CHIRPING LIKE THE SWALLOWS: ARISTOPHANES’ PORTRAYALS OF THE BARBARIAN “OTHER”

by

Christopher Delante Bravo

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICS
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements For the Degree of MASTER OF ARTS
In the Graduate College
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

2009
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APPROVAL BY THESIS DIRECTOR
This thesis has been approved on the date shown below:

______________________________    May 5, 2009
John Bauschatz            Date
Assistant Professor of Classics
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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I examine three specific characters from the extant plays of Aristophanes: the Scythian archer from *Thesmophoriazusae*, the Thracian god from *Birds*, and the Persian King’s Eye from *Acharnians*. Through a close analysis of these three characters, I show that Aristophanes portrayed each one in a different manner and with varying degrees of hostility. Aristophanes’ portrayals of these foreigners were likely informed by his fellow Athenians’ attitudes toward non-Athenians. As I demonstrate, the interactions of foreigners with Greek characters in Aristophanes’ plays reveal subtle gradations of Greek xenophobia. The playwright composed his comedies in a period of great cultural change and increasingly diverse perceptions of non-Greeks, and as a result, these xenophobic nuances emerged. Views of barbarians were evolving in the last quarter of the fifth century BCE, and Greek xenophobia was not a monolithic social phenomenon.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Aristophanes’ Barbarians

The comedies of Aristophanes offer a unique glimpse into Athenian culture and society that other types of Greek literature do not. In his plays, Aristophanes poked fun at the political, social, and cultural institutions of his city in order to achieve public recognition and win festival prizes. His works contain numerous references to contemporary events, individuals, and attitudes, and mock celebrities ranging from respected philosophers, such as Socrates, to eminent generals, such as Pericles. Aristophanes’ task was to make his audience laugh, and thus he had to know what his audience would find humorous. In order to maximize the effects of his comedy, he regarded no one as exempt from his jests and attacks—including non-citizens. In fact, a number of his comedies focus on the activities of women (e.g., Thesmophoriazusae, Ecclesiazusae, and Lysistrata), and a few others treat non-Athenian peoples and their customs (e.g., Horae and Babylonians, both of which are lost).

Close analysis of the rare glimpses of non-Athenians which Aristophanes’ foreign characters provide can be very fruitful. These few characters provide insight into stereotypical late fifth- and early fourth-century BCE Athenian perspectives on non-Greeks.1 Questions of how Aristophanes chose to portray foreigners in his plays, and why he chose to include them at all, inevitably arise in any inquiry into these barbarian characters. Perhaps unsurprisingly, all of Aristophanes’ foreign characters are the targets of their Greek counterparts’ mockery and ridicule. Yet intriguingly, a few of these non-Greek characters have speaking parts. Three

1 All dates hereafter are BCE unless otherwise noted.
characters in particular from three different plays have multiple lines of dialogue: the Scythian archer from *Thesmophoriazusae* (411), the Thracian god from *Birds* (414), and the Persian envoy from *Acharnians* (425).² The speech of these barbarians is quite extraordinary: when they speak Greek, they use poor, broken Greek, and when they do not, they use a very bizarre, nearly indecipherable mix of gibberish and non-Greek languages.

This thesis focuses on these three characters. I will investigate the questions of how, exactly, Aristophanes portrayed each of these three characters in his own distinctive manner and why he did so. I will also discuss the potential significance of his portrayals of these barbarians and the differences among them for our understanding of relations between Greeks and non-Greeks in Aristophanes’ day. As I will show, these three characters are all depicted in different manners and seem to attract varying degrees of hostility. Yet one must keep in mind the social currents of Aristophanes’ time when analyzing the derision that the playwright directed at these characters. Through an examination of the evidence, one realizes that Aristophanes’ portrayals of these various foreigners were likely informed by his fellow Athenians’ attitudes toward non-Athenians. As I will demonstrate, the interactions of foreigners with Greek characters in Aristophanes’ plays reveal subtle gradations of Greek xenophobia. Aristophanes composed his comedies in a period of great cultural change and increasingly diverse perceptions of non-Greeks. As a result, xenophobic nuances were perhaps inevitable. Aristophanes’ comedies demonstrate that Greek xenophobia was not a monolithic social phenomenon. Views of

² Dates for all plays are based on the figures provided by MacDowell (1995): xii–xiii.
barbarians were evolving in the last quarter of the fifth century, as were other aspects of Athenian society.

Before we continue, it is necessary to elaborate on certain terms and distinctions—namely, the modern conception of the “Other” and the distinctions between the various ethnic groups of antiquity. The Greeks used the adjective βάρβαρος to refer to a foreign individual who displayed a linguistic difference from the average Greek, regardless of whether that foreigner spoke in indecipherable strings of foreign words or poorly constructed yet understandable Greek. The term, however, implies more than linguistic difference. In much of classical Greek literature, the term βάρβαρος also implies a certain degree of inferiority to Greeks and Greek culture. 3 Thus, the term “Other,” coined by modern scholars to represent individuals and peoples whom a society views as antithetical to themselves, is fitting. Social historians and philosophers have long used this term, which perhaps is defined best by Edward Said in his Orientalism (1994):

> The construction of identity... involves the construction of opposites and “others” whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from “us.” Each age and society re-creates its “Others.” Far from a static thing then, identity of self or of “other” is a much worked-over historical, social, intellectual, and political process that takes place as a contest involving individuals and institutions in all societies. (332)

When I apply the term to fifth- and fourth-century Athenian society, I refer to the constructed antithesis by which the Athenians defined themselves. For them, the “Other” was everything

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3 Hall (2002: 111–17) provides a very good discussion of the adjective βάρβαρος and modern misconceptions regarding the word’s meaning.
that an average Athenian citizen was not: namely, one who lacked culture, sophistication, and refinement. In the minds of many Athenians, the imagined “Other” and their real-world counterparts were likely identical, despite the fact that the imagined “Other” was never realized in an actual Persian, Thracian, African, *vel sim*.

But who were these actual Persians, Thracians, and Africans? Of whom does the “Other” consist? That distinctions existed between the numerous ethnic groups of Greek antiquity may seem obvious and hardly worthy of analysis, but in fact the lines between ethnic groups were just as blurred in antiquity as they often are today. In the classical period, there were thousands of people who spoke Greek and lived in Athens, but were not citizens because they had been born outside of Attica. Likewise, when Greek colonies throughout the Mediterranean developed and prospered, the colonists began to take on more aspects of the indigenous cultures whose lands they had colonized. It is essential to remember that ancient ethnic groups were much more heterogeneous than the single label of “Persian” or “Scythian” might imply. In what follows, I will employ the definition of ethnicity that Jonathan Hall details in *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (1997: 17–33), and which he summarizes in *Hellenicity* (2002: 9–19).

According to Hall, six different conditions delineate an ethnic group. First, an ethnic group defines itself “in opposition to other groups of a similar order” (2002: 9). The ancient Greeks certainly did so: often in our extant sources, orators, playwrights, and historians deride their fellow Athenians for their “barbarian” behaviors, that is, for acting in ways unbefitting of normal Athenians. For instance, throughout his *Histories*, Herodotus remarks on the customs of the various peoples he discusses, and he often compares these peculiar behaviors to the behaviors
of his fellow Greeks. Likewise, one of the most important documents from the Achaemenid Empire, the Behistun Inscription, provides a rare glimpse of Persian perspectives on ethnicity (Figure 4). In the center of this immense inscription, the Great King Darius I (ruled 522–486) stands before ten different men, most of whom are bound in chains. Strikingly, the inscription depicts each of the chained men in a distinctive dress and appearance. Most likely, Darius sought to portray each man in his respective dress to signify each man’s distinctive ethnic group.

This point leads me to Hall’s second condition: the ethnic group displays “biological factors, languages, religion or cultural traits” which visibly mark, but not define, the group (2002: 9). The various styles of dress of King Darius’ prisoners in the Behistun Inscription, for example, strongly suggest that the Persians drew on outward appearances in order to distinguish between the various ethnicities in the empire. Similarly, the Greeks stressed differences in clothing, religion, and language when they distinguished themselves from the “Other.” For instance, portrayals of Scythians on archaic and classical Greek pottery depict Scythians as wearing dappled jackets, trousers, and the kidaris, a type of hat worn mainly by non-Greeks (Figures 5 and 6). The Scythians also carry bows and quivers full of arrows. Such depictions reveal Greek stereotypes about Scythians, and also helped perpetuate them in the mind of the average Greek.

While visual depictions of comic plays from the classical period do survive, none portrays a barbarian character. In the case of Aristophanes’ barbarian characters, the words they speak are all that survive. This is unfortunate, but not fatal to this study, as the ancient Greeks used language as an important means of distinction between various peoples. Herodotus makes
this point clear when he traces the ancestry of the Athenian people. During his narrative of the earliest stages of Greek history, he notes that while other historians have claimed that the Athenians descended from the Pelasgians, a people who did not speak Greek, and then later adopted the Greek language, he believes that the Athenians had in fact always spoken Greek, just like all other Hellenes:

τὸ δὲ Ἑλληνικὸν γλώσσῃ μὲν ἐπείτε ἐγένετο αἰεὶ καταφαίνεται εἶναι. (1.58.1)

The Greek race, since it emerged, always used its own language, as it seems clear to me.⁴

When he discusses the lineage of the Athenians, Herodotus makes sure to declare that the Athenians always spoke Greek. He felt it necessary to defend Athens’ language as being just as pure as that of any other Greek polis. In his opinion, one’s language was a very important factor in one’s identity.

Herodotus further explores this point while discussing the customs of the Egyptians, who seem to have had a rather Greek-like view of other cultures:

βαρβάρους δὲ πάντας οἱ Αἴγυπτιοι καλέουσι τοὺς μὴ σφίσι όμογλώσσους. (2.158.5)

The Egyptians call everyone who does not speak the same language as themselves “barbarians.”

Whether the Egyptians actually followed this practice is not relevant. What is important, however, is that Herodotus, a Greek historian, emphasizes the significance of language as a means of distinction between ethnicities other than his own. Turning to Aristophanes, we can

⁴ All translations are my own.
thus conclude that the different languages Aristophanes utilized are a very significant feature of his comedies. Not only can a character’s language help the audience to identify a character’s ethnicity, but it can also reveal Greek attitudes toward the larger group to which he belongs.

Next, Hall points out that an ethnic group shares a “putative subscription to a myth of common descent and kinship, an association with a specific territory and a sense of shared history” (2004: 9). While the creation myths of many other ethnicities have not survived, the Greeks created numerous different creation myths, both for themselves and for others. Apollodorus perhaps retells the origins of Athens best, beginning with the city’s first mythical king and founder, Cecrops (Bibl. 3.14; cf. Hdt. 1.56–59, Paus. 1.2.6). Plato, on the other hand, briefly alludes to the origins of the Persian race in a philosophical debate between Socrates and Alcibiades. As Plato’s Socrates states:

σκεψώμεθα δή, τοῖς ἐκείνων τὰ ἡμέτερα ἀντιτιθέντες, πρῶτον μὲν εἰ δοκοῦσι φαυλότερων γενῶν εἶναι οἱ Λακεδαιμονίων καὶ Περσῶν βασιλῆς. ἢ οὐκ ἴσμεν ὡς οἱ μὲν Ἡρακλέους, οἱ δὲ Ἀχαιμένους ἐκγονοί, τὸ δ᾽ Ἡρακλέους τε γένος καὶ τὸ Ἀχαιμένους εἰς Περσέα τὸν Διὸς ἀναφέρεται; (Alc. 1.120e)

Let us consider, comparing our circumstances with theirs, first whether the kings of the Spartans and the Persians seem to be of poorer stock. Don’t we know that the former are born of Heracles, and the latter of Achaemenes, and that the line of both Heracles and Achaemenes lead back to Perseus, son of Zeus?

