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PROLEGOMENA

Ancient and Modern Responses to Migration

“Millions of Migrants Flood in and There’s Nothing We Can Do to Stop Them!” screamed the headline in a British tabloid newspaper recently. The metaphor of flooding, which is particularly favored by the popular press, evokes the image of Britannia sinking beneath the waves under the weight of a migrant stampede.

There is, however, nothing novel in the sentiment. In 1601 Queen Elizabeth I had called for the banishment of “the great numbers of negars and Blackamoors, most of them infidels, who are fostered and fed here to the great annoyance of [my] people.” Even so, it was not until 1905 that the British Parliament finally introduced legislation that gave the Home Secretary the power to restrict immigration. The so-called Aliens Act primarily targeted criminals and paupers; an attempt to incorporate a restriction on Jewish immigration under the same act was heavily defeated. This was also the first piece of legislation to provide asylum in Britain for those fleeing from religious or political persecution.

In the United States, too, racism has played its part in the legislative process. In 1790, a few months after the Constitution had been ratified, the Naturalization Act granted immigrant status to any “free white person” of “good moral character” who had been resident in the country for two years. How these persons of good character were to be identified was not spelled out, but they no doubt had to belong to the proper social class. The so-called white person prerequisite remained in force in every naturalization act passed by Congress until 1952. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which banned Chinese laborers from immigrating

to the United States, was repealed only in 1943. It had been fueled by the anxiety that the Chinese were taking jobs from Americans—the persistent fear in a host population toward an energetic immigrant group.

The twentieth century witnessed a dramatic increase in the numbers of refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants. This came about largely as a result of the rise of communism and fascism and the occurrence of two world wars. Around 1.5 million Anatolian Greeks and 500,000 Muslims became refugees in 1923 as a result of the “Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations,” which the governments of Greece and Turkey cosigned. As many as 12.5 million people were displaced from their homes following the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. It has recently been determined that at the end of World War II between 12 and 14 million residents of mainly Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland were expelled from their homelands to occupied Germany (Douglas 2012). Some 600,000 Jews fled to Israel from Arab states and from Iran in the late 1940s. Between 5.5 and 8.5 million migrants moved to Britain, France, Italy, Belgium, and Holland from their respective colonies in search of work in the period from 1945 to 1973. Hundreds of thousands of refugees fled to Thailand and Vietnam when the Khmer Rouge came to power in Cambodia in 1975. About 4.6 million Palestinians currently fall under the protection of the United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East. Some one and a half million Chinese have been relocated from the region in Hubei Province around the Three Gorges Dam, which was begun in 1993 to provide energy for the world’s biggest hydroelectric power plant. At the time of writing more than two million refugees have fled from Syria as a result of the civil war that began in 2011, around half of them children, while another 4.5 million have been internally displaced inside the country according to estimates from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Not the least troubling consequence of the events of September 11, 2001, has been a global tightening of policies aimed at immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers, who are seen as potential threats to national security and as a possible cause of armed terror.

Uphreavals in early modern times include the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, the Moors from Spain in 1609, the Huguenots from

France in 1685, the early settlers to America, the émigrés of the French Revolution, and the Loyalists who fled to Canada and the Caribbean at the time of the American War of Independence. In addition, more than half a million Portuguese and Spaniards settled in Central and South America, while about 700,000 British subjects immigrated to the American colonies. It is estimated that between eleven and twelve million Africans were shipped as slaves across the Atlantic from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Approximately 2.3 million Chinese and 1.3 million Indians traveled to Southeast Asia as contract workers between 1842 and 1900.

Large-scale displacement is by no means an exclusively modern phenomenon. I estimate that well over 100,000 men, women, and slaves were displaced as a result of the Peloponnesian War, half of that number being residents of Attica. Many cities ceased to exist in that period, including Histiaea, Plataea, Thyrea, Torone, Scione, Cyme, Melos, Hyccara, Iasus, and Cedreiae (see appendix E). Some of them were razed to the ground; others were resettled by immigrants. Abandoned settlements were in fact a feature of the Greek landscape at all periods of history. Overall, about seventy-five cities were destroyed in the period covered by this survey, some more than once (Hansen and Nielsen 2004, index 20 [pp. 1363–64]). Plataea held the record, being destroyed three times (in 480, 426, and 373). In forty-two cases the population was massacred and/or enslaved. In twenty-two, the *polis* underwent *dioikismos*—that is to say, the survivors were dispersed among the villages out of which the *polis* had originally been an amalgam.

