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The Genealogy of the Parthian King Sinatruces (93/2-69/8 BC)

G.R.F. Assar

Introduction

An inscribed ostracon from Nisa confirms that Phraates III (68/7 – 58/7 BC) was a great-grandson of the third Arsacid ruler Phriapatius (185-170 BC). At the same time, two clear testimonies in our classical literature attest to the succession from Sinatruces to Phraates III. One of these further reveals that the two Parthian kings were father and son. On the other hand, Sinatruces’ coin inscriptions show that he was Theopator (Son of a Divine Father). Given the documentary, literary and numismatic evidence, my objective in this contribution is to decide Sinatruces’ paternity and establish a link with the founder of the Arsacid dynasty.

Historical Background

Setting aside the late Babylonian cuneiform tablets of the Arsacid epoch and the Aramaic-script Parthian ostraca from Nisa, our principal source for the history and lineage of the Arsacid rulers from Arsaces I (247-211 BC) through Phraates IV (c. 38-2 BC) is Justin. He relates, in his epitome of books 41-42 of the Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus, that the founder of the Parthian dynasty, Arsaces I, died after a long reign and was succeeded by his son Arsaces II (211-185 BC). Justin then omits the dynastic link between Arsaces II and his successor and continues on to the third Arsacid ruler Phriapatius, who reigned for fifteen years. Thereafter, Phriapatius’ elder son Phraates I (c. 168-165 BC) took the diadem. He defeated the powerful Mardi tribes in Hyrcania and died shortly afterwards. In spite of having several sons, Phraates bequeathed the throne to his younger brother Mithradates I (165-132 BC) who founded the Parthian Empire. Having summed up the major events of the reign of Mithradates I Justin concludes that:

Atque ita adversa valetudine adreptus, non minor Arsace proavo, gloriosa senectute decedit.

He (Mithradates I) then succumbed to illness and died with glory at an advanced age, as great a man as his great-grandfather, Arsaces.

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2 For references to Justin cf. Watson (1882); Ruehl (1886); and Yardley (1994).
Unfortunately, the Latin *proavus* is an inexact term and can denote both paternal as well as maternal great-grandfather in a direct line of descent. It can also express a distant paternal or maternal ancestor beyond great-grandfather.\(^3\) This naturally diminishes the genealogical value of Justin’s statement that links Mithradates I with Arsaces I.\(^4\)

According to Justin the successor of Mithradates I was his son Phraates II (132-126 BC) who vanquished Antiochus VII Sidetes (138-129 BC) but himself was defeated and slain by the Saca mercenaries. The latter had been induced by a promise of payment to aid the Parthians fend off the Seleucid invasion. But they arrived late and when Phraates refused to reimburse them they began ravaging Parthian territory.

Justin further relates that the next Arsacid ruler was Artabanus I (126-122 BC), a paternal uncle of Phraates II. He attacked the Tochari in Bactria but died when he was shot in the arm with a poisoned arrow. Artabanus’ successor was his son Mithradates II (121-91 BC) whose achievements earned him the epithet “the Great”. He fought a series of battles with his neighbours and added many nations to his empire. He also conducted a number of successful raids against the Scythians and avenged his predecessors. Finally he went to war with the Armenian king Artavasdes I (160-123 BC).\(^5\)

At this point Justin digresses into the history of Armenia, but then retraces the affairs of Parthia. However he confuses the events of the latter part of Mithradates’ reign. According to Justin, following his Armenian expedition, Mithradates was dethroned by the Parthian senate because of his cruelty. His brother Orodes assumed the crown and besieged Mithradates in Babylon, ultimately starving the inhabitants into submission. Thanks to the brief historical notes in contemporary Babylonian cuneiform records we now know that the successor of Mithradates II was his son Gotarzes I (91-87 BC).\(^6\) Given Justin’s hasty summaries of Trogus’ history it is likely that he mistook Mithradates II for another king of that name who took up the reins of power in 87 BC and was

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\(^3\)Smith (1855), 878; Wagner and Borgnet. (1878), 563; Lewis and Short (1975), 1448-1449; Glare (1976), 1464; Teubner (1988), 1442-1445.


\(^5\)For the duration of the reigns of the early Armenian rulers cf. Mousheghian and Deypoyt (1998/9), 31. It is obvious that Justin is confusing Artavasdes I with Tigranes I (123-96 BC), father of Tigranes II (96-56 BC). A vague passage in *Prologue* 35 of Pompeius Trogus’ *Philippic History* refers to the, “upheavals in Upper Asia caused by Aranthes and the Parthian Arsaces.” It is quite possible that Aranthes is a copyist’s error for Artavasdes who was a contemporary of Mithradates I of Parthia. Cf. Ruehl (1886), 262; Yardley (1994), 283.

challenged by a contender called Orodes. It is equally possible that we have here an echo of a later conflict involving the two sons of Phraates III, Mithradates IV (58/7-55/4 BC) and Orodes II (56-38 BC). In any case, there is an obvious hiatus in Justin’s narrative pertaining to the period 91-54 BC in Parthian history. This is generally dubbed the Parthian “Dark Age” during which a number of Arsacid claimants contended for the throne.

