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# Knowledge Commons in Ancient Athens: A Research Note

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Ancient Greek civilization was the original source of philanthropy as a term, an ideal and various philanthropic practices. The Athenian Greeks, in particular, incorporated distinctive philanthropic practices and institutions, including several that can be termed knowledge commons (Finley, 1974; Hands, 1968; Gold, 1982; Gold, 1987; Hess & Ostrom, 2007; Wiseman, 1982). For these purposes, a knowledge commons is an association or assembly in which shared resources, such as money, collections of artifacts and repertoires of shared information and practices serve as common pool resources to conduct research, build theories, or conduct any of the other activities of organizing, preparing, archiving or presenting knowledge. In this sense, classical Athenian knowledge commons were so extensive that it would require an entire monograph to cover the subject fully. In this discussion, we can only point to some of the highlights and link them to the principal concerns with the common theory of voluntary action.

The origins of philanthropy in the tradition of western civilization are currently found not in practice as reconstructed through archeological research but in Greek literature. Acts for the general good carried out primarily or even solely for the love of humankind, albeit with ever-present tragic possibilities for the philanthropist pretty well sum up the classical Greek meaning of philanthropy.

The myth of Prometheus predates any of the extensive philanthropic practices of the Athenian polis (McCully 2008). It is quite likely that actual philanthropic practices of some type may also have predated the complex and subtle moral ideals tied to the myth, but if so, they are currently lost to us. George McCully (2008), a cultural historian and humanist scholar and founder of the Massachusetts-based Catalog of Philanthropy, does not settle for any of the customary vague references tracing philanthropy to somewhere and some time in ancient Greece as so many others have done. Instead, he traces the origin to line 46 in Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*, written around 460 BCE. In that work, Prometheus, a Titan, is accused by the god Zeus of an excessive love of humanity – *philanthropia* – and made to suffer for his transgression. Prometheus' love of humanity was demonstrated, Zeus claims, when he stole fire from the gods and gave it to humanity; an act which infuriated Zeus, who chained Prometheus (hence the title) and sent an eagle to eat his continually regenerating liver which, needless to say, caused the Titan great suffering.

*Prometheus Bound* is among the best-known of the surviving ancient Greek myths. It is interesting to note that this particular connection to Greek tragedy offers a host of additional connotations and subtlety to the

rather simplistic notions of philanthropy as unqualified good without consequences as well as the simplistic notion of tragedy as negative outcomes used by Garrett Hardin (1965) in his tragedy of the commons. These subtleties and connotations are useful in fleshing out the modern concept of the commons and reveal some additional and troubling moral dimensions. Hardin's use of the term is straightforward and consequentialist, labeling as tragic merely negative consequences. This is suggestive of the colloquial phrase, "When bad thing happen to good people." McCully's pointer to Greek tragedy suggests additional tragic dimensions of Prometheus' supposed excessive love; specifically, that the negative or tragic consequences may be due simply to fate ("the will of the gods") or may arise directly from Prometheus' highest aspirations – his *philanthropia*, or love of humanity. As humans, we may never know. Prometheus' "tragic flaw", may involve a character flaw, or merely that his highest aspirations are regarded negatively by Zeus, for which he must suffer the latter's wrath. This ambiguity gives a complex and subtle dimension to philanthropy which is also present in other aspects of the Athenian ideal as discussed below, but which is often missing from the more pedestrian and less subtle modern connotations of the term. In particular, the obligatory nature of the *liturgia* as discussed below, and the ever-present potential for harsh negative – tragic – consequences befalling the philanthropist due either to *fate* or the verdict of the sometimes-temperamental gods is something missing in most modern accounts. Something much closer to this Greek situation is present in understandings of the Latin American *fiesteros*, where possibilities of great glory and honor for the philanthropist are mixed with equal potential for complete dishonor and disdain due merely to circumstances – sometimes even simply bad weather during the fiesta (See Lohmann, 2018F).

The evolution of the ancient Greek commons is a record that begins with the emergence of distinctive philanthropic practices, associations and assemblies within the Homeric leisure class of prehistoric Greece; the transformation and diffusion of aristocratic practices in the democratic context of the Athenian *polis*; and the rediscovery of these practices in the classicism of the West in the 18th century. The exact origins of the earliest Greek philanthropic practices are lost in the mists of history. They probably parallel to a considerable extent the prehistory of other prehistoric common practice.

