

Valerij Goušchin and P. J. Rhodes, eds. *Deformations and Crises of Ancient Civil Communities*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2015. Pp. 194.

The twelve papers contained in this volume come out of a conference held in September 2014 at the Perm (on the Kama River in the western part of the Urals) campus of the Higher School of Economics (one of Russia's National Research Universities), where the Section of Historical Research has a special interest in the world of ancient Greece and Rome. This was part of a larger program hosted by the Section focusing on ancient civil communities under the supervision of the two editors of this volume. The conference focused on the theme of "Deformations and Crises in Ancient Civil Communities," with speakers from both the United Kingdom and Russia. The published essays in this volume contain some works that address broad topics within the theme while others examine specific case studies tied to the larger subject.

The participants were seven Russians and five Britons, six writing on Greek (or at least pre-Roman) topics, the other six addressing Roman or Roman period matters. The papers are presented in chronological order within their area divisions, prefaced by the usual brief note about citation conventions and a list of the contributors.

The first entry, "The 'Crisis of the Pyramid Builders' in Herodotus Book 2 and Diodorus Book 1, and the Epochs of Egyptian History" by Ivan Ladynin focuses on how the Greek writers (Hdt. and Diod.) have "transplanted" the time of the famed pyramid builders Cheops (Khufu), Chephren (Khafre), and Mycerinus (Menkaure) from their proper place in the IVth Dynasty of the Old Kingdom (roughly 2500s BC) to sometime after the start of the Third Intermediate Period, about a millennium and a half later. He points to misperceptions on the part of the Greek writers of the information given them by their Egyptian informants, who themselves may have been biased. As I am not an expert on pre-classical Egypt, I will leave it to those who know better to judge Ladynin's explanation.

Peter Rhodes "Instability in the Greek Cities," argues against the notion that Athens and Sparta, the two main powers in Greece during the Classical Era, were relatively stable and free from internal strife. For Sparta, he notes briefly a series of incidents (which he labels "crises") focused upon Spartan kings and regents, which should disprove the notion that all was calm by the banks of the Eurotas. Athens we should expect to be less stable, with policy debates leading not only to heated arguments but even exile (through the ostracism procedure) and murder (such as that of Ephialtes). In the fourth century, the instability is centered upon those who want Athens to play the role of a great power and those opposed to it as a waste of resources. This state of affairs only comes to an end after the Chremonidean War (263/2), where stability follows the decision to abandon the "world stage."

Rhodes then turns his attention to other city-states, examining the sources of instability within them from the Archaic period (which was dominated by the rise and

fall of tyrannies) down to the fourth century where the actions of the great powers (Athens and Sparta in the fifth; Thebes and King Philip of Macedon in the fourth) pushed and pulled the internal factions within various *poleis* one way or another.

Valerij Goušchin's "Aristocracy in Democratic Athens: Deformation and/or Adaptation," examines the role of "aristocrats" (by which he means the "ruling class," a group he notes was not necessarily hereditary and without a fixed membership, unlike later medieval European nobility) within the Athenian system. Over time, the political system became less and less congenial for the traditional method of exercising leadership and influence within the state, in which aristocrats dominated political activity through reliance upon their organized groups of followers (*hetairoi*). Their position was threatened when members of their own class began to seek support from the *demos* in disagreements over policy. In order to combat the success of the *demos*-oriented politicians, aristocratic leaders had to make concessions towards "democratic" methods, to the point where Thucydides the son of Melesias even formed his own political grouping that contained both "aristocratic" and "democratic" members, a sign of adaptation that could be called a deformation of the traditional aristocratic methods of political control.

Polly Low addresses "Empire and Crisis in Fourth-Century Greece." While city-states, for obvious reasons, wished to play a major role in inter-state events, their ruling groups also desired internal stability. The problem is that it was not commonly agreed among the leading political figures of the time whether the two could be combined successfully. "To put it another way: does the quest for power in the inter-state arena help to avert crises in civil society, or is it more likely to create them?" (p. 63). After studying different approaches to the issue from leading thinkers (Isocrates, Demosthenes), Low comes to the conclusion that the short answer "depends who you ask, and when you ask them." (p. 72). The long answer is that unrestrained dominance of the sort the Athenian Empire acquired in the fifth century would always lead to ruin in the end, but it was still necessary for a state to aspire to a more restrained form of interstate leadership in order to provide for its own internal stability. And there were still those who believed that outright imperial dominance of others would bring the greatest safety for themselves.

