

Welcoming the New Gods

Interactions between Ruler and Traditional Cults within Ritual Practice¹

Abstract:

Among the finds uncovered during recent excavations in the small city of Aigai in Aeolis, an opisthographic stele features, on its front side, a decree introducing civic and cultic honours for Seleukos I and Antiochos I. Based on the text of this decree and a few similar inscriptions, this paper discusses how Hellenistic *poleis* associated rulers with traditional cults as a mechanism to integrate the new gods into their religious landscape. It further appears that such associations were also a means for these *poleis* to articulate the rhetoric surrounding the notion of *Soteria* against the ideological backdrop of the liberation of cities from tyranny in the context of ruler cults.

Keywords: Ruler cults; religious dynamics; Hellenistic period; *Soteria*; Seleucids; Aigai (Aeolis).

1. Cultic honours for Seleukos I and Antiochos I at Aigai

When Greek *poleis* instituted new cults for Hellenistic rulers, they had at their disposal a variety of strategies. To integrate the new gods into the religious landscape, they built sanctuaries, temples, altars or statues. To integrate them into the religious calendar, they introduced processions, sacrifices, libations, prayers, and contests². These options were rather limited and did not vary greatly from one *polis* to the other. However, the association of rulers with gods belonging to the civic pantheon was one of the mechanisms that *poleis* could use to give these new cults a truly local flavour.

One fine example of such cult dynamics has recently come from Aigai, a city in Aeolis, whose urban centre is located approximately 35 kilometres south of Pergamon, on the shores of the river Pythikos³. Among the finds that have been uncovered during recent excavations is a particularly remarkable opisthographic stele which features, on its front side, a decree introducing civic and cultic honours for Seleukos I and Antiochos I⁴. Unfortunately, the stone suffered considerable damage due to its secondary use as the threshold of a Byzantine church: the upper part has been recut, resulting in the loss of several lines at the beginning, and a portion of the text in the middle has been erased by being walked upon. This resulted in a few unresolved difficulties in the establishment of the text. The inscription is nevertheless very

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² The interactions between ruler and traditional cults has been approached notably by Chaniotis 2003; Buraselis 2008; 2012.

³ On Archaic and Classical Aigai, see Hansen, Nielsen, 2004, 1038-1039. Remains of public buildings were discovered as early as the 19th century, but systematic excavations only begun in 2004: see Doger et al. 2008, 2010, 2012; Doger, Sezgin 2009.

⁴ The inscription has been published by Malay, Riel 2009. See also the thorough commentary by P. Hamon and M. Sève in *BE* 2010, 522; A. Chaniotis in *SEG* 59, 1406; *EBGR* 2009 [*Kernos* 2012], 98.

informative as regards the history of Aigai in Hellenistic times, as well as the introduction of ruler cults in civic contexts.

The decree has been dated, on historical and palaeographic grounds, to the beginning of the third century BC, and more precisely, to the year 281, when Seleukos I defeated Lysimachos at Kouropedion and thus acquired control over the western part of Asia Minor. The city of Aigai, which had been under the rule of Lysimachos, perceived—or at least promoted—this change of power as a liberation⁵. Consequently, the *polis* issued a decree to honour Seleukos I and his son and co-regent Antiochos as θεοὶ οἱ ἐ[πι]φανέ[ντε]ς, “visible gods” (lines 4-5) and to grant them with the epithet *Soteres*, “Saviours” (lines 12-13 and 17). The subtext of this sentence appears very close to the notion of *isotheoi timai*, an expression attested elsewhere in the context of ruler cults, which defines their honours as equal to those intended for the gods⁶. Thus, the new cult for Seleukos and Antiochos features all the markers of the so-called “traditional” cults, such as the delimitation of a sanctuary, the election of a priest, and the performance of sacrifices, libations, and prayers. The similarity to traditional cults does not end here, but remains apparent in the details of the cult organisation itself.

