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SACRED PLUNDER AND THE SELEUCID NEAR EAST*

The Seleucid Empire was the largest and most ethnically diverse of all the successor kingdoms formed after the death of Alexander the Great. The relationship between the Macedonian dynasty and various subject peoples is therefore a central question of Seleucid historiography. This article focuses on the relations between king and native temples, arguing that temple despoliation was standard procedure for Seleucid rulers facing fiscal problems. I explore various instances in which Seleucid kings removed treasures from native temples under coercive auspices, suggesting that this pattern problematizes recent scholarship emphasizing positive relations between Seleucid kings and native priestly elites.

For much of the twentieth century, incidents of Seleucid temple-robbing reported in the literary sources were treated as uncontroversial if unpleasant aspects of imperial power. Elias Bickerman bluntly stated that such despoliation was plain evidence that ‘le roi était l’état’.¹ Michael Rostovtzeff took it as fact that a Seleucid king in need of money would take it from the treasury of a native temple.² Samuel Eddy described temple despoliation as simply one of many grievances endured by native peoples under Hellenic domination.³

The 1990s saw the development of a more optimistic portrait of Seleucid imperial power. Especially prominent was the contribution of Amélie Kuhrt and Susan Sherwin-White, who presented a ‘new

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¹ E. Bickerman, *Institutions des séleucides* (Paris, 1938), 121–2.

² M. Rostovtzeff, *Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World*, second edition (Oxford, 1953), 695–6.

³ S. Eddy, *The King is Dead: Studies in the Near Eastern Resistance to Hellenism* (Lincoln, NE, 1961), 98–9, 124. Seleucid kings did have some mid-twentieth century defenders, however; for example, W. Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria and India* (Cambridge, 1966), 465, insisted (incorrectly, as I argue) that ‘Hellenistic kings did not sack their own temples’.

approach' to the Seleucid Empire, one heavily influenced by post-colonial theory.⁴ For Kuhrt and Sherwin-White, the Seleucid Empire was a successful multi-ethnic polity, in which kings effectively engaged their native subjects, particularly at the level of native cult. While Kuhrt and Sherwin-White did not discount the profound potential menace of the king and his troops, they viewed Seleucid kings as willing to negotiate and compromise with native peoples in a mutual collaboration between subject and ruler.⁵

The 'new approach' rested on substantial evidence, based heavily on cuneiform records produced by native elites themselves, which revealed Seleucid kings' courteous reverence for native gods.⁶ For example, in the early third century BC, the crown prince Antiochus (the future Antiochus I) entered the city of Babylon with great piety toward the moon god Sin:

10. [Antiochu]s, the son of the king, [entered] the temple of Sin of Egišnugal and in the tem[ple of Sin of Enitenna]

11. [and the s]on of the king aforementioned prostrated himself. The son of the king [provided] one sheep for the offering

12. [of Sin and he bo]wed down in the temple of Sin, Egišnugal, and in the temple of Sin, En[itenna].⁷

This encounter was not Antiochus' only interaction with native gods. As crown prince he visited Babylon repeatedly, and as king he rebuilt portions of the Ezida Temple of Marduk as well as the suburban Temple of Esagila at Borsippa.⁸ Many similar episodes are preserved

⁴ A. Kuhrt and S. Sherwin-White, *From Samarkand to Sardis* (Berkeley, CA, 1993).

⁵ For empire defined by negotiation between the king and subject, see also J. Ma, *Antiochos III and the Cities of Western Asia Minor* (Oxford, 1999), 179–242.

⁶ E.g. on the benefactions to the temple of Nebo (Nabu) in Babylon, see A. Kuhrt and S. Sherwin-White, 'Aspects of Seleucid Royal Ideology: the Cylinder of Antiochus I From Borsippa', *JHS* 111 (1991), 71–86. See also K. Rigsby, 'Seleucid Notes', *TAPhA* 110 (1980), 248–54; C. Welles, *Royal Correspondence of the Hellenistic Period* (New Haven, CT, 1934), 280–8, for benefactions to Zeus Baitokaie in southern Syria. Useful editions of Babylonian records from the Hellenistic period include A. Sachs and H. Hungar, *Astronomical Diaries* (Vienna, 1988); A. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Locust Valley, NY, and Gluckstadt, 1975); I. Finkle and R. van der Spek, *Babylonian Chronicles of the Hellenistic Period*, <<http://www.livius.org/cg-cm/chronicles/chron00.html>>, accessed 24 September 2013.

⁷ Finke and van der Spek (n. 6), lines 10–12, translation at <http://www.livius.org/cg-cm/chronicles/bchp-antiochus_sin/antiochus_sin_01.html>, accessed 24 September 2013. See also Grayson (n. 6), 120.

⁸ The so-called Borsippa cylinder with an accessible translation is available in M. Austin, *The Hellenistic World from Alexander to Roman Conquest*, second edition, (Cambridge, 2006), 304–5. Kuhrt and Sherwin White, (n. 6), 75–6 provides text. See also R. Stroootman, 'Babylonian, Macedonian, King of the World: The Antiochos Cylinder from Borsippa and Seleukid Imperial

in Babylonian records.⁹ Nor were the Babylonians the only ethnic group to receive royal favours: the Jewish historian Josephus, for example, was aware of a series of benefactions given by Antiochus III to the Temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem.¹⁰

Incidents of Seleucid despoliation are not necessarily inconsistent with the ample evidence for Seleucid benefaction. Rather, despoliation and benefaction were dual aspects of what the political scientist Margaret Levi terms ‘predatory rule’, in which Seleucid rulers rationally balanced short-term exploitation with long-term political stability.¹¹ It may seem paradoxical that when Antiochus I prostrated himself before a Babylonian moon god, or when he dirtied his hands ceremonially baking bricks for a Mesopotamian temple, he was engaging in a form of predatory rule. While we cannot discount Antiochus’ private religious feelings toward these native gods, the most obvious motive for his public actions was gaining political legitimacy, both for himself and his fledgling dynasty, in order to facilitate tributary exploitation of the region for taxes, physical resources, corvée labour, administrative personnel, military recruits, and so forth.¹² Antiochus and his successors could certainly extract these things by raw force, but doing so had certain transaction costs. It was expensive to mobilize and supply armies, and military operations could reduce

Integration’, in E. Stavrianopoulou (ed.), *Shifting Social Imaginaries in the Hellenistic Period* (Leiden, 2013), 67–97, who emphasizes the agility with which Seleucid kings manipulated native traditions.

⁹ For a similar royal benefaction under Antiochus III, see A. Kuhrt, ‘The Seleucid Kings and Babylonia: New Perspectives on the Seleucid Realm in the East’, in P. Bilde *et al.* (eds.), *Aspects of Hellenistic Kingship* (Cambridge, 1996), 46–9; Kuhrt and Sherwin-White (n. 4), 216; Sachs and Hungar (n. 6), no. 187.

¹⁰ Joseph, *AJ* 138–53.

