
Review by Carrie Sawtell

*Communities and Networks in the Ancient Greek World* follows the precedent of much of Kostas Vlassopoulos’ previous work (for example 2007a, 2007b, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2013) in searching for ways to move away from the *polis* model as the dominant paradigm for researching and writing ancient Greek history (see also Cohen 2000). The *polis* model takes the *polis* or city-state as the prime unit for engaging with ancient Greek history, but being highly structuralist, this model has privileged the ‘citizen club’ and its exploitation of others (p.2). In their introductory chapter, Claire Taylor and Vlassopoulos (p.1) acknowledge the position of the *polis* model as “one of the greatest contributions of post-World War II scholarship to the study of Greek social, economic and cultural history” that “remains still the default position in the field.” The aim of this book, as well as much of modern scholarship in the authors’ opinion, “is to find ways of accounting for the presence and influence of non-citizens and the non-wealthy in Greek societies” (p.3). The communities and networks of the title provide the conceptual frameworks with which to account for the non-citizens and non-elitist, and the book seeks to explore relationships and interactions that happened beneath and beyond the level of the *polis*.

In drawing on these two concepts and trying to set an agenda for the future study of ancient Greek history, the book is divided into three parts; part one, dealing with ‘network thinking,’ comprises three chapters, all of which consider the role of religion in network formation; part two, another three chapters, tackles the creation of communities, those communities being formed, or at least mediated by, the disenfranchised metics and slaves of Athens; part three, two chapters, looks at networks between and outside the *poleis*; the single chapter that is part four, John Davies ‘Retrospect and Prospect’ serves as a statement on how to move forward with these paradigms.

In her chapter, Taylor uses a dedication (NM2009) from the cave of Pan at Vari as a starting point to launch a discussion of how the boundaries of citizen, metic and slave within the *polis* could be transcended, with the networks formed providing advantages for the otherwise disenfranchised dedicators. She acknowledges as in hers and Vlassopoulos’ introduction and other contributors in their chapters, and goes on to demonstrate, that while citizenship did bring tangible rights and privileges, the citizen-non-citizen dichotomy is not the most useful in all contexts (pp. 36-37). Taylor refers to social networks as a “resource” which individuals can draw to improve their standing, and group dedication can be seen as result of such networks and as cementing such networks (p.40). While Taylor recognizes other opportunities for cross-status interaction, she signals the act of group dedications like this as
special because it is voluntary (pp.41-44). The act of dedication and the votive itself are imbued with “social capital (p.45). The chapter’s use of onomastics as evidence for status ties in nicely with Vlassopoulos’ discussion in chapter five of naming practices as a slave strategy for social mobility.

Esther Eidinow’s chapter continues the focus on religion, but is concerned not just with the networks of individuals but with conceptual networks (p.58). Looking at, as her title suggests, the embeddedness of Greek religion in society, drawing on the work of Parker (1986) and Sourvinou-Inwood (2000a, 2000b). Looking at the Athenian law court speeches, Eidinow discusses the charge graphe asebeias to show how religion was embedded, as impiety was a political as well as a religious matter, for fear that punishment for the actions of the wrongdoer would be visited on the whole polis if he or she was not charged, or was charged unjustly (pp.69-73). Eidinow concludes that asebeias had the power to change networks and be changed by the individuals of position of a network (p.78).

Paulin Ismaïd’s contribution once again continues the theme of religious networks, but he is concerned with layers or scales of networks, looking at the situation at Athens at what he calls the mesoscopic level and using the Tetrapolis at Marathon as his case study. The Tetrapolis “links together a group of sanctuaries with very different levels of affiliation,” and brought together different sections of the population at different times, creating separate but overlapping networks of different scales (p.96).

While Taylor’s chapter uses onomastic evidence to identify slaves and other non-Athenians from citizens, Vlassopoulos’ chapter cautions us expecting a clear demarcation between citizen-attested and slave-attested names. Based on his earlier article ‘Athenian Slave Names and Athenian Social History’ (2010), Vlassopoulos in his contribution to this volume demonstrates that many names are shared by citizens and slaves alike. The belief that most slave names were actually foreign or ethnically derived is the product of Athenian theatre. Slaves on stage were given names that clearly distinguished them from other characters, but this onomastic distinction was not as clear-cut in reality (p.104), and it this disparity that Vlassopoulos explores. Vlassopoulos suggests a number of explanations that he deems “not necessarily incompatible with each other” (p.107). These explanations are too numerous and detailed to cite at length here, but include: a higher proportion of Greek slaves at Athens than is traditionally accepted (p106-107); slave reproduction as a contributor to the slave population, these offspring not being foreign in the sense that their parents were (p.108-111); and, the explanations which give most agency to exploited slaves, that slaves and former slaves changed their names in the hope of social mobility or that the attestation of slave names among citizens could suggest slaves had infiltrated the citizen body (p.116-119).

