

Greek history

The new paradigm of ancient economic history that has dominated the last twenty years is based on New Institutional Economics; its key concepts are growth and transaction costs. It has succeeded in proving that the ancient economies were not static and in documenting the significance of ancient markets; but by excising labour, slavery, and exploitation from discussion, the conceptual limits of this paradigm are becoming apparent to more and more people. The volume edited by John Weisweiler on debt in the ancient Mediterranean and Near East is solid evidence that an alternative, non-neoliberal, paradigm is currently in the process of formation.¹ The book is obviously an attempt to assess the validity of David Graeber's blockbuster book on debt for the study of ancient economic and social history.² As with the volume on citizenship presented below, the fact that this collection of twelve essays ranges temporally from the archaic period to the early middle ages and includes Greek, Roman, and Near Eastern societies is an excellent illustration of a growing and encouraging trend in our discipline. This is a highly stimulating volume. The essays explore: the nexus between coinage, slavery, and warfare in various ancient societies; how quantified social obligations colonized various social, political, and intellectual fields; and whether Graeber's concept of the Axial Age is valuable for the study of ancient history. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Graeber's model seems to fit best the world of ancient empires (Roman, late Roman, and Sassanian), but seems to make less sense for the world of Greek *poleis*. This illustrates, yet again, the need for Greek historians to think seriously about the peculiarities of the Greek world and the appropriate comparisons.

Deborah Kamen has written an excellent overview of the historiography of Greek slavery over the last thirty years.³ This is a field that is currently experiencing rapid and radical change; Kamen has created a great travelling guide, which allows slavery specialists, interested classicists, ancient historians, and lay readers to navigate the debates, the different points of view, the emergence of new fields of study, and the current discussion of old topics. Particularly commendable is the systematic effort to move beyond Anglophone scholarship, and incorporate into the discussion scholarship in French, German, Italian, and Spanish. Kamen presents the emergence of new approaches that have challenged traditional concepts, like that of slavery as social death, or the distinction between slave societies and societies with slaves. She judiciously allows readers to explore different points of view in these debates and assess the validity of new approaches and concepts, like that of epichoric slave systems and slaving strategies. She documents the significance of new scholarly concerns, in particular that of slavery as a gendered experience. Finally, the chapter devoted to manumission is an extremely useful navigation of the historiography of perhaps the most widely documented aspect of ancient Greek slavery.

¹ *Debt in the Ancient Mediterranean and Near East. Credit, Money, and Social Obligation*. Edited by John Weisweiler. New York, Oxford University Press, 2022. Pp. xii + 277. Hardback, £63.00, ISBN: 978-0-19764717-2.

² D. Graeber, *Debt. The First 5,000 Years* (New York, 2011).

³ *Greek Slavery*. By Deborah Kamen. Trends in Classics – Key Perspectives on Classical Research series, 4. Berlin and Boston, De Gruyter, 2023. Pp. xii + 147. Paperback, £25.00, ISBN: 978-3-11-063759-5.

I move on to three works with important methodological and theoretical implications. The first two books attempt in their different ways to trace the processes that created the unity and diversity of the ancient Greek world. Jessica Lamont's book concerns Greek curse tablets.⁴ Various other valuable works have been written on the subject, but this is the first work that does not start from a synchronic study of Greek curse tablets and the religious ideas and conflicts that generated them, but instead situates the emergence, development, and spread of this practice in space and time. Lamont shows how Greek curse tablets emerged in late sixth-century Sicily primarily in regard to judicial conflicts. In the course of the classical and early Hellenistic period they spread to the rest of the Greek world in the Aegean and the Black Sea, as well as among Oscan and Roman communities in Italy. The spread of the practice led not only to continuities, but also to important changes in the form of curse tablets, the uses to which they were put, and their users: not just judicial conflicts among the elite, but also love and economic competition among the subaltern classes. Apart from the significance of this book for the particular topic of curse tablets, this is a great methodological contribution to how to study the history of the peculiar unit of analysis that we call the 'Greek world' and its changing history.

