

## BOOK REVIEW

*Delphi: A History of the Center of the Ancient World.* By MICHAEL SCOTT. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014. Pp. xi +422. Hardcover, \$29.95. ISBN 978-0-691-15081-9.

Delphi is preeminently the site of Apollo's oracle, and, as the subtitle of Scott's book suggests, the *omphalos* or navel of the ancient world. Approximately 200,000 people visit Delphi annually. What they see, both at the archaeological site and the adjacent museum, is a multi-layered and complex collection of buildings and artifacts which span more than a millennium. Delphi is not an easy site to "read," even for the classical scholar. Furthermore, learning about the site is made complicated, as Scott notes, by the fact that most of the scholarship on Delphi is narrowly focused, on the oracle, on the Temple of Apollo, on a particular type of building like treasuries, or on Delphi at a particular period of time, like the Classical Age. The extensive bibliography at the end of *Delphi* illustrates how Scott's history of Delphi stands out as perhaps the first monograph to attempt a comprehensive overview and history of the site.

The result is a study which promises to be useful both to the novice and to the scholar. The novice will find Scott's history relatively easy to follow while the scholar will find Scott's 64 pages of extensive endnotes, citing both ancient and modern sources, an invaluable reference tool. One would hope that *Delphi* will also become a model for similar histories of other major sites like the Athenian Acropolis, Olympia and Corinth.

While *Delphi* is generally arranged chronologically, Scott begins, in a prologue entitled "Why Delphi?", with the description and importance of the site in Heliiodorus' *Aethiopica*, in order to illustrate the importance of Delphi even in the Greek world of late antiquity. He concludes the book with a fascinating epilogue entitled "Unearthing Delphi" in which he describes the exciting finds uncovered when archaeological excavations began under the French in 1892. Prologue and epilogue together provide a compelling illustration of Delphi's importance in both the ancient and modern worlds and serve as appropriate bookends for the central portion of the book, in which Delphi's history is told in three parts, each with four chapters.

In the first chapter, Scott uses detailed archaeological and literary evidence to describe the elaborate process of consulting the oracle and to evaluate the famous ambiguity of the oracular responses. Scott makes a strong case that the oracle was less a fortune teller than an “ancient management consultant” (page 30) whose advice would enable institutions, city-states and even individuals to evaluate their options as they pursued major undertakings.

In the next ten chapters Scott moves from Delphi’s mythological origins to a history of the site from its settlement in the Neolithic period, its transformation into an important site for oracular consultation in the late eighth century, its growth as first a regional and then international center of political, religious and cultural life in the Mediterranean world, and, finally, its relationship with Rome and individual Roman emperors until the closure of the site, along with other “pagan” cult centers by the emperor Theodosius in the 390’s ad. In each of these chapters Scott offers detailed descriptions of monuments and buildings which enable the reader to imagine the site as it evolves over time.

In the last chapter, entitled “The Journey Continues,” Scott takes the site beyond its Greco-Roman existence and describes the transformations of Delphi during the Christian era, including the construction of Christian basilicas and the growth of the medieval town of Castri around and over the ancient sanctuary. This part of Delphi’s story continues with visits to the site by the Italian merchant Cyriac of Ancona in 1436, the English mathematician Francis Vernon in 1675, and the growing European interest in Greek antiquities, including Delphi, in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. At the end of this chapter Scott provides a dramatic narrative about the prolonged and sometimes frustrating efforts, marked by monetary greed and political machinations, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to move the town of Castri from the ancient site and to begin excavation of the site by a French archaeological team.

Readers who have not visited the site of Delphi would benefit by reading “A Brief Tour of the Delphi Site and Museum,” appended to the main text, before reading the rest of the book. Here Scott walks the reader first through the site and then through the museum in order to highlight the Delphi’s major landmarks and archaeological finds. Those already familiar with Delphi will find this brief tour a pleasant conclusion to Scott’s earlier, more detailed description of the site.

Besides the endnotes and the 25-page bibliography mentioned above, other special features of this book include 3 maps, 39 black-and-white figures, 8 color plates, and a list of bibliographic abbreviations. Disappointingly, several of the figures, especially ones with numbers indicating various site features, are of poor

quality and are difficult to decipher. A list of figures would have been a helpful addition.

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