According to Parker (1986, 265), "(G)ift giving was perhaps the most important mechanism of social relationships to Homeric society." Homeric and classical Greek giving was an expression of peer-oriented "reciprocal friendship" and forms of mutual aid among aristocrats quite unlike modern notions of philanthropy and charity. Homeric gift giving may well have been the survival of ancient village mutual aid in the new circumstances of an emergent urban elite with vastly increased wealth and power. In this

respect, it resembles the emergence of an American philanthropic elite in the “Gilded Age” plutocracy of 19th and early 20th Century America.

Gradually, reciprocal norms of Greek village gift giving may have evolved into the ritualized aristocratic patronage obligations known as *liturgia* (Finley, 1974; Hornblower, 1986). Pericles is credited as the founder of classical Athens, by virtue of his role as patron of the Athenian Parthenon and other structures of the Acropolis (Bowra, 1967). There are suggestions of intrigue and even culpability involved. Pericles’ patronage was accomplished by redistributing League funds contributed by other Greek city states for war against Persia (Boardman, 1986, 298). Although the method and the size of funds was somewhat unique, Pericles’ act of patronage was not. Hornblower (1986) concludes that “aristocrats such as Cimon and Pericles, by their political and military leadership, brought in the public wealth which subsidized the buildings and sculptures of Phidias, Ictinus, and Mnesicles on the Acropolis; and by making available their private wealth for public purposes, they financed the festivals and dramatic productions which gave classical Athens its attractive power. This was the *liturgia*, an obligation or tax on the rich which conferred prestige when taken beyond what was obligatory. Pericles’ first known act was to pay for Aeschylus’ great historical opera, the *Persae*. We know this...from a list carved on stone” (127). The archaic Greek ethical model of philanthropy as obligatory at a minimal level and status-conferring at higher levels appears to represent a distinct moral order with important ramifications which have not yet been discussed in the context of modern philanthropy or the commons.

The Peloponnesian War of 431 BC destroyed the power and influence of the original aristocratic class of Athens and undermined its philanthropic activity. However, the citizens of the emergent democratic city state followed the example of the aristocratic obligations of patronage and reciprocity, with notable result. Hornblower (131) credits Athenian democracy and aristocratic patronage of culture (*paideia*) as important in the emergence of Athens as the premier Greek city state. Classical Greek patronage extended very broadly to include construction and operation of vast numbers of temples, comic, tragic and choral theatres (Levi, 156-7); public hospitals (Levi, 163); oracles at Delphi and elsewhere; sporting events and games at Olympia (Finley and Pleket, 1976); and a broad range of other community affairs. These were not public, in the modern sense of state-sponsored or tax-supported, events or facilities but were instead supported as in the past through the liturgical system of patronage.

Liturgical patronage, however, was not the only feature of the Greek pursuit of common goods. Many modern forms of association also have counterparts in Greek life. The democratic political organization of the polis was essentially an association of adult males (Murray, 1986, 207). As such, it was one of several major forms of association prominent in Athenian life.

The *symposium* was a kind of private drinking club. Every male Athenian citizen belonged to a *phratry* (from which the modern term fraternity derives). Originally aristocratic warrior bands, such phratries were involved in all the main stages of a man's life and the focus of his social and religious activity (Murray, 208). There are, in fact, certain intriguing similarities between the Athenian *phratries* the kiva societies of the American pueblo peoples and other similar urban male associations. The probable emergence of such "brotherhoods" from essentially military origins might take many other forms as well. For example, the *syssitia*, or mess groups of Sparta were the basis of the entire social and military organization of that city-state.

In ancient Greece the civil society of the commons was largely male-dominant. Both male and female Greek deities were abundant but social participation by women in commons figures in only tangentially and occasionally, as with the Vestal Virgins.

Other types of association were common in other Greek cities as well. In Athens, there were aristocratic religious groups called *gennetai*, whose members claimed descent from common ancestors and monopolized the priesthoods of important city cults. *Gymnasia* were not merely physical facilities, as today, but also the sporting clubs who used them. "There were benefit clubs and burial clubs and clubs associated with individual trades and activities. There were religious and mystical sects and intellectual organizations such as the philosophical schools of Plato and Aristotle." (Murray, 209)

## Athenian Philosophical Schools

The philosophical schools of ancient Athens also belong within the profile of knowledge commons. From very early times, groups of scholars have associated in intellectual commons, or "schools" to share ideas and exchange knowledge, but the philosophical schools of Athens are perhaps best and most widely known. As commons, such schools typically shared purposes of investigation, *theorie*, dialogue; shared resources, both cognitive and material; and evolved their own norms of voluntary affiliation, mutuality and fairness. In a number of instances, most notably ancient Athens, the modern concept of regional concentration of industries can be applied to one of the oldest and best-known phenomena in western learning. Exactly such a regional concentration of schools developed in and around Athens in the fourth century BCE from which knowledge has been disseminating throughout the known world ever since.

