

Ancient Greece in French Historiography

Jean-Luc Lamboley

Université Pierre Mendès France, Grenoble II



La manière dont la France a construit ses rapports avec l'antiquité permet de voir l'évolution de la notion de citoyenneté. La déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen de 1789, en faisant apparaître le mot "citoyen" à côté de celui d'"homme", fait une claire référence à l'Antiquité. Par contre dans les dernières constitutions françaises, le mot "citoyen" finit peu à peu par disparaître. Déjà en 1789 l'écart par rapport à la conception antique de la citoyenneté est grand: si pour Aristote l'homme est par nature un animal politique, c'est-à-dire fait pour vivre dans une cité conçue comme une communauté de citoyens, chez les Révolutionnaires du siècle des Lumières, le citoyen n'est plus une donnée naturelle, il doit se subsumer dans la notion universelle d'homme conçu comme individu doué de raison. Les quatre droits naturels fondateurs de nos Etats modernes, la liberté, l'égalité, la propriété, la sûreté et la résistance à l'oppression, concernent l'individu et non pas l'Etat qui n'en est que le garant. Ces valeurs universelles de l'individu ne peuvent toutefois se réaliser que dans un Etat-Nation formé de citoyens qui mettent en œuvre ces valeurs.

1. Les Révolutionnaires évoluent dans leurs rapports avec l'Antiquité. Avec les Montagnards, c'est le modèle spartiate d'un Etat militaire et parfaitement égalitaire qui prime. Après l'élimination de Robespierre, et le triomphe de la bourgeoisie éclairée, le modèle athénien sert désormais de référence, et ce jusqu'à nos jours. L'aspect culturel et social finit par l'emporter sur l'aspect institutionnel et politique, ce qui permet de prendre ses distances vis-à-vis des pouvoirs en place, et de légitimer les valeurs socio-économiques de la bourgeoisie libérale. En 1819 Benjamin Constant écrit : "L'on jouissait à Athènes d'une liberté individuelle beaucoup plus grande qu'à Sparte parce qu'Athènes était à la fois guerrière et commerçante, et que Sparte était exclusivement guerrière". Du coup l'Antiquité devient aussi un point de référence qui permet de comprendre ce présent déjà passé qu'est la Révolution française au prix parfois, comme avec Chateaubriant, de raccourcis dénués de toute valeur scientifique. A l'inverse, mais avec les mêmes risques méthodologiques, l'histoire récente de la France éclaire celle de la Grèce. L'accent mis sur les aspects culturels a aussi pour conséquence que l'apprentissage du grec ancien fait partie du cursus des élites, alors que le latin avait été remis à l'honneur sous Napoléon Bonaparte, pour qui le modèle de référence était l'empire romain.

Ainsi la révolution de 1789 a jeté les bases de nos démocraties modernes en élaborant une conception de l'Etat et de la citoyenneté héritée de l'antiquité, mais qui lui est propre. Le citoyen est l'individu qui participe à l'édification d'un Etat-Nation dont le but est de mettre en œuvre les droits de l'homme dans leur universalité. Elle a pour but ultime que la Nation soit amenée un jour à devenir la communauté humaine universelle au-delà des particularismes géographiques et culturels. Au cours du XIXe siècle le concept s'enrichit et fait apparaître trois niveaux: la citoyenneté conçue comme exercice des droits politiques, une citoyenneté naturelle fondée sur l'égalité des droits, et enfin une citoyenneté sociale qui est celle par exemple de la vie associative.

2. Un autre événement marquant de l'histoire de France a été celui de la colonisation, suivie de l'expérience de la décolonisation. Cela a permis de porter l'attention des historiens sur une autre période de l'histoire grecque, celle des Royaumes hellénistiques. Cette époque qui voit la culture grecque se répandre dans tous les grands royaumes "barbares" apparaît plus proche de la nôtre qui connaît aujourd'hui la mondialisation. Le fédéralisme grec qui connaît un grand essor, apparaît également plus proche de

nos systèmes politiques. Cette sympathie pour le monde hellénistique, comme celle des Révolutionnaires pour les Républiques classiques, s'accompagne de la même tendance à projeter sur l'Antiquité pour la comprendre, les modèles et les préoccupations du moment. Alexandre le Grand apporte la civilisation au monde exactement comme les puissances européennes s'auto-justifient en disant apporter le progrès aux peuplades primitives. Avec l'historien E. Will ont est déjà dans l'ère de la décolonisation, et il s'agit de redonner une place aux populations indigènes et de relativiser leur degré d'hellénisation: "nous le comprenons fort bien car nous avons fait nous-mêmes l'expérience de ce que la domination et l'exploitation ne sont pas de nature à rapprocher véritablement les exploités des exploités, bien au contraire". Aujourd'hui l'approche de Will est dépassée, car nous sommes dans l'ère de la post-décolonisation. Conscients des pièges d'un point de vue purement hellénique, les historiens ont trouvé une porte de sortie avec les apports de l'archéologie, a priori plus "objective" puisqu'elle exhume précisément des objets dont la réalité, hélas muette..., ne peut être mise en cause. L'intérêt porté ces dernières années sur les cultures indigènes, et les âpres débats méthodologiques sur les modèles et concepts à utiliser pour rendre compte des contacts entre colonisateurs et colonisés reflète un certain mal aise né sans doute de la mauvaise conscience des ex puissances coloniales.

