Early Hellenistic History: Nineties Approaches (Review Article)¹

This paper will consider a selection of recent books in English on the Successor period and the earlier part of the Hellenistic Age. A new burst of scholarly energy has been devoted to this area of study in the last few years and some change in direction is discernible; but it is evident that long lead times to publication have been making it hard for authors to respond to others' work. Therefore the aim here will be to make explicit the differences of method and outlook which lie behind divergent views, and to suggest points of convergence which may be worth noting.

Two Conventional Approaches

1. Biography

¹ The books discussed in this paper are the following:


A commission to write a biography of Xerxes was unexpectedly offered to a colleague of mine not long ago. Perhaps wisely, he declined; but the offer exemplifies Routledge's recent energetic building of the biographical side of its Classical Studies list. There are new Roman political biographies: Arthur Keaveney's *Lucullus*, Richard D. Weigel's *Lepidus*, Nikos Kokkinos' *Antonia Augusta* and Brian W. Jones' *Domitian*. On the Greek side there is, perhaps inevitably, an *Alexander*. Along with these, Routledge has published two Hellenistic biographies: John D. Grainger's *Seleukos Nikator: Constructing a Hellenistic Kingdom* in 1990, and in 1992 Helen S. Lund's *Lysimachus: a Study in Early Hellenistic Kingship*.

Enthusiasm for Hellenistic biography has not been confined to one publisher. The University of California Press in 1990 put out Richard A. Billows' *Antigonos the One-Eyed and the Creation of the Hellenistic State*. All three books focus on the first Hellenistic generation in the light of the lives of individual Successors. In one sense this is an obvious path to tread: in those years the free will of a small number of individuals brought upheaval every bit as great as that caused by Alexander himself. No wide-angle picture of those times makes sense unless backed up by details of what the major players were doing. However, the path to writing biographies of these men has proved harder to find than one might expect. The record shows surprisingly few precedents. For Seleucus I there is Andreas Mehl's *Seleukos Nikator und sein Reich*, and for Antigonus I there is P. Briant's

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2 Though I do not say the job might not be done one day. The Persepolis tablets, as yet unpublished, will make a difference to this area of study.


5 A. Mehl *Seleukos Nikator und sein Reich* (Louvain, Studia Hellenistica 28, 1986).
Antigone le Borgne⁶ - which only goes down to 320.⁷ Lund’s Lysimachus can claim to be Lysimachus’ first biography, certainly in the modern age,⁸ and there is no evidence for an ancient biography.

Even casting the net wider reveals comparatively little. J. Seibert did Ptolemy I in 1969;⁹ Eugenio Manni did Demetrius Poliorcetes in 1951.¹⁰ Much earlier, in 1913, there had been W.W. Tarn’s Antigonos Gonatas,¹¹ a work evidently ahead of its time. The shelf space occupied by Successor biographies is insignificant in comparison with what a full collection of modern Alexander biographies would require; nor, I suppose, has the world yet seen the last academic career to be based on a book about Alexander the Great.

So the biographical approach to the Successor period, conventional as it might seem from an abstract methodological point of view, in fact goes to a vein that has seldom been mined. Billows, Lund and Grainger come to the task with contrasting outlooks. Billows speaks up for Antigonos, Lund finds Lysimachus able and underrated, but Grainger exercises any possible ambiguity to the discredit of his subject. So on the entry in the cuneiform Babylonian Chronicle for 320, recording Seleucus’ payment to the priests for repairs to the Esagila temple, Grainger comments (33): ‘it would be a mistake to see this as anything other than a matter of dire necessity. It went very much against

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⁷ Billows (n.1) mentions this, and notes related studies including C. Wehrli Antigone et Démétrios (Geneva 1968), which is fuller on the son than the father.
⁸ There is a ninety-page article by G. Saitta: ‘Lisimaco di Tracia’ Kokalos 1 (1955) 62-152.
⁹ J. Seibert Untersuchungen zur Geschichte Ptolemaios I (Munich 1969).
¹⁰ E. Manni Demetrio Poliorcete (Rome 1951).
the grain for any Macedonian lord to be anything but arrogant, especially after the great events of the last fifteen years. Seleukos will not have liked the suggestion of governing by conciliation, but he had the political intelligence to choose it.'

