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Paul Cartledge, *Ancient Greek Political Thought in Practice*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, Key Themes in Ancient History Series, 2009. Pp. xxiii & 169. £14.99. ISBN 978-0-521-45595-4 (Pbk).

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The publication of this book reflects a wave of interest in classical political thought, which has this year also seen two companion volumes published, *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Greek Political Thought*, edited by Stephen Salkever, and Blackwell's *A Companion to Greek and Roman Political Thought*, edited by Ryan Balot. Cartledge's contribution differs from these heftier works in its focus on political thought *in practice*, an emphasis which leads to an unusual but refreshing balance in the treatment of the ancient evidence. Thus we have a chapter devoted to the third century Spartan revolutions of Agis and Cleomenes but a mere two pages on Plato's philosopher-kings.

The book's ambition, however, is not unduly limited by its brevity. It stretches from Homer to Plutarch, with a coda on the ever-popular subject of the Greeks and democracy today. Its origins, as the author states, lie ultimately in undergraduate lectures given at Cambridge, and the book follows a pattern that will be familiar to any reader who has experienced an introductory course in Greek history. After laying out the evidence, problems and terminology of the subject in the first two chapters, Cartledge turns to the key episodes and case studies that form the basis of many a seminar or essay. These can be summarised as follows: where and when to place the society of Homer's epics and its relation to the real world (chapter three); the reforms of Solon, Cleisthenes and the other major Athenian political figures (chapters four and five); Herodotus' constitutional debate (chapter six); the trial of Socrates (chapter seven); the intellectual criticisms of democratic rule (chapter eight); the aforementioned Spartan revolutions (chapter nine); and the views of Plutarch, writing in an Imperial Roman context (chapter ten).

These chapters are engagingly written, and rarely less than stimulating in their conclusions. Among the more intriguing are the author's argument that the Athenians

were right to convict Socrates on religious grounds (chapter seven), and his interpretation of Cleisthenes as the decisive figure who overrode the traditional factionalist approach to politics in Athens (chapter five). Cartledge gives the reader an idea of where his views are controversial, and his further reading sections and bibliographical essay provide useful, if less detailed than might be hoped for, starting points for further investigation. These chapters are interspersed with brief but effective narratives that incisively sketch the key political events and trends of each period.

Unfortunately, however, in the main chapters there is frustratingly little forceful engagement with the views of other scholars. The reader learns where Cartledge disagrees with others, but the arguments of his fellows are not set out substantially, or taken apart in any detail. Thus we are told, for example, that Josiah Ober's views on the Cleisthenic reforms go further than Cartledge's own, and that his belief in a 'populist self-consciousness' that drove them seems 'highly dubious or problematic' (p. 60). But we do not discover exactly why this is the case, or what precisely has led Ober to this conclusion in the first place.

Another frustration comes from the inconsistent and often inadequate referencing in the book. It is rather irksome, for example, to be informed that Cicero made a remark 'in one of his many private letters to Titus Pomponius' without being told which letter it was, or to be given the text of an inscription in English without any clue as to where to find the original (pp. 124, 41). It could be argued that the specialist is likely to be familiar with such passages in any case, but that will be of small comfort to the wider audience which Cartledge hopes to attract (p. xii). These examples seem all the more odd when compared to the comprehensive, professional referencing used elsewhere in the book, such as chapters six and seven.

Indeed, it is fair to remark that the book does not appear to be aimed at a consistent audience. The excellent seventh chapter, on the trial of Socrates, carefully sets out a series of 'articles' and 'propositions' that both explain the context of the trial to the reader who is unfamiliar with the details of democratic Athens and its legal system, and lay bare to the specialist the particular arguments and assumptions that underpin the author's assessment of the evidence. Cartledge examines the key

passages of the texts in detail, with important terms provided in Greek and explained at length in English. It is hard to reconcile this admirably thorough approach with his description of 'Protagoras's famous dictum, that man was the measure of all things that are *that* they are (or are not)' (p. 15, original emphasis). It can only be assumed that the meaning of this is clear to those more familiar with early Greek philosophy than this reviewer.

The only other criticism offered here derives perhaps from the book's brevity. It is of course absurd to expect a relatively short work covering such a period to achieve anything approaching a comprehensive treatment, but there is one omission that ought to be mentioned. It is surprising that an author predominantly concerned with 'The thoughts, however inchoate or inarticulate, of the mass rather than the theories of the elite' should ignore the rich body of evidence provided by the speeches of the Attic orators, especially when the statement quoted appears to allude to Ober's *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens*, the book which did so much to make them a vital part of modern scholarly debate (p. xii).

None of these weaknesses, however, are sufficient to render the book irrelevant to students and those teaching them, or to the interested non-specialist. On the contrary, Cartledge's arguments will doubtless inspire much fruitful debate in student seminars, and his ideas will give more experienced scholars much to think about as they examine the ancient evidence in rather more detail than is possible in a book of this length. Equally, the book will serve as an engaging introduction to the topic for those outside the discipline. It introduces the key texts, events and ideas that underpin Greek political thought in a way that captures the flavour of the current exciting period in the study of this fascinating subject.