The cult of Helios in the Seleucid East
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Citer ce document / Cite this document :
doi: https://doi.org/10.3406/topoi.2009.2289
https://www.persee.fr/doc/topoi_1161-9473_2009_num_16_1_2289

Fichier pdf généré le 28/03/2018
THE CULT OF HELIOS IN THE SELEUCID EAST

The coins of the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.) associate him with various celestial attributes and symbols – stars at the ends of his diadem ties, a star above his head, or rays about his head. The iconography is considered innovative within the Seleucid tradition, but we can trace certain antecedents in the Seleucid east. Our purpose here is to develop the background – especially the Seleucid background – for interpreting allusions to Helios on the eastern coinages of Antiochus IV *

I. Early Seleucid testimonia for the cult of Helios in the East

The written record is extremely poor concerning the worship of Greek deities in Seleucid Mesopotamia. And the cult of Helios is only rarely attested by eastern Hellenistic material sources, whether Greek, Babylonian, or Iranian. The poor survival rate of eastern coins and certain other documents may be responsible, at least in part, for the scanty evidence. The most important example is a set of five inscribed tablets found at Persepolis, which were presumably affixed to altars. One of the tablets names Helios; the other four are inscribed in the names of Zeus Megistos, Athena Basileia, Artemis, and Apollo (Figs. 1-3). Louis Robert referred to a magnificent script of the early Hellenistic period 1. Josef Wiesehöfer proposed a date in the late fourth century, under Peukestas 2. The tablets were formally

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* This paper partly draws on presentations made at two international conferences, Networks in the Greek World, Rethymnon 26-28 May 2006, and Royal Cult and Emperor Worship, Athens 1-2 November 2007. We express our sincere thanks to Andreas Blasius, Arthur Houghton, Oliver D. Hoover, and Vito Messina for reading drafts of an earlier version of this paper and offering their comments. Any remaining errors of interpretation are entirely our responsibility.

2. Wiesehöfer, 1994, p. 72-73 and 89.

Topoi 16 (2009) p. 19-42
published by Filippo Canali de Rossi, who dated them to Alexander’s lifetime. The archaeological context of this major discovery has yet to be reported. Thus the only elements available to us for dating the tablets are the Greek inscriptions giving the names of the divinities.

Modern scholars since Robert seem to overestimate palaeographical evidence for the dating of these monuments, ignoring the chronological implications of the religious composition of this pantheon. Of the five divinities named on these altar-tablets, only two (or perhaps three) were strongly associated with Alexander. Athena, patroness of his eastern expedition, was portrayed on the obverse of his gold staters. Alexander claimed to be the son of Zeus and honored the god on the reverse of his silver coinage – borrowing, however, the image of Ba’al of Tarsus, an early indication of his penchant for cultural blending. Alexander’s relation to Artemis is especially connected with one particular epithet of the goddess: Artemis Tauropolos. We are informed by Diodorus that Alexander expressed his willingness to reconstruct the temple of the goddess at Amphipolis; the goddess followed Alexander’s army in the eastern anabasis and was praised as theos enorkos of the Macedonian kings, military leaders, and soldiers. On his arrival in Ephesus, Alexander also offered to restore the temple of Artemis Ephesia, which had burned in 356, on the condition that he could inscribe his name there, but the Ephesians refused his proposal. Ephippos reports that Alexander often dressed in the costume of Artemis, in addition to impersonating Ammon, Hermes, and Heracles, but many modern scholars question the veracity of this claim. Alexander’s supposed devotion to Helios is highly specific to a particular context: he reportedly credited the sun god for his victory at the battle of the Hydaspes, offering his post-battle sacrifices only to Helios. The historicity of this episode is doubtful, since it is not mentioned by Alexander’s contemporaries but only by

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4. Diodorus 18.4-5.
5. OGIS 226 = IvPerg 13; OGIS 229 = ISmyrna 573; ITheangela 8; SEG 51, 928; Launey 1987, p. 911, 912, 914, 915, 916, 936-938 for dedications of Macedonian soldiers to the goddess. This list is not exhaustive; a list of occurrences of Artemis Tauropolos in Hellenistic inscriptions is to be found in Psoma et al. 2008, p. 197, n. 44-48. The authors would like to thank Sélène Psoma for discussing this topic and providing a draft of the relative chapter before the publication of the book.
7. Ath. 12, 537e (FGrHist 126 F 5).
8. Diod. 17.89.3; Curt. 9.1.1. Additionally, Philostratus, V4 2.24, reports that golden images of Alexander and bronze images of Porus were dedicated in the temple of the Sun at Tuxila.
much later writers. As for Apollo, so important to Philip II, he is scarcely to be associated with Alexander.

