WAR IN THE HELLENISTIC WORLD
Ancient World at War

The books in this series are authoritative surveys of the relationship between warfare and the economy and culture of ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean societies. The series explores the impact of military organization on social life and the place of war in the cultural and imaginative life of communities. It also considers the “face of battle,” examining the experiences of combatants and civilians.

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WAR IN THE HELLENISTIC WORLD

A Social and Cultural History

Angelos Chaniotis
To Professor Fritz Gschnitzer
on the occasion of his 75th birthday
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ABBREVIATIONS

1. Ancient authors

Appian, Syr.: Appian, Syrian Wars
App., Mithr.: Appian, Mithridatic Wars
App., b. civ.: Appian, Bella civilia (Civil Wars)
App., Illyr.: Appian, Illyrian Wars
Arist., Polit.: Aristotle, Politics
Athen.: Athenaios, The Deipno sophists
Cic., Flacc.: Cicero, Pro Flacco
Demosth.: Demosthenes
Diod.: Diodorus Siculus
FgrHist: F. Jacoby et al., Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker, ++1923–
Jos., Ant. Jud.: Josephus, Antiquitates Judaicae
Just., epit.: Justinus, Epitome historiarum Philippicarum
Maccab.: Maccabees (Old Testament)
Paus.: Pausanias
Plut., Demetr.: Plutarch, Demetrios
Plut., mor.: Plutarch, moralia
Plut., Philop.: Plutarch, Philopoemen
Polyb.: Polybios
Theophr., Char.: Theophrastos, Characteres
Xen., Cyr. paed.: Xenophon, Cyropaedia

2. Works of reference


F.Delphes: *Fouilles de Delphes. III. Épigraphe*, Paris 1929–.


IG: *Inscriptiones Graecae*, Berlin 1873–.


IGSK: *Inscriptae greciae in Kleinasien*, Bonn 1972–.


ABBREVIATIONS

SB: *Sammelbuch griechischer Urkunden aus Ägypten*, Strassburg-Wiesbaden 1915–.
SEG: *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*, Leiden 1923–.

Staatsverträge: Die Staatsverträge des Altertums.
TAM: Tituli Asiae Minoris, Vienna 1901–.
Tod, GHI: M. N. Tod, Greek Historical Inscriptns, Oxford 1933–1948.
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278 The Gauls invade Asia Minor; continual raids against the Greek cities.

275/4–271 First Syrian War (Antiochos I against Ptolemy II).

274–272 War of Pyrrhos of Epeiros against Antigonos Gonatas.

272 Pyrrhos invades the Peloponnese and is killed in Argos.


ca. 263/2–229 Antigonos Gonatas occupies Athens.


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129 Antiochos VII is killed in a war against the Parthians. The Seleukids loose Mesopotamia to the Parthians. Judea regains its independence.

ca. 121–114 Territorial conflicts in Crete (Gortyn against Knossos, Hierapytna against Itanos, Lato against Olous).

88–83 First Mithridatic War (Mithridates VI, king of Pontos, and his Greek allies against Rome).

77–85 Sulla besieges and sacks Athens.

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PREFACE

One of the best experts on the Hellenistic period, Michel Austin, once criticized the widespread perception of war as an intrusive external force, purely destructive and negative, and never adequately explained (Austin 1986: 451–2). Few historical periods can better demonstrate the complexity of war as a social and cultural force than the 300 years between Alexander’s victories and Kleopatra’s defeat (323–330 BC). The continual and often confusing wars of the Hellenistic Age confront those who study this period, either in academic courses or in scholarly research, with unusual challenges. The geographical range is huge: from Italy to Afghanistan and from the north shore of the Black Sea to the coast of Africa. The sources, especially the hundreds of historical inscriptions (particularly from Asia Minor), and the thousands of papyri from Ptolemaic Egypt, provide an abundance of information, but very frequently uncertain clues (if any) about the historical context in which the information should be placed. The reconstruction of this period resembles a huge jigsaw puzzle, most of the pieces of which have been lost for ever. This explains why scholarship has concentrated on the wars of the kings and the conflicts between the great Hellenistic powers and Rome, for which the sources are somewhat better, rather neglecting the importance of local conflicts and the part played by war in the life of the populations of small urban centres and of the countryside. I hope that this book will demonstrate how rewarding it is, despite the aforementioned difficulties, to turn our attention to these areas of the Greek world.

This book has primarily been written for students of classics and history. It does not aim to cover every aspect of Hellenistic warfare (e.g., tactics and weapons), but rather surveys the various ways in which war shaped Hellenistic society, mentality, and culture, and also the ways in which wars corresponded to contemporary social conditions and reflected the cultural peculiarities of this era.

