

THE TERMINAL DATE OF THE REIGN OF MITHRADATES I OF PARTHIA

غلامرضا (فرهاد) آثار © August 2005 by G. R. F. Assar

There is no doubt that the history of Parthian kingdom is very poorly recorded in the extant contemporary and classical sources. This is due mainly to the loss of almost the entire original documentary and the later Greco-Latin literary material on the Parthian affairs. As far as the preserved evidence is concerned, the Babylonian chronicles and Arsacid king lists are lacking and we have only fragments of Apollodorus of Artemita's *Parthica*, Strabo's *History*, Trogus Pompeius' Books 41-42, and Arrian's *Parthica*. At present, Justin is our primary informant on the early Arsacid history. He abbreviates the reigns of Arsaces I (247-211 BC) through Orodes II (55-38 BC) in his books 41-42 of the *Epitome of the Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus*. However, not only he frequently contradicts himself and his source, Trogus Pompeius, he also conflates some of the less eventful Arsacid reigns with the longer and successful ones and removes from his narrative the approximately forty years history of the Parthian "Dark Age" (91-55 BC) for its complexity. Other sources, including Polybius, Diodorus, Plutarch, Appian, Josephus, Tacitus and Moses of Chorene are less consecutive, preserving for us only disparate accounts of a handful of events from the Arsacid era.

This major setback is further compounded by the general dearth of accurate regnal dates in our source material. We are, therefore, left to piece together, as best as we may, the evidence of coins, Babylonian cuneiform records, and the scanty references in the classical literature in order to determine the inception and terminal dates of the early Arsacid reigns. In this note I will present and briefly analyze the primary and later sources to show that Mithradates I died sometime in the period 2/3 April – 27/28 August 132 BC and not the commonly accepted 138-137 BC.

According to Justin (41.5.9-10), shortly after his victory over the powerful Mardian tribes in Hyrcania, Phraates I (c. 168-165 BC)¹ passed the crown to his brother Mithradates I, "a man of renowned integrity", and died.

The accession of Mithradates I marked the beginning of Parthia's expansion and its eventual transformation into a World Empire. He first took advantage of the internecine wars between Bactria and India² to secure Parthia's eastern frontiers. Following the death of Antiochus IV (175-164 BC), Mithradates attacked Eucratides I (c. 170-145 BC) and annexed the two western Bactrian satrapies of Turiva and Aspionus.³ He then exploited the quarrel between Alexander Balas (150-145 BC) and Ptolemy VI of Egypt, and the campaign of Demetrius II (145-138, 1st reign) against Balas during 148-145 BC, to move against Media. After a series of inconclusive wars with the Medes, Mithradates ultimately prevailed in late 148 or early 147 BC.⁴ We are told by Justin (41.6.7) that "bolstered by this extra strength, Mithradates appointed Bagasis/Vagasis governor of Media while he himself made for Hyrcania". I have shown that Bagasis was the brother of Mithradates I and his appointed governor of Media Magna and Atropatene.⁵ He is attested as Bagāyāsh in the Babylonian cuneiform records and as Valarshak, brother of Mithradates I and king of Armenia, by Moses of Chorene.

The fall of Media paved the way for further Parthian conquests. In June/July 141 BC, Mithradates profited from the rebellion of the Seleucid usurper Diodotus Tryphon (141-138 BC) and led his army into Mesopotamia. He first captured Seleucia on the Tigris and then Babylon on 5/6 July of that same year. An incomplete Astronomical Diary fragment from year 171 SEB has retained the following account of Mithradates' triumph in Babylonia:⁶

¹ Cf. Assar 2005: 39-40 on the inception and terminal dates of the reign of Phraates I.

² Boppearachchi 1991: 65-66.

³ Strabo (11.11.2). According to Tarn 1930: 122-126, these may be identified with eastern Tapuria and Traxiana. Cf. also Tarn 1932: 579; Debevoise 1938: 19; Bivar 1983: 33; Torday 1997: 350-351.

⁴ Cf. Roberts 1963: 76; Roberts 1967: 283 and 291; Bivar 1983: 33 on the date Panemos 164 SEM (June/July 148 BC) of the inscription accompanying the reclining statue of Heracles at Bisutun.

⁵ Assar 2001a: 41; Assar 2001b: 17-22.

⁶ Sachs and Hunger 1996: 134-135, No. -140A.