With analysis of this sort Grainger repeatedly cautions the reader not to impute Seleucus' successes to any talent for leadership or wish for reconciliation on his part. Later Seleucus' solid achievements are discussed, as they must be - at his death in 281, as Grainger says, Seleucus controlled 'the same empire which the last great Persian king had had, in about 350, that is, the full Akhaemenid empire, less Thrace and Egypt' (192). But the biographer has reservations about the man. See his comment on lack of money as the explanation of why he did not attack Ptolemy's Egypt: 'this seems like an excuse rather than a reason. Somehow the delay looks more like hesitation than caution' (316). In the world as Grainger sees it there is no chance that even after Ptolemy's land grab in 301, Seleucus might have felt that he still owed Ptolemy something for saving him in 315. No scruple, no compromise on Realpolitik.

Up to a point this is a matter of clear-headedness. The Successors were hard men and are scarcely entitled to have allowances made. Still, the reader may wonder if Grainger has picked up the condition and been too hard on his subject. The discussion of Seleucus' chequered military record on ('less outstanding than his nickname of Nikator, the Victor, would suggest' 217) plays down a key point: Seleucus won long term. His Indian defeats cost him comparatively little (cf. 111), and years of endurance finally brought Antigonus down before him. While others tried to repeat Alexander's lightning conquests, Seleucus was ready to take a lifetime to achieve his ends.

A sometimes cynical tone aside, Grainger has a good deal to offer. He is strong on treatment of anecdotes, tying them convincingly to particular moments in the developing struggles of the period. His narrative is methodically established, with a broad range of evidence used. An anti-Seleucus stance is no real handicap: it is better for a biographer to make a commitment to
an opinion than to hedge. This book will be useful for some time to come.

In Lund’s *Lysimachus* the atmosphere is different. Perhaps this is the outcome of something which is implicit in the biographer’s task: if it is sufficiently evident what justifies the book, then the writer is free to pick out foibles and weaknesses. Where on the other hand the subject is potentially interesting but not automatically compelling, there is a narrower path to tread. Seleucus was the big winner in the generation after Alexander, leaving behind him the largest of the Successor kingdoms and a dynasty which lasted two hundred years. Lysimachus’ theatre of operations was always smaller, even though after Ipsus he controlled a large slice of Asia Minor. When he died at Corupedium in 281 his short-lived kingdom died with him. Lund needs to demonstrate her subject’s import

Help is to hand: kings and kingship are back in fashion as objects of historical enquiry. S.R.F. Price's *Rituals and Power* pointed the way,¹² and *Rituals of Royalty*, edited by Price and D. Cannadine, suggests wider applications of the same schema.¹³ Lund in chapter 6, ‘Kingship, Cult and Court’, starts out with approving quotations from this work: ‘power-holders seek ways to persuade those whom they rule “to acquiesce in a polity where the distribution of power is manifestly unequal and unjust”’.¹⁴ Not that her main concern is calling attention to inequality and injustice: in fact the last chapter had concluded by arguing that Lysimachus’ governmental methods ‘did not differ greatly from those of his predecessors or contemporaries’ (152).

After a first chapter establishing Lysimachus’ antecedents and his place in Alexander’s following, and questioning the image of

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him as a money-grubbing tyrant which is derived from anecdotes, Lund moves to a useful chapter on Thrace and Pontus, synthesizing recent work on Thrace and the Black Sea coast around the time of Seuthes III. Seuthopolis\textsuperscript{15} and the Rogozen treasure\textsuperscript{16} are spectacular archaeological finds of the last twenty years from this region, but there are more than just those two to draw on. In addition, S.M. Burstein’s 1976 book on Heraclea Pontica\textsuperscript{17} and his substantial series of subsequent articles have provided valuable foundations. After the archaeological chapter, two chapters give a narrative: one before Ipsus, one after. Next comes the sequence of chapters dealing with Lysimachus as ruler (arguing against images of him generated by a hostile literary tradition) and king (the ‘rituals and power’ chapter), and finally with his last years, his execution of his son and heir, and his downfall at the final battle. Five pages (186-191) go to demonstrating that Arsinoe, built up by later writers into a wicked stepmother, is unlikely to have wielded the malign influence that induced Lysimachus to have Agathocles killed: the next seven pages examine possible motivations for this apparently ruinous move. The tentative conclusion (198) is that perhaps Agathocles really was plotting against his father.