While the line of the Achaemenid dynasty probably did not lead back to Zeus, some Greeks seem to have conceived of the royal line of the Persian throne in this way. Again, by being able
to trace a people’s lineage back to a common ancestor, the Greeks were able to further justify their divisions of the world’s various peoples into numerous ethnicities.

Hall’s fourth condition for an ethnic group is that an ethnicity is “neither static nor monolithic and is often subject to processes of assimilation with, or differentiation from, other groups” (2002: 9–10). This leads directly into his fifth condition, that “membership of an ethnic group will always be the most salient dimension of identification” (2002: 10). Taken together, these two conditions maintain that while one’s ethnicity is fluid and adaptable, it is still integral to one’s identity. Ethnicity is all at once an internalized and a social construct, meaning that how one identifies him- or herself may not match how others identify him or her. Each of these two identities, however, greatly affects the other, and as such both identities are constantly shifting. Consequently, as social environments and cultural norms change, so do the socially constructed boundaries that lie between different ethnicities. In effect, while ethnic labels may not change, what each label ultimately represents does change over time. We will return to this point later in this study.

Hall’s final condition of ethnic identity concerns the creation of an ethnicity. According to him, an identity materializes often “in the context of migration, conquest or the appropriation of resources by one group at the expense of another” (2002: 10). The most common context for such an appropriation in antiquity was warfare. Ancient Greeks waged war on numerous peoples from numerous parts of the known world. This is obvious not only in the history of the Greeks, which includes wars against the armies of Persia, Macedonia, and Rome, among many others, but also in their myths, most notably those concerning the Trojan War. Ancient warfare often
pitted not only two armies against each other, but also two cultures, two ways of life. For this reason, the Persian Wars (490–479) had a transformative effect on the collective Greek mindset. After the Greeks’ victory over the Persians, the Greeks could for the first time speak of a common enemy, one who was in very many ways antithetical to them: the Persians.

To sum up: following Hall’s definition for ethnic identity, we see that ethnicity was open to numerous interpretations, and as such, was a flexible, adaptable phenomenon. There were numerous ways one could indicate both his or her own as well as another’s ethnic identity, and one very significant way was language. While language is merely an indicator and cannot ultimately define one’s ethnicity, it is a substantial indicator, and one that the Greeks valued greatly. The languages Aristophanes assigned to his characters were thus essential to conveying the identities of his characters to his audience. Ethnic identity is not a static construction, but the primary sources from Greek antiquity often portray it as such. Moreover, as a social construct, though an ethnicity does not imply anything that can be accurately attributed to all members of a group, the Greeks very often associated various stereotypes with the assorted ethnicities known to them. One therefore should not necessarily believe that the characteristic of foreign cultures reported by ancient Greek authors reflected reality. The creation of ethnicities simply allowed the Greeks to divide and classify various groups of “Others.”

Previous Scholarship on Old Comedy and Barbarians

The secondary literature on barbarians in Old Comedy and other forms of drama has blossomed in recent decades. Somewhat surprisingly, however, monographs on the subject of
barbarians in Old Comedy are rare: indeed, only Long (1986) fills this void. Numerous articles and book chapters have also treated various aspects of this and related areas of inquiry. For instance, Hall (1989a) has contributed enormously to the study of barbarians in Greek tragedy, and thus by extension, to the study of barbarians in Greek drama. Isaac (2004) also provides an insightful look at the varying depictions of barbarians in ancient Greek and Roman literature. Finally, a few articles and book chapters that focus on various aspects of the relations of Greeks versus “Others” significantly contribute to our understanding of this social and historical phenomenon.  

Nevertheless, scholarship on Aristophanes’ characterizations of the relations between ancient Greeks and non-Greeks is minimal. Hall (1989a) does not fully examine Old Comedy, but instead concentrates on the portrayals of foreigners in the extant plays and fragments of the Greek tragedians. Isaac’s monograph (2004), while thorough in its collection of primary sources, disappoints somewhat in its analysis of Old Comedy’s portrayals of barbarians. In fact, Isaac mentions Aristophanes only once, in a discussion of Greek autochthony (2004: 117). Isaac’s disregard for the playwright is surprising because Aristophanes provides very insightful perspectives into the attitudes of fifth- and fourth-century Athenians.

Lastly, while a few articles and book chapters examine various aspects of Old Comedy, Athenian society, and barbarians (most notably Hall [1989b], Colvin [1999: 39–89], and Willi [2002]), none satisfactorily explains Aristophanes’ various portrayals of barbarian characters by assessing both their language, the period of time in which Aristophanes created them, and the

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contexts in which he employed them. Long makes some insightful observations on Aristophanes’ portrayals of barbarians, especially on the linguistic oddities of these characters (1986: 131–36). He does not, however, delve further into the subtleties of Aristophanes’ barbarians, which is perhaps due to his work’s focus on the entire corpus of Old Comedy beyond Aristophanes. Long’s analysis of the Scythian archer’s scene from *Thesmophoriazusae*, for example, is cursory, as Hall observes (Long 1986: 104–7; Hall 1989b: 40). A study of Aristophanes’ different barbarian characters and their historical contexts has yet to appear.

**Aristophanes and Fifth-Century Athens**

Aristophanes was born in Athens around 450, or some thirty years after the final Greek victory in the Persian Wars, and during Athens’ cultural and political domination of the Greek world. At the time of his birth, Pericles was at the forefront of Athens’ political scene, and numerous buildings were being constructed in the city, including the Parthenon. Although an ancient biography of Aristophanes exists, it is suspect and contains little of historical value. It has been established, however, that Aristophanes was born in the wealthy deme of Cydathenaeum, and thus likely belonged to one of the privileged classes of Athenians, and that he received a fine education. Aside from this, nothing is known about Aristophanes’ formative years.

Around the time that Aristophanes became an Athenian citizen with full rights (ca 430), Athens was engaged in a full-scale war with Sparta and its allies. As the Peloponnesian War

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6 For a fuller discussion of this biography and its merits, see Storey (2000: x–xi).
7 Cydathenaeum is located in central Athens, immediately northeast of the Acropolis.
continued over the next few decades, the Athenians suffered numerous defeats and disasters.
The Athenian Assembly appointed and later recalled several generals, countless men perished in battles on both land and sea, and eventually Athens surrendered to Sparta in 404. It was during these war-filled decades that Aristophanes flourished. He produced approximately 44 plays over the course of his life, many of which were very topical in nature and derided the war, popular politicians, and Athenian society in general. Of course, Aristophanes’ main motivation in writing his plays was to entertain his audience, so the degree to which he personally championed the political and social views that he put forth in his plays is questionable. It has been hotly debated by scholars for centuries. It is not the purpose of this thesis to argue for or against any particular view of Aristophanes’ political stance; indeed, one might argue that a definitive solution is not even possible. What is important to note is that Aristophanes was by no means composing his plays in a vacuum; he was very aware of his social and political surroundings, and used his cultural observations to maximize his effect as a comic poet.

It is thus crucial to analyze Aristophanes’ portrayals of barbarian characters against this historical backdrop. Does Aristophanes present his Scythian archer and his Thracian god in a manner that conformed to social stereotypes about the broader ethnic groups to which they belonged, or does he mock them broadly for their strange and un-Greek characteristics? Does his portrayal of the Persian royal officer differ from his treatment of these northern barbarians? If so, why?

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8 Kagan (2003) provides one of the better modern narratives of the Peloponnesian War.
9 Lesky (1966: 425–49) provides a fuller discussion of Aristophanes’ career.
10 Most recently, Zimmermann (2006) and Van Steen (2007) have made this argument quite persuasively.
In order to answer these questions, I will examine in depth the few instances from Aristophanes’ extant plays that involve the speech and behavior of non-Greek characters. Many of the lines spoken by these characters are not in Greek. Questions arise: What languages are they speaking? What is Aristophanes implying when he chooses to represent the speech of these characters as he does? Furthermore, why, when foreigners do speak Greek in Aristophanes, is it not the fluid, intelligible Greek spoken by the Greek characters in the plays, but a broken, barely comprehensible version of the language? Complicating the matter even further, each of these non-Greek characters displays a different degree of skill in employing the Greek language. As a result, the foreign characters almost always come off as being inferior to the Greek characters with whom they share the stage. A close analysis of the speech of Aristophanes’ barbarians will illuminate this point.

In addition to the issues of language raised by these scenes, the interactions between the barbarians and Greeks in Aristophanes’ plays also offer significant insight into Athenian attitudes toward foreigners. In most of these interactions, the Greek characters confidently assert their authority over the barbarian characters and in a variety of ways. Yet, because these interactions are not uniform, only a study of the fine differences between each of the relevant scenes will disclose their subtler significance for determining Greek attitudes toward the “Other.”
Bilingualism in Classical Athens

Before examining Aristophanes’ foreign characters and their language, we must consider briefly the phenomenon of bilingualism in classical Athens. This will allow us to properly contextualize the familiarity of an average Athenian audience, and perhaps even of Aristophanes, with the Scythian, Thracian, or Old Persian tongue.

The ancient Greeks recognized the problems that language barriers posed for commerce and diplomacy between various peoples. Not too long after Aristophanes’ active years, Xenophon, one the more widely travelled ancient writers whose works still survive, makes a passing remark on the obstacles that language can pose. The historian raised the issue in his Memorabilia:

“ἀγράφους δὲ τινας οἴσθα,” ἔφη, “ॐ Ἰππία, νόμους;”
“τοὺς γ’ ἐν πάσῃ,” ἔφη, “χώρα κατα ταύτα
νομιμοκαὶνον.” “ἔχοις ἁν οὖν εἰπεῖν,” ἔφη, “ὁτι οἱ
ἀνθρωποὶ αὐτοὺς ἔθεντος” “καὶ πῶς ἁν,” ἔφη, “οἱ γα
ἐν δυνηθεῖν ἰπαντες ὁν δυνηθεῖν οὑτε ὑμόφωνοι εἰσι;
(4.4.19)

[Socrates] said, “Hippias, do you know any unwritten laws?” He replied, “Indeed, they are those which are used in every land in the same way.” “So can you say that men established them?” “How so, since everyone is neither able to assemble nor speaks the same language?”