- 2: [...] ʿx¹ [... ..] ^{mes}ʿx x x¹ LUGAL šá² ʿx¹ [...]
- 3: [...] DU ^{mes}ina ^{kuš}ʿGÍD.DA x¹ [... ..] MU-1-me-7-K]ÁM² šá ʿši-i² MU¹-1-me-1,11-KÁM SAR ^{mes}ʿx x GÜ¹-D[É² [...]
- 4: [...] URU ^{mes}šá KUR Ma-da-a-a [... ..] al-te-me um]-ma ¹A-ʿza-x¹-a-ʿx-x¹-a šá TA ^{uru}Ur-qa-na²-a-nu ^{lu}SIG² ʿx¹ [...]
- 5: [...] ʿSAG² ITU BI U₄-22-KÁM ^{kuš}ʿGÍD.D[A [... ..] m]uh-ḫi ^{lu}pa-ḫat E^{ki} u ^{lu}pu-li-ṭe-e MU-a-ti SAR x x ʿx¹ [...]
- 6: [...] ina ^{lu}GAL-ú-qu-tu ina KUR URI^{ki} ʿx¹ [... ..] ʿx¹ ina É IGI-DU₈-A GÜ-DÉ U₄ BI al-te-me um-ma ¹Ti-ʿu-ú-gi² [...]
- 7: [... ¹A]r-šá-ka-a LUGAL ana ^{uru}Se-lu-ke-ʿa-[a [... ..] ʿx¹ U₄-24-KÁM ¹An-ti-ʿu-uk-su A šá ¹Ar-ʿa-a-bu-za-na-a LUGAL [...]
- 8: [...] KUR Aš-šur^{ki} šá ina IGI-ma² ¹Ar-šá-ka-a ʿLUGAL¹? [... ..] m]uh-ḫi 4 ^{lu}GAL ú-qu-tu šá KUR URI^{ki} pa-qid KU TUK šá GIM GIŠ-S[AR [...]
- 9: [... ^{uru}Se-lu-ke-ʿa]-a URU LUGAL-ú-tu KU₄-ub ITU BI U₄-28-KÁM ¹[... ..] ¹Ar-šá]-ka-a LUGAL⁷ GAL-ú mun-nu-ú TA ^{uru}Se-lu-ke-ʿa-a ana E^{ki} KU₄-u[b [...]
- 2: [...] King of² [...]
- 3: [...] went, were written on a parchment [.... year 107,] which is² year 171, they were read² [...]
- 4: [...] cities of Media [.... I heard] that Aza-[x], who from the city of Hyrcania, a famous [...]
- 5: [...] That month, the 22nd day, a parchment written [....] to the governor of Babylon and these² (Greek) citizens [...]
- 6: [...] in² the position of general in Babylonia [....] was read in the House of Observation. That day I heard as follows: Tiogi² [...]
- 7: [...] King Arsaces to Seleucia [....] the 24th day, Antiochus, son of King Aryabozan², [...]
- 8: [...] of Assyria who before King Arsaces [....] was appointed [....] above the four generals of Babylonia. A which was like a gar[den²]
- 9: [...] entered [Seleu]cia, the Royal City. That month, the 28th day, [....] Arsa]ces, the recognised Great King, from Seleucia entered Babylon [...]

Mithradates then celebrated his achievements in Mesopotamia and issued a series of silver drachms and tetradrachms (S13.1-10). These were minted uninterruptedly at Seleucia on the Tigris (**Fig. 1**) until 174 SEM (Oct./Nov. 139 – Sep./Oct. 138 BC).



Fig. 1- S13.1 tetradrachm of Mithradates I (Author's Collection)

Our sources on Mithradates' movements during 141-138 BC are both meager and inconclusive. According to an incomplete historical note in a later Astronomical Diary,⁸ Mithradates was in Hyrcania in month IX of 171 SEB (3/4 Dec. 141 – 1/2 Jan. 140 BC), perhaps preparing for an expedition against the Saca invaders who had begun to impinge on Parthia's northeastern frontiers.

