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Paul Cartledge / Paul Christesen (eds.): The Oxford History of the Archaic Greek World

The book is the first in the series of *The Oxford History of the Archaic Greek World* the seven volumes of which written by more than 30 eminent scholars, present 22 in-depth studies of Greek city-states, sanctuaries and regions in the whole of the Mediterranean during the period from ca 750 to 480 BCE. The first volume includes the discussion of Argos in the Peloponnese, Chalcis and Eretria on the island of Euboea, the Aegean islands Chios, Lesbos and Samos, and Corcyra (modern Corfu) near the north-western coast of Greece.

The preface by the general editors of the series Paul Cartledge and Paul Christesen explains the purpose of the project and the principles of the structure and the selection. The goal is to offer comprehensive, commensurable and convenient insight into a broad array of Greek communities during the Archaic period, addressed mainly to the 'scholars who have some substantial grounding and serious interest in the ancient Greek world' (XXI). All the component studies are built around the same 11 rubrics: (1) sources of evidence; (2) natural setting, including climatic conditions; (3) material culture i.e. the overview of archaeological evidence, including settlement pattern, burials and sanctuaries; (4) political history, i.e. the development of internal political organisation; (5) legal history; (6) diplomatic history, i.e. the external relations and warfare; (7) economic history; (8) familial/demographic history; (9) social customs and institutions; (10) religious customs and institutions; (11) cultural history. Such a unifying division, a certain arbitrariness of which is duly accepted by the editors, is surely welcome for ensuring commensurability, and is consistently followed in the chapters. The chapter on Argos by Jonathan Hall regards the accounts of the later writers concerning this period with notable scepticism. Hall rejects the historicity of the Argive early hereditary kingship, viewing the elite leaders indicated by the wealthy burials in the archaeological record as charismatic 'big men' or 'chieftains' instead of kings. The tyranny of Pheidon, the most famous among the Argive rulers, is accepted as historical, while emphasising the irreconcilability of the evidence on his time and achievements. The accounts concerning the Argive hegemony in the eastern part of the Peloponnese, including the conflict with Sparta over the district of Thyrea between, are discussed without an explicit statement about their reliability. However, the description of Mycenae and Tiryns on the adjacent plain as independent poleis during the period, and the big sanctuary of Hera (the Argive Heraion) situated about 8 km from Argos across the plain as staying outside of the Argive control, makes Argos a relatively small polis, unable to control even the whole of the adjacent plain, which discredits the traditions about its early hegemony far outside this district.

The chapter on Chalcis and Eretria by Sylvian Fachard and Samuel Verdan inevitably devotes more space to Eretria, given its better researched archaeological record and the profound studies of its epigraphic evidence by Denis Knoepfler. [1] Particular attention is paid to Eretrian archaeology indicating a sustaining rise of the city, especially during the 6 th century BCE, evidenced by the fortifications, the temple building, and coinage. The discussion of the political history starts with the outstanding Early Iron Age site of Lefkandi situated between Chalcis and Eretria, while the so-called Lelantine War between these poleis, noted by Thucydides and Herodotos as a large-scale conflict involving many city-states in the Aegean, is described as a border war leaving the Lelantine plain to Chalcis. Both Chalcis and Eretria are described as powerful poleis controlling large territories, whose further development was halted by the catastrophic defeats at the end of the Archaic period, inflicted by Athens (in the case of Chalcis) and Persia (in the case of Eretria).

The chapter on Chios, Lesbos and Samos by Paul Christesen, Giuseppe Lentini, Sarah Murray, and Matt Simonton discusses these islands largely separately from each other. For

Chios, the archaeological investigation of the polis centre is hindered by its position beneath the modern town, which shifts the focus on the well-researched peripheral settlement at Emporio on the island's south-eastern coast. The scarcity of literary evidence for the political history is partly compensated by the so-called constitutional law from ca 550 BCE. The *boule demosie* (possibly translated as 'people's council') the duties of which this inscription states is viewed as 'a council concerned with public matters', without any indication for democracy suggested by some scholars. Due attention is paid to the commercial relations, to trading the famous Chian wine, and to the importance of slavery on Chios. The section on cultural history focuses on Homeridae, the supposed Chian descendants of Homer, describing them as the establishers of the fixed sequential order of the Homeric epics and the 'authorisers' of this version in Athens and consequently elsewhere.

