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A Note on Fr. Com. ADESP. 1147 Kassel–Austin


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In a thorough investigation (ZPE 99, 1993, 245–78) of three papyri apparently originating from one roll written in the third century B.C. (P.Cologne 203 and 243, first published by K. Maresch in Kölner Papyri V (1985) 1–21 with plates xxvii–xxviii, and VI (1987) 52–60 with plate xix respectively; P.Michigan inv. 6950, first published by R. Nünlist in ZPE 99, 245–53 with plates iii–v; these texts are republished as fr. adesp. 1147 in Kassel–Austin, Poetae comici graeci VIII pp. 478–91 with a more convenient line-numbering which is adopted here in this note), Nünlist tentatively suggests that the extant portion of this roll may perhaps derive from Menander’s Dis Exapaton.

If Nünlist is correct in this attribution, Plautus’ adaptation of Dis Exapaton in his Bacchides must have involved both original composition of text and changes in plot-construction on a scale unparalleled (according to general belief⁴) elsewhere in Plautus. In fact Nünlist cannot point to any verbal links between fr. com. adesp. 1147 and Plautus’ Bacchides of the sort that link the Oxyrhynchus fragments of Dis Exapaton vv. 11–30, 83–87 and 91–113 with Bacchides 494–519, 698–700 and 526–62 respectively, although the damage that this does to Nünlist’s argument is admittedly lessened by the fact that much of the opening act of Bacchides is not preserved in the Palatine manuscripts.


The identity of fr. 1147’s [Ἑ]φέσιος παχύς is open to question. Nünlist assumes (249–50) that παχύς here means ‘stupid’, as at Ar. Nub. 842, and that the reference is to the Greek counterpart of the soldier Cleomachus in Bacchides; however, although Plautus describes Cleomachus as non-Athenian (peregrini . . . militis 1009), he never identifies him as Ephesian in the preserved portions of Bacchides. On its own [Ἑ]φέσιος παχύς could also be taken as a reference to Theotimos, the rich priest of Artemis at Ephesus who deposited for safety by the Plautine Mnesilochus (= Menander’s Sostratos); the wealth of Theotimus is emphasised by Plautus (Bacch. 331–39), and παχύς is used in Attic with the sense of ‘wealthy’ (Ar. Vesp. 288 with Συ, Pax 639, possibly Equ. 1139; cf. also Photius and the Suda s.v. paxei). But a link here with Theotimos is probably mistaken; in fr. 1147 that reference to a fat cat from Ephesus is followed immediately by the entrance of another character from a stage house (v. 169), and in the Bacchides scene around this point no new character comes on stage.

It is the other Ephesian reference in fr. 1147 that scuttles or at least more seriously damages its attribution to Dis Exapaton. Vv. 26–27 derive from an early scene in the play. Here, according to Nünlist, the παιδαγόγος Lydos appears to be mocking his companion Moschos (= Pistoclerus in Plautus) when he imagines him saying ἀνθρώπως ὄν ὑπερηφάνος, ὃς πότνια λ[υϕ] / κληρούχ’ Ἕβεσια, σὸς πολίτης. Admittedly the papyrus text is here defective, and its interpretation not wholly certain⁵, but most probably Moschos is being made to invoke Artemis as the goddess who protects Ephesus and to claim that he is a citizen of that city. Yet in Plautus’ Bacchides none of the characters claims Ephesian origins, and the city figures in the plot only as the place where, in the antecedents to the staged

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¹ In accepting a due measure of Plautine originality, I cannot go along with all the views of Eckard Lefèvre and the Freiburg school, while applauding the important contribution that they have made to our understanding of Roman comedy.

² See ZPE 121 (1998) 38.

³ See here especially Maresch in Kölner Papyri V (1985) 15. The alternative interpretations of N. Zagagi, ZPE 62 (1986) 39 (not an apostrophe to Artemis but an address to a hetaira or a bawd) and Nünlist (an attempt to combine the Maresch and Zagagi interpretations) appear less satisfactory.
action, the Athenian Mnesilochus (= Sostratos in Dis Exapaton) spent two years, trying to recover a debt owed to his father and there falling in love with a hetaira of Samian origin (Bacch. 574).

However, Maresch’s assignment of fr. 1147 to Menander⁴ remains attractive, but its play title remains elusive. The possibility that it was his Ephesios has perhaps been too easily dismissed. Such a title would be appropriate for a play in which the young man in love was a sole Ephesian then present in some other city⁵, and the fragments quoted from Menander’s Ephesios supply nothing that runs counter to fr. 1147⁶. Indeed one of them (Men. fr. 172, ἐπ’ ἀρίστῳ λαβὸν / ὀψάριον) would neatly anticipate vv. 48–49 of fr. com. adesp. 1147 (χρηστῶς δηλαδὴ / ἤριστικὸς σεαυτόν).

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⁴ Kölner Papyri V (1985) 1.
⁵ Cf. my commentary on Alexis (Cambridge 1996) 120–21, 128–29, 244.
⁶ The fragment quoted by Nonius 1.2 with the heading Caecilius Efesione (Ribbeck, CRF³, Leipzig 1898, p. 46) also contains nothing that runs counter to fr. com. adesp. 1147, but although it is sometimes assumed that Caecilius’ model here was Menander’s Ἐφεσίως, a title Efesio (or Ephesio) is better interpreted not as a Latin variant for Ephesius, but as a slave name (cf. Ribbeck ad loc.).