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978-0-521-87744-2 - Unthinking the Greek Polis: Ancient Greek History beyond Eurocentrism

Kostas Vlassopoulos

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## UNTHINKING THE GREEK POLIS

This study explores how modern scholars came to write Greek history from a Eurocentric perspective and challenges orthodox readings of Greek history as part of the history of the West. Since the Greeks lacked a national state or a unified society, economy or culture, the polis has helped to create a homogenising national narrative. This book re-examines old polarities such as those between the Greek poleis and Eastern monarchies, or between the ancient consumer and the modern producer city, in order to show the fallacies of standard approaches. It argues for the relevance of Aristotle's concept of the polis, which is interpreted in a novel way. Finally, it proposes an alternative way of looking at Greek history as part of a Mediterranean world-system. This interdisciplinary study engages with modern debates on globalisation, nationalism, Orientalism and history writing, while also debating recent developments in classical studies.

KOSTAS VLASSOPOULOS is Lecturer in Greek History at the University of Nottingham.

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# UNTHINKING THE GREEK POLIS

*Ancient Greek History beyond Eurocentrism*

KOSTAS VLASSOPOULOS

*Department of Classics*

*University of Nottingham*



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*To the liberty of oppressed peoples*

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This book comes out of a thesis with the same title; the research for it was undertaken in the Faculty of Classics, University of Cambridge, between 2001 and 2005. I would like to thank my supervisor, Robin Osborne, for his help and his constant availability, before and after the completion of the thesis. His insistence on providing evidence has been a necessary corrective to a thesis that bended overtly towards the theoretical; my work on Aristotle is the result of his encouragement. Paul Cartledge acted as my supervisor for a term, but has always been willing to read and comment. Discussing and, indeed, even disagreeing with Paul has been one of the most stimulating experiences I have had. Dimitris Kyratas has been a teacher and a friend for many years; he has been a constant source of support and guidance; and he has been a chief stimulus to my historiographical interests. Anna Missiou has acted as supervisor for the Greek State Scholarship Foundation; my views on Orientalism go back to a seminar she ran many years ago in Crete.

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This work has a political inspiration, in the broad sense of the word, as one can surmise already from its title. But while living in the academic ivory tower, it is often easy to forget the real meaning of words used often in this work, words which have a deadly impact: war, imperialism, nationalism, globalisation, exploitation, domination. In this respect the events of the recent war have kept reminding me of the real meaning of words and things. For myself, I can do no more in the present capacity than making an appropriate dedication to a long-standing cause.

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<i>AE</i>	<i>Archaiologikè Ephèmeris</i>
<i>AHR</i>	<i>American Historical Review</i>
<i>AJA</i>	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
<i>AJPh</i>	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
<i>AmAnt</i>	<i>American Antiquity</i>
<i>ASNP</i>	<i>Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa</i>
<i>BCH</i>	<i>Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique</i>
<i>BSA</i>	<i>Annual of the British School at Athens</i>
<i>CA</i>	<i>Cultural Anthropology</i>
<i>CH</i>	<i>Cahiers d'histoire</i>
<i>CPh</i>	<i>Classical Philology</i>
<i>CQ</i>	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
<i>CSSH</i>	<i>Comparative Studies in Society and History</i>
<i>EMC</i>	<i>Echos du Monde Classique/Classical Views</i>
<i>G&amp;R</i>	<i>Greece and Rome</i>
<i>GRBS</i>	<i>Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies</i>
<i>H&amp;T</i>	<i>History and Theory</i>
<i>JESHO</i>	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
<i>JFA</i>	<i>Journal of Field Archaeology</i>
<i>JHI</i>	<i>Journal of the History of Ideas</i>
<i>JMA</i>	<i>Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology</i>
<i>JS</i>	<i>Journal des Savants</i>
<i>Magna Grecia</i>	<i>Magna Grecia e Oriente mediterraneo prima dell'età ellenistica: atti del trentanovesimo convegno di studi sulla Magna Grecia. Taranto, 2000.</i>
<i>MAS</i>	<i>Modern Asian Studies</i>
<i>OJA</i>	<i>Oxford Journal of Archaeology</i>
<i>PCPhS</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society</i>
<i>P&amp;P</i>	<i>Past and Present</i>
<i>Problemi</i>	<i>Problemi della chora coloniale dall'Occidente al Mar Nero: atti del quarantesimo convegno di studi sulla Magna Grecia. Taranto, 2001.</i>

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*Abbreviations**REA**Revue des Etudes Anciennes**REG**Revue des Etudes Grecques**Review**Review, a Journal of the Fernand Braudel Center**SS**Studi Storici**TAPhA**Transactions of the American Philological Association**WA**World Archaeology**ZPE**Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*