Vlassopoulos ends his chapter with more questions than answers, inciting others to answer “questions to which no Greek historian can be indifferent” (p.127).

Peter Hunt follows Vlassopoulos with a further contribution on slave agency and identity at Athens. Hunt argues that while accessing slave culture is difficult due to the paucity of evidence, criticizing the negativity of Morris (1998; 2011), it is not impossible, and makes comparisons throughout with the situations of more recent slaves in America and Brazil. He suggests slaves of certain origins were better at retaining birth culture and forming communities in Athens (p.130), and that ethnic identities at Athens became more broad and inclusive, drawing on similarities rather than highlighting differences (p.131), and that a Trojan heritage among slaves more broadly can be identified. Hunt goes on to say that this sense of identity must be the result of most of the slave population having been enslaved once already adults and able to form a sense of identity as “Thracian, Lydian, or Carian” (p.145). The position of slaves in Athens, i.e. household vs. living apart, would have had an effect on the extent slaves retained their original culture (p.145-149). Regardless, Hunt’s discussion reflects the mission statement of the volume cited above, to account for non-citizen agency and influence.

While entitled ‘Metics in Athens,’ Ben Akrigg’s chapter continues considering slave experience in Classical Athens, suggesting as he does that the persistence of the economic migrant model as the explanation for the presence of most metics is rather simplistic, and an alternative explanation is that a great many metics could have been manumitted slaves (pp.162-173). Akrigg argues that the allure of the types of employment at Athens, and the numbers needed to fill this employment, fall short of explaining the presence of a voluntary metic population perhaps as many as 30,000 strong (on the size of the metic population see also
Ascertaining any true total for the metic population at Athens or the motivations of the majority is out of the question, the conclusion of Akrigg’s chapter is the need for an awareness of the variety within the metic population and how it affects community formation and networks.

In part four, Vincent Gabrielsen and Christy Constantakopoulou in their respective chapters extend the purview of networks beyond Athens, each considering potentially much wider, far-reaching networks than considered thus far. Athens remains a fixture in Gabrielsen’s chapter, however, surveying as it does Athenian naval and grain networks. The chapter is a prosopographical study, the aim being to chart interpersonal networks as they relate to the Athenian navy, but also to connect people to places and events as they relate to episodes in naval and grain trade history (p.179). Gabrielsen observes that the same individuals appearing together in records of naval events suggests they formed defined groups of eranistai who supported each other financially or otherwise in naval and trade matters (p.91, 196-199). These networks consisted of wealthy Athenians but also drew on connections with outsiders, transcending the limits of the polis.

The final main chapter is the first to remove wholesale the focus from Athens in what is otherwise a very Athenocentric book, though of course not in the traditionally citizen-centered approach. Constantakopoulou surveys modes of political participation on the Aegean island koina, the koina being a form of political organization unlike that of the polis, being as they were a federation of smaller states (pp.214-215). Epigraphic evidence from the islands of Lesbos, Herakleia and Rhodes demonstrate that the political situation here was very different from that at Athens, as the evidence from the islands shows that non-citizen foreigners resident on the island could participate in politics, involved in decisions that affected citizens and foreigners alike. Political community and networks on the islands, then, looked very different from those at Athens, for while Taylor in her chapter rightly states that citizenship was not the defining feature of all interactions and participation, it certainly was in the sphere of politics (pp.36-37).

While calling this volume Athenocentric, I do not mean this as the criticism the term often implies. For while the book’s focus is inherently on Athens, it is clearly not of the usual breed of Athenocentric discourse, for as John Davies (p.243) observes in his concluding remarks:

The chapters by Akrigg, Hunt, Taylor, and Vlassopoulos, therefore, are breaking new ground. All use predominantly Athenian material, all focus on low-status social groups whose lives were lived very largely under the horizon of concern of contemporary documentation, and all attempt to recreate the experiences of such men and women via an emic style of description.

Davies, whose chapter is itself a critical review of the rest of the volume, while praising the focus and aims of the book overall, is more critical of it’s application of network theory, commenting that in the above mentioned chapters it is used “more as a metaphor than anything else” (p.245). Furthermore he is skeptical of the application of the various models in this volume to the wider Greek world, where the kinds of literary and epigraphic evidence at Athens covered in this volume are even more limited if not lacking altogether (p.247).

Despite Davies reservations, though these are coupled with praise is undeniable, this volume has much to recommend it and encourages future research on subaltern individuals and new ways of looking at ancient Greek society as a whole, with diverse ways and levels at which to do this. Essential reading for any student or researcher of Greek history.

**Bibliography**


