CHRONIQUE

Claire Préaux's « Monde Hellénistique »

It is normal for works of synthesis, aimed at a broad audience, to lag a generation or—more often—two behind scholarship ; even if the information is current, usually the ruling ideas and conceptual framework are already antiquated when a book appears. Claire Préaux's last major work (1) is a happy and extraordinary exception. Few of the ideas in it will by now seem revolutionary to Hellenistic historians and papyrologists who know the work published in the last few decades ; but this is in itself a measure of the revolution in our thinking about Hellenism, of which Claire Préaux was one of the principal architects. These volumes synthesize with clarity and grace the state of thought in the 1970's and will serve readers of many types very well (2).

The readers of this journal will know well Préaux's contributions which are summarized in this book. For her, the Hellenistic world was not some new creation of fusion and decadence, but—for its Hellenic part—a continuation of classical Greece of the fourth century. The section on Greek cities in this work sets out the salient characteristics of Hellenistic cities in such a way that anyone familiar with Greek history cannot fail to remark that most of these traits are already to be found in the fifth century and many even in the seventh (perhaps even earlier, were not our evidence so poor). Who could read Préaux's evocation of the perennial willingness of factions to betray their cities to outsiders, without thinking of Eretria and other classical instances? Or of the disastrous effects of extreme disparities in the distribution of wealth, without having Thucydides' picture of Corcyra come to mind? That we see the third-century Greek city as like that of the fifth and fourth in many essential respects is to a considerable degree Claire Préaux's contribution, but she gives credit where it is due to others as well, above all to Louis Robert.

(1) Claire PRÉAUX, *Le monde hellénistique : la Grèce et l'Orient de la mort d'Alexandre à la conquête romaine de la Grèce (323-146 av. J.-C.)*. Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1978. 2 vol., 18.5 × 13.5 cm., 770 pp. (NOUVELLE CLIO : L'HISTOIRE ET SES PROBLÈMES, 6 et 6 bis).

(2) The book was published at the end of 1978, but it spent long years in press and little appearing after 1975 could affect the contents. Recent work (see the additional bibliography, II, 685-91) has added much in many areas, but would hardly alter the main lines.

By the same token, Préaux for years has insisted on the juxtaposition rather than blending of Greek and oriental cultures in the Hellenistic period. Part IV (II, p. 545-683) summarizes in magisterial fashion and over a broad canvas her results. No student of antiquity can afford to miss these pages.

It is normal these days for works aimed at the student or general reader to avoid bibliographical footnotes or citations of evidence. Préaux did not follow this path, but sought equally to escape this extreme—an insult to the reader's intelligence and interest—and to shun that of providing the complete ballast of notes which makes the volumes of notes in Rostovtzeff's *Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World* and Fraser's *Ptolemaic Alexandria* such gold mines for scholars but so expensive and (for the general reader) indigestible. No solution to this problem is without faults, but Préaux's notes are uncommonly helpful : her range was so wide that even specialists in this period are bound to discover sources and literature they did not know in many areas. Throughout, enough is given to afford the reader at least a good start in further study of a topic.

Préaux's willingness to cite her sources is closely connected to another basic strength of this book, its closeness to the ancient sources. Quotations from authors and documents are abundant and always well-integrated. There is some cost here : individual sections often become a bit disjointed and their interrelationship may at times be lost sight of. Some of the repetition found here and there is also the product of the source-emphasis of this book. Overall, however, the use of sources is highly successful.

Le monde hellénistique is not a narrative history of the Hellenistic period, but rather a description and analysis of its main political, social, economic and cultural phenomena and structures. Nevertheless, after an introduction to the sources, it begins with a fifty-page summary of events, based largely on Ed. Will's *Histoire politique du monde hellénistique*. It is not without some errors or oversights (1), and the reader may be pardoned if he feels breathless at its end, but Préaux was probably right that some such account was needed for the sake of orientation and reference.

The remainder of volume I is devoted to the monarchies, with the king, war, and the economy forming the major topics of this section. Much of the description of the king reveals the image of what a king *ought* to be, as kings and subjects alike embraced it ; I am skeptical that this image corresponds to more than a fragment of the reality.

(1) For example : p. 129, Ptolemy aided the aristocrats of Cyrene (*ktematikoi*, Diod. 18.21.6-7), not the democrats. P. 133, Ptolemy took the diadem apparently on the basis of his victory in turning Antigonus' invasion from Egypt in 305, not « quoique vaincu ». P. 139, Magas' independence was certainly not broken in 277-274 by Ptolemy II. P. 140, the description of the Chremonidean War ignores the Koroni finds and recent scholarship which defines the operations of the war more fully.

