

Robin Waterfield, *Dividing the Spoils. The War for Alexander the Great's Empire* (Ancient Warfare and Civilization). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pp. XXVII + 273. ISBN 978-0-19-957392-9. £18,99.

“This book tells the story of one of the great forgotten wars of history”, according to the very first sentence of a highly rhetorical preface, that is clearly meant to prove in good Hellenistic historiographical tradition the importance and excitement of the period. The introductory statement probably means that when Waterfield embarked on this project no book-length overview of the whole period existed in English and that the fifty years after Alexander’s death are therefore perhaps not that well known outside of the circle of professional historians who take an interest in the Hellenistic period.¹ His “main aim has been to write an accurate and enjoyable book – to make sense of a very difficult period of history”. He has admirably achieved his goal: W.’s understanding of the period is as good as that of any specialist on the period, which is an admirable achievement for a relative newcomer to this most complicated field. The book is clearly aimed at a wider audience (p. xii: “in order to make the book as accessible as possible...”; p. 245: “to reach as wide an audience as possible”), and they will definitely find this a most enjoyable book that does indeed make sense of the period in a very clear manner. Throughout the book W. displays an excellent understanding of the power politics of the Successors and of the economic concerns (ultimately all in function of funding wars) behind many of their actions. W. for instance offers a fine analysis of the treaties among the Diadochoi (p. 125) or of the ambitions of Ptolemy (pp. 131–132 and *passim*) and rightly notes that the battle of Ipsos did not bring about a great change in the history of the Successors (p. 172).

W. treats the period mostly chronologically and with a focus on the leading individuals, an approach that is entirely justified by the subject as the preface states (p. xii). However, the book also contains several digressions about topics such as divine kingship (pp. 7–9), ruler cult (pp. 203–206) and colonization and hellenization (pp. 32–36), as well as about the cultural trends and achievements of the period: e.g. individualism in art, literature and philosophy (pp. 51–56), the Alexandrian mouseion (pp. 136–139), Athenian higher education (pp. 180–183) and early Hellenistic religion (pp. 190–192). The book ends with a time line (pp. 213–218), an overview of the cast of characters featuring in the book with some brief elucidation for each one of them (pp. 219–225), family trees of the later Argeads and early members of the Successor dynasties (pp. 227–230), endnotes (pp. 231–243), a useful bibliography (mainly, though luckily not exclusively, focusing on works in English, pp. 245–263), and an index (pp. 265–273). In the middle of the book sixteen figures have been inserted on glossy paper, mostly of coins and works of art from or relating to the period.

If there are few shortcomings in the book, it is perhaps mainly with regard to accuracy. The most important of these inaccuracies concerns the chronology of the period, and everyone familiar with this complicated matter will therefore immediately understand that it is wholly excusable. W. has made the felicitous

¹ See now also B. Bennett & M. Roberts, *The Wars of Alexander's Successors, 323-281 BC*, vol. 1, Barnsley 2008.

choice to follow the chronology developed by Tom Boiy, which for the Third Diadoch War is based on that of Wheatley and (partially) Bosworth: after more than 100 years of debate, we can now finally say that the correct chronology has been established, at least in its basic outlines (Triparadeisos 320, deaths of Eumenes and Olympias winter 317/6, battle of Gaza late in 312).² At one point, however, W. does get in chronological trouble, because from the summer of 313 until the winter of 312/311 the chronology of Smith and Hauben is to be preferred to that of Boiy and Wheatley, as I argue elsewhere.³ W. thus mistakenly places Antigonos' attempt to cross the Hellespont that failed when the Byzantines refused to assist in the winter of 313/2 rather than 312/1. This in turn leads to some confusion about the order of events and their explanation: W. holds that the invasion of Macedon after the initial failure was "surely what Antigonos had in mind for 312". In fact, however, 312 was almost over at the time of the first failed attempt which was followed not much later by the defeat of Demetrios at Gaza and Seleukos' return to Babylon as a result of which Antigonos all of a sudden had more pressing concerns than the invasion of Macedon. Evidently, then, Telesphoros' revolt in Greece (spring or summer 312) cannot explain anything here as it had already been suppressed long before Antigonos even reached the Hellespont. Even on W.'s chronology, Ptolemy's actions in Syria in the build-up to Gaza are unlikely to have played a significant part in Antigonos' decisions not to make a move in the spring or summer of 312, as they were a minor challenge to Demetrios and the news of Demetrios' actual defeat at Gaza would only have arrived very late in the year. Strangely enough, Seleukos' expulsion from Babylon, correctly dated to 316 in the narrative, is listed under 315 in the time line at the end of the book.

