
Ian Worthington, *Athens after Empire. A History from Alexander the Great to the Emperor Hadrian*, New York – Oxford (Oxford University Press) 2021, 432 S., ISBN 978-0-19-063398-1 (geb.), £ 35,49

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This book, largely a narrative account of Athens from 323 BC to AD 132, immediately invites comparison with Christian Habicht's "Athen – Die Geschichte der Stadt in hellenistischer Zeit,"¹ to which Ian W(orthington) rightly notes an "enormous debt" (6). Since the books are about the same length but W. covers another 260 years, W.'s coverage of the Hellenistic Age tends to be more abbreviated. With very few excep-

¹ C. Habicht, *Athen. Die Geschichte der Stadt in hellenistischer Zeit*, München 1995. Translated into English as "Athens from Alexander to Antony" (1997) and French as "Athènes hellénistique" (2000, 2006).

tions,² W. follows Habicht's narrative closely – sometimes word-for-word – down to 31 BC.³ After Actium, W. forges on alone. The results make his debt to Habicht all the clearer.

The twenty-nine years since Habicht's book was published have seen new archaeological discoveries, epigraphic corpora, and interpretations. W. is diligent on scholarship and his bibliography is very full, even for items from 2020, the year that the book was sent to the press. However, unlike Habicht, W. rarely engages with non-literary sources. He quotes Plutarch and Polybios frequently, but inscriptions rarely; the 33 figures include no images of coins or archaeological plans (they are mostly W.'s holiday snaps and statues of Great Men). New and not so new epigraphic corpora and archaeological publications are ignored – I.Eleusis, I.Rhamnous, IG II³ 4, almost all volumes from the American Agora excavations, and the journals *Horos*, *Arch. Eph.*, and *Grammateion* are absent from the bibliography. It is thus astonishing that W. points to the appearance of new epigraphic corpora as a justification for his book (7).

The book has two main arguments, which tend to be asserted rather than argued. The first is that post-Classical Athens was characterised not by decline, but by change (1–5, 331–333). W. opposes this argument to a “common view” of Athens as “a shadow of its former self” (ix), but this is a strawman. The vibrancy of Hellenistic *poleis* has been the *communis opinio* for at least two generations now; Louis Robert's famous dictum about what did not die at Chaironeia appeared in print fifty-five years ago.⁴ The point was already a theme of Habicht's book.⁵ W. concludes, “the two cities [Classical and post-Classical Athens] are quite different, so much so that when comparing them the only irrefutable conclusion we can reach is that they are simply different” (3; this is indeed irrefutably vague), the former being a military and imperial power, the latter a “cultural hegemon” (331). This is a false dichotomy: Athens' cultural prominence goes back to Classical times; Athens retained credible claims to military power until at least the end of the Chremonidean War

2 W. dates Lachares' tyranny to 297–ca. 295 BC rather than 300–296/5 BC (87–89, cf. Habicht 1997, 82–84); thinks the absence of the Athenians from Polybios' account of peace negotiations in 198/7 BC is due to “source issues” rather than Athenian irrelevance (154, cf. Habicht 1997, 202); believes the Athenians sold Salamis after 86 BC (257, 260–263, cf. Habicht 1997, 312–313); denies that the *lex Clodia* of 58 BC placed Athens under direct Roman control (216–218; cf. Habicht 1997, 338–341); and claims that Athens defected to Augustus before Actium (239, cf. Habicht 1997, 364).

3 E.g. “Octavian thus acquired all of Greece in one stroke” (239) is lifted from Habicht 1997, 364.

4 L. Robert, *Théophraste de Mytilène à Constantinople*, CRAI 113, 1969, 42–64, 42: “La cité grecque n'est pas morte à Chéronée, ni sous Alexandre, ni dans le cours de toute l'époque hellénistique.”

5 E.g. Habicht 1997, 2: “The most lasting impression [...] is that of a community regulating its affairs in exemplary fashion,” 4: “The history of Athens did not end with its military defeats by the armies of Macedonia,” 5: “the city retained its role as a leader in intellectual life and the arts.”

and military prowess remained a central part of its self-image into the third century AD. Actually, W. does not seem very convinced of his own claim that the city “still shone” (241); he refers to Athenian decline frequently in international politics (159), finances (105, 265), art (108), and democracy (253), and sees the Hadrianic period as “a renaissance that [Athens] had not seen since the Classical Period” (331).

