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A STUDY OF
THE POLITICAL VIEWS OF ARISTOPHANES
CONSIDERED IN RELATION TO
THE PERSONALITIES AND POLITICAL CONDITIONS
SURROUNDING HIS COMEDIES

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
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by
Eberhard Siegfried Buehler.

Written under the supervision of
Dr. J.F. Leddy.

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119156

PREFACE

Aristophanes' appeal as a poet is universal, and his contribution to the literary world is important and obvious. The importance of Aristophanes to the historian, however, is much less clearly defined. The subject matter of the comedies is certainly clear enough, but its meaning has been much and variously disputed. Aristophanes' elusiveness is well summed up in one line of the Acharnians: "Did you understand what he said? No, by Apollo, I did not."¹ The difficulty of determining the exact political views of Aristophanes has moved one writer to say:

"A sympathetic reader of Aristophanes can hardly fail to perceive that, while his political and intellectual tendencies are well marked, his opinions, in so far as they color his comedies, are too indefinite to reward, or indeed to tolerate, analysis."²

Whether or not Aristophanes' political opinions will reward analysis depends entirely on the analyst himself, but they will certainly tolerate analysis. While the subject is admittedly thread-bare, much can be learned if we approach it in the correct way.³

This thesis proposes to show Aristophanes' stand with respect to the politics of his city, Athens. To avoid

1. Ach. 101

2. Jebb, Sir Richard Claverhouse, article "Aristophanes", Encyclopaedia Britannica, eleventh edition, 1910.

3. Gomme, A.W., article "Aristophanes and Politics," Classical Review, Vol. LII, July, 1938, (pp.97-109), p. 97.

the pitfall which is inevitable if we do not understand the true Athenian spirit, it is imperative that we obtain such an understanding, for Aristophanes was an "Athenian", if he was anything at all. For this reason, it will be unnecessary to enumerate Aristophanes' views one by one. If we can see Aristophanes in his own environment, we need merely let him speak, and we will understand.

In order to place Aristophanes into his environment, it has been thought necessary to present as complete a picture as is possible, within the scope of the thesis, of the conditions of the time, and of the historical facts which were important in their development. Some information which may appear irrelevant has been included partly because it provides a fuller picture of Aristophanes' personality. For example, it is important to know what historical events preceded each comedy, even if the comedy does not contain any references to those events. Sometimes events or personalities become conspicuous by Aristophanes' failure to mention them in his comedies.

Similarly, it was felt that the origin and nature of comedy should be described in considerable detail. However, special points on which there are divergent opinions, have not been included because they add little or nothing to an understanding of Aristophanes' politics. The main idea has been to provide the casual reader of Aristophanes with a fairly reliable guide to what he must know in order to understand the poet's political personality. Further, the information on comedy has been included for another reason. It

helps to detract from too serious a view of Aristophanes as politician; for the tendency has often been to allow the poet to disappear in the politician.

The thesis is presented under three main headings. The first treats of Aristophanes' career as a whole and includes historical details surrounding the comedies. The next division shows how Aristophanes felt about various personalities and institutions of the democracy. Under the third heading comes a discussion of various aspects of the oligarchy and Aristophanes' views concerning them. In the same chapter, some attention is devoted to Aristophanes' relations with Alcibiades, a much neglected or perhaps underestimated facet of Aristophanes' political life. The concluding chapter presents some philosophic aspects of Aristophanes' politics and discusses the validity and influence of Aristophanes' views generally. The relative justice or injustice of particular charges made by Aristophanes is not given much attention throughout the thesis, since this is not its purpose. Finally, it was felt that it would be difficult to sum up, in the conclusion, all of Aristophanes' political views. The important thing is his political attitude in general, and the reader will come to a gradual understanding of this attitude during the course of the thesis.

A map and a chronological chart have been added as appendices, and it is hoped that these will help the reader to follow more closely the events during the course of which Aristophanes wrote his plays.

I wish to thank my supervisor, Dr. Leddy, for his encouragement of independent work and for his constant concern over its progress, without which the thesis could not have been completed. I should like to express my appreciation to Mr. Ferguson for first awakening my interest in Aristophanes during a stimulating translation course including the Clouds and the Frogs. My thanks are extended also to Dr. Conacher for his many helpful hints on technical and other points.

** * **

The translations of Aristophanes that appear in the thesis are all by anonymous translators, except where otherwise indicated. They are taken from an edition of Greek Drama by Oates and O'Neill.¹ In a few isolated instances, where it was required for specific points, the author has used his own translation.

Line references in the footnotes follow immediately the name of the play from which material is quoted or cited; they follow the divisions of the Oxford plain text.²

1. Oates, Whitney J. and O'Neill, Eugene, Jr., The Complete Greek Drama, (two volumes), vol. II, New York, Random House, 1938.

2. Hall, F.S., and Geldart, W.M., Aristophanis Comoediae, second edition, (two volumes), Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1906.

The following abbreviations of plays have been used in the footnotes:

<u>Ach.</u> -	Acharnians
<u>Lys.</u> -	Lysistrata
<u>Thesm.</u> -	Thesmophoriazusae
<u>Eccl.</u> -	Ecclesiazusae

Editions of Aristophanes' plays are referred to in footnotes simply by the name of the editor, followed by the title of the play, and the reference; e.g. Merry, ed. Knights, p.10. For further details on these editions, the reader is asked to consult the bibliography.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
I INTRODUCTION.....	1
1. The Formation of the Athenian Empire and the Peloponnesian League.....	2
2. The Downfall of the Athenian Aristocracy...	5
3. Economic Conditions.....	8
4. The Causes of the Peloponnesian War.....	11
5. The Beginning of the War and the Death of Pericles.....	14
6. Political Conditions Following the Death of Pericles.....	15
7. Aristophanes.....	16
II THE CAREER OF ARISTOPHANES.....	23
1. The Origin of Comedy.....	23
2. The Origin of Political Satire in Comedy...	25
3. Attic Comedy.....	26
4. Aristophanic Comedy.....	29
5. The Comedies of Aristophanes.....	35
a) The first period.....	36
1) The <u>Banqueters</u>	36
2) The <u>Babylonians</u>	37
3) The <u>Acharnians</u>	40
4) The <u>Knights</u>	43
5) The <u>Clouds</u>	47
6) The <u>Wasps</u>	50
7) The <u>Peace</u>	51
b) The second period.....	54
1) The <u>Birds</u>	54
2) The <u>Lysistrata</u>	60
3) The <u>Thesmophoriazusae</u>	64
4) The <u>Frogs</u>	65

	<u>Page</u>
c) The last period.....	69
1) The <u>Ecclesiazusae</u>	69
2) The <u>Plutus</u>	73
6. The Personality and Individuality of Aristophanes.....	75
III ARISTOPHANES AND THE DEMOCRACY.....	80
1. Demagogy.....	82
a) Cleon.....	83
b) Cleon and politics.....	85
c) The attitude of the people to Cleon....	88
2. The Law-Courts.....	89
a) The alliance between Cleon and the dicasts.....	90
b) The personality of the dicast.....	92
c) Criticism of the attitude of the dicast.	94
d) Sycophantism and the oppression of the rich and aged.....	95
e) Further criticism in connection with the law-courts.....	98
3. Aristophanes and the War.....	104
a) The war-profiteers.....	104
b) The country folk and the War.....	106
c) The causes of the War.....	109
d) The demagogues and war.....	111
e) Money and war.....	113
f) Embassies.....	114
g) Cowardice, generalship, and public spirit.....	115
h) Aristophanes' attitude to peace settlements.....	119

	<u>Page</u>
4. Other Criticisms.....	121
a) Hyperbolus.....	121
b) Cleonymus and Cleisthenes.....	123
c) Orators.....	125
d) Decrees.....	127
5. Conclusion.....	128
a) Was Aristophanes anti-democratic?.....	128
b) Suggestions for the conduct of the war...	130
c) Were Aristophanes' attacks justified?....	132
IV ARISTOPHANES AND THE OLIGARCHY.....	136
1. The Oligarchy.....	136
a) The oligarchic doctrine.....	139
b) The Clubs.....	140
2. Aristophanes and the Oligarchs.....	141
a) The Probuloι.....	145
b) Education.....	147
3. Aristophanes and "the Old".....	149
4. Aristophanes and "the New".....	152
a) Socrates.....	154
b) Euripides.....	155
c) Religion.....	160
5. Was Aristophanes Subservient to the Oligarchs?	163
6. Aristophanes' Method of Attack.....	169
7. Aristophanes and Alcibiades.....	171
a) The <u>Clouds</u>	174
b) The <u>Birds</u>	175
c) The <u>Lysistrata</u>	178
d) The <u>Frogs</u>	179

	<u>Page</u>
e) Tyranny.....	181
f) The navy and citizenship.....	183
g) Oligarchs.....	186
h) Panhellenism.....	188
V CONCLUSION.....	194
1. The Decline of Politics.....	194
2. Aristophanes and Political Philosophy.....	195
a) Utopias.....	195
b) Aristophanes and Plato.....	197
c) Wealth and poverty.....	200
3. The Validity and Influence of Aristophanes' Views.....	202
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	207
APPENDIX A -- Chronological Table.....	211
APPENDIX B -- Map.....	215

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Aristophanes was born at a time when Athens was fast approaching the height of her material prosperity and intellectual superiority. Already the final struggle between Athens and her great rival Sparta loomed ominously on the horizon of history. Aristophanes was but a young lad of fourteen when, in 431 B.C., the contest began in earnest. Twenty-seven years later, to the satisfaction of the Spartans, and of those who had predicted that the struggle would last "three times nine" years, Athens witnessed her own complete defeat. The sailing of the Spartan fleet into the very port of Athens in 404 must have been a heart-breaking sight to all Athenians, not least of all to Aristophanes.

Properly speaking, the greatest period of Athens lay in the fifteen years immediately preceding the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War. Yet, material and, especially, intellectual prosperity could not be destroyed even by a war of such great proportions. Warfare in those times was not of the "Blitzkrieg" variety; nor was it in reality a very tiring business. There was much time between battles for such things as the erection of buildings. And festivals were not the sort of activities that could so readily be ignored even in view of more urgent things. Thus it is that in 415, despite financial stringency due to the military

situation, nine talents¹ were voted for a festival known as the Lesser Panathenaea. In 410, the Athenians went a step further by actually borrowing more than six talents to cover the costs of the Great Panathenaea. Facts such as these throw great light on the character of the ancient Greeks. More than that, they will help us to understand why it was possible for Aristophanes to perfect his comedy, and, in fact, to go through almost his entire career as a dramatist during a war that has remained one of the most important in history. Let us review briefly how this Athens of Aristophanes came into being and why it was that she was at odds with Sparta.

1. The Formation of the Athenian Empire and the Peloponnesian League

We must not be surprised at the great number of independent units that Greece consisted of. The topography of the country, which made communication difficult and defense easy, is one of the chief reasons for the great number of city-states. There are more intangible reasons which do not really concern us here. It is important, however, to note that ideas of a United Greece or of Panhellenism, although they were talked of and discussed among the thinkers of the fifth century B.C., never actually materialized to any great extent during this period. True, some degree of Panhellenism was achieved during the Persian invasions, but

1. One talent = \$1080; see Kaegi, Adolf, A Short Grammar of Classical Greek, Authorized English Edition by Kleist, James A., second edition, St. Louis, B. Herder Book Co., 1944, p. 171.

then, the very existence of the Greek world had been at stake. The Greeks were great lovers of independence and, one might well say, of the disputing and fighting that were its necessary concomitants. It was impossible that such a vast array of independent states should be capable of living in peace and harmony. Accordingly, when the Persian threat had temporarily passed, upon the disposal of the second invasion in 479, local differences again took precedence.

During the Persian Wars, Sparta had retained official command both by sea and land, but it soon became obvious that the Athenians were the real commanders in one of these two spheres. The Athenian navy was a major factor in the defeat of the Persians. It was to prove thereafter the prime factor in the building of the Athenian empire and the break-up of the Hellenic League, formed as a defense against Persia. The Greek States were soon divided into two somewhat inharmonious camps, which have come to be known as the Peloponnesian League and the Athenian Empire.

The Peloponnesian League operated under the leadership of Sparta, who maintained her position by virtue of her strength as a land power. Sparta was ruled by a socialistic oligarchy,¹ that is, by Spartan citizens who formed the core of a large community. Her extreme conservatism is illustrated by the fact that relatively little importance was placed on money.² The serf problem, which

1. Harsh, Philip Whaley, A Handbook of Classical Drama, California, Stanford University Press, 1944, p. 270.

2. Sparta continued to use only unwieldy iron bars as her medium of exchange.

Sparta solved negatively by constant vigilance, made her basically unstable and added to her conservatism. Sparta's chief concern, always, was to maintain the status quo. Any state that was not an oligarchy, remained her enemy, at least in theory, and she would go out of her way to see that all potentially dangerous cities in the vicinity acquired such an oligarchic government.

While Sparta demonstrated the value of extreme conservatism, Athens proved the great potentialities of a completely different attitude. With an almost radical and unlimited democracy as a basis, she acquired a large empire. Democracy by its very nature encourages ~~rebellious~~ activity, and it was only through such activity that Athens was able to reach her height of power. She seemed to be always on the offensive; and she lost in the end partly because she had grown too confident in her own success.

Athens had become the natural leader of the islands and Ionian cities during the crisis with Persia. This situation was exploited immediately after the defeat of Persia in 479. Since Persia could very well be expected to attack again, a protective league, known as the Confederacy of Delos was organized under the headship of Athens only a year later. At first, membership in the league was voluntary, but it soon became apparent that this state of affairs would not continue. The maintenance of a fleet was more expensive than the support of an army. A tribute in ships or money, as each member found

it more convenient, was worked out. This tribute, though at first reasonable, was gradually increased, and resentment was quickly built up. Naxos, a member of the Confederacy, revolted and was reduced by the use of force, as early as 470. Five years later, Thasos revolted, and it was not until 463 that the island finally surrendered. The league was thus gradually but completely transformed into an empire. In 454, the treasury of the league was transferred from Delos to Athens, and Athenian magistrates were appointed to it. Then, in 443, came the final step in the transformation: the division of the confederacy into five districts, and the appropriation of the league's funds by Athens.

On the Greek mainland, hostility between Athens and Sparta increased quickly. Sparta became jealous of the growing Athenian Empire, but found herself too occupied with her domestic difficulties to do much about it. She refused, however, to accept Athenian help in the suppression of her helots or serfs in 463-2.

2. The Downfall of the Athenian Aristocracy

Meanwhile the political scene at Athens was undergoing great changes. The aristocratic clans had still been firmly entrenched at the time of the Persian invasions, but their weakening became increasingly evident. Themistocles, a democrat, was the first real threat to their power. He had made himself popular by his sagacious policy of building a fleet. It was, after all, the fleet that saved Greece. And now it became the main instrument in the building of the

empire. The aristocrats were warned by the success of Themistocles, and realized that they must present a united front, if the growth of the democracy was to be checked. Thanks to their support, the aristocrat Cimon became the commander-in-chief of the Athenian forces in 476, and held his position for a period of fourteen years. When Aristides, another aristocrat who had done the diplomatic work in the organization of the league died in 467, Cimon became the leader of the aristocratic elements.

The great test for the aristocrats came in 463, when Cimon was put on trial. This was the first attempt of the democrats to invite Cimon and his followers to a show of strength. Pericles, although actually leader of the aristocratic clan of the Alcmaeonids, threw in his lot with the opposition; he appeared for the prosecution. Cimon was acquitted and led an expedition to Messenia to help the Spartans against their helots. The expedition had been opposed by Ephialtes, the great predecessor of Pericles, and when Cimon was promptly dismissed by the Spartans, the triumph of the democratic party was complete.¹

The year 461 marked an important turning-point, politically. Athens withdrew from the anti-Persian League and made alliances with Thessaly, Argos, and Megara. Cimon was ostracized and a few months later, Ephialtes was assassinated, yet not before he had deprived of its powers the old Council of

1. Walker, E.M., The Cambridge Ancient History, edited by Bury, J.B., Cook, S.A., Adcock, F.E., Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1927, vol.V, ch.III, p. 71.

the Areopagus, a stronghold of the aristocrats. In 461 as well, the influence of Pericles began. The introduction of pay for the judges of the popular law-courts (the heliaea) showed the increased strength of the democrats. The "remnants" of the aristocrats were taken over by Thucydides (son of Milesias).¹

During the next thirty years, there was much activity. Under the leadership of Pericles, the democrats gained undisputed control; and there were many opportunities open to them for the testing of their abilities. The military situation was ably handled, but the democrats soon discovered that they needed a good admiral. Somewhat reluctantly no doubt, they recalled the aristocrat Cimon in 451, but unfortunately he was killed only a year later on one of his expeditions. The Athenians found they were too ambitious, were going too far afield; for the situation on the Greek mainland was deteriorating, due in no small measure to the increased activity of Sparta. In 445, finally, a thirty years' Peace was concluded between Athens and Sparta. It was probably in the same year that Aristophanes was born.

The party conflict between Thucydides and Pericles turned mainly on the issue of justice to the subject allies. The ostracism of Thucydides, however, in the very year (443) that marked the final step in the creation of the Athenian Empire, demonstrated plainly where the power lay. Throughout

1. This is not the famous historian of the same name.

the course of these events, we must not forget, Athens was in her Golden Age. According to some, the year 438, when the Chryselephantine Athena of Pheidias was set up in the Parthenon, marks the summit of splendor and perhaps power of Athens.¹

3. Economic Conditions

In order to understand the Peloponnesian War, we must consider briefly the economic conditions of the fifth century B.C. prior to the outbreak of the war. After the Ionian Revolt of 499-93, Athens entered on the commercial inheritance of the Greeks of Asia Minor. There was a great accession of wealth owing to the remarkable development of trade and industry, the exploitation of the silver mines, and the growth of the Athenian Empire itself. It was a prosperous period, and as such was not much commented upon. What we do know about it, we owe to the character of the Athenians. Not only were they better economists than the Spartans, but they believed in publicity for everything the democracy did.

The Athenian population was made up of three classes: the civic, free alien, and servile. Under democratic constitutions, the citizens alone, and directly, determined the economic policy of their state. They were the only ones with active political rights; they alone owned real property and had the monopoly of silver mining. The granting of citizenship was governed by a very narrow policy. In 451 a measure was passed,

1. Adcock, F.E., The Cambridge Ancient History, vol.V, ch. VII, p. 175.

on a motion of Pericles, restricting the citizenship to those who were of Athenian parentage on both sides. However, the free aliens were well treated. Slaves were bought and sold but were not ill-treated, with the exception of those working in the silver mines. All slaves were owned by private individuals, that is, all but a few public slaves who worked in the mint or were members of the police force.

Although the citizens controlled all state policy, they by no means dominated the industrial and mercantile life of Athens and its port; nor was it in their interest to do so. The state had other means of supporting its citizens, such as drafts to colonies, multiplication of officials, and an increase in the number of jurymen: there were about seven thousand paid posts.

The growth of commerce caused an influx to the city of many people, including aristocrats and aliens. Athens had become the focus of political, intellectual, and social life for all the surrounding district. Nevertheless, the rural population remained important, providing sizable forces in war, for example. The agricultural democracy had always been regarded as superior to every other, since the land-holders had formed the old aristocracies. Even under a commercial oligarchy or democracy, the prestige of the farmer was high, because none except citizens were allowed ownership of land. In the determination of public policy, however, the urban population had the greater influence. The political prominence of representatives of the urban and industrial element was constantly increasing.

Specialization was more marked in Athens and the Piraeus than in the rural areas. But by the end of the fifth century, specialization even in the country became very marked. Agriculture provided a serious problem, in that the annual production of grain was just enough to feed the rural population. Accordingly, imports were essential and as a source of grain, the steppes of the Ukraine were ideal. "Athenian anxiety to keep the Pontic route open provides a master-key to the understanding of Athenian policy and strategy during this period."¹ Other sources^{of grain} were Cyprus, Egypt, and Thessaly. According to Thucydides,² one of the reasons for Athenian intervention in Sicily in 426 was the desire to prevent the export of grain from there to the Peloponnese. War made the food supply an even greater problem, since labor was diverted into military channels, and production was thus cut down. The absence of grassy plains also made extensive cattle-raising impossible, but horses were kept for riding, mules and asses for transport, and pigs for food. Wool and milk were provided by sheep and goats respectively. There was extensive bee-keeping, wine culture, and growing of figs and olives.

The cost of living was not very high. There was no housing problem until the Peloponnesian War, when there was a mass migration from the rural areas into the city. Three obols³

1. Tod, Marcus N., The Cambridge Ancient History, vol.V, ch. I, p.14.

2. III.86.

3. Kaegi, Adolf, Loc. cit: one obol = three cents.

a day would cover all living expenses of a married couple. Wages for ordinary government "employees" were probably one obol a day at first. They were increased later to two, and finally, in 425, to three. Higher government officials naturally received larger sums. In the army and navy, the usual wage was one drachma per day.¹ Doctors, musicians, actors, sophists often charged considerable fees. Artizans generally worked for a drachma a day, although there was some piece-work. Great wealth was rarely accumulated. Callias was popularly reputed to possess two hundred talents, Nicias one hundred, and Conon forty, but such cases were quite infrequent. No money was spent on education, though there were honoraria for distinguished literary men such as Herodotus.

Athens' main rivals commercially were Corinth and Aegina. Once Cleisthenes had completed the political reorganization, and certain staple manufactures, including oil and pottery, had been developed, Athens was able to enter the struggle for primacy. The quarrel with Aegina had been suspended during the time of Xerxes' threat, but was soon renewed. Corinth, realizing what the aims of the Athenians were, went to the aid of the Aeginetans in 458. Aegina became a tributary member of the Delian League, and in 431, the first year of the Peloponnesian War, the inhabitants were driven from their island.

4. The Causes of the Peloponnesian War

Although the greater part of Pericles' imperial policy

1. Ibid: one drachma = eighteen cents. /One drachma=six obols/

was designed on the surface to ensure widespread commerce, it could not but lead to war eventually. The treaty with Halyciae and Segesta in Sicily (453) displayed no intention of conquest, yet it was the first step on the road to the great disaster forty years later. This policy of developing Athenian connections with the West had been foreshadowed by Themistocles.¹ Corcyra too, was necessary to Athens, because it lay in the way of the shortest route to Italy. But Corcyra was the bitter enemy of Corinth, and when Athens formed a "defensive" alliance with Corcyra in 433 to the detriment of Corinth, she clearly broke the spirit of the thirty-years' Peace which had been negotiated in 445, only twelve years earlier. In the same year Corinth lost a battle with Corcyra that would have been a victory had Athens not intervened. Corinth appealed to Sparta, "the savior of Hellas." This appeal was reinforced by Megara, whose position made her equally important to both Athens and Sparta, and whose loss, to the side of the Peloponnesians, had been one of the bitterest for Athens.² In addition, Aegina was ready to revolt because of the heavy tribute imposed on her, while Potidaea did actually revolt in 433. But "the more the democracy was organized to share the spoils of empire, the more natural it was to organize the Empire to produce them."³ This Pericles did, despite his consciousness

1. Hackforth, R., The Cambridge Ancient History, vol.V, ch.VI, p.159.

2. Henderson, Bernard W., The Great War Between Athens and Sparta, London, Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1927, pp.4-5.

3. Adcock, The Cambridge Ancient History, vol. V, ch.VII, p.168.

even several years earlier of impending war. By the Megarian decree of 432, Pericles ruined Megarian trade. No Megarian goods were to enter any port within the Athenian Empire. Potidaea was besieged as well.

Sparta suggested terms. But Athens could not possibly accept such terms and at the same time be sure of maintaining her Empire. War was inevitable. "The Athenian Empire was the negation of Greek ideas of right and, when the moment came, envy, anger, timidity, and militarism might reinforce themselves with righteous indignation."¹

Just what, then, were the immediate causes of the war? According to one view,² rivalry in trade, prejudice of race, the opposition of political ideas or a chivalrous sympathy on the part of the Peloponnesians with the subjects of Athens, were only elements which went to make war possible, but not inevitable. Nor was it Pericles who started the war from selfish personal motives. This fiction rests on a "naïve evaluation of the jests of comedy."³ Another writer says:

"Unless Pericles was curiously ignorant of his people's nature when he urged them to a war which brought such evils in its train, he can scarcely have been guilty of a blind and foolish opportunism in the supposed interest of his own political position when he bade his folk stand firm and defy the enemy."⁴

Perhaps we may sum up the causes of the war in this way:

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1. Ibid., p.178.
 2. Ibid., p.190.
 3. Ibid., p. 190.
 4. Henderson, op. cit., p.24.

"Angry men at Corinth had not feared fire, clever men at Athens had played with it, a generation of ill-will had lowered the flash-point and a conflagration was only too easy."¹

5. The Beginning of the War and the Death of Pericles

The first ten years of the war, which ended with the Peace of Nicias in 421, are often separated from the remainder and called the "Archidamian War." These years show the great power of Athens, but they also demonstrate the great versatility of the times. Politically speaking, Aristophanes completed the greatest period of his career during these years.

In 431, the Peloponnesians invaded Attica,—an event that was to become an annual tradition for some years. But the Athenians, under the guidance of Pericles, refused to give battle. Athens invaded the Megarid, and continued the siege of Potidaea. This siege was completed during the fall of the next year, despite the ravages of the plague, which constituted for Athens the greatest single unforeseen disaster of the war. One-third of the population and about one-third of the infantry and cavalry fell victim to the disease. Pericles was almost universally blamed. He was put on trial and fined. But early next year, not many months later, he was re-elected. And in that same year, 429, he died, no doubt a victim of the plague.

Some think that, whereas Themistocles had made a weak state strong, Pericles sent it on a downward path, and that Thucydides, the historian, "is a mere advocate belonging to his party."² Yet, the succeeding years amply prove the greatness of

1. Adcock, op. cit., p.191.

2. Delbrück, H., Die Strategie des Perikles (Berlin, 1890), cited by Henderson. op.cit. p.60

Pericles.

"The state had become a veiled autocracy; now the autocrat was dead, and the city was plagued by the rivalries of leaders none of whom possessed Pericles' greatness of mind, or united in themselves his military, financial and diplomatic capacity."¹

6. Political Conditions Following the Death of Pericles

The successors of Pericles inherited financial as well as military difficulties. The cost of the war for Athens during the first ten years has been estimated at thirteen hundred talents annually.² The siege of Potidaea alone cost two thousand talents.

The rich, who naturally took much of the financial strain, and the farmers whose lands lay exposed to the enemy, no doubt preferred peace to war. The aristocracy was almost completely an "underground" organization, politically, and therefore had little influence at this time. But the new class of sailors, craftsmen and traders stood to profit by the war, especially since it was not dangerous so long as Athens maintained her naval superiority. From the ranks of this class arose the new leaders, the demagogues, such as Eucrates, Lysicles and Cleon, who wanted an offensive war rather than the defensive war which was the essence of Pericles' strategy. The Board of Generals, consisting of ten men who held office for one year and might be re-elected, was the most prominent political body at Athens, at least in theory. Nicias was now the most important member of this Board, and he generally followed Pericles' line of action.

1. Adcock, op. cit., ch.VIII, p.203.

2. Henderson, op.cit., p.37 (with footnote).

Yet the demagogues had a great effect, and nothing in the constitution prevented their emergence. We shall have occasion to discuss this more fully later. Certainly Athenian policy and strategy were left without continuous direction and became the sport of promises and personal ambitions.¹

Here we must postpone our discussion of the military and political scene, because at this time Aristophanes wrote a play which was to launch him on his career, when it was produced early in the year 427.

7. Aristophanes.

The little we know about the life of Aristophanes is gathered from four biographies (five, if a note of Suidas is included).² It seems rather strange that so little should be known about Aristophanes as a person, when he was recognized even in antiquity as the greatest representative of old comedy. Apparently even the biographies were composed on evidence from the comedies, since we may gather most of the stated facts from the extant plays.³

The date of Aristophanes' birth is generally placed at 445. This is based on the testimony of the author himself: he says that he was very young when his first play was produced.⁴

1. Adcock, The Cambridge Ancient History, vol.V.ch.VIII,p.204.

2. Croiset, Maurice, Histoire de la Littérature Grecque, second edition, vol.III, Paris, Ancienne Librairie Thorin et Fils, 1899, p.526, footnote 1.

3. Ibid., p.526, footnote 1.

4. I.e., too young to have it produced under his own name. See Clouds, 530-33.

His father Philip and his mother Zenodora were free Athenians.¹ Aristophanes belonged to the deme Cydathenaeon, and the tribe Pandionis. His birthplace is variously given as Lindus and Camirus in Rhodes, Aegina, and Egypt, but these are probably references to earlier sojourns of his father or grandfather. More worthy of attention is the note in one of the biographies to the effect that he received an allotment of land in Aegina. This allotment was probably made to his parents in 431 when the Aeginetans were expropriated.² It is interesting to note that the word *δικαιοπόλις* (Dicaeopolis), which is used as the name for the main character in the Acharnians, is used by Pindar (Pyth.831) as an epithet of Aegina. The word here means "strict in public faith."³ Whether Aristophanes was a citizen by naturalization or not, remains doubtful. Yet he must certainly have been a citizen when he made his appearance as a comic poet, as we shall find reason to believe.

The only other details we have of the life of Aristophanes are that he was bald early in life⁴ and that he had three sons, Araros, Philip, and Nicostratus (or Philetaerus).

If we may draw conclusions from the great familiarity with country life displayed in his plays, Aristophanes spent the

1. Croiset, op.cit., p.527,

2. See Ach. 653-54.

3. Merry, ed. Ach., p.3.

4. Peace 768.

early years of his life in the country.¹ Children are very impressionable in their early years, and consequently this circumstance may help to explain some of the attitudes that are displayed in the comedies.

We have already described the conditions, political and economic, during the youth of Aristophanes. He, personally, did not remember any government before that of Pericles. He witnessed the growing power of Athens, the rapid development of an ultra-democratic state. If he lived in the country, he suffered from the repeated Spartan invasions of Attica following the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War. Part of the strategy of Pericles had been to allow the Spartans to ravage the countryside and thus inflict a certain "moral" defeat upon them. Thus the rural Athenians were compelled to move into the city and a serious housing problem was created. To add to the misery, food became scarcer. Thucydides says:

" The citizens were persuaded, and brought into the city their children and wives, their household goods, and even the wood-work of their houses, which they took down. Their flocks and beasts of burden they conveyed to Euboea and the adjacent islands. The removal of the inhabitants was painful; for the Athenians had always been accustomed to reside in the country!"²

Furthermore the crowding may have helped to spark the plague, and certainly made it the more miserable and uncontrollable. Pericles had formulated a plan, and, in deference to that plan, deliberately did nothing about the situation. The great tribute

1. Gomme, however, says: "...Aristophanes belonged to a city deme, the same as Cleon's and....there is no more reason to suppose that he was not born and brought up in it than that Cleon was not." (article "Aristophanes and Politics," pp. 108-9).

2. Thucydides II.14; Jowett translation.

Pericles paid to the Athenian character in his funeral oration of 431, as set forth in the pages of Thucydides, forms a striking contrast to the eloquent description by the same author of the plague that followed in 430.¹ It need not surprise us that the populace put its leader on trial; but it seems curious that the same populace recognized its error, even under the greatest adversity, and re-elected him the following spring. It is a tribute to the people of Athens as much as it is a tribute to the greatness of Pericles.

What would be likely to happen to a young man and a keen observer, as Aristophanes most certainly was, when he came face to face with the situation that existed in the city? The death of Pericles had brought more violent and less educated men to the fore. Everywhere there was the atmosphere of war, mingled with an atmosphere of material and intellectual splendor. Underneath it all there was bitterness.

It seems obvious that Aristophanes came from a highly cultivated home. He was familiar with the great literature of the day -- the epic and lyric poets, and, above all, Greek tragedy. Tragedy was probably the favorite of Aristophanes, because he quotes from it profusely throughout his comedies. When he began his career at the age of eighteen, Attic tragedy was fifty years old. Aeschylus had died about thirty years before; Sophocles, at the age of about sixty-eight, had just composed the Oedipus Rex, and still had a long career ahead of him; Euripides was about fifty-three and in his prime as a tragic writer.

1. Thucydides II, 35-46, and II. 47-54.



"If Plato's fancy picture in the Symposium could be trusted, [Aristophanes] was a man of aristocratic breeding and culture, living in the best society at Athens."¹ It is quite possible that Aristophanes was brought up as a gentleman, but his upbringing would have been more along old-fashioned lines. The country folk were more attached to tradition and continued to respect the hereditary nobility. It was a different sort of nobility that Aristophanes became acquainted with in the city. That he associated with these aristocrats, there can be little doubt, since a great emphasis was now being placed on wealth and, probably, on intellectual attainments. Hereditary priorities began to fade into the background. The sophists were already in their hey-day. Socrates was over forty years of age and was quite influential. Plato made him the chief speaker in the Symposium. Aristophanes had been accustomed to the conventional piety, respect for the aged, and good manners.² The young men he met in the city were adepts at the law and political intrigue. One would hardly say, however, that Aristophanes was shocked, as one writer says,³ because the general impression one derives from his plays belies this. Aristophanes may not have agreed with the views of his friends, but the comedies should be considered ample proof that he was not the sort of person who

1. Mahaffy, Rev. J.P., A History of Classical Greek Literature third edition revised and enlarged, vol.I, part II, "The Dramatic Poets," London, Macmillan and Co., 1891, p.217.

2. Murray, Gilbert, Aristophanes: A Study, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1933, p.19.

3. Ibid., p.19.

would limit the opportunities for exercising his genius by disowning as friends those who expressed views contrary to his own. We see today many examples of the greatest hostility in the thinking of men who are socially on friendly terms with one another. The very fact that scholars cannot decide whether Aristophanes was friend or foe of the aristocrats and oligarchs, shows that this one factor has been neglected. It may be argued that in time of war a man must be definitely on one side or the other, whether of the warring states themselves, or of factions within one of those states. Yet we must remember the nature of ancient warfare, and the nature of the Athenian democracy. The latter will be more fully described in a later chapter.

Is it possible to place Aristophanes into some definite position? Perhaps we may give a general indication here of what our answer to this question will be. Aristophanes need have been neither conservative nor radical. One thing is obvious. He was a great patriot, and a truly representative product of the Golden Age of Athens. Where else, but in Athens, could Aristophanes have the freedom to do what he did? In our day, he might have been an editorialist, a satirist, an acute observer of daily life and politics, endowed with a great imagination, keen wit, and a sense of humor. But at the same time, Aristophanes was human and prone to all human weaknesses, though perhaps not to so great a degree as a less intelligent man might have been. Finally, Aristophanes expressed his views through a medium whose nature and limitations we must first understand.

There remains, then, one question. Why did Aristophanes

become a writer of comedy?

"That a young genius should be attracted to comedy at such a time seems strange only to one unfamiliar with the seriousness and vigor of Athenian comedy during the fifth century. In point of fact, it is inconceivable that such a man as Aristophanes, at once a fiery patriot and a literary genius, should have been attracted to any other type of expression at this time."¹

It will be in order, therefore, to discuss comedy generally before proceeding to a discussion of Aristophanes' career.

1. Harsh, A Handbook of Classical Drama, p.272.

CHAPTER II

THE CAREER OF ARISTOPHANES

Aristophanes wrote his plays during the last and greatest period of the Old Comedy. Not only did he perfect it and become its greatest representative, but he witnessed also its end, and the emergence of the so-called Middle Comedy that was to result finally in the New Comedy of Menander. The political aspects of Aristophanes' comedy demand our special attention, but although the political aspect was of great importance, we must first have a picture of the whole of which it formed a part.

The origins of comedy are rather obscure, for the simple reason that comedy by its very nature discouraged any serious view of itself. Its progress from year to year was thus barely noticed. Aristotle is our principal source of information regarding comedy, but even he admits that little was known in his day about its early history.¹ Other sources are the fragments of pre-Aristophanic comedy, and vase-paintings, or the like. Modern scholars are not in complete agreement on the subject, but there are certain generally accepted views.

1. The Origin of Comedy

Comedy had its origin in the ritualistic celebrations held in honor of Dionysus, the god of fertility, at a festival known as the rural Dionysia. An important part of the ritual was the phallic procession. Aristophanes describes such a procession in his Acharnians, where Dicaeopolis goes forth with

1. Aristotle, Poetics 1449b.

his family and several slaves to celebrate the Dionysia.¹ According to Aristotle,² comedy originated in the improvisations of the leaders of the phallic rites. From the beginning, obscene and abusive jokes were directed at specific individuals. This ritualistic abuse, it was believed, would drive out the evil spirit of sterility. The object was to ensure fertility not only of animals and human beings, but of fields as well, and the phallus was the recognized symbol of such fertility. The drunken revel, called the κῶμος, is believed to have given comedy its name. "Comedy" thus means "revel-song" (κωμῳδία).

