PORTRAYING RELIGIOUS THEMES IN ARISTOPHANES AND PLAUTUS

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PORTRAYING RELIGIOUS THEMES IN ARISTOPHANES AND PLAUTUS

A Thesis

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Abstract

of

PORTRAYING RELIGIOUS THEMES IN ARISTOPHANES AND PLAUTUS

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Jacob Joel Crawford

The influence of political, social, and religious customs on Aristophanes and Plautus is evident in their comedic works. This thesis establishes, through the analysis of religious themes, that the religious nature of festivals, the prevalence of religious worship, and the impact of politics in influenced Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ works. The focus and structure of this work is categorized into the themes of devotion, divination, diviners, the divine, divine communication, ritual, and offerings. The purpose of a thematic approach facilitates cross-cultural comparisons of religiously through similar beliefs and practices found in Greek and Roman culture. Despite the influence of Greek theater in Rome, Plautus’ adaptations clearly reflect uniquely Roman perspectives under allusions of Greek settings. Aristophanes and Plautus portrayed elements of religion in their works, and despite the specific cultural influences of the playwrights both depicted them favorable to traditional beliefs and practices.

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Date
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Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

The productions of Aristophanes and Plautus provided ample religious material to present a thematic approach that compares how each playwright portrayed religious elements relative to their specific cultures. This religious influence in Greek and Roman culture shaped key points of discussion that this thesis addresses. First, religious devotion exhibited in the playwrights’ works produced a myriad of behaviors, in their characters, that varied depending upon their prescribed circumstances, and their reactions to these situations illustrated this diversity of religious conviction. Devotion stands as an underlying precursor to action and Aristophanes and Plautus shaped dynamic characters who exhibited varying degrees of religious devotion. Second, the religious observations and interpretations of divination impacted the variability of individual characters’ devotion. Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ works illustrated how these communications from the divine world functioned in their respective cultures and how their characters interacted with them in society. Third, the divine represented in their comedic works maintained a central role of the sacred in religious worship that fostered a mutual relationship of sincere communication and religious worship. Lastly, ritual practice in Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ comedies captured the actions of worship exhibited in the Greek and Roman world. The observance of these ritual practices constituted the

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1 From Emile Durkheim’s theory of ritual and belief, as an underlying motivator, that precedes ritual actions; Daniel L. Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 109-10.
2 Mircea Eliade stresses the importance of the *hierophany* (appearances of the divine) and the interconnectedness of the sacred and the profane via an *axis mundi*, and how this communication from the divine world bridges humanity and the divine; Ibid., 201-2.
physical acts that stem from individual devotion and a desire to develop a relationship with the divine. The concepts of devotion, divination, divine, and ritual provide a framework or foundation to the organization of this thesis and greatly assisted in the interpretation of the religious themes found in Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ works.  

By framing these categories the intent is to draw comparisons from the plays, which reveal how characters exhibit such behaviors and practices that are traditionally upheld and performed by ancient Greeks and Romans. Aristophanes and Plautus were both influenced by distinct cultural perspectives with shared religious characteristics and established theatrical traditions, yet whose political environments, being influenced by religious function, offered distinct climates for the production of comedy. The religious systems of these ancient cultures directed many aspects of Greek and Roman life, and Aristophanes and Plautus certainly depicted this relationship throughout their comedies. Due to both political and cultural dynamics, Plautus and Aristophanes adapted their comedies to conform with the rules of social and cultural decorum of their respective societies and circumstances. Although Aristophanes and Plautus characterized and portrayed culturally distinct religious behaviors and practices, for their audiences these strikingly accurate representations of religious life arose from disparate political climates and social circumstances that similarly elevated the role of religious worship in their societies.

3 Many of Ninian Smart’s categories or “dimensions” of religion provide deeper clarity to the organization of this thesis (Chapter two: Doctrinal, Social, and Experiential; Chapter three: Mythic and Material; Chapter four: Ritual) coupled with Durkheim’s and Eliade’s theories on the regarding the “sacred” and “profane” both help to provide a foundation for this study; Ninian Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World’s Beliefs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 10-11.; Pals, 199.
Aristophanes, the famous comic of Fourth and Fifth Century B.C.E. Athenian theater, cleverly criticized reigning politicians while populating his plays with religious themes identifiable by the Athenian spectator. Under approval of the reigning archon, Aristophanes was consistently selected to stage comic productions, so his plays in part were effectively screened prior to their performance at festivals. The material portrayed in his comedies was subjected to an archon’s approval, otherwise his admittance to production could have been denied. Although Aristophanes’ works aptly focused on political and social relationships his plays also contained a wealth of religious material. The integration of religious themes found in Aristophanes’ comedies tended to highlight the relationship of religion and individuals. Titus Maccius Plautus, the Roman playwright of the Third Century B.C.E., introduced a new style of theater into the world of the Roman Republic, full of religious ideologies. The wealthier classes of Rome, because of their political and social influence, directly maintained cultural and religious values. This pattern of societal influence and control also reflected synonymously with the practices found in Aristophanes’ Athens. Festival magistrates (wealthy senators) directly impacted Plautine comedy because of their authority to choose which plays to contract for the various festivals. Although the magistrates do not appear to have had explicit control over the content of the comedies, their influence came through the choice and funding of the productions. Plautus conveyed an approvable balance of levity and realism in his productions that placated conservative Roman magistrates in the portrayal

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5 Shawn O’Bryhim and George Fredric Franko, *Greek and Roman Comedy: Translations and Interpretations of Four Representative Plays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 152.
of these religious themes throughout his comedies, while still delivering the crude humor expected by the Roman audience. Religious themes found in Plautus’ comedies tend to reinforce cultural and religious ideologies, upheld by public religious worship, by identifying practices observed in both the public and private sphere of Roman life. Aristophanes and Plautus both actively portrayed religious themes in various social contexts.

To better understand Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ comedies, it is important to discuss briefly the circumstances and background of their lives and their style of playwriting. In addition there is need to identify and establish the political, cultural, social, and religious contexts of comic theater in both Aristophanes’ Athens and Plautus’ Rome, and how these circumstances influenced their comedy. The structure of this thesis is divided into three chapters following these religious themes: devotion and divination, the divine and divine communication, and ritual and offering. The themes introduced in chapter one are devotion, the religious mentality and ideas expressed through religious worship, and divination. Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ works exhibit divination as the practice of uncovering and interpreting the depiction and function of signs, omens, and dreams through lay believers or diviners such as seers, augurs, and oracles. Chapter two contains an assessment of how the characterization and function of the divine reflected traditionally held views in society along with an examination of how Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ used different forms of communication with the divine, primarily through prayers and vows, in their comedies that provided an insight into the function of such communication. Lastly, chapter three presents a consideration of the role of rituals and
offerings compared to traditional worship and their expressions through specific religious practices as portrayed in Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ works. Both Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ interpretation and depiction of religion throughout their works provided ample evidence to compare religious themes found in Greek and Roman culture.

THE PLAYWRIGHTS’ BACKGROUNDS

Relatively little is known about Aristophanes’ life except that which has been preserved in his own works, and the works of contemporary literary figures. Aristophanes was likely to have been born mid-Fourth Century B.C.E., and resided in the Athenian deme of Cydathenaeum of the Pandionis tribe. He was a second generation poet, and was thought to have gained sufficient notoriety and wealth that he was recognized to serve in various capacities for his deme, and in some prominent social functions. In Athenian theater it was common for family members to participate in the familial tradition, yet it was unclear in what capacity Aristophanes’ father, Phillipus, contributed to Athenian literature or theater. By the time Aristophanes had begun his playwriting in 427 B.C.E. Athenian drama, including comedy, was well established. His success and prominence in comedy from 427 to 386 B.C.E. is clearly evident by his winning a combination of ten first and second prizes at Athenian festivals, and his wealth attained in theater. Of his extant comedies eleven are preserved intact with several others in fragments.

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8 Jeffrey Henderson’s introduction to Aristophanes, 6-7.
Plautus was born c. 254 B.C.E., at Sarsina in Umbria in a territory recently captured by Rome in Cisalpine Gaul. He learned Latin later in life while living in Rome, and he is also thought to have learned Greek during his failed business ventures abroad. Plautus drew upon his earlier experience in theater by writing and adapting Greek comedies for a Roman audience. Of his plays twenty remain, mostly intact with one highly fragmented, and this collection represents an impressive example of preserved Republican comedy at Rome. Plautus’ undertakings in theater went well beyond translation as he completely “re-theatricalize[d] an alien drama for his Roman audience.”

Unlike earlier Roman playwrights who took to simple translation of ancient Greek works for Roman production, like Livius Andronicus, Plautus was interested in adapting the story to his audience for ensured compatibility.

OLD COMEDY TO NEW COMEDY

In Athens, Aristophanes’ comic theater played a similar role to that of Plautus’ in Rome. Prior to the advent of comic theater in Rome, Athenians developed a model of comedy by building upon foundations of earlier Greek comedians. Aristophanes’ works were produced in the style of Old Comedy, which enlisted the characterization of the everyday into fiction. Old Comedy is known by its political and social commentary and its blatant attacks on current events, leaders, institutions, and controversial figures or ideas. Another factor of tension created in Old Comedy was the use of a double chorus. A double chorus was characteristically divided into two groups that typically fought or

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held opposing arguments throughout the play.\textsuperscript{11} By presenting through the two choruses opposing arguments and ideologies, Aristophanes was able to create tension in his plays, and unlike other works of drama the chorus did not primarily serve as the voice of traditional values. Aristophanes’ comedy was laced with tension that created a division of traditional values and unproven ideologies. For example, in \textit{Lysistrata}, the heroine and her chorus of women directly challenge the chorus of men for a settlement of the Peloponnesian War by withholding sex. This example clearly illustrates the use of dueling choruses, with the men attempting to uphold their values in opposition to the unconventional methodology of the women. Aristophanes’ comedies often portrayed characters that challenged current Athenian behaviors and values, and hoped to solicit laughs. Also, he would provide humorous alternatives or criticisms of contemporary ideologies. Aristophanes’ success garnered much criticism of his work by contemporaries and state magistrates because of his use and the popularity of Old Comedy. However with the advent of New Comedy comic playwrights such as Menander, and later Plautus, entertained successful careers with far less political resistance than Aristophanes’ had endured.

The critical nature of Old Comedy and the blatant attacks on leaders, institutions, and controversial figures caused a shift in comedy away from the characterization of contemporary individuals to a more general stock character, which was indicative of New Comedy.\textsuperscript{12} This shift allowed greater freedom from political criticism that had plagued earlier comedians, like Aristophanes. In New Comedy the role of the chorus was also

\textsuperscript{11} Roy C. Flickinger, \textit{The Greek Theater and Its Drama} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 42.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 39.
removed, and with it the voice of traditional values was abandoned leaving individual characters to fend for themselves. These changes in the production of comedy enabled Plautus to entertain under the strictures of Roman values and the elite who patronized him. Plautus wanted his audience to be familiar with the cultural and social circumstances he portrayed, while not filling his comedy with unfamiliar Greek cultural circumstances, since Romans would have been more familiar with their own culture. Plautus’ adaptations were taken from various Greek authors, of which no original production remains, written in the Third Century B.C.E. Greek style of New Comedy. This style is distinct in its introduction of more domestic and generic thematic approaches and the implementation of stock characters, as opposed to Old Comedy and the specific depiction of current events and the lampooning of real world figures. By using the structure of earlier literary styles Plautus was able to focus on his adaptation from the Greek to Roman.

COMEDY’S CULTURAL CONTEXT, RECEPTION, VALUE, AND REALISM

It is clear that Aristophanes’ works often addressed specific contemporary issues in both civic and social spheres. For example, Aristophanes portrays both Cleon and Socrates, two very influential public figures, as characters in his plays. The relative openness of classical Athens enabled his style of playwriting to flourish. Aristophanes achieved great success in theater, winning several prizes at festivals, and entertained

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15 Norwood, 24-5.
16 Butler, 19-20.
audiences of divergent backgrounds. Although he satisfied the public with his humor his comedic works and critical commentaries offered him little favor amongst the wealthy and social elite.\footnote{Margarete Bieber, \textit{The History of the Greek and Roman Theater}, 2nd ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), 45.} Despite his unpopularity with the elite, Aristophanes produced remarkable works that highlighted important details of life in the Greek world. Greek culture was depicted through his works and his characters that portrayed how the circumstances of political and social figures affected the lives of Greeks. Although Aristophanes’ comic productions often exceed realistic bounds of typical Greek experiences his works still contain valuable details regarding religious, social, and political beliefs and actions exhibited in Greek life.\footnote{Charles Freeman, \textit{The Greek Achievement: The Foundation of the Western World} (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 253.} His works are dramatizations of (comically stressed) circumstances of the lives of Greeks. Obviously, Aristophanes’ works should be scrutinized when comparisons claim fiction as a representation of reality because his amusing exaggerations often emphasized the comic nature of his productions. However, if provided with a careful framework of agreed points of cultural references a cautious analysis of his works will provide confirmable realities of Greek life.

Plautus’ comedies, unlike Aristophanes’, refrained from direct commentary on contemporary political and social issues. Still, the content of Plautus’ comedies were risqué in comparison to the cultural strictures of mid-Republican Rome. His productions corresponded with the introduction of a conservative movement and the passage of the Sumptuary Laws. These laws were restrictive in the fact that they were enacted in an
attempt to bring Roman focus back upon the way of the elders (mos maiorum). 19 The function of these laws and conservative movement caused Plautus plenty of trouble, and less freedom of expression that Aristophanes enjoyed. Plautus’ adaptation of Greek works afforded him the option of using “geographical allusions,” which meant he used the guise of a foreign topography to portray the realities of Rome. 20 This style of theater was known as palliatae, “in Greek dress,” as opposed to a more structured form of Roman theater known as togatae, plays performed in a Roman cultural style and setting. 21 The characters were Greek and thus exempt from social restrictions provided by the conservative trends of Rome, and the setting of Greece provided Plautus a greater license to portray immoral behaviors. Plautus’ works were not mere copies of Greek productions, although they were clearly influenced by Greek comedy, they held distinctively Roman characteristics, and Plautus offered constant reminders to his audience during the play of their Roman attributes. 22 Although Plautus’ plays were adaptations from Greek originals, the religious, cultural, and social circumstances espoused in them served as a window into the lives of everyday Romans, and provided greater understanding of the world of Plautus’ Rome. Plautus’ adaptations were exceptional at the time by overcoming the strict censorship of Roman politics, yet sultry enough to gain favor with the audience. As a professional, Plautus succeeded by entertaining his Roman audiences and through his accomplishments gained much

20 Moore, 66.
21 Norwood, 20.
22 Moore, 50-1.
notoriety and wealth in theater, unlike his earlier exploits in trade.\textsuperscript{23} Plautus was truly indebted to Greek playwrights for their quality of production, but Plautus’ adaptive literary creation was novel and enabled distinctively Roman characteristics to emerge.\textsuperscript{24}

**RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS AND COMIC PRODUCTION**

Athenian comedy was not recognized and funded by the state until the 486 B.C.E. Dionysian and 442 B.C.E. Lenaean festivals; however minor volunteer-based performances of comedy had been present earlier at these festivals.\textsuperscript{25} Aristophanes’ productions and popularity started after comedy gained official acceptance at major religious festivals. These festivals were religious occasions, and were regulated by the state. In the case of the theater a randomly selected magistrate would be designated as an archon who was responsible for the administration of the theater. Although there is no detailed account of the selection process for the comedies individual comic playwrights would apply to the archon, who would then choose which performances would be held during the festival, and arrange for their funding. Theater, at these festivals, was already a well established tradition, and although subsidized by Athenian coffers the costs of production required support from wealthy individual citizens.\textsuperscript{26} Although archons provided for state paid actors, it was wealthy patrons who paid for production and individual Athenians who provided much of the financing. Also to offset the costs of the

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{23} Segal, 2.
\textsuperscript{25} Flickinger, 38-9, 119.
\textsuperscript{26} This practice falls under Greek liturgies in which wealthy citizens fund various activities at religious festivals. Additional information can be found in Louise Bruit Zaidman, and Pauline Schmitt Pantel, *Religion in the Ancient Greek City*, trans., Paul Cartledge (Cambridge Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 95.
\end{flushleft}
performances during the festival the cost of admission to the theater was two *obols*, however if an Athenian was unable to pay, there was an established fund that would subsidize their individual patronage.\(^{27}\) Despite the often controversial and vulgar subject material exhibited by Aristophanes and other comedians, none were restricted from attendance. Performances were available to practically all attending, including women, children, slaves, and even the occasional parolee.\(^{28}\) The infrequency of theatrical performance during the year created substantial attendance at these festivals; this is clearly exhibited by the massive theater complexes in Athens and the rest of Attica.\(^{29}\) Because of the open-air nature of theater in the ancient world productions typically occurred during festivals with milder climates, which increased the number of attendees and created the need to establish theaters with high capacities.

Unlike Athenian theater, the financing of Roman comedy was dispersed by the magistrates of the festival and funded by the Senate via contracts to various dramatic troops. Because of this restriction the magistrates maintained substantial control of the content and production of the performance.\(^{30}\) Since the value of comedic productions was not entirely driven by popularity their written elements had to serve two functions. First, comedy should be enjoyable enough for the audience, and secondly, it must cooperate with the censors of the magistrate and citizen who financed it. Theater during Plautus’ time was not like that of Aristophanes’ Athens; Roman spectators attended the

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\(^{28}\) Flickinger, 120-1.


\(^{30}\) Marshall, 20-1.
productions without payment, and most theaters were temporarily built for their short production periods during many of the religious festivals and games held in and around Rome’s forum. Tacitus, an ancient Roman historian, asserted that the purpose of the hasty construction and impermanence of theater in early Rome reflected the momentary nature of the activity, rather than having encouraged a permanent venue because the permanence of theater was considered to have detrimental moral effects upon Romans.\textsuperscript{31} Festivals symbolized a break from the everyday conservative boundaries in Rome, so a permanent venue was seen as harmful in the preserving of traditional Roman values. Consequently, Roman comedy operated within the confines of the socially restricted timeframe allotted by the festival season.

