

WHO SAID WHAT ABOUT ALCIBIADES?

FROGS 1422–34

ARISTOPHANES *Frogs* 1407–81 is a passage involving several problems of interpretation, the chief of which is, of course, the position and status of lines 1437–41 and 1451–3.¹ In this brief note I shall confine myself to a consideration of the distribution of lines 1422–34 among the characters involved.

νῆ τὸν Δία τὸν σωτήρα, δυσκρίτως γ' ἔχω.
ὁ μὲν σοφῶς γὰρ εἶπεν, ὁ δ' ἕτερος σαφῶς.

Thus, in 1433–4, Dionysus comments on the answers given by the two tragedians in 1427–32 to the question he has asked them first in 1422–3 *περὶ Ἀλκιβιάδου τίν' ἐχέτον / γνώμην ἐκάτερος*; and then repeated at 1426 *ὅτι νοεῖτον εἵπατον τούτου πέρι*. Although the word-play in itself is no doubt the chief *raison d'être* of line 1434, the two descriptions given in it must be to some extent appropriate to the respective opinions which precede.

Nor can there be any doubt that in *σοφῶς εἶπεν* Dionysus refers to Euripides. In 1445 he says to Euripides *ἀμαθέστερόν* (i.e. less *σοφῶς*) *πῶς εἶπέ καὶ σαφέστερον*. In 1451 he acclaims Euripides *ὦ σοφωτάτη φύσις*. In 1411–13, after refusing to choose between the two poets in the tragic *ἀγών*, he adds *τὸν μὲν γὰρ ἡγοῦμαι σοφόν, τῷ δ' ἥδομαι*. This comment cannot, *pace* Stanford,² be considered ambiguous, particularly when viewed in the light of 1468, where he finally makes up his mind to choose Aeschylus, *αἰρήσομαι γὰρ ὅνπερ ἡ ψυχὴ θέλει* (cf. also 916–17 and 1028).

Editors have generally assigned lines 1427–9 to Euripides and 1431–2 to Aeschylus. Then, on the reasonable assumption that the protagonist who intercedes with his own preliminary question in 1424 is the same as the one who first proceeds to deliver his *γνώμη*, most editors have followed Brunck in assigning the question in that line to Euripides.

But Euripides, who has only recently died, has lived through all the ups and downs of Alcibiades' chequered career.³ He should know as well as Dionysus

¹ Recent detailed analyses by H. Dörrie (*Hermes* lxxiv [1956], 296–319) and D. M. MacDowell (*CQ* n.s. ix [1959], 261–8).

But I feel that the solution to the problem of 1437–53 is to be sought in the repeat performance of the play, rather than in the transposition of lines and invention of *lacunae* in the present text.

² W. B. Stanford, *Aristophanes, The Frogs* (1963), 192.

³ The battle of Notium, as a result of which public opinion in Athens once again swung against Alcibiades, took place sometime during the winter months of 407/6 B.C. It was certainly no later than March 406 and, on balance, the somewhat confusing evidence of Xenophon (*Hellenica* 1. 5. 16–1. 6. 1) points, I think, towards autumn 407.

The Parian marble puts Euripides' death

in 407/6, Apollodorus (cited by Diodorus Siculus, 13. 103) in 406/5. The latter date is less likely in view of the fact that the *Frogs* had been conceived, written, and performed by January 405. There is a statement in the *Life* of Euripides that on the news of his death Sophocles, who himself died late in 406, dressed himself in black and introduced *ἐν τῷ προαγῶνι* his actors and chorus *ἀστεφανώτους* as a token of mourning. If there is any truth in this story it must refer to the City Dionysia in March 406, and the implication is that Euripides' death occurred early in that year. He died in Macedon, having left Athens a year or so previously. But he cannot be supposed to have forgotten in such a short time the vital preoccupations of his city.

that the Athenians have a love/hate relationship with Alcibiades. It is highly improbable that he should need to ask (1424) *ἔχει δὲ περὶ αὐτοῦ τίνα γνώμην*;

On the other hand, this question is eminently suitable in the mouth of Aeschylus, who has been cut off from Athens for over fifty years, and thus may be expected to be somewhat out of touch with public opinion there. It is for precisely this reason that Aeschylus has to ask, in 1454–5, *τὴν πόλιν νῦν μοι φράσον / πρῶτον τίσι χρήται· πότῃ τοῖς χρηστοῖς*;

It seems, then, that the question in 1424 belongs more naturally to Aeschylus than to Euripides. But in that case, since we expect the first answer (1427–9) to come from the same person, a certain amount of doubt is thrown on the traditional attribution of these lines to Euripides.