Other inaccuracies in the book seem both more and less problematic. To be sure, many of them concern minor details, but as a group they do mean that the reader who is new to the subject will often be misled. Like any author who wants to write a book of history that is to be both accurate and enjoyable, W. has struggled with the tension between history and literature, and at times he seems to have preferred being enjoyable to being accurate. He does point out in the guidance that precedes the bibliography that he has "not gone into scholarly controversies" and that "more detailed and more nuanced accounts" are to be found in the works listed in the bibliography (p. 245). For instance, whereas all that the sources tell us about the death of Kynane is that she was put to death by Perdikkas and his brother Alketas (Arr. *Succ.* F1.22; cf. Polyae. *Strat.* VIII 60), W. seems to know that "Cynnane's bodyguards resisted Alketas, and in the fracas Cynnane was killed" (pp. 46–47). Such a presentation obviously adds some drama to an already dramatic event, but it also adds some fiction to the history (unless by some lucky guess W. would be correct, but

² T. Boiy, *Between High and Low. A Chronology of the Early Hellenistic Period*, Frankfurt am Main 2007. P.J. Stylianou, 'The *Pax Macedonica* and the Freedom of the Greeks of Asia (with an Appendix on the Chronology of the Years 323-301)', *Epeteris tou Kentrou Epistemonikon Ereunon* 20 (1993-1994), 71–84 had already argued for a chronology that agrees with Boiy's until the end of the siege of Tyre in the second half of 314.

³ L.C. Smith, 'The Chronology of Books XVIII-XX of Diodorus Siculus', *AJP* 82 (1961), 283–290; H. Hauben, 'On the Chronology of the Years 313-311 B.C.', *AJP* 94 (1973), 256–267; A. Meeus, 'Diodorus and the Chronology of the Third Diadoch War', forthcoming in *Phoenix*.

how does one know?). She may just as well have been arrested first and executed at a later moment, or perhaps they feigned reconciliation and invited her to dinner to kill her unawares — a tactic used several times by the Successors (Plut. *Mor.* 530d; *Demetr.* 36.3–6). The possibilities for speculation are almost endless, but one wonders about the point.

A particularly striking case is to be found on p. 144 where W. writes that “in every case where we know the details, the Successors’ assumption of kingship followed significant military success”. He then lists all the Successors and the victory that allowed them to take up the diadem, indicating only in Kassandros’ case that it is a speculative guess. However, neither Diodorus (XX 53.3–4) nor Plutarch (*Demetr.* 18.1–2), Appian (*Syr.* 54), Justin (XV 2.11–12) and the Cologne papyrus (*P. Köln* VI 247, col. II) suggest that the other Successors awaited such victories to adopt the royal title, rather to the contrary. W.’s decision to indicate the speculative nature of his statement only in the case of Kassandros implies an arbitrary method whereby speculation that the author deems highly likely receives the same status as events for which we have evidence, and only speculation that leads to less likely results is actually considered speculation. But speculation is a process in which nothing is certain and where what is likely may well be wrong and what seems unlikely might, on the other hand, be correct. Even in a work directed at a wider audience the ancient historian should — alas — be able to practice the *ars nesciendi* just as well as the *ars bene dicendi*. This seems especially so given the standard practice in books for a wider audience to limit the notes to the bare minimum, whereas a work directed at a scholarly audience, the footnotes and the writing style should indicate where the evidence ends and speculation begins.

The same tendency is to be observed in the time line (pp. 213–218), where Lysippos is said to have died in 315, which is only the *terminus post quem* (Ath. XI 784c); he may have lived on for some years after that date. Given our lacunose source record, the chance that an ancient individual about whose life we are not very well informed died immediately after his last dated occurrence in the sources is probably not so high as to allow the assumption that in most cases they must have died very soon after that date. The fact that the uncertainty of other dates is indicated (“ca.”) only increases the impression that Lysippos’ death in 315 is certain. The same goes, e.g., for Ptolemy’s move of his capital to Alexandria which is dated to 313 without any qualification (also on p. 136).

In the discussions of the culture of the period and in the thematic chapter 13 on the kingdoms of Ptolemy and Seleukos, W. has understandably had difficulties of chronological demarcation too, both because we do not always know very much about certain aspects of culture under the Successors and because the dates are often not clear. W. sometimes indicates that he is sketching later evolutions and notes in the chapter on the Ptolemaic and Seleukid kingdoms that we have to work largely by projecting later developments back into the period of the Successors by means of “intelligent guesswork”. Even so, one may wonder about the relevance of some elements W. has included and which can at times be quite misleading. The most extreme example is probably the one to be found on p. 164 where W. gives the impression that the standard practice in the Ptolemaic *and* Seleukid kingdoms was

that the language of the case documents for a lawsuit determined in which court the case was heard. He thus turns a law of Ptolemy VIII from 118 BC (*P. Tebt.* I 5, 1. 207–220 = *C. Ord. Ptol.* 53), into a general rule for both empires around 300 BC. In the section on ‘Athens and Early Hellenistic Culture’ (pp. 84–88) even Theocritus and his presence at the Ptolemaic court have been included. While W. does mention the appropriate chronological context, one still wonders why he has favoured to include this here, rather than expanding, for instance, the discussion of comedy beyond the sole figure of Menander, which would have nuanced the picture of New Comedy as an allegedly almost completely apolitical genre.

