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A COMPANION TO  
ANCIENT  
GREEK  
GOVERNMENT

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ANCIENT GREEK GOVERNMENT**

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# A COMPANION TO ANCIENT GREEK GOVERNMENT

*Edited by*

Hans Beck

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# Abbreviated Source Editions and Lexica

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Abbreviations in the text for original sources such as Herodotus, Thucydides, and Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* usually follow the conventions of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*.

- ATL *The Athenian Tribute Lists*, ed. B.D. Meritt, H.T. Wade-Gery, and M.F. McGregor, 4 vols. (Princeton, 1939–1953)
- Austin *The Hellenistic World from Alexander to the Roman Conquest. A Selection of ancient Sources in Translation*, by M.M. Austin, 2nd edn. (2006)
- CAH *The Cambridge Ancient History*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge, 1970–2005)
- CID *Corpus des inscriptions de Delphes* (Paris 1977–1992)
- DK H. Diels and W. Kranz, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 6th edn. (Berlin, 1952)
- ER *Nomima. Recueil d'inscriptions politiques et juridiques de l'archaïsme grec*, ed. H. van Effenterre and F. Ruzé. 2 vols. (Paris, 1994)
- FdD *Fouilles de Delphes* (Athens and Paris, 1909–)
- FGrH *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, ed. F. Jacoby *et al.* (Berlin/Leiden, 1923–)
- Fornara *Translated Documents of Greece and Rome, 1: Archaic Times to the End of the Peloponnesian War*, ed. C.W. Fornara, 2nd edn. (Cambridge, 1983)
- IC *Inscriptiones Creticae* (Rome, 1935–1950)
- IG *Inscriptiones Graecae* (Berlin, 1873–)
- IGLS *Les inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie* (Paris, 1929–)
- IK *Inschriften griechischer Städte aus Kleinasien* (Bonn, 1972–) includes *I. Ephesos, I. Iasos, I. Kalchedon, I. Magnesia, I. Smyrna* etc.
- IvO *Inschriften von Olympia* (Berlin, 1896)
- K *Inchriftliche Gesetzestexte der frühen griechischen Polis*, ed. R. Koerner (Cologne, 1993)

