

1 Syrian King and Syrian Goddess: Hellenistic Influences 2 on the Ideology and Political Organization of the two 3 Great Sicilian Slave Revolts 4

5 *Sicily, the largest island in the Mediterranean and the ancient point of*
6 *contact between Italy, Greece and the Eastern world, witnessed two massive*
7 *slave uprisings in the 2nd century BC. Together with the later revolt of*
8 *Spartacus in Italy in the 1st century BC, the movements of Eunus-Antiochus*
9 *of ca. 140/135-132 BC, and that of Salvius-Tryphon and Athenion of ca.*
10 *104-100 BC form the triad of great slave wars such as were never seen in*
11 *antiquity, before or since. Twice in the same century, during a period of*
12 *several years, former slaves built states of their own, states that controlled*
13 *large portions of the island and exchanged blows with the Roman armies,*
14 *with surprising success. Our main source, Diodorus of Sicily (books 34/5*
15 *and 36, preserved in excerpts and fragments), describes these new political*
16 *structures as recreations of the Hellenistic kingdoms. This tendency is*
17 *especially remarkable in the case of the First Slave War when rebel*
18 *leadership brought about, at least outwardly, a Western replica of the*
19 *Seleucid monarchy of Syria. Historians of the older generation took notice*
20 *of these developments, though attempts at deeper analysis were rare. With*
21 *one significant exception, the newer historiography has either ignored*
22 *Hellenistic connections of the Sicilian slave revolts, or dismissed them as*
23 *marginal. This paper argues that Hellenistic elements in the structure of the*
24 *two ancient slave revolts are both substantial and historically significant. It*
25 *was partly the case of simple ethnocultural affinity (the core of the rebels,*
26 *including most of the leadership came from Syria and Asia Minor), but also*
27 *of great practical necessity that political entities created by the former*
28 *slaves took on the form of the military monarchy of the kind prevalent in the*
29 *Hellenistic East.*

30
31 *Keywords: slave revolts in antiquity, Hellenistic kingship, Sicily, Syria,*
32 *Seleucid Empire, Rome, Antiochus, Tryphon.*
33

34
35 Two great Sicilian slave revolts of the later 2nd century BC stand clearly
36 apart from the earlier examples of armed slave resistance. This is especially
37 true of their massive size (tens of thousands of armed participants) and duration
38 (several years each), but also of their specific organization and institutional
39 development. In the latter aspect they also differ from anything that came *after*
40 them, including the well-known uprising of Spartacus in Italy in 73-71 BC.
41 Temporarily successful in taking possession of the vast sections of the island,
42 the leaders of slave revolts made concentrated effort to establish organized
43 government and other basic structures of state. However, the states they built or
44 attempted to build were by no means original creations, nor were they inspired
45 by local, Graeco-Sicilian or Italian models. Rather, they were recreations of the
46 political systems most of them were familiar with: Hellenistic kingdoms of the
47 East, especially the Seleucid kingdom. These events offer a rare opportunity to

1 study attempts at state-building on the part of a group of people who were, up
2 to that point, completely marginalized and powerless.

5 **Events and Sources**

7 The basic facts of two slave wars are clear enough. They are supplied
8 mainly by Diodorus of Sicily (ca. 90-20 BC), in books 34/35 (the fragments of
9 two are impossible to disentangle) and 36 of *The Library of History*.¹ These are
10 not preserved in their original form, but mainly in excerpts compiled by later
11 Byzantine scholars.² Diodorus himself was relying primarily on the world
12 history of Posidonius of Apamea (ca. 135-51 BC), who was a contemporary of
13 the Second Slave War, though not an eyewitness. The short accounts of the
14 same episodes are preserved in the epitome of Livy, in Florus (himself mostly
15 derivative of Livy) and by Orosius.³ The second uprising is briefly referred to
16 by Appian of Alexandria; a fragment of Cassius Dio mentions an incident from
17 the same war.⁴ Epigraphic texts make but a humble contribution to our
18 understanding of these events,⁵ but there is some important numismatic
19 evidence, to be discussed later in this paper.

20 According to Diodorus, in the aftermath of the Second Punic War, the land
21 and slave owning elite of Sicily enjoyed a period of unprecedented prosperity.
22 The revenues from agriculture boomed, in large part due to the availability of
23 multitudes of foreign slaves. These were mostly younger men, brought from
24 the Greek-speaking lands of the Eastern Mediterranean. They found themselves
25 employed in demanding physical work, but were poorly fed and barely
26 provided with other necessities of life. Unsurprisingly, many took to
27 brigandage. Finally, a full-scale revolt erupted on the estate of one Damophilus,
28 an especially cruel and sadistic master, in central Sicily (ca. 140/135 BC?).⁶ A

¹D. S. 34/35.2; 36.3-10. There were in antiquity historical *opera* dedicated specifically to the servile wars, like the one written by Caecilius of Calacte (Ath. 6.272f; *Suda* s.v. Καικίλιος), but are all lost.

²Jean Christian Dumon, *Servus. Rome et l'esclavage sous la République* (Roma: École française de Rome, 1987), 200-203; Laura Pfuntner, "Reading Diodorus through Photius: The Case of the Sicilian Slave Revolts", *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 55 (2015), 256–272.

³Liv. *Epit.* 56; Flor. 2.7 (19); Oros. 5.6; 5.9. According to Orosius (5.6), there was a violent eruption of Mt. Etna, an omen of the coming conflict. The same cataclysm is recorded by Julius Obsequens (ch. 26), but without mention of the slave war.

⁴App. *Mith.* 59; Cass. Dio 27.4 (93).

⁵There are a number of inscriptions on sling-shots and similar projectiles, used both by rebels and the Roman soldiers fighting in these wars; for example, the one found at Castrogiovanni (*CIL* I² 847), the ancient (H)Enna, bears testimony of the siege that took place there in 133 BC. The so-called *Elogium from Polla* (*CIL* I 551 = *CIL* I² 638), Latin inscription enumerating the deeds of some former *praetor* and *consul* who, among other things, brought back fugitive slaves from Sicily, was for a long time widely believed to refer to the events of the First Sicilian Slave War, but the proposed connection with the slave revolt is certainly wrong, see Gerald P. Verbrugghe, "The *Elogium* from Polla and the First Slave War", *Classical Philology* 68, 1 (1973), 25-35.

⁶There are significant uncertainties concerning the initial date of the uprising, consequently too with its duration. The sources are not uniform on this point, and a number of dates between 143

1 band of 400 slaves gathered in the fields near the town of Enna (Ἐννα), elected
 2 a Syrian named Eunus as their leader, mostly because of his reputation as a
 3 miracle worker and fortune teller. Conspirators entered the town during the
 4 night and exacted their revenge on the free population.⁷

5 The insurrection spread from there, and soon the number of former slaves
 6 under arms rose to tens of thousands. The initial neglect by Roman authorities
 7 meant that for a while the rebels had only the local praetorial levies to contend
 8 with. This enabled them to take control of much of the interior of the island,
 9 including several fortified towns. Other groups of slaves revolted elsewhere on
 10 the island, the one led by Cleon the Cilician being especially strong, but they
 11 chose to combine their efforts with the main movement and subordinated
 12 themselves to Eunus. The slave leader, already proclaimed king in Enna, took
 13 the Seleucid royal name Antiochus and all the trappings of royal position,
 14 including armed guard, for himself and his wife. He organized a court, army
 15 and administration, and gave various recognizably Hellenistic military and
 16 civilian titles to his subordinates. Eventually, the Roman army appeared in full
 17 force, under consul Publius Rupilius, and the rebels' luck ran out (132 BC).
 18 Combination of military setbacks and betrayal finally led to death of Cleon and
 19 the capture of king Eunus-Antiochus, who would die ignominiously in Roman
 20 dungeon.⁸

