Coinage and the Creation of the Seleucid Kingdom

Seleucus I Nicator ruled over the most diverse set of regions and peoples of any of the successor kings.[1] Coinage was absolutely essential for the succession of military actions through which he built up his realm, from the initial capture of Babylon in 311 BC, through the consolidation of control over Persia and Bactria after 306, his acquisition of Syria in 301, and his conquest of Asia Minor from Lysimachus shortly before his assassination in 280 BC.[2] Beyond these military activities, however, coinage also played a key role in transforming the patchwork of Seleucus' conquests into a Seleucid kingdom with ideological and institutional structures that allowed it to survive the death of its founder.

There were a number of roles that coinage played in the consolidation of power for Seleucus generally, as for other Diadochi. By the start of the Hellenistic period, coined money or *chrêmata* was an essential part of a state's or a leader's military power. Without money, commanders could not hope to hire or maintain their troops. Diodorus stated that:

> εἰσὶν ἐν τοῖς πολέμοις αἱ τῶν χρημάτων παρασκευαί, καθάπερ ἡ κοινὴ παροιμία φησίν, ἑταῖραι τῶν πράξεων· ὁ γὰρ τούτων εὐπορῶν οὐκ ἀπορεῖ τῶν μάχεσθαι δυναμένων ἀνδρῶν.
>
> In warfare, ready supplies of money (*chrêmata*) are indeed—as the familiar proverb has it—the bedfellows (*hetairai*) of success, since he who is rich in them is never poor in men to fight.
>
> Diodorus *Bibliotheca* 29.6.1.

Seleucus was at war for most of his reign and coinage was thus essential for his success, even his continued survival. Coinage provided pay (*misthos*, *opson*) to friends, followers and armies in a new world of personal mobility in which professionals and specialists ceased to

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[1] Matthew Trundle passed away in July 2019, leaving an early draft of this paper. Christopher de L'isle undertook the completion of the text. The resulting text may not be what Matthew Trundle would have written, but hopefully does honour to his memory.

[2] For Seleucus and the founding of the Seleucid empire: Grainger 1990; Bosworth 2002, 210-245; Capdetrey 2007, 25-50. General discussions of Seleucus' coinage: Houghton & Lorber 2002, esp. 1-110; Houghton 2004, 49-51; Houghton 2012.

be tied to their smaller poleis and *ethnê*. Instead of relying on shared membership of a political community or inherited bonds to create a relationship with his army and officials, Seleucus (like the other Diadochi) based the relationship on pay.[3]

Pay tied soldiers to their paymaster. Defection meant forfeiting payments that were in arrears (which was common) and the large bonuses habitually paid out at the end of a campaign.[4] Moreover, received payments were stored in a soldier's baggage and, so long as commanders maintained control of that baggage, their troops were unlikely to defect.[5] On a more abstract level, Seleucus, like the other Diadochi, used the language of friendship (*philia*) and gift-giving to represent his relationship with his subordinates—as his friends, they were bound by affection and past good deeds to help him and harm his rivals. Ideally, a good deed to a friend created an obligation to do good in turn, setting up a virtuous cycle which would bind the friends together.[6] It was not possible for Seleucus to actually maintain a personal relationship with each of the myriad men in his service, but pay served as concrete evidence of a direct relationship between him and each individual payee, a benefaction in exchange for service which created an obligation to further service. This use of debt to create unequal relationships was characteristic of the developing Hellenistic kingship.[7] Coinage also helped to define the nature of that relationship by broadcasting images that Seleucus wanted promoted, which presented him as a duly appointed successor of Alexander the Great and as a charismatic figure with right to authority as a result of his own spectacular feats. As tangible markers of Seleucus' power, his coinage tied individuals to him, just as coins had functioned in earlier periods amongst tyrannies, cities and mercenary employers since the introduction of coinage in the sixth century BCE.[8]

The focus of Seleucus' minting on military payments is clear from the kind of coinage produced: large denomination silver and gold coins for making substantial

[3] Meadows 2014, esp. 173; Strootman 2014, 223.
[4] Trundle 2004, 90-91. Bonuses: Arr. 7.12.1 (Alexander at Babylon); Arr. *Succ.* 1.31-32 (Perdiccas' veterans at Triparadeisus in 321).
[5] Diod. 20.47.4; Roisman 2012, 165-170.
[6] Dover 1974, 177-184; Mitchell 1997.
[7] e.g. Bringmann 1993; Ma 1999, 182-193; Strootman 2014, 152-159.
[8] Trundle 2006.

