

## BOOK REVIEW

Leopold MIGEOTTE, *The Economy of the Greek Cities from the Archaic Period to the Early Roman Empire*. Translated by Janet Lloyd. Pp. xxii + 200. University of California Press. Paperback, \$19.95. ISBN 978-0-520-25366-7.

Janet Lloyd, the translator, states in the preface, that the current work is based on the second French edition (2007), which contained several new sections, and an updated bibliography for an English-speaking audience.

Leopold Migeotte (M. hereafter) divides his study into five major chapters – 1) Introduction; 2) The Greek Cities and the Economy; 3) The World of Agriculture; 4) Craft Industries and Business Ventures; and 5) Conclusion – followed by bibliography and index. The introduction is subdivided into two major sections: 1) purpose and nature of the study; and 2) sources. After a brief account of the controversies surrounding the study of the ancient economy (Primitivist versus Modernist, etc.), M. defines the parameters and intent of this study: it is “... no more than an introduction: it avoids the finer points of erudite discussion and presents brief, up-to-date analysis of general questions” (pp. 3-4). The avoidance of almost all references to modern studies reduces the potential expanse of the work but often creates frustration for any reader wishing to pursue the topic; a better approach would have been to include at least the name(s) and publication dates (in parentheses) of authors, included in the bibliography, who have examined the topic. M. notes that the scope of the study is limited to the Greek cities from the Archaic period to the early Roman Empire and is not intended to be a study of the whole ancient world; he defines the economy as “... activities involving production, exchange, and consumption of material goods and services in the Greek cities of antiquity.” M. “... strives to show how these activities interacted and operated within the political, social, and cultural context.” (p. 4) The last section of the introduction is a discussion of the sources: 1) oral tradition preserved in later works; 2) written texts and documents; and 3) archaeology and numismatics. The major problem for any historian of the ancient economy is the rare and lacunose nature of these sources. It is not possible to write a quantitative analysis of the economy; the data allow only for generalizations.

The first chapter, *The Greek Cities and the Economy*, “... presents a broad outline of the material, mental, and institutional context within which the economy of Greek cities developed” (p. 15) in four sections: 1) constants and constraints; 2) economy and *oikonomia*; 3) economic space of the cities; and 4) primary text (translation of Arist *Pol.* 1326b27–1327a20 on the city and its territory). In the section “constants and constraints” M. covers several topics: 1) geographical setting, which he sees as having changed very little since the ancient period; 2) demography, in which there was a major population growth in the 8th century; 3) violence and insecurity; and 4) the effect of the level of technology, in which there was a lack of innovation due to the Greeks’ mental attitude, blocking technical development. In the second section M. examines the Greeks’ understanding of the economy; while they “... knew that their well-being and that of their city depended on production and trade” (p. 28), they had no generic term for the economy, since the term used by ancient authors, *oikonomia*, referred primarily to the management of a household (*oikos*); even when the term was extended to cover public economy, it was seen more as an extension of the household economy. There was some limited interest among Athenian intellectuals in the economy, particularly in the late 5th century due to the influence of Socrates and the Sophists. M.’s investigation into economic space examines the interaction of town and country; he argues that the towns did not dominate the economy nor were they parasites. He also considers the nature of the social hierarchy of a *polis* – citizens, metics, and slaves – and notes that only citizens had access to land ownership. This hierarchy resulted in “socioeconomic” imbalance, a constant factor of every city. Revenues were vital for a *polis* to finance its operations and building projects; the primary source was taxation. Taxation on wealth (*eisphora*) was rare; the vast majority of revenue came from indirect taxes such as the 2% tax on imports and exports. Cities also earned revenues from the minting of coins; M. mentions this only in passing and does not describe the mechanism by which a *polis* could increase its revenue through minting.

The second chapter focuses on the role of agriculture in the economy of the *polis*. M. not only discusses agriculture – variety of crops and their uses, farming practices, and labor – but also animal husbandry, beekeeping, hunting, fishing, and self-sufficiency and markets, concluding with texts from Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus* and leasing contracts from Arkeisne on Amorgos. M. begins the chapter by stating: “As in all barely mechanized rural societies, Greek agriculture required a large workforce, especially at harvesting and grape-picking times, and it occupied a large majority of the population, probably at least 80 percent” (p. 67). He

notes that farming had been primarily dominated by citizens who owned the land, and farmers from the Classical period on began to improve farming methods. In the section on animal husbandry M. discusses Xenophon's passage linking agriculture and stock-raising (Xen. *Oec.* 5.3) and argues for a limited form of transhumance with flocks moved over relatively short distances. This is a debated issue on which there is no clear consensus.<sup>1</sup> In the section on self-sufficiency and use of markets, M. argues: "... a desire for self-sufficiency and dependable subsistence was characteristic of cultivators who worked their own land (*autourgoi*)" (p. 85). Farmers would take a portion of their produce to markets and purchase what they could not or did not produce; in this way they made self-sufficiency and markets complementary to one another. Some landowners actually sold their entire crops in the market and purchased necessary items: Pericles is an excellent example of this (Plut. *Per.* 16; cf. [Arist.] *Oec.* 1344b31–33; 1345a17–19). Already in the Archaic and Classical period some farmers practiced a speculative kind of agriculture, specializing in a particular product.

