

THE POPULATION OF CLASSICAL ATHENS

AKRIGG (B.) *Population and Economy in Classical Athens*. Pp. xii + 272. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Cased, £75, US \$99.99. ISBN: 978-1-107-02709-1.

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Since the 1980s the debate about the population of classical Athens has been dominated by the work of M.H. Hansen (*Demography and Democracy: the Number of Athenian Citizens in the Fourth Century BC* [1985]; *Three Studies in Athenian Demography* [1988]). Until Hansen took over, it was A.W. Gomme's *The Population of Athens in the Fifth and Fourth Centuries BC* (1933) which prevailed, to which C. Patterson's *Pericles' Citizenship Law of 451–50* (1981) made important revisions. Of these three landmarks, only Gomme took the whole population of Athens in both the fifth and fourth centuries into account. Hansen, as clearly stated in the title of his main work, was concerned with citizens only, primarily with male citizens active in the democracy, and with the fourth century. Patterson investigated the fifth century until the Peloponnesian War and was particularly interested in citizens and metics. In addition, studies on related topics such as warfare, slavery, migration and the grain supply, each with their own concerns with subsections of the population, further enriched the debate.

Combining the scope of Gomme's work with the methodological variety of recent scholarship, in the volume under review A. aims to cover the whole population of Athens (male, female, citizen, metic, slave) in the two classical centuries, and not just the size, but also the age distribution in each group and changes in numbers over time. Getting a sharper and more detailed picture of the population is essential not only for political history, as was Hansen's and Patterson's main concern, but especially for economic history, which is A.'s principal purpose. His claim that in the latter his approach is 'substantially different from those adopted in the past' (p. 247) is somewhat surprising, considering that L. Foxhall, R. Osborne, H. van Wees (each in several publications from the 1980s onwards), A. Moreno (*Feeding the Democracy* [2007]) and C. Taylor (*Poverty, Wealth and Well-Being* [2017]) have been doing precisely that. Yet, A. makes a valuable contribution by judicious comparisons with the demography and economy of the Roman world. The Roman custom of adding the age of the deceased to a grave monument is particularly helpful to the demographer, a custom Athens unfortunately lacked.

The value of A.'s volume lies in bringing together the debates on the population of Athens of the past three decades. A. offers detailed reviews of and critical engagement with the arguments and methods other scholars have brought to the question of the Athenian population. He does not advance a new approach of his own, checked against the available evidence. References to sources are actually quite scarce – readers are apparently expected to look for the relevant evidence themselves in the literature discussed (for instance [p. 15]: A.H.M. Jones's views [1957] are 'based on a pair of inscriptions', of which A. summarises the contents but does not supply the corpus numbers). Hansen's work is the point of departure, first, because Hansen brought the discussion to a new level (p. 38) by his systematic approach and his decision to apply the updated (1983) *Regional Model Life Tables and Stable Populations* by A. Coale and P. Demeny to the Athenian evidence, and second, because A. finds Hansen's results for the citizen population largely convincing (pp. 83–4 and *passim*): c. 30,000 male citizens at the time of the Persian invasion (Patterson rather thinks 25,000), at least 60,000 on the eve of the Peloponnesian war, c. 25,000 at the end of the war, c. 30,000 in the fourth century.

A. holds that, except for B. Strauss's *Athens after the Peloponnesian War* (1986), historians have largely overlooked the impact these huge changes in population size must have had on the economy and society of Athens.

The book is organised in thematic chapters: after an introduction to the study of Athenian demography, Chapter 2 focuses on population structures, Chapters 3 and 4 on population size of citizens and non-citizens (metics and slaves) respectively, Chapter 5 on the expansions and contractions of the population, and Chapters 6 and 7 on economic factors aligned to population size: the amounts of food, notably grain, and wood Athens needed, and the size and distribution of arable land, with an estimation of the number of people it might support. What all scholars whose arguments are assessed in these chapters are doing in one way or another is trying to make the most of scarce and disparate evidence. The few numbers mentioned in the sources are nearly all concerned with male citizens in their political and military roles, with some exceptions such as the scrutiny conducted by Demetrius of Phaleron (317–307; *Athen.* 6.272c), which included metics and slaves. Male citizens are therefore inevitably the measure with which all other groups are estimated. And these numbers are far from straightforward: if we get army figures, does that mean population figures? Which ages of the 16,000 defence forces of 431 does Thucydides (2.13) consider to be the 'oldest and the youngest'? The same holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for data on the grain supply, the size of ships and the composition of their crews, the strength of defence forces, rosters of ephebes, mortality by sex and age, and so on. To get at some idea about population size and age distribution requires quite substantial assumptions on the one hand and a variety of evaluative methods (comparative material; life tables such as the Coale–Demeny tables; medical data) on the other. For instance, one of Hansen's principal criteria was the number of male citizens necessary to run the Council of 500 constitutionally (25,000); if our sources do not signal serious problems in this respect, we may assume that number was available. This is a reasonable assumption, but no more than that.

Although A. observes that 'demographers are more interested in women' (p. 20), the same cannot be said about his book. Four pages (pp. 33–7) on 'the sex structure of the citizen population' review very few and quite old (1968; 1975; 1981) publications, with A. Bresson (2016) in footnotes, mainly dealing with selective infanticide. In the rest of the book women hardly surface. Although the available data certainly impose constraints on what may be inferred about women, clearly A. holds citizens, metics and slaves to be male in the first place – an astounding viewpoint, considering the productive scholarship on women and the economy in Athens of the past decades.

Concerning metics, A. claims that they 'were considered, as a body, to be somewhat servile' (p. 136, also p. 132), due to the *metoikion* tax, which 'made metics look closer to slaves than to citizens' and because many metics 'were freedmen and women' (p. 133). A. disagrees here with D. Whitehead (1977), who argued that metic status as such was not tinged with servility, amongst other reasons because Greek metics usually remained citizens of their original *polis*. A. gives no arguments for his evaluation of the *metoikion*; and distinguishing metics into two main groups, wealthy men on the one hand (for instance Lysias and his father) and on the other freed slaves (p. 137), he underestimates the variety of this group. Metics also included numerous highly skilled craftsmen and the *nothoi* of Athenians, whom A. does not mention at all. Some studies advocating a more positive approach to metics are mentioned in the footnotes, but not discussed at length, and some important items are missing (e.g. S. Wijma, *Embracing the Immigrant* [2014]).

Nonetheless, this volume is enormously helpful in collecting and appraising major contributions to the debate on the (male) population of Athens, arranged in useful themes. The

Cambridge Classical Studies, the series of Cambridge Ph.D. theses turned into books in which the volume appears, does not spoil its readers with easy legibility; for reading footnote 69 on p. 111 a magnifying glass is recommended.

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