In addition, many prominent individuals have undergone exile, both voluntary and enforced, including Hannah Arendt, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Napoleon Bonaparte, Marc Chagall, Albert Einstein, Victor Hugo, Richard Wagner, Frédéric Chopin, Sigmund Freud, Thomas Mann, Vladimir Nabokov, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Elie Wiesel. The list of those who went into exile in Greek antiquity was equally distinguished (see appendix D).

My own awareness of the issues posed by immigration dates precisely to April 20, 1968, when Enoch Powell, the Conservative Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton South East, delivered his infamous “Rivers

of Blood” speech, coincidentally (or not) less than three weeks after the assassination of Martin Luther King. He intended it to be an attack on the Race Relations Act that had been introduced in the same year by the Labour Party. The act had outlawed discrimination on the “grounds of colour, race, or ethnic or national origins” in public places. In so doing, it had also made discrimination in housing illegal. Previously it had been commonplace to see advertisements for rented rooms in Britain include the words “No Coloureds” (or “No Irish”). Now such notices were banned.

Britain had experienced considerable immigration from the Commonwealth countries in the postwar years, and Powell saw himself addressing a ticking time bomb. Allegedly quoting what he called “a decent ordinary fellow-Englishman,” he claimed that “in fifteen or twenty years the black man will have the whip hand over the white man”—a highly insensitive and inflammatory phrase if ever there was one, particularly in light of King’s recent assassination. He went on to predict that by the year 2000 there would be five to seven million Commonwealth immigrants and their descendants living in Britain, representing approximately one-tenth of the total population. Powell was a brilliant classicist—he became professor of Greek at the University of Sydney at the age of 25—and he thought fit to end his speech with a Sibylline prophecy from Vergil’s *Aeneid* (6.87), from which it derived its popular title:

As I look ahead I am filled with foreboding. Like the Roman, I seem to see “the River Tiber foaming with much blood.” That tragic and intractable phenomenon, which we watch with horror on the other side of the Atlantic but which there is interwoven with the history and existence of the States itself, is coming upon us here by our own volition and our own neglect. Indeed, it has all but come.

Powell’s answer to the “problem” of immigration was voluntary reemigration, which was to be facilitated by “generous grants and assistance.” Though many applauded his speech, he was dismissed from the Shadow Cabinet and narrowly avoided prosecution for exacerbating racial ten-

sions. Margaret Thatcher, though certainly not in the same camp as Powell, nonetheless used the word “swamp” to describe an influx of immigrants, and the metaphor is commonplace in what passes for political discourse on the subject. It goes without saying that the scale of permitted immigration remains an extremely contentious issue to this day, both in the United States, the UK, and throughout the world.

There is nothing new in this circumstance. Appeals by asylum-seekers, as well as petitions from would-be immigrants, were certainly debated in assemblies throughout the ancient Greek world, and it would be surprising indeed if those debates had not at times become acrimonious and heated. Plutarch in a throwaway line notes that the Athenian lawgiver Solon “observed that Athens was filled with people who were constantly streaming into Attica from elsewhere in order to find security” (*Sol.* 22.1). Though Plutarch cannot have known what Solon took note of, it is entirely conceivable that some of Solon’s contemporaries did indeed fear that they were being “swamped” by immigrants. It is important to note at the beginning of this survey, however, that to our best knowledge no Greek state ever settled an identifiably “foreign” ethnic minority within its territory. Only very occasionally do we hear of groups of Phoenicians and other non-Greeks residing in cosmopolitan cities such as the Piraeus, Athens’s port, or Syracuse, and they did so in very small numbers. It follows that race would not have been an issue for the Greeks in any discussion about immigration in the same way that it has in the modern world, particularly with regard to those identified as “black.” Nor, so far as we know, did any Greek state implement a policy on immigration or seek to enforce a quota. It just so happened that some states, Athens *in primis*, were open to immigrants, whereas others, most conspicuously Sparta, were not.

Though the plight of migrants and refugees in the Greek-speaking world would have been similar to their plight today, absent the halting efforts of humanitarian agencies and the distracted gaze of the international community, there are some striking differences. Many people are at least somewhat sensitized to the predicament faced by displaced persons today, whereas the best minds of Greek antiquity show virtually no concern for their welfare. A rare instance of humanitarian concern for

refugees on the part of a large number of people is briefly recorded by Diodorus Siculus (19.54.2). When the Macedonian general Cassander, “in his desire for glory,” rebuilt Thebes in 316 following the destruction of that city some twenty years earlier by Alexander the Great, “many Greek cities participated in the *sunoikismos* [resettlement], both because of their pity for the unfortunate people and because of Thebes’s renown.” We are left wondering to what extent these same cities would have come to the rescue of these unfortunates if they had belonged to a city of no particular consequence. Likewise when the Athenians expelled the Samians and sent their own settlers to the island, the Greek world sympathized with the Samians and provided them with asylum, though perhaps more out of enmity toward the Athenians than sympathy for the Samians (see later, chapter 11).

