

AN ATTEMPT TO IDENTIFY A PICTURE ON THE PARTHIAN ROCK-CUT RELIEFS OF HONG-I AZHDAR

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Among the Iranian rock-cut reliefs by its iconographic and stylistic diversity, as well as the problem of historical reality is distinguished that of Hong-i Azhdar (Hong-i Novruz)(Fig. 1). This monument (5.40 meters in length and 2.10 meters in height) was erected in the north-eastern mountainous region of the Iranian province of Khuzhistan, about 17 km to the north of the modern city of Izeh, in the neighborhood of the ancient Elamite rock-cut relief. Although this monument is known to the scholarship still from the mid-XIX century, it became a subject for study only from 1860's. This relief has been studied in the context of the history and culture of ancient Iran by L.Vanden Berghe, H.Mathiesen, A.Invernizzi, E. De Waele, S.Downey, T.Kawami and others.¹ In 2008-2011 the Italian-Iranian joint expedition of V.Messina and J.Mehr Kian even had studied it by means of lazer scanning.² Anyway, until today the monument lacks consensus regarding the date, genre and identity of pictures depicted on it.³

Agreeing with the opinion of L.Vanden Berghe in that the rock-cut relief of Hong-i Azhdar was created during the reign of the Parthian king Mithridates I (165-132 BC)⁴ and is directly connected with the military operations of the Parthians in Mesopotamia and Elymais in 141-138 BC, we shall study one of the problems of that monument, i.e. the identity of the person standing behind the king on the horseback.

All scholars who had studied the rock-cut relief of Hong-i Azhdar exclusively were

¹ Vanden Berghe 1963: 55-168; Vanden Berghe, Schippmann 1985; Mathiesen 1985: 191-196; Mathiesen 1992; Invernizzi 1998: 219-259; De Waele 1975: 59-79; Downey 1977; Downey 1986: 580-585; Kawami 1987; Harmatta 1981: 189-217.

² Messina, Mehr Kian 2011: 215-231.

³ According to H.Mathiesen, the left group of the pictures on Hong-i Azhdar relief represented in profile was carved in the second half of the II century BC, as a commemoration of the victory of Mithridates I over Elymais, and the right one, which is carved frontally, has been augmented later, by the request of the Parthian governor of Elymais (Mathiesen 1992: 121). The diachronic character of the two groups of the monument is accepted also by V.Messina and J.Mehr Kian (Messina, Mehr Kian 2011: 215-231). T.Kawami regards late II century or early III century as the latest chronological limit (Kawami 1987: 124). His opinion is shared by S.Downey who considers it possible that "the figures of the rider and the page were deliberately archaized for some now unknown historical reason" (Downey 1986: 381). Such an approach is demonstrated also by V.S.Curtis and D.V. Schlumberger, but who suggests a comparatively narrow period for the creation of the monument - late I century or even II century (Curtis 2000: 25; Schlumberger 1986: 1043). A.Invernizzi also takes into consideration the stylistic peculiarities of the right section of pictures and suggests to date the monument with the I-III centuries AD (Invernizzi 1998: 258). More fundamental approach was demonstrated by L.Vanden Berghe, who, taking into account the similarity of the rider to that on the coins of Mithridates I concluded that the rock-relief was created towards the end of the king's later period; thus, the rider represents Mithridates who receives the defeated people of Elymais (Vanden Berghe 1963:167; Vanden Berghe 1983:120-121; Vanden Bergh, Schippmann 1985: 36, pl. 2).

⁴ The dates of the Parthian kings are given according to G.Assar (Assar 2006a: 87-158).

focused on the central persons of the composition; the picture behind the king was not discussed. Regarding him as the “squire”, “bodyguard”, “servant”, scholars neither were concerned with the identity nor the participation of that person in the given historical event.

This picture has been considerably damaged due to erosion. Currently many iconographic details are hardly visible which makes it difficult to identify him. However, it would be possible to establish the tentative list of candidates if we approach the problem from the point of view of fundamental principles of the ancient Near Eastern artistic thinking - **usefulness**⁵ and **hierarchy**. In such case two related questions arose:

- a) does the picture of the person standing behind the king has social content or not,
- b) what was the role of that person in the artistically represented historical event depicted on the monument.

