

Julia L. Shear, *Polis and revolution: responding to oligarchy in Classical Athens*. Cambridge, 2011. Pp. xv, 368. ISBN 9780521760447. \$99.00.

The historical record of Athens at the end of the Peloponnesian War is particularly rich and complex. From the inscriptions, monuments, and public buildings installed in the agora to the historical accounts, political pamphlets, and forensic speeches that document Athenian responses to the Four Hundred and the Thirty, we are able to explore the civil wars of 411 and 404 from a variety of vantage points and perspectives. At the same time, much of this evidence is piecemeal, politically charged, and often muddled, making it difficult to write a satisfactory narrative for this turbulent period. Yet even if the historical record could come to us complete, I doubt our situation would be that much better. Athens was on the brink of total destruction. It suffered much at the hands of its enemies, but much of its misery was also self-inflicted. Although Athens avoided annihilation and the democracy was eventually restored, anger and bitterness continued to wax and wane as the Athenians attempted to distance themselves from their recent past and recover their former glory. What prevented the divisions that bubbled to the surface in 411 and 404 from disrupting the fragile peace? How were the Athenians able to escape from the cycle of revenge and retribution that swept through so many other Greek cities once civil war broke out? The truth is that there is no easy answer to these questions.

For Shear, the reconciliation was successful because the Athenians enacted legislative reforms that safeguarded the democracy while embarking on a sustained memory project that permeated all aspects of civic life. They fostered unity through oaths and rituals of reconciliation, and they imposed a democratic vision on the topography of the city by erecting commemorations in honor of the men who had fought for the *demos* and by constructing new public buildings in which the Athenians could carry out the work of the restored democracy (12–18). Shear faults previous scholars for neglecting to examine the Athenian response to 411, for conceding too much importance to the legal disputes played out in court between individual Athenians, and for disregarding the collective actions of the Athenian people during these time periods (4–6, 190, 226).¹ She believes that the restored democracy of 403 was successful because the Athenians had learned from their mistakes after 411 and consciously developed and implemented new strategies (313). In other words, 411 was a trial run for the Athenians. Learning from their mistakes, they adopted new forms of collective memory that proved so effective that Athens did not again suffer from civil war until Macedon gained control over Greece. Such an explanation overlooks the most obvious difference between the two periods: Sparta. Athens suffered civil war in 404 not because they failed to develop effective strategies in response to the Four Hundred but because Sparta had defeated Athens and

¹ Stephen C. Todd, "Athenian Internal Politics, 403-395, with Particular Reference to the Speeches of Lysias," PhD diss. (University of Cambridge 1985); Thomas C. Loening, *The Reconciliation Agreement of 403/2 BC in Athens* (Stuttgart 1987); James M. Quillin, "Achieving Amnesty: The Role of Events, Institutions, and Ideas," *TAPA* 132 (2002) 71–107; Andrew Wolpert, *Remembering Defeat: Civil War and Civic Memory in Ancient Athens* (Baltimore 2002).

Lysander actively assisted oligarchic conspirators in their efforts to overthrow the democracy. Similarly, Shear's dichotomy between forensic speeches and public commemorations cannot be sustained. To be successful in their private disputes, litigants needed to express values that the Athenian jury also shared. A verdict delivered by an Athenian court was as much a collective action as a vote by an Athenian assembly. Thus, forensic speeches, as I have argued elsewhere, are as much a window into Athenian collective memory as public monuments.

Shear, however, is right to call our attention to the Four Hundred but for reasons very different from those that she suggests. The events of 411 show some of the difficulties that the Athenians faced when they attempted to explain to themselves what had happened under the rule of the Thirty. As soon as the Four Hundred came to power, the fleet stationed in Samos opposed them. Then when it became clear that the Four Hundred never intended to keep their promises, they began to face opposition from within their own ranks and from men who had originally supported them. This situation paved the path for Phrynichus' assassination and made it easier for the Athenians to subsequently map memory of the Pisistratid tyranny onto their rule. Opposition to the Thirty, by contrast, took longer to form. Critias was not assassinated; he was killed in battle. The men of the city ousted the Thirty, but they continued the war against the exiles. Although the democracy was restored and a reconciliation implemented, Sparta had a direct hand in both of these outcomes. The Athenians, therefore, could only view the fall of the Thirty as a democratic victory by conflating the events of 411 and 404.

As Shear shows, the construction projects at the end of the fifth century had an explicit democratic message. After the Four Hundred were removed from power, laws were inscribed on *stelai* for the first time in the agora (89, 96). Similarly, new buildings were constructed to serve as permanent courts after the democracy was restored in 403 (272). Shear believes these projects transformed the space of the agora so that it was dedicated primarily to the civic and political functions of the city. The agora became a civic center to expunge the memory of the oligarchs from this area (106, 284). Yet, even before the Four Hundred came to power, the agora was where the council met, many juries convened, and the archons and other boards of Athenian magistrates carried out their official duties. For most, if not all of the fifth century, citizens went to the agora to perform most of the administrative and judicial functions of the democracy. It would be better to understand these *stelai* and new buildings as serving to restore and reaffirm the democratic presence of the agora. Although laws may have been displayed in novel places following the overthrow of Four Hundred, the Athenians sought not so much to purge traces of the Four Hundred from this space as to construct a democratic past in response to the criticism of the oligarchs. They came to power by accusing the democrats of deviating from ancestral customs. To prevent oligarchs from using such a pretext to overthrow the democracy again, the Athenians needed to invent a democratic past. Laws were placed in front of the Stoa Basileios as a way of asserting that the democracy *was* the ancestral constitution. It was the past of Athens, not the center of the city, that

the Athenians needed to make democratic, but the former could not happen without altering the latter.

Although I do not find the main argument of the work to be convincing, because it glosses over too much of the evidence that points to the incompleteness of the reconciliation and distorts previous scholarship, nevertheless Shear offers many insightful interpretations of individual inscriptions. Her integrative analysis of the literary and material evidence is innovative, and she has made an important first step to develop a diachronic model of Athenian collective memory.

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