Even though the same laws appear in various lands throughout the world, Hippias believes it was impossible for people of different lands to have come together to create these laws: for how can people of different tongues communicate?
Of course, Xenophon knew the answer to these questions himself. Having campaigned in the Persian Empire under the command of Cyrus the Younger against his brother, the Persian king, Artaxerxes II, in 401, Xenophon assuredly dealt with Persians on a frequent basis. In fact, Xenophon wrote in his own memoirs of these adventures:

ἡνίκα Πατηγύας, ἀνήρ Πέρσης τῶν ἀμφὶ Κῦρον χρηστός, προφαίνεται ἐλαύνων ἀνὰ κράτος ἱδροῦντι τῷ ἵππῳ, καὶ εὐθὺς πᾶσιν οἷς ἐνετύγχανεν ἐβόα καὶ βαρβαρικῶς καὶ ἐλληνικῶς ὅτι βασιλεὺς σὺν στρατεύματι πολλῷ προσέρχεται ὡς εἰς μάχην παρεσκευασμένος. (An. 1.8.1)

At which time, Pategyas, a good, Persian man from those around Cyrus, came forth, riding with full force on his sweating horse, and at once shouted to everyone he happened upon, in both the barbarian and the Greek tongue, that the King was coming with a great army, seemingly prepared for a battle.

At the end of the fifth century, Xenophon encountered a Persian man apparently able to speak the Greek language. Of course, this is not the only instance in the Anabasis of an exchange between Greeks and Persians. Yet the overwhelming majority of the bilingual individuals in the Anabasis are not native Greek speakers, but very often ethnic “Others.”

Of course, the primary sources do recount that some Greek individuals learned other languages besides their own. Perhaps most notable is Themistocles, the famous general responsible for the Greek navy’s victory over the invading Persian forces at the battle of Salamis in 480. After the Athenian Assembly ostracized him in 472/1, Themistocles eventually found his way to the court of the Persian king, Artaxerxes I (ruled 465–424). While there, he decided to

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11 Gehman (1914: 30–46) has additional examples and an accompanying discussion of interpreters between Greeks and various foreigners attested in ancient literature.
learn the Old Persian language, thus enabling him to talk with the king without the need of an interpreter (Thuc. 1.137–38; Plut. Them. 29; Nep. Them. 10; Diod. 11.57).12

Themistocles never returned to Athens, but died in the Anatolian city of Magnesia in 459 (Plut. Them. 31). Thus, as interesting as the episode is, it discloses very little about how many Athenians in Athens were bilingual. There is one report that Alcibiades, the Athenian statesman and general (ca 450 to 404), learned Old Persian while at the court of the Persian King (Ath. 12.535e). This report, however, only survives in the work a late second-/early third-century CE grammarian and rhetorician, and it seems most likely that the grammarian, Athenaeus, confused the stories of Themistocles and Alcibiades (Miller 1997: 131). Lastly, Herodotus reports that Histiaeus, the Ionian tyrant of Miletus in the late sixth and early fifth centuries, also used Old Persian, but Herodotus only records that he said “εἴη Ἱστιαῖος ὁ Μιλήσιος” (“[I am] Histiaeus the Milesian”) as a desperate effort to save his own life while being pursued by a Persian soldier (Hdt. 6.29.2).13 Therefore, even if Histiaeus did speak Old Persian, it may have only been a few words, which would not have indicated an ability to speak Old Persian efficiently.

The evidence for any Greek individual knowing Old Persian—or any other foreign language, for that matter—in classical Athens is minimal. According to our extant sources, no Athenian politician, general, or other public figure used any language other than Greek while in Athens. When one also considers the fact that Themistocles was reported to have spoken another

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12 Mayer (1997) and Gera (2007) provide fuller analysis of Themistocles’ acquisition of the Old Persian language, and its possible significance for our understanding of his character and career. They also address the primary sources’ differing treatments of the story.

13 Histiaeus presumably said this short line in Old Persian, but Herodotus provides it in Greek only. What Histiaeus actually said in Old Persian is not known.
language, the absence of other multilingual Greeks in the record becomes glaring. Undoubtedly, some tradesmen, interpreters, and artisans must have spoken both Greek and other languages in classical Athens: international commerce and diplomacy could not have operated without them.\textsuperscript{14} Yet what is debatable is the visibility and influence of such people in Athenian society. Would a playwright such as Aristophanes have had easy access to a merchant or translator who knew Greek and Scythian, Thracian, or Old Persian? Would Aristophanes have gone to the trouble of acquiring any knowledge of these foreign languages to add only a few of lines of dialogue, which most likely would not have been understood by the majority of his audience? What does Aristophanes actually accomplish by portraying these foreign languages in the manner that he does? We will address each of these questions in the subsequent chapters through a close analysis of Aristophanes’ portrayals of foreigners.

\textsuperscript{14} Willi (2004: 676–79) greatly emphasizes this assumption in his own argument. Yet his position that “linguistic diversity was as real in antiquity as it is today,” although probably accurate, relies on very little actual evidence (679). In fact, the evidence seems to suggest that classical Athens was an exception to this rule, at least among the literate levels of society: no prominent Athenian public figure is said to have been fluent in a language other than Greek, save Themistocles.
CHAPTER 2: THE BARBARIAN CLOSE TO HOME

First, we will explore the barbarians who, while originally from lands to the far north and northeast of Greece, were very visible in the day-to-day lives of fifth-century Athenians: the Scythians.\(^\text{15}\) The portrayals of the people who lived in the region known as Scythia in classical Greek literature—less abundant than portrayals of Persians and other Near Eastern peoples—are remarkably uniform. Scythians lived at one extreme of the Greek world, and inhabited cold, snowy lands far from mainland Greece. Greeks portrayed them as rugged, savage warriors who were great soldiers, but had no notions of civilization (Hdt. 4.46; Pl. Leg. 637d–e; Resp. 435e). The Scythians were also believed to be cannibals and to suffer from impotence (Hdt. 1.105; Strabo 4.5.4). Whether these allegations are true is unimportant. What is important is that the Greeks seem to have believed them, and saw the Scythians as barbarian, un-Greek peoples. Herodotus’ fairly long ethnography on the Scythians (4.1–82) predates Aristophanes’ portrayals, but as enlightening as it may be, it does not speak to any widespread Athenian interest in Scythians. In fact, Athenian diplomacy with a Scythian state is never mentioned in any source. Thucydides himself notes the absence of a coherent Scythian state, and even claims that the Scythians would be the strongest force in Asia if they united (2.97.6).

Athenians also had very little military contact with the Scythians, and thus beliefs about them changed little during the classical period. Perhaps it is surprising, then, that Athens purchased a corps of three hundred Scythians during the early stages of the Peloponnesian War

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\(^{15}\) See Figure 1 for a more precise indication of the extent of ancient Scythia.
to serve as a domestic police force. The presence of this police force is a peculiar facet of fifth-century Athens that has not been satisfactorily explained by scholars. The force appears in several works of Old Comedy, where the Scythian policemen are a common target of ridicule and often appear as mute characters (e.g. Ar. Ach. 54–58; Eq. 665). Beyond comedy, however, only a few ancient sources mention the police force, and each of these provides scant information. The following passage of Aeschines is a good example:

ἐν δὲ τούτῳ τῷ χρόνῳ ἐτειχίσαμεν μὲν τὸν Πειραιαὶ καὶ τὸ βόρειον τείχος ῥκοδομήσαμεν, ἑκατὸν δὲ τριήρεις πρὸς ταῖς ὑπαρχούσαις ἐναυαχούσαμε, τριακοσίους δ᾽ ἵππεας προσκατεσκευάσαμε, καὶ τριακοσίους Σκύθας ἐπριάμεθα, καὶ τὴν δημοκρατίαν βεβαίως εἶχομεν. (2.173)

In this time [the Thirty Years’ Peace of 446/5], we walled Piraeus, built the northern wall, added a hundred triremes to the current fleet, equipped three hundred cavalrymen, purchased three hundred Scythians, and firmly maintained the democracy.

The other mentions of the Scythian police force are equally vague and unspecific (Ar. Ach. 54–58; Eq. 665; Xen. Mem. 3.6.1; Andoc. 3.5; Poll. Onom. 8.104). Hall (1989b) and Bäbler (2005) have attempted to ascertain the historicity of the Scythian police force, but their conclusions are hypothetical at best, due to the sparseness of the evidence. A number of questions remain unanswerable. For one, why was a foreign-born police force needed to enforce Athens’ laws?

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16 Hall (1989b: 45–47) offers a detailed list of primary sources that mention this force. Her inclusion of fragments of Old Comedy is especially useful.
Furthermore, why specifically were Scythians used? How much power did they actually have to enforce the laws?\textsuperscript{17}

Scythian archers also appear in Greek art, especially on Greek ceramics. These depictions, however, are nearly uniformly negative. One such example from the classical period, according to Braund (2006), survives on the Eurymedon Vase.\textsuperscript{18} In this depiction, the Scythian is bent forward with his hands on the sides of his head, seemingly mocking the soldier on the opposite side of the vase (not shown) and inviting the soldier to penetrate him at the same time. He is also wearing the stereotypical garb worn by nearly all Scythians in Greek art: a long-sleeved dappled jacket, trousers, and a peculiar hat mainly worn in Greek art by barbarians. The Scythian also wields his conventional arms: the bow, quiver, and several arrows. Braund argues that this vase was most likely created around the same time that the Scythian police force was introduced into Athens (2006: 111–13). Perhaps this vase was a comical piece meant to mock the new social institution, which would have surely caused a commotion among the Athenian populace.

There are also references to a sagacious Scythian named Anacharsis, but most of these references were produced by authors from societies much more cosmopolitan and culturally diverse than classical Athens (e.g. Cic. \textit{Tusc.} 5.32.90; Ath. 10.428d–e; Diog. Laert. 1.101–5;

\textsuperscript{17} As for why the Athenians specifically chose Scythians as their police officers, perhaps the Athenians’ exposure to the Scythians during the Persian Wars was partially responsible. Herodotus reports that a tribe of Scythians, whom he called the Amyrgian Scythians, formed a small part of Xerxes’ army (7.64). It is possible that Athenian forces met this Scythian force and were so impressed by their abilities in battle that they purchased some of them as public slaves a few decades later.

\textsuperscript{18} See Figure 2 for a detail of the Scythian on the Eurymedon Vase. See Figure 3 for a depiction of the stereotypical Scythian. For additional depictions of Scythian archers in Archaic vase paintings, see Lissarrague (1990: 125–49) and Ivanchik (2005).
Lucian *Anach.*; *Scytha*). More importantly, Anacharsis, as Herodotus, our earliest extant source for Anacharsis, characterizes him, was an anomaly who did not fit the typical Scythian stereotype. He was a learned Scythian philosopher and traveler who even journeyed to Greece and adopted a few Greek customs. Upon his return to Scythia, however, his fellow Scythians did not welcome him kindly. While performing religious rites in honor of Cybele that he had learned while in the Greek colony of Cyzicus, a fellow Scythian took note:

ἐσήμηνε τῷ βασιλεὶ Σαυλίῳ· ὁ δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς ἀπικόμενος ὡς εἶδε τὸν Ἀνάχαρσιν ποιεῦντα ταῦτα, τοξεύσας αὐτὸν ἀπέκτεινε. καὶ νῦν ἤν τις εἴρηται περὶ Ἀναχάρσιος, οὐ φασί μιν Σκύθαι γινώσκειν, διὰ τοῦτο ὅτι ἐξεδήμησέ τε ἐς τὴν Ἑλλάδα καὶ ξεινικοῖσι ἔθεσε διεχρῆσατο. (Hdt. 4.76.5)

[The Scythian] reported this to the king, Saulius; then he himself, having arrived there, when he saw Anacharsis doing these things, shot him with an arrow, killing him. And now, whenever someone asks about Anacharsis, the Scythians say they do not know him, because he both went abroad to Greece and practiced foreign customs.