Michael Loy's book is an attempt to offer a new perspective on the study of archaic Greek history and archaeology.⁵ It is a plea to use the Big Data of archaeological excavations in order to study the economic and political networks that interconnected archaic Greek communities. Loy uses Big Data sets concerning marble, vases, amphoras, coins, and epichoric alphabetic inscriptions in order to explore a series of phenomena such as trade, the transmission of techniques, itinerant specialists, and political affiliation. The book includes fascinating maps and charts that make it possible to illustrate the spread of objects and practices like commercial amphoras and coin minting across the archaic Aegean. The reader is left with little doubt that Big Data should constitute one of the futures of ancient Greek history, but this requires proper documentation of the data used and the ability of readers to check for themselves the evidence employed. Loy has unfortunately chosen to make extremely difficult, if not completely impossible, for readers to check the evidence employed, as is, for example, the case with the assemblages of vases and amphoras: there are no page references to the publications mentioned, so one would have to read every single work to check the reliability of counting. Loy's Thucydidean approach to evidence, which basically asks his readers to trust his word, will not do, in particular, for example, when the reader observes the multiple discrepancies between Loy's own maps and charts regarding the spread of Greek coinage. The book whets our appetite for more studies based on Big Data, but such future work will require proper documentation if it is to achieve its aims.

I turn to a third important work with an equally significant methodological contribution. Marek Węcowski features heavily in this review; I start with his recent

⁴ *In Blood and Ashes. Curse Tablets and Binding Spells in Ancient Greece*. By Jessica L. Lamont. New York, Oxford University Press, 2023. Pp. xxviii + 404. 54 figures, 5 maps. Hardback, £71.00, ISBN: 978-0-19-751778-9.

⁵ *Connecting Communities in Archaic Greece. Exploring Economic and Political Networks through Data Modelling*. By Michael Loy. British School of Athens Studies in Antiquity series. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2023. Pp. xviii + 331. 54 figures, 21 tables. Hardback, £100.00, ISBN: 978-1-009-34381-7.

book on Athenian ostracism.⁶ As with curse tablets, numerous books and articles have been devoted to the topic. Węcowski argues convincingly that previous approaches to the meaning of ostracism have started from the wrong end: they assumed that the purpose of the procedure lies in achieving the annual exile of an individual, with scholars disagreeing on what that exile aimed to achieve. But careful attention to the full procedure from beginning to end raises a different possibility: that the purpose of the procedure was exactly the opposite. The procedure was successful not when it ended up exiling an individual, but when the Athenians mutually agreed not to hold an ostracism. The purpose of the procedure was to create concord among the Athenian political elite by ensuring that politicians would mutually protect, rather than turn against, each other. This interpretation has major consequences for how we conceptualize Athenian democratic politics, favouring a much more elitist perspective than we tend to assume. Furthermore, Węcowski employs rational choice theory and the prisoner's dilemma in order to illuminate the mental processes of Athenian elites in regard to ostracism. I hold the opinion that the application of rational choice theories to ancient history has largely been simplistic and unfruitful, but this is a truly excellent example of how the theoretical tool can be put to very good use.

Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge and Węcowski have edited a wonderful *Festschrift* for Josine Blok.⁷ The volume includes sixteen chapters alongside a valedictory lecture by Blok. The individual contributions range very widely and are all really excellent pieces of scholarship that will acquire their own readership (e.g. Murray's discussion of Cornelius de Pauw, Athens, and the French revolution). Among the various issues discussed, I single out some wider themes. Given Blok's contribution towards reassessing ancient citizenship and its gendered dimension, the volume aptly includes chapters on both aspects: on the one hand the nature of citizenship, exclusion, and inter-*poleis* relations, with chapters on the Spartan *perioikoi*, the dependent relationship between Elis and Pisatis, shared citizenship and the wider bonds between Teos and Abdera, and citizenship in Athens and Rome; on the other hand, female citizenship and the social and political concerns reflected in the poetry of Sappho, and female labour and textile-making in ancient Greece. Equally fascinating are three chapters on Greek historiography, which stress the renewed attention to fourth-century Greek historians apart from Xenophon. Given their forthcoming joint book, Malkin's chapter on distributive lotteries and Blok's lecture on sortition give readers a taste of what is to come. Finally, I single out Węcowski's chapter on social mobility in archaic Greece, which should be required reading for anyone interested in rethinking archaic social history.

