

Zeus and Apollo in the Religious Program of the Seleucids¹

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Introduction

This paper investigates the ascent to power of Seleucus Nicator and his son Antiochus, and the apparatus of their self-representation in lands culturally distinct from their native Macedon. I argue that the association of Seleucus (primarily) with Zeus and of Antiochus with Apollo should be explained in the context of longstanding near eastern traditions that were especially honoured in Babylon, the Seleucids' new capital.² Although recent studies on the numismatic and epigraphic evidence from the Seleucid period point to the continuity of local traditions under the Seleucids, further corroborating the voices that have long insisted on the subject,³ we still lack an understanding of the ideologies to which Hellenistic kings subscribed and hence, our appreciation of their political choices remains partial.⁴

For the most part, the involvement of Hellenistic kings in local traditions is interpreted as a series of random gestures designed to placate the eastern subjects and facilitate the kings in exacting taxes.⁵ This view is in keeping with the general tendency of presenting the conquests of Alexander the Great as the unique achievement of an inspired ruler whose vision crumbled under the rivalry of his successors.⁶ Hence, it has been suggested that Alexander's keen interest in the cultures he had conquered, which had reportedly shocked his soldiers,⁷ was systematically replaced after his death by campaigns that sought to emphasize the structural similarity of the newly-fangled Hellenistic kingdoms with the fourth-century BCE Argead house.⁸ Nevertheless, the race for legitimacy and royal authority amid Alexander's successors (in which Macedonian traditions were undeniably

¹ Due to the word limit, his paper has a slightly narrower focus compared to my conference presentation.

² Sallaberger (2007) 273-4; Selz (2007) 277-9.

³ Tarn (1930) 118; Kuhrt and Sherwin-White (1987) Introduction; Burstein (1994) 381-7; Mieroop (1999) esp. 138-9, 147; Austin (2005) 127-8; Strootman (2011) 64. Worthington (2003) 198-201 reviews Tarn's ideas on Alexander's notion of universalism which can be compared to Assyrian universalism as discussed by Liverani (1979) 297-317 and (1981) 43-66; cf. Liverani (1990) 51-9 and Root (1979) 3-4 and 311 on Achaemenid royal ideology utilizing earlier near eastern models.

⁴ See, for example, Erickson (2011) esp. 53 with Dodds 2012 online review.

⁵ Versnel (1990) 39-95 notes the paradoxical phenomenon of cities claiming autonomy while submitting to a king. Intense scholarly interest in Seleucid economy is reflected in the work of Aperghis (2001) 69-102; cf. Ma (2007) 185-6; Waterfield (2011) 159-167.

⁶ Chaniotis (2005) 439-440 discusses Alexander's conquests as a unique phenomenon.

⁷ Olbrycht (2010) 356-7; Heckel (2011) 46-7 refers to the practice of mixed marriages arranged by Alexander for his generals and soldiers, as well as the famous *proskynesis* episode (cf. Curt.6.6.3; Plut.*Alex.*45.1).

⁸ Strootman (2007) 15 mainly acknowledges the impact of Achaemenid royal practices on Hellenistic kings.

utilized) was about showcasing the kings' ruling abilities and, therefore, it required a high level of engagement with the cultural contexts in which the kings tried to promote themselves. The very landscape of the kingdoms they fought for was interspersed with elaborate royal inscriptions and prominent monuments of past rulers, loud demarcations of their political visions, which surely Alexander's generals took notice of.⁹

Among the Hellenistic successors, Seleucus was the only one to have nearly united under his rule the conquests of Alexander.¹⁰ When in 324 BCE Alexander ordered a mass wedding ceremony at Susa, Seleucus married Apama, the daughter of the Bactrian ruler Spitamenes, who had already given birth to his son Antiochus and had accompanied him in his Indian campaign as his mistress (Plut.*Dem.*31.3-4; Arrian 7.4.6). Regardless of whether Seleucus was indeed the only Macedonian noble who did not repudiate his wife after Alexander's death, a much-repeated argument whose shaky roots Mairs has recently pointed out,¹¹ Apama was undeniably an important queen who presented Seleucus with an heir able to appeal both to Greeks and their eastern subjects.¹² Seleucus and Antiochus I, his co-regent from ca. 292 BCE to the former's death in 281/280 BCE, seem to have modelled their royal profiles on near eastern kings who, according to their inscriptions, excelled in justice and piety under divine guidance. In the following pages, I discuss the connection of the Sun god, the exclusive dispenser of divine justice in the ancient Near East, with his royal protégés and the way in which his powers were absorbed in the Babylonian pantheon by Marduk. The Greeks identified the latter with Zeus,¹³ an association that could shed light to the seemingly undecided promotion of Zeus *and* Apollo as divine protectors of the Seleucids at the start of the dynasty, pointing to their awareness of local traditions from an early period.¹⁴

Shining over Babylon

Ancient near eastern societies were preoccupied with legislation and the king's duty to distribute justice.¹⁵ The king was expected to 'establish freedom' (*amar-gi₄* in Sumerian, *andurārum šakānum* in Akkadian, *kidinnūtam šakānum* in Neo-Assyrian) and 'righteousness'

⁹ Liverani (1995) *passim*.

¹⁰ Cf. Waterfield (2011) xi, 210-211.

¹¹ Grainger (1990) 12; cf. Wright 2010: 41-6 on the mixed ethnicity of the Seleucids; the emphasis, however, on the 'mixed race' of Antiochus has been questioned by Mairs (2011) 180.

¹² Sherwin-White (1987) 7; Sherwin-White and Kuhrt (1993) 124.

¹³ Hdt.1.181.2 (Zeus Belos); Agathias citing Berossus FGH 3C680F12; cf. Diod.Sic.17.112.3; 6.1.10; Strab.16.1.5.

¹⁴ Erickson (2009) 37-41 argued that Apollo's promotion as the divine ancestor of the Seleucids was more systematic under Antiochus and that Seleucus I associated himself more with Zeus; cf. Wright (2010) 57-9.

¹⁵ Speiser (1954) 8-15; Holloway (2002) 226.

(*mēšarum šakānum* in Akkadian).¹⁶ He was seen as the god's representative on earth and his appointment was subject to divine approval,¹⁷ although this was not the cause of his legitimacy but rather its expressed form.¹⁸ Despite the view that 'no single model accounts for Hellenistic kingship',¹⁹ as well as that we cannot refer to a generic model of near eastern kingship,²⁰ the variations of ruler representations seem to have been set against a relatable cultural canvass. Hence, a sense of continuity and tradition was presupposed for the innovations of specific regimes to be noted and appreciated. In Waerzeggers' words:²¹

'The good king respected the ancient cult practices. He was the one who 'safeguarded the cultic designs' (*mušsir ušurāti bītāt ilāni*) and 'renewed the temples of the great gods' (*muddiš mähāzi ilāni rabuti*). These and similar epithets put emphasis on the king's duty to transmit the practices of the past unaltered to the future and to renew what had been wronged or undone'.