First of all, the *polis* of Aigai decided to circumscribe a precinct (*peribolos*) and to build a temple (*naos*) near Apollo’s precinct⁷. There, the cult statues (*agalmata*) of both kings were to be dedicated with the inscription in the accusative form, Σέλευκον καὶ Ἀντίοχον⁸, while an altar of the *Soteres* was to be set up facing the temple, with the inscription in the genitive form, Σελεύκου καὶ Ἀντιόχου⁹. A *temenos* was also to be delimited next to the sanctuary, perhaps with the purpose of creating income to finance the cult¹⁰.

In addition, the *polis* planned to sacrifice to the kings on several occasions. First, they ought to lead bulls towards the *Soteres*’ precinct during the Hecatomb and to sacrifice them in the same way as to Apollo¹¹. Similarly, the inscription prescribes that the people of Aigai should sacrifice a bull in the month of *Seleukeion* in the same way as the sacrifice offered to Apollo

⁵ As suggested by the lines 19-20 of the text, which prescribe monthly sacrifices on the day when the city was freed (ἐν ᾗ ἡμέραι ἐλεύθ[ε]ροι ἐγνόμεθα).

⁶ On *isotheoi timai*, see Chaniotis 2003, 433.

⁷ Lines 5-8: να[ό]ν τε οἰκοδομῆσαι ὡς κάλλιστ[ον] πρὸς τῷ[ι] περιβόλῳ τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνος καὶ [τό]πον πε[ρι]βαλέσθαι.

⁸ Lines 8-10: ἀγάλματα ἀναθ[εῖ]ναι δύ[ο] ὡς κάλλιστα, ἐπιγράψαντας Σέ[λ]ευκον καὶ Ἀντίοχον.

⁹ Lines 11-14: ἰδρύσασθαι [δ] καὶ βωμὸν τοῦ ναοῦ κατεναντίον σωτή[ρ]ων ἐπιγεγραμμένον Σελεύκου καὶ Ἀντιόχου.

¹⁰ Lines 14-15: ἀνεῖναι δὲ καὶ τέμενος ὡς κάλλιστ[ον].

¹¹ Lines 15-18: ἀνιέναι δὲ καὶ ταύρους ἐν τῇ ἐκατόμβ[ῃ] εἰς τὸν περιβόλον Σελεύκῳ καὶ Ἀντι[όχῳ] σωτήρσι καὶ θύειν καθάπερ καὶ τῷ [Ἀπό]λλ[ων]ι τὰς λαχούσας τῶν .ΞΙΚΝΙΩΝ. The reading at the end of line 18 is difficult, and the meaning of λαχούσαι, “women who obtained by lot (?)” remains unclear. On this passage, see the remarks by P. Hamon, *BE* 2010, 522 (p. 830).

in the month of *Thaxios*¹². Those sacrifices are the ritual expression of the concept of *isotheoi timai* mentioned above. Additional monthly sacrifices were prescribed on the day when the city regained its freedom¹³. A priest, chosen from among the citizens, was responsible for these sacrifices together with the *timouchoi*, in addition to the preliminary rites (κατάρχεται) to be accomplished on the *Soteres*' altar at every assembly, in the same way as for the other gods¹⁴.

Further cultic honours include the recitation of prayers to the *Soteres* by the *hierokerux* at every public sacrifice¹⁵, and libations poured by magistrates accompanied by the offering of incense, the recitation of prayers, and the singing of a paean by the winner of the musical contest¹⁶. Seleukos and Antiochos were also the object of civic honours: the *polis* created two tribes named *Seleukis* and *Antiochis*, and named a month *Seleukeion*. They furthermore decreed to rebuild two public buildings, the *prytaneion* and the *strategion*, and to rename them after the two kings¹⁷.

