

Menander

Menander, Volume I

Aspis. Georgos. Dis Exapaton. Dyskolos. Encheiridion. Epitrepontes

The master of New Comedy. Menander (?344/3–292/1 BC) of Athens, the leading playwright of the New Comedy, wrote more than 100 plays. Many of his comedies were adapted by Roman dramatists. By the middle ages, however, his works were lost. Then, at the end of the nineteenth century, papyrus texts, preserved from antiquity by the dry heat of Egypt, began to be discovered. These have yielded so far one play virtually complete (*Dyskolos*), large continuous portions of four more (*Aspis*, *Epitrepontes*, *Perikeiromene*, *Samia*), and sizable chunks of many others. Menander remains a paradox: artificial plots based on unlikely but conventional coincidences, enlivened by individualized characters, realistic situations, and at times deeply moving dialogue. Volume I of Geoffrey Arnott's three-volume edition of Menander contains six plays, including *Dyskolos* (The Peevish Fellow), which won first prize in Athens in 317 BC, and *Dis Exapaton* (Twice a Swindler), the original of Plautus' *Two Bacchises*. Ten plays are in Volume II, among them the recently published fragments of *Misoumenos* (The Man She Hated), which sympathetically presents the flawed relationship of a soldier and a captive girl; and the surviving half of *Perikeiromene* (The Girl with Her Hair Cut Short), a comedy of mistaken identity and lovers' quarrel. Volume III begins with *Samia* (The Woman from Samos), which has come down to us nearly complete. Here too are the very substantial extant portions of *Sikyonioi* (The Sicyonians) and *Phasma* (The Apparition), as well as *Synaristosai* (Women Lunching Together), on which Plautus' *Cistellaria* was based.

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