In this context and despite cultural differences vis-à-vis the institution of kingship, near eastern monarchs often fashioned themselves as sons or protégés of the sun-god, the *par excellence* god of justice,²² and significantly the god who shone his benevolence upon the Seleucids, especially from the reign of Antiochus onwards.

The precedence of Shamash over justice was part of the ancient southern Mesopotamian tradition of kingship at least since the early second millennium and remained popular in the first millennium during which the piety of the ruler was stressed anew.²³ The theme appears in numerous royal dedications: hence, in the second half of 19th century BCE Jahdunlim, king of Mari, commissioned an inscription to Shamash 'whose allotment is

¹⁶ Weinfeld (1982) 493; cf. Ma (2005) 93, 186 on Antiochus' III boast that he gave Iasos back 'its liberty' and his offer to 'grant freedom' to Lampsacus.

¹⁷ Holloway (2002) 181-182, also his nn.337-343.

¹⁸ Duchesne-Guillemin (1969) 360; Liverani (1979) 301; cf. Holloway (2002) 50-54.

¹⁹ Gruen (1996) 115.

²⁰ Mettinger (2001) 49-51.

²¹ Waerzegger (2011) 729; Winter (2008) 75-6 argued that regardless of whether kings posed as gods manifest on earth or great men who enjoyed divine favour and regardless of whether the dingir, the divine determinative, was written before their names, they 'could still be represented verbally and visually as if they occupied a place in society that merited divine attributes, qualities, and status; and furthermore, that the ascription of divine power within the religious system was a necessary component of the exercise of rule, whether or not the ruler was himself considered divine'.

²² Levinson (2001) 514-515; Anagnostou-Laoutides (2013) in press. For Shamash and his exclusive relation to justice, see indicatively Reiner (1991) 307-308 and Slanski (2000) 105-106. Of course, the intensity of investing kings with solar elements varies considerably throughout the ancient Near East and seems at times reduced to metaphors that compare the king with the sun or the sun-god; still, these metaphors reveal a common milieu regarding royal authority. Launderville (2003) 26-8. Liverani (1995) 2363 stresses the examples set by influential kings such as Sargon and Naram-Sin who were emulated by later rulers.

²³ Selz (2007) 277; Waerzeggers (2011) 744-745.

mēšarum and to whom kinatum are given as a gift'.²⁴ Mēšarum and Kittu (justice and equity) appear as the divine attendants of the sun-god in a trilingual list of gods translated by Pinches,²⁵ while Hammurabi (1795-1750 BCE) proclaimed himself assertively as šar mīšarim ša Šamaš kīnātim išrukušum anāku (king of justice to whom Shamash has given the law).²⁶ As the executive hand of divine justice in the name of the sun-god, Hammurabi explained in the prologue of his stela, a copy of which has survived from Hellenistic Babylon (STC I, 216-7):²⁷

inūmišu

Ḥammurabi, rūbam na'dam, pāliḥ ilī,

iāti,

mīšaram ina mātim ana šūpīn,

raggam u šēnam ana ḥulluqim,

dannum enšam ana la ḥabālim,

kīma Šamaš ana šalmāt qaqqadim wašēmma mātim nuwwurim,

Anum u Ellil ana šīr nišī ṭubbim šumī ibbū.

It was then that Anu and Enlil ordained Hammurabi, a devout prince who fears the gods, to demonstrate justice within the land, to destroy evil and wickedness, to stop the mighty exploiting the weak, to rise like Shamash over the mass of humanity, illuminating the land; they ordained me, to improve the welfare of my people.

A few lines later (P4 I: 50-62) Hammurabi posed as rē'um, nibit Ellil, anāku/ mukammer nuḥšim u ṭuḥdim (Enlil's chosen shepherd who heaps up plenty and abundance) and was careful to stress (P7 II: 22-31) that šar tašimtim, šēmû Šamaš dannum (he is a prudent king who listens obediently to Shamash).²⁸ Much later, the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (669-627 BCE) addressed a prayer regarding himself to Shamash in similar fashion: 'May he constantly shepherd over your peoples, whom you [the Sun-god] gave him, in justice'.²⁹

²⁴ Dossin (1955) 12: col. I; cf. Zaccagnini (1994) 268.

²⁵ Pinches (1906) 25.

²⁶ Richardson (2004) 124 (E17 = XLVIII:95- XLIX:1); cf. p. 118 (E1 = XLVIII: 1-8): dīnāt mīšarim ša Ḥammurabi šarrum lē'ūm ukinnuma (laws of righteousness which Hammurabi the skilful king established).

²⁷ P3 I:27-49, text and translation by Richardson (2004) 29-30; for the text in Hellenistic Babylon, see Lambert (1989) 97 with Boiy (2004) 23.

²⁸ See Richardson (2004) 122-3 for E12 (XLVIII: 20-47); cf. id. for E10 (XLVII: 84 – XLVIII: 2) where the king invites justice to shine over his land ina qibīt Šamaš (by the command of Shamash).

²⁹ Livingstone (1989) 474: COS 1.143. Although the solar substance of Ashur has been doubted, Ashur and Shamash were united in the person of the king; see Fischer (2002) 132-3: 'The connection between king and the sun-god is reflected in the Assyrian custom of writing the word king (šarru) as the number twenty, a type of

However, in Babylon the king posed not only as ‘an image of Shamash’ but, also, as ‘an image of Marduk,’ the king of the gods in the Babylonian pantheon, as well as ‘an image of Bēl’ (cf. Jer 44: 51, Bēl in Babylon).³⁰ The latter was a cultic title (*bēlu*/ West Semitic *ba^clu*/ biblical *ba^cal*) meaning ‘lord’ or ‘master,’ often associated with storm/weather gods, which came to be closely associated with Marduk,³¹ the patron god of the city.³² Since Marduk is associated with the rise of Babylon from a city-state to the capital of an empire, he is mostly quoted apropos the king’s ability to vanquish his enemies and establish his rule.³³ Nevertheless, in his preoccupations with justice, Marduk acquired solar connections as the Anu god-list (= *Anum ša amēli*, the so-called *Marduk theology*) which refers to Shamash as ‘Marduk of Justice’ suggests.³⁴ In addition, although Marduk is frequently associated in literature with storm iconography, the *Enuma Elish* (which Berossus had translated for Antiochus in ca. 290 BCE; cf. STC I 216-7 which has survived from Hellenistic Babylon), applies to him solar qualities.³⁵ Therefore, given Zeus’ identification with Bēl Marduk,³⁶ Seleucus’ devotion to Zeus, reflected on his coins and recorded on epigraphic and literary evidence about his reign,³⁷ may reflect his initial need to conquer and establish his rule under the auspices of Babylon’s divine protector.

cryptography for the sun-god Utu/Šamaš’, inspired by Mesopotamian ideology. Tukulti-Ninurta was the first Assyrian king to adopt the Babylonian title of ‘Sun-god of all peoples’; cf. Holloway (2002) xv.

