BETWEEN MACEDONIA AND ROME

Political Landscapes and Social Change in Hellenistic Greece

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by

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INTRODUCTION

Ancient history, classics, and archaeology

The year 2003 is the centenary of the Classical Association, which was set up to combat the decline in the teaching of classics in schools, particularly Greek and Latin languages. The decline has, of course, continued. But classics as a discipline has thrived. It has successfully adapted by offering courses taught largely in translation. Students now engage with Greece and Rome because they want to, not because they have to. Now I would be the last person to suggest that languages can be dispensed with. It really matters that Aristotle in the *Politics* refers, not to ‘the state’, but to the *polis*, ‘city-state’, a term with very specific connotations (for example, a politically organized community of a certain kind, with an urban centre, however small). (The title of his book would be rendered better as the *Civics*, for related reasons.) Again, Thucydides in his history of the Peloponnesian war does not usually refer to the Spartans but

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1 This is a slightly expanded version of the lecture as delivered, with the addition of selected references. Minor corrections have been made since 2003.


3 For the numbers taking classical degrees in the UK, see e.g. G. Shipley, 'Classics at British Universities, 2002–3: statistics', *Council of University Classical Departments Bulletin* 32 (2003), 20–7.

to the Lakedaimonians, a larger community of which the Spartans were only one part.

It is vital to preserve high-level language teaching, particularly at the postgraduate and research levels. But classics has, so to speak, grown up. We do far more today than analyse the evidence of ancient texts. We cross the boundaries between all the aspects of antiquity—literature, history, philosophy, art, religion, science, geography, and of course archaeology—giving a more rounded picture than was ever attained when a sizeable minority of the population could read ‘a little Latin and less Greek’.

It has been a privilege to work in a university that retains such a strong collegiate atmosphere, and in a department where there is no dividing line between ancient history and archaeology, and teaching and research in both subjects are made stronger by the connection. I could spend half this lecture acknowledging my debts to colleagues past and present; I hope my colleagues will understand that my thanks include them all. Although it is invidious to single out anyone, I cannot fail to mention Graeme Barker, whose leadership over a decade made the School of Archaeology and Ancient History what it is today.5

Scope of the inquiry

My lecture is a report on work in progress, which was begun with the assistance of the UK Arts and Humanities Research Board and the British School at Athens. It is an example of how historians use archaeology to complement written sources. Indeed, the process is often the other way round, as archaeology in many respects offers a wholly independent, though not necessarily less unambiguous, voice.

The material I am currently researching comes from the early hellenistic period: the late fourth, third and earlier second centuries BC, from the death of Alexander the Great to the Roman conquest of Greece. Historians and archaeologists of this period tend to work independently of one another, and though that is changing it is still generally true.

5 In respect of this evening, I should specifically like to thank Ian Reeds and Debbie Miles-Williams for their help with illustrations.
My study area is southern Greece, chiefly the Peloponnese. Since the monumental synthesis of geography and history by Ernst Curtius in the 1850s, the Peloponnese as an entire region has rarely been a focus of study. In the index to an excellent new volume on hellenistic economies, there are no references to the Peloponnese or any Peloponnesian states. I must admit that in my own recent 600-page survey of the period, though I discussed individual Peloponnesian states, I did not list ‘Peloponnese’ in my index. Yet, as a naturally bounded area, a peninsula lends itself to fruitful analysis. This one happens to contain about 130 city-states, including over half of the best-known ones, spread among seven or eight well-defined cultural regions. The two most famous cities are Corinth and Sparta, but the smaller ones are equally important. Hans-Joachim Gehrke has written perceptively of das dritte Griechenland, ‘the third Greece’ beyond Athens and Sparta, the constellation of medium and small communities that were most typical. About half his case studies are taken from the Peloponnese, and indeed about one-fifth of all known city-states in the entire Greek world during the classical period are located here.

A fresh look at the Peloponnese in the early hellenistic period is particularly worthwhile. Though it was now only a small corner of a Greek world that stretched as far as the Punjab, many of its cities enjoyed international prestige because of their distinguished past. These were the men whose forefathers had defeated the Persian king in 480 BC. The Peloponnese was the home of three out of the four international Greek festivals, including the Olympics. Yet its cities have not often been considered as a collection of societies, but rather as bit-players in an ultimately futile drama of subordination and resistance. A closer look will allow the silent majority to air its real concerns, which had little to do with the breaking of nations.

