

NERVEGNA (S.) **Menander in Antiquity: The Contexts of Reception.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. ix + 317, illus. £60. 9781107004221. doi:10.1017/S007542691400161X

‘Plutarch’s passionate admiration’ for Menander in his *Comparison of Aristophanes and Menander* provides the framework for Nervegna’s analysis of ‘the social reception of Menander and his plays’. Plutarch provides evidence for the ‘contexts’, for the venues where an imperial Greek ‘could expect to find Menander’, such as theatres, symposia and classrooms (2). Nervegna argues convincingly that Menander was popular not only posthumously but also during his lifetime (a point anticipated by Ioannis Konstantakos, ‘Rara coronato plausere theatra Menandro? Menander’s success in his lifetime’, *QUCC* 88 (2008) 79–106), outstripping even his rival Philemon (16, n.19).

Chapter 1 treats Menander as a ‘cultural icon’ in three Hellenistic cities: Athens, Alexandria and Rome. His popularity in Athens is explained by his association with the Peripatetic school and connections with Athens’ Macedonian overlords. Peripatetic influence is evident in Menander’s recognition scenes, humour, subtlety and character types, though Nervegna presses too hard the idea that Menander’s comedy represents a ‘successful attempt to turn comedy into philosophical and ethical drama’ (46); better to see his comedies as part of this larger intellectual environment. He wrote to entertain and educate his audiences, but his plays are not ‘ethical’ comedies.

Nervegna sees Menander as ‘an oligarchic pro-Macedonian’ intellectual (17), against S. Lape (*Reproducing Athens*, Princeton 2004), who considers him a democrat. He was close to Demetrius of Phaleron, but that his beardlessness was a sign of Macedonian inclinations seems dubious. The relative absence of local political allusions may be a consequence less of his politics than, as Nervegna also notes, of the fact that his plays were often produced outside Athens.

Menander was a favourite of Aristophanes of Byzantium and scholars in the Alexandrian library. Travelling actors also helped spread his reputation, as Pat Easterling has argued (‘From repertoire to canon’, in P. Easterling (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, Cambridge 1997, 211–27). Velleius Paterculus, ‘the first author to name New Comedy’s champions’ (Diphilus, Philemon and Menander), concluded that Menander was the star of the genre

(56). Indeed, ‘Over 80 per cent of these *palliatae* come from the works of Menander’ (59).

Chapter 2 discusses Menander in Greek and Roman theatres of the later Hellenistic and imperial periods. Nervegna focuses on *contaminatio*, ‘spoiling and mucking around’ in existing plays to create texts suitable to the taste of new audiences. She traces the practice to the revision or *διασκευή* of Classical Greek comedies and tragedies for restaging (64, 88). Like Euripides, however, Menander’s posthumous popularity in Hellenistic theatres is due largely to his ‘linguistic accessibility’.

Chapter 3 focuses on Menander’s presence in symposia and dinner parties: Plutarch (*Moralia* 712b–d) stresses his linguistic style, plots and maxims in this connection. Scenes from his comedies decorated the rooms of private houses and were acted in the homes of the wealthy as high-quality entertainment (122); Menander was useful for ‘cultural pretension, domestic décor and a desire to reaffirm Greek identity under the Empire’, and his ‘comedies virtually monopolize our visual record of New Comedy and Greek drama in general’ (137). Nervegna is very good on the discrepancy between the plays popular in the iconographic versus literary traditions.

Menander’s place in schools from late antiquity until the Middle Ages is discussed in chapter 4. Nervegna employs a wide range of ancient sources (papyri, Quintilian, Theon, Fulgentius, Stobaeus), building on the seminal work of Raffaella Cribiore (*Writing, Teachers and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, Atlanta 1996; *Gymnastics of the Mind*, Princeton 2001). Primary teachers trained students on Menander’s maxims and he was equally important in the advanced curriculum, particularly for characterization. Extracts from *Kolax* were used for training in *prosopopoiia* (215), along with Thrasonides’ opening monologue in *Misoumenos* (216–17). Nervegna presents an excellent overview of delivery in the ancient world, though Menandrian examples are few.

In the conclusion, Nervegna revisits the reasons for Menander’s survival and loss. She denies that the Christian church was responsible for consigning ‘Menander’s comedy to oblivion’, noting that at Panopolis ‘Menander’s plays were read and reread alongside Christian texts, and they even provided the model for comedies of Christian content’ (257). Rather, Menander’s style, which differed from the pure Attic of Sophocles or Aristophanes, might have reduced his usefulness

as a school text, and, 'once an author fell out of the curriculum, he also fell out of the general favour'. So too, 'our records for ancient *ethopoiiiai* show little that can be traced directly to Menander' (259). That Menander's plays spoke little about the glorious Greek past also diminished their appeal (260), though this aspect aided his comeback in modern Greece through theatrical productions.

