

My past preoccupations and my plans for the future can both be traced back to a single moment in 1992. I was leaning against a building on the corner of 114th Street and Broadway, eating a quick lunch in between classes during my first year of graduate school at Columbia University. It suddenly occurred to me, as I watched the masses of people surging past and caught random pieces of conversations in a half-dozen languages, that I had no idea whatsoever how it could possibly work. How could it be that millions of people could collectively form a stable community in which things, for the most part, functioned smoothly? They were almost all complete strangers to each other and a substantial fraction of them were born and raised outside the United States, yet their interactions were beautifully synchronized. Traffic lights changed, cars stopped, pedestrians crossed the street. Someone walked into a coffee shop, which opened precisely on time, and someone else was waiting to take their order. The paper cup holding the coffee started in a forest somewhere and traveled from processing plant to distribution center, then onto a UPS truck and through the maze of traffic in New York City to the door of the coffee shop, just in time to be filled up and taken away. In short, everyone, without conscious agreement and with very little advance planning, was doing pretty much what they needed to do in order for an impossibly complicated system to work. I walked to class that day thinking about how and why societies do or do not function, and I have been thinking about it ever since.

Columbia University, 1992-1999

Prima facie one might think that a graduate student pursuing a PhD in ancient Greek history was not in a particularly good position to explore how and why societies do or do not function, but the reverse is in fact true. Greek communities experienced great difficulty in maintaining stable sociopolitical systems, and it is not coincidental that Greeks thought long and hard about how and why communities cohere or disintegrate. (In retrospect, I wonder if that accounts for why I became interested in ancient Greece in the first place.)

After searching through the extant bibliography, it became apparent that the kind of scholarship I had in mind, an overarching exploration of how and why Greek communities cohered or disintegrated, did not exist. That was not entirely surprising, since a proper study of a subject of that scale and complexity would require an analytical approach that was simultaneously idiographic and nomothetic (using the vocabulary invented by Wilhelm Windelband in the 19th century). Idiographic scholarship focuses on contingency and the uniqueness of the course of events in any given time and place, whereas nomothetic scholarship seeks to identify patterns and principles that operate in many different contexts. There is a strong, though far from universal, tendency for idiographic scholarship to rely on empirical approaches, whereas nomothetic scholarship typically employs, and frequently seeks to create, various forms of theory. Ancient historians have long been firmly idiographic and empirical, and the absence of a nomothetic training or impulse has led to a concomitant absence of interest in addressing in a systematic fashion how and why Greek communities cohered or disintegrated. On the other hand, social scientists coming from nomothetic backgrounds lack the familiarity with the relevant textual and archaeological evidence that is needed to do the subject justice, and they are, in any case, as a group not obviously eager to spend their time thinking about ancient Greece.

I was young, ambitious, and eager to write a dissertation on how and why Greek communities cohered or disintegrated, but there was too little depth in my understanding of ancient Greece, and I was almost entirely unacquainted with nomothetic methodologies. In the end, I chose to write about the impact of value systems on economic activity in ancient Greece. One of the members of my committee was an economist, and I spent a year working closely with him and reading intensively and widely in economic theory. It was exhilarating to develop a familiarity with methodologies that were fundamentally nomothetic and to work on finding ways to join those methodologies with close attention to the contextually specific details of economic activity in ancient Greece. I would not say that my dissertation was a perfect marriage of the nomothetic and idiographic, but it was a step in that direction.

I should add that I taught (for a graduate student) an unusually large number of courses. In doing so, I discovered a truth that has stayed with me to this day: doing great work in the classroom requires much more preparation and effort than doing very good work. My thinking was, and still is, that the most immediate and powerful way for me to change the world for the better is to share my knowledge and passion with my students. I have always expended time and energy unstintingly in order to teach as well as I possibly can, and I continue to search for ways to become a better instructor and mentor. My commitment to that part of my professional life is absolute, and I categorically refuse to compromise that commitment in pursuit of other, more obviously incentivized parts of my academic responsibilities. Among the achievements of which I am most proud is having won a series of teaching awards, starting with a coveted Presidential Award for Outstanding Teaching by a Graduate Student from my time at Columbia. There is not space here to write at length about how important teaching has been to me throughout my career; suffice it to say that it is something that occupies much of my time and energy and is a constant source of enlightenment and joy.

Dartmouth College, 1999-2007

I left Columbia in 1999, prior to finishing my PhD dissertation, because I was hired as a tenure-track assistant professor in the Department of Classics at Dartmouth College. Dartmouth gave me two years off the tenure clock to finish my PhD, which I did in 2001.

