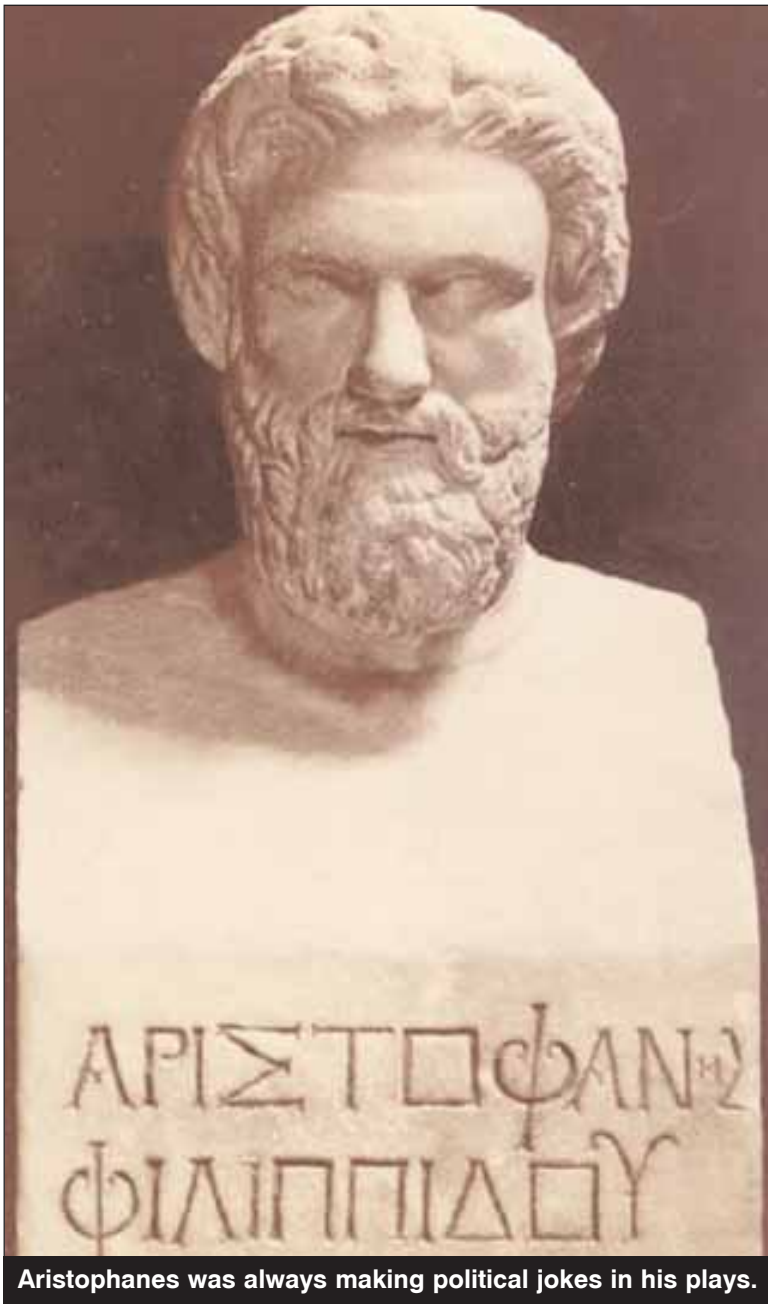


An Ancient Greek walks into a bar...

Did the Ancient Greeks tell jokes? Michael C. Scott has a look behind the punchlines



Aristophanes was always making political jokes in his plays.

By Michael C Scott

Were the ancient Greeks funny? It's a question not often asked.

When thought about, most people will turn to the 'comedies' put on at different religio-theatrical festivals across ancient Greece, most notably in Athens.

The majority surviving for us today are by Aristophanes, writing across the divide of the 5th and 4th centuries BC, but some also survive by Menander writing later in the 4th century BC.

