In the previous episode, the first of a two-part look at the Seleucid Empire, we spent time discussing the administration of the realm. The Seleucid kingship was transactional, and expressed itself in terms that could be read as Greco-Macedonian, Iranian and Near-Eastern. Delegation to those like satraps and local power holders was imperfect, and demanded a peripatetic central government where the king constantly needed to enforce his imperial presence among the many cities and territories by visiting them personally. With the second part, I plan on focusing on the ways that the Seleucids transformed the landscape of the empire with the creation of an imperial heartland and populating the territory with dozens of settlements. We will talk about the responses of the immigrant Greeks to their new surroundings, and those of the indigenous peoples who were now faced with a new political and cultural elite.

Let us start with the landscape of the empire. Before the arrival of the Macedonians, the Near East and Levant were home to several impressive cities like Babylon and Tyre, so they were no strangers to the idea of urbanization. With the conquests of Alexander and the infighting of his Successors came the creation and spread of Greek-styled cities across the Hellenistic world. But the Seleucids were unsurpassed in the scale and scope of their building program – there are over 120 named settlements that can be attributed to the dynasty, with about 70% of them located west of the Euphrates River.¹ The majority of these are tied to Seleucus I and his son Antiochus I, and Appian suggests that at least 34 cities were founded by Seleucus.² But new settlements would continue to be built down to the mid-2nd century. Of course, the settlements came in a variety of sizes, ranging from the large cities (poleis) to smaller colonies (katoikia), but it is still a significant change. Two places were subject to a radical transformation of the urban landscape in particular: first in the region near the lower-middle Tigris River, and then most especially in north Syria. What is important about those regions is that they were largely devoid of any sprawling urban plan prior to Seleucid interference.³

At the time of Alexander’s death, most of the major native cities like Babylon and Uruk could be found along the Euphrates River.⁴ Babylon served as the birthplace of the empire, the origins of Seleucid power, and it is no surprise that if there was to be any building projects or creation of an imperial heartland then this would be the place to start. But if a king was looking to try and impose some sort of dynastic stamp over this region, they would soon find it to be a fruitless effort – the sheer antiquity and reputation of these places means that attempts to rename the city or turn it into a Seleucid capital would only be a thin veneer, and the name and image of Babylon would supersede all others. Seleucus I recognized this, but he also recognized the political and economic value of the region and the need for some form of an imperial presence. So instead, he turned his attention roughly 35 miles to the north along the Tigris River, the other great body of water that provided Mesopotamia its fertility.

² Appian, Syrian Wars, 57. This claim is likely exaggerated, but it speaks to the extent to which Seleucus was associated with building and city founding.
³ Kosmin, P.J. “The Land of the Elephant Kings: Space, Territory, and Ideology in the Seleucid Empire” Pgs. 186-188; 198-199
⁴ Opis, the same city where Alexander’s troops mutinied, is an exception.
It is here during the late 4th century that the foundation of the first great Seleucid city would take place: Seleucia-on-the-Tigris.\(^5\)

The size of Seleucia was enormous, easily on par with Alexandria in Egypt, and considerably larger than the more famous Seleucid city of Antioch-on-the-Orontes.\(^6\) Its population was also gargantuan, with estimates by ancient authors suggesting around 500,000 individuals at the turn of the millennium.\(^7\) But to allow for such a carrying capacity, the Seleucids sponsored an extensive canalization project that exploited the natural fertility of the Tigris River. Seleucia also took advantage of the preexisting Royal Canal built by the Neo-Babylonian rulers that allowed access to waterways that would link it to both the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, which in conjunction with its harbor enabled the influx of great amounts of trade.\(^8\) From the very beginning, Seleucus I founded Seleucia as his capital. Babylonian chroniclers called it the “royal city”, and the excavation of the archival building has uncovered around 25,000 government seals that would have been found on official documents—a testament to the amount of administrative work taking place.\(^9\) As the size of the empire expanded, Seleucia became the eastern capital intended to oversee the Upper Satrapies, given its important strategic position. As further proof of the impact and influence of the Seleucid’s work along the Tigris, the lands immediately adjacent to Seleucia-on-the-Tigris would serve as the future sites of other great cities: the Parthians would build Ctesiphon in the vicinity and make Seleucia a twin capital, and the Abbasid Caliphate would establish Baghdad in the 8th century AD.

Though Babylonia may have acted as the cradle, Seleucid identity and power would ultimately rest in northern Syria. Prior to the Macedonian conquests, this region was very sparsely populated with a few Achaemenid outposts or villages and towns of the local Semitic populations. Barring the city of Damascus, it was the south that saw a greater concentration of wealthier urban settlements like Jerusalem and Tyre. In the initial decades following Alexander’s death, quite a bit of work was being done in North Syria by none other than Antigonus the One-Eyed, who must be given some credit for laying the foundation of and settling several Macedonian garrison ns. He even founded a city along the Orontes, Antigoneia.\(^10\) When Seleucus took it after the Battle of Ipsus in 301, he destroyed those cities and transported their populations into his settlements, which had begun to be constructed during the early 3rd century.

