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## Kings without Diadems – How the Laurel Wreath Became the Insignia of Nabataean Kings

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## Kings without Diadems – How the Laurel Wreath Became the Insignia of Nabataean Kings

While the public imagination associates the Nabataean kingdom primarily with the magnificent ruins and the elaborate tomb façades of Petra, other aspects have attracted much less attention. Like Nabataean architecture, which combines Ptolemaic, Roman and local elements in novel and unique ways, Nabataean royal portraiture too occupies a special place. In terms of style and in their choice of insignia, their portraits stand out from contemporary Near Eastern dynasties that minted coin portraits, namely the rulers of Judaea, Chalkis and Kommagene (fig. 1)<sup>1</sup>.

These dynasts favoured portraits that by and large conformed to over-regional trends of the time, i. e. Hellenistic and Roman portrait traditions: One sees a high degree of realism in the rendering of the facial features, sometimes injected with a Classicising streak inspired by Augustan portraits. These rulers have generally short hair, either in studied disarray or neatly combed forward. Their main royal insignia, inherited from their Hellenistic predecessors, was the diadem, a plain white band of cloth tied around the head and knotted at the nape of the neck with two loose ends hanging from the knot. Started by Alexander, this was »the chief symbol of Hellenistic kingship«<sup>2</sup>, more than sceptre, purple robe or any other attribute.

By contrast, Nabataean portraits show much less concern for lifelike reproduction of physiognomies and consistency in details<sup>3</sup>. Some Hellenistic elements, esp. from neighbouring Ptolemaic Egypt, are evident (e. g. stacked portraits of king and queen). But throughout their ca. 140 years of coinage<sup>4</sup>, in which almost all the silver coins are precisely dated by regnal years, royal portraits are idealized, de-individualized representations of the kings, with few personal features and much variation. The same king can look different from one issue to the next, with different facial features like the size of the eye or the shape of the nose (figs. 2. 3). Most kings are shown with large eyes similar to Ptolemaic kings, large straight noses, small rounded chins and small pouting lips. Their hairstyles, which are likewise very varied, mark a clear departure from Hellenistic royal portraiture. Instead of neat short hair the kings sport either the characteristic long thick »dread« locks (sometimes called Libyan locks) or, starting in the first century A.D., wavy strands which often cover the ears and the nape of the neck. The hairstyles of the Nabataean kings are regarded as typically Arabian<sup>5</sup>. Already in the fourth century B.C. Philisto-Arabian coins from Gaza attest a similar hairstyle of the »Qedarites«. They depict male figures with a round-cut fringe and long braids falling on the neck<sup>6</sup>. Some kings also wear a moustache (figs. 2. 3), a feature entirely alien to Graeco-Roman fashions, but common in the Arabian Peninsula, eastern parts of Syria and the countries further east<sup>7</sup>.

The present discussion will focus in particular on the portraits of Aretas IV (9 B.C. to A.D. 40), the best-known Nabataean king who led the country to

1 See in detail Kropp 2013, 49–92.

2 Murray 1966, 225.

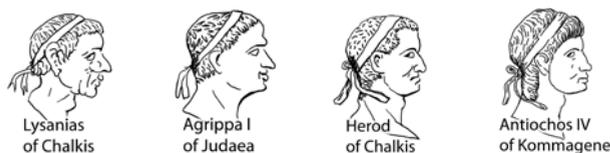
3 Essential literature on Nabataean coinage: Meshorer 1975; Schmitt-Korte 1990; Hoover – Barkay 2010.

4 Roughly from 35 B.C. to just after A.D. 100, following the convincing adjustment of the royal stemma by Huth 2010b; see below n. 10. This excludes the undated early anonymous issues. The coins minted in Damascus in the name of Aretas III in the early first century B.C. are generally recognised as late Seleucid rather than Nabataean issues.

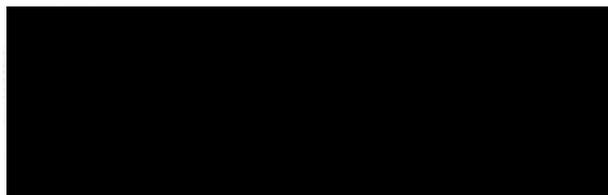
5 Hübner – Weber 1997, 112; Wenning 2003, 148. The hairstyle is described as an »arabisch-frühbeduinische Frisur«, as opposed to the hip-long braids of later Bedouins up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

6 Hübner – Weber 1997, 111; Mildenberg 2000, 385 nos. 71. 75. 80. 85. The reverse of Mildenberg 2000, no. 80 shows a rider on a dromedary.