Let me warn the reader about the faults I am aware of – reviewers will probably discover more. None of the aspects selected for presentation could be discussed in an exhaustive manner. In addition, this study does not cover the entire geographical range of the Hellenistic world. The reader will immediately notice a focus on the world of the cities in mainland Greece,
the Aegean islands, and Asia Minor — although I have included examples from Magna Graecia, the Black Sea, the Seleukid Empire, and Ptolemaic Egypt. Important subjects, such as the emergence of a Galatian state in Anatolia, the cultural background of the wars of the Maccabees, or warfare in the periphery of the Hellenistic world (e.g., in the Greek-Baktrian kingdoms) could not be discussed. The Hellenistic world is a well-defined historical period, but despite the impression of unity, a close study of the evidence always reveals local peculiarities and historical developments. Hellenistic Crete is very different from Hellenistic Ionia or Hellenistic Mesopotamia, and the warfare during the period of the Successors (322–281 BC) differs in aims, dimensions, and form from, for example, the wars of the Roman expansion (ca. 220–146 BC). Although I often draw the reader’s attention to the necessity of such distinctions, I could not always avoid some of those more or less misleading generalizations which are inherent in general introductory surveys.

This is a book without footnotes, but the reader will find references to the sources and to modern scholarship, either in the main text or in the section on “Further Reading” which concludes every chapter. The Bibliography is long, but not exhaustive. I have preferred to include recent publications (where the reader can find further bibliographies), as well as the books and articles on which my discussion of specific subjects relies. Technical terms (e.g., sympolity, liturgy, etc.) are usually explained the first time they are used; the reader can find the explanation with the help of the index (under Greek terms).

Among the sources, the inscriptions take the lion’s share in my discussions, including some very recent finds. This preference is easy to explain: it is through the discovery of new documentary sources (inscriptions and papyri) that our knowledge of essential aspects of the Hellenistic world is continually enlarged and modified. Many of the texts presented here in translation have already been included in two invaluable selections of sources, compiled by Austin (1981) and Bagnall and Derow (2004). If not otherwise indicated, all translations of Greek texts are mine; sometimes I have modified the translations of other scholars.

I hope that this book will increase the knowledge and interest of students in Hellenistic history, will enable scholars who study the wars of other periods and areas to take the Hellenistic examples into consideration, and will invite my fellow classicists and historians to provide better explanations of some of the questions which have intrigued and puzzled me.

I have never met some of the people I feel the need to thank. F. Walbank’s seminal work on the Hellenistic Age and W. K. Pritchett’s fundamental surveys on Greek warfare have helped me write this book more than I have been able to recognize in bibliographical references. J. W. Lendon allowed me to consult his forthcoming article on war and society in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds. Charalampos Kritzas (Epigraphical Museum,
Athens), Maria Akamati (Department of Antiquities, Pella), and A. Peschlow (German Archaeological Institute, Berlin) as well as the Numismatic Museum of Athens, the Rhodes Archaeological Museum, the École Française d’Athènes, and the British Museum provided photographs. My research assistant Volker Schmidt contributed substantially to the compilation of the bibliography and the preparation of the manuscript. My graduate research assistants Manolis Skountakis and Johannes Stahl offered valuable help in the collection of sources. The source index was compiled by Dr. Gian Franco Chiai. I am very grateful to Jon Ingoldby, who undertook the copy-editing and substantially improved the text, and to Sue Hadden for her patient and attentive work on the production of the manuscript. Without Al Bertrand’s continual encouragement and help I would have never started writing this book, and without Angela Cohen’s effective assistance in practical matters (and regular reminders), I would have never finished it.

From Fritz Gschnitzer I have learned to read inscriptions as sources for historical phenomena, and to pay attention to the tensions and complexities revealed by the choice of words. To him I gratefully dedicate this book on the occasion of his seventy-fifth birthday.
Map 1 The Hellenistic World
1

THE UBIQUITOUS WAR

1.1. The Visibility of War

If we are to believe the healing miracles of Epidauros, inscribed in the Asklepieion around the mid-fourth century BC, a visitor to that most famous Greek sanctuary would not only admire the newly-built temple and the sumptuous dedications, but also see, among the pilgrims seeking healing in that place, men whose bodies and faces had been marked by the wounds inflicted in war (LiDonnici 1995): “Euhippos bore a spear head in his jaw for six years” (A12); “Gorgias of Herakleia . . . was wounded in the lung by an arrow in some battle, and for a year and six months it was festering so badly, that he filled sixty-seven bowls with pus” (B10); “Antikrates of Knidos . . . had been struck with a spear through both his eyes in some battle, and he became blind and carried around the spearhead with him, inside his face” (B12).

