
The Frataraka of Persis

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ABSTRACT This article analyses the main problems surrounding the Frataraka, the rulers of Hellenistic Persis. First, the study focuses on the coins minted by these dynasts, examining their inscriptions with special emphasis on the rulers' titles and the iconographic representations. Next, it presents the various proposals from the academic community regarding the dating of these dynasts. Finally, utilizing Graeco-Latin sources that illuminate the historical context of the Frataraka, this article explores whether they remained loyal to the Seleucids as autonomous rulers or exercised continuous, independent rule during the Arsacid period, up until the founding of the Sasanian Empire.

KEYWORDS Seleucid, Frataraka, Persis, Hellenistic, History, Numismatics.

1. The coins of the Frataraka: titlature and iconography

Status quaestionis

The most significant evidence regarding the Frataraka comes from the coins minted by the dynasts themselves. The earliest study was conducted by Pellerin (1763-1770), followed by editions published by Eckhel (1794, 541, 553-554), Wilson (1841, 381), and Vaux (1856, 144), with new discoveries added over time. In the nineteenth century, De la Fûye (1906, 63-97) compiled the previously published coinage, while Hill (1922, 160-182) proposed dividing these coins into four series, dating the beginning of their minting to around 250 B.C. Shortly thereafter, Herzfeld uncovered additional Frataraka coins at Persepolis, including a hoard discovered during the 1934-35 archaeological campaign. Newell (1938, 159-160) published Herzfeld's findings. The analysis was later updated by the collaborative work of Thompson, Mørkholm, and Kraay (1973, 256-259) and the compilation by Alram (1986, 161-163).

In the second half of the twentieth century, studies focusing on historical and socio-cultural aspects of the Frataraka began to emerge. Naster (1968) and Itô (1976) addressed the interpretation of Aramaic inscriptions and their significance. Wiesehöfer has also been a key figure in this field, presenting his *Habilitationsschrift* in 1994, which marked the first comprehensive historical approach to the dynasts and laid the foundation for subsequent research. In the following years, he published various works on the subject (2007, 2010, 2013). Callieri (1998, 2007) has explored Hellenistic Persis from an archaeological perspective, while Potts (2007) has concentrated on the study of iconography and material culture in the Hellenistic East. More recently, Klose and Müseler (2005-2006, 2008, 2018) have proposed innovative theories concerning the chronology and status of the dynasts. Similarly, Hoover (2008) compiled a catalogue of Seleucid coins, including a section on overstruck coins, which are crucial for understanding the Frataraka coinage. Haerinck and Overlaet (HAERINCK–OVERLAET

2008) have also provided a significant new analysis of the coinage iconography. Interest in the Frataraka has remained strong in recent years, as evidenced by the continued publications from scholars such as Engels (2011, 2018), Strootman (2014, 2020), and Gholami (2020, 2021).

Titulature

The coins can be categorized into thirteen monetary typologies corresponding to five dynasties¹. All coins are made of silver, as some gold coins previously attributed to the Frataraka have been identified as forgeries². The vast majority of the coins bear inscriptions indicating the name of the ruler and his title, almost always featuring the term *prtrk*'. The obverse typically shows the dynast's effigy, while the reverse presents more varied scenes, often depicting a human figure standing before a structure of uncertain identification. Particularly noteworthy is the depiction of an armed soldier, portrayed in the Graeco-Macedonian style, being executed by a figure clad in Persian attire³. Equally significant is the image of the enthronement of an Iranian ruler. In addition, the reverse sides often feature inscriptions, likely in an Iranian language, but written using Aramaic script⁴.

Two types of coinage correspond to those of Ardaxšīr, differing only in the length of the inscription⁵: (1) *'rthštr' prtrk' ZY ALHYA ~ Artaxšīr fratarak ī bagān* "Ardaxšīr, Frataraka of the gods" and (2) *'rthštr prtrk' ZY ALHYA [BR] prs ~ Artaxšīr fratarak ī bagān pus pārs* "Ardaxšīr, Frataraka of the gods, son of Persia / of a Persian". Three others correspond to Vahbarz, with types (1) and (3) featuring the following legends⁶: (1) *whwbrz prtrk' ZY ALHYA [BR] prs ~ Vahbarz fratarak ī bagān pus pārs* "Vahbarz, Frataraka of the gods, son of Persia / of a Persian" and (3) *krny whwbrz ~*

¹ DE LA FUYE (1906, 79), HILL (1922, CLX-CLXXII), and DE MORGAN (1923, 277) initially suggested the Frataraka sequence as (1) Baydād, (2) Vahbarz, (3) Ardaxšīr, and (4) Vadfradād I. This order was widely accepted until recently; see SELLWOOD 1983, 299-321. ALRAM (1986, 166) and WIESEHÖFER (1994, 101-112) have suggested an alternative sequence based on Vahbarz's use of Ardaxšīr's dies: (1) Baydād, (2) Ardaxšīr, (3) Vahbarz, and (4) Vadfradād I. However, a coin that appeared in 2005 depicting a previous minting of Baydād casts doubt on the prior proposal. Moreover, an Aramaic *graffito* naming Baydād on a coin of Vadfradād I led HOOVER (2008, 209-230) to suggest a third Frataraka sequence consisting of (1) Ardaxšīr, (2) Vahbarz, (3) Vadfradād I, and (4) Baydād. CURTIS 2010, 387 also supports this proposition. Additionally, KLOSE-MÜSELER 2018, 94-95 posit two theories based on a coin of Vadfradād overstruck on a coin of Baydād. They suggest that either Baydād and Vadfradād were rival rulers during the same time period or that Baydād was the initial ruler but had two separate reigns. GHOLAMI 2020, 154 believes that type 3 of Vadfradād, which portrays the ruler alongside a *Nikē*, signifies his victory over Baydād, and should therefore be positioned at the conclusion of the sequence. On the contrary, Vadfradād II, whose existence was formerly unknown and still remains somewhat uncertain today, should be positioned after him.

² ALRAM 1986, 164. According to the opinion of HAERINCK-OVERLAET 2008, 208, an iconographic representation which includes a figure standing in front of a building and a banner is almost identical to a *bulla* of unknown provenance and the coins. See GHIRSHMAN 1962, 110.

³ Due to its outstanding iconography, ALRAM 1987, 147-155 and WIESEHÖFER 1994, 95; 2007, 48, initially regarded this coin as a fake.

⁴ The term *Huzwāreš* designates the use of Aramaic logograms to write words, frequent in Middle Iranian languages and present in both manuscripts and inscriptions. WIESEHÖFER (1994, 107) and MÜSELER (2018, 88) think that the language behind these Aramaic spellings is Middle Persian, as the use of *ezāfe* would show. On the other hand, there is no consensus as to why the final *-ā* is long, since this is not usually the case in known Middle Persian inscriptions: KOCH 1988, 86.

⁵ ENGELS 2013, 38; MÜSELER 2018, 88; GHOLAMI 2020, 136-137.

⁶ MÜSELER 2018, 90-91; GHOLAMI 2020, 138, 145. According to Gholami's opinion, BR and PRS in Vahbarz's type (1) pertain to two partial sentences and they should not be associated with each other in the translation.

**kāran Vahbarz* “commander (?) Vahbarz”. The text on the coins of type (2) is, however, difficult to read, with the unambiguous portion deciphered as follows: (2) [...] *ZY krny whwbrz* ~ [...] *ī *kāran Vahbarz*⁷. This legend has sparked some debate, but no consensus has yet been reached. Two additional types correspond to Baydād and bear the same inscription: *bgdt prtrk’ ZY ALH[YA] [BR] bgwrt prs* ~ *Baydād fratarak ī bagān pus Bayward pārs* “Baydād, Frataraka of the gods, son of Bayward of Persia”⁸. There are also three monetary types of Vādfradād I, all displaying the same legend: *wtrpdt prtrk’ ZY ALHYA* ~ *Vādfradād fratarak ī bagān* “Vādfradād, Frataraka of the gods”⁹. Finally, three other types relate to Vādfradād II¹⁰, some of which exhibit the following inscription¹¹: *wtrpdt prtrk’ ZY ALHYA* ~ *Vādfradād fratarak ī bagān* “Vādfradād, Frataraka of the gods”¹². Notably, certain coins also bear the names of their possessors inscribed in Aramaic¹³.

More generally, Itō (1976, 52) proposed that the sequence *prtrk’ ZY ALHYA*, vocalised as *fratarakā zī ‘alāhaya*, is a purely graphic Aramaic representation of the MP *fratarak ī bagān*. Similarly, he argued (1976, 53) that the sequence *prs BR* should be interpreted as *pārs pus* ‘son of Persia’, which is equivalent to the Achaemenid Persian *pārsahyā puça* (DNa 13-14, DSe 13, XPh 12). This is the most likely option. However, the interpretation given by Herzfeld (1924, 68) and Altheim (1969, 378) – that PRBR is an abbreviation for *prs BYRTA* (*pārs bīrtā* “Burg der Persis”; ITÔ 1976, 62 suggests *bīr²tā*) – is not feasible. Furthermore, as proposed by Koch (2015, 87), it is unlikely that *prs* should be interpreted as *prh*, which corresponds to *farrax*, the Parthian version of Med. *farnah*, Av. *xvarənah*, MP *xwarrah*. According to Gholami (2020, 137), both terms are part of different, incomplete sentences. Additionally, Boyce and Grenet (1991, 113) suggest that *prs* may be linked to *prtrk’* and read together as *prs prtrk’* to refer to the “Frataraka of Persis”, though this unclear.

