ARISTOPHANES AND HISTORY

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In a recently published work G. E. M. de Ste. Croix noted the absence of any satisfactory discussion of the principles to be employed in utilising Old Attic Comedy as historical evidence, and supplied five principles of his own,¹ as follows:

(i)—look at the other evidence first, and, if we have reliable sources, we must be sure to interpret the comic poet in the light of the remaining evidence, and not the other way round . . .

(ii)—always assess a particular statement in its context and character . . .

(iii)—‘no smoke without fire’ may be a useful rule of thumb, but beside comic exaggeration we must be prepared to find comic invention . . .

(iv)—look out for purely literary parodies, where the main point of the jokes may be in verbal repetition, or alteration, of a well known passage . . .

(v)—to identify the political outlook of a comic playwright we must
   (a) bear in mind the whole output of the poet and not isolate a play or group of plays,
   (b) look for persistent patterns in jokes, since their very nature may indicate the poet’s outlook,
   (c) note passages which are either not integral to the plot, or are not funny in themselves, since they are most likely to represent the opinions of the poet.

I should like to discuss these principles one by one. There are many different kinds of historical information which the plays of Aristophanes might be thought to provide, and the principles involved in verifying and utilising them will be flexible and inexhaustive. For example, for political ‘facts’ it may well be wise to doubt everything which cannot be tested against Thukydides or an epigraphic source, whereas for the wider field of social history, for which Attic Comedy has been described as ‘a mirror reflecting real life’,² there seem to be no truly reliable and informative sources. In both of these broad categories—

1. *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (Duckworth 1972) (= *O.P.W.* hereafter) 232–4. This article derives from the introductory chapter of an Index Locorum of Aristophanes, part of which was submitted as a doctoral thesis to the University of South Africa under the title of ‘Themes in Aristophanes’. Since the main premise behind the compilation of such an index is that the material is potentially useful to the historian, I felt it necessary to justify my approach and comment on the application of the material which the plays offer. In referring to the plays I have used Coulon’s Budé edition (Paris 1972), and abbreviated titles as follows—

A. Acharnians  P. Peace  F. Frogs
K. Knights  B. Birds  E. Ekklesiazousai
C. Clouds  L. Lysistrata  P. Ploutos
W. Wasps  T. Thesmophoriazousai

politics and sociology—there may be areas where the poet distorts the picture, but there may also be institutions and attitudes which are so fundamental that, as merely part of the background, they need less independent corroboration. We hardly need Thukydides to tell us that the assembly met at dawn; Aristophanes tells us eight times (Acharnians 19–20, Thesmophoriazousai 376, Ekklesiazousai 20–1, 82–5, 282–4, 290–2, 376–7, 389–91). However, the vast majority of potentially useful material will fall somewhere between the doubtful-but-not-impossible and the probable-but-not-certain, and to assign it even to this probationary status and lay down conditions for its use, requires all manner of argumentation, intuition, and the occasional act of faith. Take de Ste. Croix’s own interpretation elsewhere of Knights 1300f. Hyperbolos’ proposed expedition to Carthage, which the chorus imagines the fleet discussing and deploring. He calls the scene ‘an amusing little fantasy’, but his argument, that such a venture would have been an act of madness in view of the general hostility of Sicily, hardly depends upon any of his own principles, and when he offers some possible interpretations of the passage he tends to become highly subjective. Such rationalisations are subjective but not necessarily invalid. In a similar way, those who believe that Kimon took 4000 hoplites to Ithome (L. 1143), are committing an act of faith, perhaps reasonable in view of Thukydides’ ‘no small number’ (i.102), but brave in the face of Aristophanes’ cavalier treatment of numbers elsewhere. Thus the presence or absence of external evidence is not always conclusive.

As regards de Ste. Croix’s second principle, context and character are obviously of crucial importance, but opinions will vary about what constitutes context. If he is right in thinking that, in the Acharnians, Dikaiopolis is putting forward Aristophanes’ own political views, it would appear that, from his own fifth principle, the whole output of the poet becomes the context in this case. Dover’s remarks about the discontinuity of characterisation in the plays should warn us to beware of making generalisations about individual characters, 

3. An alternative to de Ste. Croix’s second principle should, perhaps, be the broader question: ‘Has the poet any reason to distort?’, which would include character and context, jokes for their own sake, and deliberate absurdities.