3. Avec l'afflux des populations provenant des Pays pauvres, la notion de citoyenneté a connu une dernière évolution, qui se décline sous le terme d'intégration. Il est intéressant de voir que les nouveaux programmes scolaires en France incluent désormais une étude de la Grèce et de Rome centrée sur la notion de citoyenneté conçue comme le moyen de l'intégration, alors qu'elle est née au contraire dans des systèmes où l'intégration n'a pas lieu d'être! Devant la crise actuelle, la réaction des pouvoirs politiques est étonnamment régressive: on remonte aux sources comme on chercherait un refuge dans le sein maternel. Il y a aussi en même temps la nécessité de retrouver une définition universelle du citoyen qui faciliterait la construction européenne. C'est là encore un contre sens, car l'Europe est tout sauf un Etat, ni même une Nation, et les seules valeurs refuges sont le patriotisme ou le nationalisme qui ne vont guère dans le sens d'une unification des peuples. Ces contradictions amènent à déplacer le sens du mot citoyenneté qui se trouve remplacé par celui de civisme. On demande désormais à Athènes, école de la Grèce, de devenir l'Ecole de l'Europe en formant aux valeurs civiques, ce qui apparaît comme une voie plus raisonnable, car elle permet de retrouver des idéaux comme le respect de la loi, l'implication de chacun dans un projet collectif, la reconnaissance de valeurs communes. Certes leur mise en œuvre demande de l'imagination et de l'optimisme. Or ce sont là deux qualités proches des historiens, et notamment des historiens de l'Antiquité. L'optimisme parce que nul ne peut faire de l'histoire s'il ne croit pas profondément que les phénomènes humains sont compréhensibles; l'imagination parce qu'elle le moteur de la pensée rationnelle. Comme l'écrivait E. Will: "Il n'y a pas d'histoire sans imagination, il n'y a pas d'historien qui ne soit un artisan de l'imaginaire".

Or l'Europe des droits de l'homme se construira politiquement grâce à l'imagination et à l'optimisme de tous ceux qui voudront bien y croire. C'est par ce biais que les leçons de l'Antiquité ne sont pas mortes, et nous historiens, vis à vis des jeunes que nous formons, nous avons le devoir de faire en sorte qu'ils y croient.

Jean-Luc Lamboley was born in 1953 in Toulouse, France. He was a student of the École Normale Supérieure and of the École française de Rome. He is now Professor of History and Archaeology of the Ancient Worlds at the Université de Grenoble II. His special interests are the contacts between the Greeks and the native populations in the colonial world and problems of acculturation. His works include *Lexique d'histoire et de civilisation romaine*, Paris 1994; *Les Grecs d'Occident (la période archaïque)*, Paris 1996; and *Recherches sur les Messapiens*, Rome 1996.



The aim of this chapter is to present some aspects of ancient Greece in French historiography from the French Revolution to our times, not in an erudite perspective of only historiographic interest, but keeping in mind always a question of pedagogical interest, or political interest in the noble sense of the term: the extent to which the study of ancient Greece can be useful today to all who are interested in Europe. Thus there is an underlying theme in this chapter, the notion of citizenship. It seems to me in fact that it is through this notion that one can best grasp the way in which France has built her relationship with Antiquity.

The French Revolution clearly marks an important time in the history of France and of Europe; and we can begin our reflection by asking ourselves what place Ancient Greece played in the imagination and in the actions of the revolutionaries. It is well to start with the *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* (Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen) of 26 August 1789, proclaimed by the representatives of the French people constituted in the National Assembly. The reference to Antiquity is present from the title itself: The rights of Man and of the Citizen (*et du citoyen*). Under the French monarchy this term had no sense because the king ruled over his people constituted by subjects; on the other hand now it was to become in the following years the official way of referring to the French, and it was consecrated by the fact that it was part of the refrain that would become the French national hymn, the *Marseillaise*. We must note that the constitutional project of 19 April 1946 took in its preamble the Declaration of 1789, as did later the constitution of 4 October 1958, but the term 'citizen' had disappeared. In the Declaration of 1789, the word 'citizen' is used 9 times in 17 articles; in the 1946 project only twice in 39 articles and in the definitive constitution of 27 October it is used only once (quoting the 1789 Declaration). This is certainly a point we will need to come back to: the citizen, little by little, has lost citizenship in the French constitutions.

But though the word 'citizen' appeared in the Declaration of 1789, it even there was second to 'man' ('l'homme'); in fact the aim was to affirm natural rights, inalienable and sacred. Now the citizen is not, for the revolutionaries, a natural fact; the citizen is the public man in his relationship with power and the law. One can already measure here the distance that separates this idea from the ancient concept of citizenship, because in Aristotle the *polis*, the city, is the natural frame of man who was defined then as a political animal, that is to say at last a citizen. In Greek the word *politès* (the citizen) derives clearly from *polis* (the city-state understood as the community of citizens), whereas in Latin the term *civis* seems to precede the *civitas*. The revolutionaries were always aware of the distance in relation to the Greek model. Jean-Jacques Rousseau had already written:

The ancient peoples are not a model for the modern ones; they are too foreign respect to you. Above all you Genevans [...] you are neither Romans nor Spartans; you are not Athenians either [Source 1].

