



MOSES FINLEY

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Moses Finley 1912–1986

THE DEATH OF MOSES FINLEY on 23 June 1986 was as unusual as the life that preceded it. In effect he died on the same day as his much-loved wife, Mary, who had been the close companion of his entire academic career, from the days when both were graduate students studying ancient history at Columbia University. There was something moving and symbolic about the fact that a few hours after the ambulance had taken Mary from the house, he himself suffered a massive heart attack and, although pronounced dead only the following day, never regained consciousness. News of his death was followed by a flood of telephone calls and letters from eminent scholars around the world, each of whom registered a sense of deep, personal loss. Although he could be fierce with his enemies, friendship and loyalty to his students and colleagues were two of his most attractive attributes.

It is the richness of Moses Finley's personal experiences and what Arnaldo Momigliano termed his 'formidable intellectual heritage' which in retrospect continue to astonish. The Finklesteins had origins deeply rooted in Jewish history, including ancestors (on his mother's side) among the Katzenellenbogens, one of the grand central European and Italian rabbinic families since the sixteenth century, which produced the great Maharal of Prague, creator of a *golem*. His early education at Central High School, Syracuse NY, was intended as a preparation for training as a rabbi at the Jewish Theological Seminary. His younger brother tells how at his bar mitzvah, instead of the conventional platitudes of thanks to his family, he delivered a learned

historical study of the ceremony. Quite when or why Moses changed course is unclear, and it was no doubt a slow process, but it culminated in the alteration of the family name to Finley some time after he had reached the age of 29.

Momigliano, a fellow Jew and the oldest of his European friends, who had known him since 1934, said that he had rarely heard Finley talk of his Jewish background. The violence of the renunciation, he believed, explains his blind spot in ignoring the importance of Jewish attitudes to slavery. My own experience, although later and briefer, is that, despite personal encounters with anti-Semitism when he first arrived in Cambridge, Moses spoke and wrote freely of Judaism—but more as a humanist with ironic detachment. Surveying Christian historiography in the *New York Review of Books*, for instance, he ridiculed pious attempts to eliminate collective Jewish wickedness from Western culture: ‘Are we to undertake a great campaign . . . ,’ he asks, ‘beginning with Bach’s *Passion According to St John*, the words and music together? The dead past never buries its dead. The world will have to be changed, not the past.’ Discussions of the history of Jewish resistance did not bring out any passion for Jewish nationalism; rather his dislike of ‘religious exclusiveness and alienness, in a world which otherwise found room for all varieties of cult and belief.’

The French word ‘formation’ is a better description of the extraordinarily varied influences at work on the young Finley in the next decade, since much of it came from beyond formal education. Instead of the Jewish Seminary, he went to Syracuse University, where at the precocious age of fifteen, he graduated *magna cum laude* (Phi Beta Kappa) in psychology (major), French and English (minors). From there he went to Columbia to take an MA two years later in public law, which included a dissertation entitled, ‘Justice Harlan on personal Rights with special reference to due Process of Law’. During this period he met Mary Moscowitz, his future wife, who was awarded her MA in the same year, having qualified in both Latin and Greek, after which she continued as a fellow at Columbia and abroad until 1932. Moses meanwhile left Columbia to work as a clerk in a legal department of a large corporation, but after six months he declared, ‘I had had enough’, and he found a post for the next three years as a ‘fact-checker’ on the editorial staff of the *Encyclopedia for Social Sciences*. The experience this gave him in a wide range of current thinking in social sciences was to serve him well, although he claimed its main benefit was insight into the fallibility of the good and the great.

