



Plautine Chronology

W. B. Sedgwick

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PLAUTINE CHRONOLOGY.

The following remarks may be regarded as complementary to Charles H. Buck's Johns Hopkins dissertation *A Chronology of the Plays of Plautus* (Baltimore, 1940). Apart from the positive results obtained, the writer does excellent service in summing up previous work, so that one stands on sure ground for further investigation. Perhaps his most striking discovery (pp. 14 f.) is what I think is the certain explanation of the *instaurationes* recorded by Livy, i. e. that they represent a response to the popular demand for the repetition of a successful play, and that the religious motive was a mere pretext. This is strongly supported by Dio, LX, 6, 4, who mentions as many as ten repetitions, and says that Claudius put a stop to the practice. (The repetition of the *Eunuchus* on the same day [Donatus, *praef. ad Eun.*], however, may have been merely in the nature of an encore.) I agree that the unprecedented number of seven in B. C. 205 was certainly due to the success of the *Miles*, which must have been a landmark in Roman comedy (p. 16). Apart from this case, however, these records do not help to date the plays, though Buck makes the attractive suggestion that the great increase in the number of days on which plays were performed in the period 214-200 (145, including *instaurationes*) was due to Plautus' own popularity (p. 17) — his only serious rival was Naevius. (The only other comic poets known in this period are Livius Andronicus and probably Licinius Tegula [apparently identical with Licinius Imbrex, of whom Ribbeck gives three fragments],¹ who Livy [XXXI, 12,10] says wrote the hymn to Juno in 200.)

After the Punic wars, Plautus must have been for some time the *only* comic poet at Rome of any note (there may have been others, e. g. Luscius Lanuvinus, the *vetus poeta* of Terence). Now, however keen he may have been *nummum in loculos demittere*, it is too much to expect he could have written more than say three plays *per annum*, whereas five at least must have been needed, not to count special occasions—votive and funeral games, etc. The natural inference is that to fill the gap plays were *revived*. On what grounds Buck (p. 5) denies this I do not know; from *Bacch.* 214 f.

¹ Cf. Teuffel, *Röm. Lit.*, § 107. 4.

etiam Epidicum, quam ego fabulam aequae ac me ipsum amo,
nullam aequae invitus specto, si agit Pellio

it seems a certain inference that the *Epidicum* was revived several times; while the parallel scenes in *Stich.* and *Poen.*, besides much evidence of retraction in other plays,² also point to revival (sometimes, no doubt, after Plautus' death). The *Casina* prologue, however (137 B. C.?: cf. *C. Q.*, 1930, p. 106) shows that by that time revivals had ceased for many years—there had been no lack of poets to produce *new* plays.

The lines from the *Bacchides* lead to some interesting speculations. Obviously at some time between the production of *Epidicum* and that of *Bacchides* Plautus had broken with Pellio. *Bacchides* is known to have been produced in 189 (Buck, p. 41): is it possible to date *Epidicum*? Buck points to the reference to colonies in line 343, which I agree is a quite definite contemporary allusion, and quotes Velleius to show that for some time after the Punic wars there were no new colonies, but in 194 eight—which is a clear indication of date. I find another indication in line 33: referring to ἡψόσπιδες the speaker says *ante aliis fuit* (sc. *honori*), a very striking expression, which I think refers to the state of things mentioned by Livy (XXXIII, 36 f., 196 B. C.): Marcellus was surprised by the Boii, and several distinguished men killed: *triumphus ei magno consensu patrum est decretus* (over the Insubres and Comenses): *Boiorum triumphum spem collegae reliquit*. Similarly, 25-27: the proconsul Tuditanus was routed and killed in Spain with many distinguished men; at the same time his predecessor Blasio received an ovation.³

These considerations lead us to a date about 195—the reference to colonies could come before the actual colonisation (cf. *Pseud.* 1100)—and under the circumstances the reference to the “new look” (*ut nove*, line 222), long ago referred to the repeal of the Lex Oppia, may be accepted.^{3a} It seems clear to me that there

² Cornelia C. Coulter, “*Retractatio*” in the *Ambrosian and Palatine Recensions of Plautus* (Baltimore, 1911).

