Michael Jung (J.) is the author of an impressive book about how the battles of Marathon and Plataiai were represented and commemorated all through antiquity until the fourth century AD. Changing times and circumstances made for changing forms of commemoration, which J. traces in monuments, in cults and festivals, in literature, inscriptions and archaeology. This is a massive work of 397 pages of text, plus 24 pages of lists of sources and bibliography. In the footnotes which take up some 140 pages of his text, J. spares no effort to discuss the vast research in minute detail. Some readers would probably willingly have exchanged part of this formidable erudition for an index locorum and a register. But everyone will appreciate the summaries of his five chapters dealing with Marathon and four with Plataiai. The opening chapter explains the meaning of 'lieux de mémoire', and chapter ten is a summary of the whole work.

The first Marathon chapter deals with commemoration in cult and ritual. The local cult of the Marathonian tetrapolis was taken over shortly after the battle and expanded by the Athenian polis, Herakles and other local heroes being promoted to the status of polis heroes, and the victory being used to integrate the whole of Attika into the polis and the Kleisthenic democracy. Integration was likewise the intention of a new cult of Pan who had aided the Athenians in the battle; as a god of the countryside he opened the polis more to the rural population. Artemis Agrotera had also assisted at Marathon, and so her cult was enlarged with offerings and a festival bearing a military stamp, designed to imprint the military values in the young hoplites-to-be.

In ch. 3 J. discusses the memorial of Kallimakhos, the polemarkh who fell in the battle of Marathon; a private monument, but set up in the public location of Akropolis, by another person in the name of the dead polemarkh, as J. has it. In the last line of the inscription he refers παῖες Ἀθηναίων, ‘the sons of the Athenians’, to the hoplite army (p. 79). In Delphi, he does not follow Pausanias in connecting the treasury of the Athenians with Marathon but prefers the war against the Boiotians and Khalkidians in 506. Only the phyleheroes originally placed beside the building are connected with Marathon, J. arguing that together, the building and the heroes constituted a memorial of the defence of freedom and the young democracy put up by the hoplites against Greek and Persian foes. So far Marathon had been commemorated for the defence and stabilisation of the democracy and the integration of the whole population. This was altered in the days of Kimon, when the ten phyleheroes were removed from the treasury and placed next to the Argive memorial of the battle of Oinoe, and when new statues of Miltiades, Apollo and Athena were added to the heroes, Kimon somewhat impudently exalting his father in this democratic context. In the contemporaneous paintings in the Stoa Poikile in Athens, the recent battle of Oinoe was elevated into a higher sphere by being shown on a par with such glorious feats as the Amazonomachy, the Capture of Troy, and Marathon, the Marathon picture showing Kimon’s father in a leading role similar to the one in Delphi. So by Kimon’s time Marathon was no longer commemorated exclusively as the deed of the collective polis but was utilised for personal and family interests.
In funerary and court orations of the latter fifth and the fourth centuries the hoplites of Marathon are held up as ideal soldiers – brave, swift, unhesitating and ideal citizens – incorruptible, patriotic, preferring fame to material benefit. In comedy they may appear as boorish and old-fashioned, but honourably uninfected by modern sophism and depravity. The Athenians were urged to recreate the ideal polis of the Marathon days. In Herodotos, Marathon is the last in a chain of events that constituted the background for Xerxes’ invasion, whereas in later literature Marathon is the first act of a Persian War involving the whole of Greece. Allegedly unaided by other Greeks, a small force of Athenian hoplites was able at Marathon to save Greece by repelling the first onslaught of the enormous Persian army, thereby encouraging their fellow Greeks and teaching them how to deal with countless Persian invaders. As the first of the Greeks and the selfless saviours of others the Athenians were the ideal hegemones of their fellow Greeks – a neat justification of their fifth-century empire. The Spartan feats at Thermopylai and Plataiai were played down in favour of the battle of Salamis where the Athenians won the victory almost by themselves – history creatively produced for the need of the day, but not swallowed by the historian Theopomplos of Khios and hardly by the Spartans or other Greeks.