Here, not only does Herodotus describe Anacharsis’ unfortunate death, but he also provides a further example of conventional Scythian savagery. Thus, while some later Greek and Roman writers may have held some respect for this Scythian wise man, Anacharsis was definitely the exception to the customary Athenian attitude toward Scythians. This is especially true in comparison with the members of the Scythian police force, which, as I will demonstrate, Aristophanes portrayed as having very low intelligence. There is no reason to believe that the
noble traits ascribed to Anacharsis were also applied to the Scythian archers that Aristophanes mentions.\textsuperscript{19}

On the contrary: in his comedies, Aristophanes routinely derides the Scythian police, most noticeably in \textit{Lysistrata} (433–65) and \textit{Thesmophoriazusae} (930–1226). This suggests that their presence in Athens must have been real; Aristophanes’ jabs would not have been nearly as funny if they were aimed at an imagined police force rather than an actual one. He depicts an individual Scythian policeman in Athens in \textit{Thesmophoriazusae}, in which the Scythian is known as \textit{Toξότης}, or Archer. Aristophanes most likely staged this play in 411 at the City Dionysia.\textsuperscript{20} The play explores the festival known as the Thesmophoria. Only women were allowed to attend this festival, which seems to have driven the Athenian men wild with curiosity and envy. In this particular comedy, Aristophanes portrays the playwright Euripides and his Kinsman trying to gain admittance to the Thesmophoria. Comedy ensues when the Kinsman dresses as a woman to gain entrance to the festival; he is then revealed as a man and is subsequently arrested and beaten. He is finally rescued by a mythical hero, Perseus, who is actually Euripides in costume. All the while, Aristophanes satirizes both the licentious activities of the women and the scandalous portrayals of these same women in the plays of Euripides. In the final scene of the play, Euripides confronts a Scythian officer who holds his Kinsman prisoner for sneaking into the Thesmophoria. Euripides, ever the sophistic playwright, engages the archer in a lengthy

\textsuperscript{19} For Anacharsis, see further Kindstrand (1981) and Ungefehr-Kortus (1996).

\textsuperscript{20} Henderson (2000: 444–46) provides the best support for this dating of the \textit{Thesmophoriazusae}. 
dialogue loosely modeled on various myths, all in an effort to liberate his Kinsman from captivity.

We will consider here only some of the more revealing lines of broken Greek that the Scythian archer speaks in this play. In the following scene from the play’s finale, the Kinsman is caught by the women at the Thesmophoria, and then bound to a plank. A Scythian archer stands guard over him. The passage includes the Scythian’s first words in the play, and they reveal not only his loose grasp on the Greek language, but also his penchant for torturing his captive.

Τοξότης: ἐνταῦτα νῦν οἰμῶξι πρὸς τὴν αἰτρίαν.
Κηδεστής: ὦ τοξόθ’, ικετεύω σε.
Το.: μή μ’ ικετεύσι σὺ.
Κη.: χάλασον τὸν ἧλον.
Το.: ἀλλὰ ταῦτα δρᾶσ’ ἐγώ.
Κη.: οἴμοι κακοδαίμων, μᾶλλον ἐπικρούεις σὺ γε.
Το.: ἐτι μάλλο βούλις;
Κη.: ἀτταταἱ ἰατταταὶ;
κακῶς ἀπόλοιο.
Το.: σίγα, κακόδαμοι γέρον.
πέρ’, ἐγὼ ἐκενήκι πορμός, ἵνα πυλάξι σοι. (1001–7)

Archer: Now you can wail in the open air.
Kinsman: Oh archer, I beseech you—
Arc.: Don’t beseech me!
Kins.: —to loosen the nail.
Arc.: I’ll do this instead.
Kins.: Goddamn! You’re driving it in even more!
Arc.: Do you want me to do it some more?
Kins.: Ow ow ow ow ow ow.

Damn you!
Arc.: Shut up, old bastard!
Well, I’m going to go get a mat, and I’ll guard you on that.

A few things stand out in the Scythian’s universally poor morphology: his lack of aspirated vowels (for instance, ἢκετεύσι instead of ἢκετεύσῃς [1002]); his lack of aspirated consonants (e.g., αἰτρίαν instead of αἴθρίαν [1001]); and his uniformly incorrect verb endings (such as βοῦλι [1005] and πυλάξι [1007]). Of course, the Scythian’s broken Greek would not have surprised either the other characters in the play or Aristophanes’ audience, since it would have been assumed that Greek was not the police officer’s native language. This assumption, however, does not lessen the comedic effect of the scene. Furthermore, the Scythian’s Greek is much like that of any non-Attic Greek dialect: foreign, yet still understandable. Aristophanes often employs non-Attic dialects to emphasize the otherness of his characters; examples include the Spartan women in Lysistrata and the Theban merchant in Acharnians (Lys. 81–253; Ach. 860–954). The mere fact that the Scythian even attempts to speak Greek is interesting, given that Herodotus states that Scythians were wholly against adopting the customs of others, especially of Greeks (4.76). In fact, on a few occasions, Greek writers depict barbarians communicating through the use of gestures and hand motions when

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they could not use a common language (Hdt. 4.113.2; Aesch. Ag. 1060–61). Most likely, the incorrectness of the archer’s Greek was comical in and of itself to the late fifth-century Athenian audience. Just as modern comedians often parody certain accents and dialects of English, it is feasible that the exaggerated Scythian Greek which the archer used would also have been humorous to Aristophanes’ audience.

Hall argues that with his archer, Aristophanes was attempting to give an accurate depiction of Attic Greek with a Scythian accent (1989b: 38–40). If so, this would have made the scene even more comical to his audience, which would have been very familiar with Scythian policemen. After all, the archer police force was active in the public life of Athens at this time, as indicated by various sources (e.g., Ar. Eccl. 143; 258–59; Pl. Prt. 319b). Although their exact duties remain unclear, Hunter has concluded that their chief function was to maintain public order in the agora, assembly, courts, and at other public gatherings, probably under the authority of the boule (1994: 145–49). Aristophanes, who is our best source for the functioning of this police force in Athens, makes many references to their role as order-keepers in the assembly (Ach. 54–58; Eq. 665; cf. Xen. Mem. 3.6.1). The Athenian public, therefore, was most likely very familiar with these Scythians. It should also be kept in mind that if the few Athenians in power (i.e. the boule) often used these archers to enforce the city’s laws—and often against members of the Athenian citizenry—this likely would have created animosity toward the Scythian police force.

24 Gehman (1914: 13–15) provides some discussion of the few instances in extant sources in which barbarians use gestures to communicate.
The Scythian archers were visible and active members of fifth-century Athenian society. Since the Scythian police force was active in the public life of Athens, and thus likely learned some Attic Greek, then one can assume that Aristophanes was familiar with their use of Attic Greek, since he most likely would have seen these men and interacted with them. Although the Scythian Greek portrayed here is probably still an exaggeration of how these policemen really sounded, the appeal to realism makes the comedy much more effective. On the other hand, Willi argues that the policeman’s broken Greek is indicative of more common foreigner-talk (2003: 220–25). He likens the archer’s speech to the speech of modern individuals speaking a non-native language in the country where the language is spoken (e.g., Americans speaking French in France). While the foreigner’s speech may be humorous to native speakers, Willi argues that this does not necessarily imply any sense of ethnocentrism in the native speakers. Thus, while a Greek audience may have felt superior to a Scythian speaking broken Attic Greek, according to his argument, it would not necessarily have felt a broader cultural superiority. Willi cites the figure of Anacharsis, the wise Scythian mentioned above, as evidence that Greeks did not necessarily consider themselves uniformly superior to Scythians (2003: 223). Although Herodotus does portray Anacharsis in a positive manner, he also portrays other Scythians as ruthless men. Anacharsis, we recall, was the exception to the Greek stereotype of his ethnic group.²⁵

Returning to Aristophanes’ portrayal of his Scythian archer, let us consider another noteworthy aspect of the previous passage: the Scythian’s eagerness to inflict more pain upon the

²⁵ See pp. 23–24 above for discussion of Anacharsis.
already bound Kinsman. Scythians were widely portrayed as bloodthirsty warriors; it thus makes sense for Aristophanes to exploit this common belief, and to portray his Scythian as sadistic and merciless. In the span of only a few lines, the playwright vilifies the Scythian as a dim-witted, violent foreigner who oppresses the Greek protagonist of the play. Aristophanes highlights the seeming stupidity of the archer repeatedly throughout the remainder of the play, as exemplified in the next passage:

Τοξότης: οὔτος, τί λαλίς;
Εὐριπίδης: οὔτος, τί λαλίς;
Το.: προτάνεις καλέσω.
Εὐ.: προτάνεις καλέσω.
Το.: τί κακόν;
Εὐ.: τί κακόν;
Το.: πώτε τὸ πωνή;
Εὐ.: πώτε τὸ πωνή;
Το.: σὺ λαλίς;
Εὐ.: σὺ λαλίς;
Το.: κλαύσαι.
Εὐ.: κλαύσαι.
Το.: κάκκάσκις μοι;
Εὐ.: κάκκάσκις μοι;
Κηδεστῆς: μὰ Δί’, ἀλλὰ γυνὴ πλησίον αὕτη.
Εὐ.: πλησίον αὕτη.
Το.: τοῦ ‘στ’ ἢ μιατά;
Κη.: καὶ δὴ φεύγει.
Το.: ποῖ ποί πεύγεις; <οὐ καιρῆσεις.;
Εὐ.: οὐκ αἰρῆσεις.
Το.: ἔτι γὰρ γρύζεις;
Εὐ.: ἔτι γὰρ γρύζεις;
Το.: λαβὲ τὴ μιαρὰ.
Εὐ.: λαβὲ τὴ μιαρὰ.
Το.: λάλο καὶ κατάρατο γύναικο.
Εὐ.: ὦ θεοί, τίν' ἐς γῆν βαρβάρων ἀφίγμεθα
tαχεῖ πεδίλῳ; (1083–99)

Archer: Hey you, what are you babbling on about?
Euripides: Hey you, what are you babbling on about?
Arch.: I will summon the prytaneis!
Eur.: I will summon the prytaneis!
Arch.: What’s the problem?
Eur.: What’s the problem?
Arch.: Where is the voice coming from?
Eur.: Where is the voice coming from?
Arch.: Are you babbling?
Eur.: Are you babbling?
Arch.: You’ll be sorry!
Eur.: You’ll be sorry!
Arch.: Are you laughing at me?
Eur.: Are you laughing at me?
Kinsman: God no, but it’s rather the woman nearby there.
Eur.: Nearby there.
Arch.: Where is that disgusting woman?
Kins.: Indeed, she is fleeing.
Arch.: Where, where is she fleeing to? <You won’t be happy!>
Eur.: You won’t catch me!
Arch.: Are you still muttering?
Eur.: Are you still muttering?
Arch.: Seize the defiled woman!
Eur.: Seize the defiled woman!
Arch.: Babbling, abominable woman.
Eur.: Oh gods, to what land of barbarians have we come
on quick sandal?