I move on to another volume that exemplifies a major change of attitude among ancient Greek historians in terms of a systematic engagement with other earlier and contemporary ancient cultures, and in particular those of the Ancient Near East. Jakub Filonik, Christine Plastow, and Rachel Zelnick-Abramovitz have edited a truly

⁶ *Athenian Ostracism and its Original Purpose. A Prisoner's Dilemma*. By Marek Węcowski. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2022. Pp. xix + 291. 6 figures. Hardback, £90.00, ISBN: 978-0-19-884820-2.

⁷ *Politeia and Koinōnia. Studies in Ancient Greek History in Honour of Josine Blok*. Edited by Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge and Marek Węcowski. Mnemosyne Supplements series, 471. Pp. xii + 315. Hardback, €136.74, ISBN: 978-90-04-53719-4.

game-changing volume on citizenship in antiquity.⁸ The volume includes forty-nine chapters that explore citizenship across space and time. In terms of time, the volume starts in the second millennium BCE and takes us all the way to late antiquity and the early middle ages. From a spatial point of view, the editors have taken the crucial step of including sections on the Ancient Near East, the archaic and classical Greek world beyond Athens, Athens, the Hellenistic world, the interface between Greek and Roman citizenship practices, and citizenship in Rome, Italy, and the expanded Roman empire. The temporal and spatial extent of this volume will hopefully change approaches to the topic forever, not only because the juxtaposition of different citizenship practices will reveal similarities and differences to attentive readers, but also because the volume includes focused comparisons (e.g. in regard to citizenship and manumission in Greece and Rome). Attention to historical change and transformation of citizenship practices comes out particularly strongly. Another major strength of the volume is attention to both institutionalist perspectives on citizenship and performative approaches (e.g. citizenship and religion) and attention to the impact of wider processes, such as imperial expansion.

This brings us to two volumes concerning the relationship between Greeks and other ancient societies. Lynette Mitchell has written a volume devoted to Cyrus the Great.⁹ Although the book appears in an ancient biographies series, Mitchell sensibly argues that the nature of the sources precludes the historical reconstruction of the life of Cyrus. Instead, she opts for employing the stories told about Cyrus from the sixth century BCE to the fifteenth century CE as a means through which to examine discourses about kingship in the Near Eastern, Greek, Roman, and medieval worlds. She examines stories concerning Cyrus' birth, his relationship with the Medes, Cyrus as a cosmic warrior, and his death. Among the greatest strengths of this book is a systematic and serious engagement with scholarship on the literary world of Mesopotamian cuneiform scribes and the kingship discourses of Assyria, Babylonia, and Iran. Mitchell employs successfully the entanglement between oral stories and the scribal matrix of the composers of Mesopotamian texts in order to show how stories found in Greek and Roman sources can nevertheless be traced back to these Near Eastern milieus. Both continuity with earlier traditions and the innovations of Cyrus' projection as 'king of kings' are equally stressed.

Christopher Beckwith's book aims to offer a radical reconsideration of the history of Eurasia in the first millennium BCE.¹⁰ The Scythians started to dominate the Eurasian steppe corridor before the emergence of the Persian empire in Western Eurasia and the Han empire in Eastern Eurasia. Nevertheless, the history of the Scythians is usually considered as a peripheral topic in the history of these empires, as well as in the history

⁸ *Citizenship in Antiquity. Civic Communities in the Ancient Mediterranean*. Edited by Jakob Filonik, Christine Plastow, and Rachel Zelnick-Abramovitz. *Rewriting Antiquity* series. London and New York, Routledge, 2023. Pp. xxiv + 725. 8 figures, 1 table. Hardback, £152.00, ISBN: 978-0-367-68711-3.

