

I

Introduction

Polybius of Megalopolis, the second-century Greek historian,¹ begins his account of the rise of Rome to great-power status with a rhetorical question: “is there anyone so worthless and lazy,” he writes, in his typical combative fashion, “who would not wish to know how and under what system of government nearly the entire world in less than fifty-three years has fallen under the sole rule of the Romans – something that has never happened before?” Perhaps less well known is his follow-up question: “or again, is there anyone so passionately consumed by other spectacles or studies that he regards anything of greater importance than this knowledge?”² The end point of this fifty-three year period, and the point at which the Mediterranean world was changed forever, in his view, under the unipolar control of Rome, was the destruction of the kingdom of Macedon in 168–167 at the end of the so-called Third Macedonian War

The modern world indeed seems to have been “consumed by other ... studies.” As the final stage on Rome’s journey to becoming the Mediterranean’s sole remaining superpower,³ the Third Macedonian War certainly deserves wider currency than it presently enjoys among students of history. Not only did it witness the destruction of the Macedonian kingdom – a going concern since the seventh century, the cradle of the ruling houses of the Temenids and Antigonids, birthplace of Philip II and Alexander the Great, and the crucible for Greco-Macedonian empires stretching east from the Balkans to the borders of modern Pakistan, and south to the Nile’s first cataract. The war also altered a *de facto* Mediterranean balance of

¹ All dates are BC unless otherwise stated.

² τίς γάρ οὕτως ὑπάρχει φαῦλος ἢ ῥάθυμος ἀνθρώπων ὃς οὐκ ἂν βούλοιο γνῶναι πῶς καὶ τίνι γένει πολιτείας ἐπικρατηθέντα σχεδὸν ἅπαντα τὰ κατὰ τὴν οἰκουμένην οὐχ ὅλοις πεντήκοντα καὶ τρισὶν ἔτεσιν ὑπὸ μίαν ἀρχὴν ἔπεσε τὴν Ῥωμαίων, ὃ πρότερον οὐχ εὐρίσκειται γεγονός, τίς δὲ πάλιν οὕτως ἐκπαθὴς πρὸς τι τῶν ἄλλων θεαμάτων ἢ μαθημάτων ὃς προυργιαίτερον ἂν τι ποιήσαιτο τῆσδε τῆς ἐμπειρίας; (Polyb. 1.1.5–6).

³ Eckstein 2013: 89.

power that had existed, more or less unchanged, since the death of Alexander. As Polybius recognized, what had been a Greco-Macedonian world for over 150 years had become, by 168, a Roman world. From this point on, he writes, “the growth and progress of Roman domination was now complete, and in addition, this was now the universal and inescapable fact of life – that from now on all had to listen to the Romans and obey their orders.”⁴

Despite having rethought the structure of his *Histories* as writing progressed, adding a further ten books to his original plan of thirty, in order to allow his readers to reflect and pass judgment on Roman rule between 167 and 146,⁵ Polybius never changed his mind about the world-historical significance of Rome’s final victory over Macedon. One might, of course, quibble with his view for a number of reasons, not least of which is his personal investment in the war and its outcome, having been an apparently reluctant participant while it was taking place, and then a political victim of its result. In 169, as Achaean League *hipparchos* (cavalry commander, second in command to the annually elected Achaean commander-in-chief, the *stratēgos*), Polybius tried to walk a fine line between actively supporting the Roman war effort, and keeping League troops (and resources) out of it.⁶ After the war was over, he was among the thousand Achaean “unreliables” who are said to have been rounded up and deported to exile in Italy.⁷ There, he was allowed to live in Rome, where he had access to eyewitnesses to and participants in the recent war. As will be seen later, his own personal experiences and those of his informants – to say nothing of his contempt for the Antigonid kings of Macedon, especially the last one, Perseus – may have clouded his historical judgment at times. On the other hand, the historical reliability and integrity of Polybius’ account of the Third Macedonian War can only be assessed on the basis of the few fragments of it that remain. The lion’s share of what he originally wrote must be inferred from our main surviving historical source for the war, the lacunose and

⁴ ὁ τε γὰρ χρόνος ὁ πεντηκοντακαιτριετής εἰς ταῦτ’ ἔληγεν, ἢ τ’ αὔξησις καὶ προκοπή τῆς Ῥωμαίων δυναστείας ἐτετελείωτο· πρὸς δὲ τούτοις ὁμολογούμενον ἐδόκει τοῦτ’ εἶναι καὶ κατηναγκασμένον ἅπασιν ὅτι λοιπὸν ἐστὶ Ῥωμαίων ἀκούειν καὶ τούτοις πειθαρχεῖν ὑπὲρ τῶν παραγγελλομένων (Polyb. 3.4.2–3). Cf. Walbank 1974: 21: after Pydna, “Rome enjoyed virtual supremacy, and the balance of power was dead (as indeed Polybius wrote his *Histories* to demonstrate).”

