

Introduction and Background Bibliography

Following the death of Alexander¹ his generals contended with each other over the control of the empire and his wife and unborn child. This begins what Droysen called the Hellenistic Age. For Droysen, Alexander's conquests lead to the increased fusion of Greek and "Oriental" culture out of which Christianity grew. In the past century a wealth of new inscriptions, papyri, coins and archaeological evidence has allowed for a more nuanced view of the period to emerge.

While it has become increasingly cliché to say that the Hellenistic Age has been understudied, despite several brilliant scholars, this was certainly the case until the last 20 years. The last several decades, however, have produced an ever increasing amount of bibliography and greatly increased our understanding of the period. Several important English works are helpful to have at hand in studying the era. The first are the two Hellenistic source books, *The Hellenistic Period* by Bagnall and Derow (published by Blackwell) and *The Hellenistic World from Alexander to the Roman Conquest* by Austin. For a long time the standard introduction to the Hellenistic Period was *The Hellenistic World* by F.W. Walbank, first edition in 1980 with revised editions in 1986 and 1992. Peter Green's *Alexander to Actium* also covered the time period. 2003 saw the publication of the *Blackwell Companion to the Hellenistic World*, edited by Andrew Erskine which provides many of the best introductions to the period using both a chronological and thematic approach. Other helpful resources are the text books aimed at an undergraduate audience, the best two being Errington's *History of the Hellenistic World* and Shipley's *Greek World after Alexander*.

This course will not focus on the entire Hellenistic period nor the entire Hellenistic world, but rather will explore the eastern half of Alexander's empire which is known as the Achaemenid Empire. The main focus will be on the Seleucid empire which was ruled by the descendants of the general who managed to gain the lion's share of the spoils, It will also trace the subsequent break away dynasties and dynasts as well as the other major eastern power, the Ptolemies.

Of the two eastern empires, the Ptolemaic empire has been traditionally better understood through modern scholarship. This may be from a variety of factors: from the West's fascination with Egypt, to better preserved material, and to Egypt's more successful engagement with the Roman world.

Beyond the studies mentioned above, the Seleucids have only recently begun to be studied in depth. There are a few notable early Twentieth Century works on the Seleucids, most notably Bevan's *House of Seleucus* (1902) and Bouché-Leclercq's *Histoire des Séleucides (323-64 avant J.-C.)* (1913). (Both men also wrote histories of the Ptolemaic house). Another important work is Tarn's *The Greeks in India and Bactria* (second edition 1966). Tarn, a great admirer of Alexander, viewed the Seleucids and the Greco-Bactrian kingdom as the ultimate expression of Alexander's desire to unite mankind. While this view is somewhat

¹ See L. Depuydt, "The time of death of Alexander the Great: 11 June 323 B.C. (-322), ca. 4.00-5.00 PM", *Die Welt des Orients* 28 (1997), 117-135. T. Boiy, *Late Achaemenid and Hellenistic Babylon* (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 136), Leuven 2004, 116-117.

outdated, he provides the best coverage of the evidence as it was known when he wrote. Tarn's work on Bactria has now for the most part been surpassed by the excellent work of F.L. Holt.

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw a renaissance in Seleucid studies, with an important series of studies published by Aarhus University press, the most relevant for this course being *Religion and Religious practice in the Seleucid Empire*. The two most significant works published in this period were the edited volume *Hellenism in the East* and *From Samarkand to Sardis* (both by S. Sherwin-White and A. Kuhrt). They proposed a model in which the Seleucid empire was not just the Greek imposition of colonial rule but rather a synthesis that inherited much from the Achaemenid Empire (I am confused about dates and scope of Achaemenid Empire; is it what Alex conquered?). Their work for the first time seriously incorporated the work of traditionally non-Classical fields such as Assyriology. The late Twentieth and early Twenty-First Centuries saw an increased production of works on the Seleucids as the ramifications of Sherwin-White and Kuhrt's work were incorporated, rejected or modified into new views. Several of the most important works of this era are Ogden's *Polygamy, Prostitutes and Death* (1999); J. Ma's *Antiochus III and the Cities of Western Asia Minor* (2000); Prost's edited volume *L'Orient Méditerranéen de la mort d'Alexandre aux Campagnes de Pompée* (2003); Aperghis' *Seleucid Royal Economy* (2004); Capdetrey's *Le pouvoir séleucide: territoire, administration, finances d'un royaume hellénistique, 312-129 avant J.-C.* (2007); Erickson and Ramsey's *Seleucid Dissolution* (2011).