¹¹ M. Levi, ‘The Predatory Theory of Rule’, *Politics and Society* 10 (1981), 431–65, with a more complete discussion of the ‘theory of predatory rule’ in *Of Rule and Revenue* (Berkeley, CA, 1988), 10–40. ‘Predatory rule’ is admittedly a term used with great fluidity; at one extreme, all forms of rule – from the democratically elected Barack Obama to the autocratic Xi Jinping to the despotic Robert Mugabe – could be deemed ‘predatory’ on the assumption that persons in power derive some form of private benefit from their position of ‘rulership’ (even Mr Obama receives a decent salary and vast personal prestige from holding office). As a rule, however, responsive democracies are usually exempted from the ‘predatory’ definition (although not by Levi!), which is reserved for autocratic or patrimonial rulers, as well as democratic governments mired in corruption. A. Bavister-Gould, ‘Predatory Leaderships, Predatory Rule and Predatory States’ (available online at <<http://www.dlprog.org/ftp/>>, accessed 10 October 2013), provides a useful overview of the concept as applied to modern states.

¹² The resources of Babylonia were extensive. Herodotus 3.92.1–2 reports that Babylonia and Assyria paid the Persians annual taxes of 1,000 Babylonian talents a year (approximately 33 tons of bullion), while the satrap of Babylonia is said to have taken in an *artaba* of silver a day (Herodotus 1.192).

the economic output of the very territories he wished to exploit. The king and his army could not be everywhere at once. A ruler's transaction costs were lower if subject peoples exhibited what Levi dubs 'quasi-voluntary compliance', engaging in mandatory acts despite the application of little or no immediate coercion.¹³ Antiochus' benefactions to the Babylonian temples were therefore 'predatory', even if cloaked in an aura of religious benevolence. They represented investment in the political loyalty and compliance of the priestly elite and people of Babylon, thereby reducing friction within his tributary apparatus.

Ancient temples coordinated local and even regional economic activity, and controlled substantial economic assets.¹⁴ Regularized taxation of temple holdings was a long-accepted and uncontroversial practice.¹⁵ Temples, however, were also storehouses for substantial caches of sacred treasures.¹⁶ Such concentrated wealth could prove irresistible to Seleucid rulers facing short-term fiscal constraints. The extraordinary extraction of wealth from temples fell into the extreme fringe of the spectrum of predatory rule, carrying both political risk and immediate cash rewards.

Case studies

At least ten episodes of despoliation (or attempted despoliation) are attested in Seleucid history: see [Table 1](#) for a summary.

1. *Temple of Nabu, 302 BC*

The first instance of temple despoliation comes from the Babylonian Astronomical Diaries, which refer to the removal and subsequent return of silver and gold from the Temple of Nabu in Borsippa, near Babylon:

¹³ Levi (n. 11, [1988]), 52–72.

¹⁴ For the substantial economic aspects behind Hellenistic temples, see B. Dignas, *Economy of the Sacred in Hellenistic Asia Minor* (Oxford, 2008), 13–35; P. Debord, *Aspects sociaux et économiques de la vie religieuse dans l'Anatolie Gréco-Romaine* (Leiden, 1982), 185–213. For administrative relationships between Seleucid temples and the king, see L. Capdetrey, *Le Pouvoir Séleucide* (Rennes, 2007), 167–89.

¹⁵ G. Apherdis, *The Seleucid Royal Economy* (Cambridge, 2004), 151.

¹⁶ Debord (n. 14), 215–41.

Table 1. Episodes of Seleucid despoliation

King	Deity	Location	Date (BC)	Source	Amount (talents)
Seleucus I	Nabu	Borsippa	302	Astronomical Diaries, no. 302/301 ^a	133 silver/2 gold
Seleucus I	Anaitit	Ecbatana	c. 312–281	Polyb. 10.27.11	unknown
Antiochus III	Anaitit	Ecbatana	211	Polyb. 10.27.12–13	4000 silver
Antiochus III	Ba'al	Elam	187	Diod. Sic. 29.15; Justin 32.2.1–2	unknown
Seleucus IV	Yahweh	Jerusalem	c. 180	2 Mac. 3:11–13	400 silver/200 gold
Antiochus IV	Nabu	Babylon	169	Astronomical Diaries, no. 168	unknown
Antiochus IV	Yahweh	Jerusalem	169/168	1 Mac. 1:20–8; 2 Mac. 5:21; Joseph, <i>Ag</i> 12.246	1800 silver
Antiochus IV	Atargatis	Bambyke	c. 165	Granius Licinianus 28.6.1 (Critini)	unknown
Antiochus IV	Nanaia	Elam	164	App. Syr. 66; Polyb. 31.9; Diod. Sic. 31.18; 2 Mac. 1:14	unknown
Alexander II	Zeus	Antioch	123	Diod. Sic. 34.28; Justin 39.2	unknown

^aSachs and Hungar (n. 6), no. 302.

113 talents of silver (and) two talents of gold belonging to the god Nabu, which was at the disposal of the [royal treasury (?) ho]use [...] from] the house of the artisans and the streets of Borsippa returned....¹⁷

The date of the entry is 302/301 BC, but this refers to the *return* of the bullion, by the subscription efforts of a local artisan guild. The entry does not specify who removed the money in the first place, or when. The successor Antigonos the One-Eyed is a suspect, as his armies caused considerable destruction in Babylon between 310 and 308 BC.¹⁸ The date of 302/301 BC, however, points firmly toward Seleucus I, who then controlled Babylon and was undertaking preparations for the upcoming Ipsus campaign, where he needed to pay an army of 32,000 men.¹⁹ The subsequent restoration of the funds through local fundraising efforts therefore probably occurred shortly after the act of despoliation.²⁰

2. *Temple of Anaitit in Ecbatana, Reign of Seleucus I*

Seleucus I also removed precious items from the Median palace complex that included the Temple of Anaitit, in Ecbatana, according to a brief notice in Polybius that prefaces the more spectacular despoliation of the same temple by Antiochus III (see below).²¹

The date is unclear, but the motive for the despoliation was probably again related to the ongoing financial strain of successor warfare, which was only brought to a halt with Seleucus' victory at Corupedium in 281 BC. Both of Seleucus' despoliations took place in cities with which he maintained overall good relations. The satrapy of Babylon was his initial powerbase, while he would furthermore claim himself as the founder of Ecbatana.²²

¹⁷ Translation from R. van der Spek, 'The effect of war on the prices of barley and agricultural land in Hellenistic Babylonia', in J. Andreau, P. Briant, and R. Descat (eds.), *Économie antique: la guerre dans les économies antiques* (Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges, 2000), 302.

¹⁸ For the date of Antigonos' campaign in Babylonia, using Babylonian astronomical records, see P. Wheatley, 'Antigonos Monophthalmus in Babylonia: 310–308 BC', *JNES* 61 (2002), 39–47.

¹⁹ Seleucus' army in 301 BC had 20,000 infantry and 12,000 cavalry: see Diod. Sic. 20.113.4. On the links between cash, plunder, and royal power, see M. Austin, 'Hellenistic Kings, War and the Economy', *CQ* 36 (1986), 460–6.

