

**Susanne CARLSSON, *Hellenistic Democracies: Freedom, Independence and Political Procedure in Some East Greek City-States*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2010 (Historia Einzelschriften 206), 372 pp., ISBN 978-3-515-09265-4, € 66.00.**

This book, a revised version of CARLSSON's (further C.) 2005 Uppsala dissertation, is the latest in a quite abundant scholarly production of recent years concerned with ancient democracy and polis government outside of Athens or, to be more precise, outside the narrow bounds of the strictly Athenocentric convention long dominating in the study of Greek constitutional history. C. approaches here a pivotal question of the meaning, let alone the very existence of democracy in the Hellenistic age. Since this period lacks literary sources typical of classical-age Athens, constitutional scholars have to rely on epigraphic evidence oftentimes assailed as allegedly reflecting only outward appearances of democracy while concealing the rule of the privileged elite.

C. devotes much of chapter one ("Setting and sources") to methodological issues of employing epigraphic evidence to the study of Hellenistic constitutional history. To those who question the validity of inscriptions as evidence in the study of the Hellenistic age democracy, C. offers a somber remark: "if the democratic formulas in the classical period revealed democratic government, how can we know that this was not also the case in later periods" (p. 17), and indeed she proceeds to use formulae of decrees and shifts in the epigraphic habit as the evidence of the transformation from democracy to more oligarchic forms of government later in the Hellenistic period. Throughout her book C. shows that the name *demokratia* known from scores of Hellenistic inscriptions was not an empty word. It abounded at times when democracy and freedom of a polis was under threat. C. adheres, for good reason, to the notion of democracy as a widespread and desired form of constitution of Hellenistic poleis.

In the initial section of chapter two ("Democracy then and now") C. dissects from Aristotle criteria upon which a polis can be called democratic professing to apply them to the study of Hellenistic constitutional history. One criterion which C. believes to be of importance is the freedom of a polis to conduct its foreign policy.

Throughout her book C. makes a strong connection between sovereignty and democracy, devoting chapter three ("Autonomy and sovereignty") to defining these notions. She correctly takes the now increasingly popular view that a large proportion of Greek poleis were not fully politically independent even prior to Chaeronea and that the Hellenistic epoch did not bring much change in this respect until at least the consolidation of the Roman power in the East (pp. 61–65). On many an occasion C. states that in the Hellenistic period poleis were able to keep their freedom to conduct foreign policy by manoeuvring between kings competing for power.

In chapter four ("*Autonomia* in practice") C.'s analysis of the reference made to *autonomia* and *eleutheria* in inscriptions from Asia Minor shows the importance of these slogans in the self-representation of Hellenistic poleis, especially when they felt that their freedom was threatened (pp. 84–99). Her handling of the restoration of democracy in Asia Minor under Alexander the Great is less impressive to the degree of taking an antiquated view of Alexander's alleged war aim of integrating Greek cities in Asia Minor into the Corinthian League (p. 81). Indeed, a large proportion of C.'s book is devoted to the international relations of poleis of Hellenistic Asia Minor. Besides discussing issues of *autonomia* and *eleutheria* in chapter four, C. writes extensively on foreign policy matters in chapter five. She shows convincingly the growing emphasis on arbitration and mediation as the preferred way of handling inter polis relations in this period. Chapter five of her book contains an interesting case study of inter polis relations. C.'s analysis of long territorial conflict between Samos and Priene convincingly demonstrates the preoccupation of Hellenistic

poleis with local issues sometimes harking a few centuries back and their ability to get major powers, be it Hellenistic kings or the Roman Senate, entangled in them. There can be little doubt as to the validity of the point she makes of the freedom most Hellenistic poleis enjoyed in foreign policy matters. One of the fundamental hypothesis of C.'s book is that decrees of a free, i.e. democratic polis have a high contents of foreign policy issues while a non-democratic or democratic in the name only polis of the late Hellenistic / imperial times produced only "simple honorific decrees" (passim, verbalized on p. 155). A question needs to be asked, however, whether honorific decrees, especially for prominent foreign dignitaries, could be seen as means by which a decidedly democratic polis conducted its foreign policy.

Chapters six ("Constitutional studies – methods and quandaries") and seven ("Modes of government – the cases") are the core part of the book in which C. propounds her methodological principles on working or the very existence of democracy seen in the light of decrees and tests them in chapter seven on four case studies of Miletus, Iasus, Cos and Calymna. This chapter, the longest and the most important of the book, is organized in four case study sections followed by a summary on Hellenistic democracies. In each of this four initial sections C. presents geographical background, history of each of the four poleis down to the times of Augustus, offices and then a brief analysis of important features of decrees, legislative procedures and working of assembly. She tries to establish how democratic each of these poleis was by analyzing the usual formulae of prescript, enactment, proposer, motivation, motion and provisions for recording a decree. For lack of evidence far more difficult and less convincing are her eight central aspects of democracy, from the openness of the assembly, to voting figures, to the assembly pay and the prosopography of proposers of decrees. Since e.g. the assembly pay is attested epigraphically only in Iasus, it is not a good criterion by which to gauge the democratic credentials of Hellenistic poleis. Similarly scarcely anything can be extracted from inscriptions on most of other C.'s central aspects of democracy (p. 277), attractive as they may seem in theory of ancient democracy. A clear tendency shown by C. is the growing importance of boards as the proposer of decrees and the disappearance of individual movers in the third c. BC and later which may indicate a progressive narrowing of Hellenistic democracy (pp. 281 f.).