4. Ehrenberg’s faith in the evidence of Old Comedy was, perhaps, excessive—see below.

5. O.P.W. 222.

6. Ibid. He suggests either (i) such a decree is not conceivable, or (ii) the passage is a parody of some other preposterous project, or (iii) it is the kind of lunatic decree some people thought characteristic of that politician.

7. De St. Croix, O.P.W. 368–9, seems to regard the evidence as reliable, but at L. 271 three days has unaccountably become six years! There is no way of knowing whether 4000 hoplites, or 4000 anything was topically funny at the time of the performance. Arguments based on the ‘serious’ tone of passages in comedy do not convince.

8. De Ste. Croix does not specifically say that Dikaiopolis is Aristophanes throughout the play (O.P.W. 363–5), but he surely implies this. He says: ‘Dikaiopolis can be comic, but he is never at any moment (my italics) disreputable or dishonest (as comic heroes so often are) or silly—very much the reverse’ (O.P.W. 365), and this leads up to: ‘And then to clinch the matter, comes the identification of Dikaiopolis with Aristophanes, made twice over (A.377ff., 497ff.) . . .’

9. K. J. Dover, Aristophanic Comedy (Batsford 1972), 59f.
especially when character transformation itself is a theme of comedy. To identify Dikaiopolis with Aristophanes throughout the play raises more problems than it solves. Is Dikaiopolis speaking for Aristophanes before his reference to his suffering at the hands of Kleon (A.377f.), and does this make any difference to the parody of assembly procedure, the ridicule of the envoys, and aside like A.72–2? Is he Aristophanes after 503, in the scene with the Megarian and his daughter for example (764f.)? If so he comes close to being as much of a clown as many other Aristophanic ‘heroes’, and his honesty is at least questionable at 896. Moreover is the Dikaiopolis who longs for the countryside (32–5), and knows what it is to lose his vines (512), the same man as the Dikaiopolis who makes fun of the unfortunate farmer from Phyle, whose two oxen have been stolen by the Boiotians (1020f.)? Finally if more evidence were available I doubt that Dikaiopolis’ temporary identification with the poet would prove to be unique; as it is I am not sure that we do not have an adequate parallel in Bdelykleon in the Wasps.

The third principle issues a necessary warning to look out for sheer fabrication, but this seems to cancel the validity of the ‘no smoke without fire’ rule of thumb which is also implicitly approved. A principle which states ‘sometimes x, and sometimes not x’ is not much use for assessing a specific passage, even if it is true in itself. Often only intuition can help distinguish smoke from fog.

As for the fourth principle—what is purely literary parody? Presumably it is where there is no other point than verbal or metrical similarity to another known work; but after admiring the poet’s literary skill the audience is bound to be amused by the incongruity between the dramatic setting of the comedy and the original purport of the work which is being parodied, and so the joke ceases to be purely literary and becomes situational as well. More serious than this is the problem of what to do once the parody has been spotted. Does it cast a shadow over the whole scene, or can it be separated from the ‘pill’ it is sweetening? The dilemma is classically illustrated by the rival standpoints of de Ste. Croix and W.

10. The choruses in the Acharnians, Wasps, Birds, Lysistrata, and Demos (Knights), Pheidippides (Clouds), Philkleon (Wasps) all undergo transformation of one sort or another.

11. σφόδρα γάρ εσμήζων ἐγώ παρὰ τὴν ἐπαλέξαν ἐν φοροτῷ κατακέιμένος.—Dikaiopolis contrasts his lot with the burden of luxurious living of which the envoy newly returned from Persia complains.

