Kosmin, P. 2014. *The Land of the Elephant Kings. Space, Territory and Ideology in the Seleucid Empire*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press. Pp. xv + 423, 9 maps, 15 figures, 1 appendix. ISBN 978-0-674-72882-0. US$52.50.

The Seleucid empire has been well served by scholarship in the present generation, certainly since Amélie Kuhrt and Susan Sherwin-White presented new possibilities in their excellent 1993 study, *From Samarkhand to Sardis*.[1] The books of Ma, Capdetrey, Primo and Aperghis lead the way amongst a host of specialist articles.[2] The Seleucid economy in particular is taking its place in new thinking about the economies of the Hellenistic world, and there will be a great deal more produced on the *Astronomical Diaries*. It is a pleasure, then, in this exciting field to welcome Paul Kosmin's sparklingly original contribution to Seleucid studies.

The book has a big theme. How did the Seleucids construct and hold together such an enormous tract of central Asia, over which they had no obviously legitimate claim? To answer the question Kosmin takes a spatial studies approach, the theory, argued most famously perhaps by Henri Lefebvre, that space is socially constructed.[3] Kosmin analyses how the Seleucids carved out, inhabited and moved around the space of their empire. The work covers the whole span of Seleucid rule, exerts expert control over an impressive array of archaeological, epigraphical and literary sources, and, as you might expect from what was originally a Harvard PhD thesis, is minutely attentive to modern scholarship (the bibliography is extremely useful). It is a work of major importance, opening up entirely new vistas of Seleucid history.

The four sections, with two chapters in each, provide a neat and clear road map for the journey marked out by the author. Section I ('Border' pp. 31-76) first examines the frontier between Seleucus I's domain and the Indian kingdom of Chandragupta. Kosmin uses Megasthenes' *Indica* prominently in establishing Seleucid ideology about this frontier (Chapter 1, 'India – Diplomacy and Ethnography at the Mauryan Frontier' pp. 31-58). This is problematic, given the uncertainties about the date of the *Indica* (see below). We move then to the northern frontier (Chapter 2, 'Central Asia – Nomads, Ocean, and the Desire for Line' pp. 59-76) which presented Seleucus with a different problem, there being no organised state beyond, like Chandragupta's in the east. If Kosmin makes a good case that Seleucid ideology constructed a space here that was bounded by water from the Hellespont to India (presumably balancing the watery southern edge of the empire), it is also one that places a big burden on the very little we know about what Patrocles and Demodamas wrote. The second major section ('Homeland' pp. 79-119) then deals with the western border, looking at the effect of the Macedonian Seleucus having no Macedonian homeland (Chapter 3, 'Macedonia – From Center to Periphery', pp. 79-92), and the resulting decision to create a heartland in Syria (Chapter 4 'Syria – Diasporic Imperialism', pp. 93-119). Section III ('Movement', pp. 129-80) examines journeys in and out of Seleucid territory (Chapter 5 'Arrivals and Departures', pp. 129-41), and at the way 'Seleucid monarchs took possession of their empire by journeying through it' (Chapter 6, 'The Circulatory System', pp. 142-80), both of which topics I found persuasively argued. Lastly (section IV 'Colony', pp. 183-251) deals with urban centres, the way the Seleucids constructed, adapted and named (or re-named) them (Chapter 7, 'King Makes City', pp. 183-221. Cf. the Irish playwright Brian Friel's play, *Translations*, a brilliant study of imperial renaming in 19th-century Ireland); and how urban centres also fought back, and constructed a more distant, and non-Seleucid, past for themselves (Chapter 8, 'City Makes

[1] Sherwin-White, S. and A. Kuhrt 1993. *From Samarkhand to Sardis: New Approaches to the Seleucid Empire*. London.

[2] Ma, J. 2002. *Antiochos III and the Cities of Western Asia Minor*. Oxford; Capdetrey, L. 2007. *Le pouvoir séleucide: territoire, administration, finances d'un royaume hellénistique, 312-129 av. J.*-C. Rennes; Primo, A. 2009. *La storiografia sui Seleucidi da Megastene a Eusebio di Cesarea*. Pisa; Aperghis, G. 2003. *The Seleukid Royal Economy: The Finances and Financial Administration of the Seleukid Empire*. Cambridge.

[3] Lefebvre, H. (tr. D. Nicholson-Smith) 1991. *The Production of Space*. Oxford.

King' pp. 222-51). Such a brief summary scarcely does justice to the book's wealth of material and detailed coverage of so many subjects.

