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This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by CrossWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in New England Classical Journal by an authorized editor of CrossWorks.
The book’s production values are consistently good. All of the necessary illustrations are here, but readers may regret seeing only a single example of an inscribed casualty list (figure 3.1). The white-ground lekythoi discussed in the final chapter have been illustrated extensively, but the reproductions are small and some of the scenes are difficult to see. In this book, Arrington does not offer an epigraphical study of the inscribed casualty lists of the démosion sêma, or even a catalogue of their reliefs: for more about these, the reader is referred to the author’s earlier published articles. The tone of the book is thoughtful and meditative throughout, and the text has been carefully edited; the bibliography is complete. Arrington has marshaled an impressive array of earlier scholarship while at the same time clearly asserting his own point of view.

*Ashes, Images, and Memories* is a welcome addition to the burgeoning bibliography on memory in the Greco-Roman world, differing notably from other recent studies in its focus on cognitive as opposed to collective memory; it is recommended reading for anyone interested in fifth-century B.C. Athens.

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Vincent Azoulay (trans. Janet Lloyd),

*Pericles of Athens.*


This critical biography of Pericles enjoys several strengths. First, it navigates successfully between anticipated pairs of hazards, such as idealization and vilification. Packing a lot of information into each chapter, it also offers a rich view of the strangeness (from modern perspectives) of Pericles’ world. Finally, the book concludes with a historiographical review tracing attitudes toward Pericles up to the twenty-first century. Three roughly chronological chapters follow an introduction, which articulates
goals, assesses ancient sources, and outlines the book. The first reviews both advantages and disadvantages of Pericles’ elite Alcmaeonid lineage. After sketching his education, it then examines the meager evidence for Pericles’ entry into public life, as chorêgos, in opposition to Cimon, and (allegedly) in support of Ephialtes’ reforms. The next two chapters (2–3) focus on the foundations of Pericles’ power: his position as stratêgos and his abilities as orator. Chapter 2 first explains the combination of political and military functions of a stratêgos. In discussing Pericles’ repeated election—an extraordinary fifteen times between 448/7 and 429/8 BCE—Azoulay addresses his role in repressing allied revolts and his proposed defensive strategy for the Peloponnesian War. Chapter 3 nicely balances Pericles’ ability to speak with his savvy sense of when to remain silent. As he weighs Thucydides’ claim that Pericles could both rouse and calm his audience, Azoulay examines Pericles’ use of striking metaphors, attested by a range of sources.

Chapters 4 and 5 investigate Pericles’ role in shaping Athenian imperialism and its economy. Azoulay reminds his readers that Pericles was by no means the first of Athens’ leaders to promote empire, nor the last. Nonetheless, he does not fully exonerate him. Pericles was likely the first to theorize the empire and used brutal force to retain it. “A Periclean Economy?” (ch. 5) succinctly explains the economic lives of individuals, including Pericles’ unusual way of managing his estate, and the financial workings of the city and its empire, including, as the chapter’s title suggests, the redistribution of its wealth.

Chapters 6–8 move into waters made especially murky by the unreliability of sources, in particular, fragments of Old Comedy. They serve, however, as starting points for speculations about Pericles’ personal life and tensions between his public and private conduct. “Pericles and his Circle” (ch. 6) explores Athenian marriage strategies and the identity of Pericles’ first wife. Azoulay also questions the very existence of a circle and notes the no-win situations in which sources suggest Pericles was caught. To some, for example, he seemed too aloof, in public and private, while others thought he pandered to the Athenian people. Azoulay also touches on the private crisis that may have ensued from his citizenship law of 451, whereby both parents of citizens had to be Athenian citizens, as his mistress (possibly wife) Aspasia was not.

