

091: The Fifth Syrian War

It had been nearly twenty years since Antiochus III suffered his defeat at Raphia by the forces of Ptolemy IV, which brought the Fourth Syrian War to a disappointing end. Since this setback, Antiochus had launched a campaign of reconquest that took him across much of Asia, and by 205 he was master of the largest empire in the known world. Ptolemy on the other hand spent his remaining time accomplishing little, and his unexpected death in 204 meant that his six-year-old son Ptolemy V would now sit upon the throne of Egypt. Ministers fought to puppeteer the boy-king, and a massive rebellion of Egyptians ripped much of the Thebaid away from Ptolemaic control. The time was ripe for another attempt to reclaim the lands of Coele Syria, and with a secret pact formed with Philip V of Macedon, Antiochus looked to avenge his disgrace once and for all.

For some eighteen months following the death of Ptolemy IV, the two other great powers of the Hellenistic world began to tear apart the Ptolemaic kingdom. As we can recall, Antiochus and his governors campaigned in southeastern Asia Minor in 203, capturing a number of settlements that were in the Ptolemaic sphere of influence. Philip V on the other hand attacked the western coastline in Ionia and Lycia, areas that fell outside of Seleucid interests and therefore adhered to the terms of the pact. With the dismemberment of Ptolemy's territories in Asia Minor, Antiochus was now ready to make his decisive move into the south.

Unlike the Fourth Syrian War, the account of the Fifth Syrian War is poorly documented, and we are running on limited sources of information. What we do know is that by the middle of 202, Antiochus assembled an army and crossed the border into Coele Syria. In the previous conflict he marched through the Beqqa Valley in modern Lebanon, taking each fortress and settlement along the way. This ended up being an arduous process that enabled the Egyptian army to shore up its defenses, so the king proposed to march further inland through the desert, a more treacherous but less guarded pass that enabled him to sever the key points of Egypt's control, rather than break it apart piece by piece.¹ His experience in the deserts and steppes of Central Asia would have given him ample knowledge of how to pass such hostile terrain, but he was then left to contend with the city of Damascus, which was heavily defended and overseen by the Ptolemaic official named Dion. Attacking the city would have been problematic given the limited number of supplies in the region, but if successful they would have an incomparable military advantage. In a story recounted by Polyaeus, Antiochus put on a fake festival in his camp to throw the defenders of Damascus into a false state of security, only to then send out an expeditionary force through the desert with four days provisions to launch a surprise attack against the city and take it when the defenders were caught unawares.²

Damascus' capture was probably the only significant event of 202, but in early 201 another important city was targeted. In order to solidify his stranglehold over Coele Syria, the king would need to attack the fortified city of Gaza. Much like Alexander he faced stiff resistance, but his army was able to break through the defenses and sack the city that same year.³ Inscriptions found at ancient Scythopolis (modern Beth-Shean in Israel) record a series of exchanges between Antiochus and one Ptolemaeus, son of Thraseas. He was a scion of a powerful family in Coele Syria that served under the Ptolemies for

¹ Grainger, J.D. (2015): 102

² Polyaeus, 4.15

³ Polybius, 16.18.2, 16.22a.1-7; An epitaph belonging to a Cretan mercenary named Charmadas who was likely killed in the siege has survived, see SEG 8.269

generations, and he himself had been partially responsible for re-training the Ptolemaic army in the interim before the Battle of Raphia.⁴ He remained on the staff as governor for Ptolemy IV following the war's end, but it is clear that by 201 he had already defected over to Antiochus and became the *strategos* of Coele Syria and Phoenicia, presumably having seen the chaos of the Egyptian government in recent years and hedged his bets. His change of allegiance was probably one of the reasons why Antiochus was so easily able to reach Gaza in spite of the considerable defenses between it and Damascus.⁵ The Jewish historian Josephus also reportedly preserved letters between Antiochus and Ptolemy regarding the fate of Jerusalem, and the contents suggest that the city leaders helped expel the Ptolemaic garrison. The Book of Daniel reinforces this notion by insisting that pro-Seleucid factions within the city tried to overthrow the supporters of the "King of the South".⁶ In return for the assistance, the king would grant them three years exemption from taxes, a reduction of tribute, and protection against the violation of the Temple. No doubt this was intended to give the Jews caught in middle a chance to rebuild, but the gesture was appreciated anyways.⁷

