

**P. Kosmin, *The Land of the Elephant Kings. Space, Territory, and Ideology in the Seleucid Empire*.** Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. 2014. pp. xvi + 423. 9 maps, 15 illustrations. ISBN: 978-0-674-72882-0.

This book investigates how the Seleucid kings “worked hard to make the imperial space their own, how they tried to transform the landscape over which they ruled into a meaningful and legitimate territory”. It is about the necessity that “the land had to become Seleucid”—a (central) aspect of the larger question of how Seleucid kings “could govern such an arbitrary and complicated space and ... legitimize their rule over it”. Devotees of Xenophon will recognize a version of the question posed about Persian rule at the start of *Cyropaedia*. Xenophon’s answer privileged the ruler’s capacity as personal leader—someone who can manipulate people through direct contact or institutionalized structures. K.’s answer is of a different sort. But one of his conclusions is that the articulation of landscape created ultimately fatal fault-lines; and one of Xenophon’s insights is the vulnerability of a system heavily dependent upon an individual’s personal qualities. In both cases the seeds of failure lie in the nature of previous success.

The book falls into two sections. Section A (Parts I–II) uses discussion of the kingdom’s eastern, northern and western limits to address the establishment of what classically constituted the Kingdom of Asia—the Seleucid successor to Alexander’s implicit entity of the same name. Section B (Parts III–IV) deals with the “how this closed space was articulated and practiced”.

The Treaty of the Indus plus Megasthenes’ *Indica* (with its traditional date in contrast to Bosworth’s, of which K. provides a reasoned critique) validated the view that it was natural for the Seleucid realm to end at the Hindu Kush and to co-exist with a Mauryan state that developed its own agenda of spatial delimitation (expressed through the placing and content of Ashoka’s inscriptions) and became a *locus* for political theorizing rather as Sparta did in classical Athens. This is not so much the absence of “imperial cartography of illegitimate seizure” (as K. implies) as a paradoxical version thereof: intellectual appropriation (a model for the *longue durée* history of India; meticulous description of the current kingdom) as a tool of—but also disguise for—political disengagement. If what was ceded to Chandragupta included territory as far west as Arachosia and Areia—well outside what might most naturally have been regarded as “India”—one can see why there was a need for misdirection and disguise.

There were no peer kingdoms in the north, so no treaties, just a different intellectual appropriation designed to create a “natural border”. At stake are the activities of Demodamas and Patrocles during Antiochus’ coregentship (294–281). Demodamas placed altars of Apollo of Didyma beyond the Jaxartes and wrote up what he had done, with a variety of putative historical precedents, including Heracles, Dionysus, Semiramis (shades of Indian history, also present *per contrarium* in the continued prevalence of nomads in Central Asia), Cyrus and Alexander, and allusions to barbarian destruction of Alexander’s settlements in the region as the precondition for Antiochus’ new foundations. Seleucid activity is thus inscribed in a *longue durée* of civilized confrontation

of the disorderly and barbarous. Patrocles was more inventive. He wrote a *periplous* of the Caspian which declared that its northern side connected to the outer Ocean while its eastern side contained the mouths of the Oxus and Jaxartes. These fantasies provided a water-boundary for the kingdom (Ocean/Caspian/Oxus-Jaxartes) to which it was later alleged Seleucus intended to add another in the form of a canal joining Black and Caspian seas—an over-the-top analogy to the canal activities of Darius or Xerxes.

The cognitive processes (indeed intellectual probity) of an author who can make such claims after having sailed around the Caspian challenge understanding. K. does not really address this—indeed in noting the “salutary contrast” that separates Demodamas and Patrocles from the “armchair scholars” of Ptolemaic Alexandria he seems to elide the question altogether. Perhaps the separate and unexceptionable evidence for Patrocles’ place in the entourage of Seleucus and Antiochus I does not guarantee that his claim to have sailed the Caspian was actually true: such evidence would after all make it easier for him to get away with the claim. On the other hand, if he *did* make the voyage, his status also made it easier to lie successfully about what he and his companions had seen. Either way it deserves more stress that the sheer mendacity demonstrates how *much* it mattered to Seleucus and Antiochus to have a delimiting discourse about the kingdom’s northern boundary. (Did Seleucus’ union with a central Asia princess have a particular effect on the royal psyche in this regard?)

