From Alexander to Augustus

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Through his conquest of Achaemenid Persia, Alexander the Great created a single Macedonian empire stretching from the lower Danube and lower Nile in the west to the upper Indus and Oxus valleys in the east. In the first generation after Alexander's death (323–281 BC), this empire fractured into three successor kingdoms, each ruled by a Macedonian king: the Antigonids in Macedon, the Ptolemies in Egypt, and the Seleucids in western and central Asia. The history of the great successor states, their relations with the free Greek cities of the Aegean, and their eventual collapse in the face of Roman imperialism (and, to a lesser extent, Parthian expansion in Mesopotamia and Iran) is, without doubt, a tangled and confusing story. But it is also a thrilling one, as gripping in its unexpected reversals of fortune as any other period of ancient history. For sheer *Boys' Own* drama, there is little to match Aratus' night-time commando raid on Corinth in 243 BC (brilliantly narrated by Plutarch in his

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Life of Aratus); for tragedy, little to compare with the fall and rise and fall of Demetrius the Besieger, or Cleopatra's long struggle to preserve her kingdom from Roman annexation. This chapter provides a road map to the twists and turns of Hellenistic history, from the accession of Alexander (336 BC) to the death of Cleopatra and the end of the Ptolemaic kingdom (30 BC).

Alexander the Great, 336–323 BC

In the 350s and 340s BC, Philip II of Macedon (reigned 359–336 BC) had transformed the Macedonian state from a small and backward kingdom on the northern fringe of the Greek world into one of the great powers of the Mediterranean. In the central Balkan highlands, Macedonian governors or vassal kings ruled over all the lands between the Adriatic and the Black Sea (Epirus, Illyria, Thrace). By 338, when Philip crushed an Athenian and Theban army at the battle of Chaeronea, most of mainland Greece had come under informal Macedonian dominance, with the Greek city-states of the south bound to Philip by unequal and humiliating alliances. Philip had made himself, in the words of his Athenian admirer Isocrates, 'the greatest of the kings of Europe'.

By the time of his mysterious assassination in October 336 BC, Philip II had already set his sights on the riches of the Persian empire to the east. We do not know the scale of Philip's Asiatic plans but, safe to say, his son Alexander exceeded them. In 334 BC, an army of Macedonians and Greek allies crossed into Asia. The Persian satrapies

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('provinces') of western Asia Minor fell to Alexander in the first campaigning season, and in November 333, the Macedonians won a stunning victory over the royal army of Darius III at the battle of Issus, near modern-day Iskenderun in southern Turkey. By the winter of 332, all the lands west of the Euphrates (Anatolia, the Levant, and Egypt) were in Macedonian hands. Alexander then marched on into Mesopotamia, and on 1 October 331 Darius was defeated once again, this time decisively, on the plains of Gaugamela. Within a few months, the Macedonians had captured the great Persian cities of Mesopotamia and western Iran (Babylon, Susa, Ecbatana), and the Achaemenid royal palaces at Persepolis were burned to the ground, supposedly in revenge for the Persian sack of Athens in 480 BC.

The first rule of politics, declared Harold Macmillan, is never to invade Afghanistan. The Macedonian *Blitzkrieg* of 334–330 BC was followed by three full years of grinding guerilla warfare, first in eastern Iran, and then in the north-eastern Persian satrapies, Bactria and Sogdiana (northern Afghanistan, Tajikistan and eastern Uzbekistan). These frustrating years saw two key developments, which would have an enduring impact on the Hellenistic Age to come. First, Alexander began drafting vast numbers of native Iranian and central Asian troops into his army; second, he settled tens of thousands of Greek and Macedonian veterans in newly founded garrison towns across the Far East. No longer just a conquering Macedonian general, Alexander was now planning for his future as king of Asia: the Macedonians were here to stay.

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In spring 327, the army marched on beyond the bounds of the former Persian empire, into India. Alexander's conquest of the Punjab and the Indus valley is a depressing and monotonous tale of carnage. The Macedonians established no lasting *modus vivendi* with the native population, and within two decades of Alexander's death, the Indian provinces were lost for good. But the invasion had far-reaching consequences. With the small principalities of north-west India fatally weakened by the Macedonians, an energetic Indian ruler, Chandragupta Maurya (reigned *c.* 317–293 BC), was able to unite the whole northern part of the subcontinent under his rule. The third-century empire of the Mauryas, stretching from Kandahar to Bengal, would be Alexander's chief legacy in the Far East.

By late 325 BC, the Macedonian army—thinned by a disastrous crossing of the Gedrosian desert (south-western Pakistan)—was back in western Iran, and the new masters of the world paused to draw breath. Aside from small pockets of local resistance, the entire Persian empire was now under Macedonian control. But after a decade of warfare, the Macedonian army was in desperate need of fresh blood. In autumn 324 BC, Alexander sent 10,000 Macedonian veterans, the greater part of the infantry army, off on their way back home under the command of his general Craterus, to be replaced by fresh levies from Macedonia. The king himself also began to take thought for his own eventual succession. In 328 BC, he had married Roxane, the daughter of a Bactrian noble, and in 324, after his return from the East, he also wed two women from the old Persian royal house, Stateira (daughter of Darius III) and Parysatis (sister

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of Darius' predecessor, Artaxerxes IV). At least one of these three women, Roxane, was pregnant at the time of Alexander's sudden death at Babylon on 11 June 323 BC.