21 However, slaves from the East would get another chance at freedom and
 22 statehood in Sicily. The Second Sicilian Slave War (104 – 101 BC) was stirred
 23 up by an outside catalyst. Complaints of an allied king, Nycomedes III of
 24 Bithynia, incited Senate to vote a decree that would set free all wrongly
 25 enslaved individuals from allied states. Under the authority of this decree, the
 26 *propraetor* of Sicily, Licinius Nerva, freed some eight hundred slaves. Alarmed
 27 by this activity, the slave owners of Sicily demanded a meeting with
 28 *propraetor*, where they made him desist, either by bribes or threats. But news
 29 of the decree have already spread throughout the island, distorted and
 30 magnified in scope by rumors (what if Senate order manumission of *all*
 31 slaves?). The realization that no further individuals would be set free led to
 32 bitter disappointment that swiftly turned into violence. Rebellion broke out at
 33 several points throughout the island. Governor Nerva managed to defeat one
 34 armed group in the west of the island, but then hesitated to move against the
 35 other, inaction that provided much-needed encouragement to the rebels.⁹

36 As in the previous war, there was a strong central movement, around
 37 which other rebel groups rallied. This time too there was an assembly that
 38 elected a king, a man called Salvius, who also took an ideologically charged
 39 name – Tryphon. The other slave leader, named Athenion (interestingly,
 40 another Cilician, like Cleon) took the royal title as well, but soon subordinated
 41 himself to Salvius-Tryphon. Once again, the new king established a court (and

and 134 BC were suggested. In much of the modern literature the opening year of the conflict is given as 135 BC. This is a strong likelihood, but nothing more.

⁷D. S. 34/35.2.1-14; 34/35.2.24-41.

⁸D. S. 34/35.2.15-23; 34/35.2.42-48.

⁹D. S. 36.3.1-4.2.

1 even built a palace, in a place called Triocala), organized an army and
 2 administration and awarded his followers with ranks and titles. The Roman
 3 reaction was faster this time around, but in spite of some early defeats (one
 4 already in 103 BC), the rebels managed to hold out for several more years. In
 5 the end, Athenion, now the sole leader of the rebels (Tryphon was already
 6 dead, we are not told how or when), fell in combat in the final, desperate battle.
 7 The last remaining group of rebels choose suicide, rather than death in the
 8 arena.¹⁰

9 Although there are a number of problems with these accounts (the
 10 impossible claim that most slaves were shepherds, or that most of the
 11 landowners in the 2nd century BC were Roman knights, who controlled the
 12 courts, the unlikely size of the rebel army etc.),¹¹ their basic points are
 13 corroborated by minor sources and, on the whole, there is little reason to doubt
 14 the main outline of events as provided by Diodorus.¹²

17 An Overview of Historiography

18
 19 Many scholars observed that these short-lived polities, created by former
 20 slaves in Sicily, incorporated at least some elements inspired by Hellenistic
 21 monarchies. Few went beyond basic remarks, but most of them did view this
 22 aspect as an important one. Such was already the opinion of the 19th century
 23 historians. Of the leader of the Second slave war, Isidoro la Lumia said: “I suoi
 24 l’onoravano col nome di Trifone, portato da un recente usurpatore del trono di
 25 Siria, amando anche adesso, in opposizione di Roma, le turbe servilli rivolger
 26 la mente a quelle monarchie dell’Asia.”¹³ Karl Julius Beloch expressed the
 27 view that the “ersten sicilischen Sklavenkrieg” was of the “national-syrischen
 28 Charakter”.¹⁴ Similarly, John Pentland Mahaffy maintained that “the whole

¹⁰D. S. 36.4.3-10.3.

¹¹See G. P. Verbrugge, “Sicily 210-70 BC: Livy, Cicero and Diodorus”, *Transaction and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 103 (1972), 535-559 for analysis of various problems with the Diodorus’ description of socio-economic development of the island in the 2nd century BC.

¹²This is the long-standing and current consensus. A recent outlying opinion is offered by Peter Morton, *Slavery and Rebellion in Second-Century BC Sicily. From Bellum Servile to Sicilia Capta* (Edinburgh: University Press, 2024). His position is one of great skepticism regarding the value of Diodorus and other narrative sources: the claim is that stories told by these authors are almost completely fictional, and that two Sicilian wars of 2nd century BC are not slave revolts at all, but a kind of Sicilian nationalist liberation movements. Regrettably, these and other extraordinary claims are not supported by equally extraordinary evidence: methodology on display leaves much to be desired. Morton held similar views for a long time, cf. for example id., “Eunus: the Cowardly King”, *Classical Quarterly* 63, 1 (2013), 252.

¹³Isidoro la Lumia, *I Romani e le guerre servili in Sicilia* (Roma, Torino, Firenze: Ermanno Loesher, 1874), 124.

¹⁴Karl J. Beloch, *Die Bevölkerung der griechisch-römischen Welt* (Leipzig; Verlag von Duncker & Humboldt, 1886), 245.

1 insurrection was therefore in the hands of Syrians and Cilicians, old subjects of
2 the Seleucids, who sought to establish a sovranity and royal style in Sicily”.¹⁵

3 Some historians even asserted that especially the earlier state, that of
4 Eunus-Antiochus, was in fact, a Western recreation of the Seleucid kingdom.
5 Among these are some of the most recognizable names of classical scholarship
6 in the 20th century. “The most striking fact about Eunus-Antiochus is that,
7 beyond any doubt, he modelled his kingship in detail on the Seleucid monarchy
8 he had known in Syria...” wrote Peter Green.¹⁶ Joseph Vogt was of the
9 following opinion: “Die seleukidische Prägung dieser Monarchie wird vollends
10 klar durch die Nachricht: ‘Eunus nannte sich selbst Antiochos, das Volk der
11 Aufständischen nannte er Syrer’ (Diod. 34, 2, 24)”.¹⁷ He furthermore thought
12 that “In Ganzen freilich stellt sich die Staatsgründung des Eunus als ein in den
13 Westen verpflanztes seleukidisches Herrschaftsgebilde dar.”¹⁸ In Arnold
14 Toynbee’s view, “the insurgents’ policy was the positive one of establishing a
15 replica of the Seleucid Monarchy on Sicilian soil.”¹⁹ Moses Finley went so far
16 as to claim that rebel king “set about creating a carbon-copy of the Seleucid
17 monarchy”, and also that Hellenistic elements in the emerging state cannot be
18 “dismissed as mad farce.”²⁰ As to the rebels’ aim, he concluded: “They were to
19 liberate themselves and to take revenge, and then they expected to live as free
20 men in the only kind of world they knew.”²¹ That is, the world of Hellenistic
21 monarchies.

22 However, the discussion was terminated suddenly and unceremoniously in
23 1980s by Keith Bradley who insisted that two slave movements in Sicily were
24 not and could not have been states at all, Hellenistic or other. He dedicated a
25 paper to this argument,²² but similar views were repeated in his well-known

¹⁵John P. Mahaffy, “The Slave Wars against Rome”, *Hermathena* 7, 16 (1890), 169. Other older works on the topic, now mostly outdated, include Georg Rathke, *De Romanorum bellis servilibus: capita selecta* (Berlin: Friedrich-Wilhelms Universität, 1904); Friedrich Münzer, *RE* XI (1907), sv. *Eunus*, 1143-1145; Emanuele Ciaceri, “Roma e le guerre servili in Sicilia”, *Processi politici e relazioni internazionali. Studi sulla storia politica e sulla tradizione letteraria della repubblica e dell'impero* (1918), 55-89; V. M. Scramuzza, “Roman Sicily”, in: T. Frank (ed.), *An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome III: Britain, Spain, Sicily, Gaul* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1937), 240-248; W. L. Westermann, “Slave Maintenance and Slave Revolts”, *Classical Philology* 40, 1 (1945), 8-9; Hugh Last, “Tiberius Gracchus”, in: S. A. Cook, F. E. Adcock, M. P. Charlesworth (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History IX: The Roman Republic 133-44 B.C.* (Cambridge: University Press, 1951), 11-16; id., “The Wars of the Age of Marius”, in: *ibid*, 153-157; W. L. Westermann, *The Slave Systems of Greek and Roman Antiquity* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1955), 64-66.