In contrast, four of the deities named on the altar-tablets are the principal dynastic gods of the Seleucids. Various myths linking Zeus to the city foundations of Seleucus I illustrate how the king appropriated the god as his personal protector. Mastrocinque has suggested that this Seleucid Zeus probably had a cultural function, to associate and assimilate the various sky gods, storm gods, and mountain gods of the many Syro-Palestinian and Mesopotamian cultures within Seleucus’ kingdom. Seleucus erected a marble statue of Athena at Antioch to meet the cultic needs of Athenian colonists transplanted from Antigonea to the new city. He showed his devotion to Apollo with a lavish dedication of gold and silver vessels in the sanctuary of Didymaean Apollo, including a rhyton inscribed for Artemis. And he established the cult of Apollo in Syria, building a lavish temple in the grove of Daphne and adorning it with a chryselephantine statue commissioned from the celebrated sculptor Bryaxis.

These same four gods – Zeus, Athena, Apollo, and Artemis – are the principal deities represented on early Seleucid coinage. Seleucus continued to strike coinage of Alexander type, featuring Athena on the obverse of the gold staters and Zeus (either Aetophorus or Nicephorus) on the reverse of the tetradrachms. This divine pair received new numismatic honors as patrons of the victory at Ipsus, with Zeus now occupying the obverse of the elephant chariot silver coinage of Seleucia on the Tigris, Susa, and Bactrian mints, and Athena driving the elephants on the reverse. The very rare associated gold staters replaced Zeus and Athena with Apollo and Artemis. Antiochus I introduced the Apollo on omphalos device as the standard reverse type of Seleucid silver coinage, while continuing to portray Apollo and/or his attributes, Zeus, Athena,

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11. Malalas 201.
12. Welles 1934, no. 5.
14. Houghton and Lorber 2002, nos. 130-133, 155-159, 177-180, 259-263, 272-283. For additional types of Seleucus I honoring these two deities, see nos. 32-34, 148-150, 187 (Zeus); and nos. 15-17, 125-129, 181-182, 303 (Athena).
15. Houghton and Lorber 2002, nos. 163, 257. For additional types of Seleucus I honoring Apollo, see nos. 15-20, 112-113.
and Artemis on a variety of other coin issues. The correspondence between the Seleucid dynastic gods and the pantheon of the altar-tablets suggests that the latter should be dated to the early Seleucid period.

The Persepolis altar-tablets represent an important clue that Greco-Iranian syncretism should be understood as an early phenomenon: Zeus Megistos is the Greek form of Ahura Mazda; Athena Basileia and Artemis are the two Greek goddesses assimilated to the great Iranian goddess Anāhita; while Apollo and Helios are, of course, the interpretatio Graeca of Mithras, the Iranian sun god. (Apollo and Mithras had already been associated in the fourth century B.C., much farther west, at Xanthos). The choice of the five Greek divinities thus seems to correspond to the three principal deities evoked in the royal Achaemenid inscriptions after the reign of Artaxerxes II: Ahura Mazda, Anāhita, and Mithras.

Apart from the altar-tablet, the only allusions to Helios in the eastern sources are of a numismatic-iconographic nature. There is a cluster in the early


17. For the use of this epithet in the Greek sources, see NILSSON 1950, no 117 (cult in Delos); and COOK 1965, p. 956 (in Pergamum), 807 (in Tegea), 885 and 983 (in Palmyra); ROSCHER 1978, II.2, col. 2549-2553. The cult of Zeus Megistos is also attested in Dura-Europos where his temple was built during the Seleucid period, see DOWNEY 1988, p. 76-86; DOWNEY 1985, p. 111-129; DOWNEY 1993, p. 169-193. The epithet Megistos is closely connected with certain Semitic deities and especially with the God of Israel. It is also attested in the Roman form of the principal deity of the pantheon: Jupiter Optimus Maximus, see the example from Spain, ABASCAL and ALFÖLDY 1998, p. 157-168.

18. The epithet Basileia is attached, in the Greek context, to the name of Hera, see SOKOLOWSKI 1969, no 151 B 5 (a fourth-century inscription with the name of Hera Argeia Heleia Basileia). For the significance of the Greek cult epithet in general, see BRULÉ 1998, p. 13-34, and PARKER, 2003, p. 173-183.

19. For the cult of Mithras in the Hellenistic period, see BOYCE and GRENET 1991; also, GRENET 2001, p. 35-58.

20. See especially the famous trilingual inscription from the sanctuary of Leto, METZGER 1974, p. 82-93; LAROCHE 1974, p. 115-125; and DUPONT-SOMMER 1974, p. 132-149. For an analysis of the association between Apollo and Mithras (Hšatrapti), see DUPONT-SOMMER 1976, p. 648-660. STEELE 2002, p. 583-588, tentatively proposed an early assimilation between Helios (or Apollo-Helios) and Shamash. This highly speculative thesis fails to define convincingly an early syncretic pattern between Helios and Shamash that could have introduced the later pattern between Apollo and Mithras.

