

Greatness and Decline of Planned Economy in the Hellenistic World. By Luigi
Einaudi. Berne: A. Francke, 1950. Pp. 168. Frs. 180.

This study was first published in Kyklos, Volume II, in 1948. It has been translated by R.H.F. Dalton of the University of Nottingham and revised by Professor D.F.M. Heichelheim of the universities of Toronto and Giessen, and F.J. Giles of University College, Toronto. Substantially this is a review of Rostovtzeff's Economic and Social History of the Hellenistic World by a well-known economist and representative of laissez-faire policies. Critical contact between disciplines is always risky, especially if one tends to claim to know the other's business better than it does itself. In this case it is not the historian who transgressed his jurisdiction (an event that would certainly not be without precedent), but rather the economist who frankly expresses his doubts about the historian's competency to inquire into the economic aspects of the past. Comment on Rostovtzeff's work starts modestly, but not without an ominous overtone. "The interpretation which Rostovtzeff gives to economic facts is not always the same as that which would be given by an economic theorist." The latter would not, for example, be found phrasing a sentence like this: "The economic prosperity of Delos brought about the decline of Athens," since that might seem to imply that monopolies of political origin are capable of exerting long-range economic effects. Einaudi simply remarks "Present experience proves the contrary." To be sure, there is hesitation: "What judgment can a layman, as the author of these lines confesses to be, give on the work of Rostovtzeff regarding the history of the ancient world?" Nevertheless, judgment is forthcoosing, and in not too uncertain terms. "Rostovtzeff cannot be considered a really competent historian of economics because he has not the full possession of certain instruments peculiar to pure economic theory (p. 9). We should here stop to remark that this particular sentence does not occur in the original paper as published in Kyklos. Instead, we find this: "These are, however, minor criticisms, which I felt bound to make, surely from a supercilious professional point of view." This sound of course much more like the style in which one would expect President Einaudi to express his reservations. We could find no indication, however, why this generous phrasing was replaced in the reprint by the strange sentence quoted above.

Karl Polanyi, Columbia University

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Heichelheim