W.’s second argument is that Athenian history from the death of Alexander to Hadrian is best viewed as a unit (5–7). This derives from Angelos Chaniotis’ concept of the “long Hellenistic Age.”⁶ Is this periodisation a good way to think about Athenian history? The issue has three aspects: (a) 323 BC as a start date, (b) denial of a significant caesura in the first century BC, (c) AD 132 as an end-date. W.’s arguments on (a) concern the geopolitical consequences of Alexander’s death and the practical reality that many existing studies stop there. Against this, many scholars have seen continuity at Athens between the late fourth and early third centuries.⁷ The two traditional end points for Hellenistic Athens are the Sullan Sack of 86 BC and the Battle of Actium in 31 BC. The significance of the former is subject of debate. In much recent scholarship, the trauma of the sack is characterised as a literary construct; archaeological evidence for a rapid recovery has been marshalled.⁸ Several works cross the Actium divide too;⁹ others have seen the Augustan era as a moment of revolutionary transformation.¹⁰ W.’s position is not indefensible, but undefended. Despite it being the book’s key point of difference, the sole statement on the matter is: “the only novelty stemming from Actium was a new master, Octavian, who was merely another in a line of Roman rulers going back to Caesar and more recently Antony” (6, 240). That is not a very long line and Octavian proved a very different kind of ruler. In practice, the book falls clearly into Hellenistic (ch. 1–8, 10–11) and Imperial portions (ch. 12–15), the former consisting largely of interstate politics and military affairs; the latter of relations with emperors and building projects. W. attempts to deal with the whole period at once in chapter 9, “social life and religion” (see below), but even there sees discontinuity, treating Hellenistic ruler

6 A. Chaniotis, *Age of Conquests*, London 2018, 3–4. Chaniotis’ periodisation centres on Greek unification, with the foundation of the Panhellenion at Athens “symbolically clos[ing] a circle that was opened with the effort of Philip II of Macedonia and his son Alexander to unite all the Greeks.”

7 E.g. Habicht 1997, in 4 above; A. J. Bayliss, *After Demosthenes*, London – New York 2011.

8 E.g. I. Kuin, *Sulla and the Invention of Roman Athens*, *Mnemosyne* 71, 2018, 616–639; C. Parigi, *Atene e il sacco di Silla. Evidenze archeologiche e topografiche fra l’86 e il 27 a.C.*, Wiesbaden 2019.

9 E.g. S. E. Alcock, *Graecia Capta*. The Landscapes of Roman Greece, Cambridge 1993; C. P. Dickenson, *On the Agora. The Evolution of a Public Space in Hellenistic and Roman Greece (c. 323 BC–267 AD)*, Leiden – Boston 2017; J. L. Shear, *Serving Athena. The Festival of the Panathenaia and the Construction of Athenian Identities*, Cambridge – New York 2021.

10 Notably, A. J. S. Spawforth, *Greece and the Augustan Cultural Revolution. Greek Culture in the Roman World*, Cambridge – New York 2012.

cult and Imperial cult as distinct phenomena (189–191). W.'s end point of AD 132 is inherited from Chaniotis and presented through a discussion of Hadrian's Arch, which W. sees as symbolic of "the transformation of the city into a hybrid of Greek and Roman" (327–331). But was Hadrian the end point of that process? Most of our evidence for what Hadrian did and why/whether it mattered comes from after AD 132, so one ends the book with a sense of being in the middle of things. Yet, one must end somewhere and tackling the voluminous literature on the Second Sophistic, Herodes Atticus, and Philostratos, would require several further chapters.

