

chapters are well-written, especially those parts in his own fluent hand, and being a Thames and Hudson large format book, it is (as usual) splendidly illustrated, especially in colour.

If you are not too familiar with the Mediterranean story from pre-Classical times onwards this is an excellent introduction to its history, apart from Chapter 2. This covers the immense span of prehistory to around 1000 BC, but the author is embarrassingly out-of-date. A bibliography including Childe 1943 and Trump 1981 says it all. Before that a typically magisterial treatment of environmental history by the late Oliver Rackham is a fine compensation, and from 1000 BC on with Torelli onwards things move very well.

There are some obvious criticisms however. The book first appeared in 2003 and is now reissued as a very good value paperback in 2016 without any updates. Perhaps in some periods not so much has changed in this interval (surely unlikely), but at the very least the bibliography could easily have been improved and some recognition of recent research incorporated into the narrative. A second point is the type of book we are offered. In his Introduction Abulafia states that the common theme of most of the chapters is Trade and Politics. Clearly for the most part everyday archaeology is not being treated, but surprisingly for a historian who cites Braudel constantly we might have expected a history which looks at all levels of society. It was after all one of the stimuli to the rise of the Annales School, whose chief exponent remains Braudel, to challenge traditional histories with their focus on 'battles and famous men', but this volume is rather too orientated to history at the top and would have benefitted from specific treatment of peasants, the poor, gender history, demography and some quantified economics.

One dark little spot deserves a comment. In his final chapter on the period 1900-2000 AD the editor allows his prejudices to intrude, when he clearly has little sympathy or neutral historical balance in treating the Palestinian issue, and the same occurs with his swift and far from fair description of the division of Cyprus in the 1970s.

Nonetheless for the general reader this is a very attractive and well-composed volume for anyone who wishes to enjoy a masterful overview of Mediterranean history from 1000 AD till the end of the last millennium.

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David K. Pettegrew. *The Isthmus of Corinth. Crossroads of the Mediterranean world*. pp. xiii+290, 25 halftones, 22 figures, 6 tables. 2016. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. ISBN 978-0-472-11984-4 hardcover \$85.00; e-publication \$68.95.

David Pettegrew's book *The Isthmus of Corinth. Crossroads of the Mediterranean world* is an admirable synthesis on the landscape of the Isthmus, its urban and rural habitation and the socio-economic and political development of the area from the period of first Roman involvement in the region up till the early fifth century CE. The main aim of the book is to provide a new contextualised vision of the Isthmus, reacting against the timeless, static, and in some sense simplistic, view of a natural landscape that *always* functioned as a prosperous node of high socio-economic connectivity in the Mediterranean. This image was sketched by Strabo around the turn of the Common Era and was further expanded during the 18th and 19th century by travellers, and since then has continued to colour the archaeological and historical discourse on this region. By bundling and critically evaluating an impressive richness of archaeological, historical and epigraphic sources from the Early Iron Age till Late Antiquity, including the evidence gathered by the *Eastern Korinthia Archaeological Survey (EKAS)* from 1997 till 2003, Pettegrew continues lines of thought that have been published elsewhere.¹ He manages to substitute the traditional view with a dynamic image of a landscape that indeed had its geographical advantages, though which needed input and organisation of energy to function and flourish. In this light, the man-built infrastructures, geographies and past trajectories that were influencing action and processes over time shaped a world that was in many respects different from its natural setting.

The Isthmus of Corinth is structured around a total of nine chapters (including an introduction and conclusion), or 'interpretative essays' as characterised by the author himself,² which are in turn subdivided in individual sections. The titles of the chapters give the idea that the book is arranged thematically, with names like 'The Gate' (chapter 3), 'The Bridge' (chapter 6), and 'The District' (chapter 8). Rather than singling out the 'bridge-like' functions that were facilitated by the man-made and natural landscape over time or focusing only on the rural landscapes of the Isthmus in a single

¹ E.g. Pettegrew 2007, 2010, 2011, and 2015 for some seminal contributions.

