

CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO

The Seleucid Kingdom

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1 Introduction

The death of Alexander in Babylon in 323 BC left a vacuum not only in the leadership of his huge army, but also in the leadership of Macedonia, since he had no obvious successor, his still unborn son by his Iranian wife and his mentally handicapped half-brother being the only blood-related options. In this situation, more than a handful of talented and ambitious generals made “agreements,” but actually began to fight each other for territorial gains and, in the end, also for the royal title as the successor of Alexander. It was in these tumultuous circumstances that the Seleucid kingdom was born. One of those generals was Seleucus who in 321/320 BC came to rule Babylonia. Fifteen years later, in 304 BC, after continued fighting, he was able to assume the title of king. In 303 BC he took possession of the regions east of Babylonia, the so-called “upper satrapies,” including Iran and present-day Afghanistan. After the battle of Ipsus in 301 BC and the defeat of Antigonus the One-Eyed, Seleucus’ main rival in Asia, northern Syria fell to him. The Seleucid kingdom, which for periods also included extensive parts of Asia Minor, was by far the largest of the Hellenistic kingdoms. By the mid-3rd century BC, however, Bactria, the easternmost satrapy, had broken away and become an independent Greek kingdom. This was to some extent compensated for in the late 3rd century when one of Seleucus’ successors, Antiochus III (the Great), conquered and took Phoenicia and Palestine from the Ptolemies based in Egypt. From the 2nd century onwards the kingdom gradually shrank in

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size, most notably when the Parthians conquered Mesopotamia. In 64 BC the last Seleucid king, Antiochus XIII, lost his kingdom, at the time comprising only Syria, to the Romans, and a few years later the area became a Roman province.

2 Administration and Royal Economy

The nature of the Seleucid kingdom has been the subject of a large number of scholarly discussions. The traditional view of it as a “Western” kingdom, based on a continuation of Macedonian kingship and firmly rooted in the Greek way of life, was challenged in the late 1980s and 1990s by, e.g., E. Will (1979–82), P. Briant (1990), and A. Kuhrt and S. Sherwin-White (Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993) who claimed that it was an “Eastern” kingdom centered in the Middle East – to a large extent a successor of the Achaemenid empire. A more recent approach argues that this is not an either/or issue. It is now accepted by most scholars that the kingdom cannot be classified as one or the other, for in reality the situation was much more complex (Austin 2003; Hannestad 2004, in press a).

As in the other Hellenistic kingdoms, the administration of the Seleucid kingdom was centered on the king’s court. The highest-ranking group of administrators and officials, the so-called “friends” (*philoi*), was the heart of the power structure in all of the kingdoms. The court was normally located in the palace (or palaces) of the capitals in the kingdom. To the “friends” also belonged the governors of the various provinces. The structure of governance with satrapies as the main units was inherited from the Achaemenids. We have a wealth of royal correspondence from the Seleucid kingdom from which we learn of the administrative procedures involved as decisions taken by the king were executed through a chain of higher- to lower-ranking officials. The central issue, as in all the Hellenistic kingdoms, both for the central administration and local bureaucracy, was clearly to maximize income for the royal treasury.

Rich evidence of the fiscal system has been found in several cities in the kingdom, both ancient ones and new foundations. This consists mainly of sealed bullae (clay docket) that were originally affixed to parchment or papyrus documents or, in Mesopotamia, cuneiform texts with seal impressions. Among the taxes attested is a tax on land and its produce – undoubtedly the largest source of royal income (Aperghis 2004). The salt tax, evidence of which is provided by bullae found, e.g., at Seleucia-on-the-Tigris and Uruk, was also important. From Uruk we also have evidence of a tax on sales of slaves, probably also other types of goods, and on transport on the Euphrates. At Ai Khanoum in northern Afghanistan (ancient Bactria), excavations in the royal or satrapal palace (see below) have revealed part of the treasury where jars containing “drachms,” “silver of high quality,” “olive oil,” and “incense,” to mention some of the best attested products, were stored. On the jars we find Greek inscriptions in ink with information on their contents and volume or weight (Rapin 1983).

Economic transactions, although based on the tax-collecting system of the Achaemenid Empire, saw a move towards monetization, undoubtedly brought about by the Greek and Macedonian conquerors. During the lifetime of Alexander, only one mint, at Babylon, was established east of the Euphrates, immediately after the conquest. There huge quantities of Alexander coins were produced. With a few exceptions, the Greek coinage tradition became completely dominant. Alexander coins continued to be produced in the early decades of Seleucid reign, but later the Seleucids used the portrait of the reigning king on the obverse of coins, while the reverse shows an incredible wealth of motifs, among them Apollo or Zeus, the tutelary deities of the Seleucids (Mørholm 1991; Houghton and Lorber 2002). Coins in gold, silver, and bronze were produced at mints scattered across the kingdom. Seleucus established a mint at his first capital, Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, and others at Ecbatana (modern Hamadan) and Susa in Iran, all of them very productive. Other important mints included the one at Ai Khanoum in Bactria. After the conquests in the west, mints were established at, e.g., Antioch-on-the-Orontes in Syria and later at Sardis in Lydia (western Turkey). From the 2nd century onward, Antioch was by far the largest mint in the gradually diminishing kingdom. Large emissions of coins were often connected with the kings' military campaigns.

