**Ptolemy I Soter**

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*For the astronomer, see* [*Ptolemy*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ptolemy)*; for others named "Ptolemy" or "Ptolemaeus", see* [*Ptolemy (disambiguation)*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ptolemy_(disambiguation))*.*

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| **Ptolemy I Soter I Founder of the** [**Ptolemaic Kingdom**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ptolemaic_Kingdom) | |
| Bust of Ptolemy I in the [Louvre Museum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louvre_Museum) | |
| [**Pharaoh**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pharaoh) | |
| [Royal titulary](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Egyptian_royal_titulary)   |  | | --- | |  | | |
| **Consort** | [Artakama](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artakama) [Thaïs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tha%C3%AFs) [Eurydice](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eurydice_of_Egypt) [Berenice I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berenice_I_of_Egypt) |
| **Children** | **With** [**Berenice I**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berenice_I_of_Egypt)**:** [Ptolemy II Philadelphus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ptolemy_II_Philadelphus) [Arsinoe II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arsinoe_II_of_Egypt) Philotera **With** [**Thaïs**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tha%C3%AFs)**:** Lagus Leontiscus Eirene **With** [**Eurydice**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eurydice_of_Egypt)**:** [Ptolemy Keraunos](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ptolemy_Keraunos) [Meleager](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meleager_(king)) Argaeus [Lysandra](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lysandra) Ptolemais |
| **Born** | 367 BC |
| **Died** | 283 BC (aged 84) |

**Ptolemy I Soter I** ([Ancient Greek](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greek): Πτολεμαῖος Σωτήρ, *Ptolemaĩos Sōtḗr*, i.e. Ptolemy (pronounced [/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English)[ˈtɒləmi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English#Key)[/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English)) the Savior), also known as **Ptolemy Lagides**, c. 367 BC – c. 283 BC, was a [Macedonian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Macedon) general under [Alexander the Great](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_the_Great), who became ruler of [Egypt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egypt) (323–283 BC) and founder of both the [Ptolemaic Kingdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ptolemaic_Kingdom) and the [Ptolemaic Dynasty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ptolemaic_Dynasty). In 305/4 BC he demanded the title of [pharaoh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pharaoh).

His mother was [Arsinoe of Macedon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arsinoe_of_Macedon), and, while his father is unknown, ancient sources variously describe him either as the son of [Lagus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lagus), a Macedonian nobleman, or as an illegitimate son of [Philip II of Macedon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip_II_of_Macedon) (which, if true, would have made Ptolemy the half-brother of Alexander), but it is possible that this is a later myth fabricated to glorify the Ptolemaic Dynasty. Ptolemy was one of Alexander's most trusted generals, and was among the seven [*somatophylakes*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Somatophylax) (bodyguards) attached to his person. He was a few years older than Alexander, and had been his intimate friend since childhood.

He was succeeded by his son [Ptolemy II Philadelphus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ptolemy_II_Philadelphus).

**Early career**

Ptolemy served with Alexander from his first campaigns, and played a principal part in the later campaigns in [Afghanistan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghanistan) and [India](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/India). He participated in the [Battle of Issus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Issus) and accompanied Alexander during his journey to the [Oracle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oracle) in the [Siwa Oasis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siwa_Oasis) where he was proclaimed a son of [Zeus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zeus). Ptolemy had his first independent command during the campaign against the rebel [Bessus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bessus) whom Ptolemy captured and handed over to Alexander for execution. During Alexander's campaign in the [Indian subcontinent](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_subcontinent) Ptolemy was in command of the advance guard at the siege of [Aornos](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aornos) and fought at the [Battle of the Hydaspes River](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_the_Hydaspes_River).

**Successor of Alexander**

When Alexander died in 323 BC, Ptolemy is said to have instigated the resettlement of the empire made at [Babylon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babylon). Through the [Partition of Babylon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partition_of_Babylon), he was appointed [satrap](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satrap) of [Egypt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egypt), under the nominal kings [Philip III Arrhidaeus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip_III_of_Macedon) and the infant [Alexander IV](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_IV_of_Macedon); the former satrap, the Greek [Cleomenes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cleomenes_of_Naucratis), stayed on as his deputy. Ptolemy quickly moved, without authorization, to subjugate [Cyrenaica](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyrenaica).

By custom, kings in Macedonia asserted their right to the throne by burying their predecessor. Probably because he wanted to pre-empt [Perdiccas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perdiccas), the imperial regent, from staking his claim in this way, Ptolemy took great pains in acquiring the body of Alexander the Great, placing it temporarily in [Memphis, Egypt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memphis,_Egypt). Ptolemy then openly joined the coalition against Perdiccas.

