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"Ptolemaic Alexandria", P. M. Fraser,
Oxford 1972 : [recenzja]

The Journal of Juristic Papyrology 19, 181-188

1983

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REVIEW OF BOOKS

P. M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, Clarendon Press: Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1972

Professor P. M. Fraser's book *Ptolemaic Alexandria* offers much more than one would expect from the title. We might expect it to be simply a book about the city of Alexandria, a city which, it is true, occupied a very important place in the history of culture, but about which we have only fragmentary (though abundant) information. Meanwhile we need only scan the book's contents to see that its value by no means ends there. According to the author's own words, "this book is an attempt to provide a documented study of the different aspects of Alexandrian life in the Ptolemaic period." The main text falls into two parts. The first, bearing the title *The Framework*, deals with the city itself and the country of which it was the capital. Here we have an outline of Ptolemaic Egypt, seen of course from the point of view of Alexandria, but including also a fairly broad socio-economic and even political history of the country as a whole (here it should be noted that chapters such as *Alexandrian Trade* and *The Cults of Alexandria* are not at all restricted to the confines of Alexandria itself!). All this, however, only serves the author as a framework, while it is the second part of the book, headed *The Achievement*, which contains the real gist of the matter. In it is an account of Alexandrian culture, or, to be more precise, Hellenistic culture as seen from the perspective of Alexandria, while the *Epilogue* gives an account of the period of Roman dominion, with special reference to the debt of Rome to Alexandria. The very arrangement of the book reveals the author's point of view. First and foremost, he is a historian of culture, but one who is fully aware of how culture is historically and socially conditioned.

Professor Fraser's picture of Ptolemaic Alexandria is built on full sources. He himself states in his *Preface* that he has tried "to bridge the gap between the different fields of Antiquity and the different types of source material. Literary texts of all sorts, inscriptions, and papyri all have their contribution to make to such a study, and the analysis and combination of these sources from the main element in this book." One might add that abundant use has been made of archaeological sources, too, particularly in Chapter 1, headed *Foundation and Topography*, where we find an excellent review both of sources of all kinds, and of the literature dealing with

such controversial questions as the foundation and topography of Alexandria, and especially its ports and Rhakotis.

Given this very wide range, it is all the more regrettable that no mention at all is made of Alexandrian art. The author is aware of this gap, and makes excuses for it in the *Preface*, declaring that he is not competent to deal with that subject, and that "we are still far from knowing how much of what we call Alexandrian art was the work of Alexandrian artists". It should be noted, however, that Professor Fraser discusses at length other fields of cultural life in the capital of the Ptolemies—although, as he himself admits, he is not a specialist in these fields either, and although the poetry and science of Alexandria, dealt with in great detail in his book, were for the most part not the creation of born Alexandrians.

The complete absence of any reference to art is to be regretted, for surely a good study of it would have helped us to understand Alexandrian poetry (in particular) better. But that is not the main criticism to be levelled at this nevertheless fascinating book. A more important one is that Professor Fraser, following in the footsteps of Polybius and Livy, looks upon the Egyptianization of the Greeks, and the growing say of the Egyptian population, as the main cause of the decline of Alexandria's cultural supremacy. At the end of the book we find this idea expressed in its most drastic form: "Yet still the background of the savage brutality of the city mob remained unaltered, and one cannot read the accounts of the dreadful savagery of the pagan element against Christians at the time of the Dacian persecutions and of the Christian element against pagans, as shown by the destruction of the Serapeum and the murder of Hypatia, without recognizing how fraught with lasting and dire consequences was that period after the battle of Raphia when the Egyptian population first asserted itself in the city" (p. 812, cf. p. 69, where the author mentions the Greeks of humbler class, "who succumbed first to Egyptianization, with disastrous results for the life of Alexandria"). Is it true that the Egyptian or Egyptianized mob alone commit acts of violence?

