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Polis, The Journal for Ancient Greek Political Thought

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POLIS --The Journal for Ancient Greek Political Thought

Celebrating 35 years of publication (1977-2012)

This year marks the 35th anniversary of publication of *Polis*, once the 'Newsletter' of the British and American Society for Ancient Greek Thought. We are proud that during all those years the journal has published hundred of articles (all double-blind peer reviewed), review essays, and book reviews by distinguished scholars in almost all fields of classical scholarship broadly related to the political thinking of ancient Greece.

The Journal's birth

The history of *Polis* is closely associated with the individuals who have first laid its foundations, and to whom the present Editorial is respectfully dedicated. By just going through the living testimonials, the first blue-coloured volumes, one gets a vibrant feeling of energetic enthusiasm, meticulousness and devotion to a noble task: providing a medium for discussion to historians of ancient Greek thought as a distinct group from philosophical analysts and purists who at those times had an easier entrée to various publishing outlets.

Polis was founded in 1977 by a group of keen scholars in order to provide a forum for publication to academic researchers specializing in what was then a neglected sub-field – ancient Greek political thought. Around 1976, Dale Hall and Fred Rosen envisaged the foundation of a society for the study of ancient Greek political thought. They put the idea to Peter Nicholson, who agreed to join them in organising the society. Then or fairly soon, they had Dale as the Editor of a 'Newsletter', Peter as the Treasurer (i.e. collecting subscriptions), and Fred as Conference Secretary since their original idea involved organizing an annual conference, and he had a good central location at the LSE. The first few volumes of *Polis* were published at the Department of Political Theory and Government, University College of Swansea, by Dale Hall and Peter Nicholson. Peter left Swansea for the Department of Politics, University of York in September 1979, and sometime after Dale stopped publishing *Polis* (vol. 5.1 was still published in 1983 under his editorship). *Polis* remained still for almost three years until Fred and Peter decided to take it over – Fred stepped in for vol. 5.2 (1986) and then Peter took over from vol. 6 (1987) onwards up to 2002 when he passed it on to Kyriakos Demetriou, privileged to be a student of both Peter and Fred (with vol. 20, nos 1 & 2, 2003). The major advance in the history of *Polis* was the publishing agreement with Imprint Academic, implemented from 1999 onwards (vol. 16 to the present). Noticeably, in his Editorial to the first volume published by I.A. Peter Nicholson reported, with grief, the loss of two distinguished members of the Editorial Board, friends and supporters of the original society and of *Polis* since its inception, Professors George Kerferd and Trevor Saunders.

The first issues

Vol. 1, no. 1 appeared in autumn 1977, under the auspices of the Political Studies Association as a typewritten 'Newsletter' in A4 format of a 'Study Group in Greek Political Thought'. The first piece ever published in *Polis* was Peter Nicholson's 'Plato's *Crito*: A Bibliography', pp. 2-7. Interestingly, no. 1 announced that 'Our Newsletter lacks a name. Readers are invited to exercise their ingenuity and

scholarship in proposing a suitable title'. Vol. 1, no. 2 appeared in the spring of 1978, significantly enriched in terms of contents, and henceforward proudly bearing the title 'POLIS'. In an Editorial note one learns that 'At the March conference a complicated exercise in democracy using the single transferable vote was conducted to choose our corporate name and title for the newsletter. Members' first preference were so widely spread that no outright winner could be acclaimed and your Editor [i.e. Dale Hall] began to fear that no determinate decision could be reached compatible with the requirement that the preferences of the greatest number should prevail, but, eventually, *Polis* beat *Koinonia* into second place. *Polis* denotes our area of interest and has the virtue of simplicity'.

At p. 28 of vol. 1, no. 2 (spring 1978) the reader/subscriber is informed about the Conference held in March 1978. 'The interest in the first one-day conference at the L.S.E. in March 1978 suggested that there is plenty of scope for further similar meetings between those of different disciplines. About forty members and visitors discussed the following papers: 'How Political is Plato's Republic?' by Emeritus Professor J. B. Skemp; 'Analogies with the Arts (*Technai*) in Plato', by Fred Rosen; and 'Some Political Themes in Greek Tragedy' by John Morrall.'

Vol. 1, no. 2, 'contains a full-length article in which Joseph Beatty offers an unusual account of Plato's notion of philosophic rule, an account which leads him to revise the system of social control advocated in the *Republic* (Beatty, 'Plato's Philosopher Ruler and the Sceptic', pp. 2-18. The other major items are a bibliography on Aristotle's *Politics* and a guide to Collingwood's writings on the Greeks' (by Peter and Sue Johnson). The Editor emphasizes that '[t]here are also major areas of Greek political thought unmentioned in our newsletters yet: in particular, the political and social arrangements of Athens and Sparta, and the historians, sophists and poets. No doubt Plato and Aristotle will remain the chief focus, but there are many other possibilities for comment'). The major thematic areas of *Polis* were plainly charted and were destined to delineate the future development of *Polis*' broad, interdisciplinary coverage. *Polis* aspired to 'develop as a forum for contact and argument between different schools of study' – as it actually did (vol. 2, no. 1, Editorial).

