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Μέγιστον τῶν μετὰ Ἀλέξανδρον διαδεξαμένων
τὴν ἀρχὴν βασιλεία: Arrian's Judgment
of Seleucus I Nicator (*Anab.* 7. 22. 5)²

The article deals with Arrian of Nicomedia's high estimation of the king Seleucus (called Nicator), a former officer in Alexander the Great's army. Seleucus had created the greatest – second to Alexander, in fact – empire and this is the main criterion by which he is appreciated by the Bithynian historian and philosopher. It is the same criterion that Arrian had adopted in evaluating Alexander's achievements. 'Greatness' constituted thus, to put it briefly, an old measure by which kings, commanders and eminent men were rated by Greek historians.

Key words: Arrian, Seleucus, kingdom, kingship, Anabasis

In what now constitutes perhaps one of the most intriguing passages in his *Anabasis Alexandrou* Arrian, a Roman citizen from Nicomedia, expresses a highly laudatory estimation of Seleucus, known from history as 'he who wins'³, who is 'the Victorious' (also Appian, *Syr.* 57)⁴. The Bithynian historian (*Anab.* 7. 22. 5) is sure that after the death of Alexander it was Seleucus who emerged the worthiest of his successors;⁵ this became especially evident when Seleucus had defeated Lysimachus in the battle of Kuropedion in Lydia, 281 BC (Porphyry in Eusebius,

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² The translation of the title sentence is that of P.A. Brunt in the Loeb series (Brunt 1983: 283). It renders: [Seleucus] 'was the greatest king of those who succeeded Alexander'.

³ Ammianus Marcellinus, 14. 8. 5; 23. 6. 3: a full documentation gives F. Stähelin (Stähelin 1921: col. 1233; cf. Chaniotis 2005: 60).

⁴ On Seleucus see: (Mehl 1986; Grainger 1990; Shipley 2000: 286ff.; Errington 2010: 41–44). F.W. Walbank in his classic book asserts that its peak the Seleucid kingdom reached during the reign of his founder (Walbank 1981: 123ff.; cf. Will 1975: 447ff.; Préaux 1978).

⁵ Cf. Arrian, *Succ.* 1a. 2 (*FGrH* 156); see esp.: (Berve 1926: 351–352; cf. Heckel 1992: 233–237; 2006: 246–248).

Chron. 1. 233)⁶. Such a judgment was plain for other ancient authorities too: it was repeated by Appian of Alexandria (*Syr.* 56), probably writing slightly later than Arrian, and Justin scrutinizing the work of Pompeius Trogus (*Epit.* 38. 7. 1)⁷. An occasion on which Arrian makes one such confession is a long, emphatic and portentous tale (that is, formally a digression – λόγος δὲ λέγεται τοῖσδε: *Anab.* 7. 22. 1) of how Alexander, visiting the royal Assyrian tombs near Babylon, lost his royal *diadem* (τὸ διάδημα: 7. 22. 2) in the marshes surrounding the necropolis. The diadem – the most visible symbol of Hellenistic royalty⁸ – has been brought to him by one of his sailors (τις ναυτῶν) who, in order to swim with it, must have – ominously – put the emblem on his head⁹. But, according to another version (7. 22. 5: εἰσι δὲ οἱ...λέγουσιν), here Arrian adds, in the Herodotean manner, that the royal emblem had been found by Seleucus (Σέλευκον) who returned it to Alexander. Reporting this, Arrian seems to be undecided here: he has no firm evidence to believe this story without reservation;¹⁰ on the other hand, as it deems, he finds the anecdote to be an attractive one since it provides him with an opportunity to issue a highly laudatory verdict on Seleucus's reign and achievements, officially a *basileus* from the memorable 'year of the kings' (305 BC) (cf. Leick 2002: 142; see Rzepka 2006: 115–117; cf. Waterfield 2011: 118–127)¹¹. It is my aim in the following to evaluate the character of Arrian's *laudatio* of the man, who under Alexander was 'a soldier' (Appian, *Syr.* 56), then became the commander of his elite infantry, *hypaspistai* ('the Shield Bearers') (Lane Fox 1978: 474; cf. Atkinson 2013:

⁶ See E. Bevan (Bevan 1902: 71), cf. J. Ma (Ma 1999: 33). Many years later the battle of Kuropedion was the for Seleucus's scion, Antiochus III, the cause for claiming that he was the right to occupy the territory of Lysimachus, as once won by the spear by Seleucus: Polybius, 18. 51. 4 (εἶναι μὲν γὰρ ἐξ ἀρχῆς τὴν δυναστείαν ταύτην Λυσιμάχου, Σελεύκου δὲ πολεμήσαντος πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ κρατήσαντος τῷ πολέμῳ πᾶσαν τὴν Λυσιμάχου βασιλείαν δορίκτητον γενέσθαι Σελεύκου), with F.W. Walbank (Walbank 1967: 622–623).

