

Dean Hammer, ed., (2015) *A Companion to Greek Democracy and the Roman Republic*. Malden MA: Wiley-Blackwell. xviii + 531 pp. \$205.95 ISBN 9781444336016 (hbk).

The novelist Leslie Poles Hartley famously wrote: ‘The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there.’<sup>1</sup> Published in the *Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World* series, Dean Hammer’s *A Companion to Greek Democracy and the Roman Republic* consciously bears witness to Hartley’s observation (pp. 9, 504). Greeks and Romans did do things differently from us. For example, Athenian theater-goers were not concerned with identifying the original, unalloyed text that could be attributed to a single playwright (p. 438), while Roman listeners of public speeches would fail to be persuaded if the speaker did not refer to the ‘fluid, flexible, and diverse’ set of ancient customs and moral values (*mos maiorum*) upon which the political structure of the Republic relied (pp. 218, 223). Yet, the past sometimes looks eerily familiar. Athenian playwrights ‘bypassed argument in favor of the creation of powerful and in some cases unforgettable images ... difficult then to undo or to counter effectively’ (p. 443). We can affirm their temptation to do so, living as we do in a spin-doctored world saturated with images. Roman ‘theater was an informal polling place that allowed the ruling class to gauge the sentiments of a broad cross-section of the populace’ (p. 455). It is easy to say the same thing about the ongoing success of the musical *Hamilton* (2015), first staged in the selfsame year of this volume’s publication, and which has coincided with a moment in US politics of heightened anxiety about history and identity. The past might also seem simultaneously familiar and alien. Athenian democracy was ‘a system that was maximally participatory and maximally amateurish’ (p. 170). It is hard not to think of the political amateurs who, precisely because of their status as such, have now taken center-stage in liberal democratic polities. Yet there is little that is participatory about our representative regimes, which are also outfitted with professional judiciaries and bureaucracies. By contrast to the Athenian demos, ‘the Roman people [*populus*] had no legitimate way of conveying or expressing its views without formalized leadership’ (p. 154). On its face, this comes across as a familiar description of representative politics in which ‘the people’ are – and often fail to be – represented by elected or appointed officials; upon reflection, it could also be an alien observation about the acute hierarchies that existed in Roman society and which were reflected in its ancient constitution. In its very existence the volume is a shot across the

1 L.P. Hartley, *The Go-Between* (New York: New York Review Books Classics, 2002 [1953]), p. 17.

bow aimed at those who fall into the fashionable practice of regarding comparative political thought as an enterprise which necessarily involves a so-called 'non-Western' civilization.

I have presented the claims about Athens and Rome as such to mirror the organization of the *Companion*, which spans thirteen thematic parts and alternates between a chapter on Greece and a chapter on Rome written in large part by tenured or emeritus scholars. The nearly identical titles given to the pair chapters in each theme encourages the reader to read through both chapters, while the total length of each part also pushes in this direction: each pair runs between thirty and forty pages and, with the exception of Stewart (pp. 405-427), each chapter is broken up into multiple subsections. As is typical of *Blackwell Companions*, each entry is usefully accompanied by extensive 'References' and 'Further Reading' sections. Students of informal norms, politics, and drama as well as those interested in origins, law, and visual culture will all find relevant essays which might serve either as introductions or as surveys. Examples in the first category are Konstan's standalone essay on comparative political thought (pp. 8-19) and Morstein-Marx's essay on conitional audiences in Rome (pp. 294-309), which pairs nicely with supporting arguments for Roman people power by Arena (pp. 217-238) and Tatum (pp. 262-8), and against by Champion (pp. 330-334). Examples in the second category are Fisher's essay on social values in democratic Athens and non-democratic Sparta (pp. 195-216), Ligt's thought-provoking essay titled 'Production, Trade, and Consumption in the Roman Republic' (pp. 368-385), and Balot and Atkison's surefooted tour of the status of women and slaves across theater, oratory, and philosophy (pp. 389-404). Hammer has the first and the last word in the *Companion*. In the Introduction (pp. 1-7) and Conclusion (pp. 503-519) he raises questions about central political theoretical concepts such as freedom (*eleutheria/libertas*) and power (*dunamis/potestas*). Together with his attempt to connect discussions about power in international relations theory to those in political theory (pp. 510-515), Hammer demonstrates the importance of comparative political thought to political science. Doing so somewhat mitigates the tension in the volume between the focus on democracy and republicanism, on the one hand, and the broad signifiers of 'Greece' and 'Rome', on the other. Due to the focus on democracy, Greece is often equivalent to Athens. When Athens is not the focus, as in Fisher's dual emphasis on Athens and Sparta (pp. 195-216), and in Tandy's exposition of the wider historical and geographical economic context of Greece (pp. 349-367), the reader gets much more than 'Greek Democracy'. Sicilian Syracuse, described elsewhere by Ober as 'a polis that seemed in some ways to be Athens' twin', might have served as another example of Greek