

Aristophanes on Alcibiades

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AT *Frogs* 1425 Dionysus tells Euripides that Athens desires, hates, and wishes the return of the exiled Alcibiades. I argue here that Aristophanes' own comedies reveal a similar ambivalence. My thesis is that (1) the plays predating the Deceleian War reveal both criticism and approval of the rising politician; (2) criticism of Alcibiades' political intentions and, implicitly, of the man himself predominates (as others have seen) in the two comedies of 411, *Lysistrata* and *Thesmophoriazusae*; but (3) by 405 altered conditions prompted Aristophanes to advocate cautiously the recall of Alcibiades in *Frogs*, a much debated point on which this paper offers a new view.

Most of the references to Alcibiades in the early comedies concern either his sexual behavior or his facile eloquence. Rhetorical prowess can imply intellectual ability and activity in the courts and the *ekklesia*, and both are attributed to Alcibiades in the plays from the period of the Archidamian War. In *Banqueters* Alcibiades is mentioned by a disapproving father as one of the sources of his corrupt son's turns of speech (fr.1205.5f).¹

At the time Alcibiades was in his twenties. That he is mentioned as one of the sophists and lawyers who have corrupted the old man's son is evidence that he had already acquired a reputation for that rhetorical facility and avant-garde intellectualism which characterized him throughout his life. The precocity implied in this mild slight (to give it its worst construction) is therefore in itself a backhanded compliment.

The other certain allusion to Alcibiades in *Banqueters* refers to his sexual extravagance. Photius and Hesychius preserve references describing an Aristophanic roué born in the archonship of *Phal(l)enios* or "Phallip," a sexual pun.² The notice in Photius specifies that the

¹ Aristophanic fragments are, unless otherwise noted, cited from R. Kassel and C. Austin, edd., *Poetae Comici Graeci* III.2. Kassel and Austin (145 ad fr.244) also believe that Alcibiades is satirized in fr.206; if so, the *sophismata* ascribed herein to Alcibiades are compatible with his general reputation for ingenuity and with the smart diction attributed to him in fr.244. Of interest to the question of Aristophanic reference to Alcibiades is J. W. Süvern, *Two Essays on "The Clouds" and on "The Γῆρας" of Aristophanes*, tr. W. R. Hamilton (London 1886) 44f. See also J. F. Talbot, "Aristophanes and Alcibiades," *CB* 39 (1963) 65.

² *PCG* III.2 145 fr.244 (=554 K.).

play was *Banqueters*, while the gloss in Hesychius tells us that the rake was Alcibiades.³ But there is no evidence in the Aristophanic corpus for an entire play devoted, like Eupolis' *Baptai*, to an attack on Alcibiades. *Acharnians* contains one certain reference to Alcibiades. At 714–16 the chorus proposes that in the future young men should be prosecuted by a chattering sodomite, the son of Cleinias, *i.e.*, Alcibiades. In this jovial slur there is an acknowledgement of Alcibiades' activity, and even effectiveness, in the courts. He may also be alluded to in 524f, where Dicaeopolis recounts that in the events leading to the war some drunken Athenian dandies abducted a prostitute named Simaetha from Megara. A scholion on 524 reports that Alcibiades was in love with Simaetha, and appears to have suborned some young Athenians to steal her from him. If these lines were indeed intended to recall Alcibiades, they bear witness to the irresponsible passion attributed to the fiery Almaeonid both by comedy and by more serious commentators in antiquity.

In 1959 V. Borukhovich revived Süvern's contention that Pheidippides in *Clouds* is a caricature of Alcibiades.⁴ His thorough review of the evidence nevertheless gives us no reason to doubt Starkie's judgment that Süvern did not prove his case, nor is he willing (336) to accept an absolute identification of Pheidippides and Alcibiades.⁵ There are many undeniable resemblances between the comic character and the son of Cleinias,⁶ but what makes identification untenable is the fact that Pheidippides is not blatantly, unmistakably a comic incarnation of Alcibiades. Aristophanes was never coy about his caricatures. Usually, as in the case of Socrates, Euripides, and Agathon, he gave his comic characters the names of the real persons they represented. When he did not, as in the case of Paphlagon, the *Knights'* version of Cleon, he made the resemblance between carica-

³ Kassel and Austin are right to trace the data from Hesychius to *Banqueters* rather than to *Triphales* (cf. *PCG* 285 s.v. Τριφάλης), as Süvern (*supra* n.1: 85ff), Kock (*CAF* I 532 fr.554), and J. M. Edmonds (*FAC* I 772 frs.553–57) have done.

⁴ "Aristophanes and Alcibiades," *AntHung* 7 (1959) 329–36 (in Russian; my thanks to my colleague Helen Reeve for translating this article for me); cf. Süvern (*supra* n.1) 44f.

⁵ W. J. M. Starkie, *The Clouds of Aristophanes* (London 1911) 316 ad 46, 317f ad 64.

