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## AN EARLY PARTHIAN ‘VICTORY’ COIN

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IN autumn of 1964, while tilling a field near the village of Qal’eh Paras, lying some 40 km east of Gorgan and to the south-west of Gombad-e Qābūs/Kāvūs in North-East Iran, two local farmers unearthed a hoard of ancient coins (*IGCH*, 1798).<sup>1</sup> This happened in the vicinity of the citadel of an important Parthian site also called Qal’eh Paras. The find-spot was near an Imamzadeh, probably from the Il-Khanid period (AD 1256-1357) and known locally as Bībī Halīmeh.<sup>2</sup> The old city itself was built in polygonal shape by the Parthians. It had a double defensive wall whose ruins still stand to a height of 3.50 m, separated by an interposing 6.60 m wide moat. Its citadel, probably of circular construction, is located in the southern part of the city, rising at present to a height of about 8.80 m above the level of the plain. Unfortunately the ruins of the old city have been dug over extensively by clandestine excavations throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century for plunder. According to Sykes who visited the site in the early 1900s, Qal’eh Paras was the capital of the region during the Arsacid period.<sup>3</sup> It is believed that the hoard contained approximately 3,000 non-Parthian and Parthian pieces. Of these about half was allegedly concealed by the finders at an unknown location.<sup>4</sup> Part of the other half was seized by local gendarmes and eventually ended up in some museums in Tehran. The remaining portion was later dispersed by antiquities and coin dealers in Tehran.

The first official announcement of the discovery was made by Sellwood in late 1968.<sup>5</sup> He then set out, in a joint article with Abgarians in 1971, a detailed account of the composition of the find and the 123 pieces he had examined.<sup>6</sup> As it turned out, the Parthian fraction of the hoard belonged exclusively to Arsaces I (247-211 BC) and his son and successor, Arsaces II (211-185 BC)<sup>7</sup> with four out of the six varieties present being new types. Insofar as the available records are concerned the hoard contained no bronze denominations or Parthian types later than the S6 drachms of Arsaces II. The pristine state of the latest pieces in the find indicated that it had been interred about the time of the eastern anabasis of Antiochus III the Great (222-187 BC).<sup>8</sup> It is believed that after his victory in Hyrcania the Seleucid monarch accepted Arsaces II as an ally but probably took away from him the right to issue coinage in his own name. This lasted for about twenty years. However, in 189 BC Antiochus suffered a crushing defeat by the Romans in Magnesia in Asia Minor. This encouraged the Parthians to flout their treaty of alliance, revoke the agreement not to have an independent currency and once again resume minting their own autonomous coinage. But they compounded our difficulties in assigning some of their early coinages to specific rulers by keeping them undated and also piously adopting the dynastic name Arsaces to perpetuate the memory of the founder of their dynasty.

Our aim in this note, submitted as a small contribution to celebrate the 81<sup>st</sup> birthday of an accomplished scholar and numismatist, David Sellwood, is to show that the bronze coin described

\* Tabriz, Iran. This work was completed at the St. Catherine’s College, Oxford University, Oxford (UK), and supported by a grant from the Maclaren Foundation and Morteza Rastegar Endowment.

<sup>1</sup> THOMPSON *et alii* 1973, 257, no. 1798 (Atrek Valley). According to ABGARIANS, SELLWOOD 1971, 103, the discovery was made somewhere between Gombad (in the modern Golestān province) and Bojnūrd (the capital of the present day north-Khorāsān province).

<sup>2</sup> KIANI 1982, 53, 56 and pls. 25.3-26.1.

<sup>3</sup> SYKES 1911, 18.

<sup>4</sup> The finders experienced great difficulties disposing their share of the hoard, since the coins were not immediately

accepted as genuine Parthian types. Having finally sold the pieces they returned to their village. To date their fate and that of the re-interred coins remain unknown.

<sup>5</sup> SELLWOOD 1968, 371.

<sup>6</sup> ABGARIANS, SELLWOOD 1971, 109-113.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. ASSAR 2005, 35-36 for the revised inception and terminal dates of the reign of Arsaces II.

<sup>8</sup> BM 116690 tablet (a contract text from Uruk), dated -1.90 SEB clearly shows that Seleucus III (225-222 BC) was still king in month I (Nisānu) of 90 SEB (8/9.4-6/7.5.222 BC). The *terminus post quem* of the reign of Antiochus III is now 22.II.90 SEB (28/29.5.222 BC). This new date is found in the 1<sup>st</sup> Saturn paragraph of the BM 45661+46170 Goal-Year Text from 149 SEB (163/162 BC).

below was minted by the Arsacids to commemorate their second liberation from Seleucid tutelage. If so, it would be a welcome addition to our slowly growing corpus of contemporary evidence from the formative years of Arsacid power in Iran. It would also enable us to reconstruct the early history of Parthia with added confidence.

The coin, a new variety of the S7.2 dichalkous, weighs 3.70 grams and has a 16-17 mm diameter. It shows on its obverse the royal head (not bust) in *bashlyk* facing left within a dotted border.



On the reverse, Nike with open wings is standing left. She holds a laurel wreath in her right hand and a palm branch in the left. Behind her on the right, the retrograded inscription ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ reads from outside the design. The scene is demonstrably different from the reverse motif of the S7.1 drachms showing Arsaces I seated on *omphalos* and holding a bow in his outstretched right hand. It is possible that after Antiochus III was defeated in 189 BC the Parthians associated the

eponymous founder of their dynasty with the Delphic stone to express that *the centre of the earth*, once reserved by the Greeks for such gods as Apollo, was now occupied by a new power. However, while the first appearance of Arsaces I on *omphalos* too may imply, rather strongly, that the whole of S7 coinage was a celebratory emission, the reverse design of our bronze clearly suggests that it was intended to mark a triumph.<sup>9</sup> In the following paragraphs we will attempt to show that Arsaces II struck this issue after Antiochus' heavy defeat at Magnesia assured the Parthians of no further Seleucid assault on their kingdom.

