

C. HAAS: *Alexandria in Late Antiquity: Topography and Social Conflict* (Ancient History and Society). Pp. xxviii + 494, 3 maps. Baltimore, MD and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997. Cased, £37. ISBN: 0-8018-5377-X.

This is a valuable and much needed contribution to the study of Alexandria and late antiquity. The Roman and Byzantine periods of Alexandria's history have been poorly served. Although Fraser's magisterial *Ptolemaic Alexandria* covered the early first century A.D. and there are some technical treatments of various problems and some popular histories, there has been no general scholarly treatment of the city in this period. H.'s book essentially covers the period from c. 300 to c. 500, but also comments on earlier and later events.

Alexandria was important in the early Byzantine period and the lack of a modern study of the city was a major omission, yet easily explicable, as anyone who has studied Byzantine Alexandria will verify. The sources, fragmentary, difficult, and voluminous, are written in various languages, are often much later than the period described, and are extremely hard to evaluate, in that most of the material is anecdotal and highly contentious. Uniting this material in a readable form is a considerable scholarly and technical achievement. But H.'s work is much more than a compilation of sources. Gradually, H. builds from general description of the city to analysis of specific events. H. recounts the struggles between the various groups within the city, illuminates the various alliances between religious groups, and analyses the means by which the patriarchs eliminated opposition (the Jews, the pagans, opposed movements within the Church). H., following the modern tendency to write secular history of religious movements, concentrates on the political struggles of the great patriarchs, especially Theophilus, Cyril, Timothy the Cat, and Peter Mongus.

H.'s Alexandria is riven by communal strife, and he sees the level of violence as peculiar to the city. It is not clear why this should have been the case and why various attempts to bring peace to the city should have failed. H. speculates that the factional boundaries were clearer and corners more closely fought than elsewhere. He offers as analogy certain (unspecified) modern communities in which external forces have failed to heal rifts. A more explicit consideration of parallels may have been useful since it would make certain problems more obvious. Were the boundaries between sections of the community as closely guarded as, for instance, in Northern Ireland or Bosnia? The ecclesiastical historians and the bellicose bishops focus on conflict. They are interested in deciding who is one of us and who is damned. H. is perhaps too easily led by this material, too ready to accept the patterns of conflict attested as the dominant feature of Alexandrian life. H. appears to have made a conscious decision, taken for understandable and defensible reasons, to trust the central narratives and is aware of the methodological problems that result. Not the least of the virtues of this book is the undogmatic nature of the text: H. is no Theophilus or Cyril. Yet Zachariah of Mytilene's hugely entertaining treatment of a conflict in the late fifth century involving false pregnancies, fraudulent miracles, destruction of temples, and violence in lecture halls offers a different picture of debate within a tight-knit community taking place between monastery and lecture hall, temple and church. One could draw similar lessons from what we know of the circle around Hypatia. Although these circles clashed violently, this is a different kind of city than that depicted in most of the ecclesiastical histories.

Another world also appears in the archaeological evidence, summarized ably by H. Recent excavations in Alexandria have uncovered a large area in the centre of the city. A number of small houses were clearly inhabited by Christians. The material culture of the houses and the architectural development of the whole area suggest a more relaxed city than that depicted by H. The area was dominated by a theatre and bath complex and by meeting rooms. The material culture, as elsewhere in the Mediterranean, shows a mix of pagan and Christian influences, not a world obviously dominated by exclusive Christian institutions.

H.'s book has limitations. It is not about the economics or demographics of the city, though these issues are discussed when appropriate to the major themes. H. does not look beyond the city to consider the activities of Alexandrians in the *chora*, and some will undoubtedly find this narrow focus frustrating. There are other books to be written on the city in this period. Yet H. has produced a vivid and interesting portrait of Alexandria in the fourth to sixth centuries and has provided us with a valuable guide to the conflicts in the city, which puts them in a comprehensible, if not always completely convincing, context.

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