⁷ According to the latter, apparently following a tradition favourable to the Seleucids, Seleucus was, along with Alexander, the founder of the Macedonian empire: *a magno Alexandro ac Nicatore Seleuco, conditoribus imperii Macedonici* (cf. Anson 1958: 153–170). Both commanders are compared by him (that's, by Pompeius Trogus, in fact) to the creators of the Achaemenid kingdom – Cyrus the Great and Darius (here Seleucus would be like Darius – a personality responsible for a further development of the empire, won by his predecessor – an effective analogy in itself); see P. Briant (Briant 1990L 40–65; 2002: 876 (Seleucus as a continuator of the Achaemenid kings' ideology)); cf. T. Grabowski (Grabowski 2010: 52ff).

⁸ On which see the classic treatment in Xenophon, *Cyr.* 8. 3. 13; cf. H.-W. Ritter (Ritter 1965).

⁹ The story is told by Strabo, 15. 1. 11, who relied on Aristobulus (*FGRH* 139 F55); cf. the notes by F. Pownall (Pownall 2013).

¹⁰ Although the story was told by Aristobulus, it is reported by Arrian as an alternative version only. Regarding Aristobulus Arrian certainly knew what Aristobulus was perceived: a story, preserved by Lucian in his *How to Write History* (*Quomodo historia conscribenda sit*, 12), show us 'the technical expert' (L. Pearson's term (Pearson 1962: 150)) as a shameless flatterer, postponed by Alexander himself; on Arrian's treatment of his sources see generally P.A. Brunt (Brunt 1983: 534ff.); see esp. A.B. Bosworth (Bosworth 1980a).

¹¹ As it recently has been put, 'He played a significant but not leading role during Alexander's decade-long conquest of the Persian empire' (Kosmin 2014: 16).

309–310), next the satrap of Babylonia on two occasions (319–312; 311–305 BC; cf. Plutarch, *Demetr.* 7. 2)¹² and finally, from 305 he placed the royal *diadem* on his head, a king, the founder of a new dynasty and many cities (Strabo)¹³, and the ruler of the new kingdom (cf. Sherwin-White, Kuhrt 1993: 7ff.; cf. Wolski 1999; Capdetrey 2007).

At first glance such a judgment from Arrian appears strange in a work which offers Alexander's accomplishments in a narrative essentially based on the account of Ptolemy I Soter (*Anab. Praef.* 1); rather, the reader of the *Anabasis* might expect to find Ptolemy here as Arrian's 'hero', who followed Hephaestion in the circle of the most important men among Alexander's companions. But it is not so. Here Arrian's divergence from what is now called 'the main' (official) group of sources on Alexander the Great, with Ptolemy's work ahead, is striking. Thus P.A. Brunt, in a footnote to this somewhat enigmatic and curious passage (Brunt 1983: 282–283), infers of Arrian that the 'glorification of Seleucus and not Pt. would not be his aim'; he explains the puzzle by an assumption that here Arrian followed 'Vulgate', although in this case not Clitarchus in particular (who was the main representative of the 'vulgate' tradition (Pearson 1962: 212ff.)), whose relation of the events, as preserved now in Diodorus, 17. 116. 5–7¹⁴, contained no mention of Seleucus¹⁵. But this last explanation, being a *petitio principii*, opens a gap for two further speculations: first, why should we suppose that Arrian must have followed Ptolemy's narrative everywhere in his work at all?; second, where was the tradition of the valiant Seleucus taken from? Regarding this I would like to propose two points on this matter: the first that the passage confirms Arrian's acquaintance of available various sources, including those unnamed;¹⁶ secondly, that in this particular case there is not an especially urgent need to seek at any cost a concrete source for Arrian's statement. I shall argue that this 'source' was

¹² Yet, a decisive step was made after the defeat of Demetrius at Gaza, when Seleucus, acting with his protégé, Ptolemy, bravely decided to withstand Antigonos, and make a quick return to Babylon in order to recover the lost satrapy, with an aid of force consisting of thousand men (800 infantrymen and 200 *hippeis*), given him by Ptolemy – Diodor, 19. 90–91. 2 (= Austin 2006: no. 36). It was exactly this year of recovering Babylon exactly which became the beginning of the Seleucid era, see: (Bickerman 1980: 71–72; Errington 2010: 44; cf. esp. Bosworth 2002: 210–245).

¹³ On this see E. Will (Will 1984: 60), stressing out the importance of the memorable legacy of Seleucus: the 'Syrian tetrapolis'.