W. focuses his narrative above all on military history and interstate relations, despite considering Athenian military actions in the period "simply mirages" of limited overall significance (331). There are short discussions of the city's literature, philosophy, oratory (42–47), social life and religion (181–194), but only throwaway references to the economy, Attica outside Athens, and the Athenian settlements on Delos, Lemnos, and elsewhere (this is reflected in the book's maps, which include a detailed map of Macedonia, but none of Attica). The architecture of the city is discussed for the Roman Period (287–311), but not for the Hellenistic Age.¹¹ Despite W.'s emphasis on the importance of democracy, he is totally silent on questions about institutional change (e.g., how and when metics disappeared,¹² how ideas of citizenship changed in this period,¹³ when archons started to be elected rather than chosen by lottery,¹⁴ what happened to the democratic court system).¹⁵

When W. turns to social life and religion in chapter 9 (181–194), there are barely any citations and the discussion becomes extremely general. Women get two pages (185–186), mostly about female seclusion in the Classical Period and Hellenistic royal women (neither strictly relevant), a comment on Menander's *Dyskolos*, and a note that the "limited literary sources" could be supplemented with archaeology. No mention of epigraphy,¹⁶ nor any actual presentation of archaeological data or direction to the reader on how to find it.¹⁷ The section on religion (187–193) barely

11 On the latter, see e.g. R. Krumeich – C. Witschel, *Die Akropolis von Athen im Hellenismus und in der römischen Kaiserzeit*, Wiesbaden 2010; Dickenson 2017, esp. 142–189 and n. 24 below.

12 Cf. M. Niku, *The Official Status of the Foreign Residents in Athens 322–120 BC*, Helsinki 2007.

13 Cf. M. J. Osborne, *Naturalization in Athens IV*, Brüssel 1981–1983, 139–209.

14 Habicht 1997, 321–322.

15 Cf. N. Papazarkadas, *Judicial and Financial Administration in Late Hellenistic Athens. A New Decree of the Athenian Council*, *Hesperia* 86.2, 2017, 325–357.

16 E.g. IG II² 1036+1060 of 108/7 BC (?), 1034+1943 of 103/2 BC, and 1942 of ca. 100 BC on the maidens weaving Athena's peplos, S. B. Aleshire – S. D. Lambert, *Making the Peplos for Athena. A New Edition of IG II² 1060 + IG II² 1036*, *ZPE* 142, 2003, 65–86.

17 E.g. gravestones: D. W. von Moock, *Die figürlichen Grabstelen Attikas in der Kaiserzeit*, Mainz 1998, 62–67; Agora XXXV, esp. pp. 29–40; A.-B. Karapanagiotou, *Γυναίκα και κοινωνική προβολή στην Αθήνα*, Volos 2013.

mentions the Eleusinian cult, the Pythais, or sacrifice. W. says that “foreign cults began to appear” at Athens only in the Hellenistic Period (189), but they were a feature of the Classical *polis* too – including the cult of Isis, which is W.’s specific example in this section.¹⁸ He declares that this cult “never won a large-scale following” (192); but the ubiquity of Isiac motifs in Athenian funerary monuments suggests otherwise.¹⁹ On ruler cult, W. states that the Athenians saw it as “far from religious, but something to be exploited for secular advantages” (190), characterises it as “flattery” (95), and assumes that the initiative for these cults came from kings and emperors (191–192, 275), ignoring or ignorant of scholarship of the last fifty years that has been at pains to nuance all these points.²⁰ The increased prominence of priesthoods in the Roman period is bizarrely characterised as “secularisation” (191). Economics is a particular weak point. W. sees economics primarily through politics and twists all data to demonstrate decline. Thus, W. assumes that the end of Athenian minting must have been imposed by an overlord – Antony and/or Augustus (234, 247, 260).²¹ Athenian importation of copper, gold, ivory, Italian terracotta, and Corinthian lamps in the first century AD is presented as a sign that Athens was struggling economically (273–274), but importation of luxury goods rather indicates prosperity. W. is “certain” that Athenian income from visitors in this period “was not enough to run a city” (274) but the city manifestly did run a range of expensive institutions – the Eleusinian cult, the Panathenaia, the Dionysia, the annual Council of 600/500, the ephebate – which indicates healthy public finances.

There are many factual errors, *non sequiturs*, and broad unsupported generalisations, especially once W. reaches the Roman period. A few examples: The Gauls who attacked Delphi in 279 BC did not come from Galatia in modern day Turkey and it is baselessly cynical, not “more realistic” to claim that the Greeks only defended Delphi in order to protect their own treasuries (111). W.’s statement regarding relations with Antigonos II in the 270s, that “the Athenians were fickle, and the near-slavish [!] devotion to their new democratic regime, personified in

18 R. Parker, *Athenian Religion. A History*, Oxford 1996, 152–158. Isis in Classical Athens: IG II³ 1, 337, ll. 42–45.

19 E. J. Walters, *Attic Grave Reliefs that Represent Women in the Dress of Isis* (Hesperia Supplement 22), Athen – Princeton 1988. Several domestic bronze statuettes from the Agora depict Isis or Harpokrates: H. F. Sharpe, *Bronze Statuettes from the Athenian Agora. Evidence for Domestic Cults in Roman Greece*, Hesperia 83, 2014, 143–187, no. 3–4, 7.