Coinage is well discussed; the influence of M.H. Crawford as one of the supervisors of the doctoral thesis which was ancestor to the book is in evidence here. In a kinder world, the publisher would have allowed Lund some plates. The other supervisor, Amélie Kuhrt, has also made her mark on Lund’s way of thinking. In her discussion of ‘Court and Courtiers’ (178-182) she is keen to foreground, in the first place, Achaemenid parallels for the


\textsuperscript{17} S.M. Burstein \textit{Outpost of Hellenism: the Emergence of Heracleia on the Black Sea} (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1976).
designation of ‘Friends’ of the king and their functions;\textsuperscript{18} and, in the second place, instances of men of non-Greek origin as courtiers of the Hellenistic kings. This outlook is close to Kuhrt’s view of the Seleucid empire as a Near Eastern empire—under new management but multilingual and multiethnic at administrative levels - and of the establishment of Greek rule in the Orient as not involving the spread of a ‘superior’ Greek culture.

This view will be discussed further below, but I pause here to wonder if Lund is working a little too hard for multiculturalism. She writes (181): ‘Plutarch describes Mithres, his [Lysimachus’] minister of finance, as “Syrian”, but the name suggests rather Iranian origin ... of the *philoi* sneered at by Demetrius, the name Bithys may suggest Thracian origin; Paris, known only from this anecdote, was perhaps Phrygian.’ Well—*perhaps* Paris was Phrygian. Nobody could disprove it, but why not also mention the possibility that he could have come from a Greek city in the Phrygian region—Cyzicus, for instance? Similarly with Bithys: yes, some sort of Thracian origin is more likely than not, but that does not necessarily make him non-Greek in the terms Lund wants. Thucydides son of Olorus had a ‘Thracian origin’ of some kind, and I take my hat off to anyone who can think of a less ‘non-Greek’ person than Thucydides. Even on Mithres, why not believe that Plutarch’s source knew the difference between Syrians and Persians? Non-Greeks in the Hellenistic kingdoms gave their children Greek names—why not believe that a Syrian in the Persian empire might have called a son Mithres?

Lund has overplayed her hand at this point, aiming to impose a modern ideal of diversity on the little that is known of the courts of the first Hellenistic kings. Yet even if there are hints of treating Lysimachus’ government like the ancient world’s answer to the Clinton administration, Lund’s book is in general very valuable. Her writing is fluent and enjoyable, and she succeeds in

\textsuperscript{18} Though she does say (178) that ‘to see the *philoi* of the Hellenistic kings as the direct successors of the Argead kings’ *hetairoi* is probably correct.’
the crucial task of convincing the reader of the importance of her subject. Lysimachus will have to be taken more seriously in future.

Billows’ _Antigonos the One-Eyed_ fits in more easily than either Grainger’s or Lund’s book with the main stream of the last generation’s work on fourth century B.C. history. Where Seleucus and Lysimachus are in different ways sold short by the literary tradition, Antigonus (together with Demetrius) is the central figure in Diodorus Siculus books XVIII-XX. This does not quite mean that Billows ends up sounding like volume VI of the _Cambridge Ancient History_, but he is swimming with the tide of ancient historiography rather than against it. Careful interpretation allows him to go as far as drawing out plans of the battles of Paraetacene, Gabiene and Gaza, with troop strengths and units in their proper places (96-7, 100 and 126). There is no similar plan for the fateful battle of Ipsus, though there is a detailed discussion (175-185); this illustrates a tendency to dwell on high points in Antigonus’ career.

The paradox of that career is well set out. There are appealing features in Antigonus’ personality, and although Billows disclaims the intention of centring on Antigonus’ character in his book (12), he is quick to make an approving comment on Antigonus’ being a family man (9). Loyal to his wife, strict with younger son Philip, and evidently devoted to Demetrius (what else could explain his persevering with the twit?). Yet there was also a ruthless side: Ipsus and the final challenge to all his peers that it represented was not merely an old man’s foible, and Billows takes advocacy too far (185) when he aims to minimize its place in formation of judgements on Antigonus. The impulse that made him the first real king since Alexander was the same one which prompted his final self-destructive challenge to all rivals.