Contemporaries wondered at the revolution in world affairs brought about by Alexander's conquest. In the early third century BC, the Athenian orator and statesman Demetrius of Phalerum reflected on the cruelty of Fortune:

> Do you think that fifty years ago, if one of the gods had foretold the future to the Persians or their king, or the Macedonians or their king, they would ever have believed what was to come? For in our own day not even the very name of the Persians survives, they who were formerly despots of the whole inhabited world, while the Macedonians, who previously were almost nameless, are now masters of all.

If there was ever a turning point in world history, the Macedonian conquest of Asia was it. Alexander 'the Great', indeed.

The *Age* of the Successors, 323–281 BC

Unrivalled as a conqueror, Alexander showed little interest in government. At his death in 323 BC, the Macedonian 'state' in Asia consisted of little more than Alexander's vast, battle-hardened army and a cadre of tough and ambitious Macedonian generals. The provincial bureaucracy, such as it was, consisted of whatever was left over from the old Persian system. This was, thus far, a Macedonian empire in name alone. But Alexander did leave behind him financial resources on a stupendous scale. In the last two years of his life, Alexander had begun to strike the vast gold and

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silver reserves of the Persian kings into coin, in order to pay off his veteran troops—who, quite reasonably, expected to share in the profits of conquest. A weak central state, an under-employed army, independent-minded generals, unlimited supplies of Persian silver, and, crucially, no capable adult successor to the dead king: the combination was an explosive one.

In the days after Alexander's death, the Macedonians at Babylon cobbled together a hasty compromise, by which Alexander's mentally defective half-brother Arrhidaeus would inherit the throne, along with Alexander's unborn baby by Roxane (if the child turned out to be a boy). One of the leading Macedonian generals, Perdiccas, would act as 'guardian' to the kings. But Perdiccas' rise to supremacy was really little more than a stroke of chance. Two other men, Antipater, Alexander's regent in Macedon, and Craterus, commanding a formidable force of 10,000 Macedonian veterans on their way back home to Europe, had claims at least as strong as his. The more prudent among Alexander's companions installed themselves in one or other of the rich western satrapies (Ptolemy in Egypt, Lysimachus in Thrace), and prepared for an uncertain future.

War broke out in 321. Ptolemy made the first move, seizing Alexander's body on its journey back to Macedon (an indication of his ambitions for his new Egyptian realm); Perdiccas' attempted invasion of Egypt ended in his ignominious death, assassinated by his own lieutenants. Craterus died in battle at around the same time, fighting Perdiccan forces in northern Asia Minor. At the conference of Triparadeisus in summer 320 BC, the Macedonians made one last attempt

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to hold the crumbling empire together. Antipater was appointed as guardian of the two kings, Arrhidaeus and Alexander IV (Roxane's son, by now a sturdy toddler), who returned with Antipater to Macedon. Ptolemy was left in control of Egypt (not that Antipater was given any choice in the matter). A flinty Macedonian officer, Antigonus the One-Eyed, already in his sixties, was appointed as 'general of Asia'. Although Antigonus' remit was initially limited to hunting down the remnants of Perdiccas' faction in Asia (particularly Craterus' killer, the rogue general Eumenes of Cardia), in practice his appointment hastened the division of the Asiatic and European parts of Alexander's empire.

Over the following two decades, five separate 'successor' states gradually took shape in the ruins of the Macedonian empire. In Egypt, Ptolemy ruled unchallenged, building a strong and coherent state around his capital at Alexandria (founded by Alexander himself in 331 BC). In Macedon, Antipater's son Cassander eventually emerged as the dominant figure. The two puppet kings did not encumber him for long: Arrhidaeus had been murdered in 317, and Cassander himself did away with Alexander IV in (probably) 310 BC. Thrace was ruled by the leonine Lysimachus, like Ptolemy a charismatic veteran of Alexander's campaigns. In Asia, a minor Macedonian officer called Seleucus, appointed as satrap of Babylon in 320 BC, gradually built up a formidable realm in Mesopotamia, Iran and the East; by 301 BC, he had established his rule over the entire eastern half of the old Persian empire.

Most powerful of all was Antigonus. With his son Demetrius the Besieger (Chapter 3), he built a rich and populous

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kingdom in western Asia, stretching from the Aegean to the Euphrates. And a 'kingdom' it now was: in 306, he and Demetrius became the first of Alexander's successors to assume the title of king, an act of potent symbolism that was swiftly imitated by their rival dynasts. To the cities of mainland Greece and Asia Minor, Antigonus and Demetrius presented themselves as the champions of Greek freedom and autonomy. No doubt this was a cynical move directed against Cassander, who had a notorious preference for authoritarian client-regimes in the Greek cities under his control. But Antigonus' ostentatious friendship towards the Greeks ('philhellenism') set the tone for the entire Hellenistic period. For the next three centuries, Hellenistic kings of all stamps strove to outdo one another in competitive generosity towards the Greek cities of the Aegean.