Attic comedy probably originated from two sources -- the Megarian farce, and the Sicilian mime. The Megarians of the Peloponnese travelled from village to village with their songs during the festivals of Dionysus. Grotesque actors probably associated themselves with these choruses and began to imitate the indecent buffoonery of the peasants. Susarion was the greatest representative of the Megarian comedy and probably reached Attica in his travels from village to village about 570. Another derivation for the word "comedy" here suggests itself: according to Aristotle, the Megarians claimed that their name for suburb villages was κῶμαι, whereas the Athenians called them "demes". Accordingly "comedians" are so-called not from κωμᾶσθαι, "to revel", but because they went strolling around the villages, unappreciated in the towns.³ Mahaffy accepts this derivation.⁴

1. Ach. 237-279.

2. Poetics, 1449a

3. Ibid., 1448a.

4. Mahaffy, A History of Classical Greek Literature, vol. I, part II, p.176.

Although the chorus in Attic comedy may have originated from these masquerades, the plot of comedy came from Sicily, where the greatest writer was Epicharmus, who lived from about 530 to 440. Until he integrated some of the material he found at his disposal, comedy was merely a form, and had no lasting quality. By the beginning of the fifth century, Epicharmus had acquired a strong reputation. He broke away from the established traditions by introducing mythological subjects. This seems to indicate that Epicharmus copied from Attic tragedy, or satyr drama.¹ But, most important of all, he added realism, and displayed the powers of observation and fantasy that were to become the distinguishing mark of Attic comedians.

2. The Origin of Political Satire in Comedy

We conclude, then, that Epicharmus made possible Attic comedy by adding the elements that were lacking in the "Peloponnesian chorus" which had made its way into Attica. We must now consider how politics became a part of comedy. Croiset says that comedy was more or less political, depending on the government of the day: rather timid under Pisistratus and his sons, who were tyrants, more daring and unchecked when the tyrants had been ousted and the people were the masters.² This political element was the "iambic", as opposed to the "phallic", so-called because the iambic meter was used for

1. Croiset, Histoire de la Littérature Grecque, vol.III, p.443.

2. Ibid., p.429.

lampooning.¹ After the people were victorious, the aristocrats were severely satirized. But this satire became out-dated with the disappearance of the aristocracy. "Other popular leaders had appeared: it was against them that comedy had to turn, faithful to the instinct for opposition which everywhere constitutes its force, and often its humor."² Satire in its early stages would not have been so readily possible in a large city as it was in the villages. A long period of time elapsed before comedy was admitted into the city, and it was only through the persistence of the country people that this final step was achieved. Mahaffy says:

"We constantly find the story repeated that the country people in Attica, when injured by their town neighbors, used to come in at night, and sing personal lampoons at the doors of their aggressors, so as to bring the crime home to them, and excite public censure against them -- that this practice was found so useful that it was formally legalized, and that the accusers disguised themselves with wine lees for fear of consequences to themselves."³

3. Attic Comedy

It was not until after the Persian Wars that comedy really took shape in Athens. The fifty years between 480 and 430 may be considered the period of organization of Old Comedy -- the period that made possible Aristophanes' work.

Beginning with 486, when Chionides is said to have

1. Aristotle, Poetics 1448b. Archilochus was the "innovator" who wrote lampoons in iambic verse.

2. Croiset, op.cit., p.435.

3. Mahaffy, op.cit., p.199.

gained the first "victory", comedy was given an official place in the Greater or City Dionysia which was celebrated annually towards the end of March. There were three contests: one in tragedy, one in dithyramb, and one in comedy. The competition in comedy took place on the third of six days of celebration; five comedies were presented. During the Peloponnesian War, the festival was reduced in length to five days, and the number of comic competitors to three. The comedies were then presented during each afternoon of the last three days, following a tragic tetralogy in the morning. Though the Greater Dionysia was the more important festival, comedy was more at home at the less formal Lenaea, or festival of the Wine-Press, which was held in January/February of each year. This festival was devoted almost exclusively to comedy. The archon granted a chorus, that is, he granted to the poet the right to produce his play. Often good poets were excluded, because the regulation that only five (in Aristophanes' time three) comedies could be chosen for presentation was strictly adhered to. The state paid for the actors, but the cost of dressing and training the chorus was sustained by a wealthy citizen; this was regarded as a legitimate obligation of position and citizenship.

The dress of actors in comedy was rather different from the dignified costume of tragedy; they wore the phallus and masks. The chorus did not wear the phallus but its members were fantastically disguised -- as birds, for example, or flies, or wasps. The comedy was usually named after the animals or objects represented by the chorus.

We possess only fragments of the comedies of earlier

of earlier poets who perfected the Old Comedy and thus provided for Aristophanes and his contemporaries a form with set rules. But we have a number of names and know something about the general trends. Chionides, who had won the first official prize for comedy, added to the form and power of comedy. Ephantides also belongs to this early period of Chionides. Magnes died probably in 430, after he had produced eleven prize-winning comedies. Aristophanes pays a tribute to him and his choruses of flies and birds.¹

Crates, who followed the lead of Epicharmus in the development of plot, also received honorable mention in Aristophanes' Knights.² He wrote chiefly social comedies and had a large following among later comedians, chief of whom were Phrynichus, Pherecrates, and Plato (not the philosopher) -- contemporaries of Aristophanes.

Crates, however, was not Aristophanes' real predecessor, since he remained aloof from politics and personal invective. Cratinus was the first great comic poet to break away from the "mythology" tradition. This does not mean that legendary subjects did not continue to be popular, but they became less popular than political subjects. Cratinus, whose work was done between 455 and 423, left as his legacy to Old Comedy its literary manner. He displayed a superb blend of great intellect and good humor, and made comedy a force to be reckoned with. But he had too many ideas and not enough artistry to make proper use of them. His invective was brutally direct, unlike that of Aristophanes:

1. Knights. 518-525.

2. Knights 537ff.

"Once he put on stage a complete chorus of 'Archilochuses', thus unleashing against contemporary vices a veritable pack of fierce critics..."¹ In his Dionysalexandros, he had criticized Pericles as the author of the war.

4. Aristophanic Comedy

"Perfected comedy, despite its unity of technical form, takes on a fourfold aspect derived from its main topics; contemporary manners, burlesque of legend, politics and fantasy."² No poet confined himself to any one type, and Aristophanes was no exception. He found his inspiration in the last two types.

The poet uses a comical and simple story as a plot, the story itself being a mere pretext, since satire is the important element. The leading character conceives a happy idea, which is ridiculous and impractical, but he overcomes the opposition to the idea in the debate or agon. Then follows the greatest single feature of comedy -- the parabasis. The chorus comes forward and the leader of the chorus speaks either in his own person or sometimes even in the person of the poet himself. The poet is praised for his play, and ideas on current affairs are expressed which may or may not bear a relation to the subject of the play. After the parabasis there is no further development of plot and we merely see the idea being put into practice. The play has a happy ending, the characters usually making merry at a feast or the like.

1. Croiset, Histoire de la Littérature Grecque, vol.III,p.479.

2. Norwood, Gilbert, Greek Comedy, London, Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1931, p.18.

We may see similarities between tragedy and comedy, but whereas the governing forces in tragedy were plausibility and formality, they were fantasy and informality in comedy. Comedy, indeed, was presented side by side with tragedy at the festival of Dionysus, and no doubt there were mutual influences, but comedy was also meant to serve as a contrast to tragedy. It was imaginative, extravagant, and above all, inventive. Tragedies were often repetitive and as a result, tragedians usually wrote more plays than did comic poets. The comic poet often took great pains to convince the audience of the newness of his story. Once the idea was there, the rest was easy. Realism and consistency gave way to laughter. The Greeks, as their later philosophers show, did not consider comedy to be on a spiritually lower plane than tragedy, since they defined man as the only animal capable of laughter.¹ The spirit that pervaded comedy was that of the audience, and their attitude alone makes it possible to understand why comedy could mix at will extreme reality and extreme unreality.

The characters in comedy represent very often ideas rather than persons. Socrates, for instance, in the Clouds of Aristophanes represents "sophistry," Lamachus in the Acharnians represents chauvinism. The sentiments that give character to a man were foreign to comedy.² Often characters were merely allegorical personifications, as for example Drunkenness and Poverty,

1. Jaeger, Werner, Paideia: the Ideals of Greek Culture, translation Gilbert Highet, vol.I, Oxford, 1939, p.356.

2. Croiset, op. cit., p.519.

or were identified by their occupation -- lance-manufacturer, sausage-seller. "Dans la plupart des pièces d'Aristophane, les rôles sont très nombreux, mais beaucoup sont à peine des rôles."¹ The large number of rôles and ideas represented by them, demanded great versatility among the actors, especially if, as is likely, there were only three actors. Aristophanes no doubt spent much time as an actor himself. In fact, one feels that the plays might have been written by a very versatile actor.

There are certain outstanding features of comedy that arouse considerable discussion. One of these is the great profusion of obscene jokes. Attempts have been made to exculpate Aristophanes' obscenity on the ground that it is clean dirt and not prurient, but such attempts are hardly justified. Norwood observes: "There is no kind or aspect of impropriety that cannot be found in his surviving work: his head is in the stars; his feet are planted firmly in the mud."² Croiset, speaking of comedy, says:

"Les gros mots, les propos orduriers lui sont ordinaires. Ce serait trop peu que de parler ici de gaillardise ou d'humeur grivoise; *[[la comédie]]* est obscène dans toute la force du terme, et elle l'est avec délectation."³

We must understand that Aristophanes enjoyed writing comedy in its existing form; there was absolutely no reason why he should have become a comic poet had this not been the case. The reason for the obscenity in comedy may lie in the nature of the ridiculous: incongruity is one of its elements, and indecency

1. Ibid., p.519.

2. Norwood, op. cit., p.307.

3. Croiset, op. cit., p.465.

is incongruous in Greek literature.¹ Or, we may say that the obscenity is a direct vestige of a fertility rite in which comedy originated. Literary development had subordinated abuse and obscenity to the plot, but the poets clung to the old tradition, and in so doing, they exerted an important influence on contemporary life. Their excuse, as originally, was "drunkenness". "Attic drunkenness is always drunkenness, but nevertheless it is attic (!)...it does not annihilate man, it does not make of him a wild and senseless beast."² And that is why there is no reason for believing that women and children did not attend at the presentation of comedy as they did in the case of tragedy. Contemporary opinion had decided that the religious character of the festival corrected the anomaly. Later fourth century society, which was less high-spirited and more sophisticated, and lived at a time when public affairs were a dead issue, governed its tastes according to the representative opinion of Aristotle, who thought that foul language should be banished by law from the state.³

But religious sanction, although it may have been responsible for the continuance of obscenity, was not the only factor. Another tradition -- free speech -- grew up with the democracy and became firmly entrenched. "Comedy was produced by democracy as an antidote to its own overdose of liberty, thereby outdoing its own excesses, and extending parrhesia,

1. Hadas, Moses, A History of Greek Literature, New York, Columbia University Press, 1950, p.99.

2. Croiset, op.cit., p.465.

3. Aristotle, Politics 1336b3, cited by Murray, Aristophanes, p.213.

its vaunted freedom of speech, to subjects which are usually tabu even in a free political system." ¹ Parrhesia (παρρησία) meant licence, not merely freedom. Not only was there no fear, but there was also a complete absence of scruple. Comedy attacked anyone and said anything. " The ultimate reason for this, apart from the magnanimity and the sense of humour which were inherent in the Attic character, was the fact that comedy was an internal affair of the sovereign people as a whole..."² Athens was a large city, but at the same time it was small enough to enable the inhabitants to become acquainted with one another; this gave impetus to the idea of the right to absolute liberty.

Comedy, as we have noted, ridiculed everything. But its ridicule was confined to objects that lent themselves to ridicule. Athenian traditions were thus more immune to attack than were innovations. The audience had to be willing to join in the fun. The democracy was quite happy about whipping the leaders it disliked in order to humble them; it ^{such whipping} found a form of release. Furthermore, the audience did not take comedy seriously, at least not during the performances, and thus anything out of the ordinary, anything that could be turned into a joke, became the butt of the comedian. Comedy made fun even of logic, and yet it made good use of logic, since, contrary to expectation, "its confusion is not at all confused."³ We must not be misled

1. Jaeger, Paideia, vol.I, p.361.

2. Ehrenberg, Victor, The People of Aristophanes, A Sociology of Old Attic Comedy, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1943, p.19.

3. Croiset, op.cit., p.466.

to the point where we believe that comedy never had a serious intent. For a long time, comedy was regarded with suspicion, and attempts were made from time to time to curtail its freedom. When Samos, a subject of the Athenian Empire, revolted in 440, a decree was passed forbidding the mockery of living persons prominent in public affairs, but it was repealed three years later. Comedy at once resumed its habits, apparently completely unharmed and quite happy to ignore the warning. It has been suggested that

"...the Old Comedy was really an accidental and temporary outburst of political writing in the feverish climax of the Athenian democracy. As soon as these special conditions passed away or even halted for a moment, comedy returned to its older and tamer function of criticizing general types in society, literary work, and crude superstitions."¹

The language of Aristophanic comedy had settled on a mean between the stilted grandeur of tragedy and the common language of Attic society, to become " the most perfect diction in all Greek literature!"² Quintilian described it as "grandis et venusta et elegans."³

Old comedy was topical rather than universal, that is, it chose its subjects from current affairs. Consequently the importance of much that was of immediate interest at the time of the performance is lost to us. We miss many personal allusions and tend to exaggerate the general features. It is difficult to set Aristophanes' work in its former surroundings and time, and thus gain an understanding of his real intentions.

1. Mahaffy, A History of Greek Literature, vol.I, part II, p.211.

2. Ibid., p.210.

3. Institutio Oratoria X.1.65.

Before passing on to a discussion of the plays of Aristophanes, we should make brief mention of an interesting contemporary -- Eupolis. He was born in the same year as Aristophanes, and his first comedy was produced when he was only seventeen. He was thus unusually precocious and may have proved an incentive in this respect to Aristophanes, with whom he collaborated during Aristophanes' early career. It seems that they agreed in their criticism of various conditions in public affairs. Of further interest is the fact that Cratinus, Eupolis, and Aristophanes were considered the great comic "trilogy", corresponding to the tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, respectively. The association of Aristophanes with Euripides, will prove interesting later in another connection.

5. The Comedies of Aristophanes

The productive period of Aristophanes' life comprised about forty years, in the space of which, according to the best estimates, he wrote forty-four plays; four of these, however, were ascribed by ancient critics to Archippus, another comic poet. If we consider "second editions" separate plays, the number of titles known to us comes to forty-three. Only eleven complete comedies have come down to us. These, in chronological order, are: Acharnians (425), Knights (424), Clouds (423), Wasps (422), Peace (421), Birds (414), Lysistrata (411), Thesmophoriazusae (411), Frogs (405), Ecclesiazusae (392), and Plutus (388). Of the non-extant comedies, we possess roughly a thousand fragments. Since there is considerable doubt concerning the subject-matter and date of many of the non-extant comedies, we shall confine our references to those plays which throw some addi-

tional light on the problem, and concerning which there is sufficient information.

The extant comedies, though they represent only one quarter of Aristophanes' work, can readily be divided into three periods. The first period ends with the Peace, coinciding with the Peace of Nicias in 421, which marked the close of the first phase of the Peloponnesian War. The second period runs from 414 to 405, or almost to the end of the Peloponnesian War (404). The last period includes the last two of the extant comedies.

a) The first period -- 1) The Banqueters

It will be remembered that when Aristophanes wrote his first play towards the close of the year 428, the war was nearing the end of its fourth year. Pericles was dead and Cleon was fast approaching the height of his power. Mytilene (on the island of Lesbos), an important Athenian subject, had revolted but there was as yet no hint of Mytilene's impending fate. Under these conditions, Aristophanes wrote his first comedy, the Banqueters (οἱ Δαίταλῆς); the play was produced by Callistratus at the Lenaea early in 427.

"A scholiast on Aristophanes¹ says there was a law against any poet bringing out a comedy before the age of thirty, but this I suppose means that the state would not undergo the expense of a chorus for a young and untried candidate, and hence the comic poets generally brought out their early plays under other people's names..."²

The Banqueters was a social satire of sophistry and the newer education; and it was very timely, for in this year the Sicilian sophist Gorgias was to create a sensation at Athens with his new

1. Clouds 526.

2. Mahaffy, op.cit., p.207.

brand of oratory. In the play, an Athenian of the old days is represented as having two sons, one submissive to paternal discipline the other full of new ideas and not unlike the new tribe of demagogues at Athens. The old man loved the country and believed in its value as an educator and maker of good morals. Aristophanes makes mention of his Banqueters in the Clouds,¹ where he calls it "my Virtuous Young Man and my Paederast." The play may have been intended as an attack on the moral perverseness of politicians.

2) The Babylonians

Although Nicias, the aristocratic conservative, was the most prominent man on the Board of Generals, Cleon wielded the real power, almost from the moment of Pericles' death. In his special field -- oratory -- he needed no special office in order to be a powerful political figure. There were other "respectable mediocrities"² among the demagogues, but one of these, Lysicles, was killed in Caria in 428 while engaged in the exaction of tribute from Athenian subjects. Another, Eucrates, is known practically by name only.

When Lesbos revolted in 428, public sentiment was completely in favor of putting down the revolt. An expedition consisting of one thousand hoplites was sent to Mytilene under Paches, and to spare the Athenian treasury, the hoplites rowed themselves. The siege costs at Mytilene were so high that the

1. Clouds 528.

2. Henderson, The Great War between Athens and Sparta, p.170.

Athenians for the first time imposed on themselves the property-tax (*εἰσφορά*) which brought in two hundred talents. The richer Athenians suffered most, but even they, under the leadership of Nicias, were unwilling to see the Athenian Empire broken. Yet they resented the policy of Cleon, though he did more than anyone else towards creating among the Athenians the resolution they needed in raising money and the economy in spending it. Pericles himself might have done what Cleon did at this time.

"Pericles believed that the spiritual greatness of Athens was rooted in her political power, and the tough imperial conscience of a profit-sharing democracy was untroubled by the thought that it was sacrificing the virtue of honesty to teach the Allies the virtue of gratitude."

But when Cleon persuaded the Assembly to decree the indiscriminate slaughter of all Mytileneans of military age, democrats and oligarchs alike,² and the enslavement of the women and children, that was the reductio ad absurdum of Periclean policy. This decree was fortunately not carried out. The instinctive feeling of pity, and the intelligence of the Athenians prompted them to reverse their decision, which had been made in a moment of anger.³ In the Mytilenean debate Diodotus was the mouth-piece of reasoned state-craft. Why should they slaughter the democrats who had turned against the oligarchs? It would alienate the democrats in every city of the Empire, and thus prove very harmful to the whole structure. Yet it was only by a small majority

1. Adcock, The Cambridge Ancient History, vol.V., Ch.VII,p.166

2. Lesbos, one of the few subject-allies permitted to choose its own form of government, had chosen an oligarchy. Chios and Samos did the same, though Samos of course lost her rights after the revolt of 440. Democracies were imposed on all other subjects.

3. The decision was actually illegal in Athenian legislative procedure.

that the decree was repealed. The punishment in any case was harsh enough, about one thousand being put to death, while all ships and a considerable part of the land had to be surrendered. Curiously enough, the Athenian state no longer collected any tribute from Lesbos, the money going instead to the twenty-seven hundred Athenian cleruchs (settlers) who were sent there to enable them to live a life of relative ease.

Just after these events, Aristophanes wrote his Babylonians and had the comedy produced, again by Callistratus, at the Dionysia in the spring of the following year (426). The play was a thoroughgoing attack on the whole policy of Athens towards her subjects. According to a scholiast, Aristophanes attacked "all the Athenian officials, whether elected or chosen by lot, and above all, Cleon."¹ We do not know enough from the fragments to be certain about the plot of the comedy. The usual explanation is that Cleon manages a mill for his master, the democracy, while a chorus of Babylonian slaves (perhaps the allies) tread the mill. But, as Norwood says, "there is no evidence whatever that Aristophanes championed the allies".² Furthermore, it may be construed that allied envoys in the play deliver absurd eulogies of Athens in order to secure benefits, such as a reduction of their tribute. Whatever we may conclude, Aristophanes was very bold, and Cleon probably took the play as a personal attack. Apparently at the Dionysia, the allies brought their annual tribute to Athens, and many other strangers also came in for the festival. Thus the Athenians were not alone in

1. Scholiast on Ach. 378, quoted by Murray, Aristophanes, p.25

2. Norwood, Greek Comedy, p.287.

witnessing the performance of the play, as they would have been at the Lenaea. Cleon made use of this fact in seeking his revenge. He charged Aristophanes¹ with "scoffing at his country and insulting the people"² in the presence of the allies. Aristophanes had run a great risk, since the case was brought before the Council, but he had much support among strangers, friends, and country-folk. Nevertheless the people were probably offended, because they had approved Cleon's policy in substance; no doubt Aristophanes cleared himself by showing that his intention had been to attack the politicians and not the people. At any rate, Aristophanes' acquittal shows clearly that the people wanted comedy to go on as it existed.

3) The Acharnians

About the time of the performance of the Babylonians, there was a second outbreak of the plague at Athens, but the Spartans did not invade Attica in 426 and therefore the home situation was not serious. Under the guidance of Cleon and his war spirit, a strategy of offence against Boeotia was resumed. Nicias, who had been engaged in harrying Melos, was recalled and landed his troops on the northern coast of Attica, on the borders of Boeotia. He marched inland and was joined at Tanagra by a full Athenian land force. The Athenians were unexpectedly forced to fight, and although they won the battle, it was a disappointing victory. Demosthenes, the general who had been expected from another quarter

1. Some believe that Cleon laid the charge against the producer, Callistratus, but see Knights 512ff.

2. Ach. 631.

with another army was defeated on his way through Aetolia and thus could not carry out the plan. The Athenians therefore simply retired.

Demosthenes, though he had failed in Aetolia, regained his reputation by inflicting a serious defeat on the Peloponnesians and Ambraciots on the northwest coast of Greece. Meanwhile an expedition that had been sent to Sicily under Laches to protect Athenian interests, especially in the straits between Sicily and Italy, was involved in several minor battles. While these events were taking place,¹ Aristophanes was writing his third play, the Acharnians. This comedy, the first of the extant plays, was produced at the Lenaeon festival in January 425, again under the pseudonym of Callistratus. Warned by his encounter with Cleon, the twenty-year-old poet adopted a slightly altered approach: he made an ardent appeal in favor of a truce. Yet the only real lesson Aristophanes had learned was to say that he was speaking to the citizens since the strangers were not present at the Lenaea.² Although Aristophanes is comparatively reticent concerning Cleon, he makes enough references to him to show that he is not yet reconciled. The play is daring in that it speaks in defense of the enemy and attacks Athenian policy. The Acharnians is one of Aristophanes' best plays, and was awarded first prize in competition with the famous Cratinus, and Eupolis.

1. It is possible also that Sparta earlier in the year made peace proposals: Ach. 652-53: "This is why the Lacedaemonians offer you peace, if you will cede them Aegina."

2. Ach. 502-508.

In the play, Dicaeopolis, the leading character, finding it impossible to secure a truce through the assembly, commissions Amphitheus to conclude for him a private truce with the Spartans. Dicaeopolis chooses the "thirty-year variety" and is about to celebrate when he is set upon by the chorus of Acharnians,¹ who are greatly angered by his impudence in concluding a truce. Dicaeopolis however, is resourceful and gains permission to plead his case, which he does in a sound speech in favour of Sparta. The chorus is divided. The die-hards call on the general Lamachus, who immediately sallies forth in all his military panoply, but is discomfited by the subtle arguments of Dicaeopolis and returns to his house, whereupon Dicaeopolis proclaims the cessation of all war-time boycotts. After the parabasis, Dicaeopolis is shown operating his market. A Megarian enters, distressed by the decree of Pericles, and a fat Boeotian takes back with him a representative Athenian product not found in Boeotia -- an informer. To Lamachus, the market is closed. The best scene in the play is that in which Dicaeopolis prepares for a feast while Lamachus gloomily prepares to go forth on an expedition. Dicaeopolis returns from the feast happily inebriated, while Lamachus returns from the expedition badly wounded.

One writer says of the Acharnians:

"[It is] a gaudy and compendious succession of scenes in which the tragic follies of the war-party, the lugubrious fopperies of Euripides, the proud gullibility of the Athenians and the careless inhumanity of their foreign policy are equally and effectively lampooned."²

1. Men of Acharnae, one of the most important demes of Attica, politically and economically.

2. O'Neill, The Complete Greek Drama, vol. II, pp. 427-428.

Possibly soon after 425, Aristophanes in his Farmers (a non-extant play) urges the country population to insist on stopping the war.

4) The Knights

The year 425 brought Cleon to the peak of his popularity. Demosthenes, who was always full of ideas, had a new inspiration. He occupied and fortified Pylos, on the west coast of the Peloponnese and caused so much consternation at Sparta by this move that the Peloponnesian army was immediately withdrawn from Attica and moved to the new "danger" area. The Spartan fleet hastened down from Corcyra and was defeated by the Athenian fleet in a surprise attack. The Spartans had, by way of precaution, landed a garrison on the island of Sphacteria, just south of the promontory of Pylos. This garrison was now hopelessly cut off. The Spartans in dismay agreed to an armistice while envoys were sent to Athens to discuss proposals for peace. Cleon secured the rejection of all proposals and the Athenians blockaded the island. The Spartans on Sphacteria however, were able to secure food through the valorous efforts particularly of the helots who risked their lives for the promise of freedom. Winter was fast approaching and finally, Cleon, who received the blame because he had blocked peace proposals, had the effrontery to suggest that he himself would soon finish the siege if he were in command. To his consternation, Nicias relinquished the command to him and he was forced to accept in order to "save face." Cleon then made his ridiculous position even more ridiculous, at least to the sober-minded, by promising to bring back the Spartans alive, or slay them on the spot, within twenty days. With the

help of Demosthenes, Cleon effected a landing and completely defeated the garrison, securing the surrender of one hundred twenty Spartans -- a remarkable feat, since the Spartans had a reputation for always fighting to the last man. Needless to say, the return of Cleon to Athens with these valuable hostages within the specified twenty days, caused great amazement and, although Demosthenes deserved the credit, Cleon became the idol of the populace. To add to the triumph of the year, the Athenians were able a short while later to effect the final extermination of the oligarchs at Corcyra. Athens did lose Messana in Sicily, but the year was on the whole one of the best of the entire war for Athens. Small wonder then that Cleon was able to secure an increase of tribute from the subject-allies toward the close of the year, and counteract the higher cost of living by raising the pay of six thousand Athenian jurymen from two to three obols a day.

At this time also, Aristophanes was composing his Knights, which he produced, for the first time under his own name, in January of 424 at the Lenaeon festival. Aristophanes had reflected on the successes of Cleon and the result was an astonishingly daring attack on the hero himself. Aristophanes gave himself free rein and allowed his temper to get the better of the artist in him; by universal consent, the Knights is one of Aristophanes' poorest plays, even though it did win first prize, again in competition with Cratinus, and another comic poet, Aristomenes. Eupolis apparently collaborated with Aristophanes in certain parts of the comedy. Aristophanes had contemplated his

attack for some time. In the Acharnians, the chorus says: " I will hear nothing; do not address me; I hate you more than I do Cleon, whom one day I shall flay to make sandals for the Knights."¹ The plot of the Knights is simple. Demos personifies the Athenian people and has two faithful servants, Demosthenes and Nicias. Demosthenes complains of Demos' newest slave, a Paphlagonian tanner (representing Cleon) who is making life miserable for the other slaves. An oracle discloses that he is to be succeeded by a sausage-seller. When the latter appears -- his name is Agoracritus -- he is hailed as the savior of Athens. The sausage-seller is saved from the attack of the Paphlagonian by a chorus of Knights who come to the rescue. The combatants decide to hold a contest in demagogy in the Council. In the parabasis, Aristophanes explains why he had not earlier produced his comedies under his own name: the difficulty of securing public favor was too great. After the parabasis, the sausage-seller returns victorious, but the Paphlagonian refuses to recognize the victory. And so the decision is put to Demos, that is, the Assembly in the Athenian political organization. Agoracritus emerges triumphant and enters the house of Demos. He comes out again, followed by a rejuvenated Demos. Ironically enough, Cleon had been awarded a front row seat at the theatre, and although he no doubt laughed with the rest of the audience, he probably shifted uneasily in his seat, even though Aristophanes had been careful to preserve anonymity for Cleon in the play,

1. Ach. 299-301.

his actual name occurring only once.¹ The first prize went to Aristophanes, not because of the artistic excellence of the play, but because the audience admired the poet's courage and recognized the validity of his political views, even if they did not share them. Certainly the political analysis and the well-meant satire of Demos are most apt. The "strangers," in whose interest the reforms were suggested, were not present in Athens at the Lenaea and are not mentioned until the very last line, rather the last word, of the play.

It is not certain, but at any rate probable, that Cleon's charge that Aristophanes illegally used the title of citizen was laid after the performance of the Knights. We must not exaggerate the influence of comedy, but a work like the Knights, performed before the entire people cannot have been a matter of indifference. Cleon showed his craftiness. By laying this charge, he thoroughly frightened Aristophanes, since citizenship was a jealously guarded privilege. The effect of the comedy was thereby greatly diminished. It seems clear that Aristophanes had his citizenship, since Cleon tried to deprive him of it, but he must have thought it would be difficult to prove the validity of his title. Cleon was too popular to trifle with in such an important matter, and so Aristophanes somewhat reluctantly agreed to a truce with Cleon. Aristophanes himself says in a later play, the Wasps:

1. Knights 976.

"Some have said that I and Cleon were reconciled. This is the truth of the matter: Cleon was harassing me, persecuting and belaboring me in every way; and, when I was being fleeced, the public laughed at seeing me utter such cries, not that they cared about me, but simply curious to know whether, when trodden down by my enemy, I would not hurl at him some taunt. Noticing this, I have played the wheedler a bit."¹

The next^{previous} extant play, the Clouds, hints at the suppression of Aristophanes' daring.²

5) The Clouds

The events prior to the production of the Clouds were not quite so sensational as those of the previous years, but they may nevertheless be noted here. The final extinction of the Corcyrean oligarchs in 425, had started a new trend in the war: the exploitation of party differences and political intrigues within other states. The intensely political minds of the Greeks were much affected by war.

In 424, Athens suffered several setbacks. An attempt on Megara, a city regarded with ill favor by Athens since Pericles' famous decree, proved unsuccessful, despite the help of a democratic faction in the city. In Boeotia, plans for further conquests were halted by the defeat of the Athenians in a forced battle at Delium. Here again, Athens' plans included the exploitation of political rivalries within various cities of the Boeotian League. In view of the subject of the Clouds, it is interesting to note that Socrates and Alcibiades took part in the battle of Delium. In the Symposium,

1. Wasps 1284-1290.

2. It must be noted, however, that Cleon is certainly attacked in the Wasps, though more indirectly. Aristophanes does not spare him even in the Peace, written about the time of Cleon's death.

Plato makes Alcibiades tell Aristophanes the story of the flight from the battle-field: "There you might have seen him, Aristophanes, just as you describe him, as if he were in the streets of Athens, 'with his nose in the air and rolling his eyes about'..."¹

Athens also had difficulties abroad in the same year. In Sicily, Athens was hoping to protect her trading interests by exploiting local differences. Syracuse, however, at the Conference of Gela, convinced the Sicilians that Athens intended to capture the whole island; whereupon the Sicilians settled their internal differences and left the Athenians with nothing to do but sail home. The Athenians at home were furious, and, as usual, punished the leaders of the expedition. Nine years elapsed before the Sicilian plans of the demagogues became state policy.² In 424, Athens also had difficulties in Chalcidice, where the Spartans under Brasidas captured Amphipolis. The revolt in Chalcidice was spreading rapidly, and Athens had to act because the area contributed at least thirty per cent of the total tribute.

In the light of these events, we may be surprised that Aristophanes did not write a political play. The Clouds, produced by Philonides in March, 423, makes no mention of the

1. Symposium 221A, quoted by Henderson, The Great War between Athens and Sparta, p.238.

2. One demagogue, Hyperbolus, had actually proposed that a hundred ships be sent to Carthage, but this proposal fell through. See Knights 1302-1315.

war nor of the statesmen of the day,¹ except at lines 581-594, where Aristophanes makes a trenchant allusion to Cleon's election to the Board of Generals for the year 424-423. Aristophanes evidently felt that Cleon had thrown away his weapons by withdrawing the charge^{in connection with citizenship.} Furthermore, Cleon was very preoccupied with other matters. But the general impression one derives from the Clouds is that the Athenians, as a result of their recent failures, were in no mood to joke about politics. But laugh they must, and so Aristophanes chose a non-political subject. The Clouds, which has been highly esteemed by many critics, and not least of all by Aristophanes himself,² won only third prize. The aged Cratinus, of whom Aristophanes had jestingly said in his Knights that he was past his prime and cared for nothing but drink,³ seized on this accusation and won first prize with his Wine-Flask. This demonstrates not only Cratinus' sense of humor, but the good nature of the Athenians. No doubt Aristophanes laughed heartily at his own defeat and congratulated his elder. The Clouds ridiculed Socrates as a composite figure made up from the various sophists of the day; and the failure of the play may have been partly the result of the ineptitude of the caricature, which was no doubt felt by

1. Another comedy of Aristophanes, the Merchant Ships, may have been produced in January, 423. Concerning this play..."Kock suggests that the Athenians and Spartans, wishing to state their grievances against each other, found that the grievances could only be carried in heavy freight vessels, and that one load was as heavy and disgusting as the other! Thereupon they made peace.-- This suits the fragments." (Murray, Aristophanes, p.65, footnote 1).

2. Clouds 518ff. (Compare G.B. Shaw's attitude to his own plays. Our version of the Clouds is not the one originally performed, but rather a second, revised edition.

3. Knights 525-536.

at least a segment of the audience. We shall be making further references to the relations between Aristophanes and Socrates.

6) The Wasps

A short time after the performance of the Clouds, a one-year armistice had been arranged between Athens and Sparta, but the fighting in Chalcidice continued. The Athenians hoped to negotiate Brasidas out of the area, but another city, Scione, revolted and sided with Brasidas, while Mende followed shortly after. Cleon carried a proposal that the cities be taken and their inhabitants put to death. The "peace-general", Nicias, was to execute the decree. Again, democratic factions helped the Athenians to recapture Mende, and from there a besieging force invested Scione. Potidaea was Brasidas' only chance to cut off the Athenians, but his Macedonian ally, Perdiccas, deserted to the Athenians, and he was unable to carry out his plan. The coming of winter put a temporary halt to operations. Aristophanes meanwhile was composing his Wasps, which he produced at the Lenaea of 422 under the pseudonym of Philonides; he won the first prize.¹ The failure of the Clouds drove Aristophanes back to the sphere of his original successes, and this time he attacked one of the evils in domestic politics: the abuses of the Athenian judicial system. A more detailed discussion of Aristophanes' purpose must be reserved for another chapter, but we may note here that the Wasps is essentially another attack on Cleon, even though Aristophanes says: "...despite the happy chance that gave Cleon his

1. This is not certain. The Preview, possibly also by Aristophanes, may have won first prize.

fame we shall not go out of our way to belabour him again."¹ There were six thousand jurymen at Athens, -- mostly older men, since the younger citizens were off on campaigns; control of such a large number of citizens went far towards control of the Assembly. It will be remembered that Cleon had raised the pay of the jurymen to three obols a day.

7) The Peace

By March, 422, Cleon was growing rather impatient with the situation in Chalcidice. He asked for the command and was elected general. In April, the armistice expired. Cleon, confident in his own abilities -- a confidence, incidentally, that was not shared by the army under his command -- ignored Scione, attacked instead Torone, and captured it almost before the very eyes of Brasidas. Amphipolis, the key-city of the entire district, became his next objective. In the battle that followed shortly after, Brasidas fell in the moment of victory, while Cleon died a coward's death, six hundred men falling with him. At one stroke, the last obstacle to peace on both sides was removed, and the winter was spent in peace negotiations. Nicias was now again the most important political figure at Athens; and he had always been opposed to Cleon's aggressive policy. The Peloponnesians also wanted peace, since their territory was threatened on several sides, their helots were becoming hard to control, their citizens were still at Athens, and, above all, their thirty-year Peace with Argos was expiring

1. Wasps 62-63.

and they had to be free to deal with any demands she might make.

