

The Family Business: New Approaches to the Seleucid Empire

For nearly the entirety of the first century in which the Seleucid Empire graced the pages of scholarly attention it was consistently and overwhelmingly pushed to the margins of the Hellenistic World as a remote dynasty which paled in comparison to the more glamorous Antigonids or Ptolemies. The narrative of the Seleucids became a story of decline, in which their empire was perpetuated by nothing more than the futile grasps of successive monarchs desperate to maintain their grip on a crumbling inheritance. Edwyn Bevan captures this perfectly when he writes ‘its history from the moment it misses its founder’s hand is one of decline. It was a sick man from its birth.’* This ‘sick man’ was of little or no interest to those more preoccupied with kingdoms they viewed as being won and retained by *doriktetos chora* – the notion of ‘spear-won land’ and the Macedonian Warrior *ethos* which this embodied.

But having been informed by the contemporary resurgence of Seleucid Studies over the course of several conferences in the UK, France, Quebec, and their resultant publications by ourselves and others, we aim in this paper to put forward a new approach to the Seleucid Empire which embraces the peculiar dualism of the Seleucid Realm and the various means by which it was governed. Recurrently, the evidence has pointed us toward the family as being at the core of Seleucid structures of power. From the ‘reigning triad’ of the immediate nuclear family of the king and queen to the larger dynastic web spun by the Seleucids which transformed their diverse realm into an interrelated *oikos*, we seek to tease out the ideology and practice behind these strands of descent and weave them into a more nuanced model which takes into account various familial policies and practices both within the royal family and without. In addition, we aim to pay particular attention to how in this approach to empire, unlike many of its contemporaries, royal women had just as pivotal a role to play as their male counterparts.

*Bevan, E. R. (1902), *The House of Seleucus*, 1.76. London.