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Epilogue: Rome, the Seleukid East and the Disintegration of the Largest of the Successor Kingdoms in the 2nd Century BC*

Altay COŞKUN

Abstract

Although Antiochos III Megas had been defeated by the Romans in 191/90 BC, his son Seleukos IV managed to consolidate the kingdom, and his youngest son Antiochos IV Epiphanes (175–164) even became the most powerful monarch of his time. After a brief succession crisis (164/162), the kingdom regained strength once more under his grandson Demetrios I Soter (162–150). Only the revolt of Alexander I Balas in 153 resulted in a near-permanent crisis. Dynastic rivalries proliferated and catalyzed the further disintegration of the realm culminating in the Parthian conquests of Media, Mesopotamia and Persia by 140. With the death of Antiochos VII Sidetes (129), the loss of the territories east of the Euphrates became permanent, and Seleukid dissolution continued until Pompey deposed Antiochos XIII in 64/63. Reflecting on the multiple factors that contributed to the disintegration, I shall argue (1) that the heterogeneous nature of the kingdom need not be seen as weakness *per se*. Also, the negative impact of the Peace of Apameia in general (2) and, especially, the financial needs due to indemnity payments to Rome (3) have been overstated. (4) Roman diplomacy after 188 was harmful, but barely decisive for determining the fate of the Seleukids. (5) Ptolemaic interference was more destructive, but by itself not strong enough to annihilate the Seleukid colossus. The worst enemies of the Seleukids were the Seleukids themselves. Inner-dynastic rivalry got more frequent and more harmful through Roman manipulation and Ptolemaic intervention. (6) The combination of those three factors under Balas finally crippled the realm beyond repair in that it further induced the loss of the Iranian satrapies, and soon thereafter even the Babylonian heartland, the backbones of legitimate Seleukid kingship and resilience.

1. Introduction

At the beginning of the 2nd century BC, the Seleukid Empire was thriving under Antiochos III Megas: in the East, territories had returned under his overlordship as far as the Indus during his famous *anabasis* (212–205); in the South-West, he incorporated Koile Syria (202–198) and had leverage on Egypt by marrying his daughter Kleopatra to the young King Ptolemy V Epiphanes (195); in the West,

* I would like to thank Paul Kosmin, Augustine Dickinson and Jess Russel for helpful feedback on earlier drafts.

he began rebuilding Lysimacheia on the Thracian Chersonesos (197/196) as a stepping-stone for further conquests in Europe. Many of his contemporaries must have believed that he was truly a ‘Great King’ who would soon even surpass the achievements of his greatest ancestor, Seleukos I Nikator.¹ In contrast, at the end of the same century, his descendents were only kings in name: they acted as warlords without a firm territorial or institutional base, wearing off the few remaining resources by confronting inner-dynastic rivals or trying to suppress local independence movements. Their radius of action had been reduced to ever-changing and constantly shrinking segments of the Levant and Kilikia.²

Generations of scholars have discussed Seleukid decline from nearly every possible angle, so much that the long list of potential factors leading to the dissolution of the largest of the Successor Kingdoms is well known. And yet, it seems worthwhile to attempt to redress the balance against the background of the new perspectives that the *Seleukid Study Days*, especially ‘Rome and the Seleukid East’, have provided. To my aid will also be a growing body of exciting new scholarship on Hellenistic and Seleukid Studies, much of which is directly or indirectly relevant for our concern.³

2. A ‘Tumbling Giant’?

For a long time, the Seleukid Kingdom was regarded as a ‘tumbling giant’ or even as a ‘sick man’ (obviously playing on the term which Tsar Nicholas I coined for the weakened Ottoman Empire in the mid-19th century) right after

¹ For scholarship on Antiochos III, see the contributions by COŞKUN (*Which Seleukid King*), VISSCHER and ALMAGOR (in this volume), with ample bibliographies. On his *anabasis*, see most recently D. ENGELS (2017), 307–347; on the implication of ‘Great King’ and similar titles, see MUCCIOLI (2013), 395–417; D. ENGELS (2017), 41–71.

² For references to the latest Seleukids after 129, see the contributions by COŞKUN (*Triangular Epistolary Diplomacy*) and DĄBROWA in this volume.

³ E.g. EHLING (2008) rehearses the complicated line of events from 164 to 63 (cf. HOOVER 2007). A somewhat lighter narrative of nearly the same stories has been written by GRAINGER (2015b). CHRUBASIK (2016) provides the first book-length study on usurpations (cf. HOLTON ca. 2018). ERICKSON/RAMSEY (2011) published the proceedings to the first international conference (Exeter 2008) dedicated to the question of Seleukid dissolution, which foreshadowed many of the ideas developed further on the six subsequent *Seleukid Study Days*, on which see the *Introduction* to this book. Also see the surveys on Seleukid scholarship in CHRUBASIK (2016), esp. p. 3–6 and D. ENGELS (2017b), esp. p. 488–492. While writing this *Epilogue*, I have received a copy of the splendid synthesis of the conquests in the Greek and Near-Eastern worlds from Alexander to Hadrian by CHANIOTIS (2018).

the death of its founder, only waiting for one decisive blow to let the heterogeneous components fall apart.⁴ Typical is the judgment of William Tarn:

The Seleucid empire was nothing organic, in the sense that the Roman state, up to a point, was organic. The latter resembled a vertebrate animal; it expanded outwards from a solid core, the city of Rome. The Seleucid empire resembled rather a crustacean, not growing from any solid core but encased in an outer shell; the empire was a framework which covered a multitude of peoples and languages and cities. What there really was to the empire, officially, was a king, an army and a bureaucracy – the governing and taxing officials in the several satrapies. It had no imperial citizenship, as the Roman empire had; it hardly even had a unified state worship, for each satrapy had its own cult of the deified kings. Even before the final dissolution, any satrapy could easily set up for itself, as Bactria did for good and Media spasmodically, without endangering the life of the rest ...⁵

The structural weakness of the kingdom is a recurring theme in scholarship, and some historians let its ‘collapse’ begin in the mid-3rd century with the first insurrection of the Parthians, whom Józef Wolski not only considers the heirs of the Seleukids, but also the driving force of their demise.⁶ Further telling are negative assessments of Antiochos III’s diplomatic approach on his *anabasis*: rather than commending him for his cautious use of military resources, his incapability of subjecting the Parthians and Baktrians is pointed out.⁷ A similar tendency can be ascribed to those who qualify the relations of the Seleukids with the eastern elites as strained or hostile.⁸

As has been explained in the *Introduction*, however, such views are ceasing to constitute the mainstream. They are gradually yielding to a more appreciative conception of the Seleukid Empire as the strongest realm among the Successor Kingdoms. Besides the military vigor, which has never been doubted (at least for the earlier representatives of the dynasty), a number of recent studies have brought to the fore the ideological and political creativity of the Seleukid court: Andrea Primo has presented a survey of the literary production at the court,

⁴ BEVAN (1902), vol. 1, p. 76: ‘The empire, a magnificent tour de force, had no natural vitality. Its history from the moment it misses the founder’s hand is one of decline. It was a ‘sick man’ from its birth.’ ‘Homme malade’ is also used by CAPDETREY (2007), p. 11. Note, however, that CAPDETREY calls for a re-evaluation of the early Seleukids (p. 12–15). Also see STROOTMAN (forthcoming c) for discussion.

