

BOOK REVIEW

'Aristocracy' in Antiquity: Redefining Greek and Roman Elites. Edited by NICK FISHER and HANS VAN WEES. London, UK: The Classical Press of Wales, 2015. Pp. viii + 392. Hardcover, \$110.00. ISBN 978-1-910589-01-4.

The concern of this stimulating book is to combat the simplistic application of the concept of 'Aristocracy' to the analysis of elites, problematizing the use of the term as a descriptor that can be easily transferred from one time and place to the next. The twelve chapters offer critical responses to the particular communities, social structures, and ancient sources considered, and the work also offers case-studies for those interested in elite behavior more widely, particularly in the archaic period. Together, these studies make the case that the need to transform the way in which elites are analyzed is immediate and urgent. This necessity is partly a consequence of substantial contributions in past decades (particularly the work of Félix Bourriot and Denis Roussel, along with that of Walter Donlan) failing to be absorbed deeply enough by subsequent scholarship to establish a new foundation for enquiry.

The editors of the volume provide an introduction ("The trouble with 'aristocracy'") that is learned, challenging to the discipline, and will perhaps be the most enduring contribution of the book. It is concerned with the traditions of the study of aristocracy, the scholarship and scholars that have got us to this point, and with conveying a deep frustration of the resilience of the uncomplicated application of the concept. The rhythm of this opening is though somewhat uneven. It is more than twice as long as most other chapters, and contains an imperfectly integrated, if independently engaging, contribution on elites in Homer and Hesiod. This is likely to be a result of the long gestation period of the work, published seven years after the group was convened in Cork in 2008. Some contributors used this as an opportunity to make up-to-date statements on their specialty (James Whitley's chapter, "Agonistic Aristocrats? The curious Case of Archaic Crete," is particularly successful in giving a sense of the current state of play), other chapters are more clearly a product of the time of the original convocation.

The introduction thrives on its breadth of ideas, and this is matched by the broad geographic coverage of the main chapters, from the Eastern Aegean to the

Western and Southern Mediterranean. A chronological focus on the archaic period helps promote cross-fertilization, with Laurens Tacoma's chapter ("Roman elite Mobility under the Principate") as the only outlier. Noboru Sato's contribution on "'Aristocracy' in Athenian Diplomacy" is the other based entirely outside the archaic period, questioning the decline of hereditary social capital in classical Athens by considering its role in articulating personal interactions in foreign affairs.

Sato's chronological parameters and relatively narrow thematic focus act as helpful respondents to several contributions that emphasize the importance of shedding the baggage of evidence from later periods in order to see more keenly the archaic experience. For instance, the wide-ranging Alain Duplouy ("Genealogical and Dynastic Behaviour in Archaic and Classical Greece") and Stephen Lambert ("Aristocracy and the Attic *Genos*") forcefully argue against strongly hereditary structures of elites in the archaic period, instead picking this up as a late-classical development. Similarly, James Whitley is at pains to avoid another fourth-century albatross, the 'Platonic' use of Crete as a reservoir of static/conservative political forms, a control group against which the constitutions of mainland states can be judged and tested. Whitley also bemoans the lack of discourse between historical and archaeological/art historical work on the history of Crete, a criticism that could perhaps be applied to this book more widely, for while the collection as a whole is diverse in its evidence and approaches, each chapter has a distinctive and discrete base of evidence, and more overt conversation between the chapters would have been fruitful.

In his chapter on 'aristocratic' values and practices in Aegina, Nick Fisher re-emphasizes his scepticism of the utility of talk of aristocracies, considering it a barrier to reading the subtleties of both communities and texts. He outlines some of the historical peculiarities of elite Aeginetan experience in the late archaic period and also the surviving literary evidence for that experience (particularly Pindar), which permits a different mode of analysis of elite behavior than would be possible in any other community. But though 'aristocracy' and the connotations of the term receive sustained attack in the book, the editors have allowed room for a defense. Sato and Whitley emphasize that in their respective periods and areas that there is good evidence for a group that could be usefully termed an aristocracy. Similarly, Thomas Figueira ("Modes of Colonization and Elite Integration in Archaic Greece") articulates a position that, whatever the terminology, the hierarchical structures of metropoleis are replicated in the foundations of new communities. This is echoed in Gillian Shepherd's chapter on the emergence of elites in archaic

Sicily, which is among the most successful in the book at profitably integrating evidence from a variety of sources, particularly from the funerary record.

In sum, the book is thoughtfully ambivalent. When used carefully, 'aristocracy' is a concept that can be useful to think with and think against, but is highly problematic in many contexts and should not be used to delimit any kind of closed and little-changing group. Nor should it be allowed to obscure the diversity of political relations, the social mobility of individuals, and the creative behaviors of elites visible across the Greek world in the archaic period and beyond.

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