Not only is Part I of the book—*The Framework*—a convenient summary of the available information and a review of the literature on the history of Ptolemaic Alexandria and Ptolemaic Egypt, but at the same time a treasury of worth-while, original observations. Of especial interest are the author's remarks on the composition and organization of Alexandria's population, and its division into tribes and demes. The author takes the view that this division was a purely territorial one, and thinks that the whole of the Alexandrian *chora* was divided into demes. He also believes that the main intellectual and administrative class in the city consisted of "Greek immigrants who retained their civic links with their cities of origin and preserved their foreign ethnics" (pp. 52, 59, and 66). This assertion, which undoubtedly holds good for the 3rd century B.C., and especially for its first half, already loses its validity with regard to the next century, where, as numerous papyrus documents and inscriptions tell us, chiefly the newly recruited mercenary soldiers have ethnics. Fraser, besides, is fully aware of the need to interpret the evidence

chronologically, since otherwise "the social history of the city is made to appear as a single uniform picture, instead of as a continually changing sequence." He therefore sets up a very important "chronological skeleton for the three hundred years of the city's existence as the capital of the Ptolemies" (pp. 60-62). He places great emphasis on the significance of the insurrections of the native population, forgetting that these revolts, especially in Alexandria and in Lower Egypt, were also of an economic character. The papyrologist is surprised to read that it was the growing frequency of intermarriages between Egyptians and Greeks that reduced the hostility between the representatives of these two peoples, and that "before mixed marriages were other than isolated occurrences, while conqueror and conquered stood face to face, the Egyptian remained hostile to the Greek" (p. 71). For the papyrus documents appear to provide evidence of the contrary: in the first half of the 3rd century we still see no evidence of such hostility, and it was only as time went on that tension arose between the two peoples. After all, the Egyptians hailed Alexander the Great as their liberator from the Persian yoke! And the *Oracle of Potter*, quoted here by Professor Fraser as a text testifying to the Egyptian's hostility to the Greeks under the early Ptolemies, took the form we now know not earlier than about 130 B.C., as L. Koehn recently established (*ZPE* 2, 1968, pp. 178-209). Besides, it must not be forgotten that this is a Greek version, and so its readers, and even the people who distributed it, must have been Greek—the poor Greeks who, shoulder to shoulder with the Egyptians, took up arms against the mighty lords who ruled their country from their seaside city inhabited by "people who wore belts". As in his portrayal of the social situation in the 2nd century B.C. (pp. 78-79), here, too, the author has succumbed to the all-powerful influence of Polybius, who after all was by no means unbiased in his contemptuous assessment of his Alexandrian contemporaries (it should not be forgotten that, contrary to what the author states on p. 87, and according to the available sources, Alexandria, rather than presenting "a repellent aspect" to the Greeks, attracted them). But Professor Fraser even goes a bit further than Polybius himself, for he lays the responsibility for the cruel assassination of Agathocles and his family on "the lowest class of the Egyptian population". True, Polybius (XV, 33, 9) remarks only that "the inhabitants of Egypt are capable of terrible violence" (δεινὴ γὰρ τις ἢ περὶ τοὺς θυμοὺς ὀμότης γίνεται τῶν κατὰ τὴν Αἴγυπτον ἀνθρώπων), whereas Fraser has no doubt at all that what he means are the native Egyptians (pp. 81-82). Yet even the word Αἰγύπτιοι in the literary texts sometimes also means Greeks who for generations back had been living in Egypt. For our part, it is difficult to believe that "the lowest class of the Egyptian population" had so much say in Alexandria! We should presume, too, that those Macedonian troops who led the revolt against Agathocles were only Macedonian in name (as was the case with, for example, Ptolemy, son of Glaucias, from the Memphian Serapeum). It is not easy, either, to agree with the author when (with certain reservations) he follows F. Granier and P. Zancan in believing that "the Macedonian troops at this time (i.e. in

Egypt towards the end of the 2nd century B.C.) preserved the hereditary right of approving the new sovereign" (pp. 80 and 129; contra, see e.g. A. A y m a r d, *Études d'Histoire ancienne*, Paris 1967, p. 130).

In Chapter 3, *City and Sovereign*, Professor F r a s e r examines the political history of Alexandria. He devotes considerable space to the controversial problem of the Alexandrian Council. He puts forward a convincing hypothesis that Alexandria was deprived of the Council first of all by Augustus, whereas she had already been deprived of her ecclesia by Euergetes II. F r a s e r's conclusions as to the "actual freedom of action of the ecclesia" (p. 99), on the other hand, are less convincing, for about the ecclesia we really know nothing. It is also difficult to believe that the Alexandrian system really functioned as "a democratic community without interference from the Crown" (p. 100). This chapter also contains very interesting observations regarding the fusion of the civic magistracies of Alexandria and the offices of the Crown, and also most useful deliberations on the question of hereditary power in the Crown service (pp. 104-105).