Another striking difference is that migration in the Greek-speaking world, whatever its cause, often represented a far more radical upheaval in people’s lives than it does today. Describing the moment when her parents became refugees, Vijay Agnew (2005, 6) writes: “The hurried nature of my parents’ departure from Quetta, now part of Pakistan, meant that they carried little with them that was not necessary for physical survival. No albums or pictures of the past survived.” Greek migrants invariably faced the prospect of total severance from the past, and in the absence of the practice of keeping diaries and journals, let alone photographs, the only way that memories could be kept alive was through recitation and story-telling.

The Silence of the Sources

Intensifying Peloponnesian War Sparks Refugee Crisis: Athenian Correspondent Reports That 250 Children Die of Hunger Each Day!

Even if some enterprising Greek had invented the newspaper, I seriously doubt that refugees would have made the headlines. No one to our best knowledge, including Thucydides, who occasionally took note of population movements, ever concerned himself with what we

would call today the “global implications” of war, famine, and disease for the thousands of victims of such disasters. This is perhaps all the more surprising in light of the fact that Thucydides was himself exiled from Athens for many years and must have experienced some degree of discomfort, hardship, and prejudice, even though he would have continued to lead a charmed life, like most high-profile exiles. All that he tells us about his exile, however, is that it “gave him the leisure to get a better sense of events”—and thus in effect to become a better historian (5.26.5). Of course, being an exile like Thucydides with wealth and status is a very different experience from being a common refugee. From the perspective of a Greek and indeed Roman historian (a number of whom incidentally went into exile) refugees and other homeless individuals just didn’t merit writing about; or to put it more accurately, they merited a brief mention at most. No historian was particularly interested in recording the sufferings of the undifferentiated masses, and none ever encouraged his readers to dwell on human suffering at length. Why would he? Greek history has provided us with a narrative that privileges the interests and concerns of intellectuals, the well-to-do, and, crucially for our focus here, the settled. It has little to tell us about the dispossessed. The historians belonged to the city élite and assumed that their readers did too. They therefore tell the story from the perspective of a small minority of politically powerful and largely stable cities, about twenty at most. To the extent that we can build up a picture of the dispossessed at all, the data must be culled primarily from the marginalia of history.

“The Athenians crossed over to Euboea again under the command of Pericles and conquered the whole island,” Thucydides reports of the year 446. “While they settled the rest of the island on agreed terms, they expelled the people of Histiaea and occupied their land themselves” (1.114.3; cf. D.S. 12.22.2). And that is that. No further reference to these exiles occurs in his work. They are just one more community consigned to the ash heap of history in a brief, inconsequential statement. Given the bias of our sources, literary as well as epigraphical, it is all too easy to picture the Greek-speaking world from the perspective of the prosperous citizen of a big and thriving city-state. And yet there is an urgent



FIGURE 1 Silver *tetrôbolon* (four-obol coin) from Histiaea, Euboea, ca. 267–146. The obverse depicts the head of the nymph Histiaea with her hair rolled up and wreathed in a vine. The reverse depicts her seated on the stern of a ship, holding a standard, a trident beneath the hull. The legend reads *(HISTI)AIEÏN*. The city was destroyed by the Persians in 480 after the Battle of Artemisum. It recovered, became part of Athens's maritime confederacy, and in 446 defected, along with other Euboean *poleis*. The rebellion was quickly crushed, and the Histiaeans were deported to Macedonia. A small number remained, however, and at the end of the Peloponnesian War, the city was resettled as Oreos, probably with descendants of the original population (Hansen and Nielsen 2004, 657).

story to be told, and one that has up to now received little attention from ancient historians. Indeed its omission has replicated the silence of our sources.

That said I do not mean to pass judgment on Thucydides and the other historians who failed to pay much attention to the struggles of refugees and other migratory peoples. They simply did not see it as their business to chronicle their sufferings. That does not, however, mean that they were indifferent to their plight or inherently lacking in compassion. It goes without saying that we know nothing about their capacity for compassion. What we can say with certainty is that life for the vast majority of people in ancient Greece was extremely tough, that many more people lived on the edge than do today in the West, and that compassion was a luxury that not everyone could afford. As Herbert Butterfield (1931, 16) stated, “The study of the past with one eye, so to speak, upon the present is the source of all sins and sophistries in history, starting with the simplest of them, anachronism.”

