

Seleucid Study Day IV: Seleucid Royal Women: Roles and Representations

Veranstalter: Classical Studies at McGill University, Montreal; Waterloo Institute for Hellenistic Studies (WIHS)

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Compared to their contemporaries in Macedon and Egypt, Seleucid queens and princesses have hardly begun to fall under the gaze of scholarly scrutiny. As Greco-Macedonian women, they were born into the family at the head of an empire that spanned dozens of cultures, languages, and traditions encompassing territory that extended from western Asia Minor to the Indus River. How they impacted the cultures into which they married, and were themselves impacted by them, requires far more attention. Likewise lacking is a systematic scrutiny of female Seleucids in visual and textual media. Thus emerged the theme of the fourth meeting of the Seleucid Study Group. Previous meetings in Exeter, Waterloo and Bordeaux (2011-12) had fostered research on the early Seleucids with the marked attempt to acknowledge the vital importance of the Mesopotamian and Persian satrapies besides the better-known western areas.¹

The keynote by HANS BECK (Montreal) contextualized the kingdom between the contemporary Roman-Mediterranean and Han Chinese Empires, pointing out the potential for intercultural exchange through long-distance trade. The theme of noble women was further addressed in a cross-cultural perspective, which has profoundly altered our understanding of the roles of aristocratic women in both societies by disclosing their impact on social cohesion. ALTAY COŞKUN (Waterloo) then illustrated the Seleucids' ability not only to respect local traditions in their heterogeneous territories, but also to develop ambivalent modes of royal representation that could be perceived as traditional by multiple audiences. Although Seleucid royal women

functioned within this complex interplay of political and cultural communication, powerful queens have suffered serious distortions in ancient and modern historiography alike.

Panel 1 on 'The Wives of the Founder Kings' was opened by ANN-CATHRIN HARDERS (Bielefeld) with an intriguing illustration of how the persona of the wife could be employed to create or modify the image of the male ruler – vividly exemplified by North Korea's dictator Kim Jong Un. Of specific interest was the 'invention' of the roles of wives as queens. Seleucus was the only Diadoch with a non-Macedonian queen at his side. His second wife Stratonice was a more traditional choice – yet Seleucus married her off to his own son and heir Antiochus to thus qualify his public role. The latter marriage was examined further by ERAN ALMAGOR (Beer Sheva, Israel): Stratonice embodied the relation between four important kings: her grandfather Antipater, her father Demetrius Poliorcetes, and her husbands Seleucus I and Antiochus I. The most remarkable event linked with her is Antiochus' infatuation with his stepmother, which induced Seleucus to give up Stratonice to his son, pronouncing them king and queen of Upper Asia. The many implications and the broad reception of this colourful episode were studied behind the background of Persian and Greek literary models.

Panel 2 tried to deconstruct 'Evil Queens' in royal propaganda and Hellenistic-Roman historiography. COŞKUN studied the various layers in the image of Laodice I, first wife of Antiochus II. After rejecting the traditional view that she had been repudiated due to Antiochus' second marriage with the Ptolemaic princess Berenice, it was shown that her son Seleucus II was already co-ruling king when Antiochus died in 246. With this, all allegations of her murdering her husband, Berenice, and her son were questioned. Next it was demonstrated that Ptolemaic court propaganda could not have had an interest in denigrating Laodice. It was rather Phylarchus who designed the entirely misleading view that Antiochus' bigamy provoked the blood-thirst of Laodice and therewith the outbreak

¹ Cf. <<http://seleucid-genealogy.com/ssg.html>> (22.04.2013).

of the Third Syrian War. Phylarchus thus created Laodice as the prototype of a Seleucid queen who perverted family relations to gain power. BRETT BARTLETT (Waterloo) followed with a study on Cleopatra Tryphaena, the sister-wife of Antiochus VIII Grypus. According to Justin, she personally ordered her own sister Cleopatra IV to be torn from a temple and killed. The next year, Antiochus IX Cyzicenus, the husband of Cleopatra IV, sacrificed Tryphaena to the shades of his wife. Justin never shies away from serious distortions in his account to construe cruel deaths as fitting punishments.

Panel 3 dwelt on 'Missing Queens' in our lacunose evidence. KYLE ERICKSON (via Skype from Lampeter, UK) started by introducing into the royal dossiers which explicitly institute priesthoods for Seleucid women, a pattern that contrasts with the absence of queens in the lists of priests for Seleucid kings. In conclusion, there did not seem to have been a single coherent model of central control over cults for the Seleucid monarchs even after the reign of Antiochus III. SHEILA AGER (represented by Stacy Reda) & CRAIG HARDIMAN (Waterloo) explored the absence of Seleucid female portraits prior to Laodice IV. In the few images of queens that do survive, Cleopatra Thea and Cleopatra Selene are surrounded with more Ptolemaic ties. Others, like Laodice, show a distinctive lack of the multiple royal or divine attributes. This might suggest a different role for Seleucid (royal) women when compared to other Hellenistic kingdoms, reflecting a closer relationship to traditional Near Eastern royal systems.

