

Approaching Greek History

Notes for teachers of A-level

Peter Liddel with the JACT AH Committee

Introduction

The impetus for these notes was set in motion at a meeting convened in memory of John Sharwood Smith, hosted at Wadham College, Oxford, on 12th November, 2011. 23 teachers of Greek and Roman history gathered for discussion of issues confronting them in the teaching of ancient history in schools and colleges. We discussed the difficulties faced by those teachers of ancient history at A-level and GCSE who are non-specialists, coming to the subject with enthusiasm but without extensive experience. These notes are aimed primarily at that group of teachers, and aims to provide them with orientation to the sources and some of the themes in the study of Greek history. It is hoped, however, that specialist teachers, and pupils too, will find something of interest, perhaps as a starting point for discussion of particular topics.

These notes are made available, free of charge, in pdf format to members of the Joint Association of Classical Teachers. It is the author's intention to make regular corrections and improvements to them over the course of time. For that reason, all readers are invited to send their comments and suggestions (or even contributions to areas that are neglected) to the author (peter.liddel@manchester.ac.uk). Please feel free to respond to the questions that are posed in the questionnaire at the end of the main document; corrections of any form will be warmly welcomed and acknowledged in future editions of the notes.

This booklet was written with the current (at the time of writing, early 2014) OCR Ancient History A-level syllabus in mind. It does not, however, aim to cover the syllabus in depth; nor does it restrict its coverage to that of any particular qualification; instead it aims to introduce the reader to the sources and topics in the history of classical Greece (479-323 BC), with particular reference to the fifth century BC. While there is some account of narrative events, it does not aim to offer a detailed chronology of the period covered (it does not, for instance, attempt to offer a close account of the Peloponnesian War). It places emphasis upon the ancient sources: what are they, how can they be used to reconstruct ancient history, and what problems do we encounter when attempting to deploy them? The most frequent references are to the works of the fifth-century Greek historians Herodotus and Thucydides (the modern titles given to these works are *History of the Persian Wars* and *History of the Peloponnesian War*). As will become obvious, one needs more than just these two works as sources for fifth-century history, and the reader will encounter references to ancient sources as they are translated both in the JACT LACTOR series, and accessible sourcebooks (primarily those of C. Fornara, *From Archaic Times to the End of the Peloponnesian War*, 2nd edition, 1983 and P. J. Rhodes, *The Greek City States*, 2nd edition, 2007).

The craft of the Greek Historian

Classical Greek History is an exciting subject: it brings us face-to-face with alternative forms of community- and state-organisation, military adventures, political strife, and the cultural

and social experiences of a set of societies very different from our own. On the other hand, its study raises issues of great concern to the modern world: questions about human rights, democracy, community organisation, race, colonisation, and imperialism are all informed by reference to Greek history. The great challenge – and great pleasure – in the study of Greek history is that it encourages its practitioner to combine the skills of a historian with those of the literary critic, the detective, and the anthropologist.

Proceeding as a literary critic, then, the historian of Greece must start out with an informed awareness of the possible motivations of his or her sources. Why do they write, and for whom? What points do they exaggerate? Why do they offer some details but omit others? Whose perspective do they offer? (Chris Pelling, in his *Literary Texts and then Greek Historian*, 2000, explores these and other questions). Why do they survive (see below, *Approaching* section 7)? As a detective, the historian must compare different, sometimes contradictory, accounts of the same phenomena or events. He or she must try to build up a picture from sources that are fragmentary and contradictory. By reading against the grain of texts and by surveying their coverage of particular topics, it is possible to ask questions of the literary sources that they never intended to address. He or she must be aware of the dangers of Athenocentrism, that is, the tendency to reckon to write history from the perspective of the Athenians and to think that Athens was a ‘normal’ city-state (or, equally pernicious, the view that Sparta was an incomparably ‘strange’ one (though of course, it was strange in many ways: opinions differ between those who emphasise the ‘Otherness’ of Sparta (Paul Cartledge) and those who downplay it (Steve Hodkinson)). The historian can use comparisons to try to form models as a way of thinking about the likely motivations of ancient peoples and their reactions and actions in particular scenarios. As an anthropologist, then, the historian must consider the possibility of comparing the ancient Greeks with other human groups. Is it appropriate to emphasise similarity or difference? (Consider that the sovereign political body of the period of classical Greek history, of course, in the classical period, was the *polis* (city-state); the nation-state is an invention of the late eighteenth century AD). Is it appropriate to evaluate historical societies in moral terms, or can we steer clear of value-judgements altogether? To study the history of Greece, then, is an exercise not only in asking questions about the past, and exploring the motivations of human individuals and groups in a period of time, but also in developing inter-disciplinary skills, which are transferable to all walks of life.

