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Was Carcinus I a Tragic Playwright?

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NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

WAS CARCINUS I A TRAGIC PLAYWRIGHT?

The elder Carcinus (TrGF 21, Kirchner PA 8254) is probably best known for the
dance his sons performed at the end of the Vespae. He seems to be the same Carci-
nus who served as στρατηγός in 431 B.C. (Thuc. 2.23.2, cf. Diod. 12.42.7); that he
was of the liturgical class and active in public affairs is suggested by inscriptions
(IG 13 365.30–40 [= 22 296]; 22 1498.69). If he was a general in 431 and had adult
sons by the late 420s, a birth date of ca. 480 might be about right.1 His son Xen-
ocles was a tragic playwright (TrGF 33), as was his grandson Carcinus II (TrGF
70), who was active in the 370s, and perhaps also his great-grandson Xenocles II
(TrGF 268). Our knowledge of the literary career of Carcinus I rests chiefly on
four items: (1) his name is restored on IG 22 2318.81 (the “Fasti”) for a tragic vic-
tory in 446 B.C.; (2) the words ιο μοι μοι (at Nub. 1259) are thought by Strepsiades
to be like a lament “of one of the gods of Carcinus”; a scholion on 1261 supposes
that it parodies a tragedy of Carcinus; (3) scholia on Pax 793 and 795–96 (ΣRV)
report that he wrote a drama called Μύσες; (4) a scholion on Pax 778 (ΣRVG) asserts
that he was a tragic poet (τραγωδίας ποιητής).

Although it is reasonable to conclude from the above that Carcinus was a tragic poet,
I would like to show that the case for this in fact rests on weak foundations.
Moreover, detailed examination of the evidence opens the possibility that Carcinus
was actually a comic playwright.2

I

What we actually read today in the Fasti—Κα[ρκίνος ἔδιδασκε]—is a conjecture by
J. H. Lipsius from two letters: Κα[. Lipsius forthrightly conceded that this was
guesswork (Muthmassungen) but reasoned that, if one of Carcinus’ sons had al-
ready appeared as a tragic playwright by the late 420s, 446 would be a plausible
date for a victory by Carcinus.3 This has been widely accepted, but there is no external
evidence whatever to confirm that Carcinus I was a tragic victor in 446. Moreover,
because no letters of ἔδιδασκε survive in this line, we do not know how
many letters were in the poet’s name and Κα[ρκίνος] is therefore not the only

2. This conclusion was hinted at, but not developed, by D. M. MacDowell, ed., Aristophanes: “Wasps”
(1887): 281. The text can be consulted in H. J. Mette, Urkunden dramatischer Aufführungen in Griechen-

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possible restoration: we know of a Callistatus who placed second at the Lenae in 418 (TrGF 38; cf. IG 22 2319) and it is feasible to imagine his career running from 446 to 418. Or, alternatively, the victor recorded by the Fasti for 446 could have been a tragic poet about whom we have no other evidence.

II

The words ἴω μοί μοι may imitate or parody a tragic lament (cf. Aesch. PV 742)—though if spoken by a god one can easily imagine a comic context. But even if we assume for the moment that it is tragic, deeper problems emerge. The lament is uttered by the second creditor; Strepsiades responds (Ar. Nub. 1260–61):

τίς οὕτως ποτ’ ἔσθ’ ὁ θηρνὼν; οὐ τί ποι
tῶν Καρκίνου τις δαμόνον εφθέγξατο;

Who’s this making a lament? Couldn’t it be that one of the divinities of Carcinus has spoken?

Dover’s note on these lines is worth recording:

The natural inference (drawn by the author of a scholion in the edition of Junta [Florence, 1515]) is that Carcinus had composed at least one tragedy in which a god had been portrayed as lamenting. But in V. 1501 ff., Pax 781 ff. (cf. 864), Ar. refers to the sons (three in V.) of Carcinus, one of whom (V. 1511) is a tragic poet. Σκ here names three sons (Σκ two), and identifies Xenocles (cf. Th. 441) as the tragic poet. The joke is complicated; we expect ‘one of the sons of Carcinus’; we get δαμόνον instead, and the creditor utter (1264 f.) lines which are in fact (according to Σρε) taken from a tragedy by Xenocles.5

