

BIROn - Birkbeck Institutional Research Online

Constantakopoulou, Christy (2014) F. Prontera Geografia e storia nella Grecia antica. Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, (2011). Pp. 270, illus. 28. 9788822260857. [Book Review]

Downloaded from: <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/30750/>

Usage Guidelines:

Please refer to usage guidelines at <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/policies.html>
contact lib-eprints@bbk.ac.uk.

or alternatively

Herodotus and Thucydides, Apollonius of Rhodes etc. are all carefully examined. The author is particularly successful in showing Homeric resonances in many unexpected places, such as Strabo or the genre of the *periploi*.

The first part discusses cultural constructions of the sea, and alerts us to the dangers of anachronism when transferring ancient geographic and maritime knowledge on to a modern map. The argument is that representations of the sea are not restricted to technical treatises, but permeate most of our ancient texts. The section on a relatively neglected genre outside francophone literature, the *periploi* (but see now G. Shipley (ed.), *Pseudo-Skylax's Periplous: The Circumnavigation of the Inhabited World (Text, Translation, and Commentary)*, Exeter 2011), emphasizes the potential oral nature of these texts; the *periploi*, it is argued, may preserve elements of oral knowledge of those who had practised maritime explorations. The author engages well with modern debates on geography and employs the theoretical application of 'naïve geography' for the ancient texts. He is right in stressing that 'naïve geography' is not simple, primitive or infantile, but rather it reflects the knowledge that the Greeks had for their environment, a knowledge that was shaped by cultural expectations.

The second section of the book explores various terms in our sources and stresses the lack of precision in hydrographic definitions, such as *akron*, *akroterion*, etc. A useful observation here is that some of these terms act as markers in our texts (especially Strabo) and help the description of maritime space. The last section explores the relationship between maps and geometry.

The book includes extremely useful appendices which list the Greek terms for geographic features, spatial terminology, etc, with translation, analysis and a list of references. This is probably the most useful section of the book, as it provides not only nuanced translations, but includes extremely interesting observations. For example, the author notes that there is a difference between *akra* and *akron* in their use in ancient texts. The term *akra* is mostly used as a narrative marker in geographic accounts, whereas the term *akron* normally denotes the more straightforward notion of edge or peninsula (and therefore is closer to *akroterion*).

Kowalski is very good when dealing with the texts and the language of the texts. Occasionally, one gets the feeling that his discussion of maritime spaces and geography is not historically embedded

in the periods he is discussing. In other words, Kowalski's Homeric sea is very similar to Strabo's sea, despite the massive change in the historical conditions that frame such narratives. His careful discussion of terminology, however, makes this an extremely useful book.

CHRISTY CONSTANTAKOPOULOU
Birkbeck, University of London
c.constantakopoulou@bbk.ac.uk

PRONTERA (F.) **Geografia e storia nella Grecia antica**. Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 2011. Pp. 270, illus. €28. 9788822260857.
doi:10.1017/S0075426914001876

Prontera is known for his work on ancient geography, Strabo and Italian history. His contribution to the study of ancient geography, in particular, has been substantial. It is fortunate, therefore, that he has collected together in this volume a sample of his writings on geography published over the past 20 years, some of which have been quite difficult to access. The articles are organized in two sections: the first one is focused on texts and the second on maps. Many ancient authors are discussed in the articles, including Hecataeus, Polybius, Antiochus of Syracuse, Marcianus of Heraclea, Eratosthenes and, of course, Strabo, while the geographic focus moves from Spain in the west, to Italy, Sicily, Greece and Asia. It is not possible to discuss in a short review every article in this volume; rather, I will focus on those that seem to me to capture best Prontera's contribution to scholarship.

The chapter entitled 'La geografia di Polibio: tradizione e innovazione' places Polybius within a tradition of geographic thought, ultimately linked with Eratosthenes, which is influenced by a 'scientific' approach to geography. Indeed Eratosthenes' 'scientific' approach is a common thread in many of the articles in this volume. The chapter entitled 'Identità etnica, confini e frontiere nel mondo greco' examines the processes through which *koina* and *ethne* negotiate and consolidate their identity, using mythical genealogies, ideological oppositions and local hierarchies.

