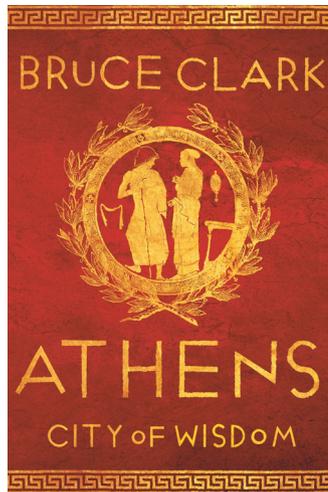


## Athens, City of Wisdom

Clark (B.), Pp. 614, maps, colour pls. London: Head of Zeus, 2021. Cased, £9.99. ISBN: 9781788548144.

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*Athens, City of Wisdom* by Bruce Clark charts the history of Athens from its mythological founding to the present day. It will be of particular interest for classicists who want to expand their knowledge beyond the classical history of Athens. Clark deals skilfully and faithfully with several thousand years of at times very complicated history, but the ease of his prose makes it a joy to read. There are times where you might feel that the narrative is oversimplified. However, this is inevitable if a

work of this magnitude is to keep to one volume and so the oversimplification can be forgiven.

Clark is a journalist who lived in Athens for four years in the 1980s and has visited regularly since. His love for and interest in the city is clear as he brings together the history of Athens. Each chapter starts with a list of the contents that will be covered which helps to navigate the book and makes it easy to dip in and out for later reference. Clark acknowledges many of his sources in the main body of the book but also gives extensive notes on the sources for each chapter at the end, including which of the ancient texts he translated himself and which of his modern sources he has known personally. He refers to conflicts within the sources, such as the discrepancies over the extent of the massacre in Athens when Sulla entered the city during the First Mithridatic War in 86 BC (p. 181). He also refers to archaeological projects and the topography of the history he retells, for example imagining standing on the eastern side of Salamis in 480 BC to watch Athens burn and the wreckage of the sea battle in the bay below (p. 55).

The first half of the book (chapters 1 to 9) charts the 'classical' or pagan history of Athens, from the first reliably dated event in Athenian history, the attempted coup of Cylon in 632 BC, to the end of paganism in the 6th century AD. These chapters chart the key narratives and events from this period, varying from giving the history of individuals such as Pericles and Alcibiades to an overview of events such as the Persian War and the Roman conquest of Greece. These chapters are therefore a good recommendation for any student of Ancient History or Classical Civilisation who wants an overview of the period. Clark also makes thoughtful comparison between ancient and modern events, for example linking the position of NATO in 1990 after the fall of communism to the

position of the Athenian empire after the defeat of Persia and the need to justify taking tribute from its allies (p. 75).

The next few chapters (10 to 12) are a dizzying whizz through the centuries of the Dark and Middle Ages, with 1000 years of history covered in about 50 pages. This long and often brutal period is tied together through the history and occupation of the Acropolis as a key defensive position, culminating in the destruction of the Parthenon by the Venetian army in 1687. Chapters 13 to 15 explore the history of Athens under the Ottoman Empire and Greece's emergence as an independent nation. Alongside the political history of this period, Clark also examines the history of European efforts to control the antiquities of Athens, including Elgin's acquisition of the Parthenon marbles, and the creative inspiration poets such as Byron found in the city.

In the final quarter of the book (chapters 16 to 21), the woes and miseries of Athens continue during the World Wars of the 20th Century down to the financial crisis in the early 2000s. In these chapters Clark focuses on the human history of Athens, including the humanitarian crisis following the influx of refugees to Athens after World War One and the attempts of successive governments to improve the city with varying levels of success. In the final chapter, Clark looks to the future of Athens and how it will overcome the pressures it faces following the financial crisis, the refugee crisis, and the aftermath of the pandemic, as well as how it will tackle climate change.

This is an extensive history of Athens which brings the city to life. Clark has woven together over 2000 years of history, drawing attention to the echoes of history that can be seen throughout this period. It must have been a labour of love for its author, but, despite being a weighty tome, it is not a labour for the reader.

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## Myths, Monsters and Mayhem in Ancient Greece

Davies (J.) Pp. 61, colour ill, colour map. London: Big Picture Press, 2021. Cased. £14.99. ISBN: 978-1-78741-641

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This might seem a disingenuous way to start a review but I don't think I can improve on these extracts from the blurb on the back cover: 'This striking comic book collection is the perfect introduction to the world of the gods – containing six tales full of love, loss, greed, envy and bravery. Bursting with detail and humour, James Davies' retelling of the Greek myths will delight readers of all ages.'

The stories are told in comic-strip format with all sorts of grotesque characters, amusingly drawn. The main stories are of Pandora's Box, Theseus and the Minotaur, Perseus and Medusa,