

Menander's Actors

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THE LONG-EXPECTED *Samia Bodmeriana* brings up for reconsideration one of the vexing problems in Menandrian studies: the distribution of parts. It is ironical that the relevant material furnished by this precious find only adds to our confusion. The aim of this essay is to collect, from all the substantial remnants of the poet, any bits of evidence bearing on the question.

In spite of numerous gaps at the top, the bottom and the left side of many of its columns, the *Samia* part of the Bodmer Papyrus gives a more or less complete picture of the characters of the play, their relations to each other, their participation in the development of the plot and the motivation as well as the timing of their entrances and exits. The list of the *dramatis personae*, in order of appearance, seems to be as follows: Moschion, Chrysis, Parmenon, Demeas, Niceratus, Cook. This is the shortest catalogue that I know in any of Menander's plays, as even the fragments of *Epitrepontes*, *Perikeiromene* and *Aspis* contain traces of at least seven characters.

In distributing the parts of *Samia*, any attempt based on the 'orthodox' presupposition that each of the actors could interpret as many parts as possible, provided that none of the parts were divided between two or three actors, would end up with disappointing results. Suppose, for example, that we started by assigning the three leading parts of the play, namely Moschion, Demeas and Niceratus, to actors A, B and C¹ respectively, on the basis of two scenes in which all these characters are present:² one near the beginning of the fourth act (440ff in particular) and another one at the end of the play (713ff). The part of the Cook, who appears twice (283–95 and 357–90), while only Demeas (actor B) is on stage, could easily be given to either A or C.

This much achieved, however, it would be impossible to proceed any further on the same principle, as none of the three actors can take

¹ In all the cases examined below these symbols are used with no reference to protagonists, deuteragonists, etc.

² For the sake of convenience, throughout this paper references to Menander's plays are made according to F. H. Sandbach, ed. *Menandri Reliquiae Selectae* (Oxford 1972).

the part of either Parmenon or Chrysis because both of them, at one time or another, are engaged in conversation not only with each one of the three leading characters but also between each other,³ thus excluding from the interpretation of their parts the three main actors and requiring two additional ones. Consequently, the 'orthodox' method of distribution would involve five actors, performing as follows: A, Moschion, Cook (?); B, Demeas; C, Niceratus, Cook (?); D, Parmenon; E, Chrysis.

On the other hand, an approach based on the restrictions of the three-actor rule would necessarily split the parts of Parmenon and Chrysis: the former can be played, say, by actor B at the beginning of the play (60ff), provided, of course, that Parmenon leaves the stage a number of verses before the entrance of Demeas and Niceratus (A and C);⁴ then by actor A in 189ff, since in the preceding scene (159f in particular) Moschion (A) seems to be trying to find an excuse to avoid meeting his future father-in-law and, consequently, leaves the stage at 162; again by actor A in 280ff, because Moschion does not appear at all in this act; lastly by actor C at the end of the play (640ff), where the interval between Parmenon's exit (some time after 690) and Niceratus' entrance (713) is long enough for a change of costume. Under the same conditions, Chrysis' part can be given at the beginning of the play to actor C; in 369ff to A, who has played Parmenon up to 325; in 568ff again to A, who has left the stage, as Moschion, at 539.

This sort of distribution looks, *prima vista*, rather feasible, and one would feel nothing but admiration for Menander's ingenuity, so well manifested throughout the fragment, especially in the two rather hasty withdrawals of Moschion, apparently designed to dispense with an unnecessary character for the sake of an indispensable one. One is left with a feeling of uneasiness, however, at the thought of assigning

³ cf. 60ff Moschion-Parmenon-Chrysis; 180ff Demeas-Niceratus-Parmenon; 295ff Demeas-Parmenon; 369ff Demeas-Chrysis; 399ff Niceratus-Chrysis; 568ff Demeas-Niceratus-Chrysis; 657ff Moschion-Parmenon; 682ff Demeas-Moschion-Parmenon.

⁴ The uncertainty is caused by a gap of about 23 lines between the Moschion-Parmenon-Chrysis conversation and a small fragment of what looks very much like the end of Moschion's soliloquy. This means that the other two characters must have left the stage some time before 95. Demeas, addressing Niceratus, speaks the next line. Austin's stage direction (*Menandri Aspis et Samia II, Subsidia interpretationis* [Berlin 1970] 56), "In solitudinem abit Moschio, dum Chrysis et Parmeno aedes Demeae intrant," would require the presence of five actors.

the charming part of the comic slave to all the members of the cast in turn.