Justin regards the person on horseback in the Parthian reality as a sign of the priority of aristocrats over slaves⁶. And if we consider the information of the Roman historiographer as a truth, and thus directly connect it with the opposition of rider-pedestrian on the left group of pictures of Hong-i Azhdar, then the person on foot really should be regarded as a slave or servant of the king. But this would be a simplified and methodologically wrong decision. In the Near Eastern reality the word for slave (Greek δούλος) used to have different social meanings. In one case it was applied to slaves, in other cases a person who was somebody's subject, in the third case to those who generally has a subordinate status and whose right on life and death belongs to the king.

Our observations of the genre and identity of persons depicted on the rock-cut relief of Hong-i Azhdar show that this has an official character. Hence, intended to propagate official ideology, it should have been created according to the principles of usefulness and hierarchy. In that case it becomes clear that on the official composition which represents the Parthian society, slaves or servants could not have place. Accordingly, the identity of the person on foot should be evaluated not by means of his place on the relief but by his place just after the king. From this point of view the possible identification of the picture should be narrowed; probably that person belonged to the closest circle of Mithridates I and, possibly, played an important role in the historical event depicted on the relief. This suggestion follows also from the comparison of the Hong-i Azhdar relief with the identical monuments of the pre-Parthian and post-Parthian periods.

In the official monuments of the IX-V centuries BC usually after the king are depicted princes. It points on the status of “after the king”, “second by rank” (*pasāgrīw*). This phenomenon is vividly expressed in the Neo-Assyrian art where the status under

⁵ The word “usefulness” V.G.Lukonin considers inseparability of artistic perception from religious and “producing” mentality. By his definition, “On different stages of the existence and development of ancient oriental art this peculiarity was expressed by different sized lucidity, but characterizes it permanently (Lukonin 1987: 50).

⁶ Justinus 1953: XLI, 3. 4.

discussion expresses, along with the legal status (prince), also his participation in the rule of the country.⁷ Introduction of the latter in the official art had political-propagating sense, in order to make public image for him and secure the easy transfer of royal power.⁸ This motive was introduced and used in the official art of the V century BC Achaemenid empire. But since the Achaemenid crown princes did not participate actively in the military-political affairs of the empire, this propagatory form for introducing them as “after king” remained as a unique parallel to the ritual of introduction of the crown prince (ἀνάδειξις).

The rock-carved inscriptions and other written sources from Persepolis, Hatra, Edessa, and Parthia show that in the Achaemenid and Hellenistic periods the term *pasāgrīw* “after king” was used in two senses, in relation to whether the preposition *pasā* “after” was expressed in the static or dynamic sense.⁹ In the first case *pasāgrīw* shows steady status in the hierarchy of the person who was granted with this title which means “second after the king”, “second (person) by the rank”, “viceroy”, “vicegerent”. In that case this word is a parallel to the Old Persian **dvitīyaxšaya* “second governor”, Middle Persian *bidaxš* “bdeshx, viceroy”.¹⁰ In the second case, when *pasā* is used in the provisional sense, *pasāgrīw* means “successor”, “crown prince”.¹¹

In the Parthian empire references to the succession of the throne are contradictory. Strabo denies the existence of the principle of direct succession in Parthia, saying that the supreme right for the succession was reserved for the Parthian senate.¹² And according to Justin, first Armenian Arshakids follow the Achaemenid tradition and managed that question towards the end of their rule.¹³ But, as it seems, that contradiction is not as principal as it might appear. It reflects two tendencies which used to exist simultaneously in the Parthian world. Beginning from Mithridates I and due to the formation of the Parthian empire the participation of Parthian Arshakid princes in the military-administrative state affairs was increasing. That practice was carried out in order to centralize the administrative organization of the empire and at the same time to