In these lines, not only is the Scythian’s poor understanding of Greek on display again, but Aristophanes also depicts his general stupidity. Euripides, apparently offstage, mimics the archer, pretending to be Echo (1083–96). The archer is thoroughly confounded by Echo; he both looks for and chases a seemingly unattainable, hidden character. At last he gives up and calls Echo a “babbling, abominable woman” (1097). The Scythian’s inability to recognize the true
source of the echo, namely Euripides, again highlights his idiocy, especially since the other characters, and probably the bulk of the audience, are aware of Euripides’ ruse. Then Euripides, dressed as Perseus, enters onto the stage, quoting a line from one of his lost plays (1098–99). This line lends credibility to Aristophanes’ portrayal of Euripides, while simultaneously mocking him, but it also underlines the Scythian’s barbarian nature. The practice of ending nouns with omicrons was very un-Attic, and Euripides points this out very clearly when he enters by rhetorically asking what barbarian land he has reached (1097–99; Willi 2003: 206–8).

Aristophanes then proceeds to ridicule the Scythian’s uncontrollable passion:

To.: ναίκι ναί
κάτησο, κάτησο, ναίκι ναίκι, τυγάτριον.
οίμ’ ὡς στέριτο τὸ τιττί’, ὥσπερ γογγυλί.
Εὐ.: αὐλεὶ σὺ θάττον· ἐτὶ δέδοικας τὸν Σκύθην;
Το.: καλὸ γε τὸ πυγή. κλαύσι γ’ ἢ μὴ ’νδον
μένης.
εἶεν· καλὴ τὸ σκῆμα περὶ τὸ πόστιον.
(1183–88)

Arch.: Yes, yes, sit down, sit down, little girl.
Wow, how firm her little breasts are, just like a turnip!
Eur.: You, play faster. Do you still fear the Scythian?
Arch.: What a fine butt! (To his phallus) You’ll regret it, if you don’t wait inside.
There! Concerning my little prick, everything’s ready!

In this sexually explicit scene, Euripides puts his plan into action: to distract the policeman with a young slave girl while he frees his Kinsman from captivity. The officer is immediately

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26 See Austin and Olson (2004: 326) for a discussion of this line.
infatuated with the girl, fondles her, and then prepares for a quick tryst with her. Meanwhile, all
is going according to Euripides’ plan, and very soon, he and his Kinsman are free. But before
the archer goes off with the girl, he asks the disguised Euripides for his name, in the hope that
this will prevent Euripides from stealing off with the imprisoned Kinsman, whom the archer was
charged with guarding:

To.: ὄνομα δέ σοι τί ἐστιν;
Eu.: Αρτεμισία.
To.: μεμνῆσι τούν τούνομ’ Αρταμουξία.
Eu.: Ἑρμῆ δόλιε, ταυτί μὲν ἐτι καλῶς ποιεῖς.
(1200–2)

Arch.: What is your name?
Eu.: Artemisia.
Arch.: I’ll remember the name: Artamouxia.
Eu.: Deceitful Hermes, you’re still doing things well for me.

The idiocy of the Scythian reaches its height here. Although he is prudent enough to ask for
Euripides’ name before going off with the girl, he completely botches his plan by mishearing the
fake name that Euripides gives him. Euripides had said “Artemisia,” but the archer repeats it as
“Artamouxia.” While this may initially only seem to highlight the Scythian’s inability to
properly process and pronounce Greek, Euripides’ next remark undermines this possibility: he
thanks the god of trickery, Hermes, for making his hoaxes against the archer so successful
(1202). This suggests that Euripides was counting on the Scythian’s inability to correctly
replicate the name Artemisia, thus giving his escape plan another line of defense.

A word here on the name that Euripides gives to the archer: Artemisia. This is probably a
reference to the queen of Halicarnassus, who sailed with Xerxes on his campaign against Greece
and even participated in the battle of Salamis (Hdt. 7.99; 8.87–88). This is especially likely, given the fact that Aristophanes references her in another play as well (Lys. 674–75). Austin and Olson, however, maintain that the Artemisia referenced here may have been a well-known prostitute who merely took the name of the Eastern queen (2004: 345–46). There is undoubtedly a luxurious, Eastern quality to the name Artemisia. This connection to the East is made clearer when the archer repeats the name. The first part of the name “Artamouxia” is arta-, an actual Old Persian prefix that would certainly have evoked thoughts of the Persian king at the time, Artaxerxes I. Thus, by subtly connecting the archer to the barbarian East, Aristophanes makes it even more obvious to his audience that Euripides, as a Greek, is the superior player.

Long is certainly correct when he states that in the Scythian “are combined the cruelty and stupidity which the Greeks felt separated the Hellene from the rest of humanity” (1986: 107). Aristophanes’ Scythian archer, a stereotype familiar to Athenian society, represented everything that characterized the barbarian: stupidity, sadism, irresponsibility, lack of sexual control, and inferiority. The police officer was nearly the exact opposite of his Greek counterpart, Euripides. When Euripides deceives the Scythian into believing that there is another character mimicking his words, Aristophanes juxtaposes the Scythian archer’s inanity with the Greek playwright’s cunning. While Euripides and the Kinsman speak faultless Attic Greek, the Scythian is unable to form many of his words correctly. Although the Athenians probably expected the Scythian policemen to learn Greek—for the Greeks would have never deigned to learn the Scythian language—the archer’s broken Greek was still a source of both comic relief and a feeling of ethnic superiority.
Scythians encompassed everything that the Greeks were not. Scythians dressed, talked, and behaved in manners that were very un-Greek. In effect, Scythians were the perfect “Other.” Aristophanes’ use of a Scythian antagonist in *Thesmophoriazusae* generates a wealth of comic material, and also reinforces the stereotypical views of the Scythians that his Athenian audience held. Yet Scythians were barbarians with whom Aristophanes likely interacted on a regular basis in Athens, and their role as peacekeepers in Athens likely made them quite unpopular among those subject to their authority. As a result, Aristophanes’ ridicule of a representative of this disliked group not only made for good comedy, but more than that, it strengthened Greek biases towards Scythians.
CHAPTER 3: THE VOICELESS BARBARIAN

To the immediate north of Greece and Macedonia lies the region of Thrace, a cold land that is also rich in precious metals and other resources. Thracians appear in Greek literature only rarely. Herodotus provides a brief assessment of them in his *Histories*:

Θρηίκων δὲ ἔθνος μέγιστον ἐστὶ μετὰ γε Ἰνδοὺς πάντων ἀνθρώπων· εἰ δὲ ύπ᾽ ἑνὸς ἄρχοιτο ἢ φρονέοι κατὰ τῶντό, ἀμαχόν τ᾽ ἂν εἴη καὶ πολλῷ κράτιστον πάντων ἑθνέων κατὰ γνώμην τὴν ἐμήν. ἀλλὰ γὰρ τούτο ἀπωθένοι καὶ ἀμήχανον μή κοτὲ ἐγγένηται, εἰσὶ δὴ κατὰ τούτο ἀσθενέες. (5.3.1)

The race of the Thracians is the most populous, after the Indians, of all peoples: if they were ruled by one person, or had this in mind, they would, in my judgment, be invincible and the strongest of all races by far. But since there is no way and no means for this to ever come about, they are indeed weak for this reason.

Herodotus believed that their inability to unite negated any positive traits the Thracians might have had. Thucydides briefly mentions a Thracian king, Sitalces, who was allied to the Athenians during the initial phases of the Peloponnesian War. This partnership seems to have had little impact on the war itself (2.95–101). After Sitalces failed to bring an army of reinforcements to the Athenian forces, he was killed in a battle by the Triballians, another Thracian tribe (Thuc. 4.101). Thucydides thus highlights the king’s ineffectiveness as an ally.

Plato, too, mentions the Thracians: he includes them in a list of bellicose peoples, but does not provide a rationale for this decision (*Leg.* 637d). Finally, Jerome, an early Christian scholar who

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27 See Figure 2 for an approximation of the extent of Thrace.
flourished in the fourth and fifth centuries CE, tells us that the Thracians conducted human sacrifices (Ep. 60.4).

Perhaps the most famous Thracian in all of Greek literature was Tereus, king of Thrace. According to Ovid’s telling of the Tereus myth (Met. 6.424–674; it is also briefly discussed in Thuc. 2.29 and Apollod. Bibl. 3.14.8), Tereus was married to Procne, the daughter of Pandion, king of Athens. Upon meeting his sister-in-law, Philomela, for the first time, he became insatiably lustful and raped her. To prevent her from revealing his crime to anyone, he cut out Philomela’s tongue. Philomela, unable to speak, revealed Tereus’ rape by weaving the incident into a tapestry, which was then given to Procne. To avenge Philomela’s violation and mutilation, the two sisters boiled Tereus’ son from Procne, Itys, and served the stew to Tereus, who was completely unaware of their plot. Once he finished eating, they presented Itys’ head to him on a platter. Before Tereus was able to exact his own revenge, all three were transformed into birds. In this gruesome yet popular Greek myth, the king of Thrace is depicted as lustful, brutal, sadistic, cannibalistic, and treacherous all at the same time.

Aristophanes drew his portrayals of his Thracian characters from stereotypes about these northern barbarians, stereotypes not unlike those embedded in the sources just mentioned. As we have seen, in many ancient sources the stereotypical Thracian was an uncivilized barbarian with a penchant for war and an ignorance of culture. Aristophanes portrayed his Thracians as such on multiple occasions. For instance, he takes a jab at Cleophon in Frogs by likening him to a Thracian swallow:

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28 Sophocles also composed a play titled Tereus, which is lost.
Χορός: Μοῦσα, χορῶν ἱερῶν ἐπίβηθι καὶ ἐλθὲ ἐπὶ
tέρψιν
ἀοιδᾶς ἐμᾶς,
tὸν πολὺν ὀψομένη λαῶν ὄχλον, ὦ σοφίαι
μυρίαι κάθηνται
φιλοτιμότεραι Κλεοφώντος, ἐφ’ ὦ δὴ
χείλεσιν ἀμφιλάλοις
deινὸν ἐπιβρέμεται
Θρηκία χελιδὼν
ἐπὶ βάρβαρον ἑζομένη πέταλον. (674–82)

Chorus: Muse, start up holy dances and come for
enjoyment of my song,
seeing the great crowd of men, where boundless
wisdom lies,
more ambitious than Cleophon, on whose
bilingual lips
a Thracian swallow
roars terribly
sitting terribly
sitting on a barbarian petal.

According to Aristophanes’ chorus, the speech of Cleophon, a very popular democratic politician
who flourished in the last decade of the fifth century, resembles a Thracian swallow. Swallows
in Greek antiquity were often characterized as chirping nonsense, due mainly to their twittering
songs. Most likely, Cleophon was not a Thracian, but his mother might have been. Plato
Comicus also seems to call Cleophon’s mother a Thracian (fr. 61), thus giving more credence to
the joke here. It is also entirely possible that Aristophanes and Plato Comicus ascribed a
Thracian heritage to Cleophon merely for comedic effect. As is still true today, calling someone
a foreigner can be a sure way to ridicule him or her. At any rate, we see here that the Thracian

29 See Vanderpool (1952) for further information on the career of Cleophon.
30 Thompson (1936: 314–25) provides a fuller analysis of swallows in Greek literature.
31 Sommerstein (1996: 214–15) has a fuller discussion of these lines and the possible Thracian lineage of Cleophon.
language was a potential source of ridicule for Attic comedians. It seems that Thracians were not known in Athens for their eloquent Greek.

