Introduction

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1 Comparing the Ptolemaic and Seleucid Empires

The Ptolemaic and Seleucid empires are usually studied separately, or otherwise included in broader examinations of the Hellenistic World. This book proposes a more dynamic comparison, with a particular, though not exclusive focus on the interaction of the royal centers with local populations and elites. Both political entities are approached as multiethnic empires whose resemblance and entanglement are sufficient to make comparisons meaningful. In the process of comparing them, differences and connections become more salient and better explained. We aim to explore the different structural capacities for, and levels of, integration that were either aspired to or achieved by the kings and populations of each empire.

The volume contributes to at least three wider issues that concern both scholars and broader audiences. First, it reorients the traditional focus of the so-called classical world from its centers in Greece and Rome to its outer reaches in Asia and Africa; second, it is anchored in the comparative history of empires by paying particular attention to the multiple social, economic, and epistemic entanglement of social and ethnic groups in the course of imperial change; and third, it engages with the increasing awareness of, and anxieties about cultural globalization and transfers. The interaction between different ethnic and socioeconomic groups, as well as local elites as mediators between centers of power and peripheries, is crucial factor in such mutual cultural exchanges.

The chapters compare the two largest political formations in the Hellenistic period after Alexander's conquest of the Persian empire. They explore difference, similarity, and purposeful imitation and interaction, especially as they present themselves in forms of exchange and ritual communication, taxation, and administration, as well as settlement and territorial policies. This introduction offers a frame for focusing our

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comparison, setting out empire as an analytical tool for understanding the role of local elites within them, and delineating lines of research along which the chapters evolve. "Local elites," however, simply serve as an umbrella term, since they are rarely homogenous groups and variously consist of particular ethnic or religious groups, military or priestly personnel, civic officials or *poleis* benefactors, or even vassal/client kings. The chronological survey in Section 3 of this introduction narrates imperial development in territorial terms, a perspective that will be challenged and moderated in the following chapters. Yet it helps to suggest that comparison close in time and space is a fertile ground for investigating imperial communication, and the nature of interaction and competition beyond their territorial expansion. As the following chapters will show, the two largest political entities deriving from Alexander's conquest were 'false twins' among the Hellenistic polities; they look similar but at the same time were quite different.

2   States and Empires

While the Ptolemaic and Seleucid empires can safely be regarded as political entities or polities, their status as empires is more controversial.[1] The Ptolemaic polity is sometimes considered as an expansive maritime empire[2] and sometimes as a state with a maritime empire, as Roger Bagnall's classic book title *The Administration of the Ptolemaic Possessions Outside Egypt* (1976) suggests.[3] The weak and ailing polity of the Seleucids, in contrast, was long regarded as not deserving the term 'state' or 'empire' at all.[4] This was challenged most influentially by Pierre Briant who in many publications from the 1990s onwards pointed to the elements of political cohesion the Seleucids took over from the Persians.[5] However, as the Persian empire conquered by Alexander was divided between several Successors, many scholars are still reluctant to call any of the Successor polities 'empires.'[6] Instead, both are generally referred to as kingdoms, which comes closest to the term *basileia* that the Greco-Macedonian rulers gave to their realms.[7]

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[1] Doyle (1986); Hurlet (2008) on 'polities' as an umbrella term for empires, states, city-states, and other forms of government different from tribes; see also Tilly (1992).

[2] Strootman (2014a) and (2019b).   [3] Followed more recently by Meadows (2012).

[4] Tarn (1951) [1938]; Will et al. (1993) 447–9.

[5] E.g. Briant (1990); (2002) [1996], now collected in translation in (2017); also Sherwin-White and Kuhrt (1993); Strootman (2014a and 2014b).

[6] Capdetrey (2008) 59.   [7] Von Reden (2019) 40.

