

## BOOK REVIEW

*Realidades e imágenes de la pobreza en la Atenas clásica*. By AIDA FERNÁNDEZ PRIETO. Berlin: Peter Lang, 2022. Pp. 522. Hardback, \$101.95. ISBN: 978-3-631-88165-1.

In *Realidades e imágenes de la pobreza en la Atenas clásica*, with a preface by Miriam Valdés Guía, University Complutense of Madrid, Aida Fernández Prieto pursues a wide interdisciplinary and post-modern study of poverty in Classical Athens, thus making a novel and welcome addition to scholarship on “daily life” in Classical Athens.

This monograph is divided into three parts. The first one, “Cuestiones introductorias” (“Introductory Questions”), includes three sections (the proper introduction and two chapters); the second part, “Las realidades de la pobreza en la Atenas clásica” (“Realities of Poverty in Classical Athens”), also divides into three chapters; and the third part consists of the last two chapters and focuses on “Percepciones y representaciones de la pobreza y de la indigencia” (“Perceptions and Representations of Poverty and Destitution”).

In the “Introducción” (25-32), Fernández Prieto explains the book’s contribution, insisting that “in a context of socio-economic ‘crisis’ such as that of recent years, in which we have witnessed an upsurge in hunger and an increase in inequality at a global level – a situation which has been further aggravated since 2020 as a result of the covid19 pandemic – the issue of poverty is more topical than ever” (26). Fernández Prieto considers poverty not only in economic terms, probably be the most traditional interpretation, but also in sociological and anthropological terms.

In Chapter 1, “Una historia de la pobreza” (“A History of Poverty,” 33-63), Fernández Prieto explains the genesis of the study of poverty in sociology, even before this discipline was considered a science. She explains, in highly technical terms, the academic evolution of the treatment of poverty, from Marx, followed by others, such as Engels, Durkheim or Weber. She then moves on to consider the incorporation of the study of poverty in the historical sciences, and more specifically in the study of ancient Greece. As Fernández Prieto states, the interest in the study of poverty as a phenomenon is quite new, arising immediately after the

Second World War. Fernández Prieto next surveys the scholarship from 1945 onwards.

In the second chapter, “¿Qué se entiende por pobreza?” (“What is Meant by Poverty?,” 65-92), Fernández Prieto deals with the concept of poverty in Classical Athens. In this chapter, she examines some ancient definitions of poverty (e.g. for Aristophanes, the poor were those who had to work for a living; a position later adopted by Austin and Vidal-Naquet). She, however, defines poverty as a polysemic concept which, therefore, must be treated in a multifaceted way. For Fernández Prieto, poverty is “a socially constructed category (...), which results from and is maintained by structural inequalities (...), which is multidimensional in nature (...) and which can lead to situations of marginalization and social exclusion” (72). As Fernández Prieto states, “the ‘need to work’ and ‘the lack of leisure’ (92) are a fundamental component of the Athenian conception of poverty, but not the only one. The lexicon of poverty, and other economic, material and moral aspects also play an important role in the Athenian understanding of poverty. However, Fernández Prieto correctly notes that the line between beggary and poverty is unclear. A more precise definition, or an analysis of whether or not this definition of the poor changed from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> century, would be welcome.

In the second part, Fernández Prieto explores the “realities” of the Athenian notion of poverty in Classical times (93-169). In Chapter 3, “Los ciudadanos ‘pobres’ de la *polis*” (“‘Poor’ citizens of the *polis*,” 95-170), Fernández Prieto traces the situation of poor people in ancient Athens from their initial support for Peisistratus in 561 BCE. Fernández Prieto also discusses the incorporation of the *thetes* into the citizen body throughout the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE. Fernández Prieto is correct in concluding that there was no direct connection between the rise of the Athenian fleet and its political regime (105), unlike other modern scholars. In this sense, she reaches the same conclusion, but through a different method, as Van Wees (“Herodotus and the Past,” in Bakker, E. J., de Jong, I. J. F. y Van Wees, H. (eds.), *Brill's Companion to Herodotus* (Leiden–Boston–Köln, 2002), 337-338; and *Ships and Silver: A Fiscal History of Archaic Athens* (London, 2013), 33-37): the Athenian fleet would already have had a presence during the tyranny. Thucydides (1.13) himself made a direct connection between the rise of different tyrannies and the fleet (although he mainly had in mind Polycrates of Samos, it could have been applied to others such as Peisistratus, Lygdamis and other Sicilian tyrants). In any case, the creation of the Delian League, and its possibilities for employment, facilitated a greater inclusion of the *thetes* in the

Athenian civic body through a greater role in the magistracies and institutions, especially in the *dikasteria* (an issue not without debate) and their role in the ships. Fernández Prieto explains through her own analysis (that is partly based in other quantitative studies of authors such as Van Wees, Foxhall or Osborne) that, after the Peloponnesian War, the situation of the poor in Athens worsened because there was a greater land ownership concentration in Attica. Of course, she does not forget other factors, such as the Athenian loss of the Peloponnesian War, the dissolution of the League or the absence of cleruchies (at least until the mid-4<sup>th</sup> century) that created a gradual degradation of the poor.