## Plato's Academy

Plato holds a special place of honor in the history of contemporary western social and political theory in part because of his role in these

concentration and dissemination processes. Although relatively little is known about its actual operations, Plato's Academy deserves a similar position in the history of the commons. Many of us are accustomed to thinking of the Academy as a semi-mythical institution, and of the philosophical school as a kind of vague metaphor for a group of like-minded intellectuals. Yet, the Academy was a real, historical place--an operating institution with an extremely long history of nearly nine centuries, and a pattern of organization which very likely conforms to the general characteristics of commons.

Plato founded the Academy as what we might today call 'a private non-profit think tank' at his home in Athens sometime between 385 BC and 367 BC (Ryle, 1966, 315). The property probably consisted of a residence and series of outbuildings located several miles north of the city of Athens and took its name from a nearby grove of trees. Thus, this famous intellectual commons arose quite literally out of the household, rather than the marketplace or the state. The theoretical significance of this should not be overlooked. In much the same way in the modern world of the late 19th century, the nonprofit social agencies called settlement houses arose out of a rather peculiar form of urban extended household.

The Academy was a "school" of philosophy in the multiple senses of a teaching institution, the purveyor of a particular set of (Platonic) doctrines, and the focal point for a group of adherents of those doctrines. We know something of its curriculum, which included mathematics, astronomy and philosophy, from Book VII of the *Republic*.

Matson suggests that Plato's Academy probably wasn't the first philosophic institution in Athens. A "thinkateria" associated with Socrates is discussed in Aristophanes' *Clouds* nearly a century earlier (first produced in 423 BC) Socrates is thought to have been a member of the school of Archelaus which carried on the science of Anaxagoras (Matson, 1968, 74).

Some decades earlier, the sophists (or "wise men") who were the first Greek intellectuals were itinerant lecturers who lectured on many subjects (science, mathematics, etc.) but specialized in rhetoric (Matson, 1968, 68). It was customary for the sophists to travel from town to town rather than remaining in one location. The greatest of the sophist teachers was said to be Protagoras (born 500 BC) who claimed to teach "prudence about personal affairs, how to run your household the best way, and how to speak and act most efficiently about public concerns" (Matson, 1968, 68). Thus, economics in the Greek sense of household management, was a constituent in the earliest sophist curricula.

Ryle concludes that at the time of his death Plato may no longer have owned the Academy since his will, quoted verbatim by Diogenes Laertius, is silent on the subject. Ryle goes on to suggest that when Plato ceased to own

the Academy, it probably became a semi-religious 'college' like that of Theophrastus--a dedicated and endowed foundation, legally under the formal control of a group of trustees (Ryle, 1971, 314).

The actual decision-making in the governance and operations of such a school can only be guessed at, since no records of meetings, budgets, minutes, or the like remain. However, Ryle's mention of trustees makes it sufficiently clear that the Academy was more than a normal Greek household. For example, Ryle suggests a pattern of leadership succession quite different from that of the patriarchal household and much more comparable to that of a modern association: Plato's nephew, Speusippus, and grandnephew, Xenocrates, both headed the School at different times. However, neither inherited the school, and both were apparently *elected* to the position by the association trustees. Further, Speusippus seems to have resigned the position--something a head of household could never do (314). There is also an often-repeated view among ancient historians that Aristotle may have left the Academy after losing a contest for the leadership to Speusippus. Kerferd, on the other hand, argues that the story that Aristotle left because of an earlier conflict with Plato has been contradicted by contemporary scholarship, but fails to provide particulars (Kerford, 1981, 151).