Handling the sources

The ancient historian can never afford to lose sight of the sources, nor of their agendas and motivations, their particular perspectives, the gaps in them. Indeed, this booklet intends to point its user to the ancient sources at every available opportunity, and devotes chapters 5, 6 and 7 to discussing them. What we have to be aware of is that the surviving ancient Greek authors constructed accounts of their pasts (both as Greeks and as advocates of city-state communities) in ways which suited their cultural and political interests: there is reason to think that Thucydides (1.2) reflected a popular view when he claimed that settlers had moved

in ancient times from Athens to the west coast of Asia Minor. Modern views, however, of this 'Ionian Migration', tend to cast doubt on the historical veracity of this event, and think of it as part of a set of claims that the Athenians and others fabricated in order to cement ties relations with those who lived in western Asia Minor. (For another example of the importance of tradition to the Greeks, see *Approaching*, section 1, 'Note: the Greeks and their Past').

Central to the history of the 'archaic' period (a term coined by modern scholars to assert the view that the Greeks of the era 776-479 BC were entrenched in tradition and were more primitive than their 'classical' successors) is Herodotus' work *The Histories*, but there are many other sources, in the shape of passing references in later historians, literary references, and inscriptions. Similarly, the history of the classical period (479-323 BC) is shaped by many different sources. Much of our understanding of the narrative of fifth-century history is derived from Thucydides' work. But there are problems: Thucydides died before his history got past 411 BC, and his work concentrates on the background to, and diplomatic and military detail of, the conflict known as the (Second) Peloponnesian War, fought between the Athenians and Sparta's 'Peloponnesian League' allies from 431 BC. There are important events (like the possible treaty with the Persians, the Peace of Kallias) which he does not mention at all and subjects (economic matters, for instance) on which he has little to say. Fortunately, there are other literary sources and inscriptions which help to flesh out the picture and offer other angles; we are, however, still very reliant upon Thucydides for our narrative. For the fourth century, in addition to inscriptions, we are fortunate in possessing versions of more than 100 speeches of orators composed for delivery in the Athenian assembly, law-courts and in funerary contexts: these offer us a wide range of perspectives on Athenian politics, society and cultural views, and have been deployed widely by modern historians in the reconstruction of democratic practices and social norms. We have to bear in mind, however, that the versions that we possess were often revised for publication by their authors, and don't necessarily represent the word-for-word the arguments that were spoken

One book can never suffice in the learning of Greek history. An entry-level history of Greece is T. Buckley, *Aspects of Greek History, 750-323 BC. A Source-based approach*, 2nd edition, 2010. A. Powell, *Athens and Sparta. Constructing Greek Political and Social History* (2nd edition, 2001, now being revised for a 3rd edition) goes well beyond the basics of narrative history, and looks at some topics in detail). Those new to Greek history will also find much of use in S. Pomeroy (et al.), *Ancient Greece: a political, cultural and social history*, 3rd edition, 2011 (this also exists in a condensed format as *A Brief History of Ancient Greece*, 2nd edition, 2008); M. Dillon and L. Garland, *Ancient Greeks: History and Culture from Archaic Times to the Death of Alexander*, 2012. S. Todd, *Athens and Sparta*, 1996 and R. Osborne, *Greek History*, 2004, provide excellent introductions which focus upon particular problems in the interpretation of ancient Greek history. Other concise introductions to ancient Greek history can be found in the shape of R. Osborne (ed.), *Classical Greece* (Oxford Short History of Europe, vol. 1), 2000 and P. Cartledge, *Ancient Greece: A History in Eleven Cities*, 2009 and *A Very Short Introduction to Ancient Greece*, 2011. P. Cartledge, *The*

Greeks: A Portrait of Self and Others (2nd edition, 2002) is a thoughtful introduction to cultural and social matters, especially those of identity. P. Cartledge (ed.), *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Ancient Greece*, 2nd edition, 2002 is a wide-ranging and richly- and wittily-illustrated volume. J. K. Davies, *Democracy and Classical Greece*, 2nd edition, 1993, is more detailed but yet highly readable. S. Hornblower, A. Spawforth and E. Eidinow, *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 4th edition, 2012 (available electronically to subscribers), is the first-rate reference work for Greek history and every other aspect of classical studies, as is the online (or print-version) *Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Ancient History*. Each section of *Approaching Greek History* (and in some cases, each sub-section) contains suggestions for further reading. These are intended to be starting points only, and priority is given to those works which might be obtainable and suitable for school and college libraries. Where they exist, reference is made to high-quality websites.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are owed to Melvin Cooley for reading the first two versions, and for making valuable suggestions and corrections, to Paul Cartledge for reading and commenting with enormous diligence, and to Zahra Newby, who contributed important passages on the subject of art history. All mistakes and infelicities of detail and expression that remain are, of course, my own responsibility. Terry Abbott made the maps. For images, I am grateful to The Trustees of the British Museum, Jason Crowley, Hans van Wees, and Polly Low.

Questionnaire

I want to improve this book in future editions, and would like to know what others think of it. At the end of this book, you will find a questionnaire: I shall be very grateful if any readers or users of this book were to complete any part of it, and to write to him with suggestions for improvement.