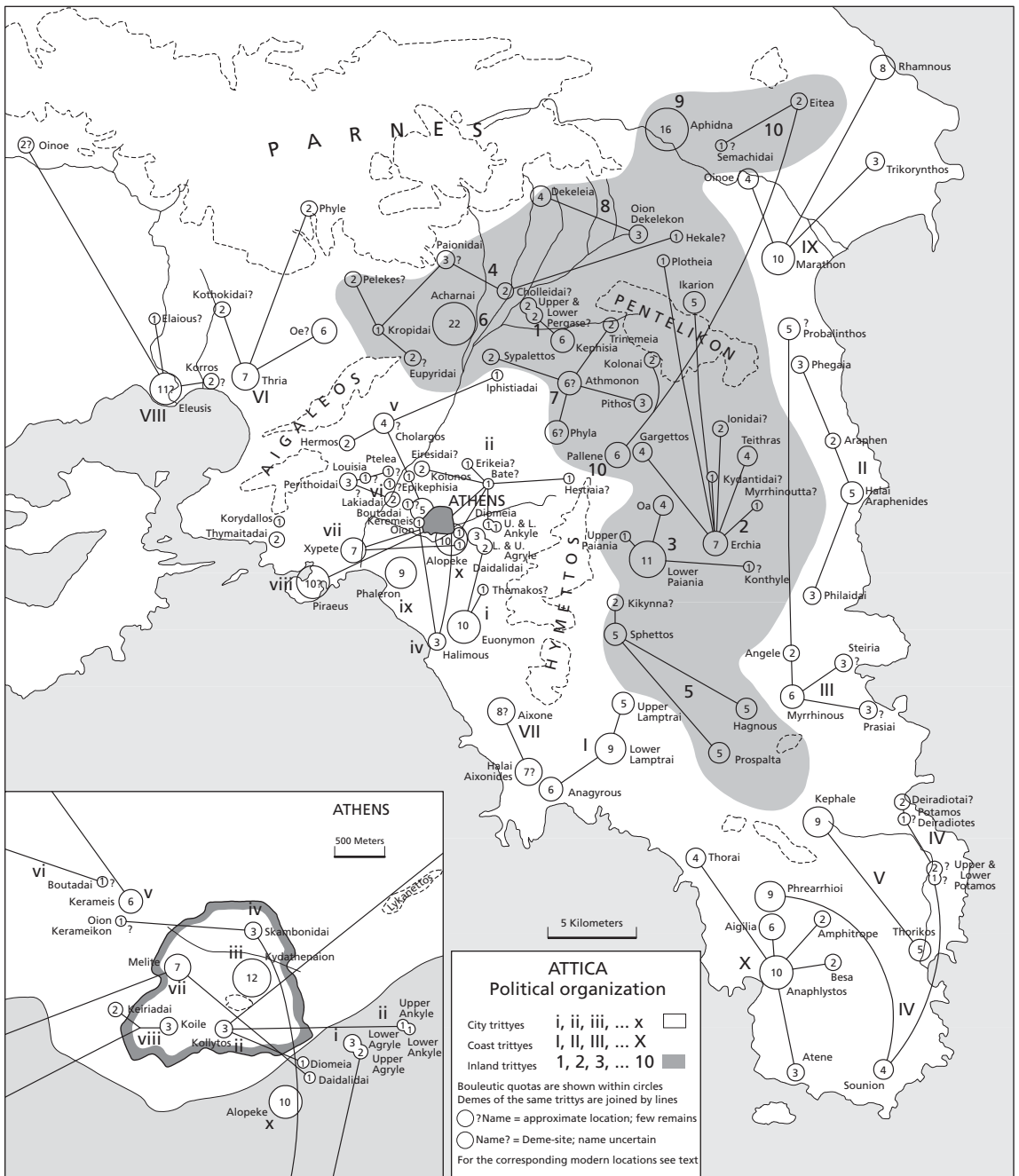
- M&L *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions to the End of the Fifth Century BC*, ed. R. Meiggs and D. Lewis (Oxford, 1988)
- OCD<sup>3</sup> *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd edn. (Oxford, 1996)
- PMG *Poetae Melici Graeci*, ed. D. Page (Oxford, 1962)
- RE *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaften* (Stuttgart, 1893–)
- R&L *The Decrees of the Greek States*, ed. P.J. Rhodes with D.M. Lewis (Oxford, 1997)
- R&O *Greek Historical Inscriptions 404–323 BC*, ed. P.J. Rhodes and R. Osborne (Oxford, 2003)
- SGDI *Sammlung der griechischen Dialekt-Inschriften* (Göttingen 1894–1915)
- SEG *Supplementum epigraphicum Graecum* (Leiden, 1923–)
- SVA *Die Staatsverträge des Altertums*, Vol. 2, ed. H. Bengtson, 2nd edn. (Munich, 1975)
- Syll.<sup>3</sup> *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum*, 3rd edn. (Leipzig 1915–1924)
- Tod *Tod, M.N. Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions. From the Sixth Century BC to the Death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC*. 2nd edn. (Oxford 1946)
- W *Greek Lyric Poetry*, trans. M.L. West (Oxford, 1993)





Map 1 Greece





**Map 2** Kleisthenes' organization of Attika according to demes, trittyes, and tribes. Adapted from: J.S. Traill (1975). Reproduced by permission of the Trustees of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens.