The different regions brought together within Seleucus' empire differed from one another in the role that coinage played in their local economies. Accordingly, Seleucus' monetary policy in each region differed. In Asia Minor, coinage had been a central part of the economy for centuries. There was a large supply of coinage on the Attic weight standard in circulation, chiefly Alexander coins, posthumous Alexanders, and the coinage of Lysimachus. Thus, there was little fiscal need for Seleucus to mint coinage.[9] In Mesopotamia, coinage was still relatively novel, but there had been a flood of coinage minted at Babylon by Alexander after 325 BC. Bronze coinage, which had a face value far in excess of its intrinsic worth, was an accepted instrument of exchange in the west, but unheard of in Mesopotamia; the advent of the 'copper coins of Ionia' is recorded with dismay by the authors of the Babylonian *Astronomical Diaries*.[10] Further east, in Bactria, coinage had only circulated as bullion before Alexander's conquest and there was very little coinage in circulation to meet new expenses in the region that had to be paid in coinage: pay for Greek garrisons and the costs associated with founding new cities.[11]

One of the key questions in current scholarship on the Seleucid realm is how they balanced general, empire-wide concerns against local circumstances and actors. The seminal work of Amelié Kuhrt and Susan Sherwin-White stressed the importance of these local factors.[12] Without downplaying those factors, scholars like Laurent Capdetrey, Paul Kosmin, and G. G. Aperghis have since presented arguments for the existence of unified institutions, ideologies, and economic policies that the Seleucids applied to their whole empire.[13] A large part of Seleucus' success rested on his willingness to preserve and co-opt local power structures, while also systematising the regions under his control and asserting the supremacy of royal power. These two tendencies—regionalism and uniformity—could have come into conflict, but Seleucus and his heirs managed to create a system in which they

[9] Aperghis 2004, 230-236; Duyrat 2004, 381.
[10] *AD* -273B; Houghton & Lorber 2002, 3 & 27-44; Joannès 2004; Pirngruber 2017, 123-127.
[11] Houghton & Lorber 2002, xvii, 3-4 & 90; Bopearachchi 2004.
[12] Sherwin-White & Kuhrt 1993.
[13] Capdetrey 2007; Kosmin 2014a; Aperghis 2004.

actually reinforced one another instead. Seleucid coinage is a valuable example of how this balance was struck ideologically and economically.

Royal financial policy

That there was a royal financial policy of some sort and that coinage played a role in it is suggested by Ps.-Aristotle's *Oeconomica*, which was probably written around 275 BCE with the Seleucid regime in mind.[14] The text identifies four types of financial administration: the royal (*basilikê*), the satrapal, the civic, and the individual. The comments on royal finance are brief and possibly corrupt:

> Πρῶτον μὲν τοίνυν τὴν βασιλικὴν ἴδωμεν. ἔστι δὲ αὕτη δυναμένη μὲν τὸ καθόλου, εἴδη δὲ ἔχουσα τέσσαρα, περὶ νόμισμα, περὶ τὰ ἐξαγώγιμα, περὶ τὰ εἰσαγώγιμα, περὶ τὰ ἀναλώματα. Τούτων δὲ ἕκαστον, περὶ μὲν τὸ νόμισμα λέγω ποῖον καὶ πότε τίμιον ἢ εὔωνον ποιητέον, περὶ δὲ τὰ ἐξαγώγιμα καὶ εἰσαγώγιμα πότε καὶ τίνα παρὰ τῶν σατραπῶν ἐν τῇ ταγῇ ἐκλαβόντι αὐτῷ λυσιτελήσει διατίθεσθαι, περὶ δὲ τὰ ἀναλώματα τίνα περιαιρετέον καὶ πότε, καὶ πότερον δοτέον νόμισμα εἰς τὰς δαπάνας, ἢ ἀντὶ νομίσματος ὤνια.
>
> Let's look at the royal administration (*basilikê*) first, then. This has power over everything, but has four aspects: coinage (*nomisma*), outgoings (*exagôgima*), incomings (*eisagôgima*),[15] and expenses (*analômata*). Taking each of these separately: on coinage, I mean what kind and when it should be made expensive or cheap; on outgoings and incomings, when and which things it will profit him to distribute, having received them from the satraps in the requisition (*tagê*);[16] on expenditure, what is to be paid off and when, and whether expenses should be paid with coinage or with goods instead of coinage.
>
> [Aristot.] *Oec.* 1345b 20

The author then moves onto the various ways that satraps and cities can collect revenue and never returns to royal finance again. Scholars have differed in the amount that can be made

[14] Aperghis 2004, 129-135.

[15] These are usually translated as 'imports' and 'exports'. The interpretation of them as flows of goods between various bodies within the empire is followed here: Aperghis 2004 118-121.