⁹ *Cyrus the Great. A Biography of Kingship*. By Lynette Mitchell. *Routledge ancient biographies* series. New York, Routledge, 2023. Pp. xviii + 188. 19 figures. Hardback, £100.00, ISBN: 978-1-138-02410-6.

¹⁰ *Scythian Empire. Central Eurasia and the Birth of the Classical Age from Persia to China*. By Christopher I. Beckwith. Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2023. Pp. xxxvi + 377. 15 figures, 4 diagrams, 8 tables. Hardback, £35.00, ISBN: 978-0-691-24053-4.

of the expansion of Greek colonies and culture in the Black Sea. Beckwith aims to break this peripheralization by arguing for the centrality of the Scythians in pretty much everything: the Median and Scythian empires are effectively considered as offshoots of the Scythian empire in Inner Asia, while even the origins of philosophy in the various Axial Age civilisations are attributed to the Scythians. Readers will find that on many occasions Beckwith's plea to reconsider ancient history from Inner Asia outwards can prove a stimulating exercise. However, the extremely naive treatment of the ancient Greek sources, like Herodotus, and the almost complete lack of engagement with the substantial modern scholarship that has been devoted to their interpretation, makes the nucleus of his argument effectively untenable. This is highly unfortunate, as ancient historians can certainly learn a lot by engaging with alternative points of view, like that suggested by Beckwith.

Moving to Hellenistic history, we commence with Peter Franz Mittag's synthesis on the history of the Hellenistic world.¹¹ The book is divided in two parts: the first part discusses various aspects of the history of the Hellenistic world, while the second follows the same structure but discusses the development of scholarly literature on these aspects. The book largely focuses on history from above: political and military history, the emergence of Hellenistic monarchies, court society, and the relations of monarchies with indigenous populations and Greek *poleis*. There is also a more limited discussion of Hellenistic economy, religion, philosophy, science, and art; particularly interesting is the discussion devoted to the reception of the Hellenistic period and its key figures. Given the foci of the book, the serious attention paid to the wider range of Hellenistic monarchies beyond the big four (Seleucid, Antigonid, Ptolemaic, Attalid) is a very positive feature of the volume. However, the perception of the Hellenistic period as fundamentally defined by the monarchies is quite limiting: by now, significant advances in the social history of the Hellenistic world and alternative perspectives that do not emanate from the court perspective have changed how we should think about the Hellenistic period. Much still needs to be done in this perspective, and, while Mittag's is a good overview of the traditional approach to the Hellenistic world, a new synthesis that takes seriously these alternative perspectives is urgently required.

The next two books complement each other well and should be profitably read together. Ian Worthington has added another book in the series of narrative histories of Macedonia in the late classical and Hellenistic world he has published so far. The new volume concerns the history of the last three Macedonian kings, Philip V, Perseus, and Andriscus, and their struggle against Roman expansion, their various attempts to negotiate the new unipolar world constructed by Rome, and their ultimate defeat and the destruction of the Macedonian kingdom.¹² He makes a good effort to represent the Macedonian perspective and the achievements of these three kings, in particular of Andriscus, a rather neglected figure. I particularly liked the serious effort

¹¹ *Geschichte des Hellenismus*. By Peter Franz Mittag. Oldenbourg Grundriss der Geschichte series, 51. Berlin and Boston, De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2023. Pp. xiv + 333. Paperback, £22.50, ISBN: 978-3-11-064873-7.

¹² *The Last Kings of Macedonia and the Triumph of Rome*. By Ian Worthington. New York, Oxford University Press, 2023. Pp. xxii + 293. 23 figures, 7 maps. Hardback, £22.99, ISBN: 978-0-19-752005-5.

made to incorporate the significant advances in our understanding of Hellenistic geopolitics and Roman expansion offered by studies applying international relations theories to the study of the period. Worthington's book offers the best current narrative in English for this complex period, while also presenting and discussing the available evidence and its limits: all in all, the result is accessible to a wide audience.