⁵ Polyb. 3.4–5.6.

⁶ Rather than deliver Achaean League troops to Q. Marcus Philippus, the consul of 169, he merely showed him a copy of the League decree authorizing the full muster. Polybius also secured the authorization of Marcus (backed up by a *senatus consultum* of the previous year) to deny League troops to Ap. Claudius Centho in Epirus (Polyb. 28.12–13; below, Chapter 6). For Polybius’ advocacy of a “soft balancing” policy vis-à-vis Rome during the Third Macedonian War, see now Burton 2011: 183–4 and 213–16.

⁷ Paus. 7.10.7–12.

deeply corrupted text of the ninth and final extant pentad of Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita*, which happens to survive in only a single manuscript.

The story of Rome's rise from a regional Italian power to an international power of the first rank has often been told and needs no extensive recapitulation here.⁸ Her victories over Carthage in the First and Second Punic Wars (264–241 and 218–201, respectively) upset the western Mediterranean *de facto* balance of power in Rome's favor. Some of the spoils from those wars that fell to Rome included the islands of Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica, as well as two Spanish provinces. Through a series of on-again, off-again wars with her perennial Celtic foes in northern Italy, Rome had also come into possession of most of the rich and fertile Po Valley across Italy's northern tier. The Romans' attention had also been drawn eastward, toward Illyria and Greece beyond. They fought and won two short wars in 229 and 219 against the Ardiaean rulers of Illyria on Macedon's western flank. As a result, and in contrast to the provincialization of the West, a group of hyper-vigilant Roman friends, *amici*, dotted the western shoreline of the Balkan peninsula, keeping the Roman senate abreast of developments there, especially those that threatened to endanger their own, and, by extension, Rome's security and position.⁹

Internally, Rome remained an imperial Republic, as she had been for centuries before her transmarine expansion. The traditional rule of the mixed patricio-plebeian aristocracy had been affirmed and strengthened in the crisis of the Second Punic War. In that conflict, Hannibal had brought Rome to the edge of extinction, in Italy itself, but was kept at bay, and finally defeated, by Rome's aristocratic, senatorial generals. The enormous manpower resources at their command in Italy helped immeasurably, of course, but the conservative, tradition-minded citizen-soldiers did not see it that way. For them, it was leaders like the brilliant tactician P. Cornelius Scipio Africanus who had brought them through the crisis – and conferred on them great spoils. The result was the popular cession of the majority of foreign policy decision-making to senatorial control. Declarations of war remained the people's sovereign right, of course, and, as will be seen shortly, the people still could deny a consul's first attempt to have an overseas war declared. But the day-to-day business of international relations – the dispatching of envoys and commissioners, the sanctioning of their activities and decisions, and the implementation of their advice

⁸ See, most recently (and brilliantly), Rosenstein 2012.

⁹ On international *amicitia* generally, see Burton 2003 and 2011. On Rome's Illyrian *amici* in particular, see now Burton 2011: 136–41.

during the crucial escalation phase on the road to major wars – was now in the hands of a relatively tiny group of 300 senators. The rise of the promagistracy, designed to cope with the ever-increasing number of *provinciae* (assignments, or commands, rather than concrete geographical zones of administration),¹⁰ made the traditional senatorial allotment of magisterial responsibilities a much higher-stakes procedure than before. Unlike the magistrates with *imperium* – the consuls, the praetors – the proconsuls and propraeors (to say nothing of the *homines privati cum imperio*, such as Scipio Africanus had been when he was assigned the Spanish command in 210) were largely unaccountable to the people (as deputies of the senate or the consuls, they did not have to render an account of their conduct in office before the people at the end of their terms),¹¹ and could dispense favors to their friends, hangers-on, and subordinates, and deliver punishments to their political rivals and enemies, at will. The stage had been set by the victory of Scipio Africanus over Hannibal. The competition for major war-time commands, through which one could achieve victory and glory, and of course, vast wealth through spoliation and plunder, intensified, with predictably dire consequences, in the view of the ancient literary sources, for Roman character and behavior.

