THE *LYSISTRATA* AND THE WAR

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IT IS NOTORIOUSLY DIFFICULT for modern readers to determine precisely what serious advice, if indeed any, Aristophanes intended to convey to his audiences about the war in which they were engaged. In the case of the *Lysistrata* the difficulties are perhaps exceptionally acute because the tension at home and abroad was such, when the play was written and produced, that a comic poet might well have felt himself likely to be endangered if he were to voice his opinions too bluntly on topical issues. The first section of this paper (I) will attempt to refute the widely held belief that Aristophanes is seriously appealing for the immediate conclusion of peace. Although this belief has not been universally accepted, no one has, so far as I am aware, pointed out in specific terms how totally incompatible it is with the evidence of Thucydides on the situation at Athens in the period to which the play belongs. To look for any single political recommendation on which the *Lysistrata* is founded is, as I hope to show, a vain quest, but topical allusions are moderately plentiful, most of them pertaining, directly or indirectly, to the war. The second section of this paper (II) will examine a number of passages and attempt to determine where Aristophanes may be thought to be making an effort to influence public opinion and in what direction. Difficulties of interpretation will be encountered because he tends, perhaps designedly, to express himself rather obscurely.

I

The first Hypothesis to the *Lysistrata* testifies that the play was produced in the archonship of Callias, whose year of office was 412/11.[1] Allusions to contemporary events and prominent personalities supply only somewhat inexact indications of date,[2] but none of them seems to conflict with the evidence of the Hypothesis, which has, so far as I am aware, never been disputed. Unfortunately the Hypothesis does not state, and there is no means of establishing with certainty, whether the play was produced at the Lenaea, held in early February 411, or at the City

[1]The Hypothesis also designates this Callias as the successor to Cleocritus in order to distinguish him from another Callias who was archon in 406/5 and is stated in the first Hypothesis to the *Frogs* to have succeeded Antigenes.

[2]In addition to passages discussed below, there is a reference to the revolt of Miletus (108), which took place in the summer of 412; here it seems to be regarded as a fairly recent event.

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Dionysia, held in early April. With few exceptions, modern scholars have maintained that the earlier dating is to be preferred and that the *Lysistrata* is anterior to the *Thesmophoriazusae*, which has no Hypothesis. The arguments in favour of the orthodox view are, in my opinion, as compelling as such arguments can be.[3] This problem is not of any great importance in considering the issues to be raised in the present investigation. Topicality is an essential element of Old Comedy, and minor alterations might apparently be made shortly before a play was produced, but the whole process of composing text and music and of assembling and training the performers must have occupied a period of months rather than weeks. Thus the plot of the *Lysistrata* had almost certainly been worked out, and much of the play very probably had been written, before the end of 412.

An imposing array of scholars have interpreted the play as a serious plea for peace.[4] They maintain that Aristophanes, behind a façade of fantasy, is earnestly urging the Athenians to negotiate a settlement with the Spartans whereby the two powers should re-establish joint leadership over a united Greece. There must indeed have been many Athenians who would have been delighted if peace could have been concluded on such terms, but was a proposal of this kind realistic? Was there any prospect of acceptance by the Spartans in the circumstances existing at the time? Categorical answers to these questions are provided by Thucydides. When, at the beginning of 411, Peisander urged the Athenian assembly to consent to a modification of the constitution and the recall of Alcibiades in exchange for alliance with Persia and victory over the Peloponnesians, there was at first bitter opposition. He then challenged the objectors separately to tell him whether there was any hope of survival (*σωτηρία*)[5] for the city, in the desperate situation facing it, unless Persia could be induced to change sides. They had to acknowledge that there was none, and eventually the assembly authorised him with ten others to initiate negotiations for the implementation of his scheme (Thuc. 8.53.1–54.2).

[3]The case for this view has recently been strengthened by A. H. Sommerstein, *JHS* 97 (1977) 112–126. An additional complication is that the chronology of political developments in 411 has been much disputed.

[4]Gilbert Murray, *Aristophanes* (Oxford 1933), whose chapter on the *Lysistrata* (164–180) is entitled "The last effort for peace;" H. Van Daele, *Aristophane* 3 (Budé, Paris 1928) 111; W. M. Hugill, *Panhellenism in Aristophanes* (Chicago 1936) 21–27; W. Schmid, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur* 1.4 (Munich 1946) 206–208, 319; V. Ehrenberg, *People of Aristophanes*[2] (Oxford 1951) 61–62; F. Ballotto, *Saggio su Aristofane* (Messina 1963) 49–50, 68–69; T. Gelzer, *RE* Suppl. 12 (1970) 1481–1482. Even W. G. Forrest, *Phoenix* 17 (1963) 10 n.22, who holds unorthodox views about the *Acharnians*, is inclined to believe that in the *Lysistrata* "Aristophanes was arguing for peace."

[5]Cf. *Lys.* 496–501, where *σώζειν* occurs four times.

This meeting of the assembly was very probably held either shortly before or shortly after the production of the *Lysistrata*.[6] The outcome of the debate reflects current opinion about the war: even those Athenians to whom the prospects of altering the constitution and recalling Alcibiades were abhorrent evidently felt that drastic measures, which might involve the sacrifice of deeply held principles, were unavoidable if Athens was to avoid defeat. Unless the impression created by the narrative of Thucydides is wholly misleading, hardly any Athenians can have expected Sparta even to consider peace proposals which did not virtually amount to an Athenian surrender. Even Peisander and his fellow-conspirators, who hoped to gain the support of Persia through Alcibiades and thereby win the war (Thuc. 8.48.1), did not, when these hopes were dashed, at first contemplate negotiation with Sparta: their intention was rather to continue the war as best they could (63.4). It was only when, after usurping control of the state, they became increasingly alarmed by the violence of the opposition to their regime that they made several attempts to negotiate a settlement of some sort with the Spartans. They argued that it was reasonable for Sparta to adopt a more indulgent attitude towards themselves than towards "the untrustworthy democracy" (70.2–71.3; 86.9), but their main concern was to secure Spartan backing to protect them against their enemies at home and at Samos (90.1–2). They cannot have been optimistic that even the overthrow of the democracy would induce the Spartans to treat Athens with any degree of leniency, since they instructed their envoys to make peace "on any possible terms that were at all tolerable" (90.2). Their overtures in fact achieved absolutely nothing (cf. 91.1), apart from securing a bolt-hole for most of them when the oligarchy was overthrown (98.1).

