assessment of Cicero's work, helping us 'disentangle the multiple purposes and strategies at work in the *Tusculans*' (12). The chapter helps us see more clearly that the *Tusculans* offer four interconnected dimensions: as formal exercises to refute proposed theses; as psychotherapy to overcome fear and suffering; as moral edification aimed at showing that virtue is essential to a happy life; and as an exhibition of philosophy's powers. Barney also shows how the *Tusculans* manage to be eclectic, in the sense of picking and choosing the strongest theory topic by topic, ecumenical by emphasising common ground wherever it exists, and ultimately compatible with Cicero's scepticism. And above all, Barney concludes, 'it is the credo of a patriotic pragmatist, motivated directly by his most powerful pre-philosophical commitments' (33).

The other chapter I enjoyed, perhaps for its honest appraisal, was Julia Annas' '*Tusculan Disputations* 5'. The chapter highlights that the second part of *Tusculans* 5 sits awkwardly with the general project developed in the previous books. Annas is unimpressed by Cicero's eclectic approach, contending that: 'The arguments in this section are peculiar, some conflicting aggressively with more careful arguments in the main part of the book' (165). A little later she acknowledges that: 'Studying Book 5 in depth has led me to admiration, but also to frustration, about the way in which Cicero has brought his ambitious five-book work to its completion and culmination' (165). In the end, she ponders whether the second part of Book 5 might be intended as 'a light-hearted coda', 'deliberately presented as insouciant about the way it proceeds', but concludes that: 'This would leave readers worrying about it in the role of humourless pedants. I would be, as one of the humourless pedants, annoyed if this were the best explanation. However, it would at least save Cicero's reputation as a writer always in control of his material' (188). Maybe the readers of the volume, like me, would be inclined to cut Cicero some slack after learning more about the context of the composition of the *Tusculans*, the sceptical method at work in the background, and the multifaceted aims of the text.

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Greek history

I commence this review with an extremely important book from a methodological point of view. Greek history has long been split between a traditionalist study of events through diachronic political narrative and the study of economic, social, and cultural history through synchronic analysis. The latter has also been shaped by a structuralist approach focusing on clear and unbridgeable status distinctions. The book by Vincent Azoulay and Paulin Ismard is formally about the events surrounding the political crisis

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of the overthrow of Athenian democracy and its restoration in 403 BCE.[1] Although the book has a lot of interesting observations concerning this major event, its groundbreaking character is the consequence of the decision to write a 'choral history': by focusing on diverse 'choruses' that brought together individuals from different social groups for a variety of purposes and with different strengths and durations, the book offers a new way of writing ancient history. The choruses examined were formed around ten individuals: Critias, Thrasybulus, Archinus, Socrates, Lysimache, Eutherus, Hegeso, Gerys, Nicomachus, and Lysias. Choral history bridges the gap between the study of events and the study of structures through the diverse entanglements between individuals; at the same time, by focusing on the shared experiences of individuals and the significance of their life courses, it makes a major contribution towards a new way of writing ancient history from a biographic point of view. This is a pathbreaking book that should inspire multiple other studies across the field of Greek history.

The book by Azoulay and Ismard should be read alongside Lisa Irene Hau's *Rethinking Hellenistic Historiography*.[2] With the partial exception of Polybius, Hellenistic historiography has not survived but in fragments; furthermore, it has long been approached through the concept of 'tragic historiography', as a genre that aimed to please readers rather than search for truth and causation. Hau offers the concept of 'immersive history' in order to interpret the work of Duris, Phylarchus, and Agatharchides. She shows that didacticism and the representation of fortune reversals in the lives of individuals and communities were not unique to Hellenistic historiography, but were shared by Greek historiography throughout its development; it was rather the achievement of readers' immersion through a conscious effort to represent how individuals had actually experienced the events of the past which characterizes the works of these Hellenistic historians. The book discusses the surviving fragments of each author, while also providing an excellent contextualization through explorations of ancient literary criticism on immersion, Peripatetic approaches to ethics and cultural history, and, finally, the contemporary poetic and visual arts. This focus of Hellenistic historiography on how individuals experienced events and how events shaped the lives of individuals is accompanied by a highly increased attention to individuals who were not members of male elites (e.g. women, slaves, poor people), who are rarely at the centre of earlier Greek historical narratives. The study of works like that of Agatharchides should be required for anyone interested in ancient history from below; accordingly, this fascinating book offers a valuable path for fostering a new biographical perspective on the study of Greek history.

