

AUTOKRATOR PHILOPATOR, KING OF PARTHIA

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Summary. The period of over two decades following the close of Mithradates II's rule (ca. 122-87) is regarded in the literature as a time of deep crisis in the Parthian Empire (ca. 90–70/69). During this time, the succession to the Arsakid throne turned out to be disputed and fights over the crown took place. One of the kings of that period used the titles of *Autokrator Philopator* on his coins (type Sellwood 31). The S31 coins were issued earlier than the S30 and S33 series, which are definitely associated with the Sinatrukids, i.e. with Sinatrukes and Phraates III. The coinages minted by the Autokrator Philopator prove that almost the entire Parthian Empire was under his control, as he struck coins in Seleukeia and in mints in Iran. The new royal epithets used by Autokrator Philopator prove that he was not the obvious candidate for the Arsakid throne and had to compete for power. *Philopator*, or "Loving Father," is an epithet suggesting that the monarch's father was a well-known and significant ruler who represented a certain point of reference for his successors. At the same time, the issuer of S31 emphasized his own achievements by introducing the very rare title of *Autokrator*, or "Self-Appointed." The only ruler to whom Autokrator Philopator conceivably referred to was Mithradates I (ca. 165-133/2). He was therefore one of the numerous sons of Mithradates I alongside Phraates II and possibly Sinatrukes. In this way, Autokrator Philopator took a stand against the dynastic line of Mithradates II, including Gotarzes I. Autokrator Philopator may be identified as Orodes I, whose rule is attested to in cuneiform texts from ca. 80 until 75. Autokrator Philopator may have been connected to the line of Sinatrukes. The name "Orodes" became known in the Sinatrukid line: Phraates III, son of Sinatrukes gave one of his sons the name Orodes (II).

Key words: Parthia, Autokrator Philopator, Orodes I, Sinatrukids, Arsakids, Iran.

Резюме. Период более двух десятилетий после окончания правления Митридата II (ок. 122–87 гг. до н.э.) рассматривается в литературе как время глубокого кризиса в Парфянской империи (ок. 90–70/69 гг. до н.э.). В это время наследование престола Аршакидов оказалось спорным и имела место борьба за корону. Один из царей того периода использовал на своих монетах титул Автократор Филопатор (тип Sellwood 31). Монеты S31 были выпущены раньше серий S30 и S33, которые определенно связаны с Синатрукидами, т.е. с Синатруком и Фраатом III. Монеты, отчеканенные Автократором Филопатором, доказывают, что почти вся Парфянская империя находилась под его контролем, так как он чеканил монеты в Селевкее и на монетных дворах в Иране. Новые царские эпитеты, которыми пользуется Автократор Филопатор, доказывают, что он не был очевидным кандидатом на аршакидский престол и должен был бороться за власть. Филопатор, или «Любящий отца», — это эпитет, предполагающий, что отец монарха был известным и значительным правителем, который представлял определенную точку отсчета для своих преемников. При этом эмитент S31 подчеркнул собственные достижения, введя очень редкое звание *Autokrator*, или «Самодержец». Единственным правителем, на которого предположительно ссылался Автократор Филопатор, был Митридат I (ок. 165–133/2 гг. до н.э.). Таким образом, он был одним из многочисленных сыновей Митридата I наряду с Фраатом II и, возможно, Синатруком. Автократор Филопатор выступил против династической линии Митридата II, включая Готарза I. Автократор Филопатор может быть идентифицирован как Ород I, правление которого засвидетельствовано в клинописных текстах приблизительно с 80 по 75 г. до н.э. Автократор Филопатор мог быть связан с линией Синатруков. Имя «Ород» стало известно в линии Синатрукидов: Фраат III, сын Синатрука, дал одному из своих сыновей имя Ород (II).

Ключевые слова: Парфия, Автократор Филопатор, Ород I, Синатрукиды, Аршакиды, Иран.

