

BOOK REVIEW

Corinth in Late Antiquity: A Greek, Roman and Christian City. By AMELIA R. BROWN. London, UK: I. B. Tauris, 2018. Pp. xiv + 341. Hardback, \$120.00. ISBN 978-1-78453-823-1.

It is with great pleasure that I took advantage of the opportunity to review Amelia Brown's latest volume, especially since her 2008 dissertation, upon which this book is based, was "required" reading before undertaking my own doctoral research. Despite the city of Corinth's important role in illuminating the post-classical periods in Greece and beyond, Brown's work fills a longstanding lacuna as modern histories of the site in Late Antiquity have been lacking.

The volume begins in the mid-2nd century CE, using Pausanias' description of the site as a point of departure from which to measure the city's later urban transformations (to the late 6th and early 7th century). As outlined in her introduction, Brown's work is centered around the "paradox" of Late Antiquity,¹ which wrestles with understanding how cities like Corinth could both suffer from centuries of decline while continuing to function and maintain the necessary civic and physical structures, even if transformed under Christian rule. Brown strives to find a middle-ground among the often-polarized approaches to the study of Late Antiquity that have either called for "decline-and-fall" or, more optimistically, transformation and/or continuity. Corinth provides an excellent case study to probe this paradox due to the extensive surviving literary evidence, as well as the mass of epigraphic and archaeological evidence discovered under the auspices of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens (hereafter ASCSA), among others, since 1896. Brown's comfort with the material is apparent as she effortlessly navigates among primary sources, sculpture, or archaeological site reports in order to "offer an organized account of the major changes to urban life" (p. 15) in Corinth, explore why it was changing and articulate who/what was responsible all while repopulating the city with the people and activities that filled it.

¹ Note 2 of her introduction offers a good discussion of what Brown means by the term "Late Antiquity," one of several terms currently in use for describing the post-Roman era that are often employed without consideration.

In Chapter 1, Brown sets the stage for her work through an examination of the natural landscape and outlines the changes from governors to bishops in civic and provincial authority. Various debates are explored, including the *actual* effects of historically-attested earthquakes and demonstrating that Corinth was indeed the seat of the governor of Achaia at least into the 5th century CE. Chapter 2 offers a survey of the public and private foci of civic administration, namely the forum area and aristocratic residences, although almost all of the evidence she cites here predates the 5th century. Chapter 3 emphasizes the way in which various civic amenities continued into the early 6th century, such as intramural commercial spaces and water-related structures as well as extramural roads and harbors.

Transformation does not preclude discontinuity, and Chapter 4 turns to the abandonment of places of entertainment and spaces for civic assembly and festivals after the late 4th century, citing the loss of dedicated patronage to maintain them. The end of the centuries-long tradition of public honorific sculpture and dedicatory inscriptions follows in Chapter 5, which is more argumentative than other chapters, concluding with a discussion of the primary sources that relate Christian attitudes towards pagan monuments.² Again, Brown demonstrates how muddy the waters are by showing that new monuments were being erected (perhaps as late as the end of the 6th century) even as old ones were being destroyed.

Chapters 6 and 7 examine the transformation of sacred space as Christianity took hold in Corinth, both in the forum, and in areas beyond, respectively. The majority of Chapter 6, however, is concerned with reconstructing the sacred pagan sites noted by Pausanias and only briefly touches on Christian (and Jewish) features at the end, while Chapter 7 presents a more informative narrative of Christian growth in the urban periphery, harbors and on Acrocorinth. Chapter 8 examines the construction of the fortifications across the Isthmus of Corinth, around the (now shrunken) city, and on Acrocorinth in the 5th and 6th centuries. Considered by Brown to have been the most monumental and expensive projects undertaken during this period, the walls were ironically also the most destructive as their construction consumed immeasurable amounts of architectural spolia and lime mortar processed from burning marble. A brief concluding chapter is followed by two appendices which examine, respectively, the relevant

² Brown's work on Corinth's Late Antique dedications have been explored elsewhere, and are here well-integrated into the narrative. See particularly Brown, A. R. 2012. "Last Men Standing: Chlamydatos Portraits and Public Life in Late Antique Corinth," *Hesperia* 81, pp. 141-176.

epigraphic and literary sources and the history of excavations at Corinth undertaken by the ASCSA and others. Extensive endnotes, a bibliography (remarkably recent to the time of publication) and an index close the volume.

Brown's work is commendable and utilizes in full all of the information on Late Antique Corinth that is currently available but, as with any study of this city during this period (including my own), it is balanced on the edge of a knife. The movement of the city's core into a smaller walled area to the east of the old forum in the mid-6th century (discussed only briefly on p. 157) is a phenomenon that has yet to be systematically studied archaeologically (beyond the mapping of most of the wall circuit) and is rarely given priority. Preliminary excavations by the Greek Archaeological Service have already begun to reveal the presence of monumental remains within this area,³ which certainly did not appear overnight. As we learn more about when and how Corinth's political center began to shift to these unexcavated areas beneath the modern village, the lens through which we perceive and give value to the transformations noted in the forum, and other locations in Corinth, will require revision. Brown's writing is very accessible and grammatical errors are few, although the text is occasionally repetitive. The publisher's printing of the numerous black-and-white images are mostly adequate (but note the nearly unreadable inscription in Figure 5.12), but the maps and plans provided by the ASCSA are clear and of high quality (with the exception of Figure 5's details that are hindered by the small scale).⁴

Corinth serves as an important case study for the examination of Late Antique urbanism, with Brown demonstrating the complexity of the city's survival that called for an equal balance of continuity and discontinuity. Brown provides a great deal of context and background and her volume will offer the most to anyone new to the study of Corinth. Seasoned veterans of Corinthian scholarship may not find all of her observations entirely new, but they will certainly appreciate the depth of Brown's research and will spend the most time pouring through the impressive appendices, endnotes and bibliography which account for nearly half the book. Overall, this is a welcome and important addition to Corinth's already large library.

³ Athanasoulis, D., M. Athanasoula, E. Manolessou, and P. Meleti. 2010. "Sýntomi Episkópisi tis Archaïologikís Érevnas Mesaionikon Kataloípon Korínthou," in *Praktiká tou I' Diethnoús Synedriou Peloponnisiakón Spoudón (Kórinthos 26-28 Septemvriou 2008)*, Athens, pp. 167-186. Some of the preliminary reports, published by the École française d'Athènes, can also be accessed online at: www.efg.gr.

⁴ Many images of the artifacts and the excavations undertaken by the ASCSA are also available open-access at: www.ascsa.net.

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