The worship of the divine was another important element of festivals, and ancient theater recognized this connection. In the case of Greek festivals and the worship of Dionysus, Greeks maintained the importance of religion and the ritual performances carried out there. “The Religious character of these festivals and of the dramatic exhibitions connected with them was a very real thing to the Greeks, and everyone in attendance would fully realize that they were present at no secular proceedings.”\textsuperscript{32} This insight into theater and the Athenian festival aligns religion as an integral part of performance. Comic performances in Athens were as much a source of entertainment as a form of religious worship. Festivals served as religious celebrations of the gods, and the Dionysian and Lenaean just happened to be expressions of Dionysus. Preceded by rustic dances, songs, and feasts in worship of Dionysus, Athenian theater and these

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 35.
\textsuperscript{32} Flickinger, \textit{The Greek Theater and Its Drama}, 123.
festivals symbolized a break from customary restrain.\textsuperscript{33} Aristophanes’ comedy clearly embraced breaking from social norms in the spirit of the festivals, where his performances took place. This permeation of religiosity during theatrical performances served to honor Dionysus in the spirit of worship, and entertainment accompanied the significance of these events.

Polybius, a Second Century B.C.E. Greek Historian, observed that the integration of religion and state was far greater in Rome than in Greek states.\textsuperscript{34} This integration is generally made clear by the full production of state sponsored religious festivals. These festivals were critical for early Roman theater, and by the time of Plautus’ productions comic performances were commonplace during four major festivals: the \textit{ludi Romani}, \textit{ludi Plebeii}, \textit{ludi Apollinares}, and \textit{ludi Megalenses}.\textsuperscript{35} At these festivals Roman comedy grew in popularity, and allowed for its adoption and performance throughout the Republic. Unlike the meticulous formula of Roman rituals during these festivals, the theater breathed fictitious and improvisational characteristics into the life of a Roman.\textsuperscript{36} Roman devotion to religious procedure differed from Athenian. This Roman fidelity to religion is well explained in Beacham’s \textit{Roman Theater and its Audience}:

Religion provided the ideological basis for society and, as determined by an elite, exercised direct and decisive control over its expressions and development….They fervently believed that the welfare of the state was utterly dependent upon the rigorous observance of sacred obligations, and unlike the situation briefly attained in the fifth-century Athens, these neither encompassed nor were mitigated by an ethos of free expression or philosophical enquiry, least

\textsuperscript{33} H. J. Rose, \textit{Ancient Greek Religion}, (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1948), 83.
\textsuperscript{34} Peter Jones and Keith Sidwell, ed. \textit{The World of Rome: An Introduction to Roman Culture} (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 20-1.
\textsuperscript{35} Marshall, 16-17.
of all in a volatile medium of public activity such as the theatre….The religious element became a part of the spectators’ experience of the performance. This sense of occasion was enhanced too by the plays’ actual content, which was frequently based on the same myths that informed religious belief.\textsuperscript{37}

The cultural, political, and religious differences between Athens and Rome are apparent, however Aristophanes and Plautus both utilized religious elements to convey comic stories that were accessible to the public and approved by various censors for production.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 21.
Chapter 2

DEVOTION, DIVINATION, AND DIVINERS IN THE WORKS OF ARISTOPHANES AND PLAUTUS

Aristophanes and Plautus both depicted relatable religious beliefs, ideologies, and practices that enabled the development of characters, plots, and dialogues of considerable depth. Analysis and comparison of religious beliefs and practices of classical Athenians and of mid-Republican Romans, in this section, will be made in consideration of pious, impious, and superstitious behaviors and actions. To aid in clarity of this cross-cultural discussion of religious ideologies in Greek and Roman cultures the theme of devotion will be discussed through the practical constructs of piety, impiety, and superstition.

Piety represents a respect and participation in traditional religious beliefs and practices, whereas impiety reflects the opposite behavior, and justifies divine retribution and possible civic punishment. Superstition will characterize behaviors and actions that reflect an unconventional observance of religion, which beliefs and practices are not culturally or socially acceptable nor inherently punishable. These constructs will enable clearer comparisons, and allow for better recognition and relationship to their ancient ideological counterparts, which express how traditional values impact Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ works.

DEVOTION IN ARISTOPHANES’ WORKS

For the ancient Greeks the term *eusebeia* broadly categorized a body of traditional practitioners who exhibited various degrees of piety, and *asebeia*, which represented
those who exhibited punishable impiety by the divine or in some circumstances through civic court.\(^1\) Religion was an integral component of Greek society and culture, and practitioners maintained relative freedom in their worship. Whether in private or public, the daily life of an Athenian was “imbued with a religious dimension.”\(^2\) Greeks who fulfilled their traditional beliefs through actions like prayer, worship, and offerings piously, and expected entitlements to prosperity and their share of “barley,…wine,…figs,…children,” reparations, and rights to war.\(^3\) Honoring these practices showed reverence to their religion and a “respect for ancestral tradition,” known as *ta patria*.\(^4\) Religion, in terms of Greek culture, reflected effective participation rather than excessively pious behavior. The exhibition of unnecessary superstitious behavior or an overabundance of piety was seen as unfavorable in appeasing the divine, since these actions portrayed behaviors that hindered everyday life. In Greek life the practice of superstition (*deisidaimonia*) expressed the idea that excessive prescriptions of belief and ritual action typically accompanied a fearful anxiety of the divine and created behavior that bordered on impiety because it ignored ideals of moderation.\(^5\) These overly zealous behaviors of *deisidaimonia* ostracized some Greeks as superfluously superstitious. Although Greeks scrutinized the exhibition of *deisidaimonia*, superstitious behavior did not exhibit the characteristics of *asebeia*, punishable impiety. Under formal decree in 433 B.C.E. the Ecclesia established that any individuals who participated in the practice of impious behaviors could have been exiled or even put to death. For example,

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\(^1\) Zaidman, 11-14.  
\(^2\) Ibid., 27-8.  
\(^3\) Aristophanes *Pax* 1316-1329.  
\(^4\) Zaidman, 13.  
\(^5\) Ibid., 14.
Socrates’ philosophical teachings and influence in Athens was suspect of impious behavior and non-traditional teaching, and because of this his actions were considered criminal. Aristophanes’ uses these behaviors and values in his characters, which enable him to create dynamic and culturally rich comic elements throughout his works.

Aristophanes’ comedies both question, although more often satirically, and uphold traditional religious piety. In *Wealth*, Chremylus argues that if Plutus (wealth) had not been blind “good people…should prosper, and the wicked and godless, the opposite.” This statement breaks with the traditional view of Zeus’ role in blinding Plutus, the Greek god of wealth. Chremylus’ argument represents Athens being free from economic inequalities and justifies rewarding moral behavior. Aristophanes here questions customary belief and practice in opposition to a simple logical and moralistic relationship. However, not all of Aristophanes’ characters support the questioning of traditional devotion. For example, in *Clouds*, Strepsiades upon entering a dark corridor with great anxiety and fear remembers his lack of religious preparation and requests some honey cakes before entering. Aristophanes here parodies the religious practice, through an analogy, of the placation of sacred snakes with holy cakes in the oracular “cave of Trophonius” at Lebadeia. The role of spiritual preparation in Greek life is critical for specific religious practices, as seen here. Whether in parody or not, portraying Strepsiades in unwarranted fear of the divine is a similitude of *deisidaimonia*, and clearly depicts the characterization of superstitious behaviors. Strepsiades is not walking

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7 Ar. *Plautus* 488-498.
8 Ar. *Nubes* 507-509.
through or attending a holy place by passing through this corridor, and so his behavior is suspicious of superstition.

The division of pious and impious behaviors allows Aristophanes to create characters that are under tension, and often unable to balance *eusebeia* and *asebeia*. In Aristophanes’ play *Clouds*, Strepsiades eventually abandons traditional piety to help solve his financial problems by devoting himself to learning the arts of logical reasoning at Socrates’ Thinkery. Strepsiades’ actions create tension within his household because of his ridiculing his son Phidippides’ traditional belief in the gods in attempt to convince him to undergo the Thinkery training regimen. Strepsiades’ efforts reflect Aristophanes’ questioning of the role of traditional Greek religion in an environment bombarded with ever changing philosophical ideologies. Strepsiades symbolizes the tension between familiar traditions and unproven philosophies in Athens. Despite his misgivings and his overindulgence of the rational arts his main flaw comes from a lack of *sophrosyne* to moderate his behavior. But what is most interesting is how Aristophanes resolves this question in the eyes of his audience by portraying Socrates’ Thinkery in ashes. Strepsiades’ failure to resolve his financial problem through logic blames the gods, while the chorus of Clouds responds: “No, you’ve only yourself to blame, since you took the twisted path that leads to evildoing.” “The twisted path” reflects Strepsiades’ impious behavior in thinking philosophy could supersede tradition, and the ease by which he abandons the gods portrays his lack of true devotion. Whether or not this retort is

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9 Ar. *Nub.* 816-19
10 Mikalson, 25.
11 Ar. *Nub.* 1452-1455.
Aristophanes’ direct opinion on the matter, it is clear that the apprehension shaped by Strepsiades’ breaking tradition is a depiction of asebeia. The punishment of impiety is the destruction of Socrates’ Thinkery, a symbolic end to philosophy. Aristophanes’ complex integration of piety, superstition, and impiety throughout his plays provided him numerous opportunities to portray these religious characteristics through comedy.

DEVOTION IN PLAUTUS’ WORKS

Moving into the Roman world, Plautus similarly grounded his comedies and characters in religious categories of piety, impiety, and superstition. Roman piety connected deeply through the expression of religio, the proper honoring of traditional religious beliefs and practices. The opposite behaviors and actions were characteristic of impiety, and the act of being impious either through the inadvertent or deliberate disturbance of religious traditions or by non-participation in them could result in divine retribution and social retaliation.\(^\text{12}\) In addition to religious impiety, superstition, described an upsetting of the balance of accepted religious tradition. Romans categorized this as superstitio, which expressed the use of extreme religious beliefs and practices through excessive behaviors and actions in an effort to appease the divine.\(^\text{13}\) Superstitio also often referred to non-Roman forms of religion which traditionally minded Romans rejected.\(^\text{14}\) Simply put, religio was good, superstitio was fearful excess, and impiety was bad.\(^\text{15}\) The behaviors of piety, impiety, and superstition each delineated the importance

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\(^\text{13}\) Ibid., 23.
\(^\text{15}\) Ibid., 193.
of conformity, consistency, and compliance in Roman worship. Rather than using the term *pietas*, which characterized correct behavior across all aspects of Roman life, the term *religio* here provided greater focus and better represented Roman piety. *Religio* described Romans who act in accordance with traditional religious practices of worship, and cultivate a proper relationship with the divine. The Roman state strictly monitored religious practices, and did allow for officially sanctioned foreign cults and practices. One form of this formal acceptance was through the process of *evocatio*. *Evocatio* served as a formal ritual adoption of foreign cult worship, and provided an official public acceptance and adoption of new religious practices. So, unless the religious practice was traditionally Roman or was adopted via official sanction, such as *evocatio*, its practice exhibited both impious and superstitious behaviors. Rather than depending upon the infrequently used ancient terms of *religio* and *superstitio* in Plautus’ works this discussion evaluates characteristics of piety and superstition through the exhibited behaviors and actions found throughout the plays. Understanding the ancient ideals in the Roman context enabled greater insight into how Plautus portrayed piety, impiety, and

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19 Plautus used the term *religio* in three instances: *Asinaria* 781-3. “*deam invocet sibi quam libebit propitiam, deum nullum; si magis religiosa fuerit, tibi dicat: tu pro illa ores ut sit propitius.*”; *Curiculio* 349-50 “postquam hoc mihi narravit, abeo ab illo. revocat me ilico, vocat me ad cenam; religio fuit, denegare nolui.”; and *Mercator* 881. “Religionem illic <mi> obiecit: recipiam me illuc.”; Plautus also used *superstitio* in three instances: *Amphitruo* 323. “*Illic homo superstitiosus.*”; *Curculio* 397-8. “Superstitiosus hic quidem est, vera praedicat; nam illaec catapultae ad me crebro commeant.”; and *Rudens* 1138-40. “At meo hercle <iniuriam>. quid si ista aut superstitiosa aut ariolast atque omnia, quidquid insit, vera dicet? anne habebit hariola?”
superstition throughout his works, and these constructs serve to represent various levels of religious devotion in Roman religion through comedy.

Plautus, in the *Bacchides*, portrays acceptable behavior through the tutor, Lydus, who argues with his pupil, Pistoclerus, whom he suspects is trespassing the bounds of religious piety. Pistoclerus is confronted by Lydus with his “paraphernalia” while on his way to his newfound mistress, who through a magic charm, feelings of lust, and the fear of disappointing his “divine” mistress, convinces him to provide her the objects she desires. Pistoclerus proclaims his mistress to be a goddess, but Lydus questions his behavior by asking, “What commerce have you with such pernicious, pernicious deities?”

Between this exchange of Lydus and Pistoclerus, a youth portrays being under the influence of impious and superstitious practices, and his tutor retains traditional piety argues the value of honoring religious piety. Pistoclerus’ tutor serves as the figure who upholds traditional piety by questioning the actions of the inexperienced youth who is under a magic charm. Despite the efforts of Lydus the argument ends as Pistoclerus belittles Lydus’ knowledge of the gods and mocks the strictures of traditional religiosity. Although Plautus does not explicitly label Pistoclerus as engaging in superstition, he does describe Pistoclerus’ actions as barbarian, and therefore non-Roman in origin. Pistoclerus’ actions here present him engaging in superstitious behaviors, and Plautus clearly portrays his religious actions in opposition to tradition. Plautus here portrays the tension between traditional piety, a trait assigned to Lydus, and superstition, through Pistoclerus’ excessively strange actions of worship, which ultimately lead Pistoclerus to a

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20 Plaut. *Bacchides* 117.
helpless state because he forgets his traditional religious beliefs practices. The most striking example of Plautus’ use of superstitious behaviors is in Rudens, when Gripus labels the practices of “witches” and “fortune-tellers” as superstitio.21 Similar to Pistoclerus being charmed by magic, witches and fortune-tellers attempt to manipulate the forces of the divine rather than appeal to them through traditionally pious behaviors. Such behaviors exhibit characteristics that are on the periphery of traditional Roman worship and are impious.22 The portrayal of characters that reinforce piety or participate in superstition is evident in Plautus’ works.

Plautus continues to develop the diversity of religious devotion in his characters through their participation of religious impiety. Libanus from Asinaria serves as a great example of stepping over the boundary of superstitious behavior into impiety by exclaiming: “put me up an altar and statues, yes and offer me up an ox here the same as a god.”23 Plautus here describes the apotheosis of a slave. In the middle Republican period this form of impiety was unacceptable because lay Romans could not assume the realm of the divine. Although Roman comedy allows some freedom to address the absurd, the distinction between the divine and humanity is clear, and the opportunity to supersede these bounds is typically only applicable to dead heroes, demigods, ancient kings, or deified emperors (of the Imperial period), and not the living.24 Also it is important to note Roman religious practice did not obsess over and formalize moral doctrines in

24 Beard, 141-2.
religious beliefs and actions. In Plautus’ *Epidicus* a clear example of this moral neutrality is evident in Epidicus’ comments:

I go out with clear auspices, with a bird on my left; I have a good sharp knife to disembowel the old man’s purse with. (aside) Aha though! There he is himself in front of the house with Apoecides-just such a pair of old dotards as I want. Now to turn myself into a leech and suck the blood out of these so called pillars of the senate.

Under the guise of favorable portents, Epidicus portrays the lack of moral dictates that a Roman could achieve for ill actions and gains. Epidicus acts in a socially unacceptable manner, a slave beguiling a senator out of his money. Moral behaviors were not dictated by religion, however the speech and omens Epidicus espoused were inconsistent with Roman traditional ideologies. Religion and government in Rome were so tightly interconnected that many senators participated in pontifical colleges; thus Epidicus’ actions could be interpreted as impious and detrimental to the state and religion.

Plautus’ use of characters engaging in questionable behaviors would have been common in theater and wholly familiar to his audience. Therefore his comedies appear to reproduce the divisions of piety and impiety found in Rome through a comedic lens.

COMPARISON OF DEVOTION IN ARISTOPHANES’ AND PLAUTUS’ WORKS

Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ depictions of the nature of piety and impiety in the Greek and Roman worlds contained many similarities, but are clearly not identical. Greek *eusebeia* and Roman *religio* both brought focus upon maintaining consistency in

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27 Ando, 58.
religious form and worship of traditional beliefs and practices by cultivating relationships with the divine. Aristophanes’ representation of traditional religious behavior provided evidence for the structure of Athenian piety, and he occasionally introduced characters that resisted traditional views, such as Strepsiades. Aristophanes’ portrayal of Strepsiades, with his contempt of traditional piety, reflected how impious behaviors had the potential to damage familial and divine relationships. Similarly, Plautus’ use of pious behaviors appeared to reflect upon Roman relations with the divine, which were bound by observable communications that bound the practices of worship and regulated Roman actions. Plautus’ examples of conflict between Lydus, who served as an example of moderation of traditional beliefs, and Pistoclerus, who rejects them, provided an illustration of the consequences of living without piety. Aristophanes and Plautus’ both used the tensions that piety and impiety created to serve in humorous functions, and their portrayal depicted believable behaviors their audiences could plainly observe through the results of either pious or impious actions on stage. By both questioning and upholding traditional pious and impious behaviors Aristophanes had the freedom to explore these themes for purely comic effect without having, like Plautus, to conform with acceptable social outcomes. Plautus, regardless of his Greek settings, portrayed events and outcomes of piety more favorably than those of impiety.

