Simon Hornblower, Lykophron's *Alexandra*, Rome and the Hellenistic World, Oxford (Oxford University Press) 2018, XXIV, 254 S., ISBN 978-0-19-87236-8 (geb.), £ 63,–

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The *Alexandra* is a perplexing, enigmatic poem that takes the form of a prophecy spoken by Cassandra before the onset of the Trojan War, as retold to Priam by the man charged with guarding her. As such it was never going to be without problems of interpretation, but the one that has vexed scholars the most is the question of its date. The poem was attributed in antiquity to Lykophron, a tragedian

and poet at the court of Ptolemy II Philadelphos (282–246 BC), but Cassandra's predictions of Roman power have often been considered to be inconsistent with an early-to-mid-third-century context. Scholars can be roughly divided into three camps, those who stick with the attested date, those argue that the Roman lines are an interpolation, and those who move the whole poem to the early second century after Rome's defeat of Philip V of Macedon. Simon Hornblower is firmly in the latter camp and argued the case in detail in his 2015 commentary on the poem. The present book could be described as a historical companion to the commentary and takes it a step further. What, he asks in the preface, are the historical implications of a date in the later 190s? This is the question that the book sets out to answer.

The book is divided into two parts. The first (Lykophron's Geopolitical World) reviews the Mediterranean world as presented in the *Alexandra*, region by region, the second (Cultural and Religious Contexts) consists of two chapters, one on prophetic texts, the other on religion and identity. In contrast to the first part the arguments of this second part are less dependent on the date. As we would expect from H., this is a highly learned book with extensive notes informed by the latest scholarship. At times it might have been better if the learning had been stripped back and the argument brought more to the fore. Despite its brevity it is not an easy read. It is written in the manner of a series of short notes, often rather elliptical, with repeated references backwards and forwards.

H. believes the poem was written in the late 190s, most likely by a poet based in southern Italy, perhaps at Lokroi, who adopted the pseudonym Lykophron. It was, he suggests, "the most interestingly political poem" to survive from the Hellenistic period, although he acknowledges that there may not be many contenders for title (187). H.'s point, however, is that Lykophron was not merely collecting and organising often obscure myths, he was commenting on the world of the early second century, a defining moment in Rome's relationship with the rest of the Mediterranean. Hannibal had been defeated in the Second Punic War, Macedon (and the Seleucids) had been humiliated in the East, with Attalid patronage the Trojan myth was in vogue, and in Italy new citizen colonies were established in the south. All this, H. argues, was reflected in the poem, which viewed Rome and Roman power in very positive light.

If Lykophron's engagement with recent events had been overt, then there would be no need to wrangle over the date, so H. has had to scrutinise the poem for hints and allusions. Its riddling and obscure character encourages this kind of exegesis, but it is important at the same time to exercise caution. A poem written in the early second century with such a strong focus on Italy and the West might be expected to make some reference to the Second Punic War that had such a profound impact on the region. H. does indeed find allusions to it, mainly through

places that contemporary readers might be expected to associate in some way or another with the war. The section on the Balearic Islands recalls Carthaginian commanders who had taken refuge there, while the 'gates of Tartessos' in southern Spain that follow (lines 633–643) could remind readers of Scipio's victories over the Carthaginians at Baecula and Ilipa. The 'Skyletrian maiden' of line 853 might bring to mind 'the military nerve centre of Hannibal's recent invasion' of the south, but the argument is tenuous; 'Skyletrian' could, supposes H., allude to the south Italian city of Skyletton, which, Pliny (NH 3.95) says was in the neighbourhood of a harbour (*portus*) that went by the name of Castra Hannibalis, about which nothing else is known. Then, at line 70 there is lake Avernus, home of a cult of the dead, which may also have prompted associations if readers remembered that it was visited by Hannibal in 214. H. is far from dogmatic, but these and other supposed allusions to the war do not seem to me to amount to much. Yet Lykophron can take the reader to Daunia with not a hint that this was the scene of Rome's worst military defeat and even name nearby Argyrippa (Arpi). A more tactful celebration of Roman power might have bypassed the region altogether. Indeed, far from referencing the Second Punic War it is the absence of Carthage from the poem which is striking.

The four chapters that make up Part One treat various regions of the Mediterranean world. The first chapter covers the Hellenistic kingdoms, including the autocrats of Syracuse, and the cities and federations of the old Greece, the second Magna Graecia and Sicily, the third Rhodes and the final one Campania, Latium and Rome. None treat Carthage, which is surprising given the presumed importance of the Second Punic War to the poem. Indeed H.'s identification of allusions to the war are scattered throughout the book rather than being brought together in a single discussion. In the sections on the Hellenistic kingdoms H. demonstrates that these kingdoms made little direct impact on the text of Lykophron. Only the Ptolemaic realm, especially if it is understood to include Cyprus, made much impression, although H. believes that this reflects Lykophron's reading of Alexandrian scholars such as Eratosthenes rather than supporting any claim that Lykophron was working in Alexandria. Of individual rulers the Antigonid Philip V is identified as the antagonist of the unique wrestler in the closing section of the prophecy. There are interesting observations in the sections on cities. Athenian myths appear but, H. points out, they seem to have no relevance to the Hellenistic present in contrast to those that Lykophron tells of Sparta and Boiotia. The second chapter moves westwards to Sicily and South Italy, a region that makes up almost a third of the poem. It is here in particular that H. traces the impact of the Second Punic War, but he also detects other allusions. Lykophron's inclusion of the cities of Kroton, Hipponion, Thourioi and Temesa was not coincidental, he argues. All came to have Roman citizen colonies in the 190s. If Lykophron had