The tangible assets of the Academy can also only be guessed at. Certainly, there was a jointly used 'physical plant' and shared 'resources'--buildings, grounds, manuscripts and necessary teaching materials--the Greek equivalent of 'blackboards', maps, anatomical diagrams and 'star charts' (Ryle, 1971, 319). Unquestionably, the Academy also possessed a rich repertory of philosophical, literary and scientific knowledge -- Plato, Aristotle and several other lesser philosophers being numbered among its staff.

It is unclear whether Plato actually taught philosophy there. Perhaps he functioned instead, after the manner of a modern-day college president, as leader, fund-raiser, publicist, spokesman and corporate symbol. Certainly, one of the most important 'human resources' of the Academy was Aristotle, who according to Ryle belonged to the Academy for 20 years prior to Plato's death, and who, for whatever reasons, left Athens for several years about the time of Speusippus' succession to head the Academy. Pressing the modern analogy, we might speculate that perhaps Aristotle was recognized by his peers at the academy as the Greek equivalent of an "idea man" -- too preoccupied with *theoria* to show sufficient interest in the *praxis* of academy management. Or, perhaps there was a closely contested race for the position won by Speusippus and Aristotle felt it best to get out of town for a while. This certainly doesn't exhaust the possibilities: perhaps, for example, that in an Academy of Platonic idealists, Aristotle's more empirical approach was deemed insufficient by his peers. Or, perhaps he had no interest in the job.

How many other faculty and staff were at the Academy and at what times, as well as the size of the enrollment are matters of speculation. It is clear, however, that the school was small by contemporary, or even by medieval, standards, and the number of students was probably under 100 (Ryle, 1971, 318).

The actual methods of financing the Academy are also unclear. It is a virtual certainty that the Academy was not a public school either in the modern American sense supported by Athenian tax funds, or in the sense of royal or other patronage from the public treasury. Also, the generally low social status of trade and tradesmen among the Greeks also virtually assures that Plato would not have undertaken the Academy as a commercial venture. However, speculations about this topic which date from medieval economists, are clearly recognizable to those familiar with modern financing practices in the commons. One possibility is that the Academy was financed through student fees, after the manner of medieval European universities in Paris, Prague, Warsaw and elsewhere. Support for this position is mostly circumstantial; for instance, Socrates inconsistent denial in Plato's *Apology* that he had ever been a teacher of students or charged fees for his teaching. Matson believes Plato did not accept fees--but that students did contribute to the common expense (Matson, 1968, 160). Such cost-sharing methods are well known among contemporary nonprofit organizations (Lohmann, 2016).

If the Academy was financed by student fees, some recognizable decision problems must certainly have resulted, for many of the students at the Academy were from outside the polis of Athens itself, and some of the students are thought to have come from families of modest means. Thus, if expenses were shared, how often were payments made, and were they prospective or retrospective in nature? Likewise, if fees were charged, such issues as tuition differentials (perhaps in-polis and non-citizen rates) and sliding scale fees may have been familiar to the Academy, as they certainly were to the denizens of the University of Paris in the 12th century.

Another possibility which must be considered is that the Academy was financed by a patron. Ryle notes that while Plato's will indicates that he was financially secure, he was hardly rich. Ryle dismisses as unlikely, however, the historic belief that Plato was the recipient of a fortune of 80 Talents from some unknown benefactor. Thus, if there was a patron behind the Academy, he remains truly anonymous to history.

Another set of issues would have revolved around the day-to-day management of the affairs of the Academy. At least two possibilities arise: One is that Plato actually managed the Academy himself, and the other is that a steward, perhaps a slave, was designated for the purpose. Given the probable origins of the Academy out of Plato's personal household, it is highly likely that he used a steward, since operation of the Academy would have been viewed as more like that of a contemporary household than any

type of contemporary Grecian commercial activity. Indeed, it is important to remember that until the 18th Century, the term 'economics' meant the science of household management. Perhaps we have a more modern analogue: Thomas Jefferson's management of Monticello in the 18th century, with its diverse agricultural, scientific, architectural and philosophical projects perhaps offers some possible insight into the daily mode of operations at the Academy. (Malone, 2005)

The extent to which Plato actually concerned himself with the day-to-day operations of the Academy, keeping the treasury, paying the bills, accepting pupils, etc. is a set of details completely lost to history. It is known, however, that no Greek equivalent of modern double-entry bookkeeping existed (Finley, 1974, 19).

The 'institutionalization' of the Academy, and its evolution out of Plato's personal household (as evidenced by its absence from his will) point to the emergence as long as 2300 years ago of a distinctive organization of a commons representing the collective interests of a group (the philosophical school) with a common purpose (*theoria*), requiring an endowment for its fulfillment.

