Sitta von Reden

1 The Hellenistic Empires

I Introduction

The Hellenistic Empires that emerged in the aftermath of the Macedonian conquest of the Achaemenid Empire (ca. 550–330 BCE) laid the foundation for the connectivity of Asia, Egypt, and the Mediterranean for many centuries to come. Although often referred to as kingdoms, they are best understood as empires dominating a vast and heterogeneous political and economic space.¹ The ideological goal of their kings was world dominion, yet the degree of their control over regions, resources, and local polities was uneven, and their styles of rule responsive to various micro- and macro-traditions.²

Looking at the Hellenistic kingdoms as parts of a dynamic imperial space alters our perspectives on their territoriality, frontier zones, and temporality. From the time of Alexander's campaigns onward, the Hellenistic Empires were in constant transformation. They gained some coherence through fiscal-administrative practices, military regimes, and political ideologies. But they remained fragmented due to their mutual competition and by the continuity of local power regimes, hierarchies, and economic practices that influenced local land and people. The Hellenistic imperial world was also polycentric, both in terms of the continuity of local power centers and in terms of the distribution of royal capitals that were built in various parts of the Hellenistic Empires.³ Given the polycentricity of the Hellenistic Empires, what constituted imperial cores and peripheries is arguable. The cities of the Aegean and

1 Ma 2013; Thonemann 2013; Fischer-Bovet forthcoming for chapter-length accounts of the Hellenistic Empires. Companion volumes such as Erskine 2003; Bugh 2006; Weber 2007 cover many aspects discussed in this chapter. Particularly influential studies include Koenen 1993; Ma 1999; Manning 2003; Capdetray 2007; Kosmin 2014, 2018. This chapter is indebted to all these works.

2 Macro-traditions refer to long-term imperial memories and models (Persian, Hellenistic, Roman, etc.), and micro-traditions to local memories and continuities. Their complex relationship is at the center of research on the Hellenistic period, see numerous articles by Pierre Briant published since the 1970s, some being translated in Briant 2017a, 429–610; Koenen 1993; Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993; and, more recently, Manning 2010; Moyer 2011; Ma 2013; Strootman 2014a, 2014b; Strootman and Versluys 2017; Fischer-Bovet forthcoming.

3 Kosmin 2014, 93–120. The cores of the Seleukid Empire were Syria and Babylonia; Egypt had its core in the delta and Lower Egypt, but rival courts existed temporarily in Cyprus and Cyrene. The Antigonid West had old Macedonia at its core, but Athens maintained some symbolic centrality in the Greek world.

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Map 1: Cores and peripheries of the Hellenistic Empires during the early third century BCE. © Peter Palm.

Asia Minor, for example, temporarily formed an outer circle of the Ptolemaic Empire, thus being peripheral to its core. Yet culturally and symbolically, they were the very core of the Hellenistic world, as kings defined themselves as Macedonians and Greeks. Many Greek immigrants in the new Seleukid and Ptolemaic Empires came from these regions. The same holds true for Thrace and Southern Syria in that both lay between two Hellenistic spheres of influence. They were geographically at the border of two Hellenistic Empires, but economically and culturally they were by no means marginal.

The societies of the Hellenistic Empires had several cultural layers. Neither the conquerors nor the conquered populations were culturally or ethnically pure entities moving in and out of foreign domination. What we call Greek, Persian, Egyptian, or Iranian are convenient but misleading shortcuts for a transcultural mix of traditions, languages, material culture, social practices, and political systems that converged in special circumstances. Representations in Greek iconography or language were not necessarily produced by Greeks. Public inscriptions in one particular or several languages, and artifacts in either one or a mixture of styles, were statements about the intended addressees, affiliations, and self-positioning within a repertoire of imperial possibilities. Vassal or client kings who adopted Greek coinages (Hellenistic or Athenian, even), or used Greek as the official language, did not necessarily speak Greek among themselves, or regarded themselves as Greeks, but placed themselves deliberately or by necessity within a particular imperial orbit. I present two examples.

In the centuries preceding the Macedonian expansion into Asia and Egypt, the dynastic predecessors of Philip and Alexander had deliberately positioned themselves as Greeks. They constructed mythical descent from Herakles, adopted Greek as the language of official communication, and issued coinages based on the Athenian weight standard. When Alexander's successors established themselves as kings over Asia and Egypt, they continued to emphasize their belonging to what we now call classical Greek culture. They collected Greek literature, adopted Athenian law and legal practice, listened to Greek philosophers, and made Greek education a focus of court culture and cultural patronage. Yet the Macedonians had never lived in city-states (*poleis*), nor had they shared typically Greek civic values so strongly associated with Greek *poleis*, such as equality and freedom. Nevertheless, *poleis* with civic institutions became major instruments of administrative and ideological control of the Hellenistic Empires, especially in Asia, but also in Egypt and Macedonia itself.⁴

Another example is Egypt. In the eyes of both ancient and modern observers, Egypt seemed and seems rather resilient to cultural change. Temple iconographies and inscriptions were highly conventional and formulaic well into the Ptolemaic period. They emphasized conquest as the condition of peace, the return of the di-

⁴ Ma 2013; Clancier and Gorre forthcoming.

vine images (statues) as a sign of benevolent rule, and pharaonic support of temple building activity as the condition for general prosperity. The Ptolemies, too, were represented in these terms, having expelled the Persian foe, returned the statues to the Egyptian temples, and supported the indigenous cults and temples.⁵ Yet not only the Ptolemies, but also the Persians, had respected the Egyptian gods, and just like the Ptolemies, they had transformed the country administratively and culturally in cooperation with local priesthods.⁶ When the Macedonians conquered Egypt, they encountered several political, administrative, and cultural traditions to which they added further. And when the Romans conquered Egypt 300 years later, once again, being Egyptian or being Greek were fairly artificial administrative labels sliding over much more complex social realities.⁷

Because of the diverse motivations and social practices that caused Hellenism to spread, it is also problematic to use the term Hellenization as an active pursuit of the Graeco-Macedonian ruling elites. The fact that the Greek Alexander historians lamented Alexander's adoption of Persian rituals and intermarriage with Bactrian and Persian aristocracies shows that Greeks had cultivated other expectations of the conquest than what had happened in its aftermath, namely interaction and entanglement, rather than segregation and revenge.⁸ Despite coercion and control, the Hellenistic ruling apparatus incorporated and responded to long-lasting local cultural practices that continued to resonate in the emerging Hellenistic tradition.⁹

II The Macedonian Takeover

The story of Alexander III's campaign is too well known to be in need of much elaboration here. A war against Persia had been planned under Alexander's father Philip II, and the Corinthian League formed by the Greek cities in mainland Greece and the Aegean had agreed to it. Macedonian imperial ambitions had developed rapidly from the mid-fourth century onward. Philip's armies had created military corridors in Thrace, Thessaly, and Illyria. He had married into several royal families to secure these and other territories. And there had been attempts to negotiate cooperation and confederations especially with the important cities of Corinth, Thebes, and Athens. The Corinthian League gave their support to the war, propagated as a pan-Greek revenge against the Persian invasion during the Persian Wars of the early

⁵ Briant (2003) 2017c.

⁶ Lloyd 2000, 383–384.

⁷ Bowman 1996, 121–186.

⁸ Badian 1965.

⁹ Moyer 2011; Strootman 2014a, 2014b; Koenen 1993 for transcultural ideas of Ptolemaic kingship; numerous agrarian and administrative practices went back to Persian, Pharaonic, or Greek precedence; Briant (1994) 2017b; Manning 2003; Thonemann 2013.

fifth century BCE. Yet Philip was assassinated before the campaign started, probably in reaction to his seventh marriage that could have impaired Alexander's dynastic succession.

Alexander ascended to the throne in 336 BCE. In 334, his army crossed the Hellespont that separated Macedonian Thrace from Persian Lydia. Within two years, the Greek cities in Asia Minor were 'liberated' from the Persians, the Phoenician cities in Syria captured, and Egypt and Libya transformed into a Graeco-Macedonian *satrapy* (Persian administrative unit). Alexander's troops pushed into Babylonia, Persis, and Media where the former Persian residences were located. They plundered the rich treasuries of Babylon, Susa, and Persepolis, installed Greek *satraps*, burned down the citadel of Persepolis, and pursued the Persian king Darius III who had fled to the Median capital of Ekbatana.

The rule of the last Persian king, Darius III, had been anything but stable, much to the advantage of Alexander, who cooperated with disaffected local elites and their armies. One of the pretenders was Bessos, a relative of Darius and royal *satrap* of Bactria. Though Bessos claimed the empire for himself, his ambitions served Alexander's interests. It was Bessos who finally killed Darius when he took refuge from Alexander in Ekbatana. Yet, rather than negotiating with the usurper, Alexander aligned himself with his opponents by offering royal burial to Darius. Bessos fled to Bactria, where he proclaimed himself King of Kings, Artaxerxes V. Losing the support of his own generals, Bessos was delivered to Alexander and executed in Ekbatana in 329 BCE. The conquest of Bactria and Sogdiana still proved difficult and violent, despite some cooperation of local military elites. It seems that it was only through marriage into a leading Bactrian family that Alexander eventually gained control over the powerful central Asian kingdoms.¹⁰

Marrying a Bactrian princess was not the only gesture by which he achieved convergence to Persian political practice. Already in Egypt, Alexander had had proclaimed himself son of Ammon Zeus by the oracle of Siwa. This combined Macedonian ideas of divine kingship with Persian concepts of the King of Kings being the substitute of god, as well as integrating the Egyptian notion of the pharaoh endowed with divine *Ka*. It had great appeal to local populations, kings, and priests, whose claims over land and income were thereby confirmed. However, many Greeks resented the idea of a divine kingship. This was partly because it implied a degree of hierarchy irreconcilable with civic equality, but more importantly it involved a degree of military expansionism not all Alexander's generals were willing to support. Alexander's rejection of Darius's peace offer in 330 BCE had already provoked criticism among a military exhausted by warfare. Internal discontent increased as Alexander made his armies march farther east and began to adopt elements of Persian dress and court ritual. The link between expansionism and resentment is amply

¹⁰ Although Arrian calls her a captive of war (Arrian *Anabasis* [Arr. *Anab.*] 4. 19–20), later her father Oxyartes was installed *satrap* of Paropamisos (6. 15).

proved by the increase of conspiracies against Alexander during the far-eastern campaigns. In their course, a whole level of generals was exchanged for personnel that were more loyal. These new generals were the contenders for Alexander's succession and transported the idea of a universal empire to the next military generation.

