

## 086: The Attalid Kingdom of Pergamon

For the past five years, our show has been fixated on the main three dynasties of the Hellenistic Age, namely the Antigonids, the Seleucids, and the Ptolemies. By the end of the third century, a new player emerged on the scene to shake up the established balance of power. I am of course referring to the Attalid dynasty, who ruled from the city of Pergamon in northwestern Asia Minor from 281 until 133 B.C.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps they aren't as famous as their rivals, but the Attalids were central figures in the affairs of the third and second centuries, chiefly through their involvement with the Roman Republic. They were Hellenistic monarchs par-excellence, with evidence of their patronage and kingly activities well documented in the archaeological record, and Pergamon became one of the most important cities in the cultural fabric of the ancient world. In this episode, let us discuss the history of the Pergamene kingdom down to the Roman intervention in Greece, but we can also look at the activities of the Attalid kings to see how they managed to assert their authority and identity in the face of fierce competition. I also strongly encourage you to look through the episode transcript, which contains a large number of supplementary materials. Many of the photos I've included were taken during my travels in Greece and Italy, and I have been recently trying to beef up the transcripts to better aid in your understanding. Please do check those out, but for now, let us continue.

Pergamon's history dates back to the very beginning of the Hellenistic period. Situated adjacent to the modern city of Bergama in western Turkey (approximately seventy kilometers north of Izmir), known in antiquity as the region of Mysia, it was host to a settlement that existed prior to the Macedonian conquest.<sup>2</sup> Control of the city fell to the Successors of Alexander following his death and was initially overseen by Antigonus Monophthalmus, before it was betrayed by Antigonus' commander Docimus to Lysimachus prior to the Battle of Ipsus in 301 BC, who turned Pergamon into his treasury.<sup>3</sup> One of Docimus' staff members that defected along with him to Lysimachus was Philetaerus, the son of a Macedonian named Attalus and a Paphlagonian woman from the city of Tios.<sup>4</sup> This man is the founder of the Attalid dynasty, though his origins are extremely unusual: it is said that as a small child, Philetaerus was caught up in a crowd crush that resulted in severe damage to his genitals, leaving him a eunuch.<sup>5</sup> How this affected his life can only be speculated on, but given that the Greeks generally viewed eunuchs with scorn or ridicule, it probably was a tougher upbringing.<sup>6</sup> The name "Philetaerus" means "lover of friends", which probably reflects his social status as a eunuch considering his brothers Attalus and Eumenes bore traditional masculine names.<sup>7</sup>

Despite this, Lysimachus trusted Philetaerus enough to appoint him as overseer of Pergamon, and therefore his vast stores of bullion. Their working relationship was amicable for the next few decades, at least until the late 280s. According to the historians, Philetaerus was at odds with the king's young Ptolemaic wife, Arsinoe II, who was accused of stirring up trouble in Lysimachus' family to further her

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<sup>1</sup> The choice to present the name as Pergamon versus Pergamum is a matter of preference, and for the sake of convenience I will go with the former.

<sup>2</sup> Xenophon, *Hellenika*, 3.1.6; Xenophon, *Anabasis*, 7.8.8; OGIS 264a, Burstein, S. (1986): 107; Cohen, G.M. (1995): 168-170

<sup>3</sup> Strabo, 13.4.1; Pausanias, 1.8.1; Diodorus Siculus, 20.107.4

<sup>4</sup> Strabo, 12.3.8; Pausanias, 1.8.1; Athenaeus, 13.577b; OGIS 264b, Burstein, S. (1986): 107; See Figure 1 for a bust attributed to him.

<sup>5</sup> Strabo, 13.4.1

<sup>6</sup> Strabo himself expresses his prejudice by stating that Philetaerus' trustworthiness was *in spite* of his status as of a eunuch.

<sup>7</sup> Evans, R. (2012): 10

own ends. This internal strife led to a final confrontation between Lysimachus and Seleucus I Nicator at the Battle of Corupedium in 281, which concluded with Lysimachus' defeat and death. Strabo claims that Philetaerus rebelled from Lysimachus and proclaimed himself master of the city during the strife, while Pausanias states that he defected over to the Seleucid side on the eve of the battle, which took place not that far from Pergamon.<sup>8</sup> It is possible that both stories are true, where Philetaerus declared independence from Lysimachus before allying with Seleucus, as evidence does suggest a favorable relationship with the Seleucid house: after Seleucus was murdered by his former ally Ptolemy Keraunos shortly following the victory at Corupedium, Philetaerus stepped in to offer Ptolemy enough cash to buy back the body, and after performing a proper cremation he sent king's ashes to his son Antiochus for interment in Syria.<sup>9</sup>

With both Lysimachus and Seleucus out of the picture, Philetaerus was now the ruling dynast of Pergamon, a king in all but name for the next eighteen years. An inscription from Delphi honored him and his household for some kind of donation to the sanctuary, and there are letters from the nearby city of Kyme thanking him for the contribution of six hundred shields for their defense, a sort of euergetism that was typical for any self-styled Greek ruler.<sup>10</sup> Asia Minor itself was quite unique in its political structure though, for we find many examples of local strongmen acting with the power of a monarchy but still serving the interests of larger Hellenistic kingdoms. Pergamon was almost certainly a vassal state to the Seleucid Empire, as there are coins minted by Philetaerus with his name but bearing the portrait of Seleucus I.<sup>11</sup> Later on we find Philetaerus' portrait on them as well, but the ability to mint coins under similar circumstances was a phenomenon that could be found in other client kingdoms of the Seleucids, such as the Diodotids of Bactria or the Arsacids of Parthia.<sup>12</sup> By offering these royal privileges, the Seleucids would expect these local rulers to oversee the defense of their territory and contribute to the empire's military without the additional strain on the central government.

