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## PREFACE & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For generations the Seleukid Empire was pushed to the margins of Classical scholarship, thought to be too remote, too diverse, and too detached from the more glamorous traditional centres of the Greco-Roman world to be of any consequence. Even among Hellenistic scholars, the Seleukids stood in the shadows of their more prominent relatives in the Macedonian motherland (the Argeads and Antigonids) and Egypt (the Ptolemies). But as our discipline has shifted its focus to a wider angle, over the past few decades the Seleukids have been buoyed by a wave of interest in the Hellenistic world and its diversity, plurality, and vectors of cultural contact. As fascination with the diversity of the Classical world begins to eclipse the former Eurocentric homogeneity, the Seleukids have become a justifiably desirable object of study among Classicists as well.

The territory controlled by the Greco-Macedonian dynasty was vast: at its height, it spanned some three million square kilometres to encompass modern-day Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Israel, stretching East through the Fertile Crescent into Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. With the exception of the Achaimenids, in almost no other region or period of the Ancient World was such a vast diversity of peoples, ethnicities, traditions, religions, and languages held under the sway of one family.<sup>1</sup> As the bridge that spanned East and West in the Hellenistic period, and the force through which a much broader Eastern world was brought into contact with the Mediterranean, the Seleukid Empire is now enjoying unprecedented popularity as fertile ground for the analysis of cross-cultural interaction and imperial administration.

While this rebirth of interest in the Seleukid Empire began in sporadic isolation, it has emerged as the primary focus of a growing network of established and up-and-coming scholars throughout Northern America and Europe. A highly productive series of meetings and conferences over the past few years has brought together academics of diverse methods and approaches. First among them is the *Seleukid Dissolution* Conference hosted at the University of Exeter by K. Erickson (now at Trinity St. David, Lampeter, Wales) and G. Ramsey (now at the University of Toronto) in 2008. The edited papers aptly reflect the lucrative potential of a collaborative approach that unites a range of different geographical subspecialisations, language skills, and source types.<sup>2</sup> Since then, scholars of the Seleukid Empire have been increasingly prominent at broader meetings of Hellenistic historians, most

- 1 For the growing awareness that the eastern dominions were as important as the Mediterranean ones for at least the earlier Seleukids, see, e. g., Sherwin-White & Kuhrt 1993; Capdetrey 2007; Engels 2011; Kosmin 2014a; Grainger 2014.
- 2 Erickson & Ramsey 2011.



notably at the three Edinburgh conferences *Creating a Hellenistic World*, *Hellenistic Court and Society*, and *Persepolis: 40 Years on*.<sup>3</sup>

A panel at the workshop *Opportunities for Interdisciplinarity in Hellenistic Scholarship*, hosted by the *Waterloo Institute for Hellenistic Studies* in 2010, reunited K. Erickson, D. Engels and A. Coşkun for the first time after the *Seleukid Dissolution* Conference. Over the course of this meeting a collaborative agenda was forged, leading to an attempt to shed more light on the (still formative) period of the Empire under Antiochos I (294/281–261). The idea was to study major synchronous developments such as the Galatian invasions in the West, temple foundations in Babylonian Borsippa and conflicts in the Iranian satrapies, and to integrate them into a complex picture of the construction and development of Seleukid Kingship.

The first results of this project were presented and further contextualized at *Seleukid Study Day I* at the University of Exeter in August 2011, which A. Coşkun co-organized as a visiting fellow together with S. Mitchell. M. D’Agostini, M. Widmer, A. McAuley, and G. Ramsey introduced a new interest in the early royal family and its female members in particular, whereas D. Engels, K. Erickson, and G. Ramsay pointed out the importance of an Eastern focus. A common interest in the ruling practices and policies of the Seleukids, and the mechanisms by which the Macedonian dynasty held sway over the disparate cultures of the empire, began to be realised. A. McAuley then first introduced his ongoing Genealogy website and research project, which has since become the web platform of the research group. These various approaches intersected very productively with the re-appraisal of King Antiochos I. Perhaps most importantly, the event fomented a sense of collegiality and warm collaboration amongst advanced students and established professors alike.<sup>4</sup>

Next, on *Seleukid Study Day II* (Waterloo, November 2011), a more unified research agenda was formulated: the reign of Antiochos II and his offspring was revisited (A. Coşkun, K. Erickson), with a particular focus on the roles of royal women (M. D’Agostini, A. McAuley, G. Ramsey, S. Ager). The presentations were complemented by the input of ‘outside’ panel chairs (R. Faber, H. Beck).<sup>5</sup>