Marathon was far from fading in the Hellenistic period. Among the extant Classical funerary orations it figures particularly in Plato’s Menexenos which according to Cicero was recited every year in the Hellenistic period, probably along with a new speech. The curriculum of the Hellenistic ephes included yearly visits to Marathon and Salamis, and offerings were instituted at the Marathonian Soros to the men who had ‘fallen for freedom’, in the words of an inscription. By now fight for freedom would mean fight against Makedonian occupation. The Marathon runner of earlier legend was included in the ephetic curriculum, and new legends bear witness to a lively preoccupation with the battle, e.g. the legend about the Persians who in their hybris brought with them to Marathon a block of marble intended for a victory monument – but which ended as a statue of Nemesis at Rhamnous after the goddess had aided the Athenians in the battle. The Hellenistic period saw no break with the canonical commemoration of Marathon but new invented tradition was added in word and deed. The battle was still praised by the Athenians as a feat of their own history but also a foreigner like Attalos I of Pergamon would, when wooing their friendship, include a group of the Marathonomakhoi ancestors of the Athenians among the numerous bronzes he put up on their Akropolis in memory of his own victory over the Galatians. In Roman times Marathon was transformed into the common victory of all Greece in its fight for freedom, and the starting point of its great Classical period. Honour that had formerly been credited to the anonymous collective of Athenian hoplites was now awarded to the aristocratic leaders, not least to Miltiades who was turned into a distinguished rhetor. In orations of the Second Sophistic, the elite are not only leaders in war but also benevolent instructors of the masses – the likes of Aiilos Aristeides, Polemon and other orators themselves. Marathon was taken over by the privileged aristocracy of the Roman province, like Herodes Atticus, a native of Marathon who adopted Miltiades as his ancestor, who spoke and wrote in the classical Greek idiom, and paraded an old-fashioned way of living.
Marathon was the feat of the Athenians, Plataiai that of an alliance of Greeks. The elegy of Simonides from the early 470s to the war-dead from Plataiai is our earliest literary evidence of the commemoration of the battle. The same immortal fame that was secured by Homer for Akhilleus who fell before the walls of Troy, the poet will now ensure for the dead of Plataiai. In the battle, the poet stresses the role of the Spartans led by their mythic heroes and the regent Pausanias, but he also mentions Korinth and other states. This might appeal to a panhellenic audience, but J. argues that in Simonides, Plataiai was first and last the triumph of Sparta, with the aid of a handful of allies. The Spartans were provoked by the boastful epigram engraved by Pausanias on the serpent column in Delphi after Plataiai and promptly had it erased: the honour for the victory at Plataiai and in the whole Persian War of 480–79 was due to no individual but to their polis, and as the leader of the Greek alliance, Sparta was the first of the 31 allies inscribed on the victory monument. The leadership of Sparta was further pronounced by victory monuments in the panhellenic sanctuaries of Olympia and Isthmos, whereas individual states would emphasise their own achievement. A common cult of the fallen, administrated by Plataiai, was instituted in the battlefield, but each member buried and honoured its dead separately. The battle of Plataiai was thus commemorated both as a panhellenic victory and a feat of each individual polis. In return for administrating the cult of the fallen from all the states, and the festival for Zeus Eleutherios who had given victory to the Greeks in their territory, the Plataians would regularly solicit the support of the other poleis against the Thebans who had parted with the Persians and were a constant threat to their autonomy. By the beginning of the Arkhidamian War, however, such appeals were of no avail, for by then the Persian Wars were held to have been fought for the freedom of Greece. In the confidence-inspiring pages of Thukydides, the Athenians dub the Plataians the benefactors of Greece, whereas the Thebans, while recognising the role of Plataiai in the war with the Persians, represented the polis as the close friend of Athens, the actual oppressor of freedom in Greece. In their conflict with Sparta, the Athenians would either disparage the battle of Plataiai in favour of Marathon and Salamis or claim Plataiai as their own triumph. Potentially the battle of Plataiai might have been an argument for a common front against Makedonia in the late Classical period, but this had to wait for a later epoch. At the time Plataiai was used by the rivals Sparta and Athens in their competitive strife for hegemony in Greece.

