Imperial metropoleis *and Foundation Myths*
Ptolemaic and Seleucid Capitals Compared

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Common Introduction

In the two parts of this chapter, we investigate the ways in which major royal cities of the Ptolemaic and Seleucid realms were constructed as capitals of imperial states. In particular, we discuss how the foundation stories of these cities reflect conflicts and integration politics, which the creation of imperial *metropoleis* involved and which these stories aimed to control. Against the common assumption that the capitals of the Ptolemaic and Seleucid empires were culturally and politically uncontested, we will suggest that both Ptolemaic and Seleucid royal cities were constantly positioned and re-positioned vis-à-vis other royal or imperial cities that expressed, or had expressed in the past, similar claims. In the foundation myths of royal cities, we observe both competition and accommodation: competition and accommodation, that is, across the imperial zones of the Seleucid and Ptolemaic kings, between Memphis and Alexandria, as well as between Alexandria and Rome.

With our focus on the discourses behind the descriptions of royal cities and their foundation stories, we try to move away from kings and emperors as the sole makers of royal and imperial capitals. Ancient authors constructed cities as having been planned by their founders and first kings for their future destiny. Every founder and subsequent king had materialized in stone a normative idea of how the city was to be. As royal cities were thus the tangible signs of imperial visions, their designs also reflected different possibilities of imperial authority vis-à-vis different elites and populations. The literary resonances of the imperial cities, the stories of their foundation, the praise of their beauty, as much as lamentations about their decay, were reactions to changing structures of legitimacy spreading within and beyond the edges of empire.

Our analysis is as much a comparative study as it is one of entanglement. Alexandria, Seleucia and Antioch formed as capitals in dialogue with each other as well as with other cosmopolitan cities, notably Athens, Pergamum and Rome. The images that poets, historians and visitors created were informed by shared visions of what it meant to be a world city. Yet through a shared and recognizable imagery some features unique to Ptolemaic and to Seleucid cities will stand out.

1A   ALEXANDRIA

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1   Introduction

The *Bellum Alexandrinum*, transmitted to us in the corpus of Julius Caesar's writings, has preserved a remarkable description of Alexandria:

> Practically the whole of Alexandria is undermined with subterranean conduits running from the Nile, by which water is conducted into private houses, which water gradually settles down and becomes clear. This is normally used by the owners of mansions and their households; for what the Nile brings down is so muddy and turbid that it gives rise to many different diseases. The common people, however, are forced to be content with the latter, because there is not a single spring in the whole city.[1] (Ps.-Caes. *B. Alex.* 5)

This sketch of the city, focusing on its subterranean structures and unequal water supply, stands out against much more typical descriptions of Alexandria as the most beautiful, populous and prosperous city in the whole world.[2] Take the almost contemporary account of Diodorus, who visited Alexandria in 59 BCE:

> He [Alexander] laid out the site and traced the streets skilfully and ordered that the city should be called Alexandria after him. It was conveniently situated near the harbour of Pharos, and by selecting the right angle of the streets, Alexander made the city breathe with etesian winds so that, as those blow across a great expanse of the sea, they cool the air of the town; and so, he provided its inhabitants with a moderate climate and good health . . . The city in general has grown so much in later times that many reckon it to be

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[1] Translations are, with minor adaptations, taken from the Loeb Classical Library, unless stated otherwise.
[2] See also Vitr. 2.4; Strab. 17.1.8–10 and 12–13; Plut. *Alex.* 26.3–7; Arr. *An.* 3.1.5; Am. Marc. 22.16.7, and below.

the first city of the civilized world, and it is certainly far ahead of all the rest in elegance and extent and riches and luxury. (Diod. 17.52.1–5)

Both Diodorus's and Pseudo-Caesar's descriptions were written against the background of another great imperial city: Rome.[3] While Diodorus left it to the reader to decide whether Alexandria was the first city of the *oikoumene*, he authenticated its size, wealth and elegance by his own observation. The *Bellum Alexandrinum*, too, invited its readers to comparisons with Rome. While Rome was well furnished with aqueducts, conducting spring water for everyone to enjoy, Alexandria's water supply mirrored the disruption of a city that had fallen into social, political and urban decay. And just as Alexandria's dirty water supply reflected a polluted city, the technically ingenuous strategy in the Alexandrian war reflected the demise of an empire that was famous for its patronage of science.[4]

Egypt invited its visitors, poets and ethnographers to cultural self-reflection. In its presumed otherness, it served as a trajectory for reflections about the cultural and geographical order of the world, cultural asymmetries and power struggles.[5] Alexandria occupied a paradoxical space in these reflections. As the city 'by Egypt' (*pros Aigyptō,* Strab. 5.1.7; *Romance* 1.34.6), it had a place and no place in Egypt.[6] Alexander had founded a city that was both Egyptian and non-Egyptian, Greek and non-Greek. Its uncertain cultural location was suggested by stories about its controversial initial siting. Both Plutarch and Curtius report that Alexander had an ideal place for the city in mind, but Homer suggested another location, the island of Pharos, just off the Egyptian coast. But this place was not appropriate, as the island was too small for the future size of the city (Plut. *Alex.* 26; Curt. 4.8.2). Alexander then built a coastal town with a maritime harbour linked to the island of Pharos by a shallow, quite against the ideas of preceding pharaohs who in the same place had stationed guards to ward off traders, as Strabo tells us (Strab. 17.1.6). Like the archetypal Greek founder (*Od.* 6.8–10), Alexander had surrounded

[3] For the literary responses to Rome in the late Republic and early Empire, see Edwards (1996). Direct dialogue between Alexandria and Rome can also be found in Suetonius's famous remark that Augustus 'rendered into marble a city of bricks not yet suitable for the grandeur of an imperial city' (*neque pro maiestate imperii ornata*, Aug. 29.1); see further below; and de Polignac (2005); Nawotka (2017) 26.

[4] Ps.-Caes. *B. Alex.* 5–6; Vasunia (2001) 278; Moyer (2011a) 10.

[5] Classically, Hartog (1988); also Vasunia (2001); Cartledge (2002); Pfeiffer (2005); Moyer (2011a) 1–41 for review and latest discussion.

[6] Vasunia (2001) 268–72, following Selden (1998); Savvopoulos (2010) for a changing discourse on Egyptian otherness.

Alexandria with city walls, distributed the land and endowed the city with an *agora* and temples.[7] Yet as if Alexandria was not just a Greek *apoikia*, the Egyptian name for Alexandria, Rhakotis (*rꜥqd*), was always remembered so as to emphasize that Alexandria was not just a Greek capital but had been an Egyptian village surrounded by pasture and animals.[8] The Alexandrians, moreover, were not Greek immigrants, as one might expect from a Greek colony, but Egyptians who had formerly lived in the surrounding villages (Curt. 4.8.5; cf. Ps.-Call. *Alexander Romance* 1.32.2–3). Alexander also had built not just Greek temples, but one for Isis as well, the most important Egyptian goddess (Arr. *Anab.* 3.1.5).[9] From the very beginning, Alexandria's cultural tensions were built into the city, just as its foundation prefigured its future size and greatness, and the rivalries that surrounded its growth.

The narratives of urban foundations wrote into space relationships and conflicts that gave meaning to an arbitrary assemblage of people, buildings and physical structures. Cities were founded by conquerors and colonizers, but they were written and rewritten by other people – their inhabitants and visitors, poets, ethnographers and enemies. These filled the cities with meanings reaching beyond their physical space. In fact, all that is known about ancient Alexandria today are ideas of the city, couched in seemingly accurate descriptions of monuments, street plans and infrastructures. Together they form a discourse over the question of what it meant to be an imperial capital.

In this part of the chapter, I explore some aspects of this discourse by looking at various texts that preserve Alexandria's foundation stories.[10] It is my contention that these stories offer access to the imperial aspirations of the city and the attempts of local elites and populations to participate in or to contest these aspirations. The task is a daunting one, as the details of Alexandria's foundation stories shifted with the shifting rhetoric of the texts within which they were told. All these texts were written or survive in a form that was fixed under the Roman empire. To ascertain layers that date back to Hellenistic times, or to disentangle the different voices that contributed to a changing discourse, is hardly possible. The chronological markers for identifying layers are purely contextual, supplemented by the suggestions of scholars that have studied these texts critically.[11]

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[7] Arr. *An.* 3.1.5; Curt. 4.8.6; *Romance* 1.31.7.

[8] Nawotka (2017) 99 with discussion of the origin of the name Rhakotis.

[9] Selden (1998) with further details for Alexandria's untypical nature as a Greek foundation.

[10] The most important foundation stories are those in Diod. 17.52; Strab. 17.1.6; Curt. 4.8.1–2; Vitr. 2, pr. 3–4; Plut. *Alex.* 26.4–10; Arr. *An.* 3.1.5–2.2; Just. 9.11.13; *Alexander Romance* 1.31–32. For a comprehensive collection of passages, Nawotka (2017) 97.

[11] This holds true especially for the *Alexander Romance*, surviving mainly in three different medieval manuscripts composed in different sociocultural milieus over a period of 600 years. I follow

This part of the chapter therefore must adopt a broader focus than its second part. Alexandria continued to compete with Rome as a world *metropolis* long after the Hellenistic kings had been concerned with establishing their capitals in competition with each other (see below, part B). In the first section, I will start with three third-century BCE representations of Alexandria, whose ideological purposes can with certainty be related to the Ptolemaic court. Here we can grasp the imperial claims of the Ptolemies and the ways in which Alexandria was constructed as the centre of a universal empire vis-à-vis other such centres. In the second part, I shall discuss the foundation story of Alexandria as it has come down to us in the *Alexander Romance*. Some of its details had clearly developed further in Roman times, but others – strongly responding to Memphis – make sense against a Ptolemaic background only. In the third part, I shall turn to a text that preserves a story about Alexandria's second foundation, this time as a prosperous city that had escaped its early destruction under Ptolemy I. It tells about the origin of Serapis, who had travelled to Alexandria to rescue the city. Tacitus's version of the story had further developed in Roman times, as Memphis and the Ptolemies served as no more than elements of an imperial memory. Yet together, these stories show the lasting debates over the formation of *metropoleis*, just as they echo the voices that participated in the work that was necessary to establish, maintain and contest their status.

