

A Typology of Ancient Greek Migration

Ancient Greece was rife with all manner of migrants. Major wars, internal stasis, economic opportunity, and environmental disasters variously combined to drive migration across the Mediterranean. In modernity, the study of migration from sociological, political, and economic angles is well-established and ever-growing in the face of increased globalization and our own share of catastrophic events. Approaches to modern migration may be applied profitably to the ancient data, although many avenues remain unexplored. While ancient migrants were not subject to the nation state or to expansive global institutions, they nevertheless shared important characteristics with modern ones. But just what is a migrant? And what factors or characteristics matter when classifying types of migrants? While scholarship on ancient migration has exploded in the past 10 years (e.g. Clackson 2020, Mauro et al. 2022, Demetriou 2023), including work with a comparative approach between ancient and modern migrants (e.g. Gray 2018), there has been no attempt to create a systematized way of comparing migrants in ancient Greece with each other or with their modern counterparts. I would like to propose the outline of a formal typology for ancient Greek migrants in order to encourage fruitful comparison, engagement with modern approaches, and a deeper understanding of individuals and institutions in the migration process.

While scholars have looked at specific groups (e.g. political refugees in Balogh 1943) and Garland has written on a monograph different types of migrant (2014), the typology itself has not been theorized. Different approaches and definitions of migration create difficulties for talking across disciplines (e.g. Brettell and Hollifield 2022). The lack of an agreed upon definition of migration types in modernity prompted Jan and Leo Lucassen to create a typology that could bridge various fields that study migration and account for a greater number of

movements as migration, rather than create a false dichotomy with “mobility.” Their goal was to facilitate systematic comparisons across time and space with their typology in order to compute cross-cultural migration rates (the likelihood a person living in that place and time would experience migration). While these works provide excellent inspiration, a typology with the ancient data in mind is a desideratum. Building from scholars such as Patrick Manning (2020), Jan Lucassen, and Leo Lucassen (e.g. Lucassen et al. 2010, Bosma et al. 2013), I will present a set of formal characteristics by which to categorize migrants that might be used by philologists and archaeologists alike, such as length of stay and size of group.

Not just descriptive, the model would have explanatory value. One difficulty in studying the ancient Greek material is the incomplete nature of the evidence and thus comparative work is essential. A refined categorization system will permit comparative approaches with formally similar populations in different times and places. That is, it will support comparisons not only with different ancient communities, but also with modern ones. This type of careful comparative work enables the use of modern theories not yet deployed in ancient history to elucidate the migrant experience. Furthermore, we can also compare formally similar groups within dissimilar receiving states to analyze the interaction between migrants and host states. In the longer view, I believe a typology would facilitate the creation a database cataloging instances of Classical Greek migration which could make possible new questions both qualitative and quantitative in nature. Finally, by adding to the “history of displacement” (Gatrell 2017), Classics can take a well-deserved seat at the growing Global Migration History table.

Works Cited

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