

Stefan Pfeiffer, Gregor Weber (eds.), *Gesellschaftliche Spaltungen im Zeitalter des Hellenismus (4.–1. Jahrhundert v. Chr.)*, (*Oriens et Occidens* – 35), Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 2021, 222 pp.; ISBN 978-3-515-13079-0

The social history of the Hellenistic world consists of a wide array of various phenomena resulting from its cultural diversity. This means that interpretation of seemingly similar phenomena largely depends on the place where they took place. This in turn is what makes the social history of the Hellenistic world the subject of continual interest from scholars. The first to attempt to depict the complex panorama of the social and economic life of this world was Michael Rostovtzeff. Despite the monumental size of his work, he was unable to include in it many issues even in passing, either because of a lack of wider knowledge about them or a shortage of sources. The progress in research on the history of the Hellenistic world made since the publication of *The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World* (Oxford 1941) has considerably expanded the list of problems of its social history. These are currently attracting interest from scholars, as demonstrated by the volume of studies edited by Stefan Pfeiffer and Gregor Weber devoted to social tensions in the Hellenistic era.

The book contains papers given within the ancient history section of the 52nd Deutscher Historikertag, which took place in Münster in September 2018. The theme of the entire conference was “Gesplante Gesellschaften,” while this particular question focused on the question of “Ausprägungen und Überwindungen gesellschaftlicher Spaltungen im Zeitalter des Hellenismus (4.–1. Jh. v. Chr.)” This volume also contains additional texts by Henning Börm, Thomas Kruse and Hilmar Klinkott. They all concern issues connected to the approach of social groups to the Hellenistic leaders, contacts between the autochthones and the Hellenistic world, as well as forms of resistance to Greek culture.

Apart from the introduction (“Einführung,” pp. 9–20), the volume consists of two main parts. The first is titled “Die Welt der hellenistischen Poleis” (pp. 21–105), and the second “Die hellenistische Königreiche” (pp. 107–205). The respective titles clearly demonstrate the differing perspectives from which each section presents the aforementioned subjects.

The first part comprises three articles. H. Börm (“Gesplante Städte: Die Parteinahme für makedonische Könige in griechischen Poleis,” pp. 21–55) analyses the attitudes of the cities of continental Greece to Antigonid rule. His research shows that, contrary to what is often seen as a given, not all cities in Greece had an explicitly hostile attitude towards them. In many, the local elites accepted Antigonid rule as they were able to


count of the support of the rulers of Macedonia in a situation when they had to face up to the conflicts and social tensions that appeared in these cities. The weakening of Macedonian influences caused by the Second Macedonian War opened the door to the Greek world for Rome, which after its victory in the Third Macedonian War became a hegemon. Th. Kruse (“Die Bevölkerung des ptolemäischen Alexandria. Eine sozialhistorische Chimäre?,” pp. 57–81) considers the factors that caused the inhabitants of Alexandria to play such a significant role in the political life of the Ptolemaic state. The starting point for his reflections is Polibius’ description of the inhabitants of Alexandria (34.14.1–8). He criticises the views it contains, especially those concerning the local patriotism resulting from possession of citizenship of this city, in the light of information concerning the reasons for the known interventions of this city’s population from the late third to the first century BCE. He concludes by arguing that, contrary to the Greek historian’s suggestions—it is difficult to pinpoint precisely not only the reasons for the social and political tensions recurring in Alexandria, but also the social groups that were their driving force, as the city’s population was “eine sozialgeschichtliche Chimäre” (p. 80). H. Klinkott (“Königsstadt und Polis—Konflikt in hellenistischen Babylon,” pp. 83–105) addresses the little-known conflict between the Babylonian and Greek residents of Babylon that took place in 163 BCE. The associated events are known solely from records in Babylonian astronomical diaries and local cuneiform chronicles. The conflict between the two communities began to grow from the moment when Antiochus III or Antiochus IV settled a group of Greek colonists in Babylon. The reason for this was the newcomers’ privileged position, manifested in their possession of administrative autonomy and their privileged relations with the rulers of Syria. The conflict took the form of armed clashes, but was soon defused. Unfortunately, we do not know the conditions of its conclusion. It is certain, however, that the administrative separation of the two communities was maintained.

