

Seleukid Perspectives – Band 1

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CONTENTS

Preface of the Series Editors.....	7
Preface of the Volume Editors	9
List of Figures.....	11

1. Richard Wenghofer and Altay Coşkun

Introduction: The Dialectics of Seleukid Ideology	13
---	----

SECTION I: FORMATION OF SELEUKID DYNASTIC IDEOLOGY

2. Kyle Erickson

Royal Propaganda and the Creation of Royal Status for Seleukos I	33
--	----

3. Eva Anagnostou-Laoutides

The King-Ship of the Seleukids: An Alternative Paradigm for the Anchor Symbol	61
--	----

4. Altay Coşkun

The First Seleukid Benefactions in Miletos and the Creation of a Dynastic Ideology	93
---	----

SECTION II: ENACTING SELEUKID KINGSHIP

5. Babett Edelmann-Singer

Material Culture, Ritual Performance, and Seleukid Rule: Antiochos IV and the Procession at Daphne in 166 BCE.....	115
---	-----

6. Stephen Harrison

Antiochos at Daphne and Xerxes at Sardeis: A Comparative Perspective on the Seleukid Vision of Empire	135
--	-----

7. Rolf Strootman

Ritual Mutilation and the Construction of Treason: The Execution of Molon and Achaïos by Antiochos III	159
---	-----

8. Benjamin E. Scolnic

Second-Hand Propaganda: Polybios and Zeno on the Role of Antiochos IV at the Battle of Panion.....	177
---	-----



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SECTION III: RESISTING SELEUKID ROYAL AUTHORITY

<i>9. Deirdre Klokow</i> Connectivity and Rural Spaces in the Seleukid Empire	201
<i>10. Gillian Ramsey</i> Rebel Poleis: The Politics of Anti-Seleukid Violence	219

SECTION IV: REFRAMING SELEUKID IDEOLOGY

<i>11. Germain Payen</i> Le royaume artaxiade dans l'Empire séleucide: de dominé à dominant	237
<i>12. Benjamin E. Scolnic</i> Šar Wars – How a Judaeon Author in the 160's BCE Transformed a Ptolemaic View of Hellenistic History into a Theology for His Time.....	261
<i>13. Eran Almagor</i> “To All Parts of the Kingdom”: The Book of Esther as a Seleukid Text.....	283

SECTION V: RE-ASSESSING SELEUKID IDEOLOGY

<i>14. Richard Wenghofer</i> Diplomatic Resistance to Seleukid Hegemony	319
<i>15. Altay Coşkun</i> The Efficacy of Ideological Discourse: Loyalty to the Seleukid Dynasty in Babylonia, Judaea, and Asia Minor.....	343
About the Authors	367
Index of Names.....	371
Index of Sources	381



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CHAPTER 10

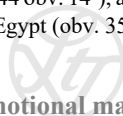
REBEL *POLEIS*: THE POLITICS OF ANTI-SELEUKID VIOLENCE

Gillian Ramsey

Abstract: Polities within the Seleukid Empire were a conglomeration of colonial ventures, reconstituted city-states, and myriad villages controlled by adherents to the royal court, all of them shaped by experiences of multicultural encounters, warfare driven by high politics of the empire, and shifting economic fortunes. The evidence for violent resistance to Seleukid authority spans all these groups and the motives for it stemmed from economic, geopolitical, and cultural concerns. Most episodes of resistance, although folded into the histories of great men's quests for usurpation and personal glory, were rooted in, and extended only so far as, local concerns. The old Greek *polis* model of autonomy and self-governance retained its force through the centuries of Seleukid colonial occupation. Many resistance movements had at their core a collective desire for local self-determination. The majority of documented encounters between the Seleukids and their subjects demonstrate how the dynasty leveraged this *polis* desire for its own gain, receiving acquiescence to Seleukid domination and performances of loyalty in exchange for promised freedoms. But this exchange tended to break down given the right combination of latent grievances and concatenating circumstances. For many cities and towns, euergetic exchanges with the dynasty were agreements to defer dealing with serious problems to a later date. The outbreaks of anti-Seleukid violence show a consistent concern with economics and local character, two areas of community life which also lay at the heart of Greek *polis* civilization. The same transplanted vibrancy of city life, which nourished a power base for the Seleukids, also posed a serious hindrance to their ongoing domination.

In the autumn of 145 BCE Antioch near Daphne was in a state of heightened tension. A war had just ended with the deaths of two kings and the imposition of a third, and the citizens already hated the new king, as they had his father.¹ While he settled in for the winter at the palace, news arrived that he was bringing into the city 3,000 Judaeian mercenaries, a clear sign that he did not trust the citizens—sensible, but also a provocation. Then, he started giving out punishments for the war to city leaders known for siding with his enemies. Rude slogans and insults about him circulated the streets and gained volume at civic gatherings. Meanwhile rumours now

1 A letter of the newly diademed Demetrios II reached Babylon Sept. 8, 145 BCE, having been dispatched some weeks earlier, (AD -144 obv. 14'), and over the next month the king proceeded to chase the Egyptian army back into Egypt (obv. 35'–36') before returning to his capital.



