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Zimmern, Athens, and the British Empire: Ancient and Modern Imperialism in *The Greek Commonwealth*

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*This article offers a reading of the intersections of ancient and modern imperialism in Alfred Zimmern's 1911 monograph *The Greek Commonwealth: Politics and Economics in Fifth-Century Athens*. The first section looks at Zimmern's use of ancient and modern comparisons and shows that, far from modernizing the ancient Greeks, as scholars have argued, he in fact insistently drew attention to the differences between the ancient and modern worlds. The second section examines the complexities of Zimmern's narrative of the Athenian empire, in particular the tension between politics and economics intimated by the book's subtitle and foregrounded by its structure. The article as a whole sets Zimmern's account in the context of Edwardian reflections on ancient and modern imperialism and shows, with the help of his own reflections, that his use of historical parallels was designed to encourage thought about modern political and economic problems as well as action to remedy them.*

Alfred Zimmern's *The Greek Commonwealth: Politics and Economics in Fifth-Century Athens* was one of the most widely read and admired works on ancient Greek history published in the twentieth century.¹ First published in 1911, it went through five editions in twenty years and remained in print with new American and British paperbacks in the 1950s and 1960s. One reason for its popularity was the way it addressed modern

¹Key biographical details on Alfred Eckhard Zimmern (1879–1957) are: Winchester College (1892–8); Literae Humaniores, New College, Oxford (1898–1902, first class); lecturer (1903–4) and fellow (1904–9) in ancient history, New College; lecturer in sociology, LSE, 1910–11; Board of Education, 1912–15; Ministry of Reconstruction, 1917–18; Political Intelligence Department, Foreign Office, 1918–19; Woodrow Wilson Professor of International Politics, Aberystwyth, 1919–21; deputy director, International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, Paris, 1926–30; Montague Burton Professor of International Relations, Oxford, 1930–44; knighted 1936. The following abbreviations are used. GMP = Gilbert Murray Papers, Bodleian Libraries. GWP = Graham Wallas Papers, LSE Library. HKP = Horace Kallen Papers, American Jewish Archives. TGC = A. E. Zimmern, *The Greek Commonwealth: Politics and Economics in Fifth-Century Athens* (Oxford, 1961), a paperback reprint of the 5th edn (1931). TGC^{1, 2, 3, 4} = 1st edn, 1911; 2nd edn, 1915; 3rd edn, 1922; 4th edn, 1924. ZP = Alfred Zimmern Papers, Bodleian Libraries.

as well as ancient problems, foreshadowing Zimmern's own move from ancient-history don to pioneering professor of international politics. Reviewers noted how the British Empire was brought into contact with ancient Greece as the book progressed through its narrative of Athens at her imperial peak under Pericles and towards its final premonition of her decline: in the London *Daily News*, for instance, the liberal journalist Robert Lynd observed that Athens fell "when she gave her heart to Empire instead of freedom," and suggested that "Mr Zimmern has made of her heroism and beauty and shame an admirable sermon for the modern world."² A later reader who drew inspiration from *The Greek Commonwealth* was Jawaharlal Nehru, who had a copy of the book when imprisoned by the British in Ahmadnagar Fort in 1943. Nehru drew on Zimmern's account of Athens in his own writings to criticize the incompatibility of freedom and empire in British India; he also took Zimmern's comparative approach further by tracing similarities between ancient India and ancient Greece, even if (as he told his daughter Indira) "this book does not go far in this direction except unconsciously, for India is not in the picture at all."³

The aim of this article is to offer a reading of the intersections of ancient and modern imperialism in *The Greek Commonwealth*. This topic has in recent years been explored in studies of British imperial discourse and of the history of international relations (IR)—a discipline in whose early development Zimmern was a leading player. Two complementary approaches can be identified in this scholarship. Tomohito Baji argues that Zimmern presents a modernizing image of Athenian civic patriotism as "nationally homogeneous" and, through "transepochal analogy," "structurally equivalent" to his conception of "a closely unified British Commonwealth": homogeneity is preserved through customs inaccessible to the metics (resident aliens), while Zimmern's depiction of slavery as apprenticeship leading to possible manumission echoes British dependencies' "progressive development towards self-government."⁴ Other scholars, while agreeing that Zimmern modernized the Greeks, have suggested that parallels with the British Empire should be sought in the external relations of the Greek city-states. According to Mark Mazower, Zimmern portrayed the rise of Athens as "an unambiguous blessing for her neighbors": "Just like the British, the Athenian navy patrolled the seas, sent out colonists to form autonomous city-states elsewhere, and promoted commerce."⁵ An even closer correspondence between Athens and Britain is suggested by Jeanne Morefield in her monograph

²Robert Lynd, "The Greek Genius," *Daily News*, 15 Nov. 1911, 4. Cf. e.g. Spencer Wilkinson, "Athens and Empire," *Morning Post*, 5 Oct. 1911; [Frederick Manning], "Greek Genius and Greek Democracy," *Edinburgh Review* 217/444 (1913), 334–51.

³Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (1946) (Delhi and Oxford, 1989), 548–51; Sonia Gandhi, ed., *Two Alone, Two Together: Letters between Indira Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, 1940–64* (London, 1992), 216.

⁴Tomohito Baji, *The International Thought of Alfred Zimmern* (Cham, 2021), 33–80, esp. 56, 52, 34, 58, all Baji's words.

⁵Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton, 2009), 70, neglecting the difference—noted e.g. by P. A. Brunt, *Studies in Greek History and Thought* (Oxford, 1993), 11—between earlier Greek colonies and the later Athenian settlements that Zimmern mentions (*TGC*, 205 n. 4, 253, 324, 454), which—except for exceptional panhellenic Thurii—are *within* the empire in the northern Aegean; similarly Jeanne Morefield, *Empires*

Empires without Imperialism: “for Zimmern, Athens was England, and England was Athens.”⁶

While parallels between Athens and England can be found in *The Greek Commonwealth*, this article shows that our understanding of them needs to be revised. My argument will proceed in two stages. The first section will look at Zimmern’s use of ancient and modern comparisons and show that, far from modernizing the Greeks, he drew attention to differences between the ancient and modern worlds. The second will examine the complexities of Zimmern’s narrative of the Athenian empire, in particular the tension between politics and economics which is intimated by the book’s subtitle and, as we shall see, foregrounded by its structure.⁷ The article as a whole will present Zimmern’s account of Athens and its empire as a provocative and intelligent contribution to Edwardian political debate.

While looking at aspects of Baji’s analysis, this article will pay particular attention to Morefield’s reading of *The Greek Commonwealth*. The reasons for this choice are that her treatment of Zimmern is detailed and imaginative, and that her work has determined later interpretations.⁸ *Empires without Imperialism* offers a critique of the tensions within liberal imperialism and the diversionary tactics used by its exponents; it has been widely praised by leading political theorists and historians.⁹ It will be helpful here to offer a summary of the chapter on Zimmern (my criticisms relate solely to this chapter). Zimmern, in Morefield’s account, by making ancient Athens and contemporary Britain “practically *one and the same* polity,” “occupying similar spaces in time but at different moments,” was able to use Athenian history as an alternative vision of Britain’s past and future while deflecting Britain’s imperial wrongdoing.¹⁰ She further suggests that Zimmern’s portrayal of fifth-century Athens is “deeply nostalgic”

without Imperialism: Anglo-American Decline and the Politics of Deflection (Oxford, 2014), 51, misrepresents traders in Periclean Athens as “early Athenian explorers” who win Athens influence before the Persian Wars.

⁶Morefield, *Empires without Imperialism*, 67.

⁷I discuss the title and subtitle in “From *The Greek Commonwealth* to *The Commonwealth of Nations*: Zimmern, Curtis, and a Tale of Two Titles,” *Global Intellectual History*, published online 23 Feb. 2024, at <https://doi.org/10.1080/23801883.2024.2318304>: *pace* IR historians, the main title refers only to the Greek city-state, not to potential imperial commonwealths.

⁸Baji’s chapter on *TGC* amplifies rather than modifies Morefield. For Morefield’s earlier treatments of Zimmern see Jeanne Morefield, *Covenants without Swords: Idealist Liberalism and the Spirit of Empire* (Princeton, 2005); and Morefield, “An Education to Greece: The Round Table, Imperial Theory and the Uses of History,” *History of Political Thought* 28/2 (2007), 328–61. For instances of her influence see Elizabeth Sawyer, “The Reception of Thucydides in Contemporary America” (unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 2013), 126–8; Benjamin Earley, *The Thucydidean Turn: (Re)Interpreting Thucydides’ Political Thought before, during and after the Great War* (London, 2020), 56–7; Liam Stowell, “The Athens of Example: The Classical World in British International Thought, 1900–1939” (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Manchester, 2020), 61–87; Priya Satia, *Time’s Monster: History, Conscience and Britain’s Empire* (London, 2020), 195; Patrick Rummel, *Ein Föderales Imperium? Das Britische Empire und das Modell Griechischer Kolonisation, 1829–1920* (Baden-Baden, 2021), 538–44. Elizabeth Wingrove, “Political Displacement at the Point of Reception,” *Classical Receptions Journal* 8/1 (2016), 114–32, discusses her method without questioning her content.

⁹E.g. Richard Ned Lebow, *Perspectives on Politics* 12/4 (2014), 877–9; Duncan Bell, *Political Theory* 45/6 (2017), 900–3.

¹⁰Morefield, *Empires without Imperialism*, 59–60, original emphasis.

and reveals “a similar nostalgia for the ‘Little England’ of his imagination and a British Empire that was both at the height of its power and perilously ... balanced on the brink of decline.”¹¹ At the end of the chapter, Morefield’s diagnosis becomes one of “retroactive proleptic nostalgia”: Thucydides’ creation, after Athens’s fall, of Pericles’ Funeral Speech, with its great vision of the city at its peak, attracted Zimmern because he already feared for the British Empire. But while regretting the passing of an age of imperial innocence in Britain when liberals did not have to trouble themselves with the contradictions of empire, Morefield’s Zimmern insisted nonetheless on the need to “man up” to realities and “embrace a unified form of imperial governance.”¹²

A number of shortcomings may be noted in the treatments of *The Greek Commonwealth* by Morefield and other IR historians.¹³ They have misunderstood passages, focused on some parts more than on others, ignored the interconnections between its different parts and other aspects of its literary texture, and neglected the changes in its various editions.¹⁴ They have also tended to write as if Zimmern’s concern was the British Empire rather than the history of ancient Greece (the subject he taught at Oxford). It is true, as we have seen, that the book itself does allude to contemporary debates on empire, and this interest is confirmed by Zimmern’s papers.¹⁵ But his surviving correspondence does not suggest that those were the main problems he was confronting in his book: he told his mentor Graham Wallas that his goals were “to liven up the classical teaching in schools” and “to make people think about the nature of the XXth century πόλις [*polis*].”¹⁶ The book itself, his other early publications, and his personal papers all reveal that, during his career as an Oxford tutor and for some years afterwards, he was much more exercised by the educational, economic, and political problems of industrial Britain than by imperial questions.

Let me close this introduction with one illustration of these shortcomings. *The Greek Commonwealth* opens with an account of the physical environment of the Mediterranean that highlights its difference both from the northern climate of Britain and from fanciful imaginings of ancient Greece. In the course of this discussion, Zimmern elucidates in a footnote the challenge that schoolchildren face in understanding the classical world: “Compare the parallel difficulty of making, say, *As You Like It* intelligible to Indian schoolboys.”¹⁷ This footnote is discussed by Morefield in the form

¹¹Ibid., 34.

¹²Ibid., 66–7, original emphasis.

¹³I will use the term “IR historians” to refer to scholars concerned with the history of internationalist thought, regardless of their disciplinary affiliation.

¹⁴See further note 77 below; Rood, “From *The Greek Commonwealth*”; and my articles forthcoming in *History of Political Thought* 46/1, “Alfred Zimmern’s Early Political Thought I: Idealism, Internationalism, and the Study of Ancient History” and 46/2, “Alfred Zimmern’s Early Political Thought II: Liberalism, Burke, and *The Greek Commonwealth*.”