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In his summary of the *Philippic History* of Pompeius Trogus, Justin (41.4.3-41.5.5) intimates that the Parthians first revolted against their Seleucid overlords in the reign of Seleucus II (246-225 BC), during the First Punic War (264-241 BC) and when Lucius Manlius Vulso and Marcus Atilius Regulus were joint Roman consuls (256 BC). He further relates that the struggle for supremacy between Seleucus II and his brother Antiochus Hierax (c. 240-227 BC) encouraged the Parthians and others, including Diodotus I (c. 255-235 BC) in Bactria, to defect from Macedonian control. Then, having heard the news of the defeat of Seleucus II by the Gauls (sometime in 240-238 BC in Ancyra, Asia Minor), Arsaces I, a man of obscure antecedents but undisputed bravery, invaded Parthia with a band of marauders. He slew the provincial governor, Andragoras, and assumed command of the people. Shortly afterwards, Arsaces annexed Hyrcania and then began to raise an army lest he was attacked by Seleucus or Diodotus. But the death of the latter delivered Arsaces from the fear of a Bactrian assault and he judiciously made a pact with the son and heir of Diodotus, also called Diodotus (c. 235-230 or 225 BC). Finally, Arsaces confronted Seleucus II who had come to suppress his revolt and won a momentous victory (generally placed somewhere in the period 232-228 BC). The Parthians observed that day with great solemnity and took it as the date of the beginning of their liberation from Macedonian bondage. Fresh troubles in Asia, however, compelled Seleucus to turn back and this gave Arsaces a respite to settle the affairs of Parthia, levy soldiers, build fortresses, and strengthen his towns. Having founded the city of Dara on Mount Apaortenon and

<sup>9</sup> LE RIDER 1965, 155, 377-378 and pl. xxxi: E-L on the celebratory bronze issue of Antiochus VII (138-129 BC) after his triumph over the Parthians in 130 BC. These illustrate Nike holding a crown in her right hand and a palm branch over her left shoulder. Cf. also SELWOOD 1980, 194-195, S60.1-10

silver and bronze coinage of Vonones I (c. AD 8-12). These were minted to commemorate Vonones' initial victory over Artabanus II (c. AD 10-38). They show Nike holding a laurel wreath and a palm branch on the tetradrachms and only a palm branch on the drachms and bronzes.

consolidated the kingdom, Arsaces died at an advanced age. The Parthians revered his memory by conferring the name Arsaces on all their later rulers.

Unfortunately, Justin's chronology of the early Parthian affairs is flawed. He has confused some of the major events of the reign of Arsaces I and conflated others. While we do not intend to present a detailed revision of the early Arsacid history in this short note, we believe a brief analysis of the extant evidence will enable us to decide a possible occasion for the minting of the 'victory' coin presented above.

The comment by Justin (41.4.3) that «a cuius pronepote Seleuco primum defecere: from whose great-grandson (error for grandson), Seleucus they first defected» strongly implies that the Parthians attempted more than once to break away from Seleucid domination. It is possible that as a locally co-ordinated revolt, the first of these in 256 BC under Antiochus II was unrelated to Arsaces I and swiftly suppressed by the Seleucid garrison in the satrapy. On the other hand, in recording the original Arsacid rebellion, Justin may have confused *Consul Suffectus* M. Atilius Regulus in 256 BC with *Consul Ordinarius* C. Atilius Regulus in 250 BC. This agrees with Eusebius (*Chron.*, II, 120) who places Arsaces' defection in Ol. 132.3 (250/249 BC). But the inconsistency between the date of the first Parthian rebellion and the identity of the Seleucid monarch suggests that Justin mistook Seleucus II for his father Antiochus II. We shall presently show that the successful Arsacid coup d'état in 250/249 BC and the subsequent epoch making victory of Arsaces I in 247 BC may have involved the former Seleucid prince as his father's ruler of the Upper Satrapies or 'Viceroy of the East'.

Regrettably, the confused statement of Justin (41.4.9) has inspired some modern authors to move the decisive Arsacid triumph from 247 BC to 232-228 BC about the end of the reign of Seleucus II.<sup>10</sup> Instead they have taken 238 BC wherein Arsaces I invaded Parthia and slew her serving satrap, Andragoras (246-238 BC), as the date of Parthian liberation. However, given the contemporary and later records it is now possible to investigate the chronological difficulties this thesis creates and set at least some of the early Arsacid affairs in their proper context.

We begin with Appian (*Syr.*, 11.65). He reports that Antiochus II Theos (261-246 BC) was murdered by his first wife, Laodice. She then eliminated both Antiochus' second wife, Berenice, daughter of the Lagid ruler Ptolemy II Philadelphus (282-246 BC), and her infant son. This provoked Ptolemy III Euergetes (246-222 BC) to avenge his sister's death. He invaded Syria, sacked Antioch and advanced as far as Babylon. Appian then continues that «the Parthians now began to revolt, taking advantage of the confusion in the house of the Seleucidae». Thanks to the colophon of a contemporary Astronomical Diary, we now know that Antiochus II died in month V of 66 SEB (20/21.7.-18/19.8.246 BC) and was immediately succeeded by his elder son Seleucus II.<sup>11</sup> A further Babylonian record confirms that Lagid forces indeed penetrated into Mesopotamia and laid siege to Babylon.<sup>12</sup> But a legal document from Uruk, dated 22.III.67 SEB (10/11.7.245 BC) to Seleucus II, shows that the Ptolemaic raid into Babylonia was transient and probably motivated by plunder rather than conquest.<sup>13</sup>

Rev.

