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Recent Studies in Parthian History: Part II

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In Part I of the present article (published last month) the significance of combined numismatic and cuneiform evidence in clarifying the mechanism of Parthian calendars and identifying the kings of "Dark Age" was briefly illustrated. Owing to the recent discovery of an important hoard with several hitherto unrecorded specimens and further information from cuneiform texts, the same exercise is continued here to cover an earlier period of Parthian history. This would begin with the conquest of Media-Atropatene by Mithradates I in 148/7 down to the accession in 123 BC of Mithradates II. It should be added that all cuneiform tablets cited here are contemporary and come from Babylon, dates are BC, and Seleucia refers to Seleucia-on-the-Tigris unless stated otherwise.

According to Justin (Book 41.5.7), the invasion of Parthia by Seleucid forces in 209 culminated in an alliance between Antiochus III (223-187) and Arsaces II (ca. 211-191). But this treaty effectively interrupted the expansion of the newly formed Parthian state until 190 when the Romans at the battle of Magnesia defeated Antiochus.

The next Arsacid monarch, Phra- patus (ca. 191-176) who, according to the Nisa ostracon No. 1760, was "son of the nephew" of Arsaces I (ca. 238-211) appears to have maintained the status quo ante and devoted his entire reign to retaining and consolidating Parthian authority. After him, his elder son and successor, Phraates I (ca. 176-171) extended Arsacid jurisdiction over the Caspian Gates, subdued the Mardi tribesmen of Mazindaran (on the Caspian shore) and prepared the way for Parthia's westward expansion. Shortly after his accession in Parthia, Antiochus IV (175-164) seized the Seleucid throne in Antioch.

Mithradates I (ca. 171-mid 138)

With the death of Phraates I, his younger brother, the mighty Mithradates I ascended the throne. At roughly the same time, Antiochus IV assisted Eukratides I (ca. 171-145) to usurp power in Bactria and later appointed his powerful minister, Timarchus (162-160), as governor of Media-Atropatene. This was a strongly held outpost of the Seleucid Empire with its principal capital at Ecbatana. In about 163 (or slightly earlier), weak-
ened by years of internal strife, Bactria could offer little resistance to Parthian advances. Mithradates waged a successful war against Eukratides and forced him to cede the two strategically important enclaves of Tapuria and Traxiana.

Subjugation of Media

After this victory, the Parthian king conducted a series of battles against Media with no clear outcome for over a decade. During the course of these hostilities, Demetrius I (161-150) overthrew Timarchus. The extant evidence testifies that Seleucid coins were minted at Ecbatana not only for Demetrius, but also during the opening years of Alexander Balas (150-145). Furthermore, Seleucid influence in the region can be shown by the Greek inscription of the statue of Hercules in Behistun to have lasted as late as June-July 148 (month Panemos of 164 SE).

The precise date of Mithradates’ conquest of Media is not reported in classical sources. However, it is very likely to have taken place shortly after the above date or early in the following year.

Satrap of Media on Parthian Coins

In reporting Parthian successes, Justin (Book 41.6.7) writes: "His viribus acutis Mithridates Mediae Vagasin praeposuit": "Bolstered by this extra strength, Mithradates appointed Vagasis/Bagasis governor of Media". I believe the little obols (S12.4-5), trachytes (S12.13), dichalkoi (S12.17-18) and chalkoi (S12.23-24) of Mithradates were issued at Ecbatana in recognition of this appointment. Accordingly, I have identified the effigy on the reverse of these coins (Fig. 1) with Bagasis, the satrap of Media-Atopatene. He is depicted facing right with a long beard and clad in kashkyl, the original pointed Saca cap introduced into satrapal iconography by the Achaemenids.

Bagasis, Brother of Mithradates I

In my list of translated cuneiform texts covering the period 141-6 of Parthian rule, there are several references to Bagagasha (Akkadian name form) who appears to be a person of distinction. The strong similarity between this and the Latin Vagasis leads me to believe that they both symbolise the same individual.

The first mention of Bagagash (Persian name form) is in month II of year 174 SE (May-June 138) when Mithradates was still alive. Although the relevant text is only partially preserved, enough remains to show that he was associated with the cities of the province of Assyria and Media.

