

Altay Coşkun, Richard Wenghofer (eds.), *Seleukid Ideology: Creation, Reception and Response*, (*Seleukid Perspectives 1*), Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 2023, 390 pp. + b/w figs.; ISBN 978-3-515-13478-1

Altay Coşkun, Benjamin Edidin Scolnic (eds.), *The Seleukids at War: Recruitment, Composition, and Organization*, (*Seleukid Perspectives 2*), Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 2024, 359 pp. + b/w figs.; ISBN 978-3-515-13773-7

An unexpected outcome of S. Sherwin-White and A. Kuhrt's groundbreaking *From Samarkhand to Sardis: A New Approach to the Seleucid Empire* (London 1993) has been the continuing surge of interest in Seleukid history. This is evident from the numerous publications and conferences devoted to its various aspects. This flourishing of Seleukid studies inspired A. Coşkun and B. E. Scolnic, organizers of the *Seleukid Study Day* conference series, to create the *Seleukid Perspectives* publication series. According to its founders' vision, each volume is intended to focus on a single theme. Two volumes have appeared so far: one devoted to Seleukid ideology, the other to their military affairs, with more in preparation.

Volume 1: *Seleukid Ideology*

The first volume of the series examines the dynastic ideology of the Seleukids. The work comprises fifteen chapters (including the introduction (R. Wenghofer, A. Coşkun, *Introduction: The Dialectics of Seleukid Ideology*, pp. 14–29), supplemented by an Index of Names (pp. 371–380) and an Index of Sources (pp. 381–390)). The process of forming and shaping the content of dynastic ideology is presented from several perspectives, each addressed in a separate section.

The authors of the chapters in the first section (*Formation of Seleukid Dynastic Ideology*, pp. 33–111) trace how the rulers of Syria created the foundations of an ideology meant to underpin their rule. The founding myth at the core of this ideology was created by Seleukos I, who also did much to popularize the symbols associated with the dynasty he established.¹ The second section (*Enacting Seleukid Kingship*, pp. 115–197) addresses

¹ Cf. K. Erickson, *Royal Propaganda and the Creation of Royal Status for Seleucus I*, pp. 33–60; E. Anagnostou-Laoutides, *The King-Ship of the Seleukids: An Alternative Paradigm for the Anchor Symbol*,

questions of consolidating and strengthening Seleukid power in both propaganda and political dimensions. Propaganda efforts served to build a public image of their state's power or to promote the ruler's personal qualities, while political actions demonstrated their severity in dealing with political opponents—intended as a warning to potential imitators.²

The chapters in the third section (*Resisting Seleukid Royal Authority*, pp. 201–234) present examples of resistance to Seleukid rule. One concerns social discontent provoked by changes in the local land ownership system in Babylonia, aimed at enlarging the king's landholdings at the expense of existing proprietors. Resistance was also sparked by rulers' attempts to limit the autonomy of *poleis*.³ The authors of the fourth section (*Reframing Seleukid Ideology*, pp. 237–315) reveal other dimensions of opposition to Seleukid rule. In the case of Armenia—a state dependent on the Syrian rulers but not intensively controlled due to its peripheral location—this resistance took an ideological form. Armenian rulers created an alternative ideology that drew on Iranian rather than Greek models. In Judea, resistance expressed itself through negative portrayals of Syrian rule in contemporary Jewish literature.⁴

The fifth section (*Re-Assessing Seleukid Ideology*, pp. 319–366) comprises chapters presenting two contrasting visions of how the Seleukids' dynastic ideology was received by their subjects. One concerns the relationship between the Seleukids and the *poleis*, which was supposedly characterized by the city-dwellers' hidden hostility toward their autocracy. However, the imbalance of power compelled the *poleis* to avoid open confrontation. Their hostile attitude toward the Seleukids was masked by offering honors, which helped maintain equilibrium in their mutual relations. These honors should therefore not be treated as unambiguous evidence of acceptance of the political order imposed by the Syrian kings.⁵ The author of the second conception, by contrast, views these relations in a positive light, demonstrating through examples from various regions of the Seleukid empire that the ideology they created was accepted by their subjects, thereby fostering loyalist attitudes toward their rule.⁶

The problems analyzed by the authors reveal the complexity of the phenomenon known as Seleukid dynastic ideology. The authors present various forms of action by the rulers of this dynasty, using ideology as a tool to justify their right to rule over the different

pp. 61–92; A. Coşkun, *The First Seleukid Benefactions in Miletos and the Creation of a Dynastic Ideology*, pp. 93–111.