²⁰ Apherdis (n. 15), 175 states without hesitation that the despoiler was Seleucus I.

²¹ Polyb. 10.27.11.

²² Plin. *HN* 5.42; Strabo 11.13.1.

3. *Temple of Anaitit, 211 BC*

A far more thorough plundering of the Anaitit Temple in Ecbatana took place in 211/120, by Antiochus III, as described by Polybius (10.27.12–13):

Upon the arrival of Antiochus, the temple of Aine²³ still had gilded columns around it and many silver tiles built into it, and a small number of gold bricks and many silver ones left over. From the abovementioned items royal coinage was collected and minted, just shy of 4000 talents.

The motive for this spectacular despoliation is transparent: Antiochus III was setting out on his great eastern campaign and needed money to pay his army.²⁴ The exact size of his force is unknown. Justin, the only ancient source to provide a figure, puts his troop strength at an inflated 100,000 infantry and 20,000 cavalry, but this is certainly grossly overstated.²⁵ Still, Antiochus III had recently mustered a reliably attested army of 68,000 soldiers at Raphia in 217, and he would mobilize a 72,000-man field army at Magnesia in 190.²⁶ Given that his eastern anabasis was an equally momentous campaign, it is likely that the army with Antiochus III at Ecbatana likewise consisted of between 50,000 and 70,000 men.²⁷ At a drachma a day, a fair estimate of Hellenistic military pay, the king required roughly 3,000–5,000 silver talents a year to pay an army of this size, regardless of other military expenses.²⁸ Thus, the despoliation of the Temple of Anaitit was a mere down payment on a campaign that would last five years.²⁹

Polybius knew that Antigonus the One-Eyed, Seleucus I, and Alexander the Great had previously ransacked the complex.³⁰ The Aina Temple is sometimes identified as the Temple of Asclepius, which Arrian suggests had been ravaged by Alexander in his grief

²³ A variant of the goddess Anaitit: see Plut. *Vit. Artax.* 27.3.

²⁴ E. Newell, *The Coinage of the Eastern Seleucid Mints* (New York, 1938), 215–17, links the incident to a series of copious silver tetradrachms, issue nos. 605–609.

²⁵ Justin, 41.5.7; F. Walbank, *A Commentary on Polybius* (Oxford, 1957), i.236.

²⁶ Battle of Raphia: Polyb. 5.79; Battle of Magnesia: Livy 37.37.9.

²⁷ B. Bar-Kochva, *The Seleucid Army. Organization and Tactics in the Great Campaigns*, second edition (Cambridge, 1979), 10.

²⁸ The problem of pay in the Seleucid army is summarized by Aphergeris (n. 15), 201–3.

²⁹ Antiochus III extorted other monies to fund his Eastern campaign. Previously he had forced the king of Armenia to pay a 300 talent indemnity (Polyb. 8.23.5), and he would later demand large sums of cash from the Indian dynast Sophagesenus (Polyb. 11.34.11), as well as 500 talents of silver and 1,500 talents of spices from the Gerrhae living along the Red Sea (Polyb. 13.9.4).

³⁰ Polyb. 10.27.11–12.

over the death of Hephæstion.³¹ It is not clear whether Antiochus III knew of these precedents, although mimicking Alexander's actions proved a major theme of the campaign.³²

There is no evidence of any rebellion in the area that might justify Antiochus' despoliation as an act of war.³³ Media had revolted between 223 and 220 BC under its satrap Molon, but had since returned securely to the fold. Median troops fought under Antiochus III at Raphia in 217 BC, commanded by a native aristocrat named Aspasianus.³⁴ Polybius' campaign narrative suggests that Antiochus III did not make contact with Parthian forces until after he crossed the vast desert region separating Ecbatana from Hecatompylos, leaving the Temple of Anaitit firmly in friendly territory.³⁵ Nor is there evidence that the local peoples challenged the despoliation. Polybius treats the entire incident as an administrative action.

Kuhrt and Sherwin-White describe the incident as an 'atypical apparent pillage, of a character normally avoided as counter-productive'.³⁶ In this particular instance, there is no evidence that Antiochus III's relationship with the Medes suffered long-term damage. Median soldiers were again present at the battle of Magnesia in 190 BC, incorporated into the crack royal cavalry regiment, the *agema*.³⁷ These were no reluctant conscripts, but elite cavalrymen, whose presence attests to ongoing collaboration between Median aristocrats and the Seleucid dynasty. However 'counter-productive' looting a temple might be in theory, in this instance Antiochus III seems to have got away with it.

³¹ Arr. *Anab.* 7.14.5.

³² Most notably, he assumed the title of 'the Great' (*Megas*) after his return from the East (App. *Syr.* 1); for discussion see Ma (n. 5), 272–3. Plaut. *Mostell.* 775 refers to *magnus Alexandrus*, suggesting that the usage 'Alexander the Great' had become common usage by c. 200 BC. Note also Antiochus' conspicuous valour in the battle of the River Arius (Polyb. 10.49), imitating Alexander's heroic leadership style, on which see J. Keegan, *The Mask of Command* (New York, 1987), 13–91.

³³ Kuhrt and Sherwin-White (n. 4), 197.

³⁴ Polyb. 5.79.7.

³⁵ Polyb. 10.28.1–7. See also H. Schmitt, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte Antiochos' des Grossen und seiner Zeit* (Wiesbaden, 1964), 101–2; M. Taylor, *Antiochus the Great* (Barnsley, 2013), 74.

³⁶ Kuhrt and Sherwin-White (n. 4), 197.

³⁷ Livy 37.40. Bar-Kochva (n. 27), 67, considers these to be Greco-Macedonian military settlers from Media, rather than native Medes, although this rests on the baseless hypothesis that only Greco-Macedonians were allowed in this elite force. On the importance of Iranian forces in Seleucid armies, however, see Kuhrt and Sherwin-White (n. 4), 53–5, as well as M. Olbrycht, 'Iranians in the Diadochi period', in V. Alonso Troncoso and E.M. Anson (eds.), *After Alexander. The Time of the Diadochi (323–281 BC)* (Oxford, 2013), 169–82.

4. Temple of Ba'al, 187 BC

In 187 BC, Antiochus III attempted to pillage a temple of the god Ba'al in Elam. The underlying motive was again undoubtedly pecuniary. Following the Treaty of Apamea, the king badly needed coin and bullion to pay the Roman indemnity. He had already made two down payments, together totalling 3,000 silver talents, but now was required to produce 1,000 silver talents per year for the next twelve years.³⁸ The war with Rome had been expensive, and his tactical defeats in Greece and Asia Minor provided little booty to offset his costs.