⁶ Both are Alcmaeonids: cf. *Clouds* 46–48, in which Pheidippides' mother is called the niece of Megacles son of Megacles, a name associated with the Alcmaeonids, as is Coesyra, the woman's name that Aristophanes turns into a participle ("Coesyrafied") referring to Pheidippides' mother in 48. Further, both Pheidippides and Alcibiades lisp (cf. *Clouds* 870–73, *Wasps* 46). J. K. Dover, *Aristophanes' Clouds* (Oxford 1970) ad 872f, suggests that such a lisp may have been characteristic of upper-class young men.

ture and victim so obvious that it was immediately evident to the dullest member of the audience. This is not the case with Pheidippides, whose rustic father Strepsiades is very different from Alcibiades' aristocratic sire Cleinias, and who, unlike Alcibiades, had to be forcibly subjected to the tutelage of Socrates. It is therefore best to view Pheidippides as the caricature not of an individual but of a type, the Athenian *jeunesse dorée*.

The next mention of Alcibiades in the canon makes an unambiguously political point that foreshadows Aristophanes' treatment of him in *Frogs*. In *Wasps* 42–45, Sosias describes his dream-vision of Theorus, the political lieutenant of Cleon, with the head “of a raven” (*korakos*), and tells how in the dream Alcibiades lisped (substituting l's for r's), “Do you see? Theolus has the head of a toady!” (*kolakos*). This is a decidedly friendly reference, as we can tell from Xanthias' response in the next line, “Alcibiades lisped that right!” (46). Alcibiades' inadvertent pun puts him on the side of the angels, since he thereby ridicules Cleon's political associate, and reminds us that he did not get on well politically with some of the radical populists like Hyperbolus and Cleophon, a fact which will have a critical influence on Aeschylus' judgment of him in *Frogs*.⁷

The next allusion to Alcibiades in Aristophanes reflects his political fall and exile.⁸ In *Birds* of 414, Euelpides rejects Hoopoe's suggestion that he settle on the Red Sea because he fears a visit from the Athenian state galley *Salaminia* bearing a summoner (145–47). The scholiast on 147 recalls Thucydides' account of the voyage of the *Salaminia* after Alcibiades (6.61). He had been accused of profaning the Mysteries, and rather than face the judicial lynching that his enemies had prepared for him in Athens, he fled into exile. Most commentators on *Birds* correctly see in this passage a comic reference to Alcibiades. And yet, although the fugitive had been condemned *in absentia* before *Birds* was produced, there is no note of condemnation in the lines. The fact is that the harm which Alcibiades in exile would do to Athens was not yet apparent.

Alcibiades' name is not mentioned again in the extant plays of Aristophanes until *Frogs* of 405 B.C. But A. Sommerstein believes that both *Lysistrata*, which he puts at the Lenaea of 411, and *Thesmo-*

⁷ It might be thought that the mention of Alcibiades' lisp draws unkind attention to a physical handicap, but Plutarch tells us (*Alc.* 1.4) in connection with this passage that Alcibiades' lisp was accounted part of his charm.

⁸ Talbot (*supra* n.1) 66 wisely rejects the scholiast's assertion that the would-be general and the slave alluded to in *Clouds* 450 and 451 are both identical with Alcibiades.

phoriazusae, which he puts at the City Dionysia of the same year, contain unmistakable allusions to Alcibiades, now in exile and intriguing with Athenian oligarchs to return to Athens.⁹ Sommerstein argues that there are several passages in *Lysistrata* calculated to recall Alcibiades in an unfavorable light: 390–97 and 589f, which condemn the ill-omened Sicilian expedition, championed by Alcibiades, and the awful losses it entailed; 507–15, in which *Lysistrata* complains about foolish decisions in the *ekklesia*, especially an addition to the treaty stele of 421 which may refer to an act advised by Alcibiades (*cf.* Thuc. 5.56.3); and 1093f, a joke about Hermocopidae, who were linked in Athenian public opinion with the profanation of the Mysteries—in which Alcibiades was allegedly implicated (*e.g.* Thuc. 8.53.2)—as part of a great conspiracy against the democracy (Thuc. 6.28.2).¹⁰

H. D. Westlake questions these arguments on the grounds that the passages do not inevitably call Alcibiades to mind, and need not do so to be dramatically effective.¹¹ So this issue is still open, but Sommerstein's contention that *Thesmophoriazusae* contains a clear hostile reference to Alcibiades is less susceptible to doubt.¹² In *Thesmophoriazusae* 331–71 the women invoke curses upon those who commit any of a catalogue of wrongs, including those who negotiate with the Mede, contemplate tyranny, or bring back a tyrant:

εἴ τις ἐπιβουλεύει τι τῷ δήμῳ κακὸν
 τῷ τῶν γυναικῶν, ἧ' πικηρυκέυεται
 Εὐριπίδῃ Μήδοις τ' ἐπὶ βλάβῃ τινὶ
 τῇ τῶν γυναικῶν, ἧ' τυραννεῖν ἐπινοεῖ
 ἧ' τὸν τύραννον συγκατάγειν. . . . (334–38)

It is well known that this entire passage is a parody of the Ἄρα, one of the ceremonies performed before a meeting of the *ekklesia*.¹³ An injunction against those who deal with the Mede or seek to restore a tyrant was a traditional part of the ritual harking back to the attempt

⁹ A. H. Sommerstein, "Aristophanes and the Events of 411," *JHS* 97 (1977) 112–26.

¹⁰ Sommerstein (*supra* n.9) 122f.