¹⁵E.g. ZP 136.1–38 (“Seven Deadly Sins of Tariff Reform”), 123–67 (“United Britain”), both papers given at student societies in Oxford in 1905.

¹⁶GWP 1/46.8 (5 Jan. 1910). The letter as a whole confirms the natural reference of *polis* to the British city internally, not to the empire (*pace* Morefield, *Empires without Imperialism*, 32–3—who ends the quotation at “the twentieth-century”—and Baji, *International Thought*, 34).

¹⁷TGC¹, 17 n. 2.

in which it first appeared in the second edition of *The Greek Commonwealth*. Zimmern there writes,

This is not the place in which to marshal the arguments for and against using the languages and literatures of Greece and Rome as a means of training the young. But it is worth pointing out that the analogous attempt to use the English language and literature as a means of education in India is severely criticized by some of the very people who defend the “classical tradition” in English education.¹⁸

The expanded note was amplified further when Zimmern prepared the third edition: “—1921. See on this point the masterly report of the Sadler Commission on the University of Calcutta, which is likely to remain for long the *locus classicus*, not only on the problem of education in Bengal but on kindred problems in other countries.”¹⁹ According to Morefield, “when Zimmern wanted his audience to understand the importance of teaching ancient Greek ‘as a means of training the young’ he turned to the ‘analogous attempt’ to use English as the language of education in India.”²⁰ This reading supports her argument that Zimmern equated Athens and England as positive examples of liberal empire. But in the note Zimmern was stressing the difficulty, not the desirability, of studying Greek civilization: the unreflecting teaching of the Classics in Britain is as *bad* as the use of English in Indian education. With some irony, the expanded footnote in the third edition draws on Latin (*locus classicus*) to praise a commission which argued *against* the use of English in Indian education.²¹ Morefield’s misreading is hard to explain other than as an attempt to make Zimmern’s text fit a preconceived grid.

With these warnings in mind, let us turn to the task of trying to understand *The Greek Commonwealth*, both as a test case of the pitfalls in extracting political theory from ancient history without appreciation of intellectual content and context and as a classic work on ancient Greece by a young historian who became a prominent public intellectual and whose later thought on the interlinking of politics and economics in IR built on his historical analysis of Athens. Those who do not know the book will find it useful to keep in mind its structure. Part I, “Geography,” outlines, as I have said, the distinctive features of the Mediterranean. Part II, “Politics,” tracks the development of citizenship in the Greek city-state, culminating in fifth-century Athens with a translation of the Funeral Speech. Part III, “Economics,” offers a detailed account of the

¹⁸TGC², 19 n. 2.

¹⁹TGC³, 21 n. 2.

²⁰Morefield, *Empires without Imperialism*, 50.

²¹The chair, Michael Sadler, was known to Zimmern personally. For his preference for Sadler over Macaulay see Alfred Zimmern, “Studies in Citizenship,” *Nation and the Athenaeum* 34/24 (1924), 840–2, at 842; Zimmern, *The Third British Empire* (London, 1926), 134; Zimmern, “Between the Quick and the Dead,” *Virginia Quarterly Review* 24/4 (1948), 481–98, at 491. Through TGC Zimmern was trying to reinvigorate classical education in British schools (see e.g. 15), but he was opposed to its dominance and to compulsory Greek: he wrote in a letter that “Greek ideas ... only become more interesting and infectious when they put on an English dress.” Zimmern, “Wanted, a New Scheme of Culture,” *The Nation* 3/17 (1908), 602–3, at 603.

development of economic activity in the Greek city-state, again culminating in fifth-century Athens. Finally, a “Conclusion” offers a narrative of the Peloponnesian War that breaks off with the sailing of Athens’s ill-fated expedition to Sicily.

Imperialism ancient and modern

There was a long-standing tradition of imperial comparison in British historical and political writing, as well as in other forms of British imperial expression such as architecture. Comparisons were used in different ways in different works, sometimes to highlight continuities or to suggest narratives of imperial succession, sometimes to point to fundamental contrasts, and sometimes to suggest both similarity and difference.²² This comparative approach was nurtured, too, by the *Literae Humaniores* (“Greats”) course which Zimmern took at Oxford. Essay-questions in examination papers on Ancient History and Philosophy frequently invited comparison of ancient and modern, and Zimmern’s own lectures took the same approach.²³ Modern scholars have made two related claims on the basis of the comparisons Zimmern included in *The Greek Commonwealth*: first that he modernized the ancient Athenians; second that he aligned Athens and Britain.²⁴ Let us see if this critique is justified.

Modernizing Athens?

It makes it easier to think about the 21st century when one has contemplated a world which is utterly different, partly from being ancient and therefore poor in material resources, partly from being Mediterranean.

Zimmern to Wallas, 21 April [1907]²⁵

In support of the claim that Zimmern modernized the Athenians, scholars cite two reviews of the first edition: H. J. Cunningham (one of Zimmern’s former Oxford

²²For discussion see e.g. Javed Majeed, “Comparativism and References to Rome in British Imperial Attitudes to India,” in Catharine Edwards, ed., *Roman Presences* (Cambridge, 1999), 88–109; Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain* (Princeton, 2007), 207–30; Ali Parchami, *Hegemonic Peace and Empire* (London, 2009); Mark Bradley, ed., *Classics and Imperialism in the British Empire* (Oxford, 2010); Krishan Kumar, “Greece and Rome in the British Empire: Contrasting Role Models,” *Journal of British Studies* 51/1 (2012), 76–101; Christopher Hagerman, *Britain’s Imperial Muse* (Basingstoke, 2013); Phiroze Vasunia, *The Classics and Colonial India* (Oxford, 2013), 119–55.

²³Tim Rood, “A. E. Zimmern, Thucydides, and the Emergence of Modern Disciplines,” in Ivan Matijašić and Luca Iori, eds., *Thucydides in the Age of Extremes and Beyond*, supplementary volume, *History of Classical Scholarship*, 2022, 25–66, at 32. See e.g. ZP 117.63–7 (Chesterton and Thucydides); 117.112 (syllabus with instruction to read, prior to the lecture on “Greater Greece,” “Seeley, Expansion of England, Part I”—where Greek and British colonization are overtly contrasted (J. R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England* (1883) (Chicago, 1971), 34–8)); Bodleian Libraries, O. G. S. Crawford Papers 122.326–409 (notes on Zimmern’s “Introduction to Ancient History” lectures, 1907: e.g. 370 on imperialism: “In those times meant imperial exploitation ... The modern idea of empire is a market for surplus goods”).

²⁴See notes 4–6, 8 above; for the claim of modernizing see also Duncan Bell, *Reordering the World* (Princeton, 2016), 146; Earley, *The Thucydidean Turn*, 56.

²⁵GWP 1/79.iii-34. Zimmern sent with the letter his translation of Guglielmo Ferrero, *The Greatness and Decline of Rome*, vols. 1, 2 (New York, 1907); “21st century” shows his concern for long-term historical change.

colleagues) wrote in the *English Historical Review* of Zimmern's "audacious modernity," while the Columbia professor G. W. Botsford suggested in the *Political Science Quarterly* that he is "excessively inclined to modernize, as when, for example, he pictures the Athenian citizen regretting that he had not stopped for a mixed drink on his way to the assembly."²⁶ Morefield expands Botsford's analysis by casting Zimmern's narrative as a form of "historical tourism" predicated on the idea that "Athens was familiar to the modern Englishman" and its way of life "profoundly recognizable": "Zimmern captured moments from the lived world of Athens's past in his descriptions of the details of everyday life: the turn of the crooked street, the feel of the sunshine, that moment when the citizen pauses to regret 'he had not stopped for a mixed drink on his way to the assembly.'"²⁷

Far more reviews presented Zimmern as seeking to accentuate the differences of the ancient and modern worlds. Thus Robert Lynd, while praising Zimmern's book itself as "ultra-modern," stressed that "no world could have been more unlike the twentieth-century modern world."²⁸ A short review in a regional American paper, the *Kansas City Star*, summed up one key difference in a byline: "WHERE MEN DODGED RICHES: It Wasn't Good Form to Be a Millionaire in Athens."²⁹ The same point was made in more academic terms in another American publication, the *Journal of Political Economy*: "His special care has rather been devoted to showing how different in many of its most fundamental presuppositions was Greek economic life from our own."³⁰ Zimmern's book was understood in the same terms by the most famous classicist of the day, Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff: "no obligation is placed on us to become Athenians or on the Athenians to have been moderns, nor are they harshly censured on the grounds that they were different."³¹ Other reviewers to make the same point include Zimmern's Jesuit pupil J. M. Murphy (whom he thanks in his "Preface") and his undergraduate contemporary A. D. Lindsay, who noted that precisely because "to every age the Greeks seem modern" it is essential "to realise how entirely different the

²⁶ H. J. Cunningham, review of *TGC*¹, *English Historical Review* 27/107 (1912), 533–5, at 534 (cited by Morefield, *Empires without Imperialism*, 49; and by Baji, *International Thought*, 34); G. W. B[otsford], *Political Science Quarterly* 27/5 (1912) 715–16, at 716, citing *TGC*, 168 (cited by Morefield, *Empires without Imperialism*, 38; and by Baji, *International Thought*, 34). Pace Earley, *The Thucydidean Turn*, 56, C. F. Huth, review of *TGC*¹, *Journal of Political Economy* 20/4 (1912), 516–20, does not present Zimmern as modernizing (see note 30 below).

²⁷ Morefield, *Empires without Imperialism*, 66–7. The claims of nostalgia and modernizing in this account stand in interesting tension.

²⁸ Lynd, "The Greek Genius."

²⁹ *Kansas City Star*, ZP 181.51. While *The Greek Commonwealth* was widely reviewed in the United States, the appearance of this review was doubtless due to Zimmern's friend Karl Walter, a *Star* journalist with whom he stayed in Kansas City in December 1911; the paper ran an interview with Zimmern on 7 Dec. 1911.

³⁰ Huth, review of *TGC*¹, 520. In a paper written before *The Greek Commonwealth*, Zimmern argues that what are now called the primitive (Rodbertus, Bücher) and modernizing (Meyer) approaches to the ancient economy are both extreme. Alfred Zimmern, *Solon and Croesus, and Other Essays* (London, 1928), 169–71; cf. *TGC*, 258 n. 1.

³¹ Review of *TGC*¹, *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* 33/17 (1912), 1072–4, at 1073, my trans. Cf. H. Swoboda, review of *TGC*¹, *Berliner Philologische Wochenschrift* 33/21 (1913), 651–5, at 652.

economic basis of Greek society was.³² The same emphasis on historical difference is found even in reviews which note Zimmern's predilection for modern analogies. The *New York Outlook*, for instance, found that "the constant citation of modern parallels and contrasts helps to clear away traditional misconceptions": "The political and economic institutions of the Greek are seen growing from very different roots from those of modern civilization."³³

The many reviewers who highlighted historical difference were following the line taken in *The Greek Commonwealth* from its opening pages. In his "Preface," Zimmern warned against "the application of modern methods and ideas to ancient times without a sufficient estimate of the difference between ancient Greek and modern conditions." He then repeated the warning in a one-page "Introductory Note," in which he asserted that he would be "approaching Greek civilization from a direction contrary to that often taken by modern writers, approaching it from the side on which its differences from our own are most apparent and from which its unique characteristics are most easily seized."³⁴ That is, Zimmern was engaged from the outset in a polemic against the tendency to assimilate ancient and modern of which he is accused by modern scholars.³⁵

Zimmern continued to stress historical difference in the rest of the book.³⁶ I will here offer some examples that bear on empire. First, the scale of the classical Greek world was much smaller than that of the Hellenistic or modern ages: "The big Hellenistic city, such as Alexandria or Antioch, a real metropolis in our sense of the word, and akin to our London and Paris, Vienna and New York, was totally different, in form as in spirit, architecturally, economically, and politically, from the sovereign municipalities of older Greece."³⁷ Second, the ancient world was simpler; the modern world is more complex.³⁸ Third, the modern belief—which "we ... are trying to teach Asiatics and Africans"—that civilization consists in "material blessings and comforts" contrasts with the ancient Greek belief that it is spiritual.³⁹ Fourth, the Greeks "show no trace of 'colour-prejudice,'" "the sentiment of the colour-bar" being "of comparative recent origin."⁴⁰ Fifth, "between Greek and modern Western warfare" there are "clear and

³² J. M. M[urphy], "Periclean Athens," *Studies* 1/1 (1912), 208–10, at 208 (ZP 8.95 proves the authorship); A. D. Lindsay, "The Greek Commonwealth" (review of *TGC*¹), *Sociological Review* 6/1 (1913), 60–62, at 60.

