



## The Wars of the Diadochi: The Fragmentation of Alexander's Empire

Dr. M.D. Rafea Kazem Maher, Faculty of Arts, Mustan Siriya University, Iraq

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### Abstract

The Wars of the Diadochi, a succession of intense conflicts among the erstwhile commanders and associates of Alexander the Great after his untimely demise in 323 BCE, signified the fragmentation of one of antiquity's largest empires. Following Alexander's premature death, the extensive empire he established—from Greece to the distant territories of India—lacked an appointed successor. The lack of a definitive successor provoked a fierce power struggle among his loyal commanders. Significant conflicts, including the crucial engagement at Ipsus, would ultimately dismantle the formerly cohesive Macedonian Empire, heralding a new epoch characterised by the emergence of fragmented Hellenistic states from its remnants. The Ptolemaic Dynasty of Egypt, the Seleucid Empire, and the Greco-Bactrian Kingdom were included. This article explores the significant events and extensive ramifications of the Wars of the Diadochi, analysing the political, military, and cultural impacts of these monumental conflicts. It examines the military tactics employed by the combatants, emphasising innovative ideas, like the use of war elephants. Furthermore, it examines the significant socio-economic and cultural transformations caused by the fragmentation of Alexander's extensive empire. The lasting effect of the Diadochi is apparent in the spread of Hellenistic culture—a combination of Greek and Eastern traditions—and in the emergence of royal powers that would significantly influence the Mediterranean region for millennia. This article conducts a thorough analysis of the battles and their consequences to elucidate the significant and enduring impact of the Diadochi on the development of the ancient world and the progression of history.

**Keywords:** - Wars of the Diadochi, Alexander's Empire, Partition of Babylon, Legacy of the Diadochi

### Introduction

The name Diadochi denotes the men who succeeded Alexander the Great, specifically his generals and close associates, who contended for dominance over his extensive empire after his untimely demise in 323 BCE (Anson & Troncoso, 2013). This period was marked by intense struggle and complex political strategies as Alexander's erstwhile friends endeavoured to seize portions of his conquered territories, resulting in the eventual disintegration of one of history's most powerful empires. The significance of the Diadochi beyond their military confrontations; their acts were pivotal in moulding the political framework of the ancient world, establishing the groundwork for the Hellenistic era and impacting subsequent civilisations (Lattey, 1917).

At the zenith of Alexander's rule, his empire extended from Greece in the west to the northern territories of India in the east, incorporating a diverse array of civilisations and places. His military victories, especially against the Persian Empire and several Indian kingdoms, led to an extensive empire encompassing Egypt, Mesopotamia, and portions of Central Asia. At the time of his death, Alexander had established over twenty towns, the most famous of which was Alexandria in Egypt, which developed into a significant centre for culture and intellectual discourse. The expanse of his dominion facilitated unparalleled cultural exchanges, disseminating Hellenistic influence over these varied territories, an effect that persisted long after the empire disintegrated due to the conflicts among his successors (Lattey, 1917).

The conflicts that arose among Alexander's successors highlighted their individual aspirations and revealed the significant challenges of administering a vast and diverse region. The gradual disintegration of Alexander's empire led to the emergence of other Hellenistic kingdoms, each possessing its unique identity and governance systems. These novel political formations profoundly impacted historical trajectories, moulding the futures of both Europe and Asia (Wheatley, 2009).

## Objectives

- To analyse the political and administrative difficulties after the demise of Alexander the Great.
- To examine the Partition of Babylon and its ramifications for the administration of Alexander's empire.
- To examine the origins and effects of the significant conflicts among the Diadochi.
- To assess pivotal confrontations in the Wars of the Diadochi and their strategic ramifications.
- To investigate the enduring legacy of the Diadochi and their influence on the Hellenistic realm.