As to how the significant expenses incurred by construction works and cult performances of this scale would be covered, the text curiously remains silent, although we cannot exclude the possibility that the funding had been regulated in the lost part of the inscription. It has been suggested that the kings themselves had contributed a sum of money for the purposes of introducing a cult in their honour¹⁸, in which case the “benefactions” twice mentioned in the decree (εὐεργετημάτων, line 4; εὐεργεσία lines 58-59) would have alluded less to the kings' military achievements than to their generosity. Following this line of thought, we may wonder whether the introduction of the cult was the result of a spontaneous gesture from the city of Aigai, or rather encouraged or commissioned by the kings¹⁹. Be that as it may, the citizens would have not lacked autonomy to regulate the details in the organisation of the cult as they saw fit.

Thus far, the example of Aigai does not particularly stand out in comparison with what we already knew about Hellenistic ruler cult. Indeed, insofar as rituals for the kings were modelled

¹² Lines 35-37: θύειν δὲ κα[ὶ τ]αῦρον ἐν τῷ μηνὶ τῷ Σελευκεῶνι καθάπ[ερ καὶ τῷ] Ἀπόλλωνι ἐν τῷ Θαξίῳ.

¹³ Lines 18-20: ἄγ[ειν δὲ] κα[ὶ κα]τὰ μῆνα γ' ἕκαστον δύο θυσία[ς] ἐν ἡμέραι ἐλεύθ[ερ]οι ἐγνόμεθα.

¹⁴ Lines 37-44. On the meaning of *katarchesthai*, see Jim 2011.

¹⁵ Lines 45-47: [—] ὁ ἱεροκῆρυξ ἐμ πάσαις ταῖς θυσίαις ταῖς δημοτελέσι τοῖς σωτήρσι Σελε[ύ]κῳ καὶ Ἀντιόχῳ. Although the verb at the beginning of line 45 is now lost, the sacred herald suggests that the context relates to some kind of prayer or proclamation.

¹⁶ Lines 47-51.

¹⁷ Lines 22-25; 36; 51-54. We have parallels of a tribe named *Seleukis* in the same historical context in Magnesia-on-the-Meander (*I.Magnesia* 5, l. 4) and in Kolophon (*AJPh* 56 [1935], p. 380-381, nr. 6). A month *Seleukeion* is also attested in Ilion (*I.Ilion* 31, line 11).

¹⁸ See M. Sève, *BE* 2010, 522, who also suggests that the purpose of the *temenos* was to cover the cost of the cult in the future.

¹⁹ For another example of the king's financial contribution to honours decreed by a community, see *I.Milet* I 9, 306 concerning the *Panionia* at Miletus. Cf. Horster 2013, 201-202.

after those for the gods, as expressed by the idea of *isotheoi timai*, the case of Aigai recalls in many ways the cases of Ilion, Erythrae, or Teos, to mention just a few Seleucid cases²⁰. Although the cult practice lacked specificity *in abstracto*, the mechanisms put in place by a particular civic community may have differed considerably, inasmuch as they corresponded to a local context that is *specific*. In this respect, the Hellenistic ruler cult should not be viewed as a completely distinct phenomenon from other cults and institutions, as cities strove to integrate these honours into their own local religious landscape—even if for a short time. At Aigai, this integration happened at two different levels: 1. through the installation of the cult within the civic and religious landscape; 2. through association with the gods and goddesses of the local pantheon.

2. The introduction of a new cult within the civic and religious landscape

The decree of Aigai prescribes the building of a sanctuary of Seleukos and Antiochos *Soteres* near Apollo's precinct. Although the god's epithet is never mentioned in the inscription, it is assumed to be the sanctuary of Apollo *Chresterios*, located approximately 3 kilometres east of the urban centre of Aigai, on the shore of the river Pythicos. Architectural remains of a temple have been found there, with an inscription (re)dedicating the temple during the time of Publius Servilius Isauricus, proconsul of Asia in 46 BC²¹. During the third century BC, the sanctuary seems to have been under the influence of the Attalids: two inscriptions declare that Philetairos of Pergamon and Eumenes I dedicated a piece of land to Apollo *Chresterios*²². Although the cult-epithet points towards an oracular function, not much can be drawn from the epigraphic evidence as regards the specifics of this cult. It seems safe to assume, at least, that Apollo *Chresterios* was one of the main gods of the *polis* of Aigai at that time. As a further indication of this assumption, a few issues of the city coinage represent the laureate head of the god on the obverse, with a goat, the symbol of the city, on the reverse²³.