And so the cause for which Aristophanes pleaded in the Peace¹ was already won when he produced the play at the Dionysia in 421. This time Aristophanes won only second prize, the first going to his friend Eupolis who produced a play called the Flatterers. The Peace is a happy play, because the outcome of the negotiations was no longer doubtful. And probably even the Spartan ambassadors were in the theatre at the time of the performance. According to Thucydides, the peace was signed immediately after the Dionysia.² Aristophanes was no longer fighting against odds; and we feel that he has run short of material. The appeal for peace is a sensuous one, and the phallic element is strong. The plot is simplicity itself and is altogether allegorical. Trygaeus, like Dicaeopolis in the Acharnians, has despaired of obtaining peace through the regular channels, and resolves to go to Zeus himself. He makes a successful journey on a flying "dung-beetle", and finds that the gods, completely tired of the stupidities of the Greeks, have handed them over to the mercy of War and Tumult, who have cast Peace into a deep pit. Trygaeus summons farmers and laborers from all parts of Greece to help him liberate Peace.

"The difficulties are delightfully Hellenic; the Boeotians are only pretending; Lamachus is in the way; the Argives laugh at the others while they profit from their troubles; the Megarians are trying hard, but are too undernourished to be of much use; some of the Greeks are pulling one way and some another; the Laconians do their part, along with the Athenians, but even here it is only the farmers that are doing any real work."³

1. There was a second Peace in the lists, but it was not known whether it was a different play or a revised version.

2. Thucydides V. 20.

3. O'Neill, The Complete Greek Drama, vol. II, pp. 668-669.

Finally Peace is hauled out of the pit and Trygaeus returns to earth. After the parabasis, he is seen preparing a feast. During the preparations, an oracle-monger appears and insists that peace is impossible. Aristophanes did not realize how true this prophecy was. Even during the negotiations, Boeotia, Corinth, and Megara refused to agree to the treaty, since they received no compensation for their losses. Athens and Sparta signed the Peace of Nicias,^{which was} to remain in force for fifty years; but the terms of the Peace were not carried out.

With the Peace, the "political period" of Aristophanes' career came to an end. Cleon, his central object of attack, was dead. Aroused by the oppression of the islands, Aristophanes had gone to the root of the trouble by attacking the chief instigator, in his Babylonians. He redoubled the intensity of his attack in the Knights, and in the Wasps he studied one of Cleon's instruments, the innocent jurymen. Cleon had also been the most important of the advocates of an all-out war with Sparta. Thus the appeal for peace in the Acharnians, and the happiness at its achievement in the Peace, make us believe that these two plays also have Cleon particularly in mind. The other two plays of the period are satires of new movements in the social and intellectual spheres. The Clouds is in this respect a development of the Banqueters. But Aristophanes does not seem to have considered such subjects to be among the most suitable for comedy, at any rate in his earlier years. I cannot help but feel that Aristophanes chose these subjects because of the lack of good political material.

b) The second period -- 1) The Birds

The next extant comedy of Aristophanes was produced seven years ~~later~~ after the Peace, and it is likely that Aristophanes did not write any plays in the intervening period, a period of confused political intrigues, resulting in more complication in the grouping of the Greek cities than had ever before been known. That speaks for itself, since complication had always been a prominent characteristic of Greek diplomatic politics. The breakdown of the peace was the breakdown eventually of what Pericles had left as his legacy: the vindication of Athenian power. To win the peace, as she had won the war, Athens needed what she could not produce -- a second Pericles, a statesman who would follow a consistent, pacific foreign policy. Instead, Athens had Nicias and a new figure, Alcibiades. Nicias was not equal to the task, and Alcibiades was too impatient. Alcibiades was exceedingly brilliant, a master of the art of war and of demagogy. If he had never acted contrary to his better judgment, he might have inspired the confidence of a Pericles, and the loyalty which he himself did not consistently display, and as a result Athens would not have lost the abilities that were to be in the end the only hope of averting an inglorious defeat.

Alcibiades began his career with a brilliant political maneuver. While Sparta made an alliance with Boeotia, Athens concluded in 420 the Quadruple Alliance with Argos, Elis, and Mantinea. Thus the aristocratic states were again ranged with Sparta and the democracies with Athens. Alcibiades had inherited from Cleon the realization of the importance of Argos¹ in the event

1. Knights 465.

of another war. For more than six years after the signing of the peace, Athens and Sparta refrained from direct attack on each other's territory, but in only three years, Spartans and Athenians were fighting on the field of battle at Mantinea (418). The battle of Mantinea, "by far the greatest and most interesting of all land battles of the great war,"¹ was the result of Alcibiades' Argive policy. Though Alcibiades had been elected general with Nicias in 419, he was not re-elected general for 418, the year in which his policy was to be put to the final test. "Such was the sense of the popular electorate in that the most stupid as the most brilliant of democracies."² For Sparta, everything was risked on one single throw, on her own territory, but Athens, through her party factions, made several basic blunders. Sparta won back the reputation which the surrender at Sphacteria had shattered. Argos received an oligarchic government and entered a fifty-year alliance with Sparta.

Next spring, Hyperbolus, a powerful demagogue of the "Cleon" variety, tried to secure the ostracism of either Nicias or Alcibiades. Ostracism was a form of banishment, used to restore singleness of purpose in politics by removing one of the causes of conflict in policy. But Alcibiades and Nicias both realized they had too many enemies, and so by temporarily settling their differences, they secured the ostracism of Hyperbolus. Both Nicias and Alcibiades were re-elected and resumed their quarrels.

1. Henderson, The Great War between Athens and Sparta, p.330.

2. Ibid., p.303.

In July, only eight months after its establishment, the oligarchy at Argos came to an end and the alliance with Athens was renewed. We are almost ready now, with Aristophanes, to leave this political morass and seek some form of escape. This was certainly the reverse of what Aristophanes had been so happy about in his Peace. He remained silent, but he was thinking, and events that followed provided him with ideas. The revolt and capture of Melos, another subject of Athens, in 416, and the slaughter of all the male inhabitants showed that the Athenian people had not changed since the Mytilenean affair of 427. The fact that this murderous decree was supported by Alcibiades, prepares us for the success of his proposal for an expedition to Sicily, a proposal which gained strength through repeated appeals for aid from cities fearing Syracusan aggression. At the debates on the Sicilian question in the spring of 415, Nicias proposed his alternative, Chalcidic policy. Why should Athens go so far afield before restoring order within the existing empire? But the fighting in Chalcidice had been going on continuously without success. Amphipolis never was recaptured. "Go and fight Thrace-way" had become a comic catchword in the streets of Athens.¹ And so Alcibiades' plan was the more popular, just because it was more sensational. Nicias against his will, was appointed to share the command of the expedition with Alcibiades and Lamachus, an old soldier. Nicias tried to resign, but the Athenians would not permit it. They knew from experience that

1. Henderson, op.cit., p.341; see Birds 1368-69.

he was cautious and dependable. "The enthusiasm of the majority was so overwhelming, that if any man did disapprove he was afraid of being thought unpatriotic if he voted against the expedition, and so he held his peace."¹ Meton, the Astronomer, was opposed to the expedition and Socrates prophesied disaster. Euripides in his Troades, produced in the spring of 415, denounced all war.

"Thucydides devotes to the Melian affair no less than twenty-two chapters of cold devastating analysis, and, though he is not the man to suggest in so many words an intervention of Providence for the punishment of sin, he proceeds forthwith: ' In the same winter the Athenians made ready the expedition against Sicily'." ²

One night, shortly before the fleet sailed, there happened something which eventually ruined the expedition.

"It was usual to have in front of the more important buildings a 'herm' or boundary pillar with two human characteristics: a bearded head, making the herm into the god Hermes, and a phallus erectus as an emblem of generation and fertility." ³

These hermae were mutilated that night and the act caused a great scandal. It was considered a bad omen for the expedition and proof of a conspiracy to overthrow the democracy. Another recent activity, the profanation of the Mysteries at dinner-parties was associated with the mutilation of the hermae, and since Alcibiades was denounced in connection with the former, he was also thought guilty of the latter. Alcibiades demanded a trial before leaving Athens, but it was not granted, and the expedition sailed shortly afterwards. Yet, in the absence of the fleet, excitement and

1. Thucydides VI.24.4, quoted by Henderson, pp.cit., p.347.

2. Murray, Aristophanes, p.137.

3. Ibid., p.140.

suspicion grew, many were sentenced to death, and finally the despatch boat Salaminia was sent to Sicily to fetch Alcibiades. But Alcibiades escaped and was sentenced to death in absentia by the Athenians. He went to Argos, and when the Athenians demanded his surrender, he fled to Sparta where he began his career of political intrigue. Meanwhile Lamachus and Nicias won a minor battle against the Syracusans, but the actual investment of Syracuse did not begin until the spring of 414.

It was at this time that Aristophanes produced, in the name of Callistratus, the Birds, at the Great Dionysia. Shortly before its performance, a certain Syracosios had brought forward a proposal for the prohibition of personal attacks in comedy. This belief is based on a scholiast's note to line 1297 of the Birds, where Syracosios is mentioned. But since the personal references in the Birds, though not severe, are nevertheless quite numerous, we may do well to disregard the law entirely. For, as Croiset says, in speaking of the numerous conjectures: "So many risky hypotheses, based on a conjecture of a perplexed grammarian!"¹ In terms of poetic quality, the Birds is the poet's masterpiece, but it was awarded only second prize, the first going to the Revellers of Ameipsias. The comedy tells of two Athenians, Pisthetaerus and Euelpides who have become tired of the stupidities and annoyances of life in Athens, and have therefore resolved to seek habitation elsewhere. Some birds they had purchased guide them to Epops, a bird that had formerly been a man. The two adventurers then convince Epops of a magnificent scheme

1. Croiset, Maurice, Aristophanes and the Political Parties at Athens, translated by James Loeb, London, Macmillan and Co., 1909, p.119, footnote 2.

whereby the supreme power of the universe may be put into the hands of the birds, a scheme made possible by the central location of their habitat. The parabasis, to our surprise, contains no advice on political questions, but is rather fanciful and quite general. The city is organized and named "Cloudecuckootown" (Νεφέλοκοκκυγία). Since the city is to be essentially Sybaritic in character, the typical Athenian nuisances who make their appearance are flatly refused admission. A messenger of the gods hears of developments and informs the other immortals. A herald from earth informs Pisthetaerus of a bird-mania at Athens. No less than ten thousand Athenians are on their way to settle in the new utopia. The new pests are driven off, and then an embassy of the gods arrives to conclude a treaty. Pisthetaerus makes his own terms and the gods finally acquiesce, Pisthetaerus marrying the goddess Sovereignty amid feasting and rejoicing.

No comedy of Aristophanes has been the subject of so much dispute. The fact that the preceding plays are so strongly political leads many to believe that the Birds must have a serious political intent. And it does seem strange that Aristophanes should have staged this successful pursuit of a kingdom in the clouds when the Athenians were going mad after a kingdom in the West almost as cloudy.¹ We must remember, however, that Aristophanes was a patriotic citizen and it seems very unlikely that he would satirize an enterprise on which Athens had staked her very existence and which had been undertaken with such universal

1. Murray, Aristophanes, p.155.

enthusiasm. As a matter of fact, the only two men of note who disapproved of the enterprise were Socrates and Meton. Socrates was ridiculed in the Clouds, and Meton, the astronomer and calendar-reformer, is not spared in the Birds.¹ Furthermore, Aristophanes makes no reference to Lamachus, whom he had attacked in the Acharnians, and, curiously enough, he makes only a casual reference to Alcibiades. "...Even if the Birds advocates a change in government, no ancient sycophant or modern scholar could prove the point. This very fact makes any dogmatically certain interpretation of the Birds utterly hopeless."² Essentially, Aristophanes' imagination is not governed by any direct satire, because the scattered allusions have no uniform tendency; but we cannot say that Aristophanes is not conscious of politics in the Birds. Norwood feels that the purpose of the play, for those not obsessed by research-mongering, is simply the working out of a glorious comic fancy.³ To say, however, that the comedy is pure extravaganza seems rather extreme. Perhaps we should adopt a middle course until some really convincing explanation is put forward. Some of the various views concerning the Birds will be mentioned later in connection with other matters.

2) The Lysistrata

Three years elapsed between the performance of the Birds and the production of the next extant comedy. The events during these years were decisive, most important among them the

1. Birds 992-1020.

2. Harsh, A Handbook of Classical Drama, p.289.

3. Norwood, Greek Comedy, p. 241.

Syracusan campaign. The Athenians met with success at first, during the spring of 414, although Lamachus was killed in a battle, but thanks to Alcibiades, the Spartans sent out Gylippus who saved Syracuse from an early surrender. Nicias wrote home in despair, asking that the project be cancelled, or that large reinforcements be sent. The Athenians were determined and sent out another expedition, under Eurymedon, and Demosthenes, the ablest general of the War. The expedition reached Sicily in December, 414. The next year was the year of the great disaster. There were a number of land and sea battles in which the Athenians were at first the more successful. Finally, however, they were hemmed in, and their only logical move was retreat. And they would have sailed home, but for Nicias, who was afraid of the reception the Athenians at home would give him. When he was eventually prevailed upon by his colleagues to adopt the sensible course, there occurred the eclipse that was destined to become the most famous in history. Nicias being superstitious, decided they must wait twenty-seven days for the full moon. That was all the Syracusans needed. They inflicted a serious naval defeat on the Athenians (September) and completed the victory within seven days by pursuing and slaughtering the fleeing forces. Due in no small measure to the account of Thucydides,¹ one has a feeling that the suffering of the Athenians was the result of a spirit of vengeance such as they themselves had displayed in their treatment of Melos only three years earlier. Gylippus, the Spartan, made a noble effort to save Demosthenes and Nicias, but even they

1. End of Book VII. John Stuart Mill considered Thucydides' account of the Sicilian catastrophe "the most powerful and affecting piece of narrative perhaps in all literature." (Gavorse, Joseph, in his introduction to the Crawley translation, Modern Library, 1934, p. xw)

were put to death by the infuriated victors. Athens lost her best general; she lost her prestige at sea. The idea that the sea and all that used it belonged to Athens, had deeply penetrated the Athenian mind. Athens might well regret, also, that Nicias had been so loyal to tradition, so much a pattern of the conventional virtues.

Meanwhile, there were new developments on the mainland of Greece. King Agis of Sparta had invaded Attica in April, 413, and on the advice of Alcibiades, he placed a permanent garrison at Decelea in Attica. This strategic maneuver by the Spartans has given the name "Deceleian War" to the remaining period of the war. But the final struggle took place in another sector -- the coast of Asia Minor and the Hellespont, where a continuous series of revolts among the Athenian subjects threatened not only the Empire, but Athens herself, by the cutting of supply lines. No terms were offered Athens after Syracuse, and she expected none. With the greatest of determination, she began to repair her losses. Ships were sent to combat areas as fast as they could be built. An attempt was made to increase the revenues by substituting for the tribute a five percent harbor duty, but this measure did not prove too successful. There was actually a mass revolt, helped along by the activity of Alcibiades at Sparta. Many of the cities went into Persian hands, mainly because the Spartans now found Persian help indispensable. Even the most faithful of Athens' subjects were encouraged to break with Athens. Some of the cities were recovered by the end of the year 412, but had not Alcibiades, now with the Persians, advised them to let Athens and Sparta wear each other down, that year

would have been the last for Athens. Thus Athens survived her greatest crisis, a crisis so great that we stand amazed at the boldness of Aristophanes in putting forth another plea for peace. The Lysistrata, produced under the name of Callistratus at the Lenaea of 411, asks not only for peace, but -- at least so it seems at first glance -- for a panhellenic unity. This element gives the play a universal appeal, and explains partly why it has been reproduced successfully in the modern theatre both in Europe and America.

The central character, Lysistrata ("Dismitter-of-Armies"), summons the women from the various states of Greece and unfolds her plan to them. The women are to go on a "sex-strike" in order to secure peace, and are induced to swear, rather tearfully, an oath of celibacy. They seize the Acropolis and successfully repulse a number of attacks. After several days, Lysistrata has some cases of attempted desertion on her hands, and the women are on the point of giving up their plans, when the men begin to weaken. In the end the opposing parties are reconciled and peace is made. Without jeopardizing his loyalty to Athens, Aristophanes has been fair to the Spartan point of view.

Its remoteness from reality makes the Lysistrata a utopian play, especially since the conciliatory panhellenic trend, which the play appears to advocate, was certainly non-existent at the time. Were it not for the brilliant imagination of Aristophanes, the play would be a tragedy rather than a comedy or a farce. But though Aristophanes came nearer bitterness than at any other time in his career, he remained true to his calling.

More than that, he remained true to Athens, because at this her worst crisis, he displays a sympathetic and generous spirit. Behind the fanciful poet, there stands a deeply reflective Aristophanes who sees in human nature the solution, that human diplomacy could not or would not find. Aristophanes appeals to deep-seated feelings, which were being restrained by more urgent considerations.

3) The Thesmophoriazusae

Very early in 411, political conditions at Athens had reached such a state of confusion, that Aristophanes again decided not to write purely political comedy. The Thesmophoriazusae, produced only two months after the Lysistrata, at the Great Dionysia, has nothing to do with politics. Like the Lysistrata, the comedy is about women, and in it, Aristophanes satirizes not only them, but also Euripides, who made extensive use of women characters in his tragedies. The women of Athens have decided to punish Euripides for his insults to their sex. His case is to be decided at the Thesmophoria, a festival for women, held in honor of Demeter and Persephone, the "law-givers" (θεσμοφόροι), who were the goddesses of grain and of stabilized civilization. Euripides is able to persuade his father-in-law Mnesilochus to dress as a woman, and speak in his defense at the assembly. But Mnesilochus is discovered and made prisoner. The remainder of the comedy is a series of attempts to effect an escape through one of the many devices of Euripides. Much of Euripides' tragedy is parodied by Aristophanes before Mnesilochus is allowed to make good his escape.

The Thesmophoriazusae is artistically one of the best comedies Aristophanes ever wrote.

4) The Frogs

Alcibiades had long been anxious to be recalled from exile. The democracy could scarcely be expected to make such a move, and the extreme oligarchs,¹ who were already planning to overthrow the democracy, would not accept Alcibiades either. And so, Alcibiades supported the moderate oligarchs under Theramenes,² with the object of overthrowing the democracy and at the same time tricking the extremists. By very skilful intrigues, he finally succeeded. In order to understand the references of Aristophanes in his Frogs, we must study the details of this plot. The revolt began in Samos, where the Athenian fleet was stationed, and the clubs at Athens quickly went into action. The oligarchy of the Four Hundred was set up at Athens by the extremists to replace the old Council of five hundred. As a concession to the moderates, an assembly of five thousand citizens, namely, the wealthiest citizens of Athens, was to be summoned at the discretion of the Four Hundred. But at Samos the oligarchic movement failed, the sailors remaining faithful to the democracy, and electing the trustiest democrats -- Thrasybulus and Thrasyllus -- as their leaders. They recalled Alcibiades, made him general, and would have sailed at once against Athens, had not Alcibiades restrained

1. Peisander, Phrynichus, Antiphon. Antiphon was the leader of the oligarchic clubs at Athens.

2. With him, we may place Aristocrates, and Adeimantus.

them. Alcibiades had not yet achieved his aims; the wrong party had come into power, and it showed no signs of making any concessions at all to Theramenes. But Alcibiades' confidence in Theramenes was finally justified. Theramenes and Aristocrates made their stand; Phrynichus was slain, and the "Constitution of the Five Thousand" replaced the Four Hundred. Peisander escaped to Decelea, and Antiphon, after a brilliant speech in his own defense, was applauded, condemned, and executed. Thucydides called the government of the Five Thousand the best the Athenians had ever enjoyed, because of its blend of oligarchy and democracy. Now at last Alcibiades was recalled; but he did not return to Athens until 408.

In September, Thrasybulus and Thrasyllus defeated the Spartan fleet in a naval engagement at Cynomessa. Theramenes and Alcibiades arrived with reinforcements for the next battle which was fought at Cyzicus. Here Alcibiades, Theramenes, and Thrasybulus won a great double victory on sea and land over Spartan and Persian forces. By this time, the full democracy was again restored at Athens, replacing the Constitution of the Five Thousand. A new "Cleon-like" demagogue, Cleophon, became prominent. He was attacked by the comic poets of the day, not least of all by Aristophanes himself. Cleophon secured the rejection of Spartan peace-proposals; he had, after all, restored the daily pay of two obols for jurymen and had thus gained an impregnable position! Yet Sparta recovered Pylos, and Megara regained her port.

In 409, Alcibiades made the Bosphorus secure for Athens; in 408 he was elected general with Thrasybulus and Conon as

colleagues, and returned at last to Athens. With the supreme powers of a Pericles, he sailed from Athens with a new fleet in October. But the great Spartan admiral, Lysander, also had a new fleet, through the kind offices of the Persians. Due to an unfortunate blunder on the part of Alcibiades, Lysander scored a minor victory at Notium in March, 407; but it was enough to cause the deposition of Alcibiades from his command -- a fatal blunder on the part of the Athenians. Conon replaced him in the command, while he retired to Thrace. The Spartans also recalled Lysander¹ and appointed another admiral in his place. He arrived in the spring of 406, and in June was able to inflict losses on Conon at Mytilene, where he was blockading Conon's fleet. News of Conon's plight goaded the Athenians into action. Aliens and slaves had to be added to citizens in order to make possible the manning of another one hundred and ten ships. Statues were melted into coin -- Athens' first gold coinage.² Eight generals took out the new fleet. At Arginusae Islands, the Athenians won a great battle but loss of life was heavy, and the generals were blamed for not having rescued the drowning men. At their trial, Theramenes, who was partly responsible for the failure to carry out the rescue operation, helped considerably in securing the condemnation and execution of the generals. This action on the part of Theramenes was motivated not only by a desire to save his own life, but also by political considerations.³ He wanted to secure the recall

1. According to the Spartan constitution, he could only serve as supreme commander for one year.

2. Frogs 720.

3. The generals had been elected by the democrats, and were therefore his political foes.

of Alcibiades, who shared with him the leadership of the "moderates".¹ Theramenes was elected general for the year 405, but was rejected through a later "scrutiny" carried out by the democrats; yet Adeimantus, an adherent of Alcibiades, escaped the screening and retained his place on the Board of Generals. Aristophanes in his Frogs bears out our conclusions concerning Theramenes' motives, but we must leave that question for later consideration. Cleophon remained for the time being supreme and again rejected Spartan peace offers. "...the folly of the Athenians is explicable only on their own theory that those whom the gods would destroy they first make mad".²

In January, 405, Philonides produced Aristophanes' Frogs. The comedy deservedly won first prize. Although Aristophanes does not refrain from airing his views on politics, he makes literature his central theme. Euripides and Sophocles, the great tragedians, had both died in 406, and Aristophanes was therefore certainly taking his subject-matter from contemporary events. In the play, Dionysus, the patron god of tragedy, has been yearning for Euripides so much that he finally decides to go down to Hades and bring him back to earth. The first part of the comedy is devoted to the actual journey. The parabasis is very patriotic in tone and satirizes political evils of the day. At the completion of the parabasis, Dionysus has found the tragedians at last, and we witness a lengthy contest between Euripides and Aeschylus, essentially an excellent piece of literary criticism on the part of Aristophanes. Dionysus finds the choice

1. Henderson, The Great War between Athens and Sparta, p.472.

2. Ferguson, The Cambridge Ancient History, vol.V, ch.XII, p.359.

between the two hard to make, but finally decides in favor of Aeschylus.

The Cleophon of Plato "Comicus" won third prize at the same festival, and the fact that this comedy was openly insulting shows not only that poets could still level attacks directly against the real head of the government if they wished, but it shows also the comparative moderation of Aristophanes. He has not forgotten politics, but he makes his intentions far less obvious than he had done in his earliest comedies. The political and literary themes in the Frogs are very closely bound together throughout. When, for example, Dionysus cannot make his decision on artistic grounds, he falls back on the criterion of civic usefulness.

With the Frogs, Aristophanes ended the second period of his career. This second period, which includes the Birds, Lysistrata, Thesmophoriazusae, and Frogs, may conveniently be termed a period of fantasy and literary criticism. Enough has already been said to show that none of these plays is purely political. If Aristophanes has serious political intentions, the average person in the audience was not always expected to recognize them. When Aristophanes was a young lad, it was only natural that he should be more violent in the expression of his views. But when he wrote the Birds, he was thirty years of age; when he wrote the Frogs he was thirty-nine. And with maturity in years came maturity of reflection, and above all, restraint.

c) The last period 1) The Ecclesiazusae

Of Aristophanes' literary productions during the next

thirteen years we know very little. During those thirteen years, however, he saw the defeat and gradual recovery of Athens. In 405, the Athenians passed a brutal decree: the generals were given the authority to cut the right hands off all prisoners taken in battle. Cleophon had outdone his master Cleon. Shortly afterwards, in September, Lysander won at Aegospotami the battle that led to the capitulation of Athens. One hundred and sixty of a hundred and eighty Athenian ships were captured and three thousand Athenians were put to death. Conon escaped, while Adeimantus was spared because he had opposed the barbarous decree of the Athenians, though he was immediately accused of treachery. Before the battle, incidentally, Alcibiades had ridden down to Aegospotami from his castle nearby to warn the Athenians of Lysander's strategy, but his advice had been ignored.

Lysander now proceeded in a leisurely manner to Athens, and all the Athenian subjects except Samos, the ever faithful, went over to his side. In gratitude Athens, rather belatedly, granted Athenian citizenship to all Samians. By the end of the year, Athens was besieged by land, and her harbor was blockaded. When Theramenes returned from his embassy to Sparta, Athens surrendered. On April 25, 404, Lysander sailed into Piraeus Harbor and razed the fortifications. The war was over. Samos fell shortly afterwards.

At Athens, thirty oligarchs were installed as the governing body; they ruled in tyrannical fashion for eight months. Cleophon was an early victim of the Thirty Tyrants. Theramenes, though one of them, protested against the outrages of Critias who had become the leading figure among the Thirty, but when he again advocated his "moderate" program, Critias denounced him before the

Athenian Council and secured his execution. There was one important enemy remaining—Alcibiades. Through Lysander, a message was sent to the Persian satrap asking him to make the necessary arrangements. The forty-five-year-old Alcibiades faced death with great courage. The democrat Thrasybulus, meanwhile, had made good his escape to Boeotia. There he mustered some troops and with seven hundred men attacked the Piraeus. Critias' forces were routed and Critias himself was killed (403). The Thirty now fled to Eleusis, which they had prepared for themselves by slaughtering beforehand its male population, while Thrasybulus occupied Athens. The democracy was restored and there was a general amnesty.

The prestige of the Spartans, which rested on their stability of character, was as high now as that of the Athenians had ever been. Lysander had a great capacity for leadership, and he was a good organizer, but he decided to become a despot and thereby gave the Spartan empire the bad start from which it never recovered.

In the years following, there was growing enmity with Persia, and by 399, war had broken out. Sparta was very successful at first, but already Athens, Corinth, and Thebes were showing signs of insubordination, and so the Spartans were compelled to give up their plans for further conquest in Asia.

"Roughly speaking, the larger states of Greece were anxious to rid themselves of their new suzerain, and obtain a free scope for their ambition, while the smaller were ready to support Sparta, oppressive though she might be, in order to guarantee themselves from the worse evils of servitude to their immediate neighbors."¹

1. Oman, C.W.C., A History of Greece -- From the Earliest Times to the Death of Alexander the Great, seventh edition, London, Longmans Green, and Co., 1921, p.425.

Thebes first provoked Sparta and enlisted the aid of Corinth, Argos, and finally Athens. Athens had been trying for eight years to live down the bitterness of oligarchical politics. A foreign war, thought many citizens, would be the best way of doing away with political grudges. At the first battle in 395, Lysander was slain. In Asia, the Persians assumed the offensive, and enlisted the aid of Conon who, it will be remembered, had escaped at Aegospotami in 405. The Greek cities of Asia Minor were invited to cast off the Spartan yoke. By 393, Conon was at Athens rebuilding the walls and fortifications of Piraeus.

Aristophanes about this time was writing his Ecclesiazusae, which was produced probably in 392.¹ Schemes for constitutional reforms were devoid of practical influence after 403, and only among philosophers were they discussed. Aristophanes seems to be moving towards a philosophic approach to politics, although the Ecclesiazusae is actually more imaginative than philosophic. The political utopia Aristophanes has devised would make women the ruling body at Athens; "...it's the one and only innovation that has not yet been tried at Athens."² If the play has any basic theme, it is the Athenian passion for ceaseless innovation. We can appreciate the feelings of Aristophanes if we recall the political events that followed directly on the heels of the Peloponnesian War. The plot of the Ecclesiazusae is not complicated. Praxagora, the heroine, is successful with her fellow conspirators in seizing control of the

1. Other dates proposed are 393, 391, 389.

2. Eccl. 456-57. -- εἰδοίκει γὰρ τοῦτο μόνον ἐν τῇ πόλει οὕτω γεγενῆσθαι.

Assembly. The men are henceforth to do no more work; property is to be held in common; and there is to be free love -- with certain stipulations.

Aristophanes, as author of the Ecclesiazusae, seems an old man. When we compare Sophocles and Euripides at seventy with Aristophanes at fifty-three, we are struck with the latter's loss of energy. But though the restoration of the democracy brought amnesty and a return to the rule of law, it did not solve the social and economic problems which now suddenly became paramount. Poverty hitherto had been an accepted status, but now poverty assumed its modern connotation. Aristophanes must have been affected by these conditions no less than others.

"...The old verve, the broad-chested riotous fun, have utterly gone: and when he seeks to recover it we find only a mechanical monstrosity like the famous longest word in Greek, a procession of one hundred and sixty-nine letters (plus an iota subscript),¹ indicating a medley of fish, flesh, and sauces."²

2) The Plutus

Four years later, in 388, Aristophanes produced the last comedy we possess -- the Plutus. In the meantime Conon had died; Thrasybulus had gone out with the first Athenian post-war fleet, and had been killed at Aspendus; on the Greek mainland, the adversaries had come to a standstill. In the Plutus, political and other contemporary elements are almost non-existent. The comedy is a fantasy which dreams of a more prosperous life for honest citizens. The blind god of Wealth, Plutus, has his

1. Eccl. 1169-1175.

2. Norwood, Greek Comedy, p.266.

sight restored and henceforth distributes wealth only to just men. Poverty is forced to leave after being beaten in an argument showing that Wealth bestows more benefits on mankind than does Poverty.

With the Ecclesiazusae and the Plutus, old comedy died. Even these two plays are really closer to the Middle, than the Old Comedy in spirit. Therefore Aristophanes not only saw the end of the Old, but adapted himself to the New, and even pointed the way which was to be followed by later Greek comedy, Roman comedy, and almost the whole theater of modern Europe. When the Plutus was written, the audience could no longer stomach the Old Comedy with all its essential characteristics. With the year 404, there began a gradual decline in energy and wealth. Money was no longer offered to meet the expenses for elaborate choruses, and so choruses disappeared. Subject-matter turned from politics to mythological travesty and erotic adventure. Soon the setting of comedy became life among the upper middle classes -- The Comedy of Manners. The wit of the comedy that supplanted the Old seems rather lifeless beside the wit of Aristophanes. One writer of the transitional period, Lysippus, says, for example, in one of his plays: "If you have not seen Athens, you are a blockhead; if you have seen her and not been captivated, you are a donkey; if you have felt her charm and scampered off, you are a pack-ass."¹

Aristophanes wrote at least two plays after the Plutus. These were Cocalus and Aiolosicon, which he gave to his son Araros for production.

1. Quoted by Norwood, Greek Comedy, p.266.

6. The Personality and Individuality of Aristophanes

When we read the plays of Aristophanes we are left with the impression that Aristophanes wrote comedy because he really enjoyed it. His natural genius for satire was stimulated by the traditions of comedy and for that reason, when he had any views to communicate to his fellow-citizens, he found no more suitable vehicle for their expression than comedy. Because his political convictions were as strong as his desire to write comedy, he easily became a great satirical comedian.

From the very start, his temerity outdid that of comedians who had already gained a reputation. Unlike the other comic writers, he attacked the most important men in public affairs:

"From the very outset of his dramatic career he has disdained to assail those who were men, but with a courage worthy of Heracles himself he attacked the most formidable monsters, and at the beginning went straight for that beast with the sharp teeth...(that is, Cleon).¹

Great courage was required to make such direct attacks. Aristophanes had even tried to obtain the use of masks resembling Cleon, for his Knights, but the mask-makers refused.² Aristophanes also claimed that he elevated comedy:

"After having delivered us from...wearisome ineptitudes and...low buffooneries, he had built up for us a great art, like a palace with high towers, constructed of fine phrases, great thoughts and of jokes not common on the streets."³

1. Parabasis of the Wasps, 1029-1031; see also Peace 751-760.

2. Knights 230-32.

3. Peace 748-750.

The difference between Aristophanes and contemporary comic poets is that Aristophanes on the whole attacked policies rather than personalities. When he attacked individuals they were usually the most important representatives of the policy under attack. For example, we find that Aristophanes alone pleaded the cause of peace -- not that the others were not opposed to war, but they attacked Pericles for the size and shape of his head, rather than for his war policy. Hyperbolus and Cleophon were attacked for their bad choice in the matter of mothers, and Hyperbolus for his bad pronunciation.¹ "Aristophanes was a good hater, and did his hating in a good and generous cause."² But he felt no obligation to be fair in his hatred.

Few deny that Aristophanes was endowed with superb wit, poetical genius and great vitality, but one writer declares flatly: "He is neither a great humorist nor a great playwright."³ The same writer then explains that Aristophanes is not a great humorist because he is without pity, since he is a normal Athenian. The humorist, he says, sympathizes with those at whom he laughs and there is no evidence that Aristophanes' loved anyone in particular.⁴ Granted, Aristophanes characters do not always gain our sympathy, but Dicaeopolis in the Acharnians and Strepsiades in the Clouds do live vividly in our imaginations as real persons. Aristophanes was not a great playwright, claims

1. Murray, Aristophanes, pp.67-68.

2. Ibid., p.68.

3. Norwood, Greek Comedy, p.298.

4. Ibid., p.298.

Norwood, because he wrote more farce than comedy; he never revised his plays; he did not write "for a reader who moves backwards and forwards with a watch-maker's goggle in his eye, and in his mind an awestruck belief in the crystalline perfection of everything Greek." -- He is irresponsible too.¹ But need a playwright, in order to be a great playwright, live up to such a high standard? If we remember that Aristophanes was considered in his day the best of the comic poets, and if we set aside modern standards of judgment, we shall be inclined to disagree with Norwood's verdict. For if Aristophanes was not a great playwright, we imply that there was no great playwright among all the writers of Old Comedy.

Aristophanes' greatest excellence is his fertility in ideas. He conceives a situation and makes the whole play one huge acted joke. Heine sees

"a deep idea of world annihilation lying at the base of each Aristophanic comedy, which, like a fantastically ironic fairy-tree, shoots upwards therein bearing gorgeous blossoms of thought, melodious nightingale-nests and climbing monkeys."²

That is, Aristophanes blows the universe to pieces and builds with the shards a new fantastic universe.³ This is especially true of the Birds.

Aristophanes shows at times such disregard for plausibility and contempt for realism, that we are apt to forget that he was very realistic and often serious. He had the ability

1. Norwood, op. cit., pp. 299-300.

2. Reisebilder III.2.2, quoted by Norwood, op. cit., pp. 300-01.

3. Plato in his Symposium paints a vivid picture of the imaginative power of Aristophanes.

to be serious at one moment and playful at another. The claim that Aristophanes wrote his comedies while under the influence of wine,¹ seems quite justified. "All the comedies, it seems, were dashed off in the rosy flush of genius and with a single bottle of wine -- but a large one."² No doubt Aristophanes speaks for himself when Demosthenes in the Knights says:

"Do you dare to accuse wine of clouding the reason? Quote me more marvellous effects than those of wine. Look! when a man drinks, he is rich, everything he touches succeeds, he gains lawsuits, is happy and helps his friends. Come, bring hither quick a flagon of wine, that I may soak my brain and get an ingenious idea."³

Like his contemporaries, Aristophanes chose his subjects from current events, but often the similarity of the subjects of comedies produced simultaneously, seems rather strange. The Connos, one of the plays in competition with the Clouds, also introduced Socrates. The Frogs and the Muses (405) both dealt with the great tragedians. The Hermit of Phrynichus, produced with the Birds in 414, also shows the hero leaving Athens in disgust. It is hard to decide why there should be such similarity of subject. If it was the result of some previous agreement among the poets, we cannot take seriously the view that Aristophanes did not get along well with Eupolis. When he accuses Eupolis of plagiarism,⁴ he is merely doing what the other comic writers did. Aristophanes was guilty of the

1. Athenaeus, Deipnosophists X.429a.

2. Harsh, A Handbook of Classical Drama, p.268.

3. Knights 90-96.

4. Clouds 553ff.

same faults he condemned in others -- he was even guilty of plundering his own plays;⁵ and his eternal remarks about Euripides' mother do not support his own claim: "I always invent fresh themes that have no relation to each other and that are all clever."²

Before we go on to discuss Aristophanes' political associations and views in detail, one point should be noted. Aristophanes had only certain vague, instinctive political tendencies when he left the country to live in Athens. These tendencies he formulated more precisely in his comedies, entirely on his own responsibility. Aristophanes' relations with political groups are much easier to understand if we assume that throughout his career he retained his individuality. It is always Aristophanes who speaks in Aristophanes' comedies.