# Introduction

## *A Prolegomenon to Ancient Greek Government*

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*Hans Beck*

*Since “constitution” [politeia] and “government” [politeuma] signify the same thing, and the government is the supreme power [to kyrion] in the state [polis], and necessarily this supreme power rests either with one single individual or a few or the masses, and when the one or a few or the masses rule with an eye to the common interest, these constitutions evidently must be the right ones.*

(*Pol.* 1279a26–30)

Aristotle’s typology of distinct forms of Greek government has often been dismissed as an over-ambitious, if not downright obsessive, attempt to categorize the exercise of political power that has precious little resemblance to the realities of the day. But the initial notion that “constitution and government signify the same thing” (*Pol.* 1279a26–27), since the citizen body, or a portion of that body, was itself the ruling force in politics, clearly captures a defining principle of governmental practices in ancient Greece. Around the same time at which Aristotle was writing, in 330 BCE, the Athenian orator Lykourgos put this concept to the test when he observed that the constitution (*politeia*) “rests on three tiers, the official [*archōn*], the judge [*dikastēs*], and the private citizen [*idiōtēs*].” (*Leok.* 79). According to Lykourgos, Athens was governed by boards of officials and judges, the members of which took turns in the conduct of the affairs of the *polis*. Bound together with the other citizens by oath, these tiers were all integral parts of the constitution and, for that matter, of the government at Athens.

By the late fourth century BCE, the relevant terms and key concepts of Greek government already had a long and vibrant history, and this history would extend well into the Hellenistic Age and the world of the Roman empire. The study of ancient Greek government has become somewhat unfashionable in classical scholarship for the most part of the twentieth century. This had partly to do with the eminent threat of what Moses Finley famously labeled the “constitutional-law trap.” Tracing, for instance, the

legislative process in Greek politics and assigning executive powers to certain colleges or institutions easily evokes the existence of a normative state law (written or unwritten, codified or by cases); yet, as has been noted by many, this assumption is anachronistic. The dangers of an overtly constitutionalist approach were probably more imminent in the study of Roman history, with its strong nineteenth-century foundations in *Staatsrecht* and its general inclination towards systematization and norm – something the Romans after all sought to elicit in their perceptions of themselves. But Greek history is not immune to similar dangers. The single most important contribution in the field, Georg Busolt's *Griechische Staatskunde* (Vol. I, 1920; Vol. II, 1926), was evidently a tremendous scholarly achievement at the time; indeed, it was so successful that, within its particular vein of scholarly inquiry, it was never superseded or replaced. Yet despite Busolt's attempt to advance the antiquated concept of *Staatsaltertümer* as applied by his predecessors, his work remained basically faithful to the idea of normative state law. Over time, this tendency generated a sense of uneasiness and hesitation amongst scholars to pursue Greek government studies. In the long run, it added to the growing awareness that the "state law" approach itself had steered the topic into a cul-de-sac.

Today's approaches to Greek government are under the spell of completely different paradigms. Due to a surge of cultural studies in recent years, the exercise of political power is mostly investigated from the perspective of its symbolic underpinnings and performative dimensions. In this sense, the communication of political power has received substantial scholarly attention. At the same time, the broad methodological array of the social sciences has been unlocked to disclose, for instance, the mechanics of agency and actorhood in politics and to break the codes of social cohesion. These approaches have become immensely influential in the study of ancient history; in Greek history in particular, they are the new benchmark for the understanding of the attitudes, sentiments, and beliefs which give order and meaning to the political process and, along with this, to the rules that govern behavior in the political system of the *polis*. But as a result, the understanding of the institutional diversity of government itself is lagging behind. Although there are some remarkable exceptions to this trend and some progress has been made, for example with regards to the construction of civic identities or the workings of democracy, the advances in this particular area of Greek politics are more modest than in others. The last synthetic account on constitutional practices in ancient Greece, *The Greek State* by Victor Ehrenberg, was published decades before the cultural turn (2nd edn. in English, 1969; 1st edn. in German, 1957). At this point, a synthesis monograph that keeps pace with the accelerated development of current research on Greek political culture seems out of reach.

