

## MENANDER'S *THAÏS*: 'HAC PRIMUM IUVENUM LASCIVOS LUSIT AMORES'\*

There has been some debate whether Menander's first play at the City Dionysia in 321 B.C.E. was *Orge*, or whether *Orge* won him his first victory there in 315 B.C.E.<sup>1</sup> To date, this debate has depended upon reconciling two sources that contain a glaring contradiction: Eusebius, as preserved by the Hieronymus, Armenian and Syncellus versions, reports that in 322/1 (Ol. 114.3)<sup>2</sup> Menander won with his first play *Orge*, while the *Marmor Parium* states that Menander's first victory was in 316/15 without naming the play.<sup>3</sup> Given that both Eusebius and the *Marmor Parium* give us victories at the City Dionysia,<sup>4</sup> that the *Marmor Parium*'s testimony is more

\* I would like to thank Ariana Traill for reading an earlier draft of this article and making many useful comments, John Friend for help with the bibliography on the *ephebeia*, and the anonymous reader. The following abbreviations are employed:

Capps = E. Capps, 'Chronological studies in the Greek tragic and comic poets', *AJPh* 21 (1900), 38–61, at 60–1.

De Marcellus = H. De Marcellus, 'IG XIV 1184 and the ephebic service of Menander', *ZPE* 110 (1996), 69–76.

PCG 6.2 = R. Kassel and C. Austin, *Poetae comici graeci*, vol. 6.2: *Menander: testimonia et fragmenta apud scriptores servata* (Berlin and New York, 1998).

Schröder = S. Schröder, 'Die Lebensdaten Menanders (mit einem Anhang über die Aufführungszeit seines *EAYTON TIMΩPOYMENOS*)', *ZPE* 113 (1996), 35–48.

Traill = A. Traill, 'Menander's *Thaïs* and the Roman poets', *Phoenix* 55 (2001), 284–303.

Wilhelm = A. Wilhelm, 'Parische Marmor-chronik', *MDAI(A)* 22 (1897), 200.

<sup>1</sup> In this article, it will be assumed that Menander was born in the archonship of Sosigenes (342/1), that his years of ephebic service were 323/2 and 322/1, and that he produced his first play at the City Dionysia in the archonship of Philocles (322/1) while still an ephebe (a fellow ephebe of Epicurus). For an overview of both the primary and secondary sources, see De Marcellus and Schröder (these two sources disagree on the date of Menander's death, 292/1 or 291/0, which remains an open question). The alternate theory, first adumbrated by W.E. Clark, 'Menander: a study of the chronology of his life', *CPh* 1 (1906), 313–28, and still accepted by some, was that Menander was born in 343/2, was an ephebe in 325/4 and 324/3, and produced his first play under the archonship of Anticles in 325/4.

<sup>2</sup> The various versions do not actually agree on the date of Menander's first play. Under Ol. 114.4 (321/0 B.C.E.) Hieronymus has *Menander primam fabulam cognomento Ὀργήν docens, superat*, and under Ol. 116.1 (316/15 B.C.E.) *Menedemus et Speusippus philosophi insignes habentur*. The Armenian version, as translated into Latin by H. Petermann (in A. Schoene [ed.], *Eusebii Chronicorum Canonum quae supersunt* [Weidmann repr., 1967], 116), has under Ol. 114.3 (322/1) *has Iêandrus [sic] primus virtutem ostendit, superabat enim ὀργήν (iracundiam)* and under Ol. 116.1 *Menander et Speusippus philosophi cognoscebantur*. Syncellus under Ol. 114.4 has *Μένανδρος ὁ κωμικὸς ποιητὴς πρῶτον δράμα διδάξας Ὀργήν ἐνίκα*, and under Ol. 116.1 *Μενέδημος καὶ Σπεύσιππος φιλόσοφοι ἐγνωρίζοντο*. See De Marcellus for why the Armenian version's date of Ol. 114.3 is to be preferred.

<sup>3</sup> *IG* XII.5 444, line 118: *ἀρχοντος Αθήνησι Δημοκλείδ[ου] [316/15 B.C.E.] / ἐνίκα δὲ καὶ Μένανδρος ὁ κωμοιοδοιοὺς Αθήνησιν τότε πρῶτον*.