While checking facts for the Encyclopedia, he returned to Columbia to work for A. A. Schiller as research assistant, mainly, as he said, 'on history and theory of public opinion', while concurrently enrolling for a doctorate in ancient history under W. L. Westermann, who was then writing his great study of ancient slave systems for Pauly-Wissowa. In 1934–5 he became a research fellow, which he combined with part-time teaching duties at the City College of New York, a post he held until 1942. In 1937 he joined the Institute for Social Research, formerly the Institut für Sozialforschung of Frankfurt, which, under threat from the rising tide of Nazism in the Weimar Republic, had removed itself with its director, Max Horkheimer, to quarters generously provided by Columbia. For two years Finley worked as an editor, translator and reviewer of books on philosophy, criminology, sociology, law, and ancient history, acquiring an awesome range of professional skills as well as a close working acquaintance with many of the Jewish radicals who were to influence the next generation of Americans—what has been described as 'the only interdisciplinary aggregation of scholars, working on different problems from a common theoretical base, to coalesce in modern times'.

One can only guess at how precisely each of these experiences affected Finley. He himself claimed that two major influences of his academic formation in this period came from fellow students—Wesley Mitchell, who opened his eyes to economic politics, and Ben Nelson, a sociologist who also worked with him in the Institute and introduced him to the works of Weber. This is not to diminish, however, the value of Schiller's knowledge of ancient law and Egypt or Westermann's interest in slavery, both of which exhibited themselves in the later Finley repertoire. From the galaxy of stars in the Institute he clearly acquired his Marxism (or 'Critical Theory', as it was termed for sensitive American ears). But theirs was the liberal Marxist dialogue of the *Gründrisse* against the deadening effect of Stalinist orthodoxy, the history of consciousness above historical materialism, which were the themes embraced by the Frankfurt group and which Finley found in later years earned him as much abuse from traditional Marxists as from the conservative Right.

Perhaps the most important lessons he absorbed from the Institute were a preference for brief critiques over large, definitive books, the importance of debate through dialogue and provocative argument, and above all the importance of studying ancient history not as a series of isolated, specialist monographs but as subjects related to an overarching

political economy. Although in these pre-war years he was beginning slowly to make his mark as an ancient historian under Westermann's influence through a few cautious articles, the bent of his mind is more evident in the reviews he produced for the house journal of the Institute. 'The study of ancient history', he said in a review of Victor Ehrenberg's *Ost und West*, 'has reached an impasse. Unless the basic postulates are shifted, no real advance is possible. Most historians, seeming unaware of this dilemma, continue to flounder in positivistic analysis and the eternal reiteration of the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome.' He quoted with approval Farrington's words (later repeated in *Greek Science*), 'The struggle between science and obscurantism is a political one', and insisted that ancient science could only be discussed by reference to the slave economy.

The war years are something of a blank in Finley's career. Although he apparently continued to retain the fellowship in history at Columbia, his attention was diverted to what he called 'war relief agencies'. But in 1948 he was appointed to his first university teaching post at Newark College, Rutgers University. In retrospect it seems that this year was a turning point in his academic career. His decision to return to his Ph.D. studies resulted in the book *Land and Credit in Ancient Athens*, completed in 1951 (published 1952), a study of Athenian boundary stones (*horoi*) on hypothecated land and in many ways the kind of specialist monograph which Finley had criticised, although some scholars still think it to be his finest work. In it he challenged the prevailing notion of a large underclass of indebted Athenian poor in the fourth century and he was able to cast important light on the functioning of the law and credit institutions.

At the same time he found his teaching at Rutgers hampered by his intense dislike of the ancient history textbooks available for the large, non-specialist classes he was required to educate. It was this that led him to contact Pat Covici at the Viking Press, a man on intimate terms with many of the great American literati of the day, such as John Steinbeck, Saul Bellow, and Arthur Miller, who was to be a major influence in his life. In 1950, with Covici's encouragement he hatched an ambitious proposal to produce a 'Portable on Greek Civilization', containing selected texts that would reflect 'the gamut of thinking *and acting* [MIF's italics] on the broadest range of materials'. The portable was intended as the material for a history of Greek civilisation that would carry on 'to the end of the Roman Empire and include, among other things, the Greek impact on Judaism and Christianity'. Above all,

he underlined, this would not be just a textbook but a book 'written to be read'.