28: ..... UNUG.KI

29: ITU.SIG UD-22-KÁM MU-1-šù-7-KÁM <sup>1</sup>Se-lu-ku LUGAL

28: ..... Uruk.

29: Month III, day 22, year 67, Seleucus (being) King

These strongly suggest that the Parthian revolt in Appian, probably led by the Seleucid satrap Andragoras, took place around 246/245 BC. They also indicate that the later date 238 BC is not neces-

<sup>10</sup> WOLSKI 1956-1957, 46-52; BRODERSEN 1986, 378-381.

<sup>11</sup> SACHS, HUNGER 1989, 68-69, no. -245B, and 70-71, no. -245A on the news of the death of Antiochus II reaching Babylon on 20.V.66 SEB (8/9.8.246 BC) and leading to the change of reign.

<sup>12</sup> BCHP 11 (<http://www.livius.org/cg-cm/chronicles/>

[bchp-ptolemy\\_iii/bchp\\_ptolemy\\_iii\\_01.html](http://www.livius.org/bchp-ptolemy_iii/bchp_ptolemy_iii_01.html)).

<sup>13</sup> CLAY 1919, pl. 13, no. 17 (a document referring to labour for the temple). Porphyry (43.23-26) reports that having ransacked the kingdom of Seleucus, Ptolemy III carried off to Egypt 40,000 talents of silver and 2,500 precious vessels and statues of gods.

sarily the beginning of Arsacid power in Parthia since Arsaces I too could have rebelled as early as 246/245 BC with impunity.

The next classical source on the secession of Parthia is Strabo (11.9.2). He relates that:

...when revolutions were attempted by the countries outside the Taurus, because of the fact that the kings of Syria and Media, who were in possession also of these countries, were busily engaged with others, those who had been entrusted with their government first caused the revolt of Bactriana and of all the country near it, I mean Euthydemus and his followers; and then Arsaces, a Scythian with some of the Dahae, I mean the Aparnians, as they were called, nomads who lived along the Ochus, invaded Parthia and conquered it.

This is indeed a difficult and somewhat confused statement. Firstly, the reference to the Bactrian ruler Euthydemus at this juncture is misplaced. As Strabo (11.9.3) himself reports:

...some say that Arsaces derives his origin from the Scythians, whereas others say that he was a Bactrian, and that when in flight from the enlarged power of Diodotus and his followers he caused Parthia to revolt.

We thus have a clear reference to the Parthian rebellion under Arsaces I which followed that by Diodotus in Bactria and after the latter had consolidated his authority and enlarged his dominion. Secondly, we have Strabo's comment that «the kings of Syria and Media» who also held the countries outside the Taurus were busily engaged with «others»<sup>14</sup> or «each other»<sup>15</sup> and its associated chronological problems. This has been generally interpreted to refer either to Antiochus II and Seleucus II during the Second Syrian War (257-253 BC) or to Seleucus II and his brother, Antiochus Hierax, in the Fraternal War (241-238 BC). Given that Seleucus II was born around 265 BC and so about 9 at the beginning and 13 years old after the termination of the second Seleucid conflicts, it is difficult to plead that he accompanied his father, Antiochus II, in Asia Minor as a joint ruler. But the possibility cannot be ruled out entirely.<sup>16</sup> In fact, we can now show that certain Babylonian cuneiform records report a «King Seleucus» in 253 BC (cf. below). He could be the elder son and co-regent of Antiochus II who succeeded his father as Seleucus II in 246 BC. The reference to Seleucus in 253 BC is close to the Consular date 256 BC of the first Parthian revolt in Justin. Given the cuneiform and literary material, it is possible to recommend that Antiochus' preoccupation in the West indeed triggered both the Bactrian and Parthian revolts in the East during 256-250 BC. Consequently Strabo's remarks about «kings of Syria and Media» may be taken to involve Antiochus II and Seleucus II although the latter did not actively participate in the Second Syrian War.<sup>17</sup> After all, in spite of defeating his brother, Seleucus II, at Ancyra in about 238 BC, Antiochus Hierax never wielded much power in Syria and Media to be regarded as king of those regions of the Empire.<sup>18</sup>

As briefly commented above, the reign of Seleucus II was beset by various conflicts, initially with Ptolemy III, leading to the Third Syrian War (246-241 BC), and then, during 241-238 BC, against his brother who was supported by Mithradates II of Pontus (c. 250-220 BC) and the Galatian mercenaries. Unfortunately, little is known about the events following the conclusion of the first Seleucid Fraternal War. But it is highly unlikely that Seleucus embarked on an expedition to quell

<sup>14</sup> MUSTI 1984, 219-220.

