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The Alleged Dynastic Era of Commagene

Abstract: The idea of a Commagenian era, beginning with the secession of this territory from the Seleucid Empire in the 2nd century B.C., is quite widespread among specialists of the Hellenistic and Roman Near East. The suggestion goes back to Henry Seyrig, Richard Sullivan and before them Victor Langlois, who explained group of letters appearing on Commagenian coins as dates, reckoning from the year 163/162 B.C. This contribution analyses old and new numismatic and epigraphic evidence, showing that at present there is no proof of the existence of a Commagenian dynastic era.

Keywords: Commagene; dynasts; Seleucid Empire; coins; era.

The history of the autonomous kingdom of Commagene begins when a certain Ptolemy, the Seleucid officer entrusted with the government of this territory, revolted from the empire and declared himself independent. The information comes from a brief and problematic passage of Diodorus Siculus.¹ It is not clear why Ptolemy is defined *epistates*² and when the secession from the Seleucids took place.³ However in the *Excerpta* of Constantinus⁴ this episode is narrated before another rebellion, the one of the satrap Timarchus against Demetrius (dating back to 162/1 B.C.),⁵ so that there is a general agreement to place the conquest of political independence by Commagene in 163/162 B.C.⁶

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It is a pleasure for me to participate in this collection of studies in memory of Sencer Şahin, an outstanding scholar who has also made significant contributions in the field of Commagenian studies. For his extensive bibliography on Nemrud Dağı, including the research reports, I refer to his list of publications in the volume. I am very grateful to Oleg Golenko for allowing me to present here the revised and shorter version of a paper which will be included in his forthcoming volume on Hellenistic eras. A special thanks goes to Fehmi Erarslan (Director of Adiyaman Museum) and to Engelbert Winter (University of Münster) for their help during my stay in September 2005, when I was allowed to examine the Commagenian coins of the Museum collection. The photo of Samos' coin here reproduced is a cliché of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

¹ Diod. 31,19a: "Ptolemy, the governor of Commagene, who even before had shown little respect for the Syrian kings, now asserted his independence, and because they were busy with their own affairs, established himself without interference in control of the country, being chiefly emboldened by its natural advantages for defence." (Trans. Loeb)

² As much as we know, in the Seleucid administration an *epistates* was usually a royal officer who mediated between the king and a city (see Bikerman 1938, 162–163; Préaux 1978, 419–420; Carsana 1996, 44–45; on the implication of this term cf. now the remarks of Capdetrey 2007, 245). In our passage instead it is implied that Ptolemy controlled the entire Commagene and had under him a military force on which to rely for his rebellion.

³ For full discussion see Facella 2006, 203–204 and Jakobsson 2013.

⁴ Const. Porphy. *ex. hist.* III, ed. C. de Boor, p. 200.

⁵ Cf. Dindorf 1868, xix; Bengtson 1944, 87–88; Will 1982, 367–369.

⁶ So, for example, Bevan 1902, 132, 194–195; Bengtson 1944, 185 n. 1 and 257; Sullivan 1977, 742–748. The order of the two revolts is reversed by Bouché-Leclercq 1978, 319 and 323. Mommsen 1876, 30, accepted the evidence of Diodorus' fragment, but believed that the independency conquered by Ptolemy had a brief life, because the expulsion of Ariarathes (V) of Cappadocia by Demetrius Soter must have involved also a subjugation of Commagene. More recently Jakobsson has proposed to postpone the independence of Commagene to the year 150 B.C., an interesting reconstruction which however rests on too many assumptions (see Jakobsson 2013).

On the basis of Diodours' passage, Théodore Reinach has restored the name of Ptolemy in a lacunose Greek inscription from Gerger (ancient Arsameia on the Euphrates).⁷ The text is carved under a huge rock representing the Commagenian king Samos (II in the dynasty), grandfather of Antiochus I who commissioned this impressive work. According to Reinach's reading, Samos was the son of Ptolemy, who is here called *basileus*. The poor condition of the inscription does not permit confirmation of Reinach's reading, which is yet substantiated from the comparison with another fragment from Nemrud Dağı.⁸ Despite its brevity, this fragment seems to confirm that Ptolemy appeared among Antiochus' ancestors, celebrated by this king in his 'tomb-sanctuary'.

In the turbulent Hellenistic period, the transition from one political authority to another was usually a crucial moment, often selected by the new authority, for introducing a new chronological era.⁹ The *apostasia* of Ptolemy has therefore been suggested as the beginning of a dynastic era which is supposed to appear on some coins of two Commagenian kings. In what follows, I will reanalyse these pieces of evidence and show, on the base of numismatic and epigraphic material, why this conclusion remains on shaky foundations. Literary sources provide little assistance in this matter: the only information on an era used in Commagene comes from the *Chronicon Paschale* where, with reference to the year A.D. 71 (Ἰνδ. Ιγ'.γ'. ὑπ. Οὐεσπασιανοῦ Αὐγούστου τὸ β καὶ Νερούᾱ) it is written: "The Commagenians and the Samosateans henceforth count their time".¹⁰ Despite the one year difference, it is clear that the calculation originated from the annexation of Commagene to the Roman empire by Vespasian in A.D. 72.¹¹ The 7th century Christian chronicle, however, offers no hint concerning the chronological computation used by Commagenians before the provincial era was introduced.