<sup>4</sup> D.M. Lewis, 'Appendix to chapter II', *apud* A.W. Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*<sup>2</sup> (Oxford, 1968), 119, argues that 'it seems most likely that [Eusebius] is referring to a Lenaian victory'. Against this view, see De Marcellus 71–2. Even W.E. Clark ('Menander: a study of the chronology of his life', *CPh* 1 [1906], 316), upon whose arguments

trustworthy, and that the Armenian version of Eusebius has a garbled reference to Menander under Olympic entry 116.1 (316/15 B.C.E.), suspicion has sensibly fallen upon Eusebius' account.

Thus Wilhelm long ago theorized that Eusebius contained an error in which Menander's first play and first win were mistakenly grouped under the same Olympic year entry. He then went on to argue that Menander's first production at the City Dionysia was with *Orge* in 321 (Ol. 114.3), while his first win at that venue was in 315 (Ol. 116.1) with another play whose title was not stated. Capps accepted the general outline of Wilhelm's theory, which he strengthened by pointing out that Eusebius also has two different Olympic year entries for Sophocles' first production (Ol. 77.2) and first win (Ol. 78.1). However, he reversed Wilhelm's order by arguing that Menander's first play at the Dionysia was in 321 with an unstated play, and that his first win was in 315 with *Orge*.

More evidence that Capps may have been correct has long been sitting under our noses, yet apparently ignored because of Eusebius' testimony. This evidence is found in an epigram by Martial (14.187) entitled *MENANDROY ΘΑΙΣ*:

Hac primum iuvenum lascivos lusit amores;  
nec Glycera pueri, Thaïs amica fuit.

With her [Thaïs] did he first play the game of youths' wanton loves;  
and Glycera was not his boyhood crush, 'twas Thaïs.

There is universal agreement that in this *apophorêton* Martial is referring to two of Menander's eponymous plays *Thaïs* and *Glycera*,<sup>5</sup> both of which are attested in other sources.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, the verb *ludere* carries the connotations of staging a character or a play, spending one's time frivolously writing love poems, and sexual sport (*OLD* s.v. *ludo*, 4, 6, 8). The most economical interpretation of the words *primum ... lusit*, therefore, is that *Thaïs* was Menander's first play,<sup>7</sup> and the wit of the epigram is to be found in the fact that Martial represents Menander's

Lewis relied, admitted that 'it would be quite without parallel for the chronographers to preserve for us records of first victories at both the Lenaea and City Dionysia, for they seem to have employed only the records of the City Dionysia'. See also E. Capps, 'The catalogues of victors at the Dionysia and Lenaea, CIA. II 977', *AJPh* 20 (1899), 395–6.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. T.J. Leary, *Martial Book XIV: The apophoreta* (London, 1996), at 251–2. Martial also names the titles of two of Menander's other plays, *Μισούμενος* and *Δις ἐξαπατών*, in epigram 14.214.

<sup>6</sup> *Thaïs* is well attested and we have some fragments (*PCG* 6.2, s.v. *Θαῖς*). We may have an extant fragment from *Glycera* (*PCG* 6.2, s.v. *Γλυκέρρα*); Alciphron (*PCG* 6.2 s.v. test. 20, lines 158–9) also seems to allude to the play.

<sup>7</sup> While several sources claim that a Glycera was Menander's girlfriend and the inspiration for his art, Martial is our only source for the claim that a Thaïs was Menander's lover. In any case, we can safely dismiss the fanciful autobiographical tradition that Menander had two actual girlfriends by the names of Thaïs and Glycera. The only other possible explanations of these lines, then, are that *Thaïs* was Menander's first 'love comedy', meaning that before *Thaïs* he wrote some other type of comedy for which there is no evidence (cf. Plut. *Mor.* 712c, who claimed that all of Menander's plays involved a heterosexual love interest), or that Martial's language is sloppy, or that Martial is simply wrong. These last three explanations seem highly improbable. It should be pointed out that Martial's epigram offers an intriguing parallel to the phrasing of the 'Menander Inscription' found on the wall of the *Casa del Menandro* at Pompei (*CIL* IV, Suppl. III 1, 7350b). However, this now-faded painted text appears to have referred to Menander as the first writer of New Comedy rather than to his first comedy. For a thorough discussion of this inscription, see J. Linderski, 'The Menander Inscription from Pompei', *ZPE* 159 (2007), 45–55.