The impact of the Alexander coinage on economic life is reflected in Babylonian administration, where we find cuneiform texts stating prices in "x shekels of silver in staters of Alexander." A text from 321 BC records the wages of workers restoring a temple as "1/3 mina of silver, the weight of 10 staters" (van der Spek 2007). In cuneiform texts from Uruk dated to shortly after 295 BC, prices were given in "Alexander staters in good condition." The impact of the Alexander coinage outside the empire is perhaps best witnessed by the imitations produced in Arabia (Potts 1990, 1991a; Callot 2010; van Alfen 2011), a region in close trading contact with Mesopotamia as well as Egypt and the Mediterranean, reflecting how sociopolitical circumstances influenced old trading networks. Alexander types became the recognized international means of exchange.

3 Cities and Settlements in the Kingdom: A Program of Colonization

Alexander founded a large number of new cities in the territories he conquered, the most famous of which was undoubtedly Alexandria in Egypt. Like Alexander's other successors, Seleucus continued this tradition, founding his first capital in Babylonia and naming it Seleucia-on-the-Tigris after himself. Following the conquest of Syria, Seleucus founded a number of cities there, the most important being the so-called "Tetrapolis," the four cities of Antioch (mod. Antakya, Turkey), Laodikeia (mod. Latakia, Syria), Seleucia-in-Pieria (mod. Çevlik, Turkey) and Apamea (mod. Afamia, Syria), all named after close family members or

himself and situated in the coastal region of northern Syria and the hinterland along the Orontes River. Smaller cities were founded on the main routes heading east (e.g., Kyrrhos and Gindaros) and along the Euphrates (Cohen 2006). This ambitious program, which clearly shows that Seleucus saw the newly won territories as the future center of his kingdom where he wished to make an unprecedented display of wealth and power, changed the physical landscape significantly and represented one of the most impressive and lasting displays of Hellenistic royal power on a landscape (Hannestad in press b). Seleucia-in-Pieria was undoubtedly intended as his western capital, since it was given his own name. Later, Antioch-on-the-Orontes became the capital and would grow to become one of the largest cities in the Hellenistic and Roman world. Many foundations mentioned in the literary sources remain unknown to us, whereas excavations have brought to light other cities of Seleucid origin, the ancient names of which are lost, such as Jebel Khalid in Syria (see below) and Ai Khanoum in Bactria (see below).

Who were the inhabitants of these new cities and how did they interact with the existing populations? That ex-soldiers in the Seleucid armies were settled here cannot be doubted. The conquered territories were to a large extent classified as royal land, and the king had the power to distribute the land as he saw fit. Land allotments (Greek *kleroi*) in and around the new cities were given to soldiers and their families. North and northeast of Damascus, rectangular (96 × 144 meters) Hellenistic land plots have been identified that are closely connected with the Hippodamian layout of the street grid of the city. It is uncertain, however, whether this land division dates to Ptolemaic or Seleucid times (Dodinet et al. 1990).

As Chaniotis (2005) has stressed, the foundation of new cities and military settlements in the Hellenistic world provided opportunities for large numbers of immigrants from mainland Greece, the islands, and the coast of Asia Minor.

Seleucia-in-Pieria

Seleucia-in-Pieria was undoubtedly intended to be Seleucus's western capital, since, like his capital in Mesopotamia, it was given the king's own name. The fact that Seleucus was buried there after being murdered in 280 BC is yet another argument favoring its identification as his capital. Based on the standing remains of its city wall, Seleucia-in-Pieria may have covered c.300 hectares. In his account of its re-conquest by Antiochus III in 219 BC (at the beginning of the Fourth Syrian War), Polybius described the city thus (*Histories* 5.59.3):

The town descends in a series of broken terraces to the sea, and is surrounded on most sides by cliffs and precipitous rocks. On the level ground at the foot of the slope which descends towards the sea lies the business quarters [*emporía*] and a suburb defended by very strong walls. The whole of the main city is similarly fortified by walls of very costly construction and is splendidly adorned with temples and other fine buildings. (Trans. W.R. Paton, Loeb Classical Library)

Excavations have revealed Hellenistic fortification walls preserved for c.5 kilometers with at least nine towers (McNicoll 1997). The foundations and remains of a Doric temple (possibly Seleucus' burial monument (Hannestad and Potts 1990) were discovered, as well as one of the characteristic traits in the townscape mentioned by Polybius – i.e., the staircase connecting the lower and the upper city.

