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**The Reception of Menander during his Lifetime**

This paper reassesses the reception of Menander's comedies within Menander's lifetime. Modern scholars generally adhere to the view that Menander's plays were as unsuccessful at the time of their first performance as they were to become popular after his death. This view is largely based on a few *testimonia* dated from the first century AD onward and clearly influenced by the small number of victories recorded for Menander at the major Athenian dramatic festivals. I argue that this traditional view is founded upon the unjustified assumption that Menander consistently first presented his plays in Athens. Given the number and the character of Menander's plays, and the political situation in Athens, it is likely that Menander presented many of his comedies outside Athens. Moreover, the rich iconographic tradition of Menander's plays, which dates from the late-fourth century onwards, is first-hand evidence for their popularity and diffusion. A terracotta group from Boeotia dated to before 300BC - and therefore about a decade before the death of Menander - is thought to represent an excerpt from the climactic scene of *Methe*, one of the earliest plays of Menander (*MNC3* 1BT 1). An early third-century statue base from Eretria with the inscription "Menander" also attests to Menander's early popularity outside Athens (*PCG* T30). Finally, Menander's affiliation with the Peripatetic circle seems to have figured largely in his contemporary reception: Menander consistently brought onto the stage the kind of comedy promoted by Aristotle and his circle, and the Peripatos in turn promoted Menander. As the work on Menander written by Lynkeus of Samos, a contemporary of Menander and member of the Peripatetic circle, clearly shows, the Peripatetics hastened to canonize Menander's comedy. In conclusion, different kinds of evidence suggest that the traditional view of Menander's unpopularity during his lifetime has little foundation. Not only were Menander's comedies known in and out of Athens by the beginning of the fourth century BC, but the Peripatetic circle had turned Menander into a cultural icon well before Aristophanes of Byzantium granted him a secure spot in the canon of the Greek authors.