7 Examples from the steppe around Palmyra, Skupinska-Løvset 1999, 48 f. 187 f.; Drijvers 1976, 19 pl. 54. 75, 1.



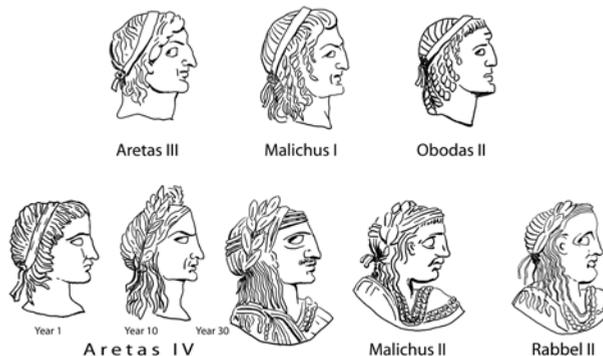
1



2

Fig. 1 Roman client kings with diadems

Fig. 2 The development of portraits of Aretas IV: year 1 with short hair and diadem, years 1, 5 and 40+ with laurel wreath and gradually longer hair (scale 1 : 1)



3

Fig. 3 Coin portraits of Nabataean kings

the peak of its prosperity. In terms of volume, 80 % of all Nabataean coinage is of Aretas IV. He also issued an exceptionally large number of types in the course of his long reign (Meshorer lists 76 types out of a total 164 for all Nabataean kings<sup>8</sup>). Despite this variety of types, the coin imagery elaborates on well-rehearsed themes. As virtually all Nabataean coinage (98 %), it draws on a limited repertoire of six subjects: royal portrait, standing figure, hand, eagle, cornucopiae, and wreath<sup>9</sup>.

One notable feature of Aretas' portraiture (figs. 2. 3) is its transformation during the first years of his reign, a development that deserves closer attention. Starting as a young, short-haired, diademed king not dissimilar to his royal colleagues elsewhere, his portrait quickly developed into the more familiar, mature long-haired Arabian ruler. Unlike the ›dread‹ locks of his predecessor Obodas II (30 to 9 B.C., formerly known as III<sup>10</sup>), Aretas developed a personal hairstyle of thin wavy strands falling in parallel to his shoulders. This change of iconography was accompanied by a change of insignia: Aretas swapped the diadem for the laurel wreath. The first Nabataean monarchs who minted coins with their portraits (Aretas III, Malichus I) wear the attribute one would expect, the diadem with the well-known characteristics of Hellenistic royal diadems<sup>11</sup>. There is only one known exception to this rule, a recently published coin series of Malichus dated year 28 (33 B.C.) where the king is wearing two insignia, a laurel wreath piled up on top of a diadem<sup>12</sup>. His successor Obodas II too generally wore a diadem, but on some of his later issues starts wearing the laurel wreath instead<sup>13</sup>. His successor Aretas IV in his first issues dated

<sup>8</sup> Meshorer 1975.

<sup>9</sup> Schmitt-Korte – Price 1994, 83.

<sup>10</sup> Huth 2010b, 214–217 makes a strong case for eliminating the hypothetical king ›Obodas II (62–60 B.C.)‹.

<sup>11</sup> On diadem typologies, see the detailed study of Salzmann 2012.

<sup>12</sup> First published in Barkay 2006, no. 2, but without taking note of the wreath. Complete description in Barkay 2009, no. 6; Hoover – Barkay 2010, nos. 13. 14 (large denomination). 16 (small denomination); Huth 2010a, nos. 45. 46.

<sup>13</sup> The earliest example is from year 10, a unique, recently identified drachm, Hoover – Barkay 2010, no. 25; Huth 2010a, no. 53 (contra Hoover – Barkay who call it diademed). See also Schmitt-Korte 1990, no. 19; Meshorer 1975, nos. 33–39. Meshorer thought no. 37



Fig. 4 Phraates IV of Parthia (40–3 B.C.)

year 1 (9/8 B.C.) alternated between diadem<sup>14</sup> and wreath<sup>15</sup>, but from then on settled for the latter as the definitive royal insignia. Some observers suggest that diademed heads of Aretas continue down to year 4, but there has been some confusion over the identification of the portraits. Judging by the hairstyle and facial features, all the diademed heads except the year 1 issues are posthumous portraits of Obodas, not Aretas<sup>16</sup>. The laurel wreath remained the principal royal insignia until the end of the dynasty (A.D. 106).

