BOOK REVIEW

Kings and Kingship in the Hellenistic World 350 – 30 BC. JOHN D. GRAINGER. Barnsley, South Yorkshire, UK: Pen & Sword Military, 2017. Pp. x + 262. Hardback, $44.95 ISBN: 978-1-473-86375-0.

In *Kings and Kingship in the Hellenistic World 350 – 30 BC* John D. Grainger proposes to offer an account of "what the [Hellenistic] kings were and did" (x). In his Introduction he states that the book is about the "work and lives and loves and experiences" of the kings who dominated the Mediterranean world (excepting the Roman and Carthaginian republics and a few city-states) between c. 350 and 30 BCE (vi, cf. x). To that purpose, the author has taken a thematic approach to Hellenistic kings by discussing, chapter by chapter, their relationships with gods, other kings, wives and children, people, cities, war, death, etc.; Eleven of thirteen chapters are titled "Kings and … " The approach results in considerable overlap and repetition, for which Grainger offers "an apology" on page x. The approach also leaves kingship itself largely unaddressed. Kingly behavior is not restricted to military success and city foundations, to inter-dynastic marriages and usurpations, as Grainger implies, but includes also ideas of justice (*eunomia*), guardianship (*sōtēria*), benefactions (*euergesia*) and piety (*eusebeia*).

The "work" of kings one might assume is governing and, of course, war, and Grainger includes a chapter on each topic. His discussion of governance (Chapter 6) hangs mainly on his notion that the authority of Hellenistic kings was "limited" by reason that the kings relied on Friends (*philoi*) to do most of their business—"agents" acting for rewards (86), which is an oversimplification of the complex relationship between king and Friends and other courtiers—though his claims elsewhere (Chapter 1 "Kings and the Gods") that a king's power was "akin to that of a god" (cf. 28, 30) seems to contradict this. On the work of war, some of Granger's contentions, for instance his claim that the initial basis for Hellenistic kingship was conquest and control of armed power (ix, 1, 5), seemingly reflect long-held views, though in this case *victory in battle*, or the appearance thereof, rather than conquest in the manner of Philip or Alexander, is closer to the mark (cf. 138; some of the most important discussions of the establishment and nature of Hellenistic

kingship are overlooked). What Grainger intends regarding his exposition of the "lives" of kings or what he means by "experiences" is not clear, nor does he define in what way "lives" and "experiences" are to be distinguished. In discussing wives and children—the love*less* "tangle of marriages and murders, plots, and civil wars" (46)—both in Chapter 4 where they appear in the title and in the previous chapter, "Kings and Kings," Grainger vacillates between calling inter-dynastic marriages "political" (40-41) and *not* political (43: "social", "prestige"; cf 58-59). Such ambiguities and contradictions confound the reader's hope of drawing conclusions.

Grainger identifies the kings' relationship with the cities (Chapter 8) as one of the most important (118), and one might well agree with his contention that "the immediate successors of Alexander" should be credited with "the main work" of founding and developing new cities throughout their respective kingdoms as a means of defense and control (124). The Successors are otherwise given short shrift in the book. Antigonus I (One-Eyed) is generally regarded the originator of Hellenistic kingship. However, Grainger declares Philip II of Macedon as the progenitor (1), and "setting aside the original kings of the time of Antigonus I" (10) he proceeds to emphasize the need to establish "hereditary" authority as one of the "methods of becoming king." Yet it was these original kings, five of Alexander's "immediate successors," who *legitimized* their individual claims to kingship by close or familial association with Philip and Alexander. Grainger does not in fact entirely set aside the "original" kings, but he does leave unexplored their associations with Argead (Macedonian) monarchy as their original method of legitimizing kingship. And by calling Philip II and Alexander III "usurpers" (vii, 1), and claiming that hereditary monarchy replaced "acclamation" as the method of succession in the Hellenistic kingdoms, he seems to suggest that Philip and Alexander were *not* hereditary kings, which is indefensible. He would need at the very least to counter the argument that acclamation was only ever a formality.

Grainger has authored upwards of thirty-five "history books" in the past three decades, more than half of which deal with Hellenistic and Roman topics, with a particular concentration on Seleucid Syria. The Seleucids indeed get top billing throughout, followed by the Ptolemaic kings (150). But by concerning himself principally with the Great Powers (36, 42), the author overlooks much that would be worth exploring. In the first of two Appendices Grainger lists twenty-nine dynasties and nearly three hundred rulers of the Hellenistic period, yet only a limited number of these are covered in the narrative; admittedly, some are known only by name. There is little illumination, for example, of the interactions of the Hasmoneans, Nabataeans, Illyrians and Numidians, either with the Great Powers or with

Rome. Moreover, Grainger severely undermines Achaemenid influence on Hellenistic kings and kingship (vi). Too few continuities with the past are acknowledged. The patronizing of intellectuals (Chapter 11) was hardly a Hellenistic innovation, after all; nor can we credit Philip and Alexander with initiating this practice (167; but cf. a contradiction at 168). For a general audience interested in what Seleucid and Ptolemaic kings did, whom they married and how they died, the book should be of interest. It will be less valuable for those looking for a systematic analysis of Hellenistic kingship(s).

CAROL J. KING

Grenfell Campus Memorial University, cking@grenfell.mun.ca