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But Menander, with his charm, shows himself not to lack absolutely anything. He made his poetry, of all the good things that Greece has produced, the most common subject of reading, learning and competitions in theatres, lecture halls and *symposia*. He shows the nature and quality of verbal skill, approaching every topic with persuasiveness that leaves no escape and mastering every sound and meaning of the Greek language. For what reason does a man of culture think it truly worthwhile to go to the theatre, if not to see Menander? When are theatres full of men of learning, when a comic mask is on the stage? To whom do the dinner table and Dionysus yield way and make room for more rightfully? Just as painters with tired eyes turn to the colours of flowers and grass, to philosophers and men of learning Menander offers a respite from their intense and straining studies, welcoming their mind, as it were, to a meadow that is flowery, shady and full of breezes.¹

With these words, Plutarch voices his huge fondness for one of the icons of Greek literature and culture, Menander. To be sure, Plutarch's passionate admiration for Menander crops up in several of his works, but it finds its best expression here, in his now excerpted *Comparison of Aristophanes and Menander*.² In a process that turns the 'literary' into the 'political' and 'moral', this essay blends together ancient literary criticism and its principles with long-standing theories on the evolution of Greek comedy. Its end-product is a remarkably one-sided and clear-cut assessment of the two towering figures of Greek comedy and their merits. For Plutarch, Greek literature and Greeks in general could well do without Aristophanes. For all of Aristophanes' claims to wit and refinement, in his comedies Plutarch can see only dirty and inappropriate jokes packed with malice and linguistic

¹ Plut. Mor. 854b-c (Men. T 103 K-A): ό δὲ Μένανδρος μετὰ χαρίτων μάλιστα έαυτὸν αὐτάρκη παρέσχηκεν, ἐν θεάτροις ἐν διατριβαῖς ἐν συμποσίοις, ἀνάγνωσμα καὶ μάθημα καὶ ἀγώνισμα κοινότατον ὧν ἡ Ἑλλὰς ἐνήνοχε καλῶν παρέχων τὴν ποίησιν, δεικνὺς ὅ τι δὴ καὶ ὁποῖον ἦν ἄρα δεξιότης λόγου, ἐπιὼν άπανταχόσε μετὰ πειθοῦς ἀφύκτου καὶ χειρούμενος ἄπασαν ἀκοὴν καὶ διάνοιαν Ἑλληνικῆς φωνῆς. τίνος γὰρ ἄξιον ἀληθῶς εἰς θέατρον ἐλθεῖν ἄνδρα πεπαιδευμένον ἢ Μενάνδρου ἕνεκα; πότε δὲ θέατρα πίμπλαται ἀνδρῶν φιλολόγων, κωμικοῦ προσώπου δειχθέντος; ἐν δὲ συμποσίοις τίνι δικαιότερον ἡ τράπεζα παραχωρεῖ καὶ τόπον ὁ Διόνυσος δίδωσι; φιλοσόφοις δὲ καὶ φιλολόγοις, ὥσπερ ὅταν οἱ γραφεῖς ἐκπονηθῶσι τὰς ὄψεις, ἐπὶ τὰ ἀνθηρὰ καὶ ποώδη χρώματα τρέπουσιν, ἀνάπαυλα τῶν ἀκράτων καὶ συντόνων ἐκείνων Μένανδρός ἐστιν, οἶον εὐανθεῖ λειμῶνι καὶ σκιερῷ καὶ πνευμάτων μεστῷ δεχόμενος τὴν διάνοιαν.

² On this essay, see the referenced discussion on pp. 49–51.



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chaos (Mor. 853b-d, 854d). By contrast, when it comes to Menander, Plutarch does not know what to praise first. Refinement, subtle and flexible use of language, balance and grace are the heart and soul of his plays, fine qualities that Plutarch describes with dazzling metaphors and images. Despite Menander's sparing use of music, Plutarch (Mor. 853e) paints him as an aulos player masterfully opening and closing the stops of his instrument to suit the dramatic action. Menander's plots are economical and tightly built and do not make much room for poetic flights, yet for Plutarch Menander's comedies are flowery and breezy meadows ready to welcome the intellectually tired. As a testament to his worth, Plutarch explains, Menander is popular within select venues and with select people. Comedy is no common fare for intellectuals, yet they crowd the theatres when a play by Menander is on. At dinner parties, Dionysus himself makes room for Menander. Menander reigns in lecture halls, or rather in and out of them, since his comedy has the twin power to instruct and distract. Theatre, symposia and schools are the three venues where an imperial Greek such as Plutarch could expect to find Menander. These are what I call the 'contexts of reception' of Menander and his comedy in antiquity.

