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AN ACCUSATION OF MAGIC IN CLASSICAL ATHIENS
(AR. WASPS 946–48)¹

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Aristophanes, in his hilarious spoof of an Athenian trial in the *Wasps*, presents his audience with a dog accused of cheese stealing. After the prosecuting canine has finished his harangue the defendant takes the stand, and although this dog is famed for his barking, he is suddenly and strangely silent. Bdelycleon, concerned lest this silence be interpreted as an admission of guilt, immediately fires out a precedent for the incident:

οὐκ, ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνό μοι δοκεῖ πεπονθέναι,
ὅπερ ποτὲ φεύγων ἔπαθε καὶ Θουκυδίδης·
ἀπόπληκτος ἐξαίφνης ἐγένετο τὰς γνάθους. (946–48)

The dog has suffered the very same misfortune which once befell Thucydides when he was on trial—he suddenly became paralyzed² in his jaw. The scholia vetera tell us that this is a reference to Thucydides son of Melesias, the famous *bête noire* of Pericles (I give the text of Koster):

Θουκυδίδης Μελησίου υἱός, Περικλεῖ ἀντιπολιτευσάμενος, τέσσαρες δὲ εἰσι Θουκυδίδαι Ἀθηναῖοι· ἱστοριογράφος καὶ ὁ Γαργήτιος καὶ ὁ Θετταλὸς καὶ οὗτος, ῥήτωρ ἄριστος τυγχάνων, ὃς κατηγορηθεὶς ἐν τῷ δικάζειν οὐκ ἠδυνήθη ἀπολογησασθαι ὑπὲρ ἑαυτοῦ, ἀλλ' ὡσπερ ἐγκατεχομένην ἔσχε τὴν γλῶτταν, καὶ οὕτω(ς) κατεδικάσθη. εἶτα ἐξωστρακίσθη.

Thucydides, son of Melesias, the political rival of Pericles. There are four Athenian men named Thucydides; the historian, the Gargæitian, the Thessalian and this one, an excellent orator who after he had heard his accusers make their case in the course of a trial, was not able to plead his own defense, just as if he had a tongue which had been bound from within. In this way he was convicted and afterwards ostracized.

¹ This paper was originally presented at the 118th Annual Meeting of the American Philological Association in San Antonio, Texas. I should like to thank E. Courtney, C. Damon, K. J. Dover, J. Henderson, M. Jameson, D. R. Jordan, A. E. Raubitschek, J. Rives, J. Winkler and an anonymous referee for their helpful comments on earlier drafts. Any remaining imperfections I jealously claim as my own.

² More specific than “dumbstruck” or “dumbfounded” (*pace* F. H. M. Blydes, *Aristophanis Vespae* [Oxford 1893] ad loc., and *LSJ* s.v.). W. J. M. Starkie, *The Wasps of Aristophanes* (London 1897) ad loc., rightly emphasizes the parallels in Hippocratic literature for ἀπόπληκτος with the paralyzed body part in the accusative (e.g. *Aph.* 6.57; *Flat.* 13; and *Artaeus SD* 1.7).

Modern historians³ agree with this identification, although this is probably the only area of complete agreement about the last stand of the son of Melesias. The date of the trial alluded to here is somewhat of a problem. The scholiast implies that Thucydides was ostracized as a result of his conviction, and since we know from other sources that he was ostracized in 443, one is tempted to date this trial to the middle of his career. Ostracism, however, was never a punishment administered by the courts, and most scholars⁴ believe that the scholiast has jumbled the earlier ostracism in 443 with events that occurred sometime after Thucydides' return from exile ten years later in 433.

The dating of the trial is of little consequence to my inquiry, so it suffices to say that I follow the majority opinion in preferring the later date. Such a reconstruction is more consistent with a current interest in the trial, which then would have occurred within a decade of the performance of the *Wasps* in 422, and even closer in time to the performance of the *Acharnians* in 425, the year in which Aristophanes gives us another description of this trial:

³ H. T. Wade-Gery, "Thucydides Son of Melesias," *JHS* 52 (1932) 205–27 = *Essays in Greek History* (Oxford 1958) 239–70; K. Fiehn, "Thukydidēs (2)," *RE* 6A (1937) cols. 625–27; F. Jacoby's commentary on Philochorus *FGrH* 328 F 120. See J. K. Davies, *Athenian Propertied Families 600–300 B.C.* (Oxford 1971) 230–37, for a complete bibliography. G. H. Macurdy, "References to Thucydides Son of Melesias and to Pericles in Sophocles *OT* 863–910," *CP* 37 (1942) 307–10, and V. Ehrenberg, *Sophocles and Pericles* (Oxford 1954) 115 n. 1, see a reference to the renewed struggle between Thucydides and Pericles in the wrestling metaphor in lines 863–910 of the *Oedipus Rex*, but since the dating of that play to 429 is not as firm as some might believe, it can give us no help in dating Thucydides' last trial. The similarity between the situation of Aristophanes' accused dog and Thucydides in the 430s is made stronger by two facts. First of all he is described in a scholion to Aristides (3.446) as being *skylakôdês*, literally "like a young puppy" (A. Raubitschek, "Theopompus on Thucydides the Son of Melesias," *Phoenix* 14 [1960] 87 n. 10, compares the usage at Xen. *Cyrop.* 1.4.4 and sees a further connection with the wrestling metaphors which Wade-Gery, *ibid.*, traces as a kind of heraldic motif for Thucydides and his family). Secondly there is some reason to suspect that at this trial he was accused of mismanaging his administrative duties in Thuria and perhaps even embezzling money just like the dog accused of eating Sicilian cheese.