⁷ Sachs and Hunger 1996: 138. Professor Hunger comments that “the noun qualified by ‘Great’ is similar to the sign LUGAL (king), but not quite identical. Some name ending in *-kā* may of course be *Aršakā*, i.e. Mithradates I; but *munnu* (appointed) does not fit a king”. However, following further consultations with Professor Hunger (private communication, 22.5.2000) it was agreed that *munnu* (ordained, established, or recognised) in this case can apply to Mithradates I since he was the first Parthian king to be acknowledged in Babylonia. This also permits the uncertain sign after [... ¹Ar-šá]-ka-a to be read as LUGAL. Assisted by Mr. C.B.F. Walker, Deputy Keeper at the Department of the Ancient Near East, BM, I have collated the corresponding tablet on several occasions and, in spite of the compactness of the text, am satisfied with the reading which is paralleled in lines 7 and 8 of the same text where Mithradates I is cited as ‘King Arsaces’ and not ‘Arsaces’.

⁸ Sachs and Hunger 1996:

Meanwhile, Mithradates' generals led a series of prolonged campaigns in Elymais. According to Orosius (5.4), having conquered Babylonia, Mithradates I "subjugated all the nations who dwelt between the Hydaspes and Indus", extending his rule to India. At the same time, Justin (41.6.1-3) relates that the fortunes of the Parthians under Mithradates I prevailed and carried them to the zenith of their power. The Bactrians, on the other hand, were buffeted in various conflicts with the Sogdians, Arachosians, Drangians, Areians and Indians, finally falling under the power of the Parthians in a state of exhaustion and losing not only their empire but also their freedom. Strabo (11.9.2) briefly confirms that having forced the Scythians to yield to them, the Parthians annexed part of Bactria. Finally, Diodorus Siculus (33.18.1) comments that "King Arsaces (Mithradates I), by pursuing a set policy of clemency and humanity, won an automatic stream of advantages and further enlarged his kingdom. For he extended his power even to India, and without a battle brought under his sway the region once ruled by Porus". These brief references strongly indicate that following his triumph in Mesopotamia, Mithradates liquidated the steppe invaders in the northeast and extended Parthian frontiers probably as far as the rivers Oxus in the east and the modern Porali in the southeast.

Mithradates' last known triumph was against the Seleucid ruler Demetrius II (145-138 BC, 1st reign). Justin (36.1.1-6) and Josephus (*Jewish Antiquities* 13.184-186) state that having eliminated Alexander Balas, Demetrius II succumbed to the vices of youth and was spoiled by his good fortune. To remove the stigma of indolence he decided to march on Parthia. The people of the east, unhappy with the cruelty of Mithradates I greeted the news of his approach. Assisted by auxiliary troops from the Persians, Elymaeans and Bactrians, he defeated the Parthians in a series of battles. In the end he was deceived by an offer of peace, captured, paraded in the cities that had aided him, and finally despatched to Hyrcania where he received treatment befitting his former status. But in another passage Justin (38.9.2-3) relates that having emerged victorious in numerous battles, Demetrius was surprised by an ambush, lost his army and taken prisoner by the Parthians. Mithradates treated him with royal magnanimity and sent him off to Hyrcania. There he gave the hapless Seleucid ruler his daughter in marriage and promised to recover for him the throne of Syria that Tryphon had usurped. According to Appian (*Syrian Wars* 11.67) Demetrius lived in the palace of King Phraates and married his sister, Rhodogune.

Although quite brief and somewhat fragmentary, our contemporary accounts of Mithradates' victory against Demetrius are preserved at the end of month IV of the Astronomical Diary of 174 SEB (7/8 Jul. – 4/5 Aug. 138 BC):⁹

