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**ROYAL IDEOLOGICAL PATTERNS BETWEEN SELEUCID
AND PARTHIAN COINS: THE CASE OF Θεοπάτωρ**

Andrea Gariboldi

Commerce and monetary systems were, in the past more than nowadays, important means not only for the exchange of material goods, but also for the conveyance of far and different cultures. I would like to stress the strength that commercial relationships and coins, in themselves, have to put in contact different cultural patterns, influencing each others and sometimes irreversibly.

As I mentioned, coins were also a means of exchanging ideas, because they were a means for propaganda. Many times we have heard about monetary propaganda or coins as “the most important medium of propaganda of the time”¹. Many numismatists and historians have written so enthusiastically about the propagandistic value of the coins, and in certain instances this is true, but only because of the lack of sources. Propaganda’s main goal is to take people away from the opposite side, its means is word of mouth, slogans and inscriptions. The figures and the inscriptions of the coins are rather the reflection of propaganda, they can also become symbols, of which the coins are, like Belloni said², the *memento*.

This introduction seems to be a duty, because it is not believed that Parthian kingship, a very complex topic, could have easily been influenced by certain Greek coins. But coins, circulating with time in regions that were also far, falling into the hands of many people, can have, without a doubt, a “psychagogic” function, in the sense that they can condition the believe of who comes into contact with these continuing messages.

There was certainly from the Parthians the desire to be benevolent, and also similar to the previous dominators, towards the subjects of Greek culture. It is not surprising to find sometimes on Parthian coins the same titles used by Seleucid or Graeco-Bactrian kings. These titles, like *Megas*, *Theos*, *Theopator*, *Epiphanes*, *Euergetes*, *Eupator*, *Philopator*, *Philadelphos* or *Autokrator*, also appear on Seleucid coins, but for example *Ktistes* and *Dikaios*, which are also well known Greek titles from epigraphy and literature, are missing on Seleucid coins. Whilst other titles used on Seleucid coins are missing from the Parthian coins, like *Eusebes*, *Soter*, *Nikator* and *Nikephoros*.

Sometimes Parthian regal titles were coined purposely for their political value, like *Philhellen* and *Philoromaios*. All this means that we, through the coins, can reconstruct only a small part of the internal political frame and of the conception of Parthian kingship³. The coins reflect the increase and the magnificence of Parthian regal titles, without a doubt, in contrast and competition, besides imitation, with the plentiful Seleucid titling, however, a direct relationship

1 Mørkholm 1983, p. 63.

2 Interesting reflections about the significance of the monetary propaganda are in Belloni 1996, pp. 387-415, with specific bibliography.

3 Lukonin 1983, pp. 683-685.

between the Seleucid regal titles on the coins and the titles on the Parthian coins, must be taken with caution.

Among the numerous titles that I mentioned, I would like to focus particularly on Θεοπάτωρ⁴, literally “one who has a father who is a God”, or “of divine descent”, which is ideologically different from that of Θεός. The case of *Theopator* is significant, because it is known exclusively through the Seleucid and Parthian numismatic documentation. And it is not by chance that this *epiclesis* appears first on Seleucid coins and, a few years later, on Parthian ones. We should not be tempted to try to find an immediate direct relationship between them, but maybe the insistent Seleucid propaganda on the *Theopator* title (which today we perceive only from coinage) could have generated, for different reasons, the same title in the Parthian environment. Since *Theopator* is not present in any ancient known literature⁵, neither in Hellenistic epigraphs⁶, we must assume that, at least in this case, coins were a privileged means of political propaganda.

Theopator sounds like an erudite word, artefact, very far from the common language. A similar case is the *hapax legomenon* of the queen Agathokleia of Bactria, coregent of Straton I (about 130 B.C.), who on the coins bears the title of Θεοτρόπος, “similar to God”⁷, or, literally, “one who turns to God”. Even this word might suggest, but does not imply, that the king is a God. Among the kings of Bactria the kingship assumed the characters of a theocracy since Antimachos I (175-170 B.C.), called *Theos*, and we must consider that the Parthians, both East and West, had a similar model of sovereignty.

4 About *Theopator* see Muccioli 1996, p. 26, note 23. The sources will be discussed below.

5 The word *Theopator*, used in ancient Christian literature of Greek language to denote the close relationship of blood between David and Jesus, has obviously nothing to do with Hellenistic and Parthian royal titles: see *apud Ioan. Chrysost.* Vol. 6, p. 478; *Dion. Ar., Ep.* 8, 1 (M.3.1085b); *Gregent. Disp.* (M.86.628a); *Ioan. Dam. fide ort.* 4.11 (M.94.1132a), *id. imag.*1.1 (M.94.1232b); *Thdr. Stud. or.* 5.1 (M.99.721a); referred to Joseph, see *Steph. Diac. vita Steph.* (M.100.1038a); to Joachim and Anna, parents of Maria Virgin, see *Lit. Chrys.* (p.358.35). We have to consider that *Theopator* referring to David means “father of God” and not “one who has a father God”.

6 *Theopator* is used in the Roman world, as far as I know, only at Samos, as testified by scattered evidence. We have one epigraph from the *Heraion* in honour of Divus Vespasianus and the emperor Titus, called *Theopator*, “one who has a father who is a God” (Herrmann 1960, pp. 121-122), and a unique coin of Agrippina II with the legend Θεομήτωρ, “mother of God”, referring to Nero (see RPC I, p. 446, n. 2686: bust of Agrippina II and on reverse a peacock standing on caduceus with sceptre). It is very probable that *Hera* at Samos was worshipped as *Theometor*, and so it was quite natural to transfer this title from *Hera* to Agrippina, as is clearly alluded by the peacock on the reverse of Agrippina’s coins with the ethnic ΣΑΜΙΩΝ. Once this unusual title was endorsed within the imperial titles, it is not surprising that *Theopator* has been adopted also by Titus at Samos, instead of the more common epithet of θεοῦ υἱός.