21. For these inscriptions, see BRIANT 2002, p. 250-254.
Hellenistic period. A radiate facing bust appears on the reverse of « Alexanders » in the names of Philip III Arridaeus and Alexander minted at Babylon during Seleucus’ first satrapy (Fig. 9) 22. The same radiate bust appears on the reverse of some « Alexanders », trophy coins, and elephant biga coins struck at Susa under Seleucus I as king (Figs. 10-11) 23. A star symbol was employed at an uncertain Babylonian mint, on « Philips » of Seleucus’ first satrapy and on « Alexanders » in Seleucus’ own name, and also on Babylonian lion staters under Seleucus’ I first and second satrapies (Fig. 12) 24. The Susian trophy coins, including small denominations that might have reached people of relatively modest status, seem to have circulated almost exclusively in Persis, where the altar-tablet of Helios was unearthed, while the lion staters were produced specifically for use by the native Babylonians 25. Thus a part of this early solar imagery appears to have been targeted at non-Greek communities, who undoubtedly saw references to their own solar gods – Shamash in Babylonia, Mithras in Persis.

On all these coins the celestial symbols occupy a discreet position on the reverse and could be considered as control marks whose fundamental purpose was administrative rather than iconographic or cultic. It is more difficult to deny the cultic significance of Bactrian gold staters and silver drachms of Antiochus II with the standard Seleucid reverse type of Apollo seated on the omphalos, but with the addition of a star in the field above the arrow (Fig. 13) 26. These Bactrian

22. Price 1991, no P204-206 (for Philip) and 3697-3698 (for Alexander). The Helios busts fall near the end of the Babylonian coinage in the name of Philip III and overlap the revival of coinage in the name of Alexander, establishing a date c. 317/316 B.C.

23. Houghton and Lorber 2002, no 165, 169, 173.16, 174.9, 177.1, 179; Kritt 1997, p. 7-8, (Al. 28-42), 19 (Tr. 107-110), 20-21 (El.1-12), and 52 for the conjunction of this symbol on all three of the major Susian coin types.

24. Houghton and Lorber 2002, Ad39.8-9, no 68, 69.2-3, 88.7b; for the pre-Seleucid lion staters, Nicolet-Pierre 1999, no 8.7 and 16. The former, at least, is datable to Seleucus’ first satrapy, see Iossif and Lorber 2007. Iossif and Lorber 2007 suggest that Houghton and Lorber 2002, no 88.7 may date to the early years of Seleucus’ kingship rather than his second satrapy. The divine symbolism of the star on Houghton and Lorber 2002, no 88.7b is assured by the repertory of other symbols that appear in the same position on other closely related (control- and die-linked) lion staters: a crescent, symbol of Selene or Artemis; an ivy leaf, symbol of Dionysus; and a laurel leaf, symbol of Apollo (Houghton and Lorber 2002, n° 88.7a, 88.7c, 88.7d). The separate symbols for Helios and Apollo would seem to indicate that they were not assimilated at this date at Babylon, just as they were not assimilated on the Persepolis altar-tablets.

25. For the use of lion staters during the pre-Seleucid and Seleucid periods, see Iossif and Lorber 2007.

26. Houghton and Lorber 2002, no 616-617 for gold staters and 618-619 for drachms. We do not intend to enter the polemic concerning the attribution of these coins: Aï Khanoum for Houghton and Lorber; Bactra for the French bibliography (cf. Gerin
issues represent the earliest appearance on Seleucid coinage of a celestial motif in association with Apollo. They anticipate specific imagery of Antiochus IV, who associated stars both with Apollo and with his own royal portrait (Fig. 14-15) 27. Commenting on the coin types of Antiochus IV, Marianne Bergmann characterized the depiction of Apollo with a star above his head as corresponding to old Greek representations of Apollo-Helios, an early syncretism first attested at the beginning of the fifth century B.C. 28. The same interpretation is obviously applicable to the Bactrian issues of Antiochus II, which also portray Apollo-Helios.

Still another eastern image of Helios comes from a religious site in Bactria: an interesting round medallion unearthed in the southern sacristy of the Temple with Indented Niches in Aï Khanoum, showing a radiate facing bust, star, and moon above the main scene (Fig. 16) 29. The radiate bust on this medallion is identical in form to the radiate busts that appear on the Babylonian and Susian coins cited above. The cultural context of this object was a Greek community in close contact with Bactrians, as may be inferred from the syncretic architecture of the temple with its tripartite cella. Considered together, this round medallion and the Bactrian coins of Antiochus II may indicate the existence of a well-established celestial-solar cult in that remote province, with which Apollo was associated.

Against this scanty evidence for the cult of Helios in the east in the early Seleucid period, we note that contemporary evidence for his cult in the Seleucid west is even scantier. The Persepolis altar-tablets may have a western equivalent in an inscription from Aeolian Aegae that names the same pantheon of Zeus, Athena,
Artemis, and Apollo, omitting Helios. This is the only known inscription where these four gods are mentioned together. Although its date is disputed, we believe that the particular composition of the pantheon points to a Seleucid context. The inscription is to be dated to the Seleucid occupation of Aegae and viewed in light of the kingdom-wide policy of a royal pantheon. In this case, the absence of Helios from this inscription, as opposed to the Persepolis altar-tablets, is significant for the purpose of this paper.