first play as his first love, as well as noting that the inspiration for Menander's art, which by Martial's day was commonly said to have been his lover Glycera, was actually *Thaïs*.<sup>8</sup> The interpretation that *Thaïs* was Menander's first play is also reinforced by the otherwise inexplicable word *pueri*, which I submit refers to the well-known fact that Menander produced his first play while still an ephebe,<sup>9</sup> and thus before July of 321 when Menander would have completed his second year of ephebic service.

All this presupposes that Martial had access to more information than we do, but that is hardly surprising, nor do we have to look far for where that information would have probably been found – in the didascalical notice affixed to the beginning of *Thaïs*. We can compare the fragmentary papyrus that preserves the didascalical notice of Menander's *Imbrioi*,<sup>10</sup> which states that Menander 'wrote this play during the archonship of Nicocles,<sup>11</sup> his seventy-[?],<sup>12</sup> and made it available to be performed at the City Dionysia, but it was not staged thanks to Lachares the tyrant. Later Callippus the Athenian played the lead rôle.'<sup>13</sup> Here we have the date (by archon), the exact compositional order of the play in Menander's corpus, the venue and some extra historical information about Lachares, suggesting that an additional note about Menander producing this play while an ephebe would not have been out of place in a didascalical notice.

There is still the possibility that *Thaïs* was not Menander's first play at the City Dionysia but only his first play altogether, but if Martial's *pueri* refers to Menander's ephebic status, Menander must have produced it before the Dionysia of 321 at some other venue,<sup>14</sup> which means he would necessarily have produced at least two plays while an ephebe.<sup>15</sup> While it is true that over the course of his thirty-year career he averaged about three and a half plays a year,<sup>16</sup> it seems unlikely that his output would have been as high at the beginning of his career,

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Traill 290 n. 26. For the commonplace that Menander's courtesan Glycera inspired him, see *PCG* 6.2 test. 16–20.

<sup>9</sup> Anon. *De comoedia* (see *PCG* 6.2, test. 3). Strabo (14.1.18) adds that Menander was a fellow ephebe of Epicurus.

<sup>10</sup> *P Oxy.* 1235 col. iii 103–22. See *PCG* 6.2 189.

<sup>11</sup> 302/1 B.C.E. The papyrus spells it Neikokles, a common variant spelling of names in Nik-

<sup>12</sup> It could be his seventy-first, seventy-third, seventy-sixth or seventy-ninth play.

<sup>13</sup> Translation based on the *editio princeps* of Hunt and Wilamowitz-Moellendorf at *P Oxy.* 1235. See also M. Gronewald, 'Bemerkungen zu Menander', *ZPE* 93 (1992), 20–1, W. Luppe, 'Nochmals zur 'Imbrioi' Didaskalie', *ZPE* 96 (1993), 9–10. Callippus 'the Younger' was also the lead actor in Menander's *Heniochus*, which was placed fifth at the City Dionysia in 312 B.C.E. (*JG* II<sup>2</sup> 2323a, col. I, line 38, Menander's name restored).

<sup>14</sup> The Lenaia of roughly January of 321 is the next most likely candidate but some other venue is not excluded, given that around 40% of Menander's plays must have been performed at other venues (see next footnote). The Rural Dionysia of December 322 would be another possible candidate.

<sup>15</sup> The Anonymus author of *De comoedia* (see *PCG* 6.2, test. 3) is emphatic that Menander produced his first play while an ephebe: ἐδίδαξε δὲ πρῶτος ἑφηβος ὦν ἐπὶ <Φιλ>οκλέους ἀρχοντος [322/1]. The manuscript actually says Διοκλέους, but there was no archon by this name in this period. Some have championed <Αντι>κλέους [325/4], but see De Marcellus and Schröder for why this is unlikely.

