

Murray, Oswyn and Price, Simon (editors). *The Greek City from Homer to Alexander*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990. Pp. xv, 372. 19 figures, 4 plates. \$110.00 (Can.)

Owens, E.J. *The City in the Greek and Roman World*. London and New York: Routledge, 1991. Pp. xi, 210. 54 black and white illustrations. \$65.50 (Can.)/\$52.50 (U.S.)

Timothy D. Barnes

Volume 21, numéro 2, march 1993

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1016803ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016803ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (imprimé)

1918-5138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Barnes, T. D. (1993). Compte rendu de [Murray, Oswyn and Price, Simon (editors). *The Greek City from Homer to Alexander*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990. Pp. xv, 372. 19 figures, 4 plates. \$110.00 (Can.) / Owens, E.J. *The City in the Greek and Roman World*. London and New York: Routledge, 1991. Pp. xi, 210. 54 black and white illustrations. \$65.50 (Can.)/\$52.50 (U.S.)]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 21(2), 125–126. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016803ar>

1804, the year of the last general mortality crisis in Cuenca.

On the surface the nineteenth-century household structure in Cuenca was simple, with a head and his wife, children, co-resident kin, and domestic servants, but Reher demonstrates that a far more complex kinship network transcended the obvious, simple family structure. The high mobility of the population made such networks absolutely fundamental—and possible. In fact, the constant in- and out-migration from the town was a stabilizing factor for Cuenca and showed the resourcefulness of the population in maximizing their income and meeting their economic needs. Moreover, this constant movement of people reflected the dynamism and mobility of *conquenses* despite the existence of static social and economic structures and demographic stagnation after 1600.

Reher's work is richly multidimensional. Thoroughly familiar with the debates prevailing in historical demography and urban history, he brings a fresh, new approach to his early modern Cuenca by arguing and demonstrating that the town cannot be viewed separately from the countryside; the two, he shows, particularly by his migration analysis, are inseparably, almost symbiotically linked. In the author's discussion of the decline of Spain, he compares demographic and economic patterns in Cuenca with those in other areas of Spain, pointing both to regional similarities and differences while confirming some conventional wisdom. Moreover, Reher—modestly—does not make too much of his prodigious research and analysis and is eager to ask new questions that he feels he has not answered adequately or can only speculate about. Lastly, his deep seated affection for Cuenca and its people, even in his heaviest statistical passages, gives the book warmth. One feels that Reher

has walked every meter of the town—no easy task—and knows *conquenses* past and present very well. This is a fine book that can be read with great profit.

JOHN JAY TePASKE
Department of History
Duke University

Murray, Oswyn and Price, Simon (editors). *The Greek City from Homer to Alexander*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990. Pp. xv, 372. 19 figures, 4 plates. \$110.00 (Can.).

Owens, E.J. *The City in the Greek and Roman World*. London and New York: Routledge, 1991. Pp. xi, 210. 54 black and white illustrations. \$65.50 (Can.)/\$52.50 (U.S.).

The city was the basic organisational unit of the Greco-Roman world, remaining fundamental both to administration and to men's conception of their place in the universe even when the heyday of the independent citizen-states of classical Greece was no more than a remote memory. In the second century of our era, a Greek panegyrist could present the Roman Empire as a commonwealth of cities, and hardly a single Roman or early Byzantine emperor failed to found cities to perpetuate his memory and that of his family. Moreover, for obvious physical reasons, inscriptions and archaeology, which together provide so much of the available evidence for the Greek and Roman world, tend to document in the first instance individual cities, their inhabitants and the dealings of both with other cities, individuals and groups. Therefore both the city as a historical phenomenon and individual cities have long been a primary focus of modern research into the classical world.

The title of *The Greek City from Homer to Alexander* consciously and deliberately provokes comparison with A.H.M. Jones' classic study of *The Greek City from*

Alexander to Justinian (Oxford, 1940). But, whereas Jones gave a systematic survey of the development and history of Greek cities in Asia Minor, Egypt and the Middle East over nearly a thousand years, the new book consists of ten papers presented at the Oxford Ancient History Seminar in 1986/7 plus four others. It possesses many of the strengths of its scholarly genre, such as the lively presentation of different points of view, but also some of its weaknesses, particularly a tendency to address questions of more interest to the group who formed the original audience than to 'the general reader and the student of the social sciences' who are identified as the target audience for the book. The stated aims of illustrating 'the different methodological approaches currently being practised' and providing 'an introduction to the state of the art' are achieved, but not every chapter can be unreservedly recommended to those who do not already have considerable familiarity with the history of the Greek city between Hesiod and Demosthenes—whose names, though less resonant than those of Homer and Alexander, would give a better indication of the real scope of the volume.