Syrian archaeological and epigraphic remains led Henri Seyrig to the conclusion that there were no solar cults in Hellenistic Syria except for those introduced by Arab infiltration in the latter years of the Seleucid dynasty; however, the Seleucid period probably saw the beginnings of assimilative processes that resulted in the syncretic solar cults of Roman imperial times. Third-century coinage from the Seleucid west affords no direct representations of the sun god, and just five cases in which stars were employed as subsidiary symbols. In only one of these cases, a tetradrachm of Antiochus Hierax from Parium, is the star actually positioned so as to comment on a deity: an elaborate star, really a small solar disk with eight rays, shines above Apollo’s arrow, designating an Apollo-Helios as on the Bactrian issues of Antiochus II.

There are no further examples of solar imagery on Seleucid coins until the second century. When such imagery reappears in the reign of Seleucus IV, it is clearly part of an iconographic program directed by the court, ultimately with significance for royal cult.

30. Malay 1983, p. 349-355. The fragmentary text is a contract given under the form of hypomnema. The four gods are invoked at the end of the inscription, in the curse sentence in case of non-respect of the clauses.

31. For Savalli-Lestrade 1992, p. 227, the document is to be dated to the reign of Antiochus II (although the possibility of Antiochus I is to be considered); Lund 1992, dated the inscription to the reign of Lysimachus or Antigonus. Descat 2003, p. 160-165, argues for a terminus ante quem of 310-300 based on palaeographical elements. None of these studies takes into account the comparison with the Persepolis altars and the composition of the early Seleucid pantheon.


33. Houghton and Lorber 2002, no. 1.2 (Pergamum – Seleucus I); no. 307.2 (Pergamum – Antiochus I); no. 543.4 (Ephesus – Antiochus II); no. 556 (unattributed issue of western Asia Minor – Antiochus II); no. 835.6 (Parium – Antiochus Hierax).
II. Solar imagery of Seleucus IV and Antiochus IV

A solar deity first appeared as a full-fledged Seleucid coin type in the reign of Seleucus IV Philopator (187-175 B.C.) \(^{34}\). The mint at Seleucia on the Tigris issued an important royal bronze coinage in two denominations, displaying a facing bust of Helios on the obverse, radiate, with the anastolé above his forehead. The larger denomination featured a Nike reverse (Fig. 17); the smaller paired the radiate bust with a tripod (Fig. 18) \(^{35}\). While there is not always a clear association between the obverse and reverse types of Seleucid bronzes, the pairing of the Helios bust with a tripod suggests that once again we may be seeing a fusion of Helios and Apollo. We take it as self-evident that these bronze coins attest to the existence (or introduction) of a solar cult at Seleucia on the Tigris in the reign of Seleucus IV. The iconography is purely Greek and accordingly we use the name Helios, but the true identity of this god in a Babylonian context is a matter for further discussion.

The Helios bust bronzes of Seleucus IV may have had recent antecedents on seals of Seleucia on the Tigris. Among the clay seal impressions from Seleucia are two that show a male head with a large, staring eye, the anastolé rising above his forehead, and six rays emanating from his hair, but no diadem (Figs. 19-20). These Seleucian seal impressions do not come from a dated context, however Vito Messina suggested that they bear the portrait of the prince Seleucus, the future Seleucus IV, in his quality as heir-designate after c. 193 \(^{36}\). If Messina is correct in his interpretation, the seal impressions not only attest to an official cult of Helios at Seleucia on the Tigris during the latter reign of Antiochus III, but also represent the earliest use of solar imagery in connection with a member of the Seleucid royal house.

Helios and Apollo were explicitly associated in the reign of Seleucus’ younger brother and successor, Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.). An issue of tetradrachms from Seleucia on the Tigris shows Apollo in his usual pose, seated on the omphalos, examining an arrow and resting his left hand on his grounded bow. A radiate, facing bust appears as an adjunct symbol in the left field, outside the legend on one specimen (Fig. 21), but more commonly inside the legend, above the arrow or before Apollo’s face \(^{37}\). The Seleucia mint did not normally

\(^{34}\) Two possibly earlier instances are listed by Houghton and Lorber 2002, no. 408 and 408A. Neither can be securely dated. The former is not certainly Seleucid; the latter, issued in the name of a King Antiochus, is of distinctly eastern fabric.


\(^{36}\) Messina 2001, p. 9-23.

\(^{37}\) Helios outside legend: Hoover 2006, no. 373. Helios inside legend: Le Rider 1965, pl. xxv, G and H. The same facing bust of Helios appears as a countermark on an Ecbatana bronze coin of Antiochus IV with the types Apollo/elephant (Houghton
place adjunct symbols on its precious metal coinage. It is therefore evident that the bust of Helios had special significance. Even more plainly than the association of a star with Apollo, this pairing indicates that Apollo is here presented as a solar god.

