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A MISSED JOKE IN ARISTOPHANES' *WASPS* 1265–1274

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beside me and gush forth in that direction with the preliminary rendition of whatever it is you are intending to sing in your flowing performance.

A *CQ* referee enhances the interpretation of the conceit here by relating *προαναβάλλεται* to “the pleasure boys sometimes take in sending their urine in a long, high parabolic trajectory”. Such imagery accords well with the earlier reference to the *ἀναβολαί* encountered in the dung-beetle’s flight-path.

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A MISSED JOKE IN ARISTOPHANES’
WASPS 1265–1274

The ode of the second parabasis of *Wasps* (1265–74) satirizes a certain Amynias, a prominent Athenian at the time.¹ I shall argue here that none of the interpretations offered so far has fully grasped the point of the ode and I shall demonstrate how Aristophanes builds his joke about Amynias to a climax.

πολλάκις δὴ ἄοξ’ ἔμαυτῶ	1265a
δεξιὸς πεφυκέναι καὶ	1265b
σκαϊὸς οὐδέπωποτε,	
ἀλλ’ Ἀμυνίας ὁ Σέλλου	1267a
μᾶλλον, οὐκ τῶν Κρωβύλου,	1267b
οὔτος ὄν γ’ ἐγὼ ποτ’ εἶδον	1268a
ἀντὶ μήλου καὶ ῥοᾶς δειπ-	1268b
νοῦντα μετὰ Λεωγόρου· πει-	
νῆ γὰρ ἤπερ Ἄντιφῶν.	1270
ἀλλὰ πρεσβεύων γὰρ ἐς Φάρασαλον ᾤχετ’.	
εἴτ’ ἐκεῖ μόνος μόνοισι	
τοῖς Πενέσταισι ξυνηῖν τοῖς	
Θετταλῶν, αὐτὸς πενέστης	1274a
ὦν ἐλάττων οὐδενός.	1274b

The discrepancy between the different interpretations begins with vv. 1265–7b and subsequently influences the interpretation of the whole ode. MacDowell (1971), like the earlier commentators Rogers and Starkie, supplied *σκαϊὸς πεφυκέναι ἔδοξεν* after *μᾶλλον* of 1267b, so that Amynias is described as stupid.² His reason is that

¹ J. Kirchner, *PA* 737. It has been suggested that he was a general in 423–422 B.C. Cf. G. Kaibel, *Hermes* 30 (1895), 441–5; D. M. MacDowell, ‘Nikostratos’, *CQ* 15 (1965), 50–1. It certainly seems from vv. 74 and 326 (suggesting that Amynias was sitting at the front of the audience) that he was holding an important public office.

² D. M. MacDowell, *Aristophanes’ Wasps* (Oxford, 1971), 295. Cf. B. B. Rogers, *The Wasps of Aristophanes* (London, 1875) and W. J. M. Starkie, *Aristophanes: The Wasps* (Amsterdam, 1968, reprint of London, 1897), ad loc.; also J. Van Leeuwen, *Aristophanis Vespae*

the following verses, which for him contain the explanation of this statement (γὰρ in 1270), show how Amyntias ‘used to associate with rich men [like Leogoras], but now he has lost all his wealth’. MacDowell rejects the obvious alternative, which is to supply δεξιὸς πέφυκεν after μᾶλλον, on the grounds that ‘hunger and poverty may be evidence of stupidity but cannot be evidence of cleverness’.³ However, the final stanza about Amyntias’ embassy to Thessaly shows that he ‘showed himself to be clever: although almost everyone is superior to him, he was ingenious enough to discover some friends with whom he could associate on equal terms, so as to get a meal out of them’. So, he concludes (297), ‘the song, which seemed at first to be paying a compliment to Amyntias, turns out to be an insult after all’.