Fustel de Coulanges, a century later confirms in a definitive way this position: Greece and Rome could not in any way be models to be imitated. This irremediable distance is due to a quadruple coming to awareness: first, it is no longer possible to have direct democracy,

representation is a given unavoidable fact. Then, man is an economic animal as much or more than he is a political animal; the State must manage the economic dimension. The well-being of peoples passes through the enrichment of societies which relieves the State of that duty (the sign of the “Liberal” English school). Thirdly, the “natural” notion of the individual comes before that of the citizen which must thus be subsumed into the universal notion of man as it had been established by the philosophers of the century of the Enlightenment. Finally, the ancient model was based on slavery and a limited number of citizens whereas the modern State was based on the bourgeoisie. The rights of the citizen are those of man himself.

Thus the four natural rights, liberty, property, security and resistance to oppression, concerned the individual and not the State, which was only their guarantor. For the revolutionaries, it is not hence so much a question of reproducing a Greek model, as to break with the monarchical State in a definitive way. That is why, in the declaration of the rights of man of 1789 we do not find the notion of ‘people’ (which already existed under Monarchy), but that of Nation, defined as the body of citizens, in which alone resides sovereignty, sovereignty which each citizen exercises through the intermediary of the representatives that he designated. Undeniably this concept of nation is inspired by that of *demos* and of the *polis* of ancient Greece, and not at all by the notion of *ethnos*. There has been however a Copernican revolution: in classical Greece the State, the naturally given fact, realises and allows the citizen to develop fully whereas in the States born from the Revolution, the citizen, a given fact in that he is a rational animal, realises the Nation-State as the only political framework that permits the realization of the universal rights of man and, as a consequence, the full development of the individual.

At this point we must quote a phrase of Saint-Just in 1791, which is very enlightening:

The ancient legislators had done everything for the Republic, France has done everything for man. The rights of man would have lost Athens or Lacedemon. There they only knew their own fatherland, they forgot themselves for it [Source 2].

We should also mention that the weight of the Judaeo-Christian tradition is too strong to be swept away by the revolutionary storm; the revolution is lived as a return to a golden age (along side the revolution which overthrows there is the revolution that regenerates), but Antiquity, very much present in the speeches in Parliament, in the press, the theatres, the national celebrations, in education, is only known to an élite and cannot act as a cultural and social cement. A strong symbol of the time is the image of Moses’ Tables of the Law, which was used for the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen.

In detail, one can note an evolution in the use which the revolutionaries made of ancient Greece and of the models they used. At the beginning, the Greek model is above all that of the legislator, creator of the State (such as Solon or Lycurgus), the figure that inspires all the philosophers of the century of Enlightenment. There is even a collection of *exempla*, those of the heroes who have struggled against tyranny, and with whom it is possible to associate modern examples.

In a second stage, under the pressure of external threats, the revolutionaries during the Terror (June 1793 to July 1794) were inspired very decidedly by the Spartan and Roman model, because it represented the ideal of the citizen-soldier ready to sacrifice his life for the health of the State, because it established a strict equality among the citizens with full rights, and because it guaranteed the maximum efficacy of State authority:

Sparta shines like a lightning flash in the immense shadows [Source 3]

said Robespierre on 7 May 1794. P. Vidal Naquet notes that three words explain this choice: virtue (which Montesquieu had made into the principle of Republics), equality (with a contradiction in the translation of the word *homioi* with “equals”) and transparency (a perfectly unified State, without class conflicts). Among the Montagnards, only Camille Desmoulin, an ardent defender of the freedom of the press, recommended the Athenian model in which he saw exactly the only regime which could guarantee the fundamental liberties:

True republicans, permanent democrats, by principle and by instinct, those were the Athenians... Read Aristophanes who wrote comedies 3000 years ago and you will be astonished by the strange resemblance between Athens and the France of the democrats. [Source 4]

Now, this Athenian model finally imposes itself after 9 Thermidor 1794, and it is this model that develops the vision of Greece that we still have today, at least after the Napoleonic episode in which Rome replaces Sparta according to the words of V. Hugo.

In fact, after Robespierre was eliminated, we find the triumph of what we may call the enlightened bourgeoisie, and by this time it uses the Athenian model as its reference point. Sparta represents a military State, dictatorial, of illiterate, barbarian citizens who ruled by terror over a population that they exploited. The image of a bourgeois Athens was indeed already present among intellectuals before the Revolution (such as the abbé Barthélémy, *Voyage du jeune Anacharsis in Greece*, or Cornelius De Pauw, *Recherches philosophiques sur les Grecs*), but it had been thrown into the shadows during the Terror. A very important development then came to the fore: the cultural and social aspect won over the institutional and political aspect; rather than to the Greek states and to their institutions, people became sensitive to the Greek mentalities, to Greek values, to a way of life; that was the triumph of a humanism which had freed itself of the pangs of politics. By now all is ready so that the ‘westerners’ can consider themselves to be the heirs of ancient culture, heirs who are always sure of their rights of succession if we consider the anecdote about General Gentilly’s landing in Corfu on 28 June 1797: he was offered as a gift of greeting and hospitality the *Odyssey* by Homer so that he could discover the values of the Greek people; doubtless a mediocre Hellenist, the general immediately re-embarked to plant the tricolour flag on Ulysses’ palace in Ithaca ...

