

GREEK ARCHAIC CHRONOLOGY

KELLNER (A.) *Die griechische Archaik. Konstruktion einer Chronologie im Wechselspiel schriftlicher und archäologischer Quellen.* (Philippika 156.) Pp. xii+465, fig., ills, maps. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2022. Cased, €128. ISBN: 978-3-447-11780-7.
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K.'s thesis about the chronology of archaic Greece is easily summarised: almost everything we think we know about archaic Greek chronology is based on flimsy foundations and circular argument. This is not in itself a new idea, and K. duly acknowledges important critical studies of Greek chronography such as P.-J. Shaw's *Discrepancies in Olympiad Dating* (2003) and P. Christesen's *Olympic Victor Lists* (2007) that cover much of the same ground. K.'s book goes beyond earlier work, however, in offering a comprehensive account of all kinds of evidence that might in principle enable us to date events and developments in the archaic period, not just chronographic, but literary, archaeological, art historical and scientific, including crucial material from cuneiform texts. An impressive range of expertise is on display, and it is especially noteworthy that K. is able to discuss barely legible cuneiform signs in as much detail and with as much confidence as the Greek textual and material record.

After a short introduction, which is largely a summary of the chapters to follow (just as in place of a conclusion there is a 'Resümee' that summarises what went before), and a chapter that considers the historiography of the concept of an 'archaic' age, Chapter 3 turns to ancient chronography. K. takes a sceptical view of the reliability of the Athenian archon list for the period before 500 BCE (pp. 34–52), as well as the Olympic Victor list (pp. 52–75), and the basis on which ancient chronographers arrived at their dates (pp. 75–100), including a brief discussion of the Spartan king lists (pp. 88–90). Chapter 4 looks at the way in which classical authors dated events before formal chronological schemes were developed: generation counts (including a second look at the Spartan king lists, pp. 117–19), inscriptions and other textual material, oral traditions and foundation dates – all deemed of limited or questionable value. Chapter 5 addresses the vexed question of Thucydides' foundation dates for Sicilian 'colonies', on which, as is well known, early Corinthian (and by extension Greek) pottery chronology rests heavily. K. agrees with those who worry about circularity when archaeology is said to vindicate Thucydides' dates although archaeological dating ultimately derives from Thucydides' dates. If all this is relatively well-trodden ground, Chapters 6 and 7 branch out to discuss the possibility of finding absolute dates in the cuneiform record: questions are raised about the usefulness for dating purposes of the destructions of Hamath by Sargon II in 720 BCE (pp. 262–7), the sack of Sardis by Cyrus in 547/6 (pp. 270–87) and the foundation dates of Carthage and other Phoenician cities in the western Mediterranean (pp. 289–322). Only Nebuchadnezzar's sack of Ashkelon in 604 BCE survives scrutiny and is accepted as a reliable indication of the date of Transitional and Early Corinthian pottery (pp. 267–70). Chapter 8 discusses doubts about dating criteria for Attic black-figure pottery, and the final Chapter 9 delivers the news that dendrochronology is not yet sufficiently developed for the Mediterranean region to be of much use, while the so-called *Hallstattplateau* means that carbon-dating cannot tell the difference between dates in the range 800 to 400 BCE and is thus for the archaic period of no use at all (esp. p. 353). A vast bibliography (77 pages) and a 'Stellenregister', but sadly no general index, close the volume.

The results of K.'s careful discussions are almost wholly negative, in line with her stated aim of presenting a 'descriptive analysis' (p. 363) of the problems posed by the

evidence. The book does not follow this demolition job with an effort to construct even a bare framework of a more reliable chronology. It does not try to explain why different authors arrived at different dates, which is potentially one way of differentiating between more and less reliable information. It does not try to establish a hierarchy of more and less valid types of data either, preferring to point out that genealogies, synchronisms, written lists and so forth each have their own problems. Nor does the book suggest ways in which various pieces of evidence that are individually open to challenge can be combined to create a fairly robust structure on the ‘wigwam’ principle. Maybe this is asking too much of an already long and detailed study. On the other hand, some thoughts along these lines seem an almost necessary counterpart to the identification of problems with the evidence, unless K. wants us to conclude that we simply do not know enough about archaic Greece to write any sort of history of the period.

Despite its one-sided approach, the book is sufficiently comprehensive to enable readers who are so inclined to draw more positive conclusions from it. For example, if the sack of Ashkelon in 604 BCE is a reliable chronological anchor, which confirms that the Early Corinthian style started not long before that date, it surely follows that from the late seventh century onwards there is a reliably dated pottery sequence for Corinth. Insofar as early Attic black-figure painting is dated by stylistic parallels with Corinthian ware, there is a reliable Attic sequence as well, and if the earliest Panathenaic amphorae fit around 570–560 in that sequence, we may conclude that Eusebius’ date for the first Great Panathenaea, 566 BCE, cannot be far wrong. The date might still be out by a few years in either direction (pp. 343–7), but that would only matter if archaic Greek historians wrote the kinds of histories of events in which years, months and days make a difference, rather than broader developmental histories that deal in quarter-centuries or at best decades.

On occasion, even a precise year might be retrievable. The main purpose of K.’s extended and extremely interesting discussion of the date of Cyrus’ sack of Sardis is to show that we cannot be sure that the Babylonian ‘Nabonidus chronicle’ under this king’s ninth regnal year (547/6 BCE) reported Cyrus’ invasion of Lydia, since the damaged first cuneiform sign could be read as SU, U and ZU rather than LU for Lydia (pp. 279–86). K. proclaims her conclusion that one cannot tell which reading is right ‘eine sehr wertvolle Erkenntnis’ (p. 285), presumably on the grounds that this pulls the rug from under yet another archaic date that had seemed stable. Yet no suggestions are offered for countries starting with SU or ZU that Cyrus might have conquered instead, while for U the only possibility suggested is Urartu, which was no longer in existence as a major power by Cyrus’ time. So even if LU is not certainly legible, it seems the best or indeed the only candidate. If one further bears in mind that the same chronicle mentions no campaigns by Cyrus in the two years before or after this; that the Greek chronographers are in near-agreement for once (offering a range of dates for the capture of Sardis as narrow as 548/7 to 545/4 BCE: p. 278, table 25); and that the Greek pottery associated with a destruction level at Sardis dates mostly to the mid-sixth century and includes nothing later than 540 BCE (p. 286), a reasonable conclusion would be that the Nabonidus chronicle referred to Cyrus’ attack on Lydia and dated it to the month Ajaru of year 9, i.e. April/May 546 BCE.

Most ‘traditional’ dates for key events in archaic history are unreliable, and K.’s book is a sobering, systematic and valuable inventory of what we do not know. With the ground now more thoroughly cleared than ever, we should not leave it a wasteland but start rebuilding.

University College London

HANS VAN WEES

h.wees@ucl.ac.uk