⁵ TARN (1951/80), p. 4.

⁶ Structural weakness: e.g., WOLSKI (1999), p. 32 and 37, though emphasizing Parthian aggression as the most destructive force (p. 40, 113 etc.); ERRINGTON (2008), p. 112; J. ENGELS (2011), p. 189–191; WENGHOFER (in this volume).

⁷ E.g., WILL (1982), p. 66f.; WOLSKI (1999), p. 67, 75–82. Also implied by ERRINGTON (2008), p. 223; CHANIOTIS (2018), p. 193 (as quoted below, section 2) and 198. Differently, however, BOUCHÉ-LECLERCQ (1913), p. 164 acknowledged the value of Antiochos’ diplomacy with Euthydemus of Baktria. For in-depth discussion, see D. ENGELS (2017), p. 307–347, with a brief survey of scholarship on p. 309, n. 6.

⁸ E.g., BEVAN (1902), vol. 1, p. 2; WIESEHÖFER (2002), p. 115.

Daniel Ogden a scrutiny of the dynastic legends. Paul Kosmin elucidated the many ways in which the remote and diverse territories were appropriated ideologically. Laurent Capdetrey fully appreciates the governmental practices and Rolf Strootman systematically analyses the royal court, whereas John Ma sheds much light on the construction of power relation through royal diplomacy with the cities within and beyond the reach of regal administration. All of this contributed to the particular resilience with which the Seleukid kingdom was uniquely endowed.⁹

Decentralized or ‘feudalized’ structures do not necessarily betray weakness: they could in fact be highly functional, as long as the authority and prestige of the king and his family was upheld. This had largely worked under the Achaimenids, and perhaps even more successfully under the Seleukids, at least until the mid-2nd century. In short, skills and strength qualified the royal family for nearly two centuries. They faced challenges since the days of the founder Seleukos I, but regularly overcame them.¹⁰

3. *The Defeat by the Romans and the Conditions of Apameia*

After Antiochos III had suffered crushing defeats by the Romans at Thermopylai in central Greece (191) and near Magnesia in Western Asia Minor (190), he was forced to accept severe peace conditions in Apameia (188).¹¹ First, he had to cede the territories north and west of the Taurus Mountains in south-eastern Asia Minor. Second, he had to demilitarize, handing over most of his fleet and his war elephants – the emblem of Seleukid power since the Battle of Ipsos (301).¹² Third, he had to offer hostages, including one of his sons. Fourth, he had to pay substantial indemnities, part of them on the spot, and more coming due in 12 annual instalments, adding up to over 15,000 talents. Antiochos III thus lost part of his territories, treasures, military capacities and prestige. It is an entrenched

⁹ Literary production: PRIMO (2009); cf. ALMAGOR and VISSCHER (in this volume). Dynastic myths: OGDEN (2017); cf. ERICKSON (2011) and (2014). Ideological geography: KOSMIN (2014a); cf. CAPDETREY (2007), p. 51–85. Diplomacy with cities: MA (1999). Administration and court: CAPDETREY (2007) and STROOTMAN (2014); cf. MEHL (1999); RAMSEY (in this volume).

¹⁰ See the *Introduction* for references, esp. to the works of D. ENGELS and STROOTMAN. Also APERGHIS (2004), p. 298, who emphasizes that the fiscal organization was centralized (in contrast to the satrapal structure) and effective until ca. 129: ‘When the empire eventually succumbed, it was not so much due to internal structural problems, but because it was unfortunate enough to encounter, at the same time, two rising powers, Rome in the west and Parthia in the east, which, in the end, proved too strong for it.’ But see below on my weighing of the external factors.

¹¹ POLYB. 21.42; LIV. 38.38; APP., *Syr.* 38f.

¹² See KOSMIN (2014a), p. 1–3 etc.; COŞKUN (2012); SEKUNDA (in this volume).

view to regard the combined effects of his defeat as the decisive turning point in Seleukid history.¹³ Most recently, Angelos Chaniotis has phrased it this way:

The long twilight of the Seleucids, during which their kingdom, continually reduced in size and torn by internal conflicts, became irrelevant as international power, started immediately after the Peace of Apameia. It lasted for more than a century and cannot be narrated in detail. The efforts of Seleucid kings to retain or regain parts of their realm were futile. Weakened by dynastic conflicts and uprisings, the Seleucids gradually lost not only the eastern satrapies but also most of their kingdom.¹⁴

While Chaniotis' general outline is certainly correct, one may still question the emphasis of his assessment. Do we not have to reckon with too many contingencies for any incident to have a necessary impact to be felt only generations later? As painful as the dictate of Apameia was at its time, one should not overestimate the long-term damage it could inflict. The Romans did not make the kingdom suffer beyond repair,¹⁵ which is evident from its splendid recovery under the successors of Antiochos III.

His oldest surviving son, Seleukos IV (187–175), has been underestimated for a long time, strangely for his wise decision to hold back on military campaigns that might irritate the Romans. In the meantime, he managed to consolidate the royal treasury despite the loss of the tax income from wealthy Asia Minor. At some point, he also shook off the burden of the indemnity payments to Rome, deciding that he no longer had to pay his father's debts.¹⁶

Even more impressive was the ensuing rule of his brother Antiochos IV Epiphanes (175–164): he was not only able to fend off a Ptolemaic invasion in 170, but also to counter the attack and defeat the Ptolemies repeatedly. He nearly annexed Egypt, had the Romans not interceded on behalf of the Ptolemies. The famous intercession of the ambassador Cn. Popilius Laenas became known as the 'Day of Eleusis', the place of his first encounter with the king on a beach near Alexandria. While Epiphanes' enforced retreat may have been a humiliation, it allowed him to maintain friendship with Rome as well as to carry home a lot of loot – and, indeed, also military glory, since his army had been unbeaten. He thus had much to show off in his procession at Daphne in 166, a celebration of the strength and prosperity of his kingdom as well as an inauguration of his own anabasis planned for the following year. During his life-

¹³ E.g., FISCHER (1980), p. 152: 'Seit dem Frieden von Apameia 188 v.Chr. geht das Seleukidenreich „wirklich“ seinem Ende entgegen.' Cf. DĄBROWA (2005), p. 75.

¹⁴ CHANIOTIS (2018), p. 193.

¹⁵ Cf. CAPDETREY (2007), p. 15f. – Contrast this with assessments that exaggerate the negative effect of Apameia, such as BOUCHÉ-LECLERCQ (1913), p. 220–225.

