

Abstract

A Persian inheritance? The Seleucids and their Achaemenid predecessors

Professor Christopher J. TUPLIN
University of Liverpool, UK

This paper (which belongs together with that due to be presented by Dr. G. G. Aperghis) assesses the validity of the idea that the Achaemenid Empire lived on in the rule exercised by Seleucus and his successors in Western Asia and Anatolia.

After considering whether Alexander can usefully be regarded as the "last Achaemenid" (Briant), it will approach the character of the Seleucid empire and its relationship to the Achaemenid through topics such as the following:

- overt or implicit assimilation of Seleucid kings or their realm to their Achaemenid equivalents
- the memory of the Achaemenids in Eastern Anatolia and Iran
- imperial space: extent, stability, cohesion, and conception (spear-won land; the king's *pragmata*); macro-organisation, relations with individual subject areas, and political centre-of-gravity; the impact of Greek settlement; the archaeological imprint (e.g. Merv, Kandahar, Ai Khanum)
- military resources and organisation
- dynastic character and behaviour
- royal self-representation, onomastic (throne-names), verbal (titulature, inscriptional discourse), sartorial (head-gear and clothing), iconographic (coins, statues, painting), ritual (coronations; formal processions, journeys and entrances), architectural (palaces) and ideological (the evidence of Hellenistic kingship theory)
- the religious dimension: the divinity of kings and the acknowledgement of non-Greek deities
- the court and courtly activity (education, dining, hunting)

The thrust of the argument will be that, although there might be a difference between how the Seleucids saw themselves and how some of their subjects saw them, the differences are far more significant than the similarities. The Hellenistic world was, of course, predicated on the Achaemenid one: on a macro-political scale, division of Alexander's empire into three broad areas (Greece-Macedonia, Asia and Egypt) did in a way reproduce the conditions of post-386 Achaemenid times and on a micro-organisational scale fiscal and administrative practices may (as Dr. Aperghis' paper will suggest) display interesting continuities. But even these analogies are slippery -- the Attalid kingdom spoiled the first; consistent monetisation of tax and economy at least provides a very different context for the second -- and in most respects the Seleucid realm represents an ideologically distinct environment from that of its Achaemenid predecessor. The idea of ruling Anatolia and Western Asia from a Syro-Mesopotamian centre and through a Greco-Macedonian *ethno-classe dominante* may be hard to imagine without the earlier Achaemenid project of ruling that area from an Irano-Mesopotamian centre through a Persian *ethno-classe dominante*: but the interest lies in the differences.