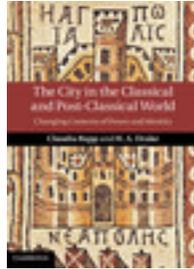


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Changing Contexts of Power and Identity

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Chapter

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TWO

HELLENISTIC IMPERIALISM AND THE IDEAL OF WORLD UNITY

Rolf Strootman

INTRODUCTION

In late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, the rulers of the Christian Romano-Byzantine Empire and Islamic Arab empires cherished the ideal of a united world under one god and one ruler. Pagan imperialist ideology profoundly influenced the evolution of this imperialist ideal of the world as a unity.

The conception of the whole (civilized) world as a single empire was continually propagated by Middle Eastern monarchies from the third millennium BCE.¹ Undoubtedly it appealed to some common belief. People living in the Achaemenid, Seleucid, or Sasanian Middle East adhered to a certain kind of belief in a legitimate Great King whose existence was in some way connected with the divinely ordained order of the world. The presence of a world ruler at the center of civilization was believed to be an essential condition for peace, order, and prosperity.

Essentially a religious concept already in pagan times, the ideal of world unity became extremely forceful when imperialism and monotheism joined hands. After Constantine, the Roman *imperator*, Byzantine *basileus*, or Arab caliph could claim to be the exclusive earthly representative of a sole universal deity. Thus, what had formerly been a somewhat indefinite distinction

¹ All dates are BCE unless otherwise stated.

between a civilized, ordered world and a chaotic, barbaric periphery now became a clear-cut dualism of believers and unbelievers.

Universalistic pretensions are a defining aspect of premodern tributary empires from China to the Americas.² This chapter focuses on universalistic ideology in the Macedonian empires of the Hellenistic age. In the context of this volume, the significance of the Hellenistic empires lies in their intermediate position, in both time and space, between the ancient Near East and the Roman Mediterranean. The Macedonian rulers of the Hellenistic Age adopted and transformed the age-old traditions of empire of the Ancient Near East to create their own ideologies of empire. Alexander the Great and his principal successors, the Seleucids and Ptolemies, “Hellenized” Eastern universalistic pretensions; they did so for the sake of their Greek subjects, on whose loyalty and cooperation their power for a large part rested.³ By converting Near Eastern royal ideology into Greek forms, adding Greek notions of belonging and unity, and actively encouraging current universalistic tendencies among the Greeks – Panhellenism,⁴ Stoic philosophy,⁵ religious syncretism – what was previously looked upon by the Greeks as oriental despotism became an intrinsic part of Hellenic *polis* culture. Macedonian imperialism thus shaped the ways in which the Greek and Hellenized *poleis* of the eastern Mediterranean later conceptualized and formalized their relationships with imperial authority under the Roman Empire. Conversely, the Hellenized variant of an empire characterized by an ideal of universal dominion provided the Roman Empire with an acceptable model for imperial unification in a world characterized by a multitude of city-states. To be sure, Hellenistic universalism not only endured in the Roman Mediterranean; it was also transmitted to the Parthian and Sasanian empires and ultimately to the empires of early Islam.

THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

When Alexander the Great replaced Darius III as ruler of the East in 330, he became heir to a more than thousand-year-old belief in universal kingship. We can trace the development of this tradition back to the early second

² For the similarities and differences between preindustrial empires consult Sinopoli (1994): 159, who defines empire as “politically expansive polities, composed of a diversity of localized communities and ethnic groups.” I return to the theme of empire later in this chapter.

³ For a comparable view, see Lehmann (1998).

⁴ Already in the classical period, the Panhellenic sentiment served as a useful tool of propaganda for the hegemonial or imperial rule of one *polis* over other Greek states; cf. Perlman (1976). In the Hellenistic age, ethnic and cultural differences between the Greeks were ironed out, especially in cities outside the Greek mainland.

⁵ In particular, the views about the unity of the world of Zeno, the founding father of Stoicism and a *philos* of Demetrius Poliorcetes (he wrote a treatise on kingship and educated Demetrius’s son Antigonos), correspond closely to the monarchical image of the world as empire; cf. Baldry (1959); I could not consult Baldry (2009).

millennium, when Mesopotamian kings claimed universal hegemony even when in reality they were not the most powerful rulers.⁶ An early instance is the self-praise of the Sumerian king Shulgi (ca. 2029–1982), the second ruler of the Third Dynasty of Ur, who calls himself “king of the four corners of the Universe, herdsman, shepherd of the blackheads, the trustworthy, the god of all the lands.”⁷ In what Mario Liverani has called the “siege complex,” Mesopotamian royal propaganda divided the world into a civilized, peaceful core surrounded by a barbaric periphery whose inhabitants are dangerous, aggressive, and wicked.⁸ In this simple matrix of human civilization versus barbaric disorder, the entire civilized world is conceived of as an empire protected from the surrounding forces of Chaos by a benevolent Great King who is himself protected by the gods.⁹ In a lengthy epic poem celebrating Assyrian victory against the Babylonians, Tukulti-ninurta I (1244–1208 or 1233–1197) is lauded as “he who [rules] the extremities of the four winds; all kings without exception live in dread of him.”¹⁰ Rival kings are routinely marginalized. They are either rebels or unruly vassals – never equals. Babylonian, Assyrian, or Egyptian kings are presented as the rulers of boundless empires in their own propaganda, expressed by such titles as Great King, King of Totality, King of the Four Corners (of the World), King of Lands, King of Peoples, or King from the Low Sea to the High Sea (i.e., from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean coast). Along with such titles, royal titulature sometimes comprised titles stressing the ethnicity of the king, thus singling out specific peoples – Babylonians, Assyrians, Persians – as benefiting specifically from the royally and divinely ordained world order.

This ideology may be exemplified by a longer quotation from an inscription celebrating the victories of the Assyrian Adad-nirari I (1307–1275 or 1295–1264) against the Anatolian kingdom of Mitanni:

Adad-nirari, king of the universe, strong king, king of Assyria, son of Assyria, son of Enlil-nirari, also king of Assyria. When Shattuara, king of the land Hanigalbat, rebelled against me and committed hostilities; by the command of Ashur, my lord and ally, and of the great gods who decide in my favor, I seized him and brought him to my city Ashur. I made him take an oath and then allowed him to return to his land. Annually, as long

⁶ See Liverani (1990), who shows how monarchies in the Near East of the second millennium – when political power in the East was divided up among several competing empires – employed strategies to deal with the inconsistency of claims to world power on the one hand and the recognition of the existence of other monarchies on the other hand, two conflicting realities that were kept radically apart as separate cognitive realities.

⁷ Barton (1918): 52; cf. Klein (1981): 50–123.

⁸ Liverani (1981).

⁹ Liverani (1979); Stadnikow (1995); Holloway (2002).

¹⁰ W. G. Lambert in *Archiv für Orientforschung* 18 (1957–8): 48–9, cited from Kuhrt (1995): 1:356; cf. Machinist (1976).

as he lived, I regularly received his tribute within my city, Ashur. After his death, Wasashatta, his son, revolted, rebelled against me, and committed hostilities. He went to the land Hatti for aid. The Hittites took his bribe but did not render him assistance. With the strong weapons of the god Ashur, my lord, with the support of the gods An, Enlil and Ea, Sin, Shamash, Adad, Ishtar, and Nergal, most powerful among the gods, the awesome gods, my lords, I captured by conquest the city Taidu, his great royal city.¹¹

Battle accounts in the Assyrian royal inscriptions present enemy forces always as numberless. Because of their inherent cowardice, rebel kings dare not fight alone. They call upon other states for help but must offer them material goods in return for military assistance – a sign of their allies' moral inferiority. Yet they are doomed because the Assyrian king alone is favored by the gods who grant him victory, even when surrounded by an overwhelming number of enemies.¹²

In the second millennium, universalistic claims in royal ideology normally did not coincide with actual political realities. Military campaigns were raids rather than real attempts at permanent territorial expansion, and in international diplomacy kings treated each other as equals, as the Amarna letters reveal. A change occurred when a new style of empire developed in the Neo-Assyrian kingdom. Neo-Assyrian imperialism aimed at the actual conquest and control of as large a territory as possible. The Assyrians set the example for all succeeding empires in the Near East.¹³ As Paul-Alain Beaulieu notes,

The history of Assyria was not only the history of the growth of an empire, but also the history of the growth of an imperial idea. Although the Assyrian Empire eventually collapsed, ... the structure it had created ultimately survived because there was no serious attempt at returning to the previous state of political fragmentation. Assyria's enduring contribution was to create the irreversible fact of empire and to inculcate it so deeply in the political culture of the Near East that no alternative model could successfully challenge it, in fact almost up to the modern era.¹⁴

For the Neo-Assyrian kings, going to war was more than a moral obligation – it was a divinely ordained commandment.¹⁵ Universalistic ideology required of kings that they always try to expand their realm in actuality.¹⁶ The yearly campaigns conducted by Neo-Assyrian kings were military as well as

¹¹ A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions*, vol. 1 (Wiesbaden 1972/6), LXXVI, 3, cited after Kuhrt (1995): 1:353.

¹² Liverani (1981).

¹³ Postgate (1992): 247; cf. Larsen (1979).

¹⁴ Beaulieu (2004): 49.

¹⁵ Kuhrt (1995): II:511.

¹⁶ For different forms of Assyrian control, see Liverani (1988).

ritual acts, and *claims* to world power now became connected with *real* conquest. A relief from Nineveh showing King Sennacherib (705–681) at prayer is accompanied by an inscription in which the king boasts that “trusting in the great might of the gods, I led my armies from one end of the earth to the other and brought in submission at my feet all kings ... of the four quarters [of the earth], and they accepted my rule.”¹⁷ The extent of a king’s military reach was demarcated both at the edge of empire and in the center. At the imperial frontiers steles, altars, or statues were set up in places like coastlines and mountain ranges, places that could be perceived as the extremities of the earth (Plate I). In an inscription of Shalmaneser III, the king boasts to have concluded a campaign in Syria successfully by constructing a statue of himself “at the source of the river Saluara, at the foot of the Amanus Mountains,” and to have erected a statue of himself and made offerings at the Mediterranean coast, after having “washed my weapons in the Great Sea” (i.e., to have established peace).¹⁸ The second mechanism was what has been called “the symbolic attainment of the world [border]”: the accumulation of images, objects, flora, fauna, and even human beings in the imperial center.¹⁹

The Persian Achaemenids, too, presented themselves as rulers of a world empire. The reliefs with tribute bearers at the Great Apadana of Persepolis are quite illustrative in this respect (Plate II): the imperial iconography and eclectic style of the palace reliefs made Persepolis a *palais des nations*, the tangible expression of an ideology of commonwealth under a benevolent Great King: “a cosmos in the real sense of the word: ordered beauty and beautiful order.”²⁰ The trilingual Foundation Charter of Darius’s new residence at Susa specifies sixteen groups of peoples that contributed to the palace’s construction by providing materials and skilled labor.²¹ Part of the vast multicultural army reviewed by Xerxes near Doriskos in Thrace when he invaded Greece in 480 (Herodotus 7.60–99) may in actuality have consisted of small token contingents brought along for mere ceremonial purposes, as Briant suggested; their participation in parades showed the extent and “infinite diversity” of Xerxes’ empire,²² comparable with the inventory of subject peoples in the Behistun Inscription where in line 6 Darius I – “the Great King, King of Kings, King of Countries” (line 1) – proclaims:

¹⁷ Museum of the Ancient Near East, Istanbul, inv. no. 1.

¹⁸ *ANET* 277.

¹⁹ Liverani (1979).

²⁰ Nylander (1979): 356; cf. Postgate (1992): 261. For Achaemenid imperial iconography, see Cool Root (1979).

²¹ Briant (2002): 168, cf. 171–2.

²² Briant (1999): 116–20; indeed, none of the exotically outfitted Ethiopians, Chaldaeans, Libyans, Outians, Pactyans, Paricanians, etc. later participated in the actual fighting at Thermopylai and Plataiai, which was done almost exclusively by Iranians.

These are the countries which are subject unto me, and by the grace of Ahuramazda I became king of them: Persia, Elam, Babylonia, Assyria, Arabia, Egypt, the countries by the Sea, Lydia, the Greeks, Media, Armenia, Kappadokia, Parthia, Drangiana, Aria, Chorasmia, Bactria, Sogdia, Gandhara, Skythia, Sattagydia, Arachosia, and Maka; twenty-three lands in all.

The principal titles of the Persian emperors were Great King and King of Kings. There seems not to have been any formal difference between the two titles, which were sometimes combined. Probably they existed alongside each other simply because they had different origins: *vazka šah* ‘great king’ was the Middle Persian equivalent of the common Babylonian title *lugal galú*, whereas the Middle Persian *šāhān šah* ‘king of kings’ presumably was borrowed from Urartu.²³ The titles could be extended with Mesopotamian designations pertaining to the same, such as King of Lands, King of the Four Corners [of the Earth], or King of Peoples.

THE HELLENISTIC EMPIRES

In the summer of 331, on the eve of the Battle of Gaugamela, the Persian Great King Darius III sent an embassy to Alexander to negotiate peace.²⁴ The envoys offered Alexander all the territory to the west of the Euphrates, an enormous amount of silver bullion, and the hand of Darius’s eldest daughter. Alexander declined the offer. Just as the universe (*kosmos*) will not hold together when there are two suns, he said, the inhabited world (*oikoumenē*) cannot be ruled by two kings; he bade the envoys to tell Darius that battle would decide “which of them would have sole and universal rule.”²⁵

Some thirty years later, when the Wars of the Successors raged, it is said that King Demetrius Poliorcetes – whom the Athenians once honored with a painting of the king standing upon the *oikoumenē*²⁶ – used to scorn people who gave the title of king to anyone but his father, Antigonus Monophthalmus, and himself. His friends thereupon drank toasts to Demetrius the king, Seleucus the commander of the elephants, Ptolemy the admiral, Lysimachus the treasurer, and Agathocles the governor of the island of Sicily²⁷ – as if his royal rivals were no real monarchs but officials in the service of the one and only Great King.

²³ Wiesehöfer (1996); cf. Griffiths (1953).

²⁴ Arr., *Anab.* 11.25; Diod. 17.54.1–5; Plut., *Alex.* 29.7–8; Curt. 4.11.1–22; Just. 11.12.9–15. Arrian dates the embassy (erroneously) to the siege of Tyre in 332; cf. Bosworth (1980): 228–9.

²⁵ Diod. 17.54.5; the metaphor of the two suns is also given by Just. 11.12.15.

²⁶ Ath. 535–6.

²⁷ Plut., *Demetr.* 25.4. Plutarch adds that Lysimachos was the most offended because the office of treasurer was commonly given to eunuchs.

Universality is not a well-known aspect of Hellenistic ideology. Modern scholarship usually describes the world of the Macedonian empires in terms of a balance of power.²⁸ Both Alexander's and Demetrius's universalism are therefore commonly believed to be exceptional – the first an illustration of Alexander's idiosyncratic *pothos*, the second evidence for Antigonos's and Demetrius's over-ambitious plans to reunite Alexander's empire as opposed to the other Diadochs' more limited aspirations. But as far as the Hellenistic kings themselves were concerned, there was no such thing as a balance of power. The perception of the *oikoumenē* as an empire, united under the rule of a single great king, was a core element in the ideologies of Ptolemies and Seleucids, precisely as it had been characteristic of the ideologies of the preceding Egyptian and Near Eastern monarchies for many centuries.²⁹ In other words, the two episodes just paraphrased, rather than being anomalous, are *typical* for the imperial ideology that Hellenistic kings – “men to whose rapacity neither sea nor mountain nor uninhabitable desert sets a limit” to use Plutarch's words³⁰ – promulgated and lived by.

The adoption of oriental universalistic ideology and propaganda by the Macedonians took place under Alexander the Great. Alexander out of necessity had to create means to pacify and unite his newly conquered empire. He needed to position himself vis-à-vis various nations and polities. He had to relate himself to the preceding Achaemenid Empire and its Iranian imperial elite. He transformed both his kingship and his court to fit his new status, against strong opposition from the members of the most powerful Macedonian noble families, who understood, with good reason, that Alexander's increasingly autocratic style was a threat to their own power. Alexander, conversely, saw the Macedonian nobility as a threat to *his* ambitions, and with equally good reason. The resulting conflicts are well known: the *proskynēsis* affair, the pages conspiracy, the violent deaths of Alexander the Lynkestian, Philotas, Parmenion, and Cleitus the Black.³¹ Alexander was ultimately victorious in

²⁸ E.g., Müller (1973); Will (1984): 38; Shipley (1993); Bosworth (2006): 12–13. Proverbial exceptions to the rule are Ager (2003): 49–50 and Adams (2006): 49.

²⁹ Interestingly, if we look more carefully at Darius's offer to Alexander, it becomes clear that the Great King himself likewise found it inappropriate for the world to be ruled by two kings; the offer to marry his daughter unmistakably entailed a notion of hierarchy: Alexander, as Darius's son-in-law, was offered dominion of the western Achaemenid lands only as a viceroy. As all biographers of Alexander make notice of the peace offer, it is usually accepted as historical fact; if not, it may reflect the later Seleucid practice to transform rebellious rulers into vassals by granting them the title of king and through dynastic marriage; cf. Strootman (2011).

³⁰ *Pyrrh.* 12.2–3. Plutarch's critical appraisal of the Diadochs' motives is pithily expressed in the word *πλεονεξία* (rapacity), that is, the craving for expansion at the expense of others, a vice he attributed in particular to Pyrrhos (cf. 7.3; 9.6; 23.2; 30.3); however, just as the vanity and pomposity ascribed to Hellenistic kings by pro-Roman authors was in fact a misinterpretation of *tryphē*, so too was the greed ascribed to these kings derived from their own self-presentation as triumphant world rulers.

³¹ For a complete overview, see Müller (2003).

this power struggle by cooperating with members of the lesser Macedonian nobility and non-Macedonians (Greeks and Iranians).

What concerns us here, however, are not the conflicts at Alexander's court but the way in which Alexander and his successors reshaped the ideology of empire, and the practical consequences of that ideology. Alexander presented himself as the legitimate successor of Darius III, whose throne he had won by right of victory. This does not mean that Alexander continued the Persian Empire, that he was the "last Achaemenid," as it is now widely held; it means simply that he claimed to have taken over from Darius the status of world ruler. To augment the legitimacy of his takeover, Alexander married a daughter of Darius and a daughter of Artaxerxes III in 324 so that his offspring would be the formal heirs of the title of Great King by matrilineal descent through two branches of the Achaemenid family.³² Thereafter, claims to world empire by Hellenistic kings, in particular the Seleucids and Ptolemies, found expression in royal titulature, ideological texts, public royal ritual, and visual imagery. In the following section, three aspects of Hellenistic universalism that were to endure in later ages will be discussed: the ideal of limitless empire; the concept of a golden age; and the use of cosmic, in particular solar, images as expressions of universal rule.

WORLD EMPIRE

The lack of contemporary Persian sources makes it impossible to prove that Alexander styled himself (or was styled) Great King and King of Kings. It is hard to imagine, however, that in his dealings with the Iranian nobility Alexander would have presented himself as a lesser king than Darius had been. In the Babylonian astronomical diaries Alexander is King of the World and King of Countries.³³ In his dealings with the Greeks, Alexander adopted the newly invented Hellenic title King of Asia.³⁴ This was an adaptation of the oriental title Great King. It was carefully created not to antagonize the inhabitants of mainland Greece and Macedonia, who were excluded from its pretensions (the designation Asia however could include Egypt).³⁵ The title King of Asia

³² Diod. 17.107.6; Just. 12.10.9–10; Arr., *Anab.* 7.4.4; Curt. 10.3.12; Plut., *Alex.* 7.2; *Mor.* 329e, 338d–e. Alexander had confirmed the titles and status of the Achaemenid royal women nine years before when they were captured after the Battle of Issos. It is possible that Alexander already then tried to create dynastic continuity by marrying Darius's wife Stateira, another daughter of Artaxerxes III, because she died in childbirth some two years after she had been captured by the Macedonians (Just. 11.12.6; Plut., *Alex.* 30.1–3) and Alexander is said to have mourned her excessively in public (Diod. 17.54.6; Just. 11.12.6–8; Curt. 4.21.4; Plut., *Alex.* 30.1–3).

³³ S-H I, no. 330; S-H I, no. 329; cf. Kuhrt (1990).

³⁴ Arr., *Anab.* 2.14.8–9; Curt. 4.1–14; Plut., *Alex.* 34.1.

³⁵ For a discussion of the title King of Asia, see Fredricksmeyer (2000); for a different view, see Brosius (2003): 173–6. Alexander's epithet "The Great" may have had oriental antecedents,

turns up again a mere seven years after Alexander's death, when according to Diodorus the Persians accepted Antigonus Monophthalmus as King of Asia when he entered Persis in 316.³⁶ Since Antigonus received the honor from the Persians (he was not yet a Greek *basileus*), and Asia was a Greek concept, this passage may mean that Antigonus was proclaimed *vazka šah* in Iran.³⁷ The Seleucids, too, used the title King of Asia, and Asia became a common name for their empire in Greek sources. They were Great Kings in their cuneiform correspondence with Babylonian cities, where, in accordance with Babylonian practice, other Akkadian titles pertaining to the same could be added, for instance, in the opening lines of a cuneiform inscription of Antiochus I Soter from the Ezida temple in Borsippa, near Babylon (268):

Antiochus the Great King, the Mighty King, King of the World, King of Babylon, King of Countries, caretaker of Esagila and Ezida, first son of King Seleucus, the Macedonian, King of Babylon.³⁸

From the reign of Antiochus III (if not earlier) the Seleucids went one step further by translating Great King directly into Greek as *basileus megas*.³⁹ To be sure, in the Ptolemaic, Seleucid, and Antigonid kingdoms the title *basileus* in itself had the connotation of emperor; *basileus* was *mutatis mutandis* the Hellenistic Greek equivalent of the Oriental title of Great King (and as such would reappear in the Byzantine Empire).⁴⁰

The Hellenistic title *basileus megas* lived on in several successor states of the Seleucids. Post-Seleucid great kings include two rulers of Commagene and Mithridates the Great of Pontus. All of them could rightfully claim to be the direct matrilineal descendants of the Seleucids and thus to have inherited the title. Also Tigranes the Great of Armenia and Eucratides I of Bactria (ca. 170–145) adopted the title. The latter conquered a vast empire in Central Asia and took the title at the death of Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 164; he too may have claimed to have inherited the title because his grandmother presumably was

but is attested (as *magnum*) not earlier than in Plautus, *Mostellaria* 775, although this passage shows that the title was then already in existence; cf. Worthington (1999): n. 3, who suggests that the title was “perhaps [first used] during the reign of Ptolemy I, at the time that he kidnapped the funeral cortege.”

³⁶ Diod. 19.48.1.

³⁷ Cf. Bosworth (2002): 162 with n. 221; cf. Brosius (2003): 174 n. 9.

³⁸ *ANET* 317; Austin (1981): 189. For a discussion of this document, see Kuhrt and Sherwin-White (1991). The title is also given to several Seleucid kings in the Babylonian king list BM 35603 (Austin [1999]: 138); cf. Sachs and Wiseman (1954); Del Monte (1997): 208.

³⁹ The interconnectedness of the two titles is clear in 1 Macc. 8.6: “Antiochus [III] the Great King of Asia”; for contemporary confirmation in the epigraphic record, see Ma (2000), who suggests distinct periods (and significance) for the use of the titles “the Great” (*megas*), which Antiochus III took after his *anabasis* (App., *Syr.* 1), and “Great King” (*basileus megas*); cf. *I. Délos* 1547 and 1548, with Just. 38.10.6 (Antiochus VII).

⁴⁰ Strootman (2007): 23.

a daughter of Seleucus II. Later Bactrian rulers followed suit.⁴¹ The Parthian kings adopted the title on their coinage after they had wrested Media and Babylonia from the Seleucids in the 140s and 130s. The crucial event presumably was the defeat and capture of Demetrius II Nicator by the Parthian king Mithridates I in the year 139; this allowed Mithridates to claim the title by right of victory, just as Alexander had done when he defeated Darius. And finally, in 34, Cleopatra VII and her son Ptolemy XV (Caesarion) were proclaimed respectively Queen of Kings and King of Kings as the matrilineal heirs of the Seleucids, claiming imperial hegemony in the East “as far as India.”⁴²

World empire is a main theme in Hellenistic, particularly early Ptolemaic court panegyric.⁴³ The surviving poetry of such court poets as Callimachus and Theocritus conveys a consistent image of the world as (potentially) peaceful and harmonious. Relevant in this respect is, for instance, the encomiastic passage in Callimachus’s *Hymn to Delos*, where it is said that Ptolemy II Philadelphus “shall rule over the Two Countries and over the lands that lie beside the sea, as far as the edge of the earth, where the swift horses always bring the sun.”⁴⁴ In another Ptolemaic court poem, Theocritus’s *encomium* for Ptolemy Philadelphus, the king is lauded as a new brand of Homeric hero, and the poet sketches both a realistic outline of his actual empire and an image of unlimited dominance:

Wealth and good fortune are his in abundance; and vast is the territory he rules, vast the sea. Countless countries and numberless tribes harvest rich crops thanks to the rains sent by Zeus. But none is as fruitful as the broad plains of Egypt, where floods of the Nile soak and soften the soil, or has so many towns full of skilled laborers. ... And over all of this Ptolemy rules as king. And he also takes as his Phoenicia, Arabia, Syria, and Libya, and the dark Ethiopians; he commands all the Pamphylians, the Cilician and Lycian spearmen, and the warlike Carians; he even rules the isles of the Cyclades, for his fine ships control the seas. The whole sea and all the land and the roaring rivers are ruled by Ptolemy.⁴⁵

The list of countries and peoples in this poem corresponds in part to the countries claimed by Cleopatra VII at the so-called Donations of Alexandria.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Coins struck in the first century CE by a Kushan ruler identified as Vima Taktu, the grandfather of the Kanishka, have Greek legends calling the king *sōtēr megas*, that is, “great savior” or “the savior, the great [king]”; see Frye (1996): 135. For the title in Pontus and Armenia, consult Sullivan (1990): 44 and 61.

⁴² Dio Cass. 49.40.2–41.3; cf. Plut., *Ant.* 54.3–6. In 41 Cleopatra had celebrated her marriage with Marc Antony, in Tarsus, as a hierogamy of Dionysus and Aphrodite “for the benefit of Asia” (Plut., *Ant.* 26.3); cf. Śnieżewski (1998): 134.

⁴³ Strootman (2007): 236–48; cf. Strootman (2010a).

⁴⁴ Call., *Hymn* 4, 169–70.

⁴⁵ Theocr., *Id.* 17.77–92.

⁴⁶ Dio Cass. 49.40.2–41.3; Plut., *Ant.* 54.3–6. For discussion, see Schrapel (1996); Strootman (2010b): 140–57.

But where Philadelphus's realm is depicted as a maritime empire, incorporating the coastal areas of the eastern Mediterranean and united by Ptolemaic sea power, Cleopatra in addition claimed Syria and Armenia "and all of the other lands east of the Euphrates as far as India," that is, the whole land empire once ruled by the Seleucids, whose heiress she could claim to be.⁴⁷

The victory stele of Ptolemy III Euergetes, a Greek inscription of circa 241, copied in the sixth century CE from a now lost original at Adulis on the Red Sea, glorifies the achievements of Ptolemy III during the Third Syrian War (246–241) in a style that combines ancient pharaonic and Greek terminology:

Ptolemy the Great King, the son of King Ptolemy and Queen Arsinoe the Brother–Sister Gods, children of King Ptolemy and Queen Berenice the Savior Gods, descendant on his father's side of Heracles, the son of Zeus, and on his mother's side of Dionysos, the son of Zeus, after inheriting from his father the kingship over Egypt, Libya, Syria, Phoenicia, Cyprus, Lycia, Caria, and the islands of the Cyclades, marched out into Asia with infantry, cavalry, a fleet, and elephants from the land of the Troglodytes and from Ethiopia. ... Having gained possession of the whole land on this side of the Euphrates, of Cilicia, Pamphylia, Ionia, the Hellespont, Thrace, and of all the forces in these countries and of the Indian elephants, and having made all the rulers of these lands his subjects, he crossed the river Euphrates, and subdued Mesopotamia, Babylonia, Susiana, the Persis, Media and the rest of the land as far as Bactria.⁴⁸

The historicity of Ptolemy III's conquests can be doubted, although Appian's claim that his armies advanced as far as Babylonia (*Syr.* 65) have found confirmation in a newly published cuneiform document from Babylon.⁴⁹ Still, Ptolemy III definitely did not conquer the whole of Asia "as far as Bactria"; and whatever conquests he made, these were of short duration as he withdrew from Seleucid territory in 241.⁵⁰ But Ptolemy was probably not at all boasting that he had really subdued so vast a territory with all of its peoples. He merely claimed that he considered the entire Seleucid empire *doriktētos chōra* ("spear-won land," i.e., war booty), meaning that the whole of Asia had become his own by right of victory over its previous master, the Seleucid king – hence his self-presentation as *basileus mēgas*, a title adopted by Ptolemaic kings only twice and in both instances as an expression of victory over their Seleucid rivals.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Dio Cass. 49. 41.3; Strootman (2010b); cf. Bingen (2007).

⁴⁸ OGIS 54; Austin (1981): 221.

⁴⁹ BM 34428 = BCHP 11.

⁵⁰ Just. 27.1.9.

⁵¹ The other instance is Ptolemy IV, who is proclaimed Great King on the Raphia Decree after his victorious return from war against Antiochus III in Coele Syria in 217; see Hölbl (2001): 162–4 with n. 23; cf. 81: "Ptolemaic propaganda effectively used [Egyptian] anti-Persian nationalism against the Seleucids who were, after all, the direct heirs of the Achaemenid empire." An Egyptian variant of King of Kings (*nswt nsu'ju*) existed in Hellenistic times as a

Seleucid universalistic ideology resonates, for example, in Appian's account of the conquests of the dynasty's founder, Seleucus Nicator:

He conquered Mesopotamia, Armenia, Anatolia, the Persians, the Parthians, the Bactrians, the Arabs, the Tapyri, the Sogdians, the Arachosians, the Hyrcanians, and all the other peoples that had before been conquered by Alexander, as far as the river Indus.⁵²

As far as India – As far as Bactria – As far as Ethiopia. These are standard claims, meaning no less than “as far as the ends of the (civilized) earth.” The idea that the aim of conquest is to reach a final frontier had already been a pivotal element in the propaganda of Alexander. The Macedonian conqueror ordered altars to be set up in India on the banks of the Beas, the river where the gods forbade him to go farther, and regularly offered sacrifice at the extremities of his empire: at the Danube in 335, at the Jaxartes in 329, and at the Hydaspes in 326.⁵³ It is all very similar to the Assyrian kings' routine of erecting statues and steles at the seashore and in the mountains. Indeed, Alexander's celebrated *pothos*, in particular his determination to reach the limits of the known world, stood in an age-old tradition. This tradition did not die out with him either. Decades after his death, in the 280s, the Seleucid general Demodamas of Miletus crossed the river Jaxartes (Syr Darya) into the steppe lands of Inner Asia to drive away the nomads who threatened Seleucid Central Asia. Demodamas, too, built altars there, dedicated to the Seleucid tutelary deity Apollo; he set them up at the same location where altars allegedly had been previously built by Heracles, Dionysus, Cyrus, and Alexander, whose expeditions had all ended there.⁵⁴ At about the same time, another Seleucid general, Patrocles, explored the Caspian Sea. When Patrocles returned, he confidently informed his king that the Caspian was indeed a branch of Oceanus, the river encompassing the world: the newly created Seleucid Empire now stretched to the northern edge of the world, too.⁵⁵

In Hellenistic royal ideology, kingship became associated with the all-embracing cosmic rule of (the Stoic) Zeus. For instance, a series of coins of Antiochus VIII (121–96) bears on the reverse the image of Zeus Ouranius stretching out his right hand in a gesture of omnipotence.⁵⁶ In his right hand the King of Heaven holds the sun and, in his left hand, a royal scepter; above his head the moon is depicted, and the whole picture is framed by a victory

title for Osiris, particularly in Philai (Hölbl [2001]: 291–2), where the title is also awarded to Ptolemy XII; see Junker (1958): 214, and cf. Griffiths (1953); Huss (1977); Hölbl (1992).

⁵² App., *Syr.* 55.

⁵³ Danube: Arr., *Anab.* 1.4.5; Jaxartes: Plin., *NH* 6.18; Orosius 1.2.5; Hydaspes: Arr., *Anab.* 5.29.1–2; Plut., *Alex.* 62.7–8; Curt. 9.3.19; Diod. 17.95.1–2.

⁵⁴ Plin., *NH* 6.49.

⁵⁵ Memnon 227a.

⁵⁶ On this gesture, see L'Orange (1953): 139–70.

wreath. The obverse bears the portrait of Zeus's earthly mirror image, the Seleucid emperor Antiochus (Plate III).

The Seleucids put Zeus on their coins regularly from the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes onward. The Ptolemies used Zeus's eagle as an emblem of their rule from the beginning. In the opening lines of his *encomium* to Ptolemy Philadelphus, Theocritus says:

From Zeus let us begin, Muses, and with Zeus let us end, when we make
our songs, for he is preeminent among the gods. But among mortals,
let Ptolemy be reckoned first – first and last and in between, for he is
supreme among men.⁵⁷

Zeus is King of Heaven, Ptolemy King of the World. In his *Hymn to Zeus*, Callimachus too compares the rule of Philadelphus with the rule of Zeus. There are other kings, of course, but Philadelphus is the only *real* king because he is Zeus's chosen one (lines 79–90).

Closely related to the dream of world empire is the almost eschatological promise of a better world, a golden age. In Hellenistic imperial mythology the ruler was seen as a savior whose military prowess secured peace, justice, and prosperity. Like Dionysus (a “royal god” par excellence), the king was a harbinger of joyful tidings, bringing good fortune to the cities he enters.⁵⁸ Kingship could even be connected directly with the fertility of the land, as in Theocritus's *encomium* for Ptolemy Philadelphus (*Idyll* 17) or Callimachus's *Hymn to Delos*. Popular too in this period was the theme of royal control of the forces of nature, which enjoyed a strong revival in imperial Roman panegyric.⁵⁹

In other panegyric poetry the opposite of the royal order is brought to the fore: the barbaric, peripheral Others who threaten civilization but are vanquished.⁶⁰ In several poems in Callimachus's *Aitia*, Heracles is presented as a savior and a culture hero: like the king, Heracles defeats monsters and pacifies savage peoples by introducing Greek culture to the barbaric periphery. He expands civilization, demarcating the new frontier by the establishment of altars. Theocritus's sixteenth *Idyll*, an *encomium* for the Syracusan ruler Hieron II, emphasizes the causal connection between kingship, on the one hand, and the prosperity, peace, and harmony of the land, on the other. The poet first describes a confused, violent world in which greed prevails over honor, war over peace, and the barbaric Carthaginians have the better of the civilized Greeks. The

⁵⁷ Theocr., *Id.* 17.1–4.

⁵⁸ Versnel (1970): 371–96; Strootman (2007): 289–305.

⁵⁹ Hardie (1986): 205–56. Compare, e.g., Alexander's calming of the waves while crossing the Gulf of Pamphilia with Caesar's calming of the Adriatic in Lucan, *De bello civili* 5.476–721. Cf. Weinstock (1971): 212; Fiedler (1931): 10; Kovács (2009).

⁶⁰ For Greco-Roman images of foreign peoples as subhuman savages, see Isaac (2004): 194–215.

coming of Hieron, Theocritus prophesies, will change everything. He will defeat the Carthaginians and restore peace and order to Sicily:

Grant that the original inhabitants may repossess their cities, and restore what has been destroyed by the hands of foes. May the soil be tilled again and bring forth crops, while bleating sheep in countless numbers grow fat upon the pastures. ... May fallow lands be plowed again and become fertile, while the cicada, watching the shepherds in the midday sun, makes music in the foliage of the trees. May weapons rust under cobwebs and may the battle cry become a forgotten sound.⁶¹

To bring peace, war must first be waged. Chaos has to be defeated to secure order. A common theme in royal ideology was the presentation of the king as vanquisher of barbarians. In *Idyll* 16 the Carthaginians are brought up as the barbaric foes, but the archetypal enemies of the Hellenistic order were the peoples known as Celts. Antigonus Gonatas used his victories over Celts to legitimize his usurpation of the Macedonian throne, and both Attalus I and (perhaps) Antiochus I styled themselves *sōtēres* after they had defeated the Asian Galatians in battle.⁶²

A final means by which the ideal of universal empire was communicated was the use of cosmic emblems in monarchical iconography, above all the sun, the symbol of almighty and eternal power. The religious association of the king with the sun (and the moon) has a long tradition in Egypt and the Ancient Near East, but in the Hellenistic empires the sun became an emblem of kingship more profoundly than in any of the preceding monarchies (Plate IV). It found expression, too, in the use of sun rays attached to a king's diadem, as depicted on coins and perhaps worn during ceremonial occasions.⁶³ In the Hellenistic age the sun also became a symbol of the expectation of a new, and final, golden age.⁶⁴ Even the ostentatious display of gold, most notoriously in the famous Grand Procession of Ptolemy Philadelphus recorded by Callixeinus of Rhodes,⁶⁵ had solar connotations, as the association of gold with the sun was common in many Near Eastern cultures, including Greece.⁶⁶ In the *Ithyphallic*

⁶¹ Theocr., *Id.* 16.88–97.

⁶² Strobel (1994); Barbantani (2001); Strootman (2005).

⁶³ Kingship as reflection of the sun in the Near East: Eisler (1910); Goodenough (1928): 78–83; L'Orange (1953); Calmeyer (1989); Nagel and Jacobs (1989); Snieżewski (1998). For radiant crowns, see Bergmann (1998).

⁶⁴ Grant (1972): 171–5; cf. Snieżewski (1998): 135–8. The sun appears on Seleucid drachms and tetradrachms from the reign of Antiochus IV, when he took the epithet of (Theos) Epiphanes in 173/2, sometimes in combination with an image of the sun god Apollo but never in combination with a portrait of the king wearing a radiant diadem; cf. Mittag (2006): 135–6; *pace* Fleischer (1991): 46.

⁶⁵ *FHG* III 58 = Athenaios 5.196–203.

⁶⁶ In New Kingdom Egypt, the golden jewelry and regalia worn by the pharaoh – who was not without reason called the Golden One or the Mountain of Gold That Brightens All The Lands – symbolized his status as the son of Re, the sun god; the hieroglyph for “gold” was a

Hymn of Hermocles with which the Athenians hailed Demetrius Poliorcetes as a god incarnate in 291/0, the king surrounded by his *philoí* is likened to the sun encircled by stars.⁶⁷ In 2000 a bronze shield decorated with the image of a large sun with twelve rays surrounded by stars was uncovered in the Macedonian sanctuary of Dion; according to the votive inscription on the shield, it had been dedicated by Demetrius Poliorcetes.⁶⁸ Demetrius's father, Antigonus Monophthalmus, was glorified as "the offspring of the sun" in a poem by Hermodotus,⁶⁹ just as Seleucid propaganda maintained that Seleucus Nicator was the son of Apollo. The so-called Star of Vergina as a monarchical emblem is a case in point, too.⁷⁰

HELLENISM AND EMPIRE

Expressions and images of the universalistic ideal varied. It is easy enough to notice diachronic developments and mutual influences. One empire might copy universalistic imagery from a predecessor or rival, adapt and develop it, and transmit it to another. As I have argued, the Hellenistic empires, particularly Ptolemaic and Seleucid ones, were notable for their role as transmitters of a Hellenized variant of Eastern imperial ideology to the West, to Rome, while preserving and further developing the Eastern tradition of empire in the East itself.

But the claim to universality as such is typical of empire in general.⁷¹ Continuity alone offers no satisfactory explanation for the persistence of universalistic ideology in the Macedonian, Parthian, Sasanian, Roman, Byzantine, and Arab empires. Considering that political ideology is normally entwined

beaded necklace, augmented by a falcon or a solar disk to signify "Golden Horus" or "Gold Sun"; cf. Muller and Thiem (1999): 60.

⁶⁷ Douris *FGrH* 76 F13 = Ath. 6.253b–f; cf. Demochares *FGrH* 75 F2. A similar image appears in Hor., *Sat.* 1.7.24, where Brutus is called the "Sun of Asia" (*Sol Asiae*) and his companions are compared to *stellae salubres*, "propitious stars" (I owe this reference to H. S. Versnel). Relevant too is Cass. Dio 63.4–6: the emperor Nero gives the diadem of the kingdom of Armenia to the Parthian prince Tiridates in the manner of a true Great King, having the power "to take away kingdoms and to bestow them" (63.5.3); in the ensuing inaugural celebrations (taking place, in Hellenistic fashion, in a theater), "the stage ... had been gilded, and all the properties that were brought in had been adorned with gold, so that people gave to the day itself the epithet of 'golden'"; on the drapery above the stage was an embroidered image of Nero as the Sun "with shining stars all around him" (63.6.1–2).

⁶⁸ Pantermale et al. (2000): xviii–xxii; I am grateful to Olga Palagia for this reference.

⁶⁹ Plut., *Mor.* 182c.

⁷⁰ The Star of Vergina is of course not a star but a sun – a similar sun still decorates Antigonid infantry shields on the victory monument of Aemilius Paullus in Delphi; it can also be seen on the captured Seleucid shields depicted on the friezes of the Athena precinct in Pergamon; see Liampi (1998) for further examples.

⁷¹ Cf. Bosbach (1985); for a plethora of instances in the ancient world, see L'Orange (1953) and Eisler (1910).

with real political circumstances, and often dictated by culture and public expectations rather than willfully created, we must also ask *why* empires developed this notion, which apparently was an essential element of empire as a state form.

Premodern empires such as the Achaemenid and Seleucid states are by definition large, culturally and politically heterogeneous polities. They are “world powers.”⁷² In a review article from 1994, Carla Sinopoli showed that definitions in modern studies concerning diverse periods and cultures have in common a view of premodern empires as “territorially expansive and incorporative, involving relationships in which one state exercises control over other sociopolitical entities, [which] typically retain some degree of autonomy.”⁷³ According to a more recent definition, “empire” means

rule over extensive, far-flung territories, far beyond the original “home-land” of the rulers. ... But it carried also two further connotations. One was of absolute sovereignty, acknowledging no overlord or rival claimant to power. ... The other was an aspiration to universality. ... Empires must by definition be big, and they must be composite entities, formed out of previously separate units. Diversity – ethnic, national, cultural, often religious – is their essence.⁷⁴

Claims to universal power arise from the way empire works. Empires by definition come into existence through conquest, and conquest is seldom a single event. Internal rebellions and attacks from the outside, and most of all competition with rival expansionist states, force the empire to continuous

⁷² Chua (2009) distinguishes *superpowers* – genuine great powers such as empires like the Assyrian and Seleucid empires, Republican Rome, Austria–Hungary, and the Soviet Union – from *hyperpowers*, the more rare phenomenon of world-dominant states without any serious rival, e.g., the Achaemenid Empire, imperial Rome, the Umayyad Caliphate, the Mongol Empire, the Ottoman Empire in its heyday, and the United States (for which the term was coined in 1999 by France’s foreign minister Hubert Vedrine) in the past decades; Chua, too, acknowledges that cultural pluralism is the essence of empires, though her central thesis that imperial success depends on the degree of “tolerance” practiced by empires is perhaps somewhat anachronistic.

⁷³ Sinopoli (1994): 160; most authors discussed by Sinopoli share a conception of “various kinds of empires distinguished by differing degrees of political and/or economic control, viewed either as discrete types or as variations along a continuum from weakly integrated to more highly centralized polities” (160). The kind of empire that was typical for the Ancient Near East has been variously described as “patrimonial” by Eisenstadt (1963), as “hegemonic” by Luttwak (1976), and as “empire of domination” by Mann (1986). For more recent comparative approaches, see Alcock et al. (2001); Bang and Bayly (2003); Münkler (2005); Hurler (2008); Morris and Scheidel (2009); Duindam, Kunt, and Artan (2011).

⁷⁴ Howe (2002): 13 and 15; Pagden (2001): 7–11, too, defines an empire as a large sovereign state that is relentlessly expansive, embraces a wide variety of different customs and beliefs, and peoples who practice a vast array of languages; for more definition, pertaining to the same, see Morrison (2001), esp. 5–6; (premodern) territorial empires should be distinguished of course from the overseas colonialism of modern Western European powers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

campaigning. The Hellenistic empires were notoriously warlike.⁷⁵ They were in essence tribute-taking military organizations whose rulers were burdened with the obligation to pursue territorial expansion and military glory: “The engine of imperial conquest, once started, may be difficult to turn off especially as systems of economic and social rewards and privileges become associated with expansion and with military success.”⁷⁶

In the ancient world, imperial control of territory, though in some places intensive, was predominantly of the hegemonic type. Hegemonic rule implies recognition by local rulers or oligarchic elite groups of the overlordship of the imperial sovereign, with personal ties established by marriage or other connections, and cemented by the exchange of gifts and honors.⁷⁷ A Great King (or King of Kings) is basically someone who can legitimately assign royal status to others. Imperial armies provide the security that the subjects need in order to produce the surplus that supports the imperial military system. The titles Great King and King of Kings are thus realistic expressions of actual political and diplomatic relations.

The ideal of world unity is the basic notion that holds empires together. Many empires collapse after the initial conquest phase.⁷⁸ For empires to endure, conquered territories must somehow be incorporated into the empire’s political, economic, and ideological domain. Military force alone will not do: “Territorial expansion, through conquest *and* incorporation, is the defining process in the creation of the geographic and demographic space of empire.”⁷⁹ An essential component of the incorporation process is the creation by all empires of “an overarching political identity capable of holding their ethnically and religiously diverse subjects together.”⁸⁰ Of course, it would be rash (and perhaps anachronistic) to think of a supranational ideology of imperial rule in terms of “tolerance.”

In the Hellenistic empires, “Hellenism” was instrumental in creating cohesion. Hellenistic kings of course did not deliberately try to Hellenize their realms.

⁷⁵ Gehrke (1982); Austin (1986); and Austin (1999). With the aid of realist theory from modern international relations studies, Eckstein (2007) explains the ruthless “multipolar anarchy” that characterized the Hellenistic world as the result of the absence of a single predominant state to impose order, so that all states were compelled to fight desperately for their survival.

⁷⁶ Sinopoli (1994): 163; cf. Münkler (2005), showing that empires throughout history aimed necessarily at obtaining world power, compelling “imperial agents” to follow basic patterns of behavior with extremely limited options.

⁷⁷ Frye (1996): 80, following Vogelsang (1992): 304–15.

⁷⁸ Imperial collapse often takes place in the first or second generation of rulers after the death of the empire’s charismatic founder, e.g., the Ch’in Empire in China (230–206), the Neo-Babylonian Empire (625–539), the Inca Empire, the Mongol Empire, and, perhaps the most notorious case in point, the Timurid Empire of the late fourteenth to early fifteenth century CE.

⁷⁹ Sinopoli (1994): 162 (emphasis added).

⁸⁰ Chua (2009): xxix.

They were inclined to adapt themselves to local customs rather than to impose an alien form of monarchy on their subjects.⁸¹ Thus, the same Seleucid *basileus* could be a Babylonian *lugal* in Babylon, a pious Israelite king in Jerusalem, and the “benefactor and savior” of a Hellenic *polis*. The Ptolemies likewise practiced a policy of pluralism. They were pharaohs in Egypt but not in Alexandria, Tyre, or Athens. However, Hellenistic kings did favor Hellenic culture by consistently patronizing at their courts Greek poets and scholars whose work was deliberately concerned with “Greekness” and the Greek cultural heritage, as we can see particularly clearly at the early Ptolemaic court.⁸² In part through the *xenia* networks of the king’s friends, imperial elite culture spread from the royal courts to patrician families in the cities and became the high culture of empire, tying together members of various local elites and binding them to the political center. This can be seen most clearly in Seleucid Babylonia and Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, the infamous Hellenizers in 2 Maccabees were in fact those elite members who had risen to predominance within the Judean state by gaining royal protection and support.⁸³ They had become part of the Seleucid imperial order and hence adopted a double, Judean-Greek, identity, including the adoption of Greek names alongside their Aramaic names.⁸⁴ This expressed their loyalty to the crown and connected them with both the court and local elites elsewhere in the empire; it also distanced them from their rivals and inferiors at home. Their less fortunate opponents within the Judean aristocracy, who had in the past benefited from Ptolemaic rule (and who for all we know may have cultivated a Greco-Judean *Ptolemaic* imperial identity), typically embraced a converse “traditionalist” self-presentation; this is true notably of the Maccabean priestly dynasty.⁸⁵ In Babylon, ethnic Babylonians likewise assumed double names and an imperial identity.⁸⁶ They were members of the official body of Babylonian “Greek” citizens, or *politai*, who are well attested from the early second century onward in cuneiform documents, written in Akkadian; the *politai* of Babylon were represented by an official *epistatēs* and established a *palaistra*, a *gymnasion*, and a theater.⁸⁷ A body of Hellenized *politai*

⁸¹ Cf. Herz (1996), who analyzes Ptolemaic and Seleucid self-presentation in various cultural contexts, and Koenen (1993), showing how the Ptolemies responded variously to the varying expectations of Egyptians and Greeks in Egypt.

⁸² Strootman (2010a).

⁸³ 2 Macc. 4.1–20; cf. 1 Macc. 1.43 and Dan. 11.39.

⁸⁴ Strootman (2006).

⁸⁵ Strootman (2006). For the phenomenon in general, see Stern (2003).

⁸⁶ Van der Spek (2006): 393–408, stressing that (multiple) identity is situational; cf. Hall (2005).

⁸⁷ Hauser (1999); Boiy (2004): 208; van der Spek (2001); and van der Spek (2005). In cuneiform Akkadian, the Greek word *politai* is transcribed as *pu-li-te-e* or *pu-li-ta-nu*; the *epistatēs* is indicated by the Babylonian word *pāhātu* (van der Spek [2005]: 204); a cuneiform chronicle dated to October 163 (BCHP 14) perhaps mentions a *boulē* in relation to the *politai* (BCHP 205).

is attested, too, for Seleucid Jerusalem in this period.⁸⁸ It too could establish a *gymnasion* for the training of its “ephebes.”⁸⁹

The crucial point is this: rather than becoming Greek (or semi-Greek), Hellenized non-Greeks like the Babylonian priest Marduk-eriba, who was also called Heliodorus,⁹⁰ or the Judean high priest Joshua, who was also known as Jason, were becoming “Seleucid.” Thus the empire was united at its highest level as a commonwealth of elites.

Religious syncretism enhanced this notion of imperial commonalty. The adaptation by Hellenistic rulers of their self-presentation to variegated local demands, manifest first of all in their reverence for the specific tutelary deities of cities, facilitated the gradual equalization of gods like Zeus, Marduk, Ba'al, and Yahweh. This went hand in hand with royal patronage of local and regional sanctuaries. Typically, the Seleucids patronized sanctuaries sacred to Zeus, the almighty king of heaven, and to Apollo and Artemis, the gods who were directly associated with the king and queen, or to these three gods' non-Greek counterparts.⁹¹ The Ptolemies favored in Egypt notably Isis and Osiris, the provincial pendants of their principal royal gods Aphrodite and Dionysus.

CONCLUSION

Elite integration in the Hellenistic empires was the result of political, cultural, and religious factors working together to create a sense of imperial commonwealth. The umbrella ideology was the ideal of world unity. This followed from the empires' nature as expansionist states based on conquest. It was also their heritage – a heritage from which they could not deviate. Moreover, it worked. It was a successful idea. Although the Hellenistic dynasties disappeared, and the East thereafter became for a long time divided between two imperial worlds – a Roman Levant versus an inland empire dominated by Iranian rulers – the notion of a world empire united by a single king of kings endured in both worlds. Already in the Late Roman Republic, Roman warlords had experimented with Hellenistic concepts of kingship and empire, not only to forge a form for their own personal power, but especially to create a *modus operandi* for Roman rule in the East after the demise of the Seleucids, and already in the age of Augustus the Roman Empire had become a divinely ordained,

⁸⁸ 2 Macc. 4.9–10.

⁸⁹ 2 Macc. 4.12.

⁹⁰ *CT* 49, 138; cf. Boiy (2004): 290; cited from van der Spek (2005): 208.

⁹¹ Notable loci of Seleucid religious patronage were the Greek Apollo sanctuary of Didyma in Ionia, the Letoon of Xanthos in Lycia (Leto, Apollo, and Artemis), the sanctuary of “Zeus” at Olba in Rough Cilicia, the precinct of Apollo and Artemis at Daphne near Antioch, the sanctuary of Artemis-Atargatis at Hierapolis-Bambyke, and the important temple of the Phoenician god Zeus Baetocaece opposite the island city of Arpad (Arados).

Hellenistic-style *imperium sine fine* over the entire *orbis terrarum*.⁹² The emperors of the Principate subsequently operated in the East as “great kings,” appointing and dismissing kings in principalities such as Judea, Commagene, and Armenia. Beyond the Euphrates, the Parthian rulers had appropriated the status of Great King as well, in time transmitting the ideal of world empire to *their* successors, the Sasanians.⁹³

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BM British Museum.

CT D. Kennedy, ed. (1968). *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum*. London.

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⁹² Verg., *Aen.* I 278–9; for the Hellenistic background of the imperial imagery in the *Aeneid* consult Hardie (1986): 85–156.

⁹³ For continuity among the Parthians, see Wiesehöfer (1996) and Fowler (2005). For Hellenistic influences on Islamic imperialism, see al-Azmeh (2001): 3–10; for the marriage of “religious universalism with political imperialism” (Karsh [2007]: 7), see Crone and Hinds (1986), and the rather politically motivated treatment by Karsh (2007), who aims to show that “Islam has retained its imperialist ambition to this day” (7).

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