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6 E. Curtius, Peloponnesos (Gotha, 1851–2).
7 This is not true of the Roman and Byzantine periods; see e.g. A. Avraméa, Le Péloponnèse du IVe au VIIIe siècle (Paris, 1997).
10 H.-J. Gehrke, Jenseits von Athen und Sparta (München, 1986).
To understand a society in these terms, we have to understand how it relates to its landscape. As landscape history, this investigation illustrates the role of long-term changes and continuities. We have to try to establish the extent to which society changed because of military and political events, or because of long-term trends which may have been quite independent of these contingent factors.

The hellenistic world
First, some chronological pointers. What we call the classical period conventionally ends with the rise of a new power in Macedonia. After Philip of Macedonia defeated the southern Greeks, his son Alexander conquered the Persian empire. He planted Greek towns across the Near East; hence the name we give to the new period, ‘hellenistic’, suggesting that the newly conquered lands ‘turned Greek’ (an exaggeration, of course).

Alexander’s early death was followed by forty years of warfare between his generals. Much of southern Greece changed hands several times. Two of the generals founded royal dynasties in Egypt and western Asia. Macedonia itself was unstable until Antigonos II, surnamed Gonatas, took control around 277. The next few decades, however, brought little peace to the Peloponnese. Pyrrhos of Epeiros, fresh from his marauding of Italy, invaded the Peloponnese in the 270s. In the 260s the southern Greeks attacked the Macedonians in what we call the Chremonidean war, but were crushed. In the 240s the Achaean league, a federal alliance of city-states in the north Peloponnese, began a sustained campaign against Macedonian rule. In the 230s Sparta began to create a new mini-empire. Even as the Achaeans, with help from their former enemies the Macedonians, were crushing Sparta in 222, the first steps in the second conquest of Greece were being taken by the Romans. By 168 they had defeated Macedonia three times. It was the second victory, however, in 197, that gave them the power to change the political map of Greece, even areas that had not been under Macedonian rule. Finally, in 146 the Romans defeated the Achaean league, destroyed Corinth, and effectively set up a Greek province that was to last for centuries.
Historians’ understanding of this turbulent period is based largely on authors such as Polybios and Livy, who tell us about generals, wars, cities, and diplomacy. These are complemented by inscriptions recording civic decrees, international diplomacy, and so on. Consequently, modern accounts have tended to present Greek resistance to Macedonia, and the lead-up to the Roman conquest, in terms of intentions and strategies on the part of the various states—a kind of war-gaming writ large. I do not mean to disparage political history, which is often sophisticated; political historians, for example, now see the Roman conquest very much as a two-way, interactive process of cultural negotiation. But to me it is ultimately more satisfying to understand how wars and politics were shaped by, or shaped, underlying social, economic, and cultural realities, among which I count the landscape and its uses.

The landscape changes resulting from Roman rule were brilliantly illuminated by Susan Alcock’s first book, an innovative synthesis of history and archaeology. She identifies the techniques by which the Romans manipulated towns, countryside, and sacred spaces to consolidate their power and exploit the province. As her focus is the Roman period, she does not say much about what these poleis (city-states) were like when Rome arrived. This may stand as my first main question tonight.

In the narrative of warfare and diplomacy, we hear little of the social and political complexion of the smaller Greek communities. Should we infer their nature from what they were like in the better-documented fifth and fourth centuries? Had Macedonian rule in the third century been a dead hand, causing inactivity or even decline, or had it affected them profoundly? What kind of changes can we detect in third-century Greece? This invites the prior question: what had these communities been like when the Macedonians took control?

Recent years have seen a flood of publication on hellenistic history, particularly in English. Apart from major reassessments

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of Athenian politics\textsuperscript{13} and studies of particular cities and regions, this revival has tended to leave ‘Old Greece’ behind. Some historians, such as John Davies in the \textit{Cambridge Ancient History}, have attempted to depict social and cultural change in Greece.\textsuperscript{14} But it is hard to find any summative judgements about the state of southern Greece or the Peloponnese as such.

Half a century earlier, in 1941, Mikhail Rostovtzeff wrote a three-volume study that still commands great respect, not only because it occupies over 1,800 pages and weighs 4.6 kilograms. He does make an attempt at the question I have posed. In his view there was little change in third-century Greece and Macedonian rule had little impact.