⁴ Wade-Gery's reconstruction (above, note 3) has been the most influential here, enthusiastically supported by D. Kienast, "Der innenpolitische Kampf in Athen von der Rückkehr des Thukydidēs bis zu Perikles' Tod," *Gymnasium* 60 (1953) 210–21, and J. K. Davies (above, note 3). Fiehn (above, note 3) quibbles about the use of portions of the *Vita Anon.* of Thucydides historicus, while F. J. Frost, "Pericles, Thucydides Son of Melesias and Athenian Politics before the War," *Historia* 13 (1964) 385–99, H. D. Meyer, "Thukydidēs Melesiou und die oligarchische Opposition gegen Perikles," *Historia* 16 (1967) 41–54, and A. Andrewes, "The Opposition to Perikles," *JHS* 98 (1978) 1–8, argue rightly against Wade-Gery's overly simplistic conceptualization (borrowed from Plutarch) of two sharply defined political parties at loggerheads with one another, and against his hypothesis that the trial of Pheidias, Aspasia and Anaxagoras (if indeed he ever stood trial) fall between 433 and 429 and represent a concerted political attack against the party of Pericles—an attack which was coordinated by Thucydides. None of these arguments, however, affects the date of the second exile of Thucydides. P. Krentz, "The Ostracism of Thucydides, Son of Melesias," *Historia* 33 (1984) 499–504, has recently suggested that Thucydides, son of Melesias, was the same Thucydides who served as general in 440/39 and that therefore his ostracism probably occurred in 437 or 436.

For how can it be fair that a man bent with age like Thucydides should be destroyed in a tangle with that Scythian wilderness, that glib-tongued advocate, that Cephisodemus. I was moved with pity and wiped the tears away when I saw a man of venerable age being harried by a mere bowman. When he was a true Thucydides, by Demeter, he would not have tolerated even Demeter herself; no, he would have begun by outwrestling ten Euathloi, and he would have shouted down three thousand archers and out-archered the kinsmen of the advocate's father. But since you refuse to let the old get any sleep, at least decree that the indictments should be segregated, so that an old defendant can have an old and toothless prosecutor, and the young can have a wide-assed fast talker, a son of Cleinias. In the future you should banish and fine the old if ever they're charged, by means of the old, and the young by means of the young. (*Acharnians* 703–18)⁵

In this version of the story, Thucydides' failure to defend himself is attributed to the dynamic performances of younger, presumably sophistic orators⁶ who rhetorically "outgunned" him, just as he was wont to do to his own opponents when he was a younger man. Aristophanes alludes to the seriousness of the charge in the last line when he speaks generally of banishment and fine; indeed, it seems to have been a blow from which Thucydides never recovered, for from this point on his name never reappears in our sources for Athenian history.

Although the two passages from Aristophanes do not directly contradict one another, there seem to have been (at least) two competing explanations as to why the orator failed to acquit himself of such a serious charge; one side (presumably his opponents) claimed that the superior rhetoric of the prosecution dazed a feeble old man, while the other (more defensively, like Bdelycleon) suggested that some kind of mysterious paralysis intervened which prevented such a famous public speaker⁷ from defending himself. That the same author should present us with two differing accounts of the mishap need not disturb us; the sudden silence of Thucydides son of Melesias and the unprecedented loss of his renowned δεινότης in the midst of such a crucial trial would have immediately become the focus of public scrutiny, and one can easily imagine how several conflicting speculations might have emerged.

⁵ I give Alan Sommerstein's lively translation here with a few minor alterations.

⁶ In the *Acharnians*, Aristophanes names two men as Thucydides' prosecutors, but as Starkie (above, note 2) points out, they seem to be generic stereotypes of the infamous sophists, rather than the actual orators who spoke at the trial. He suggests that the demonstrative pronoun which precedes the name Cephisodemus in line 705 (quoted above) gives it the generic force of an insult ("this [sort of] Cephisodemus"; cf. Antiphon 1.17 "this Clytemnestra" in reference to a woman accused of murdering her husband), while the mention in line 710, that Thucydides in his youth could have bowled over ten Euathloi seems to be better understood (especially with such a suitable *nom parlant*: "Successful in the Contest") as a generic rather than specific appellation.

⁷ *Vita Anon. Thuc.* 6: δεινός... ἐν τῷ λέγειν (this section of the *Vita* of Thucydides historicus mistakenly describes events in the life of the son of Melesias; see Wade-Gery [above, note 3] Appendix A); Sch. ad Ar. *Wasps* 947: ῥήτωρ ἄριστος; Dio Chrysostom 22.1 includes him in his list of famous Athenian orators. For more general references to his reputation as a great political leader, see [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 28; Plato *Laches* 179A–80B and *Meno* 94 (cf. *Theages* 130A).