As posing a threat for the political and social values upheld by the elite and Plutarch himself, Aristophanes' comedy was dangerous. Plutarch was anxious about its moral and educative value, something which helps explain why he is so one-sided in his views on Aristophanes and Menander. Plutarch's bias notwithstanding, there can be no doubt that Menander enjoyed great popularity throughout antiquity. Papyri and monuments, which can be easily quantified, quickly prove the point. Consider the number and chronological range of our Menander papyri: there are almost ninety records that can be ascribed to a specific play by Menander, although with different degrees of certainty. Spanning from within generations after Menander's death to the sixth or even seventh century AD and often penned on the back of papyri already used for documents of various kinds, our Menander texts often bring us into direct contact with students and the general public in Egypt. Ancient writers, who make up the elite sources, square well with them: by citing single lines or preserving longer excerpts from Menander's comedies, they speak just as loudly of their circulation. Not that Greeks and Romans approached Menander only through his texts: they also saw his portraits and illustrations of his plays in their daily surroundings. As far as we can tell, few ancient works were as widely illustrated as Menander's comedy, and no ancient author was as widely portrayed as Menander. There are over twenty illustrations of Menander's comedies in both paintings and mosaics identified by inscription, and there is a much



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higher number of non-identified illustrations in a range of media that can be traced to the same source. Menander portraits number about one hundred, including wall paintings, mosaics, busts, herms and statues. Impressive as they are, these figures are constantly on the rise.

With such a spectacular array of sources, Menander's ancient afterlife sketches itself out. To make things easier, a number of scholarly works have made this material more readily available. Kassel and Austin collected the testimonia for Menander and for his less well-preserved plays (PCG VI.2). Arnott and Ferrari edited the plays best represented on our papyri, with several comedies also blessed with editions with commentary.³ To Green and Seeberg goes the merit of gathering and discussing the iconographic record in the third edition of Monuments Illustrating New Comedy. Next to substantially updating Webster's catalogue, they also provided the first comprehensive interpretation of the material. Among other things, they identified the archetypes of the extant comic scenes and traced the diffusion of comic monuments across time and place, charting the trends and patterns of their circulation. In order to reconstruct the Early-Hellenistic statue of Menander set in the Theatre of Dionysus in Athens, Fittschen (1991) collected and discussed the surviving Menander portraits. His study laid the foundation for later works in another area to which recent findings keep adding more evidence.

In focusing exclusively on the ancient afterlife of an ancient author, this book has a spot of its own in current scholarship. In recent years, studies on the reception of Greek drama – their interpretation, influence and general use – have not been lacking. In fact, they now make up a vibrant and productive 'subdiscipline'. Their appeal is not surprising: they 'cut across' disciplines, create a sense of continuity and draw a wide audience. With Greek tragedy as their main subject, works on reception have largely focused on post-antiquity, be they concerned with the afterlife of the whole genre or of specific plays. ⁴ This is not to deny the general awareness that reception in antiquity is, indeed, something important. Writing in 1997, Easterling spoke of 'the task of capturing in detail the reverberations of tragedy in later antiquity' as 'one of the most interesting challenges for contemporary critics', 'an immensely complex story

³ Arnott 1997a [1979]–2000, Ferrari 2001 with edition and translation of other New Comedy authors. Menander's plays recently edited with commentary: Aspis (Rossi 1994), Epitrepontes (Martina 1997; Furley 2009), Samia (Lamagna 1998), Perikeiromene (Lamagna 1994).

⁴ See, for instance, the most recent major works: *Medea in Performance 1500–2000* (Hall, Macintosh and Taplin 2000); *Dionysus since 69 Greek Tragedy at the Dawn of the Third Millennium* (Hall, Macintosh and Wrigley 2004); *Agamemnon in Performance 458 BC to AD 2004* (Macintosh, Michelakis, Hall and Taplin 2005); *Le rinascite della tragedia: origini classiche e tradizioni europee* (Guastella 2006).