Old Greece, in its hundreds of cities, remained outwardly unaltered. . . . No extensive rebuilding was carried out . . . Nor did the daily routine change . . . Political and religious duties were regularly discharged by the body of citizens, lively discussions took place in the popular assemblies . . . war interrupted from time to the peaceful flow of events . . . internal conflicts arose within the cities . . . The young frequented the schools and received there their mental, artistic, religious, and physical training. Business and social pursuits followed their normal course . . . It is unnecessary to describe in detail the daily life of the Greek cities . . . It would show much the same aspect as in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.\textsuperscript{15}

Yet immediately afterwards he sketches a number of important innovations: a national Hellenic consciousness, the increasing frequency of diplomatic agreements and recognition of inviolability, grants of citizenship and proxeny, international arbitration, public protests against war crimes, and acts of public and private charity.\textsuperscript{16} Philosophers broke down the distinctions

\textsuperscript{13} e.g. C. Habicht, \textit{Athens from Alexander to Antony} (Cambridge, Mass.–London, 1997).
\textsuperscript{15} M. Rostovtzeff, \textit{The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World} (Oxford, 1941), 1109.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid. 1109–12.
between slave and free, barbarian and Greek, and even male and female. All these changes, however, he dismisses as ‘partial, the outcome of special circumstances, as palliatives ‘to counteract the dominant characteristic of Greek institutions, the city particularism’, and as mostly affecting the upper classes—or in his now discredited formulation, the bourgeoisie. ‘Palliatives’ implies a degree of cynical manipulation by the upper classes that would be surprising in politically open societies.

All credit to Rostovtzeff for pointing out (partly, I suspect, on the basis of a priori reasoning) that much in social and political life did not change. Historians have been far too ready to assume that periods, which are essentially arbitrary constructs, must each have a distinct social and cultural character. His insight that élites became more dominant agrees with recent studies. Other new work confirms that relations between the sexes, and between free and slave, became more open, though perhaps only within certain educated groups, as Rostovtzeff claimed.

Nevertheless, he does seem to me to underestimate the force of the changes. I am not sure we can distinguish so simply between daily life and other aspects. Diplomatic and ceremonial networks, grants of citizenship, arbitration, and so on must have had practical and often beneficial consequences for all classes. As for rebuilding, archaeology since Rostovtzeff’s day has revealed the grid-plan layouts of a number of towns, as well as extensive building or re-planning of older towns. I shall now look at evidence for change, and continuity, in society, cities, and the economy.

DOOM AND GLOOM?

The hellenistic period used to be presented as a time of decline, based mainly on the fact that many city-states enjoyed only precarious freedom. A more positive picture is usually painted

17 It is these features that have made some scholars see parallels between the hellenistic period and our own age. See e.g. J. Ferguson, The Heritage of Hellenism (London, 1973).
18 Rostovtzeff 1114.
19 Ibid. 1115.
now, and it is accepted that the Greek *poleis* remained creative and largely successful. Not all of the Peloponnese endured Macedonian rule, and those places that did were sometimes free, particularly once the Achaean league got going.

**Demography**

Time prevents a full discussion of the possible evidence for demographic loss. Suffice to say that it is inconclusive. Several passages of Polybios are sometimes taken as evidence of a bad state of affairs, but as others have argued, they do not really show that. 20 Many scholars have pointed to emigration from Greece. Parts of rural Greece have, notoriously, always exported young men; but, as Jim Roy has pointed out, 21 this need not have reduced the population at home. Any shortfall can be prevented or made good by a change in reproductive strategies—people simply decide to have more children.

**Warfare**

Warfare has sometimes been held to have changed Greek society in this period, but it probably had limited and transient effects. 22 It could involve the destruction of cities and the ravaging of countrysides. Casualties in battle were frequent, but rarely on anything like the scale of the battle of Sellasia in 222, when the Spartans and their allies allegedly lost over 5,000 men in a day. Civil conflict brought casualties on particular occasions. A few cities were repeatedly attacked. Sikyon was captured or plundered several times by different armies within 150 years. Similar accounts could be given of Argos 23 and of Mantineia in Arkadia. The latter city was attacked around 240 by the Aitolians.

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20 Polyb. 4. 73–4 (M. M. Austin, *The Hellenistic World from Alexander to the Roman Conquest* (Cambridge–London, etc., 1981), no. 85) on Elis; 20. 6 (Austin 84) on Boiotia; 36. 17 (Austin 81) on reproduction in his own time. For a 3rd-cent. BC testimony, see the author known as Herakleides the Critic (Austin 83).