12. Where he confiscates the Theban’s oil for market dues.

13. Compare his statement (W.560–1): χαλεπόν μὲν καὶ δεινής γνώμης καὶ μείζονς ἡ ἤπι πρωγιδεῖς ήσσαμαι νόσων ἀργαίαν ἐν τῇ πόλει ένεντακύμαν, which is the prelude to his exposure of the way jurors are exploited by politicians, with Dikaiopolis’ (A.496–500): μὴ μοι φθονήσῃ, ἀνάρει οἱ θεώμενοι, εἰ πωλόχος ὀν ἐπειτ, Ἀθηναίοις λέγειν μέλλων περὶ τῆς πόλεως, πρωγιδίαν ποιών, τὸ γάρ δίκαιον οἴδα καὶ τριγώδεια. In each case it seems that we have a temporary identification of the poet with one of his characters, which is made explicit only in the case of Dikaiopolis by 502–3: οὐ γάρ με νῦν διαβαλέτθει Κλέαν οὔτε έκεινος παρόντων τῆς πόλεως κακὸς λέγει. Cf. A.377f., W.1284f. for similar references to Kleon, and de Ste. Croix’s comments at O.P.W., 363.
G. Forrest over the parody of Euripides' Telephos in the Acharnians.\textsuperscript{14} The former feels that, to be acceptable in comedy, opinions must be cloaked in some humorous disguise, and that if Dikaiopolis' speech (497f.) was merely an elaborate ‘spoof’, not meant to be taken seriously, some of the audience would have missed the point entirely.\textsuperscript{15} By contrast, I have heard the latter reaffirm recently that the speech is about as politically relevant as a Shakespearean 'To be or not to be . . .?' on the theme of the European Common Market.

Lastly, employment of the fifth principle depends upon a purely subjective impression about whether Aristophanes is using his plays to express his own political views. Gomme felt that Aristophanes' own political outlook is not important,\textsuperscript{16} while de Ste. Croix has returned to the rather equivocal position of those whom Gomme criticised for thinking of Aristophanes primarily as a politician while paying lip-service to him as a dramatist.\textsuperscript{17} Doubtless the true answer lies somewhere between the two extremes. Gomme is surely right to argue that the business of a comic dramatist who deals with politics is to extract humour from a situation,\textsuperscript{18} and Aristophanes' claims to be a political adviser are, generally, lighthearted,\textsuperscript{19} but this need not stop him from being deliberately provocative. Once again it is a matter of opinion, from time to time a certain seriousness does seem to show through—'the historian should not meekly surrender'.\textsuperscript{20} But how seriously did his audience take him? Perhaps no more seriously than we take a modern political cartoonist or political satirist. Aristophanes may have been less subtle than a modern cartoonist (though this depends upon which newspapers one reads), but this need not mean that the Athenians took him any more seriously.\textsuperscript{21} Even his forthright vehemence may be more comic convention than political conviction. As Dover points out, he survived several changes of political climate apparently unscathed.\textsuperscript{22} If he did touch a nerve from time to time it was the exception rather than the rule, and I suggest that, similarly, it was exceptional for him to attempt seriously to

\textsuperscript{14} O.P.W., 369f., W. G. Forrest, Phoenix xvii (1963) 7f.
\textsuperscript{15} Aristophanes did, however, make a similar sort of error when the audience apparently missed the whole point of the first version of the Clouds—cf. C.520f., W.1044f.
\textsuperscript{16} A. W. Gomme, Aristophanes and Politics, C.R. lii (1938), 97f. (= More Essays in Greek History and Literature (O.U.P. 1962), 70f.)
\textsuperscript{17} 'I myself have not the slightest doubt that he often did so (try to express political opinions), and that he used many of his plays, even while they of course remained primarily comedies, as a vehicle for the expression of serious political views . . .', O.P.W., 356.
\textsuperscript{18} A Historical Commentary on Thucydides, vol. I (O.U.P. 1945) 37.
\textsuperscript{19} Cf. A.633f., 647f., 652f., K.504f., W.1043f., P.734f., though some may see a more serious tone in F.686f.
\textsuperscript{20} Russell Meiggs, The Athenian Empire, 392. Meiggs adopts a less extreme view than de Ste. Croix about Aristophanes' political views, but uses references to the plays without explaining the context which might undermine their value—e.g. K.813 on p.16, and K.465-6 p. 319.
\textsuperscript{21} De Ste. Croix compares him to a political cartoonist, O.P.W. 357. A closer parallel might be found in the popular television series of the 1960's, David Frost's That Was The Week That Was—it was irreverent, provocative, slanderous and often obscene, but hardly likely to influence a General Election, or public political opinion at any level.
influence public opinion. On one occasion, early in his career, he apparently offended Kleon; he was prosecuted after the *Babylonians* of 426 (A.377ff.).23 The facts of the matter are obscure. We are inclined to feel that our poet successfully stood up to Kleon’s bullying and for the rights of comic satirists in the face of political sensitivity. The unfortunate Kleon may have over-reacted and the poet never let him forget it. It may even have contributed to the success of his next two plays;24 but there is the suggestion that Aristophanes himself did make concessions.25 Similarly the evidence for the effect which the *Clouds* had on the career of Sokrates is ambiguous.26 There is no good reason to believe that anything Aristophanes said in his plays had political repercussions from the *Acharnians* onwards, and therefore no reason to regard him as a political propagandist. There is no telling, of course, whether the poet nursed a secret ambition to be taken more seriously than he was, but I suspect that his genius lay in his ability to reflect the many nuances of public opinion and prejudice rather than to generate them.