2   Alexandria as a Space of Empire

The Grand Procession of Ptolemy II, famously described by Callixeinus of Rhodes in the final decades of the third century BCE, has frequently been analysed as an early celebration of the Ptolemaic dynasty, its power and aspirations to universal empire.[12] Central to the procession was the pageant of Dionysus, the conqueror-god with whom the Ptolemies most strongly identified (197e–202a). It contained the god's triumphal return from India and associated his life and achievements with those of Alexander, the

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Stoneman's (1991) introduction to the Penguin translation where he suggests that (a) the stories of the *Romance* developed in an Alexandrian context, (b) most of its stories were circulating already in the first 100 years after Alexander's death, and (c) it emerged in a transcultural exchange of Greek, Egyptian, Jewish and Persian narrative and literary traditions (10–15). Nawotka's argument that the Greek ms A of the *Romance* was written by a single author, Pseudo-Callisthenes, does not concern us here. On the dating of the *Romance*, see also Fraser (1972) I 677–8 and (1996) 205–11; Jouanno (2002) esp. 68–82; Stephens (2003) 64–5 with notes.

[12] Athen. 5.197e–203d with Rice 1983; Strootman 2014a; 2014b; Blanshard 2007 for its connection with Alexander and the Ptolemies.

founder of Alexandria. For the Ptolemies, the train offered the opportunity
to present in public their collection of animals brought to Alexandria from
all over the world (Thrace in the North, Ethiopia in the South, India in the
East and Greece in the symbolic centre). Indian prisoners of war and
a caravan of camels carrying the East's most precious commodities were
on display: frankincense, myrrh, saffron, cinnamon, iris and other spices.
Universal empire was captured geographically and temporally by the
procession in its suggested identification of Dionysus, Alexander, the
divinized Ptolemies and the imports of the living king.[13] The parade across
the streets of Alexandria absorbed into the city the empire that stretched
the very edges of the world.

Alexandrian court literature, too, constructed the city as a universe of
people and commodities that were absorbed into the city through com-
merce and conquest. While in Perikles's funeral oration to the Athenians in
430 BCE, the commodities that came from all over the world had appeared
as symbols of imperial power (Thuc. 2.38.2), in the case of Alexandria both
the inhabitants and commodities came from everywhere. This is how
visitors described the city, and this is how the city was staged in
Theocritus's *Adoniazusai* (*Idyll* 15), composed under the patronage of
Ptolemy II.[14] Theocritus himself was born in Syracuse but lived most of
his life in Cos and Alexandria. In his *Encomium to Ptolemy* (*Idyll* 17), he
called his patron lord over Syria, Phoenicia, Caria, Cilicia, Arabia,
Ethiopia, the Cyclades and ruler of 11,333 cities (77–92).[15] Yet more than
in the *Encomion*, Alexandria is made a space of the empire in the
Adoniazusae. The *Idyll* connects inside and outside, the domestic house-
hold and the streets, the streets and the palace, as well as the enclosure of
Alexandria and its imperial outreach. Praxinoa and her girlfriend Gorgo,
two women from Syracuse, in their house bewail the long and busy roads of
Alexandria, where one no longer could find one's own home (1–6, 40–55).
Conquest and empire are immediately called into this space by the cavalry
and '*chlamys*-wearing soldiers' who are among the many who congested the
roads (6 and 45–50). The woolen *chlamydeis* of the soldiers, possibly by
then, but certainly a generation later becoming a metaphor for the shape of
Alexandria as well as the *oikoumene* (see further below), at an instance
created a link between the streets, the empire and the feast for Adonis in
which precious textiles formed an essential part. The chatter of the cocky

[13] Rice 1983 87–97 for the origins of the animals.
[14] For the influx of goods and people, see above and P.Oxy. II 2332, 61–2. The following interpretation
      owes much to the helpful articles by Whitehouse (1995) and Selden (1998).
[15] Strootman (2014a) 14–15 for further passages and discussion.

women about rouge (dye) and bath salt (natron; 8–10; 15–20) alluded to the weaving industry that Ptolemy II had encouraged. It also alluded to the Milesian sheep that Ptolemy had imported to the Fayum where their particularly fine wool was woven into precious fabric (P.Cair.Zen. 59430).

The high price of Praxinoa's dress and the women's domestic embroidering business (37–8) carry over to the 'looms of Samos and Miletus' which produced the tapestries for Adonis, whose feast the women are about to attend (126–7, cf. 66–71). The emphasis on textiles, their market price, their presence in the household, streets and palace, as well as their connection to faraway Samos and Miletus rendered textiles of various quality and function an image of colourful Alexandria as a political, commercial and ritual centre. Moreover, the domestic wool industry, the market for textiles and the Milesian/Samian tapestries and blankets in the royal palace together were a potent image of imperial success. Samos had fallen to Ptolemy II soon after the death of Lysimachus in 281 BCE, and Miletus had been detached from Seleucid influence at the beginning of Antiochus I's reign. Both these cities and the commodities and wool-bearing animals for which they were famous encapsulated the extent of the empire, just as the references to Cyprus (100–1) and Syria (114) referred to its inner radius contested by the Seleucids.[16]

Ptolemaic imperial ambitions extended even further in the next generation. Ptolemy III advanced as far as Babylonia (App. Syr. 65; BM 34428), and the Adulis *stele* made him conqueror of all Asia as far as Bactria, by then the end of the known world.[17] This was the time when Eratosthenes was a member of the Alexandrian *mouseion* and library. We can speculate that the polymath's interest in the world's circumference and geography was inspired not least by Ptolemy's recent conquest of this world. As Kosmin has argued, Alexandria was the point of reference for Eratosthenes's astronomical observations, and the distance between Syene and Alexandria gave him the clue for the globe's circumference.[18] This circumference was a multiplier of the distance between the southernmost edge of Egypt and Alexandria, just as Alexandria was the place where the circumference

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[16] Memphis, too, was perhaps involved in this textile imagery, for Memphis had developed a sizeable textile industry in Ptolemaic times (Thompson [1988] 46–75). Both Apollonius, the *dioiketes* of Ptolemy II, and Zenon, the manager of his *doreiai*, had recognized its potential and established a large textile firm in the Memphite *nome*.

[17] OGIS 54 with Strootman 2014d.

[18] BNJ 241 F 16 = Athen. 7.276 a–c with Kosmin (2017) 85–6; Dicaearchus of Messana and Aristarchus of Samos, Eratosthenes's predecessors, had used the distance from Syene to Lysimmachea in Seleucid territory for the same measurement.

eventually could be calculated.[19] The Ptolemaic state, its administrative principles and the shape of Alexandria also provided the mental models for the world's geography. Here it is that the *chlamys* first appears as a metaphor for the shape of the world,[20] and just as Alexandria's Hippodamian street plan cut the city into a grid, Eratosthenes cut the *oikoumene* into perpendicular axes. Kosmin suggests Alexandria was a microcosm of Eratosthenes's geographical concept.[21] What is more, the distances and shapes (*sphragides*) into which Eratosthenes divided the world were guided by a Ptolemaic urban geography. Places like Athens, Massilia, Rhodes, Alexandria and Ptolemais played an important part. Yet within Asia, Eratosthenes silenced exactly this urban geography that the Seleucids had developed. Instead of using contemporary city names like Antioch, Laodikeia, Apamea, Seleucia-Tigris or Seleucia-Eulaeus for distances and cartographic units, he reactivated Persian geography with Babylon, Susa and (abandoned) Persepolis as Asia's most representative urban markers.[22]

While Alexandrian court literature and science conjured up a Ptolemaic world order, they also propagated a hierarchy of belonging within its core. Praxinoa and her girlfriend in *Idyll* 15 are not just babbling nonsense in a foreign accent, as a bystander complains. On the contrary, their Dorian dialect reveals that they are from Syracuse, descendants from Corinth, the city of Bellerophon, and therefore Peloponnesians (90–5). The outburst of words linking Doric dialect to Syracuse, Syracuse to Corinth and Corinth to the Peloponnese in this passage rendered Syracuse not just another place in the cosmopolitan mix of origins of the Alexandrian population. Rather, it gave Syracuse (also the birthplace of Theocritus), Corinth and the Peloponnese a particular place in a hierarchical order of descent. The singer in the *Adoniazusae* is explicitly referred to as the daughter of a woman from Argos, the place from which the Argead dynasty traced its origin. In contrast, the man pushing and pulling the women and complaining about their accents is an anonymous *xenos* of no clear origin (89). The insistence on ethnic belonging well fitted with the fact that the Ptolemies maintained their Doric dialect.[23] Very few members of the Alexandrian elite, moreover, called themselves Alexandrians under the first

[19] The choice of these two southernmost and northernmost markers had further implications, which Kosmin *ibid.* discusses.

[20] Zimmermann (2002); and Kosmin (2017) with Strab. 2.5.6 (BNJ 241.F30); 2.5.9 (F34); 2.5.14 (F53); 2.5.18; 11.11.7 using 'chlamys-shaped' for the *oikoumene*. For the city of Alexandria being chlamys-shaped, Strab. 17.1.8; Plin. NH 5.11.62; Plut. Alex. 26.5; Diod. 17.52.3.