Indeed, the variety of causes which the ancients attributed to such cases of excessive "stage fright" suggests that there was no traditional explanation. In Euripides' lost play *Alcmeon*, for example, the matricide, on the point of giving his speech of defence, describes what was probably a rather common experience when those unaccustomed to public speaking were suddenly forced (as was the law in Athens) to defend themselves in the courts:⁸

ὁ φόβος, ὅταν τις αἵματος μέλλῃ πέρι
λέγειν καταστάς εἰς ἀγῶν' ἐναντίον,
τό τε στόμ' εἰς ἔκπληξιν ἀνθρώπων ἄγει
τὸν νοῦν τ' ἀπείργει μὴ λέγειν ἃ βούλεται. (frag. 67 Nauck)

This fear could be increased by the raucous noise and the hurly-burly of the crowd at an outdoor trial,⁹ or by the youth, inexperience or even the inferior social status of the speaker.¹⁰

If, however, we set aside the common plight of inexperienced speakers, we are still able to find some instances (albeit from later periods) in which even experienced orators suffered inexplicable seizures while pleading at the bar. In such cases the victims, and indeed the society as a whole, seem to appeal more readily to the supernatural for an explanation. A third-century B.C. inscribed pillar from the island of Delos¹¹ preserves a rather lengthy account in epic hexameters of the successful founding of the cult of Sarapis on that island. The central miracle

⁸ Of course, any allusion to this kind of "stage fright" mentioned directly by the speaker (like Alcmeon above) in his prologue can usually be dismissed as a calculated move to win over the sympathy of the jury. Rhetorical handbooks are filled with prescriptions for such statements in the *exordium* of a judicial speech (e.g. Aris. *Rhetoric* 3.14–15). Older, more experienced speakers, however, could not convincingly use such ploys. It is interesting that old age appears in the *Acharnians* passage as an alternate explanation for Thucydides' poor performance, because by Aristotle's time, allusion to one's old age seems to have been used in judicial speeches to gain the sympathy of the jury. Aristotle (*Rhet.* 3.15.3) mentions how Sophocles, the tragic poet (M. Jameson, "Sophocles and the Four Hundred," *Historia* 20 [1971] 546–47, argues convincingly for this identification) protested that he did not tremble during his defense in a trial to *seem* old, but because he could not help it, since he did not choose to be old.

⁹ Cf. Clodius' experience (Cicero *ad Q. F.* 2.3.2): "ei tantus clamor a nostris...ut neque mente nec lingua neque ore consisteret;" and Plutarch's description of Demosthenes' first youthful attempt at public speaking (*Dem.* 6.3). For a general discussion of the political uses and effects of loud demonstrations at Athenian assemblies, see V. Bers, "Dikastic *Thorubos*," in P. A. Cartledge and F. D. Harvey (edd.), *Crux: Essays Presented to G. E. M. de Ste. Croix* (Sidmouth 1985) 1–15.

¹⁰ Cf. Crassus' anecdote (Cicero *de Oratore* 1.121–22): "adulescentulus vero sic initio accusationis exanimatus sum, ut hoc beneficium Q. Maximo debuerim, quod continuo consilium dimiserit, simul ac me fractum ac debilitatum metu viderit." J. Henderson points out *per litteras* that Terence (*Phormio* 2.1.52–54) describes a similar courtroom scene with a young man, but here the cause is said to be *pudor*: "postquam ad iudices / ventumst, non potuit cogitata proloqui; / ita eum tum timidum subito stupefecit pudor." Achilles Tatius (*Leucippe and Cleitophon* 7.10) reports the popular syllogism that fear paralyses the memory and that slaves are by nature cowardly and thus prone to be forgetful.

¹¹ *IG* XI no. 1299. For commentary see I. U. Powell, *Collectanea Alexandrina* (Oxford 1925) 68–71, and H. Engelmann, *The Delian Aretology of Serapis*, *EPRO* 44 (Leiden 1975).

in this aretalogy is the god's timely intervention in a lawsuit that threatened the existence of his newly constructed temple:

φῶτας γὰρ ἀλιτρο(ν)οὺς ἐπέδησας
οἳ ῥα δίκην πόρσυνον, ἐνὶ γναθμοῖς ὑπανύσσας
γλῶσσαν ἀναύδητον τῆς οὔτ' ὄπιν ἔκλεεν οὐθεῖς
οὔτε γ(ρ)άμμα δίκης ἐπιτάρροθον· ἀλλ' ἄρα θεῖως
στεῦντο θεοπληγέσιν ἐοικότας εἰδῶλοισιν
ἔμμεναι ἢ λάεσσιν· (lines 85–90)

For you bound the sinful men who had prepared the lawsuit, secretly making the tongue silent in the mouth, from which (i.e. the tongue) no-one heard a word or an accusation, which is help-mate in a trial. But as it turned out by divine providence they confessed themselves to be like god-stricken statues or stones.

When these presumably professional prosecutors are suddenly and inexplicably struck dumb in the midst of such an important trial, the devout followers of Sarapis understandably believe that it was the god himself who rendered the tongues of their enemies silent and saved their temple from destruction. How else might they explain the mysterious paralysis of their rivals?

