

OLIVER D. HOOVER

A DEDICATION TO APHRODITE EPEKOOS FOR DEMETRIUS I SOTER AND HIS
FAMILY

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AND HIS FAMILY¹

This inscribed marble plaque is said to have been brought to France from Syria at the beginning of the 20th century. In the early 1990s the French collection to which it belonged was sold and the piece came to the United States where it currently remains as part of a private collection. The stone measures 25.5 cm wide, 24.7 cm high and 2.6 cm thick. There is a trace of a raised molding 0.7cm wide on the upper left corner of the stone. The lower left and upper right corners are broken and missing. The stone appears to be a cut piece of a marble stele reused for this inscription.

The script is appropriate to the second century BC (although the form of the letter Π appears more frequently in the third century) and the letters range in height from 20 to 10 mm. A space of 15-17 mm separates each line.

Ἵπὲρ βασιλέως Δημητρίου
καὶ βασιλίτσης Λαοδίκης
καὶ τῶν τέκνων
4 ἼΑφροδίτῃ ἐπηκόῳ
τὸν βωμὸν
ἼΑπολλοφάνης ἼΑπολλοφάνου
ὁ ἱερεὺς.

For the well-being of King Demetrius and Queen Laodice and their children, Apollophanes the son of Apollophanes, the priest [dedicated] the altar to Aphrodite Epekoos.

2: The letter alpha of Λαοδίκης is incomplete. Instead of the broken bar alpha used throughout the inscription, here the stone mason has carved Λ with a drill hole in the middle to mark the spot where the two parts of the broken bar should have met. This error may have occurred because the veins of the marble look somewhat like the broken bar at this point.

3: Iota *adscriptum* has been omitted at the end of ἼΑφροδίτῃ although it is included in the goddess' cult title, ἐπηκόῳ. This sort of inconsistency is not uncommonly found in Hellenistic inscriptions.

Demetrius I Soter and Laodice

The naming of the queen as Laodice and the mention of children make it certain that the Seleucid king must be none other than Demetrius I Soter (162-150 BC). The other two Seleucids bearing the name Demetrius either died childless, as in the case of Demetrius III Philopator (96-87 BC), or are known not to have had wives named Laodice. Demetrius II Nicator (145-138 and c.130-125 BC), was married successively to Cleopatra Thea and Rhodogune of Parthia.²

Since the end of the nineteenth century scholars have suspected that Demetrius I's queen was a woman bearing the Seleucid dynastic name, Laodice, despite the complete absence of evidence explicitly naming his wife.³ It was adduced that because a royal woman named Laodice was killed along with the eldest son of Demetrius when Alexander I Balas came to power (Livy, *Epit.* 50), she was probably either the queen mother or more likely, the queen herself.⁴ As reasonable as this theory was, it could not be proven to be fact until the discovery of this new inscription.

¹ I would like to thank Angelos Chaniotis and Georges Le Rider for their commentary on an earlier draft and Carmen Arnold-Biucchi for her help in accessing the coins belonging to the American Numismatic Society. Special appreciation is due to Arthur Houghton without whose assistance and encouragement this article would not have been possible. The inscription has been photographed by Nita Roberts and the coins by the author. All conclusions are the sole responsibility of the author.

² Cleopatra Thea: *I Macc.* 10.51-58; Diod. Sic. 32.27.9c; Joseph. *AJ* 13.80-83. Rhodogune: Just. 38.9; App. *Syr.* 67.

³ P. Gardner, *BMC Seleucids* (London 1897) 50; E. Babelon, *Les Rois de Syrie* (Paris 1890), cxxii.

⁴ Queen mother: E. Bevan, *The House of Seleucus II* (London 1902) 214; queen: E. Rogers, *NC IV* 12 (1912) 250; G. F. Hill, *NC V* 2 (1922) 172; G. K. Jenkins, *NC VI* 11 (1951) 2-3.

