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Cultural Collapse of the Seleucid Empire

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Cultural Collapse of the Seleucid Empire

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Abstract:

This paper seeks to explore the causes for the collapse of the Seleucid Empire following the death of Alexander the Great. The reasons for this collapse were numerous, but primarily focus on the administrative difficulties inherited from the Persian empire, the vast cultural differences within the empire, and the priorities of the Seleucid rulers. In order to show a counter point of a Greek state that succeeded in ruling a foreign people, the exploration of Ptolemaic Egypt is put alongside the Seleucids. The Egyptian Greeks succeeded in all of the ways that the Seleucids failed. By putting these two states alongside each other it becomes abundantly clear the difficulties that faced the Seleucids in their rule of the Middle East. The Seleucid period is very poorly documented in the regions that this paper is attempting to study, so a mixture of later literary sources, archaeological evidence, and sociology is used to establish a picture of what might have been going on in this period during the first few centuries BC. In the end, the main reasons for the Seleucid collapse came down to their inability to rule the vast and diverse empire that they had inherited during the Diadochi Period. One thing is clear about this period though, instead of creating a legacy of rule in the Middle East, the Seleucids would go down as primarily a footnote in the historical studies of these regions.

I. Introduction

The Middle East recently has been synonymous with instability. It seems that you cannot talk about modern world events without mentioning the “situation” of this particular region of the world. Understanding why means tracing the history of this region back millenia, and understanding the factors that shaped the cultures and economies of this region. For this paper, the Seleucid Empire has been chosen as an example of the instability of this region, and the challenges associated with the conquest and rule of the peoples who live there. From ancient times to modern day this region has been troublesome to rule, and in order to find out why the Seleucid empire has been chosen as an example of an empire which failed to rule the region. In order to establish the context of Seleucid occupation, a brief overview of the Diadochi period is necessary.

After the death of Alexander his empire fell into a power struggle among his top generals. The inheritance of Alexander’s empire was not a peaceful transition of power from one ruler to another, but instead broke the empire into a series of wars led by the successor kings vying for control of the territory once conquered by Alexander. This territory stretched all the way from Greece into the Middle East and reached into India. The Indus Valley limited the eastern extent of this empire with any further ambition stopped by the reluctance of his men.¹ The conquered Persians had held lands from Armenia and Syria all the way through Bactria and Sogdiana.² The regions of Bactria and Sogdiana are especially interesting here and will become a focal point of this inquiry into the collapse of the Seleucid Empire. The Seleucids inherited by far the largest piece of this empire.³ But while the Seleucid empire inherited after the death of Alexander was vast, stretching from Syria through to the Indus valley, it was also highly regionalized. These

¹ Romm "Ghost on the Throne" 44

² Briant "From Cyrus to Alexander" 696

³ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"66

regions and the peoples who lived within them, are especially important to understanding the collapse of this empire.

The Diadochi period itself was a complex and tumultuous time for Greece, Egypt, and the Middle East. The break up of Alexander the Great's empire was not a simple inheritance of power, but instead a struggle among his top generals for inheritance of specific portions of the Macedonian Empire. Perdiccas, with the signet ring of Alexander, attempted to set up a government with its head in Babylon in order to organize the rule of the empire.⁴ This would not prove to be a successful endeavor. Following the death of Alexander, men such as Antigonus, Perdiccas, Seleucus and Ptolemy all had equal claim to the power vacuum left behind.⁵ In the struggle between the leading men of Alexander many kingdoms were formed across what used to be the Macedonian Empire. Two of these states: the Seleucid Empire and the Ptolemaic Kingdom expanded Greek territory beyond what had been controlled by Greeks at any time before Alexander. While these politics are less valuable to understanding the collapse of the eastern satrapies under the Seleucids, it sets an important backdrop to the events which transpired in modern day Iran, Afghanistan, and India.

Alongside the Seleucid Empire, Ptolemaic Egypt stands as a counter view of a successor kingdom which succeeded for the exact reasons the Seleucid empire failed. While it was forged in the same wars that created the Seleucid empire after the death of Alexander, Ptolemaic Egypt inherited a much different region than their Seleucid counterparts. Here the Ptolemies inherited one region with one shared history, and were thus able to work themselves more readily into a kingship over the peoples who lived there.⁶ Their methods of rule were able to extend over all of the people in their kingdom without ostracizing certain groups. This distinction is the basis of

⁴ Romm "Ghost on the Throne" 111

⁵ Meeus "Confusing Aim and Result" 3

⁶ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 2

comparison between the Seleucid and Ptolemaic dynasties, and by showing the effects of this difference in various aspects of each kingdom, a clear answer to the failures of the Seleucid empire can be found.

This exploration then will be laid out as a comparison between those two states, with first mentioning the successes and advantages of the Ptolemies, and then investigating the lack of these successes and advantages in the Seleucid Empire. The Seleucids faced many different kinds of opposition in conquering the east, with mutinies, revolts, and outright desertion.⁷ The collapse of the eastern parts of the Seleucid empire can be summed up in three main points: the cultural groups present in these regions, the western focus of the empire, and the administrative difficulties associated with ruling such large varied regions. Before these reasons can become clear though, it is important to take a look at these regions as they were inherited by both Ptolemy and Seleucus to better understand the steps that each leader took in the Hellenization and rule of these regions. Then knowing how these regions were structured, the policies of each leader and their varied successes and failures can be shown.

II. Egypt, the Seleucids, and Persia:

The Persian Empire is essential to an understanding of these regions before the Macedonian Empire. Persian kings had held control over these regions for centuries before the conquest of Alexander the Great.⁸ During this time they imposed their styles of rule over these regions, and this had an effect on how they operated after the fall of the Persian Empire. The main point of interest was the system of satrapies that they instituted over these regions. These satrapies instituted by the Persian government created regions within their empire to allow for

⁷ Romm "Ghost on the Throne" 110, Overtoom "Reign of Arrows" 69, Romm "Ghost on the Throne" 44

⁸ Briant "From Cyrus to Alexander" 357

easier rule of peoples. This system was broad and applied evenly over the empire, “without taking into consideration any regional particularities.”⁹ These regions were arbitrarily decided by an outside force, and this would later come to affect their new rulers in various ways.

The satrapies themselves were not culturally unified regions but were instead administrative units of the Persian empire, fueling their tribute economy.¹⁰ The exact extent of these taxes was reformed throughout the course of the Persian empire, but the last major restructuring of these satrapies was done by Darius I, with the system going into effect around 517 or 518 BC.¹¹ By the time of Alexander’s death in 323 BC these systems were already aged by centuries.¹² The organizational structure that they offered was too great an advantage for the conquering Macedonian empire to ignore. Instead of doing away with this system they instead chose to keep it as a part of their empire, appointing members of the companions as the new satraps of these regions.¹³ The adoption of this system was so complete that the word itself *satrap* was even brought over into Greek.¹⁴ Thus this Persian system of satrapies found its way into Greek rule over the defunct Persian Empire.

This adoption did not engage with the problem of the lack of region particularity that this system had, and some regions fared well while others did not. One of these satrapies that succeeded was Egypt.