The exceptionality of this choice of insignia can hardly be overstated. With their laurel wreaths Nabataean kings stand out from virtually every local dynast along the Roman frontiers from Britain to Syria and beyond, all wearing the diadem<sup>17</sup>. Aretas actually took one further step of transformation, which has yet to be explored. In his later coin portraits, Aretas, as well as later Malichus II (A.D. 40–70), do wear diadems too, but they have been overlooked since they are half-hidden under large laurel wreaths. In figures 2 and 3 one can discern three horizontal lines on the back of the head, and three at the front, indicating a headband. In contrast to Hellenistic royal diadems, this diadem has no knot and is in horizontal position rather than knotted at the nape of the neck. This ›banded‹ or ›multiple‹ diadem is well known from Parthian kings (starting with Mithridates III, 57 to 54 B.C.) and Persian nobility (fig. 4)<sup>18</sup>. The Nabataean kings are, to my knowledge, the only royal dynasty west of Parthia to use it as their insignia. But this and other Parthian imports in royal Nabataean attire are the topic of a future article<sup>19</sup>.

In the following, I would like to propose a new explanation for Aretas' spectacular adoption of the laurel wreath as royal insignia, based on textual and archaeological sources. The argument is divided into four sections. First a word on the immediate historical context, namely Aretas' peculiar situation and his precarious relationship with Augustus. A swift summary will suffice for this well-known subject. Second, the significance of the laurel wreath as a Roman insignia of power. Third, the Hellenistic royal diadem and accession rituals of Hellenistic kings. Fourth, the ritual use and symbolic significance of the diadem in staged interactions between Roman emperors and foreign rulers. I argue that the key to Aretas' swap of insignia was not only the adoption of the laurel wreath. Despite the importance of the question ›Why the laurel wreath?‹, the main question should be ›Why *not* the diadem?‹ It is this unusual decision that makes the Nabataean kings stand out from their royal colleagues. By renouncing it, Aretas made an important political point that all parties involved would have grasped.

to be diademed (but correct on p. 45), but Schmitt-Korte 1990, nos. 21. 22 has shown that the type has a wreath. Schmitt-Korte's no. 20 is laureate too, not diademed as the description states.

**14** Meshorer 1975, nos. 46. 47; Huth 2010a, no. 64. See also some recently identified lead issues depicting Aretas short-haired and diademed, Hoover – Barkay 2010, nos. 72–74.

**15** Meshorer 1975, nos. 48. 49. 51. 53; Hoover – Barkay 2010, no. 45; Huth 2010a, nos. 65. 66; Barkay 2011, nos. 1–3; Meshorer et al. 2013, 227 nos. 35–38. He also wears the wreath on contemporary undated joint issues of Aretas and Syllaeus, Meshorer 1975, nos. 44. 45. 116–18; Meshorer et al.

2013, 227 no. 33. For the attribution to Syllaeus, see Schmitt-Korte 1990, 128.

**16** The diademed head on Meshorer 1975, nos. 50. 52. 55 is that of Obodas; see Schmitt-Korte 1990, 128 and no. 53; Barkay 2011, 55. This is also true (contra Schmitt-Korte) of Schmitt-Korte 1990, no. 52 (dated year 2), as the distinct hairstyle shows.

**17** See Toynbee 1978 and Klose 1992 for a convenient overview. For diademed portraits in Iron Age Britain, see Creighton 2000, 176 f. These crude heads are often identified as Julio-Claudians, but the accompanying legends spell out the names of local rulers. Kings of Yemen, beyond Roman reach, wore the diadem as late as ca. A.D. 300, as shown by two

extraordinary over-lifesized bronze statues of Dhamar 'Ali Yuhabir and his son Tha'ran in the nude, found at Nakhlat al-Ḥamra in 1931, see Hallett 2005, 269 f. pl. 144. 145.

**18** Acutely observed by Seyrig 1939, 179. See also von Gall 1969, 301–309 (›geriptes Stirnband‹); Sarkhosh Curtis 1998, 63 (›ridged diadem‹); Salzmann 2012, 343 n. 21. 22 figs. 17–23 (›Diadem mit mehrfachen Streifen‹). A good example is the life-sized bronze statue from Shami, Seyrig 1939; Vogelsang-Eastwood 2000. Salzmann 2012, 342 n. 20 figs. 17–20. 22–23 also cites examples from Bactria.

**19** Kropp in prep.

## Aretas, Augustus and Nabataean Kingship

Prima facie the laurel wreath on the head of the king of Petra appears to be a remarkable import of Roman imperial insignia, and a surprising one. Not only is it an exceptional choice of insignia for a king in the Roman orbit, but, of all royal dynasties, the Nabataeans would be least expected to adopt Roman insignia. On their coinage, they never broadcasted Roman imagery or Rome-friendly messages. This is in contrast to the coins of the Herods, where Roman elements are visible and often glaringly obvious. Coins of Herodian kings routinely bear the busts of emperors on their obverses. Agrippa I (A.D. 41–44) even copied Roman imperial dies, such as a famous Roman sestertius type with Caligula on the obverse and the emperor's three sisters Julia, Drusilla and Agrippina holding cornucopiae in the manner of Fortuna on the reverse<sup>20</sup>. Other issues co-commemorate Caligula's father Germanicus, depicted in a triumphal quadriga<sup>21</sup>. Since the days of Herod the Great, Herodian rulers made every effort to present themselves as models of loyalty and an integral part of the Roman empire. Many of their royal colleagues across the Roman world followed similar patterns and routinely dedicated the obverses of their coins to the portrait of the emperor.