Libanius was often accused of bewitching his adversaries in the highly competitive world of rival declaimers in the late empire. Once the memory of a rival failed in the midst of a speech, and the dumbfounded man claimed that Libanius had cast a spell on him; when given permission to read the speech from a written copy he then claimed that his eyes could no longer read (*Or.* 1.71). Another great rival, Bemarchus, complained that he had been defeated by Libanius in an important debate only by means of magic procured from an astrologist.¹² Libanius himself did not dismiss these charges lightly; he tells us (1.245–49) how at one point late in his life he became gravely ill and was no longer able to read, write or speak before his students. After a time, the twisted and mutilated body of a chameleon was found in his lecture room. Its severed head had been placed between its hind legs, one of its forefeet was missing and the other was “closing the mouth for silence.” Libanius says that he regained his health only after the body of the chameleon was removed from the room.¹³

¹² *Or.* 1.43. The Romans believed that thunderbolts caused paralysis of the limbs and mental faculties, including the power of speech. Since thunderbolts were thought to come from planets (e.g. Pliny *NH* 2.82 and 191), they were often deemed the source of paralysis. See Martial's *sidere percussa* (11.85.1) and the comments of N. M. McKay, *Martial Book XI* (Oxford 1985) ad loc., who cites parallels from medical literature which seem to indicate a Greek source for the idea, e.g. Scrib. Larg. 101 (Helmreich), and Marc. Empiricus 14.41 (Niedermann), who records a folk cure “ad anginam et linguam sideratam, quod genus morbi Graeci paralyisin vocant.”

¹³ C. Bonner, “Witchcraft in the Lecture Room of Libanius,” *TAPA* 63 (1932) 34–44, interprets this as a form of *envoûtement* directed against Libanius' oratorical abilities; the amputation of the one forefoot was directed against the hand with which the orator gesticulated and the position of the other attempted to silence him, as Libanius himself seemed to realise. For similar binding spells which employ small animals, see A. Audollent, *Defixionum Tabellae* (1904) nos. 111–12 (two second-century A.D. curses from Aquitania which were apparently buried with a puppy) and no. 241 (a first-century A.D. Carthaginian curse which was apparently buried with a trussed-up rooster).

Peter Brown discusses these accusations of magic in the late-antique period and provides an excellent framework for understanding them; drawing on the work of Evans-Pritchard, he shows that the acknowledged use of magical rituals in the community often provides professional performers with an easy opportunity for face-saving in the event of a radically poor performance.¹⁴ Anthropologists have documented, for example, how master artisans in traditional cultures, such as wood-carvers or potters, repeatedly invoke the allegedly malevolent magic of their rivals when they wish to explain misfortunes which inevitably befall them in the day-to-day work of their trade, e.g. the splitting of ill-seasoned wood or the breakage of pots in the kiln.¹⁵ Professionals in the late-antique world (especially the champion charioteers or famous orators who lived out their lives in the limelight) also made accusations of witchcraft in order to save face after some unprecedented failure, such as when the reins dropped from the hands of a veteran driver, or when an experienced declaimer like Libanius stepped up to the rostrum and was then unable to speak.

An incident in the career of Cicero offers some insight into the generation of competing explanations for an unexpectedly poor performance by an seasoned public speaker. Cicero tells us about the misfortune of the elder Curio in the middle of an important trial:¹⁶

qui (sc. Curio) in iudicio privato vel maximo, cum ego pro Titinia Cottae peroravissem, ille contra me pro Ser. Naevio diceret, subito totam causam oblitus est idque veneficiis et cantionibus Titinia factum esse dicebat. (*Brutus* 217)

What is curious about this case is that Cicero lets us know that there were different and competing explanations for this strange incident. He reports the anecdote in the *Brutus* in the midst of a discussion of Curio's faults as an orator—in this case his bad memory--while at the same time reporting Curio's own insistence (*dicebat*) that he had been a victim of magic. Such conflicting explanations are to some degree predictable; the victim saves face by blaming his failure on the supernatural, while Cicero seeks a "natural" explanation in the inferior skill and training of his adversary.

Elsewhere Cicero gives us another version of the event when he discusses the two different rhetorical strategies for affecting an audience, which he distinguishes by the Greek technical terms ἠθικόν ("expressive of character") and παθητικόν ("relating to the emotions"). He defines the latter as the means by which the emotions are aroused and excited and in which oratory alone reigns supreme. He claims that it was this very quality in his own performances that caused Hortensius to give up the defense of Verres and struck Catiline dumb when he was accused in the Senate. Curio was also a victim of Cicero's powerful oratory:

¹⁴ P. Brown, "Sorcery, Demons and the Rise of Christianity," in M. Douglas (ed.) *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations* (London 1970) 25.

¹⁵ E.g. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Magic, Oracles and Witchcraft among the Azande* (1937) 67–68 and 77. For similar practice among the Greeks as well, see Pollux (7.108), who refers to talismans which bronze workers placed on their kilns, and Pliny (*HN* 28.4), who discusses the incantations which potters were said to cast against the kilns of their rivals.