1. For example, his parody of Telephus in the Acharnians is repeated in the Thesmophoriazusae.

2. Clouds 547-48.

CHAPTER III

ARISTOPHANES AND THE DEMOCRACY

From the historical account of the background against which the plays of Aristophanes were written, it has become obvious that there were many evils in the democracy for which remedies were required. But that the majority of the people did not recognize or care to recognize even the existence of these evils, is clearly indicated by the violence of Aristophanes' attacks upon them. So numerous are the criticisms of Aristophanes, that we might conclude that he saw nothing of value in the existing form of government. But such a conclusion would be misleading since Aristophanes continued to criticize outstanding evils as long as there were any in existence, even though they might be outnumbered by the good characteristics. However, I do not wish to imply that the evils of the Athenian democracy were not as numerous as its virtues.

It has been suggested that the Periclean democracy was aristocratic in nature. But all indications appear to point to the contrary. Van Hook has made a study of the problem, and he has decided that there was in Athens in the age of Pericles "complete political equality among the citizens; poverty, wealth, station, family, occupation, and prestige all were of no consequence."¹ Yet it is important to remember that the Athenian democracy was nevertheless rooted in privilege; just as was the aristocracy that preceded it. The democracy was merely an

1. Van Hook, La Rue, "Was Athens in the Age of Pericles Aristocratic?", The Classical Journal, Vol. XIV, May 1919, (pp. 472-497), p. 478.

extension of the area of privilege, and that area by no means included the entire population.

Among the citizens, then, there was political equality and considerable freedom as well. Plato no doubt was exaggerating when he said:

"....No one who does not know would believe, how much greater is the liberty which the animals who are under the dominion of man have in a democracy than in any other State: for truly, the she-dogs, as the proverb says, are as good as their she-mistresses, and the horses and asses have a way of marching along with all the rights and dignities of freemen; and they will run at anybody who comes in their way if he does not leave the road clear for them: and all things are just ready to burst with liberty."¹

Plato goes on to say that the citizens become sensitive, impatient of authority, and cease to care for the laws.² Prejudiced as this view may be, it will nevertheless help us to understand the views of Aristophanes, because it shows that there were men who reflected on the undesirable aspects of democracy.

The central objects of Aristophanes' attacks are consistently those that undermine the stability of politics and society, those that endanger the state by producing animosities not only within the state but between the various states of the Greek world. The change at Athens from democracy to what was in reality "ochlocracy" brought with it many internal changes, the great majority of them, changes for the worse, at any rate in the opinion of Aristophanes. The evils that are singled out for special attack are those connected with demagogy, the law-courts, and the war-policy of the political leaders.

1. Plato, Republic VIII.563C-D.. Jowett translation.

2. Ibid., 563D-E.

1. Demagogy

In a sense, Pericles had been a demagogue; at any rate he made possible the great rise of demagogy. The demagogues were generally of the new class of traders and craftsmen, the class of business men which emerged as the result of the changes in economic conditions. This class soon grew quite large and quickly became the dominating force in the Athenian democracy, especially since its members lived in the city of Athens itself, or in the port of Piraeus. They would find it more convenient to attend the meetings of the assembly than would the country dwellers, who could not afford to sacrifice their work in order to exercise their political rights.

Since the adherents of the democracy did not properly form a political party and therefore lacked party discipline, the individual had considerable scope. A man with intelligence and few scruples could control the mob, especially at the time of the Peloponnesian War, when Athens was exceptionally suited to politicians. The legal position of the demagogue was the same as that of any member of the assembly. Unofficially, he became the "leader of the opposition", and was in the unique position of being able to make proposals without being held responsible for them. There was ample provision in the constitution for official responsibility, but not for political responsibility. As long as the political leader held office, political would merge with official responsibility, but the demagogues generally held no office.¹

1. Walker, The Cambridge Ancient History, vol.V, ch.IV, pp.108-9. It should be noted that these remarks do not apply to Pericles, since he always held office.

Apart from his unofficial character, the demagogue stood in great social contrast to former political leaders who, with the exception of Themistocles, had all (including Pericles) been of noble birth, and were the heirs of a long political, as well as social tradition. The demagogues on the other hand, lacking such a tradition,¹ fully exploited the corrupt practice that Pericles had begun. Everything had been left to Pericles' discretion and so it was not difficult for his successors to secure the confidence of the people for their political activity as well. Foremost among the demagogues was Cleon. But, though Aristophanes attacked him more fiercely than he did any other demagogue, Cleon may not have been the worst of them. Aristophanes was merely getting at the roots of a new evil and striking with all his force before it had spread. He never again attacked any demagogue quite so severely as Cleon.

a) Cleon

Aristophanes accuses Cleon of having a pig's education,² but it is likely that he received the education common among families possessed of comfortable means. Yet he seems never to have acquired the grace that was characteristic of Attic culture. He had the gift of oratory, and even the gift of statesmanship, but he hid his shortcomings under clamors and violent gestures.

1. Cf. Ehrenberg, The People of Aristophanes, p. 251.

2. Knights 985-87; and, in the same play, we read (188-193):
"Sausage-Seller: But I have not had the least education and can only read, and that very badly.

"Demosthenes: That is what may stand in your way, almost knowing how to read. A demagogue must be neither an educated nor an honest man; he must be an ignoramus and a rogue."

He had a great power of persuasion and, with systematic severity, he imposed the few positive views to which he clung.¹ Cleon entered public life before the death of Pericles and no doubt came into notice through his criticism of Pericles' policy² and his accusations against Pericles at his trial in 430. This was the standard method used by ambitious young men to recommend themselves to the favor of the people.

Cleon's whole policy was centered on open hostility to Sparta and strong measures with the subject allies. This policy was designed to maintain at all costs the imperial position of Athens. Cleon always looked for the simplest solution, though it might be the most brutal and the most inhuman. And in order to continue such a policy, it was inevitable that he should display certain characteristics.

Plutarch in his Life of Nicias says of Cleon:

"Among other things he destroyed all the decorum of public speaking; he was the first who broke out into exclamations, flung open his dress, smote his thigh, and ran up and down when he was speaking."³

Aristophanes bears this out in the Wasps, where Cleon is described as screaming like a pig that is being grilled.⁴ He also uses slang to endear himself to the masses; and in the Knights the Sausage-Seller, whose aim it is to defeat him prays the gods of

1. Croiset, Aristophanes and the Political Parties at Athens, pp.20-22.

2. Particularly his "temporizing", or defensive strategy, which Nicias continued to an even greater degree.

3. Plutarch, Nicias 8.3.

4. Wasps 34-36.

rascals, braggarts, and fools to grant him unbridled audacity, untiring chatter, and a shameless voice.¹ In the Knights also, Aristophanes makes Demosthenes say to the Sausage-Seller: "You possess all the attributes of a demagogue; a screeching, horrible voice, a perverse, cross-grained nature and the language of the market-place."² But the oratory of Cleon was not like modern mob oratory; Cleon's coarseness consisted rather in a vulgarity of feeling, and a domineering self-confidence.³ That Aristophanes should exaggerate is hardly surprising, since he had no sympathy for either the demagogue or the mob. Aristophanes further implies that Cleon is of humble origin, and associates with him "the fetid stink of leather."⁴ Cleon, it should be noted, was a tanner by trade. The very fact that he plays the part of a slave in the Knights, hints at doubtful citizenship. It is therefore not surprising that Cleon, immediately after the performance of the Knights, turned the tables by calling Aristophanes' citizenship in question.

b) Cleon and politics

One of the characteristics of the demagogues that Aristophanes consistently attacks is their thievery and corruptibility, and their audacity in expecting the state to reward them amply for all their services. Thus in the Knights, the Sausage-Seller says of Cleon: "He runs into the Prytaneum with an empty belly and comes out with it full;" and Demosthenes adds:

1. Knights 464; 634-38.

2. Knights 217-18.

3. Harman, Edward George, The Birds of Aristophanes, Considered in Relation to Athenian Politics, London, Edward Arnold, 1920, p.

4. Knights 185; Peace 753.

"And by Zeus! he carries off bread, meat, and fish, which is forbidden. Pericles himself never has this right."¹ Cleon is accused of having obtained ten talents from Potidaea; he answers: "Wait! I will give you one; but keep it dark!"²

Dicaeopolis in the Acharnians is happy that Cleon has been forced to give up five talents that had been accepted by him as a bribe.³ And again, in the Knights, he is accused of having accepted more than forty minae from the Mytilenaeans.⁴ This may possibly refer to an attempt on the part of the Mytilenaeans to induce Cleon to revoke or modify the decree against them. At another point there is a hint that Cleon was bribed to plead for the Milesians against a raise in their tribute.⁵ Again, Cleon is represented as constantly holding out his hand and saying; "Fill it." -- And at the mention of money he instantly turns his head.⁶ But he gives away only a part of what he takes.⁷ The Sausage-Seller, according to Cleon himself, could not be a

1. Knights 280-83. It will be remembered that it is not actually Cleon himself who is attacked directly in the Knights, but rather Paphlagonian. However, the identity of that character has never been disputed and both the Oxford text and others call him Cleon throughout.

2. Knights 438-39.

3. Ach. 5-6.

4. Knights 833-35.

5. Knights 931-33.

6. Knights 1082-83; 1198: "Where, where?"

7. Knights 1223.

greater thief than Cleon -- but he might be a luckier one!¹ In the Wasps, Aristophanes makes his "lover of Cleon" express the desire (rather inconsistently) to convict Cleon of theft.² But Aristophanes does not stop there; he accuses Cleon also of deceit and trickery -- not only in his private life as a tanner, but also as a politician.³ And of course he will not let Cleon forget the Pylos episode, which was the cleverest of his tricks. The general Demosthenes had deserved the real credit, and Aristophanes insists on impressing that fact on the audience. The Sausage-Seller says: "A woman would carry a heavy burden if only a man had put it on her shoulders."⁴ Demosthenes complains: "The other day I had just kneaded a Spartan cake at Pylos; the cunning rogue came behind my back, sneaked it and offered the cake, which was my invention, in his own name."⁵ And a little later he claims that Cleon has one leg on Pylos and the other in the Assembly -- as a matter of fact, he is everywhere, but his mind is occupied with -- theft.⁶ Cleon himself says that when he is drunk he says: "To hell with the generals of Pylos!" He had, after all, supplanted them and had thus become the benefactor of the people!⁷ He swears by the front seat which Pylos

1. Knights 1252.
2. Wasps 757-59; see also 1227.
3. Knights 315-18; 465-67.
4. Knights 1056.
5. Knights 54-57.
6. Knights 74-79.
7. Knights 741-43; 353-55.

gained him, and is made to say: "I have done a sufficiently brilliant deed to shut the mouth of all enemies, so long as one of the bucklers of Pylos remains."¹ Aristophanes makes it quite clear that he believed Cleon's popularity rested largely on the capture of Pylos.²

c) The attitude of the people to Cleon

We have seen now that Aristophanes was opposed to the methods Cleon used to obtain his ends. But since Aristophanes had the best interests of Athens at heart, he felt it his duty not to adopt a completely one-sided approach to the problem. To his way of thinking, the people were as much to blame as Cleon. They were so undiscerning, so open to flattery, and willing to put complete faith in the policy of a man whom they liked not so much for his policy as for the way in which it was presented to them. Thus a good policy would often be rejected because the people either did not believe they would derive any personal benefits from it, or because they were led astray by the less honest demagogues. In the Knights, Demosthenes complains:

"We have a very brutal master, a perfect glutton for beans, and most bad-tempered; it's Demos of the Pnyx,³ an intolerable old man and half deaf. The beginning of last month he bought a slave, a Paphlagonian tanner, an arrant rogue, the incarnation of calumny. This man of leather knows his old master thoroughly; he plays the fawning cur, flatters, cajoles, wheedles, and dupes him at will with little scraps of leavings, which he allows him to get."

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1. Knights 702; 844-46.
 2. Knights 1005; 1051-53; 1166-67.
 3. The place where sessions of the Assembly were held.
 4. Knights 40-49.

The people were powerful, but lacked the intelligence, or the will to take proper advantage of their power. Cleon's successor is to be master of all the people, governor of the market, of the harbors, and the Pnyx; he will trample the Council under foot and imprison the generals.¹ Cleon may well say to his political opponents: "I do not fear you as long as there is a Senate and a people which stands like a fool, gaping in the air."²

2. The Law-Courts

It will be remembered that Cleon had gained strong support for himself by raising the pay for jurymen in 425, from one to three obols. Aristophanes realizes the importance of the law-courts to Cleon and the other demagogues, and he analyses, in the Wasps particularly, the evils that gradually worked their way into the system.

The organization of the courts conformed to the highest conception of democracy. Every citizen at least thirty years of age was eligible to act as judge, and was known as a dicast or heliast. The heliaea was a public assembly, that is, the assembled people considered as exercising judicial functions, while the ecclesia was the public deliberative assembly. There were about six thousand dicasts³ who were divided into sections, which were assigned, by an elaborate system of lots, to the various courts. The number of dicasts in each section varied,

1. Knights 164-67.

2. Knights 395-96.

3. Wasps 662.

but was usually fixed at five hundred and one, as at the trial of Socrates in 399. The courts were actually juries without a judge, entirely lacking in legal knowledge. When payment was introduced, the poorer citizens were attracted, and as the courts gradually became permeated with the prejudices of the lower classes, the wealthier citizens no longer attended. For them it was a waste of time. The payment of three obols was for each day's attendance rather than for each case tried, and for that reason the demagogues used all their influence to limit the number of cases tried in any one day, thereby increasing the fees, and their own popularity.¹ Under Pericles, the payment for dicasts had been fixed at one obol, while the five hundred councillors received one drachma daily. Payment for the citizens was a necessary result of the democratic system, because experience showed that if no compensation were offered for the time devoted to public service, "the deliberative, administrative and judicial work would de facto be monopolized by the wealthier classes and would consequently fail to embody the democratic spirit."² But Pericles, who began the practice, was a leader, whereas the demagogues were led by the demands of the mob. The increase in the payment from one to three obols was the result of corrupt demagogic practice.

a) The alliance between Cleon and the dicasts

The law-courts were effectively organized against

1. Wasps 594-95; Knights 50-51.

2. Tod, The Cambridge Ancient History, vol.V, ch.I, p.30.

corruption and intimidation, but the war considerably undermined their incorruptibility. The juries consisted chiefly of old men, since most of the young men were gone on expeditions, and these old men were bitter because they were cut off from their farms and had to depend on the three-obol fee. But the largest element of prejudice stemmed from the class war between the rich and the poor. Cleon was the first champion of the poorer classes; he himself belonged to the working people or the unpropertied class, and in his person the political and the economic ways of life met.¹ That is why he had such strong support. In Aristophanes' Frogs, this is well illustrated in the passage where an appeal is made to Cleon (now a resident of the underworld) by two poor women.² He could justly be proud of this fact, but as Murray says: "Friends of the injured poor are not always persons of high character, especially in times of war or revolution." It is only logical to assume that, by a tacit understanding, the politician fed the judges and the judges in turn gave him their support. Aristophanes makes it clear that his purpose is to expose this sort of agreement. Let us see how he goes about effecting his purpose.

In the first place, the demagogues are shown to be chiefly to blame for the corrupt system: in the Wasps, the character who is afflicted with the "dicastic fever", or "phil-

1. Ehrenberg, The People of Aristophanes, p. 237.

2. Frogs 569, 577.

3. Murray, Aristophanes, p. 44.

heliastitis", as we might call it,¹ is named Philocleon, or "Friend-of-Cleon", while his son who wishes to reform him, is called Bdelycleon, or "Enemy-of-Cleon". And Cleon, as we have seen, is the incarnation of all the evils of demagogy, in the eyes of Aristophanes. Thus Philocleon says to his son; "We are the only ones whom Cleon, the great bawler, does not badger. On the contrary, he protects and caresses us; he keeps off the flies, which is what you have never done for your father."² When Cleon is threatened by the Knights, in the play of the same name, he summons the aged dicasts to his aid.³ Similarly in the Wasps, the dicasts summon Cleon to their assistance and call him their protector.⁴ Cleon is generally represented as a great benefactor. As a matter of fact he provides almost too much of a good thing, as, for example, when he lowered the price of silphium to such an extent that the dicasts were sick through over-indulgence.⁵

b) The personality of the dicast

Yet Aristophanes also blames the dicasts themselves for their attitude and he makes every attempt to point out to them how wrong they are. He paints an exaggerated picture of the mania for judging:

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1. Merry, ed. Wasps, p.xvi.
 2. Wasps 596-98.
 3. Knights 247-257.
 4. Wasps 197, 409; 242.
 5. Knights 896-98.

"To be judging is his hobby, and he groans if he is not sitting on the first seat. He does not close an eye at night, and if he dozes off for an instant his mind flies instantly to the clepsydra.¹ He is so accustomed to hold the balloting pebble, that he ~~awakes~~ with his three fingers pinched together...He is a merciless judge, never failing to draw the convicting line...All advice is useless; he only judges the more each day...His son is broke-hearted over this mania."²

Further, Aristophanes likens the irritable old dicasts to a swarm of wasps with sharp stings.³

Philocleon is allowed to comment freely on the blessings of the dicasts life: he is like a king and finds great satisfaction in the entreaties of powerful and wealthy citizens who have been put on trial; he is so powerful that he is able to look with disdain on wealth; and he is not held responsible for his actions.⁴ "And if the Senate and the people," says Philocleon, "have trouble in deciding some important case, it is decreed to send the culprits before the heliasts."⁵ This, says Merry, is not an empty boast.⁶ Philocleon ends his defence by saying: "As to power, am I not equal to the king of the gods? ...If I let loose the lightning, the richest, aye, the noblest are half dead with terror..."⁷

1. The water-clock which measured the time allowed for speeches in the law-courts.

2. Wasps 89-95, 106, 111-12, 114.

3. Wasps 223-27.

4. Wasps 548-58, 575, 587.

5. Wasps 590-91.

6. Merry, ed. Wasps, p.xxx.

7. Wasps 620-21, 626-28.

c) Criticism of the attitude of the dicast

Bdelycleon now replies in a systematic manner and shows why he believes the dicasts are in reality slaves.¹ He does not make a point-by-point refutation, because Philocleon's argument is in itself the best satire on him.² Bdelycleon calculates the total Athenian revenue at two thousand talents annually. Of this sum the dicasts receive one hundred and fifty in salaries -- less than one-tenth of the total.³ The rest goes to those who say: "I shall never betray the interests of the masses; I shall always fight for the people."⁴

"Consider then;" says Bdelycleon, "you might be rich, both you and all the others; I know not why you let yourself be fooled by these folk who call themselves the people's friends. A myriad of towns obey you, from the Euxine to Sardinia.⁵ What do you gain thereby? Nothing but this miserable pay, and even that...is doled to you drop by drop, just enough to keep you from dying of hunger. They want you to be poor, and I will tell you why. It is so that you may know only those who nourish you, and so that, if it pleases them to loose you against one of their foes, you shall leap upon him with fury. If they wished to assure the well-being of the people, nothing would be easier for them. We have now a thousand towns that pay us tribute; let them command each of these to feed twenty Athenians, then twenty thousand of our citizens would be eating nothing but hare, would drink nothing but the purest milk, and always crowned with garlands, would be enjoying the delights to which the great name of their country and the trophies of Marathon give them the right; whereas today you are like the hired labourers who gather the olives; you follow him who pays you."⁶

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1. Wasps 517-19.
 2. Croiset, Aristophanes and the Political Parties at Athens,
/p.107.
 3. Wasps 656-663.
 4. Wasps 666-67.
 5. The jurisdiction of the Athenian courts extended to the whole body of the allies.
 6. Wasps 698-712.

"What I stomach least is that you go to sit on the tribunal by order," says Bdelycleon.¹ We are not surprised then, to learn that Cleon has advised the aged heliasts to bring "a three days' stock of fiery rage" because they are to sit in judgment on the general Laches whom the demagogue has accused of embezzlement after his campaign in Sicily.² The trial of the dogs, later in the play, is a parody of the trial of Laches, the dog Labes representing Laches and the "dog" (κύων), standing for Laches' accuser Cleon (κλέων).³

d) Sycophantism and the oppression of the rich and aged

Men like Cleon, then, who were radical politicians on the Pnyx, became sycophants in the courts. They made possible the great rise in the new class of professional informers, who secured for the dicasts an opportunity to sit, by increasing the number of lawsuits. And since the courts were open to every kind of personal influence, sycophantism became an evil second in importance to no other, if we are to believe Aristophanes. In a sense the appearance of the sycophants was inevitable because it was the duty of every citizen to guard the public interest by going to law. The majority of the prosecutors, however, were not honest and patriotic citizens, but unscrupulous informers.⁴

According to Cleon, blackmailers and informers were necessary because there was always conspiracy against the Demos

1. Wasps 686.

2. Wasps 240-44.

3. Wasps 891-1008.

4. Ehrenberg, op.cit., p.245. Cf. Plato, Crito IV.44E-45B for another reference to sycophants.

on the part of the rich and the Allies. In the Knights Cleon says: "Unaided,...I have known how to put down the conspiracies, nothing that is hatching in the city escapes me, and I hasten to proclaim it loudly."¹ He came to be looked upon as the watchdog of the people. In the Wasps, the chorus sings: "An accused man escaped us yesterday through his false pretence that he loved Athens and had been the first to unfold the Samian plot."² The chief victims of the informers were the old and quiet and well-to-do among the islanders and other resident aliens, many of whom had never been in a law-court before and could easily be browbeaten. In the Wasps, again, we read: "Today we have to judge a man made wealthy by treason, one of those who set Thrace free."³ Merry says concerning this line: "The wealthy and substantial citizens were looked upon with suspicion by the democracy as likely to be traitors to the Athenian interests in the Thraceward regions."⁴ Impeachments and confiscations of property were constantly admitted by the Council when it ran short of funds. In the Knights we are shown how Cleon brazenly defended such confiscations: the rich fear him and he knows very well "how to select from among the citizens those who are as meek as lambs, rich, without guile and loathers of lawsuits."⁵ The courts had become an object of fear among

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1. Knights 861-63; cf. 461-63.
 2. Wasps 281-83.
 3. Wasps 288.
 4. Merry, ed. Wasps, ad loc.
 5. Knights 223-24, 264-65.

the citizens of the upper classes generally, and that is what embittered Aristophanes most of all.

The dicastic oath ran somewhat as follows:

"I will vote in accordance with the laws and the decrees of the popular assembly and the senate; where the laws have made no definite provision I will adopt the most just course unbiassed by favor or enmity. I will vote only on questions which have been submitted to the court. I will listen honestly to both sides."¹

But in most cases there was much injustice, the verdict having been decided beforehand, for all practical purposes. "I enter -- firmly resolved to do nothing that I have promised," says Philocleon.² To Aristophanes, the trial of the elder Thucydides was an outstanding example of how the courts were swayed by the prosecutors.³ In the Wasps, Bdelycleon appeals to his father at the trial of the two dogs: "Ah! my dear father, be good! be humane! Take this voting pebble and rush with your eyes closed to that second urn and, father, acquit him (that is, Laches)."⁴ And in another passage of the Wasps, Bdelycleon utters a prayer to Apollo:

"Let him become gentle toward other men, let him take more interest in the accused than in the accusers, may he allow himself to be softened by entreaties; calm his acrid humour and deprive his irritable mind of all sting."⁵

1. Reconstruction by Fränkel, cited by Merry, ed. Wasps, p.xxvi

2. Wasps 560-61.

3. Ach. 703-05; Wasps 946-48; cf. Ach. 679-91; and cf. Wasps 522-23, where there is a reminiscence of the suicide of Paches at his trial.

4. Wasps 986-88.

5. Wasps 879-84.

"If you will not leave the aged in peace," begs Aristophanes, "decree that the advocates be matched... Make a law that in the future the old men can only be summoned and convicted at the courts by the aged and the young men by the youth."¹

Aristophanes was twenty years of age when he expressed this sentiment.

e) Further criticism in connection with the law-courts

Aristophanes attacked the evils connected with the law-courts throughout his career. Even in the Acharnians, he had said: "As for the old men, I know their weakness; they only seek to overwhelm the accused with their votes."² Dicaeopolis is accused of insulting the informers, and when he opens his market, he excludes all informers.³ Then, when an informer arrives at the market and wishes to denounce the Megarian, he is driven off, while the Megarian exclaims: "What a plague to Athens!"⁴ Later the informer Nicarchus appears -- the characteristic Athenian product, "all pure evil", and he is wrapped up for export like a vase, to be used as "a vessel for holding all foul things, a mortar for pounding together lawsuits, a lamp for spying upon accounts."⁵ Aristophanes thought too much attention was being devoted to law-courts: Athens is not Athens

1. Ach. 713-18.

2. Ach. 375-76.

3. Ach. 559, 725-26: φασίανός is a pun on εὐκοφάντης.
See Merry, ed. Ach., ad loc.

4. Ach. 829.

5. Ach. 904-958.

if there are no courts in session;¹ and in the Peace, Hermes censures the Athenians for spending all their time at judging.² In the Birds, Euelpides states his reason for leaving Athens: "The crickets only chirrup among the fig-trees for a month or two, whereas the Athenians spend their whole lives in chanting forth judgments from their law-courts."³ Van Daele has interpreted the whole play as an attack on the reckless persecutions that followed certain acts of sacrilege before the departure of the Sicilian expedition: If Athens were free of sycophants and the like, she would present a picture of perfect felicity of which the Olympian gods themselves would be jealous.⁴ There are certainly enough references to law-courts in the play. When Epops hears that his visitors are from Athens, his first question is: "Are you dicasts?"⁵ Honest men are represented as the objects of attack for informers.⁶ The informer who arrives at Cloudeuckootown and seeks admission, identifies himself as an accuser of the islands, a hatcher of lawsuits.⁷ When Pisthetaerus draws attention to the fact that the informer

1. Clouds 207-08.

2. Peace 505.

3. Birds 39-41.

4. See Harsh, A Handbook of Classical Drama, p.290.

5. Birds 109.

6. Birds 285.

7. Birds 1410-69.

is only a young man and yet makes it his trade to denounce strangers, the informer replies that sycophancy is a hereditary calling in his family and so he cannot turn to another trade without belying his breeding.¹ Later in the play Aristophanes makes some sarcastic puns about informers and law-courts.²

There are other references to the law-courts in the various plays, as for example in the Ecclesiazusae, where the women claim they are not informers, do not bring lawsuits, and do not hatch conspiracies; and in their new utopia there is to be no more sycophantism, and there are to be no more lawsuits.³ The women also advocate the transformation of law-courts into dining-halls.⁴ Even in his last extant play, the Plutus, Aristophanes introduces the informer,⁵ who calls himself an honest fellow and a good citizen,⁶ and claims that he guards the established law by acting as prosecutor in the courts. But he is censored for meddling in other people's business and living at their expense. Finally he admits defeat, and leaves with the threat that he will summon the god Plutus, who is responsible for his evil plight, before the Court and will denounce him as guilty of overturning the democracy without the consent of the

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1. Birds 1410-69.
 2. Birds 1694-1705.
 3. Eccl. 452-53, 562, 657.
 4. Eccl. 676.
 5. Plutus 850-950.
 6. Plutus 900.

Council or Assembly. The scene must have appeared quite humorous to the audience. Shortly afterwards, an old woman enters, complaining that life has become unbearable, and she is therefore immediately asked whether she is a female informer.¹

There is perhaps one other feature of the Athenian law-courts we might mention, although Aristophanes' attitude towards it is not easy to determine. In the Wasps, during the mock trial of the dogs, children costumed as puppies are brought in to arouse the pity of the judge.² Elsewhere in the play we read: "They drag forward their young children by the hand, both boys and girls, who prostrate themselves and whine with one accord, and then the father, trembling as if before a god, beseeches me not to condemn him out of pity for them..."³ Socrates in his defence, at his trial about twenty-five years after the performance of the Wasps, decried such practices.⁴ It seems as though Aristophanes too is opposed to this kind of behavior. However, Aristophanes seems to point out that, while such practices are contrary to the principles of good court procedure, it was often very difficult to convince the dicasts of a just cause. This was true also of the assembly: in the Acharnians Dicaeopolis, whose part was probably played by Aristophanes himself, offers to plead with his head on a block.⁵

1. Plutus 970-71.

2. Wasps 977-78.

3. Wasps 568-71; cf. Plutus 382-85.

4. Plato, Apology, 34B-35C.

5. Ach. 355. Cf. Lord, Louis E., Aristophanes, His Plays and His Influence, Boston, Marshall Jones Co., 1925, pp.33-34.

The Athenians simply would not listen to reason.

If Aristophanes were giving advice concerning the law-courts, he would no doubt advocate a drastic reduction in the number of lawsuits, and the abolition of the three-obol payment. He wanted independent law-courts and just verdicts. Under existing conditions, this was not the case, because the dicasts were looked upon as a political power to be conciliated. And the very fact that justice was made political contributed partly to the fall of Athens.¹

Now the chief link in the alliance between the politician and the dicast was the "triobolus", and in Aristophanes' treatment of this powerful political instrument, we see quite plainly along what lines his political thinking was directed. Cleon ensures the dicasts a salary,² and in their poverty many of them are entirely dependent on this pay. No scene in Aristophanes is more pathetic than the one in which a little boy asks for figs, but his father who is a dicast, answers: "With my small pay, I am obliged to buy bread, wood, and stew; and now you ask me for figs!" -- "But, father, if the Archon should not form a court today, how are we to buy our dinner?"³ In the Clouds, Pheidippides is told by his father that when he was six years old, his father bought for him a toy with the first obol he received as a dicast.⁴ Aristophanes

1. Cf. Harman, The Birds of Aristophanes, p.8. Harman thinks it contributed "more than anything else" to the fall of Athens.

2. Knights 51, 800, 904-05, 1019.

3. Wasps 300-306; cf. Lys. 624-25.

4. Clouds 863-64.

shows therefore, that he is well aware of the true nature of the situation. But there are other considerations: "There is a strange, perhaps indeed inexplicable contrast between the frugality which marks the Greeks, and another quality equally characteristic, their great avarice and intense regard for wealth."¹ It is that intense regard for money which was constantly nourished by the demagogues. With the support of avaricious dicasts, an avaricious imperial policy was easy to maintain. Aristophanes has analyzed Cleon's policy well when he makes him say in the Knights that when the undisputed empire of Athens is established, the Demos will sit as judge in Arcadia at five obols a day.²

It must be emphasized that the dicast of the Wasps is the same person as the Demos of the Knights, serving in another capacity. Thus when Demos is duped by the "fawning Cerberus",³ sits in the assembly with mouth agape, although at home he is the most sensible of men,⁴ we understand that these attributes are equally applicable to the dicast. Similarly, the faults of the dicast may be ascribed to the Athenian Demos as a whole. Aristophanes realizes that the Athenians are not

1. Ehrenberg, The People of Aristophanes, p.169. -- Cf. Wasps 1450ff.

2. Knights 797-800; cf. Knights 1088-89, where the Sausage-Seller promises that the Athenians are to rule over the whole earth -- not only over the Greeks -- and administer justice in Ecbatana! (in Persia).

3. Knights 1030-31.

4. Knights 752-55.

lacking entirely in common sense, and he does permit Demos in the Knights to speak in his own defence:

"It is with a purpose that I play this idiot's role, for I love to drink the livelong day, and so it pleases me to keep a thief for my minister...I have my eye on them when they thieve, but I do not appear to be seeing them; then I thrust a judgment down their throat as it were a feather, and force them to vomit up all they have robbed from me."¹

What the people did not see was that they were doing themselves untold harm by placing greater importance on their own interests than on the interests of their city, because in so doing they were needlessly prolonging a senseless war.

3. Aristophanes and the War -- a) the war-profiteers

Aristophanes was opposed to the war throughout his career; he did not oppose it, however, just because it was war, but because he realized how purposeless it was, and therefore how little it served the interests of Athens. Foremost among the evils brought about by the war seems to be, in the opinion of Aristophanes, the continual increase in the tribute of the allied cities, and their consequent oppression at the hands of the Athenian imperialists. Cleon is represented as lying in wait for the tribute moneys and incessantly asking for vessels to go and collect the tributes.² Yet Aristophanes might not have been so opposed to this policy, had he not seen to what use all this money was being put. The regenerated Demos in the Knights is addressed in this manner: "If one of two

1. Knights 1123-28, 1145-50.

2. Knights 1070-71.

orators proposed to equip a fleet for war and the other suggested the use of the same sum for paying out to the citizens, it was the latter who always carried the day."¹ Aristophanes would like to see the soldiers and sailors paid rather than the citizens at home.² We have already seen that, in the opinion of Aristophanes, the argument that the tribute had to be increased in order to feed the citizens, would not hold water, since only one-tenth of the tribute was being employed for that purpose. Now, there seems to be an inconsistency in the argument, for, when Aristophanes attacks the professional soldier Lamachus in the Acharnians, he accuses him of being an ambitious mercenary.³ But there are several sides to the question, and when these are clarified, the inconsistency will disappear. Lamachus represents the non-partisan class of professional soldiers who received well-paid positions during the war and were often appointed ambassadors.⁴ Aristophanes therefore attacks those who liked war from purely personal motives. Lamachus says he proposes always to war with the Peloponnesians, both at sea and on land.⁵ To him peace is hateful and he is useless when it comes to procuring peace.⁶

1. Knights 1350-53.

2. Knights 1366-67.

3. Ach. 595-597: *σπουδαρχίδης, μισθαρχίδης*.

4. Ach. 602-06.

5. Ach. 620-23.

6. Peace 304, 473-74.

Even his little son can think of nothing but war.¹ Then there were other war-profiteers, the makers of shields and other equipment of war. They desired war for the sake of better business and, like Lamachus, they impede efforts for peace, and when it is achieved they are ruined.²

b) The country-folk and the War.

Opposed to these professional haters, there stand the genuine haters of Sparta, patriotic Athenians, chiefly older war-veterans to whom the war was an expression of deep hatred, rather than a means to prosperity. The agricultural population in particular was embittered. The Acharnians in Aristophanes' play are farmers who were forced to move into the city during the early part of the war and whose farms had been ruined by the Spartans in their annual invasions of Attica. They were eager to get out and fight the Spartans, but Pericles' defensive policy prevented any such action. Shut up within the city, they were free to attend the assembly and were exposed to the influence of the demagogues. It did not require much talking to convince these gullible rustics³ that Sparta was responsible for the war, and that the war must be continued at all costs. "Wretch!" say the veterans of Marathon, "You are the bearer of a treaty, and the enemy has only just cut our vines."⁴ They call Dicaeopolis a traitor for

1. Peace 1270-94.

2. Peace 447-48, 480, 545-47, 1210-64.

3. Ach. 370-73.

4. Ach. 179-83.

concluding a truce, when they wanted the war continued with double fury in order to avenge their ruined lands.¹

There were only two choices -- to make peace, or to fight indefinitely. Aristophanes chose peace. Ehrenberg thinks that comedy does not display the energetic and daring courage which the enemy admired, but only the "dangerous eagerness to stop the war", simply because of war-weariness.² And there is, indeed, in the final scene of the Acharnians "a jingoism of of peace as well as a jingoism of war."³ But comedy demanded exaggeration.⁴ Moreover, when we read all the plays of Aristophanes, we are not left with the impression that Aristophanes wanted peace at all costs. He merely pointed out the disadvantages of war, and the advantages of peace. Because the agricultural population had suffered most by the war, the advantages of peace would seem greater to them than to any other section of the population. The very argument used by the rustics in favor of continued war, namely, the destruction of fields, is turned by Dicaeopolis into an argument for peace. He recalls how happy he was in the country before he was forced to lead a cursed town life.⁵ The god of war "burns our vine-stocks and brutally spills on the ground the wine from our vineyards,"⁶ but the goddess

1. Ach. 290, 225-32.

2. Ehrenberg, op.cit., p. 217.

3. Norwood, Greek Comedy, p.205.

4. Cf. Ehrenberg, op.cit., p.211.

5. Ach. 32-33, 266-70.

6. Ach. 986-87.

Peace brings a return of vines, figs and olives;¹ and with freedom from military service comes a return of the pleasures of love.² Perhaps an even more effective argument for peace is the return of festivals, such as the Rural Dionysia.³ In the Peace, similar sentiments are expressed.⁴ Even the Spartan farmers are represented as suffering through war.⁵ It is interesting to note that the blessings peace brings to the farmers are not mentioned again after the Peace, and this seems indicative of the fact that the country-folk were the strongest supporters of the Peace of Nicias in 421. At any rate, in the Peace they are represented as doing all the work in rescuing Peace.⁶ One of the fragments from the second Peace makes husbandry the faithful nurse, guardian, daughter, and sister of peace.⁷ Aristophanes had hoped in the Acharnians to undermine the desire to prolong the war by changing his Acharnians from war-mongers into promoters of peace.⁸ The change was effected in actuality, but apparently the war-fever continued unabated.