7 Allouche-Le Page 1956, pp. 68-70 ; Le Rider 1967, pp. 331-342, in particular pp. 341-342, where the author describes a coin of an unknown queen of Taxila, perhaps Nachene or Machene, Maues’ wife, in the last years of the II century B.C., with the title of *Theotropos* inspired by the coins of Agathokleia.

In order to better understand the genesis of *Theopator* we have to review briefly the troubles of Alexander Balas⁸, the first and only Seleucid king to bear this title. After the death of Antiochus IV (164 B.C.) a new tormented era began for the Seleucid empire, characterized by internal struggles for power, and a progressive loss of strength of the kings, who were compelled to look for external allies, often unfaithful, or overbearing and pragmatic like Rome. In fact, the descendants, real or presumed, from the family branch of Antiochus IV, had to face the descendants of his older brother, Seleucus IV.

With Antiochus IV a heavy use of the regal titles began, on both coins and epigraphs, almost unknown before, or rather only used in particular situations. The discovery of the great political and propagandistic value of regal titles will never be abandoned, neither from his direct descendants, nor from those of the parallel genealogic branch⁹. Antiochus IV proclaims himself on the coins *Theos*, *Epiphanes*, *Nikephoros*. He is evidently a god, bearer of victory, and the first Seleucid king to claim it on coins¹⁰. The great charisma of this king is seen from the desperate attempts of his successors to follow his prestige, claiming to descend from him. New regal titles were invented *ad hoc*, beginning from Antiochus V (164-162 B.C.), who was called *Eupator*, from the moment he was presented to the people by his tutor Lysias, as the legitimate heir. Sources (*Macc.* I, 16, 17 and *Ioseph. Ant.Iud.* XII, 361) say that Lysias was the one who invented the title *Eupator* for his favourite¹¹. A similar political and propagandistic need probably brought also to the creation of the word *Theopator*.

Antiochus V was soon assassinated, leaving an open field to the other branch of the dynasty represented by Demetrius I (162-150 B.C.), who escaped from Roman captivity. Rome officially recognised him only after he had defeated the usurper Timarchos (160 B.C), satrap of Babylonia, proclaiming to be the Great King of Media. But Demetrius displeased and offended too many people, and

8 About Alexander Balas a very specific bibliography lacks. One can see *RE* I (1894), sub Alexander I Balas (22) coll. 1437-38; Bouché-Leclercq 1913, pp. 329-337; Volkmann 1923, pp. 51-66; 1925, pp. 373-412; Will 19832, pp. 373-379; Grainger 1997, pp. 6-7; Muccioli 1995, 1996 and 2001, *passim*.

9 Muccioli 2001, pp. 297-298.

10 As is well known, the Milesians firstly conferred to Antiochus II the title of *Theos*, because he had freed them from the tyranny of Timarchus (*App. Syr.* 65). Antiochus III introduced the official cult of the living queens, which implies, one can assume, also the cult of the king (Bikerman 1938, p. 247). The title of *Theos*, initially conferred only *post mortem*, was adopted by the living king surely from Antiochus IV, after 169 B.C., as is testified by coins and epigraphs (Bikerman 1938, pp. 239-240; 244). See also Muccioli 2001, pp. 296-299.

11 Muccioli 1996, in particular pp. 26-28, remembers that in the past it has been erroneously tempted to confer to Balas also the epithet of *Eupator* (but not by Babelon 1890, who expressly excludes this title from those of Alexander Balas), which in fact belongs to Antiochus V (164-162 B.C.). Cfr. Gardner 1878, p. 54, n. 33; Volkmann 1923, p. 66. This misunderstanding was caused by an erroneous reading of some rare bronze coins which bear the ethnic ΕΥΠΙΑΤΡΕΩΝ. The city which coined with this temporary ethnic is probably now to be identified with *Orthosia* in *Phoenicia*, according to Moore 1993-94, pp. 54-59, from 148/7 to 146/5, under the influence of Ptolemy VI. See Houghton-Spaer 1998, p. 206, n. 1499.

soon a great coalition was created against him (*Iust.* XXXV, 1, 6-7). One of his diplomatic errors was to support Orophernes to the Cappadocian throne (158/57 B.C.), presumed brother of Ariarathes V, who, with the help of Attalus II of Pergamum, defeated Orophernes and remained the king of Cappadocia, in the area of the Pergamenian patronage, with the approval of Rome. Demetrius failed in the attempt to conquer Cyprus, displeasing also the Ptolemies. The powerful Milesian family of Herakleides, brother of the dead Timarchos, wanted to avenge on Demetrius too. Not even the inhabitants of Antiochia were in favour of him, after he violently ended the revolt organized by Orophernes. A pretender was needed for the Seleucid throne to face Demetrius, but to be credible he should have been the son of Antiochus IV. The king of Pergamon, Attalus II, in accordance with Herakleides, not being natural heirs, invented one: Alexander Balas.