The chronological focus on the mid- and later 3<sup>rd</sup> century, when the Empire was first shaken by rebellions in the eastern satrapies and then vexed by domestic strife, was further pursued by a panel at the *Celtic Conference in Classics* (Université de Bordeaux, 5–8 September 2012). As *Seleukid Study Day III*, it was broadly devoted to the history from Antiochos II to Seleukos II, and many papers argued to abandon the old paradigm of Seleukid decline and instead focus more on the surprising degree of Seleukid resilience, a topic that was pursued further at *Seleukid Study V* (Université libre de Bruxelles, August 2015: *Rome and the Later Seleukids*).<sup>6</sup>

3 Erskine & Llewellyn-Jones 2011; Erskine et al. ca. 2016; *Persepolis*-Website.

4 See Coşkun 2011b for a report, as well as Erickson 2011, Coşkun 2012a and Engels 2013 for preliminary results. Previous plans for one collaborative monograph have now been developed further into three independent book projects.

5 See Coşkun 2012b for a report.

6 See Coşkun 2012c for a report and Erickson ca. 2016 for the proceedings. And see the report on SSD V (expected to be published on H-Soz-Kult in the fall 2015).



The present volume assembles selected papers from the workshop *Seleukid Royal Women: Roles, Representations, and Expectations*, which comprised the fourth iteration of the *Seleukid Study Day* series. With generous support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada (SSHRC), the University of Waterloo and the John MacNaughton Chair of Classics at McGill University, the event took place in Montreal in February 2013. The topic had been chosen because we had sensed the limitations of our understanding of the stakes held by queens and princesses in the power games of the Hellenistic world. Our principal aim at the conference was to better understand the character of their influence, as well as the effects they had on the creation of a cultural *koine* and, more particularly, in shaping Seleukid royalty.<sup>7</sup>

Eleven of the full chapters included in this volume have been developed from the talks presented at McGill (A.-C. Harders, E. Almagor, G. Ramsey, A. Coşkun, B. Bartlett, S. Ager & C. Hardiman, A. McAuley, R. Wenghofer & D.J. Houle, R. Strootman, J. Wilker, A. Dumitru). The papers by M. D'Agostini on Laodike, Wife of Achaïos the Younger, by F. Muccioli on the queenly virtues as reflected in their divine epithets, and R. Walsh on Galatian royal women have appeared or will appear elsewhere.<sup>8</sup> K. Erickson's study on the limited visibility of the queens in cultic spheres overlapped significantly with the investigation of S. Ager & C. Hardiman; accordingly we were happy to accept instead a collaborative study on Apama and Stratonike (D. Engels & K. Erickson). In addition, the original introductory remarks have been maintained or even developed further (A. Coşkun, A. McAuley, H. Beck).

*Seleukid Royal Women* boasts to be the most comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach not only to a subtopic of Seleukid History, but also to female royalty in antiquity, thus elaborating on an important aspect of gender roles in the Classical world. A variety of methodological approaches, such as Classical and Near Eastern Philology, Greek Epigraphy, Numismatics, Art History and Gender Studies have left their imprints on the arguments presented here. How the legacy of these women has been elaborated, embellished, twisted, or perverted to serve a variety of purposes is, to us, equally important as their biographical careers themselves, and thus we feel justified in paying both equal attention.

Seeing this volume coming together, we feel deeply indebted to all of the aforementioned institutions and colleagues for their contributions as co-organizers, participants and/or co-authors that made this project possible. We would like to single out in particular S. Mitchell and H. Beck for their institutional support and ongoing sympathies with our initiative, E.D. Carney for her generous and pertinent feedback to the conference papers, as well as D. Engels and K. Erickson for their enthusiasm and expertise with which they have fostered the collaboration of the Seleukid Study Group since its beginnings. Our gratitude further extends to Chloe Bigio, Katrina van Amsterdam and Emma Bardes for their help with the organization of the conference at McGill University, as well as to Brigitte Schneebeli for her