1. Ach. 995-99.

2. Ach. 1052; cf Lys. 99-110.

3. Ach. 201-02, 241-79; cf. Frogs 650-51; Thesm. 1147.

4. Peace 308, 338-45, especially 551-97, 1318-31.

5. Peace 625-27.

6. Peace 511.

7. Fragment 294 (Kock), cited by Norwood, Greek Comedy, p. 232.

8. Ehrenberg, The People of Aristophanes, p. 33.

After Pylos, the farmers began to return to the country, but the number of those who did so must have been relatively small, because in the Knights Cleon is addressed as follows:

"You wish the war to conceal your rogueries as in a mist, that Demos may see nothing of them, and harassed by cares, may only depend on yourself for his bread. But if ever peace is restored to him, if ever he returns to his lands to comfort himself once more with good cakes, to greet his cherished olives, he will know the blessings you have kept him out of, even though paying him a salary; and, filled with hatred and rage, he will rise, burning with desire to vote against you. You know this only too well; it is for this you rock him to sleep with your lies."¹

Here we find support for Thucydides' statement that Cleon was opposed to peace because in quiet times his rogueries would be more transparent and his slanders less credible.² Aristophanes certainly did consider Cleon largely responsible for the continuation of the war; and he claims that Cleon's support came chiefly from the ranks of tanners and "sellers".³ Even in the Peace, Aristophanes says that he fought relentlessly to deliver the people and the islanders from Cleon, and that it is well for the city that this "pestle of war" is dead.⁴

c) The causes of the War

Let us see now what Aristophanes considered to be the original causes of the war. In the Acharnians⁵ Aristophanes

1. Knights 802-09; see also 792-94.

2. Thucydides V.16; cf. Knights 864-67.

3. Knights 852-54.

4. Peace 759-60, 269-72.

5. Ach. 266.

had set down 431 as the date of the beginning of the war, but in the Peace¹ he apparently changed that date to 434; "...and it may fairly be said from the historical side that peace had really disappeared for fully three years before the actual declaration of the war..."² This fact makes it likely that Aristophanes really believed Pericles to have been responsible for the war. In the Acharnians, he insists that the Lacedaemonians are "not the cause of all our troubles."³ Then he goes on to say that Pericles, "aflame with ire on his Olympian height", passed the Megarian edict. Aristophanes imputes to it trivial motives in connection with Aspasia. The Megarians begged for the abolition of the decree, but their demand was refused, and the war started. Aristophanes concludes by saying that any pretext, even the capture of a dog, would have precipitated a war: "So I come to my general conclusion; we have no common sense."⁴ In the Peace,⁵ the Megarian decree again becomes the spark of the war, but the sculptor Pheidias takes Aspasia's place as the original cause of the decree; and the exile of Pheidias may have helped to sway Pericles' determination towards war.⁶ At any rate, the blockade of Megara was a cruel policy and Aristophanes cannot forget the starvation of her inhabitants.⁷

1. Peace 990.

2. Merry, ed. Peace, p.7; see also Graves, ed. Peace, p.x.

3. Ach. 310, 514.

4. Ach. 515-56.

5. Peace 605-14.

6. Merry, ed. Peace, p.25.

7. Ach. 751, 755-56, 760; Peace 246-47, 481-83.

As for Pheidias, the fact that the chorus in the Peace makes the beauty of Peace accountable to her relation with him, is certainly complimentary to his excellence as a sculptor. And when they add that "there are so many things that escape us", we may well be led to believe that Aristophanes is discrediting the stories which were current about the subordinate causes leading up to the war.¹ Yet, in answer to the claims of the Periclean party that the causes of the war were the deep and growing rivalry between Athens and Sparta, Aristophanes might have said:

"It is no defence of a silly action to prove that it comes from a profound and inveterate lunacy. If you and the Lacedaemonians really went to war because you always wanted to, and just chose the first suitable pretext, you are even worse than I thought. War advantages nobody, and the only sensible thing is to make peace."²

d) The demagogues and war

Aristophanes continues his analysis of the causes of the war:

"Then, when the towns subject to you saw that you were angered one against the other and were showing each other your teeth like dogs, they hatched a thousand plots to pay you no more dues and gained over the chief citizens of Sparta at the price of gold. They, being as shamelessly greedy as they were fruitless in diplomacy, chased off Peace with ignominy to let loose War...Then the rural labourers flocked into the city and let themselves be bought over like the others. Not having even a grape-stone to munch and longing after their figs, they looked towards the demagogues. These well knew that the poor were driven to extremity and lacked even bread; but they nevertheless drove away the Goddess, each time she reappeared in answer

1. Peace 615-18, and Merry ad loc.

2. Murray, Aristophanes, p.33; cf. Croiset, Aristophanes and the Political Parties at Athens, p.60.

to the wish of the country, with their loud shrieks that were as sharp as pitchforks; furthermore, they attacked the well-filled purses of the richest among our allies on the pretence that they belonged to Brasidas' party. And then you would tear the poor accused wretch to pieces with your teeth; for the city all pale with hunger and cowed with terror, gladly snapped up any calumny that was thrown it to devour. So the strangers, seeing what terrible blows the informers dealt sealed their lips with gold. They grew rich,¹ while you, alas! you could only see that Greece was going to ruin. It was the tanner who was the author of all this woe."²

Thus we see that lawsuits and "money" in its various aspects were of prime significance, according to Aristophanes, in the continuation of the war; and that it was the demagogues who brought about this situation. In the matter of lawsuits, the country-folk again were the first to exhibit any common sense. In the Birds, seeds of "anti-dicasts" are represented as existing, though in small quantities only, in the fields. This is "a special reference to the country-folk who liked peace and quiet."³

The assembly never troubled with peace, and even expelled citizens for desiring it.⁴ After Pylos there had been offers of peace, but these were rejected because "our mind was then entirely absorbed in leather."⁵ Throughout the war, apparently, the Athenians looked on Pylos as a trump card, -- until the Spartans finally recaptured it.⁶ Suppose the citizens were

1. Cf. Plutus 30-31.

2. Peace 619-24, 632-48.

3. Birds, 109-11: Merry ad loc. Cf. Knights 1332; Peace 190-91, 349.

4. Ach. 26-27, 56-58; cf. Lys. 13-15.

5. Peace 679; cf. Knights 795-96.

6. Peace 219.

to frown on the war-policy of the demagogues, or speak of ostracism: that would merely add fresh impetus to that policy.¹ "Now is the time to make peace," says Aristophanes in 421, "before some other pestle prevents us."² Cleon had made it his business to win the war and at the same time to keep the Demos fed. In order to meet the heavy expenses of the war,³ he had to resort to extortionary measures with the allies. But he was not ashamed of the charges levelled against him by Aristophanes, and even Aristophanes almost seems to admit the truth of Cleon's own defense: "I robbed for the public weal."⁴

e) Money and war

The increasing importance placed on money had its disastrous effects. No doubt one of the typical arguments for prolonging the war was: "Certainly it's not the moment to think of peace now! If anchovies are so cheap, what need have we of peace? Let the war take its course!"⁵ What was even worse, the Athenians became reluctant to attend the assembly because they were not being paid to do so. Aristophanes complains about this as early as the Acharnians.⁶ Later, payment

1. Knights 855-57.

2. Peace 292-95; cf. Peace 281-83.

3. In 426, the reserve of 6000 talents was down to 2000. Reserving of money was continued after 421.

4. Knights 1226: Murray, Aristophanes, p.42.

5. Knights 671-73.

6. Ach. 19-22, 170-73.

was actually introduced, at first to enable the poor to go to the theater, and later also to induce better attendance at the assembly. Aristophanes points out in the Frogs that money ought to be spent on ships rather than on dicasts, the latter practice bringing poverty to the state.¹ In the Lysistrata, the unstable Athenian people are represented as persisting in a warlike frenzy and refusing to listen to reason "so long as they have their trusty ships and the vast treasures stored in the temple of Athena;" and the first step to peace in the play is the seizure of the treasury: "No more money, no more war;"-- money is the cause of the war and of all our troubles.²

f) Embassies

The shortage of money had driven the Athenians also to another activity to which Aristophanes seems thoroughly opposed; that was the courting of Persia for the purpose of obtaining financial and other assistance for the war against Sparta. This practice of course, nullified the original purpose of the League, namely protection against Persia. Again, Aristophanes begins his attack in the Acharnians, where he parodies the return to the Athenian assembly of ambassadors to Persia.³ Aristophanes attacks the high pay of the ambassadors, the great amount of time consumed by the embassies, and the pompousness and splendor of it all.⁴ Then, after all the waste of time and

1. Frogs 1465-66 and Merry ad loc.

2. Lys. 170-74; 175-76; 488-89; cf. Plutus 184-85.

3. Ach. 61ff.

4. Ach. 66-67, 90; 80-82; 62-63, 94.

money, it is discovered that the mission has not been successful, in that no Persian gold is forthcoming.¹ A similar attack is made in connection with an embassy to the Thracians.² The Thracians will send troops for a wage of two drachmas!³ Throughout these episodes, Aristophanes seems to stress the fact that Persians and Thracians are "barbarians".⁴ In the Birds, the "Persian bird" is called stupid.⁵ Aristophanes was opposed to friendly relations with the Persians in particular. When Cleon is accused of intrigues with the Spartans, he retaliates by making accusations of plots with the Persians.⁶ In the Peace, there is further mention of plots to deliver Greece to the Persians.⁷ Finally, in the Birds, there is a reference to Pharnaces. "In the allusion to this Persian satrap we have a satire on the eagerness with which Athenian statesmen sought to curry favor with the Persian power."⁸

g) Cowardice, generalship, and public spirit

Aristophanes makes one particular criticism concerning the embassies that leads us directly to a complaint in connection with the conduct of the war. The ordinary "good"

1. Ach. 113-14.

2. Ach. 134ff. Cf. Ach. 604-06, where Aristophanes mentions embassies to Chaonia and Sicily; and Wasps 1271: Pharsalus in Thessaly.

3. Ach. 159.

4. Especially Ach. 100.

5. Birds 276-77.

6. Knights 465-78.

7. Peace 107-08, 408; see also Thesm. 337, 365.

8. Birds 1027-28: Merry ad loc.

citizen is never given the opportunity to go on an embassy -- except as a common soldier!¹ The favorites of the demagogues, the "secretaries",² who receive these positions are cowards when it comes to fighting.

"If I have concluded peace," says Dicaeopolis, "it was disgust that drove me; for I see men with hoary heads in the ranks and young fellows...shirking service. Some are in Thrace getting an allowance of three drachmae, such fellows as Tisamenophaenippus..."³

Tisamenus was Cleon's secretary. Theorus, another of his satellites, had gone on an embassy to Thrace.⁴ In the Peace, Aris- tophanes gets to the heart of the matter by attacking again the cowardice of the

"...damned lieutenant with three plumes and military cloak of crimson...He calls it the real Sardian purple, but if he ever has to fight in this cloak he'll dye it another colour, the real Cyzicene yellow, he the first to run away,...and I am left to do the real work. Once back again in Athens, these brave fellows behave abominably. [They indulge in the corrupt practice of changing the muster roll to escape military service]. The departure is set for tomorrow, and some citizen has brought no provisions, because he didn't know he had to go; he stops in front of the statue of Pandion, reads his name, is dumb-founded and starts away at a run, weeping bitter tears. The townsfolk⁵ are less illtreated, but that is how the

1. Wasps 1188-89; cf. Wasps 1139; and Ach. 71-72 certainly implies this also.

2. Cf. Frogs 1083-88.

3. Ach. 599-603.

4. Ach. 134ff; he is also mentioned Knights 608; Clouds 400 (as a perjurer); Wasps 42-51 and 418-19 (as a flatterer); Wasps 1220, 1236 (prone at Cleon's feet). Theophrastus (mentioned Knights 1103 as joining Cleon in cheating) was also one of Cleon's satellites.

5. They were precisely the ones who profited from the war; cf. Eccl. 1027.

husbandmen are treated by these men of war...who know nothing but how to throw away their shield. For this reason, if it please heaven, I propose to call these rascals to account, for they are lions in time of peace, but sneaking foxes when it comes to fighting."¹

In the Knights, we read concerning Pylos: "If the Paphlagonian (Cleon) ran any risk that day, it was because he was drunk."²

He had no real abilities as a general, and Aristophanes deplures the fact that such a man can with impunity continue to be a strong advocate of war. He was at home talking while others were doing their best on the field.³ No doubt Aristophanes also had Cleon in mind when he wrote:

"It's this that grieves us most of all, to see men who have never served or held either lance or oar in defence of their country, enriching themselves at our expense without ever raising a blister on their hands. In short, I give it as my deliberate opinion that in future every citizen not possessed of a sting shall not receive the triobolus."⁴

Laches, whom Cleon accused of embezzlement, had at least paid his troops.⁵ Aristophanes' solution was not simply: "Get Cleon out on the field; if he gets killed, fine!" because when Cleon was elected general, Aristophanes said:

"Do you wish that his election should even now be a success for you? It is a very simple thing to do; condemn this rapacious gull named Cleon for bribery and extortion, fit a wooden collar tight around his neck, and your error will be rectified and the commonweal will at once regain its old prosperity."⁶

1. Peace 1172-90; cf. Knights 1369-71.

2. Knights 1054.

3. Wasps 970-72.

4. Wasps 1117-21.

5. Wasps 964-66.

6. Clouds 590-94.

Aristophanes is often accused of being almost a reactionary in that he constantly harks back to the "good old days" of Marathon and Salamis, or Aristides and Miltiades. But he is merely illustrating his argument by pointing out that certain soldierly traditions have been given up since the days of old.¹ The important point is that formerly the political leaders were also noted for their real abilities as generals:

"Of all the national heroes who flourished after the termination of the Persian War, Myronides -- whose remarkable victories over the Corinthians and...over the Boeotians, B.C. 459-456, extended the Athenian supremacy by land to the utmost limits it ever attained -- and Phormio -- whose brilliant achievements in the Corinthian gulf at the commencement of the Peloponnesian War established the Athenian supremacy by sea -- appear to be the two who appealed most strongly to the mind of Aristophanes."²

Even Lamachus, who is attacked in the Acharnians, is made to exclaim: "Ah! the Generals! they are numerous, but not good for much."³ And in the Thesmophoriazusae "...Aristophanes contrasts the rich and contemptible demagogue (Hyperbolus)...with the poor but gallant soldier (Lamachus), who had fallen with honor in the Sicilian expedition."⁴ Nicias, apparently, was a good average general, but Aristophanes makes almost no mention of him, except to say that he was a good strategist, but given to

1. Knights 781-85, 1325, 1334; Clouds 986; Ach. 180-81; Wasps 711, 1060-1101; Lys. 285, 1032 (see Rogers ad loc.), 1250-56; Frogs 203-04, 1296-97. It should be noted that these references are not nearly so numerous as many would appear to believe; and some of them are not even distinctly complimentary.

2. Lys. 801-04: Rogers ad loc. See also Knights 562; Peace 347; Eccl. 303-04.

3. Ach. 1078.

4. Thesm. 839-41: Rogers ad loc.

delay and loitering.¹

In connection with Myronides, Aristophanes raises a special point:

"Let us drive away these men of the city who used to stay at home and chatter round the table in the days when only an obolus was paid, whereas now one is stifled by the crowds at the Pnyx. No! during the archonship of generous Myronides,² none would have dared to let himself be paid for the trouble he spent over public business; each one brought his own meal of bread, a couple of onions, three olives and some wine in a little wine-skin. But nowadays we run here to earn the three obols, for the citizen has become as mercenary as the stonemason."³

That was written in 393: genuine public spirit was dead, and the war helped more than anything else to kill it, because with war came poverty,⁴ and poverty brought a deadening of public spirit.

h) Aristophanes' attitude to peace settlements

From the beginning Aristophanes left no doubt as to what form he thought peace should take. In the Acharnians he tells us that a five-year truce would be merely a breathing spell for an armaments race, while a ten-year truce would only give additional time for the conclusion of military alliances.⁵ The thirty-year truce "both on sea and land" is accepted as suitable.⁶ All treaties at that time were bilateral and there

1. Birds 362-63; 640 (μελλονικιστῶν). Reference to Nicias is also made in a fragment (Kock, 100) from the lost Farmers. Nicias' grandson is complimented Eccl. 428.

2. Or: "When Myronides was our commander" -- Rogers.

3. Eccl. 300-310; cf. Birds 1541; Frogs 140-42; Eccl. 186-88, 206-08, 391-93; Plutus 171, 329-30.

4. Peace 120-23.

5. Ach. 188-93; and O'Neill, The Complete Greek Drama, vol. II, p. 474, note 5.

6. Ach. 194-200.

was as yet no movement towards panhellenic unity. "But the primary intention of every truce and every treaty (ἑπονδαί) was to end war and so create a peace in which trade and traffic were free."¹ Thus Aristophanes' thirty-year truce would be equivalent, in his day, to peace.² In the Knights, again, Demos is given a thirty-year truce to take with him into the country.³ With the truce comes a resumption of trade with Boeotia, Megara, and the Peloponnese;⁴ and of course there will be a return of wealth and general prosperity.⁵ "There were even 'peace-profiteers', such as the man, for instance, who produced agricultural tools and was now able to sell them at high prices."⁶ The economic advantages of peace were seen from the private point of view only, and the state did not come into the picture until after 403, when financial distress became acute.⁷ Aristophanes, however, like the contemporary philosophers, was ahead of the times in breadth of view. Even in the Peace, he begins to look on peace as a panhellenic blessing; at least, so it seems to the casual reader. But we shall discuss Aristophanes' panhellenism

1. Ehrenberg, The People of Aristophanes, p.235.

2. We recall the thirty-year truce signed between Athens and Sparta in 445, the year of Aristophanes' birth.

3. Knights 1388-91.

4. Ach. 623-25. Copaic eels were the favorite Boeotian delicacy at Athens. Aristophanes no doubt made many a mouth water: Ach. 880-894, 720-21; Peace 999-1016; Lys. 36-38, 702, and fragment 364 (Kock).

5. Peace 1320ff.

6. Ehrenberg, op.cit., p.219, and Peace 1198-1202.

7. Ehrenberg, loc.cit.

and his solution for the whole problem of war in a later chapter.

4 Other Criticisms -- a) Hyperbolus

Cleon was succeeded by the demagogue Hyperbolus,¹ by common agreement an even more depraved scoundrel; but, although Aristophanes does not spare Hyperbolus and his successors, the attacks are relatively light. In early life Hyperbolus was an informer, and he is therefore attacked for his litigiousness.² In the Knights, Aristophanes in a unique manner, allows the triremes themselves, assembled in council, to voice their objections to Hyperbolus' proposal for an expedition to Carthage with a hundred of their number.³ In the same passage he is represented as a lamp-seller by trade, and in the Clouds, we read: "Hyperbolus, the lamp-seller, thanks to his villainy, has gained more than...I do not know how many talents, but certainly no sword."⁴ In the same play, Aristophanes jokes about Hyperbolus' lack of intelligence: even he, though he was such a dullard, was able to learn for one talent!⁵ Yet Aristophanes considered him too insignificant to deserve the constant attacks of the other poets. He accused the comic poets of copying his own idea -- "fishing in troubled waters"⁶ for

1. Lord (Aristophanes, pp.38-39) believes that the Sausage-Seller in the Knights represents Hyperbolus.

2. Ach. 846-47; see Merry on Wasps 1007 and Peace 681.

3. Knights 1300-1315. This passage is attributed to Eupolis.

4. Clouds 1065-66.

5. Clouds, 876, and Merry ad loc.

6. Knights 864-67 -- said of Cleon.

their attacks on Hyperbolus.¹ In the Wasps, the dicast is represented as a tool of Hyperbolus; in the Peace, when peace is established, Hyperbolus is vanquished and thrown out; and we recall that in the Thesmophoriazusaë he is unfavorably compared with Lamachus.² Finally, we must not omit one more important reference to him in the Peace:

"Hermes: There is yet another question she (i.e. Peace) has just put to me. Who rules now in the rostrum?

"Trygaeus: It's Hyperbolus who now holds empire on the Pnyx. (To Peace) What now? You turn away your head!

"Hermes: She is vexed, that the people should give themselves a wretch of that kind for their chief.

"Trygaeus: Oh! we shall not employ him again; but the people, seeing themselves without a leader, took him haphazard, just as a man, who is naked, springs upon the first cloak he sees.

"Hermes: She asks, what will be the result of such a choice by the city?

"Trygaeus: We shall be more far-seeing in consequence.

"Hermes: And why?

"Trygaeus: Because he is a lamp-maker. Formerly we only directed our business by groping in the dark; now we shall deliberate by lamplight."³

1. Clouds 551-59.

2. Wasps 1007; Peace 921, 1319; Thesm. 839-45. For another reference to Hyperbolus, see Clouds 623; in the Frogs he is coupled with Cleon as a champion of the poor (570).

3. Peace 679-92 -- -- Other demagogues attacked or mentioned by Aristophanes are Meidias, Demostratus, Cleophon, Peisander, Archedemus, Cleigenes, Phormisius, Agyrrhius, Epicrates, and Pamphilus. Meidias, likened in the Birds (1297-99) to a quail that has been hit hard on the head, is spoken of as an incompetent demagogue in Plato's Alcibiades. (Alc. I.120, cited by Murray, The Birds, translation with notes, London, 1950, p.179). Demostratus, who is mentioned unfavorably in the Lysistrata, had first proposed the Sicilian expedition. (Lys. 391-94 and Rogers ad loc.). Cleophon is represented, like Cleon, as inferior even to the

b) Cleonymus and Cleisthenes

We have seen how Aristophanes hated cowardice; and almost throughout his career he chose one man to represent all cowards -- Cleonymus. Yet Cleonymus is not attacked as a coward until after the battle of Delium, in which many another Athenian shield besides that of Cleonymus was dropped in the

courtesan Salabaccho; (Thesm. 805; for Cleon, see Knights 765, where he ranks himself next in merit to Lysicles (the demagogue) and the courtesans, Cynna and Salabaccho) and in the Frogs he is attacked for his Thracian origin (Frogs 678-81, 1532-33) and is marked out for conviction and transfer to Hades. (Frogs 684-85, 1504-09. Rogers says in a note to Eccl. 183ff: "Cleophon appears to have acquired his supremacy by instituting the dole of the ὄσωρικόν..."). Peisander, the famous oligarch, had started his career as a demagogue. In the Babylonians, he was stirring up war, but according to the comic poets and Xenophon, he was a coward. (Murray, Aristophanes, p.158, citing Xenophon, Symposium 2.14. Cf. Peace 395). In the Lysistrata (490-91) he is accused of theft, and a reference in the Thesmophoriazusa to the theft of fifty talents from the state may also be aimed at Peisander. (Thesm. 811-812 and Rogers ad loc.). Archdemus, who had begun the prosecution of the generals after Arginusae, is accused of being an alien, and is called the "prince of all the shadiness on earth." (Frogs 420-25 -- Murray's translation. See Merry ad loc. Cf. Frogs 588). Cleigenes is made the champion of washermen: "There is," says Merry, "an ironical magnificence about the words 'as many as be masters of ash-mixed lye of adulterate soda and earth of Cimolus!'" (Frogs 709-712 and Merry ad loc. See also Ferguson, The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol.V, Ch.XII, p.351). Phormisus had been on an embassy to the Persian court. (Rogers, note on Eccl. 97; cf. Frogs 965). Agyrrhius had farmed the harbor dues at a price much below their actual value and was probably accused of embezzlement in this connection. But now, through his institution of a payment of three obols for attendance at the assembly, his ill deeds were forgotten and he was the friend of the people once more. Aristophanes contrasts the selfish demagogue, who is "no better than a woman", with the genuine patriot Thrasybulus, whose influence was steadily declining. (Eccl. 102-04, 183-88, 202-03 and Rogers ad locos. Agyrrhius is mentioned also Plutus 176). But Aristophanes also had a special grievance against Agyrrhius for having reduced the state gratuity for poets. (Frogs 367-68). Finally, the demagogues Epicrates and Pamphilus are mentioned by Aristophanes. (Eccl. 71 and Rogers ad loc.; Plutus 175. For Epicrates, see also The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol.VI, Ch.II, p.45).

disorderly flight. In the Peace, Cleonymus has become, through his cowardice, the most devoted friend of Peace,¹ and his son has followed in his footsteps.² In the Birds, we learn of the "Cleonymus-tree", which is as tall as it is cowardly: "In the springtime it shoots forth calumnies (εὐκοφάντεϊ) instead of buds and in autumn it strews the ground with bucklers in place of leaves."³ Thus we see that Cleonymus is attacked as a coward not only because he was a coward but because he was important politically as an informer and a supporter of Cleon's policies.⁴ He had moved the doubling or even the trebling of the tribute in 425;⁵ and he had a hand also in another affair which will be dealt with in the next chapter.⁶

Cleisthenes, another victim of Aristophanes, is consistently represented as beardless and effeminate.⁷ But again,

1. Peace 673.

2. Peace 1295-1301. His wife, ironically enough, in the Thesmophoriazusaë (605 and Rogers ad loc.) is the first woman suspected of being a man.

3. Birds 1473-81.

4. See Clouds 400, where he is represented as a perjurer together with Theorus, another of Cleon's supporters.

5. Murray, Aristophanes, p.156, and Croiset, Aristophanes and the Political Parties at Athens, p.75, footnote 1.

6. For other references to Cleonymus, see Ach. 88-89, 844; Knights 958, 1294-97, 1372; Clouds 353, 673 ff; Wasps 15-23, 592 (κολακκίζνυμος or "Flatteronymus"), 822-23; Peace 445-46, 674-78; Birds 289-90; Thesm. 824-49 and Rogers ad loc. The excessive fatness of Cleonymus made him especially suitable for caricature.

7. Ach. 117-18; Clouds 355; Birds 829-31; Lys. 1092; Thesm. 235, 571ff; Frogs 48, 426-31.

the real clue to Aristophanes' hostility lies elsewhere.

Murray says:

"We hear in the Knights that Cleisthenes was one of the 'beardless' orators in the assembly... and Lysias definitely calls him an informer... It was not the absence of beard that enraged Aristophanes. A sycophant^s without a beard would be hated for his smooth cheeks, but a bearded one would be just as much hated for his shagginess."¹

* * * * *

Aristophanes makes brief mention of many other personalities of his time but, although they were all no doubt important or notorious, we either do not know enough about them, or their mention is too brief to add anything to a study of the poet's attitude or point of view. But Aristophanes made a number of incidental remarks about the democracy that will serve well to consolidate the conclusions we have reached.

c) Orators

From the beginning, Aristophanes attacked the tendency of the people to stand in awe of oratorical abilities, and to be hoodwinked by them. A certain passage in the Acharnians is believed to have reference to the effect produced on the Athenians by the eloquence of Gorgias of Leontini, when he came to ask aid for his city against the aggression of Syracuse.² Pisthetaerus in the Birds is believed by some partly to represent Gorgias

1. Murray, Aristophanes, p.162, citing Knights 1373-74 and Lysias XXV.25-26. In Wasps 1187, we learn that he has been on a mission, and in Lys. 620-22 he is represented as plotting with the women and the Spartans.

2. Ach. 634ff. and Merry ad loc.

again.¹ In the Knights, Demos speaks of youths who are heard to babble:

"What a clever fellow is Phaeax!² How cleverly he escaped death! how concise and convincing is his style! what phrases! How clear and to the point! how well he knows how to quell an interruption!"³

Aristophanes thinks there are far too many orators at Athens⁴ and apparently does not feel that they deserve to be complimented on their abilities: "Silence! let all be quiet! Pay attention! for here she is spitting as orators generally do before they begin; no doubt she has much to say."⁵ In the Clouds, Aristophanes makes fun of the characteristic captiousness of the Athenians: "You are ready first to deny and then to contradict," says Strepsiades to his son, "it's as clear as noon. What a child of your country you are! How your lips quiver with the famous, 'What have you to say now?'" -- The Athenians would wrangle and dispute on every question.⁶

Another failing of the Athenians was their suspicious nature; and Aristophanes seems to be particularly irritated with

1. Especially Sölvén, cited by Merry, ed. Birds, pp. 14-15; cf. Thesm. 1102-04 and Rogers ad loc.

2. Phaeax had been sent on what proved to be an unproductive mission to Sicily in 422; he was a political opponent of Nicias and Alcibides.

3. Knights 1377-80.

4. Thesm. 529-30.

5. Thesm. 381-82.

6. Clouds 1172-74 and Merry ad loc. Cf. Frogs 916-17.

7. Thesm. 395ff., Frogs 958.

their unceasing "tyrannophobia",¹ a groundless feeling often exploited by the demagogues in their struggle to maintain their own political superiority. This aspect of the democracy will be discussed again in connection with Aristophanes' relations with the oligarchs.

d) Decrees

Under the influence of the demagogues, Athens was gradually becoming a democracy of that unhappy type in which the actions of the state are directed not by settled law, but by the ill-considered and offhand resolutions or decrees (*ψηφίσματα*) of the popular assembly, which were passed by a "snap vote" as opposed to the laws. Aristophanes was opposed to this system, and in the Birds we see the "Seller-of-Decrees" evicted from Nephelococcygia.

"Naturally, it was of great importance to the dependent states to be well posted up in the Decrees passed in the Athenian Assembly; so that the Dealer in Decrees with his collection for sale may have been scarcely an exaggeration."²

Aristophanes seems to think that the reason for this state of affairs was the Athenian disdain for tradition, and the passion for ceaseless innovation.³ The women in the Ecclesiazusae argue

1. Especially Wasps 487-507. O'Neill (The Complete Greek Drama, vol. II, p. 662, note 12) says this passage suggests that the word tyranny was in Aristophanes' day used as frequently and as loosely as communism and fascism today (i.e. in 1938). Cf. Birds 1074-75 and Merry ad loc.; Lys. 619, 629-30; Thesm. 338-39, 1143-44; Ecc. 181-82.

2. Birds 1035-45; Merry ad loc. Cf. Knights 1383; Clouds 1429; Lys. 703 and Rogers ad loc.

3. Ecc. 220, 456-57, and especially 571-87.

that they at any rate are consistent. Praxagora enumerates a number of their activities and ends nine consecutive lines with the same phrase -- "just as they always did."¹ Quick as were the Athenians in passing decrees, they were even quicker in ignoring them. Aristophanes quotes in the Ecclesiazusae three examples -- a reduction in the price of salt, the bronze coinage (introduced because of Decelea, but quickly recalled), and a property tax that had to be increased on closer examination.² Aristophanes believed that many decisions of the people had been hasty and foolish. He speaks of their mad expeditions; no doom is so certain as a military expedition.³ Yet Aristophanes almost admits that for some reason or other the mistakes of the Athenians always turned out for the best.⁴

5. Conclusion -- a) Was Aristophanes anti-democratic?

And that brings us to the question: Was Aristophanes really as anti-democratic as he seemed to be? Merry says: "He cordially hated the democracy, which he looked upon as the impersonation of dishonesty, turbulence and vulgarity."⁵ And another writer says: "No one of the important poets or writers of the time came forward to defend the post-Periclean democracy."⁶ And certainly, in its existing state, the democracy left much to

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1. Eccl. 220-28.
 2. Eccl. 797-98, 812-29.
 3. Clouds 579-80; Peace 367-68 and Merry ad loc. Cf. Eccl. 137-39.
 4. Clouds 587-89; Eccl. 473-75.
 5. Merry, ed. Wasps, p.ix.
 6. Ehrenberg, The People of Aristophanes, p.247.

be desired. But Aristophanes felt that, if the form of government could not be changed, some of its principles perhaps could be. Aristophanes would agree with the democratic "party" in maintaining Pericles' policy, but he thought the allies were being treated too harshly.¹ We have already seen how Aristophanes felt about the treatment of Megara -- and she was not an ally; he felt the same way about the treatment of Melos in 415.² Speaking of Euboea, Strepsiades in the Clouds explains the length and narrowness of the island: "Because we and Pericles have stretched it by dint of squeezing it."³ Yet Aristophanes seemed to be proud of being a citizen of so powerful a city. He speaks of the Milesians as traitors, and in the Plutus, he twice repeats the saying: "Once upon a time the Milesians were brave."⁴ Pisthetaerus and Euelpides in the Birds do not want a greater city than Athens, but a pleasanter city.⁵ "The real aim of Aristophanes is always to fight corruption, not to hamper Athenian might."⁶ Perhaps we shall come closer to appreciating Aristophanes' position if we regard him as both an idealist and a realist. And in his attitude to the democracy, he was a realist. That is why he not only criticizes the democracy, but

1. Merry, loc. cit.

2. Birds 186.

3. Clouds 213.

4. Lys. 108; Plutus 1002, 1075. -- Unfortunately, he says almost the same thing of the Athenians: Wasps 1060-61.

5. Birds 123-24.

6. Ehrenberg, op.cit., p.35.

offers some concrete suggestions even for the conduct of the war. While he was opposed to the war as an idealist, he accepted it in realistic fashion as an undeniable fact; and did not evade the issue by arguing that the only possible solution was peace.

b) Suggestions for the conduct of the war

Aristophanes considered Boeotia a disagreeable threat and believed that it should be subdued in order that Athens might devote herself to her conquests by sea without fear of being stabbed in the back. In the Acharnians, written, as we have seen, after the battle of Tanagra, a farmer living in a border deme complains of the seizure of his cattle by the Boeotians.¹ But Aristophanes was opposed to the hiring of Thracian help for the conquest of Boeotia, especially since the Athenian soldiers themselves were not being properly paid. Besides, the Thracians had not proved to be very good allies; and in the Peace, Trygaeus is happy to learn that the Spartans were making similar experiences.² Concerning the Argives Aristophanes had little to say. He speaks in the Knights of intrigues at Argos and in the Peace he seems to indicate displeasure at her complacent neutrality during the war.³ But when fighting actually did break out in the Argolid, Aristophanes

1. Ach. 1018-23; cf. 1076-77, 159-60; Knights 479; Peace 466; Lys. 35. In the Birds, Aristophanes mentions the General Hipponicus who had commanded at Tanagra in 426 (Birds 283).

2. Peace 283-86.

3. Knights 465-67; Peace 475-77.

made no comments at all.¹

We see then, that Aristophanes had few suggestions to make concerning the conduct of land operations. He had shown how the army and its generals had degenerated since days gone by; -- but he made no such remarks about the navy. Merry sees in a certain passage in the Frogs a reference to the decadence of the Athenian navy.² But Henderson claims that Aristophanes criticized everything except the navy. In connection with a joke Aristophanes makes about sailors in another passage of the Frogs,³ Henderson says:

"The sailors in his audience, at that moment, six months after the last great naval victory at Arginusae, could afford to chuckle at this hit at the lower deck. For the rest, even the poet, critic of the democracy though he may have been, spared the fleet, the chief bulwark of that democracy, his onslaughts. For Aristophanes was still a patriot and an Athenian."⁴

This view is no doubt correct, because Aristophanes advises the Athenians to "get down a little towards the sea" if they really want to restore peace;⁵ and in the Birds, not only are Pisthetairus and Euelpides represented as coming from "the land of the beautiful galleys,"⁶ but when Nephelococcygia is being built, the

1. The reference to fighting in the Argolid in Birds, 397-99, is introduced merely for the sake of a pun.

2. Frogs 203-04; Merry ad loc.

3. Frogs 1069-76.

4. Henderson, The Great War between Athens and Sparta, p.123.

5. Peace 506-07. As a matter of fact, Trygaeus calls his beetle a Naxian boat. The word for beetle (κένθρος) also meant a certain type of Naxian boat, and was furthermore the name of a harbour at Piraeus (Peace 142-45). Surely this is more than just a routine pun.