The section on war is an exceptionally intelligent overall view of that phenomenon, though overstating (p. 304-305) the comparison of war to modern industry and the importance of unemployed mercenaries (the case is made only for the famous episode at the end of Alexander's reign). As always, Préaux's vision of the subject is very broad, and any reader will find numerous points where his thinking is stirred up by connections made between diverse phenomena (1).

It is a tribute to Claire Préaux's sense of proportion that the chapter on the royal economy is only 30 pages long. Her remarks on the deficiencies in our source-material for the subject (p. 358-59) are much to the point, but rather too pessimistic in my view, if one considers what Jean Bingen has been able to do with the Oxyrhynchite papyri of *BGU* X and recent work on the native Egyptian aristocracy. The chapter on Egyptian revolutions is a logical continuation of the examination of the king's relations with his subjects. No doubt Egyptians were more heavily taxed than Greeks (p. 366), but it defies all probability to suppose that the average farmer could not support a family (p. 485), and the comparison of a royal remission of debts to the treasury with the abolition of debts in Greek cities (p. 392) is misleading : the latter case involves comparatively numerous lenders being deprived of their property against their will by a third party, where the former is a matter of a single great lender forgiving debts owed to himself.

Volume II is divided into two parts, one on the Greek cities, the other on Hellenistic civilization. The part on cities deals not only with the internal life of cities (which indeed is treated very briefly), but with their relations with kings, other foreigners, other cities (in the form of leagues), and the countryside. Separate sections deal with the urban economy and urban revolutions (mainly about that aberrant case, Sparta). Préaux rightly denounces the belief that the victory of Philip meant the death of the Greek city (p. 401), but she herself goes on to paint what seems overall a rather somber portrait of the city controlled by the king, burdened by his impositions (2), ravaged by wars (p. 428-29), divided into rich and

(1) On p. 313 Préaux rejects the conclusions about cleruchs drawn by Launey from statistics he compiled ; I think this rejection is correct, but I do not share Préaux's view that no useful statistical analysis is possible. I hope to show elsewhere that interesting and valid conclusions can be drawn. P. 326, usually « scorched earth » works even more against attackers (who must live off the land) than defenders, who may have stores in their city. The statement on economic motivations (p. 333) is very fair and balanced. P. 349, I doubt the statement that war indemnities were « punitives plus que réparatrices » : cf. p. 306-307 on the high cost of waging war. One would hardly expect the winner of the war to finance it solely from booty if he could help it !

(2) Préaux repeats again and again (e.g., 426 n. 6, 440) the notion of a royal demand for trierarchs from cities, a view I have argued is based on mistaken interpretation of the only evidence, *P. Cair. Zen.* I 59036 : see *Cd'É* 46 (1971) 356-61.

poor (p. 438), hard-put to feed itself (p. 445), unable to improve local food production significantly (p. 478), hampered by difficulties of transport (p. 479), harrassed by pirates (see index, p. 754 s.v.), and only in the rare cases of large cities making any real move in the direction of 'industrialization' (p. 499). All of this is undeniable, and yet the life of the Hellenistic cities, with all its dangers and precariousness, does not seem to me to deserve so negative a verdict. The Greeks themselves, certainly, were eager to live in cities despite their disadvantages, and the Hellenistic world saw a tremendous amount of construction in cities all over the Greek world—surely not all a matter of royal generosity. The number of inscriptions on stone increases dramatically—not, I think, a matter only of the chance of discovery, but an accurate reflection of widening literacy and citizen participation in affairs of state. But the question is large and cannot be treated fairly in a review. At all events, Préaux provides the documentation for her view in some detail.

A 'Critique de l'idée de civilisation mixte' occupies Part IV. It summarizes the work of Préaux and others in recent decades calling into question the conception of the Hellenistic period as one of 'fusion'; but it does much more : it provides a systematic if succinct assessment of the achievements of Hellenism in every area of culture. A summary of the wealth of this part is impossible, but insights and provocative comments are everywhere (1).

Perhaps the character of *Le monde hellénistique* can best be conveyed by the frequency with which it led me to stop and think in a new way about familiar subjects. Many general books cause the reader who is knowledgeable in the subject to grind his teeth constantly at banalities or misstatements, even to read as rapidly as possible so as to escape the suffocating miasma of a general account where all that makes a period truly interesting has been removed. Préaux's book, on the contrary, is full of fascinating detail, always lively, and yet never just a mass of miscellanies. I can think of no work more likely to convey to the non-specialist reader just why Hellenistic historians find the period so exciting.

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(1) The connection (553-54) of ancient opposition to translation with attitudes of 'gnostics' is made only in passing. P. 578 : « La thésaurisation, en effet, appelle des prédateurs ». P. 621 « (le cynisme) a de profondes analogies avec les hippies ». P. 650, the view of Sarapis as the creation of Ptolemy I is properly rejected (but with no citation of Welles' insightful remarks to that effect).