

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

Co-organized by  
[Classical Studies at McGill University](#), Montreal  
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Perhaps more so in the Hellenistic age than in any other period of Ancient History, a profound appreciation of female prominence and influence as well as an understanding of a very distinct sort of agency has begun to emerge. However, 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. Imbued with an ideological prominence, they became scions of their family's legitimacy and prestige. But 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 the representation of female Seleucids in visual and textual media, both of which are necessary to decode the process of shaping, perpetuating, and modifying expectations attached to gender and social status in general as well as kingship and queenship in particular.

The three opening addresses by CHRISTOPHER MANFREDI (Dean of Arts, McGill University, Montreal), HANS BECK (Montreal) and ALTAY COŞKUN (Waterloo) pointed out the potential of a collaborative, international and interdisciplinary framework as enabled by the Seleucid Study Group: the previous meetings of this caucus in Exeter (August, 2011), Waterloo (November, 2011) and Bordeaux (September, 2012) 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 (cf. <http://seleucid-genealogy.com/ssg.html> for reports). BECK's keynote 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: recent research on Roman and Chinese History has profoundly altered our understanding of the roles of aristocratic women in both societies by disclosing their impact on social cohesion. COŞKUN 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 readers. Although Seleucid royal women functioned within this complex interplay of political and cultural communication,

especially overly 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. From there the focus shifted towards Alexander’s generals: lacking a connection with the Argead dynasty, they mainly founded their new kingships on military success and personal charisma. Of specific interest within the creation of royal legitimacy was the ‘invention’ of the roles of their wives as queens. Married in the first place to the Sogdian Apama at Susa, 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, whose public role was highly qualified through his queen’s complex genealogy. 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. She was the first royal woman of Greek cultural heritage at the Seleucid court. Yet, the most remarkable event linked with her name is a love story: Antiochus’ infatuation with his stepmother induced Seleucus to give up Stratonice and to marry her to his son, pronouncing them king and queen of Upper Asia (Plut. *Dem.* 38). The many implications and the broad reception of this colourful episode were studied behind the background of Persian and Greek literary models, as well as a political allegory of the nature of Hellenistic succession. In the subsequent discussion, Seleucus’ strategy to avoid ‘amphimetric strife’ by this spectacular marriage was further pointed out. Also considered was a desire to create role models of familial love to contrast the abhorrent examples to be found among their descendents.

Panel 2 consisted of two case-studies that 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 divorced or downgraded to a concubine 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, while highly influential on the historiographic tradition, could not have had an interest in denigrating Laodice: initially, Ptolemy III pretended that his sister and nephew were still alive, and soon thereafter, he cooperated with Laodice and her second son Antiochus Hierax against Seleucus. It was rather Phylarchus who designed the entirely misleading view that Antiochus’ bigamy provoked the blood-thirst of Laodice and therewith the outbreak of the Third Syrian War. Coşkun characterized Laodice as a prototype of a Seleucid queen who transgressed boundaries by claiming effective rule, and was therefore construed as perverting family relations, the latter being the focus of the moralizing historiographic tradition. BRETT BARTLETT (Waterloo) followed with a study on Cleopatra Tryphaena, the wife of Antiochus VIII Grypus. According to Justin, our only source, Tryphaena personally ordered soldiers to tear her own sister Cleopatra IV from the temple where she had fled and to kill her. The next year, Tryphaena met a similar fate. For Antiochus IX Cyzicenus, the husband of Cleopatra IV, sacrificed her to the shades of his wife. As was also shown in the cases of Cleopatra Thea and Cleopatra III, Justin did not shy

away from serious distortions in his account to construe cruel deaths as fitting punishments. Special attention was given to his departures from Trogus' text.

Panel 3 dwelt on 'Missing Queens' in our lacunose evidence, or rather suggested that we approach the sources with different expectations. 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 the Seleucid kings. Further on, several of the earlier queens received civic cults in the cities of Asia Minor, whereas according attestations for Laodice III and IV, the wives of Antiochus III and Seleucus IV respectively, are missing. In conclusion, there does 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. The relatively scarce material remains reflect a society fully in line with the Hellenistic art styles that could be at home in any other part of the Mediterranean (with little evidence of blending with native elements). It would thus be easy to put the lack of female portraits into this overall situation. However, in the few images of queens that do survive, Cleopatra Thea and Cleopatra Selene are surrounded with more Ptolemaic ties; a culture that dramatically foregrounded their royal women in their visual messages. Others, like Laodice, show a distinctive lack of the multiple royal or divine attributes. This very lack of evidence 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 than previously thought.