In the second instance, we are told of "leather documents of the king concerning the appointing of Bagagash". This is from month VII of year 177 SE (October 135) in the reign of Phraates II (ca. 138-126). The next reference relates to month I of year 179 SE (April-May 133). It reads "Pillius, the general of Babylon who is above the four generals, who in month I had gone to the cities of Media before Bagagash, the brother of the king...". Finally, from month II of year 192 SE (May-June 120) in the reign of Mithradates II (ca. 123-91) we have "[Artajban the son of Bagagash who was above the four generals..."

These citations undoubtedly demonstrate the exceptional status of Bagagash. It is also noteworthy that in 133 he was referred to as "the brother of the king". I am inclined to
believe that Bagash of these texts was a brother of Mithradates I and the appointed satrap of Media-Atropatene quoted by Justin.

To this, we may add the statement of Moses of Chorene, the Armenian historian, that Mithradates I installed his brother, Valarsaces, as governor of Armenia. Considering that due to Roman influence in the region annexation of Greater Armenia at this point in time by the Parthians would seem unlikely, it is possible that Valarsaces, who is not mentioned in any other source, is a corrupt form of Vagasis.

We are told that under Roman patronage, the Armenian ruler, Artaxias I (ca. 200-190 as satrap, 190-159 as king) pursued a lively expansionist policy and wrested at least a portion of Media-Atropatene from the Medes and Persians. It is, therefore, possible that the Armenian writer simply identified this province with Armenia and confused the two names Vagasis and Arsaces (the throne name of all Parthian rulers) when referring to a brother of Mithradates I in charge of Media-Atropatene.

**Conquest of Mesopotamia**

About late summer of 145, the military commander, Tryphon, set up Antiochus VI (145-143/2) as king in opposition to Demetrius II (145-139/8, 1st reign). The ensuing strife between the Seleucid claimants gave Mithradates I the opportunity he was anticipating. In late 142 or early 141 he turned his arms southward and in a series of swift campaigns annexed much of Babylonia and Mesopotamia. By early July 141, the royal city of Seleucia fell to the Parthians. A double-dated cuneiform tablet (the earliest of its kind) which has been wrongly interpreted by several past scholars places Mithradates’ capture of Babylon in 28.III.171 SE (107 AE = 5/6 July 141). It reads "... That month, the 28th day, [Arsaces, the recognised Great King, from Seleucia entered Babylon]." Another tablet from Uruk dated 4.VII.171 (67 November 141) confirms recognition of Parthian authority there.

To mark his triumph, Mithradates issued a series of tetradrachms and drachms at the royal mint in Seleucia employing the very craftsmen who had earlier cut dies for Demetrius. In compliance with mint protocol and as an inaugural issue, the first of these (S13.1-2 & S13.6-7) remain undated (Fig. 2) but correspond to year 172 on the Seleucid-Macedonian reckoning (141/0). The following examples are dated to years 173 (S13.3-4 & S13.8-9) and 174 SE (S13.5 & S13.10), that is, 140/39 and 139/8, respectively.

Mithradates’ stay in Babylonia was short-lived. About December 141 he withdrew to Hyrcania perhaps to counter a raid on Parthia’s northern frontiers by the Saeae who had been displaced by the powerful tribal confederation of the Yüeh-shih. The latter had, in turn, been attacked by their Altaic neighbors and driven out of their pastures in western Kansu province (south of Gobi desert and in China). Later, Mithradates had to hasten eastward to face a Bactrian invasion under Heliocles I (ca. 145-130). At the same time, assisted by contingents from Bactria, Elymains and Persis,
Demetrius II returned to attack. But Mithradates crushed the Bactrians and then defeated and took Demetrius captive. According to Justin (Book 38.9.3) he was sent off to Hyrcania after marrying Mithradates' daughter, Rhelogunae. However, a historical notice from month IV of year 174 SE (July-August 138) contained in a cuneiform text refers to Media where Demetrius settled. The relevant line reads "[... ] in plenty, happiness and good peace in the cities of Media next to king Arsaces [...]."

With the Seleucid threat at an end, the Parthian forces advanced into Elymais and plundered a number of wealthy temples there. The loot from the temples of Artemis and Athina alone is estimated to have been in excess of 10,000 talents.

Shortly after this, Mithradates succumbed to illness and died before October 138 (confirmed by his last dated coins from Seleucia). He was undoubtedly the true founder of Parthia as a major power and its expansion from a petty kingdom in one corner of Iran to the rank of a world-empire stretching from Babylonia to eastern Bactria.

