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Altay COŞKUN and David ENGELS (eds.)

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Where are the Wives?

Royal Women in Seleukid Cult Documents

Kyle ERICKSON

Abstract

In 193 BC Antiochos III appointed a series of high-priestess for his wife Laodike across his empire. The epigraphic record for these appointments gives us the bulk of our evidence for the Seleukid ruler cult. This has led to the documents being used largely for an exploration of the existence of royal cults for male Seleukids, but not yet for royal women. This paper examines the evidence for an official cult for Laodike, wife of Antiochos III, and how the lack of her priestesses in other documents where they should be expected requires us to question our understanding of the nature of Seleukid royal cults.

1. Introduction

In early 193 BC, Antiochos III appointed officials to supervise the cult of his wife, Laodike. This moment is particularly significant for our understanding of the governance and existence of a cult for the Seleukid monarchs as a modification along Ptolemaic lines. As the letters of appointment for the officials for his wife's cult also refer to a cult of himself and his ancestors, the documents appear to presuppose a centralised cult for the Seleukid monarchs. While there is disagreement over the date of the establishment of the cult for Antiochos, this series of appointments clearly marks the creation of a new equivalent system for Laodike. This paper argues that there are problems with the traditional assessment of a Seleukid royal cult, with its very clear division between civic and central cults. It will be explored how Laodike and other Seleukid queens more generally fit into our view of the empire and might disrupt our understanding of the strict divisions between civic and royal.

Following Habicht's seminal work on the divinity of the Hellenistic kings,¹ scholars have tended to divide ruler cults into civic and royal categories. Traditionally imposition of central control over a cult marks the division between civic and royal cults, with those centrally controlled designated as royal. Since, for the Seleukid kings, the epigraphic evidence for a royal cult is

¹ HABICHT (1970).

limited outside the reign of Antiochos III, some scholars have suggested that the Seleukids did not have a centralised cult until his reign, well after a similar introduction in the Ptolemaic kingdom.² The major implication of this new approach is that, contrary to previous scholarship, the Seleukids lacked a systematic approach to ruler cult both before and after the reign of Antiochos III. To many scholars, the introduction of a cult by Antiochos III for his wife marks the turning point to a centralised system in which the king appoints high priests of the ruler cult across the empire.³ I argue instead that while this was an attempt to introduce order into a chaotic system, it is unclear as to whether it was ever repeated or expanded after the reign of Antiochos III. Therefore, instead of marking a turning point in the Seleukid court's acceptance of divine kingship, it marks a blip in Seleukid organisation that had relatively little lasting impact on the presentation of the dynasty.

2. *Royal Women*

It is the lack of evidence for the female members of the dynasty, 'royal women', who otherwise play such an important role in our understanding of the establishment of a Seleukid royal cult that this lack of evidence in itself emphasizes the temporary success of Antiochos' innovation. Traditionally, only a limited number of Hellenistic women received significant scholarly attention, e.g. the famous Cleopatras and Olympias. However, more recently, attention has been turned to other royal women, as is evidenced by a number of recent books appearing on Arsinoe II, Berenike and an edited volume on Seleukid Royal Women.⁴ The term 'royal women', both in the title of the recent Seleukid volume and in the title of this paper, is significant: while I will focus mostly on the official wives of the kings, we need to remember the large number of women who circulated in the courts, from the queen mother, unmarried sisters and daughters to the king to a number of women generally classed as courtesans or lovers of the kings.⁵ If these women did not achieve some form of notoriety for

² See GRUEN (1999) for a rejection of this view.

³ CHANIOTIS (2004), p. 436–437; DEBORD (2003), p. 281–308; MA (2000), p. 64; SHERWIN-WHITE / KUHRT (1993), p. 203; VAN NUFFELEN (2004), p. 278–279; VIRGILIO (2003), p. 39–50. For a Seleukid ruler cult in general, all of which prefer a date during the reign of Antiochos III for the creation of a central ruler cult see: BEVAN (1901); BIKERMAN (1938); LE BOHEC-BOUHET (2002); BOSWORTH (1999); CARNEY (2000); HABICHT 1970; HAZZARD 2000; LATTEY 1917; MA (1999); NOCK (1928); NOCK (1930); VAN NUFFELEN (1999); VAN NUFFELEN (2001); VAN NUFFELEN (2004); PRICE (1980); PRICE (1984); SCOTT (1928).

⁴ CARNEY (2013); CLAYMAN (2014); COŞKUN / MCAULEY (2016).

⁵ OGDEN (1999) remains the fundamental study of the martial relations of the Hellenistic dynasts.

their so-called ‘mis-deeds’ or for their support for their husbands, our extant, albeit limited, historical accounts often ignore their very existence, or they are only mentioned briefly in passing.⁶ Nonetheless, their role in establishing and maintaining royal power was significant, as evident by the appointment of otherwise unknown women to the position of high-priestess. This makes their relatively limited appearances in official capacity all the more important for our understanding of royal functions.

Just as her husband is the best documented of the Seleukid kings, Laodike III is among the best epigraphically documented of the Seleukid queens,⁷ particularly in relation to the divine honours and cults established for her. However, as is the case for many of the other queens, her existence in the literary record is far from complete: Polybios 5.43 gives us an extended description of how she was handed over to the Seleukid house at the Pontic court, but little else. Even in Polybios’ recounting of Antiochos’ next marriage to the girl he renamed Euboia, Laodike, who was still alive, as we now know, is not mentioned.⁸ This fact has led to a variety of suggestions. Ma has argued that the lack of evidence for her was the result of her disgrace.⁹ However, there is no evidence that this was in fact the case, and given the relative invisibility of these royal women outside of very particular contexts or specific dedications, it is equally likely that she remained at the court, and we do not need to invent disgrace in order to explain her disappearance from the sources. Thankfully, we are much better informed about Laodike’s actions, and her fairly prominent role within Antiochos’ court through the epigraphic record, mostly from the cities of Asia Minor.

