NOTES ON HYPERBOLUS

Thucydides (8.73.3) has one contemptuous reference to the unfortunate seller of lamps. Hyperbolus was a worthless character (μοχθηρός), whom no one really feared; he was ostracised for his depravity (διὰ πονηρίαν), and murdered on Samos in 411.

His language is evocative. The epithet μοχθηρός occurs only here in the historian; along with the phrase διὰ πονηρίαν, it derives from Aristophanes. The entire statement is less illuminating than the much-maligned merchandise of the victim. Hyperbolus is introduced out of political and chronological context, to be killed off like a minor Homeric hero with a gleeful _ave atque vale_. The details of his career and influence are discreetly omitted; the alleged reason for his ostracism is absurd, and the tradition that he was the last victim of this fate is absent; no precise motive for the subsequent liquidation of such a worthless cypher is offered.

The scornful silence is incongruous by the side of Old Comedy’s vigorous attention to the demagogue. Hermippus supposedly set the fashion of abusing him, and both Plato and Eupolis consecrated specific plays to the popular butt. Other comedians, such as Cratinus, Leucon, and Polyzelus joined the hunt. Aristophanes himself alludes to Hyperbolus in seven plays, ranging chronologically from 425 to 405.

Thucydides’ _suppressio veri_ perhaps influenced the author of the _Athenaion Politia_, who obliterates Hyperbolus from his accounts of ostracism and register of corrupt demagogues. Nevertheless, the demagogue is an immoral

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1. I am indebted to my colleague Dr. M. V. Molitor for his assistance with the prosopography of Old Comedy. Readers are warned (or consoled) that this article eschews the question of dating Hyperbolus’ ostracism.
2. The point is noted by H. D. Westlake, _Individuals in Thucydides_ (1968), 13; confirmed by Béant, _Lexicon Thucydideum_.
3. The epithet is not otherwise applied to demagogues by Aristophanes. The noun πονηρία occurs only here and at _Thes_. 868. Hyperbolus is πονηρόν προστάτην at _Pax_ 684. See the statistics of O. J. Todd, _Index Aristophaneus_ (1932).
4. Cratinus 196,262; Eupolis 190,192,193,194,238; Plato 167,168, 169,170,187; Leucon 1; Polyzelus 5. All references are to J. M. Edmonds, _Fragments of Attic Comedy_ (1957), vol. 1. See Aristophanes, _Nubes_ 557 for Hermippus as the instigator of the attacks. His chief onslaught was apparently in the _Artopolides_. If anything may be inferred from titles, Plato’s _Hyperbolus_ was the most directly political satire.
5. _Ach_. 846; _Eq_. 1304,1363; _Nubes_ 551,557–8,623,876,1065; _Vespaec_ 1007; _Pax_ 681,921, 1319; _Thes_. 840; _Ranae_ 570. These references are restricted to actual mentions of Hyperbolus. There are many other possible allusions in the comedians.
stereotype as early as Isocrates. He had, of course, been the victim of abusive attacks from Andocides. The comic evidence was developed with relish by Theopompus, whose account is the chief acknowledged source for the relevant scholia to Aristophanes and Lucian. Theopompus is remarkable for his assertion that Hyperbolus was the son of Chremes, rather than Antiphanes, and for his piquant details on the treatment of the demagogue's corpse.

Plutarch was fascinated enough to tell the story of the ostracism three times. Whether he used Theopompus is a moot point. He cites comedians such as Plato by name, was influenced by the Phaeax speech of pseudo-Andocides 4, and cites both Theophrastus and other unnamed sources for variant details on the factions combined against Hyperbolus.

Later antiquity heard much but knew little of Hyperbolus. He is a traditional villain in authors so diverse as Quintilian, Lucian, and Aelian. The stories grew to the point where a scholiast could assert that Hyperbolus had been a general, and Himerius could imagine a prosecution by the demagogue of Nicias.

An identikit picture can be cautiously assembled from the comedians. We assume the usual proviso: the difficulty of distinguishing slander from veracity. The standard jokes flew thick and fast. Hyperbolus was of low or

