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Arsaces IV (c. 170-168 BC) the 1st “Missing” Parthian King*

G. R. F. Assar

Justin (41.5.8-10), in his Epitome of the Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus,1 omits Phriapatius’ paternity and his dynastic link with Arsaces II (211-185 BC) and relates that as the third Parthian ruler Phriapatius (185-170 BC)2 reigned fifteen years and bequeathed the throne to his eldest son Phraates I (168-165 BC). He then reports that having defeated the powerful Mardian tribes, Phraates appointed his brother Mithradates I (165-132 BC) as his successor and died shortly afterwards. Justin’s genealogy renders Mithradates I the fifth Arsacid king. However, although Phriapatius’ link with his predecessors is absent in Justin, the genealogical record on Nisa ostracon 2638 (1760)3 confirms that he descended from the brother of Arsaces I (247-211 BC), the founder of the Parthian monarchy.

On the other hand, in recounting Arsacid exploits in Bactria and Babylonia, Orosius (5.4.16) states that Mithradates I was the sixth king after Arsaces I.4 Unfortunately, Orosius offers nothing further on Mithradates I including his relationship with the intervening rulers.

* I am grateful to the Soudavar Memorial Foundation for their generous support.
A recently published inscribed ostracoon from Nisa attests that a great-grandson of Arsaces I also ruled as Parthian king at some point in time.\textsuperscript{4} I have shown elsewhere that this prince succeeded Phriapatius, reigned briefly as the fourth Arsaces and left no mature son on his death.\textsuperscript{5} Crown and command passed, once again, to the collateral Arsacid branch and thus enabled the sons of Phriapatius, Phraates I and Mithradates I, to assume the diadem in succession.

In this paper I will present some additional evidence to amend Justin's incomplete genealogy of the early Parthian rulers and show that he intentionally omitted the brief reign of Arsaces IV.

\* \* \*

In the 3rd and 4th paragraphs of the Preface to his Epitome of the Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus, Justin relates that "... whereas Greek historians approached their work as specialists, each following his own interests and omitting what did not serve his purpose, Pompeius summarised all their material within a chronological framework while also pursuing a topic from start to finish". He then continues that "During a period of free time which we had in the City (Rome), I excerpted from his 44 published volumes all the most noteworthy material. I omitted what did not make pleasurable reading or serve to provide a moral, and I produced a brief anthology to refresh the memory of those who had studied history in Greek, and to provide instruction for those who had not".

Justin's treatment of Trogus' work clearly explains why numerous petty and inconspicuous deeds are missing from his summaries and many short and uneventful reigns are conflated with longer and prosperous ones. For example, according to a Babylonian King List of the Hellenistic period (BM 35603)\textsuperscript{5}, Seleucus III (Dec. 225 - May 222 BC)\textsuperscript{7}, the elder son of Seleucus II (246-225 BC), succeeded his father and reigned for about 3 years. Several classical authors, including Appian, Polybius, and Eusebius, report that Seleucus III spent his entire short reign in attempting to recover control of Asia Minor. Appian (Syrian Wars, 66) relates that "As Seleucus was sickly and poor and unable to command the obedience of the army, he was poisoned by a court conspiracy". According to Polybius (4.48.8), in the midst of his campaign in Asia Minor with the full levy of the kingdom, Seleucus was assassinated by two men, Nicander and a Galatian called Apatorius. However, in spite of a clear reference to Seleucus III in Prologue 27 of Trogus Pompeus, Justin limits himself to a passing remark in book 29.1.3 of his Epitome that "In Asia, when Seleucus was killed, Antiochus was made king when no more than a child"; Antiochus III the Great (222-187 BC) was the younger brother of Seleucus III.