Samos' coins and the "year 33"

As previously mentioned, Ptolemy, the founder of the Commagenian kingdom, was succeeded by Samos, his son according to Reinach's reconstruction. To this Samos two bronze issues with the legend ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΣΑΜΟΥ ΘΕΟΣΕΒΟΥΣ ΚΑΙ ΔΙΚΑΙΟΥΥ have been attributed.¹² The portrayal of the king on the obverse of the two coinages is quite different: Samos wears a pointed tiara on the reverse type with Dionysus' thyrsus between winding cornucopiae,¹³ while he is represented with a radiate crown on the other (reverse type with walking Nike: p. 384). The inspiring model for Samos' radiate head has been found in the diademed and radiate portrait of Antiochus VI,¹⁴ which primarily appears on the coinages of the Syrian mints.¹⁵ The similarity between the two portraits and other paleographic and stylistic features induced Ernest Babelon to place the reign of Samos in the year 140 or 130 B.C., as proposed by previous scholars.¹⁶ One important element for the discussion of Samos' chronology and

⁷ See Reinach 1890, 372. For the text of this inscription cf. Also Humann – Puchstein 1890, 353 and ff.; OGIS 402; IGLSyr I 46; Waldmann 1973, 141.

⁸ Cf. Reinach 1890, 371; OGIS 394 n. 6; Dörner 1996, 271–272.

⁹ On the "political eras" used in the Greek east from the Diadochic period onwards cf. Kubitschek 1893, col. 608 ("[they refer] auf ein entscheidendes politisches Ereignis der Gegenwart [...], zumeist auf den Beginn einer neuen Dynastie, auf die 'Befreiung' von irgend einer der Oberherrschaft, auf die Regelung der inneren politischen Verhältnisse durch ein neues fundamentales Statut, u.a.").

¹⁰ *PG* t. 92, no. 248, col. 596.

¹¹ Cf. *Ios. bel. Iud.* 7,7,1–3 (219–243).

¹² Babelon 1890, ccviii–ccix and 217; MacDonald 1905, 119 nos. 1–2. On Samos' coins more recently Bedoukian 1983, 73–74, 82; Taşyürek 1975, 42, I. 1–2; Alram 1986 nos. 240–241.

¹³ With a similar headdress Samos is represented on the above mentioned relief at Gerger (see Facella 2006, 477 fig. 40).

¹⁴ Babelon 1890, ccix.

¹⁵ Cf. *SC Part II*, vol. I, 316–317.

¹⁶ Babelon 1890, ccviii–ccix.

for the present work appears in the reverse type with the Nike, published for the first time by the abbot Augustine Belley,¹⁷ who had examined a specimen of this coin from the collection of Joseph Pellerin. In the exergue, beneath the feet of the Nike, appear the letters ΓΑ (33), which Belley explained as an indication of regnal years and which he took as a hint that the kingdom of Samos was to place geographically “vers la frontière septentrionale de la Syrie, où les Princes étoient dans l’usage de compter l’ordre des temps par les années de règne, plutôt que vers les frontières méridionales & orientales de la Syrie, où les temps étoient comptés par les années d’une ère”.¹⁸ The attribution of the coin to a Samos, king of Samosata, was fiercely opposed by Claude Gros de Boze, who explained the name *Samos* as an orthographic variant for the name *Soemos* (or *Soaimos*) and assigned the coin to Sohaemus I of Emesa.¹⁹ The numeral in exergue indicated “l’époque de la nouvelle dynastie des rois d’Émèse, qui ayant commencé avec l’an de Rome 802, le 49 de l’ère vulgaire”.²⁰ This year (A.D. 81) was the first of Domitian as an emperor, so de Boze believed that Sohaemus wanted to commemorate the new emperor minting a coin with a Nike on the reverse.



Coin of the king Samos, cliché Bibliothèque Nationale de France

The attribution of the coin to the dynasty of Emesa, proposed by de Boze, did not convince the most authoritative numismatists who, in the following years and decades, included this type in their studies: Eckhel, Visconti, Mionnet and Langlois²¹ followed Belley in the attribution of the coin to an Armenian dynast ruling at Samosata (a conclusion which, as we have seen, has been confirmed by the following researches). Concerning the letters ΓΑ, Eckhel believed that “haud dubie notant annos regni”,²² while Visconti and Mionnet made no comment, leaving uncertain the chronological collocation of Samos. More interesting was the position of Langlois, who thought that the year 33 indicated “très-probablement l’année de l’ère de la fondation du royaume de Samosate; car il n’est pas probable qu’elle puisse signifier l’année du règne de ce prince, qui sur la médaille, semble être fort jeune et n’avoir point encore

¹⁷ Belley 1759a, 355–364.

¹⁸ See Belley 1759b, 381. The quotation is from a second article, which Belley dedicated to the coin and which appeared in the same volume of the *Mémoires*, where the abbot responds to the critical and fierce remarks of de Boze (see below).

