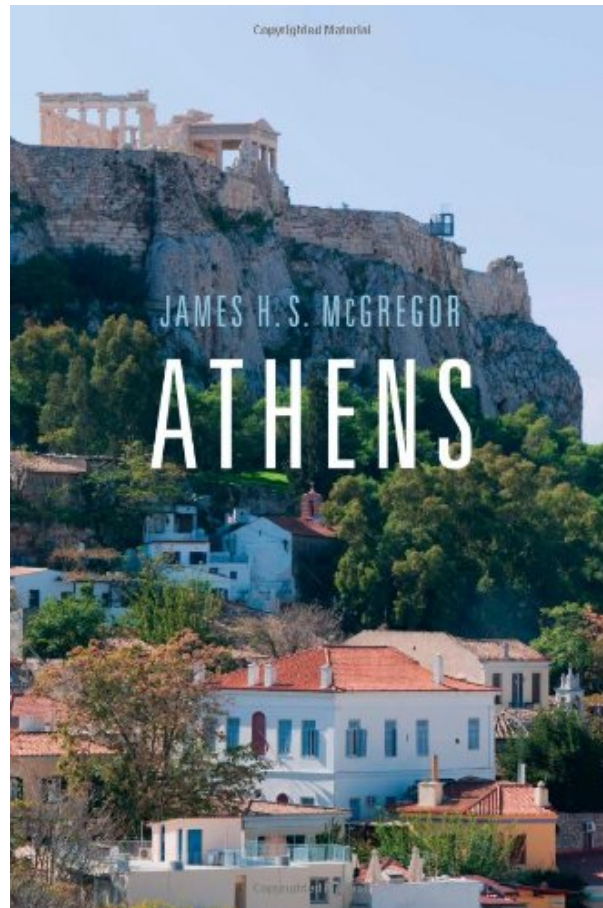


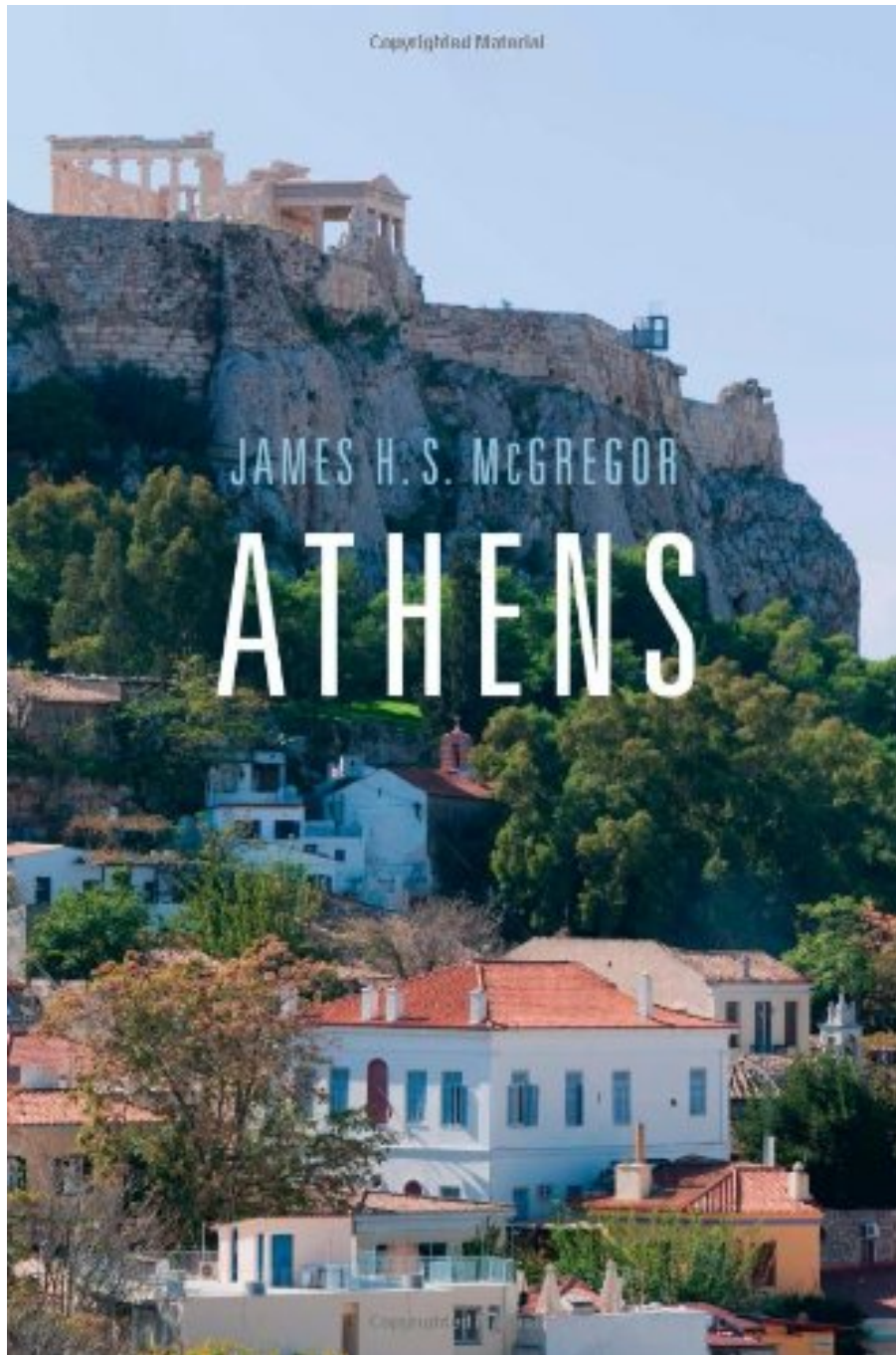
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Revered as the birthplace of Western thought and democracy, Athens is much more than an open-air museum filled with crumbling monuments to ancient glory. Athens takes readers on a journey from the classical city-state to today's contemporary capital, revealing a world-famous metropolis that has been resurrected and redefined time and again.

