

Project Description:

The Oxford History of the Archaic Greek World

Project Directors:

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1. Introduction/Overview

Imagine an historian who, in the year 4021, is writing about the United States 2,000 years before her own time. She knows quite a bit about New York and Los Angeles, but very little about any place else, and she assumes that institutions and customs in those two cities were widely replicated throughout the United States. Some of her conclusions about the United States of the 21st century would be accurate, but some would be wrong, simply because many places in the United States are quite different from New York and Los Angeles.

Historians in the year 2021 writing about ancient Greece have much in common with our imaginary scholar from the future. Historians specializing in the study of ancient Greece tend to be very well informed about Athens and Sparta and tend to assume that institutions and customs in those communities were widely replicated throughout the Greek world. However, the ancient Greek world was no more uniform than the modern-day United States. The tendency to focus on Athens and Sparta is, as a result, deeply problematic, not least because it implicitly homogenizes and inevitably impoverishes our perceptions of ancient Greece.

The directors of the project described here, Paul Cartledge and Paul Christesen, have long been concerned about the low level of attention paid to Greek communities other than Athens and Sparta. We have, therefore, established an international research project designed to greatly enhance knowledge and appreciation of ancient Greek communities throughout the Mediterranean basin. That project, the *Oxford History of the Archaic Greek World (OHAGW)*, will produce 23 detailed studies of communities, sanctuaries, and regions in the Archaic period (c. 800 – c. 480 BCE). Those studies – all aimed at an academic audience – range from 30,000 to 175,000 words in length and cumulatively total c. 1.5 million words; they will be published in both print (eight volumes) and digital form by Oxford University Press starting in 2021. Thirty-eight distinguished scholars from ten different countries have joined the project (see Appendices 1-2 for lists of sites and contributors).

One historian at Cambridge, who is not contributing to *OHAGW*, has described it as a once-in-a-generation project that will change the way scholars study and think about a crucial era in ancient Greek history. *OHAGW* will make it possible to explore, with an entirely new level of facility and detail, both the unique features of geographically dispersed individual communities and the common features that bound together those communities into a shared cultural space. Our belief, which was enthusiastically seconded by the academics who reviewed our proposal for Oxford University Press, is that *OHAGW* will rapidly become the definitive resource for Archaic Greece and will mark a watershed in the relevant scholarship.

2. Diversity and Uniformity in the Greek World

OHAGW is grounded in the complex interplay of diversity and uniformity. The ancient Greek world was remarkable for its kaleidoscopic diversity, which was, in large part, the product of a highly unusual pattern of settlement. Most cultural groups in the pre-modern world lived in well-defined, relatively compact geographical areas (think of the ancient Egyptians residing along the Nile). By c. 500 BCE, however, large numbers of Greeks had left their homeland in the southern end of the Balkan peninsula and founded settlements throughout the Mediterranean basin, ranging from Spain to Egypt and from northern Africa to the north shore of the Black Sea. As

Greeks dispersed throughout the Mediterranean, the different environmental and human ecosystems they encountered and remade led almost inevitably to important differences among widely scattered settlements. Furthermore, the vast majority of the approximately 1,000 distinct Greek polities that existed c. 500 BCE were autonomous communities, each of which developed its own, unique set of sociopolitical institutions and practices.

Nonetheless, despite their dispersion and diversity, Greek communities shared important commonalities, most notably language and religion. Those communities were also bound together by a loosely structured but highly active network of commercial, cultural, diplomatic, and military ties. In addition, certain places and events – most notably Olympia and the Olympic Games – attracted participants from Greek communities throughout the Mediterranean and became sites for the production and inculcation of a deeply embedded sense of belonging to a single, distinct cultural group.

