

DESTRUCTIONS, SURVIVAL, AND RECOVERY IN ANCIENT GREECE

MAY 16 - 18, 2019 | COTSEN HALL | ASCSA



THOMAS COLE, THE COURSE OF EMPIRE: DESTRUCTION, 1836.



AMERICAN SCHOOL OF CLASSICAL STUDIES AT ATHENS

From the Trojan War to the sack of Rome by Alaric, from the fall of Constantinople to the bombing of European cities in World War II and now the devastation of Syrian towns filmed by drones, the destruction of cities and the slaughter of civilian populations are among the most dramatic events in world history.

Sources documenting destruction and slaughter in the Greek World are plentiful. The fear of being attacked, ruined or annihilated was so real that almost all poleis increasingly built city-walls to protect their populations and economic assets. In spite of the deterrent potential of fortifications and their real force, however, the ancient historians report that ancient Greek cities continued to be besieged, stormed, “looted,” “destroyed,” “annihilated” and “razed to the ground.” For instance, Herodotus (6.101.3) states that the Persians burned down the sanctuaries of Eretria in 490 BC and took away all its citizens as slaves. According to Livy (45.34.1-6) in 167 BC, the Romans destroyed 70 towns and enslaved 150,000 people in Epeiros, an act of destruction with few parallels in the ancient world.

But how reliable are these sources? Did ancient authors exaggerate the scale of destruction and the number of killings to create tragic narratives? To answer these questions, it is first necessary to compare the literary sources with the archaeological evidence. But archaeological finds can be difficult to interpret, especially when one attempts to link archaeological horizons with a single event that unfolded in the span of a few days. Moreover, even if a destruction layer is well dated and documented in an excavation, it remains challenging to assess its true causes, not to mention the scale of destructions for an entire city and its impact on a region.

In the case of some cities whose destruction the ancient sources report, archaeologists have often searched in vain to discover evidence for destruction or abandonment. In some instances, the losses of population appear to have been less severe than those described by the literary sources. Other examples suggest that economic recovery following a siege or a destruction could be relatively quick. Moreover, because the Greeks were aware that warfare could interrupt economic activity (in some cases factoring this possibility into their contracts), measures were often taken to survive and recover from disaster.

The goal of this conference is to reassess the impact of physical destruction on ancient Greek cities and its demographic and economic implications. The problem of “destruction layers” will first be addressed from the point of view of stratigraphy and micromorphology. Using well-documented case studies, archaeologists and historians will compare literary and archaeological data in order to evaluate the scale of physical damage and demographic losses sustained by ancient cities. They will then attempt to estimate the impact of warfare on economic activity, trade and the expansion of markets, trying to understand to what extent warfare inhibited regional settlement patterns, demography, and the growth of regional and inter-regional trade.

PROGRAM

May 16, Cotsen Hall, ASCSA,

19h00 E.M. Harris and S. Fachard. "Destruction, Survival, and Recovery in Ancient Greece."

May 17, Cotsen Hall, ASCSA,

09:30 T. Karkanas. "Destruction, Abandonment, Reoccupation: What Microstratigraphy and Micromorphology Can Tell Us"

10:15 J. Bintliff. "The Survival of Cities after Military Devastation: Comparing the Classical Greek and Roman Experience"

11:00 Break

11:30 A. Herda. "Playing with Fire: How Miletos Survived the Persian Conquest and Occupation in 494-479 BCE"

12:15 J. Camp. "The Persian Destruction of Athens: Sources and Archaeology"

13:00 Break

15:00 C. Marconi. "The Carthaginian Conquest of Selinus in 409 BCE: Diodorus and Archaeology"

15:45 M. Bessios, A. Athanassiadou, and K. Noulas. "Ancient Methone (354 B.C.)"

16:30 S. Psoma. "The Destruction of Cities in Northern Greece during the Classical and Hellenistic Periods"

17:15 Discussion

May 18, Cotsen Hall, ASCSA

09:30 A. Bresson. "Rhodes 227 BCE"

10:15 G. Ackermann. "The Three Sieges of Eretria during the Hellenistic Period and Their Impact on the Town's Development"

11:00 Break

11:30 B. Forsén. "Destruction and Colonisation: Effects of the Roman Arrival in Epirus"

12:15 C.K. Williams, K. Slane, and N. Bookidis. "From the Destruction of Corinth to Laus Iulia Corinthiensis"

13:00 Break

15:00 D. Rogers. "Athens and Sulla: Revisiting the Extent of the 'Siege' of 86 BCE"

15:45 L. Chioti. "The Herulian Invasion in Athens (267 CE): The Archaeological Evidence"

16:30 Conclusion: Roundtable and discussion