The issue of the possible union of the two kingdoms had been raised back in 168 by Antiochos IV’s campaigns in Egypt, if only as a Roman nightmare; it had been alive, and even attempted briefly, in 146/145 by Ptolemy Philometor, but in the end it had been rejected by him and by his followers. With the intermarriages between the two royal families—Ptolemy V and Kleopatra Syra, Kleopatra Thea severally with Alexander Balas, Demetrios II, and Antiochos VII (and Demetrios II reclaimed his wife once again in 129 when he returned to Syria), the issue of the union of the crowns would never go away, largely because of the role of the royal women in validating a man’s kingship. This had been a Ptolemaic matter originally, when Ptolemy II married his full sister Arsinoe, possibly under the influence of pharaonic practice, more likely out of the curious assumption that he and his family were extraspacial and their blood had to remain within the family. The practice reached into the Seleukid family when Laodike, the daughter of Antiochos III, successively married her three brothers, Antiochos the Son, Seleukos IV, and Antiochos IV, while Demetrios I’s wife seems to have been his sister Laodike.\(^1\) Even before that, the Seleukids had tended to marry cousins. The Antigonids followed much the same practices as well.

This was, of course, a dangerous genetic practice, but these royal families managed to conduct exogamous relations as well as endogamous ones, more or less alternating one with the other every generation, with beneficial genetic results.\(^2\) Even the repeated endogamous Ptolemaic unions do not seem to have impaired the intelligence or ability of the rulers. The capabilities of the successive royal generations never flagged. Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II might be fat and slow and ugly, a figure of fun and detestation to many of the Alexandrians, but he was also intelligent and capable and ruthless, and the last of the Ptolemaic line, Kleopatra VII, was clearly also intelligent and capable. In the Seleukid

\(^1\) For the argument on this see Ogden, *Polygamy, passim.*

family, the children of Demetrios I, the product of two generations of brother-sister marriages, were clearly energetic and of considerable abilities.

The intermarriage of the two royal families was perhaps inevitable. They were politically and socially several cuts above every other family, and the destruction of the Antigonids in 167 left no other family in a similar condition, though the Seleukids were more likely than the Ptolemies to marry less important royals—the royal houses of Pontos, Kappadokia, and Armenia are examples. From the mid-second century, the number of other royal families gradually diminished—the Macedonian royalty vanished in 167, the Attalids in 133, many of the Greek Baktrians about the same time—and their obvious successors, the Roman nobility, were even more standoffish in their marriage customs than the Seleukids and the Ptolemies. So far as can be seen it was only with the last Hellenistic ruler, Kleopatra VII, that marriage between a Roman and that ruler took place—and the Roman people’s reaction was a major factor in Antony’s destruction. But intermarriage between the greater royal families is not just a matter of identifying those of sufficient social prestige for association, it also brought with it prospects of inheritance. When Ptolemy VI was offered the Seleukid diadem in Antioch in the summer of 145, it was surely partly because he was a Seleukid on his mother’s side, the son of Kleopatra Syra and grandson of Antiochos III; his competitors were two Seleukids, one of whom was of the line of the usurper Antiochos IV, and the other, Demetrios II, was of the legitimate line, but was unpopular—though both were also descended from Antiochos III.

The marriages of Kleopatra Thea to, first, Alexander Balas, and then Demetrios II, had reinforced that dynastic link. Then on Antiochos VII’s arrival to take over the Seleukid kingdom when his brother was captured, he married Kleopatra Thea as her third husband, thus making it clear that the kingship was in part in her gift. Further, she was the daughter of Ptolemy Philometor. The new king did not kill off his predecessor’s children (Demetrios and Kleopatra Thea had at least three children), but then Antiochos and Kleopatra had five children of their own, so that, by 131, when Antiochos set off on his eastward march, there were seven or eight children of the Seleukid house alive. This might imply that the succession was safe, as in a sense it was; in fact, it actually meant it became the subject of a new round of familial disputes.3

3 While imprisoned by the Parthians, Demetrios had been married to a Parthian princess, Rhodogune, by whom he had two children (App., Syr. 68); they could be