All together

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Michael Scott

DELPHI AND OLYMPIA
The spatial politics of Panhellenism
in the archaic and classical periods
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FROM DEMOCRATS TO KINGS
The downfall of Athens to the epic rise
of Alexander the Great
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Ancient Panhellenism was a bit like the European project: a mess of competing states with different interests which occasionally liked to pretend that they were a unified entity. Sometimes – as when war broke out against a common aggressor, such as the Persians – this might even have been true (at least for those who sided together against the aggressor, rather than for those Greeks who joined the other side). You might say that Panhellenism existed as more than a fantasy only when a significant enough enemy appeared to remind the Greeks that they actually had something in common; or – once Macedonian and then Roman dominance arrived – when the "autonomy" of the Greek states and cities became a dispensation of someone else's empire. Again like the EU, this sense of community required particular places and occasions where unity might be celebrated, when the bickering inherent in diversity was put briefly aside. Modern Europe has Strasbourg and Brussels – sites for the machinery of democratic representation and political bureaucracy; the Greeks had centres of shared pilgrimage, festival and religion, above all the great sanctuary sites of Delphi and Olympia.

Arguably, the political and economic realities of Panhellenism were less important than the ideological noise made by buildings and dedications in these special places of its celebration. It is the particular merit of Michael Scott's new book, *Delphi and Olympia*, that he has turned to the archaeology, dedications, monuments and buildings of these sanctuary sites to test the nature of Panhellenism, as it changed from Archaic to Classical times. It is not at all surprising that he finds competition between the states that came together in these sanctuaries. This competitive edge between multiple participants translated into complex spatial politics about where to put a building or a dedication and issues of how big, how visible, how close such an offering might be to the sacred centre of the site. For Scott, Delphi and Olympia are testaments to the absence as well as the presence of many Greek states in the Panhellenic community at various times, and to animosity as well as unity between the players that constituted Greece. His book is at its most interesting when attempting to contrast the different kinds of Panhellenism envisaged, or communicated, by the two sites. He points to differences in their administration and control in their landscape and topographic setting and in their histories of clearing and destruction (which might provide space for new offerings and dedications); he emphasizes too the overlap of athletic and religious space at Olympia by contrast with the separation of those activities at Delphi.

Here the spatial aspect of Scott's title finds its relevance: Olympia in the plain and Delphi on a steep hillside, Olympia – thirty-six kilometres from its governing city of Elis, yet wholly under its control – compared with the sacred site of Delphi, which is right up against the city but governed by a complex management that included the local civic authorities, priests and the religious inter-state amphictyonic council. These larger geographic and cultural differences are reflected in more specific differences in types of monument (Olympia had a special focus on commemorations of victors in its games) and in the dynamics behind the many dedications (at Delphi heavily focused on the oracle and oracular deity).

In *From Democrats to Kings*, his lively popular book on the history of Greece from Athenian democracy to the triumph of Alexander, Scott is interested in moving beyond the mythical glory days of Greek independence, the Archaic and Classical eras, to the era of Alexander the Great. But, in exploring Panhellenism, he perhaps does not go far enough.

Our most important account of the sites he discusses is not from the times of "free" Greece, but in the work of the Roman-period traveller Pausanias (to whom Scott, almost grudgingly, dedicates a brief section). Yet our own understanding of Panhellenism (especially its role as a foundational aspiration for modern political fantasies of community, freedom and cooperation) owes much more to the antiquarian dreams and reinventions of Greeks in the Roman Empire than to the world before Alexander. Panhellenism itself in the modern sense, as well as the constitution of the sites of Olympia and Delphi which bore witness to it, is largely the product of how it was seen by the likes of Pausanias, or the Delphic priest Plutarch or the Greek-speaking Syrian orator Lucian, active between the late first and the late second centuries AD. It is this Hellenistic and Roman frame for an already mythical Greece that Michael Scott's book (and so much of the study of pre-Hellenistic Greece) fails to confront, preferring to plunge into the depths of antiquity as if we could imagine away its later interpretations.

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SEÁN DUFFY, EDITOR

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