The second part consists of four texts and a summary by Hans-Joachim Gehrke (“Zusammenfassung und Perspektiven,” pp. 197–205). S. Pfeiffer (“Innere Konflikte und herrscherliche Versöhnungsstrategien im ptolemäischen Ägypten (3.–2. Jh. v. Chr.),” pp. 107–127) shows the Lagids’ methods of government that led the Egyptian subjects to acknowledge their rule over Egypt. This acceptance was essential in a situation of increased armed uprisings of various social groups (peasants, Egyptian soldiers) against their rule, supported by the priestly elites. The greatest successes in this area were enjoyed by Ptolemy V. Part of the reason for this was the use of the domain of religious life, important to the Egyptian subjects, to achieve these objectives. Thanks to economic privileges for priests, Ptolemy V obtained their formal recognition of the legality of his rule as the heir to the pharaohs. Meanwhile, his fiscal policy and amnesty united the peasants and soldiers in favouring him. As a result of these actions, society began to regard the Lagids as the heirs to the pharaohs. P. F. Mittag (“Indigene Illoyalitäten im Seleukidenreich. Gründe, Anlässe, Folgen,” pp. 129–154) analyses the causes and nature of the manifestations of resistance to Seleucid rule. The list of cases of resistance is quite long, although the author is mostly interested in those that occurred in Asia Minor, Phoenicia, Armenia, Babylonia, Elymais and Persis. Based on the sources, he concludes that all the conflicts analysed were political rather than ethnic/cultural in nature (the uprising in Judaea is not considered among them). Only Persis is something of an exception,

as a political conflict was also accompanied by a cultural one, because the approach of the local leaders (*fratarakā*) who personified and nurtured Iranian traditions influenced the local population. A discussion of the situation in Judaea under Seleucid rule is presented by A. Hartmann (“Verräter der Gesetze: Verargumentierung von Konflikten in hellenistischen Judäa,” pp. 155–180). From the perspective of sources contemporary to the events, the author reveals the internal social and religious conflicts between various groups of Jewish society. He notes that the terms used by the authors of these sources and concerning the nature of these conflicts have a religious tinge, which often makes it difficult to fully understand their social dimension. The final article addresses conflicts in the Indian borderland of the Hellenistic world. G. R. Dumke (“Griechen sein um jeden Preis? Strategien zur Überwindung gesellschaftlicher Spaltungen im hellenistischen Fernen Osten,” pp. 181–195) uses the recently published tomb inscription of one Sophytos, a merchant with an Indian name but Greek origin, to attempt to determine to what extent his cultural identity might have determined his social position in Indian society. Referring to the coinage of the Indo-Greek rulers, as well as epigraphic documents, Dumke concludes that the first Indo-Greek rulers exhibited their Hellenicity by placing Greek legends on obverses and Indian ones on the reverses of their coins and by using Greek names. In the later period, when rulers with local names took to the throne, Greek accents became less important and were marginalised. One can observe that under Greek rulers, high-ranking officials also bore Greek names, and when rulers of local origin appeared, the officials they appointed also had local names. In the case of the merchant Sophytos this could mean that his origin did not give him a privileged status, but he was assured a high position in the social hierarchy by his Indian name as well as his profession. The author concludes, however, that his findings on the equal social status of the late descendants of the Greek conquerors and autochthones are hypothetical in nature, as they are based on a relatively limited source base (pp. 192–193).

Despite the book’s modest size, its value for scholars of the history of the Hellenistic world is inestimable. The articles it contains make an excellent addition to the process of formation of a new perspective on social, cultural, religious and ideological phenomena occurring in the Hellenistic world. The essence of this new angle is analysis of these phenomena not only in the context of the history of the era or of individual monarchies, but also in a local context, disregarding the ideological aspects of the discussion raised in appraisals of this historical era. This contributes to adding to our knowledge elements whose importance was previously not sufficiently recognised and verifying the correctness of long-established general assessments or opinions, but also forces us to continually amend the vision of the entire epoch. By comparing the findings and conclusions of the authors of the aforementioned articles with certain verdicts made many years ago by Samuel K. Eddy on the form and nature of the resistance of various groups and communities towards Hellenistic culture (*The King is Dead: Studies in the Near Eastern Resistance to Hellenism*, Nebraska 1961), we see just how different they are. This shows beyond doubt that continuation of such research is essential.

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