



Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Comedy* by Martin Revermann

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THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO GREEK COMEDY. Edited by MARTIN REVERMANN.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2014. Pp. xvii, 498.

EVEN WITH THE MODERN ACADEMIC BOOKCASE stuffed with more companions than an ancient Macedonian cavalry charge, the appearance of a new volume from the *Cambridge Companion* series still whets the appetite. And here, seventeen years after P. E. Easterling's rich collection on tragedy,¹ we have a tome on Greek comedy to match that edition.

In his opening statements Martin Revermann details a key starting point for all contributors: "The agenda . . . is this: what happens if we look at the Greek comic tradition as a *continuum*, spanning the fifth and fourth centuries (and beyond)?" (3). The collection adopts a broad and interdisciplinary approach, offering a thorough review of the traditional approaches to comedy but also giving full scope to playwrights other than Aristophanes and Menander and to performances far from Athens.

Part I presents a "multi-dimensional panorama" of the genre, beginning with David Konstan's sharp analysis of the distinctive features of Greek comedy (Chapter One). Even as he notes the characteristic shape of Old and New Comedy, Konstan highlights the many ways in which playwrights manipulate those intrinsic traits, both conforming to and challenging generic norms. Zachary Biles (Chapter Two) considers the competitive nature of Greek comedy in the performance context and in intertextual exchanges. He notes how interaction between rivals helped to develop the distinctive style of "demagogue comedy" in the fifth century and also ensured that comedy "remained a dynamic and evolving genre" (57). In Chapter Three Keith Sidwell presents both an expert overview of fourth-century comedy and a stimulating challenge to readers. Rejecting the proposal that Greek comedy evolved in a progression from Old to Middle to New, Sidwell proposes, instead, an "Aristotelian model" where two types of comedy (satirical and plot-based forms) exist together until the iambic style falls away. Just as provocative is the fine piece by the late Kathryn Bosher on comedy in the West (Chapter Four). This focus on performance in a non-Athenian context is most welcome, and Bosher uncovers a vibrant court culture where drama from Athens "was absorbed into an active theatrical tradition" (93) developed by Sicilian tyrants. Eric Csapo (Chapter Five) closes the section with a well-rounded study of dramatic artefacts, detailing the impact of Greek comic theatre on art. Csapo outlines the close relationship that these "classics of art as well as of drama" (122) can have with theatre, pointing out the contributions they make to our understanding of ancient performance and production conditions.

At the start of Part II, on comic dramaturgy, C. W. Marshall studies those regular features and common devices of Athenian comedy that helped shape performance (Chapter Six). But far from providing an uncomplicated catalogue, Marshall considers the creation of dramatic meaning through the "dizzying combination of words, music and performance" in each nuanced production (145). Chapter Seven, Ian Ruffell's first contribution, works through the types and traits, sequences and shorthands, of character that playwrights play with and play off. The complex interaction between stock types and individual characters—challenging expectations in New Comedy, conforming to the "logic of the joke" in Old (165)—remained key to the success of all productions. Finally, Andreas Willi presents a systematic study of the language of comedy (Chapter Eight). Emphasising the variety in comedy's linguistic register Willi notes: "There is no other

¹P. E. Easterling (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge 1997).

genre in ancient Greek literature whose language changed so fundamentally within less than 200 years" (175).

Part III, on central themes, opens with Stephen Halliwell's essay on laughter (Chapter Nine). This entry treats Old and New Comedy separately to stress the contrasting manifestations (and mentalities) of humour. Halliwell does consider some familiar features of "the comic" in Aristophanes and Menander but his expert review remains alive to the "different shades of laughter" (202) in the diffuse and considered work of each. In Chapter Ten Ian Ruffell returns to look at utopianism and places Old Comedy, especially, "at the forefront of public speculation, going beyond and perhaps even leading the radical edge of Greek ideas" (206). Ralph Rosen (Chapter Eleven) wrestles with the "comic hero," central to Old Comedy. For Rosen, the key to understanding Aristophanes' heroes is to concentrate on their comic effect. But even beyond their parodies of "true" heroism, the link between poet and protagonist is also crucial, for the "faux-heroism" of focal characters is "the stance that Aristophanes chose to adopt in his self-presentation as a comic poet" (239). Chapter Twelve sees David Kawalko Roselli analyse comedy's engagement with social class, offering a review of the stratification of theatre audience and onstage characters. The consideration of the former sees a broad spectrum of Athenian society in the fifth-century *theatron*, but with a significant shift and perhaps "a reconfiguration of ideological divisions" later on (246). Helene Foley's essay on gender relations (Chapter Thirteen) reviews comic costume and body language before moving on to treat the constructivist representation of "masculinity" and "femininity" in texts. In general, there we see that male characters retain the freedom to be "outrageous heroes," but comic women—even the most redoubtable—remain tied to traditional gender roles (273). The section concludes with Martin Revermann's "Divinity and Religious Practice" (Chapter Fourteen), which reminds us of comedy's complex engagement with religion and also highlights a continuity—one theology—across Old and New Comedy. The poets found the gods "great to laugh at," but comic ridicule never challenges the "unshakability of the status quo outside the theatre" (285).