## The Death of Alexander the Great

The untimely demise of Alexander the Great at the age of 32 has been a topic of fascination and intense discussion among scholars and professionals. Renowned for his remarkable military accomplishments and strategic brilliance, Alexander's abrupt demise in 323 BCE in Babylon continues to be an enigmatic riddle. Historical and contemporary records regarding his death indicate that he fell victim to an enigmatic sickness characterised by fever, intense stomach pain, and a progressive deterioration of health. The symptoms allegedly developed over 11 days, resulting in his death and leaving a substantial empire without a definitive heir (Mishra et al., 2022).

A multitude of explanations has been proposed to elucidate the cause of Alexander's death. A disputed hypothesis posits that he was poisoned, possibly with *Veratrum album*, a toxic plant recognised for inducing symptoms similar to those documented in historical narratives. Proponents of this hypothesis frequently cite the potential for political machinations and rivalries within Alexander's court as motivations for such an action. Nevertheless, some historians and medical professionals' express scepticism, noting that the extended duration of his illness contradicts the typical effects of most poisons, especially *Veratrum album*, which generally induces a more rapid start of symptoms (Gamble & Bloedow, 2017).

Alternative interpretations emphasise natural causes, including the potential for infectious infections or pre-existing health issues. Certain researchers have suggested typhoid disease, malaria, or West Nile virus as possible causes, considering the hygienic conditions and environmental elements in Babylon during that period. Another explanation posits acute pancreatitis, potentially exacerbated by Alexander's reported propensity for excessive alcohol consumption. There has been speculation regarding autoimmune disorders, including Guillain-Barré Syndrome, due to the progressive onset of his symptoms. The paucity of definitive medical records from antiquity, coupled with the lack of forensic evidence, complicates the accurate identification of the cause. Moreover, historical narratives—frequently authored by individuals with vested interests are influenced by cultural and political prejudices, thereby complicating the inquiry. The conundrum of Alexander's death continues to intrigue contemporary historians, underscoring the complexities of understanding ancient history via modern scientific perspectives.

The hypotheses of Alexander's demise have developed over the centuries. Although initial accounts suggested poisoning, presumably influenced by political disputes among his associates, modern research has increasingly supported the notion of natural causes. A leading view suggests that Alexander succumbed to acute necrotising pancreatitis, a critical inflammation of the pancreas. This disease may have been exacerbated by his habitual alcohol consumption and the physical strain from injuries incurred during numerous combat engagements. This diagnosis corresponds with the historical accounts of his symptoms, such as elevated fever and abdominal discomfort, which progressively worsened over 11 days before to his demise (Retief & Cilliers, 2010; Gamble & Bloedow, 2017).

The ramifications of Alexander's premature demise were extensive. In the absence of a chosen heir, his vast kingdom, extending from Greece to India, descended into chaos. The Diadochi, his generals, competed for dominance, instigating a succession of conflicts that ultimately resulted in the disintegration of the empire into smaller, frequently antagonistic, Hellenistic kingdoms. This era of political instability not only resulted in the disintegration of Alexander's unified empire but also transformed the geopolitical and cultural landscape of the ancient world. The formerly centralised authority transitioned to regional kingdoms, each preserving distinct aspects of Greek influence, albeit in distinctive manifestations (Kotsori, 2018).

Notwithstanding the progress in medical knowledge and historical inquiry, the exact cause of Alexander's demise remains ambiguous. The absence of forensic evidence, exacerbated by the elapse of time, has rendered a conclusive diagnosis practically unattainable. Researchers persist in presenting many hypotheses, with some advocating for infectious diseases such as typhoid or malaria, while others contemplate autoimmune or inflammatory disorders like Guillain-Barré Syndrome. The current discourse highlights the difficulties of analysing historical occurrences from a contemporary viewpoint, wherever evidence gaps permit numerous conflicting interpretations (Mishra et al., 2022; Gamble & Bloedow, 2017).

Alexander's demise persists as a historical enigma and a heart-breaking reminder of the complex interplay among politics, health, and power. It underscores the intricacies of deciphering ancient manuscripts, frequently influenced by the authors' preconceptions. Despite the emergence of fresh insights, the life and death of Alexander persist in captivating interest, exemplifying his enduring legacy as one of history's most fascinating people.

