

## THE PROPER NAME OF THE 2ND PARTHIAN RULER\*

Published in: *Bulletin of Ancient Iranian History*, Vol. 4 (March 2008), 1-7.

Copyright © August 2007 by G. R. F. Assar غلامرضا (فرهاد) آثار

Our knowledge of the affairs of Parthia from the inception of the Arsacid kingdom under Arsaces I (247-211 BC)<sup>1</sup> through her expansion into a World Empire by Mithradates I (164-132 BC) is largely derived from *Prologue* 41 of the Philippic History of Trogus Pompeius and, to a lesser extent, book 41 of Justin's *Epitome* of Trogus' lost work. Of the two sources, the latter is only a condensed extract of the most significant episodes in Trogus, including the personal names of the central characters, whereas the former comprises, according to Justin, a selection of the most noteworthy material in the Philippic History. However, despite sharing a common origin, the combination of an unfortunate copyist's error in *Prologue* 41 and Justin's hasty abbreviation of several Parthian reigns in book 41 of the *Epitome* has entailed noticeable differences between the two concerning both the proper name of an early successor of Arsaces I and some of the events of the formative years of the Parthian monarchy. According to *Prologue* 41, the two prominent Arsacid rulers after Arsaces I were Artabanus and Tigranes; the latter is reported to have subjugated Media and Mesopotamia. Justin (41.5.7-41.5.10), on the other hand, registers four princes who followed Arsaces I and reigned before the accession of Phraates II (132-127 BC): The son and successor of Arsaces I "whose 'name' was also Arsaces", Arsaces III, called Phriapatius (185-170 BC), and the latter's sons, Phraates I (168-164 BC), and Mithradates I (164-132 BC), the true conqueror of Media, Mesopotamia and Elymais and the founder of the Parthian Empire. We thus have both inharmonious historical summaries, attributing the conquests of Media and Mesopotamia to the Armenian ruler, Tigranes II (96-55 BC), rather than Mithradates I, as well as conflicting personal names of the early Arsacid princes in *Prologue* 41 and book 41 of the *Epitome*. However, while the absence from *Prologue* 41 of Phriapatius and Phraates I may be explained in terms of their comparatively less impressive reigns, Tigranes' presence in the same prologue is unwarranted. As in book 40 of the *Epitome*, the proper place for the Armenian ruler is *Prologue* 40, where he appears after the civil wars of c. 128-76 BC in Syria, and not *Prologue* 41 whose *terminus ante quem* is 130 BC,<sup>2</sup> some thirty five years prior to Tigranes' enthronement in Armenia.

The first to question Tigranes' inclusion in *Prologue* 41 was Jean Foy-Vaillant (died 1706). He perceptively substituted Mithradates for the Armenian ruler and emended the faulty text.<sup>3</sup> Vaillant's thesis was adopted by most leading authors for nearly two centuries<sup>4</sup> until Alfred von Gutschmid transferred the defective statement from *Prologue* 41 to 42.<sup>5</sup> This was to enable Gutschmid to assign to a successor of Mithradates II (121-

---

\* I am grateful to the Soudavar Foundation for supporting my research.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Assar (2005), 32-45 for the revised Parthian regnal years.

<sup>2</sup> This is decided by the terminal date of the reign of Menander I Soter, the last ruler in *Prolog.* 41. Cf. Boppearachchi (1991), 76 who gives 130 BC. It may also be estimated from the date 129 BC of the first event in *Prolog.* 42, concerning Himerus' war on Mesene and his brutal treatment of the Babylonians. Justin, on the other hand, finishes book 41 with the death of Mithradates I in 132 BC and begins book 42 with the accession of Phraates II.

<sup>3</sup> Foy-Vaillant (1725), 39 (under *Mithridates Parthorum Rex VI*).

<sup>4</sup> Lewis (1728), 17-23; Lindsay (1852), 4-6 and 133-135 (coinage); Rawlinson (1873), 54-58; Gardner (1877), 4-5 and 26-27 (coinage). Although these scholars correctly identify Artabanus with Arsaces in Justin (41.5.7), their proposed early Parthian genealogy whereby the same Arsaces appears as the son of Tiridates, the brother of Arsaces I, is faulty.

