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## A New Book and Further Recent Scholarship on Seleukid Royal Women\*

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**ABSTRACT** The article sets out by briefly surveying recent scholarship on the Seleukid kingdom and Hellenistic queenship. Two important works that fall into both fields: *Women and Monarchy in the Ancient World* edited by Beth Carney and Sabine Müller (2021) and *Basilissa* authored by Christiane Kunst (2022). The discussion, however, concentrates on the first monograph that systematically explores Seleukid queenship: Robin Hämmerling's *Zwischen dynastischem Selbstbild und literarischem Stereotyp. Königinnen der Seleukiden und der Mittelmächte Kleinasiens* (2019). By investigating the roles of the sister and the mother of the king as well as inter-dynastic marriages, Hämmerling explores the extent of the *basilissa's* autonomous agency. Revisiting the evidence leads the author of the present article to many alternative views, especially concerning the early Seleukid women from Apama over Stratonike to Laodike I-IV. While Hämmerling rightly identifies the sibling marriage among the Seleukids as ritual role play until the generation of Antiochos III, the same arguments should have induced him to challenge the standard claim that there was a radical change beginning with Antiochos the son of Antiochos III. Another shortcoming is the assumption of monogamy as the norm in the House of Seleukos, although the evidence clearly favours polygamy as the prevailing model. But Hämmerling's main conclusion is confirmed: the political power of the Seleukid queen was limited and confined to some instances of troubled successions; her typical role was to represent the royal family rather than to rule. Yet he omits an investigation into the *basilissa* title. He follows the traditional view that it could be borne by every woman of the king's family, whereas the present paper argues that it is mostly attested for only one woman, namely the mother of the designated successor, co-ruling king, or king after his succession. The position of the *basilissa* was thus to support the smooth dynastic transition at the polygamous court, it did not come with any institutional power.

**KEYWORDS** Seleukids, *basilissa*, marriage diplomacy, sibling marriage, polygamy, royal succession.

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Hellenistic History is *en vogue*, and it seems that the Seleukids have dethroned the long-time favourite Ptolemies in the recent wave of scholarly production<sup>1</sup>. The number of

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<sup>1</sup> But also note the increasing cooperation or comparative approaches, most of all the contributions in FISCHER-BOVET-VON REDEN 2021; also FISCHER-BOVET 2015; LLEWELLYN-JONES-MCAULEY 2022-

books on the Seleukids published in the past decade alone dwarfs the contributions to the field made throughout the previous century<sup>2</sup>. This goes along with a high number of conferences and their published proceedings<sup>3</sup>, most of all the *Seleukid Study Days*<sup>4</sup> and the Nancy conference series<sup>5</sup>.

The surge of popularity intersects with a growing interest in women, gender and sexuality of the ancient world. Unsurprisingly, the monarchical structure of the postclassical world drew and still draws wide attention to the kings' immediate environment, their courts and families, hence also to their wives, mothers and daughters. It is widely recognized that dynastic women receive more prominence in the evidence for the Hellenistic age than in any other premodern period. The latest handbook on *Women and Monarchy in the Ancient World* may be seen as representative. Unsurprisingly, the dynasty with the highest number of assigned chapters are the Ptolemies (5.5 out of 41), followed by the extended family of Augustus and the Julio-Claudians (3.5). Next come the Seleukids (3) and the two main houses of Macedon combined, the Argeads and Antigonids (3). Counting five other papers as Hellenistic, we achieve an impressive total of 16/41, a proportion which can only in part be explained by the fact that the editors of the volume, Beth Carney and Sabine Müller, are distinguished experts on Hellenistic royal women<sup>6</sup>. Also in 2021, the monumental treatment *Basilissa – Die Königin im Hellenismus* was published. In its two volumes, Christiane Kunst presents scholarship and source material on around

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2023. C. Lorber is an authority in both fields: HOUGHTON–LORBER–HOOVER 2002/2008 and LORBER 2018. For a relatively recent survey on Hellenistic scholarship, see ENGELS 2017b.