Sommerstein,⁴ however, like Green and Blaydes,⁵ supplies δεξιὸς πέφυκεν after μᾶλλον. His interpretation of the passage (first three stanzas 1265–70) is that ‘Amyntias is being described as very clever because, though a poor man, he has found a way of keeping well fed by sponging on rich men like Leogoras’.⁶ Sommerstein further thinks that the fourth stanza, which describes Amyntias’ embassy to Thessaly (1271–4), again demonstrates his cleverness, since ‘Amyntias has shown himself clever by finding a diplomatic role to which a poor man like himself was ideally suited, when on the face of it he did not seem an appropriate ambassador to send to an aristocratic state like Thessaly’.⁷ He concludes that ‘the treatment of Amyntias is thus sarcastic from the start’.⁸

MacDowell’s interpretation forces the Greek. The wording of the passage πολλὰκίς δὴ ὄοξ’ ἐμαυτῶ ... (the chorus on itself) ἀλλὰ ... μᾶλλον (the chorus on Amyntias) suggests that the same verb should be supplied with (and the same quality recognized in) both subjects, that is δεξιὸς πέφυκεν, or, better still, δεξιὸς πεφυκέναι ἔδοξεν. For MacDowell’s interpretation we would expect ἀλλ’ οὐκ Ἀμύντιος or the like. Sommerstein is right to supply δεξιὸς πέφυκεν (or δεξιὸς πεφυκέναι ἔδοξεν). He is also right to argue that the praise is offered sarcastically. However, as I shall show, sarcastic praise is offered only in the first three stanzas of the ode. After this build-up, in the closing verses and with telling use of bathos, Aristophanes subverts even this ‘praise’ and produces a more devastating put-down of his target.

In the first verses of the ode the chorus claims that Amyntias has surpassed them in cleverness. His epithets ὁ Σέλλου ‘son of Hotair’ and οὐκ τῶν Κρωβύλου ‘he of the Hairbun family’ (1267), which suggest that Amyntias exhibits self-importance,⁹ are a hint at the kind of ‘cleverness’ which the chorus attributes to him. This becomes

clear in the verses which follow: Amyntias has become successful in social climbing¹⁰

(Lugduni-Batavorum, 1893), 137. This reading ultimately follows the ancient scholia, which on οὐκ τῶν Κρωβύλου note: ἐκ τοῦ προειρημένου προσληπτέον τὸ “σκαυδς μοι ἔδοξεν” VΓAld.

³ MacDowell on 1267, 296. Cf. his note on 1270.

⁴ A. Sommerstein, *Wasps* (Warminster, 1983), 231–2 and in his earlier article ‘Notes on Aristophanes’ *Wasps*’, *CQ* 27 (1977), 275–6.

⁵ W. C. Green, *Aristophanes: The Wasps* (London, 1891) and F. H. M. Blaydes, *Aristophanis Vespae* (Halis Saxonum, 1893), ad loc.

⁶ Sommerstein (n. 4), (1983) on 1267, 231. Cf. (1977) 275–6. Leogoras was well known for his wealth and was satirized by the comic dramatists for spending his money on pleasures and luxurious living, cf. Aristophanes, *Clouds* 109 cum schol., Plato, *Periages* fr. 114, Eupolis, *Autolyceus* fr. 50. Cf. Kirchner, *PA* 9075.

⁷ Sommerstein (n. 4), (1983) on 1273, 232. Cf. (1977) 276.

⁸ Sommerstein (n. 4), (1977) 276.