23 Argos in 318 saw the execution by the Macedonian vice-regent Polyperchon of many supporters of his enemy Cassander. Three years later, 500 supporters of Polyperchon were burned alive by Cassander’s general.
from north of the gulf of Corinth, then captured by Sparta, then by the Achaean league. It revolted back to Sparta, and was finally taken by the Macedonian king Antigonus III Doson in 223, who enslaved or deported the whole population, renamed the city Antigoneia after himself, and brought in new settlers.

But major disasters like these were exceptional. There is no reason to assume that most towns suffered long-term harm from what was extremely intermittent warfare. Argos, for example, revived after the late fourth century, reached its maximal urban extent in the mid-third, and continued to have surrounding towns dependent upon it in the early second. Sparta, despite the loss of Messenia in the fourth century, expanded as an urban centre and even developed suburbs.

*Macedonian rule*

Did Macedonian rule impoverish Greece? I hesitate to broach such a bold question in the presence of Frank Walbank, who undoubtedly knows far more about the matter than I can ever hope to, but it cannot be avoided.

When Philip II of Macedonia conquered the southern Greeks in 338, he forced them to join a federal organization which we know as the league of Corinth, whose real purpose was to cement his power over Greece. His son Alexander led the Greeks into Persia, and his successors imposed garrisons in key cities such as Corinth, which are generally supposed to have paid for the privilege of being occupied. There might also be a tyranny (in this context, the term approximates to ‘dictatorship’). Sometimes the Macedonians would set up a tyrant. On other occasions a local politician would seek the Macedonians’ support against his enemies, and take sole power. Not only internal rivalries but local enmities could play a part: at Megalopolis, a Macedonian-backed tyranny was a way of fending off troublesome neighbours in eastern Arkadia or the old enemy in Sparta.

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It is not easy to say exactly how far Macedonian power extended, because of the fragmentary nature of the evidence. In fact, it is hard to find a definitive statement in published works. A reexamination of the piecemeal evidence leads me to the provisional conclusion that under Alexander and the successors, most *poleis* in the northern two-thirds of the Peloponnese were either directly garrisoned or sufficiently intimidated by the proximity of garrisons not to rebel. But in 281/0 a cataclysmic battle at Koroupedion in Asia entailed the deaths of Alexander’s last two successors, and left the throne of Macedonia to be fought over by pretenders. The Spartans seized the opportunity to attack the Aitolians, and though this in itself did not increase Peloponnesian freedom, the accompanying chaos in Macedonia may have encouraged those *poleis* that now came together to form, or more accurately re-form, the Achaean league. Since our evidence for Macedonian tyrannies mostly post-dates 280, it may have been from shortly after Koroupedion that Gonatas set up his network of puppet rulers. The system was not at once maintained with a iron rod; some towns threw out their tyrants and garrisons within a few years, and Gonatas let it ride, having bigger fish to fry. Within a few years, however, things turned in his favour when Pyrrhos of Epeiros was defeated by the Spartans and Macedonians, who were cooperating for once. This almost certainly led to the reimposition of strict order; we know, for example, of tyrannies being set up around 272 at Elis, Megalopolis, and possibly Argos. It was now, perhaps, that Macedonian rule became more oppressive.

Only Sparta (though indebted to Gonatas), and perhaps Mantineia (allied to Sparta around 270) and Messene, remained as potential focuses for an independence movement. In the early 260s, an alliance of many states, including Sparta, Elis, the Achaeans, and the larger Arkadian *poleis* (among them Mantineia but not its enemy Megalopolis), launched a full-scale war against Macedonia. This ‘Chremonidean war’, so named after an Athenian politician of the time, was, as noted above, a disaster. While Sparta and other states remained free, Argos probably had a tyrant from now until 235, and nearby Hermion and Phleious probably suffered tyrannies now or soon after. These years
probably saw the maximum extension of Macedonian power. We can only assume that Achaea was also subdued for the moment (Achaean Leontion may have had a tyrant too).

