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***How to behave on a Greek agora***

***The politics of daily life in Hellenistic and Roman Greece***

**12 June 2013**

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Chris Dickenson is lecturer in Ancient History at Radboud University Nijmegen. In 2012, he was awarded his PhD at the University of Groningen for his thesis *On the Agora: power and public space in Hellenistic and Roman Greece*. In his thesis he draws on archaeological, epigraphic and literary evidence to explore how political relations were shaped and transformed through the countless ways that the inhabitants of the ancient polis interacted in their most important public space. He is currently working on articles relating to issues to do with the agora and ancient public space and has also plans for a follow up project on the significance of spatial setting in erecting monuments in the Greek city in Roman times.

***How to behave on a Greek agora: The politics of daily life in Hellenistic and Roman Greece***

Modern visions about what happened to the Greek agora in post-Classical times have tended to be fairly negative. Enclosure by stoas is said to have cut agoras off from flows of people and traffic; increasing numbers of statues are thought to have transformed agoras into museum-like spaces where representations of power were more important than the activities of daily life. This supposed decline of the agora is seen as a reflection of the more general political decline of the Greek city in these periods – the agora lost its vitality as a public space as the polis lost its freedom, first to Hellenistic kings and then, more totally, to the Roman Empire. Recently historians have begun to recognise that the polis retained much of its political vitality well into Imperial times. In this presentation I will argue that the pessimistic view of the post-Classical agora also deserves to be challenged. I will argue that the Hellenistic and Roman period agora remained a vibrant public space and discuss how evidence for interactions between different groups and individuals on the agora provides a useful way to explore transformations in polis society.

Anthropologists and sociologists who investigate modern piazzas and plazas are able to move among the users of these squares, observing them firsthand. Such research has shown that interactions in public space play an important role in shaping power relations within society. Issues such as how people walk and talk, who they associate with, and the clothes they wear, all have an important political dimension. Of course such ethnographic observation is impossible for the ancient agora. Yet, there is a surprising wealth of evidence – mainly literary, but also archaeological and epigraphic – that day-to-day life on the agora was just as politically charged. This evidence has, up to now, been overlooked in modern scholarship, largely because the post-Classical agora was viewed as uninteresting and also because of a belief that only sources that explicitly discuss the design of ancient agoras could be useful for understanding what agoras were for. I will argue that evidence concerning attitudes to the presence of different types of people on the agora, and for discussions about what modes of behaviour were appropriate to the agora, are much more important for thinking about how the agora functioned as a public space. This evidence allows important insights into the relationship between local elites and the rest of the urban population, and into the way that the agora served as a public stage on which tensions within the elite group were resolved.