⁷ SHAYEGAN 2011, 170 suggests *whbrz wnt ZY krny* ~ *Wahbarz wānād/wānēd ī kāren* “Vahbarz, may he be victorious, (he) who (is) the commander”, while GHOLAMI 2020, 140 proposes *krny klt-ZY whwbrz* “Of Vahbarz, (he who is) called divine (or appointed by the gods), the military leader”. He understands the sequence *klt-ZY* to be a heterographic construction concealing the Greek term κλητ-ού (*sic*). ENGELS 2013, 62; 2018, 186 suggests *wn(n)-hwy* ~ *WaNa(na)-HuWaYa* < **vanana-huvaḡa* “victorious over Susiana”; see MACKENZIE 1971, 86, *s.v.* *wānīdan*, *wān-* [*w’n-ytn’*, *w’n-yst*] “conquer, overcome, destroy”. He argues that the legend refers to a military campaign of the Frataraka in Susiana, perhaps during the invasion of Ptolemy III (c. 245 BC), but this is too speculative. The readings of Shayegan and Engels are deemed fitting by MÜSELER 2018, 91.

⁸ WIESEHÖFER 1994, 104; GHOLAMI 2020, 146: *bgdt-prtrk’-ZY-ALH[YA]-[BR]-bgwrt-prs*. According to the latter, although *prs* doesn’t appear on some coins, it often appears alongside *bgwrt*, implying that *prs* is a toponym rather than a patronymic; see ALRAM 1986, 165.

⁹ MÜSELER 2018, 93 is the only one to read BR on Vādfradād coins while documenting the absence of *prs*. However, according to Müseler, the legend *wtrpdt wyrtpyrt prtrk’ ZY ALHYA prtr(k’?)* can only be found on one coin. Nevertheless, he admits his inability to decode the meaning of *wyrtpyrt* and the reason for repeating the title *prtrk’*. The coin’s image is available in MÜSELER’s paper (2018, 103 fig. 16). Cf. ENGELS 2013, 40; GHOLAMI 2020, 149.

¹⁰ REZAKHANI 2013, 766, 775 points out that the issues of Vādfradād II are not tetradrachms like those minted by the rest of the Frataraka as well as the Seleucids, but drachms, more commonly issued by the Arsacid monarchs. It may be that this dynasty represents a transitional period, as it retains the title *prtrk’*. This is supported by the similarity between type (3) of his coins and the kings of Persis issues.

¹¹ The coins of typology (3) are anepigraphic and are attributed to Vādfradād II on the basis of their iconographic similarity. In fact, according to GHOLAMI 2020, 151-152, the dynast appears on the coins of all three typologies with a scar on his face, which allows the identification. In addition, GHOLAMI (2020, 151) and WIESEHÖFER (1994, 112-114) note that, although typology (2) coins were once deemed anepigraphic, the unearthing of more Frataraka coins has revealed traces of inscription marks.

¹² GHOLAMI 2020, 151.

¹³ These inscriptions and their socio-cultural and monetary circulation implications have been studied by GHOLAMI 2021.

Upon closer examination, it is important to note that the titles of these dynasts have generated some academic debate, which can be illuminated by various testimonies. First, the title *frataraka* has been attested in four Aramaic papyri from Elephantine, dating from the end of the fifth century BC; they have been collected by Cowley (1924, no. 20, 27, 30 and 31)¹⁴: *'n[h]nh rsynkm b-dyn np' qdm rmndyn prtrk wydrng rb hyl'* “We sued you in the court of NPA before Ramnadainā the governor (*prtrk*) and Waidrang the commander of the garrison (*rb hyl'*)” (no. 20, ll. 4-5); *kmry' zy hnwb 'lh' ['bd]w b-yb byrt' hmwnyt 'm wydrng zy prtrk tnh* “(this is the crime which) the priests of the god Khnub committed in the fortress of Yeb in concert with Waidrang who was governor (*prtrk*) here” (no. 27, ll. 3-4); *kmry' zy 'lh' hnwb zy b-yb byrt' hmwnyt 'm wydrng zy prtrk tnh* “the priests of the god Khnub, who is in the fortress of Yeb, (were) in league with Waidrang who was governor (*prtrk*) here” (no. 30, l. 5); *ksp w-nksyn yhbw l-wydrng prtrk' zy tnh hwh* “they gave money and valuable to Waidrang, the governor who was here” (no. 31, l. 5). The title also appears on a papyrus from Saqqara edited by Segal (1983, no. 27, l. 5): *šlh 'l gršpt prtrk'* “sent to *Garšapati- the governor (*prtrk'*)”¹⁵. It has generally been interpreted that the office, based on the context inferred from the content of the texts, is limited to a kind of district governor under the supervision of a satrap¹⁶. The Achaemenid origin of the office seems plausible, especially if we accept the etymology of *prtrk'* as deriving from OP *frataraka-* “prior, superior”, a comparative of *fra-* (cf. gr. πρό, lat. *pro*) “in front of, before”¹⁷. As Naster (1968, 77) points out, the title *prtrk'* is more suited to a governmental than to a military function. Moreover, Henning (1968, 138) and Hinz (1979, 112) have suggested that the term indicates a sub-satrapal position.

The term *krny* presents considerable difficulties of interpretation. It may be related to a *hapax legómenon* transmitted by Xenophon (*HG*. 1.4.3): *καταπέμνω Κύρον κάρανον τῶν εἰς Καστωλὸν ἀθροιζομένων. τὸ δὲ κάρανον ἔστι κύριον* “I send down Cyrus as commander of those gathering on the plain of Castolus”. The word *káranos* means lord”. The military connotations of the office seem to align well with its possible etymological origin in Persian: MP **kāran* < OP **kārana-* < *kāra-* “army”¹⁸. Additionally, it has been suggested that *krny* corresponds to its supposed Greek equivalent, *αὐτοκράτωρ*, a designation of military command associated primarily with the earliest coins of Arsaces I¹⁹. Coins inscribed with the word *krny* have also been found in Nysa, attributed to a certain Arsaces, likely a Parthian king. In his article, Rung (2015) argues that the term *κάρανος* refers to any kind of military leader in Old Persian rather than to a commander with extraordinary powers. Moreover, this term has also appeared on a ceramic inscription from the late Achaemenid period in Bactria (NAVEH–SHAKED 2012, 187-197, no. C2): (1) *b-šnt 1 wšt'sp krny 'zgm' mn kwpd't npq qn* (2) *'l mr'y wdywr qn 40* (3) *kwpd't* “(1) In the year 1. Vištaspā *krny*. The disbursement from Kaufadāta: sheep came out to (2) my lord Vaidyura, 40 sheep. (3) Kaufadāta”. Nevertheless, some scholars contend that *krny* ~ *karanya* refers to an Iranian aristocratic

¹⁴ Cowley-Papyrus 20 = Schwiderski B:2.9(5). Cowley-Papyrus 27 = Schwiderski A:4.5(5); Cowley-Papyrus 30 = Schwiderski A:4.7(5); Cowley-Papyrus 31 = Schwiderski A:4.8(5).

¹⁵ The term always appears as *prtrk'* in the Frataraka coinage, although in some of the Aramaic papyri from Elephantine, it appears without the final aleph. This is most likely the Aramaic postpositive article.

¹⁶ WIESEHÖFER 1991, 305-309.

¹⁷ See ITÔ 1976, 51.

¹⁸ See BEEKES 2010, 643-645 s.v. *κάρανος*; cf. *κάρηνα* and *κάρα*. Also, see TESTEN 1991.

¹⁹ REZAKHANI 2013, 767.

family known as the *Kāren*, which was prominent in the Parthian and Sasanian periods and associated with the region of Nineveh²⁰.

Iconographic images

The iconography of the coins is typically Iranian in style. While there are no significant similarities with Achaemenid coinage²¹, the coins of the Frataraka exhibit undeniable continuity with Sasanian issues. Three iconographic motifs can be identified in the coins of the Frataraka. The most common, present across all dynasts, features a figure on the left of the scene walking towards a building, the interpretation of which remains debatable. This figure, with its hands raised in a position of supplication or adoration, has often been interpreted as a priest. Early scholars, however, misinterpreted the *prtrk* title as *Fratadāra* ‘fire-keeper’²² or *Fratakara* ‘fire-maker’²³, suggesting a possible religious connection. Nonetheless, the hat worn by the figure, known as the *κροβάσια*, was typically used by the satraps of the Achaemenid Empire and later adopted by Hellenised dynasties. It would not be surprising if rulers wielding mainly political power sought to justify their position through a connection to the divine. Additionally, in some issues of Vādfradād I and II, the figure is depicted with a bow at its feet, which could symbolize military prowess, suggesting that this representation may indeed be of the dynasts themselves²⁴. Moreover, the typology (3) coins of Vādfradād I feature a winged figure crowning the dynast, which bears a striking resemblance to the Greek *Nikē*. Whether this represents a stylistic influence remains uncertain²⁵, as there is currently no evidence of parallels in earlier or later Persian art. Furthermore, coins issued from Vādfradād I onwards include a winged figure that can be identified as the MP *xwarrah*, Av. *xvarənah*-²⁶.

The building has been interpreted in various ways, including as a fire altar, a fire temple, a repository for sacred fire (*ātešgāh*), a ceremonial tower, a tomb, a crowning tower or a ‘foundation house’, i.e., a storehouse for religious paraphernalia²⁷. By comparing the iconographic representation with the preserved structures at Persepolis²⁸, a clear link with Achaemenid architecture and art emerges²⁹. Notably, the upper

²⁰ NAVEH–SHAKED 2012, 191; SHAYEGAN 2012, 11; HYLAND 2013, 2.

²¹ Unlike the Achaemenid coins, the issues of the dynasts are exclusively silver coins, with a notable absence of markedly militaristic motifs –with a few exceptions– and, moreover, they almost always bear inscriptions.

²² WIKANDER 1946, 15.

²³ JUSTI 1904, 487. See NASTER 1968, 74-80; ITÔ 1976, 48; POTTS 2007, 272.

²⁴ The bow is a customary symbol of Persian royalty. For instance, CURTIS 2010, 380 presents evidence of this phenomenon on the Behistun rock relief, as well as in the Naqš-e Rostam and Persepolis tombs. Additionally, ERICKSON 2019, 90-98 discusses the impact of the archer king iconographic *cliché* in the Hellenistic era.

²⁵ cf. GHOLAMI 2020, 150.

²⁶ Cf. WIESEHÖFER 1994, 111.

