Introduction

CHRISTOPH MICHELS

1. Hellenistic kingdoms and kingship

Just as interest in the Hellenistic world with its complex cultural interactions and interconnected economies has intensified in recent decades, the dominant political structures of this time, the Hellenistic kingdoms, have also increasingly come into focus of scholarship – albeit from quite different perspectives. Two distinct approaches can be characterised as follows:[1] One line of scholarship, which is particularly influential in the Anglo- and Francophone world, focuses on the institutional foundations of the great realms. In this context, it has proved quite fruitful to examine the Macedonian monarchies in terms of their organisational structures by conceptualizing them as "empires".[2] This is especially convincing in the case of the Seleukid realm. With its different cultural zones, it comes close to modern concepts of empire and its categorisation as such helps to analyse its multifaceted character.[3] In a recent volume, this is also argued for the Ptolemaic kingdom, and both realms have been – despite their apparent differences in territorial extension and morphology – conceived as multi-ethnic empires and accordingly compared.[4]

A comparative approach is in many ways also important for the conference which formed the basis for this volume. However, its theme follows the second identifiable approach in scholarship on the Hellenistic kingdoms, namely the study of the ideological staging of the persona of the king and his dynasty, that is on 'symbolic aspects of the Hellenistic monarchies.'[5] This is a field of research that has admittedly been influenced

---

1   Wiemer 2017, 332–338.
2   Ma 2013. Cf. Schäfer 2014, who – based on the criteria developed by Herfried Münkler – also counts the Antigonids as an empire, with some qualifications. Cf. also Kaye 2022, 2 who sees the Attalid kingdom after 188 as an 'overnight empire'. Reflections on the notion of empire and its uses in Sinopoli 1994; Gehler – Rollinger 2022.
3   Cf., e. g., Strootman 2013.
4   Fischer-Bovet – von Reden 2021b. If one agrees with Strootman 2019, who characterises the Ptolemaic realm of the 3rd century as a maritime empire, this is all the more the case.
5   Bilde – Engberg-Pedersen – Hannestad – Zahle 1996, 12.

to no small extent by recent empire studies.[6] To give only some examples: The role of imperial ideology in motivating action is stressed. Empires are understood not only as a set of centralised and autonomous institutions but as networks of communication. It is recognised that the evocation of an "imagined empire" in texts (e. g. through the mention of interlocutors participating in the respective communication or alluding to the extension of the realm) emanating from the centre or mirrored in civic texts is also part of royal representation.[7] The studies by Paul Kosmin on the construction of space and time in the Seleukid empire are only one example of this trend in scholarship.[8]

Particularly in German-language research, increased attention has been paid in the past decades to the symbolic and ritual communication of the Hellenistic monarchies, after the earlier, primarily constitutional approach to kingship in this era had proved to be insufficient.[9] This is in line with a general trend in scholarship on ancient monarchic systems, which is increasingly focusing on ritual and symbolic communication and the underlying "ideologies" as one of the foundations of the monarch's acceptance.[10] This approach has shown to be very fruitful for Alexander the Great,[11] but it is also a useful starting point for the study of the Hellenistic kingdoms following Alexander's world empire, since these were dominions which (especially in the case of the multicultur-al and multi-ethnic Seleukid empire) had no basis for a common citizenship but had their only centre in the person of the monarch.[12] This is already evident linguistically when kings describe their domination as their "affairs" (*pragmata*) or their "royal rule" (*basileia*) in the sources. In fact, it was not possible to describe a kingdom without reference to the person of the Hellenistic monarch. When a Samian decree from ca. 201–197 BC refers to a time when the polis had been won back by the Ptolemies, this is naturally described as 'when the city was restored to the *pragmata* of King Ptolemaios (V)' (ἔν τε τῆι ἀποκαταστάσει τῆς πόλεως εἰς τὰ τοῦ βα[σιλέ]ως Πτολεμαίου πράγματα).[13]

In this field of research, a particularly influential approach has been to draw on Max Weber's "Herrschaftssoziologie" and his models of legitimate rule, wherein rulership or domination is the probability that a command will be obeyed by a certain group of persons and legitimacy is to be understood as the acceptance by the ruled both of authority and of the need to obey its commands.[14] In an influential contribution, Hans-

---

6   Cf., e. g., Degen 2022, 40–51.
7   Cf. Sinopoli 1994; Fischer-Bovet – von Reden 2021a, 4; Ma 2003, 185.
8   Kosmin 2014 and 2019.
9   Wiemer 2017, 308–309.
10   Cf. the overview in Rebenich – Wienand 2017. This is especially apparent in the case of the Roman principate; cf., e. g., Zimmermann 2011.
11   Among recent works on the topic, which has long been a subject of debate among scholars, see Trampedach – Meeus 2020b.
12   Chamoux 2003, 249–250.
13   IG XII.6.1 12 ll. 26–28 (=Austin ²2006, no. 145; cf. 162 n. 3 with further examples).
14   Weber 1978. Cf. Trampedach – Meeus 2020a, 9–10: 'Two findings of Max Weber are fundamen-tal in this regard: first, the distinction between power ("Macht") and domination ("Herrschaft"),