I suggest that de Ste. Croix’s labour will not be well spent looking for persistent joke-patterns. The most persistent joke after all is the sexual and obscene, and comedy thrives on the repetition of the expected as well as the absurd. One of the obvious shortcomings of de Ste. Croix’s list of principles is the absence of a warning to be alert for comic conventions. As for finding passages which are not integral to the plot in themselves—who would dare be categorical? This ‘sandwich theory’ is applied to L.1114–77 to isolate passages which ‘demand to be taken seriously’.27 These lines consist of a speech by Lysistrate which is, according to de Ste. Croix, ‘completely serious in character and without a single jest’, punctuated by comic interjections from her listeners. I find it difficult to believe that any serious message could be put across under such circumstances. In fact it is Lysistrate herself who sets the scene for the sexual by-play which is to follow when she introduces Reconciliation in the form of an attractive woman whose physical attributes are obvious, and who is the target of lewd remarks and gestures of increasing explicitness as the scene pro-

23. Schol. 378 explains that he had attacked the magistrates and Kleon.
24. *Acharnians* and *Knights* won first prize in 425 and 424 B.C. respectively.
25. A 502–6 οὐ γὰρ μὲ νῦν γε διαβαλεῖς Κλέαν ὅτι ξένων παροντων τὴν πόλιν κακῶς λέγεις. αὐτοὶ γὰρ ἐσμένοι οὕτως Ληναίων τὸ ἀγών, καθὼς ξένων πάρεισιν: οὔτε γὰρ φόροι ἠκούσαιν οὔτε ἐκ τῶν πόλεων οἱ ἄλλοι: Was the presence of foreigners the real issue? Is it interesting to see that the *Acharnians* and the *Knights* were produced at the Lenaea, as was the *Frogs* (the only other play which we know to have won first prize). Did Aristophanes deliberately avoid the Great Dionysia for controversial plays? Did he promise to keep the parabasis within bounds?
W.1284f. refers to his backing down before Kleon, but he has broken his promise: εἴτε νῦν ἔηθεν κάπερ τὴν ἀμελείαν—MacDowell believes that the occasion must be a second clash with Kleon, and that the νῦν cannot refer back to the *Knights*, but both E.381 and L. 1236 seem to afford examples of νῦν = then?
ceeds. She bids Reconciliation: πρόσαγε λαβούσα πρώτα τοὺς Λακωνικοὺς, ἦν μὴ διδό τὴν χείρα, τῆς σάθης ἄγε ... καὶ ... τοὺς 'Αθηναίους ἄγε, οὐ δὲ ἀν διδώσει πρόσαγε τούτους λαβομένη (II15–21). She follows this with a quote from Melanippe the Wise:

ἐγὼ γυνὴ μὲν εἰμί, νοῦς δὲ ἐνεστὶ μοι

and another shortly from the Erechtheus. Not much seriousness so far. There follows a reminder of Kimon’s assistance to Sparta at Ithome, grossly exaggerated, which gives the Athenian and Spartan a funny line each; next an account of Sparta’s help against Hippias, similarly exaggerated, and answered by an amusing reversal of roles by the two listeners. The scene ends with a number of jokes as the Athenian and the Spartan bargain for ‘territory’ on the body of Reconciliation, and to take it seriously is to ignore the context entirely.

