

PLAUTUS, *BACCHIDES*, 525

THE discovery two years ago of a passage from Menander's *Dis Exapaton* which can be compared directly with Plautus' version of the same material in the *Bacchides* is surely the most important event in recent Plautine scholarship, and E. W. Handley's announcement and analysis of this discovery, in his University College London Inaugural Lecture of 5 February 1968 ('Menander and Plautus: a Study in Comparison') is a model of scholarly and humane presentation.¹ But Handley makes a very puzzling suggestion in his paper: after quoting, from the end of one act of the Greek original, a bit of dialogue between father and son in which the idea of 'following' is repeated several times, he goes on to say (p. 15): 'Plautus has of course cut this [the 'following' dialogue] with the rest of the scene. But his young man's speech ends with a conventional "uos me sequimini" [*Bacch.* 525], as if he were attended by a retinue of slaves. Did Plautus really imagine the scene in that way? And whether he did or not, was he influenced by his memory of the motif at the Greek act-ending?'

There is nothing objectionable in Handley's theory that Plautus may have been influenced, consciously or unconsciously, by the memory of scenes which he cut from his Greek originals. What is puzzling is that Handley seems to imply, particularly with the words '*as if* he were attended by a retinue of slaves', that Plautus' young man, Mnesilochus, is *not* attended by a retinue of slaves, and that therefore the phrase *uos me sequimini* is no more than a hazy ghost of the 'following' motif in Menander and is in fact addressed to no one. Handley discusses the phrase further in a note (n. 11, p. 20): 'Was Plautus' Mnesilochus supposed to have it [the gold] with him, carried by slaves (525)? If so, their presence is otherwise ignored, not least when Mnesilochus needs to make himself inconspicuous at 404.' Here again, the language ('if so') carries the same implication. Now Plautus was certainly a very careless dramatist at times, but the simple fact of production would make it impossible to overlook a blunder of this magnitude: even if Plautus were capable of making such an error—and this is doubtful—it would surely be discovered and corrected at the first rehearsal.

The *uos* whom Mnesilochus addresses *were* in fact on the stage, and had been there ever since the young man's entrance at 385; they are the luggage-porters who almost invariably accompany a Plautine traveller when he arrives on the scene after a trip abroad.² Such porters are supernumeraries, generally mute. Though they can figure in the action, as do Theopropides', who touch the ground in terror at Tranio's ghost story in *Most.* 468–9, and though they can provide material for jokes, as do Hanno's Carthaginians in

¹ The new Menander fragment corresponds to *Bacch.* 494–562. A provisional text is appended to Handley's paper (pp. 22, 24). The fragment is to be published in *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, Supplement 22. See further J.-M. Jacques, 'Ménandre inédit: la Double Fourberie et la Samienne', *BAGB* 4^e sér. 2–3 (1968), 213–22; C. Questa, *RFIC*, xcvi (1968), 502–3; E.

Salvadori, 'Nuovi frammenti del Dis Exapaton', *Maia*, xxi (1969), 86–92; and G. Arnott, 'Menander: Discoveries Since the *Dyskolos*', *Arethusa*, iii (1970), 51–2.

² References to travellers, porters, etc., in Roman comedy have been collected in convenient form by C. Knapp, 'Travel in Ancient Times as Seen in Plautus and Terence', *CPh*, ii (1907), 1–24, 281–304.

Poen. 978–81, and even take part in a recognition scene (*Poen.* 1141–6), their usual fate is simply to obey orders—most often orders to ‘follow me’ (*Men.* 350, 445; *Poen.* 1152–4). One hopes they were allowed to put down their burdens when not actually walking from one place to another, since in one play they are on stage for 302 verses without being addressed (*Amph.* 551–853; they are perhaps referred to indirectly in 629). Their presence in the *Bacchides* may indeed, as Handley suggests, be somewhat awkward (though not nearly so awkward as Theopropides’ presence during Tranio’s supposedly private interchange with the *danista* in *Most.* 566–609). But perhaps something was gained in exchange for this awkwardness. First, the fact that the tutor Lydus could overlook the presence of Mnesilochus and his train serves to heighten the humorous self-absorption of his blustering speech on the degeneracy of modern morality (419–48). Second, when Lydus finally does take notice of Mnesilochus (451), the porters and luggage would provide him with concrete evidence for his mistaken assumption that *this* young man, at least, has been going about his father’s business in a way consistent with *mos maiorum*.

Porters generally, however, serve no practical dramatic purpose; they are not needed to advance the plot, since a returning traveller could leave his luggage at the port to be delivered later (*Trin.* 1102–8), and if he had to have money he could carry it himself (*Ter.*, *Phorm.* 679). This may be why the plot-conscious Terence does not use them in the *Phormio*, though two characters (Demipho, 231, and Chremes, 567) return from abroad in this play; the one time porters do appear in Terence they are treated very realistically (*Hec.* 415–29). Though Plautus sometimes uses porters as material for comedy, their main purpose in his plays is simply to swell the scene, to add one more facet to the stately stylization so characteristic of the Plautine version of the New Comedy.

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