The final outcome was totally unexpected. It says much for the tolerance of Covici that after three years of correspondence and declarations of good intentions, Finley finally admitted that he had been unable to make progress beyond the first chapter on archaic Greece. Despite a mass of scholarly articles and books on Homer, he said, he could not find a single short work which gave 'a thorough, systematic and consistent picture of Homeric society'. Here for the first time was a need where he could provide in practice what he had complained of as lacking in ancient historical writing, a readable, brief account of an ancient society which entered into dialogue with modern scholarship beyond the confines of ancient history. His enthusiasm was fired and *The World of Odysseus* was born. 'The damned thing is in my blood,' he wrote to Covici. 'I even dream of paperbacks.' By 1954 the book was ready for publication.

Meanwhile, Finley was engaged in another interdisciplinary project at Columbia, where Karl Polanyi had taken up a visiting professorship from 1947 to 1953, inspiring a group of scholars to study the economic aspects of historical growth. The result was a collection of seminar papers edited by Polanyi and C. M. Arensberg, *Trade and Market in Early Empires* (1957). No one doubts the enormous admiration that Finley felt for Polanyi nor the profound influence of Polanyi's theory concerning the relationship between the economy and society, and his desire to liberate historians of early societies from ideas of production and exchange implanted by the industrial revolution. But the course of the relationship between the venerable Hungarian exile and the young American blood did not run entirely smoothly. Although Polanyi read *The World of Odysseus* in manuscript and Finley in turn read what was probably Polanyi's first draft of *The Livelihood of Man*, their correspondence betrays a tension and unwillingness on both sides to accept criticism. Finley, for instance, expressed himself 'flabbergasted' at Polanyi's dislike of the 'Greenwich village immaturity of tone' in *The World of Odysseus*, particularly in some of the passages on 'high-school sexuality'. Polanyi found some of the frank and trenchant remarks about his interpretation of Aristotle and the economy hard to take. Finley eventually refused to publish the text of his seminar contribution, 'Aristotle on exchange' in the proceedings and he later made public in a paper, 'Aristotle and economic analysis' published in *Past and Present* (1970), his dislike of Polanyi's non-market view of

classical Greek society. Twenty years later he wrote, 'I discovered that these studies [of Polanyi's seminar] . . . were more misleading than illuminating for my purposes. . . . The intrusion of genuine market (commercial) trade . . . into the Greek world . . . render(s) the primitive models all but useless' (*Anthropology and the Classics*, in *The Use and Abuse of History*, ch. 6).

The astonishing thing is that in the years 1951–4, during which Finley was conducting large and immensely popular lecture courses at Rutgers, he not only finished and published *Land and Credit*, delivered from scratch *The World of Odysseus*, wrote papers and numerous long letters connected with Polanyi's seminar, and was giving serious thought to a major study of Greek property institutions (for which he left two outlines, although it was never written), but he was at the same time under emotional pressure from the Senate Committee on Internal Security led by Senator McCarran (better known for its association with the name of Senator McCarthy). The committee was investigating the activities of the Institute for Pacific Relations (IPR), in the process of which Karl Wittfogel alleged that Finley had been running a Communist study group in his house in 1938–9, the period when he had been most closely associated with the Marxist-orientated Frankfurt Institute. No doubt he was also regarded with suspicion for his activities at Columbia when he had helped organise the Committee for the Defence of International Freedom, encouraged by senior academics such as Franz Boas.

The climax came with a summons in late 1952 to appear before a subcommittee, where, although denying activities with the IPR or running a Communist cell, he declined under privilege of the Fifth Amendment to answer allegations about his past membership of the Communist Party. His refusal was backed by a university review committee but rejected by the University Board of Trustees, who ruled that unwillingness to testify before a Senate committee was grounds for automatic dismissal. The ruling was voted upon and carried by a full assembly of the university. From 1953, therefore, Finley was unemployed.

