

THE INCEPTION AND TERMINAL DATES OF THE REIGNS OF SELEUCUS II, SELEUCUS III AND ANTIOCHUS III

Published in N.A.B.U. (*Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires*), No. 3 (Sep. 2007), 49-53

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It is generally believed that Seleucus II Kallinicus ascended the throne in 246 BC, ruled for 20 years and died in 226 BC. He was succeeded by his elder son, Seleucus III Keraunos, who was assassinated in 223 BC after a 3-year reign. Antiochus III the Great followed his brother on the throne and, having reigned 35 years, was murdered in Elam in 187 BC.

Our primary references on these dates are BRM 2 (*Babylonian Records in the Library of J. Pierpont Morgan. 2. Legal Documents from Erech Dated in the Seleucid Era (312-65 B.C.)*, Clay, 1913) and the BKL (*A Babylonian King List of the Hellenistic Period*, Sachs and Wiseman, 1954). These are also cited in PD (*Babylonian Chronology, 626 B.C. – A.D. 75*, Parker and Dubberstein, 1956). According to Obv. 12-13 of BKL, Antiochus II Theos died in month V of 66 SEB (Aug. 246 BC). Although this King List omits the accession of Seleucus II, the colophon date of Diary -245A+B confirms that he immediately succeeded his father. Given that Seleucus is attested as early as month V of 66 SEB, the earliest record from his reign, i.e. BRM 2,17 (dated 22.III.67 SEB = 11 Jul. 245 BC) in PD, must now be superseded by Diary -245A+B.

As for the terminal date of the reign of Seleucus II, PD restore [86] SEB in Obv. 15 of BKL and conclude that he ruled for 20 years.

To this we may add the UKL (“Uruk King List”, *Texte aus dem Rēš-Heiligtum in Uruk-Warka* = BaM Beiheft 2, Van Dijk and Mayer, 1980). The incomplete text in Obv. 9 of this King List is assumed to confirm the 20-year reign of Seleucus II. However, this is simply a guess. The anticipated number 20 is only partially preserved on the IM 65066 (W 20030,105) fragment and the remaining traces are not necessarily two “Winkelhakens” only. As shown below, this year-number will have to be restored as 21.

Regarding the inception and terminal dates of the reign of Seleucus III, PD respectively give year 87 SEB in Rev. 1 of BKL (beginning 11 Apr. 225 BC), and 24.III.89 SEB (10 Jul. 223 BC) from BRM 2, 28 (= BibMes 24,19).

As for the regnal dates of Antiochus III, we have 21.IX.90 SEB (21 Dec. 222 BC) in BM 30120 (*Documents juridiques de l'Assyrie et de la Chaldeé*, Opert and Ménant, 1877), and 25.III.125 SEB (3 Jul. 187 BC) in BKL.

In this note, I will present a brief discussion of a series of dates in several cuneiform records that enable us to improve the currently accepted inception and terminal dates of the reigns of Seleucus II, Seleucus III and Antiochus III.

The first of these are found on the obverse and reverse of BKL. Even a cursory glance at the regnal dates in this record reveals that the scribe employed two different methods for recording the beginning and end of the reported Seleucid reigns. He allocated Obv. 6-8 to Seleucus I (311-281 BC), placing his accession in year 7 SEB and equating it with year 1 of Seleucus' kingship. He then gave, in Obv. 7 and 8 respectively, the reign-length and assassination date of Seleucus I as 25 years and VI.31 SEB (26 Aug. – 24 Sep. 281 BC).

Omitting regnal year 1 of Antiochus I (281-261 BC), the scribe began in Obv. 9-10 of BKL with Antiochus' 2nd regnal year in 32 SEB, giving him a 20-year reign and reporting that he died on 16.II.51 SEB (2 Jun. 261 BC). Similarly, in Obv. 11-13 the scribe started with 52 SEB, i.e. regnal year 2 of Antiochus II (261-246 BC), son of Antiochus I, confirmed that he reigned for 15 years and that the news of his death reached Babylon in V.66 SEB (31 Jul. – 29 Aug. 246 BC). This last date can, however, be slightly improved. According to an incomplete statement from month V in Rev. 5 of

Diary -245A, the Babylonian scribe received the news of Antiochus' death on 20.V.66 SEB (19 Aug. 246 BC) and thus recorded the change of reign to Seleucus II. Assuming that Antiochus II died in Ephesus in Asia Minor and that it took no more than a month for the news of his death to arrive at Babylon, it is possible that he actually died in the last 10-15 days of July 246 BC.

