

# The Chorus of Aristophanes' *Babylonians*

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THE BABYLONIANS, Aristophanes' second attested play, was produced by Callistratus at the Dionysia of 426. It is known that Cleon resorted to some form of legal action after the performance, but there is little agreement about the theme of the lost comedy or about the chorus from which it took its title. Reaction to the important article published some fifty years ago by Norwood<sup>1</sup> continues, in the main, to be equivocal. On the one hand, there has been a definite tendency in recent years to applaud Norwood's exposure of the 'false dogma' that the chorus represented the members of the Athenian Empire.<sup>2</sup> Yet his own suggestion that the *choreutai* were followers of Dionysus has not attracted much support, and no new attempts at identification seem to have been made.<sup>3</sup> While it is impossible to reconstruct the plot of the *Babylonians*, a reappraisal of the chorus' rôle may be useful.

References to the lost play in the *Acharnians* show that it was concerned with imperial matters and that Cleon argued that it had damaged Athens' relationship with her allies.<sup>4</sup> The direction that Aristophanes took, however, is debated, and only two things are securely established about the members of the chorus: they appeared as branded or tattooed (*ἐστιγμέννοι*) slaves working in a mill, and

<sup>1</sup> G. Norwood, "The *Babylonians* of Aristophanes," *CP* 25 (1930) 1-10.

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. A. Andrewes, "The Mytilenaeen Debate," *Phoenix* 16 (1962) 80 n.40; W. G. Forrest, "Aristophanes' *Acharnians*," *Phoenix* 17 (1963) 1 n.3; G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (London 1972) 363 n.11; R. Meiggs, *The Athenian Empire* (Oxford 1972) 393. In Germany, Norwood's arguments have encountered more skepticism. Both W. Schmid, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur* 1.4 (Munich 1946) 183, and A. Lesky, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur*<sup>2</sup> (Bern 1963) 466, continue to uphold the view that the chorus represented the subject allies.

<sup>3</sup> W. G. Forrest, "Aristophanes and the Athenian Empire," in *The Ancient Historian and His Materials. Essays in Honour of C. E. Stevens* (Farnborough 1975) 17-29, essentially follows Norwood so far as the chorus is concerned.

<sup>4</sup> *Ach.* 502-06, 630-51. The two main points made in the parabasis (at 634 and 642) are discussed *infra*. I am convinced that it was Aristophanes, not Callistratus, who was attacked by Cleon after the performance of the lost play, that Dicaeopolis serves as his mouthpiece at *Ach.* 502-06, and that he is the *poietes/didaskalos* of the parabasis. For the opposing view and references to modern discussion, see D. M. MacDowell, "Aristophanes and Kallistratos," *CQ* n.s. 32 (1982) 21-26. This whole question does not affect the present argument, however, and it is too complicated to be treated here.

they were not Athenians. The combined testimony of Hesychius, Photius, and the *Etymologicum Magnum* proves the first point,<sup>5</sup> while the second is a deduction from their name and fr.79 K., ἡ που κατὰ στοίχους κεκράξονται τι βαρβαριστί. This must refer to the *choreutai*,<sup>6</sup> and βαρβαριστί shows that they represented non-Greeks or, at the very least, non-Athenians.<sup>7</sup> These two points have long won general acceptance, but the larger question of the chorus' identity remains open.

Although Norwood did not quite succeed in demolishing the theory that the chorus represented the allies, he did demonstrate that it rests on shaky foundations. Its proponents invoked as evidence a fragment of the lost comedy and a line from the parabasis of the *Acharnians*, but neither is at all decisive. Hesychius gives the reaction of an unknown character in the comedy upon seeing the chorus of slaves coming out of the mill: Σαμίων ὁ δῆμος ἐστίν· ὡς πολυγράμματος (Hesych. s.v. Σαμίων ὁ δῆμος [fr.64 K.]). Hesychius, however, also describes the speaker as astounded (καταπληττόμενος) and perplexed (ἐπαπορῶν) at the sight of the slaves, and it is at least a reasonable inference that the latter were not Samians, but that they were being more or less aptly compared to them because of the marks which they bore. Norwood perhaps went too far in concluding that this is proved by the fact that Plutarch refers to the same line as a 'riddle'. In πολυγράμματος, the biographer saw a possible allusion to the branding of the Samians following their unsuccessful rebellion from Athens in 440 (πρὸς ταῦτα τὰ στίγματα λέγουσι καὶ τὸ Ἄριστοφάνειον ἠνίχθαι), but he has previously categorically stated that the Samians were branded with a *samaina* (*Per.* 26.3–4). This scarcely harmonises with the Aristophanic adjective 'many-lettered' and might in itself explain his puzzlement.<sup>8</sup> Under another lemma, however, Hesychius also notes that in the *Babylonians* Aristophanes τὰ μέτωπα τῶν οἰκετῶν Ἰστριανὰ φησιν, ἐπεὶ ἐστιγμένοι εἰσίν. οἱ γὰρ παρὰ τῷ Ἰστρω οἰκοῦντες στίζονται καὶ ποικίλαις ἐσθήσεσι χρῶνται (s.v. Ἰστριανὰ). It seems clear from this that during the play someone exploited the outlandish appearance of the members of the

<sup>5</sup> Hesych. s.vv. Σαμίων ὁ δῆμος, Ἰστριανὰ; Phot. s.v. Σαμίων ὁ δῆμος; *Etym.Magn.* s.v. ζώπειον.