The whole problem would remain with no further implications if the case of *Samia* were isolated. A similar situation, however, is presented in nearly all that has survived from Menander. The parts of *Dyscolus*, for example, cannot be distributed between three actors unless two of the leading characters, Sostratos and Gorgias, plus a minor but very picturesque one, Simice, were split. As a matter of fact, this arrangement, originally proposed by G. P. Goold,⁵ is basically adopted by E. G. Handley in his edition of the play.⁶ It is to be noted that this sort of distribution, in this particular case, entails further disadvantages because (a) each of the two young men is to be interpreted first by one actor, then by another one and again by the first one; (b) both of them, though having many scenes in common, are played by the same two actors, A and C alternatively. Furthermore, this solution, if ever applied, must have turned certain parts of the performance into a breathless race of actors rushing into the *skene*, as soon as they have uttered their last word, in order to change costume and reappear at the next moment to play a different part, while mute substitutes are putting on the actors' previous costumes hurriedly, because the character who left the stage a little while ago must be present, though remaining silent, in the next scene. There is one particular scene in *Dyscolus*, which, if performed as suggested by the editor, would make such a description sound anything but exaggerated. The text between 143 and the end of the first act (232) involves five people: Sostratos, Pyrrhias, Cnemon, Daughter and Daos. The first two (actors C and A respectively, according to Handley's distribution) are on stage when Cnemon's (B) entrance is announced (143). Thus the three actors are already occupied. No difficulty arises with Daos' part, because there is an interval of about 25 lines between his entrance (206) and Cnemon's previous exit (178); therefore, actor B takes up Daos' part at 206. The main problem concerns the Daughter, who enters at 189 but, being present when Daos comes and Sostratos is still on stage, cannot be played by either B or C. Pyrrhias (A), on the other hand, though remaining silent between 147 and 214, seems somehow to be present at least in 179ff, because 216ff imply

⁵ "First Thoughts on the *Dyscolus*," *Phoenix* 13 (1959) 145-50.

⁶ *The Dyskolos of Menander* (London 1965) 25-30.

that he has overheard Sostratos' soliloquy.⁷ Thus, inevitably, a fourth actor would be required for the part of the Daughter.

To save the three-actor rule, the editor proposes the following solution:⁸ actor A, as Pyrrhias, disappears soon after 145; some time after 150 a mute, dressed up as Pyrrhias, appears at the door of the shrine to "overhear" Sostratos' words; in the meantime, actor A has changed his costume and reentered as the Daughter at 189. But a little later this convenient arrangement is upset by the half line (212) spoken by the Daughter and the three lines (214ff) spoken by Pyrrhias. As Sostratos (C) and Daos (B) are still on stage, the only thing to do is to send actor A, as the Daughter, into the *skene* at 206 and have a mute appear in her place at 212 in order to take the bucket from Sostratos' hands; the actor, now released from the part of the Daughter, can change into Pyrrhias' costume while uttering her half line behind the *skene* and finally reappear at 214.⁹

What makes all this fuss almost unbearable is the extravagance of Pyrrhias' reentrance. The slave is brought back for no other purpose than to speak three totally unnecessary lines:¹⁰ to tell Sostratos that everything will be all right and remind him of his decision to ask for Getas' aid. It would be difficult to believe that Menander would have resorted to the kind of gimmickry described above for the sake of three dramatically dispensable lines, which remind one, particularly in Pyrrhias' case, of the colourless remarks so often assigned to tragic choruses as a marginal justification of their presence. On the other hand, what surprises us most is that a distribution avoiding part-splitting would be feasible only if the cast numbered six actors, performing as follows: A, Pan, Pyrrhias, Gorgias; B, Chaereas, Cnemon,

⁷ It is during this soliloquy that Sostratos decides to ask for Getas' help, a thought repeated later on by Pyrrhias (216f), as if the whole matter had been discussed in the previous scene while he was present. The problem concerning Pyrrhias ceases to exist if one accepts a different assignment of lines as proposed by Christina B. Dedoussi ("Ερμηνευτικές και κριτικές παρατηρήσεις στον 'Δύσκολο',", 'Επιστημονική Έπετηρίς Φιλοσοφικής Σχολής Ίωαννίνων 1 [1972] 222–23), who rejects the slave's presence and consequently his intervention at 214. Sandbach, following Grassi, gives the lines to Sostratos.