The colophon of Diary -245A+B indicates that Seleucus II succeeded his father before the end of month V of 66 SEB: Diary from month I to month VI, Antiochus (was) King, from month V to month VI, Seleucus, his son (is) King. Yet the scribe of BKL omitted Seleucus' regnal year 1 and instead began his reign in Obv. 14 with 67 SEB, that is, the 2nd year of Seleucus II.

It is difficult to explain why the scribe of BKL started off the reigns of Antiochus I, Antiochus II and Seleucus II with their respective regnal year 2 (designated fictitious "year 1" hereafter). We know that the practice of noting accession year had been abandoned immediately after the death of Alexander III of Macedon. According to Diary -322A, Alexander died on 29 Ayyāru in his 14th regnal year (11 Jun. 323 BC). The Lunar Text ADRTB 5, 36 (*Astronomical and Related Texts from Babylon*, Hunger, 2001) confirms that Phillip III Arrhidaeus immediately followed Alexander on 1 Sīmānu "which was identical with the 30th of the previous month". Abandoning Philip's accession year, this date marked both his first and Alexander's 14th regnal year in Babylonia. It is, therefore, highly unlikely that the scribe of BKL took the accession years of Antiochus I, Antiochus II and Seleucus II as their "year 0" and began each regnal year 1 on 1 Nīsānu of the succeeding year. However, whatever the scribe's original intention might have been, his preserved reign-lengths on BKL are, with the exception of that of Seleucus I, quite close to the actual values: Seleucus I, Antiochus I, Antiochus II, Antiochus III, Seleucus IV, and Antiochus IV respectively reigned 24 years and *c.* 6 months, 19 years and 8-9 months, 15 years and 2.5 months, 35 years and *c.* 2 months, 12 years and *c.* 2 months, and 11 years and *c.* 3 months. BKL gives them 25, 20, 15, 35, 12 and 11 years respectively. Except for 25, the latter five figures would have been obtained by counting from 1 Nīsānu of the year following each accession on the obverse of BKL and subtracting the inception from the terminal date of each reign on its reverse.

Unfortunately, save for a few unintelligible traces of some signs, the final line of BKL is completely lost. However, since its Rev. 1 begins with the reign of Seleucus III, it is safe to assume that the missing line at the end of obverse recorded the death of Seleucus II including, at least, the corresponding year-date.

Turning to the reverse of BKL, there are, fortunately, enough traces left in line 1 to show that the king following Seleucus II was his eldest son Seleucus III. However, contrary to the obverse which consistently starts each new reign one year later than the death of the previous monarch, thus skipping the first regnal year as already noted above, the reverse of BKL clearly begins with the accession year of each king.

We may never know why the scribe of BKL employed two anomalous dating methods for noting the reigns of Seleucid rulers. We could speculate that with both the death-dates and 2nd regnal years present on the obverse, the subsequent users of BKL could have easily decided each accession as the year preceding the fictitious "year 1". However, since the death of Seleucus II occupied the last line of the obverse of BKL, the scribe had to either repeat it on the first line of the reverse to enable the future users to determine the accession date of Seleucus III, or simply begin the reign of the latter with his true accession year. Since the scribe indeed started off the reverse of BKL with the accession of Seleucus III, he had to, for the sake of consistency and to avoid confusion, treat the subsequent reigns similarly. Unfortunately, the loss of the last line or lines of the obverse of BKL prevents us from knowing whether the scribe actually alluded to this obvious chronographic change. We should, nevertheless, note that more often than not the first and last lines of Babylonian clay tablets were most likely to be knocked off in shelf storage before the rest. Therefore, by noting the accession date of Seleucus III on the first line of the reverse, the scribe of BKL ensured that even if the regnal dates in the last line of the obverse were subsequently destroyed, it would still be possible to work out the death-year of Seleucus II from the accession date of his son, Seleucus III. This hypothesis is supported by the statement AŠ.TE TUŠ-*ab*, "acceded", which is conspicuously absent on the obverse but appears

three times on the reverse of BKL, heralding the accession of Antiochus III, Seleucus IV and Antiochus IV (there would, most probably, have been more cases had the reverse text of BKL remained undamaged). For example, in Rev. 2 of BKL we read: [Year] 90, King Antiochus (III) as[ceded] the throne. Naturally, 90 SEB (beginning 9 Apr. 222 BC) was the accession year of Antiochus III, since, as confirmed below, Seleucus III died in that same year and left the crown to his younger brother. We may, therefore, confidently regard the incomplete date [60+]27 in Rev. 1 of BKL as the death-year of Seleucus II as well as the accession of Seleucus III in 87 SEB.

