

**Robin Osborne, *Athens and Athenian Democracy*.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. xix, 462. Paper. ISBN: 9780521605700. Paper. \$34.95.

For *Athens and Athenian Democracy* Robin Osborne has selected seventeen of his own previously published papers grouped under five broad rubrics, each with its own brief introduction: I. “Making Athenian Democracy Work,” with chapters on (2–3) how institutions from *ekklēsia* to deme reinforced each other and fostered a sense of homogeneity among citizens, and (4) the editing out of divisive debates implicit in inscriptions of political decisions; II. “Athenian Democracy and the Athenian Economy,” with chapters on (5) the economics and politics of Athenian slavery, (6) the socio-economic forces driving production decisions of large landowners, (7) the distribution of land and agricultural practices within Attica, and (8) the potential for geographical mobility within the Athenian population; III. “Athenian Democracy and the Athenian Legal System,” with chapters on (9) how law was used in its social context and on the courts as a venue for “social dramas,” (10) sykophants and their place in Athenian democracy, (11) the place of testimony by slaves in legal proceedings, (12) the effects of Pericles’ citizenship law on the place of women and their visual representations on funerary monuments and vases, and (13) the willingness to consider alternatives to democracy in light of the defeat in Sicily; IV. “Athenian Democracy on Display,” with two chapters (14–15) on the sculptural program of the Parthenon viewed in its political context; and V. “Athenian Democracy and the Gods,” with chapters on (16) the competitive context of Attic drama, (17) the erection and mutilation of the herms, and (18) the use of drama and the images on pottery as evidence for maenadism in sixth- and fifth-century Athens; the whole sandwiched between an introduction (chapter 1: “Changing Visions of Democracy”) and a final “Coda.” The introduction, an adaptation of Osborne’s inaugural lecture as Cambridge’s ancient historian, surveys scholarship on Athenian democracy in the last fifty years and suggests some future directions; the prominent place assigned here to A.H.M. Jones and M.I. Finley alert the reader to where Osborne’s sympathies lie. The “Coda” reprints in part Osborne’s introduction to the 1994 *Festschrift* honoring David Lewis, and in part ties together some, though not all, of the book’s chapters in terms of ritual, both religious and particularly civil.

Of the seventeen papers Osborne has chosen six first appeared in journals, the remainder in conference proceedings and other similar collections. They range from what one might call the conventionally scholarly (e.g. chapter 9 on “Law in Action,” with its two appendices cataloguing *apographai*, and *dikai* and *graphai* in the age of the orators) to the more adventuresome (e.g. chapter 15, with its impressionistic reading of the decorative program of the Parthenon), with the rest falling broadly between the two. Each of these papers is accompanied by an “endnote” in which Osborne briefly comments on more recent work by himself and others; the endnotes also allow Osborne to answer his critics and, occasionally, to criticize the work of others. For the most part the papers focus on fifth- and/or fourth-century Athens,

leaving aside the question of how far the “democratic” restorations in Hellenistic Athens were really democratic; exceptionally chapter 3 (“The Demos and Its Divisions”) and chapter 8 (on population mobility), draw some of their evidence from the third century and the atypical garrison deme of Rhamnous. Osborne frequently reminds us that Athenian citizens, who are the focus of his book, shared their world with women and slaves, who were both excluded from the democratic fraternity (metics are barely mentioned). As we would expect of the author of *Demos: the Discovery of Classical Attika*, Osborne’s Athens is not just the *astu*, where the institutions of *polis* government were located, but the *khōra* as well, where most of its citizens worked and lived. Particularly in his introduction and in his concluding chapters Osborne also stresses the need to include religion in our picture of the ancient Athenians.

Osborne’s primary interest, however, is in the “political” aspect of democracy – “political” to be understood in its broadest, etymological sense, as the way Athenian citizens conceived of themselves as citizens and how, as citizens, they interacted with their fellow citizens and with others. Though not emphasized, the notion of democratic equality comes up repeatedly as an essential element of democratic thought, perhaps to the neglect of democratic freedom, equality’s complementary (and sometimes antagonistic) foundational value. Osborne shows us that there was a democratic way of behaving; he also suggests that like democratic patterns of behavior there were also, beyond ideological principles, democratic patterns of thought. Although Osborne does not systematically explore this last point, it seems intuitive that in a highly politicized society like that of fifth- and fourth-century Athens, someone accustomed to thinking in terms of radical political equality would also think of matters beyond the political realm differently from someone accustomed to a rank-ordered environment.

Osborne is also interested in expanding our sources of historical knowledge. While the study of Athens and her democracy will probably always rely predominantly on our literary sources Osborne makes a strong case that we must also consider the evidence provided by epigraphy and archaeology, including images from pottery and public sculpture. The use particularly of images raises new methodological issues: how can we go beyond illustrations of daily life *vel sim.* to make these images yield answers to historical (and not simply art-historical) questions? Here Osborne seems to be most on solid grounds when he considers multiple representations that allow for some level of generalization. Osborne is fully aware of the methodological issues, and in chapters like 12 (on the representations of women) and 18 (on reflections of maenadism in art) he makes a real contribution to the ancient historian’s craft in the new questions he asks and in the materials and methods he uses to answer them.

As the earlier summary of its contents makes clear, *Athens and Athenian Democracy* is not in any sense a comprehensive survey. It is a collection of what were originally individually published papers on a variety of topics related to Athenian

democracy. Nor do the papers build on one another, or even follow a particular thread of thought. And yet the collection does hang together as a whole, “tied up” (to somewhat misuse Osborne’s phrase) by the author’s evolving perception of Athenian democracy as “political” in the broadest sense of the word. These papers enlarge our understanding of what democracy involved for the Athenians, and equally importantly they call attention to different kinds of evidence we can use (and how we can use them) to study Athenian history. I suspect that only Osborne fans (of which I am one) will read *Athens* from start to finish, while others will read the individual papers whose topics they are studying, and then perhaps not even here but in their original publications. Such selective reading is probably inevitable, but it is still regrettable since it misses the richness and complexity of thought and imagination that have made Osborne one of the most important, and interesting, ancient historians of our generation.

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