**BOOK REVIEW**

*Democracy in Classical Athens,* 2nd Edition. By Christopher Carey. New York: Bloomsbury, 2017. Pp. xv + 181. Paperback, $25.95. ISBN 978-1-4742-8636-7.

A

true revision, the latest edition of Christopher Carey’s *Democracy in Classical Athens* is a student-friendly text that draws from the author’s deep well of knowledge. Carey has concisely presented the key evidence for the development, function, and ideology of Athenian democracy alongside his lucid interpretations. *DCA* strikes a balance both between a synchronic and diachronic view of Athenian democracy and between principles and institutions, a challenging achievement for a student handbook.

Carey does an impressive job compressing the relevant information into a slim volume while providing enough commentary for undergraduates with little Classics or History background. Thematically, the chapters of the book are largely relabeled versions of the 2001 edition, with the addition of chapter 6 on “Religion in the Democratic City.” After an introductory chapter on the meaning of democracy and the use of sources for ancient history (chapter 1: “First Thoughts”), an information-packed but manageable chapter diachronically sketches Athens’ political history from archaic aristocracy to democracy’s dissolution in 322 bce (chapter 2: “The Road to Democracy”). From chapter 3 (“Democracy and Ideology”) onward the book switches to a synchronic approach, noting differences between fifth and fourth century practice along the way. Two chapters (chapter 4: “The Core Bodies” and chapter 5: “Serving the Democracy”) cover the main organs and offices of government from the Assembly down to the secretariat.

The much needed new chapter on religion makes the case for the importance of religion to civic function and status in Athens (chapter 6). The pervasive role of religion is essential for analyzing, among other things, the status of female citizens. A standalone chapter provides better grounding in the topic than sporadic mentions throughout the text. Next, the demes have a short chapter, conveying the mechanics of micro-level politics (chapter 7: “Local Government: The Demes”). While Carey employs material evidence in other chapters, the bulk finds its home in chapter 8 (“The Democratic Landscape”), an expansion of its predecessor. It has more pictures, an overall improvement, but it remains somewhat awkward and difficult to follow. The final chapter (“Democracy and Its Critics”) revisits ancient critiques of democracy and ends with a celebration of Athens’ successes and influence in antiquity.

Heavy on primary sources, the book provides a foundation for students to read further in both modern and ancient texts. Classicists will appreciate the new edition’s more detailed exegesis of primary texts as well as greater integration of Greek terms, albeit in Latin script. At times, Carey offers multiple translations for the same Greek word. Occasionally it might be a bit much, but as an entry point into discussing language and translation it is commendable. A section explaining the competition between Isagoras and Kleisthenes illustrates Carey’s use of both primary sources and transliterated Greek: “The sources use the language of political factions to describe the power base of the two sides: (*Athenian Constitution*) ‘when he was being worsted by the factional clubs/in the factional struggle (*hetaireiai*), Kleisthenes brought the *demos* on to his side’… The language (together with the insistence that he acted to reverse his inferior position) presents Kleisthenes as a democrat by need and calculation, not by conviction. There is no good reason to doubt this account. But there is more to the story” (24). Carey then discusses the role that Athens’ need for political stability played in Kleisthenes’ reforms. The inclusion of basic primary source analysis with a dash of philology serves as a paradigm of source interpretation and as a gateway into reading advanced scholarship. A stylistic curiosity is the lack of conclusions to any given section. Most notable at the end of chapters, the text tends to end rather abruptly. Otherwise, the text and structure are clear and approachable.

The success of a textbook depends on functionality as much as content. Several changes in the new edition make *DCA* more user-friendly. The chapters and, accordingly, the table of contents are newly broken down into subsections. Similarly, the index has been subdivided into more granular entries. The appendices have also been revised. Appendix 1, suggestions for further reading with updated references, is a sufficient starting point for beginning students. Carey has lightly revised the glossary of Greek terms in Appendix 2 by clarifying definitions and adding handful of terms. An indispensable addition, a pared down timeline comprises the new Appendix 3. Unfortunately, a few key events discussed in the text, such as Ephialtes’ reforms, do not make the short list. Gone is the “Suggestions for Further Study” section of fifteen questions. Students will not likely notice its omission. More likely to be missed are the inline parenthetical citations that have moved to endnotes.[[1]](#footnote-1) In technical aspects, this book is well-produced for the price with few typos.[[2]](#footnote-2) While there are a good number of images, the quality of the printing is only fair.

The new, more thoroughly explained and functional *DCA* fills a general need for lower-and intermediate-level courses on Athenian democracy, democracies ancient and modern, Greek history, and Greek political thought. *DCA* is a less exhaustive, and accordingly more accessible, text than Mogens Hansen’s excellent *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes.*[[3]](#footnote-3) While John Thorley’s short volume is more comparable in aims, it only treats the fifth century.[[4]](#footnote-4) Overall, Carey’s latest *DCA* effectively covers the main features of Athenian democracy and its historical context without sacrificing too much depth or becoming unmanageable for the novice.

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1. There are a few wayward exceptions, *e.g.* page 46 has both citation styles. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *e.g.* on page 100, the reader is directed to pg. 169 for more on the religious aspects of the Assembly, but it should actually refer to pg. 69; some inconsistencies in references in the endnotes. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Hansen, Mogens. 1991. *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes: Structure, Principles, and Ideology*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Thorley, John. 2004. *Athenian Democracy*. Edited by Eric Evans and P.D. King. 2nd ed., *Lancaster Pamphlets in Ancient History*. London and New York: Routledge. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)