Fortunately for him, his academic reputation was by now established. Momigliano in 1954 recognised him as 'the best living social historian of Greece' and offers of visiting lectureships in Britain resulted, partly through his friendship with Professor Tony Andrewes at Oxford. That in turn led to invitations to apply for posts at both Oxford and Cambridge, election to a lectureship at Cambridge in 1955

and a fellowship at Jesus College two years later. In 1962 he took British citizenship; in 1964 he was appointed Reader; and in 1970 he succeeded A. H. M. Jones to the sole Chair of Ancient History in the university. In 1971 he was elected a Fellow of the British Academy, followed in 1976 by his appointment as Master of Darwin College and a knighthood in 1979. Although he retired in that year from his chair, he continued as Master of Darwin until 1982, being responsible in his time for establishing the annual Darwin Lecture Series in 1977 and inspiring the important Darwin Centenary Conference on Evolution, whose proceedings were published in 1983. Both attracted wide audiences and eminent speakers from a variety of disciplines, thereby contributing to the growing reputation of the college as a centre for postgraduates.

Although Finley was writing extensively on a wide variety of subjects in the first decade of his period in Britain, it is fair to say that most communications were in the form of quite short articles and edited papers, many of them deriving from conferences and popular broadcasts which made his name widely known beyond the university classics faculty—*The Greek Historians* (1958), *Slavery in Classical Antiquity* (1960), *The Ancient Greeks* (1963), *Aspects of Antiquity* (1963). This is not to ignore the book on *The History of Sicily*, produced in 1968 in tandem with Denis Mack Smith, and *Early Greece. The Bronze and Archaic Age* (1970), which became another popular paperback. But his most influential works were yet to come and it is, perhaps, significant that it was the renewal of his American connections which stimulated the first of them. Nominated as Sather Professor of Classical Literature at the University of California, he also accepted an invitation to return to Rutgers University to deliver the Mason Gross Welch Lectures in what was officially described as a righting of a past wrong. This was his first, triumphant return to American soil after nearly twenty years. Both were duly published in 1973, the first as *The Ancient Economy* and the second as *Democracy Ancient and Modern*.

True to the precept he had learned in his early years, Finley presented these books as ‘dialectical discourses’—that is to say, provocative and radical challenges to received wisdom about the nature of the ancient market and the function of political élites. They were explicitly intended as dialogues between the ancient and modern world, a task for which he was by his training supremely well equipped and for which the lecture form provided an ideal vehicle. Three other books followed the same pattern in rapid succession. In 1978 an invitation by J.-P. Vernant to the Collège de France allowed him to return to the subject

of slavery in four lectures published under the title of *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (1980). In 1980 he delivered the Wiles Lectures in Belfast before a mixed audience of ancient and modern historians and political scientists, subsequently published as *Politics in the Ancient World* (1983). And in 1983 his retirement from full-time lecturing was honoured by an invitation to deliver the annual J. H. Gray Lectures in Cambridge, later published as *Ancient History. Evidence and Models* (1985), which summed up his historiographic creed.

Evidence and Models brought his published books (apart from collections of articles) to a round dozen and his works were translated into at least ten languages (including Catalan). Abroad he was fêted like a popstar in the popular media and in the quality Press like a visiting politician with full page interviews in *La Repubblica* and *Le Monde*. In Britain, although his reception was more restrained, the entry in *Who's Who* of the academic honours and positions showered upon him makes impressive reading. Outside the circle of classical faculties he had become probably the best-known living ancient historian either in Britain or abroad. It was he who insisted on and became convener of the ancient historical section in the International Economic History Conferences. In Cambridge University he played a dominant role in the History Faculty and became Chairman of the Social and Political Sciences Committee, giving to ancient history a respect it had lacked.

