

C E N S U R A E L I B R O R U M

Eos XCV 2008
ISSN 0012-7825

Glenn R. Bugh (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Hellenistic World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. XXIX, 371.

The Cambridge Companion to the Hellenistic World contains fifteen essays on different aspects of Hellenistic history. G.R. Bugh, the book editor, is a historian, with particular interests in Hellenistic Athens and in the Byzantine Empire. He invited sixteen historians and archaeologists from Europe, USA and Australia to contribute to this volume.

In the preface Bugh says that he decided not to set a precise time frame for the book, and it spans the period from Alexander the Great until the Roman conquest of the Hellenistic world. A less advanced reader will appreciate a handy Hellenistic Timeline in the beginning of the book (pp. XIX–XXII). The book is appended with three maps which feature Alexander's track, the Seleucid Empire and Hellenistic Greece. 21 black and white figures illustrate various aspects of Hellenistic art, architecture, economy. All fifteen chapters are accompanied by short bibliographies, while a comprehensive bibliography can be found at the end of this volume (pp. 331–359).

In the preface the editor presents the difficulties he encountered while studying the Hellenistic history, such as indicating the time frames, diversity of Eastern or fragmentary Greek sources. He relates key publications for the period; however, he does not cite any important Babylonian or Jewish sources, such as the Books of the Maccabees, or Babylonian Chronicles.

The chapters are not related to each other and the first one, *Alexander the Great and the Creation of the Hellenistic Age* by A.B. Bosworth, is a good introduction into the subject and an outline of Alexander's empire history. Bosworth criticizes the traditional view of Alexander, created by J.G. Droysen. The author presents how the empire grew, but he focuses on showing Alexander's ability to establish and exercise his power in the conquered lands. We learn about methods of governing the huge and diverse empire, how new cities were built or how Alexander recruited mercenaries to serve in his army. It might seem that Alexander exercised control over his domain through dictatorship. But, in fact, he usually upheld the local customs and governments to prevent treason and uprisings, albeit he protected his property well and awaited respect. Finally Bosworth contrasts the unity of Alexander's empire with chaos which occurred after his death, and which was caused by inability of his successors to rule the vast empire.

Next chapter, *Hellenistic Kingdoms* by W.L. Adams, briefly presents each kingdom with emphasis on the factors which made maintaining the equilibrium impossible, such as diversity of natural resources, size of governed lands or their military strength. This thread is continued by D.G.J. Shipley and M.G. Hansen in the chapter *Polis and Federalism*. It shows how polis, itself a creation of the classical age, was functioning under the new regime. In particular, they emphasize the characteristics which remained the same and those which evolved. The authors use Hellenistic Athens and Alexandria as models.

The economy of new lands, the exploitation of natural resources and administration are subject of J.K. Davis' essay *Hellenistic Economies*. Davies presents arguments that Ptolemaic Egypt is the best example of a prospering Hellenistic kingdom. He shows the well organized local government which restructured sea ports in order to stimulate commerce and to allow subjects of the Ptolemies to prosper despite the comparative lack of natural resources.

The later part of the book is dominated by art, science, religion, philosophy and literature. One of the most interesting essays is *The Hellenistic Family* by D.J. Thompson, which begins with a quotation from a marriage contract of some Herakleides and Demetria preserved on a papyrus from Elephantine. It defines the content of the article, describing not only the Hellenistic family,

be it noble or common, but also the phenomenon of ethnically mixed families, caused by constant expansion of the Hellenistic world.

G.J. Olivier (*History and Rhetoric*) shows the influence of historiography and rhetoric on the development of philosophy and literature. The essay *Language and Literature* (N. Krevans, A. Sens) deals with the variety of languages existing in conquered lands, describes how the Greeks inhabiting Hellenistic empires kept their identity, and how the Macedonian monarchy seized the tradition of Athens, converting the prestigious Attic dialect into official language of the empire.

Other interesting chapters cover the basic aspects of contemporary life (*Material Culture* by S.I. Rotroff; *Science, Medicine and Technology* by P.T. Keyser and G. Irby-Massie). The second essay shows the world of philosophical schools, of research in the fields of mathematics, geography, astronomy and physics, and of discoveries in medicine and technology. The Hellenistic scholars debated how the blood circulated in the body or what was the origin of human nature. The author presents also the development of technology: harbours, fleet, war machines and the innovations in everyday life.

G.R. Bugh continues the military thread in the *Hellenistic Military Developments*. The author details all the formations of the Hellenistic army and describes the military advancements such as a new method of siege warfare, usage of siege towers and catapults. A considerable portion of the chapter deals with the use of elephants in the Hellenistic army and the increasing importance of cavalry.

In the last essay of the book, *Recent Trends and New Directions*, D.G.J. Shipley debates the meaning of the Hellenistic period. He claims that the Hellenistic period was indeed the time of flowering of political institutions and culture and has to be studied as deeply as the classical period. In the last subsection the author indicates the issues which beg for more study like the functioning of the Greek cities after Alexander or the Greek Peninsula itself, which seem to be largely forgotten in modern scholarship.

Essays contained in this book aim at presenting the current state of research of the Hellenistic world. Diversity of discussed subjects is a considerable advantage and the topics selected for the book are for the most part well documented. Bibliographies contain the most recent literature and the most important publications of the earlier scholarship alike. The most obvious reader of this volume is a student of history or classics and his/her purpose is served well, as the book provides the reader with a good, clear overview of the Hellenistic times. For scholars working in the field, the book may be interesting mainly as the source of reference to the most recent studies; however, it will not enrich their knowledge substantially.

It is important to underline that the volume does not deal with all the lands of the Hellenistic world, omitting such areas as Sicily or Greek kingdoms in India, while Bactria for instance is presented in a rather cursory way. The authors do not discuss in depth any of non-Greek nationalities inhabiting the empire. Hence the question arises if it is indeed a companion to the entire Hellenistic world.

Aleksandra Szalc
University of Wrocław