¹⁶ For a positive re-evaluation of Seleukos IV, see MILETA (2014) and ELVIDGE (2017). On the payments, see below, with n. 36.

time, he was, no doubt, the most powerful of all living kings, and both his political and military achievements were exceptional.¹⁷

4. *Assessing the Impact of the War Indemnities*

The indemnities payable to the Romans deserve to be addressed once more. Did they, combined with the loss of Asia Minor, ruin the financial capacities of the Seleukids? This impression may be gained due to the remarkable fact that various sources depict Antiochos III, Seleukos IV and Antiochos IV as temple robbers, so that they could appear to be in desperate need to abide by the stipulations of the Treaty of Apameia.¹⁸ Antiochos III is said to have been killed when robbing a temple of Bel in Elymaïs, and Diodoros explicitly mentions his lack of money.¹⁹ Seleukos IV was supposedly killed by Heliodoros, the same courtier who had previously inspected the treasury of the temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem (ca. 178), but held back from confiscations due to a ‘miracle’, if the legendary account of *2Macc* were to be trusted.²⁰ Antiochos IV is reported to have plundered a temple of Nanaia (also in Elymaïs) shortly before dying under uncertain conditions. According to Polybios, he was ‘smitten with madness’ in retaliation for his sacrilege.²¹ Judaeans sources vary concerning the details, but confirm the view that the king tried to plunder temples, urged by the need to refill his coffers, and that he incurred divine vengeance.²²

¹⁷ For a positive re-evaluation of Antiochos IV, see, e.g., MITTAG (2006); FEYEL / GRASLIN-THOMÉ (2014a) and (2014b). For his military campaigns and political achievements, also FISCHER-BOVET (2014). *Dan* 11.40–45 implies that even pious Judaeans saw him as nearly invincible, see COŞKUN (2019). See below on the ‘Day of Eleusis’ (n. 48), the conflict in Jerusalem (n. 45) and his procession of Daphne (n. 42). For a less positive assessment, see, e.g., CHANIOTIS (2018), p. 195: ‘Antiochos IV was a master of illusion [...]; it required some staging for him to present his humiliation in Eleusis as a triumph. He did this by organizing an impressive military parade of more than 50,000 men at Daphne. [...] This demonstration of military power, wealth and exotic weapons was doomed to be the Seleucids’ swansong.’

¹⁸ Thus, e.g., CHANIOTIS (2018), p. 193f.

¹⁹ DIOD. SIC. 28.3; 29.15: ἀπορῶν χρημάτων; STRAB. 16.1.18 (744C); cf. JUST. 32.2.1f.; WIESEHÖFER (2002), p. 110f.; 115; 117, including a digression on the wealth of the temples in Elymaïs; also ERRINGTON (2008), p. 223; GRAINGER (2015a), p. 192f.

²⁰ APP., *Syr.* 45.233 on the murder and *2Macc* 3f. on the miracle of Jerusalem. Cf. BOUCHÉ-LECLERCQ (1913), p. 237–240. For a discussion of more or less trustworthy elements of the tale, see SCHWARTZ (2008), p. 181–206.

²¹ POLYB. 31.9; cf. APP., *Syr.* 66.352.

²² The second introductory letter of *2Macc* (1.14–17) has the king perish while plundering the temple of Nanaia. WIESEHÖFER (2002), p. 111–114 raises doubts against the narrative that implies a *hieros gamos*, whereas SCHWARTZ (2008), p. 149 defends it. According to *1Macc* 3.27–31, Antiochos intended to campaign against Persis to fund the war against Judas; later on (6.1–4), he attacks Elymaïs, ‘a city in Persis famous for its

To many scholars, this accumulated evidence has appeared compelling. And such an understanding seems to gain further support from the intention that *2Macc* 8.34–36 alleges for the military campaigns of Nikanor, Bakchides and Timotheos against the Judaeans:

As for that most ungracious Nikanor, who had brought a thousand merchants to buy the Judaeans, he was through the help of the Lord brought down by them, of whom he made least account; and putting off his glorious apparel, and discharging his company, he came like a fugitive servant through the midland to Antioch having very great dishonour, for that his host was destroyed. Thus he who took upon him to make good to the Romans their tribute by means of captives in Jerusalem, told abroad that the Jews had God to fight for them, and therefore they could not be hurt, because they followed the laws that he gave them.²³

I do not see a point in denying that Antiochos III must have been short of cash in the aftermath of his defeats: he had to make payments to the Romans and Pergamenes immediately after he had been granted a truce in 190 and more resulting from the peace negotiations in 189/88. Perhaps even worse was the loss of substantial military forces, which required new recruitments without any delay. His financial difficulties may well have continued the year after the conclusion of peace, which also saw the end of his life in Elymaïs.

But I hesitate to regard him and his successors, at least until the mid-2nd century, as compelled to rob temples to satisfy harsh Roman demands, or

wealth, silver and gold'; a general mention is also made of 'the very rich sanctuary' in the city; but the assault failed, and he had to flee to Babylon. The connection with the revolt of Judas allows Yahweh to interfere as protector of a pagan sanctuary. The epitome of Jason of Cyrene (*2Macc* 9.1f.) locates his attempted temple robbery in Persepolis, whence the king was expelled and moved on to Ekbatana. The Judaeans were apparently working on some widespread rumors, unaware of the geography of the eastern satrapies, let alone of Antiochos' specific itinerary. The king seems to have died in eastern Persis, perhaps in Gabai: MITTAG (2006), p. 319f.; differently, ERRINGTON (2008), p. 271, who suggests Ekbatana. But the Judaeans agree that the intended robbery caused the king's painful death (*1Macc* 6.5–16; *2Macc* 1.16; 9.5–29). Also see JOS., *Ant. Jud.* 12.9.1. (354f.); PORPHYR., *FGrHist* 260 F 53 and 56.1; HIERON., in *Dan* 718. For further comments, see SCHWARTZ (2008), p. 147–150 (148: 'our writer's limited knowledge and lack of interest about such things').

²³ *2Macc* 8: (34) ὁ δὲ τρισαλιτήριος Νικάνωρ, ὁ τοὺς χιλίους ἐμπόρους ἐπὶ τὴν πράσιν τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἀγαγόν, (35) ταπεινωθεὶς ὑπὸ τῶν κατ' αὐτὸν νομιζομένων ἐλαχίστων εἶναι, τῆ τοῦ Κυρίου βοηθείᾳ τὴν δοξικὴν ἀποθέμενος ἐσθῆτα, διὰ τῆς μεσογείου, δραπέτου τρόπον, ἔρημον ἑαυτὸν ποιήσας, ἤκεν εἰς Ἄντιόχειαν ὑπεράγαν δυσημερήσας ἐπὶ τῆ τοῦ στρατοῦ διαφθορᾶ. (36) καὶ ὁ τοῖς Ῥωμαίοις ἀναδεξάμενος φόρον ἀπὸ τῆς τῶν ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις αἰχμαλωσίας κατορθώσασθαι, κατήγγελλεν ὑπέρμαχον ἔχειν τὸν Θεὸν τοὺς Ἰουδαίους καὶ διὰ τὸν τρόπον τοῦτο ἀτρότους εἶναι τοὺς Ἰουδαίους, διὰ τὸ ἀκολουθεῖν τοῖς ὑπ' αὐτοῦ προστεταγμένοις νόμοις. Greek text quoted and English translation adapted from *The Greek Word*, which reproduces *Elpenor's Bilingual (Greek / English) Old Testament*, presenting the official Greek text of the Greek Orthodox Church and the translation of L.C.L. Brenton (URL: <https://www.ellopos.net/elpenor/greek-texts/septuagint/default.asp>, 28 March 2018).

otherwise to make good for the losses of the Roman War. To start with the above-quoted lines on Antiochos IV, they obviously contain several fabricated elements, as does the preceding account of the battles (*2Macc* 8.16–33). A comparison with the much more accurate version of *1Macc* would make this apparent immediately. But there is no need to go into detail here. The fact that the Judaeans are said to have already been in control of Jerusalem (*2Macc* 8.31) and that Antiochos IV was supposed to have advanced as far as Persis on his eastern campaign (*2Macc* 9.1f.) suggests an (assumed) date around 164. Since we know, however, that Antiochos had repaid the remaining debts of his father in 173 (or possibly shortly thereafter),²⁴ the purported financial motivation for plundering Judaea nearly a decade later has to be rejected.

