

Luca Asmonti, *Athenian Democracy: A Sourcebook*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014 (Bloomsbury Sources in Ancient History), XIV + 246 pp., ISBN 978-1-4411-1371-9, £25.99 (pb).

LUCA ASMONTI'S [= A.] new book was supposed to be a comprehensive sourcebook on Athenian democratic culture, intended primarily for "undergraduate students in classics and ancient history" (p. 1). Unfortunately, it is another, and rather badly edited, volume focused on the history of Athenian democracy in the fifth century BC, despite the author's assurance that the book will go beyond the classical period and will cover the evolution of the Athenian democratic system in Hellenistic and Roman times (back cover).

The volume consists of thirteen chapters preceded by a preface, a list of abbreviations and an introduction which presents a short sketch of Athenian democracy, stressing what exactly it was, what was so exceptional about it, and what were its characteristic features (pp. 1–12). A. begins in mythical times, going from Ion, through Theseus, to the battle of Crannon (322 BC), when the Macedonian army took over Greece (pp. 4–6).

All the chapters are composed in a similar way. Each section comprises a short discussion regarding the relevant period of time and the problems associated with it. Then the reader is provided with several selected sources translated into English. Unfortunately, the ancient texts are left with no commentary at all, which is extremely unhelpful for inexperienced students, who are supposed to be the main readers of this volume. Moreover, as could be expected, well known literary evidence (e.g. Pericles' funeral speech, passages from *The Athenian Constitution* and Aristotle's *Politics*) dominates over the epigraphic sources. Although A. assured us that "[s]ources include material by Aristotle, Homer, Aristophanes, Herodotus, Thucydides, Cicero, Tacitus and many other authors" (back cover), the reader will not find any passages included from Cicero or Tacitus.

Chapters 1 and 2 are rather introductory. They deal with the definition and origin of the *polis* (ch. 1), with the birth of Athens and the roots of democracy (ch. 2). The next eleven chapters (chs. 3–13) present the history of Athenian democracy in chronological order. Chapter 3 discusses Draco and Solon, and the subject of chapter 4 is the tyranny of Pisistratus. Surprisingly, A. devotes only 2 pages to Cleisthenes (ch. 5; pp. 81 f. contain a brief history of Cleisthenes' reforms, whilst pp. 83–89 refer to the sources), even though the section is entitled "Cleisthenes and the Birth of Democracy", and should really provide the reader with much more information. The procedure of ostracism is not mentioned at all, nor the council of 500. The times of the Persian wars and Athenian maritime expansion cover the next twenty two pages (ch. 6). The development of democracy under Ephialtes and Pericles is discussed in chapters 7 and 8. Chapter 9 focuses on the next phase of the Peloponnesian war, when Alcibiades and Cleon became the main politicians in Athens. Chapter 10 emphasises Athenian imperialism and the idea of spreading the democratic system beyond Athens. Chapters 11 and 12 deal with the crisis of democracy caused by the Sicilian expedition and the Arginusae failure, the anti-democratic voices and oligarchic experiments. The last chapter (13) is in fact the only part in which Athenian democracy in the fourth century BC is discussed. The book ends with a section entitled "Further Reading" (pp. 221–240). This is a well-presented section with references to up-to-date literature, enabling those less familiar with ancient history to gain insight into further studies. Two Indexes, an Index of Passages (pp. 241 f.) and an Index of Names (pp. 243–246) close the volume.

There is no doubt that A.'s sourcebook on Athenian democracy is a long needed publication; however its many defects and faults diminish its value. The large number of editing mistakes

include many misspellings, for example “Pyhtia” instead of Pythia (p. 38) and “Psisitratids” instead of Pisistratids (p. 91). The lack of consistency in using topographical names and abbreviating ancient authors, such as using both “Sicyone” and “Sicyon” and “Hyp.” then “Hyperides” (p. 217) are just two of examples of the many mistakes. It seems that the author did not achieve everything he wanted with the book, as on the back cover we are informed that there should be an A–Z of key terms, which there is not. The biggest disappointment, however, is the chronological time-frames. A.’s narration mainly revolves around Athens in the fifth century BC (chs. 6–12) with several references to earlier centuries, and only one chapter devoted to the fourth century BC. There is no other book so far on Athenian democracy beyond the classical period and A.’s work could have been a welcome contribution, but unfortunately, it is not¹. Moreover, if we compare A.’s sourcebook with ROISMAN’S collection of evidence dated from Homer to Alexander the Great, published in 2011, where at least fifteen chapters are devoted to Athens and democracy (chs. 9–11, 17–21, 23, 27–29, 34–35, 38), then the book under review looks rather poor². ROISMAN provides his readers with a proper historical narration, primary sources with commentary, and additionally with online references to various databases.

In general, before the publication of the next edition A.’s book should be better edited to avoid all spelling errors. Also, it would be far more useful if the author supplemented any references to Hellenistic and Roman times with the proper evidence and at least provided some basic comments on the cited sources. Additional maps or timelines would also be an improvement. After such improvements, both students and the general public would be able to benefit more from it.

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¹ E.W. ROBINSON, *Democracy beyond Athens*, Cambridge 2015, is a recent publication on democracy beyond Athens in the classical period.

² J. ROISMAN, *Ancient Greece from Homer to Alexander: The Evidence*. Translations by J.C. YARDLEY, Malden 2011 (Blackwell Sourcebooks in Ancient History).