ANTIOCHUS THE GREAT

J. MA: *Antiochos III and the Cities of Western Asia Minor*. Pp. xvii + 403, maps. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. Cased, £60. ISBN: 0-19-815219-1.

John Ma has written an important book, the first substantial study of Antiochus the Great since H. H. Schmitt's valuable *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte Antiochos' des Grossen und seiner Zeit* (Wiesbaden, 1964). Ma, however, is doing something different from Schmitt. His scope is at once narrower and broader. It is narrower in so far as it focuses solely on Antiochus and Asia Minor, a fairly small part of Antiochus' sprawling kingdom, but broader in that its central theme is the relationship between empire and *polis* in the Hellenistic world. This is explored through the wealth of epigraphic material from Asia Minor, the documents relevant to Antiochus being collected together in an appendix. With new inscriptions constantly being discovered, there has been a pressing need for a fresh analysis. Something like half of the forty-nine documents in Ma's appendix would have been unavailable to Schmitt when he wrote some forty years ago, although he was in a better position than his predecessors, H. Bengtson and E. J. Bickerman, authors of two fundamental studies of Seleucid institutions and administration. It is a striking testament to the scholarship of these earlier historians that their work stands up so well in the face of this new evidence.

The first two chapters examine the Seleucid empire in Asia Minor from the perspective of the ruler, while the final two turn more towards the subjects. Chapter I is concerned with Seleucid attempts to justify their rule in Asia Minor by reference to Seleucus I's victory over Lysimachus at Corupedium in 281; Chapter II with Antiochus III's conquest of the region (or, looked at from a Seleucid viewpoint, reconquest). Chapter III takes 'empire as structures' as its theme, building on the work of Bengtson and Bickerman, but Ma is less concerned with the niceties of administration than with the ideology of empire as manifested in its structure. Thus the king, by granting status, *asylia*, and freedom to cities, defined the form the empire took and the place of the cities within that structure. Chapter IV looks at the way in which the language and practice of euergetism could to some extent mitigate the violence and oppression of empire by incorporating the king and his officials into the civic realm and creating a sense of interdependence.

'L'art d'écrire pour ne rien dire'. So Maurice Holleaux expressed his frustration at the effusive, yet evasive, language of honorific decrees, 'cette langue prolixe et diluée, veule et vague, toute en formules abstraites' (quoted by Ma, p. 193). Ma is not so easily discouraged, and it is the implications and nuances of public documents that most excite his interest, whether they be civic decrees or royal letters. He is fascinated by and fascinating on the rôle of language in the interaction between ruler and subject, the way in which language constructs, disguises, and expresses relationships. His use of the epigraphic evidence owes much to the example of Louis Robert; he is adept at taking an apparently mundane text and illuminating it, drawing connections with other documents. A letter of 210/9 from Antiochus to his governor Zeuxis (first published 1987) opens the chapter on the Seleucid past in Asia Minor. It advises the governor that Nicanor has been appointed 'high-priest of all the shrines in all the land beyond the Taurus' and that he would administer matters just as Dion had 'under our grandfather'. Highlighting these phrases, Ma shows how the letter implies continuous Seleucid control over all Asia Minor beyond the Taurus, assumptions therefore about

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history and geography that might have surprised Attalus I, who for a time at least had expelled the Seleucids from the region. From here Ma moves into an examination of the way in which Antiochus III used ancestral rights to legitimate his rule in Asia Minor, setting in context his famous retort to the Romans at Lysimacheia that in occupying this area he was merely recovering what was rightfully his. Elsewhere Ma can use a text from Xanthus to give an evocative account of the transportation of a stele by boat from Lycia to the Troad (p. 89).

Ma's approach to epigraphic texts is refreshing. He emphasizes the importance of the texts themselves, as events, as acts, as embodiments of civic or imperial ideology, rather then merely as evidence for some extraneous historical event. Inscription can be a means of publicizing imperial power and ideology. Antiochus' letter about Nicanor was sent first to Zeuxis, who sent a copy to a subordinate adding a prescript of his own, and the subordinate did the same, forwarding it to his subordinate with another note. Antiochus had within his own letter instructed that it be inscribed in the most prominent sanctuaries, but what was inscribed was not merely Antiochus' letter but all the prescripts. As Ma puts it, 'the genre of the hierarchical dossier expresses the power to command' (p. 149). Throughout, Ma draws attention to the real and material nature of epigraphic evidence, 'a stele found at modern Gördes' (p. 53), or 'the stele discovered near Balıkesir' (p. 60), at the same time locating the ancient past in the Turkish present.

