ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΜΕΙΖΟΝΟΣ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΣΜΟΥ

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## Summary :

Antiochus I (1st cent. BC) was one of the most important kings of Commagene. During his reign his kingdom became considerably more powerful. He also introduced important religious reforms and erected an imposing mausoleum in Nemrut Dağ.

## Other Names

Antiochus I Theos, Dikaios, Epiphanes, Philorhomaios, Philhellen

## Date and Place of Birth

Late 2nd – early 1st cent. BC

## Date and Place of Death

*c.* 34 BC (?)

## Main Role

King of Commagene

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### 1. Family - descent – accession to the throne

Antiochus I Theos, king of Commagene (*c.* 69-36 BC), was the son of Mithridates I Callinicus and Laodice, daughter of the Seleucid Antiochus VIII Grypus.[1] The exact date of his birth is not known, for in his own Nomos he mentions only the month of his birth and the month in which he acceded to the throne without further details.[2] Generally his birth should be dated to the late 2nd or the early 1st century BC.

Antiochus traced his descent to the royal dynasty of the Achaemenids on his father's side and to the Macedonians and Alexander the Great on his mother's side. Furthermore, for propaganda reasons, he emphasized his kinship with the royal houses of Pontus, Cappadocia, Armenia, Parthia, Bactria, Egypt and Syria.[3] He succeeded his father Mithridates on the throne of the Commagene kingdom in 69 BC.

### 2. Historical framework

#### 2.1. External policy

Antiochus' ascent to the throne coincided with a period of re-arrangements due to the entrenchment of the territorial interest of the powers active in the region. During the first years of his reign the young king formed his policies largely on the basis of his neighbours' actions (the Armenians and the Parthians), also taking into account the gradual strengthening of the Romans. His coinage, a powerful medium of dynastic propaganda, is indicative of the conditions prevailing during this period. The king adopted the Armenian tiara as his iconographic type, thus alluding to his connection with the still powerful state of Armenia.[4] Following the defeat, however, of Tigranes of Armenia at Tigranakert (Latin Tigranocerta) by Lucullus in 69 BC, during the Third Mithridatic War, Antiochus sought to protect the interests of his small kingdom and sided with the victors. This diplomatic manoeuvre had the desired effect, resulting in the disentanglement of Commagene from Armenian control. The king rushed to declare his allegiance to Rome by adopting the title 'Philorhomaios' (friend of Rome), following the example set by the similarly motivated Ariobarzanes I of Cappadocia.

Commagene's strategic location played a decisive role in its relations with the era's great powers, mainly because of its propinquity to Parthia, which was still a significant power. This factor naturally did not escape Lucullus' attention, nor Pompey's later. The strengthening of the kingdom of Commagene in a period during which the balance of power had not yet been determined in this extremely important strategically located region directly served Roman interests. Furthermore, Commagene was an ideal base for

staging attacks against Mesopotamia and Syria, as well as Cilicia and Cappadocia. Taking these into consideration, Pompey, in the context of the restructuring of the East (64 BC), was careful to renew Rome's 'friendship' with the king of Commagene.[5] Furthermore, Rome recognised Antiochus' royal title and rewarded him for his stance by affirming his rule over his dominion, and granted him the city of Seleuceia in Mesopotamia as a foothold against the Parthians.[6] Naturally Rome was looking after its own interests, seeking to secure these strategic positions by nominally surrendering them to this small allied kingdom.

Notwithstanding his interests, which necessitated an alliance with Rome, Antiochus remained an eastern ruler and could not relinquish his close ties with the Parthians and the Armenians. A military clash between Rome and Parthia later led him to adopt a rapprochement policy vis-à-vis the Parthians. In 53 BC, the Roman legions crossed Commagene in order to strike into Parthia. Their annihilation at Carrhae made Antiochus aware of the dangers to his kingdom and led him to follow the tried and tested solution of intermarriage, starting with the marriage of his daughter Laodice to Orodes II of Parthia. This tactic proved very effective, for his successors up to Mithridates III persisted in it.[7]

Soon afterwards, reversing this policy, Antiochus acted again in favour of Roman interests. When the Parthian army invaded his territory (51 BC), he hastened to inform Cicero, the then proconsul of Cilicia. A similar course of action was also followed by his neighbouring rulers Deiotarus I of Galatia, Ariobarzanes III of Cappadocia, Tarcondimotus I of Cilicia and Iamblichus I of Edessa. The danger was finally averted in the summer of 50 BC ,[8] with a Roman victory followed by intense diplomatic activity.

