HIST 1421-01 Greek and Roman Civilization

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**Question**

Concerning the Egyptian Queen Cleopatra, it is stated in World History Encyclopedia “she was simply on the wrong side of a power struggle” (Wasson, 2016).

* Which power struggle is the author referring to here?
* Being in Cleopatra’s shoes, what would you have done to avoid the Roman conquest of Egypt?

The Roman Empire's conquest of Syria, from 192 to 188 BCE, was part of Rome's expansion into Asia. During this period, Antiochus III, ruling the Seleucid Empire in Syria, faced the challenge of avoiding conflict with Rome. This essay explores the actions Antiochus III could have taken to avert war with Rome, considering the actions he did take and the resulting war.

**Background of the Conflict with Rome**

Before the conquest of Syria, Rome had been expanding its control over the Mediterranean world, demonstrating its military power through the Macedonian Wars and the Punic Wars with Carthage (Eckstein, 2008). Meanwhile, Antiochus III was attempting to restore and expand the Seleucid Empire's territory through conflicts with the Ptolemaic Kingdom of Egypt and eastern campaigns. This convergence of interests led to the eventual clash between Rome and the Seleucid Empire.

**Potential Actions by Antiochus III**

Diplomatic Approach with Rome

One primary method Antiochus III could have employed to avoid war was a diplomatic approach. By sending envoys to Rome to negotiate a peaceful relationship, Antiochus III might have mitigated Roman hostility. Proposing compromises such as paying tribute or ceding some territory could have been a viable path to prevent conflict (Grainger, 1990). Additionally, he could have sought to establish treaties that acknowledged Rome's growing influence while securing the autonomy of the Seleucid Empire. Engaging in regular diplomatic exchanges and establishing mutual interests would have created a foundation for peaceful coexistence.

Stabilizing Domestic Affairs

Antiochus III should have also focused on stabilizing his own kingdom. Strengthening the economy and military, while ensuring internal unity, would have prepared the Seleucid Empire to better withstand external pressures. A stable and prosperous state would have been more resilient in facing Roman demands and aggression. Economic reforms to increase revenue and improve infrastructure would have bolstered the kingdom’s capacity to sustain prolonged negotiations or potential conflict. Additionally, consolidating power by ensuring loyalty among local governors and integrating diverse ethnic groups within the empire would have strengthened internal cohesion and reduced vulnerabilities to external manipulation.

Alliances with Other Major Powers

Moreover, Antiochus III could have sought to strengthen alliances with other major powers. Cooperation with Macedonia and other Hellenistic kingdoms would have created a formidable front against Rome. Such alliances would have provided a collective deterrent, making Rome more hesitant to engage in conflict with a united coalition. Forming a grand coalition through strategic marriages, military pacts, and economic agreements would have created a powerful network of allies. This network could offer military support, share intelligence, and create multiple fronts for Rome to consider, thus diffusing its efforts and reducing the likelihood of direct confrontation with the Seleucid Empire alone.

**Specific Strategies and Their Feasibility**

Analyzing the benefits and risks of each action reveals that the diplomatic approach posed relatively low risk and could have been an effective means of avoiding war. Diplomatic negotiations would have allowed Antiochus III to address Roman concerns directly, potentially leading to mutually beneficial agreements. However, if Rome remained intransigent, stabilizing domestic affairs and forging alliances with other powers were also crucial. The stabilization of domestic affairs would not only strengthen the empire internally but also project an image of resilience and strength, discouraging Roman aggression. Alliances with other major powers would have created a formidable bloc capable of challenging Rome’s dominance, making any potential conflict less appealing to Rome. By combining these strategies, Antiochus III could have pursued multiple avenues to prevent a direct confrontation with Rome, ensuring a multi-layered defense against Roman expansion.

**Conclusion**

To avoid conflict with Rome, Antiochus III needed to employ a combination of diplomatic initiatives, domestic stabilization, and strengthening alliances with other major powers. Through these actions, he could have averted war and ensured the Seleucid Empire's survival and prosperity. Reflecting on these alternative choices offers valuable lessons for contemporary diplomatic strategies. A multifaceted approach, balancing diplomacy, internal stability, and external alliances, remains a timeless strategy for preserving peace and maintaining sovereignty in the face of powerful adversaries.

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References

1. Eckstein, A. M. (2008). *Rome Enters the Greek East: From Anarchy to Hierarchy in the Hellenistic Mediterranean, 230-170 BC.* Wiley-Blackwell.
2. Grainger, J. D. (1990). *The Roman War of Antiochus the Great.* Brill.