⁹ Briant "From Cyrus to Alexander" 388

¹⁰ Briant "From Cyrus to Alexander" 390

¹¹ Briant "From Cyrus to Alexander" 391

¹² Romm "Ghost on the Throne" 25

¹³ Romm "Ghost on the Throne" 69

¹⁴ Romm "Ghost on the Throne" 69

1. Egypt:

Ptolemy I was made satrap of Egypt by Perdiccas immediately following the death of Alexander.¹⁵ At the time this area was considered a gem of a province, being one of the most powerful left in the wake of the Persian empire due to its economy, defensibility, and friendliness to its new rulers.¹⁶ The benefits of ruling Egypt went deeper than just what appeared on the surface though, especially when compared with the provinces of Bactria and Sogdiana that were inherited by Seleucus. In order to understand why, it is necessary to look at some of the history of Egypt, and the people who lived there.

The first major benefit of the province in Egypt was the centralization present in the region before Ptolemy took power. In its history Egypt had long been united under one ruler in the form of the Pharaoh, and thus it was easy for Ptolemy to have, “actively adopted ancient modes of governance of Egyptian society that were a part of the existing state system.”¹⁷ There was not a need in this region to unify pre-existing divides among people, or to institute an entirely new way of life into the region. Instead these old methods of rule could simply be adopted by the new kings of the region. The Egyptian people themselves were familiar with a centralized rule that extended over all of Egypt. The reasons why this developed in the region are generally agreed upon, and relate to the economic history of the region.

Egypt for its history had been reliant on the floodplains of the Nile River for production of food for its people.¹⁸ This created the need for a centralized body to be created in order to control the arable and create food for the growing population of Egypt. Egypt was primarily

¹⁵ Romm "Ghost on the Throne" 70

¹⁶ Romm "Ghost on the Throne" 70

¹⁷ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 5

¹⁸ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 3

agricultural in nature, and so its peoples were rooted in the areas in which they could farm, creating population centers around one place, the Nile.¹⁹ This did not stop certain power structures from attempting to overtake others, especially following the collapse of the New Kingdom in the form of city states.²⁰ These city states were grounded in the land that they were founded on, and could be conquered by others in a traditional way as happened in 656 BC with the Saite Restoration.²¹ Thus the country, despite being able to split apart, was able to come back together under a single strong ruler. This showed the ability of the Egyptian people to act as a unified whole.

In 525 BC the entire state would be taken into the Persian Empire through invasion.²² This conquest created little change for the lives of the Egyptians living there, as the Persians were not interested in the rule of Egypt as a state, but as a means to control the valuable trade routes through the region.²³ Thus, Egyptian life was mainly unchanged as a result of the Persian rule of their lands. Egypt was able to keep many of the aspects that had shaped it for centuries before Persian rule. The Persians instituted the same tribute system over them that they created over others, forming the satrapy of Egypt.²⁴ This satrapy, unlike others inherited by the Seleucids, was able to encompass the main cultural group of Egyptians, with few other groups being added to them. This owed to the preexisting wealth of the region, as within even this limited cultural group, it still owed the second highest tribute to the Persians, second only to Babylon.²⁵ In this way the satrapy that Ptolemy I inherited was already a primarily unified people, and not a collection of different peoples within the same administrative boundaries.

¹⁹ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 4

²⁰ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 20

²¹ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 21

²² Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 24

²³ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 25

²⁴ Briant "From Cyrus to Alexander" 409

²⁵ Briant "From Cyrus to Alexander" 409

Egyptian religious factors also played a large role in the establishment of their society. There was an intrinsic link between political legitimacy and religious institutions in Egypt that led many kings to become involved with religious institutions as a means to solidify their rule over the people.²⁶ This aspect of Egyptian kingship worked because of the centralized nature of Egyptian religion. Take for instance the case of Herihor, a governor appointed by an Egyptian king to rule over the south of the nation. In taking power his first step was to align himself with the dominant cult at the time he was ruling, that of Amun, and he became the “high priest of Amun.”²⁷ In doing so he linked himself with this theological aspect of kingship in Egypt and legitimized his power as having been approved by the god.

The Persians during their occupation of Egypt respected this link between the Egyptian gods and their methods of kingship.²⁸ This left many of these power structures intact when the Ptolemies would later come to rule this region. The Persians had no reason to change these structures as long as tribute was paid to the empire through the satrap system.²⁹ Thus the traditions of the Egyptian people were maintained throughout the Persian period and found themselves still at the forefront of Egyptian practices during the conquest of Alexander and the taking of the throne of Egypt by Ptolemy.³⁰

In order to gain control over the land of Egypt these religious traditions had to be respected. In the *Histories* Herodotus records one such instance of these traditions not being respected by the Persian king Cambyses and the Apis bull.³¹ This supposedly is what turned the Egyptian people against the king Cambyses, and led them to believe he was mad.³² This story

²⁶ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 20

²⁷ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 20

²⁸ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 26

²⁹ Briant "From Cyrus to Alexander" 401

³⁰ Romm "Ghost on the Throne" 119

³¹ Herodotus "Histories" 3.28-29

³² Herodotus "Histories" 3.30

should not be taken as fact, but shows that even to an outsider such as Herodotus "Histories", the importance of the Egyptian religious traditions and their link to proper kingship were clear. This then was both a blessing and a curse to those in the region, proper respect for these rituals could win the hearts of the people, while disrespect for those traditions could lead to disobedience of the people.

The last factor of importance to understanding Ptolemy's success in Egypt was the exposure that the Egyptians had to the Greeks prior to their rule over the region. Egypt and Greece had for a long time been near each other and had long interacted before the reign of Ptolemy. While scholars debate over whether this constituted a period of Hellenization for the region, it is clear that there was trade and cultural diffusion between these regions before the conquest of Alexander.³³ Whether or not the area was Hellenized before Alexander, is not as important as recognizing that what later occurred in the region was not something entirely new, but rather the continuing of a trend that had been building up to the conquest of Alexander.³⁴ Due to this prior exposure to Greek cultural norms, they were not seen as entirely foreign, but instead as a known neighbor.

This diffusion began when the Egyptians broke away from the Persian empire with the help of Greeks living in Egypt in 404 BC.³⁵ This in turn, left the Egyptians stuck between the influences of the Greeks and the Persians for much of the 4th century BC.³⁶ The Greeks, while not directly ruling over Egypt, played a great part in keeping it separate from the Persian empire. While the region would eventually be retaken by the Persians in 343 BC,³⁷ the Greeks had established a foothold in the land of Egypt that would exist for Ptolemy when he came to power

³³ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 27

³⁴ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 27

³⁵ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 26

³⁶ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 26

³⁷ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 27

in the region. There is also evidence of Greek involvement in Egypt even earlier, dating back to the Saite restoration.³⁸ During this period there was a great influx of Greeks into Egypt, and even the establishment of Greek cities such as Naukratis.³⁹ The rule of Egypt under the Ptolemies was not suddenly turning the region Greek, but was instead the continuing of the trend of mixing with Greek culture that had been occurring for much of the first millenium BC.

2. Peoples of Bactria, Parthia and Sogdiana

The Seleucid Empire extended much larger than that of Ptolemy, and covered many more satrapies across its vast expanse. For the purposes of this paper three regions are especially important and have the most focus put upon them, Bactria, Parthia and Sogdiana. These three regions were the most unstable in the Seleucid empire for a multitude of reasons, and to understand why it is important to view these regions as they were inherited by the Seleucids.