<sup>2</sup> Recent milestones in the study of Seleukid History include GRAINGER 2010; 2014; 2015a; 2015b; MCAULEY 2011/2014; KOSMIN 2014; 2018; MONERIE 2014; PLISCHKE 2014; ENGELS 2017a; OGDEN 2017; PIRNGRUBER 2017; ERICKSON 2019a; HÄMMERLING 2019; OETJEN 2020; VISSCHER 2020. Also note MUCCIOLI 2013; STROOTMAN 2014; ERSKINE–LLEWELLYN-JONES–WALLACE 2017.

<sup>3</sup> 2008 Exeter conference ed. by Erickson and Ramsey 2011. 2016 Freiburg conference ed. by Fischer-Bovet and von Reden 2021. Sydney 2019 conference ed. by Anagnostou-Laoutides and Pfeiffer 2022.

<sup>4</sup> The *Seleukid Study Days* offer a platform for work in progress and typically involve a high number of students and early researchers. As of 2012, they were geared towards book projects: *SSD III* (Bordeaux 2012, edited by ERICKSON 2018a) focussed on the 3rd century. See n. 6 below on *SSD IV*. *SSD V* (Brussels 2015, edited by COŞKUN–ENGELS 2019) dealt with Rome and the later Seleukids. *SSD VI* (North Bay 2017, proceedings yet to be edited: COŞKUN–WENGHOFFER 2023) tackled matters of ideology. *SSD VII* (SOPOT 2019, highlighted military matters. It is currently uncertain how the series will be continued. Plans to host another *SSD* in either Waterloo or Moscow have been thwarted by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and most recently by the Russian attack on Ukraine. For the time being, the digital *Seleukid Lecture Series* (hosted by A. COŞKUN and B.E. Scolnic) began continuing this international cooperation in May 2021; recordings can be streamed here: <http://www.altaycoskun.com/seleukid-lectures>.

<sup>5</sup> The Nancy conferences of 2011, 2013, 2016, 2019 were published by FEYEL *et al.* 2012; FEYEL–GRASLIN-THOMÉ 2014; 2017; 2021; the latest conference was “Crises, Collapses and Recoveries of the Seleukid Authority” (Athens, 19-21 October 2022) (<https://www.efa.gr/fr/manifestations-scientifiques/nos-anciennes-manifestations-scientifiques/2227-19-21-10-2022-crisis-effondrements-et-retablissements-de-l-autorite-seleucide>).

<sup>6</sup> CARNEY–MÜLLER 2021. The Egyptian section includes five Ptolemaic contributions. There is another chapter that has “Ptolemaic” in its title, but most of it is on the Seleukids, Anatolian houses and Achaemenids (AGER 2021a), whereas my count splits PLANTZOS 2021 between Ptolemaic and Julio-Claudian. Another Hellenistic chapter with limited Seleukid content is by STROOTMAN 2021. The three chapters counted as Seleukid are by OLBRYCHT 2021; RAMSEY 2021; D’AGOSTINI 2021 –with a somewhat repetitive focus on the early Seleukid women at the expense of the later Kleopatrai. But note the different choices that Patricia Eunji Kim and Anastasia Amrhein made for their *Queens* conference (Gallatin, New York, 23-24 September 2021) with a broader chronological and geographical range, in which 3 of 34 papers were on Hellenistic royal women (Roxane, Olympias, Laodike III): <https://wp.nyu.edu/queensymposium/program>.

1,000 pages. Seleukid royal women receive substantial attention (KUNST 2021, I, 123-164; II, 141-225, plus 10 figures at the end of vol. II), though again less than half dedicated to their Ptolemaic counterparts (KUNST 2021, I, 165-269; II, 227-459, plus 28 figures).

Interest in the ladies of the Hellenistic courts grew only slowly after the pioneering work of Grace Macurdy (1932), but gradually increased since the 1990s<sup>7</sup>. In more recent years, dedicated conferences and edited volumes have strongly enhanced the visibility of this field<sup>8</sup>. Two initiatives in particular have focused scholarly attention on Seleukid women: *Seleukid Study Day IV: Seleukid Royal Women. Roles, Representations and Expectations* (Montreal 2013) and the PhD thesis that Robin Hämmerling began working on around the same time at the University of Trier. The workshop proceedings were published in 2016, before the revised version of the doctoral dissertation was released from the press in 2019<sup>9</sup>. Hämmerling's book deserves particular attention, since it is the first monograph on Seleukid royal women, and hence provides a good opportunity for considering the state of the field<sup>10</sup>.