<sup>6</sup> For κατὰ στοίχους as a technical term used of the rectangular formation of the chorus in four ranks, cf. Poll. 4.108–09.

<sup>7</sup> Plato (*Pr.* 341c) does call the Aeolian dialect a φωνὴ βάρβαρος, but it was certainly not normal Athenian practice to refer to another Greek dialect in this way.

<sup>8</sup> Both Photius (*supra* n.5) and Aelian (*VH* 2.9) state that the Athenians branded the Samians with an owl, and Photius provides two other possible explanations of πολυγράμματος.

chorus by comparing them jokingly to the people living on the Ister. Similarly, it is entirely plausible to suppose that the character in the comedy who did not know what to make of them and designated them Samians was resorting to a wild comic guess.<sup>9</sup> There is certainly nothing here to support the view that the chorus included any other members of the Empire.

In the course of their long defence of the *Babylonians* in the parabasis of the *Acharnians*, the chorus at 642 make the well-known claim that Aristophanes has benefited the city, *τοὺς δήμους ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν δείξας ὡς δημοκρατοῦνται*. The words must mean “having shown how the peoples of the allied states are affected by democratic rule,” but the exact point is obscure. Despite recent arguments to the contrary, the following lines, which describe the consequences of 642, strongly suggest that it does refer to the way the allies were ruled by the Athenian *demos*, and not to their own democratic regimes.<sup>10</sup> In 643–51 Aristophanes specifies the nature of the two benefits which will (supposedly) now accrue to Athens: the tribute will come to the city, since the allied envoys will be eager to see the poet who *παρεκινδύνευσ’ εἰπεῖν ἐν Ἀθηναίοις τὰ δίκαια* (643–45); the Athenians themselves, at least in the Persian king’s eyes, have become better and will be stronger by being subjected to their poet’s criticisms (646–51). Both passages show that Aristophanes had said some harsh things (*κακὰ πολλά*, 649) about his countrymen. In context, neither boast is easily intelligible if *δημοκρατοῦνται* at 642 is taken to refer to the domestic governments of the allies, but they present no problem if it is Athenian behaviour towards them which is in question.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> This point is well developed by Forrest (*supra* n.3) 19–20.

<sup>10</sup> A. W. Gomme, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides* III (Oxford 1956) 557–58, ignored the context when he claimed that the line must mean “having shown what sort of democracies they are” or “how the people are gulled by their popular leaders.” Forrest’s interpretation is discussed *infra* n.11.

<sup>11</sup> Forrest (*supra* n.3) 22–29, adopts and develops Gomme’s view that at *Ach.* 642 Aristophanes is claiming that he “took the lid off allied democracy.” In this he sees a reference to an attack in the *Babylonians* upon the counterparts and protégés of Cleon among allied envoys. Yet mockery of ambassadors and their relationship with an individual Athenian politician would scarcely account for Aristophanes’ explicit claims at 643–51 that he had criticised the Athenians as a whole. Moreover, although 633–40 may suggest that allied ambassadors appeared as characters in the *Babylonians* (*infra* with n.15), the phrase *πολλῶν ἀγαθῶν αἴτιος ὑμῶν* in 641 picks up *πολλῶν ἀγαθῶν ἄξιός ὑμῶν* in 633 and shows that everything in between is an entity. This indicates that at 642 the chorus are making a *second* point, not simply amplifying what they have said earlier. Because the demarcation is so clear, H. Weber, *Aristophanische Studien* (Leipzig 1908) 73–74, was even led to the (impossible) assumption that Aristophanes must be referring to the *Banquetiers* in 633–41 and to the *Babylonians* in 642–51. In his earlier article (*supra* n.2), Forrest presented an abbreviated form of his argument in slightly different terms, but the objections raised above still appear valid.

Yet while Aristophanes appears to be responding here to the charge that he had mocked and misrepresented Athens' control over the members of her Empire, nothing more can be deduced from the chorus' words. The very vagueness at 642 suggests that the poet was dealing with an awkward point, but it is a considerable jump to the conclusion that he presented the allies as slaves of the Athenian people.

Some of Norwood's more general objections to that thesis are also cogent. Cleon's response to the comedy indicates that Aristophanes went very far, but it is not easy to believe that he depicted the members of the Empire as maltreated slaves so soon after the revolt and terrible punishment of Mytilene. Even if one were to assume that the poet was disposed to act with the traditional rashness of youth, the questions why the archon selected the play for performance before the allied envoys at the Dionysia and why Callistratus undertook production would still remain. Moreover, the *Babylonians* was widely known in antiquity,<sup>12</sup> and it is unlikely that such a chorus could have escaped record entirely.