As scholars have pointed out,[7] the Athenians were in a somewhat less desperate situation when the *Lysistrata* was produced than they had been a year earlier. Few Greeks had then expected them to survive the summer of 412 (Thuc. 8.2.1–2), but they had shown remarkable powers of recovery and, aided by lack of effective co-operation among their enemies, they had suffered no crushing defeats and had even regained some of the allied cities which had revolted. It is, however, clear from the evidence of Thucydides mentioned in the preceding paragraph that, despite this

[6]Sommerstein (above, n.3) 114–120.

[7]K. J. Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy* (London 1972) 158, seems to me to exaggerate somewhat the extent of the Athenian recovery, but later (161) he pertinently asks whether in 411 peace could have been obtained except at the cost of intolerable concessions. G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (London 1972) 368, also states that, while Athens "had even begun to recover a little," Sparta would certainly not at this time have been willing to grant readily acceptable terms. He insists, however, that "the *Lysistrata* is a plea for peace" without suggesting how in the circumstances Aristophanes can have thought that this goal was to be attained.

improvement, the prospect of inducing Sparta even to consider terms of peace which ranked the two powers as equals was almost negligible. Only after the Athenians had won their victory at Cynossema (late summer, 411) can they have begun to entertain hopes of negotiating a settlement without being forced to make totally unacceptable concessions. Only after their much more decisive victory at Cyzicus (early summer, 410) did Sparta actually offer them terms of peace, and these were on a *status quo* basis, which would have involved the renunciation of all former subject-allies then in revolt. It is not in theory impossible that Aristophanes could actually have believed that a reconciliation with Sparta of the kind that he is thought to be advocating in the *Lysistrata* was feasible at the beginning of 411. Yet, if he did, he must have been strangely blind to the realities of the situation, which were only too obvious to others, or else unreasonably optimistic. Neither charge can be sustained.

The play has in fact an uncharacteristic undertone of depression and anxiety, as has often been noted.[8] Aristophanes betrays here and there, perhaps unwittingly, his awareness that Athens is engaged in a struggle for survival. It is true that a note of optimism might be thought to be detectable in the attitude attributed to the Spartan woman Lampito in the opening scene. She first expresses a desire for peace (117–118) and then, after rather grudgingly consenting to support the sex strike because "there is a need for peace" (144, a strangely inexplicit phrase, which does not necessarily apply to the Spartans alone), she undertakes to make every effort to induce her menfolk to agree to a just settlement (168–169). There is, however, no indication anywhere in the play that the Spartans generally, who had embarked upon a renewal of their conflict with Athens with confidence and optimism (Thuc. 7.18.2–3; 8.2.3–4), were already war-weary and might be expected to consent to terms considered by the Athenians to be acceptable.[9] In a number of passages scattered throughout the play there are unmistakable traces of gloom. In the first scene Lysistrata avoids an explicit reference to the destruction of Athens because it might be considered to be ill-omened (37–38). Later she

[8]P. Mazon, *Essai sur la composition des comédies d'Aristophane* (Paris 1904) 124; G. Norwood, *Greek Comedy* (London 1931) 246–247; Murray (above, n.4) 165; Ehrenberg (above n.4) 62; C. H. Whitman, *Aristophanes and the Comic Hero* (Cambridge, Mass. 1964) 205–206. This depression may account for the lack of sparkle in comparison with other comedies, though the bawdiest scenes are dramatically effective and the verbal dexterity with which the poet produces a copious flow of puns and innuendoes is as conspicuous as elsewhere.

[9]In 1080–1081, where the Spartan spokesman expresses willingness to agree to whatever terms of peace are proposed, his reasons are entirely sexual and not political. The Thebans (represented in this play by the beautiful but dumb Ismenia, who accompanies Lampito as an ambassadress, 86–89, 696–697) are known to have benefited handsomely from the war (*Hell. Ox.* 17.3–5 Bartoletti).

reports having heard public comments by Athenians on the desperate shortage of manpower (523–524); and when she is apparently about to draw attention to heavy losses in hoplites, presumably those in Sicily, the Proboulos, with unusual sensitiveness, cuts her short, bidding her not to rake up painful memories (589–590). In a passage which will be cited again below[10] the chorus of old men and old women undertake not to attack individual citizens but to adopt a benevolent attitude both in speech and action: *ἱκανὰ γὰρ τὰ κακὰ καὶ τὰ παρακείμενα* (1043–1047). These passages, as well as others in which the imprint of despondency is less striking (496–501, 591–597, 655, 772), belong to the real world in which Athens is engaged in a bitter struggle to avoid defeat, and not merely to the make-believe world of the plot.

