

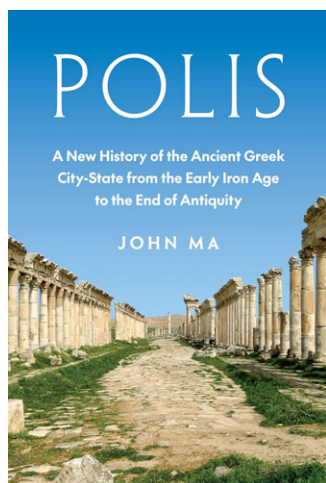
Book Review

Polis. A New History of the Ancient Greek City-State from the Early Iron Age to the End of Antiquity

Ma (J.) Pp. xviii + 713, ill., maps. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2024. Cased, £42, US \$49.95. ISBN: 978-0-691-15538-8

Brian J. Zawiski

Don Bosco Prep School, Ramsey, New Jersey, USA
bzawiski@donboscoprep.org



John Ma introduces his monumental work on the development, spread, and influence of the Greek *Polis* by quoting Aristotle when in the *Politics* he claimed that “the human being is by nature an animal that lives in a community of citizens”. Ma takes the reader on a detailed journey from the Bronze Age when citizens were engaged to consider infrastructure projects, through a period

of primitive *poleis* when people started to coalesce into basic communities, to the development and flourishing of the classical Greek *Polis*, to the adaptation of the structures of the *Polis* under the Roman Empire. This work spans a history of over 1500 years in a thorough, meticulous, and detailed manner.

In this work, Professor Ma delves into the development of the early *Polis* as a mechanism for the ordinary citizen to interact with the elite and in so doing to create an internally functioning community with the means to interact externally with similar communities. Ma highlights the achievements of the Greek *Polis* as a mechanism for ensuring rights, autonomy, and justice, while not shying away from the realities of enslavement and the negative impacts of imperialism.

Professor Ma asserts that the *Polis* continues until the rise of Christianity in the mid fourth century CE. He makes an interesting argument to support this assertion. Ma contends that the hierarchy of the Christian Church replaced the essential structures of the Greek *Polis*. As a Latin teacher, I found this argument intriguing as I had always been under the impression that the expansion of the Roman Empire and the assimilation of the Greek city states into the Roman sphere of dominance would have been considered the end of the Greek *Polis*.

Professor Ma’s authoritative work will certainly be of value to any enthusiast of Greek history, political philosophy, or even those idealistic students of Plato who seek to create that elusive *καλλίπολις*.

doi:10.1017/S2058631024001284