

One of the many areas in which Eduard Fraenkel took on his mentor Friedrich Leo was in his discussion of Plautus' polymetric *cantica*. Whereas Leo, expanding on a proposal of Wilamowitz, argued that Plautus added popular Hellenistic songs to the unmusical plays of New Comedy, Fraenkel believed that Plautus' *cantica* were derived from Roman tragedy. Leo's and Fraenkel's arguments continue to determine to a great extent how the question of the *cantica*'s origin is posed. A number of discoveries since 1922, however, have brought important new perspectives to the debate. In this paper I will chart briefly the major developments affecting this question since the first publication of Fraenkel's book and then propose that the *cantica*'s origins should be approached in a different way.

Reflecting their general approaches to Plautus, Leo found the sources of the *cantica* in Greece, Fraenkel in Italy. New finds since Fraenkel have provided support to both Hellenocentric and Italocentric explanations. Already in 1928, Marx provided a long list of lyrical passages in the fragments of New Comedy; and since then papyri have revealed both the conspicuously musical ending of *Dyskolos* and other fragments in lyric meters. Fraenkel had noted the possibility that the *technitai Dionysiou*, traveling performers of New Comedy and other genres, may have influenced Roman Comedy's music. Since Fraenkel wrote that possibility has become ever more probable, as we have learned both that the *technitai* brought more Athenian theater than was previously thought to Italy and that they performed musically passages that would have been spoken in the original performances. Meanwhile, we have gained a greater appreciation of the musicality of both traditional Roman theater and early Roman culture in general.

Together, these findings make clear that the search for the origins of Plautus' *cantica* is much more complex than simply deciding between Leo's Hellenistic songs and Fraenkel's tragic lyrics. In one sense Leo and Fraenkel were both right. References to solo performers in Plautus' plays (e.g., *Persa* 823-825) reveal that he knew of—and probably drew meters from—performers who performed songs like the *Fragmentum Grenfellianum* upon which Leo built his theory. At the same time, the large amount of tragic parody in Plautus' polymetric passages (e.g., *Amph.* 153ff., *Rud.* 185ff.) leaves no doubt that much of the content of these songs—and surely much of the meter as well—was inspired by his predecessors and contemporaries on the Roman tragic stage. These are only two elements of the vast musical potpourri from which Plautus could draw meters, however. That mix also included New Comedy, especially as performed by the *technitai Dionysiou*, other Greek theater, including mime, and Italian traditions such as the *fabulae Atellanae*.

From none of these traditions, however, did Plautus import songs into a non-musical genre. As Livy's account of the origins of Roman theater makes clear (7.2), Roman drama was musical from its earliest beginnings: it is the non-musical parts that were imported. The central musical distinction in Roman comedy was not between polymetric and stichic passages, but between unaccompanied iambic senarii and all other meters—the majority of almost every play—which were performed musically. Nor should we assume, as many have, that only the polymetric passages were sung, or that Roman actors never sang in our sense of the word. Song was the normal mode of performance for the Roman actor: Plautus' importation of *numeri innumeri* from various sources merely gave his actors new variety in the rhythms they sang.