¹⁶Peter Green, “The First Sicilian Slave War”, *Past & Present* 20 (1961), 10-29.

¹⁷Joseph Vogt, *Sklaverei und Humanität. Studien zur antiken Sklaverei und ihrer Erforschung* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, 1965), 30. English translation: *Ancient Slavery and the Ideal of Man* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1975).

¹⁸*Ibid*, 31.

¹⁹Arnold J. Toynbee, *Hannibal’s Legacy: The Hannibalic War’s Effect on Roman Life II: Rome and Her Neighbours after Hannibal’s Exit* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 325.

²⁰Moses I. Finley, *Ancient Sicily* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1979), 141.

²¹*Ibid*.

²²Keith R. Bradley, “Slave Kingdoms and Slave Rebellions In Ancient Sicily”, *Historical Reflections/ Réflexions Historiques*, 10, 3 (1983), 435-451.

1 book on slave revolts in the Roman world.²³ Relying on a variant of the
 2 Marxist theory of revolution, he argued that: 1) to create a new state a complete
 3 social revolution is necessary; but 2) to have a slave revolution, an anti-slavery
 4 ideology is needed, and such did not exist; and, furthermore 3) to successfully
 5 establish a new state in Sicily, the sanction and cooperation of the Roman state
 6 and Sicilian landowners was yet another necessity, and this they could never
 7 hope to get. Since the said elements were lacking, the slave kingdoms of Sicily
 8 were not states.²⁴

9 Furthermore, according to Bradley, there was little to these events but a
 10 violent and chaotic the day-to-day struggle for survival, a struggle that was
 11 doomed to end in failure. Whatever power structures they put in place were
 12 supposedly temporary and in direct service of the said struggle. Hellenistic
 13 elements were therefore irrelevant, as there was no real substance to any
 14 seemingly institutional or state-building aspects of the revolts. “The servile
 15 monarchical regimes, then, were not an end in themselves but a means to an
 16 end: the preservation of the slaves’ tenuously held freedom acquired by acts of
 17 revolt and flight.”²⁵ Rather than attempts to create Hellenistic-style kingdoms,
 18 free from Roman involvement, the slave wars should be seen as “maroon-style
 19 resistance” movements (!), products of “the slave rebels’ determination to
 20 extricate themselves from slavery without necessarily challenging the
 21 established order of society.”²⁶ It was really about flight, not fight: former

²³Keith R. Bradley, *Slavery and Rebellion in the Roman World, 140 B.C. – 70 B.C.* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, London: B. T. Batsford LTD, 1989), 103-104, 116-126.

²⁴Each of these points is highly problematic, they approach the problem from a very rigid and formalistic angle. Basic facts clearly show that revolution is not necessary to create a new state, least of all in antiquity when most new political entities came to be as a result of conquests, secessions or uprisings. At precisely the same time when the First Sicilian Slave War was raging, the Hasmonean kingdom was being created in Palestine. Not long before that, the Middle Euphrates region saw the birth of the kingdom of Commagene. Parthian and Bactrian monarchies, the two most important Eastern Hellenistic states, were formed barely a century prior, through secession and seizure of the Seleucid territories. None of these polities emerged as a result of a social revolution. The second point is equally redundant, the rebels did not aim at a complete social revolution or liberation of all slaves. Thus, there was no anti-slavery ideology and none was needed. The third one is the most peculiar of all, and I confess that I am not quite sure where Bradley was going with it. A state created through an uprising against Rome would not be recognized by the Romans (save in the unlikely case of complete military triumph on the part of the rebels) – that stands to reason – but what of it? The whole argument clearly shows many inadequacies of Marxist theory when applied to the ancient world.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 120.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 122. Elsewhere in his works, Bradley achieved much using historical analogies, but in this case he over-relied on them, utilizing early modern evidence not to supplement, but rather to counter and nullify the testimony of ancient authors. For example, the Haitian Revolution was true revolution, i.e. it had a proper anti-slavery ideology and it aimed at abolition of slavery, so it could not, in his opinion, offer any useful analogy to slave revolts of the ancient world. But if large-scale revolt on Haiti is discarded, what is left? The fugitive slave communities (maroons) in the Caribbean, Suriname and Brazil. But these were not states (at least according to Bradley, the assertion is debatable), so the kingdom of Eunos could not have been one as well. Again, this line of reasoning is thoroughly unconvincing. The massive and militant slave movements in Sicily were nothing like small, isolated groups of runaway slaves in the jungles of Suriname, the analogy

1 slaves were allegedly so preoccupied with day to day practicalities of mere
2 survival, that they failed to create any permanent structures, institutions or even
3 meaningful plan for the future. “Insofar as the latter contained a political
4 framework, it was grounded in the practical base of furthering rebellion, not in
5 that of establishing slave states as states of permanent, or even temporary
6 duration.”²⁷

7 In spite of many issues with his conclusions, Bradley’s influence was
8 strong and lasting.²⁸ Most scholars, especially in English-speaking countries,
9 decided to follow him. In the second edition of *CAH IX* Hellenistic influences
10 on the Sicilian slave movements are ignored altogether.²⁹ Theresa Urbainczyk,
11 while strongly disagreeing with Bradley’s dictum that rebels had no concepts
12 and ideas of their own, accepts his view that they were completely consumed
13 by the struggle for survival.³⁰ The Seleucid aspects are barely considered, apart
14 from the new names of the leaders, which are dismissed as oddities.³¹ Andreu
15 and Descat’s standard work on Greek and Roman slavery mentions them only
16 in passing.³² Likewise, in Peter Hunt’s monograph on ancient slavery, they are
17 barely recognized, and that only in the context of slaves’ traditions and identity,
18 without considering the possible aspirations at statehood.³³ On the other side of
19 the barrier, the newer scholarly literature on Seleucid Empire rarely discusses
20 or mentions slave kingdoms in Sicily.³⁴

21 The only significant dissenting voice of late was that of David Engels,
22 who argued that Seleucid aspects were of great, perhaps even central
23 importance for understanding the character of the kingdom of Eunus. However,
24 he is less inclined to explain these as a consequence of the Eastern background
25 of the rebel leaders (though this is duly acknowledged), and more as a
26 deliberate ideological challenge directed against the Romans. But this, in turn,

being completely invalid. Even Bradley concedes that once we take into account the difference in size, “the parallel breaks down”: id., “Slave Kingdoms and Slave Rebellions”, 450.

²⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸ Bradley still held the same views in 2011, see id., “Resisting Slavery at Rome”, in: K. Bradley, P. Cartledge, *The Cambridge World History of Slavery I: The Ancient Mediterranean* (Cambridge: University Press, 2011), 365-366.

²⁹ Andrew Lintott, “The Roman Empire and Its Problems in the Late Second Century”, in: J. A. Crook, A. Lintott, E. Rawson (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History IX²: The Last Age of the Roman Republic 146-43 B.C.* (Cambridge: University Press, 1992), 25-27.

³⁰ Theresa Urbainczyk, *Slave Revolts in Antiquity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 32-37. To ascertain the intentions of the rebels, Urbainczyk introduces a number of hypotheses, including the one that they may actually have been revolutionaries in the modern sense, revolutionaries who were (or would be, given time and opportunity) aiming at the abolition of slavery.