From a series of epigraphic decrees originally inscribed on the entrance to the Metroon of Sardeis, later reused in a Roman synagogue, we learn that the Sardeians established a sacred enclosure called the Laodikeion with an altar; each year they held a *panegyris* called the Laodikeia, which was first established

⁶ An interesting further study would be into the nature of the reputation of these women in the context of women’s roles in Greek historiography in general. LARSON (2006) makes an interesting argument concerning the suppression of female names in Herodotos as indicative of his desire to preserve their virtue. Without a systematic study, it is impossible to say whether this tradition would have continued into our later authors, or if the royal status of these women removed the necessity of their removal from the spot-light. The best study of the marital status and the relationship with their children and husband/lovers remains OGDEN (1999).

⁷ D’AGOSTINI (2013).

⁸ POLYB. 20.8; for her still being alive in the reign of her son, see *SEG* 7.2; WELLES *RC*, nos. 159–160; SCHMITT (1964), p. 11–13; OGDEN (1999), p. 137. Contra GRAINGER (1997), p. 49. MACURDY (1932), p. 92 without knowledge of the inscription assumed that she had died.

⁹ MA (1999), p. 335.

in 213 BC.¹⁰ The emphasis in the choice of honours for Laodike as connected to her family, both her husband and her children, is a re-occurring theme in her honours. Furthermore, the Sardeians were not unique in their honours: in about 203 (or possibly 197/198), the Teians followed suit and first dedicated sacred statues of the king and queen,¹¹ then established a festival for them, subsequently established an altar, and finally built a fountain which they dedicated to and named after the queen for use in sacrifices and by brides.¹² The final city that we know of in Asia Minor to honour Laodike was Iasos, in c. 196. The Iasians, in response to benefactions received from the Queen, established an altar for her and established the role of a maiden of 'Queen Aphro[dite Lao]dike' who took part in both formal processions and those following marriages.¹³

Within the confines of this paper, I am not interested in the root causes of these dedications to the queen by the cities, as Ma has done an excellent job of placing them in their context of mutual euergetic exchange. What I would like to note though, is how different the view we receive from the fragmentary epigraphic record is, where we can begin to see a far more active queen than the one whom we have glimpsed through the pages of Polybios. According to our normal interpretation, these decrees should have been separated from the 'imperial' ruler cult. As Ma states:

'one should merely observe that the royal *prostagma* creates a high priesthood of Laodike in the context of the central, 'imperial' ruler cult, which has no influence on the 'municipal' ruler cult, administered by the city within its own boundaries'.¹⁴

It is this firm distinction which I wish to question.

¹⁰ SEG 39.1284 = GAUTHIER (1989), no. 2 = BRINGMANN / VON STEUBEN (1995), no. 260 II = Ma (1999), no. 2.

¹¹ SEG 41.1003. See MA (1999), no. 17; J. and L. ROBERT, BE 68, 451; BE 69, 495–496; GAUTHIER (1985), p. 51–52; PIEJKO (1991a), p. 13–37. See AUSTIN (1981), no. 151 for translation.

¹² SEG 41.1003. See MA (1999), no. 18; J. and L. ROBERT, BE 68, 451; BE 69, 495–496; PIEJKO (1991), p. 37–48.

¹³ PUGLIESE-CARRATELLI, ASAA 29/30 (1967/8), p. 445–453, no. 2 = I. Iasos 4; MA (1999), no. 26. Cf. SEG 26.1226. The further decrees from the Iasians which further specify rituals for the royal family should also be included in the list of divine honours received by Laodike (LEVI / PUGLIESE-CARRATELLI, ASAA 23/24 (1961/2), p. 578, no. 5 = I. Iasos 5 = J. and L. ROBERT BE 71, 621 (now lost) and OGIS 237 = MA (1999), no. 27. See also: SOKOLOWSKI (1972); CROWTHER (1989); AGER / HARDIMAN (2016), p. 153; KOTSIDOU (2000), no. 283 [E] and 284 [E].

¹⁴ MA (1999), p. 335.

3. A Cult for Laodike, Wife of Antiochos III

To do so let us now begin at the end with Antiochos' decree for the state cult for Laodike:

*[...] just as high-priests of us are appointed throughout the kingdom, so there should be established, in the same places, high-priestesses of her also, who will wear golden crowns bearing her image, and be inscribed in the contracts after the high-priests of our ancestors and of us.*¹⁵

Three copies of a decree, dated to 193, dealing with the establishment of a cult for Laodike along the same lines as that for the king and his ancestors, have been found and published, one from Phrygia and two from Iran. The Phrygian decree appointed Berenike, daughter of Ptolemy the son of Lysimachos, as high-priestess for the queen (for the rights/shrines) in the satrapy, and Laodike daughter of Laodike was appointed to this role in Media.¹⁶ This phrase, as shown by the difficulty in translating, τῆς βασιλίσσης ἀρχιέρειαν τῶν ἐν τῇ σατραπείᾳ, has proved difficult in determining the scope for the new high-priestess' activities, and raises our first problem with the traditional view of Seleukid cult stated eloquently by Ma above. The difficulty is due to the two genitive articles, in particular the genitive plural τῶν. Welles attempted to solve this problem providing τόπων and interpreting the passage as 'high-priestess of the queen in the satrapy'.¹⁷ Ma rejected this interpretation and adopted the vaguer 'high-priestess of the queen for the rites in the satrapy'.¹⁸ However, Van Nuffelen resurrected the suggestion of Robert and supplied ἱερῶν, understanding the passage as 'grande-prêtresse de la reine et des temples dans la satrapie'.¹⁹

Welles	τῆς βασιλίσσης ἀρχιέρειαν τῶν <τοπῶν> ἐν τῇ σατραπείᾳ high-priestess of the queen in the satrapy
Robert (revived by Van Nuffelen)	τῆς βασιλίσσης ἀρχιέρειαν τῶν <ἱερῶν> ἐν τῇ σατραπείᾳ high-priestess of the queen for the temples in the satrapy
Ma	τῆς βασιλίσσης ἀρχιέρειαν τῶν ἐν τῇ σατραπείᾳ high-priestess of the queen for the rites in the satrapy

