

Alberto M. Simonetta

## THE COINAGE OF THE SO-CALLED PARTHIAN “DARK AGE” REVISITED

The problem of the attribution of the different coin series to the Parthian kings whose names are recorded either by classical sources or by documents contemporary with the coins issued during the years that David Sellwood has aptly named “the Parthian Dark Age” is still an unsettled one. Since I published my last paper on the subject (Simonetta 2001), at least two important papers have been published (Assar 2006b; Vardanyan 2006) and, as these provide some significant new evidence and as I am not convinced by their proposals, a fresh discussion of the whole problem may be useful; moreover the new evidence makes it necessary also to make some changes in my own previous conclusions.

As I think that a correct method in the approach to any problem is essential and that this has been all too often at fault in many authors’ discussions where pre-conceived attributions have been taken for granted or more or less debatable assumptions by previous authors have been taken as solid groundwork on which to build further hypotheses, I shall first outline the methodological approach that I shall follow, then I shall examine the available evidence without any reference to previous opinions, including my own, and finally try to reach some conclusions.

### **On matters of method and principles**

I shall first stress that, when tackling a controversial issue, the correct method is first to analyse the evidence without any reference to previous hypotheses by any author, however, well qualified as he can be. Comparisons of the results of the fresh analysis with previous proposals are necessary indeed, but must be left for a later phase of the investigation if bias is to be avoided. It is equally important not to force the evidence, that is just take the evidence at its minimal meaning leaving the interpretation, if any is possible, again for a further phase. Just as an example we may well have, for instance three records from three successive years, record one and three precisely mentioning a certain king identified by his name or by that of his queen, while record two merely says “king Arsaces”, now what does actually this middle record tell? It tells us that the scribe of record two considered that the local ruler was not challenged by any pretender of which he knew and nothing more.

Clearly one is tempted to think that the ruling king is the same as that of the previous year who had defeated his previous enemy and had not yet been challenged by a new one. This is clearly a possibility, but it is sufficient to think for Parthia of the various rebellions against Artabanus II (10–38 AD) and how, supposing the story to be reliable, he was discovered by his supporters in rags and hunting with his bow to get some food, to show that the “Arsaces king” of record 2 may well be a different individual intervening between two phases of the rule of the precisely named king. I, therefore, prefer to suspend judgement as the one objective way to deal with an imprecise evidence. So I here stress the need to re-examine the whole evidence from scraps if we aim for unbiased results.

It is obvious that numismatics, if it is to be of any use for archaeologists and historians, must be linked with both the archaeological and literary evidence. However, these three lines of evidence must first be examined separately to assess the internal evidence of each one. Then they must be compared to see whether the three can be combined into a coherent historical reconstruction, not marred by any internal contradiction.

Therefore, I shall first discuss the numismatic evidence to see whether the various issues of the period that we are discussing may be partly or entirely arranged into a reasonably certain chronological order and whether the coins provide any indication of the relative length of each reign. I next shall list the evidence provided by literature and contemporary documents. Archaeological data being practically absent,<sup>1</sup> the inscriptions will be considered within the examination of the literary and documentary evidence. I shall then attempt a synthesis of all the evidence. Finally I shall point to the evidence that negates previous proposals by the main students that discussed these series.

The so-called “Dark Age” covers the period 91–57 BC, that is from the death of Mithradates II to the murder of Phraates III and the inauguration of the reign of Orodes II, that is a period of about 34 years, well within a man’s lifespan and just a few years more than the duration of the rule of a single ruler, Mithradates II. This should always be considered as one of the chief reasons for the difficulties that we meet with the classification of the coins and with the historical reconstruction of a period of overlapping contenders, probably shifting allegiances and the unavoidable ups and downs in the fortunes of the contenders themselves.

However, I deem it useful to summarise in a preliminary section 1 the historical events of the Parthian history previous to that period, beginning with the great expansion of the Parthian realm under Mithradates I: thus section 1 follows on page 143 and is succeeded by section 2 which then deals with the purely numismatic evidence concerning the “Dark Age”. Anyway, when first discussing the numismatic evidence, I shall refrain from any attribution of the various issues to any monarch whose name is known to us and I shall try only to ascertain to which extent the evidence of the coins themselves allows for their chronological arrangement in the various regions

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<sup>1</sup> In fact the surviving sculptures and inscriptions can be discussed together with the cuneiform tablets, the historians accounts and other literary evidence, while the period discussed is too short to have left any definite stratigraphic evidence in the few sites excavated, as these, in spite of civil wars, apparently did not suffer from important destructions and disruptions in the social life.

of the Parthian domains and to the estimate of the relative lengths of the rule of the issuing kings.

Next in section 3, I shall briefly examine the available historical evidence and try to ascertain what *minimal* story it tells. I stress here the word *minimal*, indeed, for instance, while it is plain, and no one doubts it, that when a local record specifies the ruling Arsaces either by his own name or by that of his queen(s) that means that at the time two or more contenders were fighting for the crown, while when a document simply gives us a date and barely mention “Arsaces king” or “King of kings” that means that the king’s rule was unopposed, but, unfortunately, it does not tell us which one of the previous contenders had finally been the winner or if a third (or fourth etc. as a multi-party struggle is quite possible: one has just to think of the crisis of the Roman Empire in the third century) had finally emerged to pacify the empire. Some peculiar colophons will be discussed in their proper place, but I must again stress that, except when the proper name of the king is given in the document, to associate the “Arsaces” of a cuneiform document with the name of king known to us from other historical sources is either a *petitio principii* or, at the best, tentative, unless the association may be argued on unambiguous evidence.

In the next section I shall compare the results of the previous sections and see whether they may be combined into a coherent reconstruction with the consequent attribution of the various issues.

Finally a special section considers the evidence from the so called engraver’s sequence. I have decided to deal with it as a separate section as, on the one hand I had not considered it in the general discussion and this, clearly, would have been laid at my door as a most serious fault as, indeed, the principles originally advocated by Sellwood in his original paper are perfectly correct, though I think that not only later students have often taken its results for granted, while Sellwood’s results were just a preliminary attempt which, for different reasons that I shall point, should have been verified systematically on much larger samples.

As a sort of appendix I shall then add a brief discussion of the reasons that I have for rejecting the proposals of the more recent authors who dealt with the subject of this study.

### **Section I: Parthian history from the conquests of Mithradates I to the death of Mithradates II**

As for the early activities of Mithradates I, we largely depend on sketchy information from classical authors, who may not be entirely reliable. We can not tell for certain whether, taking advantage of the internecine struggle between the Greeks of Bactria and India and the nomads inroads and of those which weakened the Seleucid empire, Mithradates I attacked first Bactria or Media, nor we know the extent of his conquests at the expense of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom. These may well have included the satrapies of Tapuria and Traxiane and possibly of Areia, but this is guesswork. Indeed the classical sources tell us that after the capture of Media Mithradates moved to the East, so that it is quite possible that Mithradates’ conquests were the result of repeated campaigns.

Mithradates, having captured Media where he appointed a certain Vacasis<sup>2</sup> to rule the captured territories with the qualification of “Brother of the king”, then moved East, apparently to Hyrcania. The subsequent events are much clearer as there is an almost perfect fit between the accounts of the historians, the evidence from contemporary documents and that of the coins.

Apparently Mithradates advanced into Babylonia in the spring of 171 SEB (=141 BC). At the time Demetrius II was in Babylonia, probably to counter the raids by the Elymeans into the province. The fact that no coins of Demetrius II are known from Susa may suggest that, in fact, he was never in control of the town, while we know that Kamnaskires I was issuing bronze coins in Susa.<sup>3</sup>

Apparently Mithradates outmanoeuvred Demetrius and cuneiform documents show that by July 141 he was in control of Seleucia, Babylon and Uruk and an issue of bronzes from Susa without the portrait of the king<sup>4</sup> may indicate that he got control also of Susa.<sup>5</sup> However, Mithradates' hold on Seleucia was most probably brief and Demetrius apparently recaptured it from a Parthian general. Mithradates' new campaign must have been almost immediate and was terminated by the defeat and capture of Demetrius, promptly followed by the capture of Babylonia (and Susa, if it had not been captured during the previous campaign). Thus the colophons of the cuneiform tablets for SEB 172 (= 140/39), 173 (= 139/38) and 174 (= 138/37) are in the name of “King Arsaces”. As McDowall (1935) has proved that the magistrates represented on the coins of Seleucia by a monogram were changed every semester, we may be practically sure that Mithradates issued undated coins (tetradrachms and drachms) in Seleucia in the second semester of 172 Sel. (= April–September 140 BC),<sup>6</sup> dated ones in both semesters of 173 Sel. (= 140/39 BC) (two monograms) and in the first semester of 174 Sel. (139/38 BC) (mon. 1).

In fact I consider as probable that Mithradates captured Seleucia late in the first semester of 172 Sel. as there are both extremely rare tetradrachms and drachms of the

<sup>2</sup> Vacasis is most probably the same Bagha-asa mentioned in later tablets and qualified as “Brother of the King”. The title “brother of the King” is known from Indo-Parthian and Saka coins and, clearly indicates a Viceroy having authority over a number of governors and must be the equivalent of the “Satrap of satraps” of the later Behistun inscription. As shown by Assar Vacasis (= Baghaasha = Baggayash) is repeatedly mentioned in cuneiform documents between 174 SE and 177 SE as a top officer in Media and Babylonia and a son of him is mentioned in 179 SE by which time he was obviously dead (Assar 2000–2001)

<sup>3</sup> Recently Houghton and coll. (2008) have attributed some of Demetrius' tetradrachms to the mint of Susa; not being a specialist on Seleucid coinage I can not judge whether their attributions are justified, it is, however, surprising that if the mint of Susa operated for Demetrius II not a single coin of his either in silver or bronze was found in the excavations there.

<sup>4</sup> In Susa we have eleven issues, four without portrait of the king and seven with a long bearded portrait which may belong either to Mithradates I, to un-named successor of Phraates II or to Artabanus I, the ones without portrait possibly corresponding to emergency times such as those during Hyspaosines campaigns in Babylonia, when Susa may have been a sort of Parthian outpost more or less cut from contacts with the remaining Arsacid domains; the rather poor condition of all the coins prevent a definite attribution, but I think that Sellwood's attribution of four of the issues to Artabanus is correct, one might be referable to the un-named king, unless his issues are those without portrait, and at least two belong to Mithradates I.

<sup>5</sup> Though I think it unlikely. As I shall say further on I am more inclined to attribute the Susa bronzes of “Arsaces” without portrait of the king to the crisis following the death of Phraates II.

<sup>6</sup> Sellwood (1980) does list two issues of undated drachms, but that was by mistake, actually his type 13/7 does not exist and the monogram reported occurs only on drachms from Ecbatana (type 12/1). Sellwood and myself have recently searched for evidence of type 13/7 and, as we failed to find any, we now think that its listing was due to a misquote.

same types without either monogram or date and that may point to a preliminary issue by Mithradates for a brief period following the arrival in Seleucia of the Parthian army and pending the re-establishment of the normal routine.

However, as I said, we have from Susa four issues of bronzes, without the king's portrait and inscribed ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ and three with the same inscription but with a long bearded king who may be either Mithradates I or the un-named king (see further on). We know from classical sources that Mithradates I was followed by his son Phraates II and the last dated coins of Mithradates show that the death of Mithradates probably occurred around the middle of 174 Sel (138 BC).

Proof of it comes from Susa: there previous to the earliest issue by Mithradates II (whose accession was just previous to his dated overstrikes on Hyspaosines of 191 Sel = 122/21 BC) we have a total of 23 issues,<sup>7</sup> 7 with a long bearded king (at least 3 certainly belonging to Artabanus I), 5 to Phraates II (3 with juvenile and 2 with mature portrait), 4 to a "king Arsaces" but with no portrait, 6 to Tigraios and 1 to Antiochus VII. Now as the date of the death of Phraates II is certain (sometimes, probably late, in 128 BC), and that Le Rider is equally certainly right in his dating of Tigraios, we have 12 issues covering the reign of Phraates II (5 of him, 6 of Tigraios and 1 of Antiochus VII) which means from a maximum of 12 years to a minimum, allowing for three years with double issues, of 8, so that, counting back from 128 BC included, the reign of Phraates must necessarily have begun between 138 BC and 135 BC at the very latest. Then we have a tablet of 180 SEB in the name of a King Arsaces and his mother Riinnu. Assar rightly points that the wording of the colophon is unique and I think that it is better to suspend judgement as to the reasons of the scribe for using such a peculiar formula .

That at the time of his accession Phraates may have been a teen-ager is confirmed by two issues of tetradrachms from Susa and three of bronzes from the same mint and an issue of bronzes, possibly from Ecbatana, which show a youthful, almost beardless portrait. Thereafter, as suggested by Le Rider, we must place in Susa the 6 bronze issues of Tigraios (clearly pointing to a rule lasting from about 177 Sel. (= 136/35 BC) to 182 Sel. (= 132/31 BC), followed by one issue of Antiochus VII, who must have controlled Susa for a few months in 182/83 Sel. (= 130/29 BC) and corresponding with his occupation of Seleucia, where he struck two issues of coins, both in silver and bronze dated 182 (=131/30) and 183 Sel.=130/29 BC. Phraates recovered Seleucia, more or less at the same time recovered also Susa, so that we have three issues of tetradrachms in Seleucia<sup>8</sup> and two issues in Susa of Phraates showing a mature profile and corresponding one with the end of the second semester of 130/29 (I know of only 4 specimens) and the others to, presumably, the two semesters of 184 Sel. (129/28 BC). There follows a confused period<sup>9</sup>: the tablets after having recorded the brief occupation in 130/29 and 129/28 BC by "Arsaces" (obviously Phraates II or, more probably, a satrap of his) tell us that in 185 and

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<sup>7</sup> Sellwood's monograph (1980) omits one issue of bronzes with obv. bee, rev. standing deer, some specimens from the excavations of Susa in Paris, one in my collection.

<sup>8</sup> The tetradrachms from Seleucia are distinguished by the sequence of monograms: (mon.12) → (mon.12, 13) → (mon. 12, 14).

<sup>9</sup> Assar (2001–2001) has a short discussion of the Parthian calendars and it is obvious that all the equivalents in the Christian calendar that he lists in his papers are fixed according his conclusions. I have followed all his readings of the dates, though not necessarily his historical interpretation of the evidence.



186 SEB (June 127 and June 126 BC) Hyspaosines of Characene was in control of Babylon, and he certainly occupied Seleucia where he struck tetradrachms undated but with a pair of monograms, one being the same as the one on two of the issues of Phraates II and one very close to one of those appearing on the undated tetradrachms of Artabanus I, and possibly advanced into Media

In 187 Sel. (126/25 BC), as already mentioned, we have the rare dated tetradrachms struck in Seleucia by an Arsacid king of unknown name, probably a brother of Mithradates. Whether his much more common undated coins represent a separate issue is impossible to tell. As in the next year 188 Sel. (= 125/24 BC) we have the dated issue of tetradrachms of Artabanus I in Seleucia and of his drachms dated by the Arsacid era in Ecbatana, we may be sure that sometimes in 188 Sel. was the date of accession of Artabanus or anyway of his capture of Seleucia (he might have begun to rule in Iran somewhat earlier), while there are four of his issues in Susa (that is 3+ years), showing that his reign lasted into 191 Sel. Therefore, as in 191 Sel. we have the well known overstrikes of Mithradates II on Hyspaosines, we must assume that actually the un-named king disappeared before the end of 187 Sel. As far as the purely numismatic evidence goes (the cuneiform documents do not come from Seleucia), the probability favours first an occupation by this king ending in the first semester of 187 Sel. followed by the issues of Hyspaosines and the Parthian recapture of Seleucia in the same second semester of 188, but some sort of “ding-dong” fight is equally possible. Apparently the first issue of Artabanus in Susa either covers the last months of 187 or comes just at the beginning of 188 and I think likely that the four Susian issues in the name of king Arsaces, but without the King’s portrait should be dated to the period between the death of Phraates II and the arrival of Artabanus, when Susa may have been a more or less isolated outpost of the Arsacid domains. Then Artabanus ruled there for three years and for the first months of 191 Sel. The fact that on rare Iranian issues of Artabanus I are mentioned the town of Rhagae and the satrapy (or town) of Margiane shows that Artabanus was, at least temporarily in control of these eastern territories. Therefore, it looks that the Saka inroads were rather a sort of plundering raids than all out and to some extent successful, campaign of conquest. The accession of Mithradates II being thus fixed to sometimes in the middle or in the second half of 121 BC. In the same year must also be placed the issue by a young king of two tetradrachms in Seleucia (different in the inscription, but with the same monograms (Sell. 23/1 and 23/2) and in Iran of a unique drachm similar to those of Phraates II, but with the epithet ΦΙΛΑΔΕΛΦΟΣ<sup>10</sup> (fig. 1). The following coinage of Mithradates II in Susa, if we assume, as I do, that there were annual issues as proposed by Le Rider, indirectly allows

<sup>10</sup> These coins had been traditionally considered as the earliest issue of Mithradates II. Assar, I think with good reason, has suggested that they should rather belong to an ephemeral king who ruled briefly between Artabanus I and Mithradates II. If we give credit to the inscription of the unique drachm in my collection (ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΦΙΛΑΔΕΛΦΟΥ), he may have been a junior brother of Phraates II who, we may speculate, was still deemed too young to rule in the difficult circumstances following the death of Phraates, but who very briefly took over at the death of his uncle Artabanus. The type of the rev. of the tetradrachms is identical with those of Artabanus I, the arrangement of the inscription is that of all the tetradrachms from Seleucia previous to Mithradates II and of the two monograms one, (mon.8), is almost identical with that on the dated tetradrachms of Artabanus I (mon. 11) (where, however, the B is often simplified into P) and the other, TY, occurs on a number of tetradrachms of Mithradates II. Therefore, I think it as typically intermediate between the issues of Artabanus I and those of Mithradates II.

us to date, at least approximately, also the other issues of Mithradates II. In Susa we have a total of 30 issues, subdivided by their inscriptions as follows: inscribed ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ (10), ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΕΠΙΦΑΝΟΥΣ (3), ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΝ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ (13), with the king wearing tiara and inscribed ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΝ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΕΠΙΦΑΝΟΥ (4). Such a total of 30 issues<sup>11</sup> brings us down to 221 Sel. = 92–91 BC, and we now know from a tablet dated Kishlinu 157 Ars = 221 SEB (= December 91 BC) that Mithradates II died probably in November or possibly in October 91. This makes a perfect fit for our subsequent discussion on the “Dark Age” as we shall see that in Susa we have 41/42 issues, corresponding as shown below, with six kings, so that we may expect that there were six years with issues by two kings and that brings us down to precisely 57 BC which is the known date of the murder of Phraates III.