In 301 BC, the combined forces of Cassander, Lysimachus, and Seleucus routed the Antigonid royal army at the battle of Ipsus in central Turkey. By evening, the 81-year-old Antigonus the One-Eyed lay dead on the battlefield, and five kingdoms had become four. Demetrius—still only in his mid-thirties—fled with a few thousand men, and reigned for six years as a king without a kingdom. But the wheel of fortune turned: Cassander died in 297, and a civil war between Cassander's two sons in 294 gave Demetrius the opportunity to seize the throne of Macedon for himself. He lost it again to Lysimachus a mere seven years later, but by 276 Demetrius' son Antigonus Gonatas had recovered his father's kingdom. Demetrius' descendants (the 'Antigonids') would go on to rule in Macedon for the next century.

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In the wake of the battle of Ipsus, Antigonus the One-Eyed's great kingdom in western Asia had been carved up between Lysimachus and Seleucus. In 281 BC Seleucus struck at Lysimachus' territories in Asia Minor; Lysimachus was killed at the battle of Corupedium, and four kingdoms became three. Ptolemy had died peacefully in his bed the previous year (succeeded by his son, Ptolemy II Philadelphus), leaving Seleucus as the last surviving contemporary of Alexander. In September 281, Seleucus crossed back over the Hellespont into Europe, fifty-three years after he had first crossed to Asia as a young man in Alexander's army. For a brief moment it seemed as though he might go on to seize Macedonia as well, thus reuniting Alexander's European and Asiatic realms for the first time in forty years. But no: Seleucus was assassinated by a pretender from the Ptolemaic royal house, and the moment passed. Not until the coming of Rome would Macedon and Asia again be reunited under a single ruler.

The Hellenistic Kingdoms, 281–220 BC

By the middle years of the third century BC, the new balance of power was firmly established. The bulk of Alexander's empire was divided into three Macedonian successor-states: the Antigonid kingdom in Macedon, the Ptolemaic kingdom of Egypt, and the vast Seleucid realm in western and central Asia.

By far the largest of the early Hellenistic kingdoms was that of the Seleucids in Asia. At the death of King Seleucus I Nicator, 'the Conqueror' (281 BC), the Seleucid realm

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covered the greater part of the former Persian empire, from Thrace (modern Bulgaria) to the borders with India, with a population of perhaps 25–30 million. In most parts of the kingdom, a tiny settler minority of Greeks and Macedonians ruled over multitudes of non-Greeks: Iranians, Babylonians, Arabs and the rest were excluded from all but the lowest rungs of the Seleucid administrative hierarchy.

It is easy to deplore the 'colonial' nature of Seleucid Asia, and modern historians have often taken a dim view of the Seleucid state more generally: weak, despotic, inefficient, and doomed to collapse. In 1938, William Tarn drew a famous contrast between the Seleucid kingdom and the Roman empire. 'The latter', he claimed, '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 an 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 . . . What actually held the empire together was the personality of the quasi-divine monarch.

That understates the sensitivity and flexibility of Seleucid colonial rule. Like their Achaemenid Persian predecessors, the third-century Seleucid kings spoke to their dizzying range of subjects in a variety of local idioms. A building inscription in cuneiform Akkadian from the Babylonian sanctuary of Borsippa shows King Antiochus I Soter

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(281–261 BC) proclaiming his devotion to a Babylonian deity, 'Prince Nabû, son of Esangila, first-born of Marduk, noble child of Erua'. A newly published Seleucid royal letter in Greek from eastern Iran shows King Seleucus II Callinicus (246–225 BC) ostentatiously defending the rights of the horse-rearing marsh-villagers of Helmand. The Seleucid kings were not just foreign conquerors. Indeed, one of the most imaginative and far-reaching strategies of the early Seleucid monarchs was the creation of an artificial new Seleucid 'homeland' in northern Syria: local towns and rivers were renamed after places in far-off Macedonia, and four splendid new cities were founded in the name of Seleucus himself (Seleucia in Pieria), his son Antiochus (Antioch by Daphne), his mother Laodice (Laodicea by the Sea) and his Iranian wife Apame (Apamea on the Orontes). Greek and Roman authors regularly referred to the Seleucid monarchs as 'Syrian kings', indicating the depth of the roots that the Macedonians eventually put down in Asia.

Nonetheless, by the mid-third century BC, the outer reaches of the Seleucid kingdom were already beginning to crumble. In the Far East, the Seleucid governor of Bactria (the modern Oxus valley, in northern Afghanistan) staged a successful revolt around 245 BC, and Seleucid north-east Iran was overrun only a few years later by a group of central Asian nomads (the Parni, better known as the Parthians). In the west, large parts of the Asia Minor peninsula (modern western Turkey) gradually came under the control of local dynasts (the Attalids of Pergamon, the Ariarathids of Cappadocia, and the royal houses of Bithynia and Pontus), all of whom seem to have won independence from the Seleucids

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by the later third century. This Balkanization of the Seleucid periphery was only briefly reversed by the campaigns of reconquest undertaken by the energetic Antiochus III (222–187 BC). By the early second century BC, much of Seleucus I's great Asiatic kingdom had broken up into a babble of regional principalities, leaving a relatively culturally homogeneous Seleucid 'core' in Syria and Mesopotamia.

