

РЕЦЕНЗИИ

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**Pro et contra of Athenian democracy. Review of the monograph:
Монева Стела. Атинската демокрация – епизоди от историята.
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Active discussions about Athenian democracy were already conducted by ancient authors in the past, and they still continue to arise among modern classical researchers¹. In this regard, the publication of the monograph by the Bulgarian researcher Stela Moneva is of considerable interest, especially since the author offers a truly original view of the advantages and disadvantages of the democratic system of the Athenian state. In the introduction, the researcher emphasizes that she seeks to reflect an objective view of this political system, «без тя да се очерня или идеализира, доколкото идеалът за историка винаги се състои в това да представи историческата истина» (i.e. “without denigrating and not idealizing it, since the ideal for the historian is always the reflection of historical truth”) (p. 8).

Note that this is the second monograph by Assoc. Prof. Stela Moneva, dedicated to the peculiarities of the Athenian democratic system², in which the author

¹ Differences in the views of ancient thinkers on the problem of democracy are presented in sufficient detail in the article by S. M. Kudryavtseva (Kudryavtseva 2008a, 112–126).

² The first monograph by S. Moneva was published by the publishing house of the University of Veliko T'rnovo “Saints Cyril and Methodius” in 2009 (Moneva 2009).

considered even small remarks about the specifics of the functioning of democracy in Athens, made in a review of her earlier work. In particular, we are talking about such a “dark side” of Athenian democracy, as the prevalence of the phenomenon of denunciation-sycophantism (p. 102–108) (Ruchynska 2011, 251).

The general idea of this book is to show the specifics of Athenian democracy through the prism of individual episodes and phenomena in the history of Athens in the VI-IV centuries BC. The basis of the author's approach is a naturalistic, scientific and aesthetic principle associated with interdisciplinary approaches. This method allows us to compare the realities of life with the theoretical conventions of democracy in Athens, capture the variability of human behavior in the face of both the leaders of Athenian democracy and the demos, and, accordingly, identify the positive and negative features of this phenomenon.

The structure of the monograph is also built in accordance with the main idea. It consists of a short preface, three chapters, subdivided into problematic paragraphs, a bibliographic list and a short summary in English, which outlines the main points of the work.

The search for justification or denial of Athenian democracy can be traced already in the first chapter of “Historiographic Notes” («Историографски бележки»), mainly focused on the study of French, German and English-American historiography. The presentation of the material in the first paragraph “for” and “against” Athenian democracy” («За» и «против» атинската демократија) (p. 9–20) is built in a problem-chronological plan and is focused on those studies that either reflect sympathy to Athenian democracy or, on the contrary, express the views of its opponents. The author of the monograph is notably fascinated by studies that highlight the negative features of democracy in Athens. In particular, she analyzes the point of view of the Canadian researcher E. Wood (Wood 1989) about the unequal position of the Athenian citizens who lived on the territory of the chora and were literally on the verge of physical survival (p. 10). A negative evaluation of the democratic processes in Athens is also highlighted in the works of German researchers (p. 11). For example, the point of view of E. Drerup about the Athenian

polis as a “republic of lawyers”, in which orators (“lawyers”) induced the demos to pernicious actions (Drerup 1916, 85, 158). At the same time, S. Moneva criticizes the exaggerations of the negative aspects of Athenian democracy, expressed in some European studies. For instance, she points to the contradictions in the concept of the French researcher C. Mosset about the “political class” – i.e. a limited circle of citizens who took part in real political life (Mosse 1994). According to the researcher, this went against the dynamics of the development of democracy in Athens (p. 12). It should be noted that S. Moneva does not disregard those studies that emphasize the positive experience of Athenian democracy. (p. 16–20). These are the works of Arnold Jones (Jones 1957), Moses Finly (Finly 1973) and Eric Robinson, who, in particular, argued for the wide distribution of the characteristic elements of Greek democracy by the beginning of the VI century BC (Robinson 1997, 73–120). The second paragraph («Някои концепции за характера на атинската демокрация») gives a generalized idea of the existing concepts regarding the nature of Athenian democracy, ranging from “direct” (Laslett 1956) and “representative democracy” (Osborne 1985) to “hoplite”, “rural”, “radical democracy” (p. 22–26). Based on a selective analysis of concepts in modern English-language literature, the author of the monograph concludes that it is currently impossible to finally solve the problem of the nature of Athenian democracy. At the same time, S. Moneva notes that the contradictions in existing concepts reflect various stages in the development of the political system of Athens in the course of the formation of the Athenian polis as the highest form of a democratic system (p. 26).