After illustrating the importance of the (not only) Seleukid matriline by describing the *hierothesion* of the Nemrud Dağı in Kommagene (8-12), he surveys the roles and representation of females in ancient sources and modern scholarship. It is difficult to identify common threads for the non-Hellenistic periods, while a trend towards a more universal normativity under Roman imperial influence gradually emerges with Polybios in the 2nd century BCE (20). Hämmerling then adduces more than a dozen books on the Hellenistic period before addressing the range and limitations of female agency at the Hellenistic courts. His plan is to explore these for the Seleukids in the fields of brother-sister marriages, marital diplomacy and mother roles (27-29).

The first main part on siblings (30-73) is not limited to incestuous marriages, but also considers historical roles of some of the sisters of Seleukid kings (62-73). The bulk of the chapter, however, dwells on royal sibling couples. Hämmerling begins with a

<sup>7</sup> Important general works on Hellenistic women are MACURDY 1932; CARNEY 1991; 2000; 2011; OGDEN 1999; BIELMAN 2002; BIELMAN SÁNCHEZ 2003; NOURSE 2002. Further important case studies on Argead, Antigonid and Ptolemaic women include CARNEY 1992; 2013; 2015 [2016]; BENNETT 2001-2013 (*TPD*); KOSMETATOU 2004; MINAS 2005; HECKEL 2006; 2021; KUNST 2007; OGDEN 2008; MÜLLER 2009; 2013; LANDUCCI 2009; 2020; HARDERS 2013; CANEVA 2013; 2014; VAN OPPEN DE RUITER 2011; 2015a; 2015b; 2020; BARTELS 2016; AGER 2017; 2018; 2021a; 2021b; D'AGOSTINI 2020a; 2020b; MCAULEY 2020; PFEIFFER 2021; ANTELA-BERNÁRDEZ 2022.

<sup>8</sup> On ancient female royalty, including Hellenistic queens, see BOEHRINGER-SEBILLOTTE CUCHET 2013; BIELMAN SANCHEZ-COGITORE-KOLB 2016; ANTELA-BERNÁRDEZ-ZARAGOZÀ SERRANO-GUIMERA MARTÍNEZ 2017; BIELMAN SANCHEZ 2019; GARCIA SANCHEZ-GARRAFFONI 2019; OLLER GUZMÁN 2019; CUSSET-BELANFONT-NARDONE 2020; D'AGOSTINI-ANDSON-POWNALL 2020; CARNEY-MÜLLER 2020. Add the panel at the Celtic Conference of Classics in Coimbra 2019: *Cherchez la femme. Women in Hellenistic History, Historiography and Reception*, proceedings to be published by B. Antela-Bernárdez, M. Mendoza and E. Almagor. Ongoing is the spread-out conference *Power, Royal Agency, and Elite Women in the Hellenistic and Roman and Roman World* (September 2021-June 2022): <https://uwaterloo.ca/waterloo-institute-for-hellenistic-studies/power-royal-agency-and-elite-women-hellenistic-and-roman>. Further international conferences on related topics are listed by HÄMMERLING 2019, 8.

<sup>9</sup> COŞKUN-MCAULEY 2016; HÄMMERLING 2019 (Diss. 2017). Other recent works on Seleukid women not included in the volumes cited in the previous note are D'AGOSTINI 2013; 2014; MCAULEY 2011-2014 (*SG*); 2018a; 2018b; 2022; REDA 2014; AGER 2017; 2020; ERICKSON 2019b. Further articles are quoted below.