More interesting is the speech given by Benjamin Constant in 1819 at the Royal Athénée in Paris, *Sur la Liberté des Anciens comparée à celle des modernes* [On the liberty of the Ancients compared to that of the Moderns]:

The liberty of ancient times is all that which guaranteed to the citizens the greatest part in the exercise of power. The liberty of the moderns is all that which guarantees the independence of citizens against power... In Athens a much greater individual liberty was enjoyed than in Sparta because Athens was both a warrior and a trader, whereas Sparta was only a warrior. [Source 5]

We can see in this passage how Antiquity now became a reference in order to understand the present, which was already past, of the French Revolution. On the other hand, in the works of Benjamin Constant, Antiquity on the whole presents characteristics which are those of the period 1789-1815, because that period wanted to imitate the ancient Republics, especially Sparta: war, participation, the pleasure of action, to which he opposed commerce, representation and the pleasure of reflection, which were also the virtues of Athens respect to Sparta.

To understand the revolutionary period through Antiquity is above all what Chateaubriant wished to do in his *Essai historique sur les Révolutions* [Historical essay on Revolutions], published in 1797. For him it was a matter of searching in the past for revolutions that could be compared with the French Revolution; with no regard for any kind of historical method, we see the wars with the Medes identified with the revolutionary wars! Athens in fact becomes an ancient France, a virtual hearth from which to start off in order to understand revolutionary France, with an astonishing conclusion: in France the Republic is impossible because there can be no true democracy without slavery! A youthful error which the author himself condemned in later years. It indicates however a path not to follow: the study of Antiquity is of no use in understanding the present if it proceeds by simple comparison of events, flattening time into a single undifferentiated dimension and ignoring the economic, social and cultural contexts.

And going in the opposite direction, the recent history of France illuminated that of Greece: this is the case of the work by Pierre-Charles Levesque, *Etudes d'histoire ancienne* [Studies of Ancient History] (1811). Athens is characterised by its respect for property, for private life, the development of its commerce, the work of its artisans, the image of the industrious city is much more important than that of the democratic city, and Solon's Athens, refusing to divide the lands and abolish debts, is much more attractive to him than that of Pericles; in the end only Thrasybulus, a moderate democrat and supporter of order after the episode of the Trente, finds appreciation in his view. One can see the connection: between Solon and Thrasybulus there was a tumultuous democratic period, the oligarchy of the Trente was nothing less than the violent and inevitable consequence of a radical democracy; in the same way, between 1789 and 9 Thermidor there had been the Montagnards and the Terror: the history of France allows reading the history of Athens. And since the author states that Athens is far away in time, one must understand that the French Revolution has also become ancient history.

In the same state of spirit, it is not surprising to see that the work of William Young was republished in 1804 under the title *The History of Athens*; there the author defines the city not as a democracy but as "a free and commercial state" which guarantees general well-being: "the free state of Athens, in the high perfection of its establishment, was the state the best calculated for general happiness". The bourgeois ideology of production too uses Antiquity for its own purposes.

It is, finally, with the *Histoire grecque* [Greek History] by Victor Duruy (1851), that we find the beginning of the Athenocentrism of Greek studies in France, reserved to professors, the Athenocentrism of which the most recent textbooks, after the famous one by G. Glotz, did not succeed in freeing themselves completely. By now faithful admirers of Sparta could not be found except among the intellectuals of the most extreme right. Thucydides was ennobled to the detriment of Plutarch with his exempla, which now seemed too heroic and too subversive. The triumph, which is anything but historic, of Athens over Sparta, was supposed to express the victory of the rational cultivated spirit, of freedom of enterprise as a source of wealth, of independence with respect to political power. Thus Victor Duruy has only praise for Athenian imperialism where commerce and political freedom march hand in hand for the greatest profit for civilization, prosperity and social stability:

the Athenian empire delivered those pacific seas for the genius of trade and the arts [Source 6]

The silences are eloquent: the problems linked to the land, the source of wealth and citizenship, and the agrarian crisis of the 7th century are ignored, because wealth only comes from commerce, industry and banking. In the same way, Solon's reforms are only monetary – when money did not yet exist – and Athenian democracy, not without some contradictions, is pulled onto the side of the representative regimes based on property.

