Introduction

From Berlin to Bergama

In the sunny, austere central hall of the Pergamon Museum in Berlin, wrapping around the room's walls like a serpent, then rising halfway to the ceiling on marble steps, stands a strident, if also fragmentary statement of empire. It is an unfinished wedding cake of a building. Tourists recline languidly on its ascent, like guests with nowhere to sit. The room is just too small; it is overtaken by the object on display: the Great Altar of Pergamon. The Altar, with its two sculptural friezes, the outer depicting the Battle of Gods and Giants, the inner, the tale of Telephos, son of Herakles and heroic ancestor of the Attalid dynasty, was discovered in 1871, the year in which the Second German Empire was born. The engineer Karl Humann stumbled upon the marble fragments while building infrastructure for Ottoman Turkey, making the Altar as we know it a pure product of German, French, and British competition for influence in the Middle East. Today, Turkey has regained confidence, and officials from the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation expect Ankara to ask for it back.

These sinuous marbles seem to speak to ascendant world powers. The Great Altar exudes confidence. Below the surface, however, does it also betoken demise? King Eumenes II and his brother Attalos II, their faces conspicuously absent among the Altar's myriad sculpted figures, were responsible for the construction of this colossal monument in the mid-second century BCE. The Attalids were the last of the great dynasties to emerge in Eurasia in the wake of the conquests of Alexander the Great, and the Altar is the loudest expression of their arrival. "We belong," it seems to say. Consider the themes of its two friezes. On the outside, savage Giants, half-man and half-beast, challenge Olympus for supremacy in the world. Zeus, Athena, and the other Olympian gods are shown battling down the threat of chaos. The barbarians are beaten back from the gates, a Classical example of classic fear mongering. And the message is simple: In an insecure world, the Attalids belong at the helm. On the inside, the Greek exiles from Arkadia, the retinue of princess Auge and her foundling son Telephos, arrive in non-Greek Mysia. Local king Teuthras and his

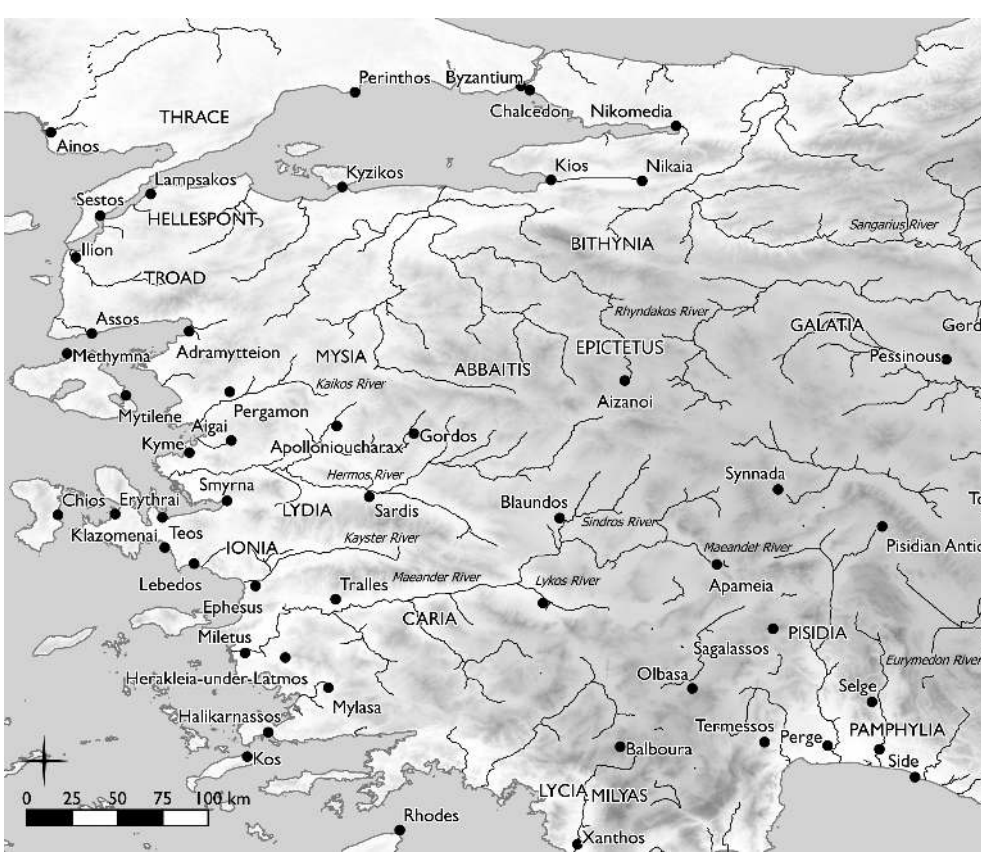
indigenous Mysians receive and absorb them. Together, they even fend off an attack of Greeks on their way to Troy. In short, the Attalids belong in Anatolia.

