Seleucid Dynasty

The Seleucid dynasty flourished in Asia from 312 to 64 BC. At its greatest extent the kingdom stretched from the Aegean coast of Anatolia to the modern India. Seleukos began with the satrapy of Babylonia and slowly added Syria, Persia, Bactria and most of Asia Minor to his kingdom. The Seleucid dynasty (interrupted by two pretenders and one usurper) lasted until Seleukos’s great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandson Antiochos XIII Asiatikos was deposed by Pompey in 64 BC.
Seleukos I Nikator “the Victor” (ca.358 – 281 BC).

Seleukos was one of the most successful of all the generals who succeeded Alexander the Great. Starting with the satrapy of Babylonia he carved out a kingdom that stretched from the Aegean Sea to the Indus river. Before his death he came “within an ace of winning the whole hand”¹ and reunifying the entire kingdom of Alexander the Great. His descendants ruled in Asia for more than 200 years.

Seleukos was the son of a certain Antiochos from the city of Europos, who was a prominent officer of Philip II.² Seleukos was a page at Pella’s court in Pella, and was a syntrophos (literally “growing-up companion”) of Alexander. Seleukos rose through the ranks during Alexander’s conquest of Asia. He fought in the Companion cavalry and later became the commander crack infantry unit known as the hypaspistai.³ When Alexander and his hetairoi or “Companions” celebrated a mass marriage to daughters of Persian nobles at the Persian capital Susa, Seleukos married Apame the daughter of Spitamenes of Bactria.⁴ Seleukos was the only Macedonian not to repudiate his marriage after Alexander’s death.

When Alexander died in 323, Seleukos was appointed as the chiliarchos or second-in-command to Perdikkas who was named epimeletes or “manager” of the Macedonian kingdom.⁵ Seleukos initially supported Perdikkas in his struggle against Antipatros, Krateros, Antigonos and Ptolemy, but betrayed him during the failed invasion of Egypt in 321. The sources indicate that Seleukos joined Antigenes the commander of the veteran soldiers known as the “Silver Shields” and Peithon in murdering Perdikkas in his tent.⁶ Seleukos was rewarded for his treachery by Antipatros who replaced Perdikkas as “manager” of Macedon. When Antipatros redistributed the satrapies Seleukos was appointed satrap of Babylon.

In 316 Seleukos was ousted from his satrapy by Antigonos the One-Eyed, and sought refuge with Ptolemy in Egypt. Appian states that Seleukos was the instigator of a coalition against Antigonos including Ptolemy in Egypt, Lysimachos in Thrace, and Kassandros in Macedon.⁷ During the next four years he commanded Ptolemy’s armies and navies in the wars against Antigonos. His years in service for Ptolemy culminated in a crushing victory of Antigonos’s son Demetrios Poliorketes at Gaza in 312.⁸

After Gaza, Ptolemy gave Seleukos a small force (either 1,000 infantry and 300 cavalry, or 800 infantry and 200 cavalry) with which Seleukos recaptured his satrapy of Babylonia. Seleukos gradually extended his power eastward into the satrapies of Media, Susiana and Persis. These victories came at the expense of Antigonos, whom he finally defeated in Babylon in 308. Seleukos went on to campaign as far east as India. He made an agreement with Chandragupta the Mauryan king (known as

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¹ P. Green, Alexander to Actium, (London, 1990), p133.
² Justin. 15.4.3.
³ Arrian, Anabasis. 5.13.1, 4.
⁴ Arrian, Anabasis. 7.5. Arrian says 80 of Alexander’s Companions married Persian women, Athenaios 12.538b-539a gives the figure as 92.
⁵ Arrian, Met’ Alexander; Diodoros.
⁶ Cornelius Nepos, Eumenes. 5.1; Arrian, Met’ Alexander. 1.28, 35; Diodoros. 18.33.2; Pausanias. 1.6.3; Strabo. 17.1.8.
⁷ Appian, Syrian Wars. 53.
⁸ Plutarch, Demetrios. 5.
Sandrokottos in Greek) ceding the Indus region to him in exchange for 500 war elephants.