The present volume encompasses the panoply of prevailing approaches towards Greek government. It embraces the various and often compartmentalized strands of scholarship and explores the potential for the future development of the field. The shortcomings of an overtly constitutionalist approach in this endeavor are, realistically, limited. No one nowadays seriously subscribes to a concept of politics that reduces governmental action to the formalistic execution of laws or the interplay between state branches whose conduct is governed only by their place in the juristic domain of the constitution. The same goes for the implicit dangers of an underdeveloped concept of institutions and institutionalized state action. The diachronic history of government in Greece naturally went through various stages of development, including a formative period in the Archaic

Age in which it might be more appropriate to speak of *polis* governance and not *polis* government; hence, the implication of institutionalized state action is, again, anachronistic. But this insight is almost too obvious. The objective here is to bring meaning to government in the Hellenic setting rather than projecting modern meanings onto the ancient paradigm.

The history of Greek government (like that of any other government through time and space) is one of a specific political culture and of a particular political experience. Both of these leave their mark on the attempt to conceptualize government in an ancient Greek context. As was noted above, according to Aristotle's understanding one of the key feats of Greek governmental practice was the partial or complete intersecting of the government regime with the citizen body as a whole. With this corresponded Aristotle's famous formula of *archein kai archesthai* (*Pol.* 1277a26–27, and *passim*), the idea that citizens took turns in “ruling and being ruled.” Note how *archesthai* signifies both the passive and the middle voice in ancient Greek; so, the act of “being ruled” might be conceived of here as something that is performed by the citizens upon themselves and for their own benefit. At various instances in the *Politics*, the good citizen is praised as someone who displays the ability not only to rule in a good manner, but also “to be ruled well” (*archesthai kalōs*: 1277a28). Both *archein* and *archesthai* thus appear to be civic virtues, a specification which endorses the idea that citizens fulfilled a double role in politics: they were members of a body politic that at once governed and was governed.

In the setting of the Hellenic city-state, with its relatively small urban topography, the close interaction between those who exercised power and those who were subject to it created a specific atmosphere of openness and directness. The conduct of politics was – quite literally – visible, in assemblies that were held in open, yet demarcated spaces, just as the comings and goings of the day were always audible, as it were, in the *agora*, during civic rituals and spectacles, or at a funeral. In the open-air culture of the Greek *polis*, the deeds of government were neither distant nor heavy-handed, or unilateral, but rather performed in the center of the community, and hence made an immediate impact on every member of that community (this is also one of the reasons why the conduct of politics was at times so messy). In federal government, this immediacy was safeguarded and in fact preserved well into the Late Hellenistic and Roman periods. Despite the new dominance of territorial states and empires, federal government in Greece encapsulated the values of civic communities that were built around the notion of self-governance and political liberty, re-enacted in and geared towards a relatively small face-to-face society.

Another feature that gave a distinct meaning to government in ancient Greece was the full absorption of the realm of religion into the command sphere of those who ruled. The issue has long been among the most vigorously debated topics in classical scholarship. It has even given cause to the rise of two opposite academic traditions: those following Numa Fustel de Coulanges (*La cité antique*, 1864), who stress the character of the *polis* as a community that was bound first and foremost by religion and ritual; and those who propel, with Max Weber (*Die Stadt*, 1921), a concept that views the occidental city as focal point of political, social, and economic relations. Eventually, so Weber's argument went, this came to define the main characteristic of statehood in the West. The vestiges of both traditions can be detected on several instances throughout this book, yet they are presented with no claim to universal validity. Today, the opposition between these two camps has diminished because it has become clear that both views are

complementary rather than mutually exclusive. According to the prevailing opinion, the main challenge of an up-to-date conceptualization of Greek government is to integrate forces that are genuinely conceived of as separate spheres. In their conduct of affairs, Greek governments were just as much directed by political procedures as they were by oracles and oaths. The political organization of local and regional amphiktyonies offers one of the most dazzling examples of this trait of government in the Hellenic world.