Regrettably Justin’s omission of nearly forty years of the Arsacid history and its likely conflation with later episodes have often led to conflicting views on the identity of the rulers and chronology of the Parthian “Dark Age”. However, in other classical sources we do catch glimpses of a chaotic time of intra-dynastic strife and frontier warfare after the death of Mithradates II. Trogus (Prologue 42) reports:

\[ Ut\ varia\ complarium\ regum\ in\ Parthis\ successione\ imperium\ accepit\ Orodes,\ qui\ Crassum\ delevit\ et\ Syriam\ per\ filium\ Pacorum\ occupavit. \]

Then an account of how, after a succession of several kings in Parthia, Orodes came to the throne, destroyed Crassus, and how his son Pacorus occupied Syria.

At the same time Plutarch (Lucullus 21.4 and 36.6) states that conflicts within the empire and with neighbouring peoples had weakened the Parthians so much so that they yielded to Tigranes II (c. 96-56 BC) who annexed and populated Mesopotamia with Greek deportees from Cilicia and Cappadocia. These brief but important testimonies accord well with the extant numismatic material and the sketchy historical notices in our Babylonian cuneiform documents. Coupled with the accession records found on at least four inscribed ostraca from Nisa, this has led to a better correlation of the evidence and a new reconstruction of the events after the death of Mithradates II in 91 BC. I have shown elsewhere that as the principal instigator of the Parthian interene wars, Sinatruces was an elder son of Mithradates I. According to Lucian (Makrobioi 15) he secured the Parthian throne with the aid of the Sacaraucene Scythians in his eightieth year and subsequently reigned for seven years. In the following paragraphs I shall present and discuss the relevant material for establishing the relationship between Mithradates I and Sinatruces, and show that they both sprang from a collateral branch of the Arsacid royal house.

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7 Assar (2000), 16-18; Assar (2003a); 52-6.
8 Ruehl (1886), 264; Yardley (1994), 285.
9 Perrin (1914), 536-7 and 590-1.
12 Harmon (1996), 232-5. Lucian’s reference pertains to the latter part of Sinatruces’ reign (77/6-69/8 BC).
Genealogical Records from Nisa

Of the 2700+ inscribed potsherds discovered during the 1934-61 excavations at the ruined cities of Old Nisa in Southern Turkmenistan, four ostraca and possibly the text on a wine-jar report the enthronement of new Parthian kings. The earliest of these documents (Nisa 2-L ostraca) is not dated and so leaves the accession date of the corresponding Arsacid ruler undecided. But it reveals that a great-grandson of Arsaces I reigned at some point in time before 151/0 BC. The next record, known only from its heavily retouched photograph, probably notes the inauguration of Mithradates I, but this is by no means certain.

The three remaining ostraca are all dated, but the one from AE 170 (2639/ Nova 366) is hopelessly incomplete. It offers very little information of genealogical or historical significance except that a Parthian king was acknowledged at Nisa in 78/7 BC. However, the other two records are of special interest since they enable us to establish the paternity of several Parthian kings. The first of these (2638/1760) gives the genealogy of an Arsacid ruler who was crowned in 91/0 BC:

Line 1: ŠNT IC XX X IX III 1 *rāk MLK* BRY B'RY ZĪY ḫPr'ptk
Line 2: BRY ḫḤY BRY ḫZY1 *rāk

Line 1: Year 157 (AE). King Arsaces, son of the son of Friapātak
Line 2: son of the son of the brother of Arsaces

This confirms a link between Phriapatius (Friapātak) and the founder of the Arsacid dynasty. According to Arrian (Parthica 1), followed by Syncellus (284.B-C) and Zosimus (1.18.1), the Parthian revolt from Seleucid dominion (247 BC) was led by two brothers, Arsaces and Tiridates. It is nevertheless believed that Arrian’s comments on the foundation of the Arsacid monarchy are tainted with Parthian propaganda. Yet the above unequivocal attestation

13 Assar (2004), 71-74, presents a detailed discussion of the evidence.
14 Diakonoff and Livshits (1999), pl. 946; Diakonoff and Livshits (2003), 177. This is ostraca 2673 (257) dated AE 97.
15 Masson (1949), 50, without transliteration or translation.
18 Roos and Wirth (1968), 224-6; Stadter (1980), 137 (defective translation); Gardiner-Garden (1987), 12.
19 Niebuhr (1829), 539-40; Jacoby (1929), 859; Mosshammer (1984), 343; Adler and Tuffin (2002), 412.
from Nisa leaves little doubt about the presence of Arsaces’ brother, although it fails to indicate whether he had a hand in the Parthian insurrection.