In 327 BCE, the armies turned south and, crossing the Hindu Kush, marched down to the western Indus valley. The region seems to have had an ambiguous status under the Persians as either *satrapy* or vassal kingdom.¹¹ A Macedonian *satrap* was installed here, while the area south of the Hydaspes, under control of an Indian king called Poros in Greek sources, became a vassal kingdom after several indecisive battles in 326 BCE. Alexander and his armies were able to develop further Macedonian corridors in northern India along the Indus valley down to the city of Patala (see ch. 3, map 1, this volume), occupying two more short-lived *satrapies* bordering the Thar Desert. In 325 BCE, Alexander was ruler of a space that, in terms of satrapal administration, was more or less coextensive with the Achaemenid Empire. It excluded, however, northern parts beyond the Lesser Caucasus, and the steppe regions along the western and eastern coasts of the Caspian Sea. No Hellenistic king ever attempted to expand beyond these ecological boundaries.¹²

III Ecologies and Climates

When Alexander died in 323 BCE, the Macedonian Empire stretched across a vast and heterogeneous ecological space (see map 1). Fertile alluvial plains were interlaced with mountain ranges and desert zones, neither easily subjected to social and political control, nor very suitable for economic exploitation. In the west, the empire included the densely populated Mediterranean micro-ecologies of the Aegean and Asia Minor characterized by Greek *poleis*, for which dry farming, private property rights, a specific relationship between town and countryside, and political regionalism were typical. In the south, it stretched into the populous country of Egypt, which for millennia had been dominated by the Nile ecology that produced immensely rich agricultural yields under the condition of artificial irrigation. Traditionally, this land was controlled through institutional landownership by the temples and the pharaoh. In the north, the empire included the fertile Pontic region (never conquered by Macedonian armies), partly settled by Greek-speaking populations since the seventh century BCE. Its northernmost frontier was adjacent to and in some connection with populations of the steppe belt, a socio-ecological zone that

¹¹ Briant 2002, 754–757.

¹² There were expeditions along the Iaxartes and into the steppe of Inner Asia in the early years of Seleukos I, but these seem to have been explorations rather than attempts at conquest, Kosmin 2014, 72–73.

was traditionally alien to the Greek way of life. In the east, it approached the natural border of the Pamir and Himalaya, while farther south it reached southwest down into the Indus Valley.

The ecological micro-systems of the Asian landmass are too numerous to be surveyed here. Yet with six of the seven administrative complexes (Great Satrapies) of the Achaemenid Empire located in Asia, these offer a useful guide to understanding the Asian landmass as an imperial as well as economic landscape.¹³ Though highly diverse and disconnected in themselves, they nevertheless seem to have formed networks of populations that were grouped together into administrative entities, arguably long before even the Persian expansion.¹⁴ These were, firstly, Persis and eastern Iran, the heartland of the Achaemenid dynasty. Secondly, Media spanned across large parts of the Zagros Mountains, forming the western border of Sogdiana and Bactria. This was a land of mountains and valleys along the axis of the mountain range, with one major transverse river valley forming a major line of communication between Babylon and Ekbatana. Thirdly, Lydia stretched across Anatolia with its Mediterranean and Black Sea temperate climate, on the one hand, and pocketed micro-ecologies ranging from fertile river valleys to high mountain ranges in eastern Anatolia, on the other. Fourthly, Mesopotamia and Babylonia were situated along the rivers Euphrates and Tigris, which watered wide and very fertile alluvial plains providing great opportunities for cereal agriculture under artificial irrigation. Their economic potential, both in terms of agrarian fertility and strategic position as a contact zone between the Persian Gulf and Syria, was fully exploited by the early Seleukids.¹⁵ It made Syria and Babylonia the core region of their empire, both politically and economically (see map 2 and 3). There was, fifthly, Arachosia, with the core region in southern Afghanistan, including the Gedrosian Desert in the south, Drangiana in the northwest, and the lower Indus valley in the east. Much of this region was covered by arid desert zones, but Arachosia itself was agriculturally fertile, and though Drangiana was mostly a poor desert zone, it had some fertile plains along the river Etymandros. Finally, Greater Bactria comprised the kingdoms of Bactria (roughly the area of central and northern Afghanistan), Sogdiana in the north, and Aria in the southwest.¹⁶ It is a region of semiarid mountain zones, interlaced with fertile river valleys that are potentially very productive if irrigated successfully. The great potential and power of Bactria must be seen in its location adjacent to the steppe and its strategic position as a communication line of roads and infrastructures linking Mesopotamia, Iran, and northern India.¹⁷ Administratively,

¹³ Also Morris, ch. 2, this volume.

¹⁴ Jacobs 1994; Jacobs 2011; and Morris, ch. 2, this volume. See Aperghis 2004, 35–51 for a bold survey of local geographies and estimated population densities.

¹⁵ Fabian, ch. 6, this volume for the importance of this route for the Arsakids ruling this space thereafter.

¹⁶ Morris, ch. 2, this volume.

¹⁷ Mairs 2014 with Strabo *Geography* (Strab.) 11. 11. 1 on the fertility of Bactria; for the connections of the Steppe with Gandhara, Morris, ch. 2, this volume.

the Far Eastern *satrapies* reached across the Hindu Kush down to the upper Indus valley, once again connecting mountain ecologies with fertile agricultural areas.¹⁸ As Morris argues below, the Hindu Kush posed a far less severe socio-ecological dividing line than the Alexander historiography wants us to believe in its attempt to stylize Alexander's Hindu Kush crossing as a truly heroic achievement. Nevertheless, the *satrapies* of the northwestern Indus valley were soon ceded to the king of the new Mauryan Empire that formed shortly after the Macedonian conquest. Though these *satrapies* were lost, relationships between the Mauryan and Seleukid kings remained friendly, and the boundary uncontested.

IV Empires in the Making

The formation of the Hellenistic Empires after Alexander's conquests and death continued to be an immensely violent process. The ambition of becoming the ruler of the entire empire that Alexander had left gave rise to six Wars of the Successors (321–272 BCE) and remained the goal of all contenders who eventually occupied parts of it.¹⁹ The story of these wars is a series of indecisive victories and defeats, changing military alliances, dynastic marriages, assassinations, and intrigues. Yet this story helps to understand Hellenistic history as prefigured by internal competition and ever-in-flux zones of conflict and internal frontiers. Because of the continuous competition and warfare between the successor kings and allies among the constituent polities, Hellenistic imperialism was essentially inward looking.²⁰

After Alexander's premature death, the succession was unresolved. His mentally handicapped half-brother Philip III Arrhidaios and his yet unborn half-Bactrian son, Alexander (IV), were the two dynastic heirs, but unfit for government when the succession was to be settled. However, as succession in the Macedonian monarchy was largely dynastic, the two heirs were appropriated for rival claims to legitimate succession. Their assassination in 317 and 309 respectively, despite making little difference to actual politics, changed the rules of the game and remade legitimacy to mean a combination of military success, support of armies, and local acceptance.

¹⁸ Kulke and Rothermund 2018, 13.

¹⁹ Meadows 2012; Hauben and Meeus 2014; Strootman 2014b; Fischer-Bovet 2019 with special emphasis on the Ptolemaic ambitions in southern Anatolia. For an emphasis on the alternative territorial designs of the Seleukids, Tuplin 2009; Kosmin 2014.

²⁰ Bugh 2006. The main sources for the history of the Wars of the Successors are Diodoros ([Diod.] 17 and 18); several *Lives* of Plutarch (Plut.), and the Alexander historiographies of Arrian, Curtius Rufus, and pseudo-Kallisthenes.

There were several contenders for succession. Among the older generation of Alexander's father, the most important ones were Antigonos Monophthalmos ("the one-eyed"), Perdikkas, Antipatros (followed by his son Kassandros), and Polyperchon. All belonged to the Macedonian aristocracy, had institutional ties of friendship with Philip II and Alexander, and occupied top ranks in Macedonia or the imperial army. A second group of aspirants were the generals of Alexander's generation. These were, to name but the most prominent, Lysimachos, who had become *satrap* of Thrace after Alexander's death; Eumenes, in charge of the northeastern Anatolian *satrapies*; Ptolemy, *satrap* of Egypt; and Seleukos, military governor (*chiliarch*) of the troops in Macedonia.

Perdikkas seems to have been the strongest contender at first, as he was elected commander of the imperial army in the first meeting of the generals after Alexander's death. He suggested they hold off on further action until Alexander's child was born. This plan would have put him in the position of trustee of the dynastic successor as soon as the baby was born. Yet opposition formed around Antipatros, who claimed dynastic succession for Arrhidaios, and the infantry armies. Antipatros was also an ancestral enemy of Olympias, Alexander's mother, who had forged a marriage between Alexander's sister Kleopatra and Perdikkas, with dynastic intentions in mind. Possession of Alexander's body was another strong symbol for legitimate succession, and armed conflict became inevitable when Ptolemy captured it for burial in Alexandria. Rebuffed by this arrogant act, Perdikkas marched against Ptolemy, while Antipatros pursued Perdikkas into Asia Minor. Yet before war broke out, Perdikkas was killed by members of his own army, leaving Ptolemy in possession of Alexander's corpse, and Antipatros the new leader of the imperial army. However, his ambitions were cut short by his own unforeseen, though natural death just two years later.

Antipatros's position now passed on to his sons, Kassandros and Polyperchon. Polyperchon revived the Corinthian League to gain the support from the Greek cities. But Kassandros joined forces with Antigonos, military governor of Asia, against Polyperchon and the Macedonian Perdikkas-Olympias alliance. Olympias, still striving for the succession of Alexander IV, had Arrhidaios and his wife murdered in 317 BCE. But she was executed by Kassandros in retaliation. The death of Olympias, Philip III, and his wife allowed Kassandros to strengthen his position in Macedonia, which was consolidated by his marriage to Thessalonike, a daughter of Philip II and heiress of the kingdom.²¹ Meanwhile, Antigonos fought several wars to solidify his position in Asia. In 316, he controlled much of Asia, and according to one ancient source, was proclaimed King of Asia in Persepolis.²² Yet his position created a new opposition joining Lysimachos of Thrace, Ptolemy of Egypt, Kassandros of Macedo-

²¹ In principle, any male offspring of a Macedonian king was entitled to the inheritance of the kingdom; see Ogden 1999; Strootman 2014b.