[16] Van Groningen 1933, 34-35 interprets this as a set amount ('contributions', i.e. tribute); Aperghis 2004, 119-120 interprets this as the jurisdiction of the satrap. The former interpretation is preferred here.

of this passage.[17] A few things are significant for this chapter, however. The first is that, although the author has disappointingly little to say about it, he does assume the existence of a royal level of financial administration. The second is that the king receives, redistributes, and spends wealth, but, beyond setting an amount that he is to receive (the *tagê*), it seems clear that the author expects the king to delegate most financial activity to local actors—the satraps and cities whose activities occupy most of the following pages. The third significant aspect is that, despite this decentralised approach, coinage and its production are placed firmly in the royal sphere.

G. G. Aperghis has argued that this text reflects a unified financial policy applied by Seleucus to the whole empire—one in which coinage played a central role. In his view, the foundation of new cities, the establishment of regional mints and revenue collection in coinage across the empire were closely connected phenomena. He proposes that the founding of cities was an economic strategy to open up 'relatively underdeveloped land to economic exploitation.' Agricultural producers would bring their produce to market in the new towns, where they would sell their produce for coinage, which would then be used to pay tax to the Seleucid government. Founding cities was then a way of increasing the amount of tax income collected in coin rather than kind.[18] This theory has been challenged. The Krateuas and Mnesimachos inscriptions provide evidence that agricultural producers paid a portion of their tax in coin in the early Hellenistic period in Asia Minor, but they also seem to indicate that that payment in coin had already been established in Achaemenid times.[19] All the evidence derives from (probably Antigonid) Asia Minor; it does not follow that payment of agricultural taxation in coin was extended to other Seleucid territories (the Ptolemaic grain tax was always collected in kind).[20] It is clear that the establishment of new foundations and new garrisons was accompanied by greater monetisation of the east, it is far less clear (and far harder to prove) that this was a key goal behind the wave of city foundations, as Aperghis maintains.

[17] Aperghis 2004 represents the maximalist approach, Thonemann 2015, 116 the minimalist.
[18] Aperghis 2004, 117-262.
[19] Billows 1994, 111-145; Thonemann 2009.
[20] Ptolemaic system: Von Reden 2001, 84-102; Manning 2003, 149-181; Criscuolo 2011.

Restriction of coining and proliferation of minting

Indeed, by the end of Seleucus' life, coinage within his realm was produced almost exclusively by royal mints and the iconography of that coinage was either imitations of Alexander coinages or Seleucid royal iconographies. Under the Persians, governors and satraps had often minted coinage in their own names. The only examples of this practice under Seleucus were some coinages issued by the Bactrian satraps, which were eliminated in 290 BC, and perhaps the Frataraka coinage produced by the local rulers of Persis, whose date and significance are disputed.[21] With a few exceptions in western Asia Minor, which came under Seleucus' control only in the last year of his reign, civic coinages were not minted within Seleucus' realm either. It is clear that that the Seleucid administration made an effort to mint currency throughout the empire. When Alexander had died, Babylon and Susa were the only mints east of the Euphrates. Seleucus opened a major mint at Seleucia-on-the-Tigris to serve Babylonia and further mints in northern Mesopotamia and at Ecbatana. After 290, Antiochus I as co-regent opened around a dozen mints in Drangiana, Arachosia, and Bactria. In the west, the new foundations in Syria—Antioch, Apamea, Laodicea, Seleucia-Pieria, and several others—each came with their own mint. In total, Houghton and Lorber identify around fifty mints operating under Seleucus I.[22]

One interpretation might be that this proliferation of mints was part of an effort by Seleucus to assert sovereignty by claiming the exclusive right to mint throughout his realm. However, Thomas Martin has argued that the idea of a close connection between sovereignty and minting arises from medieval and early modern political philosophy and was not a concept that existed in the ancient world.[23] Martin's case study was early Hellenistic Thessaly, where the beginning of Macedonian rule in 353 BC was accompanied by the cessation of Thessalian coinage. Rather than being something that any authority would rush to do, minting was an unattractive task that most avoided if they could. Minting in Thessaly was not suppressed by Philip II, it ceased because the volume of coinage produced by Philip II and subsequent Macedonian kings met the demand for coinage. Similar circumstances pertained in the

[21] Sherwin-White & Kuhrt 1993, 23, 42; Mørkholm 1985, 103; Bactria: Bopearachchi 2005, 354-5. Frataraka: Engels 2013, with extensive bibliography.
[22] Houghton & Lorber 2002, 11-14; Aperghis 2004, 214-216.
[23] Martin 1985. Important qualifications: Howgego 1995, 39-44.

Seleucid realm. So much Alexander coinage had been put into circulation in the eastern Mediterranean after 325 BC that most authorities did not need to mint.[24] Within Seleucus' empire, it was the Seleucid administration that needed to make large payments for troops and city construction and thus—when and where the existing money supply proved insufficient—it was the Seleucid administration that had to undertake the task of minting.