Antioch-on-the-Orontes

Antioch is a case where contradictions between archaeological and literary evidence (Cohen 2006: 80–4) have caused confusion, the main problem being how to relate the wealth of literary evidence available from late Antiquity to the scarce archaeological evidence of the Hellenistic period. Among the earlier literary sources, Strabo informs us (*Geography* 16.2.4) that the city in itself was a Tetrapolis,

since it consists of four parts: and each of the four settlements is fortified both by a common wall and by a wall of its own. Now Nikator [i.e., Seleucus I] founded the first of the settlements, transferring thither the settlers from Antigoneia, which had been built near it a short time before by Antigonus; the second was founded by the multitude of settlers; the third [the palace area] by Seleucus Callinicus; and the fourth by Antiochus Epiphanes. (Trans. H.L. Jones, Loeb Classical Library)

The layout and the development of Antioch during the Seleucid period have been studied and discussed by many scholars since the 19th century (Lassus 1972b; Hoepfner 1999a; Leblanc and Poccardi 1999; Hannestad in press a), but archaeological excavations have been severely hampered by the fact that the modern city of Antakya is situated on top of the ancient city, which today lies c.10 meters below the surface. Trial excavations along the modern main street have revealed several strata, the oldest of which date to the Hellenistic period and confirm the hypothesis that the main street of modern Antakya is identical to part of the ancient central street of the city. The city may have covered no less than 600 hectares by the time of Antiochus IV. Two issues in particular, however, still cause disagreement among scholars. One is the size of the city in the period after its foundation; and the other is the location of Strabo's fourth quarter, the so-called Epiphania, which was built during the reign of Antiochus IV.

Apamea

Despite the fact that Apamea has been excavated by a Belgian team since 1965, Hellenistic Apamea raises as many open questions as Antioch. The main reason

is probably the severe earthquake of 115 AD and the intensive building activity that followed in its wake. Recent studies, however, have confirmed that, apart from a short stretch near the theater, elements of the Hellenistic city wall can be traced everywhere in the preserved Roman wall (Leriche 1987; Balty 2003). That the wall has two Hellenistic phases is shown by the reuse of earlier blocks in a second phase, which has been dated by the discovery of a well-preserved didrachm of Alexander Balas, struck in 146/145 BC (Leriche 1987; Balty 2003). The earlier phase probably dates to the foundation of the city. Lamps – probably Attic imports – of Howland's type 25A–D (Howland 1958) and some pottery bear witness to very early Hellenistic layers in most parts of the city (Balty 2003). The layout was probably very similar to that of Antioch, with a broad, central street. The Hellenistic (and the Roman) wall enclosed an area of c.255 hectares (Balty 2000).

Laodikeia

Laodikeia, the fourth city of the Tetrapolis, was described by Strabo (*Geography* 16.2.9) as a beautifully built city with a good harbor and hinterland producing, among other things, huge quantities of wine. It was laid out according to a grid system still reflected in modern-day Latakia. A street running north–south, about 2 kilometers long, seems to have been the central street of the city (Bejor 1999: 49). Laodikeia was probably about the same size as Apamea. Its importance in the scheme of Seleucus I is suggested by the fact that, during his lifetime, Laodikeia had the largest mint in Syria, possibly targeted particularly at the international market (Houghton and Lorber 2002).

Apamea-on-the-Euphrates

The fairly meager evidence of how these four large cities in Syria looked in the Hellenistic period has in recent years been supplemented by material from two sites on the Euphrates, where a number of fortified settlements were founded to control and protect river transport, river crossings, and the fertile Euphrates river valley. At Apamea-on-the-Euphrates, on the east bank of the river (now flooded by the Bireçik dam), geophysical surveys and excavations (1996–9) offered detailed insight into the history and layout of the city (Abadie-Reynal and Gaborit 2003). The city wall, which could be traced over a length of 2,200 meters, surrounded a triangular area of c.40 hectares. That strong defensive measures were considered necessary is attested by the use of massive towers. The wall was built using a polygonal technique with the upper part made of mudbrick and the entrances to the towers made in an isodomonic technique (Desreumaux et al. 1999).

The orthogonal city plan is clear. Streets were of varying width. Those leading to the gates were c.10 meters wide. Two houses and a row of shops have been partly excavated. Pottery from the latest floors (including black-glazed and early shapes of Eastern Sigillata A) suggest that the settlement was abandoned in the middle or late 2nd century BC. A burnt destruction layer covers the site, reflecting no doubt the coming of the Parthians.

Jebel Khalid

Jebel Khalid is the most spectacular Seleucid site excavated in Syria in recent years. It is located just below the new Tishrin Dam and about 300 kilometers upriver from Dura Europos (see below). Since the mid-1980s, an Australian team has worked at the site, which is located on a rock outcrop extending for c.1.5 kilometers alongside the Euphrates (*Jebel Khalid I*) and covering c.50 hectares, about 30 hectares of which show signs of occupation. Jebel Khalid is protected on the inland side and along the southern river frontage by a wall, and the acropolis was further protected by a separate inner wall. The outer wall had some 30 towers and bastions and a massive gate complex protected by towers built in the 3rd century BC. No traces of pre-Hellenistic occupation have been found, and finds from later periods, including those of a Late Roman camp, are rare. Thus the site offers the best possible conditions for the study of a Seleucid foundation. So far, the best dating evidence from the site is provided by the coins. The earliest are two posthumous Alexander silver issues and two bronzes of Seleucus I; the latest dates to the late 70s BC (Nixon 2002). Coin frequencies peak under the two first Seleucids and, as everywhere in the kingdom, under Antiochus III and again in the late 2nd/early 1st century BC.