[21] Kosmin (2017) 90–1.

[22] Kosmin (2017) 91–4 with BNJ 241 F83 and F62 (= Strab. 2.1.23, 25 and 36).

[23] Clarysse (1998), also for the following two observations.

Ptolemies. Throughout the third century, Greek immigrants maintained their native *ethnicon* and chose epichoric first names for their children. To judge from Theocritus and other Alexandrian writers, ethnic diversity was deliberately preserved as a mirror of imperial relationships and hierarchies that made up the city.[24]

3 Cooperation, Competition and Foundation Myths

A great range of imperial relationships and hierarchies were woven into the fabric of Alexandrian foundation stories. The most extensive, and in some respects earliest, account of the foundation of Alexandria can be found in the *Alexander Romance*. Unfortunately, this source is also the most difficult text to pin down chronologically and in ideological origin.[25] It is a multilayered text of which the first Greek manuscript, known as manuscript A, dates to the third century CE. This manuscript was derived from an earlier hypothetical text, *recensio* α, of which large portions seem to date back to the early Hellenistic period.[26] Because of its simple style and fanciful composition, the *Romance* is regarded as a popular text, based on various literary genres and traditions, and transmitted in a non-official Greco-Egyptian context.[27]

In the *Romance*'s attempt to develop images of belonging and legitimacy that transcended the political divisions between Alexandria and Memphis, it created a truly transcultural text in which separate cultural identities were given a 'shared prominence and value'.[28] But the *Romance* reached far beyond an inner-Egyptian agenda. In its juxtaposition of the creation of the city and Alexander's discovery of the temple of Serapis, it connected the foundation of the city to the foundation of the empire.[29] The *Romance* extensively comments on the size of Alexandria. This was one of the distinguishing characteristics of a world *metropolis*. It was a measurable sign of power and one by which Alexandria could be measured against

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[24] Stephens (2003) 243. [25] See above n. 11.

[26] Stoneman (1991) 14. Several passages of the description of Alexandria, especially the debate on its size, the centrality given to Serapis and his assimilation to the chthonic god Aion Plutonius in the foundation myth, as well as some of its buildings must, for contextual reasons, be regarded as belonging to the Roman period; see Nawotka (2017) 97; de Polignac (2005); Jouanno (2002) 77, and below.

[27] Stephens (2003) 67; Jasnow (1997); and Huß (1994) 129–33 who draws out the satirical and therefore oppositional tendencies of the Nectanebo story in the *Romance*. Fraser (1972) I 680–1, by contrast, regards the Nectanebo story as propaganda deliberately circulated by the Egyptian priesthood to legitimate Alexander's claim to the throne of Egypt; also Jouanno (2002) 80–2.

[28] Stephens (2003) 72. [29] De Polignac (2005) 309.

other imperial cities. Diodorus reckoned Alexandria to be the first city in the world, Strabo commented on the size and population of Memphis as being exceptionally large but second (*deuteron*) to that of Alexandria (Strab. 17.1.32), and for Tacitus the Ptolemaic Serapeion was symbolic of the future size of the city (see below, Section 3). In the *Romance*, Alexandria's circumference takes some prominence:

> Alexander marked out the plan of a city, stretching in length from the place called Pandysia as far as the Heracleotic mouth of the Nile, and in width from the sanctuary of Bendis to little Hormoupolis (it is called Hormoupolis, not Hermopolis, because everyone who sails down the Nile puts in there). These were the dimensions of the city Alexander laid out, so that up to this day it is called 'territory of the Alexandrians'. (1.31.5, trans. Stoneman)

However, Cleomenes of Naucratis and Nomocrates of Rhodes warned Alexander not to build such a large a city:

> You will be unable to find people to fill the city, they said, and if you do fill it, the ships will be unable to transport sufficient food to feed them . . . Small cities [*mikropoliteiai*] are harmonious in debate and take council together [*eusymbouleutoi eisi*] to their mutual advantage; but if you make this city as you have sketched it, those who live there will always be at odds with one another, because the population is so huge. (1.31.6, trans. Stoneman)

The passage recalled other statements which emphasized that Alexandria was difficult to supply, difficult to fill with people (Curt. 4.8.1) and difficult to keep at peace (Strab. 17.1.12/Polyb. 34.14.6). But most importantly, it commented on the Aristotelian discussion about the relationship between size and prosperity for an ideal *polis*. Moderate size of territory and moderate numbers of citizens were the preconditions for a *polis* to be stable and thrive.[30] In some phrases the passage in the *Romance* picks up literally on Aristotelian formulations.[31] As de Polignac suggests, Aristotle was the common source for a flourishing discourse of what made a city great. In Aelius Aristides's *Encomion on Rome* (*Or.* 26; 144 CE), there are equally explicit references to Aristotle's discussion.[32] Via their common referent the two texts were related to each other and formed part of an intertextual

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[30] Arist. *Pol.* 1223 b1–5 with 1326b28–34 and 1327a2–4; on size and self-sufficiency see esp. 1261b12–5; on the negative consequences of too large a city 1326b2–24. Size and prosperity formed a harmonious balance that varied according to the power and prosperity of each city. Alexander's being the pupil of Aristotle is strongly emphasized in the *Romance*, rendering Alexander's world empire Aristotle's prophecy, *Romance* 1.16.7.
[31] De Polignac (2005) 330–4 for the comparison; and esp. Arist. *Pol.* 1326a.   [32] Ibid.

competitive discourse about what made a large city great. It is therefore significant that Serapis in the *Romance* prophesized that Alexandria was to become the centre of the world forever, just as the fame of Alexander as a god was to become eternal:

> By my command you shall subdue while young
> all the races of the barbarians [and then
> dying and not dying you will come to me].[33]
> This city you will found will be the apple of the world's eye.
> As the years and the ages go by, it will grow
> in greatness, and it will be adorned
> with numerous temples, magnificent sanctuaries,
> exceeding all in beauty, size and number.
> Everyone who comes to dwell in it
> will forget the land that bore him.
> I myself shall be its protector.   (1.33.11, trans. Stoneman)

Rome, unlike Alexandria, was not a *polis* with clear boundaries. As Aelius Aristides put it, Rome rose to heaven and spread all over Italy (Aristid. *Or.* 26.63). But like the *polis* Alexandria, it was equipped with an *acropolis* and an *agora* which the entire *oikoumene* shared (*Or.* 26.60–1). Just like Alexandria (and Athens) its supplies came from everywhere (*Or.* 26.11–3; *Romance* 33.10; Thuc. 2.38.2) and both cities spread their benefits around the world. In the *Romance*, the latter is elaborated by the story of the birds picking up the seeds with which Alexandria's perimeter had been sketched out. This was the omen that Alexandria would feed the world and her inhabitants reach everywhere (32. 5).

While Alexandria's size, population and wealth positioned the city as 'the first' in an imperial hierarchy, other passages in the *Romance* placed Alexandria vis-à-vis Egyptian Memphis. Thus, for example, in honouring Serapis Alexander follows Sesonchis, the former ruler of the world (33.6).[34] An even more powerful symbol of Alexandrian–Memphite connections are the snakes that have crept into several scenes of the *Romance*. Snakes were quite ubiquitous signs of divine interference in both the Egyptian and Greek religious universe, as Ogdon has well shown.[35] But in this context they seem to refer more specifically to the syncretistic assimilation of the Greek *agathoi daimones* with the Egyptian serpent god Shai (Greek Psais), the god of good fate:

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[33] Not part of MS A, according to Stoneman (1991) ad loc.
[34] For Alexander's assimilation with the semi-legendary pharaoh Sesonchis, Jouanno (2002) 65–6.
[35] Ogden (2014); cf. (2009).

> When the foundations for most of the city had been laid and measured, Alexander inscribed five letters: ΑΒΓΔΕ. Α for 'Alexander'; Β for *basileus*, 'king'; Γ for *genos*, 'descendant'; Δ for *dios*, 'Zeus'; and Ε for *ektisen*, 'founded an incomparable city'. Beasts of burden and mules helped with the work. As the gate of the sanctuary [*heroon*] was being put in place, a large and ancient tablet of stone, inscribed with many letters, fell out of it; and after it came a large number of snakes, which crept away into the doorways of the houses that had already been built. Nowadays the doorkeepers reverence these snakes, as friendly spirits [*agathoi daimones*] when they come into their houses– for they are not venomous – and they place garlands on their working animals and give them a rest day. Alexander was still in the city when it and the sanctuary were being built, in the month of Tybi [. . .]. For this reason, the Alexandrians still even now keep the custom of celebrating a festival on the twenty-fifth day of Tybi. (1.32. 6–7, trans. Stoneman)

Snake imagery plays an important role in other places of the *Romance*.[36] Most prominently, a snake appears in the birth story of Alexander who in the *Romance* is sired by the last pharaoh of Egypt, Nectanebo. Nectanebo, spending his later years as a prophet at Philip's court, falls in love with his wife Olympias, while her husband is absent on campaign. When he becomes desperate to make love with her, he tricks her to let him into her bedchamber by his own prophecy that she will make love to the god Ammon, who will appear to her as a snake (1.4–6). Disguising himself as a snake and thus being accepted by the queen to make love with her, Olympias becomes pregnant with Alexander. And it is again in the form of a snake that Nectanebo turns up during a feast upon Philip's return, lovingly curling up on Olympias's legs, hissing and frightening away the bystanders (1.10).