Meanwhile, Egypt was a mess. The rival pharaoh Harronophoris was still running wild in the south, which required a large amount of manpower in order to deal with the rebel forces and deprived the Ptolemaic coffers much needed tax revenues for several years, and there is evidence that their attacks reached as far north as the Delta.⁸ Since the death of the minister Sosibius and the public execution of the delinquent Agathocles, the one who had taken charge of the king's cabinet was Tleopolemus, the governor of Pelusium. He was a military man who was quite popular with the army, but soon it became clear that he was no less a fool than the hated Agathocles, spending money frivolously and running the palace more like a fraternity house for his soldiers. While Sosibius was a snake and manipulator, he at least was a competent one, and the courtiers' contempt only grew more as they witnessed Tleopolemus' frivolity.⁹ Eventually Tleopolemus disappears from our narrative by 201 and replaced as standing regent by one Aristomenes, though knowing Alexandrian politics it probably wasn't a graceful or bloodless exit. This disharmony among the leading officials was no doubt a major factor behind the sluggish Ptolemaic response to the near-complete conquest of Coele Syria, along with the betrayal of officials who saw the writing on the wall.

During the interim between Ptolemy V's accession to the throne and the outbreak of the Fifth Syrian War, the Egyptian government sent out a number of missions as they waited for the inevitable invasion by Antiochus. An attempt to broker a marriage between young Ptolemy and Apame of Macedon to secure Philip V's aid ended in failure, as did another mission to the court of Antiochus to try and delay any attack.¹⁰ The other missions were more successful: one Scopas of Aetolia, a man who you might remember as a constant thorn in the side of Philip during the Social War and the First Macedonian War, was now in service to Egypt and was sent back to Greece with a pile of gold to secure mercenaries for

⁴ Polybius, 5.65.3

⁵ SEG 29.1613; Austin, M. (2006): 347-350; Gera, D. (1987): 63-73; OGIS 230 later shows his appointment as governor; Grainger, J.D. (2015): 102-103

⁶ Daniel 11:14

⁷ Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 12.3.3-4; Schäfer, P. (2003): 28-29

⁸ OGIS 90, aka the Rosetta Stone, speaks of the city of Lycopolis in the Busirite Nome being sacked. No date is explicitly given, but it stands to reason that it would have been before 200 when the rebel force was at the height of its power.

⁹ Polybius, 16.21.1-22.1

¹⁰ Polybius 15.25.13

the upcoming conflict.¹¹ With little options left for the Alexandrian cabinet, Scopas was designated as the leading commander of the Ptolemaic army.

In the winter of 201/200, Scopas launched a counterattack that swarmed across the south. He recaptured Jerusalem, along with several other portions of the surrounding region.¹² Evidently the resistance he faced allowed Antiochus to summon his forces out of their winter quarters in Damascus, and he soon marched to meet the Aetolian general. Near the city of Panium, named after a local sanctuary devoted to the god Pan and known today as Banyon in the Golan Heights, the armies of Syria and Egypt would once again confront each other in summer of 200.¹³ Our only real account of the Battle of Panium comes from a fragment of Polybius, who critiques the account of another historian named Zeno of Rhodes, but modern investigations into the region's topography suggest that Zeno's writings were probably quite sound.¹⁴ From what we can gather, the bulk of the Ptolemaic army was much smaller than that of the force sent to Raphia, perhaps numbering somewhere around 50,000 in total. Of these, Scopas was able to gather about 6,000 infantrymen and 500 cavalry from Aetolia during his mission to Greece, but the rest would have been drawn from the Macedonian cleruchs or other mercenaries – the native Egyptians, obviously, could not be called upon again.¹⁵ Antiochus on the other hand was at the head of an enormous host, numbering about 65,000 men drawn from across his the entirety of his empire and beyond.¹⁶ Of note is Antiochus' deployment of cataphracts, a type of heavy cavalry unit whose riders and horses were completely covered armor, the ancestor of the much later European mounted knight. This marks the first use of them by a Mediterranean army, as Antiochus encountered and adopted them after fighting against the Parthians or the Bactrians during his anabasis.¹⁷

The disparity in numbers reveal Scopas' desperation to confront the Seleucid king, or perhaps he was banking on the local geography to assist his efforts. A plateau served as the main battlefield, but hills and a river cutting vertically through the area could have served the more agile Aetolians against Antiochus' pikemen. The Ptolemaic army was positioned on the north, with the Aetolians on the right wing and the pikemen on the left, with cavalry flanking both sides. In the center of the Seleucid line were the phalangites, with Antiochus commanding the cavalry on the left wing and the crown prince Antiochus the Younger on the right alongside the cataphracts, who were atop a neighboring hill. Indian elephants were also in the center, some ahead of the phalanx and some behind.