Although we know little about the management and decision-making patterns of the Academy, it certainly offers a sound example of a successful commons. Incredible as it may seem to the modern reader accustomed to thinking (if at all) of the Academy as a kind of ad hoc social circle gathered in the open spaces around a single charismatic leader, the Academy as a recognizable philosophical school had an unbroken institutional life span of 915 years! (Matson, 86)

## Aristotle's Lyceum

Despite its longevity, Plato's Academy was only one (albeit a key) link in a larger regional network of similar institutions usually referred to as the philosophical schools. We have already noted the legacy of the sophists and Socrates as antecedents. Following Plato's example, several (and possibly dozens) of similar institutions arose in and around Athens. One of the most interesting and important of these was the Lyceum founded by Aristotle.

Aristotle was the son of the court physician at Macedon. He is thought to have entered Plato's Academy at about the age of 17 and remained there for 20 years until after Plato's death in 347 BC. Following a few years absence, which apparently included various philosophical, biological and zoological research activities he undertook supervising the education of Alexander the Great for three years, and about 335 BC returned to Athens to open his own philosophical school, which he called the Lyceum. Like the Academy, it was probably located outside Athens, a short distance northeast of the city. (Kerferd, 151-2)

Matson reports the long-standing rumor that Aristotle left Athens upon the death of Plato after not being named to head the Academy and opened the Lyceum after being passed over a second time upon the death of Speusippus. (Matson, 1968, 115) Whether or not this is historically accurate matters little here. The rumor certainly has a ring of authenticity (as well as gossip!) about it, as anyone familiar with programmatic struggles and leadership succession issues in contemporary associations and nonprofit organizations can attest.

The curriculum of the Lyceum was decidedly Aristotelian with a strong emphasis on natural science, particularly biology, and history. According to Matson (115), the Lyceum contained an extensive library and collection of plant and animal specimens. It also may have been the base of operations for a large research network of biological researchers. Finley (1974) adds that at one time, Aristotle is reputed to have had a network of at least 1,000 researchers in the field gathering data throughout the Mediterranean region.

If we know little about the daily operations of the Academy, we know even less about the Lyceum. It is likely, however, that it too was a commons, rather than a state-run or commercial venture. Whether Aristotle bought or rented the gymnasium and grounds in which the school was housed is uncertain. Like Plato, he probably was more interested in philosophy and conducting scientific studies than in getting rich. Matson suggests that his former pupil Alexander put up a great deal of money to enable Aristotle to open the Lyceum--making it an endowed institution.

Likewise, whether or not students paid fees at the Lyceum is not known. The Lyceum itself is less important for its differences with the Academy and other Greek philosophical schools than it is for the emphasis placed by Aristotle's moral and political teachings on 'politics' as the branch of practical knowledge which deals with men in groups--a body of knowledge which can be reflexively turned back upon an understanding of the Lyceum, the Academy and the other schools. The Lyceum may have been the first School of Public Administration. Support for this idea grows by comparing the Lyceum with comparable developments in Confucian China.

Aristotle's Lyceum like Plato's Academy raises a question of critical importance for nonprofit praxeology: Aristotle himself came from a wealthy family. In addition, his educational efforts with Alexander appear to have been well received by the boy's father, Philip, King of Macedon, and the likelihood is good that Aristotle was well-rewarded for his efforts by both father and son. It is also very possible, therefore, that Aristotle (perhaps like Plato) may have become independently wealthy in this way and financed the Lyceum directly from his personal wealth.

If so, what motives would account for this as a rational act on his part? Certainly, we must accord Aristotle, the founder of the science of logic, giving him a unique status as a rational man. Why, then, would this very paragon of rationality choose to spend his wealth on philosophy rather than other clearly identifiable options: he might have purchased vineyards, built houses, commissioned fishing ships, equipped ships or armies.

