George Grote on Plato and Athenian Democracy: A Study in Classical Reception

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**Book synopsis**

George Grote (1794-1871) belonged to the leading Philosophic Radicals of early Victorian Britain. A student of James Mill and Jeremy Bentham, a self-educated classical scholar, and a committed utilitarian liberal, he succeeded in revolutionizing the field of Greek studies. The author draws on both unpublished works of Grote and also a wide range of published material, with emphasis on the History of Greece and Plato and the other Companions of Sokrates, to give us this study of the historian's thought and understanding of classical Greece. The book starts with an examination of Grote's early intellectual influences and then proceeds to an extensive critical exploration of the reception of Athens and Plato in pre-Grotean historiography and classical scholarship. Grote's monumental work completely reversed the traditional antidemocratic approach to the history of Greece, rehabilitated the Sophists and the demagogues after centuries of derision, examined in detail the working of Athenian democracy and the merits of political participation, and demonstrated that Plato's desire was to stimulate philosophical thinking in his audience, rather than establishing a system of dogmatic solutions to moral and metaphysical problems. At the time, Grote's original works formed an encyclopedia of classical studies and a major contribution to the history of political thought. His enduring significance in our own time is foremost the result of his profound and vast scholarship, but it also proves that ancient Greek history and theory can be still understood in the light of today's values and used as a resource for contemporary political reflection.

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