²⁷ POTTS 2007, 282; HAERINCK–OVERLAET 2008, 207, 209-214; CURTIS 2010, 390.

²⁸ HAERINCK–OVERLAET 2008, 210; TILIA 1969, 36-37.

²⁹ Besides, HAERINCK–OVERLAET 2008, 214-216 have highlighted the similarities with altars from other cultures, in particular the *Ara Pacis Augustae* and the Altar of the Twelve Gods in the Athenian Agora. Apart from the obvious differences, they share certain characteristics: a raised podium, large doors and a long architrave with parapets at the corners. However, the comparison with Persian buildings seems to be more rigorous. Also HAERINCK–OVERLAET 2008, 210 point out the similarity of the gates with the entrances of the Achaemenid royal tombs at Naqš-e Rostam, the correspondence of the parapets at the top of the architrave with almost identical forms in Palace H at Persepolis, the serrated markings on the upper part of the architrave, imitating the ends of the beams used in wooden constructions, which also appear in the Ka‘be-ye Zardošt and the Zendān-e Soleimān, and finally the elevated podium, which is

elements of the Frataraka buildings resemble the ornamental parapets of certain Achaemenid constructions at Persepolis, particularly the terrace wall to the south and west of Palace H stands out³⁰. Additionally, it is possible that the Frataraka drew inspiration from buildings such as the Ka'be-ye Zardošt and the Zendān-e Soleimān³¹, considering that the original functions of these structures may have been forgotten over time, leading the Frataraka to be inspired by their visual impact alone³². However, the key element that allows for the correct identification of the monument is the iconographic evolution of the coins; in the coinage Frataraka's successors, the Kings of Persis, the construction unmistakably resembles a fire altar (HAERINCK–OVERLAET 2008, 213). Furthermore, the scenes on the reverses of the coins bear a striking similarity to royal tomb reliefs at Naqš-e Rostam and Persepolis, where Achaemenid kings are depicted in the same position in front of a fire altar³³.

From the coinage of Vādfradād I, a new element was introduced to the reverse iconography: the MP *frawahr*, Av. *fravaši*. This mazdaist symbol is generally identified with Ahura Mazdā and is associated with royal power. Engels (2013, 70) and Gholami (2020, 149) suggest that its appearance reflects the Frataraka's intention to ideologically connect with the idealised Achaemenid past. However, its presence on coins can be more readily explained by the shared religious substrate of both dynasties. Additionally, on the coins of typology (3) of Vādfradād I, there is a figure resembling a Νίκη, reminiscent of the victory trophies found on the coins of Seleucus I³⁴. This similarity can be understood in light of the influence of the Hellenistic style on the cultural and material expressions of various peoples in the Near East, in particular in the coinage of Iranian dynasties such as those of Characene or Elymais³⁵.

also present, for example, in the tomb of Cyrus. In short, it seems clear that there is a strong link between Achaemenid architecture and that of the Frataraka mint building.

³⁰ Cf. TILIA 1969, 38; 1972, 315. Moreover, the resemblance to the parapets of the Kaniška temple at Surkh Kotal in Afghanistan is striking. They are stylistically very similar, although they date from the second century CE and are set in a cultural context that is only partly Iranian. It could therefore be concluded that this is a decoration that was to some extent widespread in the Near and Middle East.

³¹ In fact, authors such as ERDMANN (1941, 32) or SCHMIDT (1970, 46-47) identified the Frataraka emissions building as the Ka'be-ye Zardošt. See WIESEHÖFER 1994, 66-67.

³² Cf. POTTS 2007, 296. The main proponents of the functional or merely stylistic relationship between the building on the reverse of the Frataraka coinage and the Ka'be-ye Zardošt and the Zendān-e Soleimān were SARRE and HERZFELD (1910, 3-13, 89-90, 166-180; see ERDMAN 1941, 78), JACKSON (1906, 302-303), and especially STRONACH (1966, 220; 1978, 135), who argues that the structures depicted on the coins were likely tower altars. He interprets the Zendān and the Ka'be as repositories for paraphernalia and suggests that the resemblance between these structures and the building of the coins was due to its important influence on the form of post-Achaemenid altars. Also, in a similar vein but more recently, see POTTS 2007. An alternate perspective can be found in HAERINCK–OVERLAET 2008, for they suggest that the image on the reverse side of the coins could represent a Frataraka monument located on the terrace of Persepolis, potentially in the area where Palace H once stood. They also emphasise the differences between the two Achaemenid monuments and the building of the Frataraka reverses (2008, 209).

³³ POTTS 2007, 291; HAERINCK–OVERLAET 2008, 213; CURTIS 2010, 379.

³⁴ SC I 173-176. Cf. SC I 195-199 and 228.

³⁵ HANSMAN (1998, 373-376) has recognised the significant impact of the coins of Demetrius II and Alexander I on the coinage of the kingdom of Elymais. The coins of Kamnaskires III and Anzaze reveal the influence of the coinage of Cleopatra Thea and her sons. The impact was so extensive that the Elamites produced coins featuring an anchor, which was the royal symbol of the Seleucids. In addition, some coins of Kamnaskires III combine inscriptions in Aramaic and Greek as a manifestation of the intercultural exchange of that epoch: REZAKHANI 2013, 772. In the same way, as SELLWOOD 1983, 310 points out, the influence of Hellenistic culture on the Characene coinage can be seen through the inscriptions in Greek language and the employment of the Seleucid Era dating system. Also, see ALRAM 1986.

Another prominent iconographic element is the bird, which appears on some of Vādradād I's coins. This element is likely linked to the significance of the eagle in the Iranian world and its role as the emblem of the Achaemenid Empire since the time of Cyrus the Great³⁶. Xenophon notes (*Cyr.* 7.1.4):

ἦν δὲ αὐτῷ τὸ σημεῖον ἀετὸς χρυσοῦς ἐπὶ δόρατος μακροῦ ἀνατεταμένους. καὶ νῦν δ' ἔτι τοῦτο τὸ σημεῖον τῷ Περσῶν βασιλεῖ διαμένει. πρὶν δὲ ὄραν τοὺς πολεμίους εἰς τρις ἀνέπαυσε τὸ στράτευμα

“His ensign was a golden eagle mounted on a long spear. And this continues even unto this day as the ensign of the Persian king. Before they came within sight of the enemy, he halts the army three times”.

Similarly, concerning the eagle's presence in the column marching with Darius III towards Babylon during his campaign against Alexander, Curtius Rufus mentions (3.3.16):

Inter haec aquilam auream pennas extendenti similem sacraverant

“Between these they had consecrated a golden eagle represented with outstretched wings”.

The significance of the eagle may also relate to *Šahbāz*, a fabled falcon in Persian mythology. It appears on the coins of the Frataraka on the banner which could be a precursor to the *Derafš-e Kāvīān* (MP *Drafs̄ ī Kāvīān*), known primarily from the Sasanian period through epic literature³⁷. This suggests a symbolic or representational role, although this remains speculative.

The most significant iconographic elements are those that appear only in one type of coin, making them extraordinary. Noteworthy in this regard is the scene depicting the execution of an armed soldier in the Graeco-Macedonian style by a figure dressed in the Iranian manner, found in type (2) of Vahbarz. Gholami (2020, 140-141) defends the similarity of this typology to the victory coins of Seleucus, arguing that they may have originated from the same minter³⁸. He notes that on the Vahbarz type (2) coins, the dynast has traces of wings on his back, reminiscent of those seen on the *Nikē* of Seleucid issues. Furthermore, the inscriptions on Vahbarz type (2) coins are particularly small and irregular, a characteristic also identified by Newell (1938, 154-161) in Seleucus'

³⁶ See SHAHBAZI 1980.

³⁷ It is occasionally known as the *Derafš-e Jamšīd* (“Jamšīd's banner”) or the *Derafš-e Ferīdūn* (“Ferīdūn's banner”). The *Šāhnāme* contains an aetiological account according to which the blacksmith Kāve revolted against the tyrant Žahhāk and hung his leather apron from a wooden spear as a banner. As a result of the revolt, the throne passed to a prince of the former royal house, Ferīdūn, who adorned the apron and gave it one of his names. There is no direct mention of *Derafš-e Kāvīān* in the Avesta or in Achaemenid or Parthian sources, but KHALEGHI-MOTLAGH 1994, 315-316 points out that it may have been depicted on a damaged part of the Alexander mosaic at Pompeii. However, according to DE JONG 2003, 193-195 the *Derafš* is presented as an equivalent of the Av. *xvarənah* in the Vendidad. This symbol of divine glory is also personified as a winged figure on the coins of the Frataraka, which stylistically resembles Greek *Nikē*.

³⁸ GHOLAMI 2020, 141 argues that this was not an exceptional practice, since the drachms of Alexander I Balas from Ecbatana were probably minted by the same specialist who was in charge of the drachms of Mithridates I. See SELLWOOD 1980, types 10.10, 10.14, and 12.2. Similarly, the tetradrachms and drachms of Antiochus VII of Seleucia on the Tigris would be the work of the same minter who designed the coinage of Phraates II in the same mint. See SELLWOOD 1980, no. 17.1-4 and HOUGHTON-LORBER-HOOVER 2008, no. 2127.

victory coins. Gholami (2020, 142-143) adds that Seleucus' victory coins have been discovered at Persepolis and Pasargadae, although their control monogram (PY) aligns with those struck at Susa. Traditionally, it has traditionally been assumed, as Gholami (2020, 43) points out, that these coins were minted to commemorate the Seleucid victory at Ipsus. However, Mørkholm (1991, 72) suggests that they were produced to celebrate Seleucus' expedition through the Iranian territories shortly after his accession to the throne (307-302 BC). Gholami (2020, 143) proposes that the minter of these victory coins hailed from Susa and accompanied the Seleucid expedition to Persepolis/Pasargadae. At this juncture, Gholami (2020, 144-146) presents two alternative interpretations which explain the *raison d'être* of Vahbarz type (2). He first posits that the Seleucids were defeated and expelled by the Frataraka, who compelled the Seleucid minter to design a coin celebrating this victory. Alternatively, he suggests that the Frataraka were subject to the Seleucids, and that the Graeco-Macedonian figure on the Vahbarz coin represents not a Seleucid, but rather an enemy of the Empire, such as the Ptolemies, the Attalids, the Bactrians or rebellious colonists. Engels (2013, 55; 2018, 178) advocates for this perspective through what is referred to as the "pacific model". Additionally, Klose and Müseler (2018, 97-98) provide a favourable assessment of Engels' theory suggesting that while internal conflicts may have occurred, "the *frataraka* period would no longer have to be seen as struggle for Persid independence".