There is no evidence that Elam was in a state of open revolt. Diodorus states only that Antiochus *accused* (κατατιπασόμενος) the Elamites of revolt, strongly implying that the charge was spurious. Both Justin and Strabo suggest that the Elamites rose up only after Antiochus despoiled the temple.³⁹ Antiochus may have been embarking on a second anabasis to regain prestige lost in his war with Rome. If so, his motives were identical to those at Ecbatana in 211/210 BC: to obtain money quickly in order to fund the army before marching onwards to the east. It is equally possible that the king simply hoped to pilfer enough funds to keep his government running while he cobbled together cash for his next payment to the Romans. This time the despoliation did prove counter-productive, as violence erupted and claimed the life of the Great King.⁴⁰

5. Temple of Yahweh, reign of Seleucus IV

The case of the Temple of Yahweh during the reign of Seleucus IV is an incident of despoliation that, according to the native source itself, did not happen. The Jewish source, 2 Maccabees 3, suggests that, in the reign of Seleucus IV, an internal dispute within the hierarchy of the Temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem caused the disgruntled party to approach the *strategos* of Koile Syria and report that a large sum of treasure was kept off the books in the Temple. The king's chief minister (*epi ton pragmaton*), Heliodorus, responded by riding into Jerusalem and attempting to administratively appropriate 400 talents of silver

³⁸ App. Syr. 39; Polyb. 21.43.19.

³⁹ Diod. Sic. 29.15; Strabo 16.1.18; Justin 32.2.2. On the unique nature of Elamite resistance, see example 9 below.

⁴⁰ Death of Antiochus III: Diod. Sic. 28.3.2; Strabo 16.1.18; Justin 32.2.

and 200 talents of gold.⁴¹ According to 2 Maccabees 3.28, Heliodorus was driven out of the Temple by the timely arrival of a heavenly rider and two stout angels armed with whips. D. Schwartz argues that the incident is probably a 'floating legend', noting its similarity to 3 Maccabees 1–2, where Ptolemy IV of Egypt attempts to violate the inner precinct of the Temple under the priest Simon.⁴²

The recent discovery of an epigraphic dossier from Israel has given another perspective on the Heliodorus incident.⁴³ In a set of letters, we learn that Heliodorus oversaw the installation of a new high priest for Koile Syria and Phoenicia. The appointed individual, Olympiodorus, was tasked with the supervision of affairs for sanctuaries within the jurisdiction, which probably included oversight of Temple finances.⁴⁴ The narrative of 2 Maccabees 3 was therefore probably produced in response to the intensification of administrative control over traditionally autonomous religious affairs.⁴⁵ We should not be overly soothed, however, by the formulae of Seleucid administrative prose found in the Olympiodorus stele. Whatever the shrill fictions in 2 Maccabees 3, its darker vision of Seleucid exploitation cannot be dismissed so easily. At the very least, the passage suggests that native elites profoundly feared that the arrival of a Seleucid official might quickly

⁴¹ 2 Maccabees 3:1–13.

⁴² D. Schwartz, *2 Maccabees* (Berlin and New York, 2008), 185–6; M. Hadas, *Third and Fourth Books of Maccabees* (New York, 1953), 12 (Jerusalem was under Ptolemaic control until c. 200 BC). J. Goldstein, *II Maccabees* (New York, 1983), 197–8, notes that the entire Heliodorus story fits a broader Near Eastern narrative trope of the 'despoiler repelled'. E. Gruen, 'Hellenism and Persecution: Antiochus IV and the Jews', in P. Green (ed.) *Hellenistic History and Culture* (Berkeley, CA, 1993), 242 describes the Heliodorus story as a 'wonderful tale', if 'apocryphal'. For text and commentary of 3 Maccabees, see M. Anderson, '3 Maccabees', in J. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (New York, 1985), ii.509–29.

⁴³ On the Heliodorus inscription, see H. Cotton and M. Worrell 'Seleukos IV to Heliodorus: A New Dossier of Royal Correspondence from Israel', *ZPE* 159 (2007), 191–205, with follow-up by D. Gera, 'Olympiodorus, Heliodorus and the Temples of Koile Syria and Phoenike', *ZPE* 169 (2009), 125–55; C. Jones 'The Inscription From Tel Maresha for Olympiodorus', *ZPE* 171 (2009), 101–4; and A. Bencivenni, '"Massima considerazione": forma dell'ordine e immagini potere nella corrispondenza di Seleuco IV', *ZPE* 176 (2011), 139–53.

⁴⁴ On the supervision of temple finances by Hellenistic kings, see Dignas (n. 14), 36–59. G. Gorre and S. Honigman 'Kings Taxes and High Priests: Comparing Ptolemaic and Seleukid Policies', in S. Bussi (ed.) *Egitto dai Faraoni agli Arabi* (Pisa and Rome, 2013), 105–19, note that the Heliodorus incident implies the sort of secular management of temple finances that was common in Ptolemaic Egypt; Ptolemaic relations with temples are discussed in further detail below.

⁴⁵ Schwartz (n. 42), 186; U. Rappaport, 'Did Heliodorus try to rob the treasures of the Jerusalem temple? Date and probability of the story of II Maccabees, 3', *REJ* 171 (2011), 10–19. See also E. Bickerman, *Studies in Christian and Jewish History* (Leiden, 1986), ii.190–1.

cascade into a wholesale removal of Temple treasures.⁴⁶ The next case suggests that their fear was not far-fetched.

6. *Esagila Temple near Babylon, 169 BC*

M. J. Geller argues from a fragment of a Babylonian astronomical diary (Sachs and Hungar no. 168), dating to November 169 BC, that an administrative despoliation of the Esagila Temple took place near Babylon.⁴⁷ In late 169 BC, Antiochus IV appointed a new treasurer (*zazakku*) for the Esagil Temple of Bel. Shortly afterwards:

a great deal of property of the temples which had been in the old treasury in the juniper garden and in the new treasury which is on the east wall of the treasure house, was removed in the presence of the administrator (*satammu*) of the Esagil (temple) as well as the Babylonians, the assembly of the Esagil temple.⁴⁸

Geller argues that this incident in Babylon is another example of an administrative despoliation, designed to fund Antiochus IV's ongoing Egyptian campaigns.⁴⁹ He furthermore suggests that the appointment of the new temple treasurer may have been essential for ensuring a bloodless despoliation, supposing that Antiochus installed a candidate known to be pliant to royal demands.

7. *Temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem, 169–168 BC*

The two books of Maccabees both agree that Antiochus IV plundered the Temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem and sacked the city itself, although they disagree on the timing. Both state that, in 168 BC, Antiochus violently intervened in the stasis between two high-priestly factions, and sacked the city in the process. According to 2 Maccabees 5:21, during this sack Antiochus carried off some 1,800 talents of silver from the Temple proper. However, 1 Maccabees 19–20 suggests that Antiochus

⁴⁶ Native priestly elites certainly had a long set of Near Eastern tropes about temple despoliation to flesh out their paranoia: see S. Weitzman, 'Plotting Antiochus's Persecution', *JBL* 123 (2004), 219–34, for links between Babylonian protest literature and 2 Maccabees. This does not necessarily mean that reports of despoliation are false, but rather that the Jews adopted similar tropes for describing similar woes.

