

GREEK NOVELTY

D'ANGOUR (A.) *The Greeks and the New. Novelty in Ancient Greek Imagination and Experience*. Pp. x+264. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Paper, £20.99, US\$34.99 (Cased, £58, US\$94). ISBN: 978-0-521-61648-5 (978-0-521-85097-1 hbk).

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In an erudite, eloquent and wholly engaging work, D'A. reviews and reassesses ancient responses to novelty and the new. Taking issue with those who might dismiss Greek 'innovationism' too easily, D'A. bears witness, instead, to a 'deeply ingrained fascination' with the notion of newness (p. 232). This excellent book represents a significant contribution to our understanding of the ancient Greek experience, and will prompt further fresh thought and new discussion.

The volume stems from D'A.'s own attempts to reconcile contrary modern perceptions of the ancient Hellenes, often lauded for their pioneering achievements across a wide variety of fields even as there endures a 'general consensus ... that the Greeks were averse to innovation and shunned the new' (p. 1). D'A.'s method is to open out an impressive array of textual and archaeological evidence for consideration, and attempt to outline a coherent picture that might do justice to the 'richness and variety of the landscape of novelty in the classical Greek context' (p. 7). The intention from the outset is to eschew a simple historical narrative, as 'the experience of the new cannot be determinately described or evaluated, no straightforward narrative of innovation can be constructed'. Instead, D'A. suggests that 'Observing characteristic ways Greeks reacted to novelty can be more helpful' (p. 26); and so, after a short introduction, eight of the ten chapters reflect on the impulse towards innovation in different areas of culture or thought.

Inevitably, given the diverse subject matter, D'A.'s choice of explicit or suggestive 'indications of newness' may not satisfy all; none the less, his remains a fine, coherent selection on a multifaceted topic. Indeed, given that complexity, D'A. begins carefully, using the first chapters to establish the general parameters of his investigation. Chapter 1 assesses earlier critical proposals, qualifying the view 'that the Greeks did not like novelty', and moving instead towards a more nuanced discussion of all forms of the new (p. 35). That discussion expands in Chapter 2, offering a basic 'distinction between those areas in which innovation tended to be espoused by the Greeks [*tekhnai* such as medicine and gymnastics (following Aristotle), philosophy, art, literature and science] and those in which it was rejected [politics, warfare and religion]' (pp. 38–9). In this pivotal chapter, D'A. insists on a greater awareness of the challenging context in which claims/charges of newness are made in any given text, establishing that 'what counts as 'new' is a subjective and cultural construction rather than an objective reality' (p. 61). Indeed, the concept of constructed novelty provides a neat example of the shifting nature of the ancient engagement with the new in Chapter 3; a chapter that examines the Greek use of both *neos* and *kainos*, proposing that the relatively late emergence of the latter (end of the sixth century B. C.) highlights a greater appreciation for innovation generated by human effort and initiative. D'A.'s cross-cultural review details the materialisation of a beautiful and brilliant newness in the Greek register: neither organic nor temporal, *kainos* is 'more readily suggestive of modern, artificially created and potentially disruptive kinds of novelty' (p. 80–1). Further distinctions are highlighted in Chapter 4, which offers a consideration of the contrast between 'new' and 'old' in the 'discourse of innovation'. For D'A., 'a simple binarism cannot be sustained' when it comes to this opposition (p. 98): there is no intrinsic or

consistent quality, positive or negative, that can be fixed to this pair; instead, the 'evaluative force of each term depends on the object it qualifies' (p. 103).

Having confirmed the need for a more considered approach to ancient novelty, D'A. begins his own 'new' review with an exploration of the origins and causes of innovative ideas in Presocratic thought and early Greek literature. Chapter 5 poses an array of questions about new knowledge. Does it emanate from outside, or is it generated from within? Does the new supplant or merely repeat the old? How does any such process work? Answers come as the chapter explores disparities between philosophical and popular views of the new: unpacking the Pythagorean belief, for example, that nothing can be wholly novel in the recurring cycles of time, but also offering a consideration of the 'real and observable fact of novelty', unfolding in linear time. Moving through the Archaic and Classical periods, D'A. brings together different strands to form a picture of a growing interest in the 'inventive consciousness' (p. 133). Although this awareness owed much to the influence of 'foreign' cultures, the new was increasingly recognised by the Greeks as internally generated and crucially claimed to be Hellenic (and human) in origin. This key shift to a more positive evaluation of novelty is explored further in Chapter 6, where the consideration of the new as evoked in notions and images of 'genesis, light, and wonder' leads into an examination of innovation in Greek art and sculpture. The review of both the real experience and the symbolic use of birth and light highlights, again, an often uncomfortable response to things new. In general, however, we do tend to see a more unequivocal attitude towards novelty in the Greek visual arts, where the rivalry between specialists to 'outdo their fellows in technical and imaginative inventiveness' fuelled a remarkable pursuit of originality (p. 154). In a difficult section, D'A. is careful to acknowledge the lack of contemporary accounts as to how fifth-century artistic inventiveness was received, but does enough to establish how those notable 'self-conscious attempts to innovate' that we can consider were 'in keeping with the competitive spirit of the age' (p. 152).