The Greek term deisidaimonia and the Roman term superstitio held very specific cultural contexts and are difficult to compare, however they both reflected Greeks or Romans who, through excessive involvement with the divine, participated in superstitious

behaviors and actions. *Deisidaimonia* existed as an excessive characteristic of superstitious beliefs that set an Athenian apart socially, but not religiously. In Aristophanes’ comedy, acting excessively superstitious appeared to establish a Greek as overly fearful and cautious in religious observance to the point of awkward sociality. For example, Strepsiades’ reluctance to walk into a dark corridor without his holy cakes in hand rather than to simply ask for a torch and continue, related this dynamic of superstitious observation over practical social behavior. Practicing superstition appeared not to be a punishable offence, but when characters crossed into impious behaviors, like Greek *asebeia*, divine or civic punishment follows. Aristophanes and Plautus portrayed an extensive body of Greek and Roman practitioners that spanned piety, impiety, and superstition. Individual actions of impiety elevated many of Aristophanes’ characters to abandon traditional piety, and it was those who succumbed to such behaviors that happened upon punishment, like Strepsiades.\(^{30}\) Additionally, Romans shared a similar variability in religious worship through pious, impious, and superstitious behaviors and actions. Plautus’ depiction of Libanus, who set himself up as a god, transgressed superstition into impiety, and his exercise of unfamiliar religious practices and beliefs offered him with unfavorable consequences. Aristophanes and Plautus presented characters that as religious practitioners retain a surprising amount of liberty in worship of their traditional and non-traditional beliefs. These characters often exaggerated cultural norms of piety, impiety or superstition, and this depiction of them produced expressions of cultural reality throughout their works. Strepsiades and Pistoclerus clearly

\(^{30}\) Burkert, 274.
exhibited both superstitious and impious attitudes, and suffered because of them. Devotion as seen here was clearly an underlying religious theme in both Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ comedies.

DIVINATION IN ARISTOPHANES’ WORKS

Divinations, communications from the divine world, consisted of signs, omens, and dreams sent to observant Greeks and Romans who interpreted their meanings for good or ill. The dispensing of signs by the gods was not an uncommon occurrence in the Greek world.\textsuperscript{31} Greek belief in signs acknowledged the importance of divine communication and the role of the divine in the preservation of tradition. Although seers and oracles, which will be discussed later, often stood as mediators between the seen and unseen, lay Greek religious practitioners were not inhibited from observing and interpreting communication from the divine. General awareness, knowledge, and understanding of signs and dreams, from the divine, were well-known practices to the Greeks.\textsuperscript{32} Familiarity of these divine communications maintained and supported the tradition of seeking after interpretations. Dreams also served as another source of divine knowledge that helped to uncover the will of the divine, and were commonly associated with Asclepius, the god of healing, whose worshipers’ dreams served Greeks through visionary means.\textsuperscript{33}

Signs and omens from the divine serve to justify actions taken by the observer to correct the wrong course or to persevere in the right one. Aristophanes similarly

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 111-2.
\textsuperscript{32} Rose, 35-6.
\textsuperscript{33} Burkert, 115.
implements in his characters how they utilize their understanding of tradition to interpret the signs and omens from the divine. In *Acharnians*, a raindrop falls from the sky striking Dicaeopolis. Upon feeling the droplet Dicaeopolis perceives that Zeus, in the form of a sign, is showing his displeasure of their current Assembly meeting and they are to adjourn immediately rather than discuss the need to pay the Thracians. The sign of rain, or an ominous storm from the gods, may be acceptable grounds for the dismissal of the meeting, but a single drop is unlikely and the whole scene appears to simply lampoon the members of the Assembly who look for any excuse to depart.\textsuperscript{34} The importance here is not in the sign, but in the ability of a single assembly member of non-priestly, oracular, or seer-like status to interpret the meaning of the sign. The interpretation of the sign is not in question, and Dicaeopolis’ interpretation dismisses the assembly without further investigation of divine inquiry. Aristophanes, in *Lysistrata*, provides an example of a common interpretation of a potentially unfavorable omen regarding an unmarried woman’s declining value because she is approaching her “peak” of childbearing years.\textsuperscript{35} An older unmarried daughter might carry the perception of an ill omen from the divine upon the family, because of her failure at marriage, her most important rite of passage.\textsuperscript{36} Observation of an event that invites interpretation of the will of the divine by the observer, could be thought of as a sign or portent of approval or disproval of certain actions.

\textsuperscript{34} See Henderson’s note 32 in Ar. *Acharnians* 167-71.
\textsuperscript{35} Ar. *Lysistrata* 595-7.
\textsuperscript{36} Zaidman, 67.
In keeping with religious tradition Aristophanes’ depictions of dreams and their interpretation are accurate. In *Wealth*, Aristophanes’ character Plutus participates in a traditional religious method of healing rather than pursuing the science of medicine. In the temple of Asclepius the ailing enter a period of incubation, and through a dream the cure is made known.\(^{37}\) In this example the interpretation of dreams enables communication between the divine and Greeks. Although in Greek tradition messages in dreams associate quite easily with Asclepius, other divinities also utilize this form of divine contact. In *Knights*, Paphlagon dreams of Athena pouring a ladle of “healthy wealthiness” over Demos. Paphlagon interprets his dream as the fulfillment of his role in having a Sausage Seller take on the affairs of Paphlagon’s master, Demos, and reap the promised wealth.\(^{38}\) This dream depicts the role of a lay Greek person serving as an interpreter of dreams, and confirms that the portentous events may have great impact. And in the case of Paphlagon, a favorable outcome occurs that depicts how an individual successfully gains insight into the will of the divine. Aristophanes’ use of the religious theme of divination enabled a deep-seated connection familiar to his audience. Aristophanes’ use of dreams in comedy not only helps to progress his plot, but also appears to be consistent with Greek religious tradition.

**DIVINATION IN PLAUTUS’ WORKS**

Divination in Roman religion was also a common means by which the will of the divine was made known to the state or to individuals through omens, portents, and

\(^{37}\) Ibid., 129-30.  
\(^{38}\) *Ar. Equites* 1080-94.
dreams. These portents constituted deviations from the natural order. Portents often symbolized a warning to the observer that their actions represented impious or unfavorable behaviors, and presented an opportunity for the observer to reconcile their relationship with the divine. To the Romans portents and omens were occurrences of everyday live with no requirement of official authority for their interpretation, only a keen eye in uncovering their meaning. Dreams presented another interesting connection to divination through their portrayal and interpretation. If Romans believe, as Plautus conveyed, that dreams are “strange plays for humans” given to them from the divine, then their purpose as a medium portrayed the will of the divine for the individual dreamer. The major difficulty in uncovering how a dream expressed the will of the divine was through accurate interpretation of it. The act of interpreting portents, omens, and dreams seemed to be the most critical feat in deciphering divinations.

Plautus’ use of divination typically reflected a Roman interpretation of portentous events, and their implementation of corrective action. In the Aulularia, Euclio finds himself running errands apart from his secret treasure, but makes this observation along his way: “It means something-that raven cawing on my left jest now! And all the time a-clawing the ground, croaking away, croaking away! The minute I heard him my heart began to dance a jig and jumped up into my throat.” The omen of the raven serves as a warning that triggers Euclio’s nervous nature into returning home to safeguard his treasure. Because of his quick action he finds his stash intact, and announces that “if

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39 Ando, 94.
40 Plaut. Rud. 593.
41 Plaut. Aulularia 625-7.
that raven hadn’t stood by me I’d be a poor, poor ruined man.”

Although omens serve as warnings they are not always easy to observe and often end in an unfavorable outcomes, as is the case in *Casina*. Upon scrambling to hide his love affair from his wife, Lysidamus appears to miss something as he exclaims: “what omen crosse[es] me when I got into this amour, or what offence I’ve ever given Venus to have all these things happening to delay me!”

Unlike the observant Euclio who saves his precious treasure, Lysidamus overlooks his omen. Lysidamus perceives that if he would have only been more observant he could have prevented his wife from uncovering his illicit relationship, and saved himself from a quarrel with his wife. Plautus’ use of familiar events and religious signs served as a tool that built relatable comedy for his audience.

The use of dreams was another element that brings Roman religious beliefs on stage. Again, Plautus in this respect seemed to focus upon the individual. Plautus, in *Curculio*, uses a cook to serve as an interpreter of Cappadox’ dream:

(gravely) that means the other gods will do the same; they pull together perfectly, you know no wonder you get no better; why, the thing for you to do was to lie in the temple of Jove, the god that’s been your backer in those solemn oaths of yours.

Cappadox’ dream is a portent from Asclepius who is keeping his distance from the sickly pimp, as though he is ready to die. Thus the cook shares his interpretation of how the dream reflects Cappadox’ misfortune and offers a potential remedy by lying in the temple as a means to counter the bad omen for the oaths he previously enters into. Plautus’ mention of Asclepius maintains the Roman tradition of the interpretation of portents in

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42 Plaut. *Aulu*. 670-1.
dreams, but does it in an unconventional manner. Rather than portraying Cappadox approaching a professional interpreter Plautus uses a cook to serve in that capacity. Offering interpretations of dreams by lay Romans is not an unfamiliar religious or social practice; however having the background of a dream specialist insinuates a perception of trust in the accuracy of their predictions and interpretations that a simple cook does not convey. The use of dreams allowed Plautus to enhance his comedy while still following cultural norms even if it meant using unconventional means.

COMPARISON OF DIVINATION IN ARISTOPHANES’ AND PLAUTUS’ WORKS

Both omens and dreams in Greek and Roman culture appeared to serve similar purposes and degrees of accessibility. Aristophanes and Plautus both portrayed signs, omens, and dreams that lay persons interpreted, and who did not proclaim to have any prequalification or definitive insight. Observant Greeks and Romans witnessed these communications directly from the divine, and their perceptions did not require any special interpretation from a diviner, such as a seer, augur, or oracle. These signs were accessible and familiar to both cultures, and Aristophanes and Plautus’ comedies depicted their effects from everyday life. Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* even mentioned how young women were to seek favorable omens prior to marriage. Plautus also depicted the importance of understanding signs correctly by portraying Euclio’s ability to protect his fortunes through proper interpretation of omens. Aristophanes and Plautus’ abundant portrayal of omens and dreams, along with their ease of interpretation, seemed to reflect upon Greek and Roman cultures’ reliance and acceptance of communications from the divine as a part of everyday life. Aristophanes and Plautus both recognized the role of
the god Asclepius in the interpretation of dreams. The Greek practice of dream incubation for a remedy of the sick at Asclepius’ temple was also in practice by the Romans under official religious admissions, similar to *evocatio*. The Roman adoption of this familiar Greek practice allowed Plautus’ adaptation of a former Greek play to retain elements that were clearly Greek while maintaining the acculturative properties Plautus justified as familiarly Roman, thus its inclusion in *Curculio*. The Roman practice of adoption of foreign cults did show some degree of flexibility in religious practice albeit through state sanctions. Similarly the Greeks also maintained proper respect for tradition by participation in foreign cults through the practice of adoption. The degree of state influence of religious practice becomes further evident by looking into the role of the professional diviners in the cultures of Greeks and Romans through Aristophanes and Plautus’ works.

DIVINERS IN ARISTOPHANES’ WORKS

Alongside lay Greeks and Romans there was a body of professional diviners who devoted their lives to the understanding of divination. In the Greek world, the role of the seer was most prominent. Seers fit into identifiable categories of specialist: First, *exegetai*, who held profound proficiency in the interpretation of sacred laws and tradition; the second group consisted of the *mologoi*, or oracle-mongers, who maintained oral and written oracles that applied to various circumstances; lastly, the *mantis*, who commanded the most attention in their performance as a seer through comprehensive ceremonial

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45 Ando, 195. Note: Rome officially adopted the worship and practices associated with Asclepius in 293 B.C.E.

46 Burkert, 176.
observations, all for the purposes of correctly interpreting the signs of the divine sent to the Greeks.\textsuperscript{47} Their role in divination extended to the interpretation of signs, omens, birds, and ritual sacrifices to detect and decipher the often imperceptible communications from the gods, known as \textit{semeia}.\textsuperscript{48} The interpretation and observation of the flight and groupings of birds also fell under the trade of \textit{a mantis}. Apart from dreams the appearance of birds “constituted the most omnipresent and important of omens.”\textsuperscript{49} But it was the oracle that retained the most reverence in Greek life through their offering of divine communication. Seers symbolized local influence whereas an oracle maintained regional authority and prestige. The most respectable and collectively acceptable oracle was from Apollo’s shrine at Delphi.\textsuperscript{50} The oracle’s role was that of a mediator of Apollo and the divine world that offered cryptic oracles that answered the questions of the inquirers.\textsuperscript{51}

Greek seers were distinguishable for their central role and ability to interpret divine will, and they functioned with exceptional awareness of the meanings of omens, dreams, prophecies, and other forms of divination. Because of their training, education, and specialization seers typically maintained a reasonable amount of respect in Greek culture, but it appeared that Aristophanes portrays most of them mockingly.\textsuperscript{52} In \textit{Peace}, Trygaeus comments that his precision in fire building is like unto the seer’s craft of the

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
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\bibitem{47} Zaidman, 52-3.
\bibitem{48} Burkert, 111-3.
\bibitem{50} Zaidman, 121.
\bibitem{51} Mikalson, 99-111.
\bibitem{52} Michael Attyah Flower, \textit{The Seer in Ancient Greece} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 5-6.
\end{thebibliography}
famed Stilbides as he prepares to offer and interpret his own sacrifice without an observing seer.\textsuperscript{53} Aristophanes vainly attempts to question the need of an overseer through the objection of Hierocles, a seer from Oreus. Also, Aristophanes apparently created the character Hierocles who appeared to encompass the three specializations of a seer, and so serves as an excellent example here. Hierocles is first ridiculed for questionable sales as an oracle-monger (\textit{mologos}). Secondly, he postures himself as an expert in ritual by questioning Trygaeus’ actions, and by claiming he has authority to perform the rites as an \textit{exegetes}. Lastly, he inquires whether he is going to have an opportunity to fulfill his role as the \textit{mantis}, and examine the entrails for omens. Hierocles’ words fail to impact the procession of innards, thighs, and various sacrificial instruments Trygaeus calls for. Eventually, Trygaeus has to physically beat Hierocles to prevent further interruption.\textsuperscript{54} Aristophanes use of Hierocles as an authoritarian force symbolized a seer’s official threefold capacity in regulating the interpretation and performance of divining rights to ensure their credibility. However, through Aristophanes’ depiction of Trygaeus and Hierocles’ contempt for one another he appears to question the role of a seer. During the performance of the ceremony Hierocles’ need to mediate Trygaeus’ relationship with the divine is met with physical abuse. Although the role of a seer was clear in Greek tradition, Aristophanes’ representation of Hierocles’ pomposity and Trygaeus’ self-sufficiency provides, through some degree of levity, a comedic perception of the seer’s station.

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Ar. Pax} 1027-1054.
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Ar. Pax} 1547-1124, also see note 84 on page 558-9 for more on Hierocles.
Augury is another aspect of divination important to Aristophanes’ plays, and a seer was the Greek authority who connected the movements of birds with the divine. In *Birds*, he portrays various species of birds organizing under the leadership of Peisetaerus, who establishes the *polis* of Cuckooland amongst them by enlightening them to the reality of their position as mediators between Olympus and Greece. Convincing the audience of the influence of the bird’s the Chorus Leader reflects on the important role birds play by reminding them that no Greek captain would “embark on any course without first consulting the birds.”

This prompt emphasizes the importance of reading the actions of birds to uncover omens, whether good or bad, which could affect an Athenian’s actions. The interpretation of birds provides a means of uncovering the will of the divine through their actions. The ability to reveal fortunes is the diviner’s role, and reading the patterns of birds establishes another of the seer’s specializations. By controlling birds Peisetaerus gains authority and causes them to grant favorable omens interpretable to seers as they practice their augury. Peisetaerus realizes the value of birds and the wealth and power that comes through their manipulation. Aristophanes in this work showed his knowledge of the role of birds in Greek religious practice, and used these ideas to establish comedy by highlighting the function they played in Athenian life.

Although Aristophanes never portrayed the ceremony of attending the Delphic shrine, he does use the oracles readily throughout his plays. Aristophanes used oracles to develop his arguments, plots, and characters. Although he often criticizes how deeply

55 Ar. *Aves* 717.
56 Rose, 36.
57 Ar. *Av.* 593-594.
58 In his extant works.
seated religion had influenced Greek politics, his depiction of the reliance on oracles in Athenian culture was true. In *Wasps*, Lovecleon paraphrases a Delphic oracle to justify his inability to acquit any Greek of improper conduct because he will “dry up and blow away” if he does.\(^{59}\) Aristophanes’ unfavorable portrayal of Cleon depicts his unmerciful characteristics and propensity to act a warmonger, and Lovecleon’s arrogant use of this oracle helps to justify his argument. On the other hand, oracles for the Greeks provide direct links to the divine, and as long as they are interpretable they offer great insight to the believer. The role of the Greek *mologoi*, in the interpretation of oracles, further expresses the importance of an oracle, as they are bought and sold as if commodities. Confidence in the Oracle’s prophecies depends upon the accuracy of their interpretation. Because oracles are often wordy and cryptic in nature this form of divination allows Aristophanes to create comedy from them. Aristophanes’ *Knights* is an excellent example, and is overflowing with symbolic language that he uses to attack Athenian political figures, policy, and traditions.\(^{60}\) Despite his comic use of oracles, Aristophanes’ characters appear to favor them as genuine guidance from the divine and apply oracles to their path in life.

**DIVINERS IN PLAUTUS’ WORKS**

Romans valued divine knowledge and through its interpretation proper actions could be taken. Roman culture, similar to the Greek, respected the powers of the divine, and for the purposes of symmetry and a latter comparison between the Aristophanes and

\(^{59}\) *Ar. Vespae* 159-160. Note that this was an obvious parody of Cleon at the height of his power and influence, of which Aristophanes was critical of because of his political aspirations and war with Sparta.

\(^{60}\) *Ar. Eq.* 1007-54.
Plautus’ works diviners will also be divided into three groups, soothsayers, augurs, and oracles. When portentous events and omens became increasingly difficult to be read or understood by a lay person the consultation of a seer, soothsayer, or clairvoyant was utilized because of their unmatched ability to provide additional clarity. Though Roman evidence was scarce regarding the degree or frequency of Romans utilization of freelance diviners, some historical accounts depict Romans and neighboring cultures practice of similar traditions through the late Republican period. Given the few accounts of these freelance diviners, and their questionable or objectionable practices, the role of official state diviners appeared to overshadow their work in comparison. It is the augurs (augures) who served in official capacity for the state cults, and it is through this medium of discerning the actions of birds, the interpretations of natural phenomenon, and the behaviors of other animals that augurs functioned as the official explanation and judgment of the divine. The role of augurs definitively supersedes that of soothsayers who are not recognizable in any official capacity in Rome. Despite the preeminence of the college of augurs in Roman religion the status of oracles maintains a similarly high level of clout. Oracles are for the most part a legacy of the Greeks, from the procurement of the oracles of the Sibylline Books during the Roman regal period to the recognition of Delphi during the Sixth Century B.C.E. Both events are religiously important to Rome, but also admit that Greek oracular divination is critical in the function of Roman

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61 Beard, 63.
62 Warrior, 17.
63 Beard, 21-2.
religion. Roman diviners offered answers to difficult questions, and provided guidance regarding prophetic omens for both the state and individuals.