³⁰ Stol (2000) 147-8; Oshima (2008) 348-52.

³¹ See SAA 8 no. 333 rev.2 (82-5 22, 63), SAA 10 no. 191 rev.6-7 (K492), SAA 10 no. 207 rev.12-13 (80-87 19, 22), SAA 10 no. 288: 17-18 (K595), SAA 10 no. 196 rev.4-5 (K583), SAA 13 no. 46, rev.11-13 (82-85 22, 125). Schwemer (2008) 8-9 argues that Ba^clu of the early dynastic texts from Ebla, Tell Beydar, and Tell Abū Salābīh is different from the storm god Ba^clu of second and first millennia Syria. The latter developed during the late sixteenth and fifteenth centuries in Syro-Palestine from an epithet of the storm-god Haddu. Still, in the regions that were in contact with Babylonia Bēl (-Marduk) was fused with the Syrian Ba^cal, thus acquiring the qualities of a storm-god; Schwemer (2008) 15; cf. Dirven (1999) 44-5, esp. n10.

³² Oshima (2008) 355; also his p.349 for Marduk’s long history of assimilating other gods; cf. Michalowski (1990) 395-6 for the role of Babylonian priests in promoting Marduk under the Assyrians through established texts such as the famous *Enuma Elish*.

³³ See, for example, the frequently quoted BBSt (=Babylonian Boundary-Stones) 6 known as the Šitti-Marduk kudurru relating the victory of Nebuchadnezzar (1125-1104 BCE) against his Elamite rival; Hurowitz (1992) 39n1 with bibliography.

³⁴ CT 24 50, BM 47406 obv.9; cf. *AfO*, 19 115, C 5, comm. for Šamaš as ‘Marduk of the lawsuit’ cited in Smith (1990) 38.

³⁵ Smith (1990) 38 also refers to the characterisation of Marduk as ‘sun god of the gods’ in *Enuma Elish* 1.101-2 and 6.127 (ANET 62, 69); cf. Fauth (1995) 199-200. In addition, from the Kassite period onwards, the Mesopotamian god Nābu poses as the son of Marduk.

³⁶ Oshima (2008) 355; Van der Spek (2009) 110-111 argued that since we have found no Greek temple in Babylonia, the Greeks may have used the temple of Bēl, identified with Zeus, as their main cultic space; Wright (2010) 58 discusses the identification of Zeus with local Ba^cals possibly already since the time of Alexander as indicated on his famous coins representing the Pheidian Zeus of Olympia.

³⁷ Grainger (1997) 43; Erickson (2009) 61-8.

At the same time, Seleucus was also alluding to Zeus' connection to kingship in the Greek cultural context.³⁸ Zeus, the king of the gods who had claimed supremacy in the Heavens through long and violent conflicts (see Hesiod's *Theogony* for his usurpation of power from cruel Cronus, followed by the Olympians' wars with the Titans, the Giants and finally Zeus' duel with Typhoeus) appealed greatly to Hellenistic kings who following the example of Alexander³⁹ employed Zeus to endorse their sovereignty.⁴⁰ Zeus' sanction of kingship was powerfully advocated by Callimachus (*Hymn* 1.79-81) who wrote, in agreement with Hesiod (*Th.* 94-6), that 'kings come from Zeus,' while in the *Iliad* (2.196-7) Homer had Odysseus assert that 'great is the anger of kings nourished by Zeus: their honours come from Zeus, and Zeus the Counsellor loves them' (also, see *Il.*1.234, 2.205, 16.386, 9.98; cf. *Hes.Th.*84-6; 901-2). In staging his *basileia* – associated with Homer's blessed kings, rather than the Persian despotism which the Greeks (under Athenian influence) had rejected with vehemence,⁴¹ Seleucus advocated Zeus' ability to bestow military victory as evidenced by his coins featuring Zeus *Nikephoros* and his cultic title *Nicator*.⁴² The father-son relationship between Zeus and Apollo may well have been in the mind of Antiochus I who seems to have initiated a conscious shift toward Apollo following the establishment of the dynasty.⁴³

The solar investment of supreme deities able to shine their benevolence on earthly kings had become a widespread phenomenon in the Hellenistic Near East, often referred to in scholarship as the 'solarisation of cult'.⁴⁴ Indeed inscriptions from the Hellenistic kingdoms indicate that numerous temples had been dedicated to the Sun and an impressive Heliopolis in

³⁸ See Anagnostou-Laoutides (2011) esp. 24-7 on the monarchical ideology of Zeus advocated at Olympia and appreciated even in democratic Athens, especially the god's command of *Nike* (Victory) and *Zelos* (Competition), the siblings of *Bia* (Violence) and *Kratos* (Power) as per *Hes.Th.*383-5; Houghton and Lorber (2002) 8 argued that Seleucus' choice of Zeus *Nikephoros* on his coins relates both Alexander's seminal victory at Ipsus, but also Zeus' ability to bestow victory at Olympia.

³⁹ Fredericksmeier (1991) 199 nn.1-2, cites the ancient sources on Alexander's famous visit to the oracle of Zeus Ammon at Siwah arguing that one of his motives was 'to obtain confirmation of the promise of Zeus *Basileus* at Gordium for his conquest of Asia' (see his p. 213). Upon receiving the divine oracle, Alexander sacrificed to Zeus *Basileus* with 'a parade of his troops under arms and athletic and musical contests'; *Arr.* 3.5.2. Alexander had minted coins that featured an enthroned Zeus holding an eagle and sceptre, probably alluding to Pheidias' distinctive representation of Zeus at Olympia (*Paus.* 5.11.1-10); Pollitt (1986) 26 esp. n.17, 49. Moreover, toward the end of his life, Alexander coined decadrachms on which he posed as Zeus *Keraunophoros*, just as in the image of Apelles that he dedicated to the temple of the Ephesian Artemis (*Plin. HN.*7.125; Stewart (1993) 199, esp. n.27).