   The story skilfully interweaves Alexander's divine origin with some Greco-Egyptian descent. At the surface, it was problematic to make Alexander both the offspring of Zeus-Ammon and the last Egyptian pharaoh, as Egyptian political mythology required. Yet the mythologies merged.[37] As Susan Stephens suggests, each father contributed a necessary piece to Alexander's complex mythology. 'By virtue of the one father (Nectanebo) Alexander is really Egyptian, or Greco-Egyptian on the human and political level; by virtue of the other (Ammon) he is really divine on the mythical and ceremonial level.'[38]

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[36] Ogden (2009).
[37] For the connections between the Greek interpretation of the oracle given to Alexander at Siwa, and the oracle as an election oracle for a non-Egyptian pharaoh, see Pfeiffer (2014a) esp. 99–103.
[38] Stephens (2003) 72.

Alexander's Greco-Egyptian descent played a crucial part in Alexandria's foundation myth. It is as the son of Nectanebo that Alexander addresses the Memphites. There was an inscription on the base of an anonymous statue, stating that this king had fled from Egypt but would return as a young man and vanquish the Persians (1.34.2). Alexander recognizes this monument as Nectanebo's and the inscription as a prophecy of his own future deeds (cf. 1.3.6). Thus, the Macedonian conquest transforms into the return of the native king.[39] Alexander immediately plans to found the new capital, and the foundation is firmly approved by the Memphites. In a perfect connection between conquest, administration and benefaction, Alexander proposes to build Alexandria with the tribute the Memphites had formerly rendered to Darius and now paid to him. But he announces that he will not store these tributes in his treasury but spend them on 'your city of Alexandria which lies before Egypt and which will be the capital of the whole world' (Ἀλεξάνδρειαν τὴν πρὸς Αἰγύπτῳ μητρόπολιν οὖσαν τῆς οἰκουμένης, 1.34.6).

The *Alexander Romance* mapped out the city, its location, monuments and deities as a space that reflected the city's status as a *metropolis* eternal, both for Egypt and the whole world. Yet Alexandria was not quite a centre but an extraterritorial space *pros Aigyptō*. The location of the city indicated its 'in-between status', a status that also shifted according to the different ideological needs it had to satisfy.[40] The *Romance* moulded Alexandria's inherent tensions into a coherent narrative. Much of this narrative received its final elaboration in the Roman period. Yet carrying with it the sediment of past centuries, it allows us to identify Alexandria's foundation story as a competitive space in which over centuries the legitimacy of the city as a controversial capital of Egypt and *metropolis* of the inhabited world was negotiated.

3   Founding a Capital through the Cult of Serapis

Tacitus happens to transmit another foundation story of Alexandria.[41] This story does not deal with Alexandria's foundation in the course of the Macedonian conquest, but its second foundation as a prosperous city under the Ptolemies. This story shifted the role of the god Serapis from being prophet of Alexandria's greatness before its foundation to that of

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[39] Ibid.   [40] See above and Vasunia (2001) 270; and Seldon (1998) 299–300.
[41] Versions of the story also in Plut. *De Is. et Osir.* 28; and Clem. Alex. *Protr.* 4.48; Fraser (1972) I 246–51, with notes, and Fraser (1960); (1967).

making it great when the first Ptolemy was king.[42] Tacitus takes the opportunity to belittle the god who made Alexandria great, for nothing was known to the Romans about his origin:

> The origin of this God Serapis has not yet been made generally known by our writers. The Egyptian priests give this account: While Ptolemy, the first Macedonian king who consolidated the power of Egypt, was setting up in the newly built city of Alexandria walls, temples, and religious rites, there appeared to him in his sleep a youth of singular beauty and more than human stature, who warned the king to send his most trusted friends to Pontus and fetch his statue from that country. This, he said, would bring prosperity to the kingdom, and great and famous would be the city which received it. (Tac. *Hist*. 4.83.1–3, trans. Brodribb with minor adaptations)

The story continues with Ptolemy investigating the meaning of the vision among the Egyptian priests. But they know nothing about Pontus. So, he turns to Timotheus, a member of the distinguished Eleusinian *genos* of the Eumolpids, who ran the Alexandrian mysteries at the time. Timotheus knew about a temple of Jupiter Dis in Sinope where the god was sitting next to Proserpina. This was the god to be fetched. Ptolemy, however, neglected the dream and left the statue where it was. But when the god became more insistent, threatening the king with death and destruction of his kingdom, he sent a mission to Scydrothemis, the Scythian king of Sinope, to ask for the statue. Yet the Sinopians did not want to give up the statue, as they were jealous of Egypt. Three years passed and, after more threatening signs, the statue embarked on a ship by itself, making its way to Egypt, miraculously, within two days. Tacitus comments on the strangeness of this detail, but also mentions other versions of the story:

> The story becomes at this point more marvellous and relates that the God of his own embarked on board the fleet, which had been brought close to shore, and miraculously, vast as was the extent of the sea, arrived at Alexandria on the third day. A temple, befitting the size of the city, was erected in a place called Rhakotis, where there had stood a shrine consecrated in old times to Serapis and Isis. Such is the most popular account of the origin and introduction of the God Serapis. I am aware indeed that there are some who say that he was brought from Seleucia, a city of Syria, in the reign of Ptolemy III., while others assert that it was the act of the same king, but that the place from which he was brought was Memphis, once a famous city. (*Hist*. 4.84. 4–6, trans. Brodribb with minor adaptations)

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[42] For this history Fraser (1960); (1967); and Sabottka (2008) for the archaeology of the Alexandrian Serapeion.

The statue of Jupiter Dis, identified with Pluto, Osiris and Serapis,[43] brought the predicted prosperity and fame to Alexandria, and the Ptolemaic empire. The country would have collapsed, the city would have been destroyed and the king killed, had the statue not arrived. As the statue was vital for Alexandria's future destiny, it is not surprising that writers elaborated on its origin. First, it is the Ptolemies rather than Alexander to whom the second foundation was attributed. This situated the origins of Alexandrian fame in the Ptolemaic period rather than the time of its political foundation in which Alexander and his connections to Serapis played the most important part.[44] Then, it is the Egyptian priests who told the story of Sinopian Serapis, and it is they to whom Ptolemy turned first when seeking advice. This acknowledged some complicity between the Ptolemies and the priests in preparing the ground for Alexandria's greatness. But the priests were not able to comply. They lacked the broader knowledge of the wider world of which Ptolemy and Alexandria were part. Ptolemy then turned to the Athenian Timotheus who was in charge of the Alexandrian mysteries, as Tacitus explicitly states. This makes the Athenian Eumolpids, rather than the Egyptian priests, the prophets of Alexandria's future fame.[45] The prominence of Timotheus in the story contrasted Athenian and Egyptian pre-eminence in the field of learning.[46] It might be of interest that Plutarch and Clement of Alexandria have both the Athenian Timotheus and the Egyptian Manetho identify the statue upon its arrival.[47]

The most important aspect of the story is the origin of the statue. It was a matter of controversy, as Tacitus points out, in which conflicting claims to the second foundation of Alexandria were negotiated.[48] Tacitus is fully aware of this fact, without deciding the matter. Fraser, and most other scholars, suggest that Serapis was called 'Sinopian' because the Memphite Serapeion was located in a region called *Sinopion* in Greek.[49] Here lived Osir-Apis whom the Greeks had worshipped long before the Ptolemies

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[43] Pfeiffer (2008) on these identifications.   [44] Fraser (1967) 25–6 for discussion.

[45] Fraser (1972) I 251 suggests that Timotheus could be attributed a similar role in advising Soter in religious matters as Demetrius had in legal and constitutional matters.

[46] E.g. Vasunia (2001) 216–30; Stephens (2003) 33; and Hölbl (1994) 28, who draws out the rivalry of Alexandria and Memphis as an important reason for establishing the *mouseion* in Alexandria under Ptolemy I.

[47] See above, n. 39; and Bergmann (2010) 117.

[48] The *Alexander Romance* calls Serapis the 'Sinopean' and the Serapeion 'Sinopeion' several times, e.g. *Romance* 1.3.4; 34.5.

[49] Fraser (1972) I 246–59; cf. (1960) 36 with notes; Thompson (1988) 116; Huß (1994) 242, both following Fraser.

arrived.[50] The Pontic connection had crept into the story because of the coincidence of the toponyms. The Memphite origin of the cult statue, real or mistaken, is strikingly suggestive in a story that so obviously established credentials for the development of Alexandria as a prosperous city. Seleucia, too, was remembered to have claimed a part in it. This detail is likely to have entered the story when Ptolemy III had conquered Seleucia-Pieria in 241 BCE, an opportune moment for statues to be brought back to where they belonged.

If we consider the discursive nature of foundation stories, more than just an etymological confusion evicted Memphis from its role as original home of the Alexandrian god. The lack of Memphite participation (the priests fail to know the place) and the passiveness of Ptolemy (who keeps neglecting the dream) are striking. It looks as if their parts were deliberately erased from Alexandria's most important story. Subsequently, it could plausibly be told that the god came by itself from beyond the borders of the realm he was to inhabit. Sinope was far away from Egypt, and their king, Scydrothemis, a Scythian *barbaros*. The speedy journey of just two days from the northern regions to Alexandria added an additional miracle to the story. Sinope, moreover, was a commercial centre with numerous trade connections. This introduced commercial rather than political competition into the story, just as the Sinopians are said to have been just jealous of Egypt.

It is impossible to date the different layers of Tacitus's story, especially as it so obviously conflates elements that contributed to the story over time. It is important to note its Roman overtones. It is only in the Roman period that Serapis is attested to have become the most important god of Alexandria.[51] It is also truly Tacitean to favour Pontic Sinope as the statue's origin and to pass over Memphis and Seleucia which were no longer very meaningful rivals of Alexandria at his time. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that the tale of Serapis's arrival originated in the Roman period. Both the emphasis on Soter as recipient of the god and the suggestion of Seleucia and Memphis as alternative places of the god's origins suggest a third-century background from which rival versions emerged in a competitive process of myth-making.