There is, therefore, no doubt that Aristophanes fully understood the perils by which Athens was beset and was saddened by his consciousness of the situation. Why then did he apparently propose a solution which was in the circumstances prevailing at the time totally impracticable, as most of his audience must have realised? Only two scholars have, so far as I am aware, examined this problem at all searchingly. The first of these investigations, by M. Croiset, was published some seventy years ago,[11] the second, by H. J. Newiger, quite recently.[12] These scholars are to some degree in agreement: they both reject the orthodox view that the play advocates the immediate conclusion of peace, but both maintain that it does put forward another single recommendation which Aristophanes urges Athens to adopt. They disagree, however, in defining what this single recommendation is. Croiset suggests that, while it is impossible to "discover in the Athenian masses a minority of the sort that would have been inclined to propose peace," the aim of Aristophanes is to foster ideals which, though temporarily shelved during the current crisis, appealed to many as a basis for future policy and might indeed be attainable sooner than was generally believed (133). This explanation does not provide an adequate solution of the problem. Old Comedy is normally concerned with the present rather than the future, and it would be without parallel for a play to be devoted mainly to recommendations for action in circumstances which might never arise. Croiset later charges Aristophanes with mistakenly imagining that the Athenians merely by adopting a more generous attitude towards their subject-allies could regain the willing allegiance of those in revolt (142–143). Evidence from the play which has been cited above shows that he can hardly have conceived this optimistic notion.[13]

[10] Below, 47.

[11] *Aristophanes and the Political Parties at Athens* (Eng. trans., London 1909) 131–143.

[12] *Griechische humanistische Gesellschaft, Studien und Untersuchungen* 27 (1975) 185–192.

[13] Above, 41.

Newiger puts forward an interpretation which is somewhat more convincing but not wholly satisfying. In his opinion[14] the keynote of the play is to be found in the passage (572–586) in which Lysistrata uses an elaborate simile from the processes of wool-technology to expound to the Proboulos measures whereby the Athenian state should be reformed and improved: blackguardly persons, together with those conspiring to appropriate power for themselves, are to be eliminated, and support must be sought from everyone with loyal feelings towards Athens, including metics, aliens, debtors, and colonists.[15] As Newiger points out, the passage foreshadows the celebrated appeal for unity in the Parabasis of the *Frogs* (686–705, cf. 718–737). There is no doubt that the plea for unity voiced by Lysistrata is important and must certainly be intended to be taken seriously by the audience. The dangers arising from disunity were indeed attested by the developments of the next few months, when the rift between the Four Hundred at Athens and the armed forces at Samos nearly brought the war against the Peloponnesians to an abrupt and disastrous end. Nevertheless the passage is to a large extent a digression.[16] Whereas the two main strands of the plot are the sex strike and the seizure of the acropolis by the women, both designed to revolutionise foreign policy and to enforce the conclusion of peace with Sparta, Lysistrata here turns for the moment to domestic policy, which, though occasionally touched upon elsewhere, is a side issue in this play. When she first embarks upon her simile, she applies it to measures for ending the war by negotiation (567–570), and it might be argued that a preliminary requisite for progress in this direction was to effect greater unity at home and thereby recover some of the power which had been lost abroad.[17] There is, however, no indication here that Aristophanes intended to convey any such notion, and, as has been pointed out above, the play does not appear to regard a reconciliation with Sparta as a prospect for the future which might have to be deferred for a considerable time.[18] A basic objection to the explanation persuasively advanced by Newiger seems to me to be this: although members of the audience were far better able than modern readers are to distinguish between serious advice and comic

[14]*Op.cit.* 187, 190–192.

[15]Aristophanes has been thought by a number of scholars to be proposing in this passage a complicated programme of constitutional reform. As is shrewdly noted by V. Paronzini, *Dioniso* 11 (1948) 38, their reconstructions of his alleged recommendations differ widely from one another, and some are almost absurd. He is not necessarily advocating anything more specific than the need for severity towards enemies of the state and generosity towards its friends. Cf. 767–768, which might be interpreted as a general warning to the Athenians against civil strife.

[16]Rogers on 574; Wilamowitz on 580.

[17]Cf. Dover (above, n.7) 161.

[18]Above, 42.

fantasy, how can they have been expected to appreciate that the paramount recommendation of this play is conveyed in a brief passage which is only tenuously connected with the central theme? The plea for unity in the *Frogs* is different in some important respects. It is made in the Parabasis of an otherwise non-political comedy, which was produced in a very different political climate, and its recommendations are much more specific. It may be doubted whether, if the Parabasis of the *Frogs* had not survived, the elaborate simile in the *Lysistrata* with its call for unity could have been regarded as the keynote of the play.[19] Despite its undeniable importance and earnestness this passage is neither more important nor more earnest than others discussed below which are more closely linked to the plot.

II

What basis then can there be for believing that in the *Lysistrata* Aristophanes intended to convey to the Athenians any serious advice about the war in which they were engaged? The theme of the play is the scheme proposed by Lysistrata for securing a mutually acceptable peace between Athens and Sparta and the successful implementation of her scheme through the support of her own fellow-countrywomen together with women from Sparta and elsewhere. The means whereby this end is achieved are wholly farcical, supplying the foundation for the multitude of sexual jokes on which the play is largely dependent; the end itself, as I have tried to show, must have been known to almost the entire audience to have been, at the time of the performance, a vain dream.[20] Consequently the play might be deemed to be totally devoid of any serious element, a conclusion readily acceptable to anyone who considers that Aristophanes composed his comedies with the sole object of providing his audiences with entertainment. This theory, in its crudest form at least, is manifestly untenable, as scholars have convincingly maintained.[21] In the Parabaseis of some earlier plays, which are certainly not intended to be mere extravaganza, Aristophanes repudiates it himself.[22] It might be

[19]A passage in the *Lysistrata* believed by some scholars to be the Parabasis (614–705) is so abnormal that it should perhaps not be ranked as a Parabasis at all. It is structurally incomplete, and, more important, it does not interrupt the development of the plot but continues the conflict between the choruses of old men and old women; cf. Schmid (above, n.4) 324 n.3; Gelzer (above, n.4) 1483. The absence of a normal Parabasis may be thought to corroborate my view that Aristophanes does not in this play put forward any broad political recommendation.