This being a sketch of the historical events as I see them, I must warn the reader that Assar, in his paper of 2006 proposes a rather different account. As a proper discussion of the issue involves a lengthy discussion that lies outside the purposes of this paper, I do not attempt it here.

## Section II: The numismatic evidence for the “Dark Age”

As Sellwood’s monograph of the Parthian coinage is still the standard reference book for this coinage, I shall quote the different issues by reference to their numbering in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (1980) of Sellwood’s book.

As a premise I figure here the different types considered and hereafter I list the attributions proposed by the different authors for each type so that the reader may both better follow the following arguments and also mind the variety of attributions proposed even by a single author, including myself.

Type 29 (fig. 2): Mithradates II (Sellwood 1971, 1980; A. Simonetta 1966; B. Simonetta 1974, 1975; Mørkholm 1980; Dobbins 1975; Dilmaghani 1986); Gotarzes I (A. Simonetta/ Sellwood 1978; Assar 2000–2001, 2006b).

Type 30 (fig. 3): Gotarzes I (Sellwood 1971; Waggoner 1974); Unknown king I (Sellwood 1980); Unknown king 81–70 (Dilmaghani 1986); Orodes I (A. Simonetta 1966; A. Simonetta/Sellwood 1978; B. Simonetta 1975; Dobbins in part (1975); Sina-truces (Mørkholm 1980); Dobbins in part (1975), Artabanus II? (Assar 2000–2001); Arsaces XVI (Assar 2006b).

<sup>11</sup> Assar (2006a) reduces this number to 28 by pooling as just two issues Le Rider’s (1965) numbers 118+123 and 133+134. Thus he has a gap of two years between the last issue of Mithradates in Susa and his death. His argument for this pooling is the identity of the reverse types. However, this could be countered by the fact that the king’s portrait of no. 118, has a much shorter beard than that on no. 123, so that the two portraits correspond with different issues of drachms and in 133 and 134 the arrangement of the inscriptions is entirely different. These objections are clearly debatable, but of much greater weight is the fact that the colophons published by Assar for the last years of Mithradates take us down to just a few months before the tablet announcing the death of the King of kings and they give no hint of a civil war in progress, while the very same tablet reporting the death of Mithradates has the typical formula of the periods of internecine wars. Thus I follow Le Rider and I hold that the issues of Mithradates in Susa are 30 and that there is no room in Susa for an occupation by a contender for the crown in 92–91.

Type 31 (fig. 4): Orodes I (Sellwood 1971); Sinatruces (A. Simonetta 1966; A. Simonetta/Sellwood 1978; Waggoner 1974); Gotarzes I (B. Simonetta 1974, 1975; Dobbins, 1975); Arsaces IX (Mørkholm 1980); Unknown king 87–82 BC (Dilmaghani 1986); Gotarzes I (Dobbins 1975; B. Simonetta 1974; 1975); Mithradates III (Assar 2006b).

Type 32 (fig. 5): (Tetradrachms only) Unknown king 2 (Sellwood 1971, 1980); not mentioned (A. Simonetta 1966); Gotarzes I (A. Simonetta/Sellwood 1978; Dilmaghani (only the drachm) (1986); Assar 2000–2001; 2006b), Arsaces Evergetes 88–87 BC (A. Simonetta/Sellwood 1978); Mithradates II (Mørkholm 1980; Dobbins 1975; Dilmaghani (tetradrachms only) 1986).

Type 33 (fig. 6): Sinatruces (Sellwood 1980; B. Simonetta 1974, 1975; Mørkholm 1980; Assar 2000–2001; 2006b); Sinatruces 82–76 (Dilmaghani 1986); Orodes I (Dobbins 1975); Gotarzes I (Sellwood 1980); Phraates III (A. Simonetta 1966; Waggoner 1974; A. Simonetta/Sellwood 1978).

Type 34 (fig. 7): Phraates III (Sellwood 1971; Dobbins 1975); Sinatruces (Sellwood 1980); Phraates III? (A. Simonetta 1966); Vonones I (A. Simonetta/Sellwood 1978); Arsaces Evergetes Epiphanes 80/79–77 BC (B. Simonetta 1974, 1975); Orodes I? (Waggoner 1974); Arsaces X (Mørkholm 1980); Orodes I (Dilmaghani 1986; Assar 2000, 2006b).

Type 35 (fig. 8): Darius? (Sellwood 1971, 1980); Mithradates III (A. Simonetta 1966); Arsaces Theopator the Phryapitid (A. Simonetta/Sellwood 1978); Arsaces Theopator 70–69 (B. Simonetta 1974, 1975); Sinatruces (Mørkholm 1980; Dobbins 1975); Phraates III (Dilmaghani 1986; Assar 2000, 2006b).

Type 36 (fig. 9): Darius? (Sellwood 1971, 1980); Arsaces Philopator (A. Simonetta 1966; A. Simonetta/Sellwood 1978; Dobbins 1975); Arsaces Philopator 73/72 BC (B. Simonetta 1974, 1975); Phraates III (Mørkholm 1980; Dilmaghani 1986; Assar 2000; 2006b).

Type 37 (fig. 10): (tetradrachms only) Darius? (Sellwood 1971, 1980); Arsaces Philopator (A. Simonetta 1966; A. Simonetta/Sellwood 1978; Dobbins 1975); Phraates III (Mørkholm 1980; Dilmaghani 1986; Assar 2000).

Type 38 (fig. 11): Phraates III (Sellwood 1971, 1980; Simonetta 1974, 1975; Dobbins 1975; A. Simonetta/Sellwood 1978; B. Mørkholm 1980; Dilmaghani 1986; Assar 2000, 2006b); Gotarzes I (A. Simonetta 1966).

Type 39 (fig. 12): Phraates III (Sellwood 1971, 1980; A. Simonetta 1966; B. Simonetta 1974, 1975; Dobbins 1975; A. Simonetta/Sellwood 1978; Mørkholm 1980; Dilmaghani 1986; Assar 2000, 2006b).

Type 40 (fig. 15d, e): Mithradates III (Sellwood 1971, 1980; A. Simonetta 1966 (tetradrachms only); B. Simonetta 1975; A. Simonetta/Sellwood 1978 (tetradrachms only); Mørkholm 1980; Phraates IV (A. Simonetta/Sellwood 1978 (drachms and bronzes only<sup>12</sup>); not discussed (Dobbins 1975); Mithradates III as joint king (Dilmaghani 1986); Mithradates IV (traditional Mithradates III) (Assar 2000).

Vardanyan (2006) abstains from identifying any of these types with any of the kings reported in our sources, except for 38 and 39 that he considers to belong to Phraates III, but he suggests that their sequence should be for the tetradrachms: 30 part – 34 – 30 part

<sup>12</sup> Sellwood/Simonetta (2006a) now exclude the drachms and bronzes of type 40 and 41 but for 40.16 either from the coinage of Mithradates III (IV) or from that of Orodes II.



– 31 – 37 – 36 – 38 – 39 – 41, he omits type 32 and for the drachms suggests: 28 – 33 – 29 – 34 – 30 – 31 – 36 – 35 – 38 – 39 – 40 – 41

I shall now begin the analysis of the numismatic evidence by some preliminary considerations.

It should be self evident that the responsible authorities, when choosing the characteristics of the coins to be struck, had to consider a precise list of requirements, which, however, certainly did not include the possible subtleties of numismatists living some thousands of years later. As an essential commodity for trade, the coins had to be acceptable and easily recognized by the man in the market place (who was probably illiterate), therefore, innovations in the types, weights and quality had to be introduced gradually, except under dire necessity. This is typically shown by the Parthian coinage from Seleucia previous to the "Dark Age": in Seleucia Mithradates I, Phraates II and the un-named king, the first three kings, not only struck coins of the most classical Greek style and types, but the portrait of the king himself is shown according the Greek conventions and turned right; the subsequent two kings, Artabanus I and the unnamed ephemeral king, whose very rare tetradrachms have been traditionally attributed to a first coinage of Mithradates II (fig. 1), make a first departure from this pattern by being shown dressed in the Parthian fashion, all other features remaining the traditional ones; then comes Mithradates II, who, finally, abandons the traditional types of reverses for the purely Parthian Arsaces on omphalos and has the king's portrait turned left. Later kings introduced in Seleucia the Arsaces on throne, which had been adopted by Mithradates II with his second Iranian issue and, some, the portrait with tiara, again following the last Iranian type of Mithradates II. Finally, as we shall see, a new reverse type is introduced in Seleucia: the city's Tyche or a Fortune offering either a crown or a branch of palm to the king, first appearing as the Tyche attending at the back of the king shown as Zeus Aetophoros (fig. 12).

A second requirement, and an important political one, was to make sufficiently clear who was the ruling king issuing the coin. Thus on one side the inscription had to be different both in words (for the few that could read it) and in arrangement, from that of previous rulers or of opposing claimants, with the proviso that the same inscription could be re-used after a significant interval of time. On the other side, the distinction in the obverse portrait was obviously even more important, though it is possible that some features, such as the tiara, might have been re-used in order to stress some continuity or connection.

Similarities, but not identity of types and inscriptions could well be implemented for the purpose of showing continuity with the coinage of some true or supposed ancestor. It must be noted that, though most probably the choice of epithets of the king was deemed significant, even more significant, given that presumably only a minority of people on the market-place could read Greek, was the number of words making up the inscription and their arrangement.

This makes logically unlikely that the same ruler used different titles, arrangement of the inscription or hair-dress in the same monetary area except in a logical sequence. So, for instance a king might first issue coins showing his portrait wearing the diadem and later using the tiara, but not *vice versa*, or at the same mint use at the same time different titles or clearly differently arranged ones, though he might change them with time (obviously minor variations, hardly noticeable except by careful inspection were always possible at the whim of the engravers).

A final remark: as shown by several examples in the whole Parthian coinage, coins struck by the same king at different mints do, sometimes, bear different epithets as shown, for instance, by the different inscriptions on the coins from Seleucia, Ecbatana and Susa under Mithradates I and Mithradates II, while, due account being given to the different abilities of the engravers at the different mints, there was a clear effort to make the king's portrait as similar as possible.

An additional general point worth discussion is that of monograms and names of localities either given *in extenso* or just shortened. Letters and monograms appear sporadically in the Parthian coinage up to Phraates II (but they are rarely omitted on the tetradrachms from Seleucia, except by the un-named king). Otherwise the problem concerns only the Iranian and Eastern issues and will be discussed later on.

The coinage of this period, apart from a few, very rare, coins of very poor workmanship and that are probably local imitations made outside the area controlled by the Parthian authorities, can be easily subdivided into three classes: the coinage of Seleucia on the Tigris (or, perhaps, in a few instances, in other places in Babylonia), the coinage of Susa, the coinage of the Iranian and other Eastern mints. This last may be, to some extent, subdivided among different sub-regions or mints, but, for the purposes of our discussion, we may safely consider it as a unit, though its subdivision by mints is rather plain after the adoption of the monogram system, while for previous issues it rests on the somewhat individual evaluation of stylistic affinities. Subsidiary to the Iranian coinage and providing some evidence useful for its analysis, we must consider the counter-marked drachms of Bactrian origin and the Indo-Parthian coinage.

### **On the significance of some epithets**

While most epithets appearing on the coins of this age are the usual ones and therefore can not have any significance in the overall interpretation of the evidence, four are worth some consideration. These are ΘΕΟΠΑΤΩΡ, ΦΙΛΟΠΑΤΩΡ, ΝΙΚΑΤΩΡ and ΑΥΤΟΚΡΑΤΩΡ. Comparison with previous and successive issues of kings using the title Theopator shows beyond possible doubt that this is a precise reference to a father who has become a god, that is: a dead one who was a king. It is therefore a claim, whether justified or not we, obviously, can not tell, to a legitimate succession. Given the fragmentary historical evidence that we have, we obviously can not tell who, among the rulers of this age, was really entitled to this claim, except for Phraates III who, apparently, peacefully inherited the crown from his father Sinatruces. The problem with "Philopator" is more complex: apparently there are, indeed, two alternative interpretations possible: one is that the king concerned was an associate king with his father and the other is that though he was not the son of a dead king, yet he was of true Arsacid descent.<sup>13</sup> As our scanty evidence provides no hint of the existence of joint rulers, the second interpreta-

<sup>13</sup> However, as a caveat onto my own argument and to stress that I consider these interpretations just as probabilities, in my collection there is a drachm of Phraates II with the title ΦΙΛΟΠΑΤΩΡ instead of the standard ΘΕΟΠΑΤΩΡ and two more specimens and a bronze are in the Sellwood collection; the drachms are of rather poor workmanship and might be an irregular issue; moreover on some of his early issues Orodes II calls himself ΦΙΛΟΠΑΤΩΡ and, in this case, this looks as a planned disclaim of his responsibilities in the murder of his father.

tion appears preferable, particularly considering that this title appears on the coins of type 31 jointly with Autokrator, which in the whole Hellenistic coinage is always used to mean that the ruler who used it had not inherited the crown but conquered it by his own deeds. Again, our evidence is too scanty to exclude that more than one of the rulers of the “Dark Age” could have claimed the title, though the combined Autokrator Philopator is certainly a combination suitable for Sinatruces, whom we know to have been of Arsacid descent, but not in the direct line of succession and to have been enthroned by the support of a Saka tribe. The title Nikator, obviously could be claimed by anyone having had some success in the field either against an internal or an external foe. This title is used only by the king of type 33 and actually in the whole Parthian coinage this or, rather, an equivalent title appears twice more: on the issues of Phraates II in Seleucia after the recapture of the city from the Seleucids following the death of Antiochus VII (as ΝΙΚΗΦΟΡΟΥ) and on the coins of Vonones (I or II according to whether we count or not as a Parthian king the Vonones who was the overlord of Spalahora and of Spalagadama), and with reference to Vonones’ initial, ephemeral, success against Artabanus II. Further on I shall argue that the combined epithets Theopator and Nikator, though not ruling out other possibilities, would fit for an early issue of Phraates III, as he was certainly entitled to the first, and, most probably was almost immediately faced by one or more other claimants, unless the claim refers to some victories previous to his ascent, that, if the coins belong to Phraates III, is a possibility as the very old age reported for Sinatruces make it likely that his campaigns were actually led by a son.

### **The coinage from Susa**

As for other matters, the argument by Mørkholm (followed by a few others) that the coins from Susa known of this period are comparatively few, Le Rider’s thesis that the reverse types at Susa were changed on an annual or quasi annual basis was to be rejected, must obviously be abandoned as only two new types from Susa have been discovered since Le Rider’s publication over 30 years ago.

The evidence provided by the Susan issues may be summarised as follows: Mithradates II (Sellwood’s types 23–28): 30 issues (corresponding to years 191– 220 Sel., precisely about 30 years).<sup>14</sup>

Type 29: no issues

Type 30: 12 issues (corresponding to more than 10 years)

Type 31: 9 issues (more than 7 years)

Type 32: no issues<sup>15</sup>

Type 33: 6 issues (more than 5 years)

Type 34: 3 issues (more than one year)

Type 35: no issues

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<sup>14</sup> Actually Assar pools into one the two issues with type “a flower” and, again, the two with “Thunderbolt”, I follow Le Rider (1965) and keep them separate as, for the “thunderbolt” type the king’s portrait is remarkably different, one corresponding with Mithradates earliest issues in Iran and the other parallel with definitely later Iranian issues, while for the “flower” issues, I think that the different arrangement of the inscription is significant.

<sup>15</sup> As we shall see further on types 29 and 32 should be credited to the same king.

Type 36: 5 issues (more than 3 years)

Type 37: no issues

Type 38: 5 issues (more than 3 years)

Type 39: no issues

Type 35??: overstruck by type 36: 1 issue (one year or less)<sup>16</sup>

While the absence of Type 37 may well be of no significance as this type is known from 3 or 4 tetradrachms and could well be, as we shall see, a late, ephemeral issue of the king of type 36, the absences of types 29 (and the related type 32), 35 and 39 are notable and will be discussed when trying a comprehensive assessment of the whole numismatic evidence.

To summarise: we have 41 issues covering 34 years with at least 6 changes of ruler, which, presumably involved two issues in the same year, that is up to 40 expected issues. In order to explain this little discrepancy we should suppose one year with a double change of ruler (a fact that certainly occurred repeatedly in Seleucia during its history under the Parthians) or that Mithradates II had lost control of Susa during his last year of life.

Anyway, the coinage of Susa while it provides a sound evidence of the relative length of the rule of each king who was in control of the town, yet, by itself, it does not give us any positive clue to the order of succession of the various kings.