³¹ Cf. *ibid.*: 56: “It seems rather curious that he [Eunus] changed his name...” On p. 58 we read suggestion that Tryphon and Antiochus may have been their real names as free persons (!), thus no Seleucid connection needs to be evoked.

³² J. Andraeu, R. Descat, *The Slave in Greece and Rome* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press), 2011, 145-146.

³³ Peter Hunt, *Ancient Greek and Roman Slavery* (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2018), 167.

³⁴ It was acknowledged as important by Susan Sherwin-White, Amélie Kuhrt, *From Samarkand to Sardis: A New Approach to Seleucid Empire* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 138.

1 demands an assumption that even in the second half of the 2nd century BC, the
2 Seleucids were still widely seen as important antagonists of Rome.³⁵

5 Hellenistic Elements of Statehood

7 Rather than seeing the actions of the rebels as chaotic or guided by the
8 most ephemeral needs and goals, we should acknowledge that there was a clear
9 element of planning and strategy to them. The uprising on the estate of
10 Damophilus was conceived beforehand and executed with great speed and
11 efficiency.³⁶ Already during the first day of the revolt, after the fall of Enna, the
12 rebels created core structures of power: an assembly was held, to pass
13 judgment on the captured slave-owners, but also to elect a king who would
14 proceed to organize the army.³⁷ Of course, Bradley was certainly correct in
15 thinking that the former slaves desired above all to remain free and out of the
16 Roman grasp – permanently if possible. But, to achieve this, they need a large
17 and orderly army, with a background system that would provide for its supply,
18 training and armament. To have this they in turn required a minimum of order,
19 control, administration and justice on the territories in their possession. The
20 only mode of human organization that could possibly provide any of the above
21 was, of course, a state, with its clear hierarchy of power. And when they set
22 about to create a state of their own, they showed a natural tendency to emulate
23 the titles, institutions and practices of their Eastern Mediterranean homeland.

24 The following points testify to Hellenistic (and more specifically Seleucid)
25 influences on both ideology and practical side of two Sicilian slave kingdoms:

- 27 1. Eastern (Syrian, Cilician and Achaean) ethnic background of the rebel
28 leaders (D. S. 34/35.2.5, 16, 21; 34/35.7.8; 36.5.1; Liv. *Epit.* 56; Flor.
29 2.7.4, 2.7.9; Cass. Dio 27.4 (93)).
- 30 2. Greek royal title (βασιλεύς), as attested by Posidonius/Diodorus (D. S.
31 34/35.2.14, 22, 24, 42; 36.5.2; 36.7.1; 36.10.1; cf. Cass. Dio 27.4 (93))
32 and the official coins (see below).
- 33 3. Election of rulers by popular assembly (D. S. 34/35.2.14, 41; 36.2.4; cf.
34 34/35.2.15: συναγαγὼν ἐκκλησίαν).
- 35 4. Royal Seleucid names (Antiochus, Tryphon) leaders choose for
36 themselves (D. S. 34/35.2.24, 42).
- 37 5. Hellenistic royal trappings and insignia (D. S. 34/35.2.15; 36.2.4; Flor.
38 2.7.6; 2.7.10).

³⁵David Engels, “Ein syrisches Sizilien? Seleukidische Aspekte des Ersten Sizilischen Sklavenkriegs und der Herrschaft des Eunus-Antiochos”, *Polifemo* (2011), 231-251; id. *Benefactors, Kings, Rulers. Studies on the Seleukid Empire between East and West* (Leuven, Paris, Bristol: Peeters, 2017), 385-408.

³⁶D. S. 34/35.2.10-11.

³⁷D. S. 34/35.2.14-15.

- 1 6. A royal residence with a Hellenistic style court, including bodyguards,
- 2 servants, cooks, bakers, a masseur, a jester and other personnel (D. S.
- 3 34/35.2.22; 36.7.2-3).
- 4 7. Hellenistic military and administrative hierarchy, as evident by the titles
- 5 involved (σύεδρος, στρατηγός, σύμβουλος: D. S. 34/35.2.17, 42;
- 6 36.7.2, 4).
- 7 8. Royal council (βασιλικόν συνέδριον: D. S. 34/35.2.16).
- 8 9. The rebel host was organized as a royal army, led by the king himself
- 9 (D. S. 34/35.2.46; 36.8.2-4).
- 10 10. The divine protection, claimed by the new rulers, of a deity that was
- 11 amalgam of Syrian, Greek and local Sicilian traditions (D. S. 34/35.2.7,
- 12 10).
- 13 11. Official royal mint and coinage (see below).
- 14

15 Now, in the case of absence of other elements, points 2 and 3 could have
 16 been easily explained away as products of local, Graeco-Sicilian political
 17 traditions. But with wider context in mind, 2 and 3 fit well with 1 and 4-11 to
 18 present a strong evidence for the specific kind of political organization former
 19 slaves were trying to build.

20 Despite some modern detractors,³⁸ there is no reason to doubt that ethnic
 21 and cultural background of the rebel leaderships is of the highest significance.
 22 In what sense is the word “Syrian” (Σύρος, *Syrus*) used in this context? In the
 23 1st century BC, the time when Posidonius (and Diodorus) wrote, it could have
 24 one or more of the following meanings: a subject of the Seleucid Empire
 25 (“Syria”), the resident of Syria as a geographical region, or an ethnic Syrian
 26 who used one of the local Semitic dialects as their first language (similarly to
 27 the author of *De Dea Syria*). Terms like “Syria” or “Kingdom of Syria” were
 28 never the official designation of the Seleucid state, though by the late
 29 Hellenistic period they were the most common terms in colloquial and literary
 30 usage.³⁹ This was, at least partly, due to the kingdom’s changing geographical
 31 realities. After the death and defeat of Antiochus VII Sidetes in the 129 BC, the
 32 former Empire of Asia shrank so much that its territory included little beside
 33 northern Syria.

34 There is ample evidence that the western slave markets were flooded by
 35 eastern slaves by the middle 2nd century BC.⁴⁰ The Sixth Syrian War (170-168)
 36 was fought a generation ago, but, more recently, much of the rule of Demetrius
 37 I Soter (162-150) was spent on fighting local uprisings and a full-scale civil
 38 war in its final years. This is even more true of the reigns of Alexander Balas
 39 (150-145), Diodotus Tryphon (144-138) and Demetrius II (145-138), who
 40 exhausted themselves in a series of bitter civil wars, exactly at the time when

³⁸Gerald P. Verbrugge, “Slave Rebellion or Sicily in Revolt?”, *Kokalos* 20 (1974), 50-51; T. Urbainczyk, *op. cit.*, 56.

³⁹So, for example, D. S. 34/35.28.3 describes Alexander II Zabinas as βασιλεύς τῆς Συρίας; for Str. 16.2.10 the Seleucid state is βασιλεία τῶν Σύρων etc. See Peter Hermann, “Milesier am Seleukidenhof. Prosopographische Beiträge zur Geschichte Milets im 2. Jhd. v. Chr.”, *Chiron* 17 (1987), 183-190.

⁴⁰J. C. Dumon, *Servus. Rome et l’esclavage*, 217-219.

1 the Parthian advance in Iran was gaining momentum. During the First Slave
 2 War the Seleucid throne was held by Antiochus VII Sidetes (138-129) who
 3 would eliminate Tryphon after a prolonged struggle, force the Judean rebels to
 4 sue for peace, and inflict several defeats on the Parthians, before losing his own
 5 life in battle. In other words, the great Seleucid Empire was imploding, beset
 6 by dynastic strife, secession of various regions, Parthian encroachment and
 7 general instability.⁴¹ From ca. 160 BC it saw almost constant warfare, much of
 8 it internal, that provided foreign slave markets with a steady supply of recently
 9 enslaved individuals. Other major conflicts in the Eastern Mediterranean at the
 10 same time, such as the Fourth Macedonian (149-148) and the Achaean War
 11 (146), helped strengthen the unfortunate tendency, as did rising brigandage and
 12 piracy.

