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VOLOGASES I AND PAKOROS II IN PARTHIA

**FABRIZIO SINISI, SYLLOGE NUMMORUM
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The book under review, written by Fabrizio Sinisi, is the first of the planned nine volumes of the *Sylloge Nummorum Parthorum*. It covers the reigns of Vologases I, the Son of Vardanes, Pakoros II, and Artabanos III, altogether ca. AD 51–110. Sinisi undertook a detailed analysis of the numismatic evidence and focused on the coin issues minted in Seleukeia on the Tigris and Ekbatana. Some types from Mihrdatkirt and Rhagai are also represented (p. 11). The catalogue proper contains 945 coins. Sinisi used supplementary material (chiefly from auctions and internet resources as well as minor collections) adding 1,331 coins to his study (pp. 12–13).

The book is divided in two parts, the study and the catalogue. The numismatic section contains chapters on typology, metrology and chronology issues. In the catalogue, a chronological reconstruction of the coin system is provided. In an "Introduction" Sinisi offers a "Historical Overview" concerning Parthian history of the period AD 51–110 (pp. 15–23). This short chapter contains premises and prolegomena essential to the reconstruction of the political history and coinage system in Parthia.

Sinisi rightly claims that the Son of Vardanes (AD 55–58) minted no drachms, thus compelling the scholars to reinterpret some views concerning the territorial extent of his rebellion: Ekbatana was not in the hands of the claimant

(p. 17). Sinisi's rejection of the view of "Hellenizing tendencies" in the Parthian coinage of the second half of the first century AD is persuading (p. 19).

Some of the ideas Sinisi adheres to are fallacious. He gives no cogent arguments to support his dating of AD 59–60 for the Parthian attack on Izates II of Adiabene. Moreover, he is self-contradictory in some issues. First he writes, "It took Vologases until AD 61 [apparently from the beginning of the revolt in 58 – MJO] to settle the matters in Hyrcania", only to follow on with the speculation that Vologases was "able to stage an attack on Izates II of Adiabene between AD 59 and 60" (p. 17). But he does not explain how Vologases could have found the time and means for an attack on a vassal in Adiabene when he was engaged by the rebellion in Hyrcania and a Roman offensive in Armenia. To back up this inaccurate conclusion Sinisi refers to a study by E. Dąbrowa,¹ who is treated as a particular authority (p. 17). In several passages Sinisi's trust in Dąbrowa's publications goes so far that he quotes them almost as if they were primary sources.² As a matter of fact, Vologases I's attack on Adiabene must have occurred at the beginning of his reign, ca. 52–53.³

In many aspects Sinisi's establishment of the facts brings order to the chaos rampant in Parthian numismatics and is helpful for a correct reconstruction of the period's history. On p. 28 n. 84 he attributes Sellwoods (1980) type 67 to "one of the kings ruling immediately before Vologases I" (see also pp. 139–146). This debatable coin group has been assigned to Vonones, Vardanes "II", Gotarzes II or Vologases I.⁴ Unfortunately Sinisi avoids to analyse the Parthian silver issues found in Fars, attributed to the reign of Vologases I and Pakoros II (p. 11).

His insights and assessments on chronology and history Sinisi presents in detail in chapter II.3 "Chronology and History" (pp. 137–206). Sinisi corrected some far-reaching statements of Sellwood, who wrongly listed dated tetradrachms of Gotarzes II as produced from the year 355 to 362 of the Seleucid era (=SE). Sinisi states that only the years 357–362 SE (45/6–50/51) are documented (p. 144, n. 502). Coins of Gotarzes dated to 355–356 SE (S 65.1–3) do not exist. Dates read as 355 by Sellwood actually seem to represent 369 (p. 144, n. 502; 146, n. 517). Sellwood's false evidence caused a lot of misunderstandings among scholars.

¹ Dąbrowa 1983, 139–140.

² Sinisi showers praise on Dąbrowa's 1983 book as "brilliantly written from a Parthian perspective, . . . a really critical approach" (p. 15, n. 14). In point of fact there is not much of a "Parthian perspective" in it, as Dąbrowa did not go very deeply into the domestic situation in Parthian Iran. What is more, not being a numismatist, he did not make much use of the monetary evidence, which is clearly a deficiency, strangely enough, unnoticed by Sinisi, who *is* a numismatist.

³ Olbrycht 1998, 177–178.

⁴ Olbrycht 1997, 32.

Concerning the nomenclature and numbering of the Arsacid kings, Sinisi is right in assuming the existence of Pakoros I and Pakoros II. Pakoros I is styled as king in Tac. *Hist.* 5.9. His special position at the court, reflected in coinage, allows to assume that he was a kind of "rex iunior", appointed by his father Orodes II.⁵

The crucial part of Sinisi's book is the discussion of the Parthian coinage for the 70s and 80s, especially for 389–393 SE (pp. 162–170) and the joint reigns of Vologases I and Pakoros II. Most studies give a picture of extreme political confusion in Parthia at that time and list Vologases I, "Vologases II", and Pakoros II as rival kings, each stroving for the throne.⁶ In fact, the changes which occurred in the Arsacid minting practice in that period were strictly connected with the political transformations in Parthia. The attribution of coin types and interpretation of the nature of the monetary issues (e.g. new royal titles, king's names) depend on the accurate reconstruction of the political developments – an area subject to impassioned controversy and prone to the drawing of conclusions on shaky grounds. One of the chief aprioristic assumptions some specialists (both numismatists and historians) tend to adopt is the belief that the temporal overlap of particular issues is a sure indication of internal strife in Parthia. This applies especially to the period from the close of the reign of Vologases I and the beginning of the reign of Pakoros II.⁷

The issue of S 72-type coinage overlaps for a certain spell of time with the first issues of Pakoros II S73-type coinage. Researchers who use this concurrence as a basis for speculation that the S72 coinage was minted by a usurper they identify as "Vologases II" come to the conclusion that around AD 79–80 there was a civil war in Parthia, involving Pakoros II, Vologases I, and perhaps a "Vologases II".⁸ In addition Artabanos III, the issuer of S74 coinage, comes into play as the supposed rival of Pakoros II.