The precise effects of Macedonian rule, or a pro-Macedonian regime, upon a local community are not often considered, but there are hints that these local dictators were relatively quietist. They were typically local members of the upper class, occupying the role of military governors or political overseers; men who looked to their Macedonian masters for support and acted as mediators between their city and the king, rather than, as earlier Greek tyrants had been ambitious men looking to the people for support against other factions. Presumably their main aim was to ensure that their fellow aristocrats stumped up the money and supplies to sustain the garrison—a form of economic tribute.

In a thriving port like Corinth, below the fortress of Acrocorinth with its garrison, the king no doubt creamed off a share of the taxes and tolls from the harbours. Tyrants probably presided over local politics rather than suspending them, though the inscribing of public decisions on stone may have become a rarity. Beyond this, however, I have found no evidence of brutal or oppressive rule. Some tyrants were violently overthrown, but this could be the result of rivalry among aristocrats.

In considering these local dictators, is it appropriate to think in terms of ‘the evil done by good men’ so movingly dramatized by Iain Pears in his historical novel *The Dream of Scipio*, set in modern, medieval, and late Roman Provence? Must collaboration with your conqueror always be counter-productive? Several of the Peloponnesian dictators have benign reputations and were later forgiven by their cities. Kleinias of Sikyon (who may or may not have been aligned with Macedonia) was elected to a possibly dictator-like position, and his son Aratos became a leader of the Achaean league from the 240s to 210s. Two tyrants of the 230s, similarly, were so far rehabilitated as to command the league’s forces in the 220s.

It is not only that there are few signs of brutal oppression. What I have not found so far is any evidence of Macedonian royal bureaucracy. The Macedonians did not redraw the map of land ownership. There is no evidence for grants of land to the
king’s friends, as happened in Macedonian Asia, where whole towns and their territories could be assigned to a retired general or a member of the royal family as a source of tax revenue. There are no obvious attempts to break up local hegemonies. I can find very few examples of inscriptions or statues honouring the kings, such as occur elsewhere.

It seems the kings of Macedonia, unlike their cousins in Asia, were not interested in running southern Greece as a province within an empire, as long as military control was secure. That is not to say that the effects were not deleterious; the cost of a garrison would drain a town’s finances, hitting first the pockets of the rich who would pass on the cost to others. Perhaps this is why Polybios insists that the movable wealth of the cities of the Peloponnese was much lower than others thought.

Changes of, and in, poleis
The record of the destruction and disappearance of poleis is not uniform. Archaeology points to the abandonment of several poleis, though sometimes the evidence is over-interpreted. That is, I think, the case at Halieis in the Argolid, where the archaeologists talk of abandonment in the early third century but acknowledge that settlement on the town site continued on a much reduced scale, with interruptions, down to the Roman period.

On the positive side, a town abandoned earlier might be refounded on a new site, such as Asine in the Argolid or Leontion in Achaea. Whether refoundation of an existing polis was always welcome to its inhabitants must be doubtful. King Demetrios I moved the people of Sikyon to a more secure location, for his own strategic purposes, while Achaean Dyme was sold into slavery in 208 by the Romans and then refounded by Philip V.

Small cities could be elevated to polis status, as happened to Tenea near Corinth in the third century. Settlements could both lose and gain freedom. A first- or second-order town could come

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25 On this point, I find I am anticipated by Rostovtzeff 36.
26 Polybios 2. 62, rebutting Phylarchos.
to dominate other towns. Kleonai, for example, which earlier controlled the Nemean games, was annexed by Argos in about the late fourth century. The Ptolemaic takeover of previously independent Methana (whereupon it was renamed Arsinoë) was perhaps connected to the launching of the Chremonidean war, but although Ptolemaic rule may have inhibited local politics the town may thereby have gained protection against the local hegemonic power, Argos. Kalaureia enjoyed a period of independence from Troizen in the third century. Many cities gained independence, though not complete freedom of action, when they joined a league. A full survey shows that during this period some 10 per cent of poleis underwent a change of status, not always for the worse.

It is simple to enumerate examples of urban improvement. We have already noted the expansion of Argos and Sparta, and the rebuilding of Sikyon and Dyme at royal expense. Argos underwent an extensive building programme, perhaps sponsored by a king (Demetrios I?), and, as noted earlier, reached its maximum urban extent in the mid-third century. There are at least eleven cities where new houses from this period have been excavated, though exact dates are rarely available; given the traditional focus of classical archaeology on the classical period, this is without doubt only the tip of the iceberg. Up to four new theatres were built in the late fourth and early third centuries, two more in the early second. Two stoas were erected at Corinth; others at Sikyon, Argos, and elsewhere. The means and manpower to carry on building and rebuilding still existed, and did not always depend on external patronage.