Norwood was plainly justified in insisting that he was attacking an assumption, unsupported by any firm evidence; but his own tentative identification of the *choreutai* as wild Asiatics who worshipped Dionysus is even less convincing. Dionysus is known to have been a character in the play, and Norwood theorised that his devotees accompanied him to Athens only to be imprisoned by the authorities until he somehow obtained their deliverance.<sup>13</sup> In this Norwood saw a possible burlesque of Aeschylus' *Edoni*, but he was unable to adduce any evidence in support of his hypothesis and it is open to two decisive objections. It does not account for the fact that the members of the chorus were slaves, and there was no special connection between Dionysus and Babylon. Norwood did not attempt to explain why Aristophanes should have named the god's followers Babylonians, beyond observing that Hesychius defines the word as *οἱ βάρβαροι παρὰ τοῖς Ἀττικοῖς*, and this is misleading.<sup>14</sup> In the first place, it is highly improbable that *Βαβυλώνιοι* was a synonym of 'barbarians' in Athens. There is nothing to indicate this in the ancient literature, and

<sup>12</sup> It is cited more frequently than any other of Aristophanes' lost comedies except the *Banqueters* and the *Broilers*, both of which held a special interest for Athenaeus.

<sup>13</sup> Norwood (*supra* n.1) 7–10. For Dionysus' presence in the comedy and his apparent prosecution by the 'demagogues' *cf.* Ath. 494D (fr.70 K.). Norwood suggested that the Asiatics may have been tattooed on arrival or branded by the state.

<sup>14</sup> Hesych. *s.v.* *Βαβυλώνιοι*. Forrest (*supra* n.3) 27 follows Norwood in assuming that the chorus were attendants of Dionysus, and suggests, without further discussion, that they were called 'Babylonians' because "Herodotus had just hit the market."

if Hesychius is not making a trite generalisation it appears that he must be basing this note too on the Aristophanic comedy. Moreover, even if the two words were synonymous, by no means all barbarians were devotees of Dionysus. If the god's followers had made up the chorus, one would certainly expect Aristophanes to have anticipated Euripides in giving them and his play a more appropriate name.

Part of Norwood's reconstruction is more plausible, and his argument that ambassadors from the Empire figured as characters in the *Babylonians* is not unconvincing. At the outset of the defence of the lost play in the parabasis of the *Acharnians*, the chorus maintain that Aristophanes deserves credit for having stopped the Athenians from being deceived and flattered *ξευκκοῖσι λόγοις* (633–35). Since they seem to intimate that this means that the allied ambassadors will no longer succeed in duping them (636–40), it is possible that the *ξευκκοὶ λόγοι* were delivered by these envoys.<sup>15</sup> As Norwood suggested, at some point in the *Babylonians* they may have arrived in Athens, given a speech or speeches, and been suitably derided for their eloquence.<sup>16</sup> This might also tie in with the presence of Dionysus in the comedy. It was at the time of the Dionysia that the ambassadors brought the tribute to the city, and Athenian concern for the money could well have been an element of some importance in the *Babylonians*.<sup>17</sup> The play was performed in a Great Panathenaic year, and at the time of production there was almost certainly controversy in the city over the question whether the allies' contributions should be increased. The view that Cleon was one of the politicians who was arguing (unsuccessfully) for a new assessment before the Panathenaea was celebrated in August is persuasive,<sup>18</sup> and this background should at least be kept in mind when the theme of the *Babylonians* and the politician's reactions to it are considered. Yet there is reason

<sup>15</sup> See Forrest (*supra* n.3) 20–21. Yet it is the Pindaric *ἰοστεφάνους* (637) and *λιπαράς* (639) which the chorus cite as examples, and *ἀπὸ τῶν πόλεων* in 636 does not quite prove that the ambassadors were from the Empire. *αἱ πόλεις* in Aristophanes are not always the allies: e.g. at *Pax* 231 and 266 they are all the cities of Greece, and at *Vesp.* 925 the reference must be to the cities of Sicily.

<sup>16</sup> Norwood linked the presence of the allied envoys in the city with the arrival by sea of a person or persons unknown which appears to be suggested in five of the fragments (78, 80, 83, 84, 85).

<sup>17</sup> For tribute at the Dionysia cf. *Ach.* 504–06; schol. *Ach.* 504, 378. A. E. Raubitschek, "Two Notes on Isocrates," *TAPA* 72 (1941) 356–62, has suggested that the decree providing for the tribute to be carried into the orchestra during the Dionysia (Isoc. 8.82) was passed between the death of Pericles and the performance of the *Babylonians*. At *Eq.* 313 he sees the probable repetition of a joke from the *Babylonians* mocking the new practice, but the whole theory is speculative and his interpretation of *Eq.* 313–14 does not inspire any confidence.