As for the precise content of the fantasies, the Ocean’s role as a delimiting feature on the kingdom’s *southern* edge presumably made it attractive to seek the same effect in the north. In these terms the Darius parallel is more than casual (Darius joined one “home” sea to the Ocean; Seleucus would do the same with another one) and perhaps deserves more stress than K. gives it. To create a marine-fluvial northern border in an environment of robust geographical fantasy, one could simply have said that the Tanais (which some thought identical with the Jaxartes) actually flowed into Ocean, perhaps even into the bay of Ocean represented by the Caspian. But perhaps it was a more appropriate solution to have a royal canal.

In discussing evidence of a Seleucid administrative archipelago in the Gulf K. does not fully relate the case to the ideological geography of edges, though he does note that we are in a region “without the threat of peer-kingdom competition”, i.e. one that is like the northern border. One bit of the southern border did, of course, present such a threat, viz. the ever-problematic Coele-Syria and the Ptolemies (ideally) beyond. Antiochus IV’s decision to keep the kingships of Syria and Egypt separate is interesting here: it is as though one must go on acknowledging the existence of a neighbouring peer kingdom even if one is annexing it.

The west presented a special peer kingdom, one located in Seleucus’ own homeland. The aspirational categorization of Seleucus I’s showdown with Lysimachus about western Anatolia as a homecoming to Macedonia—a categorization powerful enough to appear both in a Heracleote historian and a Babylonian Chronicle—is, as K. rightly stresses, a remarkable ideological gesture, albeit fated to have only an indirect fulfilment.

If Antiochus' subsequent treaty with Antigonus Gonatas is a western equivalent of the Indus treaty, there was no western equivalent of Megasthenes because Macedonia could not be (re-)invented in a comparable fashion, while categorization of Thrace as barbarous and disorderly—a land of Hanaeans in Babylonian terms—was too obvious to require historiographical construction. This time, then, creativity found another outlet. There are two elements: disavowal of an actual Macedonian element to the kingdom and the formation of an *Ersatz* Macedonia in Northern Syria.

Elements of the “Seleucus romance” (a discourse of *ex eventu* predictions and symbolic events—final sacrifice beyond the Hellespont; loss of an iron ring in the Euphrates) provide ideological validation for the loss of Macedonia. The loss of the ring—encoding both acquisition (of Mesopotamia) and loss (of Macedonia)—recalls Hippias' tooth, whose loss in Attic soil confines his success to the precise part of Attica into which it falls, and Polycrates' ring, which evokes maritime power (a point not noted by K.) but only works until the ring is unexpectedly returned—the thing that will not happen with Seleucus' iron (symbolically unfloatable and irrecoverable) ring. The Seleucid Era (like the ring) made Babylonia (and so nowhere else) a central reference point for the kingdom. This was not a response to the loss of Macedonia (it existed long before) but an existing institution that expressed a world view in which Macedonia had no particular part—and indeed, in the long run, no individual place could claim special status: for the original specifically Babylonian connection surely became ever less present to people using this extraordinarily novel dating-system. The end result might be seen as a depersonalized kingdom that is simply a chronological space. K. sees the absence of a primate site as in the long run a structural weakness, and one may have to say that a quasi-regnal counting system that could long survive the kingdom's complete demise had gone too far in decentralizing or virtualizing the Seleucid polity.