¹⁶ M. C. Alexander, *Trials in the Late Roman Republic 149–50 B.C.*, Phoenix Supp. 26 (Toronto 1989) no. 128, dates this trial very tentatively to 79 B.C.

nobis privata in causa magna et gravi cum coepisset Curio pater respondere, subito adsedit, cum sibi venenis ereptam memoriam diceret. (*Orator* 129)

The two reports of this anecdote present clear analogies to Aristophanes' descriptions of the last stand of the son of Melesias. In both cases, the author reveals that **there were current in his own day differing accounts of the same event**: one aims at saving face for the loser of the trial by speaking of mysterious binding spells; the other suggests that the superior rhetorical skills of the prosecution had mesmerized an inferior opponent. It is important to note, however, that in the ancient world these competing versions are not as polarized and contradictory as they might appear to the modern observer; since the power of rhetoric was so often equated with that of magical spells and incantations, the two explanations actually share the common presupposition that the enemy has indeed attacked his rival using supernatural means.¹⁷

Such face-saving accusations can only occur, however, when the use of magic is an acknowledged practice in a culture. Does this condition apply to Periclean Athens? Despite the general reluctance on the part of many classicists and ancient historians to acknowledge the fact, we now have clear and compelling evidence that the Greeks in Sicily in the late sixth century B.C. and in Attica and Olbia in the fifth century B.C. practiced a form of "black magic" known in Athens as a *κατάδεσμος* and usually referred to by modern scholars by the late Latin term *defixio*.¹⁸ This kind of binding curse was usually accomplished by inscribing the victim's name on a lead tablet, which was then folded up, pierced with a nail and then (in the classical period) deposited in a grave.¹⁹

¹⁷ The Greeks, especially in Aristophanes' Athens, readily acknowledged the supernatural power of good oratory. Plato has Meno remark that although he has had lots of experience and success speaking publicly, he has been reduced to speechlessness by Socrates' speech; he describes the feeling as a "numbing" of his *ψυχή* and *στόμα* and jokes that Socrates has bewitched and charmed him (*Meno* 80A–B). Crito uses a similar analogy in the *Euthydemus* (303A). This is all probably said with tongue in cheek, but such allusions appear repeatedly throughout the fifth century, beginning most explicitly with Gorgias' claims in the *Helen*. Cf. C. Segal, "Gorgias and the Psychology of Logos," *HSCP* 66 (1962) 130–35, and J. de Romilly, *Magic and Rhetoric in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, Mass. 1975). J. Derrida, "La pharmacie de Platon," *Tel Quel* 32 (1968) 3–48 and 33 (1968) 18–58 = (English translation) "Plato's Pharmacy," *Disseminations* (Chicago 1981) 63–171, collects scores of passages in which Plato discusses or alludes to the close relationship between rhetoric and magic.

¹⁸ R. Wünsch, *Defixionum Tabellae Atticae*, appendix to *Inscriptiones Graecae III* (1897) [hereafter abbreviated "DTA"] and Auguste Audollent, *Defixionum Tabellae* (1904) [hereafter abbreviated "DT"] are the basic collections. See K. Preisendanz, "Die griechischen und lateinischen Zaubertafeln," *APF* 9 (1930) 119–54, for a full bibliography to that date and D. R. Jordan, "A Survey of Greek *Defixiones* not Included in the Special Corpora," *GRBS* 26 (1985) 151–97 [hereafter abbreviated "SGD"] for more recent work.

¹⁹ Detailed instructions for the manufacture and burial of *defixiones* are preserved in the magical handbooks of the third and fourth centuries A.D. and seem to be in agreement with the archaeological evidence of the classical period. K. Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae*², (Stuttgart 1973–74) [abbreviated hereafter as "PGM"], collects several recipes: *PGM* V 304 ; VII 394, 417; IX; XXXVI 1–35, 231 and LVIII. For a general discussion of the early Greek practice, see B. Bravo, "Une tablette magique d'Olbia pontique, les morts, les héros et les démons," in

The great majority of the early tablets come from Attica; indeed, more than two hundred examples dating to the classical period have been discovered in graves in the Piraeus or the Ceramicus. Such magical practices cannot simply be dismissed as a lower-class phenomenon. Plato (*Rep.* 364B–C) mentions itinerant magicians who crowded the doors of the rich and for a small fee promised (among other things) to harm their political enemies with incantations (ἐπωδαί) and binding spells (κατάδεσμοί).

Plato's suspicions were not without foundation; in recent years scholars have successfully used the patronymics and demotics which often appear on *defixiones* to demonstrate that these curses were being used by and against members of the Athenian upper classes, including some prominent Athenian politicians.²⁰ Although most of the extant Attic *defixiones* contain only lists of names, a majority of the more discursive texts clearly refer to upcoming trials and have been dubbed "judicial curse tablets."²¹ A good example is this binding

Poikilia: Études offertes à Jean-Pierre Vernant, Recherches d'histoire et de science sociales 26 (Paris 1987) 185–218, and C. A. Faraone, "The Agonistic Context of Early Greek Binding Spells," in C. A. Faraone and D. Obbink (edd.) *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (Oxford 1990, forthcoming). D. R. Jordan gives the most recent assessment of the archaeology of Attic lead curse tablets in a series of articles connected with his re-edition of the entire corpus of Greek *defixiones*: "Two Inscribed Lead Tablets from a Well in the Athenian Kerameikos," *MDAI(A)* 95 (1980) 225–39; "Fourteen *Defixiones* from a Well near the Southeast Corner of the Athenian Agora," *Hesperia* 54 (1985) 205–55, and "New Archaeological Evidence for the Practice of Magic in Classical Athens," which will appear in the *Praktika of the 12th International Congress of Classical Archaeology* (Athens 1983).