<sup>18</sup> See Meiggs (*supra* n.2) 322–23.

to suspect that Cleon's attack was prompted by something more than an isolated scene in the play (and possibly passages in the parabasis), as Norwood conjectured, and that the rôle of the chorus was important to this.

The note in the *Suda* that *Βαβυλώνιοι* meant 'slaves' (*s.v.* *Βαβυλωνία*) must be regarded with the same caution as Hesychius' definition. The foreign slaves in Athens came from many different nations, but in Old Comedy there is not one other reference to Babylonian slaves although there is frequent mention of Lydians, Phrygians, Syrians, Carians, Egyptians, Thracians, and Scythians.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the evidence from other sources confirms that these peoples supplied the vast majority of Athenian slaves.<sup>20</sup> It follows that an Athenian would only regard Babylonians as 'slaves' in the sense that they were under Persian rule, a condition often compared to slavery. Since the members of the chorus in Aristophanes' play were presented as slaves and named Babylonians, it also appears a logical deduction that Babylonian subjection to Persia is one of the keys to their rôle in the comedy.

This, however, does not justify the assumption that Aristophanes equated the allies' status with that of Persian subjects by making them slaves and calling them Babylonians. There is another possibility which harmonises far better with the evidence: that the chorus represented actual natives of Babylon. This explanation has the merit of simplicity and makes the silence of the ancient sources about the chorus understandable. No doubt they would have found it gratuitous to observe that the Babylonians were from Babylon. It also allows the words *κεκράξονται τι βαρβαριστί* in fr.79 K. their natural meaning, gives some point to Hesychius' statement that the Babylonians were *βάρβαροι*, and accounts for the apparently exotic appearance of the chorus (Hesych. *s.v.* *Ἰστριανά*) as well as the reference to the Persian king in the parabasis of the *Acharnians*. Everything else in the anapaests refers either to the *Babylonians* or to its aftermath, so Aristophanes' joking claim that Artaxerxes has been enquiring about him (647–51) implies that the king was mentioned in the comedy or entered into it in some way. Presumably he was depicted as con-

<sup>19</sup> The references are assembled by V. Ehrenberg, *The People of Aristophanes*<sup>3</sup> (New York 1962) 171–72.

<sup>20</sup> See Meiggs/Lewis *SGHI* p.247 for a discussion of the property confiscated from those accused of mutilating the Herms and profaning the Eleusinian mysteries in 414. They observe that of the slaves whose origins can be ascertained, 12 are Thracian, 7 Carian, 3 Scythian, 3 *οικογενείς*, 2 Syrian, 2 Illyrian, with 1 each from Colchis, Lydia, Macedonia, Phrygia, Messenia, and (probably) Cappadocia. Cf. schol. Pl. *Lach.* 187B *ἐν τῷ Καρί: ἀντὶ τοῦ ἐν τῷ δούλω. καὶ γὰρ οἱ παλαιοὶ τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἀπὸ Καρῶν καὶ Θρακῶν τοὺς δούλους ἐποιοῦντο.*

cerned about the presence of his subjects in Athens. Again, Norwood's objection that it would have been impossible for Aristophanes to place the allies in the orchestra as slaves so soon after the punishment of Mytilene is neutralised. Yet if the poet exercised his humour in comparing the Babylonian slaves to members of the Empire, the play would still mock Athenian imperialism.<sup>21</sup> More specifically, this interpretation accords perfectly well with Aristophanes' claim at *Ach.* 642 that he had shown how the allies *δημοκρατοῦνται*, if it is the *kratos* of the Athenian *demos* that he is recalling. How explicitly Aristophanes made the analogy can not be determined. In the extant fragments it is only the Samians who appear to be compared to the Babylonians, but if there is an allusion in fr.64 K. to the branding of the islanders, the joke evidently went beyond their physical appearance.<sup>22</sup> It also seems (at least) a possible inference that simply by presenting a chorus of former Persian subjects who found that they were no better off in Athens, Aristophanes was suggesting that, on occasion, the Athenians could be as repressive as the Persians in their exercise of power. In 426 this would have had obvious topical relevance because of the events that had followed the surrender of Mytilene in the previous year.

All this perhaps does not quite prove that the chorus must have represented Babylonians, but it seems legitimate to suggest that the problem of their identity has been approached from the wrong direction. In the *Acharnians* the *choreutai* are demesmen of Acharnae, in the *Knights* they are the cavalry, and so on. It would appear almost perverse to suppose that the *Babylonians* was an exception to the 'rule' when everything we know about the lost play is readily explicable if the chorus represented natives of Babylon.<sup>23</sup>

What these Babylonians were imagined to be doing in the city is a separate question, which does not admit of a definite answer, but

<sup>21</sup> The comparisons would gain in effectiveness if (as Norwood suggested) the allied ambassadors were present as characters on the stage. It is tempting to speculate that Dionysus pointed out certain similarities between the subject allies and the Babylonians, and that it was for this reason that he was brought to trial by the 'demagogues' (*Ath.* 494D).

