This monumental work stands apart from anything else written in any language. It amounts to nothing less than a sociology of the Greek city. I use 'city' advisedly since, despite leading with the term 'village community', S. is interested in all forms of community relationship. Indeed his major interest is in how community relations changed over time as the city developed.

Between Introduction and Conclusion, whose titles 'Between oikos and polis' and 'The control of social control' indicate clearly the trajectory and interests of the argument, there are four substantial chapters. The first is concerned with neighbourhoods and village life in the eighth and seventh century. The second largely concerns early Greek law. The third concerns customs of censure and shaming. The fourth concerns the breakdown of the traditional order in the fifth and fourth centuries.

That it is possible to write a book of this size on neighbourhood and local community in archaic and classical Greece will surprise many Greek historians. S. admits that the material is lacking for a systematic study, and that conducting the enquiry by using actors’ categories (e.g. by doing a word search for geiton) would not yield the material which he goes on to discuss. What enables S. to produce this monumental study is his decision to work with modern rather than ancient categories, a decision backed up by a strong belief in universal sociological patterns. Neighbourhood matters in country more than town, among the poor more than among the rich; neighbourly solidarity and intolerance against deviants go together. And so on. The assumption of such patterns is not fashionable, and it is notable that so much of his wide-ranging bibliography stems from work done in the sixties and seventies.

Important roles are played, for instance, by G. M. Foster’s classic paper on 'Peasant Society and the Image of the Limited Good', first published in 'American Anthropologist' for 1965, and S. F. Silverman’s ‘Amoral familism reconsidered’ published in the same journal three years later. Among anthropologists of Greece it is John Campbell’s ‘Honour, Family and Patronage’ of 1964 and Ernestine Friedl’s ‘Vasilika’ that get used. Michael Herzfeld’s work in Greece, by comparison, receives no mention. Similarly when it comes to using parallels from the medieval and early modern world, Natalie Zemon Davis’ 'Past & Present’ paper of 1971 and E. P. Thompson’s ‘Anamal es’ paper of 1972 are among the guides to the charivari. Most notably of all, the concerns of this book map remarkably closely onto those which feature prominently in the studies of Bavarian society by Karl-Sigismund Kramer published from the 1950s onwards – neighbourhoods, peasant communities, the charivari and other forms of public shaming.

It is inevitable, of course, that when we plunder work in cognate disciplines, and particularly work in other than our native language, we plunder what has been done rather than what is being done, but the predilection for the questions current in the 1970s, and scant engagement with what sociologists and anthropologists have been doing more recently, is nevertheless surprising. For those of us ourselves brought up in the social thought of the seventies decade this is a very comfortable book.

The sense that this is not a book concerned to be in touch with current thought is reinforced by the way in which S. handles recent scholarship in Greek
history. On some particular questions, particularly questions of law, he is both well informed and engaged with debates, but he prefers not to engage with recent scholarship on more general issues.

Despite his interest in the policing function of neighbours he makes no reference to Virginia Hunter’s ‘Policing Athens’ (Princeton, 1994). Despite his interest in demes, he makes no reference to the work of N. F. Jones (The Associations of Classical Athens, Oxford, 1999). Despite his interest in subsistence strategies he does not engage in the debate between Halstead, Hodkinson, and Garnsey, whom he does mention, and Sallares (The Ecology of the Ancient Greek World, London, 1991) and Isager and Skydsgaard (Ancient Greek Agriculture, London, 1992), whom he does not. His interest in the symposium only extends to work done in the early 80s, and he has not registered the work of Davidson (Courtesans and Fishcakes, London, 1997). His interest in sexual ethics leads him to discuss homosexuality with reference to Dover, but not to Foucault or Winkler. And so on.

This is clearly not a matter of ignorance but of studied refusal to engage with others’ questions. The impact of this book would have been greater had the author indicated where his claims touch on current orthodoxies, rather than leaving it to readers to work that out for themselves.

Although the issues about which S. is concerned are not generated from the reading of ancient texts, his method of dealing with these issues is primarily philological. This is a book about changing social relations as seen in texts. Thus the two halves of the second chapter ‘The world of the peasant farmer’ and ‘The world of the nobility’ are both explicitly subtitled with reference to literary texts (Hesiod and archaic lyric for the first, Homeric epic for the second). So too the literary bias is revealed in the way issues of law and of enforcement of norms of behaviour by shaming bulk so very large in the book as a whole (260 pages between them).

The negative side of this bias to texts is that S. has minimal concern for the material remains of communities. He notes, but does not engage with, the archaeological evidence behind the debate about whether the Attic settlement pattern was dominated by villages or isolated farms; otherwise he limits his interest in the archaeology of the Greek countryside to the Boiotia survey directly relevant to Hesiod. Nor is S. concerned with demographics, either in terms of absolute size or structure of population. His is a Greece in which change does indeed occur, as communities become incorporated into larger economic groups and hence relations between households alter, but politics and state demands, such as army service, on the one hand, and monumental building (of temples or forts), on the other, impinge rather little. Brief consideration of the archaeology of rural sanctuaries or rural cemeteries, or of the development of mining and quarrying, would reveal a significantly more complicated history to the countryside than S. is prepared to countenance. As with much rural sociology, as S. himself recognizes (13), there is an elegiac tone to much of the discussion. When the form of neighbourhood found in Hesiod is described as ‘purest’ there is only one way to go.