³³ Anon., *Outlook* 99/15 (1911), 883. Similarly T. Lenschau, review of *TGC*⁴, *Philologische Wochenschrift* 46/40 (1926), 1087–9, at 1087.

³⁴ *TGC*, 13. The point was made, too, in the discarded introductory section. Zimmern, *Solon and Croesus*, e.g. 75.

³⁵ Cf. Paul Millett, "Zimmern's *Greek Commonwealth* Revisited," in Christopher Stray, ed., *Oxford Classics: Teaching and Learning 1800–2000* (London, 2007), 168–202, at 182.

³⁶ Cf. e.g. *TGC*, 67, 287, 290–91, 320.

³⁷ *TGC*, 296 n. 1. Cf. *ibid.*, 150 n. 1, on the "bearing on very similar psychological problems to-day" of Renan's contrast of the small Greek city and the large Roman Empire.

³⁸ See esp. *TGC*, 221 as well as the Nietzsche motto at 13: "Die Griechen sind, wie das Genie, *einfach*: deshalb sind sie die unsterblichen Lehrer" ("the Greeks are, like genius, *simple*: therefore they are immortal teachers")—a (slight mis)quotation from posthumously published philological notes. E. Holzer (ed.), *Nietzsche's Werke* (Leipzig, 1910), 17.352.

³⁹ *TGC*, 215.

⁴⁰ *TGC*, 323 n. 1, citing Earl of Cromer, *Ancient and Modern Imperialism* (London, 1910).

vital distinctions.”⁴¹ Sixth, a modern colonial comparison shows “how fundamentally different their economy is from ours”: “we must not think of work on the land as it is practised, in these days of machinery and organization, by restless immigrants round Winnipeg.”⁴² Finally, there are “profound and characteristic differences between ancient Greek and most modern forms of colonization”: “A Greek colonizing expedition was not a private venture of individuals or groups of individuals, but embodied a carefully organized scheme of State-promoted emigration.”⁴³

What, then, of the evidence of the two reviews cited for the view that Zimmern did modernize the Greeks? The “audacious modernity” alleged by Cunningham refers to the fact that “the most modern terminology is used whenever possible”: “the two Xenophontic treatises are consistently referred to as ‘Old Oligarch’ and ‘Ways and Means’; the popular assemblies become ‘Parliaments’; the *πρυτανεῖς τῶν ναυκράρων* ‘General Purposes Committee’, the *κατωνακοφόροι* ‘Woolly Bears’, the *ἐπίσκοποι* of the Athenian empire ‘Imperial Bishops.’”⁴⁴ Cunningham is evidently right about the modern terminology. “Old Oligarch” was introduced by Gilbert Murray in 1897 as a name for the author of the Pseudo-Xenophontic *Constitution of the Athenians*, while “Ways and Means” as a translation of the title of Xenophon’s *Πόροι* (*Poroi*) dates back a bit earlier (“Ways” evokes the original spatial meaning of *Πόροι*).⁴⁵ Neither title, however, suggests any modernizing of the Greeks themselves. “Parliaments” and “General Purposes Committee” do seem to smack a bit more of the modern, but the political institutions for which those terms are used are well attested in ancient sources. As for those “Woolly Bears,” that name, along with “Dustfoots,” “Club-carriers,” and “Brother Dogs,” is one that was given to dependent agricultural laborers: it is scarcely an index of modernity.⁴⁶ The title “Imperial Bishops,” finally, is offered as a variant for “Overseers,” a literal translation of the Greek *ἐπίσκοποι* (*episkopoi*), in playful allusion to the word’s later history (Zimmern even has these officials appointed to “dioceses”).⁴⁷

It is only Botsford’s review, then, that directly alleges that Zimmern modernized the Greeks themselves. Let us look at the one passage he cites in support of this allegation—an account of the Athenians in assembly:

⁴¹ TGC, 296 n. 1: “the desire for territorial aggrandisement (‘painting the map red’) was foreign to the City State proper,” the temptation for Greeks statesmen being “not annexation but robbery.”

⁴² TGC, 230–31.

⁴³ TGC, 252–3.

⁴⁴ Cunningham, review of TGC¹, 534.

⁴⁵ Old Oligarch: Gilbert Murray, *A History of Ancient Greek Literature* (London, 1897), 167–9; cf. J. L. Marr and P. J. Rhodes, eds., *The “Old Oligarch”: The Constitution of the Athenians Attributed to Xenophon* (Oxford, 2008), 1. Ways and Means: Arthur Latham Perry, *Elements of Political Economy*, 5th edn (1865) (New York, 1869), 3, is the earliest instance I have found (earlier editions of Perry’s work have “On the Revenues of Athens”).

⁴⁶ TGC¹, 107. “Woolly Bears”—which can denote a hairy caterpillar (*OED* C2)—has no obvious relation to the Greek word *κατωνακοφόροι*; it was replaced in the 4th edn (TGC, 111) by “Smock-weavers” (itself presumably a mistake for “Smock-wearers”).

⁴⁷ TGC, 191 n. 1: “Wilamowitz ... thinks they were not appointed to single cities but had dioceses.” Cf. the anonymous review at *Oxford Magazine* 31 (21 Nov. 1912), 99: “the style is too ultra modern, it might almost be said, flippancy.”

There they would sit grumbling and yawning and scratching their heads, going over their olive-trees or composing letters to absent friends, wishing they had stopped for a mixed drink on their way up, above all lamenting the square meal they will not get till to-morrow (for it will be too late when they get home to have a supper worth eating).⁴⁸

These Greeks thinking about their olive trees and going to bed hungry do not seem as modern as Botsford's reference to the "mixed drink" would have us think. What is more, the footnote attached to the paragraph offers an ancient source for this cocktail: "Theophrastus, Jebb, p. 86 (countrymen's drinks)." This passage (*Characters* 4) describes a "boor" as "one who goes to the assembly having drunk *kykeon*." *Kykeon* was, to use an ancient grammarian's definition, "the drink mixed (ἀναμιεμυγμένον) from wine, honey, barley, and water";⁴⁹ derived from another verb for "mix," it literally means "mixed drink." Zimmern may again seem flippant, but he does not modernize the Greeks.

As he noted in the letter to Graham Wallas quoted at the start of this section, Zimmern's attention to historical difference matched his stress on geographical difference. His technique of zooming in on details such as that open-air assembly or "the turn of the crooked street" does not, as Morefield supposes, make them familiar: on the contrary, it defamiliarizes them. Consider Athens's streets as Zimmern presents them: "Her streets were narrow and crooked, dirty, unlighted, and ill-paved. She had no sewers, or even cesspools, and over the whole department of sanitation it is best to draw a veil."⁵⁰ This type of (un-nostalgic) physical description furthers Zimmern's pedagogical goals by humanizing the Athenians and giving a sense of their daily life. It picks up Zimmern's initial stress on how alien the natural Mediterranean environment is to northerners and how little it has been understood in the classical classroom. Greece (ancient and modern) is in fact repeatedly presented by Zimmern as part of the Near East.⁵¹ Northerners have made themselves at home in it only by adapting their ways to its challenges: many have given up the attempt and returned home.

Imperial comparisons

The right way with historical analogies is to use so many of them, and set the imagination so vividly to work, that you cannot possibly become the slave of any one.

Alfred Zimmern, "History as an Art"⁵²

⁴⁸TGC, 168.

⁴⁹Apollonius, *Lexicon Homericum*, 105.

⁵⁰TGC, 296.

⁵¹Excessively so, thought Gilbert Murray when he read a draft prior to publication (as can be inferred from GMP 116.14, Zimmern to Murray, 17 July [1910]). Morefield, *Empires without Imperialism*, 119 with n. 101, reads Zimmern's discussion of the Mediterranean (via a misrepresentation of the views of Ridgeway, Myres, and Curtis) as promoting a narrative of Anglo-Saxon domination.

⁵²Zimmern, *Solon and Croesus*, 43 (from the discarded introduction to TGC).

Let us turn now to see how Zimmern's frequent stress on the difference of the ancient Greek world sits alongside his inclusion of transhistorical imperial comparisons.

At various points in *The Greek Commonwealth* Zimmern links the Greeks' colonization of other parts of the Mediterranean with British overseas expansion. Drawing on Tennyson, he writes that Greek colonists "like the Elizabethans after them ... followed the gleam"; an accompanying note points to a shared distinction between early "migrants" and later "immigrants" in the ancient western Mediterranean and in modern Canada.⁵³ Greek colonization supplies the context, too, for a comparison of Greek and British technical proficiency, and again for a witty gloss on how the fall of Sybaris, a Greek settlement in Italy, was mourned at Miletus, the chief trading city at that time.⁵⁴ Zimmern also uses implicit comparisons: his phrasing "Sea Lords, as the Greeks called them," aligns the Greek term "thalassocrats" with the official title used since 1904 for the head of British navy, while the repeated "Outlanders" for Athens's metics translates "Uitlanders," the Boer term for the (mainly British) foreign workers in the Transvaal prior to the Boer War.⁵⁵

Narrower comparisons are made between the British and Athenian empires. In a chapter on the development of the Athenian empire, Zimmern compares the opportunities offered by sea power to Athenian metics and British subjects: "one might meet in any port of the Mediterranean, as one meets Maltese and Cypriots and other British subjects to-day, men whose proudest boast, and sometimes (it is to be feared) safest excuse for wrongdoing, was their connexion with the queen of the seas." In a note he adds, "There is, however, no instance of Athens going to war to avenge wrongs done to Athenian subjects for non-payment of traders' debts"—the implication being that there are such instances in the case of Britain.⁵⁶ In a note two pages later, he compares the gradual standardization of coinage in the Aegean with the similar process in the Indian native states.⁵⁷ The same chapter has other, more general, comparisons: "Athens could no more step back than most Englishmen feel they can leave India," and the Athenians "had neither the leisure nor the desire, any more than eighteenth-century Englishmen, to invent an imperial theory of their own."⁵⁸ These explicit comparisons are mixed with implicit ones: one of the chapter's mottos is taken from Edmund Burke's speech "On Conciliation with America"; the claim that "like other great things the Athenian empire was the child of necessity, and its creators did not know what they were doing," echoes

⁵³TGC, 255 with 256 n. 1; cf. Tennyson's poem "Merlin and the Gleam" (a glimmer of the holy grail).

⁵⁴Technical: TGC, 86 n. 1: "a grateful Spanish chieftain gives the Phocaeans money to build a wall, as an Indian rajah has had a well sunk at Stoke Row in the Chilterns as a thank-offering to his engineer." The Ionian city of Phocaea founded a settlement, Emporion, on the Mediterranean coast of Spain in the sixth century BCE. Mourning: TGC, 31: "Manchester would be as sorry, though she might show it differently, if the Cape were in foreign hands and we then lost control of the Suez Canal." The Milesians had shaved their heads.

⁵⁵Sea Lords: TGC, 33. Outlanders: first at TGC, 177 and over thirty times in all. See notes 128 and 137 below for other implicit Anglo-Boer War comparisons.

⁵⁶TGC, 191 with n. 2—presumably a loose allusion to the Don Pacifico affair (cf. Zimmern, *The Third British Empire*, 138; Alfred Zimmern, *L'empire britannique: Sa recent évolution—sa condition actuelle* (Paris: Comité national d'études sociales et politiques, 29 April 1929), 12). Thanks to George Garnett, Alex Middleton, and Jon Parkin for discussion of this point.

⁵⁷TGC, 193 n. 1.