In Chapter 4, “Los espacios de la pobreza” (“The Spaces of Poverty,” 170-248), Fernández Prieto explores the spatial dimension of poverty, that is, the places that the poor occupied. In this chapter, she makes more visible those who are ignored in the written record and whose physical remains often overlooked. Making good use of sparse literary sources, Fernández Prieto considers where the *penetes* and *ptochoi* lived, where they worked and where they “enjoyed” their leisure (e. g. in the *kapeleia*). She even examines beggars, who used to frequent uncomfortable places such as baths, doorways or even tombs. Fernández Prieto, moreover, analyses the special relationship between Zeus and the *ptochoi* (unfortunately not well-studied by modern scholars). She also surveys places and events where the poor were forbidden, excluded or expelled.

The fifth chapter, “Aliviar la pobreza: *misthophoria*, relaciones de dependencia y ayuda mutua” (“Alleviating poverty: *misthophoria*, relations of dependence and mutual aid,” 249-308), deals with the different mechanisms that the *polis* as an entity and its citizens as individuals had for “alleviating” the poverty of members of the community. In contrast to the established idea (partly based on ancient literary sources) that compassion was lacking in Greek morality (254), Fernández Prieto does not rule out a certain social duty among citizens. She analyses the *misthos* and the still controversial *diobelía*, as well as the aids to orphans and disabled, and some social protection strategies for pregnant widows, explaining the way in which these strategies and payments resulted in relationships of dependence or personal patronage. For example, the case of Cimon (Theopomp. *FGrHist* 115 F89 = Ath. 12.533a-c) or Pericles (Arist. *Ath.* 27.4; Plu. *Per.* 9.2-3; 12) demonstrate how patronage relationships arose in Classical Athens. However, although Fernández Prieto is partly following other scholars, it should be noted that a type of state patronage or clientelism is already evident under the Peisistratids (e.g. Arist. *Pol.* 1313b26-29). In any case, Fernández Prieto

moreover explores different survival strategies, from the various substitute food-stuffs, to the use of friendships, to the abandonment or murder of infants and even possible child prostitution. This last activity is documented in the case of non-citizens (Dem. *Against Neaera*), but Fernández Prieto does not rule out the possibility that it could have happened among citizens.

The third part focuses on the “Percepciones y representaciones de la pobreza y de la indigencia” (“Perceptions and representations of poverty and destitution,” 309-381). In these last two chapters, the author explains how poverty was perceived in Classical Athens. In the sixth chapter, “La representación literaria del *ptochos*: a caballo entre lo arquetípico y la ‘realidad’” (“The Literary Representation of the *Ptochos*: Straddling the Archetypal and the ‘Reality,’” 313-355), Fernández Prieto explores the physical and moral depiction projected by those living in extreme poverty. Ancient sources (especially comedies) showed beggars as very thin, starving beings, dressed in rags and old people’s clothes, an image based on Homer (e.g., *Odyssey* 13.397-438: how much we can extrapolate the Classical Athenian poor from the Homeric plays is unclear). Here, Fernández Prieto uses a post-modern approach to interrogate those living in extreme poverty that are also mostly invisible (with the rare exceptions of Dikaiopolis and Orestes in Aristophanes’ *Acharnians* and *Birds* respectively). She also notes the relationship between the poorest ones and food, although ancient testimonies are vague (with the exception of Alexis, *PCG* 2, fr. 167 = Ath. 2.55a).

In the seventh and last chapter, “El imaginario social de la ‘cultura de la pobreza’: estigmatización y criminalización del pobre y de su condición” (“The social imaginary of the ‘culture of poverty’: stigmatisation and criminalisation of the poor and their condition,” 357-381), Fernández Prieto delves into a contemporary debate: the unfair link between poverty and criminality (including the equation of the very poor with the *atimos*, those lacking honor). She identifies anti-poverty positions among Greek oligarchs who are, in turn, anti-democratic. However, further inquiry is needed to see if this relationship is more than coincidental. In fact, as the author points out, it seems to be a question of *hybris* (e. g. Isoc. 20.1-6). Some poor (i.e., those who “had to work for a living”) could also enjoy popular favor in Classical Athens, such as the *thetes*. It is also true, that a certain stigmatization of the Athenian poor endured, even though most of the extant evidence predates the Classical period.

—In the conclusion (383-397), Fernández Prieto recapitulates the salient elements of the previous chapters. The bibliography is extensive, specialized and up-to-date. Back matter includes several illustrative images, and indices (figures,

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tables, sources and names).

Fernández Prieto admirably addresses the issues of poverty in Classical Athens and gives the poor visibility, drawing from ancient material and written evidence as well as post-modern theory, explaining how they lived, how they were perceived, and how they navigated Classical Athenian society.

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