The above passage also reveals Greek distaste for bilingualism. Greeks were seemingly meant to speak only Greek. This is especially evident in two separate passages from Xenophon’s *Anabasis*. In the second book, a Greek named Phalinus, who served the Persian satrap, Tissaphernes, approaches the Greek army under the leadership of Clearchus to relay the satrap’s demands. Clearchus poignantly reminds him of his Greek roots, and states that if he wishes to preserve his honor among his fellow countrymen, he must help them (2.1.7–23). In the seventh book, Xenophon reminds a Greek ambassador to Thrace named Heracleides of his Greek roots, and that he must also stop aiding the Thracians if he wishes to avoid punishment from his fellow countrymen (7.6.41). In both cases, the Greeks seem to frown upon bilingualism: Greeks were above all else Greeks, and thus had a responsibility to serve their own people’s interests before the interests of others and speak their own people’s languages. Thus, Aristophanes’ remark that Cleophon had bilingual lips suggests that the politician was not a fully loyal, committed Athenian.

Returning to the depictions of Thracians, the mythical Thracian king, Tereus, also appears in Aristophanes’ *Birds* as a hoopoe bird, the bird into which he metamorphosed after unknowingly eating his own son (Ar. Av. 92–675; Ov. Met. 670–74). In this play, two Athenian men, Peisetairos and Euelpides, frustrated by the constant wars of Athens, seek Tereus, now a bird, in order to join his community of birds. Tereus seems to have lost all traces of his old

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32 Gera (2007: 454) provides a few more instances from Greek literature where a distrust of bilingual individuals is clear.
Thracian nature; he is now friendly, civilized, and able to use correct Greek morphology and grammar. In fact, he tells Peisetairos:

Tereus: Τηρεύς: ἔγω γὰρ αὐτοὺς βαρβάρους ὄντας πρὸ τοῦ ἐδίδαξα τὴν φωνήν, ξυνὼν πολὺν χρόνον. (199–200)

For, I was with them for a long time when they were barbarians, before I taught them speech [i.e. the Greek language].

Tereus has no trouble with the Greek language, which is not true for another Thracian character in this play who will be discussed later. Aristophanes never explains why he is no longer like the violent king who raped and mutilated Philomela, but his transformation into a bird might have had some influence. Eventually, with the help of Tereus and his fellow birds, Peisetairos and Euelpides become birds themselves and create a city of birds in the sky, which they call Cloudcuckooland (Νεφελοκοκκυγία, 819). A few visitors stop by the new city, whom Peisetairos and Euelpides drive off, before the gods Poseidon, Heracles, and Triballos, a Thracian god, show up. There is a problem: Cloudcuckooland lies between Earth and the heavens, and thus men’s sacrifices are prevented from reaching the gods. The gods seek to reclaim the offerings that are due to them, but Peisetairos and Euelpides refuse. Subsequently, the two parties reach an agreement in which the birds become the gods’ allies, and in return, Peisetairos is given the Princess (Βασίλεα) as a bride, who comes with all of Zeus’ power and
sovereignty. The play ends with a grandiose wedding between Peisetairos and the Princess, which makes him the supreme ruler of the cosmos.

Like the Scythian in *Thesmophoriazusae*, Triballos serves a dual role: he is the victim of many of Aristophanes’ jokes, but also provides a barbarian standard against which the Greek characters of the play can be measured. The first significant aspect of Triballos to consider, however, is his name. The Triballians were a Thracian tribe that lived just south of the Danube River in modern-day Bulgaria. As Dunbar notes, there is no passage in extant Greek literature to suggest why Aristophanes chose this tribe in particular to characterize his barbarian god (1995: 702). The Triballians were known as a fierce, warlike people who conquered their Thracian neighbors and Athenian allies, the Odrysae, who were ruled by King Sitalces, ca 424 (Thuc. 2.95–101; Isoc. *Panath.* 227; Papazoglu 1978: 10–11). A pair of sources recounts that a few decades after this conquest, in 376/5, the Triballians led an expedition against the Greek city of Abdera (Diod. Sic. 15.36.1–40; Aen. Tact. 15.8–10). While the latter campaign occurred after the lifetime of Aristophanes, he was likely aware of the Triballians’ penchant for war from their earlier campaign against Sitalces. This knowledge may have presented Aristophanes with the opportunity to name his barbarian god after this tribe of Thracians. Whatever the reason for Aristophanes’ choice, the Triballians were certainly known as Thracians in Athens, and Thracians in general were known for their ferocious and bellicose demeanor.

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33 The identity of this goddess is not known, but Dunbar persuasively concludes that she is not Hera, nor any other Olympian deity, but an invention of Aristophanes that represents all of Zeus’ powers (1998: 480–81).

34 See Map 2 for a more precise indication of the location of the Triballians. Note especially their distance from Athens.

35 Papazoglu (1978: 9–129) and Theodossiev (2000: 71–100) reconstruct a historical narrative of the Triballian tribe from the very few sources that remain today.
Although the Thracian god’s role is not as important to the plot of *Birds* as that of the Scythian archer is to the plot of *Thesmophoriazusae*, Triballos’ few lines of dialogue are very enlightening. Triballos first appears in a scene in which Peisetairos explains to the trio of divine ambassadors—Poseidon, Heracles, and Triballos—why humans should also swear oaths by the birds in addition to those they swear by the Olympian gods (1581–1621). He asks for affirmation from Triballos, who seems to agree with Peisetairos:

Πεισέταιρος: τί δαὶ σὺ φῆς;
Τριβαλλός: να, Βαισατρευ.
Ἡρακλῆς: ὁρᾷς, ἐπαινεῖ χοῦτος. (1615–16)

Peisetairos: So what do you say?
Triballos: *Na, Baisatreu!*
Heracles: You see, even this one approves.

This line has been endlessly debated by scholars. Dunbar postulates that it should be read as, “Yes, Peisetairos!” (1995: 724–25), but Colvin disagrees, noting the different number of syllables and divergence in spelling between Πεισέταιρος and Βαισατρευ (1999: 289–90). In the wider context of the play, this line has very little significance. Still, Aristophanes establishes the otherness of the Triballian god with his very first line of dialogue.

Shortly after this scene, Heracles and Poseidon are deliberating Peisetairos’ latest proposal: an alliance between the birds and the Olympian gods. Poseidon tells Heracles to ask for Triballos’ opinion, but Heracles instead intimidates Triballos in order to make him agree:

Ἡρ.: ὁ Τριβαλλός, οἴμωξειν δοκεῖ σοι;
Τρ.: σαυ νακα βακταιρι κρουσα.
Ἡρ.: φησί μ’ εὐ λέγειν πάννυ.
(1628–29)

**Her.** Hey Triballos, does wailing aloud seem good to you?

**Tri.** *Sau naka baktari krousa.*

**Her.** He says that I speak very well.

Here, Triballos’ words are perhaps nonsensical, but they do seem to contain some traces of Greek. The word βακταρι may be a derivative of βακτηρία, which means “stick.” Additionally, κρουσα may be a form of κρούω, “to hit.” The other two words, however, are probably gibberish. σαυ may be a form of the personal pronoun σε, and νακα may likewise be a variant of νάκη, meaning “fleece” or “goatskin.” Dunbar offers a pair of possible interpretations: (1) “You strike my hide with your stick?” (2) “I’ll hit your hide with my stick!” (1995: 728). It is possible that Triballos’ words, taken together with the movements of the actor depicting him, may have made his meaning clear to the audience. Nevertheless, his words seem to have been lost on Heracles. After threatening Triballos, Heracles seems to take the Thracian’s words as a compliment. This may point to Heracles’ notorious lack of intelligence, a theme that also runs throughout this play; but it may also suggest the Greek god’s total dismissal of the barbarian god. Instead of attempting to decipher Triballos’ jumbled words, Heracles simply translates them as he sees fit.

This theme of forced translation is even more apparent in the following passage. Here, the three gods are deciding whether they should accept Peisetairos’ latest offer: that the gods hand over the Princess of Zeus to Peisetairos as his bride. Again, the gods ask Triballos for his opinion on the matter:
Πισ.: ἐν τῷ Τριβαλλῷ πᾶν τὸ πρᾶγμα. τί σὺ λέγεις;
Τρ.: καλάνι κόραυνα καὶ μεγάλα βασιλιναύ ὁρνίτο παραδίδωμι.
Ἡρ.: παραδούναι λέγει.
Ποσειδῶν: μὰ τὸν Δί' οὐχ οὗτός γε παραδοῦναι λέγει,
eἰ μὴ βαβάζει γ' ὡσπερ αἱ χελιδόνες.
(1677–81)

Pis.: The entire affair is up to Triballos.
Tri.: Me give the pretty girl and great queen to the birdie.
Her.: He says to give her over.
Poseidon: No, by Zeus, he doesn’t say to give her over, he’s merely chirping like the swallows.

This time, Triballos’ lines are mostly intelligible, though akin to the Scythian’s broken Greek in *Thesmophoriazusae*. Scholars debate whether or not there is a negation in Triballos’ lines, but ultimately it does not seem to matter, as Heracles again interprets Triballos’ words as he pleases. This time, however, Poseidon corrects his nephew, stating that Triballos did not say anything comprehensible, but is chirping like a swallow, i.e. spitting out nonsensical gibberish. Even though Aristophanes’ audience could probably understand the gist of Triballos’ lines here, the other two gods do not, or choose not to understand him. Again, the barbarian character is mocked by his Greek counterparts, presumably much to the delight of the Athenian audience.

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36 See Dunbar (1995: 735–36) for a brief overview of this debate.
37 Cf. pp. 35–36 for discussion of swallows’ songs and, as the Greeks saw it, their likeness to barbarian speech.
As in *Thesmophoriazusae*, in *Birds* Aristophanes utilizes Athenian stereotypes of northern barbarians for comedic effect, and lends no empowerment or sophistication to his Thracian god. Although Triballos’ broken Greek is less understandable than that of the Scythian archer from *Thesmophoriazusae*, these two characters are portrayed in very similar fashions: they are both inferior to the Greek characters with whom they share the stage. Euripides and his Kinsman deceive and outwit the archer for the duration of the latter’s presence on stage. Likewise, while the Greek gods Poseidon and Heracles ask Triballos for his opinion on three separate occasions, they never do acknowledge what he actually says, thus stripping his words and gestures of any force. Both the Scythian archer and Triballos play comic foils to their Greek counterparts, and the fact that they are barbarians only heightens the comic aspects of their scenes.
Lastly, we will examine Aristophanes’ portrayal of Persians. In the mid to late fourth century, the Persians, a completely alien and barbarian people in the minds of many Greeks, were no longer lining up against unified Greeks in battle. Instead, allied Greek armies were fighting against other allied Greek armies, while numerous Greeks were serving as mercenaries in Persian armies. The notion of the enemy as the “Other” was confounded, because former allies were now enemies, and because many Greek cities sought funds and reinforcements from the formerly hostile Persian Empire. Athens sent numerous envoys to the Persian kings Artaxerxes I (ruled 465–424), Xerxes II (ruled 424), and Darius II (ruled 424–404) during the Peloponnesian War in the hopes of securing the kings’ financial backing, and numerous Persian ambassadors were sent in return to various cities throughout Greece. Although neither Athens nor Sparta secured Persia’s favor during the early period of the war, after the disaster of Athens’ expedition to Sicily (415–413), Persia sided with Sparta. Naval fleets laden with talents were sent over to the Spartan admirals, and although the Persian navies did very little militarily to assist the Spartans in battle, their monetary assistance eventually helped Sparta overwhelm the Athenians.