The next turning point in Antiochus' administration came with the outbreak of the Roman civil war. The ruler wisely sided with Pompey and symbolically despatched a contingent of 200 men to Pharsalus in 48 BC.[9] After emerging as the victor, Caesar recognized the power of the rulers who had remained loyal to Rome, even of those that had sided with Pompey. Thus Antiochus was allowed to retain his kingdom, and was among the rulers that hastened to greet Caesar at Syria in 47 BC, when the latter was marching against Pharnaces II. When, on the other hand, four years later Pacorus I, son of Orodes II, Antiochus' son-in-law, crossed the Euphrates, Antiochus chose to offer him assistance, judging that the Parthians were a force still to be reckoned with. This choice proved wise, for the advance of the Parthian army in Asia Minor and the Levant was to be terminated only after the death of Pacorus in 38 BC. Following the defeat of the Parthians the Romans took measures against all those who had collaborated with them. Thus the Roman commander Ventidius besieged the Antiochus' capital city of Samosata, while according to some information, the king attempt to bribe him by offering him 1,000 talents. At this turning point Antonius arrived; taking matters into his hand he replaced Ventidius and finally captured the city. The sources mention that Antonius's main motivation was the wealth of this small kingdom;[10] a secret agreement with Antiochus is reported to have been made in order to avoid a possible defeat that could tarnish the public image of the Romans.[11]

### 2.2. Internal policy

Antiochus was an innovator in terms of his religious policy. He is considered the sponsor of a peculiar religious syncretism that was expressed through the cult of both Greek and Persian deities, involving the deification of members of Commagene's royal house. His mausoleum at Nemrut Dağ with its numerous statues depicting Greek and eastern deities is perhaps the most characteristic expression of Antiochus' religious beliefs.[12] The monument's construction probably commenced in 62 BC, when the king was approximately forty years old. His religious reforms are preserved on a magnificent inscription engraved on a rock in Arsameia by the Euphrates. He is often depicted in the characteristic Commagene reliefs in dexioses scenes together with Greek and eastern deities. Here the king wears the Armenian tiara, a feature that served his dynastic propaganda along with his coinage.

Furthermore, Antiochus established a hierothesion for his father Mithridates I Callinicus in Arsameia by the Nymphaeus, while for himself he chose the imposing site of Nemrut Dağ.The construction cost of these buildings would have been huge for the villagers of Commagene, who were also forced to cede their lands and offer personal labour for the completion of the project.

The conditions under which Antiochus lost his power remain uncertain. According to some sources he was murdered by the Arsacid Phraates IV in 38/7 BC[13] and his grandsons in Parthia met the same fate. More specifically, it is reported that when Antiochus

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strongly protested his grandsons' unjust murder he was murdered too by Phraates. This version has been disputed; it is thought likely that Antiochus passed away in *c*.34 BC, as according to another source Mithridates II held the throne of Commagene by 31 BC .[14]

### 3. Assessment

Antiochus I was undoubtedly a competent ruler, especially adept in political manipulations and diplomatic action. His kingship, notwithstanding certain instability at its outset, was one of the longest in the history of the Commagene kingdom. The king bequeathed his successors a kingdom that retained its territorial integrity as well as its religious heritage. Thus he stabilised his dynasty's hold on power for the next 140 years.

Antiochus was never a loyal ally of Rome. His actions were always dictated by the interests of his small kingdom; he was cautious to maintain good relations with the Romans as well as with his neighbours.

Moreover, in his mausoleum at Nemrut Dağ, Antiochus honoured his Seleucid ancestors, mainly his grandfather Antiochus Grypus, as well as the Armenians. From the evidence there we can certify that he preferred to trace his descent to his Persian ancestor Rhodogoune, even to Darius the Great. It is telling that he stressed his kinship –via his daughter's marriage– to the Parthian dynasty; this was probably dictated by the new conditions that had come to prevail during that period. There could be no better summary of his dynastic propaganda than his imposing mausoleum with the numerous sculptures depicting ancestors.

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1. On the crown of the royal house of Commagene, see Sullivan, R.D., "The Dynasty of Commagene", in *ANRW* 2.8 (Berlin-New York 1977), pp. 763-775. See also *Der Neue Pauly* 1, column 772, see under entry "Antiochos [16]" (A. Mehl) for the relevant sources.

2. Sanders, D.H. (ed.), *Nemrut Dağı. The Hierothesion of Antiochus I of Commagene* (Indiana 1996), pp. 87-91, for an extended discussion of the problem of his birth and the life span of Antiochus I, as well as for the views that have been expressed.