Through his account of the origins of Serapis, Tacitus, too, not only transmitted but also transformed ideas about Alexandria as a world city. As he emphasized, the Alexandrians rather superstitiously venerated their city god, whereas to him, the Roman, the origins of that god were rather unknown and no Roman writer had cared to write about the matter. In

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[50] Hölbl (1994) 5 and 93 with UPZ I 1.   [51] Fraser (1972) I 259.

the deliberate distancing of Rome and Alexandria, the confrontation of Alexandria's local perception and perceptions from outside, Tacitus's story remains a perfect reflection of the continuous paradoxes of Alexandria as a world *metropolis*. As the capital of Egypt, a grand commercial hub, and centre of imperial memories, it was both local and global, both past and present, both locked into its local paradigms and entangled with an imperial world.

2B　SELEUCID ROYAL CITIES

Rolf Strootman

1　**Introduction**

Our approach to Ptolemaic and Seleucid capitals is as much comparative as it is about entanglements. Comparing the imperial trajectories followed by the two rival dynasties should be more than merely the identification of distinctions and similarities. Significant commonalities can be connected with actual interactions between the empires, whereas noticeable differences can often be explained from specific peculiarities of the empires. There is now a broader tendency in premodern empire studies to consider empires in their entangled relationships, and to look at processes of inter-imperial exchange rather than to study specific imperial polities in isolation.[52] As Sanjay Subrahmanyam put it in the second volume of his *Explorations in Connected History* (2009) – a work that takes issue with national histories and the self-imposed restrictions of modern area studies – 'there were also larger spaces of shared culture *that transcended imperial frontiers*, and enabled scribes, poets, artillerymen, physicians, and even artisans to move across the frontiers demarcated by latter-day "area studies."'[53] It is my contention that in a world dominated by empires, the forms and directions of 'global' exchanges were determined more often than not by the dynamics of interimperial interactions.

An underlying notion of my dissertation on Hellenistic royal courts was the idea that the connected development of the Ptolemaic and Seleucid empires was brought about most of all by competition.[54] Between 274 and

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[52] See e.g. Lieven (2000); Faroqhi (2004); Canepa (2009); Dale (2010); Barkey (2011); and for the importance of writing connected imperial histories in general Darwin (2007) 47–101.

[53] Subrahmanyam (2009) 11, with emphasis added; for a successful implementation of a similar principle, see Flood (2009).

[54] Strootman (2007) 26–30, using Charles Tilly's model of competitive state formation in early modern Europe (Tilly 1992); see also Strootman (2014b).

168 BCE, the two powers fought six major wars, followed by another three smaller ones in the later second century.[55] The six major wars are known as the Syrian Wars – a misleading designation because it suggests that they were fought over the possession of (Coele) Syria. The stakes in fact were profoundly higher. They were fought over no less a prize than imperial supremacy in the eastern Mediterranean. Military activity extended from the Aegean to Babylonia and southern Egypt. Like the previous Diadoch Wars, these were 'global' conflicts, and around them revolved most of the other military conflicts that made the Hellenistic period such a relatively violent episode in ancient history.[56] Because the Syrian Wars were conflicts between dynasties, not between nations or 'states', people, goods, and ideas travelled freely across the alleged borders of the empires, whose respective zones of imperial hegemony often overlapped.[57]

In this context of competitive development, three factors structurally enhanced similarities, notably in terms of imperial ideology, dynastic identity and court culture: (1) the Macedonian identity promulgated by the two imperial families; (2) intermarriage and diplomatic contacts between the two dynasties; and (3) a reliance on the same social group for the recruitment of their principal agents of empire: the so-called *philoi*, who overwhelmingly belonged to elite families of Aegean *poleis*.[58] All of this amounted to a culture of interaction rather than segregation. Imperial elites were continually reacting to each other, adopting new military, institutional and aulic practices and responding to each other's ideological claims. The royal court was the essential venue where representatives of the dynasties (envoys, royal women) met and interacted.

2   The Capital of the Seleucid Empire

Analysing Seleucid capital formation raises the question of which city should be considered the Seleucid capital. For where we are well-informed how Alexandria was developed as a Mediterranean imperial centre by Ptolemy I and especially Ptolemy II, the identification of the

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[55] See Grainger (2010) for a comprehensive narrative of prolonged Seleucid–Ptolemaic warfare until the end of the second century BCE.

[56] Including, perhaps, Roman warfare in the Aegean between 200 and 168 (Eckstein [2008]).

[57] Strootman (in press).

[58] Strootman (2007) 19. On the Aegean origins of Ptolemaic and Seleucid *philoi*, see Strootman (2014a) 126–31, with further references. Of course, there were also various non-Greek courtiers and other powerful men associated with the Ptolemaic and Seleucid households; they, however, were rarely *philoi*. Also see Gerardin and Dreyer, Chapter 9 of this volume, on Ptolemaic commanders and local elite members switching sides during the Fourth Syrian War.

Seleucid capital remains controversial. Most of all, Seleucia-Tigris and Antioch-Orontes have been the prime candidates. It has been assumed that Seleucia-Tigris, founded between 311 and 300 BCE,[59] was the Seleucid capital in the early reign of Seleucus I, but that the capital later was transferred to Antioch.[60] The alleged westward shift of the Seleucid attention is often seen as a major cause of decline because it led to the relative neglect of the important regions of Babylonia, Iran and Bactria. This view is no longer widely accepted.[61] Hardly ever, however, is the question asked what a 'capital' precisely is. It is simply assumed that the Seleucid empire had one.[62] But if we define a 'capital' as 'the seat of government',[63] it is clear why the Seleucid capital is a mirage. An institutionalized, impersonal 'government' did not exist in the empire, which was essentially a network of ever-shifting, personalized relationships between interest groups and powerful individuals based on reciprocal transactions.[64] The ancient sources do not reveal a formal separation of 'state' administration and dynastic household. The only office holders who were not court officials were military commanders, and they, too, were attached to the dynasty by means of ritualized friendship or (fictive) kinship. With kingship being personal and military in nature, Seleucid courts were essentially itinerant and royal sovereignty resided with the king, his co-ruler or consort, but also his higher-ranking representatives.[65] Precisely because the empire had a mobile core, there were many residences: cities such as Sardis, Antioch, Seleucia-Tigris, Babylon, Susa, Ecbatana, Merw, Bactra,

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[59] Held (2002) 221 with n. 16. However, no royal coins were struck at Seleucia before 300 BCE (Kritt [1997]).

[60] E.g. Invernizzi (1993) 230, 'Seleucus [I] certainly thought of his city on the Tigris as the centre of Asia, as the capital, the seat of the royal power, as the political and economic centre of his empire. [. . .] Founded only a few years later, Antioch at the end replaced Seleucia-Tigris as the royal seat and became the actual capital of the Seleucids.' So also Seyrig (1970); Marinoni (1972). Honigman (1923/1924) argued that the capital was transferred to Seleucia-Pieria, because the tomb of Seleucus I Nicator, the Nikatoreion, was located there.

[61] See for Babylonia Kuhrt (1987); and Sherwin-White (1987), and for the importance of Iranian lands for the Seleucids Sherwin-White and Kuhrt (1993); Strootman (2011); Plischke (2014).

[62] E.g. Will (1990) argues that Antioch cannot have been the capital before the reign of Antiochus IV; cf. Held (2002), claiming that it was Seleucus II who made Antioch the Seleucid residence following the loss of Seleucia-Pieria.

[63] *Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, MA, 2006) ad loc.; *The Cambridge English Dictionary* defines a capital as 'a city that is the centre of government of a country or smaller political area' (dictionary.cambridge.org).

[64] For the Hellenistic empires as network polities, see Strootman (2014a); the notion of the Seleucid empire as a 'transactional' enterprise was explored by Ma (1999).

[65] Sherwin-White and Kuhrt (1993); Held (2002); Kosmin (2014a); Strootman (2014a). Cf. Cohen (1983) on the need to control roads as a major rationale behind Seleucid city foundations.

and perhaps Ai Khanoum, some of which doubled as provincial centres when a governor (*stratēgos*) or viceroy representing the king was present.[66]

According to two of our best sources – Polybius and Babylonian Chronicles – the Seleucids had a concept of 'royal city', or 'seat of sovereignty'. Two of these have been attested: Seleucia-Tigris in Babylonia and Seleucia-Pieria in northern Syria.[67] The similarity of the names may not be coincidental as both cities were founded by and named after the empire's founder, Seleucus I Nicator.

What does the designation 'Royal City' signify? Seleucus I Nicator was buried in Seleucia-Pieria.[68] For this reason, and because Seleucia-Pieria was an important Levantine port and a hub of long-distance land and sea routes, the city bears some similarity to early Ptolemaic Alexandria, the burial place of Alexander. Like Alexandria, Seleucia was a geographical and symbolical centre of an imagined world empire that never gave up its claims to the Aegean (including Greece). While the Ptolemies kept the memory of Alexander alive – at least in his capacity as the deified founder of Alexandria – the Seleucids, by contrast, radically erased Alexander from their ideology after 305 BCE. They let *their* imperial Golden Age begin with Seleucus, whose becoming king in Babylonia was retrospectively presented as a new beginning of time.[69] As in the Ptolemaic empire, it probably was the second ruler of the dynasty, Antiochus I, who laid the foundation for the unifying imperial ideology. Seleucia-Pieria, however, never developed into a city as grand as Alexandria because it fell into enemy hands in 246 BCE and did not regain its prominence after the city was recaptured in 219 (though it is in connection to this event that we first hear of Seleucia as a 'Royal City').[70]

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[66] Viceroys (men whose power extended over several satrapies) have been attested for Asia Minor (Antiochus Hierax in 245; Achaeus in 223 [Polyb. 4.48.10; cf. 5.40.7]; Zeuxis [Liv. 37.45.5; Amyzon 43; OGIS 235; SEG 37, 1010]) and the Upper Satrapies (Antiochus I in his capacity as co-ruler; Antiochus II in 266/5 (?); Molon in 226 [Polyb. 5.40.7]; and Cleomenes in 148 [L. Robert in *Gnomon* 30 (1963) 76]).