20 E.g. C. Habicht, *Gottmenschen und griechische Städte*, München 1970²; S. Price, *Rituals and Power*, Cambridge 1984; P. Iossif – A. Chankowski – C. Lorber, *More than Men, Less than Gods*, Leuven 2011.

21 Economic factors, especially the huge supply of Roman denarii in the 1st century BC Aegean, should be considered. Cf. Agora XXVI, pp. 15–16, 87–89, and more generally T. R. Martins, *Sovereignty and Coinage in Classical Greece*, Princeton 1985.

the likes of Demochares did not bode well” (116) comes out of nowhere – it is cited to Justin 24.1.2, 7 which does not mention Athens. Polybios 30.20.3–7 did not fail “to see [...] how quickly the Athenians turned a diplomatic rebuff to their advantage” in his discussion of the Athenian seizure of Haliartos in 167 BC (169–170) – this was what Polybios found appalling – and claiming that “self-serving requests” were “appealing to the Roman mindset” (170) is to treat the Romans as cartoon villains. W.’s claim that after 167 BC the Romans “dealt rarely with the city’s institutions [...] and more with individual aristocratic families” (173) – important if true – is not supported by any evidence.²² W. says only five ephebes participated in the Pythaïs of 98/7 (200), but F.Delphes III.2, 26 lists sixty-six; he has confused ephebes with horsemen. Mithridates is never depicted on Athenian coinage (204); W. has misunderstood a reference to coinage minted by Mithridates at Athens.²³ W. dates the legal reform of Demeas to both 88/7 BC (204 n. 55) and to the 40s BC (218 n. 134), unaware (?) that he is discussing the same inscription in both cases (Agora XVI 333). W. places the construction of the Tower of the Winds in the 40s BC and suggests it was funded by Pompey, even as he cites the recent archaeological studies which date it to the second century BC (226–228).²⁴ W. claims that Julius Caesar probably did (232) and did not (247) confiscate Oropos from the Athenians. The monument for Livia and Augustus at Eleusis (I.Eleusis 296) is conflated with a statue base for Livia in the Roman Agora (IG II² 3238) (249). The post of *epimeletes tes poleos* is new in the first century AD, not an example of continuity between Roman Athens and earlier times (253).²⁵ The Augustan-period resolution of a dispute on Lemnos (SEG 47.143) is not an example of interstate arbitration (the island belonged to Athens) and did not result in the Lemnians erecting a monument in the Agora (254).²⁶ The Pythaïs was probably not held in 58 BC (255).²⁷ The dedications to Apollo Hypoakraios begin in the mid-first century AD or later, not under Augustus (255).²⁸

22 On the contrary, I.Délos 1510 = R. K. Sherk, *Roman Documents from the Greek East. Senatus Consulta and Epistulae to the Age of Augustus*, Baltimore 1969, no. 5 (ca. 164 BC), in which an edict from Rome is sent to the Athenian *boule*, indicates scrupulous attention to official institutions.

23 Cf. F. de Callatay, *L’histoire des guerres mithridatiques*, Louvain-la-Neuve 1997, 23–24, 41, 312.

24 H. J. Kienast, *Der Turm der Winde in Athen*, Wiesbaden 2014, 129–145; P. A. Webb, *The Tower of the Winds in Athens*, Philadelphia 2017, 26–28.

25 J. H. Oliver, *Imperial Commissioners in Achaia*, GRBS 14, 1973, 389–405, 401.

26 W. cites R. M. Kallet-Marx – R. S. Stroud, *Two Athenian Decrees Concerning Lemnos of the Late First Century B.C.*, *Chiron* 27, 1997, 155–194, who mention no such monument. The only Lemnian monuments in the Agora are Agora XVIII 33 and 34 (160s–130s BC and 50–100 AD, respectively).