### The mint of Seleucia

The output of silver coins from the mint of Seleucia in the name of Parthian kings had been rather sporadic since the death of Mithradates I: three undated issues late in the life of Phraates II, clearly corresponding with two semesters after the recapture of Seleucia by the Parthians as one of them is linked by monogram with one of the two issues in Seleucia by Antiochus VII, one or, possibly, two issues, by un-named king 1 (most of his tetradrachms have no date, but a few have ΖΠΣ (187 Sel.= 126/25 BC), two issues by Artabanus I (one dated 188 Sel.= 125/24 BC and the other with monograms), one of a young king who has been traditionally considered as a young Mithradates II, but that looks unlikely given the very different portrait from that of the bronzes of Mithradates II dated 191 Sel. (= 122/21 BC) and that on the early issues of the same Mithradates in Iran, while it might correspond with the already mentioned unique drachm in my collection very similar to some of Phraates II, but inscribed: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ-Σ ΦΙΛΑΔΕΛΦΟΥ<sup>17</sup> (fig. 1). The tetradrachms of this issue are linked by the monogram ΤΥ to some tetradrachms of Mithradates II. The issues of Mithradates II in Seleucia are eight (possibly less as some groups of monograms might belong to the same semester), all belonging to the first phase of Mithradates' coinage, when the reverse has Arsaces sitting on the omphalos and, judging from the first series from Susa,

<sup>16</sup> Le Rider gives an exhaustive discussion of these overstrikes and proves that although the inscription of the under-type includes the title Theopator these coins could not have been issues of the king of type 30 and considers just as a possibility the king of type 35 (fig. 13)

<sup>17</sup> The last two letters after the Y of ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ being larger than those of the rest of the inscription might, perhaps, be a monogram Μ placed behind the image of Arsaces.

corresponding approximately with years 122–112 BC, so that there are no issues for the next 20 years or so!

During the "Dark Age", we have a single issue of type 32, thirteen to fifteen issues of type 30 (depending on whether some similar monograms are considered to be mere die varieties or not), one of type 34, four of type 31, three of type 36, one of type 37, one of type 38, one of type 39 = total twenty or twenty-five issues for a total of 34 years (68 semesters). This shows that, except probably during the rule of the king N° 30, the mint struck silver only sporadically and this considerably reduces the significance of the monograms in order to arrange the issues in a chronological sequence. Indeed, as shown by other examples (cf. for instance A. Simonetta 2006), when we have a precise chronological arrangement of the issues as when, for instance in the coinage of the Cappadocian kings, they are dated by the regnal year of the king, we find that while in many instances monograms actually link together clear sequences of issues, there are almost as many instances in which the same monogram re-appears at considerable intervals and, not rarely, after some years under different kings. In many such instances the monograms stand for some officer's name and the same officer may well and for quite different reasons, be repeatedly, albeit at intervals, in control. Therefore, I think that, in this case, monogram links should be considered to have limited significance in comparison with other evidences.

It has been argued that the mon. ΣΥΜ on two issues of type 30 link these with the single issue of type 34, this is obvious, and, with the previous reservations, can be taken to support the early dating for the coinage of type 30 as we shall see that the Iranian coinage proves beyond dispute that type 34 immediately precedes type 31, so that type 30 should then precede type 34 as argued further on.

### **The Iranian issues**

The Iranian issues provide various lines of evidence: types, inscriptions, monograms and other indications of localities, modified coins (both modified on dies and on the coins themselves), countermarked coins, mules, and each one of these kinds of evidence has to be examined separately. Finally there is the evidence of the engraver's sequence, which, however, as I said, will be examined in a separate section for the reasons that will be explained at the end of this section.

*Types:* Out of the types listed by Sellwood two are apparently missing among the Iranian issues: numbers 32 and 37, both consisting of extremely rare tetradrachms. However, better consideration tells a different story, which has been partly already appreciated by Assar (2006b) and by myself (A. Simonetta 2001). Type 32 is the tetradrachm corresponding with type 29 and there is the possibility that two modified drachms were actually retouched to make them look like the obverse of type 37.

Type 32 has a portrait which, allowance being made for the variations depending on the size of the coins and the abilities of the engravers, is basically similar to that of type 29 and the similarity is enhanced by the tiara, which is identical with one of the varieties shown on the coins of Mithradates II and of type 29 and, moreover, the reverse is linked to that of most tetradrachms of Mithradates II by the palm branch precisely in the same



position, which is a unique feature in the whole Parthian coinage.<sup>18</sup> Unless the discovery of new evidence disproves the identification, by Ockham's razor<sup>19</sup> the attribution of both types 29 and 32 to the same ruler is justified.

**The monograms on the Iranian issues:** Many of the drachms of Phraates II have on the obverse the abbreviation of the name of a town (Nisa, Tambrax etc.). This practice was continued on rare drachms of Artabanus I where there is either a monogram (mon. 7) or an abbreviation (MAP= Margiane, PA= Rhagae).<sup>20</sup> Most of the early drachms of Mithradates II (those with Arsaces on omphalos) and the corresponding bronzes bear monograms or letters on the obverse and more rarely on the reverse, but these become rarer and rarer in the subsequent issues and are entirely lacking in the late ones. Of the coins struck during the "Dark Age" by the Iranian and Eastern mints, types 29, 30, 31, 33, 34 never have monograms except two unique specimens in the Sellwood collection, one of type 30 and one of type 31, both, however, of a very peculiar fabric which may betray an unofficial issue, engraved by someone who, not being entirely familiar with the current practices of the regular mints, engraved an unnecessary feature in his dies. Type 30, however, includes rare drachms, which, on the reverse have in full letters the names of two towns (coins with EN ΡΑΓΑΙΣ and ΝΙΣΑΙΑ) and of some oriental satrapies (ΑΡΕΙΑ, ΜΑΡΓΙΑΝΗ, ΤΡΑΞΙΑΝΗ), ΚΑΤΑΣΤΡΑΤΕΙΑ, which is assumed to mean a royal mint moving with the army,<sup>21</sup> finally we have the issues with monograms or letters on the reverse and these belong to types 35, 36, 38 and 39; however, both 36, 38 and 39 include some rare examples of drachms without monogram. All the drachms from type 40 onwards *never* lack monogram in the reverse field.

Moreover there is a certain development in the monograms themselves, especially clear with that which was to become the standard one for Ecbatana: (mon. 1, 2) (employed by type 36) → (mon. 1, 2, 3) and (mon. 4) (employed by type 35) → (mon. 4) (employed by types 38 and 39 and all later kings).

**The link between types 31 and 34:** Type 34 is characterized by the portrait of a king wearing a unique tiara, ornamented with a crest of double hooks or pairs of pearls on a stalk and decorated on its side with a sort of "fleur-de-lys" (mon. 15), behind the king is an object conventionally called an anchor as it is similar to the symbol that appears regularly on the Elymaean coins of the Kamnaskirids. However, many such drachms have been modified by always removing on the die the "anchor symbol", often the crest and rarely (probably for technical difficulties) the "fleur-de-lys". Indeed the coins struck by modified dies are more common than the intact ones. The obverse of coins so modified becomes very similar to that of type 31. Further links with 31 are the occurrence

<sup>18</sup> Actually the palm branch occurs on several issues of bronzes and on a single rare issue of drachms of Phraates IV, but in a completely different position.

<sup>19</sup> *Entia non sunt ponenda praeter necessitatem*: Hypotheses should not be advanced except when really necessary.

<sup>20</sup> If the abbreviation MAP means Margiane this could prove that Artabanus was in control, at least temporarily, of the Easternmost provinces of the empire and that the Scythians inroads under Phraates II and the immediately following years were rather plundering raids than a true migration.

<sup>21</sup> Actually as the monogram (mon. 6) is, I think rightly, considered to mean precisely ΚΑΤΑΣΤΡΑΤΕΙΑ and is sometimes found on coins struck by the same obverse dies as some bearing some local monogram, it may not mean a travelling mint, but that the coin was struck under the direct control of the army or the royal treasury by a local mint.

of a “mule” between an obv, modified 34, and a normal rev. 31 and by very rare coins of type 31, but where the side of the tiara is ornamented by the “fleur-de-lys” of 34 rather than by the standard star of type 31 (fig. 14). The only possible interpretation of this evidence of a complete transition from type 34 to 31 is that the king of type 31, at the beginning of his rule, having got (one is tempted to write “captured”) a number of dies of type 34, either because he was short of engravers or because he was in a hurry to strike his own money, had the dies of 34 modified and only later he had his own new dies manufactured, but that the engraver of the new dies begun by putting on the side of the tiara the old decoration of type 34, and only later he was instructed to substitute it with the star. Anyway there is no possible doubt that, as dies of type 34 were modified to look like those of type 31, 34 precedes 31 and the modified coins should be credited to the same king as the coins of type 31. To suppose that the modified dies of type 34 were used at the end or even in the middle of the rule of type 31 is definitely incredible given the extraordinary amount of coins of the regular type 31 (and obviously of their dies) available, as they are, indeed among the commonest Parthian drachms. Had king 31 captured coins of type 34 late in his life he would simply have had them melted down or over-struck by his own dies.

### The “dated” sequence

There is a group of very rare drachms which in the field in front of the reverse archer have three letters: ΒΠΣ, ΓΠΣ, ΔΠΣ, ΕΠΣ, ΣΠΣ (fig. 15). Though the significance of these letters is controversial<sup>22</sup> (as for myself I am inclined to think of a local and so far unknown era); as a notable coincidence on which I refrain from committing myself in any way, I notice that, if we follow the suggestion by Sellwood that the Σ stands for Susa, then the last numeral, ΣΠ= 86, given that it appears on coins that would be the second issue of Orodes II of 56 B.C., would correspond with an era of 141 B.C., that is precisely the date of the final capture by Mithradates I of Babylonia and of his possible capture of Susa). However, this is irrelevant for our purpose. Indeed ΒΠΣ and ΓΠΣ occur on coins of type 38, ΓΠΣ and ΔΠΣ on type 39 and the other two on coins of type 40/16 that Sellwood and myself (2006) have recently argued to be early issues of Orodes II. As I said whether they are dates or not is irrelevant for the problem of their chrono-

<sup>22</sup> When originally calling attention onto these coins Sellwood suggested that, as reading the letters as numerals, these gave dates that would be impossible by any known era to fit for issues that were undoubtedly struck around 60 BC, he therefore suggested that the Σ could stand for Susa as one such specimen has been actually recovered in Susa, the other two letters being, perhaps, numerals. This tentative suggestion has been followed by most authors, including Assar (2006). As, apart this solitary find, no drachm recovered in Susa has a monogram Σ and no coin of type 39 has either been minted there in bronze or found among the stray finds, I am sceptical about this identification. Anyway the place of issue is irrelevant for the historical interpretation of the issue as that including the coins now attributed by Sellwood/Simonetta (2006) to Orodes II, they make a straightforward series. Vardanyan, following Waggoner assumes that the Π stands for M, and that thus ΣΠ(=M)Σ stands for a date in the Seleucid calendar, therefore, supposing a long period of joint kinship between Phraates III and Mithradates III (= IV). These coins have been already discussed in a joint paper by Sellwood and myself (2006), which Vardanyan clearly had no opportunity to see. Our conclusion being that those of type 40.16 are most probably the earliest issues of Orodes II, while I strongly doubt that the letters, though significant of a series, actually mean a date in the Seleucid era and even more that they may be attributed to the mint of Susa.

logical position: anyway these coins provide us with a closely knit and clearly sequential group of issues, which prove which, at least at one mint, are the last two types of the “Dark Age”.

### Assessment of the evidence from the Iranian drachms

If we now try to assess by a comprehensive approach the various evidences offered by the Iranian drachms (the bronze coinage does not add anything of significance), the following conclusions are clear:

- a) The issue of type 34 immediately precedes that of type 31, as it is clear that we have a series: intact coins of type 34 → coins of type 34 where the peculiarities of symbol and tiara (anchor symbol, crest of the tiara, rarely the fleur-de-lys on its side) have been obliterated but with intact reverse → modified obverses of type 34 coupled with typical reverses of type 31 → coins of type 31, but still with side fleur-de-lys on the tiara (very rare) → common type 31. Thus I reiterate that to suppose that the modified dies were used well along, possibly at the end, of the rule of type 31, is impossible: indeed the common issues of type 31 are among the commonest Parthian coins and are struck by a number of dies, it is obvious that, had king 31 captured any amount of coins or dies from an opponent late in his reign, he would have discarded the dies and had the coins overstruck by his normal dies rather than taking the pains to have dies and coins modified. This series not only tells us that 34 precedes 31, but also that the king of type 31 at the beginning of his rule had a number of dies of type 34 at his disposal and was in a hurry to produce currency, so that he had a need to re-use his predecessor’s dies and coins, while clearly showing the change in ruler by obliterating the most obvious features of his predecessor’s and presumably enemy’s portrait and symbol. Then, as already mentioned, the monogram link between some tetradrachms of type 30 and that of type 34, would fit if we assume that type 30 immediately precedes type 34.
- b) The Iranian drachms can be divided into three groups: without monograms (types 29, 30, 31, 33, 34), usually with monograms, but with rare exceptions (types 36, 38, 39), always with monograms (35), moreover, at least the monogram which is probably the mark of Ecbatana has a precise evolution: (mon. 1) (type 36, rarely type 35) → (mon. 3) (type 35) → (mon. 4) types 35, 38 and 39.
- c) The very rare coins with three letters in place of the monogram: ΒΠΣ → ΓΠΣ (type 38) → ΓΠΣ → ΔΠΣ (type 39) → ΕΠΣ → ϜΠΣ (type 40) form a consistent series, which proves that, at least locally (and I add: probably also elsewhere) these types form a sequence which, most probably spanned years BC: 60 (type 38) – 59 (types 38 and 39 = Phraates III) – 58 (Phraates III) – 57 (Orodes II) – 56 (Orodes II).
- d) This last evidence, combined with the evidence of the bronze issues from Susa prove, as type 40.16 (see Simonetta/Sellwood 2006) belongs either to Orodes II or, less likely, to Mithradates III, that it is extremely improbable that types 38 and 39 belong to the same king
- e) The fact that the, so called, “campaign coins” of type 30 have the names of Rhagae, Nisa, Traxiane, Margiane and Areia in full, while the same appear to be represented

by monograms or single letters on the coins of types 35, 36, 38 and 39 and later issues, strongly suggest that 30 precedes all the issues with monograms.<sup>23</sup>

- f) A special, puzzling position is that of type 33. Many of its obverses are indistinguishable from those of type 39, as it is clear from the comparison of a sufficiently large sample of both (as a whole both as coins, casts and photographs I have filed 206 drachms of type 33 and 87 of type 39 plus many more seen at dealers and I can not find a single feature in the whole series of obverses which unambiguously and consistently separates the two issues) (fig. 30) but the reverses of type 33 have both a different inscription and never have monograms. Their position before the types with monograms is logical, but in order to decide its position as well as that of type 29, with respect to type 30 we have to take into account the evidence from the mint of Susa and so this will be discussed further on. Anyway types 33 and 39 are also connected by a transitional coin (countermarked by Otanes) inscribed ΘΕΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ ΦΙΛΕΛΛΗΝΟΣ and with monogram of Rhagae and by a second coin, not counter-stamped that joins a very fine obverse with a reverse with a rather incorrect inscription, which, however, clearly was meant to read as the other one (fig. 16) and I consider these two coins as critical evidence that the engraver and his controllers considered that they were preparing the die for a continuation with minor changes of the issues of type 33. These coins are perfectly regular issues as proved by comparison with a sufficiently large series of coins of types 33 and 39, the comparative series available to me (coins, casts and photos) numbering, as I said 373 specimens.
- g) It is virtually impossible that type 35 has been issued by any of the other kings: His approximate chronological position is established by the morphology of his monograms and especially by the mon. 3 that is intermediate between the mon. 1 of type 36 and the standard mon. 4 of all the later kings. The adoption of a facing portrait is clear indication that he wanted his issues to be clearly distinguishable from those of any other king. As we shall see that there is strong evidence supporting the attribution to Phraates III of both types 33 and 39, if this will be agreed, it follows that types 35, 36 (who, anyway has an entirely different profile from 39) and 38 can not belong to Phraates. Anyway, as far as the internal evidence of the Iranian issues goes, these, at least at some mints, must be arranged in the following sequence: type 29 → 30 → 34 → 31 → 33 → 36 → 35 → 38 → 39 → 40/16.<sup>24</sup> As for the evidence provided by the countermarked coins, this has been already discussed in other papers (A. Simonetta 2001) and may just be summarized as follows: available Arsacid drachms were countermarked to begin from the times of type 33 and of Tanlismaidates and Rangodeme, often on imitations of the genuine specimens (occasionally

<sup>23</sup> The problem of the "mint" ΚΑΤΑΣΤΡΑΤΕΙΑ is discussed in footnote 21.

<sup>24</sup> Sellwood and myself (2006) have recently argued that 40/16 is the first issue of Orodes II or, less probably, belongs to his brother Mithradates and that all the other coins of types 40 and 41 do not belong to Mithradates III (IV), as the account by Justinus must be discarded in favour of that by Dio: so that Mithradates, after a brief rule in Media, by 56 BC was already a refugee with Gabinius and then advanced into Babylonia in 55 BC to be promptly cornered in Seleucia after a rule of but a few months and there is no evidence that he ever controlled the Iranian mints used for drachms and coppers by the king of types 40 and 41. These being our conclusions, however, it can not be definitely decided to whom they should be credited (I favour an early stage of the coinage of Phraates IV).

in gold) by one or two local dynasts followed by Otanes (or Tanlis) who, however countermarked only Arsacid coins with tiara, the bulk of the countermarked coins belonging to types 31 (one specimen being on a mule 28/31 ex Shore, 470), 33<sup>25</sup>, 39. Towards the end of his rule Otannes counter-stamped a few coins of Orodes II (type 47.9) and was soon superseded by the Indo-Parthian Orthagnes, who employs the “Gondopharian symbol”  $\text{Ϛ}$  (countermarks on types 47.29 and 91.9,10). This showing that the bulk of the Parthian currency available in the East around the middle of the first century BC was made by a few late issues of Mithradates II and of types 31, 33, 39, while, for some reason, the coins with a diademed portrait had either vanished from the market or were deemed unacceptable by the counter-stamping dynasts until well into the reign of Orodes II (57–37 BC).

h) The Indo-Parthian coinage provides three items of information:

A) The probable raid in Eastern Afghanistan or, possibly, in the Indus valley of at least one Arsacid king (coins of Indian pattern of Arsakes theos and Arsakes dikaios), their fabric and quality of the alloys, however, pointing to a much later period, approximately corresponding with the second half of the reign of Azes II.

