PROJECT DESCRIPTION

New International Approaches to Ancient Greek History and Epigraphy

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I am applying for an IF grant to pursue a two-year project in both Europe and Princeton. The first ten months (September 1st 2017–June 30th 2018) will be devoted to a research stay in Europe, where I will work on a monograph tentatively entitled Giving and Taking in Ancient Greece – An Essay in Historical Anthropology, present the results of my last book (Benefaction and Rewards in the Ancient Greek City, Cambridge University Press, 2016), deliver lectures in France, Switzerland, Germany and Spain, and initiate contacts with some leading European specialists in ancient history to produce a collective volume on Anthropological Approaches to Ancient Greek History. The period from July 1st 2018 to August 31st 2019 will be dedicated to work in Princeton. I will prepare and coordinate the collective volume and organize a conference to be held in Princeton in May 2019. At the conference the contributors will present and discuss the draft chapters of the volume, which will have been circulated one month in advance.

An important result of his project will be an application for a Global Collaboration Network grant, which will have the goal of analyzing some of the main issues treated in the collective volume in collaboration with interlocutors outside the field of Ancient History: historians specializing in other periods, anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists and economists. I am in contact with my Princeton colleague Carles Boix, Robert Garrett Professor of Politics and Public Affairs, and we plan to center the Collaborative Network around the question of “Causality and Social Change”.

Intellectual basis of the project and description:

I am an ancient historian with primary research interests in ancient Greek history and Greek epigraphy, as well as in the closely related question of how modern historians make sense of the past. The general theoretical orientation of my work is toward historical anthropology. Fundamentally, I am concerned with the study of long periods of time, my aim being to identify regularities, structures, and principles behind the superficial variety of human actions. My goal is not to isolate ahistorical features but to analyze the role these more or less stable elements play in
the historical process and how their articulation, together with more dynamic constituents, triggers social change. Although there is inevitably a danger of over-simplification inherent in such an approach, my conviction is that in historical inquiry a certain degree of generalization is both possible and desirable.

The monograph for which I would be conducting research in Europe will analyze the basic principles of gift-giving in the Greek world. My interest in the topic derives primarily from my work on Greek “euergetism” (the phenomenon of voluntary donations by wealthy citizens and foreigners to city-states, and the reciprocal recognition of these services as benefactions). Early on in my research on that subject, I arrived at the conclusion that euergetism was best examined as an institution based on gift-exchange. I also discovered that no comprehensive, systematic study of Greek gift-giving exists. Having addressed the first question in various publications, including my book Benefaction and Rewards in the Ancient Greek City, I plan to turn now to the broader topic of gift-giving, on which I have already published several articles.

Ever since the publication of Marcel Mauss’ Essai sur le don (1924), the topic of gift-giving has occupied a central place in the work of cultural and social anthropologists (Claude Lévi-Strauss, Marshal Sahlins, Maurice Godelier), sociologists (Pierre Bourdieu, Aafke Komter), economists (Serge-Christophe Kolm) and philosophers (Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida). Provided one takes the term in a broad sense that includes both material objects and services, interaction with other human beings can be understood as largely a process of giving and receiving gifts. As many scholars insist, gift-giving is “the cement of society”, including pre-modern and modern societies. But the significance of the practice is more easily observed in archaic communities, where the lack of a developed monetary economy and the weakness of state institutions led individuals to rely more on gifts to achieve their ends.

In this sense, Greek society – ignored by Mauss in his essay – represents a particularly interesting case. Not only does a substantial amount of literary, epigraphic and archaeological information survive, but the rules and language of gift-giving played a significant role in daily interactions between individuals, and in the relationships between mass and elite and between communities and external agents. And while the process of giving and receiving gifts is key to understanding Greek civilization — much more so than Roman society — it also illuminates the role of the gift in the modern Western world in at least two ways. First, by contrast: the Greek practice was characterized by a strong sense of reciprocity, whereas modern behavior has been
decisively shaped by Christian morality; and second, from a “genealogical” point of view: despite differences, the Christian conception of the gift has Greek roots and important continuities with pre-Christian gift-giving. Recent conferences at Brown (The Gift in Antiquity, 2013) and Heidelberg (Gift-Giving and the embedded economy in the Ancient World, 2014) have confirmed that we lack a comprehensive analysis of Greek gift-giving and that such a project would be of great interest not only to specialists in ancient Greek history but also to historians of other periods, prehistorians, anthropologists, sociologists and other social scientists.

Like the monograph on gift-giving, the edited volume will apply the anthropological approaches to the study of ancient history, but its scope will be broader and it will focus on other aspects of ancient Greek society. The concrete topics and anthropological theories will be decided with the contributors, and one of the goals of my stay in Europe in 2017/8 is to hold discussions with them over this issue. Besides using the work of anthropologists, the contributors will be asked to explain the social aspects they study in ways that can be understandable to anthropologists and demonstrate how the study of ancient Greek society can make a major contribution to general anthropological theories. The idea producing a collaborative volume that is the outcome of a carefully conceived project and not of a “call for papers” is based on my recent experience of editing the book Generosity and the Polis. Origins and development of the public gift in the Greek cities from the Homeric world to Late Antiquity (under consideration by Cambridge University Preess) with a colleague at Ghent University, Arjan Zuiderhoedk. We invited 12 carefully selected specialists to write on certain topics, discussed the chapters with them, asked them to send a 500 words abstract, circulate the draft chapter among all the contributors, and finally all met in Princeton in the spring 2015 at a workshop to exchange ideas and reshape our contributions. The result is a powerful and unified study which we expect will change the field.