Any reader of Foucault's famous *Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison*[3] will remember the memorable distinction between the public spectacle of conspicuous execution during the *ancien régime* and the emergence of the self-contained prison as the

[1] *Athens, 403 BC: A Democracy in Crisis?* By Vincent Azoulay and Paulin Ismard. Translated by Lorna Coing. Classical Scholarship in Translation series. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2025. Pp. xxx + 358. 15 figures. Hardback £40.00, ISBN: 978-1-009-49096-2.

[2] *Rethinking Hellenistic Historiography: The Immersive Histories of Duris, Phylarchus and Agatharchides*. By Lisa Irene Hau. Edinburgh Studies in Hellenistic History and Culture series. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2025. Pp. x + 286. Hardback £90.00, ISBN: 978-1-4744-7560-0.

[3] Paris, 1975.

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typical form of punishment in modernity. Foucault built on a long tradition that has considered incarceration as an atypical if not non-existent form of punishment in antiquity; ancient incarceration is assumed to be pretrial detention, not actual punishment. This brilliant book by Matthew Larsen and Mark Letteney will fundamentally change our understanding of the topic.[4] Going through the book leaves the reader with the wider question of how so much existing evidence for practices and spaces of incarceration has been discarded in favour of a theory of the modernity of the prison and its related ideologies. By bringing together archaeological, literary, legal, and documentary evidence, this study inscribes the diverse forms of incarceration within the wider processes of social control and economic exploitation that were intrinsic to ancient societies. The study is remarkable for both its temporal and spatial extent from third-millennium Mesopotamia to late antiquity, as well as by paying attention to a very wide range of purposes for which incarceration was used. By examining both the bureaucracy of incarceration as well as the experience of those who faced it, this study offers a major point of view for rethinking history from below in antiquity.

Reviel Netz's latest book is a fascinating attempt to provide a new explanation of the 'Greek miracle'.[5] Previous accounts of this phenomenon have been deeply Eurocentric, and in the current political climate tend to be pushed in a horrific direction by the various cohorts of the far right. However, the current scholarly disinclination to try to answer such a historical question is equally problematic; hence, Netz's attempt at an answer is undoubtedly important. Netz argues that there is a Greek miracle, but that it does not rest on any particular eternal values. Instead, it rests on the social conditions that made possible the emergence of two important phenomena: Greek-style science based on scholarly debate, and the Greek canon of literary texts. Readers will find impressive Netz's ability to use the history of Greek mathematics as an eloquent example of how the sociology of Greek science created a world of open debate between thinkers and texts, making possible a quantum leap in the development of scientific knowledge. Equally fascinating is Netz's discussion of the emergence and development of the Greek canon, and the apparent contradiction of its inclusion of texts that encapsulated the democratic performative culture of classical Athens. While the discussion of the Greek miracle cannot possibly be restricted to these two aspects, the case offered by Netz is quite convincing and thought-provoking. But it is quite lamentable that in a book so strongly focused on the peculiar form of cultural memory based on written texts that emerged in the Mediterranean of the first millennium BCE, not a single mention is made of *Das kulturelle Gedächtniss*, the masterpiece of the late Egyptologist Jan Assmann, which already in 1992 had prefigured the kind of argument offered by Netz.[6] The critical study of the 'Greek miracle' should not be Hellenocentric!