²² Diod. 19. 14. 1.

nia, and Seleukos who had captured the city of Babylon and installed himself as governor of Babylonia with the help of Ptolemy's troops. Another war raged inconclusively until 311, when finally a settlement was reached, confirming each of the contenders in their present position. Seleukos ordered the building of the new capital of Seleukeia-Tigris close to Babylon (see map 2) and systematically began to reconquer the Median and Bactrian Satrapies that had defected from Macedonian control. However, Antigonos's ally and son, Demetrios, defeated Ptolemy's brother in Cyprus in a battle said to have destroyed one-third of the large Ptolemaic army.²³ Having reached the height of his power, Kassandros had Alexander IV killed in 309, extinguishing the male line of the Argead (Alexander's) family.

Antigonos and Demetrios forcefully expanded their position in the following years. Demetrios liberated Athens from Kassandros, a success for which he and his father were proclaimed by the Athenians as Savior Gods (*theoi soterai*). Demetrios's ambitions at that time may well have been captured by a painting with which the Athenians are said to have honored their new ruler showing him striding over the *oikoumene* (the entire inhabited world).²⁴ When Antigonos once again defeated Ptolemy off Cyprus, it forced Ptolemy to abandon Cyprus and Syria-Phoenicia, and Antigonos's armies proclaimed him and Demetrios kings (306 BCE). Lysimachos, Seleukos, Ptolemy, and Kassandros, now in Macedonia, quickly followed suit. Yet the idea of universal empire remained – Antigonos invaded Egypt, and Demetrios besieged Rhodes, a close ally of Ptolemy. Both campaigns failed.

Father and son were more successful in Greece where they liberated Athens from renewed occupation by Kassandros. Yet, instead of withstanding his opponents, Kassandros took sides with Antigonos to fight against Seleukos and Lysimachos at Ipsos in 301 BCE. Antigonos was killed in battle. When Kassandros died shortly thereafter from an infectious disease, followed by one of his sons, Demetrios invaded Macedonia. He killed the other two sons of Kassandros and was proclaimed king. Demetrios's ambitions, however, made him enemy not only of Lysimachos, but also Pyrrhos of Epiros, who was a successful general linked with the Argead family through his mother. In 287 BCE, the Macedonian elite withdrew their support from Demetrios, who had created offense by his un-militaristic behavior and (possibly Persian) style of dress.²⁵ Pyrrhus and Lysimachos divided Macedonia between themselves, though Pyrrhus was driven out, leaving Lysimachos in charge of all Macedonia. Antigonos Gonatas, son of Demetrios, was able to keep control over Greece, while Demetrios himself fled with his navy to Asia Minor. He was captured by Seleukos and kept in exile for the rest of his life.

Now, Lysimachos and Seleukos fought for universal empire. They met in battle at the plain of Kurupedion in Lydia (281 BCE) where Lysimachos lost his life. Seleu-

²³ Fischer-Bovet 2014, 53.

²⁴ Athenaios *Deipnosophistae* (Ath.) 12. 536a with Strootman 2014b, 216.

²⁵ Plut. *Life of Demetrios* (Demetr.) 41.

kos crossed the Hellespont into Europe as victor, but was murdered by Ptolemy Karaunos, a dispossessed son of Ptolemy of Egypt. Ptolemy Karaunos was proclaimed king of Macedonia, which put him in a good position to retaliate against his father in Egypt. Before he had the opportunity, he was killed during an invasion of the Celts in 279 BCE, leaving the Macedonian kingdom without a head. This was a catastrophic situation in a polity with few institutionalized state structures. The best option for the Macedonian military was to proclaim Antigonos Gonatas king of Macedonia, a decision that had some dynastic justification. Moreover, Antigonos Gonatas had successfully defeated the Celts threatening Thrace and stood a good chance of restoring Macedonian hegemony over Thessaly and the southern Peloponnese, traditionally areas of strong Macedonian influence.²⁶

The territorial situation of the early 270s BCE shaped the imperial history of the next two centuries: the Antigonids presided over Greater Macedonia, including Thrace, Thessaly and, at times, the Greek city leagues, the Seleukids were kings of Asia, and the Ptolemies held the Egyptian empire, including Cyprus, Kyrenaika, and Syria and Phoenicia. Yet major zones of conflict and unresolved imperial domination remained. The Greek cities in the mainland, the Aegean, and Asia Minor continued to regard themselves as allies rather than subjects of the Macedonians and forged changing alliances in order to regain independence. Syria and Phoenicia (including major Levantine harbour towns up to the city of Tyros, see map 2) remained contentious possessions because of their position between the Seleukid and Ptolemaic spheres of influence, as was Thrace between the Seleukid and Antigonid spheres of influence. Smaller kingdoms on what soon became peripheries of the Seleukid Empire developed either full or partial independence: Bithynia and Pontos on the southern Black Sea coast, Kappadokia and Armenia in western Anatolia and northern Iran; the kingdom of Pergamon in Asia Minor; Parthia, Media, and the Persian heartlands in the Middle East; Bactria in Central Asia, as well as the south Asian *satrapies* of Gandhara, Paropamisadaï, and east Gedrosia (see ch. 2, map 1, this volume). The latter were ceded to the newly emerging Mauryan king early in the reign of Seleukos I.²⁷ According to Graeco-Roman historiography, a treaty was negotiated in which the relationships were to remain friendly, 500 war elephants given in exchange for the land, and a daughter of Seleukos's family given in marriage to the allied king.²⁸

The fierce military competition in the 50 years after Alexander's death shows several challenges of the imperial succession. First, the rapid conquest of vast territories left the Macedonian Empire without a center. On the surface, this was due to the lack of a dynastic heir fit for rule. Yet more fundamentally, there was an unresolved conflict between several potential imperial cores – Macedonia, Anatolia, Syria, Babylonia, and Egypt. All were too rich in resources and too powerful locally

²⁶ Strootman 2014b, 144.

²⁷ Morris, ch. 2, this volume.

²⁸ Plut. *Alex.* 62. 4; Strab. 15. 2. 9. Kosmin 2014, 32–37, 227–228 for discussion.

Map 2: Main cities of the core regions of the Hellenistic Empires. © Peter Palm.

to be subordinated to an uncontested core. At the same time, each was too weak to become such a center itself. One monolithic Hellenistic Empire could not have been ruled from Pella, Alexandria, or Babylon/Seleukeia-Tigris alone. Nevertheless, none of the successors was content with a segment of Alexander's empire. Universal rule was built into the ideology of kingship, despite the insurmountable problems that

putting this ideal into political practice caused. So despite the power of the military elite that had gained the victories for Alexander, dynastic aspirations continued to be a powerful force in the conflicts over succession. Marriage alliances, kinship, and family intrigue played vital, and eventually lethal, parts in these conflicts, not only in the first 15 years after Alexander's death but throughout the Hellenistic period. As a consequence, all Hellenistic dynasties and many smaller courts of peripheral kingdoms were related by marriage ties. Multiple marriages created ambiguous lines of succession and conflict between royal offspring over claims to kingship. This imposed a dynastic burden on all Hellenistic monarchies, which made them vulnerable to internecine violence and fragmentation.²⁹

V Monarchy and Administration

Scholars of the Hellenistic period are amazed by the multiplicity of strategies employed by the Hellenistic kings in order to maintain and expand their empires. Military conquest and coercion were one strategy, but others included negotiation with local elites by means of religious politics, benefactions, land development, foundation of settlements and cities, as well as marriage alliances. Once again, the search for Greek, Macedonian, or Persian precedents is not very helpful. Imperial administration was a multidimensional mix of imperial macro- and local micro-traditions, Greek political language, and cosmopolitan discourse. Most regions of the Hellenistic Empires maintained their local socio-political character, but tinged with the transcultural influence that came with foreign domination, mobility, and warfare. The great royal cities along the Mediterranean coast – such as Alexandria in Egypt and the Seleukid four-city network of Antiocheia-Orontes, Seleukeia-Pieria, Laodikeia, and Apameia (see map 2) – may have appeared Greek by their architectural styles, concentration of Greek-speaking populations, Greek institutions and buildings such as *gymnasia*, theaters, and libraries.³⁰ Yet archaeology brings to light increasing amounts of material remains that reveal local or transcultural styles. Some buildings, such as the Serapeion in Alexandria, were deliberate hybrids.³¹

Most kings seem to have pursued a seemingly paradoxical strategy of positioning themselves as culturally Greek by means of language, coinage, social entourage, and types of warfare; but at the same time being adaptive to some local practices of warfare (especially elephant warfare) and to forms of politics that must be regard-

²⁹ Ogden 1999, 128–129.

³⁰ For Hellenistic foundations, Cohen 2006, 2013.

³¹ The mixed urban styles of Hellenistic cities and capitals are well demonstrated by the archaeology and underwater discoveries in Alexandria (Goddio 1998) and Ai Khanum in Bactria (Bernard 2012).

ed as typically local rather than typically Greek or Macedonian.³² For example, both the Seleukids and the Ptolemies held congregations with major local priesthoods who controlled populations and agrarian revenue. They published multilingual official communications, granted financial concessions to local cities and temples, and developed physical infrastructures from which not only the administration, but also local economies benefited.³³ And they practiced some degree of religious syncretism in order to strengthen the religious legitimacy of their rule.³⁴ In the Aegean, they communicated with Greek cities and League representatives, granted land to cities, and made substantial financial benefactions in support of local cults and festivals.³⁵ Concentrating on one role of the Hellenistic kings always risks neglecting the other, while separating the two ignores the duplicity of power on which Hellenistic Empires rested. The kings needed to protect and expand their 'spear-won country' (*do-riktetos ge*)³⁶ by means of armies dominated by Greek-speaking mercenaries and Greek military techniques. But in order to finance the wars and manpower, they needed to extract tribute from mostly non-Greek agrarian populations. The latter was possible only through the cooperation of local elites who provided the logistics and fiscal infrastructures.³⁷

Despite these multiple responses to local practices and traditions, the Hellenistic Empires created a common symbolic system and new Hellenistic macro-tradition that lasted well into the Roman Empire and beyond. Symbolic and institutional coherence emerged partly because of adaptations to the existing Persian macro-tradition, but also because Hellenism became a cultural parameter that was open to all who were willing to cooperate. Greeks soon formed what has been termed an ethno-class, a status group not necessarily ethnically Greek, but sharing material culture, rituals, values, interests, and loyalty to the regime through education and integration.³⁸ Greek was the administrative language, Greek coinage was a major means of payment, and members of the Greek ethno-class dominated the fiscal-military regime. These common parameters permit us to recognize the Hellenistic Empires as a connected space despite considerable local diversity. In the next sections, I shall discuss several institutions and practices that created such coherence: the monar-

³² Ma 2013.

