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This book is the first volume in Carla Antonaccio and Nino Luraghi’s series “Greeks Overseas” – and an ideal volume to begin this venture. In the series preface, the editors describe how they mean this series to “apply[ing] new methods and theoretical approaches, and bring[ing] together old and new evidence”. Originating in the Nellie Wallace lectures that Malkin gave in 2005, this book offers just such a combination. With a persuasive and expert synthesis of modern theories and ancient evidence, Malkin puts forward the thesis that Greek civilization emerged not despite of the diverse nature of and distance between Greek settlements, but because of it: “it was distance and network connectivity that created the virtual Greek center” (p. 5).

The “small world” of network theory (nodes connected without spatial or chronological distance) is used to describe the interconnected nature of Greek culture. By network connectivity, Malkin means the flows of language, trade, art and religious activity (dedications, pilgrimage), which both carried, and were carried by, Greeks around the Mediterranean and Black Sea, either deliberately or by chance. His case studies focus on Greek colonies, which he describes as “permanent nodes that allowed for network

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1. This book was published in 2011, and a review that appears four years later is somewhat belated (even allowing for slippery editorial timelines). However, the editors decided that we still wanted to review Irad Malkin’s book for *JCH* for a number of reasons. First, because of the profound achievement of interdisciplinarity it represents. Second, it also introduces with great clarity a theme that we hope will continue to run in both articles and further reviews: network theory as a tool of historical analysis. As our cover-art suggests, the image of the network as a mode of transmission of culture and ideas is significant for cognitive approaches. Finally, we hope that for hesitant contributors, it may help to demonstrate some of the different themes that this journal aims to encompass.
connectivity” (p. 11). However, Malkin is not just interested in mapping physical connections: he posits that thinking in terms of a network helps historians to redraw the conventional “cognitive maps” used to describe the Archaic Mediterranean, which are arranged in terms of a centre and periphery. Using networks, in contrast, will facilitate comprehension of ancient mental maps of space and connectivity, and, in particular, the notion of identity – “what it meant to be a Greek during the Archaic period” (p. 19).

The specific relevance of network theory is explained in chapter 1, “Introduction: Networks and History”. In this eloquent introduction, Malkin argues for the use of networks not only as a descriptive term, but as dynamic and creative systems. Seeing networks as a modern paradigm, he draws in a range of different thinkers and their work to elucidate the role of networks in his approach, including Castells, Soja, Lefebvre, Foucault (and, at one point, quoting Berger on the novel) and he makes clear how he is building on existing related work on the Mediterranean (e.g. Hordern and Purcell’s *The Corrupting Sea*).³ The details of network theory provided are clearly rooted in extensive and rigorous research, but related in an enthusiastic and accessible style, and with plenty of examples tying theory to historical evidence. Malkin also draws on other disciplines in order to construct a vocabulary that will facilitate his use of network theory as a hermeneutic tool for the analysis of historical data (e.g. “middle ground” a term first used by historian Richard White in his study of Native Americans).³

Malkin illustrates his argument with five case studies (chs. 2–6), each of which picks up and develops a theme of the last. The second chapter, “Island Networking and Hellenic Convergence”, explores regional identity through processes of divergence: it examines the ways in which the overseas activities of the Rhodians caused a “back-ripple” effect that shaped their island identity. Chapter 3, “Sicily and the Greeks”, in turn, shows how processes of convergence – Greeks to Sicily – created a Sikeliote identity. Challenging Hall’s emphasis on the role of genealogy in the formation of collective identity, Malkin argues instead for the symbolic importance of colonization processes, focusing here particularly on the cult of Apollo Archegetes, and exploring its relationship with panhellenic centres, in particular Delphi.⁴

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We remain in Sicily for chapter 4, “Herakles and Melqart” expands on the significance of cults as evidence for the creation of identities: it examines how Herakles (Greek) and Melqart (Phoenician) provided “frameworks of identity and foci of belonging to a place” (p. 120). Malkin begins by demonstrating how the myths of Herakles might be manipulated to suit different contexts of colonization. But although myth is significant, he argues it is cult that allows us to glimpse the living reality, that reveals what mattered to the community at large: he goes on to show the ways in which, in cult activity, Herakles and Melqart overlapped and integrated, revealing a common mentality among Phoenicians and Greeks.

In this picture, western Sicily is identified as a “middle ground” (“a field with some balance of power in which each side plays a role dictated by what it perceives to be the other’s perception of it, resulting from mutual misrepresentation of values and practices”, p. 46), and this concept is expanded further in chapter 5, “Networks and Middle Grounds in the Western Mediterranean”, which focuses on the Phokaians of Asia Minor, and their extraordinary maritime network. The “middle ground” is shown to provide an important conceptual tool for nuancing both the use of network theory, and understanding of the dynamics of colonization. Finally, in chapter 6, “Cult and Identity in the Far West”, the book returns to cult: drawing together the themes of the previous chapters, Malkin explores the evidence for the ways in which collective identities may have interacted with each other and how this was expressed through cult.

The conclusion provides a cogent and helpful overview of the volume’s conceptual themes. Malkin makes the point that his approach could be used to interrogate a wide range of aspects of Greek life, and emphasizes the reasons for his choice to focus on colonization. He leaves the reader with some ideas for how the network approach he has developed might be extended into other areas of ancient historical research.

As this suggests, this is a dense and closely argued volume, and a certain level of familiarity with the ancient historical issues is clearly expected. The sheer mass of detail can become overwhelming and, occasionally, assertions are left unexamined or unexplained in the wake of Malkin’s vigorous prose (for example, p. 149, where a “historically contextual” and a “mathematical” node are contrasted). One theoretical aspect was left slightly hazy: in chapter one, “cognitive networks” appear to describe the ways the ancients perceived their own and others’ identities; in chapter 4, shared foundation stories about Herakles are described in terms of “mental networks”, and then as “networks of collective imagination”: some more explanation of how these terms are intended to relate to each other would help the reader engage with this aspect. Nevertheless, despite the range of
theories, the language and discussion is lucid, and the arguments clear and compelling; there is plentiful use of terms of art here, but Malkin explains and illustrates these, and jargon rarely overwhelms meaning.

Clear and thorough maps in most cases offer a useful tool for visualizing locations and following the ancient itineraries that Malkin describes. Some of the existing maps (e.g. two full pages illustrating the contrasting ways in which Greeks and Romans saw the Mediterranean) although effective seemed unnecessary. That space might have been better used later in the book to illustrate the specifics of particular case studies for those less familiar with the ancient territories under discussion.

These quibbles aside, this book succeeds in evoking a compelling image of “The Greek Wide Web” as “multidirectional, decentralized, nonhierarchical, boundless and proliferating, accessible, expansive, and interactive”. Many of these adjectives could be used to describe this volume: like its subject matter, the intellectual reach of this book is extensive and diverse; and, again, like its subject matter, the final achievement will surely play a key role in shaping future historical studies.