At any rate, the allegations of temple robbery sharply contrast with the Seleukids' image as sponsors of traditional cults throughout their kingdom. There is noteworthy evidence, not only for Antiochos III, but even still for Seleukos IV, that they contributed substantially to the costs of running the temple of Jerusalem.²⁵ Moreover, the concern of Seleukos IV is explicitly said to have been that the royal treasury had been overpaying for cult expenses: the accumulated surplus thus seems to have been the real target of Heliodoros' mission.²⁶ Besides, the fact that *2Macc* tells us a fanciful story about his 'conversion' in the temple of Yahweh does not justify the assumption that his murdering of Seleukos IV had anything to do with Judaea. Either we trust Appian's statement that he was aiming to rule himself (though this would have been in his role as tutor of the boy Antiochos, son of Seleukos),²⁷ or we consider the possibility of his involvement in a larger conspiracy against Seleukos IV, perhaps involving Antiochos IV,²⁸ unless we reject the literary traditions of his murder and confess agnosticism.

Moreover, it is well known that temple treasuries were complex. Specifically for the sanctuary of Yahweh, we learn that it harboured a large fund to support the poor, widows and orphans, besides guarding the treasures owned by the divinity himself and the money used for the cult expenses. It further served as a deposit for the 'private savings' of the Tobiads, if that is an adequate label for money made on the side by tax farmers.²⁹ In various ways, Hellenistic kings chose to control the spending or claim part of the income generated by the

²⁴ Differently, SCHWARTZ (2008), p. 544f. considers the claim to be possibly correct. But see below, with n. 36.

²⁵ *Jos.*, *Ant. Jud.* 12.3.3 (140–142); *2Macc* 3.2f.

²⁶ *2Macc* 3.6, with PARKER (2013), 35–38.

²⁷ Cf. PALTIEL (1979b), p. 43. Differently, BOUCHÉ-LECLERCQ (1913), p. 238–240 assumes that Heliodoros planned his coup by the time he was in Jerusalem, and thus tried to keep the temple funds for himself.

²⁸ See SCOLNIC 2016. Skeptical, however, BOUCHÉ-LECLERCQ (1913), p. 241f.

²⁹ *2Macc* 3f. On the complexity of Hellenistic temple economies, also see Aperghis (2004), p. 107–110.

temples in their territories.³⁰ Kyle Erickson (in this volume) has elaborated on the tendency to centralize the control of temple funds well before Antiochos III's war against Rome, a trend that Seleukos IV continued, as is well documented by the recently-found inscription of Maresha (Marisa).³¹ Peter Franz Mittag points out that royal claims to part of temple treasures were more likely to arouse tensions in Near-Eastern than in Greek contexts; in the latter, it was customary that a polis had the prerogative to decide over the properties of its sanctuaries, a role that the king might have taken over in certain areas. At any rate, a ruler was never entitled to random demands.³²

Besides, we should be cautious not to accept too easily that the Seleukid Kingdom was broke after the loss of Asia Minor. Let us remember that all the abandoned Anatolian territory had returned to the kingdom only between 204 and 192. Even beforehand, there had been long periods in which cities and rural areas had escaped the grip of the central government.³³ Accordingly, no

³⁰ In her study of the temple states of Asia Minor, BOFFO (1985), p. 21f. *et al.* points to the tradition of regal power over the cult places in all its dimensions, a tradition shared by the Babylonians, Hittites and Achaimenids. APERGHIS (2004) variously addresses the direct (p. 108, 287f.) and indirect (p. 110) income that the Seleukid kings generated from temples. He further claims a general policy of maximizing royal income (p. 297, 299); exceptions prove the rule (p. 299): 'The numerous tax concessions granted by Seleukid kings ..., often for a few years only, are clear indications of a ps.-Aristotelian economic policy. That Sardeis or Jerusalem, for example, should not pay taxes for a while and should receive subsidies for material purchases obviously served the purpose of helping these cities find their feet after a period of troubles. It has been suggested by me that this was not so much a gesture of philanthropy on the part of the king, as a straightforward economic calculation of how soon these cities could start generating revenue again/for the royal treasury, although there were naturally political and social considerations to be taken into account as well.' See p. 300 for the Seleukids' motivation to create profit, and p. 302f. for the claim of an active policy of 'developing infrastructure'. GORRE / HONIGMAN (2014) emphasize strong regional differences as to the tolerance towards royal intervention in temple matters, high in Egypt and low in Babylon (p. 307), higher in the Hellenistic and lower in the previous periods (p. 319); moreover, they regard cultic and economic reforms as barely separable (p. 309). Somewhat differently, however, HOUGHTON / LORBER / HOOVER (2008), II.1, p. 1 state that 'temple robbery by kings was fairly common'. Also see CAPDETREY (2007), p. 167–189.

³¹ See SEG 57.1838; COTTON / WÖRRLE (2007); GERA (2009). Cf. CAPDETREY (2007), p. 173; GORRE / HONIGMAN (2014), p. 304f.; 331; ELVIDGE (2017), p. 45f.; CHANIOTIS (2018), p. 194. Even before this inscription was known, APERGHIS (2004), p. 287 suggested that the *prostates tou hierou* Simon who challenged the High Priest Onias III (2Macc 3) was not a subaltern temple official, but had actually been appointed by the king to report on tax collection. APERGHIS (2011), followed by GORRE / HONIGMAN (2014), p. 332, specified that his particular target were the market dues levied by the temple; Onias III counteracted his effort and likewise prevailed over Heliodoros, who was therefore deposed by Antiochos IV, as was Onias himself. For more context on those agents, see below, with n. 38.

³² MITTAG (2006), p. 309.

³³ Cf. CAPDETREY (2007), p. 272; differently, ERRINGTON (2008), p. 123f.; 268f.

Seleukid king had ever been dependent on income from Asia Minor. Another – somewhat paradoxical – effect of the Treaty of Apameia is that the strict limitation of the Seleukid fleet substantially reduced the number of men on the royal payroll.³⁴ Moreover, the output of silver coinage under Seleukos IV and Antiochos IV was in no way inferior to that of their father, neither in quantitative nor in qualitative terms. Their reforms are now rather understood as responding to new developments of the major Mediterranean currencies.³⁵ The fact that Seleukos IV discontinued indemnity payments to Rome was as much a political choice as it was for Antiochos IV Epiphanes to repay all extant debts,³⁶ besides adding a gift and thus regaining Roman *amicitia* this way.³⁷

Next, the desire to maximize monetary income from Jerusalem is explained as generated by Judaean dissidents in *2Macc*: a ‘jealous’ official called Simon wanted to harm the High Priest Onias III, accusing him of holding illegal funds

³⁴ APERGHIS (2004), p. 198f. estimates that Antiochos’ fleet for the Greek campaign required 20,000 to 25,000 oarsmen, not yet considered the number of those patrolling the coast of southern Asia Minor or the Levant; altogether, he suggests up to 30,000 in wartime and around 10,000 as the peace-time minimum until 191. In contrast, an optimistic total for the permitted ten ‘decked warships’, plus several smaller ships, would not have exceeded 5,000. – Note that further savings were to be made by discontinuing the elephant units.