Attalus searched for someone who looked like Antiochus (*Diod.* XXXI, 32a), and found a person in the city of Smyrne. Alexander immediately declared himself to be the son of Antiochus. Attalus crowned him with the regal diadem, and sent him to Cilicia, while word spread that a new heir of the throne would go against Demetrius. Alexander, who was only sixteen or seventeen years old, needed only the approval of Rome, so in 154/53 B.C. Herakleides accompanied him in front of the Senate, together with a false sister of Balas of the name Laodike (the name was probably invented like Alexander's), and gave a speech saying that the Senate had to approve the return of the two pretenders because they were the legitimate children of the king Antiochus (*Polib.* XXXIII, 18). The *leitmotiv* of Herakleides' apology was that Alexander was *κατὰ φύσιν* the son of Antiochus. After the approval of Rome, Alexander conquered the city of Ptolemais (153/52), in *Iudaea*, and gave many privileges to the chief of the Asmoneians, Jonathan, who he also nominated Great Priest. Jonathan cleverly took advantage of the other numerous offers of Demetrius, but in the end sustained Balas, who was also supported by Ptolemy VI *Philometor*. Demetrius, who became completely isolated, had to succumb in 151/50 (*Ioseph. Ant.Iud.* XIII, 35-61). Balas asked to marry Ptolemy's daughter, Cleopatra Thea¹², and the Lagid enthusiastically accepted to celebrate the marriage, thinking that due to the weakness of the Seleucid king he could expand his influence in all of Coele-Syria. The wedding was splendidly celebrated in Ptolemais, which became the residence of Balas in 150 B.C. (*Ioseph. Ant.Iud.* XIII, 35; 80-82).

At Seleucia Pieria splendid propagandistic tetradrachms were coined for this occasion, with on the obverse the jugated and diademed busts of Cleopatra Thea and of Alexander¹³ (1). Cleopatra, as a new *Tyche* (perhaps in opposition with the

12 This important Seleucid queen married at first Alexander Balas, afterwards Demetrius II and finally Antiochus VII: Muccioli 1995, p. 47, note 26.

13 To this important propagandistic silver issue, we have to add some small bronzes, without *Theopator*, coming from the excavations at Seleucia on the Tigris, and recently attributed by Le Rider to this mint. One coin (Le Rider 1999, p. 12, Pl. 1, 27), known in only one exemplar, shows Cleopatra Thea in front and behind her the profile of Balas, while one other type (Le Rider 1999, p.12, Pl. 1, 28), more common, presents Alexander in front and behind him the head of Cleopatra. These iconographic variations are a clear sign of the uncertain political position of Balas.

use of the *Tyche* on coins of Demetrius I¹⁴) wears also a veil and a *kalathos* on her head, while a cornucopia appears on the left. On the reverse Zeus *nikephoros* is represented, and the inscription is *Basileos Alexandrou Theopatoros Euergetou*. What strikes us in this issue, apart from the superior artistic quality compared with the normal monetary issues of Balas, is that his portrait appears behind that of Cleopatra. This is quite peculiar, considering that the coin was struck under his name. But this iconographic particularity shows the real political position of Balas, after his acquisition of power, which goes back to 150 B.C., when he started to struck coins for all the empire (from 162 to 167 of the Seleucid era, *id est* 150-145 B.C., from the beginning with the title of *Theopator*). Alexander appears oppressed under the weight of his political supporters, and so also to his contemporaries had to appear in the same way.

I think that the title of *Theopator* was certainly not chosen by Alexander, neither was he called Alexander¹⁵, as clearly defined by Iustinus XXXV, 1, 7, *nomen ei Alexandri inditur genitusque ab Antioco rege dicitur*, but that this title was invented so that it could put in evidence his lineage from Antiochus, probably by Attalus II and Herakleides, many years before Alexander assumed power. In these two persons, rather than the influent chief minister of Balas, Ammonios¹⁶, or Ptolemy VI, who seems to appear sustain Balas only from 153/52, I would identify the *philo*i of the king¹⁷ who worked on the plan of propaganda to eliminate Demetrius I, so to insert themselves, remaining behind the scenes, in the Seleucid politics.

Alexander adopted on coins the titles of *Euergetes* and *Theopator*. *Euergetes* is a common civic honour, but it is the first time that it appears on Seleucid coins. *Theopator* clearly alludes to the *Theos* of Antiochus. Babelon¹⁸ wrongly attributed

14 Houghton 1988, p. 93, note 25.

15 Muccioli 1996, pp. 26-27, note 25. I would nourish some doubt also on the truthfulness of the name Balas, which is patently derived from the Aramaic *Ba 'al*, "God". Balas seems to be a "hellenization" of *Ba 'al*, so an hypocoristic theophoric name. But is it not suspicious that an usurper calls himself (or is called) from the beginning Alexander "God"? The first name could deceive the Greek people, the second, the Semite one.

16 Ammonios was one of the *philo*i of Alexander (Grainger 1997, p. 76) who plotted against the life of Ptolemy VI (*Ioseph. Ant. Iud. XIII, 106-107*), and who reigned *de facto* almost instead of Alexander Balas (*Liv. Per. 50: in Syria...iacente eo (Balas) in ganea et lustris Hammonius regnabat*). He could be one of the personages who invented the titles for Balas (Muccioli 2001, p. 302; 1995, p. 48, note 31), but personally I give more credit to Polybius (XXXIII, 15-18), Iustinus (XXXV, 6-7), Diodorus (XXXI, 32a) and Strabo (*Geog. XIII, 4,2*), who all strongly stress the role of Attalus II and Herakleides in the catch of the power of Balas against Demetrius I. Another spy of the friendship of Alexander with Miletus, from which originated Herakleides, brother of Timarchos, is a Milesian epitaph of a certain Antigonos son of Menophilus, *ναύαρχος Ἀλεξάνδρου* (Herrmann 1987; Muccioli 2001, p. 314).