7 See Coşkun & McAuley 2013 for a report.

8 See Muccioli 2013; D'Agostini 2014; Walsh ca. 2017.



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Altay Coşkun  
Waterloo ON

Alex McAuley  
Montreal & Vancouver





## NOBLE WOMEN IN CHINA, ROME, AND IN-BETWEEN – A PROLOGUE

*Hans Beck*  
*McGill University, Montreal*

In Republican Rome noble women were not supposed to drink alcohol. Romulus himself, so the story went, had issued a piece of legislation that prohibited the consumption of alcohol by women. If a husband found his wife acting in violation of the law, he had the right to kill her. There was of course also a widely acknowledged *exemplum* that lent authenticity to this tradition. A certain Egnatius Maetennus had beaten his wife to death because she was drunk, but due to Romulus' intervention all charges against him were dropped. In the later-3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, when more reliable information on the earliest pieces of Roman sumptuary legislation is available, women were denied access to the wine cellar. Around the same time, Cato the Elder recorded that male relatives would check on their female family members and see if they had an alcoholic breath. This was the primary reason why men and women exchanged a kiss when greeting each other – or so Cato said.

At around the same time as Rome's sumptuary legislation, some 8,000 km further East, Chinese noble women were not meant to indulge in the pleasures of alcohol either. From the Qin to the early Han period – that is from the late-3<sup>rd</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC – many legendary tales of the 'good wife' survive. What derives from these tales is again the axiomatic observation that women were greatly confined by men in their actions. In the *Nü Jie*, or *Lessons for Women*, Ban Zhao writes in c. 100 CE:

Decidedly nothing is better (to gain the heart of a husband) than whole-hearted devotion and correct manners. In accordance with the rites and proper modes of conduct, (let a woman) live a pure life. Let her have ears that hear not licentiousness; and eyes that see not depravity. When she goes outside her own home, let her not be conspicuous in dress and manners. When at home let her not neglect her dress. Women should not assemble in groups, nor gather together (for gossip and silly laughter). They should not stand watching in the gateways. (If a woman follows) these rules, she may be said to have whole-hearted devotion and correct manners.

There is no need here to dwell on how the male desire to wield control over female behavior translates into societal norms in these stories. It is easy to strip these traditions of their gender assumptions and expose their inherently male mindset. By extension, such suspicion about the chauvinistic encodings of our sources applies to the vast majority of what is called the ancient tradition. What is more challenging, and maybe also more interesting from the social historian's perspective today, is the societal discourse that revolved around such traditions. The questions of how the gendered mindset related to societal practice and how it corresponded to what



Michel Foucault has labelled its “regime of truth” leads to the very core of those political cultures of the ancient world.

In Rome’s culture of public display, the gender discourse extended to regulations of the appearance of women in the public sphere. The issue was precarious because it was tied to the volatile equilibrium between the ruling elite and the common people. Just as the male members of the senatorial elite were anxious to follow an implicit protocol in their everyday interactions with ordinary citizens, so the women of this elite were subject to expectations regarding their public behavior. But while male behaviour was governed by good practice, female action was confined by law. The sumptuary laws are a good example. The need for such laws was felt in the late-3<sup>rd</sup> and then in the 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BC, when Rome had begun to conquer the Hellenistic monarchies of the East one by one. According to many contemporary observers in the senate, this conquest caused a rush towards decadence. Women were perceived as particularly prone to showing off with their luxury items; hence the stipulation of a series of laws that limited the ostentatious display of wealth in the public sphere.

Modern scholarship on women in antiquity has had its difficulties with looking behind the façade of stereotyped accounts of the sources. Textbooks on ancient Rome, for instance, usually highlight the image of the role model *matrona* and her confinement to the domestic space. Consequently, it has become axiomatic to think of late-Republican aristocratic women as masters, or mistresses, of the confined household. When they crossed into the public sphere, where the eye of the masculine tradition captured them, they are often portrayed in the sources as opportunistic, if not ruthless, individuals who navigate around the affairs of men, outsmarting the restrictions that were imposed on them. Subsequent wrongdoing – anything from sexual transgression to the evil plotting of their husband’s murder – implicitly justifies the original confinement. Tacitus bears witness to many literary *topoi* of this pattern.