6. Birds 108.

noise is just like that of a dockyard.¹ Finally, the hoplites, but not the sailors, are dismissed from service.² In the Lysistrata, we hear a complaint about the slowness of the women in meeting the crisis -- like true Athenians who do everything too late, not one has arrived from the shore or from Salamis.³

c) Were Aristophanes' attacks justified?

There remains one important question to be asked concerning Aristophanes' criticisms of the Athenian democracy: were they justified? And since Cleon was his central object of attack in connection with the democracy, we must ask this question particularly of Cleon. Neil says: "Aristophanes' attacks on Socrates and Euripides may have been stupidly wrong: this may rouse, but it does not justify, a suspicion that he was wrong in attacking Cleon."⁴ Merry on the other hand, although he does not wish to make a hero of Cleon, seems to think that such a suspicion is justified. He argues further that Aristophanes' authority in the case of Pericles is universally rejected on the redeeming testimony of Thucydides, and that consequently Aristophanes' treatment of Cleon is of no more value, as a piece of impartial evidence. Finally, he disposes of the argument that Aristophanes was merely exaggerating by pointing out that the poet is simply turning against Cleon charges which the

1. Birds 1156-57.

2. Birds 448-50.

3. Lys. 56-59.

4. Neil, ed. Knights, p.xii.

demagogue constantly brought against his opponents, and that we are dealing not with exaggeration but with paradox.¹ But the Sausage-Seller who makes the supposedly paradoxical charges,² which incidentally are very few in number, is just another "Cleon" in the act of ousting the real Cleon, just as Cleon had ousted Nicias. What would be more natural than that he should use Cleon's line of reasoning? This is especially obvious in the passage which shows Cleon advocating peace -- as a last resort!³ To a considerable degree, Aristophanes was justified in his attack, because Cleon was vulgar and self-confident; and on his death, he left a fortune "certainly of fifty, possibly of a hundred talents."⁴ Aristotle says that he was the first to corrupt the people by means of their own instincts.⁵ Since this caused the democracy to change, Cleon may be considered a large contributor to those changes. Yet in Cleon's favor, we must admit that Cleon's policy was openly that of government of the subject allies of the Empire by terrorism. He insisted that democracy cannot govern an Empire because it is too humanitarian, too sentimental.⁶ Nor would it be difficult to come to the conclusion that Aristophanes in his plays does not really make

1. Merry, ed. Knights, pp. 6, 8, 11-12.

2. Knights 467, 834, 669.

3. Knights 642-69.

4. Henderson, op.cit., p. 176.

5. Aristotle, The Constitution of Athens, 28 -- cited by Croiset, Aristophanes and the Political Parties at Athens, p. 23.

6. Henderson, op.cit., p. 177.

the cruelty of Cleon's policy a ground of attack, "which he assuredly would have done if it had kindled any popular indignation in Athens."¹ That does not mean, however, that Aristophanes was lacking in humanitarian sentiment. The humanitarian side of Aristophanes' attitude ~~was~~ a problem that cannot be answered categorically. We shall see later why this is so.

Concerning Cleon, one writer has this to say:

"Insensitive, unscrupulous, plausible, vain, resolute, and violent, he was one of the necessary evils of an aggressive democracy. But he was led captive by his own policy. To impose on half the Athenians the sacrifices needed to avoid losing the war, he was forced to make the other half believe that the war could be gloriously won. It was his fate at once to make a good peace possible and then refuse it for the mirage of a better."²

Yet Aristophanes' argument that the people were playing the part of gullible idiots was not too important, since Cleon himself used similar language in the assembly: "In a word, you are in thrall to the pleasures of the ear, and sit like an audience attending a performance of sophists, but very unlike counsellors of the state."³

Now, whether Aristophanes was justified in his attacks on the democracy concerns us here only insofar as it throws light on the relative strength of the attack. That Aristophanes did attack the democracy is beyond doubt. We are also told that when Dionysius of Syracuse wished to gain an insight into the

1. Merry, ed. Knights, p.7.

2. Adcock, The Cambridge Ancient History, vol.V, ch.VIII, p.216

3. Thucydides III.38.7, quoted by Ehrenberg, The People of Aristophanes, p.250. Cf. Croiset, op.cit., p.75.

genius, the customs, and the government of the Athenian people, he was referred by his teacher Plato to the comedies of Aristophanes as giving the most trustworthy description of contemporary history. And Plato would certainly not be indisposed to place the Athenian democracy in the most unfavorable light before his pupil.¹

We are in a position now to form a number of conclusions concerning the political attitude of Aristophanes. But, until we have studied his relations with the oligarchs, who formed the anti-democratic element at Athens, we are not in a position to decide exactly on the degree and the nature of Aristophanes' opposition to, and support of the democracy.

1. Merry, ed. Knights, p.5.

CHAPTER IV

ARISTOPHANES AND THE OLIGARCHY

There are various views among scholars concerning Aristophanes' relations with the oligarchs; but the very nature of comedy makes it impossible to assert the absolute correctness of any one view. Perhaps it will become easier to fix Aristophanes' political position if we approach the subject indirectly. Thus, if we study the serious views existing in Athens during the Peloponnesian War, we may well find that some of them can not easily be attributed to Aristophanes. A scholar will often force on Aristophanes views that it seems unnatural for him to hold. This is usually the result of an attempt to reconcile all details with some specific details that may or may not be important. We shall have occasion to point out some of these details.

One very common difficulty seems to arise out of an old law of Solon which forbade any citizen to abstain from party politics. Thus, Aristophanes must be either a democrat or an oligarch. Yet many changes had taken place in Athenian politics since Solon's day, and, although moderates -- we might call them political hybrids -- were almost outlaws at Athens, the fact remains that there were many moderates; Solon himself had been one.¹ We see, then, that we must not attempt to oversimplify Athenian politics.

1. The Oligarchy

Roughly, all governments were classified by the

1. Neil, ed. Knights, p.viii.

Greeks as democracies or oligarchies. To Thucydides, the Peloponnesian War was a duel between oligarchy and democracy -- a trial of strength between the free and popular constitution of Athens, and the rigid, military aristocracy of Sparta.¹ At Athens, the normal evolution to oligarchy through aristocracy and tyranny was interrupted by the rise of the democracy under the influence of Solon and Cleisthenes. In its early stages, the democracy was quite aristocratic in nature, since it merely served to temper the old aristocracy. The result was a form of government of the sort which Thucydides, Plato, and Aristotle would have found praiseworthy.² But, just as in the rest of Greece the general tendency of constitutional development was toward the intensification of oligarchy or democracy, so at Athens the democracy gradually became intensified. By means of the fleet, Themistocles introduced the lower classes into politics, and under Pericles, the old aristocracy, after a short revival under Thucydides (not the historian) finally lost its influence with the ostracism of the latter in 443. Political "restriction" had lost to "equality". The struggle, however, between those who claimed general equality and those who claimed

1. Whibley, Leonard, Greek Oligarchies, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1913, p.5; and Thucydides III.82.1.

2. Whibley, op.cit., p.14. "Polity...denotes either a moderate popular government or a government of mixed oligarchic and democratic elements. It thus forms a link between oligarchy and democracy, and in some constitutions the fusion of these elements is so complete that the same government may bear the name either of oligarchy or democracy." (Whibley, op.cit., pp.16-17). Aristotle in his Politics says that in a large town it is difficult for any constitution except democracy to exist. (See Whibley, op.cit., p.86).

general inequality continued for many years; compromise was impossible.

Oligarchy meant government by the few, and aristocracy used to denote the same thing, but the aristocrats generally based their claim on personal merit, and tradition, while the oligarchs recognized wealth as a further essential: "It is a circumstance peculiarly appropriate to the character of oligarchy that its origin can be traced to the invention of money more than to any one other fact."¹ The oligarch claimed that since the rich man paid most taxes, he should be entrusted with the government of the state. Had there been an absence of commerce, which brought wealth, the old aristocracy of birth might have survived, but now wealth was a very important qualification for membership. Thus, whereas the old military aristocracy frowned on all money making, the oligarchy could not exclude rich traders and craftsmen. However, the oligarchs, like the aristocrats, had contempt for ordinary wage-earners.

The oligarchs also claimed moral and mental superiority. They assumed for themselves the same "moral" terms that had been adopted by the aristocrats. As a matter of fact, the use of moral terms to describe constitutional forms tended to confuse the political terminology of the Greeks, because each party would adopt for itself and its opponents the terms that would best serve its own advantage.² In a sense, the oligarchy

1. Whibley, op.cit., p.22; see also Plato, Republic, 550c-551B.

2. The oligarchs used the word ἀριστοκρατία to denote ὀλιγαρχία. The few were οἱ καλοὶ καὶ καθαροί, οἱ χρηστοί, οἱ δυνατοί, the many οἱ πονηροί, οἱ μαχθυροί. The oligarch also credited himself with εὐνομία, σωφροσύνη, and his opponents with ὕβρις and other evil qualities. Some of these terms became simply

was the result of a degeneration of the old aristocracy, brought about by changes in social and economic conditions and by the political outlook of the democracy itself. But the oligarchs were in reality much more progressive. Unlike the old aristocrats, who were very conservative, slow, and cautious, the oligarchs were enterprising and ambitious.

a) The oligarchic doctrine

Nicias was one of the old aristocrats who survived Athenian politics for many years. Yet he survived on the strength of tradition. Nicias was able to prevent many errors on the part of the new democracy but since he lacked the genius of a Pericles, he was unable to produce a consistent policy, far less a policy that would have been approved by the oligarchs. The real strength of the oligarchic party was concentrated in a few men who held aloof and waited until the time for political action should be favorable. One of these "underground" oligarchs, it is generally believed, wrote a political pamphlet, known as the Constitution of the Athenians, in which he shows, in an ironic manner, why he disapproves of the democratic constitution. He complains that the vulgar and common and poor are given preference over aristocrats, and claims that in the people we find a very high degree of ignorance, disorder, and vileness. According to him, all the people want is power and freedom,

party catch-words and were used by the democrats with opposite application. Thus Lysias calls the Thirty Πονηροί (12.5) and, the democrats executed by the Thirty καλοὶ καὶ ἄγαθοί (30.4). The moderating influence of Theramenes is described as Πονηρία by both parties, by Critias (Xenophon, Hellenica II.3.27), and by Lysias (12.78). (See Whibley, op.cit., p.37, footnote 2, and Neil, ed. Knights, appendix II, pp.207-08).

regardless of the badness of their constitution. Justice does not interest them so much as their own profit, says the oligarch:

"I for my part...maintain that the people of Athens definitely know which of the citizens are good and which are rogues. With full knowledge of this, they like those who are devoted and useful to them, even if these are bad persons, whereas they rather hate the good ones. For they do not think that the morals of these are in-born in them to the benefit of the people, but on the contrary to its harm. On the other hand there are a few who undoubtedly take the side of the people, but they are not by nature democratic.¹

"The people itself I personally forgive its democracy; for everybody must be forgiven for looking to his own interest. But anybody who without belonging to the people prefers living in a town under democratic rule to living in one ruled oligarchically has prepared himself for being immoral, well knowing that it is more easy for a bad person to remain unnoticed in a town under democratic, than in one under oligarchic rule."²

b) The Clubs

The Constitution expresses well the general attitude of the oligarchs, but there were several factions among them, each faction banding together to form a secret club. Prominent in the clubs were such men as Antiphon, the great orator, Phrynichus, and Peisander, who turned oligarch late in the war, but continued to masquerade as a democrat. The most apparent object of the clubs was to form a mutual defense against the courts. We have already seen why they should wish to seek protection. It was a small step for the clubs to move on to active intrigues against the democracy.³ Before long they constituted

1. He is probably referring to men like Nicias.

2. II.19,20; translation by Frisch, Hartvig, in The Constitution of the Athenians, a Philological-Historical Analysis of Pseudo-Xenophon's Treatise De Re Publica Atheniensium, Copenhagen, Gyldendalske Boghandel - Nordisk Forlag, 1942.

3. The Mutilation of the Hermae in 415 was traced by the Athenian courts to an oligarchic club of which Euphiletus and

the most effective opposition to the government of Athens. The extreme oligarchs were little short of traitors. They were willing to pay the price of submission to Sparta in order to regain what they believed to be their inalienable privileges, chief of which was the privilege of being the sole ruling body. To this end they intrigued with anti-democratic factions in various Athenian dependencies and at times even with Sparta. It should be noted that there was a laconizing tendency among the upper classes generally.¹

There were other oligarchs who were not so extreme. And the struggle between the extremists and moderates continued throughout, particularly during the oligarchic revolution. It will be very important in our analysis of Aristophanes' relations with the oligarchs to bear in mind that marked differences of opinion did exist among them. Furthermore, these differences took various forms. Thus, while some oligarchs very much resembled the old aristocrats, most of them felt that the ineffectual tactics of a Nicias, for example, must be revised. Innovations were admitted more or less freely, depending on the degree to which the modern trends in philosophy, education, and social and economic conditions affected the individual oligarch. Age was also an important factor.

2. Aristophanes and the Oligarchs

Among the young aristocrats, the most important belonged to the Knights, who formed a select class, not only military, as the name suggests, but also social, political and

1. See Plato, Laws IV.706-707.

financial. They naturally adopted the political attitude of the oligarchs, since they were socially in the same class.¹ But it was also natural for men of their age to take a less serious view of politics and to adopt many innovations about which their fathers were more cautious. We may assume that Aristophanes found these young aristocrats the most congenial of young men, not only because their society was the best-educated, thus providing for the young poet an environment suitable to his intelligence, but also because their way of life must have appealed to him, as we should surmise from the very nature of the comedy which Aristophanes handled so expertly. Like Aristophanes, the young aristocrats were fond of pleasure and noisy gatherings, and were free in their morals and speech. Association with such men would certainly affect Aristophanes' work, so it will be of interest to note how the poet first became acquainted with the aristocrats.

Like Shakespeare and Molière, he probably began his career as an actor.² There were so many fixed conventions in connection with all the various aspects of comedy, that Aristophanes could hardly have become thoroughly acquainted with his art, without apprenticing himself to, or at least associating with, people who had the necessary experience. There were probably no regular specialists in comedy, but there was a large "world of comedians". "This world of comedians was by no means

1. The Knights strongly supported the Thirty and were punished on that occasion by the government. See Oman, A History of Greece, p.420, footnote 1.

2. See Knights 541ff.

shunned by the best Athenian society -- the most open-hearted, most variously constituted and most liberal society that has ever existed."¹ It was no doubt through this world of comedians that Aristophanes formed his association with the aristocrats. From their fathers at the club meetings, the young men heard all the latest political theories and opinions. It was natural for them to magnify every clever statement they heard and to turn it into slanderous gossip. The comic poets added force to such gossip by repeating it before all the people. It used to be said of an early comic poet, Myllus, that he heard everything; and, of course, he repeated what he heard, in his comedies. As a matter of fact, only under the protective mask of comedy could slanders have been repeated in public.

Yet we are not at liberty to assume that comedy was the recognized mouth-piece of an anti-constitutional oligarchy, on the further assumption that, because comedy was fed by gossip, originating in the oligarchic clubs, it was also completely subsidized by the oligarchs. It may well have been more expedient for a comic poet to refrain from attacking the wealthy oligarchs, if only to guarantee himself against the disagreeable consequences which too bold a satire was always in danger of bringing upon him. And besides, Aristophanes may have needed patronage in order to secure recommendations to the archon who supplied the comic chorus.² But we must also admit that Aristophanes

1. Croiset, Aristophanes and the Political Parties at Athens, p.12.

2. See Croiset, op.cit., pp.18-19. Cratinus sought the patronage of Cimon, and Telecleides represented himself as the friend of Nicias.

showed in most of his comedies a singular independence in his attitude to politics. Of the extant comedies, only two show marked anti-democratic leanings, but where these cannot be attributed to political views that Aristophanes could well hold, independently of party, they can be attributed to his youth, his tendency to exaggerate or to lose his "youthful temper." We must not forget that Aristophanes was only twenty-four years old when he wrote the Peace, the last of the plays most political in tone.¹ Unless we gather some additional political notes from his later plays, we are apt to misrepresent Aristophanes' mature political stand.

Perhaps the easiest way to identify Aristophanes' position will be to study some of the oligarchic principles and methods and then to compare these with the political statements and methods of Aristophanes.

* * * * *

The two great principles on which the oligarchic constitution was based were political service without pay, and limitation of the franchise. The lower classes were to be excluded from all political rights, and power was to be concentrated in the hands of the Council, which would have the authority to appoint an executive core. But, as we have already seen, when the oligarchic principles were to be put to the test in the

1. To get around this difficulty, some scholars have devised various proofs that would make Aristophanes somewhat older. For example, according to R.G. Kent ("The date of Aristophanes' Birth", and "When did Aristophanes Die?"- The Classical Review, April 1905 and April 1906 respectively), Aristophanes would be thirty-four at this time.

revolt of 411, the two main factions -- extremists and moderates -- could not come to an agreement. This disagreement on principles helped to restore the democracy, not only in 411, but again after the tyranny of the Thirty. We must remember this in our analysis of Aristophanes' views with respect to the oligarchs.

a) The Probuloi

How were the oligarchs able to achieve, however briefly, their overthrow of the democracy? To a certain extent, the democracy itself unwittingly gave them a helping hand. For in the time of crisis after the defeat at Syracuse, the Athenians felt that they needed a smaller and more permanent body than the "Council of Five Hundred" to direct the city's affairs. And so a board of ten elders, called the "Probuloi" was created. The Probuloi, among them Sophocles (probably the poet), and the father of Theramenes, had the duty of preparing motions and drawing up proposals to be brought before the Council or Assembly. Significantly, the magistracy was oligarchic in character. In the Lysistrata, the Probulus appears before Lysistrata in his own right, not as an agent for others. What Aristophanes thought of him may be gathered from the general impression he creates. He seems rather ineffectual and does not show any initiative until Lysistrata points out a course for him.¹ Previously, in the Acharnians, Aristophanes allowed

1. Cf. Hugill, William Meredith, Panhellenism in Aristophanes, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1936, p.3, and Ehrenberg, The People of Aristophanes, p.46.

his Megarian to make some rather uncomplimentary remarks about the Probuloι at Megara -- about their handling of affairs.¹ He agreed with some, no doubt, who thought that the Probuloι were too old to be useful and that younger men were required. But, even assuming that Aristophanes was opposed to the Probuloι, the fact that they supported the initial reform movement at Athens, does not prove that Aristophanes was opposed to the oligarchs as such. Many others, including the moderates and men of letters, also supported the movement. Even Peisander, the demagogue, was willing to join the oligarchs, now that a revolution seemed in order.

* * * * *

A commission of thirty (ten Probuloι and twenty others) drafted the new government. The constitutional safeguards of the democracy were removed; revenues were reserved for the needs of the war; active citizenship was limited to the "Five Thousand", that is, those who could serve the state at their own expense; a body of four hundred men was to act as a council. After the fiasco in Samos, however, the Council of Four Hundred simply assumed full power, and never convened the Five Thousand, of whom not even a list was divulged. The work of the Four Hundred was a catalogue of failures, and it was a relief for the Athenian people when Theramenes was able to

1. Ach. 754-56.

2. It is hard to say whether Aristophanes' remarks about Peisander in the Lysistrata (490-91) are directed against Peisander as democrat or Peisander as oligarch. In any case, Aristophanes resented his warmongering and greed for money, quite apart from his party affiliations.

establish in fact the government of the Five Thousand.

"The moderate oligarchs, it should be noted, had no quarrel on principle with election by lot, rotation in office, proportional representation, or majority rule. The essence of their program was to secure for high civil offices men of special competence, to reserve the privileges of the commonwealth to Athenians who could afford them, and deny a voice in political decisions to such as lacked an appreciable property-stake in the community."¹

b) Education

The idea of having men of special competence in the government, raises another question. What sort of an education would make men specially competent, and what effect would the new education of Aristophanes' day have on aristocratic standards? Some of the oligarchs were very much opposed to the new teaching introduced by the sophists, and insisted on maintaining the old tradition. In fact, the oligarchs helped their own cause considerably by harking back to the days of old. They established their government under pretext of restoring the old democracy.² But many of the oligarchs, particularly the younger, were strongly influenced by the new education. And Aristophanes, who associated with them, must have assimilated many of the novel ideas that were coming into vogue. If we ask for proof of this, one reading of Aristophanes' plays will be sufficient. His subtle treatment of the Just and Unjust Logics in the Clouds, and his literary criticism in the Frogs, certainly show that he had absorbed some of the new teaching of the sophists. But our problem is not

1. Ferguson, The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. V.ch.XI,p.339

2. See Couat, A., Aristophane et l'Ancienne Comédie Attique, third edition, Paris, Société Française d'Imprimerie et de Librairie, 1902, p.54, and Whibley, op.cit., p.61.

to decide whether or not Aristophanes received the benefits of the new education; the problem is, rather, the more difficult one of trying to decide to what extent he endorsed it, and consequently to what extent he realized what its ultimate effect on the Athenian people would be.

The advent of the sophists during the rise of the democracy brought a complete change in the education of the aristocracy. Love of country, of family, of the laws, and of the gods had become the solid traditions in which all aristocrats were educated. The new scientific curiosity called all these traditions into question, and the very rapid slackening in moral discipline that followed, shocked the older and more conservative aristocrats. They saw that the people's instinctive respect for tradition, on which the influence of an aristocracy depends, was being undermined. They saw also that the young oligarchs were overlooking this factor in their haste to regain the former political power of the aristocracy. They made attempts to forestall the inevitable. In 433, Diopceithes proposed a decree against those who did not believe in the existence of the gods or who taught theories concerning celestial things.¹ Science and impiety had apparently become synonymous. Critias forbade the teaching of oratory,² which had become a profession and was taught by the sophists. It became the chief or only way of preparation for political life and soon there were no politicians left other than orators.³

We see then, that the more conservative element of the

1. Plutarch, Pericles 32.

2. Couat, op.cit., p.275.

3. Ehrenberg, op.cit. n.25h.

aristocracy was opposed to the new education. Did Aristophanes share their antipathy or did he accept the attitude of the younger and more broad-minded aristocrats?

3. Aristophanes and "the Old"

It has been stated that Aristophanes was a champion of the old tradition. Croiset feels that no one was more an Athenian of the old type than he; that all his criticism, whether of Euripides, Socrates, Lamachus or Cleon was a reaction against innovation of any kind; that he was a child of the country and of tradition, and that it is the soul of Athens he defends against those whom he regards as its corruptors.¹ However, the overall impression of the plays does not really support such a view. This does not mean that Aristophanes had no definite aim in his comedies. For the inspiration of tragedy had made comedy conscious of a certain educational mission.² Yet it would be wrong to imagine that Aristophanes felt that his mission was to urge seriously a return to the past. Certainly, he describes it well, as only a true patriot could.

"In Dichtung und Wahrheit Goethe well describes the effect produced by that kind of poetic wishful thinking. 'A poet can create universal pleasure by skilfully reminding a nation of its own past: it admires the virtues of its ancestors, and smiles at the faults which it believes it has surmounted long ago.' The less one tries to interpret these magical fantasies...as straightforward political preaching, the more deeply one will understand his poetry."³

If Aristophanes defends the old traditions, then we should expect him to defend the older generation. But, as Gomme

1. Croiset, Aristophanes and the Political Parties at Athens, pp.26-27.

2. Jaeger, Paideia, vol.I, p.359.

3. Ibid., p.366.

points out,¹ a single reading of the comedies makes one thing clear: the older generation as such is always on the wrong side or is the wrong side, namely, the side Aristophanes is attacking. In the Acharnians, the Chorus of Elders is opposed to a truce with Sparta. In the Knights, Cleon calls on the older generation (the heliasts),² while the Knights, Aristophanes' friends, are young men. In the Clouds, Pheidippides is opposed to the system for which ~~his~~ father Strepsiades falls. In the Wasps, the younger generation exposes the folly of the older. In the Lysistrata, the old men support the war, while the defenders of the novel idea triumph in the end. Hugill calls these old men typical traditional democrats -- like the dicasts in the Wasps. "Any poet," says he, "that represents these sturdy fellows in so favorable a light must have been a man of the people, and no aristocrat or oligarch. The old men are converted by having their honest doubts resolved."³ Yet these old men barely listen to Lysistrata's arguments and surrender in the end only because her plan succeeds. Apparently Hugill feels the old men must be praised for seeing the error of their ways.⁴

It is actually difficult, at times, to decide just what certain authors mean when they use the word "aristocracy". The term is, however, often applied to the older, landed, or country aristocracy, and seems to be simply part of the country democracy. This country democracy had retained its aristocratic

1. Gomme, article "Aristophanes and Politics," p.99.

2. Knights 255-57.

3. Hugill, Panhellenism in Aristophanes, pp.47-48.

4. Gomme, op.cit., pp.100-01.

ties to a certain extent, and Aristophanes is believed by some to have defended it throughout his career. Yet, the new education had a great effect on the non-aristocratic element in the democracy, and its misuse produced such demagogues as Cleon. Old, conservative aristocrats, like Nicias, became mere figure-heads, for the new education destroyed the respect of the masses for tradition, except, as we have noted, in the country. Many of the aristocrats realized that they were due for extinction unless they took drastic measures. To fight for tradition alone was hopeless, because there was not much common ground between it and the new education. That is why many aristocrats actually patronized the sophists and attempted to regain power by beating the democrats at their own game. And that is why the old rural democracy could hardly have been what Aristophanes would defend. Those of its aristocratic leaders who had not yet given in to the new trend, might as well have done so, for their effectiveness was now negligible. The country democracy was therefore really nothing more than a mass of uneducated rustics, without the men to give them leadership and moral support.

Aristophanes may well have been brought up in the country tradition, as we have already said. Certainly, he seems to be well acquainted with country life and country traditions.¹ But he was also intelligent enough to see that a return to the past, as exemplified in these country traditions, was too unrealistic to work. Rather, it seems more natural to believe that Aristophanes was ahead of his time, in that he saw that the new

1. Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, ed. Lys., p.40.

education could produce a new tradition better even than the old. We might say that Aristophanes was conscious of a certain development or progress, which some of the older aristocrats failed to sense. They did not see how the removal of ancient tradition could lead to anything but the destruction of Athens, both morally and materially.

4. Aristophanes and "the New"

Aristophanes "had enjoyed the advantages of progressive education, and it is quite impossible to imagine that his comedy could have been written in the good old days."¹ To say that Aristophanes was "the most unreasoning laudator temporis acti,... the sworn foe to intellectual progress..."² or that he "hated the very name of philosophy, and thought it detestable..."³ conflicts with much of the material in his comedies. His defense of youth in the Wasps implies a change of outlook. The methods of instruction, the nature of education, and the ethics of political life had changed.⁴ If Aristophanes really represents the simple country folk, why does he always appeal to the clever and why is he always introducing novel ideas?⁵ He seems to have been quite

1. Jaeger, op.cit., p.372.

2. Merry, ed. Frogs, p.15. Cf. Harsh, A Handbook of Classical Drama, pp.280-81.

3. Croiset, op.cit., p.99.

4. Ehrenberg, The People of Aristophanes, p.154.

5. Wasps 1048-49; Clouds 546-47. In the Eccl. (1154-56) he asks the wise to judge his play for whatever is wise in it, and those who like a laugh by whatever made them laugh. Thus he feels he is addressing himself to everyone.

disappointed at the poor reception of his first Clouds, and he tells the audience in his second version that it had been written for an enlightened public and that he had considered it his best comedy.¹

In the Clouds, more than in any other play, we see Aristophanes' strong attraction to the new education. That he realized how much harm it could do when it was abused is fully apparent throughout the play. Aristophanes seems to mock the uneducated and deploras the harm caused by the "miseducated."² He makes the Just Argument say that some day Athens will realize what lessons the Unjust Argument is giving to her fools.³ Yet the fact remains that the Unjust Argument stands unanswered. The "devil" makes sense and Aristophanes knows it well. The gods are avenged in the end and religion triumphs, but their victory is doubtful. The whole play conveys an impression of calculated irony.⁴ It shows that the Unjust Argument confutes and defies the established laws.⁵ But it does not hint at all convincingly that these laws should remain as they were. In actual fact, the old education is made to appear rather ridiculous, old-fashioned, fit for the simple-minded, and really quite incapable of a convincing self-defense.

1. Clouds 518ff.

2. Cf. Ehrenberg, op.cit., p.208.

3. Clouds 918-19. Cf. Norwood, Greek Comedy, p.222.

4. Couat, Aristophane et l'Ancienne Comédie Attique, pp. 241-45.

5. Clouds 1040, 1399ff.

a) Socrates

Ehrenberg has observed that the attack against Socrates is not as violent as the attack against Cleon. He says that one obvious reason is that even in Athens a much smaller part of the population was interested in the things of the mind and in culture than in politics.¹ Yet, since education remained political at heart and its object, recognized by the sophists, was to prepare its pupils for political life, Aristophanes' audience was bound to become interested in the new education sooner or later. Perhaps -- as the reception of the play would appear to indicate -- Aristophanes' choice of theme, in the Clouds, was a little premature. But this point is not so disturbing to scholars as the fact that Aristophanes chose Socrates as an object of attack, regardless of the relative mildness of the attack. There is really no problem here. Socrates was a well known and controversial figure, who never avoided an argument with anyone. Furthermore, he was an Athenian citizen and Aristophanes probably felt that no other character could better guarantee success for his play. However, it would seem unnatural to assume that Aristophanes was personally opposed to Socrates' brand of education. All evidence points to the contrary.

Aristophanes' labelling of Socrates as a sophist is quite understandable. Long after Socrates' death, when his character had been better studied and appreciated, Aeschines

1. Ehrenberg, op.cit., p.37.

called him a sophist and, even later, Cato spoke of him as the corruptor of youth.¹ "When we remember, in the case of Cleon, the furious invectives which Aristophanes employed, we shall hardly be inclined to think his attack upon Socrates as personally malevolent."² Bearing in mind also the nature of comedy itself, we feel that Socrates and Aristophanes remained friends after the performance of the Clouds.³ Rogers agrees that Socrates did not take the Clouds seriously, but he claims that Plato resented the caricature.⁴ Yet how could Plato have given Aristophanes such a favorable place in his Symposium, if this is true.⁵ He admired the genius of Aristophanes and we are told that Aristophanes' works were found in his bed when he died.⁶

b) Euripides

Just as Socrates was the most profound of the new

1. Merry, ed. Clouds, p.viii.

2. Ibid., p.viii.

3. Cf. Hewitt, Joseph William, "Elements of Humor in the Satire of Aristophanes," The Classical Journal, vol.VIII, April 1913, p.294, where he distinguishes between ridicule and scorn. Cf. also Couat, op.cit., p.311.

4. Rogers, ed. Clouds, pp.xxiii-xvi.

5. Rogers, ed. Thesm., p.xxii; Jaeger, Paideia, vol.I, p.368.

6. Rogers, ed. Clouds, p.xxiv; see Apology. Murray (Aristophanes, p.98) says: "The charges quoted in the Apology as so damaging to Socrates are not grave charges. To sail aloft in a basket in order to observe the sun is not a crime; to study the things above us (τὰ μετέωρα) and to discover those beneath the earth is, in reasonable eyes, rather a credit than the reverse."

teachers, so was Euripides the most important writer of new tragedy, and that is why he becomes another leading character in Aristophanes' plays. There is no doubt that Aristophanes was very familiar with Euripides. He quotes or parodies him frequently in his plays.¹ Apart from the Frogs and the Thesmophorizusae in which of course Euripides is one of the central characters, practically every other extant play contains some reference to Euripides -- his mother, his characters, his subtleties, his attitude to women.² Aristophanes says that in the Wasps "Euripides does not get loaded with contumely."³ Of course, this is simply meant to impress the audience with the superiority of his comedy over the comedies of other poets. Later, in the Frogs, Aristophanes does even more. Far from loading Euripides with contumely, he presents a good case not only for Aeschylus but for Euripides as well. But since Euripides is defeated by Aeschylus in the comedy, many have attempted to explain Aristophanes' supposed antipathy to Euripides. One says that Aristophanes was prejudiced, that he had always been an enemy of Euripides and was deliberately unfair,⁴ and that such attacks may in part have caused Agathon and Euripides to leave

1. Knights 813ff. and Plutus 601 (Telephus); the whole first scene of the Peace and much of the language is parodied from Bellerophon; Birds 1244-45 (Alcestis); Thesm. 275-76 (Hippolytus).

2. Ach. 393-489; Knights 17ff; Clouds 1371-72; Wasps 1414; Peace 146-48, 532-34; Lys. 283, 368-69.

3. Wasps 61.

4. Harsh, A Handbook of Classical Drama, pp. 305-06.

Athens and go to Macedonia.¹ Norwood feels that the intellectual and artistic influence of which Euripides was the most distinguished exponent, ruined the Athenian spirit.²

Most writers seem to feel that Euripides is defeated on moral grounds, that on literary grounds he is the equal of Aeschylus. They feel that Aeschylus wins because he was the great representative of the good old days of Marathon, and that it is almost as though the state of Athenian affairs in 405 could be blamed on Euripides.³ Ehrenberg says that the education Aristophanes desires "is not that of a cultured governing class, based on politics and fundamentally intellectual, but the education of a politically-minded people, still based on politics, but fundamentally moral."⁴ On this basis, he feels Aeschylus had to win, because he had not made education an end in itself, as did the sophists.⁵

But does the play really leave with us the impression that Aeschylus won, or that Aristophanes really attacked Euripides?

"It is wholly wide of the mark to speak of him as having attacked Euripides;...he is never accused of pederasty or of cowardice, of venality or of sycophancy..."

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1. Ibid., p.297, where he speaks of the Thesmophoriazusae.
 2. Norwood, op.cit., p.261. Cf. Lord, Aristophanes, p.88.
 3. Croiset, Aristophanes and the Political Parties at Athens, pp.151ff; Murray, Aristophanes, p.134. See Frogs 1013ff..
 4. Ehrenberg, op.cit., p.49.
 5. Ibid., p.49.

we must remember that [Dionysus] has no easy time choosing Aeschylus..."¹

We must remember also that even at the time of the Acharnians, Aristophanes was called a "Euripidaristophanizer."² Why then does Aristophanes appear to attack Euripides? The simplest explanation is probably that Aristophanes was jealous of Euripides' popularity; by attacking Euripides, he attracted attention to himself. In any case, Aeschylus does not really refute Euripides in the Frogs; he is good only at attacking and leaves with us the impression that he makes no reply simply because he has none to make. He is going up to earth, but we may be sure that he will convert no one.³

In their opposition to the democracy, Euripides and Socrates seem to have held political opinions almost identical with Aristophanes' own;⁴ for we have seen that there was much in the Athenian democracy with which Aristophanes found fault. Yet Aeschylus too was not on good terms with the Athenians.⁵ Perhaps his victory was a concession to the respect

1. O'Neill, The Complete Greek Drama, vol.II, p.918. It is perhaps worthy of note that Merry thinks the character of Dionysus represents the political spirit and literary tastes of the thoughtless citizens of Athens (Merry, ed. Frogs, p.7).

2. Cratinus, fragment 307.

3. Couat, op.cit., pp.337-353.

4. Neil, ed. Knights, p.v. Cf.also Frogs 952, and Merry ad loc.

5. Frogs 807 and Merry ad loc. See also Harman, The Birds of Aristophanes, p.44.

people felt for his great poetry.¹ This and other qualities of his are often mentioned by Aristophanes, whether seriously or in fun.² As a matter of fact, it has been said that Aristophanes was first and foremost a poet, a revolutionary in his métier; that his politics do not matter.³ And it is true that Aristophanes mentions very many poets in his comedies. But we have already seen that Aristophanes was deeply concerned with the new education, which was intimately connected with politics. Aeschylus speaks for the old education which made men good warriors.⁴ But Aristophanes wanted no war. There were other means of attaining perfection than through sheer physical prowess coupled with majestic sentiments.⁵ And besides, Pericles had insisted that enlightenment did not dull Athenian courage or stifle Athenian competency for efficient action.⁶

I am convinced that Aristophanes was not opposed to the new education. He may have attacked orators, for example, and criticized oratory but, in spite of this, he can be described as "a student and, in some degree, a contributor to the art of

1. Usually only exclusively new compositions were produced at the dramatic festivals, but Aeschylus' plays were produced after his death and he won several posthumous victories.