C. tries to show a clear link between a polis' independence and its democratic constitution exemplified by number of surviving decrees. Hence she explains the declining number of extant decrees later than c. 130 BC by the changed political circumstance when the Roman rule was solidified over the western Asia Minor and islands. To strengthen her position C. uses the example of Calymna which almost ceased to legislate even earlier when in 215–205 it was annexed by Cos (p. 202). There is certainly much validity in this, although the situation of Calymna differed much from that of Miletus, Iasus and Cos: while the polis of Calymna ceased to exist at the Coan annexation, the poleis of Miletus, Iasus and Cos existed and fared well under the Roman rule. Conversely they did not cease to legislate after 130 BC, although the number of regular decrees with the full set of formulae recorded in stone declined markedly. This holds even in the case of Cos, a free city, not incorporated into the province of Asia until Augustus. C. shows that out of 90 extant decrees of Cos, only six postdate 100 BC. There is certainly a connection, in terms of chronology if not in substance, between the Roman rule in Asia and recording decrees of Greek states and C. is very right in showing it. What she perhaps fails to do is to indicate that what changed under the Roman rule was the epigraphic habit: as I tried to show elsewhere (*Boule and Demos in Miletus and its Pontic Colonies from Classical Age until Third C. A.D.*, Wrocław 1999) after 130 BC at least the Milesians legislated applying the same procedures as earlier but recording in stone only the essence of their decrees in the form of *tituli honorarii*. C. correctly perceives the grants of privileges to foreigners as a means of conducting foreign policy by a polis (p. 279) and in the case of Cos she acknowledges recording the grants of honours acted upon by the *boule* and *demos* under the Roman Empire (pp. 237 f.), but on the whole she rarely takes into consideration public documents other than decrees with the full set of formulae, i.e. *tituli honorarii* and abbreviated decrees. This contributes to overstating the difference in legislative practice and procedure caused by the advent

of Rome in the East, e.g. although C. notices (p. 253) that the Milesians were recording the grants of *politeia* and *proxenia* in the form of ‘dated lists’ making reference to *psephismata* (i.e. abbreviated decrees) well into the first c. BC, she does not modify her view as to the importance of 130 BC in the history of Greek legislation.

One worrisome feature of C.’s writing is her penchant for quoting opinions of previous scholarship, not trying to ascertain their validity. A good example is her handling of the issue of fortifications in Asia Minor. She claims for instance after A.W. LAWRENCE that “[t]he Persians had forbidden the Greek cities in Asia Minor to build walls, but Alexander proclaimed that they were free to do so” (p. 114). For none of this statements there is any evidence and the very existence of city walls in 334 BC and their good state of repair is very well attested in Alexander historians and in archaeological evidence e.g. from Miletus. What is even more questionable is C.’s overenthusiastic borrowing from political scientists including those who, based on cavalier reading of myth and epics, maintain that democracy was in fact born and widely used in pre-Greek Egypt and in early Mesopotamia (pp. 25 f.). On the whole C.’s summary of selected political scientists’ opinions on the birth and stability of democracy in the modern world (chapter two) is, by her own admission (p. 59), applicable mostly to Europe and North America. If there is any connection between these opinions and the study of ancient democracy, it is limited to rather perfunctory reading of Aristotle in translation by political scholars. Most of chapter two is therefore divorced from C.’s principal sources, Greek inscriptions of the Hellenistic age. Dropping this section altogether would have strengthened the book.

On general it is a well written and well researched book; in most cases C. has made a real effort to identify all relevant decrees and to offer reasonable datings. In matter of sources C.’s only major shortcoming is her failure to make use of the newest corpus of Milesian inscriptions (*Milet VI.3* by P. HERRMANN, W. GÜNTHER, N. EHRHARDT, Berlin 2006). Understandably it was not available to her when she was writing her 2005 Uppsala dissertation but the book of 2010 should have accounted for it. With this corpus the total number of Milesian inscriptions (including Didyma) is over 2280, markedly more than the number given in by C., 1720 (p. 247); the new corpus contains a number of newly published public documents of Miletus of importance for a constitutional scholar. C.’s book gives the impression that its author ceased doing serious research at the moment of submitting her doctoral dissertation: the secondary literature quoted here stops at 2005, not taking into account even the most important books published later, e.g. J.W. RIETHMÜLLER, *Asklepios: Heiligtümer und Kulte*, Heidelberg 2005; V. GRIEB, *Hellenistische Demokratie. Politische Organisation und Struktur in freien griechischen Poleis nach Alexander dem Großen*, Stuttgart 2008; R.M. BERTHOLD, *Rhodes in the Hellenistic Age*, Ithaca–London 2009. For all its shortcomings C.’s book is a valuable and stimulating contribution to the constitutional study of the Hellenistic world. Not only has she shown, as quite a few scholars had done before her, that in the Hellenistic age the democratic, sovereign polis was not a thing of the past, but she has also managed to pinpoint a connection between democracy and sovereignty of a polis.

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