Yet also ringing out from the marble, from its distended and seething bodies, is the death knell of a Hellenism without Rome. Within a generation, the Attalids were gone, their finery transported to Rome, their kingdom converted into a province, their library and collection of art picked over by Roman looters, their customs houses occupied and their cities picked over by Roman tax collectors. During an 1882 viewing, Jacob Burckhardt, one of the Altar's first sympathetic critics, was thrilled with its rippling dynamism.[1] What he saw as a terrifying creativity breaking free of the straitjacket of convention could also be interpreted as the equally mortifying last gasp of the Hellenistic World. In the end, royal Pergamon disappeared as suddenly as it had emerged onto the stage of history.

The Subject of the Inquiry

The Attalids' was an overnight empire. The story in a nutshell is that in 188 BCE, Rome defeated the Seleukid army of Antiochos III "the Great" and promptly parceled off to allies the winnings of Aegean-based Asia Minor and inland Anatolia (**Map I.1**). Those allies were the Attalid kingdom and the island republic of Rhodes. While the Rhodians failed to secure their share of the spoils, the Attalids succeeded, chiefly, by using a set of flexible and noncoercive tools of empire building. These tools were both fiscal and ideological in nature. The Attalids exploited the potent mechanisms of public finance in ancient Greece to bind an urbanized Aegean zone to rural Anatolia in a way that assured both populations of cultural autonomy. It was taxation – not predation – that afforded the Attalids their legacy as patrons of arts and culture in the polis and as prestige brokers in parts of the Anatolian countryside where an Iron Age way of life persisted well into the Roman period. In fact, for fifty years, the Attalids raised such a bountiful harvest of taxes that the Pergamene cartouche is still visible in nearly all of the most prestigious venues of Old Greece. Today, the Stoa of Attalos in the ancient marketplace of Athens stands for Pergamon's inclusion in Greece and – ever since John D. Rockefeller reconstructed it and

[1] On the discovery of the Altar in its historical context, as well as the reactions of intellectuals such as Burckhardt and Friedrich Nietzsche, see Gossman 2006. For its rapid reception across Germany, see Bohne 2012, 399–400.



Map I.1 Anatolia, ca. 200 BCE.

Dwight D. Eisenhower rededicated it in 1956 – Greece's belonging to the West. Overwhelmed by the aesthetic blitz of the Altar, or perhaps with the benefit of hindsight, seeing the hubris of a soon-to-be defunct dynasty in its monuments, we have yet to explain how this young and lightweight empire so effectively raised the money.