Of course there would be nothing wrong prima facie with using a reference to a tragedy by Carcinus to introduce a parody of lines from his son, but Σρε here stops short of attributing ἴω μοί μοι to Carcinus: it makes no specific attribution, says that the cry was τραγικῶς, and immediately goes on to explain that of Carcinus’ children Xenocles was a tragic poet. What we have in Σρε is therefore not inconsistent with an attribution of the lamentation ἴω μοί μοι to Xenocles: either Xenocles himself made such cries or a character in a play of his did.6 Thus what was evidently meant to be a comic joke—the substitution of δαμόνον for θηρνόν—has been taken literally by the Junte scholiast and has been transformed into historical data.7 In any event the Junte scholion identifying Carcinus as a tragic poet

4. To judge from the photograph of fragments a, b, and b² printed in P. Ghiron-Bistagne, Recherches sur les acteurs dans la Grèce antique (Paris, 1976), fig. 2, there is no trace of a letter after the alpha (contrast the KA[A] three lines above our KA[]).
5. K. J. Dover, ed., Aristophanes: “Clouds” (Oxford, 1968), pp. 242–43. D. M. MacDowell, on Vesp. 1501, thinks it more natural to conclude that the words quote Carcinus, though MacDowell also says, “It is not clear what kind of plays he wrote,” leaving open the possibility that Carcinus was not a tragic playwright.
6. If a character in a play by Xenocles spoke the words, possibly we are to understand an ellipsis such as “one of the divinities [one of the sons] of Carcinus . . . .” On the omission of θηριος in Greek see H. W. Smyth, A Greek Grammar (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), p. 314. P. Rau, Paratragodia (Munich, 1967), p. 191, takes line 1261 to be in anticipation of the parody of Xenocles.
7. On this phenomenon consult M. R. Lefkowitz, “Aristophanes and Other Historians of the Fifth-Century Theater,” Hermes 112 (1984): 143–53. Another illustration of the confusion between Carcinus and Xenocles occurs in Σρ Pax 794 (TrGF 21 T 3e) where the ferret story is associated with Carcinus or Xenocles.
cannot be relied on to provide reports of the scholia vetera; it certainly does not furnish us with evidence that Carcinus I was a tragic playwright.

III

The chorus at Pax 793–95 recounts how Carcinus once claimed that “a ferret strangled his play one evening” (τὸ δρᾶμα γαλάξ τῆς ἔσπερας ἀπάγχαι). One explanation is that it was an excuse Carcinus offered for his inability to have a play ready in time for a festival. The scholia, however, see an allusion to a play with the title Mice. Snell (in TrGF) observes: nomen tragoediae a scholiasta inventum. A scholiast may indeed have fabricated the title while trying to explain this obscure passage in Pax, yet when scholiasts resort to inventing titles they are usually more literal-minded. The titles of the animal choruses by Magnes that are cited by scholia on Equites 520–25 (Birds [Ὀρνιθεῖς], Gall-flies [Ψήνεῖς], and Frogs [Βατραχοῖ]) are a case in point, because they may have been reconstructed almost directly from participles in the Equites passage (πετευρηγόων, ψηνίζων, βατραχεύουσα) and this is one reason to doubt their existence. By contrast, to have contrived the existence of a play with the title Mice from Pax 793–95 does not seem to me to be an obvious inference from the text and it may just be correct. Moreover, commentators have pointed out that the title certainly sounds more like a comedy with an animal chorus than a tragedy; nor can any close parallels be found in titles of satyr-plays. It is curious that this, the only surviving title of Carcinus, should not seem to be from a tragic playwright. In any event Pax 795 had referred simply to his δρᾶμα and was not specific about genre.

IV

Thus the scholion at Pax 778 saying that Carcinus was a τραγῳδιὰς ποιητῆς is the only other explicit testimony we have in the scholia vetera. But the Pax scholion may also be inferential: poets mentioned a few lines later (Morsimus, 803, and Melanthius, 804) clearly are tragedians; the scholiast may have assumed that the entire choral ode and antode (775–818) dealt with tragic playwrights and lumped Carcinus in with the others.