² Pettegrew 2016: xi.

chapter, however, the book is built up diachronically, with each chapter-title in some way characterizing the main period under discussion. While sources down to the Early Iron Age are used to support the argument, the main focus of the book lies in the period between the late 3rd century BCE-early 5th century CE.

The first chapter of the book outlines the problem of viewing ancient landscapes, and the Isthmus in particular, as static sceneries that were constantly 'there', providing and limiting the range of possibilities of human action and economic development in a similar deterministic way throughout history. Illustrative for Pettegrew's argumentation are the writings of Strabo, and in some respects also Thucydides, Cicero and John Chrysostom, which give the impression that 'Corinth's connective location and landscape formed the *enduring, albeit static, backdrop* for the city's commercial significance and maritime associations that included merchants and cargoes, duties and taxes, wealth and luxury, attractions and crowds, and prostitutes and profligates'.³ In this chapter, it is illustrated that this 'essentialist' and 'maritime' view of Corinth and its close region has been dominant up till the later 20th century. Building on more recent theoretical and conceptual insights and the archaeological evidence from the region, however, Pettegrew convincingly argues that those geographical and infrastructural specifics that are traditionally supporting these deterministic views, including the harbours, the *diolkos* and Nero's aimed cross-Isthmus canal, should be seen as historical conjunctions and evaluated in their own context. By emphasising the changing value of this specific (man-made) landscape, Pettegrew positions himself right in the middle of recent academic discourses – though this is not referred to extensively – in archaeology, (historical) geography, and other disciplines, which are heavily inspired by the natural sciences, in which determinism, causality and predictability are revised and complex dynamics and gradual or more punctuated change, rather than single cause-effect reasoning and stability, are the norm against which 'nature-human' interactions should be evaluated.⁴

Chapter 2 'The Isthmos' is for the most part structured around ancient sources from Archaic-Hellenistic times and serves to illustrate the attitudes towards the landscape, and specifically *isthmoi* at that time, of which the Corinthian isthmus

evidently seems to have been the most prominent one in the written sources. Further explored in chapter 3 'The Gate', is the Classical Greek-Early Hellenistic view of the Corinthian isthmus as a narrow neck of lowland that was surrounded by the sea from two sides, which functioned as a meeting place and effectively shaped overland movement and exchange by its natural and man-built setting.⁵ In this chapter, the rise of specific focal points of activity and the ebbs and flows of Corinthian and 'Macedonian' infrastructural investments, which resulted in the man-made landscape that the Romans first encountered in the later 3rd century BCE, are critically evaluated on the basis of the archaeological record. Obvious cases for evaluation are the Sanctuary of Poseidon, the harbours of Lechaion and Kenchreai, a range of (defensive) walls and the *diolkos*, which developed most intensively from the later Classical into the Early Hellenistic period. Alongside this evaluation of excavated sources, the survey data from the EKAS first enter the stage, providing a complementing view on the intensity of Archaic-Hellenistic activity throughout the Eastern Korinthia. Chapter 4 'The Fetter', provides first a proper background on the development of the region in the period before Roman encounter. Subsequently it highlights 'the particular historical contingencies that made the Isthmus so central to Hellenistic and Roman explanations of [Corinth's] destruction in 146 BCE and the subsequent annexation of the territory, and show[s] how the physical territory encouraged and complicated such interpretations'.⁶ Drawing on earlier writers, Polybius' explanations for the reason and impact of Roman warfare and rule in the region are often summarized as being *inevitable* by the commercial orientation of Corinth and the 'outrageous, and insulting rowdy crowd of artisans and traders' that triggered such Roman action, alongside the strategic value of the (built-up) landscape as both being a limiting bottleneck and connecting hub of movement. The Corinthian case became the archetypal example of the loss of Greek freedom for later and modern writers and the general contributing role of regional connectivity herein. That the general abandonment of the landscape and break with the past, which is often deduced on the basis of the historical sources, was less extensive and more varied in reality, however, provides a basis for re-evaluation and fits the general theoretical frame that is argued for by Pettegrew in this book very well. In chapter 5 'The Portage',

³ Pettegrew 2016: 3 (emphasis added).

