
REVIEWS

D. Ogden, *The Legend of Seleucus: Kingship, Narrative and Mythmaking in the Ancient World*, Cambridge–New York, Cambridge University Press, 2017, xiv-386 pp. [ISBN 9781107164789].

In 1996, Fraser, in his *The Cities of Alexander the Great*¹, raised the question of whether the stories that arose around Seleucus I formed part of a similar narrative to that of the more familiar *Alexander Romance*. This book goes a considerable way towards defining the parameters in which the Seleucus legend may have arisen and the forms that it may have taken. As Ogden² clearly lays out there are a range of imperial period records of a Seleucid tradition that arose at some point during the Seleucid empire, and it goes well beyond the material contained in Appian's *Syriake*. In approaching the Seleucus material, Ogden defines six categories of legendary episodes (or groups of episodes) which correlate to the main chapters: birth myth and omens of greatness; Seleucus' escape from Babylon; omens and myths of city and cult foundation; Combabus and Stratonice; Antiochus and Stratonice; and omens of death, death and revenge. Ogden defends his groupings by linking them to two sets of criteria one related to their content and one related to their possible political function (p. 4). In addition to these chapters which serve to collect and analyse the legendary material, the final chapter explores the origins of the material: first by exploring briefly the possibility of the legendary material being reflected in coinage. He then considers the modern attempts at *quellenforschung* for the material, before a careful comparison to the structure of the *Alexander Romance*. As result, Ogden gives the most comprehensive synthesis of all the legendary material linked to Seleucus to date. Nonetheless, much like the origins of the *Alexander Romance* the question of a single narrative around Seleucus remains elusive.

For the purposes of this review, I wish to highlight and discuss a few of the episodes which Ogden discusses as indicative of his broader conclusion. Perhaps unsurprisingly given his other work on Alexander's birth legend, the first episode is the collection of material in both Justin's epitome of Trogus and Appian regarding Seleucus' birth and the gift of an anchor signet ring. In his explanation of the episode Ogden focuses on the context and the tradition concerning the gift of the ring and its relation to dream narratives involving rings. In doing so, Ogden highlights the symbolic value of the ring both within the Alexander tradition but also within folkloric traditions that stretched both through Greece and the Near East. The discussion of his mother's receipt of the signet ring and its comparisons to the gifts left behind by gods visiting mortals on the

¹ P. M. FRASER (1996): *Cities of Alexander the Great*, Oxford.

² Professor Ogden was my PhD supervisor, and at least if the acknowledgements are to be believed, helped encourage his return to Seleucid questions.

one hand demonstrates the fundamental Greekness of the material. However, as Ogden's next contextual discussion the role of rings in dreams demonstrate that the tradition is not solely Greek but also resonated with Akkadian dream symbolism. As Ogden argues the Near East, Greece and Persia all shared some legitimating mythological story-types, and rings were a potent symbol of power in all three cultures. This might mean that though the origins of the story clearly build on Greek prototypes, "the interest of the Seleucids in perpetuating the Seleucus tale may have been due in part to its resonance with the indigenous populations of their empire" (p. 33).

The second chapter provides a range of important new parallels for Seleucus' flight from Babylon. Here Ogden collects a range of regional stories of a similar archetype that all correspond to Diodorus' and Appian's narratives. Ogden highlights the possibility of an Argead parallel in the story concerning Perdikkas I's foundation of the dynasty. But he goes further in developing the horse-back escape narrative schema which allows for fruitful comparisons of a range of rulers. The schema proposed covers a wider range of legends than those considered in detail, but provides an interesting starting point for further work on the function of structured legendary schema in Greek and Near Eastern legitimating narratives that goes beyond Ogden's focus on Seleucus. In considering the episodes, Ogden highlights four narratives connected to kingship: Cyrus, Zariadres, Alexander (in the *Romance*) and Ardeshir. Ogden's discussion of Ardeshir's escape from Ardevan in the Pahlavi *Book of the Deeds of Ardeshir son of Babak* brings to light one of the more important conclusions of the work. The parallels in narrative that Ogden highlights to legendary episodes of later kings, particularly the Sassanids, suggests a longer afterlife to more of the Seleucus material than has previously been considered. Although it does not place the importance of the Seleucus material on par with the *Alexander Romance* material, it demonstrates the preservation of the material within the narratives linked to the subsequent rulers of former Seleucid territories. These narrative similarities help place the Seleucids in a longer continuity of Near Eastern rulers and not only as a Macedonian blip in the history of Persia.

One of my favourite episodes that Ogden links to the Seleucid narrative comes in his discussion of the Daphne foundation narrative. Here Ogden draws comparisons from the finding of the inscribed arrowhead, Daphne's springs into a discussion of Apollo and Drakon. This skilfully weaves the possible narratives together and displays the complex interplay of mythology and legend that surrounds Seleucus. Ogden's expansive knowledge of connected material is also evident in the well-trodden field of Combabus and Stratonice. By bringing the analogues beyond even Ardeshir, Ogden again demonstrates the persistence of the tradition and the importance of Seleucus in defining kingly archetypes. It is perhaps impossible to escape the most famous of Seleucid episodes, the pairing of Antiochus and Stratonice.³ Here Ogden collects a significant list of analogous pairings from throughout antiquity, which allows him to suggest that these stories do not only belong to Hellenistic historiography, ancient medical tradition, rhetorical schools, or the ancient novel, but rather that it transcends all of these traditions and belongs to the realm of international folktale.

Before concluding, it would be remiss of me not to mention one of the most unique stories Ogden collects, which is the story of Stratonice the Bald. Although, as Ogden

³ See for example the three chapters on Stratonice and Antiochos in the 2016 Royal Seleukid Women volume: E. ALMAGOR (2016): "Seleukid Love and Power: Stratonike I", in A. COŞKUN – A. MCAULEY (eds.): *Seleukid Royal Women*, Stuttgart: 67–86; D. ENGELS – K. ERICKSON (2016): "Apama and Stratonike - Marriage and Legitimacy", in A. COŞKUN – A. MCAULEY (eds.): *Seleukid Royal Women*, Stuttgart: 41–67; G. C. RAMSEY (2016): "The Diplomacy of Seleukid Women: Apama and Stratonike", in A. COŞKUN - A. MCAULEY (eds.): *Seleukid Royal Women*, Stuttgart: 87–104.

demonstrates Lucian appears to create an image of the Seleucid court highlighted by Stratonice's *eros*, this episode perhaps does the opposite (unless of course she is in on the joke). In the scope of a review it is impossible to touch on all aspects of the vast and varied material that Ogden collects concerning Seleucus and the analogous and parallel traditions. The final chapter provides a valuable synthesis not only of the conclusions of the interpretation of all of this material but a through discussion of the state of modern historiography in regards to the question of the Seleucus material.

In typically Ogden fashion, he summarises his conclusions with a series of succinct bullet points which serve to highlight the fundamentally broad scope of the work. Ogden has persuasively demonstrated that there was an expansive and coherent legend of Seleucus, even if it was not a single text. Further, that many of the parallel elements between the *Alexander Romance* and the Seleucus material, the extant Seleucus material predates the extant *Alexander Romance*. In a similar vein, the Seleucus legend may have been as influential as the Alexander material in shaping future Persian traditions.

The book concludes with a series of interesting appendices on individual texts and traditions. The final appendix, (F), raises the question as to whether these types of narratives were found in all of the major dynasties, and highlights some of the potential Ptolemaic material, although it is relatively limited. Does this perhaps suggest that the Alexander narrative tradition may have served the same function for the Ptolemies as the Seleucid material did for Seleucus and what of an Antigonid tradition?

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