Solar or celestial imagery was more extensively associated with the king himself. The divine pretensions of Antiochus IV have attracted considerable comment. We intend to reexamine the numismatic evidence in a forthcoming paper. Here we shall merely mention that Antiochus was occasionally shown with a star above his head and very frequently with the rays of Helios (Figs. 22-23). The radiate portrait is typical of his bronze coinage, especially in the western part of the kingdom. But both types of portrait also occur on bronze coins of Seleucia on the Tigris. In addition, Susa produced a single bronze issue with the radiate portrait of Antiochus IV. The radiate portrait was also a device of official Seleucid seals: Orchoi (Uruk), a city probably administratively dependent on Seleucia, has yielded numerous seal impressions with a radiate, draped portrait of Antiochus IV (Fig. 24).

38. The only previous instance is a flower that appeared on an exceptionally artistic tetradrachm issue of Antiochus III struck on his return from his eastern expedition, see Houghton and Lorber 2002, no. 1165.1.


41. Iossif and Lorber 2009.


43. Houghton, Lorber and Hoover 2008, no. 1535; Le Rider 1965, no. 60.

44. Vito Messina compared the seal impressions found in Seleucia and Uruk and concluded that the city of Orchoi (Uruk) was under the direct control of the eastern Seleucid capital, because the excavations at Uruk yielded many seal impressions identical to those of Seleucia, struck from seals created and used in Seleucia and then circulated south to Uruk, see Messina 2005. (Our thanks to the author for providing us a draft of the paper). Twenty-two of these seal impressions with the radiate portrait of Antiochus IV are published by Lindström 2003, no. 3-1; 76-1;
There remains one other eastern coinage of Antiochus IV with prominent celestial imagery: the silver series attributed by Otto Mørkholm to a new mint at Antioch on the Persian Gulf. The star-above-head motif occurs on two tetradrachm emissions, and on one of them it is doubled above the head of Apollo (Fig. 22) 45. As noted above, Bergmann interpreted this latter star as a solar symbol marking Apollo as Apollo-Helios, but the star on the obverse ensures that this syncretic deity is relevant to the interpretation of the king’s divinity 46. The next coinage of Antioch on the Persian Gulf, according to Mørkholm, comprises tetradrachms and drachms with a radiate portrait of Antiochus IV 47. The tetradrachms in question are quite significant, as they are the only tetradrachms of Antiochus IV to carry his radiate portrait (Fig. 23).

The conventional view is that the mint at Antioch on the Orontes developed a program for proclaiming the divinity of Antiochus IV on coinage, and that the Antiochene program was echoed more or less fully at other mints 48. Bergmann, however, explored possible eastern sources for the radiate crown, noting the high position of solar deities in ancient Mesopotamian and Hittite pantheons, the comparison of rulers to sun gods in Sumerian and Akkadian texts, the representation of Assyrian kings with solar attributes, and the inclusion of a winged solar disk in the written form of the Hittite royal title 49. The Persepolis altar-tablets and early Seleucid solar images in the east must surely reflect Macedonian awareness of important native sun gods. Our list of Hellenistic testimonia – the early Seleucid allusions to Helios or Apollo-Helios in Persis, Babylonia, Elymais, and Bactria; the appearance of a solar god as the obverse type of a major bronze issue of Seleucus

78-1 ; 90-1 ; 101-1 ; 102-1 ; 104-1 ; 106-1 ; 107-1 ; 241-1 ; 243-1 ; 249-1 ; 250-1 ; 259-1 ; 285-1 ; 287-1 ; 288-1 ; 293-1 ; 296-1 ; 301-1 ; 308-1 ; 309-1. There is also a twenty-third impression from the same seal in the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (inv. no VA 6047); see PLANTZOS 2002, p. 33-39. For a general approach to sealing practices in Hellenistic Babylonia, see WALLENFELS 2000, p. 333-348.


47. MÔRKHOLM 1970, no A4-P4 and a1-p1 through a9-p11; HOUGHTON 1983, no 1089-1091; HOOVER 2006, no 375 (tetradrachm clearly showing the radiate crown); cf. HOUGHTON, LORBER and HOOVER 2008, no 1519-1522, there attributed to an uncertain eastern mint.

48. MÔRKHOLM 1963, p. 57-74; BUNGE 1975, p. 164-172. Mørkholm associated a part of the eastern coinage with the final campaign of Antiochus IV. For Bunge, the special iconography and/or epithets marked the king as kîstes of Ptolemais (Ake) (re-founded as an Antioch), Antioch on the Persian Gulf, and Ecbatana (re-founded as Epiphanieia), see BUNGE 1975, p. 177-178, 187.

IV at Seleucia on the Tigris; and the representation of Apollo-Helios on certain eastern tetrachroms of Antiochus IV – suggests that the portrayal of Antiochus IV with celestial attributes could be seen, at least in the east, as a culmination. Eastern religion, if not the sole source of the iconography of the deified Antiochus Epiphanes, was at least a contributing source: the representations were chosen for their ability to convey the king’s divinity to his Babylonian and Iranian subjects, as well as to those in the western Seleucid kingdom.

