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Review of Cambridge Companion to the Age of Pericles

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Loren J. Samons II (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Pericles*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pp. xx, 343. ISBN 978-0-521-80793-7. \$75.00 (hb). ISBN 978-0-521-00389-6. \$29.99 (pb).

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This companion is divided into eleven chapters by eleven specialists and includes an introduction and conclusion by the editor, Loren J. Samons. The chapters are thematic and focus upon the social, economic, religious and political contexts of the age of Pericles (mid-fifth-century BC). There are endnotes after each chapter, as well as a list of suggestions for further reading. Also included are forty-three black and white images, and two maps, one illustrating Greece and Western Asia Minor, and the other Attica, the Peloponnese and Central Greece. Although the period addressed often extends before and beyond the Periclean period (which was only about thirty years), as Samons notes in his introduction to the companion, Pericles 'set in motion many trends that dominated Athenian history for much of the fifth century' (18). It is clear by the introduction, which acquaints the reader with the ancient sources for the period and provides a general overview of 'Athenian History and Society in the Age of Pericles,' that the target readership is those just embarking upon a study of the ancient world. Effort is also made by the contributors to elucidate the meaning of some key terms, such as "medizing" and "phoros".

This companion is most comparable in approach and subject to *Democracy, Empire, and the Arts in Fifth-century Athens* (1998), edited by Deborah Boedeker and Kurt Raaflaub. Both collections share five of the same contributors (Boedeker, Raaflaub, Wallace, Kallet and Henderson) and are organized around thematic chapters addressing similar topics. In both, moreover, Kallet, Henderson and Wallace offer similar discussions. One of the major differences between the two is ostensibly their target audiences: *Democracy, Empire, and the Arts in Fifth-century Athens* is clearly aimed at the more sophisticated reader, while the *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Pericles* is aimed at a more novice readership (the former is the result of the 1995 colloquium of the Center for Hellenic Studies, Washington, D.C.).

Although, as Samons notes, the contributors 'often differ in their general conceptions of the period', each consistently aims 'to stimulate the reader to further inquiry' (xvii).

The contributors, in line with the companion's blurb, do this most often by questioning conventional views and considering alternatives, often in the light of recent (or less well-known) scholarship. Although the chapters, and the book as a whole, celebrate this unparalleled period of Athenian advancement in the spheres of art, politics, intellectualism and imperial power, the contributors do not hesitate to knock (or at least decidedly nudge) Athens from its pedestal. The reader is frequently reminded that, in many respects, this was no "golden age". Although Athens undoubtedly achieved great things, these did not come without a price, most often paid by 'the thousands of allied Greeks, metics and slaves exploited systematically by the Athenian people' (300). As P. J. Rhodes stresses in Chapter 1, 'the foundation of democracy was not human rights but citizens' rights' (33).

In the first chapter ("Democracy and Empire"), Rhodes traces the rise of the Athenian empire and investigates its connection with Athens' democracy. R. contends that the empire strengthened the democracy by involving the mass of citizens, namely by adding 'to the business which the citizens had to transact' (28) and necessitating a high level of involvement from the lower classes (*thetes*), who were the source of Athens' naval power (30). Consideration is also given to 'how far the Athenian combination of democracy and empire is to be attributed to Pericles himself' (32). R. challenges Thucydides' view that Athens was 'in theory democracy but in fact rule by the first man' (2.65.9) because 'that is not how Athens worked' (32). However, he concludes that, although Pericles cannot be responsible for everything that happened in this period, the Athenians largely chose to pursue Periclean policies (33).