Two 'Powerful Queens' were the object of panel 4. ALEX MCAULEY (Montreal) scrutinized the political background of Apama of Cyrene: a daughter of Antiochus I, she was married in an alliance that confirmed both Cyrene's defection to the Seleucid banner, and the claim to kingship of her husband Magas. In 250, she steered the course of her natal house against her nuptial one as she replaced Ptolemy III with the Antigoniid Demetrius 'the Fair' as the fiancé of her daughter Berenice (II). The scandalous intrigue of her affair with her son-in-law recounted in Justin was called into question; more plausibly, Apama's power ba-

sis was identified amongst the numerous rival factions of Cyrene. ADRIAN DUMITRU (Bucharest) shed further light on Cleopatra Selene. As a daughter of Ptolemy VIII, she first became the wife of her brother Ptolemy IX, then married Antiochus VIII-X in sequence, before ruling over parts of Syria with her son Antiochus XIII. Starting as a pawn in the hands of her mother Cleopatra III, she found herself negotiating her claims over Egypt with the Roman Senate before perishing in her fight against Tigranes.

Panel 5 revealed where to look for 'Exemplary Queens'. FEDERICOMARIA MUCIOLI (via Skype from Bologna) studied the public representation of Seleucid Royal Women. A particular focus was on the language of virtue within the „Darstellung“ and „Inszenierung“ of the private and public lives of the royal couple especially as reflected in epigraphic epithets. Hereby, the influence of and on other kingdoms was considered. MONICA D'AGOSTINI (Bologna & Milan) focused on Laodice, wife of the rebel Achaeus. Polybius' account conveys more information on Laodice than on most other Seleucid women. Instead of the usual negative features typical of Hellenistic women, Laodice is styled as example of a loyal and brave companion. Particularly in the siege of Sardis, the portrait of the would-be royal couple recalls Homer's Hector and Andromache. The group discussed to what extent Polybius' episode could be taken as a source for the historical Laodice, for a role model of a Seleucid queen, or simply as a means to reinforce the emotional effect on the readers of Achaeus' tragedy.

In panel 6, 'Dynastic Intermarriage and Persian Heritage' RICHARD WENGHOFER and DEL JOHN HOULE (Nipissing, Ontario) defended W.W. Tarn's claim of kinship between the Seleucids and the Diodotid and Euthydemid dynasties of Greco-Bactria and India. Literary and onomastic evidence along with numismatics seem to imply that these ties were secured mainly by marital alliances. It was further argued that those areas remained effectively 'Seleucid' until the reign of Eucratides I (ca. 170-145 BC) thanks to marriage alliances. The central role played by Seleucid princesses transformed these vassal states ef-

fectively into matrilineal monarchies. ROLF STROOTMAN (Utrecht) approached the impact of Seleucid and Achaemenid descent in eastern royal dynasties through the *Ahnen-galerie* of Antiochus I of Commagene. After the Seleucid Empire had collapsed as a world power in the 140s, new claims to 'Great Kingship' were made by the Parthian Arsacids, the Mithradatids of Pontus, the Ptolemies, and most conspicuously by Antiochus I of Commagene, whose house had been bound to the imperial center by intermarriage and kinship ties. The same Antiochus famously displayed his royal ancestors in the sanctuary on Nemrut Dağı. STROOTMAN argued, that the idea of universal monarchy had always been pivotal to Seleucid rule and that successive claims to empire were based on matrilineal descent.

For the sake of comparison, a few 'Other Queens' were considered in panel 7. RYAN WALSH (Waterloo) discussed Plutarch's descriptions of three Galatian women (mor. 257e-258a): Chiomara, wife of Ortiagon; Kamma, wife of Sinatos; Stratonice, wife of Deiotarus II. It was specified that illustration of *philandria* rather than of queenly virtues was at the heart of these stories. The discussion further pointed out that those women were justified in transgressing gender-defined boundaries because male relatives had fallen short of their moral obligations. JULIA WILKER (Philadelphia) shifted the focus to the women of the Hasmonean Dynasty who remain conspicuously absent from *1-2Maccabees*. Mainly based on Josephus, Wilker successfully reclaimed the roles of Hasmonean women as guarantors of dynastic succession, advisors to their husbands and sons, and political players in their own right. Their distinctive Jewish identity compelled them to distance themselves from the Seleucids in respect of the queen's public role, but also due to the religious barrier against marriage alliances.