The author’s task in this book resolves itself into a reexamination of Diodorus’ narrative of the years 323-301, fleshing it out from epigraphy and other literary sources where possible. Billows is capable at this but the job proceeds predictably through the first, and narrative, half of the book. In Part II Billows argues for his claim that Antigonus’ career showed
the way in Hellenistic state-formation. A key element in the view of Antigonus argued for in the book is the assertion that he did much of the basic work of setting up Macedonian government in what was later (mostly) the Seleucid empire. There is little sympathy for Alexander here ('for all his romantic career of conquest ... essentially a destroyer, not a creator' [5-6]), and emphasis is given to Antigonus' status as a contemporary of Philip II. A substantial chapter on 'Relations with the Greeks' (189-236) argues that he followed a policy of rational self-interest in treating the Greek cities well, like Philip but unlike Alexander. To back this up, Billows builds up Philip's League of Corinth almost into an example of UN-style peacekeeping, renaming it the 'Hellenic Peace Treaty' (193);19 and he says of Alexander's 324 Exiles Decree that it 'contravened the treaty'. So with Antigonus the picture is of the steady older man empire building where a mercurial Alexander20 had barely done more than seek adventure and excitement.

Chapters on imperial administration and on economic, settlement and cultural policies fill out detail to buttress the claim that Antigonus' practices are the key pattern for the later development of Hellenistic governments. The prosopography of his Friends and subordinates (361-452) gives a sense of the scope of his organization, and is a valuable work of reference in itself. But Billows wants to build more on Antigonus than the man's achievement will stand. He was the first to proclaim himself a king, but the others followed smartly: the record of the Successors, and the biographies of Seleucus, Lysimachus and Antigonus, show in the end an odd closeness between the aging warlords - as they sparred they fed off each other's methods. There was no effective patent on Hellenistic kingship in its first generation.

19 Disappointingly, neither 'League of Corinth' nor 'Hellenic Peace Treaty' appears in the index.

20 The word 'unstable' is used (6).
2. *The Greek City*

A vague feeling that it has been done before steals over the scholar faced with a study of Greek city life in the Hellenistic period; but as in the biographical case, this feeling arises from a narrow base of actual work. Ordinary scholarly awareness rests on A.H.M. Jones’ *The Greek City* and his *Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces*; and at the back of their minds academics and students perhaps also have the unpublished commonplaces of many an undergraduate lecture on the development of the Greek world. Blithe generalizations directed at audiences of beginners can create the impression that all the detailed work has been done. Hence the importance of the other book published in 1990 by John D. Grainger, his *The Cities of Seleukid Syria*.

The book’s principal subject is the system of city-foundations set up in Syria by Seleucus after 301. Four cities on a large scale: Antioch, Seleuceia-in-Pieria, Laodicea-ad-Mare and Apamea (47-9); then a system of medium-sized and smaller foundations, including places probably in existence before Seleucus took Syria over (e.g. Larissa, 39-40). Antigonus’ recently founded city of Antigoneia, where he was on the point of holding a huge athletic and cultural festival in 302 when he had to leave for the Ipsus campaign, was destroyed and the statue of the Tyche of Antigoneia taken to Antioch.

Grainger adopts a more detached tone in this book than in his *Seleukos Nikator*. Occasionally he seems disappointed that the settlers in Syria’s Greek cities did not over the centuries show much inclination to aim at autonomy: he contrasts Arados, a Phoenician city whose inhabitants showed more spirit in exacting privileges from government (144-159). The political difference from the way city-states worked in the Classical period is so marked that Grainger even questions (63-5) whether the term *polis* is applicable to Seleucus’ Syrian cities - though he concludes

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that there is in practice no alternative to its use. On the whole, however, there is more attention given to analysing Seleucus' system in terms of its economic effectiveness as revealed by Central Place Theory than to recording the political deficiencies of the imperial government which decreed that the cities should be built.

Calculations (100) suggest that 'the number of new inhabitants moving into Syria in the reign of Seleukos I approaches half a million' - these people being needed to establish Seleucus' 'large' and 'medium' cities. Grainger explicitly rejects (65) the view implicit in Jones' work that 'an advance in the human condition is registered by the establishment of Greek poleis in eastern lands' - so he does not view Hellenistic urbanization as part of a triumphal civilizing mission of Greece - but at the same time he does suggest a low total population for Syria before 301, and a low rural population density (28). Colonization, though hardly an equal partnership between Greeks and Syrians, was on this view a move which produced economic growth, bringing increased use of marginal land and extending the area of settlement in Syria.