The large number of mints indicates a conscious decision to carry out coin production at a local level, instead of conducting all minting in a central location. Not all the Diadochi arranged their minting systems in this way: Ptolemy I produced most of his coinage in Egypt at a single mint, first Memphis and then Alexandria.[25] In the second century AD, four or five silver mints were sufficient for the entire Roman empire.[26] Perhaps the Seleucid arrangement reflects the quality of the empire's transport network. The supply of bullion taken from the Achaemenids was dispersed throughout the empire in treasuries, like Kyinda, Susa, and Pergamon.[27] It was logical to mint locally, rather than gathering bullion to a central place, minting it and then sending it off to wherever it was required. But issues of transportation cannot explain everything. In practice, bullion must have been transported around the Seleucid empire. Some areas of the empire—notably Mesopotamia—lacked native silver supplies but produced large amounts of silver coinage, while Bactria was the main source of gold for the whole empire.[28] Large military campaigns in the far east and west cannot have been funded purely from the local supply of precious metals. Whatever difficulties there were in transporting precious metal did not prevent some mints serving very large areas, most notably Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, which was the only mint in central and southern Mesopotamia and the main mint for most of the eastern empire. On the other hand, the four cities of the Syrian Tetrapolis were so close to one another and so well-connected that transportation would not have been a serious problem, but each of them had their own mint under Seleucus.

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[24] Meadows 2014, 182-3.
[25] Lorber 2018, 247-310.
[26] Rome, Cappadocia, Antioch, Alexandria, and the cistophoric mint: Beckmann 2012, 405-407; Yarrow 2012, 424-429.
[27] Diod. 18.62.2, 19.17.3, 20.108.2; Strabo 13.4.1.
[28] Sherwin-White & Kuhrt 1993, 63; Potts 1997, 174, 178-9

The advantage of this system of multiple mints was that it allowed local flexibility, with each individual mint producing at the volume, with the iconography, and (initially at least) on the weight standard that that region required. This is obvious in the case of the mints in far-off Bactria that have already been discussed. It also helps to explain situations like the four mints of the Syrian Tetrapolis. These four cities all seem to have been built on a similar plan (their *insulae* have the same dimensions), but the construction of each was managed by its own chief-of-works. At Antioch, this was a man called Xenarios, assisted by three 'supervisors of the buildings.'[29] The expenses arising from the process of constructing these new cities, which surely went on for several years, were probably not easily predictable. Rather than requiring the supervisors of the construction to appeal to a central authority for more coinage every time that a new expense arose, which would have been inefficient and would have placed a substantial amount of currency in the hands of a single official, each city had its own mint, where it could coin as actual costs required. Once the initial building was completed, some of these mints faded away (e.g. Apamea), while others found new roles (e.g. Laodicea).

This flexibility extended to the organisation of personnel involved in coin production. The monograms on coins are generally understood to represent individual responsible magistrates in the mints, probably operating as part of a college.[30] A series of coins, which were probably minted in Persis (perhaps at Persepolis) bear the Aramaic letters □□ as a control mark (*SC* 195). Aramaic remained the main language of administration in the east of the empire, as it had been under the Achaemenids, and this control mark suggests that that linguistic reality was taken into account in the staffing of the mint as well.[31] On the other hand, it also seems that there were officials who were transferred from one mint to another. In several cases, the same monogram occurs at multiple mints in succession, suggesting that a magistrate was moved from one mint to another. Houghton and Lorber cite the example of , first encountered as a minor monogram at Ecbatana (*SC* 409) late in Seleucus' reign or

[29] Cohen 2006, 80-81.
[30] Houghton & Lorber 2002, xxi.
[31] Marest-Caffey 2016, 13-14, with earlier bibliography. These coins have sometimes been interpreted as local imitations, but they are die-linked to the undoubtedly Seleucid mint in Susa, implying that the mint was part of the Seleucid administration.

early in Antiochus' reign, and subsequently the main monogram on several denominations at a new mint in Bactria (*SC* 469–471).[32] These patterns imply the existence of mint officials whom the regime assigned on the basis of their technical expertise, managerial skills and/or personal relationship to the dynasty, rather than for knowledge of the particular local context. This is logical, given that coin production was a complicated and novel procedure in much of the empire, and a sensitive activity that Seleucus had a strong interest in maintaining control over. The same pattern of trusted agents being transferred from one region to another is seen in other spheres of the Seleucid administration, such as the deployment of Achaios first as a general and city founder in the far east of the empire and then as a local lord (*kyrios tou topou*) in western Anatolia.[33] As in other spheres of administration, the system of mint administration established by Seleucus allowed a balance to be struck as required in each mint between local and imperial concerns.