- 3: ITU BI U₄-28-KÁM ¹Ar²1-[šá-ka-a² LUGAL²]
4: [...^{lú}]GAL ERÍN^{meš} šá ana muḫ-ḫi 4 ^{lú}GAL ERÍN^{meš} ana E^{ki} KU₄^{meš}-nu ITU BI ŠUB-tì
ÁB.GU₄^{bá} r_x x¹ [...]
5: [...^{lú}] UNUG^{ki} u URU^{meš} šá ana muḫ-ḫi ÍD GÚ-DU₈-A ÍD su-ú-ru ÍD pi-qu-du u ÍD^{meš} [...]
6: [...^{lú}] r_x x¹ ú ni ŠĀ^{2meš} -šú-nu TI-ú ana KUR NIM-MA ú-še-lu-ú UN^{meš} URU^{meš} šú-nu-tú ina
gi-lit EN r_x x¹ [...]
7: [...^{lú}] su²-un²-qa² u SU-KÚ ina MUŠ.ŠĚŠ^{ki} u URU^{meš} šá KUR NIM-MA GAR-an al-te-me
um-ma ^{lú}UNUG^{ki}-a-a si r_x x¹ [...]
8: [...^{lú}] r_x x¹ ik-pu-du-ú ḪUL-tì ITU BI al-te-me um-ma r_x x¹ ¹De-meṭ-ri LUGAL šá ina IGI-ma
ERÍN-šú TA URU^{meš} [...]
9: [...^{lú}] URĪ^{ki} DÛ-uš u ¹Ar-šá-ka-a LUGAL an-na-a TA URU^{meš} šá KUR Ma-da-a-a ana KUR
URĪ^{ki} GIN-ma x [...]
10: [...^{lú}] ERÍN-ni-šú GAR-ma šá-a-šú u ^{lú}GAL^{meš} -šú ina ŠU^{II} iṣ-bat um-ma ¹Ar-šá-ka-a
LUGAL sa-lim SIG₅-ka TA r_x x¹ [...]
11: [...^{lú}] ina nu-ḫu-uš DÛG.GA ŠĀ-bi u sa-lim SIG₅ ina URU^{meš} šá KUR Ma-da-a-a ina ta-ḫu
¹Ar-šá-ka-a LUGAL šak- [...]

- 3: That month, the 28th day, [King²] Ar[saces²]
4: who was above the four generals entered Babylon. That month, dying of cattle [...]
5: [...] Uruk and the cities which are on the Kutha canal, the Sūru canal, the Piqudu canal and
the canals [...]
6: [...] their they took and brought (them) up to Elam. The people of these cities in fear
of [...]

⁹ Sachs and Hunger 1996: 160-161, No. -137A.

- 7: [...] and famine occurred in Susa and the cities of Elam. I heard as follows: the Urukeans
 [...]
- 8: [...] planned evil. That month, I heard as follows: (scribal error?) King Demetrius who
 before [...] his troops from the cities of [...]
- 9: [...] made [...] of Babylonia, and this King Arsaces went from the cities of Media
 to Babylonia, and [...]
- 10: [...] brought about [the defeat] of his troops, and seized him and his nobles, saying:
 King Arsaces [...] good peace for you? from [...]
- 11: [...] in plenty, happiness and good peace in the cities of Media next to King Arsaces [...]

The testimony in lines 8-10 of the above record confirms that in one and the same month Mithradates left Media for Babylonia, crushed the Seleucid force, captured Demetrius II and sent him off to Media and not, as Justin (36.1.6) reports, to Hyrcania.

It is generally believed that Mithradates' latest dated coinage (S13.5 and S13.10) marks the end of his reign (**Fig. 2**) before October 138 BC.¹⁰ However, cuneiform records strongly indicate that he lived until early 132 BC but gradually languished into an insensate state as a result of a progressively debilitating illness after 138 BC.



Fig. 2- S13.5 tetradrachm of Mithradates I, dated 174 SEM (139/138 BC)

The earliest indication of Mithradates' extended reign is found in two partially preserved Astronomical Diaries from Babylon. These are dated 175 and 177 SEB and contain references to an individual who had suffered a stroke and perhaps later become gravely indisposed.¹¹ Although similar citations concerning men and women of no prominence are not entirely uncommon in the Late Babylonian Astronomical Diaries, the combination of these and two further supporting lines of evidence from year 179 SEB weigh heavily in favour of extending Mithradates' reign beyond 138 BC.

The first of these references is found in the historical note from month VII of the Astronomical Diary of 179 SEB (7/8 Oct. – 5/6 Nov. 133 BC):¹²

- 21: ITU BI *al-te-e*² *um-ma*¹ *Pi-li-nu-us-su*^{lu} GAL ERÍN-ni KUR URU^{ki} *šá ana muḫ-ḫi* 4
^{lu}GAL ERÍN-ni
- 22: *šá ina*^{itu} BAR *a-na* URU^{meš} *šá* KUR *Ma-da-a-a ana* IGI¹ *Ba-a-ga-a-a-šá-a*^{lu} ŠEŠ LUGAL
 GIN-*ma*

- 21: That month, I heard as follows: Philinus, the general of Babylonia who is above the four generals,
 22: who in month I had gone to the cities of Media before Bagāyāsh, the brother of the king

The second forms the colophon of a hitherto unpublished astrological omen text dated 9/10 Dec. 133 BC:¹³

¹⁰ Debevoise 1938: 26; Sellwood 1980: 29; Bivar 1983: 38; Assar 2001a: 21.