This blending of realms that are considered separate in modern societies – secular politics and religion – can also be found in the Greek conception of citizenship. It is futile to disconnect the political dimension of citizenship from the underpinnings that governed the relation between citizens (*politai*) and the gods, or to privilege one over the other. The community of citizens was as much tied together by legal rights and privileges as it was by the belief of a common, primordial descent. Treasured in narratives of heroic genealogy and venerated in *polis* cults, the idea of togetherness manifested itself in a perceived covenant between the community of mortals and the immortal gods. The traditional formula to express citizen status – “to have a share in the things of the gods and in all human affairs that are pleasing to the gods” – is indicative of this covenant. But since the gods could not really govern the state on a day-to-day basis, this had the consequence, almost inevitably, that in the conduct of “human affairs” the *politai* exercised full sovereignty. The body of citizens was at the head of the political process; its authority was unchallenged and non-negotiable.

To mirror the citizens’ uncontested role in all aspects of public life, the term *polis* is sometimes translated as “citizen-state,” rather than “city-state.” This shifts the emphasis away from the urban connotation of *polis* towards the status group of individuals itself, the *politai*, who, in their self-understanding, were one with the *polis*. Both translations are fine, but “citizen-state” also triggers the idea that the citizens, beyond the mechanisms of exclusion that were applied to separate themselves from other groups of society, subscribed to a set of hardwired criteria that governed the interaction between them. To begin with, all citizen-states established more or less similar political offices and institutions that were empowered to govern the affairs of the community. The conduct of politics was thus transferred to an abstract realm of authority; this was clearly a landmark in the conceptual development of politics. With it came the call for strict obedience to the rule of yet another abstract concept, law (*nomos*), and a tapestry of checks and balances to uphold, and reinforce, the law in everyday politics. Associated with these notions was a strong principle of equality amongst citizens. Equality is a relative concept that depends largely on the preconceptions of society. Indeed, the charged discourse on equality is not a product of the modern day, but a Greek exercise through and through. In the course of a truly seminal debate on government, Herodotus frames equality as something that is characteristic of the relation between citizens. “The rule of the multitude (*plēthos*) not only has the finest of all names attached to it, equality under the law” (3.80.6). The term to designate “equality under the law” is *isonomiē*, which is associated here with a form of government in which many (“the multitude”) take a share in the exercise of political power. It thus appears that the call for equality targeted the relations between the members of one status group in particular, the citizens, and not the entire body of individuals who lived in the *polis*. In fact, the demarcation between (equal) citizens and all other non-citizens (adult men with no citizenship, women, foreigners, slaves, children as well as seniors) was paramount.

Herodotus continues his debate on government with the observation, “the multitude chooses its magistrates by lot, it holds all officials responsible for their conduct in office, and all questions are put up for open debate” (3.80.6). So according to Herodotus, the idea of equality was taken so seriously that it came with a variety of consequences. Most strikingly, the implementation of equality meant the citizens were not only guaranteed access to political power in equal terms, but that they had an equal share in actual office-holding. The eminent expression of this was the allotment of officials and jurors. This, in turn, was built on yet another assumption, extending the idea of equality to the realm of civic disposition, ability, and skill. The lot implied that all citizens possessed similar skill-sets to exercise certain executive powers. But inequalities with regards to individual magistrates’ willingness to play by the rules surely remained; hence the many, minute, and meticulous mechanisms of control for those who were in a position to rule.

The following chapters flesh out the full experience of government in ancient Greece. They explore multiple manifestations of state action and consider a broad selection of city-states as well as governmental realms beyond the *polis*. The topical clusters of this *Companion* shed light on the major themes of Greek government. Part I traces the conceptual development of government in history, from the rise of state action in the Archaic Age to its changing nature in Hellenistic cities and courts. Part II explains corresponding intellectual trends and thought paradigms, both from the perspective of individual thinkers and that of a structural advancement of concepts and ideas. The contributions of parts III and IV survey the main governing bodies and the distinct protocols, processes, and procedures that steered their conduct. Yet the realms to which this conduct was confined were once again the result of a specific political culture; so the chapters in part V take turns in exploring the responsibilities of Greek governments in greater detail. Part VI moves on to the spatial and memorial dynamics of government; this, too, illustrates how Greek government was a very particular political experience. Part VII, finally, looks at governmental realms beyond the city-state.