mentioned only these cities, that could have been significant, but the coincidence fades when it is remembered that Lykophron refers to many South Italian cities, great and small (e.g. Taras, Krimisa, Makalla, Lagaria). Nor are these unusual cities to mention; Ps-Skylax (12–13), writing in the fourth century BC, mentions all of them except Temesa. One of the oddities of the poem, as H. observes, is the role that the Rhodians are given in mythical and colonial history of South Italy, where Philoktetes comes to their assistance with fatal consequences. In this way, suggests H. in a fourth chapter devoted to Rhodes, Lykophron brought Rhodes and Rome together in myth to parallel their collaboration in the recent Second Macedonian War, but with more positive results; whereas Rhodian colonization in South Italy failed, the Romans succeeded. The final chapter of the Part I moves northwards to Rome and central Italy. Whether the poem is dated to the third or second century, it offers the earliest extant account of Aineias' arrival in Italy. H. focusses here on the story of the twin lion cubs, as Lykophron re-envisages Romulus and Remus, looking at it especially in relation to another early Greek mention, which in this case names them explicitly, the Chios inscription, dated by H. earlier than the poem.

Part II opens with a chapter on prophecy. H. compares Kassandra's outpourings with Hellenistic prophetic writings, the "Third Sibylline Oracle", the bizarre stories recorded by Phlegon of Tralles, the "Book of Daniel" and the "Oracle of the Potter". H. argues that the *Alexandra* has certain characteristics in common with these texts, so adding support to his second century date, but also that it lacks their apocalyptic, anti-Roman fervour. As the last point suggests, the similarities here can be exaggerated; none of the prophetic texts under consideration share Lykophron's interest in mythological traditions. But in terms of attitude to Rome H. prefers to compare Lykophron with the second-century Greek historian Polybius. The final chapter treats questions of identity and includes an examination of two important passages, the excursus on the cult of Hektor at Thebes (already partially treated in chapter 1) and that on the Lokrian Maidens (on both, see below). H. argues convincingly that in both cases Lykophron's use of these stories exemplifies the civic re-appropriation and re-imagining of myths that were such a feature of the Hellenistic period. H.'s extended discussion of the Lokrian Maidens contains a useful and detailed analysis of a Lokrian inscription on the subject of the maidens, which H. dates to the 270s. H. also provides a new edition and a first English translation (somewhat surprising for an important inscription found in 1895 and first published in 1911).

The uncertainty about the date of the *Alexandra* has meant that scholars have often been wary of drawing too many conclusions from it, at least about contemporary history, even though it alludes to historical events. Clear references to such events are few. The latest is the murder in 309 of Herakles, Alex-

ander's illegitimate son by Barsine, where Herakles is explicitly referred to by name (lines 801–804). He is the only historical figure to be identified in this way, although the mythical character of his name may be a partial explanation for this. This political killing of a minor figure might still have been of interest in the mid-third century, particularly if the memory of it had been recently stirred by the publication of Hieronymos of Kardia's account, but it is hard to see why it mattered to an audience over a hundred years later, dealing with very different circumstances.

This is not something H. addresses. His primary purpose, after all, is to locate the *Alexandra* within the context of the early second century B.C., but he also seems to have a broader aim, to show that this was a poem of the Hellenistic world (p. 36 on cult of Hektor "one of the most strikingly Hellenistic sections of the whole poem"; cf. pp. 42, 48 and 165). These two aims sometimes push in opposite directions. The latter aim leads to illuminating discussions of passages that do not have direct bearing on that early second century context. Frequently they relate to issues that would have been topical in the first half of the third century, but which would have been rather dated by the early second century. For instance, in the lines on the cult of Hektor in Boiotia Cassandra predicts that her brother's bones will be brought to Thebes from the Troad. H. makes the appealing suggestion that this transfer should be dated to the time of the re-foundation of Thebes by Kassandros in the late fourth century, the choice of Hektor a deliberate expression of his hostility to Alexander, the new Achilles. Alexander had destroyed Boiotian Thebes, while Achilles had sacked its namesake in the Troad, home to Hektor's wife Andromache. Furthermore, if the Lokrian inscription is correctly dated to the 270s or thereabouts, then the ritual of the Lokrian maidens may have been attracting interest in the first half of the third century. Other examples can be found in H.'s pages. Lykophron's Spartan myths have parallels in historic time; the conflict between the Spartan Dioskouroi and Messenian Apharetidai mirrors later struggles between the Spartans and the Messenians (Paus. 4.28.1–3, at the time of the Gallic invasion of 279), and the travels of Menelaos in the West anticipate the Spartan commanders who came to the assistance of the South Italian Greeks in the later fourth century (41 f.). Then there is Lykophron's inclusion of Onchestos among Boiotian cities, a religious centre that gained in significance when it became the capital of the Boiotian League in 338 (35 f.), and the strange coincidence that lines 1172–1173 echo anti-tyranny laws, such as Ilion's law of 280 (16 f.). If we were to stress all these examples, we would have a poet who fitted nicely into the mid-third century. As with the murder of Herakles, these are allusions which would have had less relevance for a second century audience.