The next two chapters (Chapter 4 on *Industry and Trade*, and Chapter 5 on *Religious Life*) are not confined to Alexandria alone. This is of course perfectly right, for one can scarcely speak of economic or religious life of a single city in isolation from the entire Hellenistic world. Yet the author never leaves Alexandria out of his view. These chapters abound in fascinating reflections. For instance, the author gives a telling description of the western arm of Mareotis (pp. 144-145), and takes a new approach to the trade between Alexandria and Rhodes (pp. 164-171). Equally valuable are his comments on the Ptolemies' interests in the south and east (pp. 173-184). He has an interesting, original proposition, too, regarding the extremely difficult problem of the voyages of Eudoxus and that of Hippalus's discovery of the direct route to India.

The chapter on religion is the fruit of the author's long studies, and of his profound knowledge of the problem. At the same time it provides an extremely valuable résumé of what is known in this field. Professor F r a s e r treats the Greek gods, the dynastic cult, and the Egyptian deities separately. As regards the archaeological sources, he devotes a good deal of space to the dedicatory plaques which give us "first-hand" information about the religious practices of the people of Alexandria (pp. 190-191). This study is a very characteristic one, for it reaffirms the hand of a master who is sure of the tools of his trade, while at the same time revealing the author's deep-rooted prejudices, as the following example will show. From the change in the shape of the dedicatory plaque, F r a s e r rightly concludes that in the religious life of Alexandria in the 2nd century, as in other spheres of life, the Greco-Egyptian element triumphs over the pure Greek element. But why should it be "a sad tale?"

With regard to the dynastic cult, it may be remarked that the transition from heroization to the cult of the ruler as a divinity was not so direct and easy as F r a s e r seems to think (p. 213), if but for the reason that the cult of heroes was a chthonic

cult, and closely connected with the tomb, or the place looked on as a tomb. In that part of the chapter which deals with the Egyptian gods, the author refers the reader to previous articles of his concerning the history of the cult of Sarapis, and the spread of that cult, which he does no more than summarize here, whereas he deals in detail with what could be termed the "theology" of that cult. In his reasoning as to "why it was this Memphian god who was chosen to form the basis of the new god," he overlooks the possibility that the beginning of the cult of Sarapis could have been connected with the *Hellenomemphitai*. The possibility of such a connection was already pointed out some time ago by U. Wilcken in the UPZ, and that view, in my opinion, points the way to the solution of many difficulties. For instance, it would reconcile the opposite standpoints of Fraser and Welles (p. 252 and vol. II, p. 401 f., p. 483; cf. A. Świderk, *Sarapis et les Hellenomemphitai, Mélanges Claire Préaux*, Bruxelles, 1975, pp. 670-675).

Part II of *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, entitled *The Achievement*, deals with everything that comes under the general heading of Alexandrian culture, except for art. Chapter 6, *Ptolemaic Patronage: the Museum and the Library*, seems to me particularly important. Not only does it contain a handy account of all the data available, arranged lucidly and convincingly, but it also, and above all, presents us with a new, complete picture of that great cultural centre, Alexandria in the reign of the early Ptolemies. Nor is this at all a static picture. We are shown Alexandria's rise to the apex of its glory in the 3rd century, its decline in the 2nd, and its revival during the reigns of Auletes and Cleopatra VII. A most valuable feature of the book is the light that it throws on the social foundations of patronage, the background of Alexandria's new intelligentsia and the way its members were recruited, and finally the relations between the rulers and the leading figures patronized by them. As far as the Library is concerned, Professor Fraser argues convincingly that very probably it was not housed in a special building of its own, but simply formed part of the Museum. He tells us about its organization, about the system of new acquisitions, about the system for the arrangement and classification of the books, and the influence of the Library on the form of the books. The only comment one might make is that although it is quite true that most of our literary papyri are of Imperial date, we also possess a certain amount of evidence giving us some idea of the form of books in Ptolemaic times.