²⁰ See Wunsch's commentary on *DTA* 28, 47–51, 87, 89 and 167. A. Wilhelm, "Über die Zeit einiger attischer Fluchtafeln," *ÖJ* 7 (1907) 105–26, gives prosopographical notes on *DTA* 11, 24, 30, 42, 65, 84 and *SGD* 18, and identifies several prominent Athenians, including the demagogue Kallistratos. Elsewhere Wunsch, "Neue Fluchtafeln," *RhM* 55 (1900) 63, argues that the Demosthenes and Lykurgos mentioned on *DT* 60 are the famous orators. E. Ziebarth, "Neue Verfluchungstafeln aus Attika, Boiotien und Euboia," *SBAW* 33 (1934) 1028–32, traces many of the individuals mentioned on *SGD* 48 to the political circle of Demades. L. Robert, *Collection Froehner*, vol. 1 (Paris 1936) 12–13 no. 11, published a lengthy judicial curse tablet (*SGD* 42) which lists several politicians from the early fourth century, most notably Aristophon from Azenia. Jordan, "New Evidence" (above, note 19), has shown that three very rare names inscribed on lead voodoo dolls excavated in the Kerameikos (*SGD* 9 and two other dolls which are as yet unpublished) were all active politicians accused in speeches written by Lysias: Mnesimachos in Lysias fr. 182 (Sauppe); Mikines in Lysias frs. 170–78 (Sauppe) and Theozotides, the father of one of Socrates' students (the Nikostratos mentioned at *Apol.* 33C), who was also accused in a speech by Lysias (*P.Hibeh* 14). These voodoo dolls were apparently employed to bind the three politicians in anticipation of an upcoming lawsuit. Jordan, "Two Inscribed Lead Tablets" (above, note 19), also discusses a much later *defixio* which curses members of the Macedonian ruling circle, presumably during the Macedonian occupation of Athens: Kassander (the king); Pleistarchos (his brother), Eupolemos (his general in Greece) and Demetrios the Phalerian (the governor of occupied Athens).

²¹ E. Ziebarth, "Neue attische Fluchtafeln," *Nachrichten der K. Ges. d. Wiss. zu Göttingen* (1899) 122, asserted that judicial curses were enacted by the losers of a lawsuit, after the decision had been rendered. He was refuted by Wunsch, "Neue Fluchtafeln" (see preceding note) 68, who argued that judicial curse formulas all seem to point to a future event and that they were therefore employed beforehand or while cases were still pending. Audollent, *DT* lxxxviii–ix n.2, supported this



spell against Pherenikos and his σύνδικοι (*DTA* 107, Attic, late fifth- or early fourth-century B.C.):

Θερσίλοχος, Οινόφιλος,] Φιλώτιος καὶ εἴ τις ἄλλος
Φερενίκωι σύνδικ[ος, πρ]ὸς τὸν Ἑρμῆν τὸν Χθόν[ι]ον καὶ
Ἑκάτην Χθονίαν καταδεδέσθω· Φερενίκο(υ) κα[ὶ ψυ]χὴν καὶ
νο(ῦ)ν καὶ γλῶτταν καὶ βο(υ)λὰς καὶ [τ]ὰ πράττει καὶ τὰ περὶ
ἔμο(ῦ) βο(υ)λε[ύ]εται, ἅπαντ' αὐτῶι ἀντία ἔστω καὶ τοῖς μετ'
ἔκε(ῖ)νο(υ) βο(υ)λεύο(υ)σιν καὶ πράττο(υ)σιν.

Let Thersilochos, Oino[philos], Philotios and whoever else is a legal advocate for Pherenikos be bound before Hermes Chthonios and Hekate Chthonia. The soul, the mind, the tongue, the plans of Pherenikos and whatever else he is doing or plotting with regard to me, let all these things be contrary for him and for those who plan and act with him.

Judicial curse tablets attempt to bind the opponent's ability to think clearly and speak effectively in court at an upcoming trial. Just as a curse against a charioteer attempted to bind the parts of a charioteer's body in which his competitive skill lay (i.e. his shoulders, arms, elbows, wrists and eyes),²² so judicial curses are primarily concerned with the cognitive and verbal faculties which are essential to success in the law courts, e.g. καταδῶ...ψυχὴν καὶ λόγον (*DT* 49; Attic fourth century B.C.) or γλῶσσαν καταδίδωμι...καὶ τὸν νοῦν καὶ τὰς φρένας (*DT* 69; Attic, fourth century B.C.).²³

Bdelycleon uses the story of the mysterious paralysis of Thucydides as a precedent for his dumbstruck canine "client." Is Aristophanes alluding to a partisan, face-saving accusation that the son of Melesias had fallen victim to a judicial binding curse? This suggestion finds some support in the language of the scholion to the *Wasps* passage quoted above: ὃς κατηγορηθεὶς ἐν τῷ δικάζειν οὐκ ἠδυνήθη ἀπολογήσασθαι ὑπὲρ ἑαυτοῦ, ἀλλ' ὥσπερ ἐγκατεχομένην ἔσχε τὴν γλῶτταν, καὶ οὕτω(ς) κατεδικάσθη. This scholion is generally considered the best source for unravelling the events which occurred toward the end of the life of the son of Melesias, and nearly all the

view. Years later, Ziebarth, "Neue Verfluchungstafeln" (see preceding note) 1028–32, adopted the compromise view that a judicial curse was enacted while the trial was going on, but only after its author had come to the conclusion that he was about to lose his case. P. Moraux, *Une défixion judiciaire au Musée d'Istanbul*, Acad. Roy. Belg. Mémoires 54.2 (1960) 42, reviews the debate and concludes that although none of the curses seem to have been enacted after the final outcome of the trial, it is impossible to know at what point during the trial the litigants wrote the curses. There seems to be a trade-off between the practical desire to inhibit damaging testimony as early as possible and the point at which the litigants realize that such action is necessary.

