

P.J. Rhodes, *Periclean Athens*. London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2018. Pp. xix, 108. ISBN 978-1-3500-1495-4. Paperback. \$23.95.

This book represents the latest addition to Bloomsbury's well-established series of Classical World handbooks. The goal of these works is to offer concise and accessible introductions to select aspects of classical antiquity. School and undergraduate university students at an early stage in their studies are thus the intended readership. The volume in question, produced by one of the foremost authorities on Athenian democracy, primarily concerns Athens during the lifetime of Pericles (roughly from 500 to 429 BC) or what might equally be described as the 'golden age' of the Athenian Empire. It is not a biography of Pericles, but an attempt to describe the city that Pericles knew. Rhodes indeed stresses that Pericles never had the complete power over Athenian policy with which Thucydides and other authors have credited him. Rather, Pericles is the focus of a broader introduction to fifth-century Athens. The study covers (albeit briefly) not only the key military and political events of the time, but also the religious, intellectual, cultural and artistic life of Athens. As such, it will prove useful preliminary reading for students on Ancient History or Classical Civilization courses concerned with any aspect of this crucial period in Greek history.

In the first chapter, 'Pericles and his city', Rhodes provides a narrative of Pericles' life and times and a general introduction to the period. The following four chapters can be read in order or alternatively used as stand-alone introductions to specific aspects of Periclean Athens ('Democracy', 'Empire', 'Religion and Philosophy', 'Literature, Art and Architecture'), since elements of the historical narrative are repeated, where relevant, in these later discussions. Chapter 2, 'Democracy', discusses Greek political theory and the development of the Athenian constitution in the archaic and classical periods, from the laws of Draco and Solon down to the late fifth century. Key aspects such as the reforms of Cleisthenes and Ephialtes, Athenian magistracies, ostracism, liturgies, law and the judicial system are all covered. Chapter 3, 'Empire', considers Athenian power and influence beyond Attica from the sixth century. As in Chapter 1, Rhodes explains how the Peloponnesian War began and details the events leading up to the outbreak of war. In Chapter 4, Rhodes attempts to describe the religious life of Athens. He divides his account into two sections focussing on 'Religion and Philosophy' respectively. The first outlines the features that students may find most surprising or difficult in their initial attempts to make sense of Greek religion. These include the absence of any established church or uniquely authoritative texts, the differences between local and Panhellenic religion and the ways in which religion was 'embedded' in civic life. In the second section, 'Philosophy', Rhodes discusses the challenges to 'traditional religion' posed by the sophists and philosophy in general. Finally, Chapter 5 covers the literary legacy of Periclean Athens (principally tragedy, comedy and historiography) and its achievements in art (observable in surviving sculpture and vase painting) and architecture (notably the Periclean building programme). The concluding chapter,

'After Pericles', summarises developments in all four of these areas from the death of Pericles until the end of the fourth century. The book closes with an outline of useful 'Further Reading'.

The series as a whole aims to avoid lengthy discussions of points of detail and Rhodes' volume is no different in this regard. Yet at the same time he nonetheless provides students with an indication of the range of available evidence, from historians such as Thucydides and Plutarch to inscriptions or ostraka. Similarly, while references to secondary literature and bibliography are kept to a minimum, the book aims to highlight contentious issues that students may wish to explore in their further reading. Rhodes is particularly careful to distinguish his own opinions from alternative interpretations or even the *communis opinio*. Examples include his belief that the text of the Peace of Callias is a fourth century forgery or his criticism of attempts to interpret dramatic festivals in Attica as something unique to Athenian democracy.

In such a brief survey, it is unlikely that everyone will be satisfied and there are always ways of presenting the material differently. I am myself sceptical, for example, of the value of distinguishing between 'religion' and 'philosophy' in Chapter 4, since philosophy that is concerned with the divine is also an element of religion. The Socrates described by Plato and Xenophon is at least one example of a profoundly religious philosopher. And in a religious system which lacked a single authoritative text, and in which the poets were never accepted as absolute authorities, criticisms of Homer made by Xenophanes or Heraclitus can hardly be seen as an attack on 'traditional religion'. These small points aside, however, Rhodes has produced a balanced and authoritative introduction that is informed by his many years of research into all aspects of Athenian political life.

This latest volume is thus a welcome addition to the Classical World series and will certainly be a useful resource for students and teachers alike.

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