[4] *Ancient Mediterranean Incarceration*. By Matthew D. C. Larsen and Mark Letteney. Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2025. Pp. xx + 236. 25 figures. Paperback £30.00, ISBN: 978-0-520-38722-5.

[5] *Why the Ancient Greeks Matter: The Problematic Miracle that was Greece*. By Reviel Netz. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2025. Pp. xii+188. 6 figures. Hardback £19.99, ISBN: 978-1-009-50559-8.

[6] J. Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, Munich 1992; translated as *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pp. xi + 308. Paperback £28.00, ISBN: 978-0-521-18802-9.

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I continue with two important contributions to the study of Greek history as a peculiar decentralized system of hundreds of communities spread across the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. We start with the newly published third volume of the pathbreaking *Oxford History of the Archaic Greek World*.[7] The present volume covers the history of three archaic Greek regions: Cumae and Pithecusae in Magna Graecia; the Cyclades in mainland Greece; and finally, the island of Cyprus in the eastern Mediterranean. I have described in previous issues the set-up of this series, so we can dispense with this description here; all three chapters are excellent, and will form the primary port of call for a long time to come. In the short space available here, I will focus on three things. Most Greek historians pay attention to Pithecusae and Cumae only as the beginnings of Greek colonization; the significance of this volume is that it covers in detail the whole of the archaic period, thus turning our attention to the peculiarities of a particular region of the Greek world. As regards the Cyclades chapter, although it focuses on Naxos, Paros, and Delos, it manages to give a better sense of the diversity and convergence within regions than chapters devoted to a single community. Finally, I cannot sufficiently emphasize the significance of the decision to include Cyprus in this history of the archaic Greek world. Of all regions of the Greek world, Cyprus shows the most fascinating divergences of anything we take for granted in Greek history, in particular as regards Greek material and intellectual culture. The chapter in this volume will hopefully help integrate Cyprus systematically into the study of archaic and classical Greece.

The second work is the volume edited by Manolis Pagkalos and Andrea Scarpato on the Hellenistic Peloponnese.[8] If the study of Hellenistic history has traditionally focused on the major Hellenistic kingdoms, a recent welcome corrective has shifted attention to mainland Greece during the Hellenistic period, and the extent of continuities and discontinuities with earlier periods. The Peloponnese has been at the forefront of this new attitude, and the present volume is a valuable addition to this trend. The volume includes eleven essays that can be broadly divided into three main fields. The first includes three chapters on Hellenistic Sparta and its internal and external relations; particularly interesting is the chapter on the role and travails of Spartan military leaders outside Sparta. The second includes four essays on how the Peloponnesian region was affected by the geopolitical strategies and conflicts of three major powers: the traditional power of Sparta, as well as the new players of the Achaian *koinon* and Antigonid Macedonia. Particularly interesting is the study of the role of violence in how the Achaeans managed to unite a substantial part of the Peloponnese under their *koinon*. Finally, the remaining four chapters explore the material culture of Hellenistic Peloponnese; particularly interesting is the examination of the social structure of Patras through its funerary practices.

[7] *The Oxford History of the Archaic Greek World. Volume III: Cumae to Cyprus*. Edited by Paul Cartledge and Paul Christesen. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2025. Pp. xl + 816. 42 maps, 84 figures, 11 tables. Hardback £71.00, ISBN: 978-0-19-938351-1.

[8] *New Perspectives on the Hellenistic Peloponnese*. Edited by Manolis Pagkalos and Andrea Scarpato. London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2025. Pp. xxii + 245. 36 figures, 14 tables. Hardback £90.00, ISBN: 978-1-350-22890-0.