Even-handedness is not quite achieved in this connection. Grainger does work through the consequences for the economy of the huge investment and increase in activity represented by bringing in half a million settlers (e.g. at 115-9), and he discusses the effects on the previous inhabitants; but on this final point he is over sanguine: 'it would be politically stupid to antagonize these people unnecessarily ... it seems unlikely that the original inhabitants were displaced from their homes in large numbers, though some undoubtedly will have suffered' (112). This is unrealistic. Syria was spear-won land, and on Grainger's calculation Seleucus was moving in half a million people from outside. It is axiomatic that at least tens of thousands were evicted from good arable land to make way for settlers. No other way of doing it.

Antigonus had begun the job, and Antigoneia was the city which was supposed to represent the majesty of his kingdom. Hence the huge festival which he was holding just when he was
called away to the final fateful campaign: Antigoneia was Antigonus' biggest construction project, meant to provide a purpose-built setting for royal ceremonial. He had been there when he was first hailed as king by his courtiers. Seleucus did more than simply have the city torn down (a necessary gesture: Demetrius was still in business, and though he was down on his luck, fortunes were known to be changeable): he replaced it with no less than four great cities, plus a full infrastructure for a Syria that was meant to stay in Macedonian hands for ever. Seleucus' decision to make Syria special therefore illustrates Billows' idea about Antigonus as a pioneer of imperial policy while also showing that idea's limitations: Seleucus, if he was copying Antigonus' intention, was escalating so much in scope that the earlier plan seems insignificant.

Syria, which had been a backwater for centuries, became important again under Seleucus. But here is the rub - the fact which leads Grainger to edge away from the obvious on the land allotment question: it became important as a settler society, where Greeks were dominant over Syrians for ever afterward until the Arab conquest. Libanius refers to antagonism between Greek citizens and Syrian country-dwellers in the fourth century A.D. (cf. 199). Unease about sounding approving in connection with a successful imperial system gives Grainger his shakiest moments, as where he says (200): 'In the long term - longer than the Roman Empire, that is - the cities of Seleukos I could not stand on their own feet; they were artificial.' A city which collapses after 950-odd years has had a good run: 'artificial' is gratuitous.

It would, however, be wrong to carp. The Cities of Seleukid Syria is an important piece of work and an advance on G.M. Cohen's The Seleucid Colonies. The book reaches past the time of Seleucus I and the founding generation, and goes on (chapters 6 and 7) to trace their place in the later history of the Seleucid dynasty. Grainger on the Greek cities of Syria makes substance

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and detail available to readers where before there could all too often be inference and generality, and he is owed considerable thanks for that.

A New Approach

Books which claim, in title or preface or wherever, to offer a 'new approach', seldom live up to their claim. But Susan Sherwin-White's and Amélie Kuhrt's From Samarkhand to Sardis: a New Approach to the Seleucid Empire is what it says it is. Not that it has been without Vorarbeiten: readers of Hellenism in the East will be familiar with the general direction of Sherwin-White's and Kuhrt's work. But the scope of From Samarkhand to Sardis is much wider than that of the earlier collection of papers. The Preface (ix) defines the project as 'an état de question of the Seleucid empire'. It is worth pausing a moment with that phrase, because it is one which reflects the book with exactitude. It is not a general history (no new House of Seleucus) - and in fact discussion is restricted, with some exceptions, to the third century, the period when the Seleucid empire was operative in its least compromised form. It is, however, crucially, an argumentative work.

A priority target for criticism is the study of the Greek city. In the Introduction the authors say (4), 'we have deliberately not included a chapter on the Greek city' - their first reason being that city life was 'the classic form in which political life was articulated in many regions'. Thus the distinction between Arados (Phoenician city in Syria) and Seleucus' Greek cities in Syria does not come in for treatment. Long lead-up times must have something to do with the non-engagement apparent here: the Bibliography lists Grainger's Cities of Seleukid Syria (though not his Seleukos Nikator) but references to it in the text are


24 At 240, giving the publication date wrongly as 1989.
scattered and skeletal. In the Preface (ix) the authors say that Sherwin-White began the drafts of the chapters of the book as long ago as 1984. Perhaps some inflexibility is inevitable.