⁴⁰ For example, later Antiochus IV continued the works to the temple of Olympios Zeus at Athens who had been abandoned after the fall of the Peisistratids and made some notable dedications to the famous statue of Zeus at Olympia (*Paus.*5.12.4). Eumenes II of Pergamon, who assisted Antiochus IV in his military plans, also favoured the cult of Zeus and both kings were said to have embraced a cult of Zeus Olympios; Pollitt (1986) 283.

⁴¹ For this distinction, see for example, *Arist.Pol.*1285b20-30; *Eth.Nic.* 8.9.1; cf. *Pl.Resp.*576d; *Grg.*466b-471a.

⁴² Erickson (2009) 62 with Appian, *Syr.*57; *Paus.*1.16.1 and Hadley (1974) 58-9.

⁴³ Zahle (1990) 127-8 argued that the shift indicated the wish of the Seleucids to appeal mainly to their Macedonian-Greek subjects which was criticized by Erickson (2009) 18; cf. Erikson (2011) 52, 57-8.

⁴⁴ See Anagnostou-Laoutides (2013) in press.

Baalbek (modern-day Lebanon) could rival even the famous Egyptian Heliopolis.⁴⁵ However, rather than accepting that in all these regions the sun-deity was worshipped, as some type of overarching, global symbol of god, it would seem that these cults probably involved local deities whose supremacy was expressed in solar terms and included gods that were identified with the Greek Apollo *and/or* Zeus. Helios had been identified by the Greeks with Apollo already from the end of the classical period, but equally statues of Helios Zeus were erected in a number of Hellenistic cities.⁴⁶ The god worshipped at Baalbek was, of course, Ba^cal, whom the Greeks nevertheless identified with Zeus based on his iconography (Joseph.*Ant.*14.40, Strab. 16.753, Eus.*Th.*2.14). Furthermore, the role of Helios in the Greek concept of justice and the intricate way in which justice was negotiated between Helios and Zeus already in Homer⁴⁷ further encourage the Seleucid employment of Zeus and Apollo in their political program in a complimentary way which reflects local as much as Greek traditions. In the Hellenistic period, when kings show a renewed interest in passing legislation,⁴⁸ Zeus, who in Plato teaches King Minos the art of lawgiving,⁴⁹ and Apollo, whose (oracular) benefaction kings often recognized in their decrees,⁵⁰ were both invested with solar attributes which are duly transferable on their royal protégés. However, although Zeus and Apollo were both invested with the solar qualities of Babylonian deities (leading to the propagation of a late myth about Apollo being the father of Seleucus, cf. RC 22), it was their father-son relationship that appealed the most to the early Seleucids. In the rest of the paper I shall examine the early days of the dynasty and their religious policies vis-à-vis the observations made above.

The Seleucids at Babylon: the first generation

In Tarn's opinion, the Seleucids showed a profound interest in Babylonian religion,⁵¹ possibly in response to the Ptolemaic adoption of Egyptian traditions, as a means of legitimizing their claim to rule. In the same vein, Sherwin-White noted:⁵²

⁴⁵ For sun-cults in Hellenistic Mesopotamia, see Kaizer (2002) 35-66; cf. Hajjar (1985) 90-91, 98-100, 223-224, 326-327 and (1977) 221-225, 425-430, 528-530, 579-580 on the cults of Baalbek.

⁴⁶ For the identification of Apollo with Helios, see Eur.fr781N² and Ps.-Eratosth.*Cat.*24 referring to the identification of the gods in Orphic theology; cf. OF 102, 322. For the influence of Stoicism in Zeus' (solarized) Hellenistic profile and Zeus Helios, see Ferguson (1970) 41-3; Bénatouïl (2009) 40-1; also Beckman (2012) 608 for the royal traditions of the Hittites whose kings apparently adopted both solar and storm-god characteristics.

⁴⁷ Segal (1992) 490.

⁴⁸ Jones (1964) 9, 13, 18.

⁴⁹ Pl.*Hp.Mai.*319a, 320b.

⁵⁰ Parke (1985) 59-60 on kings awarding *asylia* to numerous cities; cf. Ma (2002) 305. When in 346 BCE Philip II intervened and successfully ended the Third Sacred War, he posed as Apollo's champion; Billows (1990) 26.

⁵¹ Tarn (1930) 128; cf. Boiy (2004) 21-44 for literary and other texts from Seleucid Babylon.

‘The Babylonian monarchy was a dynamic mechanism foreign rulers were careful to utilize ...the kingship and the rituals associated with it gave both the king and his subjects a framework to operate in. The Seleucids actively exploited the system’.

In the footsteps of Alexander, the Seleucids appreciated the political dimensions of their religious profile and this seems to have been the case from the beginning of the dynasty.⁵³ Apparently, the considerable role of the Babylonian priests in establishing royal authority was not lost in Seleucus who tried to appeal to them right from the start. According to Diodorus (19.90.2-4), when Seleucus was about to conquer Babylon during his fight against Antigonos, and in an attempt to encourage his terrified and exhausted soldiers, he confided in them for the first time that when he had consulted the oracle of Apollo at Branchidae, near Cyme, the god had greeted him in response as king; hence, victory was at hand and his royal destiny foretold.⁵⁴ This tradition was obviously intended to create a parallel between Seleucus and Alexander who had also received confirmation of his divinity by the Apolline oracles of Erythrai and Didyma.⁵⁵ At the same time, however, he followed a time-honoured ANE tradition about the divine selection of the king by Shamash or (solarized) Marduk.⁵⁶ Although the epigraphic and numismatic evidence⁵⁷ indicates that Diodorus propagates a later tradition, formed at the earliest around 281-280 BCE –hence, very close to Seleucus’ death and probably under Antiochus’ initiative– his portrayal of the relationship of the king with the Babylonians and their priests deserves closer attention.

Diodorus (19.90-93) reported that Seleucus was certain of the support of the Babylonians when he was about to claim the city from Antigonos because he had established good relations with them during the five years he had been their satrap (320-315 BCE) when he was behaving ‘as their king’.⁵⁸ It is certainly true that the Babylonians had a decisive role in the defeat of Archon, the previous satrap whom the local population disliked and whom

⁵² Sherwin-White (1987) 9.

⁵³ Strootman (2007) 20 suggested that the cosmopolitan character of the Hellenistic world is achieved only later when the Hellenistic kingdoms are in decline, however, the rulers seem to have been ready to engage with the Babylonian, at least, culture from early on. Also, see Van der Spek (2009) 103, 113 who discussed the existence of a Greek and a Babylonian community with different political organization in Hellenistic Babylonia. However, he notes that there was no clear dividing line between the two communities.

