Introduction

Nach der Schlacht bei Arabella,

Hat der grosse Alexander

Land und Leute des Darius,

Hof und Harem, Pferde, Weiber,

Elefanten und Dariken

Kron und Szepter, goldnen Plunder,

Eingesteckt in seine weiten

Mazedon'schen Pluderhosen.

Heinrich Heine, *Jehuda ben Halevy* 3.

This book is about court culture in the broadest sense. It discusses the social and formal aspects of court society, palace architecture, cultural and scientific patronage, and royal ritual. There are several reasons why I have committed myself to writing this book. The most important of these is the wish to fill a gap. Historians have long recognised the importance of the royal court for the evolution and functioning of monarchic states, its influence on scientific and artistic developments, and the importance of public rituals connected with the court for the legitimisation of royal rule. Historians have mainly studied the courts of Renaissance Italy and the European Ancien Régime. In classical studies, there has been much less interest, although there has been substantial historical research concerning the ceremonial of the Late Roman and Byzantine court. The Hellenistic court, however, has been relatively neglected.[1]

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[1] Cf. R. Strootman, 'De vrienden van de vorst. Het koninklijk hof in de Hellenistische periode', *Lampas* 38.3 (2005b) 184-97. For an overview of the *état de question* see below. The present study grew from my MA thesis, *Hof en heerser in de Hellenistische periode. De betekenis van het hof voor de legitimatie van absolute macht in de Hellenistische monarchieën 323-30 v.Chr.* (Leiden 1993).

There are two reasons why the Hellenistic royal court may be deemed an important subject. First, in the Hellenistic Age the foundations were laid for the development of the royal court in later history, both in Christian Europe and the Islamic East. Second, because the court was the apex of political power in the Hellenistic world. Studying it may help us understand Hellenistic kingship, one of the most important yet still most debated subjects of this period. The formal and social aspects of the court may teach us more about the nature of monarchic rule, the way it functioned *vis-à-vis* subject peoples and cities. Courtly ritual and ceremonial may shed new light on the ideology of Hellenistic kingship because it shows how kings saw themselves or wished to be seen by others. Finally, court culture and cultural patronage may clarify the meaning and use of 'Hellenism'.

The continuity of Hellenistic kingship and court culture

In the Hellenistic Age, the Eastern Mediterranean and Near East witnessed the emergence of a new and confident imperial culture when Macedonian kings inherited and shaped as their own the legacy of the Achaimenid Empire. Later history owes much to these new kingdoms.[2] The Romans initially organised their eastern empire as a system of vassal states after the example given by the Seleukids and Ptolemies.[3] They imitated Hellenistic ruler cult and many other aspects of Hellenistic royal ideology. Hellenistic monarchic imagery—the ruler portrait, Dionysos and Herakles as models for rulers, the sun as an image of cosmic rulership—influenced the shaping of an image for the Roman emperor, and eventually the image of Christ. The Parthian kings likewise borrowed much from their Macedonian predecessors. Centuries later, the first Caliphs and the Ummayads, for the development of a monarchic ideology for the Islamic world empire, amalgamated Hellenistic philosophy of kingship with the ideologies of the Sassanians and Byzantines.[4]

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[2] The following will be against the prevailing view that the Hellenistic kingdoms had only minimal influence on the ideology and organisation of the Roman Empire and the later Near East. A characteristic, recent example is G. Woolf, 'Inventing empire in Ancient Rome', in: S.E. Alcock *et al.* eds., *Empires. Perspectives From Archaeology and History* (Cambridge 2001) 311-22, at 313, claiming that the Romans '[lacked] a model or precedent for their position in the world', and therefore developed an imperial ideology from scratch.

[3] R. Strootman, 'Queen of Kings: Kleopatra VII and the Donations of Alexandria', in: M. Facella and T. Kaizer eds., *Client Kingdoms in the Roman Near East* (forthcoming).

[4] A. al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship. Power and the Sacred in Muslim, Christian and Pagan Polities* (London and New York 1997; 2nd edn. 2001) 11-34; P. Crone, *God's Rule. Government and Islam.*

The influence of Hellenistic kingship is evident too in later court culture. In the course of the centuries, more and more aspects of Hellenistic court culture were taken over by the Roman emperors: formal aspects (the imperial *amici*), palace architecture, regalia (purple, diadem, sceptre, probably the *globus* too), royal ritual (notably the Roman ceremony of *adventus*), and even hair-style.[5] Via Rome and Byzantium, aspects of Hellenistic court culture were eventually transmitted to Medieval and Renaissance Europe, and the Ottoman Empire.