<sup>5</sup> Gutschmid (1888), 81, n. 1.

91 BC)<sup>6</sup> a series of Parthian drachms with full mint-names known as the “Campaign Coins”.<sup>7</sup> However, subsequent inspection of certain Babylonian cuneiform records from the period 75-60 BC and the associated numismatic evidence has shown that the “Campaign Coins” were minted in the final years of the reign of Arsaces XVI (78/77-62/61 BC).<sup>8</sup> Given that Tigranes appears as a successor of Artabanus in *Prologue 41*, the approximate date of these special drachms requires the Armenian ruler to have conquered Media and Mesopotamia in the late 60s – early 50s BC. Yet, there are no references to Tigranes in the corresponding Babylonian records and, insofar as the numismatic evidence is concerned, he struck no coins in Ecbatana and Seleucia on the Tigris, the two principal mints in Media and Mesopotamia respectively. Combined with the accounts of his crushing defeat by Lucullus at Tigranocerta in 69 BC and subsequent participation in the closing stages of the Third Mithradatic War (74-63 BC), our cuneiform and numismatic evidence strongly indicates that Tigranes was in no position to attack Parthia and annex Media and Mesopotamia around the end of the reign of Phraates III (70/69-58/57 BC). The extant contemporary and later sources, therefore, contrast sharply with Gutschmid’s amendment but agree with Vaillant’s substitution of Mithradates for Tigranes. Yet, in spite of ensuring a closer agreement between *Prologue 41* and book 41 of the *Epitome*, Vaillant’s emendation fails to explain the omission by Justin of an early Arsacid ruler called Artabanus. In this brief excursus, I shall re-examine the relevant evidence to show that the proper name of the son and successor of Arsaces I was indeed Artabanus.

Beginning with the improved text of *Prologue 41*, it may be argued that the unknown compiler of Trogus’ prologues regarded Arsaces I, Artabanus I and Mithradates I as the most prominent Arsacid rulers in the period 247-132 BC. According to Justin (41.4.6-10), Arsaces I revolted against Seleucid domination, attacked Parthia and slew her satrap, Andragoras (246-238 BC), annexed Hyrcania shortly afterwards and also scored a momentous victory against Seleucus II (246-225 BC) who had marched east to crush the Parthian rebellion. Unfortunately, Justin makes no reference to a successor of Arsaces I called Artabanus and instead reports that the son of the first Arsaces followed his father on the throne. He fought courageously against Antiochus III the Great (222-187 BC) who had led a major expedition at the head of a vast army to eliminate the Parthian and Bactrian rulers and win back the lost Seleucid territories in the East. At the end, Antiochus was compelled to accept the second Arsaces as an ally before heading further east to confront Euthydemus in Bactria.

Justin (41.5.8-9) then hastily summarises the unimpressive reign of Phriapatius and relates that the third Parthian king ruled 15 years and left the crown to his elder son Phraates I. He further intimates, in book 41.5.9-10, that having invaded Hyrcania and defeated the powerful Mardian tribes, Phraates died shortly afterwards and bequeathed the throne to his able brother, Mithradates I, rather than one of his own sons. Finally, Justin (41.6.1-9) recounts, in some detail, the achievements of the most accomplished Arsacid prince, Mithradates I. This culminates in Parthia’s expansion from the western borders of Bactria to the eastern banks of the Euphrates and ends with the death of the founder of the Arsacid Empire.

Given Justin’s commentary on the early Parthian reigns and granted that those reported in *Prologue 41* are in their correct chronological order, we may postulate that Artabanus of

---

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Assar (2006a), 147-148 for the correct regnal years.

<sup>7</sup> Tarn (1930), 119; Sellwood (1980), 98-99, nos. S30.18, S30.21-22, S30.24-25, and S30.28-30.

