

## Cratinus, Aristophanes and Attic countryside. A note on the *hypothesis* of Cratinus' *Dionysalexandros* (POxy. 663 col. i, rr. 20-25)<sup>1</sup>

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Recibido: 9 de Abril de 2021 / Aceptado: 13 de Mayo de 2021

**Abstract.** This paper offers a discussion on a passage from the *hypothesis* of Cratinus' *Dionysalexandros* (POxy 663 col. i, rr. 20-25). According to this source, Cratinus very likely hinted, in his play, at Spartans' invasions of Attic countryside during the first years of the Peloponnesian War. This is one of Aristophanes' most typical comic themes. As a matter of fact, from *Banqueters* to *Peace* (i.e. 427-421 BC), the poet staged comedies with rustics as protagonists, depicting the countryside as an idealised place and developing in various ways the theme of the forced urbanisation of Attic country people. Although there is no evidence that Cratinus dramatized this theme, at least he referred to it in his comedy and this could have inspired the young Aristophanes.

**Keywords:** Cratinus, *Dionysalexandros*, Aristophanes, Attic countryside.

## [es] Cratino, Aristófanes y campo ático. Una nota sobre la *hypothesis* de *Dionysalexandros* de Cratino (POxy. 663 col. I, rr. 20-25)

**Resumen.** Este artículo ofrece una discusión sobre un pasaje de la *hypothesis* de *Dionysalexandros* de Cratino (POxy 663 col. i, rr. 20-25). Según esta fuente, Cratino, en su obra, muy probable hizo referencia a las invasiones espartanas del campo ático durante los primeros años de la Guerra del Peloponeso. Este es uno de los temas cómicos más típicos de Aristófanes. De hecho, de *Comensales* a *La Paz* (hacia 427-421 a.C.), el poeta escenificó comedias con los rústicos como protagonistas, retratando el campo como un lugar idealizado y desarrollando de diversas formas el tema de la urbanización forzada de los campesinos áticos. Aunque no haya evidencia de que Cratino dramatizara este tema, seguramente se refirió a él en su comedia y esto pudo haber inspirado al joven Aristófanes.

**Palabras clave:** Cratino, *Dionysalexandros*, Aristófanes, campo ático.

**Cómo citar:** Ceccarelli, Stefano (2022), Cratinus, Aristophanes and Attic countryside. A note on the *hypothesis* of Cratinus' *Dionysalexandros* (POxy. 663 col. i, rr. 20-25), en *Cuadernos de Filología Clásica. Estudios griegos e indoeuropeos* 32, 135-141.

<sup>1</sup> I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Bernhard Zimmermann, Prof. Benjamin Acosta-Huges, Francesco Paolo Bianchi and Ugo Mondini, as well as the two anonymous referees, who gave me insightful and helpful comments. All remaining mistakes are solely my own responsibility.

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The ancient *hypothesis* of Cratinus' *Dionysalexandros* was discovered and published in 1904 by Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt (*POxy.* IV 663)<sup>3</sup>. It was a very welcome discovery since it presents a substantial part of the plot of Cratinus' *Dionysalexandros*, a comedy otherwise known only through a handful of quotations from different authors (fr. 39-51 K.-A.). *POxy.* 663 has been extensively studied by scholars who have made several attempts to shed light on the features of the plot of this comedy<sup>4</sup>.

In my paper I would like to focus attention on a passage from the *hypothesis* of this comedy. In *POxy* 663 col. i, rr. 20-23 (= Cratin. *Dionysalex.* test. i K.-A.) the *hypothesis* relates that Dionysus sails off to Sparta, kidnaps Helen, and then comes back to Ida, a mountain near Troy:

μ[ε]τ[ὰ] δ[ὲ] ταῦ[τα] πλεύσας εἰς  
Λακεδαιμό[να] [καὶ] τὴν Ἑλένην  
ἐξαγαγὼν ἐπ' ἀνέρχεται  
εἰς τὴν Ἰδην.

After this, [Dionysus] sails off to  
Sparta, takes Helen  
away, and returns  
to Ida<sup>5</sup>.

From this passage it is possible to infer that the *Dionysalexandros* was set in the bucolic landscape on mount Ida<sup>6</sup>. This kind of scene is typical of satyr-plays<sup>7</sup> and this comedy shows also other features common to that genre, such as the chorus of satyrs<sup>8</sup>. In fact, Bakola (2010: 81-117, esp. 89-102) has proposed that the *Dionysalexandros* was a kind of hybrid play between a comedy and a satyr drama. Although the consistency of the definition of 'satyr-comedy' chosen by Bakola (2010: 101) has been rightly criticized<sup>9</sup>, nonetheless some elements of this comedy are undoubtedly derived from (or at least shared with) the tradition of the satyr-play<sup>10</sup>. Among them, the bucolic scene must have immediately been suggestive to the audience, who were used to watch satyr-plays in pastoral settings<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Grenfell & Hunt (1904: 69-72). See the detailed commentary of Bianchi (2016: 211-241).

