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AS ORIGENS DO PENSAMENTO OCIDENTAL  
THE ORIGINS OF WESTERN THOUGHT

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RESENHA | REVIEW

**Review of Montel, S.; Pollini, A (eds.). *La question de l'espace au IVe siècle Avant J-C. dans le mondes grec et étrusco-italique: continuité, ruptures, reprises* (2018)**

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FUNARI, P.P.A. (2022). Review of Montel, S.; Pollini, A (eds.). *La question de l'espace au IVe siècle Avant J-C. dans le mondes grec et étrusco-italique: continuité, ruptures, reprises* (2018). *Archai* 32, e-03201.

**MONTEL, S.; POLLINI, A (eds.). (2018) *La question de l'espace au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle Avant J-C. dans le mondes grec et étrusco-italique: continuité, ruptures, reprises.* Strasbourg, Presses Universitaires de Franche-Comté.**

This edited volume starts by quoting Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce: *ogni vera storia è storia contemporanea* (every true history is contemporary history). The English translation does not bear the amphibology of *storia*, history and story at the same time, as both refer to invention, in the original Latin meaning: finding and inventing (*inuenio*). Croce emphasis this inevitable disputable character of telling a story/history, its subjectivity. Truth is thus also related to standpoints, so that a true story/history is related to the subject, or author, not to diaphanous objective facts. It must be in tune with the times, “bringing together a stretch or piece of time”, contemporaneous. It is perhaps counterintuitive to start a volume on the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC with such a highbrow philosophical quote. And yet, it is quite appropriate to sum up the theoretical stand employed by editors and contributors, for it stresses the key role played by epistemological, social theory and historiographic contemporary debates to think anew the features and changes in 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC Greek, Etruscan and Italic societies.

In epistemological terms, an etymological (*sensu* Agamben) or archaeological (*sensu* Foucault) approach explores the semantics of ancient and modern concepts, such as  $\chi\acute{o}\rho\alpha$  (*chora*), a specific region, and  $\tau\acute{o}\pi\omicron\varsigma$  (*topos*), a far place, ancient *saeculum* and modern century, polis, a city, and *ha polis*, a state, *hybris*, and *asebeia*, polis, and *ethnos*, nature and culture, *emic* and *etic*, *macrocephalie*, *polycentrique*, *parisien*, *rhénan*, among others. Ancient and modern concepts are thus intertwined in unsuspected and complex ways. Who would imagine that recent European history, referring to how France center around Paris, while Germany has a variety of centers, would be useful as a tool for understanding 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC polity organization? This epistemological move must not be

underestimated, for it is time and again put into action to try and understand what was going on in that groundbreaking ancient period, fully put into interaction the study of ancient and modern concepts, so much so that the early 21<sup>st</sup> c. understanding of the 4<sup>th</sup>. C. BC is unique. This is the first tenet: there is no past, without the present, as anticipated Croce.

From this wider theoretical stand, the book offers a variety of social theory discussions, applied to several specific issues. Social theory is a broad concept, in use to comprise a wide range of approaches to social working, change and interpretation. The loose concept of social theory fosters visiting disciplines from anthropology to literary studies, from geography to archaeology and beyond. It may also benefit from social movements and social interpretative frames, as Feminism, decolonial/postcolonial practice and thought, or Anti-Racism. The growing use of the term social theory is related to the openness to both different scholarly disciplines and to different social practices, unhinged by disciplinary boundaries and a supposed positivist and neutral definition of science. Theory is indeed a good concept, as it refers to view/sight (θέα, *thea*), that is, to perspective, changing all the time, from viewpoint to viewpoint. Social relates to following (*sequor*, I follow, *socius*, *societas*, fellowship), sharing behavior, values and beyond. But sharing always implies differences within and without, so that conflict and contradictions are also subsumed by the social. Considering social theory, the volume deals with several issues: female empowerment, intercultural interaction, the making of new identities, negotiable and fluid relations, invention of traditions, narratives and networks, among several others.

These two aspects, on epistemology and social theory, are in themselves revealing of recent trends in the classics, ancient history, classical archaeology and beyond in social sciences and the humanities. Each chapter is very specific, scholarly, erudite and most specialized. And yet, each of them addresses not only those general theoretical issues, but also several very specific historiographic ones. Two main historiographic issues are at the heart of the volume: time

and space. Both are discussed time and again in the volume, as both are always fluid, changing, impossible to fix, a challenge producing all the time new approaches. Boundaries are by definition porous, artificial in that they depend on the analyst, always subject to challenge. This is dealt with first in chronological terms and depending on different tenets it could be 404 to 280 BC, at most, or 399 to 336 BC at least. In any case, the main feature of the 4<sup>th</sup> c in the Greek world starts by the interest in periodization by the Greek historiography itself. It is a revealing move, for it stresses how periodization is always a historiographic move, in relation with power or political relations. It refers also to the inevitable metanarrative character of any time understanding, including periods, traditions and changes, taking all of those as invented.

Space is the second main aspect underlying the whole volume. Space, like time, may be split in infinite ways, and boundaries are as difficult to define in space as in time. Even the supposed most defined boundaries, like walls (τείχος, *teichos*), split and put into contact, divide and share, oppose and appose. Landscape, *paysage*, is used as a key concept, taking several different aspects into account, from the physical geographical features to social representations, grounded on cultural concepts. The key here is -scape, shape, as it is related to perception (*aesthesis*, in Greek), leading to the use of the study of images, as in pottery. Archaeology here also plays a special role, enabling to relate urban, peripheral (or near wall) and rural areas, not to mention interurban areas, the hinterland and culturally defined places, such as mythic, cultic, military, funerary, daily-life, to mention just a few of them. The supposed crisis of the ancient cities in the 4<sup>th</sup> c. is sidelined and there is a stress on the interaction of several different peoples and cultures: Greeks, Italics, Carthaginian, Iberian and beyond.

The volume split into three parts: central places, wide spaces and the representation of space in the figurative arts. Each reveals a key aspect of the 4<sup>th</sup> c: centralization, interaction at a medium and long distance and the role of images of space. In terms of centralization, several features are stressed, such as the role of the sacred sphere,

city competition, invention of tradition, attention to modern historiographic prejudices. Interaction stresses negotiation, fluidity, movement and again modern historiographic models are considered, as in the use of terms as Parisien and Rhenanian patterns for a monocentric and a polycentric settlement. Images show how landscape relates to indigenous, barbarians and mixed features, to the sacred and to female empowerment. All this may foster a more complex and contradictory understanding of the 4<sup>th</sup> c.

The book is a most enticing one. It gathers contributors from several countries, eight chapters in French and four others in English. There are several figures, including plans, photos, maps, in black and white and in color, reconstruction drawings, diagrams, drawings in general, and also extensive written documentation, literary and epigraphic. The 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC witnessed the transition from cities or poleis to a variety of new political experiences, from alliances to empires. Societies moved too, as well as culture, always more connected, anticipating a brave new world. There has been thus an attention to the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, and this book may contribute to a growing interest in the key period between the two much more studied ones. Archaeology has a special role in this, as it produces a growing and varied evidence and is key in taking the volume as an important contribution. Although addressing a classical archaeology and history scholarly readership, it may also be useful for a deeper understanding of philosophical or literary issues. The reader ends with food for thought, and this is no mean feat.

## Bibliography

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