Given his inability to have any children of his own, Philetaerus adopted his nephew Eumenes, who took over rule of Pergamon after Philetaerus' death in 263.<sup>13</sup> While the Seleucids may have accepted Philetaerus' position, they seem to have been less keen on his appointed heir, as Eumenes appears to have taken liberties by expanding his privileges further, such as the founding of military colonies named Attaleia and Philetaireia.<sup>14</sup> According to Strabo, this was enough of a concern for Seleucus' son Antiochus I to warrant his direct intervention. A battle was fought between Eumenes and Antiochus at nearby Sardis, but the Pergamene ruler was able to best the Syrian king's army.<sup>15</sup> This clash is often taken to be the point at which the Attalid dynasty broke away from Seleucid control, but the extent of the fighting seems to be very small in scale, and it seems improbable that Pergamon could muster enough of an army to contend with the massive numbers of the empire. It was likely a test of Seleucid authority, one

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<sup>8</sup> Strabo, 13.4.1; Pausanias, 1.10.3-4

<sup>9</sup> Appian, *The Syrian Wars*, 63

<sup>10</sup> I. Delphi, 432; Burstein, S. (1986): 108; SEG 50.1195; Chrubasik, B. (2013): 88-89

<sup>11</sup> ANS 1967.152.413, see Figure 2

<sup>12</sup> ANS 1943.69.5, see Figure 3; Chrubasik, B. (2016): 26-34

<sup>13</sup> Strabo, 13.4.2

<sup>14</sup> OGIS 266; It's debated whether the founder of these settlements was Philetaerus, see Chrubasik, B. (2016): 29-30, or Eumenes I, see Cohen, G.M. (1995): 171

<sup>15</sup> Strabo, 13.4.2; Phylarcus the Ptolemaic court historian may have written about this battle as well, see *Suda*, Phi. 828

which ultimately allowed Eumenes to retain his position and expanded autonomy, and his victory (small though it may have been) was enough to be celebrated by Attalid court historians.<sup>16</sup>

We have little information about Eumenes' activities from 263 to 241 beyond his brief conflict with Antiochus, but an inscription from Pergamon records a series of concessions made for his mercenaries, who might have revolted early in his reign.<sup>17</sup> Like his predecessor, Eumenes did not have any children of his own, instead passing the throne to his nephew Attalus I.<sup>18</sup> Attalus is the longest-ruling and perhaps the greatest of the Attalid kings.<sup>19</sup> His father was Eumenes' first cousin, but his mother was Antiochis, the daughter of a local dynast named Achaeus the Elder, who was intimately tied up in the Seleucid royal family.<sup>20</sup> Along with being linked to two important houses of Asia Minor, historians record omens and stories of his early life. As a young man he consulted the Oracle of Delphi, and he was said to have received the following advice:

*Courage, O bull-horned one, you will have regal honours, and the son of your son will have them too, but your great-grandsons will not.*<sup>21</sup>

By the beginning of his career in 241, the rulers of Pergamon had yet to acquire the title of kings in their own right, but an opportunity soon presented itself that allowed Attalus to make a bid for the diadem. Since the days of Philetaerus, Asia Minor had perpetually dealt with ongoing attacks from a group known as the Galatians. These were the descendants of Celtic tribes that came from Central Europe and crossed the Bosphorus into Asia Minor during the early 270s, causing severe havoc throughout Greece and Asia Minor.<sup>22</sup> Antiochus I managed to best them in the famous Battle of the Elephants in roughly 275/274, whereupon they were settled in central Anatolia, a region generally known as Galatia thereafter.<sup>23</sup> In spite of their defeat and settlement, these tribes would launch raids against their neighbors, including Pergamon. Philetaerus fought them at least once, and we know that his donation of shields to Kyme was intended to help defend against Galatian attacks.<sup>24</sup>

In approximately 239, one of the Galatian tribes known as the Tolistobogii invaded Pergamene territory, before being driven back and defeated by Attalus near the Kaikos River. Attalus used this victory to take the title of king and adopt the epithet *Soter* ("Savior"), an event which he immortalized through a series of inscriptions on his altar.<sup>25</sup> The Galatians were seen as the antithesis of Greek civilization, having terrorized much of Asia Minor for over two decades, and their defeat enabled Attalus' claim of kingship. The association of Attalus with Delphi was no coincidence: the holy sanctuary was famously the target of the initial Gallic invasion of 278, and many Hellenistic kings wanted to paint themselves as the avenger of Delphi (and by extension the god Apollo) by celebrating their victories over the Celts.<sup>26</sup> Attalus was

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<sup>16</sup> Evans, R. (2012): 14-18; Chrubasik, B. (2013): 93-95 Grainger, J.D. (2012): 168-169 notes that Sardis was a Seleucid capital, and thus it is possible that Eumenes invaded Seleucid territory.

<sup>17</sup> OGIS 266

<sup>18</sup> See Figure 4

<sup>19</sup> Athenaeus, 445c-d claims that Eumenes I died of alcoholism

<sup>20</sup> Strabo, 13.4.2

<sup>21</sup> Diodorus Siculus, 35.13

<sup>22</sup> Pausanias, 10.19.4-23.9;

<sup>23</sup> Appian, *Syrian Wars*, 65; Grainger, J.D. (2019)

<sup>24</sup> OGIS 748; SEG 50.1195

<sup>25</sup> OGIS 273, 276; Livy, 38.16.13; Polybius, 18.41.7; Strabo, 13.4.2; Polyaeus, 4.20; Justin, 27.3.1 incorrectly names Eumenes, rather than Antiochus.

<sup>26</sup> For example, Ptolemy II Philadelphus in Callimachus, *Hymns*, 4.162-176

arguably the most successful of these propagandists, and Pausanias records a prophecy allegedly recited during the time of the invasion nearly twenty years before the Pergamene king was even born:

*Look! The deathly army of the Gauls  
at Hellespont, leaping the narrow roads,  
roaring for battle and the sack of Asia!  
A little while the god shall put worse shame  
on you who live beside the sea's beaches;  
and Zeus shall raise you a swift ally:  
the loved son of the god-nourished bull will set  
a day of destruction for all Gaul.<sup>27</sup>*