The positive side to S.’s methodology is his wonderful control of the whole body of archaic and classical Greek literature (inscriptions are plundered rather less readily). We might expect to find plenty of classical oratory and use of Aristotle and Aristophanes, as well as thorough exploitation of archaic poetry, but
in addition we find S. employing the tragedians, and above all Euripides, to excellent effect. Not all readers will share on all occasions S.’s confidence that later authors had good basis for what they attributed to the past, but few major observations rest on such claims.

The questions which S. wants to ask are well set out at various points in the book (cf. 149 for what is at issue in ch.3). His general concerns are set out on 16–17: how is neighbourhood structured (dyadically or polyadically)? How does neighbourhood relate to differently structured groups (by sex, age, etc.) or to friendship? What use are neighbours? What was the mediating role of neighbourhood between household and state, and did this change with developing political institutions? How did neighbourhood function to enforce norms and how did such norms relate to legal requirements? The main answers which he wishes to proffer at the end of his study are clearly signalled in the conclusion (though without reference back to the body of his text). The intensity of neighbourly relations relates directly to how precarious subsistence is, and as a result the development of the market and of economic diversification weakened neighbourly dependence, opening the way to the more affective relations between neighbours suppressed by those who considered that they might need their neighbour. There is a preference for relating on an equal footing with several neighbours (‘polyadic relations’) rather than forming a single close dyadic bond. The nature of neighbourly relations also depends upon the social structure of the settlement, and again the development of a more diversified classical economy leads to weaker neighbourly ties. Neighbourhoods are tighter when the settlement is cut off, and the effect of the integration of small communities into a larger society can be seen in the cross-deme links developed in marriage in classical Attika. Similarly neighbourly relations relate to settlement form: where farms are isolated and independent neighbourly relations are weaker than in hamlets and villages. (S. allows himself a fascinating digression into the world of the Roman agronomists to point out the greater role of neighbours as a resource in Cato than in Varro or Columella). Close neighbourly relations depend also on behaviour that conforms to norms that are often reflected in archaic law. The need to know that the neighbour who needs help needs it not simply because of his own idleness is to be seen behind Solon’s law on idleness (nomos argias). Laws against celibacy (which brings dependence on those outside the family) are to be seen in similar terms. Status relates directly to the ability to pull one’s weight as a farmer, and the man who hands over his farm to his son hands over also his authority among neighbours. In classical Athens authority ceases to be so closely tied to property since rhetorical and other abilities become relevant. Similarly, classical diversification means that women’s status changes: children cease to be so vital and concubines cease to be a respectable source of legitimate heirs. But women also become the prime neighbours, as men’s social world enlarges. At the same time, however, replacement of free servants serving for a limited period by long-term slaves, who have no link to any other family, causes households to become more independent. All these changes result in the end of the neighbourhood as the prime moral community, and policing by shaming is replaced by policing by the law-court. The world of the village community, where practically everything is public, becomes a world in which public and the private are clearly separated.
If S.’s conclusions repeatedly focus on what changes between the archaic and classical period, he also has important things to say about differences between classes. He insists that the society of the peasant and the society of the nobility were distinct throughout the archaic period (with a diagram on 144). The nobility did not need neighbours as a defence against risk and could be more independent or seek society of their own kind who were not immediately local. They did not have the same pressure on every individual’s labour and so they, as also for opposite reasons the sub-peasant class, had less distinct gender roles. It was thus peasants whose need of each other forged an ordered society that became the basis of the polis, and it is the rules of that peasant society that are to be seen behind the legal codes of the archaic lawgivers, who are seeking to control existing social control not by the nobility but among neighbourhoods of farmers.

As the above summary of S.’s conclusions makes clear, there are few areas of Greek social, political, or economic history about which this book does not challenge us to review and revise our views. He unveils a whole new background against which to see the economic development of the Greek world. The whole question of how the classical period differed from the archaic period is reopened, and current views of both periods are found significantly wanting. Against both those who think that the motor behind change in archaic Greece was the hoplite and those who think it was the aristocracy, he insists on the centrality of the peasant world to the story of legal and political change. He offers new grounds for distinguishing ‘classes’, and develops further than others have done the awareness of the ways in which social and economic conditions impinged upon the lives of women. As I have suggested above, it is not hard to find relevant bodies of evidence which S. simply leaves out of the picture, but his achievement is to show how the very evidence which Greek historians have long used will, when examined with the questions derived from sociology and anthropology in mind, yield a coherent picture which is more sophisticated and persuasive than has been created by approaching these texts armed simply with common sense. It is a pleasure to hail so original a contribution.

King’s College Cambridge

Robin Osborne


A monograph which focuses on Darius III, the last king of the Achaemenid dynasty, appears at first glance as a perhaps surprising, but challenging, undertaking. After all, information which can be gained about him predominantly from the Greek and Roman secondary sources is notoriously problematic. The immediate question one then asks is whether the subject merits an entire monograph. As Briant reminds us, he had already voiced his intention to undertake this study in 1996 (cf. p. 12), explaining that no book has ever been dedicated to Darius (p. 13). Yet the present study is not intended as a biography of the last Achaemenid king. As we learn in Chapter 2, entitled ‘The Impossible Biography’, the objective of the book is not to restore the image of Darius III, but to understand why and how his image has been constructed over the centuries (p. 129).