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**Review: Corinth in late antiquity: a Greek, Roman, and Christian city, by Amelia R. Brown**

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on a range of topics pertaining to the world of Late Antiquity and will also be a useful pedagogical tool for those seeking to unravel the complexities of the *Collectio Avellana* for the first time.

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Amelia R. Brown, *Corinth in Late Antiquity: A Greek, Roman, and Christian City*. London and New York: I.B. Taurus & Co. Ltd, 2018. xiv + 341 pp., 35 bw illustrations. ISBN 978178453831. \$59.99 (paperback).

There are few urban centers so rich in late antique archaeology as Corinth, the city near the Isthmus of Greece. Excavations there since 1896 by staff and students of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens have generated an enormous corpus of information related to the Roman forum and its surroundings. Other major projects in the region carried out by Greeks and Americans especially have shed light on Corinth's harbors, Isthmian sanctuary, fortifications, Christian basilicas, and rural sites and villas. Collectively, archaeology has produced such rich evidence for Late Antiquity in this region that a barrage of specialized studies over the last generation have effectively overturned old historical narratives of urban decay.

*Corinth in Late Antiquity* (hereafter, *CLA*) marks the first serious attempt to bring together hundreds of technical articles, books, and epigraphic and literary evidence in a comprehensive synthesis of the later Roman city. In its embrace of "all the available sources for the Corinthian city center and urban public life" (8) between the second and seventh centuries, the book differs fundamentally from other recent studies of individual late antique sites, buildings, and features (e.g., *Corinth*, *Isthmia*, or *Kenchreai* series volumes) and from the thematic explorations of specific elements of life in the late antique city (e.g., Richard Rothaus' important study of late polytheistic contexts). Brown's picture of late antique urbanism affirms these earlier works by emphasizing vibrant continuities and complex redefinitions but makes its case at the ambitious scale of the entire city. In this respect, *CLA* constitutes a work of immense practical value in that it surveys a myriad of specialist literature to identify and highlight threads of continuity and change.

The work has two aims that guide its content and organization. First, the book comprises a critical reappraisal of the role of authorities in the late

antique city and region between the third and sixth centuries. As the capital of the province of Achaia and the see of the archbishop, Corinth was host to local, ecclesiastical, and imperial authorities for over half a millennium. Leadership initially included the provincial governor and his staff together with elite landowners and city council members, and, eventually, imperial agents of Constantinople and the church hierarchy. Brown seeks to show that while administrative boundaries and authorities changed during this long period, elites remained central agents in urban life, even at those moments when old public buildings were extensively demolished (civic authorities, after all, organized the demolition: 112 and 164).

The book's other apparent goal is to provide an introductory survey of Corinth in the Roman and late antique periods. It does this through efficient description (191 pages plus endnotes), brief chapters (typically 10–20 pages), 35 figures (maps, plans, and photos), and two valuable appendixes summarizing relevant textual evidence (inscriptions and literary testimonia) and the history of American excavations at Corinth. This aim of surveying explains why the text strays so often from its explicit parameters (third through sixth centuries) to discuss the entirety of the known city (and territory) from origins to medieval times, including even areas and buildings without clear late antique archaeological remains or phases. Indeed, the second-century writer Pausanias, rather than the presence of late antique archaeological remains, is the organizing guide to several chapters. Occasionally this twofold purpose of making an argument and offering a survey leads to incongruences: a section on urban and rural domestic space, for example, seems out of place in a chapter on spaces of civic administration (Ch. 2). Generally, though, the work offers a useful summary of what has been said about the city while also advancing a broad and compelling case for vitality of leadership in the later centuries of antiquity.

*CLA* unfolds through eight chapters structured around the theme of continuity and change in authority, amenities, and public space. The first three underscore the constancies of urban life. Chapter 1 offers a cursory introduction to Corinth's topography, connective landscape, and history of scholarship before turning to the changing composition of the city's ruling class in Late Antiquity. Chapters 2 and 3 argue that, despite discontinuities in traditional religious spaces and civic basilicas around 400 C.E., the Roman forum remained a central place for political display and public commercial life into the later fifth or sixth century, evident through new investments and refurbishments. Chapters 4 and 5, in contrast, emphasize the ruptures in Corinthian urbanism.