[67] Seleucia-Tigris: BCHP 11 and 12; Seleucia-Pieria: Polyb. 5.58.4 (ἀρχηγέτιν οὖσαν καὶ σχεδὸν ὡς εἰπεῖν ἑστίαν ὑπάρχουσαν τῆς αὐτῶν δυναστείας).

[68] App. *Syr.* 63; Malalas 8.204 ed. Dindorf.

[69] Strootman (2014c); (2008). Also see Kosmin in this volume. The continuation of the throne name 'Ptolemaios' as well as the imagery of the first Ptolemaia described by Callixeinus (see below) suggests that the Ptolemies from the reign of Ptolemy II promulgated a similar ideology of 'imperial time' (Hazzard [2000], 18–46; Strootman [2014a], 254–61), though without taking the step of removing Alexander from their representation, at least not initially.

[70] See above.

The presence of a royal palace, owned by the dynasty and separated from the rest of the city on its own 'sacred' royal space,[71] is attested for several cities.[72] This does not necessarily make a 'Royal City'. There were (pre-Hellenistic) royal palaces in Babylon, and Seleucid kings are known to have stayed in that city.[73] Babylonian sources, however, emphatically distinguish their own city from the nearby 'Royal City', Seleucia-Tigris.[74] The difference apparently was that in Seleucia some kind of royal sovereignty was supposed to reside even in the king's absence as the Babylonian texts describe Seleucia as the base of the royal governor of Babylonia,[75] a presence that is corroborated by the large number of 'official' bullae found in the city's so-called Archives Building (or Administrative Building).[76] A possible additional meaning of the term 'Royal City' is that these were locations where pivotal rituals of royalty such as inaugurations could take place.

Antioch, the supposed 'capital' of the Seleucid empire of most older literature, in fact was elevated to the status of, mutatis mutandis, a Royal City only in the reign of Antiochus IV, continuing a large-scale process of imperial reorganization initiated by his father, Antiochus III.[77] The first attestation of a Seleucid king residing in Antioch is in Polybius (5.43.4), who reports a ritual of royal inauguration taking place there, namely the bestowment of the title of *basilissa* on Laodice, Antiochus III's Pontic bride, in 221 BCE. This suggests that already Antiochus III was developing Antioch as a symbolic centre of empire.

[71] Held (2002) 246, outlining a pattern of separation and pointing out similarities between the urban landscapes of Alexandria and Seleucia-Tigris (p. 235); note, however, that the identification of the palace district in Seleucia is uncertain (Coqueugniot [2015]). For the use of elevations and religious architecture to demarcate 'royal space' see Strootman (2014a) 88–90.

[72] On the variety of Seleucid palaces see Nielsen (1994); Held (2002); Strootman (2007) 66–74.

[73] See recently Madreiter (2016).

[74] See e.g. BCHP 11 ('Ptolemy III Chronicle', 246/5 BCE) ll. 12–14: 'troops / in great numbers, who were clad in iron panoply, from Seleucia, the Royal City (*Si-lu-ki-ʾ-a* URU LUGAL-*ú-tú*), / which is on the Euphrates [sic], arrived at Babylon' (trans. Finkel/Van der Spek).

[75] See BCHP 12 ('Seleucus III Chronicle', 2224/3 BCE) = Grayson (1975) 283–4, no. 13b, l. 14' rev., mentioning a 'satrap of the land' (sc. Akkad/Babylonia) stationed at Seleucia, 'the city of kingship' (l. 13' rev.); cf. Sherwin-White (1983b) 267–8; van der Spek (1985). A '*stratēgos* of Akkad' is mentioned in BCHP 15 'Gold Theft Chronicle' (162/1 BCE), l. 8 obv.; though he is not associated with Seleucia, he is represented in Babylon by a lower-ranked commander or *epistatēs* (cf. l. 2 obv.).

[76] Only Greek and Babylonian deities appear on the c. 25,000 clay sealings found there; see Invernizzi et al. (2004). On the administrative function of the building see now Coqueugniot (2015).

[77] Strab. 16.2.4. The city is usually known as Antioch-Orontes, though its earliest recorded full name is Antioch-Daphne, cf. Cohen (2006) 80–93. On Antiochus IV's building activities in Antioch, see Downey (1961) 55–63; Mittag (2006) 145–9. Both father and son presumably developed the area partially with the intention to reestablish Seleucid dominance in Asia Minor and the Aegean (to which Antioch was directly connected by land and sea routes); on these ambitions of Antiochus IV see Strootman (2019a).

3   Seleucid Foundation Myths

Only for the cities belonging to the so-called Syrian Tetrapolis – Antioch,
Seleucia-Pieria, Apamea, Laodicia-on-the-Sea – have foundation myths
been preserved. For these myths we are mainly dependent on late Roman
authors: Libanius and most of all Malalas. There are good reasons, how-
ever, to assume that the core of the stories recorded by these authors is
historical, as they are corroborated by sources from the Hellenistic period
(Polybius, Diodorus, Strabo). Moreover, both Libanius and Malalas draw
upon Pausanias of Antioch, who worked in the first century CE.[78] Also the
similarities with the Alexandrian foundation myth suggest a Hellenistic
origin. I would suggest therefore that in their first form they came into
existence either shortly after the cities' foundation under Seleucus I and
Antiochus I, or in the reigns of Antiochus III and IV.

The most conspicuous of several recurrent themes is that of divine
guidance: an eagle snatches away the sacrificial meat that Seleucus is
offering to Zeus while asking for an oracle as to where to found a new
city.[79] This also happens in the Alexandrian foundation myth in the
Alexander Romance. There Alexander is led to an abandoned temple of
Serapis, whose cult was supposed to be older than the existing Egyptian
cults elsewhere in the landscape. This trope of rediscovery is pervasive in
the Seleucid tales too: Seleucus and his men find altars that have been
established by Perseus or Heracles, built upon ground that had become
sacred because epiphanies of Zeus (and in one case Apollo) took place
there. To quote one example:

> On the 23rd day of the month of Xanthicus, Seleucus went up to Mount
> Casius in order to sacrifice to Zeus Casius. After completing the sacrifice and
> cutting the meat, Seleucus prayed (to be shown) where to found a city.
> Suddenly an eagle snatched the meat from the sacrifice and took it away to
> the old city. Following behind with his augurs, Seleucus found that the meat
> had been dropped near the sea below the old city, in the place called the
> trading-station of Pieria. Immediately he constructed walls and built the
> foundations of a city, which he called Seleucia after his own name.[80]

Together, these tales suggest a divine plan consisting of three successive
acts of creation. First, Zeus frees the place of primordial Chaos to make
civilized Order possible. Zeus does so, for instance, when he battles the

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[78] Garstad (2011) 669.
[79] On these foundation myths see now most extensively Ogden (2017) 99–173, which was not yet
available while writing this chapter was conceived.
[80] Malalas 8 p. 199 ed. Dindorf; transl. Smith.

serpentine Chaos monster Typhon, thrusting thunderbolts at him from Mount Casius (near the later Seleucia) and forcing him underground to become the snake-like river Orontes.[81] Or by turning primordial Giants to stone – still to be seen today in the form of certain rock pillars in the Orontes Valley.[82] Much later one of his sons, Perseus or Heracles, founded a sanctuary at the spot where Zeus had earlier manifested himself. The foundation of an altar (i.e. a sanctuary) is the basic prerequisite for the establishment of a human community. Then finally, Seleucus, guided by Zeus, rediscovers the ancient sanctuary and founds a city there as a third and final act of creation. One does not have to be a structuralist to recognize a suggestion of a divine plan in these recurrent attempts to inscribe Seleucus into a drawn-out mythical narrative.

The myths explaining that the sanctuaries at the core of migrant settlements are not founded but *found* are charter myths that turn migration into homecoming and enable settlers to claim the land as originally theirs. Greek myths such as the story of Apollo and Daphne are inscribed in the Syrian landscape, often on pre-existing sacred sites – such as is most certainly the case with the peak sanctuary on the top of Mount Casius and very probably the sacred grove Daphne. But more may be going on here than just 'colonial appropriation': the translation of local cults into Greek cults also facilitates the interaction between various groups of colonists and local populations.[83] An interesting example of this procedure is the Syrian version of the myth of Io, which directly responds to the Ptolemaic version of that myth. This myth contains another recurring trope, that of the presentation of indigenous populations as the descendants of earlier Greek migrants.