Over the past thirty years, the concept of empire has spurred numerous studies and debates over imperial structures, their development, and transformation, in order to show the difference between imperial and nation states: above all their different territoriality and boundaries, their different governance structures, and integration politics.[8] Although the concept of 'empire' is not uncontroversial – depending on what scholars associate with it,[9] and which historical empire they regard as most typical –[10] we regard an approach to the Hellenistic states as empires helpful. Both debates and individual historical and archaeological studies have sharpened our perspective on problems that are strongly related to this approach, such as a focus on zones that are regarded as peripheral to the center, forms of interaction between central governments and local populations, the impact of (imperial) memories on social and normative behavior, multiethnicity and transcultural forms of communication, as well as the processes that *make* a state in contrast to its institutional and constitutional frame. In contrast to nation states, empires are defined more loosely as multiethnic political entities, formed by conquest or nonviolent imperial takeover, held together by a fiscal military regime, some legitimizing ideology, and several forms of interaction between politically dominant centers and sometimes distant peripheries.[11] Despite their relatively loose control of imperial regions and populations, empires develop – like more tightly integrated states – a certain degree of institutional stability through administrative and material infrastructures, protection, access to adjudication, and sometimes coinage.[12] From these stabilities, not only the core regions and centers but also peripheries and local polities benefit.[13] Yet the integrative capacities of empires are weaker than those of nation states. Because of their fluid, multiethnic composition and local autonomies, empires rely on particular social networks, legitimacy structures, and integration

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[8] Classically Doyle (1986), and comparative investigations in e.g. Alcock et al. (2001); Hurlet (2008); Burbank and Cooper (2010); Cline and Graham (2011); Bang and Bayly (2011); Gehler and Rollinger (2014a); Düring and Stek (2018); and Ando and Richardson (2017), despite their hesitation to adopt the concept of empire.

[9] Imperial nostalgia, admiration for their stability, and admiration of the success of individual emperors, on the one hand, weakness of governance and rather contiguous governmental knowledge, on the other; Ando (2017).

[10] The Roman empire as a 'worthy' predecessor of Western empires in contrast to the Assyrian, Achaemenid, and Byzantine empires which have been seen through a more critical Biblical lens, see Düring and Stek (2018).

[11] Doyle (1986); Allsen (2011); Gehler and Rollinger (2014b).

[12] Allsen (2011); Thoneman (2013).

[13] L. Doyle (2014 a and b); on stability and duration of empires, see also Scheidel (2013) 30.

mechanisms.[14] The more that imperial governments can adapt to new circumstances and to renegotiate relationships with local elites, the longer their influence is likely to last.

Central to the concept of 'empire' is the variety of processes that developed to access regions, their resources, and the social hierarchies that controlled them.[15] We therefore pay particular attention to the strategies of local control, local responses to these strategies, and the structural capacities of the Ptolemaic and Seleucid imperial states to change and modify them.[16] The relationship between core and local elites is so essential to the nature of premodern empires that some time ago Liverani already called empires networks of communication rather than spreads of land.[17] Particular to the Hellenistic empires is their respective claims to universal rule, their common cultural and political background, their continuous competition among each other, and the development of peripheries that in the course of the Hellenistic period formed into politically independent but still culturally connected polities.[18]

3   The Ptolemaic and Seleucid Empires across Space and Time

The Ptolemaic and Seleucid polities were competitive and entangled empires that shared a common chronological frame. The following survey of the development of the Ptolemaic and Seleucid polities shows that their politics were intertwined from the start, but that they rapidly moved into the realm of competitive imperial politics.[19] A first period, from 323 to c. 220 BCE (**Period A**), is marked by the establishment and organization of each imperial space (see Maps 1, 2, and 3).[20] Both Ptolemy and Seleucus first were satraps, that is, governors of a region of the Persian empire conquered by Alexander: Egypt in 323 BCE and Babylonia in 320 BCE respectively when the Successors met at Triparadeisus. Already by 310 BCE, after the murder of Alexander's son and legitimate heir Alexander IV, they had expanded their territorial power beyond the cores. They received legitimacy to their imperial claims in 306/5 BCE by adopting the title of king as other Successors did. The defeat of Antigonus and Demetrius at

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[14] Barkey (2008); Burbank and Cooper (2010); Mann (1986).   [15] Monson (2015) 170.
[16] Ando (2017).
[17] Liverani (1988); Ristvet (2015) for network empires; for the implications of network empires on mapping, Smith (2005).
[18] Strootman (2014 a and b).   [19] Hauben and Meus 2014; von Reden (2019).
[20] Longer overview in Fischer-Bovet (2020); detailed historical studies in Hölbl (2001); Huß (2001); Sherwin-White and Kuhrt (1993); Ma (1999).

Issus in 301 BCE suppressed their main common rivals but marked a new level of rivalry between their own expanding empires. Ptolemy had not sent troops to the battle of Issus. Instead, he invaded Syria and Phoenicia in the southern part of the Levant adjacent to Egypt. Though Seleucus may have consented to the Ptolemaic appropriation of the region at first, it became contested territory, leading to no less than six wars over the course of a century. By about 250 BCE, both empires had reached their maximum imperial consolidation, though the Seleucids had already lost the kingdom of Bactria to a local usurper in 255 BCE. The Ptolemies controlled territories all along the Eastern Mediterranean from Cyrenaica to Southern Anatolia, Cyprus, and Thrace (with a few cities in Crete, mainland Greece, and the Aegean), as well as Lower Nubia. The Seleucids' imperial power extended from Anatolia and Northern Syria to Central Asia.