**Phraates II (138–early 126)**

Having succeeded Mithradates I as an adolescent (perhaps about 14 years old), Phraates inherited from his father a newly founded empire surrounded by hostile forces. Yet he tackled his foes and proved to be an outstanding ruler endowed with political maturity.

For the most part of his reign, Phraates remained chiefly preoccupied with the nomad threat and had to contend with their unremitting onslaught on Parthia's north-eastern frontiers. This had already begun during the closing months of Mithradates I.

The presence of several cuneiform texts confirms that he maintained Parthian influence in Babylonia and Seleucia until early spring 183 SE (April 129) although the lack of coins...
from Seleucia proves his absence from that city. At the same time his S14.1-2 tetradrachms (Figs. 3 & 4) attest to Arsacid jurisdiction over Elymais. These were modeled on Elymaean prototypes and minted at Susa depicting him very young. Yet their lack of dates prevents us from confidently assigning them to just before or after Mithradates' death. It is possible that having defeated Seleucid forces and captured Demetrius II, Mithradates returned to the northeast to fend off the advancing nomads. The Parthian forces under their young prince pressed southward and took Elymais. Phraates was then appointed ruler of that freshly won province and, following his father's example at Seleucia, issued these tetradrachms at Susa to mark his victory.

Alternatively, we may postulate that with the death of Mithradates, Elymais ceased from Parthia. Phraates then pressed the breakaway province back to submission and minted these coins to commemorate his success. This model appears to receive support from a handful of sketchy notices in cuneiform documents. One of these, in the name of "king Arsaces", indicates that "panic of the Elamite enemy was strong in the land" during month IX of year 174 SE (December 138-January 137). We then note, for the first time, a reference to Hyspaosines, the charismatic founder of an Arab principality in Charax or Mesene (in southeastern Iraq and Khuzistan) with its ancient city of Alexandria-Antiocha (near the confluence of the rivers Tigris and Karkheh at the head of the Persian Gulf) renamed as Charax-Spasimun.

It follows that "this [Aspasine]ne searched for a sortie against the Elamite enemy" in the same month. Apparently he ended with the capture of the "cities and canals of the lower Seeland". Finally, there is a reference to "panic in Elam, happiness and agreement in Babylonia" before month X of 174 SE. Although fragmentary, these notices seem to hint at a successful Parthian-Characene operation against the rebellious Elymaeans leading to the minting of S14.1-2 tetradrachms at Susa. At any rate, they are the first coinage of Phraates II and prove his youth.

His drachms minted in Parthia proper with both full and abbreviated mint names point to a prolonged campaign in the north and northeast against the Sacae (Figs. 5 & 6). The bulk of these carry the monogram TAM (S16.11) associated with the city of Tambrax in Hyrcania (a unique specimen in Sellwood's collection with TAMB renders the identification highly probable). It is likely that Phraates set up his headquarters there and then proceeded against the nomads as far away as Nisa (modern Ashkhabad) and Areia (Herat). Meanwhile, the Elymaeans took advantage of Parthian preoccupation and once again rebelled; this time joined by Hyspaosines. A cuneiform text from month VII in year 179 SE (October-November 133) reveals that "the forces of Aspasine, the enemy from the environs of Mesene, a friend of the Elamite enemy, came and fell on the harbor of ships in the Tigris and plundered this harbor of ships together with their possessions". On another partially preserved tablet from the same year enough remains to indicate that in month VIII (November-December) Parthian forces engaged the rebels in battle and "killed many troops of the Elamite enemy in fighting". Furthermore, the same text tells that by month X (January-February 132) the Parthians were finally victorious. They "brought about the
defeat of the troops of the enemy" and kept the breakaway provinces of Elymais and Characene under Arsacid sway. At the same time, Phraates' achievements are mirrored in a cuneiform tablet dated 5 IX. 179 SE (8/9 December 133) that credits him with the title "Arsaces, the king of all countries". This no doubt refers to Parthian hold over Elymais and Characene, and also Phraates' successes against the Sacae which probably won him fresh territory (a number of mint monograms remain unique to his coinage). Yet, his absence from Babylonia is evidenced by an interesting tablet dated month V, year 180 SE (July–August 132) giving "Arsaces and his mother Riišu, the kings"; the earliest reference to a queen-regent in charge of Parthian affairs.

