



*The Making of a King: Antigonus
Gonatas of Macedon and the Greeks*

Robin Waterfield

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The Making of a King: Antigonus Gonatas of Macedon and the Greeks. By Robin Waterfield.
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It is a familiar trope in publications about the Hellenistic period (323-30 BC), the centuries between Alexander's conquest of the Persian empire and the collapse of the last successor dynasty under Cleopatra VII, that it is high time for more to be written on the topic, given the relative novelty of studying Hellenistic history in the context of the long disciplinary traditions of Classics and ancient history. This is especially the case for publications concerning the Hellenistic royal dynasties (primarily but not exclusively the Ptolemaic, Seleucid, and Antigonid), which constituted the dominant great powers in the proto-global Hellenistic world and have, especially in the past couple of decades, received quickly increasing shares of scholarly ink. Yet it is true that accessible, well-explained treatments of this incredibly complex historical period remain few and far between, and those for a wider audience beyond academia are even rarer. Waterfield has already made significant inroads in the latter project, with previous works *Dividing the Spoils* (2011), focusing on the dissolution of Alexander's empire, and *Taken at the Flood* (2014), focusing on the Roman conquest of Greece in the second century BC. With his new volume, Waterfield makes a further, successful contribution to illuminating this difficult period.

The book has a twofold focus: third-century Greek and Macedonian history on the one hand, and on the other hand, a biography of Antigonus Gonatas (r.276-239), heir to the Antigonid dynasty based in Macedon and Greece. Accordingly, the book's ten chapters are divided into two parts.

Part One (chapters one-five) surveys the narrative of the years 319-276 BC, from Gonatas' birth to the year of his royal accession. After surveying in Chapter One the history of Macedon from the last active Argead monarch, Alexander, through the tumults of early Hellenistic monarchies, Waterfield takes the reader on a tour of the major players that Gonatas would routinely encounter as opponents after his taking the throne in 276 BC: Sparta (Chapter Two), Athens (Chapter Three), the Aetolian and Achaean federal leagues (Chapter Four), and the Ptolemaic kingdom (Chapter Five). The studies range back and forth in time, establishing necessary contexts (such as Sparta's demographic crises which led to reforms in the third century), but the focus is also nicely unified by three generations of Antigonid monarchs: Antigonus Monophthalmus (the 'One-Eyed', Gonatas' grandfather), who rose to power from 320/19 BC and was the first to declare himself *basileus* ('king') in 306 BC and then was destroyed by a coalition of enemy kings in 301 BC; Demetrius Poliorcetes ('besieger of cities', Gonatas' father), who had a dramatic on-off reign wellrecounted in Plutarch *Life of Demetrius*, first as joint king with his father and then ruler of a shifting power base until his untimely end; and the early years of Gonatas himself, who lacked a firm royal centre until his ascendancy to kingship in Macedon in 276 BC.

Part Two (chapters six-ten) covers Gonatas' own long reign in the years 276-239 BC. This is where the book has a greater biographical focus, naturally, but it also retains the promise made at the outset to use Gonatas as a lens for viewing the wider unfolding of Greek

history in the same time-period, especially through the antagonists established in Part One. It is in this section of the book that we also see the most sustained discussion of the institution of kingship (in Greek, *basileia*), which I suspect will be the primary interest to readers of this journal. This includes a standout Chapter Nine on “Court and Culture” that focuses on some of the standard aspects of royal courts (courtiers, palaces, power relations, and patronage), but also treats the discourse and ideology of kingship in the Antigonid dynasty and the Hellenistic world. The final chapter (Chapter Ten, “A Glimpse of the Future”) does, however, range beyond the life and times of Gonatas to look ahead to his Antigonid successors (such as Demetrius II and Antigonus Doson) and the entrance of Rome into the Hellenistic multipolar world, a system it would ultimately come to overthrow in its rise to Mediterranean dominance.

The complexity of the Hellenistic world is partly due to its sheer size and scale (it is a much “bigger,” more interconnected world than the Greek world of the Classical period), but also, famously, its complicated and at times sparse evidence base: Hellenistic historians frequently have to become masters of many crafts to do history on any large scale. This problem is recognised in the book, and in fact it makes an excellent, robust study of the surviving evidence, including literary, inscriptional, numismatic, and other archaeological sources (there are some superb colour figures peppered throughout the book too, and an extremely useful set of maps at the outset). These are assembled to create coherent narratives, which are sometimes (of necessity) speculative; scholars may want to disagree on individual points of reconstruction and interpretation, but the overall result is coherent and impressive. There are fuller, more detailed accounts available of individual issues, but I would say that *The Making of a King* is unmatched as a reliable, accessible overview of the topic of Antigonus Gonatas and third-century Greece.

I would counter the publisher’s claim (on the dustjacket, but also on the OUP website) that this is the first biography of Antigonus Gonatas in over a century. William Tarn’s ground-breaking biography, *Antigonos Gonatas* (1913), remains a classic, and probably the superior study (notwithstanding how dated and value-loaded it may appear to us now), but it is unfair to write Janice Gabbert’s offering, *Antigonus Gonatas: A Political Biography* (1997), entirely out of existence, slim though it may be compared to Tarn’s *magnum opus* and indeed Waterfield’s new endeavour. *The Making of a King* is an extremely welcome addition to scholarship, and it does illuminate what it sets out to illuminate. Readers will find it a superb introduction to the history of the period and will profit from it regardless of their level of prior experience. Historians of royal dynasties and royal courts will also find this an interesting and useful work, especially if they are unfamiliar with the period or the person of Antigonus Gonatas.

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