17 About the role of the friends of the king in Hellenistic age: Savalli-Lestrade 2001, in particular p. 279, for Timarchos and Herakleides *philo*i of Antiochus IV.

18 Babelon 1890, p. CXXIV. Of course the authoritative sentence of Babelon generated a long series of mistakes (for example Head 1911, p. 764) which can cause some perplexity still in modern times (Muccioli 1995, p. 42; 1996, p. 26, note 24; Houghton 1983, pp. 19 and 28). For the unique gold stater of Alexander II Zabinas, with the legend *Basileos Alexandrou*

to Balas also the titles of *Epiphanes* and *Nikephoros* (firstly assumed by Antiochus IV for his theological and military propaganda), which belong in reality to Alexander II Zabinas (128-123 B.C.), another usurper, presumed descendant of Alexander Balas, according to Porphyrius (FGH 260, F 32, 21), or adopted son of Antiochus VII, according to Iustinus (XXXIX, 1, 4-6). In this case, Alexander Zabinas (which in Aramaic means “bought”) had been supported by Ptolemy VIII against Demetrius II.

Alexander’s titles leave no doubt that the propaganda in his favour was based largely on the presumed regal lineage, beside a vague resemblance to Alexander the Great, purposely emphasised¹⁹, and evoked starting from the name. It would be diminishing to say that propaganda was left only to coins, in fact Zenophanes, who welcomed the young Balas in Cilicia under Attalus’ orders, even before he became king, spread words in all of Syria on his account and his aspirations to the throne (*Diod. XXXI, 32a*: διεδίδου λόγους εἰς τὴν Συρίαν ὡς μέλλοντος ἐπὶ τὴν πατρίαν ἀρχὴν κατιέναι τοῦ μειρακίσκου).

The favour of the people was to be prepared with care and time was needed. It is possible that in those political speeches the term *Theopator* was already in circulation. I agree with Muccioli thinking that *Theopator* is the climax of the titles *Philopator*, *Eupator*, *Theopator*, and that *Theopator* was a new word, while the others, which were more modest, were already used²⁰.

But if the sources are so scarce with information, the analysis of the coins of Alexander Balas, with or without *Theopator*, can still be useful. Mørkholm, for example, has evidenced how, during difficult political times, Alexander did not even hesitate to issue coins in the name and with the portrait of his presumed father, Antiochus IV, who had been dead for years²¹. Naturally the date of posthumous issues assures us that they were coined during Balas’ reign²². A first emission of bronzes under the name of Antiochus appeared around 151/50 at Apamea, during the final phase of the war against Demetrius I. An abundant issue of tetradrachms, drachms and posthumous bronzes were struck at Antiochia in 146/45, when, before Demetrius’ arrival in the capital, who was hated from the people because of his father, the generals of Alexander, Hierax and Diodotus Tryphon, tried to confer the crown of Syria to Ptolemy VI, who refused it, suggesting that it belonged to Demetrius II (*Ioseph. Ant.Iud. XIII, 109-115*). While Alexander was

Theou Epiphanous Nikephorou, imprinted on Antiochus IV’s titling, see Mørkholm 1983, p. 62, Pl. 9,8. On the history of Zabinas: Ehling 1995, pp. 2-7; Grainger 1997, p. 7.

19 Balas is not only the first Seleucid king to call himself Alexander, but his portraits on the coins even resemble those of Alexander the Great, also in the hair style, with the curls pulled up on the forehead. On some bronze issues Balas even wears the lion skin on his head (Babelon 1890, Pl. XVII, 14; Houghton-Spaer 1998, nn. 1448-1464). The *imitatio Alexandri* is evident also in some statues attributed to Balas (Charbonneaux-Laumonier 1955). See Bohm 1989, pp. 105-116; Muccioli 1996, pp. 26-27, note 25.

20 Muccioli 1996, p. 26.

21 Mørkholm 1960 and 1983.

22 See, for example, Mørkholm 1983, Pl. 9, 9 (silver tetradrachm in the name of Antiochus IV dated 146/45 B.C.).

escaping from Antiochia and he was reorganizing the last strenuous defence²³, the propaganda insisted again on the figure of Antiochus IV, through which Balas hoped to accredit himself.

Mørkholm rightly noted²⁴ that the presence of the official epithets is discontinuous in the monetary Seleucid legends, and how it can vary from mint to mint, depending on the quality of the metal. Of course the civil authorities could have a great influence on the choice of the legends, just like the titles to give to the kings, but in *Theopator's* case, at least, I would see a plan organized by the court in the diffusion of this term. First of all, we have to realize that *Theopator* is found almost exclusively on high nominals, that is gold staters²⁵, tetradrachms and silver drachms. The bronzes usually bear the short legend *Basileos Alexandrou*, and not because the space on coins was not enough. In fact, a drachm or a stater are of smaller size compared to a bronze coin worth 4 or 8 *chalkoi* (the *chalkoi*, in the ancient Attic weight system, are the bronze fractions of the silver *obolos*. 1 *obolos* equals 8 *chalkoi*; 6 *oboloi* = 1 drachm). So *Theopator*, being an aulic term, finds a place on noble metals, which, except for certain exceptions, are destined to a very wide monetary circulation, and not civic. Placing *Theopator* on gold and silver coinage means, on one hand, to further ennoble the sense, on the other hand, more pragmatically, to ensure a wider possible circulation of the propagandistic message. Furthermore *Theopator* is used only on coins of Attic weight of Alexander, and not on coins of Phoenician or Ptolemaic foot²⁶, coined in Coele-Syria under Lagid influence. Following the alliance between Balas and Ptolemy VI, the Se-