This brief discussion of de Ste. Croix’s principles for utilising Aristophanic comedy as an historical source has been largely destructive. Not that some of his principles will not often be helpful, but there can be no rigid rules of procedure for resolving the paradox: namely that we are trying to find ways of taking a comic poet more or less seriously. The quest starts from the reasonable assumption that the raw material for satire, parody and fantasy is a real state of affairs—in this case Aristophanes’ contemporary social and political environment. At best we might discover some formula for uncovering this reality, at the very least the existence of this type of entertainment reflects a level of social and literary sophistication. The way to start is surely to see what sort of things the plays seem to say about what sort of topics, and to do this as objectively as possible. Once all the plays have been analysed we may feel that there are areas in which reality shines through more clearly than in others, and other places where we can only say that this is what Attic comedy was like. Meanwhile we must never forget that we can rarely, if ever, be sure that the poet has not, even unwittingly, distorted beyond recognition some apparently straightforward piece of information. Perhaps this is the only principle worth knowing, but it should not deter unduly the student of Greek history, since he, if anyone, ought

28. The scene could be played in such a way that the seriousness of Lysistrata is merely a foil for the comic capers of the two men whose attention is on Reconciliation, while the audience in anticipation of the next joke would hardly be paying any more attention to Lysistrata than the characters on stage are.

29. scho1.1125, scho1.1131. There is no way of knowing how far the parody of either tragedy goes, but the title ‘Melanippe the Wise’ opens the possibility of extended parody.

30. L.1144—ὁ λεῖος ἐσσας τὴν Λακωνίδαμον.

31. 1147–8—Πρυτανίς, ἀδίκουσαν οὕτω νη ἄτ' ἀν Λυσιστράτη.

32. 1157–8—Ἀκακων, οὐ πα γυναῖκ’ ὀπωσα γαλατέμαν. Πρυτανίς, ἐγὼ θεί κύδαθον γέοδέπι καλλόνα.

33. It is true that Lysistrata has made some apparently serious remarks during the scene, and there may have been members of the audience who took them as serious political advice, but in a scene of this type there are many distractions, not least perhaps that the ‘serious’ lines are spoken by a woman. The poet did not find room in the Lysistrata for a parabasis, which was tailor-made for direct messages to the audience.

34. See n.1 above.
to admit that he is continually dealing with evidence which rarely admits of certainty.

Some of the most common types of distortion are worth mentioning: comic poets slander prominent personalities, and in many cases the insinuations may be entirely false—Sokrates teaches for money (C.98);[35] Kleon is a Paphlagonian tanner (K.44 and passim); Euripides' mother sells vegetables (A.478, T.387). Parody and satire may be closer to the truth, exaggeration rather than invention—Philokleon, the professional juror, waits all night for the courts to open, is heroised by his family, swoons at the acquittal of the defendant (W.103f., 606f., 995); Euripides' plays are full of cripples, immoral women, and trivialities (A.411f., T.392f., F.1341f.); Sokrates measures flea-jumps (C.144f.); the Athenians are like sheep in the assembly (W.31f.). Humorous self-praise by the poet and criticism of his rivals is common—he has dealt a body-blow to Kleon (C.549); Persians and Spartans acknowledge his political acumen (A.647f., 652f.); other poets are vulgar and trivial (C.537f., W.58f., P.739f.). Obscenity and sexuality can sometimes dominate a scene—the 'Reconciliation' of Athens and Sparta by Lysistrate (L.461f.),[36] the Megarian selling his daughters (A.764f.); the 'confessions' of an unfaithful wife (T.478f.). But there are other likely areas of distortion which are not so easily isolated. Comic convention may account for repeated themes like angry old men, belligerent choruses, mockery of certain gods, slave-characters, the contests, sex and obscenity, but comic inventions are not easily exposed.[37] When can we be sure that Aristophanes is not using a 'reverse' joke, funny because its opposite is true—Lord Longford's πονοποσκία, Enoch Powell's φιλοξενία?[38] Literary parodies, where the original is lost, are frustrating—Euripides' Telephos in the Acharnians (A.428f., 440f., 484f.), Agathon's poetry in the Thesmophoriazousai (T.101f.), and in many other places where the scholiasts claim to identify parody or quotation. Deliberate absurdity (A.100f.),[39] statements παρά προσδοκίαν, and the out of character, out of context joke for the joke's sake can all masquerade as meaningful comment.  

In short it would, perhaps, be defeatist to conclude that all the evidence of comedy is false, but it would be a safer assumption than the contrary.  