The general assembly placed at the head of the Empire, was no more than a chamber of representatives more numerous than ours. [Source 7]

This reading of antiquity, which comforted 19th century bourgeois society and its model of liberal society, was of course vigorously denounced by Karl Marx. In that perspective Greece no longer could act as a reference point for reflections on the State. Rome took over in that domain, and one can see that if Ancient History was constituted as a scientific discipline in the flow of the 19th century it was thanks to works such as the *Römische Geschichte* [Roman History] by Niebuhr (1811-1812). Furthermore, the accent placed on cultural aspects was such that by that time learning the Greek language – very little known by the revolutionaries who were also very distrustful of Latin, linked to the old colleges and the power of the Church – was part of the course of study of the élite. Latin had been brought back to its honoured place in the Lycées by Napoleon, when Rome replaced Sparta.

To summarise, we must hold that the revolution of 1789 created the foundations of the democracy which was to be that of the modern States, in elaborating a conception of the state and of citizenship inspired by ancient Greece, but belonging to the Revolution itself. The citizen is not just a native of or an inhabitant of the country, nor a representative of a dominant culture. The citizen is he who, cutting off his particular links, participates in building a new type of state, the Nation, of which the aim is to put into effect the rights of man in their universality. One becomes a citizen in the measure in which the unalienable, natural and sacred rights of humanity are achieved. To become a citizen is to free oneself by instruction and the use of reason, through moral and lay civic education, in order to raise oneself towards the universal values. Citizenship is then entirely turned towards the Nation-State, without intermediate juridical or social categories, the

only mediation being that of the political institutions with which the community of citizens endows itself. This is indeed a very high concept of rational, voluntarist and demanding citizenship, which became the norm of the French Republic (especially the Third Republic with J. Ferry), at least until May 1968. This ideal is always linked to the Spartan illusion of a 'transparent' citizenship, with a perfect correspondence between the citizen and the State. But in the end, the consequence of this view is that the Nation must become the timeless universal human community, beyond geographical and cultural particularism, just as in Alexander the Great's dream of the fusion of races, which became a basic theme in Napoleonic propaganda. The 19th century in France thus evolved a concept of citizenship in such a way as to allow us to distinguish three levels:

1. Citizenship conceived as participation in national sovereignty, which supposes the exercise of political rights as was the case for ancient citizenship.
2. Citizenship conceived as the equality of rights and hence the absence of discrimination, the rights of man being the necessary foundation for the rights of the citizen; this is the "natural" citizenship of the Declaration of 1789.
3. Citizenship conceived as the capacity to participate in decisions (not necessarily in the domain of political power); this is social citizenship of associative life.

That said, the obstacles could be foreseen, the Revolutionaries were already conscious of the cultural weight which could slow the process: the difference in society, and, behind the idea of Nation-State conceived as a free association of citizens, that of *patrie*, fatherland, a composite heritage of many centuries, anchored for example around Saint Louis or Joan of Arc. Here we have the basis for the entire reflection and all the ideological and political debates around the two conceptions of Europe, the Europe of the Nations and the Europe of the *Patries*, the Fatherlands, a dichotomy which would have been unthinkable in Antiquity when the Fatherland and the State were completely compatible.

We must now deal with another period of Greek history and of French historiography, that is on one hand the Hellenistic period and on the other the European colonial experience followed by the problems of decolonisation after the Second World War. The importance of the Hellenistic epoch had been discovered by a German historian, Gustave Droysen and this was not by chance; in fact the development of the German national sentiment with Pan-Germanism and the aspiration towards unity of Prussia and Germany could not but attract attention to the constitution of the great territorial states of Hellenistic times which posed the problem of the integration of populations and of minority cultures under the domination of strong regimes.

It is interesting to see the very negative image which is then given to Demosthenes, the image of the resistance of a "lokalpatriotismus" (local patriotism) to the national union of the Greeks around Philip compared then to Bismarck. Other German historians, like U. Kahrstedt and E. Drerup, were even more virulent in their attitude towards the Athenian lawyer. The opposite happened in France, where all historians defended Demosthenes, but with a bit of a guilty conscience because this was going against the flow of history, because of the influence of Hegel. This is why the most vigorous defender of Demosthenes was not a historian but a politician, Clémenceau (author of a *Démosthène* [Demosthenes] in 1926);

the French politician identified himself with the Athenian: he saw in him the man of action, politically motivated and disinterested, who had continuously to fight to obtain a majority in the Assemblée; Clémenceau is sensitive to the instability of French public opinion and to the incoherency of the policies conducted by the different governments after the First World War. At the same time Clémenceau admires Philip for his military valour, and as a man of action who made Macedonia the first political power of his era.

With the rise of the totalitarian regimes, Philip's image deteriorated and was more or less directly associated with that of Hitler; on the contrary, all the monographs which appeared on Demosthenes or on the 4th century in the same years (P. Cloché 1937, G. Mathieu 1948) exalt the valour of the ardent patriot, defender of freedom. We must wait for the most recent studies by C. Mossé (Armand Colin 1994) and by P. Carlier (Fayard 1990) in order to find a less impassioned approach, rendered possible by the disappearance of the dangerous great powers, and indeed very close to that of Clémenceau; these authors are sensitive to the lucid analysis of the politician who, in order to defend peace, knows that he must maintain the balance of power and have public opinion behind him. As P. Carlier indicates very well, reflecting on Demosthenes means posing the question of what policy to follow in order to face a great, potentially dangerous, power, to try through conciliating gestures to earn the goodwill of that power and ward off the danger in becoming its ally (the policy of Aeschines and of Phocion), or rather to endow oneself with the means for a policy of dissuasion, creating a network of alliances and restoring the balance of power (Demosthenes' policy).