In Chapter 2, Deborah Boedeker examines "Athenian Religion in the Age of Pericles", outlining 'the major beliefs and practices of Athenian religion(s)' during the period in question (46). The predominant theme of the chapter is that there were 'right ways to treat the gods', and the Athenians considered certain customary religious rites 'essential to the city's well-being' (46). The chapter is divided into six subsections, five of which begin with a quote from Aristophanes' *Clouds*. B. provides an overview of Athenian religious beliefs as centered upon the Olympian pantheon and considers how local myth played a role in Athenian identity. She then discusses hero worship, sanctuaries, sacrifices and festivals, the connection between religion and democracy, and private religious activities and beliefs. The chapter ends with an examination of Greek criticism of traditional religion. This last section draws primarily upon evidence from *Clouds* where Aristophanes associates sophistry with a disbelief in divinity, however, B. also stresses that criticism of traditional religion can be found in 'our earliest Greek literature' (61).

In Chapter 3 ("The Athenian Economy"), Lisa Kallet examines 'the place of money, economic activity, and numeracy in the life of citizens from rich to poor, urban to rural' (70). K. argues that the Athenians had 'an economic mentality'. Challenging the view that Athenians had little interest in economic matters, K. provides evidence that 'money, trade and market infuse the texts of diverse genres' (71). The chapter is

divided into two main parts with subsections. The first considers domestic economic activity (such as agriculture, mining and domestic taxation) and economic activity abroad (involving Athens' empire). The predominant argument of the chapter is that Athens' economy under Pericles was complex and unique and that the period was 'pivotal in the development of economic behaviour, both public and private' (91).

Kurt Raaflaub contributes Chapter 4, "Warfare in Athenian Society". This comprehensive discussion is divided into 8 subsections, considering a range of topics, from Athens' resources for the Peloponnesian War, Pericles' strategy, and the role of the lower classes, to broader topics, such as the ideology of warfare, Athenian civic identity and the soldiers' experience of war. The two questions central to this chapter are: 'What had brought Athens to such a height of power and self-confidence that its leader could predict victory in a war with Sparta?' and 'Why was Pericles able to convince his fellow citizens to accept his "hawkish" policies?' (97). Stressing that 'we must avoid thinking from hindsight', R. contextualizes the Peloponnesian War and the events leading up to it and argues that Athens' empire was an essential factor in the Athenians' decision to embark upon this 'astronomically' expensive war. The main conclusion is that the Athenians, with their lucrative empire, powerful fleet and strong civic pride, had every reason to feel confident at the outset, unable to foresee the lengthy 'total war' with 'its untold miseries' that the conflict would become (111).

Kenneth Lapatin provides a discussion of the "Art and Architecture" of Athens (Ch. 5). L. considers the possible factors that made (and continue to make) the Athenian material culture of this period so powerful and pervasive. Of central interest is the relation between art and ideology. It is often assumed that the "deep meaning" (such as heightened contemplation) associated with fifth-century stylistic advances in art can be explained by the new democratic era. L. stresses, however, that the picture is much more complicated and that the artistic advances of this period do not necessarily correspond to contemporaneous politics (128). After examining several famous examples (drawn primarily from the acropolis), L. concludes that 'democracy ... seems not to have been of great concern' in Athenian art; rather more broadly, Athens' art and architecture were 'potent expressions of high ideals and imperialistic nationalism' (149).

Although much of the discussion in the companion naturally centers upon the Athenian citizenry, Cynthia Patterson (Ch. 6) considers the "other" inhabitants of Attica, who were also 'necessary conditions' of the polis (154).¹ The chapter is divided into three categories: slaves, foreigners and women. Each category consists of a general discussion and is illustrated by case studies drawn from a variety of literary, material and epigraphic sources. A couple points of interest: In her discussion of The Female, P. rightly emphasizes that women should not be considered 'a single unified class, status and interest group' and argues, carefully but contentiously, that there was even 'such a thing as a female "citizen"' (168). In her discussion of The Slave, P. notes (correctly) that it is the 'consensus' that 'most citizen households' owned at least one slave (156). I am skeptical about this idea,

mainly because it seems highly improbable that poor agricultural households, namely, the bulk of the citizen population, would be able to afford the "luxury" of a slave. The idea that all citizens owned slaves is likely a misunderstanding, originating from the biased viewpoint of our elite sources. Not surprisingly, these are largely unconcerned with poor households, and in fact make little distinction between the slavish poor and slaves.² Athens might have been a "slave-society", however, this does not mean that every citizen *de facto* owned a slave. A case in point is the slave-holding American South, in which a relatively small number of wealthy people owned the majority of slaves.³

