

H. SANCISI-WEERDENBURG: *Peisistratos and the Tyranny. A Reappraisal of the Evidence*. Pp. xii + 183. Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 2000. Paper, Nlg 70. ISBN: 90-5063-416-8.

Sixth-century Athens is an era we ought to know something about. In fact, most of what we know about its politics (and about sixth-century politicians such as Peisistratos) comes from two sources: Herodotos, and the *Athenaion Politeia*, a source clearly based in turn on Herodotos. The problems inherent in reliance on both these sources have been much discussed. Need they be discussed again?

The contributors to this volume (based on seminar papers given in Utrecht in 1993) obviously think so. All make a stab at reassessing the various kinds of literary, epigraphic, numismatic, and archaeological evidence which has, for one reason or another, been linked to the 'Peisistratid tyranny'. Unfortunately many of the contributors succumb to the cardinal temptation of 'source based' approaches—that of letting the sources themselves dictate the questions we ask. The results are often unsatisfactory. Singor (on the military side), Blok (on Phye's procession), and Wallinga (on the *naukraroî*) are keen to tell us all they know about the sources. Their own interpretations are peppered with terms such as 'probably', 'surely', and 'must have been'. Boersma (on building activity) and Van der Vin (on coins) are, by comparison, brief and to the point (though it is a pity, in a volume that relies so heavily on material evidence, that there is not one illustration).

There are nonetheless a number of papers that take a refreshingly sceptical look at these 'sources'. The combined effect of reading Boersma, Slings (on literature), and the two excellent articles by the editor herself is to destroy any naive belief one might have had that the sources could be made to yield a coherent political narrative, or that there could be precise and meaningful correlations between a political narrative and the material record. Notions such as 'Peisistratid propaganda' or 'a Peisistratid building programme' are ruthlessly demolished. Archaeological data cannot be dated precisely enough to be linked with episodes of Peisistratid rule, and the sources for such episodes (based, it seems, on oral testimony collected from different sources several generations after the events they purport to describe) are hopelessly confused. Sancisi-Weerdenburg effectively skewers the idea that, because Herodotos is all we have, Herodotos must perforce be believed. Talk of a 'Peisistratid cultural policy' is an anachronism, as is the idea that either Peisistratos or Hippias could have occupied any well-defined position within the Athenian constitution.

But if the 'sources' cannot yield a political narrative, what is the alternative? In the time between the presentation and publication of these papers, other scholars—notably Sanne Houby-Nielsen on Athenian burials—have been quietly getting on with the business of archaeological synthesis and analysis. It may eventually, then, be possible to write a viable 'archaeological history' of sixth-century Athenian culture and politics, even if the personalities of Peisistratos and his sons remain as far away as ever.

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N. LORAUX (trans. S. Stewart): *Born of the Earth. Myth and Politics in Athens* (Myth and Poetics; first published as *Né de la terre. Mythe et politique à Athènes* [Paris, 1996]). Pp. ix + 175. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2000. Cased, £25.95. ISBN: 0-8014-3419-X.

In Stewart's excellent translation, Nicole Loraux's entire trilogy on ancient Athens (including *The Invention of Athens: The Funeral Oration in the Classical City* [Cambridge, MA, 1986] and *The Children of Athena: Athenian Ideas about Citizenship* [Princeton, 1993]) is now available in English.

Her latest work on the myth and politics of autochthony makes fascinating, yet occasionally difficult reading. As L. rightly remarks, there is no single authoritative Greek myth about the origins of humanity. Yet various myths point to one fundamental idea, namely that man is born of the Earth basically in two ways, either directly from Mother Earth as a plant rises from the soil, or made of earth as an artefact modelled by a god. The first applies, for example, to the *genos* of Athenians who claim to be a pure, autochthonous, race. The second applies, for example, to