Seleucus I inherited the largest chunk of the empire left by Alexander inheriting much of what used to be the Persian empire which Alexander had conquered to its farthest reaches. This included regions as far as Bactria, Sogdiana (modern day Afghanistan and Uzbekistan) and farther across the Hindu Kush mountains into India.⁴⁰ The western reaches of the Seleucid dynasty were taken from another successor king, Antigonus, in the wars following the death of Alexander. Antigonus had inherited the satrapy of Phrygia immediately following the death of Alexander, stretching from Asia minor down through the Judea to border Egypt and with its eastmost border laying in Syria.⁴¹ This conquest led the Seleucids to control land from the

³⁸ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 27

³⁹ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 27

⁴⁰ Romm "Ghost on the Throne" 10

⁴¹ Romm "Ghost on the Throne" 108

Mediterranean in the west to the Indus valley in the east. Due to the size of this empire, there were many varied peoples who lived under it, but instead of forming their own means to rule over all of these groups the Seleucids kept the Persian system of satrapies that had been in place before they arrived.⁴²

Due to the size of the Persian empire, the satrapies that it had created to organize its systems of tribute were based on geographic boundaries, and cared little about which groups or peoples lived under which satrapy. So in inheriting these satrapies wholesale, the satrapy in Bactria for instance had under it the Parthians, Chorasmians, Sogdians, and Arians.⁴³ This led to a very diverse region that was very likely completely disunified. Those names come primarily from the Greek historian Herodotus "Histories", and it is likely that those were merely the major groups that lived in this region during the time. These satrapies were not of a unified people or ethnic group, but were instead many different groups that had been divided up by the Persians.

These groups made up the majority of the population in these regions, with Greeks making up only a small fraction of the population in these regions.⁴⁴ There is also evidence of a plethora of nomadic groups intermixed with the more sedentary peoples.⁴⁵ While these people did not share a unified ethnic identity, they lived very similar ways of life to each other. This caused there to be a less centralized view of power in these regions, instead favoring smaller more community based systems of power. This way of life was not tampered with during the Persian occupation, but instead these traditions were allowed to continue and flourish through the period.⁴⁶ If tribute was able to be paid to Persia, these regions would be allowed to continue their way of life untouched by Persian occupation. This was only possible due to the satrap system,

⁴² Romm "Ghost on the Throne" 69

⁴³ Briant "From Cyrus to Alexander" 391

⁴⁴ Olbrycht "Iranians in the Diadochi" 2

⁴⁵ Olbrycht "Iranians in the Diadochi" 1

⁴⁶ Briant "From Cyrus to Alexander" 76

which allowed each region to remain mostly autonomous. Thus each separate region of the Persian empire could maintain their own way of life.

Instead of attempting to impose a blanket rule over all the peoples under the empire, each region was tailored specifically to its stage of development.⁴⁷ This meant that little was done during the Persian occupation to culturally unify these territories to any meaningful extent, “Instead, they exhibited great reverence for the local religions and sanctuaries. Each people continued to speak its own language and use its own writing system.”⁴⁸ This shows the differences between even peoples who may have fallen into the same satrapy as one another, but were differentiated from one another by language and tradition. The lack of unification was not a significant problem for the Persians, as they were ruling this area primarily for tribute. Despite the political differences that they faced they were able to rule this region until the conquest of Alexander the Great.

These regions maintained their own cultures throughout the Persian period, and would continue as they had been for centuries. That being said, it is very difficult to know exactly how these regions functioned before the Persian conquest because of the lack of textual evidence on them from before the Persian occupation.⁴⁹ Instead, there is a heavy reliance on the material records of these people as a means of understanding them. There is some evidence of canals dug by the Bactrian people in the archaeological record, but little of this is mentioned in the written records from the period.⁵⁰ This evidence postulates the possibility of more sedentary peoples living in the region. These people were still not entirely reliant on their cities for their survival though. As will be seen with the Parthians later, despite moving away from their nomadic

⁴⁷ Briant "From Cyrus to Alexander" 77

⁴⁸ Briant "From Cyrus to Alexander" 77

⁴⁹ Briant "From Cyrus to Alexander" 77

⁵⁰ Briant "From Cyrus to Alexander" 745

origins, they maintained many of their nomadic ways of life later into their cultural life cycle.⁵¹

So despite evidence of more sedentary lifestyles in the region, it is important to note that many of these cultures maintained their cultural identities from their nomadic periods.

The region of Bactria was divided between many smaller groups living under the same administrative structure of a larger empire. The peoples of central Asia were not settled in the types of cities that the Greeks were used to. Instead, most of their cultures were nomadic by nature. This cultural difference made these regions hard to conquer and rule, and the Seleucids did not even try to incorporate some of them such as the Scythians.⁵² This nature of moving from place to place was a staple of cultures here, and the Scythians laying slightly outside of the Seleucid empire serve as an excellent example of this. During the Persian reign of this region attempts were made to invade Scythia, but no suitable city center could be found to be conquered in the traditional way of conquest for the Persians.⁵³ The lack of a suitable way to conquer these peoples plagued the Persian empire, forcing them into later forming alliances with some of the nomads in an attempt to stop their raiding of Persian lands.⁵⁴

Another of these transitory groups were the Parthians, who would later become a great enemy to the Seleucid empire. The Parthian people originated as a small group known as the Parni who were living in central Asia.⁵⁵ This was a migratory group who are thought to have come out of Scythia and into northern Bactria.⁵⁶ While they would later integrate elements of Greek and Persian culture, their nomadic roots would not be lost during this process. The horse was an important element of their culture and was greatly revered throughout even their time as

⁵¹ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"34

⁵² Cohen "Hellenistic Settlement" 112

⁵³ Briant "From Cyrus to Alexander" 33

⁵⁴ Briant "From Cyrus to Alexander" 747

⁵⁵ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"33

⁵⁶ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"34

an empire.⁵⁷ This presence of the horse in their material record owes back to their primarily nomadic origins, having migrated into Bactria from the outside, and then carving their own place into the cultural fabric of the region. It is tangible evidence that although the Parthians would later implement sedentary structures into their empire, they did not abandon their roots as a nomadic people.

The Parthians did not appear to be the strongest enemy in the eastern satrapies, being nothing more than a small migratory group.⁵⁸ This was a people ostensibly weaker than the later Seleucids in conventional measures of empire building: population, soldiers, and resources.⁵⁹ They would eventually break away from the Seleucid empire later into the empire. Understanding these people more fully will help to understand how this was possible. The breaking away of the Parthians would not have been possible without their culture. Justin the Roman historian would later describe these people as such:

The disposition of the [Parthian] people is proud, quarrelsome (*seditiosa*), faithless, and insolent (*procacia*); for a certain roughness of behavior (*violentiam*) they think becoming to men, and gentleness (*mansuetudinem*) only to women. They are always restless (*inquieti*), and ready for any commotion (*dicendum*), at home or abroad; taciturn by nature; more ready to act than speak, and consequently shrouding both their successes and failures in silence. They obey their princes, not from humility, but from fear (*metu*). They are libidinous, but frugal in diet. To their word or promise they have no regard, except as far as suits their interest.⁶⁰

These were the types of peoples who occupied these regions to outside observers. Their culture was not well understood to western powers, and they were labeled as uncivilized.

⁵⁷ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"34

⁵⁸ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"33

⁵⁹ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"1

⁶⁰ Justin 41.3.7– 10. Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"2016c: 142– 50

Each of these peoples had their own culture and traditions like the Parthians, and were only loosely aligned under the Persians.

While the system of satrapies had its advantages for the Persian empire, the system also came with serious disadvantages. The presence of a government allowed the easier rule and collection of tribute from the peoples of specific regions, but also created a great target for others to gain power in the region. Each satrapy of the empire contained considerable wealth which went to support that region.⁶¹ While this wealth and the power associated with it were necessary to the proper rule of the region, they also created a great weakness in the power structure. The person who controlled the satrapy gained considerable wealth and power to turn against the empire. This can be seen through the example of a satrap of Bactria during the invasion of Alexander the Great.