⁴⁷ M. Geller, 'New Information on Antiochus IV', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 54 (1991), 1–4.

⁴⁸ Translation from Geller (n. 47).

⁴⁹ S. Eddy (n. 4), 136–7, also assumes with confidence that the removed gold was appropriated by the state.

IV carried out an administrative despoliation (perhaps similar in nature to no. 6 above) in Jerusalem the year before, during the winter of 169 BC, after returning from his first incursion into Egypt. If it did indeed occur then, it was probably undertaken in order to fund the ongoing military campaign. 1 Maccabees then agrees that the next year Antiochus violently sacked the city. The Book of Daniel likewise reports that Antiochus IV visited the city twice, although its vague language does little to clarify the course of events.⁵⁰ We therefore have two scenarios, neither of which is necessarily to be preferred.⁵¹

Fortunately, the two agree on a despoliation and a sack, occurring either concurrently or separated by one campaign season. The pretext for the violent intervention in 168 BC was the serious *stasis* gripping the city, rooted in elite factional fighting over control of the Temple and high priesthood. However, the underlying motive was probably the serious diplomatic setback that Antiochus IV had received shortly before at Eleusis.⁵² Here, a Roman ambassador had humiliated him in front of his court, by drawing a circle around him and ordering him not to step out until he agreed to withdraw his troops from Egypt.⁵³ The public incident not only derailed a successful campaign but also cost Antiochus IV a devastating loss of face. It was particularly humiliating that the Roman ultimatum had not occurred behind closed doors, but in a spectacle before his key constituencies of court and army.⁵⁴ The ongoing *stasis* in Jerusalem provided an opportunity for the king to reassert his military authority, perhaps replenishing his treasury at the same time.⁵⁵

Mørkholm argues that the 1,800 talents removed from the Temple reflect three years of uncollected tribute, at the rate promised by the

⁵⁰ Daniel 11:25–31.

⁵¹ On the problem of one versus two incidents in Jerusalem, see P. Green *From Alexander to Actium* (Berkeley, CA, 1990), 512; O. Mørkholm, *Antiochus IV of Syria* (Copenhagen, 1966), 142; Gruen (n. 42), 246; J. Dancy, *A Commentary on 1 Maccabees* (Oxford, 1954), 68. I do not think that the quality of the sources currently allows a firm conclusion either way.

⁵² On the day at Eleusis, see Polyb. 29.27.4–9. The impact upon Antiochus IV may be overstated by Polybius: see for example, M. Morgan, 'The Perils of Schematism: Polybius, Antiochus Epiphanes and the "Day of Eleusis"', *Historia* (1990), 37–9; also P. Mittag, *Antiochos IV. Epiphanes. Eine politische Biographie* (Berlin, 2006), 224. It is hard to see, however, how Popilius Laenas' diplomatic theatre could have been anything but a humiliating setback, even if the king was planning to withdraw from Egypt on his own.

⁵³ Polyb. 29.27.4.

⁵⁴ On the 'saving face' aspect of the sack, see Daniel 11:30; E. Gruen, *The Hellenistic World and the Coming of Rome* (Berkeley, CA, 1984), 661.

⁵⁵ Joseph, *Ap.* 2.83–4 states, citing Polybius and Strabo, that Antiochus IV needed the money (*egestate pecuniarum*).

priestly candidate Menelaus in 172 BC.⁵⁶ Menelaus had obtained his position as high priest by promising an additional 300 talents on top of the 360 talents of tribute already collected. 2 Maccabees reports that Menelaus soon had trouble raising this amount.⁵⁷ However, this does not mean that Menelaus defaulted the full 660 talents every year for three years (thus producing a 1980 talent debt, most of which Mørkholm claims Antiochus IV rightfully reclaimed). Rather, Menelaus was probably able to effectively collect and forward 450 talents of tribute, given that this seems to have been the Ptolemaic tribute prior to Seleucid conquest.⁵⁸ His shortfall was likely to have been around 200 talents a year, so that the Jewish arrears were only around 600 talents, one-third of the amount pillaged. If Antiochus IV saw his despoliation as a collection of unpaid tax-debt, he certainly carried off far more than he was 'due'.

8. *Temple of Atargatis in Bambyke, c. 165 BC*

At some point in his reign, Antiochus IV paused at Hierapolis-Bambyke in northern Syria, based on fragmentary evidence surviving in the palimpsest of the second-century AD epitomator Granius Licinianus, which reports (28.6.1 [Critini]):

He led a parade upon an Asturian horse and pretended to marry Diana of Hierapolis and while others prepared a banquet, he removed vessels from the temple vault. Having eaten, he stole these from the tables as a dowry, except for a ring, which alone of all the gifts to the goddess he left behind.

While the palimpsest does not explicitly name Antiochus IV within the context of the tale, fragments immediately above and below firmly bracket him as the king in question. It is unclear how to parse this story. Some irony must be discounted, particularly the quip about stealing everything save one 'wedding' ring, cravenly left behind to symbolize the sacred marriage. Mørkholm's biography of Antiochus IV, which consistently provides positive spin on the king's actions, emphasizes Antiochus' willingness to partake in a sacred marriage with the local

⁵⁶ Mørkholm (n. 51), 142–3.

⁵⁷ 2 Mac. 4:27.

⁵⁸ Antiochus III had reduced Jewish tribute by one-third, and the tribute was 300 talents in the time of Seleucus IV (Sulpicius Severus, *Chronicles*, 2.17.5); the Ptolemaic tribute was therefore probably 450 talents. See also Apherdis (n. 15), 249.

god, which he views as ‘a serious religious act, a *hieros gamos*, and thus testifies to Antiochus’ respect for the religion of his oriental subjects, although the Greek tradition regarded the ceremony as a sham, designed to cover the confiscation of the temple’s treasures’.⁵⁹

Nonetheless, this incident should be seen as a despoliation, part of an ongoing strategy of extraordinary revenue collection, for which Antiochus IV demonstrated special zeal. The elaborate pretext is noteworthy.⁶⁰ Previous despoliations took place largely un-camouflaged by ritual. The marriage may have allowed local priestly authorities to save face, even as they lost substantial accumulated wealth. Perhaps they might have hoped that the marriage would lay the groundwork for future royal benefactions. In this sense, the incident at Hierapolis-Bambyke might be classified as a ‘negotiated’ despoliation.⁶¹

9. Temple of Nanaia in Elam, 164 BC

In 164 BC, Antiochus IV attempted to despoil the Temple of Nanaia in Elam, but was driven off by armed locals. 2 Maccabees 1:14 reports that the king tried to conduct a sacred marriage with Nanaia in order to despoil the temple for a dowry (with the author of 2 Maccabees either duplicating the report from Bambyke or reporting a shared tactic), but was killed and decapitated along with his companions (possibly confusing him with his father). Most versions agree that he failed in his objective, except Appian (*Syrian Wars* 66), who reports that the king successfully pillaged the temple, only to die shortly afterwards of disease.⁶²

⁵⁹ Mørkholm, (n. 51), 132. See also G. Cohen, *The Hellenistic Settlements in Syria, the Red Sea Basin, and North Africa* (Berkeley, CA, 2006), 176 n. 8. J. Grainger, *A Seleucid Prosopography and Gazetteer* (Leiden, 1997), 726, mentions the marriage but not the despoliation.