Beyond this extra-urban sanctuary, a fragmentary section of the inscription refers to an installation in the *prytaneion* (renamed *Seleukeion*)—perhaps a statue or an altar—which would have embedded the cult of the kings within the heart of the city as well²⁴. At the very least, a second altar of Seleukos and Antiochos must have been built someplace in the urban

²⁰ Ilion: see below. Erythrai: Habicht 1956, 85-87; Buraselis 2012, 250-251, on the *Dionyseia kai Seleukeia*. Teos: SEG 41, 1003 and Chaniotis 2007.

²¹ Clerc 1886, 291-294; Bohn, Schuchhardt 1889, 46-49; Malay 1999, 21-23.

²² SEG 36, 1110; Malay 1999, 22, nr. 3.

²³ BMC Troas, Aiolis, Lesbos, p. 95-96. Other issues show Athena and Zeus.

²⁴ Line 27: [— καὶ στῆσαι ἐν τῷ πρυτανείῳ [—].

centre, as the priest had to perform preliminary rites there at every assembly²⁵. It would have been highly impractical for the priest to travel all the way to the sanctuary outside the city to perform such frequent rituals. Introducing cultic honours for rulers in the heart of the civic institutions was a powerful way to connect the benevolence of the kings to the fate of the *polis*. At Pergamon, performances to commemorate the victorious return of Attalos III comprised sacrifices on the altar of Hestia *Boulaia* and Zeus *Boulaios*²⁶. A cult of Zeus *Boulaios* and Hestia *Boulaia* is also attested in Aigai and might have been similarly connected with Seleukos and Antiochos²⁷. The *polis* of Teos set up a statue of Antiochos III in the *bouleuterion*, where magistrates sacrificed on the common altar to the king, Mneme, and Charis upon entry into office. The personifications associated with Antiochos emphasized the wish of the *polis* to remember with gratitude the royal benefactions²⁸. Similarly at Iasos, magistrates sacrificed to Antiochos III and to the gods while handing over the keys to the city to their successors²⁹.

Back at Aigai, we observe a mirror effect at work between the main sanctuary dedicated to the kings, located outside the urban centre and close to the sanctuary of one of the main gods of the *polis*, and a cult area connected with the civic centre and institutions. The provisions concerning the publication of the decree correspond to this double articulation of the cult locations: two copies were to be set up, one in the sanctuary of Apollo and the other in the sanctuary of Athena, next to the altar of Zeus *Soter*. The latter was presumably located on the acropolis, in the area where our copy of the inscription has been found³⁰. A similar connection between centre and periphery may also be observed later in the famous decree from Pergamon mentioned above, dated between 138 and 133 BC and regulating honours for Attalos III upon his return from battle³¹. On this occasion, the whole community gathered to greet the victorious king upon his formal entry in the city, a phenomenon known as *apantesis*³². The decree also prescribes cultic honours for the long-term. In the first place, a statue (*agalma*) was to be dedicated in the temple of Asklepios *Soter*, whose sanctuary was located approximately 3 kilometres south of the acropolis of Pergamon. This made the king *synnaos* of the god, i.e. sharing his temple. Furthermore, an equestrian statue (*eikon*) of the king was to be erected in the most visible spot in the agora, next to the altar of Zeus *Soter*, where incense was offered to

²⁵ Lines 42-44: καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις κατάρξετ[αι] ἐπὶ τοῦ βωμοῦ τῶν σωτῆρων καθάπερ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις θεοῖς.

²⁶ OGIS 332, lines 47-49. On this inscription, see Robert 1984, 1985, and more recently Hamon 2004.