We then have, in Rev. 3 of BKL, the 35-year reign of Antiochus III and in Rev. 6-7 his death in Elam on 25.III.125 SEB (3 Jul. 187 BC). This is followed by the accession in the same year of Seleucus IV (187-175 BC), his 12 year reign-length, and death-date 10.VI.137 SEB (3 Sep. 175 BC) in Rev. 8-9, and those of Antiochus IV (175-164 BC) in Rev. 10 and 14. The latter died probably in Media and, according to Rev. 14 of BKL, the news of his death reached Babylon in month IX of 148 SEB (20 Nov. – 18 Dec. 164 BC). As can be deduced from these dates too, the partial date 87 SEB in Rev. 1 of BKL is indeed the accession year of Seleucus III and thus his regnal year 1.

Taking 67 and 87 SEB as regnal year 2 and terminal year of Seleucus II respectively, it can be seen that he had 22 regnal years although his actual reign was a few month shorter (cf. below). This agrees with both Eusebius and Syncellus who give Seleucus II a 21-year reign. However, using the information in Rev. 8-9 of BM 32171 “The Seleucid Accessions Chronicle” (BCHP 10), whose preliminary re-edition by R. J. van der Spek and I. Finkel is available at <http://www.livius.org>, the end of the reign of Seleucus II may be refined. It is clear that the reference to “Seleucus son of Seleucus” in Rev. 8 of BCHP 10 concerns Seleucus III. According to Rev. 9 of this same Chronicle, upon the death of his father, Seleucus II (registered in Rev. 7 of BCHP 10), Seleucus III ascended the throne before month X (Tebētu): [... *ina* ^{gis}GU.ZA TU]Š-ab ITU.AB [...]. Combined with the text in Rev. 1 of BKL and provided that the news of the death of Seleucus II did not take more than a month to reach Babylon, Rev. 7 of BCHP 10 strongly suggests that he died in month IX (Kislīmu) of 87 SEB (Dec. 225 BC). Naturally, this same date may be taken as the inception of Seleucus III.

As for the terminal date of the reign of Seleucus III, the colophon date of BRM 2, 28 (24.III.89 SEB) places it after 10 July 223 BC. However, the unpublished BM 116690 cuneiform tablet from Uruk, a contract “with payment in silver staters of Seleucus”, extends, for the first time, the reign of Seleucus III into year 90 SEB and confirms that he died in 222 BC. It registers:

7: UNUG.KI ITU.BÁR
8: [UD-x-KÁ]M MU-1,30-KÁM ¹*Se-lu-ku* LUGAL

I should add that on 25.1.2006, C. B. F. Walker of the British Museum kindly re-collated the above date-formula. He confirmed that at the beginning of Rev. 8, where the edge is broken off, given the position of the right edge a little further up, one would conclude that there is very little room for [UD-KÁ]M. However, although the possibility for 10 as an alternative to 1 or 2 cannot be excluded, the existing small gap strongly indicates that the missing day-number at the beginning of Rev. 8 was probably very small. This suggests a compilation date in the period 9-18 Apr. 222 BC.

Yet, except for the fact that Seleucus III was acknowledged in Babylon in month Nīsānu of 90 SEB (9 Apr. – 7 May 222 BC), the above date-formula fails to determine the terminal date of his reign. Equally, the previously available dated texts from the reign of Antiochus III are of little help, since the earliest is the BM 30120 tablet, dated 21.IX.90 SEB (21 Dec. 222 BC). Given the new date-formula in BM 116690, the date of BM 30120 still leaves an 8-month gap into which the end of the reign of Seleucus III and accession of Antiochus III could be placed.

