

# Summary

In the Hellenistic empires of the last three centuries BCE new forms of court culture and political ideology developed. The Hellenistic kings adapted and shaped as their own their Greek, Macedonian and Persian legacy to create a monarchy that was both neither 'western' nor 'eastern'. Appropriated by Parthian kings and Roman emperors alike, the culture and ideology of the Hellenistic courts eventually influenced the evolution of royal ideology and court culture in western Europe and the Islamic East.

In this first complete study of the Hellenistic royal court, all aspects of court culture are discussed in correlation: the social, cultural and formal aspects of court society, palace architecture, royal patronage of the arts and sciences, ceremonial, and monarchic representation. The focus is on the three principal Macedonian dynasties: the Antigonids (Macedonia and Greece), Ptolemies (Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean) and Seleukids (Asia Minor, the Near East and Iran). Due to intermarriage, diplomatic contact, a shared Macedonian background and a shared Achaimenid legacy, the court culture of these empires was more similar than is commonly assumed.

In Chapter 1, 'Court, kingship and ideology', the methodological and theoretical framework is set out, using recent literature about court culture, imperialism and political representation in other cultures and periods. The Hellenistic court is defined as a social phenomenon, perceived by contemporaries as the extended family (*oikos*) of the king. Hellenistic kingship is defined by the centrality of war and conquest in both ideology and practice.

Chapter 2, 'Palaces', discusses the architecture and decoration of royal residences, accentuating the ideological implications, particularly regarding the ambiguous connection of (royal) palace and (autonomous) city.

Chapter 3, 'Court society', discusses the social, formal and political aspects of the court. At the centre of the court was the royal family. Hellenistic monarchy was not an impersonal state but an inheritable personal possession; the driving force behind royal politics therefore was not *raison d'état* but the interests and honour of the family. Although there was no official crown prince, there were informal ways to designate a successor, notably by investing him with kingship (*basileia*) during his father's lifetime. The exceptional importance of women at the Hellenistic courts is explained from their role in the transmission of the in-

heritance (further on a second explanation is given: the elevation of queens to the centre of power as ‘favourites’).

The focus then shifts to the courtiers, the so-called Friends of the King (*philoī tou basileōs*). It is shown how social relations at court were determined by the Greek moral complex of *philia* (ritualised friendship) and *xenia* (guest-friendship), with the accompanying practice of gift-exchange. The system of court titles hierarchising Hellenistic court society is described as ‘a form of formalised informality’. The *philoī* served the royal family first of all as military commanders, since there was no formal disconnection of the royal *oikos* and the armed forces. The *philoī* furthermore functioned as intermediaries between court and subjects. Because they retained bonds with their families and cities of origin, and disposed of patronage networks of their own, the king was able to exert influence through his friends; conversely, elite families and cities could exert influence at court through the *philoī*. The *philoī* community consisted predominantly of Greeks and Macedonians. Kings not always controlled the composition of their court. When kings were confronted with powerful, consolidated *philoī* aristocracies, they turned to promoting dependent ‘favourites’, and this accounts for the prominence of powerful non-Greeks and eunuchs at court, particularly in the later Hellenistic period. The chapter ends with a discussion of royal pages (*basilikoi paides*).

In Chapter 4, ‘Cultural and scientific patronage’, it is argued that poets, scholars and scientists who worked at court were not in the king’s service but had their own place in the complex of *philia* relations. They offered their work to members of the royal family and high-ranking courtiers as gifts; these gifts, if accepted, would generate favours, privileges and honours. Obtaining prestige was more important than earning money. Moreover, the international personal networks of important courtiers were instrumental in the diffusion of writings and new ideas. The remarkable preference for innovation in art, literature and science witnessed at the early Ptolemaic court was caused by competition for favour and the necessity to attract attention in order to be invited at royal symposia. The subject matter of Hellenistic court literature—pastoral poetry, urban mime, the preference for obscure myths and rare words—reflected the tastes of the courtly leisure class. The principal theme in encomiastic poetry was the ideal of world empire and the presentation of imperial rule as a new Golden Age of prosperity and concord. The court was perceived as the unifying centre of the world, the zenith of civilisation. Ethnography, historiography and geography, too, enhanced the imperial notion of the *oikoumenē* as a coherent whole. Court culture was fundamentally Greek, and the Hellenism of the court, adopted by local aristocracies collaborating with the monarchy as well, was instrumental in the creation of a sense of unity in these heterogeneous empires.

Chapter 5, 'Ritual and ceremonial', deals with public representation: inauguration rituals, burial, wedding ceremonies, ceremonial entries into cities, religious festivals and processions. Ritual and ceremonial emphasised the divinity of the ruler, particularly his role as a victorious saviour bringing peace, prosperity and order.

A fundamental characteristic of Hellenistic kingship is the adaptation of royal representation to various local traditions. For instance the Ptolemies were inaugurated as *basileus* in Alexandria and as pharaoh in Memphis, and the Seleukids participated in the Akitu Festival in Babylon as if they were Babylonian kings. Thus, Hellenistic monarchy had many faces. This, however, does not mean that the Ptolemies were pharaohs in the first place or that the Seleukid Empire was in essence an 'eastern', non-Greek kingdom: above the local level there was an umbrella form of imperial representation which was truly 'Hellenistic', intermixing different traditions of kingship in a Greco-Macedonian framework.

In the last chapter, 'Synthesis: A Golden Age', it is argued, contrary to prevailing opinion, that the Hellenistic monarchies followed the example of their Mesopotamian, Persian and Egyptian predecessors of claiming absolute rulership over world empires without limits. But as they also incorporated more 'individualistic' (or: 'western') aspects of kingship taken from Greco-Macedonian tradition, the Hellenistic empires developed a form of monarchical representation that was suitable to serve as the foundation for the imperial ideology of the Roman emperors who succeeded them.

The Appendix discusses the costume of the king and three regalia: the royal diadem, the sceptre and purple dye. In Appendix, 'The king's costume', it is argued that the standard dress of Hellenistic kings was derived from the costume and armour worn by the Macedonian nobility in Alexander's time. This costume was made kingly by the use of precious materials signifying royalty, notably purple. In Appendix 2, 'The diadem', it is argued that the principal badge of royalty was neither a Greek victory wreath nor an 'eastern' crown but a new badge, created by Alexander and the Diadochs, in which Greek and eastern traditions were combined to appeal to all subjects regardless of their ethnicity. In Appendix 3, 'the royal sceptre', it is argued that the Hellenistic variant of the generic monarchic sceptre was shaped like a spear or lance, referring to the concept of *doriktētos chōra* and the king's capacity as a warrior protecting his subjects. In Appendix 4, 'Purple', it is argued, against the view expressed by Reinhold (1970), that purple under certain circumstances indicated kingship in the pre-Hellenistic Near East, just as it indicated divinity in Classical Greece.