The Ptolemaic kingdom of Egypt was very different. Like the Seleucids, the Ptolemies ruled over an ethnically mixed society, but here there were, to all intents and purposes, only two cultural groups concerned: the Graeco-Macedonian settler class (some 10 per cent of the total population), and the native Egyptians (perhaps 3.5–4 million in number). Ptolemy I Soter and his descendants ruled as traditional Pharaohs, preserving most of the traditional institutions of pharaonic Egypt (temples and priesthoods, regional government, the agricultural system), with a new Greek-style fiscal regime lightly overlaid on top.

Today, as in antiquity, the population of Egypt is densely concentrated in a narrow strip of land along the lower Nile valley, with uninhabitable deserts to both east and west. This unforgiving geography makes Egypt, in the words of the economic historian Joseph Manning, 'perhaps the easiest place on earth to tax'. Ptolemaic tax revenue may have attained 15 per cent of GDP, a startlingly high level by pre-modern standards. The long reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (283–246 BC) saw a major programme of land reclamation and settlement in the Fayyum (a huge depression west of the Nile, south of Cairo), which was implanted with Greek military settlers (*klērouchoi* or 'plot-holders'), assigned

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regular plots of land according to their rank. The tax-revenues of the Nile valley and the Fayyum fuelled the explosive growth of the new Ptolemaic capital of Alexandria, the New York of the Hellenistic world. By the first century BC, Alexandria was the biggest city anywhere on earth, with an urban population of perhaps half a million.

Outside Egypt, the Ptolemies ruled over a shifting archipelago of maritime and coastal territories, including (at different times) the Levantine coastal strip, Cyprus, the southern and western coasts of Asia Minor, the Aegean islands, and Cyrenaica (eastern Libya). This maritime empire reached its widest extent in the 270s and 260s BC, when Ptolemy II enjoyed all but undisputed control of the Aegean basin. But—again in stark contrast to the Seleucid realm—the overseas territories were never conceived as an integral part of the Ptolemaic kingdom. Cyprus was governed as a separate principality by a Ptolemaic *stratēgos* ('general'), and the islands of the Aegean were grouped into a federal League of Islanders, headed up by a *nēsiarchos* ('island-commander') appointed by Ptolemy. It is telling that Ptolemaic coinage (struck on a distinctive local weight-standard) seems never to have been used in the Ptolemies' Aegean possessions.

From the 270s to the 160s, the Seleucids and the Ptolemies were locked in a continuous struggle for control of the Levantine coast (the six 'Syrian Wars'). The most dramatic Ptolemaic successes came in 246/5 BC, when the young Ptolemy III Euergetes (reigned 246–222 BC) swept the Seleucids out of Syria, drove eastwards into Mesopotamia, and briefly captured Babylon. One of the most vivid texts from third-century Egypt is an inscription (now lost) from Adulis

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on the Red Sea coast, celebrating, perhaps with a touch of hyperbole, this high-water mark in Ptolemaic history:

> Great King Ptolemy, son of King Ptolemy and Queen Arsinoe, the Sibling Gods, children of King Ptolemy and Queen Berenice, the Saviour Gods, descended through his father from Heracles son of Zeus, and through his mother from Dionysus son of Zeus, having inherited from his father the kingdom of Egypt, Libya, Syria and Phoenicia, Cyprus, Lycia, Caria and the Cycladic islands, has led an army into Asia, with infantry and cavalry forces, a naval fleet, and elephants from Troglodytis and Ethiopia. These elephants he and his father were the first to hunt down in their native places and bring to Egypt and train in the arts of war. Having conquered all the lands west of the Euphrates—Cilicia, Pamphylia, Ionia, the Hellespont, Thrace, and all the armies in those lands with their Indian elephants—and having made the rulers of those lands subject to him, he has crossed the Euphrates river and conquered Mesopotamia, Babylonia, Susiana, Persis, Media, and all the lands as far as Bactria, and has recovered all the holy objects plundered from Egypt by the Persians and brought them back with the rest of the treasure from the region.

Except for a brief period in 170–168 BC, when the Seleucid Antiochus IV came close to capturing Alexandria, the core Ptolemaic territory in the Nile valley was never seriously threatened by outside powers. But that is not to say that Ptolemaic rule over Egypt was untroubled. The first known native uprising in Egypt occurred in 245 BC, while Ptolemy III was campaigning in Mesopotamia. Although this particular revolt was quickly put down—albeit at the cost of the abandonment of Ptolemy's short-lived conquests in

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Seleucid Asia—it was a sign of things to come: between 217 and 186 BC, Egypt would be locked in a near-continuous state of civil war. None of the later Ptolemies (with the partial exception of Cleopatra, in the dying days of the dynasty) came close to reviving the glories of the mid-third century.

The smallest of the three major kingdoms was that of the Antigonids of Macedon. When Antigonus Gonatas (reigned 276–239 BC) came to power in Macedon in 276, he inherited a small rump state, exhausted by years of anarchy and civil war. Between 280 and 278, Macedonia had been devastated by a massive invasion of nomadic Galatian Celts migrating southwards from the Danubian basin. The Galatians penetrated as far south as Delphi before finally being checked in a great battle, fought in a whirling snowstorm, at the very gates of the sanctuary. (The Galatian invaders eventually crossed into Asia and settled on the high Anatolian plateau around Ankara, where they continued to cause trouble for generations to come.) Two years after Antigonus' accession, the tottering Macedonian kingdom was once again overrun, this time by the warlike Pyrrhus, king of the rugged highland kingdom of Epirus (modern Albania and north-west Greece).