¹⁹ De Boze 1759, 365–379.

²⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 378–379.

²¹ Von Eckhel 1794, 205–206; Visconti 1811, 247–248; Mionnet 1835, 723; Langlois 1859, 8–11.

²² Von Eckhel 1794, 206.

atteint sa trentième année”.²³ Langlois did not change the chronology of Samos’ reign proposed by previous scholars (130 B.C.), but only the interpretation of the numerals in exergue, seeing in them a reference to a dynastic era. His observations did not convince Ernest Babelon, who believed on the contrary that Samos’ reign lasted not so long. Still, the hypothesis that the letters ΓΛ represented a regnal year, a hypothesis accepted and re-affirmed by Theodor Mommsen,²⁴ appeared to him “peu vraisemblable”.²⁵ The alternative that the coin might have been dated according to a dynastic era was not discussed by Babelon, who preferred to leave the significance of the letters ΓΛ unexplained.

Almost a century later, in his long study dedicated to the Commagenian dynasty, Richard Sullivan came to the conclusion that a national era, starting from Ptolemy’s defection, existed in Commagene “and was still in use over two hundred years later, when Antiochus IV issued a coin under Nero bearing a date computed from this revolt”.²⁶ Concerning Samos’ coin, however, Sullivan considered the possibility that the “year 33” referred to a national era, but did not make a definitive choice between this and the other option of a regnal year.²⁷

Similarly Michael Alram, in his corpus dedicated to coins bearing Iranic personal names, left the question open, describing the letters ΓΛ as “Jahr 33 einer unbekanntten Ära”.²⁸ The idea of a Commagenian dynastic era, however, has always lingered among scholars and it in this sense that other pieces of numismatic evidence have usually been interpreted.

2. The coins of Antiochus IV and the “year 224”

In a long miscellaneous article that appeared in the *Revue Numismatique* (1964), Henri Seyrig dedicated a couple of pages to “l’ère des rois de Commagène”.²⁹ His analysis focused on a bronze of Antiochus IV of Commagene and his wife Iotape, published by Friedrich Imhoof-Blumer and attributed by him to Elaeusa Sebaste.³⁰ At the time of Antiochus IV, the possessions of Commagenian kings extended to Lycaonia and Cilicia Tracheia (Jos., *Ant.* XIX.5.1 [276]; Tac., *Ann.* XII. 55.1–2; Cass. Dio LIX. 8. 2) and included the city of Elaeusa. Seyrig could examine a specimen of this coin preserved at the Cabinet des Médailles (Bibliothèque Nationale de France) and his attention was attracted by a sequence of letters, ΔΚΣ, which appears on the obverse, behind the royal head. In contrast with Imhoof-Blumer, Seyrig was convinced that “les lettres ΔΚΣ, constituent si manifestement une date, qu’on ne se laissera persuader de les lire autrement que par une preuve irréfutable”.³¹ The size of the letters, their position and the impossibility of reconciling them with the Seleucid era (ΔΚΣ = 224 = 87 B.C.) were for Seyrig an indication that the numerals referred to a royal era. Since Antiochus IV reigned between 38 and 72 A.D. and the coin was dated to the year 224, the beginning of the era must have fallen between 186 e 152 B.C. The secession of Ptolemy from the Seleucids in 163/162 B.C. was therefore identified as the most suitable moment to start the computation. “Le chiffre inscrit sur la monnaie d’Elaeusa-Sébastien – conclut Seyrig – montre que les rois de Commagène avaient leur ère dynastique comme les Séleucides, les rois de Pont, et les Arsacides [...]. Leurs monuments ne semblent pas nous avoir conservé d’autre exemple de ce comput”.³² The last observation of Seyrig is not irre-

²³ Langlois 1859, 10.

²⁴ Mommsen 1876, 30.

²⁵ Babelon 1890, ccix.

²⁶ Sullivan 1977, 746

²⁷ Sullivan 1977, 749.

²⁸ Alram 1986, 82, no. 241.

²⁹ Seyrig 1964, 51–52.

³⁰ See Imhoof-Blumer 1884, 285, no. 130; Imhoof-Blumer 1898, 31, no. 19.

³¹ Seyrig 1964, 51.

³² Seyrig 1964, 52.

levant and before reevaluating his conclusions, we should first turn to the epigraphic sources of the Commagenian dynasty at our disposal.

The silence of the epigraphic sources

Our epigraphic documentation for Hellenistic and early Roman Commagene is very restricted, because it mainly consists of the Greek inscriptions of Antiochus I and his successors. No inscription has yet been found which can be surely dated back to the Hellenistic period and was produced outside the Commagenian dynasty or its court.³³ Now, it must be stressed that none of the texts discovered thus far shows a date or a reference to a Commagenian dynastic era. The homogeneity of the epigraphic evidence (mostly, different versions of Antiochus' sacred law or brief honorific texts commemorating members of the Commagenian dynasty) invites caution in drawing conclusions from an *argumentum ex silentio*. But, as a matter of fact, the various *hieroi nomoi* of Antiochus never contain a chronological reference, not even to the regnal years of the king. Apparently there was no interest by Antiochus in specifying when exactly he issued his *nomoi*. We can speculate about this absence: maybe the king wanted to emphasize the value of a law which went beyond time³⁴ or maybe his name and title, constituting the incipit of the text, were a sufficient indication. The peculiarity of Antiochus' sacred law makes it difficult to find valuable parallels among those produced by other Hellenistic dynasts, in particular the closely related Seleucids. Most of the dated inscriptions containing Seleucid cult regulations are, in fact, royal letters and decrees issued on initiative of a city:³⁵ in these situations a dating according to the dynastic era and/or the local magistrates is the norm. The Commagenian *nomos* is quite distant from those cases and to expect here a more defined chronological indication is maybe a modern exigency, rather than an ancient one.