Table of Contents

- List of Maps/Images

 - 1. The land and limits of the Greek world
 - 2. Periods, calendars and money
 - 3. Greek names
 - 4. The *polis*
 - 5. The physical legacy
 - 6. Inscriptions: public and private
 - 7. Literary sources
 - 8. Ethnicity and the Persian Wars
 - 9. Athens
 - 10. Women
 - 11. Status (slaves, metics, citizens); Greek Values
 - 12. The Delian League and Athenian Empire
 - 13. Warfare
 - 14. Diplomacy
 - 15. Democracy and its opponents
 - 16. Sparta and the Peloponnese
 - 17. Economy and food supply
 - 18. Religion and festivals
 - 19. Philosophy and ideas
 - 20. Death and commemoration
-
- Questionnaire

Maps and Images

Map 1. Greece: Physical	1
Map 2. Greece: Political	2
Map 3. Asia Minor: Physical. After Hornblower, <i>Greek World</i> , 4 th edition, map 2, p. 3	3
Map 4. Asia Minor: Political. After Hornblower, <i>Greek World</i> , 4 th edition, map 2, p. 3	4
Map 5. Greece: Prevailing Winds	6
Figure 1. The Euripos Strait, at its narrowest point	7
Figure 2. Delos: view across the sanctuary	8
Figure 3. Thasos: marble quarry	9
Map 6. Athens and Attica: Physical. After Traill, <i>The Political Organization of Attica</i> , map 2 p. 168	11
Map 7. The Mediterranean, marking Greek cities and some Greek overseas settlements. After Osborne, <i>Greece in the Making</i> , 1 st . ed, fig. 32 p. 120	14
Figure 4. Athenian Tetradrachm. Copyright Trustees of British Museum	19
Figure 5. Apparatus for measuring grain, Delos Museum	20
Figure 6. The Serpent Column, now at Istanbul. Photograph: Ian Scott, Wikimedia Commons	26
Figure 7. Terraced hills, Ikaria	29
Map 8. Important Sanctuaries. After Menze/Bukor, <i>Penguin Atlas of World History</i> , p. 48	30
Figure 8. Rylands Papyrus fr. 18. Reproduced by courtesy of the University Librarian and Director, The John Rylands Library, The University of Manchester	34
Figure 9. Ostrakon of Megakles (early fifth century BC) from the Kerameikos in Athens. After Hornblower, <i>Greek World</i> , 4 th edition, fig. 12.5, p. 144	37
Figure 10. The Theatre of Dionysos at Athens	46

Figure 11. The speaker's platform at the Pnyx, the venue of the Athenian assembly in The classical period. Image: Cornell University Library, via Wikimedia Commons	47
Map 9. The supposed movements of populations in the 'Dark Ages'. After Menze/Bukor, <i>Penguin Atlas of World History</i> , p. 46	51
Map 10. Some important locations in the Persian (Achaemenid) empire, marking the Royal Road. After Menze/Bukor, <i>Penguin Atlas of World History</i> , p. 44	53
Map 11. The Persian Wars. After Menze/Bukor, <i>Penguin Atlas of World History</i> , p. 56	55
Figure 12. The Athenian Akropolis	58
Figure 13. The Propylaia	61
Figure 14. The Parthenon	62
Figure 15. The Erechtheion	62
Map 12. Ancient Athens. After Villing, <i>Classical Athens</i> , p. 4	63
Map 13. The Delian League and Athenian allies, c.440 BC. After Menze/Bukor, <i>Penguin Atlas of World History</i> , p. 56	78
Figure 16. The Terrace of the Lions at Delos	79
Figure 17. Detail of the 'second stele' of the Athenian Tribute Lists. Athens, Epigraphical Museum. Photograph: Marsyas. Wikimedia Commons	81
Map 14. The Peloponnesian War. After Menze/Bukor, <i>Penguin Atlas of World History</i> , p. 60	86
Figure 18. A view of the hoplite phalanx in combat (hoplite design: H. van Wees; phalanx design: J. Crowley	89
Figure 19. Olympias, a full-size, working, reconstruction of an Athenian trireme. Image: Templar52. Wikimedia Commons.	91
Figure 20. The Lenormont relief, Athens, Akropolis Museum. Image: Marsyas Wikimedia Commons	92
Figure 21. Fourth-century fortifications at Aegosthena, Megarid	93
Map 15. Athens and Peiraieus, showing the Long Walls. After Conwell,	

<i>Connecting a City to the Sea</i> , fig. 2, p. 232.	94
Map 16. Athens and Attica, marking demes and trittyes. After Traill, <i>The Political Organization of Attica</i> , map 2 p. 168.	104
Figure 22. Sparta, with Mt. Taygetos. Photograph: Polly Low.	111
Map 17. Ancient Sparta. After Whitby, <i>Sparta</i> , map 1 p. xvii.	113
Figure 23. Cape Glossida, Mykonos: a rocky landscape	120
Figure 24. The central scene from the east frieze of the Parthenon. British Museum. Photograph: Twospoonfuls. Wikimedia Commons.	129
Figure 25. Herm, Delos, of c. 341 BC	131
Figure 26. Representation of Pythagoras' theorem. Drawing by Terry Abbot	133
Figure 27. Stele commemorating Demokleides; early 4th century BC. National Archaeological Museum, Athens. Photograph: F. Tronchin	139
Figure 28. Detail, Lekythos commemorating Myrrhine. National Archaeological Museum, Athens; photo Marsyas. Wikimedia Commons	139