¹¹ H. D. Westlake, "The *Lysistrata* and the War," *Phoenix* 34 (1980) 42, 47, and 49 n.32. In *Aristophanes, Lysistrata* (Oxford 1987), J. Henderson argues that at the time of the production of *Lysistrata*, Aristophanes was unaware of the intrigues of Alcibiades and that the poet "seems rather to forego than to exploit opportunities to allude to Alcibiades" (xxiv).

¹² Sommerstein (*supra* n.9) 122.

¹³ For a discussion of the Ἄρα in *Thesmophoriazusae*, see U. von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff, *Aristoteles und Athen* II (Berlin 1893) 443, and P. J. Rhodes, *The Athenian Boule* (Oxford 1972) 36f.

of the Persians to restore Hippias in the invasion of 490 B.C. But it is hard to see how an Athenian audience at the City Dionysia in the month of Elaphebolion in 411, when Alcibiades' proposal—that if he were recalled and the democracy replaced by the Constitution of the Five Thousand, the Great King would side with the Athenians—had been divulged in the *ekklesia*, could hear this parody of the traditional Ἄρα and not think of Alcibiades and his supporters at Athens. Hence Sommerstein, following Gelzer, correctly sees here a veiled but real criticism of Alcibiades growing out of a fear of his imposing tyranny on the Athenians.¹⁴

Sommerstein argues, however, that by the time of *Frogs*, Aristophanes had changed his mind about Alcibiades: “in 406/5 circumstances became such as to make Aristophanes feel that the return of Alcibiades (now free of the Persian connection), with all its dangers, might be the least of evils.”¹⁵ He is led to this conclusion by the fact that Aeschylus declares in *Frogs* that Alcibiades should be tolerated by the Athenians, *i.e.*, recalled. Subsequently Dionysus declares Aeschylus the victor in his *agon* with Euripides. Is this, as Sommerstein implies, Aristophanes' way of implicitly endorsing the recall of Alcibiades? Editors and other scholars disagree on the answer. W. W. Merry, M. Croiset, and Wilamowitz believe that Aristophanes is indeed expressing the opinion that Alcibiades should be brought back to Athens.¹⁶ But others have their doubts. C. Whitman cannot bring himself to think that the poet is really using Aeschylus as a mouthpiece to recommend the recall of Alcibiades.¹⁷ Gelzer writes that in this scene Aristophanes intends to offer “kein brauchbares politisches Programm,” and T. G. Tucker feels that Aristophanes leaves the judgment up to the audience, an opinion with which W. B. Stanford concurs.¹⁸ So the problem of whether or not Aristophanes in *Frogs* recommends the return of Alcibiades to Athens remains unresolved. I am convinced that an examination of the text of the play in the context of proximate Athenian history will reveal that the answer to this question must be ‘yes’.

¹⁴ T. Gelzer, *RE Suppl.* 12 (1970) 1468.37ff *s.v.* “Aristophanes (12).” Sommerstein (*supra* n.9) 122 and Gelzer also see a hostile allusion to Alcibiades in *Thesm.* 1143f.

¹⁵ Sommerstein (*supra* n.9) 124.

¹⁶ W. W. Merry, *Aristophanes: The Frogs* (Oxford 1892) 6; M. Croiset, *Aristophanes and the Political Parties at Athens*, tr. J. Loeb (London 1909) 160; U. von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff, “Lesefruchte,” *Hermes* 64 (1929) 474.

¹⁷ C. Whitman, *Aristophanes and the Comic Hero* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1964) 254.

¹⁸ Gelzer (*supra* n.14) 1491f; T. G. Tucker, *The Frogs of Aristophanes* (London 1906) 255 *ad* 1434; W. B. Stanford, *Aristophanes' Frogs*² (Edinburgh 1968) 194 *ad* 1433f.

Ostensibly *Frogs* is a literary play about the decline of drama, but political allusions pepper its lines, and two elements of its structure, the parabasis and the second contest between Aeschylus and Euripides, are devoted to exclusively political themes. It is not easy to explain on purely literary grounds why Aristophanes added the latter passage. Aeschylus won all three rounds of the test of the scales (1378–1410), and it would have been natural for Dionysus to declare him the winner. Instead, the god professes to be still undecided, and announces that he will sift the poets' opinions on the politics of Athens. Some critics have found this transition arbitrary.¹⁹ In any case, the fact that the poet passed up an opportunity to end the play with a literary decision that would have made good artistic sense (whatever one thinks about it as an aesthetic judgment) suggests that Aristophanes felt he had important unfinished business in the play.

In 1421ff Dionysus declares that he will take back to Athens the dramatic poet who gives better advice to the city. The object of this advice is salvation for the polis (*cf.* 1421), and indeed the *σωτηρία* of Athens has been a persistent theme in the play (*e.g.* 377–87, 636–737). The first question Dionysus asks the poets is what to do about the exiled Alcibiades, *ἡ πόλις γὰρ δυστοκεῖ*: “For the city is in painful labor” (1423). The metaphor from childbirth reminds us that Alcibiades is a son of Athens who has been, so to speak, difficult for the mother to bear. This sensitive and problematic formulation alerts us (but not Euripides) to the fact that the problem of Alcibiades is a complex one to which simple solutions cannot do justice. And in casting Alcibiades as the child of the city, the phrase establishes some grounds for an Athenian audience to sympathize with the city's most brilliant prodigal son.