<sup>16</sup> Sources differ on the number of plays Menander wrote; Apollodorus records 105 (*FGrH* 244 F 43), others say 108 (Anon. *De comoedia*; *Suda*) or 109 (Aul. Gell. 17.4.4). Of these, 97 titles are known, but some may be falsely attributed or have alternate names. Since his career lasted only thirty years, he averaged about three and a half plays per year over the course of his career.

especially in this period when he was receiving ephebic training during the height of the Lamian War – the first big test of the *ephebeia* after Lycurgus' reforms.<sup>17</sup>

Another reason to doubt that Menander produced a play before his first play at the City Dionysia in 321 is to be found in Eusebius' testimony itself, but before this evidence can be properly appreciated it requires a new explanation for how the text of Eusebius erroneously came to say that Menander's first play was *Orge*, and that he won with it at the City Dionysia of 321.<sup>18</sup> Syncellus, whose text is undoubtedly the closest to Eusebius' original, has under Ol. 114.3 *Μένανδρος ὁ κωμικὸς ποιητῆς πρῶτον δράμα διδάξας Ὀργὴν ἐνίκα* and under Ol. 116.1 *Μενέδημος καὶ Σπεύσιππος φιλόσοφοι ἐγνωρίζοντο*. I suggest the entry under 114.3 in the official record for the City Dionysia was originally just *Μένανδρος ὁ κωμικὸς ποιητῆς πρῶτον δράμα ἐδίδαξεν* and that the words *πρῶτον δράμα* mean exactly what they say; the City Dionysia of 321 were the occasion of Menander's first drama whose name was not stated, but which from Martial's evidence can now be identified as his *Thaïs*. Meanwhile, the official entry under Ol. 116.1 was originally just *Μένανδρος καὶ Σπεύσιππος φιλόσοφος ἐγνωρίζοντο*. Then, someone who had conflated memories about Menander's first play, his first play at the City Dionysia, and his first win at the City Dionysia with *Orge* – either Eusebius' source, or Eusebius or an early copyist of Eusebius<sup>19</sup> – tacked the words *Ὀργὴν ἐνίκα* on to the end of Ol. 114.3 and changed the verb *ἐδίδαξεν* to the participle *διδάξας* to accommodate the new information, thus yielding *Μένανδρος ὁ κωμικὸς ποιητῆς πρῶτον δράμα διδάξας Ὀργὴν ἐνίκα* (we already know based on the *Marmor Parium*'s testimony that the last word *ἐνίκα* was added later, so it is no stretch

<sup>17</sup> Aristotle (*Ath. Pol.* 42) informs us that ephebes were exempted from all other service, and we have evidence on an inscription for only one other playwright, Ameinias, who produced a play at the Dionysia of 311 B.C.E. while an ephebe (*IG* II<sup>2</sup> 2323.46–7). Inscriptional didascalic notices are normally quite laconic, so the additional note that Ameinias was an ephebe suggests this was quite exceptional. Menander may have been granted special permission because of a lack of other entrants for two reasons. First of all, Alexander was aggressive at recruiting playwrights from Greece to perform for his troops (Curt. 6.2.5). In fact, Plutarch (*Alex.* 29) tells us that in 331 the comic actor Lycon of Scarpheia performed for Alexander, as did the tragic actor Athenodorus, who was fined for skipping the City Dionysia and had pleaded with Alexander to write a letter on his behalf. Instead, Alexander just paid the fine. Plutarch (*Alex.* 72) also states that 3,000 artists were with him in Ecbatana in 324 (cf. *Ath.* 12.53). In addition, once Alexander died, the Lamian War broke out and was still raging after the new archon Philocles took office in July 321. With Athens' future in doubt, several playwrights may simply have decided to skip the City Dionysia that year. However, Menander probably would have had more time to write plays after September 322 when the Macedonians occupied the Piraeus and possibly disbanded the *ephebeia*, but the period between September 322 and March 321 is still quite short for one so young to write and produce at least two plays. For some of these issues, see De Marcellus 73–4. For the status of the *ephebeia* at this time, see F.W. Mitchel, 'Derkylos of Hagnous and the date of *IG* II<sup>2</sup> 1187', *Hesperia* 33 (1964), 337–51, at 346–9 and *IG* II<sup>2</sup> 1199 (see D. Whitehead, 'Notes on Athenian demarchs', *ZPE* 47 [1982], 37–42, at 37–8 for the date).