¹⁵ MA (2000), no. 37. *OGIS* 224. WELLES *RC* 37. *HGIUe* II 462: ...κρ]ίνομεν δὲ καθάπερ [ἡμ]ῶν [ἀπο]δείκ[ν]υν[ται κ]ατὰ τὴν βασιλεί[αν ἀ]ρ[χ]ιερεῖς, καὶ ταύτης καθίστασθαι [ἐν] τοῖς αὐτοῖς τόποις ἀρχιερείας, αἱ φο[ρ]ή[σουσιν στεφάνους χρυσοῦς ἔχοντας [εἰκόνας αὐ]τῆς, ἐπιγραφῆσονται δὲ καὶ ἐν [τοῖς] συναλλάγμασι μετὰ τοὺς τῶν [προγόν]ων καὶ ἡμῶν ἀρχιερεῖς.

¹⁶ See IOSSIF / LORBER (2007), p. 63–65.

¹⁷ WELLES *RC* 163–164 n. 15.

¹⁸ MA (2000), p. 355.

¹⁹ VAN NUFFELEN (2004), p. 282; cf. ROBERT (1949), p. 18, n. 4.

While the differences in interpretation are small, they are significant as they define a differing scope for the high-priestess' role and how we should understand what Antiochos has ordered to be created for his wife. Only in Robert's interpretation, the areas in which the priestess can act are clearly defined. Here, her position is one of control over the temples in the region in which she is high-priestess. On the other hand, in both Welles' and Ma's interpretations, we do not see the kind of limits that one might otherwise expect. I will argue that it is sensible to propose a combination of Ma's and Robert/Van Nuffelen's interpretation of the second genitive article: τῶν would refer to all instances where Laodike received cult or divine honours in the region, whether this was as a goddess in her own right, as a temple-sharing goddess, or in rituals, possibly such as the ones at Teos. This would have given the high-priestess a wide, but still importantly limited, oversight of the activities in the region.

In order to justify this approach, it may be useful to give a brief summary of our knowledge of ruler cults in the Seleukid Empire. The general consensus is that there were two types of ruler cult: those initiated and administered by the cities (the 'municipal' cults referred to by Ma), and those created and administered by the royal court, either called 'state', 'central', or 'imperial' cults. Under this conception of Seleukid divinity, cults for living kings were established only by individual cities until the reign of Antiochos III, whereas posthumous cults had been established already by the reign of Antiochos I. The same appears to have applied to queens, although there is much less evidence for either living or posthumous deification. Despite this lack of evidence, our understanding of the creation of a centralised ruler cult for the Seleukid kings is based nearly entirely on the documents for the establishment of the high-priestess of Laodike. As I have already mentioned, there are several areas in which these documents are poorly understood.

4. *The Office of High Priestess*

The first major question that needs to be addressed is the role that Berenike is appointed to, i.e. the high-priestesshood. Here again, the relevant passage reads:

*Just as high-priests of us are appointed throughout the kingdom, so there should be established, in the same places, high-priestesses of her also, who will wear golden crowns bearing her image, and be inscribed in the contracts after the high-priests of our ancestors and of us.*²⁰

This passage establishes several principles to work from, although it gives us very limited information on the functioning of the role. First, that the method of appointment and therefore the office of high-priestess are parallel to the office

²⁰ MA (2000), no. 37 (note 13).

of high-priest of the king. Second and related to it, the honours which are granted to the high-priestess are parallel but subordinate to that of the high-priest for the king. We also gain some information concerning the other honours the high-priestess receives, namely the right to wear golden crowns with the image of the queen. Sadly, we have not uncovered any pictorial evidence for these crowns, although they may have been similar in form to those found in Palmyra from the 2nd/3rd AD or to those crowns worn by the *Archigallus* in the cult of Cybele.²¹ From these series of letters, we can firmly establish that, by 193, there were high-priests of the royal cult, and that these roles should be comparable to that of the newly appointed high-priestesses. As we do not have any evidence that specifies the appointment of a high-priest for the king it is difficult to know exactly what that role would have entailed. However, during the reign of Antiochos III we have evidence for the appointment of Nikanor to ‘the office of high-priest of the sanctuaries in the region beyond the Taurus’,²² and that his role entails that:

*[...]he will carry out both the business concerning the sacrifices and the rest in a manner worthy of the zeal which we have concerning these matters’ and that he ‘should also be in charge of the sanctuaries, and that their revenues and the other matters should be administered by him.’*²³

The letter of Antiochos to Zeuxis from 209 BC also points to a historical precedent, as a certain Dion held the same office under Antiochos II. The office that Nikanor held does not appear to be unique, as Ptolemy, son of Thraseas, also held a similar office in Koile Syria.²⁴

The relationship of the office that Nikanor held with that of the high-priest of Antiochos (i.e. the high-priest of Seleukid ruler cult) has been both denied and fully endorsed by scholars. However, Müller has convincingly demonstrated that the high-priest assumed the role both as high-priest over the sanctuaries in the satrapy for which he was confirmed but also served as high-priest of the central royal cult rather than being separate offices.²⁵

²¹ FINLAYSON (1988). See also AGER / HARDIMAN (2016), p. 160.

²² SEG 37.1010: ἀποδεδε[ίχα]μεν ἐν τῇ ἐ[πέ]κεινα τοῦ Ταύρου ὥσπερ αὐτὸς ἡξίωσεν ἀρχιερέα τῶν ἱερῶν πάντων.