Plautus in his comedies portrays the role of a freelance soothsayer negatively, and even places into question the importance of such a figure in Roman society. *Poenulus*, contains one interesting observation on the perception of these clairvoyants. Lycus, a pimp, describes his experience: “When I had soothsayers, seers! Why, if they promise you something good, it comes at a sub-crawl, but anything bad they promise, you get that on the spot.”

This both humorous and critical account depicts a soothsayers’ craft as slow to provide favorable omens yet fast to distribute the bad. Plautus uses the negativity that exemplifies the soothsayer in Roman culture to add to the development of his comedies. Another example of a soothsayers practice comes through a *meretrix*, or courtesan, who detects the proximity of the Solder Pyrgopolynices, whom she is attempting to entice, with her “second sight,” which is in fact just her nose, and all a ploy that Palaestrio scripts to trick his master into giving up another man’s love.

Even though the scene amounts to a ploy, the gullibility of Pyrgopolynices depicts the deceptive powers of a soothsayer over honorable Romans. Plautus here appears to portray the ease with which a soothsayer influences others through the deception of an unsuspecting victim. The role of soothsayers in these examples seemed to reflect their influence and position in Roman culture, but it is unclear whether they were representative of *superstitio* or just maintained an unfavorable image. Because of the

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64 Altheim, 264.; Beard, 62.
66 Plaut. *Miles Gloriosus* 1255.
strictures of Roman religion seers and soothsayers played only peripheral roles to that of the official state religion and were often seen as superstitious, and even bordered on impiety.

For Plautus the notion of augury appeared often in comedy as a plot device to move the story along, as seen in Epidicus above, and its practice was familiar to Roman culture. Plautus used augury on several occasions, especially those instances in practice by individuals who disassociate themselves with the college of augurs. For example, in the play Asinaria a slave claims: “I’ve got my auspices, my auguries: the birds let me steer it where I please! Woodpecker and crow on the left, raven and barn owl on the right. ‘Go ahead,’ they say!” This disregard for the official capacity of augurs and their collegiate authority appears as a flippant view of their position in religious society.

Although lay Romans can interpret birds, it is clear that the Roman authorities on birds are the augurs. In Menaechmi, Peniculus requests to consult “the Board of [augures]” to investigate the odor of a woman’s gown, and this inconsequential request of the augurs is denigrating. By insisting a consultation of the augurs on this trivial matter, Peniculus questions his own ability, and thus requests the need to consult the religious experts.

Although Plautus here confirmed the authority of augurs over that of lay Romans, tradition taught the importance of the function of augury throughout Roman life. However, some 150 years later, Cicero did challenge, by means of philosophy, the validity and credibility of augury in his On Divination. Both the slave and Peniculus

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68 Plaut. Menaechmi 163.
69 Beard, 150.
served as examples here of the validity and importance of augury in Plautus’ time. Plautus’ use of augury as comic element evidently may be to humor his audience; but, whether or not it is humorous, Plautus did portray the college of augurs as the ultimate authority for interpretations.

Plautus’ adaption from Greek plays allowed for the inclusion of the oracular tradition, and such influence was understandable; however, Roman belief in these exceptionally competent diviners and revelations was also validated by the recognition of the longstanding tradition of oracles in Roman culture, such as the Sibylline Books. In *Menaechmi*, Plautus mentions a Delphic oracle to enhance the argument and credibility of the characters’ ploy to escape entrapment and impious behavior. Sosicles’ oracular threat to “burn her eyes out with blazing brands” serves to prevent further mistaken identity and some future infidelity against his own brother. 70 Plautus’ usage of the oracle in this way provides Sosicles an opportunity to justify his aggressive course of action against his twin brother Menacchumus’ wife, who has mistaken him as her own husband. Plautus implies the authority of the oracle to justify a course of actions for his character, and shows how influential divination can be in Roman life. Another familiar oracle Plautus implements is the Sibyl. In *Pseudolus*, the Sibylline oracle appears to be the only one capable of reading a cryptic and illegible letter. Plautus seems to present the Sibylline oracle’s ability to write as a joke; however he does not criticize the Sibyl’s oracular abilities only critiques the “dainty tablets” illegibility. 71 The account actually emphasizes the need for some highly competent diviner who has some prophetic status to

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71 Plaut. *Pseudolus* 25.
make sense of it. Plautus here portrays favorably the importance of diviners in society, whether they are of Greek or Roman origin. Although the Delphic Oracle is central to both Romans and Greeks the Sibylline Oracle plays a significantly more important role in Roman development, because of the Sibylline texts. Plautus’ inclusion of two culturally important oracles of Roman culture showed his adaptations were not simple copies of the Greek, but complex works of culture that pulled Roman themes through dressed in Greek productions.

COMPARISON OF DIVINERS IN ARISTOPHANES’ AND PLAUTUS’ WORKS

Aristophanes and Plautus appeared to have little respect for seers or soothsayers, and often portrayed them in a negative fashion for differing reasons. Historically the Greek seer maintained more influence and authority in ancient Greece through their specialization in the interpretation of omens, dreams, augury, and sacrificial roles, all of which fall within the bounds of traditional religion. However, when Hierocles attempted to assert his authority Trygaeus dismissed, humiliated, and challenged Hierocles’ actions, authority, and rights as a seer because of his excessive oracle-mongering and speculating of his particular relationship with the divine. Aristophanes here seemed to dislike the idea of profiting from a divine gift. Plautus similarly mocks the seer’s ability by allowing this role to be fulfilled by a woman led by her magic nose who only deceives an honorable, although self absorbed, Roman soldier, Pyrgopolynices. In Roman culture a soothsayer would have faced much suspicion by the state, since they act outside of recognizable authority, and had more appeal to those without direct access to the augurs
or other official priests. Even though Plautus’ works were set in the Greek world his audience was Roman who acted suspect of the potential for a seer to exhibit foul acts.

The importance of fowl to both Greeks and Romans is clear in their use of augury, but Roman religious strictures appeared to impact the approach of their interpretation. The influence of the birds and all forms of divination emerged from the ideal of a sympathetic *cosmos*, a world in which all things interconnect and gradually appear from chaos into a universe of order.  

72 This Classical understanding of the cosmos extended throughout the Hellenistic world, and thus also influenced Roman culture, therefore it was important in the ancient world to investigate the actions of the birds to uncover the portentous events that would be favorable, while also heading off the negative.  

According to Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ depictions of seers and augurs, a Greek *mantis* emerged most similar to the role of the Roman augurs seeing that they both influenced and interpreted the divine via the medium of omens, signs, dreams, and birds.

Nevertheless, in Rome the augurs constituted a state recognized religious college with a prescribed methodology for the observation of divinations, whereas the Greek seer independently appropriated their authority.  

74 While Aristophanes, in *Birds*, attempted to help his audiences understand the value of birds and the power of the seer’s augury, Plautus, in *Menæchmi*, confirmed the authority and importance of the college of augurs. Both of their portrayals of augury and the interpretation of prophetic birds were abundant, and depicted their respect yet questioned position within each respective culture.

72 Nilsson, 131.; Zaidman, 151.
73 Freeman, 386-387.
74 Ando, 58.
Appearances of the famous seers and holy oracles were common additions to Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ works. In Greek tradition an oracle embodied the most revered communication from the divine, and in Rome the prestige of the oracular Sibylline books cemented their reputation among the Romans. With their cultural value in mind it was no wonder that oracle-mongers and freelance diviners flourished yet obtained clearly critical portraits by Plautus and Aristophanes, since they represented the commoditization of communications from the divine. Obviously Plautus criticized the role of soothsayers who sold their divine gifts and exploited Romans. Myles Gloriosus provided an excellent example of how soothsayers presented the perception of being deceptive, magical, and even superstitious in their divining arts. However, oracles, regardless of form retained their authoritative value and were reflected with a positive perception despite their cryptic and often difficult interpretability. Plautus and Aristophanes both used oracles to add to their characters’ arguments and justifications for their actions, which ultimately strengthened the resolve of their characters. Oracles in Plautus’ and Aristophanes’ plays afford their characters the privilege of passing blame on an external force, and not taking responsibility for individual actions. However, this presentation of transference of responsibility could be perceived as a critique of oracles and their saturate role in ancient society.

75 Burkert, 114-8.; Beard, 62-3.
76 Warrior, 17.
Chapter 3

THE DIVINE AND DIVINE COMMUNICATION IN THE WORKS OF ARISTOPHANES AND PLAUTUS

This chapter focuses on Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ use of the divine and divine communication. Aristophanes and Plautus continue to present vivid details, in their plays, that depict the religious lives of Greeks and Romans. A systematic representation of each of the gods will not be the approach taken in this section. Instead, a few examples from Aristophanes and Plautus’ works will be representative of how they characterized the divine in their comedies as either figures of tradition or as comic caricatures. The section on the divine will include a brief introduction of traditionally held beliefs, beginning with Aristophanes’ Athens followed by Plautus’ Rome. After the divine is discussed, a representation of divine communication in Aristophanes and Plautus’ works will be framed and addressed through the prayers and vows offered between the Greeks and Romans and their gods. Prayer in the ancient world took many forms, and Aristophanes and Plautus both recognized this diversity throughout their comic works. Both the divine and divine communication played an important role in theater and culture, and both Aristophanes and Plautus’ works reflected this relationship. Generally speaking, the function of religion in the ancient worlds of the Greeks and Romans provided a link between humanity and the divine. Both Greek and Roman cultures have elaborately developed religious systems full of religious ideologies, specialists, prescriptions, and rituals all developed with intent to cultivate a relationship
with the divine. These religious systems were woven intricately into their societies. Aristophanes and Plautus depicted the divine and communication in their works, and to help facilitate this discussion a brief introduction of important characteristics will be provided.

THE DIVINE IN ARISTOPHANES’ WORKS

In traditional Greek culture the gods (theoi) were immortal, familial, anthropomorphic, and representative in the natural world. The gods were immortal, not eternal, and simply gained supremacy through the usurpation of power from ancestral deities.¹ Despite several myths and theogonies that tell of the various beginnings of the gods it is apparent that the Greeks saw their gods as products of the universe and not as the creators of it. Although thousands of deities comprised Greek religion primary focus shifted to a prominent few amongst the traditional Greek gods. Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Athena, Apollo, Artemis, Aphrodite, Hermes, Demeter, Dionysus, Hephaestus, and Ares were recognized Olympian gods in Greek tradition, but did not constitute the whole of the traditional Greek pantheon that included other gods, such as Hecate, Hestia, and Persephone.² The establishment of the Greek pantheon, whether through familiar or extraordinary reproductive methods, produced a veritable genealogy of interwoven deities with various responsibilities. “Historical origins…var[y],” and “no sacred book or presiding priesthood…tried to freeze the attributes of any deity.”³ Their relationships existed in a familial patriarchy with Zeus at the head.⁴ The gods’ anthropomorphic

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¹ Freeman, 126.
² Burkert, 125.
³ Freeman, 127-8.
⁴ Nilsson, 148.
nature furthered their relationship to the Greeks. Being anthropomorphic the gods clearly represented “their appearance and behavior” thru recognizable attributes.\(^5\) In Greek tradition the gods represent human-like characteristics in their emotions, physique, and desires. Many examples of the gods’ resemblance to the Greeks were seen in myth, theater, and worship. The gods also represented, by their power and control over, the natural world. Each god and goddess symbolized specific functions in the natural world, such as Zeus’ control of the weather and Poseidon’s dominance over the sea, while together they represented the whole orderly universe.\(^6\) In Greek culture the identity of the gods maintained a reasonable variability that was appropriate for local custom. This structure of variability in worship fit the Greek city-states, and Aristophanes’ Athens was no exception.

The gods in Aristophanes’ plays were disseminations of the Homeric and Hesiodic traditions, which should not to be confused with local cult worship of the gods. Since local worship and characteristics of the gods were variable, the use of traditional literary works formalized Aristophanes’ primary sources for the behavior and relationships of the gods that were familiar to Athenian audiences.\(^7\) In the case of accurate depiction of the gods Aristophanes utilized the convention of literary tradition over the specifics of local cult practices of the worship deity. Even Aristophanes recognized the tradition of upholding “The Twelve Gods.”\(^8\) The most common divine portrayal of a god was Zeus, who appeared regularly, and his nature reflected his attributes as a familial patriarch,

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\(^5\) Ibid., 144.
\(^6\) Zaidman, 177.
\(^7\) Mikalson, 34-6.
\(^8\) Ar. Av. 25.
controller of weather, and frontrunner of sexual prowess. In *Acharnians*, Dicaeopolis describes Zeus’ scope of power by exclaiming: “O Zeus who sees everywhere, through, and under!” This exclamation of the authority of Zeus characterizes him as omniscient, which is a customarily held view passed down from Homeric tradition. Aristophanes’ adherence to literary tradition, however, did not prevent him from using characters who question the existence of the gods. In *Knights*, a slave of Demos questions the existence of the gods on grounds of insufficient evidence. However the slave is questioned by a companion who believes that being “godforsaken” is evidence enough of their existence. This division of belief in the gods often served Aristophanes as a tool to reinforce traditional behaviors. Aristophanes’ characters often question traditional belief in the gods; however he balances this behavior through the voice of the chorus in his comedies because the chorus commonly reflects traditional wisdom and religiosity. Although characters often question the gods, as is the case with Demos, a traditional view from the chorus praises Poseidon, Pallas Athena, and other gods. The disagreement between the chorus and Demos represents the conflict of the community and the individual. This questioning of the gods appears as a common plot action for Aristophanes’ characters, and usually produces an unfavorable outcome of the rebellious character or their eventual repentance from breaking with tradition. Take Aristophanes’ portrayal of Socrates and Strepsiades, in *Clouds*, who through logic questions Zeus’

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9 *Ar. Ach.* 435-6.
10 Burkert, 129.
11 *Ar. Eq.* 34-39.
12 *Ar. Eq.* 551-594.
existence. But by the end of the comedy Socrates’ school is in ashes and Strepsiades vows to honor the gods again. Aristophanes’ characters who either questioned or sustained the gods served as a crisis for comic actions throughout his plays, which typically sided with traditional beliefs in the end.

Aristophanes’ traditional depiction of the gods continues through their obvious anthropomorphic representation. In Greek culture the worship of gods, in the form of a statue, was both traditional and symbolic. Unlike Mesopotamian cultures, Greek statues acted as representations of the god and did not physically incorporate or enshrine their gods. In Peace, Aristophanes offers a description of a statue of Eirene, the goddess of peace, as a symbol of the characters’ behaviors. This anthropomorphic imagery represents typical cult practice of the worship of the gods. The statue or image is tangible and characterizes the specific god in a physical form representative of their particular function in society. Although images and statues are common throughout Aristophanes’ comedies the strongest examples of anthropomorphism of the divine is through his characterizations of them. Wasps, Frogs, Birds, and Clouds all supply obvious examples of the gods serving as anthropomorphic actors in Aristophanes’ plays. In Frogs, Aristophanes set the play in the underworld with most of the characters as gods. One scene describes the interaction of Dionysius, in disguise as Hercules, while the true Hercules mocks him for wearing ladies boots with a lion skin and club. Hercules’ reaction to Dionysus’ behavior portrays how the gods maintain similar emotions and

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14 Bernard C. Dietrich, Tradition in Greek Religion (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1986), 102.
15 Ar. Pax, 520-6.
16 Zaidman, 215.
17 Ar. Ranae 35-47.
reactions to the Greeks.\textsuperscript{18} Making comedy was Aristophanes business, and by portraying Dionysus as Hercules cross-dressed as a woman shows his flippant attitude for an accurate portrayal of the gods. However, Aristophanes is still careful to voice the proper opinion of religious tradition as Hercules critiques Dionysus’ behavior and dress. It is apparent that Aristophanes has interest in comedy by his portrayal of an effeminate Hercules via Dionysius. What he also depicts in the scene is the role of symbolic representation of the divine by altering a familiar representation of Hercules. Aristophanes modified the representative nature of the god. Aristophanes’ carefully anthropomorphized the divine and generally represented them in their traditional nature, but whenever he needed a laugh he occasionally challenged, bent, or even skewed it. Although Hercules ridicules Dionysus’ reinterpretation of him in \textit{Frogs} the gods were preset in their roles and reflected the cosmic order. “Dionysus is the god who transcend[ed] boundaries,” thus Dionysus’ actions were within his traditional pattern of behavior.\textsuperscript{19} Aristophanes’ clever use of Dionysus as a character presents both Dionysus in his traditional role, while portraying Hercules satirically in opposition to his own.

Maintaining tradition was a sign of order, and Aristophanes often portrays characters that both challenge and uphold it. This apparent contradiction represents well the traditional belief in the organization of a systematic cosmos that balanced order with chaos.\textsuperscript{20} Dionysus represented disorder, and Aristophanes often portrays Apollo critically

\textsuperscript{18} Freeman, 127.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 128.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 129.
because he represented what his comedies often question, order. In *Wealth*, Aristophanes takes the opportunity to criticize Apollo and the will of the gods through Cario, a slave:

“But against Apollo,…I have a valid complaint, and here it is: people claim that he’s a healer and a sage prophet, yet he discharged my master in a deranged condition. There he goes, following a blind person, exactly the opposite of what he should be doing: we who can see should lead the blind, but he keeps following, and makes me follow too, all the while giving my questions nary a peep in reply.”