<sup>8</sup> Assar (2006b), 86-87.

the same prologue ascended the throne before the accession of Mithradates I. He could, therefore, be identified either with one of the three successors of Arsaces I in book 41 of the *Epitome*, namely Arsaces II, Phriapatius and Phraates I, or with a prominent early Parthian prince whom Justin uncharacteristically eliminated. The latter scenario is, however, unlikely for the following reasons. First, Justin affirms in his *Preface* that he extracted from Trogus' 44 books "all the most noteworthy material" and "left out what did not make pleasurable reading or serve to provide a moral". Second, to confirm his interest in hereditary succession and primogeniture, Justin records, among other cases, the accessions of the Achaemenid king Xerxes I (486-465 BC), Charillus, the posthumous son of the Spartan ruler Polydectes, Ptolemy II (282-246 BC) of Egypt, and Dionysius II, the elder son of the Sicilian tyrant Dionysius in books 2.10.1-11, 3.2.5-6, 16.2.7-9, and 21.1.1-2 of the *Epitome*. It would, therefore, be difficult to argue that having set out to excerpt the most notable episodes from Trogus' work, Justin intentionally removed from his book 41 the reign of an early successor of Arsaces I whose impressive deeds qualified him for inclusion in *Prologue* 41.

Could Justin have mistaken Artabanus or conflated his reign with another Arsacid ruler? As already remarked, judging from his place in *Prologue* 41 between the two illustrious Parthian monarchs, Arsaces I and Mithradates I, Artabanus I must himself have been an outstanding prince. On the other hand, setting aside Arsaces II for the moment, Justin's fleeting treatment of the reign of Phriapatius in book 41 of the *Epitome* strongly suggests a peaceful period with no Parthian attack on the neighbouring satrapies to provoke Seleucid reprisal. This signifies an uneventful reign and thus conforms to Phriapatius' exclusion from *Prologue* 41. It is possible that having entered into an alliance with the Seleucids in 208 BC, the Parthians observed the *status quo* for some forty years before Phraates I attacked Hyrcania about 166 BC. Given Phriapatius' quiet reign and the attestation of his personal name from Nisa,<sup>9</sup> it is unlikely that Justin confused Artabanus of *Prologue* 41 with Phriapatius.

It is equally implausible that Justin mistook Phraates I for Artabanus. Isidore of Charax (*Parthian Stations*, 2.7)<sup>10</sup> reports that the first Phraates defeated the powerful Mardi and relocated them to the garrison town of Charax at the foot of Mount Caspius to guard the Caspian Gates, a strategically important passage connecting Media and Parthia. This agrees with Justin (41.5.9) whose cursory remarks also confirm Phraates as the conqueror of the Mardi in the Hyrcanian highlands. As shown elsewhere,<sup>11</sup> Phraates was the first Parthian ruler who began the westward expansion of Parthia after the Seleuco-Arsacid pact of 208 BC. Although his sphere of influence was strictly limited to the two remote satrapies of Parthia and Hyrcania,<sup>12</sup> Phraates' incursion, nevertheless, impelled Antiochus IV (175-164 BC) to move east to thwart the rebellions in the "Upper Satrapies". However, because of his untimely death, and the inability of Antiochus IV to punish the Parthians before his own unexpected demise, Phraates' reign obviously failed to impress the compiler of Trogus' prologues. Otherwise he would have included the fifth Parthian ruler<sup>13</sup> in *Prologue* 41 as one of the prominent successors of Arsaces I. In

---

<sup>9</sup> Assar (2004), 74-76 and 81-82.

<sup>10</sup> Schoff (1914), 6-7.

<sup>11</sup> Assar (2005), 39-40.

<sup>12</sup> Justin is silent about Phraates' invasion of Media or any attack on Bactria. He credits the wars with both the Bactrians and the Medes to Mithradates I.

<sup>13</sup> Assar (2004), 82-88; Assar (2005), 38-41. With the introduction of Arsaces IV, the great-grandson of Arsaces I, between Phriapatius and Phraates I, the latter becomes the fifth Parthian ruler. Also, Orosius (5.4.16) calls Mithradates I, the brother and immediate successor of Phraates I, the sixth Arsaces.

any case, the apparent harmony between Justin and Isidore, both naming Phraates in connection with the Mardian tribes, strongly implies that Justin did not confound Artabanus of *Prologue* 41 with Phraates I.