¹¹ Sachs and Hunger 1996: 182-183, No. -136B, Obverse line 16; and 194-195, No. -134B₁+B₂, Obverse line 16.

¹² Sachs and Hunger 1996: 216-217, No. -132B; Simonetta 1978: 162, n. 9 gives 165 BC as the date of the corresponding text; Torday 1997: 349 takes the phrase *brother of the king* to imply co-regency.

¹³ BM 45715 (SH 81-7-6,122); Strassmaier 1893: 111; Minns 1915: 31, Text "e"; Kugler 1924: 446 and 448, Text 8; Oelsner 1964: 269, n. 23; Oelsner 1975: 31, n. 15; Van der Spek 1997/8: 173, n. 28.



- | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| 16: ^{itu} GAN U ₄ -r ⁵ 1-KÁM MU-1-me- | Month IX, day 5, year 100+ |
| 17: 15-KÁM šá ši-i MU-1-me-1,19-KÁM | 15, which is year 179, |
| 18: ¹ Ar-šá-ka-a | Arsaces (is), |
| 19: LUGAL KUR-KUR ^{mes} | King of Lands. |

There is little doubt that the reference to Bagāyāsh as *the brother of the king* in the above text dated Oct./Nov. 133 BC concerns a living rather than dead Parthian ruler. As indicated earlier, Moses of Chorene reports that Mithradates I appointed his brother, Valarshak, “king of Armenia”. This Valarshak is the same governor of Media called Bagasis/Vagasis by Justin and may therefore be identified with Bagāyāsh of the Babylonian cuneiform records.

Furthermore, it would be difficult to ascribe to Phraates II the epithet *King of Lands* in the last text quoted above. Several Great Achaemenid kings, followed by Alexander III of Macedon and a number of successful Seleucid rulers, adopted this title. It remains unique in the entire Parthian period and therefore rather suits a prince of Mithradates’ power and prestige than his young and less experienced son and successor, Phraates II.¹⁴ Mithradates was undoubtedly a great conqueror and succeeded in transforming Parthia from a small kingdom on the eastern extremities of the Seleucid realm into a World Empire.

However, the following two records clearly show that Phraates II could not have succeeded his father, Mithradates I, earlier than April 132 BC.

The latest Astronomical Diary from 179 SEB (133/132 BC) covers months VII-XII (7/8 Oct. 133 – 2/3 Apr. 132 BC) in that year.¹⁵ It contains only sketchy references to intense fighting in Elymais during months VIII-IX (6/7 Nov. 133 – 3/4 Jan. 132 BC). Yet it shows that the Elymaean enemy was decisively defeated and the satrapy finally pacified in early 132 BC. The incomplete historical notice from month X (4/5 Jan. – 1/2 Feb. 132 BC) reads:

- | |
|---|
| 13: [ITU BI ^{lu} KIN-GI ₄ -A LUGAL šá ^{kuš} SAR ^{mes} na-šu-ú ana E ^{ki} KU ₄ -ub ^{luš}]À-TAM É-sag-gíl u |
| ^{lu} E ^{ki,mes} ^{lu} UKKIN šá É-sag-gíl 1-en GU ₄ ù 5 SISKUR |
| 14: [ina KÁ-DUMU-NUN-NA šá É-sag-gíl ana ^{lu} KIN-GI ₄ -A LUGAL MU-a-tì NIDBA |

¹⁴ Assar 2001a: 23. I had previously assigned the text to the reign of Phraates II. The epithet LUGAL KUR-KUR^{mes} should simply be interpreted as *King of Lands* and not *King of all Lands*. This epithet, in conjunction with its two variants LUGAL KUR KUR and LUGAL KUR^{mes} is attested in numerous Babylonian cuneiform documents from the Achaemenid epoch. Cf. Assar 2005: 44, n. 101.

¹⁵ Sachs and Hunger 1996: 220-235, No. -132C+D₁+D₂+E.