23 The rapid end of the reign of Balas was due, on one hand, to the return on the political stage of Demetrius II, in 147 B.C., who, with the help of the general Lasthenes, had reorganised an army, on the other hand, to the loss of his powerful ally Ptolemy VI. After that, perhaps for an impulse of the soul, perhaps following an imprudent advice of his minister Ammonios, Alexander tried to kill him by treachery at Ptolemais. Logically the anger of Ptolemy was very great. Ptolemy regretted giving in wedding his daughter Cleopatra Thea to such a miserable fellow, and gave her in marriage to Demetrius II. He invaded Coele-Syria pressing Balas, who was finally defeated in the battle at the river Oinoparas in 145 B.C., near Antiochia (*Strab.* XVI, 8).

Alexander fled away to Arabia, but an Arab chief, maybe in accordance with two officers of Balas, cut his head off and sent it to Ptolemy, who after being delighted by this sight, expired for some deadly wound caught during the Oinoparas' battle (*Ioseph. Ant.Iud.* XIII, 116-119; *Diod.* XXXII, 9). So Demetrius was free from any rival with one strike. In general, the historiographical judgment about Balas is very modest, and also the ancients saw him as a weak person. Diodorus, for example, writes (XXXIII, 3) that Alexander for his ἀσθένειαν τῆς ψυχῆς was unable to govern. Balas weakened the Seleucid empire particularly in Palestine as in Media.

24 Mørkholm 1984, p. 98; Muccioli 2001, p. 310. Similar reflections on the titling of Balas are already present in Babelon 1890, pp. 124-126, who however does not examine deeply the presence of *Theopator* on coins.

25 Gold staters of Alexander Balas are very rare. I would like to mention a beautiful exemplar kept in the Bibliothèque Nationale, collection Beistegui n. 38, published by Babelon 1934. This piece (8.41g) lacks monograms but the mint is Antiochia.

26 The Phoenician weight was a standard weight system in antiquity. It uses a didrachm (or *siclos*) of about 7.5g, and a drachm of about 3.7g, so it is lower in respect to the Attic drachm, which weights *circa* 4.3g. On the ancient weight systems: Head 1911, pp. XXXIII-LV.

leucid struck silver coins even at the principal ports of Phoenicia²⁷, like Berytus, Sidon, Tyrus and Ake-Ptolemais. But the coins of these important centres generally follow the Phoenician weights, and from the iconographic point of view they bear the Ptolemaic eagle. *Theopator* is not present on these coins, and I think it is an important fact to realize that Alexander's propaganda was carried out in the cities of Syria, where the influence and the memory of Antiochus IV were surely greater than in the geographic areas near the Ptolemaic kingdom.

I suggest that the weight system is the real discrimination of the presence, or not, of *Theopator*. In fact, Sidon, a Phoenician city, struck coins even with *Theopator*²⁸, but only on tetradrachms of Attic weight (2), and not on those of Phoenician ones (3). In the eastern Seleucid mint of the empire, Ecbatana, modern Hamadān²⁹, capital of Media, where Alexander struck coins from 150 to 148/47 BC, until the city fell into the hands of Mithradates I king of the Parthians (171-139/38 B.C.)³⁰, principally drachms and small bronzes were coined (in great quantity by Balas), whilst tetradrachms were preferably coined at Seleucia on the Tigris³¹. In exception to what we have said about the bronzes, which is that they do not bear the name of *Theopator*, at Ecbatana, as shown by Le Rider, they bear the complete legend: *Basileos Alexandrou Theopatoros Euergetou*, even when the dimensions of the coins are very small.³² A possible explanation of this apparent contradiction is that being Ecbatana a mint destined to produce coins of modest value, the propaganda of Alexander regarding his presumed lineage from Antiochus IV had to adapt to smaller denominations. We can not exclude that the pres-

27 For the double weight system used in *Coele-Syria* and *Phoenicia* by the Seleucids, see Le Rider 1995, pp. 391-404.

28 A rare tetradrachm of the Phoenician city of Aradus (Bibl. Nat., coll. Luynes, n. 3348) bears the title of *Theopator*, but it is struck on Attic weight as those of Sidon.

29 Brown 1997, pp. 80-84.

30 The occupation of Media by Mithradates I (171-139/38 B.C.) in 148/47, profiting of Balas' weakness, is testified by a Greek epigraph, dated 149/48, in which is mentioned a "Viceroy of the Upper Satrapies", so the Parthian invasion of Media must be placed a few time later (Will 1982, p. 403; Bivar 1983, pp. 32-35; Wolski 1993, pp. 79-81; Dąbrowa 1998, pp. 36-37; Simonetta 1968, pp. 28-29; 2001, p. 75). Moreover, the mint of Ecbatana continued to coin for Balas until 148/47, as has been shown by Le Rider 1965, pp. 316-319 and 338-340, following a prior study of Jenkins 1951. The Parthian war for Media is briefly summarized by *Iustinus* (XLI, 6, 6-8), in few elusory words, often quoted by historians: "*Dum haec apud Bactros geruntur, interim inter Parthos et Medos bellum oritur. Cum varius utriusque populi casus fuisset, ad postremum victoria penes Parthos fuit. His viribus auctus Mithridates Mediae Bacasin praeponit, ipse in Hyrcaniam proficiscitur*".