<sup>22</sup> It is also worth noting that it is at the expense of the Samians; there is no indication that Aristophanes championed any of the allies in the *Babylonians*. When the political situation had changed, this naturally would not prevent him from recalling the play in a different light if there is an allusion to it at *Pax* 759–60.

<sup>23</sup> The *Wasps* is of course a partial exception to the rule since the jurymen are named after the wasps whose behaviour they imitate. Yet it would be a very different thing to name another people Babylonians, particularly since the latter had no uniquely distinctive characteristics while the disposition of wasps was proverbial (*Anth.Pal.* 7.405, cf. *Ach.* 864).

there is one clue—the fact that they were ἐστιγμένοι. Since there are a number of references to branded slaves in Athenian literature and there is no record that the Babylonians decorated themselves with tattoos, one would expect the participle to mean that the members of the chorus were branded,<sup>24</sup> and this is supported by a note in Eustathius. Because Photius states that the extremely rare word στίγων (which he defines as ὁ στιγματίας) occurred in the *Babylonians* (Phot. s.v. στίγων [fr.97 K.]), the anonymous authority, cited by Eustathius, who refers to Aristophanes' use of στίγων καὶ πέδων δούλος for ὁ στιγματίας καὶ πεδήτης (Eust. *Od.* 1542.48) is almost certainly quoting from the same play. πέδων δούλος can only mean 'fettered slave', and the juxtaposition indicates that in στίγων there must be a reference to branding, another more permanent form of physical humiliation.

It was however by no means normal practice in Athens to brand slaves, partly, it seems, because this would identify them as proven trouble-makers and lower their market-value.<sup>25</sup> Only runaway slaves who had been recaptured are known to have been liable to branding, presumably to facilitate their recovery if they should escape a second time.<sup>26</sup> Accordingly, while other possibilities can be envisaged, the most plausible explanation of the presence of the Babylonians in the city is that the Persian subjects were imagined to have fled to Athens, only to find that they had exchanged one form of servitude for another.<sup>27</sup> This receives some support from another small piece of

<sup>24</sup> The comparisons to the branded Samians (fr.64 K.) and the tattooed Istrians (Hesych. s.v. Ἰστριανὰ) effectively nullify each other. It seems clear that Aristophanes took every opportunity to extract humour from the marks which his chorus bore.

<sup>25</sup> For the difficulty of distinguishing between slaves and citizens, cf. [Xen.] *Ath. Pol.* 1.10. See W. L. Westermann, *The Slave Systems of Greek and Roman Antiquity* (Philadelphia 1955) 23; T. Wiedemann, *Greek and Roman Slavery* (London 1981) 193.

<sup>26</sup> Schol. Aeschin. 2.79, ἐπειδὴ οἱ φυγάδες τῶν δούλων ἐστίζοντο τὸ μέτωπον; Ar. *Av.* 760, δραπέτης ἐστιγμένος. See in general Westermann and Wiedemann (*supra* n.25). In the case of certain references to branded slaves (e.g. Hermipp. fr.63.19 K., Ath. 612c) it is impossible to establish that they were fugitives, but there is nothing to indicate that they were not.

<sup>27</sup> It is impossible to determine from the fragments whether the Babylonians were branded in Athens. If they were, Aristophanes may have intended to emphasise that their coming under Athenian rule was virtually equivalent to recapture by the Persians. On the other hand, the Babylonians could equally well have been represented as already branded on arrival. An Athenian audience would apparently have expected to see these marks on runaways, and the brands would also serve the purpose of making the chorus' status clear from the outset. The other possibilities might involve the Athenian negotiations with Persia which were at least in the air if not under way at this time (*Ach.* 61–127). Aristophanes may conceivably have invented a situation in which Artaxerxes sent the Babylonians as a gift, or barter of some kind may have taken place. In this case, their being branded before arrival might illustrate Persian ruthlessness. Alter-



evidence in the fragments. Zenobius reports that the phrase ἀνθ' Ἐρμῶνος occurred in the *Babylonians* and explains that the proverb was used of those who save slaves, because of the Peloponnesian temple that afforded sanctuary to fugitives (Zen. 2.22 [fr.87 K.]). It is clearly tempting to link this with the deduction that the slaves in the orchestra were runaways. Either an ironic reference to the 'sanctuary' which the Babylonians had found in Athens or speculation that they might succeed in escaping a second time could provide an appropriate context for the phrase.<sup>28</sup>

The dramatic circumstances of such a flight cannot now be safely reconstructed, but references to Babylon and Babylonians are surprisingly rare in classical Athenian literature and particularly in the drama. Babylon appears to be mentioned elsewhere in Old Comedy only in the parody of Herodotus at *Aves* 552; in the plays and fragments of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, the sole reference to the city occurs at *Persae* 52–53.<sup>29</sup> In the light of this, one might suspect that Aristophanes had a specific reason for making his chorus Babylonians, and an intriguing possibility suggests itself. In the chapters of his work dealing with a revolt of Babylon from the Persians, Herodotus describes the siege of the city in considerable detail. He graphically recounts how the Persian Zopyrus mutilated himself by (*inter alia*) cutting off his nose and ears in order to win the trust of the Babylonians, and after purposely sacrificing large contingents of Persian troops ultimately effected the capture of the city (Hdt. 3.153–58). In gratitude, Darius gave him Babylon to govern for life, and Herodotus' narrative ends with the bald statement that the grandson and namesake of this Zopyrus later deserted from the Persians to the Athenians (3.160).