Aristotle himself offers us part of the answer to this question in his discussion of the ways of life open to a free man. He notes three in particular: *theoria*, the life of contemplation; *praxis*, the life of action; and hedonism, the life of pleasure-seeking. Freedom has a praxeological as well as a political connotation: Hannah Arendt phrases this as being "free from necessity and fear". (Arendt, 1950)

## The Garden, The Painted Porch, etc.

All in all, it would be a serious mistake to see Plato's Academy as an anomaly or Aristotle's Lyceum as merely the copy of a disgruntled protege passed over for promotion. Other types of commons, not only philosophical schools, but a broad range of scientific, cultural, religious institutions, ceremonies, festivals and many others were a part of daily life of Athens. Although in some cases, the patron was the state, the philosophical schools that sprang up in ancient Greece were apparently not unique in being independent associations. Indeed, the principal question is whether responsibility for patronage of the schools was individual, after the manner of the *liturgy* or collective, as in the *hermandados* and medieval monasteries.

Taken together, the Greek philosophical schools constitute a well-known and familiar phenomenon: local concentration of an industry. In the fourth century BC, we might say, the philosophy industry was heavily concentrated in Athens. In addition to the Schools of Plato and Aristotle, and the already mentioned school of Anaxagoras, there were numerous others. Epicurus and his followers founded a residential community called The Garden in 307-306 BC for disseminating their philosophy.

Like the Lyceum, another school, called the Stoa was founded in another building in Athens called the Painted Porch about 300 BC by Zeno of Citium. Zeno was acting in conscious opposition to the Epicurean Garden. (Matson, 160) In a similar vein, the former slave Epictetus is reported to have gathered around him in Epirus, his place of exile, a large and thriving school for the teaching of the logic, physics and ethics of Stoicism around 90 C.E.. (Hallie, 1) And there were others as well.

In certain respects, the Garden may have been a marked contrast to the theoretical character of the schools of Plato and Aristotle. In modern terms, it may have been less a school than a commune, largely because of the 'anti-

academic' quality of epicurean philosophy. To some extent, accounts of the Garden remind one of "hippy" communes of the 1960's. Life in the Garden was almost certainly not one of *theoria* and science, but one of quiet contemplation and enjoyment after the manner of epicurean teachings. According to DeLacy, the epicurean movement spread as The Garden became the prototype of other epicurean groups, where women and even slaves and courtesans were accepted into friendship. (p. 3) This also is in marked contrast to the practices of the Academy and the Lyceum, which appear to have been all-male preserves.

Epicurean philosophy, with its preference for practical wisdom (*phronesis*) over philosophy (*theoria*), and its explicit rejections of education, geometry (as contrary to experience), rhetoric (as an abuse of language), and strivings after the 'life which escapes men's notice', the suppression of desires that go beyond natural needs, the cultivation of friendship, the enjoyment of carefree pleasures and religious festivals emphasizing the complete tranquility of the gods contains both strange and familiar elements for us.

The manner in which Epicureans attempted to live their philosophy may, in some respects, be easier for us to understand than efforts by the residents of the Academy or the Lyceum to live the life of *theoria*. The Garden, however, forges an important link between other philosophic schools--arising as they did out of the households--and later associations, including the collectivism of later monastic communities, and the communal and 'communitistic' economics of later communities. (Indeed, until the 20th century theoretical 'discovery' of the firm-like status of the household and the association by economists of the neo-classical school, this point never appears to have occurred to anyone, although the relationship with households is a recurrent theme in Western civilization.)

Surely, while the Academy and the Lyceum were transitional events in the evolution of the association out of the household, the Garden, with its emphasis on practicing Epicureanism, constitutes the full-scale emergence of a community self-consciously devoted to practicing what it teaches--truly a momentous event in the history of associations.

Another important off-shoot of the Athenian philosophical movement of great importance to the rise of modern science centuries later was diffusion of the concepts of science and philosophy: Ancient libraries and scriptoria at Alexandria, Toledo, and other sites collected and duplicated an astounding wealth of knowledge and information and kept it alive for hundreds of years. Under the Ptolemies, Greek rulers installed by Alexander, the Greek city of Alexandria in Egypt became headquarters of what we might today call a private university -- a scientific and philosophical complex centered on the famous Library of Alexandria. (Forster, 1961) In this setting, important ancient discoveries regarding Euclidean geometry, solar and astronomic

calculations, and detailed knowledge of animal and plant taxonomies were preserved and passed on. Later, monastic libraries and scriptoria in Cordoba, Celtic Christian Ireland and elsewhere forged the essential links between the knowledge of the ancient and modern worlds. The modern world would know nothing of Greek philosophy, science, medicine, drama or poetry without these links. Each was, in all probability, an endowed institutions with one or more wealthy patrons and a class of attendants and functionaries devoted to its operations in a manner not inconsistent with modern nonprofit research libraries and laboratories.

