



BIBLIOTHECA ÆTERNA

Menander

**Dyscolus, fragments and
Sayings**

NEW COMEDY REDISCOVERED

CLEMENTINIUM EDITIONS

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Clementinium Editions — Bibliotheca Æterna.

Greek text of the Sayings: FirstKGreek corpus, following the editions of S. Jäkel and F. H. Sandbach. English translations of the Sayings: this edition. The comedies are represented by critical notices, since their papyrological transmission does not provide continuous texts here.

Public-domain texts.

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Menander

Dyscolos, Fragments, and Sayings

Recovered New Comedy

Bibliotheca Aeterna / Editions Clementinium

MENANDER, ATHENS, AND RECOVERY

Menander was one of the major poets of New Comedy. His durable models of plot and character made comedy out of the pressures of ordinary household life: love, money, status, marriage, inheritance, error, and reconciliation. The near-continuous survival of Dyscolos, recovered on the Bodmer papyrus, gives an unusually full view of this dramatic world. The rest of his dramatic corpus is chiefly papyrological and incomplete; its gaps make reconstruction a matter of degrees of probability, never certainty.

Ancient prestige is counterbalanced by an almost total medieval loss. Menander survived in names, extracts, and detached maxims rather than as a theatrical repertory. Egyptian papyri changed that situation, beginning with the Cairo codex of 1907 and culminating in the Bodmer Dyscolos of 1958-59. The discoveries revised the corpus profoundly but did not make it complete. Roman comedy is another important, but transforming, medium of survival: Plautus and Terence adapted Greek plots for Roman stages. Later European comedy, including Molière, belongs to a history of adaptation rather than a simple direct lineage.

The secure outline of Menander's life is modest. He was an Athenian from Cephisia, probably born in 342/341 BCE and dead in 292/291 BCE. His parents are named as Diopeithes and Hegesistrate. The Souda and the Marmor Parium preserve valuable traditions, but no reliable ancient biography exists. His alleged kinship with the comic poet Alexis is plausible but unverified. An affluent Attic background may help account for the acuity with which his plays observe households, wealth, dowry, and marriage.

Tradition makes Theophrastus his teacher. The moral observation of Theophrastus' Characters and Menander's dramatis personae is genuinely close, but the direction of influence cannot be decided. Cnemon in Dyscolos is a Theophrastean kind of character tested by dramatic action: a type in which moral taxonomy and stage craft meet. Menander is also said to have known Demetrius of Phalerum, the Peripatetic governor of Athens under Cassander from 317 to 307 BCE. A later story reports danger after Demetrius' fall and rescue through a relative of Poliorcetes; it should be treated cautiously. Another tradition makes Menander an ephebe alongside Epicurus. An affinity in private happiness and friendship is possible, but there is no systematic Epicurean doctrine in the plays: Menander is a poet, not a philosopher.

His first production is placed about 321 BCE, under the archon Demogenes. More than a hundred plays and three or four productions annually are traditional figures. The familiar machinery includes obstructed love, exposed and recognized children, dowries, misunderstandings, and reconciliations. He is credited with only eight victories, while Philémon repeatedly defeated him; posterity nevertheless placed Menander above his rivals. Dyscolos won the Lenaea in 316 BCE. The story that Ptolemy invited Menander to Alexandria and that he refused is late and suspect, even if it suits a tradition of Athenian attachment. His drowning at Piraeus is similarly late and legendary.

New Comedy differs from Old Comedy in its reduced civic and political satire, avoidance of contemporary named targets, diminished chorus, and retreat from large-scale fantasy. Hellenistic monarchy and constrained civic autonomy help to explain its domestic and social focus, though the change is not simple political

silence. Post-Chaeronea and Macedonian-dominated Athens remains present through law, assembly, deme, status, and honour. The oikos becomes a dramatic laboratory for the relations of money, inheritance, marriage, and family.

MENANDER'S DRAMATIC ART

New Comedy ordinarily works through interlocking domestic plots in five acts. A prologue can give information and create irony; entries, exits, and choral intervals articulate the action; recognition and reversal carry it toward a settlement that normally restores household and community. This is a flexible pattern rather than a mechanical formula. Young lovers, fathers, slaves, cooks, parasites, soldiers, courtesans, farmers, and misers inherit familiar masks, but Menander individualizes them. Speech, motive, social position, and action disclose characters that are stable enough to be recognizable yet capable of change. He does not divide the stage into wholly good and wholly bad figures.