As I was making the transition from Columbia to Dartmouth I hit a rough stretch in my scholarly work. The view of the ancient Greek economy that I propounded in my dissertation ran directly contrary to the prevailing orthodoxy at the time. I soon discovered that it was going to be difficult and time-consuming to find venues in which to publish, and it also became apparent that some of my new colleagues were dubious about the value of economic history.

I decided to take a short break from economic history and do some work on a subject – Greek athletic nudity – with which I had some prior familiarity. As an undergraduate I had written my senior honors thesis on the architectural development of what the Greeks called *gymnasia* (sites at which males exercised in the nude). In doing the research for that thesis I had found that scholars had written with considerable insight about the design of *gymnasia*, but had little to say about why Greeks exercised in the nude in the first place. When I took a step back from economic history, I recalled that curious lacuna and proceeded to write an article that traced the origins and development of the Greek verb used to denote the act of exercising in the nude (γυμνάζειν / *gymnazein*). Like most ancient historians, a key part of my training consisted of learning how to carry out close readings of both historical and literary texts in ancient Greek and Latin. Close reading is impossible without understanding at a deep level the meaning of individual words, and so an obvious starting place for an investigation of Greek athletic nudity was to look carefully at the relevant vocabulary. There was no thorough study of γυμνάζειν, and, when I finished writing an article on that word, it was very easy to get into print.

Although it was not clear to me at the time, at this distance it is apparent that the overall dynamic in that part of my career was rooted in the nomothetic/idiographic divide and in ancient historians' commitment to idiographic approaches. My scholarship on economic history included a major nomothetic component. The γυμνάζειν article, on the other hand, was purely idiographic. The nomothetic work met with resistance, the idiographic work with a warm reception.

As an assistant professor with a tenure clock ticking loudly in the background, I made the choice to press ahead with the research on athletic nudity and put my work on economic history on hold. The research on athletic nudity rapidly took on a life of its own, in large measure because it has offered me the opportunity to explore Greek society in broad terms and to think about why Greek communities cohered or disintegrated. My scholarly trajectory has thus, without much in the way of forethought on my part, taken me precisely where I wanted to go in the first place.

In pressing ahead with my research on athletic nudity, I discovered that I needed to do much of the foundational research. The most immediate result was a monograph on key sources for the chronology of athletic nudity (*Olympic Victor Lists and Ancient Greek History*; Cambridge University Press 2007), which remains the standard study of that subject. The custom of athletic nudity originated in Sparta, and I therefore also began serious research on that city and wrote a series of articles, including an article on military reform in Sparta that appeared in the most prestigious journal in the field, the *Journal of Hellenic Studies*. That work, all of which was purely idiographic, was made possible in part by virtue of being a Margo Tytus Visiting Scholar at the University of Cincinnati in the summer of 2005.

My energies during this period of time were not consumed entirely by research, and many of the best moments came in the classroom. As I settled into Dartmouth and got to know my students, I became concerned that they found it difficult to connect what they were learning inside the classroom and their lives outside the classroom. With that in mind, I founded a discussion group program, in which a faculty member or a senior undergraduate invited a dozen or so students to come together once a week to talk about a short text and think about how it applied to their studies and their lives. Partly as a result of the success of that program, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching named me the New Hampshire Professor of the Year in 2006.

Dartmouth College, 2007-2012

In 2007 I received tenure and was promoted to associate professor; I was also given the Manley Huntington award for newly-tenured faculty, the Russell Ladd Newcomb fellowship for 2007-8, and the Gridley faculty fellowship for 2008-9. That made it possible for me to move rapidly forward with a new and different research program. I had spent the better part of a decade doing primarily idiographic scholarship, and I was determined to return to more nomothetic work by taking full advantage of the freedom that comes with tenure and the leverage that comes with a reputation for producing solid scholarship.

My shift in focus was also driven by an emergent interest in exploring the sociopolitical importance of athletic nudity in the Greek world as a whole. Athletic nudity was seen by the Greeks themselves as having a sociopolitical impact on par with participation in a legislative assembly or holding a magistracy. There was, however, no extant scholarship that accounted for the rather surprising importance of athletic nudity; in order to address that issue, it was necessary to situate athletic nudity in the broader social and political structures of Greek communities. It was clear from the outset that the scale and complexity of the issues involved made some degree of reliance on nomothetic methodologies a near necessity.