⁶⁰ E. Will, *Historie politique du monde hellénistique*, second edition (Nancy, 1982), 354–5, suggests that *hiera polis* might be the name of an Elamite location, rather than Hierapolis-Bambyke. Mittag (n. 52), 150–1, also doubts a despoliation, although admits it as a distinct possibility. Diana of Hierapolis fits quite well with Atargatis of Bambyke, however, and Granius Licinianus is elsewhere accurate, if brief in his references and poorly preserved in his manuscript. Cross-fertilization of details between sources does not necessarily negate the conclusion that some sort of incident took place at each location.

⁶¹ Apheris (n. 15), 174, notes that lavish gifts from temples to kings as part of religious ceremonies also represented a transfer, albeit a voluntary one, of wealth from temple to king.

⁶² On the death of Antiochus IV, see D. Mendels ‘A Note on the Tradition of Antiochus IV’s Death’, *IEJ* 31 (1981), 53–6, who discusses the relationship between Jewish and Greek sources; see also Mittag (n. 52), 308, and Walbank (n. 25), iii. 473–4. D. Gera and W. Horowitz, ‘Antiochus IV in Life and Death: Evidence from the Babylonian Astronomical Diaries’, *JAOs* 117 (1997), 241, deals with the Babylonian evidence of his funeral procession.

It is notable that the only two instances of armed resistance resulting from a temple despoliation occurred in Elam.⁶³ This testifies to the Elamites' marginal status in the empire, owing to highland geography that prevented strong political and administrative links.⁶⁴ In other despoliations discussed above, kings often used administrative officials to remove temple treasures peaceably.⁶⁵ Coercion was never absent, but was usually indirect. Lacking compliant subalterns in Elam to carry out orders quietly, both Antiochus III and Antiochus IV felt compelled to approach the temples noisily with troops, thus inviting armed resistance. The Elamites' decentralized political structures, coupled with martial traditions of archery and slinging, also proved well adapted for *ad hoc* guerrilla resistance.

While our sources are uneven, there does seem to be a noted escalation of the practice under Antiochus IV, who gained the reputation as a despoiler of temples both domestic and foreign.⁶⁶ He inherited a kingdom that was still financially strained, but no longer desperately so: early on in his reign he was able to repay delinquent instalments of the Roman indemnity.⁶⁷ Rather, Antiochus needed capital for the major investments he was making in rebuilding the kingdom and re-establishing its international prestige. Primarily, he engaged in internal strengthening policies, largely focused on reforming the Seleucid army.⁶⁸ Equally important, and expensive, was external patronage, most notably paying for ongoing work at the Olympieion in Athens, a project intended to re-establish Seleucid diplomatic

⁶³ Not counting Jerusalem, of course, where civil violence was already taking place prior to Antiochus IV's intervention.

⁶⁴ The Augustan geographer Strabo (16.1.17.13–14) described the region as 'rugged and full of bandits' (τραχεῖα ἡ πολλὴ καὶ ληστρικὴ), and noted their capacity with the bow. This does not mean that the Elamites were independent. Note, for example, Elamite slingers at the Battle of Magnesia in 190 BC (Livy 37.40.9), suggesting that Seleucid kings had the ability to muster troops from the region.

⁶⁵ See especially example 6, above. Even in the violence of the sack of Jerusalem, 2 Maccabees 2:15 reports that Menelaus followed royal orders and opened the temple treasures. Although this accusation is probably slanderous, it may hint at the reality of collaboration between pro-Seleucid officials and the king in the midst of the Jerusalem *stasis*.

⁶⁶ Polyb. 30.26.9 also notes that Antiochus IV sacked a number of Egyptian temples during his invasion; cf. Ath. 195 F. Certainly Antiochus IV's reputation as a temple-robber might lead to the accretion of additional accusations. But historical reputations are not necessarily unearned.

⁶⁷ On late indemnity payment, see Livy 42.6.6.

⁶⁸ For Antiochus IV's army reforms, see N. Sekunda, *Hellenistic Infantry Reform in the 160s BC* (Warsaw, 2001), who argues that Antiochus and other Hellenistic rulers sought to retool their forces based in part on Roman tactics and equipment.

influence in the eastern Mediterranean.⁶⁹ The despoliation of temples under Antiochus IV was therefore driven less by fiscal desperation than by revived dynastic ambition. The king risked short-term alienation in the hopes of solidifying the dynasty's long-term military and diplomatic standing. Given the subsequent revolt in Judea, and the possible violence of Antiochus' own death in Elam, the risk does not seem to have paid off.

10. *Temple of Zeus in Antioch, 123 BC*

The last attested case of Seleucid temple despoliation took place in Antioch itself, a desperate measure undertaken by the pretender Alexander II Zabinas during his civil war with Antiochus VIII. Diodorus (34.28) only states that Zabinas pillaged a Temple of Zeus. Justin provides additional details, claiming that the temple was in the city of Antioch itself, that the object removed was a golden statue of Victory, and that the motive was explicitly to pay his troops.⁷⁰ Here a new boundary was crossed: Zabinas despoiled the treasures from a Greco-Macedonian deity. According to both sources, the sacrilege caused a riot in Antioch, forcing Zabinas to flee from the city; he was captured and executed shortly afterwards.⁷¹

Conclusion

This coherent pattern of despoliation, ranging from administrative confiscations, through despoliation disguised by high ceremony, to

⁶⁹ On the reconstruction of the Temple of Olympian Zeus, see Polyb. 26.1.11; Livy 41.20.8–9; Vitruv. 7.*Praef.* 15, 17; Strabo 9.1.17; Granius Licinianus 28.10–13 [Critini]. See also L. Bevier, 'The Olympieion at Athens', *Papers of the American School of Classical Studies* (1885), 198–201; H. Thompson, 'Athens and the Hellenistic Princes', *PAPhS* 97 (1953), 256–7; H. Abramson, 'The Olympieion in Athens and its Connections with Rome', *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* 7 (1974), 2–4; A. Corso, 'Vitruvius and His Monuments', *ABSA* 92 (1997), 380–3.

⁷⁰ Justin, *Epit.* 39.2. For the critical link between money and legitimacy for the late Seleucids, see P. Mittag, 'Blood and Money: On the Loyalty of the Seleucid Army', *Electrum* (2008), 51–5. For the short reign of Alexander II Zabinas, see Will (n. 60), 435–6; K. Ehling, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der späten Seleukiden (164–63 v. Chr.)* (Stuttgart, 2008), 212–14.