Instead of remaining loyal to the Persian empire, the satrap of Bactria, Bessus, led the assassination plot on Darius successfully in 330 BC.⁶² Following this he had the people of his region declare him the new Great King, and mounted resistance to the invasion of the Greeks.⁶³ This showed a distinct lack of loyalty to the Persian empire for the people of this region, and instead showed that they favored the governance closer to them, that of the satrapy itself. With the power structure of the Persian empire so spread out, following the assassination of Darius, “. . . Bessus's personal authority held priority with his Bactrian horsemen and over the alliance with some of the Saka chiefs.”⁶⁴ Each individual region of the empire created a position of power such as this. Satrapies created many potential threats to the overarching structure of the empire from the inside. Each satrapy was located so geographically far from the capital that it was difficult to

⁶¹ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"67

⁶² Briant "From Cyrus to Alexander" 746

⁶³ Briant "From Cyrus to Alexander" 746

⁶⁴ Braint 747

maintain central control over all of them even during the Persian period. This problem would later be exacerbated during Seleucid control of the region as they would move their capital even farther from these unstable satrapies.

III. Hellenisation of Egypt and the Seleucid Empire

With the two regions which these empires ruled explained, it is now possible to trace the steps that each took in order to maintain control and order in their empire, and the varying degrees of success that these measures were met with. Egypt would go on to flourish through the Roman period, while the eastern portions of the Seleucid empire would become more and more unstable throughout the period.⁶⁵ These two differences come as both a result of the regions themselves, but also the actions of each dynasty in ruling over these regions. With this in a mind, a discussion of both policy and situation will be used to show the differing stability of these two regions.

First though, it is important to note an ideological difference between the two successors Ptolemy and Seleucus I, as the ambitions of these two men play greatly into how their kingdoms were to function. Most of the successor kings sought to control only their territory taken from the Macedonian Empire, but there were a few among them who hoped to keep the empire whole.⁶⁶ Of these the most notable are Perdiccas and Antigonus, who sought to keep the empire whole despite great size and disparity between different regions of the empire.⁶⁷ The Seleucids seem as though they sought to keep the empire of Alexander more or less as a whole as well, conquering many regions from other successor kings.⁶⁸ This explanation does not fully explain the Seleucid goals in their conquests against the other successor kings.

⁶⁵ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"xv

⁶⁶ Meeus "Confusing Aim and Result" 1

⁶⁷ Meeus "Confusing Aim and Result" 2

⁶⁸ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"66

Many of the successor kings believed that the division of the empire into kingdoms was a better way to maintain power in their individual regions. One such of these was Ptolemy in Egypt. While he would fight wars against the other successor kings, he did not seek to control the whole of Alexander's empire, but merely his part.⁶⁹ Ptolemy was content in the control of individual kingdoms instead of the expansive empire that Alexander had established in the wake of the Persian Empire. This is partially due to the province that he inherited from the empire being such a rich one.⁷⁰ The Seleucids did not have this particular advantage, and what could be mistaken for imperial tendencies from them is more easily explained as them hoping to control more wealthy provinces of the empire. The regions that came into their possession were not enviable ones, lacking much of the tax base of the other successor kingdoms.⁷¹

This is important because it shows the focus of these two states, the Seleucids who were looking outward and the Ptolemies who were looking in. This matter of focus will later become important in what each kingdom found to be necessary for their long term success, but their initial situations factored into these decisions greatly. Ptolemy sat on Egypt, one of the best provinces left behind after the dissolution of the Macedonian empire,⁷² and thus could afford to maintain what he had and still have a prosperous kingdom. The Seleucids on the other hand inherited many less useful provinces.⁷³ In order for them to share the success of others, their policy had to be more western focused, and this focus would play its role in the destabilizing of the east of their empire.

⁶⁹ Meeus "Confusing Aim and Result" 12

⁷⁰ Romm "Ghost on the Throne" 70

⁷¹ Briant "From Cyrus to Alexander" 391

⁷² Romm "Ghost on the Throne" 69

⁷³ Briant "From Cyrus to Alexander" 391

1. Egypt and Ptolemy

Ptolemaic Egypt was successful primarily due to the nature of the Hellenisation Ptolemy implemented in the region. While Ptolemy implemented some Greek aspects in his control of Egypt, he also maintained a good portion of Egyptian tradition during his rule of the region.⁷⁴ In effect, “The Ptolemaic state, within its core territory, was neither an Egyptian, nor a Greek state.”⁷⁵ The success of Ptolemy in the region was dependent on his adherence to some of the cultural norms of the people whom he ruled over. The synthesis of these two cultures allowed him to be successful in his rule of the region.

While the Egyptians may have been unhappy to be ruled by a foreign king, their society was set up, as mentioned before, in a way that centralized power had been the primary means of rule in Egypt for centuries.⁷⁶ So Ptolemy was able to step into the existing role of king in Egyptian society. With this in mind, Ptolemy was able to move slowly in implementing change in Egypt, relying on the ancient institutions of the state to legitimize his power.⁷⁷ How he did this is what interests this paper, and so the next sections will show how Ptolemy filled the role of king in the Egyptian kingdom. This will be explained through the concepts of the pharaoh, Egyptian religion, and Ptolemaic economic reform.

In his reign of Egypt, Ptolemy established himself as a pre-existing image within the Egyptian cultural psyche, that of the pharaoh. The method of governance in the Ptolemaic period differed little from what was seen during the Saite restoration.⁷⁸ This shows the continuity of rule that was fostered by Ptolemaic rule in the region. The structure of power in Egypt was not rebuilt from the ground up, but instead adopted by the Greek kings to have greater control over the

⁷⁴ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 3

⁷⁵ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 3

⁷⁶ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 3

⁷⁷ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 33

⁷⁸ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 35

Egyptian people. In establishing control over the Egyptian state the Ptolemies modeled themselves off of the ancient “good” pharaohs of Egypt.⁷⁹ Despite the success of this model, this Egyptian political fashioning had to be tempered with the Greek expectations of kingship.⁸⁰

While it was expedient to use the Egyptian idea of pharaoh to gain power over the new ethnic group that made up the core of his new kingdom, he could not alienate his Greek allies in Egypt.

So Ptolemy was forced into the balancing act of being both Egyptian and Greek. He had to be both an Egyptian pharaoh and a Greek king. This political fashioning did not inhibit his ability to use the previously established administrative systems of the Egyptian state. He did not have to establish a new bureaucracy alongside his image of kingship.⁸¹ Despite the change of the administrative language from Egyptian to Greek, much of the bureaucracy was the same as before the Ptolemaic dynasty took power.⁸² This allowed Ptolemy to more readily focus on his own personal image as king without having to establish an entirely new administration through which to rule. The ability to rely on these ancient institutions was a great boon to Ptolemy, and instead of building an entirely new system, Ptolemy could implement small incremental changes in an existing system. While there was some instability present in the Egyptian system,⁸³ there was not enough to topple the systems themselves. The draw of the pharaonic institution was too great for Ptolemy to simply ignore as this institution saw, “the king as the ‘centralizing principal’ of the state.”⁸⁴ This would lead to some issues within his own primarily Greek court, but found him a stable place from which to exercise power in Egypt.