³ There is a similar reference in *Trin.* 1034, which Ritschl (*Parerga*, p. 339) showed not to be *before* 194, when the Megalesia first became scenic: the reference to the new aediles would be most apposite the first year in which it could be made. Topical jokes depend for their point upon novelty, a fact not without weight in these investigations.

^{3a} If we date *Epidicum* 195, we may, with Ladewig, find in lines 166 f.

must have been a longish interval between *Epidicus* and *Bacchides*, but Buck puts *Epidicus* in 190, apparently for the sole reason that in *Bacchides* there is no reference to the *Pseudolus* of 191, an infinitely better play. But if Plautus had quarrelled with Pello, Pello would not have acted in *Pseudolus*. *Epidicus* may well have been the last play of Plautus in which Pello acted. It is possible that Pello had bought the *Epidicus* from Plautus (as actor-manager), and by repeating it, had to some extent queered the pitch for Plautus' new plays. Note that the words *si agit Pello* imply that others than Pello had taken the part. (The lines in the *Bacchides* would gain in point if Plautus himself took the part of Chrysalus [Buck, p. 14, note 11] but by 189 he would be rather old for the exacting work of a comic actor: cf. Terence, *Haut.* 35-45.)

While we are on the subject of Pello, attention must be called to *Men.* 404: *quasi supellea pelliionis, palus palo proximust*. It will hardly be denied that the audience cannot have failed to see a pun in the line, with a side-reference to the wardrobe in which Pello kept his costumes; if so, this too will be before the quarrel. I would put it *ca.* 194, which would agree with the comparative fewness of lyrics and personal allusions.

With regard to the early group, *Asinaria*—*Stichus*, 207 (212?)—200, it can be taken as certain that *Asinaria* and *Mercator* are the earliest, while the dates 205, 203-2, 200 are definitely established for *Miles*, *Cistellaria*, *Stichus* (*Asinaria* was probably 207 rather than 212: Enk finds affinities with *Mercator* [in his edition of that play], F. W. Hall [*C. Q.*, 1926, p. 20] with *Miles*).

Asinaria and *Mercator* are connected 1) by the name *Maccus* in the prologue (the only two cases), 2) by runs of iambic octonarii without diaeresis (cf. Lindsay, *Early Latin Verse*, p. 108). *Cistellaria* and *Stichus*, both from Menander, are each introduced by a highly lyrical scene between women, and marked by a sentimental tone, in *Stichus* at the beginning only (it soon gives way to farce), but no doubt further maintained by Menander, to whom the play we have probably bears little relation (cf. *C. R.*, 1925, pp. 55 ff.) (The extensive Plautine addi-

an echo of Cato's famous speech of that year on the *Lex Oppia* (Livy, XXXIV, 4, 16). The reference to parricides, *Epid.* 349 ff. (cf. Plutarch, *Rom.*, 22 *ult.*) offers rough confirmation.

tions in *Miles* and *Stichus* show that at a comparatively early stage in his career Plautus was capable of writing long stretches of independent work.) The earliness would account for some at least of the peculiarities which led Havet to deny Plautus' authorship of the *Asinaria* (see the Budé edition). Indeed Havet proves too much: on his showing the play can hardly have been old at all, and if not, it would not have been accepted by *all* Roman critics.

Turning to the rest of the plays, i. e. those after 200, I think Buck's date of 186 for *Persa* may be taken as established, and *ca.* 191 for *Poenulus* as highly probable. The remainder I consider not proven, though I think 193 for *Curculio* (reference to usurers) is very likely (Buck, p. 64). For *Aulularia* I consider the most likely date 191, the first *ieiunium Cereris* (Buck, p. 37), borne out perhaps by the reference to the plump *tibicina* in line 332 (cf. *Poenulus* 1416). In *Truculentus* the reference to lying accounts of alleged victories might connect either with Cato's speech *De Falsis Pugnis*, 190 B. C. (Bergk), or Tenney Frank's identification of *Homeronida* with Ennius, making the date 186 (Buck, p. 103). But as *Rud.* 994 = *Truc.* 119, and like *Pseudolus* (of 191) refers to the Lex Plaetoria, the balance of evidence is on the whole in favour of 190 for *Truculentus*, especially as it has verbal similarities to *Bacchides* of 189. *Rudens* would be soon after 190, but as it has very striking verbal similarities to *Amphitruo*, we should have to put *Amphitruo* about the same time (Buck's very ingenious arguments for 187-6 do not convince me). Reference to the Boii puts *Captivi* after 191, and the reference to corners in food suggests 189. The date of *Mostellaria* is quite uncertain, though Pasquali (*Riv. Fil.*, LV [1927], p. 30) sees affinities with the *Captivi*, and it bears every mark of Plautus' latest technique.