Another ground for misunderstanding is the danger of confusion in the scholastic tradition between Carcinus I and Carcinus II. The problem of misattribution of

8. This Juntine scholion on Clouds 1261, printed by Dübner, Scholia in Aristophanem, vol. 3:1; Scholia Vetera in Nubes (Groningen, 1977), pp. 228–29. Snell (TrGF 21 F 2, note) thinks that the Juntine scholion is nothing more than an improvisation (αὐτοσχεδίαμα), lacking independent value.
12. We might note also that if Carcinus I has a consistent “epithet” in comedy it is ὀθλόττης, apparently in light of his naval command in 431 (Vesp. 1519. Plato comicus frag. 143 K-A = ΣV Pax 792), and this tells us nothing about his career as a playwright.
fragments between the two men of the same name was raised by Diehl. Document-
tation for the career of Carcinus II as a tragic playwright is secure: we have eleven
titles and fragments of tragedies. (By contrast, the title *Mice* and the quotation Ὄ
μοί μοι, if it is his, are all we have for Carcinus I.) Curiously, Diogenes Laertius
(2.63) says that Polycritus Mendaeus thought that Carcinus II was a κωμῳδιοποιός.
This has been emended to τραγῳδιοποιός and Meineke long ago eliminated Carci-

nus II from consideration as a comic poet. But could it be that Carcinus I was a
comic poet? Did Polycritus Mendaeus know of a comic poet in the family and mis-
takenly ascribe to the grandson the calling of the homonymous grandfather? Con-
versely, the scholar at Pax 778 perhaps knew of a tragic playwright named
Carcinus and mistakenly identified Carcinus I as the τραγῳδιοποιός τοιητής. (Even in
cases where there were no homonymous tragedians, comic poets could be mistaken-
ly identified as tragic poets: the secondary scholion at *Eq.* 537 misidentifies the
comic poet Crates as a τραγικός.) Furthermore, some confusion in the *Suda*
(κ. 394 and 396) is relevant: the entries mention (1) an Agrigentine Carcinus (*TrGF*
235), (2) Καρκίνος, Θεσόδεκτος ἦ Ξενοκλέους, Αθηναῖος, τραγικός (*TrGF* 70), and
(3) Καρκίνος, ποιητής Αττικός. Curiously there is no unambiguous evidence here
for Carcinus I as a tragic poet: as far as we know he was not from Agrigentum (this
“Agrigentine” Carcinus may simply be a confused allusion to Carcinus II, who
spent time in Sicily); #2 is clearly Carcinus II; but if #3 is Carcinus I, the *Suda* has
retreated to a non-committal τοιητής. I should point out that in testimonia con-
cerning these playwrights we do not find the careful distinctions between different
generations or different playwrights of the same name that ancient scholars occa-

sionally drew about other playwrights: for example, Euripides (*TrGF* 16) is distin-
guished from the other Euripidai (*TrGF* 17 and 18) as the elder (πρεσβύτερος); cf.
Astydamas (*TrGF* 59, πρεσβύτερος) and Astydamas II (*TrGF* 60).

Finally, if it could be established that Carcinus I was a comic poet, we could find
room for him in the inscribed lists of victors: in *IG* 22 2325, a list of comic poets at
the Dionysia (= Mette V B 1), Κρατινός has been restored from τοιης in col. 1.14.

13. Diehl, “Karkinos,” *RE* 10 (1919): 1952. Carcinus I and II would seem not to have been subjected
to Hellenistic work on ὁμώνυμοι: see S. Halliwell, “Ancient Interpretations of ὄνοματι κωμῳδίαν in Ari-
stophanes,” *CQ* 34 (1984): 83–88, esp. 87. An entry in a list of tragedians found on a Teubnus papyrus in-
für Papyrusforschung* 11 (1935): 220–83, esp. 277. Because his family was from the deme Thorikos this
would fit Carcinus—but which Carcinus? W. Schmid assumed it was Carcinus I: see *Geschichte der
griechischen Literatur*, vol. 3 (Munich, 1940), p. 843, n. 9: Snell thought it was Carcinus II: *TrGF* Cat A
6.3–4 and 70 Carcinus II T 6.

Graecorum* (Berlin, 1839; repr. 1970), pp. 505–16, esp. 506; cf. *SF* 2a in C. Austin, “Catalogus Comi-

15. It could be that Carcinus I wrote both comedies and tragedies, but this is a remote possibility; we
have no secure knowledge of a playwright in antiquity who did so: B. Seidensticker, *Palintinos Harmo-
nia. Studien zu komischen Elementen in der griechischen Tragödie* (Göttingen, 1982), pp. 15–16. To fur-
ther muddy matters: ΣΟ *Nub.* 1261b says that Xenocles was a ποιητής κωμῳδίας and ΣΑ says he was
ποιητής κωμῳδίας καὶ τραγῳδίας. But we have the testimony of ΣΟ and other reliable evidence for Xen-
ocles’ career as a tragic poet.