³³ A famous example is the Pithom canal first constructed by Darius and later reopened by Ptolemy II. The priesthood of Tjeku (Pithom) praised the king for the benefaction, which increased their local revenues; Mueller 2006, Appendix II for a translation of the Pithom *stele*.

³⁴ Derow and Bagnall 2004, no. 164 (Kanopos Decree); Derow and Bagnall 2004, no. 165 (Rosetta Stone); for comparable evidence from the Borsippa Cylinder recording benefactions of Antiochos I, Kuhrt and Sherwin-White 1991; Pfeiffer and Klinkott forthcoming; Ma 2013.

³⁵ Ma 1999, esp. 179–214; Thonemann 2013; for a comprehensive collection of texts on royal benefactions, Bringmann and Steuben 1995.

³⁶ Diod. 18. 39. 5.

³⁷ Monson 2015, 170–171. Valuable case studies for Egypt can be found in Lewis (1986) 2001.

³⁸ Briant 1988; Ma 2013.

chical military-administrative apparatus, settlement politics, administrative language, and coinage. This coherence fostered mobility, exchange, and interaction at a global scale. Through a shared official language, shared coinages, and shared urban cultures, merchants, mercenaries, settlers, and itinerants moved around the Hellenistic imperial space with a certain ease.³⁹

V.1 Monarchy

Hellenistic monarchy developed from preexisting monarchical traditions in Macedonia, Persia, and Egypt, and the socio-political dynamics created by two generations of military conquest. Victory was the key to political legitimacy and military rank, and so to social status. At the top of this military social hierarchy stood the king, followed by his generals and the ranks of the armies. Military rank became the structuring principle of the social order of the Hellenistic kingdoms, and the soldiery a group with a particular social identity and coherence.⁴⁰

Yet Hellenistic monarchy was also a political order that had to respond to particular internal tasks, such as creating peace, generating income, and distributing this income. At the top of this hierarchy, again, stood the king, but this time as benefactor, friend, savior, and protector. In this role, he communicated via memoranda (*hypomnemata*) and prescripts (*prostagmata*) in the first person with local constituencies, and the language of friendship formed the governing principle.⁴¹ Within this personalized system, the entourage played an important role. Its members were the representatives of the monarchy, agents of the king's prestige, and managers of the royal relationships with cities, local elites, and populations. Friends (*philoî*) filled the position of local governors (*strategoi* or *hoi epi tôn pragmatōn*) and garrison leaders (*phrouarchoi*, or equivalent titles). The entourage, forming some kind of court, was ranked according to degrees of intimacy with the king, ranging from 'kinsmen,' 'bodyguard,' and 'most honored friend,' to 'first friend,' and lesser titles.⁴² In the course of the Hellenistic period, these personal designations routinely came to be attached to high-ranking administrative officers as court titles, showing a degree of institutionalization and formalization that came along with the gradual development of state structures in the Hellenistic Empires.⁴³ From the second century onward, they also became open to people with no apparent Greek

³⁹ Walbank 1981, 66–67.

⁴⁰ Fischer-Bovet 2014.

⁴¹ Gehrke 2008, 46; Ma 2013, 336.

⁴² Mooren 1977; Moyer 2011; similar court titles are found in the Seleukid and Ptolemaic courts, but not so in Antigonid Macedonia, John Ma 2011, 526.

⁴³ Mooren 1977 dates the first evidence for institutionalized honorific court titles to Ptolemy V, while Lanciers 2018 has adduced convincing evidence for their emergence in the 210s under Ptolemy IV.

or Macedonian roots – a process that can best be observed in Egypt.⁴⁴ Throughout the Hellenistic period, the friends formed a hierarchical and exclusive group of cultural Hellenes that reproduced their status through Greek education, Greek forms of entertainment, music, games, and athletic contests, as well as the orchestration of the ruler cults. The culture and learning of the courtiers, their ceremonies, and rituals spread to local *metropoleis* and towns where Greek and local elites emulated it as a means of integrating themselves into the wider group of the dominating ethno-class.

The second characteristic of Hellenistic monarchy was the royal interaction with local constituencies: cities, temples, and populations. This interaction was partly coercive and tributary in nature, as the next section will show. But in order to create stable structures of authority and legitimacy, it also took more benevolent forms. Gift-giving and offers of protection were the most important means by which the kings created relationships with, and loyalty among, different social bodies. Gifts were sent to sanctuaries at Delphi, Olympia, or Delos in order to enhance royal prestige within the symbolic centers of the Hellenistic Empires. Gifts in the form of subsidies or tax relief were given to cities who reciprocated with crowns, statues, and cultic honors. Local temples received financial contributions (*suntaxeis*), tax relief, and support for construction work, as well as grants of income from land and customs dues, in return for ritual services that stabilized the kingdom. Negotiations and concessions are best known from the multilingual *stelai* (the most famous being the Rosetta Stone) that the Egyptian priests erected at the end of ritual gatherings (*sunodoi*) between kings and priests. Other recipients of gifts were high officials entering the administrative apparatus, and provincial military officers who were rewarded with land and gift estates (*doreiai*). In return, the kings gained loyal followers, economic prosperity, and increased tax income.⁴⁵

Ruler cult was a third characteristic of Hellenistic monarchy and closely connected to the kings' role as benefactors. Religious cults had been devoted to kings in Greece, Persia, and Egypt before, yet the immediate model was Alexander.⁴⁶ Alexander had become a religious figure in Egypt immediately after his visit to the oracle of Siwa (which had confirmed him as a son of Zeus), while numerous Greek and non-Greek cities offered him cults spontaneously on the occasion of a victory, sometimes on the demand of generals and the king's friends. The successor kings immediately latched onto this ritual. A cult for Demetrios and Antigonos was set up in Athens when they liberated the city from Kassandros. Ptolemy II introduced a cult for his deceased father and his father's wife Berenike, who were worshipped as Savior Gods (*Soteres*) from about 278 BCE. Soon afterward, he set up a cult for his

⁴⁴ Fischer-Bovet 2014.

⁴⁵ There are some indications that large gift estates formed distinct tax districts for whose income the estate owner was responsible.

⁴⁶ Jones 2010; Mitchell 2013.

own deceased sister-wife, Arsinoe. Not only was this cult henceforth celebrated in all Egyptian temples with revenues of one of the largest taxes in Egypt (the so-called *apomoira*); but Arsinoe being associated with the mother goddess of Aphrodite equalling the Egyptian goddess Isis, became the most popular cult-figure in the entire Ptolemaic world.⁴⁷ In dating formulas, Ptolemy put his own cultic name *Philadelphos* ('sister-loving [god]') alongside the title of the Alexander priest who was eponymous for each year, and thus both circulated together as part of all official documents throughout the country.⁴⁸ In Seleukid Asia, essentially the same thing happened. Kings received cults by cities spontaneously, while they were divinized officially after their death. From the late third century onward, living kings started to have themselves divinized, as we learn from dating formulas and official letters requesting that priests for the living king be elected.⁴⁹ In the Antigonid kingdom controlling much of the Greek world in the mainland and Aegean, no official ruler cult was established, but spontaneous cults sprang up in Greek cities in honor of individual kings.

Ruler cults and the divine status of the kings and queens consolidated the cosmological role of the Hellenistic monarchies. It elevated the kings and queens to god-like figures who were in control of natural fecundity, procreation, prosperity, and the Nile inundations. The king (pharaoh) as a divine figure also legitimized local Egyptian priesthoods' claims to income from land and people.⁵⁰ In combination with the king's and queen's role as benefactors, the ruler cult formed a major means of communication between local cities and royal centers. The kings and queens were far away, but their sacred districts, priesthoods, and statues were present, as were the libations, sacrifices, and festivals taking place in their names.⁵¹ The celebrations of festivals and cults were powerful means of building identity and community in the Hellenistic world. Local social life was attached to their figures and rendered the experience of empire a matter of joyful festivity and song.

The power of cults also helped to build dynastic continuity, a major problem in any monarchy, but in particular in the Hellenistic Empires where multiple marriages created ambiguous lines of succession. The problem of dynastic succession was greatest in the Asian and Egyptian empires, while in Antigonid Macedonia, the violent fight over the succession of Alexander seems to have put an end to the conflicts over succession once and for all. In the Asian and Egyptian empires, however, the Seleukids and Ptolemies established new royal dynasties with Alexander as their founder. This dynastic origin was widely disseminated through coinage minted in Alexander's name and carrying his image. Eponymous priesthoods were established

⁴⁷ Koenen 1993.

⁴⁸ Chaniotis 2003.

⁴⁹ Chaniotis 2003, 473; Lanciers 1993.

⁵⁰ As for example expressed in the Pithom *stele*, Mueller 2006, Appendix.

⁵¹ Chaniotis 2007, 139–140.

in his name, while numerous stories developed about his divine origin and heroic status acquired by conquest. Local Egyptian myth-making gave him a double descent as the son of Philip II of Macedonia and of Nektanebo, the last native pharaoh of Egypt.⁵² The dynastic cult was most strongly developed in Egypt. Dynastic festivals were celebrated regularly, and dynastic succession expressed explicitly on early Ptolemaic coinage.⁵³ For fear of dynastic trouble, Ptolemy II even married his own sister Arsinoe shortly before her death. Brother-sister marriage was practiced henceforth roughly every other generation in the Ptolemaic dynasty, although this did not solve dynastic frictions. Multiple marriages aiming to confirm territorial possessions and diplomatic friendship fostered internecine warfare and alienated the royal houses internally. Both ancient and modern commentators regard the dynastic problems of the Hellenistic royal houses as one of the main reasons for the Hellenistic monarchies' incapacity to respond successfully to military and political challenges in the long-term.

V.2 Administration

The administration of the empire was linked to the person of the king but gradually developed into an institutional apparatus governing in his name. The intimate relationship between the king and his administration had conceptual, ideological, and economic dimensions. Conceptually, the administration was just another aspect of the king's *pragmata* (affairs). Ideologically, the empire was the king's personal household, just as regional administrations were regarded as parts of this household.⁵⁴ In principle, all land was royal land. It could be ceded or given to others, but some of it was cultivated by the king's own royal tenants. Like a good landlord, the king was personally interested in his land and agrarian development. Economically, benefactions to local elites and temples, land donations, and land development created incentive structures for the mobilization of local resources and people.

This form of rule was not just a Macedonian invention. At the time of conquest, the Macedonian *satraps* took over the administrative systems of the Achaemenid Empire and only gradually changed these structures as a matter of practice. The Achaemenids, on their part, also had not interfered radically with preexisting administrative practices, authority structures, and agrarian systems.⁵⁵ Yet they eventually established a centralized system of foreign authority to which the local constituencies responded. They had created roads and land registers, standard weights,

⁵² Alexander Romance I, 1–30; Stephens 2003, 64–73.

