

## BOOK REVIEW

*Status in Classical Athens*. By DEBORAH KAMEN. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013, Pp. xiv + 144. Hardcover, \$35.00. ISBN: 978-0-691-13813-8.

It was Moses Finley who suggested that there existed a “spectrum” of status-groups in ancient Greece; this book sets out and assesses the implications of this perspective in classical Athens. Kamen identifies ten distinct groups, devoting a chapter of this meticulously-organized book to each of them. The groups are as follows: chattel slaves, privileged chattel slaves, freedmen with constitutional freedom, metics, privileged metics, bastards, disenfranchised citizens, naturalized citizens, and both female and male citizens. In her introduction, Kamen outlines some of the challenges facing her approach: the Marxist critique which points to the hermeneutic limitations of the idea of status, and the fact that ancient writers tended to focus on the tripartite division between citizens, metics, and slaves.

Combining succinctness with attention to detail and controversies, Kamen describes the rights, duties, privileges of, and restrictions on, members of each of the status groups; she judiciously weighs up the possibilities where certainty is impossible (for instance, on the extent to which disenfranchised citizens may have faced military obligations). Accordingly, Kamen provides a learned but highly accessible guide to the experience of the individual in ancient Athens.

At the same time, this book assesses the workings of status at Athens, analyzing the relationship between civic ideologies and historical dynamics: as she observes in her chapter on chattel slaves, one reason why the de-socialization of slaves was emphasized in Athenian literature was that their status appears to have been physically invisible. But social experiences sometimes undermine the ideologies of legal status: the existence of privileged slaves, who may have enjoyed economic conditions better than those of the poorest citizens, made ancient beliefs about the value of freedom and citizenship highly problematic. Moreover, some freedmen, regarded simply as “freed slaves,” suffered contempt equal to that of a slave.

Kamen, in a sensitive way, demonstrates how experiences of status would have depended on gender, wealth, and other factors including the ability of the individual

to negotiate the challenges and burdens they faced; indeed, as she observes, metroxenoi may well have wanted to highlight their pedigree, at least until the mid-fourth century when the ideology of the pureblooded Athenian was at its strongest. Kamen also highlights the significance of social mobility within (and sometimes) across the social groups; such mobility, Kamen makes clear at several points, was downward as well as upward.

Despite the tidiness of her classificatory scheme, one of the things that Kamen succeeds in doing is showing that status-groups were far from being clear-cut: the existence of freedmen with conditional freedom, for instance, explodes the neatness of the distinction between free person and slave. Kamen acknowledges that there may well have been finer distinctions between different types of nothoi (bastards) than the sources allow us to securely draw; her Chapter 5 makes a good case for hierarchies within the broad set of privileged non-citizens.

The message of the book—that there was a discrepancy between the rigidity of Athenian ideologies about status and the flexibility of status boundaries—is convincing. The book raises wider implications, too, leading its readers to ask whether Greek thought (about status, and other subjects too) was as binary as it is sometimes reputed to have been. This is a book that deserves to be read closely and can be recommended to historians of every status.

PETER LIDDEL

*University of Manchester*, Peter.Liddell@manchester.ac.uk