Meanwhile in real geographical space the burial of Seleucus in Seleuceia-in-Pieria was a powerful symbolic choice. Northern Syria was denominated “Seleucis” and became toponymically North Greek/Macedonian or specifically Seleucid. Not all of the former names were due to Seleucids, and K. resists the notion that they fashioned a “New Macedonia”. The renaming of Syrian Pella-on-the-Axios as Apamea is a reminder that different agendas coexisted (especially as the dynastic name here is Iranian), and in focusing on North Syria the Seleucids perhaps followed the lead of a generation of Macedonian settlement (they were developing an existing diasporic pattern not wholly creating one), but, if they were buying into and promoting a Macedon-coloured alternative (to) Macedonia, it is hard to see it as unfair to speak of New Macedonia. Either way up-front consciousness of the matter was inevitably time-limited. Seleuceia-in-Pieria can be *arkhêgêtis*, dynastic *hestia* and *patris* because it both bears the dynastic name and sits in an *Ersatz* Macedonia (a space less intrinsically alien than the dynasty's real *origo*, viz. Babylon). But the kings were kings of or in Syria (both emically and etically), not least because they needed a distinctive identity alongside rulers in Egypt and (the real) Macedonia. (The case of *OGIS* 239, Antiochus III “the Macedonian” in a Delos dedication by Menippus, is a rule-proving exception; and he and his next-but-one-

successor—confronting Rome—were much more interested in Greece than Macedonia. Incidentally, the comparison of Antiochus IV energetically being energetic in Old World Greece with the *Kulturpolitik* of the Attalids—both seen as attempts by people to compensate for uncertain status—calls to mind the comparative lack of *Kulturpolitik* among the Seleucids in general.) As K. nicely observes, Stratonice’s Akkadian transmutation into *Astartanikku* encodes the dynasty’s North Syrian character through allusion to the region’s goddess Astarte.

With border-definitions dealt with, K. turns to internal spatiality. But we are not quite through with frontiers.

First, Popilius Laenas’ gesture at Eleusis is interpreted as a allusion to spatial delimitation as a Seleucid trope: Antiochus IV was symbolically put inside the boundary of his (proper) kingdom (i.e. excluding Egypt) and invited to consider whether he would leave it aggressively or peacefully. One may wonder, though, whether Popilius needed to be aware of a persistent Seleucid trope here, or just of the fact that Antiochus had lately crossed his actual border aggressively and sequestered Egypt, albeit as a separate kingdom. Next, the peculiar circumstances of post-Apamea history resulted in many Seleucid princes returning from outside to take power and formally asserting their kingship at the crossing of the kingdom’s frontier—this certainly, if accidentally, underlined frontier-delimitation. A hard-to-answer question here is whether there could have been a version of Seleucid ideology in which it would *not* have occurred to returning princes that the border was the proper “coronation” point. In the particular circumstances of 175 Eumenes II *et al.* had quite a strong interest in insisting on the Attalid/Seleucid frontier and may have played a role in determining the way things went. There were also quasi-precedents in the context of royal weddings, outlined by K. in a subsequent section. Finally, a plausible case is made that Antiochus III’s marriage to a Chalcidian girl represented a wedding with the island of Euboea and symbolized (and validated) the king’s acquisition thereof. For the symbolism involved one might compare the Spartan Callicratidas’ announcement that he would stop Conon *moikhônta tèn thalassan* (Xenophon *Hellenica* 1.6.15)—which implies that Callicratidas claimed the sea as his legitimate wife.

Moving genuinely inside the kingdom’s frontiers, the remainder of the book focuses on royal journeys and colony-creation.

The journeys are seen as a mechanism promoting provincial integration and expressing royal control. That is plainly reasonable, but one becomes rather more conscious hereabouts of the scrappiness of available sources. An opening section notes (and displays in illustrative maps) that kings do a lot of travelling on the Babylon-Sardis and Babylon-Gaza axes and less elsewhere. That is not particularly surprising, but one can only fear that the proportions we now see are an artefact of scanty source-material. What we precisely would like to know is what the true level of travel away from the main two axes was, especially if such travel might be more likely to be dictated primarily by display rather than the need to get from A to B for specific purposes—a distinction K.

rightly draws. But the sources are not helpful: tellingly the section “On the road”, which introduces the concept of travelling “as a way of being somewhere or inhabiting by travelling through”, includes stories involving (i) the king being in landscape away from cities (but normally with armies) and (ii) the king’s tent (but not necessarily *en route*: Achaeus was brought to a tent presumably immediately next to Sardis). One could wish for the sort of evidence of royal perambulations to be found in the Persepolis Fortification archive. (Other potential Persian parallels, such as Darius III’s departure from Babylon in 333 or Artaxerxes III’s march on Egypt in 343, might have been mentioned.)