## **The Partition of Babylon and its implications for governance**

The notion of partition, illustrated by the historical case of Babylon, offers a crucial perspective for analysing government in both ancient and contemporary contexts. The Partition of Babylon involved a systematic partition of urban districts, segregating places to differentiate between the elite and the mass populace. This was not merely a manifestation of social inequity but a deliberate tactic to sustain dominance and perpetuate hierarchical frameworks. Babylonian kings established separate quarters according to class and function, so constructing a physical and symbolic government structure that centralised authority and facilitated systematic oversight (Kempen, 2002). This method demonstrates how division serves as an effective mechanism for consolidating authority and governing society, a technique that has echoed throughout history.

The influence of spatial segregation in government reaches well beyond the confines of ancient Babylon. In contemporary society, partitioning has often been employed as a strategy for resolving political and social issues. A notable instance is the 1947 United Nations partition plan for Palestine. In contrast to Babylon, where divisions were predominantly internal, the UN proposal aimed to partition the territory into distinct states for Jews and Arabs. This was not merely a reaction to escalating tensions, but also an indication of the UN's expanding influence in global governance. Through its intervention in Palestine, the UN established itself as a principal mediator, striving to negotiate peace and create new frameworks for conflict resolution. This intervention exposed the intricacies and difficulties of dividing, as the plan did not resolve the conflicts and, in fact, exacerbated persistent geopolitical instability (Robson, 2023).

The notion of partitioning is also evident in modern Iraq, where administration is fragmented due to internal divisions and external influences. Post-2003 invasion, Iraq emerged as a central case study for the challenges of state-building amid foreign intervention. The fragmentation of governmental authority, alongside sectarian tensions and conflicting global interests, has rendered the formation of a cohesive governance structure especially difficult. Similar to the splits in ancient Babylon, the contemporary disintegration of Iraq highlights the challenge of reconciling sovereignty with external influence. External entities, frequently motivated by their own strategic interests, have typically intensified these differences, obstructing the establishment of a unified and stable governing structure. This demonstrates that the legacy of partitioning transcends territorial boundaries and encompasses the fragmentation of political authority (Herring, 2009).

The heritage of dividing, from ancient Babylon to contemporary wars, demonstrates its contradictory nature. Partitions can provide systematic frameworks for governance, enabling society to be organised into manageable groups and provide prompt responses to urgent situations. Conversely, they can exacerbate divisions that promote enduring instability and compromise sovereignty. The historical division of Babylon illustrates a governing framework based on control and hierarchy, whereas contemporary instances like Palestine and Iraq underscore the unforeseen repercussions of partitioning in a globalised and linked context.

Partitioning, in both ancient cities and modern governments, is a governance system intricately linked to power dynamics, control, and social regulation. Nevertheless, the results of such divides are infrequently unequivocal. They frequently interlace historical precedents with the intricacies of contemporary geopolitics. The current challenges of modern wars illustrate that the lessons of partitioning necessitate a more sophisticated approach to state-building, which harmonises external intervention with the requirement for enduring, sovereign government.

## **Major Wars of the Diadochi**

The demise of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE signified the disintegration of the consolidated Macedonian Empire and the commencement of a tumultuous era referred to as the Wars of the Diadochi. The wars fought

among Alexander's generals, referred to as the Diadochi, were characterised by intense conflicts for control over the extensive territories he had acquired. The Wars of Succession significantly influenced the political and cultural landscape of the eastern Mediterranean, leading to the emergence of the Hellenistic kingdoms.