How will the project broaden the international nature of Princeton’s profile, and who will benefit from it:

Ancient History remains a field dominated by European scholars. Of the 30 full time professors of ancient history active in the seven American Ivy League universities, Stanford, Berkeley and Chicago, half of them are Europeans trained in Europe and only eleven are Americans. The weight of European scholarship in Ancient History is so considerable that there
are four primary languages of publication: English, French, German and Italian. In the United States there are only two Ancient History journals and not a single journal devoted exclusively to Epigraphy, while German journals such as *Chiron, Historia, Klio, ZPE, Epigraphica Anatolica*, and *Tyche* are usual publishing organs for American ancient historians. The different relative strengths of Europe and the United States are due to several reasons: questions of national identity (where and when does our history begin?), geographical issues (the proximity of European scholars to the Mediterranean and to the ancient archaeological sites) and tradition (when American universities began sending archaeological expeditions to the Mediterranean, French, English and Germans already had a long tradition of work in the Mediterranean regions, where they still have easier access to excavation permits). Finally, we have to take into account institutional reasons: whereas in Europe there are many departments of Ancient History or departments of Ancient Studies (“Altertumswissenschaften”, “sciences de l’antiquité) hosting numerous historians, in the United States the ancient historians are trained in departments of Classics where literary scholars predominate.

In conclusion, it is essential for ancient historians in the United States to maintain close relationships with the extensive European network of ancient historians, which means interacting with colleagues not only online but also personally through lectures, workshops, joint projects, and research stays in Europe. In the case of Princeton this has a special raison d’être: Princeton with its six ancient historians in the Classics Department constitutes an exception among American universities, which usually have not more than two ancient historians. The University and its Classics Department have made a great effort to transform Princeton into the main reference for Ancient History studies in the United States and into a place that attracts ancient historians and graduate students from around the world. My project is part of the efforts to maintain Princeton’s preeminence within the field.

But not all European countries are equally appealing to Princeton’s interests and to a project with the characteristics of the one I propose. We have already a strong relationship with our colleagues from the UK due to the common language and almost common job marked, and with our German colleagues because of the German training of some of our ancient historians and because of our partnership with universities and research centers in Berlin. We have, however, few relations with France, although France has been and continues to be one of the most innovative countries in the field, particularly when it comes to apply anthropology to the study of
history. In the 1960’s Jean Pierre-Vernant and Pierre-Vidal-Naquet founded the so-called “School of Paris”, certainly the most original and successful attempt to study ancient Greek history and culture from an anthropological perspective. The two main representatives of the youngest generation of the school, Vicent Azoulay and Paulin Ismard, are currently having so much impact with their work that their last two books have been translated into English and published by Princeton University Press and Harvard University Press.

For all these reasons, my goal is to establish myself in Paris during the 10 months stay in Europe. In December I was awarded a fellowship from the European Network of Institutes for Advanced Study (EURIAS) that offers me an office and research facilities at the Paris Institute for Advanced Study, free accommodation for me and my family at the Cité International Universitaire, and a stipend from September 1st 2017 to June 30th 2018. The EURIAS fellowship is one of the most prestigious and competitive scholarships in Europe. This year there were 1020 applicants for 42 scholarships (of which only two were attached to the Paris institute). The fellowships were granted by a Committee composed of 18 international scientific personalities covering a large panel of disciplines and geographical origins. Obtaining such a fellowship is a great recognition and being able to take advantage of it is a unique opportunity both for my own research and for the future of Ancient History and Classics at Princeton. There is also a great potential benefit for our graduate-students. The scholars I would contact in France, and those from the other European countries which I would visit from Paris, are specialists who could act as co-supervisors of dissertations, organizers of workshops and conferences in which our students could participate, and directors of summer courses in technical fields such as epigraphy and numismatics that offer scholarships to graduate students.

**Participants in the project:**

Paulin Ismard, Maître de Conference at the Université de Paris I-Pantheon Sorbonne. I have been in touch with him since he spent last academic year as member of the Institute of Advanced Study at Princeton.

Vincent Azoulay, Professeur d’histoire ancienne at the Université Paris-Est Marne-la-Vallée. He has co-authored and co-edited books with Paulin Ismard.

François Lissarrague, Director of Studies at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris. He is one of the main disciples of Vidal-Naquet. I will meet with him in Princeton on April 6th to prepare my stay in Paris.
Marcel Hénaff, French anthropologist and philosopher, Professor Emeritus at UC-San Diego. We have been corresponding since we both were invited to participate at the Yale 2013 conference on ancient gift-exchange.

Julien Zurbach, Maître the Conference at the École Normale Supérieure of Paris. I have known him since 2013, when we met at the conference on “Land, Territory and Population in Ancient Greece” at the Autonomous University of Barcelona.

Julien Faguer, graduate student at the École Normale Supérieure, who worked with me in Princeton as visiting student collaborator in 2014-2015.

Beate Wagner-Hasel, Professor of Ancient History at the University of Hanover in Germany. She is the main representative of the historical anthropology of ancient Greece in Germany.

During my stay in Europe, I will be also interact with scholars who will not participate in the collective volume but with whom I share many interest in the fields of ancient Greek epigraphy and economic history and who have invited me to give lectures in their institutions:

Cédric Brélaz, Chair of Ancient History at the Université de Fribourg, Switzerland.

Werner Tietz, Professor of Ancient History at the Universität Köln, Germany.

Toni Ñaco, ICREA Research Professor at the University of Girona, Spain.

Takashi Fujii, Associate Professor of Ancient History at Kwansei Gakuin University, Japan.