Ptolemy then could focus entirely on propaganda for himself. In this he was able to find the balance between Greek king and Egyptian pharaoh. Ptolemy I, while aligning himself with

⁷⁹ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 73

⁸⁰ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 95

⁸¹ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 95

⁸² Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 95

⁸³ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 95

⁸⁴ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 81

the idea of Egyptian pharaoh, maintained his relationship with his fellow Greeks. Even in his wars with the other successor kings, he offered proper burial rights to those he defeated in battle in the Greek fashion.⁸⁵ Actions like this showed his ability to maintain his Greek cultural identity in the eyes of his fellow countrymen, but he also had to adopt Egyptian ideas of kingship in order to keep his new subjects under his control. In this pursuit he wanted to show himself as the liberator of the Egyptian people from the Persian empire.⁸⁶ The return to a pharaonic style of rule showed a change to the Egyptian people from the political model of the Persians.⁸⁷ In order to fully establish himself as an Egyptian king he needed to make some sacrifices with regards to his past as a companion of Alexander. Specifically he had to reject one of the honors given to him during his campaign with Alexander, his wife.

During the campaigns with Alexander Ptolemy I was married to Artacama, a Bactrian woman, in a mass wedding ceremony at Susa whom he would stay with until presumably the death of Alexander.⁸⁸ Upon his death he repudiated her because she was of no value to him in the rule of Egypt.⁸⁹ This seems extreme, but due to the nature of the balancing act he was attempting to execute in Egypt, she had become a liability to him.⁹⁰ This then turns to the next aspect of Egyptian society, religion. In order for Ptolemy to gain the legitimacy he needed to rule Egypt, he needed to keep the class of priests under his control. In order to do so, he needed a new wife in order to keep those priests happy with him in his new kingdom.

As mentioned in the first portion of this paper, religion was an important aspect of rule in Egypt, and luckily was widely shared among those living in Egypt. Because of this, Ptolemy could use religion as a tool to legitimize himself as king of Egypt. As described earlier, the

⁸⁵ Romm "Ghost on the Throne" 190

⁸⁶ Muller "Female Element of Political Self-Fashioning" 205

⁸⁷ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 80

⁸⁸ Muller "Female Element of Political Self-Fashioning" 204

⁸⁹ Muller "Female Element of Political Self-Fashioning" 204

⁹⁰ Muller "Female Element of Political Self-Fashioning" 204

pharaoh was an inherently divine position, ruling both secular and religious matters.⁹¹ This meant an inherent tie between Ptolemy and Egyptian religion. Unlike their previous Persian counterparts, the Ptolemies decided to embrace this as part of their rule in Egypt.⁹²

In the repudiation of Aratacama there is tangible evidence of this embrace of Egyptian religion. As mentioned earlier the motivation for this move was to keep the priests in Egypt on his side.⁹³ Priests could be the downfall of kings in the eyes of the Egyptian populace as seen with the story of Cambyses, that while not thought to be true, left an impact on the people of Egypt such that the story was told to the historian Herodotus "Histories".⁹⁴ While he did not feel the need to take for himself an Egyptian wife, he did feel the need to distance himself from his Persian wife.⁹⁵ This move kept the priests happy in Egypt, and these priests in turn would keep their communities in line with the Ptolemaic agenda. The nature of centralized religion in Egypt had already proven to be a great asset to Ptolemy in his establishment of a hellenized Egypt, but the priests were more than just propaganda for Ptolemy.

Religion also paid into the economy of Egypt as well. Priests were not immune to taxes, but were instead beholden to pay certain amounts to fund the state due to the divine implications of rule in Egypt.⁹⁶ The ideas of Egyptian religion and Egyptian kingship were deeply intertwined in the cultural psyche, and thus were inseparable from one another. Such were the economic implications of this, the priests and the scribes were the record keepers for the transactions of this period in Egypt.⁹⁷ With these under his control, Ptolemy was able to exercise his economic reforms in Egypt.

⁹¹ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 80

⁹² Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 3

⁹³ Muller "Female Element of Political Self-Fashioning" 204

⁹⁴ Herodotus "Histories" 3.28-29

⁹⁵ Muller "Female Element of Political Self-Fashioning" 205

⁹⁶ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 118

⁹⁷ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 81

The economy of Ptolemaic Egypt was a mixture of old Egyptian practice, and new Greek ideas. The wealth in Egypt was centralized towards the top, and when he took power Ptolemy inherited a great sum of wealth with which he could begin to implement change in the Egyptian economy.⁹⁸ With this money Ptolemy used one of the greatest propaganda tools of the time, he minted coinage.⁹⁹ These coins spread the message of a hellenized Egypt to the populace through imagery. Using these new coins Ptolemy would go on to implement many economic reforms in Egypt to great benefit in the land. These reforms would not be an entirely new economy, but a restructuring of the already existing Egyptian economy.

Ptolemy attempted to keep old Egyptian institutions in place under a new economic system.¹⁰⁰ This was because the existing Egyptian institutions lent themselves well to the policies that Ptolemy wished to implement in Egypt. In his rule of Egypt he simply had to expand on these institutions and bring them to the marketplace of the Mediterranean.¹⁰¹ There was no need to implement any great changes to the Egyptian way of life, but instead he merely had to encourage its growth and movement into an expanding world. This meant that he was met with little resistance in the changes that he made, as his policies were not aimed at changing the way of life of his people. Instead he improved upon these already existing systems incrementally in a way that did not threaten the stability of Egypt itself.

The steps he took also solved the problems that had plagued Egyptian systems for periods before he ruled. One such of these was the implementation of tax receipts throughout the state.¹⁰² This seemingly small change increased the stability of Egypt by a great amount. Through writing and contract, the collection of taxes and all other transactions could be recorded and maintained

⁹⁸ Romm "Ghost on the Throne" 122

⁹⁹ Romm "Ghost on the Throne" 123

¹⁰⁰ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 122

¹⁰¹ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 122

¹⁰² Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 129

without the regional infighting that had occurred before the Ptolemaic dynasty. The implementation of coinage as mentioned earlier was also a change that brought stabilization to Egypt from Ptolemy himself. Previously a system of barter had been used to exchange goods and services, but was exchanged by Ptolemy for the Greek monetary style of economy.¹⁰³ This change allowed for goods and services to be exchanged for money instead of for promises. This greatly increased public trust in the Ptolemaic economy. These are examples of the types of changes that Ptolemy implemented in order to improve upon the pre-existing Egyptian institutions, without having to create an entirely new economy to build them upon. In short the changes of the Ptolemaic dynasty were important, but not transformative to the system that they had inherited.¹⁰⁴ Ptolemy in Egypt did not have to do very much in order to stabilize Egypt, but could instead inherit already working systems from the previous government and improve upon them.

2. Seleucid Collapse

The collapse of the eastern portions of the Seleucid empire were not particularly surprising given the situation of the Greek occupiers of the region. The Bactrians were so far from Greece itself that their ways of life were almost entirely foreign to the Greeks. The reasons for the collapse of this region come down to three main aspects, a difference in cultural views, a lack of political capital in the east, and an uninvolved approach to the occupation of Bactria. The various cultures and peoples living throughout this region had little faith in their new Macedonian rulers from the start. Unlike Ptolemy, Seleucus did not attempt to distance himself from the previous Persian empire, but instead embraced both its administrative systems and the political capital aligning himself with them would give him.

¹⁰³ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 136

¹⁰⁴ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 203

The eastern satrapies were far more complicated than Egypt. As can be seen in the descriptions of Persian satrapies, many of the administrative units of the Seleucid empire contained many cultural groups within them.¹⁰⁵ These groups did not often agree with one another, nor with their being ruled by the Seleucids.¹⁰⁶ That being said these peoples made up the bulk not only of the people ruled by the Seleucids, but the primary basis for their military.¹⁰⁷ The situation in the east was further complicated by the distinct differences between the Greeks and these peoples, and for the purposes of this paper the Parthians and the Scythians will be used to show the exact difficulties that were faced by the Seleucids in their rule of the East.