²³ MA (2000), no. 4 ll 28–42. MALAY (1987) (SEG 37.1010); GAUTHIER BE 89, 276. [...] ἀποδεδε[ίχα]μεν ἐν τῇ ἐ[πέ]κεινα τοῦ Ταύρου ὥσπερ αὐτὸς ἡξίωσεν ἀρχιερέα τῶν ἱερῶν πάντων, πεπεισμένοι καὶ διὰ τὸ ἥθος ἐξάξιν τά τε κατὰ τὰς θυσίας καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ ἀξίως τῆς ἡμετέρας σπουδῆς, ἣν ἔχομεν περὶ ταῦτα, προαιρούμενοι αὔξιν ὥσπερ προσήκον ἐστίν· ὡιόμεθα δὲ δεῖν εἶναι αὐτὸν καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἱερῶν καὶ τὰς προσόδους τούτων καὶ τὰλλα διεξάγεσθαι ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ καθὰ καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ πάππου ἡμῶν ὑπὸ Δίῳνος·

²⁴ OGIS 230; ROBERT / ROBERT (1970), p. 1, n. 627 (date ⚭ bef. 197); as early as 201: GERA (1987), p. 66–73; PIEJKO (1991b), p. 245–259; VAN NUFFELEN (2004), p. 281; GRAINGER (1996), p. 333.

²⁵ MÜLLER (2000).

This creates the interesting situation concerning the parallel role for the high-priestess of the queen particularly given the lack of evidence. If we follow the instructions for the priestesshood of Laodike, then the royal document should have taken the form:

King Antiochos, Seleukid era, Macedonian month, high-priesthood of Antiochos III and his ancestors (Regional official), high-priestesshood of Laodike (Regional official, here Berenike).

Ma proposes as counter-hypothesis that if the establishment of the ruler cult for Antiochos III and his ancestors only shortly predated (or was contemporary with) the establishment of the cult for Laodike, then ‘one could imagine that Nikanor remained the ‘high-priest’ with a general purview over the shrines’, but was not the high-priest of the royal cult. Under this formulation, Ma proposes that a document would have the following preamble:

King Antiochos, Seleukid era, Macedonian month, (general) high-priesthood of Nikanor, high-priesthood of Antiochos III and his ancestors (not Nicanor), high-priesthood of Laodike.

We have not yet found any documents of either type which would definitively decide the debate; however, in a decree from Xanthos (196), the same Nikanor we have been discussing is the eponymous priest, and his name precedes that of the priests of the municipal cult. He is also named high-priest in the pre-ambles to documents from Amyzon (in 202 and 201). In the analysis of the Xanthos document, Jeanne and Louis Robert have argued that his role was similar to that of the high priest of the central royal cult.²⁶

Unfortunately, these documents all date to before the introduction of a high-priestess for Laodike, but they do, I believe, hint at the form of the office Berenike and Laodike were appointed to could take. She would have been in a position of supervision over the rites and the sanctuaries devoted to the Queen, and her name would be included before that of the municipal priests. On this parallel, I think we should accept Robert’s and Van Nuffelen’s argument to understand <ἱερεῶν> as the terms of reference for Berenike’s office.

If one accepts my proposal, namely that the office of high-priestess is parallel to the office of high-priest and therefore has essentially the same purview, then we must address the question of what she was meant to be high-priestess of. The general assumption seems to be that the creation of a high-priestess for Laodike directly resulted from the establishment of a central cult created for her. I will instead argue that her task was to act as the overseer of the pre-existing cults, temples, or sacrifices and rites for the queen (including as a temple-sharing goddess): that is the civic cults of the types that we have seen were established for the Queen at Teos, Iasos, Sardeis and perhaps elsewhere.

²⁶ ROBERT / ROBERT (1983), p. 146–166; VAN NUFFELEN (2004), p. 280.

Since the inscription for the Laodike priestesshood refers directly to the existence of the cult of Antiochos III, some have argued that Antiochos likewise created a cult for himself and his ancestors. While, in this present paper, I am unconcerned with when during his reign Antiochos would have created this cult, I still feel the need to explore the form that it would have taken. It has often been assumed that the various priest lists for the deified Seleukid kings are evidence for this centralised ruler cult. If this is the case, then I wish to ask why Laodike and every other Seleukid queen are notably absent from these lists, and how their absence helps us understand these lists.

5. *A Brief Summary*

First, a brief summary of the lists may be helpful. There are three sets of priest lists for Seleukid kings, and they have been found in various locations across the empire: Antiocheia-in-Persis, Seleukeia-in-Pieria, and Teos. A somewhat surprising element in these lists, which highlights an important aspect of the nature of Seleukid cults, is that their superficial similarity hides significant variation which should cause us to question the centralised nature of any of these lists. The list from Teos poses the greatest number of difficulties, not least the inclusion of Ptolemaic kings, but also as Mastrocinque argues it may be a private dedication rather than a cultic calendar.²⁷ Nevertheless, if under Antiochos III, there was in fact a consolidation and centralisation of cults for the Seleukid kings, then some consistency may be expected even for private dedications. The lists all date to during or after the reign of Antiochos III, which has been taken both as confirmation of the lack of a centralised cult before his reign and as confirmation of a Seleukid royal cultic system after it.

The decree from Antiocheia-in-Persis lists priests of Seleukos Nikator, Antiochos Soter, Antiochos Theos, Seleukos Kallinikos, King Seleukos, Antiochos Theos, and Antiochos the son.²⁸ This document must date after the association of Antiochos the son as joint-ruler with Antiochos III, and the lack of the epithet *Megas* for Antiochos III suggests a date before his assumption of the title in 204.²⁹ The inclusion of Antiochos the son is rather interesting, particularly given that where he was included in the civic cults for the Seleukid royal family, his mother was also included.³⁰

²⁷ MASTROCINQUE (1984), p. 83–85.

²⁸ *OGIS* 233 = DE ROSSI (2004), no. 252.

²⁹ *C.* 208–205.

