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**Is There a Cook in the House? The *Mageiros* As a Barometer of Domestic Tension in Menander**

The character of the *mageiros* in fourth century Athenian comedy encompasses two conflicting purposes. The cook routinely engages in obnoxious behavior on the comic stage: abusing his employers, stealing, and spewing excessively detailed accounts of his profession. In so far as New Comedy pursues the resolution of a domestic crisis, however, the cook also embodies a key part of the ritual, usually a wedding feast, which symbolically marks the restoration of the home. This paper argues that Menander obviates this tension by calibrating the comic aspects of the cook to the degree of disruption in the *oikos* where the cook is employed.

Scholars have thoroughly catalogued and surveyed the character of the cook in stage comedy (H. Dohm *Mageiros: Die Rolle des Kochs in der griechisch-römischen Komödie* [Munich 1964], G. Berthaume *Les rôles du mageiros* [Leiden 1982], and J.B. Lowe "Cooks in Plautus," *CA* 4 [1985] 72-102). Ruth Scodel ("Tragic Sacrifice and Menandrian Cooking" in her *Theater and Society in the Classical World* [Ann Arbor 1993] 161-76) deepens the study of comic cooks by integrating the authority of the *mageiros* with the coarser elements of the stereotype. "The cook is always an alazon," Scodel writes, "yet within the dramatic tradition, his task as sacrificer and cook justifies his claims" (173).

The question then becomes how does a comic playwright prevent the traditional authority from clashing with the buffoonery. The fragmentary remains of most comic poets do not permit an answer to this question. In some cases in Menander, too, scenes with cooks are too fragmentary (e.g., *Epitrepontes* fr. 2 and 603ff, *Phasma* 73-74) or dependent upon lost scenes (*Misoumenos* 270ff [=670ff Arnott], *Perikeiromene* 995) to indicate Menander's treatment. Other plays, however, do suggest a *modus operandi*. As may be expected for a dramatist who keeps the focus of his plays on the *oikos* (cf. W. Major "Menander in a Macedonian World," *GRBS* 38 [1997] 41-73), Menander manipulates the harsher components of cooks so that they correspond to the level of crisis in the household. A settled household does not suffer at the hands of a cook but a home in turmoil can expect the worst from a cook.

*Aspis* demonstrates this second phenomenon. When Kleostratos is reported dead, his sister's wedding plans collapse in the face of her uncle's ulterior motives. Accordingly, the cook hired for the wedding feast is fired. The *mageiros* and his assistant *trapezopoios* make their appearance on stage at this critical juncture to vent their frustration, and then depart (216 ff). The cook in *Samia* arrives rather than leaves at the time of crisis. The young man Moschion is scheduled to marry the girl next door who has already had his baby. The cook swaggers in to begin his preparations. He crosses words with a household slave as a typically arrogant and annoying cook does, and goes inside. Immediately afterwards, Moschion's father, Demeas, begins a rampage, for he mistakenly believes his mistress Chrysis had Moschion's baby. When the cook returns to the stage, he watches Demeas throw Chrysis and the baby out of the house.

Menander uses the cook's established character traits to demonstrate the degree of Demeas' anger. The cook tries to settle Demeas down but fails, indicating that Demeas seethes with an anger and outrage beyond that associated with a character who is normally angry and outraged.

*Dyskolos* shows the contrast in a cook's behavior when employed in a stable household. The cook Sikon first appears to perform at a sacrifice intended to bring a favorable omen. In his first appearance (393ff), it is the slave Getas who displays the irritation we might expect of the cook. Sikon's temper flares in his next appearance (487ff), when he confronts the grumpy Knemon. Knemon is the true source of the domestic crisis, so Sikon's unpleasant characteristics rise accordingly. Sikon's performance at the neighbor's sacrifices goes without incident (555). When Knemon is reported to have fallen into a well, however, Sikon rejoices bitterly (620ff). The correlation between Sikon's attitude and the disarray of Knemon's house can enhance appreciation for the final scene of the play, where Sikon and Getas torture the crippled Knemon until he consents to attend the wedding festivities. It may seem odd for Sikon to be involved in resocializing Knemon, rather than someone integrally involved in one of the households (in *Samia*, for instance, Moschion forces the issue with his own father). But if Sikon operates as a barometer of domestic tension, then he can serve as a dramatically appropriate agent for signaling that Knemon still requires reform.

In the end, then, the cook as *alazon* can serve paradoxically as a facilitator of domestic reconciliation.