Another somewhat exceptional scene is the enthronement depicted in the coins of the Baydād type (2). This dynast has generally been interpreted as a usurper who sought to legitimise his position through this type of propaganda³⁹. This interpretation is further supported by Hoover's suggestion (2008, 213-215) that the mutual overstrikes of coins between Vādfradād I and Baydād demonstrate the coexistence and probable rivalry of the two dynasts. Furthermore, Baydād is the only Frataraka known to have what appears to be a patronymic in his title. Although its meaning remains uncertain, it may represent another attempt to justify his leadership or to establish a hereditary dynasty. Similarly, Koch (1988, 85) posits that this scene imitates a relief of Darius I at Persepolis, likely intended to reinforce his right to rule by symbolically linking himself to the Achaemenid legacy.

Finally, the progressive simplification of the iconography is notable, particularly during the last Frataraka. This trend continued under their successors, the Kings of Persis, and did not experience significant changes until the establishment of the Sasanian Empire.

Furthermore, we have a similar testimony, although it provides limited information. Archaeological excavations conducted by Herzfeld in 1923 at Persepolis revealed evidence of building activity during the rule of the Frataraka, particularly in the area of the Achaemenid terrace⁴⁰. Tilia (1972, 315-316) proposed that one of the post-Achaemenid structures in the southern corner of the terrace served as a residence for the Frataraka. Two reliefs were discovered alongside the remains, each depicting a figure in the traditional Achaemenid style, which was identified as one of the dynasts and possibly his wife; the latter figure is very poorly preserved (DEBEVOISE 1942, 87; ENGELS 2013, 32). This identification is supported by the resemblance to figures on the

³⁹ According to NEZHAD 2018, 41, the sceptre is believed to depict a lotus flower which was associated with the divine realm among the Achaemenids. WIESEHÖFER 1994, 103 also notes the presence of the flower. However, the identification remains uncertain.

⁴⁰ The building activity of the Frataraka would have affected, above all, the area where palaces D, G, and H are located; see TILIA 1972, 253-257; 1974, 239-243; WIESEHÖFER 1994, 68-70.

Frataraka coins⁴¹. In 1932, Herzfeld conducted further excavations and uncovered an architectural complex⁴² identified as a fire temple based on fragmentary votive inscriptions⁴³. These inscriptions contained the names of Greek deities –possibly Hellenistic interpretations of Iranian gods⁴⁴– which supports Herzfeld’s dating and interpretation. Shenkar (2011, 118-120) argues that Herzfeld’s identification is valid, as the building does not belong to the Achaemenid architectural ensemble, and its third base was cubic, a form uncommon in Persepolitan architecture⁴⁵.

2. THE FRATARAKA: CHRONOLOGY AND ALLEGIANCE

Chronology

The study of the Frataraka has traditionally focused solely on the available evidence, namely the coins they minted. However, by considering the broader context in which these coins emerge, we can formulate a range of historical insights concerning their political status and their relationship with the dominant regional power, the Seleucids. To pursue this analysis, it is first essential to address a particularly challenging issue: the chronology of the dynasts.

Admittedly, this is a contentious issue, with no consensus beyond the broad chronological range typically attributed to the coins, spanning approximately the third to second centuries BC. Scholarly research has evolved to identify two main trends regarding this chronology. On the one hand, scholars such as Hill (1922), Herzfeld (1935), Newell (1938), Mørkholm (1973; 1984), Koch (1988), Klose and Müseler (KLOSE–MÜSELER 2005-2006; 2008; 2018), Hoover (2008), Curtis (2010), and Engels (2013, 2018) advocate for the so-called high chronology, which dates the Frataraka rulers in Persis to the third century BC onwards. On the other hand, specialists including Alam (1986; 1987), Wiesehöfer (1994; 2010; 2013), Stiehl (1969), Callieri (1998; 2007), Potts (2007), Haerinck and Overlaet (HAERINCK–OVERLAET 2008), and Strootman (2017; 2020) support the low chronology, situating the dynasts in the second century BC⁴⁶.

It seems quite plausible that the Frataraka governed Persis by the mid-second century BC, as the disappearance of their office is likely tied to the Arsacid conquest of Iran and the establishment of a new monarchical structure under the Parthian Empire.

⁴¹ Cf. HERZFELD 1935, 46-47; 1941, 286. As DEBEVOISE 1942, 87 points out, the relief of the Frataraka finds clear parallels as “the figure of the king on the tomb *façades*, on a *repoussé* gold figure in the Oxus treasure, and it is frequent in Phoenician monuments contemporary with the Persepolis Fratadara reliefs. It also occurs on Parthian stelae from Ashur”; see ANDRAE–LENZEN 1933, pl. 59. He also notes the similarity with a relief located in the tomb known as Dukkân-e-Dâ`ūd; see SARRE–HERZFELD 1910, 62. KLOSE 2005, 96 and CURTIS 2010, 379 also note the similarities with the reliefs of Qizqâpân. See also WIESEHÖFER 1994, 129.

⁴² WIESEHÖFER 1994, 72 states that there are in fact two complexes and only one of them can be precisely dated to the post-Achaemenid period.

⁴³ HERZFELD 1934, 232; 1935, 44. The so-called Temple of the Frataraka, however, has never been subjected to an in-depth study beyond that carried out by Stronach and collected by SCHMIDT 1953, 56. WIESEHÖFER 1994, 72-78 gives a fairly comprehensive summary of the different approaches to the interpretation of the temple. Even today, the question remains unclear.

⁴⁴ The inscriptions were first published by HERZFELD himself (1935, 44; 1941, 275). The main study can be found in ROBERT 1967, 282. They are also collected in the recent compilation by ROUGEMONT 2012, 125-128, no. 59-63. WIESEHÖFER 1994, 72 questions the identification. The opinion of GHIRSHMAN 1976, 201 is that the inscriptions may have been produced during Alexander’s occupation or Peucestas’ rule.

⁴⁵ See NEZHAD 2018, 42.

⁴⁶ DE MORGAN 1923, 270-271 takes a moderate stance, arguing that minting likely began around 220 BC.

Although Müseler (2018, 98) points out that the coins of Vādfradād II do not show consistent continuity with the designs used as typological models, there is no reason to assume a political or cultural rupture between the coinage of the Frataraka and that of the Kings of Persis under Arsacid rule⁴⁷.

Firstly, as Müseler (2018, 85-86) argues, Frataraka coins have consistently been stratigraphically linked to the coinage of Seleucid kings from the early third century BC. Notably, Herzfeld's 1934 discovery included one victory-type tetradrachm of Seleucus I, one of Vahbarz, one of Baydād and three of Vādfradād I. In 1962, Stronach unearthed a hoard containing six more victory-type coins of Seleucus I, along with four of Alexander III and four of Philip III⁴⁸. Similarly, Frataraka overstrikes on Seleucid coins appear exclusively on issues of Seleucus I and Antiochus I⁴⁹. Klose (2005-2006, 94) observes that the Herakles' lion mane depicted on Seleucus's coins is clearly visible beneath some of Baydād's coinage⁵⁰. Moreover, some Frataraka coins feature a production control monogram identical to that found on Antiochus I's mints, suggesting the possibility that both sets of coins were designed by the same minter. This evidence has led Curtis (2010, 386) to propose that the Frataraka began their rule around the time the Seleucids first arrived in the region.

Nevertheless, the high chronology poses significant challenges in supporting the notion of historical continuity between the Frataraka and the Persis kings. Based on the dynasts attested through coinage, it appears that there were five Frataraka –Baydād and Vādfradād may have been rival rulers. Furthermore, if their rule began in the early third century BC, they would have had to exhibit remarkable longevity to maintain power until the Arsacid conquest in the mid-second century BC. Additionally, given the substantial number of coins attributed to each dynast, the likelihood of other Frataraka not attested numismatically seems slim, though not entirely impossible.

As noted earlier, the two competing theories regarding the dating of the Frataraka are closely tied to the interpretations of their political status. Just as we cannot definitively assert the independence or subordination of these rulers to Seleucid authority, we cannot be certain of the precise dates of their reigns. However, as Müseler (2018, 84-85) argues, the conception of Seleucid rule as indirect and maintained in autonomous regional governments leads us to place the Frataraka in the third century BC –this is in line with the numismatic evidence– especially in the reigns of Seleucus I or Antiochus I, who shaped the basic structures of the kingdom and determined the general lines of imperial policy. Likewise, the dating of the Frataraka to the third century BC necessarily implies this interpretation of the Seleucid Empire, since otherwise the possibility of a relatively small peripheral region separating from the rest of the Empire at its peak, while the surrounding territories continued to be subjugated, would be incomprehensible.

Allegiance

Furthermore, regarding the allegiance of the dynasts, there is some evidence worth discussing. While Graeco-Latin sources rarely mention the dynasts directly, there are two texts that may offer some insight into this issue. One possible exception is the following passage from Polyaeus:

⁴⁷ WIESEHÖFER 1994, 112.

⁴⁸ STRONACH 1964, 38; see GHOLAMI 2020, 142.

⁴⁹ GHOLAMI 2020, 154; MÜSELER 2018, 86-87.

⁵⁰ Additionally, GHOLAMI 2020, 149 notes that one of Baydād's issues were overstruck on a Demetrius Poliorcetes coin (NEWELL 1917, 96-97, no. 90). This also suggests an earlier dating for the Frataraka coins.