⁵⁴ See Strab.13.3.2; cf. 13.3.5; OGIS 312; Paus.5.7.7-9; Ma (2002) 230; cf. his page 246 arguing that Apollo appears as the founder of the Seleucid dynasty under Antiochus III; cf. Mørkholm (1991) 113, 118; Kuhrt and Sherwin-White (1993) 27-8.

⁵⁵ Strab.17.1.43 = Callisthenes, *FGrH* 124 F 14a; Hammond (1998) 341.

⁵⁶ Waerzeggers (2011) 722-5.

⁵⁷ Erickson (2009) 39-46; Wright (2010) 60-2.

⁵⁸ Arrian as discussed by Erickson (2009) 35-6 reports that Seleucus secured the satrapy of Babylonia following the Triparadisos settlement in 320 BCE (Arrian *FGrH*156F9, 34-8; Diod.18.39.6 and 19.12.2). Grainger (1990) 74 argued that Seleucus probably secured the support of the Babylonian priests by appealing to them with monetary gifts. Still, he admits (p. 32) that ‘bribery’ is too coarse a term’.

Perdiccas tried to replace with Docimus;⁵⁹ and although, as Boiy pointed out,⁶⁰ the Greek sources do not explicitly say that the Babylonians or their priests favoured Seleucus⁶¹ or that their opinion mattered in his selection, Seleucus seems keen to fulfil his ritual obligations as the satrap of Babylonia.⁶² The priests also seem to have acknowledged Seleucus' authority since, soon after his entering the city in October/November 320, they asked for his financial aid so that the 'dust' of Esagila could be removed, that is the temple of Bēl-Marduk to be cleaned (BCHP 3, obv.25 = ABC 10, CM 30).⁶³ Although the reading of the Chronicle in question is unclear as to whether Seleucus granted the requested funds after all, later Seleucids clearly obliged.⁶⁴

Diodorus (19.91.1-2) also related the enthusiasm with which the Babylonian people welcomed Seleucus back to the city. Although his account lacks explicit support from cuneiform documents,⁶⁵ Seleucus seems to have been attentive to maintaining the balance of power between the rulers and temple authorities because despite being in dire financial situation, following the war with Antigonos, he remained diplomatic in the way he imposed his demands on local temples.⁶⁶

In BCHP 3 Seleucus appears as the 'satrap of the land of Akkad' (obv. lines 22, 25), a title he must have assumed upon his victory against Antigonos in 311 BCE –the title appears on the same line as the aforementioned reference to the cleaning of the Esagila,⁶⁷ a duty that later Seleucids duly observed according to the Chronicles.⁶⁸ Van der Spek and Finley⁶⁹ are

⁵⁹On Archon, his shadowy election as satrap as his death, see Arrian *FGrH*156F10A, 3-5 with Grainger (1990) 29 and Boiy (2004) 109 and 117.

⁶⁰Boiy (2004) 121-2 with Mehl (1986) 64-8. The latter understood Diod.19.91.1-2 which refers to the support of the Babylonian people for Seleucus as an indication that their priests had sided with Antigonos. Billows (1990) 107, esp.n33 doubts the authenticity of the story.

⁶¹*D.S.*18.37-39; Appian, *Syr.*57; Just. 15.4.11; Mehl (1986) 30-40; Grainger (1990) 26-30.

⁶²Cornelius Nepos, *Eumenes*, 5; Mehl (1986) 25-28; Grainger (1990) 22-3; Sallaberger (2007) 269-70.

⁶³Sherwin-White (1991) 81 nn44-9; cf. Van der Spek (2006: 265). See Grayson (1975) 283 on Alexander's restoration of the temple of Marduk. Bidmead (2002) 144 speculated that the cleaning of the great temple could allude to the celebration of an Akitu festival, an idea also picked up by Erikson (2011) 59-62. Cf. Cohen (1993) 404 who argued that the Akitu festival focused on Marduk's exit from and re-entry in his temple in connection with royal succession.

⁶⁴For the 'removal of the dust of the Esagila' in later Chronicles, see *BCHP* 5, obv.5 (=ABC 11, CM 32) and *BCHP* 12, obv.3, 4, 6 (=ABC 13b, BM35).

⁶⁵Yet, see Boiy (2004) 134 discussing Geller (1990) and his dating of *BHLT* 28-29 III: 13-23 as contemporary of Seleucus' return to Babylon. The text refers to the aversion of the Babylonian people for Antigonos and his continuing plundering of the land.

⁶⁶See Boiy (2004) 134 for a dispute between the governor of the royal treasury and the temple of Shamash dated in 308/7 BCE. Probably the royal treasury tried to confiscate the temple estates but in the end, a compromise was reached: the estates remained with the temple, although half of the produce was handed over to the state.

⁶⁷For Alexander's interest in the Esagila, see Arrian 3.16.4-5; 7.17.1-3; Strab.16.1.5; Jos.*C.Ap.*1.192.

⁶⁸See Boiy (2004) 136-7 who also explains that although Plut.*Dem.*18.2 relates that Seleucus acted 'as king among the barbarians', this still does not mean that he had accepted the title king of the Babylonians before being called *basileus*; cf. Mehl (1986) 152.

not clear as to whether the satrap of line 22 is Docimus or Seleucus. But even if the satrap here is Docimus, then Seleucus' appointment must be mentioned in the intervening lines and hence, the satrap of line 25 is most likely Seleucus. Seleucus' engagement with Babylonian religion is also mentioned in BCHP 9, obv.2 (=ABC 12, CM 33) where reference is made to a 'procession of Bēl'.⁷⁰ This is compatible with our surviving neo-Babylonian inscriptions where the most typical phrase characterizing the king is *zānin Esagila u Ezida* 'provider of Esagila and Ezida',⁷¹ which highlights the cultic profile of the king and his close connection with the temple. The most prominent sample of this ideology is a hymn addressed to Nebuchadnezzar II (605-562 BCE) where we are told that in fitting out temples and renewing the cities that contained them, the king obeyed Marduk who 'desired that Esagila and Ezisa should be provided with ample means of support and that Babylon should be completely restored'.⁷² This oracle stands at the core of Nebuchadnezzar's political program and exemplifies the notion of royal patronage as a divine mandate which the king carried out successfully.⁷³ Fittingly, Chronicle BCHP 12 reported that Seleucus III celebrated a Babylonian ritual wearing a 400 year old robe that belonged to Nebuchadnezzar II.⁷⁴

The issue of ruler cult during the Seleucid period has been long discussed in the bibliography with the inference that Seleucus was probably less zealous about his deification which was mostly organized by Antiochus.⁷⁵ However, Seleucus was certainly interested in winning the favour of Bēl Marduk who was, as discussed, identified with Zeus. Hence, when the Athenians at Lemnos decided to posthumously honour Seleucus and his son Antiochus by building them a temple,⁷⁶ they ordained that the former would be worshipped as Soter (a cultic title associated with both Zeus and Apollo),⁷⁷ but, also, that in libations Zeus' name would be substituted for that of the king.⁷⁸ Zeus Soter was especially associated with Athens (Arist.*Plut.*1174-5) where he was also linked to Zeus Eleutherios;⁷⁹ given that Seleucus was

⁶⁹ See the online prepublication of the Chronicles on <http://ancientworldonline.blogspot.com.au/2012/01/online-prepublication-babylonian.html>.