The explanation is that the Attalids made culture depend on taxation. It is important to remember that for the average Greek of 188 BCE, only death was certain, not taxes. Surely, the new imperial overlord would demand tribute, an outflow of resources – but that amounts to confiscation, not taxation. A fiscal system that works sustains the fiction of reciprocity. With the tax return that Pergamon sent back, a bundle of money and fiscal privileges, the taxpayers funded the reproduction of their own culture. Naturally, lent such dignity, they agreed to pay up. It was all rather like the gambit that C. P. Cavafy imagined in his poem "In a Large Greek Colony, 200 B.C." (lines 18–20). An outsider appears, a "political reformer," who meddles with the local economy, making radical changes under cover of carefully chosen words. Just so the Attalids seem to have coaxed their subjects, by arguing, in Cavafy's telling, "Give up this revenue and that other similar one, and this third, *as a natural consequence*" (emphasis added).

It is a remarkable fact that the Attalids extracted resources from vast new territories without militarizing them or succumbing to a revolt. Rather, the great revolt, the War of Aristonikos, broke out under the shadow of the extinction of their line. Instead of imposing bureaucrats and garrisons, the Attalids ruled through an extraordinarily wide range of local actors, from the elite of the old Greek cities of the Aegean coast to the tribal leaders of the interior of Anatolia. Instead of abolishing local institutions and identities, they harnessed them. The cities' budgets were written into the royal tax code. The king inscribed the cities' emblems on coins, not his own portrait. In the cities, the Attalids profited from ancient civic institutions, a well-oiled administrative machine. In the countryside, a civic awakening was afoot, and Pergamon nimbly helped generate new institutions that instantly meshed with their own. They ruled under the banner of a new universalism, which drew on Panhellenism's traditional appeal to the Greek polis, but built out their own cosmopolis to encompass zones of backwoods Anatolia as yet unknown to state power.

As a subject of inquiry, the rise and fall of an empire is as old as the writing of history itself. In the fifth century BCE, Herodotus described the formation of imperial Persia, while Thucydides analyzed the origins of the Athenian Empire. In Hellenistic times, the Greek historian Polybius,

a contemporary and an admirer of Pergamon's most famous kings, the brothers Eumenes II and Attalos II, explained to Greece how Rome had risen to Mediterranean-wide power. Philosophically, Polybius' view was that every great empire must eventually fall, though he left that theme to the likes of eighteenth-century English historian Edward Gibbon, whose *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* very much speaks to the concerns of our own age.[2] Indeed, with American power on the wane, Europe's cohesion evaporating, and the postcolonial order in the Middle East crumbling, understanding imperial and civilizational collapse is once again on the agenda. Yet between these two poles of birth and demise stands another issue, one now of pressing concern to sovereigns of young empires like China's or to those who rule over pieces of failed states, namely, the question of how a "successful" empire actually functions. If we define "success" in terms of the capacity of the few to dominate the many, to extract or control the resources of extensive territories, to integrate populations ideologically, and to substitute cooption for coercion, then the Attalid Empire, short-lived as it was, ranks among the most successful of Classical Antiquity.

The subject of the inquiry here, then, is not how an empire came into being or disappeared. The Attalids gained their empire by shrewdly allying themselves with the Romans, who simply created it by fiat to fill a power vacuum and avoid the burden of direct rule. In turn, Attalos III bequeathed his kingdom to Rome, ultimately preserving its unity in the form of Rome's new Province of Asia, contributing a major building block to the kind of "composite monarchy" that we later find in early modern Europe.[3] For such perspicacity and timeliness, the Attalids have been rewarded with little attention from historians.[4] Yet what most sorely awaits investigation, the subject of the inquiry here, is how the Attalids' empire came to be so entrenched, so quickly. Consequently, what follows is micro-history on an imperial scale. It is the story of how an empire embedded itself in society, how an empire came to be a state. While both terms, "empire" and "state," are notoriously difficult to define, and even vexing when we import to the ancient past the categories of European colonialism or the nation-state, it is important to mind the distinction. Empire implies the effective sovereignty of one polity, the dominant metropole, over another, the subordinated

