

MATTHEW R. CHRIST: *The Bad Citizen in Classical Athens*. Cambridge University Press, New York 2006. ISBN 978-0-521-86432-9. XI, 250 pp. GBP 57, USD 94.

Matthew R. Christ's book *The Bad Citizen in Classical Athens* is not, despite the title and the pretty cover, a populist work on scandals. Instead, it focuses on studying the tensions between idealistic legislation and the realities of opportunism. Divided into sections on conscription ("The Reluctant Conscript"), cowardice in battle ("The Cowardly Hoplite"), and tax evasion ("The Artful Tax Dodger"), the book aims to prove self-interest, cowardice, and greed frequently made citizens fall short of the ideals impressed upon them by orators and group pressure.

After an introductory chapter on self-interest in Athens, Christ moves on to the avoidance of conscription and desertion in battle. The system of conscription offered many chances for manipulation: One could argue for an exemption which was given, for example, to office-holders or the sick. Alternatively, a man could use connections and bribe the generals not to select him, or simply not show up.

Perhaps the most interesting and insightful section of the book concerns cowardice in battle. Christ explores the psychology of war, the tactics strategists applied to minimize desertion, and how military successes and failures were dealt with in the polis. Familial and friendship ties could be utilized to help hold the line, but in the cases of lost battles, blame was heaped on the individual general rather than the army.

The most extensive – and cleverly named – chapter "The Artful Tax Dodger" explores the development of the *eisphora* and liturgies. Christ shows how especially military liturgies were divided more evenly among multiple individuals as time progressed, no doubt reflecting the discontent and problems caused by heaping considerable financial duties on a selected few.

The author uses an admirably wide range of literary sources: tragedy, comedy, oratory, philosophy and history. Unfortunately, he quite often does not quote or summarize the relevant passages and instead settles for references and footnotes, which require much investment on the part of the reader (to hunt down and read the passages) and make the book heavy going, at least for the casual – or non-specialist – reader.

Another problem with *The Bad Citizen in Classical Athens* is the very limitations set on research by the dearth of evidence. As Christ himself argues, Athenians were keen to uphold their ideals, at least in public, and this leaves the academic to speculate based on what was *not* said at the Assembly and on how much we can trust the speeches of the accused and the accuser in court. Occasionally, this drives Christ to push forward seemingly unlikely arguments. He, for example, suggests Athenians preferred military service to paying taxes such as the *eisphora* since while one might make it out of battle alive, there is no escaping the tax collectors. Without evidence to prove or disprove this claim, the reader is left confused since one of the chapters is devoted to proving how reluctant Athenians were to face battle.

Despite these issues, *The Bad Citizen in Classical Athens* is a worthwhile introduction for anyone interested in ancient legislation, taxation and the clashes between ideals and reality in the upper echelons of society.

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