Malalas reports that when Seleucus was looking for a site to found Seleucia, he discovered near the mouth of the Orontes 'a small city situated on the mountain, which had been founded by Syros son of Agenor'.[84] Syros is the name-giver of the land of Syria. More intriguing is the figure of Agenor, the mythical founder of kingship in Syria, and a grandson of Zeus and Io. Agenor is the central figure in a web of connections that link Syria and Phoenicia to Egypt and Europe, as we will see. From Strabo we know that Seleucus discovered an ancient settlement on Mount Silpius, the *acropolis* of Antioch. This place was said to have been founded by settlers

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[81] Strab. 16.2.7; Malalas 8.200: '[Seleucus] laid the foundations of the city at the bottom of the valley opposite the mountain, by the great river called Dragon which was renamed Orontes, where there was a village called Bottius, opposite Iopolis.'
[82] Malalas 8.202.   [83] Strootman (forthcoming).   [84] Malalas 8, p. 199 ed. Dindorf.

from Argos, who called it Iopolis.[85] Pausanias of Antioch recounts an earlier discovery, set in the mythical past, in which the protagonist is the Argive hero Perseus:

> Perseus, after ruling the Persian land for many years, learning that Iopolitans from Argos were living in the Syrian land, came to them in Syria at Mount Silpius, as to his own relatives. These same Argive Iopolitans recognized him because he too was descended from the race of the Argives. Rejoicing, they hymned him.[86]

Perseus appears in his capacity of progenitor of the Persians. At this occasion, Perseus introduced a cult for Zeus Keraunios on Mount Silpius which was rediscovered by Seleucus:

> [Seleucus] returned rejoicing to Iopolis and after three days he celebrated a festival there for Zeus Keraunios, in the temple which had been established by Perseus, the son of Picus and Danae, on Mount Silpius, where Iopolis is situated. He performed the sacrifice on the first day of the month of Artemisios.[87]

Syrian foundation mythology associated Seleucus with Heracles and Perseus, making the king appear as a culture hero too. Perseus and Heracles are connected to each other by kinship. Most of the myths referred to by Libanius, Pausanias and Malalas belong to the mythological circle of Argos, home city of both Perseus and Heracles. To an even earlier generation of mythic antecedents belongs the Argive princess Io, who allegedly was revered as the eponymous 'national' deity of the Iopolitans living on Mount Silpius.

The reference to Io is noteworthy. In pre-Hellenistic Greece, this originally Argive myth was connected to Egypt, and after the Macedonian conquest of Egypt, Io is best known as a prominent figure in early Ptolemaic imperial myth-making.[88] This presumably developed at

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[85] Strab. 16.2.5, claiming that several towns along the Orontes were founded by the Argive *hērōs* Triptolemus and his companions, who had come to Syria in search of Io; cf. Lib., *Or.* 11.91; Malalas 8.201.

[86] Pausanias of Antioch *FHG* IV F9 *ap.* Malalas, *Chron.* p. 37 ed. Dindorf; see Garstad (2011), 677. App. *Syr.* 57 mentions a foundation of Seleucus I in NW Syria named Heraia after the principal Argive deity, Hera (who was associated with both Io and Heracles); the location of this town is unknown.

[87] Malalas 8, p. 199 ed. Dindorf. On Perseus as a Seleucid dynastic model and his role in the mythology of Antioch see Ogden (2011) 155–7. Note that the Spring Equinox of 1 Artemisios (March/April) is the first day of the Macedonian New Year, which was synchronized in Hellenistic times with the last day of the Babylonian Akītu Festival (1 Nisannu): yet another indication of the connectedness of foundation myth and creation myth.

[88] The Hellenistic-period version of the myth has been best preserved in Apollod. 3.1.1; cf. Moschos 277; Diod. 5.78.1; Luc. *Dial. Marin.* 15; and *De Dea Syria* 4; Ov. *Met.* 2.836; and Ovid *Fasti* 5.603; Hyg. *Fab.* 178. From the third century BCE, Io was equated to Isis and credited with the

the court of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, and its intended audience was not the population of Egypt, but people from the Aegean, who were acquainted with these tales. Io and Zeus were the ancestors of Aegyptus, the eponymous first king of Egypt who fled to Argos after losing his throne to his treacherous twin brother, Danaus; by claiming descent from Aegyptus via Temenus, first King of the Macedonians, Philadelphus could present his father, Ptolemy I Soter, as Aegyptus's legitimate heir returning to Egypt to reclaim his ancestral realm.[89] This view was promoted most of all by the court poet Callimachus.[90] The Seleucids likely responded to the Ptolemaic appropriation of the Io myth.

In explaining the meaning of the Io myth for the Ptolemies, conventional scholarship has looked first of all for underlying Egyptian deities and pharaonic ideology – an exercise that all too often leads to the rather meaningless conclusion that such stories 'legitimized' Ptolemaic rule in Egypt. Another way of looking at these stories is to see them as the product of antagonistic exchanges between the entangled Ptolemaic and Seleucid courts. In contrast to the Ptolemaic version, the Argive myths of Seleucid Syria do not stress Egypt as Io's principal destination. Instead, they seem to aim at linking Europe to Asia by developing Io's connections to Syria. For just as Io came to Egypt in the form of a cow, so too did she arrive in Syria (to where she later was said to have returned in human shape). Her descendent Agenor, the son of Poseidon and Libya, later settled in the Levant where he fathered Syrus and Phoenix, the eponymous kings of Syria and Phoenicia.[91] Moreover, as father or grandfather of the maiden Europa and of Kadmos, Agenor linked Asia to Europe.[92] Being specifically associated with Seleucia and the cult on Mount Casius, Agenor, and the story of Zeus's abduction of his child Europa to Crete, also provided a mythical rationalization for the Hellenistic-period association of the cult of Hadad-Ba'al-Zeus Casius with the newly introduced cult of Zeus Cretagenes in Syria; this cult may have been a focus for identity formation, perhaps for settlers from Crete or for so-called 'Cretan' soldiers.[93]

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establishment of the cult of Apis (Diod. 1.24.8; Apollod. 2.1.4; Hyg. *Fab*. 145.1; Luc. *Dial. Deor*. 3; cf. Hdt. 2.41); cf. Rutherford (2011).

[89] For a full discussion of Io's Egyptian connections see Kampakoglou (2016).

[90] Harder (2012) 400–1; Stephens (2015) 155; cf. Stephens (2003) 8–9.

[91] Apollod. 2.1; cf. Hdt. 2.145.1.

[92] The name of Europa's father is alternatively given as Agenor, the first king of the Phoenicians, or as Phoenix, Agenor's son and name-giver of Phoenicia.

[93] An altar of Zeus Cretagenes allegedly was discovered at the founding of Antioch (Mastrocinque [2002]). Note the well-known appearance of Zeus in the form of a bull; the Ugaritic storm god Hadad, whose sanctuary was on Mount Casius in the Late Bronze Age, was commonly depicted on

Thus both Seleucids and Ptolemies used Argive mythology to claim sovereign rights upon a variety of lands and peoples, including Egypt and Syria, remodelling these myths to suit their own respective aims and in reaction to the other's modifications of these myths.[94] Where the better preserved Ptolemaic material focused on links between Egypt and Europe (e.g. by foregrounding the myth of Aegyptus and Danaus), the Seleucids emphasized links between Asia and Europe by developing Io's connections to Syria and by foregrounding the figure of Agenor. The version of the Io myth promoted by the Ptolemaic court has been understood from the Ptolemies' broader strategy of framing the eastern Mediterranean as a coherent world of interconnected coasts under Ptolemaic hegemony.[95] But Seleucid imperial propaganda had much the same message. The Seleucid court upheld the conventional Greek view that Egypt is part of Asia (over which as 'Kings of Asia' they claimed imperial hegemony), while the Ptolemies from their maritime perspective maintained that Asia was essentially an interior continent to which Syria and other countries by the sea did not belong (for these lands, of course, were rightfully within the Ptolemaic sphere of influence).[96] Through the appropriation and adaptation of the myth of Io and especially her descendants, the Seleucids claimed possession of the Levant in opposition to the Ptolemies, who claimed the same thing using the same myth. Thus, Seleucid imperial cities of northern Syria, like Ptolemaic Alexandria (see above), were at once local and global, both locked into local 'traditions' and entangled with a wider world of competing empires.

Another illuminating example is provided by the sacred grove and oracle at Daphne (present-day Harbiye in Turkey), which was dedicated to the Seleucid tutelary deities Apollo and Artemis and in 166 was the scene of grand festivities organized by Antiochus IV (see below). In Seleucid times, the valley was identified as the place where the virgin Daphne had been touched by Apollo and was transformed into a laurel tree. Laurels descendant from her covered the area, as they still do today. This epiphany myth

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reliefs while standing on a bull with a lightning bolt in his right hand; Hadad also is often represented with bull's horns, and the later Syrian deities Anat and Ba'al were sometimes worshipped in the shape of bovines (Lipiński [2000] 632). Any connection of course must at present remain provisional, but at least this shows that Io's bovine form *could* also have had other associations than with Apis or Isis-Hathor.

[94] That identity myths in particular are malleable is apparent here, e.g. from the fact that Io's father has been alternatively recorded as Inachus, Argus and Iasus, see inter alios Paus. 2.16.1; 3.18.13; Apollod. 2.1.3; Ov. *Met.* 1.583–5; Schol. on Eur., *Or.* (932).

[95] Stephens (2003) 171–237; Acosta-Hughes and Stephens (2012) 148–203; Strootman (2017) 115–34.