³⁵ Catharine Lorber emphasized this to me on the 9th Enoch Seminar, Gazzada (near Milan), 13 June 2018. Cf. APERGHIS (2004), p. 231f., who confirms that the quality of Seleukid coins remained unchanged after 188, but suggests that the increased influx of foreign currencies was caused by the massive removal of Seleukid silver coinage; also see p. 232 for an outlook on the later changes under Epiphanes and Balas. HOUGHTON / LORBER / HOOVER (2008), II.1, p. xviii, 1 etc. and ELVIDGE (2017), p. 48f. concede to Apameia only little impact on the minting of Seleukos IV. DOYEN (2014) characterizes the coinage of Antiochos IV as a mix of continuity and innovation; the reduction of the silver content by 2% in the mint of Antioch is explained as an adaptation to the changing standards in the eastern Mediterranean (p. 266f., 295), whereas the reduction of the bronze denominations is explained with the Roman model (p. 292–294).

³⁶ LIV. 42.6 (on year 173): *Et <ab> Antiocho rege sub idem tempus legati uenerunt; quorum princeps Apollonius in senatum introductus multis iustisque causis regem excusauit, quod stipendium serius quam ad diem praestaret; id se omne aduexisse, ne cuius nisi temporis gratia regi fieret. Donum praeterea afferre, uasa aurea quingentum pondus.* This is normally understood as implying the payment of all remaining instalments in one lump sum; cf. MITTAG (2006), p. 99f.; ELVIDGE (2017), p. 48f. Differently, SCHWARTZ (2008), p. 544f. reads Livy’s *stipendium* as referring to a single annual instalment; if so, then *omne* also denotes no more than the full payment of one annual rate (of 1,000 talents). The case cannot be decided, since it is not known when Seleukos IV interrupted the payments and on which terms the Roman embassy to Antioch had agreed in 174. At any rate, there is no reason to assume that Seleukos stopped payments immediately in 187 or 186, so that the payment in 173 may well have been the last, or at least close to the last one. At any rate, it is highly improbable that payments continued until 165, as purported by *2Macc* 8.36 (quoted above, with n. 23).

³⁷ On Epiphanes’ *amicitia* with Rome, see MITTAG (2014) as well as BERNHARDT (2014); also STROOTMAN in this volume.

in the temple treasury (which triggered the abovementioned enquiry of Heliodoros, ca. 178/75); Jason bought his succession to the high priesthood at the cost of his brother Onias by promising to increase the annual payments from Jerusalem to 440 talents (174), only to be outbid by his rival Menelaos by another 300 talents (171).³⁸ While this narrative may be in part distorted for ideological reasons, it should nevertheless have some bearing on our question: the Seleukids are not represented as acting in despair. In fact, they are not even said to do so in the parallel accounts of *Daniel* and *IMacc*, where Epiphanes is acting as the most depraved evildoer, but not out of any kind of weakness, such as financial needs. He is rather posing as the embodiment of hubris in a predetermined divine plan of scrutinizing God's people and saving the faithful.³⁹ The example of the financial capacities of Jerusalem also serves as a point of comparison, which minimizes the effect that an annual payment of 1,000 talents might have had on the Seleukid treasury.⁴⁰

At any rate, the very fact that Seleukos IV was able to subsidize the cult of Jerusalem generously – i.e. one of secondary importance from an imperial perspective – speaks to the wealth of the kingdom under his rule. These riches were not only passed on to Antiochos IV, but additional resources poured in through the looting of Egypt. Further on, the spoiling of the temple of Yahweh in 169 must have generated substantial income as well.⁴¹ The procession and feasting at Daphne best illustrate the exuberance of the kingdom under Epiphanes.⁴²

³⁸ *2Macc* 3f. Note, however, that Jason of Cyrene, from whose work *2Macc* has been epitomized, had the intention to discredit certain Judaeans factions, and may thus have downplayed the role of the king or his court. For the financial implications of those successions, see GORRE / HONIGMAN (2014), p. 333–335.

³⁹ The 'prophet' posing as Daniel, a contemporary of Antiochos IV, puts all the blame on the kings (*Dan* 11.20, 28, 30–32), to call on his fellow Judaeans for courageous resistance (11.31–35). Similarly, though for a different purpose (namely, to unite all Judaeans factions behind the dynasty of Simon, the brother of Judas Maccabee), the author of *IMacc* (1.20–24) mainly criticizes the Seleukids. For a discussion of the different ideological agendas, see, e.g., SCHWARTZ (ca. 2017); COŞKUN (in preparation).

⁴⁰ Also see APERGHIS (2004), e.g., p. 172–175 for several further examples of indemnities or plunder.

⁴¹ *IMacc* 1.16–20; this is to be distinguished from the sack of Jerusalem in 168 (*2Macc* 5.11–21), which will have yielded further loot. Cf. *Dan* 11.28–32; Josephus amalgamates the various traditions: *Ant. Jud.* 12.5.2 (244)–12.5.3 (246); also *Bell. Jud.* 1.1.1f. (31–35). For a discussion, see COŞKUN (2019); differently, SCHWARTZ (2008), p. 533–536.

⁴² See ELVIDGE (2017), p. 47–56. On Daphne, see, e.g., MITTAG (2006), p. 282–295; also IOSSIF (2010), p. 134–151, who concludes (p. 151) that the procession was designed to paint 'une image du monde séleucide idéal, tel qu'il aurait dû être' (but note that he suggests dating it to summer 165: p. 126–134).

Whatever motivated him to seize funds deposited in the temple of Nanaia, financial despair would have been the least likely incentive.⁴³ Mittag plausibly suggests that we take seriously the indication of *IMacc* 3.31 that the king's aim had been to collect overdue taxes.⁴⁴ In addition, I cannot exclude that Epiphanes felt it timely to demonstrate his sovereignty and, in a certain sense, the limitless of his power – just as we may interpret his religious politics in Jerusalem, which Judaeans sources represent as desecration, persecution or ‘Abomination of Desolation’.⁴⁵

At any rate, Polybios' narrative is sufficiently transparent for us to see that there was no factual relation between Antiochos' treatment of the temple of Nanaia and his death. It is no more than a malevolent construction of divine vengeance of sacrilege, a commonplace of political propaganda.⁴⁶ The financial implications of Apameia on the kingdom were apparently quite limited: while we cannot exclude that they were still pressing in 187, they were quickly balanced out by Seleukos IV, and distant past under Antiochos IV.⁴⁷

5. *The Effect of Roman Diplomacy after Apameia*

Roman diplomacy after Apameia is another factor that, on balance, caused harm to the Seleukid Kingdom. The first in a series of notorious incidents was the

⁴³ Pace BOUCHÉ-LECLERCQ (1913), p. 300, who even claims that the whole eastern campaign had been aimed at the riches of Elymaïs to overcome pressing financial needs. WIESEHÖFER (2002), p. 115 explains Antiochos' financial needs as ‘bedingt durch die innenpolitischen und wohl auch militärischen Reorganisationsmaßnahmen der ersten Jahre sowie vor allem den erfolglosen Ägyptenzug und die Auseinandersetzungen in Judäa’. I would, however, assume that both conflicts rather generated a surplus for the king. More convincingly, WIESEHÖFER (2002), p.118 adds the argument that Antiochos wanted a demonstration of unlimited loyalty before he moved further east.

