
Rosetta

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Review: Michael Scott, *Delphi. A History of the Center of the Ancient World*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 2014. Pp. 440, 8 colour illustrations, 41 halftones, 3 maps. £19.95. ISBN 978-0-6911-5081-9 (Hbk).

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Why Delphi? Delphi was a key site in the ancient world. Not only because of its famous oracle, which played a significant role in some of the most intriguing events in ancient Greece, but also because of its role within ancient society as a whole. Scott attempts to explore each aspect of this role: its oracle, its dedications, its games, the chronological periods of its activity, and the kinds of evidence available. The book provides a compilation of sources from different times and places and their difficulties in order to help the reader understand both how Delphi's importance in the ancient world was perceived, shaped, and changed, and how and why the sanctuary at Delphi prospered for so long.

In this book Scott has taken the three main phases of Delphi's history to be the three main parts of the book. He combined each phase with one of Shakespeare's famous lines: 'Some are born great (part I), some achieve greatness (part II), and some have greatness thrust upon them (part III)'. Part I describes the nature of Delphi's oracle and earliest history. Part II tells us about the golden age of Delphi's influence and part III shows how 'Delphi was heroised' and lived up to its reputation. The epilogue and conclusion bring the reader up to the present day, including all the difficulties faced by the excavators in uncovering the rich history of Delphi.

By the sixth century BCE the sanctuary of Delphi had a prominent role in Greek society. Scott demonstrates, however, that there is a lot more to the history of the sanctuary and its importance during major events in the Greek world than one would initially suppose. As early as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* Delphi was 'a recognised place of wealth and importance' (p.49). But Delphi is much more than the ancient centre of the world, where Greeks from all over the Mediterranean came to consult the oracle, leave dedications, or participate in the Pythian Games. Like Pausanias, Scott

focuses on 'the stories, places, objects and monuments that spoke to Greek unity and most definitely to Greece's past rather than its present' (p. 234). He also follows Pausanias in discussing only the 'objects remaining in Delphi worth recording' (10.32.2) to such an extent that anyone interested in Delphi's archaeological record for themselves, particularly the earliest material, has to plough through the French excavation reports.

It is understandable that Scott did not include all the material that is available, but more use of it could have been made to illustrate the history of the city, adding to the often cited examples of the dedications by Croesus, the Athenians, the Spartans and the Siphnians. This would have been particularly useful since, as he says, the 'Greek cities of the modern world [have] begun to stake their claim once again on ancient Delphi, (by collecting and depositing money for the reconstruction), ensuring their monuments [will] once again receive the respect they garnered so many centuries before' (p. 277).

The journey to the sanctuary starts with the oracle, the best known feature of ancient Delphi. However, modern day scholarship started with the negotiations for permission and then excavations by the French (1892-1901). This is discussed in the Epilogue which shines a light on the importance of the work and the information these excavations have provided. The process that started over a hundred years ago is summarised nicely, but a little inconveniently because it comes last. Scott calls it a 'snapshot', but in the reviewer's opinion more depth and detail is necessary to fully understand the roles the sanctuary played in the ancient Greek and Mediterranean world. As a whole, however, with the many questions that still remain for Delphi, Scott is 'looking for and providing us with the most likely possibilities'.

Unearthing Delphi has proved quite a challenge and nature has often played a destructive role in the history of Delphi - covering it up by with rocks and mud, time and again, thereby wiping out parts of its history. Both World Wars had their influence on the unearthing of Delphi as well. The First World War brought a halt to the excavation work. The Second World War led to the development of ingenious ways of protecting the uncovered materials by creating underground deposits (incidentally, just as the ancient temple wardens would have done). History appears to be repeating itself; the modern European travellers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries took

part of what was left of ancient Delphi continuing the political, cultural and intellectual discussion.

The reviewer would have liked to see more information about the excavations (especially having heard the author discuss the research in a lecture given to the Birmingham and Midlands Classical Association) and the specific artefacts that were uncovered at Delphi, but this book offers a valuable insight into the history of the Delphic sanctuary and the importance of the role it has played in Greece from ancient times until today.