The story of late Antigonid Macedon is more opaque. This is not solely a function of our surviving literary sources' hostility to Rome's Macedonian antagonists, and their lack of interest in Macedonian institutions,¹² but also owes something to the minefield that comprises the modern debate over Macedonian identity politics. In recent years, a significant scholarly by-product of this debate, the "new Macedonian history" movement, has revolutionized the study of the Macedonian kingdom in antiquity.¹³ One area of research in particular has raised important (and controversial) questions about the relationship of the Macedonian king to the disparate parts of his kingdom, its various administrative units/districts, and its cities. The traditional scenario of a unified kingdom under the firm control of a strong, centralized

¹⁰ Richardson 2008.

¹¹ Accountability of promagistrates to senate or consuls: Lintott 1999: 113–15; accountability of consuls to the people: Polyb. 6.15.10.

¹² Hatzopoulos 1996: 265.

¹³ Ma 2011: 524, describing Hatzopoulos 1996 and, more briefly, 2015. The main virtue of Hatzopoulos' study is that it moves the discussion forward from the somewhat sterile debate over the nature of the Macedonian monarchy – whether it was "constitutional," and thus limited, or "autocratic," and therefore absolutist. For a recap, see Borza 1990: 231–52 and 1993: 31–5; Anson 2010: 9–10; King 2010: 374–5, 390–1 (all fairly partisan in favor of the autocratic position).

monarchy has been complicated by more nuanced readings of the well-known ancient literary and numismatic evidence in the light of recent epigraphic discoveries. The corpus of Macedonian inscriptions, some of them only recently published, may indeed point to a kind of two-tiered Macedonian “commonwealth.” From at least the time of Antigonos Gonatas (r. 277–239), these texts consistently refer to “the king and the [community/land of the] Macedonians.”¹⁴ This has compelled scholars to revisit the traditional dates assigned to coins struck by regional, apparently autonomous mints in Macedonia. These can no longer be assigned to the last days of Perseus’ reign, just before the Roman post-war settlement, but clearly belong to as early as the reign of Philip V – ca. 187, and perhaps even earlier.¹⁵ This, in turn, means that the division of Macedonia into four self-governing, semi-autonomous administrative units (*merides*) in 167 was not carried out by the Romans *ex nihilo*, but in fact reflects regional divisions within the kingdom going back to the reign of Philip II (Map 3).¹⁶ The people of the diverse Macedonian *poleis* (in the Old Kingdom and Chalcidice),¹⁷ *sympolitēiai* (groups of villages – *komai* – administratively joined to a *metropolis*, mostly in the “New Lands” west of the Axios River),¹⁸ and *ethnē* (*politeiai*, “regional groupings of rural communities,” mostly in Upper Macedonia),¹⁹

¹⁴ *IG* XI 4.1097 (from Antigonos [Doson] and the Macedones); *IG* XI 4.1102 (from “the community of the Macedones,” τὸ κοινὸν Μ[ακε]δόν[ων], to king Philip [V]); *SEG* 29.795 (from Philip [V] and the Macedones); *SEG* 12.373 ll. 35–55 (Antigonos [Gonatas] and “the other Greeks and Macedonians,” τοὺς ἄλλους Ἑλληνας καὶ Μακεδόνας); *SEG* 12.373 ll. 18–34 (Antigonos [Gonatas] and the Macedonians); *SEG* 12.373 ll. 1–17 (“Antigonos [Gonatas], the city of the Cassandreans, and all the other Macedonians,” τὸν βασιλέα Ἀντίγονον καὶ τὴν Κασσανδρέων πόλιν καὶ πρὸς τοὺς λοιποὺς Μακεδόνας πάντας; τὸν βασιλέα Ἀντίγονον καὶ τὴν ἡμετέραν πόλιν καὶ Μακεδόνας πάντας); *SEG* 12.374 (“Antigonos [Gonatas], the people of Pella, and the rest of the land of the Macedonians,” τὸν βασιλέα Ἀντίγονον καὶ πρὸς Πελλαίου καὶ τὴν λοιπὴν χώραν τὴν Μακεδόνων; τὸν βασιλέα Ἀντίγονον καὶ πρὸς Μακεδόνας). Discussion: Papazoglou 1983; Hatzopoulos 1996: 219–20.