[20]Above, 39–41.

[21]Whitman (above, n.8) 5–8; de Ste. Croix (above, n.7) 355–371 (who seems to me to overstate a good case); F. H. Sandbach, *The Comic Theatre of Greece and Rome* (London 1977) 29–32 (which came to my notice only when this paper was almost completed).

[22]Cf. *Ach.* 633–645; *Knights* 509–511; *Wasps* 1023–1028; *Peace* 736–738.

argued that the *Lysistrata* is a special case because of the exceptionally tense situation in which it was composed and produced. If, however, the poet had felt that the inclusion of comments on the contemporary political scene might produce violent repercussions and even prejudice his purpose in introducing them, he could have decided against writing a predominantly political play, as he apparently did when planning the *Thesmophoriazusae*. The *Lysistrata* does, however, contain a number of topical allusions, though fewer than occur in earlier plays or in the *Frogs*. Some of these allusions are evidently introduced merely to provide the foundation of passing jokes, but others, which tend to be more complex and may contain no patently comic element, seem to have at least a serious undertone. The play in fact conforms basically to what appears to have been the normal practice of Aristophanes. He is not urging the acceptance of his convictions on any single broad issue but seeks, in addition to amusing his audience, to educate and influence public opinion, especially the opinion of more discerning spectators, on a variety of topics, mostly connected with the war, in some instances in a single passage and in others in a group of widely separated passages. He evidently found himself compelled to be more wary here than in other plays when touching upon controversial questions of public concern, both external and internal. For this reason it is in some passages not easy for modern readers to be sure what views or recommendations he intends to convey, and even among members of his audience some uncertainty may have been felt. Examination of some allusions to the present and to the past will suggest that on a number of issues he is very much in earnest.

A passage in the formal speech of Lysistrata to the Athenian and Spartan representatives assembled for the final reconciliation is of special interest here because there is little doubt that it is designed to give serious advice on relations between Athens, Sparta and Persia (1128–1134). She claims to be justified in censuring both Athenians and Spartans equally: though sharing a common religious heritage, like kinsfolk,

> ἐχθρῶν παρόντων βαρβάρων στρατεύματι
> Ἕλληνας ἄνδρας καὶ πόλεις ἀπόλλυτε (1133–1134)

The meaning of these lines is by no means clear, perhaps designedly, and they have been variously interpreted. Most scholars link στρατεύματι with the preceding genitive absolute, some of them emending βαρβάρων to βαρβάρῳ.[23] This interpretation is not easily reconcilable with the evidence of Thucydides on relations with Persia at the time. The danger that the Persians might soon be in a position to dictate to the Greeks did not arise from the strength of Persian armed forces in the western satrapies but from the immense wealth of the Great King. The military resources of

[23]Cf. Blaydes on 1133; Wilamowitz on 1133; Dover (above, n.7) 170.

Tissaphernes were so limited that he was unable to crush the rebel Amorges and had to enlist the aid of the Peloponnesians for this purpose in the summer of 412 (Thuc. 8.28.2–3); and it is very doubtful whether, when the *Lysistrata* was being written, anyone at Athens can have heard of the mysterious Phoenician fleet which was later reported to have been assembled at Aspendus.[24] A more convincing interpretation is to link στρατεύματι with ἀπόλλυτε and to take it as a reference to hostile movements by Greeks against one another,[25] such as the Spartan occupation of Decelea. The passage thus means: "though barbarian enemies are in the offing, you are by military action trying to destroy Greeks and Greek cities."[26] Aristophanes is here critical of the Peloponnesians, as the scholiast recognises, for allying with Persia and accepting Persian subsidies to finance a war against fellow Greeks, but the preceding lines (1128–1132) show that he is also critical of the Athenians.[27] Even if the

[24]Peisander evidently did not refer to it when encouraging the Athenians to believe that Persia could be induced to change sides (53.1–54.2); and in the account of the secret negotiations held with the intention of implementing his plan the only mention of ships is the demand by Alcibiades on behalf of Tissaphernes that the Persians should be free to sail wherever they pleased and in whatever strength (56.4). This demand, apparently an afterthought, was probably intended to be so unreasonable that the Athenian delegates would be forced to break off negotiations, cf. M. S. Goldstein, *CSCA* 7 (1974) 160–161.

[25]Blaydes originally emended στρατεύματι to στρατεύμασι. This emendation is attractive: someone linking the word with the genitive absolute could well have substituted the singular for the plural, believing it to be more appropriate.

[26]According to V. Coulon, *REG* 66 (1953) 52–53, who develops an interpretation favoured by some earlier scholars, the passage means that the Greeks are fighting one another when barbarians are available as enemies, i.e., when it would be more sensible to band together and fight Persia. He claims to have found parallels for this sense of παρόντων in *Clouds* 776–777 and elsewhere in Aristophanes. In such passages, however, the meaning is that someone has, or possesses, something, whereas this interpretation of the passage under discussion is that the Greeks *can* have the barbarians as enemies if they so choose. Without ἑτοίμων or some such word the meaning suggested by Coulon can hardly be extracted from the passage. Dover (above, n.7) 170 n.8, points to what may be a closer parallel in Aesch. *Eum.* 864, but the passage has been variously interpreted. In any case, what evidence is there that Aristophanes, despite his antipathy towards barbarians, favoured the idea, so strongly advocated in the fourth century, of a crusade against Persia?