⁸ *op.cit.* (*supra* n.6) 27.

⁹ Needless to say, even this distribution would fall to pieces if one followed F. Stoessl (*Personenwechsel in Menanders Dyskolos*, SBWien 234.5 [1960] 28f, and also *Dyskolos, Kommentar* [Paderborn 1965] 75), in assigning 211/12 and 213/14 not to Sostratos but to Pyrrhias.

¹⁰ The question of the dramatic plausibility of Pyrrhias' reentrance is put by Goold (147), but the answer provided does not seem satisfactory even to the author himself.

Daos; C, Sostratos; D, Daughter, Simice; E, Getas; F, Sicon.¹¹ And this may reasonably be considered another sort of extravagance.¹²

The three-actor rule meets with similar difficulties in most of the larger fragments.¹³ In *Epitrepontes* the question arises shortly after the arbitration scene. The three characters involved—Syriscos, Daos and Smicrines—occupy the respective actors, say, A, B and C. Onesimos has entered by 381. His part could hardly be taken up by actor B, leaving the stage as Daos at 376, unless we assume that (a) either an interval of about five lines would be long enough for an actor to leave through one of the *parodoi*, go into the *skene*, change his costume and reappear from the central door to play a new character; (b) or Syriscos' "conversation" with his wife¹⁴ is interrupted (and thus made longer) by short gaps of silence, not entirely unjustifiable in this scene of enumeration and close inspection of various objects. If neither of these alternatives were applicable, it would be necessary that the part in question should be performed by actor C (Smicrines), who leaves the stage some time between 367 and 370. This solution, however,

¹¹ Sostratos, Getas and Sicon enjoy the luxury of an exclusive actor because, as we have seen with Parmenon and Chrysis in *Samia*, each one of them meets on stage all the other characters of the play.

¹² J. G. Griffith, "The Distribution of Parts in Menander's *Dyskolos*," *CQ* N.S. 10 (1960) 113–17, proposes two schemes of distribution, one with three and one with four main actors, but both of them assume the use of one supernumerary as well as part-splitting.

¹³ After the discovery and the publication of the Papyrus Cairensis the question of the distribution of parts, as presented by the larger fragments of the poet, was discussed by a number of scholars: P. E. Legrand (*Daos. Tableau de la comédie grecque pendant la période dite nouvelle* [Lyon 1910] 368ff) emphasizes the difficulties involved in rapid changes; K. Rees ("The Three-actor Rule in Menander," *CP* 5 [1910] 291–302) refutes the idea of any restriction in the number of actors by applying his strict principles of distribution as established in his radical dissertation (*The So-called Rule of Three Actors in the Classical Greek Drama* [Chicago 1908]); R. Graf (*Szenische Untersuchungen zu Menander* [Diss. Giessen 1914] 29–49) concludes his detailed examination of the fragments by accepting the device of part-splitting; F. Keusen (*De histrionum numero fabulae Menandreae* [Diss. Bonn 1920] 19–34) follows Graf in his main arguments, although he refuses to share his suggestions concerning the fragment of *Perikeiromene*. Some of the arguments, on both sides, are now partly outdated due to new and more certain assignments of parts and even rearrangement of particular fragments. This is one of the reasons why the results of my investigation, though sometimes based on the same principles as those applied by one or other of these scholars, bring up a few more, so far unnoticed, relevant details. For the evidence of the smaller fragments (in particular of *Heros*, *Georgos*, *Kitharistes*, *Colax*, *Perinthia*, *Phasma*) not discussed in this paper, see Graf, *op.cit.* 30–32.

¹⁴ She is also present but, though referred to and even addressed by the other characters, remains silent throughout this scene. Her presence is justified only by the single task she has come to perform: to carry the baby and the *γυνώρισμα*. Her *λόγος* is dramatically unnecessary.

leads to the inevitable split, as later on (1062ff) both Smicrines and Onesimos are together on stage, obviously played by two different actors.