¹⁵ Koukouli-Chrysanthaki 1981: 240; Hammond 1989: 384–5, 388; Hatzopoulos 1996: 231–2, 245–7, 250–62 (dating Philip V’s minting reforms to 188/7 (260 n. 7)), and 2015: 337; Kremydi-Sicilianou 2007 and 2009; Dahmen 2010: 49 and n. 33. Meloni 1953: 75 n. 2 believed that Philip V tolerated local minting “to increase circulation and the income from the mines.”

¹⁶ Hatzopoulos 1996: 42, 231–60, 473–86, and 2015: 321, 337. The traditional scholarly description of the Roman *merides* (called *regiones* and *partes* by Livy) as “Republics” is misleading (Hatzopoulos 1996: 229).

¹⁷ Hatzopoulos 1996: 105–22.

¹⁸ Hatzopoulos 1996: 51–75 (the example of Gazoros and nearby *komai*, based on the testimony of *SEG* 45.763, dated to either 216/15 (or 215/14) or 174/3).

¹⁹ These were not tribal states, but “federations of self-governing villages and townships organized not on a ‘gentilic’ but on a local, geographical, basis”; see Hatzopoulos 1996: 77–104 (quotation from 103); cf. 220 (whence the quotation in the main text).

6 Rome and the Third Macedonian War

enjoyed self-government at the local level, each with its own magistrates (*epistatēs*, *politarchēs*, etc.), council (*boulē*), and assembly (*ekklēsia*).²⁰ Polybius' suggestion, that the Macedonians "were freed by the Romans from significant civil strife and partisan massacres" that prevailed under the kings, incidentally confirms this picture of local political disputes, and thus, political self-determination beyond the complete control or concern of the kings.²¹ These communities were by no means fully autonomous – they had no independent foreign policy, for example,²² and the land they occupied was entirely subject to the king's discretion as "spear-won land"²³ – but the king, so far as we can tell, did not suppress their freedom of political expression.²⁴ This stands to reason, for the king was answerable and, in traditional Macedonian fashion, accessible to his people. Twice a year, at Pella or Aegae (at the *panegyreis* marking the vernal and autumnal equinoxes), the king, together with "the leading men" (*protoi*, that is, his closest companions, Friends, and commanders), sitting formally as a probouleutic Council (*synedrion*),

²⁰ On the *epistatēs/politarchēs* as a local civic official, as opposed to a royal functionary (*per* Walbank 1984: 228; Hammond 1989: 391–5; Errington 1990: 230, 232–4), see Hatzopoulos 1996: 78–9 n. 2, 149–65, 372–429, 489, and 2015: 339. Koukouli-Chrysanthaki 1981 is agnostic on this point, but the inscription she discusses (*SEG* 31.614) proves Holleaux's (1897: 452–55) hunch that such officials were not introduced by the Romans after Pydna (cf. also Hatzopoulos 1996: 134–38). On the local *boulai* and *ekklēsiai*, see Hatzopoulos 1996: 129–49 and 2015: 321–2. A good summary of the structure and function of local government is Hatzopoulos 2015: 332–7.

²¹ Μακεδόνες ... κατὰ πόλεις ἐκλυθέντες ἐκ μεγάλων στάσεων καὶ φόνων ἐμφυλίων διὰ τῆς [χάριτος, ὠφελείας, *uel sim.*] Ῥωμαίων (Polyb. 36.17.13). As far as I can tell, no scholar has invoked this evidence in the debate over the pre-167 existence of the *merides* and the regional power structures within them.

²² Hatzopoulos 1996: 365–9. For his powers see Arist. *Pol.* 1285b (who was, of course, in a good position to know); Dem. 1.4; cf. 18.235 (who was motivated to exaggerate, but fundamentally agrees with Aristotle).