13 This does not mean that the majority of Sicilian slaves at the time were
 14 “Syrians”, as is sometimes assumed,⁴² but they definitely were a large group,
 15 indeed numerous enough to form a leading element among the insurgents.
 16 What little we know regarding the persons involved seems to confirm this
 17 conclusion. We are informed about six rebel leaders in the case of the First war.
 18 Three of them are Syrians (Eunus, Εὔνους, his unnamed queen, and a
 19 commander called Sarapon, Σαραπίων, who would betray Tauromenium to the
 20 Romans), two Cilicians (Cleon, Κλέων, and his brother Comanus, Κομανός),
 21 and an Achaean (Ἀχαιός) from Peloponnese.⁴³ As to the Second War, the
 22 situation is much less clear. The leader has a Latin sounding name (Σάλουιος =
 23 Salvius), but we are again unsure if this was his actual name or maybe a
 24 Roman translation of it.⁴⁴ His second in command, Athenion (Αθηνίων), was a
 25 Cilician by birth. The third leader was a certain Satyrus (Σάτυρος), the
 26 commander of the last rebel group to surrender, of whose origin we are told
 27 nothing.⁴⁵

28 Eunus, born in Apamea in the first half of the 2nd century BC, a worshiper
 29 of the Syrian Goddess of Hierapolis (Bambyce or Manbug), was certainly a
 30 Syrian in the first two senses, and perhaps also in the third; the Greek name
 31 Εὔνους proves little one way or the other, and it may even not have been his
 32 birth name, as is often the case with Roman slaves.⁴⁶ There is much speculation
 33 in modern literature regarding his background, including assumptions about the
 34 circumstances under which he was enslaved, his social status and possible

⁴¹Imperial crisis and downfall is the recurring phenomenon in the history of the Near East and Mediterranean, see Nuno Valério, “Empires in the Near East and Mediterranean Regions: Steps towards Globalization?”, *Athens Journal of History* 4, 2 (2018), 69-80.

⁴²Though this is exactly how D. S. 34/35.7.8 refers to them, as the “runaway Syrians” (οἱ Σύροι δραπέται); also in 34.35.2.24: “the king of the rebels, Eunus, called himself Antiochus, and mass of the rebels the Syrians” (ὁ τῶν ἀποστατῶν βασιλεὺς Εὔνους ἑαυτὸν μὲν Ἀντίοχον, Σύρους δὲ τῶν ἀποστατῶν τὸ πλῆθος ἐπωνόμασεν).

⁴³D. S. 34/35.2.15-17, 20, 43

⁴⁴As suggested by Giacomo Manganaro, “Monete e ghiande inscritte degli schiavi ribelli in Sicilia”, *Chiron* 12 (1982), 241; accepted by D. Engels, *Benefactors, Kings, Rulers*, 401.

⁴⁵D. S. 36.4, 5, 7, 10.

⁴⁶That said, this personal name is attested in Syria, even in Hierapolis-Bambyce itself, see for example *IGLS* I 244.

1 military experience.⁴⁷ If Eunus had any prior military experience, this is
 2 omitted by our sources, who speak of him mainly as a holy man and a miracle
 3 worker. As to his military faculty as the rebel leader, Diodorus' information is
 4 contradictory. He will initially deny any masculine courage (ἀνδρεία) or
 5 generalship (στρατηγία) on the part of Eunus,⁴⁸ only to claim later that slave
 6 king was bold and capable enough to challenge and defeat Roman leaders in
 7 open battles.⁴⁹

8 A royal council (βασιλικόν συνέδριον), filled with close associates of the
 9 ruler, is one of the most common institutions of any Hellenistic monarchy. It is
 10 no surprise that one was immediately set up by Eunus, to act as a central
 11 government body of the new kingdom. We read that the king “appointed to the
 12 royal council those who seem to be singled out by their intelligence”
 13 (βασίλισσαν ἀποδείξας συνέδρους τε τοὺς συνέσει δοκοῦντας διαφέρειν
 14 ποιησάνεμος). Among this was one Achaeus, “a man distinguished by both
 15 words and deeds” (ἀνὴρ καὶ βουλῆ καὶ χειρὶ δαιφέρων).⁵⁰ The honest and
 16 critical speech was not censured but encouraged in the council.⁵¹ Similar story
 17 is told of the Second uprising.⁵²

18 Royal attire and other symbols of status and power that we would expect
 19 of a Hellenistic king are there. Eunus wore a diadem (διάδημα) “and
 20 everything else that was becoming for himself as a king” (καὶ πάντα τὰ ἄλλα
 21 τὰ περὶ αὐτὸν βασιλικῶς).⁵³ Florus notes that Eunus adored himself with “the
 22 insignia of royalty”.⁵⁴ In the later uprising, Salvius took whatever was
 23 customary to designate the dignity of a king – presumably, a diadem, a ring and
 24 a scepter, among other things.⁵⁵ But, in this case, there is also a noticeable
 25 Roman influence. Salvius appeared in a robe with a red-dyed strip along its
 26 border (a *toga praetexta*?), and even employed lictors (ῥαβδοῦχοι) when
 27 holding court.⁵⁶ He dedicated a similar item of clothing to the local Sicilian
 28 heroes, the *Palici* (Παλικοί).⁵⁷ Likewise, Athenion wore a crown, a silver
 29 scepter (*baculum argenteum*), and a purple robe (*vestis purpurea*).⁵⁸

30 The royal names of the rebel leaders are equally striking. The name
 31 “Antiochus” (Ἀντίοχος), taken by Eunus, is one of the obvious and direct
 32 Seleucid associations; it is one of the two most highly regarded and frequent
 33 Seleucid dynastic names. Perhaps this is enough to explain the choice: the rebel

⁴⁷Cf. D. Engels, *op. cit.*, 388-391.

⁴⁸D. S. 34/35.2.14

⁴⁹D. S. 34/35.2.16.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

⁵¹D. S. 34/35.2.42.

⁵²D.S. 36.7.4.

⁵³D. S. 34/35.2.16.

⁵⁴Flor. 2.7.6.

⁵⁵D. S. 36.7.4.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

⁵⁷D. S. 36.7.1. The self-proclaimed king and liberator of slaves in Campania, Titus Vettius (or Minucius) also assumed a royal title (ca. 105 BC), and wore a similar Hellenistic-Roman mixture of trappings of power: a diadem (διάδημα) and a purple cloak (περιβόλαιον πορφυροῦν), with lictors (ῥαβδοῦχοι) in his entourage (D. S. 36.2.4).

⁵⁸Flor. 2.7.10.