Having ruled out the intentional omission of Artabanus or his misidentification with other Parthian princes, it can be shown that while excerpting the reign of Arsaces II, Justin simply neglected the personal name of the son of Arsaces I and instead recorded his dynastic title, Arsaces. However, since a detailed analysis of the relevant material is beyond the scope of this brief note,<sup>14</sup> the following summary seeks to highlight the inconsistencies in the extant translations of book 41 of the *Epitome* and conclude that Arsaces II was indeed called Artabanus:

Justin (41.5.5), in his closing remarks on the reign of the eponymous founder of the Arsacid monarchy, relates:<sup>15</sup>

*Thus Arsaces, having at once acquired and established a kingdom, and having become no less memorable among the Parthians than Cyrus among the Persians, Alexander among the Macedonians, or Romulus among the Romans, died at a mature old age.*

This is consistent with the Latin text.<sup>16</sup> However, the generally accepted interpretation of the next passage is defective and therefore misleading. Following the above narrative, Justin (41.5.6) continues that:

*... cuius memoriae hunc honorem Parthi tribuerunt ut omnes exinde reges suos Arsacis nomine nuncupent.*

Disregarding the documentary, literary and numismatic evidence that upon mounting the throne and in addition to their personal names, all Parthian rulers adopted the title Arsaces,<sup>17</sup> the above is freely translated as:

*... the Parthians paid this honour to his memory, that they called all their kings thenceforth by the name of Arsaces.*<sup>18</sup>

or elsewhere as:

*... the Parthians revered his memory by giving all their subsequent kings the name Arsaces.*<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> These will be discussed in a future contribution.

<sup>15</sup> Watson (1882), 276.

<sup>16</sup> Ruehl (1886), 231.

<sup>17</sup> The Babylonian cuneiform records from the Parthian period are subscribed either to “King Arsaces” or “King of Kings Arsaces”, with a handful also giving the personal names of the rulers. Cf. Assar (2006a), 90-149 and Assar (2006b), 62-95. Strabo (15.1.36) agrees with Justin that all Parthian princes were called Arsaces. There are also a significant number of Parthian coins carrying both the proper names of the kings and their dynastic epithet. Cf. Sellwood (1980), 127 (S41.1), 129 (S41.17), 154 (S48.18), 194-195 (S60.1-10), 201 (S62.12), 218-219 (S66.1-4), and 233-299 with both the personal and throne names struck up on the coins, including, in several cases, the Aramaic version of the proper names, either abbreviated or in full.

<sup>18</sup> Watson (1882), 276.

<sup>19</sup> Yardley (1994), 256.

Taken *prima facie*, not only these ignore the contemporary and later material but also disagree with Justin (41.5.6) who wrote *Arsacis nomine nuncupent* undoubtedly to confirm that the successors of Arsaces I were *called by the second-name/clan-name Arsaces*. In fact, as a corollary to this, we have Justin's own commentary in book 41.5.8 on the reign of Phriapatius where he reiterates that:

*Tertius Parthis rex Priapatius fuit, sed et ipse Arsaces dictus. Nam sicut supra dictum est, omnes reges suos hoc nomine, sicuti Romani Caesares Augustosque, cognominavere.*

*The third king of the Parthians was Priapatius (Phriapatius); but he was also called Arsaces, for, as has just been observed, they distinguished all their kings by that epithet (tr. name),<sup>20</sup> as the Romans use the titles of Caesar and Augustus.*

Having removed the confusion concerning the adoption of the title Arsaces, we may now turn to the crucial passage in Justin (41.5.7) on the reign of Arsaces II:

*Huius filius et successor regni, Arsaces et ipse nomine, adversus Antiochum, Seleuci filium, centum milibus peditum et XX milibus equitum instructum mira virtute pugnavit; ad postremum in societatem eius adsumptus est.*