²⁷ *Altertum von Aegae*, nr. 34 (1st cent. BC).

²⁸ SEG 41, 1003, II, lines 29-38. Cf. Chaniotis 2007, 162-163.

²⁹ *I.Iasos* 4, lines 68-75.

³⁰ Lines 61-65. On the temple of Athena, see Bohn, Schuchhardt 1889, 35-38.

³¹ OGIS 332.

³² On royal entries, see Perrin-Saminadayar 2009.

the king. In this case, the proximity is not only spatial, but also ritual³³. Additional sacrifices were made on the altar of Hestia *Boulaia* and Zeus *Boulaios*, patrons of the council, so as to further connect the cult of the king with the institutions of the *polis*. Finally, in order to commemorate the arrival of Attalos in the territory of Pergamon, an annual procession departed from the *prytaneion*, i.e. the centre of the *polis*, to reach the extra-urban sanctuary of Asklepios where they performed a sacrifice funded by sacred money.

Despite the later date of the inscription from Pergamon compared with the decree from Aigai, both cases present similarities as regards the organisation of the sacred space. Also conspicuous are the association of the rulers with deities belonging to the local pantheon and the permanence of the notion of *soteria*. Both deserve a closer look.

3. Old gods and new gods in interaction

At Aigai, topographical proximity to the sanctuary of Apollo *Chresterios* is just one of the means used by the *polis* to express an association between divine and royal powers. Another way consisted in modelling the new rituals after those already in place for the god. Sacrifices to Seleukos and Antiochos introduced both at the Hecatomb and in the month of *Seleukeion* were to be performed in the same manner as for Apollo. As pointed out by P. Hamon, the Hecatomb must be a pre-existing festival celebrated in honour of Apollo *Chresterios*³⁴. Presumably some of the sacrificial animals from the procession were simply reoriented towards the precinct of the kings. This would explain why nothing further is specified concerning which sacrifice to Apollo was meant, as opposed to the second regulation of the kind, which refers to a specific sacrifice to Apollo that took place in the month of *Thaxios*. It is also worth noting that the priest of Seleukos and Antiochos had to wear a wreath made of laurel, a plant closely associated with Apollo. This suggests that the priestly outfit took its inspiration from the cult of Apollo as well.

The pattern is not a particularity of Aigai, as modelling new rituals after traditional cult practice is a general feature of ruler cults. At Athens, it was proposed to welcome Demetrios Poliorketes, every time he would come to the city, with the same reception (*xenismos*) as the one organised for Demeter and Dionysos, two deities closely associated with the honouree³⁵.

³³ Lines 9-13: (...) ἐπιθυέτωσαν λιβανωτὸν ἐπὶ τ[ο]ῦ βωμοῦ τοῦ Διὸς τοῦ Σωτῆρος τῷ βασιλεῖ. The fact that the dative is used rather than the formula “ὕπερ + genitive”, suggests that sacrifices were indeed performed to the king and not simply “on behalf of” him, *pace* Robert 1985, 475. On *hyper* and genitive, see lately Jim 2014 and Stefano Caneva in this volume.

³⁴ P. Hamon, *BE* 2010, 522 (p. 830).

³⁵ Plutarch, *Demetrios* 12. On the relations between Demetrios Poliorketes and Athens, see Mikalson 1998, 75-104.

A decree from Teos regulating honours for Antiochos III and Laodike prescribed to the priest of the king to initiate the sacrifice (κατάρχεσθαι) and oversee the libations and other rituals performed during the festival in the same way as did the priest of Poseidon at the *Leukothēa*³⁶. At Aigai, however, sacrifices were not only modelled after, but apparently also integrated into pre-existing festivals. The provisions concerning the sacrifices at the Hecatomb remind us, to a certain extent, of the phenomenon of “appended festivals”, as K. Buraselis phrased them, i.e. festivals dedicated to rulers that were combined with pre-existing festivals to traditional deities and named after both the ruler and the god.³⁷