There is a decline in the construction of fortifications (FIG. 1). Urban and rural fortifications are mostly pre-300. Some new constructions do occur later (such as Ágios Andreas, possibly ancient Anthana, in NE Laconia; Geráki, ancient Geronthrai, in east–central Laconia). Some that have been dated to the third century may in fact be earlier, such as Zarax in Laconia. The most striking fact is the steep drop in numbers in the second century. This need not necessarily indicate a lack of funds or a

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28 Sikyon (twice), Argos, and Orchomenos.
29 At Tegea, by king Perseus of Macedonia.
period of inactivity. After all, once a city has a wall, what need of another?

Religion
As Alcock has pointed out, the archaeology suggests a partial—but far from total—neglect of religious practice in the countryside. Some rural cult places are abandoned. Fewer objects are dedicated at some rural cults. To put this in context, we should also look at the contexts in which public investment of funds may have taken place, both in country and town.

The next chart (FIG. 2) summarizes the evidence for temple building and new amenities at excavated sanctuaries. There is a clear downward trend, with only two new temples in the third century. Both of them, at Arkadian Lousoi and at Mycenae, probably pre-date 250. In the second half of the third century and the second century no new temple is definitely built, though there are two possible ones in the second century (which show up as a total of 1.0).

Clearly, it would be wrong to presuppose that a slow-down in building was inevitably accompanied by a comparable decline in cult worship. Indeed, the decline in repair and enhancement of cult buildings is not as steep as that in new buildings. Religious practice is always in a state of flux. The excavated sanctuary of Zeus Messapeus at Laconian Tsácona, for example, goes out of use in the third century or just before, but is then revived in Roman period; this may even imply a continuity of at least popular memory or minimal cult observance in the hellenistic period.

Some sanctuaries, both urban and rural, were certainly in active use. The Athena sanctuary at Arkadian Stymphalos, for example, is described as having ‘intensive’ activity in the last quarter of the fourth century; dedications continue in the third, early hellenistic jewellery is reported from a sanctuary on the nearby acropolis, and the temple continues in use to the mid-

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31 Excluding those, about half the total, that are dated ‘hellenistic’ without further specification.
second. The temple at Achaean Áno Mazaráki, destroyed by earthquake and fire in the first half of the fourth century, is not rebuilt, yet cult deposition continues to the fourth century AD. Although rural cult has mixed fortunes and some small cults decline, some urban cults flourish. And we must not forget the international sanctuaries of Olympia, Nemea, and Isthmia, where international games were patronized by Greeks from a far-flung diaspora. There is, as Alcock says, a change of emphasis, but there are also signs of life.

**Epigraphy**

Epigraphic activity—the number of inscriptions found in different places—can only be an indirect proxy for social or economic change, but it can certainly indicate whether a city-state is functioning as a political decision-making body. The overall numbers (FIG. 3) are more or less the same in the fourth, third, and second centuries, but increase sharply in third-century Arkadia and Messenia. Clearly there is no universal impoverishment of political life under the Macedonians, and though the data are patchy it is clear the political tradition of the *polis* was alive and well in many places.

In the second century, there are sharp falls in the Argolid but steep increases in Messenia, Laconia, and Achaea. The downturn in the Argolid was perhaps a result of the Roman conquest.

**Democracy and oligarchy**

The extraordinarily productive Copenhagen Polis Project, directed by Mogens Hansen, has revealed that there were over a hundred city-states in the Peloponnese. However, in most cases we have little direct evidence for their constitutions. From fourth-century references to oligarchic regimes and attempted democratic revolutions, it is a reasonable working hypothesis that most were oligarchic at the time when the Macedonians took charge. What did this mean in practice?

A Greek oligarchy is a city-state in which not all free men have voting rights because there is a minimum property qualification for the vote. Martin Ostwald has argued that oligarchy was not government by the rich as such, but by, and in the interests of,
the moderately well-off—who could be the majority. What distinguished it from democracy was that democracy gave full civic rights to the less well-off. There is therefore, not surprisingly, a correlation between the concentration of wealth and how high the property qualification is set. Gehrke shows that in the classical period most Peloponnesian poleis were characterized by limited democracy (he calls it Bauerndemokratie, ‘farmer democracy’), open only to those with land—which we should really call oligarchy.

