

Seleukid Perspectives – Band 1

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CHAPTER 6

ANTIOCHOS AT DAPHNE AND XERXES AT SARDEIS: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE ON THE SELEUKID VISION OF EMPIRE

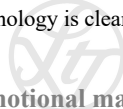
Stephen Harrison

Abstract: This paper takes as its point of departure two processions, Xerxes' exit from Sardes *en route* to Greece in 480 and Antiochos IV's parade at Daphne in the 160s. The latter has often been compared with the Grand Procession of Ptolemy Philadelphos, but only rarely viewed through an Achaemenid lens. Here, I use these two episodes as a window into the broader relationship between Achaemenid and Seleukid kingship. Thus, I draw in wider material regarding the representation of empire to demonstrate how these two events brought to life wider imperial conceptions. Two principal observations emerge from this discussion. First, I suggest that we need not think of the Seleukid or Achaemenid Empires as either 'universal' or 'bounded', as some recent scholarship has implied. Instead, I argue that these two conceptions of empire are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and that the acknowledgement of apparent borders can actually be used as part of the construction of a claim to universal rule. Secondly, I show that the Achaemenids and Seleukids took a contrasting approach to integrating the disparate territories that constituted their realms, meaning that their overall conceptualisation of empire was actually fundamentally different. This plays into ongoing scholarly consideration of continuity and change from the Achaemenid period to the Hellenistic. It also draws attention to the important issue of how identity was understood at both the imperial and local levels, and thus to the internal cohesion of the Seleukid Empire.

In the mid-160s BCE, Antiochos IV organised a festival at Daphne, outside Antioch-on-the-Orontes.¹ This was a pivotal moment for Antiochos, coming shortly

* I am very grateful to Altay Coşkun and Ben Scolnic for organising the online seminar series at which the original version of this paper was given. Feedback from both, as well as David Engels, Christopher Tuplin, Richard Wenghofer, and the anonymous reviewers, have enhanced the finished product and I am thankful for their contributions, while naturally retaining full responsibility for any errors.

1 Traditionally, the festival is dated to 166, see e.g. Walbank 1996, 125; Erskine 2013, 47; Coşkun 2019, 448; Coşkun 2021, 270. See Mittag 2006, 282f. with n. 1 for the merits of this date rather than earlier in the 160s. Iossif 2010, 126–134 proposes 165, situating the event closer to the beginning of Antiochos' eastern *anabasis*. The precise date has no bearing on the discussion here since the relative chronology is clear.



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after he had been forced to retreat from Egypt by a Roman ultimatum, at a time when his authority was being challenged in Jerusalem by the Maccabees, and before he departed on a military expedition in the east. The festival was inaugurated with a parade, which has attracted significant scholarly commentary and has often been treated through a comparative lens, with parallels drawn particularly with the Grand Procession of Ptolemy Philadelphos.² By highlighting the militaristic nature of Antiochos' procession, scholars have commonly interpreted the whole event as a reassertion of Seleukid military power and, therefore, as a challenge to Rome; some have even argued that the format was influenced by Roman triumphs.³ This position imagines that the festival was aimed at a Mediterranean audience. Walbank, for example, argued that the 'Greek environment' at Daphne was a way to reiterate the importance of Greeks and Macedonians within the empire.⁴

We will see that the contemporary context certainly appears to have affected the messages communicated by the procession, but the view that this was targeted exclusively at Rome, Greece, and Macedonia is largely unpersuasive, not least because similar events may have been held elsewhere. Indeed, as discussed below, ceremonial entrances and exits from key cities were an important feature of the Achaemenid monarchy and had been practiced by Alexander too. Consequently, it seems unlikely that the procession at Daphne was a unique event, even if it is the only example clearly attested in the extant sources. Indeed, it is also possible that the festival at Daphne was a regular occurrence.⁵ If this is true, neither the 'Day of Eleusis' in 168 BCE nor the recent games staged at Amphipolis by Aemilius Paullus could have been Antiochos' principal motivation for orchestrating the event. More recent interpretations have begun to escape the Roman lens for exploring the festival. Iossif, for instance, stressed that the procession offers insight into Seleukid geographical-ideological conceptions and Strootman argues that it provides evidence of Seleukid claims to universal hegemony.⁶

This paper also focuses on the connections between geography and ideology as they were expressed at Daphne, but I offer a new interpretation of the procession by comparing it with Xerxes' departure from Sardeis at the beginning of his invasion of Greece. This comparison enables a broader examination of the relationship between the Achaemenid and Seleukid Empires. This is often evaluated in terms of continuity and change, which is a particularly important analytical framework as a

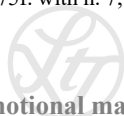
2 See e.g., Walbank 1996; Mittag 2006, esp. 287–289; Erskine 2013.