The Final Seleucid Assault on Parthia

It is alleged that after removing the pretender Tryphon and consolidating Seleucid power in Syria and Judaea, Antiochus VII (138-129) moved against Parthia in 130. He is said to have mustered a large army whose number has been put by classical authors at around 80,000-100,000 combatants and 200,000-300,000 camp-followers. Joined by a number of Parthian tributaries, he recovered Babylonia after three successful battles, moved to Media, dispersed his troops into winter quarters in and around Ecbatana and then offered Phraates impossible peace terms.

Having suffered the burden of supplying the Seleucid forces, the local population grew restive and in early spring 129 switched allegiance to the Parthians. Phraates released Demetrius II from captivity to divide Seleucid loyalties and Antiochus was surprised in a judiciously timed Parthian counter-attack and either slain or compelled to commit suicide. Yet the evidence from several cuneiform tablets and recently discovered coins appears to hint at a rather different course of events during Antiochus' campaign in Mesopotamia. One of these texts refers to the "satrap of Babylonia" who probably departs "from Babylonia to Seleucia" on 17 IV 182 SE (24/5 July 130) followed by a partial notice giving "That month the Arabs ....". The latter is paralleled in both earlier and later texts usually in connection with raids and pillage in southern Mesopotamia by dwellers from the Arabian Desert. Unfortunately, nothing remains of the following months since the corresponding section of the tablet is lost.

These incomplete statements seem to imply that Antiochus VII was not present in Babylonia before late July 130 and pos-
The first two, containing some closely related astronomical measurements, were undoubtedly compiled within days of each other very early in month I of 183 SE. The colophon of the first tablet reads "Arsaces (being) king" while the second contains "Antiochus (being) king". At the same time, the third tablet is dated 22 II.183 SE (189 May 129) in the name of "king Antiochus". Here, I should add that the latter had been mistakenly dated to 182 SE in the original publication and remained so for over a century thus extending Antiochus' Parthian campaign to about a year.

Accepting that neither the Seleucids nor the Parthians would have allowed dating in the name of their adversaries, we may maintain that of these three texts the one mentioning Arsaces could not interpose the two in the name of Antiochus and hence is the earliest. Accordingly, Antiochus could only have entered Babylonia after and not before early spring of 129. Furthermore, we have a fourth astronomical tablet dated 13 VIII.183 SE (5 November 129) in the name of "king Arsaces" and a few rare and until recently unrecorded tetradrachms of Hyspaspises. These are dated A.D. i.e. year 184 on the Seleuco-Macedonian reckoning and carry the inscription ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΥΣΠΑΙΕΩΝΟΥ implying "(the coin of) king Hyspaspises" (Fig. 13). The combined cuneiform and numismatic evidence initiates two possibilities in relation to the end of Antiochus' expedition. Firstly, we may assume that for his support Hyspaspises was permitted by Antiochus to strike coins and that the Parthians suppressed the issue after their victory. Since the beginning of year 184 in the Macedonian calendar equates to 1 VII.183 in the Babylonian (23/4 September 129), these coins could only have been issued during the period 23/4 September–5 November 129. According, Antiochus' campaign would be limited to the period spring–mid-autumn 129.

Secondly, we may take these tetradrachms of Hyspaspises as having been minted after the Parthian victory and Phraates' return to the north in pursuit of the Saca invaders. This would then render the end of Antiochus' expedition indeterminable. It could have come a day or even months before (but not after) the date of the fourth tablet given above (5 November 129). Equally, Hyspaspises' tetradrachms could have been minted at any time during 1 Dios–29 Hyperberetairos 184 SE (23/4 September 129–10/11 October 128) depending on when he succeeded from Parthian control (see further).

After crushing the Seleucid challenge, Phraates issued a series of celebratory tetradrachms and drachms at Seleucia to commemorate his victory (Fig. 7). He then placed his minion, Himerus, in charge of affairs in Mesopotamia and returned to resume his operation in the northeast. There is no surviving contemporary reference to this appointment although a cuneiform text mentions "Imnusu, the chief... of the treasury" in month II of year 182 SE (May–June 130).

