

## TRAVELLING ACTORS IN THE FIFTH CENTURY?

The object of this note is to draw attention to a piece of evidence about the history of the Greek theatre which appears to have gone unnoticed, yet may be of some importance. Aelian in his *Historia animalium* 11.19 reports the fate of Pantacles the Lacedaemonian, who refused to allow some actors on their way to Cythera to pass through Sparta. Later, when performing official duties as ephor, he was torn to pieces by dogs.

Aelian is not interested in chronology and makes no attempt to date this event. He refers to the actors as artists of Dionysus, a description which is anachronistic if interpreted strictly so as to imply membership of an organised guild; such guilds appear not to be attested before the third century B.C.<sup>1</sup> Pantacles was in fact ephor in 407 B.C. according to two passages in Xenophon's *Hellenica* (1.3.1 and 2.3.10). Though both passages are now regarded as interpolations, they seem to be ancient and based on something more than fanciful invention. There is, however, no other evidence about this bearer of the name Pantacles.<sup>2</sup>

If the anecdote is true and not the result of conflating two events from different dates, we have to infer that actors might be travelling from one city in Greece to another, even in time of war, before the end of the fifth century. In other words, theatrical life was not confined to Athens and perhaps one or two Sicilian cities. Archaeological evidence shows that there were theatres in several places by the beginning of the fourth century, and perhaps a little earlier; Isthmia, Corinth, Argos, and Eretria have been cited as the most important examples.<sup>3</sup>

Sparta did not have a theatre at this date. Nor, it seems, did Cythera.<sup>4</sup> So if Aelian's story is true, it is hard to see what these actors were doing; they are hardly likely to have been natives of Cythera returning home.

The anecdote, though useful up to a point, is irritatingly imprecise: it is welcome additional evidence for an appreciation of tragedy outside Athens in the last decades of the fifth century, while it tantalizingly fails to confirm a hypothesis still needing support, namely that Old Comedy was already a subject of interest outside Athens.<sup>5</sup>

Lincoln College, Oxford

N. G. WILSON

<sup>1</sup> See e.g. A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dramatic Festivals of Athens* (2nd edn, rev. by J. P. A. Gould and D. M. Lewis, Oxford, 1968), 279 (the revised reprint of 1988 with a supplement has further notes on these actors at 365, but my point is not affected); P. Ghiron-Bistagne, *Recherches sur les acteurs dans la Grèce antique* (Paris, 1976), 163ff. On strolling players see also O. Taplin, *Comic Angels* (Oxford, 1993), 90–1.

<sup>2</sup> See the *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names* IIIA (Oxford, 1997), 350.

<sup>3</sup> Taplin (n. 1), 3.

<sup>4</sup> See G. L. Huxley and J. N. Coldstream, *Kythera* (London, 1972) and D. Müller, *Topographischer Bildkommentar zu den Historien Herodots: Griechenland* (Tübingen, 1987), 790–4. I owe the latter reference to the kindness of Prof. R. R. R. Smith.

<sup>5</sup> Taplin (n. 1), 5, suggests that Aristophanes' *Clouds* 518ff. makes sense if Athenians accepted that not every first performance of a comedy took place in their own theatre. Given the rather parochial nature of Old Comedy, this is difficult to accept for a date as early as 423 B.C. Or could the *Clouds* passage imply the possibility of production outside Athens but within Attica, e.g. at Thorikos? The theatre there has recently been discussed by H. van Looy in *Miscellanea graeca* 9, *Studies in South Attica* II, ed. H. Mussche (Gent, 1994), 9–29, to which Prof. C. Collard drew my attention.