The difficult but intimate relationship between Alcibiades and Athens is underscored by 1425 (with which this paper began). Euripides asks Dionysus what Athens thinks of Alcibiades, and Dionysus replies *ποθεῖ μὲν, ἐχθαίρει δέ, βούλεται δ' ἔχειν*. The language remains intensely emotional, but it seems to shift from a maternal to an erotic metaphor.²⁰ Athens is like an abandoned lover whose yearning for the lost beloved is not overcome by resentment over their differences: she

¹⁹ B. B. Rogers, *The Comedies of Aristophanes V The Frogs*² (London 1919) xvii; Stanford (*supra* n.18) xxivf (Stanford feels arbitrary transitions are Aristophanes' *modus operandi*); L. Radermacher, *Aristophanes' "Frösche"*² (Vienna 1954) 356; C. F. Russo, “The Revision of Aristophanes' *Frogs*,” *G&R* 13 (1966) 5f.

²⁰ The scholiast on 1425 tells us that Dionysus' line is an adaptation of a statement made by Helen to Odysseus in Ion's *Guards*: *σιγᾶ μὲν, ἐχθαίρει δέ, βούλεται γέ μὴν*. The precise reference of this line is unknown, but it shows no particular sign of denoting a mother's feelings towards her child.

wants him still.²¹ The diction is lyric, and the conflict it expresses well known to Catullus: *odi et amo*.²²

It should also be noted that, although 1425 expresses ambivalence, the positive emotions outweigh the negative. There is only one expression of hostility, ἐχθαίρει δέ, opposed to two expressions of desire, πόθει μέν and βούλεται δ' ἔχειν, and the two positive phrases are placed first and last, the emphatic positions in the line. It is particularly important to Dionysus' question that Athens' wish to have Alcibiades has the last word, ἔχειν.

Euripides proves remarkably insensitive to the complexities of the issue. His answer is unequivocal:

I loathe a townsman who is slow to aid,
And swift to hurt his town: who ways and means
Finds for himself, but finds not for the state.²³

Euripides' gnomic response looks to the universal, not to the particular, to the negative, not the positive. His is the harsh measurement of Procrustes which fits the moment to the maxim, no matter what the cost. His meaning is: Alcibiades should not return.

Aeschylus' answer in 1431f, on the other hand, has a complexity appropriate to the complications of the problem:

μάλιστα μὲν λέοντα μὴ ἴν' πόλει τρέφειν
ἦν δ' ἐκτραφῆ τις, τοῖς τρόποις ὑπηρετεῖν.

Aeschylus says that it is best not to rear a lion in the polis, but if one has, it is best to submit to its ways (1432). The metaphor that casts Alcibiades the Alcmaeonid as a lion (it seems that lions were associated with his family)²⁴ is a conscious reminiscence of the lion metaphor in *Agamemnon* 718ff, in which a lion cub, representing either Helen or Paris, is reared by humans charmed by its ways, only to repay their kindness with bloody violence when it grows to maturity. This association of Alcibiades with either Helen or Paris, who brought ruin to Troy, is certainly ominous. It led Cedric Whitman to conclude that through Aeschylus Aristophanes was trying to say not that Alcibiades

²¹ For the metaphorical characterization of the bond between citizen and polis as one between lovers, see *Knights* 732–34, 1341f, and Thuc. 2.431.

²² Stanford (*supra* n.18) 193 *ad* 1425 points out the parallel. See also Talbot (*supra* n.1) 67.

²³ 1427–29, tr. Rogers. In “Who Said What About Alcibiades? *Frogs* 1422–34,” *CQ* n.s. 20 (1970) 53–55, J. L. Marr argues that 1427–29 should be attributed to Aeschylus, and 1431f to Euripides. In this he has found few followers. In an Aristophanic debate it is virtually a rule—maintained without exception in *Frogs*—that the loser goes first.

²⁴ On this point see Stanford (*supra* n.18) 194 *ad* 1431b.

should be recalled but that Athens has “Nursed its own doom.”²⁵ H. van Daele was so startled by the metaphor that he tried to make the couplet bear a meaning, that Alcibiades should *not* be recalled, which is opposite to the patent significance of the text.²⁶ Both these reactions seem extreme. Aeschylus’ metaphor shows that he views the problem of Alcibiades without any of the positive sentiment of the Athens that Dionysus describes in 1425. Aeschylus sees the negative side of Alcibiades’ relationship with Athens at least as realistically as Euripides does. Yet he still recommends, in his oracular way, the recall of Alcibiades. Why?