⁴⁴ MITTAG (2006), p. 309f. (cf. p. 320), with reference to *IMacc* 3.31: ἐβουλεύσατο τοῦ πορευθῆναι εἰς τὴν Περσίδα καὶ λαβεῖν τοὺς φόρους τῶν χωρῶν καὶ συναγαγεῖν ἀργύριον πολὺ.

⁴⁵ *Dan* 7–12; *IMacc* 1; *2Macc* 5–7. Historical interpretations of the conflict in Jerusalem are legion, and vary between emphasizing religious, political and fiscal motivations. The most recent and, at the same time, most profuse discussion of previous scholarship is by BERNHARDT (2017), esp. p. 217–274, who has returned to stressing religious intentions. I prefer to see, together with BICKERMANN (1937), most of the problems resulting from inner-Judaeans tensions, to which the king responded with growing severity; cf. MITTAG (2006), p. 226–230; 252–268; 274f.; 280f.; D. ENGELS (2017), p. 349–380; COŞKUN (in preparation).

⁴⁶ Cf. MITTAG (2006), p. 309, also 307f., where he points out the diverse and inconsistent nature of the literary tradition; the obvious parallel to his father's death is seen as further evidence for a fabrication.

⁴⁷ Also see MITTAG (2006), p. 298–307 on the short- and long-term income that he generated in the Persian Gulf.

rude treatment of Antiochos IV Epiphanes on the ‘Day of Eleusis’ (168).⁴⁸ The second was the Senate’s refusal to give Demetrios permission to leave Italy and claim the Seleukid throne (163).⁴⁹ Perhaps the worst was the embassy of Cn. Octavius, who burnt the fleet and hamstringed the elephants under the weak child king Antiochos V (163/62).⁵⁰ Some have argued that Octavius was only enforcing the stipulations of the peace treaty of Apameia, but it needs to be pointed out that this was no longer binding: it had defined the condition for peace and friendship with Antiochos III in 188, but did not legally oblige his successors.⁵¹ The treaty’s value was at best an expression of the political interest that several Roman senators might endorse. Many of them indeed wanted to see the Seleukids weak, if we can trust the judgment of Polybios.⁵² And yet, other Roman aristocrats, as those headed by the Scipio family and C. Sempronius Gracchus, were much more sympathetic, especially with Demetrios. Roman politics under the auspices of the multi-headed Republican Senate was certainly not always straightforward and depended on several contingencies.

This is why we should be cautious not to assume that the Romans pursued anything close to an anti-Seleukid agenda. Indifference would seem a much more pertinent descriptor, at least as long as they saw no threat coming from Syria.⁵³ Such a view would be in line with the very limited impact of Roman

⁴⁸ POLYB. 29.27.1–8, LIV. 45.12.3–8, DIOD. SIC. 31.2; JUST. 34.3.1–4; APP., *Syr.* 66.350f. For more on Eleusis, see MITTAG (2006), p. 214–224 and SCOLNIC in this volume.

⁴⁹ POLYB. 31.2.1–7 (on 163) and 31.11f. (on 162). Cf. EHLING (2008), p. 119f.; 122. Note, however, that WENGHOFER in this volume suggests that, by holding Demetrios back, the Romans even reduced the potential for domestic strife and ultimately strengthened the kingdom as of 175. Also consider the position of SCOLNIC in this volume, according to whom Popilius Laenas got his way because his threat was that Rome may let loose Demetrios. Similarly, GRAINGER (2017), p. 237 argues that Lysias gave in to Octavius because of the same threat.

⁵⁰ POLYB. 31.2.8–11; 31.11.1f. For more detail, see EHLING (2008), p. 120f. and GRAINGER (2017), p. 234–239, who question Polybios’ allegation that Octavius was acting according to the instruction of the Senate. On the elephants, also see SEKUNDA in this volume.

⁵¹ PALTIEL (1979a) argued convincingly that the terms of Apameia were no longer valid after the death of Antiochos III; cf. COŞKUN / D. ENGELS (2015), differentiating between legal and political implications; similarly, the treaty is regarded as no longer binding by GRAINGER (2015a), p. 193; ELVIDGE (2017), p. 18–42; SEKUNDA in this volume. GRAINGER (2017), p. 208, points out that many stipulations were not enforced while Antiochos III was still alive, let alone thereafter. For different views, see EHLING (2008), p. 121; PAYEN (2016); SCOLNIC in this volume, n. 3.

⁵² See above, with n. 49.

⁵³ Cf. GRUEN (1984), p. 73–95; FISCHER (1980), p. 118f.: the Romans acted ‘vielmehr vorsichtig, zurückhaltend und nachprüfend in der Absicht, die eigene Macht zu behaupten und zu festigen’. Contrast this with the view, e.g., of APERGHIS (2004), p. 298, quoted above, n. 10.

diplomacy on the Seleukids after 160. One may well debate the degree of indifference or ill-will, but it will be hard to argue that Roman machinations were the decisive factor of Seleukid disintegration. If this should have been the aim, those promoting such a policy in the 160s would have been utterly disappointed of the developments, at least until 153.

6. *The Impact of Ptolemaic Interventions and Dynastic Strife in the House of Seleukos*

The particular roles of the Ptolemies deserve a closer look as well. Their interventions were frequent and particularly deleterious: they repeatedly fuelled dynastic rifts in Syria. And yet, we should perhaps not overestimate their influence, since the first victims of their destructive intercessions were the subjects and even family members of the Ptolemies themselves: dynastic crises paralysed them for nearly a century after 175. That, in the 1st century, they emerged from these power struggles so much better than the Seleukids is at least to a large degree contingent.

Another point to keep in mind is that the Ptolemies had been opposing, if not seriously harming, the Seleukids from early on, either through indirect interference or direct military intervention. The first known case is the War of Succession (280–277), to be followed by the series of the so-called Syrian Wars, the first three of which were all the result of Ptolemaic aggression. Even the Sixth Syrian War (170–168), in which Antiochos IV laid siege to Alexandria and had himself inaugurated as pharaoh in Memphis had been started by an attack on the Seleukid Kingdom.⁵⁴ Ptolemaic hostility was thus not at all new. The question should therefore rather be: what had changed by the mid-2nd century, so that the Seleukids were no longer capable to respond to Ptolemaic encroachments as successfully as before?

What about domestic strife amongst the Seleukids? This had been an occasional problem since the (first) War of Brothers (246–242).⁵⁵ It became the most critical issue when the brothers Seleukos IV and Antiochos IV established

⁵⁴ See esp. GRAINGER (2010); cf. HÖLBL (1994/2004).