Under Antiochus' successors the silence of sources on dating systems in Commagene continues, the only exception being a lacunose inscription from Damlıca (near Adiyaman) published by Sencer Şahin.³⁶ The text is carved on a stone wall belonging to a complex excavated in the rock, now of difficult access due to its partial collapse. The dedicator is a certain Ariaramnes, son of Pallaios, an architect who reports to the king Mithradates (II), son of Antiochus, about his works in the sanctuary.³⁷ At the beginning a chronological indication is provided: (ll. 1–3) [βασιλεύον]τος μεγάλου Μιθραδάτου φιλορωμα[ίου] / [καὶ φιλ]οπάτορος τοῦ ἐν βασιλείῳσ μεγάλ[ο]υ / [Ἀντιόχ]ου Ἐπιφανοῦς φιλο[ρ]ωμαίου ἔ[τ]ο[υ]ς [?] / μη[ν]ὸς ? Αὐδν[α]ίου.³⁸ Unfortunately at the end of line 3 and beginning of line 4 the surface of the stone is heavily damaged: the poor left traces are interpreted by Şahin as a reference to a date (year, day and month), but the proposed readings are hardly verifiable on the photo of the squeeze published in the article. In any case, the loss of the ciphers which followed the restored ἔ[τ]ο[υ]ς does not permit any conclusion to be drawn on the system of year-reckoning employed by Ariaramnes.

Epigraphic material dating to the later years of the Commagenian dynasty is similarly inconclusive. Worthy of note is a funerary inscription from the western necropolis of Zeugma (Bahçe Dere), analysed and published by Jean-Baptiste Yon in 2001 and now submerged by the water of the Birecik

³³ On the absence of the so-called “epigraphic habit” in Commagene cf. Facella 2012, 67–94.

³⁴ Cf. in particular the lines 105–123 of the long *hieros nomos* from Nemrud Dağı (OGIS 383).

³⁵ See for example the decree of Ilion honouring Antiochus I (OGIS 219; Robert 1966, 175–210; III. 32) or the decree of Sardis and the letters of Laodice and Antiochus III on the institution of divine honours for the royal family (Gautier 1989, 47–111, no. 2; Ma 1999, 285–287, no. 2). For an overview of these and other epigraphic texts of the same typology cf. Virgilio 2003, 231–241 nos. 7–10.

³⁶ Şahin 1991, 99–113.

³⁷ On the Commagenian king Mithradates II and a fragmentary inscription from Nemrud Dağı dedicated to him see now Staab 2012; Jones 2013; Şahin 2013; Staab 2013.

³⁸ I reproduce here the edition by Şahin 1991, 102.

Dam.³⁹ It is a dedication to the deceased Antipatra, dated to ἔτ(ους) γοτ' κατὰ τὸν πρότ[(ερον ?) - -], i.e. Seleucid year 373 (= A.D. 61/2). Various parallels (from Arethusa, Doura Europos and Babylonia) suggest to the editor that something like ἀριθμόν or ἔτος followed in the lacuna, so that he translates “Année 373 selon le calendrier ancien (?)”.⁴⁰ The Seleucid era is defined “earlier, of former times” in comparison with another adopted later, and probably still in use (if the dedicator of the inscription felt the need to specify this). Concerning this second reckoning system, Yon notes that the date of the inscription (A.D. 61/2) “rendrait probable la référence à une ère romaine pour l'ère sous-entendue par opposition”. Yon considers the possibility of an Actian era being in use at Zeugma, a hypothesis proposed by J. Wagner⁴¹ but criticized by K. Butcher.⁴² The other possibility which Yon does not exclude is the one of “une ère de Commagène, qui ne serait pas attestée par ailleurs”.⁴³

As we will show in this paper and as Yon himself notes, there is no trace of a “Commagenian era” before the one mentioned by the *Chronicon Paschale*, beginning from the definitive provincialisation of the region (A.D. 72). A first annexation of Commagene to the Roman empire had taken place already in A.D. 17.⁴⁴ In this year (rather than in 31 B.C.) Butcher has recently placed the beginning of a civic era at Zeugma, attested on a few of its Roman provincial coins.⁴⁵ Later Commagene was given back to its dynasty,⁴⁶ but we do not know whether the rich and lucrative city of Zeugma (a gift of Pompey to his *philos* Antiochus)⁴⁷ was also returned to the monarchy or instead remained attached to the province of Syria.⁴⁸ Before referring the κατὰ τὸν πρότ[(ερον ?) of the inscription from Bahçe Dere to an unattested “Commagenian era”, we should ascertain that in A.D. 61/2 Zeugma was still part of the kingdom and we should find good evidence against Butcher’s reconstruction.