- GUB^{meš}-niš-šú ana ^dE]N ^dGAŠAN-ia DINGIR^{meš} GAL^{meš} ana bul-^rtu¹ šá LUGAL ù a-na bul-^rti-šú GAR-an ITU BI
- 15: [^{kuš}GÍD.DA šá ana muḫ-ḫi ^{lu}pa-ḫat u ^{lu}pu-li-ṭa-an-nu šá ina E^k[^ri S]AR-u' ina É ta-mar-tú šá-su-ú ak-ka-'i-I
- 16: [... ¹Ur-'a-a A šá ¹Ka-a]m-na-áš-ki-i-ri ^{lu}KÚR ^{lu}NIM-MA^{ki} šá si-ḫi ana muḫ-ḫi ^{lu}AD-šú is-se-ḫi-'u
- 17: [...] ina KUR URI^{ki} TUŠ-u' UGU [^{lu}]ERÍN^{meš}-šú-nu ú-ka-ši-ru ú-zi-bu
- 18: [...] ^rx¹-ár-ra-ta-áš ÍD [KUR NI]M-MA^{ki} i-bi-ru-ú a-na 1 DANNA.ÀM id-du-ú
- 19: [... M]AḪ^{meš} a-na LÚ.[NE a-na⁷ tar]-ša a-ḫa-meš ip-ṭu-ru-ú ina ^{itu}APIN U₄₋₇ ^{lu}ERÍN^{meš}
- 20: [... ¹]ERÍN^{meš} [x x] ^rx¹ BAD₅.BAD₅ ^{lu}ERÍN^{meš} KÚR GAR-u' EN ŠÚ šámaš re-ḫe-e-tú
- 21: [... K]U₄[?]-ub ¹Ur-'i-a A šá ^{lu}KÚR ^{lu}NIM-MA^{ki} MU-a-ti
- 22: [...] 1-en GU₄ ù 5 SISKUR ana tar-ša ^{lu}DUMU šip-ri MU-a-ti
- 23: [...]-u' u ana bul-^rti-šú GAR-an

- 13: [That month a messenger of the king who carried a message entered Babylon]. The administrator of Esangil and the Babylonians, the assembly of Esangil, [provided] one bull and 5 (sheep) sacrifices
- 14: [at the 'Gate of the Son of the Prince' of Esangil for that messenger of the king as offering, and to B]el and Beltija, the great gods, for the life of the king and for his (own) life, he sacrificed them. That month,
- 15: [a parchment letter] which was written [to] the (Greek) citizens who are in Babylon, was read in the House of Observation; according to
- 16: [...Uria, son of K]amnaškir, the Elamite enemy, who had revolted against his father
- 17: [...] lived in Babylonia, organised against their troops and left²
- 18: [...]-arrataš, the river of Elam, they crossed, for one bēru distance they pitched camp
- 19: [...] departed [...] many [troops] for fighting [against] each other. In month VIII, the 7th, the troops
- 20: [...] the troops [...] they brought about the defeat of the troops of the enemy². Until sunset, the remainder
- 21: [...] entered. Uria, the son of this Elamite enemy,
- 22: [...] one bull and 5 (sheep) sacrifices opposite this messenger
- 23: [...] and performed (it) for his life.

The partially preserved upper edge text of this Diary confirms that its dated colophon was subscribed to King Arsaces alone:

- 3: [... MU]-1-me-1,19-KÁM ¹Ar-šá-ka-a LUGAL
- 3: [... Year] 179, Arsaces (is) King.

The next record is the incomplete colophon of a “deed of gift to the house of gods” from Uruk, compiled in month V of 180 SEB (30/31 Jul. – 27/28 Aug. 132 BC).¹⁶



¹⁶ Clay 1913: 13, 87, and pl. 48 (MLC 2153) dates the tablet to c. 173 SEB; Oelsner 1975: 30-31, n. 14, year 180 SEB; Doty 1977: 377, year 180 SEB; Oelsner 1986: 275, n. “s”, and 408, n. 570, year 180 SEB; Oelsner 1995: 147-148, year 180 SEB; Del Monte 1997: 245, year 180 SEB.