Another example concerns Seleucus IV (187-175 BC), the eldest son and successor of Antiochus III. The above quoted Babylonian King List records a 12-year reign for Seleucus. Appian (Syrian Wars, 66) comments that the two sons of Antiochus III, Seleucus IV and Antiochus IV (175-164 BC), ruled in succession. Seleucus "reigned 12 years but feebly and without success by reason of his father's misfortune ...". Yet, although in Prologue 32 of his book Trogus reports that "on the death of Seleucus (IV), son of Antiochus (III), his brother Antiochus (IV) succeeded to the throne", there are no allusions to Seleucus IV in Justin's book 32. He simply records the death of Antiochus III in his book 32.2-1.2, omits Seleucus IV and his son Antiochus (175 BC), and continues with Antiochus IV in book 34.2.7. Then, having excluded Antiochus V (164-162 BC) son of Antiochus IV, who was murdered by his cousin Demetrius I (162-150 BC) son of Seleucus IV, Justin summarises, in his books 34 through 39, the events of the reigns of Demetrius I, Alexander Balas (150-145 BC), Demetrius II (145-138, 1st reign), Antiochus VI (144-142 BC), Didotus Typhon (141-138 BC) and Antiochus VII (138-129 BC).

\textsuperscript{5} Assar 2004: 82-87; Assar 2005: 38-39.
\textsuperscript{6} Sachs and Wiseman 1954: 204 and 206-207; Del Monte 1997: 208-209.
\textsuperscript{7} In a forthcoming paper, to be published in N.A.B.U. (\textit{Nouvelles Assyriologique Brèves et Utilitaires}), I will argue that these lines 7-9 on the reverse of "The Seleucid Accessions Chronicle (BM 32171)" record the death of Seleucus II and the succession of his elder son, Seleucus III, in month IX of 87 SEB (December 225 BC). Given that the colophon of BM 116690, an unpublished contract text from Uruk, is dated -1.90 SEB (April/May 222 BC) and

subscribed to Seleucus III, and that Antiochus III is mentioned on 22.11.90 SEB (28/29 May 222 BC) in the 1st Saturn paragraph of the BM 45661-46170 Goal-Year Text, the terminal date of Seleucus III may be securely placed in 222 BC. Cf. Del Monte 1997: 200-202; Assar and Baglo 2006: 25, n. 8 and Hunger 2006: 162-163.
As for the remaining Seleucid rulers, except for a condensed discussion of the dynastic strife during the reigns of Demetrius II (130-125 BC; 2nd reign), the usurper Alexander II Zabinas (128-123 BC), Seleucus V (128 BC), Antiochus VIII Grypus (128-96 BC) and Antiochus IX Cyzicenus (114/113-96/95 BC) in book 39, and a brief remark in book 40.2.2-4, confusing Antiochus X (94/93 BC) with his son Antiochus XIII (66/65-64 BC), they are omitted by Justin. He was simply uninterested in the court intrigues and factional disputes that plagued the Seleucid Empire after the demise of Antiochus VII in 129 BC and thus summarised about 60 years of Seleucid history because he believed it failed to make "pleasurable reading or serve to provide a moral".

Unfortunately, Justin is our primary source on the early Arsacid history, chronology and genealogy. He reports, in book 41.5.5-10, that having won and consolidated the kingdom, Arsaces I died at an advanced age. He was succeeded by his son Arsaces II (called, most probably, Artabanus\(^8\) who fought gallantly against Antiochus III and was finally accepted by the Seleucid ruler as an ally. Justin then drops the dynastic link between Arsaces II and his successor and relates that the third Arsacid ruler was Phriapatius who reigned 15 years and left the throne to his elder son Phraates I. The latter conquered the powerful Mardian tribes (in Hyrcania) and died shortly afterwards leaving several sons. Yet Phraates passed over all of them and left the kingdom to his brother Mithradates I who was renowned for his military prowess and sagacity. Unfortunately, the omission