When I was named the Lynette Autrey Visiting Faculty Fellow at the Humanities Center at Rice University in 2010, I took the opportunity to carry out an intensive course of reading on sociological theory, with an admixture of some political science. My colleagues at both Rice and Dartmouth helped me construct a reading list and patiently answered a steady stream of questions. In due course, I found myself in a much better position than before to join together idiographic and nomothetic approaches. My work on Sparta moved from focusing on specific issues to examining the structure of Spartan society as a whole, and from a reliance on empiricism to the judicious use of social theory. One almost immediate result was a lengthy article on the connection between sports and social order in Sparta that drew heavily on social identity theory and Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. That article was published in 2012 in *Classical Antiquity*, a journal that is widely recognized as the leading venue for methodologically novel scholarship in Classics.

I also came to see the sociopolitical importance of athletic nudity as part of a much larger pattern of interplay between political systems and sports. Drawing heavily on nomothetic approaches derived from sociology and political science, I produced a comparative study of the connections between democratization and sports in ancient Greece, in Britain and Germany in the 19th century, and in the United States in the 20th century. That study took the form of a monograph, *Sport and Democracy in the Ancient and Modern Worlds*, which was published by Cambridge University Press in 2012.

As I was carrying out that program of research and writing, I became increasingly concerned that intensively studying ancient Greece while living in a small, isolated, and wealthy university town was eroding my contact with the hard surfaces of the modern world. With that in mind, I asked the director of outreach at Dartmouth to help me find a community-service project that would get me outside of the physical and social space of the university. I ended up serving as a part-time college counselor at a high school in one of the poorest sections of New York City. The graduates from that school struggled mightily in college, both because the financial aid on offer was frequently inadequate and because the students received relatively little logistical and emotional support from their families. With that in mind, I persuaded some friends and former students to build a non-profit organization that offered financial aid, logistical assistance, and mentoring to college students from the most disadvantaged neighborhoods in New York City. The result was the Education Opportunity Fund, for which I continue to serve as treasurer and director of scholarship programs. The benefits of those programs extend beyond the fact that the college graduation rate for participants in our programs is eight times higher than that of other students from similar backgrounds. Both as an undergraduate and as a graduate student, I had a visceral appreciation of the opportunity to be part of a great educational institution, in no small part because that was something my parents never had the chance to do. However, over the course of the years at Dartmouth I slowly and largely unconsciously came to see my life as an academic more and more as a job and less and less as a privilege. My regular trips to the Bronx and the constant flow of calls, texts, and emails from the scholarship students have been transformational in helping me recover and hold onto a sense of wonder in holding a tenured position at an Ivy League school and everything that comes with that position.

Dartmouth College, 2012-2016

The scholarship that I carried out immediately following tenure proceeded so rapidly that I was promoted to full professor in 2012, five years after being tenured and significantly earlier than is normally the case at Dartmouth. Four years later, Dartmouth appointed me to an endowed chair, the William R. Kenan professorship, that is given to a faculty member who has achieved the highest standards in both teaching and scholarship. In that same period of time, as *Sport and Democracy in the Ancient and Modern Worlds* found an audience, I was invited to give courses of lectures at the International Olympic Academy and served as a supervising professor for their postgraduate seminars in 2013 and 2014. My scholarship also attracted wider interest outside academia, and I began doing radio and television interviews for media outlets, including NBC, NPR, and the BBC.

That was also the time frame in which the editors at Oxford University Press issued an open-ended invitation to me to propose a project. I suggested that OUP publish a series of detailed studies of Greek communities in the Archaic period (c. 750 – 480 BCE). By the end of the Archaic period the Greeks were settled in approximately a thousand politically autonomous communities across the entire Mediterranean basin, ranging from what is now southern France to what is now southern Russia. However, the extant scholarship focused largely on just two communities, Athens and Sparta. Much information was available about dozens of other Greek communities, but it was very difficult to access because it was dispersed across thousands of publications in more than ten different languages. The idea of a major reference work that covered a representative sample of Greek communities from across the Mediterranean responded to my long-standing desire to see Greek society in broad terms. Almost before I knew what was happening, I was an editor of a new series, *The Oxford History of the Archaic Greek World (OHAGW)* that will comprise 27 detailed studies of Greek city-states, sanctuaries, and regions throughout the Mediterranean basin. The magnitude of that series, which will run to 1.25 million words when it is completed, motivated me to seek assistance, and I was fortunate in being able to persuade Paul Cartledge, one of the leading ancient Greek historians anywhere in the world, to become co-editor.