⁷ A similar positional relationship is observed on the wall-painting of Sargon II in Dur-Šarrukin (Loud and Altman 1938: 85, pl. 89). In this composition Ch. Altman regards the identification of the god on the podium with Assur as “possible”, and the king with Sargon II “undoubtedly”. What regards the third picture, the author not only erroneously presents his place in the composition, that is “to the right of the king”, instead of “after the king”, but also defines him simply as “accompanying official” (Loud and Altman 1938: 85). To our knowledge, the official character of the wall-painting, the position of the picture “after the king”, measurements identical with the king, luxurious clothing and headgear forces one to identify the picture with the crown prince Sennacherib, son of Sargon II who during the reign of his father held the office of the ruler of Assyrian provinces facing Urartu (Frahm 2002: 1116).

⁸ Melikyan 2013: 109.

⁹ Sanches 2014: 53-63; Gnoli 2002: 79.

¹⁰ Hinz 1969: 149-153; Khurshudyan 1990: 9; Khurshudyan 2015: 21-48.

¹¹ In Iranian inscriptions the term under discussion first was used in the bilingual of Xerxes I from Persepolis in the face of its homonym *’passā tanūm* “after him” as a unique epithet of Xerxes who was recognized by Darius I as his heir to the throne (Herzfeld 1932: 4-5). See also Gnoli 2002: 79; Melikyan 2013: 88-118.

¹² Strabo 1960: XI. 9, 3.

¹³ Justinus 1953: XLI, 5. 10.

establish control over the succession. With the incorporation of the future heir to the throne into state affairs the ruling king first of all was concerned with the promotion of experience for him, and makes conditions for eliminating possible alternatives of the Parthian senate in regard to the succession. So, in the early Parthian state system the *pasāgrīw* office became a sort of its Assyrian-Achemenid precedents; it propagates the person who occupies a place after the king in the state affairs, whose right on the throne later was ratified by the senate.¹⁴

Under the light of the compositional peculiarities of the Assyrian and Achemenid reliefs one might consider the possibility of the identification of the person standing behind Mithridates I as his son Phraates. According to the current view, Rinu, the mother of Phraates was the descendant of the family of Karenians who rule in the neighborhood of Ecbatana which after the conquest of Media in 148/147 BC had recognized the Parthian supremacy.¹⁵ But even if we accept that the political marriage with Rinu took place in that same year (the conquest of Media), then the first child should have been born in 147/146 BC. Hence, the identification of the bearded person with the son of Mithridates I seems impossible.

The next person from the close neighborhood of Mithridates I was the ruler of Media who is mentioned by Justin ("Abbreviation" XLI) as Vagasis,¹⁶ in some copies also Bacasis¹⁷ or Bocasis.¹⁸ Saying that after the conquest of Media, before his return to Hyrcania, Mithridates handed over to him the rule of that province¹⁹, but he does not reveal their affiliation to each other. This gap is filled by the Babylonian astronomical table dated with the VII month of the Seleucid calendar for the year 179 (year 133, 7/8.10-5/6.11) which calls the Median king by the name *Bagāyāsh*, regarding him as being the brother of Mithridates I.²⁰ Taking into account the identity of the Iranian Bagāyāsh with *Vagasis-Bacasis-Bocasis* reported by Justin (*vag-bac(g)-boc(g)*), we can agree with G.Assar who regards all these forms as variants of the same name.²¹

N.Debevoise is right when he noticed that the appointment of Bagasis in the office of the ruler of Media contradicts the practice adopted by the tradition of leaving the representatives of the local dynasties in their places.²² The violation of that practice could be explained with the important role given to Media in the expansionist policy of the Parthians. Firm control over the recently conquered province was intended to close

¹⁴ The mechanism introduced by Mithridates I is clearly visible especially during the "Dark ages" of the Parthian empire (91-55 BC)(Assar 2006b: 56-104) and later, from the early I century AD until its last quarter (Melikyan 2003: 22-26).

¹⁵ Assar 2006a: 95.

¹⁶ Iustinus 1886: XLI, 6. 7.

¹⁷ Iustinus 1953: XLI, 6. 7.

¹⁸ Justin 1994: XLI, 6. 7.

¹⁹ Iustinus 1953: XLI, 6. 7.