² Cf. B. Edelman-Singer, *Material Culture, Ritual Performance, and Seleukid Rule: Antiochos IV and the Procession at Daphne in 166 BCE*, pp. 115–134; S. Harrison, *Antiochos at Daphne and Xerxes at Sardes: A Comparative Perspective on the Seleukid Vision of Empire*, pp. 135–158; R. Strootman, *Ritual Mutilation and the Construction of Treason: The Execution of Molon and Achaïos by Antiochos III*, pp. 159–176; B. E. Scolnic, *Second-Hand Propaganda: Polybios and Zeno on the Role of Antiochos IV at the Battle of Panion*, pp. 177–197.

³ Cf. D. Klokow, *Connectivity and Rural Spaces in the Seleukid Empire*, pp. 201–218; G. Ramsey, *Rebel Poleis: The Politics of Anti-Seleukid Violence*, pp. 219–234.

⁴ Cf. G. Payen, *Le royaume artaxiade dans l'Empire séleucide : de dominé à dominant*, pp. 237–260; B. E. Scolnic, *Šar Wars – How a Judaean Author in the 160's BCE Transformed a Ptolemaic View of Hellenistic History into a Theology for His Time*, pp. 261–282; E. Almagor, "To All Parts of the Kingdom:" *The Book of Esther as a Seleukid Text*, pp. 283–315.

⁵ R. Wenghofer, *Diplomatic Resistance to Seleukid Hegemony*, pp. 319–342.

⁶ A. Coşkun, *The Efficacy of Ideological Discourse: Loyalty to the Seleukid Dynasty in Babylonia, Judea, and Asia Minor*, pp. 343–366.

regions of their empire. To disseminate this ideology's content, they employed methods that took local traditions into account, intended to help the Seleukids win the sympathy and loyalty of different subject groups. The elements that compose this picture clearly justify the value of continuing regional studies, as they reveal different manifestations of the same phenomenon. The findings proposed by individual authors also highlight another important benefit of such studies: the diversity of research methods can sometimes lead to differing assessments of the issue under investigation—an argument for continuing research on Seleukid ideology, which still contains content requiring discovery.

Volume 2: *The Seleukids at War*

The second work in the *Seleukid Perspectives* series is devoted to Seleukid military affairs. This topic can hardly be considered fully explored, though issues related to it have already received considerable attention.⁷ However, the growing body of epigraphic sources and new interpretations of iconographic, archaeological, and numismatic evidence are enabling us to expand our knowledge of the military affairs of the largest Hellenistic empire.

This work consists of fourteen chapters divided into four parts. It opens with a substantial introduction by its editors (B. E. Scolnic, A. Coşkun, *An Introduction to the Seleukid at War: Recruitment, Composition, Organization*, pp. 11–28) and closes with three indices: Index of Names, Index of Subjects, and Index of Sources.

The first section, devoted to recruitment into the Seleukid army (*Recruitment*, pp. 31–127), consists of three chapters whose authors hold divergent views on this question. According to J. Serrati (*Soldiers, Settlers, and Citizens: Katoikoi in the Seleukid Empire*, pp. 31–48) the Seleukids' colonization of veterans combined with land grants resulted in military service obligations, whereas N. V. Secunda (*Macedonian Military Service in the Seleukid Kingdom*, pp. 49–102) argues that colonists were not subject to such obligations, and only descendants of ethnic Macedonians—on whom the power of the phalanx in the Syrian army rested—were recruited. P. A. Johstono (*Generating Infantry for Seleukid Field Armies*, pp. 103–126) contends that the Seleukid state's mobilization capacity was considerably greater than commonly supposed, since scholarship typically focuses on the main forces of their army while overlooking local units organized from Greek inhabitants of various regions when necessary. He also points out that many elements of the Syrian recruitment system still require further research.

The chapters in the second section (*Composition*, pp. 129–220) address questions concerning the composition of the Seleukid army. A. Coşkun (*Macedonians, Silvershields, and the Phalanx under Antiochos III Megalos and Antiochos IV Epiphanes*, pp. 129–156) notes that the *argyraspides* formation present in this army evokes in name and character the formation of the same name in Alexander the Great's army. P. Möhring and R. Strootman (*Mysian Light Infantry in the Seleukid Army*, pp. 157–178) argue that the Mysian

⁷ See B. Bar-Kochva, *The Seleucid Army: Organization, and Tactics in the Great Campaigns*, Cambridge 1976; B. Bar-Kochva, *Judas Maccabaeus: The Jewish Struggle against the Seleucids*, Cambridge 1989.