A large building on the acropolis identified by the excavators as the governor's palace has been excavated (Clarke et al. 2002: 25–48; Clarke 2003). The building centers on a peristyle court (c.17 meters on a side) with a Doric colonnade. On the south side of the peristyle is an *andron* complex (area reserved for men) with two columns *in antis* at the entrance, clearly for audiences and other such occasions. The north wing also seems to have had an official function consisting of a large room surrounded by kitchens and storerooms. The entrance to the main room, situated directly opposite the *andron* complex, was flanked by two attached columns; the roof was supported by a column in the middle of the room, and the floor was covered with marble slabs and decorated with wall paintings in the so-called Pompeian First Style, imitating marble slabs, and also a kind of floral decoration. One unusual element in the building when considered in a Greek context is the two corridors that close off the peristyle from the suite of rooms on the south and the north side. This is undoubtedly a result of the influence of local Oriental traditions. The palace dates broadly to the 3rd century BC, or, more specifically, to the first half of the 3rd century.

Part of a domestic quarter has been identified in the northern part of the site (Jackson 2003, 2005, 2009). One *insula* (an “island” between four streets, consisting of residential buildings) has been completely excavated. The houses were mainly built of rubble, but mudbrick was used for the upper parts of the houses. A common feature is a courtyard. Most rooms contained two floor levels, the lower built directly on bedrock and the upper reflecting a time of radical renovations. The second floor levels can be dated by the appearance of early Eastern Sigillata A pottery to c.150 BC. The coins found in the *insula* date from the reign of Antiochus I (281–261 BC) to the first quarter of the 1st century BC, the majority dating to the 2nd century BC. Remains of painted wall stucco were recorded here. The remains of a small figured frieze with *erotes* in chariots drawn by goats – clearly attesting the continued close connection with the Mediterranean world – are particularly interesting.

In the saddle between the Acropolis to the south and the Domestic Quarter to the north, excavations have revealed remains of a Doric temple (Clarke 2005). Close to the temple a small fragment of a marble sculpture was found, probably from the cult statue (Harrison 2000). In front of the temple stood five altars of unusual shape, one of which was found in situ. The temple was so situated that it would have been visible from the main gate. In the same area are also remains of houses and what may have been a civic structure including a peristyle court or a *pi*-shaped stoa of Doric order.

The faunal material from Jebel Khalid allows us some insight into the diet and animal economy of the people living at the site (Steele 2002: 125–45). Animal husbandry was mainly based on sheep and goat, sheep being far more common than goat. Equids (ass/onager) and cattle apparently served a dual purpose, for transport and labor (as draft animals) and for food. In these groups the animals seem only to have been slaughtered at a late stage of their lives. Camel is also present. Pigs were quite common, whereas fishbones were comparatively rare. Since the condition of the bones is generally very good, the absence of fishbones is surprising at a site on the Euphrates, and may reflect the recovery techniques employed (cf. Ch. I.12). Hunted animals included young gazelles and deer.

Dura Europos

Dura Europos (or more correctly Europos Dura, since Europos was the Greek name taken from a city in Macedonia and Dura was the later Parthian name) was founded during the reign of Seleucus I (305–281 BC) on a rock plateau on the west bank of the Euphrates (Cohen 2006: 156–69). Only the west side offered natural and easy entry to the city, a fact reflected in the defensive measures on this side, including numerous towers. The walled area covered c.63 hectares. Since its excavation, Dura has often served as the model of a Seleucid colony, though the remains are mainly of the Parthian/Roman period. In particular, the

city walls and the general layout, with an orthogonal street plan and a main street running southwest–northeast through the city from the river to the main gate, have been considered part of the earliest settlement on the site.

The Citadel was situated on a separate plateau formed by the *wadis* and strongly fortified with a solid stone wall (McNicoll 1997: 93). It included a palace, the earliest parts of which are very scanty, whereas the second phase probably dating to the 2nd century BC is better preserved. A sounding (Leriche and Mahmoud 1994: 403; Leriche et al. 1997) behind the northern façade of the other palace at Dura (the Redoubt Palace), often identified as the *Strategeion* (originally, the meeting room of the generals, *strategoí*, in Athens), has yielded numismatic evidence that this façade, which belongs to a second phase of the building, cannot predate the early 2nd century BC (Leriche and Mahmoud 1994). Among the coins found there on the lowest floor level of room W is a small bronze denomination from the reign of Antiochus III, probably from 223 to 200 BC, struck at a western Seleucid mint (Augé 1988). The first phase of the building probably dates to the foundation of the settlement. The *Strategeion* is situated beside the Parthian temple of Zeus Megistos and it is possible that, already in the earliest phase of the settlement, the main temple of the city – probably also dedicated to Zeus – was situated there.

The city walls represent two different types: toward the west and the desert a type completely built of stone, and on the northern and southern sides a type constructed of mudbrick over a socle of stone and gypsum and/or mud-mortar.

