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## The Date of Aristophanes' Birth

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The Classical Review / Volume 19 / Issue 03 / April 2005, pp 153 - 155  
DOI: 10.1017/S0009840X00000160, Published online: 27 October 2009

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### How to cite this article:

Roland G. Kent (2005). The Date of Aristophanes' Birth. The Classical Review, 19, pp 153-155 doi:10.1017/S0009840X00000160

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optative, just as the chorus does in the *Ajax*. Jebb's note on this passage is correct: *must have* (come true). Even Tecmessa sees in Ajax's behaviour evidence of a διαφθορά φρενῶν, α θεία νόσος (243): κακὰ δένανζων ῥήμαθ' ἃ δαίμων | κοῦδεὶς ἀνδρῶν εἰδῶξεν.

It is the subjective conviction of the chorus that a θεοβλάβεια,<sup>1</sup> or νόσος φρενῶν,

<sup>1</sup> Dionysius of Halicarnassus, in his treatise *De Compositione Verborum*, speaks of the arch-offender against style, Hegesias, as being afflicted with θεοβλάβεια καὶ διαφθορά φρενῶν ὥστε εἰδῶτα τοὺς

has visited their chieftain. Consequently ἦκοι ἂν θεία νόσος is equivalent to θεία νόσος αὐτῷ ἐμπεπτωκυῖα ἂν εἴη, Die Wuth vom Himmel wird gekommen sein (Der Fluch eines Gottes wird ihn getroffen haben), La folie lui sera venue du ciel (quelque dieu l'aura atteint de folie), La pazzia gli sarà venuta dal cielo.

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κρείττους ἔπειτα αἰρεῖσθαι τοὺς χείρονας, ('so infatuated and fatally misguided that he chose the worse although he knew the better').

### THE DATE OF ARISTOPHANES' BIRTH.

ARISTOPHANES' birth is commonly assigned to the year 444. This date is reached by the assumption that the minimum age at which a poet could receive a chorus for the bringing out of a drama was twenty years, and is supported to a greater or less degree by four passages. In 424, when Aristophanes presented the *Equites*, the first play which he brought out in his own name, he says of himself, *Nubes* 530 sq.:

κἀγώ, παρθένος γὰρ ἔτ' ἦ, κοῦκ ἐξῆν πώ μοι τεκεῖν,

ἐξέθηκα, παῖς δ' ἐτέρα τις λαβὼν ἀνείλετο.

This is interpreted as indicating that until the time of the *Equites* Aristophanes was not qualified, in point of age, to receive a chorus. At any rate, he was still a young man when he entered the lists of comedy; for we read in *Schol. ad Ran.* 501 σχεδὸν γὰρ μειρακίσκος ἦδ' ἤπτετο τῶν ἀγώνων, and in *Thom. Mag. Vita Aristoph.* § 1, ἐν νέᾳ κομιδῇ τῇ ἡλικίᾳ ἠδδοκίμησεν ἐν κωμωδίαις. The fourth authority for the belief that he was born in 444 is the life of the poet found in the *Codex Ambrosianus* L 39 ('Novati life') and in *Suidas*. In the latter we read, κωμικός, υἱὸς Φιλίππου, γεγονὼς ἐν τοῖς ἀγῶσι κατὰ τὴν ριδ' Ὀλυμπιάδα, while the former says, κωμικός δέ, ἐπὶ Φιλίππου γεγονὼς ἐν τοῖς ἀγῶσι κατὰ τὴν Ϛδ' Ὀλυμπιάδα. There is no difficulty in extracting the meaning: 'A writer of comedies, son of Philippus, flourishing at the time of the wars in the 94th Olympiad.' Ol. 94, 1 is 404/3, which is just at the close of the Peloponnesian war; and as a man's *floruit* was taken to be his fortieth year, we get 444 as the date of his birth. Then this agrees with the sup-

position that at the time of the *Equites* he was just old enough to receive a chorus.

The whole argument, however, in favour of this date is too weak to stand a very searching examination. Croiset (*Hist. Lit. Gr.* iii<sup>2</sup>. 527) does indeed say that Aristophanes was born 'vers 445,' but Kaibel (*Pauly-Wissowa Real-Encyc. s.v. Aristophanes* 12) is inclined to a somewhat earlier date and Christ (*Gr. Lit.-Ges.*<sup>2</sup> 290 sq.) says 'um 450.' On considering the sources, we find that in the passage quoted from the *Nubes* the poet may merely be referring to his modesty and lack of experience. The scholiast interprets the phrase κοῦκ ἐξῆν πώ μοι τεκεῖν as meaning οὐτῷ ἐπέτρεπον ἐμὰντῷ τὸ λέγειν διὰ τὴν αἰδῶ, 'through modesty I did not allow myself the privilege of speaking to the public.' He is doubtless right, for the παρθένος cannot be taken as referring to the years of the poet, but must indicate his bashfulness and shame in first presenting a comedy—as though he were an unmarried girl with a child. This is supported by other passages. He tells us that he considered that 'the duty of a chorodidas-calus was an exceedingly difficult one,' (*Eq.* 516), and that bearing in mind the capriciousness of the public in the bestowal of its favour upon comic writers (*Eq.* 517-540), he desired to test its attitude by having others present his plays, before himself coming before it in his own name (*Eq.* 541-544). No word is here said that implies that he was ineligible to receive a chorus on the score of years; yet in this passage is exactly where we should expect to find such a statement if it were the case. In the *Schol. ad Ran.* 501, the word