In the second chapter, “A Look at Political Life” («Поглед към политическия живот»), author considers several of the most important moments, which, from her point of view, formed the features of the political life of Athens. First of all, the definition of the special role of the Areopagus, as a state authority that protected the law. This is discussed in the first paragraph of «Съветът на ареопага при Солоне и νομοφυλακία-та» (p. 27–36). S. Moneva seeks to clarify the controversial issue regarding the institution of Nomophylaxis and its connection with the activities of the Areopagus. The researcher concludes that the Areopagus in the time of Solon

acquired the functions of control over the activities of the magistrates. In her opinion, this was “one of the first (not the only one), but also the last experience of defending Athenian legislation” (p. 35)¹. Author considers the right to freedom of speech as the second important point related to the Athenian experience of democracy. In the paragraph «Свободата на словото в контекста на Солоновите реформи» (p. 37–48), based on an analysis of the narrative tradition, S. Moneva expresses an opinion that since the time of Solon, public speaking has been strictly limited to certain moral norms and has been a legitimate method of influencing the minds of citizens caused by the needs of sociopolitical consent (p. 46–47). The further history of Athenian democracy, according to the author, showed that the right to freedom of speech was monopolized by ambitious individuals. The reason for this was the competition in public statements, which, in its turn, led to deformations in the thinking of the Athenians, the abuse of freedom of speech, violations of laws, etc. (p. 48). In the paragraph «Перикъл: име и прозвища» the name of the leader of the Athenian democracy and his nicknames are studied, based on the methods of anthroponymy and micro-anthroponymy. (p. 49-59). The author notes the two-component origin of the name Pericles, consisting of the prefix “peri-” (“over”, “absolutely”, “absolutely exclusively”) and the multi-valued lexeme “-cle/ -cley”, “-cles” (“glorious”, “eminent”, “famous”). Translated from ancient Greek, this allows us to interpret the name of Pericles as “illustrious, famous” (p. 53). At the same time, the emphasis is on the connection of the name of Pericles with his genealogy, rooted in the noble families of the Bouzygai and Alcmaeonids. The aristocracy of his origin was manifested in the final component of the name “-cles” (Pericles), which, from the point of view of S. Moneva, is a sign of a social status (p. 55). Analyzing the nicknames of Pericles - the Olympian and Skinokephalus, the researcher notes his unique oratorical and personal abilities. According to ancient authors, the Olympian Pericles received the nickname due to the “gift of the word” and the ability to use words like the thunderbolts of Zeus the Thunderer. The same talent likened him to the goddess of persuasion – Peitho. (p. 57, 59). The second nickname – Skinokephalos

¹ A similar view on the activities of the Areopagus is expressed by other researchers. Gushchin 2009, 17–18.