The second ostracon (2640/Nova 307) is somewhat incomplete. But its preserved text reports the enthronement of Phraates III in 68/7 BC and confirms his relationship with Phriapatius: 21

Line 1: ŠNT IC XX XX XX XX ‘rāk MLK’
Line 2: [B]įRY npt Pry’ptk
Line 3: [ ]r/k3
Line 4: [ ]r3[?]

Line 1: Year 180 (AE). King Arsaces,
Line 2: son of the grandson of Friapātak,
Line 3: [ ]r/k
Line 4: [ ]rsases (?)

However, in spite of revealing two clear dynastic links, the above record fails to name Phraates’ father and grandfather.

Sinatrucus-Phraates III Affiliation

Of the small number of classical authors whose remarks on Parthian affairs have reached us only two comment briefly on Sinatrucus’ relationship with Phraates III. The first is Appian (c. AD 95-165). He writes that in 65 BC, while pursuing the Pontic king Mithradates VI Eupator (120-63 BC), the Roman general Pompey decided to go to war with Mithradates’ ally Tigranes II (Mithradatic Wars 104). 22 On his march towards the Armenian royal residence in Artaxata he met Tigranes, son of Tigranes II. The young prince had earlier deserted his father, fought him later, and having been defeated, fled to, “Phraates, king of the Parthians, who had lately succeeded his father Sintricus (sic.) in the government of that country.”

The second author is Phlegon of Tralles (2nd century AD). He first lists the victors in the 177th Olympiad (72/1 BC) and then adds a great deal of other events that took place after the games (Fr. 12 in Photius). 23 In the third year (70/69), he says that, “they took a census of 910,000 Romans, and Sinatrucus, the Parthian king died [and was] succeeded by Phraates, surnamed the God.” Although Phlegon is silent about the paternity of Phraates III, his remark on the succession from Sinatrucus to Phraates agrees with Appian. This naturally

21 Diakonoff and Livshits (1966), 143-4, n. 28 and pls. X and Xa; Chaumont (1968), 16; Chaumont (1971), 145-6; Bader (1996), 264 (read 2638 for 2538); Assar (2003a), 59; Assar (2004), 75-76; Assar (2005).
22 White (1999), 436-9.
strengthens the latter’s reported father-son link between the two Arsacid rulers.

Now, given the information drawn from the above documentary and literary evidence we may construct the following fundamental stemma:

I
Arsaces I → Arsaces II → Son → Arsaces IV
Brother (Tiridates ?) → Son → Phriapatius → Son → Sinatruces → Phraates III

Regrettably, despite forming a solid basis for the study of early Arsacid lineage, the above genealogy stops short of identifying Sinatruces’ father. This unfortunate deficit can however be compensated, to a large extent, by input from a handful of coin and lapidary inscriptions.

**Numismatic Evidence**

The “annual” Parthian bronze issues from Susa indicate that Sinatruces had captured the city in SEM 220 (93/2 BC). We have, after the S28.1-23 silver and bronzes of Mithradates II, a new coinage (figs. 1-3) depicting on its obverse the bust of Sinatruces facing left and wearing a tiara much influenced by the art of the Central Asian steppe nomads. On the other hand, the extant evidence confirms that Sinatruces was not acknowledged at Babylon and issued no coinage from Seleucia on the Tigris. But a mule drachm struck from a pair of S33 obverse and S28 reverse dies strongly suggests that at some point in time before 91 BC at least one Iranian mint on the plateau issued coins for Mithradates II and Sinatruces simultaneously. However, although the bronze emissions LR 170 and S33.15-19 indicate that Sinatruces held Susa until SEM 225 (88/7 BC), cuneiform records show that Gotarzes I succeeded Mithradates II in Babylon sometime between 30/1 May and 23/4 September 91 BC. It is possible that in order to counter Sinatruces’ challenge and also follow his predecessors, Gotarzes issued his S32 tetrachroms in Seleucia on the Tigris at the outset of his reign. These depict on their obverse the bearded royal bust

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25 David Sellwood’s collection.
26 The latest Babylonian cuneiform record from the reign of Mithradates II is dated 3.III.221 SEB (30/31 May 91 BC). Cf. Reisner (1896), viii and 82, no. 46; Minns (1915), 34, n. 21; Oelsner (1975), 36 and 44; Del Monte (1997), 169, n. 281; and 250-1. I have shown that the colophon of the Astronomical Diary No. – 90, covering months VII-XII of year SEB 221, was dated to Gotarzes I alone. Accordingly, Mithradates II must have died before 1.VII.221 SEB (24/5 September 91 BC). Cf. Sachs and Hunger (1996), 432-3.
facing left and wearing a tiara decorated with a central star borrowed from S28 drachms of Mithradates II (fig. 4).

