

Michael Scott, *Delphi: A History of the Center of the Ancient World*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014. Pp. xviii, 422. ISBN: 978-06-91-15081-9. \$29.95. hardbound.

It is surprising that a site as famous and influential as Delphi has not already been the subject of a comprehensive monograph in English. Although the bibliography on the site is enormous, publications understandably tend to focus on individual features or deal with a limited chronological range. Michael Scott fills this void with his sweeping coverage of the city and sanctuary from prehistory down to the modern excavations. The book is intended to be accessible to a general audience, but the extensive endnotes and references (almost 100 pages) make it a valuable resource for scholars too. It is a lofty goal to cover so much ground for such a wide range of audiences, and that goal is not met to full satisfaction, but there is much to appreciate in the effort.

The organization is primarily chronological and the emphasis historical. Scott carves out three large sections based on Delphi's changing roles, titled after a quote from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*: the earliest origins down to the 6th century BC ("some are born great"), the heyday from the late 6th century BC through the Hellenistic period ("some achieve greatness"), and its twilight from Roman rule to rediscovery through excavation ("some have greatness thrust upon them"). Each of these sections is divided into four chapters that each focus on a time period within the phase. The vicissitudes of the site's fortunes are marked by pithy titles like "Transformation," "Fire," "Renewal," and "Renaissance." An epilogue about the excavation, a very short conclusion, and a brief guide to the site follow the main chapters.

As suggested by the section titles, this approach situates Delphi in an international context over time. Elsewhere, Delphi is often examined from the point of view of other powerful cities, for example, how cities used the oracle when founding colonies, or how the Alcmaeonids used their building projects in Delphi to increase their status back home in Athens. Scott, in contrast, offers a more nuanced view that reminds us Delphi was also an active player in these events. This treatment is especially successful when he traces the power of the local polis of Delphi vis-à-vis the Amphictyony and emphasizes Delphi's role as both teller and re-teller of Greek history.

In order to appeal to a general audience, the tone is kept light and breezy. Chapters usually open with a dramatic retelling of an event before turning to the historical and scholarly questions about said event. The text often reads like an undergraduate lecture, sprinkled with modern metaphors to make things more "relevant," and informalities like describing the Siphnians as "nouveau riche upstarts" (p.109). Scott occasionally recounts an ancient story simply because it makes a good story—and when a secondary rather than primary source is provided in the endnote (e.g., the death of Pausanias, p.126), it unfortunately becomes harder for the reader to check the historicity of the details. The right balance when providing background explanation is hard to strike, and sometimes it fails (e.g., the definition of tithe, p.140). Some of these features may grow tiresome to certain academic readers, but they should note that a

benefit of an accessible book is an accessible price: it is easy to justify this purchase for both home and library.

The text is supplemented by about 40 black and white maps, photos, and drawings. A few of the plates set in the center of the book are in color. The images of the early excavation are the highlight, since other illustrations related to Delphi are easily to come by. The maps and plans are an awkward fit with the text, however. The verbal descriptions of the site frequently rely on cardinal directions, but none of the plans even have a north arrow. Phase plans would have also been beneficial. Scott is at his best when he draws on his previous research and discusses the changing monuments of the site, their relationships, and the competition they represent, but those fascinating arguments are undermined by how difficult it is to follow them using the plans provided.¹

The book opens with a brief prologue (pp.1–6) that sets the tone by asking the question, “why Delphi?” Part I (Chapters 1–4) begins with another introductory chapter on the oracle. This overview presents an ahistorical, composite image of oracular consultation rather than focusing on the context of the ancient sources or development over time. The early history of the site is covered in the three remaining chapters of Part I. Chapter 2 combines mythology and archaeology in seeking the origins of the site. It is folly to try to contain the complexities of what the ancient sources say about Delphi in about 10 pages, so the result (similar to the preceding treatment of the oracle) is a schematic presentation of the main sources (e.g., the *Homeric Hymn*) and the major interpretive methods used to approach them. Scott offers all sides of an argument in order to be inclusive, but in this chapter (and at other points in the book) I would have preferred to see him make his own stance more obvious. For example, he states that “[t]he debate remains open” (p.44) on the interpretation of Mycenaean *psi* and *phi* figurines found at the site, but the evidence he cites shifts that debate in one definite direction. Chapter 3 picks up with a fire at the end of the 8th century and focuses on Delphi’s subsequent growth as an international player, particularly in its relationships to Sparta and Corinth. Chapter 4 begins with the problem of the First Sacred War and argues that the early 6th century was a watershed for the influence and activity of the sanctuary whether the war happened or not. Scott implies that there was a conflict—albeit on a smaller scale than the later sources indicate—but does not push this view with much force. The rise of the Amphictyony and the famous consultation by Croesus are also discussed.