In his Prologue to Book 42, Trogus Pompeius writes "There is an account of Himerus' war on the Meseni after he was made governor of Parthia by Phraates and his brutal treatment of the people of Babylon and Seleucia". This confirms the aid given by Parthian tributaries (including Characene) to Antiochus in his war on Parthia. But Himerus is said to have been unsuccessful against Hyspaspises, who overran southern Mesopotamia and extended his sway over Babylon. A cuneiform tablet refers to "Aspasis (being) king" during 13 III.184–24 II.185 SE (27/8 June 128–28/9 May 127)
and his above-mentioned tetradrachms dated A.D. 185 may well have been issued in this period before 10/11 October 128 (end of Hyperberetios 184 SE).

Several classical authors report that Phraates enlisted the captives from his war with Antiochus in a battle against the Sakae. The latter apparently failed to arrive on time to aid the Parthians fighting Seleucid forces and when refused reimbursement took offense and began ravaging Parthian territory. When the Greeks realized that their Parthian captors were in trouble, they deserted to the enemy and Phraates was killed in the ensuing mêlée. Yet there are no contemporary records of such a contest and the classical version of the last Seleucid assault on Parthia would be open to review in the light of recent discoveries. It is very likely that after defeating Antiochus, the Parthian forces were divided so that they could fight the rebel states in the south and the Sakae in the north. Consequently, the army under Phraates fell short of its full strength and was overwhelmed by the nomad warriors.

A cuneiform tablet suggests that Phraates was still alive before spring of 126 since apparently offerings were made "to the great [gods] for the life of king Arsaces" prior to 17.XII.185 SE (13/4 March 126). But as early as 3.I.186 SE (29/30 March 126) we have fragmentary references to the devastation by Arab raiders under their leader Adad, departure of Babylonian satrap from Babylon, massacre, defeat of troops in battle, destruction and plunder. These imply, very strongly, that Phraates had died and Parthian fortunes in and around Babylonia were at a low ebb. We have, in fact, numismatic proof that Hyspaosines had annexed Seleucia and issued tetradrachms there (Fig. 14). This unique specimen from the recent hoard follows, stylistically and in fabric, Seleucid and Parthian prototypes struck at that mint. Additionally, one of its two mint magistrates' marks is identical with that appearing on the coinages of Antiochus VII and Phraates II from Seleucia. The second may also be classified with one of the two monograms on tetradrachms of Artabanus I from the same mint (S21.4). Finally, as an inaugural issue, it too remains undated. But, it can be placed with reasonable certainty in the period March–June 126.

**Bagayash as King**

It is suggested that after the death of Phraates II the mint officials at Seleucia temporized by placing a fictitious portrait on Parthian coinage in ca. 127. Yet we have already established that Phraates died sometime during 13-30 March 126. Additionally, there are strong indications that in fact a true Parthian king was on the throne about June 126 and before the succession of Artabanus I. He expelled Hyspaosines from Seleucia and initiated his own coinage there. Until recently, these had been taken as an inter-regnal issue depicting Mithradates I who had died ca. 12 years earlier. However, a handful of examples from the recent hoard confirms that the coinage was not restricted to the remainder of Seleucid year 186 after the death of Phraates; it continued to the next year starting with Dios 187 (19/20 September 126). The coins minted during Artemisios-Hyperberetios 186 SE (the rest of year 186 on the Macedonian reckoning) initiated the issue and therefore remained undated (Fig. 8). But, the next ones (Fig. 9), struck during and possibly after Dios 187, were dated ZIIP (187 SE). They indisputably prove that the succession of Artabanus I was not immediate and took at least 7-8
months after the death of Phraates II in March 126.

I have identified this new king with Bagayash (Bacasis), brother of Mithradates I and appointed satrap of Media-Atropatene in 148/7. As suggested by cuneiform evidence, he was still alive in April-May 133 and might well have outlived his nephew, Phraates II. He was, therefore, a legitimate candidate and installed as king in March 126. But he died probably of old age after a reign of about 7-8 months and his younger brother, Artabanus I, was called to the vacant Parthian throne.

I believe this attribution is reasonably safe. There are no grounds for a posthumous coinage of Mithradates I or an interregnal issue authorized by the magistrates at Seleucia mint. If Artabanus I was deemed a rightful successor 7-8 months later, then the Parthian nobles should have called him to power immediately after the death of Phraates II. Unless, of course, the throne was already occupied and so his accession had to be delayed.

