

Menander's political sympathies are remarkably opaque (cf. Athen. 12.72), but Lape (2004) has recently argued that his plots, themes, and portrayals of some characters such as the braggart soldier belie the ideology of a closet democratic supporter. Since both Major (2004) and Blanchard (2005) have offered trenchant critiques of Lape's analysis of the internal textual evidence for these claims, the main purpose of this paper will be to review and offer some new interpretations on what some of the external sources have to say about Menander's life and political sympathies, as well as to point out the ways in which the politics of Early Hellenistic Athens were very complicated and nuanced. It will then be argued that Menander's known biographical details and the internal evidence of his plays (such as portrayals of braggart soldiers), rather than pointing toward a democratic supporter, are more fully consistent with the life and views of a supporter of the moderate oligarchs, especially Demetrius of Phalerum.

The biographical tradition states that Menander was the son of a wealthy and distinguished Athenian named Diopieithes (Anon. *De com.*), which is borne out by the fact that Diopieithes was a public arbitrator in 325/4 BCE (*IG II²* 1926.19). Tradition also states that Theophrastus educated him at the Lyceum (Diog. Laert. 5.36; Alciph. 4.18-19), which is consistent with the ubiquitous Aristotelian and Peripatetic ideals contained in his plays (of course, Aristotle, Theophrastus and the other members of the Lyceum were suspected of being supporters of the Macedonian-backed oligarchy). After the Lamian War had concluded in the Fall of 322 and the more stringent oligarchy of Antipater was imposed upon the Athenians, which included the exiling of thousands of democratic supporters, we hear of no exile for Menander or his family. Quite the contrary; Menander produced his very first play in the second year of his ephebeia at the City Dionysia of 321 under the archonship of Philokles, just months after Antipater's extreme oligarchy was imposed (Anon. *De com.*; Strab. 14.1.18; Euseb. Chron. 5.198 [Armenian version]). After the more moderate Macedonian-backed oligarchy of Demetrius of Phalerum was inaugurated in 317, once again Menander was not exiled; indeed, other significant milestones in his career soon followed: his *Dyskolos* won at the Lenaia of 316 and he won his first victory at the City Dionysia in 315 (didascalie notice of Bod. Cod.; *Marm. Par.* = *IG XII,5* 444.118).

Beyond this circumstantial evidence of a career that flourished under various oligarchies, we have the testimony of Diogenes Laertius (5.79), who states that after Demetrius of Phalerum was exiled in 307 Menander was unsuccessfully prosecuted for no other reason than his friendship with Demetrius (cf. Phaedrus 5.1). We are also told that Lachares blocked his *Imbrioi* from production at the City Dionysia in 302/1 (*P. Oxy.* 1235). Since Lachares would later seize the reins of Athens as tyrant (*ca.* 297 BCE, see *P. Oxy.* 2082), it has been assumed that this incident suggests that Menander may have taken flack also from the oligarchs (cf. Major 1997, 53-4), but Pausanias (1.25.7) tells us that before his tyranny, Lachares was an ardent democrat, so it appears that Menander had run-ins with the democrats on at least two occasions. Finally, even if Menander's braggart soldiers were meant to be a back-handed slap at the Macedonian overlords, we cannot automatically assume this made him a democrat. In fact, Menander's braggart soldiers have been most closely associated with the colorful Demetrius Poliorcetes (Lape 2004, 172 ff.; Dixon 2005), and Demetrius Poliorcetes was responsible for the exile of Demetrius of Phalerum and was considered Athens' savior by the Stratoklean wing of the democrats.

In summation, all the external and internal evidence is fully consistent with the traditional view: Menander was on good terms with the moderate oligarchs, especially Demetrius of Phalerum, and was suspected, harassed and even prosecuted by the democrats.