

# Bryn Mawr Classical Review

Bryn Mawr Classical Review 2008.04.21

**Mario Telò, *Eupolidis Demi. Testi con commento filologico, 14*. Firenze: Felice Le Monnier, 2007. Pp. 789. ISBN 978-88-00-20666-2. €3.00.**

**Reviewed by Giulia Torello, Monash University ([Giulia.Torello@arts.monash.edu.au](mailto:Giulia.Torello@arts.monash.edu.au))**

Word count: 1789 words

This volume consists of an introductory essay followed by a very detailed commentary on the fragments of Eupolis' *Demes*, accompanied by apparatus and translation in Italian and completed by a useful index and an extensive bibliography. It is the latest volume of a series of philological commentaries of classical texts edited by Gian Biagio Conte for Le Monnier.

A previous commentary solely on *Demes* by Plepelits was published in 1970.<sup>1</sup> Although Plepelits' work still remains valuable, a resurgence of interest in Eupolidean plays in the last 15 years and, in particular, the recent publication of Storey's monograph,<sup>2</sup> which on account of its format could not provide a detailed analysis of each Eupolidean fragment, makes this new commentary particularly welcome.

Telò (henceforth T.) includes in his analysis the whole of the forty-eight fragments assigned to the play by Kassel and Austin to which he adds four unassigned fragments.<sup>3</sup> All fragments have been renumbered in accordance with T.'s reconstruction of the plotline and Kassel and Austin's numeration only appears in the Greek printed version of the text as well as in a table at the back of the book (the existence of which I discovered too late). Their absence from the introductory essay and the commentary makes it at times inconvenient to identify the fragment(s) in question.

T. also includes a brief commentary on twelve additional fragments that Kassel and Austin have consigned to the sections of unassigned or adespota fragments. T. does not believe that these fragments belong to the *Demes*, but includes them in an acknowledgement of the scholarly tradition which ascribes them to the play. Unfortunately the text of these fragments is not printed and to make sense of the commentary the reader needs to consult the PCG edition.

T.'s introductory essay is organised into five sections that deal with the play's scholarship (*0. Una lunga fedeltà e un puzzle irrisolto*), dating (*I. Una datazione problematica*), plot reconstruction (*II. Alla ricerca del plot perduto*), characters (*III. L'eroe comico, il coro e gli altri*), and the ideology of the play (*IV. Politica, ideologia, utopia*).

Section I rejects both the traditional dating assigned to the play (412) and Storey's alternative dating (417-6) to suggest a later dating (410). T. argues that the elliptic expression τούς ἐν μακροῖν τεύχοῖν could refer to the presence of extraordinary garrisons on the Long Walls. He supports his argument by appealing to a passage from Thucydides

(8.71), who reports that in 411 Athens intensified the patrolling of the Long Walls.<sup>4</sup> This interpretation is highly implausible. The construction  $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$  + dative usually expresses a locative "in, within a certain area, territory" (as in Thuc. 2.78.4, 3.68.3; Xen. Hell. 3.5.18; D.C. 37.1.5, 49.27.2) whereas the expression "on the wall" would best be rendered with  $\acute{\epsilon}\pi\acute{\iota}$ . Various elements, I believe, concur to exclude this later dating. Admittedly the inclusion of Eupolis in a list of casualties dated to 411 is not conclusive evidence for the death of the dramatist, given that the name Eupolis appears to be fairly common. The allusion to the battle of Mantinea (418) at fr. 99.30 (= 17.30 T.) and to the profanation of the Mysteries (415) at fr. 99.79ff. (= 17.79 T.), on the other hand, can only acquire significance if these events belong to a recent past.<sup>5</sup> The mention of Laispodias (fr. 107 K.-A. = 23 T.) also rules out the possibility that the play was performed in 410. Indeed, Laispodias appears as one of the envoys sent by the Four Hundred to Sparta in 411. During the journey he was seized by the ship's crew and handed over to the Argives, for he was considered responsible for the change of government in Athens (Thuc. 8.86.9). Since we do not hear of Laispodias thereafter we can presume that in 410 he was dead or had lost his public prominence. Either way he was no longer a palatable comic target.