⁵⁸TGC, 194, 196.

the trope of the British as absent-minded imperialists; and the tag “Little Athenians” applied to internal opponents of empire is modeled on “Little Englanders.”⁵⁹ In the following chapter, the climax of Part II, Zimmern writes that Athens, “like England, was dependent for its existence on foreign supplies,” adding that “by the ‘consolidation’ of her Empire, i.e. by exercising her sea-power, she was able to control the trade in necessities.”⁶⁰ Later, in Part III, there is a comparison between the British use of tax farmers in Bengal and the Athenians’ system of municipal taxation within Athens itself—in a passage which draws a contrast with the Athenians’ direct supervision of imperial taxation (tribute, it is noted, was farmed out only after the Sicilian disaster).⁶¹ Zimmern went on to add a further implied comparison in a footnote in the 1922 edition where, in discussing Athens’s use of sea power to enforce laws about grain shipments, he alludes to what he saw as Britain’s selfish and politically calamitous coal policy in the immediate aftermath of the war.⁶²

One implicit comparison merits close attention. Zimmern twice refers to the Persian naval force in 480 BCE as an “Armada,” once in a translation from Thucydides (“the Barbarian came over with his big Armada to enslave Greece”), the second time in stressing the effect of “the repulse of the Armada at Salamis.”⁶³ The obvious allusion to the English naval victory over the Spanish in 1588 is linguistically clever: just as “Armada” in Spanish derives from a verb meaning “arm” and denotes “an armed force,” so the Greek word Zimmern translates as “Armada,” *στόλος*, derives from a verb meaning “equip” and denotes both “equipment” and “expedition.” As for the allusion’s significance, that changes when “Armada” is repeated in the final sentence of *The Greek Commonwealth*, as ominous climax to the truncated Peloponnesian War narrative that forms its “Conclusion”: “Six months after the sack of Melos the Great Armada left port for Sicily.”⁶⁴ By seeking to conquer Sicily, Athens is now following in the destructive imperial path of Persia.⁶⁵

⁵⁹Burke: *TGC*, 180. Absent-minded: *TGC*, 185. Little Athenians: *TGC*, 185, 194. The “absent-minded” tag is based on a common misreading of a sentence in the most famous nineteenth-century study of British imperialism, Seeley’s 1883 *Expansion of England*: Seeley’s claim—“We seem, as it were, to have conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind” (12)—was a comment on the historiography, not the process, of British imperialism. Cf. John Gross, “Editor’s Introduction,” in Seeley, *Expansion of England*, xi–xxvii, at xii. Zimmern was guilty of this misreading (see note 158 below).

⁶⁰*TGC*, 202 n. 1—though cf. the historicization of necessities in *ibid.*, 319–20.

⁶¹*TGC*, 297 n. 1. Morefield, *Empires without Imperialism*, 50, misrepresents the passage. Zimmern’s allusion to Bengal picks up the aside in *TGC*, 296, that tax farming “still survives, of course, in many parts of the East”: the point is a continuity in the East—to which Athens belongs.

⁶²*TGC*³, 363 n. 1. Cf. Zimmern’s letters on coal in the *Manchester Guardian*, 28 Nov. 1919 and 5 Dec. 1919, and the *Observer*, 7 Dec. 1919.

⁶³*TGC*, 180, 182.

⁶⁴*TGC*, 443. Thomas Hobbes, in his translation of Thucydides, uses “this *Armada*” of the Athenian expedition, translating τὰς νηυσὶν (lit. “the ships”) at 6.8.3. Thucydides, *Eight Bookes of the Peloponnesian Warre*, trans. Thomas Hobbes (London, 1629), 355; cf. Peter Green, *Armada from Athens* (London, 1970).

⁶⁵A Thucydidean reading: cf. Tim Rood, “Thucydides’ Persian Wars,” in Christina S. Kraus, ed., *The Limits of Historiography: Genre and Narrative in Ancient Historical Texts* (Leiden, 1999), 141–68. The shift from “big” (Persian) to “Great” (Athenian) Armada captures the Herodotean opposition of quantitative Persian and qualitative Greek greatness, as analysed by David Konstan, “Persians, Greeks and Empire,” *Arethusa* 20/1–2 (1987), 59–73.

What of the implicit comparison with Britain's imperial citizenship that, as I noted earlier, Tomohito Baji finds in Zimmern's account of Athens? Baji's claims are that Zimmern presented both Athenians and English patriotism as homogeneous and rooted in traditional local loyalties, and that he saw this national homogeneity as a unifying moral force for the British Commonwealth.⁶⁶ One problem with Baji's reading is that homogeneity does not play much of a role in Zimmern's account of Athens, even in the early stages where the power of custom was strongest and inter-city communication weakest. In the later stages, Zimmern stresses the importance of non-Greek influences and then roots the distinctiveness of fifth-century Athens in two factors: the political revolution masterminded by the Athenian statesman Cleisthenes at the end of the sixth century, which broke the force of the lesser loyalties, and the naval power built up during the war against Persia. If, in Zimmern's vision, Cleisthenes' reforms marked "the complete breakdown ... of the old exclusive patriarchal idea of the State as a corporation," then this process was boosted further by Athens's acquisition of ships and wealth in her newfound imperial power, and together these developments meant that "Athens was glad to see her aliens"—a cutting implied *contrast* with the Britain of the 1905 Aliens Act, against which Zimmern had protested.⁶⁷

It is time to draw some conclusions from this analysis of Zimmern's imperial analogies. One point that should immediately be stressed is that comparisons do not undermine my earlier criticism of the view that Zimmern modernized the Greeks. He does use unclassical tags such as "Little Athenians," but he applies them to features of ancient life that are amply attested in extant sources.⁶⁸

A second point is that analogies between Britain and Athens or other Greek cities are accompanied by many other types of imperial comparison—including comparisons with and between other empires and between imperial and domestic practices. The chapter on Athens's empire includes comparisons with judicial arrangements in the Turkish Empire,⁶⁹ with Germany's move to unification and financial centralization,⁷⁰ with the continuing use of Maria Theresa dollars in Abyssinia and Arabia,⁷¹ with the Persian and Assyrian empires,⁷² and with the enthusiasm of "the Rhineland and Italian troops" for Napoleon.⁷³ On facing pages in a chapter on seventh-century Greece, Zimmern first aligns Thucydides' omission of the land crisis with the neglect of industrial misery in Seeley's *Expansion of England*, and then writes that the rural Greek poor

⁶⁶Baji, *International Thought*, 33–80.

⁶⁷TGC, 178; Alfred Zimmern, "The Alien Act," *Economic Review* 21/2 (1911), 187–97 (written in 1905, but still topical the year TGC was published). Pace Baji, *International Thought*, 57, Zimmern does not present the metics as inherently unreceptive to Athenian culture. Note too that Thuri fails owing to the particularism, not the homogeneity, of the city-state. See further note 7 above on "commonwealth," note 155 below on slavery; and Rood, "Alfred Zimmern's Early Political Thought II" for further detail.

⁶⁸The "Little Athenians" are the men criticized by Pericles at Thuc. 2.63.2 and discussed in L. B. Carter, *The Quiet Athenian* (Oxford, 1986).

⁶⁹TGC, 189 n. 2 ("until recently").

⁷⁰TGC, 189—though Greek coinage starts with even greater diversity and does not reach so strong a uniformity as the Zollverein.

⁷¹TGC, 193 n. 1.

⁷²TGC, 194 (see further below).

⁷³TGC, 196 n. 1, with the qualification "probably"; the comparison was suggested by Arnold Toynbee.

were “in a ‘condition of service or residence of a servile character’”—“to use the convenient South African phrase.”⁷⁴ In dealing with exploration and colonization, Zimmern detects continuities in Greek emigration “whether, as of old, to Sicily and Italy, or, as now, to the United States,” while his suggestion that Kipling used Hanno for his story “The Joyous Venture” aligns Carthaginians exploring Africa with Vikings setting off from Britain to roam along the same coast.⁷⁵ These comparisons are supplemented by numerous other parallels in Zimmern’s account of the rise of the city-state—including a running parallel with the Old Testament history of the Jews and analogies with modern Japan.⁷⁶

A further point that emerges from the passages cited above is that Zimmern’s comparisons are mostly specific rather than global comparisons between two empires. Ancient Athens and modern Britain *are* linked in their exercise of sea power (not always for the common good), in some administrative measures, and in their perception of the danger of letting go of power. India is separate from the dominions and the tropical empire, and within India different comparisons are made with the princely states and with Bengal which do not hold for the other provinces. In addition, and partly as a corollary, comparisons frequently carry an idea of contrast too (the people of Manchester would not cut their hair in mourning, and Athens did not go to war for metics).

Allied to this specificity is the chronological distribution and sparing use of particular allusions. Comparisons with the Greeks in general are more common in the account of colonization, while comparisons with Athens are found in the fifth-century narrative and largely restricted to a single chapter. The claim that the whole book is “overburdened with explicit historical parallels between the fifth-century Athenian experience of empire and the British rule in India” is altogether misleading: in a book of 450 pages, I count at most three such explicit parallels, and of these two are buried within long footnotes and one applies only to the last few years of Athens’s empire.⁷⁷

Reading *The Greek Commonwealth* as a whole exposes the hollowness of claims that Zimmern’s main goal was to align Athens and England as exponents of liberal empire. The small number of passages drawing Athens and England together are part of a nexus of comparisons and contrasts, some of which pull the other way: the “Uitlanders”

⁷⁴ *TGC*, 108, 109 (the Transvaal constitution of 1906 *prohibited* such a condition of service).

⁷⁵ *TGC*, 62, 26.

⁷⁶ Jews: e.g. *TGC*, 71, 84. Japan: *TGC*, 81 with n. 1, 183, 200, 216 n. 1, 342 n. 1; cf. Zimmern, *Solon and Croesus*, 65 (from the discarded introductory section of *TGC*).

⁷⁷ Morefield, *Empires without Imperialism*, 50; contrast Nehru’s judgement (Gandhi, *Two Alone*, 216). Morefield explains the supposed Indian obsession by Zimmern’s membership of the Round Table group when he was writing *TGC*—but in fact he joined the group in 1914 (Alex May, “The Round Table, 1910–66” (unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1995), 453). Morefield, *Empires without Imperialism*, 50, cites Zimmern’s discussion of Indian education (which has nothing to do with the Athenian empire), uniform coinage (*TGC*, 193 n. 1), and tax farming (*TGC*, 297 n. 1); elsewhere she cites the only other instance—the reference to the difficulty of abandoning empire (*TGC*, 194). There are other Indian references in *TGC*, 60 n. 1 (Indian heat contrasted with the Aegean), 74 (possible Indian influence on Plato, cf. 446), 184 n. 1 (Marathon “was no more a ‘crowning mercy’ [a phrase Cromwell applied to the Battle of Worcester] than Plassy”—i.e. an East India Company victory over French and Bengalese forces is compared with an Athenian victory over Persian invaders), 224 n. 1 (mechanical progress is still properly appreciated in “India or Turkey or Morocco”).

tag equates British workers in Transvaal with metics working for Athenian Boers; the use of “Armada” ends up by stressing Athenian aggression; and a passage where Zimmern cites Burke’s exhortation “to bring the dispositions that are lovely in private life into the service and conduct of the commonwealth” stresses that Japan *alone*—not Britain—provides a national parallel for the Greeks’ civic devotion.⁷⁸ The stress on difference is reinforced at the domestic level, for instance by explicit contrasts between English and Greek gardens or between the social systems responsible for the Parthenon sculptures and the Albert Memorial and an implicit complaint about British legislation on immigration.⁷⁹ Zimmern’s beguiling assemblage of modern references does not encourage simplistic analogies or the extraction of formulas that can be applied to the twentieth-century *polis*. Rather, to adopt some of his own phrasing, it sets the imagination vividly to work, prompting readers to think more deeply about the complexities of political and economic life, both ancient and modern, without becoming the slave of any one analogy.⁸⁰

Zimmern’s stress on difference was part of a wider Edwardian engagement with antiquity that sought meaning in both similarity and difference. Indeed, the very fact that Zimmern spoke of approaching Greek civilization “from the side on which its differences from our own are most apparent” shows his consciousness that it might be approached from a side on which its similarities were more apparent.⁸¹ Behind such language of difference and similarity lay a common perception of Greek civilization as a complete whole which was marked by progression from primitive to archaic (or “medieval”) eras and then by modernization and decline.⁸² In keeping with this vision, Zimmern saw Athens as having undergone an ancient form of a process approximating to modernization, so that her very points of difference could also encourage thought about contemporary history. As we shall see, it was the very fact that the imperial city had failed to adapt adequately to the changing economic forces of the fifth century that made her so instructive for modern readers in an age of rapid political and economic change.