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With the Galatians defeated, and now formally wearing the title of king, Attalus ought to have expected some form of retaliation from the new Seleucid ruler, Seleucus II Callinicus. However, the neighboring empire was experiencing its own turmoil, for having just recovered from the disastrous Third Syrian War, Seleucus' younger brother Antiochus Hierax snatched much of Asia Minor in his own bid for power immediately afterwards.<sup>28</sup> The so-called "War of the Brothers" concluded with an uneasy peace in 239, but Antiochus looked flex his newfound authority from his capital at Sardis. What follows is a poorly documented period of about fifteen years: according to Attalus' own inscriptions, he fought at least three battles against Antiochus and his Galatian allies between 239 and 228.<sup>29</sup> The final battle resulted in Attalus driving out Hierax from Asia Minor altogether by 227, who was killed shortly afterwards in an unrelated incident.<sup>30</sup>

Though the Pergamene kingdom had managed to capture some of the westernmost portions of Seleucid Anatolia during the wars against Antiochus Hierax, Attalus was still limited from expanding much further than beyond the borders that were overseen by his predecessors. Seleucus II died shortly after Antiochus Hierax, and was replaced with Seleucus III Ceraunus in 225, who planned a reconquest of Asia Minor. Skirmishes between the Pergamene king and Seleucid officials are recorded, but the expedition was cut short when Seleucus III was murdered by one of his commanders in 223.<sup>31</sup> The new young ruler Antiochus III was left to manage a crumbling empire, and in Asia Minor a new threat arose once again: Achaeus the Younger, a cousin of both Antiochus III and Attalus by way of the eponymous Achaeus the Elder. Like Antiochus Hierax, Achaeus declared himself king and sought mastery over Anatolia.

Once again, Pergamon was in the sights of an upstart Seleucid rebel. War broke out almost immediately between the two, but Attalus did not fare as well against Achaeus as he did Hierax. Achaeus seems to have retaken much of Attalus' territorial gains, and drove the Pergamene king back to his city around 222.<sup>32</sup> During the interim of 222 – 218, Achaeus busied himself with the affairs of other local powers like Bithynia and Byzantium, while Attalus made a personal visit to the cities of the Ionian coastline to try and win over their alliance. He even tried to bolster his military forces by hiring a large group of Galatian warriors, but his efforts to try and launch a counterattack ended in failure when the Celts were

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<sup>27</sup> Pausanias, 10.15.2; Translation by Levi, P. (1971): 444

<sup>28</sup> Justin, 27.2

<sup>29</sup> OGIS 274, OGIS 275, OGIS 278, OGIS 279, OGIS 280

<sup>30</sup> Justin, 27.3.1

<sup>31</sup> Polybius, 4.48.6-8, 5.41.2; OGIS 277

<sup>32</sup> Polybius, 4.48.10-13

convinced by an eclipse that it was unwise to do so. Rather than have them turn to Achaeus as a paymaster, he was forced to settle these tribesmen on Pergamene farmland.<sup>33</sup>

By 217, the future of Attalus looked grim. An unexpected windfall came into his lap, however, when a message from Antiochus III arrived at his court at the end of that year seeking an alliance. The Seleucid ruler had returned from his war against Egypt, only to immediately launch a campaign of reconquest to destroy Achaeus and restore the empire to its former glory.<sup>34</sup> Certainly the two dynasties had their disagreements, but this usurper was an existential threat to both of them, and they could easily set aside their differences to unite against a common foe. From the start of 216, the pair coordinated in a joint campaign to strike at the holdings of Achaeus, who was eventually captured and summarily executed following the siege of Sardis in 213.<sup>35</sup>

With Achaeus now dead, the Syrian king departed for the east, not to return to Asia Minor for another ten years. Presumably he and Attalus came to a mutual understanding, and much like their predecessors, the Pergamene ruler probably was left in a semi-autonomous position that was nominally allied with the Seleucids, albeit with much greater independence than his forebears. It was in Antiochus' best interest for someone to protect his western borders, given that he was going to be spending the next decade campaigning in Iran and Central Asia – though we know that he appointed one of his top officials named Zeuxis to act as his representative in Anatolia, lest the Attalid king get any funny ideas.<sup>36</sup> Though this uneasy coexistence would only last through the rest of Attalus' lifetime, it also meant that he was unable to expand his kingdom any further into Asia Minor.

Therefore, it was only fitting that he would look westward across the Aegean. Philip V of Macedon, the leading figure in Greece, kickstarted a war with the rising power of the Roman Republic in 215 by allying with Hannibal Barca of Carthage. The First Roman-Macedonian War gradually escalated in scale, and almost the entire peninsula was dragged into the conflict, with the Romans allying with the Aetolian League against Philip and the Achaean League. Other players eventually got involved, and Pergamon was one of them. It seems that Rome courted for an alliance with Attalus, who accepted the proposal and joined the war in 209. Attalus' responsibility was to provide money and manpower to the Aetolian League, who oversaw most of the fighting but honored the king with the position of *strategos*. Much of his personal involvement was rather limited, though we know that he was almost captured by Phillip when the Macedonians interrupted their invasion of Euboea. Shortly after this defeat came the news that his neighbor, King Prusias of Bithynia, led a campaign into Mysia and directly threatened Pergamon in 207, forcing him to abandon his Greek expedition.<sup>37</sup> Though his time war was brief, this was a major turning point for the history of the Attalid kingdom: it was their first foray outside of Asia Minor, and their involvement in the wider Hellenistic world would only continue to increase over the next seventy-five years. To encourage his assistance against Philip, the Roman Republic sold to Attalus the island of Aegina, situated only thirty kilometers south of Athens, for a relatively small sum of thirty talents, and it became the first overseas territory and hub for Pergamon's developing navy.<sup>38</sup> It also marked the

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<sup>33</sup> Polybius, 5.77-78

<sup>34</sup> Polybius, 5.107.4

<sup>35</sup> Polybius, 8.21.1-3

<sup>36</sup> Grainger, J.D. (2015): 82-83

<sup>37</sup> Cassius Dio, 17.58; Polybius, 11.7.1; Livy, 28.7.9

<sup>38</sup> Polybius 22.8.9-10; OGIS 281; See Figure 5

beginning of their long relationship with Rome, which would directly impact the kingdom's history down to its very last days.