This doubt is increased if we examine without preconceptions the opinion actually delivered in 1427–9. For surely this, with the emphatic *μισῶ* coming first word, is perfectly *σαφές*—at least as *σαφές* in fact as the somewhat oracular second *γνώμη* in 1431–2 (which is misunderstood by at least one modern editor, see p. 55, note 1). Nor is such a blunt expression of dislike to be regarded as especially *σοφόν*. It is true that the antithetical nature of the language of 1428–9 may be considered stylistically *σοφόν*, and thus, *prima facie*, might appear to be uncharacteristic of Aeschylus. But the advice given (undisputedly by Aeschylus) on how the city might be saved (1463–5) is couched in very similar antithetical terms. It is a mistake to assume that Aristophanes intends antithetical language *in itself* to be regarded as a distinguishing characteristic of Euripides. The important point is that the *sense* of 1427–9 remains clear, unlike, for example, the confusing oxymorons of 1443–4, which really are intended to parody Euripidean propensities.

In fact a rhetorical contrast between Alcibiades' personal ambitions and his alleged indifference to the public weal was, if we can believe Thucydides, given public expression long before the *Frogs* was written. In 415 B.C. Nicias advises the Athenians before the Sicilian expedition . . .

εἰ τέ τις ἄρχεν ἄσμενος αἰρεθείς παραινεῖ ὑμῖν ἐκπλεῖν, τὸ ἑαυτοῦ μόνον σκοπῶν. . . . ὅπως θαυμασθῇ μὲν ἀπὸ τῆς ἵπποτροφίας, διὰ δὲ πολυτέλειαν καὶ ὠφελῆθῃ τι ἐκ τῆς ἀρχῆς, μηδὲ τούτῳ ἐμπαράσχητε τῷ τῆς πόλεως κινδύνῳ ἰδίᾳ ἐλλαμπρύνεσθαι. νομίσατε δὲ τοὺς τοιούτους τὰ μὲν δημόσια ἀδικεῖν, τὰ δὲ ἴδια ἀναλοῦν . . . (Thuc. 6. 12. 2).

Thus the format and content of *Frogs* 1427–9 would not have been regarded as a very novel piece of rhetoric in 405 B.C.

On the contrary, it is surely 1431–2,¹ not 1427–9, which would have appealed to a character like Dionysus as *σοφόν*:² first, from the very fact that it 'caps' the

¹ Either 1431a or 1431b must go, and the choice is not a difficult one. It is essential to retain the *σχύμνος*, without which the line is neither accurate nor apposite (cf. *Agamemnon* 717–18 *ἔθρεψεν δὲ λεόντος ἰνὺν . . . ἀγάλακτον . . . φιλομάστον*).

The source of the variant which appears in most manuscripts (though not in V or A) is no doubt Plutarch's faulty quotation of the line (*Alcibiades* 16. 2). It is hardly necessary to point out that such quotation was frequently done from memory and, therefore,

often inaccurate. As for Valerius Maximus (7. 2. 7), he hardly inspires confidence in his accuracy when he attributes the remark to *remissum ab inferis* . . . *Periclem*! Further, whereas in his citation (*non oportere in urbe nutrirī leonem*) the solitary *leonem* might suggest 1431b, the opening words *non oportere* (= *οὐ χρή*) equally strongly suggest 1431a.

² It was probably the realization of this basic difficulty which caused the Scholiast to comment *σοφῶς Αἰσχύλος, σαφῶς Εὐριπίδης*.

first opinion, secondly because of its gnomic form, and thirdly because the speaker makes use of material drawn from his *opponent's* work (cf. 1469-78 for this procedure)—though he gives it a twist of his own. Furthermore, the unprincipled sophistry of 1431-2 (contrast the moral earnestness of 1427-9) is hardly what we should expect from Aeschylus (or, to be accurate, Aristophanes' portrait of Aeschylus). It is important to realize that, whereas line 1431 affirms the moral of the simile expressed in Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 717 ff., line 1432 quite stands it on its head.¹

It will be apparent from these considerations that I should assign lines 1427-9 to Aeschylus and 1431-2 to Euripides. In line 1434 *ὁ μὲν . . . ὁ δ' ἕτερος* does not mean 'the former . . . the latter' but simply 'the one . . . the other'.²

Manuscript evidence for the attribution of lines in comic dialogue is notoriously lacking in authority,³ and so the fact that the tradition is unanimous in assigning 1427-9 to Euripides (though not in the attribution of 1431-2 to Aeschylus) need not cause any great concern. After all, most editors have followed Brunck in assigning the question in 1424 to Euripides, apparently without any support in the tradition.

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¹ The view of Coulon, *Aristophane*, tome iv (Budé series, 1962), 152, that both poets express themselves against a return of Alcibiades, and that this represents Aristophanes' own opinion, is quite untenable. The two *γνώμαι* are contrary, and no doubt reflect the broad division of public opinion on the issue.

² Cf. Thuc. 1. 68. 4 and see J. D. Denniston, *The Greek Particles*, 370-1. In any case

one must not be over-literary on this point. As K. J. Dover has pointed out (article on Greek comedy in *Fifty Years (and Twelve) of Classical Scholarship*, 125), the gestures of comic actors were as important as their words.

³ See, e.g., J. C. B. Lowe, 'The Manuscript Evidence for Changes of Speaker in Aristophanes', *BICS* ix (1962), 27-42.