⁷⁸ *TGC*, 81, citing Burke’s “Present Discontents”—one of only three uses of “commonwealth” in *TGC*¹ (I discuss these in “From *The Greek Commonwealth*,” Section 2). Morefield, *Empires without Imperialism*, 48, nonetheless sees “slippage between Athens and England” in this passage. Elsewhere Zimmern calls Venice “the State which, in all history, [Athens] most closely resembles” (*TGC*, 217).

⁷⁹ *TGC*, 446 (cf. 60), 368 n. 1, 178 (see below).

⁸⁰ See above at note 52. Modern comparisons are a feature of other British histories of ancient Greece too (see now Oswyn Murray, *The Muse of History: The Ancient Greeks from the Enlightenment to the Present* (London, 2024)), but I know of none that uses them with such frequency or bravura as *TGC*.

⁸¹ *TGC*, 13.

⁸² One common Edwardian view (popularized by Gilbert Murray) saw Euripides as the chief emblem of the Athenians’ modernity. This view is echoed at *TGC*¹, 56, in an Athenian–Norwegian/English comparison which was removed in later editions: “The Greek peasant understood and enjoyed the plays of Euripides (which were as deep as Ibsen and as delicate as Galsworthy).” The comparison underlines difference too, in that British “peasants” would not regularly attend such plays.

Zimmern and Athens

IR historians who have claimed that Zimmern presents Athens as England, and vice versa, have based that claim not just on Zimmern's supposed modernization of the Greeks and on his use of historical comparisons, but also on his narrative of the development of the Athenian empire. In the final part of this article, I will show that this account is much more complex and sophisticated, and much more critical of Athens, than has been assumed, and that its complexity lies in its probing analysis of the failure of Athenian political practice to adapt to economic change. The key chapters which I will discuss in the next two sections are the final two in Part II, "Politics"; in the third section I will outline the contribution of Part III, "Economics," to Zimmern's argument.

The paradox of liberty and empire, or the illogicality of Athens

We start with an analysis of a single chapter in *The Greek Commonwealth*: "Liberty, or the Rule of Empire," the final chapter in the subsection "The Development of Citizenship" that occupies the first seven chapters of Part II. Drawing on Herodotus and Thucydides, the chapter describes how the Athenians resisted the Persians' attack with the help of allies, and then became leaders at sea with their allies' consent when the land-based Spartans withdrew from the Aegean; later they became still more powerful when the allies started to contribute money rather than ships for the upkeep of the fleet. Zimmern evidently gave some thought to the title of this chapter: in his draft "Empire" is written above the crossed-out words "the individual."⁸³ Its combination with "Liberty" was viewed as "paradoxical" by one reviewer, and the chapter as a whole received further criticism from others; these reviewers have been followed by modern scholars, one of whom has described it as the book's least satisfactory chapter for twenty-first-century readers.⁸⁴

To understand Zimmern's choice of title, we must first look at its literary resonances. The grouping of freedom and empire glances at a passage in Thucydides where the Athenian Diodotus describes how irrational desires tempt both individuals and states, but especially states, since for them the stakes are highest, "freedom or rule over others" (3.45.6: ἐλευθερίας ἢ ἄλλων ἀρχῆς). While that passage may suggest that freedom and empire were compatible for some Greek thinkers, the pairing of Latinate "liberty" with empire recalls *imperium et libertas*, a Latin tag used in late Victorian and Edwardian

⁸³The title "Freedom, or the Rule of the Individual" would have highlighted the development from "Custom, or the Rule of the Family" (the title of Ch. 2)—as flagged at various points in the section, e.g. 137 (Solon's laws were designed "to free the individual from lesser ties and bind him closely to the city"). Readings of *TGC* as offering a Burkean narrative of the building of larger upon smaller loyalties (Morefield, *Empires without Imperialism*, esp. 35, 46–8; Baji, *International Thought*, esp. 51–4) ignore how revolutionary and centralized fifth-century Athens is (cf. *TGC*, 138 on Cleisthenes): see Rood, "Alfred Zimmern's Early Political Thought II."

⁸⁴Reviews: anon., "The Greek Commonwealth" (review of *TGC*¹), *The Spectator* 107 (4 Nov. 1911), 745–6; cf. Lynd, "The Greek Genius" ("Empire instead of freedom"); [Henry Stuart Jones], "Imperial Athens" (review of *TGC*¹), *Times Literary Supplement* 505 (14 Sept. 1912), 303. Modern scholars: Millett, "Zimmern's *Greek Commonwealth*," 188; see also P. J. Rhodes, *Ancient Democracy and Modern Ideology* (London, 2003), 48; Peter Liddel, "European Colonialist Approaches to the Athenian Empire," in John Ma, Nikolaos Papazarkadas and Robert Parker, eds., *Interpreting the Athenian Empire* (London, 2009), 13–42, at 28.

discussions of British imperialism.⁸⁵ For many who used it, the phrase signaled the division of Britain's empire into free dominions and unfree dependencies. While its use did not necessarily signify disapproval, Zimmern provocatively restores the full paradox by applying both terms to Athens's rule. As we follow Zimmern's narrative in the chapter itself, we shall see that he himself anticipates the charge of paradox.

There is much in the chapter that portrays the Athenians' imperial activity positively. Besides mentioning, as we have seen, Solon's excellent laws and the Athenians' (selective) commitment to free trade, Zimmern presents the Athenians as "clearing the sea itself of pirates and evildoers" and as having an "imperial mission—to mix freely with all mankind and to give of their best to men and nations."⁸⁶ He speaks, too, in glowing terms of Athens's use of the money she took from her allies: "The world is still blessing her for what she did with it ... The money was what Athens lived on, and still partly lives on."⁸⁷ With this last phrase, Zimmern makes modern Hellenophiles (and especially tourists) complicit in Athenian wrongdoing while seemingly excusing the Athenians themselves through their confidence that "posterity would understand it."⁸⁸

These rosy passages are balanced by darker tones. Zimmern notes that Athens protected her own adherents in criminal jurisdiction, including, as we have seen, metic traders who "were able to exploit their legal status," their connection with Athens being "sometimes (it is to be feared) [their] safest excuse for wrongdoing."⁸⁹ In other passages, he brings out that the allies had very mixed feelings about their position: Athens was a teacher "whether her pupils liked it or not," and among those pupils there was "plenty of grumbling," particularly from the wealthier classes.⁹⁰ The language Zimmern himself applies to Athenian actions is often far from positive: he speaks of financial centralization "of a peculiarly *insidious* kind," of the "gradual *encroachment* of the predominant partner," of the "still greater *encroachments* on [the allies'] sovereign jurisdiction," and of the process by which Athens, "with her overwhelming military predominance," was able with ease "to *steal* from position to position."⁹¹ In the second edition, moreover, he added a reference to the failure of the unrepresentative Delian parliament.⁹²

Two passages merit particular attention. First, a comparison between Athens's empire and two Asiatic powers:

⁸⁵ Compatibility: Jacqueline de Romilly, *Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism*, trans. P. Thody (Fr. orig. 1947) (Oxford, 1963), 79–82. *Imperium et libertas*: Parchami, *Hegemonic peace*, index s.v. Zimmern uses "freedom" more than twice as often as "liberty," and consistently in the Funeral Speech translation.

⁸⁶ TGC, 189, 193.

⁸⁷ TGC, 194–5. The reference to Athenian hotel keepers implied in "still lives on" was explicit in the first draft (ZP 126.195).

⁸⁸ TGC, 195.

⁸⁹ TGC, 190, 191.

⁹⁰ TGC, 191, 196 n. 1.

⁹¹ TGC, 188, 189, 190, 191, added emphasis. Lisa Kallet, "The Origins of the Athenian Economic *Arche*," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 133 (2013), 43–60, at 56, similarly calls Athens's financial exploitation of empire "insidious." Contrast Rhodes, *Ancient Democracy*, 48, on Zimmern's "glowing picture of beneficent centralisation"; and Morefield, *Empires without Imperialism*, 51, on the allies as "free partners" (a phrase Zimmern applies in fact to metics).

⁹² TGC, 161 n. 1, refining his claim in the 1st edn that representative government was known to the Greeks; see Rood, "From *The Greek Commonwealth*," Section 4.

in the course of a generation freedom had changed its meaning ... Athens had now become an Empire just like Persia or Assyria, and she did not blush to receive tribute from her inferiors. Indeed she needed it for the fulfilment of the work she had to do: and Pericles, like Darius, was determined to see that she should secure and keep it.⁹³

This comparison was condemned in a probing review by Victor Ehrenberg: the chapter “makes ἐλευθερία as demand for freedom from the Persian Empire a symbol of the idea of empire, but lets the actual development from συμμαχία [‘alliance’] to ἀρχή [‘rule’] end in the completely misguided idea of an ‘Empire just like Persia or Assyria’—a formulation which “completely ignores the crucial problem of the contradictory phenomenon of the ‘polis empire.’”⁹⁴ While there is evidently a vast difference of scale between the two types of empire, Zimmern must again have had in mind the Thucydidean model of Athens as a new Persia.⁹⁵ That much, at least, is implied by the claim that freedom had changed its meaning: picking up the tension in the chapter title, Zimmern suggests that Athens under Pericles no longer stood for freedom from rule by others but for freedom to rule others. When he goes on to call Athens’s creation of tribute districts her “first avowedly imperial piece of organization,” moreover, he was, like more recent scholars, claiming that Athens was copying Persian methods.⁹⁶

The second passage pointedly picks up one of the chapter’s mottos—a quotation from Burke:

It was indeed very illogical of Sophocles to hymn eternal justice in his Oedipus and yet to take office without a scruple as a misappropriator of imperial funds. It was very illogical of the Sovereign People to entice sister communities into a league of liberty and then to punish them for their withdrawal—as illogical as for Burke, imbued with the spirit of a later Empire, to declare about the American Colonies that “the more ardently they love liberty the more perfect will be their obedience.”⁹⁷

⁹³ TGC, 194. Morefield, *Empires without Imperialism*, 50, sees a contrast with Persia in Zimmern’s earlier claim that the watchword of the Athenian alliance was “not Defense but Freedom” (TGC, 186), but that passage is drawing a contrast between two stages of the Greek alliance. During the First World War Zimmern can be found opposing British rule to “Prussianism,” which “in its cruder aspects” is “as old as Egypt and Assyria.” Alfred Zimmern, *Nationality and Government, with Other War-Time Essays* (London, 1918), 333.

⁹⁴ Review of TGC⁴, *Gnomon* 1 (1925) 140–46, at 144, my translation.

⁹⁵ See note 64 above (on “Armada”).

⁹⁶ TGC, 195. So also e.g. Kurt Raaflaub, “Learning from the Enemy: Athenian and Persian ‘Instruments of Empire,’” in Ma, Papazarkadas and Parker, *Interpreting the Athenian Empire*, 89–124, at 98–101; Herodotus is thought to be making the same point. Kai Ruffing, “Gifts for Cyrus, Tribute for Darius,” in Thomas Harrison and Elizabeth Irwin, eds., *Interpreting Herodotus* (Oxford, 2018), 149–62, at 152. See further TGC, 407–8, where Zimmern follows Francotte in supporting that the term for “tribute,” *phoros*, was taken over from Persia: contrast Oswyn Murray, “Ο ἀρχαῖος δασμός,” *Historia* 15/2 (1966), 142–56.

⁹⁷ TGC, 195–6. In a discarded draft Zimmern alluded to Sophocles’ role in “enslaving’ Samos.” ZP 126.395 v, echoing Thuc. 1.98.4.

The Burke quotation draws together Athens's rule and the first British empire, not as positive models of liberal empire but as exemplars of the paradox signaled by the chapter title. Rather than deflecting imperial contradictions, Zimmern again emphasizes them.