Ὀβορζος τρισχιλίους ἄνδρας τῶν ἐν τῇ Περσίδι κατοίκων ἐπιβουλεύοντας αἰσθόμενος ἀπεπέμψατο δούς ἡγεμόνας τῶν ὁδῶν, οἱ προήγαγον αὐτοὺς εἰς τινα τόπον τῆς Περσίδος, [ὄς] καλεῖται Κωμαστός, ἔνθα κῶμαι πυκναὶ καὶ λεῶς πολλὰς καὶ σταθμοὶ πολλοί. ἐπεὶ δὲ ἄλλος ἐν ἄλλῳ σταθμῷ κατήγετο, φυλακῆς ἰσχυρᾶς κυκλωσαμένης τὰς κώμας, ἕκαστος τῶν σταθμούχων τὸν ἴδιον ἐπίσταθμον εὖ μάλα καταμεθύσας ἀπέκτεινε, τὰ δὲ σώματα τῶν τρισχιλίων ταφέντα διὰ νυκτὸς ἀφανῆ ἐγένοντο.

“When Oborzos learnt that three thousand of the settlers in Persis were conspiring against him, he gave them guides for the road, who led them to a place in Persis called Comastus, where there were numerous villages, a large population and many inns. When they had taken shelter here and there, after the villages had been surrounded with a strong guard, each of the owners of the inns got his guest well drunk and killed him, and the bodies of the three thousand were secretly buried during the night” (Polyaen. 7.40).

Some scholars have suggested identifying Oborzos with Vahbarz⁵¹, though this remains doubtful. According to the account, a local dynast killed three thousand κάτοικοι who were conspiring in a village called Κωμαστός. However, this passage has been a source of controversy, particularly due to its clear connection with another passage by the same author, placed immediately before it in the extant text of his work:

Σείλης τρισχιλίους Περσῶν νεωτερίζοντας κτεῖναι βουλόμενος ἐσκήψατο Σέλευκον αὐτῷ δι’ ἐπιστολῆς χαλεπῶς ἀπειλεῖν· αὐτὸς δὲ τῇ τούτων συμμαχίᾳ χρῆσάμενος ἐθέλειν αὐτὸν προλαβεῖν. ὅπως δ’ ἂν βουλήν ἀγάγοιεν, συνέταξεν αὐτοῖς ἀπαντᾶν ἐς κώμην Ῥάνδα καλουμένην. οἱ μὲν πιστεύσαντες ἤκον, ὁ δὲ, ἦν γὰρ ἔλος βαθὺ καὶ κοῖλον ὑπὸ τὴν κώμην, ἐνταῦθα Μακεδόνων καὶ Θρακῶν ἰπτεῖς τριακοσίους, ὀπλίτας τρισχιλίους ἀποκρυψας συνέταξεν, ὅταν ἴδωσι πέλτην χαλκὴν ἀρθεῖσαν, ἐκδραμόντας ἀναιρῆσαι πάντας τοὺς ἠθροισμένους. ἀνεδείχθη μὲν ἡ πέλτη, οἱ δὲ ἐκδραμόντες τοὺς τρισχιλίους Πέρσας κατεφόνευσαν.

“Since Seiles wanted to kill three thousand Persians who intended to revolt, he pretended that Seleucus had threatened him severely in a letter and that he, with their cooperation, wanted to forestall him. In order to bring them together in assembly, he ordered them all to go to the village called Rhanda. They believed him so they went and he—for there was a deep, concave quagmire beneath the village—having hidden three hundred Macedonian and Thracian horsemen, along with three thousand hoplites, ordered them that when they saw a bronze shield rise up, then they should run to kill all those who had gathered there. The shield appeared and they, on the run, killed the three thousand Persians” (Polyaen. 7.39).

Polyaenus recounts how a certain Seiles, a Graeco-Macedonian officer, feigned being under threat from king Seleucus⁵², commanded three thousand Persian rebels, and subsequently betrayed and murdered them in a village called Rhanda. The similarities

⁵¹ GHOLAMI 2020, 143; ENGELS 2018, 174; KLOSE–MÜSELER 2018, 91; WIESEHÖFER 1994, 110.

⁵² The disputed chronology of the Frataraka also complicates the identification of Seleucus: BICKERMAN (1966, 96), BAR KOCHVA (1976, 33), GRAINGER (1990, 213), SHERWIN-WHITE–KUERT (1993, 29), and GHOLAMI (2020, 143), consider him to be Seleucus I Nicator. ENGELS 2013, 31 seems to imply the same. MITTAG 2006, 314 and KLOSE–MÜSELER 2008, 26 believe that he should be Seleucus II Callinicus. Furthermore, according to STIEHL 1969, 376 and WIESEHÖFER 1994, 125, Seleucus IV is a possible identity for this Seleucus. NEZHAD 2018, 39 proposes a tentative link between the event and Alexander I Balas’ conquest of Elimeia around c. 150 BC. Nevertheless, this proposal is too speculative.

in both events and numbers are striking. It is unlikely that the transmission of two nearly identical stories is coincidental. This likely points to a problem in the textual transmission, which, beyond any potential onomastic coincidence, casts doubt on the reliability of Polyaeus' account as a historically accurate source.

Nonetheless, as previously mentioned, the only direct testimony concerning the Frataraka, the coins, provides highly valuable information in this respect. These coins are inscribed with a title that identifies all the dynasts, *prtrk'*, which seems to refer to a type of sub-satrapal official. Likewise, portraits on the coins depict the dynasts wearing the *κυρβασία* (**kurpāsa-*), a hat used by Achaemenid satraps and later adopted by rulers of post-satrapal states such as the Ariaratids of Cappadocia, the Orontids of Sophene or the Arsacids of Parthia⁵³. Moreover, the title *prtrk'* has been attested elsewhere only in a series of four Aramaic papyri from Elephantine in the late fifth century BC and in another document from Saqqara of the same period, which define the Frataraka as an official acting as a district governor under the authority of a satrap. Three individuals – all of whom bore Iranian names – held the office of Frataraka: **Ramnadainā* [*rmndyn*]⁵⁴, in the district of Elephantine, c. 420; **Vidranga* [*wydrng*]⁵⁵, in the same region, c. 410; and **Garšapati-* [*gršpt*] (SEGAL 1983, n° 27), in the district of Memphis, c. 419⁵⁶. In the documents from Elephantine, the Frataraka appears alongside other minor titles or offices, such as that of *sgn*, an unspecified official, or *mr'*, literally 'lord'. The appearance of the Frataraka's name in contracts suggests a connection between this office and legal matters, although the presence of the title 'commander of the garrison' [*rab ḥaylā*] in legal documents indicates that the Frataraka was not the only judicial authority in the region (WIESEHÖFER 1991, 305-309). Therefore, the Frataraka in the Elephantine texts seems to be focused exclusively on local matters as provincial governors, although they likely held a higher hierarchical position than the garrison commander, allowing them to manage both administrative and military matters within their jurisdiction (WIESEHÖFER 1991, 309).

In addition, Vahbarz employs another designation, *krny*, which may be related to the term *κάρωνος*, as mentioned previously, appearing in Xenophon (*HG*. 1.4.3). It also appears on some Arsacid coins and in a ceramic inscription found in Achaemenid Bactria. The term has also been interpreted as a military title, following Xenophon, or as a reference to the Iranian aristocratic family known as *Kāren*.

Certainly, these titles carry important implications. They denote positions of responsibility, not merely honorifics, suggesting a degree of political autonomy. Xenophon's *κάρωνος* refers to an exceptional title granted to a governor who was given military command over the armies of multiple satrapies. However, as Engels (2018, 179) observes, what is most striking about the titles used by the Frataraka is their deliberate and systematic avoidance of any reference to kingship or monarchy. Their use of the *κυρβασία* in their iconography should be understood in the same sense. Only in response to political changes, such as the Arsacid conquest, did the dynasts choose to adopt a royal title. Furthermore, the subordination of the Frataraka to a higher authority becomes apparent if we accept that this institution existed during the reign of

⁵³ cf. STROOTMAN 2017, 187-199; CANEPA 2017, 205-216; REZAKHANI 2013, 767.

⁵⁴ Read as **Damandin* (*dmndyn*) by COWLEY 1923, 58, n° 20. See HINZ 1975, 198 s.v., **ramnadainā-* and WIESEHÖFER 1991, 305. Cf. COWLEY 1923, no. 20; SCHWIDERSKI 2004, no. B:2.9(5).

⁵⁵ COWLEY 1923, no. 27, 30, 31; SCHWIDERSKI 2004, no. A:4.5(5), A:4.7(5) and A:4.8(5)).

⁵⁶ WIESEHÖFER 1991, 305.

Antiochus III, since Polybius, in describing the rebellion of Molon, mentions the presence of a satrap of Persis in the following passage⁵⁷:

Ἀντίοχος γὰρ ἦν μὲν υἱὸς νεώτερος Σελεύκου τοῦ Καλλινίκου προσαγορευθέντος, μεταλλάξαντος δὲ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ διαδεξαμένου τὰδελφοῦ Σελεύκου τὴν βασιλείαν διὰ τὴν ἡλικίαν τὸ μὲν πρῶτον τοῖς ἄνω τόποις μεθιστάμενος ἐποιεῖτο τὴν διατριβὴν, ἐπεὶ δὲ Σέλευκος μετὰ δυνάμεως ὑπερβαλὼν τὸν Ταῦρον ἐδολοφονήθη, καθάπερ καὶ πρότερον εἰρήκαμεν, μεταλαβὼν τὴν ἀρχὴν αὐτὸς ἐβασίλευσε, διαπιστεύων τὴν μὲν ἐπὶ τὰδε τοῦ Ταύρου δυναστείαν Ἀχαιῶ, τὰ δ' ἄνω μέρη τῆς βασιλείας ἐγκεχειρικῶς Μόλωνι καὶ τὰδελφῶ τῷ Μόλωνος Ἀλεξάνδρῳ, Μόλωνος μὲν Μηδίας ὑπάρχοντος σατράπου, τὰδελφοῦ δὲ τῆς Περσίδος. Οἱ καταφρονήσαντες μὲν αὐτοῦ διὰ τὴν ἡλικίαν, ἐλπίσαντες δὲ τὸν Ἀχαιὸν ἔσσεσθαι κοινῶν σφίσι τῆς ἐπιβολῆς, μάλιστα δὲ φοβούμενοι τὴν ὀμότητα καὶ κακοπραγμοσύνην τὴν Ἑρμείου τοῦ τότε προεστῶτος τῶν ὄλων πραγμάτων, ἀφίστασθαι καὶ διαστρέφειν ἐνεχείρησαν τὰς ἄνω σατραπείας.

