Introduction

This book is the result of many years of development. In the early 1990s I began working on a book with the preliminary title of *Archaeology of the Seleukid Empire*. Much of the manuscript was written when, due to other pressing tasks, I had to put the project on hold. Some years later, my interest in the Hellenistic Near East was reignited and I found myself with the time to return to the idea of producing a book on the subject. However, my interest had changed from a general interest in the material culture of the Seleucid Empire to something more specific, i.e. a biography of Seleucus I and his empire. This, of course, meant that the source material with which I had to work also changed. It expanded to include a greater focus on the written sources, both literary and epigraphical, in the Greek, Latin and Babylonian cuneiform scripts. But the material culture still plays a substantial role in this study, due to its value for understanding the much discussed issues of continuity and change during the transition from the Achaemenid to the Seleucid Empire, the colonisation scheme of Seleucus and the interaction between local populations and Greek and Macedonian immigrants.

During my years as a young student of classical archaeology in the 1960s, no other scholarly work caught my interest and opened my eyes to the same extent as M. Rostovtzeff's *The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World* (1941). The breadth of Rostovtzeff's knowledge and his eminent ability to combine history and archaeology fascinated me completely, and rereading this work over the decades since has only kept my admiration intact. Years later, the pioneering work of S. Sherwin-White and A. Kuhrt, *From Samarkhand to Sardis: A New Approach to the Seleucid Empire* (1993), also made extensive use of both written sources and archaeological material. By that time, I had myself been working with Hellenistic material from the Near East over a long period, and, though I do not agree with the main thesis of the book, i.e. that the Seleucid kingdom was simply

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a successor of the Achaemenid Empire, it definitely brought new life to the study of the Hellenistic East.

This is not the first biography on Seleucus. Indeed, within the last 50 years, two such books have appeared: A. Mehl, *Seleukos Nikator und sein Reich* (1970) and J.D. Grainger, *Seleukos Nikator* (1990). So what is it that keeps generation after generation of scholars fascinated by Seleucus? The answer may of course vary from person to person, but perhaps Seleucus' life as a whole is the simple answer. From the outset of the chain of events beginning with Alexander's expedition in 333, Seleucus was an unlikely winner of the bid for power following Alexander's death in 323, and was only appointed satrap under the Triparadeisus agreement three years later. Until the culmination of the Babylonian War (see chapter 4) he was not in the same league as Antigonus, Ptolemy or Lysimachus. However, by the end, he was not only the last surviving Diadoch, but he was also undefeated in the great battles between the Diadochs which characterised the period. Later, this led to him being given the surname Nicator.[1] In 301 he contributed decisively to the defeat of Antigonus at Ipsus and in 281 he defeated Lysimachus at Corupedium. By this time, the two combatants were both in their late 70s and had spent most of their adult lives campaigning. Following this last battle, Seleucus wanted to move on to his old homeland, Macedonia, but was murdered shortly after reaching the European mainland (see chapter 5). Thus ended an epoch that had begun with Alexander's anabasis more than 50 years earlier.

Written sources

The literary sources on Seleucus' life are few; in fact, he is the least mentioned of the Diadochs in the preserved Greek and Roman literature. Unlike Ptolemy, he did not himself, as far as we know, leave memoirs or any other written evidence. He seems to have had no Greek historian at his court, as Eumenes and later Antigonus had Hieronymus of Cardia; if he did, no evidence is preserved, apart, perhaps, from a number of myths about Seleucus whose origins are lost in the mists of time. It is possible that Appian used such a source (see below).

Much of the preserved Greco-Roman historical material on the early Hellenistic period is secondary, based on works of earlier Greek authors. This is also the case for the time of Alexander and his Successors. Our

1 For example, an inscription in Magnesia from the time of Antiochus III (OGIS 233; see also chapter 8).

best source for the latter is Arrian's *Alexander's Anabasis*.[2] Arrian explicitly states that he has based his work on those of two contemporary eyewitness sources: on the 'memories' of Ptolemy and Aristobulus, who was probably an engineer or architect. He also notes when he has used the official Royal Diaries, the so-called *Ephemerides*.[3] In his preface, Arrian presents the following argument:

'Wherever Ptolemy son of Lagus and Aristobulus son of Aristobulus have both given the same accounts of Alexander son of Philip, it is my practice to record what they say as completely true, but where they differ, to select the version I regard as more trustworthy and also better worth telling. In fact other writers have given a variety of accounts of Alexander, nor is there any other figure of whom there are more historians who are more contradictory of each other, but in my view Ptolemy and Aristobulus are more trustworthy in their narrative, since Aristobulus took part in King Alexander's expedition, and Ptolemy not only did the same, but as he himself was a king, mendacity would have been more dishonourable for him than for anyone else; again both wrote when Alexander was dead and neither was under any constraint or hope of gain to make him set down anything but what actually happened.'[4]

When reading Arrian, one clearly notes a change in the narrative. In the first books on Alexander's three great battles against Darius until he leaves Susa (III.16), the style is rather stiff, with stress on the names of high-ranking officers; for this part, one could imagine that Ptolemy used the Royal Diaries (*Ephemerides*).[5] After the stay in Susa (book III.17 onwards), the narrative becomes much more lively, often with a focus on Ptolemy himself. It is quite possible that from this point onwards Ptolemy often relied on his own diaries. Arrian also wrote a work titled *Events after Alexander*. Hieronymus was probably the main source for this,[6] but, sadly, only fragments are preserved.