⁷⁰ Bidmead (2002) 144 suspects an Akitu celebration, but our evidence is limited.

⁷¹ Da Riva (2008) 94; Waerzeggers (2011) 727-9 discusses the profile of neo-Babylonian kings (ca. 700-539 BCE) as patrons of temples; the fortification of Babylon, she argues, was essential not only for securing the city from attacks, but for showcasing the king's ability to warrantee the continuity of cult in the Esagila temple.

⁷² Waerzeggers (2011) 730.

⁷³ Shauding (2001) 51.

⁷⁴ For Nebuchadnezzar as ideal ruler in Seleucid Babylon, see Beaulieu (1993) 242-3; Waerzeggers (2011) 739-40.

⁷⁵ Mehl (1986) 95-102, 230ff.; Kuhrt and Sherwin-White (1991) 71ff.; id. (1993) 7-52, 114-187; Grainger (1990) 31-87, 137-169; Kuhrt (1996) 41-54; Shipley (2000) 271-307.

⁷⁶ Phylarch.*ap.Athen.*4.254f.

⁷⁷ Mattingly (1998) 237-243; Houghton (1998) 65-71; cf. Mørkholm (1991) 108-9.

⁷⁸ Wright (2010) 107 with Bevan (1901) 627.

⁷⁹ Raaflaub (2004) 108.

hailed as liberator on this occasion,⁸⁰ the cult fits his profile as victorious king under the auspices of Zeus/Marduk, although the input of the ordaining group was probably (more) important on this occasion.

Overall, despite the tradition that claimed Seleucus to be the son of Apollo (i.e. Justin, *Ep.*15.4),⁸¹ the king seems to have differentiated between Apollo and the Sun-god. Hence, although he had allegedly instituted games at Ilion ‘*similar to those held in honour of Apollo*’ (OGIS 212),⁸² who was hailed as the founder of the dynasty (*archēgos*),⁸³ the cult involved sacrifices to Athena (Il.18, 20), a goddess typically associated with Victory and Zeus. Seleucus had indeed issued coins that featured heads of the sun-god (not Apollo) in connection with Nike, Zeus and/or Athena,⁸⁴ while opting for Apollo only ‘in limited issues...most prominently on the gold staters issued in the east, where Antiochus was king’.⁸⁵ Hence, soon after his victory against Antigonus at Ipsos in 301 BCE, Seleucus issued coins with the image of the king (or Alexander) on the obverse wearing a leopard-skin helmet with bullhorn and ear (a nod to Dionysus, the conqueror of India). The reverse of the coin depicts Nike with a crowning trophy and a head of Helios which could be interpreted in the Babylonian ideology as an indication of divine favour [illustration 1]. The coin is inscribed ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΣΕΛΕΥΚΟΥ and given that Seleucus had also struck coins without his royal title, it seems that these coins were designed to stress his newly acclaimed royal status.



Illustration 1: Mørkholm (1991) 72

⁸⁰ Alexander was also hailed as liberator by the Greek cities of Asia Minor during his 336 BCE campaign; Ma (2005) 181-2. For the Sun on Antiochus IV coins, possibly inspired by the Rhodian sun-god, see Wright (2010) 124-5. Antiochus IV had struck coins portraying a radiant Zeus which indicates his assimilation with Apollo; Houghton (2012) 241-2. Cf. Iossif and Lorber (2009) *passim* for the Helios motif in connection to Mithras.

⁸¹ Wright (2010) 59n12 argues contra Hadley (1974) 152 that Justin's text was current by 278 BCE. The circulation of this tradition is corroborated by a paean to Asclepius from third century BCE Erythrai where Apollo was celebrated as the divine progenitor of Seleucus; Parke (1985) 50-1; Erickson (2009) 46. For the cult which possibly included subsequent members of the Seleucids, see Ma (2002) 48 with Habicht (1970) 85. Still, the date of the paean ca. 280 BCE points to a posthumous cult ordained by Antiochus; Erickson (2009) 211-2.

⁸² Bevan (1901) 627. Although, as argued, the decree may relate to the reign of Seleucus II, nevertheless the traditional earlier date of ca. 281 BCE cannot be dismissed; Erickson (2009) 218-219.

⁸³ CIG 2, 3595, 28sq discussed by Drijvers (1980) 70 deals with contributions made by Antiochus I to a sanctuary near Troas. Here, Apollo is also mentioned as *archēgos tou genous*, although Zeus and Nike as gods to whom offerings would be made also appear on the same line of the inscription.

⁸⁴ Houghton and Lorber (2002) nos165.1a and 1b; 173.16; 177.1b.

⁸⁵ Erickson (2011) 51.

In addition, the king had issued tetradrachs as early as 304/ 305 BCE featuring horned elephants driving the chariot of Athena, while on a few double darics we come across a horseman wearing a horned helmet and riding a horned horse (related either to Seleucus who was thus trying to allude to Alexander or Alexander himself).⁸⁶ Although the horns may evoke the Siwan representation of Zeus Ammon⁸⁷ or Dionysus or Apollo, the ‘two-horned’ god of Orphic hymns,⁸⁸ horned caps of divinity were often worn by Shamash and his royal protégés in near eastern representations,⁸⁹ while on Hammurabi’s stela the god is portrayed with both rays and horns.⁹⁰ Hence, Seleucus most probably appreciated the Mesopotamian images that had for centuries associated kings with the horned Shamash.⁹¹

Seleucus also dedicated a sanctuary to the god at Daphne, near Antioch⁹² which was later represented on a special issue of Antiochus IV (215-164 BCE),⁹³ and he started rebuilding the famous oracle of Apollo at Didyma.⁹⁴ Yet, his offerings to the temple and to the θεοῖς τοῖς Σωτήρησι (the saviour gods) most probably included Zeus Soter.⁹⁵ In addition, Seleucus returned to the temple bronze statue of Apollo that Darius I had removed in 494 BCE⁹⁶ in an attempt to replicate Cyrus’ return of the statue of Marduk, recorded on his

⁸⁶ Houghton and Lorber (2002) nos. 448-451 with Wright (2010) 116-8.