Nabataean coinage, by contrast, avoided imperial themes and stayed stubbornly ›local‹. It did not bear imperial portraits and instead continued to show the same repertoire of six subjects listed above, and retained the Nabataean Aramaic script till the very end. The only Greek letters on Nabataean coins are Greek numerals on two of the earliest issues of the Petra mint, the coins of Malichus of the 30s B.C. There is no allusion to Rome in either text or image, and not so much as a hint of even the existence of the Roman empire. These coin images show that Nabataean kings had a fundamentally different approach to Roman power, and a different way of defining their position in the face of Roman supremacy. They also show what a wide variety of political entities lurks under the modern umbrella term ›client kings‹<sup>22</sup>. Though useful and legitimate, this misnomer stands for a host of fluid and informal states of indirect administration must not obfuscate the fact that many of the monarchs in question would not consider themselves dependent, let alone clients, of Rome. Judaea and Nabataea may have found themselves in similar political situations, being the two largest Near Eastern kingdoms at the time, but there is no reason to expect any uniform behaviour of them, since Rome rarely took an interest in their internal matters. There was no juridical status of ›client kingship‹<sup>23</sup> – each king had to rely on his connections and intuition to figure out what, if anything, the emperor would have him do.

In political terms, the Nabataean kings remained independent-minded. While Judaea moved ever closer into the Roman orbit, the Nabataeans were ›darauf bedacht, ›in politicis‹ gegenüber Rom Distanz zu halten‹<sup>24</sup>. Since they were tied to Rome by contractual obligations that required e. g. the supply of troops<sup>25</sup>, this policy could lead to friction with Rome, as happened in the first decade of the rule of Aretas IV. The diplomatic faux pas of Aretas IV's accession to the throne without the approval or ›permission‹ of Augustus is a perfect illustration of the informal and personal nature of this relationship. When Obodas II (ex-III) died in 9 B.C., Aretas IV seized the throne in what some considered a coup d'état. The following scuffles are well documented and require no detailed analysis<sup>26</sup>. Aretas withstood the grudge and distrust of Augustus and the defamations by Obodas' former minister Syllaeus at the imperial court in Rome until, for lack of alternatives, Augustus confirmed Aretas ›with no great enthusiasm for the king himself‹<sup>27</sup>. Aretas took an opportunity

20 RPC 1 no. 4973; Meshorer 2001, no. 112; Hendin 2010, no. 1236.

21 RPC 1 no. 4976; Meshorer 2001, no. 116; Hendin 2010, no. 1240.

22 The main study is Braund 1984; see also Braund 1988; Coşkun 2005; Near Eastern client kings in particular, Paltiel 1991; Butcher 2003, 87–98; Kaizer – Facella 2010; Kropp 2013.

23 Coşkun 2005, 3–6 doubts that *foedera* were frequently signed or necessary to establish a foreign *amicitia*.

24 Funke 1989, 9. See also Bowersock 1983, *passim*; Hackl et al. 2003, 40–46; Schmid 2006, 438 f.

25 These ties seem to have started in 61 B.C. when Pompey declared himself patron of the Nabataeans, Hackl et al. 2003, 50.

26 See Nicolaus of Damascus in Ios. Ant. Iud. 16, 294–299. 335–360. Bowersock 1983, 51–53; Millar 1993, 39 f.; Hackl et al. 2003, 44–46. For Syllaeus' failed second journey to Rome and execution by order of Augustus, see Ios. Ant. Iud. 17, 52–57; Ios. Bell. Iud. 1, 374–377; Strab. 16, 782.