35. For convenience I employ the bare references to the passages in the plays, although this can be particularly misleading in the case of Aristophanes, as I argue below.  
36. See p.63 above. In an article recently published Carl Ruck argues that we have even now greatly underestimated the part played by obscenity, especially obscene gesture. Arion New Series ii (1975) 13f.  
37. The 'causes' of the Peloponnesian War at A.515f., P.605f. have even been taken seriously by some.  
38. Pseudartabas' gibberish speech.  
39. 'If Kleophon wants to fight let him go home and do it there'—F.1532-3.  
40. Cf. Dover's comment in the Cambridge Journal 1951-2 p.637: 'The historical use of Comedy appears... remarkably similar to the use of Oratory... It would be implausible to say that all plain statements in the orators are false; but it would be a safer assumption than its contrary.'—quoted by de Ste. Croix, O.P.W. 232 n.6 (I have not seen the original—a review of Ehrenberg's People of Aristophanes). The mistake lies in looking for any general evaluation of comedy which holds good for every specific passage.
comedy is a field in which safety can never be assured, but despite the dozens of reasons for not taking it seriously, there will still be occasions when comparison with other evidence, historian or orator, epigraphical or archaeological, suggests that an Aristophanic theme is close enough to reality to warrant serious attention. Some may even venture further and, feeling that a certain picture is plausible, they may give qualified approval even to uncorroborated evidence. The evidence of comedy in these cases becomes just another source whose reliability must be assessed and argued before it can be used. Very rarely can it be relegated to a bare reference in a foot-note, with the implication that its confirmation of our point is uncontestable; too often the text and context mean different things to different readers—"The facts we learn from a passage in Comedy rarely, if ever, emerge directly from the statements, general or particular, made by the characters; they come indirectly through an understanding of the tacit assumptions..."41

Thus if the interpretation of comedy is to depend to a large extent on subjective impression and intuition, the greater the need for objective presentation of the material to start with. Victor Ehrenberg's The People of Aristophanes is a good example of the intuitive approach to Old Comedy. He himself was aware that in providing a general atmosphere he was going beyond the sum of the single facts that the bare evidence offers.42 The sociological patterns which emerge are plausible and not inconsistent with some of the evidence, but often Ehrenberg, and consequently any of his readers who are persuaded by a string of foot-notes, take the evidence of Aristophanes too literally.43

Since any treatment of themes in Aristophanes must cover some of the same ground as Ehrenberg, whose book is in many respects excellent and provocative, I should like to examine his use of the evidence to support the contention that it is better to look first at all the assembled raw material, without prejudice, than to attempt to blend together material of uneven quality into a coherent narrative. Often the latter approach produces a series of staccato and barely related statements, and when the narrative does flow there is the suspicion that the hypothesis is largely independent of the evidence.

A serious weakness in Ehrenberg's attitude towards Attic Comedy seems to be, incredibly, a relative lack of a sense of humour. For example here are some of his footnotes in which a line-reference is adduced to support his narrative:44

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41. Dover again as quoted by de Ste. Croix—see n.40 above.
42. P.A. 5, 7.
44. If some of the items of information seem trivial, their selection was Ehrenberg's not mine. Passages referred to are Ehrenberg's footnotes, quoted by line reference only, purporting to support his interpretation in the narrative.
L.1173 is the footnote to 'the farmer performed his work almost naked', whereas, even if we needed evidence for the fact that workers in hot climates sometimes take their coats off, in this context we have one of the many agricultural double entendres, which need not tell us anything specific about farming, since their main point is sexual innuendo.45

F.739-40 hardly justifies 'the gentleman ... was generally characterised by his inclination to drinking and sexual pleasures'.46 A better comment would be 'sometimes caricatured as inclined ... ', which is more or less a truism of most societies.

E.1058 the use of the ambiguous term μαλακίαν is thin evidence for 'on the whole the average youth, who enjoyed his life and did not wish for anything better was a "little weakling"'.47 The hideous appearance of the old woman, her sinister words to the young man, and the farce of his having several such women in pursuit of his body, count very much against the passage carrying any social comment about the degeneracy of the young man in question, and it is not clear that Kratinos' Malthakoi was about young noblemen, and not, say, dithyrambic poets.