From these unpromising beginnings, Antigonus gradually re-established Macedonian control across much of the Greek mainland. Antigonus had inherited a handful of great fortresses in southern Greece (Corinth, Chalcis, Demetrias), and a sustained attempt by Sparta and Athens to drive the Macedonians out of Greece (the 'Chremonidean War', *c.* 267–262 BC) ended in total victory for Antigonus: the

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Athenians spent the next three decades (262–229 BC) under Macedonian occupation. At an uncertain date, perhaps also around 262 BC, Antigonus' fleet destroyed the Ptolemaic navy at the battle of Cos, heralding a new era of Antigonid dominance in the Aegean.

But even at the peak of Antigonid power, much of the Greek mainland remained stubbornly independent. The Aetolian League, initially a small tribal confederation in the mountains west of Delphi, had transformed itself by the mid-third century BC into a formidable anti-Macedonian coalition stretching across central Greece. Further to the south, the Achaean League, a federal alliance of Greek cities in the northern Peloponnese, made a series of spectacular (if short-lived) gains at Antigonus' expense in the 240s and 230s, most famously the daring commando raid on Corinth in 243 BC mentioned in the introduction to Chapter 2. These new federal states (*koina*) in central and southern Greece were one of the great constitutional innovations of the Hellenistic world (and later served as a model for the Founding Fathers of the United States)—an attractive 'third way' between the autonomous Greek city-state and the autocratic Hellenistic kingdom.

West of the Adriatic, in Italy, Sicily, and the western Mediterranean, the influence of Macedon was far less strongly felt. The ancient Greek city-states of Sicily and southern Italy were untouched by the conquests of Philip II and Alexander the Great, and the sole concerted attempt by a Hellenistic monarch to expand his realm to the west, the campaigns of Pyrrhus of Epirus in Italy and Sicily (280–275 BC), ended in complete failure. That said, the third-century kings of

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Syracuse in eastern Sicily (Agathocles, 316–289 BC; Hieron II, 269–215 BC) consistently presented themselves as dynastic peers of the Antigonid, Seleucid, and Ptolemaic kings in the eastern Mediterranean, and the court of Hieron at Syracuse was home to a constellation of literary and scientific figures (the poet Theocritus; the mathematician Archimedes) hardly less distinguished than the scholars of the museum at Alexandria. But on the whole, the western Mediterranean took its own path in the third century BC, dominated not by Macedonian kings, but by the imperial city-state of Carthage in modern Tunisia, and, increasingly, by the ambitions of an aggressive new power in central Italy.

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Symplokē, 220–188 BC

For the Greek historian Polybius, writing in the mid-second century BC, the 140th Olympiad (220–216 BC) marked a turning point in world history:

> In earlier times, world events had been, so to speak, dispersed, since the various deeds of men showed no unity of initiative, outcomes, or geography. But from this point on, history started to be an organic whole, and the affairs of Italy and Africa became interwoven with those of Asia and of the Greeks, all of them now tending towards a single end.

This 'interweaving' (in Greek, *symplokē*) was the work of Rome. In the course of the third century, the Romans had extended their dominium along the western flank of the Adriatic, and by 219 most of the Greek and Illyrian cities on the eastern shore of the Adriatic (modern Croatia and

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Albania) had become an informal Roman protectorate. In 218, the Carthaginian general Hannibal invaded Italy, and the youthful new Antigonid ruler of Macedon, Philip V (221–179 BC), seized his chance to drive Rome out of the eastern Adriatic, and restore Macedonian power across the Balkan peninsula. The First Macedonian War (214–205 BC) saw Philip fighting against a rag-tag anti-Macedonian coalition of Rome, the Aetolian League, and other mainland Greek states; the outcome was an uneasy stalemate, but Rome was now inextricably tied up in mainland Greek affairs. Many Greeks feared for the future: as a Rhodian speaker put it, in an address to the Aetolians recorded by Polybius (207 BC):

> You say that you are fighting against Philip on the Greeks' behalf, so that they might be liberated and not have to follow his orders, but in fact you are fighting for the enslavement and ruin of Greece . . . For once the Romans disentangle themselves from the war with Hannibal in Italy, they will throw themselves with all their force on the lands of Greece, on the pretext of helping the Aetolians against Philip, but with the real intention of subjugating the whole country to themselves.

As we will see, events bore this gloomy prediction out.

In the immediate wake of their victory over Hannibal (201 BC), Rome provoked a second war with Antigonid Macedon (200–197 BC), and the Roman general Flamininus won a crushing victory over Philip V at the battle of Kynoskephalai (197 BC). Antigonid power was broken for good, and Philip's kingdom was confined to his Macedonian homeland. In 196 BC, at the Isthmian Games at Corinth, Flamininus

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proclaimed the freedom of the Greeks, to general rejoicing. Gold coins minted in Greece at this point depict Flamininus in the style of a charismatic Hellenistic monarch (see Figure 4). Evidently the Greeks did not quite know what to make of their new, powerful western neighbours: Flamininus was an annual elected magistrate, not a Roman king. After 196, the cult of a new deity, the goddess Roma (a personification of Roman power), sprang up in numerous cities of the Greek world. The cult of Roma was apparently modelled on the earlier cults of Hellenistic kings, beautifully illustrating the Greeks' desire to accommodate the new Roman power into their existing world-view.