unit consisted of mercenaries recruited from the inhabitants of northwestern Anatolia. H. Bru (*The Pisidians between Seleukids and Ptolemies*, pp. 179–198) analyzes accounts of the presence of Pisidians in the Seleukid army. B. E. Scolnic (*From Mosollamos' Arrow to Makkabaios' Sword: Jewish Soldiers in the Seleukid Era*, pp. 199–220) presents the problem of Jewish soldiers' service in the Syrian army. Contrary to prevailing belief, they were quite numerous in this army. This suggests that Judah Maccabee may have acquired his skill in commanding large units and knowledge of the tactics employed by the Syrian army through service under the Seleukid banner. Thanks to the experience gained from this service, he was later able to successfully lead the insurgent forces.


The chapters in the third section (*Organization*, pp. 221–293) concern issues related to the functioning of the organizational structures of the Syrian army, with particular emphasis on the high-level command system. G. Wrightson (*Command Hierarchy in the Seleukid Phalanx*, pp. 223–240) compared the phalanx command system in Alexander the Great's army with the system employed in the Syrian army as described by Asclepiodotus. In the author's view, the weakness of the latter command model stemmed from its inefficiency caused by too many decision-making levels, resulting in limited flexibility—particularly crucial in confrontations with Roman legions. S. R. Gerrard (*Seleukid Infantry/Cavalry Ratios: the Numerical Importance of Cavalry*, pp. 241–268) analyzes data concerning the proportions between infantry and cavalry units in the Syrian army from the battle of Ipsus (301 BCE) to the battle of Elasa (161 BCE). Based on these data, he concludes that these proportions were not constant but fluctuated over time depending on logistical, economic, and political factors. M. J. Taylor (*"A Commander Will put an End to his Insolence:" The Battle of Magnesia, 190 BCE*, pp. 269–293) analyzes the course of the battle of Magnesia. The cause of Antiochus III's army's defeat, despite its numerical superiority and initial success, was the superiority of Roman command skill, Roman soldiers' experience in fighting Hellenistic armies, and the manipular structure of the legions, which enabled greater mobility on the battlefield compared to the phalanx's inflexible line and greater autonomy in action.

The fourth section (*Warfare and Diplomacy*, pp. 295–334) contains chapters addressing issues that relate more or less directly to Seleukid military affairs. According to Y. N. Kuzmin (*A Shield with the Depiction of a Seleukid Anchor at Patara*, pp. 297–306), carved stone blocks covered with images evoking the iconography of Seleukid symbols, reused during the Roman imperial period in the reconstruction of the theater at Patara, may be remnants of a monument commemorating some Roman victory over Seleukid naval forces. P.-L. Brisson (*Of Ships and Elephants: the Aftermath of Gnaeus Octavius' Embassy and Rome's Eastern Policy in the 160s BCE*, pp. 307–324) examines the aims of Roman Republican policy toward the Seleukid state in light of Gnaeus Octavius's visit to Syria in 162 BCE. His findings indicate that one of the most important was to weaken the Seleukids' position, since contrary to scholarly consensus, their state after the Peace of Apamea still possessed considerable capabilities and posed a threat to Roman policy in the eastern Mediterranean basin. The final chapter of this section—and simultaneously the conclusion of the entire work—is an epilogue by A. Coşkun (*Epilogue: the Strength of the Seleukid Army and Open Questions*, pp. 325–334).

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the work under review contributes many new elements to our knowledge of Seleukid military affairs. The panorama of problems it presents reveals all its complexity. At the same time, reading the individual chapters prompts the reflection that fully understanding this subject is not entirely possible given the state of the source base, which, while slowly expanding through discoveries of new epigraphic documents, remains geographically limited. This is confirmed by the fact that the sources on which the authors based their findings are well-known written accounts containing information about Seleukid history and epigraphic documents from Asia Minor. Although several of the problems presented concern not only the organization and functioning of the Seleukid army in general but also local matters, it is hard not to notice that they relate mainly to situations in the western provinces of their state. The absence of chapters concerning the eastern provinces (except for references to Mesopotamian realities) makes the sketched picture decidedly one-sided. This shortcoming does not, however, affect the overall positive assessment of this work. Its great value lies in proposing a different perspective on the problem of recruitment into the Syrian army than previously offered. This opens the way for further discussion. It is worth noting that beyond its important contribution to deepening knowledge of Seleukid military affairs, the work also contains a wealth of valuable data for the social history of their state. Like the volume devoted to dynastic ideology, this one too deserves a prominent place in the library of any scholar engaged in the history of the Seleukid empire.

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