²³ Hammond 1989: 389, 1993: 19–21, and 2000: 157–8, with sources there cited. An inscription, *SEG* 13.403, records Philip V's transfer of land in Greia (in Elimia or Eordaea) from a certain *metoikos* Corragus to Nicanor the *tetrarchēs* and his men. This demonstrates as well as anything that all Macedonian lands were entirely at the disposal of the Macedonian king. Discussion: Rostovtzeff 1941: 1471 n. 39; cf. Hatzopoulos 1996: 95–101, 435 n. 7, who, however, denies royal ownership of all but the so-called "royal estates" (99–100 n. 4 and 2015: 333), and believes, despite the kings' well-documented assertions to the contrary (*mei regni, meae dicionis*: Livy 42.41.13 [Philip V]; τὰ βασιλικά: Plut. *Alex.* 15.4 [Alexander the Great]), that the monarch was a mere caretaker of Macedonian communal property – a mere "administrator of Crown property [but] not its real owner" (433).

²⁴ There is no evidence for the king interfering in the internal political affairs of the communities, unless the political leaders and their families that Philip V deported from the cities to the barbarian wilds of Emathia, discussed at Polyb. 23.10.1–11, is an oblique reference to *stasis*-correction. But it seems clear from the passage that the king was less worried about internal disputes than the potential defection of the cities and their leaders during his upcoming war against Rome. This is, once again (and incidentally), good evidence for the *politarchs* and *epistatai* being locally chosen officials rather than royal functionaries (above, n. 20; the passage is oddly overlooked by Hatzopoulos).

consulted the will of the people in plenary sessions of the common assembly (*koinē ekklēsia*) of the Macedonians, in the first instance a civilian (as opposed to a military) organ of state.²⁵

This reinterpretation of the organization and power structures in the kingdom of Macedon has forced a reconsideration of passages in the literary sources that have conventionally been overlooked and/or deliberately misinterpreted/emended to fit preconceived notions about the nature of the Macedonian state, and the level of innovation achieved by the Romans in the settlement of Macedonia in 167. The preamble to the treaty between Carthage and Philip V, struck in 215, and copied verbatim by Polybius, refers to the Macedonian side of the agreement as “king Philip, the Macedonians, and the allies.”²⁶ The Isthmian decree, declaring the freedom of the Greeks in 196, refers to the Roman conquest of “king Philip and the Macedonians.”²⁷ Closer to the concerns of this study is a passage in which Livy happens to mention delegations of the Macedonian cities (*legationes ciuitatum Macedoniae*) arriving at Citium in 171, where Perseus was busy assembling his forces on the eve of the Third Macedonian War. The ambassadors offered the king as much money and grain as they could supply for the war effort; the king duly thanked them, but refused the cities’ offers, instead requisitioning from them wagons to transport his vast war materiel.²⁸

Taken together, and in light of the epigraphic and numismatic material, the evidence paints a far more complex picture of the nature of the Macedonian state than was apparent less than a half-century ago. The kingdom of Macedon was neither a fully integrated, unified state subject to the absolutist rule of a powerful king, nor a republican federation, such

²⁵ Hatzopoulos 1996: 261–322 (assembly), 323–59, 491–2 (council); cf. Hatzopoulos 2015: 331. Errington 1990: 220 doubts that the assembly had a political function, but this is probably due to gaps in our evidence (*per* Hatzopoulos). It is clear from Hatzopoulos’ discussion that outside the twice-yearly scheduled assemblies, the council carried on the day-to-day business of the kingdom, and when major crises supervened requiring popular consultation (e.g. when a king died), an assembly of available and accessible (i.e. nearby) Macedonians had to be hastily convened. If the crisis occurred on campaign far away from Macedonia (as when Alexander the Great died at Babylon in 323), then the assembly would consist largely of Macedonian soldiers, lending it the *appearance* of an exclusively military character. But it is equally clear that, if the crisis hit within the kingdom itself (as when Alexander succeeded to the throne upon the assassination of his father Philip II), the assembly would be summoned from among whatever Macedonians were nearby, whether under arms or not.

²⁶ Φίλιππος ὁ βασιλεὺς ... καὶ Μακεδόν[ε]ς καὶ τῶν σύμμαχ[οι] (Polyb. 7.9.1).

²⁷ βασιλέα Φίλιππου καὶ Μακεδόνος (Polyb. 18.46.5). Many other passages from Polybius, Livy, and Diodorus are cited in the notes at Hatzopoulos 1996: 219–20, 261–2 n. 3; cf. Walbank 1984: 226; Hammond 1989: 382, 1993: 15, and 2000: 146.