³⁰ *SEG* 39.1284; *OGIS* 237; *I.Iasos* 5; *SEG* 37.659. See also IOSSIF / LORBER (2007). See also the Ionian Koinon decree for Antiochos I and his family, where Stratonike is likewise included: *I.Erythrae* 504 = *OGIS* 222.

The inscription from Seleukeia-in-Pieria lists two sets of priests for the royal ancestors under Seleukos IV:³¹ these include a priest of Seleukos Zeus Nikator, Antiochos Apollon Soter, Antiochos Theos, Seleukos Kallinikos, Seleukos Soter, Antiochos and Antiochos Megas, and a priest of King Seleukos. The second of the Seleukeia-in-Pieria lists is nearly identical to the first, except that it elides Seleukos Kallinikos. The elision of Seleukos II does not appear to be an act of deliberate policy, but rather an error caused by the repetition of the name Seleukos which confused the inscriber.³² This list differs from the other lists by the inclusion of Zeus and Apollon with Seleukos I's and Antiochos I's epithets. This is an important local variation which is suggestive of a general inconsistency of divine titles across the empire. This list clearly dates to after the appointment of a high-priest of Laodike, and her exclusion seems to be notable.

The third of the decrees comes from Teos, and its list of divine Seleukid kings is as follows: Seleukos Theos, Antiochos Megas, Antiochos Soter, Seleukos Theos, Antiochos Theos, Seleukos Theos, Antiochos Megas, Antiochos Theos, Seleukos Theos, Antiochos Theos Epiphanes, and Demetrios Theos Soter.³³ Once again, any Laodike (whether the wife of Antiochos III or the wife of Seleukos IV/Antiochos IV) is missing.

This is problematic, especially as she is the only Seleukid for whom we have evidence concerning a centrally appointed high-priestess. This means that the lists, which we have from during and after the supposed codification by Antiochos III, neither list his wife, whose priestess' appointment is attested epigraphically, nor are they consistent amongst themselves, thus suggesting either that a centralised cult as normally defined did not exist, or perhaps better that this variation should be considered a normal feature of the less centralised Seleukid Empire which was reflected in administrative terms.³⁴

Before returning to the question of the nature of these cults, we need to explain the omission of Laodike from these lists. One explanation is that Laodike fell from grace and was removed from the central royal cult, but as a brief summary of the evidence of cults for Seleukid queens will show, she is not the only queen who could have been included in the Seleukid ancestor lists. Nor is it at all clear that Seleukid kings who may have fallen from grace have been

³¹ *OGIS* 245.

³² Cf. VAN NUFFELEN (2004), p. 292.

³³ *OGIS* 246. As the end of the Teos decree appears to also include several Ptolemaic kings, it has been proposed that it is a reconstruction of Teos' idealised relationships with the various kings, see VIRGILIO (2003). If the list is a creation of the Teians then I find it surprising that Laodike, wife of Antiochos III, who had received civic cultic honours from the city, is not mentioned. See MA (2000), p. 308–321 for the epigraphic dossier and interpretation.

³⁴ ENGELS (2011) and ENGELS (2017); see also ERICKSON (2018) for an argument for a less centralised cult system based on numismatic evidence.

excluded from these lists, as the list from Teos may include Seleukos son of Antiochos I, or could even include Antiochos Hierax hiding behind an epithet (most likely *theos*).³⁵ As this list of epithets differs significantly from our normal understanding of Seleukid epithets, it is nearly impossible to determine with certainty which kings were originally honoured. In all cases, the most notable ‘Seleukid’ king excluded is the rebel king Achaios who was never accepted by later Seleukid courts as part of the dynasty.

6. *Cults for Seleukid Queens*

If one were to set a list of Seleukid women who received cults,³⁶ then Apame, wife of Seleukos I and mother of Antiochos I, would have been a candidate for inclusion. Tarn considered that she might have provided the link between the Seleukids and Alexander for Kommagene at Nemrut Dağı,³⁷ although there is little other evidence for a cult or even divine honours having been established for her. While her memory was preserved through city foundations in her honour, little is heard of her after her death. Her husband’s second wife and the wife of her son, Stratonike, did receive cults in Asia Minor. Sherwin-White suggested that Stratonike’s titles in the Borsippa cylinder were reserved for goddesses.³⁸ Furthermore, Kosmin has argued that we should see the translation of her name in the cylinder as linked with that of Astarte.³⁹ At Smyrna, Antiochos II and his mother Stratonike were both revered as gods: θεὸν Ἀντίοχον καὶ τῇ μητέρᾳ τὴν τοῦ πατρὸς θεᾶν Στρατονίκην ἰδρῦσθαι παρ’ ἡμῖν τιμωμένους.⁴⁰ Again in Teos, she appears to be linked to the cult of her husband and/or son. Thus, Stratonike would have been an excellent candidate for inclusion in the list of Seleukid ancestors. However, as we have seen above, in the lists of priests of the Seleukid kings, neither Stratonike nor her predecessor is named.

The wives of Antiochos II, Laodike and Berenice, both appear to have good reasons not to have been honoured by their children, given the fratricidal strife they helped engender, although the prominent position both women played would have made it possible for either of the women, but more likely Laodike to have been honoured. If Coşkun is correct in his new chronology of the Third Syrian War, then Laodike’s vigorous defense of Seleukos II would have made it

³⁵ HOLTON (forthcoming).

³⁶ AGER / HARDIMAN (2016), p. 151–153 collect the epigraphic evidence for sculptural representations of the queens in cult before Laodike IV, as none of their sculptures survives.

³⁷ TARN (1929), p. 141. Rejected by ENGELS / ERICKSON (2016), p. 42; STROOTMAN (2016), p. 217, n. 22.

³⁸ SHERWIN-WHITE (1991), p. 84.

³⁹ KOSMIN (2014), p. 187; ENGELS / ERICKSON (2016), p. 59–63.

