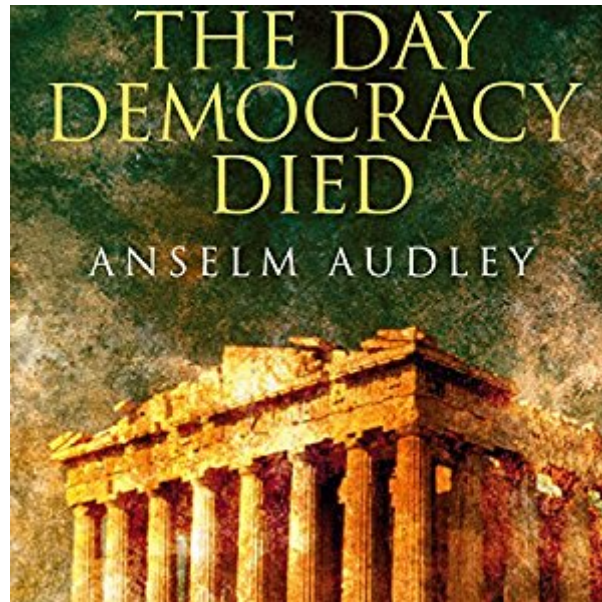




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The Day Democracy Died



Synopsis

How scapegoating and hysteria doomed the world's first democracy. From the chaos of a sea-battle to the fury of a lynch mob, from personal bravery to political machinations, *The Day Democracy Died* tells in vivid detail the tragic story of the Arginusae trials and the fall of Athens: a cautionary tale of democracy's demons which is as relevant in the age of instant news and mass media as in the volatile city-states of ancient Greece. October, 406 BC: on the darkening waters of the eastern Aegean, an inexperienced Athenian fleet prepared to face the might of Sparta. With the fortunes of the Peloponnesian War turning inexorably against it, a beleaguered Athens badly needed a victory - and it got one. The Battle of Arginusae, won by raw recruits against a battle-hardened Spartan armada, saved Athens from disaster at a heavy cost in sunken ships. Yet in the confusion following the battle, neither the survivors nor the bodies of the dead were ever recovered. When the fleet returned to an apprehensive, overcrowded Athens, recriminations between its leaders escalated into a vicious, hysterical witch-hunt which convulsed the democracy and swept aside custom, sense, and law. In an extraordinary and chilling sequence of events, six victorious generals were arrested and put on trial for their lives before the Athenian people. On a day of violent passions, before a crowd of thousands, a handful of brave men including the philosopher Socrates struggled to save Athens from itself.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 2 hours 13 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Audible Studios

Audible.com Release Date: May 26, 2015

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B00YBX8RSE

Best Sellers Rank: #149 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > History > Ancient #540

in Books > History > Ancient Civilizations > Greece #904 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Ideologies & Doctrines > Democracy

Customer Reviews

Sad that people want revenge and destroy their country!

Kept the pace up and didn't clutter up the narrative with references and academic asides

I would highly recommend this book to any person who loves history or wants to hear the truth about how the democracy fell apart.

Democracy can be fragile...we should take care with ours.

This was a fascinating account of how the world's first democracy set itself up to fall. And fall it did. It's a very easy read that draws mainly from two sources written in the aftermath of a battle known as Arginusae between the Greeks and the Spartans. Athens sent her fleet, guided by her best Generals to meet and rout the Spartans. Two Captains were left to retrieve the survivors whose ships were sunk, as well as the dead. A rare but violent storm appears making it too dangerous to do anything but flee and so the survivors died and the dead remained in the water. When word reaches Athens that her sons were abandoned the city was filled with outrage. According to their beliefs because they never received any funeral rites their souls could never go on to the afterlife. The Generals cast blame on the storm, but the people wanted heads to roll so they turned their ire on the Captains who then cast the blame on the Generals. In the end it was the Generals who stood trial and just one voice, as has happened so often in history and in the present, uses his oratory skills to bring the rage of the people to peak levels and instead of using reason and logic, they condemned the Generals to death. With their military leaders gone, Sparta began a series of attacks that drew Athens back into the war where, essentially leaderless, she was broken, starved, and subjugated. What's the meaning of this tale? That democracy is a fragile thing that can be lost if we aren't careful.

I like it. Clear, simple without talking down, and covers an event not in Thucydides. I'm knocking off one star for being so pro-Athens and pro-Athenian democracy that a few things weren't thought through. A couple of examples: Lysander was not a "reserve" or an "auxiliary." He was a mothrax--the illegitimate son probably of a helot mother. That is, exactly the sort of person the Athenian democracy barred from citizenship or command. But in Sparta, if you passed the agogae alive and paid your mess dues, you were a Spartan. Likewise it's democratic if Athens makes slaves rowers in the fleet, but evidently not when Sparta frees helots and makes them hoplites. So too the Athenian empire. Athens was as democratic at home as any city of the period could have

been, but the dependence of the governments in Athens' empire on the Athenian fleet and sometimes garrisons makes one think of the Warsaw Pact "people's republics" or the servile "republics" of Revolutionary France. It's a point that needed to be addressed. But this is still very good writing on an important point in classical history with implications for democracy and constitutional government. Buy it and enjoy.

This quick read is more than an enjoyable tale of ancient history; it resonates with our modern experience as the mere words of our Constitution seem to have little binding effects on the political leaders of both parties.

Well written. Moves along quickly. No unnecessary extras. Highly recommended. Finished in a few hours. Very enjoyable. Read it now.

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