<sup>15</sup> WOLSKI 1956-1957, 38-40; WOLSKI 1999, 29-48; WOLSKI 2003, 28-66. But cf. Syncellus who calls Seleucus I «king of Syria, Babylonia and the interior regions»; Antiochus I «king of Asia, Syria and Babylonia»; Antiochus II as well as Seleucus II, «king of Syria and Asia». It appears that after the loss of Bactria and Parthia, Syncellus omits the title 'king of Asia' from the titulature of the Seleucid rulers, referring to Seleucus III through Demetrius I as «king of Syria» only. Thereafter, he again styles Alexander Balas, Demetrius II, Antiochus VII, and Antiochus Grypus «king of Syria and Asia». Cf. also DRIJVERS 1998, 284, and WILL 2003, 305-306, who reject Wolski's view that the kings of Syria and Media were «busy with each other».

<sup>16</sup> According to Polybius (5.55.4) Antiochus, the eldest son of Antiochus III, was born in 220 BC. Cf. SACHS, WISEMAN 1954, 204 and 207 on the co-regency in 210/209 BC of Antiochus III and Antiochus before the senior king set out to recover the lost satrapies of Parthia and Bactria.

<sup>17</sup> Strabo (11.14.15). WOLSKI 1999, 48, n. 15, quoting SCHMITT 1964, 70, n. 10, maintains that the reference to «those who held Syria and Media» applies to the Seleucid rulers in general. As shown in n. 15 above, this was the title of Seleucus I through Antiochus III who held Syria and Media, including Armenia.

<sup>18</sup> HOUGHTON, LORBER 2002, 295-325. The locations of the active Seleucid mints under Antiochus Hierax limit his sphere of influence to Western Asia Minor.

the rebellions in the eastern satrapies soon after his crushing defeat in Asia Minor in 238 BC.<sup>19</sup> A further setback would have destroyed his authority and endangered the integrity of the Seleucid Empire. We are told that shortly after his triumph in Asia Minor, Antiochus Hierax was attacked by Attalus I (241-197 BC), king of Pergamum, who remained an enemy of Seleucus II<sup>20</sup> and later, his son Seleucus III (225-222 BC). Perhaps Seleucus' presence in Syria prevented Attalus from further incursions into western Seleucid territories.

There was also a constant threat from Antiochus Hierax. He would have profited from Seleucus' absence in the East and overrun Syria and Babylonia. It is believed that at some point in time subsequent to his victory in Asia Minor, Hierax conspired with his aunt, Stratonice, to usurp the Seleucid throne. He invaded Mesopotamia while Stratonice led a revolt in Antioch about 235 BC.<sup>21</sup> In any case, the two references in our cuneiform records to major unrest in Babylon clearly reflect the turbulent state of affairs in the Empire following Seleucus' defeat at Ancyra. These report fighting at the palace in month III of 74 SEB (3/4.6-2/3.7.238 BC)<sup>22</sup> and intense clashes, again around the royal residence, involving the loyal troops and those who had «revolted against King Seleucus» in month VII of 77 SEB (26/27.9-24/25.10.235 BC).<sup>23</sup> Taken together, our scanty evidence strongly indicates that the victory of Arsaces I over Seleucus II in Justin (41.4.9-10) must have pre-dated both the War of the Brothers during 241-238 BC and the 246-241 BC conflict between the Ptolemaic and Seleucid Empires. It is, therefore, possible that Justin confused or conflated two separate expeditions under Seleucus II against Parthia. The first took place in 247 BC in the last year of Antiochus II and while Seleucus was the viceroy of Media and the Eastern satrapies.<sup>24</sup> This ended with a Parthian victory. The second was led in 229/228 BC and culminated in Seleucus' triumph. Perhaps the Parthian threat was taken lightly in 247 BC and thus prevented the full diversion of the Seleucid forces to the East. Seleucus was directed to attack Parthia at the head of a small army. This enabled Arsaces I to defeat him and gave the Parthians their epoch-making victory. According to Justin (41.4.10), the Arsacids took that day as the beginning of their independence. The double-dated Babylonian cuneiform and Greek documents and also those from Susa and Dura-Europus place the beginning of the Parthian epoch in the spring of 247 BC.<sup>25</sup> This agrees with Justin's statement on the victory of Arsaces and contradicts a date after the invasion of Parthia in about 238 BC (cf. below). Perhaps the reference to the coronation of Arsaces I in the city of Asaac in Astauene (north of Hyrcania), reported by Isidore of Charax (*Parthian Stations*, 11), echoes the events immediately after the first Parthian triumph in 247 BC.<sup>26</sup> However, it is also possible that the confusion surrounding the identity of the Seleucid prince who was defeated by Arsaces I stemmed from the fact that Antiochus II was also called Seleucus. We are told that Seleucus III was originally called Alexander and took the name Seleucus after his accession to the throne.<sup>27</sup> So did Antiochus IV (175-164 BC), who was called Mithradates.<sup>28</sup> He adopted the name Antiochus upon the death of his elder brother, Antiochus (born in 221 BC and died in 193 BC). A similar situation may have prevailed after Antiochus I executed his eldest son, Seleucus, sometime after 4.V.46 SEB (13/14.8.266 BC). Although one colophon refers to «Kings Antiochus and his son Antiochus» in 13.VII.46 SEB (20/21.10.266 BC), at least one date-formula gives «Kings Antiochus and Seleucus» in 24.XII.46 SEB (27/28.3.265 BC) some five months after the death of co-ruler Seleucus.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, there are two date-formulas from month I of 49 SEB (11/12.4-9/10.5.263 BC) in two separate texts both clearly

<sup>19</sup> Eusebius (*Chron.*, I, 251) puts Seleucus' losses at 20,000 men.