Seleukos returned from the east and joined with Ptolemy, Lysimachos and Kassandros in a military showdown against Antigonos. After many years of striving to capture the Macedonian throne, Antigonos the One-Eyed decided to risk everything in a pitched battle against all his enemies. He brought together an army of 70,000 heavy infantrymen, 10,000 cavalry and 75 elephants and marched into Asia Minor. Seleukos and Lysimachos met him at Ipsos with 64,000 foot-soldiers, 10,500 horsemen, 120 war-chariots, and 400 elephants.9

The battle initially went well for Antigonos and Demetrios. Antigonos lead the infantry, and Demetrios, who was leading the cavalry, drove the enemy horsemen completely from the field of battle. But it seems that Seleukos’s son Antiochos who was leading the horsemen deliberately retreated to draw Demetrios away from the battlefield. Once Demetrios was off the scene, Seleukos moved his elephants between Demetrios and his father’s infantrymen to prevent Demetrios from returning. Antigonos was thus in an unprotected position. Seleukos delayed his attack on Antigonos, with a series of feints and manoeuvres designed to demoralise Antigonos’s men. They deserted to Seleukos in droves, after which Seleukos attacked. Antigonos was slain in the fighting.

After the battle, Seleukos took control of Syria, Lysimachos took most of Asia Minor, and Ptolemy stole Koile-Syria. Despite playing the leading role in the defeat of Antigonos, Seleukos received very little in return compared to his allies. This sowed the seeds of trouble between Seleukos and the others for years to come.

After adding northern Syria to his kingdom, Seleukos destroyed Antigonos’s capital Antigoneia-on-the-Orontes and re-founded the city as Antioch-on-the-Orontes (named after his father).10 He also founded many other cities named after himself and his family members. Appian indicates that Seleukos founded 16 cities named Antioch after his father, 5 named Laodikeia after his mother, 9 named Seleukeia after himself, three named Apamea after his Iranian wife, and 1 named Stratonikeia after his second wife, who later married his son Antiochos.11

After being squeezed out by diplomatic manoeuvring by Ptolemy and Lysimachos, Seleukos made an alliance with Demetrios Poliorketes and married his daughter Stratonike (I). Seleukos later relinquished Stratonike to his eldest son Antiochos, and named him as co-regent of the eastern satrapies in 292. Scribes and masons then commenced recording dates on official Seleucid documents by the reigns of both Seleukos and Antiochos.

The alliance between Seleukos and Demetrios did not last long. Demetrios fled to Europe and was able to seize power in Macedon. After Demetrios was driven out of Macedon by Lysimachos and Pyrrhos the king of Epeiros, he invaded Asia. He hoped to inspire the eastern satrapies to revolt from Seleukos and go over to him, but he

failed. Seleukos captured Demetrios in 285 and kept him in honourable imprisonment on a large estate until he died.\textsuperscript{12}

In 281 Lysandra the widow of Lysimachos’s son Agathokles urged him to attack Lysimachos. Seleukos did so after Lysimachos’s satrap Philetairos seized control of the massive treasury at Pergamon and went over to him. Seleukos invaded Asia Minor and slew Lysimachos in a pitched battle at Kouroupedeion. According to the Greek sources Seleukos was then overcome by a “pothos” (yearning) to see his ancestral homeland and crossed into Europe. A newly published fragment of the Babylonian Chronicle indicates that Seleukos aimed to recapture “Macedon, his land”. Seleukos was stabbed to death by Ptolemaios Keraunos as he entered Thrace and was only a few days from fulfilling his dream. Seleukos was succeeded by his eldest son Antiochos.

\textsuperscript{12} Plutarch, \textit{Demetrios}. 45-52.
Antiochos I Soter “the Saviour” (ca.324 – 261 BC).

Antiochos was the eldest son of Seleukos and Apame. The fact that he was half-Iranian may have made him more acceptable to his subjects. Antiochos does not appear in the sources until 301/0 when he commanded the cavalry in his father’s army. His feigned flight drew Demetrios Poliorketes away from the battlefield and ensured victory for Seleukos and Lysimachos.

Antiochos was named as the “crown prince” (mār šarri) of Babylon in the Babylonian Chronicle. He became co-regent of the Seleucid kingdom in 292, and it was at this time that he married Seleukos’s wife Stratonike (I), the daughter of Demetrios Poliorketes, and Plutarch states that they received the titles “King and Queen of all Upper Asia”. This marriage may have been intended to be a symbol of dynastic stability, although tradition has it that Antiochos fell in love with his stepmother which prompted Seleukos to relinquish his much-younger wife. According to Plutarch, Antiochos fell in love with Stratonike and resolved to starve himself to death rather than admit to the passion he felt for his stepmother. Seleukos agreed to give up his wife when Antiochos’s doctor realised the truth. The fact that Seleukos minted coins with his own image and that of Antiochos is further evidence he was trying to smooth his son’s path to the throne.

