

significantly throughout the whole of the classical period. This fact is illustrated by examples, such as the Athenian inscription honoring the Eteocarpaians (now *IG*³ 1454), which in terms of the system of international relations envisaged can be fitted equally well into the imperial context of the fifth century and the non-imperial one of the fourth, as well as the history of Thucydides, whose descriptions of the practicalities of international relations do not differ dramatically from the activities of later periods. There might be a flow of events, but the underlying structure remains the same. This claim must, of course, face the objection that the Athenian empire, with its unique use of tribute, does resemble a shifting pattern. L. resolves this difficulty by conceding that the system of IR was, after all, flexible at times: 'some of the norms of interstate interaction might be pushed to the margins in this period, but they return to the centre with remarkable speed' (251).

L. has successfully demonstrated her thesis, but much more important — she has created in this book a framework for the analysis of Greek interstate affairs which future students of Greek IR should adopt. One might of course disagree with some of her methodological premises and conclusions. The present reviewer would have been much happier if the stability of the Greek state system had been illustrated by concrete counter-examples of essentially unstable systems, or if the highly abstract, almost mechanical terms in which the basic features of IR were here presented would have been related to that historical school which views the issue of personality as important (arguably, the development of the Athenian empire would have followed a different course were it not for the political genius of Themistocles, the charisma of Pericles, and the communal spirit of the Athenian *demos*). But this is the sort of criticism that could be directed against any original piece. L. has written a truly groundbreaking book, for which we should be grateful.

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Kostas Vlassopoulos, *Unthinking the Greek Polis. Ancient Greek History beyond Eurocentrism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. xiv + 288 pp. ISBN 978-0-521-87744-2.

Vlassopoulos's (henceforth V.) ambitious book advocates a change of paradigm in the study of ancient Greek history. Drawing his inspiration from the school of the *Annales* and the rapidly developing fields of world-system history, global and world histories, and regional studies, V. calls for studying the ancient Greek world in general, and the Greek polis in particular, in their wider Mediterranean, Near Eastern and global contexts. Unfortunately, even though V.'s thesis deserves full attention, the present book only provides a preliminary starting point, since its discussion remains general and its theoretical premises are questionable.

As the introduction advertises (1-10), the book tackles two issues which V. presents as interrelated. On the one hand, V. challenges the view that the *polis* should be the sole framework of analysis for the political, social and economic history of the ancient Greek world, as has been the case in modern studies since the nineteenth century. On the other hand, he challenges the modern Western meta-narrative which has turned Greek history into one stage — the first — of European history. This combined heritage has been responsible for the misleading equation of the ancient Greek world with the nation-state. Not only has Greek history been taken out of its wider Mediterranean context, but the study of the Greek world has been geographically reduced to the Peloponnese, the Southern Balkans and the Aegean islands. Restoring ancient Greek history to its wider regional context requires, in V.'s view, deconstructing the primacy of the *polis*. He does this in two ways: first, by insisting that the alternative forms of polities, the *ethnos* and the *koinon*, are to be studied together with the *polis*, and secondly, by deconstructing the polarities that oppose citizens and non-citizens within the *polis*. Part I (Chapters 1-3) of the book is dedicated to the deconstruction of the basic premises of the historiographical views that are challenged. Part II

(Chapters 4-5) deals with the *polis* as an entity, and Part III (Chapters 6-10) with the notion of *système-monde*, or world-system.

Chapter 1, 'An archaeology of discourses' (13-67), is a useful historiographical survey of the construction of the Western representation of ancient Greek history since the Renaissance. It traces how the paradigm of the *polis* was formed and came to prevail. Chapter 2, 'The ancient discourses on the *polis*' (68-84) and Chapter 3, 'Making use of Aristotle: concepts and models' (85-96), examine anew Aristotle's conception of the *polis* in the *Politics*, arguing that this work does not support the monolithic definition of the *polis* as a politically autonomous and economically self-sufficient community of citizens. V. convincingly argues that *autarkeia*, far from meaning self-sufficiency, contains the notion of exchange (74). Aristotle's concept of *koinōnia* is analysed to show that Aristotle conceived of the *polis* as being composed of all the relationships and associations needed to achieve its *telos*, the good life. The composition of these *koinōniai* changed according to context, but most often brought together citizens and non-citizens. Indeed, the modern concept of 'network' may offer an adequate translation for *koinōnia* as analysed by V. (86-87). Finally, pointing out that the Greeks themselves did not see the *polis* as a specifically Greek institution, V. proposes an alternative, minimalist definition of the *polis* which leaves open the issues of territorial size, structure of rule (including kingship) and degree of autonomy. This definition suits both Greek and non-Greek polities.

Chapter 4, 'East and West, Greece and the East: the *polis* vs. oriental despotism' (101-22), surveys aspects of city-state cultures in Mesopotamia, Syria and Phoenicia. The discussion apparently aims at refuting the old stereotypes that contrast the Orient, as the realm of redistributive bureaucratic monarchies, and Athens, as the realm of Democracy and Freedom. Chapter 5, 'The consumer city: ancient vs. medieval/modern' (123-141), criticises Finley's opposition of the consumer city of ancient Greece with the producer city of medieval and early modern Europe. The chapter includes an interesting analysis of how Finley oversimplified Weber's typology of cities.