But in a more general way French historiography on the Hellenistic period as been above all marked by the experience of colonialism and then by decolonisation. As E. Will underlines, that period appears closer to contemporary concerns, and whether or not one knows it, one has the impression of understanding it well, of being able to sympathise with it.

Each epoch reads history in its own way, no epoch is probably better than our own for reading, in the noise and the fury, Hellenistic history. [Source 8]

In fact, with Alexander, the Greeks discovered that the Aegean was no longer the centre of the world, just as we too ended up by discovering that Europe was not the centre of the world either, not even in the Mediterranean area. The enlargement of the Greek *oikouménè* with and after Alexander, and the globalisation of our problems also have something in common. The way of governing, of making decisions is also close to ours: whether they are taken secretly in royal palaces or in the offices of technocrats in Bruxelles, they give the impression of escaping the grasp of simple citizens. In spite of everything, in those vast monarchical states, those 'super powers', dressed in the virtues of Greek culture, we see that the cities and small States continue stubbornly to want to keep their identity and their local institutions; we know well that the *polis* did not die at Chaironeia; we have to wait for Sylla for that to happen. Now, within a political Europe, what present State does not want to preserve if not the essence of its sovereignty at least its way of life and its 'peculiarities', such as public services "à la française"? The intensification of the circulation of people, of goods, of ideas, the contacts between different cultures, are also traits which

seem common to the Hellenistic world and to today's world. Greek federalism, which finally knows its greatest expansion in the Hellenistic period, with its representative assemblies, also appears closer to our political systems.

This sympathy for the Hellenistic world, like that of the revolutionaries for the classical Republics, leads to identical attitudes, that is to the tendency to project onto Antiquity in order to understand the models and the concerns of the present. It is thus that the first French work on the period, by P. Jouguet, which appeared in the 1920s, was entitled *L'impérialisme macédonien et l'hellénisation de l'Orient* [Macedonian Imperialism and the Hellenisation of the East] a title easy to paraphrase by explaining the underlying implication the western imperialisms and the Europeanisation of the world. Jouget wrote before decolonisation. It is easy to demonstrate that there never was a Macedonian imperialism. Alexander the Great and his successors brought civilisation to the world as the colonial powers did, with the ideology of the White Civilised Adult, justifying themselves in saying they were bringing civilisation and progress to primitive peoples. The Barbarians of yesterday and of today could not but receive their benefactors with gratitude. That is exactly the perspective in which the historian Jean Bérard wrote his thesis on Greek colonisation (Paris 1941). The point of view is entirely Helleno-centric, founded exclusively on Greek literary sources, and very little attention is given to the indigenous populations of Southern Italy and Sicily. P. Wuilleumier's thesis on Taranto (1939) dedicates some attention to the neighbouring Messapian populations, but only to note the diffusion of Tarantine Greek culture. The well-known work by E. Will, *Histoire politique du monde hellénistique* [Political History of the Hellenistic World] (Nancy 1966), was already written in the era of decolonisation, and posed the problem of Hellenisation, although without yet questioning that concept. It was only a matter of measuring the degree of Hellenisation in order to establish that in most cases it was superficial because it did not really modify the culture of the subject peoples. As the author writes:

It is probably not by chance that, in the following generation, that of decolonisation, there has been a tendency to see things in a less idyllic light, if today it is thought that the Greek Macedonian conquerors never intended to bring their civilisation with the indigenous populations, if we like to underline that between Hellenes and barbarians, between Greek civilisation and eastern civilisations, there was more impenetrability than interaction, and to the indigenous have survived the Hellenic rule. [Source 9]

And we understand it very well because we have ourselves had the experience that domination and exploitation are not of a nature that can really draw together the exploited and the exploiters, rather the contrary.

E. Will always defends the idea of Hellenisation, limiting it to the upper strata of society in the urban sphere. We also find in his work the tendency to understand the Hellenistic world starting from contemporary situations that he judges analogous; for example the situation of the Latin American states – with peonage, an indebted peasantry, private militias fighting against banditry, flight from the countryside to the towns – evokes for him the situation in the Hellenistic kingdoms. Although he admits that the comparison is not correct, he declares:

I have never ceased to think of the agricultural and pastoral populations of the Seleucid empire when I read novels such as those by the Peruvian Alegria, because the men that I see living and dying resemble remarkably, in their ethnic, economic and social destiny, what my reflections as a historian had made me imagine, with much hesitation, about those oriental peasantries subject, they too, to their Creoles and their half-breeds. [Source 10]

E. Will's approach today is outdated, which does not necessarily mean that today we know or understand the Hellenistic world better than he. We have in fact entered the post-decolonisation era, and this is particularly evident for studies concerning the Greek west. Aware of the pitfalls of a purely Hellenistic point of view, broadly handed down to us through literary and epigraphic monuments, historians, and not just French historians (historiography has now become European and not national) have found a life raft, or a breath of oxygen, in the contributions of archaeology, a priori more objective, because it exhumes 'real' things of which the reality cannot be cancelled. Of course it is still necessary to interpret those objects, and there the problem arises again because the mass of the documentation which must be considered becomes uncontrollable, and the objects which are by definition mute must be made to speak, and we are in no better position to do that than the Greeks! In any case, a little all over the Mediterranean basin, archaeological diggings are more and more interested in the territories and the sites of the indigenous populations. The Messapians have finally had their revenge on the Tarantines, or at least they have caught up with them, with a thesis published in 1996 (J.-L. Lamboley, *Recherches sur les Messapiens*).