**Artabanus I (late 126-123)**

The numismatic evidence just discussed proves that his rule did not commence in c. 127 (commonly taken as Artabanus' accession date). He came to power in the last quarter of year 126 at the earliest. On the other hand, the cuneiform texts confirm that he was king on the 10th day of intercalary Addar 186 SE (24/5 March 125) at the latest. However, the relative abundance of the undated tetradrachms of Bagayash/Bacasis as compared to his dated variety (Fig. 8 & 9) suggests that the latter ceased to be minted far beyond Dios 187 SE (19/20 September 126). Therefore, an accession date in mid-autumn 126 for Artabanus I seems highly plausible. His rule was inaugurated in Seleucia by a series of tetradrachms (Figs. 10 & 11) the first of which is, as expected, undated but corresponds to year ZHIP (187 SE) on the Macedonian calendar (19/20 September 126 – 6/7 October 125).

Artabanus' reign began, like his two immediate predecessors, with the threat of Saca in the northeast, revolt and secession of Elymaean and Characenean states, and constant plunder by Arab raiders in the south. A cuneiform tablet from year 187 SE paints a very chaotic picture of the affairs during months I-IV (14/5 April – 11/12 July 125). It reads "Arabs attacked and plundered" in month I; "fire ..., as before in the king's palace" and probably walls which "kept falling as before" in month II; "fire in king's palace as before" and "Arabs broke a hole into the wall of Babylon" in month IV. But, a second text concerning the events of months VIII-X in the same year (6/7 November 125 – 4/5 January 124) confirms that both Elymais and Characene were forced to vassalage by Artabanus I. It begins with a fragmentary notice in month VIII that "Il'mutusu son of Apasines [went] from Babylon to Seleucia" and that "king Arsaces [from the city of] Susa departed to the area of Elam opposite Piriti, the Elamite enemy, for fighting" in month IX. We then find a possible reference to the capture of son of Hysposines who himself appears to have submitted to the Parthian king. It states that "at the command of the king he was thrown into an iron ring and brought next to his father Apasines". The historical notices in this month end with a reference to the usual plunder by Arabs and the panic from their
raids. Finally, the fall of Elymais is cited in the following month. The relevant lines of the text read “That month, the 2nd, [a leather document containing] a message of Aspamine, king of Mesene, which he had written to the general of Babylon was brought near .... and was read [to the citizens who are in Babylon as follows: In this month, on the 15th, king Arsaces and Pittit, the Elamite enemy, fought with each other. The king defeated the troops of Elam in battle. Pittit [the Elamite enemy] he seized”. This is further supported by a message from Artabanus who announces that “Fighting [the troops of] Pittit, the Elamite enemy, I made, and 15,000 battle troops among his troops I [overthrew] in battle. .... Elam in its entirety I hit with weapons. Pittit [the Elamite enemy] I seized”.

It is interesting to note that the above report refers to Hyspaspines as “king of Mesene”, an indication that perhaps he remained a vassal after recognition of Parthian hegemony secured him the throne of Characene. But, I believe his recently discovered tetradrachms (Fig. 15) from Charax dated ZTIP (187 SE = 125/4) were minted without Parthian approval and before Arsacid suzerainty was acknowledged in early 124.

We also find that the Elamite enemy, Pittit, is mentioned by Diodorus of Sicily (XXXIV/XXXV 19.1) as Pittides although the author obviously confuses Artabanus I with Phraataes II. Nevertheless, Pittides is reported to have had his eyes gouged out and warning the inhabitants of Seleucia of a similar fate for their actions against the Parthians.

I have associated S18.2 tetradrachm of Artabanus minted at Susa (known from a unique piece) with his victory in Elymais. It corresponds to a commemorative issue similar to those minted by Phraataes II at the same mint (Figs. 3 & 4) and may not be taken as an inter-regnal coinage.

**Death of Hyspaspines**

The extant numismatic material confirms that with the exception of his isolated issue from Seleucia (Fig. 14), Hyspaspines’ tetradrachms were issued at Charax in the Seleucid years 184, 187, 188, 190, 191 and 192 (the first two and the last are recent discoveries). However, an interesting cuneiform text from month III in year 188 SE explains that “[Aspamine, king of [....]Mesene, ....the 5th day of this month he became ill and on the 9th day he died of his illness”. This places his death on 10/11 June 124 and proves that minting in the name of “king Hyspaspines” continued posthumously (Figs. 16-18) at least until year 192 SE (121/20). At the same time, Talaisti’as, the dead king’s wife appears to have “made one small boy, his son, sit on the royal throne of his father, Aspamine” probably with the aid of Characene nobles.