27 Bowersock 1983, 53.

to prove his usefulness to Rome in the civil strife in Judaea that ensued in the wake of Herod's death in 4 B.C., by sending a large contingent of troops to support the Roman governor of Syria Quinctilius Varus<sup>28</sup>. It appears that the king's rapports with Rome remained strained, though it is rather unlikely, as some suggest, that relations declined to such a point that Augustus temporarily withdrew the kingdom from Aretas and created an ephemeral provincia Arabia between 3–1 B.C.<sup>29</sup>. Towards the end of his long reign, Aretas engaged in further conflict with his neighbours that caused friction with Rome. A diplomatic tussle between Aretas IV and Herod Antipas flared up into all-out war<sup>30</sup>. Rome sided with the Herodian king, and Vitellius was set to invade and conquer Arabia when timely news arrived of the death of Tiberius in A.D. 37<sup>31</sup>. In the following decades, the Nabataean kings Malichus II and Rabbel II managed to maintain their independence thanks to diplomatic and military adroitness, and they held out longer than any of their rivals. Theirs was the last kingdom to be annexed in this region in A.D. 106.

Before further analysing the royal imagery, and the extent to which the exceptional set of historical circumstances help explain Aretas' adoption of the laurel wreath, it is worth citing the only textual source that gives a (very brief) description of a Nabataean king and his court. It too reveals fundamental differences from the Herodians and other comparable dynasties. The eyewitness Athenodoros, as reported by Strabo, notes with astonishment the king's lack of pomp and ceremony. »They [the Nabataeans] go out without tunics (*akhitonos*), with girdles about their loins, and with slippers on their feet – even the kings, though in their case the colour is purple.«<sup>32</sup> Even more surprising to the Greek observer was the king's behaviour as a »man of the people« (*dēmotikós*) serving his guests in person at symposia<sup>33</sup>. Strabo presents the king as a reflection of an ideal *civilis princeps*<sup>34</sup> that the emperor Augustus impersonated by refusing honours and flattery, showing modesty and ostensive respect for the Senate, and wearing homespun togas. This is however not to deny the veracity of the description. Strabo elaborates: »He often renders an account of his kingship in the popular assembly; and sometimes his mode of life is examined«<sup>35</sup>. This goes well beyond what one could expect of an emperor, or, for that matter, a Hellenistic king. The image that emerges is that of an affable tribal leader who was, unlike his royal colleagues in e. g. Judaea and Kommagene, accountable to the nobility as a *primus inter pares*.

The royal court and administration too distinguish themselves from our best-known client king's court of Herod the Great. Herod's court was organized after Hellenistic models<sup>36</sup>, with officials ranked in hierarchical order starting at the top with »friends« or »companions« (*philoí*) and »relatives« (*syngeneis*)<sup>37</sup>. The court of Jerusalem alone comprised several hundreds of people (we hear of spies, barbers, tutors, stewards, cooks, eunuchs, physicians, secretaries and much else). Nicolaus of Damascus even estimates the overall number of court associates at 10,000 people<sup>38</sup>. For the Nabataean realm, Athenodoros (in Strabo) does not comment on any formal court structure. The one office we hear

28 Ios. Ant. Iud. 17, 287.

29 Bowersock 1983, 54–56 based on Strab. 16, 779. Radt 2009, 381 agrees, contra Funke 1989, 10 f.; Wenning 1993, 35; Millar 1993, 44 n. 1; Hackl et al. 2003, 45.

30 Ios. Ant. Iud. 18, 109–114. Bowersock 1983, 65 f.

31 Ios. Ant. Iud. 18, 115. 120–124.

32 Strab. 16, 784.

33 Strab. 16, 783; cf. Hackl et al. 2003, 615–617. Athenodoros is probably Athenodoros son of Sandon from Tarsos. His visit to Petra is dated anywhere between 63 B.C. (Graf 2009, 73) and the early 20s B.C. (Philippson 1931, 50).

34 Wallace-Hadrill 1982; Price 1984, 71–75.

35 Strab. 16, 783.

36 Kokkinos 2007 with lengthy catalogue of court titles and offices.

37 Ios. Bell. Iud. 1, 473; 2, 21; Ios. Ant. Iud. 17, 225.

38 FrGrH 90 frg. 136, not from Josephus; Kokkinos 2007, 281.

about is that of the king's »minister« (*epitropos*) who was probably responsible for day-to-day administration and also had the honorary title of »brother« of the king<sup>39</sup>.

## Laurel Wreath

Considering Aretas' strained relations with Augustus, and the general absence of overtly Roman references in Nabataean royal art, the choice of the laurel wreath as royal insignia seems entirely out of tune. The model for this innovation is unlikely to have come from the Greek world. Laurel had mainly been associated with Apollo and with victory at games and contests, but had not been used as insignia of power<sup>40</sup>. Hellenistic kings likewise rarely swapped their diadem for the laurel wreath<sup>41</sup>. By contrast, in the Roman world the laurel wreath was an attribute charged with political significance, as literary sources amply attest (fig. 5)<sup>42</sup>. Originally an attribute of Jupiter and of *triumphatores*, Augustus turned the laurel wreath into a monarchic insignia and an essential part of imperial iconography. He is first depicted wearing it on coins in 16 B.C. From 11 B.C. he appears with a different, more elaborate version of the wreath, larger and with loops at the back, and it is this version, which becomes his standard attribute from then on<sup>43</sup>. Therefore it is appropriate to look at the Roman emperor for an explanation to why a local dynast like Aretas IV discarded Hellenistic conventions and adopted the laurel wreath as his insignia.