E.49 that Mrs Taster was the name of the inn-keeper's wife is one of the many jokes about women's drinking habits, and tell us nothing about the prominence of inn-keepers in the community!48

B.1040f. to believe that ψηφίσματα should be amended to the 'right' word νομίσματα, after comparison with the actual decree which is apparently parodied here, is to ignore the fun Aristophanes had with 'officialise', either adapting it or carrying it to absurd extremes; in this case the necessity to use 'the same decrees' would ensure the decree-seller's living in Cloud-cuckooland.49

F.541f. when 'Dionysos expresses himself in very drastic terms' about slaves and masters changing places, it is no real evidence that 'the idea of slaves and masters changing places was unthinkable outside comedy'. Dionysos' statement is not 'outside comedy' since it is prompted by the thought of Xanthias attending the party he has just been invited to, and Dionysos' pomposity contrasts with his abject appeal to Xanthias a few lines later to change places again (F.579f.). Once again there seems to be no point worth making—in real life slaves and masters do not change places and so the situation is good comedy. No-one, I imagine, will want to argue that the

45. P.A.75 n.8. L.1173 (part of the sexual game that has centred around Reconciliation—see p. 63 f. above) ἡ δε γυναῖκα ἡ μνάρη εἶναι ἐνθάδε διάνοια καὶ πολὺ. We might just as well conclude that the next line, spoken by the Spartan, ἔγγον δὲ κοπρεμώσῃ καὶ προφήτας τῆς γραμματίας; shows the importance of manure in Sparta!
46. P.A. 102 n.3. Xanthias, the slave, replies to the comment that his master is a 'real gentleman': μνᾶς γάρ οὐκ ὑπάρχει γενναίας, διότι γε πίνακας ἐνδεικνύει καὶ τιμωρεῖ μόνον;  
47. P.A.105 n.9.
48. P.A.114 n.7. τὴν τοῦ καπέλου ... Γεωνιστράτην.
49. P.A.157 n.10. See A.553f. for the Megarian decree; T.331f. for official prayers and oaths.
50. P.A.166 n.7.
scene is evidence for the fact that slaves and masters could change places! At most, from this and other passages, one gets the impression that slaves were probably regarded as human beings by some people and treated accordingly.\textsuperscript{51}

W.769\textsuperscript{52} may have been deliberately framed to accommodate a double entendre, and hence is unreliable evidence for the expression of a sum in drachmas without the addition of the word ‘drachmas’.

K.913f. the joke about handing over a rotten ship to a trierarch and thereby increasing the burden of a liturgy is only recognised as such in Ehrenberg’s second edition,\textsuperscript{53} but many others still escaped his notice, not least:

W.579f.\textsuperscript{54} where Philokleon claims that jurors make actors recite, and flute-players pipe, when they appear as defendants in court. This is blandly incorporated with the literal interpretation of another joke at W.242–3\textsuperscript{55} into another of the generalities in which the book abounds—‘Sometimes they (the jurors) would listen to a recital by an acquitted flute-player or actor, but on the whole they brought along the necessary “ration” of anger, and were cruel and keen to persecute.’

Finally the humorous parody of the powers of a political leader at K.1644f.\textsuperscript{56} is quoted to support ‘the assembly . . . where the overwhelming power of the people, in controlling market, harbours and pnyx rendered politically impotent the council, the strategoi, and those prominent citizens who were honoured in the prytaneion.’ There are several objections to using the passage as evidence for the powers of the assembly, not least that it describes the powers of a successful politician, but the language is extravagant and the passage ends with a joking reference to ‘whoring in the prytaneion’ which rather undermines any serious interpretation. One implication, surely, might be that the people have no control over what happens in the prytaneion.\textsuperscript{57} At all events a passage like this should not be dismissed to a footnote, since any application of it to reality will be contentious.

\textsuperscript{51} But there is no effective counter to the extreme point of view that the behaviour of slaves in comedy is only evidence for the behaviour of slaves in comedy.

\textsuperscript{52} Bdeyleleon suggests a penalty for Philokleon to impose in his own domestic court: \textit{διτς την θύραν ανέβαιν ἢ σηκίς λάβρα, ταύτης ἐπίβολην ψηφεῖτ μίαν μόνην.} \textit{P.A. 221 n.3.}

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{P.A. 326 n.3.} The Paphlogonian (Kleon) threatens the Sausage-Seller: \textit{ἐγὼ σὲ ποιήσω τριμμαρχιὲν, ἀναλίκοντα τῶν σαυτῶν, παλαιὰν ναὸν ἔχοντ᾽}, εἰς ἡν ἀναλῶν σὸν ἐφέξεις ὅδε ναυπηγοῦμενος.