The reason behind the success and long life of Hellenistic royal culture was the amalgamation of 'eastern' and 'western' elements.[6] The basics of Hellenistic imperial rule

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Six Centuries of Medieval Islamic Political Thought (New York 2004) 165-96. Alexander lived on as ideal king, cf. E.H. Waugh, 'Alexander in Islam: The sacred persona in Muslim rulership adab', in: A. Small ed., *Subject and Ruler. The Cult of the Ruling Power in Classical Antiquity* (Ann Arbor 1996) 237-53; R. Stoneman, 'Alexander the Great in the Arabic tradition', in: S. Panayotakis, M. Zimmerman, W. Keulen eds., *The Ancient Novel and Beyond*. Mnemosyne Supplement 241 (Leiden 2003) 3-21; F. Doufikar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus. Zeven eeuwen Arabische Alexandertraditie* (diss. Leiden 2003; English translation forthcoming with Peeters, Leuven).

[5] On the adoption of Hellenistic royal hair-styles by Imperial women see D.E.E. Kleiner, *Cleopatra and Rome* (Cambridge, MA, 2005) 242-60, tracing Hellenistic antecedents of the Roman monarchy's self-presentation during the early Principate, albeit perhaps too much emphasis is laid on Kleopatra VII and her personal influence on Caesar and Antonius. P. Hardie, *Virgil's Aeneid: Cosmos and Imperium* (Oxford 1986) 85-156, argues in favour of Hellenistic influence on Roman imperialistic ideology, apparent notably in the theme of gigantomachy in the Aeneid. E. Kosmetatou, 'The Attalids of Pergamon', in: A. Erskine ed., *A Companion to the Hellenistic World* (Oxford 2003) 159-74, esp. 173, argues for Attalid influence on Roman imperial ideology, although perhaps overestimating the uniqueness of the royal ideology of the Attalids. On the continuity of formal aspects of Hellenistic court society in the Principate see K. Buraselis, 'Des Königs Philoi und des Kaisers Amici: Überlegungen zu Ähnlichkeiten und Unterschieden zwischen dem hellenistischen und dem römischen Modell monarchischer Regierung', in: id. ed., *Unity and Units of Antiquity* (Athens 1994) 19-31, esp. 24-31 with n. 14; Buraselis emphasises the similarities between *philoi* and *amici*, but nevertheless remains indeterminate regarding the question of influence and continuity. Cf. I. Savalli-Lestrade, 'Des "amis" des rois aux "amis" des Romains', *RPh* 72 (1998) 65-86, showing how in the Roman east pre-existing *philia* networks were preserved and adapted to bind cities to the empire.

[6] Throughout this book I will question the modern east-west dichotomy in which the Greeks are designated as 'western' or European; here, however, I have for the sake of convenience left this principle aside, hoping to emphasise the Hellenistic Greeks' intermediate position between the cultures of the ancient Near East and Roman civilisation.

and ideology—forms of taxation and administration, the ideology of world empire, the centrality and autocracy of the king—had eastern antecedents, but these were integrated in the more modest Macedonian tradition of kingship, and adapted to Greek morality, philosophy and religion, resulting *i.a.* in a form of personal monarchy that emphasised the qualities and character of individual kings and queens. This made Hellenistic kingship acceptable as a model for the developing Roman monarchy, a model that provided an ideology of world empire yet without it being, in the eyes of Greeks and Romans, a form of 'oriental despotism'.

Court culture and Hellenistic kingship

The principal aim of this study is to cast a new light on the phenomenon of Hellenistic Kingship by approaching it from the angle of the court.[7] Ever since the publication of Norbert Elias' *Höfische Gesellschaft* (1969) and Jürgen von Kruedener's *Die Rolle des Hofes im Absolutismus* (1973), historians studying the cultural and political history of Europe after the Middle Ages have understood the importance of the court for the evolution of the modern European state system, and the number of publications is proportionately substantial. 'Of all