<sup>10</sup> Disclosure: Although I had close links to Trier, I was at no stage involved in Hämmerling's PhD, and our contact gravitated around *Seleukid Study Day V* in Brussels (21-23 Aug. 2015). It was a pleasant surprise for me to find a kind mention of my name in the preface (HÄMMERLING 2019, 7). A much shorter version of my discussion has been submitted to *Gnomon*.

short reflection on the precedents under the Achaemenids, Hekatomnids and Ptolemies (32-35). For the Seleukids, he first turns to the ritual and allegorical representation of the king and his wife as brother and sister (or Apollo and Artemis). Traces in our evidence go back as far as Seleukos I and Apama, daughter of the Sogdian dynast Spitamenes, since Livy (38.13.5) calls her “sister of king Seleukos” (35). Interesting, though quite speculative, is the inclusion of the names of the four Syrian cities Antioch, Seleukeia, Apameia and Laodikeia, which are well attested as “sibling cities” (36f., cf. Str. 16.2.4 [not 28ff.])<sup>11</sup>. Hämmerling no longer follows the obsolete commonplace that all other Diadochs divorced their Iranian wives wed to them at Susa in 324 BCE soon after Alexander’s death. But he still overemphasizes Apama’s political usefulness, as if Seleukos needed a particular reason for not rejecting her, the mother of various of his children<sup>12</sup>.

Hämmerling rightly adds Antiochos I and Stratonike to this list, with reference to the inscription from Ilion (41: OGIS 219 = *I.Ilion* 32.22-24). We only learn in a different context (87 n. 382) that he further includes Laodike I, the wife of Antiochos II, and rightly so, though this does not yet make her a *basilissa*, for which there is no evidence<sup>13</sup>. Our knowledge of the subsequent royal wives is more limited, so that we cannot say much about their representation<sup>14</sup>, before the evidence becomes much clearer for the couple Antiochos III and Laodike III, the king’s cousin presented as his “sister” (42-51)<sup>15</sup>.

Effective sibling marriages were practiced by the Seleukids only since Antiochos III matched his son Antiochos with his daughter Laodike IV in (31, 51: Appian, *Syriake* 4.17, as below), so at least is the general understanding nowadays, which Hämmerling adheres to. The model is then believed to have proliferated: Laodike IV was joined in two subsequent levirate marriages to her brothers Seleukos IV and Antiochos IV respectively (51-58); hence it is also assumed for Demetrios I and his wife Laodike and even occasionally among the satellites, such as for Mithradates IV of Pontos (58-62). Hämmerling does not engage with the sources that suggest the death of Laodike IV (or

<sup>11</sup> Not yet considered is the Apameia Foundation Mosaic that depicts Apama with her husband Seleukos, her son Antiochos and others. The first major discussion is Olszewski and Saad 2017 (cf. OLSZEWSKI 2022), but see COŞKUN 2022a for several modifications.

<sup>12</sup> HÄMMERLING 2019, 36-38 suggests –as many others– that she was a helpful advisor for Seleukos to establish his rule over the eastern satrapies. For the negative part, he could have drawn on VAN OPPEN DE RUYTER 2015a, who dispels the myth that most Macedonians rejected their wives in or soon after 323 BCE. The assumption of practical use of Apama is in contradiction to Hämmerling’s own observation regarding the typically young age and limited abilities of a royal bride (192, as below, with n. 25). One may add that an ethnicizing interpretation is a modern construct with no anchor in the ancient sources, as VAN DER SPEK 2018, 388 emphasizes; cf. COŞKUN 2023b (Miletos); for discussion, see also STROOTMAN 2023. Last but not least, admitting polygamy (on which see below) would take away most of the assumed pressures on Seleukos to replace Apama by a bride of higher standing among the Diadochs.

<sup>13</sup> Likewise, D’AGOSTINI 2016, 44-45. understands the sister title as synonymous to *basilissa*. But see COŞKUN 2016, 116-118 on the lack of the *basilissa* title; more detailed: COŞKUN 2022b; 2023a. HÄMMERLING 2019, 87 n. 382 references Polyainos (8.50), who presents Laodike erroneously as daughter of Antiochos I. Also consider Laodike’s role as Aphrodite / Ishtar in the temple of Belet-Babili, with RAMSEY 2020, 255-257 on the ritual role of Laodike (though without mention of the notion of sister).

<sup>14</sup> HÄMMERLING 2019, 64-66 tries to gather information on Laodike II, whom he regards as wife of Seleukos II, but the evidence is in fact much more complicated, especially since the recent discovery of the letter by Queen Laodike to the Koans, on which see BOSNAKIS–HALLOF 2020 for the letter and COŞKUN 2021b for a new discussion.