Skirmishers from both sides launched their missiles at one another to kickstart the battle. Horns and shouts from officers ordered each of the phalanxes to begin their push forwards. Seleucid elephants on the left thundered across the valley to batter the Aetolian infantry, and Antiochus ordered his cavalry to move ahead past the phalanx line. On the right wing, Prince Antiochus the Younger sounded the charge of the cataphracts, who came down the hill in a mass of rumbling hooves and clattering of metal. The

¹¹ Polybius, 15.25.16

¹² Polybius, 16.39.1-3; Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 12.3.3; Porphyrius, 45

¹³ Figure 1

¹⁴ For the ancient references, see Polybius, 16.18-20, 28.1.3; Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 12.3.3; Daniel 11:15; Porphyrius, 46; For modern commentaries, see Wrightson, G. (2022): 37-50; Du Plessis, J.C. (2022): 253-257; Johstono, P. (2018): 162-169; Bar-Kochva, B. (1976): 146-157

¹⁵ Livy, 41.43.5

¹⁶ Johstono, P. (2018): 167 suggests as high as 70,000, based on the descriptions of Daniel and Josephus that indicate the army was larger than one at Raphia (which was approximately 68,000 strong)

¹⁷ Du Plessis, J.C. (2022): 103-110; Their armor may be seen on the Pergamon Altar, see Figure 2 and Figure 3

Egyptian cavalry on the left wing was utterly terrified by this new type of horsemen: the incoming cataphracts were covered head to toe, with segmented pieces of armor wrapping around their arms and legs, and the faces of some of the riders were hidden by iron masks that presented uncaring expressions to their victims, resembling statues of bronze more than men.

As Antiochus the Younger smashed through the Ptolemaic cavalry with ease, the center phalanxes came together and began their struggle. Scopas' phalangites actually seemed to be getting the better of the Seleucid pikemen, who were being pushed back by the ferocity (or desperation) of their Ptolemaic opponents. But King Antiochus was also besting the Aetolian right wing, tying up their cavalry as the elephants began to wreak havoc on them and then the phalanx. It seems that the Seleucid infantry had engaged an orderly retreat, and drew the opposing phalangites into a false sense of security. Antiochus, the elephants, and the Seleucid pikemen all brought their full fury on the Egyptian center. So too did Antiochus the Younger, who saw an opportunity to lead his cataphracts into a charge from behind, skewering many defenseless and trapped pikemen. Scopas witnessed the destruction of his army at the lances of the cataphracts, and realized that the day was lost. He ordered a general retreat, and was able to gather some 10,000 troops and escape the field.

Scopas and his survivors fled to the city of Sidon, holding the fortress down as he hoped for a rescue by Ptolemaic reinforcement. Antiochus laid siege to Sidon, but presumably also reclaimed much of what had been lost in Scopas' counter-invasion, including Jerusalem. Daniel and associated commentaries tell us the names of a handful of generals who were dispatched by the Alexandrian government, but do not elaborate further on what they did, though all we know is that they ultimately failed. By early to mid-199, the defenders of Sidon faced starvation, and the Aetolian leader chose to surrender the city to the Seleucid king. Evidently Antiochus let Scopas live, as we will find him alive in a few years' time, but the fighting in Syria was now definitively at an end.¹⁸

