

51) Once more on ‘the general who is above the four generals’ and his congeners – Anyone who has trawled through the astronomical diaries (Sachs and Hunger 1989, 1996) in an attempt to glean data pertaining to Babylonian history in the Seleucid and Parthian periods will be familiar with the title $lúGAL ERÍN^{meš} šá ana UGU 4 lúGAL ERÍN^{meš}$, ‘the general who is above the four generals’. Considering how unusual this title is, it is surprising that so little has been written about it. Attested in the diaries from 229 to 119 B.C., the title has one important congener, namely, $lúGAL ERÍN KUR URI^{ki} šá ana UGU 4 lúGAL ú-qu-tú$, ‘the general of Babylonia who is above the four generals’. Discussing this title in 1999, K. Kessler suggested that, in spite of the fact that no such title exists in Greek, this would have been understood by contemporary Seleucid authorities as the *strategos* of Babylonia who ranked above the four (other) *strategiai* (Kessler 1999:178). In 2002 Y. Mitsuma suggested that the general above the four generals ‘is probably to be equated with “the Satrap of the East”... of the Seleucid kingdom’, adding, ‘One variant of the title for the latter “the General of Akkad who is above the Four Governors”, indicates that this official controlled a number of provinces because the word “Governor (LB $lu\mu\mu-ma-?i-ir/lúGAL UKKIN$)” here no doubt corresponds to the Gk. *satrapes*, the “governor” of a province (e.g. Babylonia), whereby the “Four Generals/Governors” will be the “Generals/Governors” of the provinces in the Seleucid East’ (Mitsuma 2002: English abstract). More recently, however, Mitsuma has suggested that the jurisdiction of the general above the four generals corresponded to the ‘Upper Satrapies, i.e. the whole of the Seleucid realm east of (the) Euphrates’ (Mitsuma 2007: 9).

The geographical extent of the term Upper Satrapies varied through time and we have no way of knowing just what jurisdiction might have been meant, if indeed this is how we are to understand the title, by the references in the astronomical diaries to the general above the four generals. Are we talking about an area as extensive as has been assumed for the lifetime of Alexander, when no fewer than 14 satrapies (Persis, Paraitakene, Karmania, Media, Tapuria, Parthia [with Hyrcania], Bactria, Areia [with Drangiana], Gedrosia, Arachosia, Paropanisus, and India) are thought to have been subsumed under this designation (von Gutschmid 1888: 6-7)? Was it the much smaller if no less far flung area assigned to the Upper Satrapies by Diodorus in his discussion of Eumenes’ attempt, after reaching Persis in 318 B.C., to gain the aid of ‘the satraps and generals in the Upper Satrapies’, which included 7 satrapies, viz. Persis, Karmania, Arachosia, Paropanisus,

Drangiana, Bactria and India (Diodorus 19.14.1-8). However one is to understand Mitsuma's interpretation, it is clear that there were far more than four eastern or upper satrapies in the Seleucid period, and that the designation 'general above the four generals' is not matched by a neat, quadripartite satrapal division east of the Euphrates.

Indeed, this same conclusion, reached by Mitsuma, suggested to him an alternative explanation for the presence of the numeral four. He wrote, 'We would rather conjecture a symbolical use of the number "four" in the light of the title *šar kibrāt arba'i/erbetti* (King of the Four Quarters, i.e. the Entire World), which is used of Mesopotamian and Persian kings who ruled over vast territories.... the numeral in "the General who is above the Four Generals" may be used to imply the vastness of the territory under his jurisdiction' (Mitsuma 2007: 10).