What, then, of modern criticism of this chapter as the least satisfactory in *The Greek Commonwealth*? That perception is due to the sudden change in narrative gear once Athens is fully established in an imperial position. The final three pages of the chapter are impressionistic, rich with literary allusion, and presented almost entirely from an Athenian perspective.

First there is a description of the Athenians engaged in the business of empire:

the men of these two generations of empire-building were not conscious of any wickedness. They were too busy with their work. If they stopped to think at all, as they rested on their oars, it was to reflect on the joy of achievement and how "all things worked together for good." For this it is which makes this short half-century perhaps the greatest and happiest period in recorded history. The world was moving onwards with extraordinary swiftness, bearing on its bosom, like a strong river in flood, all that lay within its track. And how much that was! "Freedom, Law, and Progress; Truth and Beauty; Knowledge and Virtue; Humanity and Religion; high things, the conflicts between which have caused most of the disruptions and despondencies of human societies, seemed all to lie in the same direction."⁹⁸

Zimmern here draws on the King James Version (Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God") and on Gilbert Murray's much-admired introduction to his translation of Euripides' *Bacchae* ("Freedom, Law, and Progress ...").⁹⁹ He seems caught by his own (Nietzschean) image of the Athenians as "artists" enjoying "the joyousness of the creator."¹⁰⁰

Though Zimmern does still offer reminders of the tensions inherent in Athenian imperialism, the chapter becomes still less satisfactory, by normal historiographical standards, as he evokes Pericles' Funeral Speech (a speech delivered at the end of the first year of the Peloponnesian War honoring, in accordance with Athenian custom, that year's war dead).¹⁰¹ The whole account of "The Development of Citizenship" to which Chapter 7 forms the climax is set up at the start as an attempt "to play the commentator to that highest expression of the art of life in the City State, the Funeral Speech of Pericles," and that idea is resumed at key transitional moments.¹⁰² These structural signposts are buttressed by other (referenced and unreferenced) allusions to the speech,

⁹⁸ TGC, 195.

⁹⁹ Gilbert Murray, *Euripides Translated into English Rhyming Verse* (London, 1902), xxiii.

¹⁰⁰ TGC, 195.

¹⁰¹ For the tensions see the Burke passage discussed above (TGC, 195–6); also "felt as yet no misgivings" and "every whisper which could reason them into unhappiness" (TGC, 195).

¹⁰² TGC, 58; cf. 132, 180.

several of which present it as a sort of *telos*.¹⁰³ Now, just before offering his own translation in the following chapter, Zimmern returns to the speech twice, first in describing Athens's sailors "serving her with 'the fighter's daring, the wise man's understanding, and the good man's self-discipline,'" and then in the chapter's extraordinary final paragraph.¹⁰⁴ The Athenians, Zimmern explains, were too busy during the half-century after the Persian Wars to invent a theory of imperialism for themselves. But Thucydides invented one for them after the collapse of the empire—one that "sounds absurd and vainglorious, as imperial theories always do, to a critical posterity," but that would be borne out, "albeit with modesty," "if the dead could rise from the Cerameicus [the setting of the Funeral Speech], or if their grave reliefs could find voices."¹⁰⁵ To convey this theory, Zimmern has "Thucydides" use "we" forms, so that the risen Athenian dead seem to speak with "Thucydides" while he echoes the speech that was supposedly delivered over their grave:

We are the leaders of civilization, the pioneers of the human race. Our society and intercourse is the highest blessing man can confer ... through effort and suffering and on many a stricken field we have found out the secret of human power, which is the secret of happiness ... the name we know it by is Freedom, for it has taught us that to serve is to be free. Do you wonder why it is that "alone among mankind" (will there ever be another nation which can understand what we mean?) "we confer our benefits, not on calculations of self-interest, but in the fearless confidence of Freedom"?¹⁰⁶

"Alone among mankind ..." is a translation of the initial motto from the Funeral Speech at the start of the chapter, there quoted solely in Thucydides' Greek (2.40.5). The sentiment is now given a Christian inflection: the idea that freedom lies in service can be traced back through Luther to the New Testament.¹⁰⁷

It is a curious thing, this "theory of imperialism" that Zimmern invents Thucydides inventing while anticipating criticism of its absurdity. For one thing, Zimmern has earlier termed a similar Periclean boast—"in doing good we are the exact opposite of the rest of mankind. We secure our friends not by accepting favours but by doing them"

¹⁰³ *TGC*, 68, 85, 101 n. 1, 112, 121, 124, 136, 144, 145, 161, 166, 172, 173 n. 1, 177, 180, 182 n. 1, 193, 195 n. 1; also 196, 197, for unreferenced quotations from Zimmern's translation, and 183–4 for an unmarked close paraphrase of 2.41.4.

¹⁰⁴ *TGC*, 196, cf. 207 (Zimmern's translation of 2.43.1).

¹⁰⁵ *TGC*, 196.

¹⁰⁶ *TGC*, 196–7. Nehru, who drew on this chapter in his critique of the British Empire (see note 3 above), misunderstood this passage as an actual quotation from Thucydides (*Discovery of India*, 550, omitting the quotation marks that delimit the actual Thucydides citation ("alone ... Freedom") as well as the parenthesis which interrupts it.

¹⁰⁷ For the Lutheran ethos (to which James Zetzel alerted me) see the two "themata" set out at the start of *De libertate Christiana*: "Christianus homo omnium dominus est liberrimus, nulli subiectus. Christianus homo omnium servus est officiosissimus, omnibus subiectus" ("A Christian is the freest master of all, subject to none. A Christian man is the most dutiful slave of all, subject to all"). Luther then cites 1 Corinthians 9:19; cf. e.g. 1 Peter 2:16. Zimmern's Jewish paternal grandfather was baptized into the Lutheran Church in Heidelberg in the 1820s.

(2.40.4)—“the most bitterly ironical passage of the Funeral Speech.”¹⁰⁸ For another thing, this theory seems very vague—unlike that “imperial theory,” “so dangerous to ambitious nations,” to which Zimmern later alludes, namely “the path ... of Defence through Offence.”¹⁰⁹ In Zimmern’s reading, the Athenians subscribe to this dangerous theory in their actions already under Pericles’ leadership, even if Pericles does not express it in words. The theory enunciated here, by contrast, is so removed from the realities of imperial power that some scholars take the key sentence from the Funeral Speech (2.40.4) to refer to the behavior of Athenian individuals at home rather than to Athenian dealings with other cities.¹¹⁰

Curious as the theory is, when Zimmern makes Thucydides/the Athenian dead break off to ask whether any other nation will ever understand what they mean, he is hinting that readers should lay aside criticism, answer “yes,” and prove their answer right by their words and deeds. But he has already provided plenty of evidence that the Athenians’ own actions belied the theory with which this paradox-driven chapter draws to a close.

Ironizing the Funeral Speech

The final chapter of Part II of *The Greek Commonwealth* stands alone in a subsection titled “The Ideal of Citizenship”; picking up the Athenians’ discovery of “the secret of happiness,” the chapter has the title “Happiness, or the Rule of Love.” It has been claimed that this chapter “consists solely of Zimmern’s own translation of the [Funeral Speech], as if Pericles’s observations simply spoke for themselves.”¹¹¹ In fact, the whole section is designed as a commentary on Pericles’ speech, and within the chapter itself some striking textual features guide the reader’s interpretation. Zimmern includes, unusually, no fewer than four chapter mottos (two in untranslated Greek, one in untranslated German): from Euripides, from the Funeral Speech itself, from Nietzsche’s *Also sprach Zarathustra* (“Was ist gut, fragt ihr? Tapfer sein ist gut”), and from Wordsworth’s poem “The Happy Warrior” (“More brave for this that he hath much to love”).¹¹² Besides this, Zimmern richly conveys the setting of the speech—including Pericles’ cadences and gestures as Thucydides recalls them—while suggesting that it transcends that setting.¹¹³ This transcendence occurs through the fusion of temporal perspectives (pre-plague and postwar) in the written speech: citing Nietzsche again, Zimmern suggests that “here we can listen, as in all fine works of interpretation, to two great spirits at once.”¹¹⁴ The temporal reach of the speech then extends as Zimmern evokes other patriotic

¹⁰⁸ TGC, 136, a gratuitous addition to a discussion of Solon’s reforms; the passage cited is just before that cited at 197. Cf. Zimmern, “Athens and America,” *Classical Journal* 43 (1947), 2–11, at 8.

¹⁰⁹ TGC, 357, 355.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War, Book II*, ed. J. S. Rusten (Cambridge, 1989). 156: “they would be a grotesque distortion of the nature of empire.”

¹¹¹ Morefield, *Empires without Imperialism*, 45. Bajji, *International Thought*, 55, similarly claims that Zimmern takes the speech at face value.

¹¹² TGC, 198.

¹¹³ Cf. Rood, “A. E. Zimmern,” 55–6, on how Zimmern draws here on Graham Wallas’s *Human Nature in Politics*.

¹¹⁴ TGC, 199.

sacrifices (including the Japanese at Mukden), as well as the most famous modern celebration of sacrifice, Lincoln's speech at Gettysburg ("great statesmen, like great poets, speak to one another from peak to peak").¹¹⁵ It is only now ("Let us stand in the valley and listen") that the translation itself starts.

If the framing of the translation of the Funeral Speech suggests that readers ought to attend submissively, Zimmern at once disrupts this expectation: "I have added a few notes, some pointing to storms ahead"—for "Thucydides could not restrain his irony even when Pericles was talking."¹¹⁶ He provided a fuller explanation of these notes in a letter he wrote to Graham Wallas: he wanted to emphasize "the pains Pericles took to glaze over the inner contradiction between his political sermon and his economic policy—e.g. how he describes the biggest trading city in Greece as *αὐτάρκεστατήν* [*autarkestatēn*, 2.36.3: literally "most self-sufficient"]."¹¹⁷ This tension between politics and economics is, as we shall see, central to the plot of *The Greek Commonwealth*.

Let us look at some of the footnotes Zimmern added to his translation, using italics for phrases directly quoted as captions. Some notes point to how Pericles' rhetoric is at odds with his own war strategy of abandoning the Attic countryside: "Both in 480 and in 431 Athenians withstood the warfare, but not the enemy in person"; "*March out none the less*: this was just what Pericles would not let them do until the enemy had retired home"; "*Not idly to stand aside*: this is exactly what the Athenians had just been forced to do during the Peloponnesian invasion of Attica."¹¹⁸ Other notes comment on contradictions between Pericles' words and his earlier speeches: the claim that Athenians do not trust in "the devices of material equipment" (2.39.1) is shown up by Pericles' appeal to their naval proficiency at 1.142.7–9.¹¹⁹ Also exposed is the shallowness of some of Pericles' rhetoric about relations with Athens's subject cities. Consider the section which immediately follows what Zimmern has called the "most bitterly ironical passage of the Funeral Speech" (2.40.4):¹²⁰ "we are naturally more firm in our attachments: for we are anxious, as creditors, to cement by kind offices our relation towards our friends. If they do not respond with the same warmth it is because they feel that their services will not be given spontaneously but only as the repayment of a debt." These fine words receive two notes: "*More firm in our attachments*: so much so that the 'friends' cannot shake off the tie, but become subjects"; "*The repayment of a debt*: at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War this was being repaid, in the form of tribute, at the rate of about 600 talents a year."¹²¹ The ensuing claim that Athens's subjects feel "no shame at the indignity of their dependence" is glossed as follows: "This is Pericles' theory of imperialism. The Empire is based, not on justice (as between equals) but on sentiment; not on rights secured to the other cities, but on the admiring loyalty they

¹¹⁵ *TGC*, 200.

¹¹⁶ *TGC*, 200 n. 1.

¹¹⁷ *GWP* 1/46.7–8 (5 Jan. 1910); cf. the note on 2.36.3 in *TGC*, 202 n. 1.

¹¹⁸ *TGC*, 202 n. 2 (on the vague boast of the Athenians "withstanding the warfare" of their enemies), 204 n. 1, 207 n. 1, original emphasis.