The concept of *système-monde* which underlies Part III refers to a system 'larger than any juridically defined political unit' (150, see also 169). Chapter 6, 'The *polis* as a unit of analysis: *poleis* and *koinōniai*' (147-155), elaborates on the observation that societies are not coterminous with political boundaries. *Poleis* could control territories and people located beyond their frontiers. Chapter 7, '*Poleis* and space' (156-189), is the core of the book, and its most rewarding part. It addresses the question of how the perspectives promoted by the school of the *Annales*, historical geography, area (regional) studies and world history may be profitably applied to ancient Greek history. The varying relations between *poleis* and the exploitation of their territories and resources (production either for self-consumption or for exchange, and economies of redistribution and services based on occupations like sailors, mercenaries and wandering craftsmen) are analysed. Programmatic observations for a history of the mobility of goods, people, ideas and technologies, and their possible interdependence are offered, and directions for inter-regional comparative studies are suggested. These topics of investigation all imply close interdisciplinary collaboration between archaeologists and historians. Chapter 8, '*Poleis* and polities' (190-202), criticises the evolutionary approach to the different forms of the *polis*, *ethnos* and *koinon*, and shows how the concept of *système-monde* may cast new light on their diverging organisations. Chapter 9, '*Poleis* and time' (203-220), criticises the old paradigm which saw ancient Greece as one stage in the development of the West. Instead, V. argues that the Greek world must be seen as part of the Mediterranean space. This shift of perspective allows V. to suggest non-evolutionary causes for the different pace of development in central Greece and the Aegean islands on the one hand and Aetolia, Epirus and Macedonia on the other. The key factor is to be sought in the different contacts between these regions and the more advanced civilisations of the Mediterranean and the Near East.

Finally, Chapter 10, 'Towards new master narratives of Greek history' (221-240), addresses the question of the sources which may be used to write the revised historical narrative that V. calls for in the book. As we might have expected, archaeology, Greek historians and Athenian forensic speeches are all enrolled, but V. also advocates the exploration of alternative methodology: the re-invention of ancient literary genres and self-conscious blurring of academic writing and fiction. No general conclusion is offered to end the book.

The perusal of this book is a disconcerting experience. This seems to derive from V.'s mistaken strategy in defining the ideal reader. V. chooses to target views which have already been discarded by many historians of ancient Greece. The result is an unnecessarily polemical tone, where a *status quaestionis* assessing what has already been done and what should be done next would have been much more effective rhetorically. Thus, although V. refers to numerous studies of ancient economy which adopt a modernist approach, openly critical of Finley's primitivist view, V. does not use them as his starting point, and as a result his own discussion does not take their conclusions any further. Instead, the discussion repeats criticism of Finley's views. Concrete case-studies illustrating what may be gained from the theoretical insights discussed in the book are far too few. It would have been helpful to have at least a synthesized survey of the case-studies already published in the existing literature.

V.'s choice to quarrel with outdated approaches is particularly problematic in his treatment of the *polis*. The crucial import of the post-structuralist and anthropologically oriented approach to the Greek *poleis* describing them as embedded, or organic, societies is overlooked altogether. This anthropological approach does not only encompass V.'s view of the *koinōniai*, it also provides a good theoretical basis for arguing that even though structuralist studies have unquestionably taken the idea of polarities too far, polarities between citizens and non-citizens cannot be disposed of altogether. Even though V.'s claim that the rôle of metics has been underestimated in social studies of the Greek *poleis* is certainly right, the distinction between citizens and non-citizens remains essential. Likewise, the (debated) progressive blurring of this distinction is a crucial issue in the social evolution of Greek polities. Incidentally, maintaining this distinction by no means detracts from V.'s call to study the mobility of individuals (160, 177, 197). The two issues are complementary and not mutually exclusive. Needless to say, a correct definition of ancient Greek societies is a crucial foundation for comparative studies, both synchronic and diachronic. Thus comparisons between ancient and modern democracies, and between the political cultures of ancient Greek and Near Eastern cities, must be based on the realisation that the field of politics in both Greek *poleis* and Near Eastern societies was constructed in a very different way from today. Otherwise, we are in danger of making comparisons which are both anachronistic and Eurocentric. More generally, a much more refined methodological discussion is required of the ways in which the debates held in post-colonial studies, area (Atlantic) studies (180) and world history may be brought to bear on the study of ancient societies. The basic structural differences opposing modern and early modern societies, and ancient societies, e.g. the different constructions of the individual, class and status, have to be reckoned with.

More theoretical discussion and more concrete case-studies will be needed before the comparative perspective advocated by V. can materialise. However, ancient historians certainly need to keep up to date with the historiographical debates and achievements taking place in the study of other periods. These debates can profitably inform our own questions and help us define new issues and new directions. The primary contribution of V.'s book is certainly in drawing the attention of ancient historians to the innovative historiographical debates in world-system history, global, and world history now taking place.