

## Demetrius II and Antigonas III Doson

Demetrius II succeeded his father Antigonas II as king of Macedonia in 239 BC. Upon his rise to the throne, the Achaean League, an alliance of Greek cities in the Peloponnese fighting Macedonia and the tyrants it supported, joined forces with the Aetolian League, an alliance of Greek cities in central Greece, in an attempt to take advantage of the inexperience of the new king. The kingdom of Epirus (modern-day Albania) joined with these two leagues in an attempt to also gain from Macedonia's misfortunes. However, in the Demetrian War, Demetrius II scored a number of victories against this alliance, notably in Boeotia and Delphi. Ten years after he came to the throne, however, he confronted an invading tribe called the Dardanians, who killed him and defeated his army.

When Demetrius II died in 229 BC, his son Philip V was only nine years old. The Macedonian army and nobility, seeing the difficult position of their kingdom—with the Achaean and Aetolian Leagues threatening Macedonian control over Greece, the threat of Epirus in the west, and invasions of Illyrians and Dardanians coming from the north—decided that an experienced leader was necessary. They selected a cousin of Demetrius, Antigonas Doson, to act as the regent of Philip and take control of the government. He promptly proved himself an effective leader and defeated the Dardanians. Next he moved against Thessaly, which the Aetolians were encouraging to rebel. After subduing Thessaly, he married Demetrius's widow and, given the title of king, he became known as Antigonas III.

Perhaps Antigonas Doson's greatest achievement was reasserting Macedonian control over Greece. By the time he became king, the Achaean League under Aratus was suffering major setbacks. After numerous successful terms as leader of the league, Aratus came into conflict with Sparta and its reformist king, Cleomenes III, who had brought back the traditional Spartan military system (after the Theban general Epaminondas had freed the helots and disassembled it) and armed his soldiers in the new, Macedonian fashion. One by one, the cities of the Peloponnese fell to the Spartans. When Corinth surrendered to Sparta, the Achaean League collapsed. So, in order to fight the Spartans, Aratus surrendered his native Sicyon to Macedonia. A surprising and unprecedented alliance between the Achaean League and Macedonia was arranged, and Aratus and Antigonas III became allies and friends. Aratus's decision was unpopular among the Greek cities, but it succeeded. The Macedonians drove the Spartans out of the Peloponnesian cities, though in exchange Macedonia gained Corinth and political control over the region. From Corinth, Antigonas reformed the Hellenic League under Macedonian leadership. At the Battle of Sellasia in 222 BC, the combined armies of the Achaean League, the Hellenic League, and Macedonia under Antigonas Doson won a crushing victory over the Spartans, killing most of the invaluable Spartiates and forcing Cleomenes to flee and ultimately go into exile in Egypt. Sparta was reduced to irrelevance and would never recover.

In the meantime, Illyrian tribes invaded northern Macedonia. Antigonas rushed from the Peloponnese to meet them, and he defeated them in battle. He died soon after, either of bursting a blood vessel while shouting orders during the battle or from a sickness just after the battle. Thus, in 221 BC, Philip V, the son of Demetrius II,

assumed the throne. Antigonas Doson had left him a very strong kingdom that controlled most of Greece. Perhaps even more valuable to the new king, Antigonas Doson had never attempted to challenge his claim to the throne, and so Philip V enjoyed an uncontested rise to the kingship.

### *Summary*

- Demetrius II, the son of Antigonas II, ascended the throne in 239 BC. He won several victories over the enemies of the Macedonians, but he was killed in battle against the Dardanians in 229 BC.
- Upon the death of Demetrius II, his son Philip V was only nine years old. The Macedonian army and nobility therefore entrusted the kingdom to a cousin of Demetrius, Antigonas Doson. He acted as the regent of Philip and eventually married the widow of Demetrius II and became king, known as Antigonas III.
- Antigonas III built an alliance with Macedonia's former enemy Aratus and his Achaean League of Greek cities.
- In cooperation with the Achaeans, Antigonas III crushed the resurgent Spartans under Cleomenes III at the Battle of Sellasia in 222 BC.
- The next year, Antigonas III died after a battle against the Dardanians, leaving Philip V a stronger Macedonia.