Such a poet, writing in the middle of the century and alive to recent developments, could easily have picked up on the story of Aineias just as he had on

Hektor's bones and the Lokrian maidens. Rome was certainly topical then. It had not long expelled Pyrrhos from Italy and as a result controlled the whole peninsula. This is something that should not be underestimated. It had never happened before and it did not happen in isolation. The Greeks of south Italy were well-connected and news travelled. Diplomatic relations now opened between Rome and the Ptolemy II in Alexandria. The historians Timaios and Hieronymos, both of whom Lykophron is likely to have been familiar with, had treated Rome and Pyrrhos in their lost histories; while neither is explicitly attested as having written about Aineias, Timaios was keen to prove the Romans' Trojan ancestry (Polyb. 12.4 b–c) and Hieronymos is known to have written about early Rome (Dion. Hal. AR 1.6.1). It is in the Aineias episode that the principal objection to an early date lies. Could Rome at this time reasonably be said to possess 'sceptre and kingship over land and sea' (line 1229)? Not according to H., for whom "it is merely a matter of deciding between an ultra-prescient earlier, and entirely believable later, Hellenistic awareness" (50). But is it so prescient? Rome's authority over the whole of Italy marked it out as a major power and with Neapolis and Taras it controlled the peninsula's two main naval states. As A. Momigliano long ago pointed out, the phrase should not be taken literally (Terra Marique, JRS 32, 1942, 53–64).

Other mysteries remain in the poem. There is no consensus on the final prophecy. There are many suggestions for the "six generations" and the "unique wrestler" (nicely summarised by A. Hurst in his 2008 Budé commentary, xxiii–xxv). For H. the poem culminates in the victory of T. Quinctius Flaminius over Philip V in the Second Macedonian War. Most scholars take these verses to be referring to the Romans in some way, although the fit is awkward. Lykophron follows Herodotus in the last 160 lines or so of the prophecy in retelling the story of the clash between Europe and Asia, beginning with Io, through the Trojan War and on to the Persian Wars. It is very much a conflict between the two sides of the Hellespont and presented in that way. Consequently resolution by means of an abrupt switch to Italy is jarring. An alternative would be to find some means of maintaining geographical continuity. The Persians in Herodotus are made to identify very closely with their Trojan predecessors, an identification that goes beyond considering themselves simply to be successors but falls short of any explicit claim of kinship (Hdt. 1.4). If we take the six generations instead from the Persian Wars, the reconciliation of Europe and Asia could be the creation of Alexander's empire spanning the two continents, incorporating Persian satraps, and embodied in the wedding at Susa. This, however, would leave the identity of the wrestler frustratingly open, although it may be metaphorical and not refer to any one individual. But whatever interpretation is adopted, no definitive answer is possible.

H. concludes with the provocative claim that “there is a sense in which Lykophron is himself a serious historian” and compares him to the great prose historians, Herodotus, Thucydides, Hieronymos and Polybius (197). H. had already noted in the chapter on prophecy that his attitude to Rome foreshadows that of Polybius and he seems to imagine Lykophron as a practitioner of the kind of autopsy that Polybius advocated. Yet, the idea of Lykophron travelling round the sacred places of Italy, asking questions and gathering information (111) is unconvincing. In his reading of historians, such as Herodotus, Timaios and Hieronymos, Lykophron appears as an intellectual with a library at his disposal, working in the manner of poets such as Callimachus. As C. McNelis and A. Sens have pointed out (*The Alexandra* of Lycophron, Oxford 2016, 38–43), his tendency to give divine epithets in alphabetical order suggests the use of some kind of list, again the approach of a library-based poet rather than one out in the field conducting research.

This conception of Lykophron as a quasi-historian is in keeping with Hornblower’s argument that the *Alexandra* is a political poem, one that engages with the momentous events of the late third and early second century. To make his case, however, he has to look closely for ‘coded allusions’ in the text. Inevitably it is speculative, and even those who accept a later date may baulk at some of his suggestions, but whether or not readers agree with the conclusions they will find much to think about here.