The inscription of Gotarzes' tetradrachms reads ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΕΥΕΡΓΕΤΟΥ ΕΠΙΦΑΝΟΥΣ ΦΙΛΕΛΛΗΝΟΣ (Of Great King Arsaces, Benefactor, Distinguished, Philhellene). On the other hand, his S29 drachms (fig. 5) bear the legend ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΝ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΔΙΚΑΙΟΥ ΕΥΕΡΓΕΤΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΦΙΛΕΛΛΗΝΟΣ (Of King of Kings Arsaces, the Just, Benefactor and Philhellene). These emanated from Ecbatana, Rhagae and one or more mints further east on the plateau.

The royal title ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ on Gotarzes' tetradrachms agrees with his title LUGAL (šarru = king) in the colophons of contemporary cuneiform records. These consistently include the name of a royal consort, Queen Ashiabatar, in their date formulas to distinguish Gotarzes from Sinatruces. It is likely that in the face of an ongoing struggle with a strong rival, Gotarzes adopted the vainglorious epithet ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΝ (King of Kings) soon after the S32 tetradrachms to reassert his claim to the Arsacid throne. This title had been originally introduced by Gotarzes' father, Mithradates II, in 109/8 BC. Further Babylonian records suggest that Gotarzes ultimately expelled Sinatruces from Susa in 87 BC. This however failed to quell the dynastic strife and promote peace. Several mule drachms indicate that Sinatruces continued to contest the crown and had access to Iranian mints until his death in 69/8 BC.

The central ornament of Sinatruces' tiara is a bull's horn, probably an idealised quasi-divine characteristic. At the same time, its crest is decorated with a row of recumbent stags, the totem animal of the Scythian tribes of the south-

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27 The earliest tablet ascribed to Gotarzes and Ashiabatar is from 6.XII.221 SEB (25/6 March 90 BC). Cf. Reins (1896), ix and 93, no. 51; Minns (1915), 34; Oelsner (1975), 40-2; Oelsner (1986), 276-7; and n. "w"; McEwan (1986), 93; Del Monte (1997), 251; Assar (2003a), 41. The latest cuneiform document mentioning both Gotarzes and Ashiabatar is dated 1.I.225 SEB (15/16 April 87 BC). Cf. Epping and Strassmaier (1891), 222; Schrader (1891), 2-6; Minns (1915), 35, n. "j"; Kugler (1924), 447, no. 24; McEwan (1986), 93; Assar (2003a), 46.


29 The extant cuneiform records in the period 87-81 BC are subscribed to King Arsaces without an associated queen. This shows that Mithradates III encountered no serious challenge to his authority from Sinatruces at the outset of his reign. The latter must have been supplanted in Susa at the close of Gotarzes' reign. The S31.16-23 "annual" bronzes confirm that Susa was under Mithradates III during 887-80/79 BC.

30 These are S33/S31, S31/S33, and S30/S33 drachms from the period 887-69/8 BC.
eastern Caspian region. These appear both with and without antlers on the corresponding drachms and so imply a possible seasonal crown. Given Lucian’s statement on the age of Sinatruces and the circumstances of his accession to the Parthian throne, it is possible that the Arsacid claimant spent some time among the Sacae tribes. Yet there are no references in the literary sources to Sinatruces’ sojourn among the nomads beyond Parthia’s eastern frontiers. We can only postulate that he survived the massacre of the Parthian camp after the defeat and death of Phraates II in 126 BC and was captured by the Sacae fighters. But there may well have been other reasons for Sinatruces’ association with the steppe nomads.

It is apparent that Sinatruces’ tiara immediately differs in its design from those worn by Mithradates II (fig. 4) and his successors, Gotarzes I (fig. 5), Mithradates III (son of Mithradates II) (fig. 6), and Orodos I (80-75 BC) (fig. 7). On the other hand, it is virtually identical with the one adopted by Phraates III on his S39 coinage (fig. 8-9). This further supports the attribution of the S33 type to Sinatruces and his paternal affiliation with Phraates III.

Ignoring the orthographic inconsistencies, the inscription on Sinatruces’ coinage reads ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΘΕΟΠΑΤΡΟΥ ΝΙΚΑΤΟΡΟΥ (Of Great King Arsaces, Son of a Divine Father, Victor).³¹ This clearly honours a deified father and celebrates a momentous victory over a rival. While it is possible to attribute ΝΙΚΑΤΟΡΟΣ (Victor) to Sinatruces’ triumph over Mithradates II, it is difficult to determine his biological lineage from the epithet ΘΕΟΠΑΤΡΟΣ (Son of a Divine Father) alone. Given the general dearth of contemporary and later attestations of Sinatruces’ paternity, one may assume from his coin titulature that he was son of Mithradates I. The following re-examination of the extant literary and numismatic material is intended to show whether the great Parthian monarch fathered Sinatruces.

