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**The King-ship of the Seleukids: a Different Explanation of the Anchor Symbol**

The anchor has been one of the most puzzling symbols of the Seleukid propaganda, variably explained with reference to a ring that Apollo had allegedly given to Laodike, the mother of Seleukos Nikator, founder of the dynasty. The ring, a token of Seleukos’ divine ancestry bore a stone engraved with an anchor and resembled a birthmark that Seleukos had on his thigh (Just. *Epit*. 15.4.3–6). Appian (*Syr*. 56) mentions that while returning to Babylon, Seleukos stumbled upon a stone underneath which an anchor was found – the incident was interpreted positively to predict Seleukos’ successful recapturing of Babylon. A less mythological explanation refers to Seleukos’ time as Ptolemy’s admiral which Seleukos later employed as a symbol of his naval superiority. However, following my argument that the Seleukids were very appreciative of near eastern religious traditions, from early on in their dynasty, I will here suggest a different explanation of the symbol in connection with near eastern symbols of king-ship.

In near eastern context, the skill of the king is often metaphorically expressed through a number of trades: a king is like a shepherd, a hunter, a gardener and a fisherman – and often ancient tales refer to extraordinary individuals who were chosen as kings among such tradesmen. Hence, the Sumerian Dumuzi, the predecessor of Gilgameš from Kuara in the Sumerian King List (ll. 109-110), bears the cultic title the Fisherman. Equally, in the Chronicle of Sargon, the king impresses the god Marduk with his piety and diligent care of his temple notably comprising fish-offerings from the fresh-water fishermen and is thus entrusted with the kingship. Furthermore, when Inanna stole the qualities of rulership from Enki she loaded them onto her Boat of Heaven. Crucially, state boats for Marduk and Nabu decorated the temples of the gods in Babylon and Borsippa, as we read in Nebuchadnezzar’s cylinder, currently housed in the UPenn Museum, which the gods typically rode during the New Year’s procession. My paper argues that, given the importance of Nebuchadnezzar as a royal model for the Seleukids, we ought to consider the possibility that the state-boats of Marduk and Nabu may have inspired the Seleukid anchor – the ship of their empire (an easy allusion to the ship of state that we come across already in Greek archaic lyric) was under their rulership safely moored.