That said, the discussion of Antiochus I’s “Persian festival” as an ideological integration of army and local people, the detection of something similar in Posidonius’ hostile account of Antiochus VII’s *anabasis*, and the interpretation of the sympotic Heracles at Behistun as an image of Seleucid “tryphic” conquest are well worth attention; a brief section on “Parades and parodies” shows that descriptions of journeys of kings as prisoners, defeated army-leaders or otherwise under duress might be calqued upon happier versions of royal progress; a formalization of *adventus* ceremonial can be detected; and, more generally, the discussion as a whole gathers as best it can a lot of pertinent material. If the end result seems less than the sum of its parts, one can only sympathize with K. One particularly tantalizing issue is that of milestones. For those who do not believe in Achaemenid milestones, the existence of any Seleucid ones (especially as two come from Persis) represents something strikingly novel, and very relevant to spatial appropriation. But would anything like a systematic use of such things have yielded only three surviving examples in total?

Unlike travelling kings, colonies stay put, making analysis somewhat easier. As an enterprise they are a pure Alexander-inheritance, but they constitute one of the most distinctive and well-known aspects of the Seleucid dispensation and naturally entice the spatial analyst. Not that they are an evenly spread spatial phenomenon, as K.’s maps (184–185) display: they cluster in west/south-central Anatolia, North Syria, Palestine-Jordan and the Tigris Valley, though in K.’s analysis what we have are two “colonial panels”, in North Syria (especially the Tetrapolis) and the Tigris Valley, with other elements functioning as “colonial hinges”—a metaphor I confess I do not find particularly lucid. Either way, it is one of history’s ironies that two of the more familiar colonial sites, Dura-Europus and Ai Khanum, lie outside these principal clusters. There is a mixture of new and re-used sites, but the total effect was a radical change to the map. (K. speaks of “a complete restructuring of Achaemenid and Iron Age patterns of local settlement size and distribution” both in the main panels and elsewhere, e.g. the Amuq Valley, Homs, the Beqa’, the Diyala valley, Susa, Ai Khanum.) The process involved considerable physical and demographic dislocation, perhaps even at times a deliberate exorcism of the pre-Seleucid terrain: the continuing sense of old and new that K. evokes in the inhabitants of Ai Khanum contemplating the abandoned Achaemenid Kohna Qale just to the north will have been paralleled at Apamea (beneath the hill of Celaenae) and many other places. (Sometimes this took the form of a pre-existing

indigenous settlement surviving as a separate quarter of old-style architecture within the city—in its own way a reminder of what had changed with the arrival of victorious outsiders.)

The associated ideology is uncomplicated, expressed through names (normally from the royal family) and foundation-narratives, of which Appian's story about Seleuceia (encoding fate's determination that the foreign monarch will embed his rule irrespective of the wishes of indigenous people) is the best-preserved example. K. notes a striking verbal echo of Herodotus on Cyrus' conquest of Croesus which hints at the world-changing status of Seleucus; and another antecedent for the *roi bâtisseur*, in officially inspired constructions of the past, may have been Nebuchadnezzar II.

At the level of individual site architecture the “grandiose orthogonal cities of the Seleucid kingdom...manifest a distinct and instantly recognizable imperial urbanism” (202), involving a “geometric uniformity...without precedent in the Near East”. And the blocks are not just an architectural expression of imposed standardization but an organisational system for military and labour purposes. (The association of *plinthion* and *corvée* vaguely recalls the *ḏīku ša bābti* [“levy of the city-ward”] or *ilku ša bābti* [“tax-/service-obligation of the ward”] attested in Achaemenid Borsippa, though perhaps the *plinthion* lies in terms of size between the ward and the individual house, also a potential tax-basis in Achaemenid times.) Alongside, but separate from, the civic grid (in larger places) were the fortress and the palace, physical reflexes of the Haussmann-like aspiration for control implicit in the grid.