In conclusion, the epigraphic material so far recovered in Commagene bears no hint of a dynastic era and invites doubts on the suggested explanation of the letters on Samos’ and Antiochus’ coins as a chronological reference to a dynastic era.

A different interpretation

As much as Samos’ coins with the letters ΓΑ is concerned, we should begin from the chronological placement of this king. A few inscriptions define him as grandfather of Antiochus I,⁴⁹ hence, if we calculate approximately 60 years for the 2 generations which separated Samos from his grandchild Antiochus I, king of Commagene since at least 70 B.C. (Cass. Dio 36,2,5.), we can assume for him a *floruit* between ca. 130 and 100 B.C. This time span, unfortunately, does not allow us to exclude either of the two possibilities:⁵⁰ the ‘year 33’ might equally refer to a dynastic era (starting in 163/162 B.C.) or to a 33rd year of reign of Samos, a reign which begun at an unknown time after 162 B.C. and ended around 100 B.C., when the successor Mithradates was active.

³⁹ Yon 2001, 303–305, no. 1 (Bull. ép. 2002, 455). See now Ergeç – Yon 2012, 157–159, inscr. no. 5.

⁴⁰ Ergeç – Yon 2012, 158.

⁴¹ According to Wagner 1976, 64, Zeugma was detached from the Commagenian kingdom and annexed to the Roman empire after 31 B.C.; Wagner 1982, 137. See also Millar 1993, 29.

⁴² Butcher 1994, 449–450; Butcher 2004, 460, 463–464.

⁴³ Ergeç – Yon 2012, 158.

⁴⁴ Tac. ann. 2,56,4. On this see lastly Facella 2006, 316–318 (to which I refer for previous bibliography).

⁴⁵ So Butcher 2009, 81–83.

⁴⁶ Suet. Cal. 16,3; Cass. Dio 59,8,2.

⁴⁷ Strab. 16,2,3; App. Mithr. 114.

⁴⁸ Zeugma is listed among the cities of Syria by Plin. nat. 21,86–87 and Ptol. 5,14.

⁴⁹ Beside the already mentioned inscription from Arsameia on the Euphrates (OGIS 402), see a very fragmentary inscription from Nemrud Dağı (West Terrace) published by Dörner 1996, 300–301.

⁵⁰ As noted already by Sullivan 1977, 749.

An assessment of the arguments in favour of the two options and a careful re-examination of the coin may be useful at this point. Already Belley recalled the practice in the bordering kingdom of Cappadocia, where coins with regnal years were struck at least since the reign of Ariarathes VI (ca. 130–116 B.C.) onwards.⁵¹ But the Cappadocian royal coinage of these years does not offer a good comparison for the Commagenian royal issues. First of all, it is necessary to stress that only a few bronze coins of Samos have been discovered to date (6 specimens of the reverse type with Dionysus' thyrsus and 5 of the reverse type with walking Nike are known to me),⁵² a very restricted number which cannot be compared with the numerous silver issues of the Cappadocian kings contemporary to him (Ariarathes VI and Ariarathes VII). The bronze coinage of the Cappadocian kings does not show numerals, which rather seem confined to the drachms and tetradrachms and which not always seem to represent regnal years.⁵³ Commagenian kings did not mint silver, but only bronze coins and clearly in a very modest output.⁵⁴ However low the coin production must have been, it is perplexing that only coins of Samos' "year 33" have reached us (in other words, that such a long reign has left us coins with a different annual date) and that regnal years do not appear on the other type of Samos' coins. Unfortunately in this respect Langlois' objection, that the head of the king looks too youthful for someone in his 33rd year of rule, is of little use. Iconographic details of the portrait types are often very important for determining the chronology of some issues,⁵⁵ but in this case it is clear that the head of Samos is strongly idealized and hardly reflects his real appearance. A deduction based on this kind of argument cannot lead to any sensible conclusion. The comparison of the two obverses of Samos' coin types is also unhelpful, since the portrait of the king wearing the tiara is also lacking individual features.⁵⁶

Much more profitable is to look at Seleucid models. The radiate head of Samos was defined by Babelon "une copie directe des monnaies d'Antiochus VI Dionysos"⁵⁷ (144–142 B.C.) likewise Alram underlined the derivation of this coin from Seleucid models, as it is evident from its design, arrangement of the legend and fabric.⁵⁸ A Nike standing or advancing left with a wreath and other attributes is a reverse type recurrent in the Seleucid coinage.⁵⁹ A close similarity in the design can be observed with the Nike reverse type of Antiochus VII's tetradrachms and drachms, especially those struck at

⁵¹ The interpretation of the numerals in the exergue of the coins of several Cappadocian kings and their attribution is a very complex and debated question. The main protagonists of the dispute were O. Mørkholm and B. Simonetta who have dedicated numerous articles to this subject since 1961. A list of these works can be found in de Callatay 1997, 186 n. 1, to which I refer for the analysis and conclusions expressed at pp. 186–214. To the bibliography here collected we can also add the following, most relevant, publications: de Callatay 1990, 891–895; Arslan 1997, 230–232; Arslan 2003, 24–28; Lorber – Houghton 2006, 49–97; Simonetta 2007.