3. The Problem

Remarkable diversity and a countervailing uniformity were thus two of the defining traits of the Greek world. Historians of ancient Greece have for the most part tended to emphasize uniformity at the expense of diversity and to take Athens and Sparta as typical. To give but one example, little attention is paid to the experiences of Greeks who lived in places such as Cyprus, where the interaction of Greeks, Phoenicians, Egyptians, and Persians, among others, helped produce Greek communities with a constellation of institutions, practices, and cultural traits not found anywhere else in the Greek world. Historians of ancient Greece are not unaware of the existence of important differences between Greek communities. Nor is it the case that information about other Greek communities is unavailable. Indeed, decades of excavation and scholarship have greatly enriched our knowledge of dozens of Greek communities located throughout the Mediterranean.

The problem is that scholars have difficulty accessing the information about any given Greek community that has been generated by excavations and scholarship because it is scattered among literally thousands of publications. Someone interested in, for instance, the Greek community of Cyrene (located in North Africa) would need to put in months if not years of work in order to identify, collect, and read the relevant scholarly literature, which includes reports from dozens of excavations conducted by various teams of American, British, French, Italian, and Libyan archaeologists starting in 1884. Even in cases where individual communities, such as Corinth and Miletus, have been the subject of scholarly monographs, the resulting publications take widely varying approaches with respect to the types of evidence considered and the methodologies used. The resulting lack of commensurability makes integration and synthesis difficult.

As a result, historians writing about ancient Greece have typically concentrated on the two communities about which information is most readily available – Athens and Sparta. That, in turn, means that textbooks about ancient Greece and writing for the general public have little to say about the hundreds of other Greek polities.

4. The Solution: *The Oxford History of the Archaic Greek World*

The directors of this project have both long been concerned about the predominance of Atheno- and Sparta-centric views of ancient Greece. In 2009 Paul Cartledge took a preliminary step toward righting the balance by writing an introduction to Greek history, *A History of Greece in Eleven Cities*, that offered a broader perspective.

However, the basic problem – the existence of a great deal of widely scattered information – remained. With that in mind in 2013 we initiated a research project specifically designed to remedy that problem at a fundamental level. That project will generate a collection of detailed studies of communities, sanctuaries, and regions, from all over the Greek world, during the Archaic period. The studies will vary in length, depending on the amount of information available about the site in question. The shortest studies will run to c. 30,000 words; the longest ones to c. 175,000 words. Each study will include at least a dozen maps and images, as well as a bibliography and guide to further reading.

The immense time span covered under the broad rubric of ancient Greek history required establishing some chronological parameters in order to keep the project to a manageable scale. The Archaic period was chosen as a focal point because it was a critical era in Greek history. During this period Greeks confronted a series of demographic, political, social, and economic challenges and generated an array of responses that transformed the ways in which they lived, worked, and interacted. Much of what is now seen as distinctive about Greek culture – democracy, stone temples, and nude athletics, to name but a few – first developed in the Archaic period. The history of this period thus merits careful study by anyone interested in the ancient Greek world and its legacy.

A key feature of *OHAGW* is that it will include the most important categories of information about each site and will present that information in a standardized format. All of the studies that we have commissioned will be structured around the same 11 rubrics:

- (1) sources, (2) natural setting, (3) material culture, (4) political history, (5) legal history, (6) diplomatic history (including warfare), (7) economic history, (8) familial /demographic history (including education), (9) social customs and institutions, (10) religious customs and institutions, (11) cultural history.

The studies in *OHAGW* are also linked together because they all employ the same methodology, which we have chosen to call archaeohistory. Careful study of the development of the Greek world during the Archaic period requires making thorough use of approaches taken from two different fields: history and archaeology. In simple terms, history explores the past on the basis of written texts, whereas archaeology achieves the same goal by means of heavy reliance on material remains such as pottery and architecture. A substantial number of literary and epigraphic texts from and about Archaic Greece have survived to the present day, but their quality and quantity are such as to make it impossible to construct a satisfactory narrative solely on the basis of written sources. At the same time, ongoing excavations at dozens of sites all over the Mediterranean basin have yielded a rich and growing collection of material evidence. That evidence is invaluable, but it has significant lacunae and limitations, and its full value is realized only when it is brought into dialog with the relevant textual sources. Textual and material evidence suggest narratives that complement and contradict each other, and the dialectic

between those narratives enriches our understanding of the Archaic period. As a result, serious study of the Archaic period requires a hybridized approach that leverages methodologies and bodies of evidence associated with both history and archaeology. Much of the best scholarship on the Archaic period produced in the past 30 years is notable for combining literary and inscriptional texts with material evidence such as pottery, coins, and statuary.