B) The existence sometimes before 58 BC (establishment of the Vikrama/Azes era) of a Parthian king Vonones (see A. Simonetta 1979, 1993, 2001; A. Simonetta/Sellwood 1978; A. Simonetta/Widemann 1978) who was the acknowledged overlord of Saka dynasts either in the region of Kandahar or that of Ghazni and who styled himself as “King of kings”. His supremacy was, however, short lived as Spalagadama shifted his allegiance to the Saka predecessors of Azes I sometimes around 65–60 BC,

C) That sometimes around the middle of the first century BC the first Gondophares established himself as a fully independent ruler and clearly patterned his new currency (drachms) on the tetradrachms of type 39 both in the obverse and reverse and this type of reverse (fig. 17) remained the standard one for the Indo-Parthian drachms until the second half of the first century AD. This combined evidence supports the hypothesis that some (one or more) Parthian rulers of the Dark Age, possibly during its second half, were active in Afghanistan (that is later than the activities of the king of type 30, and that the main responsible was a king of kings named Vonones; finally it supports the placement of the issue of the tetradrachms of type 39 as at the very end of the “Dark Age”.

### **On mules, overstrikes and other modified coins**

I have no doubt that the historical significance both of mules and overstrikes has been often overstated (see A. Simonetta 2006). All mules tell very much the same story: old dies were evidently stored and, in case of a sudden requirement of significant quantities of currency, if they were found to be sufficiently similar to the regular ones as to be readily acceptable on the market they were used as such, otherwise either the old dies or the coins themselves were modified so as to eliminate some symbols, the name of the past king, details of the tiara and so on. In fact also some odd assemblages, where, apparently both obverse and reverse are from past princes, may be thus explained. Yet

<sup>25</sup> “Otannes” countermarks on type 39 are probably rarer than on type 33, but see, for instance Peus 376 (2003), 788.



another possibility is that, especially during troubled times when it might be expected that people were not very careful about which prince's coins they were using, people, having got somehow a pair of old dies, used them. Indeed not a few of the following mules are struck by poorly engraved dies, something that may point either to issues by a local minor mint, where competent craftsmen were not available, or to really irregular issues. In fact, for the "Dark Age", besides the already quoted mules "modified 34–31", we know of the following mules:

28–31 (fig. 18) This mule, formerly in the Shore collection (no. 470), has an obv. of type 28 (Mithradates II) with a reverse of type 31 and is counter-stamped by "Otanēs". Both dies appear to be perfectly regular ones and as shown by the countermark, the coin was circulated for some time after being counter-stamped.

30–28 (fig. 19, Author's coll.), dies of poor workmanship, plated, as the arrangement and number of words is the same as in the regular coins of type 30, the coin, which may be an irregular issue, was meant to pass as a type 30.

30–34 (fig. 20, Sellwood coll. formerly Shore, Erivan Museum). Both coins have an obverse of poor style, possibly from an Eastern mint and actually the obverse of that in the Sellwood collection is so close to one of a regular coin of type 30 also in the Sellwood collection that they are probably the work of the same engraver. The reverse inscription, though poorly executed, is of type 34. It may just be a transitional issue struck at the very beginning of the rule of the new ruler, the king of type 34, at a peripheral mint when not enough new dies were available.

33 or 39–28 (fig. 21, Sellwood coll.) appears to be an instance of re-use of a die of type 28 as it had the same number of words and the same arrangement of them as in the regular coinage of both types 33 and 39, as the reverse of Mithradates II naturally, had no monogram, the similarity is closer with type 33 rather than with type 39, which always carries a monogram.

33?–31 (fig. 22, bronze drachm or core in Assar coll.). This is an irregular coin rather than a mule; indeed while the reverse has a regular inscription of type 31, the tiara of the obverse, has that crest of horned animals of types 33/39, but the side is decorated by a star instead of the horn typical of 33/39, it is thus hybrid between 33/39 and 31, the long beard is similar to that on many coins of type 33 and some of type 39 (see p. 165). This coin may be compared with a plated drachm from the excavations of Susa (Le Rider 1965: 197, no. 483; pl. 38), which, however, has the bottom lines inscribed ΘΕΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ/ΕΥΕΡΓΕΤΟΥ. This seems to point to a forgery struck sometimes approximately between 65 and 60 BC.

30–36 (fig. 23, Author's and Sellwood coll.). Two unquestionable mules struck by the same worn obverse die; as the reverses are from regular dies of type 36 (monogram T = Traxiane?), that is unquestionably later than 30, the coins were expected to pass as coins of type 36. Other apparent mules, but struck with a much fresher obverse dies and from Rhagae are in my collection, in Sellwood's and I have seen other similar coins; also two of these are figured.

38–30.18 (fig. 24, Sellwood coll.). The coupling of an obverse of the late king of type 38 with the extremely rare reverse of type 30 with ΕΝ ΡΑΓΑΙΣ (actually, though the inscription corresponds with that of the coins of type 30 with the same inscription, yet the workmanship is very different from that of all the drachms of type 30 that I know), this

mule may, perhaps, be explained as follows: as though rare, I know several specimens (and actually I own one) of regular drachms of type 38 with the Rhagae monogram (mon. 10), this coin might have been struck in a hurry immediately after the capture of the town and pending the preparation of new reverse dies, while obverses may have been available with the incoming army; it is also possible that the local engraver, asked to prepare new dies for Rhagae, used an old coin of type 30 as prototype.

39–38. In the Sellwood collection there are one regular drachm of type 38 and one with obverse type 39 struck by the same reverse die as the previous one.

Pseudo-mule 30–33 (fig. 25, Sellwood coll.). The style and workmanship associate this coin with those of type 30 inscribed *APEIA*, but also of normal coins of the same king though it lacks the name of the satrapy and the last two words are badly blundered and read: *ΟΕΠΤΙ ΝΙΚΑΤΡΣ*. This is not a mule 30–33 and could possibly be a coin struck in Aria at a moment when the political situation was totally confused and, to make as much as possible a noncommittal coin, was re-used the obverse of a dead king. Anyway this is a really puzzling coin.

31–43.4 (fig. 26, Hirsch 164 (1989), 412). A very puzzling mule made of a regular obverse of type 31, with a reverse which, though the inscription is badly blundered corresponds to coins of type 43.4 with the monogram of Mithradatkert. Though this coin shows how dies might be re-used after an interval which may have been close to twenty years and thus it is comparable to the mules 30–36, yet it is so obnoxious that its purpose is quite obscure.

Finally it is worth while to mention a unique coin (fig. 27) in the Sellwood collection which is a regular coin of type 39 with monogram (mon. 4), except that the two lines on top read *ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΝ* (misspelled) and the two lines to the left are written from bottom and from inside! Thus this coin appears transitional between the normal issues of type 39 and some of Orodes II.

### Modified coins

Vardanyan illustrates a pseudo-mule presumed from Rhagae that he considers as a 31–33. In fact it is a coin of type 33 modified (whether on the die or on the coin is impossible to judge from the picture) by obliterating the horn and the crest of deers on the tiara, possibly in order to make it a drachm of type 37, though a mistake was made by obliterating the horn! A second identical coin is in Assar Coll. and is stated to be a modified coin, not struck by modified dies. Closely similar is a specimen in the Cabinet des Médailles: a coin of type 39 where the crest, but not the horn, has been erased (mint monogram: Mithridatkart) and another such coin is in Assar's collection (personal communication).

Finally, as already seen, there are coins of type 34 in which anchor, crest and “fleur de lys” have been erased from coin or from the die (Author's, Sellwood's and Assar's coll.). And to finish we have the following two coins:

A coin in Sellwood's collection struck by dies of type 34, but modified on the coin by the obliteration of the anchor and crest of tiara and substituting by a horn the “fleur de lys” on the tiara, so that the coin's obverse becomes very close to that of tetradrachms type 37 (fig. 28).

A drachm of type 39 with modified tiara (horn on the side and the deers crest of obliterated) is figured by Vardanyan (2006) and is a modified coin, not one from modified dies, therefore, its significance may be the same as that proposed by Sellwood for some modified drachms of Phraates IV: the individual attempt by an opponent of Phraates to disfigure the portrait of an enemy, but as a sporadic, individual action, it may as well be nothing more than the result of a leisurely whim.

As I have remarked in my paper of 2006 (A. Simonetta 2006) there are other instances of mules and of modified coins in the Parthian coinage and these occur generally at times of civil war when sudden demands for money, the fortunes of war and possible shortages of engravers prompted the re-use of discarded or captured dies somewhat modified to suit the new situation. On the other hand it is possible and even probable that discarded dies may have been obtained and used by irregular mints.

While true mules and modified coins can have any of the above mentioned origins and thus be of problematic historical significance, those produced by modified dies should, in principle, be deemed as official issues. The assortment of mules and modified coins and dies listed, does, anyway suggest that most of them are evidence of hasty issues struck in parallel with the normal coins during troubled times.

### The overstrikes

As I have already referred to them while listing the issues from Susa, as a preliminary to more general considerations I must call attention to some overstrikes from Susa that have been incorrectly quoted. There is a small group of coins (Le Rider 1965: nos. 184–188) that Le Rider attributed to Orodes II, while Sellwood, I think with good reasons, has considered to belong to type 36 and which are over-struck on coins of a ruler who includes in his inscription the title ΘΕΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ. Though Le Rider in his exhaustive discussion proves that the under-type of these coins cannot be an issue of type 30 and concludes that either they are referable to type 35 or to some otherwise unknown prince<sup>26</sup>, yet they have been quoted as overstrikes of type 36 on 30, probably by having overlooked Le Rider's discussion. As several overstrikes of type 36 on type 30 would support a late date for type 30 it is important to stress that such overstrikes do not exist.<sup>27</sup> Considering that no coins corresponding with the under-type of these overstrikes

<sup>26</sup> The inscription corresponds save for the arrangement of some words, also with a unique plated drachm poorly preserved (Le Rider 1965: no. 483) also from Susa but which obverse shows a long bearded king wearing a tiara which details are obscure so that it is impossible to decide whether it is an obverse of Mithradates II or of type 33 or 39. The reverse would be typical of type 35 except that there is no monogram, so that it could also be a transitional one between 33 and 39. All taken I rather think that it is an irregular coin. The under-type of the coins from Susa over-struck by type 36 was clearly a diademed profile.

<sup>27</sup> Clearly the inscription of these overstrikes has been pieced together by Le Rider from the evidence of different coins, but there is no doubt that it is correct. In his correspondence Dr. Assar has advanced the hypothesis that, as there is a single specimen where the word "Theopatoros" is undisputed, but that on this specimen the top lines of the inscription can not be read, yet while this specimen could still be an over-strike of 36 on 30, on the other over-struck coins the corresponding word could be Philopatoros and these be overstrikes of 36 on itself. True: very rare, occasional over-strikes of a king on his own coins are known (see fig. 29), but as all the coins of type 36 from the Susa excavations are overstrikes, this clearly points to a massive over-striking, apparently of a whole issue, so that it is incredible that we have a systematic over-striking by type 36 on 36, with but a single specimen of 36 on 30. As to the objection that the under-type

have ever been found, one is tempted to consider that they may be the result of an ephemeral occupation of Susa by someone who was promptly eliminated, at least there, before the coins were put into circulation and thus the whole issue was captured by the king of type 36; a sequel of events similar to that by which we know the tetradrachms of Mithradates IV only as over-struck by Orodes II. As the choice would then be that the king concerned was either the issuer of type 35 or an otherwise entirely new one who left no trace, by Ockham razor we should tentatively assign the under-type to type 35, whom we know by his monograms to be contemporary or almost so with the king of type 36.

As I have argued in a previous paper (A. Simonetta 2006) quoting a number of examples, over-striking whatever coins came at hand which could be used as workable blanks was, at least in Parthia (and most probably elsewhere) current practice when the mint did not have the time to melt down the coins available and prepare new blanks, so that we even find overstrikes by a ruler on his own coins (fig. 29)! As coins were not usually demonetised unless there was a serious change in the quality of the alloys or in the size of the coins, coins remained on the market for any number of years<sup>28</sup>, so that sporadic overstrikes have no historical meaning except that they prove that the overtype is later than the under-type, but whether by a few months or by a hundred years they do not tell, though the probability of very old coins coming for over-striking was comparatively low. Also the significance of massive overstrikes may vary: sometimes, indeed, it may betray a planned attempt to obliterate all evidence of a defeated enemy, but it is clear that this may have been done only when his coins had some blatantly obnoxious feature, such may be the above quoted overstrikes of Orodes II on Mithradates III (or IV according the somewhat controversial evidence for the existence of a Mithridates shortly after the death of Mithradates II), which carried the name Mithradates, or those of Phraates IV on those of Tiridates II with the epithet *Philoromaiois*.

However, as there is no evidence of overstrikes between the issues of most of the rulers that we know for certain that were involved in internecine wars, I think that even such massive overstrikes were simply the result of the capture of large quantities of coins. Indeed, at least in Parthia, we do not have any evidence of attempts to eliminate the coinage of past princes. An indirect evidence for this is that while we find that the majority of the tetradrachms of Vonones I (or II as previously noted) are overstrikes on Phraataces and Musa (who were both dead by the time and were not Vonones' enemies), there is no evidence of overstrikes of Artabanus II on Vonones, his defeated enemy! It simply appears that when Phraataces and Musa were chased and took refuge with the Romans they had taken with them a large amount of coins and when the Romans sent Vonones to Parthia, they handled him Phraataces' trea-

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of the over-struck coins has a profile portrait, while the other coinage of type 35 has a facing portrait I may point to the converse example from the same mint: the issue of Mithradates I (or perhaps of the un-named king 1) with facing portrait: the one exception in a coinage consistently showing the king in profile! Finally, the reconstructed inscription is just one known from the coinage of a king who everyone agrees to be contemporary or almost so with the king of type 36.

<sup>28</sup> That this was not only a practice in antiquity: an extraordinary recent record is that of copper coins of the late years of the republic of Lucca, in central Italy, suppressed by Napoleon in 1799 and that were still locally accepted for change in 1920! Most probably it was hardly feasible to implement any systematic collecting of the old currency.

sure. Over-striking, quite clearly, was a matter of opportunity and, usually, not of politics. Obviously the coins that came to the mint for over-striking were usually those more common on the market and, moreover, as too worn coins were commonly underweight they would have been considered unsuitable for over-striking, this being apparently the simple reason for overstrikes and of the fact that though long time gaps are recorded, especially with Roman coinage, under-types and overtypes are usually rather close in time.

This hypothesis is indeed supported by the evidence from the "Dark Age" itself where, as we have seen, we have evidence of coins struck by modified dies and mules, but simply no overstrikes are reported on silver from this period and just a few on bronzes from Susa where the under-type, as stated above, has not yet been identified with certainty, though, this being a time of almost perennial civil wars and changing fortunes, had the practice of over-striking had a political significance (as it has often been assumed in numismatic literature), one would expect a number of them. Probably the very simple reason was that it was practically impossible to implement a systematic collection of the enemy's coins and their change, and so the operation was not even attempted. Indeed, just to take some additional examples: Gotarzes II finally defeated Vardanes I and yet not a single overstrike is reported<sup>29</sup> and the same may be said of Volagases I and his rebel son Vardanes II, and so on. Obviously, as I said, when some king, besides defeating an enemy, captured an amount of his coinage, this was over-struck or melted down.

Indeed traces of difficult interpretation of the under-type of a coin such as is the usual condition, could not have any propaganda value. Clearly countermarking was a different matter: its purpose was obviously that of validating the circulation of a foreign coin or, possibly, also of defacing the coins of an enemy. However, precisely with some of the coinage of the "dark age", the Eastern countermarks discussed above, were carefully applied so as not to deface the features of the Parthian king, thus showing that these were not struck "in anger".

## **Hoard**s

The evidence from hoards is commonly a difficult one to assess. The historical significance of hoards largely depends on the one hand on the possibility of being certain of their original composition and on the other on the circumstances of their entombment. Both these conditions are met by finds done during regular excavation, while they can but seldom be ascertained for hoards recovered from the market as it is obvious that passing through one or more dealers specimens may have been separately sold or eliminated, others may have been added and anyway all the precious information concerning the context where the hoard was originally assembled and lost is missing. Thus I think that the evidence from hoards acquired on the market should be used with a very conservative approach. A couple of hoards will, anyway, be quoted further on.

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<sup>29</sup> The overstrike of Gotarzes II on Vardanes I reported by McDowell (1935) is a mistake by this author, the coin is not an overstrike, but a double strike.



## Comprehensive assessment of the numismatic evidence

Let us now see what may be the result of the cross comparison of all the numismatic evidences.

Some preliminary caveats are necessary in order to make clear that I am conscious of the limitations of the available material.

As a general premise I think that the possibility that more than one of Sellwood's types were issued by the same ruler has to be assessed on internal evidence; indeed while the cuneiform documents give us the names of two otherwise unknown kings and the joint coinage of Vonones and his Saka vassals may give us yet another name, and, as we shall see, there is no positive evidence to identify any of the Kings known by their names with the Phriapitid kings (obviously two different characters) of the Nisa ostraka, therefore, the total number of rulers spanning the "Dark Age" must be, for the time being left as an open question to be re-assessed when, after having arranged the issues in a chronological frame, we shall try to match them with the historical evidence.