The east of the Seleucid empire had not been stable from its inception, but the group that best illustrates how quickly this situation could evolve into a major problem is the Parthians. Unlike the settled peoples of the Mediterranean, the Seleucids were now ruling over primarily nomadic and migratory peoples in Bactria.¹⁰⁸ One such of these groups were the Parni, a minor unimportant group living in the steppe.¹⁰⁹ This group would not show itself to be a problem for Seleucid rule in the region until it was too late to change the course upon which they set Parthia and Bactria.

The Parthians were exceptional at one thing, and that was adaptability.¹¹⁰ The Parthians were able to adopt the cultural attributes of others to achieve their goals, without losing their own cultural uniqueness. In this way they were able to effectively meld Greek and Persian styles of rule with their own migratory lifestyle.¹¹¹ For instance in their conquest of Seleucid territories in both Parthia and Bactria, they were open to accepting the administrative positions created by the

¹⁰⁵ Briant "From Cyrus to Alexander" 391

¹⁰⁶ Olbrycht "Iranians in the Diadochi" 177

¹⁰⁷ Olbrycht "Iranians in the Diadochi" 178

¹⁰⁸ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"1

¹⁰⁹ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"2

¹¹⁰ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"30

¹¹¹ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"30

Greeks in the region such as the: *strategos*, satrap, regional commander, and citadel commander.¹¹² Thus their transition to power in the region was an uneventful one with regards to administrative change. This adaptability also allowed them to control the highly regionalized eastern satrapies more easily than the Seleucids had. An important aspect of ruling in these provinces was to meet the expectations of kingship of the indigenous population.¹¹³ The adaptability of the Parthians allowed them to take these expectations into their own culture.

The Parthians rose up against Seleucid power as a means of defense against foreign threats. The Middle East under the Seleucids was anything but stable, with many internal conflicts between neighboring tribes and peoples.¹¹⁴ These people were not united under the banner of the Seleucid empire, but instead maintained their own cultural identities and fought among one another. The Parthians sought to establish themselves as a stable power who could survive this turmoil in the Hellenistic Middle East. In doing so they took advantage of the regional economies of the Seleucid empire. As mentioned before, each region of the Seleucid empire contained considerable wealth which went to support that region.¹¹⁵ Their ability to internalize these structures while keeping their nomadic roots made the Parthians extremely difficult to uproot from the region. In order to fully unroot the Parthians from the eastern satrapies, a major military intervention became necessary. This would not be an easy task for the Seleucid empire. For examples of why these nomadic peoples were so hard to conquer, it is necessary to look at another group in the region, the Scythians.

The peoples of central Asia were not settled in the types of cities that the Greeks were used to. Instead most of their cultures were nomadic by nature. This made these regions hard to

¹¹² Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"32

¹¹³ Muller "Female Element of Political Self-Fashioning" 178

¹¹⁴ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"65

¹¹⁵ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"67

conquer and rule, and some were not even attempted such as the Scythians.¹¹⁶ The Scythians lay just outside the borders of the Seleucid empire, but played an important role in the collapse of the region. Returning to the Persians for a moment, they had previously made an attempt to conquer the Scythians during their time in the region. They had failed because no suitable city center could be found to be conquered in the traditional way of conquest for the Persians.¹¹⁷ The Parthians as well adopted this tactic when fighting the Seleucids. They would retreat in the face of the whole of the Seleucid army as a matter of course.¹¹⁸ This flight was simply a trick though as “(w)hen the Parthians ‘fled’ an important territory in the face of a major invasion, they were not really abandoning it.”¹¹⁹ By feigning these retreats the Parthians would lure the Seleucids into poor strategic positions where they could defeat them in detail.¹²⁰ Their non reliance on these territories allowed them to abandon them for a time, and then return later without losing any of their strength.

This became a great issue that the Seleucids faced in the region. They were suited to a very particular style of warfare, in which one army faced another head on. The asymmetrical warfare style of the eastern tribes such as the Parthians and the Scythians was difficult for them to counter in any meaningful way.¹²¹ Due to this difference in military strategy, these peoples were able to outmaneuver the heavier Greek armies.¹²² This meant there was no suitable way for the Seleucids to bring force to bear against these revolts. Attempting to create a more well balanced force was not an option due to the near constant western wars of the empire.¹²³ An historical account of how this could happen can be found in Herodotus "Histories" when he

¹¹⁶ Cohen "Hellenistic Settlement" 112

¹¹⁷ Briant "From Cyrus to Alexander" 33

¹¹⁸ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"51

¹¹⁹ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"51

¹²⁰ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"51

¹²¹ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"67

¹²² Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"67

¹²³ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"67

explains the previously mentioned Persian attempt to conquer the Scythians. While it would be improper to take Herodotus "Histories"'s account as entirely fact, there is a bit of truth to his account. In this account the Scythians leave towns and villages that they have established and just continually pull away from the Persian advance until they find a favorable time and place to fight.¹²⁴ This shows how capable these peoples were without their cities, as they were willing to trade these cities to the enemy in order for a strategic advantage. They were not reliant on a city for their survival, and this advantage made it very difficult to pin them down for a decisive conquest.

This could have been rectified in a number of ways though. An army suited for this task could have been created as Overtoom "Reign of Arrows" suggests in his book on the Parthians, but this would not have been cost effective.¹²⁵ Another method by which this region could have been better controlled by the Seleucids was the establishment of better political leverage over the peoples of Bactria and Sogdiana. The Seleucids failed in this respect because they had kept the broken system of satrapies from the Persians, as can be seen in the administrative difficulties they faced in the region.

The Seleucids lacked significant political capital to hold onto the territories that they inherited in the break up of the Macedonian empire. This originated with the first king of the Seleucid empire, Seleucus I. Seleucus I sought to do what Ptolemy did with Egypt and build on the existing structures in the region, and in pursuit of this kept his Bactrian wife, Apama.¹²⁶ This decision was one of the few things that the Seleucids had in their favor on the Iranian plateau. By attaching himself to the Achaemenid Persian line, he tied himself in with the primary centralized

¹²⁴ Herodotus "Histories" 4.123

¹²⁵ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"67

¹²⁶ Muller "Female Element of Political Self-Fashioning" 206

force in the region, the remnants of the Persian Empire.¹²⁷ Inheriting this system would be one of his greatest mistakes in the region though. The Persian system as seen earlier with the story of Bessus,¹²⁸ was inherently flawed from its outset. The Seleucid decision to inherit this system would further inhibit their ability to rule over the areas of Bactria and Sogdiana by pulling their power away from the empire and entrusting it to the autonomous satrapies.

As described with the Parthians these satrapies became targets for outside attacks, but also for inside usurpers. One such example of this was the Greco-Bactrian kingdom. Diodotus I broke away from the Seleucid empire as the governor of Bactria.¹²⁹ In doing so he established the Greco-Bactrian kingdom, a mixture of Greek, Iranian, and Indian cultural influences on the eastern border of Parthia.¹³⁰ This particular example shows the weakness of the system of satrapies inherited from the Persians. Diodotus, using the resources in his own province, was able to fully break away from the Seleucids and not be reincorporated back into the empire.¹³¹ This came in much the same way as Bessus had previously broken away from the Persians in the same exact province.¹³² Thus they inherited not only the successes of the Persians with this system, but also the exact failures that had revealed that system to be so weak in the first place. The inability of the Seleucids to reincorporate this province also brings into question the methods of power projection used by the Seleucids in these far flung provinces.