<sup>20</sup> With Mithradates II of Pontus, Zeilas of Bithynia and the Galatians allied to Antiochus Hierax, it is possible that Attalus I initially supported Seleucus II. Hence his attack on Hierax soon after the conclusion of the Fraternal War. Attalus may have turned against Seleucus in c. 226 BC about the end of the latter's reign.

<sup>21</sup> GRAINGER 1997, 61 gives 235 BC; HOUGHTON, LORBER 2002, 291-292 give 227 BC.

<sup>22</sup> SACHS, HUNGER 1989, 88-89, no. -237.

<sup>23</sup> SACHS, HUNGER 1989, 94-95, no. -234A.

<sup>24</sup> SACHS, HUNGER 1989, 68-69, no. -245A, Obv. 13 confirms Seleucus' presence in Babylon in month I of 66 SEB (3/4.4-2/3.5.246 BC). This suggests that he may have retreated to Mesopotamia after his battle with Arsaces I.

<sup>25</sup> ASSAR 2003, 176.

<sup>26</sup> SCHOFF 1914, 8-9.

<sup>27</sup> Eusebius (*Chron.*, I, 253); Porphyry (32.9).

<sup>28</sup> Livy (33.19.9-10).

<sup>29</sup> BM 55519, Goal-Year Text for 94 SEB, Rev. 13, Mars II paragraph.

<sup>30</sup> BM 34691+45809, Goal-Year Text for 95 SEB, Obv. 10,

referring to «Kings Antiochus and Seleucus». <sup>30</sup> Finally, we have «King Seleucus» from 16.1.59 SEB (4/5.5.253 BC). <sup>31</sup> While the last of these could relate to Seleucus II as his father's appointed ruler in the East, the earlier records undoubtedly correspond to the joint reigns of Antiochus I (281-261 BC) and Antiochus II. Perhaps the latter was, after all, known as Seleucus. This may explain the confusion in Syncellus (284 B). Of all the Seleucid kings reported by the Byzantine writer, the only one with an uncertain name is Seleucus II. Syncellus remarks that «the fourth king of Syria and Asia was his son Antiochus, surnamed Callinicus, also known as Seleucus». If Antiochus II was indeed called Seleucus, it is possible that he, not his son Seleucus II, confronted Arsaces I in 247 BC and suffered a defeat. In any case, the first Parthian victory cannot be placed soon after the debacle in Ancyra in 238 BC. It must have happened either before this date or several years later, enabling Seleucus to raise an army and the necessary revenue to conduct another expedition. Furthermore, as shown above, Justin (41.4.8) reports that not long after his capture of Parthia (c. 238 BC) Arsaces annexed Hyrcania (probably c. 236/235 BC). This too indicates that the memorable victory of the founder of the Parthian dynasty over a Seleucid ruler (whether Antiochus II or Seleucus II) must have come before these major territorial gains to be reckoned by the Parthians as the beginning of their freedom from the Macedonian yoke. After all, the two consecutive statements in Justin (41.4.9-10 and 41.5.1) appear to be unconnected, implying that he conflated two separate battles between Arsaces I and the Seleucids. In the first Justin speaks of Seleucus' defeat that gave the Parthians their momentous triumph. In the second he states that Seleucus had to return to Asia to combat fresh troubles. <sup>32</sup> This gave Arsaces a respite to settle the affairs of Parthia and consolidate his position. If Seleucus had been worsted by Arsaces at this time, he would have been unable to lead a defeated army into further conflicts elsewhere in his Kingdom. Instead he would have retreated to Babylonia or Syria to replenish his forces before moving against another foe. This in turn would have enabled the Parthians to press westward unopposed and expand their dominion probably as far as Media. The fact that Seleucus abandoned his Parthian expedition and returned to deal with disturbances in the West strongly indicates that he was successful in his war with Arsaces. This also agrees with Strabo (11.8.8) who reports that when confronted by Seleucus Callinicus, Arsaces withdrew into the country of the Apasiacae (Apa-Sacae = 'Water Sacas', or Aspa-Sacae = 'Horse Sacas') between the Oxus and Tanais. <sup>33</sup> It is, therefore, highly unlikely that a triumphant Arsaces would have required a respite from his victory to manage the affairs of his kingdom. Taking the extant evidence in its entirety, including the statement by Eusebius (*Chron.*, I, 207) which places Arsaces' revolt in Ol. 133 (248/247-245/244 BC), we believe that the beginning of Parthian freedom and foundation of the monarchy may be safely placed in 247 BC.

A poorly preserved notice in an Astronomical Diary, dated month XI of 82 SEB (27/28.1-24/25.2.229 BC), suggests unrest in the royal palace in Babylon. We then have, from the same month, a possible reference to the presence of Seleucus II and his sons in Babylonia. <sup>34</sup> It is generally believed that the above mentioned passages in Strabo (11.8.8) and Justin (41.4.9-10) record the Parthian expedition of Seleucus in 229/228 BC. Perhaps the sketchy remarks in the corresponding cuneiform material about a ritual and presentation of offerings in month XII of 82 SEB (25/26.2-25/26.3.229 BC) allude to Seleucus' impending attack on Parthia. As briefly pointed out earlier, Antiochus Hierax exploited his brother's preoccupation in the East and invaded Mesopotamia sometime after his victory in Ancyra. Whether or not he attempted to unseat Seleucus II at this point in time is open to conjecture. But the incomplete date-formula of an Astronomical Diary fragment, cover-

Mercury paragraph. BM 35388, Goal-Year Text for 96 SEB, Rev. 3, Mars II paragraph. These clearly show that the corresponding date-formulas cannot have been mere scribal errors. The original Diary yielding the relevant planetary data must have been dated to "Kings Antiochus and Seleucus".