<sup>18</sup> Capps (61) believed that '... the combination of the two notices [Ol. 114.3 and Ol. 116.1] can most readily be explained if we assume that the second notice ran thus: *Μένανδρος <κωμικὸς πρῶτον, δράμα διδάξας Ὀργὴν, ἐνίκα, καὶ Μενέδημος> καὶ Σπεύσιππος οἱ φιλόσοφοι ἐγνωρίζοντο*. The preceding notice [Ol. 114.3] employed the words *πρῶτον ἐδίδαξε*. Now the first person who falsely construed *πρῶτον* with *δράμα* (cf. Hieron.: *primam fabulam*) or with *διδάξας* would be tempted at once to substitute the second notice for the first'. His reconstructed 'second notice' is scarcely possible Greek and has been rightly criticized by Schröder 36–7, n. 9, yet his instinct remains sound.

<sup>19</sup> Since all versions of Eusebius claim Menander won with his first play *Orge*, the error must have been found in Eusebius' original, or in an early copy from which all later copies sprung.

to presume that the second to last word Ὀργήν was also a part of this addition). We find a similar conflation of memories made by Plutarch, who wrongly states that Sophocles won with his first play (*Cimon* 8.7).<sup>20</sup> After this, once the erroneous information that Menander won with his first play *Orge* was added under Ol. 114.3, the entry under Ol. 116.1 that Menander 'became celebrated' would not make much sense, and hence resulted in Ol. 116.1 being corrupted into *Μενέδημος καὶ Σπεύσιππος φιλόσοφοι ἐγνωρίζοντο*. If correct, this means that Menander's first play was *Thaïs*, he produced it at the City Dionysia in 321 B.C.E. while he was still an ephebe, and *Orge* won him his first victory in that venue in 315 B.C.E.

The supposition that *Thaïs* was Menander's first play immediately raises fresh questions involving the play's eponymous heroine, for in several of our sources on Alexander the Great, an Athenian courtesan named Thaïs was allegedly the instigator of a deed for which she became a celebrity throughout the Greco-Macedonian world, especially at Athens. The story is told that, at a wild victory party in Persepolis sometime between January and May of 330 B.C.E., she, a lowly Athenian prostitute, persuaded Alexander to torch the palace of Xerxes and thus exacted revenge for Xerxes' destruction of Athens.<sup>21</sup> Many modern scholars have questioned the veracity of this tradition,<sup>22</sup> and unfortunately the new dating of Menander's *Thaïs* to 321 B.C.E. sheds no new light on this controversy. Whether Menander based his character Thaïs on the historical Thaïs also remains impossible to say.<sup>23</sup> Those who are sceptical of the connection can point out that even if we assume that there is some kernel of truth behind Thaïs' involvement at Persepolis, it would probably have been the case that by 321 – nine years after the event, which may as well be a lifetime in terms of comic material – Thaïs would long since have been a household name for courtesans in Athens, so any connection to her would

<sup>20</sup> On the unreliability of Plutarch's dating of Sophocles' first play, see S. Scullion, 'Tragic dates', *CQ* 52 (2002), 87–90.

<sup>21</sup> The story is first recorded by Clitarchus (paraphrased by Ath. 13.37.17–25 = *FGH* 137 T 11), whence it found its way into the 'vulgate tradition' of Diodorus (17.72), Curtius (5.7.2–7), and Plutarch (*Alex.* 38). Both Curtius and Plutarch also allude to an alternate official story that elided Thaïs from the scene. This 'court tradition' is found in Strabo (15.3.6) and Arrian (3.19); the latter describes the firing of Xerxes' palace as a calculated political decision by Alexander, against the advice of Parmenio, in order to please the Greeks, whose loyalty he was continuing to cultivate.

