



The Birth of the Sitcom in Ancient Greece

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Tuesday, January 20, 2026 - 6:30 p.m. to 7:45 p.m. ET

Timeline

400s BCE – Playwrights Aeschylus, Aristophanes, Euripides, and Sophocles active

359 BCE – Philip II Rises to power in Macedonia

338 BCE – Philip II overwhelms Greek forces at Battle of Chaeronea

336 BCE – Philip II Assassinated

323 BCE – Alexander the Great Dies

322 BCE – Lamian War (Athenian revolt put down)

318 BCE – Athenian revolt put down

316 BCE – Menander produces the *Dyskolos*

Late 290s BCE – Menander dies

Late 200s-160 BCE – Terence and Plautus produce comedies in Rome

Early 1500s CE – Ariosto and Machiavelli produces comedies in Italy

Dyskolos Cast of Characters

Knemon – the protagonist. A morally upright farmer who has rejected wider Athenian society.

Knemon's Daughter – a country girl and Knemon's only companion. She displays both religious and filial piety in the play, garlanding Pan's shrine and taking care of her father.

Sostratos – young, rich youth. He falls in love with Knemon's daughter and spends the play trying to marry her.

Gorgias – Knemon's stepson. He is poor but takes care of both himself and his mother with a small plot of land. He helps Sostratos in his efforts to marry Knemon's daughter.

Getas – Sostratos's slave who helps prepare a banquet, organized by Sostratos's mother, taking place in Pan's shrine. He is handled roughly by Knemon after asking to borrow a pot.

Sikon – the cook hired by Sostratos's mom to prepare the food for the banquet taking place in Pan's shrine. He is also handled roughly by Knemon after asking to borrow a pot.

Epitrepontes Cast of Characters

Pamphile – The female protagonist. Before the play begins, she is raped in the dark by an unknown assailant. Thinking that she has produced an illegitimate child (*nothos*), she exposes the baby, who is later found.

Charisios – Pamphile's husband and the male protagonist of the play. Unknowingly to both himself and his wife, he is also Pamphile's assailant and thus the father of her child. At the beginning of the play, he holds up in his friend's house, distraught over the illegitimate child.

Habrotonon – *Hetaira* hired to comfort Charisios during his separation from his wife. Once the baby is found, she sets out to identify his parents by posing as his mother.

Smikrines – Pamphile's miserly father. Distressed by Charisios's behavior, he attempts to convince his daughter to divorce her husband throughout the play.

Chairestratos – Charisios's friend. He lets Charisios stay at his house during the separation.

Onesimos – Charisios's slave. He reveals Pamphile's production of a *nothos* to Charisios, who was away on business during the late portions of the pregnancy.

Further Reading

Balme, Maurice. 2008. *Menander: The Plays and Fragments*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
(a modern translation of Menander's surviving plays).

Brown, Mitch. 2024. *Menander and the Birth of Domestic Drama*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Konstan, David. 1995. *Greek Comedy and Ideology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lape, Susan. 2004. *Reproducing Athens*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Petrides, Antonis. 2014. *Menander, New Comedy and the Visual*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Traill, Ariana. 2008. *Women and the Comic Plot of Menander*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.