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SØREN LUND SØRENSEN — KLAUS GEUS

A Macedonian King in Arabia.
Seleukos IV in Two Old South Arabian Inscriptions
A corrected synchronism and its consequences

Introduction

Texts in the Old South Arabian languages documenting relations with the Greco-Roman world are of natural interest to classicists¹. They are, however, of greater importance to scholars of the civilisations of the ancient Arabian Peninsula, as they may provide synchronisms for sources otherwise very difficult to date. Although a reliable palaeographical chronology has emerged, its anchor points for the pre-Christian period are based on external synchronisms.

Ry 547 and A-20-216

Peter Stein has helpfully refined the palaeographical development of the monumental South Arabian script dividing it into various steps. For the palaeographical step C2 Stein puts forward the famous bilingual inscription from Širwāḥ as the anchor point². Unearthed by the German Archaeological Institute in 2004 this huge lime-stone block contains a complete Nabatean inscription as well as enough letters of a Sabaeen inscription to conclude that it is the same text. This unique document is dated according to the Nabatean king Aretas IV to the year 7/6 BC thereby providing a fixed date for this palaeographical step³.

¹ We are grateful to the editors of *Tyche* for accepting this short article and to the reviewers for valuable criticism. Furthermore, we thank the members of our reading group “Old South Arabian inscriptions” at the department for “Historical geography of the Mediterranean world” at the Freie Universität Berlin for comments on this paper.

² *DAI Širwāḥ 2004–12 + Frag.* Cf. P. Stein, *Palaeography of the South Arabian script. New evidence for an absolute chronology*, *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 24 (2013) 190. Cf. also P. Stein *apud* A. Multhoff, *Merchant and marauder – The adventures of a Sabaeen clansman*, *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 30 (2019) 259–261.

³ First mentioned in N. Nebes, *Eine datierte nabatäische-sabäische Bilingue aus Sirwāḥ*, *Jemen-Report* 37 (2006) 10. See also N. Nebes, *Die Nabatäer in Südarabien. Eine datierte nabatäisch-sabäische Inschrift (Bilingue) aus Sirwah/Jemen*, *Antike Welt* 40.1 (2009) 52–53; M. A. Speidel, *Almaqah in Rom? Zu den Beziehungen zwischen dem kaiserzeitlichen Imperium Romanum und Südarabien im Spiegel der dokumentarischen Überlieferung*, *ZPE* 194 (2016) 247–249; C. J. Robin, *Les silences d’Aelius Gallus. L’hypothèse d’une brève occupation romaine et nabatéenne du royaume de Saba*, in: *The State Hermitage Museum* (ed.), *Ex Oriente lux*.

For the previous step Stein adduces an inscription (*Ry* 547 = *RES* 3605) mentioning the second year of a king Seleukos⁴. A similar inscription (*A-20-216*), first published in 2011, is dated according to the seventh year of a homonymous king⁵. Whereas *Ry* 547 comes from Mārib, the provenance of *A-20-216* is disputed, but the dedicators of both steles are identified as foreigners from the eastern Arabian Peninsula, most likely Gerrha⁶. The full text of these inscriptions is of minor importance for this article. What matters here is that the inscriptions are thought to be dated according to the well-known Seleucid era initiated by Seleukos I Nikator (305–281 BC)⁷.

The Seleucid era is, however, only a quasi regnal era. Assuming the diadem in 305 BC Seleukos retrojected his reign from his reconquest of Babylon in spring 311 BC, and the counting of years from this date was taken over as a dynastic era by his successor Antiochos I (281–261 BC)⁸. Two calendrical systems, a Babylonian and a Macedonian, are attested for the Seleucid era. Whereas the latter has the first year of the era fall in 312/311 BC the former lets the era begin in 311/310 BC⁹. Consequently, no documents exist dated to year 2 or 7 of the Seleucid Era in either system (i.e. 311/310 BC (SEM)

Collected papers to mark the 75th anniversary of Mikhail Borisovich Piotrovsky, Saint Petersburg 2019, 242–244.