While the campaign in Syria was over, the war would drag on for another four years. The only question was where to target next. With Coele Syria completely under Antiochus' control and the Ptolemaic army in tatters, there appeared to be little preventing him from launching an all-out invasion of Egypt. The wealth and grain could be an enormous boon to his empire, along with the prestige factor of conquering his long-hated rivals. There were a number of issues that complicated the matter: the logistical challenges of an Egyptian invasion were obvious given the difficulty of the terrain, and should he actually depose Ptolemy, he would then be tasked with issues of administration. Much had been lost to the Egyptian rebels and needed to be reconquered, and whatever was left of the Greek settlers appeared to be loyal to the Ptolemaic cause. It is possible that such an expedition was never seriously considered. On the other hand, the king was already very experienced in dealing with harsh environments and rebellious subjects. It would certainly line up with his vision as a great conqueror, and given the events of the later Sixth Syrian War, a conquest of Alexandria was probably on the table.¹⁹

¹⁸ Daniel 11:15-16; Porphyrius, 46; Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 12.3.3; Polybius, 16.39.1-3; St. Jerome, 145.4

¹⁹ Grainger, J.D. (2015): 115-119 argues that Antiochus never truly considered an Egyptian invasion for the above reasons. Eckstein, A.M. (2012): 308-310 disagrees.

But it seems that outside factors may have influenced his decision making. During the height of the Syrian campaign in 200, Antiochus received an embassy from the Roman Republic. This mission came on the heels of their meeting with Philip V at Abydos, where they attempted to halt the Macedonian ruler's aggression against the Greeks to no avail. Polybius' only surviving snippet suggests that the ambassadors had gone to try and mend relations between the Seleucids and Ptolemies.²⁰ The tradition as put forward by both Justin and Appian suggests a much more direct tone: the Romans *ordered* that Antiochus keep his hands off of Egypt.²¹ Syria appeared not to be a point of contention – not that they could do anything about it, since the Battle of Panium had either just happened or was about to happen – but they insisted that Ptolemy be allowed to retain his throne. This brash attitude is surprising, for they may have proved themselves against the Carthaginians, they still had yet to best Macedonia to truly show they were an equal position of power. It was also an unusually forward stance to take for a first-time meeting. Personally, I believe that instead of safeguarding the interests of Ptolemy V, the Republic was probing to see whether Antiochus would come to Philip's aid in the Second Macedonian War. The existence of the Pact (or at least the suggestion of its existence) was known to the Senate by this point, and given the cooperation of both parties in Asia Minor, it was a legitimate question. But Antiochus seemed to have no intentions of offering military aid to Philip against the Romans, nor was it ever requested. Frankly if the Ptolemaic kingdom did collapse, a war between both men would have been inevitable, any agreements be damned.²² Antiochus seems to have given the answer the Romans were looking for, and Livy tells us that the king was named Friend and Ally of Rome by 198.²³

So instead of marching on Egypt, Antiochus decided to pursue another campaign in Asia Minor to seize any remaining Ptolemaic cities and strongholds. After spending much of 198 consolidating his conquests in Coele Syria, the king amassed his land army in Sardis and 300 ships in the spring of the following year.²⁴ Attalus I of Pergamon was alarmed by the buildup of forces so close to his own border, and requested that the Romans send another mission to have the king swear not to cross into his territory. The Senate promised to send a party to remind Antiochus of Pergamon's dedication to their cause, and apparently Antiochus' response was satisfactory enough to not press the issue further.²⁵ With the onset of the campaigning season in 197, the king moved along the southern coastline of Anatolia, capturing major cities like Aphrodisias, Soli, and others.²⁶ At the fortress of Coracesium (modern Alanya) Antiochus was occupied for a month, and during the siege he received another embassy, this time from Rhodes. The Rhodians were troubled by the king's expansionism, and set out with a fleet of ships, claiming that they were acting to defend the interests of Rome against assisting Macedonia, and ordered that he not pass the promontory of Chelidoniae, which historically was used to define the border against the

²⁰ Polybius, 16.27.5

²¹ Justin, 31.1.2; Appian, *Macedonian Affairs*, 4

²² The convenience of the pact is made clear by the fact that no ancient author suggests Philip ever asked for military aid from Antiochus. Livy 33.19.3 does state that Antiochus intended to help Philip in the war, but this contradicts his earlier claim that the king was named "Friend and Ally" of Rome in 198, see next note.

²³ Livy, 32.8.3; Eckstein, A.M. (2012): 311 suggests (with caution) that the friendship was offered to Antiochus because of his agreement to not attack Egypt. Gruen, E.S. (1984): 615-617 is less inclined to accept this.

²⁴ This was a dramatic expansion of Seleucid naval power, prompted by his campaigns along the coastline, but also in part due to looking to fill the void which the Ptolemaic navy once occupied.