The main literary source for the period after the death of Alexander is Diodorus Siculus, who wrote a *Bibliotheca Historica* in 40 volumes between 60 and 30 BC; books I–V and XI–XX survive. Books XVIII–XX

2 For Arrian and his work, see Cartledge, P. in Romm and Mensch, XIII–XXVIII (2012); also Baynham, E. ibid. 325–32; Bosworth 1988.
3 For a discussion of their origin, see Bosworth 1988, 157–84.
4 Translation P.A. Brunt, Loeb 1976.
5 Also, Hammond is of the opinion that Alexander's Diaries were accessible to Ptolemy, probably being kept in Alexandria (1988, 17).
6 Walbank 1988, 96.

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and the preserved fragments of book XXI[7] treat the time of the Diadochs. These books clearly form a unified section that differs from the preceding book XVII.[8] For this period, Diodorus' main source was undoubtedly Hieronymus of Cardia, who held high posts under Eumenes, Antigonus and Demetrius and his son Antigonus Gonatas, and wrote a *History of the Successors* (see Diod. Sic. XVIII. 42.1), of which only a few fragments are preserved. In Antiquity his style was considered tedious and unreadable in large parts (Dionysius Hal. *Comp.* 4.3 = *FGrH* 154 T12).

Diodorus' value as a source has often been questioned by modern historians, and, in contrast to Arrian, he makes no references to his sources. However, one should not underestimate the enormous value that his work presents, being the only preserved nearly complete and detailed work on the period of the Diadochs. His work is structured so as to present separately events in Asia and Europe (divided into Greek and Roman parts) for each year – more or less.[9] His main source for Asia seems to have been Hieronymus of Cardia, a contemporary of the Diadochs who wrote a history of the period 323–272. He first served Eumenes, then Antigonus, Demetrius and at the end Antigonus Gonatanas.

Plutarch, in his *Parallel Lives* written around and after AD 100 (Plutarch died in AD 120), undoubtedly also draws on Hieronymus in his *Lives of Eumenes and Demetrius*. However, due to the subject, it informs us of Seleucus only in relation to Demetrius' life.

Our sources for the last period of Seleucus' life are scanty. The loss of most of Diodorus' book XXI is particularly frustrating, since, in this book, Seleucus, who at this point in the narrative had direct connections with political development close to the Mediterranean and went on to become a principal character on the political scene over the course of the next two decades, must have been much more visible than in preceding sections.

Another comprehensive work on Alexander and the period of the Diadochs was the *Historiae Philippicae* of Pompeius Trogus (a historian of the Augustan period). However, this is known only from excerpts adopted by a number of Christian authors and an epitome by Justin. In book XV there is a longer passage on Seleucus, mainly concerning the myths that came to be told about him (see chapter 7) and his campaign to India; books XVI–XVII, which cover the whole period, form the only continuous narrative from Ipsus to the death of Seleucus.

7 Diodorus' books XXI–XL are only preserved in fragments in Photius and Byzantine excerpts.
8 See Hornblower 1981, 32–9.
9 For a discussion of the sources for the Diadoch period, see, e.g., Billows 1990, Appendix 1.

Of particular importance for the last phase of Seleucus' life is Memnon's history of Heraclea Pontica, his native city. This work, probably written in the first century AD, is preserved only in an epitome of Photius. Memnon seems to have used as his source the historian Nymphis, who in the middle of the third century wrote a work called *Concerning Alexander and his Descendants*, together with two other works, all preserved in fragments only. Memnon's work offers, in particular, information on the very last period of Seleucus' life, on Lysimachus' death, on the months after the battle at Corupedium and on the murder of Seleucus by Ptolemy Keraunus.

Appian's *Syrian Wars*, part of his *Roman History* written in the middle of the second century AD, is the source that focuses most directly on the life of Seleucus, in a digression on how the Macedonians had conquered Syria (App. *Syr.* 52–61). Appian's history is a mix of a short presentation on political history and what he calls prophecies. He stresses Seleucus' achievements as city founder, something about which the other sources tell us very little. He also relates in detail the story of Antiochus falling in love with Stratonice and how this developed. Clearly, Appian took much of this from one or more sources that may have been written at the Seleucid court.