⁵⁵ The beginning of the revolt of Hierax is normally dated to ca. 242/239 and its end to ca. 228/227, but I have tried to show that this late date is due to a narrative simplification by Justin. This needs to be corrected after Porphyry's report, which limits Hierax' war with his brother Seleukos II to 246–242/241. It was thus contemporary to the Third Syrian War, and both the external and internal attack on Seleukos II had been instigated by Ptolemy III Euergetes. See COŞKUN (2016a) and (2016b), and soon (ca. 2018) for a full argument, where I also reject (together with DEL MONTE 1997, p. 37, 228) the idea that Seleukos, the son of Antiochos I, had revolted against his father. For alternative accounts, see GRAINGER (2010) or CHRUBASIK (2016). ERRINGTON (2008), p. 112 overstates the importance of usurpations under the early Seleukids.

two rivalling lines, represented by Antiochos V, Alexander I Balas and Antiochos VI on the one hand and Demetrios I, Demetrios II and Antiochos VII on the other (175–125).⁵⁶ The final chapter of Seleukid history was shaped by the deadly strife between the offspring of Kleopatra Thea (150–122): the sons that she bore to Demetrios II and Antiochos VII, Antiochos VIII Grypos (125–98/97) and Antiochos IX Kyzikenos (114–97/96) respectively, began wrecking whatever was left of the Syrian kingdom, leaving their sons and grandsons only spoils to fight over before Pompey put an end to the protracted tragedy. Clearly, such ongoing dynastic rifts spring to the eyes of those who study Seleukid history, and one may easily identify them as most destructive factor of all – as did Poseidonios, Strabon and Justin.⁵⁷

But here, too, some caution is in place: in some way, usurpation was a phenomenon inherent to Hellenistic kingship, which was rooted in military victory and agonism.⁵⁸ At any rate, we need to ask why such domestic conflicts proliferated as of 153, and, perhaps even more importantly, why the kingdom was no longer able to deal with such strife in a swifter and less costly way. Obviously, in the case of Alexander I Balas' usurpation against Demetrios I, we have a contingent combination of detrimental factors: most of all, the active interference of Ptolemy VI Philometor gave this insurrection a completely new drive. With the additional support of Attalos II of Pergamon, Ariarathes V of Kappadokia and the Judaeian High Priest Jonathan, Balas managed to become the first usurper to successfully challenge a mature and fully established Seleukid king.

There is room for speculation as to how important the influence of the Roman Senate was: while the *patres* gave Balas their blessings, perhaps to please their other allies among his supporters, they did not provide any material resources.⁵⁹ It would be somewhat speculative to muse about the effective value of this diplomatic move. In other words: how far might friendship for Balas, or better: resentment of Demetrios I,⁶⁰ have induced Philometor, Attalos and Ariarathes

⁵⁶ Or even 123, if one considers Alexander II Zabinas an offspring of Antiochos IV.

⁵⁷ See, e.g., JUST. 40.2.5: *discordia consanguineorum regum*; cf. J. ENGELS (2011), 190f.

⁵⁸ On usurpations as a general phenomenon of Seleukid or Hellenistic kingship, see CHRUBASIK (2016); also OGDEN (1999). Foundational for the chronological reconstruction of the rifts as of 164 is EHLING (2008). For the 3rd century, see ERICKSON (ca. 2018). On Seleukid militarism, see, e.g., AUSTIN (1999); MUCCIOLI (2013), p. 94–107.

⁵⁹ POLYB. 33.15, 18 presents Herakleides, the brother of the usurper Timarchos (162/161), as the driving force behind Alexander Balas' claim for kingship and also for his success with the Senate.

⁶⁰ Resentment and mistrust of Demetrios was the driving factor for Jonathan: *IMacc* 10.46.

to go without Roman recognition of Balas?⁶¹ The very fact of withholding potential heirs by keeping them hostages in Rome a generation earlier had ultimately caused the existence of two rivalling royal lines. We cannot even acquit the Romans of the reproach of doing such harm on purpose, if we remember that the Senate had denied Demetrios the throne with ill intentions, as Polybios claims. The Romans preferred a weak boy-king (Antiochos V) over a highly gifted and energetic Demetrios.⁶²

More decisive, however, was that Philometor chose to support Balas with both an army and the hand of his daughter Kleopatra Thea. The impact of Ptolemaic endorsement became clear when Ptolemy switched sides and chose to support Demetrios II, son of Demetrios I, in his challenge of Balas (147–145). And that there was no shortage of further sons or reckless governors who would seek their own chance to rule (Diodotos Tryphon, 144/141–137) made the vicious circle perfect. There was no need even for ill-willed Romans to intervene anymore.

7. Babylonia and the Iranian Satrapies: the Backbone of the Kingdom

The case of Alexander I Balas reveals that so far one further factor has escaped our attention: Seleukid control of the Eastern territories, which evaporated under his short rule. As has been indicated above (section 1), recent scholarship is gradually abandoning the idea that the kings' grip on them was weak and ineffective, despite the fact that many satraps had assumed the royal title since the mid-3rd century, and were hence enjoying a higher degree of independence. But they remained – or were soon brought back into – a vassal status, so that the unity of the empire under the King of Kings continued. Loss of direct rule in most of the Iranian satrapies should thus not be confused with an effective loss of their resources for Seleukid warfare.⁶³

In addition, a number of case studies have reduced the periods in which Eastern satraps or kings were fully emancipated from Seleukid sovereignty. We are thus encouraged to believe that the dynasty's indirect control of Baktria and Persia largely remained firm under Antiochos IV and Demetrios I. Only Parthia may have gained its complete independence under Epiphanes and maintained it,

⁶¹ Note, however, the high degree of freedom in their diplomatic and even military actions the kings of Asia Minor were enjoying the half-century after Apameia, not only according to the pioneer study by GRUEN (1984), but also in the eyes of PAYEN, MCAULEY and MICHELS, all in this volume.

⁶² See above, section 4, with n. 49.

⁶³ The Seleukids are believed to have lost control of the far-eastern territories in the mid-3rd century by, e.g., CAPDETREY (2007), p. 11, despite his emphasis on the importance of the Achaimenid heritage living on in the Seleukid Kingdom (p. 12).

since the king died on his campaign. But alternative interpretations are likewise possible: Parthia may well have continued to be a Seleukid vassal: Epiphanes ended his life in eastern Persis, which may speak against the assumption that he had perceived a threat from the north; or if his plan was to attack from the east (but failed to do so), it is still feasible that Demetrios I achieved the desired success. Our sources are too patchy to allow us to know for sure. It is certain, however, that Epiphanes had forced Armenia and Media Atropatene back under Seleukid overlordship. Media itself, with its royal residences Susa and Ekbatana, had remained a core part of the kingdom until the beginning of Balas' rule; its loss to the usurper Timarchos had only been ephemeral (162/161).⁶⁴

Most of all, it is now widely accepted that Mesopotamia, flanked by the giant cities Babylon and Seleukeia-on-the-Tigris, was not one of the many eastern satrapies, rarely visited by the Syrian kings, but rather represented one of the two main centres of the kingdom, on par with Syrian Seleukis in political terms, though more important financially, as the wealthiest of all parts of the realm.⁶⁵ Good relations between Seleukos I and the local population had been fundamental in the build-up of his kingdom, and induced Antiochos I to draw exhaustively on old Babylonian traditions in the construction of his royal legitimacy.⁶⁶ It has thus been an overdue correction that D. Engels (in this volume) has dispelled the myth that Babylonians were either unfit or not trusted to serve in the Seleukid army.