**Death of Artabanus I**

With Elamite threat pacified and Hyspaspines subdued, Artabanus is said to have moved to quell the nomad attacks in the north. The lack of coins from Seleucia dated to year ΘΤΠ (189 SE = 124/3) is an indication of his absence from southern Mesopotamia. In support of this, we have several cuneiform tablets giving sketchy reports of raids, plunder, killing of the chief of the guards in Babylon and the ensuing panic in the early part of year 188 SE (124). At the same time, a partial notice from month V in this year which reads “smote them in battle. Three royal soldiers among them [....] entered Babylon” may well refer to Parthian successes against the Sacae. A number of Artabanus’ drachms struck in Iranian mints (S20.3-6 & S22.4) refer to his campaign in Ecbatana, Rhagae and Margiane (Merv). But it appears that while commanding the troops in person against the Tochari tribe, a poisonous arrow he received in his arm eventually killed him. A short notice dated to intercalary Ululu 189 SE (16/7 September–15/6 October 123) refers not only to raids by the Arabs around Babylon but also gives “all Babylonia were surrounded. Many days the gates of Babylon were not opened (because of fighting)”. This is perhaps a reference to an uprising following the death of king and opposition to Parthian authority in the region. Some rare drachms of Artabanus (S22.2) bear the date ΚΕΠ, i.e. 125 on the Arsacid reckoning (123/2) and may well be taken as his final coinage.

The evidence from cuneiform tablets has obviously increased our knowledge of the reign of this king. Like his nephew, Phraataes II, and Great brother, Mithradates I, he appears to have been a competent ruler and largely successful in maintaining Parthia’s integrity. His respect for Mithradates I is reflected in the inscription on most of his drachms from the Iranian mints carrying the epithet ΦΙΑΑΔΕΑΦΟΥ (loving his brother, a devoted brother).

It is generally accepted that Parthian numismatic art attained its zenith during the reign of this king. Some of his large and small denominations are undoubtedly amongst the most superior examples of Parthian coinage (Fig. 12).

The critical state of affairs in Parthia after Artabanus’ death was handed down to his son and successor Mithradates II,
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- Pay by credit card or consider using one of the escrow services. Credit cards give you a level of protection that you don’t have with checks, money orders or (gasp) cash. Don’t get us wrong, just because a seller may not be able to accept credit cards does not mean he or she is dishonest. But services like Paypal, BidPay, Billpoint and a variety of others makes accepting credit card payments very easy and affordable for most sellers or bidders. Escrow services such as iEscrow, which act as middlemen between the buyer and seller, are another option. However, not all sellers will accept escrow since they tend to take a long time for the final settlement. Ask the seller before bidding if he will accept escrow.

- Finally, after doing all of the above if you are not completely sure, don’t bid!

That’s about all for this month folks. Until next month, don’t forget to practice safe bidding and we will see you online.

Parthia Cont. from page 27

the true savior of the Empire who exceeded all his predecessors (with the exception of Mithradates I) and successors in valor and glory. He ascended the throne in mid-123 at a very young age and immediately set out to liberate Parthia from the threat of nomads and prevent its total disintegration. However, the events of his illustrious reign are beyond the scope of this note and will be considered in detail in a future publication.

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The generous help from others, including friends, numismatists, cuneiformists, historians, etc. will be duly acknowledged later in my book.

I would finish with stating that I shall gratefully welcome from the readers their constructive comments (including reference to evidence unknown to me) and criticism of my conclusions or correction of mistakes.

Addendum

Included in the Triton IV sale (5 December 2000, New York) was a S18.1 example (lot no. 326) given as an overstruck on a tetradrachm of the Bactrian ruler Euthydemos I (ca. 230/225-200). Yet, the remaining traces of the undertype confirm the original coin as a tetradrachm of Hyspaosines minted during the period March-June 126 at Seleucia (Fig. 14). This lends credence to my attribution of the S18 type to a true Parthian king (possibly Bagayash) and its rejection as an inter-regnal or posthumous coinage.

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