<sup>15</sup> For the latest on Laodike III, see BENCIVENNI 2017a; 2017b; ERICKSON 2019b; KLOKOW 2023b; quite speculative is WIDMER 2019a.

rather IVa) in 182 BCE or might encourage alternative interpretations for Demetrios I and Mithradates IV respectively<sup>16</sup>. This is somewhat surprising, for a number of reasons. First, there is not a single case where we have explicit and unmistakable evidence for Seleukid full or half-siblings as married couples. Second, Alex McAuley has rightly pointed out that nearly all attested royal wives after Stratonike and before Kleopatra Thea were called Laodike, which seems to have become a female throne name and thus obstructs efforts of identifying their parents. As a result, Appian's allegation pertaining to the children of Antiochos III may constitute a similar error as conceded in the cases of Apama, Stratonike and Laodike I<sup>17</sup>.

But even if Appian were true for Laodike IVa, a prosopographical analysis for Laodike IVb, the (later) wife of Seleukos and Antiochos IV, clearly speaks against her being a daughter of Antiochos III, not least because the oldest son from Seleukos IV was named Demetrios. This points to an Antigonid offspring of Laodike IVb. Add to this that the dynastic conception of the Ptolemies differed significantly from that of the Seleukids, since it practiced endogamy with unique persistency (the intrusion of Kleopatra I, daughter of Antiochos III, being a rare exception forced upon them after military defeat)<sup>18</sup>. In contrast, the Seleukids practiced exogamy prolifically, as is well documented in the second main part of Hämmerling's book on marital diplomacy (74-194).

In a passing remark, Hämmerling muses about a political motivation for the ritual sibling model among the Seleukids, as to de-emphasize the foreign origin of the wives (31). However, this would have counteracted the political benefit of highlighting the imperial network of the royal family. The ritual role play thus seems to root less in political expediency than in a much broader Near Eastern (and Greek) conception of the *hieros gamos* of the divine sibling couple. The evidence from Egypt is much more diverse, but the styling of Stratonike as love goddess among the Seleukid subjects also provides a rich dossier<sup>19</sup>.

The great potential of marriage diplomacy is illustrated by a welcome biography of the Achaemenid princess Amastris, who was married subsequently to the Diadoch Krateros, the dynast of Herkleia Dionysios and the Diadoch Lysimachos (74-85, also 196-199 on her role as city queen of Herakleia)<sup>20</sup>. A key chapter is devoted to Antiochos II and his two wives Laodike I and Berenike II, a topic closely connected with the Second and Third Syrian Wars as well as the Seleukid War of Brothers (85-98). Hämmerling largely maintains the traditional view of Laodike's divorce to give room to Berenike. Although he quotes my 2016 article that challenged this view, not all of my arguments have been considered. However, there is at least one interesting twist in that Hämmerling admits Antiochos' reunion with Laodike for 248 BCE, when she is attested as the king's wife in the Babylonian evidence, suggesting that this reversal caused the tensions leading up the Third Syrian War in 246 BCE. But this interpretation is not backed up with a chronological analysis of the conflict, nor does it salvage the

<sup>16</sup> AD II -182, with MONERIE 2014, 149-150.

<sup>17</sup> MCAULEY 2018b, and App. *Syr.* 4.17: γάμους τε τῶν παίδων ἔθυσεν, Ἀντιόχου καὶ Λαοδίκης, ἀλλήλοις συναμύζων.

<sup>18</sup> See COŞKUN 2021a (on Laodike IVb and V); 2021c (on Mithradates IV); 2022b (Ptolemaic concept).

<sup>19</sup> Ptolemies: MÜLLER 2009; MCAULEY 2020. Seleukids: JONES 1993; ENGELS-ERICKSON 2016; WIDMER 2019b; For more on Stratonike, see n. 23 below. Now see also AGER 2021a, 351-352, on Near-Eastern traditions.

<sup>20</sup> For more on Amastris, see n. 28 below.

testimony of Porphyry since the chronicler (wrongly) claims the rejection of Berenike and adds the slander of Laodike poisoning Antiochos regardless<sup>21</sup>.