The answer must lie in the terms of Aeschylus’ response. When Aeschylus calls Alcibiades a lion, he gives a reason to fear him, and a reason to prefer him. This is particularly clear when we consider the animals to which other politicians are compared in *Frogs*. Cleophon, the powerful demagogue most frequently satirized in the play (679–85, 1504, 1532f), is portrayed in the ode of the parabasis as a squawking Thracian swallow, barbaric and hence no true Athenian, and dishonest to boot. Cleophon was the most influential leader at Athens in 405 and the very type of new politician that the chorus soon urges the audience to reject in favor of the *kaloï kagathoi* (717–37), among whom it would not be inaccurate to class Alcibiades, an Alcmaeonid with blood as blue as any. In the antode of the parabasis (707–16) the chorus bitterly attacks a political ally of Cleophon the lyre-maker, Cleigenes the bathman, whom it contemptuously calls “this trouble-making monkey”: ὁ πίθηκος οὗτος ὁ νῦν ἐνοχλῶν (708). We know that Cleigenes was a leading figure in the legal and political moves against the failed oligarchs of 411 (*cf.* Andoc. 1.73) for whose civic rehabilitation the epirrhema of the parabasis pleads (684–708), and in this assault it is reasonable to suppose that Cleigenes and Cleophon were, by reason of political affinity, working in concert. Aristophanes depicts the politicians whose policies he deplors and whose replacement he advocates as small, unpleasant, and contemptible animals, while he portrays Alcibiades as a lion—a large, powerful, and noble creature as worthy of respect as it is dangerous in a fight; and in 405 Athens was, be it noted, involved in a fight for its life. Here, then, is one reason for Aeschylus to recommend the recall of Alcibiades, a dangerous choice for dangerous times, but at least a figure of stature in a play that persistently decries the degenerate diminution of con-

²⁵ Whitman (*supra* n.17) 254.

²⁶ H. van Daele in *Aristophane IV*, edd. V. Coulon and H. van Daele (Budé, Paris 1954) 152 n.4.

temporary Athens (*cf.* 72–97, 1006–98), a decline of which Cleophon the swallow and Cleigenes the monkey are certainly prime political symbols.

This analysis does not exhaust the implications of Aeschylus' advice. The poet says that if one has raised a lion in the polis, it is better *τοῖς τρόποις ὑπηρετεῖν* (1432). LSJ lists the literal meaning of *ὑπηρετέω* (I) as "do service on ship, as a rower." In an important article on the family of words to which this verb belongs (*ὑπηρέτης, ὑπηρετικός, ὑπηρεσία, ὑπηρετέω*), Richardson argues that all these words were originally derived from *ὑπ-*, signifying subordination, and *ἔρε-*, meaning 'row'.²⁷ In his view (58) the motive for their formation was the development in the history of seafaring in which

the number of *ἔρέται* reached a point when it became necessary to have on board a 'time keeper' or controller, in other words a *κελευστής*. All the oarsmen now became 'under-rowers' in respect of this coxswain, taking their time, orders, *etc. without question* from him.

To signify their subordination to the coxswain, Richardson argues, the rowers now became 'under-rowers', *ὑπηρέται*, with the concomitant creation of a verb *ὑπηρετέω*, a noun *ὑπηρεσία*, and an adjective *ὑπηρετικός*, to communicate fully the nature of their activity. He believes, however, that at a time before the first appearance in our sources of this word family (in Herodotus), these words had been replaced in their literal application to rowing by their virtual synonyms *ἔρέτης* and its cognates, and *ὑπηρέτης, ὑπηρετέω, etc.* survived only as "dead" metaphors (since their literal meaning was forgotten) whose shared significance was "service" or "implicit obedience" (55, 58f). In apparent support for this position we may note that LSJ cites only transferred (or as Richardson might put it, "inadvertently figurative") fifth-century uses of *ὑπηρετέω*. Thus *ὑπηρετεῖν* at *Frogs* 1432 is defined (II) as "humour," a reading in harmony with Rogers' earlier translation of the line, "But having reared, 'tis best to humour him."²⁸

I do not say that this translation is absolutely wrong, but rather that it is not enough. Surely Aeschylus is not stating merely that Athenians should take back Alcibiades so they can indulge his leonine temperament. At issue is the *soteria* of the city, and if Aeschylus hopes to achieve the victory that in fact he does, his answer should have some positive bearing on that issue. We find a clearer idea of what that bearing might be in Lattimore's rendering of 1432 as "But if we rear

²⁷ L. J. D. Richardson, "ΥΠΗΡΕΤΗΣ," *CQ* 37 (1943) 55–61.

²⁸ *Supra* n.19: 219.

one, we must do as it desires.”²⁹ Even this is too mild. *ὑπηρετεῖν* implies unswerving, perhaps abject obedience. Richardson gives the core meaning of *ὑπηρετεῖν* and its cognates as “implicit, unquestioning service in response to another’s authoritative bidding” (55). This definition aptly describes following orders in military service, and in fact those cognates of *ὑπηρετεῖν* that in the fifth century reacquired connection with the sea—*ὑπηρεσία* (naval specialists on a trireme), *ὑπηρεσίον* (rower’s pad), *ὑπηρετικός* (naval dispatch boat)—all connote service with the fleet.³⁰ Aeschylus is saying that the Athenians must take orders from Alcibiades, that is, they must accept him as a military leader. In 405 Athens’ last great fleet was at sea, operating against Lysander to maintain access to the vital Black Sea grain markets, and Aeschylus’ advice on Alcibiades would be even more pertinent to Athenian circumstances if it could be shown that by 405 B.C. *ὑπηρετεῖν*, like *ὑπηρεσία*, *ὑπηρεσίον*, and *ὑπηρετικός*, had also regained a naval significance. This cannot be demonstrated by fifth-century citations, but it is not quite out of the question.