By the mid-190s, the Romans already had their sights fixed further east. The last decades of the third century had seen a remarkable Seleucid resurgence under Antiochus III

Figure 4 *The Roman general Flamininus, depicted in the style of a Hellenistic monarch, with a Nike ('Victory') figure laying a wreath on his name.*

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(reigned 223–187 BC). In the early years of Antiochus' reign, the Seleucid kingdom must have seemed on the verge of breaking up altogether, with one rebel king (Molon) creating a breakaway state in Babylonia, Persis, and Media, and another (Achaeus) seizing what remained of Seleucid Asia Minor. Over twenty-five years of constant warfare, Antiochus gradually reimposed Seleucid authority from the Aegean to the Hindu Kush. A spectacular series of campaigns in the Far East (212–204 BC) reduced the independent kings of Bactria and Parthia to the status of Seleucid vassals, and between 203 and 196, Antiochus (initially in concert with Philip V) swept the Ptolemies out of the Levant and coastal Asia Minor. By the mid-190s, Antiochus' kingdom was scarcely inferior to the empire of Seleucus I at its peak in 281 BC.

The crash, when it came, was brutal. Between 196 and 192, the Romans, in their new-found capacity as protectors of the freedom of the Greeks, presented Antiochus with an increasingly peremptory series of demands over his treatment of Greek cities under his rule in western Asia Minor. An ill-judged intervention by Antiochus in mainland Greece in 192 sparked a massive and instant Roman retaliation, and in the winter of 190/189 BC, the Roman general Scipio Asiaticus wiped out the Seleucid royal army at the battle of Magnesia in western Turkey (near modern Manisa). Under the terms of the treaty of Apamea (188 BC), Antiochus was ordered to give up all his territory in the Asia Minor peninsula, and to pay Rome a crippling indemnity. In less than a decade, Rome had ruthlessly asserted her dominance over two of the three great powers of the Hellenistic world.

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In one of his most haunting poems, *The Battle of Magnesia*, the Alexandrian poet C. P. Cavafy (1863–1933) imagines the news of Antiochus' defeat arriving at the court of the embittered Philip V in Macedon:

> He's lost his former ardour, his audacity.
> To his tired, almost ailing body,
> he'll mainly devote attention. And the remainder
> of his life will pass without a care. So Philip
> at least maintains. Tonight he plays dice;
> he's eager for amusements. On the table
> let's put a lot of roses! What of it, if Antiochus
> met ruin in Magnesia. They say disaster
> fell on the splendid army's multitudes.
> They might have exaggerated; it cannot all be true.
> Let's hope so; for though an enemy, they were of our race.
> Well! One 'let's hope so' is enough. Maybe too much!
> Philip, of course, will not postpone the feast.
> No matter how intense has been his life's exhaustion,
> one good thing he's retained: he hasn't lost his memory at all.
> He recalls just how they wept in Syria, what sort of sorrow
> they feigned when their mother Macedonia was humbled.–
> Let the banquet begin. Slaves: the flutes, the lights.

The 'Short' Second Century, 188–133 BC

Rome's victories over Philip V and Antiochus III redrew the political map of the eastern Mediterranean. In the short term, the chief beneficiaries of the treaty of Apamea (188 BC) were the powerful island city of Rhodes and the Attalid

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dynasts of Pergamon in north-west Turkey, both of whom had fought on the Roman side in the wars against Philip and Antiochus. The rich Seleucid territories in western Asia Minor were carved up between Rhodes and the Attalids. Rome's decision to grant Rhodes her own miniature 'empire' in south-west Asia Minor (188–167 BC) was particularly startling: it had been centuries since any Greek *polis* had enjoyed this kind of regional hegemony. No Roman officials were yet stationed east of the Adriatic, but it was left quite clear that Rome would no longer tolerate too much independent thinking.

The Attalid kingdom of Pergamon was a small independent principality in the far north-west of the Asia Minor peninsula, not much larger—at least before 188—than a big Greek city-state. But the third-century rulers of Pergamon already aspired to Hellenistic great-power status. Attalus I (reigned 241–197 BC) built up a reputation as an exemplary philhellenic ruler, through lavish and expensive building works at the major cultural centres of the old Greek world (Delphi, Delos, and Athens). In particular, Attalus emphasized the role of the Pergamene kings as protectors of the Greek cities of Asia Minor against the Galatians, the fierce Celtic tribal peoples who had settled in central Turkey in the 270s BC. Several vivid sculptural depictions of defeated Galatians, surviving in Roman copies, are probably modelled on Pergamene originals of the late third or early second century BC (see Figure 5).