2. Ach. 10-12; Clouds 1365-66; Birds 807-08; Lys. 188-89; Thesm. 134ff; Frogs 868.

3. Gomme, article "Aristophanes and Politics", p.109. Cf. Murray, Aristophanes, p.106.

4. Frogs 1021-22.

5. Frogs 1056ff!

6. Thucydides II.40, cited by Harsh, op.cit., p.303.

rhetoric."¹ What Aristophanes was really opposed to was the sordid scramble of politicians, many of whom were educated, but who used this education to exploit the people to their own advantage. Perhaps this also explains what little sympathy Aristophanes felt for the uneducated rustics who became the dupes of such politicians. But Aristophanes also shows the real gap that existed between the educated and uneducated, particularly in the case of Strepsiades, who was married into the aristocracy. Similarly, the old aristocrats with their old education, with the old warrior spirit, are made to look rather old-fashioned and ridiculous, especially when we consider that they had the support of many of the simple-minded for whom progress was incomprehensible. They^{may} have been fascinated by novelties, but they nevertheless rejected the modern doctrines.² Their attitude is best summed up in the line of Chremylus in the Plutus: "You will not convince me, even if you do convince me."³

c) Religion

One more phase of the new education -- its relation to religion -- throws some light on Aristophanes' attitude to "the new". Here again we will find that, while some of the old superstitions are ridiculed, some of the novelties are attacked, because, in Aristophanes' opinion, they were often not much better.

1. Murphy, C.T., Harvard Studies in Classical Philology, vol.XLIX, 1938, pp.69ff., cited by Ehrenberg, The People of Aristophanes, p.289, note 2. Cf. also Quintilian, Institutio Oratoria X.1.65.

2. Ehrenberg, op.cit., p.210.

3. Plutus 600: οὐ γὰρ πείθεις, οὐδ' ἦν πείσῃς.

There was a growing dissatisfaction among the educated classes at Athens with the old pagan beliefs.¹ They were no doubt shocked at the great terror that seized the superstitious masses after the "Mutilation of the Hermae." Aristophanes makes a joke about the Mutilation in the Lysistrata.² Cleonymus, who proposed a reward for information concerning the Mutilation and who helped to inflame the fury of the mob, was attacked throughout Aristophanes' career, as we saw in a previous chapter. The defiling of Hecate's shrine by Cinesias is mentioned at least twice by Aristophanes,³ but in neither instance does Aristophanes seem to speak as one who is attacking impiety; he is simply making a jibe. The shrines of Hecate were objects of superstition that provoked the scorn of the intellectuals.⁴

Aristophanes also makes fun of superstition and oracle-mongering. In the Peace, there is a passage in which the oracle-monger Hierocles attempts to prove that peace is impossible, but he is finally driven off.⁵ Harsh suggests that this attack may have been made especially to combat the prediction that the war must last "thrice nine years".⁶

1. Harman, op.cit., p.95. Cf. Murray, op.cit., p.141.

2. Lys. 1093-94.

3. Frogs 366; Eccl. 329-30.

4. Murray, Aristophanes, p.160. See also Lys. 64.

5. Peace 1043-1126. Other soothsayers mentioned by Aristophanes are Diopithes (Knights 1085; Wasps 380; Birds 988) and Lampon (Birds 521, 988). In the Birds, an oracle-monger enters Nephelococyggia and is thrown out (Birds 959-991; cf. also Birds 593ff).

6. Harsh, A Handbook of Classical Drama, p.477, note 61.

Aristophanes seems to have been opposed to new cults, as well as to old superstitions. The Birds, especially, is directed partly against all the pomp of Greek mythology.¹ In one passage he speaks of barbarian gods who are starving because of a lack of markets.² However, Aristophanes does not appear to have been an atheist and he does make Socrates and Euripides look somewhat ridiculous when they call upon their new deities.³ Further, it is interesting to note that the very last words in the Clouds concerning Socrates and his disciples are: "...they have richly deserved their fate -- above all, by reason of their blasphemies."⁴ And Aristophanes does point out the "atheism" of Socrates.⁵ In the Thesmophoriazusae there is a passage which creates the impression that Aristophanes respected the traditional religion.⁶ One writer has expressed surprise at the disrespect Aristophanes displays towards Meton, the great astronomer and reformer of the calendar.⁷ But Aristophanes is simply making fun of the scientist and his gadgets.⁸ As for the new calendar, Aristophanes seems to express the sentiments of many when he points out in the Clouds that the religious festivals are not being kept at the regular time because of the

1. Cf. Merry, ed. Birds, p.19.

2. Birds 1520-24.

3. Clouds 264ff; Frogs 892-94.

4. Clouds 1508-09.

5. Clouds 830, 853.

6. Thesm. 295-371.

7. Murray, op.cit., p.143 -- Birds 992ff.

8. Note also that Meton had been opposed to the Sicilian expedition, which Aristophanes probably approved. At least, Aristophanes did not express any real opposition to it.

confusion in the calendar.¹

With respect to "the new", particularly in education, we might conclude that Aristophanes was not opposed to it as such, although he deplored the lack of intelligence frequently displayed in its application to existing conditions. No doubt he felt proud of a great Athenian past, but he did not feel that in his day Athens could recapture her former greatness by returning to her ancient principles and traditions. I am certain that he saw the possibility of applying modern ideas and thus achieving a new greatness for Athens. In this regard, Aristophanes could well be said to belong properly with the modern oligarchs who shared the same attitude to the new education.

5. Was Aristophanes Subservient to the Oligarchs?

But was Aristophanes subservient to these oligarchs? There is some external and internal evidence that might well be used to prove that he was. Couat goes to some pains to point out that the comic poets were in the pay of the aristocracy and that they were therefore required to follow the party line. He feels that this is the only way to explain what he has observed in the comedies of Aristophanes, namely that the popular representatives were constantly scoffed at, while the others were relatively spared or even praised.² He admits that comedy was the product of democracy, that Pericles may have been

1. Clouds 615-626; cf. Peace 406ff. and Merry ad loc.

2. Couat, Aristophane et l'Ancienne Comédie Attique, pp. 34-44.

the first to introduce it officially and try to use it for his own purposes, but that comedy nevertheless entered the service of the oligarchy.¹ Müller-Strübing also claims that Aristophanes was the literary organ of the oligarchs -- at least during the first and last part of his career.² To ask whether Aristophanes was a good patriot, he feels, is not enough, since in times like those of the Peloponnesian War a good patriot always appears as a good party man. Only born statesmen, he says, with a world of experience, will on the whole rise above party. Politicians generally, will not, a poet hardly, and a comic, political poet, whose business it is to be one-sided, will not try not to be. Then Müller-Strübing cites examples from modern history to illustrate his point.³ But he does think that Aristophanes was not a fanatic party man, a doctrinaire like Critias who devised theories for the overthrow of the democracy; that he was too young to understand the politics which influenced him.⁴ Couat seems to agree, but he points out that, although we know whom Aristophanes disliked, it is more difficult to say whom he admired. He says that in the Acharnians, Dicaeopolis is as objectionable as Lamachus, and that in the Knights, Cleon would be absolutely odious if the champion of the nobles, Agoracritus, were not more so.⁵

1. Ibid., p.22.

2. Müller-Strübing, Hermann, Aristophanes und die Historische Kritik, Polemische Studien zur Geschichte von Athen im fünften Jahrhundert vor Ch.G., Leipzig, Druck und Verlag von B.G. Teubner, 1873, p.105.

3. Ibid., pp.106-108.

4. Ibid., p.112.

5. Couat, op.cit., pp.120-21.

The points of view expressed above show how difficult it is to arrive at a definite conclusion about Aristophanes. For example, Croiset's conclusion about Agoracritus is that he was not worse than Cleon, but that he had to be if Aristophanes was following the oligarchic doctrine, -- which stated that the democracy could not be reformed, that it was destined by its very nature to carry its principles to extremes. Therefore, Croiset thinks, Aristophanes did not adopt the ideas of the oligarchs.¹ As for Dicaeopolis, we have already seen why he is ridiculed -- because of his old-fashioned ways and his ignorance.

Perhaps the Chorus of Knights in the Knights is cited most frequently as evidence for Aristophanes' oligarchic leanings. But even here there is room for differences of opinion. Couat seems convinced that the praise of the Knights for their insignificant feat at Corinth under Nicias, in view of the belittling of Cleon's real achievement at Pylos, is a clear indication of Aristophanes' oligarchic leanings.² But Ehrenberg says the chorus were not oligarchs, and that they were merely hostile to Cleon, as was Aristophanes.³

Aristophanes' opposition to the law-courts might also be taken as an indication of oligarchic leanings. In oligarchies, speakers in trials were kept to the subject and

1. Croiset, Aristophanes and the Political Parties at Athens, pp.77-86.

2. Couat, op.cit., p.88 -- see Knights 565ff.

3. Ehrenberg, The People of Aristophanes, pp.36-37; see Knights 510. Cf. Croiset, op.cit., pp.72-76.

were not allowed to work on the emotions of the judges.¹ We have seen how Aristophanes felt about this practice. And, as far as the courts themselves are concerned, they were really bad. Merry says: "After making every allowance for the exaggerations of the comic stage, one can but feel surprise that the work done by these Courts was not worse done than it actually was."² Little wonder then that one of the earliest acts in both oligarchic revolutions at Athens was the suspension of the popular jury courts.³

The tyranny of the democracy over the subject islands was another sore point with the oligarchs. They must have discussed the Mytilenean question quite thoroughly. Under Cleon, even the expression of regret disappeared, and the tyranny was openly admitted.⁴ Again, Aristophanes' attitude could be put down to party motives. We might say that when he fights against the oppression of the allies, Aristophanes is fighting for the oligarchies in the allied cities, especially since Cleon did not really have a bad name among the allies. The troops he took to Sphacteria were not Athenians.⁵

Finally, we have noted Aristophanes constant opposition to war, and his longing for peace. Couat says that it is an expression of popular sentiment and at the same time of the

1. Whibley, Greek Oligarchies, p.175.

2. Merry, ed. Wasps, p.xi.

3. Whibley, op.cit., p.175.

4. Neil, ed. Knights, p.xi.

5. Müller-Strübing, op.cit., pp.179-81.

cowardice and egoism of the oligarchic party.¹ Müller-Strübing calls it "peace-mongering" to the detriment of Athens and the advantage of Sparta. He says that a peace in which Sparta would not be preponderant, was approaching, thanks to Cleon, but that this was sad for the oligarchs and Aristophanes. Call Aristophanes patriotic, he says, when he is sorry to see his country foreseeing victory in a life and death struggle, but people generally have not considered this sort of patriotism genuine.² Such a view is hardly tenable. Aristophanes does not laugh about peace as he does about other things.³ And, as we shall see, he was not willing to make humiliating concessions; rather, he had definite long-range objectives in mind. Perhaps one of his greatest objections to war was its cost; for we saw how he sympathized with the rich people who were being taxed more and more heavily. Apparently it was considered a strong punishment to be listed as a rich man.⁴ Archeptolemus, who was a peace partisan and later an oligarch, is described as melting into tears at the sight of Cleon, who dares to milk the purses of the opulent aliens.⁵ It is important to remember that the wealthy aliens suffered as much as the wealthy oligarchs. Therefore Aristophanes is not necessarily speaking for the oligarchy when he sympathizes with the

1. Couat, op.cit., pp.102, 383.

2. Müller-Strübing, op.cit., pp.109-11.

3. Murray, Aristophanes, p.x. Cf. Ehrenberg, op.cit., p.221.

4. Knights 925-26 and 912ff.

5. Knights 326-27; see also 794-95.

rich.¹ Müller-Strübing has argued that in the Wasps,² Aristophanes' calculations in connection with state revenues are designed as a protest against the εἰσφορά, the war-time property-tax. He says that Aristophanes is in favor of raising the tribute, since the allies are bribing the Athenian leaders in order to avoid the higher payments which they realize they could well be ordered to pay.³ But the tribute had already been raised from Pericles' 600 to Cleon's 12-1300 talents.⁴ Aristophanes is primarily concerned with the misuse of funds. The funds amassed under the Aristeidian assessment were gone.⁵ As a matter of interest, Aristophanes does not always appear to sympathize with the rich. In the Acharnians, Dicaeopolis speaks of the aristocrats who are being avoided because of their unpaid debts and who nevertheless get paid appointments.⁶ In the Frogs, Aeschylus speaks of the evading of state taxes by the rich.⁷ But we must remember who the speakers were in these instances. Perhaps Aristophanes is merely reminding the rich of their responsibilities; there is a time for action as well as a time for complaint.

1. Cf. Ehrenberg, op.cit., p.226, and Couat, op.cit., p.91.

2. Wasps 698-712.

3. Müller-Strübing, op.cit., pp.172-73. To explain Aristophanes' defense of the allies, he says that it was a defense of the oligarchies in the various cities (see above).

4. Couat, op.cit., p.93.

5. Lys. 653-55 and Rogers ad loc. Cf. Hugill, Panhellenism in Aristophanes, p.95.

6. Ach. 614-17.

7. Frogs 1065-66.

The foregoing paragraphs suggest that we have not yet been able to discover exactly where Aristophanes stood with respect to the oligarchs and others. The only method that has any hope of success now is to treat Aristophanes as an independent, free of all party affiliation. For we have already shown that party affiliation was not necessary. Furthermore, it has never been proven that there were any organized political parties, as such, at Athens in the time of Aristophanes.

6. Aristophanes' Method of Attack.

As a comic poet, Aristophanes certainly appreciated the possibilities for attacking his enemies through the medium of laughter. He knew that laughter is man's greatest and most neglected weapon.¹ He had a great capacity for introspective humor, and for irony, an irony which contrasts men and beasts, only to find man the lower animal.² And yet there is in Aristophanes a "quality akin to tears." "The lacrimae rerum are never far from his thoughts and the laugh of the jester often ends in a choking sob."³ As a true student of human nature, Aristophanes was able to drive home his points despite the seeming grotesqueness of the plays themselves. Rosamund Gilder in a review of a revival of the Lysistrata on Broadway, says:

"In presenting Aristophanes' Lysistrata, James Light

1. Lord, Aristophanes, p.174. Cf. Croiset, op.cit., p.xv.

2. Hewitt, article "Elements of Humor in the Satire of Aristophanes", p.295. See Birds 685ff. Cf. Couat, op.cit., p.386.

3. Lord, op.cit., pp.71-72.

as director...struck on a happy idea. The making and keeping of peace is a vital subject today as it has been for these last two or three thousand years. It is good to attack the enemy from all sides -- by laughter as well as tears, by satire as well as argument. Lysistrata, for all its centuries of life, is young with the perennial youth of the world's major obsession. Aristophanes had the right idea: pit two such motives as sex and greed against each other and sex will win."¹

To say that Aristophanes did not support or oppose any definite policy, that he merely held up the mirror to the nation and to its leaders, almost without hoping to change them, or that Aristophanes as a dramatist must convince, be sympathetic to both sides,² is not really true.³ It is true that Aristophanes' plays present a good picture of Athenian life -- as such they were supposedly sent to Dionysius of Syracuse by Plato -- but they also contain the sentiments of their author. We may find apparent inconsistencies, which have been explained in various ways. Gomme says every play is consistent in itself,⁴ while Harsh says that Aristophanes is sometimes playful, sometimes serious, and will say anything to raise a laugh.⁵ These explanations merely emphasize the failure of many to comprehend the real thought of Aristophanes. The fact is that Aristophanes' views do not grow or develop from play to play as much as they vary in the emphasis with which they are set forth, according as he judges that the occasion is more or less suitable. He was greatly influenced by the fluctuating fortunes of the objects

1. Theatre Arts, vol. XXX, December 1946, p.697.

2. Jaeger, Paideia, vol.I, pp.364-65; and Gomme, article "Aristophanes and Politics," p.102.

3. Cf. Murray, op.cit., p.209.

4. Gomme, op.cit., p.102.

5. Harsh, A Handbook of Classical Drama, p.267.

of his criticism.¹ Thus Cleon is attacked most violently just after his exploit at Sphacteria. Norwood says that Aristophanes lost his temper and in his anger wrote a bad and stupid play.² Ehrenberg calls Aristophanes a demagogue in his fight against the deterioration of democracy brought about by demagogic leaders.³ Certain it is that Aristophanes felt it his duty to state his views and give his advice.⁴

We have had ample illustration of Aristophanes' fault-finding with the democracy. But we have not been able to prove that he was an oligarch. The fact that Cleon was very much opposed to the oligarchs,⁵ proves nothing about Aristophanes' affiliation with the oligarchy.

7. Aristophanes and Alcibiades

There remains, however, one outstanding peculiarity about Aristophanes' comedies which a number of scholars have observed, but which few have taken very seriously. This fact is the conspicuous absence of attacks on Alcibiades, who was certainly one of the most familiar figures at Athens and, because of his notorious career, a very suitable subject for caricature.⁶ But Aristophanes deliberately seems to avoid

1. Hugill, op.cit., pp.v,1.

2. Norwood, Greek Comedy, p.207.

3. Ehrenberg, The People of Aristophanes, p.260. Cf. Couat, Aristophane et l'Ancienne Comédie Attique, p.65.

4. Frogs 1009-10, 1054-56 and many other passages cited earlier.

5. Knights 876ff., 235ff., 361, and Neil ad loc.

6. Cf. Couat, op.cit., pp.178-79. It may be noted, however, that some scholars disagree, and insist that Alcibiades was not at all suitable for caricature.

attacking him. Müller-Strübing states that Aristophanes spared him and other young oligarchs because they were his friends and fellow party men. And he points out that Süvern had suggested there were hidden attacks which are not yet understood. But, as Müller-Strübing points out, it seems odd that these attacks should be so hidden that even the old commentators guessed nothing of them, while the attacks against the democrats strike the eye at once. Similarly with respect to the lost plays, he says it would be a strange chance that preserved the attacks against the democrats and lost those against the oligarchs.¹ We shall see that Aristophanes did not spare all the oligarchs; yet it must be of some significance that he spared Alcibiades.² Most likely Aristophanes and Alcibiades were personal friends. Alcibiades represented brilliantly the new education with all its spirit and lack of scruples, and I am sure Aristophanes admired him for it. To say that Aristophanes was really opposed to Alcibiades on moral grounds, but that he may have been secretly fascinated with him, is an argument that stems from a misunderstanding of Aristophanes and even of the Athenian character and temperament as a whole.³

There are few direct references to Alcibiades in Aristophanes. In a fragment from the Banqueters, he is mentioned with Lysistratus, and Thrasymachus the sophist.⁴ In the Acharnians he is mentioned in connection with orators in the courts.⁵ But

1. Müller-Strübing, Aristophanes und die Historische Kritik, pp.115-18.

2. Cf. Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, ed. Lys., p.47.

3. Cf. Couat, op.cit., pp.185-86.

4. Fragment 198.

5. Ach. 716; cf. Müller-Strübing, op.cit., pp.346-47, where he speaks of this passage as simply a passing jibe.

Alcibiades was then only twenty-five years of age and had not yet begun his political career. However, the absence of an attack becomes quite noticeable when we reach the Clouds. It has been suggested that Pheidippides represents Alcibiades.¹ Couat claims that this view is difficult to justify, and Croiset also disagrees with it.² On the other hand, Norwood claims that Alcibiades represents the Unjust Argument and Nicias the Just Argument.³ Then, in the Wasps, Aristophanes makes a harmless joke about Alcibiades' lisp.⁴ The only other direct reference to Alcibiades is in the Frogs, where Dionysus asks Aeschylus and Euripides for their advice concerning him.⁵ An outspoken play, Triphales, written in or soon after 411 was probably about Alcibiades, but it is difficult to say which side it took. Does "triphales" mean "thrice-debauched", or does it mean "thrice charged with vigor and blessing," asks Murray. He thinks it was the latter.⁶ Finally, concerning the Plutus, Jebb says:

"The first edition of the play had appeared in 408 B.C., being a symbolical representation of the fact that the victories won by Alcibiades in the Hellespont had brought back the god of wealth to the treasure-chamber of the Parthenon."⁷

1. Jebb, article "Aristophanes" in Encyclopaedia Britannica.

2. Couat, op.cit., p.179. Croiset, Aristophanes and the Political Parties at Athens, p.93, footnote 2: "Suvern's opinion (Ueber Aristophanes Wolken, p.33 et seq.), followed by Gilbert (Beiträge, p.218), that Pheidippides represents Alcibiades, ought, I think, to be entirely discarded, notwithstanding the reference contained in the second argument. There is no definite allusion to lend it the slightest semblance of probability."

3. Norwood, op.cit., p.216.

4. Wasps 44-46.

5. Frogs 1422-23.

6. Murray, Aristophanes, p.182.

7. Jebb, op.cit.

The foregoing remarks give an indication of how easy it will be to place Aristophanes alongside Alcibiades in politics. It may of course be argued that Aristophanes feared Alcibiades' revenge: Eupolis, who had attacked Alcibiades in his Baptae, is said to have been drowned by him.¹ But this hardly seems likely, in view of the violent attacks against Cleon which Aristophanes survived, thanks to the immunity enjoyed by comedy.

a) The Clouds

With respect to the Clouds, we have already seen on which side Aristophanes' sympathies lay. If the Just Argument represents Nicias, we have here an excellent picture of his conservatism. His fault was that he accepted the democracy and served it religiously, so that he was elected general thirteen times, in spite of the fact that he was opposed to the popular Cleon. Couat says that Nicias blundered at Pylos, since he was unable to effect the defeat of Cleon, and for this reason, he is attacked by Aristophanes.² In the Farmers, a lost play, Aristophanes represents him as buying his way out of office.³ In the Knights, he is timid and credulous, and he disappears upon the arrival of Cleon. Apparently it was considered something out of the ordinary for anyone to have seen Nicias, since he avoided the public eye.⁴ Certainly, Aristophanes could expect no help from him in his fight against Cleon. Nicias was also

1. Couat, op.cit., p.179.

2. Couat, Aristophane et l'Ancienne Comédie Attique, p.176.

3. Fragment 100; see Plutarch, Nicias 8.

4. Plutarch, Nicias 5.

superstitious. "In piety Alcibiades could not compete with Nicias, for he was as much in advance of the sober thinking of his times as Nicias was behind it."¹ The Unjust Argument certainly illustrates this well.

b) The Birds

The Birds, written after the recall of Alcibiades from the Sicilian expedition, has become the subject of much conjecture. The first² to elaborate a theory concerning the meaning of the play was Süvern, and subsequent writers have advanced theories just as elaborate or else not elaborate enough. According to Süvern,³ the play is a protest against the Sicilian expedition, conceived by Alcibiades with the intention of making himself despot of Athens and then of all Greece. Pisthetaerus is supposed to represent partly Alcibiades and partly the orator Gorgias, who had encouraged Athenian interference in Sicilian affairs. Euelpides, according to Süvern, is the typical Athenian, attracted by projects of conquest and gain, but he also represents Polus, a pupil of Gorgias. The Hoopoe with his crest, is Lamachus. The birds are the Athenians and the men who visit the new city are the minor Hellenic states. The gods are the Lacedaemonians and their allies, and the cutting off of supplies from Olympus by Nephelococcygia, represents a blockade of the Peloponnese by

1. Ferguson, The Cambridge Ancient History, vol.V, ch.X, pp.279-80.

2. I.e., after the chronological errors concerning the Birds had been corrected.

3. Ueber Aristophanes Vögel, cited by Murray, The Birds, pp.14-15.

an Athenian fleet. Merry feels that such minute parallelism is foreign to Aristophanes and further, that Aristophanes himself was influenced by the enthusiasm for the expedition.¹ He also points out that Meton and Socrates, who disapproved of the enterprise, were ridiculed by Aristophanes. As we have seen, Meton was also ridiculed for religious reasons. But Merry bases some of his objections on the assumption that Aristophanes was opposed to Alcibiades, and that this would have been an absurd occasion for an attack, though he does admit that Aristophanes had a profound admiration for the gifts of Alcibiades. There is really no reason to assume that Aristophanes was opposed to Alcibiades.

Harman has more recently elaborated his own theory.² According to him, Süvern's theory broke down on the identification of the gods with the Lacedaemonians. Harman identifies them with the sovereign democracy, while the men are the subject allies, and Tereus stands for the ancient regime at Athens. He claims that the audience did not understand this because it was not intended for them. The tribute (sacrifices) from the allies to the gods (the democracy) is now intercepted by the birds.³ The derision of Zeus, says Harman, is levelled at the democracy and not at the deity. He says also that Aristophanes is advocating a return to the constitution of Cleisthenes, with magistracies confined to citizens of higher assessment. To his

1. Merry, ed. Birds, pp.15ff. Cf. Knights 174 and Wasps 700. The jokes here concerning Carthage and Sardinia assume that the intervening Sicily has already been captured; see Müller-Strübing, op.cit., ad locos, pp.9-12.

2. Harman, The Birds of Aristophanes, pp.87-104.

3. Birds 518ff.

mind, a short passage in the Birds¹ is an allegory of the restoration to power of the better classes -- not the extreme oligarchs, but the better class of citizens generally.

Rogers also describes Süvern's theory, but he disagrees and proceeds to ridicule Süvern's method. He says that

"...the idea that the play 'is not what it seems' has proved so fascinating to the professional mind, that Professor after Professor has advanced some new theory which if satisfactory to its author has proved satisfactory to nobody else."²

It is true that some of these theories do attempt to explain too much.³ But it is wishful thinking to deny that Pisthetaerus represents Alcibiades. Rogers sounds somewhat sentimental when he insists that Pisthetaerus is very unlike Alcibiades, and when he protests Kennedy's application to Pisthetaerus of the epithet "dissolute."⁴ Why should Aristophanes not have been a close friend of the "dissolute" Alcibiades, and why should it not be possible for a good poet to produce a dissolute character, or, in fact, be dissolute himself? To prove how baseless, to his mind, is the identification of Pisthetaerus with Alcibiades, Rogers shows how Pisthetaerus could equally well be taken to represent Euripides,⁵ but his arguments are not convincing. The net result of the attempts to discredit Süvern's theory, is to make it the more attractive, since it can apparently only be

1. Birds 611-626.

2. Rogers, ed. Birds, pp. xv-xvii.

3. Cf. Harsh, A Handbook of Classical Drama, p.290, and Croiset, op.cit., pp.126-30.

4. Rogers, ed. Birds, p.xviii.

5. Rogers, ed. Birds, pp.xviii-xix.

discredited with arguments based on sentiment rather than on fact.

Assuming then that Pisthetaerus represents Alcibiades, the play may be interpreted as a defense of Alcibiades.¹ Even Rogers says:

"Aristophanes...gives a comic representation of the high schemes and ambitions which were in the air; not as encouraging them,...yet not as discouraging them, since even his fantastic adventure is crowned with a brilliant success."²

The reference to the "Salaminia"³ is an indication of the poet's sympathy for Alcibiades. And the marriage of Pisthetaerus and Basileia (the democracy) at the end of the play could well represent Aristophanes' desire to see Alcibiades back in the service of Athens.

c) The Lysistrata

The Lysistrata again hints at Aristophanes' feelings concerning Alcibiades. In one passage Lysistrata describes how the men would come to some new decision that was worse than ever. Then someone would be heard to ask: "Is there not a man around?" And the answer would be: "No indeed, there is not."⁴ Someone was desperately needed to shape policy.

"And so all eyes would turn to that remarkable young man who, whether acting for or against his country, had proved himself beyond all comparison the most brilliant and resourceful politician of his time. They recalled him, and made him dictator, and all went well. They distrusted him

1. Cf. Sheppard, Cambridge Ancient History, vol.V, ch.V, p.141.

2. Rogers, ed. Birds, p.xv.

3. Birds 145-147; cf.1204.

4. Lys. 517-524 -- 'οὐκ ἔστιν ἀνὴρ ἐν τῇ χώρᾳ,' 'μὰ Διὶ οὐδ' ὀφείλει,' <ἐὶφ> ἕτερός τις. (524).

and dispensed with his services, and Athens was ruined."¹

d) The Frogs

When Aristophanes wrote the Frogs, Alcibiades had again been exiled. Euripides and Sophocles had died recently and the recalling of a first-class poet in the Frogs might conceivably symbolize the need to recall a first-class leader, specifically Alcibiades.² Alcibiades becomes one of the key problems concerning which the advice of both Euripides and Aeschylus is sought. Dionysus says that the city both loves and hates him, but wants to have him. Aeschylus appears to favor his recall, while Euripides considers him a traitor.³ Since Aeschylus wins in the end, we may assume that Aristophanes favors Alcibiades' recall.⁴ But Euripides' judgment was a widely accepted one in Athens, and and requires some comment. I do not believe that Aristophanes

1. Rogers, ed. Lys., ad loc. Cf. Also Thucydides VI.15.

2. Cf. Harsh, op.cit., p.30.

3. Frogs 1422-1433.

4. In view of the fact that Aristophanes' sympathies are probably with Euripides in the Frogs, it may be considered odd to think of him as putting his views concerning Alcibiades into the mouth of Aeschylus. But, it must be noted that Alcibiades' recall was of much greater urgency than was the defense of Euripides' poetry, and if Aristophanes was letting Aeschylus win, as a concession to his popularity, then it would obviously be better to let Aeschylus state the author's views concerning the exile. As a matter of fact, Aeschylus is declared the winner shortly after he gives his decision concerning Alcibiades. -- In another passage of the Frogs (1152-1169), there is some quibbling between Aeschylus and Euripides concerning the difference between "returning" (ἤκειν) and "being restored" (κατελθεῖν) in connection with an exile. Dionysus is baffled; he does not understand!

himself thought of Alcibiades as a traitor, for, in the Birds, we hear Epops' claim that those who are foes by nature may be friends at heart, and that the wise can often profit by the lessons of a foe.¹ It is interesting to note that Alcibiades was at this time intriguing with the enemy. Another passage in the Birds speaks of the son of Pisias wanting to betray the gates of his city: "Let him become a partridge," says the chorus, "...Among us there is no shame in escaping as cleverly as a partridge."² The son of Pisias "...apparently had some project of granting an amnesty to persons condemned for treason -- a policy which Aristophanes himself favored later in the Frogs..."³

The entrance songs of the Frogs are modeled after the Eleusinian ritual.⁴ By this means, Aristophanes "...suggests the joys to be had if Alcibiades is again recalled and placed at the head of the Athenian forces."⁵ It reminds the Athenians that the armed protection the procession had enjoyed under Alcibiades in 407, was lacking in 406, and that they had therefore been forced to make the trip to Eleusis by boat, since the Spartans controlled the land.⁶

It was true that the Athenians could not dispense with the services of Alcibiades. And yet they continued to distrust him. Alcibiades was able to inflict great harm on the democracy,

1. Birds 371-75.

2. Birds 766-68.

3. Murray, The Birds, pp.180-81; see Frogs 688-705.

4. Frogs 316ff.

5. Harsh, op.cit., p.301.

6. Cf. Merry, ed. Frogs, p.6.

but he had also been the victim of its unreasoning vindictiveness. His first condemnation, in 415, was based on wild fears and superstitions. "Athens paid dearly for the decision; it is not too much to say that the disasters of the next five years were the direct consequence of it."¹ As Henderson put it: "If ever a democracy deserved ruin for its treatment of its own servants, Athens was that democracy."² Cicero, speaking of Thucydides' exile, remarked drily that it was a fate that usually happened to all the best men at Athens.³

e) Tyranny

Aristophanes probably would not have objected to a dictatorship under Alcibiades.⁴ The Athenians were very afraid of tyranny, perhaps because they had submitted to it so often. The position won by Pericles was open to any man of sufficient ability and popularity. Aristophanes combats the fear of tyranny which stemmed from distrust. The advice of Euripides -- to trust and use those who are now distrusted, and to mistrust and suspect those who are now trusted -- seems to be seriously meant. As is usual in such serious passages, Aristophanes introduces some grotesque lines to emphasize how complete he wants the reversal of Athenian policy to be. Euripides suggests that if Cleiocritus were winged with Cinesias (i.e. if the light man

1. Benson, E.F., The Life of Alcibiades, London, Ernest Benn Limited, 1928, p.158.

2. Henderson, The Great War Between Athens and Sparta, p.275.

3. Cicero, De Oratore II.56, quoted by Henderson, op.cit., p.275.

4. Cf. Couat, Aristophane et l'Ancienne Comédie Attique, p.184, and Merry, ed. Birds, p.17.

served as wings to the heavy man), and the two were then wafted out over the sea, and engaged in a sea battle with vinegar cruets in their hands, sprinkling them in the eyes of the enemy, the city might be saved.¹ In other words, the Athenians are to do what they consider impossible, but which is the only course left to follow. Dionysus points out to Aeschylus that the city hates the good, but does not really take pleasure in the bad; she is simply forced to use them. Aeschylus sees no hope for a city that finds no profit in either the good or the bad.²

As far as the fear of tyranny was concerned, Aristophanes had already shown his attitude to this Athenian disease. For one thing, he was tired of the tale of Harmodius, the hero of the "anti-tyrannicals."³ And in the Wasps, Bdelycleon gives us his impressions:

"Everything is now tyranny with us, no matter what is concerned, whether it be large or small. Tyranny! I have not heard the word mentioned once in fifty years, and now it is more common than salt-fish; the word is even current on the market. If you are buying gurnards and don't want anchovies, the huckster next door, who is selling the latter, at once exclaims: 'That is the man whose kitchen savours of tyranny!' If you ask for onions to season your fish, the green-stuff woman winks one eye and asks: 'Ha, you ask for onions! are you seeking to tyrannize, or do you think Athens must pay you your seasonings as a tribute?'"⁴

Aristophanes might well ask: "Oh democracy! whither are you leading us?"⁵ -- There was no reason to fear Alcibiades.

1. Frogs 1437-1450; cf. Merry, ed. Frogs, ad.loc.

2. Frogs 1455-59. Cf. the scene with the parricide in the Birds (1337-1371), where it is shown that he may yet serve a useful purpose if he fights as a soldier. (See Murray, Aristophanes, p.151).

3. Ach. 980, 1093; Knights 786; Wasps 1225; cf. Harman, The Birds of Aristophanes, p.13.

4. Wasps 488-499; see also Lys. 619ff.

5. Birds 1570.

f) The navy and citizenship

It has been said that the name Pisthetaeros contains a possible reference to the oligarchic clubs (ἐταλρείαι).¹ That Alcibiades had dealings with the oligarchs, is certainly true. But he used all parties in the best interests of the state, *at least, whenever he was able to make his services acceptable to the state.* Someone has suggested that the oligarch who wrote The Constitution of the Athenians was Alcibiades; his sudden change from one extreme to the other would then explain the double tendency of the treatise.² The proof of this does not concern us here, but it is of interest that the treatise places considerable importance on the navy. The writer even thinks that its necessity to the state provides a good reason to give the power to the people. He also discusses the advantages of a command of the sea, as apposed to land-power.³ The navy was certainly anything but oligarchic in composition, but with the decline in the importance of the hoplites, "...even the noble-men, although either they or their ancestors had most probably fought as knights, now boasted of their naval activities; after all, Kimon had given the most outstanding example."⁴ Alcibiades for one found good support in the navy, whether he worked for the oligarchy or the democracy, especially during the intrigues at Samos.

"In the conduct of the sailor rabble throughout this terrible crisis -- their ready response to prudent and patriotic leadership, capacity for quick self-reorganization, determination to live up to their most heroic tradi-

1. Merry, ed. Birds, p.16.

2. Helbig, W., Alkibiades als Schriftsteller, cited by Frisch, The Constitution of the Athenians, p.104.

3. The Constitution of the Athenians I.2; II.2-13.

4. Ehrenberg, The People of Aristophanes, p.214.

tions -- Athenian democracy was commended by its works."¹ But without Alcibiades' patriotic leadership and brilliant control of all factions, even they might well have given way to the tensions of the moment. For many at Athens wondered on which of the generals at Samos they could rely.² As it was, Alcibiades was able to rise above party intrigue and secure the government of the Five Thousand, the best constitution, according to Thucydides, that Athens had ever enjoyed.³

Yet this government contained what some thought to be a major flaw: it disfranchised the element on which the maintenance of the empire depended. Aristophanes was quick to point this out. In the Frogs, Aristophanes argues that if the slaves who fought at Arginusae were set free because of their help, then all who fight in the navy should be rewarded for their efforts.⁴ But this does not mean that Aristophanes was thinking of "empire" citizenship.⁵ What Aristophanes really seems to criticize is the sudden foolish indulgence to slaves that grew up during the Peloponnesian War. Xanthias in the Frogs is an overly arrogant slave.⁶

1. Ferguson, The Cambridge Ancient History, vol.V, ch.XI, p.333.

2. Lys. 313, and Rogers ad loc.

3. Rogers, ed. Lys., p.xviii.

4. Frogs 693-702.

5. Cf. Wilamowitz-Moellendorf. ed. Lys., p.52, and Huggill, Panhellenism in Aristophanes, pp.76-78. See also Ach. 507-508.