The period of over two decades following the close of Mithradates II's rule (ca. 122-87)¹ is regarded in the literature as a time of deep crisis in the Parthian Empire (ca. 90-70/69). During this time, the succession to the Arsakid throne turned out to be disputed and fights over the crown took place. There is no uniform record concerning this period of Parthia's history. In Babylonian cuneiform texts, the kings of Parthia most often appear under the regnal name "Arsakes," which makes identifying them difficult. A monarch's proper name was added only sporadically (Oelsner, 1975; *Del Monte*, 1997. P. 169-182; 249-259; *Shayegan*, 2011. P. 188-240). Coins constitute the most abundant source category for Parthian history ca. 90-70/69 (Le Rider 1965, passim; Sellwood 1976; *Mørkholm*, 1980; *A.M. Simonetta*, 1966, 2001; *Sellwood, Simonetta*, 1978; *Nikitin*, 1984; 1995; *Dobbins*, 1974; 1975; *Olbrycht*, 1997; 2020; *Assar*, 2006; 2009). No proper names of kings can be found on coins; however, royal epithets, attributes (like types of tiaras), and symbols appear which allow us to draw certain historical conclusions. One of these kings used the titles of *Autokrator Philopator*. He minted the most mysterious coins of the period 90-70/69 in Parthia (type S31). They encompass tetradrachms (at least four different issues), drachms, hemidrachms, and bronzes minted in Seleukeia on the Tigris, Ekbatana, Rhaga, Margiana (S31.9), and Susa. The obverse of tetradrachms depicts a bearded bust left wearing tiara decorated on side with six or eight point star, and a circular border of pellets. The reverse shows a beardless archer wearing bashlyk and cloak seated right on throne, holding bow in right hand. *Mørkholm* (1980, P. 35) knows of seven different obverse dies for the S31 tetradrachms.

The legend on S31 coins reads ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΑΥΤΟΚΡΑΤΟΡΟΣ ΦΙΛΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ ΕΠΙΦΑΝΟΥΣ ΦΙΛΕΛΛΗΝΟΣ. Apart from the usual epithets, the legend also includes two rarer ones: *Autokrator* (αὐτοκράτωρ) and *Philopator* (φιλοπάτωρ). This is why the issuer of S31 can be referred to as Autokrator Philopator.

A hoard of coins found at Diyarbekir (Turkie) contained 28 specimens of S31 and 20 or 21 specimens of S33, the latter minted by Sinatrukes (ca. 76/5-70/69) (IGCH 1744). This fact proves that there was a chronological proximity of these two types. The very common S30 coins are missing from the Diyarbekir hoard. This fact implies that the S30 coins were minted after S31 and S33 coinages (*Mørkholm*, 1980. P. 39). There is also another chronological link between type S31 and S33: a type S33 coin was struck from a modified obverse die of type S31; the reverse die was left unchanged (*Loginov, Nikitin*, 1996. P. 41, 44. Fig. 3, 18).

In some iconographical aspects, type S31 clearly refers to the S32 issues, that is, to the coins of Gotarzes I: the tiara shows a star (six-pointed or eight-pointed one) ornament on the side, the legend is arranged in seven lines similarly to that in S32.1. One of the issues, S31.1, shows the control mark A, which also appears on S32.1 coins. A floral emblem appears on the tiara of the issuer of S31 on a few coins (S31.7 drachms). It is known from S34 coins. Furthermore, it can be observed that there is

a chronological proximity between types S31 and S30. (*Nikitin*, 1995. P. 227-228) stresses that S30.9 and S31 coins share the monogram HAP.

All of these observations lead to the conclusion that the S32 and S34 tetradrachms were issued earlier than the S31 coins. The sequence of the drachms is likely S29 – S32 – S34 – S31 – S33 (*Mørkholm*, 1980. P. 40) assumes that the drachms feature the following sequence: S29 – S34 – S31 – S33/S30. He proposes that S31 tetradrachms were minted after S32 tetradrachms and before S34 which is not convincing. *Nikitin* (1995. P. 228) rightly states that S31 coins were issued after S34. Possibly, Autokrator Philopator captured parts of Iran and ruled there simultaneously with another ruler, probably Gotarzes I, for some time. Only later did he control Babylonia, where his tetradrachms were issued.

Seven type-S31 coins were found at Shahr-e Qumis (Parthia proper, northeastern Iran) in the upper layers of Site VII. An ostrakon dated to year 170 of the Arsakid era, which translates to ca. 79/78 B.C., was found nearby (*Bivar*, 1981. P. 80-82); he assumes the calculation 248-170 = 78 B.C.). If the ostrakon and coins come from the same deposit and the same time, then the S31 coins were in circulation around 79/78 B.C. Admittedly this assumption may be not quite exact, but generally the date from the ostrakon falls within the chronological framework that we can attribute to a ruler named Autokrator Philopator who certainly reigned in the decade prior to Sinatrukes, i.e. in the early 70s B.C.