A notorious problem throughout is, of course, that of Athenocentrism. Indeed, “the school of Hellas” (Thuc. 2.41.1) figures prominently in many contributions – maybe too prominently for the taste of those who, like myself, tend to advocate local and regional approaches towards Greek history. But the sheer quantity of evidence from Athens, in civic issues in particular, is simply too overwhelming to be outweighed by that of other *poleis* (note how relatively little survives from Sparta in this regard). The chances to correct this imbalance are limited. The question of whether the evidence from Athens, in terms of content, is either exceptional or paradigmatic is a different matter, and, to be sure, a treacherous one. But the exhaustive compilations of, for instance, decrees and other documentary evidence relating to the public organization of Greek states (R&L; N.F. Jones 1987) should tip the balance, I think, towards the latter. In this sense, this *Companion* considers itself distinctly Greek, rather than Athenian, despite the heavy weight that is pulled by Athenian government throughout.

Greek government is a phenomenon *sui generis*. All the while, its inherent qualities as a universal paradigm that has inspired political agents and thinkers in all ages are undiminished. In the present day, the study of Greek government holds a particular fascination. In the Western world, governments are traditionally embedded in the political macrostructures of representative democracy and parliamentarism. Yet both of these face multiple challenges. Parliamentarism in particular, with its strong intellectual

founding in the British tradition (which in itself draws on Roman rather than Greek models), suffers from various threats that jeopardize its most basic tenets; the erosion of long-term party alignments amongst the electorate is only one of them. At the same time, national governments are compelled to (re)orient themselves in response to new forms of supra-state institutions and compete with non-governmental forces which, despite their lack of genuine political authority, increasingly encroach on their traditional realm of action. For example, so-called rating agencies clearly infringe upon the economic and monetary policies of national governments, yet they are not accountable to an electorate. Representative democracy, as it was experienced for the longest time in the twentieth century, appears increasingly unable to respond to the changing morphologies of politics. The call for a “new democracy” airs the discontent that this generates amongst the largest parts of Western societies, and this call is once again amplified by media forces and the potency of social networks, which foster an all-new sense of directness, immediacy, and also volatility. In this atmosphere of general apprehension, ancient Greek government is in all likelihood the most relevant and perhaps the most advanced historical experience with direct democracy. But then again, democracy was only one of many forms of government in the Greek world. It was neither the presumed norm nor unrivalled, but was under the permanent threat of being altered or altogether abandoned in favor of another power configuration. In any case, if implemented, democracy called for the persistent negotiation, the meaningful development, and reinstatement, of the middle ground of society, and, with this, the general ability to compromise. This aspect of Greek government, too, is covered in this volume.

Like other volumes in the series, this *Companion* combines contributions from scholars of an exceptionally diverse background, from many different academic cultures and scholarly traditions. The mixture itself speaks to the enduring fascination with the topic, despite the divergent trajectories that academic research and teaching have taken in those university cultures in recent years. The chapters are all authored by leading experts in the field: while some of them have had this status for many years, others have more recently developed interests in Greek government, and yet others have only occasionally published their work in English. It has been an immense pleasure and privilege to work with such an array of wonderful colleagues and engage with them in conceptual debates (not only when their contributions had to be cut to comply with the word-limit). As copyediting began, my “Greek government” email folder recorded 1,711 messages that were exchanged in the course of the project, from the original conception of the book. This exchange was almost entirely pleasant throughout, which again made this project such a worthwhile experience. Here at McGill, the editorial process was once again supported by a group of excellent graduate students. Catherine McPherson translated chapters 17 and 28 from the French. Sarah Binns and Ruben Post helped with the streamlining of papers. Katrina Van Amsterdam resolved various bibliographical bugs. In the project’s final stages, Alex McAuley became my strong right arm in all operations relating to the editorial process and critical review, and, with Ruben Post, he also offered invaluable assistance with the preparation of the index file. At Wiley-Blackwell, Haze Humbert was truly the anchor of the project as it unfolded, with a clear command, superb judgment, and excellent troubleshooting skills when they were needed. To all of them, I offer heartfelt thanks.