

BOOK REVIEW

A Naval History of the Peloponnesian War: Ships, Men, and Money in the War at Sea, 431-404 BC. By MARC G. DESANTIS. South Yorkshire, UK: Pen & Sword Maritime, 2017. Pp. xvi + 261. Hardback, \$34.95. ISBN 978-1-47386-158-9.

On page xvi of his preface DeSantis writes that, “With the end of Athens’ seapower, her empire crumbled, and the Golden Age that bequeathed to posterity the likes of Aristophanes, Sophocles, and Socrates came to an end. It is worthwhile knowing how and why this happened.” After his acknowledgements, six maps and a preface DeSantis proceeds to tell the story of the Athenian empire’s downfall in five parts: Introduction; The Trireme; The Archidamian War; The Sicilian Expedition; The Ionian War; and Conclusion. Notes, a select bibliography and a general index close this volume out.

A Naval History of the Peloponnesian War benefits from having been written in straightforward prose. It had the potential to be an accessible gateway text for high school students and members of the general population who want a basic introduction to the Peloponnesian War with heavy emphasis on naval matters. However, the utility of this text is severely hampered for a number of reasons. First is the fact that DeSantis does not attempt to argue a thesis. Unfortunately, he is not advancing scholarship on one of the greatest wars of Classical antiquity. He is simply telling a story of how and why the Spartans defeated the Athenians in the Peloponnesian War. He achieves this by providing a compressed and selective retelling of this war with a focus on important naval events such as the Battle of Naupactus, without neglecting or downplaying relevant terrestrial contests such as Brasidas’s campaigns in the Chalcidice.

Beyond the lack of a thesis this book has many methodological flaws. The maps are not referred to anywhere in the text. This practically negates their ability both to illuminate often complex pre-battle warship deployments and either educate the novice reader or remind the knowledgeable reader about the often overriding importance of geography to the outcome of military engagements.

DeSantis in the first paragraph of his introduction includes two quotes from two different English translations of Thucydides. The first is from an English translation this reviewer could not find. The second is from page 16 of Strassler’s

The Landmark Thucydides. However, DeSantis does not cite either of his sources for the English. Instead he cites the first as Thuc.1.22.4, and the second as Thuc. 1.23.6. This is his *modus operandi* regarding citing primary literature. Out of 724 endnotes 584 (i.e. 80.7%) are primary literature. But nowhere does DeSantis cite the English texts from which his quotations of Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon et al are drawn.

Problems also pervade DeSantis's citation of secondary literature. On page 22-23 he discusses the *agôgē*, the Spartan inspection of all its infants, and Sparta's communal messes, as well as the Spartiates' eventual entry into the *apella* with an endnote citing "Grant *Rise of the Greeks* p. 98." However, this page of Grant discusses "homosexual pairing among Spartans," Spartan marriage practices and the unusually good treatment of women at Sparta. On page 39 endnotes 29-30 direct the reader to Rodgers page 10, but Rodgers (i.e. Rodgers, W. L. 1937. *Greek and Roman naval warfare: a study of strategy, tactics, and ship design from Salamis (480 B.C.) to Actium (31 B.C.)* B.F. Stevens & Brown, Ltd. London) is not listed in DeSantis's select bibliography. This omission might have been understandable if DeSantis did not cite Rodgers eight more times. On page 79-80 DeSantis notes possible explanations for "the decision to send the reinforcement fleet of twenty ships, which were desperately needed by Phormio at Naupactus, first to Crete to attack Cydonia" for which endnote 96 cites page 114 of D. Kagan's *Archidamian War*. However, on this page Kagan discusses only the events and brilliant maneuver of an Athenian trireme at the Battle of Naupactus. On page 100 when discussing the Athenian attack on Thyrea in the Peloponnesus DeSantis provides endnote 153 with the citation, "Kagan *Arch. War* p. 164." However, this page in Kagan discusses the Athenian settlement of all of Lesbos, except loyal Methymna, with a cleruchy. On page 155, after discussing the heavy financial costs Athens sustained in 428 and the fact that she exceeded the limits of her resources by pursuing operations in both Greece and Sicily, DeSantis provides Rodgers page 151 as an endnote. However, this page in Rodgers contains a map of Syracuse and less than two sentences concerning the summer of 415. And on page 236, in the conclusion for a sentence about how the financial backing of the Persians allowed the Spartans to defeat the Athenians fully, DeSantis's endnote cites Cawkwell page 64 which talks about Thucydides's assessment and treatment of Cleon's role in the war. Further down on this same page, in the endnote for a sentence about Athens' inability to indefinitely continue a war against an opponent who could continually replace lost oarsmen and ships, DeSantis cites Meier *Athens* page 404.

However, this page talks about the autarky, grace and aristocratic essence of the people of Athens, as well as Pericles's funeral oration.

As a scholar with deep and abiding interests in Classical naval matters—both monumental and otherwise—this reviewer was excited to read a new book on such a fascinating and pivotal period in history. However, for all the reasons outlined above this reviewer cannot recommend the text under review.

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