Laodice was a common female name among the Seleucids,⁵ and Demetrius I himself was known to have had a sister bearing this name. She had been married to Perseus of Macedon sometime between 179 and 177 BC,⁶ but following the military disaster of Pydna it is thought that she was sent home to Syria and the care of her brother.⁷ Because of the dynastic quality of the name and the existence of this sister it has been suggested that Demetrius I took her as his own wife.⁸ There is a good deal of circumstantial evidence that would support this theory. The literary sources suggest that Demetrius I had a great deal of difficulty in contracting marriage alliances with his fellow kings and dynasts. Because of his questionable position *vis-a-vis* Rome, Demetrius I could not even marry Laodice off to Ariarathes V, his Cappadocian cousin and a man who probably sympathized with his cause.⁹

In 161/0 BC Ariarathes turned down the offer of Laodice's hand for at least two very good reasons. Such a marriage would have been a diplomatic disaster from the perspective of late Hellenistic international politics. Demetrius I, the king offering the bride, had escaped from captivity in Rome and seized his kingdom by force, all without the approval of the Senate. He would not be recognized as king by the Romans until late in 160 BC. This was perhaps reason enough to turn down the marriage proposal, but the situation was made even worse by the fact that Laodice, the prospective bride, had formerly been the wife of Perseus, the latest Macedonian king to be crushed by the force of Roman arms. Although Ariarathes was a powerful king in his own right, he knew very well not to get himself entangled in problems with the Senate through such a union as this. Both Demetrius and his sister were dangerous pariahs to be avoided if at all possible.

There can be little doubt that Laodice was not welcome as a bride in the courts of the eastern kings and Demetrius I cannot have fared much better as a prospective groom. The two of them were tainted with the same anti-Roman stain at a time when all the world was enamored with the name of *philoromaios*. Bearing this in mind, it might not be too surprising for Laodice to marry her brother. She was in need of a husband who could be supplied from no other source, and he was similarly wanting for a queen to provide heirs and an image of stability for the troubled beginning of his reign. Besides, by the second century BC sibling marriage had ceased to be taboo (assuming that it was ever a serious issue) in the Seleucid house. Seleucus IV Philopator (187-175 BC) and Laodice IV, the parents of Demetrius I and Laodice, are thought to have had been brother and sister as well as husband and wife.¹⁰

In 161/0 BC Demetrius I began to issue silver and bronze coinages bearing an obverse type depicting the jugate busts of the king and a royal woman wearing a *stephane*.¹¹ The latter can hardly be any one other than the new wife of Demetrius I. The date of, and the political circumstances surrounding, the production of these coins both help to support the possibility that his wife, Laodice, might also have been his sister. If we consider that the obverse design was probably developed to celebrate the wedding of Laodice and Demetrius I, the union must have taken place late in 161, close on the heels of the rebuff of Ariarathes V. The literary sources, deficient as they are, give no hint that Demetrius I had any marriage prospects at this time, making it tempting to think that he may in part have married his sister to

⁵ Eighteen Seleucid queens and female relatives are listed in J. Grainger, *A Seleucid Prosopography and Gazetteer* (Louvain 1998) 39-43.

⁶ Polyb. 25.4.8-10, 26.7; Livy 42.12.3-4; App. *Mithr.* 2; 1 *Macc.* 11.2.

⁷ Stähelin, *RE* 12.1, s.v. Laodike (20), 707-708. J. M. Helliesen, *CIJ* 75 (1979/80) 297-298 denies that she returned to Syria because the sources are silent about the details. They are equally silent about the fate that he assumes her to have suffered at the hands of the Romans.

⁸ A. Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire des Séleucides* I (Paris 1913) 337; E. Bickerman, *Institutions des Séleucides* (Paris 1938) 25 n. 1; E. Will, *Histoire politique du monde hellénistique* II (Nancy 1967) 312; G. Le Rider, *BCH* 110 (1986) 415.

⁹ The bad blood between Ariarathes V and Lysias may have enhanced Demetrius' position with his cousin at this time: E. R. Bevan, *The House of Seleucus* II (1902) 195.

¹⁰ Le Rider (n. 8), 413-414; Grainger (n. 5), 48 s.v. Laodike (8), 50 s.vv. and (15). However, the theory that she married three of her brothers in succession (*pace* F. Cumont, *CRAI* (1931) 284-285) should probably not be taken very seriously: O. Mørkholm, *Antiochus IV of Syria* (Gyldendal 1966) 49 and n. 40; Le Rider, 414 and n. 30.