<sup>31</sup> BM 32222, Goal-Year Text for 118 SEB, Obv. 28, Saturn paragraph.

<sup>32</sup> Eusebius (*Chron.*, I, 251-253) is quite confused about the wars of Antiochus Hierax whom he calls Antigonus. Perhaps before his final defeat by Attalus I in Caria, Antiochus invaded Mesopotamia and was repelled by Seleucus.

<sup>33</sup> Polybius (10.48.1).

<sup>34</sup> SACHS, HUNGER 1989, 126-127, no. -229B.



ing at least month XI of year 84 SEB (2/3.2-3/4.3.227 BC), clearly omits the name of the reigning Seleucid ruler:<sup>35</sup>

[MU]<sup>r</sup>1<sup>1</sup>,24-KÁM<sup>1</sup><uninscribed> [Year] 84, <royal name excluded>

According to Justin (41.5.1) fresh troubles in Asia compelled Seleucus II to abort his encroachment into Parthia and turn west. It is possible that an attack on Babylonia by Hierax in early 227 BC and the ensuing confusion obliged the scribes to defer including a royal name in their date-formulas until after the conclusion of the final struggle between the two Seleucid brothers. Eusebius (*Chron.* I, 253) reports that Antiochus Hierax was defeated by Attalus I in Ol. 138.1 (228/227 BC) and that Seleucus II died in Ol. 138.2 (227/226 BC). With fresh contemporary evidence placing the death of Seleucus II in December 225 BC,<sup>36</sup> Hierax's defeat may be dated to 227/226 BC. Perhaps Attalus took advantage of Hierax's setback in Babylonia, attacked him and terminated his power in Asia Minor. In any case, Seleucus never returned to deal with the eastern secession in Bactria and Parthia. Justin (27.3.12) claims that he died in exile after falling from his horse. This enabled Arsaces I to rule unmolested by the Seleucids until his own death in 211 BC.

To summarise, we believe the following chronology highlights the main events before the eastern Anabasis of Antiochus III in 209 BC:

- |            |  |
|------------|--|
| 256-250 BC | Beginning of secessionist movements in eastern Seleucid satrapies leading to Bactrian independence under Diodotus I. Strabo (11.9.2-3) and Justin (41.4.3-5).  |
| 250-248 BC | Arsaces I rebels against Seleucid sway. He then defeats the expedition in 247 BC, led either by Antiochus II, called also Seleucus, or Seleucus II as his father's viceroy of the Upper Satrapies. Eusebius ( <i>Chron.</i> , II, 120 and <i>Chron.</i> , I, 207), Isidore of Charax ( <i>Parthian Stations</i> , 11) on the coronation of Arsaces I, Syncellus (284 B-C) and Zosimus (1.18.1), giving a 2-year reign to Arsaces, Justin (41.4.9-10) on the epoch-making Parthian victory against Seleucus, and the cuneiform material referring to «King Seleucus» during the reign of Antiochus II as well as Syncellus (284 B) reporting that Seleucus II was called Antiochus. |
| 246-245 BC | Antiochus II dies. Beginning of the Third Syrian War (246-241 BC). Ptolemy III invades Syria and briefly holds Mesopotamia. Andragoras rebels and declares Parthia independent. Cuneiform material ( <i>BCHP</i> 11) and Appian ( <i>Syr.</i> , 11.65).  |
| 245-238 BC | Arsaces I consolidates his power. Strabo (11.9.2). Fraternal War (241-238 BC) between Seleucus II and Antiochus Hierax erupts in Asia Minor.   |
| 238-237 BC | Seleucus II is defeated at Ancyra. Arsaces overruns Parthia and eliminates Andragoras. Strabo (11.9.2-3), Justin (41.4.7), Arrian ( <i>Parthica</i> , 1), and Syncellus (284 B-C).   |
| 237-235 BC | Arsaces I captures Hyrcania whose satrap is not mentioned in the classical literature, perhaps either Pherecles in Arrian or Agathocles in Syncellus.  |
| 235-230 BC | Stratonice revolts in Antioch in conjunction with a possible attack on Mesopotamia by Antiochus Hierax. Diodotus I dies and Arsaces I enters into alliance with his son Diodotus II against the Seleucids. Justin (41.4.8-9).  |
| 229-228 BC | Seleucus II invades Parthia and puts Arsaces I to flight. Strabo (11.8.8).   |
| 228-227 BC | Antiochus Hierax invades Babylonia. Seleucus II returns from his Parthian expedition and defeats Antiochus. Arsaces I is saved from further Seleucid attacks and begins strengthening his kingdom. Justin (41.5.1).  |
| 225 BC     | Seleucus II dies. Cuneiform and literary material.   |
| 225-211 BC | Arsaces I rules unopposed by the Seleucids. Justin (41.5.1-6).   |
| 211 BC     | Arsaces I dies. Syncellus (284 B-C), giving a 37-year reign to Tiridates, the putative brother of the founder of the Arsacid dynasty, rather than Arsaces I.   |

According to Justin (41.5.7), the successor of Arsaces I was his son, also called Arsaces. He fought gallantly against Antiochus III who led a hundred thousand infantry and twenty thousand cavalry to recover the lost Seleucid satrapies. At the end Antiochus accepted Arsaces II as his ally. Unfortunately, our extant literary sources give no further details about the Seleuco-Parthian alliance.

<sup>35</sup> SACHS, HUNGER 1989, 130-131, no. -227. The scribe has impressed on the left edge the masculine determinative wedge without the corresponding royal name.