This is incessantly rendered as:

*His son and successor on the throne, whose name was also Arsaces, fought with the greatest bravery against Antiochus, the son of Seleucus, who was at the head of a hundred thousand foot and twenty thousand horse, and was at last taken into alliance with him.*

Judging from the above extracts, the central theme of Justin's book 41.5.6-9, covering the first three Parthian reigns, is basic chronology with especial emphasis on all successors of Arsaces I receiving the dynastic appellation Arsaces. We thus have strong indication that the interpretation of *Arsaces et ipse nomine* in Justin (41.5.7) as *whose name was also Arsaces* is not secure. Given the overall context of Justin (41.5.6-8) and the fact that there is little sense in conferring the title Arsaces on a prince whose personal name is Arsaces, the decisive sentence in Justin (41.5.7) may be rendered as *whose title was also Arsaces*, in agreement with both *omnes exinde reges suos Arsacis nomine nuncupent* and *et ipse Arsaces dictus* in books 41.5.6 and 41.5.8 of the *Epitome*.

Historically, there can be no objections to this. According to Justin, Arsaces II fought with admirable gallantry, *mira virtute*, against Antiochus III and distinguished himself by avoiding capture or death in the hands of his powerful antagonist. He thus retained his imperial status and was finally accepted by Antiochus as an ally, *in societatem eius adsumptus est*, and not a vassal. It is possible that following his successful campaigns against the Seleucid onslaught, the Parthians held Arsaces II in high esteem as their saviour from total subjection to a foreign power. Justin (41.4.7-9) informs us that having liberated Parthia and conquered Hyrcania, Arsaces I fought a momentous battle against Seleucus II who had set out to crush the Parthian rebellion, and emerged the victor. Hence the inclusion of the first Arsaces in *Prologue 41* as the founder of the Parthian

---

<sup>20</sup> Watson (1882), 276 translates *hoc nomine* as *that name*. However, given that the personal name of the third Parthian ruler was Phriapatius, Arsaces was simply his throne-name.

monarchy. We are further told by Justin (36.1.2-6) that Mithradates I the Great defeated and captured a later Seleucid king, Demetrius II (145-138 BC, 1st reign), and thus ensured Parthia's freedom from Seleucid tutelage. As both the architect and protector of the Arsacid Empire, Mithradates I also appears in *Prologue* 41 as a distinguished successor of Arsaces I. It is, therefore, not surprising that as an accomplished Parthian prince, Arsaces II called Artabanus, was justifiably included in *Prologue* 41 for his bravery and successful defence of Parthia against Antiochus III, the most celebrated of all Seleucid rulers after Seleucus I Nicator (311-281 BC).

It should, nevertheless, be emphasised that Justin uses *nomine* throughout his *Epitome* to register the names of persons of both royal and common background. One example in book 42.4.16 is of particular interest:

*Sed fatum Parthiae fecit, in qua iam quasi sollemne est reges parricidas haberi, ut sceleratissimus omnium, et ipse Phraates nomine, rex stateuretur.*

*But the fate of Parthia, in which it is now, as it were, customary that the princes should be assassins of their kindred, ordained that the most cruel of them all, Phraates by name, should be fixed upon for their king.*

However, here Justin is not concerned, as he is in book 41.5.6-8, with the adoption of the dynastic title by the successors of Arsaces I. The context makes it abundantly clear that Justin is employing *nomine* in book 42.4.16 to confirm that the son of Orodes II was also called Phraates.

Conversely, in relation to the accession of the last Achaemenid king, Darius III (336-331 BC), Justin (10.3.5) intimates that:

*Ob haec decora idem Codomannus praeficitur Armeniis. Interiecto deinde tempore post mortem Ochi Regis ob memoriam pristinae virtutis rex a polulo constituitur, Darei nomine, ne quid regiae maiestati deesset, honoratus.*

*For this honourable service Codomannus was made governor of Armenia. Some time after, on the death of Ochus (Artaxerxes III), he was chosen king by the people from regard to his former merits, and, that nothing might be wanting to his royal dignity, honoured with the throne-name (tr. name)<sup>21</sup> Darius.*

The above examples confirm that the proper interpretation of *nomine* is decided by the context in which it appears and so it should not be invariably translated as “name” or “named”. We may, therefore, maintain that Artabanus in *Prologue* 41 is none other than the son and successor of Arsaces I and that he was, according to Justin, *Arsaces et ipse nomine*.

