



# Pericles on Stage: Political Comedy in Aristophanes' Early Plays

*Michael Vickers*

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Since the eighteenth century, classical scholars have generally agreed that the Greek playwright Aristophanes did not as a matter of course write "political" plays. Yet, according to an anonymous *Life* of Aristophanes, when Dionysius the tyrant of Syracuse wanted to know about the government of Athens, Plato sent him a copy of Aristophanes' *Clouds*.

In this boldly revisionist work, Michael Vickers convincingly argues that in his earlier plays, Aristophanes in fact commented on the day-to-day political concerns of Athenians. Vickers reads the first six of Aristophanes' eleven extant plays in a way that reveals the principal characters to be based in large part on Pericles and his ward Alcibiades.

According to Vickers, the plays of Aristophanes—far from being nonpolitical—actually allow us to gauge the reaction of the Athenian public to the events that followed Pericles' death in 429 B.C., to the struggle for the political succession, and to the problems presented by Alcibiades' emergence as one of the most powerful figures in the state. This view of Aristophanes reaffirms the central role of allegory in his work and challenges all students of ancient Greece to rethink long-held assumptions about this important playwright.

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