⁷¹ Euseb. *Chron.* 1.257 reports that Alexander poisoned himself instead. It should be noted that two Christian sources (Arn. *Adv. nat.* 6.21 and Clem. Al. *Protr.* 5.53) attribute the looting of a gold statue of Zeus to Antiochus Cyzicenus. It is quite likely that they are in fact confusing Cyzicenus with Zabinas, probably misreading Diodorus or Trogus, rather than describing an additional incident.

outright sack and pillage, is distinctively Seleucid. Alexander the Great had demonstrated great savvy and restraint in interfacing with native cults. Upon entering Babylon, according to Arrian (3.16.4–5):

Alexander ordered the Babylonians to rebuild all the temples Xerxes had destroyed, including the Temple of Bel. ... In Babylon, Alexander also met with the Chaldeans and did everything they advised with regard to the Babylonian temples. He even sacrificed to Bel in the manner they prescribed.⁷²

Alexander made it a point to protect temples and shrines, even executing subordinates accused of despoiling them.⁷³ Certainly he did not need native temples for their money, having appropriated over 180,000 talents from Persian treasuries.⁷⁴ His assault on the Temple of Aina/Asclepius at Ecbatana, if it occurred at all, would be unique. If, as Arrian relates, the act was designed to punish the god Asclepius for the death of his beloved Hephaestion, then it may reflect Alexander's own declining mental state more than anything else.⁷⁵

The Ptolemaic dynasty of Egypt likewise sought to co-opt the native priestly elite. When the sacred Apis bull died shortly into the fledgling reign of Ptolemy I, the king paid 50 talents of silver for a lavish funeral.⁷⁶ This put Ptolemy in stark contrast with his Achaemenid predecessors, as Artaxerxes III had supposedly cooked and eaten the Apis several decades previously.⁷⁷ While the Ptolemies took care to exert close control over the

⁷² Translation by Pamela Mensch, in J. Romm (ed.), *The Landmark Arrian. The Campaigns of Alexander* (New York, 2010). Also note Alexander's sacrifice at the temple of Heracles Melquart after capturing Tyre (Arr. 2.24.5–6), his supposed prostration before the high priest in Jerusalem (Joseph, *AJ* 11.331), and his sacrifice to the Apis Bull (Arr. *Anab.* 3.1.4). Polybius (5.10.8) comments on Alexander's exemplary behaviour towards Persians temples.

⁷³ On execution of temple despoilers, see Arr. *Anab.* 6.27.4 and 7.4.2. A protective order on papyrus, probably issued by the Peukestes installed by Alexander as a lieutenant in Egypt, orders troops away from priestly property: see E. Turner, 'A "Commander-in-Chief's" Order from Saqqāra', *JEA* 60 (1974), 239–42.

⁷⁴ For this figure for Alexander's bullion stockpile at Ecbatana, see Diod. Sic. 17.80.3; Strabo 15.3.9.

⁷⁵ See n. 31 above.

⁷⁶ Diod. Sic. 1.84.8. See also D. Crawford, 'Ptolemy, Ptah and Apis in Hellenistic Memphis', *Studia Hellenistica* (1980), 15–18; J. Stambaugh, *Sarapis Under the Early Ptolemies* (Leiden, 1972), 65–7; D. Thompson, 'The High Priests of Memphis under Ptolemaic Rule', in M. Beard and J. North (eds.), *Pagan Priests. Religion and Power in the Ancient World* (Ithaca, NY, 1990), 107–16.

⁷⁷ On this claim see Plutarch *De Is. et Os.* 11, 31 (= Deinon of Herakleia *FGrH* 690 F 21); Ael. *NA* 10.28; Suda s.v. *Apides* (A 3201). Sulpicius, *Chronicles* 2.14, acquits the Persian king of killing the bull, but records that he publically ridiculed it. The story echoes that of Cambyses killing the Apis in Hdt. 3.27–9, whose veracity remains in dispute; see L. Depuydt, 'Murder in Memphis: The Story of Cambyses's Mortal Wounding of the Apis Bull (ca. 532 B.C.E.)', *JNES* 54 (1995), 119–26. Even if the story of Artaxerxes and the Apis is apocryphal, it may nonetheless represent Ptolemaic propaganda stressing the benevolence of the new order compared to the old.

secular assets of Egyptian temples, they never engaged in outright despoliation.⁷⁸ It is notable that when the Jewish author of 3 Maccabees tried to imagine a Ptolemaic ruler behaving badly, his misconduct was to try to enter the Holy of Holies, not to rob treasures from the temple.⁷⁹ This may have been due to the greater stability of Ptolemaic revenues, reported as upward of 14,800 talents of silver per year.⁸⁰ Despite a host of other dynastic troubles, the Ptolemies never experienced fiscal constraints that would necessitate risky acts of temple despoliation.

Other Hellenistic kings did from time to time despoil and even destroy temples, invariably in the context of external warfare. Pyrrhus removed large sums from the Temple of Persephone at Locri Epizephyrii in the 270s BC in order to finance his campaigns, although he reportedly returned the treasures in a fit of belated scruple after his fleet was shipwrecked.⁸¹ Pyrrhus also received an immense 'contribution' (*sunteleia*) of over 11,000 talents from the Temple of Zeus in Locri.⁸² Philip V ransacked and vandalized Aetolian temples at Thermus in 218 BC, supposedly in retaliation for similar Aetolian actions at Dium and Dodona.⁸³ However,

⁷⁸ For Ptolemaic economic relationships with temples, see J. Manning, *Land and Power in Ptolemaic Egypt* (Cambridge, 2003), 328–41.

⁷⁹ 3 Maccabees 1–2.

⁸⁰ On Ptolemaic revenues, see Jerome *Commentary on Daniel*, 15.1, for the reign of Ptolemy II; Cicero put the revenues of the later Ptolemies at 300 million sesterces, or 12,500 talents (Strabo 17.1.13). See also J. Manning, *The Last Pharaohs* (Princeton, NJ, 2010), 126–7. The extent of Seleucid revenues is unknown. Apheris (n. 15), 259, estimates that revenues for the empire at its peak of territorial extent (Seleucus I in the 280s; Antiochus III in the 190s) was between 15,000 and 20,000 talents, while in moments of territorial contraction (e.g. the reign of Antiochus IV) he postulates revenues between 11,000 and 15,000 talents. Mittag (n. 52), 86, posits Seleucid revenues at 15,000 talents in the reign of Antiochus IV, largely following Apheris' speculative model. G. Le Rider and F. de Callatay, *Les Séleucides et les Ptolémées* (Paris, 2006), 169–75, suggest revenues of 10,000–15,000 talents based on spotty literary evidence and a hasty estimate of military expenditures. K. Bringmann, 'Königliche Ökonomie im Spiegel des Euergetismus der Seleukiden', *Klio* 87 (2005), 110–15 argues, based on Seleucid benefactions, that the kings were routinely cash poor, having collected much of their revenue in kind, which would make Roman indemnity payments all the more onerous, and temple treasures all the more tempting. On the problem of tax collection in kind or in cash, see also F. De Callatay, 'La richesse des rois séleucides et le problème de la taxation en nature', *Topoi* S6 (2004), 29–43. I suspect that Apheris' and Mittag's estimates are too high, but it should also be noted that the vast geographic extent of the Seleucid Empire required higher expenditures, in particular on standing military forces, so that Seleucid expenditures were probably much higher than those of the Ptolemies, even if their revenues were similar.