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waiting to be told'. Consistently, at one time or another, reception in antiquity has been singled out as needing serious work, a point otherwise made clear by the general enthusiasm for Graziosi's book on the early reception of Homer. But it is still dwarfed by work on reception in later times, hidden in collections of primary sources and variously fragmented into select episodes and chapters.

To be sure, Menander studies often fall under the umbrella of reception studies. By the mid-third century BC, his comedies reached Rome to be performed in Latin adaptations for local audiences. How Roman dramatists adapted their texts probably stands out as the most thoroughly researched strand of Menander's Nachleben.8 Menander and Roman comedy have priority of mention, but the influence that Menander exerted on later authors and genres has been another key research area in this field. From Roman poets such as Catullus and Ovid, for instance, to the Greek novel and Christian writers, there is no lack of evidence for ancient writers' familiarity with Menander: be they quotations, allusions or just echoes, the various references to Menander's drama in later works have been keenly identified and detailed. As a towering figure in Greek literature and culture, Menander loomed large, too large to be ignored by ancient authors. Indeed, they often imitated him, cited or variously recalled his lines, and toyed with his characters, often to serve their own purposes. What does call for attention is that there is much more to Menander's afterlife than the literary reception of his comedy. Ancient authors and genres were surely not the only ones that appropriated Menander's drama. They stand side by side with a number of other figures: the actors who kept staging Menander's plays and the audiences who kept attending their performances; the artists who illustrated Menander and his comedies, and the patrons who commissioned and displayed these artefacts; the very many teachers and pupils who kept approaching Menander's works at different stages of the school curriculum. The role that they all played in Menander's survival has been greatly overshadowed by the emphasis given to texts and authors, even though texts and authors can tell us a relatively small part of the story. If we are to go

⁵ Easterling 1997: 226.

⁶ Hardwick 2003, esp. 4; Hall 2004: 53; Revermann 2008; Gildenhard and Revermann 2010, esp. 3.

Graziosi 2002. See also Koning 2010 on the ancient reception of Hesiod. Also welcome are May's chapter on 'the knowledge of drama and archaism in the second century' (2007: ch. 2) and the essays collected by Gildenhard and Revermann 2010.

 $^{^{8}\,}$ Scholarly literature on this topic is massive. Select references are given in Chapter 2.

⁹ Select references: Thomas 1984 (Menander and Catullus); Davis 1978 (Menander and Ovid); Corbato 1968, Crismani 1997 (Menander and the Greek novel); Grant 1965 (Greek comedy and Christian authors).



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beyond the common claim of Menander's high standing in antiquity and to trace the dynamics that fuelled this process, Menander's afterlife cannot be confined to texts and scholarly circles. My intention is not to discuss how individual authors such as Plutarch or Dio Chrysostom, for instance, read and interpreted Menander or how they used his works, but to place Menander's survival against a broader cultural and social background. In other words, this book deals not with the literary but with the social reception of Menander and his plays.

A major problem lies in finding a 'handle' to tackle the material and to frame it within a picture that is as broad as possible. I believe that Plutarch's 'contexts of reception' offer a working solution. Theatre, symposia and schools are the filters through which the evidence can be sifted to allow the most inclusive approach: different as these venues may appear, they all shared an interest in Greek drama and in Menander in particular. A good starting point is provided by scholarly works on the ancient reception of Greek drama in general or on a specific social institution. Consider Easterling's emphasis (1997) on actors' repertoires and their importance in making up the canon, a body of chosen texts that underwent various selections later on. The painstaking studies by Le Guen (2001a) and Aneziri (2003) have given us a full account of the Associations of Artists of Dionysus and their important activities during the Hellenistic period. A notoriously debated issue is to what extent theatrical performances were the means whereby Greeks and Romans alike came to know the masterpieces of Classical and Early-Hellenistic Greek drama. Fantham (1984) doubted that the Romans of the Early Empire flocked to see Menander's plays in theatres. By contrast, Jones (1993) showed the continued importance of theatre and drama in the Greek East during the Roman Empire, when newly composed plays kept being staged alongside the 'old plays', as the epigraphic record calls them. The pioneering works by Jones (1991), Csapo (1999 and 2010) and Dunbabin (1996) put private performances under the scholarly radar, raising important questions on the use of Greek drama as a form of private entertainment. A key field in the reception of ancient works in general is, of course, education. By combining close scrutiny of schoolrelated records and sophisticated readings of literary sources, Cribiore (1996, 2001a) and Morgan (1998) unravelled its structures and mechanisms, shedding light on the interaction between pupils and the major figures of Greek literature, including, of course, Menander. This book and its claims are greatly indebted to all these studies, to their detailed discussions and to their precious findings. Needless to say, any work on reception in antiquity cannot but be a preliminary one. This statement is even truer in