⁵² Specimens of the reverse type with Dionysus' thyrsus: 1 in the Hunterian Mus. (cf. MacDonald 1905, 119 no. 1), 1 in the Vienna Mekhitarian Collection and 1 at the Hermitage Museum (Alram 1986 no. 240), 2 in P. Bedoukian Collection (Bedoukian 1983, 82 no. 1), 1 in the Archaeological Museum of Adiyaman (unpublished). Specimens of the reverse type with walking Nike: 2 in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (cf. Babelon 1890, 217), 1 in the Hunterian Museum (cf. MacDonald 1905, 119 no. 2), 1 in the Archaeological Museum of Adiyaman, 1 in Kâhta (private collection, unpublished).

⁵³ Doubts have been expressed above all by Mørkholm 1969, 21–31 and by de Callatay 1997, 87 and ff.

⁵⁴ For a brief overview cf. Facella 2005, 235–238.

⁵⁵ As explicitly stated by C. Lorber and A. Houghton in *SC Part I*, vol. I, xv: "*Seleucid Coins* offers a different emphasis, in which iconography is regarded as fundamental and is sometimes used to date the hoards".

⁵⁶ Cf. the similarity of Samos' portrait with those of Mithradates I and Mithradates II of Commagene (see Alram, *Nomina*, nos. 242–248).

⁵⁷ Babelon 1890, ccix.

⁵⁸ Alram 1986, 82, no. 241.

⁵⁹ It already appears on the gold coinage of Seleucus I of the Alexandrine type (see for ex. *SC Part I*, vol. I, nos. 55, 66, 81, 86, 92, etc...). Cf. Babelon 1890, cxvii ("la Victoire couronnant le nom royal est un revers fréquent chez les Séleucides, les Arsacides et les dynasties de l'Asie Mineure").

Antioch on the Orontes.⁶⁰ Here, as well as in our coin, the Nike is represented extending the wreath beyond the royal epithet and supporting her dress with the left hand. A reverse type with Nike holding wreath was employed by another king of probable Orontid origin, Xerxes, who ruled Sophene at the time of Antiochus III (Pol. 8,23) and whose authority might have been extended also to Commagene.⁶¹ On his bronzes, Greek letters appear which Visconti and Langlois explained as regnal years,⁶² while Babelon, more convincingly, as monograms.⁶³

The importance of Seleucid models for Commagenian Hellenistic coinage becomes even more apparent when looking at the results of Oliver Hoover's analysis of some drachms imitating a series of Demetrius I.⁶⁴ Various hints and observations of numismatic and epigraphic character have convinced Hoover to trace these barbarous imitations back to Commagene, in a period which extended from the second half of 2nd century to the 1st century B.C. Such an extensive production of imitation drachms actually requires a major minting authority, identified by Hoover in the Orontid dynasts, that is Ptolemy and his successors.

The above described derivation and imitation of Seleucid coinage by the Orontids invites us to extend our look at the dating practice of Seleucid royal coinage. The first dated coins are some bronzes issued at the mint of Tyre in 198 B.C., which show numerals referring to the Seleucid era.⁶⁵ Dates were only occasionally applied on Seleucid coins and when this was the case, they were computed since 311 B.C.; only on coins of the usurper Tryphon regnal years appear.⁶⁶ From this perspective the interpretation of the letters ΓΑ on Samos' coin as a dynastic era seems more plausible than the one which takes them as regnal years. Nevertheless, another explanation must be taken into consideration. A glance at the most complete lists of signs of control present on Seleucid coins⁶⁷ shows their extraordinary variety and that it is also not uncommon to find two juxtaposed Greek letters which may be explicable as a date, but as a matter of fact are signs of control. In the absence of decisive elements, as is the case of Commagenian coinage, we should not yield to the temptation of a straightforward equation between letters and dates, but to consider also this possibility. An instructive example is provided by a tetradrachm of Demetrius I from Antioch on the Orontes where appear in exergue the letters ΓΑ, that are certainly a sign of control.⁶⁸ The possibility that the letters on Samos' coin are identifying marks as well is not remote and is actually reinforced by two observations. First, as we have mentioned above, monograms were already present on the coinage of another Orontid king, Xerxes. Second, and more significantly, we know that by the latter half of the 2nd century control marks were employed by a Commagenian mint. In fact control marks occur on the first two groups of Demetrius I' imitations from Commagene (Hoover Series IA and IB):

“those in group IA are extremely good copies of control marks taken directly from original official coins while those found on the coins of group IB are primarily corrupt versions of the common Antiochene alpha-pi monogram [...]. Occasionally other

⁶⁰ SC Part II, vol. I, pp. 362–365.

⁶¹ For discussion and modern bibliography see Facella 2006, 184–190. On the coins of Xerxes, including this one, cf. Bedoukian 1983, 84–85, nos. 9, 11–13; Alram 1986 nos. 179–182.