Jeffrey Henderson discusses "Drama and Democracy" (Ch. 7). Although drama flourished under Athens' democratic government, H. asks to what extent the development of Athenian drama can be related to the development of Athenian democracy and empire. The chapter focuses primarily upon tragedy, which, H. argues, has a more tenuous relation to democracy than the more political genre of comedy.⁴ Although H. allows that there were some democratic elements to tragedy and its production, he contends that 'traditional practices' were put above 'democratic rules and ideology' (185). H. concludes that, while comedy has 'a fair claim to being a phenomenon related to democracy', tragedy transcended the concerns of democracy, preserving older themes and ideas based upon the polis and panhellenism (188). This chapter is one of the more contentious. Ralph Rosen, for instance, provides a compelling contrasting view in his book *Old Comedy and the Iambographic Tradition* (1988) that some of the supposed "social functions" (which might be considered democratic) of Old Comedy actually predate the democratic period, such as "collective obscenity".⁵ Moreover, H.'s conclusion that tragedy is little reflective of the democratic period contrasts with the more common view that tragedy was considerably influenced by democratic ideology.⁶

In Chapter 8, "The Bureaucracy of Democracy and Empire", J. P. Sickinger provides an illuminating discussion of the important role that written texts played in maintaining Athens' government and empire. After providing an overview of the history of the civic uses of writing at Athens, S. primarily surveys the functions of 'non-lapidary texts' since 'inscriptions tell a very small part of the story of Athenian bureaucratic practice' (198). The chapter stresses that the function of writing in fifth-century Athens should not be 'downplayed' or 'minimized' and provides convincing evidence that most writing was likely on perishable materials, such as papyrus or wood.

Robert W. Wallace contributes Chapter 9 on "Plato's Sophists, Intellectual History after 450, and Sokrates". The chapter, as its title indicates, centers largely upon the sophists, 'who were among the most prominent intellectuals working in Athens during the second half of the fifth century' (215). The chapter stresses how 'fundamentally problematic' and 'devastating' the simplified, traditional view of sophistry is, and aims to encourage the reader to discard Plato's term "sophist", which is 'necessarily anachronistic and reductive' (218). W. examines the possible reasons

why Plato targeted the sophists, and concludes that it was partly due to his disillusionment with other intellectuals of the time. After Plato's 'beloved master' was executed, Plato sought to extricate his teacher posthumously from the group of intellectuals, with whom Socrates, W. argues, had much more in common than Plato's illustration allows (232). In fact, there is some evidence from Plato's dialogues that Socrates' had friendly relations with at least a few sophists and even referred some of his own students to them (231).

One of the more dense chapters in the companion is Sealey's examination of "Democratic Theory and Practice" (Ch. 10). The chapter begins with a discussion of the development of the polis, then examines its political and judicial organs, and ends with an assessment of the relationship between Athens' *demokratia* and its independent courts. S. holds the "new" view, based upon more recent scholarship, that early Greece did not have monarchies, but rather that power was private, organized around wealthy households and their dependents. As settlements grew larger, informal meetings organized by household were no longer satisfactory and assemblies and councils were gradually formed, giving rise to the polis-structure. S. stresses that traditional stories of early kings should not be taken literally but rather 'were fictions invented in the fifth and fourth centuries' by families wishing to align themselves with a more 'distinguished ancestry' (239).

