Classical

Jenifer Neils and Dylan K. Rogers (eds) *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Athens*. pp. 494 pages, + 56 pages of illustrations and maps in an online supplement. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. ISBN 978-1-108-72330-5. £29.99.

Given the outsize presence of Athens in the surviving evidence for ancient Greek society and history, a handy starting point for all things Athenian is welcome indeed. This volume fills that role in exemplary fashion. With an introduction and 33 chapters, it touches on practically all aspects of the life and fabric of the city – from the earliest history of Athens to the current condition of its ancient remains, from residential architecture to military organisation, and from the philosophical schools to the ceramics industry. Each chapter offers a brief introduction to its subject pitched at an informed but general readership and a section with recommendations for further reading.

An in-depth discussion of each individual chapter would far exceed the bounds of this review; in any case, the high overall quality of the contributions would make such discussion a repetitive exercise. I will restrict myself only to some general remarks. Besides its breadth, the main strength of the volume is its integration of history, literature, and archaeology, both between and within chapters. Students and scholars in each field of study will find something in the contents of this volume to supplement their own knowledge. Some chapters that focus on material evidence or phases of construction can read like a catalogue, but most are well-pitched and informative, including careful delineation of what we can and cannot learn from studying sites and objects. Chapters on the walls, streets, water infrastructure, harbours and markets provide an invaluable sense of the space and texture of the city. Meanwhile, combined literary and archaeological overviews of topics like family, labour, animals, food and sex combine into a potted social history of ancient Athens (effectively the only Greek city for which such a history can be written).

Each of the contributors is an expert in their particular field, including some – like John McK. Camp and Edward Harris – whose work has defined our understanding of their respective chapter topics. In the best case, this expertise allows the authors to deliver a pointed account of the latest scholarship on each subject; notable examples include David Lewis on labour and James Kierstead on associations. The downside, however, is that some chapters are little more than summaries of earlier surveys, as for instance David Pritchard freely admits in his chapters on sports and the armed forces. In his case, this has unfortunately led to the perpetuation of notions of Greek warfare that are no longer current (such as its supposedly 'agonal' nature, pp. 313-314), backed by an outdated bibliography.[1] This observation raises reasonable concerns about other chapters' coverage of disputed ground (note, for example, George Steinhauer's uncritical presentation of Athenian rowers as a political power bloc driving further democratisation, which Paola Ceccarelli disproved decades ago: p. 241-242).[2]

Due to the scale of the project, it is perhaps inevitable that not all chapters are perfectly coordinated. Maria Liston's fascinating account of diseases and causes of death undermines Ann Steiner's conclusion that Athenians were 'uniformly well nourished' and 'healthy' (pp. 358-359). Robert A. Bridges' account of the formation of modern Athens around its ancient sites is helpful, but retreads some ground already covered by earlier chapters. Danielle Kellogg's chapter on demography and social stratification has rather a lot to cover, and the subject might usefully have been split into two separate treatments. Conversely, Margaret M. Miles and Jenifer Neils' chapter on festivals really only covers two – the Panathenaia and the Eleusinian Mysteries – while barely even mentioning the rest of the extensive festival calendar. A further contribution on religious cult or 'the other gods' might have rounded out this topic.

Across several chapters, there is a tendency to wax lyrical on the glory of Athens, its 'great leaders' (p. 69), 'the great Themistokles' (p. 13), and so on; one wonders whether Leagros really had an 'idyllic childhood' under the Peisistratids (p. 16). These traces of old-fashioned lionisation are out of place in this generally well-grounded work of scholarship.

A more serious negative aspect of the volume is the way its maps and illustrations are organised. The subject of the volume makes maps of both the ancient and the modern city indispensable. Yet

[1] Especially notable is the omission of H. van Wees, *Ships and Silver, Taxes and Tribute: A Fiscal History of Archaic Athens* (2013). Other highly relevant works appeared too late to be cited, but may be of interest to readers: C. Kucewicz, *The Treatment of the War Dead in Archaic Athens* (2021); O. Rees, *Military Departures, Homecomings and Death in Classical Athens* (2022).