As LSJ notes (I), *ὑπηρετεῖν* is used twice in its literal meaning of “do rower’s service for” in an inscription (*I.Cret.* III vi 7B.10, 23; ca 300 B.C.) in which the Praesians dictate to the Stalitan (whom they have apparently defeated in the war) the conditions under which the latter shall perform naval offices for the former. This literal usage of *ὑπηρετεῖν* follows the occurrence in *Frogs* by scarcely a century. Moreover, the close connection between *ὑπηρετεῖν* and rowing persisted for a considerable time. LSJ also cites a passage from Diodorus in which rowing is clearly indicated (2.55: *πλοίου ὑπὸ δύο ἀνθρώπων ὑπηρετεῖσθαι δυνάμενον*).³¹ Thus there is no question that *ὑπηρετεῖν* eventually regained its original connotation. If it did so by 405, then *Frogs* 1432 could be understood to mean that if the polis has reared a lion, a dangerous warrior like Alcibiades, then it is best to serve under him in the fleet. On this reading, Aeschylus is telling the Athenians to recall Alcibiades, in spite of the risks, to direct the triremes of Athens. But whether the meaning of *ὑπηρετεῖν* in 1432 is nautical or not, the kernel of its significance is the same: in its extremity, Athens must submit to the orders of Alcibiades, the most formidable leader available.

²⁹ *The Frogs*, tr. R. Lattimore, in *Aristophanes: Four Comedies*, ed. W. Arrowsmith (Ann Arbor 1969) 87.

³⁰ See J. S. Morrison, “*Hyperesia* in Naval Contexts in the Fifth and Fourth Centuries B.C.,” *JHS* 104 (1984) 48–59, esp. 48 (*contra* Richardson), 55.

³¹ The argument is complicated by the question to what extent Diodorus’ text depends on the wording of his source, but obviously he understood the literal meaning of *ὑπηρετεῖσθαι* and expected that his readers would as well.

Such an injunction for military (and thus, in a city at war, civic) discipline in the service of a superior officer is appropriate to *Frogs* in a number of ways: it reflects the fact that Athens, in reality and as depicted in the play, was a maritime state at war; it echoes the plea of the parabasis that the city unite under competent leadership; it is closely compatible with Aeschylus' complaint and Dionysus' supporting evidence that, unlike the sailors of the past, modern sailors disobey their officers, refuse to row, and sail where they want (1071–77); and it implies that Aeschylus is advising the recall of Alcibiades to regain his naval expertise for the city.

This recommendation is particularly sensible in view of the military predicament of Athens in early 405. The city could still put a redoubtable battle fleet to sea, but it had no strategic reserves. The next crushing defeat would spell ruin. Aristophanes was fully aware of the situation. In *Frogs* 704 the Mystae declare that the Athenians have their city in the arms of the sea: τὴν πόλιν καὶ ταῦτ' ἔχοντες κυμάτων ἐν ἀγκάλαις. Later they exhort their fellow citizens to use aristocratic leadership again, for if they succeed, they will win a good reputation; if they fail, they will seem to the wise to have hung from a worthy wood (735ff):

καὶ κατορθώσασι γὰρ
εὐλογον, κἄν τι σφαλῆτ', ἐξ ἀξίου γούν τοῦ ξύλου,
ἦν τι καὶ πάσχητε, πάσχειν τοῖς σοφοῖς δοκήσετε.

The message of the parabasis is that the Athenians are experiencing a crisis of leadership. This crisis was particularly acute in the case of military expertise. In the wake of the battle of Arginusae, the Athenian *strategoí* who had taken part in the battle were put on trial for failing to pick up those whose ships had been sunk. All eight were found guilty, and the six at Athens were executed. As Sealey correctly notes, "this verdict diminished the pool of strategic talent on which the Athenians could draw in electing the ten generals of 405/4."³² Alcibiades was genuinely needed at Athens. One of the most skillful admirals in the Aegean, he had won the battle of Cyzicus in 410, a victory that induced the Spartans to propose peace.³³ Lysander himself feared him.³⁴ Recalling Alcibiades involves some risk, as Aeschylus obviously understands, but having reared the lion Athens cannot afford to repudiate his dangerous talents. Unlike Euripides, Aeschylus sees both sides of the issue and, while not without misgivings, saga-

³² R. Sealey, *A History of the Greek City States ca. 700–338 B.C.* (Berkeley 1976) 376.

³³ Xen. *Hell.* 1.1.11–24; Diod. 13.49–53; Plut. *Alc.* 28.

³⁴ Plut. *Lys.* 4f.

ciously concludes that Athens is better off with Alcibiades than without him.

At this point Dionysus declares that he still cannot decide, for one dramatist has spoken wisely, σοφῶς, the other clearly, σαφῶς (Σ *ad loc.* believes that Aeschylus has spoken σοφῶς and Euripides σαφῶς; I am convinced that he is correct). Euripides' unequivocal and one-dimensional judgment is a model of clarity that falls short of wisdom because it does not consider all factors relevant to a decision. On the other hand, Aeschylus' paradoxical and oracular response is certainly not σαφής. It is so problematic that, as we have seen, some scholars cannot even bring themselves to believe that he really means what he seems to say. He weighs good against evil in deliberating Alcibiades' recall, and decides finally that the good outweighs the evil. The renegade admiral should return. Dionysus judges that he has spoken σοφῶς, and in that judgment is prefigured Aeschylus' victory.

