



Aristophanes: *Wasps*

Animals in Antiquity

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Background:

- 431-404: Peloponnesian War
- 423: One-year truce with Sparta
- 422: Aristophanes at the Lenaea
- 422: Truce between Athens and Sparta ends



→ Wasps satirizes Athenian jurors and criticizes their staunch devotion to demagogic politicians.

Plot

- Two slaves are guarding „a monster“
- Philocleon, father of Bdelycleon and a trialophile
- „Waspish“ jury comes to collect the judge
- Bdelycleon tricks Philocleon with a trial of a dog
- First Parabasis: Chorus praises author and chastises audience
- P. & B. argue about clothing and a dinner party
- Second Parabasis: Chorus jokes about important concurrent figures of Athens (i.e. Cleon)
- Household slave describes P’s appalling behaviour at the party
- Chorus speaks of the difficulty of changing habits and commends filial devotion



The Animals



- Wasps (chorus)
- 2 Dogs: Labes and The Dog (with their puppies)

Other mentioned animals:

- Mammals – Sheep, Donkey, Cow, Pig, Camel, Cat, Mouse, Seal...
- Birds – Eagle, Raven, Swan, House sparrow, Jackdaw, Wader,...
- Fish – Carp, Herring, Ray, Eel,...
- Insect – Fly, Honey bee, Spider, Beetle, Katydid,...

The Interpretation

- Considered one of the greatest comedies regarding Old Comedy ever made
- The play is about Cleon, a politician leader of the pro-war faction
- The interpretation must have been very funny at the time, but not so much today