⁸¹ Dion. Hal. 20.9–10; cf. Val. Max. 1 ext. 1. For an overview of the looting of sanctuaries in the context of Greek warfare, see K. Pritchett, *The Greek State at War, Vol. 5* (Berkeley, CA, 1991), 160–8.

⁸² A. De Franciscis, *Stato e società in Locri epizefiri* (Naples, 1972), 74–84. The king to whom the money was given is never explicitly identified, but was almost certainly Pyrrhus. There is no direct evidence that this was given under coercive auspices, but the sum is so enormous that it is difficult to believe it was given as a strictly voluntary gift.

⁸³ Polyb. 5.9.2–5.

even as Polybius describes this as an act of extreme iniquity, he notes that Philip was careful to spare statues of the god and offerings inscribed with the names of gods, primarily removing arms and armour from the temples in order to equip his troops and deny their use to his enemies.⁸⁴ Philip displayed fewer scruples when he later sacked a number of Attalid temples during his campaign in Asia Minor in 201 BC.⁸⁵ Prusias II of Bithynia also sacked a series of temples in Attalid territory and burned the Temple of Apollo in Temnus to the ground, acts which Polybius attributes to sheer madness.⁸⁶ Ultimately, while temple despoliation in the broader Hellenistic world was not an unknown practice, no dynasty engaged in the practice as extensively or consistently as the Seleucids.

P. F. Mittag attempts to defend Seleucid rulers, claiming that the incidents of despoliation represented a profound cultural misunderstanding.⁸⁷ After all, Greeks did not consider it wrong to 'borrow' treasures from their own temples, especially to fund emergency military operations.⁸⁸ Such actions, however, were sacrilege to the Seleucids' native subjects, who saw the treasures as the divine property of the god. Seleucid kings, however, routinely demonstrated an awareness of native religious principles, for example Antiochus III's (partial) understanding of Jewish dietary taboos.⁸⁹ It is difficult to believe that these monarchs, who knew enough to bow before Nabu, bake bricks for Esagil, and enforce kosher regulations in Jerusalem, would be blithely unaware of the political hazards of removing Temple treasures. It is more likely that they knew the risks but took them anyway.

All Hellenistic rulers were affected by what Margaret Levi terms a 'discount rate', economics jargon to describe the trade-off between short-term and long-term pay-offs. When Seleucid rulers felt secure in their

⁸⁴ On weapons dedicated to temples as military resources, see Livy 23.14.4.

⁸⁵ Polyb. 16.1.5.

⁸⁶ Polyb. 32.15.7. See also Diod. Sic. 31.35. Prusias seems to have been motivated by something other than impecuniosity, given that he primarily looted objects of art. See Walbank (n. 25), ii.499, for the similarities between Polybius descriptions of Prusias' and Philip V's actions. A. Chaniotis, *War in the Hellenistic World* (Malden, MA, 2005), 154–7, discusses the phenomenon of temple despoliation in the wider Hellenistic world. For the temple plundering in the Roman Republic, see J. Wells, 'Impiety in the Middle Republic: The Roman Response to Temple Plundering in Southern Italy', *CJ* 105 (2010), 229–43; here the competitive dynamic of the Roman elite provided a modicum of protection to southern Italian temples.

⁸⁷ Mittag (n. 52), 309–10.

⁸⁸ Most notably Thuc. 2.13.4–5, where Pericles lists the sacred treasures of Athena and other gods as liquid assets that can be 'borrowed' for the war. For emergency war 'loans' from Greek temples, sometimes paid back and sometimes not, see Pritchett (n. 81), 166–7.

⁸⁹ On Antiochus III and keeping kosher, see Joseph, *J* 12.146. The Great King was aware that certain animals were off limits, but curiously omitted pigs from his list!

rule and in the stability of the dynasty, their discount rate was 'low', so that they were inclined to limit short-term exploitation in order to ensure long-term stability. However, during periods of crisis, when the position of the dynasty faced immediate threat, the discount rate was 'high', so that Seleucid kings were more likely to try to maximize short-term revenues through intensive exploitation. In such instances, they judged ready cash more important than long-term goodwill.

The frequency with which the Seleucids resorted to the short-term benefits of temple pillaging is notable. The concentration of despoliation incidents following the Peace of Apamea is in part a quirk of our surviving sources (in particular Polybius and Maccabees).⁹⁰ The dynasty was under severe strain, however, following significant territorial loss in Asia Minor and over a decade of hefty indemnity payments.⁹¹ Yet, in many ways, the history of the Seleucid Empire is one of near-continuous crisis, whether in the form of external invasion (Galatians, Parthians, Ptolemy III, and the Romans), internal revolt (Antiochus Hierax, Molon, Achaeus) breakaway kingdoms (the Attalids, Bactrians and Judeans), or, following the death of Antiochus IV, frequent civil war.⁹² The centrifugal nature of the empire meant that hard-pressed Seleucid kings were frequently forced to place short-term exploitation ahead of longer-term accommodation, making temple despoliation a common extractive strategy.

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⁹⁰ We have no incidents of temple despoliation from the crisis years of the 240s–220s, which saw the disastrous Third Syrian War, the War Between the Brothers, and the failed reign of Seleucus III. The sources for this period, however, are extremely poor. It is only when Polybius begins his discussion about the reign of Antiochus III that we have a high-quality narrative of dynastic events. Polybius was well positioned to report on Seleucid history, given that he had a fellow hostage and Seleucid prince, the future Demetrius I, as an informant.

⁹¹ A. Houghton, 'Seleucid Coinage and Monetary Policy of the Second Century BC', *Topoi* 56 (2004), 59, notes that the reign of Antiochus IV also saw a modest reduction of the weight standard for the tetradrachma, from 17 grams to 16.5 grams, a move that he associates with the fiscal stress of the Roman indemnity and other dynastic troubles.

⁹² E. Bevan, *House of Seleucus* (London, 1902), remains the most complete blow-by-blow narrative of Seleucid history in English, although now quite out of date. The myriad of threats that the Seleucid dynasty faced from its founding is discussed in J. Wolski, *The Seleucids. The Decline and Fall of Their Empire* (Krakow, 1999). On the breakaway kingdoms of Parthia and Bactria, see J. Lerner, *The Impact of Seleucid Decline on the Eastern Iranian Plateau* (Stuttgart, 1999). J. Grainger, *The Syrian Wars* (Leiden, 2010), chronicles the ups and downs of Seleucid military confrontation with Egypt, while his *The Roman War of Antiochos III* (Leiden, 2002) deals with this substantial dynastic setback. For the Judean revolt, see B. Bar-Kochva, *Judas Maccabaeus. The Jewish Struggle against the Seleucids* (Cambridge, 1989).