But first Dionysus must pose one other question. He asks both poets how Athens may be saved. Euripides states that if the Athenians use as leaders those out of favor, and turn out those in favor, the city could be saved (1446–50). This answer appears to echo the exhortation of the Mystae in the parabasis to reject the leadership of the radical populists headed by Cleophon and his associates, and to restore as leaders the *kaloι kagathoi*. As we have seen, this is an argument that can be used to support the civic rehabilitation of the *kalos kagathos* Alcibiades, so in a way it works against Euripides, who opposed Alcibiades' recall, precisely because it is good advice. It is germane to point out here that Alcibiades had a history of political opposition to the radical populists. Aristophanes' joke in *Wasps* 42–45 suggests that the young Alcibiades was hostile to Cleon, just as we would expect in the ex-ward of Pericles. Alcibiades was also instrumental in the exile of Hyperbolus,³⁵ and he was a personal and political enemy of Cleophon. It was Cleophon who indicted Alcibiades on a charge of treason after the battle of Notium, precipitated and lost by Alcibiades' lieutenant Antiochus in defiance of his commander's explicit instructions to avoid an engagement. Cleophon's malice confirmed Alcibiades' decision to go into voluntary exile.³⁶ Should Alcibiades return, it would spell serious political trouble for his adversary. Although Cleophon was a *strategos* (Σ *ad Frogs* 679), we do not know of a single military success for which he was responsible. Alcibi-

³⁵ Plut. *Alc.* 13f, *Nic.* 11, *Aristid.* 7.

³⁶ Diod. 13.74; Plut. *Alc.* 36f, *Lys.* 5; Xen. *Hell.* 1.5.17, 2.1.25; Nep. *Alc.* 7.4, 8.1; Himer. *Ex.Nap.* 36.15, Phot. *Bibl.* 377a18.

ades, by contrast, was a seasoned and highly capable military commander. And nothing of what we know of Cleophon suggests that he could compete with Alcibiades in the exercise of that most potent but intangible of political assets, charisma. Aristophanes wanted the radical populists out, and there is reason to believe that the recall of Alcibiades might have contributed to that end.³⁷

It is now Aeschylus' turn to speak. He says that the city will be saved

τὴν γῆν ὅταν νομίσωσι τὴν τῶν πολεμίων
εἶναι σφετέραν, τὴν δὲ σφετέραν τῶν πολεμίων,
πόρον δὲ τὰς ναῦς, ἀπορίαν δὲ τὸν πόρον. (1463–65)

Because, as the scholiasts *ad* 1463 note, this naval policy resembles that given by Pericles at the beginning of the war (*cf.* Thuc. 1.140–44), it has struck some scholars as intolerably anachronistic. Wilamowitz and others even athetized the passage.³⁸ But the principles of Athenian power had not changed in twenty-six years. Athens was a sea power whose very survival depended upon her fighting triremes, as the catastrophe at Aegospotami showed with grim clarity.³⁹ Besides, Aeschylus has another reason to remind an Athenian audience of Pericles the Alcmaeonid. Pericles had formulated his naval policy in the days of Athenian greatness, an acme for which he himself was in no small part responsible, and which, in the eyes of many, his successors, particularly those currently in power, had let slip away. Who

³⁷ Some may object that if a restored Alcibiades did in fact move against Cleophon, Archedemus, and the rest of the popular leaders, it would be only to replace them at the head of the radical democrats. Even if we grant the point (and with Alcibiades nothing was certain), we cannot infer that Aristophanes must have seen the matter in this light. Diodorus (13.68.4) reports that Alcibiades had the peculiar power simultaneously to make Athens' leading citizens view him as a strong man able openly to oppose the *demos* and to make the Athenian poor view him as a champion who would promote their interests. The historian concludes that on the occasion of Alcibiades' recall all the Athenians gratuitously assumed that good fortune (however they variously conceived it) had returned to the city (13.68.6). Alcibiades was a veritable lightning rod for wishful thinking, and *Frogs* provides reason to believe that Aristophanes was not immune to this effect. Plutarch tells us that Athens' obstinate faith in Alcibiades' ability to redeem the city from catastrophe lasted even after the fall of Athens, to be extinguished only by his death (*Alc.* 38). If in the hour of Athens' extremity in early 405 Aristophanes succumbed to the legendary power of Alcibiades to induce hope, it was, in the context of the historical record, an absolutely unexceptional event.

³⁸ Wilamowitz (*supra* n.16) 474; T. Kock, *Die Frösche* (Berlin 1868) 212 *ad* 1460; Schmid-Stählin I.4 354f; G. Wills, "Aeschylus' Victory in *The Frogs*," *AJP* 90 (1969) 56, among others.