Perdiccas appears to have suspected Ptolemy of aiming for the throne himself, and may have decided that Ptolemy was his most dangerous rival. Ptolemy executed Cleomenes for spying on behalf of Perdiccas — this removed the chief check on his authority, and allowed Ptolemy to obtain the huge sum that Cleomenes had accumulated.

**Rivalry and wars**



Kingdom of Ptolemy I Soter

Other [diadochi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diadochi)

Kingdom of [Cassander](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cassander)

Kingdom of [Lysimachus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lysimachus)

Kingdom of [Seleucus I Nicator](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seleucus_I_Nicator)

[Epirus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epirus)

Other

[Carthage](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carthage)

[Rome](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Rome)

[Greek colonies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_colonies)

In 321, Perdiccas attempted to invade Egypt only to fall at the hands of his own men. Ptolemy's decision to defend the [Nile](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nile) against Perdiccas's attempt to force it ended in fiasco for Perdiccas, with the loss of 2000 men. This failure was a fatal blow to Perdiccas' reputation, and he was murdered in his tent by two of his subordinates. Ptolemy immediately crossed the Nile, to provide supplies to what had the day before been an enemy army. Ptolemy was offered the regency in place of Perdiccas; but he declined. Ptolemy was consistent in his policy of securing a power base, while never succumbing to the temptation of risking all to succeed Alexander.

In the long wars that followed between the different [Diadochi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diadochi), Ptolemy's first goal was to hold Egypt securely, and his second was to secure control in the outlying areas: Cyrenaica and [Cyprus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyprus), as well as [Syria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coele-Syria), including the province of [Judea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judea). His first occupation of Syria was in 318, and he established at the same time a protectorate over the petty kings of Cyprus. When [Antigonus One-Eye](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antigonus_I_Monophthalmus), master of Asia in 315, showed dangerous ambitions, Ptolemy joined the coalition against him, and on the outbreak of war, evacuated Syria. In Cyprus, he fought the partisans of Antigonus, and re-conquered the island (313). A revolt in [Cyrene](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyrene,_Libya) was crushed the same year.

In 312, Ptolemy and [Seleucus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seleucus_I_Nicator), the fugitive satrap of Babylonia, both invaded Syria, and defeated [Demetrius](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demetrius_I_of_Macedon) Poliorcetes ("besieger of cities"), the son of Antigonus, in the [Battle of Gaza](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Gaza_(312_BC)). Again he occupied Syria, and again—after only a few months, when Demetrius had won a battle over his general, and Antigonus entered [Syria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syria) in force—he evacuated it. In 311, a peace was concluded between the combatants. Soon after this, the surviving 13-year-old king, Alexander IV, was murdered in Macedonia on the orders of Cassander, leaving the satrap of Egypt absolutely his own master.

The peace did not last long, and in 309 Ptolemy personally commanded a fleet that detached the coastal towns of [Lycia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lycia) and [Caria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caria) from Antigonus, then crossed into Greece, where he took possession of [Corinth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corinth,_Greece), [Sicyon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sicyon) and [Megara](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Megara) (308 BC). In 306, a great fleet under Demetrius attacked Cyprus, and Ptolemy's brother [Menelaus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Menelaus_(general)) was defeated and captured in another decisive [Battle of Salamis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Salamis_in_Cyprus_(306_BC)). Ptolemy's complete loss of Cyprus followed.



Ptolemy as Pharaoh of Egypt, British Museum, [London](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London).

The satraps Antigonus and Demetrius now each assumed the title of king; Ptolemy, as well as [Cassander](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cassander), [Lysimachus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lysimachus) and [Seleucus I Nicator](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seleucus_I_Nicator), responded by doing the same. In the winter of 306 BC, Antigonus tried to follow up his victory in Cyprus by invading Egypt; but Ptolemy was strongest there, and successfully held the frontier against him. Ptolemy led no further overseas expeditions against Antigonus. However, he did send great assistance to [Rhodes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhodes) when it was besieged by Demetrius (305/304). [Pausanias](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pausanias_(geographer)) reports that the grateful Rhodians bestowed the name *Soter* ("savior") upon him as a result of lifting the siege. This account is generally accepted by modern [scholars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academia), although the earliest datable mention of it is from coins issued by [Ptolemy II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ptolemy_II_Philadelphus) in 263 BC.

When the coalition against Antigonus was renewed in 302, Ptolemy joined it, and invaded Syria a third time, while Antigonus was engaged with Lysimachus in [Asia Minor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anatolia). On hearing a report that Antigonus had won a decisive victory there, he once again evacuated Syria. But when the news came that Antigonus had been defeated and slain by Lysimachus and Seleucus at the [Battle of Ipsus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Ipsus) in 301, he occupied Syria a fourth time.



The taking of Jerusalem by Ptolemy Soter ca. 320 BC, by [Jean Fouquet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Fouquet).

