

## Seleucus I Nicator

Seleucus I Nicator was one of the *Diadochi* (general) of Alexander the Great, who went on to become the founder of the Seleucid Empire, a superstate that extended from modern-day Turkey to the borders of Pakistan.

His empire left a lasting legacy of cultural fusion between the western and eastern cultures that would last for centuries.

Within the Indian context, Seleucus is known for his war with Chandragupta Maurya, the result of which was the Seleucid Empire losing some of its eastern territories to the Mauryan Empire.

This article will give more details about Seleucus I Nicator, which will be useful in the Ancient Indian History segment of the IAS Exam.

### Early Life of Seleucus I Nicator

Seleucus was the son of Antiochus, a general in the Philip of Macedon's army. Philip was the father of Alexander the Great. In the year 334 B.C, he was one of the many generals that accompanied Alexander on his campaigns against the Persian Achaemenid Empire.

During their long stay in Asia, Seleucus was married to a Persian princess Apama, like all the other generals in Alexander's Army. It was one of Alexander's methods to bring harmony between his Greek and Persian subjects. Unlike most of his colleagues, Seleucus remained faithful to his Persian wife and did not abandon her following Alexander's death in 323 B.C. The Persian Princess, named Apama remained his consort and later Queen for the rest of her life.

The division of Alexander's Empire did not go smoothly. Ptolemy, who had received Egypt, rebelled against the system and this inadvertently led to an unsuccessful invasion of Egypt by Perdicaas, who's commander in chief was Seleucid. Seleucid would assassinate Perdicaas and following the second partition of Alexander's domain in 321 B.C, Seleucus was given holdings in Babylonia (modern-day Iraq and Iran).

When Antigonus was made a satrap of the east in 316 B.C, Seleucus was threatened by this and made his way to Egypt. Soon war broke out between the diadochi and Seleucus joined hands with Ptolemy and commanded the Egyptian fleet.

Ptolemy's victory at Gaza in 312 B.C, Seleucus returned to the East and his return is marked as the beginning of the Seleucid Empire. Soon he began to conquer neighbouring states and within 9 years the entire eastern part of Alexander's empire was under his control.

When the old royal line of Macedonia died out in 305 B.C, Seleucus and the other Macedonian generals took the mantle of *basileus* (king). Soon, he established Seleucia on the Tigris as his capital

## Conflict with the Mauryan Empire

By the year 305 B.C. Seleucus I Nikator came into conflict with the Mauryan Empire under Chandragupta Maurya

Although there is little in historical records about the information regarding the battles fought at the time, most modern historians agree that Seleucids fared poorly against the Mauryans.

The two emperors came to an understanding and signed a treaty which conceded Seleucid holdings in southern Afghanistan and parts of Persia west of the Indus

In order to solidify the treaty, historians speculate that Seleucus married off his daughter to the Mauryan Emperor and even dispatched an ambassador, Megasthenes, to the Mauryan court at Pataliputra. In exchange, Chandragupta Maurya provided 500 war elephants to Seleucus which he would use with decisive effect at the battle of Raphia.

Further evidence of his limited presence in India can be of coins excavated in India. These coins describe him as a king and at a date as late as 293 B.C. No coins were struck in India thereafter and seems to confirm the reversal of territory west of the Indus to Chandragupta.

## Later Life and Legacy of Seleucus I Nikator

Following the end of the conflict with the Mauryan Empire, Seleucus turned his attention westwards. He added Syria to his territory in 301 B.C. Although his push into Ptolemaic Egypt was a failure at the battle of Raphia, his position in Asia Minor was relatively stable.

The new holdings of Syria gave him access to the Mediterranean. He founded the city of Antioch, which became a thriving port and an important administrative centre

Following the decisive battle of Corupedium in 281 B.C. he eliminated his chief rival Lysimachus and thus secured the whole of Alexander's conquests with the exception of Egypt. He was about to move on to take Thrace and Macedonia when he was assassinated the same year by another rival, Ptolemy Keraunos. He was succeeded by his son Antiochus.

Like their Ptolemaic counterparts in Egypt, the empire that took his name would adapt aspects of the many cultures present within the empire. While the Ptolemies achieved a delicate balance between Greek and Egyptian cultures, the Seleucids went overboard in promoting Hellenistic culture. It even led to local revolts such as the Maccabean revolt which devastated the province of Judaea. Nevertheless they were at the forefront of cultural integration

The Seleucids showed piety towards indigenous Gods. Cultural exchange was a two-way process; the conquered populations were expected to embrace aspects of Greek culture but the colonizers also embraced aspects of the culture of the colonized.