⁹ For Amyntias’ hair cf. *Wasps* 466 with MacDowell ad loc.

by sponging on rich men like Leogoras (1269),¹¹ although he himself has only ‘poor’ means (1268b, cf. 1270, 1274).¹² At the same time, in the whole of the third stanza (1268–70) the chorus describes Amynias as a successful sponger by stressing one element with which a *kolax* is usually associated in Comedy: *food*.¹³ Since Amynias is ‘poor’ he would be dining only on very simple food, like ‘apple and pomegranate’.¹⁴ But he is very hungry,¹⁵ and now he manages to fill his stomach by sponging on Leogoras’ lavish dinners. Here, then, as elsewhere in fifth-century comedy, the *kolax* is described in terms which resemble those of the *parasitos* in later literature. The content of this ode is, therefore, thematically related to the preceding episode, where Philocleon is given a lesson on sympotic behaviour with his hypothetical symposiasts being well-known *kolakes* (vv. 1219–48).¹⁶

The claim about Amynias’ ‘clever’ social climbing and his big appetite, as a *parasitos*, has prepared the climax of the joke in the final stanza: Amynias contrived to be sent in an embassy to Thessaly. But that nation was notorious for one thing, which in the interpretations of this passage has so far been disregarded. According to Athenaeus 418c,

πάντες Θετταλοὶ ὡς πολυφάγοι διεβάλλοντο,

the Thessalian people were known for their voracious appetites.

Athenaeus (418c–e) cites numerous examples of this jocular stereotype from Attic Comedy, which show that it was extremely common:

Crates, *Lamia* fr. 21:

¹⁰ Earlier in the play Amynias had already been called a social climber (326): τὸν Σέλλου/ τοῦτον τὸν ψευδαμάμαξεν (‘Mr Son of Hotair, that lying climber-vine’). Cf. MacDowell ad loc.

¹¹ We know that Cratinus in his *Seriphioi* (fr. 227) also satirized Amynias as a *kolax*.

¹² Poverty is a prominent element in the portrayals of *kolakes* in comedy, cf. J. Wilkins, *The Boastful Chef: The Discourse of Food in Ancient Greek Comedy* (Oxford, 2000), 83. Therefore, I think that the chorus’s claim for Amynias’ poverty should not be taken at face value. It is unlikely that anyone known to an Athenian audience as Amynias was (so as to become a *komodoumenos*) was destitute, or even on a moderate income. What matters here, as generally in Old Comedy, is how an individual is depicted rather than his real status, and Amynias is depicted as a *kolax*. Perhaps he was by elite standards only moderately well off and had the habit of exploiting his connections with the rich in order to achieve a lifestyle which he could not otherwise afford.

¹³ Cf. the portrayal of *kolakes* in Eupolis’ homonymous play of the following year as *κοιλοδαίμονας* (fr. 187) and *ταγνηνοκισθήρας* (‘those who can sniff out the smell of hot fat from a frying-pan’, fr. 190) and the description of their habits in fr. 172.11ff. and fr. 175; see I. Storey, *Eupolis* (Oxford, 2003), 189–92. Such portrayals help understand how the transition from the *kolax* of Old Comedy to the *parasitos* of later comedy came about. For the common ground of the two terms see Wilkins, 73–7; N. Fisher, ‘Symposiasts, fish-eaters and flatterers: social mobility and moral concerns in Old Comedy’, in D. Harvey and J. Wilkins (edd.), *The Rivals of Aristophanes* (London, 2000), 372–3.

¹⁴ The phrase ἀντι μίλου καὶ ῥοῶς probably typifies ‘cheap and not very nutritious’ or ‘cheap and very common’ food, as noted by Sommerstein and MacDowell. Contra cf. F. Delneri, ‘Ar. *Vesp.* 12688 ss.’ *Eikasmos* 13 (2002), 86–9.

¹⁵ The climax of this claim is *πεινῆ γὰρ ἤπερ Ἀντιφῶν* (1269–70). We do not know who Antiphon is; he may have been the famous orator who at that time was at the peak of his career, but we cannot be sure, since Antiphon was a common name. If this is indeed the well-known orator, Aristophanes points out how big Amynias’ hunger is (because of his ‘poor’ means), by comparing it to—and laughing at—Antiphon’s big appetite (probably in the context of his lavish living; for the sense of *πεινάω* ‘to have a big appetite’; cf. Antiph. fr. 249.2, Eub. fr. 9.4); cf. MacDowell on 1270, 297. Antiphon, then, is a collateral target here. Sommerstein (n. 4), (1977), 275–6 gives a different interpretation (‘in spite of his poverty he [Amynias] manages to be no hungrier than a rich man like Antiphon’).