The study of their coinage has been an important source of direct knowledge about the Seleucids. The most significant publication in this field is the comprehensive catalogue of Seleucid Coins (Part 1 Seleucus 1 - Antiochus III (2002), Part 2 Seleucus IV - Antiochus XIII (2008)) by Arthur Houghton and Catherine Lorber. These volumes replaced Newell's earlier two volumes on Seleucid coins (Western Seleucid Mints and Eastern Seleucid Mints) and have facilitated the research into numismatics by Classicists.

Another significant strand of research that has made material more available has been the online publication of many Babylonian texts through the website: <http://www.livius.org/>

Ancient Sources:

See above for numismatics and for some of the Babylonian material.

The literary sources for the Seleucid empire are relatively thin with a few areas of better coverage. For the early Hellenistic period there is significant literary coverage of events in the west, whereas the events in Babylon and further east are less well covered. Our major literary source for this period is Diodorus books 18-20 who covers the years 323-302. While Diodorus provides the only continuous account of this period that we presently have, other sources of information (with some overlapping of the underlying contemporary historians) comes to us from Plutarch's lives of Eumenes and Demetrius, and Cornelius Nepos's life of Eumenes. Another major source is Justin's epitome of Pompeius Trogus (a new English

translation of the relevant Diadochoi books is now available translation by Yardley and Heckel). For the Seleucids in particular a brief summary of all of their history can be found in Appian's *Syriaka* (Syrian Wars) as well as a more detailed account of the Roman war with Antiochus. Several other fragmentary sources further help with the early chronology, in particular the Marmor Parium (FGrHist 239) and the Babylonian *Chronicle of the Successors* (BCHP 3).² The period from the end of the Diadoch wars until the reign of Antiochus III is less well documented than the early period, Diodorus who covered the period becomes fragmentary. And we are left with only digressions in Polybius and Livy, Justin's epitome, Appian and the various epigraphic, cuneiform and numismatic material. The reign of Antiochus III and his war with the Romans is well covered in Polybius' history, the best commentary on the text remains Walbank. For the period after Antiochus III the reign of Antiochus IV is covered from the Jewish perspective in the books of Maccabees, as well as in Polybius, although here much of Polybius is fragmentary. For the rest of Seleucid history, the sources again return to the same state as after the 280s.

Early Hellenistic Chronology:

While the date of Alexander's death can be fairly firmly established,³ the chronology of other events in the east is particularly problematic. Two sets of dates have been established, called respectively the high chronology and the low chronology.

One of the problems in chronology is derived from Diodorus' chronological practice. In his attempt to unite the various areas his work covered, he equated Roman consular years, Athenian archon years, and olympiads. However, these systems do not begin or end on the same dates. For the Diadochoi period after 315 it becomes apparent that Diodorus assigned everything that happened in one campaigning season (winter to winter) to the year of the archon (appointed in summer) so the first half of the campaign season is systematically assigned to the wrong archon. Additionally, not all of Diodorus' information is in the correct year, he misses the archons for 321/0 and 320/19, placing events in other years. Supplementary information is available mainly through the cuneiform sources.

Weekly Assignments:

Do the following reading, and write a brief summary of the two different chronologies and argue which you believe is preferable.

² Several other cuneiform sources will be discussed in your reading for this section.

³ See L. Depuydt, "The time of death of Alexander the Great: 11 June 323 B.C (-322), ca. 4.00-5.00 PM", *Die Welt des Orients* 28 (1997), 117-135. T. Boiy, *Late Achaemenid and Hellenistic Babylon* (Orientalis Lovaniensia Analecta 136), Leuven 2004, 116-117.

Reading:

Read Book 18-20 of Diodorus

Boiy, Tom. "The Reigns of the Seleucid Kings According to the Babylon King List" *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 70, No. 1 (April 2011), pp. 1-12.

Boiy, Tom "Dating Methods during the Early Hellenistic Period" *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, Vol. 52, (2000), pp. 115-121.

A. T. Olmstead "Cuneiform Texts and Hellenistic Chronology" *Classical Philology* Vol. 32, No. 1 (Jan., 1937), pp. 1-14

Boiy, T. "Early Hellenistic Chronography in Cuneiform Tradition" *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* Bd. 138, (2002), pp. 249-255

R. M. Errington "Diodorus Siculus and the Chronology of the Early Diadochoi, 320-311 B.C." *Hermes* 105. Bd., H. 4 (1977), pp. 478-504

Meeus, Alexander "The Power Struggle of the Diadochoi in Babylon, 323 BC" *Ancient Society* 38 (2008), pp. 39-82

If you can get access to it:

Between High and Low: A Chronology of the Early Hellenistic Period

By T. Boiy (try on google books) is very helpful.