

Polybadiscus and the *Astraba* of Plautus: New Observations on a Plautine Fragment

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Aulus Gellius (3. 3. 11) reports that at one time 130 comedies were attributed to Plautus; of these 20 now remain in fairly complete condition and one, the *Vidularia*, is only partially preserved. Another 32 plays ascribed to Plautus are represented in fragments, and in addition there are 66 fragments from plays unidentified, seven of them dubiously attributed to Plautus; the titles of three other comedies are also known.¹ The fragments of Plautine comedy, which represent the majority of work ascribed to him, were once regarded as having some importance for the understanding of Roman comedy, but have been virtually ignored by scholars in the twentieth century; indeed they have scarcely even made their way into standard handbooks such as George Duckworth's *The Nature of Roman Comedy* and William Beare's *The Roman Stage*, and so have been rendered all but invisible. And yet, when one considers what a small percentage of comedies has survived—Plautus' 21 and Terence's 6—and that the vast majority of Roman comedians are represented only in quotations, it becomes clear that there is still a fair amount of work to be done.² Fortunately, several areas of Plautine comedy are reasonably well defined by the consistency of phenomena in the surviving plays and these can help us isolate and come to terms with similar elements in the fragments. One of these is Plautus' use of names that quite frequently indicate the nature of their bearers and their situations within the drama.³ It is my contention that the first of the seven

¹ Plays for which only titles exist are *Anus*, *Bis Compressa*, and *Syrus*. See F. Winter, *Plauti Fabularum Deperditarum Fragmenta* (Bonn 1885), 23, 27, 47. These plays are not noted in Lindsay's edition.

² In Plautus' case, therefore, only about 16 percent of the work attributed to him in antiquity is known to us in any state of completion.

³ See C. J. Mendelsohn, *Studies in the Word-Play in Plautus* (Philadelphia 1907); W. M. Seaman, *The Appropriate Name in Plautus* (diss. Illinois 1939); R. K. Ehrman, "The Double Significance of Two Plautine Names," *American Journal of Philology* 105.3 (Fall, 1984), 330-32.

fragments of the *Astraba*, a comedy ascribed to Plautus in antiquity,⁴ contains such use of a name. My immediate purpose is to re-examine this fragment, which has not been discussed for almost 85 years,⁵ for despite its brevity it is unusually informative on a number of matters of plot and character, thanks largely to its named *persona*; it can also be reasonably well meshed, I believe, with a couple of other fragments from the piece, and lends itself quite readily to plausible interpretation. Indeed, this will be the first time such a literary study has been done to the extent presented here. My larger goal is to show that the fragments of Plautus have life in them yet and still offer a fruitful field of investigation.

Varro (*De Lingua Latina* 6. 73) cites two lines from the *Astraba* in his discussion of the derivation of *spes*:

etiam spes a sponte potest esse declinata, quod tum sperat cum quod volt fieri putat: nam quod non volt si putat, metuit, non sperat. itaque hi quoque qui dicunt in *Astraba* Plauti:

sequere adsecue, Polybadisce, meam spem cupio consequi.
sequor hercle equidem: nam lubenter meam speratam consequor.

quod sine sponte dicunt, vere neque ille sperat qui dicit adolescens neque illa sperata est.

It is particularly fortunate that Varro has preserved a name in this quotation; in the present case its reading was established by Scaliger from the *polyba disce* of the manuscripts, was sanctioned by Ritschl and generally accepted

⁴ Varro attributes the *Astraba* to Plautus twice: *De Lingua Latina* 6. 73 and 7. 66, in the latter without naming the poet but in the midst of quotations also ascribed to Plautus. Probus, or at least the author of the commentary on Vergil's *Bucolics* that has survived under his name (2. 23 Keil), discussed the word *astraba* and noted "quo titulo et Plautus fabulam inscripsit" (see Schanz-Hosius, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur* I, § 35; cf. F. Ritschl, "Deperditum Plauti Fabularum Fragmenta," *Opuscula Philologica* III (Leipzig 1877, repr. Hildesheim 1978), p. 187, and G. Goetz, *De Astrabae Plautinae Fragmentis* (Jena 1893), p. 2. Gellius (11. 7. 5) indicates an indeterminable degree of uncertainty on the question of the play's authenticity when he records "idque a Plauto in comoedia, si ea Plauti est, quae *Astraba* inscripta est . . .," but does not indicate the grounds for any doubt nor the seriousness of it; nor does he allude to the issue at 3. 3. 1-14, the discussion of Plautine scholarship: see Goetz, p. 5, and Winter, pp. 4 ff. The same lack of clarity is discovered in Nonius' statement at 69. 32, "Plautus in *Astraba* fabula . . . cuius incertum an sit ea comoedia," but, again, there is no way of knowing the degree of Nonius' uncertainty. However, at 62. 32 Nonius ascribes the play to Plautus with no qualifying remark (see note 20, below). At any rate, no substantial reason can be adduced to show that the *Astraba* was not the work of Plautus. For a full discussion of the authenticity of this and other fragmentary plays ascribed to Plautus, see E. H. Clift, *Latin Pseudepigrapha: A Study in Literary Attributions* (Baltimore 1945), pp. 40-78.