### Discussion:

- 1) As the known number of issues of bronzes from Susa covers precisely the whole time span of the "Dark Age", the complete absence there of both types 29/32 and 35<sup>30</sup> means that the two kings concerned never controlled that mint, while, should we conclude that types 33 (Iranian issues without monograms) and 39 belong to the same king, we must also conclude that this king lost control of Susa before the advent there of types 36, and 38 and never recovered it. As for the king of type 35, the fact that he did not strike either in Seleucia or in Susa<sup>31</sup> clearly means that he was a purely Iranian ruler never able to advance much beyond Ecbatana.
- 2) The number of issues of each king in Susa provides good evidence of the length of the rule of each king there, while it gives no key as to their rule elsewhere or to their chronology, just as the very fact that we have Iranian issues of two more kings (types 29 and 35) and of types 32 (=29) and 37 in Seleucia requires some adjustments for the chronology of other mints.
- 3) The sequence 38–39–40 must be taken as a certain one at least for some districts and, therefore, type 35, because of its partly evolved monogram for Ecbatana must be, at least there, later than type 36 and earlier than type 38. His coins being rather rare, the issuer must have probably been active for just a short time.
- 4) Type 34 necessarily precedes type 31 as shown by the modified dies of 34 and the evolution of the full type 31 from the modified coins of type 34. It is, indeed impossible that the modified coins of type 34 come late among the issues of type 31 for two sound reasons: first there is a perfect gradual transition from the intact coins of type 34 to the common issues of type 31 and second, the extreme abundance of the

<sup>30</sup> Apart from the possibility, suggested by Le Rider (1965) that he was responsible for the issue over-struck by type 36.

<sup>31</sup> We have seen (p. 161–162) that there is a possibility that actually an issue of bronzes may have been struck by the king of type 35, but in this case it seems that the whole issue was captured and over-struck by the king of type 36 as a result of a prompt counter-offensive.

common issues of type 31 shows that the king of type 31, once fully established, had available an abundance of dies, so that, should he have captured some coins of a rival he would have simply over-struck them! The usage by type 31 of the titles Philopator and Autokrator shows that this king, though claiming Arsakid parentage was not the son of a king as the term Autokrator is regularly employed in Hellenistic coinage to qualify a king who had not got his crown by inheritance but that he had taken the crown by force.

- 5) It is reasonable to presume that the coins without monogram were struck before those with monogram, with the proviso that the adoption of monograms may not have been simultaneous at the various mints.
- 6) Given the previous conclusions the problem of placing types 30 and 33 in the Iranian series remains open. However, given the identity of the obverse portrait of types 33 and 39 (fig. 30), the existence of two coins with a transitional inscription 33–39 and the application of Ockham's razor<sup>32</sup>, suggests that type 33 and 39 are by the same king and that 33 precedes 39 and comes after type 30 and this is supported by the fact that types 31, 33 and 39 form by far the bulk (meagre as it is) of the coins countermarked by "Otanēs". All this, however, requires the assumption that the king of type 33 was the son of that of type 31 (hence the title Theopator) and was immediately challenged by some opponents and that, like later Vonones I (II), after some initial victories (hence the title Nikator<sup>33</sup>) lost all or nearly all of his kingdom, which he partly recovered after some time, though he never recaptured Susa. The coinage of Seleucia gives us practically no evidence for a chronological arrangement, except by supporting the evidence from Susa that type 30 was struck for a reasonable length of time and in bulk as, by itself, it makes up well more than the double of all the others taken together.<sup>34</sup> Against this conclusion there was, however (once discarded, as we have seen, the supposed overstrikes of type 36 on type 30 in Susa), a single piece of evidence: a hoard acquired by Assar, who is sure to have got about 95% of the original hoard. This hoard is made up only of coins of types 28 (Mithradates II) and of type 33, all practically in mint conditions. Obviously the lack of coins of types 29 and 31, which usually occur in the hoards of this period, coupled with the unworn

<sup>32</sup> *Entia non sunt ponenda praeter necessitatem*: Hypotheses should not be advanced except when really necessary.

<sup>33</sup> The suggestion that the title "Nikator" must necessarily be related with a victory against a powerful opponent, possibly Mithradates II) has no evidence to support it; indeed it is sufficient to think of the equivalent "Neikesas" and victory type adopted by Vonones I (II?) after his initial inconclusive victories against Artabanus II to doubt the hypothesis.

<sup>34</sup> The fact that Type 30 struck in Seleucia first an issue with an almost beardless portrait and later several more with a fully bearded portrait suggests that n. 30 ruled there for a short time in 90 BC, soon lost the town and recovered it sometime later. It might be objected that Mørkholm, arguing on the supposed evidence of the sequence of die engravings of tetradrachms has suggested an entirely different arrangement. Apart from the many instances when Mørkholm's judgements on die identities, wear etc. have been proven wrong, even allowing (and I am not convinced) that in this case he was right in his judgement about the die engravers, his argument is worthless as all the coins concerned will, anyway, have been struck within a span of some ten years and, for instance Sellwood's "engraver E" appears to have been active for over thirty years. The "engraver's series", by the evidence published by Sellwood himself and that, as seen further on, I fully confirm, will give only a rough indication and one that must be anyway subordinate to the other evidences.

conditions of the coins seems to suggest that types 28 and 33 were rather close in time, rather than separated by some 18 years as argued on all the other pieces of evidence. However, Dr. Assar has recently informed me that the previous information was not complete, as he now has precise evidence that the hoard originally included at least one, possibly two drachms of type 29.

Though not including any coin of type 31 and 39, yet now this hoard invites comparison with our remarks on the countermarks by Otanes, which show that, at least in eastern Iran and Afghanistan, by the middle of the first century BC the coins with obverse “king with diadem” had either vanished or had been banned as legal tenders and perhaps suggest that when Phraates III finally disposed of his enemies, he banished all the coins not showing the king with tiara. Given such possible explanations for the hoard mentioned by Assar, I prefer to stick to all the other evidences.<sup>35</sup> Another hoard perhaps worth mentioning is that that I described as “Mardin 1” (A. Simonetta 1966) and that included: type 27 (Mithradates II), no. 6; type 28 (Mithradates II), no. 7; type 29, no. 3; type 30, no. 14; type 31, no. 9; type 33, no. 9; type 34, no. 1 (with anchor removed); type 36, no. 1; type 38, no. 1 (barbarous and with monogram T); type 39, no. 1, as it may be evidence of the practical separation of the coinage of the “Dark Age” into two distinct periods, the three solitary coins of types 36, 38 and 39 being in mint conditions or almost so.

- 7) The “campaign coins” of type 30 suggest that the king concerned made a victorious campaign in Iran even to the most Eastern satrapies, and this makes it difficult to identify no. 30 with the Phriapitid contender, who was certainly holding Nisa in 90 BC.
- 8) Though the first issue of the tetradrachms of type 30 (clearly the first by the very youthful portrait) is linked to the tetradrachm of type 34 by the exergue letters ΣYM, yet, for the reasons advanced in page 153, and the fact that if we place type 34 as immediately following type 30, the two issues may be separated only by some eight years; and that the same exergue letters ΣYM appear on a tetradrachm of type 30 with a fully mature portrait of the king, that shows that this abbreviation was re-used sometimes after its first employment, I do not consider these letters as particularly significant. Indeed on one side the issue 30.10 is necessarily the first of type 30 in Seleucia, on the other the already discussed types 34 and 31 show that 30.10 can not possibly follow type 34.<sup>36</sup>

If we pool all this evidence from the various regions we have the following result with a tentative dating for the various issues (years approximate):

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<sup>35</sup> Assar (personal communication) considers the unworn conditions of the coins as decisive evidence for a close temporal connection of types 28 and 33 and that this is corroborated by the absence of coins of type 31, which would be expected, if 31 precedes 33. I do not agree as to the crucial significance of the condition of the coins in the hoard, given the fact that the hoard having been purchased on the market, it lacks any corroborating evidence as to the circumstances of its accumulation and loss and the well known fact that hoarders tend to select for storage the best specimens they can find. The absence of coins of type 31 is indeed disturbing, but to me it can not outweigh all the other pieces of evidence discussed.

<sup>36</sup> Mørkholm (1980) has argued, on his interpretation of the “engraver series” for Seleucia, for a very different sequence of issues. As far as I have had an opportunity to check Mørkholm’s conclusions concerning both Cappadocian and Parthian coins, he was usually wrong.

Susa	Iran	Seleucia
90–79 BC type 30	90–? type 29	90–? type 32
	? –79 Type 30	? –79 type 30
79–77 type 34	79–77 type 34	79–77 type 34
77–69 type 31	77–69 type 31	77–69 type 31
69–64 type 33	69–? type 33	??
64–60 type 36	? –? type 36	? –? type 36
	? –? type 35	? –? type 37
	? –? type 38	? –? type 38
60–56 type 38	? –57 transitional 33/39 and 39	? –57 type 39
end of bronze coinage		

### The literary and documentary evidence

We may now list the historical evidence and then compare it with the arrangement arrived on purely numismatic evidence and see whether they may be matched or not.

As Assar (2006b) has definitely proved that the word *ittarridu* was used in the Babylonian documents of Parthian age with the meaning “named”, though, theoretically, this does not exclude that it might have been used also with the meaning “has expelled”, I think that it is wise to abandon the translations which I have used in my previous papers and therefore the whole chronology of the surviving documentary and literary evidence must be revised. Therefore, I shall herewith follow the readings and the dates proposed by Assar (2006b).

By now it may be considered as being well established that while the coins issued in Seleucia are dated by the normal Seleucid Era (SE) of September/October 312 BC and the same era was used in the Greek documents in Iran, the Seleuco-Babylonian (SEB) era of March/April (Nisan) 311 was used in the cuneiform documents in Babylonia together with the Arsacid Era of 247 BC; the same Arsacid Era was used alone on the Pahlavi documents and on some exceptional drachms, probably from Ecbatana.

It has been noticed that a few out of the whole series of double dated cuneiform documents show a discrepancy by one year between the Seleucid and the Arsacid dates in comparison with all the others. Whatever the interpretation of such discrepancies they make little or no difference for historical purposes.

It is also fairly clear that whenever in a document the ruling Arsaces is specified by the addition of his personal name, by that of his queen or queens or by both, that means that a civil war was in progress and that the scribe had to make it clear who was the ruler actually locally in power. Precisely the same meaning presumably have “pedigree” colophons where the ruling Arsaces is specified by quoting his ancestors (who, presumably, are mentioned just to justify his claims).

When the king is merely mentioned as “Arsaces” it may be presumed that the crown was not contested.

Naturally we can’t know who was the unchallenged Arsaces except by inference, comparing all our sources and evidences, so that identifications *must* qualify as tentative. Here, following the translations proposed by Assar (2006b) is the list of the evidence as it is:

**Dec. 91 BC:** (tablet) letter of Arsaces king telling of the death of his father Arsaces king of kings (clearly Mithradates II). The colophon of this tablet though fragmentary clearly states “King Arsaces who is named Gotarzes”.

**91/90 BC:** (Nisa ostrakon 1760) either “Arsaces king, son of son of Phriapites (?), son of brother’s son of Arsaces” or “The year 157 of the Arsacids, the king, grandson of Phriapatak, son of the nephew of Arshak”.

**Dec. 91/Jan. 90 BC:** (tablet) Colophon: “Arsaces whose name is Gotarzes and Ashiabatara his wife, queen” military operations by general Mithratu.

**March 90 BC – February 87:** (several tablets) same colophon, some mentioning military operations by general Mithratu. One tablet (intentionally?) omits to mention the king.

**88 approximately November:** (the Avroman parchment) Apellaios 225 Sel. Arsaces and his queens, among them Aryazates Automa, daughter of the Great King Tigranes. Ashiabatara is not listed among the queens.

**87 BC April:** Last known colophon mentioning Gotarzes and Ashiabatara.

**87 July/August:** (tablet) Arsaces king begins to rule or, anyway, is unchallenged ruler (“sits on his throne”). The same tablet still mentions military operations by general Mithratu. The text proposed by Assar is largely restored, but the restoration appears to be entirely justified.

**87:** (Josephus) Mithradates Sinaces captures Demetrius III and sends him to a king Mithradates.<sup>37</sup> This being the only evidence for the existence of a king Mithradates during the “Dark Age”. About this time Tigranes the Great begins his advance South and captures, among other territories, at least some districts of Media (the 70 valleys?). During the following campaigns, of which we have no detail, Tigranes conquered Atropatene, Corduene and Adiabene, probably advanced even to Ecbatana and, finally, in 83 he annexed all the remains of the Seleucid kingdom eliminating both Antiochus X, son of Cyzicenus, who either died or fled for temporary refuge to the Parthians, and Philippus Philadelphus, son of Gryphus.

**87/86:** (two tablets) of this year mention only Arsaces.

**Oct.86:** (tab.) “Arsaces King”.

**86/85:** (tab.) Same.

**85/84:** (fragmentary tablet) This document is notable as, though the content is lost, it mentions “Arsaces king” not by the usual term “lugal”, but by the term “Malek”

**84 May/June:** (tab.) Colophon “Arsaces king”, mentions military operations still led by Mithradates.

**83/82:** (tab.) Same.

**April 81:** Last tablet with colophon simply mentioning “Arsaces king”.

**April 80:** (tab.) “Arsaces who is called Orodes king”.

**September/October 80:** (Tabs.) two almost contemporary tablets give two slightly different colophons: the first gives just the previous “Arsaces who is called Orodes king”, while the second reads “Arsaces king, who is called Orodes, and Isbarza, his sister the queen”.

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<sup>37</sup> Josephus’s account being that Appian, Eusebius and Justinus give entirely different accounts which do not involve the Parthians, except possibly as temporary hosts to a refugee Seleucid prince.



**April and May 78:** (tabs.) two records with colophon “Arsaces king and Izubbarza, his sister. Queen”.

**78/77:** (Ostrakon): “Arsaces king, son of ... son of ...”

**Approximately 77:** Sinatruces becomes king (inference from Phlegon, who gives the date of accession of Phraates III and of Lucian who attributes 7 years to the rule of Sinatruces).

**77 BC:** (tab.) “Orodes and Isbubarza” is fighting Kamnaskires and wins a remarkable victory, while there are riots in some towns.

**April 76 BC:** (tab.) “Arsaces-Orodes and Izubbarza”.

**Dec. 76/Jan. 75:** (very fragmentary tablet) last mention of “Arsaces and Isbubarza”.

**April 75 BC:** (Tab.) Colophon mentioning only “Arsaces King”.

**April 75 BC:** (tab.) “King Arsaces” only. Note: the year is conjectural.

**November/December 73 BC:** (tab.) king’s reference lost, news of war and troubles.

**72–71BC:** (fragment of Memnon, Sinatruces requested of assistance by Mithradates VI of Pontus, refuses.

**70/69 BC:** Phlegon the chronographer states that Phraates III became king.

**March 69 BC:** (tab.) “Arsaces King”.

**69/68 BC:** (tab.) new colophon: “Arsaces king and Piruztana his wife queen”.

**69/68 BC:** Phraates is urged by Tigranes I and Mithradates VI to attack the Romans, however, as Tigranes is defeated by Lucullus at Tigranocerta on October 6, 69, Phraates remains neutral. Lucullus thought of attacking Parthia, but the army refused to march.

**March/April 68 BC:** (tab.) “Arsaces king and Piruztana”.

**68 BC:** (tab.) “Arsaces king and Piruztana his wife, Queen”.

**68/67 BC:**(ostrakon) “Year 180 Arsaces son of the line of Phriapatius” or: “the year 180 of the Arsacids, the king of the lineage of Friapatak”.

**January 67 BC:** (tab.) “Arsaces king and Piruztana his wife queen”.

**66 BC:** Unsatisfactory dealings with Pompey who refuses to Phraates the title “King of kings”; Phraates III advances into Armenia to support Tigranes the younger against his father, but after reaching Artaxata suddenly withdraws leaving a token force and Tigranes is defeated.

**BC 66 Approximately:** Dio mentions operations by the Romans against a Darius from Media. and the death of an “Arsaces king of Parthia”.

**December 66 BC:** (tab.) “Arsaces king of kings” and “?-Ishtar” (name incomplete), his mother, the queen”.

**65 BC:** Pompey receives embassies from Media and Elam.

**April 65 BC:** (tab.) Arsaces, king of kings and *name lost*.

**64 BC:** Pompey angers Phraates by refusing him the title “king of kings”.

**April 64 BC:** (tab.) “Arsaces, king of kings”.

**63 BC:** (tab.) Month 1 185 Ars = 249 SEB Arsaces, king of kings and Teleonike (his wife, queen)” with the added colophon (Diary from month 1) to month 6 of year 185 (=249) “Arsaces, king of kings”.

**61/60 BC:** (tab.) “Arsaces, king of kings”.

**March/April 58 BC:** (tab.) “Arsaces, king of kings”.

This being the evidence, let us see how we can synthesise it without, at this stage, undue hypotheses and whether it can be interpreted so as to fit with the coin evidence.

Again as a matter of method: given the practice of the scribes that when the crown was not contested the ruling king is simply mentioned as Arsaces, the documents of peaceful periods can not be *a priori* attributed to any king of the period, that is: if we have evidence for period A that the crown was contested between a prince X and a claimant Y, we can not tell whether in the following period of peace the Arsaces mentioned in the colophons was X, Y or, possibly even someone else, as multi-parties civil wars are well known in history. Moreover, if, during a period of peace there was a peaceful succession, this will not appear in the colophons, but was presumably recorded in the text, as it is in the lucky instance of the tablet recording the announcement by his son Gotarzes of the death of Mithradates II. The plain fact that in times of civil war it was deemed as expedient to record the name of one or more queens as eponyms implies that when different queens are mentioned, they were the wives of different kings. Naturally there is the possibility that if the eponym queen died, a new one could take her place.<sup>38</sup>

In December 91 BC an Arsaces named Gotarzes<sup>39</sup>, son of Mithradates II announces the death of his father. The wording of the colophon implies that the accession of Gotarzes had already been challenged. Shortly after one of the challenger(s) appears on an ostrakon from Nisa and, notably, does not substantiate his claim by reference to any of the recent kings (the colophon would have read something like “the son of the great king of kings” or “the grandson of the Great Arsaces”), instead the pretender traces his claim to a more distant past, almost to the origin of the dynasty. Indeed it is well known that beginning with the accession of Mithradates I the succession had not regularly followed the father-eldest son sequence, so that it was quite possible that some branches of the Arsacids could have some reasonable claim against the accession of Gotarzes.