The first clue for the father-son relationship between Mithradates I and Sinatruces is gleaned from the latter’s approximate date of birth. According to Lucian, Sinatruces ascended the throne in his eightieth year and held it for another seven, making him 87 years of age at the time of his death. At the

³¹ ΘΕΟΠΑΤΡΟΣ occasionally appears on the examples from Ecbatana (S33.1-2). On the other hand, the drachms from Rhagae (S33.3-6) consistently have ΘΕΟΠΑΤΡΟΥ. This is further degenerated to ΘΕΟΠΑΤΙΛΙ and its meaningless derivatives on the east-Parthian emissions (S33.7 and others).
same time, Nisa ostracon 2640/Nova 307 shows that Phraates III was acknowledged king in 68/7 BC. Combining these figures places Sinaturces’ birth in 155/4 BC.

On the other hand, Phlegon reports that Sinaturces died in Olympiad 177.3 (70/69 BC). This implies that he was born in 156/5 BC, but given Appian’s comment that Phraates III had lately succeeded his father in 65 BC, it is possible that Sinaturces lived until 67 BC. This would then give 153 BC as his birth date. In any case, the period 156-153 BC falls in the reign of Mithradates I (165-132 BC) and so precludes Sinaturces from being the son of an earlier Parthian king. Moreover, coupled with the genealogical record on Nisa ostracon 2640/Nova 307, Appian’s statement reaffirms Sinaturces as a grandson of Phriapatus. Consequently he could not have been a grandson of Phraates I, the elder son of Phriapatus, who died about 165 BC. According to Justin, Phraates had several sons but passed the crown to his brother, Mithradates I. Yet Phraates’ exclusion from Sinaturces’ lineage does not automatically ensure the latter’s filial link with Mithradates I. Literary and numismatic evidence shows that at least two younger brothers of Mithradates I also took the diadem before Sinaturces’ accession. The elder of the two princes was Bagasis32 who reigned briefly after the death of Phraates II in 126 BC and the younger Artabanus I.

Another clue involves Sinaturces’ epithet ΘΕΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ (Son of a Divine Father) on his coinage. This and ΦΙΛΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ (Father-loving) appear intermittently on Parthian emissions. Even so, they confirm a father-son link between the issuer and his predecessor. The prime examples of the introduction of both titles are found on certain coins of Phraates II (fig. 10) and Phraates III (fig. 11). As the son and successor of Mithradates I, Phraates II adopted the titulature ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΦΙΛΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ (Of Great King Arsaces, Lover of his Father) for his S15.3 drachms. He then improved his titulature to ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΘΕΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ (Of Great King Arsaces, Son of a Divine Father) on his final S16 coinage (fig. 10) with the exception of S16.17 drachms. On the other hand, Phraates III, son of Sinaturces, chose ΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΦΙΛΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ ΕΥΕΡΓΕΤΟΥ ΕΠΙΦΑΝΟΥΣ (Of Great King Arsaces, Lover of his Father, Benefactor, Distinguished (and) Philhellene) for his inaugural S37-36 tetradrachms. The same legend is found on the corresponding S36 drachms, struck uninterruptedly at the major Parthian mints until about 63/2 BC. But while retaining his earlier titles, on his S35 campaign drachms (fig. 11) struck about 62 BC, Phraates substituted ΘΕΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ for ΦΙΛΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ to boast of his noble

birth.\textsuperscript{33} This was also to express continued affection for his deified father, Sinatruces. However, having eliminated his rival successfully, Phraates styled himself \textit{ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΘΕΟΥ ΕΥΕΡΓΕΤΟΥ ΕΠΙΦΑΝΟΥΣ ΦΙΛΕΛΛΗΝΟΣ} (Of Great King Arsaces, the God, Benefactor, Distinguished, Philhellene) on his celebratory S39.1 tetradracms and then employed the modest legend \textit{ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΕΥΕΡΓΕΤΟΥ ΕΠΙΦΑΝΟΥΣ} (\textit{καὶ}) \textit{ΦΙΛΕΛΛΗΝΟΣ} (Of Great King Arsaces, Benefactor, Distinguished (and) Philhellene) for his S39 drachms (figs. 8-9) and bronzes, and the S38 emission. These examples clearly demonstrate that while fighting a determined rival, Phraates took advantage of coinage as an effective medium for political propaganda throughout the empire.\textsuperscript{34}

We also find \textit{ΦΙΛΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ} on S42 and 43 drachms and bronzes of Orodes II, son of Phraates III. Copied from the early issues of his father, it is possible that Orodes too adopted this epithet to demonstrate his filial piety. Yet according to Cassius Dio (39.56)\textsuperscript{35} he colluded with his brother Mithradates IV in the assassination of their father.

