BOOK REVIEWS


Divided into 14 chapters which together offer a coherent progression of topics and case-studies, John Pedley’s Sanctuaries and the Sacred in the Ancient Greek World presents a clear and readable introduction to the subject. The book was written with classroom use in mind and could easily provide the basic structure for an undergraduate course on ancient Greek sanctuaries and religion. Because of the intended audience, P. must often present the evidence or its interpretation somewhat dogmatically or in a greatly simplified manner, but he does not shy away from alerting readers to difficulties and scholarly disagreements where appropriate. The writing style tends toward the conversational (e.g. contractions are ubiquitous), presumably in an attempt to increase its accessibility. Bibliography, located at the end of the book but keyed to the individual chapters, allows topics of interest to be pursued further; a glossary of terms, also located at the end, should provide help with most unfamiliar words. Overall, the book is well illustrated with numerous site-plans and photographs of objects, generally to the point. I personally found a number of details with which to take exception, as presumably will many readers. But viewed as a whole P.’s book succeeds admirably as a text for use in the classroom and as such can be wholeheartedly recommended.

After three short chapters (“Introduction,” “Setting the Stage,” “Growth and Variety”) that provide a point of entry to the student unfamiliar with basic concepts of Greek religion and sanctuaries, P. turns to the locations in which sanctuaries are found. He distinguishes between those that are interurban, urban (treating suburban and extra-urban sanctuaries under separate headings) and rural; the importance of this division is explored via a simplified but essentially accurate account of the work of de Polignac. While not everyone will agree with the utility or importance of understanding sanctuaries this way, the gain is two-fold: the student is given a framework, followed throughout the remainder of the book, for distinguishing types of sanctuaries and is introduced to relatively recent scholarly developments and conceptual models.

The book falls into two discrete halves of seven chapters each. After the introductory material noted above, P. proceeds to three chapters outlining architecture, rites and rituals, and offerings. In all these chapters the arrangement of topics is sensible and works well to recreate the experience of visiting a sanctuary and participating in a religious festival. Thus, for example, in Chapter V (“Architecture for the Gods: Sacred Building”), P. discusses individually the various architectural features (temenos wall,
propylon, altar, temple, etc.) often found in sanctuaries, but
structures the discussion to correspond to the order in which a
visitor might encounter them when entering a sanctuary. The
building types are illustrated with examples drawn both from
the sites chosen as case-studies in the second half (see below)
and from other sites throughout the Greek world.

The second half of P.’s book consists of five case-studies
(Olympia, Delphi, Samos, Poseidonia and the Athenian Acropo-
lis) followed by two concluding chapters. The case-studies
are reasonably well chosen for illustrating the types of sanctuaries
distinguished by P. at the outset, although to cover them all
Poseidonia must do rather heavy duty. More importantly, the
inclusion of examples from the west and the east breaks out of
the usual Athens-Olympia-Delphi nexus; the juxtaposition of
familiar and unfamiliar leaves the student with a better impres-
sion of the geographical range of the Greek world. The sites P.
has chosen allow for useful comparison and discussion of the
categories of evidence available and how one might interpret
that evidence; in a manner that may be eye-opening to students, P.
raises the issue of practicalities, particularly in the case of Posei-
donia, that can hinder archaeological exploration, and thus the
extent to which these realities can affect our knowledge and col-
lection of evidence.

Less successful are the final two chapters, which cover Greek
sanctuaries from the Roman period to the present day, although
P. is to be commended for including this material at all. Under-
standing the advent of the Romans as a major turning point in
the life of a sanctuary may make sense in the case of Poseidonia,
but works less well for the non-western sanctuaries. P. falls into
the all too common trap of failing to distinguish adequately be-
tween a purely chronological as opposed to a cultural use of the
term “Roman” as applied to Greece; whatever the case in the
west, sanctuaries and the activities that occurred in them contin-
ued on much as before in Greece and the Greek east until well
into the Imperial period. At the close of the final chapter, some-
what in the nature of an epilogue, P. comments on the often
tense and conflicted relationship between archaeology and tour-
ism. His sensible remarks on this issue contain much of value but
may seem out of place to readers, despite the attempt to place
them within the context of the afterlife of the sanctuary.

A few points of detail. The illustrations are frequently taken
from handbooks, which on occasion leads to incongruities or
even outright error. For example: fig. 24, the Archaic perirrhan-
terion from Isthmia, is said to be housed in the Corinth Museum (it
has been in the Isthmia Museum for the past 30 years), and the
illustration depicts the old reconstruction (for the current recon-
struction, see M. Sturgeon, Isthmia IV. Sculpture I: 1952–1967
(Princeton, 1987), p. 17 and pl. 1); on p. 59 the propyla at Eleusis
are discussed but not marked on the accompanying fig. 25; the
small naïskos within the north colonnade of the Parthenon is
mentioned on p. 69, but is shown neither in the accompanying fig. 34 nor in any of the other plans which include the Parthenon. Similar discrepancies abound. Characterizing Macedonian hegemony merely as a force that put “an end to th[e] squabbling among Greek states” and thus allowed Athens, “now free of the expenditures of war…” to “turn its revenues to more peaceful endeavors” seems naive at best. The bibliography is generally sound and up to date, but some gaps remain, e.g. Ulrich Sinn’s publications on Olympia, some of which have even appeared in English translation. Typographical errors are rare, and so the reader must wonder whether the reference to “the death of certainty” (p. xv) is one of the few examples or instead an ideological statement.

B.W. MILLIS

American School of Classical Studies at Athens