In each of these cases, public recognition and affirmation of patrons must have been an important consideration of some importance. The previously discussed ethics of *liturgy* would suggest as much, as would the frequency with which patrons were memorialized on stelae. Meritt, Wade-Gery, and McGregor (1939) collected a four-volume catalog of English translations of the inscriptions on all of the various Athenian tribute stelae which had been located to that point.

In sum, we find in ancient Greece a complex variety of commons: festivals, temples, *liturgia* and *paideia*, amphitheaters, spectacles, hospitals, oracles, games, *stadia*, the *polis* association itself, *symposia*, *phratries*, *sysstitia*, *gennetai*, *gymnasia*, academies, lyceums and libraries. In addition, the legacy of Greek commons also includes a bi-level ethic of obligation and recognition based upon an original legal principle of autonomy: 'If a deme or *phrateres* or worshippers of heroes or *gennetai*, or drinking groups or funerary clubs or religious guilds or pirates or traders make rules amongst themselves, these shall be valid unless they are in conflict with public law.' (Murray, 209)

## The Hellenistic Age

The Hellenistic Age generally refers to the period after the classic age of Athenian Greece, and to the process of Greek culture and cities disseminating throughout the Mediterranean region. An important element in this diffusion was the continuing norm of aristocratic responsibility for patronage of at least some Greek commons. Most Hellenistic cities, for example, had temples and amphitheaters which housed subsidized productions of Greek drama. Further, the Hellenistic period was "the golden age of Greek science..." (Barnes, 381) Among the sciences, astronomy and medicine were particularly strong. (Barnes, 383) It seems reasonable to assume that as Greek arts and sciences were disseminated, the practices of support for them (*liturgia* and *paideia* ) were disseminated with them.

"We know most about (Hellenistic) patronage in Alexandria, where the Ptolemies' record was important but limited: the literature they patronized did not produce major talents in history and philosophy. They had an

alphabetical list of pensions, a museum and two libraries. They had a serious need for a royal tutor to teach the little princes and a royal librarian to preside over the growing arsenals of books. Long-term patronage was for useful industry: tutoring, science, the library and textual scholarship.” (Price, 349)

## Library at Alexandria

Some of the most distinctive commons in the ancient world were the libraries which arose in various centers of learning of Greece and the Hellenic cities. The Greeks were not the inventors of libraries. The first libraries in Egypt had developed by 2000 BCE. Before 1000 BCE, the library in the Hittite capital had tablets in eight languages, and before 600 BCE, the library at Nineveh contained poetry, educational texts and grammars. Nor did the Ancient Mediterranean have any monopoly on libraries. The Chinese... History records also that in one savage month in 15XX, the Spanish conquistadores may have destroyed Aztec libraries containing millions of volumes. (XXXX)

Presumably, both the Academy of Plato and the Lyceum of Aristotle had their own libraries, although it is doubtful that the Garden of Epicurus contained a library for the reasons cited above. Archeological excavations at Herculanaeum (Pompei) also unearthed evidence of a large library there.

No library in the ancient world, however, is better known or more awe-inspiring than that which developed when Alexandria was made capital of an Egypt conquered by Alexander in 332 BC. The Library of Alexandria was part of The Museum, founded during the reign of Ptolemy I, who had been one of Alexander's commanders. It was essentially a 'research and graduate teaching institute' which formed part of the Royal Palaces of Alexandria, and the Library, in turn, formed part of the Museum. The term museum originally referred to the corporation dedicated to the cult of the Muses. (Matson, 154) Also in the museum were a public walk, an exedra with seats, and a large house with a common room for the fraternity of scholars who were fellows of the Museum, and a zoological garden with many species of African and Asian flora and fauna.

This brotherhood of scholars was the corporate holder of the Museum property and was headed by a priest appointed directly by the ruler. This community of scholars was maintained by the king and enjoyed an exemption from taxes. Because it was funded directly from the Royal Treasury, the Museum had greater resources available to it than any of the Athenian philosophical schools. In return, it was expressly forbidden to teach or engage in political science research. (Matson, 155)

The original faculty at the Museum of Alexandria were mostly graduates of the Lyceum in Athens. (Matson, 115)

The objectives of the library were to assemble in one collection all works of Greek thought in correct texts, and to make available in Greek translation major works in foreign languages. Anyone familiar with the laborious processes of translation and hermeneutics involved in that mission could not mistake such a library for a business firm.