However, an important incomplete date-formula in a recently edited Goal-Year Text (GYT) narrows down the interval between the death of Seleucus III and accession of Antiochus III considerably and thus vastly improves our knowledge of the regnal years of these two rulers. The relevant date is found in Obv. 1, (1st Saturn Paragraph) of the BM 45661 + BM 4610 fragments, published in ADRTB 6 (Hunger, 2006) as GYT 41 for 149-151 SEB. It provides the earliest attestation of Antiochus III as

king in Babylon. However, although the year number in Obv. 1 is lost, the date formula in Obv. 5 (2nd Saturn Paragraph) gives: MU-1,31-KÁM ¹An LUGAL. It thus enables us accurately to restore the date in Obv. 1 as: [MU-1,30-KÁM] ¹An LUGAL GU₄ ina 22.... In other words, we now know that Antiochus III was recognised in Babylon as early as *c.* 22 Ayyāru 90 SEB (around 29 May 222 BC). It may, nevertheless, be objected that because the scribe of GYT 41 extracted the required planetary and lunar data from earlier Diaries, he may have mistakenly included the personal name Antiochus rather than Seleucus in the corresponding date-formula. Also, the fact that Antiochus IV was on the throne in 149 SEB, the compilation date of GYT 41, may have induced a scribal error. Luckily, however, in spite of a general dearth of material from Seleucid Babylonia wherein a change of reign occurred, we have just enough evidence to show that the scribes of GYTs took due care to identify the rulers correctly.

As explained above, Antiochus III was killed in Elam on 25.III.125 SEB (3 Jul. 187 BC). His death, followed by the accession of his elder son, Seleucus IV, is recorded in Rev. 6-8 of BKL as:

- 6: Year 125, (month) III, it was heard in Babylon
- 7: as follows: on the 25th day, King An(tiochus III) was killed in the land of Elam
- 8: The same year, Se(leucus IV), his son, ascended the throne. He reigned 12 years.

It should be noted that Seleucus IV was already on the throne by 11.IV.125 SEB (19 Jul. 187 BC), the date of BRM 1, 88.

According to Obv. 1 of Diary No. -188, the co-regency of Antiochus III and Seleucus IV is attested as early as 1.I.123 SEB (3 Apr. 189 BC). Later cuneiform documents show that the two monarchs continued to rule jointly until the death of Antiochus III. Currently, the latest date-formula mentioning the two Seleucid kings is from 25.I.125 SEB (6 May 187 BC). This is found in Obv. 14 at the beginning of the Mercury Paragraph in GYT 53. It clearly demonstrates the insertion in the corresponding date-formula of the correct royal names and also confirms that the scribe did not confuse Antiochus III and Seleucus IV with the contemporary ruling monarch (either Demetrius II (145-138 BC, 1st reign) or Mithradates I (165-132 BC) of Parthia) under whom he compiled GYT 53 in 171 SEB.

A similar accuracy prevails in five further date-formulas in GYTs from 144, 160, 201-202 and 225 SEB. The first is GYT 39 for 144 SEB whose first Moon Paragraph begins in Rev. 1 with: [Year] 125, King Seleucus. It covers months VII–XII of the same year and correctly excludes Antiochus III who had died some three months earlier.

The second is in GYT 40, also from 144 SEB. Unfortunately, the year number in Rev. 1 at the beginning of Col. I in this fragment, covering, once again, months VII–XII of 125 SEB, is broken off (months X and XII are incompletely and month XI is fully preserved in Rev. 9, 11, and 10 respectively in the same Col.). However, the partial and also complete dates in lines 14 of Col. I and 1 of Col. II (the latter reading: Year 126, King Seleucus), enable us to reconstruct the lost year number in line 1 of Col. I in GYT 40 as [Year 125], King Seleucus, again unaccompanied by Antiochus III.

The 3rd-5th date-formulas concern the co-regency of Antiochus IV and his elder son. We have Kings Antiochus and his son Antiochus in 18.I.142 SEB in Obv. 4 at the beginning of the 2nd Jupiter Paragraph of GYT 82 for 225 SEB, the last year of the Arsacid ruler Gotarzes I (91-87 BC). The same date-formula is attested from II.142 SEB in Rev. 16 at the start of the Saturn Paragraph of GYT 73 for 201-202 SEB, compiled under the Parthian ruler Mithradates II (121-91 BC). Finally, the joint kings appear as late as 28.IV.142 SEB in Rev. 3 at the beginning of the Moon Paragraph of GYT 46 from 160 SEB under the Seleucid ruler Demetrius I (162-150 BC). Given that Rev. 12 of BKL dates the execution of co-ruler Antiochus, on orders from his father Antiochus IV, to V.142 SEB, it can be seen that the scribes of GYTs 46, 73 and 82 correctly subscribed the corresponding date-formulas to both kings and not to Antiochus IV alone.

