

A NEW MOSAIC OF MENANDER'S *SAMIA* (AND AN OLD RELIEF)

Richard Green has very great merits in the history of classical studies as editor (with A. Seeberg) of the third enlarged edition of Webster's *MNC*¹.

The identification – made by him just in the pages of this journal² – of the scene represented in the Brindisi mosaic, found by Assunta Cocchiaro's team during the 2000-2001 excavation campaign³, is a new splendid success of Green's. Actually his accurate observations led him to identify the subject of what, for the first editor, was only a "motivo figurativo non identificato" (p. 75). In particular, Green's precise and patient analysis of the details brought him to these conclusions:

a) he recognized two male figures (a slave/cook and a gentleman) belonging to a comic scene;

b) he understood that, on the right, a third figure is missing, which disappeared because the mosaic was damaged and repaired simply with white tesserae replaced in rough alignment;

c) he recognized in the two surviving figures (although only the lower part of both is preserved) some significant signs and details that induced him to compare the Brindisi mosaic with

1. a fragmentary relief on a sarcophagus lid, now at the Louvre,

2. a wall-painting from Pompeii, now conserved in Bonn,

3. the *Samia* mosaic found in Mytilene, in the so-called House of Menander, and (perhaps) even with

4. a fragmentary relief on a sarcophagus lid in the Archaeological National Museum in Naples⁴.

d) Consequently, he concluded – with very persuasive argumentations – that the first three objects and the Brindisi mosaic exhibit the representation of the main scene of Menander's *Samia*⁵, with the cook on the left side, De-meas in the centre, and Chrysis (holding the baby against her) on the right.

In my opinion, his demonstration is a sure and very important acquisition for our knowledge on Menander's reception in the figurative arts and on the spread of artistic representations drawn from his comedies during the Hel-

¹ T.B.L. Webster, *Monuments Illustrating New Comedy*, 3rd ed. revised and enlarged by J. R. Green and A. Seeberg, 2 voll., London 1995 (for Menander, vd. in particular I, 85-98).

² R. Green, *A Scene from Comedy in Brindisi*, "Prometheus" 2014, 100-110.

³ A. Cocchiaro, *Brindisi*, "Taras" 22, 2002, 72-79.

⁴ Obviously, I refer to Green's article (cit. n. 2) for the numbers and the pictures of all the fragments (and the related bibliography).

⁵ About the fragmentary relief indicated by me as n. 4, his demonstration is not conclusive, because the relief has four (or five?) figures and the scene is rather complex.

lenistic and Roman period. After the studies by E. G. Csapo⁶ (and by Green himself)⁷, the development of this tradition has been brilliantly sketched by Sebastiana Nervegna⁸: now, Green's article adds the light of a new archaeological evidence, coming – not by chance – from the city that always was, with his harbour, the principal link between the Roman world and Greece.

After this, just because of the importance of the new acquisitions produced by Green's study, I would like to add some observations of mine, in order to guide the readers to a better assessment of the problem.

The Australian scholar thinks that the gesture of Demeas' right arm, raised and outstretched to the right, should be interpreted as a gesture of entreaty, made with the hand showing the palm up, addressed to Chrysis. In his opinion, this is sufficient to conclude that what we have here is not the scene of Chrysis' expulsion in the third act of the *Samia*, but another scene in which Demeas implores her to return with him: a scene that we have to imagine in the second part of the play.

I think Green's argumentation is hardly convincing here for two different types of considerations:

i). Demeas' gesture, as it is represented in the Louvre relief, is perhaps difficult to interpret, but – in my opinion – it is not an entreating hand showing the palm up. Demeas' hand is turned down of (at least) 45 degrees, with the thumb forward: I think this is a hand stretched out to 'push away' the woman. In other words, this gesture means "out of here" with a movement from below, that implies the idea of sweeping away or cleaning the house (cf. *Sam.* 382 f. ἐκ τῆς οἰκίας / ἄπιθι).

On the contrary, Demeas' gesture is very clear in the Mytilene mosaic, where – I believe – no doubt can be entertained. Certainly his hand is not "palm-up": this hand is directed to Chrysis but is stretched out like a flag, with neither the palm nor the back turned up or down (with the thumb up and all the fingers visible). In my opinion, this is a gesture meaning direction: it is a solemn and imperative sign, drawn in the air, and matches the order to "go away", probably repeated (cf. *Sam.* 369: οὐκ ἀκούεις; ἄπιθι)⁹.

I find the same gesture represented in the fragmentary mosaic from

⁶ E. G. Csapo, *Performance and iconographic tradition in the illustrations of Menander*, "SyllClass" 10, 1999, 154-188; Id., *Actors and Icons of the Ancient Theatre*, Chichester 2010, 140-167.

⁷ J. R. Green, *The material evidence*, in G.W. Dobrov (ed.), *Brill's Companion to the study of Greek Comedy*, Leiden 2010, 71-102 (see in particular 93-102).

⁸ Vd. S. Nervegna, *Menander in Antiquity. The Contexts of Reception*, Cambridge 2013, 136-169 and 264-267.

⁹ This could also be interpreted as a gesture of threat, with the hand stretched out poised and ready to slap, but I think this interpretation is decidedly less probable.