As with any complex personality, it is impossible to sum up the academic contribution of Finley in a few words. But it helps us to understand his achievement if we recall the state of ancient history in Britain in the 1950s and early 1960s. In an article, 'Unfreezing the Classics' in a *Times Literary Supplement* of 1966, he complained bitterly about the isolation of ancient history outside Britain, fixed as it was in the tradition of classical philology. Ancient historians never published in the *English Historical Review*. Weber's studies of Roman agriculture were practically unknown and no English translation existed. It was difficult, he said, to find what were the debates which excited ancient historians, who, instead of discussing the nature of the Athenian Empire, were writing 'sentimental piffle' which often revolved around the dates of stonecutters.

Momigliano, who had taken up the chair of Ancient History at University College London, chose the 'crisis' in Greek History as the

subject of his inaugural lecture in 1952 to voice the same disquiet. While public interest was turning more and more to social and economic history, ancient history was in intellectual bondage to German abstractions—causing ‘the divorce of the study of Greek political ideas from the study of politics’ (Finley’s words, reviewing Momigliano). No history existed of the Athenian empire, no history of Greek agriculture, only out-of-date studies of Greek trade, no history of Greek political theory after Aristotle nor of historiography after Thucydides. The wrong kind of history was occupying the energies of ancient historians. ‘Too much historical research’, said Momigliano, ‘was being done by people who do not know why they are doing it.’ Writing for the American Social Science Research Council in 1960, Finley summed up: ‘Ancient history is unique in western history in that its professional practitioners are by long tradition often men who are not in the first instance historians but . . . who call themselves classicists.’ The historian’s task was not merely to recover lost data but to understand—which was to generalise.

It is not hard, therefore, to see why Finley’s intellectual formation rebelled against this suffocating climate and turned much of his writing into a crusade. Nor is it difficult for even a first-year undergraduate to recognise how much had changed by the time he died. Here I pick out only three areas where his contribution to historiography seems clearest. They are all of a parcel and themes which he repeated throughout his life. First, his attitude to ‘facts’ and sources; secondly, his use of models; and thirdly, his devotion to total history.

One of the deadening effects of the philological background, he believed, had been that classicists rarely reflected upon historical problems outside those posed in the ancient texts, from which they had formed their basic assumptions in their school-days. Ever greater refinement of the Greek and Latin sources might improve the ‘superstructure’ of understanding but rarely led to re-examination of the ‘substructure’, which had to be stimulated from outside. Inevitably, therefore, he had a strong antipathy for Rankean scientific historicism and the notion that value-free facts and truth could be distilled from the sources. He was relentless against history that was mere ‘fact grubbing’ or ‘butterfly collections’, reserving a chapter of his final book for a savage denunciation of the whole concept of ‘How it really was’, which could never be more than illusory. ‘Accuracy and truth’, he declared, ‘are not synonymous.’ In this campaign against what he called ‘latter-day anti-quarianism’ he reserved his special ire for learned monographs of

city-histories, not because the aim was intrinsically wrong but because it was impossible to achieve with data that was not susceptible to analysis.

Finley's attitude closely mirrored the prevailing view of what came to be called the French *Annales* school. H.-I. Marrou, for instance, in 1954 was stressing that the initiative in historical research did not belong to the document but to the historian and that ever closer study of documents did not bring answers, since history was not a police enquiry. Yet it is probably a fair guess that when Finley came to Britain few modern and almost no ancient historians had even heard of the *Annales* school, despite some notable exceptions. Finley, by contrast, had already learnt one of the central tenets of the school, when he wrote *The World of Odysseus*, that a historian must generate his own data. The text of Homer did not yield up its secrets simply by closer study of the text nor by applying recent research in archaeology but by using the conclusions of modern anthropology and in particular those of Marcel Mauss. His book immediately attracted the attention in Paris of the rising scholar, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, and a lifelong friendship was forged which did much to bring Finley's work into the mainstream of scholarship in France far sooner than in Britain.