³⁹ For a more detailed defense of the good sense of the advice in 1463–65 different in certain respects from, but not incompatible with, that here, see A. H. Sommerstein, "Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1463–5," *CQ* n.s. 24 (1974) 23–27.

better to restore some measure of that lost preëminence than Alcibiades, another lion from the same illustrious stock? So Aeschylus has recommended that Athens recall her most famous admiral, and risk everything on the navy, in any case a necessity. Taken together, these two *gnomai* represent a coherent naval policy that was not impracticable, and which, if implemented, seemed to have a chance of producing an honorable peace in an Athens released from the grip of radical populist hawks. Having given this intelligent advice, Aeschylus is allowed to win the contest.⁴⁰

The poet's meaning, as I have argued, was that Alcibiades should be recalled and made virtual commander-in-chief of the Athenian forces because he was best qualified to restore the once-preëminent fortunes of Athens. In giving this advice, Aristophanes was not recommending that the Athenians set an astonishing precedent in their treatment of Alcibiades, but rather that they deal with him precisely as they had dealt with him once before, and on the same grounds. Xenophon (*Hell.* 1.4.12) reports that in 407 Alcibiades, emboldened by the friendly attitude of the Athenians, ended his exile and returned home to Athens, where he was appointed supreme commander (*ἀπάντων*

⁴⁰ J. Hatzfeld, *Alcibiade*² (Paris 1951) 331, believed that Aristophanes was part of that sector of public opinion that considered Alcibiades' return dangerous but inevitable. E. Delebecque, "Alcibiade au théâtre d'Athènes à la fin de la guerre du Péloponnèse," *Dioniso* 41 (1967) 358, follows Hatzfeld in asserting that the parodos of *Frogs* creates an impression favorable to Alcibiades, for in that passage the chorus of Eleusinian initiates refers to their overland journey to Eleusis, a trip that was last possible when Alcibiades led the way with an armed escort to protect the procession from marauding Lacedaemonians based at Decelea. The problem with this interpretation is that not all scholars believe that Aristophanes' chorus is composed of initiates of the mysteries. For a synopsis of the scholarship and issues, see C. P. Segal, "The Character of the Cults of Dionysus and the Unity of *The Frogs*," *HSCP* 65 (1961) 207–42, esp. 236f n.44; see also G. T. Hooker, "The Topography of the *Frogs*," *JHS* 80 (1960) 112–17; and M. Guarducci, "Le Rane di Aristofane e la topografia ateniese," in *Studi in onore di Aristide Colonna* (Perugia 1982) 167–72. Delebecque is on firmer ground when he points out (358f) that in the parabasis of *Frogs* Aristophanes was making a tendentious point very much to Alcibiades' advantage by blaming the Revolution of the Four Hundred exclusively on Phrynichus, Alcibiades' bitter enemy, although we know from Thucydides (8.47ff) that the oligarchic revolution was fostered by Alcibiades' intrigues to come home, and in the beginning Phrynichus opposed it with all the persuasiveness at his command. Although his arguments are less developed than mine, Delebecque believes (359) as I do that Aristophanes advocates the recall of Alcibiades to alleviate the dearth of military leadership after the Arginusae trial, and particularly to oppose Lysander.

For a new argument that in *Philoctetes* of 409 B.C., Sophocles enjoins the return of Alcibiades to Athens, see M. Vickers, "Alcibiades on Stage: *Philoctetes* and *Cyclops*," *Historia* 36 (1987) 171–97. Vickers' synopsis of Sophocles' message in *Philoctetes* suits my assessment of Aristophanes' message in the political context of *Frogs*: "Alcibiades' virtues were considerable, and if they could be harnessed in the service of his native city, Athens might be saved" (186).

ἡγεμῶν αὐτοκράτωρ) by the *ekklesia* because he was thought to be capable of restoring the previous power of the city, ὡς οἶός τε ᾧν σῶσαι τὴν προτέραν τῆς πόλεως δύναμιν (1.4.20). Diodorus tells essentially the same story (13.69.3). On that occasion the Athenians had decided that it was best for the embattled city τοῖς τρόποις ὑπηρετεῖν. Aristophanes was merely asking, though in vain, that they do so again, for the same reason, the *soteria* of the city.

The soundness of Aristophanes' suggestion that Alcibiades the admiral should be enlisted once again in the service of the *polis* was to receive melancholy confirmation in the chain of events culminating in the action at Aegospotami. On the day before the battle, Alcibiades sailed from his nearby castle to the Athenian camp, where he pointed out to the *strategoí* the very weaknesses in their position that Lysander was to exploit in achieving total victory. He was laughed out of camp, and the next day Lysander launched the attack that won the war.⁴¹ On the crucial issue of Alcibiades, the comic poet was right and the general staff was wrong.

That said, it should be pointed out that Aristophanes couches his recommendation so cautiously that good scholars have denied he ever made it. For this, of course, there was excellent reason. Alcibiades was as volatile as he was brilliant. His dexterity at changing sides made Theramenes seem a veritable Gibraltar. Alcibiades had the capacity to save Athens—or ruin her. It is no wonder that Aeschylus' advice to serve the lion's nature is so troubled. Aristophanes' statement on Alcibiades is the whisper of an implication, not a clarion call to action. The poet knew that Athens was in the arms of the sea, and he did not wish to be blamed for sinking the ship of state.⁴²

CONNECTICUT COLLEGE
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⁴¹ For these events see Plut. *Alc.* 35f, Xen. *Hell.* 2.1.25–28.

⁴² This paper has been improved by the suggestions of the anonymous referee.