Investments in major entertainment spaces such as the odeum, theater, gymnasium, and stadium ended dramatically in the first half of the fifth century as imperial officials diverted resources to other projects, especially Corinth's massive fortification walls (72). Similarly, public statues of Corinthian and imperial elite formed a constant presence in and around the forum until their intentional and systematic destruction by order of civic officials in the late fifth and sixth centuries.

The next two chapters cover sacred space, with Chapter 6 describing sites in the forum and Chapter 7 detailing those elsewhere in Corinth and its territory. The discussion of traditional religious spaces tends to focus on what Pausanias says about shrines and temples, making only occasional note of specifically late antique evidence for these sites. The presentation of evidence for Christianization in the city and region, on the other hand, offers a clear discussion of churches given current knowledge of their chronology. Brown's overview underlines both the absence of early Christian basilicas in the forum and an apparent association of these buildings with cemeteries and former sanctuaries beyond the forum. Chapter 8, the last main chapter, provides a compelling overview of how major new investments in urban and regional fortifications impacted public architecture at Corinth and Isthmia: the ubiquitous reuse of old building material to construct these new edifices explains why it is challenging to study public architecture at these sites today.

While the book comprises a powerful and sweeping refutation of the old plauging image of Corinth in decline, its other major contribution lies in its accumulation and exhibition of a vast array of scattered studies and evidence. The book is a veritable goldmine of bibliographic research (numbering over 1,500 entries) and interesting facts and finds that are often buried in specialist publications less known beyond the narrow circuit of Corinthian scholarship. We read, for example, of the governor's granaries at Corinth in 401/2 CE and the entanglement of the region in ecclesiastical disputes of Rome and Thessalonica. We encounter curious and intriguing contexts: an acclamation to the emperor Theodosius found in a quarry near the eastern harbor Kenchreai, and the destruction debris from a commercial *peribolos* that buried the building's occupants alongside their money bags. We meet interesting individuals in epigraphy and sculpture, such as the bishop's muleteer, a boy comedian, a third-century gladiator, a doctor of horses, pickle-sellers, a fireman, benefactresses, and beast hunters who dedicated a statue to

their doctor. The study's encyclopedic character will make it a valuable starting point for any explorations of the city's history in Roman and late antique times.

The cost of this broad canvas, however, is depth of research, such that readers will need to constantly examine whether specific claims in the text are justified by the documented evidence and level of argumentation. One should be wary, for example, of breezy assertions about the region's population ("about 30,000 in the second century, and into Late Antiquity," 25) when endnotes indicate a wide range of modern estimates and methods of estimation; or statements on the quantity of coinage in the fourth century ("more than from any other century but the twelfth," 57) citing studies now 70 years old. One must likewise watch out for overstatements such as the Roman bath at Isthmia remaining in use for several hundred years beyond the mid-fourth century (citing an unrelated article from 2016; 82): the bath was half-collapsed after 400 C.E. and served only as a site of storage and limited occupation. Brown's democratic approach in embracing a wide array of modern scholarship often equalizes studies of different methodological type and quality. When discussing domestic space, for example, the results of salvage digs are summarized alongside those of systematic stratigraphic excavations without noting their differences (45–51), while an early fifth-century construction date of the trans-Isthmus Hexamilion wall, based on a series of secure stratigraphic deposits, is dismissed (without clear reason) in favor of a date perhaps as "early as the middle of the fifth century" (153). References to dates sometimes also raise concerns. How confident should we be that hairstyle, quality, and carving depth in statues can pinpoint specific decades in the fourth or fifth centuries (86–87), given the challenges of stylistic dating and the constant and complex reuse of statues documented in Chapter 5? A tendency to cite archaeological reports without consistently noting the basis for chronology prompts questions about reliability given the latest downdating of ceramic chronologies at Corinth and critical scholarship about the circulation and differential survival of late Roman coinage. It is worth emphasizing here that this work's description of archaeological evidence largely reflects a summary of what excavators have reported about buildings and contexts rather than an original reanalysis of the primary evidence itself. A systematic reexamination of contexts and assemblages in terms of new knowledge of pottery and coinage could alter the phases of major urban changes outlined in the work.

These concerns do not diminish this book's picture of a thriving urban center in the later Roman era, even as they invite us to dig into the original primary and secondary sources that lay at its foundation. In that sense,

Brown has offered scholars of Late Antiquity and students of the Corinthia an immensely useful resource: a point of departure for deeper exploration of a major provincial capital transformed by local elite and imperial intervention in antiquity's final centuries.

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