The complaint appears quite logical. To literally follow after a blind person is foolish, but the “blind person” in this example is the god of wealth. This complaint originates with an oracle given by Apollo who promises fortunes, but the oracle is so vague in its meaning that much confusion and inappropriate action is taken in its interpretation. Aristophanes here similarly criticizes Apollo’s role in prophecy and appears to convey that oracles are often so cryptic that accurate interpretation is necessary to gain divine insight. Misinterpretation by lay practitioners highlights the need for professional diviners to clarify cryptic oracles. Apollo’s role in providing order is in question here by one of Aristophanes’ characters. Although some characters question traditional roles of the gods, many uphold them. In *Wealth*, Cario’s master Chremylus chooses the traditional healing proficiency of Asclepius as an option over that of a doctor, which they could not locate anyway. Aristophanes through Chremylus appears to discount professional healers, by claiming doctors participate in an unprofitable vocation in opposition to that of traditional religious methodology, such as the incubation at Asclepius’ temple. Although Chremylus appears to claim that doctors are less effective

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21 Ar. Plut. 1-17.
22 Ar. Plut. 407-411.
then religious incubation it is unclear if all Greeks also felt this way. Aristophanes’ example clearly identified the traditional practice of incubation as a representation of religious worship of the divine. Also, Aristophanes more often represented characters that generally supported traditional religious perceptions over logical or scientific pursuits.

Although the traditional gods are more commonly discussed, the existence of daimones, or intermediary deities, according to tradition also had effect upon the lives of the Greeks. These deities, the daimones, could act on humans for good or ill. In Knights, Demonsthenes, a slave, expresses his need to make a “toast” or an offering of wine to appease the “Good Genie” that could grant him good favor. This example of offering to intermediary deities depicts that practice of calling upon various forms of the divine for support rather than simply turning to the gods. These spirits appear to have similar effect upon their devotee as the gods, yet on a smaller scale. This also seems to reflect smaller scale local practice of worship rather than the elaborate worship of the Olympian gods. Additionally Aristophanes includes occasion to mention and acknowledge other mythical deity like creatures such as nymphs. In Women at the Thesmophoria, the chorus mentions “the daughters of the sea…and you nymphs who range the mountains,” while praising many other god, which gives weight to their position in religious observance. Nymphs appear throughout Greek literature, and seem to symbolize the natural world in a more specific and local way than the gods. Nymphs,

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23 Zaidman, 178.
24 Ar. Eq. 85-86, (i.e. δαίμονας translates to “Good Genius” or “Good Genie”).
25 Ar. Thesmophoriazusae 312-371.
as described by Aristophanes, appear to have dominion over local natural features such as mountains, groves, streams, waterfalls, and other local places that are known for their spiritual nature. Although *diamones*, nymphs, and spirits do not play prominent roles in Aristophanes’ comedies they were present and reveal an important aspect of traditional Greek religiosity.

**THE DIVINE IN PLAUTUS’ WORKS**

Similar to Greek divinity, the gods in Rome symbolized immortality, physicality, family, and natural power. However, Roman gods maintained a distinctly Roman context, and were not simple copies from Greece. Although many Roman deities shared similar myths, functions, and ideals of the Greek, the gods and their identities were firmly rooted in Roman culture. The primary Roman gods who filled similar roles to the Greek gods are: Jupiter, Juno, Janus, Neptune, Mercury, Diana, Minerva, Saturn, Ceres, Venus, Vulcan, Vesta, Mars, Apollo, and Pluto. The intent here is not to directly parallel the Greek Olympians to the Roman gods, but to simply highlight the major deities of Rome that follow, similar to the Greek, the attributes of immortality, familial patriarchy, anthropomorphism, and characteristics of nature. Although Romans believed the gods to be superior they were not inaccessible to them. Tradition holds that the gods, on occasion, directly involved themselves with the affairs of the Roman people. An individual god’s actions did not reflect a model of behavior acceptable in Roman society because they typically symbolized only a few behavioral extremes; however embodying a portion of them all, albeit in moderation, could demonstrate model Roman behavior. The

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26 Beard, 30.
attributes of the Roman gods were reflections of their place in society and nature. An example of a god filling a distinctly Roman context is Mars, who associated with agriculture and warfare, unlike the Greek god Aries who was primarily linked to warring. In Plautus’ comedies the gods were distinctly Roman because he portrayed them through their Roman characteristics, thus his adaptations of Greek plays highlighted the transforming of similar Greek deities into markedly Roman deities who were more accessible to his audience. Apart from the gods, Romans also worship familial deities that represent their closest connection to their ancestral heritage. Whether in grand public spectacle, through idealizing behaviors, or a simple family shrine the deities of Rome Plautus portrayed the divine as an important aspect in the lives of Romans.

Plautus’ portrayal of the gods was in line with tradition, and he even adapted mythic stories in his productions. The gods, for the most part, do not participate in direct roles in Plautus’ works; however there are a few exceptions to discuss. In Amphitryon, Jupiter disguises his true nature by imitating Amphitryon, who is returning home from a victorious campaign, for the sole purpose of sleeping with Amphitryon’s wife. In many ways this portrayal of Jupiter depicts his ability to engage in an extreme behavior of deception and extramarital relationships, which are not acceptable in Roman society; nevertheless Jupiter’s behavior is in keeping with Roman belief. Mercury, acting as Jupiter’s accomplice to the love affair, declares Alcmea’s innocence by saying: “no no, it would seem highly unbecoming for a god to let a mortal take the consequences of his misdeeds and his indiscretions.” Regardless of how inappropriate the actions of the

27 Plaut. *Amphitrueo* 492-3.
gods, a mortal is not accountable for a god’s misdeed or offences. Another mythic image Plautus uses is that of Oreus guarding the path of Acheron to the underworld, typically held by Pluto. Plautus’ text is unclear as to the reason for referring to Oreus over Pluto, but again this offers an interesting insight as to the religious culture of the Roman audience who might have better insight and clarity in their understanding in this context. The Roman gods in these examples serve to portray Plautus’ ability to anthropomorphize the divine in character while preserving their traditional characteristics.

In Plautus’ comedies the gods functioned primarily through indirect intervention and scrutiny rather than direct action and influence, and a clear example of this is through their operating under a patriarchal hierarchy familiar to Romans. Presenting the gods in this manor established a more familiar interaction to the Roman audience between the divine and Romans. According to Demipho in Mercator the role of the gods is to “make sport of mortals in amazing ways.” With this in mind, Demipho proceeds to recount a vision of contending “she-goats,” sent by the gods warning him of his future actions of infidelity. However, Demipho’s lack of spiritual insight and this indirect communication from the divine he fails to recognize that the maid he hires, for his wife, and his wife are the “she-goat[s],” who are to cause turmoil in his marriage. Demipho’s heart lusts after his maid and because of his new found love for this girl he neglects his familial responsibility to his wife. The gods attempt to intervene in Demipho’s life, through a vision of contending she-goats to save him from woe, but he could not see through his lust the guidance the gods bestow. The gods in their specific roles and

28 Plaut. Mercator 225-270.
functions operate under a system of hierarchy, similar to the functions of the Roman family and patriarchy,²⁹ thus power and authority reside at the top, which provides structure and situations of tension in many of Plautus’ comedies. The gods also symbolized respective roles similar to what existed in the Roman household. For example, “Jove” represents the figurative head and ruling arm of the family of the gods just as a father would rule his home; while Juno represents the hierarchy of the feminine counterpart to the male.³⁰ Plautus clearly addressed and alluded to the mirroring of the earthly and divine social hierarchy on several occasions. He also appeared to set forth the importance of Roman religious ideologies as expressed through the characteristics of the divine.

The gods that Plautus portrayed in his works were beings who exercised extraordinary divine powers. Plautus also used the gods and their powers to direct the story of the characters, and to portray the gods influence upon humanity. One example of divine power wielded by the gods directly upon the Roman world is Jupiter stretching out the length of the evening so he is able to prolong his love affair with the wife of a mortal man, and following his indiscretion he utilizes his power again to shorten the next day.³¹ Roman perception of divine power of the gods is traditional, and elicits a desire of respect of that perchance the divine will use these powers in their individual favor. Such practices of prayer and rituals highlight this relationship further between the divine and humankind in the coming sections. Another example of divine power is Vulcan who “in

²⁹ Beard, 30-1.
³⁰ Plaut. Cas. 408.
his wrath begot that villain: whatever he touches he consumes entire.” This depiction by Plautus vividly illustrates the power and potentiality of the gods to induce fear and reverence for their divine powers. Therefore, it is not unreasonable that if a Roman believes in the might of these deities, that they would call upon them in prayer and make vows to them for a chance to gain their trust and favor and win their support.

The worship of spirits of deceased ancestors was also an important aspect of maintaining religious piety through the worship of household gods. This worship of the familial deities (penates) symbolized the worship of an individual Roman’s family ancestry, and reflected the tradition that middle Republican Romans practiced and later Vergil portrayed through the remembrance of Aeneas’ pious religiosity the worship of gods that were brought from Troy to their new home. In a farewell address we gain a glimpse of this reverence as a son speaks, upon leaving his father’s home: “Ye, Penates of my parents, father Lar of this abode, to you I commit the fortunes of my parents that ye guard them well.” The penates, in this farewell address, are given some credence with regard to their influence of the material world. Further, the invocation of the Lar, the protective god of the household, and these lares are worshiped at local shires throughout the vici of Rome. Plautus builds the setting of one of his comedies the Aulularia around the influences of the lares upon the family of the impious Euclio. Euclio’s daughter, Phaedria, conversely is a pious worshiper of their familial gods and their Lar praises her for actions by saying: “she prays to me constantly, with daily gifts of

33 Beard, 323-4.
35 Beard, 139.
incense, or wine or something: she gives me garlands.” Her piety in regular worship and acknowledgement of the lares brings favor upon her, and even affects the coldhearted nature of her father who is a miserly hoarder of riches. Through her actions of pious religiosity, and the reciprocity of the Lar, they enact meaningful change upon her father’s willingness to support her marriage through his giving the precious treasure he hordes. Plautus’ portrayal of familial ancestor worship is prevalent, and serves as another example of the depth of his adapting of the Greek plays by making them distinctly Roman. To a Roman audience these examples depicted believable and favorable actions and behaviors of piety in their devotion, through the worship of the household gods.

COMPARISON OF THE DIVINE IN ARISTOPHANES’ AND PLAUTUS’ WORKS

The divine in Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ comedies reflected their individual cultural ideals. Their works also maintained traditional religious views of the divine. Similarities existed between the portrayal and characterization of the gods between Plautus and Aristophanes’ works. Both used traditional sources and myths to create or adapt their comedies to establish a more traditional portrayal of the divine familiar to their audiences. Aristophanes’ numerous uses of the gods as individual characters in his works far outweighed Plautus’. Additionally the gods they portrayed maintained their traditional attributes, however Aristophanes tended to push acceptable boundaries further than Plautus. For example, Aristophanes’ portrayal of Dionysus, as mentioned previously, as a cross-dressed Hercules depicted characteristics of traditional gods in a

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36 Plaut. Aul. 20-25.
37 Henderson’s in text note in Plaut. Aulularia pg 323.
comic way. This blurring of tradition in comedy was closely relatable to Aristophanes’ work and Greek culture than the works of Plautus and his more conservative Rome. The use of comic action often came from the tension between two characters, and Aristophanes and Plautus both portrayed characters who questioned the divine in opposition to those who were trying to uphold tradition. Although characters often misaligned from traditional values and belief in the gods, the purpose appeared significantly for comedic purposes, as these characters by the end of the play tended to return to traditional beliefs, such as Plautus’ Pistoclerus and Aristophanes’ Demos and Strepsiades.

Although Aristophanes and Plautus’ works contained many similarities in their use of the divine in comedy many differences surfaced because of cultural, religious, and stylistic divergences. One freedom that Aristophanes seemed to enjoy more liberally then Plautus was his ability to operate under the flexibility of Dionysus. Dionysus shifted the bounds of order, and his worship at festivals ultimately allowed for the extremes of behaviors that carried over into forms of entertainment, including comedy. Plautus, on the other hand, appeared more restricted by religion and the governing body of the senate because of their conservative ideologies. Although Greek culture, religion, and government allowed Aristophanes a greater degree of freedom of expression, he maintained traditional views of the gods just like Plautus. The greatest difference in the use of the divine is Aristophanes’ use of daimones and Nymphs, and while Plautus portrays some spirits he focuses mostly on the Roman lares or familial gods. Although these deities serve a similar function in both Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ comedies they
were both culturally distinct. In the plays these spirits or intermediary deities had both spiritual and physical influence upon characters, and attempted, whether successfully or not, to guide or manipulate them depending upon the storyline.

Another way Aristophanes and Plautus similarly portrayed the divine was through the use of images, idols, or statues to represent various gods throughout their plays. Aristophanes and Plautus both used recognizable imagery to represent the divine, since not all plays warranted the inserting of a god, as a character, directly into the production. The use of representative imagery allowed the characters of the plays to interact with the divine in a way more familiar to Greek and Roman audiences. The use of these anthropomorphic statues or images was easily more relatable to everyday Greek and Roman life than to portray a god walking and talking amongst the human characters. Although ancient literature, theater, and myth often depicted tangible interaction with the divine, ancient Greeks and Romans communication to their gods was more often intangible through divine communications.

PRAYERS IN ARISTOPHANES’ WORKS

Communication with the divine signified an important traditional practice of the Greeks, and Aristophanes shows this through his works. Although the calling upon the divine in prayer commonly accompanied many religious proceedings, its practice existed both publicly and privately. Traditionally the prayers of Greeks served as an outward voice of communication to the divine world. Because of a cultural perception and need for divine guidance, prayer typically maintained a practical and sensible form of
communication with the divine.\textsuperscript{38} The practice of prayer in both casual and formal occasions served the needs of both lay Greek practitioners and professional diviners. Informal declarations, boasts, or oaths to the gods appeared commonly in Greek culture as seen through both theater and literature. Additionally prayer frequently accompanied vows, which served to establish formal contracts between the invoker and the divine. However, a god was not under obligation to honor the petitioner of the vow, and retained discretion as to whom they choose to answer. Only when the gods fulfilled their vow was a contract entered, and the invoker compelled to uphold the agreement. This contract or “oath” placed the gods as “guarantors,” and if the invoker of the vow broke it the gods were permitted to seek out divine punishment.\textsuperscript{39} Receiving favor of the divine warranted a return of pious action in worship, and if such action was not reciprocated by the invoker they were liable of divine retribution because of their impiety. Although the divine had no obligation to guarantee favorable outcomes, prayers by the Greeks offered an opportunity for them to create contracts with the divine in hopes of obtaining favor.

Throughout Aristophanes’ comedies the use of prayer appeared frequently. From short pleas to long winded utterances Aristophanes’ use of prayers connects his characters to the divine. Whether for help, forgiveness, knowledge, or some other form of assistance, the calling upon the divine appeared quite regularly. The most apparent verbal recognition of the divine consisted not as some formal prayer, but as a short acknowledgment or affirmation of specific deities, most commonly Zeus. Even the most unlikely of characters swore to the gods. In \textit{Acharnians} an ambassador of the Persian

\textsuperscript{38} William Stearns Davis, \textit{Day in Old Athens a Picture of Athenian Life} ([S.l.]: Biblo & Tannen, 1914), 224.  
\textsuperscript{39} Freeman, 133.
King ignites the nerves of the statesman Dicaeopolis by “swear[ing upon] Zeus,” that drachma strapped city-states are begging for resources by throwing lavish parties for the Persian ambassadors. The ambassador appears confident in swearing by a foreign god, and his reference to Zeus depicts the recognition of Greek gods in the eyes of foreign powers. Although the ambassador is mocking the Greeks by swearing by their gods he also portrays knowledge of the Greek custom of “swearing” and uses the gods to give weight to his argument in a form recognizable by the Greeks. Aristophanes’ use of casual swearing to the gods may reflect on the commonality of making oaths with the gods in typical Greek conversation; it is uncertain if lay Greeks typified comic characters, but the regularity of Aristophanes’ use of this form of prayer seems to show its commonality. This casual nature of making oaths to the gods appears more frequently in Aristophanes’ comedy than the more formal dialogue of prayer. For example, in Lysistrata, both Lysistrata and an old woman confront a magistrate and swear by and invoke three heroine goddesses, Artemis, Pandrosos, and Hecate, to aid their defense against oppressive men. No formal dialogue or vow is made, just a simple oath, expression, or plea to the goddesses that favor their particular situation. Aristophanes’ comedies contained similar expressions to the divine, and his Greek characters appeared prone to calling upon them during their exploits.

Formal public prayer typically signaled a major event, such as a festival, ritual, or ceremony, and Aristophanes uses many of these events as familiar scenes throughout his comedies. In Women at the Thesmophoria, Critylla leads a poetic prayer, with a

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40 Ar. Ach. 88.
supportive chorus, to the divine asking to preserve and prosper the Athenian people, culture, and beliefs. Unlike simple oaths or affirmations, prayers like Critylla’s are characteristically different because of their beautiful descriptions of the divine, elaborate requests of provisions, and honorific acknowledgements of the role of the divine in the lives of the Greeks. The use of this formal style of prayer caters to the circumstance of the festival of the Thesmophoria, and reflects the religious importance of the occasion. In Aristophanes’ works the chorus commonly acts as the sustaining voice of reason for the people, and because of their support of Critylla’s prayer they respond in kind by offering their own prayer:

Zeus of the grand name, and you with the golden lyre who live on holy Delos; and you almighty Maiden with the gleaming eyes and golden spearpoint, who dwell in a city you fought for, come this way! Any you of the many names, slayer of beasts, seed of Leto of the golden eyes; and you, august master Poseidon, who rule the brine, quit now the fishy deep so lashable to frenzy;…May Apollo’s golden lyre resound in harmony with our prayers, and may we well born women of Athens hold a faultless meeting!"  

The religious nature of the Thesmophoria warrants divine communication, and the chorus in this example both praises and calls upon the gods in prayer. The prayer here describes the gods primary attributes, and recognizes their authority over the festival. This pattern of prayer was not unlike traditional prayers found in ancient texts, and depicted realistic recreations of traditional prayer offerings prior to a major religious proceeding.