There will of course always be disagreement about interpretations. In the preface W. tries to increase the importance of the Successors by means of a mild overstatement of the currently most popular paradigm on Alexander the Great: “Alexander had left things in a mess” (p. x, cf. 10–11). The Successors were responsible for creating order in this mess and consolidating Macedonian rule in the east. While the Diadochoi’s role as consolidators was undoubtedly important, the view that Alexander was only interested in conquest and had taken no steps to organize his newly won empire may emanate from the literary sources in the sense that they focus on the exciting aspects of military conquest rather than the dull side of imperial administration, but it also ignores such evidence (literary, epigraphical and numismatic) as there nonetheless is for Alexander’s administrative actions.⁴

W. contends that it may have been possible at the beginning of the Successor Wars for one of the generals to gain control of the entire empire, but not at the end of it (p. xi, cf. 210–211). It may well be that realist historians take it as a law of history that “contiguous powers with imperialist ambitions are bound to clash and so limit those ambitions”, but one wonders whether Ptolemy III, Antiochos III, Philip V and so many other Hellenistic kings would have agreed with this view. Seleukos was close enough to reuniting Macedon with almost all of what was left of Alexander’s Asian conquests, and it would certainly not have been impossible for him to actually achieve this and for him or one of his successors to add Egypt as well. Antiochos IV proved in 168 that this was possible, and Ptolemy III had already gone the other way around some about eighty years earlier. The definitive proof was eventually delivered by the Romans, who certainly had to clash with contiguous imperialist powers too, when they conquered all Hellenistic kingdoms. It was not impossible, then, and the situation certainly need not have limited the ambitions of the Hellenistic kings too much; many of them seemed more than eager to disprove this law of history.⁵

⁴ W. E. Higgins, ‘Aspects of Alexander’s Imperial Administration’, *Athenaeum* 58 (1980), 129–152; W. Heckel, review of J.D. Grainger, *Alexander the Great Failure. The Collapse of the Macedonian Empire*, London 2007, *BMCR* 2008.09.30, <http://bmc.brynmawr.edu/2008/2008-09-30.html>: “That he took numerous administrative and financial measures during his brief reign should be clear to anyone who bothers to read the first volume of Berve 1926, and it is almost certainly the case that, if the sources were not entirely focused on the military aspects of Alexander’s career, we might know even more about these relatively mundane matters. Nevertheless, the information is available to those who take the trouble to find it. For those who are merely intent upon denigrating the king’s achievement, a few generalizations and a sprinkling of rhetoric suffice”.

⁵ M.M. Austin, ‘Hellenistic Kings, War, and the Economy’, *CQ* n.s. 36 (1986), 456–457.

I do not see how the 114 elephants in the coalition army of eastern satraps in 318 could have turned into “a gift from an Indian king to one of Peukestas’ allies”, while our only source says that Eudamos had gotten hold of them by killing Poros (Diod. XIX 14.8).

In spite of its likely nature as a *vaticinium ex eventu*, W. considers the prediction of Seleukos’ kingship by the oracle of Didyma as an actual historical event that Seleukos referred to in order to encourage his men on the way back to Babylon in 311 (p. 123), and he even gives Seleukos’ visit to the oracle a precise historical context in 315 (p. 112). It is further adduced as evidence for the Successors already claiming kingship before the official adoption of the royal title (p. 144). Perhaps, but one rather gets the impression that the prophecies in Diodorus (XIX 55.7 and 90.3–4) and Appian (*Syr.* 56) simply emanate from later (post 306 or even post 301) Seleukid propaganda.

W. holds that the with assumption of kingship the territorial divisions became clearer, because the Successors “could not all be kings of one empire” (p. 143). He seems to confuse the worlds of reality and claim here. The Diadochoi could not all be king of one empire, but they could all claim to be the only legitimate king of that empire. The fact that the Antigonids were the first to officially claim the title does not make them more legitimate, certainly not in the eyes of their enemies. Thus, the kingship of the others need not have been limited to “the territory they currently occupied — and to whatever else they could still win by the spear”.

W. further claims that “heredity was irrelevant for the Successors” (p. 144). This makes one wonder why they were all trying to establish family ties – real or imagined – with the Argead dynasty. Polybius (V 10.10) states that “all through his life [Philip V] was at great pains to prove that he was allied in blood to Alexander and Philip”. If the Argead affiliation still mattered so much a hundred years later, it is likely to have been even more important at the time of the Successors.⁶

In his description of Demetrios’ situation in 288, W. contends that “in central Greece only the perennial hostility of the Aetolians remained”, but it seems that Demetrios and the Aitolians had just concluded a five year armistice (*SEG XLVIII* 588).

Although readers with a serious interest in the period would do well to dig further in the more nuanced accounts, these shortcomings on the whole do little to detract from a book which is an excellent introduction for the newcomer to the period. Even the specialist who wants to engage with the interpretations offered by W. will find the book stimulating. W. is to be congratulated on having written a clear, insightful and very enjoyable introduction the history of Alexander’s Successors.

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⁶ J.L. O’Neil, ‘The Creation of New Dynasties after the Death of Alexander the Great’, *Prudentia* 32 (2000), 118–137; A. Meeus, ‘Kleopatra and the Diadochoi’, in P. Van Nuffelen, ed., *Faces of Hellenism. Studies in the History of the Eastern Mediterranean (4th century B.C.-5th century A.D.)* (Studia Hellenistica 48), Leuven 2009, 63–92.