²⁵ Livy, 32.8.8-16

²⁶ Livy, 33.19.8, 33.20.1-4; Porphyrius, 46: OGIS 230 actually has a dedication in Soli by Ptolemy, Son of Thraseas, whose family was originally based out of Cilicia.

Persians.²⁷ Antiochus was annoyed by the challenge, but announced his good intentions and pointed to his recent concord with the Romans on behalf of Pergamon. Conveniently, news of Philip's defeat at Cynoscephalae arrived at the same time, and so the Rhodians quickly changed their position: the king would be allowed to progress unimpeded, but on the condition that Rhodes be given some of Philip's conquests in Caria (which were now forfeit), and Ptolemy be allowed to retain Samos. Antiochus accepted the terms, and sailed passed Lycia in southwest Asia Minor.²⁸ While he attacked the coastline, Seleucid commanders such as Zeuxis marched in the interior, capturing cities in Caria.²⁹ At the end of that year, Antiochus made landing at Ephesus, where he would spend the winter.³⁰

His next important step came in the following spring, where he moved to the city of Lysimacheia. This was the former capital city of the would-be dynast Lysimachus who situated it on the Thracian side of the Chersonese (near the modern Gallipoli Peninsula). It had since fallen into disrepair after earthquakes and attacks by Gauls and Thracians, but Antiochus endeavored to restore the city to its former glory. Far from being an act of magnanimity – becoming the city's new founder was one last insult to Lysimachus for the rivalry against his ancestor – Antiochus would use the city as a vantage point to launch new campaigns into Europe, devastating much of the Thracian tribes who lived in the area.³¹ He also made a very public statement to the effect that he was announcing his sovereignty over all of the cities in Asia, citing the claims of Seleucus I.³² Much of the region had now submitted to Seleucid authority, which had been built upon the earlier conquests of 204/203, though cities like Smyrna and Lampsacus continued to resist.³³ Philip's defeat at Cynoscephalae meant that he was confined to Macedonia, leaving his earlier conquests in Caria vulnerable, the pact notwithstanding. By now, Attalus I of Pergamon was dead and succeeded by his son Eumenes II. Any past alliance between both rulers was now null and void, so an attack on Pergamene territory was to be expected.

This did not bode well for Aristomenes, the standing regent for Ptolemy V. Almost all of their overseas territories were now lost, and he panicked to find a scapegoat for his troubles. Scopas, whom Antiochus allowed to leave Sidon unmolested following its brutal siege, was placed under arrest by the minister on the grounds of fomenting treason in 197. Polybius claims that the Aetolian commander had taken to enriching his house in Alexandria with goods and money fleeced from the palace, and with his still-sizeable band of mercenaries he conspired to take power. True or not, the trial was a formality and he along with his supporters were executed via poison while in prison.³⁴ Soon afterwards came a blow to Aristomenes' position: the court saw the arrival of Polycrates of Argos, the governor of Cyprus, bearing an enormous cash gift for Ptolemy. For a monarchy in dire need of funds, this was an excellent way to get in someone's good graces. He capitalized further by organizing the *Anakleteria*, the coming-of-age ceremony for the 13-year-old Ptolemy V, who was now officially king. This was formally acknowledged by

²⁷ Plutarch, *Life of Cimon*, 13

²⁸ Livy, 33.20

²⁹ Some of their inscriptions survive, for instance SEG 33.867, SEG 36.973, SEG 37.859, all collected in Ma, J. (1999); Grainger, J.D. (2015): 125-127 provides a synthesis of these inscriptions.

³⁰ Polybius, 18.40a; Porphyrius, *Fragments*, 46; Livy, 33.38.1

³¹ Livy, 33.38.9-14; Appian, *The Syrian Wars*, 1, 3 also suggests that he intended it to become a new capital to be ruled by his son, presumably in joint kingship.

