

BESTIAL RIVALRY: ANIMAL PROPAGANDA  
IN THE HELLENISTIC KINGDOMS\*

by

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ABSTRACT: In this article the use of animals in Hellenistic politics is discussed: in parades, as gifts, and animal images functioning as symbols. The point of departure is the *Pompe* of Ptolemy Philadelphus, for which an alternative to the previously argued date is proposed. Ptolemaic propaganda is further compared with the way other Hellenistic monarchs used animals.

Animals, especially exotic species, are characteristic of the lavish lifestyle of the Roman emperors, and indeed, they played a prominent role as entertainment for the masses throughout the Roman era. This paper, however, will concentrate on another aspect of exotic animals – hidden behind entertainment and religious festivals – as symbols of power and kingship. The discussion will aim at answering the question of how the Hellenistic kings showed their power by means of animals and animal symbols. The crucial period in European history for this subject are the first two centuries after Alexander's Eastern campaign, which resulted in the appearance of the *exotica* in the Greek, and then the Roman world on such a large scale<sup>1</sup>. In this period people realized that the image they create,

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<sup>1</sup> A very interesting and deep survey of the role of animals in the construction of cosmic kingship throughout the history of Europe and Asia was made by T. ALLSEN (2006). The examples given by ALLSEN help in understanding common patterns in Eurasian nations with regard to how animals were used in political propaganda and the constitution of rulership. The role of animals in Hellenistic kingship is deeply studied by V. ALONSO TRONCOSO, who inaugurated a project *The Zoology of Hellenistic Kingship: From Alexander the Great to the Epigoni (336–c. 250 BC)*, and part of his research