²² See Wünsch, "Neue Fluchttafeln" (above, note 20) 248–59, for a detailed discussion of a Carthaginian circus curse from the third century A.D. (*DT* 242).

²³ Galen (*XII* p. 251 Kühn) ridicules people who are taken in by the claims of magicians, but in the process he preserves a useful bit of evidence that those who employed binding magic believed that the verbal powers were the target when they attempted to bind an opponent in a court of law: καταδῆσαι τοὺς ἀντιδίκους, ὡς μηδὲν ἐπὶ τοῦ δικανικοῦ δυνήθηται φθέγασθαι. For a detailed discussion of the targets of judicial curses with numerous examples, see P. Moraux (above, note 21) 41–56; C. A. Faraone, "Aeschylus' ὕμνος δέσμιος (*Eum.* 306) and Attic Judicial Curse Tablets," *JHS* 105 (1985) 150–54; and *idem*, "The Agonistic Context of Early Greek Binding Curses" (above, note 19).

information contained in it can be traced back to an ancient source.²⁴ Only two facts recorded there are judged to be of doubtful antiquity and authority: the confusion about Thucydides' ostracism (discussed above) and the description of his paralysis. That the latter appeared in the scholiast's sources has been doubted because it seems merely to paraphrase Aristophanes.²⁵ In fact it differs in two crucial details; whereas Aristophanes simply mentions the paralysis of the *jaw* suffered by the son of Melesias, the scholion says that the part of the body affected was the *tongue*, which is perhaps the most frequently specified target in the Attic judicial curse tablets.²⁶ The language, moreover, used to describe the tongue does not repeat the medical terminology of paralysis, but employs instead the participle ἐγκατεχομένην, a compound form of one of the two most commonly used verbs in extant Attic *defixiones*. In fact the use of the verb κατέχειν as a technical term for this sort of magical binding is unique to classical Attic Greek, a fact which further corroborates the belief of most commentators that the ultimate source for this entire scholion is some learned fourth-century Athidographer.²⁷

To return finally to Aristophanes, and to the use of his text as an historical source, I would stress the fact that he employs different versions of the last stand of Thucydides solely to suit his specific dramatic purposes. He is a dramatist first and foremost. In the *Wasps* he needs a handy excuse for having Bdelycleon

²⁴ Wilamowitz, "Die Thukydideslegende," *Hermes* 12 (1877) 348 n. 34, suggested Symmachos as the source here. Raubitschek (above, note 3) 82, places great importance on the use of the term ἀντιπολιτευσάμενος to refer to intramural strife, and argues that Theopompus is the source for some of this scholion, a suggestion rejected by W. R. Connor, *Theopompus and Fifth-Century Athens* (Cambridge, Mass. 1968) 38–43. Taking the limited evidence only as far as it can go, Jacoby (above, note 3) points out that scholia which begin with an opening of the type "There are five men of the name of X" usually derive from the *Komoidoumenoi*, which itself seems to have been culled from the Athidographers, late fifth- and fourth-century pamphlets and other references in comedy. He is undoubtedly correct in his reticence to speculate on exactly which fifth- or fourth-century sources the compiler of the *Komoidoumenoi* was drawing upon here. See note 27 *infra* for a corroboration that it was indeed an Attic source.

²⁵ Raubitschek, (above, note 3) 90, refers to the information as "a prose version of the lines of Aristophanes, which it is designed to explain." All of the other scholars cited above in notes 3 and 4 implicitly indicate this same judgment by failing to discuss the binding at all.

²⁶ The victim's γλῶττα is the target of 37 different Attic *defixiones* compared to eight instances of ἔπη or four instances of λόγος. See *DTA* Index V–c and *DT* Index VI–d.

²⁷ The verb κατέχειν is (after καταδεῖν) the second most frequent verb to appear on Attic *defixiones* from the classical era, but it is not used anywhere else in the Greek world as a technical term in binding magic. Wunsch, *DTA* p. iii, and F. B. Jevons, "Greco-Italian Magic," in his *Anthropology and the Classics* (Oxford 1908) 93–120, both argue persuasively that this particular verb is closely connected with the Attic cognomen κάτοχος which is applied to Hermes on twenty tablets and to Gê once. Certainly there is some kind of etymological play in the invocation Ἐρμῆ κάτοχε κάτεχε found in *DTA* 88, 89 and 109. Again this epithet is an Attic one with two isolated exceptions, *DT* 189 (Italian) and 242 (African), both of which are of very late date. J. Henderson suggests *per litteras* that ἐγκατεχομένην "is not the kind of simple gloss you would expect for ἀπόπληκτος, it is far too learned." I would further add that it is a specifically Attic technical usage which probably points to a local Attic source for the scholion.