Herodotus gives no indication when the younger Zopyrus defected, but Ctesias purports to provide the background and further information. After his account of the recovery of Egypt by Zopyrus' father Megabyzus (in 454), he describes the final stages of the latter's long and chequered career. He then states that it was after his death at the

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natively, it is possible that the Babylonians were undergoing different forms of punishment to which slaves in Athens could be liable.

<sup>28</sup> It may also be pertinent that the note in Eustathius (*Od.* 1542.48) and perhaps the reference to an ἀνὴρ πεδήτης in fr.65 K. indicate that the chorus were fettered. It was customary to forestall potential runaways by keeping them in chains (Xen. *Mem.* 2.1.16).

<sup>29</sup> H. Bacon, *Barbarians in Greek Tragedy* (New Haven 1961) 173–85, provides a convenient list of the 152 names of foreign peoples and places found in the works of the tragedians. Many of these recur frequently.

age of seventy-six and the subsequent death of his wife Amytis that their son came to Athens. Some time later he was killed while helping the Athenians during the revolt of Caunus on the southern coast of Caria (*FGrHist* 688F14.36–45).

According to Ctesias' narrative, Megabyzus' death can scarcely have occurred before 440 and may well have been a number of years later.<sup>30</sup> This should mean that his son defected in the 430's, probably late in the decade.<sup>31</sup> Ctesias is, of course, an unreliable authority, but with the final events of Megabyzus' life he is at or near his own day, and the date is supported by the reference to the younger Zopyrus' death at Caunus.<sup>32</sup> Although it is uncertain precisely when this revolt broke out, Caunus' record of tribute payments indicates that it must be placed either between 437 and 433 or between 431 and 425,<sup>33</sup> and there is good reason to prefer the latter. In Photius' epitome of Ctesias, this is the last event recorded before the death of Artaxerxes in 425/4, and while one might normally have expected Herodotus to refer to Zopyrus' death, there is nothing in the *Histories* which can be securely dated after 430.<sup>34</sup> Eddy, who suspects that Pisuthnes may have been involved in the revolt, has plausibly linked it with the Persian interventions at Colophon and Notium in 430 and 428/7

<sup>30</sup> Five years elapsed after his recovery of Egypt before Megabyzus withdrew to Syria in revolt against the king (F14.39–40), and he spent another five years in exile on the Red Sea (F14.43). It is difficult to compress the remaining events, which include two victories over Artaxerxes' generals in Syria, two periods of reconciliation with the royal family, and his escape from the Red Sea (F14.40–43), into less than four years.

<sup>31</sup> If there is any truth in Ctesias' report of scandal concerning Amytis' sexual misconduct and lingering illness after Megabyzus' death (F14.44), she must have died some considerable time after her husband.

<sup>32</sup> Ctesias' deficiencies as a historian have recently been emphasised by J. Bigwood, "Ctesias' Account of the Revolt of Inarus," *Phoenix* 30 (1976) 1–25, "Ctesias as Historian of the Persian Wars," *Phoenix* 32 (1978) 19–41. Yet as Meiggs (*supra* n.2) 437 observes, the end of the Greek physician's story is circumstantial and plausible. After revolting from Athens, Caunus was apparently under Persian control (*infra* n.35), and "Zopyrus, himself a Persian, would seem a useful man to negotiate with Persians or Medizers, but the plan miscarries." It may also be worth emphasising that Ctesias was a native of Cnidus and that this city was not far from Caunus. He could easily have learnt the details of Zopyrus' death either before leaving for Persia or after his return. For a recent attempt to reconstruct Ctesias' life, see T. S. Brown, "Suggestions for a Vita of Ctesias of Cnidus," *Historia* 27 (1978) 1–19.

<sup>33</sup> For the details see Meiggs (*supra* n.2) 437.