The third chapter concerns the role of crafts and businesses in the ancient *polis* economy, focusing on private crafts, workplaces, types of production, public works – quarries, forestry, mines, constructions, warfare and defenses, the fleet – and concluding with translations of Xen. *Cyr.* 8.2.5 on the development of the world of craftsmen, and Xen. *Poroi* 4.1–4 on the silver mines. In Athens it is possible to distinguish about 100 different crafts in which metics and slaves worked, supplemented by 10,000 citizens. Workshops in the rural areas could be in the *oikos* or in specialized structures usually near the sources of raw materials; in the towns they were often clustered together in "industrial areas." The *polis* was involved in various forms of production; most important for several cities was the exploitation of mines and quarries. Revenues collected were used to construct various buildings such as temples, stoas, official buildings, shipyards for the construction of warships. "Public enterprises had important economic consequences for both cities and individuals; they created not only employment but also a labor market, at least from time to time" (p. 113).

<sup>1</sup> Supporting transhumance: J. Skydsgaard, "Transhumance in Ancient Greece," in C. R. Whittaker, ed. *Pastoral Economies of Ancient Greece and Rome* (Cambridge 1988) 75–86; arguing against transhumance: P. Halstead, "Traditional and Ancient Rural Economy in Mediterranean Europe: Plus ça Change," *JHS* 107 (1987) 77–87; and proposing local variation of the two, C. Chandezon, *L'élevage en Grèce, fin V<sup>e</sup>–fin I<sup>er</sup> siècle a.C.: l'apport des sources épigraphiques* (Bordeaux 2003).

Chapter Four focuses on trade, which over the centuries expanded: "... it was the development of what was truly commerce, effected by the use of money, that fueled change and most clearly distinguished between some cities and others" (p. 117). There were several constraints on the development of trade within the Greek world: multiplicity of frontiers; warfare; piracy; banditry and plunder. Most significant was the slow pace of transportation, particularly overland; most goods traveled by sea. What helped trade was the diffusion of minted coins, recognized and accepted in most *poleis*. Here M. separates his position from that of the Primitivists who emphasized the scarcity of coins in circulation and argues: "... apart from exceptional times, such as those of warfare, which could delay the arrival of precious metals, those shortages were for the most part only temporary, doubtless provoked by hoarding" (p. 122). The diffusion of coinage resulted in the establishment of and spread of banks. In the second half of the 6th century the professional moneychanger appeared; eventually individuals accepted deposits and made loans at interest resulting in the appearance of proper banks. Central to all of this was trade which operated on several levels within the *polis*; the city provided a specific area for local trade, the *agora*. In addition trade took place at popular festivals, which were comparable to medieval fairs. These markets functioned as an intermediary between local and regional trading. Finally, there was regional and long-distance trading. The *emporion* was the place where all imported and exported materials were traded. During the period of the *polis* big business first appeared, specifically in Athens, and developed over the centuries, due to the need of funds (capital) to outfit merchant vessels; to meet this need mercantile loans were made. The methods of financing these voyages were not those of the modern capitalist; however, the Greeks did respond to economic rationale. They understood the value of wealth and how to use it. "So it is not anachronistic to refer to their activities using words such as 'capital' and 'investment'" (p. 141). Furthermore, the Greeks understood the law of supply and demand, and market controls were limited for the most part. On occasion prices may have been fixed by the state; however, "... in practice, the fixing of wholesale and retail prices depended primarily on negotiations between the merchants and the magistrates, and on the magistrates' power of persuasion" (p 149). Important to long-distance trade were international agreements that could establish favorite-nation status. The cities and sanctuaries stimulated trade via their purchases of supplies from local and overseas vendors. M. concludes: "The world of commerce was a complex one, in which activities taking place at different levels continued to operate alongside one another for centuries" (p. 170). The chapter

concludes with the translation of four texts related to trade: Arist. *Pol.* 1257b1–34; a law from Kyparisia in Messenia; an extract from regulations on the mysteries of Andania; and the treaty between the Aetolian *koinon* and Triikka in Thessaly.

In the last section M. pulls together the information to arrive at some conclusions about the economy of the *polis*. He notes that a number of conclusions can be drawn from this “rapid overview” of the economy. First, over the long-term, production and trade increased slowly and irregularly. Second, the *polis* economy was marked by great diversity and even contradictory features, even from one region to another. He notes that while some cities remained for centuries small peasant country towns, others were more economically dynamic. Such a conclusion would seem to undermine the concept of this study which lumps together all Greek *poleis* over a substantial period. I personally agree that there were significant variations among the various *poleis* and each needs to be understood independently first before any overall conclusions can or should be drawn. Third, he raises the question whether or not by the 4th century or even earlier in the late 5th century a market economy existed. While there were some aspects of a market economy in operation, such as market prices governed by the law of supply and demand, it was not a market economy: much of production was aimed at self-sufficiency; there was no great market serving the entire ancient world; and wealthy citizens continued to think and act as landowners not businessmen.<sup>2</sup> This may be too narrow a definition of a market economy. Altvater defines a market economy as one in which prices of goods and services are determined by the law of supply and demand. However, he concludes that in the real world, market economies do not exist in a pure form, as societies and governments regulate them rather than allowing self-regulation by market forces.<sup>3</sup> The issue needs to be reexamined. Finally M. states: “To sum up the ancient economy is a single word, the term precapitalist or preindustrial is often used” (p. 177). It is pointless to reduce the *polis* economy to a single formula, since it was marked by great diversity and contradictory features.

<sup>2</sup> “In the modern sense ... a market economy is a system in which the market is the mechanism that fuels and autoregulates the entire economy ...” (p. 176).

<sup>3</sup> E. Altvater, *The Future of the Market: An Essay on the Regulation of Money and Nature After the Collapse of “Actually Existing Socialism”* (London, New York: Verso (1993) 57, 237–238.

Even though this study is a brief overview of the ancient *polis* economy, it still is very useful for students of ancient economic history; however, the specialist in the field may well find much of the discussion of controversial topics too brief and not well documented.

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