

Seleukid Perspectives – Band 1

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CHAPTER 5

MATERIAL CULTURE, RITUAL PERFORMANCE, AND SELEUKID RULE: ANTIOCHOS IV AND THE PROCESSION AT DAPHNE IN 166 BCE

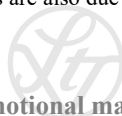
Babett Edelmann-Singer

Abstract: While the procession at Daphne has been studied from multiple perspectives over the last decades, the scholarly discussion has been largely dominated by Polybios' perception of the event, which can be summarised as follows: the eccentric Antiochos wanted to surpass the *pompe* that the Roman general Aemilius Paullus had organized in Macedonia in 167 BCE on the occasion of his triumph over Perseus. According to this interpretation, the background of the festival in 166 BCE has been deemed an ideological confrontation between Rome and the Seleukid Empire against the backdrop of Rome's rise to power in the eastern Mediterranean. The article offers an alternative interpretation by studying religious objects displayed in the *pompe* as described by Polybios and attested by Athenaios. The role of religious objects in the context of people's ritual performance should be read as a communication process between the king and the different parts of the Seleukid realm. Although the *pompe* cannot be understood without reference to Rome, its main focus was on the self-construction of Seleukid rule and the ruler's self-image. Furthermore, the objects described by Polybios will also be discussed in terms of the reaction thereto by those subjected to Seleukid rule. This approach allows us to understand better the singular ritual of 166 BCE as the materialisation of a distinct Seleukid claim to power and of forms of acceptance of this suzerainty within different local cultures.

I. INTRODUCTION

The present volume deals with the question of how Seleukid claims to political legitimacy were received and responded to by those over whom they claimed suzerainty. At the same time, the analysis of the royal centre's reactions to those responses aims to hone our understanding of the character of Seleukid rule, since these responses from the capital also played a role in whether or not Seleukid

- * I would like to thank the volume editors, Altay Coşkun and Richard Wenghofer, for their helpful comments. I would also like to thank Peter Herz for the numerous productive conversations we had about the topic. Special thanks are also due to Mary Frazer for the very helpful information on Babylonian sources.



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suzerainty prevailed in these local settings. In the following, I would like to approach this question by examining a concrete political and religious ritual which reflected the Seleukid notion of power: namely, the great procession arranged by Antiochos IV at Daphne near Antioch in the year 166 BCE.

Why do I focus on the Hellenistic ritual of *pompe* in general? And why do I emphasise this *pompe* in particular? Regarding the first question, there is a plausible and reasonable answer: Compared with orchestrated *pompai*, hardly any other ritual of the Hellenistic period reflects royal self-image so explicitly. The ruler presents himself as the guarantor of prosperity and wealth, as the conqueror of the *oikoumene* and as a victorious war hero, as the protector of the Greek *poleis*, as a divine offspring and charismatic leader – sometimes even as a divine manifestation himself. All these facets of the Hellenistic strategies of legitimation can be observed in the specific cultural characteristics of royal processions. In this regard, the great *Ptolemaia* at Alexandria in 274 (?) BCE¹ can be seen as an illustrative example of the Ptolemaic version of these rites, with the festival at Daphne in 166 BCE being a Seleukid equivalent. After Alexander the Great, the self-conception of Hellenistic rulers was basically of threefold derivation, consisting of dynastic legitimation, self-effectiveness manifested in victory, and recommendation by a divinity.² All three categories are in fact part of a concept of religious legitimation. In every *pompe*, this overall concept of Hellenistic legitimation is basically transformed into a performative act, in which not only the visualization but also the materialization of the typical Hellenistic claim to power comes about.

The procession may thus be interpreted as a performative claim to legitimacy – especially in a political situation where the ruler lacked some of the vital elements of such legitimacy. This point now leads us to the second question concerning the specific characteristics of the Daphne procession: In the year 167/166 BCE, the issue of the legitimacy of Antiochos IV's rule clearly came to the fore politically. The Seleukid withdrawal from Egypt, forced by the Romans, as well as the latter's victories over King Perseus from Macedonia called into question Antiochos IV's self-image.