<sup>22</sup> Given Clitarchus' low reputation for accuracy even in antiquity (cf. Cic. *Brut.* 42 and Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.74), several modern scholars have questioned Thaïs' involvement in this affair. See U. Wilcken, *Alexander the Great* (London, 1932), 145; W.W. Tarn, *Alexander the Great II: Sources and Studies* (Cambridge, 1948), 48; L. Pearson, *The Lost Histories of Alexander* (New York, 1960), 218; N.G.L. Hammond, *Alexander the Great* (Bristol, 1989), 2. Others, however, feel that she may have been present; see E. Borza, 'Fire from heaven: Alexander at Persepolis', *CPh* 67 (1972), 233–45. Whatever the truth of Thaïs' involvement, the archaeological evidence points towards a conflagration that did not leave enough time to loot the palace thoroughly. On this, see E.F. Schmidt, *Persepolis*, 3 vols. (Chicago, 1953–1970); N.G.L. Hammond, 'The Archaeological and literary evidence for the burning of the Persepolis palace', *CQ* 42 (1992), 358–64; and H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 'Alexander and Persepolis', in J. Carlsen et al. (edd.), *Alexander the Great: Reality and Myth*, *ARID* Supplement 20 (Rome, 1993), 177–88. The latter stresses that the evidence does not suggest premeditation. Athenaeus (13.25) adds that after Alexander's death, Ptolemy married Thaïs and sired two sons with her, Leontiscus and Lagus, plus a daughter named Eirene whom Eunostos king of the Soli on Cyprus married.

<sup>23</sup> One extant fragment may support the connection to the historical Thaïs of Persian fame. In it (*PCG* 6.2 164) an undoubtedly lovesick male refers to himself as an ἀγγαρος, or Persian pony boy. However, the connection remains tenuous at best.

probably have been only loosely associative.<sup>24</sup> In fact, the opposite may have been true; Menander's play may have contributed to the growth of Thaïs's legend that eventually made its way into the vulgate tradition of Alexander's exploits.

Only a few fragments of *Thaïs* survive, the longest of which comes from the prologue of the play:<sup>25</sup>

ἐμοὶ μὲν οὖν αἶδε τοιαύτην, θεά,  
θρασεῖαν, ὥραϊαν δὲ καὶ πιθανὴν ἄμα,  
ἀδικοῦσαν, ἀποκλείουσιν, αἰτοῦσαν πυκνά,  
μηδενὸς ἐρώσαν, προσποιουμένην δ' αἶψα.

So sing, goddess, of such a whore  
Bold, beautiful, with a tongue that can bend,  
Unjust, locking out, yet asking for more,  
Who really loves no one but can always pretend.<sup>26</sup>

While we do not know the context of this passage other than that it almost certainly comes from the prologue, possibly even the first lines of the play (Traill 287), such overt parody, especially of epic, is uncharacteristic of Menander's (arguably) later extant prologues and may point to a youthful poet who was still writing plays more akin to Middle Comedy, where burlesque of epic was more common.<sup>27</sup> We can now also explain the impressive *Nachleben* of this play among the Romans (see Traill): *Thaïs* was Menander's first play, and as such it was perceived to have represented his original genius that changed the course of literary history.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> E. Körte, 'Glykera und Menander', *Hermes* 54 (1919), 87–93, argued that the historical Thaïs had nothing in common with Menander's character except the name.

<sup>25</sup> See Traill 285.

<sup>26</sup> *PCG* 6.2 163.

<sup>27</sup> Menander may have drawn the speaker as a comic figure who frequently quotes Homeric bombast, just as Davus quotes tragedy in *Aspis*. Even so, this obvious parody of Homer is unique among the fragments of Menander and the intertextual dialogue with an epic source rather than tragedy comports more closely with the burlesque of epic plots found in Middle Comedy. For mythological burlesque in Middle Comedy, see Platonius, lines 51–8; text of G. Kaibel, *Comicorum graecorum fragmenta*, vol. 1.1, *Doriensum comoedia, mimi, phlyaces* (Berlin, 1899), 3–6. For Middle Comedy in general, see H.-G. Nesselrath, *Die attische Mittlere Komödie: Ihre Stellung in der antiken Literaturkritik und Literaturgeschichte* (Berlin and New York, 1990).

<sup>28</sup> Already at a young age Menander demonstrated his ability to turn a memorable phrase with *φθείρουσιν ἥθη χρηστὸν ὁμιλία κακαί* (= *PCG* 6.2 165), which was quoted by the Apostle Paul (*I Corinthians* 15:33).