

## On the Tracks of Susarion and Megarian Comedy

According to the Parian Chronicle, inscribed 264/3 BCE, comedy was invented by a shadowy figure named Susarion. Four peculiar lines attributed to him survive: "Listen, my people, Susarion, the son of Philinus, from Megara, of Tripodiscus, says the following: women are an evil; even so, my demesmen, one cannot keep a home without evil" (fr. 1 K.-A.). The crux of the fragment is that Susarion addresses his demesmen—an indication that he is Attic—while also calling himself Megarian. The traditional solution is to postulate a process of forgery and counter-forgery by partisans claiming the invention of comedy for Athens on the one side and Megara on the other (see Piccirilli 1974; West 1974, 183-4; Kerkhof 2001, 46-7). In this paper, I argue that the controversy about Susarion and Megarian comedy was connected not only to the debate about where comedy came from but also how it arose and what it was originally like.

The earliest notice linking the origins of comedy to Megara is in *Poetics* 1448a31-34, which says that the Megarians claim comedy because it arose under their democracy in the early sixth century. If it really existed, the Megarian democracy might have been Greece's earliest, and it had a very unpleasant legacy (Figueira 1985). The surviving sources describe it as the site of class warfare between masses and the elite; after the masses took over and installed the democracy, the state fell into disorder and collapsed within a couple decades, perhaps around 580, which is consistent with when the Parian Chronicle puts Susarion's first performance. This is, I suggest, the background against which the tradition of a Megarian Susarion must be understood: he was an immigrant who imported a dangerous invention from a radical democracy.

Yet our earliest and best sources, the Old Comic poets, draw no connection between Megarian comedy and democracy. They regard it as vulgar and hackneyed, not political and abusive, and consistently distance themselves from it. Furthermore, as Forsdyke 2012 has shown, there is no good

reason to suppose that the democracy at Megara ever really existed: it was probably the product of later anti-democratic political theory. Likewise, I suggest that the connection between Susarion, democratic Megara, and the genesis of comedy was a product of later literary and political theory that interpreted Old Comedy as an instrument of the Athenian democracy.

### Bibliography

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