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COMMAGENE
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COMMAGENE, the portion of southwestern Asia Minor (modern Turkey) bordered on the east by the Euphrates river, on the west by the Taurus mountains, and on the south by the plains of northern Syria. It was part of the Achaemenid empire and its successor kingdoms and did not achieve status as an independent kingdom until the mid-2nd century B.C.E. Commagene is unique in that indigenous documentation is more extensive than the notices in Greek and Roman sources; nevertheless, that documentation, which consists of official inscriptions in Greek, is skewed: The royal monuments of Antiochus I (ca. 69-30s b.c.e.) predominate, and the inscriptions (identified here by letters, following Wagner, 1983; and Waldmann) reflect his claims for himself and his dynasty.

Commagene controlled Euphrates crossings from Mesopotamia and was thus the favored invasion route for Persian troops moving west (Cicero, *Ad Familiares* 8.10.1; Strabo, 16.746, 749; Appian, *Syriaca* 48; Dio Cassius, 49.13; Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* 5.86). The kingdom became wealthy from trade and agriculture, particularly on the fertile lands around the capital, Samosata (Strabo, 16.749; cf. 12.535 on fruit trees). Although the means by which the rulers of Commagene developed their land economically are not entirely clear, the existence of great wealth is obvious from the array of royal monuments, the number of festivals celebrated throughout the kingdom, invaders' expectations of booty (Plutarch, *Antony* 34), and contemporary notices of royal wealth (Tacitus, *Annales* 2.81).

Political history. Under Achaemenid rule Commagene was administered by a

minor official, stationed at Samosata or a similar site and responsible for protecting the Euphrates crossings. Antiochus claimed to be descended from Achaemenid royalty through Orontes, the noted satrap of Armenia in the 4th century b.c.e. (e.g.. Plutarch, *Artoxerxes* 27); this claim suggests that in the Achaemenid period Commagene may have been part of the satrapy of Armenia and that intermarriage among Persian and Persianized nobility was common in the region. During the Hellenistic period Commagene was part of the Seleucid empire and was at times subject to the nominally Seleucid dynasts of Armenia. Antiochus' royal inscriptions at Arsameia on the Euphrates (modern Gerger; inscription G) and Arsameia on the Nymphaios (modern Eski Kahta; inscription A) include references to his ancestor Arsames, "founder" of both cities. This Arsames can be identified with the Arsames whom Polyaenus (4.17) described as an Armenian dynast supporting the rebel Seleucid Antiochus Hierax in the mid-3nd century b.c.e. Arsames fortified Arsameia on the Nymphaios as part of his building of a power base against the legitimate Seleucid king, Seleucus II Callinicus (246-26 b.c.e.).

The history of the kingdom of Commagene begins with the reign of Ptolemaeus, a Seleucid officer who became king in 163 or 162 b.c.e. Despite Antiochus' grandiose claims, the royal family of Commagene was probably an indigenous and somewhat Hellenized dynasty, the early members of which had been assigned Greek titles in the Seleucid administrative hierarchy (e.g. Ptolemaeus Epistates; Diodorus Siculus, 31.19a). At first Commagene was a third-ranking power, weaker than the former Achaemenid satrapies of Armenia and Cappadocia, which were then in conflict over the region of Sophene (Diodorus Siculus, 31.22). Ptolemaeus took advantage of such strife to establish Commagene as a kingdom, which he immediately enlarged by occupying northern strong points in Melitene, part of Cappadocia. His successor, his son Samus, is known only from coins, on which he is represented in both Seleucid and Persian style, and from his grandson Antiochus' monuments at Nimrud Dagh (inscription Nfa/Nfb = OGI 396 in part) and Arsameia on the Euphrates (inscription Gf = OGI 402).

The reigns of Mithradates I and Antiochus I are better documented. Commagene was clearly a minor power with a limited range of political options, maintaining a semblance of independence by accommodating adjoining larger powers. A tie to the Seleucid house was viewed as a necessity, and Mithradates married Laodice, daughter of Antiochus VIII. A more serious threat was posed from Armenia by Tigranes II the Great (ca. 95-55 b.c.e.), who

must have marched across Commagene to occupy the province of Seleucus in the mid-80s b.c.e. and subsequently, as self-styled king of kings, exercised hegemony over it. Mithradates built his royal monuments at Arsameia on the Nymphaios, at that point a somewhat more secure location within the kingdom.