In this region Greeks and native peoples were intermixed, but the Greeks were greatly in the minority.¹³³ Thus Seleucid settlement in the East was not based on the *polis*, but instead was based upon military colonies.¹³⁴ These military colonies benefited the Seleucid empire by

¹²⁷ Muller "Female Element of Political Self-Fashioning" 206

¹²⁸ Briant "From Cyrus to Alexander" 747

¹²⁹ Watanabe "Greco Bactrian Kingdom" 1

¹³⁰ Watanabe "Greco Bactrian Kingdom" 1

¹³¹ Watanabe "Greco Bactrian Kingdom" 1

¹³² Briant "From Cyrus to Alexander" 747

¹³³ Olbrycht "Iranians in the Diadochi" 178

¹³⁴ Tarn "Greeks in Bactria" 6

allowing for greater defensive capabilities, but lacked the economic structures of a fully fledged city.¹³⁵ They were in theory good for the empire, but had little value for the people. for the people. In theory these colonies would be the first line of defense against rebellions or foreign invasion, but the concept was plagued with problems that caused them not to function as intended. Usually these colonies were located near a native village and settled by mercenaries and standard troops of the Seleucids.¹³⁶ These troops were no longer fully Greek, but even from the time of Alexander had become a mix of Greeks and non-Greeks.¹³⁷ So the soldiers settling these colonies had little attachment to the Greek empire ruling over them, and would likely not fight against their own neighbors in defense of their foreign rulers. So in order to project power into these regions the Seleucids would have to send the imperial army led by the king.

This was the exact case with the Greco-Bactrian kingdom as Antiochus the Great would attempt a reconquest of the region to bring it back under Seleucid control with the imperial army.¹³⁸ The problem being that this campaign would take place two generations after the founding of the kingdom.¹³⁹ The idea that this attempt at reconquest would occur a whole two generations after the secession of the kingdom is interesting, but not surprising given the geographical challenges the Seleucids faced. The power base of the Seleucid empire was located far off in Antioch Syria, and this made it difficult to project their power to the easternmost reaches of their empire.¹⁴⁰ Communications between the capital and the eastern satrapies could take multiple months to get back and forth.¹⁴¹ So for this reason and many others, this attempt at the reconquest of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom failed.¹⁴² It seems that the Persians previously had

¹³⁵ Tarn "Greeks in Bactria" 8

¹³⁶ Tarn "Greeks in Bactria" 8

¹³⁷ Romm "Ghost on the Throne" 44

¹³⁸ Watanabe "Greco Bactrian Kingdom" 1

¹³⁹ Watanabe "Greco Bactrian Kingdom" 1

¹⁴⁰ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"70

¹⁴¹ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"68

¹⁴² Watanabe "Greco Bactrian Kingdom" 1

been able to hold onto these territories more effectively because their capital was much closer, located at Persepolis central to the entire empire. They were thus able to react more quickly than the Seleucids to the volatile situation of these regions.¹⁴³ The position of the capital was in great part due to the focus of the Seleucid empire during this period. The Seleucids did not wish to invest in the eastern provinces, but instead favored the Mediterranean and the western provinces.

The provinces of Bactria and Sogdiana were not greatly wealthy, and contributed little when compared to other former Persian satrapies.¹⁴⁴ These provinces covered a sizable amount of land, but contributed very little to the empire as a whole. As previously seen in the last two sections though, the rule of these satrapies had proven to be a large investment for the Seleucid empire as they were very difficult to rule. These provinces were worth very little compared to places such as Ptolemy's Egypt sitting just off of their western border.¹⁴⁵ Seeing this, the Seleucids waged a number of wars with other successor kingdoms in the hopes of gaining these more valuable regions.¹⁴⁶ These wars would become the focus of the empire, and this would cast greater doubt on the ability of the Seleucids to rule the Iranian plateau and its surrounding regions.

These wars and dynastic disputes were in part the cause of the degradation of the Seleucids' power in the eastern satrapies.¹⁴⁷ They were far more willing to invest their resources in the Mediterranean where the provinces were far more wealthy, than in the low value satrapies of Bactria and Sogdiana. In pursuit of these higher value provinces they drained their resources in a series of costly wars against the other successor kings, weakening their ability to hold on to the already unstable eastern satrapies.¹⁴⁸ In some territories there was not even an attempt to hold

¹⁴³ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"70

¹⁴⁴ Briant "From Cyrus to Alexander" 391

¹⁴⁵ Romm "Ghost on the Throne" 70

¹⁴⁶ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"68

¹⁴⁷ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"68

¹⁴⁸ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"68

the regions; one example of this is the Indus valley. Seleucus I was given 500 war elephants by the Mauryan empire in exchange for the territory.¹⁴⁹ He would later use these elephants in his war against Antigonus in the west of the empire to take Syria.¹⁵⁰ From this instance the motivations of the Seleucids are clear that the eastern satrapies were only useful in how they could fund their war efforts against the other successor kings. While this is an extreme example of this tendency, the lack of investment seen in the eastern provinces supports such a hypothesis.

There was some investment of the eastern satrapies by the Seleucids, but this came mainly in the form of the military colonies established to pacify the regions.¹⁵¹ In these settlements, people were given plots of land in the eastern satrapies in exchange for military service.¹⁵² This served the purpose of both cultivating that land, and freeing up soldiers for the Seleucid war efforts in the Mediterranean. These soldiers were primarily to defend the eastern satrapies from foreign attacks, and so the Seleucids hoped that they could focus their resources on the wars in the Mediterranean. In theory, this system created a self sufficient system of defense for the region, and there would be little need for intervention from the imperial army. This would clearly not be the case though, and the rise of the Parthians and the Greco-Bactrian kingdoms shows how these seemingly self-sufficient systems could be overcome without aid from the seat of the empire.

This reluctance to properly settle the eastern satrapies also extended to the Greek settlers of the region. The original settlers of the colonies in these regions were for the most part veterans in Alexander's army who had done their service and were semi-retired to garrison duty in these colonies.¹⁵³ These men would be left to defend these cities against outside threats and serve as

¹⁴⁹ Fauconnier "Ex Occidente Imperium" 122

¹⁵⁰ Fauconnier "Ex Occidente Imperium" 122

¹⁵¹ Tarn "Greeks in Bactria" 6

¹⁵² Tarn "Greeks in Bactria" 8

¹⁵³ Cohen "Hellenistic Settlement" 285

the initial settlers of these cities.¹⁵⁴ These soldiers as mentioned earlier were not entirely Greek though, and did not further any goal of Hellenization in the eastern satrapies. Then there were those who were Greek. Most of these veterans were searching for a way to leave the region, and upon the death of Alexander in 323 BC a mass exodus of these Greeks was seen from the eastern satrapies.¹⁵⁵ These regions were far less safe than the western provinces, with frequent ambushes and attacks on the settlements in these regions.¹⁵⁶ To the average Greek, there was little value in settling in these regions, and because of this there was not a significant Greek population in the region during Seleucid rule.

Later in the Seleucid Empire this region would be almost entirely forgotten in the face of wars that they were fighting in the Mediterranean.¹⁵⁷ This neglect of these regions effectively allowed powers such as the Parthians to fully take root in these regions.¹⁵⁸ The highly regionalized nature of the empire exacerbated this problem. As the direct control of the Seleucids weakened in the region, each regional government became more independent from imperial control. With the treasury of the Seleucid government drained by wars in the Eastern Mediterranean, there were few resources left to invest in the eastern satrapies.¹⁵⁹ The Seleucids would not invest their resources into keeping these provinces and instead allowed them to take small steps towards independence that would eventually allow the creation of regional kingdoms such as the Parthians and Greco-Bactrian kingdom.