With 'Queens in Action', panel 8 attempted a more systematic approach. ROBERTA SCHIAVO (Pisa & Bordeaux) investigated dowries and gifts from the husband kings, especially estates. Epigraphic dossiers from both the western and eastern parts of the empire were scrutinized, complemented by

evidence referring to other contemporary women. The perspective was further broadened by adding Achaemenid and Roman referents. GILLIAN RAMSEY (Toronto) scrutinized the role of (early) Seleucid queens in diplomacy. Beginning with Apama's support of Demodamas of Miletus' Sogdian expedition, they participated in diplomatic activities which consolidated and extended Seleucid authority. In doing so, they utilized connections to their birth families and homes, gifts from their own personal wealth, cultic patronage and associations, as well as friendships with different parties. This paper aimed to categorize diplomatic patterns rooted in their filial and affinal relationships on the one hand, and in their individual agency on the other.

In a remarkably concise way, this conference has not only enhanced and synthesised our knowledge of Seleucid Royal Women, but also addressed new paths to be pursued in Hellenistic and more broadly Classical Studies wherever concerned with dynastic rule and gender roles. Drawing on the concluding remarks of BETH CARNEY (Clemson, SC) and the ensuing general debate, we would like to identify the following vectors of further exploration:

- 1) The experimental character of the creation of kingly roles and the negotiation of legitimacy under the Successors needs to be re-addressed with a specific attention to the design and modification of queenly personae.

- 2) The expectations related to dynastic intermarriage and the sometimes unintended effects need to be revisited systematically, starting with the marriage alliances forged by Antipater. This does not, however, mean that we must assume intermarriage always served the same function.

- 3) The multiple roles of queens as daughters, wives, sisters, and mothers of kings (or queens) urge us to reconsider concepts of dynastic loyalty and identity.

- 4) A comprehensive revision of the particular agency of aristocratic and royal women is required that appreciates their particular potential as mediators between family members, dynasties, but also subjects, soldiers and representatives of foreign nations.

- 5) More work is to be done on the repre-

sentation of Hellenistic royal women in literary sources, with due attention to motives known from epics and tragedies as well as to the schematizing effect of serving as either positive or (mainly) negative role models in Hellenistic-Roman historiography.²

Conference overview:

Hans Beck (McGill, Montreal): Noble Women in China, Rome, and in-between

Altay Coşkun (WIHS, Waterloo): Themes and Methods of the Seleucid Study Group

Ann-Cathrin Harders (Bielefeld): Making of a Queen – Seleucus I Nicator and His Wives

Eran Almagor (Beer Sheva, Israel): Seleucid Love and Power: Stratonice I

Altay Coşkun: Layers of Propaganda and the Representations of Laodice I in Hellenistic-Roman Historiography

Brett Bartlett (Waterloo): The Fate of Cleopatra Tryphaena, or: Poetic Justice in Justin

Kyle Erickson (Lampeter, UK): Where are the Wives? Royal Women in Seleucid Cult Documents

Sheila Ager & Craig Hardiman (WIHS): Seleucid Female Portraits: Where Are They?

Alex McAuley (McGill, Montreal): Princess & Tigress: Apama of Cyrene

Adrian Dumitru (Bucharest): A Look at Cleopatra, the Moon and Her two Sides

Federicomaria Muccioli (Bologna): The Language of Virtues for Seleucid Queens. A Study on the Hellenistic Context

Monica D'Agostini (Bologna & Milan): The Good Wife: Laodice of Achaeus

Richard Wenghofer (Nipissing ON): Seleucid Blood in Bactrian and Indo-Greek Genealogy

Rolf Strootman (Utrecht): Women's Roles in the Transmission of Kingship: The Seleucid Ahnengalerie of the 'Great King' Antiochus I of Commagene on Nemrut Dağı

Ryan Walsh (Waterloo): Inversion of the Inversion: the Representation of Galatian Queens in Classical Literature

Julia Wilker (Philadelphia): Women of the

Hasmonean Dynasty – Jewish and/or Seleucid Features of a New Dynasty

Roberta Schiavo (Pisa): Queens as Landowners

Gillian Ramsey (Toronto): The Diplomacy of Seleucid Women

Beth Carney (Clemson, SC): Feedback and Opening of General Discussion

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²For information on the publication of the proceedings and the next meetings of the Seleucid Study Group, please follow the group's website (n. 1).