speak the defense of the accused dog who was played by a κωφὸν πρόσωπον. The limitation of the number of speaking actors often demanded some such excuse.²⁸ In the parabasis of the *Acharnians*, however, the same trial is used quite differently as an example of how the present crop of young Athenian nobles have been abusing the *Marathônómachai* both in and out of the law courts. By presenting this kind of stereoscopic view of Thucydides' misfortune, Aristophanes provides us with a different type of historical evidence, a rare glimpse into that rich melange of competing testimony or gossip which must have constituted much of Athenian popular discourse. In order to understand how public opinion was fashioned in these circumstances, we must remember that two factors complicated the perception of current events in the ancient world: the absence of any authoritative form of mass media; and the somewhat wider social acceptance of mendacity in Greek society, especially when some degree of face-saving was required to preserve the honor of an individual or a larger family group.²⁹

In ancient Athens this freewheeling ability to twist the facts or invent them outright was undoubtedly countered in most cases by an equally keen suspicion toward all public statements.³⁰ In the instance of a "miraculous" event, however, or an unexpected *peripeteia* in public performance such as those discussed above, this ability to discern the "real" story beneath the various partisan versions was severely hampered, because there existed no authoritative empirical science which could rule out incredible claims.³¹ Plato, for example, derides the fears of superstitious men troubled by the sight of waxen voodoo dolls at the crossroads or elsewhere, but because he cannot disprove their efficacy he is forced to outlaw the practice in his law code (*Laws* 933B–C). On the other hand, when a "natural" cause presents itself, there is no opportunity for ambiguity. Thus when Demosthenes was struck dumb during the first embassy to Philip (Aesch. *de falsa leg.* 34), we hear nothing from Demosthenes or his supporters about magic or supernatural interference, even though Aeschines is elsewhere accused of knowledge of hocus-pocus and magical purifications (e.g. Dem. *de Cor.* 258–60). In this case both the youth of the victim (Demosthenes was the youngest of the envoys; Aesch. *de falsa leg.* 22 and 25) and his well known physical

²⁸ See K. J. Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy* (Berkeley 1972) 123, and D. M. MacDowell, *Aristophanes' Wasps* (Oxford 1971) ad loc. The "whispering" statue of Peace in the play of that name is another notorious example.

²⁹ P. Walcot, "Odysseus and the Art of Lying," *Anc. Soc.* 8 (1977) 1–19, discusses the utility of mendacity in very early Greek society. For a good description of the actual mechanics of lying, competitive gossip and face-saving in a modern Greek village in Euboea, see J. du Boulay, "Lies, Mockery and Family Integrity," in J. G. Peristiany (ed.), *Mediterranean Family Structures* (Cambridge 1976) 389–406, esp. 400–401. I include perfectly justifiable cases of self-delusion under the rubric of mendacity. See K. J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (Berkeley 1974) 133–56, for a good discussion of the balancing of divine intervention and personal responsibility in times of disaster; he closes with the epitaph of the Athenians killed at Koroneia, which attributed their defeat to the intervention of a supernatural hero, "not the strength of the enemy."

³⁰ Walcot, (above, note 29) 7–9, quotes the relevant passages from the ethnographies of Friedl, Campbell and Du Boulay.

³¹ C. R. Phillips III, "The Sociology of Religious Knowledge in the Roman Empire to A.D. 284," *ANRW* 2.16.3 (1986) 2697–732 (esp. 2700–2702); and *idem*, "Nullum Crimen Sine Lege: Socio-Religious Sanctions on Magic," in C. A. Faraone and D. Obbink (edd.), *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (Oxford 1990).

disability (Plut. *Dem.* 4.3–5 and 6.3) instantly provide an irrefutable natural explanation.

Thus in the normal play of events, “local history” seems to be created after the various partisan versions have been sifted and evaluated by the gossips in the agora and a “canonical” version is accepted. In the case of unexpected results such as the sudden silence of Thucydides son of Melesias, the survival of two or more competing versions is encouraged by the inability to disprove explanations which rely on a belief in divine intervention or the efficacy of magical spells.³² The very fact that the mysterious last stand of Thucydides produced such different impressions on the Athenians is very revealing, and perhaps one should not, in the hope of uncovering exactly what *did* happen to the son of Melesias, dismiss the testimony of Aristophanes and his learned scholiast as comic fantasy; for as social historians are quick to point out, understanding what a contemporary believed to have occurred, no matter how inconsistent that belief is in terms of twentieth-century scientific fact, can often be as important as discovering what actually happened.

³² See for example the two explanations given by Plutarch (*Arat.* 32.2) for the unexpected salvation of the city of Pellene, or G. Fowden, “Pagan Versions of the Rain Miracle of A.D. 172,” *Historia* 36 (1987) 83–95, who gives a sensible treatment (with all the relevant bibliography) of the competing Christian and pagan claims over the so-called “rain miracle” which saved a Roman army during a campaign against the Quadi.

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[Footnotes]

³ **References to Thucydides, Son of Melesias, and to Pericles in Sophocles of 863-910**

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²³ **Aeschylus' $\mu\mu\mu\mu$ $\mu\mu\mu\mu$ (Eum. 306) and Attic Judicial Curse Tablets**

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