31 Le Rider 1960, pp. 32-33; 1965, pp. 339-340; 1999, pp. 94-95.

32 Le Rider 1965, pp. 338-340 (Pl. LXVII, nn. 27-29) has published and attributed some bronzes of Balas, with an elephant surmounted by a rook on the reverse, to the mint of Ecbatana. The attribution of Le Rider is based on stylistic confrontation with coins of sure attribution to Ecbatana, and on technical data (in particular, the orientation of dies and the scalloping of the edge of the coins, typical features of the Ecbatana's mint). According to Le Rider also the presence of a great deal of small bronze fractions of the *obolos* is a characteristic of Ecbatana, which used to coin low nominals. To the bronzes catalogued by Le Rider, we have to add another coin type (perhaps worth one *chalkos*), with on the reverse a bee and the complete legend of Balas (Houghton-Spaer 1998, n. 1592).

ence of the title of *Theopator* on the bronzes was not addressed also to the near Parthian population. It would have been, if we believe in this prospective, a sort of “reinforced” propaganda on the extreme borders of the empire.

What is certain is that the Parthians totally perceived the term *Theopator*, so much to adopt this even on their coinage. We must be grateful to the analysis of Le Rider, who has shown that the first Parthian drachms with *Theopator* belong to the reign of Phraates II (139/38-128 B.C.), and not to that of Mithradates I, although this is the *communis opinio*. In fact, comparing the drachms that bear the beardless bust of Arsakes (5), and on the reverse Arsakes seated on the *omphalos*, with the legend *Basileos megalou Arsakou theopatoros*, with the drachms having a bearded portrait of Phraates II (6), and the same legend, one can notice the same disposition of the legend, palaeography of the letters and orientation of the dies, moreover the borders of the coins are dotted and the flan is wide and thin.³³ The mint proposed for these coins is Hecatompylos, the capital of the Parthians, for similar stylistic reasons, like the head on obverse facing left or the presence of a separating line between the words of the reverse.³⁴ Thus, in this monetary series, the beardless type precedes the bearded one.

Other drachms which have a beardless head on the obverse, with the epithet of *Megas* or *Theos* (4), therefore should be attributed to Mithradates I³⁵. The extremely rare coins of Mithradates I with *Theos*, a term that could have been suggested to Mithradates either from the coins of the king of Bactria, Antimachus I (175-170 B.C.), or from the Seleucid coins, are from the mint of Hecatompylos too, and *Theos* is to be considered the premise for the other following Parthian coins with *Theopator*.

Phraates II could, just like Balas had already done, claim to have had a father who was a God. In fact, in addition to the coins of Mithradates I with the title of *Theos*, we have to consider those documents from Nisā which could imply the cult of the souls of the dead kings, a tradition that will be peculiar to the Sasanians. Some ostraca bear the inscription *mtrdtkn(y) / Mihrdātakān*, “the work of Mithradates”, and suggest the cult of the soul of Mithradates, worshipped, like

33 Le Rider 1965, pp. 316-319, in particular p. 316, notes 5,6,7; Le Rider 1960, p. 28, note 4.

34 Simonetta 1968, pp. 32-33; 42-43; Sellwood 1983, pp. 281-282. Also Le Rider 1965, pp. 319-320, agrees that this Parthian mint should be placed in the North-East of Iran, probably in Hyrcania.

35 Le Rider 1960, pp. 27-28: « la plupart des monnaies à la tête imberbe, sinon toutes, ont été frappées sous le règne de Mithridate I »; 1965, pp. 316-319 ; Simonetta 1968, pp. 32-33. Otherwise the position of Le Rider, who believes that the Parthians never coined before Mithradates I, is completely surpassed after the publication of the Bujnūrd hoard, in the valley of the river Atrek, in the North-East of Iran. This hoard, of nearly 1500 coins, contains pieces attributable to Arsakes I and Arsakes II. Moreover some coins present Aramaic inscriptions, so it is possible to talk about “neoiranism” from the very beginning of the Parthian royal dynasty (see Abgarians-Sellwood 1971; Sellwood 1983, pp. 279-281 (Pl. I, 2); Gnoli 1989, pp. 116-119; Wolski 1993, pp. 69-70, 98, note 4; Panaino 2001, pp. 112-113). We have to note that Simonetta 1968 was already, at that time, on a different position in respect to Le Rider.

other kings, in royal fire temples.³⁶ Phraates II struck coins with *Theopator* at both Hecatompylos and Ecbatana³⁷. The monetary hoards show that the Seleucid coins in Mesopotamia and in Parthia circulated together with the Parthian ones³⁸, so the title of *Theopator* might have had many occasions to be known also by the Parthians, whom partially for imitation, partially because they probably had to turn against populations in which the Greek element was still dominant (in fact they maintain the Greek language on the coins of this period), and in part because Phraates was surely son of a father whose soul was, at least, worshipped like divine, it was useful and convenient to adopt, among others, the same regal title.

Moreover we have to take into account that Demetrius II (145-125 B.C.) fell into the hands of the Parthians in 139, and was taken prisoner and sent to Mithradates in Hyrcania. The Arsacids cleverly treated him well, and even gave to Demetrius his daughter Rhodogune in marriage³⁹. The captivity of Demetrius II among the Parthians lasted about for all the period of the reign of Phraates II (Demetrius was set free by Phraates in 129), so there were very close contacts between Seleucids and Parthians, and not only warlike ones. One of the regal titles of Demetrius II was *Theos* (besides *Philadelphos* and *Nikator*), and the circumstance that he stayed friendly with the Parthians so many years could have influenced also the Parthian titling (the *Theos* of Mithradates I and the *Theopator* of Phraates II). The influence was also inverted, in fact Demetrius II on some coins of his second reign (129/125) curiously appears bearded like a Parthian king (7)⁴⁰.