Aristophanes makes political jokes, imitates the politicians of the day (who without doubt were often sitting in the audience) and uses exaggeration and caricature to pass comment on the social and political well-being of the city.

The caricature of 'Demos' - the people - is, for example, an old man who is easily hoodwinked.

What we have of Menander on the other hand seems to reveal a comic writer much more concerned with representing a kitchen-sink-drama style portrayal of domestic hilarity.

But did Greeks tell jokes? Yes they did.

Sources tell of 'joke-groups' who met to trade and test their wit, like the group of 60 who

“A person went to a doctor and said ‘Doctor, whenever I get up from sleeping, I’m groggy for a half an hour afterwards and only after that am I all right’ The doctor replied: ‘Get up half an hour later.’”

met in the Temple of Heracles in Athens in the 4th century BC, and whom even Philip of Macedon paid to send him a collection of their best.

A much later text that has survived down to us is the 'Philogelos' - "the laughter lover", compiled by Hierocles and Philagrius (of which almost nothing is known) in perhaps the 4th century AD.

Here the compilation reveals something of the nature of Greek jokes - and they are surprisingly like our own.

There are those that focus on the 'buffoon', the idiot, who does something stupid and funny, which have a remarkable parallel, as some scholars have already pointed out, with the 'English, Scottish and Irish' jokes told in Britain still today in which the Irish person always does something ridiculous (and which, I'd wager, every country has a version which simply varies the nationalities).

So one ancient Greek idiot joke goes 'An idiot, wanting to go to sleep but not having a pillow, told his slave to set an earthen jar under his head. The slave said that the jug was hard. The idiot told him to fill it with feathers.'

There are also the comic insults, listed so as to be used in instant one-line put downs ('You don't have a face, but a fireplace,' reads one...)

But my favourites are the 'doctor' jokes.

"A person went to a doctor and said 'Doctor, whenever I get up from sleeping, I'm groggy for a half an hour afterwards and only after that am I all right'

The doctor replied: "Get up half an hour later."

* Michael C Scott is a Research Fellow and lecturer at the Faculty of Classics, Cambridge University.

George Papandreou: 79th on list of top 100 global thinkers

Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou is ranked amongst the top 100 thinkers across the globe according to American magazine Foreign Policy.

The Greek Prime Minister is ranked at 79 on the list 'for making the best of Greece's worst year', according to the magazine.

He is heralded for spending "2010 telling Greeks hard truths about the unsustainable nature of their welfare state - and sounding an international warning that Greece is the canary in the European coal mine."

The magazine goes on to say the austerity measures introduced in Greece were 'ambitious enough to convince Europe to keep Greece afloat even as it has provoked riots in Athens. And he has argued that the disaster should be a wake-up call for the threat sovereign debt poses far beyond Europe's borders.'

Warren Buffet and Bill

Gates were rated equal first for their efforts to create a global network of philanthropists who "who will transform philanthropy from a pastime of the wealthy into a calling for everyone who is rich."

Others on the list of leading thinkers in 2010 include Barack Obama, Angela Merkel and Henry Kissinger.

Foreign Policy's list of the Top 100 Global Thinkers was published for the second time in this month's edition of the magazine.



Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou is one of the world's top 100 thinkers by an American magazine.



Georgiana Georghiou well on the way to a model future

Little Georgiana a twinkling star

Georgiana Georghiou won't get out of bed for less than \$5000, her mum jokes. The two-year-old baby has just won a 12-month modelling contract and \$5000 for being a cutie with a performing personality to match.

Mum Pauline said she entered the Practical Parenting magazine competition at the urging of family and friends. It turned out to be a sure bet, with the Gold Coast family over the moon at the toddler's win.

Georgiana relishes lens time, exclaiming: "That's me!" when she checks out the back of the camera. "With the money, we'll just lock it away for a while, put it in her bank account," Mrs Georghiou said. "Maybe, when she's a bit older, she can choose something to spend it on." Mrs Georghiou said her daughter could take her modelling opportunity as far - or as little - as she wished.