Finally, \textit{ΘΕΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ} ties the S10.17 with S10.15 drachms. The latter are inscribed \textit{ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΘΕΟΥ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ} (Of King Arsaces the God). Given the absence of mintage dates and the personal names of their issuers both varieties were attributed to the great Parthian king Mithradates I.\textsuperscript{36} But I have shown elsewhere that S10.15 was struck under Phriapatius who had been deified before his death.\textsuperscript{37} This then induced Mithradates to adopt the epithet \textit{ΘΕΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ} on his S10.17 drachms.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{33} S35 with a facing bust portrait cannot be attributed to the issuer of S30. The latter appeared on his coins in profile and was styled \textit{ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΘΕΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ ΕΥΕΡΓΕΤΟΥ ΕΠΙΦΑΝΟΥΣ} (with \textit{ΦΙΛΕΛΛΗΝΟΣ} on tetradrachms only). One tetradrachm issue (S30.11) has \textit{ΕΥΣΗΒΟΥΣ} in place of \textit{ΕΠΙΦΑΝΟΥΣ}. The "annual" Susian bronzes LR 150 and S30.33-43 confirm that this issue was minted throughout the period 78/7-67/6 BC. We also have a S38/S30.18 mule drachm (Sellwood’s collection) showing that the S30 campaign coinage (S30.18, S30.21-22, S30.24-25, and S30.28-29, with full mint names) continued to be minted until 62/1 BC. The sum of evidence indicates that S35 was struck by Phraates III with an \textit{en face} bust to distinguish the issue from S30 (both types bearing \textit{ΘΕΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ}).\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{34} Phraates fought with the issuer of S30 coinage from about 68/7 to 62/1 BC. The Babylonian colophons from this period include a number of royal consorts.

\textsuperscript{35} Cary (2001), 390-1.

\textsuperscript{36} Sellwood (1980), 34-5.

\textsuperscript{37} Assar (2004), 82 and 38; Assar (2005). Cf. Wroth (1903), 5, who tentatively assigns S10.15 to Phriapatius; Ars Classica – Naville (1926), 127, 207, and pl. 61, attribute a similar example to Phriapatius I (?).

\textsuperscript{38} Assar (2004), 88; Assar (2005). Cf. Wroth (1903), 5, for attribution of S10.17 to Phraates I (?); Petrovicz (1904), 7, assigns to Tiridates (brother of Arsaces I) a unique obol (not in Sellwood) with a left-facing beardless bust in \textit{bashlyk} on the obverse and the reverse inscription \textit{ΕΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ [ΑΡ]ΣΑΚΟΥ [ΘΕΟΠΑΤΟ}}
Now, given the literary and numismatic evidence it becomes immediately apparent that no Parthian ruler after 156/5 and before 93/2 BC merited deification except Mithradates I. Moreover, it is inconceivable that Sintruces’ claim to a noble birth on his coinage contrasted sharply with his accepted paternity at Nisa. Taken together, these signify that the epithet ‘THEOPATOROS’ on Sintruces’ coinage directly alludes to the greatest of all Arsacid rulers, Mithradates I. Yet it may still be objected that in times of internal warfare contenders may adopt pretentious epithets to drum up support and legitimise their cause. It may also be argued that the inclusion of ‘THEOPATOROS’ in Sintruces’ titulature does not necessarily imply a biological link with his predecessor. In fact we have enough evidence to show that a pretender employed the same epithet to validate his fictitious paternity.

According to a number of classical sources the Seleucid usurper Alexander Balas (150-145 BC) was a man of obscure origins. Justin (35.1.6) maintains that he was, “a young man of lowest station.” Yet Alexander claimed to be the son of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 BC). Supported by the Lagid king Ptolemy VI, Attalus II of Pergamon and Ariarathes of Cappadocia, Alexander marched against Demetrius I (162-150 BC) and ultimately defeated and slew him in a battle near Seleucia in Pteria in northern Syria. He then took control of the Seleucid mints and began to strike coins in his own name. But while Alexander styled himself ‘BAΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ’ on some of his issues, on others (fig. 12) he employed the expanded titulature ‘BAΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ ΘΕΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ ΕΥΕΡΓΕΤΟΥ’ (Of King Alexander, Son of a Divine Father, Benefactor). This strongly suggests that to legitimise his reign Alexander exploited his coinage to claim descent from Antiochus IV.

