

Antiochos III Megas

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Antiochos III the Great (243/2–187) was the sixth king of the Seleucid Empire. His thirty-five-year reign (223/2–187) was the longest in the empire's history. Antiochos, whose rule is relatively well-known from Polybius and Livy and a large number of inscriptions (cf. Ma 2000), was also one of the most capable and successful Seleucid rulers, notwithstanding a disreputable defeat against Rome at the end of his career. Campaigning in areas as far apart as India and mainland Greece, Antiochos restored Seleucid hegemony in the Far East, defeated the Ptolemies, and made important but short-lived conquests in the west. His contemporary title *Megas* (Great) perhaps referred to his authority of Great King, especially his practice of installing vassal kings as a means to reorganize the empire – a practice that would later form the basis for the creation of the Roman Near East. Yet Antiochos' military triumphs were of little consequence: most of his territorial gains had been lost again upon his death in 187; the empire also lost control of Asia Minor as the result of the war with Rome.

Antiochos became king when his brother SELEUKOS III KERAUNOS was assassinated in Asia Minor in 223 or 222. He was nineteen or twenty years old. The young king at first was under the influence of some powerful courtiers, in particular Hermeias and Epigenes, two former *philoi* (see FRIENDS OF THE KING) of his brother who controlled the court and the army. A third imperial magnate, ACHAIOS, controlled Seleucid Asia Minor. A fourth, Molon the satrap of Media, revolted with the help of several other governors of the Upper Satrapies. While the king and the main army were in Syria preparing a campaign against the Ptolemies, Molon invaded Babylonia and tried to found an empire of his own, taking the DIADEM in ca. 222/1. In the third year of the revolt, Antiochos personally confronted and defeated him. The victory over Molon gave

Antiochos the prestige and support he needed to remove his brother's *philoi* from court and replace them with his own friends, skilfully playing off rival factions against each other.

Antiochos inherited an empire that was potentially strong but had been plagued by centrifugal powers in the past decades, especially in Asia Minor, Iran, and Bactria. He also inherited a brutal rivalry with the Ptolemaic family, whose maritime hegemony comprised many ports along the Levantine and Anatolian coasts; these included since 245 also Seleukeia-in-Pieria, the Seleucid royal city where the dynasty's deified founder was buried (see SELEUKOS I NIKATOR). Antiochos proved himself to be a skilful diplomat and general. In ca. 222, he married his cousin Laodike, whose parents were Mithradates II of Pontos and a daughter of Antiochos II Theos. Antiochos and Laodike had at least three sons and four daughters (the latter were given in marriage to vassal kings as part of Antiochos' new imperial policy). Queen Laodike became one of Antiochos' most trusted associates, acting as vice-ruler in Syria and Babylonia, while the king was in the east (212–205). Around 200, Antiochos decreed a cult of himself and his wife, the first centrally ordained imperial cult of the Seleucid kingdom (see RULER CULT, GREEK AND HELLENISTIC). Of his other favorites, ZEUXIS the "viceroy" of Asia Minor stands out because of his long, loyal, and relatively well-documented connection with the king.

From 219 to 217, Antiochos fought the Ptolemies in the Levant. This conflict is known as the Fourth Syrian War – a misnomer since much more was at stake than merely the possession of (Koile) Syria (see SYRIAN WARS). Although the Seleucids were generally successful – retaking Seleukeia in the first year of the war and conquering most of Phoenicia and Palestine – they ultimately lost the conflict after suffering a major defeat in the Battle of Raphia (see RAPHAIA, BATTLE OF), near Gaza. A peace treaty was concluded between Antiochos and the Ptolemaic king, PTOLEMY IV PHILOPATOR. Thereafter Antiochos turned against his



Figure 1 Seleucid tetradrachm (213–208). Obverse: Diademed head of Antiochos III. Reverse: Apollo seated on the omphalos, holding an arrow. Courtesy of the American Numismatic Society.

uncle Achaios, who had become autonomous in Asia Minor. It lasted until 213, until Achaios was finally captured and executed. The following year, using a mixture of diplomacy and brutal force, the Armenian kingdoms were incorporated into the empire.

In the next campaigning season, Antiochos' famed *anabasis* in Iran and Central Asia began (211–205). In the course of this long campaign – which was not an attempt to imitate Alexander but rather a kind of ritual progress along the edges of the empire meant to restore Seleucid suzerainty – Antiochos defeated the Parthian ruler ARSACES II in a cavalry battle and besieged the rebellious satrap of Bactria and Sogdia, Eukratides, in his capital Bactra. Both kings were re-installed by Antiochos in his capacity of Great King, and their kingdoms integrated within the imperial framework as vassal states. Antiochos then made his mark in India, collecting tribute (including elephants) from local rulers. After these successes, Antiochos proceeded to build up Seleucid control in the Red Sea and Hellespont regions.

In 204, Ptolemy IV died. Antiochos, no longer bound by the oath he had made at the peace treaty of 217, declared war on his successor,

PTOLEMY V. In the ensuing Fifth Syrian War (202–195), the Seleucid forces were successful. After a victory in the Battle of Panion (200), they were able to take possession of Koile Syria and Palestine. The capture of Gaza allowed the Seleucids to turn against Ptolemaic presence elsewhere in the Mediterranean. Marching swiftly along the coast, Antiochos restored Seleucid dominance in Asia Minor, effectively terminating the Ptolemaic naval empire in the Mediterranean. In 195, hostilities came to an end. Antiochos proceeded to build up Seleucid power in the Aegean, residing in Ephesos and rebuilding Lysimacheia in Thrace as a new regional capital and a base for future conquests. The cities of Lampsakos, Smyrna, and Rhodes, as well as EUMENES II of Pergamon, however, appealed to Rome for aid. This resulted in a series of Seleucid-Roman negotiations that have been described as a “cold war” (Badian 1968; cf. Grainger 2002).

In 192, the AITOLIAN LEAGUE, in turn, appealed to Antiochos for help against the Roman presence in mainland Greece. Antiochos landed in Greece with a small force hoping to win the support of the Greek states. This led to open war with Rome (192–188). After being defeated

by the Romans in the Battle of Thermopylai (191), Antiochos returned to Asia Minor. Seleucid forces attacked Pergamon, while in the eastern Aegean a naval war was fought, in which Antiochos' favorite HANNIBAL played a leading role. In 189, Roman and Pergamene armies were victorious in the decisive Battle of Magnesia in Lydia. The Roman-Seleucid war ended the next year with the Treaty of Apamea (see APAMEA, PEACE OF). Antiochos was forced to cede his possessions in Asia Minor to Rome's allies Pergamon and Rhodes and to pay an indemnity to Rome, his Mediterranean fleet was denied access to the Aegean Sea, and he had to send his son Antiochos (IV) as a hostage to Italy. The loss of Asia Minor did not cause the decline of the dynasty, as historians believed in the past. However, it did turn out to be a severe blow to the power and prestige of the Seleucids, because it prevented them from replacing the Ptolemies as the principal naval power in the eastern Mediterranean seas, leaving Rome as the only Mediterranean superpower.

Antiochos died in 187 while trying to confiscate the treasury of a Bel sanctuary in Elam. He was succeeded by his son Seleukos IV Philopator.

SEE ALSO: Antiochos IV Epiphanes; Apamea, peace of; Ptolemy IV Philopator; Raphia, battle of; Seleucids; Syrian wars.

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