Section II addresses the no less challenging task of reconstructing the plot. Against Storey's suggestion that Aristeides, Miltiades, Solon and Perikles might have been resurrected through necromancy, T. opts for the traditional interpretation of the play's partial underworld setting. T. adds to this series of underworld scenes an encounter between Pyronides and Phrynys, the exponent of the new music. T. takes a Fourth-Century Paestan bell-krater illustrating a scene between two characters labelled 'Phrynys' and 'Pyronides' as an indication that the play must have contained an underworld encounter between the two characters, based upon the assumption that Phrynys would be long dead at the time of the staging of the *Demes*. But the absence of any evidence for the role of Phrynys in the comedy, the later dating and provenance of the vase-painting along with the disputed chronology of Phrynys and the uncertain date of the staging of the play make his considerations highly conjectural.

The hypothesis of an underworld setting makes the identity of the Chorus rather problematic. Indeed, a Chorus of Demes can only appear in an Athenian setting, whereas it would bear no significance in the underworld. Scholars have been trying to overcome this obstacle either by proposing the presence of a second Chorus (Keil and Page), though their existence is not supported by the remaining text, or by interpreting fr. 99.1-34 K.-A. (= 17.1-34 T.) as a parodic rather than a parabolic context (cf. most recently Storey).<sup>6</sup> T. refutes both positions and proposes that the play could feature "una scena ateniese racchiusa tra parodo e parabasi" (p. 43). In other words he suggests that the action could be set in Athens in the initial scenes, moved to the underworld, and brought back to Athens again. T. probably implies (although he does not state this clearly) that during the underworld scenes the Chorus would be absent from the scene to come back just before the arrival of the Four and Pyronides to signify that the action is back in Athens. A prolonged absence of the Chorus is, however, very unusual in Old Comedy, although it occurs in Aristophanes' *Ekklesiazousai*. One would have hoped that T., who has refuted the scholarly arguments on this matter in some length, could explain his own view in greater depth.

In the discussion of the play's characters that follows (section III) T. forcibly assimilates Pyronides to Odysseus' comic *alter ego*. Although the dialogic scene between Pyronides and Perikles (fr. 110 K.-A. = 4 T.) is a clear paratragedy of the encounter between

Odysseus and Achilles in *Odyssey* XI, one cannot tell to what extent Eupolis deliberately exploited the epic material. The heroic catabasis is not an uncommon feature in Old Comedy as Aristophanes' *Frogs* and *Gerytades* certainly prove. Neither is the comic hero's intervention to restore the order in Athens through a series of clever stratagems. Therefore if one can recognise among the features of the comic character a certain degree of cunningness, it is hard to ascribe it to a 'specific Odyssean stance' (in Whitman's words that T. quotes at p. 59). Likewise the analogies between the recognition scenes of the *Demes* and those of the *Odyssey* are not as striking as the author would like them to be, as he himself at times admits (see, for instance p. 60 and p. 455).

The interpretative key that underlines T.'s reading of the play is the hazardous assumption that in their role as saviors of the city the four statesmen "si rivelano del tutto immuni alla lente deformante della caricatura comica" (p. 68). Such an irreprehensible characterisation is alien to Aristophanic heroes, as he himself admits (n. 243), and the play's extant lines do not allow us to determine this. I suspect that the four statesmen were represented not simply as a model of virtue but at times also as laughable targets. Perhaps what made them "caricature comiche" was their embodiment and exasperation of certain virtues, such as Aristides' accentuated and uncompromising sense of justice. This would not differ from the characterisation of Aeschylus and Euripides in Aristophanes' *Frogs*, who are not simply advocates of their art but the personification of their own poetic styles.

The seriousness of comic attacks *ad personam* has been widely discussed by the critics. Sommerstein among others<sup>7</sup> has downplayed the serious intent of *onomasti komodein* to state that comedy often operates on the principle '*nil boni nisi de mortuis*'. Perikles who has repeatedly been the object of derogatory satire by Kratinos and Hermippos while alive, becomes after his death a model of virtue. Within this perspective, to propose, as T. does, that in the *Demes* Eupolis has endeavoured a laborious process of rehabilitation of Perikles' public image (or "solonizzazione" as he calls it, see pp. 95-102) seems unnecessary.