<u>The open circulation system</u>

The key feature of the monetary system of the Seleucid empire was the so-called 'open financial system' or 'open monetary system' developed under Seleucus I and continued until the late 2nd century BC.[34] In this system, all silver coinages, even those minted outside Seleucus' realm, circulated freely within the kingdom as long as they were based on the Attic weight standard (drachm of 4.3 grammes and thus a tetradrachm of 17.2 grammes). This standard had already been used for the coinage of Alexander and the posthumous Alexander coinage issued in great quantity at a number of mints by his successors. It was thus the main standard in circulation in much of the Seleucid empire and the standard expected by crucial groups of Seleucid payees, most notably Greek and Macedonian troops. The Seleucid system meant that this Alexander coinage continued to circulate throughout Seleucus' reign and for more than a century and a half afterwards. Georges Le Rider's analysis of the third century hoard evidence from the Seleucid empire shows that Alexander coinage consistently dominated hoards from both Asia Minor and the east, ranging between 52% and 95% of the total coins in a given hoard. The other coins in these hoards included some minted by the

[32] Houghton & Lorber 2002, xxi, 147 & 160–161.
[33] McAuley 2018.
[34] Le Rider 1986; Howgego 1995, 51-52; Meadows 2014; Thonemann 2015, 115-118 & 126-127.

Seleucids, but also coinage of Lysimachus, the Antigonids, the Attalids, and some cities of Asia Minor.[35]

What can we make of this open system? The system meant that regime did not need to mint as much coinage, effectively allowing Seleucus to profit from the large numbers of coins minted by Alexander the Great, Perdiccas, and even direct rivals like Antigonus and Lysimachus. Such coins paid troops, who spent the coins, which could then return to the Seleucid treasury through taxation and be paid out to troops once more. If coinage was not reminted before putting it back into circulation, this would have freed mints up to concentrate on converting bullion into coinage. On G. G. Aperghis' interpretation, Seleucid minting would have served only to 'top up' this existing money supply.[36] The 'simplicity of exchange' applied not just in the regions under Seleucus' control, but across the whole of Alexander's old empire and thus may have made it easier to incorporate new regions and subjects into the Seleucid realm.

The alternative to this open system was the 'closed' or 'epichoric system' created by the Ptolemies and the Rhodians *inter alios*. These polities enforced lower weight standards, with two results. Firstly, coinage minted by the polity did not leave their realms, since it was literally worth less elsewhere. Thus, they did not have to fear a contraction of the money supply and their soldiers were less likely to desert (since their savings would be worth significantly less outside the bubble of the closed system). Secondly, the minting authority could profit from the exchange rate by taking Attic weight coinage and returning coinage in the lower weight. In the Ptolemaic realm after 294 BC this meant a profit of 2.9 grammes of silver (17%) for every exchanged Attic tetradrachm. This profit took place at the point in time when the Ptolemies introduced the system, when all Attic weight silver in circulation was exchanged for lower-weight coinage, and continuously as merchants made harbour at Alexandria and had to exchange their Attic weight coinage for local coinage.[37] By operating an open system, the Seleucids surrendered these opportunities for profit.

[35] Le Rider 1986, 14-32. Cf. Aperghis 2004, 228-236
[36] Aperghis 2004, 230-231 and 235-6.
[37] Egypt: Von Reden 2007, 43-48; Lorber 2018, 24-32 & 37-46. Rhodes: Ashton 2001, 82-85 and 97

In a sense, the open system was the default: Antigonus, Lysimachus, Cassander, and other contemporaries all allowed any Attic standard coins to circulate within their kingdoms. There were also practical factors that meant that it would have been harder for Seleucus to create a closed currency system than for Ptolemy. The scale of the Seleucid empire would have made it significantly harder to recall and reissue all the coinage as the Ptolemies had done. Whereas merchants mostly accessed the Egyptian and Rhodian systems through a single large port (Alexandria and Rhodes-town respectively), which was easily monitored, the Seleucid empire had a range of ports and land emporia that would have had to be monitored. Egypt produced large quantities of grain, a product heavily in demand in the Aegean, and Rhodes acted as a central hub for the trade of grain within the Aegean, ensuring in both cases that merchants willing to exchange Attic weight coinage for lower weight coinage would continue to come. By contrast, the breadbasket of the Seleucid empire was Mesopotamia and it was not economically viable to bring grain from there to Aegean markets, even after Seleucus gained a Mediterranean port in 301 BC.[38]

Nevertheless, the open system was not simply a policy of *lassez faire*; it required that a single weight standard be enforced throughout the realm. Although the Attic weight standard—as the standard of Alexander's coinage—was familiar in most of the Macedonian territories it was not the sole or main standard in much of what would become the Seleucid empire. Coinage of multiple different weight standards had circulated in the Achaemenid empire and Alexander's conquest did not change this.[39] Silver coinage on a 'Persic' standard, now known as 'lion staters' and weighing between 15.09 and 16.83 grammes were minted at Babylon (*SC* 88–91) on Seleucus' return to power in 311 BC, with further issues accompanied by gold double Darics weighing 8.35 grammes at Babylon (*SC* 101–104), Susa (*SC* 183), and Ecbatana (*SC* 219-221) in c. 300-298 and a final issue at Susa (SC 184–186) from 291-288 BC. Alongside these issues, Attic-weight Alexander coinage continued to circulate and to be produced in all three cities.[40] Further east, the satraps in Bactria minted