Kosmin moves throughout the wide expanse of his territory with supreme confidence, writing with great panache, often convincingly and always interestingly. The bold use of fragmentary sources, however, can leave the reader feeling a little queasy, nowhere more so than in the heavy reliance placed on Megasthenes in Chapter 1. The problem is not so much the fine analysis of the *Indica* (pp. 37-53) as whether it can bear the interpretative load placed on it. If the work is to be dated to 319/8 BC, as argued by Brian Bosworth, against the traditional dating that places it some 15 years later, it comes too early to have anything to do with Seleucid court ideology, and much of what Kosmin says about Megasthenes' significance in Chapter 1 cannot be right. The dating is addressed fully in an appendix (pp. 261-71). The *BNJ* has perhaps too readily accepted Bosworth, and Kosmin argues his position to some extent effectively, but Bosworth's view will not easily be banished. The traditional readiness to emend Arrian *Indica* 5.3 and remove the inconvenient reference to Porus, who is described there as greater then Chandragupta, is the crucial issue. I do not suppose there can be a definitive answer, but basing so much on a controversial textual emendation is high-risk.

Spatial theory has led Kosmin down all sorts of attractive avenues, but not all interpretations are equally persuasive. I find, for instance, his analysis of the circle in the sand that C. Popillius Laenas drew around Antiochus IV in 168 BC (p. 130) too much of a stretch. For Kosmin this was 'senatorial modeling of separate spatial units, reinforcing the traditional multi-polar Hellenistic world order'. The circle leaves the king standing 'within a bounded territorial unit that can only represent Seleucid territory'. The conclusion that Popillius' action represents not 'on-the-spot invention of territorial architectonics suited to senatorial ambition, but the manipulation of the Seleucid kingdom's own ideology of delimited space' seems to me highly improbable. It is a big burden for a small circle to bear, and how did Popillius, or Polybius, who tells the story, know what Seleucid ideology of delimited space was? I cannot help thinking the story is precisely what Kosmin says it is not.

Potentially more attractive is Kosmin's approach to the problems posed by Polybius' account of Antiochus III's marriage in 191 to a local Chalcidian girl, after his conquest of Euboea the previous year. Appian (*Syr.* 20) says Antiochus gave her the name 'Euboea' (pp. 136-38). This is an odd story because Antiochus was still married to Laodice, and Seleucid kings did not practice polygamy. Kosmin proposes that the king's marriage to 'Euboea' should be understood as 'the allegorical integration of the island into the king's sovereign domain'. The personification of islands and conquered peoples is well documented, and Kosmin shows successfully how 'personification was the imperial imagination's simple way of embodying territorial conquest' (p. 139). So it is an attractive idea that this marriage of Antiochus is somehow connected to his annexation of Euboea. But it leaves us with the logistics of moving from allegory to a perfectly simple story in Polybius, branded rather too easily as 'a propagandistic and literary distortion'. Did Antiochus marry a Chalcidian girl or not? There are other reports of kings doing this sort of thing on campaign. At the beginning of the First Mithradatic War, for example, Mithradates Eupator spotted a pretty girl in the town of Stratonicaea after he had captured it, and married her, or at least 'added her to his wives' (App. *Mith.* 21.82). Her name, Appian says, was Monime, and like Antiochus, Mithradates spent time enjoying her in the middle of a busy military campaign (*Mith.* 27.107). Curiously, Plutarch (*Pomp.* 36.3-6) records that Mithradates also had a wife/concubine called Stratonice. It would be tempting to think that something has got confused here, and that Stratonice was the woman Mithradates married after capturing Stratonicaea, thus possibly locating the story in the same sort of allegorical world as Kosmin suggests for Antiochus.

It would be unfair to criticize Kosmin for what he does not include, but he does say himself (p. 142) that the creation of a sovereign political landscape required, among other things, 'the configuring of the imperial space into administrative structures'. I fully accept Kosmin's contention that the kings took possession of their empire by journeying through it, and admire his analysis of this process, and of 'the sedimentation of dynastic identity into Seleucid territory', but he does not really deal with administrative structures. How, for instance, did the satrapies fit into the wider ideology of space developed by the Seleucids? I think it might have been desirable to drill down a little into such matters.

But in a work of such grand scale, what is not there can only occasion a passing frown and is soon forgotten amid the riches of a ground-breaking and exciting study, in which the Seleucid elephant, expertly ridden by its mahout over the huge kingdom, is given new life.

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