[27]S. L. Radt, *Mnemos.* 27 (1974) 14, and Sommerstein (above, n.3) 121 n.60, who both point to κοινῇ in 1129, are fully justified, in my opinion, in concluding that the Athenians as well as the Spartans are reproached here and in rejecting the view of Dover (above, n.7) 170, who maintains that the criticism applies to the Spartans only. Dover states that "until about the end of January the Peloponnesians were known to be receiving Persian support, whereas the Athenians had for at least three years been giving active support to a native rebellion against Persian rule in Asia Minor." The revolt of Amorges had in fact been crushed in the summer of 412 (see above), many months before the production of the *Lysistrata*. It is also questionable whether the Athenians were in league with him for any considerable period and whether either side rendered to the other anything more than token aid, cf. *Phoenix* 31 (1977) 319–329.

Lysistrata was produced before the meeting of the assembly at which Peisander propounded his scheme for enlisting Persian aid, most Athenians must have been aware that intrigues were afoot with this end in view. Aristophanes, who in the opening scene of the *Acharnians* (61–127) and in some passages of other plays (cf. *Knights* 478; *Peace* 107–108) shows repugnance towards any dealings with barbarians, certainly abhorred military collaboration with them by Greeks, especially against other Greeks. He is here seeking to deter the Athenians from incurring the same guilt as the Peloponnesians had already incurred, but he evidently thought fit in the circumstances to convey this warning with extreme caution, amounting almost to ambivalence. Many of his audience must have understood what he meant.

A similar wariness is traceable throughout the *Lysistrata* in the treatment of political leaders. The choral ode sung by the old men and old women when finally united into a single chorus begins with a declaration that because of the present troubles they have no intention of disparaging any citizen (1043–1048). Indeed neither in the remainder of this strophe (1049–1071) nor in the antistrophe (1189–1215) is any Athenian mentioned by name.[28] This principle of excluding personal attacks on individuals is observed generally throughout the play with few exceptions. The effeminate Cleisthenes inevitably turns up in a comedy so largely devoted to sex (621, 1092). Uncomplimentary remarks are also made about Demostratus, who was responsible for proposals relating to the Sicilian expedition, but he is mentioned mainly because the Proboulos wishes to recall that, while these proposals were being debated in the assembly, cries of mourning were heard from women celebrating the festival of Adonis, a contingency regarded as an evil omen (387–398). The minor politicians Theogenes and Lycon, who are attacked in other plays, receive mention here only as the husbands of disreputable wives (63–64, 270). A passing reference to Eucrates, the brother of Nicias, implies disapproval (102–103), but the point is obscure.[29]

It is therefore surprising to find a passage damning Peisander, probably the most powerful figure in Athens at the time and known to be the instigator of designs to revolutionise Athenian policy, both foreign and domestic. The brief but trenchant attack upon him by Lysistrata cannot be intended, as many references to public figures are, merely to raise a laugh. It is indeed not strikingly witty. It is surely designed, as some scholars have concluded,[30] to convey advice of some kind on the intrigues

[28]Contrast *Birds* 1553–1564 and 1694–1705, produced three years earlier.

[29]According to the scholiast he accepted bribes and was a traitor and a foreigner, but these charges are certainly not based on reliable evidence, cf. Wilamowitz on 103. The absurdity of regarding the brother of Nicias as a foreigner is noted by Rogers on 103.

[30]Cf. F. Sartori, *Le eterie nella vita politica ateniese* (Rome 1957) 115–116, who maintains that Aristophanes is referring to the increasing activities of political clubs.

of Peisander and others, of which many of the audience must have had some inkling. As was doubtless advisable in the circumstances, the passage is circumspectly worded, and its meaning and implications are not altogether clear, at least to modern readers. Lysistrata explains to the Proboulos that the women have seized the acropolis "to keep the money safe and to stop you making war because of it" (488). When he asks indignantly whether it is because of money that men make war, she replies:

καὶ τἄλλα γε πάντ' ἐκυκήθη.
ἵνα γὰρ Πείσανδρος ἔχοι κλέπτειν χοἱ ταῖς ἀρχαῖς ἐπέχοντες,
ἀεί τινα κορκορυγὴν ἐκύκων. οἱ δ' οὖν τοῦδ' οὕνεκα δρώντων
ὅ τι βούλονται· τὸ γὰρ ἀργύριον τοῦτ' οὐκέτι μὴ καθέλωσιν. (489–492)

In 411 Peisander had already been a prominent politician for a long time, probably since the opening years of the Archidamian war. Derogatory references to him occur in earlier plays of Aristophanes and in fragments by other comic poets:[31] he is said to have been a glutton, a coward, and, most important in the present context, a warmonger who made money out of the war. During most of his career he was evidently a typical demagogue, and the accusations against him in the passage quoted above are among those to which demagogues were traditionally subjected in Old Comedy. Aristophanes uses κυκᾶν when portraying Cleon stirring up trouble at home and abroad[32] and frequently charges him and others with misappropriation of public funds, mainly through opportunities provided by the war.[33] It is important to observe that Lysistrata uses past tenses in the first two sentences of her reply to the Proboulos: the turbulence which is said to have given Peisander the opportunity to steal is assigned by her to the past, and it extended over a considerable period (ἀεί), so that it must relate to his career as a demagogue.[34] On the other hand, since she proceeds to refer to the present (δρώντων ὅ τι βούλονται) and to the future (οὐκέτι μὴ καθέλωσιν), she is not concerned only with his activities, now apparently ended, when he was a typical warmongering demagogue. The passage should probably be interpreted as a warning, which, if Aristophanes had not felt himself compelled to wrap up his meaning more than

[31]A. G. Woodhead, *AJP* 75 (1954) 131–146, assembles the evidence and discusses his career, cf. W. J. McCoy in *The Speeches in Thucydides* (ed. P. A. Stadter, Chapel Hill 1973) 78–89. Unfortunately the *Peisander* by Plato Comicus cannot be accurately dated, and no fragment has survived.