Emma Nicholson's book is the first monograph devoted to Philip V of Macedon since Walbank's magisterial biography from 1940. This book is not strictly speaking a biography, but rather uses Philip V and the way he is represented in Polybius' narrative as a means of exploring Polybius' historiographical methods and the discourses that shape his narrative. As a result, the volume combines the examination of two different and important topics. Nicholson traces the Achaean perspective that shapes how Polybius represents Philip V and the presumed changes in his behaviour in relation to his attitude towards the Achaean League. Nicholson successfully balances this Achaean perspective with the attempt to see Philip's own Macedonian perspective in his relationships with the Greek cities and the other superpowers of his time. However, there is a third important audience for this volume, beyond those interested in Polybius or Philip: this consists of those interested in Greek interstate relations. This book is an insightful commentary on the Greek interstate world and the practices that shaped and shattered that world in a particular and crucial temporal context: a good example is the famous pillage of the Thermon sanctuary, extensively discussed in the volume. I found Nicholson's commentary highly interesting and often thought-provoking.¹³

Estelle Strazdins' monograph is an impressive reconstruction of the cultural world of Roman Greece.¹⁴ The field has been long dominated by a view of the Second Sophistic as fixated on the classical past. Strazdins breaks new ground by stressing that the appeal of Roman Greeks to the classical past constituted a means of addressing the future and finding a place for themselves in that imagined future. Equally significant is the systematic attention not just to the elite literature, but also to monumental culture and epigraphic evidence. The study of the entanglement between literature, monuments, and inscriptions in Roman Greece is at the heart of this volume: the book does an excellent job in examining how literary texts respond to and incorporate inscriptions and monuments and vice versa. The two chapters that explore the significance of honorific inscriptions and inscribed honorific statues for the self-perception and future projection of elite Roman Greeks are truly fascinating for the many stimulating paths to future research they open. The book largely focuses on Roman mainland Greece, with some attention to coastal Asia Minor: it can function as an excellent model of how other areas of the Greek-speaking eastern Mediterranean dealt with the issues raised in the book and entangled texts, monuments, and inscriptions.

I conclude this review with three works on Greek historiography and the study of the past. The first is Hans-Joachim Gehrke's slim, but highly stimulating, volume on the

¹³ *Philip V of Macedon in Polybius' Histories. Politics, History, and Fiction*. By Emma Nicholson. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2023. Pp. viii + 391. Paperback, £100.00, ISBN: 978-0-19-286676-9.

¹⁴ *Fashioning the Future in Roman Greece. Memory, Monuments, Texts*. By Estelle Strazdins. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2023. Pp. xxiv + 368. 84 figures. Hardback, £100.00, ISBN: 978-0-19-286610-3.

Greeks and their pasts.¹⁵ Gehrke distinguishes between two ways in which Greeks approached the past: the first is what he calls intentional history, the public memory that constituted the foundation of Greek communal identities and was expressed in myth and poetry, in festivals, and in public performances and monuments; the second is what he calls critical historiography, the attempt to discover the truth about the past with critical methods, which emerges from the late sixth century BCE onwards. Gehrke rightly argues that, given the prominence and peculiar nature of Greek intentional history, the emergence of critical historiography was by no means a foregone conclusion, but something quite unexpected. The great value of this volume is therefore twofold: on the one hand, to trace the specific characteristics of Greek intentional history, in particular the impact of the peculiar medium of Greek myth and its multivocal character; on the other hand, to situate the emergence and development of critical historiography in relationship to communal history and the ongoing dialogue between them. This is a very important work, which will have a significant impact on future scholarship.

Rosie Harman's book focuses on the politics of viewing in Xenophon's historical narratives (*Anabasis*, *Hellenica*, *Cyropaedia*).¹⁶ Harman focuses on how two aspects of visibility are represented in Xenophon's texts. The first concerns how Xenophon's narrative creates images that invite the reader to see things from the visual perspective of the protagonists or of those who see those images; the second concerns the manipulation of the visual by those with power, whether the Persian king Cyrus in the *Cyropaedia* or the Spartan commanders in the *Hellenica*. Stressing the significance of the visual in Xenophon's narratives is significant in itself; I came across multiple passages I thought I knew pretty well, in which Harman's stress on visibility offered new ways of thinking about them. Even more stimulating is how Harman uses the visual aspect in order to offer an interpretative way through Xenophon's complex and contradictory narratives: visual politics raise important questions about conflict and audience. Visibility makes it possible to negotiate the multiple conflicts contained in the historical narratives: between Greek *poieis* in the *Hellenica*, within Greek communities in the army community of the *Anabasis*, and between Greeks and Persians. Visibility invites the intended reader audience of Xenophon to take into account multiple points of view and negotiate the complex and contradictory identities of both the historical protagonists and the audience.