Very clearly, the term Hellenisation is now banished, since it almost appears to signify a fascist approach; the more neutral term of acculturation has been forged to replace it, although it has survived only for about a dozen years. A great conference held in Cortona in 1981 which brought together historians and archaeologists of all western Europe, gave birth to the slightly complicated expression "ways of contact and processes of transformation of ancient society". That is a bit of what is "scientifically correct" for the historians of our generation. But the realisation and awareness of the determinisms, because each epoch reads history in its own way, sometimes brings with it a certain paralysis; historians try more and more to forge working concepts (such as that of *frontier history*), and to build models which are able to take into account material remains (such as the material contained in tombs for example) in order to avoid projecting onto Antiquity an illusory image; often this means falling into sophisticated and abstract constructions, certainly freed from any pre-existing prejudice about what results should ensue, but which favour neither knowledge nor understanding. The polycentric approaches or history by problems seem to give richer results.

During the same period the Anglo-Saxons create the new concept of ethnicity in order to take into account the cultural and social phenomena of the Hellenistic kingdoms. At the very moment when the nationalist flames set off the explosion of Eastern Europe, with a true Balkanisation of peoples, historians feel again the urgent need for identification of the populations within States, in regard to their origin, their beliefs, their organisation and the ways they have been integrated.

And it is on the concept of integration that I wish to conclude because it allows us to come back to the political concerns of the present and return to a much more traditional approach to Antiquity, because it is political.

The new school programmes defined by the Ministry for the French highschools now include a study of Greece and Rome centred on the notion of citizenship conceived as the means of integration, or, in other terms, the “just” place of the citizen in the city. The echo of the present political debate is evident. The problem of violence in the areas around the cities and the realisation that the School of the Republic has more and more difficulty in playing its role as an integrator, leads the political organisms to go back to the roots of citizenship, “*les sources antiques de la citoyenneté moderne*” [the ancient sources of citizenship]: mythical behaviour of a return to the sources known as regeneration. We are in a cultural revolution! Integration is in the first place that of the immigrants into French society, but beyond that, there is a concern felt to rediscover the universal definition of citizen that will permit the social and political construction of Europe. Integration, not participation, that is to say the reuniting of citizens in a unitary public and private statute. Is it a coincidence that one of the most recent great conferences of Greek history held in Paris was on the theme “private-public”?

Antiquity thus finds again its rights of citizenship, but it realises that the notion of citizenship recalls too closely that of the *patrie*, of the fatherland, and of participation in political life; thus the official texts prefer to speak of *civism* (‘civic-ness’) and to ask Athens, now more than ever the school of Greece, to help us teach civic morality. There is interest in Sparta too, but in its women, because their citizenship appears more disinterested and less warlike! One can see very well the process which has led the political powers to launch such an SOS citizenship: the disintegration of the social fabric due to the aggravation of the lack of equality (the famous social fracture on which Jacques Chirac won the presidential election in 1994), the higher and higher rate of abstention in the different elections and the diffidence or the indifference towards politicians, violence among young people, globalisation of problems which makes the action of national governments difficult, the more and more marked cultural differences. At the same time the refuge values, such as *patrie* and nationalism, are rendered impossible by the construction of Europe. We are now asking Antiquity to teach us how to build a national community which is open to the outside and which admits ethnic plurality. But we are asking that of the republican and democratic Antiquity, in which the communities were rather closed in themselves and homogenous; there is nothing, or very little, in the new textbooks on the Hellenistic monarchies... Nonetheless, I believe that Antiquity allows us to find three fundamental notions which then will have to be made operative in today’s world: first, the respect for the Law (from the wise law-giver to the expression of the general will), next the involvement of each person in collective projects (a new form of direct participation), and lastly the recognition of common values (from the values of the *paideia* to human rights).

To implement them, it will be necessary to give proof of imagination and optimism, two qualities which seem to me to be close to historians and of which we should encourage in our students. Optimism because nothing can be done in history if the historian does not believe firmly in this premise: human phenomena are comprehensible, they can be understood, the strength of reason is the real motor of human progress. Imagination is a quality which may appear contradictory, however historians of antiquity can do nothing without it, an imagination based on reason, naturally. Here we must re-read some lines by E. Will:

There is no historian without imagination, there is no historian who is not an artisan of the imaginary. Careful of his scientific statute, the historian does nothing but formulate hypotheses... Since the number of hypotheses that remain without proof is considerable, and these hypotheses are often refuted only by other hypotheses which are not necessarily demonstrated, we must recognise that there is an imaginary part of history, the breadth of which is naturally in an inverse relationship to the quantity of documents: it is therefore considerable for ancient history. The imagination of the historian is not the imagination of the novelist: it is an organ which the need for understanding makes work when understanding is paralysed by the absence or the inadequacy of documents. [Source 11]

Antiquity, so far away from us with its dead languages and its slave society, has then this immense privilege of being particularly stimulating for the historian's imagination.