We thus get a series approximately as follows: *Epidicus* 195, *Trinummus* 194, *Menaechmi* 194, *Curculio* 193, *Poenulus* 191, *Truculentus* 190, *Bacchides* 189, *Rudens* 189, *Captivi* 189, *Amphitruo* 188, *Persa* 186, *Casina* 184. If these dates are even approximately correct, which I think is undeniable, we are faced with the remarkable fact that, of the twenty plays, there are five from 207 to 200, fifteen from 195 to 184, and none at all from 199 to 196 (or 195 according to Buck). Any attempt to explain this must be highly speculative, but certain points are worth considering.

Our 21 Varronian plays are not the only plays Varro thought genuine, but those whose authenticity was admitted by all (Teuffel, § 96. 4). Plautus must have written many more, even if we confine his activity to the period 207-184, several a year in all probability when he was the only notable comic poet at Rome.⁴ Many plays would be accepted or rejected by Roman critics on purely subjective grounds of style, etc., and while we can place some confidence in the judgment of expert scholars like Stilo and Varro, many critics, like Volcatius Sedigitus and, I suspect, even Accius would be mere dilettanti. On the whole, then, we may accept with some confidence the extra 19 plays admitted by Varro, which bring the total up to 40, still far fewer than Plautus must have written.⁵

The question arises what credit we can give to the *didascaliae*, and this resolves itself into the question of their origin.⁶ It is usually thought that they represent the result of the investigations of ancient scholars, especially Varro's *De Actis Scaenicis*, and that they are based on the records of the magistrates; but the contents rather suggest that they came from the stage-managers. It is unsafe to argue from the Terentian *didascaliae*, which date from a time when records were more systematically kept (yet even these contain mistakes, e. g. the *Hecyra* is attributed in the Bembinus to Menander). For the *Stichus*, the only complete example for Plautus, we have, besides title, author's name, and Greek original, (1) date of production, (2) composer of music, (3) nature of music (instruments required), (4) original actor—followed by *Personae* (which must have been added when masks were introduced, after the time of Terence), a list of masks required, much as in modern theatrical catalogues we find 5 M, 3 F, and so on. (So too the scene-headings meet the requirements of the producer, rather than of the reader.)

Now this strongly suggests not state or any official records, but information for the use of the producer, quite different from what we have in Greek, compiled for readers by scholars, and based on public records.

⁴ *Saturio* and *Addictus* are known to be before 207 (Gellius, III, 3, 14). Cf. Buck, p. 11.

⁵ The *Hauptwerk* is Ritschl's *Fabulae Varronianae* (*Parerga*, pp. 71 ff.).

⁶ See especially Michaud, *Sur les Tréteaux Latins* (Paris, 1912).

In Plautus' time magistrates were no more interested in what they paid the proprietor of a play than the proprietor of gladiators or *funambuli*. That is why the records of Plautus and his contemporaries were so ill-preserved. If a play held the stage, there was some prospect of the stage-records being preserved; if not, they would almost inevitably get lost. Hence the hopeless confusion of Accius about early chronology (Leo, *Plautinische Forschungen*,² p. 66), and the uncertainty of attribution of plays to Plautus in the time of Varro (Teuffel, pp. 168 f.): it is probable that by then most extant copies would have no original *didascalía* at all. The priestly records used by Livy, or his sources (Buck, p. 7, note 11), would be concerned only with the religious aspect, the *instauratio*, and quite probably did not even mention the poet. The aediles would give the name of the poet, and perhaps of the play, the price paid, and little or nothing else—they dealt with the producer, not the poet (at Athens, owing to competitions, conditions were quite different). In such circumstances, some of the details of a *didascalía* could not be supplied by ancient scholars, and numerous revivals with consequent retractation would add to the confusion. This is borne out by the Ambrosian palimpsest, which had *didascalíae* for *Stichus*, *Pseudolus*, *Vidularia* and probably *Rudens*, but apparently not for *Mercator*, *Trinummus*, and *Persa*—for the rest it is impossible to say (Lindsay, *Anc. Editions of Plautus*, p. 88). In some cases it may not have been possible even to identify the Greek original: Athenaeus (336 D) says he had read more than 800 plays of the Middle Comedy alone—I doubt if Varro had access, for example, to Demophilus' *Onagos* (*Onagros?*). It was the enormous number of Greek comedies and Latin adaptations which gave plausibility to Terence's statement (*Eun.* 34) that he did not know the *Colax* of Menander had already been translated.⁷