The next chapters, devoted to Alexandrian science, scholarship and literature, are arranged in a new and interesting way. The author does not endeavour to supply the reader with a review of all the achievements of Alexandrian culture, for he rightly holds that to be done well such a task would be beyond the capacity of a single man. Therefore he confines himself to certain fields and certain topics, the sequence and arrangement of which are not stereotyped. In the chapter on science, his aim is primarily to describe the advances made by science in Alexandria and the role of the scientist in Alexandrian society, with special reference to medicine (his remarks on "the practitioner and society" are particularly interesting), mathematics and

the physical sciences, as well as the "pseudo-sciences". True, the author's interpretation of μηχανή in P. Edfou 8 as "a machine for regulating the flow of the Nile during the flood" seems somewhat risky, for we do not know if in fact what was involved was indeed a machine! On the other hand, it is a great pity that Ctesibius's inventions are mentioned hardly at all. Another comment the reviewer might make is that in the chapter on mathematics and the physical sciences there is no word of mathematical geography, and, in particular, of Eratosthenes's *Geographica*, which surely would fit this chapter much better than the chapter *Aspects of Alexandrian Literature*. In the author's account of the "pseudo-sciences", or "false sciences", the predominant tone is perhaps unnecessarily one of reproof or regret (for he describes such sciences as "corrupted", or "debased", and refers, too, to "unhappy deviation"). There is no attempt to show the foundation of these pseudo-sciences. He also ignores completely the scientific, mathematical aspect of astrology, which after all made an appeal to such great scientists as Hipparchus in ancient times, or Kepler in times much nearer to our own.

The chapter *Alexandrian Scholarship* complements very usefully that great work of R. Pfeiffer's, *History of Classical Scholarship* (Oxford, 1968). Professor Fraser deals especially interestingly, and in much greater detail than does Pfeiffer, with the period of decline (after 145 B.C.), and with the problem of the influence of Alexandrian scholarship.

Alexandrian philosophy in the Ptolemaic period has won neither fame nor recognition, and for that reason is usually passed over in silence. All the more so, then, may we be indebted to Professor Fraser for bringing this sphere of the cultural life of the capital of the Ptolemies out into the light of day. Readers will first and foremost be grateful to the author for his penetrating account of the philosophy of the first century B.C., when, with the emergence of Philon of Larissa and of his pupil Antiochus of Ascalon, Alexandria became a centre of philosophy.

The last two chapters are devoted to Alexandrian literature, while the *Epilogue* gives us a glimpse of life in Alexandria in the very early days of Roman rule. Professor Fraser's intention, however, as he himself clearly states, is not "to provide a continuous or detailed account of the literary production of Ptolemaic Alexandria", but merely "to place Alexandrian writers in their social and intellectual setting, and to determine and examine the types of literature represented there" (p. 495). In the chapter *Aspects of Alexandrian Literature*, he deals with the following in turn: historiography (here I should have liked to find some indication as to the connection between Hellenistic historiography and the early Greek romance, which is not discussed until later in the book, under the heading *Secondary Literature*), geographical writing (among the author's conclusions, we find on p. 551 one that is surprising: "in general it must be granted that third-century Alexandria as a coherent intellectual unit contributed no more to historical or geographical writing than it did to philosophy", this is undoubtedly true as regards historical writing, but surely it was in this very 3rd century that Eratosthenes in Alexandria created mathematical geo-

graphy!), the epigram, narrative poetry and hymns, and finally what the author calls "secondary literature". Side by side in this last section of the book we find a discussion of the beginnings of the Greek romance, an account of the relics of Egyptian literature dating from the Ptolemaic period, and its influence on Greek literature, as well as a broad and very interesting account of Jewish-Alexandrian literature. (Note: the *Oracle of Potter* can nowadays no longer be regarded as a proof of the early Egyptian hostility towards the Greeks in the early Ptolemaic period, cf. above).