²⁰ Sachs, Hunger 1996: 216-217, № 132B, 1. 22.

²¹ Assar 2005: 42-43.

²² Debevoise 2008: 43, n. 96.

the access of the Seleucids to Parthia, and to become an important precondition in the future movement of Parthians to the west as well. And although the Greek and Roman sources does not mention Bagasis anymore, the information contained in the numismatic materials and Mesopotamian astronomical tables prove the important role of Media in the western policy of Mithridates I.

Bagasis was the person from the neighborhood of Mithridates I whose profile has reached us due to the silver *obols* minted in Ecbatana after the conquest of Media²³ and copper double *dichalcouses*.²⁴ On the obverse figures the profile of Mithridates I wearing a diadem, and on the reverse that of the Bagasis with the headware of a satrap (Fig. 2). Although the legend ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ (“[coin] of Arshak the Great king”) in Π-form encircles not the figure of Mithridates but that of Bagasis, it goes without saying that it refers to the Parthian king but not the ruler of Media. The minting of coins bearing parallel pictures of the Parthian king and the vassal ruler is unprecedented phenomenon in Parthia. In this regard G.Koshelenko suggests that “the Parthian satrap Bakasis was trying to reach some independence from the central government of Mithridates I”.²⁵ As to L.Torday, he assumes that between Mithridates I and Bagasis existed relations of co-rulership.²⁶

Hardly the suggestion of G.Koshelenko could be accepted since it lacks any evidence in written sources. As to the second opinion, in the Hellenistic world and especially in the Seleucid empire (whose impact on the early Parthian political system could not be doubted) our knowledge of the co-rulership mentioned above²⁷ theoretically does not exclude such a possibility. But we think that such relationship could have been only unofficial. Otherwise it might have performed through the ceremony of ἀνάδειξις which was adopted by the Hellenistic world from Achemenids,²⁸ an event which probably should have been fixed by the Greco-Roman sources and Babylonian astronomers. And in that case calculations of the calendar carried out by the latters should have took place on behalf of two kings, as it was done in the text from Uruk which regards the co-rulership of Phraates II and his mother Rinu:

“11: Uruk. Month V,

12: [day x, year 116, which is year] 180, Arsaces and Rīnnu, his mother,

13: (are) Kings”²⁹.

Narrative sources does not contain any information regarding the extent and form of the Median king’s participation in the conquest of Mesopotamia, and the Babylonian astronomical texts mention him only in the context of events which took place in 179

²³ Sellwood 1980: 12. 4-5.

²⁴ Sellwood 1980: 12. 13; 12. 17-18; 12. 23-24.

²⁵ Koshelenko 1972: 99.

²⁶ Torday 1997: 349.

²⁷ Bickerman 1985: 23-24.

²⁸ Bickerman 1985: 24.

²⁹ See Assar 2006: 95.

(133 BC) and 185 (126 BC).³⁰ However, it goes without saying that the responsibility of a large-scaled invasion into Mesopotamia probably must have been laid on the ruler of the neighboring ally, i.e. Media.

The Parthian army invaded Mesopotamia under the command of Mithridates I in 141 BC. In June-July of that same year Parthians entered Seleucia on Tigris, and Babylon in July 6/7. His success in Mesopotamia Mithridates celebrated with the minting of silver drachmaes and tetradrachmaes in Seleucia on Tigris, on which the king is given a new title “Great king Arshak, Hellenophil” and new official image,³¹ which almost is identical with the rider on Hong-i Azhdar. But according to another Babylonian astronomical table, in the IX month of 171 of the Seleucid calendar (December 3/4, 141 BC – January 1/2, 140 BC) Mithridates I had already returned to Parthia³² and was concerned with the Saka tribes who were terrifying his new empire in the north-east.³³ Being busy with the extension of his eastern borders³⁴ Mithridates I never returned to Mesopotamia. Hence, neither the war against Demetrios, nor after the defeat and imprisonment of the latter the durative struggle for Elymais were headed by Mithridates personally.