Two 'Powerful Queens' that kept close links with their homes of birth 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 from the Ptolemaic to the Seleucid banner, and the claim to kingship of her husband Magas. Thereafter, she fell into obscurity until the latter's death in 250, when she vigorously steered the course of her natal house against her nuptial one: she replaced Ptolemy III with the Antigonid Demetrius 'the Fair' as the fiancé or husband of her daughter Berenice (II). The scandalous intrigue of her affair with her son-in-law recounted in Justin was called into question when compared with the epitomizer's less than favourable depictions of other queens. More plausibly, Apama's power basis was identified amongst the numerous rival factions of Cyrene. Finally, her legacy in shaping the ideological and practical place of royal women in the administration of the Seleucid Empire and perpetuation of the dynasty's interests were considered. While the argument was further strengthened in the discussion by pointing out the alliance between the Antigonids and Seleucids, the question was raised regarding which alternative options Apama might have had to maintain or even enhance her position in the face of an annexation by the Ptolemies. ADRIAN DUMITRU (Bucharest) shed further light on the last of the domineering Seleucid queens, Cleopatra Selene. Her biography is based on three coin types (from Ptolemais or Damascus) and some fragments scattered throughout the works of Cicero, Strabo, Josephus, Appian and Justin. As a daughter of Ptolemy VIII, she first became the wife of her brother Ptolemy IX and ended up marrying Antiochus VIII-X in sequence. Although not included in the list of kings compiled by Eusebius, she ruled over parts of Syria with her son Antiochus XIII. Starting as a pawn in the hands of her mother Cleopatra III, she later found herself negotiating her claims over Egypt with the Roman Senate before perishing in her fight against Tigranes. The

role of this important but somehow neglected queen was re-examined at the crossroads of a complex political game involving Rome and the kings of Armenia, Egypt, Syria and Judaea.

Panel 5 revealed where to look for 'Exemplary Queens'. FEDERICOMARIA MUCCIOLI (via Skype from Bologna) studied the public representation of Seleucid royal women through the literary, numismatic, epigraphic, and archaeological evidence to identify the various steps of the development towards its climax. A particular focus was on the language of virtue within the "Darstellung" and "Inszenierung" of the private and public lives of the royal couple (to use the terms of H.H. Schmitt), especially as reflected in the epithets transmitted in Greek inscriptions. Hereby, the influence of and on other kingdoms, particularly of Egypt was considered. Likewise, the image of Seleucid queens was compared with those of Commagene, Cappadocia, and Pontus, kingdoms that had established close ties with the court of Syria. MONICA D'AGOSTINI (Bologna & Milan) focused on Laodice, wife of the rebel Achaeus. Polybius describes the Seleucid usurper as a brave and respected general, a victim of the events. Contrary to what would be expected from an historian who tends to be markedly indifferent towards women, his account conveys more information on Laodice than on most other Seleucid women. Instead of the usual negative features typical of western historiography on Hellenistic women, especially the wives of usurpers, Laodice is styled as example of the loyal and brave companion. Particularly in the context of Antiochus III's siege of Sardis (VIII 15.1-21.11), the portrait of the royal couple loudly recalls epic tones, and D'Agostini argued that Polybius was borrowing from Homer's Hector and Andromache. The subsequent discussion posed the question 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 (who acknowledged contributions by DEL JOHN HOULE, both Nipissing, Ontario) opposed the now standard view established by A.K. Narain in 1957 and defended W.W. Tarn's claim of kinship between the Seleucids with the Diodotid and Euthydemid dynasties of Greco-Bactria and India. A close analysis of the iconography found on Greco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek coins revealed a number of potential connections with Seleucid coins which argue strongly for political relations. Moreover, there is a small amount of literary and onomastic evidence which seem to imply that these ties were secured mainly by marital alliances. The women of the Seleucid house must thus have played a key role in this. It was further argued that, owing to the policies laid down by Alexander and continued by the Seleucids for controlling the Upper Satrapies through dynastic marriages, Hellenistic Bactria and India remained effectively 'Seleucid' even until the reign of Eucratides I (ca. 170-145 BCE). The central role played by Seleucid princesses in legitimizing the rule of Greco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek monarchs transformed these vassal states effectively into matrilineal monarchies in spite of a preference for the more typical patrilineal succession. ROLF STROOTMAN (Utrecht) approached the impact of Seleucid and Achaemenid descent in eastern royal dynasties through the *Ahnengalerie* of Antiochus I of Commagene on Nemrut Dağı. From the conquests of Seleucus Nicator, Seleucid rulers presented themselves as heirs to the age-old Near Eastern ideal of universal monarchy. 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. While such dynastic expressions are predominantly viewed as fictitious Persian revivalism, it was argued, by using the presentation of royal ancestors on Nemrut Dağı as a guide, that the idea of universal monarchy had always been pivotal to Seleucid rule and that with the demise of the Seleucid patriline new claims to empire were based on matrilineal descent. This was possible due to the importance of Seleucid women as transmitters of inheritance and royalty.