But at this point K. introduces another perspective. “Behind Baron Haussmann saunters the flâneur.” More mundanely, kings create cities, but (in various senses) the cities strike back. Palaces take on a “forbidden city” character (a proposition based archaeologically on Ai Khanum, but bolstered by stories of royal withdrawal or transgressive wandering), perhaps suggestive of an intrinsic tension between king and city, perhaps merely of the danger of creating such a tension. That Antioch-in-Persis replied to the Magnesian *theôroi* in its own right, even though Antiochus III was resident there at the time and also gave an answer, illustrates the city-king separation in a different fashion, as does the existence of quasi-municipal coinage. Since this too is a feature from the time of Antiochus III and later, perhaps it is an ominous sign rather than symptomatic of a healthy regard for the autonomous space proper to properly formed cities. More remarkable is that *non-Seleucid* foundation-narratives were in circulation, even for Tetrapolis cities. Even so, perhaps this reveals not so much an anti-royal posture as a desire to keep up with the “old world” in an environment that was (after all) full of mythological kinship diplomacy. (The Clearchus/Cineas inscription at Ai Khanum is a sort of parallel too, both in the assertion of a connection with Delphi and the sages and in the privileging of Cineas over the dynastic founder.)

But one undoubted effect of the multiplicity of cities and the valorisation of some of them both by kings and by the cities themselves was the cities' role in the fragmentation of the kingdom's final era as places to be wooed or shunned by competing would-be

rulers—and *vice versa*. This is an important insight. Intra-familial conflict between senior and cadet branches was also a *sine qua non*; but such problems will arise sooner or later in a dynasty (though Roman manipulation exacerbated the situation in this case), so the deliberate creation of a kingdom without a single central focus may plausibly be regarded as the more primary cause of failure.

But could Seleucus and his successors have behaved differently? Was it inescapable that Alexander's Funeral Games would eventually produce a litany of pointless matches between lower league teams more notable for transient provincial self-importance than the possession of any salient skills? Drawn west by Macedonian heritage but east by an initial base in Babylon, the eastward extension of the realm that initially fell to him and even the Iranian origin of his Queen, Seleucus was perhaps condemned to indecision. It was possible to hive off India (and even live with the loss of Macedonia). But there was no one safe to whom to hive off Mesopotamia and the Iranian plateau. Yet, whatever Alexander may have thought, Babylon was too alien a place from which to rule to the exclusion of all else.

For those brought up on pre-Hellenistic history, familiar at first hand with the landscape of mainland Greece and (therefore) at ease with the scale and fragmentation of the classical Greek world, one of the problems of the post-Alexander dispensation is space—there is too much of it, it is mostly not familiar at first hand and one struggles to find a happy compromise between the quasi-global and extremely local. This is a problem about the Hellenistic world as a whole, but is particularly prompted by the Seleucid kingdom. Those who supplement a classical training by study of the Achaemenid empire are slightly better off. But the comparative cohesion and stability of the Achaemenid imperial state (not to mention the character of the salient source material) make it easier to grasp. K.'s book does not solve this problem, but, in the spirit of the part-of-the-problem-part-of-the-solution trope, it certainly makes a contribution. The proposition that the Seleucids themselves consciously perceived space as an issue is, at worst, comforting and, at best, provides a way to frame one's reaction to the difficulty. In fact, it provides a way towards the compromise just mentioned. The kingdom is an aggregation of spaces (geographical and/or virtual) of various sorts, and this mental fact is true whatever the kingdom's actual size at any given moment. The actual size certainly varied and, in the long run, generally downwards. Those whose first dim experience of the post-Alexander Near East is with an off-stage part of late Roman Republican political history perceive another fragmented world and are liable to find Pontus more impressive than Syria. Readers of K.'s book will not dissent, but they are better placed to understand the late Seleucid monarchs who squabbled over a small amount of territory but whose mental map perhaps still had the spatial characteristics established by Nicator two centuries and more earlier.

CHRISTOPHER TUPLIN  
UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL