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John Ma, *Antiochos III and the Cities of Western Asia Minor*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. Pp. xix, 403. ISBN 0-19-815219-1. $98.00.

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One of the most exciting areas of research in recent years has been, owing to the abundance of epigraphical finds, Hellenistic Asia Minor. Ancient historians will therefore welcome the appearance of this important and fascinating book, which will be of interest not only to students of Seleukid Asia Minor but also to everyone interested in Hellenistic history. As Ma makes clear in the preface, this is not a biography of Antiochos III: rather, the aim is to explore the relations between the Seleukid empire and the Hellenistic poleis, as they emerge from the narrative of the ancient historians (mostly Polybios, Livy, and Appian), from the analysis of the structures of the empire, and from the study of the language of power as attested in the inscriptions--letters of kings and administrators, decrees of the cities. Throughout the book--and this is what in my opinion makes its originality--the focus is sharply maintained on the ways in which power expresses itself through language and on the contrast between imperial and local versions of history. Because of the relative richness of the evidence, the reign of Antiochos III offers a good opportunity for a case study; but the implications of Ma's work are much wider, and the analyses offered can be applied to a number of other documents and situations.

Apart from the introduction and the epilogue, the book is structured in four chapters, the first two retracing the steps of the 'Seleukid' conquest of Asia Minor, the second two looking at the situation from the angle of the local communities. A few specific problems are discussed in a number of appendixes (mostly clear and concise discussions of controversially dated inscriptions but also, for instance, a valuable survey of the evidence for the surname *Megas* and for the title *basileus megas*); these are followed by an extremely useful and complete epigraphical dossier, offering texts, translations, and short--but very much to the point--commentaries. A large bibliography and indexes close the book.

Starting from an arresting passage in Livy (33.38.1-3, a text which comes up more than once in the book), the introduction sets out the different strands which will be followed in the course of the study. On the one side, the perspective of the Hellenistic king: Antiochos' vision of a Seleukid past, in which all of Asia Minor was Seleukid, and the reflections of this past in the present, inasmuch as in the imperial vision past control gives the right to, and justifies formally, renewed control. On the other side, the local perspective: in Antiochos' vision Asia Minor is presented as a unified whole (*omnes Asiae civitates*), but actually the landscape and its settlements offer a striking diversity (one only has to think of the differences in size, antiquity, religious and political status of the different communities), and the reactions of the cities mirror this diversity (resistance being championed in the Livian passage by the 'recalcitrant cities', Smyrna and Lampsakos). The epilogue will take up, in ring composition, the idea of the persistence of the *polis*: the decrees of Amyzon, Sardis, the Karian cities, the Attalid settlement concerning the temple of Apollo at Pleura, all illustrate the permanence--under the new settlement of Asia Minor after Apameia, now that the Seleukid empire is, at least for that region, 'history'--of issues and behaviour similar to those that had obtained under the Seleukids. Much of the book is thus devoted to the study of the various strategies (local narratives, selective memory, monumental celebrations of civic discourse) through which the cities managed to preserve their sense of identity and civic pride.

Ch. I centers on the confrontation between the Seleukid version of the past history of Asia Minor (281-223 B.C.) and the past as construed by the local communities and by the Romans. The possession of Asia Minor ("all the land this side of the Taurus", as in the *prostagma* concerning Nikanor1) is presented by Antiochos as an ancestral right, his claim being grounded on the right of conquest (the victory of Seleukos I over Lysimachos at Kouroupedion) and on the right of inheritance. This allows the ruler to deproblematize conquest, by grounding it in the past. Such a vision however implies serious omissions: the important Ptolemaic presence in Asia Minor and Attalos I's victories over Antiochos Hierax had resulted in the dissolution of the Seleukid cis-Tauric dominion. Antiochos' version is shown thus to be "a myth, not in that it was a total fabrication, but in that it presented an authoritative discourse that enabled forms of power" (p. 52)--a myth that will break down, at least in the Livian narrative, when confronted with the discourse of Sulpicius Galba and the embassies from the cities. The documents produced by the local communities show as well that they weren't simply passive objects of conquest: they did assert themselves, or pursue private disputes and wars, even while conflict was going on between superpowers.2

Ch. II sketches the reconstruction of Seleukid empire over Asia Minor through the campaigns of Achaios, Antiochos, and Zeuxis; we are given here a military narrative of conquests, meant to provide a context for the structural analyses of the following chapters. A good overview of the history of the period (223-192 B.C.), taking into account the new epigraphical findings and recent research, has been lacking: this one is detailed, extremely well documented and well-balanced. Moreover, in the course of his narrative Ma manages to show in detail how history gets written and rewritten in the course of the interaction between local communities and a super-poleis power and how these (re)writings of history are used to justify actual choices.3 (One cannot but agree that it is a pity indeed that Achaios' reign, or Philip's short period of control over Karia, are as yet so poorly documented.)

In Ch. III, Ma sets out to give both a panoramic review of the evidence pertaining to the structures (military and administrative) of the Seleukid state and an assessment of their ideological force. Violence (the violence of the initial military conquest and that of the eventual garrisoning) and the negotiation of local statuses defining the position of the conquered community within the empire are the foundations on which the Seleukid empire rested. Relations with the communities went through a very ramified and extensive administrative apparatus: besides taking care of practical questions (taxation for example), the workings of the administration were such as to further by implication imperial ideology. Thus Ma shows how the language of bureaucracy, a very specific language ("In this world, everyone says 'we'; patronymics and ethnics are dropped; the language is in koine, not dialect... The participants share a language of orders", 141), displays itself, engraved in administrative dossiers such as the *prostagma*

concerning Nikanor, 'over' the locals, who aren't even addressed. One has to enter into this language in order to participate, and this is ultimately the way in which Seleukid administration imposes acceptance of the Seleukid imperial ideology.

Having given a survey of the administrative structures, Ma directs his attention to the local communities. Here I must say that, although the combined analysis of actual and ideological structures in the preceding pages had not always made for clarity, it is to this dual approach that some of the most interesting pages of the book are due, those on the legal statuses of the cities in the Seleukid empire. Ma's treatment of this problem is excellent. He doesn't merely give a convincing description of a system which distinguished between the statuses of subject, subordinate, and autonomous cities, all uniquely dependant on a royal utterance; he also shows how this system worked to help maintain imperial control, how the very existence of a scale of statuses and the possibility of bargaining in order to obtain privileges led the cities into accepting as their horizon the imperial space and ideology. Ma is clearly aware of the fact that the picture drawn in his sketch of the structures of the empire is "less about realities than about a rhetoric of power, and hence about ideology" (174); but he is right to point out that ideology is a very real tool for domination.

How rulers and ruled interacted within this ideology is the theme of Ch. 4, "Empire as Interaction". Empire appears here as a process of exchange, the interaction between ruler and ruled being not a vertical relationship of exploitation but rather a process of reciprocity, finding its linguistic formulation in the 'contract clauses' so common in the epigraphical material (phrases in which royal benefaction is linked to civic *eunoia* in a self-perpetuating spiral). Ma offers here a fascinating analysis of the documents emanating from ruler and ruled (royal letters and civic decrees), stressing both their specificity in the form chosen[4] and their similarity in the language used. What emerges is the existence of a well-defined, stable, institutionalized language of euergetism--a language that because of its conventionality has been dismissed as "l'art d'écrire pour ne rien dire".[5] On the contrary, as Ma convincingly argues, the standardized nature of this language is essential to its working, because it means that, far from being monopolizable, it could be used by both parties: "the institutionalized nature of the shared language of euergetism entailed parity between the parties" (242). We are thus shown how royal interlocutors could use the language of euergetism to represent power as benefaction but also how the cities could cast the ruling powers in well-defined roles so as to obtain what they wanted from them. Ma's choice of taking this language seriously, as a tool, as "the standard medium for communication between ruler and ruled, shaping communication and actions", and consequently of trying to see how it worked, is in my opinion one of the things which make his book so important and so new.

As must be by now clear, this study is very much concerned with implications, with indirect ways of imposing control--and of defending margins of independence. As I said, this is what makes it so interesting. But at times one has the feeling of an excessive stress on the implicit, to the detriment of the explicit. For example, to say that 'The *prostagma* of 209 is not about royal cult, but about imperial practice and language' is a little excessive: the *prostagma* is about giving appropriate thanks to a *philos*, Nikanor, and it concerns religious (and economic) administration,[6] even though the way it is formulated allows us inferences on imperial practices as they are reflected in the language--and even though it must have 'done' things to the subjects besides telling them that they had to put in the prescripts of their documents the name of Nikanor. It was, one might add, Nikanor who, having refused other suggestions by the king, asked for the specific honour of being high priest (ll. 27-32)--this too tells something about how things went on in the Seleukid empire. In the same vein, I don't know whether (or to what degree) insistence on ancestral claims can be attributed specifically to Antiochos III: reference to the ancestors was always important in royal ideology, as Ma himself says. And looking for implications can lead along fascinating, but also very winding and sometimes inconclusive, paths: for example in lines 20-22 of the first Teian decree for Antiochos and Laodike, discussed by Ma at p. 184, one could see in ἵνα...μὴ μόνον εὐεργεσίας λάβῃ τὴν ἐπιγραφὴν τῆς τοῦ δήμου, ἀλλὰ καὶ σωτηρίας, ("so that...he should receive the title not only of benefactor of the people, but also of his saviour"), Antiochos' own words:[7] but how should we interpret this? Simply as the Teians' taking up the words of the king and inserting them into their decree? And would that imply passivity on the Teians' part? Or does this imply a distancing (the king does it all by himself, taking the title of benefactor, while the Teians figure as independent spectators)? The difficulty of distinguishing between shades of meaning in the register of euergetical discourse is evident (and Ma's discussion of this problem at p. 199-201 is once more excellent).

As my comments should have made clear, this is both from the historical and the methodological/historiographical point of view a very interesting book. Ma's discussions, while always starting from some specific document, are wide-ranging, full of insights and challenging. His choice of taking seriously the language of royal letters and city decrees allows him to give a very nuanced picture of the relations between royal power and cities (and I for one am grateful to him for rescuing back to dignity the language of Hellenistic honorific decrees). This is an engrossing book to read, very dense, beautifully written,[8] and enormously rewarding for anyone interested in how language can shape power relations.

Notes:

1. N. 4 in the dossier; text first published by H. Malay, *EA* 10, 1987, 7-17.
2. The independence of the cities as regards local conflicts has now been discussed in greater detail by Ma, "Fighting poleis of the Hellenistic world", in H. van Wees ed., *War and Violence in Ancient Greece*, Duckworth: London, and The Classical Press of Wales 2000, 337-376.
3. Couched in such general terms, it sounds rather 'banal'; but Ma's detailed treatment substantiates generic affirmations on the rewriting of history in a quite extraordinary way, while at the same time making the stakes of such rewritings come very much alive.
4. He builds here on a seminal article by J.-M. Bertrand, "Formes de discours politique: décrets des cités grecques et correspondance des rois hellénistiques", in Cl. Nicolet ed., *Du pouvoir dans l'Antiquité: mots et réalités*, (Cahiers du Centre Glotz 1), Paris/Genève 1990, 101-15.
5. 193. The scapegoat is here Maurice Holleaux, but the dismissal out of hand of this kind of language as rhetorical verbiage is something extremely common.
6. Though Ma is probably right about its not concerning royal cult; for a careful examination of the question see now H. Müller, "Der hellenistische Archiereus", *Chiron* 30, 2000, pp. 519-542, in particular 528-535: Müller in my opinion rightly stresses (against the implications of Ma's discussion) that at some point Nikanor must have become high priest of the imperial ruler cult and also that at some point he was replaced by Demetrios in the charge of ἐπὶ τῶν ἱερῶν; arguably the separation of the two charges and the institution of an imperial ruler cult will have taken place at the same moment--but here we are reduced to the usual guess--around 204 B.C.
7. Following P. Herrmann's 1965 suggestion, founded on the use of the ἵνα clause (the use of λαβεῖν might be added to this), and cited by Ma in his footnote: I am simply developing implications of Ma's own discussion.
8. I should however mention the presence of a few errors in the Greek (mostly accents; but in the citation from a Teian decree at p. 185, ἀξίας should be inserted between χάριτας and ἀποδιδόντες: it is a pity that it was left out, because ἄξιος is one of the terms which might deserve a

place in a discussion of reciprocity), and of some in the English text as well.

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