⁴⁰ OGIS 299.9 = CIG 3137.9 = I.Smyrna 573.I.9. See note 48.

more likely that she was honoured by him.⁴¹ Her absence is particularly interesting; given the later role she played elsewhere in the empire. She granted land to the Babylonians alongside her children, and subsequently received honours there. Furthermore, after her husband's death, she played a brief but significant role in the turmoil that ensued. Perhaps, it was the nature of Antiochos II's marriages that reduced the possibility of honours for either of the women. I do not mean to suggest that Antiochos divorced Laodike, but the status of both women would have been less than straightforward. Both came from prominent families: Laodike from the house of Achaïos with its strong ties to the foundations of Seleukid power in Asia Minor;⁴² Berenike daughter of Ptolemy Philadelphos and sister to Ptolemy Euergetes. I have, however, suggested elsewhere, that we may see hints of honours for Berenike in the controversial Soter coinage, which I would rather date to the reign of Antiochos II Theos, than to the period of conflict following his death.⁴³ In the case of these two women then, it may be the aftermath of the conflict between the Ptolemaic and Seleukid houses that deprived them of honours.

The wives of Hierax⁴⁴ and Seleukos II⁴⁵ are equally anonymous as their mother-in-law was notorious and the civil war between the brothers may have presented a reduced opportunity to glorify them. When looking back to Stratonike as a possible model for Seleukid royal women, it is perhaps surprising that Laodike II, wife of Seleukos II, is not similarly honoured by either of her sons, Seleukos III and Antiochos III.

The queens following Laodike III, the wife of Antiochos III, appear to have been treated as divine with greater frequency than their predecessors. Thus, Laodike IV wife of Seleukos IV and Antiochos IV appeared on bronze coinage dressed as a goddess.⁴⁶ This may be evidence for viewing the reign of Antiochos

⁴¹ COŞKUN (2016), p. 132–133; COŞKUN (Forthcoming).

⁴² See COŞKUN (2016); D'AGOSTINI (Forthcoming); MCAULEY (Forthcoming); MCAULEY - Seleukid Genealogy.

⁴³ ERICKSON (Forthcoming).

⁴⁴ Hierax married the daughter of Prusias of Bithynia in c.233 B.C. We are uncertain as to her name, but it may have been Laodike. (EUS., *Chron.* 1.40.10, BEVAN [1902a], p. 2.132); it is unclear if POLYB. 5.74.5 refers to his wife or daughter, MACURDY (1932), p. 91. See MCAULEY (2013), s.v. Antiochus Hierax.

⁴⁵ Seleukos II's primary wife was Laodike, who seems to be related to the family of Achaïos: POLYB. 4.51.4, 8.33.1, POLYAEN. 4.17. He may also have had a wife/concubine/mistress, Mysta: POLYAENUS 8.60; although OGDEN (1999), p. 132 rejects the marriage. MCAULEY (2013), s.v. Seleucus II.

⁴⁶ SC 1421–1422; See HOOVER (2002) for the discussion of the identity of the Laodike on this coinage, and the rejection of it as an image of Laodike wife of Antiochos III. IOSSIF / LORBER (2007) on the other hand provide a convincing argument that the coinage should represent Laodike III. If this is the case, then I believe this is significant further evidence for the continuation of cults for Laodike III which makes her exclusion from

III and Laodike in particular as a turning point in the presentation of Seleukid cult. Beginning with the reign of Antiochos IV, divine epithets began to appear with regularity on Seleukid coinage, and with Kleopatra Thea, we have a wonderful series of coins which portray her and one of her husbands or children as jugate busts. She is always portrayed with the *polos*, and clearly falls into the traditional image of a Ptolemaic queen. The introduction of these Ptolemaic women into the Seleukid house clearly changed the nature of the representation of these women.⁴⁷

I will now turn back to the cults that had been established by the cities of Asia Minor for Laodike III. Before the establishment of a high-priestess for the cults of Laodike, she had received cultic honours from several cities in Asia Minor, including Teos, Sardeis, Iasos, as we have seen above. She had also received a variety of cults alongside her husband and children. Despite the spotty epigraphic record, there does seem to be an increase in the number of cults for Laodike established by the cities during her lifetime. However, there is no evidence outside the inscriptions discussed above for a centralised cult for her.

Rather than looking for evidence of this centralised cult for Laodike, of which Berenike is but one of the officials, I believe that it is the supervision of these local cults which now fell under her control. This seems to be a similar situation to the one that developed in Xanthos, where Nikanor is listed before the priests of the municipal cult. Thus, as we would expect from the instructions concerning Berenike's appointment, the high-priest of the King is listed before the other priests. Before attempting to assess how the lack of evidence for priestesses of the deified Seleukid Queens should influence our understanding of Seleukid cults more generally, it is useful first to examine the nature of deification of royal women in the empire.

7. Syncretism and Seleukid Queens

As we can see with the cult of Laodike at Iasos and of Stratonike at Smyrna, the queen can be associated with the goddess Aphrodite.⁴⁸ It is unclear to me what the significance of the order of the names in which the queen is associated with Aphrodite is, either 'Aphrodite – Queen' or 'Queen – Aphrodite', nor is it clear if one or the other is of lesser status. As such, for the time being, I will not differentiate between them. The syncretism between Hellenistic queens and

the lists of rulers all the more problematic. See AGER / HARDIMAN (2016) for the problematic representation of Seleukid queens prior to Laodike IV.

⁴⁷ AGER / HARDIMAN (2016), p. 164–171.

⁴⁸ I, like IOSSIF / LORBER (2007), reject RIGSBY (1996), p. 95–99's view that the cultic epithet at Smyrna is anything more than accidental. He shows no evidence that the title predates Seleukid influence on the city.