⁵³ For dynastic cult, Hölbl 2001, 77–124, 160–177 in place of numerous other studies. For the distinction between dynastic and ruler cult, see Pfeiffer 2008.

⁵⁴ Gehrke 2008, 48, 57–59.

⁵⁵ Briant 2002, 411.

measures, and some coinages, and probably also the practice of differentiating between royal land and other types of land.⁵⁶

Keeping the diversity of local structures in mind, some general principles of the Hellenistic administration can be observed. Two qualifications need to be made, nevertheless. First, due to the excellent papyrological evidence from rural Egypt,⁵⁷ we are much better informed about this than any other part of the Hellenistic World, including Alexandria and the Greek cities with their exceptional historiographical tradition. Egypt was as typical or atypical for the rest of the Hellenistic world as any other part of it, but it had developed particularly cohesive state structures and a highly developed administrative system over 2,000 years. Its agricultural rhythm was determined by the Nile inundation, its agrarian income dependent on changing field sizes, and the local administration heavily involved in the maintenance of the dyke system. All of this created specific administrative structures, similar perhaps only to those of Babylonia for which we lack comparable evidence. The second problem is administrative language. Having to find Greek terms for local institutions and offices, the conquerors had at their disposal a limited linguistic repertoire that had developed in the Greek and Macedonian context. Administrative terminology thus obscured substantial socio-economic differences and created a degree of coherence and familiarity that will have been greater in linguistic than in practical terms.

To judge from the Egyptian evidence, the basis of Hellenistic administration was the district. All of Egypt was divided into what the Greeks called *nomoi*, regional divisions dating back to the Old Kingdom. The *nome* reflected the continuity of local agrarian organization regardless of the shift of domination in the political centers.⁵⁸ At the top of the *nome* was a *nomarchos* ('head of the *nome*') who supervised agricultural production and the dyke system, as well as fulfilling some judicial functions. An *oikonomos* was in charge of the *nome* income in cash and in kind, while a checking clerk (*basilikos grammateus*) keeping records worked at his side. They had their subordinates in the *topos* (tax district) and the *komos* (village). The tax income, carefully pre-assessed on the basis of a sowing schedule and plot sizes each year, was collected, recorded, and countersigned in storehouses (*thesauroi*) to which the Ptolemies added banks (*trapezai*) with very similar accounting systems. Yet while the in-kind income was collected by the *nome* administration itself, all monetary taxes were auctioned off to tax farmers. Though not collecting the taxes themselves, they guaranteed a fixed total sum and kept a sharp eye on its efficient collection. The *dioiketes* stood at the center of the royal administration. He was in charge not only of finances, but also of the coordination of the economy and the

⁵⁶ Briant 2002, 410–421.

⁵⁷ Von Reden, ch. 8 C, this volume.

⁵⁸ Derow and Bagnall 2004, 285–286; Thonemann 2013 for Attalid Asia Minor; Capdetrey 2007, 227–267 for the Seleukid administration.

correspondence of the empire. The royal mints and the treasury (*to basilikon*) were also under his control.⁵⁹ People could submit legal matters, often emerging from tax collection practices but also from other conflicts, in the form of petitions directly to the king. The petitions were decided on in the king's name and sent back for execution to the heads of the *nome*.

Alongside the *nome* administration, the Ptolemies developed a parallel structure that resulted from their military presence and the cleruchic system. Rather than keeping their soldiers under arms, they gave them land lots (*kleroi*) that provided them with an income for themselves and their families. The allotments varied in size according to military rank and achievement, giving a military social order to the immigrant population of the *nome*. Military *cleruchs* belonging to the same garrison under an eponymous commander (*hegemon* or *phrouarchos*) formed communities that served many informal social and economic purposes as well. At the top of the military hierarchy in the *nome* was a *strategos*, who not only had military functions, but supervised the *cleruchs*, their land, and filled judicial functions, much in the same way as the *nomarch*. Both must have worked closely hand in hand at first, but in the course of the third century, the *strategoi* took over the role of the *nomarchs*, and eventually replaced them. This is quite a remarkable fact, as the *strategoi* were direct royal appointees, whereas *nomarchs* had been subordinate to the *dioiketes*, who had replaced the former *satrap* and thus been part of the satrapal structure that the Ptolemies took over. There must have been a military superstructure in the capital as well, but not much detail is known.⁶⁰

In the Seleukid Empire, we encounter similar administrative principles and institutions with two important exceptions. Both led to rather different administrative hierarchies and geographies.⁶¹ First, Egypt under Achaemenid rule had been a single *satrapy* to which the Ptolemies added just some regions in Cyrene, Cyprus, Syria, and temporarily, Asia Minor.⁶² Thus, the royal economy of Egypt was equivalent to that of one *satrapy*, while in the Seleukid Empire, the king was on top of several *satrapies*. So in Asia, we find *dioiketai* cooperating with *strategoi* at a regional (satrapal) level and acting in conjunction with *oikonomoi* and *phrouarchoi*, who in Egypt were subordinates of the *dioiketes*.⁶³ There is evidence, nevertheless, for administrative heads (*hoi epi tōn pragmatōn*) and subdivisions of the *satrapies* (*hyp-*

⁵⁹ Von Reden 2007, 79–152; Capdetrey 2007, 306–331.

⁶⁰ Fischer-Bovet 2014.

⁶¹ See most comprehensively, Capdetrey 2007; also Ma 2000, 122–139; and Aperghis 2004, 263–295 for a survey of the most important administrative documents.

⁶² Syria and Phoenicia, Cyprus and Cyrene were closely integrated into the Egyptian administration, while the cities of Asia Minor maintained their own fiscal institutions and coinages, see Bagnall 1976.

⁶³ Aperghis 2004, 269–274 with examples from Palestine (when under Seleukid control), Kappadokia, and the city of Iasos in Asia Minor.

archiai, *toparchiai* and *oikonomiai*).⁶⁴ The second major difference was that the Seleukids tended to settle their soldiers in cities rather than the country side. Higher military personnel and civil beneficiaries who received large plots of land as gift estates attached their holdings to the land that belonged to the cities.⁶⁵ This seems to have led to special administrative districts (*hyparchiai* or *oikonomiai*) attested in the Greek *poleis* of Asia Minor and the former Lydian capital Sardis. These administrative districts, much like the *toparchies* in Egypt, seem to have been in charge of the revenue from the cities and their hinterland. In second-century inscriptions from Ai Khanum, too, several *oikonomoi* are documented as delivering tax money to the treasury, suggesting that though the city was not the capital of the Bactrian kingdom, it was the center of several districts. It is best to conclude that while administrative institutions and some principles of collecting revenue were comparable throughout the Hellenistic world, administrative geographies and hierarchies could vary depending on the established structures of the fiscal unit. In the second century, local variation increased even further as a result of weakening central authority and the reemergence of local authority structures.⁶⁶

VI Settlement and Cities

The Hellenistic period was a time of urban growth and development.⁶⁷ Alexander is well known for the large number of cities he founded in the course of his campaigns. Many were attributed to him later, and the early successors, most notably Seleukos and Antiochos, followed his practice. Urban foundations not only served to settle and resettle veteran soldiers, civil immigrants, indigenous populations, and personnel in charge of military control and tax collection, but also created an imperial landscape marked by settlement and urbanization. Several hundred new cities emerged in the first century of the Hellenistic period, forming part of an urban development that reached from the Mediterranean coasts through Iran to central Asia and northern India. Some of these cities are still visible, such as Alexandria in Egypt, Samarkand in modern Uzbekistan, and Ai Khanum in Afghanistan.

Parts of the material culture of these cities were recognizably Greek, such as *gymnasia*, theater buildings, and libraries that became part of the representational quarters of royal cities. We also find portrait sculpture, votive offerings, vase paintings, and pottery of typically Greek iconography and manufacture. For a long time,

⁶⁴ Capdetrey 2007, 257–265 with some alternative nomenclature for satrapal subdivisions.

⁶⁵ Aperghis 2004, 99–107 (land grants) and 148–153 (revenue from cities).

⁶⁶ Well shown by Thonemann 2013 for the Attalid kingdom after 188 BCE, and Manning 2003 for Egypt.

⁶⁷ Billows 2003; Kosmin 2014, 183–221; Mairs and Fischer-Bovet forthcoming; Cohen 2006, 2013 for a survey.

archaeologists have latched on to the Greek remains, emphasizing the Hellenizing influence of Greek urbanization in Asia and Egypt. Yet with increasing sensitivity to transcultural practices, larger amounts of non-Greek artifacts, as well as objects of mixed styles, are being identified in Hellenistic urban sites, suggesting various types of convergence, interaction, and segregation. Ai Khanum is a particularly instructive place for analyzing Greek and local social and cultural interaction, including common use of temples and sanctuaries by worshippers belonging to different religious communities.⁶⁸ Alexandria in Egypt, a truly multicultural space where people of various origins met and settled, also offers opportunities for studying growing degrees of cultural interaction, as the number of artifacts and buildings of Egyptianizing styles increased in the course of time.⁶⁹

On closer inspection, a very heterogeneous picture of Hellenistic urbanization emerges. First, very few of the sites were actually new foundations. Some big cities, such as the royal residences of the Seleukids, do seem to have been new foundations (e.g., Seleukeia-Tigris, Seleukeia-Pieria, and Antiocheia-Orontes). Yet Alexandria in Egypt incorporated a local village, Rhakotis, which continued to be remembered in the mythographies of the city.⁷⁰ Moreover, many cities were refounded to accommodate the cult for a new dynastic founder and to receive a dynastic name.⁷¹ Thus, Susa became Seleukeia-Eulaios, Uruk became Antiocheia-Ishtar, Gaza became another Seleukeia, and Jerusalem only just escaped the fate of becoming another Antiocheia.⁷²

Foundations also differed in size and organization. Scholars have attempted to classify Hellenistic foundations, distinguishing between large primary, medium-sized secondary, and small tertiary urban centers, as well as between villages from large to small.⁷³ Archaeological surveys of selected Hellenistic settlements suggest that there were indeed certain categories of urban foundations. The sumptuous royal capitals of Seleukeia-Pieria, Antiocheia-Orontes, Laodikeia, Apameia in north Syria and Ptolemais Hermiou (Upper Egypt) were all in the range of 205 to 280 ha in size, while secondary urban sites such as Dura-Europos on the Euphrates, Philadelphia in the Fayum, and Berenike Troglodytike on the Red Sea, measured between 50 and 70 ha. As the evidence for urban areas is generally too scanty and fraught with archaeological problems, it would be unwise to speak of a coherent strategy of Hellenistic city foundations. Yet it is still possible to argue that settlement sizes were

⁶⁸ Hoo forthcoming, with further literature.

