

BOOK REVIEW

Poverty in Athenian Public Discourse: From the Eve of the Peloponnesian War to the Rise of Macedonia. By LUCIA CECCHET. Stuttgart, DE: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2015. Pp. 283. Hardcover, €59. ISBN 978-3-515-11160-7.

Cecchet lays out the aims of her book on page 13: “to explore the public debate on poverty...and to investigate how arguments about poverty and representations of it were used in the context of public communication from the eve of the Peloponnesian War to the rise of Macedonia in the mid-fourth century.” The study is thus not primarily about the reality of poverty in democratic Athens, but instead about how various notions of deprivation were represented. In the Introduction Cecchet surveys the history of measuring and discussing poverty. She eschews a quantitative approach and opts for a study of the “imaginary” of poverty in Athenian public discourse, with the elite authors of literary texts serving as the “reference group” against whose expectations relative deprivation was defined.

Chapter 1 provides some background to Classical conceptions of poverty by examining depictions of beggars in the *Odyssey*. Irus, as a *pandêmios ptôchos*, or local beggar, elicits laughter, scorn, and anger from those around him. This is in large part because he seemingly brings his condition on himself. A beggar might also engender pity in his audience, however, especially if he had fallen from elite status.

Chapter 2 examines representations of poverty on the dramatic stage, first in Euripidean tragedy and then in Aristophanic comedy. Cecchet convincingly argues that drama has been a relatively untapped vein for the economic experiences of non-

elites during the Peloponnesian War, particularly veterans. There is a useful discussion of Dicaeopolis' decision to don Telephus' beggar's rags in *Acharnians*, but note that he is not from the deme Acharnae (102, 108 with n162, 110 n169) but Cholleidai (*Ach.* 406). Cecchet does not discuss figures such as Lysistratus and Pauson (e.g., *Ach.* 854–55), “starving artists” who were probably the lackeys of rich men (indeed, a discussion of *parasitōi* and *kolakes* and the relationship between these characters and poverty is a desideratum here).

Chapter 3 grapples with the question of whether poverty was widespread in the fourth century. Cecchet rightly points out that a demographic decrease in the citizen population does not necessitate impoverishment, since it might entail a more equitable redistribution of existing wealth. She also argues against the assumption, prevalent among elite critics of the democracy, that the fourth century saw an increase in the participation of the landless urban population in politics.

Chapter 4 examines the discourse of poverty in fourth-century public speeches. Cecchet notes the tendency of orators to claim that their opponents criminally enriched themselves, thus moving from poverty to wealth. The chapter concludes with a reading of the *Plutus*, in which the author argues that personified Penia's speech was meant as a warning about the improper use of arguments based on poverty. Cecchet believes that demagogues habitually misled the members of the demos about the reality of their poverty and used these distortions to advocate successfully for war-making.

Chapter 5 examines the discourse of good and bad *penia*. It begins with a discussion of the *nomos argias*, or law against idleness, which Cecchet believes was a regulation against leaving one's field uncultivated; later, however, it became a way to curb begging. The remainder of the chapter examines the use of *penia* in courtroom rhetoric as a means of, alternatively, condemning idle wealth and praising active poverty, granting leniency to criminals induced to act by their poverty, or fostering pity in inheritance disputes. A brief Conclusion summarizes the book's findings.

There are many good readings of individual passages in the book, and Cecchet is to be commended for collecting and mining unlikely sources for the experience of poverty. Several factors, however, prevent this from being the decisive treatment of the subject. The author relies on the old Kock and Edmonds numbering systems for the fragments of the comic poets rather than the standard edition of Kassel-Austin, and there is little engagement with recent work on non-Aristophanic authors of Old Comedy. Thus she follows Edmonds (whose overall judgment in editing and translating the comic fragments was highly questionable) in dating Cratinus' *Plutoi* to the early 430s, when most scholars would now agree it belongs to 429, when Pericles was briefly deposed from office. The careful work of scholars like Ian Storey and Emmanuela Bakola has done much to rectify the state of our knowledge about the dating and content of Old Comedy, and it would have been useful to engage with their findings here.

Translations tend to come from the old Loeb editions, now in the public domain. Reliance on these can introduce inaccuracies: for example, the phrase *tôn metriôn tina kai dêmotikôn* (Dem. 21.183) does not pick out two separate groups (a person "of the middle class or a friend of the people," in the translation of A. T. Murray) but one, "one of the moderate and democratic people." The study is also far from exhaustive: in addition to the absence of any treatment of parasites and flatterers, noted above, there is, among others, the case of Epicrates. As Cecchet notes, he was accused of receiving bribes from Persia but acquitted (146); she does not address, however, the remark that supposedly got him off, to the effect that the Athenians should not appoint nine archons every year but instead nine men from among the poor commoners (*dêmotikôn kai penêtôn*), who could then enrich themselves through Persian bribes (Plut. *Pelop.* 30.7). This, if true, is an important piece of evidence for public attitudes about poverty, class, and legality, but it goes untreated. In short, this is a welcome contribution about an im-

portant topic, but it is outdated in places, and much remains to be said.

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