Shortly after 197 BC, a traveller in North Thessaly would see, reaching the plain of Kynos Kephalai, the remains of 8,000 unburied Macedonians, killed at the decisive battle of the Second Macedonian War between Philip V of Macedonia and the Romans. It was not until 191 BC that King Antiochos III gave instructions to built a tomb for their bones (Livy 36.8; Appian, Syr. 16). Along the streets that led from the countryside to the city walls of a Hellenistic city, one would see the graves of men who had fallen in war. And a visitor to the Aitolian federal sanctuary of Thermon shortly before 218 BC would have been able to count more than 15,000 hopla – unidentifiable pieces of armor, dedicated by victorious parties in wars (Polyb. 5.8).

Travelling in Hellenistic Greece meant travelling in a landscape marked by war. The modern viewer of an aesthetically pleasing Hellenistic statue such as the Nike of Samothrace tends to forget that this statue decorated a victory monument (see chapter 11, section 6) and that ancient warfare could take unpleasant forms of visibility. Burned fields and farms next to trophies, cenotaphs in front of ruined or hastily built fortifications, plundered temples next to statues of war heroes – these are some of the impressions the Hellenistic landscape must have left on a contemporary traveler.
No detailed description of the Hellenistic world survives, but even if such a description had been written, it is doubtful whether the author would have bothered to inform his readers about the devastations caused by war – so familiar would these have been to his eyes, it would be more rewarding to describe impressive monuments. The only lengthy fragment of a Hellenistic periegesis, a work of the late third century attributed to a certain Herakleides, does not say a single word about warfare.

Despite this, among the factors that shaped the Hellenistic world, war seems without doubt to be the most important. The genesis of the Hellenistic world is itself the result of a war – the campaigns of Alexander the Great – and the end of this historical period is also marked by a battle – the Battle of Actium and the defeat of the last Ptolemaic monarch, Kleopatra. Between the violent beginnings, with the Wars of the Successors (322 BC), and the bloody end (31 BC), we have three centuries in which major and minor wars provided contemporary historians with the material for their books, and artists with assignments for grave monuments, war memorials, and dedications. These wars demanded thousands of mortal lives and the attention of those deities who were believed to be the patrons of war. There is hardly any moment in which a geographical region was not directly involved, or indirectly affected, by a military conflict; in fact, the most influential historian of this period, Polybios, regarded the entire Mediterranean as a single battlefield from the late third century onwards, and introduced the notion of the *symploke* ("interweaving") to characterize the "world history" of his times. The Hellenistic Age is not only the period of a global culture (*koine*), but also – indeed, more so – the period of the ubiquitous war.

The Hellenistic Greeks were surrounded by images of war (see chapter 10). The coins they used were decorated not only with the portraits of kings with military attributes, but also with weapons, war monuments, trophies, and divine patrons of war (especially Athena holding the Victory). Demetrios the Besieger, for example, minted silver coins after his victory in Salamis on Cyprus (307 BC) with the representation of Nike (Victory) standing on the prow of a warship and blowing a trumpet (see figure 1.1), and coins of the Syracusan tyrant Agathokles were decorated with the winged Nike erecting a trophy (see figure 11.1). The public areas of urban centers, such as the market-place, the buildings of the administration, and the sanctuaries, were decorated with the statues of war heroes and memorials of victorious battles, and war booty was dedicated to the gods. Inscriptions praising benefactors who had saved their own or foreign cities during wars were exhibited in the same public areas, and if the passers-by did not have the leisure to read the text of the honorary inscription, a representation would often provide a hint of the military context. For example, the honorary decree for Euphron of Sikyon in Athens (see figure 1.2) is decorated with the images of Athena and the grateful Demos (the personification of
the people) on one side, and Euphron, in military attire, standing in front of his horse, on the other.

Military parades were an integral part of public ceremonies, and one of these may be portrayed on the famous mosaic of Praeneste (Pollitt 1986: figure 222; cf. Coarelli 1990). In many regions, the graves of people who had spent a long period in military service were decorated with their images in military attire (see chapter 10, section 2). Even houseware was decorated with military themes – for example, with war elephants (see e.g., Ducrey 1985: 105, figure 76), and it is highly likely that paintings with representations of battle scenes would have adorned private houses.

There are a variety of reasons for the ubiquity of images of war, military equipment, and military personnel: an interest in dramatic changes of fortune, the feeling of compassion, the love of the exotic, and a fondness for the paradoxal (see chapter 10). But in addition to these reasons, which are closely connected with major trends in Hellenistic culture, there is a more pragmatic one: wars were extremely frequent in the Hellenistic period.
Figure 1.2 Athenian honorary decree for Euphron of Sikyon, an ally of the Athenians in their wars for freedom against the Macedonians (323–18 BC). The relief shows Demos (the personification of the people) on the one side and Euphron, in military attire, standing in front of his horse, on the other. Athens National Museum (courtesy of the Museum).