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Rhyne King's first book focuses on the satraps of the Achaemenid Empire.[9] Satrapies have been traditionally interpreted as territorial divisions of the empire and satraps as their administrators; King argues that the empire was organized around trans-territorial satrapal households, whose personnel and resources provided the fundamental building blocks for the collection of tribute, the maintenance of order, and the pursuit of war. The book is organized around six case-studies of such satrapal houses, from Western Asia Minor through Egypt to Iran, Arachosia, and Bactria, using the full spectrum of Greek and non-Greek sources that will prove immensely stimulating for Greek historians. The discussion of these case-studies has much to offer readers interested in various facets of the relationship between the Persian Empire and the Greek world, not least in terms of the organization and funding of campaigns. King's proposition to dispense with satrapies as territorial divisions is not fully persuasive; but the call to centre large-scale households as the building blocks of the Achaemenid Empire is in line with other recent studies which have called our attention to the need to think seriously about the sociology and economics of households as the fundamental organizational units of ancient societies and the implications of this fact. Finally, I must emphasize that one of the advantages of King's household approach is a serious incorporation of slavery as an important element of Achaemenid history, something that has been lacking in previous studies.

Philip Davies' book focuses on Spartan society in the late-archaic and classical periods.[10] His approach is based on two key concepts. The first concerns institutions and how they shaped Spartan society. Davies usefully distinguishes between universal institutions that affected all members of the Spartan community (the upbringing, the syssitia, military service, and the assembly) and selective institutions that admitted only a limited section of the Spartans (from the most selective, that of the dyarchy, to the relatively more inclusive institutions of the *hippeis* and the *krypteia*). The second distinction is between formalized status and the individual standing that involves also personal merit and achievement. Universal and exclusive institutions provided the main contexts through which Spartans pursued their strategies based on affirming status and increasing standing; at the same time, the distinction between status and standing provides conceptual space for recognizing the significance of individual strategies and performances in Spartan society. Among the more interesting findings of the book is that the Spartan elite was a relatively open group without formal recognition, in line with recent approaches to other Greek elites; at the same time, the formal recognition of the two royal lineages provided elite Spartans with a means of achieving supremacy through marriage and kinship with those lineages that was generally absent in other Greek societies.

The next book by Nigel Nicholson takes us to cultural history, and the history of Greek athletics in particular.[11] The great value of this book is that it studies Greek

[9] *The House of the Satrap: The Making of the Ancient Persian Empire*. By Rhyne King. Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2025. Pp. xviii + 313. 10 figures, 3 maps, 7 tables. Hardback £80.00, ISBN: 978-0-520-41612-3.

[10] *Standing among the Spartans: Institutions and Status within the Spartiate Community*. By Philip John Victor Davies. London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2025. Pp. vi + 200. Hardback £85.00, ISBN: 978-1-350-17163-3.

[11] *Victory and Celebration: An Introduction to Greek Athletics*. By Nigel Nicholson. New York, Oxford University Press, 2025. Pp, xii + 340. 23 figures, 1 map. Paperback £22.99, ISBN: 978-0-19-762633-7.

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athletics not from the point of view of games and practices, but from the point of view of how athletes and their achievements were commemorated and presented to the wider community. As a result, the book focuses on the period between 550–400 BCE, since this is the golden period of two particular forms of athletic commemoration: the victory ode and the full-size statue. Based on these memorial forms, Nicholson focuses on three main issues. The first explores the representation of the victorious athlete and how victory constitutes an emphatic illustration not just of athletic capacity but of a general form of excellence, which is hence particularly valuable to the community as a whole. The second aspect concerns the exploration of the political claims raised by this type of generalized excellence within the political community of the victor. Finally, particularly interesting is the study of how the diverse forms of athletics (e.g. boxing, horse-racing) generated important differences in terms of how excellence was celebrated and employed. This is a fascinating book with implications that reach beyond the study of Greek athletics.