In Babylonia Gotarzes remained in control until at least April 87, but, meantime, the civil war had never abated and military operations, apparently mainly along the border with Susiana, had been the responsibility of a general Mithrates (=Mithradates).

In 88 the Avroman parchment, gives evidence of a claimant different from the Phryapitid of the Nisa ostrakon. Indeed as later tablets in the name of Gotarzes still mention Ashiabatara as eponymous queen, her omission from the queens listed in the Avroman parchment is strong indication that the “Arsaces” of the colophon is not Gotarzes, while the fact that among the queens mentioned is listed Ariazate Automa, daughter of Tigranes, is clear indication that the prince concerned was not a distant relative of Mithradates II such as the Nisa Phryapitid, but most probably his son as we know that Mithradates II had been instrumental in the establishment of Tigranes in Armenia and had been compensated by the 70 valleys, quite possibly the dowry for Ariazates (the successive retaking by Tigranes of the valleys may well be a consequence of the defeat or death and succession of a son-in-law by a rival to whom Tigranes had no obligation). It seems plausible to suppose that this is the Mithradates mentioned by Josephus who in the next year is acknowledged as king throughout the empire and receives the prisoner Demetrius III.

<sup>38</sup> We know that, when hard pressed by Tiridates II, Phraates IV had his entire harem executed.

<sup>39</sup> This Gotarzes could be the Gotarzes “satrap of satraps” (a good title for the heir in pectore) of the Behistun relief.

However, the war on the Babylonian border (against whom?) lasts until at least April 87 BC, Mithrates is always in charge and Gotarzes is the locally acknowledged ruler, but a fragmentary tablet of 87 may imply that Gotarzes himself was on the spot.

Then in July/August of the same year the civil war is over: whether an entirely new prince had appeared or one of the contenders had gained the final victory may be left as an open question.

Again in 87, according to Josephus, Mithradates Sinaces (most probably the same Mithrates of the previous campaigns, makes a raid in Syria, captures Demetrius III and sends him to his overlord, a king Mithradates. As Josephus is usually a reliable source, we may tentatively assume that the "Arsaces who sat on his throne" in Babylonia was named Mithradates and that the change of ruler had not affected the position of the general Mithradates.

About this time Tigranes the Great, begins his drive South and, among other territories, captures at least the "70 valleys" in Media that he had given Mithradates II. From 87 BC to the spring of 80 BC the crown is not contested. We have no way to judge whether the substitution of the title Malek for the usual Lugal as the title for the Arsaces on a tablet of 85 BC has any special significance.

In spring of 80 BC a new civil war has started and a king Orodes I (with his queen Isubarza) appears in Babylonia. This Orodes lasts in Babylonia until the end of 76 and in 77 wins a remarkable victory over Kamnaskires of Elymais, but there are riots in some towns.<sup>40</sup>

Meanwhile in 78/77 BC an ostrakon from Nisa mentions another king, but his parentage is lost. Obviously the date of the ostrakon does not imply that this corresponds even approximately with the moment when this prince first claimed the crown. It is possible, but most unlikely, that in Nisa they used a local alternative to the system of naming the king and his queen and, therefore, that the king mentioned is Orodes. Another possibility is that this king is the enemy already fighting Orodes; lastly that the Arsaces of the ostrakon is a third claimant adding to that fighting Orodes since 80/79. In this case it is possible that this one may have been Sinatruces as approximately in 77 the combined evidence of Phlegon and Lucian place the accession of Sinatruces with the support of Scythian tribes and gives to Sinatruces a reign of some seven years. The Greek sources state that Sinatruces, though an Arsacid, was not in the direct royal lineage and won the crown by the support of the Sacaraucae.

Orodes and Isubarza are last mentioned in December 76 and thereafter the cuneiform documents do not give evidence of any contest for the crown which must have been securely in the hands of Sinatruces.

70/69 is the year of the accession of Phraates III according the chronographer Phlegon. But his accession was promptly challenged as while a tablet of March 69 simply mention "Arsaces king", another from the same year already mention Arsaces king and his queen Piruztana.

In 69 Phraates III is apparently ruling, at least in the West, as he, in spite of urging by Mithridates VI and Tigranes, keeps neutral in their war with the Romans, just as,

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<sup>40</sup> As we shall see I think that type 34 is the coinage of Orodes I, if so the Elymean "anchor symbol" on his coins might be a reference to his war against Kamnaskires.

according a fragment of Memnon, had been done by Sinatruces when requested for support by Mithradates of Pontus in the winter 72/71.

On October 9, 69 BC Lucullus defeated Tigranes at Tigranocerta, and thence considered the opportunity of attacking Phraates, but his army refused to march. Lucullus' plan may have been prompted by news of a civil war in Parthia as a tablet of 69/68 mentions Arsaces and his wife Piruztanaa, the queen, and an ostrakon of 68/67 again mention a Phryapitid king. The last mention of the queen Piruztanaa is for 19/20 January 67 BC.

For 66 BC we have some more information and this is confusing: Phraates III has contacts with Pompey, who refuses to address him as King of kings. Meantime Phraates invades Armenia in support of his son in law Tigranes the younger against Tigranes the Great. However, his advance suddenly stops short of Artaxata and Phraates withdraws, leaving Tigranes with but a token force, which is promptly defeated by Tigranes the Great's counter-offensive. It is logical to think that Phraates was recalled by troubles at home, and that is confirmed by a tablet of 29 December 66 mentioning both an Arsaces king of kings and “?-Ishtar” (incomplete name), his mother, queen, while classical sources barely mention, again for 66 BC, minor Roman operations against a Darius, ruler of Media.

For 65 we have no information from the Parthian Empire, but we hear that Pompey received embassies from Media and Elam, which may suggest that these countries were not controlled by Phraates. While Elam proper had always remained under the more or less autonomous rule of the Kamnaskirids, Media was a key region for the Arsacids.

In 64 Phraates reappears in our records, with new attempts to some sort of agreement with the Romans, but Phraates was angered by the persistent refusal of the Romans to recognize him as “King of kings”, and the colophons on the tablets from 64/63 BC mention an Arsaces king of kings and his wife Teleonike, the last, dated April 63 with an added note mentioning a date of the 6<sup>th</sup> month, that is approximately September/October, mentioning an Arsaces, king of kings, without reference to the queen, thus implying that the war was over. Two further tablets of 61/60 and of October 58 suggest peaceful conditions for the king of kings. These last records posing, as we shall see, a tantalizing problem as they, apparently, do not fit the numismatic evidence.

### **A comprehensive assessment**

If we now try to interpret these records, we may subdivide the Dark Age into three periods without, at this stage, introducing any numismatic evidence:

To begin with, at the death of Mithradates II a son of him takes his crown, but is almost immediately challenged by at least one pretender, the war lasting inconclusively until the Spring of 87 BC and at least one of the theatres of operation is more or less along the Tigris, approximately on the road to Susa, the operations being led by a Mithrates = Mithradates (who may or may not be, the same Mithrates/Mithradates, “the overseer” of the Behistun relief<sup>41</sup>). One of the contenders is Gotarzes I and Mithrates

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<sup>41</sup> As the relief is at least some 20 years earlier than the operations mentioned in the tablets, I am rather sceptical of the identification.

is clearly in his service. Sometimes in 87 Mithradates Sinaces, possibly the same as the Mithrates of the previous operations, may have captured Demetrius III and sent his prisoner to a king Mithradates, also in the same year the civil war is over and this information closes the first phase.

The second phase, as far as our records tell, was a period of some six years of peace, which close with the third phase, beginning in Spring 80: a new period of wars, one of the contenders being an Orodes, another a new Phriapitid pretender and who knows who others. Here we must note a curious thing: in some colophons from 80 BC instead of the expected formula "Arsaces whose name is Orodes" we have simply "the king named Orodes", then in the same year we have "the king named Orodes and Izubarza the queen" and in the following years "king Arsaces and Izubarza the queen". Obviously this may be just the result of the whims of the scribe but there is an equal possibility that the different colophons were meant to be meaningful; in this case we should suppose that in 80 BC Orodes was acknowledged as king, but not as "Arsaces", that is that he was a sort of "sub-king" to someone else. Once again the evidence leaves us with alternative options. Anyway the colophons of 80 BC tell us that the subsequent colophons mentioning Isubarza may safely be referred to Orodes I.

The fight of Orodes I was against an unnamed contender, who may be the king mentioned in an ostrakon of 78/77 BC. After April 76 our record is almost lacking, but what we do have may point to a new spell of peace, corresponding with most of the time span that Western sources attribute to the reign of Sinatruces and lasting until the end of March 69, closely corresponding with the accession of Phraates III according the chronographer Phlegon.

Within the same year we have again precise indication of a civil war. In 69/68 we have repeated references in Babylonia to a King Arsaces and his queen Piruztanaa, and these last at least until the second half of January 67, while in 68/67 an ostrakon from Nisa mentions a new Phriapitid pretender. It is possible that Piruztanaa was actually the wife of Phraates III, but it is equally possible that the husband of Piruztanaa was someone else who had been able to capture Babylonia from Phraates. Shortly after the battle of Tigranocerta Mithradates VI and Tigranes appealed for help to the Parthian king, but, assuming, as it is traditional, that this was Phraates III, yet the two defeated kings were in touch with Parthian territories in the North while the tablets come from the region of Babylonia, further South, and thus the husband of Piruztanaa may have been someone other than Phraates III. Whether the apparently minor operations of the Romans against a Darius of Media and of the embassies sent by the Medians and the Elymeans to Pompey are an indication that the ruler of Media was also making a bid for the Arsacid tiara, we can't tell, just as we can not tell whether the persistent refusal of Pompey to acknowledge Phraates as "King of Kings" is an indication that the Roman was aware of the precarious position of Phraates and did not want to commit himself and Rome to even a formal support of Phraates. What is certain is that, while in 64 Pompey refuses to acknowledge Phraates as "King of Kings", at least since December 66 the tablets always style Arsaces as king of kings, though a civil war was certainly going on, as we have a colophon of December 66 mentioning Arsaces King of kings and his mother "...Ishtar" (name incomplete) and later in 64/63 and 63 again an Arsaces, king of kings and Teleonike his wife.



Only with the last three years of Phraates, peace is apparently restored as a tablet of 61/60 and one of the end of March 58 simply mention an Arsaces King of Kings. It is precisely with 58/57 that Phraates re-appears in the Western chronicles, as the victim of a plot engineered by his sons Orodes (II) and Mithradates III (or IV).

We may now try to match the historical record against the numismatic evidence that we have analysed in the previous sections, that is: the sequence of issues which may be deduced from the evidence of the Iranian mints and the duration of each ruler as deduced from the Susa annual issues of bronzes. The following table plots in parallel the two lines of evidence.

### Numismatic evidence

<b>(dates based on Susa)</b>		<b>Historical evidence</b>
Type 29	91–?	91–87 Civil war, Gotarzes I and Ashiabatara + a Phryapitid pretender
Type 30	91–80 BC	87–80 peace, Arsaces king
Type 34	80–78 BC	80–75 civil war, Orodes I and Isubarza
Type 31	78–70 BC	75–March 69 apparently peace, Arsaces king
Type 33	70–65 BC	69–January 67 Civil war Arsaces king and Piruztanaa
Type 36	65–61 BC	68 civil war, a Phryapitid pretender
Type 35	about 62 BC	66 civil war, Arsaces King of kings and mother
Type 38	61–57 BC	65 and 63 civil war, Arsaces king of kings and Teleonike   64 Arsaces King of kings
Type 39	? –57 BC	61 and 58 BC Arsaces King of kings

*Note that the dates based on the issues of Susa may not correspond with those of the issues from other regions as control of the different regions may have shifted in time.*

A first good match may be given by the pairing of types 29/32 and 30 with the pair Gotarzes I – Mithradates III.

Type 30 ruled in Susa for 12 issues, that means over 10 years and claims to be the son of a dead king,<sup>42</sup> so, as the absence of monograms on the drachms and the full name of the towns and satrapies place him unquestionably in the first group, the only possible solution to fit this span within the extant record is to add the period of war from early 90 to 87 BC and the following period of peace until 80 BC; likewise the extreme similarity of types 29/32 to the last issues of Mithridates strongly points to a conscious effort to emphasize continuity with Mithridates II.

Is it possible to decide who is who in the pair? Here we are obviously on more shaky ground: the name Mithridates is certified only by the brief entry of the dispatch to him, presumably in Ecbatana, of the prisoner Demetrius, that of Gotarzes by the colophons on some tablets and an entry on a tablet. The identification of the “Arsaces who sat on his throne” with one of the two is plausible, but is only based on a coincidence of dates. Anyway, as a tentative assumption, I suggest this possibility: after the death of Mithridates II, his son Gotarzes takes over in Iran and Babylonia, but is immediately faced by

<sup>42</sup> Clearly it is possible that the claim was a fictitious one or that the dead king was a more or less remote ancestor; there are historical instances of both situations, however, the possibility of an entirely fictitious claim seems improbable.

a rival, possibly a brother, the “king of the campaigns”, whose power is centred in Susa and a desultory border war follows during the next approximately three years and, during this time the “King of the campaigns”, most probably named Mithridates, is able to capture for a brief time Seleucia, where he strikes the tetradrachms S.30/10 (early issue with youthful portrait; there is a second issue with the same exergue letters, but with a much more aged portrait and which may link with the unique tetradrachm of type 34 which, again, has these exergue letters).

In 87 BC Gotarzes finally comes in person to Babylonia, but soon dies and his officers, including his general Mithrates-Mithridates, submit to Mithridates, who is therefore acknowledged as supreme ruler. Mithridates thence advances into Iran and Afghanistan, there commemorating his capture of Rhagae, Nisa and of the satrapies of Margiane, Aria and Traxiane. This reconstruction accounts satisfactorily for the Susan evidence and for the Iranian and Babylonian coinages. It leaves, however, unaccounted the first Phriapitid in Nisa, who is left without a coinage, a possibility if his was an ephemeral adventure, yet certainly is a disturbing negative evidence. As Gotarzes and his queen Ashiabatara are the ones mentioned in the colophons both prior and subsequent to the Avroman parchment, Mithridates III may well be also the king of the Avroman parchment and it makes sense that among his queens Ariazate Automa is specially mentioned as the daughter of Tigranes, as we know that Mithridates II had supported Tigranes ascent to the Armenian throne and that may well have involved a marriage between a son of Mithridates II and a daughter of Tigranes. Within the framework of this interpretation Type 30 would be the Mithridates who received the prisoner Demetrius III and types 29 and 32 should be credited to Gotarzes I.

Next comes the pair 34–31 and here we are on firm ground. The coins themselves tell us that type 31 follows type 34 and the coins from Susa prove that type 34 ruled there for somewhat more than one year and type 31 for something more than seven years. Now, when in 80/79 BC the king of type 30 (Mithridates III?) vanishes,<sup>43</sup> a new war starts, this time between an Orodes (I) and someone else, who may well be the prince mentioned in an ostrakon of 78/77 from Nisa. This same prince can well be Sinatruces, as the dates would reasonably fit for the dates which may be deduced from the classical sources and, again with the fact that, though an Arsacid, Sinatruces was not of the direct line of descent of Mithridates II. Again, Sinatruces is the ideal candidate for type 31 as: a) the annual bronzes from Susa give him a rule of just a bit more than 7 years, which is the length of the reign of Sinatruces according to Lucian, who, considering his scathing comments on his contemporary historians precisely on Parthian matters, must be considered as a scrupulous author.<sup>44</sup> b) As we have already discussed, the title *Autokrator* in the inscription on the coins of type 31 tells us that the king was not the son of another king and that he had got the crown by force, while that of *Philopator* may well be a generic reference to Arsacid ancestry. Meantime, the parallel type 34 has just three issues in Susa which nicely correspond with the span covered by the records of Orodes I: from Nisan of year 80/79 to the end of 76 BC, followed, apparently, by a spell of peaceful times. I, therefore, suggest that both the modified coins of type 34 and those

<sup>43</sup> He may have vanished earlier and his successor was initially unchallenged, but such an assumption would clash with the evidence of the annual bronzes from Susa.

<sup>44</sup> Lucian: *Luciani Samosatensi Quomodo historia conscribenda sit*.

of type 31 should be attributed to Sinatruces, while the intact coins of type 34 are the coinage of Orodes I.

The next phase is more complex and I, honestly, consider my proposal as tentative just as I shall point to some difficulties that my proposal fails to clear entirely.

The fragmentary historical record is at least positive that, while for the Greek and Roman historians Phraates III was the only Arsacid with whom the Romans on the spot had some dealings between 70/69 and 57 BC, the tablets and the ostraka clearly show that most of this period was one of internecine conflicts and this is confirmed by the coinage. The coins show that five types<sup>45</sup> were struck during this period, most probably corresponding to at least four kings. The internal evidence of the coinage (apart from the evidence of the engraver's series, which will be argued in a separate section) shows that type 33 is the last series struck without monograms and it nicely follows type 31: the title Theopator correctly applies to Phraates III, who was a son of Sinatruces; and also the title Nikator may suit a king that was apparently challenged by pretenders almost immediately and that, as shown by the coinage of Susa, was able to keep control at least there for some four years.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, the transitional issue and the countermarks by Otanes strongly suggest that type 33 was the early coinage of the king of type 39, who is undoubtedly Phraates III. Of the other three series Type 36, if we give credit to the inscription by the title Philopator may or may not claim imperial parentage (see page 150), this is claimed by the king of type 35, while type 38 does not give any clue to his parentage. Two things are clear for me: that it is incredible that a king, once he has adopted the tiara can shift to the diadem, nor that the titles Theopator and Philopator could be used by the same king<sup>47</sup> at random or adopting Philopator after having used Theopator, while the contrary is possible, therefore I think that we have three kings competing in turn with Phraates and, at times, practically controlling the whole empire (types 36 and 38) or, at least all the Iranian mints (type 35), a situation like those occurring later during the rules of Phraates IV, Artabanus II, Volagases I or around the times of Trajan's attempt to conquer Parthia.