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[7] For general discussions of Hellenistic kingship and its main problems see: C. Préaux, *Le monde hellénistique. La Grèce et l'Orient (323-146 av. J.-C.)* (Paris 1978) I, 181-388; H.-J. Gehrke, 'Der siegreiche König. Überlegungen zur hellenistischen Monarchie', *AKG* 64 (1982) 247-77; F.W. Walbank, 'Monarchies and monarchic ideas', in: *CAH* 7.1 (1984) 62-100; E.S. Gruen, 'Hellenistic Kingship: puzzles, problems, and possibilities', in: P. Bilde *et al*. eds., *Aspects of Hellenistic Kingship* (Aarhus 1996) 116-25; B. Virgilio, *Lancia, diadema e porpora. Il re e la régalità ellenistica*. Studi Ellenistici XI (Pisa and Rome 1999); K. Bringmann, *Geben und Nehmen. Monarchische Wohltätigkeit und Selbstdarstellung im Zeitalter des Hellenismus* (Berlin 2000); J. Ma, 'Kings', in: A. Erskine, ed., *A Companion to the Hellenistic World* (Oxford 2003) 177-95. Specifically on Ptolemaic kingship: P. Herz, 'Die frühen Ptolemaier bis 180 v.Chr.', in: R. Gundlach and H. Weber eds., *Legitimation und Funktion des Herrschers: Vom Pharao zum neuzeitlichen Diktator* (Stuttgart 1992) 52-97; R.A. Hazzard, *Imagination of a Monarchy. Studies in Ptolemaic Propaganda*. Phoenix Supplementary Volume 37 (Toronto, Buffalo, London 2000); G. Hölbl, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire* (London and New York 2001) 77-123 and 160-77. On Hellenistic ruler cult there is a vast bibliography; a good overview is A. Chaniotis, 'The divinity of hellenistic rulers', in: A. Erskine ed., *A Companion to the Hellenistic World* (Malden, Oxford, Carlton, 2003) 431-45. Important older titles are: F. Taeger, *Charisma. Studien zur Geschichte des antiken Herrscherkultes. Band I: Hellas* (Stuttgart 1957); L. Cerfaux and J. Tondriau, *Un concurrent du christianisme: le culte des souverains dans la civilisation gréco-romain* (Paris and Tournai 1957); C. Habicht, *Gottmenschentum und griechische Städte* (Munich 1970).

the institutions affecting the political, religious and cultural life of early modern Europe,' John Adamson wrote, 'there was probably none more influential than the court.'[8] The study of the early modern court focuses on three basic issues: (1) the court as a political system, (2) the court as the focal point of scientific and cultural developments, and (3) the court as the central stage for the monarchy's self-presentation – discussed in succession in chapters 3, 4 and 5.

In modern scholarship, Hellenistic kingship is mostly approached from the perspective of subject cities. By approaching it from the angle of its centre, the court, new evidence, or rather, data so far neglected or overlooked, will be used. Literature about the better documented and more intensively studied courts of the European Renaissance and Ancien Régime will lead the way into analyses of the Hellenistic court as a political instrument and as a stage for monarchic representation. The aim is a synthesis of the court as the locus of both monarchic representation (ritual, ceremonial, ideology) and actual politics (networks, social relations, diplomacy, competition). In other words: the aim is understanding the relationship between the ideology and reality of Hellenistic kingship.

The Hellenistic royal court was essentially the household of the royal family. The royal household included many 'friends' (*philoi*) of the king and his family. These *philoi* constituted the court society of the Hellenistic Age. They stood at the top of a pyramid of patronage networks which was the essence of imperial rule. In the Hellenistic kingdoms, government and court coincided, with the latter being the better term, as 'government' is a rather anachronistic term to describe the personal networks and ad hoc measures through which Hellenistic kings attempted, and not always successfully, to control the territory they claimed to control.

The court furthermore was a stage for the performance of the 'theatre of kingship'. It was the central place where the monarchy presented itself to the world. Palace architecture, the use of sacral and heroic images in iconography and propaganda texts, pomp and circumstance, the display of military power and wealth – all of it was carefully designed to legitimise royal power and to overawe both friend and foe. Most importantly, it was in the context of the court that the king himself was physically present and visible to others. What, then, were the most important 'messages' that were conveyed through the court?

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[8] J. Adamson, 'The making of the Ancien-Régime court, 1500-1700', in: id. ed., *The Princely Courts of Europe, 1500-1750* (London 1999) 7-42; the modern study of the court, and its relevance for understanding Hellenistic court culture, will be introduced more extensively in section 1.1.

The scope and structure of the book

Although the Hellenistic kingdoms owed a lot to the Achaimenid Empire, they owed at least as much to Argead Macedonia. The rulers of the Hellenistic dynasties were Macedonians before anything else. However, the Greco-Macedonian aspect of Seleukid and Ptolemaic kingship is frequently underestimated in present scholarship. In this book, the Hellenistic Age begins with the period of Macedonian expansion during the reigns of Philippos II and Alexander III. The emphasis lies on the empires of the Antigonids, Seleukids, and Ptolemies, but other kingdoms, like the kingdoms of the Attalids or the Pontic Empire of Mithradates VI, will occasionally be dealt with as well.

The book is divided into five parts. Part I, 'Court, kingship and ideology', discusses the methodology and main contentions of the study. Part II, 'Palaces', sets the stage for the drama of kingship by describing residences and palace architecture. Part III, 'Court society', is concerned with the social and political aspects of the courts. These include the central role of the royal family, the royal *philoi*, the organisation of the court and court titles. Part IV, 'Cultural and scientific patronage', discusses the patronage of art, scholarship and science at the royal courts, and the significance of 'Hellenistic' culture for the imperialism of the Macedonian dynasties. Part V, 'Ritual and ceremonial', describes the court as a stage for the theatre of kingship, and discusses the form and meaning of monarchic ritual. The book is concluded with a synthesis, titled 'A golden age', and a summary.