Another long chapter is dedicated to Kleopatra Thea and the younger Ptolemaic princesses married to the later Seleukids (98-121). This lower period constitutes a very different phase of Seleukid history in which marital choices were induced by dynastic infighting or dictated by dominant Ptolemies. Hämmerling's discussion is on a solid basis, especially thanks to the close consideration of Ehling's important book that has often remained unconsidered in Anglophone scholarship<sup>22</sup>.

The treatment of the most illustrious (and sexualized) queen, Stratonike, is based on a wide range of scholarship. The chapter about her perhaps best display's Hämmerling's ability to integrate Greek literary and epigraphic sources as well as Near Eastern evidence (121-139)<sup>23</sup>. He rightly identifies a political context for Seleukos I passing his youngest wife to his oldest son Antiochos I. This said, Hämmerling's proposal (139, 212) to date the romanticizing plot to the early imperial period strikes me as bold and not sufficiently supported.

The next chapter takes seriously the book's subtitle "und der Mittelmächte Kleinasiens", since it subjects to detailed scrutiny the marital policies of the houses of Pontos, Kappadokia, Pergamon and Bithynia (139-190). Hämmerling offers much more than just brief surveys, but engages with an array of primary sources and recent scholarship. His conclusions on martial diplomacy thus reach beyond the Seleukid court (190-193). As potential motivations of such inter-dynastic weddings, he lists a conclusion of military alliances, sealing of peace treaties, transfer of money or territory disguised as dowry and, perhaps most importantly, the accumulation of dynastic prestige.

I am not so sure whether most of those marriages were indeed concluded with a firm view to regulating dynastic succession ("die meisten Ehen wurden unter dem Gesichtspunkt der Nachfolgekontinuität geschlossen") (190). After all, the genealogical outcome of a new marriage must have been highly uncertain, especially in a polygamous environment (on which see below), but also considering the typically young age of royal brides and thus probably also a relatively high mortality in childbed. But Hämmerling is certainly right to point out that the status of a mother (or should we not say: of the mother's father?) significantly added to the expectation of her son to succeed his father one day.

The chapter's conclusion puts due emphasis on the largely fictitious nature of romanticizing narratives concerning royal marriages, which ignore the highly political

<sup>21</sup> The only source claiming the rejection of Laodike is the same Porphyry, *FGH* 260 (= *BNJ* 260) F 32.8; F 43, esp. ll. 12-15: *Antiochus autem Berenicen consortem regni habere se dicens et Laodicen in concubinae locum, post multum temporis amore superatus Laodicen cum liberis suis reducit in regiam. quae metuens ambigui viri animum, ne Berenicen reduceret, virum per ministros veneno interfecit*. My first argument is COŞKUN 2016a, complemented by COŞKUN 2016b and 2018 for a detailed chronology. Further discussion is in COŞKUN 2021b (other Laodikai); 2022b (on Berenike and the Ptolemaic perspective) and 2023a (engagement with all responses to COŞKUN 2016a, including further engagement with Hämmerling). On Laodike's economic and political role, see also RAMSEY 2020 and KLOKOW 2023a.

<sup>22</sup> EHLING 2008. The new standard for the Kleopatrain will be LLEWELLYN-JONES–MCAULEY 2022-2023, to replace WHITEHORNE 2001; cf. COŞKUN 2021a, 286. On the Kleopatrain in the house of Seleukos, also consider BARTLETT 2016; DUMITRU 2016; SCOLNIC 2021.

<sup>23</sup> Hämmerling builds especially on ALMAGOR 2016 and ENGELS–ERICKSON 2016. Latest scholarship on Stratonike includes WIDMER 2019a; VISSCHER 2020; NELSON 2021; RAMSEY 2021; COŞKUN 2022c; 2023b; [in preparation]; problematic is the scheming role ascribed to her by CLÉMENT 2020. Relevant for the chronology of her queenship is also HACKL 2020; KUNST 2021, I 131-138.

implications of the royal matches<sup>24</sup>. Likewise persuasive is the observation that brides who married out of or into the Seleukid house were typically too young to support their fathers' political interests, so that this function rested on the courtiers accompanying her (192). The most influential representative of this type was Ammonios at the court of Alexander Balas and Kleopatra Thea (103f.)<sup>25</sup>. Moreover, truly powerful queens were those who remarried and had a chance to accumulate royal prestige and political experience. As already Macurdy had observed, their time for prominence came in a time of uncertain succession, when a king deceased without leaving a grown-up son behind<sup>26</sup>.