3. Synthesis

The reasons for the successes and failures of the Ptolemaic dynasty and Seleucid Empire respectively comes down to the history of these regions, and the types of economies that they

¹⁵⁴ Cohen "Hellenistic Settlement" 285

¹⁵⁵ Romm "Ghost on the Throne" 110

¹⁵⁶ Romm "Ghost on the Throne" 112

¹⁵⁷ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"67

¹⁵⁸ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"67

¹⁵⁹ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"67

possessed. Egypt flourished as Ptolemy was able to draw on the very functional system of the pharaoh to establish himself as the autocrat of Egypt.¹⁶⁰ The Seleucids drew upon a much different system inherited from the Persians in order to establish their rule in the eastern satrapies, but this system was flawed when they inherited it. The Egyptians focused their energy on investing their wealth within the empire, while the Seleucids were focused on the conquest of regions outside of their empire often at the expense of regions that they already held. Lastly, the Egyptian society was very culturally unified whereas the Seleucid empire was very diverse and disunified in comparison. The combination of these differences shows why the outcomes of these two successor kingdoms were so different.

The Egyptians succeeded in Egypt due to the wealth and cultural unity of their region, using these Ptolemy was able to take power through a blanket approach to his region. Meanwhile, the Seleucids contended with a multitude of different groups, with their only cultural constant being the systems implemented by a previous conqueror. The Seleucids then did not have the luxury of taking a blanket approach to the rule of the eastern satrapies, but instead had to invest a great amount of resources into their control of these regions in order to tailor them to specific groups. Especially, they struggled with the nomadic roots of many of these peoples,¹⁶¹ which differed so greatly from the Greek styles of life that their army could not effectively fight against them.¹⁶² These factors all played into the collapse of the eastern satrapies, and paved the way for the rise of new kingdoms in the region.

IV. Conclusion

From this exploration of these two successor states, differences have appeared between the two that make clear the reasons for the collapse of the eastern satrapies under the Seleucid

¹⁶⁰ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 35

¹⁶¹ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"35

¹⁶² Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"36

empire. Egypt would go on to survive this period mostly intact, reaching all the way until the Roman period, when they would finally succumb to Roman expansion. Ptolemaic shaping went farther than that though as, ". . .Ptolemaic rule captured Egyptian civilization in a form that would become its canonical image until just a little less than two centuries ago."¹⁶³ Meanwhile, Seleucid rule failed in creating a lasting image of itself in the eastern satrapies. Instead it left behind states such as the Greco-Bactrian kingdom and the Parthians. The empire had proved too cumbersome to sustain itself due to its immense size.¹⁶⁴ This created the fractured eastern kingdoms as Seleucid power began to diminish in these far flung regions of the empire. This would be the legacy of the Seleucids in this region, not as successful conquerors, but instead as a series of failures and failed states in unstable provinces on their eastern borders.

Greek civilization represented a sort of cultural dominance in the regions that they ruled, and this can be seen through the Hellenisation of many cultures. During the Seleucid period they greatly failed in creating a unified culture in the eastern satrapies, and the consequences of this failing are made very apparent in the collapse of these regions. Specifically they failed in creating security to the eastern satrapies, and instead created a very hostile environment.¹⁶⁵ In this environment many different cultures would clash under the same banner of the Seleucid empire. While they themselves did not create this cultural divide in the East, they did not take any steps to create a lasting unity in the region.

The region has grown and changed as time went on, new forces and ideologies have come up in the region that leave a far different political landscape than what exactly faced the Seleucids in the third and fourth centuries BC. It is important not to read modern cultural ideas

¹⁶³ Manning "The Last Pharaohs" 206

¹⁶⁴ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"66

¹⁶⁵ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"65

about the region into these ancient situations.¹⁶⁶ While there are lessons that can be learned from the Seleucid occupation of the eastern satrapies, it is all too easy to misapply these to modern conflicts in the region.¹⁶⁷ For more reading on matters like this the historians Edward Anson "Counter-Insurgency" and Timothy Howe have done excellent research and started a very worthwhile debate on what we can learn from the failings of the Seleucid Empire. That being said, there are aspects of the Seleucid failure in this region that would play into later historical situations. One such empire that was greatly affected by the cultural collapse of the eastern parts of the Seleucid empire was the Romans.

The Romans would later come into contact with the Parthian empire, spawned from the failures of the Seleucids in the eastern satrapies.¹⁶⁸ The Parthians would serve as a great rival to the Romans for the latter half of the first century.¹⁶⁹ The Parthians were able to succeed where the Seleucids failed mainly due to their ability to incorporate other cultures into theirs more easily than the Seleucids.¹⁷⁰ This allowed them to become much more prosperous and rule for much longer than the Seleucids had in the multicultural environment of the eastern satrapies.¹⁷¹ Ruling in these regions was possible as demonstrated by both the Parthians and the Persians, but the Seleucids lacked the means to effectively establish their rule in these regions.

The Seleucids being focused on the West of their empire could have foreseen the problems growing in the eastern satrapies had they given them the level of attention that they needed to prosper. Instead the Seleucids turned their attention and energy to fighting wars in the eastern Mediterranean in more historically Greek areas. There was little attempt to Hellenize the east beyond the naming of cities and import of Greek goods. Any Hellenistic settlement

¹⁶⁶ Howe "Afghan Insurgency" 157

¹⁶⁷ Howe "Afghan Insurgency" 158

¹⁶⁸ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"1

¹⁶⁹ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"1

¹⁷⁰ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"14

¹⁷¹ Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"15

attempted in the region was not well enough supported by the empire to become a success, but was instead allowed to be destroyed by the native peoples of the region. The peoples in these regions did not see themselves as Seleucid subjects, but foremost saw themselves as members of their own personal cultural groups. With little Seleucid intervention and presence in the region this idea was reinforced and grew into the revolts that could be seen in the region.

So, the Seleucid occupation of Bactria, Sogdiana, and Parthia has been rightfully deemed as a failure in all respects. Instead of maintaining control over these regions, they allowed great rival states to establish themselves and take root in the regional economies of their own empire. Some of these states would go on to outlast the Seleucids themselves, as is the case with the Parthians.¹⁷² The comparison of Ptolemy's Egypt makes this failure all the more striking, but also more understandable. The situation that the Seleucids had inherited was not an enviable one when compared to the situation that Ptolemy found himself in at the beginning of the Diadochi Period. This was not helped by the fact that the eastern satrapies were afforded so little attention by the Seleucids that intervention on many of these problems would come far too late to solve them as seen with the establishment of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom. The collapse of the eastern satrapies brings to the fore questions of how a multicultural empire should be established, and by what means different groups of people can be united under a common state. While the Seleucids failed in establishing this multicultural empire, the lessons of the Seleucids can still be used to see what does not work, and temper modern understandings of multiculturalism, counter insurgency, and state building.

To make a complex situation simple, the failures of the Seleucids in the eastern satrapies can be summed up into three main points: the cultural groups present in these regions, the western focus of the empire, and the administrative difficulties associated with ruling such large

¹⁷² Overtoom "Reign of Arrows"247

varied regions. These factors each helped in their own way to destabilize these regions in such a way that their collapse was inevitable. While the Seleucids were given unstable regions to rule, they did little to solve the problems that made them so volatile, and instead allowed them to grow mostly unchecked until they boiled over into outright revolt.

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