⁵ The last word on the *Astraba*, from a strictly literary standpoint, was spoken by K. Schmidt, "Die griechischen Personennamen bei Plautus II," *Hermes* 37 (1902), 389-90. Other works were by Ritschl, Winter, Goetz and Clift, *opp. cit.*, but these scholars were interested in examining the sources and background of the fragments rather than investigating in any detail the literary motifs or characterizations detectable in the *Astraba* except in the most sweeping way; some of the conjectures of Ritschl need to be called into question.

thereafter.⁶ However, K. Schmidt, who was the last to have spoken on the *Astraba*, objected to "Polybadiscus" on the grounds that the joining of πολύ and βαδίζω was "unwahrscheinlich." He proposed reading "Libadiscus," from λιβάδιον, "little stream," and read "sequere adsecue intro, Libadisce, meam spem cupio consequi." His justification was that "Damit rückt Λιβάδισκος also unmittelbar mit Σταλαγμός zusammen," referring to the slave in the *Captivi* who had abducted Tyndarus as a small boy. He noted also that there is a Λιβάς at Ovid, *Amores* 3. 7. 24; "Libadiscus" was therefore a more likely name on linguistic grounds than "Polybadiscus." Still, it must be asked whether this reading is an improvement and whether Schmidt was in fact justified in regarding Scaliger's correction as unlikely. His challenge to "Polybadiscus" has never been answered. The response will surely lead to a fuller comprehension of the fragment.

First, "Polybadiscus" is obviously acceptable paleographically. Second, it must be remembered that the *Astraba* was generally taken in antiquity to be the work of Plautus,⁷ and as A. S. Gratwick has recently remarked on the characters of Plautine comedy, "his stage-population are given individual names varying in formation from the possible but unattested (Agorastocles) to the absurd (Pyrgopolynices)."⁸ When coming to terms with a name coined by Plautus, and "Polybadiscus" clearly is an invented name,⁹ the main concern is not so much with linguistic possibility or occurrence as a real name, as Gratwick's and other studies have demonstrated, but rather with its significance as an indicator, either ironic or accurate, of the nature of the *persona* to which it is attached or to his circumstances in the context of the comedy. For example, to use one of the names cited by Gratwick, "Pyrgopolynices," "frequent conqueror of towers," or "conqueror of many towers," although an absurd name, perhaps concocted from "pyrgos" + "polynices," is clearly a suitable appellation for the *miles gloriosus*; likewise "Pseudolus," "the crafty liar" (*pseudos* + *dolus*) is an accurate name for that deceitful slave. Now, the person addressed in the first line of the fragment and who responds in the second is a slave, as has long been recognized, since in Plautus the suffix -ISCUS or -ISCA always denotes a character of that station.¹⁰ However, the single most important

⁶ Ritschl, pp. 188 ff., and "Quaestiones onomatologicae comicae," *ibid.*, p. 328.

⁷ See note 4, above.

⁸ A. S. Gratwick, "Light Drama: Plautus," in E. J. Kenney (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature II: Latin Literature* (Cambridge 1982), p. 104. See note 3, above.

⁹ See W. Pape, and G. E. Benseler, *Wörterbuch der griechischen Eigennamen* (Hildesheim 1959), s. v. Πολυβάδισκος.

¹⁰ For example, Ampeliscia (*Rudens*), Collybiscus (*Poenulus*), Pardaliscia (*Casina*), Phaniscus (*Mostellaria*), Sophoclidisca (*Persa*); cf. Syricus in Menander's *Epilepentes* and in Terence's *Eunuchus* and *Adelphoe*. See A. W. Gomme and F. H. Sandbach, *Menander: A Commentary* (Oxford 1973), pp. 310 ff. Sometimes, although there is no evidence that this is the case here, -ISCUS is added to a slave's name to form a diminutive; thus Lampadio is called Lampadiscus at *Cistellaria* 544, and at *Poenulus* 421 Milphio is called Milphidiscus. Ritschl (pp. 190 ff.) argues against the slave's name being Polybadio on the grounds that such a name is unattested;