The apparent consistency and accuracy of the above date-formulas in GYTs 39, 40, 46, 53, 73 and 82 strongly indicate that the one in GYT 41, acknowledging Antiochus III in II.90 SEB, is, most probably, correct (there are only two “incorrect” cases among some 190 secure date-formulas in ADRTB 6). This confirms that Seleucus III was not recognised at Babylon in Ayyāru 90 SEB and that his younger brother, Antiochus III, had taken over in that same month. Accordingly, 1.II.90 SEB (8 May 222 BC) may now be taken as the *terminus ante quem* of the reign of Seleucus III and the *terminus post quem* of the kingship of Antiochus III. Hopefully, future discoveries will further enhance the regnal dates of these two monarchs.

It is now possible to correlate the contemporary and near contemporary Babylonian cuneiform evidence with references in the extant classical literature to decide the inception, duration and terminal dates of the reigns of Seleucus II and his sons Seleucus III and Antiochus III:

Seleucus II

- 1: Accession (regnal year 1) = immediately after 20.V.66 SEB (19 Aug. 246 BC). Eusebius gives Ol. 133.3 (246/245 BC).
- 2: Regnal year 2 = 67 SEB (22 Apr. 245 BC – 10 Apr. 244 BC) = fictitious “year 1” in BKL.
- 3: Terminal date = IX.87 SEB (4 Dec. 225 BC – 1 Jan. 224 BC). Eusebius gives Ol. 138.2 (227/226 BC).
- 4: Number of regnal years = 22.
- 5: Duration of reign = 21 years and roughly 4.5 months. Both Eusebius and Syncellus report that Seleucus II reigned for 21 years (rounded down reign-length).

Seleucus III

- 1: Accession (regnal year 1) = terminal date of Seleucus II.
- 2: Regnal year 2 = 88 SEB (31 Mar. 224 BC – 18 Apr. 223 BC).
- 3: Terminal date = sometime in I.90 SEB (9 Apr. – 7 May 222 BC). Eusebius gives about Ol. 139.1 (224/223 BC).
- 4: Number of regnal years = 4.
- 5: Duration of reign = 2 years and. 3-5 months. Both Eusebius and Syncellus register a 3-year reign for Seleucus III (rounded up reign-length).

Antiochus III

- 1: Accession (regnal year 1) = shortly before 1.II.90 SEB (8 May 222 BC). Eusebius gives Ol. 139.2 (223/222 BC).
- 2: Regnal year 2 = 91 SEB (28 Mar. 221 BC – 15 Apr. 220 BC).
- 3: Terminal date = 25.III.125 SEB (3 Jul. 187 BC). Eusebius gives Ol. 148.2 (187/186 BC).
- 4: Number of regnal years = 36.
- 5: Duration of reign = 35 years and approximately 2 months. Both Eusebius and Syncellus give 36 years (rounded up reign-length).

It should be pointed out that Polybius (4.47.6-7) implicitly reports that Seleucus III reigned for about 2 years and Appian (*Syr.* 66) gives him a 2-year reign. These figures agree well with the Babylonian evidence. In spite of having 4 regnal years, Seleucus III actually reigned approximately 3 months in year 87 SEB, 2 full years covering 88 and 89 SEB, and less than 1 month in 90 SEB. These add up to 2 years and roughly 4 months, far short of the 3 full years quoted by Eusebius and Syncellus. It is, therefore, clear that Eusebius and Syncellus rounded up the duration of the reign of Seleucus III, as they did that of Antiochus III (giving 36 years rather than 35 years and *c.* 2 months) while Polybius and Appian respectively reported the approximate and rounded down reign-length of Seleucus III. In short, the following regnal dates may be proposed for the above-named three Seleucid rulers:

Seleucus II (246 – 225 BC)
 Seleucus III (225 – 222 BC)
 Antiochus III (222 – 187 BC)

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