This theme is picked up in the chapter entitled 'Sulle rappresentazioni mitiche della geografia greca', which highlights the importance of space in mythical narratives. Space in mythical narratives, it is argued, represents to a certain extent 'actual space', but at the same time it is shaped by other mythical narratives, such as those in epic poetry.

In the second part of the volume, Prontera turns his attention to ancient maps and the ancient discipline of cartography. In the chapter entitled 'Sulle basi empiriche della cartografia greca' the author explores the huge impact of Eratosthenes on Hellenistic cartography. It is argued that Eratosthenes' map was the first to use a mathematical approach in order to calculate the inhabited earth. But even if Eratosthenes' map can be viewed as the product of a 'scientific' approach, the cultural and societal context of map production affected the final product. Cartography may be the combination of a mathematical approach with the use of empirical data, but, at the same time, the historical importance of cities becomes another important parameter in the construction of maps. For example, in Eratosthenes' map, the same meridional line passes through Byzantium, Rhodes and Alexandria; in other words, the lines of the cartographer's map could not exist in an empty space, but had to go through what was considered to be a historically prominent location. This interplay between a scientific approach and cultural context as an essential component for the production of maps is picked up again in 'Centro e periferia nei mappamondi greci'. The focus here is the fourth century, which, according to Prontera, marks the transition between circular maps and orthogonal maps, which represent a 'scientific' approach to cartography. The notions of centre and periphery are important here. Whereas circular maps had an obvious centre and periphery (with the centre being always Greece, and more particularly the Aegean Sea), this was not the case for orthogonal maps. At the same time, the expansion of geographic knowledge to the east and west during the late fourth century created maps which had as their symbolic centre the Aegean, but in fact extended far beyond to the east.

This is an extremely important collection of articles particularly on the disciplines of geography and cartography. One would have liked a more elaborate presentation of what exactly makes Prontera's Eratosthenes' 'scientific' approach 'scientific', but this is a minor criticism of an otherwise thought-provoking volume.

CHRISTY CONSTANTAKOPOULOU
Birkbeck, University of London
c.constantakopoulou@bbk.ac.uk

JOHNSTONE (S.) **A History of Trust in Ancient Greece**. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011. Pp. xi + 242. \$50. 978022640509. doi:10.1017/S0075426914001888

'This book is a heap' (2) is one of many memorable phrases in the wonderful *A History of Trust*. Rather than an overarching argument, this 'heap' of seven chapters and an introduction is held together by a running theme. Johnstone explores how impersonal and personal trust operated in the social, political and economic life of – mostly – Classical Athens (the title is rather too general).

We have a chapter on haggling in the marketplace, which, in Johnstone's view, was a widespread strategy aimed at overcoming the asymmetry of information between seller (whose wares may be subjectively priced) and distrustful buyer (whose money had an objective value). Chapters 3 and 4 (my personal favourites) convincingly show that the use of standardized measures and written accounts was relatively uncommon outside of specific contexts. Most of the time, people in the marketplace or in the household measured without measuring in the modern sense: they gauged, assessed, estimated, eyeballed, often through 'containerizing', i.e. using unstandardized measures such as sacks or bags. Expertise in 'containerizing' was something that slaves and women could have too. In the same vein, chapter 5 argues that the Athenian practices of valuing, including valuing for the purposes of political office, were looser than has traditionally been thought and generally based on self-evaluation, open to potential challenge but, in fact, often unchallenged.

Chapters 6 and 7 shift gears from the economic to the political process: Johnstone tries to understand how committees arrived at decisions and what happened when those decisions made the committee members liable to punishment and sanction. He suggests that relationships of trust had to be created by and within the board or committee – they were not pre-existing. He also claims that this was achieved through collaborative discussion, the possibility of dissent and the fact that, although the final decision was set in aye-or-nay dichotomized terms, multiple opinions were played out during board meetings. Finally, the last chapter discusses the rhetorical skills not of the speaker, but of the listener, and claims that even though the audience may be aware of persuasion strategies, and distrustful of specific