That distinctive agonistic ethos is considered at length in Chapter 7, which asks whether the competitive drive of the Greeks was 'directed at doing or producing something new?' (p. 163) For D'A., neither in the more traditional forms of competition (warfare and athletics), nor in the banausic *tekhnai* do we find that innovation results from 'competitive striving'. At least not in a contest with one's contemporaries. Granted, taking a diachronic perspective does allow us to see how the bitter and protracted fighting of the Peloponnesian War prompted crucial technical and tactical changes in the conduct of warfare by the start of the fourth century. None the less, advances in the technical domains still tended to be the result of a collective and incremental process. Individual innovators, where noted, were outstanding figures, and it remained the case that 'the production of novelty as such was prized more in intellectual and artistic spheres rather than in practical ones' (p. 182). As we see in Chapter 8, which offers a quite brilliant consideration of creativity and novelty in Greek *mousike*. Artists in other spheres may not have innovated in order to gain acclaim, but the Muse here required novelty in melody, style, content, expression and effect even before the rise of the New Music. That late fifth-century musical 'revolution' is reconsidered as part of the natural development of the discipline, as a 'social and technical phenomenon' (p. 202). While the secularisation of musical practice and performance may have been disconcerting for some contemporary commentators, that separation allowed singers and musicians a rare 'freedom to experiment with the possibilities of their art' (p. 204). A fine balance is maintained throughout this chapter: even as D'A. considers 'the most explicit and enduring examples of innovationist discourse in any sphere of Greek cultural activity' (p. 184), he remains mindful of the ambivalent reaction to the 'vitality of *mousike*' that we find in the work of a number of fifth- and fourth-century

thinkers. Similarly, the review of new texts in Chapter 9 offers notes on select fifth-century Athenian authors and orators, and the imperial city in which they worked. Perhaps both key parts of this short chapter could be developed further: certainly, one would have liked more depth to D'A.'s thoughts on the importance of writing in the development of new *tekhnai*, while the quick review of Athens' distinctive 'orientation to innovation' aims at a number of targets and is a little less satisfying as a result.

Of course, some unevenness is inevitable in an ambitious volume that aspires to represent the 'elusive and many-sided aspect' of the Greek understanding of the new. None the less, this rich and challenging book succeeds in offering a suitably bright assessment of ancient innovation and novelty. D'A.'s outstanding study is one that all with an interest in ancient Greek culture need to read.

National University of Ireland, Maynooth

E. P. MOLONEY
eoghan.moloney@nuim.ie

WHAT IS A FESTIVAL?

BRANDT (J.R.), IDDENG (J.W.) (edd.) *Greek and Roman Festivals. Content, Meaning, and Practice*. Pp. xviii + 405, ills, maps. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. Cased, £85, US\$160. ISBN: 978-0-19-969609-3.

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This volume collects the papers from a conference, 'What is a Festival?', held at Bergen, Norway in 2006, as part of a cross-disciplinary project. An international group of scholars was asked to consider ancient festivals from a variety of angles, such as 'origins, as well as their social function and meaning from a synchronic and diachronic point of view' (p. v). Although the project was apparently aborted, the programmatic nature of this meeting still shines through in this volume, which shows a strong concern with matters of definition and methodology. These questions are further adumbrated in the introduction by the editors, and return in some of the chapters. I. grapples with definitions in his (rather) long piece 'What is a Graeco-Roman festival? A polythetic approach'. The hybrid Graeco-Roman of his title might suggest that he is concerned with defining a particular category, for example Greek festivals under Roman rule, but in fact he is looking for a definition for all festivals in Greek and Roman antiquity. Not surprisingly, perhaps, a definitive definition eludes him. His suggestion to opt for a polythetic approach, i.e. a definition which seems to cover most of the cases, most of the time, may have been useful in the context of a grant application, but the result is so general that one wonders whether readers of this volume really need this kind of definition. Some concise definitions are offered by other authors in this volume that will satisfy most readers, most of the time. Consider the one offered by J. Scheid: 'A ritual system capable of conveying complex messages', or by S. des Bouvrie: an 'orchestrated cultural performance'. Questions of methodology are raised (also at some length) in another programmatic chapter by B., which explains how to read changes in content and form of a festival of certain categories of archaeological data. B. offers some examples, such as a diachronic distribution of pottery types in different festivals, but he leaves it unclear what can be achieved with such diachronic comparisons. Finally in this category, S. des Bouvrie offers a theory- (and jargon-) laden approach to the understanding of ancient festivals, which are neither 'irrational' nor 'incomprehensible'. She focuses on the ritual process in ancient Olympia, where she rightly points at the