The solar iconography of the deified Antiochus IV was a unifying factor, yet it could not conceal a major bifurcation of his western and eastern coinages. The figure of Zeus, so prominent in hellenized Syria and on the quasi-municipal coinages of western cities, is completely absent from eastern coinage. Though Zeus replaced Apollo as the reverse type of Antiochus’ western tetradrachms, the eastern mints all retained the long-established image of Apollo on his omphalos on the reverse of their silver coinage. In succeeding reigns as well, the eastern mints, with the sometime exception of Seleucia, continued to ignore the personal types of the king in favor of Apollo. This conservatism may have been motivated in part by a concern to retain a familiar image, so as to ensure acceptance of the currency in weakly monetized provinces. But we believe it was determined primarily by oriental cultural and religious traditions.

III. The Seleucid Apollo

The figure of Apollo seated on the omphalos, holding an arrow in his right hand and resting his left hand on a bow, is an iconographic type that occurs only in the Seleucid kingdom (Fig. 25)\(^{50}\). This familiar image, introduced to the Seleucid tetradrachm by Antiochus I, was supplemented by variations employed on other coin denominations and/or in other reigns. The type of Apollo standing, holding the arrow before him and resting his other hand on his bow, first appeared on bronzes of Antiochus I at Seleucia on the Tigris and remained a popular type for the bronzes of his successors, as well as for gold staters and silver drachms of Seleucus II (Fig. 26)\(^{51}\). Bronzes of Antiochus I from Ecbatana also portray the god standing, but holding the bow before him and the arrow by his side\(^{52}\). Antiochus II introduced two new types: Apollo seated on the omphalos, holding an arrow and resting his elbow on a cithara (on bronzes of Antioch); and Apollo standing with his foot resting on the omphalos, holding a bow and arrow (on bronzes of

\(^{50}\) It might be objected that Nicocles’ coinage from Paphos introduced the same type before the Seleucids. For Panagiotis Iossif, the Cypriot issue should be considered a modern forgery, as argued in a forthcoming paper; see Iossif forthcoming.


\(^{52}\) Houghton and Lorber 2002, no 411-414; Newell 1938, 520-522.
The personal type of Seleucus II was a figure of Apollo standing before a tripod, resting his left elbow on the lebes and holding an arrow in his right hand. Seleucus III briefly experimented with his own personal type, adapting the emblem of his father by replacing the tripod with a low column. The last addition to this repertory of types came in the reign of Antiochus IV, when Apollo was depicted striding to the right, holding his bow before him in shooting position and reaching over his shoulder to draw an arrow from his quiver (Fig. 27).

What all these type have in common is that they present Apollo in his aspect as archer, as Apollo Toxotes. This theme is overwhelmingly present in Seleucid depictions of Apollo, which only rarely portray him as Citharoedes. The choice of Apollo Toxotes served to legitimize the Seleucids as the successors of the Achaemenid kings. Achaemenid inscriptions invariably praise the prowess of the Great King as a bowman. Achaemenid coins depict him shooting or holding a bow, imagery that inspired the popular Greek name for these coins, toxotai (Fig. 28). The bow was, in fact, a symbol of divine kingship for the Iranians, and its association with sovereignty can be traced back in ancient Mesopotamia to Elamite and Assyrian origins. The survival of this tradition beyond the Seleucid period is attested by the reverse type of Arsacid drachms, which also show a seated archer (Fig. 29).

As the son of an Iranian princess, Antiochus I was perhaps especially sympathetic to eastern cultural traditions. His fourteen-year reign in the east as his father’s coregent will have deepened his exposure and brought home the practicalities of placating the subject populations. Seleucus Nicator’s early use of solar imagery in the east suggests that he too was attuned to the multiethnic

55. Houghton, Lorber and Hoover 2008, 1410, 1423, 1436, 1504. This type was used mainly in the west, its easternmost appearance occurring at Nisibis.
56. For a detailed analysis on the motives that led Antiochus I to choose Apollo as the archegetes and the numismatic trademark of the dynasty, cf. Iossif 2007 forthcoming.
57. The inscriptions from Behistun and Naqsh-i Rustam constitute a kind of dogmatic text on the Achaemenid kingship in which the king is praised as the ideal bowman: Briant 2002, p. 210-213 (with a translation of the Naqsh-i Rustam text in p. 212, § 8h). See also p. 213-214 for a short discussion on the archer king and the different types of the king archer on Achaemenid reliefs and coinage.
character of his territories. Indeed, this may explain why he was the only one of Alexander’s successors to remain married to his Iranian wife and to make her the matriarch of a Hellenistic dynasty. Still, it was Antiochus, not Seleucus, who found a way to inscribe the Seleucids in the eastern tradition of divine kingship by claiming descent from Apollo and portraying him as the divine archer. At the same time, as the patron of Greek colonization Apollo spoke to the Macedonian and Greek immigrants who peopled the new foundations of the Seleucid kingdom.