<sup>36</sup> ASSAR forthcoming. Cf. also *BCHP* 10 ([http://www.livius.org/cg-cm/chronicles/bchp-dynastic/dynastic\\_01.html](http://www.livius.org/cg-cm/chronicles/bchp-dynastic/dynastic_01.html))

Appian (*Syr.*, 11.1.1) simply reports that Antiochus invaded Media and Parthia, and other nations that had revolted from his predecessors. Polybius (10.27.12-31.13) begins with Antiochus' arrival at Ecbatana in about 210 BC. It is possible that the Seleucid expedition set out for the Parthian heartland in early spring of 209 BC. The colophon date of a contract text from Uruk attests that on 17.v.102 SEB (7/8.8.210 BC) Antiochus III was still the sole ruler of the Seleucid Empire:<sup>37</sup>

Rev.

34: [... IT]U.NE UD-17-KÁM MU-1-me-2-KÁM <sup>1</sup>An-ti-'a-i-ku-su L[UGAL]

34: [... Mon]th V, day 17, year 102, Antiochus (being) K[ing]

This agrees with the incomplete text on the reverse and upper edge of an Astronomical Diary fragment dated month I of 102 SEB and mentioning Antiochus III alone. However, it has been pointed out that this and a larger fragment comprising months I-VI of 102 SEB may belong to a common original.<sup>38</sup> If so, the sole rule of Antiochus could be extended to 19/20.9.210 BC. But according to a Babylonian Hellenistic King List, Antiochus III appointed his eldest son, Antiochus, as co-ruler sometime in 102 SEB.<sup>39</sup> Assuming that Antiochus III was still the senior monarch in early autumn 210 BC, his co-regency must be placed before 1.I.103 SEB (13/14.4.209 BC). In any case, a date-formula in a legal text (division of inheritance) from Uruk confirms that on 15.I.103 SEB (27/28.4.209 BC) Antiochus III and the young prince were joint rulers:<sup>40</sup>

Obv.

3: .... ITU.BÁR UD-15-KÁM MU-1-me-3-KÁM <sup>1</sup>An-ti-'a-i-ku-su u <sup>1</sup>An-ti-i-ku-su DU[MU-šú LUGAL<sup>meš</sup>]

3: .... Month I, day 15, year 103, Antiochus and Antiochus, [his] so[n], [(being) Kings]

Herodotus (7.2) narrates that while the Achaemenid king, Darius I (522-486 BC), was preparing to invade Egypt and Athens, a dispute arose among his sons concerning the appointment of an heir to the throne. They held that according to Persian law, Darius was obliged to declare a successor before marching off with his army. This ultimately led to the appointment of Xerxes I (486-465 BC) as Darius' crown prince. It is possible that Antiochus III followed a similar tradition and installed his eldest son as his vice-regent lest he perished during his eastern anabasis. He then moved from Babylon to Media in early autumn of 210 BC, went into winter quarters in Ecbatana and departed for the East in mid spring of 209 BC.

Polybius relates that Antiochus plundered the temple of Aene (Anaitis/Anahita<sup>?</sup>) in Ecbatana to replenish his war chest. He minted a large issue amounting to about four thousand talents (equivalent to 24 million drachms) and then moved against Arsaces II. The Parthian ruler had anticipated Antiochus' arrival at Ecbatana but not envisaged his march across the adjacent desert to Parthia and Hyrcania. To obstruct Antiochus' advance, Arsaces ordered the destruction of the water wells and underground canals. Antiochus in turn sent one of his officers, Nicomedes, with a thousand cavalry to oppose the enemy. Having found Arsaces and his main army retired, the Seleucid commander attacked a small force of Parthian cavalry who were destroying the wells and forced them to fly. Unfortunately, from this point on Polybius fails to report the whereabouts of Arsaces II and his role in the ensuing battles. He simply follows Antiochus' unhindered march to Hecatompylus in the centre of Parthia and from there to Hyrcania where the Seleucid ruler deployed, for the first time, the engines of organized siege-warfare. Polybius intimates that Antiochus captured Tambrax without a battle. This was an unwalled city with a large royal palace. He then used sappers to undermine the fortified walls of the provincial capital Syrinx and took it by storm. Meanwhile, having found their defences breached, the Parthians slaughtered the Greek citizens, pillaged the town and made off by night. Antiochus dispatched one of his commanders, Hyperbas, with a band of mercenaries who overtook the fleeing fighters and forced them back into

<sup>37</sup> SCHROEDER 1916, 71, No. 48 (vat 8561).

<sup>38</sup> SACHS, HUNGER 1989, 172-175, no. -209A and 180-187, no. -209D. The incomplete date-formula in Obv. 1 of BM 34969 + 35467 (2<sup>nd</sup> Jupiter paragraph in the Goal-Year Text of 185

SEB) also confirms Antiochus III in month VI of 102 SEB.

<sup>39</sup> SACHS, WISEMAN 1954, 204 and 207.