Alan Sommerstein's thoughts on the political in Athenian comedy are at the start of Part IV. Chapter Fifteen, first, presents a form that was perhaps "an instrument of left-wing politics" early on (292) but more conservative through the second half of the fifth century, reflecting a theatre audience that was not fully representative of the general citizen body. In his summary of political material in fourth-century works, Sommerstein finds "slim pickings" beyond the likes of Timocles and Mnesimachus or, later, Philippides. Festival culture is the focus for Edith Hall (in Chapter Sixteen); ubiquitous, as both a performance context and a prominent part of Aristophanes' dramatic fiction. In festival, Hall maintains, the poet seeks to affirm and "shape *mainstream* opinion" (307, emphasis in the original), while on stage the presentation of the festival theme plays to the assembled audience's shared experience and identity, creating bonds across the citizen audience. Chapter Seventeen, Victoria Wohl's "Comedy and Athenian Law," also views Athenian drama as a constructive and crucial institution for the exercise of *demokratia*. While the "continuum" between courts and theatre in the fourth century is highlighted, of note here is Old Comedy's political engagement, how it helps to inculcate a "critical disposition" in citizens (335). Susan Lape and Alfonso Moreno reassess the New and Old comic worlds as a source for social and political history (Chapter Eighteen). In a comprehensive discussion, the point is made that Aristophanes and Menander are products of very different contexts—representing a change from "the mentality of tribute

to one of self-sufficiency" (368)—but the approach of each playwright to their shared concerns offers much for the social historian to consider.

Part V presents five chapters on reception. Richard Hunter surveys how hellenistic and Roman readers utilized comedy in their public and private worlds (Chapter Nineteen). While New Comedy connected to this educated elite's "cultivation of human sympathy" (382), the "idea" of Old Comedy, too, remained potent for the later satirical tradition and authors like Lucian and Dio Chrysostom. Sebastiana Nervegna's "Contexts of Reception in Antiquity" (Chapter Twenty) considers the later appropriation of comedy in public theatres, dining rooms, and schools. These contexts kept the plays alive, although there developed in each a preference for New Comedy over Old: Aristophanes was "too hard, too 'dirty,'" but "graceful Meander made good citizens and refined gentlemen" (402). In Chapter Twenty-One, Michael Fontaine reminds us of the Roman enthusiasm for New Comedy and situates the work of Plautus and his peers firmly within a hellenistic literary context. Roman comedies were not mere translation pieces—more "operatic adaptation"—but these "updated" versions of classic texts remained a recognizable "species" of Greek comedy (422). Nigel Wilson opens his learned review of the history of textual transmission (Chapter Twenty-Two) with the note that even the problematic texts that survive represent less than one per cent of the ancient corpus, but closes with the expression of hope that the study of palimpsests and papyri may yet throw out spectacular results. To conclude, Gonda Van Steen considers recent receptions of Greek comedy, with the previous preference for "New" over "Old" reversed (Chapter Twenty-Three). Therefore, Van Steen highlights some "primary associations" of Aristophanes in the West, and focuses on the modern Greek tradition to emphasise how "spirited and versatile" these works still remain (449).

All in all, this is a superb companion: a comprehensive and rich collection that will long serve as an invaluable resource for students and specialists alike. It is a work full of clever and challenging essays (note important contributions by Ruffell, Boshier, and Nervegna); the splendid section on reception represents, in itself, a crucial addition to scholarship, and even summary chapters are fresh and full of insight (with perceptive pieces by Sidwell, Csapo, Halliwell, Foley, Revermann, Hall, and Hunter). The volume stands as a fitting memorial to Colin Austin and Kathryn Boshier, both of whom are remembered in the opening dedication.

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THE RISE AND FALL OF CLASSICAL GREECE. By JOSIAH OBER. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. 2015. Pp. xxviii, 416.

HOW CAN ONE MEASURE AND EXPLAIN the striking success of the classical Greeks? Even to try represents a major scholarly undertaking, one that most professional ancient historians, content to labor in their own specialized subfields, dare not tackle. To his credit, Josiah Ober takes up the challenge in *The Rise and Fall of Classical Greece*.

Ober argues three interconnected theses. First, Greece experienced a heretofore underestimated efflorescence during its archaic and classical periods (roughly 800–300 B.C.). Ober maintains that in addition to its well-known literary and cultural achievements, Greece also became an economic powerhouse during this time: aggregate economic output and per capita consumption rose steeply; Greece's population became more dense and urbanized; and its wealth was distributed relatively equitably. Given the absence of actual