The most important aspect of this region is known as the Syrian Tetrapolis.\(^11\) As its name implies, this is a collection of four major cities in North Syria built in the early years of Seleucid rule, arranged in something of a quadrilateral shape. The northeastern point was Antioch-on-the-Orontes, more often

\(^5\) For a reference of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, see Getzel, C. “The Hellenistic Settlements in the East from Armenia and Mesopotamia to Bactria and India”, Pgs. 184-202
\(^6\) Strabo, Geography, 16.2.5
\(^7\) Pliny, Natural History, 6.122 suggests about 600,000 in the 1st century AD; Orosius, Histories against the Pagans, 7.15 suggests 400,000 (writing some 300 years after Pliny).
\(^8\) Kosmin, P.J. “The Land of the Elephant Kings: Space, Territory, and Ideology in the Seleucid Empire” Pg. 187
\(^10\) Diodorus Siculus, Library of History, 20.47.5; Getzel, C. “The Hellenistic Settlements in Syria, the Red Sea Basin, and North Africa” Pgs. 76-80
\(^11\) Strabo, Geography, 16.2.4-5
referred to as the Antioch, which served as the administrative locus of the Tetrapolis and became its most prominent city. To the south of Antioch was Apamea-on-the-Axios, the primary center for military operations and also hosted a stud farm for both horses and (less successfully) war elephants. Along the coastline to the east was the port city of Laodicea-by-the-Sea, and north of that was the other port Seleucia-in-Pieria, which was likely Seleucus’ intended western capital. To make it a bit clearer, I will include a map of Seleucid Syria and outline the Tetrapolis, which will be available in the episode notes on my website.

The purpose of the Tetrapolis, and by extension North Syria, is largely military in function. To the immediate south past the Eleutherus River (which divides modern day Syria from Lebanon) laid the northern tendrils of the Ptolemaic Kingdom, the main rival of the Seleucids. The dispute between the Ptolemaic and Seleucid houses can be traced to Ptolemy I claiming southern or Coele Syria following the Battle of Ipsus, while Seleucus I believed it to be his by right of conquest. This contentiousness would contribute to the outbreak of six Syrian Wars, and so this region would see the near-constant movement of troops and internecine warfare. The Tetrapolis could thus simultaneously act as a highway for Seleucid troops and a barrier for Ptolemaic incursions. Seleucia and Laodicea could help protect the route along the sea, while Apamea and Antioch acted as guards for any land invasions. It wasn’t always successful though, and the Ptolemies would gain a foothold within this region at least once, such as during the Third Syrian War.

The costly building programs in Syria and Mesopotamia were made possible by the great wealth of the empire, acquired from both the accumulated treasury of the Persians that had been taken by Alexander and his Successors, and from its own internal revenues. These new cities and villages would need to be provided with an immigrant population so that the land could be cultivated, and provide a pool for military manpower. Given the nature of these settlements, most of the original colonists would have been Greco-Macedonian men, with the number of Greek women quite small in comparison. Not all settlers were of Greek origin either though. In a letter from Antiochus III to his philos Zeuxis, the king ordered the resettlement of 2000 Jewish families from Babylon (very likely the descendants of the families taken during the Babylonian Captivity) in Phrygia, where they would be given farms and vineyards like their Greek counterparts. Many Jewish men served as mercenaries, as would several non-Greek peoples looking to ply their trade, such as the Galatians for instance.

In turn, the trade and agricultural goods produced in these newly settled regions brought a substantial influx of revenue into the Seleucid economy each year to be used for the equally enormous costs of maintaining said empire. We don’t have as much information on the finances of the Seleucid realm when compared to Ptolemaic Egypt, and any sort of estimates about ancient economies are generally