[38] Aperghis 2004, 73-76; Graslin-Thomé 2009, 271-273.
[39] Joannès 1994; Howgego 1995, 51-52.
[40] Houghton and Lorber 2002, 43-49, 67-68, 74-75, 79, 87. Another issue (*SC* 144) may have been issued at Seleucia-on-the-Tigris. Aperghis 2004, 243-244.

their own coinage from 306 BC, some of it on the Attic weight standard and some of it on a local weight standard with a drachm of 3.5 grammes and with the drachm rather than the tetradrachm as the main unit. When Antiochus I was established as co-regent over the east in 290 BC, he inaugurated a Bactrian coinage with Seleucid iconography, but still on this system of dual weight standards (*SC* 276–283). It was not until around 285 that minting in the local standard ceased.[41]

Essentially, both the 'Persic' zone and Bactria were operating on a mixed system, with a lighter epichoric standard that would only circulate locally, ensuring that the local silver supply remained intact, and a heavier standard for inter-regional payments (e.g. to soldiers who were not intending to stay in the area). This mixed model was a viable system that proved successful in many contexts in the Hellenistic period, notably in the Attalid kingdom and the *poleis* of western Asia Minor.[42] But by the end of Seleucus' reign, he had eliminated the epichoric weight standards in his realm and brought the regions into the open circulation system. Two plausible reasons can be offered for this. One is political: the effort to reduce the independence of Bactria and the 'Persic' zone. Indeed, regional secession would be a recurring theme in Seleucid history.[43] Support for this interpretation is the fact that the suppression of the regional weight standard went along with the introduction of particularly Seleucid coin iconography might support this interpretation. A The other reason is financial: if Seleucus needed silver to pay for campaigns and city foundations elsewhere in his empire, these light-weight coinages would have to be melted down and restruck before he could use them, which would have been inconvenient, particularly in an emergency. For Seleucus, the political and financial advantages of the open system for his control of the empire as a whole trumped the local advantages of these epichoric standards.

Iconography

That same balance between local and empire-wide concerns that has been discussed so far with respect to mints, mint officials, and weight standards is also illustrated by the

[41] Houghton and Lorber 2002, Bopearachchi 2005,
[42] Howgego 1995, 54-56; Meadows 2013; Thonemann 2015, 119-121.
[43] Holt 1999; Chrubasik 2016; Strootman 2018.

iconography of Seleucid royal coinage.[44] Seleucus' mints did not all employ the exact same iconography, but there was a clear set of motifs and images, reflecting the developing Seleucid dynastic myth, which appear on royal coins throughout the empire. Key motifs are the anchor, the horned horse, the horned horseman, the elephant, and bronze coinage with Medusa on the obverse and a butting bull on the reverse. The exact significance of many of these motifs is the subject of discussion, but their connection to Seleucus is beyond doubt. Some of them were connected with specific episodes or alleged events of Seleucus' career. Others presented ideological links—with Alexander, the gods, virtues of rule—that served to legitimise his rule. Except for the anchor, which is present on Babylonian coinage from 311 BC (*SC* 80), these motifs first appear around 305, simultaneously with the adoption of the royal title,[45] and its appearance on coin legends at Susa (*SC* 173). The introduction of Seleucid motifs at other mints is accompanied by the introduction of the legend there as well. Thus, the introduction of these motifs is clearly linked to Seleucus' assumption of royal authority.

There is a methodological question about the amount of significance that can be given to the legends and iconography of these coins. Coins are small objects and their primary purpose was not to propagate images but to act as economic instruments. Moreover, coinage with Seleucid iconography was a minor part of the coinage in circulation compared to the masses of Alexander coinage which continued to be minted in the Seleucid kingdom until the late third century BC, long after Seleucus' death. These issues can be overstated. Although coins were small, most were very high value objects and they were closely observed, precisely because of this economic value—close inspection was essential to distinguish good coinage from forgeries. The dominance of the Alexander coinage makes the decision to mint any coinage with Seleucid motifs a significant one—the desire to propagate the iconography was so strong that it overcame the economic argument for producing money in the established type.[46] This was not inevitable: contemporaries of Seleucus, like Antigonus Monophthalmus

[44] On Seleucid coin iconography: Houghton & Lorber 2002, 5-9; Erickson 2018a, with bibliographies. Cf. Lorber 2018, 46-59 on Ptolemy I. On the system of stories that grew up around Seleucus: Visscher 2016; Ogden 2017.
[45] Boiy 2011, 7-11
[46] On these methodological issues: Elkins & Krmnicek 2014; Erickson 2018a, chapter 0.5.1.1-4.

