

PTOLEMY I SOTER

ANSON (E.M.) *Ptolemy I Soter. Themes and Issues*. Pp. xxiv + 221, maps. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023. Paper, £24.99, US\$34.95 (Cased, £75, US\$100). ISBN: 978-1-350-26080-1 (978-1-350-26081-8 hbk).

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Ptolemy, son of Lagus, was undeniably one of the most successful of the Diadochi. He rose from the chaotic circumstances after Alexander the Great's death to consolidate control over Egypt, became a king and forged a dynasty that would outlast those of his rivals. The majority of Ptolemy's personal history is lost to us, and his career has been subject to significant scholarly debate. A.'s volume does much to add clarity and expert discussion to what we can know about this enigmatic figure.

This volume on Ptolemy joins A.'s excellent series, the author having already given the same comprehensive treatment to issues relating to the reigns of Philip II and Alexander the Great. This work on Ptolemy is equally insightful and important. Like the companion works on Philip II and Alexander, A. does not set out to provide a standard biography for Ptolemy, nor is the work simply an exploration of the events of this period. The focus instead is on examining key themes concerning Ptolemy's reign, considering broadly his actions, ambitions and influence. Topics include reconstructing Ptolemy's early life, the political struggles that set the stage for Ptolemy's eventual claim to power, his relationship with his rivals, his role as ruler of Egypt and, of course, the military matters that were so important during an age in which kingship was won through military success. The work brings in recent scholarship and does away with many long-held arguments and assumptions regarding Ptolemy, for example his purported origins as an illegitimate son of Philip and the likelihood of his history of Alexander being written purely for propaganda reasons. Here, A.'s handling of the material is excellent. Throughout the work there is also examination of the major questions around Ptolemy's ultimate goals and of his role in the fracturing of Alexander's empire.

The book naturally follows a thematic order, mostly chronological within the chapters themselves. Some events are repeated by necessity as a result of approaching the topic in this way. Nonetheless, such repetitions are suitably integrated into the overarching theme of each chapter, and it is helpful to have the significance of such matters underlined from different perspectives, for example, what the seizure of Alexander's corpse meant for Perdikkas' ambitions and his clash with Ptolemy (pp. 58–9), what it meant for Ptolemy's influence on religion in Egypt (pp. 136–7), and so on.

The introduction sets the scene, with a review of Alexander's legacy and the challenge left behind for ambitious would-be Successors; as A. aptly notes, Alexander's life had been one of 'conquests not of consolidation' (p. 1). The introduction also outlines some of the major issues in understanding Ptolemy and addresses the problems in the source material, especially the ever-present Roman filter through which we have to understand much of Hellenistic history (p. 10). Chapter 2, 'An Early Life Imagined', provides a great reconstruction of what we can know about Ptolemy's early life and the beginning of his career. In particular, A.'s argument regarding Ptolemy's purported Argead heritage (pp. 21–4) is convincing, and A. does well at dispelling the assertion that Ptolemy rose through the ranks from obscurity and poverty (pp. 24–7).

Chapter 3, 'The Man with a Plan', provides a good outline of the complicated circumstances at Babylon at the time of Alexander's death and the immediate division

of the empire. The exploration of the dynamics between Perdikkas and Ptolemy and the suggestion that Egypt may have been awarded to Ptolemy for supporting Perdikkas are compelling (pp. 43–4). In Chapter 4, ‘The Destruction of an Empire’, we follow Ptolemy’s immediate actions as satrap of Egypt. A. provides an excellent examination of the perception of Ptolemy’s ambitions in the sources, where he is portrayed as generous and indeed praised for lacking in desire to take over all of Alexander’s former empire (p. 46). A. notes that Ptolemy’s attempts to connect with Cleopatra, sister of Alexander the Great, and alleged desire to replace Cassander in Macedonia were realistically more focused on limiting the power of the rivals Antigonos and Demetrius, rather than hoping for the Macedonian throne for himself, which makes for a nuanced perspective (p. 47). A. puts forward a strong case that Ptolemy’s actions show that he was in favour of the dissolution of Alexander’s former empire; and, after securing Egypt, he was wholly focused on preservation, even suggesting that Ptolemy’s dynastic manoeuvring to choose Ptolemy II Philadelphus over Ceraunus was part of this policy (p. 47). I am equally convinced by the assessment that Ptolemy’s focused concentration on Egypt was one of his greatest strengths (p. 65).