This last topic (192f.) provides an elegant transition to the third major theme of Hämmerling's book: the roles or more specifically regencies of mothers (194-209). The chapter is opened with a short investigation of Laodike, the mother of Seleukos I, who does not fall into the specified category. While we know nothing of her historical existence, she played an important part in the first king's dynastic design, since he is said to have named five cities for her.

Hämmerling allows for locally diverse traditions of the main dynastic myth from early on, starting at the court around the time that Seleukos assumed the diadem in 305 BCE. This may be a few years early, since our positive evidence postdates the Battle of Ipsos (301 BCE) by a few years. Parallels to the Alexander Romance are addressed, but questions of finer chronology are avoided, although they might reveal a great deal about the authors and addressees of the various legend versions or their elements<sup>27</sup>.

The figure of Amastris, now in her role as a mother (murdered by her son Klearchos) is resumed (196-199), though not that of Laodike I, who was traditionally reproached of plotting against her own son Seleukos II<sup>28</sup>. Hämmerling further addresses the first jugate portrait of the Seleukids depicting Laodike IVb (as I would say) and the boy Antiochos, son of Seleukos IV, a good example of the widow-mother embodying "Nachfolgekontinuität" (199-201)<sup>29</sup>. Likewise balanced is the discussion of Nysa, who co-ruled Kappadokia with her son Ariarathes VI before being murdered by him<sup>30</sup>. The last section once again treats the Kleopatrai of Ptolemaic descent (203-208). The conclusion of this chapter (208f.) comes across as a bit too humble, since most results are formulated as open questions. Of particular importance is the point on the agency of such queen mothers in times of succession: was the prominence of their representation a result of the explicit will of the deceased king, a decision of influential courtiers or a choice of a powerful queen herself? Hämmerling at least hints at the answer by concluding that there is not a single case in which a royal woman might have established rule in her own right on a permanent basis.

This point also weighs into the final conclusions (210-214). The guiding question is again that of agency versus representation, and the evidence clearly inclines towards

<sup>24</sup> In this regard, his analysis is superior appears superior to that of OLBRYCHT 2021 and D'AGOSTINI 2021.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. COŞKUN 2021a, 280 with further references.

<sup>26</sup> MACURDY 1932, 1, 5.

<sup>27</sup> HÄMMERLING 2019, 194-196, with several references including ENGELS 2017 and OGDEN 2017, who argues for a bold design of Seleukos, with priority before the Alexander Romance. The discussion is ongoing, see the more recent contributions by NAWOTKA 2019; VISSCHER 2020; COŞKUN 2023b.

<sup>28</sup> This is addressed by HÄMMERLING 2019, 97-98, but he leaves the case open, with reference to my concerns (COŞKUN 2016, 111, though better see 132-133). For the latest on Amastris, see VAN OPPEN DE RUITER 2020; D'AGOSTINI 2020a.

<sup>29</sup> On jugate portraits, now see also MEYER 2020; PLANTZOS 2021.

<sup>30</sup> The skepticism of HÄMMERLING 2019, 201-203 concerning the dramatizing literary tradition is more convincing than BALLESTEROS PASTOR 2018 (which actually appeared after Hämmerling's book).

the latter (213f., my translation): “On balance, one may thus conclude that it is impossible to ascertain a general process of emancipation for the Hellenistic period. Political participation was neither warranted through the inclusion of female members of the dynasty into the means of dynastic representation nor were women of the Hellenistic dynasties at any time entitled to it”. This is well in line with recent trends in our discipline<sup>31</sup>.

Yet to be addressed are two general concerns. First, Hämmerling holds the conservative opinion that Seleukid kings were monogamous. He does not engage with the increasingly numerous and strong voices rejecting the view that the Seleukids significantly differed from the Argeads, Ptolemies or Antigonids regarding marital practices and polygamous family structures<sup>32</sup>. The closest Hämmerling gets to a theoretical reflection is his concluding remark that monogamy became the norm in most Hellenistic houses, aiming at the “Kohäsion der Dynastie” and resulting in the “Idealisierung dieser auf Monogamie basierenden geschwisterlich inszenierten Herrschaft” (211). I do not want to sound polemic, but in the truest sense of the words, I believe that Hämmerling has been too susceptible of the Seleukid dynastic ideology that focuses on the father, mother and son designated to succeed one day, while shrouding other sexual relations of the king in darkness. We hear of rare exceptions when the curtain is briefly lifted at the occasion of diplomatically motivated weddings<sup>33</sup>.