The same solutions were not, however, available for archaic Greek history, where he produced a much less satisfactory book than *The World of Odysseus*. Anthropology, he argued in this case, could not open doors to every society. But he also had an instinctive suspicion of oral tradition and the kind of Lévi-Straussian religious 'bricolage' or arguments from 'mentalité', techniques in ancient history most closely associated with the works of Vernant and Dumezil, which were (and still are) used to reconstruct an age where the written sources are so fragmentary. The reluctance may have derived from his close association, dating from his Institute days, with Herbert Marcuse and Walter Benjamin, who were then writing about political manipulation of ideology and creation of political myth. This, in Finley's opinion, was the central obstacle to writing a history of the archaic period in either Greek or Roman history—'the irrecoverable losses of data, or conflation of data, manipulation and invention'. His inaugural lecture in 1971, after election to the chair in Cambridge, was devoted to the same theme, a demonstration of how a political myth was created in Athens in the fifth century, analogous to what had happened in the America of Jefferson.

Ultimately, of course, this was a counsel of despair for many periods of antiquity where no contemporary sources existed, which Finley made no attempt to hide. It was not that he rejected the importance of ancient

sources; on the contrary, he asserted, they were the only means of selecting a valid historical problem. But all depended on the nature of the sources. The sources must contain what he described in an important programmatic essay, 'Myth, Memory and History' (1965), as an historical or historiographic 'interest' or process. You cannot write a social or economic history of Greece *from* Thucydides, he argued, but you cannot write a social or economic history of Greece *without* Thucydides. Inscriptions and archaeology, however abundant, were not enough.

The emphasis was on 'history' and 'politics'. One could discuss 'problems' using the resources of archaeology, myth, and poetry, just as Finley himself was perfectly prepared to use the text of Homer and colonial myths to study alienability of land in ancient Greece. But it was not possible to write a history of those societies, only to discuss their structures. To write history it was necessary to have sources which found their explanations in an historical narrative which was 'human and secular and, in particular, political'. If there is some justice in the criticism that he undervalued the force of religion in the ancient city, we must never lose sight of the fact that Finley, the historian of society and economies, saw them essentially in the context of politics.

The second major contribution by Finley was in his use of models, which was an obvious corollary to his attack on the use of sources. Writing in 1977 on 'Progress in historiography', he was blunt. 'The evidence propounds no questions. The historian himself does that . . . (by) the construction of hypotheses and explanatory models.' His objection to Ranke's theory of value-free history was that all history was a form of ideology, since no historian was capable of detaching himself from the thought-set of his environment, and it was more honest to be explicit about one's preconceptions. The model, or Weber's 'ideal type', was just such a means of explicit declaration. It was a simplified means of structuring reality which mediated between particular phenomena a coherence which was sometimes lacking. Because, however, it was simplified and never found empirically, the construct was bound to be Utopian.

The failure of his critics to appreciate the function of a model led to frequent attacks and misunderstandings, nowhere more so than in his model of the ancient economy. But, said Finley in the second edition of *The Ancient Economy*, 'it is not a serious objection . . . to evoke a particular passage of an ancient author or a specific case of economic

behaviour, unless it can be reasonably argued that the passage or the case represents more than a passing exception.’ Even though much had been written about Weber by the time Finley wrote his last book in 1985, and although many pupils and colleagues by then freely admitted the success of his method, he returned to the theme, since he believed that the model was persistently misunderstood or ignored by ancient historians, most especially in recent books on urban history.

It comes as a surprise to us, therefore, (and to Finley himself, he claimed) that in the final chapter of his last work his dislike of Weber’s schematic model of legitimate domination, when applied to the *polis*, and Weber’s élitist views of Athenian democracy led him to believe that ‘the deployment of models can become too abstract, too schematic.’ Just as in his earlier change of approach from the study of *The World of Odysseus* to the study of archaic Greece, he now called for ‘different strategies according to the nature of the evidence.’ ‘Not even my stress on non-mathematical models’, he added, ‘is meant to imply an exclusive approach or procedure.’ Exactly what these different procedures might be, he did not make clear, and certainly all that he said about historiography throughout his career gave the impression that the model was everything. The attack on Weber was not, in any case, despite his claim, on Weber’s methodology but on Weber’s classification. In reality, I suspect, Finley, the natural rebel, was renouncing his own position as an infallible *papato laico*, since the devil was already on the run.