J. E. Lendon contributes the final chapter, "Athens and Sparta and the Coming of the Peloponnesian War" (Ch. 11). The discussion is divided into two parts: the first considers what the Greeks might have thought about the causes of war, and the second traces the events in the fifty years preceding the Peloponnesian War (*Pentecontaetia*). L. challenges Thucydides' contention, which remains the traditional view, that the Spartans engaged in war against Athens because they feared 'the growing greatness of the Athenians' (1.23.6). L. holds that Thucydides' reasoning was incorrect and should not be taken at face value: the issue was not one of power but rank, and the Athenians' refusal to recognize that they were inferior in rank to Sparta compelled Sparta to war. Since it is central to L.'s argument, I would have liked to see more discussion about the conceptual difference between power and rank. If superior rank 'conveys the right to ... deferential compliance from other states', as L. argues, does this not mean that a city with superior rank (*hegemonia*) also has some power over the compliant states? (261). In fact, at 1.23.6, Thucydides' phrase 'growing greatness' (*megalous gignomenous*) is ambiguous, and might suitably refer either to power or rank (or both?).

Overall, there is a great deal to recommend this companion. The chapters are thought provoking and merit much more attention individually than I was able to give them here. However, as is often the case with collections of essays by autonomous contributors, the chapters do range in difficulty, with some clearly aimed at beginners and others assuming at least some prior acquaintance with the study of ancient Greece. Although much of the material will be familiar to anyone but the absolute beginner, each contributor makes an effort to consider alternatives to

traditional views. Therefore, although the readership will mainly be at the undergraduate level, the chapters do hold some interest for more advanced readers.

One quibble I have is with the arrangement of the chapters, which do not appear to have any particular order. Since Pericles and the Peloponnesian War are central to the period in question, it might have been more helpful to the reader if these were discussed first. For instance, the last chapter, on Athens and Sparta, would have been better placed up front, rather than at the end. Also, it is unclear why Samons did not place at least some of his discussion of "Pericles and Athens", which traces Pericles' background and career, in the introduction to the companion, rather than leaving it until the conclusion. My other quibble is that at times different spellings are used for Greek names (for instance, on p. 157, "Evangelos" appears in the section title, while the following discussion latinizes the name to "Evangelus"; Chapter 9 uses the hellenized spelling of "Socrates" while it is latinized everywhere else). These quibbles, however, are very minor indeed and should not detract from the overall high quality of this publication and the offerings of the contributors.

Notes:

- [1.](#) For further reading on the "other" in Greek literature and art, the reader should consult Beth Cohen, ed. *Not the Classical Ideal* (Leiden 2000).
- [2.](#) For a discussion of the blurred distinction between slaves and the lower classes in Greek literature and art, see Kelly Joss, *Reconstructing the Slave: An Examination of Slave Representation in the Greek Polis* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of St Andrews, 2006) pp. 102-118; 233-237.
- [3.](#) Cf. Peter J. Parish, *Slavery: The Many Faces of a Southern Institution* (Durham 1979) p. 13.
- [4.](#) For a more thorough discussion of comedy as 'essentially democratic', see Jeffrey Henderson, "Attic Old Comedy, Frank Speech, and Democracy", in *Democracy, Empire, and the Arts of Fifth-Century Athens*, Deborah Boedeker and Kurt A. Raaflaub, eds. (Cambridge, Mass. 1998) pp. 255-273.
- [5.](#) See also Stephen Halliwell, who argues that 'the laughter of both bodily and mental release ... could undercut even the values of the democracy that sponsored the performance.' "Aischrology, Shame and Comedy", in *Free Speech in Classical Antiquity*, Ineke Sluiter and Ralph M. Rosen, eds. (Leiden 2004) pp. 115-144 (quote from p. 142).
- [6.](#) For a more positive view regarding the connection between democracy and tragedy, consult Edith Hall, "The Sociology of Athenian Tragedy", in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, P. E. Easterling, ed. (Cambridge 1997), pp. 93-126. Hall notably concludes that 'Athenian tragedy's claim to having been a truly democratic art-form is ... paradoxically, far greater than the claim to democracy of the Athenian state itself' (126).