

**B. O'Halloran.** *The Political Economy of Classical Athens: A Naval Perspective*. Leiden: Brill, 2019. Pp. xiii + 381. ISBN 978-90-04-38614-3.

The goal of O'Halloran's argument is the further destabilization of the "primitive" view of ancient economies, and of Athens' economy in particular. If you are a strict adherent of the non-market economy side of this debate, you may want to stop reading now. If, however, your faith is already wavering, if you are an agnostic or if you have always been a "modernist" of some sort, this book will interest you. O'Halloran employs path dependence theory along with institutional economic analysis to explore what happens when a community transitions from an agrarian economy to an economy in which a substantial portion of the population is employed by the state as rowers in the navy, for a cash income, and in which many of the community's other expenditures are for the physical infrastructure that is required for that navy.

The book is a rewritten version of O'Halloran's PhD thesis. Before his "second life" as a graduate student, O'Halloran had a career as a documentary filmmaker and journalist with training in economics. The result is a book, which is better than many thesis-rewrites, and which demonstrates a deep understanding of economic theory and its history.

O'Halloran builds his argument over twelve chapters with an introduction (1-14) and a relatively short conclusion (315-325). The short appendix on "Sources" (327-334) may be useful for students who need a quick introduction to ancient historians and inscriptions. The bibliography (335-371), on the other hand, is a great resource, although I noticed that not everything in the footnotes reached the bibliography (see below).

The overall direction of the book is from the general and theoretical to the specific. Chapter 1 ("Primitive Positions – the Oikos Debate", 15-36) sets out the two directions in ancient economic scholarship ("primitive" and "modern"), and, in particular, describes the continuing influence of Moses Finley. O'Halloran produces a helpful guide to this academic controversy, a summary of the situation thus far and how it has affected our understanding of the ancients. The second chapter ("New Perspectives", 37-50) presents O'Halloran's challenge to the status quo (although it is not quite the status quo that it once was), and considers what can we learn about an economy by looking at its institutions. O'Halloran offers the reader a different interpretation of the evidence using "New Institutional Economics" (37), which allows a researcher to combine "economic theory and economic reality and make economics amenable to the analysis of the long-run dynamic processes of economic history" (37) by putting time back into the equation. In Chapter 3 ("Warfare States", 51-75) O'Halloran starts to put his theoretical framework to work, beginning with a section on "path dependence" (51-57; esp., 53), which he uses to analyze ancient institutions.

Chapters 4 through 12 explore different aspects of Athens' naval economy in a more or less historical pattern, beginning in the Archaic period with the development of

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the trireme and the development of polis navies, and then moving (Chapter 5) to consider the origins of the Athenian navy and its growth in the first decades of the fifth century in particular. Subsequent chapters deal with the costs of the Athenian fleet (Chapter 6), the institution of the triarchy (Chapter 7), naval infrastructure (Chapter 9), the sailors (Chapter 10) and the outcome of all that expenditure on the Athenian economy (Chapters 11 and 12). Some of these topics are intertwined, and a certain amount of repetition occurs, but parts of Chapter 10 ("Soldiers, Sailors, Citizens", 229-262) and Chapter 11 ("The Ancient Athenian Naval Economy", 263-290) should have been reorganized and better integrated. Chapter 10 provides a good discussion about the nature and make-up of trireme crews, demonstrating that from the outset Athens could not have provided enough citizens to make up the crews that she needed (244), yet, in Chapter 11, the issue is revisited without really adding anything except confusion (279-285).

O'Halloran's argument is often thought provoking and compelling. The navy took men from the fields and turned them into rowers. It provided them with long-ish term employment (eight months of the year or more), as even when Athens was not at war, her navy regularly patrolled the Aegean Sea.<sup>1</sup> There was also regular work for a certain number of carpenters and masons constructing the shipsheds and other buildings needed to store and protect the ships and their gear, not to mention the shipwrights who built the ships in the first place. What effect did all these jobs have on the economy? These men needed markets in which to buy their food and had the money to buy it with. The result is the monetization of the Athenian economy, the institutions needed to make the economy function, and the development of a market exchange economy (314). For 150 years the navy was the largest expense in the Athenian budget. In turn it not only pumped funds into the Athenian community through the rowers' pay, it also spread Athenian coins into the food markets of the communities where the navy rested each night while it was at sea. The Athenian navy changed the Athenian economy.

Specific, sometimes minor, aspects of O'Halloran's arguments are less convincing. He is, I think, quite right to point out that too often modern scholars equate technological advances with mechanical innovations while disregarding improvements in other areas such as tools or techniques (8 and *passim*). But can the transition from sewn or laced ships to mortise-and-tenon joinery among Greek shipwrights in all parts of the Greek world really be as late O'Halloran wants it to be? I realize that O'Halloran is not alone in arguing this, but since we know that mortise-and-tenon joints were used in the Levant in the

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<sup>1</sup> O'Halloran could also have asked what effect the absence of so many men from their homes for long periods of time had on their families' income. The rowers had to be paid while they were away so that they could provision themselves. How much was left when they returned? Were they paid their full income while at sea, or did they receive only partial pay when away and the remainder when they returned? How did their families manage without them for months on end? What did the rowers do when they were at home? Did they pick up extra employment as agricultural labourers? Did the cycle of "home and away" affect the local economy with periods of "boom and bust"?

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Bronze Age (203), it is hard to believe that the Greeks in Asia Minor, at least, had not considered using this technology before the mid-sixth century.<sup>2</sup> O'Halloran does not evaluate the evidence for the long-running debate on the date for the origin of the trireme as carefully as he could. One example: the mid-sixth century poet Hipponax is cited for the first use of the words “embolos” (ram) and trireme, (196; 209); if this actually proves something about the date of the first triremes, then Pindar (Pythian 4.245) proves that the pentekontor is a later development than the trireme, since he is the first to use that term. Finally, is the difference between Thucydides' and Herodotus' treatments of Themistocles due to Thucydides' sources not being “aristocratic” (119, n. 55)?

The copyediting of the volume could be better. I was surprised by the number of times “navel” appeared for “naval” (my two favourites are both on p. 119, where we find both a “novel navel strategy” and “anterior navel combat”), and Eritrea / Eritreans for Eretria / Eretrians.<sup>3</sup> In addition (as noted above), there are a number of bibliographical citations in the footnotes that are not in the bibliography. Among the ones that I noticed are Lavelle 2005 (84, n. 44), Rhodes 1981 (85, n. 45), Rhodes 2008 (102, n. 1), Murray et al. 2017 (195, n. 58).

O'Halloran's book is a valuable contribution to the debate on the ancient economy. By focusing on the Athenian navy and the market economy and institutions that developed to support it, O'Halloran makes a strong argument for revising how we think about how ancient Athens worked.

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<sup>2</sup> Wooden ship building traditions are a remarkably localized phenomenon. The majority of the wrecks listed in Table 1 (206) are of “western” Greek origin. The six that appear to be from Massalia tell us much more about local shipbuilding developments at Massalia than anything about what is going on in Mainland Greece.

<sup>3</sup> One might add the amusing “tendency for the strong to dominate the weak” (82) or wonder what type of work “paid employment in the navel sector” was (312).