The Greek historian Polybius wrote his *Histories*, covering the period 264–146, as a contemporary eyewitness to a significant part of the period. In his narrative of the fifth Syrian war between Antiochus III and Ptolemy V of Egypt, he includes (V.67) the convention between Seleucus, Lysimachus and Cassander after Ipsus (see chapter 5).

Pausanias, the indefatigable traveller, who wrote his *Description of Greece* in the second century AD, is little appreciated by historians but of great interest to archaeologists. Characteristic of his descriptions of sites in Greece are long passages telling of myths or historical figures or events. Thus, in his description of the Agora in Athens he details a number of bronze statues in front of the stoa poikile, including one of Solon 'and, a little farther away' one of Seleucus, whose future prosperity was 'foreshadowed by unmistakable signs'. Pausanias continues with a narrative of Seleucus' life, covering in particular the last months of his life and his death.

A source that is unfortunately preserved only in fragments is that written by the Babylonian priest Berossus, who composed a history of Babylonia in Greek dedicated to Antiochus I (*FGrH* 680 T2). None of the preserved fragments concerns the Hellenistic period.

As to Greek epigraphical sources, very few from Seleucus' time are preserved, and, for this reason, I have included in this book a number from the

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times of Antigonus and Antiochus (in particular in chapter 6 on administration). The majority are from Asia Minor.

Of the Babylonian sources,[10] the most important are the *Babylonian Chronicles of the Hellenistic period*.[11] These take the form of cuneiform tablets written during the Seleucid period by Babylonian scribes of the Esagil temple in Babylon, probably using the historical information sometimes included in the *Astronomical Diaries* (see below) as their principal source. The main text concerning the time of Seleucus is written on one tablet, now broken into two pieces (ABC 10/BCHP 3),[12] which offers us glimpses of the period when Seleucus became satrap of Babylonia and is particularly important regarding the so-called Babylonian War, which is not even mentioned by Diodorus. The tablet has also reopened the question of chronology from the time of the agreement of Triparadeisus until the end of Antigonus' war with Eumenes. Another tablet, BCHP 9, concerns the last months of the king's life.[13]

The *Astronomical Diaries* has been edited by Sachs and Hunger. Particularly relevant is their Vol I, covering the period 652–262. Apart from astronomical information, the *Diaries* also report on prices of commodities, river levels and historical events. The *Babylonian King Lists* are lists of kings and the lengths of their reigns, one from Babylon and one from Uruk.[14]

The material sources

The quantity of archaeological evidence from the time of Seleucus and his son Antiochus has grown significantly in recent years due to a number of important excavations. In chapter 8, on Seleucus as coloniser, I focus on a number of sites in order to present cities that were probably founded by him or his son, with the following question in mind: was there a specific layout characteristic of these cities? Chapter 9 deals with the material culture of different parts of the kingdom. It is important, of course, to realise

10 For cuneiform documentation on the history of the Diadoch period, see Boiy 2013.

11 For an introduction to the *Babylonian Chronicles*, see Waerzegger 2012.

12 The tablet is about 17 cm long and 6–6.5 cm wide. It probably had four columns of text: two on the obverse and two on the reverse, of which column 2 on the obverse and column 1 on the reverse are lost. ABC stands for the edition of Grayson; BCHP for the online edition of Finkel and van der Spek.

13 Two non-joining fragments of a tablet. For both tablets I have used Finkel's and van der Spek's online presentation and translations https://www.livius.org/sources/about/mesopotamian-chronicles/ In the most recent online update it is announced that the book Finkel, I.L and R.J. van der Spek and R. Pirngruber. *Babylonian Chronographic Texts from the Hellenistic Period* will appear in 2020.

14 See Boiy 2011.

that the dating of material culture can rarely be as precise as that of political history. In this chapter, I have, therefore, taken a broader view, though I attempt, as far as possible, to concentrate on the time of Seleucus and Antiochus or sometimes the early Seleucid period. The aim here is to study the cultural meeting of Greek and local cultures.

Numismatics

Numismatics is usually considered a separate discipline from archaeology, and offers much more precise dating possibilities. The study of coins offers rich information regarding both economic and ideological issues, and is, therefore, adopted mainly in chapters 6–7, but also in chapter 8 when attempting to date the foundations of the colonies.

Chronology

In this book, the so-called low chronology first proposed by B.E. Manni (1949) has been used for the period from the meeting at Triparadeisus to Antigonus' campaign in Syria and Phoenicia. For various opinions regarding the chronology of this period, see Boiy 2007. T. Boiy prefers the low chronology for Perdiccas' death and the meeting at Triparadeisus,[15] but the high chronology for the Babylonian War (2007, table 25). See chapter 3 for my scepticism as to this change of chronology.

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15 See also Anson 2002/2003.