During Antiochus' reign the Roman army put an end to the Armenian threat. Shortly after the Armenian retreat in 69 or 68 b.c.e. Antiochus set up a stela (found at Sofraz Köy; Wagner and Petzl) depicting himself greeting the Greek god Apollo, putative ancestor of the Seleucid dynasty and, according to Antiochus' claims, his own; Apollo was depicted nude in the Greek style. In the accompanying inscription (SO) the king emphasized that he was the first of his line to take up the *kidaris* (see *EIr*. V, p. 724 fig. 50). Nevertheless, Antiochus had to accommodate the Roman generals operating in the east (successors to the last warring Seleucids) and the Parthian rulers, who were pursuing a forward policy on their western frontier. The relations with the Romans are better documented, especially in connection with the late republican wars and the careers of the generals involved. Initial hostilities with the Roman general Pompey gave way to friendship (64-63 b.c.e.). Antiochus was entrusted with control of Seleucia on the Euphrates (Zeugma) and portions of Mesopotamia (Appian, *Mithridatica* 100, 114) and thus styled himself *megas* (great). The Parthian rout of Crassus in 53 b.c.e. left the Roman east and Rome's allies in a precarious position. At some point Antiochus arranged the marriage of his daughter Laodice to Orodes of Parthia (inscription Kb, on the royal monument at Karakus; Wagner, 1983). Parthian forces under Pacorus, Orodes' son were allowed to cross Commagene to raid Syria in 51-50 b.c.e., though Antiochus did notify Roman officers of such troop movements (Cicero, *Ad Familiares* 8.10.1, 15.1-2, 4.4). Antiochus managed to forestall serious damage to his realm by deploying some of his troops in support of more powerful forces, paying out money, and welcoming refugees before they ravaged the countryside (e.g., Appian, *Bellum Civile* 2.49; Caesar, *Bellum Alexandrinum* 65; Plutarch, *Antony* 34; Dio Cassius 48.41, 49.20; Josephus, *Bellum* 1.321-22).

Mithradates II had shared power with his lather for a number of years and as king functioned increasingly on behalf of the *princeps* at Rome, repeating the pattern of his ancestors under the Achaemenids. Augustus forgave Antiochus' early support for Antony (Plutarch, *Antony* 61; Suetonius, *Augustus* 48) and later intervened to stabilize the Commagenian royal family (Dio Cassius, 52.43, 54.9) during dynastic quarrels. After the death of Antiochus III Commagene

was administered by Rome through his son Gaius Julius Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who had spent his youth in the imperial capital. During his reign Commagene was first enlarged, then taken away, then restored during the reign of the emperor Claudius (Dio Cassius, 59.8, 60.8; Josephus, *Antiquitates* 19.276), who was expected to assist Roman forces against the Parthians (Tacitus, *Annales* 13.7, 37, 14.26) and in subduing rebellious peoples (Tacitus, *Historiae* 5.1; Josephus, *Bellum* 5.460-63). With the accession of the Flavian dynasty at Rome Commagene was suspected of favoring the Parthians and was again reduced to provincial status after an invasion and the flight of the royal family (Josephus, *Bellum* 7.219ff). Members of the family settled at Rome as citizens and remained prominent into the 2nd century c.e. (OGI 407-13).

Administrative structure. The administration of Commagene was parallel in structure to that of an Achaemenid satrapy, based on estates, agriculture, and village life. For example, Antiochus assigned villages, their inhabitants, and their revenues to his cult centers and identified the rural population who were to participate in various royal festivals. With the passage of time, the administration had gradually became Hellenized in many respects. Greek was adopted as the language of official documents. In Antiochus' inscriptions classes of political officers are enumerated: *dynastai, stratēgoi, ethnarchoi, archontes* (cf. OGI 229 for a Seleucid parallel). The title *stratēgos* on a stele set up by Apollas, son of Apollas to honor Antiochus (inscription KI from Kilafik Hüyük) suggests Hellenistic influence at court, but it is not certain whether it meant "provincial officer," as it did in neighboring Cappadocia (Strabo, 12.534; cf. the use of *monokritēs* "chief judge," borne by another Commagenian official; Schmitz et al.).