In section IV T. follows earlier scholarship in viewing *Demes* as a comedy of strong political orientation. In particular he sees in Eupolis' choice of resurrecting the Four, and Solon in particular, his deliberate intent of unmasking the false appropriation of Solonian ideology by the regime of the Four Hundred. Once again this interpretation of the play's ideology is based on his later dating.

More convincing are his considerations on the utopia realised in the play. Against Ruffell<sup>8</sup> who states that the play removes "what has been constructed as negative" but does not entail constitutional changes, T. rightly argues that the intervention of the Four ended with the introduction of changes endorsed by the law that aimed to restore order in Athens. In particular, T. reads fr. 128 K.-A. (= fr. 27 T) as referring to legal provisions to guarantee a more equal distribution of wealth. These legal measures are not only paralleled in the rules of the newly founded gynocratic regime in Aristophanes' *Ekklesiazousai* 688-9, but also by Solon's beliefs, expressed in his poetry, that every citizen deserves to partake of the state's prosperity.

The extensive philological commentary that accompanies the analysis of each fragment is the book's major strength. Textual problems are discussed with precision and competence. T. pays particular attention to discussion of syntactical and metrical issues, offering opportune references to *loci paralleli*. He also analyses extensively the supplements of

corrupted passages suggested by the critics through a close reading of the papyri (although he consulted photographic reproductions rather than the originals).

However, T. at times devotes an inordinate amount of space to proposals that are hardly worth refuting, and it is not always clear where he stands (see, for instance, the discussion on the marginal note to fr. 99.37 K.-A = 17.37 T at pp. 406-7).

Despite the reservations expressed here, T.'s book is a thoroughly researched and comprehensive commentary on Eupolis' *Demes* and Old Comedy specialists will find it a useful research tool. One can only hope that a fortunate papyrological find will one day shed light on some of the unresolved enigmas posed by this highly fascinating play.

---

#### Notes:

- [1.](#) K. Plepelits, *Die Fragmente der Demoi des Eupolis* (Vienna 1970).
- [2.](#) I.C. Storey, *Eupolis Poet of Old Comedy* (Oxford 2003).
- [3.](#) R. Kassel and C. Austin, *Poetae Comici Graeci*, vol. v (Berlin and New York 1986) fr. 99-146. The unassigned fragments that T. ascribes to the *Demes* are fr. 333 K.-A (= 49 T.), 336 K.-A. (= 50 T.), 397 K.-A. (= 51 T.), 389 K.-A. (= 52 T.).
- [4.](#) T. deals more extensively with the dating of *Demes* in M. Telò and L. Porciani, 'Un'alternativa per la datazione dei *Demi* di Eupoli', *QUCC* 72 (2002) 22-40.
- [5.](#) Compare for instance the harsh tone in Aristides' condemnation of the sycophant and in his mention of Demonstratos at fr. 99. 105-117 (= 17.105-117 T.) with the more jocular reference to the mutilation of the herms, four years after the event has taken place, at Ar. Lys. 1093ff.
- [6.](#) B. Keil 'Über Eupolis Demen und Aristophanes Ritter', *NAWG* (1912) 248-51 suggested that the underworld chorus could have consisted of old or dead demes. His argument was followed by D.L. Page, *Greek Literary Papyri*, vol. i (Cambridge Mass, 1941) 203-4. Storey (2003: 128) revives an argument already presented by W. Schmid, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur*, vol. i (Munich 1946) 127.
- [7.](#) A.H. Sommerstein, 'How to avoid being a *komodoumenos*', *CQ* 46 (1996) 334.
- [8.](#) I. Ruffell, 'The World Turned Upside Down: Utopia and Utopianism in The Fragments of Old Comedy' in F.D. Harvey and J. Wilkins (eds.) *The Rivals of Aristophanes: Studies in Athenian Old Comedy* (London 2000) 490.

[Read Latest](#)

[Index for 2008](#)

[Change Greek Display](#)

[Archives](#)

[Books Available for Review](#)

[BMCR Home](#)