

Eva Anagnostou-Laoutides, Stefan Pfeiffer (eds.),
*Culture and Ideology under the Seleukids:
Unframing a Dynasty*, De Gruyter, Berlin–Boston 2022,
pp. 360 + multiple figures; ISBN 978-3-11-075557-2

From the 1980s onwards, ancient historians turned close attention to the Seleukid Empire, publishing a series of studies that profoundly challenged previously held views on the empire's place and role in the Hellenistic world, opening new research avenues. The growing scholarly interest in the Seleukids resulted in a number of subject-specific conferences, with one of them ('Culture and Ideology under the Seleukids: An Interdisciplinary Approach') held in Sydney on March 29–31, 2019. Papers presented at the event (by an international group of scholars) have been published as a volume, *Culture and Ideology under the Seleukids: Unframing a Dynasty*, edited by the conference convenors, Eva Anagnostou-Laoutides and Stefan Pfeiffer. The volume does not strictly qualify as conference proceedings, since it includes texts authored by non-attendees who were invited to contribute due to their aligned research interests: in result, the collection encompasses a much broader variety of contributions on the conference's topic. One must note that the volume editors decided to publish papers in their original languages, willing to reflect the diversity of research conducted on the Seleukids all over the world.¹

The editors' introduction ('Introduction: Un-Framing Seleukid Ideology,' pp. 1–20) express the aims behind the conference: (1) to shed light on the origins of the Seleukid Empire and the policies employed by its first rulers to win over different groups of their new subjects; (2) to represent the Seleukid political culture and their influence over their subjects; (3) to examine the Seleukid royal ideology (drawing on the example of Babylonia); and (4) to investigate relations between the Seleukids and neighbouring powers, such as Rome. The volume's structure reflects the topical order presented above.

The volume's initial section ('Representations and Perceptions: Ideology and the Beginnings of a Monarchy') consists of five chapters that discuss how the first Seleukid rulers attempted to legitimise their rule.² Their efforts focused on avoiding succession strife

¹ '... in our view, it is important to acknowledge the different academic cultures that often interfere with our ability to reach out to colleagues working on the Seleukids in different latitudes and in different languages ... it simply reflects the acknowledgment that modern academia is no less multicultural than the Seleukid Empire ...' (p. v).

² A. McAuley, *The Seleukid Royal Family as a Reigning Triad*, pp. 23–40; G. R. Dumke, *Alexandros vs. Soter vs. Nikator. Die Rolle Alexanders, Ptolemaios' I. und Seleukos' I. in der politischen Legitimation ihrer Nachfolger*, pp. 41–56; M. Trundle, *Ch. de Lisie, Coinage and the Creation of the Seleukid Kingdom*, pp. 57–75; D. Ogden, *Seleucos and the Typology of Heracles*, pp. 77–95; M. T. Olszewski, *Memory and Ideology of the First Successors of Alexander the Great as Inscribed on Roman Mosaics from Apameia of Syria*, pp. 97–127.

in the family and ensuring that the power would pass from one generation to the next. Markedly, the Seleukid dynastic ideology could not draw upon Alexander the Great's legacy, since it was their rivals Ptolemies who possessed Alexander's tomb. Consequently, the coinage of the first Seleukid rulers avoided any references to Alexander and paid their soldiers with coins struck in local mints, stamped solely with their likenesses. As a substitute, the Seleukid dynastic mythology underscored Heracles as the divine dynastic founder, the connection first made under Seleukos I and fully developed under Antiochus III. The memory of origins of the Seleukid rule endured until the Roman period, as evinced, for example, by scenes on one of the mosaics found in Apamea.

The second section ('Political Culture: A Contested Monarchy') consists of three chapters that consider what is seen as manifestations of resistance against the Seleukid rule. Paul McKechnie ('Wars of the Brothers: the Contested Coalescence of Seleukid Statehood in mid-Third-Century Asia Minor,' pp. 131–150) examines Asia Minor to pinpoint external and internal factors that undermined the Seleukid authority over regions far removed from Syria, the seat of their power. Since the Syrian rulers wished to keep their influence over Asia Minor and other regions, they had to acknowledge and accommodate local centres of power. One frequently discussed example of a population that resisted the Seleukid authority are Jews of Judea. Altay Coşkun ('The Reception of Seleukid Ideology in Second-Century BCE Judaea,' pp. 151–166) highlights the shift in relations between the Seleukids and Judean elites. After the conquest, the Judean elites attempted to cooperate with their Seleukid overlords. After Jonathan's ascension, the Jewish leaders used the Seleukid authority to legitimise the Hasmonean hold over the land. Richard Wenghofer's ('Popular Resistance to Seleukid Claims of Hegemony,' pp. 167–184) chapter offers a more comprehensive account of the anti-Seleukid domestic resistance, distinguishing between violent and non-violent opposition. The subjects' attitude largely depended on the extent of royal coercion: the Seleukids met with violent resistance whenever they unduly oppressed their subjects. The extant sources indicate that the Seleukid subjects most frequently rose against their rulers across the empire in an interval between the reigns of Seleukos I (312–281 BCE) and Demetrius I (187–150 BCE).