8. Justin (41.5.5-6) relates that the Parthians revered Arsaces I for his deeds and thus gave his name to all their later kings: ut omnes exinde reges suos Arsaces nomine nunquam. Since the Latin text renders Arsaces the throne name of the Parthian rulers, the next sentence in Justin (41.5.7) may not be taken to confirm that the son of Arsaces I bore the personal name Arsaces. Rather, it should be interpreted that he assumed the dynastic appellation upon his accession: Hulas Illius et successor regni, Arsaces et ipsa nomine…. Justin (41.5.8-9) further stresses that: The third Parthian king was Phriapatius, but he too was called Arsaces, for, as has just been observed, they (the Parthians) distinguished all their kings by that name, as the Romans use the titles of Caesar and Augustus: Tertius Parthis rex Phriapatius fuit, sed et ipsa Arsaces dictus. Nam sicut supra dictum est, omnes reges suos hoc nomine, sicut Romani Caesares Augustosque, cognominae recte. As for the personal name of Arsaces II, Trogus (Prologue 41) places a Parthian king called Artabanus before Mithradates I. Since Justin (41.5.7-8) hails Arsaces II for his achievements against Antiochus III and that Trogus (Prologue 41) lists only the prominent Arsacid rulers of the period 247-112 BC, Arsaces II may indeed have been called Artabanus.

by Justin of Phriapatius' paternity entails the following incomplete Arsacid stemma:

\[
\text{Arsaces I} \rightarrow \text{Arsaces II} \\
\text{.. Phriapatius} \rightarrow \text{Phraates I} \rightarrow \text{Sons} \\
\text{Mithradates I}
\]

However, one piece of contemporary evidence shows that Phriapatius was related to the brother of Arsaces I. This is the "accession record" on ostracon 2638 (1760), discovered by the Soviet team during the 1951-1955 South Turkmenistan Archaeological Expedition in the ruined city of Old Nisa, and originally published by I.M. Diakonoff and V.A. Livshits in 1960.\(^9\) It registers the genealogy of an Arsacid ruler who ascended the throne in 91/90 BC:

\[
\text{Aramaic transcription:} \\
1: \text{ŠNT IC XX XX X III III I 'ršk MLK' BRY-BRY Ṗ Y ZY(?) Ṣry(?) Ṣk} \\
2: \text{BRY ḤY-BRY Ṗ Y ZY(?) 'ršk}
\]

\[
\text{Parthian transcription:} \\
1: \text{srā ṣad (ud) paŋjāšt (ud) haš} Aṛšak šāh puhr-puhr ēē(?)} \text{Fryāpātak} \\
2: \text{puhr barādvarādāg ēē(?)} Aṛšak
\]

\[
\text{Translation:} \\
1: \text{Year 157 AE (91/90 BC), King Arsaces, grandson(?) of Phriapatius} \\
2: \text{son of the nephew(?) of Arsaces}
\]

It should be emphasised that the links between King Arsaces in 91/90 BC and Phriapatius in line 1, as well as Phriapatius and the brother of Arsaces I in line 2 of this document may have to be amended. It is possible that the Parthian ruler in 91/90 BC was son of the great-grandson of Phriapatius while Phriapatius himself was the son of either grandnephew (BRY ḤY-

in 1955, shows that a great-grandson of Arsaces I also ascended the throne at some point in time:

**Aramaic transcription:**
1. 'ršk MLK' BRY rpt
2. 'ršk Q'YLW
3. NDBT' ZNH Ś-RN ' II ILP

**Translation:**
King Arsaces, son (of) grandson (of) Arsaces. Accounted this offering of barley—2000 'e(phas)

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**Fig. 1. Nisa ostracon 2638 (1760)**

BRY-BRY) or grandniece (BRY 'HY-BRY-BRTY) of Arsaces I.\(^\text{10}\) However, regardless of these genealogical uncertainties, combining the Arsacid interrelationship in Justin's book 41 with Phriapatius' paternity in the accession record on Nisa ostracon 2638 (1760) yields to the following improved stemma:

\[
\begin{array}{ccccccc}
Arsaces I & \rightarrow & Arsaces II \\
\text{Brother} & \rightarrow & \text{Son} & \rightarrow & (?) & \rightarrow & \text{Phriapatius} & \rightarrow & \text{Phraates I} & \rightarrow & \text{Sons} \\
\rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & \rightarrow & 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Phriapatius the grand-cousin of Arsaces II (or his great-grand-cousin if the above proposed amended dynastic link turns out to be correct). It is highly likely that the complex interrelationship between the two rulers induced Justin to omit Phriapatius’ paternity. More importantly, however, is Phriapatius’ appointment as the third Arsaces. Given that he was from the collateral line of the Arsacid dynasty, his accession to the throne strongly suggests that on his death, Arsaces II had no mature son, grandson, or great-grandson to succeed him. Nor did he have a 15-year old brother, a nephew or a grand-nephew to claim the vacant throne. Yet the accession record on Nisa ostraca 2L proves that Arsaces II had, after all, a grandson. It also confirms that as the rightful heir to the throne of Arsaces I, the grandson of Arsaces II was ultimately crowned king. However, his coronation had to be postponed until after the 15-year reign of Phriapatius. Unless we are completely ignorant of the true reasons for the delayed accession of the grandson of Arsaces II, he must have been less than a year old when his grandfather, Arsaces II, died. Otherwise he would have secured the crown before the termination of Phriapatius’ reign. Confirmation for this comes from the only known Parthian co-regency involving a young Arsacid prince. The colophon of a contemporary cuneiform tablet14 from Uruk in southern Mesopotamia shows that upon his accession in early summer of 132 BC (July/August), Phraates II shared the throne with his mother:

Transliteration:
11: ... UNUG.KI ITU.NE
12: [UD-x-KÁM MU-1-me-16 šá ši-tu] [1-me-1,20] Ar-šák-‘a U R̃-en3-nu AMA-ši
13: LUGAL.MEŠ

Translation:
11: ... Uruk. Month V,
12: [day x, year 116, which is] year 180, Arsaces and his mother, Rinnu,
13: (are) Kings.

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However, beginning with April/May 131 BC, the extant cuneiform documents are exclusively subscribed to King Arsaces, i.e. Phraates II.16 The Babylonian evidence, therefore, shows that having ruled jointly with his mother for less than a year, Phraates began his independent reign when he came of age sometime in the period August 132 - May 131 BC.

It is possible that a similar situation arose after the death of Arsaces II. He had lost his son or sons, brothers and nephews either in war17 or to natural causes and so designated his infant grandson as his successor. However, Arsaces II died before the child prince could be crowned king. With the principal Arsacid branch depleted of eligible heirs, the Parthian Council installed Phriapatius as the Empire's regent and, according to Justin (41.5.8), granted him the dynastic appellation Arsaces. Whether Phriapatius died after 15 years, as Justin claims, or relinquished the throne, as the Babylonian sources indicate, cannot be ascertained at this stage. What is in little dispute is that having attained maturity, the grandson and heir of Arsaces II claimed his grandfather's throne and ruled before Mithradates I began his reign. Naturally, had he been older than 15, it is highly unlikely that his accession would have been postponed until after the 15-year reign of Phriapatius. Consequently, given the paternity of Arsaces IV and the above discussed reasons for Justin's omission of his brief reign, it is now possible to reconstruct the genealogy of the first six Parthian rulers as follows:

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Arsaces I → Arsaces II → Son → Arsaces IV

Brother → Son → (?) → Phriapatius → Phraates I → Sons → Mithradates I
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17. Assar and Bagloo 2006: 31-33. It is possible that Arsaces II lost some of his brothers and sons while fighting Antiochus III. Unfortunately, Polybius and Justin fail to record the entire Seleucid incursion into Parthia proper. However, the passing remark by Justin (41.5.8) that Arsaces II fought with admirable gallantry against Antiochus who had invaded the Parthian homeland with a huge army and that he was finally accepted by the Seleucid king as an ally, strongly indicates that both sides had suffered losses in prolonged combats.

Unfortunately, we have no knowledge of the fate of Arsaces IV and the events of his ephemeral reign. Given that Phriapatius ruled until about 170 BC and that Mithradates I ascended the throne around 165 BC, the intervening 5-6 years must be divided between Arsaces IV and Phraates I. I have shown elsewhere that Phraates ruled during 168-165/164 BC.18 This confines the reign of Arsaces IV to the period 170-168 BC and justifies its absence in Justin. Arsaces IV was simply too young when he died and could, therefore, not have had a mature male successor. Hence the transfer of kingship to the cadet Arsacid line for a second time.

**Abbreviations**


SEB Seleucid Era of the Babylonian Calendar, beginning 1 Nišān (2/3 April) 311 BC (cf. Assar 2003)

**Bibliography**