The overview of the archaeological evidence for the five Lesbian poleis points out their possession of good harbours and thus the access to the foreign exchange networks. The section on political history focuses, expectedly, on the rivalry between the elite groups in Mytilene illuminated by the poetry of Alcaeus, while accepting the influence of *demos* on this turbulent course of events. Attention is paid to the importance of *peraia* - the extensive territory possessed by Mytilene on the Anatolian coast opposite to Lesbos - providing the basis for the Mytilene's hegemonic ambitions on the island. The importance of *peraia* becomes equally clear in the next subchapter on Samos, discussed in connection to the so-called Meliac War recorded by the later sources - the conquest and destruction of a probably Carian community on Cape Mycale opposite to Samos on the mainland, which led to the division of the conquered lands among the nearby Ionian poleis, and to the subsequent feuds between the winners for these possessions. The discussion of the material culture of Samos relies on the relatively wealthy archaeological record from the polis centre (modern Pythagorio), and gives a detailed insight into the development of the outstanding sanctuary of Hera - the Samian Heraion - on the coast ca 6 km westwards of the polis town. The political history of the island focuses on the 6th century tyranny of Polycrates, described as predatory rule transforming piracy and the slave trade to highly organised state-level enterprises, which made the funding of the magnificent building projects of the time possible.

The last chapter on Corcyra by Hans-Joachim Gehrke and Philip Sapiststein combines the archaeological record with the evidence of the later literary sources - mainly Thucydides - for describing the polis centre as a notable conurbation with harbours, numerous temples, workshops and agora. Attention is paid also to the dependant settlements on the island, and to the *peraia* controlled by Corcyra on the opposite mainland. The tradition about the foundation of the Greek colony on the island is accepted as generally reliable, supported by the archaeological record. The early 6th century honorary epigram on the tomb of a certain Menecrates, repeatedly mentioning *damos* conferring the honours, is seen as indicating a 'partially democratized political system' in which the people, i.e. the relatively broad citizen body, had decisive influence. The discussion of the 'diplomatic history' focuses on the relations with Corinth, the generally recognised mother city of Corcyra. Corcyra is shown to have been allied or subject to the 7th and early 6th century Corinthian tyrants, but forcefully asserting its independence and power immediately after the tyranny's fall. The section on cultural history concentrates on the innovative architecture and sculpture of the Corcyraean temples.

The chapters reveal wonderfully both the limits of our evidence and, despite this, the possibilities to arrive at well-founded conclusions. The critical review of the literary tradition and the exhaustive use of the scarce contemporary written sources, both inscriptions and poetry, combined with the archaeological record and, in some points, the deductions from the evidence pertaining to the later periods, allows a fairly reliable reconstruction of the main lines of development of the Archaic poleis. Chalcis, Eretria, Chios, Samos, Mytilene and Corcyra are described as developing into powerful political communities for the end of the period, with tens of thousands of inhabitants and notable urban centres controlling relatively

extensive territories, in some cases including a *peraia* overseas. Argos, however, appears rather exceptional in this respect, unable to control even the whole of the nearby plain, which virtually excludes the broader hegemony ascribed to it by the ancient tradition. We might, however, ask if this divergence in the descriptions reflects variable historical reality or different attitudes of the writers quite natural by multiple authorship.

The high quality of all the chapters is without doubt. The book is a highly worthy contribution to the study of the Archaic Greek world, offering an updated in-depth review of the complex range of available evidence with expert insights into the current discussion. This will be helpful, indeed indispensable, for any serious student of this crucial period in the history of ancient Greece, both the experienced researchers and either the graduate or undergraduate students working in this field.

Note :

[1] E.g. D. Knoepfler: Décrets érétriens de proxénie et de citoyenneté. Eretria XI, Lausanne 2000.