This hypothesis, which invokes an ancient title first attested under Naram-Sin (Hallo 1957: 49), is interesting, but it ignores an entirely different line of evidence from Iranian sources which suggests that a real, quadripartite division of authority attested in the Sasanian period may be relevant to our understanding of the Seleucid and Parthian title under discussion here. Following a line of inquiry first opened by F. Gurnet, T. Daryaee has interpreted four mint signatures – DYW-XW (dēwān of Xwarāsān, i.e. the northeast), DYW-AT (dēwān of Ādūrbādagān, i.e. the northwest), DYW-AT (dēwān of Āsūrestān, i.e. the southwest), DYW-KR (dēwān of Kermān, i.e. the southeast) – as evidence of quadripartition late (years 32-40, or 520-528) in the reign of Kawād I (Daryaee 2002: 10). According to Tabari, on the other hand, it was Khusraw I (539-579) who replaced the office of general over the army of the entire empire (*Erān-spāhbed*) with four generals designated according to the cardinal points, viz. *xwarāsān spāhbed* (General of the East) *nēmroz spāhbed* (General of the South), *xwarbarān spāhbed* (General of the West), and *abaxtar spāhbed* (General of the North) (Nöldeke 1879: 155). Later writers (al-Dinawari, Yaqubi, Ferdowsi) give more precise information about the composition of these four regions. Thus, al-Dinawari says that the East comprised Khorasan, Seistan and Kerman; the West comprised Isfahan, Qom and Jibal; the South comprised Fars and Ahwaz (Khuzestan); and the North comprised Iraq up to the Byzantine border (Nöldeke 1879: 155, n. 2). Interestingly, Mas'udi says that the institution of four generals was an innovation of Ardashir's in the early 3rd century (Gignoux 1984: 5-6 and n. 25). The quadripartite division of Iran into a western (*K'usti Xorbaran*), southern (*K'usti Nemroğ*), eastern (*K'usti Xorasan*) and northern (*K'usti Kapkoh*, lit. Caucasus) is explicit in a geographical description of the Sasanian empire by the Armenian writer Pseudo-Moses of Khorēn, dating to 8th or 9th century (Marquart 1901: 6, 16-17), while the same titles attested in Tabari are preserved in the 9th century *Bundahiān* (Gyselen 2001: 5).

P. Gignoux suggested that the literary evidence of this quadripartite division of the empire was fictitious, 'un thème littéraire plutôt qu'une réalité historique', and like

Mitsuma, he invoked Naram-Sin's famous title as a parallel expression simply meant to gloss domination over the entire world (Gignoux 1984: 4). Over the past two decades, however, epigraphic evidence has come to light confirming that the quadripartite division of the Sasanian empire was not a fiction. In 1988 Gignoux himself presented a fragmentary seal impression on which the legend *nēmroz spāhbed* (General of the South) could be read (Gignoux 1991) and in 2001 R. Gyselen published further seal impressions, dating to the reigns of Khusraw I (531-579) and Hormizd IV (579-590), which document the office of the other three generals of the Sasanian empire (Gyselen 2001). The seal impressions present us with titles that are effectively an amalgamation of the terminology preserved by Tabari and Pseudo-Moses of Khorēn, viz. *ērān kust ī xwarāsān spāhbed* ('General [*ērān-spāhbed*] of the side of the East'), *ērān kust ī nēmroz spāhbed* ('General [*ērān-spāhbed*] of the side of the South'), *ērān kust ī xwarbarān/xwarārān spāhbed* ('General [*ērān-spāhbed*] of the side of the West') and *ērān kust ī ādūrbādagān spāhbed* ('General [*ērān-spāhbed*] of the side of the North').

It is not my contention that the Sasanians were cognizant of the much earlier Seleucid and Parthian title 'general who is above the four generals', but I think the Sasanian evidence for a quadripartite division of military authority must raise a question mark over the interpretation of the numeral four in the earlier title as merely a rhetorical device harkening back or parallel to the Old Akkadian 'king of the four world quarters'. The military exigencies which caused the Seleucids in Babylonia to re-organise their military command structure in the 3rd century B.C. may have been very different from those which motivated the reform of Sasanian Iran's high command. Yet, if the Seleucid generals were indeed responsible for the Upper Satrapies, as Mitsuma has suggested, and if the satrapies of 229 B.C. were even half as extensive as Diodorus' account of the situation in 318 B.C., then one can see that the geographical imperatives confronting the Seleucids and Sasanians were not entirely dissimilar. In any case, though the parallel adduced here is not precise, I do believe that the title used in the astronomical diaries very probably reflected a real, quadripartite division of military responsibility, comparable to that seen in the Sasanian period, rather than a semi-mythic allusion to the four world quarters and the vastness of the empire thereby implied.

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