[96] Primo (2009); cf. e.g. Polyb. 5.67; 1 Macc. 11.13; and Strab. 11.9.2.

connected Daphne to Delphi. It was moreover said that Daphne's sacred spring, called Castalia, was fed by Delphi's sacred fountain Castalia through an underground river that ran all the way from Delphi to Syria, allowing Apollo of Delphi to pronounce oracles near Antioch as well.[97]

But that is not all. A second foundation myth was created according to which the culture hero Heracles had planted cypresses at Daphne and established a cult of Zeus there. Finally, Seleucus came around to discover the old altar built by Heracles and make it the heart of his settlement policy on the Upper Orontes, planting more cypresses.[98] Again we have a foundation myth in three parts. The first is set in the time of creation or shortly thereafter when Apollo's divine power descended on the grove and made it sacred for all times. A second tale is set at the temporal intersection of myth and history, when Heracles created a sanctuary and thereby laid the foundation for human habitation. And a final one is set in the present when Seleucus established settlements in the area. And here again, it may be surmised that a local cult was appropriated to make this sanctuary into a neutral 'middle ground' to accommodate both newcomers and local inhabitants and stimulate the emergence of a communal identity for the population of Antioch.[99]

4 The Daphne Festival (ca. 165 BC): The Imperial Court as Cosmopolis

If the Seleucid empire had a mobile core – in none of the 'Royal Cities' and various residences has monumental architecture been attested of the kind that adorned Alexandria – then it is the court where we should look for the Seleucid universalistic 'answers' to the Ptolemies' imperial cosmopolis Alexandria. Elite integration in the Seleucid empire was the sum of political, social and cultural factors working together to create a sense of imperial commonwealth. The umbrella ideology to bind together elites of various cultural backgrounds and belonging to a variety of types of polities (*poleis*, tribes, kingdoms) was the idea that the world was somehow a unity under a single imperial ruler: the Seleucid (great) king. This universalism followed from the empire's nature as an expansionist state based on conquest. It was also a heritage of previous Near Eastern empires – a heritage from which the Seleucids could not deviate, especially not in the

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[97] For the sources see Downey (1961) 364, n. 217; cf. Queyrel (1990).
[98] Malalas 8, p. 204, ed. Dindorf.   [99] Strootman (forthcoming).

face of rival Ptolemaic claims to universal dominance.[100] Rivalry between the empires is particularly clear from a certain competition over the use of the title 'Great King', a title that Ptolemaic kings seem to have used specifically as an expression of victory over the Seleucids and subsequent claims to Seleucid 'Asia'.[101]

The famous festival celebrated at Daphne by Antiochus IV in the late summer of 166 capitalized upon Daphne's connection with the Greek world. The festival with its elaborate procession was connected with Antiochus's return from his second Egyptian campaign.[102] The main 'audience', however, were the *poleis* of the Aegean.[103] Of importance for the present argument is the construction of the festival terrain as a microcosm of empire, not unlike the way the Ptolemies had made Alexandria into an imperial microcosm in the third century BCE:

> [Antiochus] brought together at his festival the most distinguished men from virtually the whole world [*oikoumene*], adorned all parts of his palace [*basileion*] in magnificent fashion, and having assembled in one spot, and, as it were, put on a stage [*skene*] his entire monarchy [*basileia*], left them [*sc.* the Romans] ignorant of nothing that concerned him. In putting on these lavish games and this stupendous festival Antiochus outdid all earlier rivals.[104]

Polybius (30.25.1) adds that Antiochus 'sent out envoys and sacred embassies to the cities to announce the games', and that the Greeks 'were very eager to visit Antioch'.

This is how imperial festivals function, and how coronations and other great events of the court work: they are prepared and announced well in advance and meant to attract to the imperial centre representatives of (potential) subsidiary polities such as cities, temples or kingdoms. The Grand Procession of Ptolemy Philadelphus during the Ptolemaia in Alexandria about a century earlier had basically the same function, as it presented the riches of Egypt and Africa and Arabia, and the Ptolemaic empire's universalistic claims, with Dionysiac imagery centre stage, to civic elites in the Aegean, which was the main arena for Seleucid–Ptolemaic

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[100] For the universalistic nature of Hellenistic imperialism, see Strootman (2007) *passim*; (2010); (2014b); and (2014d); also see Bang (2012); and Kosmin (2014a) on the creation of real and symbolic borders.

[101] Strootman (2010).

[102] See Polyb. 30.26.9 = Ath. V 195f: 'All the above display and outlay was provided for by the robberies he had appropriated in Egypt when he broke his treaty with king Philometor, who was then only a child, and partly by contributions by his *philoi*. He had also sacrilegiously despoiled most of the temples.'

[103] Strootman (2019a).   [104] Diod. 31.16.1.

rivalry. Though they took place about a century apart, both processions reflect imperial rivalry between Seleucids and Ptolemies.

We already saw that Diodorus uses the word *oikoumene* to describe the radius of the Daphne Festival. Universalistic imagery was a noticeable element in the procession at Daphne, which included images of Earth and Heaven, Night and Day, and Dawn and Noon.[105] Among the troops partaking in the procession were units from various parts of the world, including Thracians, Galatians, Mysians and Iranians. The various 'ethnic' units in the procession at Daphne may have had symbolic meaning as well; they presented Antiochus as a ruler of all nations and reanimated the dynasty's claims to Asia Minor and Thrace as Seleucid *doriktētos chōra*.[106]

There is, moreover, the probable association of the king with Dionysus. Such an association is best known from the Ptolemaic context: most of all, the Dionysiac imagery in the Grand Procession of Ptolemy Philadelphus had associated the advent of the victorious king with Dionysus's triumphant return from India.[107] Dionysiac imagery at Daphne included the king's disorganizing behaviour, the presence of 800 ivory tusks as votive offerings,[108] and chariots drawn by elephants. Dionysus featured on Seleucid coinage since the reign of Seleucus IV (187–175 BCE), who struck bronze coins at Ecbatana showing Dionysus on the obverse and an Indian elephant on the reverse.[109]

In the Hellenistic period, Dionysus became a powerful symbol of kingship: as the conqueror of Asia, Dionysus was a victorious god and a saviour whose arrival in the west signalled the beginning of a golden age of plenitude and good fortune.[110] There may be a link with the enigmatic

[105] Polyb. 30.25.16. [106] Strootman (2007) 313; Iossif (2011c) 136–43.
[107] The Dionysiac procession of Ptolemy II is described in detail by Callixeinus of Rhodes, *FGrHist* 627 F 2 *ap*. Ath. 5.196a–203b. The association of Dionysus with India was not an exclusively Ptolemaic idea, as we find it also around 300 with Megasthenes, *viz.*, in a Seleucid context (Strab. 15.1.6); on Megasthenes and Seleucid myth-making, see Kosmin (2013).
[108] Polyb. 30.25.12.
[109] *SC* II nos. 1353–6. Antiochus IV used images of elephants on his bronze coinage too (*SC* II nos. 1554 f.), as did some of his successors: Demetrius I (*SC* II nos. 1646; 1745), Alexander I (*SC* II nos. 1791; 1872; 1876), and Antiochus VI (*SC* II no. 2243). The image of triumphant Dionysus was known in Greece already in the pre-Hellenistic period (see e.g. Hdt. 2.146); but it was only after the death of Alexander that he became associated with India, and elephants became part of Dionysiac processions, first of all in early Ptolemaic Alexandria (Goukowsky [1981]). Antiochus IV was the first Seleucid to portray himself wearing an elephant scalp: *SC* II no. 1533: Susa. Elephant scalps are later also worn by Demetrius I (SC II no. 1696; Seleucia-Tigris), Demetrius II (SC II no. 1989: Seleucia-Tigris) and finally Alexander II (*SC* II no. 2234: Antioch).
[110] Tondriau (1953); Versnel (1970) 250–3; Heinen (1983). On Golden Age imagery in Hellenistic royal ideology and representation see Alföldi (1977); Préaux (1978) 201–38; Strootman (2014c).

inscription OGIS 253, dated to 167/6 but of unknown provenance, in which Antiochus IV is hailed as the 'Savior of Asia'.[111] A promise of liberation and peace was thus conveyed at Daphne by a king who already in 172/3 had styled himself *Theos Epiphanes* and in *c.* 169/8 had adopted, in addition, the epithet *Nikephoros*, bringer of victory, to commemorate his Egyptian campaigns.[112] Interestingly, the image of Dionysus as the king-like conqueror of Asia had originally been developed at the Ptolemaic court in relation to Alexander. This image was then adopted by the Seleucids, too.

Common Conclusion

Imperial capitals do not come into existence naturally. They have to be constructed symbolically as well as practically. Even the Ptolemies had to reckon with pre-existing administrative and religious centres (most of all Memphis). These needed not to be replaced, but integrated. To create an imperial centre, a place's status not only had to be expressed in monumental space and architecture. Moreover, rituals were needed that put the empire and the empire's power and splendour on display. It most of all had to be communicated. Court poetry and philosophy were important for the spread of imperial ideologies. Myths and reports about spectacular ritual and ceremonial too could do the trick to create the idea of a new imperial or even global centre. Empires claim to exist for all eternity. To ingrain the establishment of an imperial centre permanently in the minds of future generations, these capitals were presented as having always been there – hence the references to a pre-cultural and prehistorical past, the discovery of primordial sanctuaries in the footsteps of gods and culture heroes creating order.

   In this joint chapter, rather than looking for differences, we have emphasized similarities. The Ptolemaic and Seleucid empires are, to a high degree, entangled systems, partly employing as their main imperial elites the same social groups: representatives of civic elites in the Aegean *poleis*. Differences are mainly visible in core regions where direct control

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[111] OGIS 253: Βασιλεύοντος Ἀντιόχου θ[εοῦ Ἐπιφανοῦς τοῦ] | σωτῆρος τῆς Ἀσίας καὶ κτίσ[του καὶ εὐεργέτου] | τῆς πόλεως, ἔτους σμ′ καὶ [ρ′ ἐν τῶι συντελουμένωι] | ἀγῶνι Χαριστηρίοις ὑπὸ [- – – – – – – – – – – -] | ἀπιόντος Ὑπερβερεταίου· (ll. 1–5; emendations Dittenberger).

[112] Mørkholm (1963) 37 and 72; cf. Mittag (2006) 118–19.

was possible: the Nile Valley, Babylonia, Lydia or Bactria, but not where the empires competed, met and clashed, such as the Levant and the Aegean. Ptolemaic–Seleucid rivalry was not just a matter of war. The Seleucid and Ptolemaic courts constantly reacted to each other in antagonistic exchanges of many forms.