As regards the significance of this association of the ruler cult with Apollo, two hypotheses can be advanced. The first would rely on the tradition that made Apollo the founder of the Seleucids, although no such reference is made explicit in the text of the decree from Aigai and it is uncertain whether this tradition dates back to Seleukos himself, or appeared later³⁸. Beyond this potential dynastic reference there was certainly another, local one. The cult of Apollo *Chrestērios* was undoubtedly one of the main cults at Aigai, and was therefore particularly appropriate to be associated with the honoured kings of the *polis*. Similarly, in Teos, Antiochos III and Laodike were associated to the cult of Dionysos, patron deity of the city.³⁹

In this respect, the divine associations that were implemented in Ilion are also significant. A decree praises a king Antiochos, son of Seleukos, for having restored the peace in his kingdom (it remains a matter for debate whether the text concerned Antiochos I or III)⁴⁰. As a result, the city decided to increase the prayers and sacrifices that were offered on behalf of the king and his family. Prayers were directed to Athena *Ilios*, Apollo, named ἀρχηγ[ῶν] τοῦ γένους, Zeus, Nike and all the other gods and goddesses. In addition, an equestrian statue of Antiochos was to be set up in the sanctuary of Athena and the king was to be named *Soter* on the inscription. The convocation of this small pantheon is almost self-explanatory: while Athena is intimately connected with the identity of Ilion and its mythical past, Apollo is invoked as patron of the Seleucid dynasty; Zeus and Nike embody the victory of the king and freedom from invaders, also echoed in the epithet of *Soter* attributed to Antiochos. As opposed to the case of Aigai, the king is not the recipient of sacrifices and prayers, but they are performed *on his behalf*, which is expressed by the formula *hyper* with the genitive. The king thus acts as an intermediary between the community and the gods. Favoured by divine

³⁶ SEG 41, 1003, II, lines 13-17. Cf. Chaniotis 2007, 161.

³⁷ Buraselis 2012.

³⁸ On the role of Apollo in the Seleucid dynasty, see Iossif 2011.

³⁹ SEG 41, 1003. On Dionysos as patron deity of Teos, see Cole 1995, 313-316.

⁴⁰ *I.Ilion* 32. On this inscription, see Robert 1966; Piejko 1991; Jones 1993; Ma 1999.

protection, he is able to accomplish good deeds for the city. In reciprocity, the *polis* continuously prays and sacrifices on his behalf, to ensure the continuity of the gods' protection and of the royal benefactions. Yet, Antiochos must have benefited from a cult in Ilion at the time, since a priest of the king is mentioned in the decree⁴¹. This exemplifies particularly well the diversity of mechanisms used by *poleis* to express their relationship to the royal power.

4. *Soteria* as religious rhetoric, from divine to royal cult

The decree of Aigai contains multiple references to the notion of *Soteria*, the most obvious being the cult-epithet *Soter*es that is attributed to both kings⁴². The inscription further specifies that the stele was to be set up in the sanctuary of Athena, next to the altar of Zeus *Soter*. The presence of this god in association with ruler cults has many parallels⁴³, and the cult-epithet in this context evidently relates to the concepts of political safety and freedom from tyranny or barbarian invasions. In this regard Zeus *Soter* appears very close to Zeus *Eleutherios*⁴⁴. Finally, an intriguing section of the text concerns the setting up of a statue (*agalma*) and an altar of *Soteira* in front of the temple of Seleukos and Antiochos⁴⁵. Dedicating a statue of a king in the temple of a god, so that the former would become *synnaos* of the latter, is a common phenomenon that we have already observed in Pergamon, for Attalos and Asklepios⁴⁶. In Teos, too, statues of the royal couple Antiochos III and Laodike were set up in the temple of Dionysos⁴⁷. In Aigai, it is, so to speak, the other way around, as the goddess is settled in the sanctuary of the kings. Although the text does not expand on the details of this cult, the presence of an altar, next to the cult statue, strongly suggests that ritual performances took place.