¹¹⁹ *TGC*, 203 n. 2. Cf. already *TGC*, 39 n. 1: "Contrast Thuc. ii.87.6 with 39.1; Thucydides is, of course, quite aware of the contradiction, and so was Pericles."

¹²⁰ *N*. 108.

¹²¹ *TGC*, 205 nn. 1, 2, original emphasis.

ought to feel. If they do not happen to feel it, he has nothing to fall back upon but naked force.”¹²² This comment exposes further the limitations of the theory of imperialism which “Thucydides” was made to present at the end of the previous chapter: Zimmern himself wrote early in the First World War that “Peace ... means States and societies based on Justice.”¹²³

The footnotes Zimmern attaches to the Funeral Speech carry a consistent implication. Pericles is using language appropriate to the ethos of a conventional city-state. He praises the city in terms suitable to a state that provisions itself from its own land rather than importing its necessities; he envisages it as defending itself on land, not shielding behind its walls; and he applies to it the traditional discourse of reciprocal friendship even as the imbalances of power make a mockery of his phrases.

The analysis of the last two sections shows that *The Greek Commonwealth* is an artful narrative that is in constant dialogue with its powerfully ironic inspiration, Thucydides’ *History*. It is far from being a simple validation of Athens’s liberal empire or any form of allegory of the past or future of Athens’s supposed modern analogue, Great Britain. To understand fully the aim of Zimmern’s narrative, however, we have to watch his narrative craftsmanship at work as he moves to the long third part of *The Greek Commonwealth*.

The economics of empire

What I want to do is to show the forces on both sides: the πόλις, with its traditions of religion, morality, law, humanity etc. and the imperialist or economic forces which drove them into injustice in order (speaking roughly) to finance the Parthenon.

Alfred Zimmern to Gilbert Murray, 28 March 1910¹²⁴

Zimmern initially planned to include a “static” treatment of economics in *The Greek Commonwealth* by surveying the fifth-century city-state in its varied economic life. But as he wrote the book, he decided that his story required a “dynamic” approach.¹²⁵ After two introductory chapters (“Poverty” and “Usage and Wont”), he divided the section into three parts: “The Growing City,” “City Economics,” and “Imperial Economics.” In these subsections (the first and third in particular), Zimmern goes over some of the same ground as in Part II and with help from the same key source: the Funeral Speech is frequently quoted, notably in the mottos for Part III as a whole and for the first three chapters on “Imperial Economics.” But Zimmern now tells the story from a different perspective.

The point of returning to the Funeral Speech is to enable the gaps between traditional rhetoric and the realities of empire to be better understood.¹²⁶ Take the

¹²² TGC, 205 n. 3.

¹²³ Letter to Horace Kallen, 11 Dec. 1914 (HKP).

¹²⁴ GMP 116.155.

¹²⁵ Zimmern, *Solon and Croesus*, v–vi, confirmed by the differences between Part III in draft (ZP 127) and published form.

¹²⁶ See, besides the passages discussed below, TGC, 289, 299 (“There is his usual gentle irony playing round the confident sentences in which Pericles glorifies the Athenian amateur”), 318, 329, 338, 367, 375, 376.

chapter on sea power. This chapter has as its motto (in untranslated Greek) the passage on self-sufficiency (2.36.3) on whose irony Zimmern commented in his letter to Graham Wallas.¹²⁷ It then evokes the occasion of the Funeral Speech as it describes the men stationed in the Hellespont and Black Sea to protect the grain ships and tribute money on which Athens's survival depended: "They were 'No, not combatants—only/Details guarding the line,' and as they did not die in battle, Pericles, when he spoke over the dead, could only indirectly acknowledge their services." The verses cited here are a refrain in Kipling's Anglo-Boer War poem "Bridge-Guard in the Karroo," and that poem is also the source of a phrase Zimmern uses three pages later, "the city's 'far-flung battle-line.'" In a long footnote, Zimmern picks up on the "curiously unreal" phrases found in the Funeral Speech owing to Pericles' use of "sentiments appropriate to the old theory of defence" (that is, defending one's land against invaders).¹²⁸ After describing what Athenian sea power entailed, he then returns to the dissonance of speech and reality in the chapter's final paragraph:

This then is what Pericles meant, when, using the old sanctified conservative phrase, he told his hearers that the city was "most completely self-sufficient both for war and for peace." To the casual listener the words would suggest the creaking of the corn-wains as they bore the harvest from the fields to the granary. But Pericles, as he spoke them, saw the watchers at Sestos and the far lands of the "Ploughing Scythians."¹²⁹

The first quotation here is a translation of the chapter's Greek motto (2.36.3); the second may be from Herodotus' account of "Scythian ploughmen" (4.17.2: Σκυθῶν ἀροτηρῆς).¹³⁰ As earlier, Zimmern brings out how Pericles applied the old language of independence to the new economic conditions of empire. Now that he has fully explained those conditions, he uses a richer literary palate, juxtaposing a nostalgic evocation of Attica's rural past with the imperial ethnographic vision of Pericles.

To understand how these ironies shape the overarching narrative of *The Greek Commonwealth*, we need to turn to the end of the "Economics" section. In the final chapter, Zimmern attempts a statistical analysis of the finances of the Athenian empire. He concludes by emphasizing how the Athenians still had to struggle to realize the ambitions made possible by what he sees as their unjust extraction of allied money:

When we put together all these separate facts and figures and try to imagine for ourselves their cumulative social effect, we begin to understand in some measure the meaning of Pericles' words about his fellow citizens—how "they yield to none, man by man, for independence of spirit, many-sidedness of attainment, and complete self-reliance in limbs and brain" [Thuc. 2.41.1] ... Only now can we appreciate why Athens, who has shown us, in every line she wrote and every stone she carved, how willingly she submitted to the compelling power of art,

¹²⁷ See note 117 above.

¹²⁸ *TGC*, 356 with n. 1.

¹²⁹ *TGC*, 366. Kallet, "The Origins of the Athenian Economic *Arche*," 55, likewise notes the "irony" of 2.36.3, but stresses overseas Athenian landholdings.

¹³⁰ William Beloe's translation (*Herodotus* (1791) (London, 1831), 194) uses Zimmern's exact phrase.

spoke with so businesslike a caution of the homage she paid in its cause—why, not out of choice but out of necessity, she “loved beauty with cheapness” [Thuc. 2.40.1].¹³¹

The struggle is conveyed by a reference to the Athenian character, as conveyed in two passages in the Funeral Speech—the second of which provided the epigraph to the whole of Part III: Φιλοκκᾶλοῦμεν μετ’ εὐτελείας.¹³² The section ends on the Athenians’ heroic struggle, despite their relative poverty, to provide themselves with spiritual enrichment.

To show how Athens overcame her financial constraints, Zimmern draws on what he calls Thucydides’ “introduction”—his opening account of how the Greek world arrived at greater stability and power after a period of disorder and piracy (1.1–19).¹³³ This section is used in Part II to frame the formation of the political community.¹³⁴ With the section “The Growing City” in Part III, Zimmern reverts to the early stages of disorder—while adding pointed forward allusions to how fifth-century Athens used methods similar to those found in early Greece.¹³⁵ After moving from a dynamic to a static analysis of “City Economics,” he returns again to Thucydides’ “introduction” in “Imperial Economics,” once more to make a point about the methods to which Athens resorts: “the time-honoured expedient of State robbery,” “the old-fashioned buccaneering way.”¹³⁶ The pattern continues in the “Conclusion”: Athens, intent on conquering Sicily, “stands self-confessed as a Robber Empire” (earlier, it is implied, she had tried to conceal it); finally, in the very last paragraph, “still hungry” after the conquest of the small island of Melos, “the imperial city lifted up her eyes towards a better prey.”¹³⁷

The Athenians’ struggle to overcome poverty, and the wrongdoing committed in the process, is only part of Zimmern’s story. At the start of the “Imperial Economics” subsection, he explains that when the economy of the city-state reached a point when a civilized existence could be supported, the forces that had produced that happy state could not be halted:

¹³¹ TGC, 419.

¹³² TGC, 211 (an unreferenced citation). Zimmern omits the particles τε ε γάρ because he is citing the phrase in isolation; his earlier translation was “We are lovers of beauty without extravagance.” TGC, 204.

¹³³ TGC, 108, cf. *ibid.*, 432, for TGC as an “introduction” to Thucydides.

¹³⁴ Engagement with the *Archaeology* in TGC is most intensive in Ch. 2, 76–80, but see also 62 n. 1, 85, 86 n. 1, 108 n. 1, 110 n. 1, 126, 128 n. 1, 136, 180–81, 186 n. 3.

¹³⁵ TGC, 239, on how “the spirit of [these adventurers’] calling lived on into fifth-century Athens”; *ibid.*, 249, on the relevance of “freebooting expeditions” for the Athenian empire; *ibid.*, 250, on the “ominous shadow” of Miltiades’ raid on Paros, for the empire “did not forget the methods found so convenient by the City State.”

¹³⁶ TGC, 403, 404 (where Zimmern indicates a shift to greater reliance on tribute after the peace with Persia in 448). TGC, 257, signals the shift to a static analysis.

¹³⁷ TGC, 432, 443. Contrast “the mood of the Funeral Speech, when Athens is still a Liberator” (*ibid.*, 432)—a comment on attitudes, not realities. The closing imagery picks up the earlier chapter entitled “Hunting or Robbery”: “In the early days ... there was plenty of good hunting, both of beasts and men. Men went hunting singly and in hordes, greedy for good prey” (*ibid.*, 236). The label “Robber Empire” was applied by Germans to the British during the Boer War (e.g. a newspaper extract translated at anon., “Military Situation in South Africa,” *Literary Digest* 21/4 (1900), 112–13, at 113: “the robber empire will be forced to release its prey”).

We moderns know to our cost that economic forces care nothing for social harmony or “natural limits,” that, once unchained, they are not easily arrested. Sixth-century Athens ... might seem ... an ideal picture of a State comfortably settled at the happy ending of a long and troubled course. In reality she was at the beginning of ... a spiritual conflict ... which was to bring her civilization to disaster at the culminating moment of its greatness.¹³⁸

This key transition “from the economics of the City State to the economics of Empire” shows that the disasters of the Peloponnesian War did not fall on Athens from nowhere.¹³⁹ as she became an imperial power, her stability was upset by the operation of the same economic forces that had created her strength as a city.

As this passage hints (“We moderns ...”), in *The Greek Commonwealth* Zimmern took an interest in the economics of modern imperialism too. While he at times suggested a broad contrast between ancient conditions which favored robbery and the modern creation of wealth through commerce, he was alert to the distinctive dangers of modern capitalism.¹⁴⁰ One of his long footnotes contains an attack on the savagery shown by “King Leopold’s Congo administrators”; in the second edition, the reference was changed to “the Europeans employed by the Putumayo rubber companies” (which were listed on the London Stock Exchange).¹⁴¹ His discussion of slavery at Athens includes a strong denunciation of labor conditions in Portuguese Africa and the Congo—as well as in Mexico and Britain.¹⁴² This capitalist appropriation of resources at the cost of great human misery is the reverse of “Thucydides” theory of beneficent imperialism. If there is one imperial lesson to extract from Zimmern’s book, perhaps it is that the invented Thucydidean theory might have more purchase in the economic conditions of the modern world than it did in ancient Greece, but only if accompanied by a transformation of labor conditions: four years after the book’s publication, at least, Zimmern wrote of the need for “Democracy” to “restrain the actions of white capitalists,” for “problems like the Congo, the Putumayo, Haiti, Mexico etc cannot be met by looking the other way and thanking God you are not a ‘land-grabber.’”¹⁴³

My analysis in this section has shown that the negative undertones in the presentation of the Athenian empire in the first half of *The Greek Commonwealth* become stronger in its second half. There is counterbalancing praise for Athens’s (limited) promotion of free trade, but the verdict that Zimmern offers on the economics of Athens’s empire is damning, and in the process he exposes the delusions of the Athenian self-perceptions on which he lovingly dwelt in the closing two chapters of Part II. “Truth and Beauty,” and other “high things,” may have “seemed all to lie in the same direction,”

¹³⁸ *TGC*, 351.