[2] P. Ceccarelli, 'Sans thalassocratie, pas de démocratie?', *Historia* 42.4 (1993): 444-470.

maps are only provided in a few early chapters, which later parts of the volume refer back to; since there is no table of maps or illustrations and no page numbers are given, the reader is forced to go on a manual search for each map when it becomes relevant again later. The maps themselves are usually reproductions taken from other works. Some of them are small and difficult to read. A few additional maps and a wealth of illustrations are provided in a downloadable online supplement; this has no doubt kept the cost and size of the volume down, but it raises the question whether the purpose of the book is to be a companion to Athens in its own right, or not. For future scholars, the usefulness of this volume will partly depend on the resilience of CUP's file hosting infrastructure.

Yet none of these points could weigh against the achievement of this volume; they merely suggest ways in which a work that is already great could perhaps be even better in future editions. In its current state, it is already broadly comprehensive, accessible, affordable, and eminently useful for students of the ancient Greeks at any level.

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A. Konecny and N. Sekunda (eds) *The Battle of Plataiai 479 BC.* pp. 296. Vienna: Phoibos Verlag, 2022. ISBN 978-3-85161-271-4 (hardback), 978-3-85161-272-1 (e-pdf). £73.70 reduced to £66.45 (according to Amazon).

The occasion for this collection of essays on various aspects of the Battle of Plataea (as it is usually spelled in English-language sources) is the 2500th anniversary, in August or September 2022, of the battle which is presented in the Preface as a decisive event in world history. To quote, "The largest political entity the world had hitherto seen, in possession of the mightiest military host of the time, was conquered by a feat of arms which, until that day, none had dared believe possible." One might well find things to criticise in this description. "Conquered" is surely the wrong word, because it implies the takeover of the Persian empire, as achieved only by Alexander the Great, and Plataea was certainly a serious defeat, but Marathon and Salamis had already shown that it was possible to defeat Persian forces. In fact, the most serious blow struck against the Persian empire, supposedly on the same day as Plataea, may well have been the defeat of Persian land forces, at Mycale in Asia Minor, and the subsequent destruction of the remains of the Persian fleet, by the Greek fleet, now led by king Leotychidas of Sparta, aided by contingents from local Greek cities that had gone into revolt. Moreover, these defeats did not remove the threat from Persia in the eyes of the Greeks; even after the Spartans and their Peloponnesian allies had withdrawn from the continuing war to free Greek islands and cities that were still under Persian control, the Delian League under Athens' leadership continued the fight for a generation, and Spartan leaders, especially king Agesilaos, became involved in anti-Persian campaigns in Asia Minor and elsewhere for much of the fourth century BC. However, it is certainly true that no Persian king ordered a serious attack on mainland Greece after Plataea and Mycale, and attempts to regain their lost subject territories in the Aegean were largely confined to diplomacy.

After a Preface and preliminary short summary by Konecny of the historical background to Plataea, the papers fall into three sections, Kings and Commanders, Strategy and Tactics, and After the Victory. The first section has studies of Xerxes, Mardonios, Pausanias and Aristeides, mostly by McGregor Morris. I found the first particularly interesting, as, drawing on Persian sources but also on remarks and attitudes attributed to Xerxes and his circle by Herodotus, it showed what the actual viewpoint of Xerxes and the ruling group in the Persian empire is likely to have been concerning the invasion of mainland Greece, and how far the character and achievements of Xerxes could be seen to conform to the Zoroastrian ideal of a just king. In contrast, the view presented by Herodotus and exaggerated in later Greek tradition was infected by the need to portray the Persians as inferior to the Greeks. A similar attempt to get behind later hostile tradition, to the reality of what Pausanias may have been doing while commander-in-chief of the Greek forces and later as Regent for his nephew in Sparta was also instructive, especially to someone who has not given much consideration to Classical Greek history, though teaching it in general civilisation classes, since undergraduate days. But I feel bound to comment that much is inevitably hypothesis, relying on informed speculation, for the sources indicating factionalism in Sparta and serious disagreements on policy are minimal; one may even wonder how easy it was for factions to become established in Spartan society, when the board of ephors changed every year. A much more plausible picture of Aristeides than the perfect