Another kind of laurel wreath, or rather an imitation thereof, was often used as a precious and symbolic gift awarded to Roman commanders. Golden crowns, which were in all likelihood crafted to imitate laurel wreaths, were a kind of payment, *aurum coronarium* or *corona aurea*<sup>44</sup>. The custom of giving precious crowns has deep roots in the rituals and celebrations of Ancient Near Eastern and Hellenistic kingship. In Roman times, such donations came overwhelmingly from the eastern Mediterranean, and regularly from client kings. The custom started off as a more or less voluntary payment at first, but gradually became a form of compulsory tribute extracted for a variety of occasions, such as the accession of a new emperor or a military victory. It was a way for allies as well as defeated foes to acknowledge Rome's supremacy. The crowns were destined to be carried in triumph and brought to the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline. The symbolic power of these gifts is evident in the fact that even cursory reports of triumphal processions regularly record their weight and number as a measure of the lavishness of the parade and significance of the military victory. Claudius, in his triumph after the conclusion of his British campaign in A.D. 43, proudly displayed crowns of altogether 7,000 pounds of gold from Spain and 9,000 pounds from Gaul<sup>45</sup>.

For eastern client kings, the golden wreath was a diplomatic currency with which to pay their Roman superiors. Caesar, for instance, demanded and received »many golden crowns from potentates and kings in honour of his victories«<sup>46</sup>. Aretas IV himself was one such donator at a later occasion<sup>47</sup>. As part of his appeasement efforts after having acceded to the throne without the emperor's permission, he sent Augustus a golden wreath in the hope for recognition.

It is from this Roman angle, as a response to precarious relations with Rome, that Aretas' adoption of the laurel wreath is generally explained<sup>48</sup>. It has been suggested that both the gift of a precious golden wreath to Augustus and Aretas' adoption of the laurel wreath were part of the same policy, aimed at mending fences over his accession. The swap of insignia is e. g. described as an »appeasement policy« aimed at reconciliation<sup>49</sup>. This argument contains



Fig. 5 Rome, Sestertius of Caligula wearing laurel wreath. 33 mm (scale 1 : 1)

39 Strab. 16, 783. Syllaios himself uses this title in his bilingual dedication »for the life of Obodas« at Miletus, Bowersock 1983, 51 n. 25.

40 Ganszyniec 1922.

41 See examples in Svenson 1995, 35–39; Salzmann 2012, 357–359.

42 See references in Bergmann 2010, 51–58; Alföldi 1980, 137.

43 RIC I nos. 186–248. 350–355. 426–434. 528 f. 536 f. 541 f.; Kraft 1952–1953, 92; Seyrig 1952, 237 f.; Bergmann 1998, 119.

44 Humbert 1873, 579; Bergmann 2010, 8 f. 41–51; Braund 1984, 25 n. 20. Latin makes no clear distinction between »wreath« and »crown«; I use the words »golden crown« here as the more familiar term.

45 Plin. nat. 33, 54. See Bergmann 2010, 41–48 with lit.

46 Cass. Dio 42, 49.

47 Ios. Ant. Iud. 16, 295–296. Schürer 1973, 580 f.

48 Wenning 1993, 34 n. 77; Hackl et al. 2003, 273; Schwentzel 2005, 160. By contrast, Meshorer 1975, 43 and 45 only states the change, but offers no interpretation.

49 Schmid 2009, 336 f. referring to Ios. Ant. Iud. 16, 296. Schmid 2009, 337 n. 43 however also emphasises that in their portraiture, »Nabataean kings do not show any assimilation« to the prevailing Roman imperial styles.

two assumptions. 1. That Aretas' model for adopting the wreath was indeed Augustus. 2. That Aretas considered imitation a viable means to flatter the emperor. Both need to be checked briefly.

