Comic Chorus in the Fourth Century*. *ZPE* 36 (1979) 34–35 and OLSON: *Broken Laughter* (n. 1) 126–127. They all agree with the possibility that those lines belong to the prologue of the comedy, cf. moreover LEO, F.: *Plautinische Forschungen*. Berlin 1912², 222, 239.

⁴¹ BREITENBACH (n. 33) 40, cf. WEBSTER: *Studies* (n. 1) 44.

⁴² NESSELRATH: *The Polis* (n. 1) 274. SOMMERSTEIN (n. 1) 300 ties the chronology to “the period of confused warfare and politics between the end of Spartan hegemony (371) and the arrival of Philip of Macedon as a force in Greek affairs (353)”; V. WILAMOWITZ-MOELLENDORF, U.: *Menander. Das Schiedsgericht*. Berlin 1925, 145 n. 1, on the other hand, suggests the period around the beginning of the Second Athenian League in 379/378; finally, KOCK, T.: *Comicourm Atticorum fragmenta. Vol. II*. Lipsiae 1884, 434 considers a reference to the end of the Chremonidean War (268/267–262/261), but this would be in contrast with the information of the *Suda*, which states that Heniochus is a Middle Comedy poet (cf. *Sud.* η 392 = Henioch. T1 K.–A.).

political inclination, contemporary characters are most of the time targeted for their private lives and vices (eating, sex) rather than for their public actions. As mentioned at the beginning, Athenaeus alone, the source of most of the fragments, is not to be blamed. The public probably developed a stronger interest in the matters, which is in turn reflected in the poets' choices. Such a number of *real* gluttons (or political gluttons) and *real* hetairai is found in no other period of Athenian comedy. The hypothesis is validated also by the name of Plato, an important personality in the period, which occurs 15 times in 15 different comedies in the 4th century.⁴³ The frequency, together with the material analysed, shows to what extent poets of Middle Comedy were interested in all aspects of contemporary life – political, social and cultural – in Athens.

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⁴³ Cf. WEIHER, A.: *Philosophen und Philosophenspott in der attischen Komödie*. Munich 1913, 37–55; ARNOTT: Alexis (n. 7) 6, IMPERIO, O.: *La figura dell'intellettuale nella commedia greca*. In BELARDINELLI, A. M. et al. (eds.): *Tessere: Frammenti della commedia greca. Studi e commenti*. Bari 1998, 121–129; for other intellectuals targeted in Middle Comedy cf. HENDERSON (n. 1) 188.