16. Furthermore, confusions by scribes between Carcinus and Cratinus are not unknown: see A. M.
22a. Could information about a comic Carcinus have been misunderstood at an early stage in the tradition
and “corrected” so as to be credited to Cratinus?

1952, accepted at face value the notion that Carcinus I came from Agrigentum.
We have no external evidence for a victory by Cratinus in the 450s and \( \text{Καρκίνος} \) would fit perfectly well. Alternatively, in col. ii.9 of the same inscription the fragmentary \( \text{ΚΑ} \) has been restored to read \( \text{Καρκίνος} \), for a victory before 422 B.C., but this too could just as easily be \( \text{Καρκίνος} \).\(^{18}\) (\textit{IG} 2² 2325 lists each poet only once, so these would be mutually exclusive possibilities. The dates in question—the 450s or 420s—are consistent with what could have been Carcinus’ career.)

With so few hard facts and with evidence of marginal credibility I make no claim to certainty. But the case for Carcinus as a tragic poet perches on especially fragile twigs: a conjectural restoration in the Fasti and inferences in the scholia. The weakness of the case for his tragic career opens up the possibility that Carcinus was a χωμῳδιοποίος who wrote a play titled \( \text{Μύες} \) (probably with an animal chorus). Allusions to him in Aristophanes and in some scholia are not inconsistent with this, and with so many tragic playwrights in the succeeding generations, including his grandson of the same name, it is understandable that he was thought to be a tragedian himself.\(^{19}\)

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19. The author gratefully acknowledges the helpful comments of the two anonymous readers for \textit{CP}.

OFF OF MICE AND MEN IN ARISTOTLE

\textit{De Motu Animalium} 698b12–18:

\[ \text{ὅσπερ γὰρ καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ δὲι τι ἀκίνητον εἶναι, εἰ μέλλει κινεῖθαι, οὕτως ἕπι μᾶλλον ἔξω δὲι τι εἶναι τοῦ ἔφου ἀκίνητον, πρὸς ὁ ἄπερειδόμενον κινεῖται τὸ κινοῦμενον. εἰ γὰρ ὑποδόσει δὲι, οἶνον τοῖς μυσὶ τοῖς ἐν τῇ γῇ ἢ τοῖς ἐν τῇ ἄμωρ πορευομένοις, οὐ πρόεισιν, οὐδ’ ἔσται οὕτε πορεία, εἰ μὴ ἡ γῇ μένοι, οὕτε πτήσεις ἡ νέοσεις, εἰ μὴ ὁ ἄηρ ἢ ἡ θάλαττα ἄντερειδοί.} \]

16 τοῖς μυσὶ τοῖς ἐν τῇ γῇ: τοῖς ἐν τῇ γῇ μυσὶν \( YV \ b_1 \) \( \mu\lambda\mu\iota\nu\iota\ 
\text{ποσὶ} E \ \tau\iota\ \alpha\nu\tau\eta\ \gamma\theta\iota\ \text{om.} \ b_2 \ \text{πορευομένοις} \ \text{post} \ \gamma\gamma\ \text{b}_1, \ \text{post} \ \gamma\gamma\ \text{et} \ \text{post} \ \ddelta\mu\mu\upsilon\ Y \]

The \( \ddelta\iota\nu\om\) clause in b15–16 has bedeviled editors and interpreters, and the MS variants, which I have taken from Nussbaum’s admirable edition (\textit{Aristotle’s “De Motu Animalium”: Text with Translation, Commentary, and Interpretive Essays} [Princeton, 1978]), show clearly that the Byzantines also felt a difficulty here, since, with the exception of the omitted \( \tau\iota\ ) before \( \gamma\gamma\ ) in the \( b_2 \) group (doubtless a mechanical lipography), all the variants are deliberate attempts to restore some sense by conjectural intervention.

Aristotle asserts here that, for movement to be possible, not only must the moving animal have within itself some part that remains at rest but, even more importantly,