3. The information related to Antiochus I's genealogy has been preserved on inscriptions in Nemrut Dağ. See, Sanders, D.H. (ed.), *Nemrut Dağı. The Hierothesion of Antiochus I of Commagene* (Indiana 1996), p. 21. Naturally this evidence is not confirmed in the sources. Tracing one's descent to illustrious ancestors was common practice in all eastern dynasties during the Hellenistic period.

4. On the symbolic significance of the adoption of the Armenian tiara see Sullivan R.D., "Diadochic Coinage in Commagene after Tigranes the Great", *NC* 13 (1973), pp. 18-37 and idem, "Dynastic Propaganda in Commagene", in Akurgal, E. (ed.), *The Proceedings of the Xth International Congress of Classical Archaeology 1973* (Ankara 1978 ), pp. 295-309, as well as Sullivan R.D., *Near Eastern Royalty and Rome, 100-30 BC* (Toronto-Buffalo-London 1990), pp. 403-404, note 5.

5. Plin., *HN* 2.235; App., *Mith.* 106.20. It is telling that when Pompey made his triumphal entrance into Rome, he spared Antiochus the humiliation of having to walk together with the other vanquished leaders.

6. App., *Mith.* 114.25; Plut., *Pomp.* 45.5.

7. These intermarriages resulted in complex dynastic links between members of Commagene's royal house and Parthian, Atropatene, Emesan, and Judean nobles.

8. Cic., *Fam.*8.10.1, 15.1.4; Dion K 40.28.29.

9. App., *B. Civ.* 2.49.202.

10. Dion K 49.20.5; Plut., *Ant.* 34.3-4.

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11. For the relevant texts see Sullivan, R.D., “The Dynasty of Commagene”, in *ANRW* 2.8 (Berlin-New York 1977), p. 769, note 157.

12. The silence of the Roman sources on this imposing monument is a mystery. It is thought possible that Strabo, for instance, had never visited Commagene or the intentionally refrains from mentioning the monument for political reasons. A third version is that the passages referring to Commagene simply did not survive.

13. Dion K 49.23.3-4.

14. Plut., *Ant*. 61.1.

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## Glossary :

**dexioses, the**

Scene at which two human figures are depicted in handshake, usually interpreted as a farewell to the dead. Such scenes are mainly found on funerary stelae.

**proconsul, -lis**

A quite high ranking official, vir spectabilis according to the rank of the senate, who was inequable only to the Domestikos of the Scholae and to the Magister Militum per Orientem. The proconsul usually served as a governor of the Imperial provinces (i.e. in Asia Minor the provinces of Asia and Cappadocia). The office was demoted from the 9th century onwards and the term was in use until the 12th century meaning a dignity.

**tiara**

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A kind of headdress worn mainly by the kings in Persia, Medea, Armenia, Chaldea and Assyria. In Persia the kings wore it upright, whereas the high state officials wore it in a slant position. It is probably identical with cyrbasia and kidaris. A generic kind of tiara was the phrygian pilos.

## Chronological Table

Late 2nd – early 1st cent. BC: Antiochus I is born.

69 BC: He succeeds his father Mithridates on the throne of the Commagene kingdom. Third Mithridatic War. Antiochus sides with Rome, adopting the title 'Philorhomaios', thus freeing Commagene from Armenian control.

64 BC: Pompey renews Rome's 'friendship' with Antiochus, recognising his royal title and affirming his power within his dominion; he also cedes to him the city of Seleuceia in Mesopotamia.

62 BC: Possible date for the commencement of the construction of the mausoleum at Nemrut Dağ.

53 BC: Roman legions cross Commagene in order to strike into Parthia. Intermarriages with the Parthians, starting with the marriage of Antiochus' daughter, Laodice, to Orodes II of Parthia.

51 BC: Antiochus I acts again in favour of Roman interests, warning Cicero of the imminent threat posed by the Parthian army advancing through his dominion.

50 BC: The Romans defeat the Parthians.

48 BC: Roman civil war. Antiochus I sides with Pompey, thus winning the affirmation of his powers by Caesar.

47 BC: Antiochus I meets Caesar in Syria, when the latter is marching against Pharnaces II.

43 BC: Antiochus I offers help to the Parthians.

38 BC: Following the defeat of the Parthians, the Romans take measures against all those who had collaborated with them; Antiochus' capital city of Samosata is besieged.

38/7 or 34 BC: Possible dates for Antiochus' I death.