⁴ *Ry* 547,1: *snt tntn SLK mlk*’ (“the second year of king Seleukos”). Cf. Stein, *Palaeography*, 189–190 (*op. cit.* n. 2). On *Ry* 547 = *RES* 3605, cf. G. Ryckmans, *Inscriptions sud-arabes. Quinzième série*, *Le Muséon* 70 (1957) 113–117. That *SLK* does in fact render the name Seleukos may be surmised from the Minaean inscription *Riyād* 302F8, in which Seleukeia is referred to as *SLKY*.

⁵ *Editio princeps* of *A-20-216* in A. Prioleta, *The Sabaic inscription A-20-216. A new Sabaean-Seleucid synchronism*, Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies 41 (2011) 283–294: *b-snt sb’ SLK mlk* (“in the year seven of king Seleukos”).

⁶ Cf. C. J. Robin, A. Prioleta, *Nouveaux arguments en faveur d’une identification de la cité de Gerrha avec le royaume de Hagar (Arabie orientale)*, *Semita et Classica* 6 (2013) 162–163; 167–170, who also argue that the fragmentary *CIH* 921 comprises the missing right-hand part of *Ry* 547.

⁷ On this ruler, see A. Mehl, *Seleukos Nikator und sein Reich*, Louvain 1986; J. D. Grainger, *Seleukos Nikator. Constructing a Hellenistic kingdom*, London 1990; D. Ogden, *The legend of Seleucus. Kingship, narrative and mythmaking in the ancient world*, Cambridge 2017; L. Hannestad, *Nikator Seleucus I and his empire*, Aarhus 2020.

⁸ *App. Syr.* 272–275.54–55; *Diod.* 19,91,4–5; *BM* 34660 (= *BCHP* 3); *BM* 35603; *BM* 3592. On the recapture of Babylon and the introduction of the Seleucid era, cf. E. Bickerman, *Chronology of the ancient world*, Ithaca, New York 1980, 71–72; B. Z. Wacholder, *The beginning of the Seleucid era and the chronology of the Diadochoi*, in: F. E. Greenspahn, E. Hilgert, B. L. Mack (eds.), *Nourished with peace. Studies in Hellenistic Judaism in memory of Samuel Sandmel*, Chico, Ca. 1984, 183–211; Mehl, *Seleukos Nikator*, 91–94 (*op. cit.* n. 7); J. C. Yardley, P. Wheatley, W. Heckel, *Justin. Epitome of the Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus, 2. Books 13.–15. The successors to Alexander the Great*, Oxford 2011, 271; P. Kosmin, *Time and its adversaries in the Seleucid empire*, Cambridge, Ma. 2018, especially 21–30.

⁹ Kosmin, *Time and its adversaries*, 35–37 (*op. cit.* n. 8); O. D. Hoover, *Time is of the essence. The Seleucid Era and coinage*, *ANS* 3 (2020) 19–20.

or 310/309 BC (SEB) and 306/305 (SEM) or 305/304 BC (SEB), respectively) referring to Seleukos I as king¹⁰.

Already the editors of *A-20-216* noted this stumbling block and suggested that an actual regnal era was in use in the present inscriptions. The second and seventh year should, then, correspond to 303/302 and 298/297 BC, respectively¹¹. Such a dating is not only very unique, but it is also unlikely that two documents from Southern Arabia both include the same eclectic era.

The first part of the argument, that the inscriptions are mentioning an actual regnal year, seems plausible but in that case we should, however, look for a ruler other than Seleukos I¹².

Two other rulers by this name, Seleukos II Kallinikos (246–225 BC) and Seleukos IV Philopator (187–175 BC), come into question¹³. During the early reign of the former the kingdom was in a state of disarray and the Third Syrian War (246–241 BC) lead to temporary Seleucid loss of control in Mesopotamia and the long-term Ptolemaic annexation of the Levant¹⁴, whereas the latter inherited an empire bordering on Egypt. When looking for a ruler, whose influence may have extended to the Arabian Peninsula, Seleukos IV is the more likely candidate¹⁵.