In 188 BC, more or less overnight, the able Eumenes II of Pergamon (reigned 197–159 BC) saw his kingdom expanded tenfold at Seleucid expense. In the decades after the treaty of

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Figure 5 *The 'Dying Gaul', a Roman copy of a Hellenistic sculpture depicting a Galatian warrior.*

Apamea, Eumenes and his successors built a stable and prosperous state in western Asia Minor. Thanks to the Romans' declared policy of freedom for the Greeks, the old Greek towns of coastal Asia Minor were treated with conspicuous courtesy by the later Attalid kings, and the peninsula's rich agrarian heartlands were seeded with dozens of new city-foundations. Eumenes deliberately sought to present his kingdom as more like the Achaean and Aetolian federations in mainland Greece than the absolutist Ptolemaic and Seleucid monarchies—as, in many ways, it really was. The 'short' Attalid century in Asia Minor (188–133 BC) saw a major boom in public building projects across western and southern Turkey, including perhaps the single best-known monument from the Hellenistic world, the Great Altar of Pergamon,

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now on display in all its baroque splendour in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin.

The disintegration of the great Hellenistic kingdoms of the East continued. The reigns of Ptolemy IV (221–204 BC) and Ptolemy V (204–180 BC) had seen Egypt rocked by a series of native Egyptian uprisings; upper Egypt was ruled for almost twenty years (206–186 BC) as an independent Pharaonic state. Stripped of most of its overseas possessions by Antiochus III in 203–196 BC, the Ptolemaic kingdom of Egypt must have seemed on the verge of collapse, and in the winter of 170/169 BC the Seleucid Antiochus IV (reigned 175–164 BC) launched a devastating invasion of Egypt. By spring 168, all of lower Egypt except the capital city of Alexandria was under Seleucid control. Once again, the Romans stepped in. A Roman ambassador, Popilius Laenas, met Antiochus IV in the outer suburbs of Alexandria, and presented him with a blunt ultimatum: immediate withdrawal from Egypt, or war with Rome. The memory of the Seleucid defeat at Magnesia two decades earlier was enough to force Antiochus into a humiliating climbdown. The failure of Antiochus' Egyptian expedition marked the beginning of a slow and agonizing decline of Seleucid power in the Near East. A major Jewish revolt under Judas Maccabaeus (167–160 BC) ended in the establishment of an independent Hasmonean state in the Levant; more seriously, the old Seleucid heartlands in Mesopotamia were lost to the Parthians between 141 and 138 BC. By the later second century, the Seleucid kingdom was reduced to a small rump state in northern Syria focussed on the city of Antioch.

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The year 168 BC also saw the end of the Antigonid kingdom of Macedon. The last Antigonid king, Perseus (reigned 179–168 BC), despite making no open moves against Rome, had rebuilt good relations with the Greek cities of the mainland and Aegean, on a populist platform of debt-cancellation and support of democratic factions against pro-Roman civic elites. The Romans had no intention of allowing Perseus to re-establish Antigonid primacy in mainland Greece, and launched a vicious and unprovoked war against Macedon in 171 BC (the 'Third Macedonian War'). Perseus' army was destroyed at the battle of Pydna in June 168, and the victorious Roman general, Aemilius Paullus, showed no mercy to Greek 'fellow-travellers'. More than a thousand Greek politicians of unsound views were deported to Italy (the historian Polybius among them); 550 leading Aetolians were butchered in their own council-chamber, and 150,000 Epirote Greeks were sold into slavery.

The last major independent power in mainland Greece was the Achaean League, which by now incorporated most of the Greek cities of the Peloponnese under a single federal umbrella. Some modern scholars have been tempted to romanticize the Achaean League, with its unshaking commitment to (in Polybius' words) 'the freedom of the individual cities and the unity of the Peloponnesians'; they may even be right to do so. In 147, the Romans decided to liquidate this last bastion of Greek independence, once again on the flimsiest of pretexts. The Achaean War of 146 BC was brutally short: fifty years after Flamininus had declared the 'freedom of the Greeks' at Corinth, the Roman

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general Lucius Mummius burned the city to the ground and enslaved its surviving inhabitants.

For most people in the Aegean world, the twin hammer-blows of 168 and 146 marked less of a turning point than one might have expected. Roman dominance in Greece was now unchallenged: some regions (certainly Macedon, perhaps Achaea) were required to pay annual tribute to Rome, and the island of Delos, assigned the status of a free trade port by the Romans in 166 BC, did a brisk trade in slaves for Italy. But Roman jurisdiction east of the Adriatic was still more or less non-existent; the cities of Greece continued to govern their own internal affairs with minimal interference from Rome. The mid-second century BC is often conceived as the age of the 'Roman conquest of Greece'—a strange kind of conquest, which left most of the Greek states autonomous and free from taxation!

In Asia Minor, an era came to an end with the death of the last Attalid king, Attalus III (reigned 138–133 BC). In his will, it was found that he had bequeathed his kingdom to the Roman people. In the fifty-five years between the treaty of Apamea and the bequest of Attalus, the Greek-speaking world had undergone momentous changes. The Antigonid and Attalid kingdoms had ceased to exist; the Seleucid empire was now just one among several squabbling regional principalities in the Near East, and the Ptolemaic dynasty had been reduced to the status of Roman clients. The late second and first centuries BC would see the gradual transformation of this loose network of Roman dependencies and client kingdoms in the eastern Mediterranean into a coherent landscape of directly administered Roman provinces.