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12 Antioch-on-the-Orontes is also sometimes referred to as Antioch-by-Daphne
13 Hannestad, L. “The Seleucid Kingdom” in “A Companion to the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East” Pg. 987
15 For an analysis of the composition and amount of wealth captured during the conquest of the Persian Empire, see Holt, F.L. “The Treasures of Alexander the Great: How One Man’s Wealth Shaped the World”
difficult to make. From the calculations of one expert, it is suggested that the revenues of the empire amounted to about 15,000 to 20,000 talents of silver between the early 3rd century and early 2nd century BC.\(^{17}\) This is an enormous amount of money, most of it derived from the taxation on land and agricultural byproducts which would be maintained and produce by the colonists.\(^{18}\) Yet much of it was eaten away by administrative and (more importantly) military costs. Even during non-campaigning seasons the standing Seleucid army was about 50,000 men, but total military forces could tally up to about 90,000 during times of peace and over 120,000 during times of war.\(^{19}\) As a low estimate, over half the Seleucid budget would go to military-related expenses, but during military campaigns it would be even higher. This is not surprising, as it would also be the case for many states in the ancient world, such as the Roman Empire who may have had it as high as 70% of the total budget.\(^{20}\) However, this huge army allowed the Seleucid dynasty to retain its “spear-won land”, to spend the cash they earned with the traders and regions that they passed through (assuming they didn’t take the crops of the nearby peasants while foraging) and to fill the economy with plunder and foreign booty. The intensive cultivation and development of places like Syria allowed the army to be supplied with the manpower and cash that it needed. Once they would lose these sources of revenue, the empire would soon spiral out of control as well.

The need to create an imperial heartland was in large part a consequence of the dynasty’s sundering from their ancestral homeland of Macedonia, assured through the murder of Seleucus I before he could consolidate it into his empire. In some sense, Macedonia was transplanted and imposed upon the Syrian landscape.\(^ {21}\) Towns and colonies were christened or renamed after cities and regions found mainly in Macedonia: Amphipolis, Larissa, and Europolis, to name but a few.\(^ {22}\) Even the physical geography was affected – the Orontes River, the modern Āṣī, was known as the Axios. This is the major river that cuts through Macedonia, but it is also likely no coincidence that the Macedonian capital of Pella and the Seleucid Antioch-on-the-Orontes both sit adjacent to their “own” Axios.\(^ {23}\) While many of these were directly bestowed by the Seleucid monarchy, some of the colonists of Macedonian-Greek origin who immigrated to the region would name their new home after their previous ones. For instance, a group of settlers from Thessalian Larissa are said to have founded a Syrian Larissa.\(^ {24}\) But it is especially striking when Syria is the only known area in the entire empire that possesses such naming conventions.

At the same time, Syria had to reflect the new political realities of the age. Many of the cities of the new heartland would be given Seleucid dynastic names like Antioch, Laodicea, and Seleucia. This not only was a way to obliterate the memory of the Antigonid or Persian occupation, but also acted as a

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\(^{17}\) Aperghis, G.G. “The Seleukid Royal Economy: The Finances and Financial Administration of the Seleukid Empire” Pg. 251
\(^{19}\) For a discussion on Seleucid manpower, see Bar-Kochva, B. “The Seleucid Army: Organization and Tactics in the Great Campaigns” Pgs. 7-18; Aperghis, G.G. “The Seleukid Royal Economy: The Finances and Financial Administration of the Seleukid Empire” Pg. 197
\(^{20}\) Comparison of expenses during the Imperial period, see Herz, P. “Finances and Costs of the Roman Army” in “A Companion to the Roman Army”
\(^{21}\) Kosmin, P.J. “The Land of the Elephant Kings: Space, Territory, and Ideology in the Seleucid Empire” Pgs. 106-108
\(^{23}\) Kosmin, P.J. “The Land of the Elephant Kings: Space, Territory, and Ideology in the Seleucid Empire” Pg. 106
\(^{24}\) Diodorus Siculus, Library of History, 33.4a
reminder that this transplanted Macedonia was due to the beneficence of the Seleucid dynasty.\textsuperscript{25} The Seleucids were not above renaming natural features after themselves either: while not directly linked to Syria, Pliny the Elder suggests that there was an effort to change the name of the Caspian Sea to the Seleucian or Antiochean Sea.\textsuperscript{26} Following Seleucus’ murder and cremation, his ashes were brought by Antiochus to Syria so they could be interred in the family mausoleum in Seleucia Pieria.\textsuperscript{27} The burial of a king was a highly ceremonial and important event, and to be laid to rest in Syria confirmed the region’s unique and important role in Seleucid identity, contrasting with Seleucus’ original wishes for his remains to be returned to Macedonia upon his death.\textsuperscript{28}

In my opinion, Syria became the core of the Seleucid Empire for three reasons. First, much of their cultural identity and political power was still tied to Greece and the Mediterranean. In contrast to Babylonia, Syria was much closer in terms of its distance and connections with the Greek mainland. Immigrant Greeks would be the majority of administrative offices and roles, they would act as colonists for the new cities and villages founded across the empire, and serve as pools for military recruitment. Non-Greeks could very often did fill these roles as well, but they were the minority position. As I argued in the last episode, the Seleucids largely ruled in the manner of a Greco-Macedonian king and elevated Greek culture, despite their eagerness to incorporate non-Greek traditions and practices into the monarchy. It therefore follows that they would wish to remain closely tied to that particular network.

