

The book can be a very useful aid in teaching. Its inventive, bi-authorial comparative approach can complement the more narrowly focused specialized books and articles and help to cultivate a better multicultural awareness among students. Although the essays work better together, they are also stand-alone pieces, which can be read (and assigned) in classes on early modern Asian history or on more specialized subjects that they relate to.

Nevertheless, this important scholarly contribution is much more than an introductory textbook. It is extremely valuable for the questions that it raises and the example that it sets. Despite the focus on the early modern period, it remains open toward both the past and the future. On the one hand, it explores how the earlier periods of history left their profound imprints on early modern societies, while on the other, it ponders how the early modern experiences will continue to shape the future, which, in an increasingly globalized society, will affect not only India and China, but all of us.

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*Time and Its Adversaries in the Seleucid Empire*. BY PAUL J. KOSMIN. Cambridge, MA: HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2018. Pp. x + 379, illus. \$55.

Intended as a companion piece to the author's *The Land of the Elephant Kings: Space, Territory, and Ideology in the Seleucid Empire* (2014), this volume concerns the implementation of the Seleucid Era—a consecutively numbered dating system continuing beyond a single generation. The two volumes can easily be read separately, however, and one gets the feeling that a third is in the works. The Seleucid Era, to be sure, presented an innovative method of time-reckoning, though similar to the Olympiad system, and is the immediate precursor of the Common Era (the modernization of the Anno Domini calendar).

Apart from a short preface with acknowledgments, an introduction, and a brief conclusion, the monograph is divided into two parts: the first deals with the implementation of the Seleucid imperial dating system, the second with local responses to and supposed resistance against it; each part is further subdivided into three chapters of unequal length (ca. 15–50 pages). Additionally, the backmatter consists of extensive endnotes (65 pages), lists of abbreviations, maps, illustrations, and tables, as well as a substantial bibliography (60 pages) and a helpful index (11 pages).

The imperial dating system that is the Seleucid Era introduced a standardization of rationalized time administration that remained in use for centuries, rather than starting anew each generation as the common method of counting regnal years. Kosmin, Professor of the Classics at Harvard University, emphasizes that the Seleucid Era was reckoned retroactively from Seleucus's return to Babylon (in 311 BCE), after he had been ousted as provincial governor (*satrap*) by Antigonos, the general (*strategos*) of Western Asia (in 316 BCE), nominally under Macedonian sovereignty. Seleucus had actually assumed kingship only six years later (in 305 BCE), after claiming to rule as general of Asia as successor to Antigonos, as well as *satrap* of Babylonia, positions for which he had to fight (both during the Babylonian War, 311–309/8, and the Fourth War of the Successors, 308–301 BCE). As such, the author contends, the Seleucid Era represents an artificial epoch which he believes constitutes a “technology of historical idealization” (p. 26).

The second chapter traces the bureaucratic implications of the new dating system, particularly the different methods in which the numbering was repeated. Examples include administrative forms of record keeping, such as sealing documents with Seleucid Era dates, public inscriptions such as royal decrees, and a volume-measuring standard. Kosmin makes a point about the fact that in counting the Seleucid Era the numbers were reversed (saying “three and twenty and one hundred,” p. 47), but does not consider when this numerical reversal was introduced, or who cared about it in a world where few people could read. The author furthermore addresses the destruction of archival material as deliberate

acts of vengeance against the imperial dating system—rather than against the content of the documents contained within the archive or against the imperial rule itself.

In the next chapter, Kosmin theorizes that the Seleucid Era as a phenomenon restrained possibilities of celebrating individual kings and their achievements, their accessions, and deaths. The author acknowledges that the creation of the Seleucid Era may be connected to the dynastic tendency to appoint successors by means of joint-rulers. Yet he does not reflect on that connection—for instance, the possibility that the dating system was a symptom of this method of succession and enhanced the legitimacy of Seleucid rule by emphasizing its longevity. He argues that the Seleucids did invent new means of dynastic celebration, such as the participation in the *Akītu* festival by Antiochus III at the centennial of the assumption of kingship by Seleucus I, which was, however, 107 years after the beginning of the Seleucid Era (thus conrindicating the importance of the dating system).

With the subsequent chapters, Kosmin intends to “constitute a coherent library” of indigenous Hellenistic histories that respond to and resist Seleucid imperial power and especially its dating system. These “histories” include not only Berossus’s *Babyloniaca*, but also the Babylonian *Dynastic Prophecy* and the Uruk List of Kings and Sages, the apocalyptic Book of Daniel and 1-Enoch, as well as the late Middle Persian (eleventh–twelfth cent.) *Zand-ī Wahman yasn*. The author contends that these sources all reflect upon a pre-Hellenistic past and/or a post-Hellenistic future, in direct response to the imposition of the Seleucid Era. It is in his interpretation of these disparate sources that Kosmin appears most at home, yet he makes little attempt to consider the various stages of their transmission, such as the late antique Ethiopic (*Ge’ez*) translation of an intermediate Greek version of the Aramaic and/or Hebrew Hellenistic original Book of Enoch. Rather, sources are presented as mostly unproblematic evidence of Hellenistic historical and religious thought. The last chapter particularly addresses indigenous acts of resistance and revival without much reference to the Seleucid Era.