“Antiochus, then, was the youngest son of Seleucus, the so-called Callinicus. After his father died and his brother Seleucus inherited the kingdom, since he was the eldest, Antiochus first settled in the upper regions and resided there. But when Seleucus, after crossing the Taurus with his army, was treacherously murdered, as mentioned above. Antiochus then took power himself and reigned, entrusting the dominion of the region beyond the Taurus to Achaeus and giving the eastern half of the kingdom to Molon and his brother Alexander. Molon became the satrap of Media and his brother that of Persis. They despised the king because of his age and hoped that Achaeus would join them in their plan, for they greatly feared the crudity and malice of Hermeias, who was then the official in charge of all affairs; they attempted to rise up and to lead the upper satrapies to revolt” (Plb. 5.40.5-41.1).

Similarly, it can be stated with a fair degree of certainty that Persis was part of the Seleucid Empire during the reign of Antiochus III. This is the only way to account for the king’s presence in Antioch in Persis⁵⁸, as documented by the following inscription⁵⁹:

⁵⁷ Moreover, Arrian (*FGrHist* 156 F 31 = Syncell. 539 ed. Dindorf) notes the existence of an *éparchos* named Agathocles in the region of Persis during the reign of King Antiochus Callinicus (SHAYEGAN 2012, 11): Ἐπὶ τούτου τοῦ Ἀντιόχου [...] Ἀρσάκης τις καὶ Τηριδάτης ἀδελφοὶ τὸ γένος ἔλκοντες ἀπὸ τοῦ Περσῶν Ἀρταξέρξου ἐσατράπευον Βακτριῶν ἐπὶ Ἀγαθοκλέους Μακεδόνοιο ἐπάρχου τῆς Περσικῆς “Under the reign of Antiochus (Callinicus?), Arsaces and Teridates, two brothers of the line of Artaxerxes, king of the Persians, were satraps of Bactria when Agathocles the Macedonian was eparch of Persia” (cf. F 30 in Phot. *Bibl.* 58). Nevertheless, the testimony relates to the legendary beginnings of the Arsacids, is untrustworthy, and furthermore, we possess no proof that any Seleucid King, called Antiochus, was ever bestowed with this epithet.

⁵⁸ Regarding Antioch in Persis, it is worth noting that there has been no archaeological evidence found to confirm its location. The inscription *OGIS* 233 documents the sending of settlers from Magnesia on the Meander in the reign of Antiochus I, which means that Antioch in Persis was founded during this king’s rule or that of Seleucus I. SALLES 1987, 90-92 has suggested that the city was a significant economic hub in the Persian Gulf, essential for regulating trade links with India. According to some authors including TARN (1929, 11), BERNARD (1990, 46-52), and FRASER (1996, 31), the settlement should correspond to modern Bušehr on the coast or Taoce (Borāzjān) inland. BERNARD 1990, 48 has also evaluated the likelihood of Rišahr. ROUECHÉ–SHERWIN-WHITE 1985, 9 advocate for Taoce, arguing that during the Achaemenid era, this settlement was already a significant administrative centre: see COHEN 2013, 214. However, FRASER 1996, 31 suggests that Antioch in Persis might correspond to Alexandria in Persis. As shown, this is a questionable matter which is yet to be solved.

⁵⁹ This inscription, ROUGEMONT 2012, no. 51 (*OGIS* 231; WELLES 1934, no. 31), is a letter written from Antioch in Persis and sent by King Antiochus III to Magnesia on the Maeander showing his support to the establishment of festivities in honour of *Ártemis Leucophryēnē* in Magnesia on the Maeander. The

“King Antiochos to the council and the people of Magnesia, greetings. Demophon, Philiskos and Pheres, the sacred ambassadors whom you sent to us to announce the games and other honours which the people have voted to perform for the patron goddess of the city, Artemis Leukophryene, came to us in Antioch of Persis and conveyed to us your decree, and they themselves spoke enthusiastically in accordance with the contents of the decree, inviting us to recognise the games which you institute every five years in honour of the goddess as “crowned” and of the Pythian rank...”⁶⁰.

Similarly, Nezhad (2018, 38) argues that Hellenistic pottery remains found at Tall-e Taht, Pasargadae⁶¹, and Tall-e Žahhāk⁶² suggest that the region continued to be inhabited by Graeco-Macedonians and thus remained under imperial authority⁶³. Wiesehöfer (1994, 66) notes that a marble head of Aphrodite dated to the third-second centuries BC was found at Tall-e Žahhāk⁶⁴. Although material culture may not fully reflect the ethnic origin of the population, it is important to consider the influence of Graeco-Macedonian artefacts.

This notwithstanding, a frequently cited argument for the independence of the Frataraka is based on two passages from Polyaeus, which relate clashes between Persians and Graeco-Macedonians and mention a certain Oborzos, often interpreted as the Greek version of Vahbarz. However, the parallel structure of these passages and

polis dispatched envoys to several towns to extend invitations for participation. Thus, we have another important inscription, ROUGEMONT 2012, n° 53 (*OGIS* 233; BURSTEIN 1985, 41-43 §32; AUSTIN 2006, 342-344 §190), a copy found in Magnesia of the reply of the citizens of Antioch in Persis to his invitation, which refers to Antiochus I as the founder of the colony; see CECCARELLI 2018, 140-148.

⁶⁰ ROUGEMONT 2012, no. 51 (*OGIS* 231): βασιλεὺς Ἀντίοχος Μαγνή-//των τῆι βουλῆι καὶ τοῖι δήμωι χαί-//ρειν· Δημοφῶν καὶ Φιλίσκος καὶ Φέ-//ρης οἱ παρ’ ὑμῶν πεμφθέντες πρὸς// ἡμᾶς θεωροὶ ἔνεκεν τοῦ ἐπαγγεῖ- //λαι τὸν ἀγῶνα καὶ τᾶλλα ἃ ἐψηφίσα-//ται ὁ δῆμος συντελεῖν τῆι ἀρχηγέ-//τιδι τῆς πόλεως Ἀρτέμιδι Λευκοφρυ-//νηϊ, συμμείξαντες ἐν Ἀντιοχειαί// τῆς Περσίδος τό τε ψηφίσμα ἀπέδω-//καν καὶ αὐτοὶ διελέχθησαν μετὰ σπου-//δῆς ἀκολούθως τοῖς κατακεχωρισμέ- //νοισι ἐν τῶι ψηφίσματι, παρακαλοῦντες// ἀποδέξασθαι στεφανίτην ἰσοπύθιον// τὸν ἀγῶνα ὃν τίθετε τῆι θεᾷ διὰ πεν-//[τ]αετηρίδος...

⁶¹ The Pasargadae fortress, *Tall-e Taht*, was destroyed by flames towards the end of Archaeological Period II, dated by STRONACH 1978, 155-156, 183-186 around 280 BC. Cf. WIESEHÖFER 1994, 97. However, both the dating of the site and the implications for the Frataraka are highly dubious.

⁶² See STRONACH 1978, 178-183.

⁶³ Regarding this issue, in addition to the villages of Comastus and Rhanda referred to by Polyaeus (7.39, 40), Stephanus of Byzantium (*s.v.* Στάσις) mentions a Persian city named Stasis, where a certain King Antiochus, son of Seleucus, is believed to have travelled through. Several recensions (A, B and Γ) of the *Alexander Romance* (3.35 AERTS) note the existence of Alexandria in Persis, alongside other secondary sources (collected by FRASER 1997, 53-55). However, scholars have defended its identification as Antioch in Persis: COHEN 2013, 210. Additionally, Stephanus (*s.v.* Μεθώνη) provides evidence of the existence of a city called Methone in Persis. Ptolemy (6.4.2) makes mention of the city of Ionaka (Ἰώνακα), but it has been argued that he likely meant Antioch in Persis (COHEN 2013, 216). According to him, Tanagra (Τανάγρα) was a colony established during the Achaemenid era by Greek deportees and lasted until the Hellenistic period (6.4.4). Pliny (*HN* 6.115) talks about Laodicea in Persis which was situated near the border of the region, possibly founded by Antiochus I near the Persian Gulf: COHEN 2013, 217. Moreover, both Ptolemy (*Geog.* 6.4.6) and Ammianus (23.6.42) mention Tragonice (Τραγονίκη) in Persis. Also, the Masjed-e Soleimān site provides significant evidence of the Graeco-Macedonian influence in the region. GHIRSHMAN 1976, 187-190 uncovered a temple that was potentially dedicated to Athena, along with figurines of Macedonian horsemen carrying the *καυσία*, and another statue honouring Heracles. Ceramic studies estimate that these artefacts originated between the third and second centuries. On this basis, COHEN 2013, 189 suggests that there was likely a Graeco-Macedonian garrison located in the area.

⁶⁴ See STEIN 1936, 111-230.

their striking similarity suggest a complex textual transmission, which prevents drawing far-reaching conclusions. Similarly, interpreting Graeco-Macedonians as supporters of the Seleucids and the Persians as their opponents is a superficial reading. On the one hand, numerous testimonies demonstrate the collaboration of the indigenous population with imperial authority, while on the other hand, many of the internal conflicts faced by the Seleucids were exclusively between Graeco-Macedonians. Additionally, the reference in the text to *κἀτοιχοὶ* indicates the Graeco-Macedonian presence in the region, supporting its incorporation into the empire.

Another testimony often cited to suggest hostility between the Frataraka and the Seleucids, is the following passage from Pliny (*NH* 6.152):

“Mira res ibi traditur; Numenium, ab Antiocho rege Mesenae praepositum, ibi vicisse eodem die classe aestuque reverso iterum equitatu contra Persas dimicantem et gemina tropaea eodem in loco Iovi ac Neptuno statuisse”.

