

BOOK REVIEW

The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Athens. Edited by JENIFER NEILS & DYLAN K. ROGERS. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021. Pp. x + 494. Paperback, \$39.99. ISBN: 978-1-108-72330-5.

Confession: I thought that I knew something about ancient Athens, but I realize now that I really didn't, and that I had never worried about such basic things as how Athenians got their water, where their roads ran or whether there was another agora or theatre somewhere else in the archaic period. For anyone who has never worried about such things in the past either, there is good news as this volume is a welcome source of enlightenment.

The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Athens is the second book in Cambridge University Press' new series of *Companions* to ancient cities (the first city was Rome). Thirty-two of the thirty-three chapters are divided into six sections ("The Urban Fabric," "Inhabitants," "Business / Commerce," "Culture and Sport," "Politics" and "Reception"), with one chapter ("Leagros: An Athenian Life") and a short "Introduction" standing outside the main groupings. The contributors are among the most well known in their areas – John Camp on the agora, Maria Liston on human bones, Mark Lawall on trade, Susan Rotroff on ceramics. There is a certain "American School"-ness to the selection of topics and authors, not entirely surprising since one of the editors (Jennifer Neils) is the current director of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, and not a bad thing either since the chapters in the "Reception" section reflect the School's commitment to the entire history of the city of Athens.

Overall, each chapter is well written with an up-to-date bibliography. The book was published in 2021, but manages to cite at least one 2021 publication. Typographical and other errors are rare. Maps and diagrams are clear and easily interpreted. Images are sharp but generally on the small side. Additional images are available online, but I have never yet been able to access them. The cross-referencing between chapters is very helpful.

Generally speaking, the tendency of the contributions is physical – don't turn to Bakewell's chapter, "The Philosophical Schools," if you need a quick review of the basics of Platonic philosophy, but it is a useful summary of the history of the schools themselves. Similarly, although we may think of tragic drama as a particularly Athenian tradition, it is the "Theatrical Spaces" (Di Napoli) and not the plays that receive attention.

Each chapter provides some new insight, and some chapters are simply fascinating. Liston's chapter on "Death and Disease" is a stand-out effort. She begins by explaining what can and cannot be learned from human skeletal remains and then discusses various aspects of ancient health. Katherine Harrington's chapter on "Housing and the Household" is another excellent contribution, while Leda Costaki and Anna Maria Theocharaki ("City Streets, Walls, and Gates") and Jutta Stroszeck ("Water and Water Management") made me realize how little I actually knew about the most basic and important aspects of the city's infrastructure. James Kierstead ("Associations") does a very fine job of explaining the various types of social groups in Athens and their changing roles. The final section on the post-Classical history of Athens and its archaeology is a valuable and thought-provoking finale to the volume.

Mistakes are few and do not affect the value of any given contribution. Ann Steiner's chapter on "Eating and Drinking" may confuse the reader a little by suggesting that the ancient Athenian diet included bread made from corn (348) in addition to bread made from wheat and barley. If maize-corn is meant here, it is surely incorrect; maize is a "New World" grain. Tyler Jo Smith links (202) the names of two of Solon's wealth categories, the *zeugitai* and the *hippeis*, to the financial ability to possess oxen and horses (surely correct), but these are not "the two upper social tiers" (they are the middle two), and *zeugitai* is not derived from the word for oxen but rather from the word for the yoke worn by the oxen. One chapter seemed to me to be misnamed: "Sculpture and Its Role in the City" (282-292) would more accurately have been called "Sculpture and Sources of Marble," as it focuses more on the sources of marble (imports, Pentelic, Hymettian) than on the role of sculpture as such.

Two things in particular seem to me to be lacking. The first is a glossary. By and large authors explain terminology, but this means that recurring terms, such as *ephebe* / *ephebeia*, are explained more than once. On the other hand, some vocabulary is not defined at all. How many of the intended readers of this *Companion* will immediately understand what is meant by "a hexastyle amphiprostyle cella" (69)? A glossary would prevent repetition and take the decision about whether to

define something away from individual authors. The second is a chapter on religion proper. Chapter 24, "Athenian Festivals," presents two iconic, but somewhat atypical, festivals, the Panathenaia and the Eleusinian Mysteries. Chapter 5, "The Akropolis," discusses the temples found there. Neither chapter really engages with the everyday religious life of Athenians or with more "average" festivals, both of which seem to me to be reasonable expectations in a volume that is intended to act as a companion for a reader exploring ancient Athens.

Those caveats aside, this is an excellent, reasonably priced book. It is both a useful introduction for those new to the topic and a helpful reference book for those looking to refresh their knowledge quickly. The book would probably make an effective textbook for a course on ancient urbanism or as a starting point for an advanced seminar on ancient Athens.

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