and Cassander never introduced iconography or legends on their precious metal coins which communicated messages about themselves.[47]

Figure 1. Reverse of ANS 1947.98.294, with erased anchor

Two examples from opposite ends of Seleucus' career illustrate the seriousness with which this iconography was taken and the amount of central direction that could be exercised by Seleucus over coin iconography across the whole empire. After Seleucus recaptured Babylon in 311 BC, a small anchor—Seleucus' personal symbol—was added to the reverse of the posthumous Alexander coinage that was minted there. At some point in the following years, this symbol was carefully erased from the die and, in one case, from a coin already in circulation (*SC* 94, at left). Arthur Houghton and Catharine Lorber propose that this took place during the brief period around 311 BC, when Demetrius recaptured Babylon.[48] If they are correct, this episode demonstrates the power of coin iconography to communicate Seleucus' authority and the degree to which his rivals saw it as a threat to their own authority even at the very beginning of his reign. The second example comes from the period very shortly after Seleucus' assassination, when Antiochus I was fighting to reconstitute his father's realm. In the midst of this, around 279 BC, Antiochus introduced a new tetradrachm design throughout the realm, which depicted his own face on the obverse and Apollo seated on an omphalos on the reverse (*SC* 310, 323, 327, 331, 335, 378, 409, 437). This motif emphasised the idea of the dynasty's divine descent from Apollo and probably also the idea that Antiochus as a new Apollo was the inevitable successor to Seleucus as a new Zeus.[49] That Antiochus was able to change the iconography of all the coinage in the empire—in the midst of a major crisis—is indicative of the amount of central control that these first Seleucid kings were able to exercise over coinage iconography. That

[47] Price 1991, 88, 130-131 and 208-209.
[48] Houghton and Lorber 2002, 43. Bosworth 2002, 210–245 for this reconquest. On the anchor: App. *Syr.* 56.286-7; Kosmin 2014, 96-99; Ogden 2017, 45-49.
[49] Wright 2018; Erickson 2018a, chapter 2.

he considered it worthwhile to do so indicates the ability of coin iconography to communicate a consistent ideology about the ruling power to the whole empire.[50]

Alongside this, though, some of Seleucus' coinages seem to have been issued with iconography that reflected the local interests of the area in which they were minted. Often these coinages only circulated within specific areas of the Seleucid Empire.[51] The earliest and most significant example are the low-weight 'lion staters' of Babylon, Susa, and Ecbatana mentioned above (*SC* 88–91, 183-186, 219-221, fig. 2). They deployed types with Ba'al seated on the obverse and a lion on the reverse, which had originally been minted by the satrap Mazdaï / Mazaeus in the 340s as satrap of Cilicia and Syria under Artaxerxes in the 340s and continued by him as Alexander's satrap of Babylon from 331 to 328 BC. In this case, the iconography had developed local currency, so Seleucus made the practical economic decision to retain it.[52] As with the non-Attic weight standard, Seleucus seems to have made an effort to phase this sort of iconographic variation out as soon as he was able to.

Figure 2: SC 88 (ANS 1944.100.72099)

The low-weight Bactrian coinages discussed above are significant for this point. The low-weight coins issued by the satrap Sophytes had depicted a victorious general on the obverse (Sophytes? Seleucus?) and a rooster on the reverse and imitations of Athenian tetradrachms. When Antiochus as co-regent initially retained the Bactrian weight standard in *SC* 276–283, he issued it with Seleucid types rather than using the old iconography—an example of the political desire

Figure 3: Coin of Sophytes (*ANS* 1995.51.61)
SC 278 (*ANS* 1954.203.299)

[50] Cf. Chrubasik 2016, 146-178 on the use of coinage iconography by usurpers in the second century BC.
[51] Mørkholm 1991, 72.
[52] Nicolet-Pierre 1999 and see n. 40 above.

for a unified iconography trumping the economic value of a type with local recognition (fig. 3).

Imagery reflecting a local economic context is very limited in the coinage with Seleucid iconography. The only possible examples are the very small mint symbols (*parasêmata*) that consistently appear coins from some mints: the horse's head on the coinage of Ecbatana, which recalls the famous Nisean horses that were bred in the region and the dolphin on the coinage of Laodicea-by-the-Sea (examples in fig. 4). These symbols indicate that there was some value in making the particular source of these coinages clear to those who inspected them closely. In the Laodicean case, this is usually connected with the currency's use in Mediterranean commerce and a desire to communicate its reliability to merchants.[53] Thus, the degree of variation permitted for economic reasons seems to have declined over time.