In recent years our traditional understanding of the development of Hellenistic Dura Europos has been challenged by P. Leriche (2003, 2004, 2007), who interprets the result of his test trenches across the main street and along the inside of the western wall together with the fact that the archive building on the agora (Block G3) contained seal impressions dating to no earlier than year 184 of the Seleucid era – i.e., 129/8 BC – as proof that it was only at this time that the street grid was laid out. He assumes that before this date the site consisted only of a garrison in the citadel and some habitation in the adjacent area to the south and west of the citadel where the main street descends into the *wadi*. However, the evidence from the test trenches does not seem entirely convincing for such a radical re-dating of the layout of the city. It is also difficult to see why the settlement should then have had, from an early period, two palaces indicating the existence of an administration including two high-ranking officials. It is perfectly possible that during the early phase of the city's existence not all of the walled area and *insulae* within the street grid were inhabited.

From at least 141 BC, with the fall of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris to the Arsacids, the Seleucids must have invested massive resources in the defensive line that the Euphrates provided, concentrating their efforts on the west bank of the river. It is thus very likely that repairs and improvements – if not a completely new circuit, as suggested by Leriche – date to these years. Leriche considered Antiochus VII

Sidetes (138–129 BC) the possible “founder” of the new Dura Europos. Against Leriche’s hypothesis, however, is the fact that most of the coins found at Dura date to the reign of Antiochus III (223–187 BC), with large numbers also from the reigns of Antiochus I (281–261 BC, 89 coins) and Seleucus III (225–223 BC, 80 coins). A smaller peak dates from the time of Antiochus VII (138–129 BC, 62 coins). This pattern is somewhat surprising if Leriche’s re-dating of the layout of the city and of the city wall is correct. One would instead expect a stronger reflection of the economic activity connected with a completely new layout of the city and of the building of the walls. Thus, the coins clearly suggest major activities during the reigns of Antiochus I and Seleucus II (246–225 BC), culminating in the late 3rd and early 2nd centuries (for similar reflections, see Yon 2003).

Seleucia-on-the-Tigris

Seleucia-on-the-Tigris is still poorly known. Despite two long excavation programs, one in 1927–36 by an American expedition (Hopkins 1972) and one from 1964 onward by an Italian team, our knowledge of Seleucus I’s eastern capital is still sadly meager. Situated on the Tigris, the city replaced Babylon on the Euphrates as the power center of Mesopotamia and was probably founded c.305/304 BC when Seleucus I assumed the royal title. It seems to have covered c.550 hectares. The Seleucid layers are overlain by thick deposits of the Parthian period. From ancient sources (e.g. Strabo, *Geography* 16.5.1) we know that the city was surrounded by strong walls, no traces of which remain today. The building material seems mainly to have been mudbrick on stone foundations. The layout of the city was the usual grid system found in most other new foundations (Invernizzi 1993; Messina 2007). The house blocks (*insulae*) were usually large (144.70 × 72.35 meters), and one such block (G6), dating to the Parthian period, was excavated by the American expedition.

A significant element was a canal running through the city from east to west. The Italian team uncovered a large building which was undoubtedly an official archive situated on what seems to have been the main square (Greek *agora*) of the city, opposite which the remains of a *stoa* (a covered, columned portico, often around a marketplace) were excavated. The American expedition concentrated part of their efforts on Tell Umar, where remains identified originally as a Parthian house were later dated to the Sasanian period. These may have been built on top of a theater dating to the Seleucid and Parthian periods. The most interesting finds made at Seleucia are probably the c.25,000 stamp seal impressions from bullae in the archive building (Invernizzi 2004), about 10,000 of which show the enormous variety of Hellenistic iconography in mainly Greek style, but often with a Mesopotamian flavor, e.g. in depictions of syncretistic gods such as Apollo-Nabu.

Ai Khanoum

Ai Khanoum is located in Bactria (northern Afghanistan) on the bank of the Oxus river. It was founded by Seleucus I in c.300 BC in what was then the easternmost part of his kingdom (Bernard 2008). A main feature of the layout of the city is a long, central street similar to the main streets at Antioch, Laodikeia, and Apamea in Syria. The street divided the city into a lower and an upper town, the upper part running up to the acropolis and citadel of the city. The natural stronghold of the site was further strengthened by a number of defensive mudbrick walls. Like Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, Ai Khanoum was founded on a previously uninhabited site. It was excavated by French archaeologists from 1964 until the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, and the impressive results have contributed decisively to our understanding of a Seleucid royal city founded thousands of kilometers from the homeland of its Macedonian and Greek colonists. Excavations have revealed two of the most characteristic elements of Greek culture: a gymnasium (Veuve 1987) and a theater. A large palace and a number of sanctuaries, a single private house, and a mausoleum outside the city walls have also been excavated.

The palace was situated in the center of the lower city. Macedonians were familiar with their own type of royal palaces, but the plan of the Ai Khanoum palace was Achaemenid, consisting of a number of building blocks with long corridors and courtyards. The forecourt, at more than 100 × 100 meters, was surrounded by four colonnades with Corinthian capitals, typical of Greek architecture. The inner courtyard used columns of another Greek architectural order, the Doric. All the walls were built of sun-dried mudbrick. The roofs were flat, typical of the Oriental building tradition, but along the edges of the roofs Greek antefixes were erected.