¹⁴ Diodorus (17. 116. 5) says of the event that 'heaven sent him a second portent about his kingship' (transl. C.B. Welles, Loeb. edn.).

¹⁵ Only later, at 19. 55. 3, Diodorus only tells of Seleucus's military duty under Alexander. But later, 19. 95. 2 the Sicilian historian gives an appreciation of Seleucus's deeds in the words strangely resembling Arrian's eulogy: ἔχων ἤδη βασιλικὸν ἀνάστημα καὶ δόξαν ἀξίαν ἡγεμονίας.

¹⁶ Which, on the other hand, justifies the demand of A.B. Bosworth (Bosworth 1976: 1–33) not to take Arrian's words about the priority of Ptolemy's work too literally or dogmatically: to be sure Ptolemy remained for Arrian the most important source, yet this does not exclude the possibility that his work was consulted in every case on equal terms. Accordingly, one ought to bear in mind that the historian also relied on another, unnamed sources, including these belonging now to 'the Vulgate' (cf. Bosworth 1980b: 1ff).

both Arrian's personal knowledge of what Seleucus had done as well the historian's criteria of what constitutes greatness in the historical process. I just suggest that in this latter case such criterion (and, by the same, a point of departure in evaluating) was for Arrian the deeds of Alexander himself. In consequence, it was Alexander's everlasting achievements by which Seleucus's reign was assessed by Arrian as highly as possible. It was this old, Homeric ideal of the greatness of achievements (confirmed by the works of Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, and Polybius), in which lies, I believe, the main reason for which Arrian issued so high an estimation of Seleucus's royal qualifications and deeds (cf. the note by: Romm 2010: 212). At the outset, let us remind ourselves of an earlier sentence in the *Anabasis* where the figure of Seleucus appears for the first time (5. 13. 1). This passage proves, it seems, the validity of the thesis suggested above.

When narrating the crossing of the Indian river Arrian says of Alexander that Αὐτὸς δὲ ἐπιβάς τριακοντόρου ἐπέρα καὶ ἅμα αὐτῷ Πτολεμαῖός τε καὶ Περδίκκας καὶ Λυσίμαχος οἱ σωματοφύλακες καὶ Σέλευκος τῶν ἐταίρων, ὁ βασιλεύσας ὕστερον, καὶ τῶν ὑπασπιστῶν οἱ ἡμίσεες. This is translated by Brunt as follows: 'Alexander in person embarked on a triacontoros and began the passage, and with him were Ptolemy, Perdikkas and Lysimachus, bodyguards, and Seleucus, one of the Companions, who afterwards became king, and half the hypaspists'. For many reasons this remains a remarkable judgment, beyond doubt pointed out here purportedly by Arrian who, writing from the vantage of 400 years, knew well of the bright, future career of the passengers of the boat over the Hydaspes – just on the eve of the clash with Porus. It is evident that the extremely unusual appearance of Seleucus in this company and (especially) the emphasizing of his subsequent kingship resulted – as in the case of *Anab.* 7. 22. 5 – from the thorough knowledge Arrian had of the wars of the diadochi; he knew this perfectly well, when composing his other important historical work: *The Events after Alexander* (*Ta met' Alexandrou*: FGrH 156), based essentially on the work by Hieronymus. The statement referring to Seleucus thus looks almost like a kind of prophecy (ὁ βασιλεύσας ὕστερον). No wonder, then, that modern scholars are puzzled by Arrian's statement. Brunt (*Arrian II*, p. 38) thinks it must have been the same source that stood behind this passage and that from 7. 22. 5. Romm (in: *Landmark Arrian*, p. 212) and even seems to be somewhat disgusted in observing that 'The qualification attached to Seleukos's name is odd, because both Lysimakhos and Ptolemy also had themselves crowned at about the same time as Seleukos'. He continues: 'Arrian calls attention to the first appearance in his narrative of Seleukos [...] but Lysimakhos is also mentioned here for the first time without similar fanfare'. So, following this scholar's term, what we need now is to return to our question: what is the character of the Arrianic 'fanfare' for Seleucus?