A question arises concerning the leadership of the military operations in the west in the absence of Mithridates. Considerable number of scholars think that shortly after the conquest of Babylonia the old political system of this region was replaced by the Parthian one, and the Babylonian scribes continue to use the title ^{lú}GAL ERÍN KUR URI^{ki} šá ana UGU 4 ^{lú}GAL ú-qu-tú “commander who stands over four commanders” in regard to the Parthian viceroy of Babylonia³⁵ who was in command of military operations. This view is acceptable, although still remains the question whether this person had acted alone or through the advise of Parthian central administration.

On one of the Babylonian astronomical tables dated with 171 BC (141 BC) of Seleucid calendar as the first Parthian “commander who stands over four commanders” of Babylonia is mentioned Antiochus, the son of the king Arabuzana (¹An-ti-’u-uk-su A šá ¹Ar-’a-a-bu-za-na LUGAL).³⁶ The same individual is mentioned also in the cuneiform tablet dated with the IX month of that year (November 3/4, 141 BC – January 1/2, 140 BC) in the context of the Parthian campaign against Elymais:

³⁰ Sachs, Hunger 1996: 216-217, № 132B, 1. 22; 256-259, № 126B, 1. 2.

³¹ Sellwood 1980: 13.1-10.

³² Sachs, Hunger 1996: 216-217, № 140 C, 1. 34.

³³ Assar 2006a: 91.

³⁴ Justinus 1953: 41.6.1-3; Strabo 1960: XI. 9.2.

³⁵ By K.Kessler, this title which was alien to the Greeks, was given to the Seleucid strategos of Babylon under whose supremacy were acting four other strategoses (Kessler 1999: 178). Initially Y. Mitsuma considered that “the general above the four generals” is probably to be equal in the status with “the Satrap of the East” of the Seleucid kingdom”, to whom four other governors were subordinated” (Mitsuma 2002: 26-27). After the revision of his assumption he thinks that the chief of the four generals of Babylonia was the supreme administrator of Upper satrapies, i.e. all Transeuphratian east of the Seleucid empire (Mitsuma 2007/9:9).

³⁶ Sachs, Hunger 1996: 134-135, № 140A, 1. 7.

“34: That month, I heard as follows: King Arsaces and his troops departed from Hyrcania.

35: I heard as follows: (on the) 6th, the Elamite and his troops departed towards Apamea which is on the river Silhu for fighting.

36: That [month?], the people who dwell in Apamea went out to Bit-Karkudī; they burned Apamea.

37: [...] An(tiochus) the general who is above the four generals, who was representing King Arsaces, went out from Sel[eucia which is on]

38: the Tigris towards the Elamite for fighting...”.³⁷

The name of the Babylonian commander and his patronymics point on his non-Parthian origins. M.Olbrycht regards the name Arabuzana as a corrupted form of Ariobazan and, recalling its frequent appearance in the I century BC dynasty of Atropatena, identifies him as the son or grandson of Artaban, the king of Media-Atropatena. According to him, this Antiochus was born as the result of the political Seleucid-Atropatenean marriage and named after Antiochus III, his maternal grandfather.³⁸

The involvement of the representative of a vassal dynasty in the military operations outside his country was a common practice during the Achemenids and Seleucids. Numerous examples could be referred to also in the Parthian empire. But in our case it seems highly improbable that Mithridates who was busy with the defence and increase of his eastern borders could give the recently conquered Babylonia to the prince of not too long ago subdued country without establishing firm control over him. On the contrary, the situation in the Parthian-Seleucid front and in Mesopotamia and beyond the borders of the empire, and inability to successfully manage the affairs in the West should have forced Mithridates to hand over the material and military resources and administration of the West, as well as the expansion and security of the borders to an experienced and trusted person. From the Babylonian astronomical texts Bagasis, king of Media appears as such person:

In the astronomical table dated with the VII month of 179 BC (October 7/8, 133 BC –November 5/6) is mentioned Philinus, another Parthian general of Babylonia:

“21: That month, I heard as follows: Philinus, the general of Babylonia who is above the four generals,

22: who in month I had gone to the cites of Media before Bagāyāsh, the brother of the king”³⁹

The phrase “Cities of Media” in the text (URU^{meš} šá KUR Ma-da-a-a), undoubtedly is used traditionally as an equivalent to the former “Ummān-Manda” which the Assyrian-Babylonian scribes use in regard to the whole country of Media. Due to the defective state of the tablet it is impossible to define the exact motive of the above-mentioned trip

³⁷ Sachs, Hunger 1996: 146-147, № 140C.