Avenches (Switzerland)¹⁰ that S. Nervegna shows in her Fig. 10c (p. 142), where the face of the woman is on left side and – very near her – there is a stretched arm with the hand completely open, in a comparable position, with the thumb up and all the fingers well visible.

The gesture is not evident on the Brindisi mosaic, because only the lower part of the two characters is preserved and we can see only the elbow of Demeas' right arm. Nevertheless, the arm appears to be raised, and this suffices to suggest that – if we have to choose one of the two gestural patterns outlined above – the Demeas from Brindisi has to be compared with the gesture in the mosaic of Mytilene (and in the one from Avenches).

In the wall-painting from Pompeii, on the contrary, Demeas' right arm is stretched down and lowered towards his right, in a completely different movement: in fact, the whole figure is bent to our left, i.e. the character is moving back. As shown by his feet's direction, he is returning home (where the figure of the cook is visible, though badly worn) and leaving the woman alone, outside, sent away from the house¹¹. Obviously, it is a third gestural pattern, chosen in order to mark in a different way Chrysis' expulsion: the different directions of the two characters. In my opinion, Demeas' movement follows his last word before getting back home (ἐσταθι, v. 398: “stay outside”, i.e. “do not follow me”).

In conclusion, I think the whole iconographical tradition is hardly uniform: rather, it exhibits different gestural patterns; but, beyond this, all the types seem to refer concordantly to Chrysis' expulsion, not to a supplication to her.

ii). The Mytilene mosaic has the express inscription that the scene belongs to the third act of the *Samia* and the characters are – from the left to the right – the cook, Demeas, Chrysis (with the baby on her arms). Now, in the text of *Samia*'s third act we find the scene of Chrysis' expulsion, that takes place in presence of the cook. The mosaic indication is therefore correct. We can add that the text of this act survives almost entire (excepted the first lines, ten at most, when Demeas is arriving alone: vv. 205 ff.): it has no relevant gaps or lacunae¹² and ends at v. 420 with Chrysis succoured by Nikeratos and sheltered in his house. There is no space for the scene conjectured by Green.

Chrysis' return to Demeas' house takes place in the fourth act, vv. 568 ff., when Chrysis has to run away from the house of Nikeratos (who is now very angry) and is saved by Demeas, who now knows everything and is

¹⁰ The ancient town of *Aventicum*, the capital of Helvetia.

¹¹ Chrysis' left foot shows the direction of her movement.

¹² See the recent edition (with ample commentary) by A. H. Sommerstein, *Menander. Samia (The Woman from Samos)*, Cambridge 2013.

quite cheered up. When Chrysis cries in a despairing tone ὦ τάλαιν' ἐγώ, τί δράσω; ποῖ φύγω; τὸ παιδίον / λήψεταιί μου ("Poor me, what can I do? where can I escape? He will take away my baby!"), Demeas intervenes with a quick and peremptory order (Χρυσί, δεῦρο), followed in the same line (569) by εἴσω τρέχε. And immediately Chrysis runs into the house (while Demeas has to face Nikeratos, trying to stem his fury). In other words, Chrysis' return to Demeas' is indeed represented in the comedy, but not in the way Green supposes.

We can add that the acts IV and V of the *Samia* survive quite entire and there is no space at all for another hypothetical scene. Therefore, in my opinion, we have to conclude that – *pace* Green – no scene of entreaty was in the text of Menander's *Samia*¹³.

A last observation. The fragmentary relief of Naples¹⁴ seems at first sight also to present the scene of Chrysis' expulsion, but some details hardly fit. On the right side, Demeas is possibly sending away Chrysis (whose figure is almost totally missing: only a small fragment of her himation is preserved) in spite of the protests of Nikeratos and his wife (in the centre). However, the character represented on the left side is not the cook, but the young Moschion, who stands fearful in front of the doorway, lifting his right hand to the nape of his neck (i.e. he is worried and in doubt as to what should do). Therefore, the scene represented is not the expulsion in the third act, but rather the one in the fourth, when Moschion is present. So – in my opinion – the man on the right is more probably Nikeratos, pursuing Chrysis and trying to take away the baby, while his wife is screaming and Demeas is just stepping in: he is shouting and holding forward his staff (vd. *Sam.* 570 f. "Ἀπολλων, μονομαχήσω τήμερον, / ὡς ἔοικ', ἐγώ. τί βούλει; τίνα διώκεις;). The fight with Nikeratos will follow (and then the clarification).

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ABSTRACT.

As shown by Green, the new Brindisi mosaic represents a scene of Menander's *Samia*. However, Demeas is not entreating Chrysis, but expelling her, as in a Mytilene mosaic, in a Louvre relief and a wall-painting from Pompeii. No entreaty scene was in Menander's *Samia*. The Naples relief represents probably Chrysis' escape from Nikeratos' house in the fourth act of the play.

KEYWORDS.

Menander, *Samia*, figurative arts, mosaics, comedy.

¹³ For other comments on Green's interpretation see Sommerstein, *Menander. Samia* (cit. n. 12) 68-69.

¹⁴ Indicated by be as n. 4 at p. 111 (Naples 6730: vd. *MNC*³ 6RS 6; "MEFRA" 88, 1976, 763 and 799 fig. 2 (K. Schefold)).