OHAGW thus represents a large-scale collaborative effort to bring together a broad range of information to describe the Archaic Greek world in ways that highlight the importance and important contributions of communities such as Metapontion and regions such as Cyprus. In addition, *OHAGW* presents key categories of information about each site in a standardized format that facilitates comparison and contrast of different communities, sanctuaries, and regions. Those two features of *OHAGW* will, taken together, make it possible to generate synthetic understandings of the Greek world that have heretofore been nearly impossible to achieve.

The utility of *OHAGW* is perhaps more immediately apparent if we return to our imaginary historian from the year 4021. If she had at her disposal a reference work that enabled her to access, quickly and easily, an array of information about cities other than New York and Los Angeles, she could produce a much more complete and nuanced account of the United States in the 21st-century.

5. Publication and Access

As mentioned above, *OHAGW* will appear both in hard copy and in digital form. The hard copy will occupy eight volumes that will collectively run to close to 2,500 pages. A digital version will also be available on the Oxford University Press (OUP) website. Both hard copy and digital versions will include an index, and the digital versions will be searchable.

Individuals wishing to access *OHAGW* digitally will need a paid subscription to the OUP website. Alternatively, they will be able to purchase a digital PDF version of any given study for an as-yet undetermined price. Most research libraries in Europe and North America already maintain a subscription to the OUP website, so *OHAGW* will be readily available to scholars. In addition, OUP has agreed to make abridged versions of the studies in *OHAGW* available on a website that can be accessed free-of-charge. That website, and the option to purchase a complete version of any given study in PDF form, means that interested individuals around the world will have immediate access to *OHAGW*.

OUP has a financial interest in ensuring that *OHAGW* is available on a continuous and continuing basis, and hence there is no doubt that *OHAGW* will be accessible via the OUP website for the foreseeable future.

6. What Differentiates *OHAGW*

Although there are a number of extant reference works on ancient Greece, *OHAGW* is unique in a number of ways.

- *It will massively enhance both the breadth and depth of our understanding of ancient Greece.*
The scale of the project – the studies in *OHAGW* will collectively run to close to 1.5 million words – means that it will provide a wide-ranging view of the ancient Greek world in the Archaic period. The focus on a single time period and the selection of a representative sample of Greek sites – rather than attempting to write about every known site in all periods – means that each study will provide an in-depth look at a particular community, sanctuary, or region. Most existing reference works (e.g. Hansen and Nielsen’s *Inventory of Archaic and Greek Poleis*) have broad coverage but offer only minimal information about any given site.

- *The design of the project will make it much easier than ever before for scholars to learn about sites other than Athens and Sparta.*

The high degree of structural and methodological commensurability among the component studies will make it possible to read either vertically (reading a complete study of a single site) or horizontally (reading, for example, about the political history of a number of different sites). Reading vertically will enable scholars to familiarize themselves relatively quickly with a number of different Archaic Greek sites. This will greatly facilitate research and writing that acknowledges the relevance and importance of sites other than Athens and Sparta. Reading horizontally will enable scholars to familiarize themselves relatively quickly with how specific institutions and practices manifested themselves from place to place across the Greek world. The capacity to read both vertically and horizontally will help generate a new, more complex, more nuanced understanding of the Archaic Greek world as a whole.

- *Each study will be written by one or more leading experts (see Appendix 2 for a list of contributors).*

This project has met with a warm reception from other scholars, who recognized its vast potential, and we have been able to secure the participation of 38 distinguished researchers from ten different countries.

