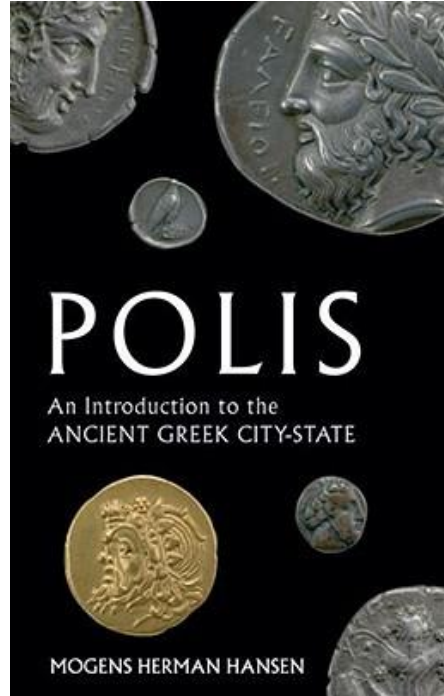_____

Mogens Herman Hansen, *Polis: An Introduction to the Ancient Greek City-State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 237 pp.

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This small book (actually booklet will be the correct name) is the result of many years of work that Mogens Herman Hansen; after relevant preparatory work and together with others, began in 1993 with the establishment of the Copenhagen Polis Center (CPC). A number of academic conferences have been held since 1992 and have dealt with many relevant topics in numerous publications. An provisional report detailing the aims of the company was published in September 1998; in the form of 95 theses a kind of balance; and also the introduction of the closing volume, the *inventory*, published in the autumn of 2004, deals with the topics systematically, similar to this book. This, in turn, was first published in Danish language (*Polis: the Old-*

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graeske Bystatskultur, Copenhagen 2004), as stated in the dedication (for John Crook, the translator's assistant). With him Herman, still after the end of the CPC according to the program in the spring of 2005, kindly provides all due to people a resume of his many years of work, compressed to a little more than 200 pages.

In the introduction Herman has an explanation on the motives that led to the creation of the CPC. Due to the lack of comprehensive studies on *polis* both as a concept and as a historical phenomenon, the plan arose, a list of all 1500 in archaic and classical Greece (from about 650 to 323 BC), including the colonies to create πόλις called settlements. Conversely, the completion of this directory should now provide the opportunity to review previous views on the polis from a much broader basis than before. And for that, the *polis*, the ancient Greek city-state, should be compared to the other known city-states in world history.

This will be the first chapter. In a nutshell, all 37 cosmopolitan city cultures known today, from the Sumerians of the Middle East to the present day, are presented, including the famous medieval city republics of the Middle Ages and the German imperial cities of the late Middle Ages and the early modern period, but also a whole series little known in the West from Asia, Africa and Central America. They have all historically been replaced by territorial states, but their world heritage, the market economy and self-government, is effective in modern (area) states. On the question of how to explain the emergence of city states here and territorial states there, a number of hypotheses are formulated, which allow the conclusion that there are historical laws only very limited or random. After all, it is clear that a certain amount of urbanization is a *conditio sine qua non* (without which it could not be). So where a strong state is already emerging before the urbanization of a country, the emergence of city-states is almost impossible. But that's almost tautological.

In the main part, under the heading *The City-State Culture in Ancient Greece*, we will go through a short course of the ancient

Greek city -state (from 650 to 323 BC) on nearly one hundred pages (pp. 31-134) in 20 chapters (Chapters 3 to 23). It should be noted that the chapter headings sometimes refer only to parts of the chapter contents and that some topics are dealt with in several chapters. Although there are chapters on the beginning and end of the *polis*, it is not a general description of the historical sequence but a systematic, synchronous description. The time that is described is more likely to be the 5th and 4th centuries.

In the last chapter (pp. 137-146) then the findings in *Polis* are compared with the other known city-state civilizations. The specific features of the Greek city-state culture are emphasized: the small size of the average *polis* and the (in the lex Hafniensis formulated as a norm) close link between urbanity and statehood, from "town and state" (p. 146). With these characteristics, the Greek πόλεις (city-states) formed the numerically largest network of city-states in the history of this earth so far.

The most concise comments (pp. 147-190) naturally refer, in addition to the cited ancient sources, to works which have arisen in the context of the work of the CPC, but also to others, often called into question by the work of the CPC views. The bibliography (pp. 191-214), though over 500 titles, offers only a relevant selection from the infinite literature on the ancient city and polis. The booklet is completed by a number of useful indices: an index of the (ancient) literary and in-writing sources, an index of (mainly geographical) proper names, and a short but very useful general index.

The extremely instructive booklet is well legible and clearly written and sometimes really exciting. I pick out some aspects that seem important to us:

Word and Term

In 1985, Wilfried Gawantka referred to the sloppy use of the term polis in historical science, which had been going on for more than a hundred years. At the latest since Jacob Burckhardt's Greek Cultural History (published in 1898), *Polis* was the

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versatile cipher for the Greek state (which, however, does not yet have any) proper state), the state idea, the city-state, the city. Herman, obviously took this to heart and tackled the subject with profound philological-historical tools, which is not self-evident given the popular use of transliterated Greek words as academic terms. The simple word with its meaning ("term") and a concept encompassing another concept ("concept") are distinguished, and the term is not arbitrary in relation to the meaning of the word. Starting point and criterion of the concept formation *Polis* is and remains the Greek word πόλις, its meaning and what it designates and what is associated with πόλις. And against all skepticism it turns out that this is a meaningful procedure.

The investigation of the meaning of the word πόλις initially showed, which is no surprise that πόλις mainly two things, namely, on the one hand, a settlement consisting of houses ("settlement") and on the other a man-made community ("community") (p 56). But not every settlement is referred to as πόλις (as little as any community), but in archaic and classical texts the word πόλις usually only a city, if this city is also the political center of a community (a municipality, a city-state), and conversely, every community called πόλις has an urban center called πόλις. This finding, which applies to Herodotus, Thucydides and Xenophon, as to all other archaic and classical authors, is what Herman and his Copenhagen colleagues call the lex Hafniensis de Civitate and the inverse lex Hafniensis de Civitate. Herman has my opinion in this regard rightly, and it is good that he insists against all criticism that the modern word *Polis* should only be used for what the Greeks πόλις have called, but of course modern terms such as city-state or state can and should be used, when, from a modern perspective, it is about analyzing what a *polis* is, and comparing the *polis* with other city-states.