After the destruction of Plataiai in 371, there is no trace there of commemoration of the battle until the 420s, when a synedrion of Greeks from Peloponnesos including Sparta and Central Greece including Athens convening there is met with in inscriptions. The koinon was in charge of the cult of Zeus Eleutherios and Greek Homonoia; the Eleutheria athletic games arranged in honour of the fallen of 479 were enlarged. J. reads the federation as a cultic, and only potentially a political one. By choosing Plataiai as the symbolic place for its synedrion to convene, the federation legitimated a common stand by former enemies against the Makedonia of Antigonos Gonatas, as once against the Persian empire of Xerxes. Formerly the self-assertion of each polis for its role in the battle was predominant, not least in the cases of Sparta and Athens in justification of their hegemonic ambitions. Now the concord of the poleis was the slogan.
In the late-Hellenistic and Roman periods the Eleutheria in Plataiai grew in importance, with more events being added, e.g. a race in armour from the Persian Wars, and a musical and rhetoric contest, and with participants coming in from the islands and Asia Minor. In advance of the games the Athenians and Spartans paraded their historical achievements, in particular in the Persian Wars, in a rhetorical duel for the right to lead the procession of the poleis under the upcoming Eleutheria. Gone were the days of their martial strife and struggle for hegemony; now we see a peaceful dialogos and the leadership of a procession of independent poleis. Nero was associated in Plataiai with Zeus Eleutherios and hailed as the defender of Greek freedom, the emperor worship being a medium for the provincial aristocracy to demonstrate its loyalty to Rome. With historical actualisation, the Persian Wars prefigured the wars of Nero and later emperors with the Parthians. Hadrian was venerated in Athens as the son of Zeus Eleutherios, and his foundation there of the Panhellenion reduced the role of Plataiai as integrator of the whole Greek world into a unity, and as a forum of the Greek aristocracy for communication with the emperor. In late antiquity’s dearth of sources less is heard of Plataiai as a place of commemoration. The latest we hear of is the transfer of the serpent column in Delphi, that proud memorial of the battle of Plataiai, to a most dignified position in the hippodrome of Constantine’s new capital at the Bosporus. Far from serving there for mere ornamentation, it placed the actual war with the Sassanid empire in a historical continuity of the fifth-century Persian Wars.

This summary is far from doing justice to J.’s detailed and well-documented book in which from a great number of pebbles he composes a neat mosaic showing a straight and logical development of the ways of commemoration of the two battles through the centuries. Possibly at the cost of resorting to violence to make the individual bits fit into the overall picture.

Now some critical remarks. His theme is the way Marathon and Plataiai were commemorated rather than what had actually happened. But occasionally J. makes such statements as that the version given by several sources of a battle taking place at Marathon right after the landing of the Persians is «in offensichtlichem Widerspruch zur historischen Wirklichkeit» (p. 134) and that the memory of Marathon became constantly less a commemoration of what had actually happened and more a «geglaubte Geschichte» (p. 137). The report in later sources of a manumission of slaves before Marathon is not historical (p. 174), and J. readily brushes aside a theory as being in conflict with «die belegten historischen Fakten» (p. 75 n. 12). But how does J. know these historical facts? One misses, as with the register and index locorum, a brief discussion of the sources. J. places profound trust in Herodotos, apparently as the earliest literary source for Marathon (but less in Simonides, the much earlier source for Plataiai), without asking for the historian’s sources or his ideology. In the literature after Herodotos, J. sees a decline with always less facts and more fiction. His Herodotos is right in showing Marathon as the feat of the hoplites alone, and since liberated slaves would have been more likely to serve as light-armed soldiers than as heavy hoplites, manumission cannot have been effected before the battle. J. barely mentions the late Cornelius Nepos and his version of a Marathon quite different from that of Herodotos, without considering Nepos’s possible debt to
Ephoros, that most influential fourth century historian who in turn depended on earlier literature.

Like Herodotos and scholars, J. allows no more part for ships than for light-armed infantry in the year of Marathon. After their defeat at Marathon, the Persians of Herodotos (6.115) embarked on their ships and sailed around Cape Sounion to Phaleron, obviously for a frontal attack on Athens – only to turn their ships and sail back to Asia. They seemingly did not try to land when they saw the hoplites that had hurried over from Marathon. So the Persians of Herodotos were not defeated by an Athenian fleet, and our sole literary evidence for a naval battle on this occasion is Nepos, Themistocles 7.5, where in the early 470s Themistokles tells the Spartans that the fleets of the Persian king had twice suffered naufragium near Athens. The second defeat was obviously the battle of Salamis, the first our fight off Phaleron. Although Diodoros who usually follows Ephoros has no word about such a battle, Nepos’s hint may mean that it did figure in Ephoros and his source. It is amazing, if this is right, that the feat of the fleet could almost fall into oblivion and that under the Athenian democracy, Marathon could be commemorated as the monopoly of the well-to-do hoplites, to the exclusion of the unprivileged ship crews and light-armed warriors.

The book is handsomely edited, as befits the Hypomnemata series, but unfortunately the editor’s computer has had no lucky hand with the Greek texts or the dividing of words. Time and again a word like ‘Athen’ is divided with an ‘A-’ followed by ‘then’ in the next line or next page. J.’s very valuable book would have deserved some better proof-reading.

Oslo

Johan Henrik Schreiner