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The End of the Hellenistic World, 133–30 BC

In the event, it took the Romans four years to bring the Attalid kingdom firmly under their control. A pretender to the Attalid throne, Aristonikos, raised an army of poor Greeks and freed slaves, whom he called *Heliopolitai*, 'Citizens of the Sun'; not until 129 BC was this abortive social revolution finally put down by Roman arms. The rich valleys of western Asia Minor were then re-organized as a new Roman province of Asia, subjected to crippling exploitation by Roman tax-farmers. It was the formation of the province of Asia in the 120s BC, not the dramatic military victories of 168 or 146, which really marked the beginning of direct Roman rule in the Greek world.

Further to the east, the eclipse of the Attalids and the decline in Seleucid authority allowed several local dynasties of northern and eastern Anatolia to emerge as strong regional powers. Huge stretches of central Anatolia were subject to the Ariarathid dynasty of Cappadocia, and Tigranes II of Armenia (ruled *c.* 95–56 BC) carved out an enormous (if short-lived) empire stretching from the Caspian Sea to northern Syria. Most important of all was the kingdom of Pontus, on the Black Sea coast of Turkey, ruled in this period by the fearsome Mithradates VI Eupator (119–63 BC). Over the first three decades of his reign, much of the Black Sea and eastern Anatolia were brought under Pontic control, culminating in the dazzling successes of 88 BC, when Mithradates took the Roman province of Asia by storm.

As coin-portraits of Mithradates indicate (see Figure 6), the king presented himself as a second Alexander the Great, a

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Figure 6 *King Mithradates VI of Pontus.*

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charismatic, philhellenic warrior-king in the old Hellenistic mould (Chapter 3). After a generation of vampiric Roman profiteering, the Greeks found this irresistible. Most (though not all) of the Greek cities of Asia welcomed Mithradates as a liberator, and early May 88 BC saw a co-ordinated massacre of all the Romans and Italians in the province, some 80,000 in total. In mainland Greece, Athens too came over to the Mithradatic cause; by the end of the year, most of the Aegean was under Pontic control. The Roman reconquest of the East was entrusted to the general Sulla, who sacked Athens in March 86 BC, and drove Mithradates out of Asia the following year. It is telling that many cities in Roman Asia Minor began to employ a new 'Sullan Era', starting from 85 BC: for many people at the time, Sulla's reorganization of the province was seen as the true beginning of direct Roman rule in Asia.

Sporadic hostilities between Rome and Mithradates dragged on until the mid-60s BC (the king eventually committed

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suicide, in exile from his kingdom, in 63 BC). But the Romans had learned the lesson of 88 BC: no Hellenistic king would again be allowed to wield as much power as Mithradates. In 65/64 BC, the Roman general Pompey the Great annexed a wide swathe of the East to the Roman empire. New provinces of Bithynia–Pontus and Cilicia were created in eastern Anatolia; the moribund Seleucid kingdom was unceremoniously dissolved and replaced by a new Roman province of Syria. A new constellation of reliably pro-Roman client kings was set in place across the remainder of the Greek East.

By the mid-first century BC, the only surviving independent Hellenistic kingdom of any importance was Ptolemaic Egypt. Long plagued by dynastic strife and internal unrest, the Ptolemaic state inherited by Cleopatra VII in 51 BC had been whittled back to the borders of the old Achaemenid Persian satrapy of Egypt taken over by Ptolemy I in 323 BC. For two decades, Cleopatra waged a campaign of the utmost diplomatic ingenuity to prevent her kingdom falling into Roman hands. Her nine-month love affair with Julius Caesar in 48–47 BC bore immediate fruit in the form of the restoration of Cyprus to the Ptolemaic kingdom, not to mention the birth of a half-Roman son, Ptolemy XV Caesar (known to history as 'Caesarion'). After Caesar's assassination, Cleopatra hitched her kingdom's fortunes to Mark Antony, whose reorganization of Rome's eastern provinces in 37/6 BC saw vast tracts of the Roman East handed over to the Ptolemaic kingdom. Antony clearly intended to rule the eastern Mediterranean as a single, Hellenistic-style Romano-Ptolemaic dominion, presided over by himself

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and Cleopatra. These grandiose dreams were swept away by Octavian, the future Augustus, through his victory over Antony at the sea-battle of Actium in September 31 BC; Alexandria fell to Octavian eleven months later, and Egypt was smoothly incorporated into the Roman empire.

With Octavian's annexation of Egypt, the whole western half of Alexander's empire up to the Euphrates river was now in Roman hands. The eastern parts of the old Macedonian empire were controlled by the Parthians, the Iranian dynasty who had succeeded the Seleucids in Mesopotamia and Iran in the course of the second century BC. The Greek city-states, and Greek culture more widely, continued to survive and flourish under Roman (and Parthian) rule. Several of the minor client-dynasties of the Near East, the direct successors to the great Hellenistic kingdoms, persisted into the Julio–Claudian period and beyond. But if one had to name a time and place at which the curtain fell on the Hellenistic world, then most people would surely opt for Alexandria on 12 August, 30 BC. As Cleopatra's servant Iras puts it in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, 'The bright day is done,/ And we are for the dark'.

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