“It is said that an incredible event happened there: Numenius, the officer appointed in Mesene by King Antiochus, fighting against the Persians, defeated them there one day in a naval battle and then, after the tide had gone out, again in a cavalry battle; there he erected a couple of trophies in honour of Jupiter and Neptune”.

However, the text is far from clear. First, the region under Numenius’ command, Mesene/Characene, was not part of the territory of Persis, and the possibility that the Frataraka temporarily annexed the region, as suggested by Shayegan (2011, 155-156), is particularly uncertain⁶⁵. Thus, although there is no conclusive evidence, it seems likely, as Coloru (2017, 111) and Engels (2013, 69; 2018, 188) suggest, that the troops defeated by Numenius were pirates, bandits, or rebels, without any necessary connection to the Frataraka.

Moreover, we can be fairly certain that by the time of Demetrius II, the Seleucids no longer controlled the Iranian territories, as can be inferred from the following passage from Justin:

“Recuperato paterno regno, Demetrius, et ipse rerum successu corruptus, uitii adolescentiae in segnitiam labitur tantumque contemptum apud omnes inertiae, quantum odium ex superbia pater habuerat, contraxit. Itaque cum ab imperio eius passim ciuitates deficerent, ad abolendam segnitiae maculam bellum Parthis inferre statuit; cuius aduentum non inuiti Orientis populi uidere et propter Arsacidae, regis Parthorum, crudelitatem et quod ueteri Macedonum imperio adsueti, noui populi superbiam indigne ferebant. Itaque, cum et Persarum et Elymaeorum Bactrianorumque auxiliis iuaretur, multis proeliis Parthos fudit”.

“After gaining possession of his father’s kingdom, Demetrius, himself corrupted by the success of his undertakings due to the vices of youth, fell into indolence and reaped as much scorn from everyone for his idleness as his father had incurred hatred for his arrogance. And so, since all over his empire the cities were in revolt,

⁶⁵ The *Ta’rīḥ sinī mulūk al-arḍ wa’l-anbiyā’* (ed. and transl. by GOTTWALDT 1844-1848, 58-120), a historical work dating back to the tenth century AD, written by the late Persian author Ḥamza Iṣfahānī, mentions a certain Saḥt as the ruler of the Persian Gulf region (ed. 137, transl. 108-109 *Kinda wa Ḥaḍramawt*). According to SHAYEGAN 2011, 152-153, Sagdodonacus, father of Hyspaosines of Characene, who is documented by Pliny (*HN* 6.139), and is said by Ḥamza Iṣfahānī (ed. 137) to have served as *marzbān* of Characene, during the period between 191 and 164 BC, has a high probability of corresponding to this reference: see BLAU 1873, 331. Nevertheless, acceptance of this identification is challenging due to the lack of additional testimonies.

he decided to wage war against the Parthians in order to remove the ignominy of his indolence. The peoples of the East were pleased to see his arrival because of the cruelty of Arsacides, king of the Parthians, and because, accustomed to the ancient rule of the Macedonians, they could not bear the arrogance of the new people. He was aided by auxiliary troops from the Persians, the Elymaeans and the Bactrians, and defeated the Parthians in many battles” (Just. 36.1.1-4).

The mention of the Persians, Elamites, and Bactrians as external allies suggest that they were no longer under Seleucid rule. Furthermore, if we accept the historical veracity of the expression *Orientis populi (...) ueteri Macedonum imperio adueti noui populi superbiam indigne ferebant*, it could imply that they remained under Seleucid rule, albeit only formally, until a relatively late date, perhaps until the Arsacid conquest. It seems no coincidence that these peoples longed for Seleucid rule rather than for their own independence.

By all means, the presence of Persian troops in the Seleucid armies should be emphasised⁶⁶. For instance, Polybius describes the army of Antiochus III during the battle of Raphia and notes the presence of soldiers of Persian origin (Plb. 5.79.6):

πρὸς δὲ τούτοις Ἀγριᾶνες καὶ Πέρσαι, τοξόται καὶ σφενδονῆται, δισχίλιοι.

“Alongside these were Agrians and Persians, archers and slingers, two thousand”⁶⁷.

Similarly, Polyaeus mentions the celebration of a Persian festival by the army of Antiochus I, certainly involving Persian troops:

Ἀντίοχος βουλόμενος κρατῆσαι Δαμασκοῦ, ἣν ἐφύλασσε Δίων Πτολεμαίου στρατηγὸς, ἐπήγγειλε τῇ στρατιᾷ καὶ τῇ χώρᾳ πάση Περσικὴν ἑορτὴν θαλιάζειν προστάξας ἅπασιν τοῖς ὑπάρχοις ἀμφιλαφεῖ κομίζειν εὐωχίας παρασκευήν. ἐφ’ ἣ πανταχοῦ πανηγυρίζοντος Ἀντιόχου μετὰ πάντων, καὶ ὁ Δίων πυνθανόμενος τὴν τρυφὴν τῆς ἑορτῆς ἐχάλασε τὸ σφοδρὸν τῆς φυλακῆς. Ἀντίοχος δὲ προστάξας ἄπυρα σιτία τεσσάρων ἡμερῶν κομίζειν ἤγαγε τὴν στρατιὰν διὰ τε ἐρημίας καὶ ἀτραπῶν παρακρήμων καὶ ἀπροσδοκῆτως ἐπιφανεῖς αἰρεῖ Δαμασκὸν, Δίωνος οὐ δυνηθέντος ἀντισχεῖν Ἀντιόχῳ παρόντι.

“When Antiochus intended to take the city of Damascus, which was defended by Dion, a general of Ptolemy, he instructed the army and the whole country to hold a Persian feast after ordering all the governors to bring abundant provisions for the feast. Since Antiochus was feasting with everyone and in every place, Dion heard of the luxuriousness of the feast and relaxed the strictness of vigilance. Then Antiochus ordered to take uncooked food for four days and led the army through the desert and up steep paths and, appearing unexpectedly, took Damascus without Dion being able to oppose Antiochus’ arrival” (Polyaen. 4.15).

It is true that we do not know whether the classical authors used the term “Persian” precisely to refer to the inhabitants of Persis or, conversely, whether they used it more broadly to refer to Iranians in general. Additionally, the Persian troops could have been

⁶⁶ BAR KOCHVA 1976, 20-53 shows that the presence of Iranian and Semitic components in the Seleucid armies was a structural rather than a circumstantial element.

⁶⁷ WIESEHÖFER 1994, 102, however, notes the absence of Persian troops at the battle of Magnesia (Liv. 37-40). In fact, it is difficult to elucidate the implications of this evidence.

mercenaries, soldiers from Persis who had settled outside their homeland, or allies of a friendly but independent political entity. However, if we accept the inclusion of Persis in the Seleucid Empire, as demonstrated by the testimonies examined above, this statement becomes much clearer.

CONCLUSIONS

In this article, we attempted to review the main issues concerning the Frataraka, present the solutions proposed by various scholars, offer new interpretations of specific sources, and ultimately provide an overview that links the study of these dynasts with the history and organisation of the Seleucid Empire. The available testimonies are neither abundant nor detailed, leaving many areas still obscure and possibly never fully clarified. Nevertheless, thanks to sustained scholarly efforts, our understanding of the subject has significantly improved, allowing us to conduct this in-depth analysis.

Firstly, it should be noted that, although these are the only direct testimonies, the information they provide is somewhat limited on its own. Moreover, it can be compared with what we know from other places and periods, but we cannot be certain that the *fratarakas* under the Achaemenids were exactly the same as those under the Seleucids, especially if they had the privilege of minting coins and, therefore, exercised a certain degree of political autonomy. Similarly, although there is no evidence to rule out the interpretation of the title *krny* as referring to the *Kāren* family, it is preferable to think that it must refer to some office, perhaps similar to the one mentioned by Xenophon. However, the extraordinary military powers granted to Cyrus are difficult to reconcile with the figure of Vahbarz. Perhaps he carried out this role under the command of a Seleucid king, as Cyrus did under the command of his brother, king Darius II. In any case, these titles are difficult to explain in a political context of complete independence, especially considering the historical references to the Achaemenids and the rejection of the royal title.

As for the puzzling coin legend of Vahbarz, no satisfactory consensus has yet been reached. While there are instances of Aramaic script being used for a language it was not devised for, such practices are rare and have no applicable parallel in Hellenistic Persis. For this reason, it is difficult to imagine a legend written in Aramaic script containing a Greek term, as suggested by Gholami (2020, 140). Similarly, the proposal put forth by Engels (2013, 62; 2018, 186) suggests that, on the one hand, the coin issuers would have committed numerous errors, and on the other, they would have introduced significant innovations, including a conjugated verb and a mention of a specific event unknown to us, such as the alleged invasion of Susiana. While technically possible, this scenario is unlikely. Ultimately, Shayegan's (2011, 170) proposal seems the most viable. Although he does not definitively explain the function of the *ezāfe* and leaves some of the Aramaic readings uncertain, his hypothesis remains a possibility. Additionally, MP *wnt* ~ *wānēd* or *wānād* (the third singular present indicative or subjunctive of MP *wānīdan* “be victorious, win”; cf. OP *van-* “overpower”) is only attested here in the Frataraka coinage. However, considering the significant challenges posed by heterographic Middle Persian, Shayegan's suggestion merits consideration.

Moreover, the building depicted on the reverse of most of the coins cannot be unanimously identified or interpreted. The Achaemenid stylistic influence is evident, especially when considering Tilia's observations on the upper parapets and their resemblance to those found at Persepolis. However, a comparison with similar parapets at Surḥ Kōtal, in Kušan Afghanistan, suggests they may share a common cultural

substrate (cf. SCHLUMBERGER 1969, il. no. 10, pl. 9:3). Similarly, the building's resemblance to Ka'be-ye Zardošt and Zendān-e Soleimān is undeniable. Nevertheless, it is impossible to determine whether the reverse of some Frataraka coins represents one of these buildings, a similar real structure, an imaginary one inspired by them, or, alternatively, a completely different building that happens to resemble them due to a shared architectural tradition. In any case, it is hard to imagine that the Frataraka, whether or not fully aware of the Achaemenid past, would disregard the monuments of the region they governed, which was, after all, their homeland. However, it remains uncertain whether the dynasts consciously embraced these architectural influences and deliberately depicted them on their coinage.