As I have indicated above, one ought not to be too dogmatic in looking for an actual source for Arrian's laudatory statement: in any case such 'hunting' must end with in failure. Instead, I think one would do better by starting from Professor Brunt's correct observation (*Arrian II*, p. 283, note 2) that Arrian's judgment refers

to the period after 281, ‘when S. briefly re-united most of the empire’ (see Adams 2006: 34; cf. Errington 2010: 72; see Olbrycht 2010: 147ff). This was really Seleucus’s greatest moment of triumph, for as experts stress today, his empire covered almost all of the territory (without Ptolemaic Egypt and Macedonia) once conquered by Alexander. I suppose that when Arrian wrote his personal judgment of Seleucus he had in mind this particular historical moment in 281; this means that as a historian he also remained under the great allure of Seleucus’s territorial achievements, given that Seleucus’s rising star shone relatively modestly in its beginnings, especially if compared with others among the important group of men around Alexander. I think Arrian would agree with A.B. Bosworth’s remarks in his indispensable commentary (*ad* Arrian’s *Anab.* 7. 13. 1): while rightly pointing to the fact that Lysimachus and Seleucus are ‘veiled in mystery’ (Bosworth 1995: 280), Bosworth rightly observes that ‘Seleucus is even more obscure’. Bosworth repeats his view in a brilliant chapter on Seleucus in his study on the diadochi. He briefly states: ‘Seleucus’ rise to power is perhaps the most spectacular phenomenon of the period of the Successors’ (Bosworth 2002: 210)¹⁷.

The scale of his achievements was therefore the main criterion Arrian adopted in judging Seleucus; the territory he reigned (just after Kuropedion) was much larger than that of Ptolemy (‘ruling over the greatest extent of territory, next to Alexander himself’: πλείστης γῆς ἐπάρξει μετὰ γε αὐτὸν Ἀλέξανδρον; cf. Arrian, *Syr.* 56. 291: Σέλευκον τῆς Ἀλεξάνδρου γῆς, ὅτι πλείστης μάλιστα τόνδε τῶν Ἀλεξάνδρου διαδόχων, βασιλεῦσαι)¹⁸. Let us also add, however, that that, as in the case of Alexander, Arrian’s opinion should not be identified with his possible moral approval of each of Seleucus’s actions: for instance, he omits Seleucus’s participation in the plot aimed at eliminating Perdikkas but we must not assume that Arrian – a Stoic – approved of it. We wish to know more but this must remain a matter of speculation. Arrian’s encomium is that of a historian.

It also seems justifiable to argue that for Arrian Seleucus was an example of a ‘good king’, probably because he had a lot of positive attributes of which the Hellenistic authors of manuals On Kingship (*Peri basileias*) so frequently spoke. Here the famous examples of Seleucus’s nobility of character (cf. the Arrianic phrase τὴν τε γνώμην βασιλικώτατον – ‘the most royal mind’) might have been attractive

¹⁷ Jane Hornblower (Hornblower 1981: 184) paid the due attention to the fact that this may be a result of the loss of Hieronymus’s monograph. Already, she suspects, the work was not known to Plutarch who left no biographies of the Seleucids. Otherwise, Plutarch’s motives might have been here moral: in the essay on the fate and virtue of Alexander (*Fort. & virt. Alex.* B, 338c), Plutarch condemned the immoral behaviour of the Successors; they called themselves ‘Benefactors’, ‘Conquerors’, ‘Saviours’, or ‘the Great’, he boasts, but in fact spent their lives with women like mares in a herd. Accordingly, Seleucus appears only three times in Plutarch’s biography and plays no vital role in his *Life of Alexander*, although the biographer has some knowledge of his activity in Babylon in 323, where we, as we are told, Seleucus together with Peithon, went to the Serapeion: *Alex.* 76. 4 (cf. Hamilton 1969: 110).

¹⁸ Appian paints a true idealized portrayal of Seleucus, a king loved by this army; a best ‘father’ for the soldiers; a pious man fulfilling the oaths; a loving father to Antiochus (cf. Brodersen 1989).

to Arrian: towards his Persian wife, Apame, whom Seleucus did not divorce, and towards his own son, for whom Seleucus gave up his second wife, Stratonice (Arrian, *Syr.* 59. 309–61. 327). One cannot fail to mention another ground for Arrian's positive words for Ptolemy. When he attempted to write the *Indica* his main source on this country remained Megasthenes, of whom Waterfield (*Dividing the Spoils*, p. 104) has recently said that 'Seleucus kept a permanent ambassador at Chandragupta's court'. All this points to the claim that Arrian retained the figure of Seleucus in his memory which additionally may be inferred from another passage, this time in the *Indica* where the name of the king appears (43. 4: Σέλευκον τὸν Νικάτορα).

Much can be written on this point but here suffice it to say that one should not to be surprised by the (unexpectedly) high opinion Arrian held of a king who realized (true, but for a moment) the ideal of Alexander. As a Stoic thinker, Arrian's judgment was probably not without restrictions, but as a historian writing along the lines of the traditional genre of historiography whose aim was to keep the memory of great deeds alive, Seleucus fully embodied what eminent personalities were glorified in antiquity for: he achieved true greatness, by which measure he was equal to Alexander himself, and superior to Ptolemy.

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