³⁸ Olbrycht 2010: 239-240.

³⁹ Sachs, Hunger 1996: 216-217, № 132B, 1. 22.

of Babylonian general. Excluding the possibility that he could have exercised any legacy or function in Media, we can propose that the purpose of that trip was a report to the king of Media.

Mithridates I had died in 132 BC. The troublesome situation along the borders demands to put on the throne a strong and experienced person, such as Bagasis. Probably, Mithridates I also might prefer to act in that manner, just like in the similar situation he was granted with throne from Phraates I, his brother, bypassing the former's sons.⁴⁰ Meanwhile Parthian senate put on the throne Phraates, his underaged son (Phraates II - 132-127 BC).⁴¹ Probably, the order of succession drawn by Phraates I and Mithridates I had not become political reality yet. However, as Babylonian sources mention, during the reign of Phraates II Bagasis had completely preserved his former positions.

In 130 BC Antiochus VII Sidetes organized a major campaign against Parthians and defeating Phraates II in three battles, conquered Seleucia on Tigris and Babylon.⁴² Since in 130-129 BC Phraates II was only 16-17 years old, probably Bagasis, king of Media had to take care of the war against Seleucids. Accordingly, his role should have been significant in the rebellion of Hellenistic towns of Media against Antiochus.⁴³ That organized action which put an end to the attempts of the Seleucids to re-conquer the lost territories, demonstrates the popularity of Bagasis during the last two decades.

After the defeat of Antiochus VII and the retreat of Seleucid army Babylonian astronomical texts testify in favor of the participation of the Median king Bagasis in the military-political processes in Mesopotamia, particularly in the war of Parthians against Hyspaosines, king of Charax. The text dated with the VIII month, 185 BC of the Seleucid calendar (September 31/October 1, 127 – October 29/30) says:

“6:..... That month, on the 4th Timarchus,

7: who previously from the side of King Arsaces was appointed the guard commander and who in month IV

8: had escaped from Hyspaosines, came from the side of Indupanē with troops of Media;

⁴⁰ Justinus 1953: XLI, 5, 9-10. “Priapatius, after reigning fifteen years, died, leaving two sons, Mithridates and Phraates, of whom the elder, Phraates, being, according to the custom of the nation, heir to the crown, subdued the Mardi, a strong people, by force of arms, and died not long after, leaving several sons, whom he set aside, and left the throne, in preference, to his brother Mithridates, a man of extraordinary ability, thinking that more was due to the name of king than to that of father, and that he ought to consult the interests of his country rather than those of his children”.

⁴¹ On tetradrachmae minted in Suza for the commemoration of his accession Phraates II is represented as a youngster, without moustache (Sellwood 1980: Types 44-45). G.Assar is right when he assumes that the co-rulership of Phraates II and his mother after the death of Mithridates I proves that in July-August of 132 BC he has not reached his adulthood (in Zoroastrian tradition the adulthood begins with 15 years) (Assar 2005: 44).

⁴² Debevoise 2008: 51-52.

⁴³ Debevoise 2008: 52.

9: they entered Babylon. That day, the administrator of Esangil and the Babylonians provided for him one bull and 3 (sheep) sacrifices".⁴⁴

Although the Babylonian source does not clarify the offices of Timarchus and Indupane, from the general context of the text G.Assar assumes that the former was the commander of the Babylonian garrison appointed by Phraates II, and Indupane the newly appointed satrap of Babylonia or the commander of the satrapy's army.⁴⁵

In order to reveal the role of Bagasis in the struggle against Hyspaosines is of importance the mention of **Median army**. Undoubtedly, the advance of Median army towards Seleucia on Tigris should have been caused by the conquest of Babylon by Hyspaosines and carried out only by the order of Bagasis. About the exceptional rights of Bagasis in regard to the territories lying beyond the borders of the region under his jurisdiction testifies one Babylonian astronomical table dated with the last period of Phraates II:

“1:[...] from Seleucia [...]