was associated with his bodily defect – an oversized pointed head, similar to a sea bulb. Analyzing the works of Plutarch, Thucydides, Aristophanes, S. Moneva notes that this nickname was not of a negative nature, since the unique personal qualities of Pericles (broad political outlook, theoretical knowledge, artistic taste, logical mind) significantly exceeded the desire of contemporaries to point out his physical imperfection (p. 56). In the fourth paragraph («Демагози и демагогия») author carefully analyzes the narrative tradition and Greek terminology and notes the connection between the origin of the terms “demagogue”, “demagogy” and the democratic form of government in Athens. (p. 60). S. Moneva notes that demagogues played an extremely important role both in the Athenian Assembly (Ecclesia) and in the Council of 500 (Boule). This provided them with “great opportunities to put forward various initiatives, attracting the attention of the demos” (p. 64). An important point, that the researcher draws attention to, is the origin of demagogues. The ancient tradition laid down stable ideas about demagogues as people of low social origin, mainly merchants and artisans. However, S. Moneva notes that the peculiarities of their public activities suggested the presence of personal wealth for teaching the art of the word. The researcher concludes the viability of these political leaders, who were excellent orators, influential people and were by no means poor representatives of the demos (p. 65). Over time, the desire for power and wealth leads to the fact that “the crowd turns into an instrument of greedy demagogues, and they, in turn, become prisoners of their own system” (p. 69). The term “demagogue” gains a negative meaning and transforms into “demagogy”, focused on creating “fabricated consent” with the help of skillful public speeches of orators, which S. Moleva defines as the main feature of Athenian political life in the 20s of the V century BC (p. 70). The position of the author is fully argued in relation to the methods and features of decision-making in the conditions of Athenian democracy, which are defined in the fifth paragraph. (p. 71–82). The author gives the right to complain about illegality a special role in the adoption of laws, which contributed to the preservation of the democratic system (c. 77)¹. At the same time, the researcher seeks to clarify all stages

¹ This issue is well studied in modern historiography. Kudryavtseva 2008b.

of the adoption of laws from consideration of the proposal to the final choice, relying on good knowledge of the ancient tradition. (p. 78–79). In the sixth paragraph («Демократия и коррупция»), S. Moneva quite fairly focuses on the propensity of Athenian political leaders to corruption and venality (p. 83–101). With the perfect knowledge of the modern literature on this issue and analyzing the sources, she notes several ways to limit the possibility of bribery (oaths of elected persons; casting lots; the numerous compositions of the Ecclesia, Heliaia; the collective nature of Boule and magistracies) and punishment for corruption (from the erection of golden statues to the confiscation of property and even proclaiming the death penalty) (p. 96–97). The author rightly notes that in the Athenian democratic system an atmosphere of public intolerance towards corruption in the political environment was created, which was expressed in public persecution, condemnation and punishment of those responsible (p. 101). The seventh paragraph «Демократия и доносы» The seventh paragraph "Democratization and informing" is devoted to consideration of the reasons for the appearance of informers-sycophants and the attitude towards them in Athenian society. The researcher believes that the term “sycophant” acquires its negative meaning as a spy, informer from the 30s of the V century BC, and in the IV century BC the phenomenon of sycophancy has become widespread (p. 108).

In the last section of the monograph “Women and Democracy” («Жени и демократия») expresses a point of view about the access of some Athenian women to occupying a certain position in society and the possibility of their public speaking, which is reflected in theatrical performances. In real life, such women were endowed with special epithets and names (“wise”, “wise as a man”, “philosopher woman”) (p. 109–119). The second paragraph of this section is also of considerable interest. It is based on the speeches of Lysias, which reproduce the picture of the active participation of women-citizens in the burial of fellow citizens, as one of the elements of their daily life and, at the same time, a way of participating in public life (p. 119–129).

It should be emphasized that the book is written in a good literary style and is read with great interest. The bibliographic index presents a significant number of studies on the considered issue, including the latest ones.

Some surprise is caused only by the absence of such a conceptual part of the study as a conclusion, which would make it possible to explain the “selectivity” of the episodes in the history of Athenian democracy presented in the work. A holistic vision of the problem requires more solid conclusions. The author of the study does not always clearly express her position on certain aspects of the history of Athenian democracy, but only focuses on identifying its positive and negative sides. There is a small number of typos and errors in Greek quotations, mainly in diacritical marks – the lack of aspiration or individual inaccuracies in the placement of stresses (p. 35, note 99; p. 40, 53, 77, 106). Here are some of the most typical examples. On p. 35, note 99, the term εισαγγελία is indicated instead of the correct εἰσαγγελία. On p. 40, the term ρητωρ is indicated instead of the correct ῥήτωρ. On p. 77, the term γραφή παρανόμων is indicated instead of the correct γραφή παρανόμων.

The above remarks do not in any way affect the overall positive impression of the reviewed study, which offers an original perspective on Athenian democracy. There is every reason to believe that this work will take its rightful place in the historiographic tradition associated with this important phenomenon of ancient history.

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