- *The publication of the studies in digital form means that the information in *OHAGW* can be revised regularly and hence *OHAGW* will always be up to date.*

A major problem with reference works that exist only in hard copy is that they rapidly go out of date as new finds and scholarship accumulate. *OHAGW* will be available on the website of OUP, which means that any given study can be updated any time significant new information becomes available.

- *The studies that currently comprise *OHAGW* can be indefinitely supplemented, and *OHAGW* will become more and more comprehensive over the course of time.*

The structural and methodological template we have established can be applied to any number of other places in the Greek world. Once the first tranche of studies is finished, essays on other sites written by suitably qualified individuals will be gradually added to *OHAGW* and made available on the Oxford University Press website.

7. Conclusion

If one were to open any of the current textbooks on ancient Greek history aimed at college undergraduates, one would be hard pressed to find any mention of sites such as Massalia (in southern France) or Chios (in the Aegean). Indeed, an inattentive reader might conclude that everything of significance in Greek history took place at either Athens or Sparta. This reflects the ongoing difficulties that scholars experience in accessing information about many important sites, and in synthesizing the information that is available.

Our hope is that *OHAGW* will facilitate the creation of scholarship that presents more complete and more nuanced views of the ancient Greek world. *OHAGW*, by greatly ameliorating the current difficulties in learning about the Greek world outside of Athens and Sparta, also has the capacity to help scholars bring a deeper and richer conception of ancient Greece to general audiences.

Appendix 1: Essays in *OHAGW*

Arcadia	Cyprus	Olympia
Argos	Cyrene	Rhodes
Athens	Delphi	Sicyon
Chalcis and Eretria	Macedonia	Sparta
Chios, Lesbos, Samos	Massalia	Syracuse
Corcyra	Metapontion	Thebes
Cumae and Pithecusae	Miletus	Western Sicily (Acragas, Himera, Selinus)
The Cyclades (Naxos, Paros, Delos)	Northwestern Greece	

Appendix 2: List of Contributors to *OHAGW*

Erica Morais Angliker (Institute of Classical Studies, London)	Adolfo Dominguez (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid)	Clemente Marconi (New York University)	Reinhard Senff (German Archaeological Institute at Athens)
Zosia Archibald (University of Liverpool)	Sylvian Fachard (University of Lausanne)	Valentina Mignosa (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia)	Matthew Simonton (University of Arizona)
Hélène Aurigny (Aix-Marseille University)	Hans-Joachim Gehrke (Albert Ludwig University of Freiburg)	Catherine Morgan (Oxford University)	Alexandra Sfyroera (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens)
Hans Beck (University of Münster)	Jonathan Hall (University of Chicago)	Sarah Murray (University of Toronto)	Anja Slawisch (University of Edinburgh)
Gregory Bonnin (Bordeaux Montaigne University)	Edward Henderson (independent scholar)	Robin Osborne (Cambridge University)	Lone Wriedt Sørensen (University of Copenhagen)
Joseph Carter (University of Texas)	Clayton Howard (Dartmouth College)	James Roy (University of Nottingham)	Anja Ulbrich (Ashmolean Museum)
Paul Cartledge (Cambridge University)	Alexander Karsten (Duke University)	Philip Sapiststein (University of Toronto)	Samuel Verdan (University of Lausanne)
Paul Christesen (Dartmouth College)	Yannos Kourayos (director, Archaeological Museum of Paros)	Gerald Schaus (Wilfrid Laurier University)	Andrew Ward (William and Mary)
Matteo d'Acunto (Università degli Studi di Napoli l'Orientale)	Giuseppe Lentini (Sapienza University of Rome)	Adam Schwartz (University of Copenhagen)	
Franco de Angelis (University of British Columbia)	Yannis Lolos (University of Thessaly)	Michael Scott (University of Warwick)	