Like democracies, oligarchies usually operated with a citizen assembly, council, and legitimately appointed officers. Peter Rhodes and David Lewis have shown, on the basis of the civic decrees, that in the late fourth and third centuries many, probably most, city-states in the Peloponnese had a working assembly and council. But not all were democratic. For example, there were assemblies at Epidauros, Messene (sometimes), and most Arkadian poleis, even though these were very likely oligarchies. A few states, such as Elis and possibly Mantineia and Methana, were at the other end of the spectrum—narrow oligarchies. Democracy was rare, but seems deeply rooted at Argos.

Most violent changes of constitution were reversed, and most attempts at reform or revolution failed. When Macedonian rule ended, a city normally reverted to its former constitution if it had been suspended. Equally, where Macedonian rule had not operated, pre-existing traditions seem to have been maintained. The general picture is therefore one of constitutional stability.

A partial exception to this is the Achaean league. When a city with a pro-Macedonian government was forced to join, it had to bring its constitution into line with that of the league, which had a central council and periodic assemblies that any citizen of a member city could attend. But the required ‘convergence’ generally seems to be limited to the ending of tyranny and possibly the resumption of inscribing civic decrees. Presumably, most new member states remained either formally oligarchic, or formally democratic but still dominated by landowners. Despite Polybios’s claims for its fundamentally democratic character, the

32 M. Ostwald, Oligarchia (Stuttgart, 2000).
league begins to look like a conservative state dedicated to preserving the privileges for the ruling élite in each polis. This may explain the reaction of the ruling circles in the 220s, when the ambitious king Kleomenes III of Sparta was trying to build popular support in other towns and provoked fears of revolution in the Achaean league.

This brief review suggests that in the early hellenistic period most cities kept their former constitutions, and that land was still, though to a variable extent, concentrated in relatively few hands. This is in line with recent research suggesting that in the hellenistic period generally, the political power of landed élites increased, even in democracies.

**REGIONS, CENTRES, AND ECONOMIES**

*Regions and centres*

A full analysis of regional trends and interactions would require detailed quantitative data, particularly for pottery from excavations. This is not yet available. One proxy measure is the number of stone inscriptions recorded in each polis and region (FIG. 3). Simple number counts are fraught with problems, not least because the sample is non-random. Despite this, certain features of the data concur with other observations. Studies of Corinth have concluded that the dearth of civic documents reflects a genuine absence of the ‘epigraphic habit’, characteristic of a restrictive oligarchy. The scarcity of Eleian inscriptions, even from Olympia and the city of Elis, is striking and consistent.

*‘Epigraphic centralism’*

Another way to look at epigraphic data is to see to what extend the finds are concentrated in one or two central places in a region. There are clear indications of change, which may imply changes in civic networks, particularly the diffusion or delegation of political culture to outlying settlements.

The data point to a continual tension between centre and periphery. The degree of centralization (FIG. 4) does not change
much in any region in the third century. In the fourth and third
centuries, Korinthia, Laconia, and Messenia are strongly
centralized, most inscriptions coming from one site (two in the
Argolid). Arkadia, by contrast, is strongly decentralized, with
texts coming from 10 places in the fourth century and 17 in the
third.

In the second century, centralization increases sharply in
Korinthia, western Arkadia, and western Achaea but decreases in
eastern Arkadia, Messenia, and Laconia. In Messenia, for
example, only 65 per cent of inscriptions now come from
Messene. In Laconia the change is sharper, no more than 18 per
cent of inscriptions now found in Sparta. Here the finds are
dispersed among many settlements: seven of the formerly
dependent poleis, liberated by the Romans in about 195 BC, now
account for four-fifths of all Laconian texts. It is tempting to link
these changes to the partial break-up of regional hegemonies in
Messenia and Laconia: the dissolution of the Messenian
federation by the Romans, and the removal of Sparta’s last
dependent settlements in Laconia. Since, in Laconia and
Messenia, the epigraphic pattern fits known historical events, it
would seem reasonable to infer that in others areas, too, we may
have here an index of the degree of dominance, or at least eco-
nomic predominance, exerted by a central settlement over its
region. More analysis is needed to tease out the fine details and
take the description down to an even more local level. For some
local communities, the coming of the Romans meant liberation
from domination by a central place.

