

DEMETRIOS C. BEROUTSOS, *A Commentary on the Aspis of Menander, Part One: Lines 1-298*, Hypomnemata 157, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005, 112 pp., ISBN 3-525-25256-0.

Though at times in the past *Aspis* has been criticised for its overall simplicity of plot and what has been termed the black-and-white nature of its characters, I have to admit to finding it one of Menander's most appealing of extant dramas. In many ways indeed those very factors that some have taken issue with provide ample evidence of the playwright's ability to circumvent and resolve difficulties of his own creation. Nor is the fragmentary nature of the play an impediment to our appreciation. The first three Acts remain substantially complete, and the information contained in these, together with genre expectations and the extant scraps of Acts IV and V, allow an outline of the play's final events to be readily established. It was with great interest, therefore, that I approached Beroutsos' commentary, and found much within it that is both illuminating and will be of use to anyone studying the play either as a Greek text or as a piece of New Comedy drama.

In origin a PhD thesis submitted to University College London in 1997, the book retains many features of its original format, despite the revision it has undergone subsequently. There is, for instance, the occasional profusion of references to individual points of analogy which might well have been pruned, and a tendency to comment on features of language one might consider undeserving of detailed mention, especially when such comment is founded on the paucity of parallels in a genre where we still have so very little. But in this I am probably betraying my own preferences of approach; others will doubtless reach their own conclusions.

Beroutsos opens the work with an Introduction devoted to examining a range of topics. These vary from the place occupied by *Aspis* in the context of Menander's works, through its characters and characterisation, the legal implications of Kleostratos' sister

becoming heir to his estate, to final sections on the play's date, title, and the sources of the text. For like so many of Menander's works, *Aspis* today is a patchwork of minor fragments and the much more substantial remains of the Bodmer papyrus. Beroutsos makes some telling points here, but I was constantly left with a desire for more. Take, for instance, the five elements which he says at the beginning bring out the 'distinctive dramatic character of the plot': (1) the plot's solemn, almost tragic, tone (cf. Goldberg's 'Mixture of Modes'), (2) the playwright's often novel use of standard comic techniques, (3) the improvisatory nature of Daos' scheme to thwart Smikrines' plans, (4) the effect of a deferred prologue, and (5) the startling insertion of the opening scene. These are dealt with in little more than two pages. True, they do also figure in the commentary, but there too detail of discussion can be tantalisingly brief. The same is true of the author's discussion of the heiress-status foisted onto Kleostratos' sister by his supposed death. As Beroutsos explains, until publication of *Aspis* the prevailing view had often been that a girl would inherit a deceased brother's estate in her own right, and not in trust for any subsequent offspring, as would be the case if she had inherited her father's property directly, in the absence of any brothers. What the play seems to do is to clarify this, though not without some scholarly dissent. Indeed resolution of this one problem raises a number of others which might usefully have been touched upon either here in the Introduction or later, at relevant points in the commentary.

The Commentary itself, some seventy seven pages long, combines general observations on individual aspects of dramatic interest, both within and between scenes, with a detailed discussion of linguistic points, the meaning and significance of phrasing used, and textual restoration. The last of these has obvious importance for a text that has suffered damage to individual words and lines as well as being a prey to scribal error. The *apparatus raisonné* approach, therefore, is hardly surprising, with Beroutsos providing a useful guide to suggested emendation, usually accompanied by some indication of his own preference. Anyone studying the text of the play will find this of immediate value, a rich and wide-ranging source of detailed information well worth mining, even if, inevitably,

one cannot always agree with those preferences. Likewise, his comments on linguistic usage often serve to illuminate detailed points of character and to provide incisive insights into dramatic development, even if occasionally he cannot resist setting up the idiosyncratic ideas of others simply to knock them down.

There is, however, one major drawback to the work; for what Beroutsos has produced is essentially a fragment of a fragmentary play. Limiting himself to the first 297 lines is an arbitrary imposition upon the text, of which we have just over 465 lines from Acts I-III. The approach may have been determined in the first place by conditions attached to a postgraduate thesis - and it is a practice one sees increasingly these days - but to transfer this unaltered to the published form, with an abrupt ending after scene two of Act II, is disappointing.

It would, however, be wrong to end this review on a critical note. One may regret that the author has not been able to find time to extend his commentary to the whole play, and thus augment more fully earlier commentaries, such as that of Gomme and Sandbach. On the other hand, what there is here, rounded off as it is by a rich bibliography, constitutes a very welcome addition to scholarship on the play. I look forward, in fact, to seeing it completed (something heralded by the book's subtitle, *Part One: Lines 1-298?*).

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