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6. De Pace 75; Hyperbolus is coupled with Cleophon.
7. Fr. 5 (Blass); Hyperbolus is the foreign lamp seller son of a branded slave at the mint. The orator was clearly drawing upon the repertoire of the comedians.
8. See the scholia on Lucian, Timon 30; Aristophanes, Vespae 1007, Pax 681. The passages are assembled by W. R. Connor, Theopompus and Fifth-Century Athens (1968), 59–63.
9. The confusion of fathers may have arisen out of the standard jokes against Hyperbolus' low and foreign birth; it is likely that the demagogue was accused of illegitimacy also. Alternatively, Theopompus may have confused the demagogue with one of the other attested Hyperbolus'. The cadaver of Hyperbolus was forced into a bag or wine skin, and flung into the sea. The wine skin may derive from the comedians' jokes on Hyperbolus' luxurious living. For Theopompus and katapontismos, see Connor, 61.
10. Aristides 7; Nicias 11; Alcibiades 13.
12. Theophrastus is cited at Nicias 11, the unspecified accounts at Alcibiades 13. The Phaeax speech (probably either a forgery or a rhetorical exercise) and Plato are cited at Alcibiades 13, and Plato again at Nicias 11. Thucydides is named at Alcibiades 13, although the epithet used is ποτιτερς, not μοχδηρς.
13. Quintilian 1.10.18; Lucian, Timon 30 (Hyperbolus coupled with Cleon); Aelian, VH 12.43.
15. Ecl. 36.318; see Edmonds, 599.
foreign birth; his mother was drunken and corrupt, and he had had to follow a humble profession.\textsuperscript{16}

Hyperbolus made an early entry into politics. The point was urged against him by both Cratinus and Eupolis.\textsuperscript{17} He was prominent enough to be attacked by Aristophanes (\textit{Ach.} 846–7) in a general passage on sycophants. Hyperbolus is named along with the perennial Cleonymus and a certain Prepis. This latter is described by the scholiast as a sodomite, but may have had another fundamental distinction. A Prepis is attested as γραμματεύς βουλής for 421/20. The name is not common, and equation of Aristophanes’ butt with the official is reasonable.\textsuperscript{18} Hyperbolus’ status as a βουλευτής can be inferred from \textit{Nubes} 680–92 and from Plato (fr. 167). Perhaps he was building a discernible faction in the 420s. His sycophancy, along with his mother’s ill-gotten gains, will have helped him to the luxurious living for which Plato attacks him (fr. 169). It may also be significant that Hermippus made him a popular target, when this comedian’s alleged earlier role in the prosecution of Aspasia is recalled.\textsuperscript{19}

Hyperbolus was represented as a poor man’s Cleon. The lamp seller was probably beginning to rival the tanner’s influence before the latter’s death. \textit{Equites} 1304 asserts that Hyperbolus was planning an expedition against Carthage. An earlier reference in the play (174) suggests that this was a scheme of Cleon, and the charge was perhaps repeated against the latter in the \textit{Centaur}.\textsuperscript{20} It will be seen later that this matter may supply an early clue to Hyperbolus’ eventual ostracism.

Cleon’s death opened the path to influence. Aristophanes desperately alleged (\textit{Pax} 685–7) that the people merely used the demagogue as a cat’s-paw. The expedient was a convenient explanation for Plutarch who reproduced it.\textsuperscript{21} An obscure passage (\textit{Nubes} 623–5) refers to some chicanery whereby Hyperbolus was appointed on a mission to the Amphictyonic Council and then deprived of his position. The libel is comparable to Plato’s doubts about the legality of the demagogue’s election to the council (fr. 166). A second instructive passage in the \textit{Nubes} (1065–6) parades Hyperbolus as a pupil of the Unjust Cause; the passage provides Thucydides with his phrase διὰ πονηρίαν.

\textsuperscript{16} Hyperbolus is a Lydian (Plato 170) or a Phrygian (Polyzelus 5), who spoke bad Greek (Plato 168). The point is underlined by Eupolis’ title \textit{Maricas}. The bibulous mother was the target of Hermippus’ \textit{Artopolides}; she occurs inevitably in Aristophanes (\textit{Nubes} 551, \textit{Thes.} 840) as rich and corrupt. Leucon (fr. 1) imputes theft to Hyperbolus. The lamp seller motif is widespread.

\textsuperscript{17} Cratinus 262; Eupolis 238.

\textsuperscript{18} Tentatively proposed by J. Kirchner, \textit{Prosopographia Attica} (1903), vol. 2,227 (s.v. Prepis).

\textsuperscript{19} Plutarch, \textit{Pericles} 32.

\textsuperscript{20} This is inferred from the pun on \textit{byrsa} and Byrsa; see Edmonds, 655.

\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Alcibiades} 13.
The versatile Hyperbolus may also have been a trierarch. Aristophanes (Thes. 836-7) ridicules cowardly sailors and vile trierarchs. Hyperbolus is not named, but the passage is in the context of the odious influence of his mother. Cleophon is named in this choral parabasis, as is Charminus who connived at Hyperbolus’ death on Samos. These collocations may be significant. A military career can hardly be worked out, or even presumed, but some sort of naval or army exploits seem to have been ridiculed by Eupolis.22