<sup>4</sup> See Bianchi (2016: 203-210).

<sup>5</sup> All the translations of *Dionysalexandros*' *hypothesis* come from Storey (2011).

<sup>6</sup> See Bianchi (2016: 234). According to Arnott (1962: 106), «there is no setting in tragedy or comedy that could not be represented by the basic arrangements of *skene*, altar, stage and steps, helped out by a little imagination. Examples from other theatrical traditions show that realistic scenery is by no means essential». See also Webster (1956: 16-19), Dearden (1976: 38-46), and Thiercy (2007<sup>2</sup>: 27-28).

<sup>7</sup> Bakola (2010: 95) wrote that «later antiquity associated satyr-plays with bucolic settings in contrast to the urban settings of comedies and the palaces of tragedies». On the typical rural setting of a 5<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C. satyr play see Rossi (1972: 261-262), Sutton (1980: 153-154), Paganelli (1989: 216-222), Griffith (2008: 73-74), Di Marco (2013: 29-31), and Shaw (2014: 61 [n. 23], 82-83 and 126).

<sup>8</sup> See Bakola (2010: 82-88), Di Marco (2013: 71-72 and 81), and Bianchi (2016: 203-205).

<sup>9</sup> See the discussion by Bianchi (2016: 205).

<sup>10</sup> On common motives shared by old comedy and satyr drama see Cassio (1977: 45), who rightfully writes: «in linea generale è sbagliato erigere barriere insormontabili fra commedia da una parte e dramma satiresco dall'altra, soprattutto quando nelle commedie le divinità avevano un ruolo importante». See also the discussion by Bakola (2010: 102-117), though I do not completely agree with some conclusions of her on the topic.

<sup>11</sup> Bakola (2010: 99) notes that «in the opening scene of *Dionysalexandros*, the spectators would initially be puzzled to see Dionysus in a pastoral setting».

There is no doubt that Cratinus chose a bucolic setting for his *Dionysalexandros* (namely mount Ida) because, according to the myth, the famous judgment of Paris/Alexander took place in the countryside around Troy<sup>12</sup>. However, Cratinus did not merely perform a comedy with mythical characters and setting on stage: in fact, the *Dionysalexandros* is a myth-burlesque. In other words, Cratinus' play alludes to his present times under the veil of the myth, and precisely at Pericles' politics during the Peloponnesian War<sup>13</sup>. As a matter of fact, *POxy.* IV 663, col. ii, rr. 44-48, says that «in the play Pericles is very persuasively made fun of through innuendo (δι' ἐμφάσεως) for having brought the war on the Athenians»<sup>14</sup>. Consequently, also the passage from *POxy.* 663, col. i, rr. 23-25 where the *hypothesis* refers to a narrative describing the Achaeans ravaging the country around Troy in order to find Helen (who was taken away from Sparta by Dionysus disguised as Paris) could be read as an allusion to Cratinus' present times:

ἀκού[ει] δ[ὲ] με-  
τ' ὀλίγον τοὺς Ἀχαιοὺς πυρ-  
πολ]εῖν τήν χώ[ραν]

But he [Dionysus] hears  
a little while later that the Greeks are  
ravaging the countryside

This passage testifies that the bucolic setting of this comedy is not only a background for the myth; in fact, by a 'zooming device'<sup>15</sup> Cratinus is alluding to the first invasions of Attica carried out by the Spartans during the Peloponnesian War<sup>16</sup>. Although the papyrus does not mention explicitly the Peloponnesian War, two hints lead to this conclusion: 1) *POxy.* IV 663 col. ii, rr. 47-48 tells that Pericles brought

<sup>12</sup> Apollod. *Epit.* 3, 2 (Scarpi 2010<sup>10</sup>: 328); see Bianchi (2016: 326).

<sup>13</sup> See Bianchi (2016: 206-207).