I continue with two interesting works in comparative history. The first is Christopher Metcalf's book on the myths of kingship in Greece and the Near East.[12] Metcalf focuses on three myths which concern legendary and historical figures found in Mesopotamian, Jewish, and Greek literature. The first type of myth illustrates how somebody from a low background can end up becoming king; examples discussed include Sargon, David, Gyges, Cyrus, and Semiramis. According to Metcalf, the myth aims to legitimize the new dynasties created by such figures, since such a miraculous outcome could only occur with divine approval. The second myth concerns a sexual relationship between a future king and a deity, leading to punishment and lamentation, although things will end up well through divine intervention. Apart from the Inana cycle from Mesopotamia, the book discusses the stories of Cinyras and Anchises represented in Greco-Roman sources. Finally, the third myth illustrates a conflict between kings and other sources of divine authority, such as priests and poets. Metcalf's discussions of individual sources are useful, and it throws interesting light on texts such as the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*. The comparative reading of texts from different cultures can produce illuminating results, but the absence of any concluding chapter that draws together what the author thinks are the wider implications and the general lack of interest in the processes of intercultural interaction and the relevant scholarship unfortunately limit the utility of the book.

The second volume is a comparative study of the kingdoms of Macedon and Qin by Jordan Christopher.[13] The comparison seems justified by a seductive analogy: Argead Macedon and Qin were 'pioneer' kingdoms at the periphery of two older systems of interacting states with cultural unity, classical Greece and Zhou China, which, around roughly the same time, managed for a short period to conquer and become dominant over the two older civilizations. In pursuing this analogy, Christopher examines a range of factors that affected both Macedon and Qin: the nature and operation of sole rulership; the relationship between rulers on the one hand and elites and the military on

[12] *Three Myths of Kingship in Early Greece and the Ancient Near East: The Servant, the Lover, and the Fool*. By Christopher Metcalf. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2025. Pp. viii + 292. Hardback £90.00, ISBN: 978-1-009-48149-6.

[13] *The Pioneer Kingdoms of Macedon and Qin: A Triumph of the Periphery*. By Jordan Thomas Christopher. Antiquity in Global Context series. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2025. Pp. xvi + 286. 6 maps. Hardback £90.00, ISBN: 978-1-009-53489-5.

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the other – in the context of major military transformations that played a key role in their respective rise to power; and, finally, the practices employed by the key rulers, Philip, Alexander, and Ying Zheng, in regards to e.g. expansion, population transfer, and self-divinization. This is a well-written book, which also pays equal attention to both Macedon and Qin, instead of the usual lopsided character of similar comparative studies. However, the question of what we have actually learned from the comparison that we did not know before is difficult to answer. Christopher argues that the nature of kingship developed in different ways in Macedon and Qin, because of the differential significance of bureaucracy in Greece and China; undoubtedly, but that conclusion would hardly come as news. Ultimately, the book could have made an important contribution by forcing Greek historians to rethink some important peculiarities of Greek history from a Chinese perspective, such as the character of Greek identity and culture, the consequences of mass armies, or the nature of Greek geopolitics, but the author's engagement with the relevant issues and scholarship is unfortunately too limited to achieve this aim.

We end with two important recent works on Hellenistic and imperial Egypt. The second volume of the *Corpus of Ptolemaic Inscriptions* has been published.[14] While the first volume covered Alexandria, the second focuses on the Fayum and Middle and Upper Egypt, including 222 Greek, bilingual and trilingual texts, presented with apparatus, translations, photos, and commentary. Most of the inscriptions in the volume are dedications of temples and buildings by various individuals and groups, commonly naming the reigning Ptolemaic kings. Along with these rather repetitive texts, the volume also includes diverse inscriptions with fascinating implications for the social and cultural history of the multi-ethnic society of Ptolemaic Egypt, as well as the epigraphy of the Greek world. Particularly interesting are: metrical inscriptions; inscriptions of inviolability (*asylia*) from various temples; the constitutional inscription from Ptolemais concerning unruly assemblies; the early epigraphic attestations of various associations, including military groups and foreign *politeumata*, occupational groups, Jewish synagogues, and youth associations; the dedications of gymnasia and their implications for athletics and social life; the sexual graffiti from Karnak; the four hymns (aretalogies) of Isis from Narmouthis with their fascinating implications for the cross-cultural religious history of the Mediterranean; and, finally, the graffiti and dipinti left by visitors to temples and tourist places, among which I note the remarkable dipinto recording the visit of the eight named slaves of Mithron to the famous tomb of Petosiris in Hermopolis Magna.

