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Julie Bernini, *"Plaise au peuple." Pratique et lieux de la décision démocratique en Ionie et en Carie hellénistiques*. Scripta antiqua, 173. Bordeaux: Ausonius Éditions, 2023. Pp. 400. ISBN 9782356135834.

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If Hellenistic democracy is now appreciated as an important component of any broader history of ancient Mediterranean power-sharing institutions, rather than a doomed dissimulation of de facto oligarchy, the number of book-length studies that offer both in-depth and synoptic treatment remains low. Articles abound, but we are still missing a general, if still nuanced, study that moves beyond the case-study approach advanced 15 years ago.^[1] Bernini's first book, a revision of her 2019 doctoral thesis, comes close to filling this void despite promising no such aim, as the subtitle's geographical limitations make clear. Her study of the decision-making practice and spaces in Ionia and Karia ably contextualizes her evidence within a broader synthesis of prior work on Hellenistic democracy more generally, all while building on this work in important ways and remaining attuned to examples from beyond these two regions.

What Bernini does promise is a spatial analysis of what she comes to identify as “les complexes politiques” within the *poleis* of Ionia and Karia in order to understand democratic decision-making not merely in terms of institutions, an aspect well studied hitherto, but as a practice conducted within spaces that were intentionally designed by the community and which in turn shaped the subsequent development of the very decision-making practices that created these spaces. This spatial lens marks her examination as inherently interdisciplinary, drawing on theories from the field of geography and making use of epigraphical, archaeological, and literary evidence, while also allowing her to offer convincing explanations of why democracies could exist without these political complexes, what motivated cities to create them, and how the elaboration of these spaces played an ambiguous role in the efforts of elites to position themselves above the rest of the civic body at the end of the Hellenistic period.

The book is divided into three parts, with the first (“From Proposal to Decree”) demonstrating Bernini's impressive handle on the extensive bibliography on the democratic decision-making process that took place in the cities of Asia Minor. While not original in detail, as a synthesis this section is a recommended entry point on Hellenistic democracy for anyone with a passing ability to read French. Chapter 1 focuses on what took place ahead of an assembly meeting in the probouleutic institutions of the Council and its permanent, rotating committee (variously named *epimenioi*, *proedroi*, *prytaneis*, etc.). Here one encounters the evidence for these institutions from the cities under study, followed by a treatment of how and by whom decrees were initiated, how often assembly meetings took place, and what type of business was addressed in these meetings. Chapter 2 discusses the duties of the presiding body of the assembly, the nature and goals of deliberation, the process of voting, and the roles of various magistrates in publishing and storing the results. Bernini's main contention here is that the permanent committee of the *boulê* played a central role in decision-making procedure within the assembly.

With this important background established, Part 2 (“Specialization and Monumentalization of Democratic Decision-Making Places”) focuses on the activities of the Council and civic magistrates. Chapter 3 argues that we should not simply equate a building with a civic institution or body. Councils could meet in *bouleuteria*, but also in *prytaneia* or even within sanctuaries in the agora, and likewise for the Council's permanent committees, with the added location of the *arkheion*; assemblies could gather in an *ekklasiasterion*, but also in the theater, bouleuterion, or even the agora itself. By the same token, each civic building had multiple functions and should not be solely associated with one political body. The point helps explain the key observation of Chapter 4: that democracy developed in Ionia and Karia well before buildings that housed deliberative practices did. A survey of civic building history in these regions shows that communities prioritized defense, divinity, and commerce when monumentalizing their urban spaces. The chronology suggests that once this was accomplished, citizens put the construction of buildings for the council and magistrates next on their list, depending on finances. Bernini also explores the shift in the Late Hellenistic Period to *bouleuteria* with a new form that included theater-like seating and a courtyard surrounded by a colonnade. She argues that this new form, far from signaling an oligarchic development, offered more space to accommodate other deliberative bodies such as the assembly and the courts, and was perhaps also suitable for certain forms of entertainment.

Part III (“The Places for Democratic Decisions, Places for Politics”) seeks to elaborate on the significance of these buildings as cohesive political complexes that fostered civic unity. Chapter 5 highlights how *bouleuteria* and *prytaneia* were connected sites for collective rituals that celebrated the community and sought divine guidance and protection for it. These complexes, and especially the *prytaneion*, housed the communal hearth (and often a cult to Hestia) whose flame burned to symbolize the community's health and survival. In addition, this space welcomed those honored by the *demoi* to complementary meals, and ultimately served as the religious center of each *polis*, as suggested by the fact that many civic processions started at this complex.