Perikeiromene presents a more complicated case because more scenes involving more characters are preserved. At the beginning of the fragment the distribution looks very simple, although no decision can be made as to the part of Daos because of a gap in the papyrus between 190 and his entrance. The situation in the next scene, which coincides with the beginning of the second act, is much clearer. The parts of Moschion and Daos, conversing from 267 to 353, are given to actors A and B respectively. Sosias, entering at 354, engages actor C. Doris, who is introduced by most of the editors at 397, can only be played by A, who, as Moschion, has already left. In the next scene, however, which most probably belongs in the third act (467ff), both Moschion's and Sosias' parts, so far interpreted by two different actors (A and C respectively), must be taken by the same actor, say A, performing as Sosias from 467 to 485 and as Moschion from 526 onwards, while the two other actors are at this time occupied with the parts of Pataicos (B) and Polemon (C). In the fragment of the fourth act (708–27) things run very smoothly: Doris (753–60) and Moschion (774–827) are again given to actor A, Pataicos to B and Glycera to C. In the last act (976ff) new problems arise: as Polemon and Glycera, so far performed by C, meet on stage at the end of the fragment (1010ff), either his or her part must now be given to A.¹⁵ Thus, the fragment of *Perikeiromene*, preserving not much more than half of the whole play, includes two cases of split parts. As far as the preserved part of the play goes, the characters can easily be given to four actors as follows: A, Moschion, Doris, Agnoia; B, Daos, Pataicos; C, Sosias, Glycera; D, Polemon.

The evidence of *Aspis* is equally confusing. Throughout the first act the parts are easily assigned to three actors: A, Daos; B, Smicrines, Table-Servant; C, Tyche, Cook. In the following act (250ff) this balance is upset. As no time intervenes between the Chaerestratos–Smicrines conversation and Chaereas' entrance (284), the three parts are given to actors A, B and C respectively; Daos, entering at 299 while Chaerestratos and Chaereas are still on stage, can only be per-

¹⁵ It is on the evidence of this last scene that Wilamowitz ("Der Menander von Kairo," *NJbb* 21 [1908] 60) rather reluctantly expresses his doubts on the validity of the three-actor rule.

formed by Smicrines' actor, who must have left the stage some time after 283. Later on (391ff) Smicrines and Daos, meeting on stage, are again interpreted by two different actors. Thus, the part of the comic slave suffers again a double split.

The last and least certain piece of evidence comes from the fragment of *Misoumenos* and provides another probable case of part-splitting, if the three-actor rule is to be preserved. According to 208ff Demeas, Crateia and Getas are played by three different actors, A, B and C respectively. A little later while the first two characters are still on stage, Getas leaves (238) to fetch his master; Thrasonides, entering at 258 as Demeas and Crateia are leaving, can be played only by actor C. It is interesting to note at this point that Getas, who reappears together with Thrasonides, though addressed by him remains silent. Later on (429ff), however, both of them have speaking parts in the same scene.

The data emerging from this investigation can be summed up as follows:

- (a) none of the scenes examined above includes more than three speaking parts;
- (b) as far as the preserved fragments can be used as evidence, none of the respective plays (*Dyscolus* included) could be performed with only three actors unless some of the parts, not always minor ones, were split between two or even three actors;
- (c) sometimes the withdrawal of a character is so well calculated and appropriately excused that we are left with the impression that the poet sends off his actor because his services are required for another person who is to appear a little later; in most of these cases part-splitting is involved;
- (d) there are plays in which avoiding split parts would lead to the assumption of casts numbering up to six actors;
- (e) in a few cases part-splitting could be avoided and the three-actor rule saved if intervals of silence were assumed;¹⁶
- (f) apart from the actual mutes there are a few examples where one of the speaking characters remains silent.

It would be unsafe to draw any positive conclusion on the basis of such evidence. The difficulties are only multiplied by the fact that,

¹⁶ This is in fact suggested by Graf, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.13) 49ff, who believes that very often, and not only between the acts, the stage remained empty.

