

# Review

ANNE GANGLOFF and GILLES GORRE (EDS), *LE CORPS DES SOUVERAINS DANS LES MONDES HELLÉNISTIQUE ET ROMAIN* (Collection 'Histoire'). Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2021. Pp. 422, illus. ISBN 9782753586482. €30.00.

Since its publication more than six decades ago, Ernst Kantorowicz's pioneering work on the political–theological conception of the king's two bodies in the Middle Ages has generated much discussion in medieval scholarship (*The King's Two Bodies* (1957)). Its impact on the study of the ancient world has been more limited, although it has inspired some notable publications (J. B. Meister, *Der Körper des Princeps* (2012); G. B. Lanfranchi and R. Rollinger (eds), *The Body of the King* (2016)). The present volume, edited by Anne Gangloff and Gilles Gorre, likewise takes its inspiration from Kantorowicz's work, employing his distinction between the sovereign's natural and symbolic body as a heuristic tool for the examination of the corporality of Hellenistic and Roman rulers. How were bodies that were subject to maladies, old age and death used to express and legitimise monarchical power? The volume focuses on three themes: firstly, how royal bodies were codified and perceived; secondly, how they were staged; and thirdly, how Greek, Hellenistic and Roman norms and traditions with regard to the sovereign's body differed from or resembled each other. The editors take an interdisciplinary approach to these questions, including contributions from experts in various fields who draw not only or predominantly on literary sources, but also on epigraphy, sculpture and coinage.

Following an introduction in which G. and G. clarify the volume's theme and set out its goals, the medieval scholar Franck Mercier provides a helpful summary of Kantorowicz's discussion of the two-bodies theory, explains how his ideas have been contested and modified, and cautions against the straightforward application of a concept that was developed in such specific historical and cultural circumstances to the ancient world. The central part of the volume is then divided into four sections, which respectively deal with the representation of the sovereign's body; his '*sur-corps*', or body that has been elevated and singled out through staging, clothing and other means, yet is not absolved from human flaws and weaknesses; the diffusion of his physical representations; and the relation between his 'body natural' and his 'body politic'. These sections establish a thematic structure for the volume, although the boundaries between them are somewhat blurred. The overall quality of the contributions is quite high and the range of topics and sources they cover very diverse. For instance, Christophe Vendries discusses possible caricatures of Roman emperors in graffiti and statuettes, concluding that Rome lacked a strong tradition of visual caricature, especially in comparison to its highly developed genre of literary satire. Florence Gherchanoc examines literary discourses concerning the splendid appearances of Demetrius Poliorcetes and other Hellenistic rulers, which could be framed in terms of prestige and majesty as well as tyranny and self-aggrandisement. Valérie Huet and Emmanuelle Rosso draw on statues, reliefs, frescos and coins to discuss the 'divine' bodies of Roman emperors, including elusive depictions of their *genius* and *numen*. Panos Christodoulou explains how Ptolemy VIII used his corpulent body as an asset to advertise his *tryphè* and forge a connection to Dionysus.

Although the contents of the volume are without question very rich and varied, not all sections are equally well balanced in terms of their chronological and thematic coverage. In section I, only a small part of Gwenaëlle Le Person-Rolland's article deals with the physiognomy and iconography of Hellenistic kings other than Alexander, while the bodies of Roman emperors are only dealt with through the negative lens of hostile literary discourse (Christophe Badel) and caricature (Vendries). The second section is better balanced, although three of its five articles put a heavy focus on Octavian/Augustus (Damien Agut-Labordère, Pierre Assenmaker and, to a lesser extent, Huet and Rosso). In section III, two of the three articles are concerned with Ptolemaic Egypt (Stéphanie Wackener and Gilles Gorre). The final section offers the fullest chronological range, extending from Alexander the Great and his Hellenistic successors (Paul Cournarie) to the emperors of Late Antiquity (Jan Meister). In terms of images, the volume is a mixed bag: some articles contain many fine coloured or black-and-white images (e.g. Vendries; Huet and Rosso), yet there are also some that barely include any pictures at all, even though visual sources feature prominently in

their argument (e.g. Le Person-Rolland's article on Hellenistic kings only shows one portrait of Alexander, while Christodoulou's article on Ptolemy VIII has none).

The concluding piece by Francis Prost does an effective job of tying the volume's various strands together and relating them to Kantorowicz's two-body theory. Prost notes that the codes and languages referring to the bodies of Hellenistic kings and Roman emperors in various types of sources more often diverge than converge. The staging of rulers' bodies covers a wide spectrum from a human, approachable style to aloofness and sacralisation. The ancient royal body could be glorified and even multiplied in the bodies of governors, courtiers and soldiers, but neither in the Hellenistic nor in the Roman world did a metaphorical, enduring 'body politic' in Kantorowicz's sense of the word develop.

The volume's engagement with the two-bodies model pioneered by Kantorowicz provides a degree of focus and coherence to a collection that covers such a wide chronological range from so many disciplinary angles. Particularly strong in this regard are the bookending chapters by Mercier and Prost, although it has to be said that some of the contributors to the intermediate sections engage much more intensively with Kantorowicz's model than others. Unfortunately, some other important aspects one would expect to be covered in such a volume are underrepresented, if not completely missing. For instance, a number of Hellenistic queens wielded considerable power, and representations of Roman empresses such as Sabina and Julia Domna were on display throughout the Empire, yet only one article is primarily concerned with the bodies of powerful women (Marie Widmer on Seleucid queens). Despite all the important work that has been done on ancient gender discourses and their impact on the iconography of Roman emperors and other ancient rulers, the volume does not thematise gender at all and only addresses it on an ad hoc basis. Last, but not least, little is said about the (posthumous) mutilation of sovereigns' bodies, although both toppled rulers and their sculpted or cast likenesses frequently fell victim to such abusive treatment, especially in ancient Rome.

In sum, G. and G. deserve much credit for presenting us with such a rich and varied collection of articles, which definitely constitutes a milestone in the study of the corporality of Hellenistic and Roman rulers. They leave us with plenty of food for thought, but also with plenty of room for further research.

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