None of the kings by the name of Seleukos are known for any particular connections to the Arabian Peninsula. Antiochos III (223–187 BC), the father of Seleukos IV, had,

¹⁰ The earliest document dated according to Seleukos I refers to the eight year = 304 BC, cf. Kosmin, *Time and its adversaries*, 244 n. 20 (*op. cit.* n. 8), i.e. after his ascension to the throne.

¹¹ Prioleta, *The Sabaic inscription A-20-216*, 289 (*op. cit.* n. 4); Robin, Prioleta, *Nouveaux arguments*, 162 (*op. cit.* n. 6); C. J. Robin, *Before Himyar. Epigraphic evidence for the kingdoms of South Arabia*, in: G. Fisher (ed.), *Arabs and empires before Islam*, Oxford 2015, 103. Cf. also P. Stein, *Languages and scripts in the Arabian Gulf in the Hellenistic period. The epigraphic evidence from Mleiha (Sharjah, U.A.E.)*, in: G. Hatke, R. Ruzicka (eds.), *Ancient South Arabia through history. Kingdoms, tribes, and traders*, Cambridge 2019, 134 n. 31.

¹² Cf. C. J. Robin, *Gerrha d'Arabie, cité séleucide*, Syria. Supplement 3 (2016) 240–241. By analogy the Nabataean bilingual inscription from Sirwāh (cf. n. 2) attests to a regnal year rather than a dynastic era being used in the Arabian Peninsula.

¹³ The three-year reign of Seleukos III Keraunos (226/225–223 BC) automatically excludes this king. Seleukos VII Philometor (83–69 BC) may be dismissed, as his influence was as limited as his domains. In addition, the existence of this king has been called into question, cf. B. Kritt, *Numismatic evidence for a new Seleucid king. Seleucus (VII) Philometor*, The Celator 16.4 (2002) 25–28; 36; O. Hoover, *Dethroning Seleucus VII Philometor (Cybiosactes). Epigraphical arguments against a late Seleucid monarch*, ZPE 151 (2005) 95–99.

¹⁴ App. Syr. 346.65; OGIS 54; BM 34428 (= BCHP 11). Cf. J. D. Grainger, *The Syrian Wars*, Leiden 2010, 153–170; A. Çoskun, *The war of brothers, the Third Syrian War, and the battle of Ankyra (246–241): A re-appraisal*, in: K. Erickson (ed.), *The Seleucid empire. War within the family*, Swansea 2018, 197–252. An inscription from Failaka in the Persian Gulf may, however, date to the reign of Seleukos II, i.e. 238/237 BC, cf. M.-Z. Petropoulou, *A Seleucid settlement on Failaka*, EA 39 (2006) 142.

¹⁵ On this king, cf. C. Mileta, *Seleukos IV. Eupator – Ein zu normaler Herrscher?*, in: C. Feyel, L. Graslin-Thomé (eds.), *Le projet politique d'Antiochos IV (Journées d'études franco-allemandes, Nancy 17–19 juin 2013)*, Nancy 2014, 165–180; J. D. Grainger, *The fall of the Seleucid empire. 187–75 BC*, Barnsley 2015, 1–11.

however, travelled as far along the eastern Arabian coast as Gerrha (204 BC) thus securing the goodwill of the Arabian merchants¹⁶. Similarly, Seleukos' successor and younger brother Antiochos IV Epiphanes (175–164 BC) took an economic interest in this area, mainly by refounding the city of Antiocheia-Charax on the Persian Gulf, perhaps as a counterweight to Gerrha¹⁷. In addition, the extensive garrison Ikaros on the Failaka Island, similarly in the Persian Gulf, remained a Seleucid place of interest for centuries¹⁸. In this context one might expect at least an interest in this area on behalf of Seleukos IV, though no clear evidence for this exists. Tentatively, we may refer to coins from Seleukeia on the Tigris depicting Seleukos IV with the accoutrements of Helios, a divinity hitherto not connected to this ruler¹⁹. Perhaps the prominent role of the divinity *ŠMS*, literally the Sun, in the above-mentioned inscriptions (*Ry* 547 and *A-20-216*) referring to king Seleukos may be linked to a cult of Helios²⁰.

