A MESSENIAN HERO

D. OGDEN: *Aristomenes of Messene. Legends of Sparta's Nemesis*. Pp. xxiv + 244, map, ill. Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2004. Cased. ISBN: 0-9543845-4-7.

Aristomenes, the legendary hero of the Second Messenian War, and the subject of much of Book 4 of Pausanias' *Periegesis*, is an intriguing and much-neglected figure. Daniel Ogden's reconstruction of the ways in which Aristomenes may have been represented across many centuries of shifting narrative tradition goes a long way towards compensating for that neglect.

The book opens in Chapter 1 with a survey of the Aristomenes material Pausanias presents us with. O. rejects both 'literary' approaches, which seek to explain Aristomenes' presentation in terms of Pausanias' wider aims, and conventional 'historical' approaches, which search for the 'real' Aristomenes, in favour of a history of the multifaceted Aristomenes narrative itself, an approach justified in outline in Chapter 2. He then proceeds to dissect the range of symbolic resonances and alternative versions which have gone into the making of the charismatic and complex figure Pausanias presents us with.

In Chapter 3, for example, O. argues that the Achillean overtones of Aristomenes' character show signs of being overlaid with Odyssean and even Aesopic qualities, where Aristomenes fits the narrative pattern of the hero-buffoon. In Chapters 4–6 he argues that the presence of a number of basic motifs replayed in many different forms is a sign that a few basic Aristomenes story types were reused in wide range of different ways within popular tradition. He discusses, for example, the recurring motif of Aristomenes' shield and his repeated association with the underworld. And in Chapter 7, O. recounts the story of Aristomenes' hairy heart, which, he suggests, overlaps closely with tales told about Aristomenes' counterpart from the first Messenian war, Aristodemus, arguing that both of these legendary figures grew up around the same narrative paradigms. Finally, in Chapter 8 O. argues persuasively, although (as he acknowledges) inconclusively, that the many-sidedness of Aristomenes arises partly from the fact that a range of different communities contributed their own versions of these basic stories. The work ends with three detailed appendices: one reconstructing the rôle of Aristomenes in Rhianus' *Messeniaca*; one on discussions of Aristomenes in a great range of other ancient texts, from Tyrtaeus to Stephanus of Byzantium; and one on the afterlife of Aristomenes in modern European and Middle-Eastern literature.

The book as a whole is often surprisingly reticent about its conclusions. The opening sentences of the text lay out two reasons why we should care about Aristomenes: because his story is 'entertaining' (that is undeniable—and O.'s own book is often entertaining, especially in the wealth of sometimes obscure details it produces in its central chapters); and because 'the legend reflects, however dimly, the voice, self-identity, memories and aspirations of the Messenian people'. Both of those reasons are compelling ones, but I often found myself wishing the author had taken the second issue a step further, by discussing in more depth other evidence for Messenian identity forming, or by exploring from a more theoretical perspective the processes by which communal memory and communal narrative are formed and transmitted. Those issues are gestured towards often, but they are rarely given any sustained attention, and the book as a whole is short (just over 160 pages of main text, not counting appendices). Many of the chapters, and indeed the conclusion of the

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book as a whole, come to an end just when one might expect such a widening of perspective. For example, the claim that Pausanias' version carries the traces of a 'popular tradition' of Aristomenes stories (Chapter 2) is stated very baldly, without any interrogation of what the term 'popular tradition' really means, or of why it might have mattered to anyone to tell these stories in these ways.

This reviewer (as someone coming to the book mainly from an interest in Pausanias and Imperial Greek literature) would also have liked to see more determined discussion of the question of how Pausanias' own text operates. Admittedly O. is very much aware of that possible avenue of investigation, in fact he turns away from it quite deliberately, resisting the current fashion for seeing Pausanias and his Imperial Greek counterparts as writers who organize their material primarily in order to explore issues of contemporary relevance. His rejection of that project is, however, to my mind too rushed. The decisive moment in this argument is the brief section at pp. 16–18, where he discusses, and criticizes, the ideas of Janick Auberger, who has argued in two separate articles that the Pausanias' narrative is influenced by the narrative patterns of the Greek novels; and that Pausanias is interested in Aristomenes partly as a paradigm of leadership against which to measure up contemporary Greek and Roman constructions of heroism and military prowess.

Admittedly Auberger's arguments are not conclusive, and O. is honest about his own preference for not dissecting Pausanias' own agenda in any depth himself. But he also seems to my mind too dismissive of the possibility that such an approach might be a useful one at all. One of the things which struck me in reading O.'s account is simply that his own enterprise is in many ways a Pausanian one. It seems quite plausible, for example, that Pausanias himself may be responsible for some of the patterning O. notices in the Aristomenes story, given the care with which he arranges his material elsewhere in the *Periegesis*. Could not Pausanias himself be partly responsible for foregrounding the parallels between Aristomenes and Aristodemus or the prominence of Aristomenes' shield?—patterns which O. views solely as consequences of 'popular tradition'. And in Chapter 8, O.'s fascination with the way in which different communities reshape and record the heroes and wars of the distant past in line with their own preoccupations in the present is itself a very Pausanian theme. To some extent it is anticipated by the way in which Pausanias threads passing references to the Messenians through other books, showing us how the historical heritage of the exiled Messenians has left its traces across mainland Greece. None of that invalidates O.'s challenging arguments. But perhaps Pausanias should perhaps be given more credit for those insights than O. offers him.

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GREEK TRADERS

C. M. Reed: *Maritime Traders in the Ancient Greek World*. Pp. xiv + 162, maps. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Cased, £40, US$60. ISBN: 0-521-26848-6.

This is a little gem of a book. In just eighty-one pages of text and fifty-one pages of useful appendices, Professor Reed argues three connected theses. First, he suggests that 'those trading at Classical Athens were mainly poor and foreign (hence politically inert)'. Nevertheless, he adds, their economic importance was such that

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