the gap of Middle Comedy set aside, Menander is squeezed between two conflicting extremities: the tradition, on the one hand, that each team of Dionysiac *technitai*, for comedy as well as tragedy, consisted of only three actors;¹⁷ and the indirect evidence, on the other, that the performances of Aristophanes' comedies often required additional actors.¹⁸ As a matter of fact, it is surprising how often scholars, in distributing the parts of his plays, have used the terms 'extras', 'super-numeraries', *parachoregemata* and the like without ever pursuing this puzzle to a coherent conclusion. It is by now certain that, with the sole exception of *Equites*, the performance of the surviving comedies would be impossible without a fourth actor, whether split parts were assumed or not; there are even scenes, though very few and very secondary ones, with four speaking characters on stage.¹⁹ But the basic parts of Aristophanes' comedies run very smoothly with the participation of only three speaking actors. Those exceptional instances may be regarded as remnants of that pre-artistic period when comedy had not yet been officially accepted into the programme of the dramatic festivals, still being an affair of *ἐθελονταί*, i.e. unorganized amateurs, who were not very strict with their *πρόσωπα* and *πλήθος ὑποκριτῶν*. Aristotle's agnostic statement (*Poet.* 1449b1ff) concerning the pre-history and the first stages of development of comedy is somehow supplemented by a later source:²⁰ οἱ ἐν τῇ Ἀττικῇ πρῶτον συστησάμενοι τὸ ἐπιτήδευμα τῆς κωμωδίας . . . τὰ πρόσωπα ἀτάκτως εἰσῆγον καὶ γέλως ἦν μόνος τὸ κατασκευαζόμενον. ἐπιγενόμενος δὲ ὁ Κρατῖνος κατέστησε μὲν πρῶτον τὰ ἐν τῇ κωμωδίᾳ πρόσωπα μέχρι τριῶν στήσας τὴν ἀταξίαν. The inference from this text seems to be that what Cratinus actually did

¹⁷ See A. Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*² (Oxford 1968) 283ff.

¹⁸ It should be noted here that in many scenes of Aristophanes' plays any method of distributing the parts is open to doubt, as long as the question of line-assignment still remains unsettled. Ever since C. Beer (*Ueber die Zahl der Schauspieler bei Aristophanes* [Leipzig 1844] 22f in particular) sought to establish the principle of parsimony as the best guide in assigning lines and distributing parts, students of Aristophanes have repeatedly proved how difficult it is to apply in his case the three-actor rule and how fruitless on this particular question to approach tragedy and comedy from the same angle. In comedy the whole problem presents far more difficulties, not only because the evidence drawn on the manuscript tradition is almost totally unreliable (as was so pessimistically emphasized by J. C. B. Lowe, "The Manuscript Evidence for Changes of Speaker in Aristophanes," *BICS* 9 [1962] 27–42) but also, and mainly, because the movements of the comic characters are not always explicitly stated or even adequately motivated.

¹⁹ A tentative distribution of parts for all the surviving comedies is to be found in Pickard-Cambridge, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.17) 149–54.

²⁰ Tzetzes, *De comoedia graeca* (Kaibel 18).

was not to reduce the number of the performers but to improve the structure of the plays by arranging the entrances and exits of his characters in such a way that no scene would consist of more than three speaking parts. This restriction, however, did not prevent the comic poets from occasionally composing scenes for which either the actual presence or the availability of a fourth actor was necessary.

The three-actor rule is mainly established on the evidence of tragedy, where the movements of the characters are dramatically justified and their entrances and exits so perfectly accounted for and timed that the restriction of the number of actors, namely the number of characters engaged in dialogue at any given moment, functions as an artistic rather than as a technical law. And, indeed, such seems to be the principle implied by Aristotle's statement (*Poet.* 1449a15ff) on the number of the *ὑποκριταί*, which appears in a context essentially dealing with the artistic features acquired by tragedy in its development as a new genre: increase in number of dialogue parts at the expense of chorus, expansion of the originally short myths through the development of more complex plots, change of the basic metre from trochaic to iambic, use of sober and serious language, increase in number of episodes. How could this list include such an irrelevancy as the number of performers?

The evidence gained from the distribution of parts in tragedy, overwhelming though it is, cannot by itself exclude the possibility that on rare occasions, such as the performance of *Oedipus Coloneus* for instance,²¹ an additional actor was hired. After all, we know of quite a number of cases, from extant as well as lost tragedies, in which the poets used additional choruses.²² Was it, one may ask, more difficult to hire one supernumerary than to prepare an extra group of amateurs? An affirmative answer would leave the field open to the theory of part-splitting. Should this assumption cover both tragedy and comedy?

²¹ On the difficulties of distributing the parts of this play between three actors see Pickard-Cambridge, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.17) 142f.