¹⁶ Cf. Fisher 374.

ἔπη τριπήχη Θετταλικῶς τετμημένα

and explains: τοῦτο δ' εἶπεν ὡς τῶν Θετταλῶν μεγάλα κρέα τεμνόντων.

So, Philetaeros, *Torch-Bearers* fr. 10:

καὶ χειροβαρῆς σαρκὸς ὑείας Θετταλότμητον κρέας

Also, Hermippus, *Fates* fr. 42:

ὁ Ζεὺς δὲ τούτων οὐδὲν ἐνθυμούμενος

μύων ξυνέπλαττε Θετταλικὴν τὴν ἐνθεσιν

Aristophanes' *Masters of the Frying-pan* fr. 507:

(A.) τί πρὸς τὰ Λυδῶν δεῖπνα καὶ τὰ Θετταλῶν;

(B.) τὰ Θετταλικά μὲν πολὺ καπανιώτερα¹⁷

Athenaeus says that among the Thessalians, the people of Pharsalus were especially notorious for gluttony (καὶ Φαρσάλιοι δὲ κωμωδοῦνται ὡς πολυφάγοι: 418b). He gives an example from Mnesimachus, *Philip* fr. 8:

τῶν Φαρσαλίων

ἦκει τις, ἵνα (καὶ) τὰς τραπέζας καταφάγη;

(B.) οὐδεὶς πάρεστω. (A.) εἶ γε δρῶντες. ἄρα που

ὀπτὴν κατεσθίουσι πόλιν Ἀχαϊκῆν;

There are several more passages from Attic Comedy which exploit the same stereotype about the Thessalians: Antiphanes, *Inc. Fab.* 249 (=Athen. 2.47B), Ephippus, *Artemis* 1 (=Athen. 3.112F), Eriphus, *Peltast* 6, and Alexis, *Running-Mates* 216 (=Athen. 4.137C–D). The occurrence of the stereotype in Plato *Crito* 53D–E further establishes how widely known it was:

ἤξεις δὲ εἰς Θετταλίαν παρὰ τοὺς ξένους τοὺς Κρίτωνος; ἐκεῖ γὰρ δὴ πλείστη ἀταξία καὶ ἀκολασία, . . . ἐτόλμησας οὕτω γλίσχρως ἐπιθυμεῖν ζῆν, νόμους τοὺς μεγίστους παραβάς, οὐδεὶς ὅς ἐρεῖ; . . . τί ποιῶν ἢ εὐωχούμενος ἐν Θετταλίᾳ, ὡς περ ἐπὶ δεῖπνον ἀποδοδημηκὸς εἰς Θετταλίαν;

The wording of this passage suggests that εὐωχούμενος ἐν Θετταλίᾳ was probably a contemporary proverbial expression for wild self-indulgence. Otherwise the phrase ἐν Θετταλίᾳ in this passage seems redundant and odd.¹⁸

In the *Wasps* ode, when the chorus makes his next remark

ἀλλὰ πρεσβεύων γὰρ ἐς Φάρσαλον ὦχετ',

it looks as if the parasite Amynias is going to receive even more 'praise'.¹⁹ Given his 'poverty', his hunger and his love for lavish food, in the world of comedy Amynias must have been considered very lucky to achieve an embassy to the gluttonous Thessalians. Going to the Land of the Gourmands, one thing he would definitely get out of them would be good feasts.

¹⁷ Aristophanes plays here with the Thessalian idiom, too, by using the idiomatic word *kapane*, which is what the Thessalians called the chariot, cf. Xenarchus, *Scythai* fr. 11.