In *Ptolemaic Alexandria* we find such a valuable and original study of Alexandrian poetry that it would be difficult to do justice to it here. All specialists in this field will be greatly indebted to Professor F r a s e r. Nevertheless one must draw attention to the fact that its author is clearly dominated by the spell of Callimachus, as we can see even from the title of Chapter 11: *The Horizon of Callimachus*. So although this study abounds in apt, original observations, we cannot resist the impression that all this is done at the expense of other great Alexandrian poets. The author denies Apollonius both talent and originality, forgetting that it was he who created something entirely new: the great Hellenistic epic, paving the way for Virgil. Theocritus is ignored altogether, being regarded as a non-Alexandrian poet, although in actual fact his links with Alexandria (even apart from idylls XV and XVII) and with Cos are much stronger than his links with Syracuse, and although the bucolics were born in the city, out of nostalgia for the Sicilian countryside, rather than in direct contemplation of that countryside itself. To some extent, too, an injustice is done to Callimachus, for Professor F r a s e r attributes to him a characteristic which is surely foreign to his nature. Could it really be said that "the most important common factor in his hymns is the genuinely religious element they contain"? And is it true to say that Callimachus ever "laid his heart bare for us", showing himself to be "a true believer in the traditional gods of Greece" (pp. 662-663)? The author, it is true, convincingly demonstrates Callimachus's importance to the period and to his environment, and to the centuries of poetry and scholarship to come. This is all very well, but where in Callimachus' work is that "deep and unquestioning feeling for the Olympians"? His attitude to the ancient Olympian gods is certainly, as Professor F r a s e r rightly points out, "different from the theological speculation of the Attic tragedians", but, in spite of what he asserts, Callimachus's attitude was undoubtedly very similar to the "cold mythological use of the Olympian religion by Theocritus in some Idylls" (pp. 787-786). No doubt Callimachus was a greater erudite than Theocritus, and was fonder of dazzling his readers with his own mythological erudition than was the Syracusan poet. He was, too, no mean master of words, and in the brilliance of his intellect was incontrovertibly superior to his contemporaries. In the tribute he pays to the king and queen he was perhaps not quite so moderate as F r a s e r is inclined to think, but rather extremely adroit, much more adroit than Theocritus, whose flattery at court came out too coarse and clumsy. Nor do I think that he was so "strictly homosexual"

as might appear from his epigrams. Love for a boy is simply a literary motif. The poet, who, contrary to Fraser's opinion, was not in the habit of "baring his heart" expresses in his verses what he would like to write about, and not what he really felt. This principle could be applied to many other questions as well, including Callimachus's attitude to religion.

Thus one could take up a number of points with the author of *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, but this does not alter the fact that it is a book that will be indispensable to all students of hellenistic culture, useful, too, because of its extensive footnotes, its splendid, analytic index, an undoubtedly great work which the author dedicates, with a beautiful tribute, ΦΙΛΟΙΣ ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΕΥΣΙΝ, whose names, given in the *Preface* and often cited in the footnotes, are well known to every historian of ancient culture who has worked in Alexandria in the second half of the 20th century.

[Warszawa]

Anna Świderek

M. A. Dandamayev, *Rabstvo v Vavilonii VII-IV vv. do n.e.* (626-331 gg.) [Slavery in Babylonia in the 7th-4th Centuries B.C. (the years 626-331)], Moscow, 1974, 493 p.

The author considers his work as a preliminary study of the social and economic structure of Babylonian society. His purpose was to collect and thoroughly investigate the evidence contained in the documents from the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenian periods and for this reason he had transcribed and translated in Russian all cuneiform documents from the 11th to the 2nd centuries B.C. known and accessible to him. After a foreword (pp. 3-6) follows a short survey of the sources (pp. 7-19) and more important Assyriological studies (pp. 19-22). The introductory part of the book ends with a concise description of social and economic situation in Babylonia in the period in question (pp. 23-43). In the following chapters the author presents a detailed analysis of the sources. The Chapter One is devoted to the problem of slaves owned by private persons (pp. 44-272), the second treats of the temple slavery (pp. 273-324), the third—of the royal slaves (pp. 325-340), the fourth—of the dependent social groups (defined as *glebae adscripti*, pp. 341-379). Then the author summarizes his conclusions (pp. 380-390). In an appendix are given the transliterations of selected texts (pp. 391-427). The book contains also a copious bibliography (pp. 428-444), an index of transcribed and translated documents (p. 445), an index of documents translated only (p. 446), an imposing general index of utilized sources (pp. 447-476), an English summary, (pp. 477-486), the addenda (p. 487) and the table of contents in Russian (pp. 488-490) and in English (pp. 490-493).

After a very patient and laborious analysis of the sources the author came to the conclusions which generally correspond to the conclusions reached by I. Men-