In one of my papers published in 1999 I was able to establish the correct order of the events on the grounds of both numismatic and historical materials, and to give the right attributions to the coin types minted at the turn of the 70s and 80s.⁹ Sinisi cites my article, but assigns the original idea of Vologases' and Pako-

⁵ For the numismatic evidence related to Orodes II and Pakoros I, see Simonetta 1978 and, rather sceptical, Assar 2011, 129 (neglecting the existence of Pakoros I's coins).

⁶ See, e.g., Hauser 2006, 307–308; Assar 2011, 147.

⁷ See, e.g., Sellwood 1983, 295: "Dated tetradrachms show a continuous conflict for two years between Pacorus and Vologases, concluded with the disappearance of Vologases". See also Karras-Klapproth 1988, 199.

⁸ Bivar 1983, 86; McDowell 1935, 229: "A revolt against Vologases I broke out under the leadership of Pacorus II in the spring of 78".

⁹ Olbrycht 1999. The article is based on a paper I delivered at the University of Münster in 1995. Besides, I mentioned the joint rule of Vologases I and Pakoros II, and the attribution of S 72 type to Vologases I in other papers, see Olbrycht 1997, 32.

ros II's co-regency to B. Simonetta (p. 163).¹⁰ However, Simonetta made a fundamental mistake by treating Vologases I and Pakoros II as siblings; moreover, he gave no grounds at all for his suggestions concerning the co-regency. In this respect he did not analyse the coins at all. I did not know of Simonetta's paper in 1999, but it does not contribute anything new to the issue. Several other scholars have put forward a conjecture on the basis of the historical data that Vologases and Pakoros were father and son, and I quote them in my 1999 article. This was, e.g., assumed although not corroborated by W. Schur in 1949.¹¹ Then Sinisi states that "Olbrycht 1999 ... again proposed the idea of joint rule" by Vologases I and Pakoros II. It has to be stressed that not only did I propose it, but I actually corroborated the claim with evidence. Sinisi goes even further and suggests that the "sad neglect of Simonetta, all the more remarkable in Olbrycht 1999", is due to the fact that his paper was published in Italian, which is a groundless supposition (p. 163, n. 584). While he was working on a much broader set of materials Sinisi has reiterated all of my key determinations. He claims that I limited myself to a discussion of the period from 388 to 390 SE (AD 77–79). This is not true, as my article of 1999 takes Vologases' earlier years into account, as well as some of the coins Pakoros II issued when he was the sole monarch in his own right.

By and large, the Parthian coinage of the late AD 70s shows that in his old age Vologases I decided to designate his young son Pakoros II as his heir. This move was in perfect harmony with Vologases' policy, which was always far-sighted, especially as regards the avoidance of the chronic family conflicts that plagued the Arsacid clan. Already at the beginning of his reign he had cut short the dynastic quarrels by appointing his brothers to separate kingdoms. Tiridates received Armenia, and Pakoros was given Media Atropatene (*Ios. ant.* 20.74; *Tac. ann.* 12.50, 15.2). Thanks to this measure the power of the Arsacid clan and of the Parthian Empire as a whole was reinforced very substantially.¹² It seems self-evident that at the close of his reign the ever-provident Vologases I settled the matter of the succession, making Pakoros his heir.

Sinisi (p. 178) suggests that Artabanos III was a brother of Vologases I and regent on behalf of Pakoros II. The available sources do not offer any mention of Vologases' brothers except for the well-known figures of Tiridates and Pakoros. Thus it seems more probable that Artabanos III was a son of Vologases I and brother of Pakoros II.¹³

¹⁰ Simonetta 1958.

¹¹ Schur 1949, 2020–21: "Es würde meines Erachtens der Art des Vologases mehr entsprechen, daß er durch die Königswahl und Krönung des Nachfolgers schon bei seinen Lebzeiten für einen ungestörten Übergang der Herrschaft zu sorgen gesucht hätte".

¹² Olbrycht 1998a, 126.

¹³ The multiplication of the Parthian kings named Artabanos, proposed by Assar (2011, 115, 119, 147f.) is problematic and must be treated with caution.

The basic section of the book is the catalogue (pp. 207–412). The coin types are arranged according to the ruler and denomination. Thus there are coins of Vologases I, the Son of Vardanes, Pakoros II, Artabanos III and City Issues.

On the whole Sinisi's book is a considerable achievement in research on Parthian mintage. Thanks to his thorough analysis of the numismatic material and the facts established by earlier scholars, and reiterated by Sinisi, he has managed to put together and match on many points the numismatic perspective with Parthia's political history for the period from AD 51 to 110. It is an essential work of reference and has besides a wealth of comments and observations on topics related to the enquiry. Let us hope that the next volumes in the series will appear soon.

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