27 The fragmentary F.Delphes III.2 56 (with add. 56c) probably records attendance at the Pythian Games: S. Kühn, *Neue Untersuchungen zur Pythaïs-Prozession von Athen nach Delphi*, Berlin 2018, 187.

28 The earliest examples are IG II³ 4 128–129 (mid-first century AD) and 130 (85–95 AD).

Dio Chrysostom 31.116 criticises the Athenians for honouring Julius Nikanor as “New Homer and New Themistokles,” not for rescinding those titles (263). There is no evidence that Nikanor was popular with “the lower social faction” and his receipt of Roman citizenship cannot be the reason for the erasure of his titles (263), since he already held it when he was first honoured. W. claims non-citizens “first” served as ephebic gymnasiarchs in the archonship of Domitian (67, 272), but none appear in the ephebic list from this year (IG II² 1996). The only instance of non-citizens *ever* performing this duty is IG II² 2026a, ll. 21–30 (115/6 or 116/7 AD), where they are – significantly – denied the actual title. W. claims that Hadrian banned dual citizenship, with only rare exceptions (318, no citation), but dual citizenship is very common in the Roman period – aside from the thousands of Athenians who held Roman citizenship,²⁹ many Athenian citizens held citizenship of multiple other Greek *poleis*.³⁰ The sacred *diataxis* cannot have been introduced by Hadrian (318), since it is attested in late first century BC inscriptions (IG II² 1035, l. 14, Agora XV 287, 307). There is no evidence that the list of properties in IG II² 2776 = SEG 29.160 (which W. refers to only as “a fragmentary inscription”) was “a census”, nor that it was ordered by Hadrian; since it does not specify the size of properties, it is unclear whether it shows that wealthy landowners had expanded their holdings (319).³¹ The Panhellenes were not “drawn from all walks of life” (325); they did not necessarily belong to their cities’ uppermost stratum, but minimum standards of age, birth, and previous officeholding (SEG 29.127, ll. 19, 76–79), as well as the cost of residing in Athens, limited the role to the upper class.³²

This book is aimed at a general audience. This imposes a special obligation to get things right, present a cogent argument, and model scholarly rigour, which this book fails to fulfil. It makes no novel contribution to debates surrounding the

29 Catalogued by S. G. Byrne, *Roman Citizens of Athens* (Studia Hellenistica 40), Leuven – Dudley 2003.

30 E.g., Valerius Eklektos (IG II² 4, 629); Gellii of Melite, Corinth and Delphi (Byrne 281–284); Vibullii of Marathon and Corinth (Byrne 481); Claudius Attalos Andragathos of Sphettos and Synnada (D. J. Geagan, *Hadrian and the Athenian Dionysiac Technitai*, TAPA 103, 1972, 133–160, 153–154); Ulpius Eubiotos of Gargettos and Thessaly (N. V. Sekunda, *The Kylloi and Eubiotoi of Hypata during the Imperial Period*, ZPE 118, 1997, 207–226).

31 On land use in Roman Attica, see S. E. Alcock, *Graecia Capta*, Cambridge 1993, 33–92 and the studies by D. D’Aco, *L’Attica in età romana: le fattorie dal I sec. A.C. al V sec. D.C.*, in: A. D. Rizakis – I. P. Touratsoglou (eds.), *Villae Rusticae. Family and Market-Oriented Farms in Greece under Roman Rule*, Athens 2013, 440–465 and G. Stainchauer, *Roman Farmhouses in Attica*, in: A. D. Rizakis – I. P. Touratsoglou (eds.), *Villae Rusticae. Family and Market-Oriented Farms in Greece under Roman Rule*, Athens 2013, 466–485. On the inscription, see S. G. Miller, *A Roman Monument in the Athenian Agora*, *Hesperia* 41, 1972, 50–95.

32 Cf. A.J.S. Spawforth – S. Walker, *The World of the Panhellenion, I: Athens and Eleusis*, *JRS* 75, 1985, 78–104, 86–89.

history of Athens. At its best, dealing with Hellenistic political history, it accurately paraphrases Habicht. At its worst, dealing with social history and the Imperial period, it fails to represent the current state of knowledge and cannot be relied upon for basic facts.