μειρακίσκος may be used loosely, not in its strict sense, and may mean no more than 'a young man.' The same may be said of the ἐν νέᾳ ἡλικίᾳ of *Thom. Mag. Vita Aristoph.* The Novati life and the Suidas article are both, as a comparison of the texts quoted shows, corrupt, and little reliance can be placed upon the dates contained in them. They will be taken up again below, and discussed at greater length. To cap the climax, there is really no evidence that twenty years was the legal age minimum for receiving a chorus. Thus all the arguments in favour of the specific date 444 have fallen to the ground.

Can any other date be proposed as more probable? Christ says 'um 450;' but I think that we have a real indication of a definite date in the *Schol. ad Nubes* 510: νόμος ἦν Ἀθηναίοις μήπω τινὰ ἐτῶν ἅ γεγονότα μήτε δρᾶμα ἀναγινώσκειν ἐν θεάτρῳ, μήτε δημιουργεῖν. τούτῳ τῷ νόμῳ καὶ ὁ κωμικὸς οὗτος εἰργόμενος πρότερον διὰ τὸ μὴ τριακονταετῆς ἔτι ὑπάρχειν, ποιῶν δρᾶματα διὰ Φιλωνίδου καὶ Καλλιστράτου ἀνεγίνωσκεν εἰς τὸ θέατρον, ὃν ἐν ἡν τὸ τῶν Δαιταλέων λεγόμενον, . . . καὶ πολλοῖς τῶν θεατῶν ἐπηνέσθη, οὐ μέντοι καὶ νενίκηκεν ἐν τούτῳ ὁ ποιητής. ἐπιβὰς ἤδη τοῦ ἅ ἔτους, καὶ τούτῳ δὴ τὸ τῶν Νεφελῶν ποιήσας δι' ἑαυτοῦ διδάσκει, καὶ αἰτεῖ παρὰ τῶν θεατῶν, ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι αὐτῷ, ἥτοι τὸ νικῆσαι τῷ δρᾶματι.

It is evident at first glance that the scholiast is wrong in setting the legal age minimum at thirty years: the great tragedians all produced plays before they reached the age of thirty. Aeschylus produced his first play when he was twenty-five (*Suid. s. v.*); Sophocles was victorious at the age of twenty-six with his first play, the *Τριπτόλεμος* (*Marm. Par.* 72); Euripides, born about 480, brought out the *Πηλιάδες* in 455 (*Vita*). Is the scholiast in this passage then merely making a guess, and a bad one at that, or did he have some data which misled him? From the circumstantial way in which he goes on to relate that Aristophanes, on reaching the age of thirty, applied for a chorus in his own name, and on receiving it, presented the *Equites* (the scholiast wrongly says the *Nubes*), it seems highly probable that it is the second part of his narrative which is to be trusted and not the first. Then the truth is, that the scholiast learned from some source unknown to us, that Aristophanes was thirty years old at the time of the production of the *Equites*. From this basis he made up the rest of his story with the aid of *Nubes* 530 sq. Through this passage, therefore, we

arrive at the date 455/4 as that of Aristophanes' birth.

This scholium is late and cannot be relied upon, if unsupported. While no other considerations favouring this specific date are known to the writer, there are six that tend to set the date at about this time.

I. That a boy of seventeen years should set himself up as a censor of morals, public and private, and compose the *Δαιταλῆς*, following that play up inside of three years with the *Βαβυλώνιοι*, *Acharnenses*, and *Equites*, seems intrinsically unlikely, despite the example of Eupolis (*Suid. s. v.*). The addition of a few years to his age makes the performance seem less like that of an infant prodigy.

II. Eupolis aided Aristophanes in the composition of the *Equites* (*Nubes* 551-556, *Schol. ad* 554; *Schol. ad Equites* 531, 1291; Kirchhoff in *Hermes* xiii. 287). Eupolis was himself born in 447/6 and brought out his first play 430/29 (*Anon. de Com.* § 11; *Suid. s. v. Eupolis*). And yet he acted as a mere assistant, receiving no credit, to a poet who brought out his first play two years later than his own first play (*Anon. de Com.* § 12; *Nubes* 529 et *Schol.*). He would hardly have performed this part of an underling for a man his junior not only in dramatic standing, but also in actual years of age: he must have been induced to give his services through Aristophanes' being sufficiently his elder to cause him to look up to him with respect.

