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# The Oxford history of the archaic Greek world. Vol. IV: Cyrene to Metapontion

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## Review by

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## Preview

The *Oxford History of the Archaic Greek World* series presents 22 studies of individual Greek city-states (5 of which appear in this volume), authored by more than 30 contributors. The choice of scholars reflects deliberate effort by the editors, Paul Cartledge and Paul Christesen, to recruit the foremost authorities in the field, thereby guaranteeing that each chapter is written by those most capable of interpreting the archaeological and textual evidence at hand. Broadly, the chronological scope extends from ca. 750 to 480 BCE (xxx), though contributors carefully delineate and justify more precise temporal boundaries within their chapters. The stated goal of the series is to provide both “breadth and depth” (xxi; see BMCR [2024.09.41](#)), pursued through the integration of literary, epigraphic, and material records into what the editors describe as a practice of “archaeohistory” (xxii; see BMCR [2024.09.41](#)).

The structure imposed by the editors is both a strength and a limitation. The subdivision of topics, outlined in detail in the front matter (xxiii–xxiv), allows readers to locate particular themes with relative ease. However, the rigidity of this sectioning at times produces unnecessary repetition or fragmentation. This reviewer, for example, found little substantive difference between the sections, “4.4.2. Foundation of Massalia” and “4.4.4. Foundation(s) of Massalia: Overview,” both of which review literary foundation accounts while being situated within the broader category of “Material Culture.” A similar overlap arises in the Metaponto chapter between “5.4.2. Settlement Pattern” and “5.4.3. Settlement Organization.” Such divisions, while helpful for topical referencing, occasionally disrupt narrative cohesion.

Cartographic and reference tools significantly enhance the utility of this volume. Paul Christesen’s maps are particularly welcome; in the Massalia chapter alone, six maps are provided (492–497), ensuring spatial clarity for sites mentioned in the text. Gazetteers accompany each chapter, though the absence of page numbers within them can frustrate navigation. Bibliographies are self-contained, making individual chapters consumable as stand-alone resources.

The intended audience is defined as “largely scholars who have some substantial grounding and serious interest in the ancient Greek world” (xxv). In practice, however, the contributions remain accessible across subfields. Certain editorial decisions (such as the elaborate discussion of orthographic conventions, xxxi–xxxii) feel unnecessarily complex, though the overall presentation is carefully considered and its explanation may prove useful to the especially dedicated researcher. Repetition of information across subsections, while at times distracting for a cover-to-cover reader, proves a welcome feature for those consulting individual topics.

The volume therefore succeeds in offering both a comprehensive resource and a set of highly specialized studies for scholars of the Archaic Greek world. A review of each chapter follows.

## Cyrene:

Gerald Schaus leverages his extensive archaeological experience in Cyrenaica to offer a nuanced reading of both the settlement's history and its historiography. This chapter (1) presents Cyrene from its foundation in the 7<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, paying particular attention to its shifting political landscape throughout this period. Political power, Schaus explains, initially resided in the Battiad monarchy but was restructured in the 6<sup>th</sup> century by Demonax of Mantinea; a brief restoration of Battiad influence followed, with Persian support. Its economy was closely tied to the unique exploitation of silphium, the medicinal and culinary plant that became emblematic of Cyrene's wealth and identity.

Central to Schaus' analysis is the interplay between literary myth, local oral tradition, and the archaeological record. For example, Schaus concludes that Herodotus likely visited Libya himself, while also emphasizing that Herodotus' Cyrenaean informants, members of elite families for whom the overthrow of the Battiads was a recent memory, introduced anti-dynastic biases, such as the unflattering characterization of Battus as a "stuttering bastard" (27). Particularly welcome is the integration of the "Agreement of the Founders" into broader colonial discourse, though readers might regret the absence of a Greek text in some instances (e.g., 24–25).

Terminological consistency is sometimes lacking. Definitions are given for terms such as *stasis* (7) and "Minyans" (19), but not for more specialized terms like *ktisis* (25), *apoikia* (32), or *kome*, the latter being employed in an unusual sense to describe secondary settlements such as Apollonia (51). Despite this, Schaus lends authority to this treatment of Cyrene, and readers will find it an invaluable resource in the integration of archaeological and textual evidence for Greek overseas settlement.

## Delphi:

Hélène Aurigny and Michael Scott provide a comprehensive analysis of Delphi from the 8<sup>th</sup> century to ca. 470 BCE (ch. 2), examining the sanctuary, city, and surrounding landscape within broader networks of religion, politics, and material culture. Delphi's rise as a Panhellenic center is traced from its earliest cult activity in the 8<sup>th</sup> century through to its role as a symbolic "hearth" (132) of the Greek world following the Persian Wars. Aurigny and Scott emphasize the sanctuary's international significance, as evidenced by imported luxury goods and dedications, and its centrality to colonization, interstate diplomacy, and artistic innovation. The role of the Amphictyony and the establishment of festivals, most notably the Pythian games, positioned Delphi as both a religious and political hub.

Aurigny and Scott's presentation of the oracle as a "discussion-inciting force" (180) is especially insightful, reframing the Pythia's function less as a unilateral authority and more as a catalyst for negotiation and reflection within the Greek world. Equally valuable is the synthesis of archaeological evidence, particularly useful for readers without access to the largely Francophone scholarship on the site. The catalogue of buildings and dedications in the appendix (212–226), ordered chronologically, is a helpful reference, although fuller citation of ancient sources would strengthen its utility.