In light of the restricted body of sources at hand, it is challenging to project a picture that is immune to the shortcomings of stereotyping. One of the few breakthrough moments in scholarship was the publication of Ann-Cathrin’s Harders’ book *Suavissima Soror* (2008). Based on anthropological family models, Harders argues that Roman aristocratic families were not just vertically layered units that were governed by the authority of age. Instead, in her analysis she fleshes out the horizontal intersection among families, and she demonstrates how the idea of horizontal interconnectivity became a defining moment in the constitution of a noble family. It has often been argued that the families of the Roman nobility entertained all sorts of marriage alliances to maintain their social status and enhance their prestige. But in Harders’ account, the utilitarian advantage a marriage strategy secures in any given moment is complemented by a much more permanent force of familial relations. The horizontal bond between families is established, however, not by men, but women, who were true agents in shaping families – i. e., and not just passive tokens or trophies in the exchange between men.

In one of his recent books, *The Early Chinese Empires. Qin and Han* (2007), Mark Edward Lewis characterizes the role of women as inferiors and outsiders,



“necessary for reproduction but otherwise aliens within the husband’s family” (156). Lewis refers to the *Record on Ritual*, or *Li ji*, published with commentaries and annotations between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC. The *Li ji* advocated three forms of obedience for a woman, that is: a woman first had to obey her father, then her husband, and, when widowed, her son. So just like at Rome, the male discourse in imperial China placed women under the control of multiple layers of patriarchy, with reserved spheres of action and governed forms of behavior. But unlike their Roman counterparts, Chinese women actually commanded their sons, as the authority of age trumped the authority of gender; filial piety to both parents was a son’s highest obligation. In this sense, then, we find a similar tension between male moralizing tales and normative traditions on the one hand, and the actual role of women in society on the other. It is difficult to disentangle these strands because so little survives, and whatever is available falls in the category of gender normativity as construed by men. But interestingly enough, Lewis acknowledges this gap between a woman’s place in text and everyday life, and, in passing, he entertains the role of women in the process of securing political alliances and accumulating family fortunes. The look behind the brick wall of masculine source narratives and their stereotyped extension into scholarship promises to offer an all-new understanding of women in ancient China.

Chinese and Roman women had no knowledge of each other, just as their civilizations were worlds apart from one another. Their mutual awareness was fuzzy at all times. While the Han Chinese sources refer to Rome as the realm of the Da Qin – some sort of ‘Counter China’ at the other end of the world – Roman sources speak of trade relations with the *Seres* people who, according to Pliny the Elder, were “famous for the woolen substance obtained from their forests”. The exciting thing about this substance was that it allowed the *matrona*, according to Pliny, “to flaunt transparent clothing in public”. The cultural advancement of silk production is measured here against the excitement this sparked in the eyes of the male observer. At the same time, the moralistic tenor of the passage is unmistakable. As so often, then, the assessment in the source is inspired by the idea of male authority over the female body in the public sphere.

The political cultures of the two Eurasian flanks were unrelated, but at different times different intermediate empires fed into the realms of both Rome and China. The largest power to do so was the Seleukid Empire, spanning at its peak from the coast of Asia Minor into Baktria or, in the words of Susan Sherwin-White and Amélie Kuhrt, *From Samarkhand to Sardis* (1993). The Seleukids clawed the greatest part of the Persian Royal Road System, which would become the future Silk Road. This alone made them cultural intermediaries of an unprecedented magnitude. At the same time, their realm was a huge cultural tapestry in itself, embracing a very high volume of diverse local political and social organizations, regional ethnicities, economic circumstances, and religious traditions.

The study of this patchwork empire has regained significant momentum in recent years, thanks also to the inspiring work carried out by the Seleukid Study Days (SSD) and their associated group of researchers. The present volume adds to this inspiration. It offers a unique attempt to delve into the political culture of the



Seleukids. Maybe more than the women of any other royal era in antiquity, the noble women of the Seleukid Empire are almost entirely subject to the drawback of masculine source narratives and their thoughtless repetition in scholarship. As the editors discuss in their introduction, for the longest time the best that researchers could say about Seleukid women would be summarized in one way or another under the labels of romance, affectionate love, or sexual ecstasy, spiced up with scenes of cruelty and, to be sure, a heavy dose of 'orientalism'. The subsequent contributions to this book refer to these gendered stereotypes throughout, yet more importantly, they disclose the multiple ways and means in which they can be overcome. By making women the lead actors of the script, the authors unearth a layer of the historical narrative that has been buried underneath male perspectives and understandings. In this vein of inquiry, the advanced approach in gender studies allows them not only to research the noble women of the Seleukids in their own right, but also present exciting new discoveries in the fields of, for instance, alliance building, cultural transfer, and the integration of ethnic groups from a perceived periphery. The gap between Rome and China is closing once again.