Chapter 6 seeks to contextualize these political complexes in relation to other urban spaces. Bernini stresses their accessibility from the agora, and cautiously uses the geographical concept of a “high place” to understand how these complexes represented civic ideals before the entire citizenry. It was before these complexes that citizens took public oaths, performed communal prayers, and heard public proclamations, many of which honored fellow citizens for embodying civic ideals. It was also here that citizens could view the ornate facades of the *bouleuterion*—whose decoration in mimicking Macedonian palace and tomb facades evoked civic power, protection, and excellence—along with honorific monuments that promoted civic values over individual exaltation and, eventually, the monuments of Roman power that linked this power to the *demoi*'s sovereignty. The chapter concludes by considering how elites sought to create rival political spaces from around 100 BCE that represented alternatives to the civic ideals advocated in the official political complexes. In particular, the gymnasium and the dining areas of elite houses defined a politics centered on these individuals' actions toward the community rather than on attaining ideals defined and adjudicated by the civic body at large.

Any meritorious historical study not only informs and persuades its reader, but also evokes a critical response, and this book is no exception. One of the central challenges facing any scholar of Hellenistic democracy is the imperfect nature of the evidence and the corollary question of to what extent this evidence allows for conclusions of a general nature. Bernini is well aware of this challenge and exercises prudent caution in highlighting variation among the Ionian and Karian communities she discusses in the first part. This caution remains thereafter, but in mitigated form, as case studies come to dominate the evidentiary support for her claims. For instance, her point about the priorities that cities had when monumentalizing public spaces is largely based on the building histories of Priene and Kos only, while her discussion of political complexes as sites for building civic cohesion rests on an analysis of Priene and Teos. The methodology here is not so much objectionable as provocative, as it reflects a more general scholarly desire to tell histories in terms of generalities. Without this desire, would we (not just Bernini) feel the need to say something about Hellenistic Ionian-Karian democracy, as opposed to simply Prienean, Koan, Milesian, or Teian democracy? There are some clear patterns that emerge, especially when it comes to basic institutions or the range of possible uses for civic buildings; but do these commonalities justify the inference of other patterns that the evidence does not support with such frequency, such as the shift to a new style of *bouleuterion* or the building priorities of cities? Of course, I began this review by stressing the need for a general treatment of Hellenistic democracy, and Bernini's book pushes us to consider to what extent such a treatment should simply be the sum of its parts or produce a narrative that fills in the space when the few cases we have are similar enough to suggest a broader commonality.

As wide-ranging as this study is, it also leaves open certain avenues for further research. The question of generalizability, when answered in the affirmative, still demands explanation beyond the use of chemical metaphors like “diffusion” that are not actually natural processes. In addition, the *ekklisia* merits more attention when thinking about the political complexes of Part III: to what extent were its meeting spaces also sites for collective rituals, and how did the larger urban contexts facilitate (or not) accessibility, visibility, and the expression of civic ideals? Another question relates to the use of political complexes for banqueting. How do such uses relate to the issue of eligibility for those magistracies to whom civic banquets were restricted, an issue discussed in chapter 1 but not connected to the Late Hellenistic developments treated later? In other words, if such banquets lent prestige to those involved, as Bernini argues, does this suggest that not only honorees but also certain civic officials were also coming to be seen as more worthy of distinction than other citizens, because the very holding of such offices was no longer equally attainable?

As should be clear, my ability to identify unanswered questions in the book does not indicate a failing, but instead marks just how fruitful Bernini's approach, analysis, and findings are. The book's production value is also high, in terms of both the relative absence of errors and the number of helpful figures and pictures included throughout. Those interested in Hellenistic democracy, along with scholars working on other periods of democratic history, will find Bernini's keen ability to bring democratic practice and ritual to life in their spatial setting significantly rewarding.

Notes

[1] E.g., V. Grieb, *Hellenistische Demokratie: politische Organisation und Struktur in freien griechischen Poleis nach Alexander dem Großen* (Stuttgart, 2008); S. Carlsson, *Hellenistic Democracies: Freedom, Independence and Political Procedure in some East Greek City-States* (Stuttgart, 2010).