³² Livy, 33.38.1

³³ Livy, 33.38.2-9

³⁴ Polybius, 18.53.1

the priests of Ptah in Memphis, who crowned him pharaoh in an elaborate display on March 27th of 196.³⁵ Aristomenes was now demoted to an advisory position, one that he would only hold onto for a two more years until he was executed in 194.³⁶

The Ptolemaic government would continue to take no decisive military actions, but an important diplomatic initiative would be taken to Antiochus on their behalf. In September 196, the king was met by another mission of Roman officials at Lysimacheia. The Republic had been busy organizing the affairs of Greece after the end of their war with Philip, but no doubt was kept aware of Antiochus' encroachment upon European soil. Representatives from Smyrna, Lampsacus, and Alexandria all arrived to protest the Seleucid conquests during the last year, requesting Rome to step in on the matter.³⁷ Rome had recently just made a well-publicized declaration in Corinth announcing the freedom of all Greek cities in both Europe *and* Asia, standing in direct contradiction to Antiochus' own claims over Asia Minor that same year. It would have been an awkward request to turn down from a public relations standpoint, but Rome also was aiming for a complete evacuation of Greece within the next year or two. If Antiochus was already this far, what was stopping him from laying claim on the Greek cities of the mainland?

Seleucid ambassadors who were present during the Isthmian Declaration were apparently given the preliminary message to have Antiochus keep his hands off of the autonomous cities of Asia and not allow his army to cross into Europe.³⁸ The official meeting in Lysimacheia took place a couple of months later, headed by Lucius Cornelius and a few members of the Roman commission.³⁹ With the king present, Lucius announced the Senate's wish to broker a peace between him and Ptolemy. Antiochus should abandon the cities that belonged to both Ptolemy and Philip, with Lucius pointing out the absurdity that the king should even consider taking Philip's former territories since Rome had done all the hard work in securing the victory. Furthermore, he advised that Antiochus stay away from the other free cities of Asia, and demanded an explanation of why the king amassed such an enormous army on the border of Europe. Antiochus was both surprised and annoyed, shooting back his disbelief that the Romans would dare interfere with the politics of Asia when he had taken no actions in Italian affairs. He defended his actions in Thrace: the kingdom once ruled by Lysimachus had been taken in battle by Seleucus, but had been stolen from by the Ptolemies and Antigonids. By right of conquest, Antiochus was simply reclaiming his ancestral territory. Not only did he defeat the barbarians occupying the region, but he also resettled the people of Lysimacheia to their homes, thus restoring order to a lawless land. Rome had no right to liberate the Asiatic Greeks, that was to be left to his own grace and magnanimity. Lastly, Ptolemy was no longer a concern, for he had already been in negotiations with Alexandria to bring an end to the war. Though Lucius attempted to bring forward the Smyrnian and Lampsacian witnesses to list their grievances against the king, Antiochus deflected and announced he would settle their dispute another time, with the Rhodians acting as an impartial arbitrator instead.⁴⁰

³⁵ Polybius, 18.53.3-9; The date of the ceremony is recorded on the Rosetta Stone, OGIS 90, and the importance of the Memphite coronation is a topic I shall reserve for a later episode.

³⁶ Diodorus Siculus, 28.14

³⁷ Appian, *The Syrian Wars*, 2; Diodorus Siculus, 29.7

³⁸ Polybius, 18.4.1-3; Livy, 33.34.2-3; Considering that Antiochus had already attacked Thrace, was the Republic not aware at the time?

³⁹ Not to be confused with Lucius Cornelius Scipio, who will be an important figure in the next episode.

⁴⁰ Polybius, 18.49.2-52.5; Livy, 33.39-40; Appian, *The Syrian Wars*, 3; Diodorus Siculus, 28.12; Gruen, E.S. (1984): 622-623 believes the Republic was acting on good faith as a peacemaker between Syria and Egypt, enhancing her status among the Greeks; Eckstein, A.M. (2012): 311 openly disagrees with Gruen's viewpoint, arguing that Rome was taking a hard stance to

So concluded the negotiations at Lysimacheia, and by all accounts Antiochus left the meeting as the diplomatic victor. Rome did not suggest a declaration of war, therefore his position as Friend and Ally was not in jeopardy, and Antiochus seems to have relented on his claims over Smyrna – in the following year, the city dedicated a temple to the goddess *Roma*, a deified personification of their new benefactor.⁴¹ In part, the meeting was also adjourned so abruptly because a rumor from the south suggested that Ptolemy had died. Antiochus quickly set sail in the hopes to claim Egypt for himself, but was forced to turn back when it proved to be untrue. His fleet was beset by a winter storm and badly damaged, with the remaining ships making landfall in Seleucia, and the king spent the rest of the season in Antioch.⁴²