Wherever the status of a royal woman as sole wife, divorced or dead is controversial, he discusses the sources and some selected scholarly views to maintain consistency with his premise. Some arguments are better, others are weaker, but beside potentially misjudging individual instances (such as the cases of Apama/Stratonike<sup>34</sup>, Laodike I/Berenike and Laodike III/Euboia), further opportunities are missed. There is no explanation of how the Seleukids could have sustained their intensive marital diplomacy through monogamy, nor is there a meaningful discussion of the sexual relations of the king and the potentially differing status that concubinage, wedding or motherhood conveyed to the women at court<sup>35</sup>.

Closely related to this *lacuna* is Hämmerling’s indifference towards the *basilissa* title. He admittedly shares what I would call the ‘random’ view, namely, that all royal wives could have borne the title as they pleased (211). However, he follows Ramsey’s (likewise problematic) proposal that the title was first used for Apama by the Milesians in the early 290s, concluding that Seleukid queenship only became official with Stratonike (39, 132f.). Should we really assume that the origin of such an important development was due to flattery from a city and that the royal court did not respond to

<sup>31</sup> Cf. CARNEY 1991, 164; MÜLLER 2009; 2013; AGER 2021. For similarities but interesting nuances, cf. the regnant pharaonic women (MINAS 2021).

<sup>32</sup> Cf. CARNEY 1991, 164; OGDEN 1999; AGER 2018.

<sup>33</sup> See MCAULEY 2022 and COŞKUN 2022b.

<sup>34</sup> Hämmerling follows Malalas (8.10) for the assumption that Apama was dead. For a compromise view, see AGER 2017, 172-173, who thinks that Seleukos only briefly experimented with bigamy. Based on a chronological analysis of the epigraphic and literary evidence, I shall soon argue that Apama’s *basilissa* title was probably introduced only around the time that Seleukos married Stratonike, to dispel any speculation that this latest wedding might affect Antiochos’ claim to succeed his father (COŞKUN 2023b). And as Julien Monerie has indicated to me (20 Oct. 2022), an inscription from Uruk (YOS 20, 087, obv. 24) mentions “queen (sarratu) Apama” in 28 SEB (= 284/83 BCE). The text will be republished with corrections by J. Monerie and P. Clancier (in *Altorientalische Forschungen* 50, 2023).

<sup>35</sup> For theoretical approaches to female roles at Hellenistic courts, see, e.g., OGDEN 1999; MCAULEY 2022. For the distinction between the “King’s Great Wife” from “secondary wives” of the Pharaoh, see MINAS 2021, 23.

it for one or two decades? I also doubt that we are on safe ground when equating evidence for the *basilissa* title and sister status (55, 90). As I shall argue elsewhere, the *basilissa* status more likely marked out the mother of the designated dynastic successor in the early-Hellenistic period<sup>36</sup>.

If both of my concerns are warranted, then Hämmerling's (accurate) observation that Seleukid princesses regularly became queens when married to external kings (191) is missing an important implication: against a polygamous background, it would have meant that a yet to be expected son of the Seleukid bride was the designated successor.

As far as I see, Hämmerling has so far presented the only systematic monograph on Seleukid women. Since it argues most of its cases under close consideration of ancient sources (cf. the list: 242-247) and modern scholarship (his international bibliography is impressive: 215-241) and further contextualizes aspects of queenship in a broader Hellenistic context, his book should be considered an indispensable research tool, irrespective of whether one agrees with his conclusions or uses his work to complete and refine one's own argument. Therefore, his book should not be missing on the shelves of anyone who is trying to come to grips with the unique prominence of Hellenistic royal women.

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<sup>36</sup> HÄMMERLING 2019, 38-39, with *I.Didyma* 480 and RAMSEY 2016, 89. See notes 33-35 above for my alternative suggestions; COŞKUN 2023b.

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