Attalus was the first of ruler of Asia to formally extend his friendship to Rome, though their earliest dealings were almost entirely transactional and limited to the duration of the First Macedonian War.<sup>39</sup> Yet in 205, the Roman Senate sent an embassy to Attalus' court requesting his assistance once again. An oracle from the Sibylline Books foretold that the Romans would be able to drive out the invaders of Italy if the Great Mother was brought from Pessinus in Asia Minor to Rome. This "Great Mother" was an Anatolian Mother Goddess known to the Greeks as Cybele and *Magna Mater* in Latin, and it appears that the Romans were looking to acquire a large black stone (perhaps a meteorite) that was her most sacred totem. Attalus honored their past friendship, and assisted the Romans in its retrieval.<sup>40</sup> The connections between Pergamon and Rome would become increasingly complex as the dramatic shakeups of the next fifteen years – namely the Second Macedonian War and the Syrian War – would lead to Attalus and his successors allying further with the expanding power of the Republic so they could strengthen their own position. While Attalus I will continue to feature as a key figure, I want to hold off on discussing the rest of the Attalid dynasty until we move forward with the overall narrative, since they are so tightly wound up in the affairs of the second century. Why don't we instead take a closer look at the Pergamene Kingdom, and see how the Attalids were able to turn their small dominion into one of the most culturally and economically vibrant realms of the ancient world.

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The Attalids are simultaneously one of the most unorthodox dynasties of the time, yet also operated within much the same paradigms as their contemporary monarchs. Alongside the Diodotids and Euthydemids of Bactria, the Attalids were one of the first Greek families to establish themselves as kings in the Hellenistic period outside of the Successor dynasties, who traced their lines back to the generals of Alexander. Though his family was of humbler origins than the Macedonian aristocracy, Attalus was the first to officially take the title of king after his military victory over the Galatians, a practice that was seen as an acceptable form of legitimacy.<sup>41</sup> As a military monarchy, the Attalids personally led their armies in campaigns throughout western Asia. Their more hostile neighbors included the Greco-Thracian kingdom of Bithynia to the north, the Iranian kingdom of Pontus, the fierce Celtic tribes of Galatia, independent dynasts like Antiochus Hierax and Achaeus the Younger, and eventually the Antigonids and Seleucids. As we shall see in a moment, the Attalids emphasized their role as the saviors of the Greeks from the barbarian menace, and played it up to full capacity. This was certainly a smarter idea than trying to use victories against any Seleucid ruler as the basis of their authority, given the relationship that they shared for much of the third century, and the possible threat of a full-on invasion. This doesn't mean that they weren't above recruiting from these same barbarians, as it is unlikely that the Attalids could draw upon communities of Greco-Macedonian settlers like Ptolemies or the Seleucids, so their armies were a collection of mercenaries of diverse origins and local communities in Western Asia.<sup>42</sup> They were also pragmatists (or hypocrites), as they willingly hired Galatian warriors to make full use of their skill in battle – or perhaps out of a desire to redirect the Celt's zeal for raiding to their neighbors rather than Pergamon.

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<sup>39</sup> Polybius, 21.20.3; Livy, 29.11.1-3; Gruen, E.S. (1984): 530-531

<sup>40</sup> Livy, 29.10.4-11.8

<sup>41</sup> Grainger, J.D. (2017): 1-17; Eckstein, A.M. (2006): 84-88

<sup>42</sup> Ma, J. (2013): 62-75

In comparison to the other Hellenistic dynasties, succession among the Attalid rulers was very unusual, given how harmonious the family dynamics were.<sup>43</sup> As I mentioned earlier, the dynasty's honored founder Philetaerus was a eunuch and unable to have children, and so his position went to his nephew-turned-adopted son Eumenes I. Eumenes in turn passed it to another nephew, Attalus I Soter, and it became more straightforward as the rest of the rulers were his direct descendants. At the time of his death, he had two adult sons named Eumenes and Attalus, which would normally invite civil war in almost any other circumstance, but the younger Attalus deferred to his older brother's appointment and served as a valuable ally, a move which probably helped earn him the epithet *Philadelphus* ("one who loves his brother").<sup>44</sup> A famous incident took place during the Third Macedonian War where false rumors of Eumenes' assassination led Attalus to taking the Pergamene throne, only to voluntarily return it when his brother proved to be alive and well.<sup>45</sup> When Eumenes actually died, the newly-crowned Attalus II married his sister-in-law and ruled in place for his young nephew Attalus III, but refused to have any children who could challenge his legitimacy.<sup>46</sup> It's quite likely that the Attalids were keen to circulate these stories (staged or otherwise) to emphasize the unity of their family over the violence that gripped the Seleucid and Ptolemaic houses.<sup>47</sup>

Attalid royal women are less understood, but clearly played an important role in the family's presentation as a unified body.<sup>48</sup> The most interesting is Apollonis, wife of Attalus I, who was apparently a commoner from the nearby city of Cyzicus that was married and elevated to the royal position.<sup>49</sup> Polybius gives high praises to Apollonis, describing her as a virtuous woman who never forgot her humble origins and an excellent mother to her sons. In a very publicized display of familial values, Attalus II and Eumenes II brought Apollonis back to Cyzicus and walked hand-in-hand with her to visit each of the city's temples, as the citizens cheered out of admiration.<sup>50</sup> This piety between mother and sons is a common theme in Attalid propaganda, and even kings like Attalus III are known by the epithet *Philometor*, "one who loves his mother".<sup>51</sup>

There is evidence of a royal cult centered around the Attalid household. An inscription honors a Pergamene resident named Menodoros, who served as a councilman and priest of Philetaerus, hence suggesting an official body dedicated to the veneration of the kings.<sup>52</sup> Attalus I received the epithet *Soter* for his victories over the Galatians, cult statues of the rulers were placed in various temples throughout the Greek-speaking world, and queens like Apollonis were also deified upon their deaths.<sup>53</sup> Festivals like the Attaleia and Nikephoria were sponsored and celebrated much like the Pan-Hellenic games of other

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<sup>43</sup> A complete list of kings is available under Appendix 1

<sup>44</sup> See Figures 6 and 7; Polybius 18.41.10 indicates that Attalus had a total of *four* adult sons, who all apparently supported Eumenes' appointment!

<sup>45</sup> Plutarch, *Moralia*, 489e-490a

<sup>46</sup> OGIS 264c

<sup>47</sup> Kosmetatou, E. (2003): 168-170

<sup>48</sup> Mirón, D. (2020)

<sup>49</sup> "Commoner" likely means "non-royal", Apollonis was probably from a well-to-do family in Cyzicus, and the marriage could have been a political arrangement for Attalus to try and gain the loyalty of this city.

