

## PREFACE

Gabriel Herman

This volume originated in an international conference of the same name, *Stability and Crisis in the Athenian Democracy*, held at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem on 29–30 October, 2008. The conference, organized by Israel Shatzman and the present writer under the auspices of the Hebrew University's Authority for Research and Development, was dedicated to the memory of Alexander Fuks (1917–1978), beloved teacher of some of the participants, source of inspiration to others. All the articles, barring that of the present writer, were delivered as papers at the conference.<sup>1</sup> Comprehensive coverage of the subject matter was never claimed, but all the contributions were composed with the question of the stability of the Athenian democracy in mind. Each article was critically reviewed by the remaining participants, at first orally, immediately after delivery, and later by email, following the circulation of the final written versions.

As the reader will observe, none of the participants have adopted the view that has lately won some currency in research, namely that Athenian society was much given to lawlessness and feuding, and as such was unstable. In the present writer's opinion the reason for this non-concurrence would appear to be the extreme difficulty, if not impossibility, of reconciling that view with the picture that emerges from an overview of Athens' performance through almost two hundred years of democratic rule (508–322 B. C.), a picture whose details point to unusual stability, as judged by the standard of ancient states.

The articles assembled in this volume fall into two groups, in accordance with the questions they address. Wallace and the present writer tackle problems of method, asking which approaches would be the most appropriate (and by implication, the most inappropriate) for assessing the stability of a social system, with the example of classical Athens foremost in mind. Rhodes, Low, Epstein, Zelnick-Abramovitz, Schaps and Yakobson confront the issue of stability head-on, asking how the Athenians coped with the forces which threatened to de-stabilize their society, in all its multifarious compartments and fields of activity. It will be up to the reader to judge the extent to which these authors have succeeded in their enterprise.

1 The paper that I originally delivered, "The Best Few and the Bad Many: Decision Making in the Athenian Democracy" was already committed when the conference took place. It is now published in H. Lohmann and T. Mattern (eds.), *Attika – Archäologie einer 'zentralen' Kulturlandschaft* (Philippika. Marburger altertumskundliche Abhandlungen 37, Wiesbaden 2010) 231–244.