⁶² Visconti 1811, 252; Langlois 1859, 14–15.

⁶³ Babelon 1890, cxcvii “ Rien n'autorise une pareille conjecture, d'autant plus que la prétendue lettre H est fort probablement notre monogramme n° 98, compose des lettres HAΔ”. Cf. also the catalogue of Xerxes' coins in Bedoukian 1983, 84–85, from which emerges the standard use of monograms on this type.

⁶⁴ Hoover 1998, 71–94.

⁶⁵ SC Part I, vol. I, xv.

⁶⁶ Cf. Mørkholm 1984, 99; Houghton 2012, 244–245.

⁶⁷ See the *Index 2* of SC Part I, vol. II, 219–280 and of SC Part 2, vol. II, 469–519.

⁶⁸ See SC Part II, vol. I, 169, no. 1638.2c.

controls appear, such as **M**, **Z** and the variants **Ξ** and **Ζ** which seem to be particular designations in the Commagenean mint and are not derived from Antiochene controls”.⁶⁹

Most of the coins of group IA bear dates corresponding to the years 153/2 and 152/1 B.C.; the coins of group IB (with their lower weight, obscure inscriptions and stylized portraits) are likely to follow group IA. Hence, if Hoover is right, the use of control marks was experimented in Commagene by the middle of the 2nd century and with time the local mint evolved from the simple reproduction of Antiochene control marks to the creation of its own ones. As we have seen, Samos was active in the second half of the 2nd century and was one of the kings to whom Hoover assigns a group of the imitation drachms of Demetrius I.⁷⁰ When we consider all this, the presence on Samos’ bronze issue of letters indicating control marks appears fully justifiable.

Commonly on Seleucid coins, as well as in general, letters and monograms referred to individuals who were responsible for the issuing,⁷¹ but a few problematic cases indicate that slightly different uses were possible.⁷² Whether or not this mark on Samos’ coin represented the abbreviated name of the supervisor of the mint, it is clear that such signs of control were later no longer considered essential: the coinage of Samos’ son, Mithradates, and of his grandson, Antiochus, is lacking in letters (or combinations of them) which might have had this function.⁷³ The exigency of imitating the Seleucid coinage and the need of following their monetary praxis was probably more compelling in the incipient stages of the newly independent kingdom, when it was essential to exploit the legacy of the powerful predecessors and to reassure the users of the coins of their legal value.

A similar explanation can be suggested also for the letters appearing on Antiochus IV’ coins on the base of old and new numismatic material unknown to Seyrig. The major reason which made the French Alsatian scholar perplexed was the position and the prominence of the letters. Seyrig’s doubts are understandable: one would expect that if the letters were identifying marks, they would have been placed on the reverse, as it happens on Antiochus IV’ coins from other Cilician cities, for example Anemurium or Celenderis.⁷⁴ Now, the coin from Elaeusa examined by Seyrig has some letters (**ΔΙ**) on the reverse, so a logical conclusion would be that the letters on the obverse had another function. However, if we look at a few other bronzes struck at Elaeusa, but earlier, during the reign of Archelaus of Cappadocia (20 B.C. – 17 A.D.) and in the 1st century A.D., we can see the presence of monograms both on the obverse and on the reverse.⁷⁵ It seems therefore not surprising that the habit of extending signs of control to the obverse continued in the following years, when the city became part of the Commagenean kingdom.

A clear indication towards this direction comes from other varieties of this coin type which are described in RPC I. On the obverse of some coins appears the letter **E**, which obviously cannot be regarded as a date referring to a dynastic era. “If the prominent **E** on the obverse of other coins is also a date, – comment the authors of RPC – it must presumably be a regnal date”.⁷⁶ Yet, further examples of regnal years on Antiochus IV’ coins are lacking. More telling is a second group of coins where, in front of the royal head, the letters **NAO** appear.⁷⁷ The authors of the RPC Catalogue aptly remark that this sequence cannot be interpreted as a date, but they do not explore the problem further. In addition to

⁶⁹ Hoover 1998, 79.

⁷⁰ Cf. also *SC* Part II, vol. I, 207.

⁷¹ So already Newell 1978, 134–135.

⁷² See *SC* Part I, vol. I, xxi-xxii; Le Rider – de Callatay 2006, 58–60.

⁷³ For the coins of Mithradates I cf. Alram 1986 nos. 242–246; for Antiochus I see RPC I, nos. 3845–3847.

⁷⁴ See RPC I, nos. 3705, 3709–3710.

⁷⁵ See RPC I, nos. 3714–3716.

⁷⁶ RPC I, p. 563.

⁷⁷ RPC I, no. 3719.

this group of coins, I would like to mention a new variety of the same type, a bronze known from the auction market and mentioned by E. Levante,⁷⁸ which shows on the obverse ΔΑΡ. Again this sequence cannot be a date, so it seems more plausible to interpret these and the other letters next to Antiochus' portrait as control marks, probably referring to the mint officers of Elaëusa-Sebaste.