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the case of Menander: lucky discoveries of papyri, monuments and inscriptions are bound to add more details and throw new light on old ones. Scattered across time and place, often elusive and tantalizing, this material is no subject for a grand narrative.

I maintain that our sources for Menander's popularity in antiquity can be placed within one of the three contexts of reception of Greek drama: theatre, symposia or schools. Once each source has been properly identified, they can also help us assess how each venue approached Menander and the role it played in his popularity. Menander's plays quickly entered actors' repertoires and remained part of them until around the mid-second century AD. So influential was Menander's impact on ancient comic theatre and its history that his plays became and remained the model for comedy writing throughout antiquity, even after drama stopped being performed on public stages. With their domestic plots and moralistic stance, they were beautifully suited to inform the thoughts and articulate the speech of subjects to a central rule, both inside and outside theatres. This also explains in part why Menander quickly entered the school curriculum, where the conservative cast of ancient education granted him an undisputed position at all levels until Late Antiquity. Once he became a symbol of Greek paideia, Menander's image and illustrations of his plays were appropriated by house-owners eager to lay a claim to a high degree of cultivation.

These three social institutions provide a way to arrange the evidence and to structure the book, where a chapter is devoted to each of them. My starting point is a predictable one, the reception of Menander and his comedy in Early-Hellenistic Athens, which paves the way to the equally interesting issue of Menander's canonization. Chapter 1, 'Canonizing Menander in Athens, Alexandria and Rome', argues two main points: (1) in spite of the literary tradition that consistently paints Menander as a dramatist unappreciated by his contemporaries, he had already been turned into a cultural icon in Early-Hellenistic Athens; and (2) Menander owed his canonization not to the scholarly activities pursued in the Library of Alexandria, but to actors and their repertoires. I argue that Menander's close affiliation with the Peripatetic circle is key to both his playwriting and his reception. Menander consistently staged the kind of comedy promoted by Aristotle and his school, and, in turn, the Peripatetic school promoted Menander. Menander's drama also quickly gained and retained popular favour to become a theatrical classic as early as the mid-third century BC: the important inscription first attesting, at least for us, competitions of old plays in Athens has Menander competing against Diphilus and Philemon (Hesperia 7 [1938] no. 22). The New Comedy trio figures here for the first time, not in the works of Roman authors usually considered to draw



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from Alexandrian scholars. To prove further the importance of theatrical production in the early reception of Greek New Comedy, Menander's drama is the largest source for Roman comedies on Greek subject-matter, the *palliatae*. He is followed by Diphilus and Philemon.

Actors' activities work as a bridge between Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, 'Menander in public theatres', which follows Menander in public theatres during the Hellenistic and Roman periods, sifting through a variety of sources for their public revivals and their format. Although Plautus (*Mostell.* 1149–51) could use the names of Diphilus and Philemon as bywords for comedy under the Republic, during the imperial period both authors apparently faded into obscurity with theatre-goers, and they were also largely ignored by readers. By contrast, Menander's name (like Euripides') remained so firmly attached to actors that performers delivering Menander eventually became a sort of literary topos attested well into Late Antiquity. I also argue against the widespread claim that public revivals of Classical and Hellenistic Greek drama were reduced to selections from one or more plays, with spoken parts turned into songs, thus providing the Greek background to the Roman practice of 'spoiling' plays (contaminatio). Driven by ancient and modern biases against actors, this claim rests on records related to students, teachers and musicians, not actors. Actors evidently continued to stage old plays in their entirety, although at least occasionally stripping old tragedies of their choruses. This is not to say that the Roman contaminatio has no Greek precedent. Roman poets 'spoiling' Greek plays probably followed the example of Greek playwrights revamping their own or other poets' dramas to stage 'revised plays' (διασκευαί). The Roman contaminatio and the Greek διασκευαί are probably two sides of the same coin.