[2] See recently, e.g., Morris 2010; Ober 2015.
[3] On "composite monarchy," see, e.g., Koenigsberger 1989.
[4] The last synthesis of Attalid history was Hansen 1971 (first ed. 1947). Allen 1983 is a more specialized treatment. For renewed interest, see the papers collected in Thonemann 2013a.

periphery.[5] That domination, of course, rests on the recognition of sharp differences in identity. A state, by contrast, in Max Weber's famous definition, is a continuous and compulsory political organization, which upholds its monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force in the enforcement of its order on a specific territory.[6] Here, local elites cooperate and common identities predominate. Rome handed Pergamon an empire, but it was the Attalids who pursued the path of the state. The task is to narrate and explain the rapid and relatively bloodless conversion of an imperial periphery into a coherent state. Along the way, a further objective is to illustrate the texture of Attalid state power in order to provide a fuller account of the historical development of Hellenistic monarchy and enrich our knowledge of its many regional inflections.

If we step back and survey the grand history of ancient empires, we see a great variety of solutions to the problem of governance. On one extreme, certain empires integrate conquered territories with only the credible threat of violence. The Neo-Assyrian Empire of the early Iron Age operated on this basis. The vanquished faced either integration or annihilation, a choice vividly illustrated on the stone reliefs that show cities toppled, bodies impaled, and all that is sacred profaned. However, that form of integration was administrative and fiscal, but never ideological. On the other extreme, we find empires that can take a step beyond merely attracting the loyalties of local elites on the periphery; they open up new identities for broad segments of the conquered population. The Roman Empire, which turned its provincial Gauls, Africans, and Syrians all into card-carrying Romans, lasted centuries because it penetrated society to an unprecedented depth. This is the fundamental question in the comparative study of empire: To what extent do empires convert their peripheries into parts of their original state?[7]

It is a question that remains unanswered for the Hellenistic kingdoms of western Eurasia, which form the chronological and geographical bridge between the Ancient Near East and Rome. In his magisterial *The Sources of Social Power*, Michael Mann calls them "loose, Persian-style states," with Greeks holding sway.[8] With a wealth of evidence unearthed in recent decades, we can now see the Pergamene iteration of Hellenistic empire in a different light. This late-breaking version, strapped for charisma if not for cash and administrative acumen, evinces a clear break with the old Achaemenid tradition of minimal interference in local affairs. As Peter

[5] Doyle 1986, 19–48. [6] The paraphrase of Weber is drawn from Monson and Scheidel 2015, 6.
[7] Goldstone and Haldon 2009, 16. [8] Mann 2012, 247.

Thonemann argues, the Attalids now came "creeping into their subjects' lives in a new and intrusive way," leaning on the Greek polis and other, non-Greek civic organisms to generate ever more of what Mann calls *infrastructural power*.[9]

Classics

If the Renaissance rediscovered Classics, the original discovery took place in Antiquity itself. Those ancient tastemakers whom we have labeled since the nineteenth century the so-called Hellenistic Greeks are often credited in romantic narratives with spreading Hellenism across the Middle East. Johann Droysen, the Prussian monarchist who coined the term "Hellenistic," celebrated the scientific and philosophical achievements of their age and exalted their mixing of cultures. Hellenism and Judaism were combined to produce Christianity, on his account.[10] We have inherited Droysen's fascination with cultural mélange, if the fracturing of academic disciplines has also meant a turn away from his mode of synthesis. Yet we can understand the mix only as well as we know the ingredients. Hellenism may have been generalized in the wake of Alexander the Great, but it was also classicized. Drawing on their inheritance, scholars in the Ptolemies' Library of Alexandria and the Attalids' Library of Pergamon selected and refined, catalogued, preserved, and transmitted the corpus of literary and artistic output that we call Classics. Not just the shape, then, but also the prestige attached to Classics in its primeval form derives from a specific historical context, in which the new Hellenistic kings gambled on a new conception of culture.