²⁸ Livy 42.53.2–4.

as the Aetolian and Achaean Leagues, but an amalgam of the two nestled within a bifurcated state framework:

The kingdom of Macedon was constitutional and national as regards the relations between the king and the “Macedones,” in his realm, and ... the rule of the king over the subject peoples of the spear-won lands was absolute.²⁹

The *epistatai* and *politarchai* were no less civic magistrates than the mayors of modern France or Greece ... [T]hey were answerable to the central authorities and even to their regional representatives ... This situation results from the “federal” character of the Macedonian state and is independent of the monarchical ... form of the central government.³⁰

The royal versus the republican *form of government* is quite another question or criterion of constitutional distinction than that of the unitary versus the federal *form of state*. Both the King and the *ethnos*, the *Makedones*, represented the central authorities as against the particular cities and the other territorial units which constituted the Macedonian communities.³¹

None of this necessarily means, however, that the late Antigonids were significantly less powerful than Philip II had been in the first half of his reign, nor was Macedon a mere rump state, lacking in resources or real power in the Hellenistic East.³² True, the Antigonid kings could not possibly call upon state resources as enormous as the Ptolemies in Egypt could,³³ nor was the kingdom of Macedon capable of fielding as many men as the polyglot armies of the Seleucids at their height.³⁴ Nevertheless, as we will see, thanks to his father Philip V's and his own careful husbanding of Macedonia's resources over the course of twenty-five years, Perseus had access to stockpiles of arms, money, and men, including eight million bushels of grain, and enough money to employ ten thousand mercenaries for ten years. By 171, the king was able to field an army of 43,000 men – perhaps larger than Alexander the Great himself ever commanded.³⁵ L. Aemilius Paullus, the victor of Pydna, captured 6,000 talents of gold and silver from the royal Macedonian treasury, and displayed several hundred million sesterces in

²⁹ Hammond 2000: 159.

³⁰ Hatzopoulos 1996: 426–7.

³¹ Hatzopoulos 1996: 491 (emphasis in the original); cf. Hatzopoulos 2015: 326.

³² “A busted flush,” as one of the referees put it in his/her report on my original proposal for this study.

³³ Walbank 1984: 225, 228. According to Plutarch (*Aem.* 20.6), Perseus' annual income was 200 talents. However, this was derived from land taxes, exclusive of revenues from the mines, port duties, the sale of timber and pitch, etc. Errington 1990: 223. According to Diodorus (16.8.6), the mines accounted for an annual revenue stream of a thousand talents under Philip II.

³⁴ Antiochus III fielded an army of 68,000 at Raphia in 217 (Polyb. 79.13), and perhaps as many as 70,000 at Magnesia in 190 (Livy 37.40, 44).

³⁵ See below, Chapter 5, p. 126.

his triumph over Perseus.³⁶ This also means, incidentally, that for all the emphasis the “new Macedonian history” places on institutions, regional units, local autonomy, and wider social forces, it remains the case that individual kings significantly influenced the shape and destiny of their kingdom, its resources, and its ends.

The late Antigonids’ ace in the pack – the Macedonian phalanx – deserves more than a passing mention, for this is what the Seleucids and the Ptolemies lacked, and, by his own admission, gave Paullus the fright of his life at Pydna.³⁷ For its initial impact, the Macedonian field army in this period still relied on the Macedonian cavalry – Alexander the Great’s weapon of choice – consisting of the elite sacred squadrons (*sacrae alae*) and the royal cavalry (*regii equites*), which, along with the regular cavalry, numbered around 3,000 in total.³⁸ In set-piece battles, as at Pydna in 168, the Macedonian cavalry were deployed on the right, while Macedon’s allies, usually Thessalians or Thracians, held the left. The phalanx itself typically consisted of 16,000 men (although at Pydna, Perseus at first deployed a double phalanx of 12,000 men each), all native Macedonians. They carried the deadly *sarissa*, the long pike, which measured 16 feet or more and weighed up to 14 pounds, and round shields 30 inches in diameter by means of a strap, which allowed them to wield the *sarissa* with both hands. Well-trained and lightly armed, the phalangites could move fast against opposing armies, their long *sarissae* nullifying the enemy’s attempts to fight at close range. Deployed defensively, the phalanx was almost invincible; no soldier or horse wanted to go near the bristling wall of pikes. Meanwhile, the enemy would be steadily ground down by waves of attacks by the Macedonian cavalry, mixed units of skirmishers and archers, and the peltasts, an elite light-armed infantry unit of around 5,000 Macedonians which included the *agēma*, a hardened, older elite group, all armed with *sarissae* and smaller round shields 24 inches in diameter.