Eumenes of Cardia, a distinguished strategist, exemplified the transition from conventional Macedonian military formations to more inventive fighting techniques during this stormy period. Eumenes adeptly amalgamated traditional tactics with innovative ideas, including the incorporation of war elephants, a hallmark of Hellenistic warfare. These elephants, utilised as psychological instruments and strategic resources, underscored the evolving dynamics of military combat throughout this period. Eumenes' capacity to adapt on the battlefield reflected the wider transformation of warfare instigated by the Diadochi wars (Mikhaylov, 2021). The political scene of this era was similarly intricate. Following Alexander's demise, his successors endeavoured to preserve an appearance of unity via a regency, administering on behalf of his little son, Alexander IV, and his half-brother, Philip III Arrhidaeus. Nevertheless, this tenuous agreement rapidly disintegrated as competing factions vied for dominance. The assassination of Alexander IV in 310 BCE by Cassander was a crucial event, signifying the conclusion of the Argead dynasty and enabling aspiring generals to assert their claims to the throne. One of the most notable figures was Antigonos Monophthalmus, whose assertive quest for supremacy resulted in the formation of the Antigonid dynasty. His attempts to consolidate Alexander's empire under his authority encountered staunch resistance from other Diadochi, including Ptolemy, Seleucus, and Lysimachus, leading to protracted and violent struggle (Gruen, 2018).

The socio-economic and cultural ramifications of the Diadochi wars were significant. The aspirations of these generals extended beyond simple geographical acquisition; they aimed to consolidate their authority and create lasting dynasties. They assimilated local traditions, integrated Greek and Eastern customs, and fervently supported the arts and sciences. This amalgamation of civilisations established the foundation for the Hellenistic period, characterised by notable progress in art, architecture, and intellectual endeavours. The battles, however, devastated trade and agriculture in the impacted areas, resulting in changes to economic power centres and modifying the demographic composition of the eastern Mediterranean (Wrightson & Hauben, 2014; Antela-Bernárdez, 2010; Chaniotis, 2005).

The Wars of the Diadochi were a pivotal episode following Alexander the Great's demise, transforming the ancient world politically, militarily, and culturally. These battles not only mirrored the personal aspirations of Alexander's generals but also signified wider socioeconomic changes in the regions they aimed to control. Although these battles disintegrated Alexander's empire, they simultaneously established the foundation for the Hellenistic kingdoms, whose cultural and intellectual accomplishments would profoundly influence the Mediterranean region and beyond. The lasting impact of these battles highlights their crucial significance in the overarching narrative of ancient history.

## Key Battles and Their Outcomes

The Battle of Ipsus, occurring in 301 BCE in central Phrygia, marked a pivotal moment in the Wars of the Diadochi, the struggles among the Successors of Alexander the Great. This significant battle was a critical juncture in the power conflicts that ensued after Alexander's demise in 323 BCE, as his former generals vied for dominance over his extensive empire. The conflict was a coalition of Successors, comprising Lysimachus and Seleucus, uniting to contest the supremacy of Antigonos I Monophthalmos and his son, Demetrios I Poliorketes. The battle's outcome not only dictated the Antigonid dynasty's fate but also reconfigured the political and geographical dynamics of the eastern Mediterranean (Wheatley & Dunn, 2024). Antigonos I, a prominent commander of Alexander, emerged as a formidable leader in the post-Alexander era, commanding extensive lands in Asia Minor and the Near East. His ambition to consolidate Alexander's realm under his dominion constituted a considerable menace to the other Successors. A coalition was established between Lysimachus, the governor of Thrace, and Seleucus, who governed the eastern territories, with the backing of Cassander and Ptolemy. The coalition's united forces confronted Antigonos and Demetrios at Ipsos in a decisive and strategically significant fight.

The conflict was characterised by novel military strategies, particularly the substantial deployment of war elephants by Seleucus. The hundreds of elephants were instrumental in disrupting Antigonos's formations and obstructing reinforcements from reaching his troops. Notwithstanding Antigonos's tactical acumen and expertise, the coalition's superior coordination and planning were ultimately crucial. Antigonos was slain in combat, terminating his aspirations for empire-wide dominion. Demetrios successfully evaded capture and subsequently returned to restore his power, ultimately ascending to the throne of Macedon (Wheatley & Dunn, 2024).