The mixture of Oriental and Greek elements which the palace presents permeates the whole city. Thus the main sanctuary inside the city, the “temple with niches,” has a layout quite unlike a Greek temple (Francfort 1984). Even if the niches belong to a later phase of the temple (the earliest phase had no niches and just one cella), the plan still differs significantly from that of a traditional Greek temple with its oblong shape and use of columns. Additionally, the fact that an altar with ash still in situ stood in the cella suggests a ritual far removed from normal Greek practice, where one would expect the altar to have stood outside the temple. The cella of the late phase (IV), with a corridor on each side, is clearly related to the Mesopotamian tradition. On the other hand, a fragmentary foot with thunderbolt on the sandal, and a left hand, both from a colossal acrolithic statue (a wooden statue with marble hands, feet, and head), are purely Greek in style and suggest that the cult was dedicated to Zeus, possibly fused with a local god. What is striking is the combination of the temple and some rituals reflecting an Oriental tradition with a purely Greek cult statue. Bernard has dated the initial phase of the temple (phase V) to around 300 BC, and phase IV to the early 3rd

century. In this later phase, two wooden columns placed on Attic Ionic bases of stone stood in the interior of the cella. Thus a trend toward more and more local elements is not obvious. Rather, hybridization characterized the temple from beginning to end (Hannestad and Potts 1990: 98).

Among the earliest buildings in the city is the so-called *heröon* of Kineas, a sanctuary built of mudbrick and dedicated to the city's founder (Bernard 1973: 85–102). Here the Greek elements are stronger. The *heröon* underwent four building phases, the earliest of which resembles Greek *heroa* in plan, such as those at Kalydon or the tomb of Lefkadia in Macedonia (Hannestad and Potts 1990). A sarcophagus, probably that of Kineas, was interred below the building in a pit lined with mudbrick antedating the building itself. This is thus a Greek type of sanctuary, but built mainly in the local style. In phase 2 the plan was changed to a more traditional Greek temple with two columns *in antis*, but the three-stepped *crepis* (the solid base of a structure) was transformed into a podium. Another burial was interred at this time and later two more followed.

The gymnasium, also built of mudbrick, underwent at least two construction phases, the earlier of which seems to have involved two large courtyards (pre-175 BC) while the later one dated to the reign of Eucratides (175–145 BC), when Bactria had become an independent Greco-Macedonian kingdom. The enormous building (388.5 × 99.9 meters) with a southern courtyard and a northern one with *exedras* (semi-circular recesses, semi-domed) is easily recognizable as a gymnasium for anyone coming from the Mediterranean world, despite differences due to the local building tradition and materials, and the apparent lack of a *loutron* (bath). Among the Greek traits are the *herm* (sculpture with a head on top of a rectangular lower portion) in the niche in the middle northern *exedra* with the dedicatory inscription of Triballos and Straton, sons of Straton, to Hermes and Heracles (the traditional protectors of the Greek gymnasium). The date of the inscription is uncertain, but is thought to be either mid-3rd (Robert 1968) or 2nd century BC (Bernard in Veuve 1987: 111–12), corresponding to phase 2 of the gymnasium.

In accordance with Greek tradition the necropolis was situated outside the city walls. Excavations have brought to light a mausoleum used over several generations (Bernard 1972a). Inscriptions on three of the jars where bones were collected for reburial are in Greek, as are two very fragmentary inscriptions found in connection with the mausoleum. One relief-decorated tombstone was found there, not intact but in fragments, which had been used to block the entrance to the mausoleum. The relief depicts a naked young man with a long cloak which clearly enhances the ideal of Greek male nudity, and a *petasos* (traveling hat) hanging on his shoulder. His distinctly non-Greek, long hair provides an interesting contrast to the use of Greek (language and names) in the inscriptions from the mausoleum. Greek was the most common language attested in inscriptions at Ai Khanoum, whether on stone, clay, parchment, or papyrus (Robert 1968; Rapin 1983; Bernard 2008) and Greek names were by far the most common as well.

The problem when analyzing the material culture of Ai Khanoum is that one very easily tends to stress either the Greek or the local elements. But what the city really represents is a true hybrid of the Hellenistic period. It is neither Greek nor Oriental/local, but a unique blend. What is perhaps the most interesting element in this hybrid city is the evidence of continued links to and mobility from the Mediterranean across thousands of kilometers. People traveled and so did ideas.