The cult-epithet *Soter*/*Soteira* became increasingly popular during the Hellenistic period and qualified a great number of gods and goddesses. The reason can undoubtedly be found in its polysemy: the notion of *Soteria* could refer to contexts as diverse as illness, plague, famine, perils of traveling by sea or by road, and dangers provoked by foreign or civil wars. The question at hand is which goddess hides behind this bare epithet in our inscription, and whether

⁴¹ Line 26.

⁴² On the epithet *Soter* attributed to rulers, see Muccioli 2013, 159-178.

⁴³ Thrace (*JOAI* 1926, 151, nr. 87): votive to Zeus *Soter*, Athena *Nikephoros* and Apollo *Pythios* for the king Eumenes, *Soter*, *Evergetis*, and founder of the city, for his brothers and for the queen Stratonike. Telmessos (*Kotsidu* 2000, nr. 290): altar of Zeus *Soter* on the agora on behalf of Ptolemaios, son of Lysimachos. Cyprus (*I.Kition* 2003): votive to Zeus *Soter* and Athena *Nikephoros* on behalf of the king Ptolemy IX *Soter* and his children. See also the mention of a festival *Soteria kai Philetairaia* in Kyme (*I.Kyme* 17). Cf. Buraselis 2012, 252.

⁴⁴ On Zeus *Soter* and Zeus *Eleutherios* in Athens, see Lebreton 2013, 190-237.

⁴⁵ Lines 10-11: καὶ πρὸ τοῦ ναοῦ στήσαι ἄγα[λ]μα καὶ βωμὸν τῆς Σωτείρας.

⁴⁶ *OGIS* 332, lines 7-9. Nock 1930 was the first to tackle the concept of *synnaoi theoi*.

⁴⁷ *SEG* 41, 1003, I, lines 44-52.

we ought to presuppose the presence of a specific goddess at all. The editors suggested the identification of *Soteira* as either Artemis or Athena⁴⁸. Both goddesses are plausible candidates, since they appear alongside Apollo and Zeus on another inscription from Aigai, dated to the reign of Antiochos I, concerning taxes imposed on royal lands⁴⁹. Athena is moreover mentioned in connection with Zeus *Soter* at the end of our decree. The joint cult of Zeus *Soter* and Athena *Soteira* is well known thorough the Greek world and it would not be unusual to find it also in Aigai⁵⁰. Perhaps the goddess was so prominent in the local pantheon that it sufficed to refer to her simply through her cult-epithet, but we should also consider the possibility that *Soteira* acted here independently as some personified form of the concept of *Soteria*⁵¹. A letter addressed by Seleukos I to Miletus dated to 288/7 BC, a few years before Kouropedion, contains a list of offerings dedicated to the *Theoi Soteres* to be set up in the sanctuary of Apollo⁵². The identification of these gods is a matter for debate, but what particularly interests our purpose is the fact that the list records a wine-cooler set reading the inscription “Of *Soteira*.” Did the cult of *Soteira* in Aigai form part of a wider programme of religious propaganda surrounding Seleukos I? In any case, it is clear that the emphasis was placed here on a specific function or power, namely the deity’s ability to save, rather than on an individual goddess.

On a more general level, we observe a strong interaction, in the context of ruler cults, between the epithet *Soter* and the cult of Zeus against an ideological backdrop related to the liberation of cities from tyranny. For instance, Plutarch reports that the citizens of Sicyon were offering an annual sacrifice called “*Soteria*” to Aratos to commemorate the liberation of the city from tyranny. The preliminary rites for this sacrifice were conducted by the priest of Zeus *Soter*⁵³. Similarly, a few years before the battle of Ipsos, in 307 BC, Demetrios Poliorketes defeated Cassander, freed the city of Athens from the tyrant Demetrios of Phaleron, restored the democracy and provided the city with a large quantity of grain. Consequently, Demetrios and his father Antigonos were named *Soteres* and *Euergetai*, “saviours and benefactors.” According to Plutarch and Diodoros, the Athenians passed a decree to institute a number of honours: they set up gold statues of both kings next to Harmodios and Aristogeiton, the tyrannicides, created two tribes named Demetrias and Antigonis, erected an altar with the

⁴⁸ Malay, Riel 2009, 45. P. Hamon seems to prefer Artemis (*BE* 2010, 522, p. 830).