Admittedly, the presence of the king, his wife or son (whether co-ruling or not yet) in Babylonia or the Iranian territories got more sporadic after Antiochos III's return from his *anabasis*. But we should avoid rash conclusions on the significance of the eastern parts of the realm. First of all, the focus of military conquests or challenges clearly turned to the Mediterranean world as of 204, and

⁶⁴ Armenia: MITTAG (2006), p. 296–298; D. ENGELS (2017a), p. 311–315; cf. PAYEN (in this volume). Media Atropatene: COLORU (2014); D. ENGELS (2017a), p. 309–311. Persian Gulf/Charakene: MITTAG (2006), p. 298–307; 326f. Elymaïs: WIESEHÖFER (2002); MITTAG (2006), p. 307–310, 316–318; MARTINEZ-SÈVE (2014). Media/Susiana: MITTAG (2006), p. 322; MARTINEZ-SÈVE (2014). Persis/Frataraka: D. ENGELS (2017a), p. 247–306; 329–331; cf. WIESEHÖFER (1994); D. ENGELS (2013) and (2018); MITTAG (2006), p. 310–316; 319f.; PLISCHKE (2014). Parthia: MITTAG (2006), p. 320–323; D. ENGELS (2017a), p. 315–317; STROOTMAN (ca. 2018); cf. ASSAR (2006a) and (2006b); Dąbrowa (2005) and (2009). Baktaria: DUMKE (2012); WENGHOFFER / HOULE 2016; WENGHOFFER (ca. 2018); cf. HOLT (1999); MITTAG (2006), p. 322–326; COLORU (2009); D. ENGELS (2017a), p. 318–322. Further East: D. ENGELS (2017a), p. 317f.; 322–329. Comprehensive approaches: D. ENGELS (2011); (2017a), p. 338–347; STROOTMAN (2017); cf. WIESEHÖFER (2002), p. 118–120.

⁶⁵ See, e.g., CLANCIER (2014); PIRNGRUBER (2017); also APERGHIS (2004), p. 36–40, 44–46, who assesses the population of Mesopotamia two or three times as high as that of Syria.

⁶⁶ See, e.g., SCHARRE (1999); CAPDETREY (2007), p. 25–38; ERICKSON (2011); KOSMIN, P.J. (2014b).

would, for the most part, remain there due to the conflicts with the Romans and Ptolemies. Second, our knowledge of the reigns of Seleukos IV and Demetrios I is very lacunose, perhaps precisely due to their activities far east of the Levant. Third, the demography of the royal house changed significantly after the death of Antiochos III: no Seleukid king was lucky enough to stay in power until his oldest son reached the age of maturity, to be appointed co-ruling king with at least initial responsibility for Babylonia or Media.

Against this background, I suggest that the loyalty of the Mesopotamian and Iranian subjects formed the backbone of Seleukid power, besides the Macedonian colonists of the Levant, not only during the first three generations, but effectively until the mid-2nd century. Drawing on their vast recruits and material resources had enabled the legitimate successors of Seleukos I to fend off, sooner or later, every single encroachment of the relentless Ptolemies, maintain military and financial stability after the defeat by Rome and also overcome usurpations such as that of Antiochos Hierax or Achaios.⁶⁷

Turmoil in the West, violent successions, ineffective child kings and rival claims to kingship had diminished the prestige of the royal family among the eastern vassal kingdoms and satrapies: the Armenians gained independence around 188, the Parthians, Baktrians, Persians and Elymaïens sometime in the ensuing half-century. At the same time, Seleukos IV, Antiochos IV and Demetrios I seem to have worked towards counteracting dissolution. With the continued loyalty of Syria, Mesopotamia and Media, the core of the kingdom was intact and functional, and there is a good chance that most, if not all, of the aforementioned territories were (once more) part of the empire under Demetrios I. It was the victory of Alexander I Balas that changed the power dynamics for good: the Parthians were in a position to intrude into Media in 148/147, the crucial link between the centre and its eastern periphery. The ongoing dynastic war between Demetrios II and Antiochos VI/Diodotos Tryphon then paved the way for the independence of Elymaïs by 145. Even worse, it soon led to the complete breakdown of Seleukid rule east of the Euphrates with the further Parthian conquests of Babylonia (142/141), Persis (ca. 140) and Susa (139/138).⁶⁸

Quite telling is the bold *anabasis* of Demetrios II (140–138): although he did not have the resources to defeat Diodotos Tryphon in Syria, he dared to invade Babylonia, rightly trusting that his dynastic prestige would be to his advantage. After Babylonia, he was hoping to also regain control of Media and Persis – an endeavour in which he failed. His capture by the Parthians could well have sealed the end of the Seleukid Kingdom – but, surprisingly, it did not yet. Demetrios' brother Antiochos VII Sidetes gradually resumed control of Syria

⁶⁷ On usurpations, see above, ns. 3 and 55.

⁶⁸ For references, see above, ns. 64f.

and Koile Syria. Coming out of nowhere, he succeeded in unifying the Levant by 37, for the first time after the revolt of Demetrios II in 47. He was the last to also bring back the Judaeans army under Seleukid supreme command. His achievements are one of the most remarkable testimonies to Seleukid resilience, and to the military and political capabilities of the dynasty's greatest representatives.

Antiochos VII was thus well prepared for yet another Seleukid *anabasis* (131–129). He prevailed in Armenia, Mesopotamia and also celebrated his first victories east of the Tigris, when he was ambushed and killed. No further chance of recovery was ever given to the House of Seleukos.⁶⁹ As of 129, one might consider accepting the derogatory Roman designation *rex Syriae* for the later Seleukid kings – if only they had controlled Syria. When the last *anabasis* had ended in disaster, independence movements flared up again throughout the Levant. Best known is the case of Judaea under John Hyrkanos II, but many other tribes and cities were striving to achieve the same. Seleukid kings, beginning with Demetrios II after his return from Parthian captivity in 129, were nearly constantly fighting for their survival, against one or often more rivalling kings or queens.

The Romans, Parthians, Baktrians, Persians, Egyptians, Armenians and Judaeans had all contributed to this downward spiral (and the Egyptians and Judaeans continued doing so), but every single one of them played at best a secondary role compared to the long line of dynastic pretenders, who had eroded the kingdom's resources. Without the annual tax income and fresh recruits from Babylonia and Media, recovery was not sustainable, and there was little chance to put down a rival king, if he could draw on the support of the Ptolemies and had at least some dynastic legitimacy to buttress his claim to rule.

A final (and yet unanswered) question to end with is how on Earth it was possible for those remnant Seleukid warlords to renew their claim to rule in some pockets of Syria, Koile Syria or Kilikia time and again, before Pompey finally liberated the Near East of this plague.

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⁶⁹ Cf. CAPDETREY (2007), p. 16. Tellingly, ERRINGTON (2008), p. 275 titles the last chapter of Seleukid history beginning with 129 'Terminal Cancer'.

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