On Chremes in Aristophanes’ *Ecclesiazusae*

In the final scene of Aristophanes’ *Ecclesiazusae* there appears a male character who is identified only as the husband of the mistress of the tipsy maidservant who entered at 1112 to describe the delights of the communal feast being held in the Agora (cf. 681-686). He is seen approaching, ‘on his way to dinner’, at 1128 (we learn at 1133 that he is the only male citizen who has not yet dined) and exits at the end of the play together with the chorus and at least two attractive young women (1137, 1151-1152, 1166-1167); it is not clear whether he has picked these women up while walking through the streets, in accordance with the new law that all women are the common possession of all men but that precedence in the conferment of their favours must be given to ugly men over handsome ones (614-634), or whether they have been brought to him by the maidservant on the instructions of his wife.

Can this character be identified with any of the men who appeared earlier in the play? His wife is described by the maidservant as the happiest of the happy, a special felicity that is shared to some extent by everyone who is in any way connected with her, even the chorus who are merely standing near her door (1112-1116); this points unmistakably to her identification with Praxagora, by far the most important woman in the play, the creator of the new society and the only woman described as holding a significant public office in it, that of (apparently sole) *stratēgos* (246, 727, 835, 870)—in which case the man must be her husband Blepyrus (who had been on stage earlier in 311-477 and 520-727). This has been the view of most scholars and most editors, including Ussher 1973, Vetta 1989, Sommerstein 1998, Henderson 2002 and Wilson 2007.

However, the identification of this man as Blepyrus creates an inconsistency with an earlier scene. When we last saw Blepyrus, he was exiting in the wake of his wife, so as to bask in her reflected glory (725-727); and she was going to the Agora (711), where we presently hear she is presiding over the lottery assigning men to the various dining-halls (835-837, cf. 681-686, 715-716). By 1128, therefore, Blepyrus ought to have dined already, nor should Praxagora have needed to send a servant to search for him. Attempts to obviate the inconsistency while still identifying the man of the final scene with Blepyrus involve arbitrary assumptions about supposed offstage events for which there is no evidence in the text (e.g. Ussher 1969, 36; 1973, 229; Sewart 1979); rather we must choose between accepting the inconsistency (with Dover 1972, 193, n. 3).
and finding another identity for the man (and therefore also—a much harder task—for his wife). The latter option was chosen by Wilamowitz 1903 451-452 (taking the man to be a character who had not appeared before), Fraenkel 1936, 270-274 (the loyal citizen of 730-876—but he, like Blepyrus, had exited making for the Agora), and by Olson 1991 who identified the man as Chremes.1

Chremes was the old man (cf. 465) who arrived on the scene at 372 and told Blepyrus what had happened in the ekklesia that day, when all power had been voted to the women; he had exited at 477. Some scholars, including Ussher 1973, have identified him with a man who appears at 564 and makes generally favourable comments on Praxagora's exposition of the new social order (whereas Blepyrus is persistently sceptical) and/or with the loyal citizen of 730-876; but Olson, I think rightly, rejects this identification, and holds that Chremes does not appear between 477 and 1128.

In my edition (Sommerstein 1998, 233) I gave a number of reasons for rejecting any identification of the man in the final scene with anyone other than Blepyrus. I wish now to add another reason why Chremes in particular must be ruled out.

One thing that is certain about the man of 1128ff. is that he is married—or rather that he was married until the institution of marriage was officially abolished. The Chremes of 372-477, however, is clearly meant to be envisaged as an unmarried man—bachelor or widower, we cannot tell which.

a) The wives have stolen their husbands' outer garments (26, 40, 75, 275, 314-316, 340-341), and those men who do not have a spare himation are therefore unable to attend the ekklesia (352-353). Chremes has been at the ekklesia, and says nothing about having lost a garment, though he comments (374) on the fact that Blepyrus is wearing a garment of his wife's (and accepts Blepyrus' false explanation for this, 375).

b) Chremes mentions Blepyrus' wife twice (374, 461; also, by implication, 469-470) but never mentions any wife of his own.

c) Blepyrus is worried (465-469) that 'those of our age' may in future be compelled to give their wives sexual satisfaction, and denied food if they refuse; Chremes gives him some jocular advice (469-470) and says that it is every man's duty to do what is in the city's interests (471-472), but nothing in his words gives any indication that he expects to have to fulfil this duty himself.

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1 This paragraph is largely repeated, for the reader's convenience, from Sommerstein 1998, 233.