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filtered into the city about an insurrection growing rapidly along the border with Arabia.²

Then two things happened: the citizens brought out their weapons and began to barricade the streets and alleys leading out of the palace, and the king sent out his new mercenaries and ordered the citizens disarmed. Bloody chaos ensued. It seems that after the initial violent encounter at the barricades, the citizens had the upper hand, but the mercenaries went back into the palace and began firing arrows from high vantage points down into the crowds. After this fusillade, they took to the streets again, cutting down civilians indiscriminately. They killed women and children who were hiding inside buildings and set fire to a large portion of the city. Many of the survivors fled the city as refugees, watching for opportunities to revenge themselves on the king. The rest were beaten into submission, and the king confiscated property and presented the spoils to his hired soldiers.³

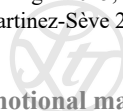
Such is the account of the uprising of the Antiochenes against Demetrios II given by Diodorus Siculus and Josephus. It is one episode in a long sequence of violent conflicts during the internecine wars of the late Seleukid dynasty. The brewing insurrection away to the southeast near Arabia was Diodotos Tryphon's. Over-shadowed by Diodotos' more famous and successful insurrection, the Antioch uprising appears like a sad episode, perhaps at best evidence for Demetrios' poor choices as king. Antioch figures as merely a pawn in the great game between kings and generals; after all, the same Diodotos Tryphon had only a few years earlier incited these same Antiochenes to unrest while he tried to negotiate with Ptolemy VI in favour of Alexander Balas. This backfired, and Ptolemy ushered Demetrios into the city instead, while the citizens ended up frustrated and facing punishments from the winning side.

The 145 revolt, however, began on the impetus of the citizens themselves and their own collective decision to move against the king, not at the behest of another royal rival. It was city against king, and the city acted for its own interests. The anatomy of this anti-Seleukid rebellion lines up with the other episodes summarized in the following table:

Insurgents in:	Against whom & why:	Date:	Reference:
the Seleukis	Antiochos I	280s– 270s	<i>I.Illion</i> 32; <i>OGIS</i> 219
Apollonia	Antiochos III drawn into Molon's campaign; perceived as still loyal	222–220	Polyb. 5.43.8; 5.51.8
Seleukeia-on-the-Tigris	Antiochos III supported Molon's campaign; punished unjustly?	222–220	Polyb. 5.54.10

2 Ehling 2003, 324f.; Ehling 2008; Grainger 2015; Coşkun 2021, 283f.

3 Diod. 33.4; Jos. *AJ* 13.5.3 (135); Martinez-Sève 2004, 35–37.



Antioch-on-the-Kydnos / Tarsos & Mallos	Antiochos IV rebel after being gifted to Antiochis	171	2Macc 4.30f.
Antioch-near-Daphne	Demetrios II besiege him in his palace for abuses	145	Diod. 33.4; Jos. <i>AJ</i> 13.5.3 (135); <i>IMacc</i> 11.38–52
Apameia-on-the-Axios	supported Diodotos Tryphon's regime towns Larissa, Casiana, Megara, Apollonia, <i>et al.</i> feed resources to Apameia Tryphon's rebellion started at Chalkis, with local support	141–138	Strabo 16.2.10; Diod. 33.4a
*Seleukeia-in-Pieria	Kleopatra Thea *she fears they might rebel	138	Jos. <i>AJ</i> 13.7.1 (222)
Seleukeia-on-the-Pyramos / Mopsuestia	Seleukos VI kill him, burn down his palace	94	Jos. <i>AJ</i> 13.13.4 (368); App. <i>Syr.</i> 69.365

Table 1: Episodes of anti-Seleukid rebellion.

Several of these cities were involved with usurpers, such as Molon and Diodotos Tryphon. The reason for including these and not Sardeis with Achaios (for example) is that these cities were not the original headquarters of royal enemies or usurpers. In general, the cities listed in the table acted on their own local concerns, and in so doing joined with usurpers, and, crucially, the king treated each city as rebellious, regardless of how they got involved in the wider violent insurrections. This combination of circumstances and the availability of the evidence make these examples useful comparanda for the cases of cities who clearly rebelled on their own.

In all the cases there was a breakdown of constructive communication between the city and the ruler. Like any movement against a king, the city rebellions were challenges to Seleukid legitimacy, but the motives emerged from *polis* identity and function, making them rather different from conflicts arising out of court politics. The severity of the violence in civic rebellions is quite stark, and most of the revolts considered here were dire situations, both in the causes for rebellion and in the consequences.



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