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42 Ar. Thesm. 312-371.
43 Ar. Thesm. 312-330.
Prayers also tended to reflect a reciprocal relationship that affected both devotee and the divine. Aristophanes acknowledges the reciprocity of vows and portrays how deities ultimately choose whether to accept or reject the vow of the devotee. In *Peace*, Trygaeus, a farmer, is resentful of the war with Sparta and vows to know Zeus’ intentions for the people of Hellas. Trygaeus’ servants fear he is mad, but he calls on Zeus to “lay down [his] broom,” and pleads to not “sweep Greece away.” 44 The vow that Trygaeus’ makes is to discover a path to peace on his own, and eventually he does through the help of several of the gods. Trygaeus’ prayers and vows are at first offered to Zeus, however Trygaeus through the establishment of a new cult to Peace (an idol hidden in the earth), ultimately has his vow fulfilled by the gods. Aristophanes’ commentary on the war stresses the importance of the efforts of Athenians to seek after all avenues of peace as the war is bankrupting Athens. Another example of the one-sided nature of vowing to the divine is seen in *Acharnians*. Dicaeopolis, through his mounting hatred of Sparta calls upon Poseidon, his patron god at Tainarum, to “send them an earthquake and shake all their houses down on them.” 45 His vow is one of vengeance and reflects his loss of livelihood by the destruction of his vineyard by Spartan troops; additionally his vow to Poseidon is an allusion to a prior earthquake that is sent as a punishment for the deaths of refugees slain at his temple. 46 Although Dicaeopolis pleads for the fulfillment of his request his vow is denied and ignored by Poseidon. Despite the reciprocal nature of vows the gods are ultimately responsible for their outcome and the benefit to both parties.

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44 Ar. *Pax* 50-81.  
45 Ar. *Ach*. 509-515.  
46 Henderson’s note in Ar. *Ach*. pg 120-1.
Prayers in Aristophanes comedies come in many forms and his unpredictability reflects the variability of offering prayers in Greek culture.

PRAYERS IN PLAUTUS’ WORKS

Romans also revered prayer, in various forms and practices, as a special link to the divine world. Seeking divine favor through the use of prayer and vows was important in Roman culture because it served as the means of gaining divine support for the state or household of the devotees. Prayer typically preceded ceremonies of sacrifice, festivals, theater, and other religious events as an invocation of the divine, but it was not limited to such occurrences. The prayers that accompanied these festivals contained formal descriptions and followed more strictly traditional models, and occurred frequently in the texts of ancient writers.\textsuperscript{47} Although prayer is a common form of communication with the divine it was the use of vows that depicted the legalistic traditions of Roman religion. The religious colleges acted in a legal function and position between the divine and the people of Rome because they authorize the writing and maintenance of vows to the gods.\textsuperscript{48} One example of legalism in Roman culture comes from Plautus’ \textit{Asinaria}, when a contract is read and subsequently modified to provide legal provisions in the securing a prostitute’s services, for one full year, to a single individual.\textsuperscript{49} The contract serves as a satirical commentary on the structure of the current legal system that permeates Roman life, especially religious culture. A vow established a contractual agreement with the divine promising a specific favor or action on behalf of the invoker, only if the gods

\textsuperscript{47} Beard, 35.  
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 24-32.  
\textsuperscript{49} Plaut. \textit{Asin.} 746-801.
honor their contract.\textsuperscript{50} Although similar to the Greek practice of vowing, the Roman custom of vowing was more saturate in a legalistic devotion through precise language and actions.\textsuperscript{51} The portrayal of divine communication in Plautus’ works will share the same structure as discussed in Aristophanes by being divided into three parts: simple expression (i.e. oaths), formal utterances, and vows.

Informal utterances, acknowledgements, and oaths constituted a more common form of prayer, and on a more general level consisted of the invocation or naming of the gods. For example, in \textit{Cistellaria}, Melaenis and Alcesimarchus jointly praise the gods: “now so may all the gods and goddesses, of Heaven, of Hell, and of in between, so may Juno,…Jove,…Saturn,…Mercy.”\textsuperscript{52} This naming of gods and invoking them was a call for witnesses to justify his action with his own mistress. The content of the prayers appears remarkably exceptional and throughout Plautus’ comedies serves as an example of common speech in asking for help from the divine or in thanks and phrase of the gods. In \textit{Aulularia}, Euclio calls desperately for Apollo’s help to protect his fortune from his servants.\textsuperscript{53} This action is representative of a reflexive plea to the gods calling out in desperation for extra worldly assistance in protecting what Euclio desires most. This form of prayer is common to Plautus’ characters as they appear in many trying circumstances, so they grasp for any assistance they can find, especially that of the gods. Another common form of expression to the divine in prayer is that of simple thanks. In \textit{Captivi}, Ergasilus praises Jupiter after learning that his masters’ son is safe and free from

\textsuperscript{50} Beard, 32-5.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 32.
\textsuperscript{52} Plaut. \textit{Cistellaria} 510-20.
\textsuperscript{53} Plaut. \textit{Aul.} 392-4.
harm. Ergasilus’ appreciation to Jupiter reflect his gratitude in being first to receive the news because now he will gain favor in his master’s house by reporting the news, and Ergasilus attributes his good fortune to the divine and praises Jupiter for it. Simple prayers of thanks reflect the relationship Plautus’ characters have with the divine, as they tend to acknowledge the hand of the gods in their lives.

Although not nearly as common, characters in Plautus’ works found themselves offering praise or thanks to the gods in more formal prayers. Formal prayers often reflect specific characteristics of the gods, such as Sagaristio’s, a parasite in Persa:

O Jupiter, thou opulent, glorious son of Ops, deity supreme, powerful and puissant, who does bestow opulence, happy hopes, and bounty, gladly do I thank thee and duly do I offer praise for that the gods do bestow upon my friend in friendly wise this bounteous benefit by enabling me to help him in his need with an opulent loan! 

Sagaristio’s adoration, admiration, and appreciation are a reply to Jupiter’s favor in securing a loan, albeit not for himself, and motivates his gratitude to an expression in prayer. In Sagaristio’s case he not only praises Jupiter, he thanks him for sending funds to his close friend. Simple praise and thanks to countless deities are found throughout Plautus’ works, and it is apparent that prayer is a common form of communication. However the seemingly most important type of prayer in Rome generally accompanies the receipt of some request in a formulaic vow.

54 Plaut. Captivi 768-780.
55 Plaut. Persa 251-272.
Vows garnered reciprocity from the divine and the devotee, and under such contracts mutual benefits emerge. A vow was not binding unless corroborated with the divine, thus it was often in the case of war that both sides would make a vow to the divine in hopes to succor their favor before another did.\textsuperscript{56} Even Rome engaged in this practice with foreign deities through the process of *evocatio* in hopes to steal the favor of the divine by promising superior worship if they are to switch sides. Through a “network of obligation, traditions, [and] rules” Romans negotiate with the divine who are to provide, at their own discretion, a more reliable and favorable relationship through vows.\textsuperscript{57} The goal of establishing a vow with the divine is to secure favor and a reciprocal relationship that was mutually beneficial. With influence from the legalistic nature of Rome a vow acted as a formula based upon proper language and were carefully recorded with precision, in hopes of preserving the intentions of the agreement.\textsuperscript{58} This formulaic communication depicted the organization and detail of the Roman interaction with the divine in an attempt at favoring the growth of the Roman state. Reciprocity is espoused in the phrase *do ut des*, meaning “I give so that you might give.” Plautus also recognizes this relationship in *Bacchides* with Pistoclerus declaring that “man proposes and God disposes,”\textsuperscript{59} which adequately expresses this association of vowing for favors of the gods. However, once the favor is accessible the devotee is responsible for completing the vow, typically through sacrifice or some offering as outlined by the vow. This reciprocity and finalization of a vow is well demonstrated in *Miles Gloriosus* as Philocomasium mentions

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\textsuperscript{56} Plaut. *Amp.* 229.  \\
\textsuperscript{57} Beard, 34-5.  \\
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 32.  \\
\textsuperscript{59} Plaut. *Bacch.* 146.
\end{flushright}
how she will honor the gods for her safe passage across the sea, and fulfills her vow to
the gods by burning “Arabian incense” upon an altar.60 Once a god fulfills their
obligations in the vow it is expectant that the devotee who enters into the vow also
complete their portion. Roman prayers and vows, as Plautus illustrated in his comedies,
served as an excellent source for the portrayal of traditional religious behaviors in theater.

COMPARISON OF PRAYERS IN ARISTOPHANES’ AND PLAUTUS’ WORKS

The uses of prayer in Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ works served very comparable
purposes, but they retained a very specific cultural context for their audiences.
Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ characters used prayers for similar reasons and functions, and
by depicting how individuals sought access to the divine and their power. The use of
prayers often facilitated in their comedies the opportunity to develop religiously rich
content as characters sought the divine whether in thanks, praise or request. Aristophanes
and Plautus commonly portrayed individuals that, through pious prayer, gained divine
favor, in opposition to those who prayed impiously received divine recourse. The
regularity of the depiction of prayer throughout their works appeared to portray the
prevalence it had in their cultures. Prayer as a form of divine communication served as
an avenue for many of Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ characters to reveal their dependence
upon the divine in achieving goals. The common use of prayers throughout both
Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ works provided a religious form of expression, gratitude, and
reverence of the divine.

60 Plaut. Mil. 410-4.
In both of Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ works the most common expression to the divine was made through an oath to the gods, but formal prayers, albeit less frequently, also provided an important glimpse into the lives of the ancients. Oaths, exclamations, praises, and thanks were all variations of a short utterance toward the divine, and Aristophanes and Plautus both utilized many forms of this type of communication between the gods and their characters. Although tempted to simply superimpose theatrical characters as real Greeks and Romans, the characters that Aristophanes and Plautus create simply modeled or exhibited characteristics of reality. When their characters speak informally to the divine, they used the words familiar to their authors, which come from their own experiences or observations. As a reflection of reality, Aristophanes and Plautus used characters in relatable circumstances to that of their audience, so when they casually make an oath, offer praise, give thanks, or ask for help from the divine they are reflecting real culture, religion, and life. The examples of simple prayers permeate Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ comedies, and established a believable reality for their audience by recreating familiar dialogue. Unlike the simplistic nature of oaths, formal prayers in Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ productions appeared less frequently, but were distinctive in their use of traditional religious settings. Just as with the illusion of reality of simple prayers, formal prayers also reflected this same value. Characters utilized this elaborate form of prayer in context to major events, ceremonies, festivals, or rituals. This formal prayer is longer in verse and more poetic in language, and centered upon reverencing the divine rather than disrespecting them by making jokes at their expense.
The greatest difference in the use of prayers by Aristophanes and Plautus in their plays is through the depiction of vows. Although vows played a major role in Greek life, Romans tended to reflect a more legalistic outlook and embrace the need to be extremely precise in their language. Vows appeared less frequently than informal prayers, yet occurred more often than formal prayers. Although the portrayal of making vows is clear in Aristophanes’ work and reflected its use in Greek society, Plautus’ references to this practice in Roman life were more explicit in describing the relationship of the divine and humanity. Plautus articulated the relationship of the divine and Romans through his characters (especially Pistoclerus) that identify how they were to ask for divine favor, but ultimately the power lied in the hands of the divine to honor or fulfill contracts proposed by the devotee. Aristophanes acknowledged the cultural and religious practice of vowing in Greek society, but Plautus, because of the inherent legalism in Roman culture, seemed to emphasize the practice of vows through defined contracts. Aristophanes focused more upon the devotees’ requests of the divine with fewer acknowledgements of reciprocity, while Plautus more often highlighted what was asked, offered, and reciprocated. Aristophanes’ depictions of vows were no less articulate or formal than Plautus’, but they appeared less concerned with reciprocity. The difference between the two in portraying vows demonstrated cultural differences, or perhaps was merely stylistic playwriting. Clearly the practice of offering vows was important to both cultures, independent of Plautus’ clearly Roman perspective; Aristophanes also underscored the value of maintaining favorable relations with the divine through vowing.
Chapter 4

RITUAL AND OFFERING IN THE WORKS OF ARISTOPHANES AND PLAUTUS

Aristophanes and Plautus depicted religious rituals, offerings, and sacrifices in their comedies relative to their cultural familiarity. Ritual takes various forms in worship, and Aristophanes and Plautus illustrated how it functions, in their works, in light of multiple religious and cultural contexts. A ritual can be defined as an act of religious devotion that commonly represented a reverence of the divine through some physical action or process on part of the devotee that attempted to gain some form divine favor.¹ Rituals permeate ancient Greek and Roman culture, and Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ works portray how religious actions affected their characters. Festivals congregated civic, cultural, and religious life of both ancient Greeks and Romans, and expressed a focus on religious observance. At festivals rituals are prominent and both Aristophanes and Plautus capture these activities in their performances. The most common form of ritual in Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ works were offerings, and their portrayal will be highlighted through libation, meal, animal sacrifice, and burnt offerings. Offerings in Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ works often presented a ritual performance for comedic purposes; although these performances enabled comedy they also reflected a representation of reality, and how their portrayal of rituals had a resemblance of religious cultural practices in the lives of Greeks and Romans.

FESTIVALS IN ARISTOPHANES’ WORKS

¹ Pals, 272.
Festivals and similar public rituals permeated Greek culture; Aristophanes used these events to direct his storytelling, and convey his ideas of religiosity through them. Comedies are performed at religious festivals, and often these productions portrayed characters at such festivals, which are common to Greeks. The festival formulated an important religious, cultural, and civic gathering for the Greeks, and was central to the celebration and worship of the divine. Festivals are the means of public worship overseen by civic appointment. Many ritual activities accompanied festivals, such as sacrifices, performances, processions, dancing, and feasting. The religious elements of festivals and the examples found in Aristophanes’ works reflect how he portrayed ritual activities in his comedy that mirrored the Greek world. Several festivals served as the settings for Aristophanes’ works, including the Thesmophoria, Stenia and Scira, which were festivals of women. Aristophanes set these plays surrounding important festival to feminine goddesses and filled them with behavior and practices held during them. For example, he portrayed women chanting “Sabazios,” and the “worship of Adonis on rooftops,” both being imports from Phrygian and Semitic cultures respectively, and also illustrated the importance of how festive environments and practices were found in Greek culture. Aristophanes included vivid detail of festivals, and the practices associated with them.

Other examples of religious activities at festivals included dancing, parades, and processions. In Aristophanes’ Clouds, during the Panathenaea, men are said to be

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3 Ar. Thesm. 834-5.
4 Ar. Lys. 387-390.
proudly dancing in the buff while holding high a shield out of respect for Athena, but rather Aristophanes jokes about their actions of using the shield to hide their nakedness, which disrespects Athena. The men in this example, for some undisclosed reason, hide behind the very shields they are to be lifting up to the divine in honor of their goddess Athena, but rather reflect their impiety through their actions. Another ritual action in some festivals is the participation or serving in processions. Aristophanes, in *Wasps*, jokes that rather than pointlessly debating, old men should serve a more fulfilling function, and then identifies the practice of elderly men serving as olive bearers in the Panathenaic parade. The use of branches, of various types, in procession or parade is common to Greek festivals. Aristophanes recognizes the importance of such religious events and actions by cleverly stating that old men will serve a more valuable purpose in religious service then endlessly debating politics. Festivals not only include activities of dancing, performances, and sacrifices, they most definitely included feasting. The popularity of offering libations and animal sacrifices served as a vehicle to justify the (often excessive) consumption of food and drink. Aristophanes briefly mentions a few of these celebrations in his works that focus on feasting, such as The Pitchers Feast, New Moon Feast, and the Apaturia. No one event is more important than another, but the specific mention by Aristophanes of the practice of “eat[ing] sausages at the Apaturia” is interesting because this festival significantly served as the point of admittance of Greek

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5 Ar. Nub. 985-990.  
6 Beard, 40-1.  
7 Ar. Vesp. 531-545.  
9 Ar. Ach. 961,999.
children and new citizens to kinship groups.\textsuperscript{10} Aristophanes here described the importance of the ritual consumption of sacred sausages at a festival central to civic experience, and this mingling of cultural, civic, and religious life is central to being Greek.

FESTIVALS IN PLAUTUS’ WORKS

Plautus’ presentations of festivals embodied Roman culture, but they also contained Greek elements because his works were adaptations from Greek originals. One example of this is his mention of the Aphrodisia, a festival of the Roman goddess Venus. The Aphrodisia is a festival of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, and the festival in Roman terms reflects the Roman goddess Venus. As an adaptation of a Greek original the characters are Greek with Roman influence and dialogue for cultural accessibility. Agorastocles, in \textit{Poenulus}, speaks of going to the temple of Venus to attend the Aphrodisia and watch the finely costumed courtesans because of Cupid’s influence upon him.\textsuperscript{11} The cultural dualism of Cupid and Venus in connection to the Aphrodisia portrays the mingling of cultures in Plautus’ comedy. Festivals both culturally Greek and Roman, through adoption, are also important in Plautus’ works. In \textit{Cisterlaria}, Plautus briefly mentions the Dionysian festival and how one of his characters invites another to the procession.\textsuperscript{12} Although the god Dionysus is originally Greek, his acceptance in Roman culture as Bacchus is important to recognize. Despite the cultural dualism that Plautus portrays in festivals he is also clearly represents distinctly Roman rituals and festivities.

\textsuperscript{10} Ar. \textit{Ach}. 145; also see Henderson’s note 27.
\textsuperscript{11} Plaut. \textit{Poen}. 189.
\textsuperscript{12} Plaut. \textit{Cist}. 89-90.
Festivities and their rituals appear quite frequently in Plautus’ comedies, and their performance is in connection with religious thanks and praise. One firmly Roman example of religious inspired festivities that Plautus used depicted the rituals surrounding the practice of marriage.

Although not a state sponsored civic celebration, the festivities of marriage indicate ritual practices, and served as an outward expression of religious beliefs. Between two of his plays there are several details that surface that provided an accounting of the rituals involving marriage. From Casina, the practice of acting as a torch bearer for the bride appears. Although Plautus here belittles this role by giving the task to a male slave, the characters recognize the importance of maintaining the tradition.\(^\text{13}\) The significance of bearing a torch for the bride has deep cultural meaning to the Romans who look to the role of the Vestal Virgins as the standard bearer of chastity, always keeping watch over the flame.\(^\text{14}\) Despite Plautus’ jest the mere mention of this role signals at least a cultural if not religious function in marriage. Another reference to marriage comes through a precursory ceremony, by means of bathing prior to the offering of a sacrifice of purification.\(^\text{15}\) The evidence found here presents Megadorus’ desire to be clean through the physical act of bathing prior to his religious actions of offering sacrifice preceding the marriage. In the dialogue Plautus does not confirm that bathing is a necessary precursory ritual, but he is clear that the offering of sacrifice is to earn the favor of the gods; and such a ritual is to detect any portends that might be looming over

\(^{13}\) Plaut. *Cas.* 118-9.