²² The whole question is discussed in detail by J. Lammers, *Die Doppel- und Halbchöre in der antiken Tragödie* (Diss. Münster, Paderborn 1931). Ambiguous cases are briefly reexamined (with all the relevant bibliography) in Pickard-Cambridge, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.17) 236f. Additional choruses may be suggested for Euripides' *Erechtheus* (*cf.* frs. 351 and 369) and *Theseus* (*cf.* fr.385, also *P.Oxy.* 2452 fr.4 col. ii 2ff?), and Ion's *Omphale* (*cf.* frs. 22 and 23, addressed to a group of women, not to the Satyrs of the main chorus).

A few crumbs of information on the distribution and the interpretation of parts in ancient drama come from very late and quite unreliable sources. That the number of tragic actors for a performance was limited is indirectly implied in ancient scholia and explicitly stated by Lucian, although in neither case are we certain as to whether or not the references are to fifth-century practices.²³ Furthermore, we possess one, and very flimsy, bit of evidence on the question of part-splitting. It comes from the well-known scholion to *Phoenissae* 93, stating that the interval between Jocasta's exit and Antigone's retarded entrance should be regarded as a clever device for assigning both these parts to the protagonist. When later on in the play (1270ff) both these characters are on stage together, the scholia say nothing. If the note to 93 draws on old sources based on actual performances, we have to assume *e scholiastae silentio* that in the second scene Antigone's part, being very short, was given to a different actor, only to be resumed by the protagonist at one of the next episodes.

It is difficult, but may not be necessary, to choose between the two alternatives, as on neither of them do we have convincing evidence and both of them seem quite plausible, at least so far as comedy is concerned. Certainly no 'rule' can be established until some new discovery enriches our knowledge on the extent of tolerance in Athenian audiences and the conventions of fifth and fourth-century dramatic performances.

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²³ The *locus classicus* is schol. Aesch. *Cho.* 899; cf. also the confused and confusing information on the *παραχορήγημα*: schol. Aesch. *Prom.* 12, *Eum.* 573; Ar. *Pax* 114, *Ran.* 209; also Poll. 4.109f, Lucian, *Menippus* 16.

PLATE 5 TRACY

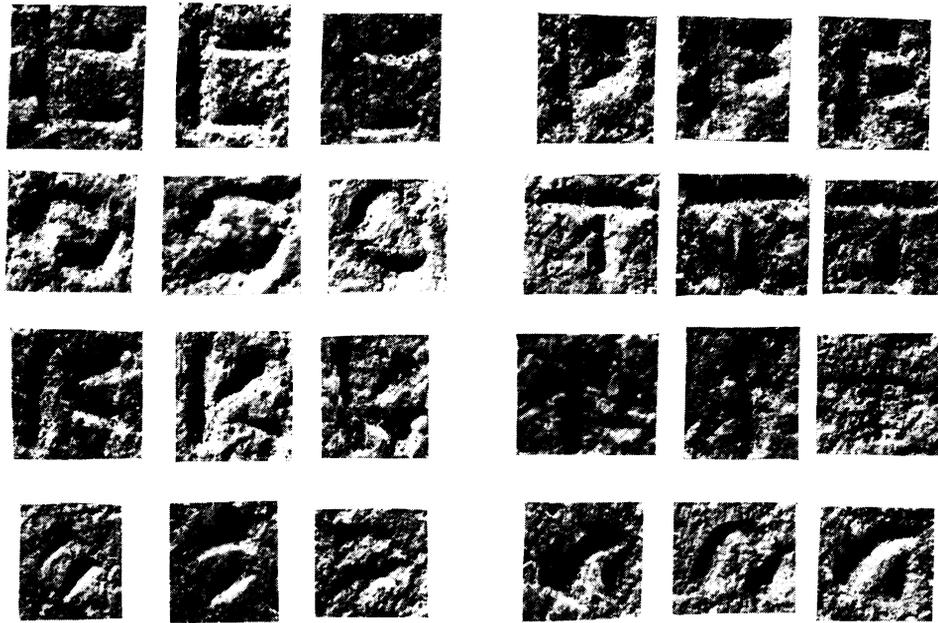


Figure 3. CHARACTERISTIC LETTERS OF CUTTER 5



Figure 4. EXCERPT OF AGORA I 247 (LINES 59-64)
LETTERING OF CUTTER 5