Another widely debated issue, perhaps the most discussed, is the chronology of the dynasts. As mentioned earlier, there is a significant divide between proponents of the high chronology and those supporting the low chronology, although some scholars advocate for a middle ground between the two. There is no conclusive evidence to decisively support either option. Nonetheless, numismatic and historical evidence seems to suggest that the Frataraka may have begun their rule in the third century BC.

Regarding the evidence for early dating, the coins of the dynasts were found in the same archaeological contexts as the issues of the earliest Seleucid monarchs. Furthermore, the overstrikes were made exclusively on the coins of these early kings. As mentioned, some Frataraka coins also bear a control monogram identical to the one found on the issues of Antiochus I. Additionally, the reigns of rulers such as Seleucus I, Antiochus I, or Antiochus III seem the most likely period for the establishment of a territorial governance model based on granting regional autonomy to dynasts nominally subject to imperial authority. The recentralising policies of Antiochus IV, as well as the absence of long-reigning monarchs who implemented significant reforms in the territorial structure of the Empire, suggest that the Frataraka were established before his reign⁶⁸. If we assume historical continuity between these dynasts and the Kings of Persis under Arsacid rule, it would imply that each dynast ruled for many years, given that we have only five documented dynasts, and two of them –Baydād and Vādfradād I– were likely contemporaries. However, the number of years required is not implausible, depending on when in the century their reigns began.

Nevertheless, scholarly views on the Frataraka acting as dynasts independent of Seleucid rule –based on their capacity to mint coins or the textual references of Polyaeus– are contradicted by evidence pointing in the opposite direction. A preliminary clarification is necessary in this regard. Organisationally, the Seleucid Empire largely exercised indirect control over the eastern satrapies located beyond the Zagros for most of its existence⁶⁹. Furthermore, the autonomous status retained by Babylon until the reign of Antiochus IV⁷⁰ and the nominal equality between the kings and the minor Asiatic *poleis*⁷¹ demonstrate the Seleucid tendency towards indirect rule. The accession of Antiochus III to the throne marked a revival of Seleucid power in the

⁶⁸ Antiochus IV's control over Persia has recently been re-emphasized by COŞKUN 2021; see also MITTAG 2006.

⁶⁹ On his expedition through the High Satrapies, Seleucus I accomplished rapid conquest by forming agreements with dynasts and local warlords, who governed the territory much like in the Achaemenid period; see CAPDETREY 2007, 267-270.

⁷⁰ On Seleucid Babylonia and its autonomy, a fundamental study is that of BOIY 2004. He demonstrates that the city had its own priestly assembly, known as *kiništu*, as well as a community leader, the high priest of the Esagil, the *šatammu*.

⁷¹ An example of this is MA 1999.

eastern regions⁷². His policy of decentralization encouraged the autonomy of the local satraps and dynasts, limiting his demands to economic and military cooperation, while also requiring nominal recognition of Seleucid hegemony⁷³. Scholars have described this territorial model as federal (SCHMITT 1964, 94), tributary (CAPDETREY 2007, 103-133), or even feudal (ENGELS 2017, 24). The existence of the Frataraka must be understood in this context. It is not surprising that titles such as *prtrk'* or *krny* were used, as they imply a deliberate avoidance of identification as kings, despite their specific implications. The assumption of the title MLKA ~ *šāh* only occurred after the Arsacid conquest, which introduced substantial political changes.

The *OGIS* inscriptions 231 and 233, along with Polybius' *Histories* (7.39, 40), indicate the presence of Graeco-Macedonian colonies in Persis and a satrap in the region during Molon's rebellion⁷⁴. Therefore, at the beginning of the second century BC, it seems unlikely that Persis was outside Seleucid control. While the presence of Persian troops in the Seleucid armies does not definitively prove the region's integration into the empire, it is more plausible if we assume the Frataraka were dynasts who remained partly dependent on the Seleucids. Furthermore, Justin's reference (36.1.1-4) to Persians, Elymaeans, and Bactrians seeking to return to Seleucid rule may serve a rhetorical purpose. However, it also suggests that Justin viewed the Seleucid kingdom as a political entity dominating various peoples in Iranian territories until the Arsacids' arrival⁷⁵. As previously noted, Pliny's imprecise account of Numenius' conflict with some Persians does not convincingly demonstrate hostility between the Frataraka and the Seleucids. Additionally, the passage from *2 Maccabees* (9.1-2) cited by Wiesehöfer (1994, 102), which would suggest Persian hostility towards Antiochus IV, cannot be considered as strictly historical.

For these reasons, it is plausible that the Frataraka were indigenous dynasts who enjoyed considerable autonomy in governing Persis, with minimal imperial intervention in internal affairs. Whether the Seleucids appointed an ἐπιστάτης in Persepolis is unclear. They likely focused on cooperation with the imperial authority in areas such as recruitment and the payment of taxes or tribute. However, it is possible that their autonomy grew during periods of instability and internal conflict in the Seleucid empire. Nevertheless, the absence of military expeditions in the region and the consistency in the form and content of the coinage suggest that they did not fully sever ties with the Seleucids until at least the second century BC.

⁷² On the Anabasis of Antiochus III through the eastern regions, see GRAINGER 2015 and FEYEL-GRASLIN-THOMÉ 2017.

⁷³ Take for instance, when Antiochus III seized Armenia in the year 212 BC, he placed it back under Xerxes, its former monarch, and only collected the tribute which was due to him (Plb. 8.23). After his demise, the kingdom was divided among two indigenous rulers (Str. 11.14.5). He then faced the Parthians. The sources do not indicate how the conflict was resolved (Plb. 10.27.1-31.13), except for the fact that the Parthian king –an Arsaces– “was at last taken into alliance with him” (Justin 41.5.7: *ad postremum in societatem eius adsumptus est*). Finally, after his Bactrian campaign (Plb. 10.49.1-15), he granted Euthydemus I the right to use the royal title (Plb. 11.34.8-9); see BICKERMAN 1966, 94. On the granting of royal titles and their relationship to the Seleucid μέγας βασιλεύς and the Arsacid βασιλεύς βασιλέων, and the influence of the Achaemenid *xšāyaθiya xšāyaθiyānām*, see STROOTMAN 2017, 191.

⁷⁴ Another noteworthy discovery is the finding of two altars from the first half of the third century BC inscribed in Greek and consecrated to Hellenistic deities. The texts were published by ROBERT 1967, 281-297. Also, see HERZFELD 1935, 44; SHERWIN-WHITE-KUHRT 1993, 76. In contrast, WIESEHÖFER 1986, 84-85 believes that the texts originate from the late fourth century BC.

⁷⁵ This could be related to the following passage from Strabo (15.3.24): νῦν δ' ἤδη καθ' αὐτοὺς συνεστῶτες οἱ Πέρσαι βασιλέας ἔχουσιν ὑπηκόους ἑτέροις βασιλεῦσι, πρότερον μὲν Μακεδόσι νῦν δὲ Παρθυαίοις; “Now, though again organised into a state of their own, the Persians have kings that are subject to other kings, formerly to the kings of Macedonia, now to those of the Parthians”.

Lastly, it is worth considering the historical significance of the Frataraka. Historically, pre-Islamic Iran has often been classified into three main periods: Achaemenid, Arsacid, and Sasanian. Meanwhile, Seleucid rule is perceived as an interruption in the continuity of Persian empires. However, the progress made in the field of Seleucid studies has invalidated various misconceptions that have previously hampered our discipline, such as the idea that the empire was solely Graeco-Macedonian in character. The Frataraka, particularly if they were dynasts who were integrated into the functioning of the Seleucid kingdom, provide an excellent illustration of the cultural diversity of the Ancient Near East and historical continuity of the Persian people⁷⁶. These traits extend even to the Sasanian era. Engels' proposal (2011, 19, 30) to use the term *longue durée* to describe the socio-cultural and political landscape of the Near East from the second century BC to the seventh century CE is noteworthy. After the Arsacid conquest, the dynasts adopted the title of kings, denoted by incorporation of the term MLKA ~ *šāh*. They acted under the authority of the Arsacid monarchs and eventually led uprisings that challenged the Parthian kings' ability to effectively control their territory. The model of political decentralisation inherited from the Seleucids proved to be ineffective due to the proliferation of rebellious dynasts throughout the empire⁷⁷.

Eventually, one of these rulers, Ardaxšīr ī Pābagān –who, by chance, shared the name with the first Frataraka–, defeated Ardawān IV, ended the Arsacid kingdom, and founded the Sasanian empire. However, the latter faced similar issues, as its rulers often implemented both decentralising policies to strengthen their position on the throne and centralising initiatives to weaken the power of regional aristocracies. This continuity in history should not be overlooked. We should strive to examine the four empires – Achaemenid, Seleucid, Arsacid, and Sasanian– in relation to each other and from a broad perspective to arrive at more comprehensive, meaningful, and satisfactory conclusions.

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⁷⁶ REZAKHANI 2020, 130 *et passim* points out the significance of the role of Achaemenid memory. Precisely their memory, evident if we consider the similarities in onomastics, would also play a significant role during the later periods of pre-Islamic Iranian history.

⁷⁷ The political strategies of the Seleucids failed, although only to some extent. The Arsacids integrated and successfully applied them for four centuries. The Parthians encouraged local self-governance and faced the challenging task of preserving a balance of power amid a declining centre and a strengthening periphery. However, in the end, the situation became unmanageable. In Arab tradition, Sasanian propaganda labelled the Arsacid's final defence as *mulūk at-tawā'if* “party kings”, alluding to their scattered nature: ENGELS 2017, 29.

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