Seleucus’ own devotion to Apollo scarcely foreshadows the multivalence of the dynastic Apollo. The early inscriptions from Didyma do not mention the king’s descent from the god but instead seem to reflect the ordinary piety and benefactions expected of a Hellenistic king vis-à-vis one of the great pan-Hellenic sanctuaries. The first explicit reference at Miletus/Didyma to the divine filiation of the Seleucids belongs to the reign of Seleucus II. Inscriptions from Ilium may provide earlier allusions to Apollo as Archegetes and as a Seleucid ancestor, but their dating is controversial. The famous cult statue at the sanctuary of Daphne, commissioned by Seleucus I, portrayed Apollo as Citharoedes, not Toxotes. And while Apollo occupied a fairly prominent place on coins of Seleucus I, only his head appeared.

These observations give us a new context for considering the celestial and Apollonian iconography of Antiochus IV: the bifurcation of coin types under this reign recognized a fundamental cultural difference. In the hellenized parts of the

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60. * DIDidyma 479 = OGIS 213 = BRINGMANN and V. STEUBEN 1995, 281 E1; DIDidyma 480 = BRINGMANN and V. STEUBEN 1995, 281 E2; DIDidyma 424 = OGIS 214 = BRINGMANN and V. STEUBEN 1995, 280 E. For another possible early association of Seleucus I to Apollo, cf. I. Erythrai 205, ll. 74-76 (the dating of the inscription is quite problematic).

61. * DIDidyma 493 = OGIS 227 = BRINGMANN and V. STEUBEN 1995, 282 E, ll. 5-6 reference to the suggeneia between the dynasty and Apollo.

62. * OGIS 212 = KOTSIDU 2000, 206 E and OGIS 219 = KOTSIDU 2000, 221 E. The arguments in favour of a high or low dating of the last inscription were exposed in an exhaustive appendix in MA 1999a, p. 254-259 and in an extensive article by the same author in MA 1999b, p. 81-88; Ma’s preference goes to a dating under Antiochus I.


64. On bronzes of Antioch (HOUGHTON and LORBER 2002, 15-20; NEWELL 1941, 911-922), of Uncertain Mint 8 in Babylonia or Mesopotamia (HOUGHTON and LORBER 2002, 112-113; NEWELL 1941, 884-885), and of Seleucia on the Tigris (HOUGHTON and LORBER 2002, 148-150; NEWELL 1941, 99A-B, NEWELL 1938, 106-108); and on gold staters of Susa (HOUGHTON and LORBER 2002, 163; NEWELL 1938, 329) and of a Bactrian mint (HOUGHTON and LORBER 2002, 257; NEWELL 1938, 331).
west. Antiochus could promote the cult of Zeus, who for the Greeks was the patron of kingship. But in the east that same role belonged to the Seleucid Apollo.

IV. Conclusion

The evidence traced here reveals an evolving and complex policy of the Seleucids in relation to eastern cultures and religions. During his first satrapy, Seleucus acknowledged a solar god who could be identified by his Babylonian and Iranian subjects with their own native sun gods. As king, Seleucus promoted a royal pantheon consisting of Zeus, Athena, Apollo, and Artemis. But when altars were erected at Persepolis for the worship of this pantheon, Helios was added to the quartet, a seeming admission of the essential importance of a solar divinity in this eastern context. Helios had long been assimilated to Apollo in Greece, and Apollo had already been associated with Mithras in fourth-century Lycia. The presence of both Helios and Apollo in the Persepolis pantheon may express two aspects of Mithras. The entire Persepolis quintet invites interpretation in terms of the Iranian triad of Ahura Madza, Anāhita, and Mithras.

Antiochus I introduced a new aspect with his creation of the Seleucid Apollo, whose bow and arrow evoked the eastern tradition of divine kingship. The assimilation of Helios to Apollo, already established in Greece, was reaffirmed by the association of a star with the Seleucid Apollo on certain Bactrian coins of Antiochus II, meaning that solar or celestial qualities were involved in the divine legitimation of the Seleucid kings. This, too, was in accordance with eastern tradition. In Near Eastern civilizations the star is always connected with the notions of divinity and royalty. This is not the place to furnish an exhaustive account of the association, but we can provide the most significant examples. In the cuneiform scripts, the word ‘god’ was rendered by a star and the name of a particular divinity was preceded by a star symbol (\textit{dingir}) 65. The names of deified kings were also preceded by the star symbol, e.g., the name of the deified king Naram-Sin of Akkad in the inscription on the famous Louvre stela (Sb 4) or in the legend on the seal of a royal official from Girsu 66. The association of the star with divine epiphany is also illustrated by Assyrian cultic scenes: the worshipper is shown in front of the cultic symbols of one god, while the entire scene is dominated by the presence of a star 67. In the neo-Assyrian empire, the royal power – of divine origin – which inspired fear and panic among the enemies was depicted as a star-like symbol, a kind of nimbus emanating from the king’s head: it is the \textit{melammu},


which rendered the king beautiful and terrifying at the same moment 68. Ishtar, the great Mesopotamian warrior-goddess, the šarrat šamê u kakkabāni of the Akkadian texts (Queen of the Heavens and the Stars), is depicted associated with the star, in a shining wreath or in the middle of a nimbus of stars 69. The goddess Anāhita is also depicted encircled by the rayed nimbus on the Achaemenid seal from Gorgippa (Anapa) 70. In this perspective, we should also consider the Iranian notion of *farnah/ Xvarənah, the central term designating the royal Achaemenid legitimacy and the creative force of the gods 71. In the Jewish religious tradition, the star is again connected with God, kings and divinity 72.