<sup>50</sup> Polybius, 22.20; Plutarch, *Moralia*, 480c; Kosmetatou, E. (2003): 168

<sup>51</sup> OGIS 338

<sup>52</sup> SEG 50.1211

<sup>53</sup> Palagia, O. (2020): 74-88; Mirón, D. (2020): 212-213

Hellenistic monarchs.<sup>54</sup> These institutions must have been developing during the early history of the kingdom, but it is likely that the Attalids were able to expand their more ceremonial roles as the traditional Hellenistic dynasties began to decline in power.

The collapse of Seleucid authority in Asia Minor following the Treaty of Apamea in 188 allowed the Attalid kingdom to grow tremendously rich, and the region they cultivated was the wealthiest province of the Roman Republic until the conquest of Egypt. One of the most dramatic changes was the introduction of a closed monetary economy sometime in the early third century.<sup>55</sup> Like Ptolemaic Egypt, the Attalids minted a series of coins that were to be exclusively used within the borders of their kingdom, and in order to do business, any prospective traders had to exchange their own currency for Pergamene coinage, often at high rates. Many of the dynasty's earlier coins bore images of those like Philetærus, Attalus, or even Alexander the Great, but the emphasis on royal portraits declined during the latter half of the kingdom's existence. Eumenes II had authorized the creation of a brand-new coin type, the *cistophoros*, which removed much of the standard Hellenistic portraiture in favor of Dionysian images of writhing serpents surrounding a bow-case.<sup>56</sup>

Most silver coins in the Hellenistic world were minted on or near the Attic standard, about 4.31g for a drachma and about 17.26g for a tetradrachm.<sup>57</sup> By contrast, the *cistophoros* was only the weight of three Attic drachmae, but possessed a value within the kingdom equivalent to a tetradrachm (a 25% overvaluation). These were exclusively used in the closed currency system of the later Attalid rulers, and scholars have hypothesized a number of factors for this change. After the Treaty of Apamea, the kingdom had greatly expanded from the Bosphorus to the Taurus Mountains in a very short time – a smaller denomination would enable faster production of coins to better integrate the newer territories into the Pergamene economy and administration. If the kings could also get the same result but use fewer precious metals per strike, then that would go hand-in-hand with the closed currency system that prevented the supply of silver from being circulated abroad.<sup>58</sup> It also has been suggested that the decision to de-emphasize the militarism of royal figures on the coinage may be due to the growing influence of Rome, who could have frowned upon an ally expressing themselves in such ambitious terms, but this is only speculative.

The system was extremely successful, and Attalus III posthumously bequeathed to the Romans an enormously wealthy province. Cicero would refer to the tax revenues brought in from the former Pergamene kingdom as the “sinews of the Republic”, a colorful description of what clearly was one of the most important sources of income for the developing Roman Empire.<sup>59</sup>

Given their newfound wealth, they allocated much of their surplus silver to sponsor extensive construction projects in both their capital and other cities across the Greek world. Pergamon itself possessed a magnificent acropolis, and its most striking surviving feature is the theater, the steepest in

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<sup>54</sup> SIG 672, 35-38

<sup>55</sup> Meadows, A. (2013)

<sup>56</sup> de Callataÿ, F. (2013): 218-231; See Figure 8, ANS 1951.5.1

<sup>57</sup> In reality, the standard was slowly trimmed down over the centuries – the tetradrachm at this time may have been 16.8 g, as per de Callataÿ, F. (2013): 219 – but the proportionality remains the same.

<sup>58</sup> Meadows, A. (2013): 202-204

<sup>59</sup> Cicero, *De Lege Manilia*, 7



antiquity – its highest row is situated nearly 36 meters (118 feet) above the orchestra, and could perhaps hold up to ten thousand spectators.<sup>60</sup> We know that queens like Apollonis were benefactresses in Pergamon as well, such as the renovation of temples to goddesses like Demeter and Kore.<sup>61</sup>

Like the Ptolemaic rulers of Alexandria, Eumenes II endeavored to build a library, which became one of the great storehouses of knowledge in antiquity. According to Pliny the Elder, the Ptolemies were so concerned about the Alexandrian library being eclipsed by that of Pergamon that they banned the export of papyrus outright, hoping that it would slow down their rival's copyists. In response to the sudden shortage of writing materials, the Pergamene scholars are said to have created parchment, a sort of paper-like material made from untanned and split animal skins.<sup>62</sup> While the invention of parchment most likely predates the second century B.C., it is very possible that its production expanded rapidly under the Attalid rulers and became associated with the region – the word "parchment" is a derivation of the medieval Latin "*pergamentum*", the classical Latin "*pergamena*", and the Greek "*pergamenos*", which essentially means "of Pergamon".<sup>63</sup> Mark Antony was said to have gifted Cleopatra two hundred thousand scrolls from the city's library, perhaps intending to restock the Alexandrian library after it was damaged in a fire that broke out during Julius Caesar's siege, and it is likely that the Pergamene library never recovered from this act.<sup>64</sup>

Looking outside of their immediate kingdom, Athens is one of the most well-attested recipients of Attalid euergetism.<sup>65</sup> On the southern slopes of the Acropolis and adjacent to the ancient theatre are the scant remains of a stoa, a covered walkway intending to provide shade for passersby. This one was commissioned by Eumenes II to offer shelter for theatergoers, but little of it survives.<sup>66</sup> By contrast, we can see another stoa in its full splendor in the city's ancient agora, known as the Stoa of Attalus II. The building itself is a modern reconstruction based upon the original foundations, acting as a museum to house many artifacts discovered in the area, and contains a surviving inscription recording the dedication by Attalus and his queen Apollonis.<sup>67</sup> The Athenians meanwhile honored the Attalids with cult statues and the enrollment of a new tribes known as the Attalis and Apollonieis.<sup>68</sup> Delphi also held a special relationship with Pergamon: court historians made a conscious effort to paint Attalus I as the avenger of Delphi from their attack by the Celts and weave his early life with the Pythia's prophecies. Inscriptions show that the Attalids sponsored a large educational endowment for the sanctuary's residents, and the Delphians in turn set up equestrian statues as a gesture of appreciation.<sup>69</sup>

The wealth of the Attalids also attracted groups of artists to their capital, generally referred to by modern art historians as the "Pergamene School".<sup>70</sup> These master craftsmen were renowned for their sculpture

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<sup>60</sup> See Figures 9 and 10

<sup>61</sup> I. Pergamon 170

<sup>62</sup> Pliny the Elder, 13.21/13.70

<sup>63</sup> Harper, D. (2022)

<sup>64</sup> Plutarch, *Life of Antony*, 58.5; It is important to recognize that this was included in a list of accusations thrown by a political enemy of Mark Antony, many of which were believed to be false, so the truth of this statement is hard to verify.