The Europe of human rights will be built thanks to the imagination and the optimism of all those who will want to believe in it. And we historians, and maybe most of all we historians of the Ancient world, have the duty of believing in it and to encourage our students to believe in it.



SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Vidal-Naquet P., *La démocratie grecque vue d'ailleurs*, Paris 1990.

Will E., *Pour une "anthropologie coloniale" du monde hellénistique*, in: *The Craft of the Ancient Historian: Essays in honor of Chester G. Starr*, London 1985, pp. 273-301.



SOURCES

1. *Les anciens peuples ne sont plus un modèle pour les modernes; ils leur sont trop étrangers à tous égards. Vous surtout Genevois ... vous n'êtes ni Romains ni Spartiates; vous n'êtes même pas Athéniens.* (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Lettre écrite de la montagne*, 1764)
2. *Les anciens législateurs avaient tout fait pour la République, la France a tout fait pour l'homme. Les droits de l'homme auraient perdu Athènes ou Lacédémone. Là on ne connaissait que sa chère patrie, on s'oubliait pour elle.* (Antoine-Louis-Léon de Saint-Just, 1791)
3. *Sparte brille comme un éclair dans les ténèbres immenses.* (Robespierre, 7 May 1794)
4. *De véritables républicains, des démocrates permanents, par principe et par instinct, c'étaient les Athéniens... Lis Aristophane qui faisait des comédies il y à 3000 ans et tu seras étonné de l'étrange ressemblance d'Athènes et de la France des démocrates.* (Camille Demoulin)
5. *La liberté des temps anciens était tout ce qui assurait aux citoyens la plus grande part dans l'exercice du pouvoir. La liberté des temps modernes, c'est tout ce qui garantit l'indépendance des citoyens contre le pouvoir... L'on jouissait à Athènes d'une liberté individuelle beaucoup plus grande qu'à Sparte parce qu'Athènes était à la fois guerrière et commerçante, et que*

Sparte était exclusivement guerrière ... (Benjamin Constant in 1819 at the Royal Athénée in Paris, Sur la Liberté des Anciens comparée à celle des modernes)

6. *L'archè athénienne livrait au génie du commerce et des arts ces mers pacifiées. (Victor Duruy, Histoire grecque, 1851)*

7. *L'assemblée générale placée à la tête de l'Empire, n'était qu'une chambre de représentants plus nombreuse que la nôtre (Ibid.)*

8. *Chaque époque lit l'histoire à sa façon: nulle époque n'est sans doute mieux faite que la nôtre pour lire, dans le bruit et la fureur, l'histoire hellénistique (Edoard Will, Histoire politique du monde hellénistique, 1966)*

9. *Ce n'est sans doute pas un pur hasard si, à la génération suivante, celle de la décolonisation, on a tendu à voir les choses sous un jour moins idyllique, si l'on estime aujourd'hui que les conquérants gréco-macédoniens n'ont jamais entendu communiquer leur civilisation aux indigènes, si on se plaît à souligner qu'entre Hellènes et Barbares, entre civilisation grecque et civilisations orientales, il y a eu imperméabilité plus que compénétration, et que les civilisations indigènes ont survécu aux dominations helléniques (Ibid.)*

10. *je n'ai jamais cessé de penser aux populations agricoles et pastorales des régions montagneuses de l'empire seleucide en lisant des romans tels que ceux du Péruvien Alegria, parce que les hommes que j'y voyais vivre et mourir ressemblaient singulièrement, dans leur destin ethnique, économique et social, à ce que mes réflexions d'historien m'avaient fait imaginer, avec combien d'hésitations, pour ces paysanneries orientales soumises elles aussi à leurs créoles et à leur métis. (Ibid.)*

11. *Il n'y a pas d'histoire sans imagination, il n'y a pas d'historien qui ne soit un artisan de l'imaginaire... Soucieux de son statut scientifique, l'historien ne fait que formuler des hypothèses... Comme toutefois le nombre des hypothèses qui restent sans démonstration véritable est considérable, et que ces hypothèses ne sont souvent réfutées que par d'autres hypothèses qui ne sont pas nécessairement plus démontrées, il faut bien reconnaître qu'il y a une marge d'imaginaire en histoire, marge dont l'ampleur est naturellement en raison inverse de l'abondance des documents: elle est donc considérable en histoire ancienne. L'imagination historique n'est pas l'imagination romanesque: elle est l'organe que le besoin de compréhension fait fonctionner lorsque la compréhension est paralysée par l'absence ou l'insuffisance des documents. (Ibid.)*