<sup>14</sup> This is the Greek text from the papyrus: κομωδεῖται δ' ἐν τῷ δράματι Περικλῆς μάλα πιθανῶς δι' ἐμφάσεως ὡς ἐπαγχοῶς τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις τὸν πόλεμον. What the word ἐμφασις really means with regards to Cratinus' dramatic technique is now explained by Sonnino (2019: 248-253); he writes (261-262): «il motteggio velato [*i. e.* the ἐμφασις] è un modo per elevare il livello del proprio ὄνομαστὶ κομωδεῖν, rendendolo più accetto al gusto del pubblico colto (σοφοί). [...] L' ἐμφασις comica riguarda la forma (λέξις) del motteggio, non i contenuti e ha a che fare, dunque, con un'interpretazione del motteggio velato in chiave 'estetica', non 'politica'».

<sup>15</sup> The expression comes from Sourvinou-Inwood (2003: 22), who explains that a zooming device «had the effect of bringing the world of the play nearer, pushing the audience into relating their experiences and assumptions directly to the play».

<sup>16</sup> This has been persuasively argued by Croiset (1904 : 308): «les mots qui se rapportent à l'invasion des Achéens sont caractéristiques [...]. Cela rappelle très vivement la première invasion d'Archidamos, dans l'été de 431, l'incendie des fermes et des moissons à travers la plaine d'Éleusis et tout ce que Thucydide a décrite à ce propos (II, 19). On peut être assuré que le récit détaillé dont ces mots sont le résumé faisait ressortir avec force cette ressemblance et qu'il était calculé pour reviver les souvenirs et les ressentiments tout récents des paysans athéniens». Schwarze (1971: 16) has acutely noticed that, according to the traditional version of the myth, the Achaeans did not ravage Ida's surroundings; in other words, this detail was an invention by Cratinus, which demonstrates without any doubt that a political reading is correct (see also Bianchi 2016: 235). On the contrary, Bakola (2010: 188-189) argues that the detail about the Achaeans ravaging Ida's surroundings is a version of the myth already attested in the lost *Cypria*. Whether Cratinus is following a specific version of the myth or is intentionally inventing this part, his purpose is very likely that of hinting at Attica's invasion by the Spartans. This is the only certain political hint that emerges from the *hypothesis*. On Spartans' invasions of Attica during the first years of the Peloponnesian War see Hanson (1989: 112-127).

the war to the Athenians (Περικλῆς [...] ὡς ἐπαγροχῶς τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις τὸν πόλεμον): the Peloponnesian was precisely a war that the Athenians had to fight mainly in their own territory; 2) the papyrus refers just to ὁ πόλεμος very likely because the Peloponnesian was the war *par excellence*<sup>17</sup>. For these reasons, even though other options have been suggested (such as the Samian War), the Peloponnesian War seems the most suitable candidate for the unspecified ὁ πόλεμος preserved by the papyrus.

In the *Dionysalexandros*, the landscape of mount Ida clearly hints at the Attic countryside, and it can be demonstrated in the light of Aristophanes' first comedies. Some years later than the *mise en scène* of the *Dionysalexandros* (probably in 430 or 429 BC)<sup>18</sup>, Aristophanes staged several comedies in which the Attic countryside was portrayed as an idealized place to which the countrymen, forced to live in Athens, struggled to return<sup>19</sup>. Since the Spartans started regularly invading the Attic countryside, Pericles gathered all the rustics from their demes into Athens' Long Walls, in order to protect them: this is the so called *Sitzkrieg* strategy. These rustic people were consequently forced to leave their villages and homes, where they had previously lived, and to drastically change their own everyday habits<sup>20</sup>.

This is the reason why, in comedies like *Acharnians*, *Farmers*, *Clouds* and *Peace* (all staged from 425 to 421 BC)<sup>21</sup>, Aristophanes brought on stage rustic characters (such as Dikaiopolis, Strepsiades and Trygaeus) living in the city of Athens against their will and desiring to return back to their beloved countryside<sup>22</sup>. Aristophanes' aim was to portray comically on the stage the discontent of the countrymen and their hatred against those politicians and demagogues who wanted to continue the war against Sparta. In those comedies, the rustics, along with farmers' choruses (such as those from the *Farmers* and the *Peace*)<sup>23</sup> break out in poetic passages in which they touchingly recall the Attic countryside, describing it as an idyllic place, particularly in comparison with the hateful city of Athens<sup>24</sup>.

A reasonable hypothesis is that, according to *POxy.* IV 663 col. i, rr. 20-25, at least in some passages from the *Dionysalexandros*<sup>25</sup> Cratinus alluded to the contemporary problems regarding the Spartans' invasions of Attica before Aris-

<sup>17</sup> See Napolitano (2012: 66, n. 136)

<sup>18</sup> See Bianchi (2016: 207-210).