Second was its proximity to the kingdoms of the Ptolemies in Egypt and the Antigonids in Macedonia. Because of the militaristic nature of Hellenistic kingship, it would make sense as to why the Seleucids would want to keep a close eye on their hotly contested western borders in both Asia Minor and southern Syria. A large amount of time, money and lives were spent in either launching campaigns into the lands of their fellow Greco-Macedonian rivals, or attempting to repel expeditions into Seleucid lands from said rivals. For the most part, the Seleucids did not have to worry about invasions from their eastern neighbors like the emperors of Mauryan India, and so they were relatively hands-off when it came to overseeing the Upper Satrapies. Ironically, this neglect would enable the gradual independence of Bactria and the opportunism of the Parthians, the latter of whom would become one of the main contributing factors for the Seleucid decline.

Thirdly, the general lack of longstanding or preexisting urban institutions of North Syria meant that the Seleucid rulers could plan and transform the land to fit their political and ideological needs accordingly. The economic potential of occupying the coastline and exploitation of the region’s agricultural fertility, combined with the military and strategic value of the region, made it a perfect area to colonize and establish as a bulwark against any potential force. Syria would thus become synonymous with the Seleucid identity, as a land that weaved the memories of Macedonia with the realities of the new world that was built by Seleucid arms.

\textsuperscript{25} Kosmin, P.J. “The Land of the Elephant Kings: Space, Territory, and Ideology in the Seleucid Empire” Pgs 108-109
\textsuperscript{26} Pliny, *Natural History*, 2.67
\textsuperscript{27} Appian, *Syrian Wars*, 63
\textsuperscript{28} Kosmin, P.J. “The Land of the Elephant Kings: Space, Territory, and Ideology in the Seleucid Empire” Pgs. 103-105
The success of the Seleucid rebranding was absolute. Though the Seleucids were often referred to as “Macedonian Kings”, above all else they would be described in the Greco-Roman and Jewish sources as “Syrian Kings” or “Kings of Syria”.\(^{29}\) The region of North Syria was often simply called the Seleucis.\(^ {30}\) Just prior to Seleucid rule, the population of North Syria may have only been half a million. Less than two centuries later, it swelled to about 2-2.5 million.\(^ {31}\) During the empire’s terminal stages as a rump state, Syria would be its last bastion before being swallowed up by the Roman Republic. Conversely, Rome would benefit from the structure and organization of the Seleucis down to the Islamic Conquests, and the region would remain a highly urbanized society until the High Middle Ages over a thousand years after its creation.

 Like I’ve said before, the empire contains a vast number of diverse cultures and peoples, ruled by a relatively small minority of Greek officials who expressed a general preference to Greek culture. How did the native subjects of the empire respond to the arrival of this new cultural and political elite? Was there a sort of cultural isolation where Greeks mingled only with Greeks, Syrians with Syrians, and so on and so forth? Let’s investigate.

Given the size of the empire and its diversity, it might be more helpful to break it down region-by-region instead of assuming a uniform pattern of Hellenization and continuity. Babylonia is an interesting case study, given the relative wealth of sources that have been recovered from it. It has been argued that during Seleucid rule, Babylonia not only expresses continuity, but is said to have undergone something akin to a cultural reinvigoration.\(^ {32}\) Under the early Seleucid rulers there was a flurry of Babylonian temple rebuilding, with traditional religious practices and festivals being performed throughout the dynasty’s reign, as we discussed extensively in the last episode. Religious cults demonstrated relatively little change after hundreds of years of Greek rule, and continued well after the Seleucids lost control of Babylonia to the Parthian conquests.

One perspective of Hellenistic Babylonia comes from a figure named Berossus or Bêl-re’ušunu, a prominent figure of Babylonian origin who served under both Seleucus I and Antiochus I before emigrating to the Ptolemaic-controlled Island of Kos in the Aegean Sea.\(^ {33}\) Though he spent much of his career as a staff member of the local temple complexes, Berossus is more well-known as the writer of a


\(^{30}\) Strabo. Geography. 16.2.4


“Babylonian History” which sadly does not survive outside of quotations by later authors. As its name implies, it is a work primarily focused on the history of Babylon down to the Persian conquest, but it is a striking blend of Greek historiographical traditions and a catalogue of Mesopotamian knowledge and mythology. It was written in Greek for a Greek audience, and strongly resembles the works of Herodotus with the emphasis on geography and the willingness of the author to identify himself – a trait almost unheard of when it came to any Mesopotamian chroniclers. At the same time, Berossus is clearly proud of his Babylonian heritage. His work is dedicated to Antiochus I, who may have been the writer’s patron, and it was likely conceived as a way to provide the new Macedonian kings a handy guide to the lands that they now ruled over.