Our rich iconographic tradition for Menander and his comedies holds the spotlight in Chapter 3, 'Menander at dinner parties'. My argument is that our visual record has little to tell us about the use of Menander's drama in private settings; rather, it testifies to the cultural pretensions of ancient hosts and it reinforces Greek identity in the Greek East under the Empire. My review of the extant illustrations of Menander and his plays brings out three main points: (1) they typically grace private domestic spaces; (2) the differences between artefacts reproducing similar but not identical scenes are due to a long process of corruption and misinterpretation of the image; and (3) the iconographic tradition and textual transmission of individual plays often followed different patterns. Plutarch makes Menander ubiquitous at *his* dinner parties (*Mor.* 712 b–d), and this claim is often read against Menander's wide popularity in domestic art. This connection is, however, misleading because it fails to consider the socio-economic dimension of



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having drama over dinner. As involving stages and actors, drama in private settings was a form of entertainment confined to the very top of the social pyramid, the Emperors and their associates. I identify three reasons why ancient hosts picked Menander and his comedies to grace their houses: cultural pretensions, domestic decor and a desire to reaffirm Greek identity under the Empire.

My main argument in Chapter 4, 'Menander in schools', is that students and not actors 'fragmented' Greek plays, reducing them to one-liners and select passages. Next to discussing Menander's role as a gnomic author and identifying possible reasons why he came to be credited with multi-authored collections of maxims, the so-called *Menander's Maxims*, this chapter also looks at Menander's presence in school anthologies and the criteria underlying the selection of specific passages from his plays. Part of my discussion focuses on a series of papyri preserving New Comedy and tragedy commonly referred to as 'actors' papyri' and variously linked to theatrical or private performances. Building on my work on the format of public and private dramatic performances in Chapters 2 and 3, I suggest that these texts belong to a school context and that they were used by students.

Given its very broad scope, this book places Menander within different socio-historical contexts. In Chapter 1, I frame Menander's comic style within a discussion of comedy writing in the Classical and Early-Hellenistic period, arguing that the increase in the number of foreign poets active in Athens and Attica seems to have played an important role in the shift from political comedy to comedy of characters. As an Athenian poet who consistently eschewed politics, Menander is a noteworthy exception, which I explain by his connection with the Peripatetic circle. As both Chapters 2 and 4 show, Menander's avoidance of political and topical references, next to his moralistic stance and accessible Greek, also granted him a warm reception from later audiences and school teachers, but there is a gap between his reception in the Greek and Roman contexts. In the Greek East, for instance, Menander's plays long retained their appeal as performance-texts not only on the stage but possibly also in schools. From pupils practising 'speeches in character' to sophists delivering their magisterial declamations, Greek rhetors seem to have fashioned themselves and their trainees after actors by appropriating their texts and techniques. Quintilian and other Roman rhetors, by contrast, were obsessively concerned about differentiating speakers from actors. This is due, I suggest, to the different social status enjoyed by Greek and Roman actors, and it may not be a coincidence that possible evidence for Roman pupils performing



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drama comes only when actors are no longer attested. The material record that I discuss in Chapter 3 outlines a similar divide between Menander's afterlife in the Roman West and in the Greek East. Although Roman house-owners kept setting up Menander portraits in their gardens, their interest in adorning their houses with Menander's plays registers a decrease after the Early Empire. By contrast, the iconographic tradition of Menander's drama reaches its climax in the Greek East during the Second Sophistic and beyond, in Late Antiquity. Taking issue with recent discussions of the Romanization of the Greek East and with the claim that material culture had a marginal role in Greek self-definition, I suggest that these illustrations can be placed in the cultural self-fashioning of imperial Greeks.