There were three main cities in the kingdom: Samosata, Arsameia on the Nymphaios, and Arsameia on the Euphrates, the latter two improved by Antiochus (cf. his use of the title *ktistēs* in inscription SO). Each remained inhabited long after the fall of the kingdom, but excavations have been centered on the more visible royal monuments. Samosata (modern Samsat), on the fertile lands of the upper Euphrates, was walled as the capital, perhaps superseding in importance the two earlier cities. In recent excavations in the palace area mosaics and other finds similar to those at the royal cult center at Arsameia on the Nymphaios have been found. The latter city consisted of two high points, which Arsames, the founder, had surrounded with one wall (for site maps, see Hoepfner). One of Antiochus' inscriptions (A) indicates that he improved and expanded the palace, defenses, and royal cult center

(*hierothesion*) founded by his father, Mithradates I. A processional way led to Arsameia on the Euphrates, also founded by Arsames, which appears to have been the early burial site of the royal family. Antiochus (inscription G) mentioned cult centers of his royal ancestors there and the precinct of a local deity, the goddess Argandene. Nothing is known about the civil administration of the cities, except that *politai*, members of the citizen body, are mentioned in royal inscriptions. Antiochus improved the defenses at all three cities, providing the two Arsemeias with garrisons.

According to Josephus (*Bellum* 5.460ff.), in the 70s c.e. one section of the royal army was known as Macedones because of its equipment and training (cf. Antiochus' claim of a dual Persian and Macedonian heritage).

Royal monuments. Commagene is best known today for its royal burial monuments, with or without associated buildings, at which festivals in honor of the gods were led by priests in Persian dress. The major sites are Arsameia on the Euphrates, where festivals were held to honor the royal ancestors; Arsameia on the Nymphaios, where the burial monuments of Mithradates I have been found (festivals for him and for Mithra-Helios-Apollo-Hermes, depicted in Persian fashion); Nimrud Dagh, a short distance from Arsameia, with the tumulus of Antiochus I (festivals for him and the fully syncretized deities Zeus Oromasdes, Apollo-Mithra-Helios-Hermes, Artagnes [Vərəθraγna]-Herakles-Ares, and the personification of Commagene [instead of Hera, who was mentioned on the Nymphaios at Arsameia]); and Karakus, the burial place for royal women, established by Mithradates II. At Nimrud Dagh Antiochus established monumental images of himself greeting the deities and galleries of images of his claimed royal ancestors: the family of Orontes, including Darius I and his heirs, and the Seleucid house back to Alexander the Great.

Much of the building activity throughout Commagene was owing to Antiochus I, and it is reasonable to conclude that it was part of a program to revitalize the kingdom and the position of the dynasty after the end of the Armenian occupation (cf. the Sofraz Köy stele), especially through the establishment of ornate cult centers and frequent festivals throughout the realm. The royal monuments were designed to have both a programmatic (as demonstrated by inscriptions setting forth cult laws and identifying the figures depicted) and, even more importantly, a visual impact. They were located on high places (e.g., Arsameia of Nymphaios and Nimrud Dagh) that were visible from afar and reached only by exhausting ascents. In the *dexiōsis* (hand clasping) reliefs and in the giant sculptures at Nimrud Dagh Antiochus is depicted as equal in size

to the gods of the realm, emphasized their support for his rule. At the latter site the galleries of ancestors must have appeared to the illiterate as rows of local and foreign nobles paying homage to the king. The style of all these works is representative of the Hellenized east, reflecting both western, Hellenistic and eastern, Persian traditions, parallel to Antiochus' claims of dual descent from Macedonians and Achaemenids (Colledge; Dörner, 1967; cf. Petzl) The siting of the monuments (e.g., on the terraces at Nimrud Dagh) evokes earlier Achaemenid use of the natural landscape for imposing royal monuments, for example, the rock reliefs at Bīsotūn (q.v.). Contemporary influence can be seen in the relatively flat reliefs on the stelas and the meticulous attention paid to the details of Antiochus' and the deities' dress and iconography, in order to establish clearly the status of the figures represented. The Hellenistic tradition is recognizable in the architectural remains at Arsameia on the Nymphaios (where western craftsmen worked), the columns at Karakus and Sesönk, and the naturalistic representations of Artagnes-Herakles and Apollo Epēkoos (on the Sofraz Köy stele) as nude figures. After the fall of the monarchy many of the royal monuments fell into ruin; stones from the royal tumulus at Karakus, for example, were used in construction of the Roman bridge over the Chabinas river.

Table 2. The Dynasty of Antiochus I.

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