The dialogue is Attic but moves towards Koine. Iambic trimeter predominates, alongside lyric or chanted passages and other metrical variation. Its apparent ease is a crafted form of stage speech, and later textual forms should not be treated as secure evidence for classical diction. Dyscolos alone survives nearly continuously. Samia, Epitrepontes, Perikeiromene, Aspis, Sikyonioi, and Misoumenos survive more substantially, but in fragments of unequal extent and security.

Ancient performance and quotation, school anthologies, the loss of codices, and discontinuous papyri all shaped transmission. The Cairo codex of 1907, finds from Oxyrhynchus, and the Bodmer discovery of 1958 are decisive landmarks. Modern texts collate witnesses that remain precarious. Reception likewise involves mediation: Plautus and Terence refashioned Greek plots for Rome; Byzantine schooling preserved gnomic Menander; Renaissance hu-

manists and modern scholarship recovered and transformed what remained.

THE GREEK SAYINGS

The Greek Monostichoi, or one-line sayings, are preserved in several manuscript and printed traditions, including the editions of Jäkel and F. H. Sandbach. The sayings are presented in their traditional alphabetical sequence. The English rendering is literal prose rather than an attempt at metrical recreation. These detached lines are not a continuous comic text.

CHRONOLOGY

- 342/341 BCE: probable birth at Cephisia.
- c. 321 BCE: dramatic debut.
- 316 BCE: *Dyscolos* wins first prize at the Lenaea.
- Late fourth century BCE: proposed dates for *Samia*, *Epitrepontes*, *Perikeiromene*, and *Aspis* remain disputed.
- 292/291 BCE: death; later tradition places it at Piraeus.
- 1907: discovery of the Cairo codex.
- 1958-59: discovery and publication of the Bodmer *Dyscolos*.

SELECTED TEXTS

- F. H. Sandbach, *Menandri reliquiae selectae* (OCT).
- A. Körte and A. Thierfelder, *Menandri quae supersunt* (Teubner).
- W. G. Arnott, *Menander* (Loeb Classical Library, 3 vols.).
- R. Kassel and C. Austin, *Poetae Comici Graeci*, II.
- S. Jäkel, *Menandri Sententiae*.

SELECTED STUDIES

- A. W. Gomme and F. H. Sandbach, *Menander: A Commentary*.
- E. W. Handley, *The Dyskolos of Menander*.
- N. Zagagi, *The Comedy of Menander*.
- S. Nervegna, *Menander in Antiquity*.

DYSCOLUS

Δύσκολος

Greek title. Δύσκολος (*Dýskolos*).

Date. 316 BCE, Lenaea.

State of the text. A comedy almost entirely preserved by the Bodmer papyrus.

Here. Critical notice; text and apparatus are to be consulted in critical editions. *Menander's Greek title is Dyskolos. The comedy won at the Lenaea in 316 BCE and survives almost complete on the Bodmer papyrus, in 969 lines. It is the only near-complete example of New Comedy, though lacunae and textual problems remain. The Bodmer discovery and publication of 1958-59 transformed its standing, but did not remove its uncertainties.*

The setting is rural Phyle, around a shrine of Pan and the Nymphs. Its town-and-country contrast and its local divine space frame the action. Pan's prologue announces the situation and desire that will move it forward. The divine frame governs the action without cancelling human responsibility.

Cnemon, an irascible farmer who rejects contact with others, is more than a flat villain. His extreme misanthropy makes him a social and ethical type, a man who treats self-sufficiency as a refusal of community. Sostratus, a wealthy young man, loves Cnemon's

unnamed daughter. Gorgias, her poor step-relative, initially suspects an attempted seduction and rebukes Sostratus at 271 ff.; he then becomes his ally. The courtship tests wealth, poverty, merit, status, and the terms of a respectful marriage negotiation.

Sicon the cook and Getas the servant repeatedly tease and pressure Cnemon. Their attacks are a form of comic collective retaliation, not merely uncomplicated cruelty. The decisive reversal occurs when Cnemon falls into a well and must be rescued. Dependence upon others forces him to recognize the human need for mutual help. He transfers decisions about his daughter and household to Gorgias, but his change is limited rather than a sentimental conversion.

The settlement produces two marriages: Sostratus marries Cnemon's daughter, and Gorgias marries Sostratus' sister. The resulting exchanges integrate households and social ranks. In the finale, the cook's revenge compels Cnemon's participation in a carnival-like correction of the misanthrope. Its comic violence and residual discomfort should not be erased.

The five-act form moves from divine prologue through rural action and the crisis at the well to recognition, settlement, and comic finale. Its major concerns are misanthropy and community, philanthropia, Fortune and divinity, human nature, and moral education.