Although my focus is squarely on Menander, other authors and their afterlives often provide a good term of comparison. As sources of various kinds make clear, Menander could proudly stand next to two figures: Homer and Euripides. To be sure, Homer held sway over all texts and authors, at all times. Dio Chrysostom can speak of the warlike Borysthenites, who lived on the Black Sea in the 'midst of barbarians', as knowing at least the Iliad by heart. The Indians, he adds, live in a different hemisphere and see different stars, yet they also know Homer and sing in their own language the woes of heroes such as Priam, Hector and Achilles. Fictional as Dio Chrysostom's comments may be, their emphasis on the Iliad is not casual. Of the two Homeric poems, the *Iliad* is the one best represented in the over a thousand Homer papyri that we have, and it also provides the richest source of quotations for ancient authors.¹⁰ In the late third or early second century BC, Aristophanes of Byzantium, a passionate admirer of Menander, ranked Menander second only to Homer. In the fourth century AD, Ausonius recommended his grandson to master the basics, Menander and 'the author of the Iliad'. Both Aristophanes and Ausonius were reserving for Menander the highest honour of all – to be associated with Homer. 11

Sometimes, when ancient authors speak of Menander, they also mention Euripides in the same breath.¹² Pupils such as Apollonios son of Glaukias probably copied lines from both dramatists in the second century BC, and later collectors even turned Euripides into Menander by ascribing tragic maxims to the latter.¹³ With his some hundred and fifty papyri, including anthologies of

¹⁰ Dio Chrys. Or. 36.9, 53.6–7. See Cribiore 2001a: 194–7.

¹¹ IG XIV 1183c (on which see Koerte 1936), Auson. Protrepticus ad nepotem 45–7; Men. T 170, 128 K-A.

¹² See, for instance, Quint. Inst. 10.1.69; Sozomenos, History of the Church 5.18.4 (Men. T 101, 131 K-A).

 $^{^{13}\,}$ P.Louvre 7172. On this anthology and on the Menander's Maxims, see pp. 80, 205–11, 215.



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various kinds, Euripides rubbed shoulders with Menander. ¹⁴ The pairing of Menander and Euripides probably comes up more conspicuously in the material record than in literary sources: house-owners displayed side by side portraits of both authors and illustrations of their plays. ¹⁵ As far as we know, Menander monopolizes our record for illustrations of New Comedy and, whenever we can identify the tragic scenes often set next to them, Euripides' drama is invariably their source, or at least the likeliest candidate. ¹⁶ Since festival records and literary sources alike point to Euripides and Menander as the two Greek dramatists who entertained generations of theatre-goers well into the imperial period, at least some of the authors who spoke of Menander alongside Euripides, or some of the patrons who surrounded themselves with their portraits or illustrations of their plays, might have also been familiar with 'seeing them together' in their experience as theatre-goers. In Late-Republican Rome at least, Menander and Euripides themselves were to be seen together on the stage, most probably impersonated by mimes. ¹⁷

Unlike Homer's poems and Euripides' tragedies, however, Menander's comedies did not make it to the Late-Byzantine period, but met with the saddest fate of all. They stopped being transcribed and were left out of the ninth-century renaissance. In a way, it is fair that one of the first books on the reception of an author throughout antiquity be devoted to Menander: after all, he does come to us straight from antiquity. Before they were lost, Menander's plays travelled far and wide, on public stages and select private ones, in classrooms and among the literati in their leisure time. Across time and space, they brought with them the stamp of refinement and the cultural authority of the major achievements of Athens and its glorious past.

 $^{^{14}}$ Carrara 2009 provides a detailed description and overall discussion of our Euripides papyri.

Both Euripides and Menander were probably depicted in the Casa del Menandro in Pompeii, and their portrait heads were also included in the gallery of the villa owned by the Volusii Saturnini at Lucus Feroniae (see p. 133). For illustrations of Menander's comedies next to Euripides' tragedies, see the *viridarium* of the Casa dei Dioscuri in Pompeii and the so-called 'theatre-room' in Ephesus (see pp. 138, 155–6, 194). More examples probably lay among the unidentified scenes.

The only possible candidate for a tragic illustration not related to Euripides is a metope from the House of the Comedians in Delos (Metope VII, MTS² DP1 [455]), which may represent the opening scene of Sophocles' Oedipus at Colonus. But see Csapo 2010: 164, n. 37. On the Delos paintings in general, see also Bruno 1985.

¹⁷ Cic. On behalf of Quintus Gallius fr. 2, p. 400.6 Sch. (Men. T 85 K-A) with Giancotti 1967: 119–28.