Yuri N. Kuzmin's "The Antigonids, Caunus and the so-called 'Era of Monophthalmus': Some Observations Prompted by a New Inscription" centers upon his new historical interpretation of *IKaunos* 4 (=Ch. Marek ed. *Die Inschriften von Kaunos* (Munich, 2006) 133–136) based firmly upon identifying the ll. 1–3 Ἀντιγ[όν] | [ο]υ [ἔ]τει πεντεκαίδεκά[τ] | ω[ι] of the inscription with Antigonus II Gonatas, the only Antigonid monarch who reigned at least 15 years, dismissing the possibility that the inscription refers to Antigonus I Monophthalmus as might be argued by those following an earlier theory that suggested Monophthalmus counted his "reign" from before his official proclamation as *basileus* in 306 (see. pp. 74–79 for full discussion with detailed citations to relevant scholarship). With this identification in place, he argues that the inscription indicates that Caunus in Caria was conquered

by Gonatas shortly before the Chremonidean War and subsequently lost during that conflict to the Ptolemies.

Also from the Hellenistic era is Oleg L. Gabelko's "A Tales of Two Cities': Some Particulars of the Conquest of Cius and Myrlea by the Kingdom of Bithynia." It discusses King Prusias I's seizing the aforementioned places in 202, which Gabelko looks at in greater detail, reassessing the written sources and bringing in archaeological and epigraphic resources which have not been utilized sufficiently.

The volume then moves to Roman subjects, starting with Tim Cornell's "Crisis and Deformation in the Roman Republic: The Example of the Dictatorship." In his interesting paper, Cornell argues that the conventional view that the Roman *dictator* was "a response to crisis, and reflects a state of emergency, a state of siege, or a state of exception" (pp. 113–114) is incorrect. What drives this inquiry are the recent attempts by modern political scientists examining the possibilities for a "constitutional dictatorship" (compared to the more oppressive kind), looking back at the Roman example.

Examining the full use to which the office was put during the historical period of the middle Republic (rightly ignoring early examples whose historicity is questionable and setting aside the late dictatorships of Sulla and Caesar as being non-representative of the traditional role), he argues that the dictatorship was not an "emergency" office. "It seems clear that, in the period when dictatorships were most frequent, few if any were prompted by serious national emergencies. On the contrary, most of the known dictators...seem to have been more-or-less routine substitutes for the regular magistrates." (p. 118).

Why then the conventional view in the ancient sources and many modern works that it was an office tied to emergencies? He points to its use during the early stage of the Second Punic War, where the office was revived in the perilous days following Trasimene and Cannae, based on some notion that it had once served that purpose, even if the reality, he argues, is different.

Cornell makes an interesting case, but I'm not sure we should be so quick to throw out the conventional view entirely. There is no reason why the Roman dictatorship could not be an office whose purpose was to provide an emergency official in unusual situations yet at the same time be a mechanism that was (ab)used by the Romans to provide a substitute magistrate until the use of promagistrates largely answered this need. Further, part of his case rests upon hindsight, pointing out that when *dictatores* were called upon to serve as extra generals in the field, "...it is not as if the campaigns in question were always the most perilous or demanding." (p. 116). That is a conclusion that can only be determined without doubt *after* the campaign was completed. While certainly states did (and continue to) "rank" the levels of their threats in advance, we in the modern world most of all should know that taking those estimations as forgone conclusions in advance can sometimes result in disaster. It may be that many of those occasions when a *dictator* was named, the Romans grossly

overestimated the danger. I'm not sure anyone would complain afterward (other than the man denied a chance to celebrate a triumph because of the underwhelming result).

Amy Russell's "The Tribune of the Plebs as a Magistracy of Crisis" argues that the traditional portrayal of the tribunate by later historians as the institution responsible for causing crises which brought about the "fall" of the Republic is inaccurate. While "contemporary observers, including Polybius, Gracchus, and Cicero, all saw the tribunate of the plebs as a magistracy of change and conflict...later historians pigeonholed its transformative power" into a limited period which they saw as the "final crisis leading up to the collapse of one system and the birth of another." (p. 138). This is a mistake, Russell argues, because the power to create conflict and force change within the Roman system was an attribute of the office from the start and existed within it at all times. It was, in fact, a failure of the tribunes that "they did not go far enough" in using their power to address the "crisis of the Roman Republic." (p. 139). While there is certainly merit to the insights she provides in this paper, they do not, as she admits herself, provide any easy answers to the old chestnut of "why the Republic fell." And she is correct that simply blaming the tribunate, as later historians did, is an untenable position to hold.