2: [... Bagāyāsh ordered the 4 generals to [(enter Babylon from Seleucia)?]

3: [...] above Babylon towards the rivers to the [...]

4: [...] this [general] from his camp with his riders [...]

5: [...] and workmen an offering which was like [...]

6: [...] they provided for him. The administrator of Esangil and the Babylon[ians]

7: [... performed] sacrifices at the ‘Gate of the Son of the Prince’ of Esangil for the general [...]

8: [...] to great [gods] for the life of King Arsaces [...].⁴⁶

Defective state of the cuneiform tablet does not allow us to identify the described event. The phrase referred to in the second line (“[Bagā]yāsh ordered four generals”) is not enough to assume that Bagasis held the offices of the Median king and the “commander of four generals”. Hence, the order given by him to four generals could lead to an assumption that the Median king experiences a military-political supremacy over them during Mithridates I and his successor Phraates II as well, as the architect of the Parthian Arshakids in the West.

With the proposed role of Bagasis beyond the borders of Media should be connected also the first Parthian-Armenian war. Still in 1888 A. von Gutschmid and some other scholars, trusting the confusing information of the “Epitome” of Justin,⁴⁷ had suggested that the above-mentioned Armenian-Parthian war took place during the last

⁴⁴ Sachs, Hunger 1996: 254-255, № 126A, Obv., lines. 6-9.

⁴⁵ Assar 2006a: 104.

⁴⁶ Sachs, Hunger 1996: 256-259, № 126B.

⁴⁷ Justinus 1953: XLII, 2, 4. “Artabanus, making war upon the Thogarii, received a wound in the arm, of which he immediately died. He was succeeded by his son Mithridates, to whom his achievements procured the surname of Great; for, being fired with a desire to emulate the merit of his ancestors, he was enabled by the vast powers of his mind to surpass their renown. He fought successfully, too, several times, against the Scythians: At last he turned his arms against Artavasdes, king of Armenia“.

years of Mithridates II.⁴⁸ But they did not consider the important fact that in the Prologue to the Pompeus Trogus Book XLII, Mithridates the Great who waged war against Armenia is regarded as the king who had succeeded Phraates I (168-165/4 BC) but not Artabanus I (126-122 BC). "In the forty-second volume are contained Parthian affairs. How the prefect of Parthia created by Phrates, Himerus, made war on the Meseni and of his brutal treatment of the people of Babylon and Seleucia: how Phrates was succeeded on the throne by King Mithridates surnamed The Great, who made war on the Armenians..."⁴⁹ It was not considered also the question that, Mithridates II (121-91 BC⁵⁰), the son and successor of Artabanus I could not fight with the Armenian king Artavazd I (160-115 BC) towards the end of his rule (*ad postremum*). From the point of view of these principal discrepancies looks well-founded the suggestion of Zh.G.Elchibekyan who thought that the war in question in the "Epitome" of Justin was removed to more earlier period due to the confusion of repeated personal names, and that "the first Armenian-Parthian war must have taken place during the last years of Mithridates I."⁵¹

Thus, it appears that the Roman historiography had ascribed to Mithridates a war which he could not wage personally since he was busy with the problems in the East. This paradox was solved by M.Khorenatsi in his "History of the Armenians", where in the Book I we read: "Arshak the Great, king of the Persians and Parthians, who was Parthian by race He made his brother Vagharshak king over this land of Armenia, thinking it convenient in this way to render his own rule unshakeable. And ... established as his frontiers part of Western Syria, Palestine, Asia, and all of Mediterranean and T'etalia, from the Sea of Pontus to the place where the Caucasus runs into the Western Sea, and Atrpatakan".⁵²