For the sake of comparison, a few ‘Other Queens’ were considered in panel 7. Overly ambitious Hellenistic queens ran a high risk of being defiled in the accounts of moralizing historians: poison, bloodshed, and sexual deviance yielded both, cocktails of shocking crime stories and clear-cut anti-role models. Against this background, RYAN WALSH (Waterloo) discussed Plutarch’s descriptions of three Galatian women (mor. 257e-258a): Chiomara, wife of King Ortiagon, who returned home from captivity with the head of her own violator; Camma, who poisoned herself in order to also kill the murderer of her husband; and Stratonice, who offered her maiden Electra to her royal husband to ensure him dynastic continuity without being repudiated herself. Although they crossed the ethical boundaries of Plutarch’s times, they are presented with much sympathy. Departing from the initial hypothesis that these barbarian females functioned as inverted role models for Hellenistic queens, WALSH convincingly specified that, rather than queenly virtues, illustration of *philandria* 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, thus urging women to act as substitutes. JULIA WILKER (Philadelphia) shifted the focus to the women of the Hasmonean Dynasty who remain conspicuously absent from *1* and *2Maccabees*. Their absence is even more noteworthy since shortly afterwards Salome Alexandra inherited the throne from her husband Alexander Jannaeus, and her rule was remembered for its remarkable prosperity and stability. Under Herod the Great, the female descendants of the Hasmonean family were leading protagonists in court intrigues. Mainly based on the account of Flavius Josephus, Wilker successfully reclaimed the roles of Hasmonean women as guarantors of dynastic succession, advisors to their husbands and sons, and political players with their own personal agenda. While Seleucid women served to some degree as their role models, their distinctive Jewish identity compelled them to distance themselves from the Seleucids in some regards, most notably 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 to queenly agency. ROBERTA SCHIAVO (Pisa & Bordeaux) investigated the material resources of the queens, including dowries and gifts from the husband kings. Compared to Macedonia and Egypt, little attention has been paid to the formation of queens’ estates in the Seleucid realm. Schiavo thus tried to reconsider the management of those goods and the employment of their proceeds, especially with a view to the sociopolitical implications: she discussed their interaction with and within the imperial structures and their connections with the royal dynastic ideology and propaganda. For this reason, epigraphic dossiers from both the western and eastern parts of the empire were scrutinized, complemented by evidence referring to other wealthy women’s possession in the Hellenistic age. The perspective was further broadened by adducing the so-called Tablets of Persepolis for comparison with the Achaemenid tradition as well as documentation for the estates of some Roman empresses. 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. Drawing on examples from Apama to Laodice III, 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. While their marriages are generally focused upon as the major diplomatic events of their careers, what followed, namely lives lived in foreign courts, had important and long-lasting political ramifications. One crucial aspect needing elucidation is the extent to which these women considered themselves solely Seleucid agents, or rather mediators between kingdoms.

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 the leading specialist on the royal women of Macedonia BETH CARNEY (Clemson, SC) and the ensuing general debate, we would like to identify the following topics:

- 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. In particular, the implications of the fact that not all wives of kings were *basilissai* will have to be explored more deeply.
- 2) Also beneficial would be a systematic revision of the expectations related to dynastic intermarriage as well as the sometimes unintended effects. Crucial and of lasting impact were the marriage alliances forged by Antipater, most importantly, the marriage of Phila to Demetrius Poliorcetes who became the parents in law of both Seleucus and Antiochus. This does not, however, mean that we must assume intermarriage always served the same function or followed the same patterns.
- 3) Likewise, the multiple roles of queens as daughters, wives, sisters, and mothers of kings (or queens) urge us to reconsider concepts of dynastic loyalty and ethnic identity. When and why did they start to interfere actively in succession politics or even to rule in their own right?
- 4) Related to this, 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 representation of Hellenistic royal women in literary sources, with due attention to specific court propaganda, but also to motives known from epics, tragedies or more popular fairy tales that render them either villains or victims. In addition, the schematizing effect of serving as either positive or (mainly) negative role models in Hellenistic-Roman historiography needs to be studied more thoroughly, in order to gain keys to more plausibly distinguish historical events from the layers of literary transfiguration.

The conference proceedings are expected to be published by 2015.

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 (WIHS, Waterloo): 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, Waterloo): 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 Achaëus

Richard Wenghofer (Nipissing, Ontario): 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