⁴ E.g. Bintliff 1999, Bentley and Maschner 2003, van der Leeuw *et al.* 2009, Sieferle 2011, González de Molina and Toledo 2014 as solid examples of this line of thought.

⁵ Cf. Chapter 6 for changes in the meaning of the term *isthmos* by the Roman period, including land-bridges of 67 km on average in Strabo's writings, reflecting 'real shifts in perceptions of scales of space' that were accompanying Roman expansion (Pettegrew 2016: 137-141).

⁶ Pettegrew 2016: 91.

Pettegrew critically evaluates and substitutes the often exaggerated portaging of (commercial and military) ships over the Isthmus: portaging was anything but ordinary, though, especially for the documented portage by Marcus Antonius in 102 BCE, characteristic expressions of power and the political context at the time, while, at the same time, reflecting the growing and central political and connective role of Corinth and its close region in the extending sphere of Roman influence. In chapter 6 'The Bridge', Pettegrew tackles the traditional view that the destruction of Corinth and subsequent Caesarean colonial foundation on the same spot was a constant node of *natural* connectivity throughout history and aimed 'to revive the mercantile glories of the city that Mummius had destroyed in 146'.⁷ *Inter alia* on the basis of the EKAS data, this essentially maritime view of the city can no longer be supported, according to Pettegrew, as Corinth's fertile territory must have played a fundamental role as a resource for 'a new program of habitation and land use',⁸ alongside its strategic positioning in both regional and supra-regional networks of movement and exchange. In the final part of the chapter, the ceramic assemblages, and especially the imported vessels, from Corinth, which were extensively studied by Kathleen Warner Slane, and the broader Isthmus are evaluated against each other. On the one hand, illustrating changes in the market share of western (Italian, African, etc.) and eastern tablewares (Levantine, Asia Minor) that reached Corinth over time and, on the other hand, sketching a more complex scenario than Strabo's description of its closer region as a great zone of redistribution between Italy and Asia, as only small amounts of western products reach the area covered by the EKAS and sites like Isthmia and Kenchreai. Chapter 7 'The Center' highlights and evaluates Nero's ambitious project of the canalization of the Isthmus in 67 CE. In line with previous chapters, the need for a fluid, contextual and dynamic approach to the human and natural geography of the region is clearly illustrated: even though Nero's attempt failed,⁹ the investments that accompanied the emperor's visit, the presence of a huge workforce that had to be fed, and the irreversible changes that were made to the landscape kept on functioning as a path that was shaping action in the centuries after. In chapter 8 'The District', Pettegrew provides

an account of transition and reinvestment, rather than decline, of the Isthmus during the later 3rd and 4th centuries. Summed up, the intensity of direct imperial munificence and central role of the Isthmus in Hellenic assembly and contest did indeed decrease, though the area remained an important node between east and west in the institutionally reconfigured later Roman Empire and economy, paving the way for the flourishing of the broader Aegean economy in the centuries after.

The chronological, and at the same time thematic, arrangement of *The Isthmus of Corinth* facilitates an easy reading of the book and is highly illustrative for Pettegrew's main line of thought that was argued for in chapter 1. The book is constituted by an admirable richness of references and examples from Corinth, as well as other places of habitation, cult and exchange on the Isthmus. The data that were generated by EKAS provide a highly illustrative complementary base for further spatial and chronological exploration. The decision to stop the exploration of the changing roles and values of man-made landscapes around the Isthmus at the early 5th century CE, however, does feel a bit unnatural, as the 'radically new trajectory in the history of the landscape',¹⁰ which was beginning in the 5th and ran into the 7th century, should be seen as 'an outgrowth of the reconfigurations of the later third and fourth centuries', as argued by Pettegrew himself.¹¹ The applied chronological 'ceramic' framework for the later Roman ceramics spans four-and-a-half centuries from 250-700 CE, which is generally different from the subdivision in Mid Roman (200-400 CE) and Late Roman (401-700 CE) that is more commonly used in Greek survey archaeology. The applied chronological framework therefore complicates the singling out of individual periods for most of the ceramics. Most of the Late Roman ceramics that were collected in the Eastern Korinthia, however, can be dated later than the 4th century,¹² making this period (one of) the best-documented phases of activity and agricultural intensification by EKAS.¹³ This is also argued for by increases in site-numbers and increases in the output of local/Corinthian, or at least Northeast Peloponnesian, lines of amphora production that can be tracked from the later 4th century onwards and specifically during the late 5th-early 6th century.¹⁴

⁷ Salmon 1970: 135 in Pettegrew 2016: 136.