Period B from c. 220 to c. 160 BCE saw intensive warfare between the two empires, starting with the temporary conquest of Syria and Phoenicia by Antiochus III during the Fourth Syrian War (219–217 BCE) and the victory (or rather confirmation of *status quo*) of Ptolemy IV who recuperated the lost territories in the battle of Raphia. The Fifth Syrian War (202–195 BCE) ended with the definitive loss of these territories to the Seleucids, who now faced a new rival in Asia Minor, Rome. During the Sixth Syrian War (170–168 BCE) Antiochus IV temporarily invaded Egypt, only to withdraw after an ultimatum was set by the Roman Popilius Laenas.[21] This period is also marked by important reforms that led to the Ptolemies and Seleucids gaining more direct control of their territories, however reduced they were in number and size. The repression of concomitant internal revolts was successful in the case of the Great Revolt in Egypt, but not so in the case of the Maccabean Revolt in Judea.

Period C from c. 160 to 30 BCE is characterized by extended dynastic conflicts and external pressure from the Romans in the West and the Parthians in the East. By 129 BCE, the Seleucid polity was reduced to the territory of Northern Syria before becoming a Roman province in 63 BCE. In 94 BCE, Rome had seized Cyrenaica according to the will of Ptolemy Apion and took Cyprus in 58 BCE, reducing Egypt to its core state. But soon after, thanks to her remarkable alliances with Julius Caesar and Marc Antony, Cleopatra VII was able to recoup the empire of her forefathers, though at the cost of Egyptian autonomy. After the final defeat of

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[21] Mittag (2006); Feyel and Graslin (2014).

Cleopatra and Antony at Actium in 31 BCE, Egypt became a Roman province in 30 BCE.

To be sure, the Ptolemaic and Seleucid empires were different in territorial extension and morphology. Yet despite these differences, models of center–periphery relationships, though much debated, can be applied usefully.[22] As Motyl suggests, it does not matter whether empires are geographically contiguous or discontinuous, that is, whether they have overseas possessions or a more tightly organized territorial texture.[23] Both our cases are different from any of these imperial types, which have developed largely in response to the European colonial period. Macedonia, the point of origin of the core elite, was not the core state of any of the empires. Nor was Greece, the symbolic center of all Hellenistic empires. The capitals or royal cities within the core states (arguably Egypt and Babylonia) had physical and social infrastructures close to Greco-Macedonian cultural and political forms.[24] And yet, both were built close to the old royal cities of Memphis and Babylon. In the vast Seleucid empire, further royal centers were erected in Syria under Seleucus I (Antioch, Laodiceia, Apameia, and Seleucia-Pieria), while Ptolemy I founded Ptolemais Hermiou as a political outpost of the Alexandrian administration in the Thebaid. These urban similarities, and simultaneous important differences of the geographies of power, lead us to the study's main areas of investigation.

In a comparative volume on the Hellenistic local elites, Dreyer, Mittag, and their contributors showed that local factions in favor of and against royal power emerged within the local elites of Judea and of the Greek city-states, while there seem to have been fewer tensions or open revolts in Egypt and Babylonia.[25] How can this be explained? Thanks to the rapid advance in Seleucid and Ptolemaic studies during the past three decades, it is now possible to provide balanced and nuanced comparative answers to this and similar questions. Local archaeological and textual sources offer unprecedented opportunities for investigating the interactions between the centers of power and local elites and populations. The nature of the sources, though very different for each empire, still favors top-down approaches, and the voice of ordinary people is hard to grasp independently of their representation in elite forms of expression. Even so, and for this very reason, the role of local elites as mediators between core and

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[22] E.g. Wallerstein (1974); cf. (2004) 11–12; Doyle (1986) 130; Motyl (1997) 20; Osterhammel (2001) 209–15; Scheidel (2013) 28; Gehler and Rollinger (2014b) 20.
[23] Motyl (2001) 4.   [24] Weber (2007).   [25] Dreyer and Mittag (2011).

peripheries can be demonstrated, and thus the ways in which they partici-
pated in the formation and transformation of the Ptolemaic and
Seleucid empires.