But the authors' scepticism about this area of study goes beyond the 'nothing new under the sun' attitude on show in their comment about 'the classic form in which political life was articulated'. They speak (without giving references) about 'the obsession of modern ancient Greek historians with the classical Greek polis' (170). 'Obsession' is a strong word, but strong feelings are engaged. Countermeasures include moves to minimize the degree to which there was any such thing as a Greek city in the Seleucid realm. The authors emphasize that in Seleucid cities relative ethnic composition of the population, and statuses of ethnic groups, are generally unknown. They cite instances where evidence, admittedly late, points to a mixed population (Edessa, Failaka: 169), and say that in these places 'Greek/hellenised people lived with local inhabitants, both equally subject to the King's rulings.'25 Straws in the wind are exploited enthusiastically: at Dura-Europos the temple of Zeus Megistos was built in the Mesopotamian style, but with a Doric porch added, and the palace 'has been compared to the mixed Greek-Achaemenid plan of the Ai Khanoum palace' (172); these two pieces of information give an opening for the comment, 'How un-Greek a spectacle third-century Dura-Europos actually presented, we are not, alas, in a position to say.'

Motivation, then, is in the direction of claiming that Seleucid monarchs' explicit and implicit assertions of legitimacy directed towards particular ethnic groups in their realm entailed fair, or even actually equal, treatment of those ethnic groups within the empire as a whole. After discussing the temple-foundation inscription from the temple of Ezida at Borsippa (36-7), the authors argue (39) that 'the Seleucid kings present a coherent

25 A red herring, I think: groups can be more or less favoured without having de iure privileges or disabilities. Indeed, that is a fact which underlies much political debate today.
picture of rulers who are no foreign enemy but constitute a legitimate and just dynasty.' There are more examples of the consequences of this direction of thought than can be dealt with here, but an example of the style of analysis involved will be useful. The authors argue that Polybius X.27, describing Media as ringed by Greek cities, is misleading in the impression it gives of Greek city-building as intended to contain by encirclement territories which could be dangerous to the government (74). Laodicea-Nihavend, a site now identified by the discovery of a royal inscription, was a Greek city and is inside Media: so Polybius' hellenocentric view of the Seleucid kingdom as defined by potential or actual antagonism between Greeks and their non-Greek subjects was mistaken.

Sherwin-White and Kuhrt, after starting from a view of the Seleucid empire as 'an eastern empire centered in the middle east' (1) and rejecting the idea that 'the Greeks were in some sense politically, culturally and economically more advanced than the various peoples of the middle east whom they had conquered', go on to canonize the Seleucids as the royal family which developed an empire which was not a Greek empire - or not in any important sense. Modern scholars, with it all at their fingertips if they take the trouble, have apparently been guilty of 'overconcentration on the western edges of the Seleucid state' (2), so missing the point that places like Syria and Palestine, well known to the Greeks, were peripheral to the Seleucids' concerns.

Exposition of the basic insight ('look at the Seleucid empire from its centre outwards') thus shades too easily into arbitrary rejection of qualifications that should be made. Grainger's work on Syria, where it is mentioned, is unfairly treated: e.g. on Polybius' description of Seleuceia-in-Pieria: 'as strongly fortified as Greek cities of "old Greece" and, of course, as other Seleucid foundations (171; pace Grainger 1989 e.g. 86-7: strong fortifications were not unique to Syria).26 Grainger in fact does not say at 86-7, or anywhere else I can find, that 'strong fortifications were unique

26 The word not is put in italics by Sherwin-White and Kuhrt.
to Syria'. He does make the point that the cities founded in Syria by Seleucus were strongly fortified (and at 86-7 he is making the point that the citadels of these cities dominated their cities); but it is bad practice to represent him as thereby claiming that other cities were not.

The canonization of the Seleucids has yet more controversial consequences than this. Once the decision has been made to cast them as 'no foreign enemy but a legitimate and just dynasty', a Jewish question arises. Even with a third-century focus, the book could hardly ignore the Maccabees completely; and sure enough, at the end of the perfunctory final chapter on 'The Disintegration of the Seleucid Empire', there they are, debunked in a pro-Seleucid version of the events of I and II Maccabees. For example (227): 'Firm repressive action, using military force, was taken by the Seleucid authorities against the aggressively orthodox rebels, who attempted to impose their beliefs and cultic conventions on the Judaean peoples [sic] by brutal means.' This account pulls off the extraordinary feat of making Antiochus Epiphanes into the defender of authentic Judaism against its 'aggressively orthodox' enemies. Notice the choice of words: for the Seleucids, 'firm repressive action', 'military force', 'authorities'; for the Maccabees, 'aggressively orthodox rebels', 'impose their beliefs', 'brutal means'.

