

Anne-Valérie Pont: *La fin de la cité grecque*

Covering almost six hundred pages, the book by Anne-Valérie Pont examines the history of Greek cities in Asia Minor during the period between the reigns of Decius and Constantine, before, as she believes, these cities ceased to exist in their old political and administrative form. The book's three parts - each comprised of two chapters - deal with the new challenges those cities faced from the mid-third century to the 280s (Part I), the many diverse outcomes of the evolving interactions between the cities and the central authority (II), and the mutation and dissolution of those cities' old social texture and, consequently, the emergence of new communal and institutional structures (III).

More specifically, Part I studies martyrdom literature to see how the Greek cities of Asia Minor changed under the influence of Christianity (chapter 1) and how those cities responded to external threats like barbarian invasions, and internal transformations, with a focus on agonistic competitions (chapter 2). Part II begins with Pont's analysis of the evolution of the cities' internal organization and interactions with resident senatorial aristocracy and other local potentates (chapter 3), before delving into the cities' social and administrative mutations that stemmed from the imperial authority's legislative interference in local affairs on the provincial and city levels (chapter 4). Part III combines an analysis of the religious policies of the imperial administration, specifically dealing with persecutions by Diocletian and Galerius, and Licinius' oppression of Christians in Asia Minor (chapter 5), and offering a broad overview of the (social, administrative, and financial) situation in Greek cities of Asia Minor during Constantine's reign which, according to Pont, stripped them of their traditional political identity (chapter 6).

Ending a history of the ancient city in the late third century is traditional, as one can see in, for example, A. H. M. Jones's *The Greek City from Alexander to Justinian* (1940) and C. Lepelley, "De la cité classique à la cité tardive: continuités et ruptures," in *La fin de la cité antique et le début de la cité médiévale: de la fin du IIIe siècle à l'avènement de Charlemagne*, ed. by C. Lepelley (Bari 1996), 5-13, both of which are curiously missing in Pont's *Bibliographie*. While these and other such studies mark the significance of Diocletian's reforms to this development (291-304), they typically rely on the local evidence; in fact, Diocletian's reforms were only an adjustment on a higher administrative level to changes that took place locally: S. Dmitriev, *City Government in Hellenistic and Roman Asia Minor* (2005).

The principal novelty of the book, then, lies in Pont's innovative focus on Christian literature (martyrdoms, hagiography, liturgical texts) as an important source on life in Greek cities in Asia Minor during the period under consideration (esp. chapters 1 and 5). Well aware of the challenges posed by such materials, Pont offered a detailed methodology of how they need to be approached (35-38). Her use of Christian literature - and, more broadly, her emphasis on the role of Christianity in the transformation of ancient Greek cities - determined the chronological span of the book: it begins with the famous edict of Decius in 250 and ends with Constantine's pro-Christian legislation in the 320s. Can we say that Decius' edict made an essential difference, which would justify beginning the book with it, if the post-Decian Christian texts from some provinces in Asia Minor only contain "familiar" scenes of interrogations by governors, whereas the author herself marks no trace of this edict in other provinces (39-61)?

It would be hard to deny that the Christians developed a communal identity that often caused them to withdraw loyalty from the cities in which they resided (102-106), and, accordingly, their presence undermined

the political and social, and religious, cohesiveness of ancient cities (488). This issue was addressed by many, including N. D. Fustel de Coulanges, who ended the last part (V: *Le régime municipal disparaît*) of his *La Cité antique* (which is also missing from Pont's bibliography list) with a chapter *Le christianisme change les conditions du gouvernement*, precisely with reference to how the Christians came up with a new conceptualization of "community" that did not conform to the traditional political, social, and religious patterns of city life (on this see also Lepelley, *op. cit.*, 11 with n. 23).

On the one hand, however, the tension between the local pagans and Christians existed before Decius's edict, which, in a sense, responded to that situation (see K. W. Harl, in *Past & Present* 128, 1990, 8). Eusebius (*HE* 5.1) described the famous persecution of Christians by Roman authorities and members of the local community in Lyon in 177; Tertullian (*Ap.* 40.1-2) mentioned how famine, plague, and any other calamity brought about persecutions of Christians by local communities at the turn of the third century; and the bishop Firmilian of Caesarea in Cappadocia recollected in a letter to Cyprian of Carthage (*Ep.* 74.10) how, during the reign of Alexander Severus (222-235), an earthquake prompted local communities to persecute resident Christians. With a marked increase in the number of Christians during the third century (K. Hopkins, in *JECS* 6, 1998, 185-226, and esp. 198 and 222; repr. in *Sociological Studies in Roman History*. Ed. by C. Kelly 2017, 398-431), the quantity turned into the quality, and Decius introduced persecutions on the level of the state (Hopkins, *op.cit.*, 223), only to be followed by later emperors.

On the other hand, the same applied to different social groups, including local city elites who ceased to reap the same political and social benefits from involvement in city affairs before the mid-third century - as one's status depended more and more on proximity to the emperor, especially in the Greek-speaking territories, and Christianity gradually started to offer better prospects, competing with the local political and administrative organization, creating alternatives to traditional city life, and pulling local elites to the Church, as was succinctly summed up by A. Momigliano, in *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, ed. by A. Momigliano (1963), 9-12, who thereby added a more subtle touch to Edward Gibbon's vision of Christianity's detrimental impact on classical civilization.

Pont refers to the disappearance of civic coinage (234-240), and of public benefactions and liturgies, which undermined the communal spirit and material wellbeing of Greek cities, as she had already noted elsewhere (*Chiron* 47: 2017, 35-55). Yet, Greek cities retained such traditional communal administrative and financial activities as hiring public physicians and teachers or financing the purchase of oil for public illumination at night long after the early fourth century (S. Dmitriev, in *Byzantion* 87: 2017, 207-231), and local city councilors did not lose their financial responsibilities, or their last *raison d'être*, until Justinian's reign (*Lyd. Mag.* 3.49; *Malal.* 16.12). One would expect to see the decline of the ancient city as a transformation over many centuries, which Pont disputes in her book (14-20), rather than as an abrupt disappearance. The problematic view that Greek cities ended with Constantine's reign also raises the question of what is actually meant by an ancient "Greek city" - as opposed to a non-Greek ancient city. It is only in the Conclusion (483-497) that Pont addresses this issue, speaking of the cities of Greek pattern, or heritage ("*les cités de tradition grecque*") but solely as regards traditional forms of communal organization and activities, and without a precise formulation of what made up a Greek city (different from a non-Greek city) by the time of Decius' edict in the mid-third century. The issue is crucial if one plans to extend the same approach to other parts of the late Roman empire, when the situation was variable even within the provinces of Asia Minor. Thus, the vitality of local pagan worship in some of its regions made Peter Brown remark that "the third century, as we know it, does not appear to have happened in Stratonikeia" (*The Making of Late Antiquity* 1978, 51), with reference to A. Laumonier, *Les cultes indigènes de la Carie* (Paris 1958), 288 n. 1, who noted "*une continuité et une stabilité*

remarquables" in this field.

The wealth of the material collected in the book, with a welcome addition of evidence from many Christian texts, illuminates numerous details of local life in the cities of late imperial Asia Minor, while raising imperative and exciting questions. The book ends with the index of sources and personal names.

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