Seleucid images of Helios and of Apollo Toxotes thus tapped into a nexus of meanings that linked the legitimacy of the Seleucid kings with eastern solar gods, eastern archer gods, and the Greek Apollo, their divine ancestor and the patron of Greek colonization of the east. This network did not develop further during the reigns of Seleucus II, Seleucus III, and Antiochus III, even though two of these kings undertook heroic campaigns in the east. However Seleucus IV showed a new interest in solar imagery, and Antiochus IV explicitly appropriated the complex symbolism of Apollo-Helios for his own epiphany.

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72. Among the multiple references to the star, see Isaiah 60, 1-3, Malachi 3, 20 (in these two sources, the God of Jerusalem is described as a « being of light », closely related to the sun), Ezekiel 1, 27-28 or II. Macc. II 9.10. For the solar aspects of Yahweh, see Niehr 1990, p. 150-161.
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Fig. 1 – Tablet from an altar inscribed in the name of Helios, Persepolis (photo: courtesy F. Assar).

Fig. 2 – Tablet from an altar inscribed in the name of Zeus Megistos, Persepolis (photo: courtesy F. Assar).

Fig. 3 – Tablet from an altar inscribed in the name of Apollo, Persepolis (photo: courtesy F. Assar).

Fig. 4 – Gold stater of Seleucus I with Athena head/Nike, Babylon, SC 81.5.

Fig. 5 – Silver « Alexander » of Seleucus I with Herakles head/Zeus Aetophorus, Ecbatana, SC 204.3.
Fig. 6 – Silver tetradrachm of Seleucus I with Zeus/elephant quadriga, Seleucia on the Tigris, SC 130.33a var.

Fig. 7 – Gold stater of Seleucus I with Apollo head/elephant quadriga, Susa, SC 163.

Fig. 8 – Silver tetradrachm of Antiochus I with Antiochus I's head/Apollo on omphalos, Smyrna, SC 311.1.

Fig. 9 – Silver « Alexander » issued in the name of Philip III Arrhidaeus, Babylon, Price P204.

Fig. 10 – Silver « Alexander » of Seleucus I with Herakles head/Zeus Aetophorus, Susa, SC 165.1.

Fig. 11 – Silver tetradrachm of Seleucus I, « trophy » coin, Susa, SC 173.16.

Fig. 12 – Silver shekel, « lion stater », Babylon II, SC 88.7b.

Fig. 13 – Gold stater of Antiochus II with Antiochus II head/Apollo on omphalos, Aï Khanoum, SC 617.

Fig. 14 – Silver tetradrachm of Antiochus IV, probably Seleucia in Pieria, SC 1424.

Fig. 15 – Silver tetradrachm of Antiochus IV, « Persian Gulf » mint, SC 1517.
Fig. 16 – Oscillum from Ai Khanoum, catalogue of the exhibition Afghanistan : les trésors retrouvés, cit. n. 29 supra.

Fig. 17 – Bronze coin of Seleucus IV, denomination C, Seleucia on the Tigris, SC 1336.2.

Fig. 18 – Bronze coin of Seleucus IV, denomination D, Seleucia on the Tigris, SC 1337.2.

Fig. 19 – Clay seal, Seleucia on the Tigris, Se 31 : S7-3330.

Fig. 20 – Clay seal, Seleucia on the Tigris, Se 30 : S7-3331.

Fig. 21 – Silver tetradrachm of Antiochus IV with Antiochus’ head/Apollo on omphalos, Seleucia on the Tigris, SC 1505.2 (Hoover 2006, no 373=AHNS 340)

Fig. 22 – Silver tetradrachm of Antiochus IV, « Persian Gulf » mint, SC 1517.
Fig. 23 – Silver tetradrachm of Antiochus IV, « Persian Gulf » mint, SC 1519.2.

Fig. 24 – Clay seal from Orchoi (Uruk), Lindstrom 2003, nº 3-1.

Fig. 25 – Silver tetradrachm of Antiochus I with Antiochus' head/Apollo on omphalos, Seleucia on the Tigris, SC 379.3a.

Fig. 26 – Gold stater of Seleucus II with Seleucus' head/standing Apollo with bow, Unattributed Western issue, SC 720.

Fig. 27 – Bronze coin of Antiochus IV, Nisibis, SC 1504.1.

Fig. 28 – Achaemenid siglos, type I.

Fig. 29 – Silver drachm of the Parthian kingdom, Arsaces II, Sellwood 1971, 6-1.