1 leader decided on a name that stood for royalty and power in his homeland.
 2 That he, however, decided for Antiochus instead, for example, Alexander or
 3 Seleucus, could be significant. Assuming that the uprising began in ca. 138 BC
 4 or later, the current Seleucid ruler was Antiochus VII Sidetes (138-129), under
 5 whom the Kingdom of Syria experienced a considerable resurgence. This
 6 restoration was to be ephemeral and would end in disaster, of course, but
 7 contemporaries, including rebels in Sicily, could not have known this. On the
 8 other hand, the intention might have been to remind the Romans and others of
 9 Antiochus III the Great (223-187), one of the most successful Seleucid rulers,
 10 whose conquests and power caused, for a time, much consternation in Rome. It
 11 is true that Antiochus III was ultimately defeated by Romans and their allies,
 12 but even so his name could still serve as an anti-Roman rallying cry half a
 13 century later.⁵⁹

14 A somewhat more puzzling choice is the name “Tryphon”, taken by
 15 Salvius in 104 BC. It too has clear and strong Hellenistic associations and, on
 16 its own, presents a strong argument in favor of the assumption that Salvius was
 17 another Syrian. The word Τρύφων (“Opulent”), coming from the verb τρυφάω
 18 (“to live luxuriously”) and noun τρυφή (“opulence”, “luxury”, “delicacy” etc.),
 19 invokes material wealth and abundance, but also negative attributes of softness
 20 and even wantonness.⁶⁰ The only Syrian ruler with such name was the usurper
 21 Diodotus Tryphon (142-138/7).⁶¹ Given his erratic career and short reign that
 22 ended in total defeat and execution (or suicide), this might seem as a strange
 23 choice. However, a life story like his, that of a self-made man who rose from
 24 humble (perhaps servile) origins to become, first a general, then a king, could
 25 hold an immense appeal for someone like Salvius, a leader of runaway slaves,
 26 who endeavored to build a kingdom out of nothing. Diodotus Tryphon
 27 famously embraced the fact that he had no dynastic legitimacy, on his coins he
 28 styled himself as “king Tryphon, the absolute ruler” (βασιλεύς Τρύφων
 29 ἀτοκράτωρ).⁶² The position of Salvius was similar, his right to rule lacking
 30 dynastic foundation.

31 As to details of the organization of the rebel armies, not much is know,
 32 though important Hellenistic influences can be freely assumed. We see them
 33 build fortified camps, conduct raids and scouting operations, fight and often
 34 win large scale battles in the open.⁶³ Once again, the origin of the many slaves
 35 is a fact of the highest importance. Large numbers were not only born as free,

⁵⁹Cf. A. J. Toynbee, *op. cit.*, 325.

⁶⁰Henry G. Liddel, Robert Scott, Henry S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 1831, sv. τρυφάω, τρυφή.

⁶¹Ptolemy VIII Euergetes (170-163, 145-132, 127-116) also used the name Tryphon. But the Syrian background of many rebels, as well as the extremely negative reputation this king left behind him, exclude any reasonable connection.

⁶²Oliver D. Hoover, *Coins of the Seleucid Empire from the Collection of Arthur Houghton* (American Numismatic Society: New York, 2007), 100-101; Kay Ehling, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der späten Seleukiden (164-63 v. Chr.)* (Franz Steiner Verlag: Stuttgart, 2008), 180; Boris Chrubasik, *Kings and Usurpers in the Seleucid Empire. The Men who would be King* (Oxford: University Press, 2016), 139-140.

⁶³D. S. 34/35.2.18-20.

1 but were actually former soldiers, a few even military leaders, sold into slavery.
 2 While their weaponry and other equipment were entirely dependent on
 3 whatever could be captured or produced locally,⁶⁴ their organization and tactics
 4 must have been to a significant level modeled on the Seleucid and other
 5 Hellenistic armies. A serious military organization, led by people with
 6 significant military experience (it is not crucial whether Eunos and Salvius
 7 themselves had any), goes a long way to explain the early victories of the
 8 rebels, as well as the high cost in time and manpower necessary for the
 9 Romans to quell the two uprisings. However, one prominent, highly technical
 10 and expensive type of Hellenistic warfare seems not to be especially developed
 11 among the Sicilian rebels: siege warfare. All the strongholds rebels captured,
 12 fell due to total surprise or their own unpreparedness, usually during a night
 13 attack.⁶⁵ Whenever a fortified settlement was ready to defend itself, the rebels'
 14 efforts would prove futile, and this greatly frustrated their attempts to take
 15 control of the whole island.⁶⁶

18 **The Royal Coinage**

20 Uprisings of any kind seldom leave recognizable trace in the archaeological
 21 record. Slave revolts rarely last long enough or provide conditions sufficiently
 22 stable to allow creation of a distinct material culture. What little there is often
 23 goes unrecognized as created or used by former slaves, or connected with
 24 them. Now, the same is mostly true of two Sicilian revolts as well – so far as
 25 we know, no buildings, monuments or works of art made or dedicated by the
 26 rebels have survived.⁶⁷ The short inscriptions on sling-shots are material
 27 artifacts of a sort, but they do not tell us very much, apart from the locations
 28 where battles took place and the names of the gods combatants were invoking.
 29 However, there are a number of bronze coins minted by or in the name of
 30 Eunos-Antiochus.

31 The existing sample of these is by no means large, there are less than
 32 twenty known coins, all bronze, most of them currently hidden away in various
 33 private collections, and inaccessible to scholars. For almost all of them it can
 34 be reliably claimed that they originate in Sicily in the 2nd century BC, though
 35 exact provenance is often uncertain. A common thread that links them is the

⁶⁴Cf. D. S. 34/35.2.15-16.

⁶⁵This was the case with Enna (D. S. 34/35.2.11), Acragas (34/35.2.43) and Tauromenium (retaken by the Romans only after difficult siege, 34/35.2.20-21) in the First war. Probably too with Triocala in the Second (36.7.2-3). The neglect by some local communities to properly maintain their walls might have been a contributing factor (34/35.2.45).

⁶⁶The unnamed city in D. S. 34/35.2.44-46 successfully resisted Eunos' army. The fragment in 34/35.9 (sacrilege committed by some people against sacred fish in the pools of Arethusa) is sometimes taken as a proof that rebels made a failed attempt against Syracuse. With no clear context to place the fragment in, this remains entirely hypothetical. Similarly, in the Second War, Morgantina resisted Salvius (36.4.5-8) and Lilybaeum fended off repeated attempts by Athenion (36.5.3)

⁶⁷This is not to say they never existed at all. See, for example, the dedication of articles of clothing made by Salvius before proclaiming himself a king (D. S. 36.7.1).

1 legend *ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΝΤΙΟΧΟΥ* (“of king Antiochus”) on the reverse, with
 2 words displayed in full or, more commonly, in one of several abbreviated forms
 3 (*ΒΑΣΙ ΑΝΤΙ*, *ΒΑΣΙΛΕ ΑΝΤΙΟΧ*, *ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩ ΑΝΤΙ* etc.). This Sicilian king
 4 Antiochus can be no other than the slave king Eunos-Antiochus of our written
 5 sources. So far, there are no known coins of kings Salvius and Athenion.⁶⁸

6 That these issues had little or no economic importance should be obvious.
 7 They are exclusively bronze – to mint in silver or gold was likely out of the
 8 rebels’ reach⁶⁹ – struck in small quantities, while the overall quality is hardly
 9 impressive. But coins in antiquity served other purposes beside purely
 10 monetary – they were (or could be) powerful political and propaganda tools.⁷⁰
 11 To write history from coins alone is notoriously difficult and unreliable. But
 12 since in this case they can be combined with information from narrative
 13 sources, they provide another logical piece of the overall picture. Royal
 14 coinage was an important medium of self-promotion for any Hellenistic
 15 kingdom. Similarly to royal apparel, court personnel or armed guard, all of
 16 whom were there to broadcast the king as a serious figure, deserving of respect,
 17 so too would the coins introduce himself and his kingdom to a wider populace,
 18 painting a picture of a serious and powerful state, seemingly equal to other
 19 Hellenistic kingdoms. It is likely a message of stability and permanence, as
 20 much as that of strength and military power. “The slave kingdom was able to
 21 maintain itself against the power of Rome... it was not merely destructive or
 22 anarchical institution, and it need not surprise us that it possessed a coinage.”⁷¹

23 As one would expect, the coins in question exhibit a mixture of Eastern
 24 Hellenistic and local imagery and symbols. While the king and most of his
 25 advisers and officers were former Seleucid subjects, the die makers were
 26 almost certainly locals. The mint was likely set up in the rebel capital of Enna
 27 and local artisans were made (forced) to work there. Diodorus reports that,
 28 after the fall of the town, rebels executed most of the slave-owners, except

⁶⁸Edward S. G. Robinson, “Antiochus, the king of slaves”, *The Numismatic Chronicle* 20 (1920), 175-176; Alfredo de Agostino, “Le monete di Henna”, *Bollettino storico catanese* 4 (1939), 85-86; Giacomo Manganaro, “Monete e ghiande inscrite degli schiavi ribelli in Sicilia”, *Chiron* 12 (1982), 237-239; id., “Due studi di numismatica greca”, *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa* 3/20, 2-3 (1990), 418; D. Engels, *op. cit.*, 399-400. The most extensive recent treatment of these coins in English is P. Morton, *Slavery and Rebellion*, 22-67; however, the interpretation offered is highly arbitrary, and one is advised to approach his conclusions with caution.