Perhaps the most important historiographic contribution Finley made was his insistence that history could not be studied by compartmentalising it into politics or economics or social studies, but only by acknowledging what Marc Bloch called ‘the total historical fact’ and what he himself called ‘all-pervading factors’. The texts of history were not restricted to the ancient historical authors but included drama, epic, law, and philosophy, as well as art and archaeology, on all of which Finley wrote with authority. For this his early multi-disciplined training had equipped him superbly well, apart from his personal passion for the theatre, which he attended regularly, and music, of which he possessed a massive collection of records. But most particularly he was served by his association with the extraordinary array of talents gathered in the Mandarin society (as Martin Jay calls it) of the Frankfurt School, from where during its brief sojourn at Columbia, fifty young scholars in different faculties became professors in American universities, inspired

by the holistic vision of society they had learned from their mutual association.

Apart from a rejection of vulgar Marxism and the rigidities of the class society, which Finley learnt from this group, there is little doubt that he also inherited their obsession with the problem of why the poor and deprived did not behave in a revolutionary manner—why, for instance, the German proletariat accepted Nazism but not Communism—and the problem of authority and control of society. It was this which stimulated Finley's interest throughout his life in revolution, demagogues and democracy. Momigliano rightly observed that Athens was the ideal context in which to work out the problem through the unification of social, economic, and political history. Here it was possible to explain freedom by slavery; to reject the élitist views, propounded by Mosca and Pareto, that democracy only worked through mass apathy and non-participation, or that it was dominated by emotional demagoguery, or that there was some innate good sense in the Athenian people, if one followed Hannah Arendt, which persuaded them to hand over power to experts. Finley's unromantic response to such theories was that the system worked through rationality, based upon promises and programmes, not charisma. His aim broadened in *Politics in the Ancient World* to demonstrate how popular politics worked—or were 'invented', as the French title was translated. But his intention was misunderstood by some critics who believed, with some justice, that he had reduced all ancient politics, particularly those of Rome, to the operation of Athenian institutions.

One final effect of *histoire totale* was the stress placed upon the 'embeddedness' of economies in social structures. Although the term was never used, as far as I know, by Finley, there is no doubt that Polanyi's influence led him to perceive that markets were not invariably a form of economic organisation and that economics did not invariably determine society and culture. But he met stiff opposition from both orthodox Marxists and classical economists, who dismissed him as a Primitivist. The absurdity of the label can be seen in the Jane Harrison Lecture of 1972, when Finley distanced himself from the societies studied by most anthropologists. But his vision of Athens was paradoxical. On the one hand, it was the measure of democracy in the twentieth century, yet on the other, so specific in its alterity that modern comparisons simply distorted the truth. The modernity of the message lay in the organising principles and the nature of the problems—the principle of embedded

economies and of political rationality or the problem of the relations between rich and poor.

But the very success of Finley has obscured the magnitude of his achievement. Many of the historiographic citadels he was storming have fallen and the debates have moved on. The status of the text is no longer disputed between Rankeans and structuralists but elevated to the level of a discourse between author and reader. Models are taken for granted and have given way to semiotics. Social and economic histories have given way to religious, cultural, or gender studies. I do not know whether Finley would have approved or not, although he was by nature sympathetic to innovation. But he scented danger in privileging any one form of history: 'Human behaviour cannot be reduced *only* to structures and symbols. . . . Overt behaviour is as legitimate a subject of systematic enquiry as the unconscious structures beneath.' Above all he insisted on the political dimension of every enquiry, without which any historical research was in danger of being reduced to mere antiquarianism.

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Bibliographical note. Apart from the papers of MIF which are held in the Faculty of Classics, Cambridge and in Darwin College, Cambridge, surveys of his work or the period in which he worked appear in the following books and articles:

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