Another is Anu-uballit-Nikarqusu, the governor of Uruk during the reign of Antiochus II Theos. By reading his name aloud, you might be able to tell that something is unusual, and you’d be right. He is of Babylonian origin as reflected by Anu-uballit, but Nikarqusu is actually Greek, a Babylonian rendition of the name Nikarchos. From what we are told, Anu-uballit received a second Greek name while in service to the Seleucid government. This is a phenomenon that has much more evidence in Ptolemaic Egypt, but the adoption of a Greek name is partly due to the pressure to fit in with Greek cultural norms. It’s unclear as to whether the Seleucids explicitly or implicitly demanded cultural assimilation to be promoted or favored, but this is neither a phenomenon exclusive to Greek rule nor the Hellenistic period: name-taking in Babylonia has been recorded during the domination of Neo-Assyria, and many non-Italians would adopt Roman surnames while living in the Roman Empire.

Though these snapshots are certainly invaluable, there are certain limitations as to what we can take away from them: both Berossus and Anu-uballit were members of the Babylonian upper class that worked for the Seleucid government. It is not unreasonable to think that the adoption of Greek culture was at least partially due to wanting to be part of the ruling elite, which itself was mainly comprised of Greeks. Even the sources that tell us about the two are framed within a Greek context. Is it possible to get the perspective of your everyday individual, whether Greek or Babylonian? More on that in a little bit.

The Seleucids reoriented the structure of the Near-East from the Lower Euphrates to the Tigris, planting bastions of Greek culture like Seleucia-on-the-Tigris against the backdrop of the traditional Mesopotamian cities like Babylon and Uruk. When you compare Babylon with Seleucia, there are some interesting points to consider. While Babylon has produced a treasure trove of cuneiform documents

35 Kurht, A. “Berossos’ Babyloniaka and Seleucid Rule in Babylonia” in “Hellenism in the East: The interaction of Greek and non-Greek civilizations from Syria to Central Asia after Alexander” Pg. 54; Sherwin-White, S. and Kurht A., “From Samarkhand to Sards: A new approach to the Seleucid Empire” Pg. 148
36 YOS 1:52
37 Sherwin-White, S. and Kurht A., “From Samarkhand to Sards: A new approach to the Seleucid Empire” Pgs. 150-154; Strootman, R. “Hellenistic Court Society: The Seleukid Imperial Court under Antiochus the Great, 223-187 BCE” in “Royal Courts in Dynastic Empires” Pgs. 81-83
dating to this period, almost none have been found in Seleucia despite it being the administrative capital of the east – yet there are thousands of those archival seals which are predominantly Greek in design.\textsuperscript{39} It is said that Seleucus and Antiochus deported several Macedonians living in Babylonia to Seleucia following its construction, and Pliny also claims that even after 200 years of Parthian rule following their conquest of the city, many of the members of Seleucia still retained their Macedonian identity and customs.\textsuperscript{40} It is not a wild assumption that the dynastic epicenters of the Seleucids were primarily Greek in identity and appearance.