A good Parthian politics was to try not to change many things in respect to the Seleucids, and in fact in economy they adopted the Attic weight system, with an admiring precision. For example, Mithradates I, who had just conquered Ecbatana, struck a series of reduced weight bronzes, with the same mark of value

36 Lukonin 1983, p. 694; Wolski 1993, p. 94; Schmitt 1998, pp. 168-170. Isidorus Characenus 11, reports that there was an ever-burning fire of Arsakes at Asaak (Wiesehöfer 1996b, p. 61, note 49; Boyce 1987, p. 541).

37 Simonetta 1968, pp. 41-45.

38 See, for example, Newell 1924; Le Rider 1960, pp. 24-28, Pl. III (Treasure n. 2, which contains a tetradrachm of Balas, n. 17, dated 150/49, *terminus post quem* for the hollowing of the hoard in Susa, and a drachm of Mithradates I, n. 19, beardless type); see Le Rider 1999, for the excavation coins from Seleucia on the Tigris.

39 Bivar 1983, pp. 34-37; Wolski 1993, pp. 82-85; *App. Syr.* 67, 356; 68, 360; *Iust.* XXXVIII, 9, 3; *Macc.* I, 14, 1-3. On the titles of Demetrius II: Muccioli 1995.

40 Gardner 1878, p. 77, 18; p. 78, 23 and other coins. Recently Mittag 2002 writes that the beard of Demetrius II is not a Parthian custom, but that it is a sign of his devotion to Zeus. I remark that when the bearded head on the coins (but also in general in Greek art) is diademed, it is the representation of a king, while Zeus usually wears a crown of wreath (Gariboldi 2000, pp. 31-63). See also Svenson 1995, p. 424, n. 365, Taf. 64 (coin of bearded Demetrius II with diadem), and p. 425, n. A1.5, Taf. 65 (coin of Antiochus IV with head of Zeus with crown of wreath).

corresponding to those of Alexander Balas, who had reduced to half those of Antiochus IV⁴¹.

Much more impressive was Mithradates' act, always to favour the trade with the Greeks, after having conquered also Seleucia on the Tigris in 140 B.C., to coin tetradrachms, in perfect Hellenistic style, with a typical Greek subject, like Heracles, and with the addition of the new regal title of *Philhellen*⁴². Even the portraits of Mithradates, in the mints of Greek cultural tradition, like Seleucia, Ecbatana and Susa, are always facing the right side, while at Hecatompylos, in the centre of Parthia, they are facing left⁴³. This means that the Parthians, as far as the monetary system is concerned, at least and above all in their initial stages of the rule among the Greek people, wanted to maintain the *status quo*. Mithradates I, as stressed by Wolski⁴⁴, is certainly the real founder of the Parthian empire and the one who led the Arsacid dynasty towards an absolute monarchy, assuming for the first time the title of MLKYN MLKA / *xšāhān xšāh*, "King of Kings"⁴⁵, and expanding his kingdom both East and West, but we have to remember that these achievements were also possible thanks to an astute and opportune "philhellenism".

In this intelligent continuity, I think, the Parthian adoption of *Theopator* must be explained, rather than excessively emphasizing the superhuman aspect of the Iranian kingship, which, even if it allows a divine cult of the king, clashes with the most orthodox Zoroastrian religious thought, which can not but see a superior being above the king, who is at the most conceivable like a divine representative, but is not God.⁴⁶

41 Le Rider 1994, pp. 17-34, in particular p. 25. Balas redoubled the value of the coined bronze in respect to silver, so his monetary politics, followed also by Mithradates I, tends to a general growth of the fiduciary value of the coins.

42 Sellwood 1983, p. 282 (Pl. 1, 10); Wolski 1993, pp. 72-73; Wiesehöfer 1996b, p. 60. Daḅrowa 1998, pp. 40-41. Mithradates I bestowed also political privileges to Seleucia on the Tigris, among them the right to possess a municipal bronze coinage (Le Rider 1999, pp. 82-83).

43 The remark that the portrait of Mithradates facing left is in opposition to the custom of the Seleucids to portrait themselves facing right, so many times stressed by modern scholars (see Göbl 1978, I, p. 94; Wolski 1993, p. 98; Panaino 2001, p. 113), is true, but it is important to say also that in all Parthian mints of Greek tradition, which are the majority, the portrait of Mithradates is always facing the right side. I think that this "opposition sensible à la pratique des Séleucides" should be a little lessened.

44 Wolski 1983; 1990; 1993, pp. 97-101 and *passim*.

45 See Wolski 1993, p. 99; Wiesehöfer 1996a, p. 121; 1996b, p. 59; and Schmitt 1998, p. 168, Panaino 2001, pp. 113-114. The title of "King of Kings" for Mithradates I is testified by a pahlavi inscription on the triumphal rock relief at Hung-i Naurūzī in Xūzistān, which shows Mithradates I (*mtrdt* MLKYN MLK (sic)) on horseback and the "Satrap of Susa Kamnaskires" (*kbnškr šwš* PHTA) standing. The relief is dated about 140 B.C., at the time of Mithradates' conquest of Elymais. For a different interpretation of this relief see Invernizzi 1998, who believes that the figure on horseback could be Demetrius II, sustained by Kamnaskires against Mithradates (see also Wiesehöfer 2002, pp. 118-120). On Parthian coins, as is well known, the title of ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΝ appears only from Mithradates II (124/23-88/87 B.C. onwards): Sellwood 1983, p. 285 (Pl. 2, 10).