Even in the modern world it is virtually impossible to obtain accurate statistics about movements of peoples. *A fortiori* we cannot begin to estimate the proportion constituted by the migratory population in ancient Greece. Such data as we have are disjointed and piecemeal. To make matters worse, the figures in our sources are inherently unreliable, both because the Greeks could provide only rough estimates of population size and because numbers are frequently transmitted incorrectly in the manuscript tradition. It is clear, however, from what we know about overseas settlements and mercenary service that from the beginning of the historical era, and probably much earlier, Greece had what is called a large “exportable proletariat.” It may have been for this reason that both Plato (*Rep.* 5.460a, *Laws* 5.740b–d) and Aristotle (*Pol.* 7.1335b 19–26) were concerned to restrict the size of the citizen body of individual *poleis*. It is not until the middle of the second century BCE that we have evidence to suggest that the prospect of a dwindling population was causing anxiety in Greece (Polyb. 36.17.5–10). The literary evidence suggests that migration reached its peak in the fourth century, when communal life itself threatened to be overwhelmed by the numbers of homeless persons. However, much of the evidence that supports this view is propagandist in nature. And though population movement is our concern, let us not forget the fact that in the seventh and sixth centuries many Greeks never traveled more than a few miles from their birthplace (Purcell 1990, 37).

“It is clear that the *polis* exists by nature and that by nature man is a being who lives in a *polis*,” Aristotle famously declared (*Pol.* 1.1253a 1–3). Neither he nor any other political theorist of whom we have record thought it worthwhile either to imagine a different state of being or to focus his attention on those Greeks who faced a very different reality. Yet even for Athenians the chance of being forced by circumstance from their homes represented a very real danger. Indeed it became a reality during the Persian and Peloponnesian wars. And once we turn our attention away from the major centers of power to the periphery, the picture darkens appreciably. Given the precariousness of life in the ancient world we can well suppose that at any period of history the

landscape would have provided the spectator with haunting images of refugees, forced from their homes by human conflict or natural disaster.

Nowhere is the silence of our sources more deafening than with regard to women and slaves, both those who were ejected from their homes and those who remained behind, when their husbands, fathers, or owners were exiled. Any woman who took to the high seas or to the open road unaccompanied by a man would have had little chance of survival. A striking difference between then and now was the paucity of outlets abroad for women. It is estimated that in 2005 half the world's migrants were women, many of them propelled to leave their homeland in the hope of achieving release from its restrictive traditions and social practices. By contrast, only a small number of Greek women would have been able to seek a livelihood abroad, due to the lack of career options. Virtually the only way for a woman to escape the confining lifestyle to which the vast majority conformed was by becoming a prostitute (see later, chapter 9), an anodyne term that hides the fact that many of the women who found themselves so identified would have been victims of sex trafficking. The fact, too, that women played only a minor role in overseas settlement leaves us wondering what would have been the fate of those who were left behind. Slaves disappear without trace.

Causes of Population Displacement

Modern theories of migration differentiate between a complex series of interconnecting factors on the micro-level, viz individuals and whole families who have personal reasons for wanting to migrate; meso-level, viz networks and systems that facilitate the process; and macro-level, viz demographic, political, and economic conditions that help determine the rate and size of a migration flow (Goldin et al. 2011, 97–120). Self-evidently we cannot apply this kind of sophisticated theorizing to the ancient evidence. At the macro-level, however, the Greeks certainly understood that war was a cause of population displacement. At the beginning of his history of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides identifies

the characteristic features of a life that is unpredictable, unsettled, and subject to constant upheavals. It is what he imagines to have been the life of the primitive settlers who first inhabited the Greek mainland (1.2.1–2):

It is clear that the land that is now called Hellas did not have a settled population in ancient times, and that formerly there were many *metanastaseis* [migrations] whenever individual tribes readily abandoned their land under constant pressure from people who were more numerous than they were. Lacking commerce, having no free communications with one another either by land or by sea, cultivating only as much land as was necessary to keep alive, having no reserves to fall back on, not growing crops on the land, since they never knew when an invader might deprive them of those crops, and not having walls, all because they thought that their daily necessities were all that they needed, it hardly mattered to them if they were uprooted, and for that reason they did not acquire powerful city-states nor have any other resources [that is, either military or naval].

This is a striking passage for many reasons. Its underlying assumption is based partly on the memory of a dimly remembered past that has been passed down by oral tradition, and partly on speculative inference. Indeed by prefacing his remarks with the words “It is clear,” Thucydides admits that his analysis owes little to what we would call evidence, though this does not alter the fact that his inference is of high quality. Indeed this is the first attempt by a historian to describe the living conditions of those wretches for whom survival against the odds is the essential and primary goal.