consideration for the reading of the name, after the paleographical, has yet to be taken into account so far as I am aware, namely that "Polybadiscus" is a perfectly suitable *sprechender Name* for the context preserved in Varro's quotation. The name means "the slave who walks much" which is *exactly* what this character claims to be. After the speaker of the first line, an *adulescens* according to Varro,¹¹ commands him, "Follow, follow closely, Polybadiscus," the slave replies emphatically, "Good God! I am following!" The particle *equidem* and the expletive *hercle* placed next to *sequor*, along with the fact that there are also three cognates of *sequor* in two lines, make it quite certain that the slave really does walk a lot and that "Polybadiscus" is the appropriate reading here. To be sure, the suitably named slave is found in other comedies, such as Pseudolus, noted above, or Phaniscus who "reveals" the truth to Theopropides at *Mostellaria* 933 ff. "Libadiscus," on the other hand, has neither the paleographical nor the interpretative value of Scaliger's reconstruction, for while "much walking" fits the picture presented in the fragment, the idea of a stream has no apparent relevance. Moreover, the argument in favor of "Libadiscus" is further vitiated by the suggested connection with "Stalagmus." The latter name according to Anaxandrides (*Odysseus* 34K) is given in jest to a small person:¹²

ὕμεις γὰρ ἀλλήλους ἀεὶ χλευάζετε, οἶδ' ἀκριβῶς·
 ἂν μὲν γὰρ ἢ τις εὐπρεπῆς, ἱερὸν γάμον καλεῖτε·
 ἔαν δὲ μικρὸν παντελῶς ἀνθρώπιον, σταλαγμόν.

Since there is no evidence in the fragments as to the slave's physical appearance, as at *Asinaria* 400 ff. and *Pseudolus* 1218 ff., there is no valid reason to accept "Libadiscus" on this score.

It is also possible to determine more about the character of the slave since Polybadiscus plainly exhibits another interesting, if rare, feature which offers a clue to the nature of the *Astraba*. Polybadiscus is in love, as is shown by his use of *sperata*. Varro's final remarks on the quotation confirm this conclusion, and although Polybadiscus' status as a loving slave has been briefly noted by others,¹³ the matter has yet to be treated as a literary device. Varro has judged that, strictly speaking, neither does the speaker of the first line truly "hope" because he speaks *sine sponte*, nor is the woman referred to in the second line truly "hoped for" because, again, the idea of speaking *sine sponte* lurks behind *speratam*. As with the earlier question on

but neither is Polybadiscus attested. Either would be a comic formation; see notes 3 and 6, above.

¹¹ Some earlier commentators, despite Varro's remarks, believed that this character was Polybadiscus' beloved. See Ritschl, pp. 189 ff. and note 18, below.

¹² See Schmidt I, 207 f., Mendelsohn, p. 57, Seaman, p. 109.

¹³ Ritschl, pp. 189 ff., established the reading *meam speratam* from the *mea sperata* of the manuscripts. He briefly notes in passing the idea of love suggested by Varro and also some parallels for this use of *sperata* but does not discuss the question.

the correct reading and significance of the slave's name, so this remark of Varro also demands careful consideration. First, Varro does not categorically state that *spes* and its cognates are in fact derived from *spons** ("spes a sponte potest esse declinata") and, second, he also acknowledges that the two characters in the *Astraba* are not using *spes* and *spero* in a technically or, possibly, etymologically correct way.¹⁴ Therefore what emerges is that both speakers "desire" but are unsure of their chances of success, so that it would be more correct for them to say that they "fear they will not succeed" rather than that they "hope." Nevertheless, Varro's point is that by *spem* and *speratam* Plautus intends to connote someone or something desired regardless of the degree of success that the speakers achieve.

Unfortunately it is impossible to know what specifically the *adulescens'* *spes* is since the word has so many different implications in Plautine comedy, although the similarity in wording between the two lines makes it probable that *spes* and *sperata* are somehow interconnected in the plot.¹⁵ At any rate, whatever his hope may have been, whether a person (the young man's girlfriend was Ritschl's conjecture), an opportunity or a goal, the chance of realizing it is fleeting and thus the tone of the speaker is urgent. *Sperata*, on the other hand, specifically refers to a woman, and the use of the term to designate the beloved one hopes for has parallels in the surviving comedies.¹⁶ For example, at *Amphitruo* 676 Amphitruon addresses his wife, "uxorem salutat laetus speratam suam" and at *Poenulus* 1268 Anterastilis calls Agorastocles *sperate*.¹⁷

Slaves in love are found on occasion in the surviving comedies, most notably Toxilus of the *Persa*. There the smitten slave explains his condition to Sagaristio (24 ff.):

sacius factus sum in Veneris proelio;
sagitta Cupido cor meum transfixit. SAG. iam servi hic amant?