First, the idea that Aretas' adoption of the wreath was »eine bewußte ikonographische Annäherung an Rom«<sup>50</sup>. There are two points one can raise against the idea of tracking the wreath back to Augustus. First, the wreath had already been used sporadically by Obodas II in 16–15 B.C.<sup>51</sup>, and once even by Malichus I as far back as 33 B.C., before even Octavian was depicted with it<sup>52</sup>. So Aretas might be harking back to his own predecessors rather than Augustus. Secondly, an immediate model for the Nabataeans may have been closer to hand. South Arabian coinage, mostly ascribed to the kingdom of Saba', shows large numbers of portraits of laureate kings on silver coins<sup>53</sup>. These kings are generally clean-shaven and with corkscrew locks; some are diademed, but most of them are laureate. According to recent research, the coins with laureate heads, which are notoriously hard to date due to the lack of external evidence, go further back in time than originally thought, up to perhaps the beginning of the first century B.C.<sup>54</sup>. There are, besides, also later series that depict what has been identified as the portrait of Augustus laureate<sup>55</sup>. It is remarkable to find the Roman emperor on the coins of rulers outside his reach, whereas those within his orbit, the Nabataeans, never depicted him or any other emperor on coins.

The precocious laureate heads on South Arabian coins have been explained by some as echoes of Roman Republican coins, specifically coins of the moneyers L. Calpurnius Piso Frugi and his son minted in 90 and 67 B.C.<sup>56</sup>. However, in this region Roman Republican coins are unheard of<sup>57</sup>, and the idea has long been contested<sup>58</sup>. For the present argument, the exact origins of the laurel wreath of South Arabian rulers are not decisive. What matters is its early appearance on these coins which opens up the possibility that the laurel wreath in the portraits of south Arabian rulers may precede the Nabataean adoption of this attribute by decades, and thus present itself as the immediate model. If Nabataean kings took their cues from their South Arabian colleagues, it could also explain the precocious use of the wreath by Malichus I in 33 B.C., before Octavian adopted it. However, the dating of these early coins needs to rest on firmer footing before one can make this assertion.

The second assumption is the idea that Aretas' mimicking of Augustus' insignia was meant as appeasement or flattery. The obvious way to verify this claim is to look at other dynasties. Whereas the rulers wearing the wreath are those furthest removed from the Rome, i. e. Aretas and South Arabian kings, no client kings except the Nabataeans wore the laurel wreath at all. This evidence is significant, since by necessity or inclination, most Roman client kings were experts in flattering emperors. Their arsenal included: dedications of altars, statues, contests, cults and temples or entire cities to the emperor; naming of family members with names from the imperial family, and much more<sup>59</sup>. If there were the slightest prospect that mimicking the emperor would produce an advantageous effect, these dynasts would all be depicted with laurel wreaths on their heads. The exceptionality of the Nabataeans therefore militates against this idea.

Another possible interpretation would be to suggest that the laurel wreath was an exclusive gift from the hands of the emperor. But once again the record contradicts this. Among the many symbolic gifts given to client kings, the main ones were items of prestige like the *toga picta*. Agrippa I, and later on his son Agrippa II, even received *ornamenta consularia*<sup>60</sup>. One attribute they never received was the laurel wreath. »Laurel ... is not attested as a gift to kings

50 Hackl et al. 2003, 273.

51 See n. 13.

52 See n. 12.

53 Meshorer 1981, nos. 1462–1502; Huth 2010a, nos. 278–291; Munro-Hay 2003.

54 Munro-Hay 2003, 44 f. 123–141.

55 RPC 1 nos. 4993–4998; Munro-Hay 2003, 45–49 type 1, 16; Huth 2010a, nos. 292–298, probably minted by the kingdom of Saba. Breton 2004, 306 sees this as a result of Aelius Gallus' abortive campaign in South Arabia in 25–24 B.C., i. e. local authorities imitating the money that the troops of Gallus brought with them. But Munro-Hay 2003, 47 places them in the mid-first century A.D.

56 Munro-Hay 2003, 44 f. 123–141. For the types, see Crawford 1974, nos. 340. 408.

57 M. Huth, personal communication.

58 BMC Arabia, lvi.

59 See Kropp 2013, 343–385.

60 Cass. Dio 60, 8, 3; Braund 1984, 27 f.

by any literary source<sup>61</sup>. What is more; the sources also confirm the highly exclusive status of the laurel wreath. In Rome, the conventions of who could wear a laurel wreath, and when, were strictly circumscribed. The wreath was only appropriate for clearly defined contexts and occasions, principally cult, triumph, victory. As a permanent attribute, i. e. an insignia, the laurel wreath was a supreme privilege, jealously guarded. Only the emperor himself was allowed to wear it. Throughout centuries of imperial history, even co-regents and members of the imperial family did not wear it unless they had the title emperor<sup>62</sup>.