II. ANTIOCHUS IV, THE DAPHNE PROCESSION, AND PROBLEMS IN THE SOURCES

Antiochos IV Epiphanes, the Seleukid king from 175–164 BCE, appears as a problematic figure in ancient historical discourse. In deliberate manner and with ironic

1 The *pompe* of Ptolemy II Philadelphos at Alexandria, as described by Kallixeinos (*FGrH* 627 F 2), is recounted by Athenaios of Naukratis (Athen. 5.196a–203b). See Dunand 1981; Rice 1983; Walbank 1996; cf. also Hazzard 2000; Thompson 2000; Iossif and Lorber 2012; Erskine 2013; Mittag 2015. The year of the procession is highly debated among historians. Today, most scholars agree that Kallixeinos' description refers to the second festival of the *Ptolemaia* (established in 279/278 BCE by Ptolemy I), which took place in February 274 BCE. See Caneva 2016, 87–92.

2 See Edelmann 2007.



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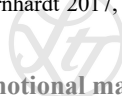
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allusion to his self-designation as *Epiphanes*, '[God] made manifest', Polybios gives Antiochos the epithet *Epimanes*, 'the Mad'.³ This judgment on the part of the Greek author is representative and indicates the difficulties the ancient sources pose concerning the king's short reign. Greek and Roman literature, in addition to late antique Jewish and Christian texts dealing with Antiochos, are negatively biased against the ruler and thus of little help for our endeavour to interpret his political intentions.⁴ This picture began to change only in the 19th century,⁵ with historians in the 20th century then speaking of him as an enigmatic and puzzling figure. More recent research has sought to unveil the 'rational' Antiochos who launched a series of reforms. Thus, the 'mad' Antiochos IV was explained away to a large extent – although some of his actions remain cryptic.⁶

Among others, these actions include the great procession at Daphne near Antioch in the year 166 BCE,⁷ which is described by Polybios⁸ and Diodoros.⁹ Polybios' account is one of the most famous reports on ancient processions. The great *pompe* was the prelude for a series of *agōnes* or festivals lasting a full month and consisted of a large-scale review of the different branches of the army, a parade displaying the material wealth of the king and his court, as well as a solemn religious procession including a great number of sacred embassies from all parts of the Greek world, carrying portable images of deities and mythological scenes, painted or written on banners.

Polybios' interpretation of the event, which correlates it closely with Rome, has been decisive for modern reception.¹⁰ According to Polybios, the eccentric

- 3 Polyb. 26.1a = Athen. 10.439a: Πολύβιος δ' ἐν τῇ ἕκτῃ καὶ εἰκοστῇ τῶν Ἱστοριῶν καλεῖ αὐτὸν Ἐπιμανῆ καὶ οὐκ Ἐπιφανῆ διὰ τὰς πράξεις.
- 4 See Mittag 2006, 18–31.
- 5 Cf. Hoffmann 1873.
- 6 Cf. Mørkholm 1966; Will 1982; Habicht 1989; Mittag 2006; Iossif 2011; Feyel and Graslin-Thomé 2014.
- 7 Cf. Mørkholm 1963 and 1966; Bunge 1976; Walbank 1996; Mittag 2006, 282–295 and 2015; Köhler 1991; Strootman 2019. The year the procession took place is controversial; cf. Mittag 2006, 282f., n. 1.
- 8 A shortened version of Polybios' text was handed down by the later excerptor Athenaios of Naukratis in his *Deipnosophistai* (Polyb. 30.25.1–26.4 = Athen. 5.24.194c–195d). Other sources are only available as small fragments, for example Protagorides of Kyzikos *On the Games at Daphne and On the Festive Assemblies at Daphne* (Athen. 4.33.150c–d; Athen. 4.78.176a–b and 4.82.183f = *FGrH* 853 F 1–2). Cf. the historical commentary on Polybios by Walbank 1979, 448–453.
- 9 Diod. 31.16.1. See also Rathman 2016.
- 10 Cf. Edmondson 1999, Strootman 2007. Strootman 2019 has once again taken up the 'answer theory', according to which the festival at Daphne was seen as a response to Aemilius Paullus and Roman intervention in the East. In accordance with the assumption of Polybios' propositions, there are three aspects in favour of this theory: the temporal proximity to the parade of Aemilius Paullus in 167 BCE; the 5,000 soldiers wearing Roman uniforms; and the elephants, which were interpreted as war elephants in a military context. The central thesis thereby is that under Antiochos IV's rule, the Seleukid realm was still an empire oriented towards expansion and an imperialist policy. Cf. also Bernhardt 2017, 241: 'Man hat die prächtige Heeresschau



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