While Alexandria's earlier role in this process is well recognized, we tend to look past Pergamon, Hellenistic latecomers, toward Rome, though ironically, the Romans themselves believed wholeheartedly that the Attalids were the agents of cultural transfer.[11] Pergamon commands a crucial, if relatively unexamined position in the mediation of the Classical Tradition. Gregory Nagy describes the Library of Pergamon as both rival and alternative to the centers of Alexandria and Athens. It operated according to a different notion of comprehensiveness, verging on

[9] Thonemann 2013b, 46–47.
[10] For the origins of this grand hypothesis, which Droysen himself never put to the test, see Momigliano 1970.
[11] Kuttner 1995.

encyclopedism. This is no triviality if it meant that a much larger corpus of Aristotle and more poetry attributed to Homer and Hesiod survived.[12] The Attalids were omnivorous and voracious collectors across media. Theirs was a truly bibliophilic city; an ancient etymology for the word "parchment" links it to Pergamon. They collected Athenian intellectuals and refashioned the legacy of Pericles, erecting a replica of Pheidias' statue of Athena from the Parthenon inside their library. They purchased the island of Aegina and then plundered it for statues, including a portrait of the poet Sappho. They participated in the Sack of Corinth and picked out the paintings of old masters from the rubble. They were no more or less opportunistic than their peers in this regard, only more successful at making their mark with the detritus of Greece's heyday. Yet inevitably, each king and court with the requisite institutions shaped Classics for the ideological use best suited to the needs of the moment. By focusing on the historical moment of urgent state formation in the decades after the Treaty of Apameia of 188 BCE, and by providing a full account of the ideological challenges and proclivities of the Attalids, who decorated Delphi, Delos, and Athens and built a capital with a royal library and the largest gymnasium on record in the Hellenistic world, we can supply the missing context for a key stage in the development of the Classical Tradition.

Taxation

We live in the most financialized economy in the history of the world. Money is more ubiquitous, fungible, and powerful than ever before; it permeates every aspect of life and of death too. It flies around the globe with ferocious velocity and underwrites American dominance. The differences are striking, if we juxtapose to ours the world into which Philetairos, founder of the Attalid dynasty, was born. Imagine an agrarian society, in which many people rarely laid eyes on a coin, in which there was so much that money could *not* buy. Kings ruled only as long as they proved themselves worthy on the battlefield; their lands were "spear-won," and therefore also their right to consume the fruits conspicuously.[13] And yet money is a central theme of the story of the improbable rise of Philetairos and the Attalids. Generations ago, when money was newer and perhaps viewed with more suspicion, this oddity was frequently noted. Theodor

[12] Nagy 2011.
[13] For "spear-won" land, the essential sources are collected by Austin 2006, 84 n. 4.

Mommsen, for example, cast the Attalids as the Medici of Antiquity, while a historian of the 1920s bemoaned the "money power of Pergamon."[14] An Anatolian archaeologist of the 1950s and 1960s, as if charging stray ruins to their account, opined, "Pergamenes always preferred gold and diplomacy to force of arms."[15] In fact, an ancient critique of the Attalids relates to their moneyed origins: Philetairos was a eunuch and a treasurer (*gazophylax*), not a king. Indeed, they did descend from this rogue official, a Hellenized Paphlagonian who managed to embezzle 9,000 talents of royal silver stored in a citadel of Lysimachus.[16] This was a large amount of silver, if we compare it with the estimated cost of the construction of the Parthenon, around 500 talents, or take these 9,000 talents as roughly equivalent to Herodotus' guess for the annual tribute of Achaemenid Persia. If minted, Philetairos' silver would have equaled almost eight years of the copious coinage issued in the name of Alexander the Great (ca. 332–290 BCE).[17] On the other hand, hypothetical revenues for the Seleukid kingdom in this period reach 14,000–19,000 talents; the cash income of Ptolemy II Philadelphus of Egypt has been registered at 14,800. In short, the Attalid dynasty was born into money, but not much more than a middling-to-large Hellenistic kingdom collected in a year.[18]