Although the Acropolis remains the city's anchor, Athens' vibrant culture extends far beyond the Greek city's antique boundaries. James H. S. McGregor points out how the cityscape preserves signs of the many actors who have crossed its historical stage. Alexander the Great incorporated Athens into his empire, as did the Romans. Byzantine Christians repurposed Greek temples, the Parthenon included, into churches. From the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, the city's language changed from French to Spanish to Italian, as Crusaders and adventurers from different parts of Western Europe took turns sacking and administering the city. An Islamic Athens took root following the Ottoman conquest of 1456 and remained in place for nearly four hundred years, until Greek patriots finally won independence in a blood-drenched revolution.

Since then, Athenians have endured many hardships, from Nazi occupation and military coups to famine and economic crisis. Yet, as McGregor shows, the history of Athens is closer to a heroic epic than a Greek tragedy. Richly supplemented with maps and illustrations, Athens paints a portrait of one of the world's great cities, designed for travelers as well as armchair students of urban history.

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About the Author

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Most helpful customer reviews

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

A must read for travelers to Greece

By Jeannine Smith

I'm visiting Athens soon on a Rick Steve's tour, and this book is terrific. It isn't a travel book per se, but rather provides a lot of additional history that isn't in the travel guides. I am reading it alongside travel guides which show the places reference but it's ATHENS, the book, that provides the cultural background and history that makes Athens, the city, come alive.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Disorganized and no fun to read

By AES

This books contains a lot of useful information, but the author is clearly more interested in the minutiae of architecture and art history than in telling a coherent narrative. Each chapter is a disorganized mess, bouncing back and forth between architectural details and political history. There are also occasional sentences which require reading about 10 times to actually understand. Clearly this book was not edited very well.

If you want a social and political history of Athens, I would look elsewhere for a more balanced and easy to read narrative. For that, I'd even prefer wikipedia over this book. However, if you want a somewhat dry art history lecture to have on hand while touring Athens, then this could be of some help.

I also take issue with some allusions that the author makes in the first chapter to the Indo-European hypothesis (though he never mentions it by name). He does this in the context of cultural and economic changes in Greece in the Neolithic and later. He appears to dismiss the theory of IE migration (violent or not violent) outright, insinuating that the switch from female earth deities to male sky gods (and a more militant culture to go along with it) was a homegrown phenomenon brought wholly about by economic change. He asserts that population growth and improved farming technology meant that males occupying valuable

territory had come to supersede the reproductive power of females. In doing so he ignores decades of archaeological, genetic, and linguistic research supporting an IE migration, and fails to acknowledge the possibility that his ideas and the IE theory aren't necessarily mutually exclusive. In other words, the economic conditions were a widespread phenomenon in Neolithic cultures making the transition from isolated farmers to cohesive, militant, territory-holding cities and states. This didn't just happen in Greece, but Greece (like much of Europe) was within the IE sphere of influence. This socioeconomic change could very well have simply provided the power vacuum for the IE/Kurgan cultures to migrate and establish their cultural influence, not necessarily by exclusively violent means.

Obviously this is somewhat tangential to a history of Athens, but he shouldn't throw ideas out so recklessly.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Tourist Info

By Jim Eggers, M.D.

Helpful in preparation for 10 day trip to Greece. Highlights sites and historical background associated with sites.

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