

*Ancient Athens on 5 Drachmas a Day: Where to eat, drink and meet a philosopher—your guide to the cradle of Western culture.* By PHILIP MATYSZAK. London: Thames & Hudson, 2008. Pp. 135. Paper, \$18.95. ISBN 978-0-500-28765-1.

A companion to the author's *Ancient Rome on 5 Denarii a Day*, this book presents itself as a guidebook to ancient Athens as it would have appeared to a visitor just before the start of the Peloponnesian War. As Matyszak (M.) explains in an Author's Note, "[This date] was chosen for this book, as it marks both the peak of Athenian splendour, and the point just before a certain innocence was lost" (p. 129). In this panorama of the past, Perikles is the current charismatic leader, Aristophanes is a young man marveling at life in the big city, the finishing touches are being placed on the Stoa of Zeus Eleutherios, and the Parthenon looms over the city in its full-color glory.

Appropriately for a guidebook, the first chapter is entitled "Getting There," and it takes the reader on a brief tour of Thermopylae, Delphi, Marathon and their environs. Before we reach Athens itself, we are also offered a vivid portrait of life in Piraeus, Athens' main port. The place "has a bustling, hard-edged feel, and not a little squalor," but the high proportion of metics (non-Athenian-born residents) "helps to make Piraeus a more lively, tolerant and cosmopolitan place than the main city four miles to the northeast" (pp. 23-4). Subsequent chapters are devoted to Athenian pastimes, activities, important persons, religion, rites of passage and must-see sights. Throughout, there are abundant illustrations taken from vase paintings, coins and sculptures, and plates that contain handsome full color reconstructions of the city's major monuments. The illustrations include a handy guide to vase shapes and to the orders of architecture: Doric, Ionic, Corinthian and Aeolic—the latter "with leaves artistically peeling off" (p. 118). No guide book would be complete without a list of useful phrases, and this one is no exception; if you have ever wanted to say, "How much is that?" in classical Greek, you will learn how here. (There are also more erudite utterances, such as observations on the merits of Sophocles vs. Aeschylus.)

This is a book of considerable learning; M. acknowledges the assistance of John Camp, the author of *The Athenian Agora* and *The Archaeology of Athens*. There are amusing and interesting facts on every page, some of them likely unknown even to many classicists. Did you know, for example, that at the vegetable stall "you can get your lentils fresh or ready-stewed" (p. 54)? Although other

information will probably be familiar to specialists and even general readers, it is pleasant to receive such a wealth of it in a compact form. Nowhere else will you find a detailed account of the Eleusinian Mysteries within pages of a description of hoplite armor.

The one drawback to the chatty guidebook style is the lack of footnotes, and the pedant in me did occasionally want to see a specific citation of an ancient source. Is everything M. narrates genuinely factual, or does he sometimes repeat tales uncritically? There seems to be little classical evidence, for example, that Socrates' wife Xanthippe practiced slapstick violence upon her henpecked husband, as described on pages 59–60. (Socrates is the target of considerable ridicule in this book, as is Theseus.)

But these are minor flaws. Overall, this is an excellent resource for anyone desiring an overview of ancient Greek daily life and many important events of its pre-Peloponnesian War history. The final pages contain a gloriously lyrical description of the Acropolis at dawn, filling the reader with both longing to be there and sorrow at the knowledge of the destruction to come.

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