⁷ We are apt to overlook the scantiness of our knowledge of ancient literature. But for Plautus we should have known nothing of Demophilus or the *Achilles* of Aristarchus, and nothing of the comic poet Plautius, had not Varro mentioned the confusion caused by the similarity of names; nor of Luscius Lanuvinus but for Terence. Several comic poets in Ribbeck are known only by two or three fragments. (The alternative titles also were confusing: *Syra* in Festus for the *Cist.*, however, seems not a third title, but a misreading of the first letters of *Synaristosae.*)

I should say that down to about 195 B. C. the records existing in Varro's time were very scanty—the *Stichus* may have been a lucky accident. *Asinaria* and *Mercator* mention Plautus' name in the prologue; *Miles* was famous; about *Cistellaria* we do not know. (Still the choice of attribution in the early period would lie practically only between Naevius and Plautus.) From 202 (or earlier), then, to 195, apart from *Stichus* there was apparently no external evidence in Varro's time guaranteeing Plautus' authorship of any particular play, so that, however certain he felt about it, he could not count it among the "universally accepted." Finally, combining all the results known to me, I suggest as very nearly correct the following chronology: ⁸

<i>Asin.</i>	207	<i>Men.</i>	194	<i>Rud.</i>	189
<i>Merc.</i>	206	<i>Curc.</i>	193	<i>Capt.</i>	189
<i>Mil.</i>	205	<i>Poen.</i>	191	(<i>Most.</i> 188?)	
<i>Cist.</i>	203-2	<i>Aul.</i>	191	<i>Amph.</i>	188
<i>Stich.</i>	200	<i>Pseud.</i>	191	<i>Persa</i>	186
<i>Epid.</i>	195	<i>Truc.</i>	190	<i>Cas.</i>	184
<i>Trin.</i>	194	<i>Bacch.</i>	189		

Referring to the metrical tests which I suggested in the *Class. Review*, 1925 and *Class. Quarterly*, 1930, it will be seen that they hold their ground in the definitely early group 207-200 (except for the badly mutilated *Cistellaria*) and in the late *Persa* and *Casina*. I noted at the time that *Poenulus* had far fewer lyrics than we expected for its date, pointing out that the double ending indicated extensive retractation; likewise I suggested that the high proportion in *Epidicus* was due to the shortening it has evidently undergone. But the whole group, *Epidicus* to *Amphitrūo*, 195-188, thirteen plays in eight years, is much too close together for the lyric test to carry much weight.

When I wrote, I hoped that someone would approach the problem from a new angle: this Buck has done, and done well, and I think we have now reached a stage at which we can point to

⁸ This list roughly agrees with that of J. H. Hough in *A. J. P.*, 1934, pp. 346 ff. (and *C. P.*, 1935, pp. 43 ff.) except for *Poenulus* and *Menaechmi*. I think *Poenulus* at least must be put much later than Hough puts it: Plautus could hardly have staged such a sympathetic Carthaginian till some considerable time after the war. See also E. V. Arnold on the development of Plautine anapaestics, *C. R.*, 1925, pp. 7-8 (cf. F. W. Hall in *C. Q.*, 1926, p. 1).

definite results, and a chronology which can claim to be in the main established with only a small margin of error. Many "eccentric" datings have, it may be hoped, been finally put out of court, though one which had been thought among the most eccentric, Radermacher's of *Asinaria* in 212 (Buck, p. 32) has been surprisingly vindicated (I would refer it, however, with Buck [*loc. cit.*], to a Scipio of 207, not 212). It still remains to establish details, but we can now study the plays in groups, which should produce some interesting results, and throw fresh light on Plautus' workmanship.

W. B. SEDGWICK.

SCARBOROUGH, YORKS.