Antiochos succeeded his father in 281, and immediately had to restore order in many regions because he had been far away in the eastern satrapies. There were revolts in Syria where Ptolemaios Philadelphos stirred up trouble, and independent kingdoms broke away in Bithynia and Pontos. Antiochos also had to repel an invasion of Celts (Gauls) who swept down through the Balkans and into Asia Minor. He defeated them in the so-called “Battle of Elephants”, thus confining them into the region in Asia Minor that came to be known as Galatia. He also fought unsuccessfully against Ptolemaios Philadelphos for control of Koile-Syria and Phoenicia in the First Syrian War, and against Antigonos Gonatas for control of the regions around the Hellespont.

Antiochos was an active king, and like his father built many cities in Syria and Asia Minor. He left his kingdom in relative peace and prosperity. However, it is arguable that his policies led to the ultimate collapse of the Seleucid empire. Green has speculated that the fact that Antiochos “expended far more effort and investment on Asia Minor and the always elusive foothold in Europe than he did on his vast Oriental satrapies...in the long run was to prove a major factor in the collapse of the Seleucid empire”. Antiochos named his son Seleukos as co-regent in the early 260s, but had to execute him. He later named his younger son Antiochos as co-regent. Antiochos died in 261.

13 Plutarch, Demetrios. 29.
14 Plutarch, Demetrios. 38.
Antiochos III Megas “the Great” (ca.242 – 187 BC).

Antiochos III was the younger son of Seleukos II. He succeeded his elder brother Seleukos III who died in 223. Throughout his reign Antiochos was driven by a burning desire to restore the kingdom of his great-great-grandfather Seleukos I Nikator i.e. to re-acquire Koile-Syria and the eastern satrapies. Between 212 and 205 he embarked on a long campaign or *anabasis* to recover the eastern satrapies. His success earned him the epithet “the Great” (Megas), a title which only Alexander and Demetrios Poliorketes are known to have acquired.\(^{16}\)

Antiochos inherited a kingdom in crisis. His elder brother Seleukos had been assassinated whilst campaigning against Attalos I of Pergamon, and he was soon forced to deal with rebellions in Media, Persis and Asia Minor. To make matters worse, the Ptolemies were in possession of Seleukeia-in-Pieria, normally a Seleucid stronghold in northern Syria.

The army initially hailed Achaios (the maternal uncle of Seleukos III and Antiochos III, and great-grandson of Seleukos) I as king, but Achaios declined the throne in favour of his nephew Antiochos. Achaios continued the campaign against his cousin Attalos, and eventually drove him back to Pergamon.\(^{17}\) The young king was reputedly dominated by his chief minister, a certain Hermias, which allegedly prompted Molon the satrap of Media to revolt in 222. Molon was supported by his brother Alexander, the satrap of Persis. Molon seized the capital city Seleukeia-on-Tigris, and took the title “king” (*basileus*). Hermias was assassinated, and the forces of Antiochos quickly overcame him, and he committed suicide in 221.

Having dealt with the rebellion of Molon, Antiochos soon had to cope with a rebellion by his uncle Achaios. After completing his conquest of much of Asia Minor in 220, Achaios took the title of “king” and began wearing a diadem.\(^{18}\) He “ruled” as king until he was killed in 213.

Antiochos chose to ignore his rebellious uncle and concentrated on dealing with the Ptolemies. He sparked off the Fourth Syrian War in 219, recapturing Seleukeia-in-Pieria and capturing the cities of Ptolemais-Ake and Tyre in Koile-Syria. Antiochos intended to invade Egypt, but he was defeated in 217 at Raphia in Palestine, just beyond the Egyptian frontier. Antiochos brought an army of 68,000 men to Raphia, and Ptolemaios IV could only muster 55,000 to oppose him. It was the biggest battle since Ipsos in 301, and it ended in a remarkably similar fashion. Antiochos stacked the right-wing of his army with his cavalry and elephants, and drove back the opposing left wing. But like Demetrios at Ipsos he pursued the enemy too far, and while he was away from the field of battle Ptolemaios’s men counterattacked and broke the Seleucid infantry phalanx.\(^{19}\) Astonishingly Antiochos would go on to make the same mistake against the Romans in 190. After this defeat Antiochos made peace with Ptolemaios and withdrew.