Phraates, at least during the second part of his rule certainly claimed the title "King of kings" and the same title was probably claimed also by one of his enemies (Vonones). The tablets and the ostraka may give some evidence to support this reconstruction, but this is certainly equivocal. The ostrakon from Nisa of 68/67 BC suggest a pretender of the Phriapitid lineage of a branch different from that of Sinatruces-Phraates III as, had the text referred to Phraates III it would simply have referred to his deceased father, rather than to such a distant ancestry. The ostrakon might, possibly, fit for type 36 (Ar-

<sup>45</sup> The extremely rare type 37 may well be a development of type 36. However, it could also be supposed that it is an early issue of Phraates III as associate with his father Sinatruces. This has been proposed by Assar and, although I find his argument unconvincing, especially considering the very different features, which rather resemble those of type 36 yet I think that, on the available evidence it can not be either proved or definitely disproved.

<sup>46</sup> Given the reported old age of Sinatruces, Phraates III may have claimed the title Nikator for some victories gained in the name of his father.

<sup>47</sup> Clearly this was possible for a prince having begun his issues as an associate with his father. For instance the early issues of drachms and coppers of Orodes II, that with a Nike on the obverse, have the title *philopator*, which vanishes from all the following issues; it is also possibly a disclaim by Orodes to be involved in the murder of his father.

saces Philopator, who may also be the Vonones of the Parthian/Saka issues), while the husband of Piruztana could be the king of type 38 (and, again, he could be Vonones I, though, considering that the coinage of Vonones and Spalagadama must be dated around 65 BC<sup>48</sup>, type 38 appears a bit late for this association). Whether the “king of kings” associated with his mother and the one associated with Teleonike were the same ruler, we can not tell, anyway either of them is almost certainly Phraates III. The association of a queen-mother with an Arsaces king of kings remains a mystery.

The issues of type 35 pose no problem: They are rare, thus pointing to a rather ephemeral adventure, though one sufficiently successful for a time to allow for the capture of almost the whole of Iran. Meantime the documents from Babylonia and from Susa, will certainly not mention him except indirectly by mentioning the local ruler in association with at least a queen. However, this general hypothesis requires two further hypotheses, and for them there is no evidence or rather there is a contrary one: the last two-three years of the Dark Age were, according the colophons of the tablets, quiet ones and they are plainly needed to lodge the coinage of type 39, but 39 is absent from Susa and, actually it appears that there the coinage of type 38 lasted at least until the accession of Orodes II. An obvious answer to the problem could be that, just as it happened in the third century in the Roman empire a *modus vivendi* had been reached between 38 and Phraates with 38 acknowledging some sort of overlordship by Phraates. However, this is clearly an *ad hoc* suggestion for which there is no positive evidence.

Clearly we can not exclude a ding-dong sort of control by the different rulers on some mints such as we know, for several occasions in the Parthian history, when we find two kings issuing coins in Seleucia even in the same month. The real difficulty is that the tablets of the last three years do not mention the queens so that, apparently, no one was challenging Phraates, while the absence of type 39 from Susa, clearly shows that at least that town was not under the control Phraates III (type 39)!

To conclude this essay, I think that if both the numismatic and the historical evidence are examined without previous bias the following list is the best chronological order possible given the evidence presently available, with the proviso that the names associated with each type must be considered as tentative suggestions and dates are necessarily approximate:

Gotarzes I (types 29 and 32) 90–87 BC, Mithradates III (?) (type 30) 90–79 BC, Orodes I (Type 34) 79–76 BC, Sinatruces (type 31) 79–69 BC, Phraates III (first period) (type 33) 69–65 BC, Arsaces XVI (Vonones I?) (types 36 and 37) 64–60 BC, Arsaces XVII (type 35) about 60 BC, Arsaces XVIII (type 38) 60–57 BC, Phraates III second period (type 39) 65–57 BC (probably with gaps).

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<sup>48</sup> Spalagadama actually shifted his allegiance from Vonones to Spalyris, clearly a Šaka, who precedes Spalirises, who is the immediate predecessor of Azes I, the originator of the Era of 58 BC. Therefore, Vonones brief overlordship on Spalahora and Spalagadama, is probably to be dated around 65 BC.

## APPENDIX

### The problem of the “engraver’s sequence”

In a well known paper of 1976 Sellwood proposed a new approach to the problem of arranging the Parthian drachms of the “Dark Age” in a chronological sequence: having noticed certain peculiarities in the figures of Arsaces in the reverse of the drachms of the “Dark Age” which allowed for the grouping of several coins of different kings, correctly argued that these were features that depended on the craftsmanship and whims of the engraver and that, as it could be presumed that each engraver’s active period would span a certain time, when the coins of two or more kings were the work of the same engraver (and even better of a given group of engravers) these must have been produced within a comparatively short time. He, therefore, argued that it should be possible to “chain” such groups by the gradual transition from a given group of engravers to an entirely different one.

In principle the method is impeccable, however, there are some remarks to be done that suggest that these criteria may have some limits of reliability. Indeed we know nothing of the actual functioning of the mints in Parthia, so that we can not be sure whether some engravers might eventually move, at least occasionally from one mint to another or dies be dispatched from one workshop to different officinae, possibly located in different places (for instance an army could travel with a supply of dies to be ready to issue coins as it captured or otherwise got the necessary bullion). Moreover, a worker might, for different reasons, such as, for instance for political disgrace, stop engraving for some years and so on. Finally as the sample available to Sellwood at the time was comparatively small: 624 coins, but actually only 395 really belonging to the “Dark Age” (practically the coins in the British Museum, the Cabinet des Médailles and those of his collection as they were at the time); moreover, out of these 395 coins 31 remained “unattributed”, that is, Sellwood did not think the evidence adequate for the attribution of these coins to any of the engravers that he had identified, thus actually reducing the sample to 364. Finally it is difficult to avoid some measure of subjectivity in the attribution to given “engravers” of coins showing clearly some features, but that are untypical for others. Moreover, clearly Sellwood’s results should have been checked as often as possible and on as large a sample as possible in order to discover whether A) additional engravers spanning different kings could be identified and whether they confirmed or not the original proposals, B) whether among the newly considered coins one might find coins engraved by known engravers for kings other than those for whom they were already known to have worked, C) whether any additional evidence would support the attributions to different mints proposed by Sellwood for the coins without monograms. Indeed Sellwood first assumed that the monograms on the coins from the second half of the “Dark Age” stand for the name of the mint (and his proposals are, indeed, mostly quite convincing) and thence worked backwards proposing stylistic criteria for the attribution to different mints of coins without monogram.

The sample considered here numbers a total of 2374 coins. It partly overlaps with that used by Sellwood as I have had the opportunity to examine Sellwood’s collection as it is now, the British Museum’s and part of that in the Cabinet des Médailles, but I did



not have the time to check precisely which were the coins used by Sellwood in his original study and which were the later additions to the various collections.

I must say that I am convinced that the only way to get really objective results would be the implementation on the largest possible sample of the rigorous tests of similarity that we currently use in biology.<sup>49</sup> Indeed the simple inspection of the coins, casts and photographs is easily subjectively biased. As a matter of fact I have tried together with David Sellwood to check all my files and the result was that we were unable to attribute well over one half of the total coins considered to any of the "engravers" proposed by Sellwood himself in 1976 and in many other instances we were uncertain as the coins appeared transitional between the features of two proposed engravers. [Just as possibly significant examples of the difficulties that I met with this revision of the evidence; on all the rare coins of type 31/7 known to me (the type with "fleur de lys" instead of the star on the tiara) the bashlik has no cheek-flaps, a feature that, according Sellwood's key occurs only with "engraver H", but again in all these coins the right sleeve reaches much lower than the throne seat and is terminated by a horizontal bar and the identical mixture of features occurs on some coins of type 33, while in Sellwood key in H the sleeve always terminates at the seat's level, thus just here in an issue that shows a transitional obverse between 34 and 31, we have reverses that are typical of 31, but that have transitional features as far as the "engravers" are concerned; a second instance: Sellwood's key of characters mentions under "engraver G": "bottom of legend read from outside, not inside of square as normal." and , as, otherwise, this feature is not mentioned for any other "engraver", it is apparently diagnostic; however this is not true: it is shared with all the drachms of types 26 and 27, all of those of type 39 with the mintmark of Rhagae, with the bottom two lines of the drachms of type 36 with mintmark of Rhagae and several with the mintmark of Ecbatana and of the court mint!]. Again, as another example of the problems faced: several dies have an inscription arranged so as to leave a very cramped space for the figure of Arsaces and that, on one side, is a distinctive feature of one or more engravers, while, on the other side, the little space available dictated some features of the figure, so that they may not correspond with the similar features as engraved by the same engraver on larger images allowed by a different inscription. This is particularly significant considering the transition between the coins without monograms and those with monograms as it is quite clear that the need to find room for the monograms introduced new constraints for the engraver, so that the same celator may have been obliged to significantly modify his figures. Finally, while it is probable that the main peculiarities of the figure of Arsaces were sufficiently proper to each engraver, when a change of ruler required a change in the wording of the inscription it may well have involved other changes, so that, for instance in the case of my attribution to "engraver G" of some coins of type 39 I have not considered the inscription. I must finally add that the plates illustrating the original paper by Sellwood are not very good and, therefore, some images do not show clearly the diagnostic details listed in the text or may even seem not to correspond to the diagnose suggested by the different characters listed in the text. However, to propose a new key to the identification of the engravers and, in some cases, to suggest some changes, would make it practically impossible a comparison.

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<sup>49</sup> I say "we" as my really main field of research is evolutionary morphology.

Given the aforesaid problems, I must say that while I acknowledge in principle the validity of the evidence provided by the “engraver’s sequence”, yet I do not think that at the present stage of development of the techniques its evidence is, alone, sufficient to overrule other kinds of evidence.

This given, there is yet no doubt that this line of evidence should be duly considered and, though with some reservations, I herewith offer my results.

We shall begin this section by re-considering Sellwood’s original Table as this will enable us to identify precisely the evidence necessary to check the proposals set forth in the preceding sections.

Here Table I is Sellwood’s (1976) Table I, simplified by substituting the numbers of coins recognized as engraved by each celator with a + as clearly what is relevant is not the number of specimens recorded for each engraver, but the fact that his activity for a given king is certified or not, moreover I have here omitted the X that in Sellwood’s table fill gaps that he expected to be, sooner or later, filled by positive evidence.

Table I

Type	Engraver																	Unatt.	Total
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q		
26	+	+	+															16	32
27		+	+	+														7	39
28			+	+														12	41
29			+		+													3	16
33			+		+													3	51
31			+		+	+	+	+										2	58
30					+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+						18	92
34			+		+	+		+										0	14
36					+	+				+	+	+	+	+				3	58
35					+						+	+	+					0	14
38					+								+	+	+	+		1	47
39					+						+			+	+	+	+	1	45
40					+							+		+	+	+	+	4	66
41					+										+		+	0	24
42					+													0	3
43					+										+		+	1+	24

A first consideration concerns the column of “engraver E”. This appears with type 29, that almost everyone places at the very beginning of the “Dark Age”, that is, most probably in 90 BC and is still active with type 43,<sup>50</sup> which undoubtedly belongs to Orodes II and which is certainly not his first issue, so that the activity of this engraver should span from 90 to, at least, 55 BC and quite possibly even later, not less than 35 years! Clearly this is not impossible, but is disturbingly out of proportion to the time range of all the

<sup>50</sup> For a recent discussion of the possible attributions of types 40 and 41 see Simonetta/Sellwood (2006).

other “engravers” who seem to be active for approximately 10 years each. Anyway E clearly does not provide any evidence for the chronological arrangement of the issues.

Though Sellwood remarked that he was in some doubt as to the possibility of really distinguishing between “engraver J” and “engraver O”, it is equally clear that Sellwood’s conclusions of 1976 fully support a clear cut distinction between an early group of issues always without monograms on the drachms and a later one that, but for rare specimens, have a monogram and that the sequence of the issues with monograms is the same arrived in the previous sections of this paper. Naturally there are considerable differences in the ruler’s names associated with each issue. This, obviously, has nothing to do with the chronological arrangement of the issues, but depends on the interpretation of the literary and other historical evidence and its tentative correlation with the different issues. The wealth of new evidence that has accrued during these last years and the problems of their interpretation have been already discussed.

The relevant differences between the chronological arrangement of the early issues proposed in the foregoing sections of this paper and that proposed by Sellwood in 1976, therefore, concern the internal arrangement of the issues without monograms and their connection with the engravers sequence of the second part of the “Dark Age”.

Let us then see what happens if we try to re-arrange Sellwood’s evidence, supplemented by that accruing from the material at my disposal, according to the sequence proposed in the previous section:

Table II

Type	Engravers																	Sell	Here
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	O	K	L	M	N	P	Q		
26	+	+	+															32	275
27		+	+	+														39	216
28			+	+														41	233
29			+		+													16	76
30			**		+	+	+	+	+	+		+	+					92	236
34			+		+	+		+		**								14	42*
31			+		+	+	+	+					**					58	236*
33			+		+		**	**?		**?								51	206
36			**		+	+					+	+	+	+	+			58	127
35					+							+		+				14	116
38					+						+		+	+	+			47	282
39					+	**	**				+		+		+	+	+	45	87
40					+						+				+	+	+	66	82
41					+										+		+	24	46
42					+													3	12
43					+										+	+	+	24	102

\* Sellwood counted under type 34 both the intact coins and those struck by modified dies, I have counted the coins struck by modified dies (25) as belonging to type 31, both arrangements are defensible. Indeed, while, from a historical outlook, the coins with

modified obverse of type 34 must be considered as issues of the same ruler as those of type 31, yet, as the coins are almost all struck by unmodified reverse dies of type 34, from the standpoint of the “Engraver’s series”, they must count as coins of type 34.

In the second table, while the symbol + marks the engravers identified by Sellwood, re-arranged according my new proposals, the symbol \*\* marks the additions that, for the only span of the “Dark Age”, have been identified on the additional material examined (fig. 31). I have also displaced the column for “engraver O” to the vicinity of the column of “engraver J” as, given the difficulty of separating the two, as noticed by Sellwood, they may well be, in fact a unique sequence.

The comparison of the two tables shows : A) that as already said, as far as types 35, 36, 37, 38 and 39 are concerned both the sequence proposed by myself in this paper and that originally proposed by Sellwood on the evidence of his “engravers sequence” are the same. There are, indeed important differences between my proposals and those of Assar and the other previous authors in the names of the kings associated with each type, but this is a matter of matching the numismatic and the historical evidence and does not concern the chronological order of the issues and, as we have seen, these depend both on the interpretation of the meagre historical record and on the acceptance of the hypothesis, that I reject, that portraits significantly different may actually belong to the same king and be almost contemporary.

Again, when we consider the first part of the tables (that concerning types 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, and 34, we may immediately notice that the sole evidence of the “engravers” is inconclusive: discounting, as I said “engraver E” who is shared by all the rulers of the Dark Age and is thus of no significance, there are only two gaps in this otherwise perfectly homogeneous group: type 34 apparently does not employ “engraver G” and type 31 did not employ “Engraver J” (though as I am not entirely sure of my identification of an “engraver J” coin of type 33 the gap might not exist). As type 34 is comparatively rare the gap can not be considered as really significant: It follows that the “engravers evidence” does not provide any significant evidence for the chronological sequence of types 29 (+32), 30, 31, 33 and 34 and thus we must entirely rely on the other evidence discussed in the previous sections. More particularly it is perfectly indifferent to place 34 previous to 31 or vice versa; therefore, the evidence of the modified obverses of type 34 and of a gradual transition from 34 to 31 makes it safe to assume that 34 comes just before 31.

No comment is necessary about type 32 as it was originally credited by Sellwood with just three coins: two tetradrachms, which are irrelevant in a discussion of his “engravers sequence” and a single barbarous drachm, which is equally irrelevant, there being, anyway, no evidence for associating it with the tetradrachms.<sup>51</sup>

The critical problem, therefore, depends on the positions in the series of types 30 and 33.

As I have already said there is no real evidence for a definite “engravers sequence” for this group of types. Anyway, if we want to make some additional remarks, the relative positions of type 30 and 33 depends on the evidence of engravers C, E, J, K, L, and O.

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<sup>51</sup> The reasons for assuming that the tetradrachms of “type 32” were issued by the same king who issued the drachms of type 29 have already been seen.

However, as we saw, the evidence of E is irrelevant as, according to Sellwood, this engraver was active continuously from well before 90 to at least 55 BC.<sup>52</sup> As to C, the new additions fill the gap that occurred by the evidence collected by Sellwood, so that no gap appears by the arrangement proposed here. The new arrangement may, as well, support a link between 31 and 33 as good as that of 31 with 30 and 34. Finally the find that “engraver L” was active for type 31 and thus fills much of the residual gap between types 30 and 36 as, given that we can not know when L was active for type 31, it follows from what we have argued in the previous pages, that the gap between 30 and 31, under the arrangement and attribution proposed here, was at most of 3–4 years and, again, that between 31 and 36 may well be by a couple of years.

To conclude the additions supplied by a larger sampling reduce the gaps that would be most disturbing for the new arrangement proposed here if we remained to the original sample studied by Sellwood in 1976, so that the new “engraver’s sequence” is in no way opposed to the revised chronology of the issues suggested here.