The repercussions of the Battle of Ipsos were extensive. The disintegration of the Antigonid empire enabled Lysimachus to seize control of a substantial portion of western Asia Minor, so considerably augmenting

his power and resources. Likewise, Seleucus acquired significant areas in the east, notably Syria, which would emerge as a central focus of future clashes with the Ptolemaic dynasty. The reallocation of authority reinforced the division of Alexander's empire into several Hellenistic kingdoms, each ruled by rival dynasties (Heinen & Walbank, 1984).

Ipsos underscored the tenuous nature of relationships among the Successors, as their cohesion was chiefly motivated by resistance to Antigonos rather than by common objectives. Subsequent to the conflict, fresh disputes arose, especially between the Seleucid and Ptolemaic kingdoms, regarding dominion over vital regions such as Coele-Syria. The persistent confrontations documented in historical fragments and inscriptions illustrate the lasting instability and rivalry characteristic of the Hellenistic period (Harding, 1985; Burstein, 1985).

The conflict highlighted the increasing significance of military innovation and logistics in determining the results of extensive warfare. The strategic deployment of war elephants, in conjunction with synchronised cavalry and infantry manoeuvres, impacted subsequent Hellenistic military confrontations. It emphasised the essential function of strategic alliances and resource mobilisation in shaping the power dynamics among the Successors.

The Battle of Ipsus is a pivotal event in Hellenistic history, altering territorial boundaries and the governmental framework of the ancient world. The defeat of Antigonos and the ensuing transfer of his domains facilitated the emergence of the Seleucid, Ptolemaic, and other Hellenistic dynasties, whose rivalries and achievements would characterise the post-Alexander period. As a pivotal event in the Wars of the Diadochi, Ipsus exemplifies the significant influence of military strategy and political ambition on the historical trajectory of the eastern Mediterranean.

## The Legacy of the Diadochi

The legacy of the Diadochi, successors of Alexander the Great, exemplifies the dispersion and alteration of his extensive empire. Following Alexander's demise in 323 BCE, a power vacuum arose, resulting in decades of strife among his generals, generally referred to as the Diadochi, who competed for dominion over his domains. This conflict ultimately led to the disintegration of the unified Macedonian Empire and the formation of multiple autonomous Hellenistic kingdoms. The most notable included Ptolemaic Egypt, the Seleucid Empire, and the Greco-Bactrian Kingdom. The shift from a singular empire to multiple kingdoms redefined the political landscape of the ancient world and established the foundation for the dissemination of Hellenistic culture (Gruen, 2018; Billows, 1996).

The Diadochi commenced solidifying their authority soon after Alexander's demise. Individuals like Ptolemy, Seleucus, Antigonos, and Lysimachus became prominent figures in the subsequent Wars of Succession. By 306 BCE, numerous generals had assumed royal titles, signifying their evolution from military commanders to sovereign rulers. This transition underscored the disintegration of Alexander's aspiration for a cohesive empire and the emergence of new, autonomous republics. Ptolemy I founded a dynasty in Egypt that endured for nearly three centuries, transforming Alexandria into a hub of scientific, artistic, and political progress. Simultaneously, Seleucus I established an extensive empire extending from Asia Minor to the Indus Valley, thereby founding the Seleucid dynasty, which served as a conduit between Greek and Eastern cultures. The Kingdom of Bactria, despite its geographical isolation, developed into a dynamic centre of cultural and economic interchange, amalgamating Greek, Persian, and Indian influences (Billows, 1996).

A significant element of the Diadochi's legacy is the dissemination of Hellenistic culture throughout the regions they ruled. The Greek language, art, architecture, and political concepts disseminated over varied locations, including Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Central Asia. The cultural merger termed Hellenization impacted local customs, resulting in a distinctive amalgamation of Greek and indigenous elements. The founding of cities such as Antioch and Seleucia functioned as hubs of cultural exchange and economic engagement, hence reinforcing the dissemination of Greek ideas and customs. The Hellenistic culture significantly advanced philosophy, science, and the arts, while also altering the identity of conquered countries and fostering enduring connectedness across the ancient globe (James, 2012).