⁶⁹There are two gold coins, found in Sicily, that are occasionally introduced into this debate, as possible coins of the Sicilian slave kings (so, for example Harlan J. Berk, Simon Bendell, “Eunos/Antiochus: Slave Revolt in Sicily”, *The Celator* 8, 2 (1994), 7-8). As far as I can see, there is no substance to this claim. Apart from a strong possibility that these are counterfeit (the workmanship is of low quality), the images they carry (a male head with a crown on the obverse, standing Nike / seated soldier on the reverse) are not very similar to those on the issues of king Eunos-Antiochus. The legend on the reverse reads *ΦΙΛΙΠΠΕΙΟΝ* and *ΦΙΛΙΠΠΙΟΣ* respectively; the accusative and nominative case of the king’s (?) name make these pieces especially suspicious. See Giacomo Manganaro, “Un Philippeion di oro di Euno-Antiocho in Sicilia?”, *Museum Helveticum* 47, 3 (1990), 181-183; D. Engels, *loc. cit.*; P. Morton, *op. cit.*, 195-196.

⁷⁰Otto Mørkholm, *Early Hellenistic Coinage. From Accession of Alexander to the Peace of Apamea (336 – 188 B.C.)* (Cambridge: University Press, 1991), 24.

⁷¹E. S. G. Robinson, *op. cit.*, 176.

1 those that had manufacturing skills useful for the production of weapons.⁷² It is
 2 likely that other individuals with useful skills, such as die manufacturers,
 3 would also be spared and put to work. The majority of the issues have bearded
 4 male head on the obverse, that was interpreted in various ways (Zeus? Dionysus?
 5 Heracles? Antiochus himself?). Four of the coins show a person with a helmet
 6 (Athena?), while three display the veiled Demeter. It is obviously the Sicilian
 7 Demeter (*Ceres Hennensis*) of (H)Enna.⁷³ But in the eyes of people from Syria
 8 and other eastern countries, the deity could have been (re)interpreted in various
 9 ways. The imagery on the reverse of the coins mostly invokes associations of
 10 divine and/or military power: there is a quiver, a thunderbolt, or a club,
 11 together with the king's name. Demeter coins display an ear of barley on the
 12 reverse.

13 14 *Dea Syria et Ceres Hennensis*

15
16 The veiled woman on the mentioned coins brings us to another, closely
 17 connected and equally important topic: the divine protectress invoked by the
 18 rebels. That new monarchy sought divine approval and support will surprise no
 19 one familiar with the Hellenistic world. Divine kingship is one of its core
 20 concepts. When discussing the Hellenistic ruler cult, Frank Walbank famously
 21 remarked that “the new kings who succeeded Alexander were all in a sense
 22 usurpers and so looked for religious support to help legitimize their pretensions
 23 and reinforce the claims of their new dynasties.”⁷⁴ The leaders of the Sicilian
 24 slaves were in somewhat similar, yet much more difficult situation. Apart from,
 25 and indeed before, their victories against the Roman levies, they were badly in
 26 need of another, more fundamental, way of legitimization and self-legitimization.

27 In the case of both revolts, the monarchs elected by the rebel assemblies
 28 were not singled out for their martial abilities, but rather because of their
 29 reputation as magicians and holy men. Our main source, Diodorus, is puzzled
 30 and annoyed by such a choice: a warrior king, who leads from the front, sword
 31 in hand, would be much more to his liking.⁷⁵ But there were good reasons for
 32 this, that make sense once the perspective of the slaves is taken into account. To
 33 even contemplate such a hopeless and extremely dangerous endeavor as this,
 34 ancient people required divine encouragement. This was provided by Eunos who,
 35 Diodorus' scorn notwithstanding, managed to acquire a considerable reputation as
 36 a miracle worker and a prophet. He would perform magical tricks, including an
 37 especially impressive one, when fire and flame came out of his mouth. More
 38 importantly, he claimed to experience divine visitations in his dreams, but also
 39 the walking visions, where gods would appear to him in person. He prophesied
 40 his own ascendancy as a king, a laughing matter to his masters and their peers,
 41 but something taken seriously by many slaves. Finally, Eunos asserted a special

⁷²D. S. 34/35.2.15.

⁷³Cic. *Verr.* 2.4.(48-49)106-108.

⁷⁴Frank W. Walbank, *The Hellenistic World* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 210.

⁷⁵D. S. 34/35.2.7-8, 14; 36.4.4.

1 connection with the so-called Syrian Goddess of Hierapolis. The day when the
 2 revolt was about to begin, conspirators met with Eunus to learn the will of the
 3 gods: he persuaded them of heavenly favor and urged them to act instantly,
 4 which they did, successfully. The credibility gained in this way secured the
 5 kingship for him.⁷⁶ Once he had the power, divine support remained necessary
 6 to justify it.

7 As usual, we are given much less details about Salvius: he was well practiced
 8 in divination using sacrificial victims (ιεροσκοπία), and in performing on flute
 9 during mystical ceremonies (αὐλομανέω) celebrated by women.⁷⁷ Should we
 10 assume that he was a participant in the same cult as Eunus?

11 The deity in question will be familiar to any student of ancient religions.
 12 Atargatis or the Syrian Goddess (Συρία θεά, *Dea Syria*), as she was known to
 13 the Greeks and the Romans, began her incredible history as a local female deity
 14 of northern Syria, with the main cult center in the town of Hierapolis/Bambyce
 15 (modern Manbij, 30km west of Euphrates). By the 2nd century BC she was
 16 attracting masses of worshipers throughout the Hellenistic East, while in the 1st
 17 and 2nd centuries AD her cult would spread to the most remote provinces of the
 18 Roman Empire. The details of religious practices associated with Atargatis are
 19 know from a number of literary sources, above all the famous text *De Dea*
 20 *Syria* by (Pseudo?-)Lucian. The cult was characterized by strong devotion of
 21 its followers, which went to the point of fanaticism, and by certain rather
 22 intense ritual practices. Some of these rituals are recorded to be performed by
 23 Eunus: he would fall into trance and dance frenetically.⁷⁸ Others, more
 24 extreme, such as self-mutilation, seem to be absent in his case and that of his
 25 followers. Similar eastern religious practices were often viewed as shocking
 26 and offensive by the more conservative Romans, though in the eyes of the
 27 rebels this was probably a positive thing, enhancing the anti-Roman credentials
 28 of the new movement.⁷⁹

29 Eunus, of course, brought the worship of the *Dea Syria* with him from his
 30 homeland. As far as he was concerned, there was probably never any issue
 31 about the identity of the divine protector of his kingdom. It was Atargatis who
 32 told him in a vision that he would rule.⁸⁰ But there was more to this than simple
 33 ethno-cultural affinity. The town of Enna, the chosen seat of the new kingdom,
 34 was similar to Syrian Hierapolis in that it too was a holy city, dedicated to
 35 Ceres. Cicero makes very clear that this aspect was of the highest importance
 36 for the citizens of Enna and for the inhabitants of the wider region.⁸¹ In
 37 conflating the Greek Demeter, the Sicilian Ceres, and the Syrian Goddess,

⁷⁶D. S. 34/35.2.5-10; Flor. 2.19.4.