<sup>34</sup> J. Wells, *Studies in Herodotus* (Oxford 1923) 106–07, aptly cited 9.75 and 9.37 in emphasising that the historian's silence about Zopyrus' death is significant. However, his attempt to explain Herodotus' knowledge of 'half the story' (by postulating that after meeting Zopyrus in Athens in 441 or 440, he left for Thurii in 440 before the latter was killed) is entirely unconvincing. For the latest datable reference in Herodotus, see J. A. S. Evans, "Herodotus' Publication Date," *Athenaeum* 67 (1979) 145–49, and *infra* n.43.

respectively;<sup>35</sup> Meiggs has suggested that the failure of Melesander's expedition to Caria and Lycia in 430 provides the most probable context,<sup>36</sup> which would mean that Zopyrus was in Athens a few years at most before the production of the *Babylonians*. Meiggs also concluded that when Zopyrus met his death he had not been long enough in the city "even to invite a joke from Aristophanes," but this may be doubted.<sup>37</sup>

The colourful details which Herodotus provides concerning the elder Zopyrus' self-mutilation and other machinations during the siege of Babylon are admittedly usually dismissed now as elements from folk-tale, and according to Photius, Ctesias placed this Babylonian revolt in the reign of Xerxes, not Darius. Although Ctesias apparently told much the same story as Herodotus about the stratagems employed to reduce the city, he attributed them not to Zopyrus, but to his son Megabyzus. In this version, Zopyrus was the Persian commander killed by the Babylonians during the revolt (F13.26). Yet despite the chronological mistakes and the exaggerations evident in Herodotus' chapters, it would be dangerous to assume that they do not contain at least a kernel of truth.<sup>38</sup> Babylonian documents prove that two revolts against Darius took place in 522 and 521, and one or more early in the reign of Xerxes,<sup>39</sup> so the accounts of Herodotus and Ctesias can perhaps be partially reconciled. The elder Zopyrus, a son of one of the 'Seven', could have played a prominent rôle during one of the Babylonian revolts of Darius' reign and some time subsequently been made satrap.<sup>40</sup> In this case, his own son,

<sup>35</sup> S. K. Eddy, "The Cold War between Athens and Persia, ca 448–412 B.C.," *CP* 68 (1973) 254–56. According to Ctesias (F14.45), Amestris had the Caunian who killed Zopyrus executed, which indicates Persian influence in the city at this time.

<sup>36</sup> Meiggs (*supra* n.2) 437; Thuc. 2.69.1 for the expedition.

<sup>37</sup> Cratinus certainly mocked Zopyrus' grandfather in the *Pylaea* (fr.176 K.). The date of this comedy is unknown, but Cratinus was active as a playwright until at least 423 and there is no reason to place it before 430. See *infra* n.44.

<sup>38</sup> As Wells (*supra* n.34) 109 observed, it would be surprising if the historian was totally wrong about an important event that took place only some forty years before his birth, particularly since he is, in a number of respects, well informed about Darius' reign.

<sup>39</sup> See G. A. Cameron, "Darius and Xerxes in Babylonia," *AJSemL* 58 (1941) 314–25; R. A. Parker and W. H. Dubberstein, *Babylonian Chronology 626 B.C.–A.D.* 45 (Chicago 1942) 13–15. Neither of the revolts against Darius appears to have lasted three months and Herodotus' 'twenty-month' siege of Babylon (3.153.1) cannot be right. It seems possible that his sources combined the two revolts into one. Confusion may have arisen from the fact that the leaders of both took the name Nebuchadnezzar, and pockets of resistance probably continued after the suppression of the first.

<sup>40</sup> Arguments advanced by Wells (*supra* n.34) 108–11 that the story of his self-mutilation contains "a solid base of truth" are scarcely convincing, but deception may have been involved in the fall of Babylon. Darius is unlikely to have promulgated this. If Herodotus has fused the two revolts in his narrative, Zopyrus' activity would fit the

Megabyzus, who would presumably have been familiar with local conditions, may have been the logical choice to suppress the later rebellion in which Zopyrus was killed (probably in 482). Ctesias, who knew of this uprising against Xerxes, but not of those against Darius, could then have taken advantage of what appeared to be yet another opportunity to 'correct' Herodotus.

This reconstruction is obviously speculative, but chronologically it is entirely possible,<sup>41</sup> and it is strengthened by Ctesias' notorious ignorance concerning the events of Darius' reign, his propensity for confusing the careers of fathers and sons, and his pro-Megabyzus bias.<sup>42</sup> In any case, while it may be impossible to determine precisely what part the elder Zopyrus or his son played during the Babylonian rebellions, this is of very secondary importance in the present context. It is only necessary to establish that when Aristophanes was working on his play, the Athenians were familiar with stories linking the family of 'their' Zopyrus with the city. If one accepts what is still the orthodox date for the publication of Herodotus, the early 420's, there is naturally no problem.<sup>43</sup> The graphic chapters of the *Histories* dealing with the siege of Babylon would have held a special interest for the Athenians since they had been involved in the sequel. In fact, even if the younger Zopyrus had defected shortly after 440 (which is unlikely), Athenian interest in him would have been rekindled early in the Archidamian War with the appearance of Herodotus' work. On the other hand, if Zopyrus did reach the city *ca* 430 and brought the story of his grandfather's and perhaps his father's exploits at Babylon, it would still have been of topical interest in its own right when Aristophanes was writing his play.<sup>44</sup> In this case, if the *Histories* then

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second better, but it is uncertain whether Darius destroyed Babylon's fortifications after the first revolt, thereby (presumably) rendering subterfuge unnecessary.