The book has three main sections. In the first, Nicholas Purcell gives a brilliant Braudelian analysis of migration and mobility in the eastern Mediterranean from c. 800 to c. 500, while Bruno D'Agostino discusses military organisation and social structure in archaic Etruria primarily from iconographic evidence. The second section, on 'the geography of the city,' contains four excellent essays on topics of wide interest. Oliver Rackham argues with elegance, erudition and wit the controversial thesis that the landscape of classical Greece was closely similar to that of modern Greece. Anthony Snodgrass provides both a theoretical justification of survey archaeology and a demonstration of its practical results when applied to western Boeotia. Lucia Nixon and Simon Price use the

Athenian tribute lists, particularly that of 441, to estimate the size and resources of Aegean cities. Finally, Michael Jameson considers private space and the Greek city: going beyond his title, which implies a focus on private and public space, he also offers a sensitive treatment of the social functions of the private house.

The six chapters collected under the sub-title 'the institutions of the city' are varied in theme, approach and emphasis. Three are general studies. Pauline Schmitt-Pantel and Emily Kearns concentrate on theoretical issues of interpretation: the former uses the banquet to consider the relationship between 'collective activities and the political,' while the latter identifies common features in the varied figures who saved cities in myth and history. Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood gives a detailed and subtle answer to the question: what is polis religion?, but the completely uninitiated reader will receive more enlightenment from the chapter 'The Country of the Gods' in R. Osborne's *Classical Landscape with Figure* (London, 1987), 165-192, which she seems nowhere to mention. The other three chapters concentrate on Athens, in two cases exclusively. David Lewis discusses public property in the city: although he casts his net as wide as possible, the relevant evidence is mainly from Athens—and suggests that the city may have owned more than one thousand public slaves in the fourth century. Robin Osborne recapitulates and refines the central thesis of his book *Demos: The Discovery of Classical Attica* (Cambridge, 1985) that participation in the communal activities of the local demes throughout Attica was as important for the functioning of Athenian democracy as involvement in the direct democratic government of the city. The argument here proceeds from the inscribed decisions of corporate bodies that survive at Rhamnusi

(in northeast Attica close to the crossing to Euboea): fifty-two are listed, two quoted and translated in full. Mogens Herman Hansen considers the political powers of the Athenian courts: the evidence is set out clearly, precise questions are asked, relevant modern analogies are adduced—and the stunning conclusion is drawn that 'the rate of political trials of generals in classical Athens seems to match the French revolution under Robespierre.'

Oswyn Murray contributes a somewhat disjointed introductory theoretical essay on 'Cities of Reason' that has already been published in *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 28 (1987), 325-341. The original publication includes several pages of critical comments by Hansen (pp. 341-346): unfortunately, instead of reproducing these, Murray offers a perfunctory restatement of his belief that Athens was not 'an exceptional Greek city that should be analysed in terms different from those used for Sparta and other cities'—an issue that deserved full and explicit treatment as central to the subject of the volume. By contrast, the concluding essay by W.G. Runciman, which describes itself as 'an exercise in comparative sociology,' is an intellectually disciplined, clearly argued and thought-provoking interpretation of the Greek citizen-state as 'an evolutionary dead-end:' it argues that even Athens, Sparta and Corinth, which alone of Greek cities of the period had the potential to evolve into a more enduring form of polity than the citizen-state, were prevented by their very structure and organisation from breaking out of the constraints imposed by the legal and customary institutions characteristic of the *polis*.

The book by E.J. Owens offers a clear, competent, unpretentious and reliable account of Greek, Hellenistic, Etruscan and Roman town planning down to c. 200 A.D., illustrated by more than fifty

schematic plans closely keyed to the text. It is presumably the publisher who has given it a title which suggests that the author has written a general book on the ancient city comparable, for example, to Frank Kolb's excellent *Die Stadt im Altertum* (Munich, 1984). What Owens does, he does well: potential readers (and potential purchasers) who want an up-to-date and accurate survey of town planning in the Greek and Roman world should not be deterred by a title that seems to promise something else.

TIMOTHY D. BARNES
Department of Classics
University of Toronto

Johnson, J.K. *Becoming Prominent: Regional Leadership in Upper Canada, 1791-1841*. Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989. Pp. xi, 277. \$29.95.

At a time when many excellent studies on Upper Canada are being published, Keith Johnson has produced an indispensable reference work with significant implications for the larger historiography of Ontario. *Becoming Prominent* is a collective biography or prosopography of the 283 members of the Upper Canadian House of Assembly. Johnson admits at the outset that these men were not ordinary, nor typical, nor representative Upper Canadians, nor is this book in any concerned with what went on in the legislature. Rather, this study is about prominence at the provincial and local levels, and about the economic, social and political ingredients that went into the making of regionally prominent politicians. This study seeks to answer the basic question: how was prominence achieved? Johnson does not presume to offer definitive conclusions, based as this study is on sometimes fragmentary, sometimes dubious evidence, but instead he attempts "to identify some trends and collective characteristics that can be