Central to “Pericles and Eros” (ch. 7) is Pericles’ exhortation in the Funeral Oration to “look upon the power of the city and become its lovers” (erastas autês, Thuc. 2.43.1). Azoulay explains the metaphor in terms of the dynamics of pederastic love affairs (despite the feminine gender of autês), but skips over its striking image of Athens as an entity other than the collective “Athenians.” As for Aspasia, he exposes
the weak foundations of stories about her legal woes and discusses an inscription possibly casting light on her family.

Given the lack of good evidence, in “Pericles and the City Gods” (ch. 8) Azoulay refuses to choose between a rational and a religious Pericles: being both may not have seemed contradictory (p. 122). Acknowledgment that the public performance of religion was likely to have been more important than privately held views would have been welcome, however.

The following criticism applies especially to the first eight chapters, which differ in tone and approach from the final two. The book is clearly intended to be accessible to non-specialists; thus Azoulay provides explanations for terms like oikos, thete, and ostracism. I found none, however, for heliaea, ekklêsia, boulê, or dicasts, to mention a few examples, nor are they in the index. A glossary would have helped. Second, finding references to ancient sources sometimes in the text, sometimes in the endnotes is frustrating (less so in the French edition with footnotes). More important are overstatements, as when Azoulay claims Pericles “shamelessly [made] the most of his social networks” (p. 84). Shamelessly? Equally suspect is, “Relations between men and the gods were lastingly undermined” (i.e. by the plague) (p. 126). I also doubt that the city controlled the details of all religious expression as tightly as Azoulay claims (p. 108), and his explanation for the absence of the myth of earth-born Athenians from the Funeral Oration in Thucydides (p. 115) seems odd. Finally, the prose is usually engaging, but the author overworks some favorite expressions (e.g., “trump card,” “upstream … downstream”), and at least one metaphor, with a shaft of light helping things rise in an ocean of ignorance (p. 13), left me scratching my head. All, by the way, are in the original French.

The next two chapters serve as hinges for the concluding historiographical review. Chapter 9 contrasts Thucydides’ detection of change for the worse following Pericles’ death with Plato’s picture of persistent corruption. Azoulay rejects both extremes, instead placing Pericles’ life within a “long-term evolution” (p. 135), in which the people tamed the elite, a process he says stabilized only in the fourth century. Chapter 10 pulls together conclusions from the preceding chapters. Azoulay gives Pericles due credit, but within strict limits. He may have initiated the monumental embellishment of Athens, for example, but he was not responsible for all of it, nor did he oversee finances or construction. Throughout, Azoulay points to checks on Pericles’ power, including the push-and-pull of negotiations between leaders and the Athenian people.

The final two chapters form a historiographical essay that could almost stand on its own. They are selective and condensed, but informative, and Azoulay moves through
the material with confidence and clarity. “Pericles in Disgrace” (ch. 11) offers three general reasons for Pericles’ languishing reputation between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries: the popularity of Plutarch; the view of history’s role as providing models of behavior; and the tendency to privilege Spartan and Roman society. In this chapter and its companion, “Pericles Rediscovered” (ch. 12), Pericles’ reputation is linked with attitudes toward Athens, since the ill repute of democracy until the nineteenth century diminished interest in both Athens and Pericles. Discussions of exceptions, like the fifteenth-century Florentine Leonardo Bruni, who emulated Thucydides, are stimulating. Equally so are the connections between attitudes toward Athens, Sparta, and Rome in Britain, France, and Germany in the first half of the twentieth century. Although long “rediscovered,” even idealized after World War II, Pericles took another hit in the twentieth century thanks to the Annales school and the anthropological turn in the discipline of history.

Azoulay concludes with advice “to accept [Pericles’] radical strangeness so as to restore to his ‘all too white statue’ the vivid colors it has lost, and, above all, accept that he has no useful lessons for our times” (p. 226). Indeed, by complicating our picture of Athens and Pericles’ relationship with the Athenians, Azoulay offers a colorful image, engaging not least because of the important “rupture” (p. 4) in the fifth century, that is, Athens’ early steps toward democracy and empire.

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