The third section of the volume ('Local Ideology: The Babylonian Tradition and Greek Culture') encompasses four chapters.³ The contributions focus on a wealth of written sources written in Hellenistic Babylonia under the Seleukid rule. The marked intellectual activity of Babylonian priests produced many documents that shed light on the interplay between the local culture and imported Greek customs and on relations between the Babylonians and their Greek rulers. The chapters discuss select examples of these cultural interactions. The Babylonian documents call the Seleukid rulers 'Great Kings,' even though the Syrians never used this title themselves. The first Seleukids paid homage to the Babylonian tradition by donning Nabonidus' royal vestments during their stays in Babylon. The Babylonian deities and mythological characters were adapted to align with the Hellenic worldview. The interplay of the Hellenic and Babylonian cultural strata is

³ A. Mehl, *How to Understand Seleukids as Babylonian "Great Kings,"* pp. 187–202; P. M. Michel, M. Widmer, *Au sujet de la puissance symbolique des vêtements du souverain en Babylonie et dans l'Orient grec hellénistiques,* pp. 203–226; E. Anagnostou-Laoutides, *Flexing Mythologies in Babylon and Antioch-on-the-Orontes: Divine Champions and their Aquatic Enemies under the Early Seleukids,* pp. 227–250; P.-A. Beaulieu, *The Death of Antiochos IV in the Context of Babylonian Hellenistic Historiography,* pp. 251–266.

also made evident in the Babylonian historiographical tradition on the circumstances of Antiochus IV's demise.

The fourth part of the volume ('Cultural Interdependencies: Empires and Ideologies in Dialogue'), also comprising of four chapters, examines how the Seleukid Empire influenced (and was perceived by) its neighbours. Daniel Hunter ('The Influence of Seleukid Coinage upon the Bithynian and Pontic Monarchies to the Reign of Mithridates VI,' pp. 269–296) traces how the ideological content of the Seleukid coinage influenced coins struck by kings of Bithynia and Pontus in 3rd and 2nd c. BCE. According to the author, the might of the Seleukids in the 3rd c. BCE greatly impressed lesser rulers of Asia Minor, who minted coins after the Seleukid fashion and copied elements of the Seleukid iconography that emphasised their authority and majesty. The Seleukid influence manifestly appears in coins struck by the very first rulers of Bithynia, whereas Pontic rulers began to emulate Syrian coinages after a series of diplomatic marriages that united these two ruling houses in the 2nd c. BCE. In turn, Rachel Mairs ('Kingship and Ruler Cult in Hellenistic Bactria: Beyond the Numismatic Sources,' pp. 297–312) surveys a variety of archaeological, epigraphical and numismatic sources to ascertain inspirations behind the forms of royal cult in Bactria. Having analysed the material in Bactria and the eastern regions of the Seleukid Empire, the author surmises that the royal cult in Bactria imitates Seleukid patterns. Stefan Pfeiffer's ('Great King Ptolemy III and Great King Antiochos III: Remarks on the Significance of a "Persian" Title in their Representation,' pp. 313–329) investigation focuses on the origin and meaning of the title of the 'Great King,' adopted by both the Ptolemies and Antiochus III. The scholar denied that the title came from Persia, arguing that its use by Ptolemy III and Antiochus III points to its symbolic expression of superiority over other rulers. For Antiochus III, the title of the Great King underscored his predominance over Rome.⁴ Finally, Thomas Brüggemann's ('Mehr als Schall und Rauch? Das Seleukidenreich und seine antiken Namen,' pp. 331–350) chapter discusses the official nomenclature of the Seleukid state. Although the Seleukids hailed from Macedonia, they never included any Macedonian references in their titlature, perhaps willing to emphasise the ethnic diversity of their subjects. Accordingly, they adopted a more convenient formula of naming by referencing the actual ruler.

This brief survey of the volume's content only partially reflects the breadth of issues examined by its contributors. Every chapter showcases how new research methods may shed light on long-known sources and expand our knowledge of the early Seleukid Empire. Significantly, many conclusions and hypotheses found within open up new avenues of research. The volume's contributions demonstrate that the first Seleukids were effective rulers who enhanced their political standing by their deft use of propaganda and politics, won over local elites by respecting their customs and privileges, and readily assimilated foreign traditions if they would further their goals.

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⁴ Cf. also Ch. Lerouge-Cohen, *Souvenirs du passé perse à l'époque hellénistique (Arménie, Cappadoce, Commagène, Perside, Pont, Royaume Arsacide)*, Brussels 2022, pp. 315–351.