In general, it should be assumed that the S31 coins were issued earlier than the S30 and S33 series, which are definitely associated with the Sinatrukids, i.e. with Sinatrukes and Phraates III. The coinages minted by the Autokrator Philopator prove that almost the entire Parthian Empire was under his control, as he struck coins in Seleukeia and in mints in Iran. Most of the S31 drachms were minted in Ekbatana and Rhaga (S31.5-8). *Shore* (1993, no. 126) assumes a mint in Areia. Some S31 coins were issued in Margiana (S31.9). Autokrator Philopator's coins were discovered at Merv too (one drachm and two chalkoi, see *Loginov, Nikitin*, 1996, P. 41, nos. 15-17).

At Susa, Le Rider 161-169 issues, wrongly attributed to Sinatrukes, represent S31 type. In total, according to G. Le Rider, these bronze issues correspond to 9 years of reign (*Le Rider*, 1965. P. 92-100, 391-404, types 161-169. See also *Olbrycht*, 2020). However, the Susa S31 bronzes may correspond to a semi-annual sequence within five years. The S31 tetradrachms cover four subtypes *Mørkholm* (1980. P. 35) lists seven different obverse dies for S31 tetradrachms), which may hypothetically suggest four years, although this reasoning can only be considered a possibility, but requires verification based on further research. In turn S31 drachms have five subtypes, which may theoretically indicate a rule of up to five years.

The new royal epithets used by Autokrator Philopator prove that he was not the obvious candidate for the Arsakid throne and had to compete for power. *Philopator*, or "Loving Father," is an epithet suggesting that the monarch's father was a well-known and significant ruler who represented a certain point of reference for his successors. At the same time, the issuer of S31 emphasized

¹ All dates are B.C. unless otherwise stated. S is the prefix to Parthian coins types after *Sellwood*, 1980.



Fig. 1. Drachm of Autokrator Philopator. S31.5. Cracow National Museum (no. 5068). Photo: Courtesy of the Cracow National Museum, Numismatic Cabinet
Драхма Автократора Филопатора. S31.5. Краковський національний музей (№ 5068). Фото предоставлено Краковским национальным музеем, Нумизматический кабинет



Fig. 2. Drachm of Arsakes Theopator Nikator (Sinatrukes). S33.4. Cracow National Museum (no. 5070). Photo: Courtesy of the Cracow National Museum, Numismatic Cabinet
Драхма Аршакида Феопатора Никатора (Санатрука). S33.4. Краковський національний музей (№ 5070). Фото предоставлено Краковским национальным музеем, Нумизматический кабинет

his own achievements by introducing the very rare title of *Autokrator*, or “Self-Appointed.” The title *Autokrator* was used in Parthia by Arsakes I (S1.1, S2.1). Another example offers the rival of Phraates IV (37-3/2), Tirdates (S55.7-9) (Olbrycht, 2013). The title of *Autokrator* implies that the claimant was not the legal heir to the late Mithradates II, which is understandable if he was not his son or his brother. The same applies to Gotarzes I as the possible brother or son of Mithradates II. Apparently, *Autokrator Philopator* was not a son of Artabanos I, and thereby a brother of Mithradates II, for his legal legitimacy would have been too strong to use the extraordinary epithet “Self-Appointed.” The succession of *Autokrator Philopator* was obviously not recognized as evidently legitimate among the successors to Mithradates II. But in all likelihood, his father was king, otherwise his chances of taking the throne in Parthia would have been negligible. Likely, therefore, his father had ruled before Mithradates II. Taking into account the political developments in Parthia in the decades prior to the death of Mithradates II, *Autokrator’s* father could have been Phraates II but the latter reigned too short and was too young to leave prominent established successors. The only ruler to whom *Autokrator Philopator* conceivably referred to was Mithradates I (ca. 165-133/2). He was therefore one of the numerous sons of Mithradates I alongside Phraates II and possibly Sinatrukes (Olbrycht, 2021. P. XVII). In this way, *Autokrator Philopator* took a stand against the dynastic line of Mithradates II, including Gotarzes I.