4 On the Borders of the Kingdom and Beyond

For a while the Seleucids had a keen interest in the Arabian coast of the Persian Gulf. They may have had at least one, possibly more, naval bases in the area. As mentioned above, trade with Arabia was important. Here just one settlement, clearly built on the command of a Seleucid king, will be mentioned, a “fortified sanctuary” on the island of Failaka (ancient Ikaros) in the bay of Kuwait excavated in the late 1950s and early 1960s by Danish archaeologists. In its early phase the Failaka fortification seems to have protected a sanctuary with a temple very much in Greek style both architecturally and with respect to the rituals connected with it (Jeppesen 1960, 1989). Among the finds was one of the very rare stone stelae with a long Greek inscription found outside of Asia Minor. The inscription contains two letters, the first of which is from an official named Anaxarchos, probably a local administrator, who forwarded a letter from another high-ranking official, Ikadion. Ikadion instructed Anaxarchos about the King’s wishes respecting the island of Ikaros (i.e. Failaka). This letter and stele, which was originally set up in front of the temple, mentions a sanctuary of Soteira, which must have been the temple excavated by the Danish expedition. The date of the letter is damaged and has been much debated by modern scholars (e.g., Jeppesen 1960, 1989; Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993; Hannestad 1994). Most probably the king in question was Seleucus II (246–226/5 BC) and the letter probably dates to either 243 or 241/240 BC. In a later period another temple was added, the fortress extended and a moat laid out around it. Gradually the sanctuary filled up with private houses. From that period, if not earlier, the fortress probably housed a Seleucid garrison. The finds, including coins, terracotta, and pottery, all suggest that the settlement came to an end in the late 2nd or early 1st century BC, although some pottery in the larger temple may relate to either a squatter habitation or continued cultic practice in the late 1st century BC or 1st century AD. Many of the finds suggest close contact with southern Mesopotamia and Susiana.

5 Continuity vs Change: Tradition in a Changing World

The many new Seleucid foundations should not obscure the fact that across the empire many areas and already existing cities remained little affected by changing

political circumstances and the immigration of probably quite a large number of foreigners. An interesting example of this phenomenon can be seen at Uruk, an ancient city and religious center in Mesopotamia. More than 100 years of German excavations there allow us to study in detail the theme of continuity and change in material culture (Falkenstein 1941; Finkbeiner 1993b; Boehmer et al. 1995; Kose 1998; Lindström 2003). The period between c.300 and 125 BC actually seems to have been the most intense building period in the long history of the city, which then covered about 300 hectares. An ongoing discussion concerns the extent to which Greco-Macedonian settlers lived at Uruk (Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993: 149ff). Only a single Greek inscription – dating from after the region had been conquered by the Arsacids in 141 BC – has been found. The Greek names recorded on cuneiform tablets have often been taken as evidence of the presence of Greeks in the city, but in fact the situation was more complicated.

If we consider other cultural markers, it is striking that the material culture speaks strongly of a continued local tradition in most aspects of life and death. As an important Babylonian religious center, Uruk surely was the object of royal interest, not only for tax purposes but also with respect to royal propaganda and the display of power and wealth, as attested by the impressive building activity at the site. Two enormous temple complexes were built during Seleucid period, the Bit Resh sanctuary and the Irigal, as well as the largest *ziggurat* in Babylonia (Falkenstein 1941; Kose 1998). Building techniques are traditional Babylonian – without the use of stones or columns, but with mudbrick, glazed brick, and typically Babylonian plans. The enormous Bit Resh complex (217 × 167 meters) seems to have had an earlier, pre-Hellenistic phase, but most of the complex was built under the Seleucids (Kose 1998: 93ff). The construction was carried out under Anu-uballit Nikarchos (a characteristic double name – the Greek name being given to him by the king himself) (Doty 1988: 96) and was dedicated in 244 BC to the divine couple Anu-Antum. The king's direct involvement is attested by an inscribed clay cylinder (Clay 1915: no. 52) which states that the king gave the Greek name Nikarchos to Anu-uballit and that Anu-uballit built the temple for the sake of the lives of Antiochus and Seleucus, the kings. In a later phase, the main temple of the two deities was built of baked brick. Several of the bricks on the façade were stamped with a building inscription in Aramaic mentioning Anu-uballit Kephalon and the phrase “for the sake of the life of Antiochus, king (of the lands), my lord.” This part of the complex dates from 201 BC. Anu-uballit Kephalon was also responsible for the building or rebuilding of parts of the Irigal, a sanctuary dedicated to Ishtar. The main cella there was decorated with glazed bricks above the cult niche bearing an Aramaic inscription which reads “Annu-uballit, whose other name is Kephalon” (Falkenstein 1941: 30–9; Doty 1988: 97ff).

The archives found in the Bit Resh included two types of records: clay tablets with cuneiform texts, a medium that was still alive in the city during the Hellenistic period, and texts written in Greek or Aramaic on parchment or papyrus

and sealed with bullae (Lindström 2003). The seal types used were new. Instead of Babylonian-style cylinder or stamp seals, elliptical seals in metal – usually mounted in finger rings – were now the rule. The ratio of bullae to tablets seems to have been 10:1 (640 bullae and 61 tablets). The iconography of the seal impressions points to various sources of inspiration: a significant number are in Greek style, among them all the official seals showing royal portraits, royal symbols or Greek gods and heroes. Among the private seal impressions the prevailing iconography is Mesopotamian, with winged bulls and mythological animals. However, they also include Greek motifs. A third and particularly interesting group is a new creation of the Hellenistic period which shows, for instance, motifs from the zodiac reflecting the continued role of the city as a center for astronomy and astrology.