As a result of Athens’ persistent courtship of Persian aid during the war and the frequent presence of Persian envoys in the city, Persians became much more visible and familiar to the Athenians than ever before. Persia was still seen as foreign, decadent, and barbarian, as is

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38 See Figure 3 for the vast territory of the Persian Empire.
39 Briant (2002: 591–600) and Kagan (2003: 154–55, 346–59) provide detailed accounts of Persia’s actions during the Peloponnesian War. Thuc. 8.5–44 provides the most thorough primary narrative of these events.
evident from Aristophanes’ few depictions of Persians. Their role in the collective Athenian mindset, however, had changed, because Athens was now seeking Persia’s aid against a more local—and more culturally similar—enemy. Contrary to Aeschylus’ and Euripides’ more hostile views of Persians, Aristophanes’ portrayal of a Persian character casts the Persians as a respectable people, if only moderately.40

This depiction occurs in *Acharnians*, in which the protagonist, Dicaeopolis, a middle-aged farmer, is stuck in Athens, unable to return to his country farm due to the ongoing war with Sparta. He sits in the Athenian assembly, where he listens to various Athenian ambassadors who have returned from abroad, each of them with various stories detailing how much he enjoyed his trip at public expense. Dicaeopolis, fed up that no one in the assembly discusses any plans for procuring peace, happens to meet Amphitheus, an immortal who is able to secure a private peace between Dicaeopolis and Sparta. This allows Dicaeopolis to return to his farm, where he then celebrates his peace. Here at his farm, a group of battle-hardened Acharnians approach Dicaeopolis, demanding that he take up war again. Dicaeopolis rebukes them, eventually convincing them that peace indeed is preferable to war. After Dicaeopolis deals with several other individuals who visit his farm, where he has set up a private market, the play ends with Dicaeopolis merrily and drunkenly celebrating his peace. This cheerful image is starkly contrasted with the image of Lamachus, Dicaeopolis’ neighbor, who has just returned from battle, wounded and in severe pain.

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40 See Hall (1989a) and Isaac (2004: 257–83) for further discussion regarding other fifth-century authors and their views on Persia.
Of all of Aristophanes’ extant plays, only *Acharnians* depicts a contemporary event: in this instance, the Peloponnesian War. The play seems to be a strong exhortation from Aristophanes to his fellow citizens to pursue peace. But how closely do the views of Dicaeopolis, whose name means “righteous city,” match those of Aristophanes? Some scholars have interpreted Dicaeopolis as the direct mouthpiece of Aristophanes (e.g., Starkie 1979: xxviii–xxix). Others have taken a more critical view of this opinion, noting that differing, often contradictory political stances emerge from the various characters in the play, which makes it near impossible to ascertain Aristophanes’ own beliefs (e.g., Olson 2002: xlix–l ii). Regardless of what Aristophanes may have hoped to convey to his audience through this play, the character of Dicaeopolis undoubtedly opposes the war, and all of the absurdities and hardships that accompany it. One such absurdity, as noted above, occurs near the beginning of the play, while Dicaeopolis is sitting in the Athenian assembly. Here, he listens to a series of Athenian envoys returning from various places abroad (1–202). One such envoy has returned from the Persian royal court, and he has brought a Persian envoy with him. This envoy is ὁ ὀφθαλμὸς βασιλέως, the King’s Eye.

Before discussing the lines spoken by the King’s Eye, a few matters should be considered. First, his name: Pseudartabas. This perhaps means “false measure,” from ψευδής and ἀρτάβη. The *artabe* was a Persian dry measure. It is already attested in Herodotus (1.192.3), but it occurs much more frequently in Ptolemaic and Roman papyri from Egypt.
Several commentators argue for this interpretation of the Persian ambassador’s name.\textsuperscript{41} However, a more persuasive interpretation of the name is provided by Olson (2002: 101). Pseudartabas may in fact be a combination of both Greek and Persian elements: the Greek word \textit{ψευδής}, and an Old Persian prefix, \textit{arta-}. Although the latter does not appear by itself in any lexicon of Old Persian, it appears as a prefix in many Old Persian words and names, such as \textit{artāvan} (“righteous”) and \textit{Artaxšaça} (“Artaxerxes”).\textsuperscript{42} The Persian king at the time of the production of \textit{Acharnians} was Artaxerxes I (ruled 465–424), which virtually guarantees that Aristophanes was familiar with the name when he composed his play. The idea that an Old Persian element may lurk behind the name Pseudartabas is appealing. It suggests that Aristophanes had some familiarity with the Old Persian language, if only with proper names. Furthermore, by adopting this interpretation, the few lines spoken by Pseudartabas become even more meaningful.

We must also consider who, exactly, the Persian King’s Eye was. Several authors mention the institution of the King’s Eye (Aesch. \textit{Pers.} 979; Hdt. 1.114.2; Xen. \textit{Cyr.} 8.2.10–12). While the duties of this official differ in each source, Briant has concluded that the responsibilities of the King’s Eye were essentially those of royal spies (2002: 343–44). Most likely, there were numerous King’s Eyes spread throughout the immense Persian Empire, and they reported any news of rebellion or corruption directly to the king.\textsuperscript{43} It also seems that they served as envoys to foreign nations, relating the demands of the king to foreign peoples.

\textsuperscript{41} E.g. Starkie (1979: 30–31) and Whitehorne (2005: 39).
\textsuperscript{42} See Kent (1953: 170–71) and Skjaervo (2002: 161) for a fuller discussion of the prefix \textit{arta-} and related words.
\textsuperscript{43} See also Autran (1950: 287–90) for the King’s Eyes.
Unfortunately, the King’s Eyes are not attested in the extant Old Persian texts, and thus nothing else is known about this corps of royal spies outside of the data from Greek sources.

Given the date of composition of *Acharnians* (425), at the height of the Peloponnesian War, Aristophanes had most likely observed Persian envoys regularly in the Athenian assembly. Therefore it is probably safe to assume that the character of Pseudartabas, just like that of the Scythian archer from *Thesmophoriazusae*, was based on actual people that the playwright encountered in Athens. At the very least, Aristophanes and his audience were likely familiar with scenes of Persian envoys in the Athenian assembly. Aristophanes may have based the following scene on contemporary events in the city:

| Πρεσβευτής | ἄγε δὴ σὺ, βασιλεὺς ἂττα σ’ ἀπέπεμψεν φράσον λέξοντ’ Ἀθηναίοισιν, ὦ Ψευδαρτάβα. |
| Ψευδαρτάβας | ιαρταμανεξαρξαναπισσονασατρα. |
| Πρ.: | ξυνίεθ’ ὃ λέγει; |
| Δικαιόπολις: | μὰ τὸν Ἀπόλλω ἓ ἔω μὲν οὐ. |
| Πρ.: | πέμψειν βασιλέα φησίν ύμιν χρυσίον. λέγε δὴ σὺ μείζον καὶ σαφῶς τὸ χρυσίον. |
| Ψευ.: | οὐ λῆψι χρυσό, χαυνόπρωκτ’ Ἰαοναῦ. |
| Δικ.: | οἴμοι κακοδαίμων, ὡς σαφῶς. (98–105) |

Ambassador: Come on, Pseudartabas, tell the Athenians the things which the king sent you here to tell them.

Pseudartabas: *iartamanexarxanapisonasatra*.

Amb.: Do you understand what he’s saying?

Dicaeopolis: No, by Apollo, I do not.

Amb.: He’s saying that the king will send you gold.
(To Pseudartabas) Speak louder and clearly about the gold.

Ps.: You ain’t gonna get no gold, loose-assed Greeks!

Dic.: Holy crap, how clear that was!

Line 100 (ιαρταμανεξαρξαναπισσονασατρα) has been debated by scholars for over a century. Numerous interpretations have been proposed, but nothing has been proven definitively for a number of reasons. First of all, there are problems with the manuscripts, and several variations exist. Next, editors must contend with the problem of word division. Unfortunately, no matter how the words are partitioned, there are still no obvious Greek or Persian words in the line. Editors must either emend the text, or arrive at an alternative explanation for the line. Some have tried to reconstruct an Old Persian sentence or a collection of words from related Near Eastern languages, but no attempt has been successful. Among the more unconvincing of these are those of Margoliouth (1887) and Aveline (2000). Margoliouth attempted to reconstruct the line as a series of corruptions of old Sanskrit words, while Aveline argued that the line is actually a string of Greek words made to sound more Persian-like. Neither theory has won broad acceptance. Tolman (1906) assumed that the line consists of several Old Persian syllables, and perhaps even whole words. Unfortunately, it seems that he manipulated the Old Persian to create a hypothetical “correct” line, rather than first examining each component of the line independent of the others, and only afterwards fitting everything together. Further, he mistranslated several of the Old Persian words he drew from the line, e.g., “harass” for πιš-, which actually translates

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44 Willi (2004: 661–63) resolves this problem quite persuasively, and his text, which is identical to Olson’s, is printed here. For the rest of the play, I use the edition of Wilson (2007).
Moreover, his connection of the Greek ωγρα to the Old Persian išayatiy is not at all convincing: he neglects to provide any linguistic reasons for the connection, and without them, the differences in types of consonants and number of syllables make his reading difficult to accept. Tolman’s final reading of the line, “Xerxes sends me to harass (your) kingdom,” simply contains too many linguistic suppositions for it to be plausible.

Friedrich (1921), Dover (1963), and Willi (2004) take very similar approaches, using Iranian linguistics to reconstruct the line. Friedrich concludes that the line says in Old Persian, hy’ artamanā Xarxas abiy Yaunā xšaθā, which translates to “The well-disposed Xerxes to the Attic kingdom” (1921: 101). Similarly, Dover supposes that the line reads, Iarta nāma Xarxaā puça satrā, which he translates as “Iarta by name, son of Xerxes, satrap” (1963: 8). There are problems with this reading that Dover does not explain. First, there is no reason for Pseudartabas to reintroduce himself to the assembly; his arrival was already announced in line 91. Moreover, why would he also have the name of Iarta? Dover’s explanation that this was another comic device is not persuasive: having two names is not attested as a joke in classical Greek literature. Willi’s analysis results in hī artaman’ Ḥšæršā niyapθ’ ovaθ’ aθrā, which means, “The well-minded Xerxes wrote down these things here” (2004: 673).

All of these reconstructions have their merits, but they share the same problem: none makes much sense in the context of the play. The Greek ambassador has instructed Pseudartabas to tell Dicaeopolis and the rest of the assembly why he has come to Athens. Friedrich’s interpretation lacks a verb, and there is moreover no good reason why Aristophanes would have

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45 See Kent (1953: 194) for a full analysis of piš- and related words.
composed the line as Friedrich translates it. Along the same lines, Willi’s translation, while a complete sentence, presents its own problems. What are the “these things here” (οναθ’ αβρα) that Xerxes wrote down? Willi postulates that Pseudartabas was holding a papyrus roll from the Persian King himself, and was sent to deliver the message to the assembly (2004: 674). While this is a possibility, Willi does not adequately address a further problem. Just as Friedrich and Dover do, Willi does not persuasively argue why Aristophanes would have gone to the trouble of rendering a genuine Persian sentence into Greek, which he then inserted into his play. Few, if any, in Aristophanes’ audience would have understood the Old Persian message.