A second fire at Delphi in 548 BC is used as the division for Part II (Chapters 5–8). The damage to the sanctuary resulted in increased involvement with Athenian politics, since the Alcmaeonids contributed funds to the rebuilding; the oracle also played a role in the reforms of Cleisthenes. Scott additionally examines dedicatory practices in this period and briefly addresses the oracles pertaining to the Persian invasion. Chapter 6 is

¹ Cf. Scott’s earlier work in this area, *Delphi and Olympia: The Spatial Politics of Panhellenism in the Archaic and Classical Periods*. Cambridge, 2010.

devoted to the Classical period. After the Persians were repelled, the oracle took on an important role in the strategies and celebrations of multiple Greek cities, and the site became a locus for victory dedications. Interstate competition through dedications at this Panhellenic site continued through the Peloponnesian War. An overview of the Pythian Games is also featured in this chapter (pp.123–126). In Chapter 7, by expanding the range of actions that should be viewed as “political,” Scott argues that the oracles of the 4th century were of greater significance than other scholars have been willing to allow. This chapter feels too condensed and complicated as it follows the intense fluctuations of this period: an earthquake, the push for control by the Aetolians, the rise of Thebes, Sacred Wars, the rise of Philip, and yet another rebuilding of the temple; it also packs in a summary of all Dionysus festivals at the sanctuary (pp.152–154). The section closes with continued shifting allegiances in the Hellenistic period (Chapter 8). Although there is a definite downshift starting with Alexander, who downplays the oracle, it is balanced by interest from Rome, so Scott concludes that there is “a contraction in Delphi’s appeal” but “not...total decline” (p.174).

Part III (Chapters 9–12) comprises everything from the 2nd century BC to the rediscovery of the site in the 19th century AD. Chapter 9 describes Delphi’s position in the struggles between Rome and various Macedonian kings. This is also the period to which most of the slave manumission texts belong. Delphi’s popularity picks up again under Augustus (Chapter 10, “Renaissance”). Subsequent emperors maintained an interest in the sanctuary not for its oracle, but for what Scott calls “a continuing misunderstanding within the Roman world of what the Amphictyony was supposed to represent” (p.205); Romans seemed to believe it was a symbol of Panhellenic unity. The 2nd century AD—the time of Hadrian, Pausanias, and Plutarch—is another high point for the site. Chapter 11 covers this prosperity, but also traces the decline that followed. A devastating earthquake in AD 365 and the Theodosian edict of the 390s ensure the end of pagan Delphi. In the final chapter, Scott paints a picture of the late antique town of the 5th century, abandoned by the 7th. Antiquarian interest begins in the 15th century, ultimately leading to the protracted plans for excavation in the 19th.

Two supplementary sections round out the book, an epilogue on the excavation and a guide to the site and museum. The richly illustrated story of the French School at Athens’ struggle for permission to excavate at Delphi began in the preceding chapter. Although the tone often veers towards heroizing the French cause as a triumph over bureaucracy and stubbornness with little sympathy for the Greeks who lost their entire town, the inclusion of this account as an important part of the history of Delphi must be celebrated.² The “brief tour” to the site and museum is not intended to replace a guidebook, but it may be a useful tool for those who are drawn to read Scott’s book because of a planned trip to Greece. I took it with me on a short day trip and found it beneficial, especially since it highlighted a few remains in the sanctuary that lacked

² Archaeologists are likely to be aware of Pierre Amandry, “Fouilles de Delphes et raisins de Corinthe: Histoire d’une négociation,” in *La redécouverte de Delphes*, ed. O. Picard (Paris: de Boccard, 1992), 77-128, on which Scott relies, but it will not be on the radar of many other readers.

signage. The Kindle Edition would have been a better choice to carry than the unwieldy hardcover, however.

Scott's work is undermined by far too many typos and editorial issues for a university press publication. Examples include dropped words (pp.65, 242), missing or misplaced punctuation and spacing (pp. 223, 240, 285, 294), and even a bizarre coding error (p.117). There is too much repetition across chapters, as in the comment about the "irony" of the modern popularity of the round temple (p.149 and again at p.278). One hopes that a paperback release or second printing will provide an opportunity to fix these unfortunate flaws.

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