⁶⁹ Goddio 1998; Ashton 2004.

⁷⁰ von Reden and Strootman forthcoming.

⁷¹ Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993, 161. Seleukos I is said to have founded 9 Seleukeias, 16 Antiocheias, 5 Laodikeias, 3 Apameias and 1 Stratonikeia, see Kosmin 2014, 183–184 and map 3, below. The number of known Ptolemaic foundations include 24 Arsinoes, 19 Ptolemaeis, 13 Berenikes, 5 Philoteras, 5 Kleopatras, and 4 Euergeteis, see Mueller 2006, 14.

⁷² One of the reasons for the Maccabean revolt, see Billows 2003, 198.

⁷³ Grainger 1990, 91–99; Mueller 2006, 89–106.

planned in relation to their function and location, their importance in wider regional urban networks, and their role in controlling agrarian land, communication lines, and local populations.⁷⁴

Some Hellenistic cities developed from mid-sized urban sites to gigantic cities – largely by cramming more people into the urban space and developing new hinterlands for the supply of urban demand. There is abundant evidence that the Fayum in Egypt, for example, supplied Alexandria with food and other agricultural products. The Seleukid and Ptolemaic capitals developed into urban centers far bigger than any of the biggest towns in the Classical period. Athens, Syracuse, and Miletus once the largest *poleis* in the classical period had about 100,000 to 125,000 free inhabitants. Antiocheia-Orontes and Seleukeia-Tigris, in contrast, reached populations on the order of 300,000, while the population of Alexandria, the biggest town in the Mediterranean before Rome, numbered an estimated half million inhabitants by the mid-third century BCE. Many secondary cities and local *metropoleis* still reached population numbers of 50–100,000 people, while Berenike Troglodytike at the Red Sea or Ai Khanum are estimated to have had populations on the order of 20,000–30,000. The vast majority of new settlements, however, was in the category of large to small villages numbering about 5,000 inhabitants.⁷⁵

There were also different types of political organization. Our evidence unfortunately is too limited to construct a typology of Hellenistic cities, but we know that many communities were organized, or organized themselves as *poleis* with citizen bodies usually drawn from the Greek ethno-class and a set of well-functioning civic institutions: councils, magistracies, and popular assemblies. Yet not all Hellenistic foundations were Greek *poleis* with citizen bodies and civic institutions. Out of the 49 cities known to have been founded by Alexander and the early Ptolemies in Egypt, just two cities were organized as *poleis*: Alexandria and Ptolemais Hermiou, the second Ptolemaic administrative center founded by Ptolemy I for the administration of Upper Egypt. The Seleukids founded many more cities, the majority of which are believed to have been organized as *poleis*. Other cities, such as Jerusalem, gradually developed Greek civic structures in the course of the Hellenistic period, a trend that has been termed ‘poliadization’ or ‘polification’ by modern scholars.⁷⁶ The process of poliadization meant not just the development of civic institutions, but also the adoption of a more comprehensive civic model in terms of architecture, socio-political behavior, education, and urbanization.

Archaeological research has brought to light the spatial politics of Hellenistic settlement and urbanization. It is obvious that Alexandria and the Seleukid Tetrapolis of capitals on the Mediterranean coasts marked the orientation of Hellenistic

⁷⁴ Mueller 2006, 85–184 for city sizes and discussion. Alexandria quickly outgrew the size of any of the other capitals, e.g., Monson 2012, 40–41.

⁷⁵ Kosmin 2014, 189.

⁷⁶ Clancier 2017 (for Babylonia); Thonemann 2013 (for the cities of Asia Minor).

Map 3: City foundations under Seleukos I and Antiochos I and II (after Kosmin 2014, map 8).
© Peter Palm.

rulers toward the Mediterranean. The choice of Seleukeia-Tigris as Seleukid capital instead of using the major Persian residence in Persepolis was also a sign of the western gravity of Seleukid imperial politics.⁷⁷ It was part of a new Seleukid geography for which the development of the Persian Gulf, its riverine connections into northern Iran and Syria, as well as the agrarian development of the Tigris valley, played a crucial economic role. Yet smaller settlements add to the picture. West of the Euphrates, 87 Seleukid settlements are attested and just 35 in the larger expanse between the Euphrates and Sogdiana. All but a dozen of these eastern foundations, moreover, were located in the lower middle Tigris and Gulf region, areas that were marginal during the Achaemenid period, but became centers of strategic economic development under the early Seleukids.

A similar combination of urban, strategic, and economic development can be observed in northern Syria. The development of northern Syria was a direct result of the Seleukid loss of southern Syria to the Ptolemies and the fragmentation of the Levantine coast between the late fourth to the early second century BCE.

The Ptolemies, too, pursued an urbanization policy, if at a smaller scale.⁷⁸ One focus of new settlement was the Fayum Oasis in Lower Egypt, just 45 miles away from the former capital of Memphis. Ptolemy II tripled the area of cultivation by draining Lake Moeris (modern Birket Qarun). The Fayum not only became a center

⁷⁷ Kosmin 2014, 188–195 for this and the following.

⁷⁸ Müller 2006; Fischer-Bovet in Mairs and Fischer-Bovet forthcoming.

of Greek settlement, but also a center of agrarian development and innovation. Another focus of economic development and settlement was the Eastern Desert and the Red Sea coast. On the northwestern stretch of this coast, two important harbor towns, Myos Hormos and Berenike Troglodytike, were founded and linked by caravan routes to the Nile. Substantial forts with large capacities for grain storage and water supply have been excavated along these routes, demonstrating substantial Ptolemaic interest in this area.⁷⁹ At the northern tip of the Red Sea, Ptolemy II also reopened a canal that linked the Bitter Lakes via Heroonpolis (Pithom/Tjeku) with the eastern branch of the Nile delta (see ch. 8 C, map 2, this volume). Where the canal connected with the sea, a city called Arsinoe was founded, and the opening of the canal was celebrated in grand style by the priesthood of Pithom/Tjeku.⁸⁰ Above all, the urban and infrastructural development of the Red Sea coast and its linkage with the Nile served as the means to transport a supply of war elephants from Nubia and the East African coast to Alexandria. But in time, it acquired further economic functions and laid the foundation for the thriving trade between Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula, and India.

The largest number of new settlements were founded in Egypt, but Ptolemaic foundations spread throughout the provinces of Cyrene, Cyprus, and Asia Minor. Small settlements and garrisoned fortresses suggest that they served as nodal points for the control of local taxation and administration, as well as for the control of networks of communication in areas of imperial and economic interest.⁸¹

VII Language and Institutions

Greek language, but also Greek political terminology in the Hellenistic kingdoms, created a sense of cultural homogeneity that was greater in appearance than in practice. As far as language was concerned, written documents increasingly used a common Greek dialect (*koine*) that replaced numerous local dialects of Greek (i.e., Doric, Aeolic, Ionic etc.) as well as local administrative languages. The Hellenistic *koine* was a slightly modified version of the Attic dialect, which shows the cultural role of Athens in the formation of Hellenistic culture.⁸² It is difficult to estimate how far the use of Greek spread down the social scale (many Egyptian priests learnt Greek and fixed religious texts and Egyptian literature in Greek writing), but Greek language offered access to the administration and to Greek legal practice, which was favored by many indigenous inhabitants.⁸³

⁷⁹ Sidebotham and Gates-Foster 2019.

⁸⁰ Mueller 2006, Appendix II; Tuplin 1991 for the previous Achaemenid canal that had silted up.

⁸¹ Mueller 2006, 41–84; Kosmin 2014, 183–221.

⁸² Billows 2003. Continuing Athenian influence can be seen in the Athenian weight standard of most Hellenistic coinages, Athenian legal traditions in Hellenistic law, and the emulation of Athens as educational center by many Hellenistic capitals, especially Alexandria.

⁸³ Clarysse and Thompson 2009, 36–89.

Moving from language to terminology, there was a rather distinct political and administrative terminology in use throughout the kingdoms. This creates the impression of a certain administrative homogeneity derived from some common model. Hellenistic kings called their own realms *basileiai*, kingdoms, and their political activities, which included religious and military affairs, *ta pragmata* (business). Court titles such as *philos* ('friend'), *sungenes* ('kinsmen'), *somatophylax* ('bodyguard'), *protos philos* ('first friend') and some others were used across the Ptolemaic and Seleukid courts (see above). The cities in which kings and courts resided, the *metropoleis* of local administration and urban living, and city foundations with Greek-style civic organizations were all called *poleis* despite their socio-political diversity. Not only were there different types of *poleis* within the Mediterranean world – the *poleis* of Cyprus, for example, had been ruled by kings before the Macedonian conquest – but the Phoenician cities, Judaea, Babylon, Memphis, as well as many local cities had their own urban organization, political structures, and economic systems despite all being called *poleis* in Greek administrative terminology.⁸⁴ Local administrators and supervisors of temples, without any clear definition of their tasks and authority, were included in the large category of *epistatai* (prefects), as local governors in pre-Hellenistic Macedonia had been called. *Strategoi* are regularly found as top royal appointees in the military administration with shifting profiles and tasks. *Phoros* was the general term for land tax, *ekphoria* for rents (although the two imposts could overlap in practice). We have similar titles for a range of other taxes, such as the *enkuklion* ('sales tax'), *ennomion* ('pasture tax') and *tele* (a very general category of surcharges and market taxes). Many standard taxes, moreover, were called according to the fractions of the total on which they were levied (e.g., *dekate* ('the tenth'); *tetarte* ('the fourth'); *pentekoste* ('the fiftieth') despite the fact that different quantities were extracted under these titles.⁸⁵

The degree to which the royal administration of the Hellenistic Empires could be regarded as a coherent system is shown by the pseudo-Aristotelian *Oikonomika*. It was written within the Aristotelian school during the early years of the Hellenistic period and attempted to put the relationship between imperial, satrapal, *polis*, and household administration into a coherent system. According to pseudo-Aristotle, the four types of administration are part of a hierarchy in which the royal administration stands at the apex. Royal administration is responsible for the most important economic affairs, such as imports, exports, coinage, prices, and the revenues from the local *satrapies*. The *satraps*, in turn, are in charge of local taxation and land use. Autonomous cities are free to look after the civic revenues, while private citizens deal with their private income from agriculture, industries, and credit.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ For the different types of cities in the Hellenistic period, Billows 2003; Kosmin 2014; Mairs and Fischer-Bovet forthcoming.