\(^{16}\) Demetrios is only referred to as “the Great” on one Athenian inscriptions.
\(^{17}\) Polybios. 4.48.
\(^{18}\) Polybios. 5.57-58.1.
\(^{19}\) Polybios. 5.74-87; Justin. 30.1.6.
In 216 he began blockading Achaios in Asia Minor, and captured him in 213. Antiochos had Achaios crucified, which was the standard punishment for traitors used by the Achaemenid kings of Persia.²⁰

During the first eleven years of his reign he had suppressed two major insurrections, regained the satrapies of Media, Persis, Susiana and Babylonia, and reacquired large tracts of Asia Minor. The defeat at Raphia was his only real failure during the early phase of his career, and that did not result in the loss of any territories that he had not acquire himself.

In 212 Antiochos began his famous journey into the eastern satrapies – his anabasis, like that of Alexander the Great before him. Antiochos first brought the satrapies of Armenia and Kommagene under his control. He then spent the best part of the next two years (211-210) in the satrapy of Media raising a large army and 4,000 talents to pay them. Having made these preparations Antiochos then subdued the Parthians (210-209),²¹ besieged and came to terms with Eumenes of Bactria (208-6),²² and renewed links with the Mauryan kingdom in India. After treating with Subhagasena (Sophagasenos in Greek) the Mauryan king, Antiochos returned to west via Arachosia and Drangiana, and then mounted a naval expedition to the Persian Gulf (206-5).²³ Antiochos completed his anabasis after making a treaty with the Arabs of Gerrha. Antiochos was rewarded for his successes in the east with the epithet “the Great” (Megas) just like Alexander before him.

In 203 Antiochos allegedly made a pact with Philippos V of Macedon to partition the kingdom of Ptolemaios V.²⁴ This alleged pact led to few useful gains for either Antiochos or Philippos since they seem to have spent more time trying to cheat each other than try to gain Ptolemaic possessions. It was a lost opportunity, because if Antiochos and Philippos had worked together against the Romans instead of trying to outmanoeuvre one another who knows what they could have achieved. Philippos was able to muster 25,000 troops for the decisive battle at Kynoskephale in 198 and Antiochos gathered some 75,000 troops at Magnesia in 189. Both battles ended in victory for the Romans, but if Antiochos and Philippos had pooled their resources the Romans might not have been able stop them both. Instead they allowed the Romans to deal with them separately and suffered the consequences.

Antiochos did get some benefit from this pact with Philippos. Between 202 and 198 he campaigned against the Ptolemies and gained control over Syria, Phoenicia and Judaea. In 198 he invaded Lykia and Karia and captured both regions from the Ptolemies.

Antiochos then crossed into Europe and invaded Thrace. He re-founded the city of Lysimacheia in 197/6 for use as a military base and as a residence for his eldest son Seleukos (later Seleukos IV).²⁵ Antiochos now held sway over almost all the lands that controlled at the time of his assassination in 281.

²⁰ For Achaios see Polybios. 5.72-8, 107, 8.15-23.
²¹ Polybios. 10.28-31.
²² Polybios. 10.49, 11.34.1-10.
²³ Polybios. 11.34.11-3ff.
²⁴ Polybios. 3.2.8, 15.20.2-6; Livy. 31.14.5; Justin. 30.2.8; Appian, Macedonian Wars. 4.
²⁵ Livy. 33.38; Appian, Syrian Wars. 1.
But his successes brought about a clash with Rome. The Romans had only just defeated Philippos V of Macedon, and were suspicious of Antiochos’s intentions. After they defeated Philippos the Romans declared that all the Greeks of Europe and Asia were to be free – a none the subtle threat directed at Antiochos. They demanded that Antiochos leave Europe, but he ignored their demands on the grounds that the Romans had no right to interfere in his affairs and that Lysimacheia and Thrace had belonged to his ancestor Seleukos I. He also made a peace treaty with Ptolemaios V and gave his daughter Kleopatra to Ptolemaios in marriage in an attempt to convince the Romans he had peaceful intentions.26

After three years of diplomatic wrangling Antiochos invaded Greece. The Romans sent an army to stop him and routed his army at Thermopylai. Antiochos had hoped to stop the Romans in the narrow mountain pass at Thermopylai, but he somehow managed to allow him army to be surrounded in almost exactly the same way that the Persians had surrounded the Greeks in 479. The defeat was a disaster, and Antiochos lost more than 10,000 of his troops. He fled to Asia Minor and raised a new army of some 75,000.

The Romans then invaded Asia Minor with some 30,000 legionaries, and were joined by Eumenes II of Pergamon. Antiochos realised that his troops were not of the same quality as the Romans and offered to make peace and pay a war indemnity to the Romans and surrender some cities in Europe and Asia Minor. But the Roman generals – L. Cornelius Scipio Asiaticus and P. Cornelius Scipio Africanus Major – demanded that Antiochos surrender all the lands north of the Taurus mountains.