The man deserved the fate, the fate did not deserve the man. That was the pretty comment of Plato (fr. 187) on Hyperbolus’ ostracism. But why was he ostracised? Thucydides’ ‘reason’ is proposterous, and was too much for even Plutarch to swallow.23 No sober man could credit Alcibiades (of all people) with arranging an ostracism διὰ πονηρίαν. The explanation may go back to the 420s and Aristophanes’ claim that Hyperbolus was planning an expedition against Carthage. Carthaginian aspirations are associated with Alcibiades in the period of the Sicilian expedition. Thucydides directly imputes (6.15.2), and Alcibiades claims them in his speech at Sparta (6.90.2). Alcibiades may of course have exaggerated his ambitions in order to terrify the Spartans into action, and Carthage is not an overt issue in the debate between himself and Nicias prior to the Sicilian venture.24 However, if Hyperbolus was associated with the scheme, whether it was his own idea or inherited from Cleon, a good reason for the ostracism is provided. Alcibiades may have reasoned that, with Hyperbolus out of the way, he could appropriate the Carthaginian policy and present it as his own at the first suitable occasion. The same notion may also have occurred to the new demagogue on the scene, Androcles. It is notable that Aristophanes applied the epithet μοιχητήρως to Hyperbolus in this Carthaginian allusion. It is possible that Thucydides took it over because of a mental connection between demagogues and Carthaginian schemes.

Phaeax is relevant to the matter. He was prominent enough to be ridiculed for his oratory (Eq. 1375–81). Plutarch, wrestling with the comic evidence and Thucydides’ silence, quotes a similar joke from Eupolis.25 The biographer was aware of accounts which stated that Alcibiades had arranged his anti-Hyperbolus pact with Phaeax, not Nicias.26 Phaeax had been on a diplomatic mission to Italy and Sicily (Thucydides 5.4.1). The experience may have persuaded him into strong views, for or against, on a Carthaginian

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22. Fr. 192; Maricas is dubbed as περσαπτολίς, in a parody of Aeschylus, Persae 65.
23. Plutarch follows Thucydides at Nicias 11, but Alcibiades 13 stresses the real influence of the demagogue; Aristides 7 is equivocal.
26. Plutarch is neutral on the matter at Alcibiades 13, but implicitly rejects the version at Nicias 11.
If he was for the scheme, he would be a potential threat to Alcibiades' influence, and Plutarch would be correct in placing him with Nicias as a leading rival. If he was opposed, then his agreement to turn the ostracism against Hyperbolus was natural and even principled.

We know who killed Cock Robin, but why? Thucydides associated the general Charminus with Hyperbolus' murder. Charminus had been sent to Samos (8.30.1), and had been defeated in a sea battle by the Spartans off Syme (8.41–2). It has been noticed that he appears in a significant passage in the Thesmophoriazusae. The context is notable, if only as a coincidence. Charminus is postulated by an abrasive reference to Cleophon, and the choral passage builds up to the above-mentioned comments on Hyperbolus' mother. Charminus may have been an old enemy of Hyperbolus, or the two may have clashed recently on Samos. Perhaps Charminus connived at the murder in the hope of future ingratiating with Alcibiades, or with the oligarchs at Athens.

Whatever the date of his ostracism, Hyperbolus had enjoyed a lengthy and various career. He had been a comic target for nearly a decade. The jokes of the stage left their mark on Thucydides, whose statement on Hyperbolus is not more than a patchwork of phrases from Aristophanes. The subsequent, pious tradition that ostracism was abandoned because of the disgrace of using it against such a villain is impossible to accept. The notion, clearly based on the epigram of Plato, presupposes an incredible bout of collective and enduring disgust on the part of the Athenians. The immediate reason for the disappearance of the institution was the changed nature of politics and factions. After the eclipse of Hyperbolus, old enemies die or fade away. Nicias perished on Sicily. Alcibiades was exiled, returned, and again withdrew. Androcles was murdered, and Cleophon eventually executed. The atmosphere at Athens during the last years of the war militated against ostracism. There were no spectacular personal feuds, and popular resentments were expressed in different ways; as, for example, the trial of the generals after Arginusae. It is more than a coincidence that the attested use and abuse of the graphe paranomon may date from c. 415,27 thereby replacing ostracism as a political weapon.

Precise details of Hyperbolus' career cannot be rescued. For nearly a decade he was an important element in Athenian politics. His attitudes and policies were influenced by Cleon. That was reason enough for the comedians' abuse and the distortion of Thucydides. I am no scholiast, and shall not invent details of a personal issue between the demagogue and the historian. The standard jokes establish him as typical of the breed of popular politician after Pericles. Old Comedy, incidentally, did not draw the same fine distinction between Pericles and his successors, as do Thucydides and

too many scholars. It was natural that Hyperbolus should be an enemy of Nicias. In other circumstances, however, he might have been used rather than abused by Alcibiades. To the latter, Hyperbolus was the wrong man with the right ideas. The seller of lamps had to be extinguished. He was; in terms of career, life, and reputation.

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