⁸⁵ Monson 2015 for the *dekate*.

⁸⁶ Pseudo-Aristotele *Oikonomika* (Arist. [Oec.]) 2. 1. 1–6.

The treatise represents a Greek perspective on the late Persian administrative tradition.⁸⁷ It ignores the difference of agrarian systems and fiscal practices across a vast imperial space, but created a common language of economic administration that nurtured unity and coherence in an otherwise impenetrable range of local diversity.

VIII Coinage

Greek coinages were both a means of exchange and a means of communication. This led to fierce academic controversy over the political vis-à-vis economic function of Greek coins.⁸⁸ Hellenistic coinage reflects commercial and fiscal functions as well as different governance structures in different parts of the Hellenistic Empires. Kings could tolerate non-imperial forms of money, un-coined metal, pre-Hellenistic coinages, and several forms of in-kind payment. They could also grant monetary autonomy to local polities, which created identity through coinage. Yet all kings also produced their own imperial coinages. They were the ones most widely accepted, allowed monetary taxation to run effectively, and were most suitable for applying fiscal revenue to military and urban expenditure.⁸⁹ This part of the monetary policy facilitated and encouraged commercial exchange. While imperial coinages were issued to pay for mercenaries, warfare, urban development, and monetary benefactions, it was probably also the single most visible symbol of foreign domination and imperial rule. Hellenistic coins reached into every corner of the Hellenistic Empires and deep down the social scale of the population. They were not only an instrument of taxation, but also a means of payment to public workers and civil administrators, to whom coins transmitted the public image of the rulers, their success, and ruling ideologies. The impact of Greek coinage on local polities and populations can best be gleaned from the fact that many kingdoms that politically and administratively broke away from Graeco-Macedonian control maintained recognizably Greek-style coinages, only adapting portraiture and symbolic repertoire to their own images and needs.⁹⁰

Alexander had paid his mercenaries with Macedonian coins minted in large quantities in the fourth century BCE. Philip II had deliberately adapted his coinage to the weight standard of the dominant Athenian currency, but had added gold and bronze coins.⁹¹ Both small denominations in bronze and high-value pieces in gold had been unusual among Greek *poleis*. Achaemenid wealth, among which was the

⁸⁷ Lowry 1987.

⁸⁸ Howgego 1995, 39–61 for the debate.

⁸⁹ Von Reden 2007.

⁹⁰ Morris, ch. 2; Fabian, ch. 6, this volume.

⁹¹ Thonemann 2015 for a lively and up-to-date account of the impact of coinage on the Hellenistic Empires.

vast treasury of Persepolis captured in 330 BCE, poured large quantities of additional precious metal into the hands of the Macedonian victors, which was then minted into coinage and spread the message of Alexander's victories when spent on campaign.⁹² The number of Greek mints in Asia increased substantially in the late fourth century BCE, and at the same time, first steps were undertaken to introduce Macedonian coinage into Egypt.⁹³ City buildings, garrisons, and mercenaries began to be paid for in Macedonian coinage. It has been estimated that between 333 and 290 BCE, Alexander's royal mints struck 60 million *tetradrachms* (40,000 talents), 66 million *drachms* (11,000 talents) and 12 million gold *staters* (each worth 20 silver *drachms* = 40,000 talents), totaling an estimated 91,000 talents of silver.⁹⁴ These are vast quantities in comparison to the tribute of the Athenian Empire in the fifth century BCE that totaled on average 500 talents per year at its peak.

Immediately after Alexander's death, most Hellenistic mints minted so-called posthumous Alexander coinages using an iconography that Alexander had adopted on some issues in 333/2 BCE. It showed Herakles with a lion scalp on the front side (obverse) and a seated Zeus on the back (reverse). On the reverse, the coins carried the legend "[coin of] Alexander." Posthumous Alexander coinages were minted in all Hellenistic royal mints except Egypt until the second century BCE. Several local coinages, former Persian coins, Babylonian *shekels*, as well as royal issues produced to commemorate particular events and victories added to the volume of coinage in circulation. Kings and cities in Antigonid Greece and Seleukid Asia created a large repertoire of designs on their coins (showing royal portraits or Alexander in attire that symbolized military, royal, or divine status), but their coinages followed the basic model set by the posthumous Alexander coinage. On the obverse was a royal or divine portrait looking right, and on the reverse a seated or standing divinity engaged in some military activity.⁹⁵ The adaptation of the Alexander coins engaged deliberately and intentionally with the time of Alexander's conquest, which increasingly became a monetary macro-tradition influencing the imperial space across individual empires and kingdoms. It also created a numismatic *koine* that was recognizable to all users as a common language of communication and exchange. It built confidence in, and adherence to, a monetary system that was backed by royal authority and protected every individual's capacity to own monetary wealth. It was a powerful means of imperial integration that also enhanced the economic power of the central royal authority. The Seleukid and Antigonid kings accepted a large degree of local minting, and payment in local species, within their spheres of influence, but the large amount of Alexander coinage and royal issues based on his model left no doubt about the imperial dominance of monetary circulation.

⁹² Thonemann 2015, 15; with de Callatay 2005.

⁹³ Lorber 2012.

⁹⁴ De Callatay 2011, 23.

⁹⁵ Thonemann 2015.

Fig. 1: Silver *tetradachm* of Ptolemy I Soter (306 BCE), obv. Head of Alexander with elephant scalp, Ammon's horn, and Dionysos head band. Rev. standing Athena. Diameter 28 mm., 14.93 g. ANS 1957.172.2019. © American Numismatic Society.

Fig. 2: Gold *stater* of Ptolemy I Soter (299/295 BCE), obv. Head of Ptolemy I. Rev. Alexander leading elephant quadriga. Diameter 18 mm., 7.1 g. ANS 1967.152.621. © American Numismatic Society.

The Ptolemies of Egypt created their own coinage and monetary system.⁹⁶ As early as 320 BCE, Ptolemy I had developed a distinct iconography on his coinage, replacing the Herakles type of the central Macedonian mint with a portrait of Alexander with elephant scalp (symbolizing his Indian conquests), carrying a Dionysos headband (also referring to the Indian campaign), and a ram's horn that symbolized that he had been accepted as son of Zeus Ammon by the oracle of Siwa (fig.1). Ptolemy also gradually diverted from the Attic weight standard of the Macedonian coinage to a lighter standard that may have been inspired by Rhodes, one of Alexandria's most significant commercial partners.⁹⁷ But the reduction in weight and the silver gained from the reduction were also an important source of revenue, as it was made equivalent to Attic-standard coins. From about 300 BCE onward, when Ptolemy I had become king of Egypt, he put his own portrait on the gold and silver coinages and reduced their weight standard once again (fig. 2). All foreign coins to be used in Egypt had to be exchanged for Ptolemaic coins in Alexandria and the ports at a relationship of value of 1 : 1.⁹⁸

Until far into the Roman period, Egypt formed a closed currency system. It not only marked the core of the Ptolemaic Empire as a distinct monetary zone, but also allowed the Ptolemies a larger degree of monetary control of Egypt. For not only

⁹⁶ Le Rider 1986; Le Rider and de Callatay 2006; von Reden 2007, 31–57.

⁹⁷ Lorber 2012 for the connection with the Rhodian standard.

⁹⁸ The evidence is purely numismatic, and unmistakable as Egyptian coin hoards no longer contain non-Egyptian coinage, Le Rider 1986.

were Egyptian gold and silver denominations less valuable than their other Hellenistic equivalents, but Ptolemy II also created a bronze coinage that had entirely fiduciary value. This allowed a degree of monetization in the Egyptian countryside that would have been impossible with the means of precious metal coinage alone.⁹⁹ While the motivations for these monetary manipulations were most likely financial, their implementation was feasible only because the unusually strong state structure that the Ptolemies inherited from their Pharaonic predecessors.¹⁰⁰

IX The Dynamics of the Hellenistic Empires

The end of the Wars of the Successors gives a false impression of imperial stability during the Hellenistic period. While the kings recognized each other in their imperial centers, their imperial reach remained contested. As was noted above, universal empire was built into the royal ideology of Hellenistic rulers. In the course of imperial development, it became the most important symbol of legitimacy vis-à-vis both Greek and local populations. Images of foreign domination, such as captives of war, exotic animals, and other trophies, passed in royal processions through the capitals on the occasion of dynastic festivals and victories, while coinages, inscriptions, and pictorial representations spread the message throughout the country.¹⁰¹ Imperial propaganda of victory was often more glorious than the territorial gain or political advantage that was actually achieved, but its universal presence (also finding its way into Hellenistic historiography) suggests that gaining and maintaining empire were inseparably linked. There was never a turn from military expansion to peaceful state-building in the Hellenistic world. Both went hand in hand and deteriorated simultaneously in tandem with the increasing decline of the spatial and political cohesion of the Hellenistic monarchies.

The first period of the Hellenistic Empires that lasted until the 220s BCE was characterized by systematic empire building in which the kings forcefully expanded and consolidated their power in their spheres of influence. By about 250 BCE, both the Ptolemaic and Seleukid Empires had reached their maximum imperial expanse, although the Seleukids had already lost the *satrapies* of Bactria and Parthia to local kings in 255 and 247 BCE respectively.¹⁰² Yet the Ptolemies controlled territories all along the Eastern Mediterranean coast from Kyrenaika to Southern Anatolia, Cyprus, and Thrace, with a few enclaves in Crete, mainland Greece, and the Aegean,

⁹⁹ Von Reden 2019.

¹⁰⁰ Von Reden 2007; Manning 2010. The kingdom of Pergamon temporarily experimented with a lighter coinage, the so-called *kistophoroi*, but it had a more limited impact and design; Thonemann 2015, 77–82.

¹⁰¹ Thonemann 2015; Rice 1983 for a grand procession in honor of the deceased Ptolemies celebrated quinquennially in Alexandria.

¹⁰² Fischer-Bovet 2014, 7–11 for this and the following chronological scheme.

as well as Lower Nubia. The Seleukids' imperial power extended from Anatolia and northern Syria to Central Asia.¹⁰³ Most of the imperial structures that are regarded as typical for the Hellenistic period developed in these 60 years: colonization, land development, and the foundation of new settlements and cities; the gradual transformation of fiscal structures, economic development, expansion of trade, and forms of adjudication of law based on classical Greek models; royal representation in capitals, as well as ritualized communication and exchange with local elites; the development of Hellenistic court life and cultural politics in the form of literary and scientific patronage, athletic games, libraries, and museums; and the development of a ruler cult and ritual as a means of creating dynastic continuity and legitimacy.