<sup>65</sup> Worthington, I. (2021): 149-150

<sup>66</sup> See Figure 11

<sup>67</sup> Vitruvius, 5.9.1; See Figures 12 and 13

<sup>68</sup> Polybius, 16.25; Plutarch, *Life of Antony*, 60.3; Pausanias, 1.5.5; Suda s.v. "*Apollonieis*"

<sup>69</sup> SIG 672; Burstein, S.M. (1985): 110-111, 113-115

<sup>70</sup> Pliny the Elder, 34.84; Pollitt, J.J. (1986): 79-110

work, which imbue their friezes and statues with a degree of emotion that was nearly unrivalled during the time, and the most famous pieces were centered around the achievements of the Attalid dynasty. Following his victories over the Celts and his self-declaration as king, Attalus I commissioned a victory monument with the centerpiece showing these Galatian warriors in various states of defeat.<sup>71</sup> While the original bronzes are lost, marble reproductions of Roman origin have been found. Perhaps the most famous is the “Dying Gaul”, currently housed in the Capitoline Museum, which shows a Galatian warrior laying wounded, his face etched with grim resignation to his impending death.<sup>72</sup> The emphasis on the defeat of the Galatians is a central element in Attalid propaganda, where those like Attalus are the defenders of civilization against the barbarian forces bent on destroying it.<sup>73</sup> It is unsurprising then that the Romans would be so interested in appropriating this imagery, given their own dealings with the Celts and self-stylization as the protectors of civilization.

But perhaps the most spectacular artistic work to be sponsored by the Attalids was their famous Altar of Zeus.<sup>74</sup> The original altar was built on the Pergamene acropolis in the time of Eumenes II, but German archaeologists in the late nineteenth century excavated and brought many of the surviving pieces back to Berlin.<sup>75</sup> A recreation stands in the now famous Pergamon museum, and in some eyes it is the height of Hellenistic art. Adorning it are several enormous friezes depicting scenes of the Gigantomachy, the battles between the Olympian gods and the wild giants for control of the universe.<sup>76</sup> The details on these reliefs are incredible, but it is not merely a straightforward recreation of mythical stories. The Attalids were drawing explicit comparisons between themselves and the Olympic pantheon as bringers of order and civilization, contrasting them with the barbarian-like giants. Inserted into the designs are more contemporary images like Galatian warriors, a shield bearing the Macedonian star of Vergina, and Seleucid cataphract armor, all having been at one point defeated foes of the Pergamene kingdom.

The Altar of Zeus celebrated the last hurrah of Pergamene military power, as the long shadow of Rome extended ever further across Asia. The relationship between Pergamon and the Roman Republic is a complicated subject, and one that will be fully explored over the next several episodes, but they certainly profited off their involvement in the great clashes that marked the turn of the third century. However, like the Macedonians, the Pergamene kingdom would eventually be absorbed by the Roman Republic as the province of Asia. Rather than a straightforward conquest, its last king Attalus III willed his realm to the Roman Senate upon his death in 133 B.C. To some this was seen as an act of mercy for his subjects, as the childless Attalus might have hoped to avoid the bloodshed of a civil war, or the inevitable arrival of Roman legions. To others, it may have been a last act of spite to his enemies in Galatia, Bithynia and Pontus, who otherwise may have preyed upon the vacant throne, but now would have the

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<sup>71</sup> Pausanias, 1.25.2; It is quite likely that there were multiple of these Galatian victory monuments set up across the Mediterranean by Attalid agents or were directly inspired by the original designs.

<sup>72</sup> See Figures 14, 15, and 16

<sup>73</sup> Stewart, A. (2014): 75-83; Cunliffe, B. (2018): 6-9

<sup>74</sup> Pollitt, J.J. (1986): 97-110; Stewart, A. (2014): 105-113

<sup>75</sup> The German government was actually given permission by the Ottoman authorities to bring the altar pieces back to Berlin, and after WW2 they were taken by the Red Army back to Moscow, but were eventually returned in the 1980s. Since it was done with the approval of the Ottoman sultan, the legality of the German acquisition has not been contested by the modern Turkish Republic.

<sup>76</sup> See Figures 17 and 18

Republic's agents on their back doorstep. Either way, one cannot say that the Attalids of Pergamon were anything but complicated.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> The story of Pergamon does not end with Attalus' death, for there was a revolt led by Eumenes III/Aristonicus, a self-styled heir of Eumenes II who tried resisting the Republic's expansion from 133 – 129 B.C.

## 086 References

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Plutarch – Life of Antony  
Plutarch – Moralia  
Polyaenus – Stratagems  
Polybius – The Histories  
Strabo – Geography  
Vitruvius – On Architecture  
Xenophon – Anabasis  
Xenophon – Hellenika

### Abbreviations

ANS (American Numismatic Society)  
I. Delphi (Inscriptions from Delphi)  
I. Pergamon (Inscriptions from Pergamon)  
OGIS (Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae)  
SEG (Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum)  
SIG (Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum)

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Map 1 - Western Asia Minor during the Hellenistic Period. Map made by me.