However, I don’t wish to imply that these populations remained segregated from one another. In fact, there are pieces of evidence that give a suggestion that there was a greater degree of cohabitation and interaction between Greeks and non-Greeks. Seleucia was an enormous settlement, and as an administrative and commercial epicenter of the Upper Satrapies, it would be surprising if it didn’t have a cosmopolitan makeup. On the other end, it is actually not uncommon to find Greeks dwelling in traditional Babylonian communities. We have a list from Uruk that gives us the names and professions of residents that lived in the region: among them is Ina-qat-Anu, a local shepherd that is said to be “a descendent of Makka”.\textsuperscript{41} Makka means Macedonian, so the shepherd is either an immigrant or a descendent of earlier settlers from Macedonia that may or may not have intermarried with the local women. According to the Babylonian Chronicles, Antiochus IV is said to have settled Greek colonists in Babylon during the mid-2\textsuperscript{nd} century.\textsuperscript{42} Though Antiochus did not change the political structure of the city, Babylon’s Greek population eventually became sizeable enough to warrant the construction of such quintessentially Greek institutions like a theatre and a gymnasium.\textsuperscript{43} At the same time, we cannot find evidence of a Greek-styled temple or religious space in Babylon – but we can see that in 125 BC, a Greek was appointed as a high priest of the temple of Esagila.\textsuperscript{44} I also spoke earlier about how most of the Greek colonists would have been men, and very few women were likely part of the initial waves of settlement. Because of this, it is almost inevitable that many of these troops would take wives from the local population. In the time of Alexander’s campaigns, there were already marriages between the soldiers and native wives, most famously the mass wedding of Susa in 324. Diodorus also claims that Alexander wanted the intermarriage between the peoples of Europe and Asia as a way to make peace between the peoples of his empire, but in my opinion it was a matter of pragmatism and practicality more than a “unity of mankind”.\textsuperscript{45} The children produced of these unions would therefore be of mixed cultural or ethnic background. Of course most of them would be given a Greek upbringing and education, and while they were in all probability recognized as Greek, the influence of their mothers and their non-Greek heritage in their childhood cannot be discounted.\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{39} Getzel, C. “The Hellenistic Settlements in the East from Armenia and Mesopotamia to Bactria and India”, Pg. 185
\textsuperscript{40} Strabo, Geography, 16.1.5; Pausanias, Description of Greece, 1.16.3; BCHP 5, 6-10; Pliny the Elder, Natural History, 6.122
\textsuperscript{41} YBC 13278; Sherwin-White, S. and Kurht A., “From Samarkhand to Sardis: A new approach to the Seleucid Empire” Pg. 159
\textsuperscript{42} BCHP 14
\textsuperscript{43} van der Spek, R.J. “The Babylonian City” in “Hellenism in the East: The interaction of Greek and non-Greek civilizations from Syria to Central Asia after Alexander” Pg. 67
\textsuperscript{44} Astronomical Diaries 3:271, no. 124A Rev. 21;
\textsuperscript{45} Diodorus Siculus, Library of History, 18.4; Engels, D.W. “Benefactors, Kings, Rulers: Studies on the Seleukid Empire between East and West.” Pg
\textsuperscript{46} For a discussion on the mixed marriages of Seleucid soldiers and immigrants, see Houle, D.J. “Ethnic Constructions in the Seleucid Military” University of Waterloo, Pgs. 14-18;
A unique way of looking and determining the degree of cultural interactions between the various communities of Babylonia is a study on terracotta figurines done by Stephanie Langin-Hooper. These are small widely-produced objects commonly found in both Greek and Babylonian households, usually depicting a female figure that can generally be associated with a goddess or some sort of religious purpose. By analyzing and categorizing the characteristics of these figurines (poses, clothing, hairstyles etc.), we can infer the purpose of these objects and who they likely belonged to. Across the board, we can see a hybridization of Greek and Babylonian designs that suggests a more fluid nature of social and cultural boundaries. Perhaps a Greek woman who sought to pay homage to Aphrodite found the Babylonian presentation of the female form more aesthetically appealing. Perhaps a devotee to Ishtar chose a figurine that was more akin to Aphrodite in order to fit in with the culture of the Greek political elite. A particularly marvelous example is currently housed in the Louvre: a white alabaster female figurine recovered from Babylon and thought to represent the Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar, yet is strikingly Greek in its hairstyle and design, with inlaid rubies likely mined in India. In a way, this encapsulates the Hellenistic period in general.

In Seleucid Syria we have a fair amount of evidence, though much of the original Hellenistic foundations of cities were built over by Roman development. Still we have the Jewish accounts of Seleucid rule in Syria in addition to the Greco-Roman authors who frequently mention Syria within their histories. Like Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, the cities of the Tetrapolis were also cosmopolitan. Inscriptions of workers who worked on the canals of Antioch show names of Greeks, Thracians, and even some Persians. Antioch itself was divided into quarters; some explicitly settled by Macedonians, while the others were likely inhabited by other Greek communities or indigenous peoples: those like the Syrians, Idumaeans, Jews, Phoenicians etc. This doesn’t appear to be a policy of ghettoization and segregation on the part of the Seleucid government – the Antiochene Jews were given a large amount of privileges with a considerable degree of self-autonomy – it was probably more akin to the gradual formation of immigrant communities like a Chinatown or Little Italy that are found in several modern North American cities. As the dynasty was increasingly restricted to the Seleucis during its decline, there is an increased attempt to appeal to the religious practices of the Semitic population: coinage minted during this time could bear the image of Hellenized Ba’al, among other non-Greek gods.

Both Babylonia and Syria were functionally the empire’s core regions. But what do we find when we move outwards to its border territories like Asia Minor and Bactria? As much as I know you’re all

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48 https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Statuette_Goddess_Louvre_AO20127.jpg
49 Kosmin, P.J. “The Land of the Elephant Kings: Space, Territory, and Ideology in the Seleucid Empire” Pg. 206
50 Strabo, Geography, 16.2-4;
51 Sherwin-White, S. and Kurht A., “From Samarkhand to Sardis: A new approach to the Seleucid Empire”Pg. 169 points out that we cannot be certain of the exact makeup of Antioch’s population at any one time; Bickerman, E.J. “The Jews in the Greek Age” Pg. 92
52 Wright, N.L. “Non-Greek Religious Imagery on the Coinage of Seleucid Syria” Mediterranean Archaeology, Vol.22/23 (2009/10), Pg. 199
chomping at the bit to learn about Bactria, for the moment I am going to keep our discussion to only a very limited overview. The best preserved Hellenistic settlement in Bactria is Ai-Khanoum, located in the Takhar province in modern Afghanistan. We cannot pinpoint the identity of neither its founder nor even its original name, but its enormous size and palatial spacing suggests that it was a royal residence for the Seleucids and/or the Greco-Bactrian kings and governors. It has often been seen as an alien placement upon the landscape, an unmistakably Greek outgrowth that sticks out like a sore thumb along the edges of the Amu Darya. It certainly has the hallmarks of a Greek city – a gymnasium and theatre, for instance. At the same time, it possesses several characteristics that show a hybridity of Greek and local cultures: its building materials and architecture were designed to deal with the often-harsh Afghan climate rather than a Mediterranean one. One of the major temples of Ai-Khanoum has been described as Mesopotamian or Iranian in its design, which suggests that a sizeable indigenous community resided in the city – though this does not also mean that the Greeks who lived there did not use it as well. There named members of the administration that are of Greek and Bactrian origin. It is challenging to distinguish whether these characteristics emerged during the Seleucid period, but I think this is about the extent that I will cover Bactria. Consider this but a teaser for what is on the horizon.

Asia Minor was also subject to intensive colonization, especially along the southern shore bordering the Mediterranean. These cities were largely like the other Seleucid settlements, and many of the indigenous cities and villages along the Anatolian coastline were Ionian Greek in origin anyways. Other non-Greek settlements did exist though, and would also incorporate Greek cultural elements as well. The former Lydian capital of Sardis, now a Seleucid regional capital, was even given hippodrome. But the Seleucids were not the only major presence within Asia Minor. The Ptolemies managed to gain a foothold near the Black Sea, but there were also many independent and semi-autonomous powers: the Galatians, Iranian kingdoms like Pontus and Cappadocia, and the Greek Attalids of Pergamon to name a few. To oversee them required a deft hand, and many of these groups and warlords would be what are called “local power holders”, which I talked about in the last episode. They could mint currency or build cities and temples in their own name, while at the same time furthering the Seleucid agenda by keeping the peace.

As I have spent the last however long attempting to illustrate the interactions between Greek and non-Greek in the empire and policies of the Seleucid rulers, I must of course take a different perspective. Analyzing the impact and consequences of a small foreign body ruling over a larger indigenous population is, for better and for worse, going to draw comparisons to colonialist practices of the early-modern period. A question as to whether the exploitation of the local populace is linked to some notion of cultural or ethnic superiority, or the way cultural influence is understood has been brought up in

53 For the debates on the founder and name of Ai-Khanoum, see Cohen, G. “The Hellenistic Settlements in the East from Armenia and Mesopotamia to Bactria and India” Pg. 261.; A detailed description of Ai-Khanoum’s layout and makeup can be read in Maris, R. “The Hellenistic Far East: Archaeology, Language, and Identity in Greek Central Asia” Pgs. 57-101
54 For a discussion on Ai-Khanoum’s Temple with Indented Niches, see Maris, R. “The Hellenistic Far East: Archaeology, Language, and Identity in Greek Central Asia” Pgs. 85-89
55 Ma, John. “Antiochos III and the Cities of Western Asia Minor” Pg. 35
56 Polybius, The Histories, 7.15-7.18
57 Chrubasik, B. “Kings and Usurpers in the Seleukid Empire: The Men who Would be King” Pg. 23
debates regarding the modern perspective of ancient empires. I don’t know if I am clever or well-read enough to give an accurate assessment when it comes to the Seleucid Empire – perhaps the Ptolemaic realm will give a better picture given the greater volume of evidence. But I do think that it is worth it to look at the Seleucid transformation and impact on the lands they conquered from another, less favorable approach.

When I spoke about the governance of the empire during the last episode, I briefly discussed the ethnic identity of its administrative officials. Approximately 98.5% of them bore Greek names, and while we must take it into account that many individuals adopted Greek names on top of their personal name, the fact that they had to adopt at all suggests that power remained disproportionately in the hands of a small Greek elite. Forced relocation is also controversial subject to begin with, but it does need to be considered in both Babylonia and Syria. Up to 80% of the sites founded in Syria during the Hellenistic period were unoccupied. As we already have seen though, the kings were willing to either forcibly combine settlements in acts of synoecism or take populations from neighboring regions to populate their new cities. This was often an unpopular move for both Greeks and non-Greeks alike, with some communities attempting to stymie the process or outright rebel. The degree to which the Seleucids reshaped the landscape must have also caused significant upheaval in the traditional networks and preexisting institutions. Appian’s writings contain an interesting piece of information: in his account of the foundation of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, Appian suggests that the Babylonian priesthood attempted to mislead Seleucus during the initial surveying of the land since they feared a new city would diminish Babylon’s prominence. It’s quite possible that this story was a retroactive creation since Seleucia would indeed overshadow its predecessor: the geographer Strabo refers to the Babylon of his time as a “Great Desert”. We also have indications that Antiochus I taxed Babylon to encourage emigration to Seleucia, and that both he and his father were willing to forcibly relocate the Macedonian population to the newer city if need be.