Interestingly, we find Alexander’s link with Antiochus IV mirrored, more explicitly, in a partially preserved lapidary inscription from Athens. This is the undated IG II2, 2317 text, listing the victors of two consecutive Panathenaic games. What remains of the relevant lines of its first column reads:

Line 37: [ΙΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΝΤΙΟΧΟΥ ΕΠΙΘΑΝΟΥΣ]
Line 47: [ΟΧΟΥ ΕΠΙΘΑΝΟΥΣ]

It had traditionally been assumed that Antiochus V (164-162 BC), son of Antiochus IV may be restored in the above lines. But a more recent inscription, giving a record of the winners of the equestrian events for three successive years, has raised doubts. That this inscription is an earlier record of the Panathenaic games, the same coin is later given to Phraates I (?!) in Ars Classica – Naville (1926), 127, no. 2075 and pl. 61.

39 Koehler (1883), 392-2 (no. 969); Kirchner (1927), 652 (no. 2317).
40 Koehler (1883), 392; Ferguson (1908), 350; Kirchner (1927), 652.
celebrations at the Panathenaia, has been convincingly dated to 170/69, 166/5,
and 162/1 BC.\textsuperscript{41} This has consequently pushed the date of the above text down
to 150/49 or 146/5 BC and thus shown that \textit{ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΣ} must be restored
in the two incomplete lines.\textsuperscript{42}

The apparent harmony between Alexander’s epithet \textit{ΘΕΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ} and his
filiation with Antiochus IV in the above victors’ list has broad genealogical
implications. First and foremost it shows that Alexander’s deceptive paternity
indeed concealed his true antecedents. Secondly it implies that a similar stratagem
may well have been practised elsewhere. Thirdly it enables us to identify
some of the unnamed generations in other genealogical records. For example,
to maintain the same agreement between divergent Parthian records, we must
equate Sinatruces’ deified father of his coin titulature with the son of Phriapatius
in the above given Arsacid genealogy. This signifies a father-son link
between Phriapatius and Mithradates I regardless of Sinatruces’ true paternity.
Granted that the dynastic links in Justin (41.5.9) are correct, we can justifiably
maintain that these two Arsacid rulers were biologically related.

Finally, in the absence of a direct reference to Sinatruces’ paternity it is impera-
tive to determine whether he might have been an adopted son of Mithra-
dates I.

There are strong indications that like their successors, the Sasanians, the Par-
thians were devout Zoroastrians. According to the Avestan traditions the age
of adulthood for Zoroastrian men was fifteen. This meant that as soon as a
young boy came of age he could marry or be appointed as heir to his father.
We also know that well before the Parthians the Iranian community was
formed from agnatic families. These were bonded by a common ancestor,
namely a dead father, or a paternal grandfather or great-grandfather. In such a
community an adult man’s status dictated his responsibilities including guardi-
anship over orphans of a dead agnate.

Insofar as the literary and documentary evidence is concerned, Mithradates I
had three brothers, Phraates I, Bagasis and Artabanus I.\textsuperscript{43} Of these, the eldest
was Phraates who died about a decade before 156/5 BC, the \textit{terminus post quem}
of Sinatruces’ birth. But as mentioned earlier Bagasis and Artabanus
out-lived Mithradates and ascended the throne before Sinatruces. It is there-
fore theoretically possible that one of Mithradates’ two younger brothers could
have been Sinatruces’ father. But it would be difficult to posit that as the son
of either Bagasis or Artabanus, Sinatruces could have been adopted by his un-
cle, Mithradates I. We may even maintain that a fourth brother fathered Sina-

\textsuperscript{41} Tracy and Habicht (1991), 192-3.
\textsuperscript{42} Tracy and Habicht (1991), 217-8 and 226.
\textsuperscript{43} On the possibility that Mithradates II too was a brother of Artabanus I (and Mithra-
truces and died afterwards, but lack of evidence compels us to abandon the possibility that Mithradates adopted his dead brother's son.

Unfortunately, our knowledge of adoptions of orphaned princes by reigning Parthian rulers is painfully restricted. A possible scenario involves Artabanus II (c. AD 10-38) and Gotarzes II (c. AD 40-51). We are told by Tacitus (Annals 6.31-35) that Arsaces, the eldest son of Artabanus and Parthian appointed king of Armenia, was assassinated by his attendants in AD 35. The Parthian king then sent a second son, Orodes, to avenge his brother and claim the vacant throne. Wounded in battle, Orodes probably died shortly afterwards. Unfortunately Tacitus gives no indication of a link between Orodes and Gotarzes II, but it has long been suspected that the two princes were father and son and that on the death of Orodes, Gotarzes was adopted by his grandfather, Artabanus. Admittedly, the entire argument hinges on the inscription of Gotarzes' S66.4 drachms. When modified slightly this reads ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΝ ΑΡΣΑΚΗΣ ΧΩΤΕΡΖΗΣ ΚΕΚΛΗΜΕΝΟΣ ΥΙΟΣ ΑΡΤΑΒΑΝΟΥ (King of Kings Arsaces, Gotarzes, called Son of Artabanus).