## **Appendix 1: List of Attalid Rulers**

Philetaerus (301/281 – 263)  
Eumenes I (263 – 241)  
Attalus I Soter (241 – 197)  
Eumenes II Soter (197 – 159)  
Attalus II Philadelphus (159 – 138)  
Attalus III Philometor Euergetes (138 – 133)  
Eumenes III/Aristonicus (133 – 129)





**Figure 1** - A marble bust believed to be Philetaerus of Pergamon. Photo taken by me at the Naples Archaeological Museum, Sept. 2022

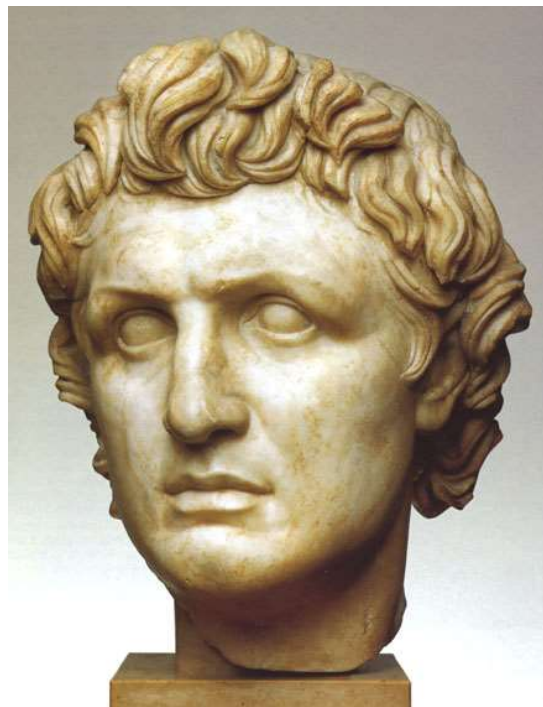


**Figure 2** - A silver tetradrachm, minted under the authority of Philetaerus but carrying the portrait of Seleucus I Nicator. Photo from the American Numismatic Society, ANS 1967.152.413





**Figure 3** – A silver tetradrachm of Philetæus, though his portrait has replaced that of Seleucus. His face will be continually present on the coinage of the next three rulers. Photo from the American Numismatic Society, ANS 1943.69.5



**Figure 4** - A colossal marble head attributed to Attalus I Soter, housed in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin. Photo taken from Wikimedia Commons, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AtaloPergamo.jpg>



**Figure 5** – The island of Aegina, Pergamon's foothold in Greece some thirty kilometers south of Athens. It was captured by the Romans, and became the dynasty's naval base until the final days of the kingdom. Photos taken by me in March 2023.



**Figure 6** – A bust attributed to Eumenes II Soter, also known as the “Young Commander”. Photo taken by me at the Naples Archaeological Museum, Sept. 2022



**Figure 7** - A marble bust found in the Stoa of Attalus, one interpretation is that it is supposed to represent Attalus II Philadelphus, otherwise it might be a playwright of New Comedy. Photo taken by me at the Athens Archaeological Museum, March 2023





**Figure 8** – An example of the cistophoros, dating to approximately the 160s BC. Gone is the standard Hellenistic portraiture in favor of writhing serpents. Amusingly, some modern scholars have called it the ugliest coin of the ancient world. Photo from the American Numismatic Society, ANS 1951.5.1

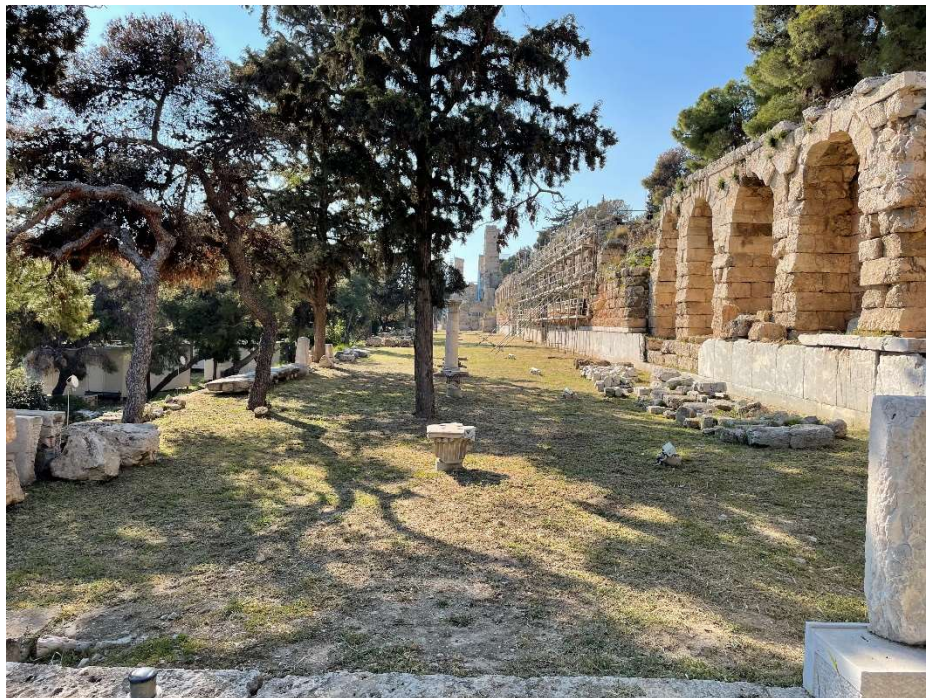


**Figure 9** - A hypothetical reconstruction of the Pergamon Acropolis at its height. Photo taken from Wikimedia Commons ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Acropolis\\_of\\_Pergamon\\_-\\_Friedrich\\_Thierck\\_-\\_1882.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Acropolis_of_Pergamon_-_Friedrich_Thierck_-_1882.jpg))





**Figure 10** – The theatre of Pergamon, overlooking the modern city of Bergama, Turkey. Photo taken from Wikimedia Commons ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Acropolis\\_amphitheatre\\_of\\_Pergamon\\_\(2020\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Acropolis_amphitheatre_of_Pergamon_(2020).jpg))



**Figure 11** – The remains of the Stoa of Eumenes II, located on the Athenian Acropolis. Photo taken by me in Athens, March 2023





*Figure 12 – The Stoa of Attalus II, the modern reconstruction/museum occupying the original site in the Athenian Agora. Photos taken by me in Athens, March 2023*



