

# Antiochos I Soter

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Antiochos I Soter was the second king of the Seleucid Empire (b. ca. 323 BCE; r. 281–261, as sole king). He was the son of SELEUKOS I NIKATOR and his Iranian wife, Apame, daughter of the Bactrian warlord Spitamenes. The importance of Antiochos' long reign (about 33 years, including his time as co-ruler) lies in his efforts to consolidate and organize his father's conquests.

Already ca. 294/3 Seleukos gave Antiochos the title of *basileus*, “king,” and made him ruler of Babylonia and the Upper Satrapies. To secure the succession even further, Antiochos married Stratonike, the daughter of DEMETRIOS I POLIORKETES and formerly his father's consort, an event that was presented in literature as a moving love story (Brodersen 1985). Operating from Babylonia, Antiochos spent the next decade consolidating and organizing Seleukos' acquisitions in the east, while his father consolidated and further expanded the western part of the empire. Antiochos constructed fortified towns to control the major routes and irrigation works in Iran and BACTRIA, and sent out an expedition under the general Demodamas of MILETOS across Syr Darya River into inner Asia. The outlines of the massive fortifications he built in the oasis of Merw – ALEXANDRIA IN MARGIANA, confidently renamed Antioch in Margiana “after himself” (Plin. *HN* 7.18.47) – are still visible today. His activities as co-ruler are also attested in a number of cuneiform documents from BABYLON, which call him *mar sharri*, “crown-prince”; good relations with the Babylonian cities would continue to characterize his rule when he had become sole king.

When Antiochos succeeded his father, who was murdered by Ptolemaios Keraunos after the latter's victory at the battle of KOUROPEDION in September 281, Babylonia and the provinces further east remained conspicuously loyal to him. In the west, however, Seleucid rule had



**Figure 1** Ruined head of Antiochos I of Kom-magene. West Terrace, Nemrud Dagı, Turkey. Photograph © Robert Harding Picture Library/Alamy.

not been universally accepted yet. A famous inscription from ILION in Antiochos' honor (OGIS 219) states that his reign began with an otherwise unknown uprising in northern Syria (there is no evidence warranting the speculation of Tarn (1926) that PTOLEMY II PHILADELPHOS was directly responsible for these upheavals). Although Antiochos put down the revolt, he arrived in Asia Minor too late to restore full Seleucid authority there. Asia Minor and Thrace had been acquired by his father only one year earlier. The vassal states BITHYNIA and PONTOS became autonomous kingdoms. Some cities, notably MILETOS, accepted Ptolemaic suzerainty. There was a short and inconclusive war with ANTIGONOS II GONATAS (281/0). Antiochos furthermore failed to deal with his father's assassin, Ptolemy Keraunos, who was able to take possession of Thrace, and even of Macedon. To consolidate what was left, Antiochos built fortified cities along the Royal Road, the main highway connecting Syria and Mesopotamia with SARDIS, the administrative center of Seleucid Asia Minor.

Antiochos buried his father in SELEUKEIA in Pieria and established a cult at his tomb. He put forward Apollo as the tutelary deity of his dynasty, propagating Apollo's paternity of his deified father. Probably he was also the one who institutionalized the SELEUCID ERA, the first

system of continuous year reckoning. The Seleucid era started with his father's return to Babylon in 312/11 BCE, which suggested that, with Seleukos, a new era in history had begun – a “golden age.” Like his contemporary and rival Ptolemy II Philadelphos, Antiochos was a renowned patron of the arts, entertaining at his court for example the poet ARATOS OF SOLOI in the late 270s. He also commissioned the Chaldean priest Berossos to compose the *Babyloniaka*, a history of Babylonia written in Greek (see BEROSSOS OF BABYLON).

Antiochos maintained good relations with many cities, both Greek *poleis* in Asia Minor and non-Greek cities such as Babylon. His diplomatic skills laid the foundation for the friendship between the Seleucid and Antigonid houses, an alliance which would last until the disappearance or collapse of the Antigonid state one hundred years later. Being already ANTIGONOS II GONATAS' brother-in-law through his marriage with Stratonike, Antiochos gave his half-sister Phila in marriage to Gonatas, to cement the peace treaty of 281/0; one of his and Stratonike's own daughters would later marry Gonatas' successor, Demetrios II. Another daughter, Apame, was given in marriage to Magas, the ruler of Kyrene, in ca. 276.

Together with MAGAS, Antiochos fought the first in a long sequence of Seleucid–Ptolemaic wars, known as the Syrian wars. The causes of the First Syrian War (274–271) are unknown. Ptolemy II Philadelphos started the hostilities, but he may have been provoked by the alliance between Antiochos and Magas. The war remained inconclusive, although Ptolemy II gained some ground in the Levant and Asia Minor. Before, during, or after this conflict Antiochos gained tremendous prestige when he defeated a Galatian army in the so-called “Battle of the Elephants” in Asia Minor. Although it is not known where and when exactly this battle took place – various dates ranging from 276 to 268 have been proposed, none being supported by conclusive evidence – and although its consequences are debated, it is

clear that Antiochos was able to propagate it as a decisive victory of divine order over barbaric chaos. The writer SIMONIDES of Magnesia celebrated Antiochos' Galatian victory in an epic poem, which resonates in LUCIAN's poem *Zeuxis*. The victory, which probably prompted Antiochos to accept the title of *Soter*, “Savior,” greatly enhanced his popularity and hence his power in Asia Minor.

Antiochos' later years were troubled. In 267/6 he executed his eldest son and co-ruler, Seleukos, in order to be able to appoint another son, Antiochos, as his fellow *basileus* and successor. There were also military setbacks. EUMENES I, the new dynast of the strategically crucial stronghold PERGAMON in MYSIA, declared himself independent in 263 and defeated Antiochos in battle near Sardis one year later. In 262/1 Ptolemy took control of Ephesos. Antiochos I Soter died in 261. He was succeeded by his son ANTIOCHOS II THEOS, who had already been his co-ruler for some five years (261–246).

SEE ALSO: Antigonids; Apame, wife of Seleukos I; Asia Minor, Hellenistic; *Basileus*, Greece; Demetrios II (Seleucid king); Ephesos, Classical and later; Galatia; Koroupedion, battle of; Margiana; *Polis*; Royal road(s); Ruler cult, ancient Near East; Seleucids; Syria (pre-Roman); Syrian wars.

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