Antiochos decided to take his chances and engaged the Romans in battle near Magnesia. Again Antiochos managed to rout the forces opposing him with his cavalry, and again he failed to return in time to protect his phalanx and thus suffered a crushing defeat. His infantrymen were cut to ribbons by the Roman legionaries while he was pursuing the fleeing horsemen.

Antiochos was forced to accept a humiliating peace. The terms of the Peace of Apamea (188) were that Antiochos would evacuate Asia Minor north of the Taurus (and thus cede the satrapies of Lydia, Phrygia, Mysia and Caria), and surrender his elephants and his fleet (except for ten ships). Antiochos also had to pay the Romans a 15,000 talent war indemnity (the largest ever recorded), and pay a further 2,500 talents upon the ratification of the treaty by the Roman Senate. He also had to pay the Romans twelve annual instalments of 1,000 talents, and give the Romans 90,000 medimnoi of wheat. Antiochos also had to send various hostages to Rome including his youngest son Antiochos (later Antiochos IV Epiphanes).

After making peace with the Romans Antiochos made his son Seleukos (later Seleukos IV) as co-king and set off to campaign in the eastern satrapies. Antiochos was killed while pillaging the temple of Bel/Zeus in Elymais. As Green noted, Antiochos “never quite achieved the greatness of his public title”.27

26 Livy. 35.13.4.
Antiochos IV Epiphanes “(God) Manifest” (ca.215-164 BC).

Antiochos IV Epiphanes, the younger son of Antiochos the Great was one of the more flamboyant figures of the Hellenistic period. An eccentric king and a skilful general, his reign is most notable for the fact that he almost conquered Egypt, and would have eliminated the Ptolemaic dynasty if not for Roman intervention, and for his antagonising of the Jews that led to the so-called Maccabean revolt.

Antiochos was the third son of Antiochos the Great. After Antiochos was defeated by the Romans the young Antiochos was sent to Rome as a hostage. Antiochos proved popular at Rome. The Romans built a house for Antiochos at public expense, and he later thanked the Senate for their kind treatment. After ten years as a hostage he exchanged places with his nephew Demetrios, the son of his brother Seleukos IV.

When Antiochos the Great died in 187 he was succeeded by his second son Seleukos IV (his eldest son also named Antiochos died before him). During his short reign, Seleukos distanced himself from Rome, and fell behind in the war indemnity repayments. After he tried to raise funds by plundering the temple at Jerusalem Seleukos was assassinated by his chancellor Heliodoros in 175. Eumenes II of Pergamon helped Seleukos’s younger brother Antiochos succeed to the throne rather than his young son Demetrios. It may be that Eumenes or even the Romans contrived to have Seleukos assassinated in order to get his more popular brother on the throne.

After succeeding to the throne, Antiochos soon developed a reputation for eccentricity and unusual behaviour. He was said to wandered through the streets of his capital city alone, talking with craftsmen and drinking with tourists. Antiochos also liked to give things away to his people, sometimes it was something valuable like a gold ring, but other times it was a pebble or a knucklebone. He frequented to the public baths, and once emptied a jar of expensive unguent over the bather's just to watch them slither and slide about. Polybios indicates that this eccentric behaviour earned Antiochos the nickname “Epimanes” or “Mad” as a pun on his regnal title “Epiphanes”.

After his succession, Antiochos paid off the war indemnity to Rome and then set about trying to consolidate the Seleucid kingdom. In 170 Antiochos invaded Koile-Syria sparking off the Sixth Syrian War. At this time Egypt was in a very weak position being ruled by the young king Ptolemaios VI who had only just declared himself of age. Ptolemaios VI married his sister Kleopatra II and named his younger brother Ptolemaios VIII Physkon “Potbelly” as co-regent. In 169 Ptolemaios tried to recapture Koile-Syria. Antiochos marched south to meet him, routed the Egyptian forces and invaded Egypt itself. He captured Pelousion in the Nile delta and thus won over all of Egypt except the city of Alexandria. Ptolemaios VI tried to negotiate with Antiochos which prompted a revolution in Alexandria. The populace abandoned the cause of Ptolemaios VI and declared Ptolemaios VIII and Kleopatra II as their rulers instead. Antiochos withdrew for the winter and let them fight among themselves. Unfortunately for him the two Ptolemies patched up their differences in his absence.