<sup>40</sup> MCEWAN 1982, 81, no. 41 (1930.565), Obv. 3.

the city where they surrendered in despair. Given the discrepancy between the accounts of Justin and Polybius, it is possible that Antiochus waged further wars against Arsaces II after the fall of Syrinx. Perhaps the outcome of some of those conflicts remained in the balance thus compelling Antiochus to negotiate a treaty of alliance with the Arsacid ruler rather than waste his resources in prolonged warfare. But whatever the terms of the truce, it is highly likely that Arsaces II gave up Hyrcania, forfeited the right to issue his own coinage<sup>41</sup> and acknowledged Seleucid suzerainty. Antiochus then moved to Bactria and spent two years (208-206 BC) fighting Euthydemus.<sup>42</sup> At the end, with no clear outcome and the threat of a nomad invasion, both sides sued for peace and Antiochus acknowledged Euthydemus' formal submission. He then invaded India, exacted a substantial tribute from Sophagasenus, the Indian ruler, and operated in the Persian Gulf against the Gerrhaean Arabs. Finally, at some point in time before 8.1.107 SEB (7.4.205 BC) Antiochus went back to Babylon via Persis where sacrifices were performed for his successful expedition and safe return.<sup>43</sup> Around early spring 203 BC he campaigned in Asia Minor and then opened the Fifth Syrian War (202-195 BC) against Ptolemy V (205-180 BC). This saw him capture Sidon, Jerusalem, Tyre, southern and Coele Syria, and the Phoenician coast. Boastful of his achievements in Asia and Anatolia, Antiochus III invaded Greece in 192 BC. This provoked Rome to declare war on him. In 191 BC Roman forces drove the Seleucid army out of Thessaly and defeated Antiochus at Thermopylae.<sup>44</sup> The following year saw the Roman fleet crush the Seleucid naval force at the Battle of Myonnesus in the bay of Teos.<sup>45</sup> Antiochus retreated to Asia Minor where he was roundly defeated by the pursuing Romans at Magnesia in late 190-early 189 BC.<sup>46</sup> The Great Seleucid ruler sued for peace and was compelled at the Treaty of Apamea in 189 BC to cede to the Romans the whole of Asia Minor north of the Taurus, hand over his elephants and restrict his naval access in the Aegean. He was also required to pay a war indemnity of fifteen thousand talents, three thousand in advance and the remainder in twelve annual instalments.<sup>47</sup> This was a disaster Antiochus could not have foreseen when he marched on Greece in 192 BC. Perhaps to raise money to pay off the Romans, Antiochus moved east to Babylon and proceeded to Seleucia on the Tigris in month XI of 124 SEB (11/12.2-11/12.3.187 BC).<sup>48</sup> He then invaded Elymais and together with his entourage was slain on 25.III.125 SEB (2/3.7.187 BC)<sup>49</sup> by a mob when he vainly attempted to pillage the sanctuary of Zeus/Bel/Jupiter.<sup>50</sup>

In the defeat of the powerful Seleucid monarch at Magnesia in 189 BC and his subsequent demise in 187 BC, the Parthians might have seen an opportunity once again to throw off their foreign yoke.<sup>51</sup> As briefly mentioned above and adduced elsewhere,<sup>52</sup> the fabric, style and iconography of the S6 and S7 emissions are markedly different. These indicate a considerable lapse of time between the two issues. Given that the S6 coinage was struck during 211-209 BC and before Antiochus' successful eastern expedition, it is highly unlikely that the S7 silver and bronze denominations were minted before the news of the *fiasco* at Magnesia reached Arsaces II. While we cannot provide indisputable proof of our thesis, we believe that the above celebratory bronze was issued to mark Parthia's second freedom from Hellenistic subjection in about 189-187 BC.

#### ABBREVIATIONS

BCHP    Babylonian Chronicles of the Hellenistic Period  
 IGCH    *Inventory of Greek Coin Hoards* (cf. THOMPSON *et alii* 1973)

<sup>41</sup> ABGARIANS, SELLWOOD 1971, 117 state that Parthian coins bearing a rebel's head would have been *nummi non grati* and this accounts for the extreme rarity of the early issues (S1-S6) of Arsaces I and Arsaces II.

<sup>42</sup> Polybius (10.49.1-5 and 11.39.1-10).

<sup>43</sup> SACHS, HUNGER 1989, 202-203, no. -204C.

<sup>44</sup> Livy (36.8.2-18.8); Appian (*Syr.* 11.4.19-20).

<sup>45</sup> Polybius (21.11.3-13.1); Livy (36.42.1-45.8 and 37.8.1-30.10); Appian (*Syr.* 11.5.22-6.28).

<sup>46</sup> Livy (37.31.1-44.2); Appian (*Syr.* 11.6.28-36).

<sup>47</sup> Polybius (21.42.1-27 and 21.43.1-3); Appian (*Syr.* 11.7.37-39).

<sup>48</sup> SACHS, HUNGER 1989, 330-333, No. -187A, Rev. 4-18.

<sup>49</sup> SACHS, WISEMAN 1954, 204 and 207.

<sup>50</sup> Strabo (16.1.18); Diodorus Siculus (28.3.1 and 29.15.1); Justin (32.2.1).

<sup>51</sup> Strabo (11.14.5 and 11.14.15) reports that after the fiasco in Magnesia, the two generals of Antiochus III, Artaxias and Zariadris, abandoned their Seleucid overlord and ruled as kings in Sophene and Armenia respectively. Cf. also Polybius (25.2.11-12) on Artaxias, the ruler of the greater part of Armenia in 180-179 BC. Diodorus (31.17a) refers to him as king of Armenia in 165 BC just before he was defeated by Antiochus IV.

<sup>52</sup> ASSAR 2005, 36.

- «NC» «The Numismatic Chronicle»  
 SEB Seleucid Era of the Babylonian Calendar, beginning 1 Nīsānu (2/3 April) 311 BC (cf. ASSAR 2003)  
 VAT Vorderasiatische Abteilung Tontafeln - Vorderasiatischen Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

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