As for the later issues it appears that we have two clear “packages”: 35, 36 (+37?), 38 and 40, 41, 42, clearly connected by type 39, which also provides a tenuous link with the “package” 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, while the chronological arrangement of the issues of types 35, 36 and 38 does not find any clear evidence in the “engravers sequence”, nor does this sequence provide evidence for the sequencing of types 40, 41, 42, which depends on other pieces of evidence (symbols on the obverse, inscriptions). We may thus conclude that the “engraver’s sequence” does not tell much about the chronological arrangement of the coins considered and, anyway, it does not provide any evidence against the arrangement proposed here, while it might be worth while to carry out a new, comprehensive revision of the whole evidence concerning the engravers of the “Dark Age” on an even larger sample than that available to me.

### **Some objections to the proposals by Assar and by Vardanyan**

As I have said in the introductory section of this paper, two most relevant papers have been recently published (Assar 2006b; Vardanyan 2006) on the “Dark Age”. As it is apparent from the previous pages, I do not agree with several of their conclusions and I think it is methodologically correct to devote some pages to point the arguments by these scholars that I think that may be faulted.

Obviously, given the fragmentary and often obscure nature of the evidence, I think that just as I regard also the proposals advanced in this paper as being tentative, so also the following remarks must be considered as accurate only as far as the “state of the art” allows and new evidence may fault them.

As a preliminary consideration I wish to underlie that, but for type 39, while the attribution of each type by myself is different from that advocated by Assar (as we have seen Vardanyan refrains to associate the different issues with definitely named kings), yet the sequence 36–35–38–39 is the same here as that advocated by both Assar and Vardanyan, though, possibly, 36 and 35 may overlap in some sort of ding-dong struggle.

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<sup>52</sup> A continuous activity of some 35–40 years or more, though not impossible, is surprising.



Again as a useful premise let us consider table V, where are summarized the sequences proposed by myself, Sellwood, Assar and Vardanyan, for the types discussed here.

My proposal	Sellwood 1980	Assar 2006b	Vardanyan 2006	
29+32 Gotarzes I	29 Mithradates II	33 (Sinatruces 93/92–69/68)	4dr: 30	dr: 33
30 Mithradates III	33 Gotarzes I	29 Gotarzes I (91–87)	34	29
34 Orodes I	31 Orodes I	31 Mithradates III (87–80)	31	34
31 Sinatruces	32 unknown king1	34 Orodes I (80–75)	37	30
33 Phraates III	30 unknown king2	30 Arsaces XVI (75–67/66)	36	31
36+37 Arsaces XVI	34 Sinatruces	35 Phraates III (70/69–58/57)	38	36
35 Arsaces XVII (Vonones I?)	36+37+35 Darius?	38 Phrates III	39	35
38 Arsaces XVIII (Vonones I?)	38 Phraates III	36+37 Phraates III		38
39 Phraates III	39 Phraates III	39 Phraates III		39

As far as Assar's paper is concerned, I must first stress the great debt that we owe to his effort to revise and add to the documentary evidence, yet his conclusions are much at variance with those advocated in the present paper. Most of my objections to his interpretation of the coinage and documents for the "Dark Age" proper, again is implicit in my arguments for attributions different from those advocated by Assar, so that they do not need to be reiterated. However, some points may be stressed as if one agrees that on these points Assar's reconstruction and attributions do not stand criticism, then, by a sort of chain reaction, all the other assumptions where his tenets are different from my conclusions, will be invalidated. The first is that his whole reconstruction of the life history of Sinatruces<sup>53</sup> is a complex chain of hypotheses (beginning with the attribution to Sinatruces of the coins of type 33 and the supposed civil war of the last two years of the life of Mithradates II) for which there is not any definite evidence as Sinatruces is known to us merely by the brief statements of Lucian and Phlegon and from them we can just say that he was recalled from exile and won the crown with the support of Scythian tribes, that he was eighty when attained the crown and that he ruled for about 7 years. Clearly it is possible that he may have spent most of his life in futile attempts to the crown, but no source mentions it. Moreover, the colophons of Mithradates II listed by Assar, as they all mention simply "Arsaces king of kings" are strong evidence against the hypothesis that someone rose against Mithradates II during his last years and the gap of two years in the coinage of Susa by Mithradates II (on which depends much of his chronology) is the result of his own proposal of pooling into two of four issues that had been kept separate by Le Rider and is, therefore, impossible to verify (see footnote 13).

Both Assar and myself agree that type 29 (and the tetradrachms of type 32 are the coinage of Assar's Gotarzes I), this, as argued before leaves us with the alternative of having

<sup>53</sup> Incidentally it may be noted that Assar's argument about the relationships between Gotarzes and Sinatruces gives an incidental reference the Firdausi's "Shahnameh" and to the supposed identification of one of the characters of the poem with Sinatruces. As proved by de Santillana and Dechend (1983) in their discussion of the astronomical references in the poem, the whole story relates to an age much earlier than the Parthian period and can not have any reference with the Arsacids. Whoever proposed the identification quoted by Assar had overlooked the precession of equinoxes!

either type 33 or type 30 as coming before the pair 34–31. Dr. Assar in his kind comments on a previous draft of this paper has stressed three points as supporting both an early position for 33 and a late one for 30, namely: a) the supposed existence of overstrikes from Susa by type 36 on type 30, b) the engraver’s sequence proposed by Mørkholm (1980) for the tetradrachms, c) a hoard owned by Assar of about 50 drachms, all in practically mint conditions and consisting only of coins of types 28 and 33 and one or two of type 29. As for a) as already stated, I can confirm, having both examined the original coins and having their casts, that Le Rider (1965) is perfectly right: the overstrikes are *not* on coins of type 30. As for b) I simply think that, as in many other instances in which I had to check Mørkholm’s arguments, Mørkholm is simply wrong and, anyway, is unsupported by the drachm’s engraver’s sequence, there remains point c) and this is indeed a curious hoard, as its evidence appears to run contrary to that of other hoards of drachms so far recorded which bulk is consistently made of types 31, 33 and 39, which also make up the bulk of the coins counter-stamped by “Otanés” (see A. Simonetta 1966, 2001). As I have already briefly discussed this hoard and, as I have previously said, the assessment of the precise significance of hoards other than those from regular excavations, is always problematic, therefore, I refrain from an opinion on the relative weight of the evidence from this hoard against the evidence of all the other hoards on record. The clear links between types 34 and 31 and the clear and logical argument for placing type 34 just before type 31 leave us, as already repeatedly stated, with the only choice to have either type 33 or type 30 to precede type 34.

The second point of Assar’s reconstructions which is plainly untenable is placing type 31 before type 34 (type 31 being attributed to “Mithradates III” (dated 87–80 BC) and 34 to Orodes I (dated 80–75 according Assar). This point has been discussed before and, while I agree with Assar in attributing type 34 to Orodes, I think that it is absolutely plain that 34 is immediately followed by 31 (who, therefore, is necessarily Sinatruces and all the evidences confirm it) and that type 30 can not possibly come after 34 (and we have seen the reasons to pair 30 with 29/32 and how the evidence of the “engravers sequence” which originally suggested to place type 30 after 34 and 31 should be revised). Just as an addition to support the suggestion that types 33 and 39 belong to the same king: consideration of Fig. 30, which illustrates just some examples, the identity of portraits means that, in order to maintain that 33 and 39 are different kings, all such examples are mules!

Finally Assar packages types 35, 36, 37, 38 and 39 as the coinage of Phraates III; we have seen my arguments for crediting these issues to different kings, but the documentary evidence listed by Assar himself plus the Indo-Saka coinage of Spalahora and Spalagadama plainly show that the whole span of the reign of Phraates III was beset with troubles and that he must have repeatedly lost control of different provinces if not of almost of the whole empire: there may have been a Darius of Media, who might (though I do not advocate it) be the purely Iranian responsible for type 35; the king with Piruztanaa and that with Teleonike appear to be different characters and, anyway prove that when the documents were written there were at least two contenders for the crown; there probably was a Vonones.

Thus it is plain that, by the evidence listed by Assar himself, Phraates’ reign was one of almost chronic civil wars, possibly with true gaps, as it happened to different Par-

thian kings (Phraates IV, Artabanus II, Volagases I) and to some Sassanids, and, therefore, that we must expect that the late issues of the “Dark Age” that Assar pools under Phraates III must be split among different kings, which is much more credible than to consider that the same king, contrary to the main Parthian tradition before and after the “Dark Age” used at the same mints entirely different types, not to mention considerable portrait differences. It may be objected that we have in the Parthian coinage examples of development in the king’s portraiture, yet this will not change, for instance the outline of the nose (almost Socratic in the best portraits of type 36, hooked in type 39)!

As for Vardanyan’s paper, I have no problem with his extremely accurate analysis of the coinage of type 30 from Seleucia.

I fully agree with Vardanyan arguments linking types 30, 34 and 31, which actually support my arguments for the arrangement proposed here. Indeed my only two objections concern: the first the significance attributed to the monogram ΣΥΜ as, as I have previously written, the evidence from precisely dated issues from other kingdoms prove that monograms do not always chronologically link two issues as often the same monogram occurs at some intervals in the coinage even of different kings (e.g. A. Simonetta 2006). Monograms standing for names, the same magistrate may hold office repeatedly at some years interval or homonyms use the same monogram. The second is that one cannot rule out the possibility of overlapping of two issues distinguished by details such as the legs of the throne of Arsaces, clearly depending only on the engraver, as it is quite possible that two or more engravers were simultaneously at work at the same mint.

A first point of substantial disagreement with Vardanyan concerns the supposed links between type 30 and 37, and between 30 and 36. Vardanyan correctly says that the only real link between these issues are the two monograms (mon. 9) and B; now (apart from the fact that a single letter being just the first letter of a name may have been used by anyone whose name happened to begin with H or B), I have already explained why the evidence from monograms must be taken with reservations. The other pieces of evidence quoted by Vardanyan are just the engraver’s peculiarities and just if one accepts Sellwood’s “engraver’s sequence” “engraver E” apparently has been active for something like forty years!

As for Vardanyan’s placing of type 33, the two mules that he quotes in support have already been discussed and their significance, for what it is, does not support Vardanyan’s argument.

Again, while I agree with Vardanyan as to the reasons to group the tetradrachm of type 32 with the drachms of type 29, I think that he was misled to consider at all the drachms that Sellwood has included in his “type 32”. These drachms (three specimens known, possibly from the same pair of dies) are quite clearly “barbarous imitations”, an irregular issue whose obverse was cut in imitation of a drachm of Mithradates II with tiara (type 28) and the reverse, for what may be made of a completely blundered inscription, may be an imitation of a “type 30”. Such imitations were possibly done in Bactria or Sogdiana like the countermarked coins discussed in pages 157–158, and have scarcely any significance for the arranging of the regular Parthian issues.

Finally a few words about “types 40, 41 and 44”. While the significance of the “dated” coins (type 40/16) has been discussed in the previous pages, the attribution of the other coins of types 40 and 41 to Mithradates III has been argued *in extenso* by Sellwood and

myself in another paper (A. Simonetta/Sellwood 2006), which clearly Vardanyan had no opportunity to see, and we concluded that, while 40/16 was the first issue of Orodes II, all the others, but for the obliterated tetradrachms of type 41, can not possibly belong to Mithradates III (IV), their attribution remaining doubtful; moreover, that there is no evidence whatsoever for Mithradates ruling as an associate either of Phraates III or of Orodes II, but simply that he got Media and ruled there, probably for but a few months, in 57 BC. As for the tetradrachms of type 44 both myself and Sellwood agree that they most probably belong to Pacorus I and were possibly struck in Syria during his campaigns there.

A more significant point of disagreement concerns the placement of type 33. Of the evidences quoted to support this placement, that which refers to Sellwood’s engraver’s sequence has been already discussed, just as that concerning the mule 31/33 or rather modified 34/33. The last evidence, that of coins of type 33 showing the king with a long beard like that of Mithradates II (Vardanyan 2006: 115) is apparently assumed because Vardanyan had access to a rather limited sample. In fact such obverses on type 33 are not that rare and definitely most of the drachms of type 33 have a more or less rather long beard whose terminal tip is often off flan. However, coins showing the long-bearded portraits occur also, though more rarely, on type 39 (Fig. 30) and the coin illustrated is struck by an obverse die that, though not the same, is so close to one of type 33 as to be almost certain that they were both by the same engraver.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

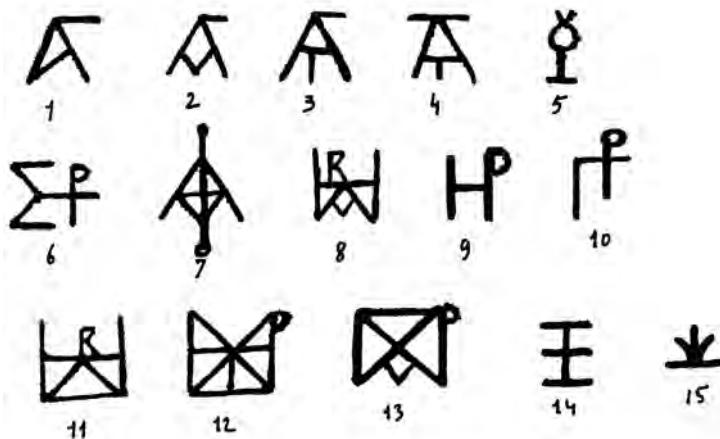
I am especially grateful to Dr. G.R.F. Assar, who read successive drafts of this paper and made extensive comments on it. He pointed out to me some factual mistakes in my first draft, so that I was able to make the necessary amendments and by listing in detail his reasons of disagreement to my proposals has enabled me to re-examine the evidence and, even where I still disagree with him, either to amend or clarify several statements, or to offer additional arguments to counter his objection. Thus I must stress my obligation to a friend that has been so helpful in the improvement of a paper that yet maintains several criticisms to his own tenets.

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Monograms of the coins



Fig. 1. A tetradrachm of type 23.2 and the drachm with ΦΙΛΑΔΕΛΦΟΥΥ possibly belonging to the same king (both author's coll.)



Fig. 2. Drachm of type 29 (author's coll.)



Fig. 3. Tetradrachms and drachms of type 30: (a) from Petrowicz, (b) Mørkholm, (c-d-e) author's coll.)



Fig. 4. Tetradrachm and drachm of type 31  
(author's coll.)



Fig. 5. Tetradrachm of type 32  
(author's coll.)



Fig. 6. Drachm of type 33  
(author's coll.)



Fig. 7. Tetradrachm and drachm of type 34  
(tetradrachm American Numismatic Soc.;  
drachm author's coll.)



Fig. 8. drachm of type 35  
(author's coll.)



Fig. 9. Tetradrachm and drachms (with and without monogram) of type 36 (tetradrachm  
formerly Shore coll.; drachms author's coll.)



Fig. 10. Tetradrachm of type 37  
(after Mørkholm)



Fig. 11. Tetradrachm and drachm of type 38  
(tetradrachm Petrowicz; drachm author's coll.)



Fig. 12. Tetradrachm and drachms with and without monogram of type 39: (a) tetradrachm British Museum; drachm (b) author's coll.; (c) Sellwood coll.



Fig. 13. Reconstruction, by comparison of the different overstrikes, of the under-type overstruck by type 36 in Susa, showing that it has a different number of words and a different arrangement from the coins of type 30 and probably corresponding with known inscriptions on coins of type 35



Fig. 14. A series of drachms showing the transition from type 34 to 31 (author's coll., except e) from Sellwood coll.)



Fig. 15. The series of “dated drachms” of types 38–39–40: (a): ΒΠΣ author’s coll.; (b): ΓΠΣ author’s coll.; (c): ΓΠΣ author’s coll.; (d): ΕΠΣ author’s coll.; (f): ΣΠΣ Sellwood coll.; I have failed to get a picture of the coin marked ΔΠΣ.



Fig. 16. Drachm of type 33–39 with ΘΕΟΠΑΤΟΡ ΦΙΛΕΛΛΗΝΟΣ (Sellwood coll.)



Fig. 17. Drachm of Gondophares I based (Nike instead of Tyke) on the types of the tetradrachm of type 39 (author’s coll.)



Fig. 18. Mule 28/31 counter-stamped by “Otanés” (formerly Shore coll.).



Fig. 19. Mule 30/28 (author’s coll.)



Fig. 20. A normal type 30 and the mule 30/34 apparently by the same engraver (both Sellwood coll.)



Fig. 21. A normal type 30 and the mule 30/34 apparently by the same engraver (both Sellwood coll.)



Fig. 22. Mule 33?/31 (Assar coll.)



Fig. 23. Mules 30/36 (a, b: author's coll., c, d: Sellwood coll.)



Fig. 24. Mule? 38/30 with EN ΠΑΓΑΙΣ compared with a regular issue 30 (both Sellwood coll.)



Fig. 25. Mule 30/33 (Sellwood coll.)



Fig. 26. Mule 31/43.4? (Hirsch 124 (1989) n. 412)



Fig. 27. Drachm of type 39 with title ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΝ? (Sellwood coll.)





Fig. 28. Modified coin of type 31 but with horn on tiara (Sellwood coll.)



Fig. 29. Overstrike of Mithridates II on a previous coin of himself (author's coll.)



Fig. 30. Usually the coins of type 33 show a king with a somewhat longer beard than those of type 39, however, as shown here, this is far from being a general rule: a, c drachms of type 33 and b, d drachms of type 39, showing identity of portraits both of the short and long bearded varieties on coins of both types (a, d): author's coll.; (b): Sellwood coll.; (c): CNG



Fig. 31. Examples of the additions to the engraver's table: (a): type 30 eng. C (CNG); (b): 34 eng. J (author's coll.); (c): 31 eng. L (author's coll.); (d): 36 eng. G (Num. Fine Arts); (e): 33 eng. G (author's coll.); (f): 39 eng. G (Num. Fine Arts); (g): 39 eng. F (author's coll.); (h): 33 eng. H? (Hirsch)