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Book reviews

J. Siapkas, *Från Olympia till Leonidas* (Antikvetenskapens teoretiska landskap, 2), Lund: Nordic Academic Press 2018. 368 pp. ISBN 978-91-88661-69-2

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The book under review is the second in a planned series of six in which Johannes Siapkas attempts to map the theoretical landscape of classical studies, an ambitious and laudable aim. The first volume, *Från Laokoon til Troja* (*From Laokoon to Troy*, 2017) covered this field during the long nineteenth century, from antiquarianism to *Altertumswissenschaft* and early evolutionism (see my review for *BMCR*: <http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2018/2018-02-14>). This follow-up covers theoretical and methodological developments (or, perhaps more correctly, the lack of such developments) within what the author calls “traditional” classical studies roughly in the period between the late 19th century and 1950, book-ended by the title’s references to the Olympia excavations and the political uses of Leonidas and his 300 Spartans in Nazi propaganda. Many of the approaches that Siapkas discusses continue to have significant ramifications in the present day. Indeed, in light of the deep conservatism that the author identifies within the field, many of the theories and methods covered in the book continue to occupy prominent roles in contemporary scholarship, as he indeed repeatedly notes. Throughout the volume, Siapkas criticises the current state of classical studies, claiming that it suffers from an unhealthy dose of inductionism, epistemological continuity and methodological conservatism. Somewhat paradoxically, however, he also characterises classical studies as a field marred by methodological eclecticism, even what he calls a “cacophony” of approaches and terminologies. It is not always immediately apparent how these tendencies can co-exist.

After a brief introduction, the book’s first part turns to an overview of culture-historical scholarship as it developed

within classical studies from the late 19th century onwards, discussing in turn the study of Indo-European, Aegean and Italic prehistory as well as Etruscology. These areas of study have contributed to broader methodological developments within the field. Notably, it is within the context of Aegean prehistory that the notion of a classical studies entirely separated from texts developed. Advances in the study of pottery from the 1920s onwards contributed greatly to the development of relative chronologies more broadly within the study of the ancient world. Characteristic for much of the scholarship during the period is the increased professionalisation of classical studies and its slow but steady fragmentation into a bewildering number of subfields, fuelled not least by the significant increase in the volume of data available for analysis.

The book’s second part then moves to the early days of the major excavations (such as the title’s Olympia) and traditional studies of classical architecture, which are often referred to by the German name, *Bauforschung*, but which also have a strong bearing in France and the UK. Siapkas refers to these two traditions by means of the umbrella term “normative classics.” He discusses scholarship on both topics as being closely related to 19th-century antiquarian scholarship in its focus on aesthetically pleasing paradigmatic monuments. Individual chapters usefully summarise the study of both public and private architecture. Siapkas identifies the latter as a significant subfield within classical studies, although arguably it is much more than that and has continued to develop in productive ways up until the present day. Indeed, when he uses two German-language publications, published in 1994 and 2003 respectively (and thus well beyond his stated chronological threshold of 1950), as examples of the “object-fixated positivism” that he sees as rampant within classical studies, he ignores the significant amounts of Anglophone work on both Greek and Roman private architecture that has flourished since the 1990s. Furthermore, while there are obviously significant aspects of continuity, contrasting the early days of the Olympia excava-

tions with the present is highly revealing in terms of the ways in which the field has changed, for example in the project's current focus on investigating the wider landscape of the sanctuary, but Siapkias has little time for such nuances.

Part three turns to classical art history, first presenting an overview of this field's development from the rise of connoisseurship to Panofsky's iconology, followed by individual chapters that outline the substantial bodies of scholarship on ancient vases and sculpture, the two media that research traditionally has focused on. Siapkias critically engages with the deeply embedded structures of research on ancient vases, including the Beazley paradigm's focus on the identification of artists, as well the masters of classical sculpture. In his account of *Kopienkritik* (a topic that confusingly was also covered in the first volume of the series), he ignores the important role of manuscript studies as a model for the development of this method. Siapkias rightly criticises the singular focus on masterworks in some art-historical scholarship, but he completely ignores the substantial body of scholarship on the social history of art that developed in the mid-20th century under the influence of Marxism, notably the works of Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli. Although these developments will apparently be covered in a future volume of the series, what we are treated to here is in many ways a caricature of the art-historical perspective in classical archaeology as it is applied in the 21st century.

With part four, Siapkias changes course and turns to various aspects of the ideological and political uses of antiquity, another potentially massive topic. Here, Siapkias focuses on National Socialist and Fascist scholarship (and shades of such scholarship), concluding with a chapter on the work of archaeologists during military conflicts that blurs the lines between scholarship, diplomacy and espionage. His discussion of the culture of copies in Fascist museum practices is fascinating, as is the rhetorical construction of Hitler as Perikles. However, there is little here that adds new dimensions to a topic that has been covered in much more incisive fashion in so much other recent scholarship. Individual discussions move even further away from the chronological outline of the book and turn to very recent developments in scholarship and even contemporary politics, including the rise of the far-right Golden Dawn movement in present-day Greece.

The qualities of this book lie mostly in its sweeping overviews rather than its penetrative analysis. In many cases, the chronological sequencing stifles the thematic and diachronic discussions that would have provided a clearer and more precise overview of the present state of the field. Scattered across the entire book are observations on various consequences of the "theoretical atherosclerosis" (p. 118) of classical studies. Burdened by its traditions (with all of the inherent weaknesses that follow, including but not limited to scientific racism, positivism, naïve realism and inductionism, all diagnosed by Siapkias), the field has seemingly limited itself to such a narrow

and outdated theoretical basis that it is unable to move forward. Siapkias encourages us to be aware of these problems and discuss their implications for scholarship, and he is right to point out that in many cases the methodological conservatism of the field actively limits the analytical possibilities of our material. His call for more research on the history of the field and what he calls "situated scholarship" that contextualises current approaches within their social, political and epistemological context is thus very much to be welcomed. Generally, however, this reviewer is considerably more upbeat about the adaptability (and eclecticism) of classical studies as well as the potential of the field for theoretical and methodological progress. In short, what is missing from Siapkias' volume is a more positive and more constructive vision of the future of the field of classical studies in general.

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W. Scheidel, *Escape from Rome. The failure of empire and the road to prosperity*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 2019. xvii + 670 pp., 56 figures and 5 tables. ISBN 978-0-691-1721-8-7.

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Walter Scheidel has high aims and provocative claims in his new book *Escape from Rome*. The central argument evolves around the hypothesis that Europe's "escape" from the Roman Empire is the best thing that ever happened to Europe (and possibly even the world) because it eventually set up the right conditions for the Great Divergence, the Industrial Revolution and the leap forward to modernity. Instead of the traditional negative stand on the collapse of the Roman Empire, Scheidel views the collapse positively. He clearly sets out to start a debate by taking an unusual standpoint for which he presents persuasive arguments. The book is structured to build up the argumentation for his hypothesis by applying a comparative method and the testing of counterfactual scenarios in chronological order, starting in the 8th century BC Mediterranean up to the start of the Industrial Revolution in Western Europe in the 18th century AD. Throughout the book, Europe is consistently compared to China to strengthen the argument that the Great Divergence was only possible in a fragmented and competitive polycentral environment such as Europe—where unified central imperial authority was missing since the fall of the Roman Empire, and where it would