Easily the most well-known case of native hostility to both Seleucid rule and influx Hellenistic culture can be found in Judea with the Maccabean Revolt, led by the Jewish Hasmoneans against Antiochus IV Epiphanes from 167-160 BC. By its very nature, being strongly tied to Jewish political and religious traditions, this conflict is extremely complicated and will command considerable attention when we eventually cover both it and Hellenistic Judaism. I can almost guarantee that we will spend almost an entire episode dedicated to critically analyzing the biblical accounts of the Hellenistic period, including 1 and 2 Maccabees and the Book of Daniel. But the question of preserving one’s cultural identity was

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59 Kosmin, P.J. “The Land of the Elephant Kings: Space, Territory, and Ideology in the Seleucid Empire” Pgs. 192-195
60 Kosmin, P.J. “The Land of the Elephant Kings: Space, Territory, and Ideology in the Seleucid Empire” Pgs. 193
61 Appian, Syrian Wars, 58 refers to the “Magi” of the Persian tradition, but it is almost certainly a reference to the Babylonians.
62 Kosmin, P.J. “The Land of the Elephant Kings: Space, Territory, and Ideology in the Seleucid Empire” Pgs. 211-215; Strabo, Geography, 16.1.5; Pliny, Natural History, 6.122
63 Strabo, Geography, 16.1.5; Pausanias, Description of Greece, 1.16.3; BCHP 5, 6-10; Kosmin, P.J. “The Land of the Elephant Kings: Space, Territory, and Ideology in the Seleucid Empire” Pgs. 193
clearly an issue to some degree, as written by the very hostile author of 1 Maccabees:

"Then the king [Antiochus IV Epiphanes] wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people, and that all should give up their particular customs."64

When compared to Rome, the Seleucids and other Hellenistic rulers were quite miserly when it came to the granting of citizenship. Even then, it was mainly given to ethnic Greeks.65 One of the privileges of the Antiochene Jews were the special oils that they would anoint themselves with when they exercised in the gymnasium, and being involved in the gymnasium specifically implied the adoption of a Greek lifestyle and customs (and by extension, citizenship).66 While I believe the claims of 1 Maccabees often toe the line between history and character assassination, it is very likely that the Seleucid favoritism and patronage of high ranking Jewish families that were more willing to adopt Greek culture did sow a degree of factionalism and strife in Jerusalem, whether unintentional or not.67 For all the effort the Seleucids had gone through by “planning” out their empire, the Hellenistic Levant and Near East was politically unstable due to the sheer frequency of wars and civil wars fought between the competing powers. Though ordered by Ptolemy II Philadelphus, there is an edict dating to the year 265 which explicitly tried to curb the enslavement of the resident populations of Syria and Phoenicia — a plausible consequence of the internecine periods of violence waged between the armies of the Seleucids and Ptolemies during the Syrian Wars.68 If they found themselves short on cash flow to pay for military expenditures, the Seleucid kings could (and would) help themselves to the treasuries of sacred temples: both Antiochus III and IV infamously plundered the sanctuaries of Elymais and Jerusalem (which may have led to the death of the former).69

With the various examples and observations we have gone over, I hope that I have been able to give a sense of what life was like in the empire, and the legacies and impacts of the Seleucid dynasty within their domain. Attempting to summarize the experiences of millions of people in very different cultures isn’t always easy, but I think that being able to give a general idea in regards to each region of the empire can provide a better overall understanding of a rather complicated subject. But that point, I think we can wrap up our two part coverage of the Seleucid Empire. This isn’t going to be our last in-depth look, and our normal narrative episodes will be blended with some detailed discussions

In the next episode, we will be returning to the narrative of the Seleucids. The ever-precarious stability of the empire will be threatened by a variety of challenges both external and internal: the invasions of Ptolemy III into Syria and incursions of steppe nomads into Central Asia, the rebellions of satraps at its borders, and the “War of the Brothers” which would ultimately threaten the very existence of the Seleucid dynasty.

64 1 Maccabees 41-42
65 Andrade, N.J. “Syrian Identity in the Greco-Roman World” Pg. 44
66 Bickerman, E.J. “The Jews in the Greek Age” Pg. 92
67 Andrade, N.J. “Syrian Identity in the Greco-Roman World” Pgs. 59-63
69 Justin, Epitome, 32.2; Diodorus Siculus, Library of History, 28.3; Josephus, The Jewish Wars, 1.31
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