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Perikles *katapugon*: a new reading of Hermippus 46

When recalling the popular unrest during the siege of Athens in the *Life of Perikles*, Plutarch quotes several lines from the comic poet Hermippus (46) as an example of the common accusation that Perikles was eager to start the war but lacked the courage to face the invading Spartan army.

Modern commentators have added little to Plutarch's original explanation of the fragment, being content merely to cite the same theme in Cratinus' *Dionysalexandros* (Schwarze 1971, 101-105), leaving several acknowledged problems unresolved, chief among them a satisfactory explanation of Perikles' title *basileus satyron* ("king of the satyrs") which occurs exclusively in these few verses of Hermippus. The methodology employed by this paper looks beyond the immediate context of Plutarch and examines the fragment with an eye to broader comic themes from both literary texts and vase painting. By comparing the fragment to similar language in Aristophanes, it becomes clear that Hermippus creates a unified string of sexual metaphors based on the martial language of epic, resulting in a comic image of a sexually passive Perikles who becomes the victim of Cleon's political and sexual assaults. For instance, Perikles' unwillingness to raise his spear acknowledges popular criticism while becoming a metaphor of sexual impotence. The joke is complete when Perikles clenches his teeth and groans in pain while being stabbed, not by a sword, but by Cleon, whose political attacks have become sexual aggression and rape through the comic language of Hermippus. Based on this interpretation, the significance of the title "king of the satyrs" becomes clear. In Attic vase painting, anal intercourse between mature men is restricted to satyrs: they are notorious sodomites (Lissarrague 1990, 64-66). The comic trope of the old pathic satyr reappears in Euripides' *Cyclops* when Silenus is raped by the one-eyed giant and the chorus is likened to the Athenian demos. Satyrs are also known for their heterosexual liaisons, and the Athenian audience would surely have had Aspasia in mind when confronting the "king of the satyrs" on stage. Aspasia was also accused of being a catalyst for war through her unnatural influence over Perikles, perhaps leading to the statesman's martial and metaphorical impotence.