When arguing for a date in the reign of Seleukos IV, it is appropriate to mention one of the dedicants of the inscription to *ŠMS* in *Ry* 547, Qāsima', son of 'Abd (*QSM*' ... *bny* 'BD). The editors of *A-20-216*, Robin and Prioletta, have convincingly sought to identify Qāsima' with the dedicant of a marble altar set up to Helios in Kos²¹. The inscribed altar mentions a Kasmaios, son of Abdaios (Κασμαῖος Ἀβδαίου)²², of whose ethnonym only the letters ΓΕΡ have been preserved. If the restoration Γερ[ραῖος], i.e.

¹⁶ Polyb. 13,9,2–5. Cf. Plin. *Nat.* 6,147. Cf. M. Huth, D. T. Potts, O. D. Hoover, *Two Seleucid notes*, *AJN* 14 (2002) 73–81.

¹⁷ Plin. *Nat.* 6,139. Cf. O. Mørkholm, *Antiochus IV of Syria*, Copenhagen 1966, 167–170; A. R. T. al-Ansary, *Al-Gerrha, the port of Qaryat al-Fau*, in: J. F. Healey, V. Porter (eds.), *Studies on Arabia in honour of professor G. Rex Smith*, Oxford 2002, 7–17; P. F. Mittag, *Antiochos IV Epiphanes. Eine politische Biographie*, Berlin 2008, 298–307. Robin, *Gerrha d'Arabie*, 241 (*op. cit.* n. 12) even argues for Gerrha having belonged to Seleukos I.

¹⁸ P. J. Kosmin, *The land of the elephant kings. Space, territory, and ideology in the Seleucid empire*, Cambridge, Ma. 2014, 171–173.

¹⁹ Cf. V. Messina, «*Presto sarò re*». *Seleuco IV come Helios sulle cretule da Seleucia al Tigri*, *Parthica* 3 (2001) 9–23; A. Houghton, C. Lorber, O. D. Hoover, *Seleucid coins. A comprehensive catalogue*, 2. *Seleucus IV through Antiochus XIII*, 1. *Introduction, maps, and catalogue*, London 2008, 26 nos. 1336–1337; C. C. Lorber, P. Iossif, *The cult of Helios in the Seleucid east*, *Topoi* 16 (2009) 19–42, see especially 26–27.

²⁰ In addition, Gerrha minted “Antiochos-Basileus” coins, imitating Antiochos III, the father of Seleukos IV. Cf. O. D. Hoover, *The beginning of the end or the end of the beginning?*, in: R. Oetjen (ed.), *New perspectives in Seleucid history, archaeology and numismatics. Studies in honor of Getzel M. Cohen*, Berlin 2019, 766–767; A. Houghton, C. Lorber, *Seleucid coins. A comprehensive catalogue*, 1. *Seleucus I – Antiochus III*, 1. *Introduction, maps, and catalogue*, London 2002, no. 1146. Robin, *Gerrha d'Arabie*, 241 (*op. cit.* n. 12) proposes that the Gerrha-coins mentioning *ŠMS*, from around 230 BC, followed the lead of a Seleucid mint.

²¹ *IG* 12,4,549 = W. R. Paton, E. L. Hicks, *Inscriptions of Cos*, Oxford 1891, 116, no. 64. Cf. Robin, Prioletta, *Nouveaux arguments*, 175 (*op. cit.* n. 6); Robin, *Gerrha d'Arabie*, 228–229 (*op. cit.* n. 12).

²² Qāsima' as well as Kasmaios are rare names, cf. Ryckmanns, *Inscriptions sud-arabes* (*op. cit.* n. 4) 113; 116; Robin, Prioletta, *Nouveaux arguments*, 169; 175 (*op. cit.* n. 6).

from Gerrha, proposed long ago, is correct, the identification gains further weight²³. The Greek inscription has unanimously been dated to the second century BC²⁴. As Robin and Prioleta date *Ry* 547 to 303/302 BC, they are forced to conclude that Kasmaios must be a homonymous descendant of Qāsima' (with a similar filiation)²⁵. This inconvenient gap of a hundred years disappears with the new date of the *Ry* 547 (186/185 BC) and *A-20-216* (181/180 BC).