And in fact the whole intrigue of the *Persa* centers upon Toxilus' acquisition of money to buy his beloved. As another instance, at *Rudens* 415 ff., Sceparnio falls in love (or rather, lust) with Ampelisca, the maid of Palaestra, and tries to win her favor. Polybadiscus therefore is by no means

¹⁴ Goetz, 6, would add to Varro's remarks, "sed potest etiam sine sponte dicere 'spero', si iocandi causa hoc dicit."

¹⁵ Ritschl, pp. 189 ff., again with only scanty discussion, conjectured that *spes* stood for the *amata* of the young man. This naturally is possible but not necessarily the case here. It is true of course that *adulescentes* have girlfriends, but we do not know that *spes* here refers to a person as at *Stichus* 583 (see note 16, below) rather than some abstract desire or practical goal such as fleecing a *senex* or dealing with a *leno*.

¹⁶ Ritschl, p. 190; he adduces as a parallel *Stichus* 583, "sperate Pamphilippe, o spes mea," but this is not a true parallel because there the parasite Gelasimus is addressing a long absent patron on his return rather than someone he loves.

¹⁷ In addition Nonius 175. 1 equates, as did Varro, *speratum* with *sponsum* and quotes from Afranius' *Fratriae* (10 Ribbeck), "speratam non odi tuam." Again the idea of love is present.

unique as a comic slave with his eye on a girl.¹⁸ There is no other evidence to indicate how serious Polybadiscus' love is, whether real love like Tranio's or an infatuation like Sceparnio's. However, as the examples noted show, *sperata* usually of course implies a situation more enduring than Sceparnio's lust at first sight. On the other hand, the comic potential of a *sperata* as a recent acquaintance cannot be discounted.

I would like to conclude with a final new observation on Polybadiscus; I suggest that he is a *servus callidus*. The *adulescens* calls upon him to follow because, as he says, he wishes to pursue his hope (whatever that may be), clearly indicating thereby his reliance on the slave's assistance.¹⁹ This action naturally calls to mind one of the most common motifs in comedy, namely that the young man puts his confidence in the slave who in turn must be clever enough to pull his master through his dilemma. Such an identification is attractive for another reason, because if Polybadiscus is in fact the *servus callidus*, as the urgent commands given him make probable, then the fourth fragment, "terebratus multum sit et supscudes addite," certainly could have been directed at him, for the fragment surely denotes a punishment of a slave, as Ritschl surmised largely on the basis of Nonius' definition of *exterebrare*.²⁰ In comedy the slave is the only type ever punished physically, and the clever slave naturally was especially liable to horrible tortures, or at least the threat of them, as Pseudolus, Chrysalus in the *Bacchides*, or Tyndarus in the *Captivi* had reason to know.²¹ Likewise, if this is a correct assumption, then the fifth fragment, "terebra tu quidem pertundis," also refers to the inquisition or punishment of Polybadiscus, and in fact both fragments are strikingly similar to the threat of punishment made at *Mostellaria* 55 ff. to Tranio, the mover of the comedy's intrigue:²²

o camuficium cribrum, quod credo fore,
ita te forabunt patibulatum per vias
stimulis, * si huc reveniat senex.

¹⁸ Ritschl thinks it likely that *sperata* is the maid of the *spes*, that is the maid of the *adulescens*' girlfriend. On the one hand, this is a possibility and is paralleled by the situation already noted from the *Rudens* and also by the carousal of Stichus with the maid Stephanium at the end of the *Stichus* (742 ff.). On the other hand, this conjecture assumes that *spes* is a person and we have seen that there is no evidence for such an identification.

¹⁹ Ritschl, pp. 189 ff., is surely correct in assuming that the young man is Polybadiscus' master.

²⁰ Ritschl, p. 194; Nonius 62. 32, "*exterebrare* est vi aliquid extorquere et scrutari aut curiosius quaerere. Plautus in *Astraba*, cum in curiosum iocaretur." Ritschl did not single out Polybadiscus as the *servus callidus* nor as the slave punished in these fragments.

²¹ See Duckworth, pp. 288 ff., for an enumeration of the punishments, threatened or actually inflicted, of slaves in comedy.

²² Ritschl in his 1852 edition of the *Mostellaria* in fact read "terebris huc si"; the same type of punishment is depicted here. Cf. *Persa* 28, "vide modo ulmeae catapultae tuom ne transfigant latus" and *Mostellaria* 358, "ubi . . . denis hastis corpus transfigi solet." The threat *fodere stimulo* (*stimulis*) occurs at *Curculio* 131 and *Menaechmi* 951.

The first fragment of the *Astraba* with its division of speakers, inclusion of a *sprechender Name* and clearly defined actions, is the most tractable of this comedy's remains. Indeed, it seems to shed light on the two fragments that refer to punishment. Fortunately, parallels from the surviving comedies support the conclusions presented here.

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