Finally, Aggelos Kapellos has edited a volume with twenty-eight chapters devoted to the representation of the past in the Athenian orators.¹⁷ The contributions largely focus on one form of the past: the recent past within the individual memory of speakers and audience, and to some extent the middling past that could be related by elder people, while largely putting aside the distant past beyond individual memory. The primary value of the volume lies in the particulars: the examination of representations of the past in particular orators, speeches, or oratorical genres. Different chapters accomplish

¹⁵ *The Greeks and Their Histories. Myth, History, and Society*. By Hans-Joachim Gehrke. Classical Scholarship in Translation series. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2023. Pp. xvii + 166. Hardback, £85.00. ISBN: 978-1-316-51978-3.

¹⁶ *The Politics of Viewing in Xenophon's Historical Narratives*. By Rosie Harman. London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2023. Pp. viii + 231. Hardback, £76.00, ISBN: 978-1-3501-5902-0.

¹⁷ *The Orators and Their Treatment of the Recent Past*. Edited by Aggelos Kapellos. Trend in Classics, Supplementary series, 133. Berlin and Boston, De Gruyter, 2023. Pp. x + 531. Hardback, £137.00, ISBN: 978-3-11-079187-7.

highly divergent tasks. Some chapters examine the historical reliability of the events mentioned in Athenian oratory; particularly interesting in this respect is Trevett's chapter on Chabrias' career in *Against Leptines* and Harris' demonstration that the historical inaccuracies in Andocides' *On the Peace* prove that the speech is a forgery. Other chapters focus primarily on the use of the past in the oratorical strategies of particular speeches or orators; the use of the recent past of the Peloponnesian war and the oligarchic revolutions in oratorical strategies comes out well in various chapters. Finally, some chapters examine what the representation of past events in Athenian oratory can tell us about Athenian public memory and the concept of historical truth in ancient Greece; particularly interesting is Sickinger's chapter on how orators employed recent public inscriptions.

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Art and archaeology

The first book in this review refers back to a theme we have considered repeatedly in previous reviews: cities, in this case those of Roman Italy and the new modes of investigation that are bringing them alive.¹ The volume is particularly interested in looking at the diversity of these centres, laying to rest that early twentieth century faith in the regularity of the Roman town plan. Instead, the case studies in the volume show how towns in different areas of Italy fared and failed to meet the demands of their immediate surroundings as well as responding to wider political and economic changes. This changing understanding comes from two directions: our willingness to ask new questions of the cities and the use of new technology. In all the case studies, different kinds of remote sensing technology (clearly laid out by Martin Millett in the first chapter as a preamble to his case study of Falerii Novi) and drone photography allow the city to be mapped and explored in new ways. The book shows how these have allowed new evidence and questions, affecting traditional interpretations. The whole thing is finished by an epilogue by John Patterson, who pulls together some of these themes and points to new questions.

In many chapters, the use of these technologies alongside more traditional techniques, such as digging trenches and revisiting the material culture retrieved from the sites, allows new interpretations. Many of the sites discussed, such as Falerii Novi, Septempeđa, or Interamna Lirenas, have few visible physical remains, yet new technologies can conjure up traces of their civic spaces, main routes, and land allotments for domestic units.

¹ *Roman Urbanism in Italy. Recent Discoveries and New Directions*. Edited by Alessandro Launaro. University of Cambridge Monograph no. 5. Oxford, Philadelphia, Oxbow, 2023. Pp. vii + 264. 71 b/w illustrations + 9 colour plates. Paperback, £42, ISBN: 979-8-888-57036-4.