

Cynic Cercidas and the politics of prostitution.

In this paper, I focus on the “Erotic” fragment (fr. 2 Livrea = fr. 2 Lominento = fr. 5 Powell) attributed to the Hellenistic poet and Cynic Cercidas of Megalopolis. With my analysis of this fragment, I demonstrate how Cercidas’ conscious references to Greek archaic poetry and to the representation of prostitutes, marriage, and adultery in New Comedy introduce his political agenda and views on the democratic values of the Greek polis. Building on previous discussions of the cultural implications of prostitution in the Greek polis from the Archaic to the post-Classical period [Halperin 1990, 88-104; Kurke 1999, 175-219; Lape 2004, 74-95], I examine the poet’s evaluation of “good” and “bad” Eros not only in a dialogue with earlier and contemporary philosophical tradition or as a Cynic reflection on ethical dilemmas connected with passion and sex, but also as a strategy for promoting certain political ideas.

In the first part of the paper, I analyze humorous representation of the popular *topos* about the double nature of Eros in the context of the works of other Hellenistic poets such as Antagoras of Rhodes (fr. 1 Powell) and Callimachus (fr. 200a-b Pfeiffer). In the second part of the paper, I examine the motif of the “Ship of Eros” which is central for the interpretation of this fragment. I argue that Cercidas directly refers to the origins of this motif in Archaic poetry, and particularly to the poetry of Archilochus and Alcaeus [Gentili 1988, 197-215]. I then examine lexical parallels with several fragments of Alcaeus (fr. 6a, 106, 73, 117b Lobel-Page) and demonstrate how Cercidas combines the philosophical image and poetical motif with political metaphor. In the third part of the paper, I examine the theme of prostitution as a solution for a “bad” Eros in Cercidas’ fragment in the context of New Comedy and its representation of *hetairai* and *pornai*. With a comparative reading of Cercidas’ fragment and fr. 3

(Kassel-Austin) by Philemon, younger contemporary of Menander, I demonstrate how Cercidas emphasizes the connection between prostitution and democratic ideology.

In the conclusion of this paper, I discuss the historical context of this fragment based on the information provided by Polybius (2, 48-50; 2, 65) and Cercidas' affiliation as a "political fixer" between the Achaean league and Macedonian king Antigonus [Williams 2006, 347]. I suggest that the conclusion of the fragment, the Aesopic fable about the tortoise that was "cursed" by Zeus to carry its own home for disobeying Zeus's orders and prioritizing solitude, could provide a key to the interpretation of the political metaphor. I argue that by concluding the discussion of "good" and "bad" Eros with this fable, Cercidas illustrates particular ideological choice: in between uncontrollable passions, that bring only civil storm, and option to buy calmness for money, Cynic politician prefers to remain loyal to his own home, "truly noble and beloved" (ἄριστος ἀλαθέως / καὶ φίλο[ς, lines 31-32).

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