In Chapter 5, ‘The General’, Ptolemy’s military and strategic capabilities are explored. Compared to some of his contemporaries, there is less said about Ptolemy’s strategy and military feats (p. 67), but the chapter provides a good overview of the major engagements and Ptolemy’s military career, both under Alexander and afterwards. The chapter confirms that Ptolemy was less of a risktaker than his contemporaries, though this was to his great advantage (p. 101). A. could have said more here about possible propaganda influences on the record of Ptolemy’s military successes and actions during the campaign of Alexander (e.g. pp. 69–72), but this potential propaganda angle is unpacked in Chapter 8 (pp. 156–7), when the purpose of Ptolemy’s historical writing is considered. Chapter 6, ‘The Lord of Egypt’, focuses on the nature of Ptolemy’s dynasty creation, as well as his ruling ideology and approaches when it came to the two populations of Egypt, exploring theories of segregation compared to the unification of Greek, Macedonian and Egyptian cultures (p. 107). The observations regarding Ptolemy’s city-founding policy, quite different to that of Philip II and Alexander as well as the other Successors, is also notable (pp. 115–17), revealing further insights into Ptolemy’s broader ambitions and vision for his role.

In Chapter 7, ‘Ptolemy and Religion’, Ptolemy’s religious policy and reforms are discussed, including an important discussion of his involvement with the Serapis cult as well as the nature of religious identity in Egypt, where it appears that Ptolemy took a mostly pragmatic approach; he conducted many of the duties expected of an Egyptian ruler, but did not play a very active role in the traditional religious institutions of Egypt (p. 129). The final chapter, ‘The Royal Historian’, is one of the standout chapters of the work. It has long been assumed that Ptolemy’s historical work on Alexander’s campaigns could not have been anything else other than a propaganda piece. A. convincingly unravels this argument and demonstrates how this assumption is built on dubious evidence. While much must remain speculation, A. makes a convincing case for not assuming, for example, that blame for omissions in Arrian lies squarely with Ptolemy (pp. 146–7) and draws attention to the idea of the ineffectiveness of incredibly subtle propaganda, especially where the effect is created by ‘omission’ (e.g. pp. 161, 163). A. also suggests that the likely motive for the work was more in line with attempting to set the record straight, as opposed to having a strong political motive (p. 150). I wonder if such a work can ever be apolitical given Ptolemy’s involvement in the scramble for power and subsequent career; would it really have been possible to present something in a mostly neutral manner? I agree,

however, that some of the scholarly conclusions on Ptolemy's propaganda motive have been overstated given the fragmentary nature of what survives of his work.

The volume is a thorough and authoritative discussion of key themes, which are not only important for understanding Ptolemy but for understanding the age of the Successors as well. The work does much to distil the complexities of this transitional period of Hellenistic history into an engaging format and will be fundamental for anyone wishing to know more about Ptolemy I Soter.

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THE ATTALIDS

KAYE (N.) *The Attalids of Pergamon and Anatolia. Money, Culture, and State Power*. Pp. xviii + 444, figs, b/w & colour ills, maps. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. Cased, £105, US\$135. ISBN: 978-1-316-51059-9.

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At the core of K.'s thorough and thought-provoking thesis on the Attalid state is the premise that the rapid success of Attalid state formation can be understood through an examination of the fiscal policies and cultural bent of the Pergamene kings. Certainly, as K. notes, the initial granting of hegemony over what had once been Seleucid western Asia Minor to the Attalid dynasts in 188 BCE did not carry with it a guarantee of stable imperial rule; Attalid policies drew order and cohesion from the loose territorial control gifted by Roman fiat. This work ably demonstrates how Attalid deployment of their storied wealth in ways often distinct from those of their royal peers contributed to the embedding of Pergamene power within and among civic administrations under their rule, strengthening both Anatolian identity and Attalid authority. K.'s argument that the Attalids deployed fiscal policies as a means of enmeshing their subjects more deeply in the affairs of the state, marrying cultural output with financial predation, suggests a new interpretation of what has traditionally been understood as the bourgeois face of Attalid power. To decide whether the policies of the Pergamene dynasts can indeed be considered a 'creatively employed noncoercive means' (p. 354) of dominating the Anatolian plateau would likely necessitate a wider comparative study beyond the scope of this work.

The use of the Attalids' proverbial wealth is the subject of the strong first half of the monograph. The first chapter focuses on 'earmarking', the designation of revenue for specific future public uses, a process that the epigraphic record demonstrates was used with much greater frequency by the Attalids than other Hellenistic dynasties (pp. 36–9). K. argues that the practice functioned both as a tool for imperial consolidation by necessitating royal penetration into the details of specific local circumstances and involving subject communities in a dependent relationship with Attalid futurity, and as a negotiated process that strengthened the political agency of those same subject communities. The focus on earmarks as drawing from funds collected within the communities themselves, rather than royal monies, highlights the extent to which the Attalids positioned themselves