[32]*Knights* 363, 692; *Peace* 270, cf. 654.

[33]From many passages in the *Knights* it will suffice to cite 823–827, 1147–1150. Other passages on embezzlement include *Ach.* 5–6; *Clouds* 351; *Wasps* 554; *Birds* 1111–1112; frag. 40.

[34]Sommerstein ([above, n.3] 113–114) is convincing on this point but less convincing when he makes the rather desperate suggestion (n.21) that Aristophanes may have altered the tenses at the last moment.

usual, might have been expressed somewhat as follows: "Peisander may appear to be making a political *volte face*, but in view of his record for conventional demagoguery it would be most unwise to trust him. His aim may well be, as it has been hitherto, to feather his own nest." Such a warning, issued before the oligarchical coup took place, was abundantly justified by subsequent developments if there is any validity in the verdict of Thucydides, who, while crediting the leading oligarchs with outstanding ability, utterly condemns their methods and their motives.[35] They chose to continue their revolutionary movement in their own interests when the prospect of assistance from Persia, which had been the ostensible reason for it, was no longer feasible.[36] The "office seekers" accused by Aristophanes of having, jointly with Peisander, caused disturbances in the past in order to provide themselves with opportunities for thieving (490–491) were presumably, like him, formerly extreme democrats and warmongers who are now imitating his political metamorphosis prompted by equally selfish motives.[37] Thucydides in his account of the situation at Athens when the overthrow of the democracy was imminent notes that the conspirators included men whom no one would ever have expected to turn to oligarchy (8.66.5).

Another passage may well be designed to suggest that the prosecution of the war on the other side of the Aegean would be adversely affected if the looming threat of political disruption at home were allowed to develop. The old men have climbed to the acropolis carrying logs intended for use in burning down the gates. When they find the burden exhausting

[35]See my conclusions in *Ryl. Bull.* 56 (1973) 199–215.

[36]Sommerstein ([above n.3] 122–123) maintains that, although Alcibiades is nowhere mentioned by name, certain passages (390–397, 589–590, 1093–1094, 507–515) are designed to deter the Athenians from consenting to his recall, which was one element in the plan sponsored by Peisander. While it is very difficult for modern readers to determine where there are veiled hints which might have been perfectly clear to contemporaries, these passages do not seem likely to be intended to refer to Alcibiades. Their inclusion may be explained on other grounds. The first two have already been cited (above, 47 and 42). The reference to the Hermocopids (1093–1094) is surely inserted solely to provide the opportunity for a bawdy joke, which is in fact among the wittiest in the play. The mention of a decision by the assembly to make an addition to a peace treaty (507–515) could well refer, as noted by Wilamowitz on 513, to an occasion other than one recorded by Thucydides when Alcibiades was involved (5.56.3), and the passage, even if it does refer to this occasion, is admirably effective in its context without necessarily reminding the audience of the part played by Alcibiades.

[37]There may be a link, as Sartori (above n.30) maintains, between these office seekers and the persons mentioned later in the textile simile who "conspire together (*συνισταμένους*) and form themselves into clumps in order to gain offices" (*ἐπὶ ταῖς ἀρχαῖσι*, 577–578). Thucydides uses *ξυνίστασθαι* of oligarchical conspirators, 8.65.2; 66.1–3, cf. 54.4 on the oligarchical clubs canvassed by Peisander, which existed *ἐπὶ δικαῖς καὶ ἀρχαῖς*. It is, however, not clear whether the two groups of office seekers mentioned by Aristophanes are identical.

because of their age, their leader asks, "Who of the generals at Samos will be willing to lend a hand with the wood?" (313). Some modern scholars have sought to explain the passage by suggesting that help is requested from younger men whose physique would be better suited to the task of handling the logs.[38] This interpretation is unsatisfactory. It is true that elsewhere the play presupposes that many Athenians of military age are absent on active service (cf. 99–104), and a considerable number of these must have been at Samos, but why should the chorus leader refer specifically to the generals there, who were not necessarily young and strong? Why also should he imply that some of them might be prepared to help while others might not? The narrative of Thucydides makes very clear that, throughout the period leading to the establishment of the oligarchy at Athens and while it remained in power, the attitude of the generals at Samos, who were in a position to influence their troops, was a crucial factor in the development of the situation.[39] The appeal by the chorus leader for support from the generals in suppressing the revolutionary movement of the women who have seized the acropolis may be intended to suggest that those of the generals at Samos who felt that the prospect of Athenian survival might be wrecked by political disruption should use their power to halt the spread of the revolutionary movement known to be being planned by Peisander and his confederates.[40] It is true that the old men are represented as blustering fools and very unsympathetically treated until they become reconciled to the old women (1043), but, in conformity with the traditional illogicality of Old Comedy, Aristophanes evidently uses them as his mouthpiece elsewhere in the play.[41]

Some support for this interpretation of the reference to the generals at Samos may be thought to be supplied by a scholium on the passage, even though it is rather muddled. According to this scholiast Didymus and Craterus stated that Aristophanes is making a riddling reference (*αἰνίττεσθαι*) to Phrynichus. Now of the generals serving at Samos in 412/11 Phrynichus is the only one known for certain to have opposed the scheme to win Persian support through Alcibiades, and indeed Thucydides

[38]Wilamowitz on 313, cf. Rogers on 313.