Sometimes Ma can go a little too far with his interpretation of epigraphic texts as acts in themselves, thus 'the interaction between king and city took place through canonical forms, the royal letter and the civic decree' (p. 182, cf. 'they *are* this interaction', p. 19, his italics). This would seem to prioritize the written over the spoken word. The wish to emphasize the importance of the 'canonical forms' is perhaps what leads Ma to believe that when ambassadors arrived before the king they read out the civic decree (pp. 20l, 205). It is possible that they did, but the evidence, including that cited at p. 201 n. 71, suggests that the normal procedure was for the decree to be handed over and then the ambassadors would speak about the decree, explaining its contents. No doubt this was the opportunity for rhetorical display; the object, after all, was to win the king over, not bore him with detail. I would prefer, therefore, to stress the oral character of the interaction: the ambassadors speak, the king addresses the ambassadors in reply; there may even be scope for negotiation here (cf. p. 113). Later a reply is drafted, following the text of the civic decree (cf. the uniformity of the replies to the Magnesian *asylia* requests). Letters provide confirmation, a means of pinning down oral discourse, in the interaction not only with kings but also with other cities (cf. all the letters Hegesias collected in his wandering embassy on behalf of Lampsacus, *SIG*^{3} 391).

All was not courteous embassies. Ma takes care to stress the rôle of violence and expropriation, explicit at the moment of conquest, less visible but still present thereafter, and the fear that this engendered among the subjects. Here the literary and the public epigraphic record often diverge; thus Polybius tells of the destruction and bloodshed of Antiochus' capture of Sardis, while inscriptions reveal little more than the king's subsequent solicitude for the city. It is important not to overlook the fear that could permeate even the Seleucid administration. The garrison commander who stayed at his post in Perge after Magnesia because he had had no orders from Antiochus may have been more afraid of his own king than of the Romans (Polyb. 21.41). The power of the king in the imagination of his subjects was extraordinary, and Ma captures very well the illusions that both subject and ruler built up between them.

Ma is an historian alive to the scholarly traditions in which he is working, keen to

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explore them, experiment with them, and, importantly, add to them. He has produced a subtle book, full of insights, one for the specialist rather than the Hellenistic novice.

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THE PAST AS TEXT

C. PELLING: *Literary Texts and the Greek Historian.* Pp. x + 338. London: Routledge, 2000. ISBN: 0415-07350-2, 0415-07351-0 (pbk).

After *Greek Tragedy and the Historian* (Oxford, 1997) comes a dose of pure Pelling on a broader subject—though not that broad, since a more accurate title would be: 'Some literary texts and the historian of late fifth-century Athens'. The texts include Thucydides, Aristophanes (*Acharnians*, *Lysistrata*), Plutarch (*Nicias*, *Alcibiades*, *Pericles*), Apollodorus = Pseudo-Demosthenes 59, *Eumenides* and *Orestes*, Lysias 1, and Xenophon's *Oeconomicus.* Histor(iograph)ical topics include several old favourites (Thucydidean speeches; women; the 'seriousness' of comedy), though there is little on others, e.g. religion or barbarians. P. acknowledges some impact from theoretical work on performance, narratology, reader-response, reception, New Historicism and gender, but that the impact is implicit is one of his strengths. Two others are his elegant amalgam of academic and conversational style and his sense of humour. (There are numerous allusions to TV comedy. But why none to *Blackadder*?)

While problematizing texts, P. resolutely clings to reality: 'Those who died at Salamis or Syracuse were not killed by a text, and we owe it to them to try and find out what happened'. If this involves being keenly aware of reasons why surviving texts might not tell us, the trust is not betrayed. Nor (as we have seen) does P. betray reality through excessive theorizing, rightly unwilling to '[pass] off criticism as more sophisticated, and more driven by a particular theory, than it really is'. What drives P. is the texts, approached with scholarship, reasonable cynicism, and good humour. Some principles emerge. We should note what the author expected to be sayable without alienating the audience, test comic texts by asking how little must be true for a joke to work, expect authors to cater for different reactions, look for how the audience thought, attend to context, and avoid hermetically sealing 'funny' from 'serious' ('the funny is the serious': p. 160). These are not wholly new ideas, but any student of classical Athens will find pleasure and profit in inspecting P.'s 'worked examples' (p. ix). The devil is in the detail, but so are the pearls.

P.'s texts are diverse and, though rhetoric is a common factor, the manipulations of reality in Thucydides or Plutarch are rather different from those in forensic oratory, comedy, or tragedy. One must agree that Plutarch is 'not merely . . . a "source" but also . . . an intelligent and knowledgeable reader of events and texts'; and one may agree that Thuc. 1.22 is a deliberately ambiguous statement about speech-(re)construction designed to cover a variety of individual cases, or that 'the truest cause but least clear in what was said' makes sense because (i) Spartan fear and 'enforced' war-declaration are not clear elements in Book 1 speeches, and (ii) the phrase may really apply to the actual speeches of 435–432. But this all seems remote from the problems of using, for example, *Troades*, and there is some equivocation in treating Plutarch, Thucydides, and Euripides undifferentiatedly as authors of 'literary texts'. (Moreover, Plutarch's date detaches him from P.'s prevailing concern with classical Athenian views.) Thucydides' 'need-to-know' policy and 'combative' silences do have a forensic quality; and historians can be as equivocal as poets. But the luxury

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