

Lawgivers from Hades:
Demagogues, Politics, and Legal Issues in Eupolis' *Demoi*

Demoi, the best-known Old Comedy except from those written by Aristophanes, is perhaps the most significant of Eupolis' plays. Even if the forty-six remaining fragments and the leaves of the Cairo codex are still mysterious in their content (STOREY, 2003: 112) and do not allow to fully reconstruct the details of the plotline, it is evident from the available sources that the comedy was mainly focused on a strictly political dimension. In fact, the play presented on stage the return of four politicians from Hades - Miltiades, Aristeides, Solon and Perikles- who were apparently called back in order to overcome the Athenian crisis. According to many scholars, such a civic background could explain the large presence of an institutional terminology along the verses.

The legal aspects of the text, however, have been largely ignored. The dead demagogues are referred to as *prostatai*, *nomothetai* and *strategoï*, and a fragment of Plutonium (2.6., fr. 2 [S] 13-15) explains how Eupolis placed these lawgivers (*nomotheton*) on stage to have them deal with the passage or repeal of law (*he peri theseos nomon e kataluseos*). At the same time, references in the play to a specific technical language of law -including the vocabulary used in the encounter of a sycophant with a just man occurring in the last part of the play (fr. 99)- have not been properly discussed from a philological and legal approach.

By analyzing the specific knowledge that every Athenian citizen should have had on the practice of judicial activities, the purpose of these paper is to unveil the nature of those legal passages and to show in which ways the use of juridical allusions in *Demoi* might have constituted for Eupolis an efficient comic technique and a humorous device.

Preferred panel: 18. Open Topics

Length of the paper: 20 minutes

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