Moving to more modest artifacts such as pottery, we note that Greek imported pottery was rare in the city. The most common type of fine ware was alkaline-glazed ware. Greek shapes, such as the fish plate, the bowl with angular profile and outturned rim, and the plate with thickened interior rim, were attested. Of closed shapes, the so-called West Slope Ware (named after a site opposite the Acropolis in Athens) amphora was popular. But in this type of ware and in other classes of pottery there remained a strong element of Babylonian tradition in the shapes used (Finkbeiner 1993b: 3–16).

Uruk also offers us the possibility of examining cross-cultural relations as evinced in burial practices. In this aspect apparently little changed: the burials found inside the city walls of Uruk from the Seleucid and Early Parthian periods continued the old local tradition of sub-floor burial under houses. Also the few grave gifts including the pottery show a strong link to older Babylonian practices (Boehmer et al. 1995: 152 ff). However, a very different picture emerges at two tumuli (at Frehat en-Nufegi) north of Uruk (Boehmer et al. 1995: 141–52). In the burial chamber of the western tumulus four vessels in traditional Babylonian style were discovered. Otherwise, the finds in the chamber point distinctly to some of the most characteristic traits of Greek culture, such as the golden wreath of olive leaves. The wreath was probably originally placed on the funerary urn of a male. Closest to this urn were also found four *strigils* (a curved metal tool used to scrape grease and dirt off the body), reflecting the Greek gymnasium tradition. The eastern tumulus shows a stronger Greek tradition with the body laid out on a *kline* (Greek funerary bed) and a golden wreath around its head, suggesting a symbolic representation of the Greek symposium. Among the grave gifts was a Greek wine amphora, possibly of eastern Mediterranean origin. The two tumuli and their burial customs raise the question of the identity of the deceased. Bearing in mind the names recorded at Uruk, were they of Greek descent or members of the local elite with Greek names or double names such as Anu-uballit Nikarchos or Anu-uballit Kephalon? Whatever the case, the tumuli themselves and the grave goods point to quite a strong hybridization of material culture amongst the city's elite. It must remain an open question, however, whether the

strigils point to the existence of a gymnasium in the city, no traces of which have been found so far, or whether they should simply be taken as a symbol of “Greekness.”

6 Conclusion

Our insight into the archaeology of the Near East during the reign of the Seleucids has grown exponentially in recent decades. We no longer depend solely on literary sources, coins, or assumptions based mainly on sites heavily overlain with Roman and later buildings. It is now possible to see in the material culture of the period that the Seleucid kingdom was characterized by strong regionalism with few overarching elements, such as coins, characterizing the entire empire.

The period under the first Seleucids, not least the years under Seleucus I, witnessed a large number of new settlements and an influx of new settlers bringing with them their own customs, but apparently also adapting to new ecological and cultural environments. Enormous investments were made by the early kings in the organization of their kingdom. The resources to some extent probably derived from Alexander’s conquest and the seizure of the treasures accumulated by the Achaemenid kings. Continued warfare among the Hellenistic kingdoms was costly, but could of course – if won – also bring substantial gain. The running of the kingdom depended on an extensive taxation system and tributes.

The archaeological evidence collected so far suggests that the division of the kingdom into an eastern and a western part, which is clear from the two capitals (Seleucia and Antioch) and from Seleucus I making his son Antiochos I co-regent of the east, is also reflected to some extent in the material culture. Thus, from the very beginning, settlements as far east as the banks of the Euphrates have their strongest ties with the west. This is clearly attested by coins, most of which were minted at Antioch, even at Dura and Jebel Khalid. Pottery and lamps also show strong affinities to the west and thus to the Greek Hellenistic pottery tradition – a picture totally different from what is found in Mesopotamia. Western imports, such as Rhodian wine, seem to have been more common west of the Euphrates than in Mesopotamia. The overall pattern strongly suggests that the Euphrates may have formed a tax barrier between Syria (the western part of the kingdom) and Mesopotamia and the east (cf. Bikermann 1938: 115–18; Lindström 2003: 54) which drastically reduced the amount of trade in items of daily life. Alternatively, or in addition, the number of immigrants from Greek areas and from coastal Syria was comparatively small in regions east of the Euphrates from the early 3rd century onwards. The archaeological evidence also suggests that the western part of the empire experienced a peak in wealth by the mid-2nd century BC, as seen at Antioch, Jebel Khalid, and Dura. The political disasters that befell Antiochus III in his wars with the Romans and the rivalry for the

throne that later ensued still left the western core area of the earlier empire in a state of comparative wealth (Hannestad in press b).

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

For general orientation on the subject of the Seleucids in the Near East, see, e.g., Shipley (2000) and Austin (2003). On Seleucid colonies and earlier settlements that continued to be settled, see Cohen (2006). The economy of the Seleucids is dealt with comprehensively in Aperghis (2004). For a more Near Eastern/Central Asian perspective on the Seleucids see, e.g., Sherwin-White and Kuhrt (1993) and Hansen and Lindström (in press). A comparison of a new foundation (Ai Khanoum) and an ancient city (Uruk) can be found in Hannestad (in press a).