\(^{14}\) Beard, 70-1.

\(^{15}\) Plaut. *Aul.* 578.
the couple prior to their union. Rituals in marriage are common among most cultures, but the details that Plautus performs on stage present both a written dialogue of the event and his interpretation of these rituals through fictional characters. The last example in the connection to the ritual of marriage is a portrayal of the carrying of the bride over a threshold, which serves as further protection from bad omens and curses that could befall the bride. These ritual actions of marriage Plautus describes serve as a means to uncover the reality of ritual action and the significance it plays in the lives of the Roman audience who would have been able to understand the cultural contexts.

COMPARISON OF FESTIVALS IN ARISTOPHANES’ AND PLAUTUS’ WORKS

Aristophanes used festivals to solidify Greek religious and cultural context in his comedies, unlike Plautus who, because of conservative cultural boundaries used Greek cultural settings (palliatae) in his works and is unable to directly portray distinctively Roman festivals. Despite Plautus’ limitations he did manage to illustrate other Roman cultural and religious context in his works. Although festivals established the settings for many productions of the two playwrights their portrayal of them was quite different. Aristophanes’ depiction and dialogue of festivals appeared to accompany more details of the rituals, events, and proceedings at these festivals; whereas Plautus depiction, at least through the dialogue, offers a less than full account. However both Aristophanes and Plautus recognized the importance of festivals for the lives of their characters, and the impact they had culturally. Festivals and religious festivities represented culturally relevant settings and opportunities for their characters to commune civically, socially,

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16 Plaut. *Cas.* 815-25.
and religiously. Aristophanes and Plautus also recognized that festivals had impact upon the relationships between the divine and the community. Critical religious processions, offerings, rituals, and sacrifices were present in Aristophanes and Plautus’ works, and offer a diverse view, through their characters, of how individuals perceived festivals.

OFFERINGS IN ARISTOPHANES’ WORKS

Offerings typically centered on a “convenient focal point,” whether an icon or specific offering that better directed the sacrifice to the divine. Aristophanes utilized this form of ritual often in his works, and generally included the recognition of statues, images, and symbolic objects that had representational qualities of the divine. The regularity and use of idols was common in Greek religious worship. In Clouds, Strepsiades, while dwelling upon his folly for choosing to devote his time to reason rather than religiosity, stumbles past a familiar statue of Hermes and exclaims: “well, Hermes old friend, don’t be angry with me…but forgive me for taking leave of my senses.” Strepsiades recognition of the statue brought about a recollection of guilt that led him to a prayer of repentance and the correction of his abandoning of the gods. In Clouds Aristophanes acknowledges that although reason may lead to great intellect, in no way should one lose their religious and cultural ties like Strepsiades. Although idols play an important role in religious prayer, other offerings similarly direct the prayers of the devotee. In Wasps, the chorus goes to gather myrtle wreaths and incense at the request of Loathcleon, prior to offering a prayer to Apollo for a fair trial. The ritual objects

17 Dietrich, 102.
18 Freeman, 49-50.
19 Ar. Nub. 1476-1492.
accompany a prayer, of clarity of mind and temperament, prior to the prosecution, so the jury could reach a fair settlement of the criminals past warmongering.\textsuperscript{20} The inclusion of this prayer and the accompanying offering is important as it provides focus, just as with the idol, to the prayer by identifying the deities to whom the devotee is addressing. It is not certain that the myrtle wreaths are in fact the sacrifice to the gods, but instead accompany and symbolize identifying qualities of the gods to whom they are praying.\textsuperscript{21} Another instance further illustrates the use of myrtle in \textit{Women at the Thesmophoria}, when “brazier and myrtle sprigs” are brought as an offering to the gods, after recognizing the hand of the gods on Agathon’s success.\textsuperscript{22} This offering depicts the reciprocation of a vow honored by the gods in Agathon’s behalf. The offerings here of myrtle and brazier paid homage to the divine, and are representative of how Aristophanes used his characters to portray religious actions.

Other significant offerings, that are not quite as common, include the votive offering, burning of incense, and meal offering. A votive offering accompanied a vow made to the divine in a typical “if-then” statement fashion; however unlike a simple vow in prayer a votive offerer might inscribe the vow or initiate a tangible offering.\textsuperscript{23} In \textit{Women at the Thesmophoria}, a captured kinsman uses wooden votive tablets to call for help both to the gods and those who may come across them.\textsuperscript{24} This votive offering is a symbolic gesture of hope that the gods will direct his tablets to those who might save him from his plight. Additionally a votive offering is a tangible gesture of an inward

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{20} Ar. \textit{Vesp.} 860-2.
\bibitem{22} Ar. \textit{Thesm.} 35-8.
\bibitem{24} Ar. \textit{Thesm.} 765-84.
\end{thebibliography}
commitment between the devotee and the divine. Unlike a simple prayer a votive offering took some planning and contemplation prior to presenting up an offering to the gods. The burning of incense also appears frequently as a precursor to many other rituals performed in Aristophanes’ works. In Wasps, Xanthias mentions the ritual burning of incense at the new moon while holding three fingers together. This particular example of burning incense is interesting because it mentions the specific details of a particular occasion that ritual incense is burnt, and also includes a description of the ritual action performed by holding three fingers together. Clearly Aristophanes uses recognizable imagery, settings, and language to illustrate the use of such offerings familiar to his audience. Meal offering often accompanies various sacrifices in both private and public religious spheres, and commonly represents the firstlings of the season. In Peace, a double offering of meal and wine briefly mentions a symbolic offering of the “firstlings” to Peace. This presentation of the offering of the first fruits of the soil to Peace appears as a symbolic gesture of the tender nature of achieving peaceful relationships in a hostile environment. Although the dialogue Aristophanes presents is not explicitly clear as to confirm this statement, it still shows the importance of presenting meal offerings in religious practice. In another example, meal offerings are commonly presented as offerings to Hecate at shrines in the streets, and the offerings are symbolic of giving up

25 Freeman, 142.
26 Ar. Vesp. 94-6.
27 Burkert, Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical, 68.
28 Ar. Pax 1059.
foodstuffs, albeit in most cases were just leftover scraps. In Wealth, Chremylus addresses this practice of placing food before the shrines of Hecate, but often before too long the food is taken by the poor. Aristophanes acknowledges the ritual offerings of meal before Hecate’s shrines, and is clear to highlight its apparent effect on society. The ritual action of offering perishable foodstuffs to the gods was readily practiced in society. Meal offerings were not unique in their ritualistic gifting of food to the gods; libations follow a similar pattern.

Libations presented the most iconic form of offering that Aristophanes used in his productions. As explained by Walter Burkert, “usually libation [was]…taken to be some ‘offering,’ some gift presented to a divine or daemonic power.” A libation was an offering presented by the pouring out some liquid, commonly wine or oil, as a gift to the divine that the devotee was seeking favor. In Knights, Aristophanes depicts a libation of wine to the “Good Genie” and the “Pramnian Genie.” Two slaves, who are excessively drunk, think of a plan to win their master back from Paphlagon, and they attribute this inspiration to the spirits through an offering of libation in thanksgiving. This double libation offering, to these daimones, of their wine serves as a gift to them for inspiring the slaves’ plan. Although this may just seem like a clever marketing strategy for ancient wine makers, the purpose of libations is to offer a smaller portion of something valuable to the divine that is readily available. Aristophanes does appear to identify some

30 Ar. Plut. 594-600.
31 Burkert, Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual, 41.
32 Ar. Eq. 105-107; Henderson notes pramnian is a fine, strong red wine.
controversy in libation offerings; however it may just reflect a simple comic element added for pure entertainment value. In *Assembly Women*, the women criticize the men of the assembly who because of abuse of the acting out of libations and long prayers appear to mask their drinking, as they bicker like “drunkards.” Aristophanes seems aware of the abuse of the religious tradition of pouring libation as an excuse to drink, or at least that Greek women during this time entertain the perception that a libation is an easy excuse for a drink. Libations are not always simple gestures of thanks to helpful deities; they often accompany serious acts, such as those found in *Acharnians*. A libation, made by Sitalces, a powerful Thracian King, symbolizes a vow to the gods and Athenians to send an army so large it would have been seen as a cloud of locusts. This act by Sitalces depicts the commitment of honoring vows through the making a physical act of a votive offering through a libation. This form of libation is similar to a contract involving the two negotiating parties as well as the divine. Similarly, the formation of a treaty is codified by the use of a libation, which serves to ratify a treaty between two parties or city-states. Libations provided many useful purposes for the Greeks, and reflected a religious commitment on their part to the divine. Regardless of the circumstances of offering a libation Aristophanes clearly echoed the common practice of offering libations to the gods in Greek life throughout his works.

**OFFERINGS IN PLAUTUS’ WORKS**

33 *Ar. Ecclesiazusae* 139-40.
34 *Ar. Ach.* 148-50.
35 *Ar. Ach.* 185-195.
Plautus also demonstrated the use of offerings throughout his works and the use of religious paraphernalia and sacred spaces in worship. Symbolic objects and offerings provided an additional focus to the devotees in their worship of the divine by directing their attention to specific deities. Statues provided an excellent example of the use of representational objects that focused worship. In *Rudens*, Ampelisca refers to the female followers of Venus who gather around the statue in her temple, and would not leave unless “dragged away by brute strength.” Their devotion in worship is strong, and their commitment to Venus exhibits the bond they have with her through the worship with the statue. These examples depict the use of statues in worship of the gods as they are a common focal object found throughout Rome. Idols, although important in religious worship, did not constitute the only means for focusing ritual dialogue and action. Holy places such as shrines, groves, and other divine habitations serve as sacred spaces for Plautus’ character in their acknowledgement of the divine throughout his works. In *Rudens*, a shrine to the Venus symbolizes her comely attributes, and allows the devotee to focus upon their individual worship of her. Similarly, Euclio, in *Aulularia*, maintains a sacred grove and shrine in hopes of honoring and gaining favor of the divine for the protection of his treasures. *Mostellaria* provides another example of a divine habitation that Theopropides believes the divine space is his former home, and this group of unfavorable spirits’ curse blocks their passage to the underworld. Each of these examples depicts a divine space that has special influence upon the devotee, for good or

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38 Plaut. *Aul.* 616-23.
39 Plaut *Mostellaria* 445-470.
ill, and acts as a focal link to the divine. Whether through a divine object or space the possibility of gaining closer access to the divine was important in Roman culture.

Offerings proved devotion to the divine through various rituals that directed the pleas of devotees to the gods. The use of offerings other than animal sacrifice was common in Plautus’ works, and their practice throughout Rome was significant.\textsuperscript{40} Plautus used religious offerings to recreate believable worlds familiar to his audience. In \textit{Miles Gloriousus}, a mention of the offering of incense is made to Ephesian Diana in thanks for safe passage through “Neptune’s realm and blustering abode.”\textsuperscript{41} In this example Plautus portrays his characters recognition of divine realms and influence, and that through the burning incense acknowledges the guiding hand of the divine. The burning of incense serves in many functions and accompanies various religious circumstances from prayer to animal sacrifices, and represents the importance of the rituals of sacrifice that did not contain the spilling of blood. Another specific ritual is found in the offering to Apollo of a laurel branch.\textsuperscript{42} Similarly the offering in \textit{Rudens} of perfume and scents to Venus during the Aphrodisia reflects Plautus’ use of offerings to the divine throughout his works.\textsuperscript{43} These offerings are very specific in their nature as they associate very keenly to Venus and Apollo’s divine attributes. These symbolic items as offerings serve as objects that reflect divine characteristics that devotees believe portray and identify specific deities. Presenting offerings to the divine in the Roman world is a key religious observation, and the representation of offerings in Plautus depicts

\textsuperscript{40} Beard, 154.
\textsuperscript{41} Plaut. \textit{Mil}. 411-14.
\textsuperscript{42} Plaut. \textit{Mer}. 676-80.
\textsuperscript{43} Plaut. \textit{Poen}. 1174-1181.
their prevalence in culture and religion. Plautus’ portrayal of ritual offerings highlighted the importance of maintaining a relationship with the divine. The functionality of offerings Plautus portrayed linked the fundamental ritual practices by connecting the divine to representational objects.

Plautus provided considerable variety regarding the performance of offerings, but the most common offering he depicts is the libation. Along with the practice of prayers and vows, offerings served as a critical step in maintaining favorable relationships with the divine, and perpetuating religious contracts. The act of offering a libation as a token of religious commitment was an acceptable offering, and Plautus described several circumstances of this ritual offering. In Curculio, Phaedromus while pouring out wine says: “Drink, ye portals of pleasure, drink! Quaff deep, and deign to be propitious unto me!” The intention of this libation is to satisfy the hag who holds the entrance to the rear door of the brothel, thus allowing Phaedromus to visit his favorite prostitute without paying the proper fee to the pimp. Although this example is a comedic depiction of a libation offering to a wine hag, the principles of the offering remain true to causality, and of making a sacrifice to the divine, for the offering is a careful gesture in attempt to receive a favorable outcome, which is exactly what happened. Another example of how Plautus’ uses libations is through Phaedria, in Aulularia. In this example the familial Lar praises the daughter of Euclio for her regular piety in presenting daily gifts and offerings, including libations of wine. This example is particularly different from the previous as it reflects how Plautus characterizes pious behaviors through offerings, and does so

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44 Plaut. Curc. 88-90.
45 Plaut. Aul. 23-7
through the voice of the divine. Regardless of the purpose of the libation the offering of wine remained the same, but the reasoning and outcome varied dramatically.

COMPARISON OF OFFERINGS IN ARISTOPHANES’ AND PLAUTUS’ WORKS

The role of symbolic offerings in Aristophanes and Plautus were very similar as they, often comically, portray characters acting out religious rituals to connect with the divine. Tangible objects tended to highlight religious behaviors of their characters. Aristophanes in *Lysistrata* and Plautus in *Rudens*, portrayed the use of statues in worship as a focal object. In *Lysistrata* the women gathered and praised the statue of Athena just as the followers of Venus attached themselves to the statue of their goddess in *Rudens*.46 In each example the women worshiped their goddess through the use of an image that had representational qualities of their respective deity. Apart from the use of representative objects, sacred spaces and ritual offerings also, in both Aristophanes and Plautus’ works, served to direct the prayers and worship to the divine. Gathering in a sacred space such as a grove, a shrine, or a temple also focused the religiosity of Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ characters by depicting their desires to gain access to the divine through sacred environments.

From the burning of incense to elaborate votive offerings, Aristophanes and Plautus represented offerings that echoed the religious practice of their audiences. They also go as far as to present a comical commentary on the effects of omitting religious offerings to the divine. In *Clouds*, Strepsiades’ served as an excellent example of what

giving up rituals such as libations and incense burning does to an individual.\textsuperscript{47} Giving up on traditional offerings led to unfavorable outcomes for Strepsiades. Coming across the statue of Hermes reminded Strepsiades of his impiety and brought about a change of heart that directed him toward his traditional religious values. Strepsiades stood as a good example of Aristophanes’ portrayal of a character living outside custom that illustrated the value of following a traditionally minded life. Similarly, Plautus portrays characters that exhibited a similar crisis of faith, and either fall to ruin or return to traditional practices and achieve success. Euclio, from the \textit{Aulularia}, exemplified a disconnect from tradition bordering on superstition, but eventually through the help of traditional religious practices, of which his daughter was a beacon of pious behavior, realizes his faults and has a change of heart. Aristophanes and Plautus both portrayed offerings as an outward expression of an internal longing to gain access to the divine.

The most common offering that Aristophanes and Plautus depict in their comedies is the practice of libations. Aristophanes’ use of libations focused upon his characters’ opportunity to drink excessive quantities of wine. He even appeared to criticize the practice by labeling it as an excuse to regularly drink in wine excess. However most of his references pay homage to deities to whom the characters are intending to offer thanks, give praise, or gain favor. These latter examples show Aristophanes’ inclination to present how individuals had used libation rituals in their particular circumstances. A modern reader might think, or even agree with Aristophanes critique, that many of the characters in Aristophanes’ plays make selfish decisions or even immoral requests, such

\textsuperscript{47} Ar. \textit{Nub.} 425-6.
as the drunkards in *Assembly Women* or Phaedromus’ libation to gain access to prostitutes. However, ancient Greek and Roman religion was not explicitly moralistic, and regardless of the request the action of performing the ritual was the same, but the outcome under divine control. Plautus’ use of libation performed similar functions to that of Aristophanes, and they tended to present libation rituals in various circumstances that proved the diversity of religious devotion in their respective cultures. The amount of references to libations in both Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ works seemed to point to the commonality and regularity of this offering in the lives of the audiences. Additionally their use of ritual libations depicted a wide range of religious actions from characters in diverse circumstances, from that of household slaves to wealthy citizens.

**SACRIFICE IN ARISTOPHANES’ WORKS**

Until now the discussion of ritual offerings only briefly mentioned animal sacrifice yet Aristophanes’ works often depict these important acts and ceremonies from Greek religion and culture. On a basic level animal sacrifice consisted of the ritual slaughter of an animal that was set apart for the ceremony. Following the slaughter of the animal the ritual proceeded through the division of the animal into parts designate for the divine (for divination, ceremony, or to be burnt) and parts for the consumption of the participants, or through a holocaust sacrifice, a ritual burning of the animal wholly, where the entire animal presented an offering to the divine.\(^{48}\) Aristophanes use of animal sacrifice in his works is plentiful, from the sacrifice of a “phallus” at a Rural Dionysia, to

\(^{48}\) Freeman, 134.
the use of piglets as sacrificial animals.\footnote{Ar. Ach. 241-4,745-48,763.} In *Peace*, Trygaeus pleads to borrow “three drachma for a piglet” because he desires “to get initiated before [he] dies.” This discussion regarding the sacrifice of piglets during the initiation rites of the Elysian Mysteries points to the importance of animal sacrifice in cult worship that leads to a promise of happiness after death.\footnote{Ar. Pax 374-5.} Piglets provide an affordable, popular, and typically inedible sacrificial animal, and thus provide an example of a common holocaust offering.\footnote{Daniel Ogden, ed. *A Companion to Greek Religion*, Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World.; Literature and Culture; (Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2007), 134.} Although Aristophanes makes jokes at the expense of sacred cult ritual he still portrays the importance of performing specific sacrificial offerings through the ritual slaughter of animals.