The last theory for the reconstruction of line 100 that I will discuss was first put forth by West (1968), and has consequently been accepted by both Sommerstein (1980: 162) and Long (1986: 134). West argues that the line is simply a collection of Old Persian syllables, and thus sounds like something a Persian delegate would say, but is not actual Old Persian. His breakdown of the syllables in 100 and their corresponding matches in the Old Persian corpus is very convincing. The playwright seems to have composed a line of syllables that he had likely heard in Persian speech, but with no deeper significance.46

Regardless of its meaning, the important point is that Dicaeopolis fails to understand Pseudartabas. Most likely the audience did as well. This raises the question of why Aristophanes used Old Persian, or at least Old Persian-sounding words here. Just as with the Scythian in Thesmophoriazusae and the Thracian in Birds, the mockery of the foreignness of the

46 Starkie (1979: 33–34), Graves (1982: 60), Chiasson (1984: 132–33), Miller (1997: 130–31) and Olson (2002: 104–5) remain neutral on the line, offering multiple possibilities that were presented by editors before them, but committing themselves to none of them.
Persian ambassador seems to have been comical to the Athenian audience. Also, as noted previously, Persian ambassadors had been appearing fairly frequently throughout Greece at the onset of the Peloponnesian War. Poking fun at these meddlesome foreigners, or at least their language, may have helped relieve some of the aggression directed towards them and perhaps some of the general tension in a city that was in the midst of a long and destructive war.

If we look more closely at the scene, however, we see that Aristophanes actually strays somewhat here from his tendency to belittle foreigners in his plays. In 104, Pseudartabas strongly chastises the Athenian assembly, boldly proclaims that the Great King will not send any gold to Athens, and then calls the assembled group of Athenians “loose-assed Greeks,” an attack on the Athenians’ supposed sexual passivity (χαυνόπρωκτ’ Ἰαοναῦ, 104). The envoy does not understand Pseudartabas’ words here, but Dicaeopolis—and presumably the Athenian audience as well—understands them, for these broken words of Greek are similar to the Scythian’s lines (Thesm. 1001–225) and Triballos’ last line (Birds 1679), in that though they are doctored, they are still decipherable.

How exactly was Pseudartabas able to get away with insulting the Athenian assembly so bluntly, and with such a meager response from the Athenians? After the insult, Dicaeopolis threatens Pseudartabas and his attendants, vehemently asking them whether the Persian King will send Athens gold:

Δικ.: ποίας ἀχάνας; σὺ μὲν ἀλαζῶν εἰ μέγας.
ἀλλ᾽ ἄπιθ᾽· ἐγὼ δὲ βασανιῶ τοῦτον μόνος.
ἀγε δὴ σὺ φράσον ἐμοὶ σαφῶς πρὸς τούτον,
ίνα μὴ σε βάψω βάμμα Σαρδιανικόν.
Dic.: What sort of measure is this? You are a big imposter.
Get lost! I will examine this matter alone.
Come, talk to me about this clearly,
so that I don’t dip you in Sardinian dye:
Will the Great King send us gold?
Or are we deceived by the ambassadors?
These men nodded in a Greek manner,
So they are from this very place!
I knew that one of these two eunuchs
was Cleisthenes, son of Sibyrtius.
Oh shaven, hot-headed ass,
Oh monkey, having such a beard,
you came to us dressed as a eunuch?
And who in the world is this? Is it not Straton?

Dicaeopolis seems to receive confirmation that, indeed, no gold is coming to Athens. He does not linger on this fact for too long, however, as he quickly notices that Pseudartabas’ attendants, who are now revealed to be eunuchs, are in fact Greek men. He identifies one as Cleisthenes, an Athenian politician whom Aristophanes frequently ridiculed in his comedies as a beardless, effeminate man (e.g., Lys. 1092; Eq. 1373–74; Av. 829–31). Dicaeopolis proceeds to identify the other eunuch as an Athenian man named Straton, about whom nothing is known.

Unfortunately, before Dicaeopolis can continue his ridicule of these eunuchs, a herald from the *boule* interrupts him and announces that the *boule* has invited the Persian ambassador to dine in the Prytaneion, much to the displeasure of Dicaeopolis (123–29).

The significance of this scene is difficult to ascertain. The fact that the eunuchs are Greek men does not affect our analysis of Pseudartabas: for Aristophanes mocks two of his favorite Athenian targets for being effeminate, but not for being in league with a Persian official. Dicaeopolis does reply to Pseudartabas’ scathing remark in line 104, but not to Pseudartabas himself. He first calls the Athenian ambassador to Persia a μέγας ἄλαζων ("great imposter"), then unveils the true identities of Pseudartabas’ eunuchs, but he never personally attacks Pseudartabas. Why does Dicaeopolis, and by extension, Aristophanes, shy away from openly ridiculing the Persian King’s Eye?

The answer to this question lies in the nature of Athens’ stance toward Persia in Aristophanes’ time. As noted previously, Persia was no longer Athens’ main enemy at the time that *Acharnians* was produced, ca 425. Instead, Persia’s aid was being sought by numerous Greek envoys from both camps in the Peloponnesian War. While they were still mocked in many respects, Persians were now recognized in both Athens and Sparta as possible allies in a potentially long war against fellow Greeks. Aristophanes mocked them in *Acharnians*, ridiculing their decadent lifestyle and servile obeisance to their king, but he also gave to the Persian ambassador a surprisingly strong voice, even allowing him to mock the Athenian citizens gathered in the assembly. Of course, Aristophanes’ mockery of Athenians is not unheard of or even unusual. But the fact that Aristophanes depicts well-known Athenian men in the retinue of
So A Persian King’s Eye definitely is. Such mockery of Athenians for the aggrandizement of barbarians is quite significant considering Aristophanes’ other portrayals of “Others.”
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

When one compares the scene with the Persian King’s Eye to those featuring the Scythian archer and the Thracian god analyzed above, the contrast in Aristophanes’ treatments of the three characters becomes stark. The Persian is allowed to speak out against the Greeks, while the Scythian and Thracian are always mocked, and never gain the upper hand over their Greek counterparts. The political environment in which Aristophanes created these barbarian characters accounts for the dissimilar treatments of the barbarians.

The Scythian archer of Thesmophoriazusae, who belonged to a group which Athenians had presumably seen and with whom they had presumably interacted on a regular basis, is freely ridiculed. There were few, if any, repercussions for deriding a Scythian policeman who possessed no power or influence of his own. Nor does the fact that the archer used broken Greek seem to bolster his status, especially as the archer’s fractured Greek stands in direct contrast to the perfect Greek spoken by his costars, Euripides and the Kinsman. Aristophanes’ mockery of the archer, however, goes beyond his language. Even though he speaks broken Greek, he is still portrayed as a stereotypical barbarian: violent, lustful, and dimwitted.

Aristophanes portrays the Thracian god of Birds, Triballos, in a similar negative manner, and perhaps even more negatively than the Scythian archer. Triballos has very few lines of dialogue, but in these few lines the playwright portrays him as an unintelligent god with little grasp of the Greek language. Moreover, Triballos is constantly disregarded by the Greek gods, Poseidon and Heracles. Even though these two gods ask for Triballos’ advice on Peisetairos’ proposals, they misinterpret his responses, at least some of the time, and disregard any opinion.
that Triballos supplies. Triballos is effectively voiceless, unable to communicate with his fellow divinities, and is merely present in the play as a comedic foil to the Olympian gods.

Aristophanes’ audience could laugh at these Scythians and Thracians without restraint, for not only did most Athenians probably believe them to be inferior to themselves, but these ethnic groups were also not able to offer Athens any sort of political or military advantage. Thus, their barbarian nature lay open to unrestrained mockery by Aristophanes. On the other hand, delegates from Persia did have the ability to influence Athenian lives during the Peloponnesian War. Despite having been defeated a few generations earlier by Greek armies, the Persian Empire of Aristophanes’ day had maintained its large kingdom, and still controlled massive armies and resources. The Persians were a formidable foe, and their overtures to Spartan and Macedonian kings did not go unnoticed at Athens. Athenians acknowledged Persia’s potential to help them in the ongoing Peloponnesian War, and Aristophanes took note. As a result, though the Persian ambassador in *Acharnians* is disparaged and scorned like the Scythian archer and Thracian god, he also fires back at his tormentors, unlike his Scythian and Thracian counterparts. Aristophanes does not endorse or attack Athens’ courtship of Persian aid in *Acharnians*; on the contrary, he merely acknowledges the reality of Persia’s powerful position at the time.

What conclusions can one draw from Aristophanes’ depictions of various ethnicities in his plays? For starters, though foreigners were always to some extent regarded as inferiors in Athens, Aristophanes shows in his comedies that Athenian ethnocentrism and xenophobia were not static. Like most social phenomena, they constantly shifted and evolved. Some stereotypes
and attitudes remained more rigid, as was the case with those concerning Scythians and
Thracians, but others did not. With the dissolution of its empire and the advent of the
Peloponnesian War, Athens began to require the aid of foreign nations, the most prominent of
these being the Persian Empire. As a result, attitudes toward Persians and other foreigners began
to change, and people whom Athenians once considered to be “Others” were now seen as
potential allies. The practical needs of the city, beleaguered by a long, strenuous war, took
precedence over the long-standing biases against Persians. Scythians and Thracians, however,
were not potential allies. True, numerous Scythians were employed by the Athenian government
to serve the city, but they were public slaves; and the Thracians remained as they always had, at
the fringes of Athenian consciousness. As Aristophanes reveals in his comedies, views of
barbarianism could be nuanced, and not all barbarians were equally detested by Athenians.
While Greek ethnocentrism still persisted in late fifth- and early fourth-century Athens, it also
had its shades of gray.
APPENDIX A: FIGURES

Figure 1. Map of Scythia


The nomadic Scythian tribes inhabited the lands north of the Black Sea, and thus were far to the northeast of the Greek mainland.
Map of Thracian Tribes in Classical Period, including the Triballian tribe (After Fol and Marazov 1977: 133). The shaded region designates the approximate extent of Thracian influence.
The Achaemenid Empire was the largest empire of its time, consisting of millions of inhabitants.
Figure 4. Detail of Behistun Inscription

Illustration of a detail of the Behistun Inscription (After Briant 2002: 125). King Darius I (ruled 582–486) stands before subjugated individuals from the various peoples of the Persian Empire. Mount Behistun, Iran.
This figure, usually identified by scholars as a Persian, is argued by some to represent a Scythian (Braund 2006).
Attic red figure oinochoe from Athens, ca 460. Painted by Triptolemos. Height: 23.8 cm.
Figure 6. Depiction of Scythian Archer

Stereotypical depiction of a Scythian archer.
Attic red figure plate,
Vulci, ca 500. Painted by Epiktetos. Diameter: 19.4 cm.
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