⁸ This Roman interest in regions with a solid basis for agricultural activity appears to be not specific for Corinth, as is, for instance, also illustrated by the inland city of Thespieae in Boeotia, where a community of Roman citizens settled and were apparently heavily involved in local politics by participating in cultural events and holding offices from a relatively early stage onwards as well (E.g. Müller 2002).

⁹ With an estimate of 21.6 years(!) of excavating left in case of a workforce of 10,000 men, see Pettegrew 2016: 177.

¹⁰ Pettegrew 2016: 244.

¹¹ Pettegrew 2016: 239.

¹² Pettegrew 2016: 220.

¹³ E.g. Pettegrew 2007. Although the general recognisability of Late Roman amphora body-sherds is likely to be significantly contributing to higher sherd counts (and site numbers?) for this period, the amount of surface evidence from this period of occupation is substantial (even after the application of corrective measures to account for differences in recognisability of sherds from individual periods).

¹⁴ E.g. Slane 2003: 328, fig. 19.3 for increases in the relative share

The book *can* do without touching in more detail upon this period, as ‘the picture that has emerged in this diachronic overview is [indeed] clear enough’,¹⁵ and the argument is presented and illustrated quite well. However, in the light of its material richness, observed dynamics, and changing role of the landscape and the activity in it, the reader would benefit from more focus on these centuries and be provided with one of the most obvious examples of the fluid and dynamic nature of landscapes, man-nature exchanges, and socio-economic activity.

The range of images that is included in the book supports the author’s argument well and provides snapshots of the landscape for readers that are not that familiar with the Corinthian landscapes and/or archaeological record. The maps on which the EKAS data are illustrated are, however, rather small, regarding the small size of the printed volume, though they come better to the fore in the reviewed e-publication. Although the general spread of the survey units throughout the Eastern Korinthia certainly limits the extent to which the maps can be enlarged without losing some general overview of the landscape, the book would benefit from more focus, zoom and labelling of the discussed survey zones on the map. The tables that are used to present the EKAS data contribute to the readability of the book and store much, generally ceramic, information on the surveyed zones. The data presented in the tables are mostly qualitative. For example, percentages of vessel type per zone are shown, rather than hard numbers and sherdcounts. The addition of the sample size per survey zone or vessel type would be beneficial and almost essential, however, as it is not clear how large the samples per vessel type or chronology are and to what extent ‘acceptable’ sample sizes are reached for making inferences.¹⁶ This can be best illustrated on the basis of table 7.2 on page 199 in which the ratios between ‘coarse-’, ‘kitchen-’, and ‘fine wares’ of 50:0:50, 100:0:0, or 33:33:33 percent for some of the zones could mean anything from 1:0:1, 1:0:0, or 1:1:1 sherds upwards. The book and cautious way of handling the survey-evidence clearly show Pettegrew’s background and involvement in EKAS and elaborates upon earlier publications that touch upon themes on the recognisability and over-