Two appendices provide lists of Roman *palliatæ* with their playwrights and Greek models, and paintings and monuments representing scenes from New Comedy.

Nervegna has produced an excellent study on a difficult subject, and her book will be an indispensable tool not only for anyone interested in Menander but also in the reception of the classics. It is a first-rate achievement.

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BENEKER (J.) *The Passionate Statesman. Eros and Politics in Plutarch's Lives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. Pp. xii + 258. £55. 9780199695904.

doi:10.1017/S0075426914001621

In his introduction, Beneker states his intention to juxtapose Plutarch's ethical outlook with his methodological approach in the *Parallel Lives* by focusing 'on how *eros* can act as a lens both for [Plutarch's] interpretation of historical sources and for his composition of political biographies' (3). He makes a cogent case that Plutarch uses *eros* in both those ways and that awareness of these devices enhances our appreciation of Plutarch's art. It is always a challenge in Plutarchan studies to avoid the extremes of over-sampling the abundant material with 'bits' or restricting examples to such a narrow area that generalizations aren't meaningful. Beneker succeeds, partly because his points are well-argued and amply documented, and partly because of the creative way the book is structured.

There are five subdivided chapters in two sections. Section 1 includes chapters 1 and 2 and features an extended and dense discussion of those themes and examples, using *eros* as a lens. Section 2 includes chapters 3, 4 and 5, and examines *eros* as a compositional device. Each chapter is subdivided as follows. Chapter 1: '*Eros* and marriage' ('The parts of the soul'; '*Philia* and marriage'; '*Eros*, *philia* and marriage'; 'Brutus and Porcia';

'Pericles and Aspasia, idealism and realism'). Chapter 2: 'Moral virtue, *eros*, and history' ('Historical-ethical reconstruction in the *Lives*'; 'Moral virtue in the *Pelopidas-Marcellus*'; 'Dion, Dionysius, and Plato's tyrannical man'). Chapter 3: '*Eros* and ambition in the *Alexander-Caesar*' ('Building an empire: Alexander's *sophrosyne* and ambition'; 'Xenophon's Cyrus and Plutarch's Alexander'; '*Eros* in the *Alexander*'; '*Thymos*, ambition, and *sophrosyne*'; '*Eros* and ambition in the Caesar'; 'Limits to *eros* and ambition'). Chapter 4: '*Eros* and the fall of Mark Antony' (see next paragraph). Chapter 5: '*Eros* and the Statesman' ('*Sophrosyne* in Xenophon and Plutarch'; '*Eros* in the *Agessilaus-Pompey*'; 'Concluding remarks'). The transition from the biographies in general, viewed in connection with one another, to the *Lives* in particular, helps make one of the author's points for him, that structure can be flexible if there is a strong enough anchoring theme, *eros* in this case.

What does this dual and flexible usage of *eros* as lens and compositional device look like in practice? Cleopatra is crucial to the biographies of both Julius Caesar and Mark Antony, yet she is a very different figure in the two biographies. Chapter 4, '*Eros* and the fall of Mark Antony', is subdivided into '*Eros* in the *Demetrius*', 'Antony's Women' ('The early years'; 'Fulvia'; 'Fulvia and Cleopatra'; 'Octavia and Cleopatra'; 'Cleopatra') 'in order to demonstrate how Plutarch has used Antony's various wives to represent the psychological struggle between reason and *eros* in his soul. During each period, Antony's struggle with *eros* advances, while the boundaries of the periods are marked by important changes in the status of Antony's women' (173). Here *eros* is a lens. By breaking down the biography into sections dominated by one or more wives, Beneker imports a whole new layer of structure to the biography, what he calls a 'blueprint for examining the Life' (173). This blueprint, or compositional device, has the additional virtue of showing starkly how inseparable Cleopatra is from almost three-quarters of the *Antony*. In contrast, Beneker shows, Plutarch's presentation of Cleopatra in *Caesar* is minimal and not particularly erotic, so that 'Plutarch is able to account for the Roman statesman's celebrated eroticism by redirecting it toward his military and political objectives, and so he represents both Alexander and Caesar as fundamentally the same in their ability to withstand the lure of physical beauty, despite their very different reputations with regard to sex' (150).