The other members of the coalition had assigned all Syria to Seleucus, after what they regarded as Ptolemy's desertion, and for the next hundred years, the question of the ownership of southern Syria (i.e., Judea) produced recurring warfare between the [Seleucid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seleucid_dynasty) and Ptolemaic dynasties. Henceforth, Ptolemy seems to have mingled as little as possible in the rivalries between [Asia Minor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asia_Minor) and [Greece](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greece); he lost what he held in Greece, but reconquered Cyprus in 295/294. [Cyrene](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyrene,_Libya), after a series of rebellions, was finally subjugated about 300 and placed under his stepson [Magas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magas_of_Cyrene).

**Successor**

In 289, Ptolemy made his son by [Berenice](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berenice_I_of_Egypt)—[Ptolemy II Philadelphus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ptolemy_II_Philadelphus)—his co-regent. His eldest (legitimate) son, [Ptolemy Keraunos](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ptolemy_Keraunos), whose mother, [Eurydice](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eurydice_of_Egypt), the daughter of [Antipater](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antipater), had been repudiated, fled to the court of Lysimachus. Ptolemy also had a consort in [Thaïs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tha%C3%AFs), the Athenian [*hetaera*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hetaera) and one of Alexander's companions in his conquest of the ancient world. Ptolemy I Soter died in 283 at the age of 84. Shrewd and cautious, he had a compact and well-ordered realm to show at the end of forty years of war. His reputation for bonhomie and liberality attached the floating soldier-class of Macedonians and Greeks to his service, and was not insignificant; nor did he wholly neglect conciliation of the natives. He was a ready patron of letters, founding the Great [Library of Alexandria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Library_of_Alexandria).

He himself wrote a history of Alexander's campaigns that has not survived. This was long considered an objective work, distinguished by its straightforward honesty and sobriety. [Arrian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arrian) of Nicomedia, author of the most widely read account of Alexander the Great, noted that he relied most heavily on Ptolemy's history because "as he himself was a king, mendacity would have been more dishonorable for him than for anyone else." However, as noted by A.B. Bosworth, an expert on Greek history, Ptolemy may have exaggerated his own role, and had propagandist aims in writing his history.

**Euclid**

Ptolemy personally sponsored the great mathematician [Euclid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euclid), but found Euclid's seminal work, the [*Elements*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euclid%27s_Elements), too difficult to study, so he asked if there were an easier way to master it. According to [Proclus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proclus) Euclid famously quipped: "Sire, there is no [Royal Road](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Road) to [geometry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geometry)."

**Fictional portrayals**

* Ptolemy was played by [Virgilio Teixeira](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virgilio_Teixeira_(actor)) in the film [*Alexander the Great*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_the_Great_(1956_film)) (1956) and by [Robert Earley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Earley), [Elliot Cowan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elliot_Cowan), and [Anthony Hopkins](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthony_Hopkins) in the [Oliver Stone](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oliver_Stone) film [*Alexander*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_(2004_film)) (2004).
* [L. Sprague de Camp](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L._Sprague_de_Camp)'s novel [*The Bronze God of Rhodes*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bronze_God_of_Rhodes) features Ptolemy as a minor character. He also appears in [Harry Turtledove](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_Turtledove)'s novel [*The Gryphon's Skull*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Gryphon%27s_Skull).
* [Duncan Sprott](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duncan_Sprott)'s novel [*The Ptolemies*](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Ptolemies&action=edit&redlink=1) features Ptolemy as a central character and founder of the Ptolemaic Dynasty.
* Ptolemy appears as a character in [Mary Renault](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Renault)'s novels [*Fire From Heaven*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fire_From_Heaven), [*The Persian Boy*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Persian_Boy), and [*Funeral Games*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Funeral_Games_(novel)). He also appears in her non-fictional [*The Nature of Alexander*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Nature_of_Alexander).
* Ptolemy is one of the minor characters in the historical novel *Roxana Romance* by A. J. Cave with the Hellenic spelling of *Ptolemaios*.
* Ptolemy is the main protagonist of Christian Cameron's *God of War* (2012), a fictional account of Alexander the Great's life and campaigns as narrated by Ptolemy himself.

**Gallery**



A rare coin of Ptolemy I, a reminder of his successful campaigns with Alexander in India. **Obv**: Ptolemy in profile at the beginning of his reign. **Rev**: Alexander triumphantly riding a chariot drawn by elephants.



Ptolemy coin with Alexander wearing an elephant scalp, symbol of his conquest of India.



Ptolemy I gold [stater](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stater) with elephant [quadriga](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quadriga), [Cyrenaica](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyrenaica).



Tetradrachm with portrait of Ptolemy I, [British Museum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Museum), London

**See also**

Media related to [Ptolemy I](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Ptolemy_I) at Wikimedia Commons



* [History of Ptolemaic Egypt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Ptolemaic_Egypt)

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