The identification of the issuer of S31 coins is disputed and several rulers have been proposed including Orodes I (Sellwood, 1980. P. 89-92; Nikitin, 1995. P. 228) and Sinatrukes (Wroth, 1903. P. 42-44; Le Rider 1965, 959-960). Mørholm (1980, 43) concludes that S31 coins were minted by an Arsakes within the period 90-86/87. Historical findings and the sequence of coin types imply that the *Autokrator Philopator* reigned between Gotarzes I (ca. 90-80) and Sinatrukes (76/75-70/69). Thus, the possible bearers of the title comprise a mysterious “Arsakes” (Gotarzes I?) from ca. 86–80, known from Babylonian sources, or Orodes I, whose rule is attested to in cuneiform texts from ca. 80 until 75 (Del Monte, 1997.

P. 170, 177, 254-5). The latter possibility seems to be more plausible.

Orodes I appeared in Babylonian texts with the title of King of Kings in the year 80/79 (232 SE, 168 AE) (ADART 5, 25 (obv. 1-3). In other Babylonian texts Orodes, or Urud, is referred to simply as King, and his wife Ispubarza is often mentioned (LBAT 1162 + 1163 [234 SE = 170 AE = 78/77 BC]; LBAT 1171 [236 SE = 172 EA = 76/75 BC]; LBAT 1174 [236 SE = 172 AE = 76/75 BC]. See Del Monte 1997, 255). Orodes I, who was probably responsible for S31 monetary issues, ruled for about five or six years (80-75). This length of reign correlates with the types of monetary issues that suggest coinages covering at least four or five years.

On some coins of *Autokrator Philopator* were countermarks of a ruler called Otanlis (OTANAIS, S91.2), who was most likely a local prince from Bactria or Sakastan (earlier, his name was read as OTANNEΣ, cf. Koshelenko, 1971). The same type of countermark appears later on the coins of the Sinatrukid kings Phraates III (S91.3-5) and Orodes II (S91.6) (NPIIN 1184-1188). In the 1st century B.C., countermarks were often used by local rulers in the eastern borderlands of the *Imperium Parthicum*, especially in Bactria and Sistan/Sakastan, as signs on the coins of the Arsakids, which were considered to be the dominating issues in the regions (Sellwood, 1980. P. 294-295; NPIIN 1142ff.). The links of *Autokrator* with local rulers in Afghanistan imply that this king in some way relied on nomad clans from Bactria and eastern Iran, a policy that was later typical of the Sinatrukids (Sinatrukes, Orodes II, Phraates IV). Therefore, *Autokrator Philopator* may have been connected to the line of Sinatrukes.

On the origins of Orodes I no direct evidence exists. The name Orodes is first recorded in Parthia for 107 B.C. A certain Orodes, a high ranking Parthian official – *rab kumar(ri)* – is mentioned in a Babylonian text (ADART 3, -107 C 16’) in connection with the temple of Babylon (for the title of *rab kumar*, see Del Monte, 1997. P. 158; Boiy, 2004. P. 181, 211-212). We are informed that a “man from Subartu who performed instead of Orodes” entered Babylon from Media, during the month Addaru of the year 204 SE (February/March 107 B.C.). Then, the man from Subartu went out to Media (ibidem, 20’-21’).

Subartu usually refers to countries north of Babylonia (*Michałowski*, 2013; *Del Monte*, 1997. P. 158) states that Subartu in the Neo-Babylonian age and in the early Achaemenid period indicated Assyria, but in the Parthian period this term possibly took a more generic meaning) – it could have been Adiabene, north Mesopotamia, Syria or even Atropatene. It can be assumed that Orodes later became king of Parthia around 80 B.C. Orodes I probably rose against Gotarzes I and won the Parthian throne. In unclear circumstances Orodes I died, and it was then that the Sakaraukai placed his alleged brother Sinatrukes, until then standing aside, on the throne of Parthia.

Orodes I may be conceivably linked to the Sinatrukids. The name “Orodes” became known in the Sinatrukid line: Phraates III, son of Sinatrukes gave one of his sons the name Orodes (II). We know of two sons of Phraates III, his heirs, who fought a civil war for the Parthian throne after the death of their father, Mithradates and Orodes (for the name Orodes, see *Livshits*, 2010, no. 267 (Parthian *Hurōd). Cf. *Karras-Klaproth*, 1988, 103ff.). The name Mithradates could be a reference to Mithradates II, or even Mithradates I. The name Orodes must have referred to a rather prominent predecessor who played a decisive role after the death of Mithradates II.

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