Obviously, if Gotarzes were indeed a biological son of Artabanus his filial link should have been expressed as ΓΩΤΕΡΖΗΣ ΥΙΟΣ ΑΡΤΑΒΑΝΟΥ (Gotarzes, Son of Artabanus) The intentional inclusion in the royal titulature of ΚΕΚΛΗΜΕΝΟΣ (called) therefore signifies that the two Parthian rulers were not father and son. This in turn suggests that Gotarzes might conceivably have been adopted by Artabanus.

On the other hand, the inscription on Gotarzes’ rock carving at Sar-i Pol-i Zoh ḫān in Kirmānshāh, Iran gives:

\[ ptkr'ZNH : NPŠH gwtrz : MLK' \]
\[ f'r1 : f't1 \]
\[ rtbw : MLK' \]

This is the very image of King Gotarzes, son of King Artabanus.

This reveals that adoption was not disclosed in official Parthian records. In other words, the adopter was regarded as the biological father of his adopted son. But perhaps most significantly we note here, once again, perfect agreement between a ruler’s lineage in two different sources – Gotarzes is linked with Artabanus in both the legend of his S66.4 drachms and rock inscription. As a consequence we can be confident that irrespective of Sinatruces’ true paternity, his epithet ΘΕΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ on S33 coinage is a direct reference to the

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44 Moore and Jackson (1951), 206-17.
45 Lindsay (1852), 64-5 and 153.
46 The inscription on the coins reads ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΝ ΑΡΣΑΚΗ ΧΩΤΕΡΖΗΣ ΚΕΚΛΗΜΕΝΟΣ ΑΡΤΑΒΑΝΟΥ. Cf. Wroth (1903), 165; Petrowicz (1904), 119; Sellwood (1980), 219.
son of Phriapatius in the genealogical record of Phraates III on Nisa ostracon 2640/Nova 307. Since we have already identified this particular son of Phriapatius with Mithradates I, we may now amend the above given Arsacid stemma as follows:

Arsaces I → Arsaces II → Son → Arsaces IV
| Brother (Tiridates ?) → Son → Phriapatius → Mithradates I → Sinatruces → Phraates III

The only uncertainty here concerns Sinatruces' relationship with Mithradates I. However, having ruled him out as an adopted nephew, and also shown that he boasted of his noble birth on his coinage and was a grandson of Phriapatius, there can be little doubt that he was a biological son of Mithradates I.

Sinatruces' birth date shows that he was older than his half-brother, Phraates II. But he did not succeed his father. Instead Phraates II ascended the throne when Mithradates II died in early 132 BC.48 This suggests that Sinatruces' mother was a lesser queen or possibly even a concubine. Justin (41.6.1-4) relates that under Mithradates I, a contemporary of Eucratides I of Bactria, the Parthians were at the zenith of their power. On the other hand, buffeted in various conflicts the Bactrians finally fell in a state of exhaustion and succumbed to the Parthians. This is also echoed in Strabo (11.9.2 and 11.11.2)49 who reports that the Parthians took away the satrapies of Turiva and Aspionus (probably Traxiana and Tapuria, respectively)50 from Eucratides, forcing him to yield to them. Perhaps following his successful campaigns in the east Mithradates I took as his wife a Bactrian princess who then mothered Sinatruces. Alternatively, given Lucian's statement that the Sacaraucian tribes restored Sinatruces to the Parthian throne, it is conceivable that he was born from a Scythian princess. These possible maternal links may explain why Sinatruces did not succeed Mithradates I as a Parthian king. But there may well have been other reasons for his failure to secure the Arsacid throne. What is now clear is that Sinatruces was a biological son of Mithradates I and therefore a great-great-grand-nephew of the founder of the Parthian monarchy, Arsaces I.

48 Assar (2003a), 7-8; Assar (2005) discuss the relevant evidence that firmly places the death of Mithradates I in 132 BC.
49 Jones (2000), 274-5 and 280-1, respectively.
50 Tarn (1930), 122-6; Tarn (1932), 579.
Abbreviations

Fr. Fragment
LCL The Loeb Classical Library
LR Prefix to coin types in Le Rider (1965)
S Prefix to Parthian coin types and varieties in Sellwood 1980
SEM Seleucid Era of the Macedonian calendar with its epoch on 1 Dios (6/7 October) 312 BC. Cf. Assar (2003b).

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