Yet money came to define the Attalids because of how they deployed it – as a means of girding subjects to express their own communal identities and granting those expressions increased prestige. With characteristic subtlety, they delivered cultural autonomy, status, and risk buffering to many a polis and village, but also, the bonds of dependence. For a Hellenistic king, conspicuous consumption was a given, as was pandering to the cultural prejudices of those he ruled. So why, centuries later, was the Christian moralist Tertullian still railing against "Attalid riches" (*attalicae divitiae*)?[19] Clearly, money was the basis of their power. However, the mechanisms and ideological maneuvers through which Pergamon obtained money and used it to gain an empire have long been opaque. Any investigation into the roots of the Attalid imperial project must shed light on systems of public finance.

The Attalids were heirs to a long line of thinking about taxation that stretches from Xenophon's reflections on a specifically economic Athenian

[14] Ure 1922, 285. [15] Winter 1966, 129. [16] Strabo 13.4.1.
[17] Hdt. 3.89–95. For the Parthenon, see Stanier 1953. For an estimate of just 10% minted, see Marcellesi 2012, 80.
[18] Callataÿ 2011, 20; Manning 2007, 454; Aperghis 2004, 251. On the historical insignificance of these 9,000 talents, see already Rostovtzeff 1923, 360.
[19] Tertullian, *De ieiunio adversus psychicos* 294.

Empire through the political economy of Pseudo-Aristotle's *Oikonomika*, written at the dawn of the Hellenistic period. What makes the Attalids unique is that their question was not just how to raise more taxes, but how to involve the populace more deeply in its own taxation. Pergamon maintained a modest army and fell back behind sturdy walls when attacked.[20] The Attalids' subjects did not revere them as pharaohs, nor as the successors of the Great Kings of Persia and Babylonia, nor as the representatives of a Macedonian kinship group. If only for survival, cunning choices about taxation were essential; though just as important were decisions about redistribution, which is why the term "taxation" and not "tribute" is maintained in what follows. The case of Pergamon may even disprove the dictum now attributed to the Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter: "The budget is the skeleton of the state stripped of all misleading ideologies."[21] On the contrary, everything we know about fiscal practice in the Attalids' empire shows that culture and ideology were inscribed in their tax code.

Taxation provokes debate. Behind arguments about what the state must purchase and how to distribute the costs are debates about the very nature, essential fairness, and even definition of taxation. In the United States, where the Constitutional Convention of 1787 failed to agree on an unambiguous definition of "direct taxes," taxation is a divisive issue and consensus elusive.[22] As recently as 2011, the Supreme Court disagreed over whether to qualify as a tax the individual mandate provision of Obamacare.[23] Different taxes have received the public's approbation and its scorn, cast as natural, habitual obligations and sacrifices, or foreign and un-American confiscations. Slavery and its legacy, the impact of industrialization and now globalization, the American way of life, are all debated in the fiscal arena. What we talk about when we talk about taxation is citizenship and democracy, but also the vaunted and loathed exceptional character of American culture.

It turns out that the ancient Greeks were just as divided over taxation. They had budgets.[24] They also had fiscal preferences and prejudices. From the assembly of Classical Athens to the battlefield of Alexander's Babylon, public spending debates were surprisingly sophisticated.[25] The average citizen knew how much was in the treasury and how to investigate the

[20] Ma 2013a, 59–62. [21] Schumpeter 1991, 100, quoting Rudolph Goldscheid.
[22] Einhorn 2006; Huret 2014; Hutchins 2016.
[23] *National Federation of Independent Business* v. *Sebelius*. [24] Rhodes 2013, 217–18.
[25] Perikles on eve of Peloponnesian War: Thuc. 2.13.3. Alexander at Opis: Arr. *Anab*. 7.9.6.