

A EUPOLIDEAN PRECEDENT FOR THE ROWING SCENE IN ARISTOPHANES' *FROGS*?

THE scene in Aristophanes' *Frogs* where Dionysus rows Charon's boat across the Styx to the accompaniment of the chorus of frogs is, of course, one of the most famous passages of Greek Comedy, and an essential element of the humour of the passage is the ineptitude of Dionysus as a rower. As a large part of the Athenian audience would have served in triremes as rowers, Dionysus' inability to perform this familiar task adequately will have been immediately ridiculous. Aristophanes was thus exploiting an easy source of humour in depicting Dionysus as an unaccomplished rower battling against the difficulties and discomforts of the task. Had so obvious a source of humour been neglected by the playwrights of Athenian Old Comedy till the time of *Frogs*? We should have been obliged to answer that we had no positive indications to the contrary till the publication in 1968 of Pap. Ox. 2740, but this now furnishes us with grounds to infer that some other Old Comedy, very probably the *Taxiarchs* of Eupolis, contained a scene where some person was represented as rowing ineptly. It is the purpose of this article to argue the case for the identification of the play as *Taxiarchs* and of the rower as Dionysus. It is also apparent that some object represented a boat or ship in the play, a rare stage property and also worthy of note.

Pap. Ox. 2740 consists of scholia on an Old Comedy with a number of lemmata from the text preserved. The principal guide to the identification of the play, as Lobel observed,¹ is the implication at fr. 1. 14-16 that Phormio was a character in it. Someone is quoted as saying, 'Don't you know my name is Ares?' and the scholiast comments, 'Phormio was nicknamed Ares.' The natural deduction is that the speaker of the line quoted from the play was Phormio. I give the text as restored by Lobel (the supplements are quite certain):

[οὐ-
]κ οἶσθ' Ἄρη μου τοῦνο[-
μ]α; Ἄρης ὁ Φορμίω[ν ἐ-
]πεκαλεῖτο.

The only Old Comedy for which Phormio is attested as a character is Eupolis' *Taxiarchs* (Eup. fr. 250 C.A.F. and Schol. Ar. *Pax* 347), and so the possibility that the play on which the Oxyrhynchus scholiast is commenting was *Taxiarchs* is the obvious one to explore. It would, of course, be naïve to assume that Phormio appeared nowhere else in Old Comedy and automatically to conclude that *Taxiarchs* is the play in question without further corroboration, but I shall argue that internal evidence supports the hypothesis very well. Lobel, however, hesitated to see the play as *Taxiarchs* on the grounds that the scholia implied a chorus of sailors, whereas one might presume that the chorus of *Taxiarchs* would be taxiarchs.

The suggestion of a chorus of sailors derives from fr. 2. ii. 6-8, where a line is quoted by the scholiast requesting that a man in the bows stop spraying 'us':

¹ *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, xxxiv (1968), 49.

[οὐ]

παύσει ραίων ἡμ[ᾶς, οὐκ
πρώρας;

Lobel takes it that ἡμᾶς refers to a chorus of sailors, which is a possible view, but, so far from pointing *away* from an identification of the play as *Taxiarchs*, the context here surely assists the interpretation. The appeal to 'stop spraying' and the address to someone in the prow inevitably suggests a rowing scene and the presence on stage of a boat. The spraying is presumably the result of incompetent use of the oar, and the people being splashed by the water are behind the inept rower in the boat. The suggestion that the scene is a rowing scene is corroborated by the instruction to stretch the foot out (sc. against the stretcher on which rowers rested their feet) in fr. 2. ii. 10-11, just below in the scholia:

ἐκτενεῖς οὖν τὸν [κελί-
σκον.

The instruction is the same as that given to Dionysus in Ar. *Ra.* 202 f.