¹⁸ Cf. H. Tredennick and H. Tarrant, *The Last Days of Socrates: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo/Plato* (London, 1993), 211. It is interesting that one editor of *Crito*, Schanz (Leipzig, 1875), deleted ἐν Θετταλίᾳ as superfluous.

¹⁹ The ἀλλὰ . . . γὰρ marks a difference between what precedes, which is subsidiary, and what follows, which is primary or decisive: 'And, as a matter of fact, he even went . . .'. Cf. J. D. Denniston, *The Greek Particles* (Oxford, 1954), 101.

Out of all the Thessalians, however, Amynias with his *σκαιότης* managed to spend his time in the company of the only ones he should not: he was hosted only by the *Penestai*, the serfs—‘Poorboys’—of the area, as the chorus sneers:

εἶτ' ἐκεῖ μόνος μόνοισι

τοῖς Πενέσταισι ξυνῆν²⁰ τοῖς

Θετταλῶν, αὐτὸς πενέστης

1274a

ᾧν ἐλάττων οὐδενός.

1274b

The poet has contrived the bathos through a pun: the *Penestai* of Thessaly were not literally ‘paupers’, but a social class without citizen rights, often compared to the Spartan helots.²¹ Since, however, the obvious connotation of their name is that of poverty, it serves the poet, first of all, to sneer at Amynias’ ridiculous stupidity to meet the sole Thessalians who would very obviously not be able to provide him with the food he wanted,²² secondly, to insult him once more by reminding him of his own ‘straitened circumstances’. Bathos is a typical humour technique of Aristophanic comedy,²³ and most importantly, it is once more employed in the epirrheme corresponding to this ode (1275–83): there the chorus builds up the praise to Automenes for his ‘artistically talented children’, to tell us only in the final verse that the talent they mean for his third son is sexual perversion.

Needless to say, since things are so, the allegation that Amynias had contacts with the *Penestae* need not be literally—that is, historically—true, but Aristophanes could have just fabricated it for the sake of the joke.²⁴ The satire would have been particularly amusing if Amynias was sitting at the front in the theatre, as vv. 74 and 326 suggest, so that the chorus was facing and pointing at him when they sang this song.²⁵

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²⁰ *ξυνῆν* has apparently the convivial sense that it has in v. 1256 of the same play, cf. Starkie on 1272, 378. Contra cf. F. Delneri (n. 14).

²¹ So Theopompus, *FGrH* 115 F122. The difference from the Helots was that the *penestai* belonged to individual Thessalian aristocrats and were not public slaves. Dionysius of Halicarnassus (2.9.2) compares them to the *thetai* of Athens and Pollux 3.83 characterizes them as *μεταξὺν ἐλευθέρων καὶ δούλων*. Very obviously, their name is etymologically associated to the word *πένης*.

²² While writing this paper, I realized that Starkie has mentioned the stereotype about the ‘luxury and the gluttony of the Thessalians’ in his commentary on 1271; he has failed, however, to connect it with the sarcasm about Amynias’ stupidity, believing that this is explained by the claim that Amynias has become poor. Cf. Starkie on 1267, 376.

²³ Cf. e.g. *Lysistrata* 1043–57, 1058–71, 1189–1202, and 1202–15, *Ecclesiazousae* 1140–8, *Clouds* 169–73 and 175–9.

²⁴ For a literal interpretation of this allegation see J. S. Morrison, ‘Meno of Pharsalus, Polycrates and Ismenias’, *CQ* 36 (1942), 64; cf. Starkie on 1272, 378. A. W. Gomme, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, Vol. 3 (Oxford, 1956), 622–3, found it possible but uncertain whether it reflected a real event.

²⁵ I would like to thank C. Carey, A. Griffiths, L. Prauscello, and R. Rawles for their advice and suggestions, and also the Saripolou Bequest the AHRB and the A. G. Leventis Foundation for successively funding parts of my research.