Conclusions

The analysis conducted above reveals that there is no tangible evidence to conclude, as sometimes has been the case,⁷⁹ that a Commagenian dynastic era was in use in this kingdom. However attractive the reconstruction of Seyrig may be, it still needs to be proved: at present there is no inscription or coin where we can find a secure reference to a Commagenian royal era. A glimpse to the volume of the IGLSyr I or to other collections of inscriptions from Commagene⁸⁰ shows that most of the dated texts refer to the Seleucid era. Being part of the Seleucid empire until the half of the 2nd century, the people of Commagene adopted the system of numbering years employed by this dynasty and probably retained it when they became politically independent. Obviously with the annexation to the Roman Empire other eras (imperial and civic) were introduced, but it was the Seleucid dating system which, as often happened in many regions of the Near East,⁸¹ survived the longest.

Abbreviated Literature

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| Arslan 2000 | M. Arslan, A unique tetradrachm of Ariarathes, king of Cappadocia, from a hoard found at Kotyora (Ordu), in: B. Kluge – B. Weisser (edd.), <i>Internationaler Numismatischer Kongress Berlin 1997, Akten-Proceedings-Actes</i> , Berlin 2000, 230–232. |
| Arslan 2003 | M. Arslan, The Cappadocian King Ariarathes VI, a unique drachm of the Cappadocian king Ariarathes VI and the Star on the Tiara, <i>The Celator</i> 17.3, 2003, 24–28. |
| Babelon 1890 | E. Babelon, <i>Les rois de Syrie, d'Arménie et de Commagène</i> , <i>Catalogue des monnaies grecques de la Bibliothèque Nationale</i> , Paris 1890. |
| Bedoukian 1983 | P. Z. Bedoukian, Coinage of Armenian kingdoms of Sophene and Commagene, <i>ANSMusN</i> 28, 1983, 71–88. |
| Belley 1759a | A. Belley, Observations sur une Médaille du Roi Samus, Prince jusqu'à présent inconnu, <i>Mémoires de Littérature, tirés de registres de l'Académie royale des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres</i> 26, 1759, 355–364. |
| Belley 1759b | A. Belley, Nouvelles Observations sur la Médaille du Roi Samus, <i>Mémoires de Littérature, tirés de registres de l'Académie royale des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres</i> 26, 1759, 380–390. |
| Bengtson 1944 | H. Bengtson, <i>Die Strategie in der hellenistischen Zeit II</i> , München 1944. |
| Bevan 1902 | E. R. Bevan, <i>The House of Seleucus</i> , London 1902. |
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| Butcher 2004 | K. Butcher, <i>Coinage in Roman Syria</i> , London 2004 (Royal Numismatic Society Special Publication 34). |

⁷⁸ Münzhandlung Schulten, Auktion 27.–29. März 1990, no. 407. Cf. also SNG France 2, no. 1162.

⁷⁹ Cf. for example Sullivan 1977, 746; Schmitt 2005, col. 1101; Cohen 2006, 189; Capdetrey 2007, 246.

⁸⁰ As for example Wagner 1976, 213 no. 69, 252 no. 136, 261 no. 148.

⁸¹ Cf. the still useful overview in Kubitschek 1893, 632–634. For the use and surviving of the Seleucid era outside the empire cf. Leschhorn 1993, 35–43.

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Özet

Sözde Kommagene Dynast *Era*'sı

Yazar makalesinde Kommagene Dynast *Era*'sının varlığını tartışmaktadır. Bölgenin M.Ö. 2. yüzyılda Seleukos İmparatorluğu'ndan ayrılmasıyla başlayan bir Kommagene *Era*'sı düşüncesinin, Hellenistik Dönem ve Roma'nın egemen olduğu Yakın Doğu üzerine çalışan uzmanlar arasında oldukça yaygınlaşmış bir düşünce olduğunu belirtmektedir. Bu önerinin öncelikle, M.Ö. 163/162 yıllarını hesap ederek Kommagene sikkelerinde görünen harf grubunu açıklayan Victor Langlois ve ardından Richard Sullivan ve Henry Seyrig'e kadar geriye gittiğini vurgulamaktadır. Facella ise daha önceki ve günümüzdeki numizmatik ve epigrafik verileri inceleyip yeniden değerlendirerek bu verilerin niçin sağlam temellere dayandırılmadığını açıklamaktadır. Kommagene yazıtlarının tarihlendirilebilir olanlarında yaygın olarak Seleukos *Era*'sı kullanılmaktadır. 2. yy.ın ortasına kadar Seleukos İmparatorluğu'nun bir parçası olması neticesinde Kommagene'liler onların tarih sistemini kendilerine adapte etmişler ve bu sistemi olasılıkla bağımsız olduklarında da kullanmaya devam etmişlerdir. Roma İmparatorluk Dönemi'nde ise her ne kadar başka *era*'lar söz konusu olsa da Seleukos tarihlendirme sistemi Yakın Doğu'nun başka bölgelerinde de olduğu gibi çok uzun süre kullanılmaya devam etmiştir. Sonuç olarak, yazar Kommagene'ye ait bir *dynast Era*'sının varlığına ilişkin bir delilden söz edilemeyeceğini belirtmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Kommagene; dinastlar; Seleukos Krallığı; sikkeler; *era*.