⁸⁷ Stewart (1993) 234.

⁸⁸ In the Greek context horns allude mostly to Apollo who was worshipped as such in Laconia and Cyrene. For Apollo Cereates in Greece, see Paus.8.34.5; Nonn.*Dion.*108; also, see Hesychios s.v. *karneatai*; *agētēs* (leader) for the emphasis on the leading qualities of horned Apollo in Sparta. Dionysus is also addressed as a “horned-bull” (Eur.*Bac.*100).

⁸⁹ For example, Naram Sin’s (2254-18 BCE) was represented in his famous Victory Stele wearing a horned helmet and a neck bead. Michalowski (2008) 35n3 juxtaposes Naram-Sin’s title DINGIR a-ga-dè^{KI} (= god of Agade, alternating with LUGAL a-ga-dè^{KI} = king of Agade), with the title dingir (zi) kalam-ma-na [= (effective) god of the land] employed by the kings of Ur and Ishbi-Erra, first king of Isin, but Winter (2008) 76 argues Naram-Sin was also called “il matim,” (=god of the land).; cf. Marduk’s title *bēl māṭāti* (Lord of the Lands) discussed in Oshima (2008) 352.

⁹⁰ Bahrani (2008) 158.

⁹¹ Marduk is associated with a horned-dragon; see *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* 3, 486.

⁹² Libanius *Or.*11.94; Justin 15.4; cf. Erickson (2009) 50; also, see her pages 64-5 for Libanius highlighting the connection of Seleucus with Zeus which indicates that Apollo’s role as divine progenitor of the Seleucids was little known in antiquity; also, see Wright (2010) 59.

⁹³ Mørkholm (1991) 26.

⁹⁴ Grainger (1997) 267, 273, 324, 352, 407, 472; Wright (2010) 58-9; also, see Bevan (1902) 131 who suggested that Seleucus’ divine ancestry was an invention of the priests at Didyma.

⁹⁵ Dittenberg ad *OGIS* 24.15n9. Erickson (2009) 212-3; Wright (2010) 59-60; The king appreciated his special association with the oracle and urged the Milesians to use his gifts ἵνα ἔχητε σπένδειν καὶ χρᾶσθαι ὑγιαίνοντων ἡμῶν καὶ εὐτυχούντων καὶ τῆς πόλεως διαμενοῦσης σώας (so that you can offer libations and consult the oracle about our health and happiness and the safety of the city); cf. Ma (2002) 93 for one Dioscourides who dedicated a statue of Antiochos the son before the temple of Apollo Clarios; Grainger (1997) 114, 660.

⁹⁶ Paus.1.16.3; 8.46.3; cf. Hadley (1974) 58n48; Eirckson (2009) 43-4; Wright (2010) 58-9.

famous Cylinder. According to the text, Cyrus accepted an invitation by the god Marduk who fed up with Nabonidus was in search of a righteous king. As a result of divine favour, Cyrus entered the city peacefully and significantly returned to its temples statues of gods that Nabonidus had previously removed thus provoking divine anger.⁹⁷ Hence, it could be argued that while Seleucus' gesture has been understood as a nod to the particular god, when placed in its wider politico-historical context, it promotes his alliance with a divine benefactor of kings who in Babylon was notably linked with Marduk.

Given the solar associations of Bēl Marduk (p.5 above) and Seleucus' careful predilection for Zeus, the notion of promoting one god over the other as the result of gradual immersion into local traditions by the time of Antiochus fades away.⁹⁸ Rather, Antiochus' more exclusive association with Apollo was possibly designed to mirror the divine father-son relationship of Zeus with Apollo on their royal protégés.⁹⁹ Apparently 'Zeus *and* his son Apollo modelled the world of earthly sovereigns'¹⁰⁰ and they fitted perfectly the royal ideology that was current in first millennium BCE Babylonia when the task of the king was to create prosperity under divine orders.¹⁰¹ Hence, an inscription from the reign of Seleucus IV (187-175 BCE) indicates that there was a priest of Seleucus Zeus Nicator together with Antiochus Apollo Soter.¹⁰²

The next generation

After Seleucus' death, Antiochus entombed his father's ashes in Seleucia and ordained his veneration as Zeus Nicator.¹⁰³ However, as we saw, the path to ruler deification was subtly but surely strewn for Antiochus I who also received cult at Erythrai, possibly during his lifetime.¹⁰⁴ In turn, Antiochus seems to have held the city in special esteem and a surviving decree records privileges that Antiochus (or his son) offered to the city for their loyalty.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁷ Bidmead (2002) 139-140.

⁹⁸ Erickson (2009) 30, 37-8; Sherwin-White and Kuhrt (1993) 27.

⁹⁹ Smith (2001) 54-7 discusses the importance of the divine family in the Ugaritic concept of the divine council.

¹⁰⁰ Dowden (2006) 78.

¹⁰¹ Vanderhooff (1999) 34.

¹⁰² Nilsson (1974) 2:167; for Antiochus I Soter as identified with Apollo, see Walbank (1984) 86.

¹⁰³ App. Syr. 63; also, Chaniotis 2005: 437.

¹⁰⁴ OGIS 222= Erythrai 504 contains resolutions of the Ionian League about the cult of Antiochus I. His birthday was to be celebrated, as was Alexander's, and a sacred precinct would be established as the seat of his and his son's worship. Price (1985) 40: '...at Erythrae there were cults of Alexander the Great, Antiochus I of Syria, perhaps the Pergamene king, and Roma side by side'. Erythrae 37 also refers to the 'Sacred room' (hieros oikos) to Dionysus, Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius. IGR 4.1533 = I. Erythrae 1.132.

¹⁰⁵ RC 15; OGIS 223= Erythrai 31 dated after 261 BCE contains a letter allegedly of Antiochus I towards the citizens of Erythrai. Cohen (1996) 27: 'Thus Antiochus II confirmed Erythrai in its status as autonomous and aphorologetos ("tribute-free;" RC 15.26-27)'.