Antiochus' claim that he had almost reached the end of his negotiations with Ptolemy may be taken with a grain of salt, especially after his stunt following the conference, but it appears to have been genuine. Both kingdoms reached an agreement during early 195 that confirmed the end of the Fifth Syrian War, and a wedding was to be held in the following year. At Raphia, the site of his of ignominious defeat, Antiochus gave the hand of his daughter Cleopatra to Ptolemy to cement the peace between the two houses. Ironically, it would be this Cleopatra who introduced the name into the family, which became so prevalent among its female members all the way down to the dynasty's final days. She would be distinguished by her Seleucid ancestry, known as Cleopatra I Syra ("the Syrian"), and will continue to play an important role for decades to come.⁴³

At long last, Coele Syria was in the hands of Antiochus, who finally avenged the insult that Ptolemy inflicted on Seleucus a century earlier. Confusingly, some of the accounts suggest that the region was bequeathed to Ptolemy as part of Cleopatra's dowry. These claims may be considered Ptolemaic fabrications, as I find it highly unlikely that Antiochus would part so quickly from his newly-won prize. Though there will be one last Syrian conflict that will need to be covered, the Fifth Syrian War was a pivotal moment in the Hellenistic period. Ptolemaic Egypt had ultimately survived Antiochus' onslaught, but not without serious consequences. The overseas empire that once stretched across the Eastern Mediterranean was reduced to a fraction of its former size. Cyrene, Cyprus, and a few islands in the Aegean were all that was left, and the naval hegemony that once dominated the seas was gone. While overshadowed by the engagement at Raphia, the defeat of the Egyptian army at Panium was a huge blow. Virtually the entire phalanx was annihilated, and a large number of Greco-Macedonian settlers – the ones who served as phalangites and acted as the main instrument of Ptolemaic power within Egypt – were now dead on the field. This would have been devastating on the demographics of the army, which I shall discuss in future episodes.⁴⁴ From this point forward, Egypt would be relegated to a status of a second-class power.

It is also worth looking at the effects of the Syrian Wars as a whole. Since Ptolemy's I disputed

warn Antiochus from moving any further. Grainger, J.D. (2015): 137-144 meanwhile considers much of the episode a fabrication on Polybius' part.

⁴¹ Tacitus, *Annals*, 4.56

⁴² Livy, 33.39; Appian, *The Syrian Wars*, 4; Despite his expressed intent to establish peace with Ptolemy, Antiochus' blatant grab for Egypt serves as evidence that there was always an interest in a full conquest of the kingdom.

⁴³ Livy, 35.13.4; Appian, *The Syrian Wars*, 5; Porphyrius, 47; Daniel 11:17; Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 12.4.1; Cleopatra ended up being the most popular name for Ptolemaic royal ladies, with eight (or nine depending on how you count) distinct individuals, compared to four Berenices and four Arsinoes.

⁴⁴ Johstono, P. (2018): 182-183

occupation of Coele Syria following the Battle of Ipsus in 301, the Seleucid and Ptolemaic houses were locked in a perpetual cycle of war and peace for over a century. Neither side could reasonably concede: the Ptolemies would not abandon an important corridor that could be used by armies looking to invade Egypt, and the Seleucids were equally unlikely to give up what they viewed to be theirs by right of conquest. Admittedly the bellicose nature of Hellenistic monarchies meant that almost any excuse would have been used for the kings to go to war, but the rivalry between Syria and Egypt was particularly intense due to this territorial dispute. As put by historian John D. Grainger, "*The Syrian Wars were a major cause of both the power of the two dynasties, but also of their destruction*".⁴⁵ Hundreds of thousands of soldiers would be mobilized, enormous fleets built and maintained, all greatly enhancing the military capabilities of each kingdom, a sort of ancient arms race for lack of a better expression. This was done at huge financial cost, which eventually became too much to bear in the case of the Ptolemies, and the late third century was a downward spiral as they struggled to maintain their empire before it almost collapsed entirely. The Seleucids were no less affected: because of their constant vigilance and competition with the Ptolemies, much of the eastern half of the empire was not given the same level of attention as their western half. Rebellious satraps and opportunistic invaders soon filled the vacuum, which demanded Antiochus to undergo his anabasis to restore order, lest his authority be reduced to the Levant and Mesopotamia. Civilians living in the Levant also suffered greatly whenever a new war broke out. This is well documented in the Jewish literary tradition: Josephus likens Jerusalem to a ship trapped in a storm, battered by the waves on both sides.⁴⁶ The Book of Daniel describes the Syrian Wars in apocalyptic terms, with the campaigns of the *King of the North* and the *King of the South* being compared to natural disasters such as floods and whirlwinds.⁴⁷ Calamities that inevitably followed conflict such as raiding or famine could befall the communities caught in the crossfire, or even slavery - an ordinance from Ptolemy II Philadelphus that attempted to limit the enslavement of non-Greeks living in Coele Syria and Phoenicia may suggest that it was a widespread problem.⁴⁸ As we shall explore in upcoming episodes, the Fifth Syrian War did not end the fighting between both dynasties, and this region would continue to be a hot button issue as both sides vied for whatever scraps of power that they could.