46 Lukonin 1983, pp. 683-698; Wiesehöfer 1996b, p. 62, writes about a "divine right" (*Gottesgnadentum*) of the Persian ruler and underlines the influence of the Hellenistic ruler-cult

If we try to discover, in fact, which other Parthian kings adopted *Theopator* on coins, or even *Theos*, we realize that we do not go beyond the first century B.C.⁴⁷, taking into consideration also the case of Artabazos (48/47 B.C.), the king of Characene (8). And it is exactly when Hellenism ended, which nourished in itself, and spread, the premises of this theocratic conception of the kingship.

on Arsacid kingship; a similar position is expressed by Gnoli 1998. Recently Panaino 2003, pp. 272-273, has remarked that this Hellenistic influence on the Iranian kingship is nevertheless superficial and above all directed to the Greek people subject to the Parthians. We cannot exclude, in fact, the possibility that the title of $\Theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$ and that of $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\pi\acute{\alpha}\tau\omega\rho$ actually were propagandistic devices targeting the Greek cities and peoples, but which did not affect the core of the Parthian royal ideology. The Parthian titles of $\Theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$ and $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\pi\acute{\alpha}\tau\omega\rho$ are seldom used on coins, and clearly for propagandistic reasons towards the Greeks, like in general is shown by the Parthian monetary system, which is without doubt more “Hellenized” in the West of the empire. This political capability naturally facilitated not only cultural interactions but *in primis* economic relationships.

- 47 This has been freshly noted by Panaino 2003. The title of *Theos* was assumed in the Parthian dynasty first by Mithradates I, and after only by Phraates III (71/70-58/57 B.C.) and Mithradates III (58/57 B.C.), to whom we could add the very particular case of Thea Musa (2 A.D.), the only queen, ex slave of Augustus, who had the privilege to be portrayed on Parthian coins, having married her own son Phraates V (Sellwood 1983, Pl. 6, nn. 4-5; Gariboldi 2003, p.13).

The title of *Theopator*, which I would exclude from the titling of Mithradates I (contrarywise, Sellwood 1980, p. 35, influencing many other scholars, ascribes this title to Mithradates I, but he is not totally sure: “Perhaps an issue of Phraates II”), belongs to Phraates II, Artabanos I (128-124/23 B.C.), Gotarzes I (91/90-81/80 B.C.), Sinatruces (?) (78/77-71/70 B.C.) and Darios (?) (about 70 B.C.). One must keep in mind that the period of Parthian history from 91 to 57 B.C., the so-called “Dark Age”, is very confused and uncertain, so any date and attribution is in some way precarious and should be assumed with caution (Simonetta 2001).

To these Parthian kings we have to add Artabazos of Characene, who, according to a unique tetradrachm dated 49/48 B.C., from the Basra hoard, had the title of *Theopator* too, clearly of Parthian origin (Le Rider 1959, pp. 248-250, Pl. XXII, n. 55). The same coin has been published also by Sellwood 1983, p. 311, Pl. 13, 5, and Alram 1986, n. 505.

Finally, the interesting article of Mariq 1958, pp. 378-383 deserves mention, who believes that *Theopator* is the Greek translation of the Parthian *bagpuhr* and of the Kushan title $\beta\alpha\gamma\omicron\pi\omicron\upsilon\rho\omicron$, “son of god”, comparable with Skt. *devaputra*-. This interpretation (followed, for example, by Le Rider 1965, p. 316, note 7; Tubach 1990, p. 377-378) rises nevertheless some philological perplexity (Panaino 2003, pp. 273-274). In fact *Theopator* has not the same significance of *devaputra* (not literally at least). A similar consideration can be done about a parallelism which could be made between *Theopator* and the Syrian *bar'alāhē* (son of the Gods), referring to the king of Edessa Abgar VII (109-116 A.D.), in the *Acta Martyrum* of *Šarbēls* (Tubach 1990, pp. 377-378; Cureton 1864, p. 42). If we give attention to the geographical proximity of the Kushan kingdom to India, where the king can be a *deva*-, and to the chronological gap between the use of *Theopator* among the Parthians (not beyond the I century B.C.) and the assumption of the term *devaputra* in the regal titling of Kanishka (first half of II century A.D.), it seems clear that a direct Hellenistic influence of the word *Theopator* on *devaputra* must be taken with caution.

Figures:



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

List of figures:

- 1) Tetradrachm of Alexander I Balas and Cleopatra Thea, mint of Seleucia Pieria. (Houghton-Spaer 1998, n. 1483).
- 2) Tetradrachm of Alexander I Balas, mint of Sidon, Seleucid Era 165 = 148/7 B.C. (Houghton-Spaer 1998, n. 1515).
- 3) Tetradrachm of Alexander I Balas, mint of Sidon, Seleucid Era 164 = 149/8 B.C. (Houghton-Spaer 1998, n. 1514).
- 4) Drachm of Mithradates I, mint of Hecatompylos (?) (Simonetta 1968, Tav. III, n. 42).
- 5) Drachm of Phraates II, mint of Hecatompylos (?) (Simonetta 1968, Tav. IV, n. 14).
- 6) Drachm of Phraates II, mint of Hecatompylos (?) (Simonetta 1968, Tav. IV, n. 16).
- 7) Tetradrachm of Demetrius II, mint of Antiochia, Seleucid Era 186 = 127/6 B.C. (Gardner 1878, p. 77, 15).
- 8) Tetradrachm of Artabazos of Characene, Seleucid Era 264 = 49/8 B.C. (Aram 1986, Tf. 16, n. 505).

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