Another example of animal sacrifice Aristophanes depicted in his works was the ritual proceedings of the sacrifice of a lamb. At an altar a basket is brought with barley meal, garlands, and a ritual knife, and then continues with the sprinkling of water on the lambs head and a spreading of “barley pips” in to the crowd. Once these actions take place the officiator offers a prayer, and at its conclusion carefully carves the lamb into proper portions. Finally the kindling and fires are lit and portions are set out for the gods and others left for consumption of the participants.\footnote{Ar. Pax 942-1126} This account of a ritual animal sacrifice by Aristophanes provides the most detail and dialogue of all his works, and closely resembles a formal sacrifice.\footnote{Freeman, 135-6.} Although his depiction contains fictional and comic elements this depiction of the ritual of animal sacrifice has correlation in the
religious and cultural practices of the spectators. Another important religious ideal in this sacrificial demonstration is the contention between the lay officiators, Trygaeus and a slave, and a professional diviner, Hierocles. The performance of and interpretation of divinations in animal sacrifice is within the realm of professional diviners; however, Aristophanes presents lay devotees in this capacity performing the ritual. Hierocles critiques their ability and performance of the sacrifice and offers to assist, but is ultimately rejected. This portrayal offers a commentary regarding the need for priestly and professional officiators over that of lay Greeks. The imagery is recognizable, and even though the characters are comical about the proceedings, their actions and desires to complete an offering to the gods was in line with social and religious norms.

Although Aristophanes portrayed animal sacrifice humorously, his accounts provide elements of religious truths long held by tradition. In *Birds*, Aristophanes parodies the idea that burnt offerings provide a source of power to the divine. Between the earth and the divine lies the domain of birds, and once the birds finally recognize their position they begin to block the “aroma” of the sacrifices to gods.\(^{54}\) This clever parody of Aristophanes presents the cultural and religious perception of sacrifices that rise through the air to the divine. However it is important to note the impious nature of acting as the gods, by usurping sacrifice intended for their benefit.\(^{55}\) Sacrifices empower the divine and are sent in an attempt to gain favor on behalf of those offering the sacrifice. In *Lysistrata*, a sacrificial boar represents the women’s vow and oath of celibacy in opposition to the Peloponnesian War, and only upon the signing of a peace treaty with

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\(^{54}\) Ar. Av. 180-222, 560-9.
Sparta will the women deem their vow satisfied. This ritual action strengthens their cause and commitment to ending the war by presenting their argument to the divine through the offering of a sacrifice, and the public who witness it. Women in Athens retain little power, but Aristophanes cleverly portrays man’s weakness for women, and thus presents Athenian women with effective power and authority. The sacrifice is both symbolic of their vow and also represents the importance in offering sacrifice to the divine when a goal or cause is seemingly insurmountable without divine assistance.

Sacrifice on a more public level commonly accompanies great festivals, where the largest of these rituals took place. In *Knights*, a sausage seller who is driven to greatness because of an oracle, attempts to gain favor of the council, and in his speech Aristophanes highlights the Panathenaea at which the sacrifice consists of 100 cows and the sacrifice of 500 goats to Artemis for the success at Marathon. Aristophanes does not stop there as the Sausage Seller insists that these sacrifices be doubled in an attempt to gain greater favor of the council. Clearly the importance of these sacrifices is evident in the lives of the Athenians as the number of sacrificial victims attests; however Aristophanes’ character here emphasizes the importance of Greek religiosity by demanding the ritual numbers be doubled when they perform the sacrifices. These animal sacrifices whether at grand festivals, cult initiations, or a simple vow proved the rich religious culture of the Greeks, and Aristophanes captured these moments in his plays.

**SACRIFICE IN PLAUTUS’ WORKS**

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56 *Ar. Lys.* 175-239.
57 *Ar. Eq.* 646-62.
Roman animal sacrifice followed a similar pattern to the traditional Greek structure of sacrifice. Animal sacrifice served many functions in Plautus’ works, such as through ritual cleansing, honoring vows, giving thanks, and seeking revelation, and these portrayals are relatable to their use in Roman religion and culture. Depending upon the circumstances of the ritual offering certain prescriptions would be given on how to prepare the animal for ritual sacrifice. In Epidicus, Plautus mentions the perceptions of offering a holocaust animal sacrifice to Vulcan who “consumes entir[ly]” with fire. Vulcan’s role as the god of fire and smiting leans to a commonality of the idea of offering holocaust sacrifices, and this form is not uncommon in the cult of Vulcan. Although Plautus’ works mention the performance of holocaust sacrifice they are not prevalent and lack sufficient detail to adequately discuss the practice in-depth. General depiction and Instances of animal sacrifices however are plentiful and Plautus provides insight into this ritual practice. In Poenulus, Plautus highlights a couple of important reasoning for maintaining the practice of animal sacrifice. Lycus offers six lambs to Venus in hopes of receiving “good omens,” but when his sacrifice fails to gain divine favor he stops and critiques the “greedy” goddess for not accepting. Plautus portrays Lycus’ desire in sacrifice is to make an expensive offering with the intent of securing Venus’ favor; however, Lycus upon realizing his sacrifice is vain dismisses the ceremony prior to portioning the meat and burning the proper portions. Lycus’ sacrifice points to several processes of the ritual that include: identifying the divine recipient, having a purpose,

58 Beard, 35-6.
selection of sacrificial animals (lambs), the hiring of a professional diviner, the slaughter of the animal, the reading of the entrails, and the division of the meat prior to it falling on the altar. Plautus later even recognizes the use of sacrificial meats to feed a hungry dinner party following worship and the ritual sacrifice.\textsuperscript{62} Plautus’ representation of ritual animal sacrifice clearly illustrates the importance of order, authority, and rationality. Despite the unfavorable outcome on Lycus’ part, Plautus presents the sacrificial ritual in context of daily Roman life through his character.

Unlike the portrayal of other offerings by Plautus, ritual sacrifices were typically not offered by lay individuals as a direct offering to the divine, but through the professional mediation of an intercessor. The performance of ritual sacrifice was supervised by the authority of a priest. Priests, as specialist or experts, served through pontifical colleges and held specific duties in association with their office, and advised in major and minor religious functions.\textsuperscript{63} This function is brought up on occasions by Plautus, but specifically in \textit{Poenulus}, Lycus recounts a priest’s general purpose clearly when he resents: “their telling me the sacrifice a while ago showed I [am] in for some terrible trouble and loss.”\textsuperscript{64} Lycus also states that he paid the priest even though the portents he identifies are unfavorable to him.\textsuperscript{65} Despite the perceptively negative portents, this statement presents the priest in an advisory role during a ritual of sacrifice by relating the function, condition, and outcome of the ceremony. Other examples similarly portray the role of professional diviners in religious rituals, but there are

\textsuperscript{62} Plaut. \textit{Poen.} 617-19.
\textsuperscript{63} Beard, 18.
\textsuperscript{64} Plaut. \textit{Poen.} 746-50.
\textsuperscript{65} Plaut. \textit{Poen.} 466-70.
unfortunately no specific mentions by Plautus regarding the practice of the taking of the *haruspices*, the practice of a specialized priest reading the entrails of the sacrificial victim. However the quotation above does provide an inference to this function, by reporting upon the outcome of the sacrifice, without explicit mention of the reading of the entrails. The details of the performance of sacrifice is lacking in Plautus’ comedies, possibly because he focuses more upon the outcome of the ritual that drives his storytelling, but the number of references to ritualistic sacrifice are plentiful.

The act of performing offerings and sacrifice supplied three main functions in Plautus’ works. The first was to reciprocate the honoring of a vow or thanks to the divine in providing some benefit to the sacrifice. This action is apparent in *Curculio* as Cappadox recounts the favor granted him of the divine for his fortuitous business and social endeavors, thus he unwaveringly resolves to pray and offer sacrifice at the temple in recognition of the divine in honoring the vow. This function appears most frequently in recognition and reciprocity of honoring vows entered into between an individual and the divine. The second function was to entice the gods through selflessly pious ritual actions, anticipating favor of the gods rather than contracting it from them. Such is the case of Phaedra, in *Aulularia*, who piously offers to the household gods without intention of reciprocity. The last function is the use of sacrifice in impious portrayal of unsavory characters who “think to placate Jove by gifts and offerings.” The portrayal of these circumstances are rendered in a comedic flair and of a flippant disregard for the divine, as

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66 Beard, 19-20.
67 Plaut., *Curc.* 527-32.
69 Plaut., *Rud.* 22.
ritual only clouds these characters quests for self satisfaction. An example of this function is provided in *Pseudolus*, when Pseudolus acknowledges his quest for wealth over his religiosity.

Why, if I was sacrificing to Jove supreme, ay, with the organs in my hands to put on the altar, and a chance for profits suddenly appeared, my offering would be all off. Profit’s a kind of piety you can’t resist, be everything else as it may.\(^70\)

This blatant disregard for the divine over the quest of coin ultimately brings ruin for Pseudolus, but portrays realism in the world of Rome and the diversity of religiosity that exist there. Plautus’ references in his works to sacrifice, rituals, and offerings as themes provide insight into the potential piety and influences of these sacred activities as they reflect his Rome.

**COMPARISON OF SACRIFICE IN ARISTOPHANES’ AND PLAUTUS’ WORKS**

The procedure and practices of animal sacrifice were similar between Greeks and Romans, but their interpretation and purposes contained differences because of their distinctive cultural and religious contexts. Greek religion is “indissolubly connected with the community…state, clan, [and] family,” but it does not ever reach the “formalism” obtained in Rome.\(^71\) Customs in Greek terms are usually unwritten and offered guidance rather than structure, unlike the Romans who primarily focus on exactness and prescriptive ritual practice.\(^72\) Although Greece and Rome share similarities in ritual practices they were different culturally, and these differences carried over into their religious behaviors, and the behaviors of Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ characters. The

\(^{70}\) Plaut., *Pseud.* 265-69.


\(^{72}\) Mikalson, 182.
physical acts and performance of ritual animal sacrifice is similar in both Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ depiction of these actions.

Aristophanes and Plautus portrayed the importance of following precise ritual actions in the preparation of the offering, its slaughter, and interpretation to ensure divine reception. Aristophanes depicted the performance of sacrifice where lay Greeks officiate, albeit under attempted supervision of a professional diviner. In both Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ works professional diviners served to interpret signs, omens, and portends of a sacrifice; however lay Greeks appeared frequently offering sacrifices that did not require these services unlike the Romans who anticipated pontifical authority to officiate in civic cult or patriarchal authority in familial worship. Another similarity comes from the division of the animal sacrifice into consumable parts, and this division between man and god followed the guidelines for both cultures. Both Aristophanes and Plautus portray the consumption of sacrificial meats clearly divided between the divine portion and the devotee’s. Unlike the suspicion of indulging in libations as an excuse to drink wine, animal sacrifice seemed not to have the same negative association in Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ works, and did not serve solely as an excuse to feast on barbeque. Rather ritual animal sacrifice satisfied the appetites of religion and the Greeks. Although the context and reasoning of their characters’ actions is often inappropriate, generally the performance of these rituals maintains traditional practice. Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ use of animal sacrifice in their comedies mimicked believable behaviors found in

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73 Beard, 36-7.
traditional religious worship, but because of their comedic flair they were able to portray these rituals satirically with little criticism.
Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

The observation of religious beliefs and practices in Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ works highlighted culturally specific identities and proved their incorporation of religion in comedy as an integral part of ancient popular culture. Although Plautus was influenced by Greek theatrical tradition his adaptations of Greek plays provided distinctly Roman cultural values expressed through the façade of Greek allusion. Even though Aristophanes benefited from greater political, social, and cultural elasticity than Plautus both of their works hold religious worship in high regard. Producing comic theater was a central tenet to both Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ works, and religion was not exempt from their humorous plots. Their comedic works served as valuable sources in the study of Greek and Roman religion because their depictions of ancient religious beliefs and practices more often reflected an accurate portrayal of these customs. Context and corroborative evidence framed the evaluation of religion in Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ comedies, and underscored the depth and precision of religious material these playwrights exhibited.

Ancient ideologies of religious devotion exhibited similarities in Greece and Rome, such as *religio* and *eusebeia*, but such terms maintained culturally specific values that favored their particular societies. The use of comparative constructs such as piety, impiety, and superstition helped identify common exhibitions of religious behaviors depicted throughout Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ works. Plautus and Aristophanes
recognized and emphasized familiar religious worship and repackaged it for their audiences through comprehensible behaviors. Religious devotion in Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ productions exemplified diversity. The characters depicted in their productions demonstrate a variety of behaviors ranging in piety, impiety, and superstition that remained accessible to their audiences. Aristophanes and Plautus use clear examples of characters that exhibited ancient principles of religious devotion either to their detriment or success. The examples of Strepsiades, Pistoclerus, Lydus, Libanus, Epidicus, Euclio, and so many others who through their actions either reaped the benefits of pious actions, or squandered them because their impious or superstitious behaviors failed them. Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ characters either gain divine favor or deserve divine retribution, depending upon their behaviors and actions throughout the plays, and reflect either piety or impiety. These reflections of pious, impious, and superstitious behaviors in religious worship serve an important purpose in their works. Although Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ depict pious, impious, and superstitious behaviors the major plots and characters more often reflect a reverence for traditionally pious values of religious worship. Despite their character’s exploits the playwrights repeatedly favored a return to piety.

Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ comedies include the practices of the interpretations of the divine through divination. Portends, oracles, and dreams in Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ works illustrate the importance of divine signs to the Greeks and Romans. Aristophanes and Plautus use divinations and their interpretations in ways that reflect their use in society. Their works highlight the practice, function, and prevalence of
divining in the Greek and Roman worlds and how they fulfill specific context for their cultures. Roman and Greek religious practices often diverged in methodology of how professional diviners participated in society, and their plays upheld this distinction. Greek diviners portrayed in Aristophanes’ works projected a less integrated image to Plautus’ state sponsored Roman counterparts. Their position in the community differed, but their role in interpreting the divine through various forms of divination reflected commonality. The function of divinations in comedy tended to direct the actions of characters toward favorable outcomes, as long as they were properly interpreted. The misinterpretation or neglecting of divinations either by lay or professional diviners leads to improper (although comedic) conduct and unfavorable circumstances. Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ depictions of divinations in their works reflected the importance of traditional worship through the observation and interpretation of divinations.

The representation of the divine in Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ works depict deities (and not mere caricatures) of traditional culture and how Greeks and Romans communicate with them. Although Aristophanes at times portrays the divine comically and in unfamiliar or unconventional approaches, his depiction of the divine represents them through their well-known attributes, characteristics, and positions. Plautus also portrays the divine with respect to their place in Roman culture yet he did not represent them as flippantly as Aristophanes had. Dionysus’ depiction in Frogs, by Aristophanes, stands as an excellent example of the flexibility he enjoyed in Athens, which Plautus did not. Both playwrights portrayed the divine as characters whether as gods, or intermediary deities, that directly interact with Greeks and Romans, but their use
remained limited. However infrequently they depicted divine spirits, their representation of them showed how they influenced characters actions and behaviors in keeping with traditional beliefs. From Aristophanes’ *daimones* to Plautus’ *lares* each playwright attempted to maintain distinctively Greek and Roman religious characteristics intact in their representation of divine worship. The playwrights occasionally portray the divine as tangible characters, but more often they depict the divine intangibly engaged through prayers and vows. Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ portrayal of divine communications centers on various forms of praises, acknowledgements, requests, and oaths. Regardless of the form of prayer, Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ works exemplified how countless Greeks and Romans conducted their lives in respect to the divine.

Greeks and Romans participated in elaborate festivals and rituals as religious worship, and Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ works portrayed such events. Festivals presented the central venue for theatrical performances of comedy, and these performances “shared the stage” with important ritual observations in both Greek and Roman cultures. Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ integration of such important events into their comedies provides a manifestation of their functions and proceedings filled with religious ritual. The elaborate performance of rituals on stage would have been impressive to observe, and the text of their great works provided a glimpse of these actions through dialogue. The interpretation of rituals came from the descriptions offered by Aristophanes and Plautus through their characters, and these examples only reflected a fraction of the whole production being performed on stage. Despite the full picture, their works represented many circumstances that rituals were performed, and highlighted their
intent and function. Several rituals and offerings were provided as examples to depict Aristophanes and Plautus’ diverse inclusion of specific cultural and religious traditions familiar in the lives of their audiences. Libations appeared as a prominent practice in reaching for the divine, and a significant offering portrayed in Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ works. The frequent depictions of libation offerings reflected upon the regularity, or at least the commonality, of this religious practice anciently. Between Aristophanes’ Hierocles and Plautus’ Lycus they portrayed important characteristics of ritual sacrifice, and represented how Greeks and Romans had planned, performed, and reacted to these sacred ceremonies.

Aristophanes and Plautus maintain the traditional beliefs and actions that were directly associated with their respective cultures throughout their works. These primarily accurate depictions and representations of religious ideologies and practices of ancient Greeks and Romans reflected the continued importance of religious life and quite possibly the influence that religious observance had upon their productions.

Aristophanes and Plautus presented their works at state sponsored religious gatherings under the influence of appointed and sponsored magistrates who regulated such performances. State censorship in Plautus’ Rome was apparent as seen through their conservative ideologies and laws; while Aristophanes’ Athens appeared unconcerned with such restrictions as his plays directly attacked political and social institutions.

Additional evidence regarding the selection and sponsorship of Roman and Greek comedies for production might help to answer why Aristophanes and Plautus portrayed an apparent reverence of traditional beliefs and practices in their works. Or perhaps the
correlation stems from their personal observance of traditional religious worship, but without further evidence these claim are purely speculative. Because of the sheer amount of religious references found in Aristophanes’ and Plautus’ comedies an all inclusive discussion of religious worship was not attempted. But through careful research some critical examples helped to shape this discussion and comparison of their works into the themes portrayed, and highlighted a distinctively positive portrayal of religious behaviors and actions. Perhaps this thesis will serve others as a starting point into other more tightly focused discussions of the religious beliefs and practices that Aristophanes and Plautus portrayed.
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