[39]C. W. Fornara, *The Athenian Board of Generals* (Wiesbaden 1971 [*Historia Einzelschrift* 16]) 66, gives the names of those known to have been members of the board for 412/11. It is impossible to draw up an accurate list of those serving at Samos when the *Lysistrata* was produced. Some members of the board are known to have later supported the Four Hundred, while others remained faithful to the democracy.

[40]Wilamowitz on 313 (last sentence) and Hugill (above, n.4) 49 are inclined to believe that the passage hints at political unrest. Van Daele on 313 apparently considers that it refers to the need for military success, which depended largely upon the generals at Samos, if Athens was to be saved.

[41]Cf. all the passages cited below from the more distant past (52), apart from the references to Artemisium and the expedition of Cimon.

records his objections at considerable length in a celebrated passage of reported speech (8.48.4–7). Thus Didymus, who wrote a commentary on Aristophanes, apparently maintained that the appeal for help by the old men to the generals at Samos was addressed primarily to the chief opponent of the revolutionary movement led by Peisander. Admittedly the scholiast drew a very different conclusion, but he is demonstrably mistaken. He goes on to record that Phrynichus acted maliciously towards the democracy with the result that a decree was issued confiscating his property and imposing other penalties. It is inconceivable that Aristophanes can have been referring to the measures taken against Phrynichus, which were in fact posthumous. Even his removal from office at the instigation of Peisander on a trumped up charge (Thuc. 8.54.3) can hardly have taken place when the *Lysistrata* was written, and in any case it would be inappropriate for the old men, when asking the generals for help, to draw attention to accusations against one of them.[42] It is very difficult to believe that Didymus, who had a high reputation as a learned compiler, can have made such an elementary blunder, and the fault must surely lie with the scholiast. Finding in the commentary of Didymus a statement that the verse about the generals related to Phrynichus, to which was appended some further information including a quotation from Craterus on the decree issued by the democracy,[43] the scholiast is likely to have mistakenly concluded that, according to Didymus, Aristophanes is referring to the measures against Phrynichus. The scholia on Aristophanes are notoriously unreliable.[44]

Some allusions to the contemporary scene seem to have no serious undertone and to be introduced merely to supply material for bawdy jokes. Among these are two references to the Carystians (1058, 1181),[45] of whom three hundred are known to have later been in Athens in the

[42]A second scholium on *Lys.* 313 is almost nonsense. It states that the generals at Samos were very unfortunate (which misrepresents the situation there) and that the verse means "Which of them will with me grasp the wood in order that he may become more unfortunate?"

[43]As F. Jacoby, *FGrHist* 3 b Komm. (1955) 108, points out, the mention of Craterus does not mean that he also commented on *Lys.* 313 but that by referring to his collection of Athenian decrees Didymus sought to authenticate information about the decree against Phrynichus.

[44]H. Lloyd Jones, *CP* 70 (1975) 197: "One needs no very wide acquaintance with the ancient commentaries on Aristophanes to know that the explanation in the scholia has no authority."

[45]According to the scholia on both passages the Carystians are derided as adulterers, but this explanation is probably a gratuitous assumption from the contexts. My attention has been drawn to Jeffrey Henderson, *The Maculate Muse* (New Haven 1975) 126, who sees here a punning reference to κάρυα (nuts), which he claims to have been "a common slang term" for testicles. This explanation is not inconceivable, but he does not seem to me to have established convincingly that κάρυα was in fact so used.

service of the oligarchs (Thuc. 8.69.3), and a mysterious remark by the Spartan herald about Pellene (996), presumably the Achaean town of that name.[46] It is also noteworthy that the localities which the Athenians require the Spartans to hand over to them under the terms of the proposed peace treaty (1168–1170) are chosen solely to provide a series of sexual puns.[47] On the other hand, many allusions to the past, distant or recent, seem to have been included because they can be used to convey serious views relevant to the situation at the time when the play was written. It contains an abundance of references, indeed a larger number than in any other extant comedy, to the more glorious episodes in Athenian history. Some of these episodes occurred towards the end of the sixth century in the course of struggles for freedom: the exploit of Harmodius and Aristogeiton (631–634), the heroic failure at Leipsydrion (664–665) and the triumph over Cleomenes, when he was besieged on the acropolis and forced to surrender with ignominy (274–282). There are

[46]J. Taillardat, *Mélanges Pierre Chantraine* (Paris 1972) 255–261, in an ingenious and persuasive discussion of the passage, emends Πελλάνας to Παλλάνας, maintaining that the herald is referring to a Spartan claim to the peninsula of Pallene in Chalcidice and that there is a punning allusion to a prostitute bearing the same name as the locality claimed by the Spartans, as is attested by the scholium on the passage. Since the Spartans had during the past decade hardly concerned themselves with the Thraceward region (the contacts mentioned by Thuc. 5.80.2 and 6.7.4 are almost negligible), a Spartan claim to Pallene does not fit easily into the historical context, but it may have been chosen solely for the sake of the pun. Taillardat may be thought to be insufficiently critical of the scholium, which is contemptuously rejected by others (cf. Blaydes, *ad loc.*) and, though he shows that a prostitute might be named after her place of origin, his evidence relates to cities only, whereas Pallene is a geographical term. Nevertheless, his explanation is preferable to any previously offered and could well be correct.