The next 60 years from ca. 220 to ca. 160 BCE saw intensive warfare between the Ptolemaic and Seleukid Empires, starting with the temporary conquest of Syria and Phoenicia by Antiochos III during the Fourth Syrian War (219–217 BCE), and the victory of Ptolemy IV who recuperated the lost Syrian territories in the battle of Raphia in 217 BCE. Antiochos then started a campaign, reminiscent of Alexander's, through Armenia, Media, Parthia, Bactria and northern India, but its success was short-lived. Shortly after Antiochos's death in 187 BCE, these areas were lost again to local kings. The Fifth Syrian War (202–197 BCE) ended with the definitive loss of these territories by the Ptolemies to the Seleukids, while during the Sixth Syrian War (170–168 BCE) Antiochos IV temporarily invaded Egypt, only to withdraw after an ultimatum was set by the Roman Popilius Laenas.¹⁰⁴ In this period, the Hellenistic imperial space rapidly fell under the spell of the new power of Rome. From the last decade of the third century onward, Rome had become an increasingly dominant factor in the Eastern Mediterranean.¹⁰⁵ This had been triggered by the Roman aggression against Illyrian piracy in the Adriatic Sea, which led to two Roman wars against the Illyrian queen. As this was part of the Antigonid imperial orbit, Philip responded by allying with Rome's enemy, Hannibal of Carthage, which led to the first military confrontation between Rome and Macedonia in 215–205 BCE. This first Macedonian War also involved the kingdom of Illyria, Pergamon in Asia Minor, the Aetolian League in central Greece, and the Peloponnese. Simultaneously, the Greek cities entered into a dangerous internecine war that was also settled by Roman interference. The second Macedonian War ended with the defeat of the last Antigonid King, Philip V, at the battle at Cynoscephalae (197 BCE), which put the Roman general Titus Quinctius Flamininus in the position of declaring the Greek cities free and autonomous in 196 BCE. The Attalid kings of Pergamon became loyal allies of the Roman senate, and in 188 BCE were rewarded with large amounts of formerly Seleukid territory that Antiochos III had to cede to the Romans after the spectacular victo-

103 Ager 2003, 37–50.

104 Ma 2000; Mittag 2006; Feyel and Graslin 2014.

105 Derow 2003, and Weaverdyck, ch. 7, this volume.

ries of the Romans and their allies in Syria, Asia Minor, and Greece. The small kingdom of the Attalid dynasty, in control of the territory around the city of Pergamon since 283/2 BCE, gained a large territorial expanse stretching across the rich and densely populated river valleys of northwestern Asia Minor, Phrygia, and the southern Pontic Coast.¹⁰⁶ Within one generation, Rome had risen to be an aggressive military factor, protector state, and arbitrator within the imperial Hellenistic space. A third war between Rome and Macedonia ended with a crushing defeat of the Macedonians at Pydna (168 BCE). This led to the fragmentation of the kingdom into four independent but separate regions. Large numbers of slaves from Illyria, Epiros, central Greece, and the Peloponnese were deported to Rome. Ptolemies and Seleukids changed the nature of the control over their remaining territories.¹⁰⁷ Relationships with local elites and the distribution of revenue were renegotiated, as the famous decree on the Rosetta Stone suggests.¹⁰⁸ In most areas, we see the reemergence of independent local social structures and the devolution of tributary and administrative tasks to local elites.¹⁰⁹ Internal secessions ensued, and were successfully repressed in the case of the Theban revolt in Upper Egypt (204–185 BCE), but not so in the case of the Maccabean revolt in Judaea (167–160 BCE).

The years from ca. 160 to 30 BCE are characterized by extended dynastic conflicts, which weakened the cohesion of the Hellenistic Empires in both their cores and the peripheries. Concomitantly, there was further growth of Roman power, which also mobilized increasing resources and ambition within Rome itself.¹¹⁰ Further expansion of the Parthians into Media, Elymais, and the important region of Babylonia threatened the Seleukids from the east.¹¹¹ The dynamic expansion of the Pontic king Mithridates VI (120–63 BCE) into Bithynia, Kappadokia, Galatia, Paphlagonia, Asia Minor, and the Greek mainland not only reduced the Seleukid sphere of influence in northwestern Asia, but also triggered a final phase of Roman imperial expansion into the Hellenistic world under Sulla, Lucullus, and Pompey. By 129 BCE, Seleukid possessions were reduced to the territory of northern Syria before becoming a Roman province in 63 BCE.

In 148 BCE Macedonia had been made the first Roman province in the Hellenistic imperial space, followed by the Peloponnese, central Greece, and Thessaly, which became the province of Achaia in 146 BCE. The aggressive expansion, and increasing popularity of Mithridates VI, a rather typical Hellenistic king who, though descending from the Achaemenid royal family, presented himself as a typi-

¹⁰⁶ Thonemann 2013, 2–3.

¹⁰⁷ Manning 2003, 43–54.

¹⁰⁸ Derow and Bagnall 2004, 165; see also n. 50 above.

¹⁰⁹ Thonemann 2013 for the Attalid kingdom. In Egypt, the most striking evidence for the reemergence of local autonomy and power is the Ptolemaic local bronze coinage, which reverted to Egyptian standards of weight and value, Faucher and Lorber 2010.

¹¹⁰ Weaverdyck, ch. 7, this volume.

¹¹¹ Derow 2003 for the following.

cal Greek benefactor and defender of Greek interests against the Roman barbarians, led to the confrontation between Mithridates and three Roman legions under Sulla in Greece. Mithridates's retreat and the Roman advance into Asia during the second and third Mithridatic Wars (83/2 BCE and 74–63 BCE) involved almost all parts of the Hellenistic world and caused massive human and financial losses. It eventually ended with the reorganization of Asia under Pompey in 63 BCE. Bithynia, Pontos, Kilikia, and Syria became Roman provinces, while treaties of friendship and submission were concluded with the kings of Armenia, Kappadokia, Kolchis, and Galatia.

The Ptolemies, too, gradually lost their peripheral territories. In 94 BCE, Rome had seized Kyrenaika according to the will of Ptolemy Apion, and Cyprus in 58 BCE. Soon after, however, thanks to her remarkable alliances with Julius Caesar and Marc Antony, Kleopatra VII was able to reestablish the empire, if at the cost of Egyptian independence. After the final defeat of Kleopatra and Antony at Actium in 31 BCE, Egypt became a Roman province in 30 BCE.

X Decline and Transformation

This is not the place to discuss the reasons for the loss of the Hellenistic Empires to the Romans. Polybios and subsequent historiography put much emphasis on the dynastic and moral decline of the Hellenistic courts. The luxury and debauchery of the kings bewildered Roman armies, magistrates, visitors, and envoys, known for their austerity. Some modern scholars suspect that the Ptolemies turned mad in the course of their repeated incest.¹¹² Yet, strong rulers such as Ptolemy VIII and Kleopatra VII argue against this suspicion.

More convincing is the argument that Roman expansion in the Eastern Mediterranean was an extraneous shock.¹¹³ The military machine Rome had been able to develop in the course of the third century was simply more powerful than that of the Hellenistic armies, and became increasingly so the more the Romans were able to tap Hellenistic financial resources.¹¹⁴ Access to manpower, as well as agrarian and monetary revenue that paid for armies, fleets, and campaigns were crucial to imperial power in the Hellenistic world. Some extraordinarily wealthy regions, such as Babylonia, Media, and Egypt (including Cyprus and Cyrene), had been indispensable for imperial success. Transportation routes and nodal cities that connected

112 From the marriage between Ptolemy II and his full sister Arsinoe II, brother-sister marriages were frequent among the Ptolemies, probably in order to act against the problem of unclear lines of succession. This marriage policy, however, was not successful, as the dynastic conflicts surrounding the reigns of Ptolemy VIII and Kleopatra II suggest, Hölbl (1993) 2001, 194–203, 222–256.

113 Fischer-Bovet 2014.

114 Weaverdyck, ch. 7, this volume. The capture of foreign treasuries was indispensable for further conquest, de Callatay 1989; Taylor 2014.

these regions were similarly important. This explains the strategic importance of Syria-Phoenicia and its coastal harbor towns, of the Euphrates and the Tigris as riverine routes, the Aegean islands connecting Northern Greece and the Propontic coast with the Western Asian coast and Egypt, and the Pontos region that linked the Black Sea with Kilikia. Above all, the city leagues of central Greece, the Peloponnese, and Macedonia may have functioned as symbolic centers for Hellenistic rulers and their followers who drew identity and cultural orientation from them. The loss of these regions to the Romans and the Arsakids respectively cut the courts off from their lifelines.

Finally, there was the problem of imperial expansion turned inward. As was mentioned several times in this chapter, all Hellenistic rulers, including new contenders in Asia Minor, Pontos, and Armenia, were spurred by the ideological drive for universal empire. For this goal, alliances were created and negotiated, probably always to the advantage of the highest bidder. Those potential allies who promised to make available most revenue, troops, and transportation routes were won over by means of benefactions, promises of friendship, and protection. In this fiercely competitive sphere, no single Hellenistic ruler was able to develop stable alliances in the long-term (Egypt, Cyrene, and Cyprus perhaps being an exception). Dynastic conflicts and changing marriages added to the instability of the Hellenistic Empires. Eventually, the new powers from the West (Rome) and East (Parthia) seem to have struck the best deals in this ever-changing imperial space.

Yet approaching the imperial transformation of the Hellenistic Empires in terms of decline is a misleading perspective in the context of world history. Under Hellenistic influence, structures developed that outlived the rule of the Hellenistic kings. Greek continued to function as common language in the eastern Roman provinces. Hellenistic elites, although gradually adopting Roman habits, continued to fill the most important administrative positions under the Roman Empire. Greek and Greek-style coinages remained the dominant media of payment and exchange in Egypt and in many regions of Asia that lay beyond the Roman fiscal-military regime based on Roman coinage. The greatest Hellenistic capitals, Alexandria and Antiocheia-Orontes, continued to be the uncontested *metropoleis* of the Eastern Mediterranean. The development of productive economic regions such as the Fayum, the Eastern Desert, north Syria, and the Tigris valley provided the foundations for the economic prosperity and vibrant trade of subsequent centuries. Ruler cults and political generosity (*euergetism*) remained important elements of political identity- and community-building in the Eastern Mediterranean under Roman rule. It is thus with some justification that scholars suggest that the Hellenistic World did not decline culturally before the Arabian conquests of Asia and Egypt in the seventh century CE.

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