The king, posing as a close reflection of Apollo Soter (and hence named Antiochus Soter after the god), introduced the coins of the god sitting on the omphalos with an arrow.¹⁰⁶

In the Babylonian context, Antiochus' interest in his cultic duties is exemplified in BCHP 5 (obv.8-12) where the king is shown as visiting temples, making offerings for the moon god Sin and ordering the dust cleared from Esagila.¹⁰⁷ In the reverse of the tablet which is badly damaged we read about dedications to Bēl Marduk, Nabû and Beltia(?) (lines 12-14). Apart from the temple of Bēl, Antiochus re-founded the temple of Nabû at Borsippa.¹⁰⁸ In his famous cylinder dedicated to the god Antiochus leaves no doubt of the universal aspects of his royal status in line with Babylonian royal ideology. The text reads (lines 1-15):¹⁰⁹

Antiochus, great king, mighty king, king of the world, king of Babylon, king of the lands, provider for Esagil and Ezida, foremost heir of king Seleucus, the Macedonian, king of Babylon, am I. When I decided to (re)build Esagil and Ezida, I moulded the bricks of Esagil and Ezida in the land of Hatti (=Syria) with my pure hands, using the finest oil, and for the laying of the foundations of Esagil and Ezida I brought them. In the month of Addaru, on the twentieth day, in year 43 (=251 BC), I laid the foundations of Ezida, the true house, the temple of Nabû which is in Borsippa.

Here Antiochus (esp. ll.1-2) clearly subscribes to the Babylonian formula of presenting the king as ruler of the world.¹¹⁰ On line 28 of his dedication the king prays for victory against his enemies and for a just kingship (LUGAL^{u₂-tu} mi-ša₂-ri pa-le-e) following a long list of Mesopotamian rulers before him.¹¹¹ In addition, the king had identified Nabû – despite his gender being either male or female – with Apollo,¹¹² probably because Nabû was believed to be the son of Marduk.¹¹³ By aligning himself with Apollo/ Nabû, Antiochus promotes the idea of Marduk being identified with Seleucus. Thus, the royal family perfectly replicated the world of the gods. In Kuhrt and Sherwin-White's words (1991: 78):

¹⁰⁶ Wright (2010) 79 suggests that this type of coinage may have had a Persian antecedent; Erickson (2009) 121-30; cf. Ma (2002) 94 for the Telmessians who decided to strike coins with Apollo seated on the omphalos under Antiochus III. The reverse of these coins showed the Rhodian-inspired head of the god (BMC Lyc.86.1), obviously in recognition of the god's straddling of the Greek and near eastern worlds; cf. Mørkholm (1991) 163.

¹⁰⁷ Erickson (2011) 54.

¹⁰⁸ For Nābu and Antiochus I, see Fauth (1995) 18 and nn. 121-122; Erickson (2011) 57.

¹⁰⁹ Translation and text by Stevens, online edition at <http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/cams/selbi/corpus>; cf. Sherwin-White (1991) 77.

¹¹⁰ Bidmead (2002) 143 with Kuhrt and Sherwin-White (1991) 75-77 and Sherwin-White (1983) 156-9.

¹¹¹ Bidmead (2002) 143: 'Boasting that he is the caretaker of the temples of Marduk and Nabû,' he surely must have celebrated their festivals, including the New Year Festival'; Linssen (2004) 19.

¹¹² Drijvers (1980) 72; Kaizer (2002) 93-4; Erickson (2011) 58-9; cf. Facella (2006) 250-97.

¹¹³ Seux (1976) 512-3.

‘The prayer of Nabu articulates an ideal picture of the king’s socio-political functions: in external relations the conquest of enemies, and enduring superiority, internally, justice, peace, a long reign and a stable succession’.

Antiochus’ prayer to Nabû reads (II.33-46):

Son of the prince, Nabû, heir of Esagil, firstborn son of Marduk, offspring of Erua the queen, when with rejoicing and jubilation you enter Ezida, the true house, the house of your supreme divinity, at your true command, which cannot be annulled, may my days be long, my years many; may my throne be secure, my reign lengthy, on your exalted tablet which preserves the boundary of heaven and earth. In your pure mouth may my good fortune be constantly established.

Antiochus seems to emulate the example of Ashurbanipal (685-627 BCE) whose stele was found in an area of the temple of Marduk in Babylon.¹¹⁴ The inscription on the stela presents Ashurbanipal as ‘the great king, the mighty king, king of the universe, king of Assyria, king of the four regions of the world, king of kings....who adorns Esagila, the temple of the god...who repaired the damage to the sanctuaries’. Like Antiochus he calls upon Nabû to make his ‘royal throne firm’ and finishes with a call for future rulers of the land to restore and preserve the ruins of the sacred precinct and to protect his monument.¹¹⁵ The Seleucids clearly heard his message.

Concluding Remarks

The religious policy shaped under the Seleucus I and Antiochus indicates not only the interest of the Hellenistic kings in appealing to their eastern subjects while retaining their Macedonian-Greek identity, but it additionally highlights their intense understanding of local traditions. This was especially important during the founding period of the dynasty and therefore, Seleucus and Antiochus seem to have negotiated between them their royal profiles. While Shamash, the Babylonian sun-god who sustained his royal protégés through his benefaction, was readily associated both with Zeus and Apollo in the Greek context, in Babylon he was exclusively linked with Marduk who was identified with Zeus Belos (Lord Zeus). Therefore, possibly from early on, Seleucus surnamed Nicator promoted his special relation with Victorious Zeus/Marduk, while Antiochus assumed the role of his son Apollo/

¹¹⁴ Bahrani (2008) 155.

¹¹⁵ Luckenbill (1927) 376 with Bahrani (2008) 157.

Nabû. Although the picture seems to be complicated by the tradition of Apollo as the father of Seleucus and founder of the dynasty, a closer look at the sources indicates that Seleucus differentiated between the sun-god and Apollo, although the two were inevitably syncretized. This development is perfectly exemplified in the case of Antiochos I of Commagene (86-38 BCE): on his tomb at Nemrud Dağ the king introduced himself as ‘Antiochos the Great King, eminent and just god, friend of the Romans and the Greeks’ (Βασιλεὺς μέγας Ἀντίοχος Δίκαιος Ἐπιφανῆς Φιλορωμαῖος καὶ Φιλέλληγν),¹¹⁶ who had set up godly statues of ‘Zeus-Oromasdes, *Apollo-Mithras-Sun-Hermes*, and Artagnes-Heracles-Ares’ (Διός τε Ὠρομάσδου καὶ Ἀπόλλωνος Μίθρου Ἡλίου Ἑρμοῦ καὶ Ἀρτάγνου Ἡρακλέους Ἄρεως...καθιδρυσάμην ...). Nevertheless, the distinction seems to have been retained in Babylon where Antiochus III the Great (223-187 BCE) celebrated local ceremonies,¹¹⁷ while passing legislation under the direct guidance of (solar) Apollo, in the steps of Hammurabi.¹¹⁸

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¹¹⁶ OGIS 1.383; LIMC V.1.386.

¹¹⁷ Linssen (2004) 84-85; 125-8.

¹¹⁸ Ma (2002) 181.

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