underrepresentation of individual classes of pottery from certain periods and the ways in which one might account for such observed discrepancies.¹⁷ Now and then, however, some more nuance seems to be appropriate. For instance, in the case of the ‘Panorama survey-zone’, which is situated ‘below the bluff of the Ayios Dimitrios Ridge [at Kenchreai]’. Here, concentrations of cut limestone blocks, ceramic water pipes, marble, tesserae, glass and andesite were retrieved, seemingly hinting at elite residence at the site. On the basis of this evidence, elite residence is a solid possibility, though the argument that the ‘proportions of [Early Roman] fine ware (45 percent), utilitarian coarse ware and amphoras (34 percent), and kitchen ware (20 percent) [...] are consistent with a domestic signature’¹⁸ is not conclusive *in itself* and should be argued in a more nuanced approach. The assemblage, indeed, seems to be more balanced compared to the other zones, though, in fact, this constitution comes quite close to the overall average of these classes of ceramics on the basis of the total body of Early Roman sherds that was collected during the survey, with 39% coarse ware and amphorae, 20% kitchen ware and 45% fine ware.¹⁹ The probability that the relatively large, but again unspecified, number of Early Roman sherds on this site is likely to be a contributing factor to more balanced assemblages in its own right, as larger samples are more likely to include rarer specimens and more balanced than assemblages of smaller sizes, is, however, not explored. In line with Pettegrew’s previous publications, the Early Roman functional assemblage from Panorama is also unlikely to be ‘viable’, as the period appears to be almost structurally underrepresented and functionally different from other periods in the Greek survey-record,²⁰ due to poorer visibility and recognisability, both in the field and ceramics lab. Unfortunately, it is not clear *how* and *if* Roman domestic assemblages are clearly distinguishable from other contexts, like burials and layers of refuse, on the surface. In the light of the general discrepancy between the ratios of surface sherds and ‘general’ ratio of vessel types in excavated Mediterranean ceramic assemblages,²¹ higher degrees of caution are needed while making

of ‘local’ amphorae in late 4th-early 5th century Corinthian contexts; Hammond 2015, 221 for the later 5th-early 6th century. In Tzavella *et al.* 2014: 93 Late Roman Amphora 2 production at Sikyon is published.

¹⁵ Pettegrew 2016: 244.

¹⁶ The approximation of ‘acceptable’ sample sizes for the making of inferences is likely to be different from period to period, region to region and project to project, though observations from the Knossos Urban Landscape Project reveal that percentages of fine, cooking and coarse wares only appear to stabilise as collections reach about 40 sherds (Whitelaw 2012: 80).

¹⁷ E.g. also Pettegrew 2007 and 2010.

¹⁸ Pettegrew 2016: 204.

¹⁹ Cf. Pettegrew 2016: 199, table 7.2.

²⁰ Similar observations are made for the Boeotian urban cities of Thespieae and Tanagra in which the Late Hellenistic-Mid Roman functional assemblages are substantially different from the Late Roman period, yet roughly comparable with the average figures that are presented for the Isthmus (Bes and Poblome in press: 338-341, fig. 12.13a; Peeters *et al.* accepted).

²¹ E.g. Gebhard *et al.* 1998: 444 for the definition of ranges of ca. 10% slip-coated tablewares, ca. 10-20% cooking wares, 5-10% plain buff wares and 60-80% commercial amphorae as a ‘normal domestic mix’ for Isthmia, which heavily relies on the evidence from Carthage.

the step from surface sherds to 'fixed' and 'viable' functional assemblages. More detailed definition of which functional classes of ceramics are actually put under the umbrella of 'fine ware', 'utilitarian coarse ware', and 'kitchen ware' appears also needed. For instance, it is debatable to which category jugs that are made from fine clays, which are generally constituting a substantial part of Roman ceramics in a range of contexts, should be ascribed in this framework.

In summary, *The Isthmus of Corinth* is an essential read for archaeologists, historians, (historical) geographers and students alike, as the rich body of references provides a proper introduction on the archaeology of Corinth and its close region. The dynamic nature of Pettegrew's conceptual framework and the case study, with many changes in the perception and role of the landscape and societal developments on a broader scale, place this book central in a rapidly evolving field of research in which (geographical) determinism and causality are dramatically revised. The book would benefit from certain elaborations and improvements in the images and tables that are used to illustrate the EKAS data, while more focus on the later 5th-7th centuries should more be seen as a 'reviewer's wish' than a real critique, as Pettegrew's argument is widely illustrated with proper pre-late 5th century examples from the Isthmus.

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