For the moment though, all looked bright for Antiochus. More and more it appeared that the Seleucid king was an unstoppable force, easily the most powerful Hellenistic monarch since Alexander, and his ambition showed no signs of abating. His appetite for conquest led him to taking his first steps into Europe, and the chance to expand his horizons westward would present itself when messages from Greece begged for his assistance. With the necessary excuse, Antiochus the Great would lead his army across the Bosphorus intent on victory, only to come face to face with the Roman Republic.

⁴⁵ Grainger, J.D. (2010): 419

⁴⁶ Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 12.3.3

⁴⁷ Daniel 11:1-11:45

⁴⁸ C. *Ord. Ptol.* 22

091: References

Primary

Appian – Macedonian Affairs

Appian – The Syrian Wars

Diodorus Siculus – Library of History

Josephus – The Antiquities of the Jews

Justin – Epitome

Livy – The History of Rome

Plutarch – Life of Cimon

Polyaenus – Stratagems

Polybius – The Histories

Porphyrius – Fragments

St. Jerome – Chronological Tables

Tacitus – Annals

The Book of Daniel

C. Ord. Ptol. (Corpus des ordonnances des Ptolémées)

OGIS (Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae)

SEG (Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum)

Secondary

Austin, M. (2006) *The Hellenistic World from Alexander to the Roman Conquest: A Selection of Ancient Sources in Translation (Second Edition)*

Bar-Kochva, B. (1976) *The Seleucid Army: Organization and Tactics in the Great Campaigns*

Du Plessis, J.C. (2022) *The Seleucid Army of Antiochus the Great: Weapons, Armour and Tactics*

Eckstein, A.M. (2012) *Rome Enters the Greek East: From Anarchy to Hierarchy in the Hellenistic Mediterranean, 230-170 BC*

Gera, D. (1987) "Ptolemy Son of Thraseas and the Fifth Syrian War", *Ancient Society*, Vol. 18, pp. 63-73

Grainger, J.D. (2010) *The Syrian Wars*

Grainger, J.D. (2015) *The Seleukid Empire of Antiochus III, 223-187 BC*

Gruen, E.S. (1984) *The Hellenistic World and the Coming of Rome*

Johstono, P. (2018) "'No Strength to Stand': Defeat at Panium, the Macedonian Class, and Ptolemaic Decline", *Brill's Companion to Military Defeat in Ancient Mediterranean Society*, pgs. 162-187

Ma, J. (1999) *Antiochos III and the Cities of Western Asia Minor*

Schäfer, P. (2003) *The History of the Jews in the Greco-Roman Period*

Wrightson, G. (2022) *The Battles of Antiochus the Great: The Failure of Combined Arms At Magnesia That Handed the World to Rome*

091 Figures



Figure 1 - The Battlefield of Panium, modern Baniyas. 33°14'55"N 35°41'40"E. Photo taken from Google Earth



Figure 2 - Captured Seleucid Cataphract armor from the Altar of Athena, Pergamon. Currently in the Pergamon Museum of Berlin. Photo taken from Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pergamon_Panorama_Weapon_Relief_8263.jpg)



Figure 3 - A relief of a Parthian Cataphract in full equipment. Housed in the British Museum, photo taken from Wikimedia Commons (<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:ParthianCataphract.JPG>)