¹³⁹ *TGC*, 351. Contrast Morefield, *Empires without Imperialists*, 55, who finds no prewar intimations of Athens’s problems in *TGC*; her related claim (*ibid.*, 53) that Zimmern ignores Thucydides’ analysis of the causes of the war is equally ill-founded (see *TGC*, 423–4).

¹⁴⁰ Ancient versus modern: note the pointed use of Montesquieu (twice as a chapter motto) at *TGC*, 213, 366, 379 n. 1, all of which were added in typescript (they are not found in ZP 127).

¹⁴¹ *TGC*¹, 99 n. 1; *TGC*², 101 n. 1 (= *TGC*, 102 n. 1). Cf. *TGC*, 218: “there were as yet no international financiers” in ancient Greece.

¹⁴² *TGC*, 387 n. 1, 402 with n. 1.

¹⁴³ Letter to Horace Kallen, 13 Oct. 1915 (HKP).

Gilbert Murray had written, but, as Zimmern told Murray once he had done the sums, Athens was driven to injustice to finance the Parthenon.¹⁴⁴

Conclusions

I have argued in this article that *The Greek Commonwealth*, rather than modernizing and idealizing Periclean Athens, underlines the historical distance of antiquity and the oppressiveness of the Athenian empire. Zimmern's analysis of the formation of the political community in Part II culminates in what may seem a utopian depiction of Periclean Athens. But there are recurrent discordant notes in his account, and these hints are replaced in Part III by an open confrontation with the source of Athens's problems. Analysis of Athens's economic foundations reveals how much of a struggle it was for the Athenians to realize the vision of civilization that was unleashed by the creative explosion after the Persian Wars. Already under Pericles, Athens was an empire like Persia, and the process of growth required to create the conditions needed for the emergence of Periclean Athens could not be contained. Throughout, Zimmern encourages a comparative approach to history, but not for the sake of equating ancient Greece and modern Britain.¹⁴⁵

The reading I have offered of *The Greek Commonwealth* is altogether different from the dominant one among IR historians. These historians have, it seems, been all too ready to subscribe to the view that the book aligns Athens and Britain. While claims of a straightforward correspondence of ancient and modern do particular violence to the intricate narrative ambitions of *The Greek Commonwealth*, they are at odds too with the historicizing spirit in which ancient history was generally written in the late Victorian and the Edwardian periods; even when comparisons were made (and it was more common to compare Britain with Rome than with Athens), historians tended to emphasize differences of scale, economic interdependence, political structures, and racial dynamics.

A fuller analysis of the dialogue Zimmern establishes between ancient and modern would need to look beyond *The Greek Commonwealth* to his subsequent theorizing about the British Empire and about the emergence of the United States as a world power. While there is no space to pursue Zimmern's later writings here, it may be useful to note that the narrative he offers in *The Third British Empire* bears little relation to the account of Athenian empire in *The Greek Commonwealth*. Athens experienced a rapid rise and fall in the aftermath of her leadership against Persia, as a successful alliance transitioned into rule over cities that contributed ships or paid tribute. Zimmern's tripartite model of British rule, by contrast, sees a move from old-style rule over scattered colonies (up to 1776), to an expanding commercial empire backed by naval power that did not rely on contributions from the Dominions (up to 1914), to a Commonwealth of numerous different communities at different stages of their advance

¹⁴⁴See notes 98–9, 124 above. Cf. Zimmern to Wallas, 5 January 1910 (GWP 1/46.8): the Athenians were forced “to sacrifice either Beauty or Goodness as they understood it (i.e. either the Parthenon < built out of tribute-money from Greeks > or Athena)” (the words in the parenthesis are a marginal addition).

¹⁴⁵Note the addition at *TGC*⁴, 449, of a reference to James A. Williamson, *A Short History of British Expansion* (London, 1922): “for those who wish to compare Greek and British methods of colonization.”

to self-determination.¹⁴⁶ And while the Athenians exercised rule over fellow Greeks, Zimmern pays particular attention to the diversity of the British Empire and to the tensions caused by differences of culture and race. The model of inclusive multinational Commonwealth that Zimmern hoped might relieve those tensions, moreover, was based on a theoretical separation between political state and cultural nationality that he developed only after the publication of his Greek book, even if that separation in some ways picks up the book's dual stress on liberalism and the force of custom.¹⁴⁷

A richer context for understanding *The Greek Commonwealth* is suggested by the work's focus on the intersection of politics and economics. In 1931, soon after his return to Oxford as Montague Professor of International Relations, Zimmern, in an article for the Workers' Educational Association journal, wrote that the questions that interested him were the same as in the early years of his engagement with that association—the very time, that is, when he was thinking through his Greek book: “international economic questions, including the economic tendencies making for conflict, international political questions, including the working of democracy in a field larger than that of an individual country—in a word, the problem of how to run a large-scale world with the instruments at the disposal of modern civilisation, including the moral and intellectual equipment of the democratic peoples.”¹⁴⁸ What he hoped to offer in his book was a way to think through those modern issues better by showing how the Athenians had failed to make the necessary political adjustments to the economic transformations of the sixth and fifth centuries. Within IR, it is revealing that his ambitions have been understood best by a scholar familiar with his intellectual roots, Agnes Headlam-Morley. When she followed in Zimmern's footsteps as Montague Burton Professor, she suggested in her inaugural lecture in May 1949 that “if you look at his book on the Greek Commonwealth you will find that he was even then preoccupied with the difficulties of a society in which the bonds of a common culture and the demands of a common economic need had outrun the limits of effective political organization.”¹⁴⁹ It was this deeply historical preoccupation, not any transhistorical aspiration to merge idealized visions of Athens and England, that underlies Zimmern's narrative of the fifth-century *polis*.

What, then, is the relevance of Zimmern's work for modern critiques of liberal imperialism? It is undeniable that Zimmern was both a liberal and an imperialist of sorts. His liberalism during the 1900s was, however, close to socialism, and the criticisms the book contains of Athens's imperial oppression already under Pericles suggest

¹⁴⁶Zimmern, *The Third British Empire*, esp. 2–3, for the periodization. Note that at the economic level Zimmern does present Britain as now facing a choice between Athenian and Spartan systems, loosely conceived slogans for cooperation and protectionism. *Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁴⁷See further Rood, “Alfred Zimmern's Early Political Thought II.”

¹⁴⁸Alfred Zimmern, “The Intellectual Status Quo,” *The Highway* 24/12 (1931), 4–6, at 4.

¹⁴⁹Agnes Headlam-Morley, “Idealism and Realism in International Relations” (St Hugh's College Archives, SHG-S-2-2-11-5). Headlam-Morley's father James was a former professor of ancient history who served as Zimmern's boss at the Foreign Office in 1918–19.

that claims that Zimmern adopted deflecting tactics are wide of the mark.¹⁵⁰ Those criticisms should, moreover, prepare us to take seriously his later calls for the “de-anglicisation” of the British Commonwealth and his promotion of equality among its members.¹⁵¹ More questionable still are claims that Zimmern was calling for the British to “man up” and “embrace a unified form of imperial governance.”¹⁵² This notion is not only not supported by anything in the content of *The Greek Commonwealth*, but also contradicted by Zimmern’s relative detachment from schemes for imperial federation and by the priority he gave, when he did consider such schemes, to the need to foster over time a spirit of cooperation rather than attempt to impose unity from above.¹⁵³

For Jeanne Morefield, the most influential of modern critics of Zimmern, reading *The Greek Commonwealth* is part of an attempt to capture the linkages between Oxford Idealism and empire. She is certainly right to stress that the Oxford from which that book emerged was steeped in empire.¹⁵⁴ The particular interconnection of the study of Literae Humaniores and empire emerges vividly from the *Oxford Magazine*’s review of Zimmern’s book. “Perhaps the best criticism to be made of this book,” the review starts, is a story told by “a well-known Oxford tutor” who “had staying with him an old pupil, who had taken his degree in the ordinary way, had been a useful member of his college, and was now a still more useful colonial administrator.” “The man had never shown any interest in the intellectual side of the University; but happening to take up Mr Zimmern’s book casually, he read it through from end to end, and then asked his old tutor where he could get any more books about the Greeks that were at all like it.” He “had never found before that the Greeks were real flesh and blood.”¹⁵⁵ This vignette reveals at the same time the potential disconnect between academic study and imperial administration. More broadly, a fuller study of the part played by Classics (as studied at Oxford and elsewhere) in British imperial culture in the early twentieth century would stress the need to be discriminating about the precise imperial nuances of different texts. Zimmern’s book is an emblematic product of a culture poised between celebration and critique of empire.

While the imperial culture of Edwardian Britain looms over *The Greek Commonwealth*, it is nonetheless important to question the assumption that empire was Zimmern’s main concern when he wrote the book. His book in fact carries far more echoes of the progressive causes (university and industrial reform, the position of women) to which he devoted himself, in varying degrees, in his years as an Oxford tutor. His treatment of Athenian slavery, for instance, which has often, and with some reason, been criticized as rosy, is not a blueprint for the future of Britain’s colonies, but in part at least a polemic against the monotonous and ill-paid labor carried out

¹⁵⁰ Against the reading in Morefield, *Covenants without Swords*, of Zimmern as a consistent antistatist liberal infused with paternalist Oxford Idealism, see Rood, “Alfred Zimmern’s Early Political Thought I.”

¹⁵¹ ZP 139.259 (1924 LSE lectures which anticipate the argument of Zimmern, *The Third British Empire*); also ZP 138.228. Cf. a letter written to Zimmern by Lionel Curtis, 30 Dec. 1922: “Without you I should never have lost Kipling’s friendship nor achieved the abhorrence of the Morning Post.” ZP 17.168–9.

¹⁵² Morefield, *Empires without Imperialism*, 66–7.

¹⁵³ For Zimmern and federalism see Rood, “From *The Greek Commonwealth*,” Section 4.

¹⁵⁴ Richard Symonds, *Oxford and Empire: The Last Lost Cause?* (1986) (Oxford, 1991) remains standard.

¹⁵⁵ *Oxford Magazine* anonymous review (see note 47 above).

by workers in large modern factories and in colonial plantations.¹⁵⁶ Zimmern's own sense of the priorities of his book is shown by the fact that he did not even include it among his publications when he applied for the Montague Burton Professorship of International Relations at Oxford.¹⁵⁷

A reading of *The Greek Commonwealth's* engagement with social causes would show still more strongly that it is anything but nostalgic. Zimmern did not feel any regret for the passing of an age when Athenians or Englishmen did not need to think: both in his correspondence and in public utterances he repeatedly berated English anti-intellectualism.¹⁵⁸ It is true that he portrayed the Greek world as (at times at least) simple and harmonious. But, with his deep historicizing instincts, he did not think that there was any point in utopian dreaming. As he told Gilbert Murray while he was writing the book, "Tolstoi and Ruskin, like the Greeks, would bring the smile back on to the faces of Tube-travellers and City clerks by preaching simplicity. This the world won't have."¹⁵⁹ His goal, rather, was to encourage readers to think how social, economic, and political life could be so organized in the altogether altered world of the twentieth-century *polis* as to make possible something like the joy in collaborative creativity that he attributes, for all their wrongdoing, to the Greeks—and not just to think, but to act on their conclusions.

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¹⁵⁶ Contrast Baji, *International Thought*, 58. Modern criticisms of Zimmern's treatment of slavery have neglected his condemnation of working conditions in the Athenian silver mines (*TGC*, 397–402).

¹⁵⁷ GMP 415.69. *TGC*¹ does include several passages that show Zimmern's interest in international cooperation, and this interest becomes greater in later editions (see Rood, "Alfred Zimmern's Early Political Thought I"); these passages have been ignored by IR historians wedded to the notion that the book is about the British Empire.

¹⁵⁸ See e.g. a letter by Zimmern published in the *Kansas City Star*, 8 Dec. 1911 (ZP 177.129): "The British Empire ... was acquired, as we all know, in a fit of absence of mind. And surely a man whose mind is absent, however well timed that absence may be ... is a stupid man."

¹⁵⁹ GMP 116.157 (28 March [1910]).

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