Aphrodite was fairly common, not only in Ptolemaic Egypt where at the very least Berenike I and II, Arsinoë II and various Kleopatras were assimilated to the goddess in various contexts,⁴⁹ but also some of Demetrios' courtesans were honoured with cults linked to Aphrodite.⁵⁰ If Kosmin's supposition that the translation of Stratonike's name into Akkadian hid an association with Astarte and to Aphrodite is to be believed, it is possible that these associations should be seen in a wider context. Roller has argued that the cult of Kybele could be associated with the power of the state, and that Attis originally functioned as high-priest/king who participated in a *hieros gamos* rite.⁵¹ And, most famously, Lucian associated Stratonike with the building of her temple at Hierapolis.⁵² It is unclear how complete the syncretism between the prominent female goddess was in this period, but it appears as if the queen could be linked to the appropriate manifestation of the divine consort. Iossif and Lorber offer up the equally important syncretism between Aphrodite, the queen and the goddess Nikephoros who became particularly significant for Antiochos IV.⁵³

As noted above, Stratonike and Laodike are the only two purely Seleukid queens that have an association that we know of with Aphrodite. However, the association does seem to have been extremely common in the Hellenistic period: Phila, daughter of Antipater and wife of Krateros and subsequently Demetrios, and thus mother of Stratonike, was honoured as Aphrodite Phila;⁵⁴ Ptolemaic queens, Berenike wife of Ptolemy Soter, Arsinoë II, Berenike wife of Ptolemy Euergetes were likewise honoured. Cheshire has argued that many of the bronze statues found in both Egypt and Syria with the image of Aphrodite may in reality reflect the continuity of these pairings beginning with the long reign of Kleopatra II of Egypt (170–115 BC with various breaks).⁵⁵ The general discussion concerning the establishment of these associations for the queens have been linked either to their womanly virtues and patronage of typical rituals for women: births, marriages, etc. as we see with both Phila and with Laodike III, wife of Antiochos III, or for their beauty and support for their husbands. But is it really as straightforward as Cheshire suggests, when she states: 'the

⁴⁹ Berenike, wife of Ptolemy Soter, is deified by Aphrodite (THEOCR., *Id.* 17.50ff; *Idyll* 15.106–108) there is also evidence of a joint shrine for Aphrodite-Berenike in the Fayum *P. Enteux.* 13; ROWLANDSON (1998), p. 28–30. Berenike II, wife of Ptolemy III, dedicates her famous lock of hair (Kallimachos *Aetia* 4 / *Coma Berenices* and Catullus 66) at a temple of Arsinoë-Aphrodite, and is herself then connected with the god. See GUTZWILLER (1992) and CLAYMAN (2014), p. 97–104 for analysis of Berenike's connection with Aphrodite.

⁵⁰ ATHEN. 253a–253b.

⁵¹ ROLLER (1999), p. 111–112.

⁵² LUC., *Dea Syr.* 384–402.

⁵³ IOSSIF / LORBER (2007).

⁵⁴ ATHEN. 254a and 255c.

⁵⁵ CHESHIRE (2007), p. 157ff.

emphasis of the religious propaganda of the Hellenistic queens was, not surprisingly, based on the tenet that “sex sells, beauty sells”.⁵⁶ Would the portrayal of these women as both desirable and loyal have helped secure either their own power or that of their consorts? What impact did the polygamous relationships have on the choice to honour an individual queen as an aspect of Aphrodite?

To look at these Aphrodite pairings in a bit more detail, we must step outside the Seleukid realm and look first at Phila, the daughter of Antipater. Athenaios notes that in a symposium, Phila was toasted as ‘Aphrodite Phila’ and that ‘flatterers’ established a cult to her as Phila Aphrodite with the erection of a sanctuary, the Philaion, during her lifetime.⁵⁷ It is possible that we should see these titles conferred on her for similar activities to those for which Laodike would later be honoured. Thus, Diodoros states that Phila established dowries for the ‘sisters and daughters of the poor’.⁵⁸ It is not at all clear that we should link Phila’s charitable activities with her cult, but given our normal understanding of the establishment of cults for Hellenistic rulers as part of a euergetic exchange between unequal powers, and the subsequent honours for Laodike clearly defined along these same lines, it seems highly likely. If Phila was the only woman who was associated with Demetrios and with Aphrodite, then perhaps we could suggest that the association of the queen with the goddess marked her out for special status within the royal court. But we also see the *hetaira* Lamia honoured as divine by both the Athenians and the Thebans, with a temple built by the latter to Aphrodite Lamia.⁵⁹ Further honours were also bestowed on his other courtesans.⁶⁰ In addition to his liaisons with courtesans, Demetrios had several other wives who bore him children, including Eurydike, Deidameia, Ptolemais, Lanassa.⁶¹ None of these women appear to have been honoured in the same way as Phila and Lamia. Since Phila seems to have obtained some form of special status within Demetrios’ court, as did Lamia, perhaps we should consider their associations with Aphrodite as special markers of their status. Furthermore, as both women were notably older than the king, perhaps their association with Aphrodite did indicate or further enhance their reputation.

Stratonike,⁶² the first Seleukid queen to receive honours of this type, was Phila’s daughter. It is therefore interesting that she eventually received the same

⁵⁶ CHESHIRE (2007), p. 164–165; cf. ATHEN. 566a–e.

⁵⁷ ATHEN. 254a. 105; ATHEN. 255c.

⁵⁸ DIOD. SIC. 19.59.4–5.

⁵⁹ ATHEN. 253a–b.

⁶⁰ OGDEN (2009). See OGDEN (1999), p. 232ff. for the discussion of the roles, status and careers of these women.

⁶¹ OGDEN (1999), p. 173.

⁶² For Stratonike see now: HARDERS (2016); ENGELS / ERICKSON (2016); ALMAGOR (2016); RAMSEY (2016).

titulature as her mother. While the desirable nature of Stratonike is clear from Antiochos' desire for her, we do not have clear evidence for her cult until the reign of her grandson. I believe that the association between Stratonike and Aphrodite extends back into the reign of her second husband Antiochos I. Owing to the context of the inscription in which we find Aphrodite Stratonikis, we do not have any information concerning the reasoning behind her deification. Should we assume that Stratonike was honoured at Smyrna for benefactions which were specifically associated with women's status in society or perhaps with specific reference to the goddess, as might be possible with her mother? Or should we see her deification linked to a different model that stresses her other virtues?