ἀλλ' ἀντιβᾶς
ἐλᾶς προθύμῳ

As the instruction to use the stretcher immediately follows the appeal not to splash it is likely that the advice to rest the feet correctly is intended to make the rower's efforts more controlled. It seems then that we have an incompetent rower in this context: does this fit in with anything we already know of *Taxiarchs*? I think it does; for we know from Schol. *Pax* 347 that Dionysus was taught about 'generalship and war' by Phormio in *Taxiarchs*:

. . . Διόνυσος ἐν Ταξιάρχοις παρ' Εὐπόλιδι μανθάνων παρὰ τῷ Φορμίωνι τοὺς τῶν στρατηγιῶν καὶ πολέμων νόμους . . .

We seem to see Dionysus being shown how to hold his shield in fr. 257 *C.A.F.*,

οὐκ ἦν φυλάττη γ' ὧδ' ἔχων τὴν ἀσπίδα,

while in fr. 250 Phormio appears to be telling Dionysus to prepare to eat his ἄριστον. Fr. 256 seems to take Dionysus to task for coming with bathing-tub and cauldron like some soldier's woman from Ionia near to childbirth, apparently an indication that Dionysus will not find the rigours of military service easy to endure. As in *Frogs* he is portrayed as an effeminate god:

ὅστις πύελον ἦκει ἔχων καὶ χαλκίον,
ὥσπερ λεχὼ στρατιῶτις ἐξ Ἰωνίας.

Fr. 255 refers to the harsh diet of a soldier, perhaps a complaint by Dionysus of the lowly fare he must now exist upon, or instructions from Phormio as to what he must make his meals of:

ἐπιφαγεῖν μηδὲν ἄλλ' ἢ κρομμύον
λέποντα καὶ τρεῖς ἀλμάδας.

It is thus apparent that an effeminate and unsoldierly Dionysus being trained in the ways of war by Phormio was a central figure in *Taxiarchs*, and I should like to suggest that the unskilled rower of Pap. Ox. 2740 could also well be Dionysus, as the situation seems to harmonize excellently with what we know of the

play. Phormio was renowned as a naval commander and would presumably school Dionysus above all in the sailor's skills; Dionysus was utterly ill-suited to the military life and would presumably perform most inadequately as a sailor. In Pap. Ox. 2740 we have a character, who could well be Dionysus, rowing badly and being instructed in the oarsman's skill by Phormio, a situation entirely in place in *Taxiarchs*. With the actual attestation of Phormio as a character, I feel that the evidence for the identification of the play as *Taxiarchs* is very strong.

As for the identification of ἡμᾶς in fr. 2. ii. 6–8 as a chorus of sailors, I would argue that such an interpretation is not essential, as several other explanations of ἡμᾶς are possible. An obvious one would be that the occupants of the boat besides Dionysus were Phormio himself and perhaps a couple of silent characters (with Phormio speaking the direction not to splash), or perhaps only Phormio is in the boat apart from the rower, and the command is humorously phrased as though there were a full complement. It does not, at any rate, seem inevitable that ἡμᾶς denotes the chorus.¹

If *Taxiarchs* did require a boat as a stage-property, then it shares that distinction only with Aristophanes' *Frogs*, Cratinus' *Odyssseis*, and Pherecrates' *Ant-men* (*Μυρμηγκάνθρωποι*) among Old Comedies (Cratin. frs. 138, 139, 140; Pherecrates frs. 114, 117 and cf. the Deucalion and Pyrrha legend treated in the play).

Thus it seems that the rowing scene in Aristophanes' *Frogs* could well have had a precedent in the works of Eupolis for the display of incompetent rowing by Dionysus. There, of course, the similarity between the two contexts would end, as the musical accompaniment of the *Frogs*' chorus and Dionysus' attempts to keep time with their song are completely independent pieces of comic invention.

University of Durham

A. M. WILSON

¹ Even if ἡμᾶς does denote the chorus, it does not seem impossible for Phormio's fellow officers to be on board the craft and to be assisting in the rowing and taking a hand in schooling Dionysus in the art. The ship in Cratinus' *Ὀδυσσεύς* was evidently capable of carrying Odysseus and his crew, at least a

ἡμιχόριον, even if there was a ἡμιχόριον of Cyclopes later in the play (so J. Pieters, *Cratinus*, 35, after Kaibel). The idea of a large number of persons in the craft, whether sailors, 'taxiarchs', or whatever, is not open to objection because of any problem of staging.