⁷⁷D. S. 36.4.4.

⁷⁸Flor. 2.19.4.

⁷⁹On the cult of Atargatis: Robert A. Oden, *Studies in Lucian's De Syria Dea* (Missoula, Montana: Harvard Semitic Museum, 1977), 47-107; Monika Hörig, *Dea Syria. Studien zur religiösen Tradition der Fruchtbarkeitsgöttin in Vorderasien* (Kevelaer, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Butzon und Bercker, Neukirchener Verlag, 1979), 233-261; Jane L. Lightfoot, *Lucian: On the Syrian Goddess* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1-85.

⁸⁰D. S. 34/35.2.7.

⁸¹Cic. *Verr.* 2.4.(54)113-114.

1 there was much opportunity to spread the insurgents' message far and wide, to
 2 various groups and places. The foundation for this was already there. In the East
 3 the Greeks were for a long time now identifying Atargatis with Demeter, an
 4 interaction made easier by a number of similar traits existing between the two
 5 deities: both were connected to fertility, agriculture, crops and natural abundance,
 6 both incorporated aspects of mother-goddess. Similarly, the Greek Demeter was
 7 for centuries equated with the local Ceres of Enna, another benevolent female
 8 agricultural deity. While women on the coins of Antiochus-Eunus bear little
 9 resemblance to the Eastern iconography of Atargatis, this was no obstacle for
 10 Eunus and his subjects to identify her with their goddess. Greeks and other
 11 inhabitants of Sicilian would recognize her as their own Demeter/Ceres. And none
 12 of them would really be wrong in their assumptions.⁸²

13 Almost from the very beginning the rebel kingdoms would include groups
 14 and individuals other than slaves. There are indications that some effort was made
 15 to recruit support outside of the (former) slave ranks, especially among the
 16 impoverished free. The propagation (on coins, but probably in other ways as well)
 17 of a deity that was essentially an amalgamation of the Greek, Sicilian and Eastern
 18 traditions could be seen as a strong and positive step in that direction. It seems that
 19 this activity was only marginally successful, as some actions of rebels, aiming at
 20 revenge and crude justice, went against it. After the fall of Enna, the citizens were
 21 subjected to wholesale slaughter, apart from those who were known to be kind to
 22 slaves, or in possession of valuable skills.⁸³ The common people of the
 23 countryside seemingly refused to pick a side. Diodorus claims that they were
 24 actually glad about the misfortunes of the rich and the privileged, but otherwise
 25 would not side with the rebels. Some of the poor actually took opportunity to
 26 plunder and burn estates of the big landowners.⁸⁴ The servile wars in Sicily were
 27 not "national" Sicilian uprisings against Roman rule, as they are occasionally
 28 portrayed in modern literature.⁸⁵

31 **Conclusion: The Purpose and Significance of the Rebels' Efforts**

32
 33 There was nothing purposeless, whimsical or farcical about the ways
 34 former slaves sought to organize and pursue their efforts. Possibilities that are
 35 sometimes considered by modern scholars, like the formation of a maroon-

⁸²There are other religious aspects of the slave wars that I will not go into here: for example, a widespread belief that powerful omens (such as an eruption of Mt. Etna) foretold the coming calamities (Jul. Obseq. 26; Oros. 5.6.); the inscriptions on sling-shots naming some typically Greek deities (but, again, subject to local interpretation), well-known in both Sicily and the East; the fact that initial stirring of the Second slave war took place at the holy enclosure of the heroes Palaci (τέμενος τῶν Παλικῶν), a well-known refuge for runaway slaves (D. S. 36.3.4); the dedication Salvius made at the same shrine (D. S. 36.7.1) etc.

⁸³D. S. 34/35.2.15. Cf. 34/35.2.46: rebels trying to taunt and frighten the inhabitants of a Sicilian city.

⁸⁴D. S. 34/35.2.48.

⁸⁵So Gerald P. Verbrughe, "Slave rebellion or Sicily in revolt?", 46-60, and, more recently, P. Morton, *op. cit.*

1 style refuge, were never realistically open to them. There were far too many
 2 slaves on a large, but densely populated and urbanized island, for any such
 3 option, and they never seem to contemplate it. Once the violence began, the
 4 only way forward was continued fight. But, to do so successfully, a certain
 5 level of organization and hierarchy was needed. There is no contradiction, as it
 6 is sometimes postulated in modern literature, between the desire for freedom and
 7 state-building. The best guarantee of continued liberty and safety for the rebels
 8 was a state of their own, endowed with familiar institutions and practices and ruled
 9 by someone from their own ranks. Unlike the uprising of Spartacus, which lacked
 10 coherent strategic goals, and was in the end torn apart by incompatible aims and
 11 desires of its many members, the rebels in Sicily were quick to reach a consensus
 12 about what they wished to achieve and how it should be done.

13 The ethnic and cultural background of many slaves, particularly their leaders,
 14 together with the pressing need to maintain the struggle, explain the form these
 15 two slave states acquired. They were recreations of the Hellenistic kingdoms, built
 16 from the ground up, encompassing all the core institutions and outward symbols of
 17 power. As post-Alexander monarchies were, above all, military monarchies, this
 18 political form suited their aims well. Many specific details, not least of all the
 19 names the rulers took, point to the more specific, Seleucid source of inspiration.
 20 The state rebels were trying to build was indeed a kind of mirror image of the
 21 Seleucid monarchy, planted on an island in the Western Mediterranean. They
 22 created exactly the kind of state that was most familiar to them.

23 Ultimately, the two rebel kingdoms of Sicily were defeated and broken by the
 24 Roman might. A consensus regarding strategy is, of course, of little value if the
 25 proposed goal is unrealistic or unattainable. In that respect the rebels in Sicily were
 26 not more prudent or successful than their counterparts in Italy, some decades later.
 27 Although they did everything humanly possible, their enemy was, after all, the
 28 Roman state. With their military organization, numbers, material resources and
 29 dogged persistence, the Romans brought low much bigger and more powerful
 30 political entities than Sicilian rebel kingdoms could ever hope to be. Where
 31 Hannibal, Antiochus the Great, Perseus and Mithridates Eupator failed, one could
 32 hardly expect an Eunus or a Salvius to succeed. Rebels could win one or several
 33 battles against the Romans, but in doing so they were only postponing the bitter
 34 end. This fact should not serve, however, to undermine their efforts and
 35 achievement, for they did manage to hold out against the Romans for several years
 36 in both cases. The word of their early victories reached places far removed from
 37 Sicily, and even inspired several short-live slave uprisings in Italy and Greece.⁸⁶
 38 Without serious political and military organization, which was put in place
 39 early, their struggle would have certainly been much more ephemeral, and we
 40 might have never known of them.

⁸⁶One in the city of Rome itself, two in the Aegean, in the mines of Attica and in the slave market on Delos during the First Servile War, but also “in many other places” (κατ’ ἄλλους πολλοὺς τόπους; D. S. 34/35.2.19; Oros. 5.9.5). There was another uprising in Attica during the Second Servile War (Ath. 6.272e-f). On these revolts, see: Nemanja Vujčić, “Large Scale Slave Revolts in Ancient Greece: An Issue of Absence or an Absence of Issue?”, *Athens Journal of History* 9, 3 (2023), 228-230.

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