3 Military character, e.g., Walbank 1996, 125–127; Mittag 2006, esp. 284, 290f.; Strootman 2019, 177f. Roman influence, e.g., Gruen 1976, 76; Habicht 1989, 345; Préaux 1978, 503. Erskine 2013 refutes this view, with 48f., n. 38 offering further examples of proponents of this position. Mittag 2006, 284f. highlights the Hellenistic influence on Aemilius' celebrations at Amphipolis, which is sometimes heralded as the prompt for Antiochos' festival but was far from being a Roman triumph.

4 Walbank 1996, 129.

5 See Iossif 2010, 129–134 for the argument that this was a regular event.

6 Iossif 2010, 143; Strootman 2019, 175f. with n. 7, discussed further at 199–204. See also Edelmann-Singer, ch. 5 in this volume.



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result of characterisations of the Seleukids as ‘heirs’ to the Achaemenids.⁷ While continuity is certainly apparent, Tuplin and others have offered a more sceptical interpretation of any Achaemenid inheritance.⁸ One of the challenges of investigating this topic is that the evidence – fragmentary in both periods – rarely enables direct comparison between entirely equivalent occasions. As we will see, the evidence for the processions at Sardeis and Daphne remains problematic. However, we have the advantage here of being able to compare accounts of similar occasions, which were both produced by authors who offer what we might interpret as an external perspective on the empires, though Herodotos’ roots in Halikarnassos bely neat definition.

We can imagine three broad audiences for these events: the participants themselves, those watching the procession, and those hearing reports of it. Participants might have a limited perspective on the occasion as a whole, with their experience confined to what they could perceive themselves or learn from others, which would be affected by considerations such as language barriers. Nevertheless, they would form an impression of what the procession implied for them, including issues such as their place in the imperial hierarchy, and carry that conception back to their communities. Onlookers fall into two camps, those who lived in, or close to, Sardeis and Antioch, and those who had been invited to attend the celebrations. Antiochos, in particular, seems to have been keen to attract representatives from cities within and beyond his empire.⁹ These external observers would also have acted as conduits, reporting what they saw to their communities. Finally, it is possible that the imperial authorities subsequently circulated written reports of festivities.¹⁰ These were, therefore, not just internal affairs. We cannot know precisely whence our reports originate, but our sources represent that external viewpoint. Consequently, at the very least, this evidence can reveal how one important part of the target audience responded to these processions. I will suggest that it offers broader insights too.

The comparative approach is particularly useful for illuminating Seleukid conceptualisations of the geography of their empire. As Sinopoli has argued, empires can only endure if ‘conquered territories are incorporated into the empire’s political, economic, and ideological domain’ which means that ‘individual personal relations

7 See especially Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993, 38f.; Kuhrt and Sherwin-White 1994, 453. See also Briant 1982, 291–330; Briant 1990. The impact of this is seen methodologically in the application of Achaemenid evidence to the Seleukid era on the assumption that continuity is likely, see e.g., Aperghis 2004, 2, 7, 263. The continuity-change framework is perhaps seen most explicitly in Sancisi-Weerdenburg et al. 1994, though it is applied more widely therein as a means of examining the impact of the Achaemenid Empire on local traditions. The contributions to that volume by Briant, Kuhrt and Sherwin-White, Stolper, Invernizzi, Machinist, Burstein, and Wiesehöfer deal most explicitly with the post-Achaemenid period. As a means of assessing the long-term impact of the Achaemenid Empire, the importance of these questions to the aims of the Achaemenid Workshop is obvious.

8 Tuplin 2009. See also Martinez-Sève 2003, 240, which highlights a break in royal ideology and the management of the empire, and Chrubasik 2016, 240–243 who emphasises the fundamentally different relationship between king and elite in the Achaemenid and Seleukid Empires.

9 Athen. 5.194c.

10 Strootman 2019, 174f., n. 4.



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