

BOOK REVIEW

After Thermopylae: The Oath of Plataea and the End of the Graeco-Persian Wars. By PAUL CARTLEDGE. *Emblems of Antiquity*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. xxx + 240. Hardcover, \$24.95/£16.99. ISBN 978-0-19-974732-0.

Not Marathon, not Salamis, but Plataea was “the decisive battle.” In this addition to Oxford University Press’ “Emblems of Antiquity” series, Paul Cartledge tackles the challenge of “paying due homage to the Battle of Plataea as a key and pivotal moment not just in ancient or classical Greek history but in all Western history.” There could hardly be a better person for the job: Cartledge has established himself as an excellent scholar who can write for the public too. Here he aims at a general audience.

The title is not the only quirky thing about this book. The chosen emblem is one of two oaths inscribed on a stele erected in the village of Acharnae outside Athens perhaps a century and a half after the battle of Plataea. But Cartledge sides with the majority of scholars who think that the inscribed oath is not authentic in the sense that it was not sworn before the battle. So the emblem is not an emblem of a pivotal moment in all Western history, but of Athenian thinking in the fourth century about that pivotal moment, then long past. “The main point of this book,” Cartledge says in Chapter 2, “is to try to identify and to explain the function(s) the Oath of Plataea was designed to serve in its immediate monumental context” following the Athenians’ defeat by Philip II of Macedon at the battle of Chaeronea in 338.

After a brief introduction, Chapter 2 gives a translation of the inscribed oath, a commentary on the text, a brief discussion of authenticity (not of much importance for Cartledge’s purpose, and in fact “in a crucial way,” he says, “that [verbal inauthenticity] is beside the point”), and a longer survey of the “contexts” of the inscribed oath, touching on history, religion, and politics.

Subsequent chapters expand on these contexts. Chapter 3 treats the Oath as a document of ancient Greek religion, arguing that the Athenians in particular liked oaths that fostered community. Chapter 4 gives a succinct synopsis of the events that led to the battle of Plataea. Chapter 5, “The Face of the Battle of Plataea,” will disappoint readers looking for the definitive treatment of the great bat-

tle based on autopsy of the terrain. Cartledge gives only a single sketch map of the conflict, taken from William Shepherd's *Plataea 479 BC: The Most Glorious Victory Ever Seen* (Osprey 2012). The map and its legend are printed horizontally rather than vertically, in such a way that both have edges that disappear into the binding.

In Chapter 6, "The Greeks Invent the Persian Wars," Cartledge suggests that Greek competitiveness determined how the Greeks remembered and commemorated the wars. He discusses first the monuments erected by the Athenians, the Plataeans, and the Spartans, and then surveys literary texts from Simonides to Pausanias, adding a note at the end about the relocation of the Serpent Column from Delphi to Constantinople. He places the Acharnae stele into its fourth-century context, following Athens' disastrous defeat at Chaironeia, when the Athenians instituted a new system of compulsory military service for young men. The "Oath of Plataea" reminded the young men who swore the oath that precedes it on the stone that Athenians fighting together had in the past achieved a glorious victory. (As befits an honorary citizen of modern Sparta, he has no patience for my suggestion that the inscribed oath ought to be known as the Oath of Marathon rather than the Oath of Plataea. He dismisses the idea on the grounds that I did not "take the fourth-century BCE ideological-commemorative context sufficiently into account." But it seems to me that an oath supposedly sworn before Marathon fits the fourth-century Athenian context sketched by Cartledge *better* than an oath supposedly sworn before Plataea. See Danielle L. Kellogg, "The Place of Publication of the Ephebic Oath and the 'Oath of Plataia,'" *Hesperia* 82 (2013) 263–76.)

A brief concluding chapter considers how the themes of the book resonate today. Cartledge does not try to explain why Plataea has been "forgotten" compared to Marathon and Salamis and even Thermopylae, given that famous ancient authors such as Herodotus and Plato clearly agree that Plataea "actually decided the Persian Wars."

The book includes three maps, nine black-and-white photographs, a six-page timeline, a masterful literature review, and a bibliography.

To sum up: an interesting, accessible study of the oath in particular and the Greek mythologizing of the Persian Wars in general.

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