The shadow of Edward W. Said falls long across *From Samarkhand to Sardis*, though oddly *Orientalism* is not cited or listed in the Bibliography. Other scholars are speaking in terms of decolonizing Hellenistic history, but Sherwin-White's and

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28 See e.g. Maria Rosaria Falivene 'Government, Management, Literacy. Aspects of Ptolemaic Administration in the Early Hellenistic Period' *Anc. Soc.* 22 (1991) 203-227. Falivene writes (225) of 'a sophisticated attempt ... on the part of the Greek conquerors, and with the cooperation of certain individuals from the cultured strata of the Egyptian population, to acknowledge the complexities inherent in a situation of cultural contact'. Thus her model, like Kuhrt's and Sherwin-White's, is of sensitive non-hellenocentric empire-building. Puff, the imperialist vanishes. Is this
Kuhrt’s consistent revisionism is new, and goes far beyond what other left-wing scholars like Grainger have done. In *Hellenism in the East* the authors had used a quote from Said for the epigraph to the Preface:29 ‘The worldwide hegemony of Orientalism and all it stands for can now be challenged, if we can benefit properly from the general twentieth-century rise to political and historical awareness of so many of the earth’s peoples.’ In this book the authors speak of the ‘fundamental experience of decolonisation’ (e.g. 186) and attack the older scholars for their ethnocentric and imperialist views. Predictably Tarn is the primary target, accused (same page) of representing ‘the old colonial British Empire view’; though the real Tarn is more nuanced than this polemic allows - his ideas on Alexander and the World State close to the ‘beneficial ideology’ which underpinned the justifications put forward by the British in the postwar period for relinquishing the possessions which economic weakness and American disapproval made it impractical to hold. Tarn’s *Alexander*,30 completed as India moved to Independence, is not a text of reactionary imperialism: more one of mild nostalgia for the days when Kipling could be taken seriously.

A great part of Said’s effectiveness as a persuader resides in the urbanity of his work. Sideswipes are rare, and argumentation dense. There was an early warning about Susan Sherwin-White’s reception of the sophisticated model he put forward in *Orientalism* in her paper in *Hellenism in the East*, where she spoke of ‘the European invention of Orientalism (Said 1978), to which the colonial empires of Europe gave birth with their handful of often brilliant administrator scholars’.31 This summary bears virtually an inverse relationship to Said’s key decolonizing Hellenistic history? But the word ‘decolonization’ is used on the next page.


argument, which is not that imperialism produced Orientalism but that Orientalism shaped European power in the territorial expansion phase in the nineteenth century. Sherwin-White has put the cart before the horse. Hence, perhaps, the pro-Seleucid outlook: she and Kuhrt assume that Seleucus assumed the throne without ideological baggage (no one would cast him as a scholar-administrator) and took over one empire, as a going concern. Admittedly it was E & OE, and minor defects caused difficulties later (like the Maccabees); but there is no consciousness of the sort of Original Sin represented by Orientalism in Said. The Seleucids, in this book, simply are not normal European imperialists.

Readers who find this assumption plausible may put aside my comments above as an assemblage of pinpricks whose combined effect is too trivial to detract from the significance of Sherwin-White’s and Kuhrt’s new insights. Neither will such readers be deterred by small infelicities like dynastoi (16) and pre mortem (125). I am sceptical: if this is what we find in an état de question, then I think discussion still has some way to go. All the same, valuable points are made from time to time. The high output of mints in Bactria/Sogdiana under Antiochus I does suggest that there was a genuine and definite effort by the Seleucids to hold on to these areas (cf. 19); and the discussion of Parthia in the third century (84-90) explains convincingly that stories of the greatness of Arsaces I derive from a foundation myth put about by the Parthians at a later date when they really were powerful: their third-century attacks on Seleucid areas were actually an ‘insignificant and hard beginning’ (86).

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32 The Greek word dynastes is third declension. For the Latin prae with accusative Lewis and Short s.v. offers two references in Petronius; still, one would hardly encourage it.