Among the lasting achievements of the Library are Euclid's geometry; Greek translation of the Old Testament (although it is unclear whether this work was actually done at the library or in the Greek-speaking Jewish communities of Alexandria, according to Preaux, p.114); various histories of Egypt, numerous detailed human anatomy studies and the famous pre-Copernican Ptolemaic map of a flat earth circumscribed by a revolving sun. The world map was based in part upon African and Asian explorations which gathered the animals and plants for the zoo. Also developed there were the pipe organ and the steam turbine. (Matson, 155)

The larger praxeological significance of the Museum at Alexandria was also quite profound:

The library attracted so many visiting scholars that feeding and housing them became an important Alexandrian industry. Copying services were provided so that the library was in effect a publishing house as well. In this way the diffusion of learning was greatly aided. Nevertheless, it remains a tragic puzzle why printing was not invented at this time. There is nothing in the printing process that should have been beyond Alexandrian ingenuity. Probably the scarcity of paper, made by a laborious method in small sheets, was the factor that made printing infeasible. (Matson, 155)

Although the achievements of the Museum of Alexandria are unprecedented, history records other great library collections. The caliph al-Hakam II, for example, is reputed to have gathered a library of 400,000 volumes of theology, medicine, arithmetic, logic, astronomy, lexicography, grammar, poetry, history, jurisprudence, and other Andalusian sciences in 10th Century Muslim Cordoba. (Arberry, 175-6) Regrettably, his successor, Hisham II began his reign with a public burning of all the books dealing with the ancient sciences of the Greeks, and there followed a climate of repression and gradual extinction of scholarship and learning.

Price summarizes the character of Ptolemaic patronage:

“All the (Hellenistic) courts had libraries, even on the Black Sea, but Alexandria's are the most famous. Followers of Aristotle had settled in that city with memories of their master's learned society and great collection of books. Probably they suggested the idea of a royal museum and library to the first Ptolemy. The royal library was

probably attached to the colonnades and common room of the museum and served more as a vast arsenal of books than as a separate set of reading rooms. Nearly half a million book-rolls are alleged to have been stored inside, while another 42,000 are said to have lived in a second library attached to the temple of Serapis. Texts became hot royal property. When ships landed in Alexandria they were searched for books. Any found on board had to be surrendered for royal copying in scrolls stamped with the words 'from the ships'. The 'borrowing' of the master-scrolls of the great tragedians from the Athenians was one of the sharpest coups of Ptolemaic diplomacy. Pirating, in our modern sense, was a Hellenistic invention. As demand was insatiable, supply rose to meet it, aided by plausible forgery. ...

"Why did the kings bother? As the Aristotelians had no doubt explained to a willing Ptolemy I, libraries and scholarly studies kept a king abreast of man's understanding of the world. The Ptolemies had had good tutors and they did not lose interest in learning....Royal extravagance inflated these tastes, and when others entered the race, book collecting became a mad competition...." (Price, 341)

Hellenistic cities also developed a distinctive variation on the *gymnasium* in which sports training was combined with libraries and lectures. (Price, 343) Another form of Hellenistic association which were a variant on the *symposia* were societies in which members would dine and patronize recitals (perhaps a kind of early dinner theatre). It is possible that other Hellenistic cities may also have developed additional common innovations in this period.

Ancient Greek culture and the Hellenistic period in particular also saw development and refinement of another form of association familiar to modern readers: Military federations or leagues of cities were a common feature known to the Greeks and used for common defense. It was from such a league, for example, that Pericles purloined the funds used for the Athenian Acropolis. Another multicity association known as the *Delphic amphictyony* long served as an international panel which controlled the affairs of the shrine of Apollo, home of the famous oracle of Delphi, with its power to declare 'sacred wars' (Hornblower, 1986, 129). Such leagues took on renewed importance with the decline of Athens as the single most powerful center of Greek culture.

The ancient Greeks appear to have had a broad and subtle grasp of the potentials and possibilities of commons and common goods and applied their knowledge to a broad variety of situations. Ancient Greece also represents an important historic point of evolution from the prehistoric commons to the modern association. An important, but largely unanswered question, is whether the Homeric Greeks developed the basis of Greek commons on their own or learned them from other earlier cultures.



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