A priori, our proposed date in the first half of the second century BC is the most likely as Seleukid control over Gerrha, as evidenced by coinage, is only attested after 204 BC. Only then does a date referring to a foreign ruler make sense.

Chronological implications

Leaving the historical context aside, we are forced to address here the severe chronological implications of the proposed redating of the two inscriptions to 186/185 and 181/180 BC, respectively. A date in the early second century lowers Stein's palaeographical step C1 more than 100 years. Recently, we have argued for a redating of the famous Minaean inscription *M* 247 referring to a war between "Medes" and "Egyptians" to the time of Antiochos IV Epiphanes' second invasion of Egypt in 168 BC²⁶. Overall, *M* 247 belongs to the same palaeographical step as *Ry* 547 and *A-20-216*²⁷. Rather than being a hundred years apart from each other all three inscriptions now appear to have been inscribed within a few decades²⁸.

²³ H. Seyrig, *Antiquités syriennes*, Syria 42 (1965), 26 n. 2; C. Habicht, *Zur Chronologie der hellenistischen Eponyme von Kos*, Chiron 30 (2000) 311; G. M. Cohen, *The Hellenistic settlements in the east from Armenia and Mesopotamia to Bactria and India*, Berkeley, Ca. 2013, 21–22 n. 48.

²⁴ Cf. the commentary to *JG* 12,4,549; *SEG* 63.665.

²⁵ Robin, Prioleta, *Nouveaux arguments*, 175 (*op. cit.* n. 6): "Si l'identification n'est pas entièrement sûre, puisqu'il est habituel que les mêmes anthroponymes se répètent de génération en génération, il n'est guère douteux que Qs'm' fils de 'bd et Kasmaios Abdaïou sont issus d'une même famille". Robin, *Gerrha d'Arabie*, 224 (*op. cit.* n. 12).

²⁶ S. L. Sørensen, K. Geus, *Medes and Minaeans in Egypt: Who is who? Synchronising classical and Old South Arabian sources*, *JAC* 35 (2020) 147–160. Recently, J. Schiettecatte, M. Arbach, *La chronologie du royaume de Ma'in (viii^e–i^{er} siècles av. J.-C.)*, in: I. V. Raitser (ed.), *Arabian antiquities. Studies dedicated to Alexander Sedov on the occasion of his seventieth birthday*, Moscow 2020, 248–252, argue for a more traditional dating of *M* 247 to the fifth century BC, but see next footnote.

²⁷ In certain places *M* 247 bears witness to the transition from step B to C1: The previous 3:1 ratio of letter forms gives way to a 1:2 ratio, most clearly in the letters S, K und Š. In addition, W and 'Ayin become increasingly oval, and the extremities of vertical lines are thickened, a development toward serifs. R has, however, not yet reached its boomerang shape, which is typical from step C2 onwards.

²⁸ In a forthcoming article we propose a new synchronism for the inscription *M* 338 from Egypt, dating it to the reign of Ptolemy V (204–180 BC).

Elsewhere we have proposed dating the famous inscription *Demirjian 1 / B-L-Nashq*, mentioning a war between “Greeks” and “Chaldeans”, to ca. 390–380 BC²⁹. This inscription belongs to step B of Stein’s chronology, a step hitherto dated to the 7th century BC³⁰. The lowering of the date for this inscription thus allows for a shorter transition between the various palaeographical periods: B (early 4th cent. BC), C1 (early 2nd cent. BC) and C2 (late 1st cent. BC).

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²⁹ S. L. Sørensen, K. Geus, *A Sabaean eyewitness to the war of Euagoras against the Persians. Synchronising Greek and ancient South Arabian sources*, ZPE 209 (2019) 196–204.

³⁰ Stein, *Palaeography*, 189 (*op. cit.* n. 2).