4 The Structure of This Book

The three parts of the book reflect three complementary lines of research
that assess and compare the nature and level of integration, communica-
tion, and resistance within each empire. The first part explores capitals and
settlement policies: their effects on and responses to relationships and
tensions between immigrants and local populations, as well as between
local populations and rulers. Each type of settlement may have had differ-
ent effects on integration and inspired different responses and feelings of
belonging to a Ptolemaic or Seleucid culture as well as their wider imperial
universe. Particular emphasis is given to the foundation of new capitals, as
preserved in textual and visual evidence, and to settlements of different
kinds of peripheries, such as Bactria, the Red Sea basin, and Lower Nubia.
We also ask why new semiautonomous administrative units called *politeu-
mata* emerged under the Ptolemies, and what we can learn from them
about the status of immigrant soldiers in the later Hellenistic period.
The second part examines forms of communication and exchange, both
between the two empires, and between imperial centers and local elites. We
look at media as diverse as portrait sculpture, calendars, coins, and inscrip-
tions. Given the different forms of communication considered, very dif-
ferent kinds of exchange stand out. They range from intense local
engagement (Kosmin and Moyer) to a relative absence of local involve-
ment in some areas of governance, such as coinage (Lorber and Iossif).
Moreover, the relationship between rulers and local elites in regions
undergoing transition deserves particular attention. The third part looks
at forms of active reassertion of cooperation and violent resistance of local
elites in moments of political crisis. It explores when and why elite
brokerage, especially that by priestly elites, failed.

As the Ptolemaic and Seleucid empires were part of a connected imperial
history and because their study has different historiographical traditions
going back even to antiquity (Kosmin and Moyer in this volume), the
comparative endeavor of this volume is sensitive to both the historical
entanglement and historiographical discrepancies of these empires. We
have preferred an open dialogue in which the coauthors or single authors of
each chapter have chosen an approach and focus that they regard as suitable
to their evidence, sociopolitical contexts, and historiographical discourse.

Some readers may miss a one-by-one comparison of specific phenomena, yet we follow the classical formulation of McMichael, stating that the "goal is not to develop invariant hypotheses via comparison of more or less uniform 'cases,' but to give substance to a historical process (a whole) through comparison of its parts."[26] Clancier and Gorre, as well as von den Hoff, have attempted direct comparison of very specific phenomena, while Sänger explains why some developments were apparently unique to one imperial context. We hope that by this approach we avoid superimposing comparability artificially, while at the same time drawing attention to the historical and historiographical complexities that comparison entails.

Von Reden and Strootman (Chapter 1: *Imperial* metropoleis *and Foundation Myths: Ptolemaic and Seleucid Capitals Compared*) deal with two different types of capital formation. In the case of Egypt, Alexandria was by far the most important royal city in Egypt, rivalled only by the "second city" (Strab. 17.1.32) of Memphis that became a religious center instead. Urban centers in the imperial possessions outside of Egypt never conflicted with the centrality of Alexandria. The Seleucids, by contrast, took over a much more heterogeneous, mobile and, at the same time (paradoxically) more connected empire with a tradition of several royal cities already established. Identifying a political center is more problematic there, as Strootman argues, but governance was "a network of ever-shifting, personalized relationships between interest groups and powerful individuals based on reciprocal transactions." There was particular need here to establish a symbolical political center that was Seleucia-Pieria first, but moved to Antioch by the time of Antiochus IV. Both von Reden and Strootman observe, however, that it was above all imperial competition, and to a lesser extent local discourse, that shaped the vision of Ptolemaic and Seleucid capitals. Looking at foundation myths as a guide to the symbolic construction of Ptolemaic and Seleucid capitals, they observe a deeply entangled discourse. The Seleucid and Ptolemaic courts and populations constantly reacted to each other as well as to Rome in an antagonistic interaction that manifested itself in many other forms than war alone.

The foundation of *poleis* beyond the capital cities, as well as the alteration and renaming of settlements, are explored as marks of imperialism by Mairs and Fischer-Bovet (Chapter 2, *Reassessing Hellenistic Settlement Policies: The Seleucid Far East, Ptolemaic Red Sea Basin and Egypt*). Rather than presenting an exhaustive survey of the (re)foundations

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[26] McMichael (1990) 386.

throughout both empires, the authors emphasize the methodological issues faced by historians of identifying and assessing new settlements – Mairs by focusing on the historiography and archaeology of the early Seleucid Far East, and Fischer-Bovet by offering a typology of Ptolemaic settlements. Seleucid settlements in Bactria can only be understood as a continuation of Alexander's settlement policy. Their strong military character shows the early Seleucid interest in Central Asia and is not representative of the Seleucid empire as a whole. The Ptolemaic empire was also connected through a network of either new or transformed settlements, whose type and variety were adapted to each region, and actively shaped by their local populations. The existing urban and administrative networks in Egypt, moreover, did not create the need for new *poleis* – and complementary explanation to the question raised by Clancier and Gorre in Chapter 3 – but the new and altered settlements reflect the Ptolemaic strategy of combining Greek and Egyptian elements.