As to Subscriptions: 'As readers will know, the first two newsletters have been published and distributed free of charge. However, because we intend to produce more substantial issues with a more durable format and cover, and because an increasing circulation has raised duplication and postage costs, we must now charge the following small annual subscription to cover two numbers of *Polis*: Within the U.K. £1.00, Elsewhere U.S. \$3.00 (or equivalent).'

Printing with today's antique

(With Peter Nicholson's permission, I here transcribed from a private letter dated 23 September 2010): 'The Newsletter was printed on blue copier paper (hence the colour of *Polis*'s cover). I don't recall having anything to do with its production – Dale must have done that. It was an "in-house" job, produced in the Department (of Political Theory and Government) at Swansea – with the Department I think carrying the cost (small!). In those days, one used a Gestetner duplicator (like a Roneo). The text was typed (obviously I mean an old manual type –writer), with the ribbon removed so that the type face cut into a jelly-covered stencil, which was then inked and several hundred copies could be printed off (literally rolled off, the stencil was on a revolving drum; it was all manual). If

you made a typing error, you dabbed on a spot of the jelly, which filled the hole and once it was dry you typed in the correction. All laborious and messy, and of course the method was abandoned once photocopying became cheaper.’ That appears to have happened with vol. 2.2 (spring-summer 1979), when Dale Hall announced that ‘[t]he new style of printing *Polis* is an improvement on the old in dispensing with the stencils previously used, which had only a limited life and were difficult to handle and proof-read’. The ‘new style’ was practically the introduction of the innovation of the epoch, photocopying methods. One can imagine the hardships and the personal efforts involved in the production of a single volume! Editing a journal, and especially under those adverse circumstances, is partly, albeit profoundly so, sacrificing one’s own energy to the benefit of the academic community. With vol. 4, no. 1 (1981) the journal appeared in a smaller format (‘intended to be neater, easier to read and cheaper to post’ (Editorial). In the same volume there is a reference to the foundation of the American Chapter at the APSA Conference in Washington in 1980, which ‘has grown considerably in membership with the co-ordination of Kent Moors. With such an enlarged and widespread membership, the title “Study Group” seems no longer appropriate, so we shall be known as “The Society for Greek Political Thought”.’

With vol. 4.2 (1982) the first Editorial Board features prominently, comprising Julia Annas, J.Peter Euben, G.B. Kerferd, Kent Moors (American Convener), Peter P. Nicholson, Thomas L. Pangle, D.D. Raphael, Fred Rosen and Trevor J. Saunders.

Its aftermath

Since its inception *Polis* has served as a medium for the publication of research studies that appeal to a wide range of fields and interests. The main focus however remains and will remain, faithful to its origins and the noble objectives of its founders, ‘Greek Political Thought’ in its various and rich manifestations. Despite the current crisis in the ‘Humanities’, there is still a growing and lively interest in ancient Greek political thought (attested in the many submissions received, especially by younger scholars). Looking back to the ancients for guidance or emulation, at times of transition and in the face of complex contingencies, is not after all an antiquarian leisure pursuit.

Over the years *Polis* evolved into a fully-fledged academic journal that publishes material of interest to those who study ancient Greek political thought broadly understood, whether they do so as classicists, ancient historians, philosophers, or political scientists. *Polis* also welcomes articles on the reception of ancient political thought in Europe, America, or elsewhere.

Since its inception the journal speaks for no particular perspective or methodology and it is devoted to the publication of original papers, even though extensive literature reviews, critiques of contemporary research and review essays are also included. All submissions are sent to two referees and normally an editorial decision is taken within 3 months from the time of submission. At present the journal’s acceptance rate is about 25%. Unlike most journals, *Polis*, despite being modernized in many respects, still retains the character of personal communication with authors, as if the former ‘Study Group’ still survives carrying out a dialogical encounter with all those genuinely interested in the ancient Greek world.

Thornton Lockwood was appointed Assistant Editor in 2005, shortly afterwards joined by David Mirhady. Thornton, whose contribution to *Polis* can be hardly overestimated, became Associate Editor (and Book Reviews Editor in 2009). In a most recent development Ryan Balot, Rosanna Lauriola and Peter Liddel have joined the editorial team and there were also several additions to the International Advisory Editorial Board.

Presently *Polis* appears in two issues (fall and spring) per annual volume.

The Editor

(Kyriakos Demetriou)

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