11: UNUG^{ki} it^uNE
 12: [U₄-x-KÁM MU-1-me-16 šá šⁱ-tu₄] r¹1-me-1,20 ¹Ar-šak-'a u ¹Ri-r¹in¹-nu AMA-šú
 13: LUGAL^{meš}

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

This attested co-regency is clearly inconsistent with our traditional date of Mithradates' death (138-137 BC). If Phraates II had succeeded his father sometime in 138-137 BC as an adult,¹⁷ he would have required no assistance from his mother to administer the Empire some six years later in 132 BC. Combined with the following date-formula from 21/22 Apr. 131 BC,¹⁸ the above dated colophon from Uruk strongly indicates that the corresponding tablet was compiled while the reigning Arsacid prince was not quite 15 years old (the Zoroastrian adulthood age). Consequently, he required his mother to act as regent of the Parthian Empire until her son came of age shortly afterwards and ruled independently:¹⁹

10 [U₄-1-KÁM IGI-DU₈-A^{meš} DIB-qa^{meš} u AN-KU₁₀]^{meš} šá a-na MU-1-me-17-KÁM
 11 [šá šⁱ-i MU-1-me-1,21-KÁM ¹Ar]-šá-ka-a LUGAL kun-nu-'u

10 [Day 1 (of month I), appearances, passings, and eclipse]s which were established for year 117,
 11 [which is year 181], [Ar]saces (is) King.

Phraates' tender age is also mirrored in his youthful portrait on his inaugural coinage from Susa (**Fig. 3**), depicting him with sideburns only and without a moustache and full beard.



Fig. 3- S14.1-2 tetradrachms of Phraates II from Susa

As commented above, the latest extant Astronomical Diary from 179 SEB covers the period 7/8 October 133 – 2/3 April 132 BC and is subscribed to King Arsaces as the sole ruler. The latter could not have been the King Arsaces who ruled jointly with his mother around four months later in Jul./Aug. 132 BC. He must have been Mithradates I who, in spite of his debilitating ailment, remained the supreme ruler of the Parthian Empire as late as April 132 BC but nevertheless no later than 27/28 August of that year.²⁰ It is noteworthy that our hypothesis on the state of Mithradates' health towards the end of his reign agrees with Justin (41.6.9) who reports that: *He (Mithradates I) then succumbed to illness and died with glory at an advanced age, as great a man as his great-grandfather Arsaces.*²¹

¹⁷ Phraates II could not have assumed the crown as a minor in 138-137 BC and ruled jointly with his mother. The preserved date-formulas in the period 138-132 BC are all subscribed to King Arsaces only, indicating that the Arsacid monarch reigned independently and not as a co-ruler.

¹⁸ Sachs 1955: 195 and 207, LBAT 1272+1345.

¹⁹ Dąbrowa 2005: 73, n. 1 also dates the end of Mithradates' reign to 132 BC.

²⁰ Assar 2005: 44; Assar 2006: 95-98.

²¹ Cf. Assar 2004: 84-87 on the correct dynastic link between Arsaces I and Mithradates I.

Given the primary and later sources, we can now confidently place the terminal date of the reign of Mithradates I in the period 3/4 April – 27/28 August 132 BC.

* * * * *

Abbreviations

AfO *Archiv für Orientforschung*

SEB Seleucid Era of the Babylonian calendar (epoch = 1 Nisānu (2/3 April) 311 BC). Cf. Assar 2003: 175-176.

SEM Seleucid Era of the Macedonian calendar (epoch = 1 Dios (6/7 October) 312 BC). Cf. Assar 2003: 176.

ZfA *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*

Bibliography

ASSAR G. R. F.,

– 2001a, “Recent Studies in Parthian History: Part II”, *The Celator. Journal of Ancient and Medieval Coinage*, 15.1 (January): 17-27 and 41.

– 2001b, “Recent Studies in Parthian History: Part III”, *The Celator. Journal of Ancient and Medieval Coinage*, 15.2 (February): 17-22.

– 2003, “Parthian Calendars at Babylon and Seleucia on the Tigris”, *Iran* 41: 171-191.

– 2004, “Genealogy and Coinage of the Early Parthian Rulers. I”, *Parthica* 6: 69-93.

– 2005, “Genealogy and Coinage of the Early Parthian Rulers. II. A Revised Stemma”, *Parthica* 7: 29-63.

– 2006, “A Revised Parthian Chronology of the Period 165-91 BC”, *Electrum* 11: 87-158.

BIVAR A. D. H.,

– 1983, “The Political History of Iran Under the Arsacids”, 21-99. In E. Yarshater (ed.), *CHr 3.1: The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

BOPEARACHCHI O.,

– 1991 *Monnaies gréco-bactriennes et indo-grecques – Catalogue raisonné*.

Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

CLAY A. T.,

– 1913, *Babylonian Records in the Library of J. Pierpont Morgan*. Vol. 2. *Legal Documents from Erech Dated in the Seleucid Era* (BRM II). Privately Printed, New York.

DĀBROWA E.,

– 2005, “Les aspects politiques et militaires de la conquête parthe de la mésopotamie”, *Electrum* 10: 73-88.

DEBEVOISE N. C.,

– 1938, *A Political History of Parthia*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

DEL MONTE G. F.,

– 1997, *Testi dalla Babilonia Ellenistica I: Testi Cronografici*. Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali, Pisa.

DOTY L. T.,

– 1977, *Cuneiform Archives from Hellenistic Uruk* (PhD Dissertation). Yale University, Yale.

KUGLER F. X.,

– 1924, *Sternkunde und Sterndienst in Babel. – Assyriologische, Astronomische und Astralmythologische Untersuchungen 2.2.2. Babylonische Zeitordnung und Ältere Himmelskunde*. Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, Münster in Westfalen.

MINNS E. H.,

– 1915, “Parchments of the Parthian Period from Avroman in Kurdistan”, *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 35: 22-65.

OELSNER J.,

– 1964, “Ein Beiträge zu keilschriftliche Königstitulaturen in hellenistischer Zeit”, *ZfA*, N.F. 22 (Band 56): 262-275.

– 1975, “Randbemerkungen zur arsakidischen Geschichte anhand von babylonischen Keilschrifttexten”, *AfO* 3: 25-45.

– 1986, *Materialien zur Babylonischen Gesellschaft und Kultur in Hellenistischer Zeit*, *Assyriologia*, 7. Eötvös University, Budapest.

- 1995, “Recht im hellenistischen Babylonien: Tempel-Sklaven-Schuldrecht-allgemeine Charakterisierung”, 106-148. In M. J. Geller and H. Maehler (eds.), in collaboration with A. D. E. Lewis, *Legal Documents of the Hellenistic World*. The Warburg Institute, University of London.
- ROBERTS L.,
- 1963, Reviewing *Samothrace*. Excavations conducted by the Institute of Fine Arts, New York, ed. K. Lehmann. Volume 2:1, The Inscriptions on Stone, by P. M. Fraser (1960), *Gnomon*, 35: 50-79.
- 1967, “Encore une inscription grecque de l’Iran”, *Comptes Rendus de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*: 281-297.
- SACHS A. J.,
- 1955, *Late Babylonian Astronomical and Related Texts*. Copied by T. G. Pinches and J. N. Strassmaier. Brown Univ. Press, Providence, RI.
- SACHS A. J. and HUNGER H.,
- 1996, *Astronomical Diaries and Related Texts from Babylonia*, Vol. 3, *Diaries from 164 B.C. to 61 B.C.*, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien.
- SELLWOOD D. G.,
- 1980, *An Introduction to the Coinage of Parthia*, 2nd. ed. Spink and Son Ltd., London.
- SIMONETTA A. M.,
- 1978, “The Chronology of the Gondopharean Dynasty”, *East and West*, N.S. 28: 155-187.
- STRASSMAIER J. N.,
- 1893, “Zur Chronology der Seleuciden”, *ZfA* 8: 106-113.
- TARN W. W.,
- 1930, “Seleucid–Parthian Studies”, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 105-135. British Academy, London.
- 1932, “Parthia”, 574-613. In S. A. Cook, F. E. Adcock and M. P. Charlesworth (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History*. Vol. 9. *The Roman Republic, 133 – 44 B.C.* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- TORDAY L.,
- 1997, *Mounted Archers – the Beginnings of Central Asian History*. Durham Academic Press, Durham.
- VAN DER SPEK R. J.,
- 1997/8, “New Evidence from the Babylonian Astronomical Diaries Concerning Seleucid and Arsacid History”, *AfO* 44/45: 167-175.

A Farsi version of the above is available at the below links also:

Assar G.R.F., “The Terminal Date of the Reign of Mithradates I”, *Bulletin of Ancient Iranian History*, Vol. 2 (September 2006), 1-16 (in Farsi):

<http://www.parthian-empire.com/articles/Terminal-Date-of-Reign-of-Mithradates-I-F.pdf>

<http://web3.ehost-services.com/hemranib/articles.htm>

Copyright © August 2005 by G. R. F. Assar

غلامرضا (فرهاد) آثار

* * * * *