³⁶ Polyb. 18.35.4 (gold and silver). Vell. Pat. 1.9.6 records HS 200m, Livy 45.40.1 (from Valerius Antias), 120m, and Plin, *NH* 33.56, 300m (see now Briscoe 2012: 747–8). Paullus’ triumph, which took three days to complete, displayed the massive resources of the kingdom to the astonishment of all (Diod. Sic. 31.8.10–12; Livy 45.40.1–8; Plut. *Aem.* 32.2–34.8). Rostovtzeff 1941: 252 recognized that the kingdom “was certainly prosperous in the reigns of Antigonos Gonatas and his successors,” and (623) “the resources of Macedonia during the reigns both of Philip [V] and Perseus were still large. Both rulers did their best to develop them and derived an ample revenue from the [kingdom].” See also Gruen 1982: 259 (“the state had evidently accumulated staggering wealth in a mere thirty years”). For what it is worth, Polybius says (31.22.3) that Paullus died in (relative) poverty, even though he had access to the “massive treasure” (μεγίστων θησαυρῶν) of Macedon.

³⁷ Polyb. 29.17.1; Plut. *Aem.* 19.2. Their lack of access to a reliable supply of native Macedonian troops always put the Seleucids and Ptolemies at a disadvantage.

³⁸ Livy 42.51.9 (3,000), 58.8–9 (*regii equites*, *sacrae alae*).

In attack mode, the phalanx was equally formidable, the relatively light weight of the phalangite panoply contributing to its momentum, which intensified its impact during the initial clash with the opposing, typically more heavily armed enemy infantry. That initial success could only be sustained, however, provided the ground was smooth enough and the men kept their tight formation, one of the keys to the phalanx's success. If the formation broke up, opposing soldiers could insinuate themselves into the gaps, where the phalangites' light armour, wicker shields, and daggers were no match for the heavily armed legionaries or hoplites armed with broad swords. As will be seen later – spoiler alert – at Pydna, unfortunately for Perseus, despite a fortuitous beginning, when the Macedonians almost effortlessly held off the Romans by standing their ground, the phalanx soon lost its formation by pursuing their advantage and advancing across uneven terrain, leading to disaster.³⁹

Thus far the circumstances of the major protagonists. Something should also be said about the supporting cast in the story that follows. Ptolemaic Egypt and the Seleucid empire (often referred to, in overly reductionist fashion, as “Syria,” or “the Syrian kingdom” after its urbanized, Hellenized heartland) emerged, alongside Macedon, as two of the three major post-Alexander Hellenistic kingdoms. These three major powers, differently resourced and strategically positioned in such a way that none was ever able to undermine one or both of the others completely, lived in a state of grudging *de facto* balance of power, and were in an almost constant state of war with each other.⁴⁰ In the period covered by this study, Ptolemaic Egypt, in addition to having to deal with periods of native revolt, experienced unfortunate periods of weakness at the royal center, with child-kings, feuding siblings, and powerful regents and advisors undermining the kingdom's ability to grapple with its perennial enemies the Seleucids, particularly over possession of Coele-Syria (roughly modern Lebanon, Israel, and Palestine). The Seleucids, by contrast, enjoyed a resurgence in its fortunes after a long period of instability, beginning with the ascension to the throne of Antiochus III (r. 223–187). This vigorous 20-year-old went on to reconquer Alexander the Great's empire to the borders of India and reclaim his ancestral possessions in Asia Minor and Thrace. His defeat by Rome in the Syrian War (192–188), discussed later, was a minor setback by comparison to the restored fortunes of the Seleucid house for which

³⁹ On the Antigonid army see now Sekunda 2010: 459–64.

⁴⁰ In the 163 years between Alexander's death and 160, there were only around five years in which none of the major kingdoms was involved in war: Eckstein 2006: 83.