Several editorial choices render the images less impactful than they might otherwise be. The awkward placement of a legend on p. 149 opposite the plan for the Sanctuary of Apollo, and the reliance on black-and-white images (more present in print than its digital counterpart) reduces clarity (e.g., the bronze shield on p. 164). Further elaboration of the social and environmental impact of the ca. 40,000 attendees encamped during the Pythian Games (209) would also have enriched the analysis. Overall, this chapter succeeds in presenting Delphi as a richly textured site whose influence extended far beyond its immediate topography.

## Macedonia:

Zosia Archibald provides a detailed examination of Macedonia and its wider Aegean context to the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. This chapter (3) is distinctive for the breadth of its temporal framing, including considerably more discussion of Bronze and Iron Age histories than other

contributions. Archibald situates the rise of Macedonian polities within the wider region, while also engaging with the persistent challenge of defining Macedonia geographically (249–262), a task she undertakes with admirable care given the region’s shifting and often opaque boundaries.

The emergence of Macedonian kingship is a central theme. Archibald remains cautious in reconstructing the early Temenid dynasty, which often relies on the retrojection of later traditions (376–380). Her handling of this material reflects both a critical stance toward N. G. L. Hammond’s influential reconstructions (Hammond 1972) and a broader concern with evidentiary limits.

While the chapter is rich in detail, it often reads more as a reference work than as a narrative. The wealth of data will benefit specialists, though the density may prove challenging for general readers. Readers may also be surprised by the brevity of discussion concerning Olynthus (328) in a volume with such a heavy archaeological focus; this choice is, however, consistent with Archibald’s decision to end her treatment of the region in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century.

Archibald provides a comprehensive, critical, and rich treatment of early Macedonia. Readers will find it an indispensable resource for understanding the complex formation of Macedonian identity and political structures, as well as for engaging with the historiographical debates that continue to shape its study.

Massalia:

Adolfo J. Domínguez contributes a chapter (4) on Massalia, offering a review of the city from its foundation ca. 600 BCE to the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century. The analysis highlights Massalia’s rapid development into a major trading hub in the western Mediterranean, with particular attention paid to its foundation myths, Phocaean connections, and evolving political and economic structures. The chapter underscores the interplay between Greek migrants and indigenous populations, while also situating Massalia within wider Ionian and Mediterranean networks.

Domínguez echoes his fellow contributors in stressing the need for more expedient publication of archaeological material (480), a challenge that continues to hinder research despite the proliferation of studies. His discussion benefits from thoughtful editorial inclusions, such as helpful translations of French scholarship (e.g., 498). Not all claims are equally convincing, however. The assertion that “...it seems unlikely that at the time of the Greek foundation of Massalia the climate was significantly different from that of present day” (502) does not align with current understandings of climate change across the millennia (see Roberts et al. 2019, McCormick et al. 2012).

While this chapter is richly illustrated, with numerous maps that clarify the geographic scope of Massalia’s interactions, it lacks a map illustrating the orientation of the settlement discussed on page 515. Despite this, Domínguez’s chapter succeeds in integrating archaeological and textual evidence to emphasize Massalia’s significance. He provides a valuable account of a city whose importance has often been underestimated in studies of the Archaic Greek world.

Metaponto:

Joseph Coleman Carter’s chapter (5), “Metapontion,” reflects the author’s unmatched expertise, representative of a lifetime of research and fieldwork in the chora and sanctuaries of the Metapontino. Carter seeks to reconstruct the development of the settlement largely through rural landscapes, although the absence of a clear or continuous political history forces him to rely heavily on the better-documented histories of nearby Taras, Sybaris, and Siris. His survey of the material record is comprehensive, though occasionally repetitive (e.g., the Temple A architrave inscription is repeated often and in close proximity: 679, 714–15, 716).

Some interpretive decisions invite further discussion. The presentation of artifact percentages at farmhouses in the chora (664) is somewhat opaque: were figures calculated from fragment counts, weight, minimum number of vessels, or some other metric? Population estimates also prove somewhat problematic. While Carter concedes that population estimates always contain elements of uncertainty, he assumes uniform density across the entire chora, along with a household size of

five (737). This contrasts with other models that suggest denser settlement nearer the asty, polynuclear settlement patterns in the wider region (Casarotto et al. 2016, 568; Stek 2014), and households of roughly seven members (Cabaniss 2019; Uggeri 1969, 59).

Carter's bibliography is unusually thin in recent scholarship: only five cited works since 2018. Several analyses of archaic Metaponto, presented by established scholars of this region, are absent (e.g., De Stefano 2020a; De Stefano 2020b; Graells i Fabregat 2020). Cartographic support is similarly uneven. While a localized map of Lago del Lupo includes some of the frequently referenced 'division lines' (660), the absence of a map depicting their full extent is an oversight.

Despite these caveats, Carter's authority in presenting the material record is evident throughout, and his unparalleled familiarity with the site ensures that his presentation provides an indispensable foundation for future work at Metaponto and its territory. The chapter will serve as an essential reference point for scholars of Magna Graecia and the Archaic Period.

#### Conclusions:

As a whole, this volume represents a valuable and consolidated presentation of studies in the archaic Greek world. The few observations offered above arise largely from the difficulty of finding fault in a volume of this scope and quality. The editors have assembled an impressive group of specialists and, through careful editorial oversight, produced a collection that is both clearly organized and thoughtfully presented. The work offers an authoritative synthesis of existing archaeological, epigraphic, and literary evidence that will serve as invaluable reference material for future research. Individual chapters function effectively as stand-alone studies while collectively providing a broad overview of key centers of the archaic Mediterranean. The result is a well-edited volume which will undoubtedly become a standard point of reference and an indispensable addition to any library concerned with Greek antiquity.

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