Paul and I are also working together on authoring a volume on Sparta, under the title *Spartan Origins*, that will form part of *OHAGW*. I have over the years become increasingly interested in Sparta, which stands out among the hundreds of Greek city-states as the most intensely communal community; Plutarch famously compared the Spartans to bees clustering around a hive. It has thus long been a source of fascination for people interested in

how communities form, cohere, and disintegrate – Aristotle’s extensive analysis of Sparta in the *Politics* is a case in point. The peculiar Spartan sociopolitical system took shape during the Archaic period, and hence co-authoring a comprehensive study of Archaic Sparta represents a remarkable opportunity to dig into the issues that have driven my scholarship since graduate school.

Cambridge University, 2016-17 and 2018-19

My work on *OHAGW* in general and on *Spartan Origins* in particular has been immensely facilitated by grants from Dartmouth College and the Leventis Foundation that enabled me to spend substantial portions of the 2016-17 and 2018-19 academic years at Clare Hall at Cambridge University. Clare Hall is Cambridge’s equivalent of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton and brings in fellows in varied fields from around the world to live and work together in an environment that, for me at least, approximates the ideal version of an academic community. Clare Hall selected me as a visiting fellow in 2016 and subsequently made me a life fellow. During my time at Clare Hall I wrote a scholarly monograph and three long articles on Sparta and co-edited two volumes of essays (one on historiography for Oxford University Press and one on ancient sport for Bloomsbury). I also, with help from Paul Cartledge and from Estelle Strazdins, a post-doctoral fellow attached to *OHAGW* and funded by the Leventis Foundation, carried out editorial work on all of the components of *OHAGW* that have to date been submitted. Reading and editing the contributions to *OHAGW* brought my idiographic knowledge of ancient Greece to an entirely new level. In addition, Paul and I have been working steadily on the monograph on Sparta for *OHAGW*. In doing so, I have drawn heavily on both the base of idiographic knowledge of Sparta that I have developed over the course of more than a decade of research and a familiarity with nomothetic approaches that comes from my reading in economics, sociology, and political science.

My commitment to *OHAGW* has occupied much of my time for the past five years, and there are moments when the sheer scale of the project and impossibility of making substantial progress on any given day or week produce moments of despair. However, I take heart from the belief that it represents a profoundly important addition to the scholarly resources for the study of ancient Greece. It will give us at one and the same time unprecedented breadth and depth in our understanding of Greek communities other than Athens and Sparta. The significance of the project is reflected in the fact that 34 leading scholars from ten different countries have signed on as contributors. As one of the historians at Cambridge put it, upon hearing about *OHAGW*, it is a once-in-a-generation project that will be a watershed in the field as soon as it is completed and for decades thereafter.

Future Plans

OHAGW has progressed to the point that the end is now in sight. We have received and done substantial editorial work on 22 of the 27 essays, and, thanks to the generosity of the Leventis Foundation, Paul, Estelle, and I will be able to devote much of our time during the 2019-2020 academic year to pushing that project to completion. All of the essays in *OHAGW* and most of my own writing from the past decade are aimed at a scholarly audience, and as I begin to look past *OHAGW* and think about what I will do next, I would very much like to shift my attention toward writing for a more general audience. In teaching Dartmouth students on campus and in the context of our foreign study program in Greece, I have become acutely aware of and deeply concerned about the paucity of publications at Sparta that are up-to-date and well-grounded on one hand and easy to read and access on the other hand. Ancient Sparta looms large in the modern imagination and is regularly mischaracterized in ways that feed partisan political agendas. My top priority going forward is to make available what I and other scholars have learned about Sparta available to as broad an audience as possible.

As I write this at the age of 53, I see 25 years of scholarship behind me and another 20 ahead of me. Looking behind me, I am acutely aware of having benefited immensely from my interactions with students, from the open-handed assistance of colleagues, and from the generosity of organizations that have supported my

research. Looking ahead of me, I can sense the slow work involved in developing a fine-grained knowledge of ancient Greek history and a matching analytical sophistication coming to fruition. Ancient Greeks were firm believers in the importance of recognizing a propitious moment for action, what they called *kairos*, and I have no doubt that this is a *kairos* for me. I am at long last in a position to bring together the idiographic and nomothetic in novel and productive ways that permit me to think deeply about the questions I asked myself on that street corner in New York in 1992. I cannot wait to share the answers, with my colleagues, with my students, and with people from around the world whom I encounter at a distance through my writings.