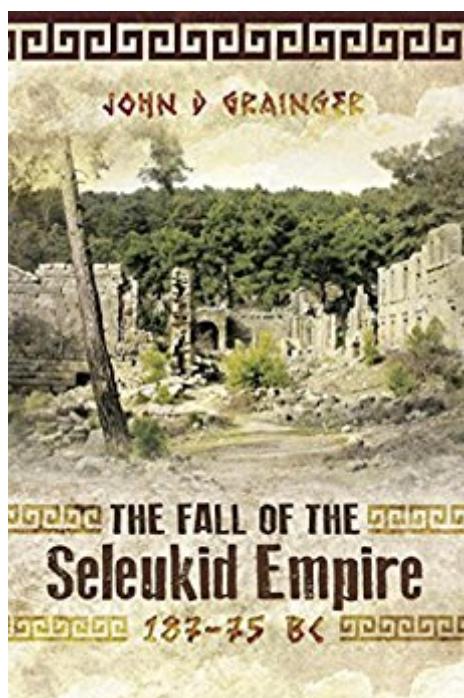


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# The Fall Of The Seleukid Empire 187-75 BC:



## **Synopsis**

The concluding part of John D Grainger's history of the Seleukids traces the tumultuous last century of their empire. In this period it was riven by dynastic disputes, secessions and rebellions, the religiously-inspired insurrection of the Jewish Maccabees, civil war and external invasion from Egypt in the West and the Parthians in the East. By the 80s BC, the empire was disintegrating, internally fractured and squeezed by the converging expansionist powers of Rome and Parthia. This is a fittingly, dramatic and colourful conclusion to John Grainger's masterful account of this once-mighty empire.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Review first posted on .co.uk on 14 December 2014 This is the third and last volume of John Grainger's history on the Seleucid Empire. It covers a period of a bit more than a century and it is probably the less known (and perhaps also the less studied) part of their history. The book, and the little-known story of the decline of a once-powerful Empire, has several considerable merits, and perhaps also a couple of problems. I have already mentioned the first of these merits. There are few, if any, modern and accessible accounts in English on the last century of the Seleucid Empire. The

second merit is to show that the decline and fall was not engineered by Rome, contrary to what is often still believed. One of the qualities of this book is precisely to show that the loss of Asia Minor and the peace treaty that Antiochus III had to sign following his defeat did not cripple his Empire. Asia Minor was not one of the core provinces of the Empire. The clauses of the treaty seem to have been largely ignored by the Seleucid King and his immediate successors and not enforced by the Romans, at least initially. In addition, the last Seleucid king was not deposed by the Romans but by Tigrane, King of Armenia, which was a kingdom that was once a vassal of the Seleucid Empire. The third merit is to identify the root cause of the Fall: the inability to resist and check the expansion of the Parthians, also once a vassal kingdom. However, John Grainger shows that this inability had little to do with military weakness. Instead, he identifies the main cause of the decline and fall as being the breakdown of the normal order of succession by which the King nominated his successor – “almost always his eldest surviving son.

This is a brief review of Vol. 3 of John Grainger's three volume work on the entire course of the Seleukid Kingdom. The full title is *The Fall of the Seleukid Empire 187-75 BC* by John D. Grainger; Pen and Sword, 2015. The third volume was a tougher read for me than the first two, mainly because of the unremitting series of disasters it chronicles. From the time Antiochus IV (of Biblical infamy) killed his nephew and seized the throne, there began what seems to have been an endless series of pretenders and rebellions, sometimes with as many as three or four candidates for the throne slugging it out at once. The institutions unifying the kingdom were enough to hold it more or less together for roughly 100 years, but the constant corrosive effect of the complete absence of any real legitimacy ultimately doomed the state. Grainger manages, somehow, to find what is interesting to tell about this slow-motion disaster. By painstakingly assembling the scant evidence, he manages to present a coherent chronicle of events, complete with fascinating glimpses into the character and motivation of the various participants. This book does provide a really thorough answer to that age old wargamer's question; if the Seleukid army was really as tough as most rules make it seem on the table, why did the Kingdom fall apart? The answer, according to Grainger, is that so long as the Kingdom was able to control its main sources of money and recruits, the army remained effective. Eventually, the constant friction caused by the unremitting civil wars eroded the manpower pool and tax base beyond what was sustainable.

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