Indeed, it was revealed since long that Arshak the Great and Vagarshak of M.Khorenatsi combine numerous historical personalities who lived in different periods.⁵³ Some scholars who gave credence to the "facts" contained in the source mentioned above which deals with the enthronement of the Parthian kings' brother in Armenia and thus ascribing him the foundation of the Armenian Arshakid dynasty, identify Arshak the Great of M.Khorenatsi with Vagharsh I Arshakuni, and accordingly that Vagharshak with Trdat I.⁵⁴ It shall be stated that these arguments are not enough to prove the above-mentioned identifications.⁵⁵

⁴⁸ Debevoise 2008: 58; Diakonoff 1961: 19; Manaseryan 1987: 27-28; Bivar 2006: 40-41.

⁴⁹ Justin 1994. Prolog. XLII.

⁵⁰ Assar 2006a: 134.

⁵¹ Elchibekyan 1979: 72-76.

⁵² Movses Khorenatsi 1913: I. 8.

⁵³ Sarkisyan 1973: 57; Danielyan 1976: 165-169.

⁵⁴ Yeremyan 1971: 745; Danielyan 1976: 167.

⁵⁵ M.Khorenatsi could have erroneously identified Arshak the Great with Arshak the Brave in the oral tradition regarding the early Parthian history which was available to him, but hardly he could identify Trdat with his kingly

A new and logical approach was demonstrated by G.Assar, who regards the name Vagharshak mentioned by M.Khorenatsi as variant of Justin's *Vagasis* (*Bacasis*, *Bocasis*) and *Bagāyāsh* of Babylonian texts, and his brother "Arshak the Great" with Mithridates I.⁵⁶ As to why M.Khorenatsi regards Bagasis-Vagharshak Armenian king, he writes: "Perhaps, the satrapy of Media Atropatene covered part of what Moses perceived as Greater Armenia".⁵⁷

Indeed, to the Parthian empire during the reign of Mithridates I could not be attributed such expansionist ambitions, and it is clear that the Armenian historiographer had pushed the later situation⁵⁸ back to the period of Arshak I. But we assume that in this case the extensive region "granted" to Vagharshak-Bagasis by M.Khorenatsi should be understood merely in the sense of the "western side" of the Parthian empire, as it is summarized in the Book II of the "History": "At that time he made his brother Vagharshak king of Armenia, giving him the regions of the north and west".⁵⁹ The passage of M. Khorenatsi was understood by St.Taronetsi as follows: "In that period of time Arshak the Great, the grandson of Arshak the Brave, enthroned his brother Vagharshak over our land Armenia. He left all the Western world (the west - A.M.) which was obedient to his authority, to him and he himself left for Bahl".⁶⁰ In that case Vagharshak-Bagasis appears as the person who was granted the defence and extension of the western borders of Parthian empire: "... for the frontiers of the brave", he said, "are their weapons; as much as they cut, that much they hold".⁶¹

If our assumption regarding the position of Bagasis in the Parthian empire is acceptable, then it would be fairly possible to identify him with the person depicted in the left group of pictures of Hong-i Azhdar. In the case of such explanation principally is not important the question whether the commander of the Parthian army which had reached the Malmir field was Bagasis, the governor of the Parthian West or the Babylonian "commander over four commanders" acting as his subordinate. The latter acted on behalf of the king and, naturally, on the official monuments erected in order to commemorate the victory of the Parthian army should have been depicted the Parthian king and the person who was the "second after the king".

brother Vagharsh since the works of Greco-Roman historiographers used by him, especially Josephus Flavius, clearly distinguish these persons (Josephus 1963: XX, 3. 4).

⁵⁶ Assar 2005: 42.

⁵⁷ Assar 2005: 43.

⁵⁸ Tacitus 1963: VI, 31.

⁵⁹ Movses Khorenatsi 1913: II, 3.

⁶⁰ Stepanos Taronetsi 1885: 30.

⁶¹ Movses Khorenatsi 1913: I, 8.

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Translated from the Armenian by Aram Kosyan



Picture 1. Rock-cut relief of Hong-i Azhdar



Picture 2. Silver obolus of Mithridates I, with the image of Bagasis on the reverse (Sellwood 1980, 12.5).