¹¹ A. Houghton, *Coins of the Seleucid Empire from the Collection of Arthur Houghton*. (New York 1983) nos. 991-995.

salvage some honor from the debacle with his cousin. Demetrius' later attempts to destroy the power of Ariarathes in Cappadocia suggest that he had taken the insult to his sister and himself very seriously.¹²

A marriage to a sister, and particularly to one who had formerly been married to the last scion of the Macedonian royal house may have made good political sense to Demetrius in 161/0, once he had crushed the revolt of Timarchus. Following the period of unrest in the eastern regions of the Seleucid empire occasioned by the actions of the rogue satrap of Media, it would have been in the best interest of Demetrius to show to his subjects that he was now firmly in control and that he had restored stability to the land. The wedding of Demetrius and the prospect of heirs would have been a sign of renewed order and seems to have been recognized as such by his regime. It is no accident that many of the tetradrachms issued by Timarchus were overstruck with types depicting the jugate busts of Demetrius and his wife, a clear symbol of triumphing Seleucid stability over the chaos of the usurper. The image of the king and queen was also used on official seals,¹³ further underscoring the idea of the marriage as a symbol of order and legitimacy. By marrying his sister, Demetrius I would have increased the image of stability since such a queen would not have loyalties to other royal houses which might lead to difficulties. Laodice may also have been a good choice for a queen in the aftermath of Timarchus' revolt because her mother seems to have been popular in the eastern satrapies.¹⁴ With two children of the beloved Laodice IV ruling the empire some of the dissident elements that had come to the fore under the administration of Lysias might have been conciliated with the new regime.

It is even possible that Laodice's link to the Antigonid royal family of Macedonia may have been of political value to Demetrius I. Following the defeat of Perseus at Pydna in 168 BC and the total collapse of Antigonid power there seems to have been strong feelings of concern and sympathy among the 'Macedonian' subjects of the Seleucid empire. The resentment at the Roman treatment of the Antigonid house began to appear under Lysias but came to a head during the rule of Demetrius I Soter. By the end of the 150s pro-Macedonian feeling had reached such a fever pitch that the populace of Antioch-on-the-Orontes held public demonstrations to compel Demetrius to aid Andriscus, the pseudo-Philip, in his bid to reclaim Macedonia from the Romans (Diod. 31.40a; Livy, *Epit.* 48-49; Zonaras 9.28). Ultimately, the king was unmoved by the rioting and handed Andriscus over to the Roman authorities in 151/0 BC. Nevertheless, the episode shows the kind of support that could be garnered in Syria by claims of an Antigonid connection. One suspects that Demetrius I, despite his later reputation as a loner and alcoholic, would not have been insensitive to the benefits to be gained by appealing to public opinion early in his reign. It is hard to think of a stronger appeal to the pro-Macedonian sentiments of his subjects than by marrying the ex-wife of Perseus. Such playing on public opinion may also lie behind the naming of the first child of Demetrius I and Laodice. In defiance of Seleucid custom, their eldest son was not named Seleucus or Antiochus, but Antigonus, after the founder of the recently defunct Antigonid kingdom (Livy *Epit.* 50).

The Children of Demetrius I Soter and Laodice

This Antigonus must be one of the children (τέκνων) mentioned in the inscription, but it is unclear how many of his siblings are referred to here. Demetrius I had two other sons who, unlike Antigonus, survived to become kings in their own right, the future Demetrius II Nicator (145-138 and c.130-125 BC) and Antiochus VII Sidetes (139-129 BC). If Demetrius I married Laodice in 161/0 BC, as

¹² Demetrius I went to great lengths to ruin his cousin by leading a military assault on Cappadocia and by supporting the usurper, Orophernes (App. *Syr.* 87). Personal vendetta seems to be the underlying cause of this behavior since the Ariarathid house of Cappadocia had been closely allied with the Seleucids since the end of the third century BC and does not seem to have posed a threat to Demetrius' rule in Syria and the east.

¹³ R. Fleischer, *Studien zur seleudischen Kunst I, Herrscherbildnisse* (Mainz 1989) 58.

¹⁴ Laodice IV is honored with a priesthood in a decree of Seleucia-on-the-Eulaeus (Susa) dated to 177/6 BC. Her daughter, Laodice V, also received a cult in this city, apparently after her marriage to Perseus: F. Cumont, *Mémoires de la Mission archéologique de Perse* 20 (1928) 81-84, no. 3; C. B. Welles, *Royal Correspondence in the Hellenistic Period* (London 1934) 159-160.

suggested above, then it seems likely that Antigonus was not born until 160 at the earliest, and Demetrius II not before 159. This would mean that Demetrius II could not have been older than fourteen years old when he became king for the first time, an age that accords well with the extremely youthful portraits on his early coins. Antiochus, the youngest of the brothers must have been born still later. In short, because of the mention of children in line 3, the inscription cannot have been carved before 159 BC.