Figure 4: SC 202 (ANS 1944.100.73425); SC 36 (ANS 1976.107.3)

A major aspect of the iconography chosen by Seleucus for his coinage was its polyvalence—it was designed to communicate messages about Seleucus' authority simultaneously in a variety of different local contexts. For example, a butting bull appears on the reverse of most of Seleucus' bronze coinage, while horses, horsemen, and elephants with bull's horns are found on bronze and silver coinage. This bull referred to a specific story about how Seleucus wrestled down a sacrificial bull that had escaped from its pen during Alexander's campaign with his bare hands. This story presented Seleucus as a superhuman figure and emphasised Seleucus' connection to Alexander. The bull was one of the animals most closely associated with Zeus in Greek thought, so it served to associate Seleucus with the king of the gods and with the Macedonian king's traditional role as priest of the Zeus-cult. At the same time, the bull was also linked to kingship in Babylonian and Persian thought.[54] Thus, the same motif would communicate the message that Seleucus' authority was legitimate and divinely ordained to audiences from the Aegean to the Iranian plateau for quite different reasons. This

[53] Houghton 1999, 180-181; Houghton and Lorber 2002, 25.
[54] App. *Syr.* 57; Ogden 2017, 61-63, 109 & 274; Erickson 2018a, chapter 1.4.

was not limited to coinage, but was part of a broader iconographic programme—statues of Seleucus also bore bull's horns—and it is part of a wider policy of cultural polyvalence that has been well-studied since the work of Kurht and Sherwin-White.[55] Coinage thus played an important role in the effort to construct a kingdom in which all subject peoples, not just those conversant with Greco-Macedonian culture, were cognizant of Seleucus' royal authority and understood it in as similar a manner as possible.

Standardisation and variation

Over the course of Seleucus' reign, then, we see an increasing amount of standardisation in his coinage, in terms of mint organisation, weight standards, and iconography. There were probably practical reasons for pursuing standardisation. The existence of a coherent iconography and a single standard made it easier to requisition coinage from one region for use elsewhere. Perhaps it was hoped that the single standard would encourage the economic integration of the Mediterranean littoral with the Seleucid territories in Babylonia and further east.[56] Limiting local autonomy and distinctiveness was probably also a factor. Recent research has challenged the old idea that the investment of local actors with significant authority was a result of the decline and weakness of the Seleucid monarchs. These scholars have argued that not only was devolution the only plausible way for an empire on the scale of the Seleucid kingdom to operate, but that it was actually a source of strength and dynamism.[57] Pseudo-Aristotle's *Oeconomica* makes clear the degree to which this was true in financial matters. For this decentralised system to be effective, there had to be centrifugal forces which held these local actors into the Seleucid kingdom. Coinage was a key aspect of this. The royal oversight exercised over mints and the establishment of a single weight standard integrated local actors into an economic system that was dominated by Seleucus, while the iconography of the coins emphasised the relevance of the Seleucid dynasty to local religions, ideologies, and identities.

[55] Bull's horns: Smith 1988, 40-41. Polyvalence: Massina 2011; Kosmin 2014b; Strootman (forthcoming).
[56] If so, this hope was largely disappointed: Le Rider 1991; Duyrat 1994.
[57] e.g. Strootman 2018, Mitchell 2018, McAuley 2018. Dissenting: Chrubasik 2016.

Paul Kosmin has stressed the importance placed—already under Seleucus I—on marking out and defining the empire as a Seleucid space.[58] For all that Thomas Martin has demonstrated that the right-to-coin and sovereignty were not linked concepts in Antiquity, there *was* a link between coinage and the assertion of royal power in the Seleucid empire. The enforcement of a single weight standard that applied to the whole Seleucid realm helped to define that space, in a way that would have had a tangible impact on the lives of the wealthy throughout the empire. A number of standardised mina weights survive, mostly from the second century BC, which use Seleucid symbols of the elephant, the anchor, and often the Seleucid era-system (fig. 5).[59] No such weights survive from the reign of Seleucus I himself, but they nevertheless the impact of enforcing a standard. The king claimed the power to define value itself and that had a tangible effect on how people traded in their local marketplace. The weights also show that that same iconography was deployed in other media as well as coinage, but the fact that coins were valued and were exchanged between people made them a particularly significant tool for the propagation of this Seleucid iconography. The presence of Seleucus' name and symbols on his coins emphasised that they came from him. Each coin thus became a concrete symbol of relationship of benefaction between the king and the recipients of coinage—both Seleucus' direct payees and those who subsequently received the coinage.

Figure 5: Mina weight, Seleucia-Pieria, third century BC (Getty 96.AC.142)

Hemi-mina weight, Seleucia-Pieria, 151/0 BC (Getty 96.AI.145)

58 Kosmin 2014.

59 True & Hamma 1994, 200-205

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