[47]In another connection the aim of Aristophanes seems to me to have been nothing more profound than to cause amusement. D. M. Lewis, *BSA* 50 (1955) 1–12, has produced evidence that the priestess of Athena Nike, when the *Lysistrata* was produced, was Myrrhine and the priestess of Athena Polias was Lysimache (cf. *Lys.* 554), closely akin to Lysistrate. The mother of the Spartan king Agis, who was in command at Decelea and must have been of all Spartans the best known to Athenians at the time, was named Lampito (Hdt. 6.71.2; Plato *Alcib.* 1.123e; Plut. *Ages.* 1.1). Dover ([above, n.7] 152 n.3) is sceptical about these links between characters in the play and real persons: "it seems hard to believe that Aristophanes means us to think of Lysistrata as the priestess Lysimakhe and of Myrrhine as the priestess Myrrhine." The links, striking though they are, might possibly be fortuitous, especially as Myrrhine is a common name, but, if they are not, why should anyone believe that Aristophanes means actually to identify his characters with the real persons? On the contrary, he chooses only to give them the same names, thereby devising an admirable joke, which must have been all the more effective because his characters, as they appeared on the stage, were doubtless much younger and perhaps more personable than the august ladies whose names they shared, just as they are likely to have differed from them in being so largely preoccupied with sex. To seek more serious explanations of this curious phenomenon, as suggested by N. V. Dunbar (*CR* 20 [1970] 271) and Gelzer ([above, n.4] 1480), seems to me to be unprofitable.

indirect references to Marathon (285) and Salamis (675), and a Spartan singer credits the Athenians with victory at Artemisium (1248–1253). More recent events mentioned with pride are the expedition of Cimon to Sparta, which Lysistrata represents as having saved Sparta from the helots (1137–1146), and the achievements of those tough old warriors Myronides and Phormio (801–804). The motive behind these reminders of a glorious past is evidently to raise morale in a period of stress. Their introduction may be compared with the use of Attic legends by Euripides for patriotic purposes. It also foreshadows the practice of Isocrates and other fourth-century writers, whose adoption of much the same methods as that of Aristophanes had a similar aim. There is some misrepresentation in two of the passages cited above, a normal characteristic of propaganda in time of war: Artemisium was in fact indecisive, and the force sent to Sparta under Cimon was unceremoniously dismissed before the revolt was crushed.

The attitude of Aristophanes towards the more recent past is strikingly different. He is critical of the Athenians for decisions which he considers to have been misguided: they would not now, he implies, be in a perilous situation if they had had the good sense to accept the advice offered by him in earlier plays. Though never a pacifist, he had urged them to seek a reconciliation with Sparta provided that it could be achieved with honour. Even in the period of high confidence after the victory at Pylos he continued to favour a negotiated peace, as is seen from the *Knights* (794–808, cf. 1388–1395), and he evidently shared the view of Thucydides that the Athenians had acted foolishly in allowing themselves to be persuaded by Cleon to reject the overtures repeatedly made by the Spartans at that time. In the *Lysistrata* criticism of past policy mostly takes the form of strictures by women, especially Lysistrata herself, against men who had been responsible for it. In her confrontation with the Proboulos she complains that since the outbreak of the Archidamian war the men have constantly reached ill-advised decisions and have contemptuously refused to listen to any criticism from their wives who tried to sway them in the direction of moderation (507–528). In several briefer passages she charges them with mismanagement (432, 1115–1118, 1276–1278). The Spartan Lampito expresses doubts whether the Athenian demos, while in possession of a fleet and ample funds, could be induced to be reasonable (170–174), implying that it had behaved unreasonably in the past. The women of the chorus censure the men for having failed to make proper use of the financial advantages gained by their ancestors from victory in the Persian wars (652–655) and also for having passed decrees forbidding uncontrolled traffic with Boeotia (700–705). In the exodos an Athenian spokesman deplores the obstructive behaviour of envoys sent to Sparta who through inattention and misrepresentation

bring home conflicting reports of what was said to them (1228–1235), and a Spartan singer prays that Athenians and Spartans alike may abandon foxy dodges in their relations with one another (1269–1270). While it was traditional for Old Comedy to poke fun at the authorities responsible for the policies of the state, in this instance Aristophanes does seem to have had an axe to grind and to have accordingly drawn attention to the consequences arising from disregard of his advice.

The *Lysistrata* has a war-time atmosphere, comparable with that of the *Acharnians*, though the situation has now become much graver. To readers with experience of modern wars the hardships and shortages have a familiar flavour. Because Athens was at war with Boeotia, the importation of Copaic eels was discontinued, and the absence of this prized delicacy is noted with regret (700–703, cf. 36). Almost the only point of interest in two choral passages based on the tedious repetition of a primitive joke (1049–1071, 1189–1215) is the presupposition that ordinary Athenian citizens were ill-supplied at the time with food, not only for festal occasions but even for daily use, also with various luxury goods including clothing, and even with money.[48] Shortly before the final reconciliation is concluded, the representatives of both sides look forward impatiently to the long postponed resumption of agricultural pursuits (1173–1175). A passage in which Lysistrata and Calonice express their contempt for the frequent spectacle of men shopping in the market place equipped in full armour presents a lively picture of war-time Athens, though the joke is somewhat laboured (555–564).[49] More generally, the play makes a subtle appeal to the many Athenians who, depressed by sufferings resulting from the war and also by the fear of defeat, must have indulged in wishful thinking and, with the illogicality common in such conditions, have said to themselves, "How wonderful it would be if suddenly we could be friends again with the Spartans as we once were, so that all our troubles would be ended."

The *Lysistrata* is a play about peace but not an appeal to the Athenians to try to make peace. On the other hand, its aim, unlike that of the *Thesmophoriazusae* produced in the same period of danger and stress, is not only to entertain the audience. Some of, though not all, its allusions to the present and the past are designed to offer, in guarded terms, advice and comment on issues which were in the public eye at Athens at the beginning of 411.[50]

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[48]The strictures on this passage by Dover (above, n.7) 154 are fully merited.

[49]Thuc. 8.69.1 reflects similar conditions from a different angle.

[50]I am grateful to Professor D. M. MacDowell whose comments on an earlier version of this paper have been most valuable.