Apollophanes the son of Apollophanes

It is difficult to identify the Apollophanes of the inscription much further than to note that he was the son of a man bearing the same name. Apollophanes was a relatively common name in the Hellenistic east, and at least fourteen men bearing this name are known to have been subjects of the Seleucid Empire between the third and first centuries BC (Grainger [n. 5] 267-268). Many of these individuals resided in Asia Minor, but four of them lived or spent time in Syria where our inscription was discovered. In the third century both Apollophanes the Stoic philosopher and Apollophanes the dream interpreter resided at Antioch-on-the-Orontes (Athen. 281d; Bevan [n. 4], I 225). Their contemporary was the Apollophanes of Seleucia-in-Pieria who rose to fame as the royal physician of Antiochus III (Polyb. 5.56). In 69 BC Apollophanes the son of Bion, another Antiochene, is mentioned in an Egyptian decree of asylum for Euhemeria in the Fayyûm,¹⁵ and around the same time an Apollophanes of Sidon made a dedication in Syrian Hammara (*SEG* XXXVII, 1446). Although it is not possible to directly link the Apollophanes of our inscription to any of these individuals, it seems likely that he lived in the same regions of Syria.

Besides his name, all that we know about Apollophanes the son of Apollophanes is that he was a priest, probably of the same goddess to whom he erected the altar. Because the dedicatory inscription that was attached to his altar was carved into a small piece of marble, apparently reused from a cut down stele, it is likely that Apollophanes was not an especially important or wealthy priest in the Seleucid realm. Instead, he was probably in charge of the cult observances for the local Aphrodite at a modest shrine.

Aphrodite Epekoos

Although the epithet, ἐπηκόος, is frequently used to describe Aphrodite,¹⁶ it does little to help identify exactly which avatar of Aphrodite is intended. Almost any deity can be referred to as ἐπηκόος “the one who listens”,¹⁷ and especially those worshiped in Syria, Asia Minor and Thrace. This could mean that in general she listens to the prayers of her worshipers or that she paid particular attention to a prayer or vow of Apollophanes in return for which he erected the altar. The latter possibility is most tempting because the altar itself must have been small and intended for an intimate group of worshipers rather than for grand public religious observances.

Because of the rampant religious syncretism of the late Hellenistic age it is possible that Apollophanes' Aphrodite should not be understood as a version of the Greek goddess of love at all, but rather as a local Semitic goddess who has received a Greek name. If she is indeed a native deity in Hellenic

¹⁵ E. Bernard, *Receuil des Inscriptions Grécques de Fayoum II, Le 'Méris' de Themistios* (Cairo 1981), 135.

¹⁶ Laumonier, *Les cultes indigenes de la Carie*, 185, n. 5.

¹⁷ The title is attested for Aphrodite, Tyche, Artemis, Achilles, Isis, Apollo, Angdeisis, Serapis, Asclepius, Telesphorus, Hygeia, Leukothea, Salenus, the Theoi Enthemelioi, Meter Phileis, Heracles, Zeus Olympius, Zeus-Hadad, Zeus Okkonenos, Zeus Hypsistos and the unnamed god of Soumna (?). It may also have been used with reference to the Jewish God (*SEG* XXXVII, 851). In addition, inscriptions refer to Theoi and Theai Epekooi as well as to Hosios Epekoos, whose true identities are uncertain.

guise the goddess is most likely some form of Atargatis, Astarte or Ba'alat.¹⁸ All of these goddesses were recognized and patronized by the Seleucid kings.¹⁹

New York

Oliver D. Hoover

¹⁸ All of these Syro-Phoenician goddesses are known to have been syncretized with Aphrodite, and particularly with Aphrodite Ourania: V. Pirenne-Delforge, *L'Aphrodite grecque* (Paris 1994) 60-61, 120-121, 249, 324.

¹⁹ Lucian, *De Syria Dea* 17-20. Ba'alat/Astarte and her symbols appear on the quasi-municipal bronze coins of Byblos and Ake-Ptolemais issued under Antiochus IV Epiphanes and Cleopatra Thea and Antiochus VIII Grypus: Houghton and Spaer (1999), nos. 1071, 1074-1075; Houghton (1983), nos. 697-698, 700, 703.