<sup>41</sup> If *e.g.* Zopyrus was born *ca* 545 he would have been in his twenties when Darius came to the throne, and in his sixties when he was killed at Babylon; if his son Megabyzus lived to the age of seventy-six and died *ca* 440–435, he was born *ca* 515–510 and was approximately thirty in 482.

<sup>42</sup> For Ctesias' confusion of members of the same family and his partiality towards Megabyzus, see J. Bigwood (*supra* n.32: 1976) 6 with n.24 and 15.

<sup>43</sup> The attempt by C. W. Fornara, "Evidence for the Date of Herodotus' Publication," *JHS* 91 (1971) 25–34, to date publication later has been answered by J. Cobet, "Wann wurde Herodots Darstellung der Perserkriege publiziert?" *Hermes* 105 (1977) 2–27. The theory of Evans (*supra* n.34) 145–49 is not very persuasive, but if he is correct the entire third book of the *Histories* could have reached Athens by 427.

<sup>44</sup> Photius (*s.v.* Ζωπίρου τάλαντα) shows that Cratinus employed the Herodotean version of events at Babylon in mocking the elder Zopyrus (fr.176 K.), but obviously it cannot be proved that he learnt it from the grandson. Nevertheless, as Wells (*supra* n.34) 100–01 argues, certain points in Herodotus' chapters look like part of a special family tradition. This implies that Zopyrus would have given much the same account of

began to circulate *ca* 428 or 427, they would have focussed attention on Zopyrus and his tale for a second time, but Herodotus' publication date would not be absolutely critical to the present argument. Zopyrus was the nephew of Artaxerxes and the grandson of Amestris, the infamous queen-mother. The arrival of such an eminent Persian must have provoked considerable curiosity among the Athenians, particularly since they would well recall how his father Megabyzus had defeated them in Egypt in 454 (Thuc. 1.109). One would imagine, too, that Zopyrus' loyalties and family background were subjected to examination in the assembly before the decision was taken to send him to Caunus.<sup>45</sup>

In short, provided only that the younger Zopyrus had reached Athens by 427, he could have served as an attractive 'prototype' for the chorus of Babylonians in Aristophanes' play. Making one final attempt to escape Persian dominion, they decided, on this occasion, to follow the example of the man who was the grandson and namesake of their former conqueror and ruler, and whose father may have defeated them a second time. Upon imitating him in fleeing to Athens, however, they discovered that in the comic theatre (at least initially) a very different fate awaited them.<sup>46</sup>

The fragments of the *Babylonians* are short and they do not yield any examples of parody of Herodotus, so it cannot be proved that Aristophanes derived his inspiration for the chorus from Zopyrus'

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his grandfather's deeds some ninety years earlier as the historian. Wells' theory that the younger Zopyrus was one of Herodotus' sources for Persian history is attractive and has found considerable support, but not enough is known of either man's movements to establish conclusively that they were in Athens at the same time; for recent scepticism concerning Herodotus' Athenian visits, see A. J. Podlecki, "Herodotus in Athens," in *Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean in Ancient History and Prehistory. Studies Presented to F. Schachermeyr* (Berlin 1977) 246–65. Yet if the historian's 'late' references to fairly minor events of 431 and 430 (7.233.2, 6.91.1, 9.73.3, 7.137.3) are accepted as evidence that he was in the city at the beginning of the war, this could fit in nicely with an arrival of Zopyrus *ca* 430. In any case, the possibility that Herodotus learnt this particular story at Thurii or elsewhere from Athenians who had met the Persian clearly cannot be discounted. Unless Ctesias is completely wrong, Zopyrus would presumably have supplemented the description of events at Babylon with facts concerning the length of his grandfather's rule, his death there, and Megabyzus' subsequent suppression of the later revolt.

<sup>45</sup> It would be interesting to know the nature of the service which, according to Ctesias (F14.45), his mother had performed for the Athenians.

<sup>46</sup> 'Comic inversion' is very common in Aristophanes, but it naturally cannot be assumed that the Babylonians remained in slavery throughout the play. If anything can be deduced from Aristophanes' technique in the extant comedies, it is likely that the chorus would have shared in the conventional 'happy ending'. So little is known about the plot of the *Babylonians*, however, that it is futile to speculate how this ending was achieved.

defection. Nevertheless, there is no reason to doubt the main point, that the chorus represented natives of Babylon, and this theory resolves two problems. It explains why Aristophanes chose to make his chorus Babylonians rather than another of the Persian subjects who figure more prominently in Old Comedy, and why they were *έστυγμένολ*. Moreover, the evidence suggests that only a few years separated the flight to Athens of the Persian noble whose family was so closely linked with Babylon, and the appearance of Aristophanes' unusual chorus of Babylonians who bore the marks of fugitives. Coincidence naturally cannot be ruled out, but it seems unlikely, particularly if the orthodox publication date of Herodotus is correct.

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