Field survey data
Many archaeological surveys have been carried out in southern
Greece during the past twenty-five years. Do they give any signs
of a change in settlement or land use between the fourth and the
second century? The evidence from different regions is hard to
compare, but the attempt must be made. Where we have the
information, the picture is generally of increased numbers of
small farms in the early hellenistic period, followed by their
partial abandonment in the middle or late phase; but the
changes are not universal and some regions show contradictory
trends. There are also signs of a shift of population away from the countryside and into towns.

The bar-chart (FIG. 5) summarizes the results of five major surveys, showing the numbers of sites per square kilometre. The date labels should be regarded as overlapping, because different projects used different definitions of periods. In different regions, the peaks and troughs come at different times. Local factors are surely influencing the nature of settlement change and the use of the land. In the southern Argolid the drop in small rural farms is closely dated to around 250 BC, whereas in Berbati–Limnes the fall is thought to have happened around 200. At Dyme in Achaea (from non-intensive survey), not shown here, contraction comes later. In Laconia, and also at Pylos and Asea (not shown), there is no clear evidence of a decline at all. So it would be simplistic to link these downturns to global political changes, such as Macedonian rule or the coming of Roman rule.

As well as numbers of sites, the sizes of rural sites can be an indication of changes in land use. A dense scatter of small farms suggests one pattern of land ownership, a thin distribution of large farms another. We do not have numerical data that are detailed enough to permit close comparison between regions over a short time-scale. We can, however, compare the hellenistic period, broadly defined, with the classical before and the Roman after it. In Methana (a Ptolemaic naval base) and Laconia there was little change between classical and Roman times. In several other regions, the data point to the beginnings of a rise of large estates during the hellenistic period: Megalopolis, Messenia, Berbati–Limnes, and the southern Argolid. Not all of these areas were Macedonian in the third century, and more data are needed from the western Peloponnese, but if this development had anything to do with Macedonian power it was only an indirect effect. Alcock points to increased numbers of large estates as typical of Roman rule, but it will be interesting, as this work in progress goes further, to see if the start of the change can firmly be dated before the Romans came.

The balance was clearly tilting in favour of landowners. Outside powers, not surprisingly, failed to check the
acquisitiveness of the élite, which had always been a feature of Greek political and social life.

IN CONCLUSION

Not all is doom and gloom in the early hellenistic Peloponnese. Short-term demographic losses may have been avoided or quickly made good. Macedonian rule did not necessarily disrupt local economies and politics. The kings did not attempt to run the Peloponnese as a province, but were concerned mainly with security. Though the building of towns and forts declined, and some cities were abandoned or lost their freedom at various times, many others enjoyed improvements to urban amenities and religious architecture.

More telling than all these factors, in my view, was the oligarchic nature of most of the city-states, and the deep-seated, traditional domination of land and politics by the better-off. This is reflected in the conduct of the supposedly liberating Achaean league, and may explain the vehemence of its resistance to Sparta in the 220s. The trend towards increased élite domination and the creation of economic dependency seems to be endemic in most Greek societies, rather than the result of Macedonian or Roman rule. But it became more extreme on their watch.

In one respect the Roman takeover may have been beneficial. Some small communities that had been overshadowed by a regional centre gained autonomy, though only because it suited Rome.

In answer to Rostovtzeff, daily life did change. Inequalities within society intensified, though urban facilities and amenities often improved. The traditions of civic life persisted, but those at the bottom of the social scale were disadvantaged.

The study of ancient history needs to be informed by archaeology, and increasingly it is. Text-based analysis may provide lessons for our age—pointing up, for example, the ways in which our democracy compares, not always favourably, with Greek—but it is the synthesis of history and archaeology that is
most revealing. Settlement data, material culture illuminating personal relations, the distribution of epigraphy across the landscape, the chronology of excavated cult sites—these and other techniques, if we are sensitive to the nature and limitations of the evidence, will help us to a more rounded understanding of the ancient Greeks.

And just to show that I have not forgotten my Latin . . .

NUNC EST BIBENDUM
Fig. 1. Fortifications, 4th–2nd cent. BC.

Fig. 2. Peloponnesian religious architecture, 4th–2nd cent. BC.
Fig. 3. Inscriptions by region, 369–100 BC.

Fig. 4. Epigraphic centralization, 4th–2nd cent. (largest 2nd-cent. decrease in centrality on right)
Fig. 5. Sites per sq km (field survey data).