Thucydides paints a picture of backward and closed-off communities whose members lived a semi-nomadic existence, largely dependent for their survival on hunting and gathering, and incapable of consolidating and flourishing because of constant migratory movements. Though he leads us to believe that this was a lifestyle that had long ceased to be current in his day, I strongly suspect there were parts of Greece where it had not entirely been superseded. Backwardness, however, was not the only cause of migration, as he points out (1.12.2):

The fact that the Greeks returned only after many years from Troy led to revolutions. *Staseis* [political upheavals] generally occurred in the city-states, and it was the people who were driven out who founded city-states.

The example he cites in support of his important claim that war causes political upheaval, which in turn generates population displacement, is the ancestors of the Boeotians, who were allegedly driven out of Arne in Thessaly by the Thessalians sixty years after the fall of Troy and who subsequently settled in Boeotia as refugees. No doubt this was just one of many upheavals that were thought to have occurred around this time. He concludes (1.12.4):

It was only long after the war had ended that Greece finally became stable, no longer prone to upheavals and able to send out *apoikiai* [settlements] abroad.

Though Thucydides does not draw any analogy between the migratory movements that were occasioned by the Trojan War and the frequent unsettlements that were brought about by the Peloponnesian War, it is evident that he had this latter event in mind when he cast his imagination back to the past.

Stasis (political strife), as we shall see, was a routine feature of life in the Greek city-state, and it commonly resulted in the expulsion of one or other faction, either oligarchic or democratic, or, less commonly, one or other ethnic group. It was in fact one of the principal causes of mass displacement, just as it is in the modern world. Other stimuli in the modern world include demographic growth, religious conflict, environmental disaster, war, famine, and the desire for economic advantage. In ancient Greece a similar set of determinants operated, absent religious conflict, which for the most part counted for little.

The best we can do in seeking to determine the cause of population movement in the Greek world is to make some crude generalizations. Though demographic growth, famine, and an eagerness to establish markets for the sale and purchase of goods are likely to have prompted a *polis* to dispatch a group of pioneers to found a settlement, we are hardly ever

in a position to prioritize these (and other) factors. We know, too, that some settlements were founded by groups that were politically disaffected. The expansion of the Greek world consequent upon the conquests of Alexander the Great in the last decades of the fourth century, which resulted in mercenary soldiers settling as far east as the Hindu Kush and beyond, was fueled in part by demographic growth. Armed conflict was as much a source of dislocation then as it is now, especially when the Greek world was in turmoil, as during both the Persian and Peloponnesian wars. Human trafficking was extremely prevalent as a result of both piracy and warfare. Those most at risk were women, children, and young adults. Large numbers of people were displaced to serve the military and political ambitions of tyrants and states. Dionysius I, for instance, ruler of Syracuse (405–367), forced tens of thousands to relocate to his capital, not only to provide a counterweight to Carthage's increasing domination of the western part of Sicily, but also to strengthen his hold over that city. In somewhat similar fashion the city of Megalopolis was established in 368 to reduce Sparta's military domination of the Peloponnese. Environmental disasters probably caused displacement, too, though the evidence is inconclusive.

As for individuals, *aeiphugia* (permanent exile) was a common punishment for those convicted of homicide and treason, since long-term imprisonment was not an option in the Greek world. We already hear of itinerants in the *Odyssey*, and they became numerous in the fifth and fourth centuries. The majority of metics who resided in Athens were probably motivated to leave their homes to improve their economic circumstances. At least some, however, must have been compelled by exigency. The topographical diversity of the Mediterranean landscape made it essential for the population of each micro-region to be highly mobile in order to capitalize on the full range of environmental opportunities (Horden and Purcell 2000, 385). An unknown number would have been either transhumance pastoralists, viz those who follow a fixed pattern of movement, or semi-nomadic, viz those who do not adhere to any fixed pattern. An example of a transhumance pastoralist is the herdsman in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, who spends his time "on Mount Cithaeron and places nearby" (l. 1127). A related phenomenon

is that of internal migration, as for instance in the case of Athenians moving from one deme to another (Osborne 1991, 151–57).

To conclude, we tend to think of migration in negative terms, focusing on the causes, frequently catastrophic, invariably pressing, that propel individuals to abandon their homes and seek a livelihood often thousands of miles away. Alternatively, following the lead of Queen Elizabeth I and Enoch Powell, we decry the tension and disruption that refugees create in the host community and the strains that they place upon the social fabric. But it is impossible to overestimate the enormous benefits that have accrued to human society, including ancient Greek societies, from the intermingling of peoples of dissimilar ethnic identities.