<sup>19</sup> See Ceccarelli (2017-2018: 4-43).

<sup>20</sup> See Thuc. 2, 16, 1-2.

<sup>21</sup> The *Farmers* were staged most likely at the Great Dionysia in 424 B. C. (see Gil Fernández 1996: 151-152 and Ceccarelli 2017-2018: 82-89).

<sup>22</sup> In Ar. *Ach.* 201-202 Dikaiopolis «exits into the door in the *scenae frons*, transforming it momentarily into his own house and making it clear to the audience (as an exit into and subsequent entry from a wing would not) that the setting is no longer the Pnyx but the Attic countryside» (Olson 2002: 134). As I demonstrate, Aristophanes, throughout his comedies performed from 425 to 421 BC, was particularly interested in creating a tension between the urbanised rustics and the countryside that they were forced to leave due to Pericles' war strategy. So, Dikaiopolis' case is exceptional.

<sup>23</sup> The chorus of the *Peace*, at the beginning of its appearance on stage, «impersonates all the Greeks, of every class and profession [...]» and «later, it represents the farmers of all Greece» (Sifakis 1971: 32). On the identity complexities of *Peace*'s chorus see the discussions by Sifakis (1971: 29-32), Dover (1972: 137-138), Cassio (1985: 69-77), and McGlew (2001).

<sup>24</sup> For example, see Ar. *Ach.* 32-36; *Eq.* 805-809; *Nub.* 43-52; *Pax* 551-600, 1127-1171; fr. 111, 112 (from the *Farmers*) and 402 K.-A. (from the *Islands*: see Pellegrino 2015: 240-241). On the idealization of Attic countryside in Aristophanes' first comedies see Cassio (1985: 32-33, 145), López Eire (2000: 184-188) and Ceccarelli (2020).

<sup>25</sup> The accounts of the Achaeans' ravaging Ida's surroundings may have been presented by the poet to the audience in choral passages sung by the satyrs or in a narrator's speech.

tophanes did at least from 427 BC, the date of the *Banqueters*<sup>26</sup>. There is little evidence that Cratinus was as concerned as Aristophanes for the social issues that resulted from Attic countrymen's forced urbanisation, which was the most evident result of Pericles' *Sitzkrieg* strategy. Since the *Dionysalexandros* was a myth-burlesque with evident attacks on Pericles' political conduct during the first years of the Peloponnesian War, it is logical to infer that Cratinus hinted in that comedy at Pericles' choice to let the Spartans ravage the Attic countryside without a military response. In this sense, *Dionysalexandros*' bucolic setting worked perfectly in representing the Attic countryside, and so did the Achaeans with regards to the Spartans.

In conclusion, on the base of *POxy.* 663 (col. i, rr. 20-25) it is reasonable to assume that one of Aristophanes' most typical comic themes in his early comedies (from *Banqueters* to *Peace*, i.e. 427-421 BC) was already present in Cratinus' *Dionysalexandros* some years before. Although there is no evidence that Cratinus dramatized this theme, at least the poet referred to it in his comedy and this could have inspired the young Aristophanes. The forced urbanisation of the rustics as a consequence of the invasions of Attica by the Spartans was so much a pressing social issue at the time<sup>27</sup> that both Cratinus and Aristophanes were sensitive about it. Yet, the two comedians present significant differences in this sense<sup>28</sup>. On the one hand, Cratinus somehow addressed these invasions within the plot of a myth-burlesque comedy; we do not know if it was just an allusion or he dramatised this theme. On the other, Aristophanes staged comedies with rustics as protagonists, depicting the countryside as an idealised place and developing in various ways the theme of the forced urbanisation of Attic country people. In all likelihood, Cratinus' allusion in the *Dionysalexandros* is the oldest evidence in a comic text of a theme that had considerable fortune not only in Aristophanes, but also in Eupolis – as titles such *Prospaltians* and *Demes* bear witness.

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<sup>26</sup> The unnamed Old Father in the *Banqueters*, «a traditionally minded landowner», is a countryman who praises rural life and despises the dynamic urban education and its new values (see Cassio 1977: 26), embodied by one of his two sons, the Bugged: «the Bugged Boy has abandoned traditional rural virtues for an urbane life of self-indulgence and troublemaking» (both the quotations are from Henderson 2007: 205).

<sup>27</sup> See the account in Thuc. 2, 14-17.

<sup>28</sup> It is rather frequent that a particular theme was varied from a comedian to another one as poets were rivals during the Dionysian festivals (see in general Kyriakidi 2007, and Biles 2011).

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