

BOOK REVIEW

The Polis in the Hellenistic World. Edited by HENNING BÖRM AND NINO LURAGHI. Stuttgart, DE: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2018. Pp. 264. Hardback, €54.00. ISBN: 978-3-515-12020-3.

Henning Börm and Nino Luraghi present ten essays on developments around the concept of the polis during the Hellenistic period. Most chapters originated as conference papers, either at the conference *Rethinking the Polis in the Hellenistic Age*, Kulturwissenschaftliches Kolleg of Konstanz University, June 2-3, 2014, or at a workshop in the Department of Classics of Princeton University, February 2, 2015. The papers have been revised to include cross-references across the volume and provide thorough references and bibliographies. As a collection of conference papers, the book does not provide a general introduction to the topic, but gives a snapshot of current trends and advances. Similarly, it does not aim at an integrated synthesis of the subject, but highlights developments of current interest. The balance of topics covered tends toward political and economic approaches, but additional perspectives from social history and philosophy are also included. Here I focus on two representative chapters.

In the second chapter, "Oligarchy and the Hellenistic city," Christel Müller combines philological and economic approaches to refine the conventional wisdom about Hellenistic oligarchy. Namely, the predominant trend is the concentration of power in the hands of an economic elite, which should be separated from the developments in political institutions. First, Müller examines the usage of "oligarchy" in Aristotle, Polybius and the epigraphic record, showing that each source uses it in both a technical sense of requiring a property qualification for the franchise and a non-technical sense as an anti-type of "democracy," referring not to a particular constitution, but to autonomy, that is not being subject to one of the Hellenistic monarchies.

Next, Müller considers the concentration of wealth into a few families in the Hellenistic cities, arguing that Sparta, where this process is well-documented, is typical rather than exceptional, and that this process is independent of the formal political system. In connection with this, Müller examines examples of euergetism,

arguing that these examples evince concentrations of wealth progressing through the Hellenistic period, creating economic elites or “oligarchies,” which engaged what were often still “democratic” political structures. Finally, Müller looks at constitutional changes proper, such as the trend to transform elected positions into liturgies, which were occupied by the wealthiest citizens, or the transformation of the Athenian *ephebeia* into a private club. Müller advises caution in examining the change in nomenclature for councils from *boule* to *synedrion*; it likely reflects the introduction of a property qualification, but that trend is not monolithic. Furthermore, the property qualification was consistently promoted by the Romans, but could also be resisted by the Greek cities, and appeared later in cities further from the Roman sphere of influence.

Altogether the chapter achieves an appropriate reframing of thinking about oligarchy in the Hellenistic period. The conventional wisdom that democracy receded and oligarchy advanced is not incorrect, but it is refined in a number of points: the primary transformation was in the concentration of wealth, and changes in constitutional structures followed the economic changes, often at a distance or under pressure from Rome. Changes in political form were typically piecemeal, so that it is less informative to ask whether a city was a “democracy” or an “oligarchy” than to consider how individual cases complicate the broader trends.

The ninth chapter, “Documentary evidence and political ideology in early Hellenistic Athens” by Nino Luraghi, explores how to approach understanding political ideology in Hellenistic discourse, given that the nature of the evidence changes from the Classical period, dominated by narrative history, to the Hellenistic period, dominated by documentary evidence. Luraghi argues that this change intensifies the need to identify the influences of political ideologies, since the documents were produced for consumption by the citizen-body rather than as literary texts produced for an intellectual elite. Such documentary discourse can appear as conforming to the dominant political ideology, with the paradoxical result that lapidary statements of fact can also be convoluted periphrases avoiding politically embarrassing or unacceptable admissions.

Luraghi examines the case of Kallias, the object of an honorific inscription excavated in 1971. Since Kallias is otherwise known, Luraghi analyses the inscription in terms of what it omits or obfuscates, on the assumption that these are strategies to accommodate what is politically acceptable in public discourse. Thus, the context of Kallias’ military actions in Athens, the expulsion of the Macedonian garrison in 287 and Kallias’ position as an officer in Ptolemy I Soter’s army were

omitted because references to Athens being under Macedonian domination or an Egyptian satellite were politically unacceptable. Luraghi further argues that Athenian political discourse lacked a frame to represent precisely these situations, so it tended to reframe those narratives in more acceptable ways, such as internal struggles between oligarchs and democrats, comparing Demochares' honorific decree of 281/0, which reframes Demosthenes' anti-Macedonian position as an anti-oligarchic one.

Finally, Luraghi discusses the absence of reference to the Hellenistic monarchs in the inscription, arguing that in Athenian political ideology a legitimate king in the Greek world would be a contradiction, necessitating the suppression of Demetrius and Ptolemy in Kallias' career. This chapter makes an important methodological point, prompting scholars to reconsider the relationship between political ideology and the sort of documentary evidence that is predominantly available for the Hellenistic period. Luraghi's argument is compelling: inscriptions purporting to record bare facts are nevertheless constructed in a political context that constrains what can be said; when they present silence or periphrasis, readers should be alerted to a dissonance between the event and its record. Replication in other Hellenistic contexts may be increasingly difficult when we lack the plurality of sources that tend to be available for Athens.

These chapters are representative of the collection as a whole in that they combine careful examinations of specific texts and problems with innovative approaches. This is a collection for a scholarly audience; the essays assume previous knowledge of Hellenistic history and current trends in the field. The general goal of the volume is to identify areas of potential revision and growth, not to synthesize or report areas of consensus. As such it does not provide an overview of the topic, aim at comprehensive coverage or strive for unity of methodology, but rather reflects the diversity of scholarship on the Hellenistic polis. Readers may disagree about individual approaches, but will find something to stimulate and challenge their conceptions of Hellenistic history in every chapter. Each chapter has its own bibliography, and a general index concludes the volume.

PAUL OJENNUS

Whitworth University, pojennus@whitworth.edu