\textsuperscript{54} \textit{P.A. 346 n.8.}

\textsuperscript{55} The chorus of juror-wasps says: \textit{χιτὶς ὅπων Κλέων ὁ κηδεμών ἦλθεν ἐφείτ᾽ ἐν ἀμφὶ ἤκειν ἔχοντας ἢμερῶν ἄρηγν τριῶν πονηρὰν.}

\textsuperscript{56} \textit{P.A. 349 n.2.} One of the slaves begins to encourage the Sausage-Seller to enter politics: τούτων ἀπάντων αὐτός ἀρχέλας ἔσει, καὶ τῆς ἁγορᾶς καὶ τῶν λιμένων καὶ τῆς πικνοῦς βουλὴς πατισμῶς καὶ στρατηγοῦς κλασάσσεις, δῆσεις, φιλαξεῖς, ἐν πρυτανεῖω λατρείας.

\textsuperscript{57} That Kleon abused his undeserved privilege of σίτησις is implied at K.280–1, 709, 766.
There are other places where the relevance or apparent interpretation of Ehrenberg’s references to the plays could be disputed on grounds other than the failure to see the possibility of a joke. For example, it is not clear from K.806 that porridge and olives were necessarily regarded as part of the hardships and difficulties of country life. The context makes these one of the privileges of country life, unless the use of χίδρα here and at P.596, is deeply ironical. P.1179f. does not show that townspeople always found a way to get out of active service, nor does P.618 justify ‘often the peasants had the feeling that they fought or suffered for a cause unknown to them.’ L.555f. does not show that ‘it annoyed people to see men in full armour striding about the market-place.’ I can find nothing in A.938f., K.258f., 824f., and W.102 to support ‘it is said to have been almost usual for the jurors to blackmail the officials when they had to render their accounts;’ only W.102 is about jurors in so far as Philokleon is said to have accused the cockerel of accepting bribes to wake him up late! B.1452 is not strong evidence for hereditary syphophany, though the idea is not impossible.

The passages mentioned in the last paragraph are a random selection of places where the evidence of Aristophanes does not automatically support the interpretation offered, even though it is part of a theory which is perfectly reasonable in itself, as most of Ehrenberg’s theories are. Thus The People of Aristophanes provides many sound ideas and much useful material for the historian who is prepared to check all the footnotes, but it is often misleading and by no means comprehensive.

The failure of Ehrenberg in practice, and de Ste. Croix in theory to provide satisfactory criteria for the use of comedy as historical evidence, does not mean that the evidence must be dismissed, though I can sympathise with those who are inclined to lose patience with it. What it does mean is that there can be no short cut for assessing passages individually from all possible points of view, involving other evidence where relevant, and, from a knowledge of the general nature of Attic Comedy, anticipating as many objections as can be foreseen; a full discussion can rarely be avoided, if we wish to go beyond vague assertions

58. P.A.88 n.2. The Sausage-Seller says of Demos: εἰ δὲ ποτ’ εἰς ἄγραν οὐτος ἄγηθών εἰρηνατός διατρίβη, καὶ χίδρα φαρμ ἀναθαρμήσει καὶ στεμφύλῳ εἰς λόγον ἐλθη, γνώσται σοιν ἄγηθών αὐτὸν τῇ μισθοφορῇ παρεκόπτοι.
59. Peace is addressed as the farmers’ χίδρα καὶ σωσισία.
60. P.A. 88 n.5. The reference is to tampering with conscription-lists, and the short notice of mobilisation from which the country-folk suffer more than the townspeople.
61. The chorus of farmers, on hearing of Pheidias’ involvement in the disappearance of Peace, says (naively and mock-tragically?): πολλὰ γ’ ἡμῖνς λανθάνει.
62. P.A. 302 n.2. The women find the men in armour in the market-place ludicrous.
63. P.A. 343 n.3.
64. P.A. 344 n.11.
65. Although I am sure he is wrong to see the views of Aristophanes himself in the speeches of Right in the Clouds (P.A. 105 n.8), and of Aischylos in the Frogs (P.A. 106 n.1).
like 'There is a passage of Aristophanes which seems to suggest ...'. The quest for objectivity in a thing as personal as the interpretation of comedy and satire can seldom produce more than qualified observations about the probabilities and possibilities of the situation underlying the humour; a subjective stand must often be taken to stimulate debate and provoke objections. If Aristophanes is important enough to be cited, he above all must be quoted with an indication of speaker and context wherever they are remotely relevant, since the last thing that can be assumed is that he was trying to give us the information we claim to have found, and that his words speak for themselves.
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