The second work is the volume on Greek personal names in Egypt, edited by A. Almásy-Martin and Y. Broux.[15] Due to the preservation of large numbers of papyri, Egypt records an enormous amount of onomastic data in comparison with the rest of the Greek world, while also including the onomastics of social milieux which are largely

[14] *Corpus of Ptolemaic Inscriptions. Part 1: Greek, Bilingual, and Trilingual Inscriptions from Egypt. Volume 2: The Fayum and the Valley (Nos. 207–409)*. Edited by Alan K. Bowman, Charles V. Crowther, Simon Hornblower, Rachel Mairs, and Kyriakos Savvopoulos. Oxford Studies in Ancient Documents series. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2025. Pp. xxxviii + 767. 1 map, 125 figures. Hardback £209.00, ISBN: 978-0-19-886830-9.

[15] *Greek Personal Names in Egypt*. Edited by Adrienn Almásy-Martin and Yanne Broux. Oxford Studies in Ancient Documents series. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2025. Pp. xx + 315. 33 figures, 142 tables. Hardback £99.00, ISBN: 978-0-19-894701-1.

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invisible elsewhere. The digital prosopography of Trismegistos has enhanced immensely what can be done with this treasure trove, and the nine chapters in this volume reflect the first systematic approaches to process them for historical study. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the relatively early stage of study, the reader of the volume comes across with more questions than answers. Some chapters explore important phenomena such as the gradual decline of cross-gender names in the course of the Hellenistic and imperial periods, or the strange significance of Greek names with a literary character from Egypt's western oases. Particularly interesting are the two chapters devoted to the onomastics of two groups of Semitic immigrants, Jews and Idumaeans. Both chapters illustrate the diversity of patterns in the onomastic preferences of these groups and the extent to which they retained names from their country of origin, or adapted to the Greek onomastics of immigrants in Egypt; equally important is the finding that such varied patterns often originate in their place of origin outside Egypt.

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Roman history

Peter Wiseman – who turned eighty-six early this year – has just produced two major volumes that any student of the Roman Republic should readily take notice of. The first one is a collection of the essays and reviews which he has published on early Rome over the last quarter of a century, with the addition of ten previously unpublished pieces.[1] The three key terms of the title, *Myth, History, and Archaeology,* provide a teachable summary of the main interests of that great scholar and, more importantly, point to the ways in which he has shown how those three areas interrelate and overlap, with the unique blend of philological insight and historical imagination that has made his contribution to Roman studies (broadly understood) so significant and so original. Having such a distinguished body of work collected in one venue is in itself invaluable, and makes this volume a required presence in any Classics library. An *Introduction* and an *Epilogue 2025* give Wiseman the chance to draw attention to the main tenets of his vision of early Rome and of the correct use of the evidence – written and unwritten – for it: the unremitting and enlightening polemic with Andrea Carandini is a leading theme throughout the collection. Another key nodal point is the deep connection that Wiseman establishes between Rome and the Greek world, which he regards as central to the understanding of the origins of the city.

It is perhaps a trope – but nonetheless true – that the studies collected in this volume would by themselves be a worthy outcome of a long period of sustained research.

[1] *Myth, History and Archaeology: Essays and Reviews, 2000–2025.* By T. P. Wiseman. *Mnemosyne* Supplements: History and Archaeology of Classical Antiquity 497. Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2025. Pp. xiv + 354. 28 illustrations. Hardback £95.00, ISBN: 978-90-04-74253-6.

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