For the Ptolemaic queens, again we have limited information. The clearest association between a queen and Aphrodite that goes some way to explaining the relationship can be found in Kallimachos' *Lock of Berenike* (Βερενίκης πλόκαμος).⁶³ Here Berenike's devotion to her husband provides the cause of the link between the Queen and the goddess. Arsinoë II's honours, although far grander than the other queens, may have been generated along the same lines, emphasising her relations and equal status with her brother-husband. Another model might have been provided by the courtesans of Ptolemy Philadelphos: e.g., Bilistiche who was honoured as Aphrodite Bilistiche.⁶⁴ Ogden has suggested that the advertisement of Ptolemy II's courtesans may have been part of an effort to show that he was not only sleeping with his sister-wife to a Graeco-Macedonian audience.⁶⁵

Looking at the evidence for these women for whom cults were established in the first three generations after Alexander, we can divide up the reasons behind their honours into three general categories. First, the women provided some benefaction within an area related to one of the spheres of Aphrodite's influence. Here, the examples of Laodike and Phila fit well. The second seems to be related to their devotion to their family and in particular their husbands. Here, once again Laodike fits as does Berenike. The final category seems to be developed out of their own equation with Aphrodite and their desirability. This is particularly true for the courtesans, but also for queens such as Stratonike. So, to return to the establishment of the high-priestess for Laodike by her husband, Antiochos highlights a range of these virtues: a loving consort, devoted to the gods, and loved by her husband.⁶⁶ These reasons seem to capture the reasons for

⁶³ VAN OPPEN (2015), p. 71–115.

⁶⁴ PLUT., *Mor.* 753e–f.

⁶⁵ OGDEN (2009), p. 350–351.

⁶⁶ MA (2000): διὰ τὸ [μὴ μόνον ἡμῖν φιλοστόργως καὶ κηδεμονι[κῶς] αὐτὴν συμβιοῦν, ἀλλὰ καὶ πρὸς τὸ θε[ῖ]ον εὐσεβῶς δια[κ]εῖσθαι, καὶ τὰ ἄλλα μὲν [ὅσα πρ]έπει καὶ δίκαιόν ἐστι παρ' ἡμῶν αὐτῇ [συνα]ντᾶσθαι δια[τ]ελοῦμεν μετὰ φιλοσ[τ]ο[ρ]γίας ποιοῦντε[ς] (since she not only is a loving and caring consort, but also is piously disposed

which the individual cities had honoured the queen, but they also fall into the wider range of ways in which the kings honoured their associated women.⁶⁷ Furthermore, does this tendency to link the deified queen to a goddess also have implications for how the priestesshood should be established? It seems plausible that officials may have normally been appointed under the auspices of existing deities rather than only in light of the creation of a new royal deity. However, the establishment of a high priestess for Laodike's cult provided the impetus to create a new office to incorporate the other pre-existing cults in various regions across the empire.

8. Conclusion

In summary, what I have argued is that rather than the establishment of a new cult for Laodike, Antiochos III created a new official who was entrusted with overseeing the activities of the existing local cults. Thus, instead of establishing a new centralised cult at the court, Antiochos appointed a number of officials who could intervene into the local affairs of sanctuaries dependant on the circumstances (although it seems unlikely that they would have done so regularly). These officials received the honour of being placed at the head of documents. However, it appears that at least for the male branch of the Seleukid royal cult, this office could go unoccupied in a region for a length of time (as it had after Dion until the appointment of Nikanor in Asia Minor, undoubtedly owing to Seleukid military setbacks). If this model is correct, then much of the variation of the cults for the Seleukids can be explained. Firstly, there was no new cult for the royal family established as there was in Alexandria. Secondly, the cults for which the new high-priestess was appointed did not differ from the civic cults for the queen. This model allowed for greater flexibility for the Seleukid royal family in establishing its relationship with the divine and with individual city states under its control. This flexibility would have been particularly important with regards to the inclusion of royal women who could prove to be problematic or fall out of favour. Contrary to what would be expected if Antiochos III was successful in establishing a centralised cult of himself and his family, this is the case both before and after his reign. It is not until the reign of his son, Antiochos IV, that symbols of divinity (either in the legend or the iconography) became common on Seleukid coinage. This suggests that Antiochos III's reforms had relatively little impact on the presentation of ruler across the empire.

towards the divine, we continuously do, with love, the things which it is fitting and just that she should receive from us).

⁶⁷ RAMSEY (2011).

In light of the evidence concerning Laodike's cult, I propose a slightly different option: there was never a fully-centralised cult of the Seleukid kings, but there were interventions into what have previously been considered only civic cults. This does not mean that the Seleukids did not attempt at various points, particularly in the reign of Antiochos III, to bring local cults under central control, but rather that they were never fully successful. The defeat inflicted by the Romans on Antiochos not only severed the cities of Asia Minor from the Seleukid king's grasp, but they will have also disrupted his administrative reforms elsewhere as the king worked to re-establish his authority. The full extent of this change is that the ruler cults for the Seleukid kings that already existed as *polis*-initiated cults could be and were recognised by the Seleukid state during the reign of Antiochos I (e.g., the Nicatorium), and this pattern of acceptance of local cults was partially re-organised by Antiochos III, who may have given the supervisory duties for the local royal cults to a single official in each administrative unit.

If this is the case, then what do we learn concerning the status of these royal women? First, if Berenike only took over the role of overseer, this would explain the lack of specification of her new role. She is allowed particular honours, but would have had little impact on the running of the municipal cults. This system makes it nearly impossible to tell from our limited evidence if the role of the high priestess included supervision of the cults for the female ancestors, as it did for the high priest. This more limited role for high-priestesses does not completely explain the lack of evidence for the cults for these women after Laodike, it may provide a new way to look for evidence of their existence.

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