6. Cf. Merry, ed. Frogs, p.7; see also Frogs 33-34, 190-92, and cf. Clouds 7.

Whether Aristophanes is intent on granting citizenship to all who fought in the navy¹ is not as important as his insistence on the importance of the navy as such. To maintain the the navy, both money and material were urgently needed.² That is why Aristophanes felt that the rich should be given privileges according as they bore the cost of the war. In this respect, the government of the Five Thousand was an equitable arrangement, for it restricted citizenship to the wealthiest of the Athenians. Thus, when Aristophanes speaks out against the treatment of the various strata of Athenian society, he is not necessarily advocating citizenship for them, but rather a better appreciation of their usefulness to the state, and a consequent change in attitude towards them.³ As far as citizenship itself was concerned, the Athenians were a proud people and both democrats and oligarchs were opposed to the extension of the franchise.⁴ But the attitude of intelligent evaluation advocated by Aristophanes was favored on the whole by the cultivated classes, as opposed to Cleophon and his like.

If Alcibiades' plans concerning Sicily had worked out,

1. The number of non-citizens in the Athenian navy during the war was brought to thirty thousand.

2. After the Sicilian disaster, the emergency reserve of a thousand talents was laid open for use. In the Lysistrata, the Spartan Lampito says the Athenians will not listen to reason as long as they have their ships and their treasure (Lys.173-74).

3. Frogs 718-737; Lys. 574-586. The better elements at Athens, including actual citizens, were really being ignored in favor of the baser.

4. For Aristophanes' references to aliens and others desiring Athenian citizenship, see Birds 11,764,1527 (Execestides); Birds 762 (Spintharus); Birds 31-32 (Sacas); Wasps 1221 (Acestor).

the timber that was needed for ships would have become available. As it was, the precious cash reserve of the Athenians had to be spent on procuring materials elsewhere. In the Lysistrata, the probulus needs money to buy timber for oars (κωπηὶς).¹ Andocides, during his enforced absence from Athens, acquired oar-spars for the armament at Samos. For this act he barely escaped with his life at the hands of the oligarchs, who accused him of supplying these items to the "enemy".² Small wonder that Aristophanes did not support the radical oligarchs any more than the radical democrats, since they were equally vindictive. Andocides was a striking example, for he was a victim of both.

g) Oligarchs.

In the Birds, Euelpides says he does not want a greater city than Athens, but rather a more pleasant city to live in. Asked whether he wants an aristocratic city, he says he holds the son of Scellias in horror.³ The son of Scellias was Aristocrates. Murray says that the disgust here expressed applies only to his name.⁴ Aristophanes did attack some of the oligarchs, but only, it seems, when they were enemies of Alcibiades, or when they were more concerned about themselves than about the welfare of Athens. Phrynichus was an enemy of Alcibiades and opposed his plans, saying that Alcibiades cared no more for the oligarchy than for the democracy. In the Frogs, Aristophanes asks that

1. Lys. 421-22, and Rogers ad loc.

2. Rogers, ed. Lys, pp.xv.xvi.

3. Birds 123-26.

4. Murray, The Birds, ad loc.

those who were misguided by Phrynichus he freed and permitted to rectify their former mistake by declaring the cause.¹ Phrynichus had foreseen, and Aristophanes would have agreed, that the allies did not prefer a tyranny of the oligarchy to that of a democracy; for under the democracy the law at least was there, even though it was badly observed.²

Theramenes, who had been a co-worker with Alcibiades in many of his political intrigues, is mentioned in only one of the extant plays of Aristophanes -- the Frogs. Here he is described as a clever and tricky individual who had sailed on many seas and who always knew the easiest way out. He had a happy instinct for self-preservation.³ Theramenes had pleaded for the prosecution at the trial of the eight generals after Arginusae and in helping to secure their execution, he prevented his own. Merry sees in one of Aristophanes' lines the possibility of a bitter allusion to the fact that Theramenes was "as near as any one else" to the struggling sailors at Arginusae and though he did not help them, he saved himself.⁴ It is, of course, quite possible that among the generals who were executed, were some friends of Alcibiades. Certainly two of them, Diomedon and Thrasyllus had done much for the democracy. It is also possible that Aristophanes was sorry for these lines later, for Theramenes did stand up for his principles shortly afterwards in opposition to the Thirty,

1. Frogs 689-691.

2. Couat, Aristophane et l'Ancienne Comédie Attique, p.116.

3. Frogs 534-541, 967-970.

4. Merry, ed. Frogs, ad 969 -- ὅς ἦν... πλεονέκτης παραστή.

and was executed by them. Where Alcibiades had the genius to use any and all parties to procure results, Theramenes believed too much in attaining his ends through quiet, legal means, and thus became the victim of his own lack of imagination.

In the Frogs, Aristophanes also mentions Adeimantus, another friend of Alcibiades. With several others, including Cleophon, he is to be sent to Hades.¹ But Aristophanes mentions no fault of his. Henderson says: "Aristophanes, before the disaster, consigns Adeimantus to Hades, but there is not a syllable in the poet's lines to justify Rogers' version -- 'the vilest rascal in all the town.'"²

h) Panhellenism

One more aspect of Aristophanes' relations with Alcibiades is important in that it throws some light on the much discussed elements of panhellenism in Aristophanes. According to Thucydides, Alcibiades made the following statements to the Lacedaemonians:

"We sailed to Sicily for the purpose of subduing, if we could, first the Sicilian, and then the Italian Greeks; and next we intended to make an attempt upon the Carthaginians and their empire. And if we succeeded in these designs or the bulk of them, we contemplated attacking the Peloponnese, collecting for that purpose the entire Hellenic force which we should have acquired from those quarters, enlisting many barbarians, Iberians and others, belonging to the most warlike tribes, and building numerous triremes in addition to what we already have, Italy supplying us with abundance of ship-timber; and with these, encircling and blockading the Peloponnese, and at the same time assailing it with our troops, we expected to subdue it without difficulty, and so become lords of the whole Hellenic world..."³

1. Frogs 1513-14.

2. Henderson, The Great War Between Athens and Sparta, p.481, footnote 2.

3. Thucydides VI.90, quoted by Rogers, ed. Birds, p.xiii.

This speech lends some credibility to Süvern's theory about the Birds, which we have already discussed. But it also makes us wonder if Aristophanes' panhellenic sentiments did not stem from this source too. In other words, if we can prove that Aristophanes was not really interested in a permanent truce with Sparta, we will have shown that his panhellenism is not the genuine product many writers think it is.

The Sicilian disaster was a serious blow to everyone, since it represented not only a deep humiliation for Athens, but also a heavy loss of lives. In the Lysistrata, written shortly after the disaster, when Lysistrata speaks of the warrior sons the women bear, the magistrate tells her not to remind^{him} of old injuries.¹ Yet, while the demagogue Demostratus is ridiculed for his part in promoting the Sicilian expedition,² Alcibiades is left untouched. In fact, Aristophanes probably wants him recalled, since he is the only man who can perhaps still turn defeat into victory. For if he had been given the opportunity and if he had been successful, his policy would have led to the final defeat of Sparta, because she was dependent on food imports from Sicily and Italy. As matters stood, however, Athens was desperately short of money, manpower, and materials. What else could the sensible Aristophanes have suggested but a temporary truce which would give Athens a breathing spell in which she could regather her strength. Nowhere in the play is there really a suggestion of a permanent truce. The Spartan Lampito appears

1. Lys. 589-590. Cf. Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, ed. Lys., ad loc., and Ehrenberg, op.cit., pp.220-21.

2. Lys. 391-97.

to be gullible, and is the first to agree to Lysistrata's plan.¹ In her Spartan ways, she appears somewhat ridiculous. In any case, she actually plays a minor role. The idea seems to be to obtain a truce; and the plot, the choice of protagonist, and the appeal to sentiment are all designed to that end. To convince the Spartans, Lysistrata points out that the Spartans and Athenians have ceremonies in common, and that Cimon came to the aid of Sparta when she had difficulties with the Messenians.² And the Athenians are reminded of Spartan aid in the days of the tyrant Hippias.³ Finally, in the merry-making at the end of the play, there is an exchange of Athenian and Spartan songs, praising the exploits of both cities. And that is all. When it comes to the actual terms of the treaty, there is the usual bickering over individual places. Sparta wants Pylos, and Athens wants Echinus, the Maliac Gulf, and Megara.⁴ Furthermore, before the arrival of Lampito, Lysistrata tells the women that their country's fortunes depend on them -- that it is with them to undo utterly the Peloponnesians.⁵ Thus she puts into better perspective the line she has just spoken, namely that the salvation of all Greece (ὅλης τῆς Ἑλλάδος) depends on the women.⁶

The panhellenism which so many have seen in the Lysis-

1. Lys. 142-44.
2. Lys. 1129-1132, 1137-1146.
3. Lys. 1149-1156.
4. Lys. 1162-1170. These names are also obscene puns in Greek.
5. Lys. 32-33.
6. Lys. 29-30; cf. 41, 525.

trata has been seen also in the Peace.¹ But here again, it is never really suggested that Athens and Sparta can be genuine friends. It seems that the panhellenism of Aristophanes has been over-emphasized. Hugill says that Aristophanes' political principle is not a woman's sentimental theory, but a tradition, since Cimon had been popular at Athens and at the same time friendly with Sparta.² But he fails to mention that Cimon's countrymen ostracized him as a "philo-Laconian." Further, he feels that, where Aristophanes appears to compromise with his principles, he is simply showing that he is a realist as well as an idealist, and that dualism -- the recognition by Sparta of Athens' naval hegemony, and the recognition by Athens of Sparta's power on the mainland -- serves the end of panhellenism.³ This is the sort of wishful thinking that supposedly proves the genuine character of Aristophanes' panhellenism. In the Frogs, Aeschylus advises Athens to consider the land of the enemy her own, and her own the enemy's, and to count her ships her treasure, and her treasure her poverty.⁴ According to Gomme, Hugill sees here pure panhellenism:

"...if Aristophanes is urging, at a desperate crisis in their affairs, a positive policy for his countrymen, what is the value of advice so cursory -- it is but three lines and is at once forgotten -- and so obscure that it was left to two professors of the twentieth century to discover its meaning?"⁵

1. Peace 58-63, 93, 105-106, 204-220, 242-250, 296ff, 435-36, 993-98. See Murray, Aristophanes, pp. 59-60; Ehrenberg, The People of Aristophanes, p. 42; Hugill, Panhellenism in Aristophanes, pp. v, 12; and Rogers, ed. Peace, pp. xxi, xxxv.

2. Hugill, op. cit., pp. 25-26.

3. Ibid., pp. 34-35.

4. Frogs 1463-65.

5. Gomme, article "Aristophanes and Politics", p. 101.

As far as the Lysistrata is concerned, I think we may safely say that Aristophanes is primarily concerned about internal unity, and possibly also with the eventual recall of Alcibiades. The choice of a woman protagonist at once keeps him clear of party entanglements; and these were certainly prominent at this time. But genuine panhellenism is absent. The panhellenism we have here is merely a means to an end -- to secure peace as quickly as possible.¹ The panhellenism of Alcibiades was a very concrete thing. At the Olympics of 416, he had acted like the "lord of Hellas." He, in his way, through ambition and energy, had magnified for Athens the triumphs of peace.² And under his guidance, Athens could well have become the capital of a panhellenic empire.

If Aristophanes appears to be Hellenic and human, it is because he is intelligent. His own experience taught him that the war was senseless, not only because of the damage it caused, but also because of the unintelligent way in which it was being conducted. We have already seen that he saw the serious flaws in the financing of the war, and Athens' financial policies generally. The allies, on whom the Athenians depended for a large part of the war expenses, were being needlessly oppressed. In the early days of the Delian confederacy, the allies had at least enjoyed some autonomy and they willingly contributed money for a common defense against Persia. But now this original purpose of the League was being ignored by the Athenians.³

1. Cf. Ehrenberg, op.cit., p.220.

2. Ferguson, The Cambridge Ancient History, vol.V, ch.IX, p.280. Note the mention of the Olympics in Plutus 583-84.

3. See Wasps 1098-1101, and Lys. 1133-34.

It was little wonder that the allies revolted one by one, thus exposing all Greece to the threat of Persia. How was Athens ever to complete her defeat of Sparta while her empire was in such bad repair and the Spartans were courting Persian help? Since Aristophanes, as an Athenian, was certainly not in favor of giving up the empire, his common sense saw only one thing to do; and that was first of all to win back the allies by giving them more freedom and by treating them in a more kindly fashion.¹ We saw earlier that Aristophanes also favored unrestricted trade with the neighboring cities, including even those of the Peloponnese. But nowhere does Aristophanes really endorse a genuine reconciliation with Sparta. The lines in the Peace which speak of the sharing of empire by the signatories of the peace² can be taken simply as a jest. It is also conceivable that Aristophanes was trying to convince the Spartans of Athens' good intentions, for the Spartan envoys who were in Athens negotiating the Peace of Nicias may well have attended the performance of the play.

1. Peace 936, 1097-98; cf. 538-542. Cf. Croiset, Aristophanes and the Political Parties at Athens, p.142; Hugill, op. cit., pp.70-71.

2. Peace 1080-82.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

1. The Decline of Politics

After the death of Alcibiades and the defeat of Athens, Aristophanes seems little concerned about the day-to-day politics of Athens. There are some favorable references to Thrasybulus, the "hero of Phyle", who did much for the revival of Athens.¹ Aristophanes also seems to favor the alliance of various cities against Sparta;² he urges the Athenians to be friendly with the Corinthians and speaks favorably of the Argives.³ But external politics seemed to interest Aristophanes only as long as there were problems of internal politics as well. And with the restoration of the democracy, these problems were more or less solved. Economic questions now crowded out the political, and individualism took the place of the earlier public spirit. The rise of the middle class made new policies necessary, and Cleon, who rose from this class, was constantly guided by its demands. Thus began a process whereby "...the polites, the citizen as a political being, lost his political character."⁴ To keep up interest in political affairs, citizens were paid to sit as judges and later even to attend the meetings of the assembly. As soon

1. Eccl. 203,356; Plutus 1146, and Rogers ad loc.

2. Athens, Thebes, Corinth, Argos. The alliance brought about the defeat of Lysander, as we noted earlier.

3. Eccl. 193-202, and Rogers ad loc.

4. Ehrenberg, The People of Aristophanes, p.226.

as politics became a paid profession, public life was opened to corruption. Aristophanes was certainly opposed to pay for public office, as we have seen, and though he may have regretted the loss of the former ideal of disinterested service by those who could afford it, he deplored even more the widespread corruption in Athenian politics. In the Ecclesiazusae, Praxagora says:

"My country is as dear to me as it is to you, and I groan, I am grieved at all that is happening in it. Scarcely one in ten of those who rule it is honest, and all the others are bad. If you appoint fresh chiefs, they will do still worse. It is hard to correct your peevish humour; you fear those who love you and throw yourselves at the feet of those who betray you. There was a time when we had no assemblies, and then we all thought Agyrrhius a dishonest man; now they are established, he who gets money thinks everything is as it should be, and he who does not, declares all who sell their votes to be worthy of death."¹

The attitude expressed in the Plutus -- "any country where a man gets on well is his fatherland"² -- was spreading and gradually undermined the citizen's attachment to his state. "It could be said of the assembly no less than of the Persian king that it existed 'thanks only to money'."³

2. Aristophanes and Political Philosophy -- a) Utopias

The decline in true politics and in honesty drove many philosophers to the study of ideals. Aristophanes' utopias

1. Eccl. 173-188; cf. Plutus 35-38, 329-330, 567-570. Agyrrhius had been able to carry a decree not long before the production of the Ecclesiazusae, fixing the pay for attending assembly meetings (τὸ ἐκκλησιαστικόν) at three obols, like the dicast's pay (τὸ δικαστικόν).

2. Plutus 1151.

3. Ehrenberg, op.cit., p.247; Plutus 170-171

in the Ecclesiazusae and the Plutus show that he too was influenced by this trend. Just as panhellenism has been found in plays preceding the Lysistrata, so have utopias been found in in plays preceding the Ecclesiazusae and the Plutus. Murray sees the first sign of the "utopia-tendency" in the regeneration of the Demos in the Knights, then in the Birds and the Lysistrata.¹ Ehrenberg claims that in the Birds, the victory of the unpolitical man is won; but he admits that like will stick to like, and the Athenian to politics, so that the achievement of non-political life is to be approached only by the path of true politics.² Harsh also sees elements of utopia in the Birds, but states that the play as a whole does not put forward any utopia.³ That "escape" was one of the characteristics of the age may well be true. There was a transition from purely political to social-economic thought, and thereby also to individualism. Aristophanes himself "...in spite of his patriotic zeal was fundamentally a representative of an individualistic materialism akin to the creed...of the sophists."⁴ As early as the Acharnians, he shows this in his support of free trade. But Aristophanes' guiding motive here was common sense rather than unpolitical thinking. He sincerely believed that such action would benefit the state by benefitting all its individuals.⁵ In any case, ideas of a utopia, whether political

1. Murray, Aristophanes, pp.138-39.

2. Ehrenberg, op.cit., pp.43-44.

3. Harsh, A Handbook of Classical Drama, p.289.

4. Ehrenberg, op.cit., p.255.

5. Cf. Ehrenberg, op.cit., p.33.

or social, need not concern us until we reach the Ecclesiazusae and the Plutus.

b) Aristophanes and Plato

The philosophic ideas expressed in the Ecclesiazusae are widely thought to come from Book V of Plato's Republic. Plato had foreseen that his theories were likely to attract ridicule, though he could not have anticipated the form which that ridicule would take.¹ Murray agrees that Aristophanes' ideas seem to be drawn from the Republic. But he points out that the Republic was not published until about twenty years later, though our conception of "publication" does not fit ancient conditions. Further, the ideas may have been in the air for some time.

"The subject is obscure and needs study; but one of the cardinal facts which any satisfactory theory must explain is this knowledge by Aristophanes of certain daring paradoxes of Platonic thought long before they appeared in their present form in Book V of the Republic."²

Both Rogers and Murray point out some of the similarities in the communistic schemes of Plato and Aristophanes. Praxagora uses Plato's key word -- community (κοινωνία).³ The land and all movable property are to be common, as in Plato, including the women.⁴ "How will each one know his children?" is a question

1. Rogers, ed. Eccl., p.xxiii.

2. Murray, op.cit., pp.186-87.

3. Eccl. 590.

4. Eccl. 597-98, 614.

asked also by Plato, and in each case the answer is the same.¹ As for slavery, it is not abolished in the Ecclesiazusae² any more than in the Republic, "where it is simply ignored except for the remark that a Greek should never be slave to a Greek."³ If Plato was referring to the Ecclesiazusae when he spoke of the ridicule his ideas would encounter, we may assume that Plato did not take it seriously, for not only does he make Aristophanes one of the guests at the Symposium, but he is also said to have been the author of an epigram saying that the Graces, when looking for a temple that would never fall, found the soul of Aristophanes.⁴

Wilamowitz-Moellendorf frowns on these attempts to see a connection between Aristophanes and Plato -- that Aristophanes is ridiculing Plato's ideas and that Plato twenty years later makes reference to the Ecclesiazusae in his Republic.⁵ And it is true that there are some striking dissimilarities between Aristophanes' and Plato's systems. The former applied to all the citizens for their own enjoyment, while the latter applied only to a special class for the purpose of enabling them

1. Eccl. 635-37; Murray, op.cit., p.188; Rogers, ed. Eccl., p.xxiv. Note also the use of the expression "Diomedean Necessity" in Eccl. 1029 (See Rogers ad loc.).

2. Eccl. 651.

3. Murray, op.cit., p.194, footnote 1.

4. Murray, op.cit., pp.188-89 and footnote:

Αἱ χάριτες, τέμενός τι λαβεῖν ὅπερ οὐχὶ πέβηται
ῥητοῦσαι, ψυχὴν γούρον Ἀριστοφάνους.

5. Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, ed. Lys., appendix Eccl., p.204, footnote 1.

to fulfil more efficiently their special duties towards the state. Furthermore, the "free love" advocated by Praxagora is one of universal licence, unlike that of the Republic.¹ Croiset also feels that the connection between Aristophanes and Plato is not really confirmed by the play itself.

"There is not the slightest allusion to a philosopher whom he might have intended to ridicule -- very surprising discretion on the part of a man who did not shrink from using proper names. And then these ideas themselves have not a shade of philosophy in them...[Praxagora's] ideas hardly go beyond food and drink -- a conception as simple as it is material...The entire social fabric practically rests upon the good will of the slaves and the supposed self-denial of the women...[The play] is a fairly incoherent poetical structure, which we must beware of taking for the work of a philosopher in disguise."²

It is really not possible to decide whether one or the other of these views is the correct one, but it is true that Aristophanes shows some grasp of the idea of communism, for in the last part of the Ecclesiazusae, he shows that the system breaks down as a result of ordinary self-interest, inequality, and the creation of ridiculous situations.³ It may be that the idea of women ruling the state, which seems to have been peculiar to Aristophanes among the comic writers,⁴ serves to emphasize the absurdity of the whole system, and consequently the manner in which the play was meant to be taken. In any case, Aristophanes makes enough scattered references to the character of the Athenians to convince us that he might well agree with Plato who said that the

1. Rogers, ed. Eccl., pp.xxvi- xxvii. Cf. Ehrenberg, op.cit., p.52.

2. Croiset, Aristophanes and the Political Parties at Athens, pp.172-77.

3. Cf. Couat, Aristophane et l'Ancienne Comédie Attique, pp.203-07.

4. Murray, op.cit., pp.165-66, footnote.

Athenians had become lazy, worthless, loquacious, and fond of money.¹ We may safely assume that Aristophanes and Plato were friends. As for Socrates, it is interesting to note that Aristophanes makes no mention of him or his friends after the Frogs. In the Lysistrata, the wife of Lycon, who was one of the accusers of Socrates, is called a murderess and is the first of those the chorus of men wish to burn at the stake.²

c) Wealth and poverty

In the Plutus, Aristophanes gives us a picture of another utopia -- one of universal wealth, but where wealth comes only to the good. We must be careful to distinguish between ancient and modern conceptions of wealth. Luxury, which is the mark of modern wealth, was not important to the wealthy of Athens. What was important to the Athenians was a life without work.³ Now the question is, how can money, which we have often seen associated by Aristophanes with dishonesty, produce happiness? Obviously the god of Wealth must be blind, so if his sight is restored, he will come only to the good and avoid the bad.⁴ Thus the crimes connected with money will disappear, and the misery of poverty will become the lot of the dishonest persons who have deserved it. But, although Chremylus seems right, since he takes Plutus home with him at the end of

1. Through the institution of pay for public offices by Pericles -- Gorgias 515E.

2. Lys. 269-270.

3. Cf. Couat, op.cit., pp.194,199.

4. Plutus 489-506.

the play, does he really prove that universal wealth means universal happiness? Happiness, after all, is of prime concern to the just man. Chremylus does not prove in practice that wealth will produce happiness, nor does he prove that poverty and misery are the same thing. Aristophanes no doubt ended the play as he did in order to satisfy the audience. But there are enough allusions to the evils, as well as the virtues of money to convince us that Aristophanes' real answer lies somewhere else. Although Poverty is driven out by Chremylus and Blepsidemus, they really see no serious objections in her argument. Universal wealth, she explains, would mean universal wretchedness, for someone would have to do the work. She says that she is like a severe mistress to the artisan, forcing him by need and poverty to find a way of earning a living. And she denies that poverty and misery are one. "The poor man," she says, "lives thriftily and is attentive to his work; he has not got too much, but he does not lack what he really needs." Finally, she claims to make men better.¹ "The Plutus, that apotheosis of wealth, ends in a panegyric of poverty."²

Aristophanes saw that the taxation of the rich, which was designed to enable all citizens to share political equality, was not successful. For the poor citizens believed that they needed even more money in order to be completely free of work. Aristophanes is simply showing that equality of wealth implies

1. Plutus 510-578; Cf. Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, ed. Lys., appendix Eccl., p.205, and Couat, op.cit., pp.211-12. Couat points out that Plato too distinguishes between poverty and misery (op.cit., pp.213-14).

2. Couat, op.cit., p.213.

equality of work. The aristocratic ideal would work only under the condition that only a few could share it. The rise of the middle classes, who worked for a living, raised labor from a position of contempt to one of necessity. The political citizen who had hitherto reigned supreme was more and more being governed by economic factors. Many failed to see this as clearly as did Aristophanes.¹

3. The Validity and Influence of Aristophanes' Views

The question of the validity of Aristophanes' criticisms has frequently been asked, as has the question of the veracity of his description of Athenian life and Athenian personalities. Regarding this question, Harsh says:

"Facts only too eloquently prove that Aristophanes was right in saying that Athens was being ruled by its worst elements and that these worst were scoundrels of the blackest sort...Perhaps no Greek or Roman state ever committed so many publicly deliberated atrocities as did the Athenians from 427 to 399 B.C. The history of Athens during the fifth century, like a tragedy of Aeschylus, is a fatal progression from prosperity (koros) to insolence (hybris) and finally to ruin (ate)."²

Speaking of the Birds, Murray says that Aristophanes no doubt had his prejudices but that it is worth noting that all the individuals he pillories in this play are condemned by subsequent history.³

It has also been said that Aristophanes probably saw more clearly than any contemporary (except Thucydides) that the Peloponnesian War was a senseless contest of annihilation.⁴ Rogers has made a

1. Cf. Ehrenberg, The People of Aristophanes, pp.238-39.

2. Harsh, A Handbook of Classical Drama, p.300.

3. Murray, The Birds, p.8.

4. Harsh, op.cit., p.265.

comparison of Aristophanes and Thucydides and has come to the conclusion that many statements of Thucydides in his history of the Peloponnesian War are due to his recollection of the comedies of Aristophanes. He also sees a

"...striking accord...between the light offhand touches of Aristophanes and the well-considered judgements of Thucydides;...not merely when they are treating of actual events, or estimating the conduct and character of individuals, but also when they are tracing the various dispositions and tendencies of the several Hellenic States."¹

This is somewhat exaggerated,² though it is noteworthy that history's estimate of Cleon, for example, has taken long to recover from the combined verdict of both Thucydides and Aristophanes.³

Cleon's case deserves study, for it shows just how little influence Aristophanes had on public opinion. Apparently the Athenians admired boldness both in comedians and in politicians, for they gave Aristophanes the first prize for his Knights and elected Cleon general three months later. We have seen how frequently Aristophanes reminds his audience of the gratitude he deserves for his counsels, but we cannot but wonder about his influence when we note the undiminished political primacy of Cleon from the death of Pericles to his own. Thus we must conclude that Athenian opinion was not formed by the comic stage,⁴ and consequently the belief that Socrates' death was hastened by Aristophanes' caricature in the Clouds, is really quite unfounded.⁵

1. Rogers, ed. Ach., pp.xxxi-xxxii, and ed. Peace, pp. xxii-xxiii.

2. Cf. Couat, op.cit., pp.170-71.

3. See Merry, ed. Knights, p.10; cf. Croiset, op.cit., p.xiii.

4. Norwood, Greek Comedy, p.218.

5. In any case, Socrates was not condemned to death until twenty-four years after the Clouds.

Aristophanes himself admits in the Wasps that it was beyond comedy to heal so old a disease of the city as the passion for serving on juries.¹ Yet Aristophanes' lament "...shows that tasks of this kind were thought to be the final aim, or at least one of the final aims, of the comic poets, even if their fulfilment was obviously beyond their power."²

Was Aristophanes then a failure? I do not think so, for though his influence in his day did not seem to be too powerful,³ his great insight must have commanded respect among the Athenians, as it does with us today. Let us not forget that Aristophanes won many prizes, and that the Frogs was so well liked that it was given a second performance, and its author was given a wreath made from Athena's sacred olive tree on the Acropolis. Aristophanes' insight was such that it permitted him to foresee the fates of several political leaders.⁴ Perhaps an indication of the respect in which Aristophanes' opinions were held at Athens, is the singular fact that he won first prize for

1. Wasps 650-51.

2. Ehrenberg, op.cit., p.23.

3. It may be noted that Aristophanes' Peace is thought to have helped bring about the Peace of Nicias. Thucydides specifies that the Peace of Nicias was concluded not only in the early spring of 421, but also immediately after the Great Dionysia. (Rogers, ed. Ach., p.xxxii; cf. Harsh, op.cit., p.266, and Lord, Aristophanes, pp.77-78). Lord thinks Euripides hardly ever won at tragedy, thanks to Aristophanes, and that after Aristophanes, he was preferred to Sophocles and Aeschylus. The sentiments expressed in the Lysistrata "...were largely instrumental in bringing about /Alcibiades/ triumphant return." (Rogers, ed. Lys., note on line 524). Actually, the whole question of Aristophanes' influence is too vague to permit of specific conclusions.

4. Lord, op.cit., p.76; Couat, Aristophane et l'Ancienne Comedie Attique, p.166.

all extant comedies known to have been produced at the Lenaee. As we noted earlier, only the residents of Athens were present at the Lenaee. Thus we might conclude that when visitors from the allied cities attended the theatre, the Athenians were reluctant to grant the first prize to a man who spoke the truth to them in the presence of those they continued to oppress. The truth was painful.

Whatever the Athenians thought of Aristophanes, the fact remains that his criticisms of democracy are still practical and significant. John Middleton Murry has expressed the hope for a revival of Aristophanic comedy as the only satisfactory expression for the exasperation of our age.¹

"In spite of the great interval of time and space that separates the modern world from fifth century Athens, in spite of the many allusions that escape us, his plays still charm whether they are given in Athens or Munich or Oxford or Berkeley."²

* * * * *

To give a summary of the political views of Aristophanes is a difficult task. We cannot say that he was either a democrat or an oligarch. The real key to Aristophanes' views is the word "common sense". Aristophanes showed the same grasp of Athenian politics as did Alcibiades, only because both were endowed with intelligence and common sense. The word "conservative" is

1. Article "The Break-Up of the Novel", Yale Review, 1923, cited by Lord, op.cit., p.172.

2. Lord, op.cit., p.168, Cf. review of a performance of the Lysistrata on Broadway (see pp.169-70 above), and cf. New Republic, vol. XLV, Jan.6,1926, p.188, for a review by Edmund Wilson of a production of Lysistrata by the Moscow Art Theatre. In September, 1951, I had the good fortune to attend a successful open-air performance of the Lysistrata in Carmel, California.

perhaps the only other word that has been consistently used to describe Aristophanes' position. But without a definition of the word "conservative", its use is unwarranted. Russell Kirk has identified six "canons of thought" by which conservatism may be recognized. They include the belief that political problems, at bottom, are religious and moral problems; the conviction that all attempts to extend equality to economics and politics lead to despair, and that civilized society requires order and classes; the persuasion that economic leveling is not economic progress; faith in the accumulation of tradition and sound prejudice, that is, common sense; and the recognition that change and reform are not the same thing, and that innovation is a devouring conflagration more often than it is a torch of progress.¹ In this sense, providing only we remember that Athenian tradition and Athenian morality were not the same as the traditions and morality Kirk speaks of, and providing we do not assume that Marathon and Salamis necessarily represent the apex of Athenian morality and tradition, we may call Aristophanes a conservative.

1. Kirk, Russell Amos, The Conservative Mind; from Burke to Santayana, Regnery, 1953.

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APPENDIX A

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

B.C.

490	Battle of Marathon
482	Ostracism of Aristides
480	Recall of Aristides Xerxes invades Greece Battles of Thermopylae and Salamis
479	End of Persian Wars
478	Foundation of Confederacy of Delos
476-462	Cimon Commander-in-Chief of Athenian forces
472	Ostracism of Themistocles
470	Revolt of Naxos
ca.467	Death of Aristides
465	Revolt of Thasos
464	Revolt of the Spartan helots
463	Surrender of Thasos Cimon tried and acquitted
462	Cimon in Messenia to help Spartans Ephialtes influential at Athens
461	Withdrawal of Athens from the anti-Persian Confederacy Ostracism of Cimon Assassination of Ephialtes Introduction of pay for judges of the heliaea Rise of Pericles End of aristocratic coalitions
459	Athenian expedition to Egypt
458	Building of Long Walls of Athens
456	Athenian conquest of Aegina
454	Failure of Egyptian expedition
451	Cimon recalled
450	Death of Cimon Death of Themistocles

- 446 Revolt and reduction of Euboea
- 445 Thirty Years' Peace between Athens and Sparta
 BIRTH OF ARISTOPHANES
- 443 Division of Athenian Confederacy into five districts
 Ostracism of Thucydides (not the historian)
- 440 Revolt of Samos
- 433 Revolt of Potidaea
- 432 The "Megarian Decree"
 Battle of Potidaea

The Peloponnesian War (431-404)

- 431-421 The Archidamian War
- 431 May to July -- Peloponnesian invasion of Attica
 Siege of Potidaea continues
 Expulsion of Aeginetans
 Winter -- Pericles' funeral oration
- 430 May to July -- Second Peloponnesian invasion of Attica
 June -- Plague breaks out at Athens
 August -- Fall of Potidaea
 Pericles tried and fined
- 429 March -- Pericles re-elected
 Athenian defeat in Chalcidice
 Phormio's naval victories
 Death of Pericles
- 428 Third Peloponnesian invasion of Attica
 Revolt of Lesbos
 Property-tax to raise money for siege of Mytilene (Lesbos).
- 427 January -- THE BANQUETERS
 May to June -- Fourth Peloponnesian invasion of Attica
 Fall of Mytilene
 July -- Civil War in Corcyra
 Embassy of Gorgias of Leontini to Athens
 Athenian expedition to Sicily (Laches)
- 426 Second outbreak of plague at Athens
 April -- THE BABYLONIANS
 Spartan peace proposals
 Engagement at Tanagra
 Aetolian expedition of Demosthenes
 End of plague

- 425 January -- THE ACHARNIANS
 April to May -- Fifth Peloponnesian invasion of Attica
 Cleon refuses Spartan peace proposals
 August -- Capture of Sphacteria
 November -- Increase of tribute. Pay for dicasts raised
 to three obols by Cleon
- 424 January -- THE KNIGHTS
 Athenian defeat at Delium
- 423 March -- THE CLOUDS
 Revolt of Mende and Scione
 Mende recaptured and Scione besieged
- 422 January -- THE WASPS
 September -- Cleon takes Torone
 Battle of Amphipolis -- Death of Cleon and Brasidas
 Winter -- Peace negotiations with Sparta
- 421 March -- THE PEACE
 March -- The Peace of Nicias
 Re-assessment of the tribute
- 420 Alliance between Athens, Argos, Mantinea, Elis
- 419 Nicias and Alcibiades generals
 Alcibiades operates in Peloponnese
- 418 Alcibiades not re-elected general
 Spartan victory at Mantinea
- 417 Ostracism of Hyperbolus
 Nicias and Alcibiades re-elected
- 416 Embassy of Segesta to Athens
 Sicilian expedition planned
- 415 Mutilation of the Hermae
 Athenian fleet sails for Sicily
 Recall and flight of Alcibiades
- 414 March -- THE BIRDS
 Siege of Syracuse
 December -- Second Athenian expedition reaches Sicily
- 413 Spartans seize Decelea
 September -- Athenian disaster in Sicily
- 412 Revolt of Athenian allies
 Treaty between Sparta and Persia
 Alcibiades leaves Sparta
- 411 January -- THE LYSISTRATA. Revolt of Rhodes
 February -- Pisander at Athens
 March -- The THESMOPHORIAZUSAE
 May -- Provisions for new constitution
 Revolution of the Four Hundred
 Government of the Five Thousand

Alcibiades at Samos

September -- Athenian victory at Cynomessa

October -- Athenian victory at Abydos

- 410 April -- Athenian victory at Cyzicus
Full democracy restored at Athens
Spartan peace offers refused
- 406 Athenian defeat at Notium. Alcibiades withdrawn
August -- Athenian victory at Arginusae
Trial of the Generals
Spartan peace offers again refused
- 405 January -- THE FROGS
Battle of Aegospotami
Siege of Athens
- 404 April -- Lysander sails into Piraeus

* * * * *

The Thirty Tyrants at Athens

Death of Alcibiades

Democratic exiles under Thrasybulus seize Phyle and
Piraeus.

- 403 February -- Fall of The Thirty
September -- Restoration of the democracy
- 399 Death of Socrates
- 395 Death of Lysander
- 393 Rebuilding of Long Walls of Athens
- 392 THE ECCLESIAZUSAE
- 390 New Athenian fleet under Thrasybulus
Death of Thrasybulus
- 388 THE PLUTUS
- 384 Birth of Aristotle and Demosthenes