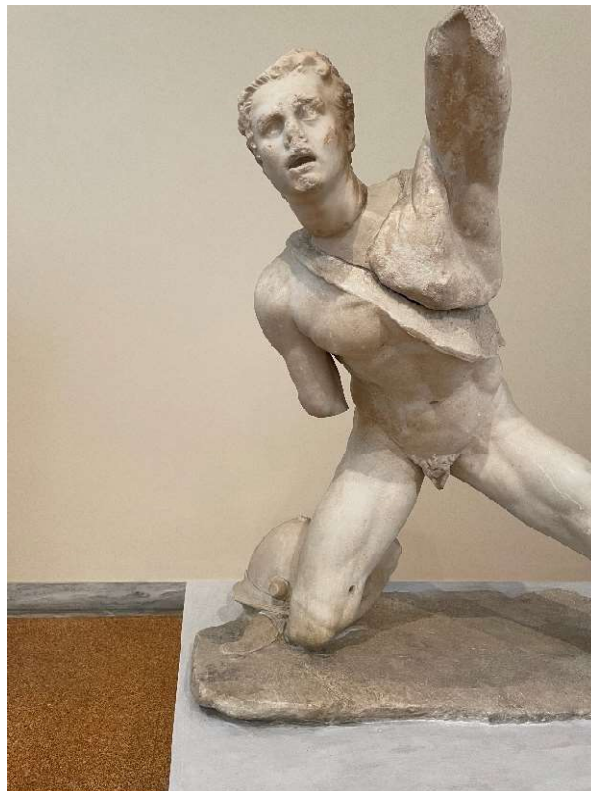


**Figure 13-** A surviving inscription from the Stoa of Attalus, listing the names of Attalus II and Queen Apollonis. Photos taken by me in Athens, March 2023



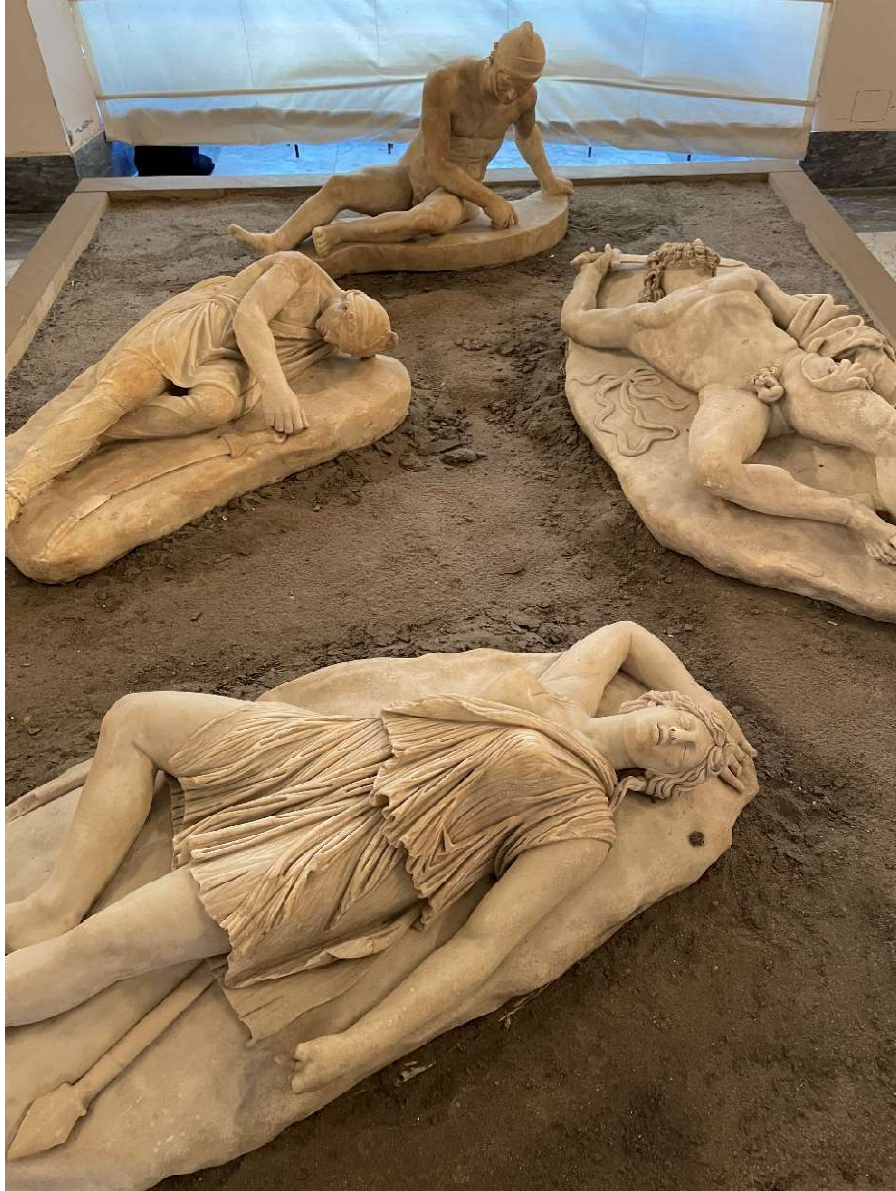


**Figure 14** – “The Dying Gaul”, a Roman marble copy of a Hellenistic original, likely a part of the Attalid victory monument. Photo taken by me at the Capitoline Museum, Rome, Sept. 2022



**Figure 15** – “The Wounded Gaul”, found on the island of Delos. Photo taken by me at the Athens Archaeological Museum, March 2023





**Figure 16** – Marble copies of the Attalid victory monument. Photo taken by me at the Naples Archaeological Museum, Sept. 2022



**Figure 17** – The Altar of Zeus, currently housed in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin. Photo taken from Wikimedia Commons ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pergamon\\_Altar\\_hnapel\\_Berlin\\_2011\\_09.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pergamon_Altar_hnapel_Berlin_2011_09.jpg))



**Figure 18** – The Gigantomachy frieze from the Altar of Zeus, showing the defeat of the giants by the Olympian deities. It was a celebration of civilization's triumph over barbarism, alluding to the Attalid victories over the Galatians. Photo taken from Wikimedia Commons ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pergamon\\_Museum\\_Berlin\\_2007017.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pergamon_Museum_Berlin_2007017.jpg))