Rounding out the Republican triumvirate, Catherine Steel's "The Roman Political Year and the End of the Republic" proposes that Sulla's radical rebuilding of the Roman Republic resulted in changing the experience of the citizens and the political process to the extent that the magistrates and Senate could not behave in the ways they had been used to before Sulla's alterations. Her primary focus is on the yearly run of political business (elections, senatorial actions, the routine acts of a functioning government) and how Sulla's new system changed matters to the point that the traditional rule by the *nobiles* was no longer functional.

The altered cycle of political activity resulted in changes to the composition of the active electorate and the numbers of office holders with *imperium* being present in Rome, both of which radically altered the practice of politics. These combined with other factors to prevent decisions from being made, as the negative usually prevailed in disputes (as consuls, and after 70 tribunes, could effectively prevent an issue from being decided as long as they were in office and present in the City). The new calendar was key, as consuls coming into office had a limited time, generally about six months, in which to attempt to accomplish anything, before their successors, who would influence any future policy decisions, were chosen. That Rome eventually had to resort to tribunician activity to get anything done was the result of senatorial paralysis. It may not be what Sulla intended, but it is what he created and Steel is correct in her analysis.

The remaining essays move to the Empire, the first one viewing it through the lens of reception: Natalia Almazova's "The 'Cultural Crisis' in Rome on the Cusp of the Republic and Principate as Seen in Russian Research in the Late 19th-Early 20th

Centuries.” Almazova discusses the work of several Russian scholars from the period and their views about the cultural transition from the late Republic to Augustus’s reign, showing that many of them were influenced by their own contemporary concerns when viewing Antiquity.

Pavel Rubtsov’s “Imperial Power in the Third and Fourth Centuries: Deformation or Evolution?” argues that the traditional view that the early imperial system suffered deformation during the “so-called crisis of the third century A.D.” ignores how much the rule of emperors in the fourth century resembled that of their third-century peers. If Diocletian’s restructuring was meant to address problems within the imperial system that manifested in the third century, they appear to have made little difference. “The problems of the third century were too similar to those of the fourth.” (p. 172). There were changes to the imperial office, without doubt, but there is no hard break with the past. Instead, an evolutionary process took the looser, unspoken conventions of the early imperial office and institutionalized them so that even child emperors in the late fourth and fifth centuries could hold the position without carrying out the duties or exercising the powers of the office.

The final paper is Aleksey Kamenskikh’s “The Dialectic of the Other: Political Philosophy and Practice in the Late Neoplatonist Communities.” In his paper, Kamenskikh challenges the broadly held view that the late Neoplatonists were apolitical persons who ignored the changes going on in the world around them. Following the publication of Dominic O’Meara’s *Platonopolis* (full citation on p. 184 n. 1), dealing with Platonic political philosophy in late Antiquity, Kamenskikh thinks that the previous consensus is not beyond question. Kamenskikh sets out a model of Neoplatonist interaction with those outside the community, in the context of an increasingly “alien” world (as Christianity spread to most of the population), followed by a list of practical modes of engagement with outsiders, including the dramatic emigration of the last leader of the Athenian school along with his fellow philosophers to the Persian Empire in the wake of Justinian’s prohibition of teaching pagan philosophy, issued in 529.

The volume ends with a very brief Index of persons, places, and things.

As is usually the case with collections of this sort, most readers will be interested only in one or another paper, those most closely tied to their own sub-specialties. While the breadth and range of subjects covered is impressive, those qualities are in tension with the announced theme of the whole. Some of the pieces seem to address the issues of “deformation” and/or “crisis” much more directly than others, which merely appear to gesture in the general direction of one or the other term before proceeding to the author’s personal interest. Part of the reason for this impression lies in the fact that the editors never clearly define “deformation” or “crisis” at the start of the work, which might have been helpful for readers even if one is only coming to this volume to peruse a single essay.

The volume is handsomely produced by Steiner Verlag on good quality paper with strong binding for a paperback. The text is well set and edited, with only two minor infelicities making their way into the work (on p. 58, there is an errant ; in the second line of the second paragraph. On p. 150, near the middle of the page, "...these consuls would then spend hold office the following year..." it appears that an earlier version had either "spend" or "hold office" and a change of mind occurred without the original being removed).

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