Who am I? Representations of personifications as expression of resonant self-world-relations in the Old comedy

Isabell Wagener, Classical Archaeology

University of Graz | Supervisors: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Peter Scherrer (Graz) / Dr. Georgia Petridou (Erfurt)

Start 2017

Topic

Personifications as a way of expressing abstract concepts emerge quite prominently in the mid-fifth century BCE. At the same time, they also figure as characters in Old comedy on stage in Athens. This project wants to shed light on the interdependence of these two fields of art in order to improve our understanding of the making of ancient religion.

Aim

The aim is – by combining literary sources with archaeological evidence to:

- examine the depiction and the development of personifications in ancient visual arts.
- enlighten the role of personification and of comedy in the development of ancient religion.

Methods

Different groups of data need different methods. General approach is to start with the material and to verify/revise the theoretical approach later on

- Study of iconography of the different personification, identifying developments over time and space.
- Close reading of Old comedy. How are personifications introduced and fitted into the plot?

Research Questions

In the light of the material the following research questions emerge:

1. How are these personifications depicted and iconographically coined?
2. How are they introduced in the comedy? Which ritual and social codes can be identified that support their introduction?
3. In which way does the representation on stage influence the emergence and the spreading of these personifications? In short: What role does comedy play in the making of religion? In how far do literary and archaeological evidence interrelate?
4. Does the development and adaption of personifications reflect individual appropriation in the ancient religious system and if yes, in how far? In which ways may the concepts of resonance and sacralisation improve our understanding for this system?

Sources and Material

Following the interdisciplinary approach the processed sources and material is two-fold:

- Literary sources in general to highlight the ancient understanding of personification
- Those plays of Old comedy that include a personification as acting character on stage.
- The visual representations of personification in art, mostly Attic vase-paintings with inscriptions on it, as personifications are not always easily identifiable

Contact:

Isabell Wagener
University of Graz, Institute of Classics
IGDK „Resonant Self–World Relations“
Isabell.mueller@uni-graz.at