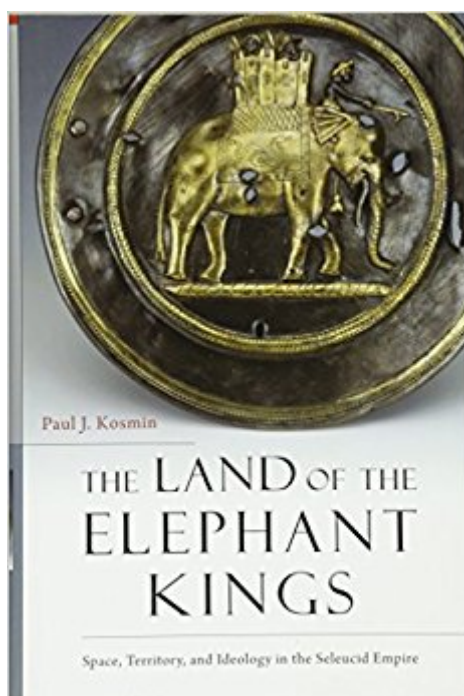


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The Land Of The Elephant Kings: Space, Territory, And Ideology In The Seleucid Empire



Synopsis

The Seleucid Empire (311-64 BCE) was unlike anything the ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern worlds had seen. Stretching from present-day Bulgaria to Tajikistan--the bulk of Alexander the Great's Asian conquests--the kingdom encompassed a territory of remarkable ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity; yet it did not include Macedonia, the ancestral homeland of the dynasty. The Land of the Elephant Kings investigates how the Seleucid kings, ruling over lands to which they had no historic claim, attempted to transform this territory into a coherent and meaningful space. Based on recent archaeological evidence and ancient primary sources, Paul J. Kosmin's multidisciplinary approach treats the Seleucid Empire not as a mosaic of regions but as a land unified in imperial ideology and articulated by spatial practices. Kosmin uncovers how Seleucid geographers and ethnographers worked to naturalize the kingdom's borders with India and Central Asia in ways that shaped Roman and later medieval understandings of "the East." In the West, Seleucid rulers turned their backs on Macedonia, shifting their sense of homeland to Syria. By mapping the Seleucid kings' travels and studying the cities they founded--an ambitious colonial policy that has influenced the Near East to this day--Kosmin shows how the empire's territorial identity was constructed on the ground. In the empire's final century, with enemies pressing harder and central power disintegrating, we see that the very modes by which Seleucid territory had been formed determined the way in which it fell apart.

Book Information

Hardcover: 448 pages

Publisher: Harvard University Press (June 23, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0674728823

ISBN-13: 978-0674728820

Product Dimensions: 1.5 x 6.2 x 9.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.8 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.7 out of 5 stars 6 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #741,648 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #94 in Books > History > Middle East > Syria #1582 in Books > History > World > Civilization & Culture #4513 in Books > History > Ancient Civilizations

Customer Reviews

This fresh and thoroughly enjoyable account of the Seleucid kingdom is dedicated to understanding

how one of the great states of the Hellenistic world was formed and how it actually worked. Although often understood as little more than a placeholder existing in time between Alexander's conquest of the east and the coming of Rome some three centuries later, Kosmin dispels such facile notions and breathes considerable new life into Seleucid history. Deeply researched and engagingly written, Kosmin's book will be required reading for all those interested in understanding the history of this crucially important and still relevant part of the world that stretches from present-day Syria to Afghanistan. (Joseph Manning, Yale University) The Land of the Elephant Kings is unusual and original, and I have no doubt that it will find a large and appreciative audience. It is a lively addition to the literature on the Seleucids. (Nicholas Purcell, Oxford University)

Paul J. Kosmin is John L. Loeb Associate Professor of the Humanities at Harvard University.

Here is a book about a esoteric dynasty that is fasinating..

Philip Kosmin's descriptions of the lands of the house of Seleucus are a very different approach than a normal historic narrative. Similar to W. W. Taren's Greeks in Bactria and India, Kosmin shows the bones beneath the narrative. The reason for this approach by both authors is the same: all we have for sources for this part of Hellenistic history are shattered fragments. The best nominative narrative remains Bevan's House of Seleucus. There are other interesting approaches, including Kuhrt and Sherwin-White, From Samarkand to Sardis and John Granger's numerous works. But Kosmin's account is very good and adds significantly to our understandings of the Hellenistic age. Using collections of underutilized primary sources, epigraphic, cuneiform, archeological, and source statements found in the fragments of later authors, the author draws an image of the Seleucid elite's understanding of themselves and their kingdom. By interposing contemporary statements with major events, Kosmin teases significant nuanced interpretations of Seleucid motivations and actions. His point is that if we had the lost histories of the Seleucid kingdom and the Hellenistic age, this is what we would find. This book is not an introduction to the Seleucid realm or its history. It is an extraordinary elucidation of what the Seleucids thought about themselves and how they wanted their world to see them.

If your interested in Seleucid empire this book is necessary , although it's not vast and fully detailed but yet again it's necessary , even for teaching purposes.

With the seductive title of "Land of the Elephant Kings", written by Paul Kosmin, one would expect an interesting account of the Seleucid conquest and settlement ventures in Asia. Indeed, in the introduction to the book, the author cites the finding of an Indian elephant in a relief carved on the lintel of Fort Karasis in central Turkey. The war elephant had become the emblem of the Seleucid Empire, lauded in epic poems and seen on the blazon of chariots, and on coins, seals and trophies. In the main portion of the book, however, the word "elephant" is rarely mentioned and the author gives a long, rambling, often discontinuous and flavorless academic presentation about the various Seleucid kings over a period of 250 years. Particularly distracting was the frequent interspersing of phrases in Greek, and the use of difficult terminology (which often had no definition in the Oxford Dictionary of the English Language). Rather than a good read in history, this large and expensive book is more consistent with a PhD thesis or a manuscript to be serialized in a journal of ancient history. I'm amazed that it featured it as recommended to the general reading public.

I'm not an academic but I am fascinated by ancient history, and well read. Kosmin's book opened wide a new world for me. He wrote and plotted it in a way that allowed me to plunge. So, yes, it was nearly a five star read for me.

A well-researched book but truly written for a small group of academics; this is NOT a book for general reading. If you want to read a book about the Seleucids, written in a style that is fairly easily understood, then you had best try something else. If you are doing graduate study on the topic of the book then you probably will find it useful.

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