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29 Livy. 42.6.9
30 2 Maccabees. 3.4-40.
In 168 Antiochus again invaded Egypt and prepared to besiege Alexandria. In the meantime his fleet captured the island of Cyprus. Unfortunately for Antiochus the Romans had just defeated Perseus and were now free to turn their attention to matters in the east. An official order from the Senate (a senatus consultum) was sent to Antiochus in Alexandria ordering him to withdraw from Egypt and Cyprus. The Roman envoy C. Popillius Laenas met Antiochus in the Alexandrian suburb of Eleusis and delivered the ultimatum. Antiochus asked for time to consider things, but Popillius drew a circle in the sand around where Antiochus was standing and ordered him to give his answer before he stepped out of the circle. It was humiliating, and Rome was exceeding to parameters of the Peace of Apamea, but Antiochus was compelled to back down.

Antiochus withdrew his forces from Egypt and Cyprus and sent an embassy to Rome insisting on his peaceful intentions and congratulating the Romans on their victory over Perseus.

On his way home he took out his anger and frustration on the people of Jerusalem. A factional dispute had erupted at Jerusalem while Antiochus was in Egypt. The High Priest, a certain Jason, had been deposed by a faction within the Jewish population that favoured the adoption of the Greek way of life. These so-called “Hellenists” drove Jason out of Jerusalem and installed one of their own group, a certain Menelaos, as High Priest. While Antiochus was in Egypt a rumour spread that he had been killed. Jason and his followers saw this as the opportunity they had been waiting for and launched an assault on Jerusalem. Jason gained control of Jerusalem and slaughtered large numbers of his enemies. Menelaos and his supporters were forced to flee for their lives. They fled to Antiochus in Egypt and convinced him that Jason was leading a pro-Ptolemaic rebellion. Antiochus is said to have marched up from Egypt “raging like a wild beast”. He took Jerusalem by storm and let his soldiers loose on the city with orders not to spare anyone. 80,000 people (men, women and children) were slaughtered in three days, and a further 40,000 were sold into slavery.

Antiochus entered the Temple itself and stripped it of its sacred objects including the altar, and carried off 1,800 talents of gold. He then set up an altar to Zeus in the temple and tried to impose Greek cult throughout his kingdom in the hope of controlling the Jewish population.

Antiochus then returned to Syria where he celebrated a magnificent games and a procession to the Sanctuary of Apollo at Daphne near Antioch. The procession included 36,000 soldiers, 9,500 horsemen, 800 gladiators, 140 chariots, 36 elephants and thousands of sacrificial animals. This procession was clearly a show of strength and aimed to show that the Seleucid kingdom was still a potent military force.

Afterwards Antiochus set out to restore Seleucid power in the east. He regained control of Greater Armenia which had asserted its independence in 188, and then moved further east.

32 2 Maccabees. 5.11.
33 2 Maccabees. 5.12-16.
While Antiochos was absent the Jewish population began to resist his attempt to impose Greek cult on them. In 166 a rebellion broke out after a priest named Mattathias of the Hasmonean family from the village of Modein (el-Medieh) northwest of Jerusalem refused to take part in a heathen sacrifice. When another Jew stepped forward to comply with the demands of Apelles the Seleucid official sent to ensure the participation of the populace, Mattathias slew them both and overturned the sacrificial altar. Mattathias then called upon all those who were zealous for Jewish Law to follow him. He and his five sons John, Eleazar, Simon, Jonathan and Judas Maccabaeus (“The Hammer”) headed into the hills were the began an armed rebellion against the Seleucid authorities.

Mattathias died in 166 and leadership of the rebels passed into the hands of Judas. The rebellion came to known as the “Maccabaean revolt” after Judas’s nickname. They defeated the Seleucid forces in the region in three separate pitched battles, which prompted the Seleucid governor Lysias to write to Antiochos in the far east for further instructions. Antiochos issued an amnesty and promised to allow the Jews to revert to their own laws. At the end of 164 Judas and his followers entered Jerusalem to purify the Temple. In a solemn ceremony they rededicated the Temple according to Jewish Law. The Jewish festival Hanukkah celebrates this event.

Antiochos fell ill and died in 164 whilst campaigning in Persia. He was succeeded by his son Antiochos V. After Antiochos died Judas Maccabaeus continued to fight against the Seleucids, and eventually set up an independent kingdom in Judaea. The Seleucid kingdom continued to decline and never again reached the heights that it had under Seleukos, Antiochos the Great and Antiochos IV.