

TWO PASSAGES IN THE *BIRDS* OF ARISTOPHANES¹⁾

I. 434-6: ἄγε δὴ σὺ καὶ σὺ τὴν πανοπλίαν μὲν πάλιν
ταύτην λαβόντε κρεμάσατον τὴν χάραδι
εἰς τὸν ἱπνὸν εἴσω πλησίον τοῦπιστάτου.

Here the Hoopoe orders two attendants to remove the improvised 'weapons' (cooking-pot, saucers and spit) and, perhaps not inappropriately, to 'take them and hang them at the hearth indoors *πλησίον τοῦπιστάτου*'. Clearly this last object must be something we could expect to find in an Athenian kitchen, and three interpretations have traditionally been offered²⁾: (i) that it is a pot-stand; (ii) a clay figure of Hephaestus (as superintendent of the kitchen fire); and (iii) a wooden stand with pegs for hanging up utensils. Evidence can be adduced to support (i)³⁾, and (ii) is *prima facie* possible. I should reject (iii) however, on the grounds that one does not hang something up *near* (but *on*) a peg.

In attempting to assess the relative merits of (i) and (ii) we may find help in *Peace* 729-32:

ἡμεῖς δὲ τέως τάδε τὰ σκεύη παραδόντες
τοῖς ἀκολούθοις δῶμεν σῶζειν, ὡς εἰώθασι μάλιστα
περὶ τὰς σκηρὰς πλείστοι κλέπται κυπτάζειν καὶ κακοποιεῖν.
ἀλλὰ φυλάττετε ταῦτ' ἀνδρείως.

Here we have clear evidence for the pilfering of stage properties. Can it be that Aristophanes is making the same allusion in *Birds*? If so, the Hoopoe is instructing the attendants to hang the 'weapons' up 'near the superintendent', that is to say, near the stage manager who can then keep an eye on his props and protect them from light-fingered loiterers. The point is all the more pungent if, in the culinary context, *ἐπιστάτης* is Hephaestus the Superintendent⁴⁾.

1) I should like to thank Mr. K.H. Lee for much helpful criticism of this paper.

2) See the *Souda*, s.v. *ἐπιστάτης*.

3) See B. A. Sparkes, *J.H.S.* LXXXII (1962), 127, with footnote 56.

4) If, on the other hand, the reference is *not* to the 'superintendent',

Π. 904–954: in particular the text of 953 where the mss. vary between *πολύπορα* and *πολύσπορα*. I wish to argue that, for reasons that revolve around an elaborate lisping pun, *πολύσπορα* is unquestionably the adjective which we should expect Aristophanes to put in the mouth of our frigid lyric poet.

The editors of both the OCT and Budé read *πολύπορα*, no doubt reasoning that *πολύσπορα* is inappropriate in this context: it is certainly not immediately evident why the poet should refer to the *fertility* of the region, though he may reasonably enough allude to its extent⁵). What he is most concerned with, however, is the icy coldness of the area and the consequent need for protective clothing. I believe that this latter point is best brought out by *πολύσπορα*.

For I suggest that our poet is portrayed as afflicted with a prominent lisp, a lisp of the ‘Chinese’ type now known as ‘lambdacism’, which manifests itself in the mispronunciation of ‘r’ as ‘l’. That Aristophanes was not unaware of this form of speech impediment, or of the possibilities of its humorous exploitation, is evident from *Wasps* 44–45, where the pun turns on Alcibiades’ *τραυλότης*⁶):

εἶτ’ Ἀλκιβιάδης εἶπε πρὸς με τραυλίσας
 “ὄλας; Θέωλος τὴν κεφαλὴν κόλακος ἔχει.”

It is also possible that Plato similarly exploits this well-known trademark of Alcibiades: in the *Symposium*⁷) Alcibiades begins his encomium of Socrates by comparing him to *τοῖς σιληνοῖς τούτοις τοῖς ἐν τοῖς ἐρμογλυφείοις καθήμενοις*, and then proceeds, via a comparison with Marsyas, to liken the effect of Socrates’ voice to that of the Sirens: *βία οἶν ὡσπερ ἀπὸ τῶν Σειρήνων ἐπισχόμενος τὰ ὄτα οἴχομαι φεύγων*. “The word *Σειρήνων* on Alcibiades’ lips in this context involves either a very remarkable coincidence or else an amusing pun... When Alcibiades said (or was portrayed as saying) *Σειρήνων* he would pronounce it like enough to *Σειληνῶν* to suggest an amusing equivoque.”⁸)

then, of course *τοὔπιστάτου* may derive from *ἐπίστατος* or *ἐπίστατον* (see L.S.J.⁹ *s.vv.*).

5) *πολύπορα* must surely mean ‘with many paths’, not, as L.S.J., ‘furnishing abundant harvests.’

6) Cf. Plutarch *Alc.* 1.6, where Plutarch comments on the lisp charm of the son of Cleinias: and *ibid* 1.8, where, in a quotation from Archippus (fr. 45) we are told that Alcibiades’ son deliberately affected the same mannerism of speaking as his father.

7) 215A–216A. See W.B. Stanford, *CR* 56 (1942), 72.

8) Stanford, *art. cit.*

In our present passage Aristophanes more than prepares the audience for such a joke. Consider the superabundance of liquids from the moment of the poet's entry: *Νεφελοκοκκυγίαν ... κλήσον* (904-5); *μελιγλώσσων* (907), *θεράπων ότηηρός* (909; 912-13); *μέλη ... κύκλιά τε πολλά και καλά και παρθένεια* (917-19); *πάλαι, πάλαι δή τήνδ' έγώ κλήζω πόλιν* (921) and so on. This accumulation of lambdacistic potential leads up to the punch-line: *υφόβολα πεδία πολύσπορά τ' ήλνθον*. The poet has come to beg for raiment and, unlike the recipient of Hiero's favours⁹), he has not been dismissed *άκλεής*. He wins both *σπολάς* and *χιτών*, and, as he departs, praises the plains of Cloudcuckootown: he has found them not only chilly and *υφόβολα*, but *πολύσπολα*¹⁰), 'rich in jerkins'!

A close inspection of his parting words – there is at least one liquid in virtually every word – reveals how cleverly Aristophanes rams home his lambdacistic point:

*κλήσον, ώ χρυσόθρονε, τάν τρομεράν, κρουεράν
υφόβολα πεδία πολύσπορά τ' ήλνθον. Άλαλαί.*

One may perhaps be forgiven – especially in view of the date of the play¹¹) in relation to the exploits of Alcibiades in the Sicilian Expedition – for suspecting that, at the very least, Aristophanes intended us to call to mind the somewhat eccentric *στρατηγός*. Is it just conceivable that the lyric poet *is* Alcibiades?¹²)

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9) Pindar, fr. 94 (Bowra).

10) Certainly in itself a *vox nihili* of unacceptable formation, but surely admissible in the guise of a pun on *πολύσπορα*. As for the metre, 951 seems best taken as a dochmiac dimeter in which the first element of the second metron scans long:

υ υυ υυ υ υυ — υυ — υ —

άλαλαί (accepting Bentley's emendation) is *extra metrum*. (950 is dactylo-epitrite of the form e-Dd²).

11) Produced at the City Dionysia of 414, and presumably therefore written in 415.

12) This is not, of course, to maintain that the *Birds* is a 'political' play: it is simply another sample of Aristophanes' fondness for making fun of a noticeable characteristic of a prominent citizen.