Clancier and Gorre focus on Babylon and Egypt (Chapter 3, *The Integration of Indigenous Elites and the Development of* poleis *in the Ptolemaic and Seleucid Empires*) and offer a systematic comparison of the role of the local elites in the temple administration within the Seleucid and Ptolemaic governmental structures. While in both regions temples were the centers of public life before the Macedonian conquest, the traditional religious role of the king offered to the Ptolemies in Egyptian temples granted them a unique position that was not paralleled by the Seleucids in Babylonia. Moreover, the authors emphasize that the temple's elite was representative of the local elite in Egypt, but that this was not the case in Babylonia. Therefore, these different traditions, notably the conception of the Egyptian king as a high priest superior to all the other priests, may explain why the administrative functions of the temples in Egypt, as well as the priestly elites, were largely integrated into the state structures of power, and why this did not happen in Babylonia. There, Seleucid kings could not play this role through the existing temple institutions and instead founded *poleis* as tools of governance of local communities.

Part I ends with an individual chapter (Chapter 4: *Contextualizing a Ptolemaic Solution: The Institution of the Ethnic* politeuma) since this particular type of political organization is attested in Egypt and Cyrenaica only. Sänger examines the question of precisely why *politeumata* are not found in other Hellenistic kingdoms. He argues that they were a specific response to the internal and external conflicts faced by the Ptolemies during the second century BCE. By offering the opportunity of founding a *politeuma*, the Ptolemies tightened the loyalty of ethnic groups settling or

settled in Egypt while attracting new immigrants. The core members of a *politeuma* belonged to the army as mercenaries and would identify with a given ethnic group. After their settlement, they formed an 'ethnic community' sharing a temple and a quarter of the urban space. Sänger suggests, furthermore, that since *poleis* in the Greek constitutional sense played a limited role in Egypt (see the previous chapters), constitutional terms connected to the Greek *polis* were applied freely, thus allowing derivatives such as the *politeuma* to develop. The apparent specificity of Ptolemaic *politeumata* emerges as just a particular case of binding soldiers to urban spaces and attracting them as identity groups. These show altered ruling strategies when compared with the Ptolemaic *cleruchies* and army organization of the third century BCE.

Kosmin and Moyer (Chapter 5: *Imperial and Indigenous Temporalities in the Ptolemaic and Seleucid Dynasties: A Comparison of Times*) compare different temporal regimes developed by the Seleucid and Ptolemaic dynasties. Kosmin suggests that the Seleucids created a new "historical field" when Seleucus proclaimed a new epoch of Babylonian history and called the year of his conquest of Babylon year 1. The third-century Babylonian historian and priest Berossus takes over the concept of temporal rupture. Despite writing a history of pre-Seleucid Babylonia in Greek, he situates himself in the new world of the Seleucids, acknowledging a preexisting world that was distinct from Seleucus's royal period. In Egypt, by contrast, the Ptolemies continued reckoning with traditional regnal years, showing their subordination to traditional uses of historical time. But there were changes, too. Greek regnal years started with the anniversary of the new king's accession rather than with the first day of Thoth. From the time of Ptolemy II onwards, oaths were sworn by the divinized members of the Ptolemaic dynasty rather than the reigning pharaoh. And Demotic dating formulae begin to use the eponymous priests of the royal cult. Moyer argues that all of this established the Ptolemaic dynasty as a unit and a method of structuring time in its own way. Manetho, like Berossus, took over dynastic history, creating thirty dynasties up to the Macedonian conquest, and formed a complete temporal unit ending with the Nectanebids. The Ptolemies thus created a *Neue Zeit*, too, although the Seleucids were more revolutionary. What is more, in both empires the representatives of local elites and populations participated in shaping the new politics of time.

Von den Hoff (Chapter 6: *The Visual Representation of Ptolemaic and Seleucid Kings. A Comparative Approach to Portrait Concepts*) looks at what he calls a "system of visual communication" in the Seleucid and Ptolemaic