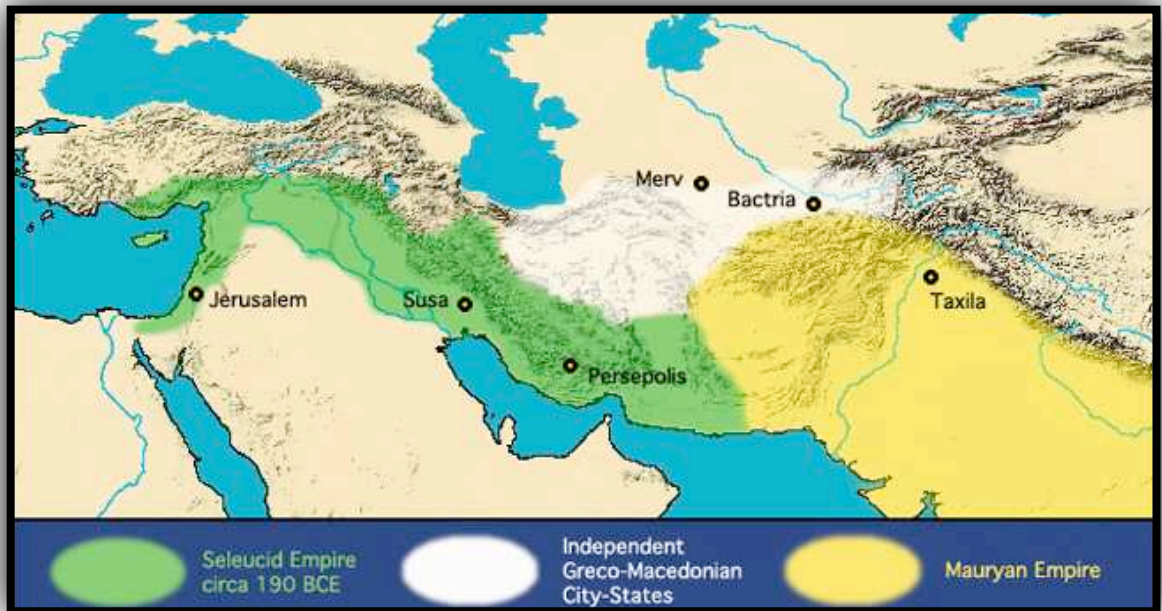


# SELEUCID EMPIRE



## Seleucid Empire 312-64 CE

**Background** After conquering as far east as the Indus River valley, Alexander the Great returned to Babylon in today's Iraq, where he died in June 323 BCE. After his death, his generals fought among themselves for power, and his empire was split into three smaller empires: the Seleucid empire centered in what is now Iran and Iraq, the Antigonid monarchy centered in today's Macedonia and Greece, and the Ptolemaic empire centered in Egypt.

**Founding** Seleucus I Nicator (Victor), another former general of Alexander, eventually got control of most of Alexander's empire except for Egypt, the region that is now part of Pakistan, and the Aegean Sea basin, including Greece and Macedonia. The Seleucid empire, the name given to the area he controlled, included modern Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, as well as parts of modern Turkey,

Armenia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. Seleucus thought that the part of the Indus region that Alexander had conquered should be his as well. He moved his army into the area in 305 BCE, however, he found himself confronting Chandragupta, the ruler of the rising Maurya empire, and his 9,000 war elephants. Seleucus wisely called it quits, signed a treaty, gave Chandragupta his daughter in marriage, and went home with a consolation prize of 500 elephants.

**Administration** The Seleucid empire had two capitals, one at Antioch in Syria and a second at Suleucia on the Tigris River. It contained a huge variety of peoples and languages. Both bureaucracy (government systems and rules) and the army were needed to keep order. Unlike Alexander, Seleucus was not interested in combining Greek and Persian ways. Rather, he based his

governance on the Greek culture that he knew. The old Persian political divisions (satrapies), were reduced in size and administered by a Greek elite. To increase Greek influence, he established a string of new cities and encouraged Greek immigrants to settle in them. The establishment of these cities was perhaps the most striking achievement of the Seleucids. The new cities were usually laid out on a grid pattern, and they were overseen by magistrates responsible for seeing to the condition of the water supply, public bathrooms, and streets. These cities were not distributed evenly throughout the empire. Most of them were in the Anatolian Peninsula and northern Syria. There were also several in Bactria, an ancient region that today corresponds to parts of Iran and Afghanistan. Lots of settlers from the Greek city-states came to the area to get free land, and many of

these new settlers became the local elites, usually married local women, and raised Greek-speaking off-spring. Even after the collapse of the Seleucid Empire in the middle of the third century, Greeks, their language, and their culture remained important in the region.

### Trade

Seleucus' treaty with Chandragupta in the Mauryan Empire led to expanded trade that , connected India with the Mediterranean. Merchants, as well as ambassadors, monks, artisans, and adventurers traveled from northern India to Seleucid territory. One result was that Greek became a common language in this large area, particularly used in trade.

### Religion

Seleucus, like Alexander and many other conquerors, created a story that gave himself a divine origin. While Alexander traced his roots to Zeus, Seleucus presented himself as Apollo's son. Reputedly, he had a birthmark in the shape of an anchor, Apollo's symbol. He established a religious cult with himself as its god. The Seleucids did not try to impose any particular religion on their subjects, most of whom belonged to **polytheistic** religions that simply added the emperor to its pantheon of gods. Only after 198 BCE, when the Seleucid ruler Antiochus III grabbed Palestine from the Ptolemies, did the monotheistic Jews find living with the polytheistic Seleucids a problem.

### Decline/Fall

During its existence, the Seleucid Empire had thirty rulers, though the territories they ruled varied widely. The empire was at its height in 312 BCE when it conquered Babylon. Its decline began about 190 BCE when Antiochus III crossed the Bosphorus Strait and invaded Thrace (northeastern Greece). The Romans, who by this time were expanding into Greece, did not appreciate this provocation, and they quickly defeated Antiochus III, pushing him back into the Anatolian Peninsula. In the eastern part of the Seleucid domain, the Parthians, originally a nomadic group, revolted and pushed the Seleucid borders westward. Little by little, other bits of the empire broke off or were gobbled up by neighbors until by 129 BCE the Seleucids were reduced to only a small area in northern Syria. In 64 BCE, The Romans conquered that region and made it a province of their own empire.



Bust of Seleucus I  
Museo archeologico nazionale, Napoli

## EXPERT GROUP NOTE TRACKER: **SELEUCID** EMPIRE

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Significant information about this empire related to this characteristic:</b>
Background/ location	
Founding	
Organization	
Religion	
Trade	
Decline/Fall	
Summary description / categorization of this empire	

# SELEUCID EMPIRE

323-30 BCE