### **Bibliography:**

- Assar G. R. F., 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.

---

<sup>21</sup> Watson (1882), 90. The translation is obviously defective since Darius was only the title of the last Achaemenid ruler. Two Babylonian records confirm that the personal name of Darius III was Artashata. Cf. Sachs and Hunger (1988), 168-175; Hunger and Sachs (2001), 268-269.

- , 2006a, “A Revised Parthian Chronology of the Period 165-91 BC”, *Electrum* 11, 87-158.
- , 2006b, “A Revised Parthian Chronology of the Period 91-55 BC”, *Parthica* 8, 55-104.
- Bopearachchi O., 1991, *Monnaies gréco-bactriennes et indo-grecques*. Paris.
- Foy-Vaillant J., 1725 (reprinted 1728), *Arsacidarum Imperium, sive Regum Parthorum Historia, ad fidem Numismatum Accommodata*, Tomus Primus (Parisii).
- Gardner P., 1877, *The Parthian Coinage*. London.
- Gutschmid A. Von, 1888, *Geschichte Irans und seiner Nachbarländer von Alexander dem Grossen bis zum untergang der Arsaciden, von Alfred von Gutschmid*. Tübingen.
- Hunger H. and Sachs A. J., 2001, *Astronomical Diaries and Related Texts from Babylon*. Vol. V: Lunar and Planetary Texts. Vienna.
- Lewis T., 1728, *The History of the Parthian Empire, from the Foundation of the Monarchy by Arsaces, to its Final Overthrow by Artaxerxes the Persian*. London.
- Lindsay J., 1852, *A View of the History and Coinage of the Parthians*. Cork.
- Rawlinson G., 1873, *The Sixth Great Oriental Monarchy; or the Geography, History and Antiquities of Parthia*. London.
- Ruehl F., 1886, *M. Ivniani Ivstini Epitoma Historiarvm Philippicarvm Pompei Trogi*. Leipzig.
- Sachs A. J. and Hunger H., 1988, *Astronomical Diaries and Related Texts from Babylon*. Vol. I: *Diaries from 652 B.C. to 262 B.C.* Vienna.
- Schoff W. H., *Parthian Stations by Isidore of Charax. An Account of the Overland Trade Route Between the Levant and India in the First Century B.C.* Philadelphia.
- Sellwood D. G., 1980, *An Introduction to the Coinage of Parthia*. London.
- Tarn W. W., 1930, “Seleucid-Parthian Studies”, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 105-135.
- Watson J. S., 1882, *Justin, Cornelius Nepos, and Eutropius*. London.
- Yardley J. C., 1994, *Justin. Epitome of the Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus*. Scholar Press, Atlanta, GA.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Copies of this note could also be found at the following links:**

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

HTML version:

[http://web3.ehostservices.com/hemranib/files/BAIH\\_Vol\\_IV/BAIH\\_Vol\\_IV/HTML/Articles/Assar2.html](http://web3.ehostservices.com/hemranib/files/BAIH_Vol_IV/BAIH_Vol_IV/HTML/Articles/Assar2.html)

PDF version:

[http://web3.ehostservices.com/hemranib/files/BAIH\\_Vol\\_IV/BAIH\\_Vol\\_IV/Doc/Articles/Assar2%20The%20Proper%20Name%20of%20the%202nd%20Parthian%20Ruler.pdf](http://web3.ehostservices.com/hemranib/files/BAIH_Vol_IV/BAIH_Vol_IV/Doc/Articles/Assar2%20The%20Proper%20Name%20of%20the%202nd%20Parthian%20Ruler.pdf)