As a point of general critique, it should be stressed that many of Kosmin’s theories remain unsubstantiated by evidence. When he does adduce sources, it is therefore important to examine how the author employs the evidence in support of his argumentation. In the first chapter, for instance, he cites a small fragment of a cuneiform tablet that mentions Seleucus’s return to Babylon at the start of the new year in 311 BCE (BM 35.920; van der Spek 2014). Kosmin does not address questions such as the text’s nature, alternative interpretations, date, provenance, lacunas, or even the partially legible lines above and below the ones he quotes. The author presents the short text almost as the charter myth of the imperial dating system in a nutshell. While the text is historically significant, it speaks of neither Seleucus’s kingship nor his regnal years. (It is even unclear to whose “year 1” the tablet does refer.)

Kosmin correctly points out that it must have been more than fortuitous that Seleucus’s return to Babylon coincided with the beginning of the Babylonian New Year (1 Nisan). If Seleucus had wished to coincide his return “from the desert” with the return of the gods to Babylon, however, he would have synchronized it with the end of the *Akītu* festival, rather than the beginning. The battle in Babylon mentioned in the table (but not discussed by Kosmin) likely refers to the onset of the Babylonian War that would have actually disrupted the religious ceremonies.

As the *Chronicle of the Successors* makes clear, Seleucus explicitly presented himself as the successor of Antigonos as general of Asia: “count year 7 of Antigonos, the general, as year 6 of king Alexander, son of Alexander, and Seleucus, the general” (*BCHP* 3, rev. ll. 3–4); but he did not add his own “year 1.” Counting the years of his rule in Babylon from 311 BCE does not so much downplay the moment Seleucus assumed kingship six years later (as Kosmin would have us believe) as it enhances his right to rule by disregarding the theoretical difference between the de facto and de jure nature of that rule. The start of the Macedonian year, however, continued to lag by half a year. The supposed mythic or symbolic importance of commencing the Seleucid Era at the opening of the *Akītu* festival on 1 Nisan is thus exaggerated.

Moreover, Kosmin ignores the fact that Seleucus could not have foreseen or have ensured that his descendants would continue numbering years according to this dating for generations—let alone that it would be continued for centuries even after the demise of his royal house. It was his son Antiochus I who first made that decision upon his father’s death in 281 BCE. The author never considers what may have motivated Antiochus to continue counting according to his father’s regnal years, thereby institut-

ing the “Seleucid Era.” By conflating the various stages of this process (Seleucus’s return to Babylon, his proclamation of kingship, the appointment of his son as joint-ruler, his successor’s continuation of numbering his father’s regnal years, etc.), Kosmin turns Seleucus into a visionary architect of time. Yet Seleucus could not have been such; and no evidence is adduced to show that he aspired to introduce a revolutionary imperial dating system.

In the second chapter, Kosmin refers to the legendary birth tale of Seleucus (App. *Syr.* 9.56; Just. *Epit.* 15.4.1–10) as the “founding myth for the imperial bureaucracy” (p. 53). Again, the author does not address problems of interpretation and transmission of this tale, nor the date of its creation (van Oppen 2013, esp. pp. 91–92). In short, before his birth, Seleucus’s mother Laodice was said to have dreamt that she had conceived from Apollo, who gave her a signet ring engraved with an anchor, foretelling that Seleucus would become king. The tale continues that he did indeed use an anchor as his signet, and that the first three Seleucid kings had the symbol tattooed on their thigh. The anchor furthermore first appeared on Seleucus’s coins after he assumed the kingship and the symbol continued to appear frequently on early Seleucid coinage (Hadley 1974). Kosmin never relates this legend with his own claim that the “dynastic blazon of the anchor represented, at its most obvious, the taming of the bitter waters” (p. 33) when Seleucus served as Ptolemaic admiral. He, nonetheless, presents the bureaucratic act of sealing with the anchor symbol as a religious sacrament in which the body of the dynastic founder was ritualistically impressed upon documents. Unfortunately, the book is littered with such interpretations that force the evidence into the author’s reading.

Kosmin is clearly erudite and well read, and appears well versed in several ancient and modern languages. His often verbose and at times incomprehensible style and frequent overstatements seem to be intended to impress upon the reader the importance of the subject. Yet the author’s method reveals an inductive predilection of forcing evidence into his reading without attempts at falsification so as to account for alternative explanations. He does not examine the relation of the Seleucid Era with similar dating systems, such as the Olympiad (in use in some form at least since the mid-fifth cent. BCE); the Ptolemaic “Soter Era” which was in use in Phoenicia and Coele-Syria (commencing in 262/1 BCE; Lorber 2007); or the supposed “Arsinoe Era” with its likewise innovative numbering system (commencing in 271/0 BCE; Troxell 1983). Likewise, (apart from brief statements in the endnotes) the author barely attempts to examine the relation of his sources with their predecessors and contemporaries, such as, say, Herodotus and Ctesias, Megasthenes and Manetho, the Potter’s Oracle and the Isis Aretalogies. In all, this volume is a disappointment and is recommended only to specialists in Hellenistic historiography, particularly literary scholars interested in resistance against Seleucid imperialism.

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