⁴⁹ Malay 1983, 349-353.

⁵⁰ On Athena *Soteira*, see Author 2016.

⁵¹ Other cases of *Soteira* used as a bare epithet are analysed by Jim 2015 (see esp. 66-68 for a discussion on Aigai).

⁵² *RC* 5. I would like to thank Stefano Caneva who kindly pointed out this inscription to me.

⁵³ Plutarch, *Aratos*, 53. Cf. Buraselis 2003, 194.

inscription “of the Saviours”, and instituted a priesthood. In addition, they planned to perform every year a procession, sacrifices, and contests, and ordered that the figures of the kings be woven into the *peplos* of Athena⁵⁴. According to an inscription from the same period, an equestrian statue of Demetrios was to be placed in the agora, next to *Demokratia*, as a means of emphasizing the king’s contribution to the restoration of the once lost democracy⁵⁵. The configuration of these honours presents several common threads with those bestowed upon Seleukos and Antiochos at Aigai. Particularly, the topographical association with *Demokratia* in Athens may be further indication that we should interpret the figure of *Soteira* in Aigai in a more abstract way.

Yet, the ideology based on the notion of *Soteria* is not an exclusive feature of ruler cults. Just three years after the battle of Kouropedion, in 278 BC, the Greeks repelled a Galatian invasion that had threatened the sanctuary of Delphi. This miraculous victory was attributed to the intervention (*epiphaneia*) of the gods. That same year, the city of Cos passed a decree that regulated ritual performances in order to thank Apollo for his epiphany in a time of crisis and for the salvation (*soteria*) of the Greeks⁵⁶. The Coans planned to send an embassy to Delphi to sacrifice an ox with gilded horns to Apollo *Pythios*, and additional sacrifices were to be offered to Apollo *Pythios*, Zeus *Soter* and Nike at home. In this way, they chose to honour the god of Delphi, the god who brought salvation, and the goddess who personified the victory of the Greeks over the barbarians. Similarly, the Delphians instituted the festival of *Soteria* to commemorate the Greek victory, where Apollo *Pythios* was honoured alongside Zeus *Soter*. The rhetoric of the Coan decree shares a few common features with the rhetoric used as grounds for the institution of the cult of the Seleucids in Aigai and of Demetrios in Athens. The rulers are acclaimed as saviours, as visible gods, because they had freed the city from a threat, in this case a tyrant. The epiphany of gods in times of crisis is of course a *topos* that dates back to Homeric epic and became increasingly popular in the epigraphic evidence from the third to the first century BC⁵⁷. Thus, the rhetoric surrounding the notion of *Soteria* employed in ruler cults forms part of a wider trend that will develop even further throughout the Hellenistic period.

⁵⁴ Diodoros, 20, 46, 1-4; Plutarch, *Demetrios*. Cf. Mikalson 1998, 78-83; Buraselis 2008.

⁵⁵ *SEG* 25, 149.

⁵⁶ *IG* XII 4, 68. Lines 16-20: ὅπως οὖν ὁ δᾶμος φανερός ἦι συναδόμενος ἐπὶ ταῖς γεγενημέναις νίκαις τοῖς Ἑλλασσιν καὶ τῷ θεῷ χαριστήρια ἀποδιδούς τὰς τε ἐπιφανείας τὰς γεγενημένας ἔνεκεν ἐν τοῖς περὶ τὸ ἱερὸν κινδύνοις καὶ τὰς τῶν Ἑλλάνων σωτηρίας.

⁵⁷ On this phenomenon, see Author 2013.

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