III. The passage *Equites* 542-544 suggests that there were three rungs in the dramatic ladder: ἐρέτην γενέσθαι, to be an assistant, as Eupolis to Aristophanes in the *Equites*; πρῶτα τεύσαι καὶ τοὺς ἀνέμους διαθρῆσαι, to bring out under the name of another poet, to see how popular favour inclined; κυβερνᾶν αὐτὸν ἑαυτῷ, to bring out one's plays in one's own name. Though this may be a far-fetched interpretation of a poetical passage, we know certainly that Aristophanes passed through the second and third stages. It is the first, however, with which we are here concerned. By the side of ἐρέτην γενέσθαι may be set *Vespae* 1018, ἐπικουρῶν κρύβδην ἐτέροις ποιηταῖς, 'secretly helping other poets.' The two passages indicate that he aided, at some time or other, certain other poets as an assistant, without receiving any credit for his collaboration. The time of this naturally falls before 427, when he began to be constantly active in composing plays for himself, to be brought out either in the name of another or of himself. And

in this case Aristophanes must have been born some years before 444, for by the time that he was seventeen he could not have gone through this literary apprenticeship.

IV. Aristophanes was markedly bald as early as 424, for he alludes to this fact in the *Equites* (produced in that year), and also in the *Pax* (produced 421) and in the second *Nubes* (*Eq.* 545-550; *Pax* 767-774 *et Schol.* *ad Plat. Apol.* 19 c). In a youth of twenty—the poet's age in 424 if he were born 444—this baldness would be very remarkable; in a man of thirty it would be less strange.

V. Unquestionably *Ach.* 646-654 indicates that there was some connexion between Aristophanes and Aegina (cf. also *Schol. ad Ach.* 653, 654; *Anon. Vita Arist.* § 5; *Schol. ad Plat. Apol.* 19 c). The most probable explanation—derived from the scholia—is that either he or his father was a cleruch in the division of the island amongst Athenian settlers in 431. Now if Aristophanes had been born in 444 he would in 431 have been but thirteen years old, and it must have been not he, but his father, who received the allotment of land. In this case he could scarcely, at nineteen years of age (the *Acharnenses* appeared in 425), have been known as prominently connected with Aegina. Were he in 431 twenty-three years old, he might have been himself a cleruch; and if he made his abode in the island during the greater part of the time for the next six years, he would in great measure have identified himself with the island, and the phraseology of *Ach.* 646-654 becomes more readily comprehensible.

VI. In the years from 426 to 424 the poet would, if born in 444, be an ephebus, undergoing military training. In those years, when every man was needed for the defence of Athens, a youth would have found his time fully occupied with the drilling and exercises necessary to make of him a good soldier. Leisure to write comedies would not at that time have fallen to the lot of the ephebus. Were he a few years older he would have had time to write, in the intervals between campaigns.

Though any one of these six points is by itself almost insignificant, their cumulative

weight is not to be disregarded. They point strongly to a date about 455/4 as that of Aristophanes' birth.

It remains to take into consideration the date given in the Novati life and the Suidas article. If γεγονός be understood in its usual meaning of *floruit*, and a man's *floruit* be considered the time at which he reached his fortieth year, the date given in the Novati life, Ol. 94, unquestionably favours the date 444 as that of Aristophanes' birth. To establish the year 455/4 in its stead, the passage may be treated in any one of three ways: (1) The term *floruit* may not refer precisely to the fortieth year. (2) The numeral may be emended in accordance with the recognized principles of textual criticism. (3) Γεγονός may mean not *floruit*, but *natus*. The first course leaves us all at sea as regards any definite date, and we have liberty to choose any time between 460 and 440 as the year of his birth. But if we retain *floruit* in the sense of the fortieth year, the second way may be followed by emending Qδ' to Qα', the corruption of A to Δ being very easy. We have then the date Ol. 91, or 416-412. Ol. 91, 2 is the fortieth year after 455/4. The ἀγῶνες mentioned are the Syracusan expedition and the commencement of the Decelean war.

If γεγονός mean *natus*, rather than the customary signification *floruit*, we must of course first change the Qδ' to πδ'. This gives Ol. 84, and Ol. 84, 1 is 444/3. The same correction of Δ to A as in the previous case, however, gives us πα', or Ol. 81. Ol. 81 was 456-2, the time of the ἀγῶνες in which the Athenians extended their dominion in central Greece and sent the fleet to its destruction in Egypt. Ol. 81, 2 is 455/4, the date for which we are arguing.

It should be added, however, that the phrase ἐν τοῖς ἀγῶσι refers naturally to the theatrical competitions rather than to any war or wars. This suggests at once that something has fallen out of the text, and this may have been vital to its comprehension. At any rate the passage is too corrupt to be authoritative, and cannot count for or against any fixed date.

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