

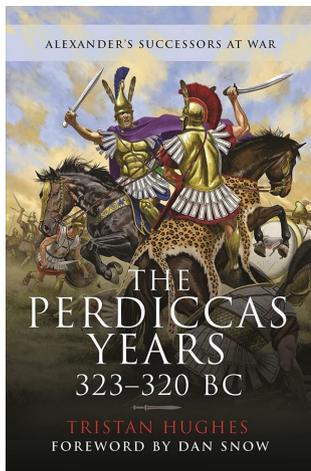
## Book Review

### The Perdiccas Years, 323–320 BC: Alexander's Successors at War

Hughes (T.), Pp. 384, ills, maps. Barnsley:  
Pen & Sword Military, 2022. Hardback, £25.00.  
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Alexander is known as the 'Great' for his total empire estimated at 2000,000 square miles. However, shortly after his death the successors (his leading generals such as Perdiccas, Antipater and Ptolemy) split up his empire. Tristan Hughes' book attempts to explain the scale of conflict in the period 323–320 BC, dominated by Perdiccas.

The book begins with a laudatory foreword, promoting *History Hit*, by Dan Snow. It sets the tone for an unashamedly populist narrative. Hughes directs us to the end notes for sources in

his introduction, indicating his tendency to dramatise with pithy statements and rhetorical questions rather than discuss sources in depth within the narrative. Often this makes his book engaging; for example, Chapter 13 reads like a historical novel. Hughes builds up tension for the battle between Eumenes and Craterus with eye-catching subtitles (such as 'Athena vs Demeter', playing on Plutarch's account of Eumenes' dream) and describes the duel between Eumenes and Neoptolemus as 'Homeric'. Similarly, his analysis of Diodorus' narrative about Perdiccas' defeat in Egypt is critical and engaging, creating a gripping and perceptive account of how Perdiccas came to lose 2,000 men crossing the Nile and be subsequently assassinated himself.

Hughes' approach also clarifies this complex period. In chapter two on the Lamnian War he does this especially well using maps and short sections. Psychologising, this time about the scheming of Demosthenes in relation to Harpalus and Samos, is used to engage the reader. The prosecution speeches from Athens at this time are used very effectively to illustrate the bitter anti-Macedonian feelings across Greece.

In chapter three concerning Lysimachus' conquests in Thrace, Hughes' use of maps is even more useful. There is a plethora of

background 'players' (such as Perdiccas, the Athenians, Antipater) and obscure locations but Hughes brings everything together, thus painting a clear picture of battles leading to the establishment of Lysimachus in that area. The clarification of myriad characters in chapters five and six is also impressive. Here Hughes links the events in Cyrene with the eventual Athenian defeat in the Lamnian War. He recapitulates Harpalus' escapades as well as Ptolemy's separate negotiations with Perdiccas (necessary repeats) to introduce Thibron and his battles.

On the other hand, some critics may say the book lacks academic rigour. In chapter one there is a long section psychologising the infantry rebel Meleager without reference to a source. One might suggest he could be more analytical of the evidence from primary sources. Most notably, Hughes does not question the figures given for number of Athenians disenfranchised by Antipater's settlement, nor does he break down the significance of Plutarch's epitaph for Demosthenes which he quotes, that 'had you for Greece been strong, as wise you were, The Macedonians had not conquered her'; consequently, he misses an opportunity to delve into contemporary Greek senses of their own inadequacies. There is also a marked lack of analysis for the Arrian and Diodorus writings about Eumenes' unique loyalty to Perdiccas during the Cappadocian and Armenian campaigns.

Throughout the book, but in chapter eight especially, his work might have benefitted from more consideration of the relevant women. For example, in this chapter there is room to discuss the possible motivations of Cleopatra in offering herself in marriage to Perdiccas. Was she merely following her mother Olympias' orders to fulfil Olympias' ambitions? However, this marginalisation of women is somewhat rectified in the following chapter with a vivid narrative concerning Cynane the Dardanian 'Amazon' and her assassination by Perdiccas. Indeed, Hughes almost goes too far, perhaps not being critical enough of Polyænus' mythologising of this figure (indeed, he was a *rhetor* and so likely to exaggerate for dramatic effect).

Furthermore, some may say he draws too heavily on certain secondary historians. In chapter 14, the abundance of references to Grainger implies Hughes relies a little too much on this scholar. Otherwise, in this chapter he convincingly builds up a picture of the scale of the revolt to support his point that Polyperchon's suppression of the revolt was a great achievement.

He finishes the book rapidly with a chapter on Ptolemy's refusal of the regency and an epilogue. Whilst succinct, it could perhaps show a clearer overall answer to the question: why did Alexander's empire break up so rapidly in these years? The back cover of the book includes a promise of more books in a series on this subject of Alexander's successors, so presumably Hughes is reserving his conclusion.

Perhaps these chapters could include more visual sources. His description of the equipment including the four-horse chariot is well-organised in the relevant chapter, but more references to sculpture (such as temple pediments) would balance out his excellent discussion of literary evidence. Nevertheless, it must be said that he includes detailed discussion of Alexander's funeral cortège and its possible symbolism, balancing Diodorus' account with modern artistic representations.

The book is definitely accessible reading. Hughes restricts the size of extracts from literary sources and slots them into the narrative in well-chosen spaces. There are lots of Greek terms explained as he uses them e.g. *taxis* (unit of the army) and *prostates* (rules on behalf of an incapable leader). Frequently the reader is provided with maps including modern place names to contextualise an episode. Finally, there is a 'Who's who' guide at the back of the book. As such, even students at Key Stage 3 (ages 11–14) might be

directed to this book to widen their knowledge. More pertinently to exam groups, A level Ancient History candidates could engage in critical discussion of his pronouncements on Alexander, such as the imprudent decision to establish Alexandria-The-Furthest where he did, as well as his repeated point that Alexander's fast conquests created political instability.

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