The rivalry and political intricacies of the Diadochi period are clearly documented in historical writings. Authors like Diodorus Siculus offer essential perspectives on this era, elucidating the ambitions, betrayals, and alliances that characterised the power battles of the successors. These narratives not only underscore personal rivalry among individuals such as Ptolemy, Seleucus, and Antigonos but also mirror the wider geopolitical dynamics of the era. Contemporary analyses of these sources, (notably by Ip 2023 and Gallagher 2022).

underscore the lasting significance of the Diadochi's legacy, demonstrating how their acts influenced the trajectory of Hellenistic history.

Ultimately, the Diadochi inherited both Alexander's kingdom and the complexities of administering a big, culturally heterogeneous territory. Their achievement in founding lasting kingdoms altered the political and cultural framework of the ancient world. Despite the dissolution of Alexander's empire, the kingdoms established by him facilitated the preservation and evolution of his legacy. The amalgamation of Greek and indigenous traditions fostered by the Diadochi established a unique Hellenistic identity that persisted in shaping the Mediterranean and Near Eastern regions for millennia. This legacy, marked by fragmentation and creativity, highlights the significant and enduring influence of the Diadochi on the ancient world.

## Conclusion

The Diadochi era emerged as a significant convergence of military victories, political strategies, and a flourishing of artistic and intellectual creativity. The Hellenistic kingdoms became centres of cultural fusion, where Greek language, philosophical ideas, and artistic forms blended with local customs. Alexandria, Egypt, serves as a prime example a city founded by Alexander and then enhanced to remarkable magnificence under Ptolemaic governance. It emerged as a symbol of knowledge, exemplified by the renowned Library of Alexandria and its academic establishments, which integrated Greek intellectualism with the scientific and literary works of the ancient Near East. Similarly, the Seleucid Empire functioned as a crucial intermediary, uniting Mediterranean and Central Asian traditions. The Seleucid administration skilfully integrated Persian bureaucratic practices with Hellenistic principles, thereby maintaining control over a heterogeneous array of ethnic groups. Urban centres such as Antioch and Seleucia-on-the-Tigris exemplified this cultural syncretism, characterised by architectural excellence and artistic creativity.

The Diadochi left a significant legacy in military strategy and governance. Their persistent clashes prompted tactical advancements, including the strategic use of war elephants and the enhancement of siege warfare. These developments demonstrated the intricate complexity of Hellenistic militarism, significantly influencing the military doctrines of subsequent nations, such as Rome and Parthia. Moreover, their complex administrative systems for governing vast regions established models for subsequent empires, illustrating the adaptability of Alexander's core concepts in addressing changing geopolitical contexts.

Nonetheless, the long saga of the Diadochi exemplifies the dangers of unchecked ambition and persistent disintegration. The continuous internal conflicts among Alexander's successors progressively diminished the strength of their kingdoms, making them vulnerable to external invasions. By the 2nd century BCE, the rising might of Rome started to eclipse the Hellenistic realm, leading to the eventual subjection of these states under Roman control. The Seleucid Empire, once magnificent, declined under the combined might of Rome and Parthia, while Ptolemaic Egypt fell to Rome with the notable defeat of Cleopatra VII and Mark Antony at the Battle of Actium in 31 BCE.

The legacy of the Diadochi embodies a significant transformation. Although their aspirations fragmented Alexander's cohesive empire, they established the foundation for the Hellenistic period, characterised by exceptional cultural flourishing and complex political interactions. Their domains, created in the midst of conflict, formed essential links between the East and West, significantly impacting the course of history and leaving a lasting mark in the records of civilisation. The account of the Diadochi highlights the contradictory nature of human ambition, a power that can lead to remarkable achievements while simultaneously fostering unavoidable discord.

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