Client kings could therefore not hope to win sympathies by emulating the emperor, and they knew it. Herod e. g. on many occasions scrupulously insisted on pointing out his subordinate position with regard to Augustus in words and deeds. His behaviour and that of his royal colleagues shows that such outward gestures and tokens mattered, and that they were registered at the Roman imperial court. The Herodians knew better than anyone else the means to entertain friendly relations with Rome, and mimicking the emperor was not one of them. There is, in sum, no basis for the assumption that Roman emperors considered the laurel wreath an appropriate insignia for a client king. Through Roman eyes, it would likely be taken as an insult rather than a compliment, a violation of closely circumscribed conventions that could be misconstrued to suggest that the Nabataean king saw himself on par with the Roman emperor.

Hence Augustus was not consulted or even involved in Aretas' decision to make the laurel wreath his permanent insignia. It could be interpreted as an innocuous faux pas, the same as Aretas' unfortunate self-proclaimed accession in 9 B.C., due to a lack of knowledge of Rome's symbolic language of power, or a lack of understanding of Augustus' first-hand, paternalistic style of rule, keeping close tabs on client kings. But the following discussion shows that the swap was probably done in full conscience of the semantics of both the diadem and the laurel wreath.

## Diadem and Accession Rituals

Before Aretas could tie the laurel wreath around his head, he first had to take off the diadem. It is this component of the puzzling swap of insignia that I shall investigate here. How could the diadem lose its appeal in the eyes of Aretas IV? Any answer to this question must first consider the use and significance of the diadem in his day. Despite an abundance of literary and visual sources attesting the continued use of the diadem by Roman client kings, there is as yet no systematic study of the symbolic use of such insignia in choreographed interactions between Roman authority and client kings, esp. in accession rituals. An in-depth treatment would need to examine the protocol, rationale and symbolism of such exchanges, and pay attention to the accompanying imagery in Roman state media<sup>63</sup>. The present study cannot hope to bridge this gap, but rather sets out to provide some prolegomena.

In addressing the question at hand, I will first briefly comment on the accession of Hellenistic kings, then on Roman attitudes towards kings and kingship and finally, as a consequence, on the use and significance of the diadem as a symbol of power employed in diplomatic exchanges.

The diadem is mentioned and described by ancient authors more often than any other royal attribute from the time of Alexander till late Antiquity. The origins of this insignia are still a matter of debate<sup>64</sup>, but shall not concern us

<sup>61</sup> Braund 1984, 28.

<sup>62</sup> Alföldi 1980, 137 f.

<sup>63</sup> Even Mommsen's fundamental »Staatsrecht« 1887–1888 does not deal with the investiture of Roman client kings. Braund 1984, 27 f. names gifts like the ornamenta consularia, but strangely omits the diadem. Ritter 1965, 165–169 merely lists the literary sources. Lichtenberger et al. 2012 omit post-Hellenistic kings entirely.

<sup>64</sup> Almost two thirds of Lichtenberger et al. 2012 is devoted to arguments for and against Persian, Macedonian and Greek (agonal) precedents.

here. What matters for the present discussion is that the diadem was universally acknowledged as *the* quintessential symbol of royalty<sup>65</sup>. The tying of the diadem around the head was the gesture that more than any other marked the accession of a new king. But paradoxically the sources elaborate surprisingly little on such events and report them with terse words to the effect of »he put on the diadem«<sup>66</sup>. In contrast to medieval and modern monarchies, neither Hellenistic kings nor Roman emperors celebrated their accessions with coronation ceremonies<sup>67</sup>. Terms like »coronation« or »investiture«, which imply that regalia played a crucial role in accessions, are therefore not appropriate to describe accessions in the classical world<sup>68</sup>. Though the act of putting on the diadem was evidently a moment of great symbolic significance, it may not have been indispensable to validate the accession, and there was apparently no protocol and no ceremony to mark the event<sup>69</sup>. This does not mean that there were no specific rituals to mark and validate Hellenistic royal accessions as a whole. Recent research has, for instance, focused on public acclamations of the new king by the (Macedonian) army as a crucial recurrent element of accessions: »Not the binding of the diadem, but the public acclamation of the already diademed king by the army was the central rite of inauguration in the Hellenistic kingdoms«<sup>70</sup>. In addition, it is also striking that there was usually no third party involved in the tying of the diadem: the crowned was normally also the one who did the crowning<sup>71</sup>. On the contrary, having someone else tie the diadem may have been seen as a sign of weakness or nefarious machinations<sup>72</sup>. For the Roman period there is even less evidence for rituals to carry out the accessions of Roman emperors. In late Antiquity, the main insignia of Roman emperors, the purple robe, is routinely mentioned at the accession of new rulers, but it was not a crucial prerequisite for transforming a contender into an emperor. The investiture was not accomplished by the adoption of the purple or the sceptre or the diadem, but *de facto* by the acclamation of the troops<sup>73</sup>.

»Coronation« ceremonies were, by contrast, performed regularly at the Parthian court. A new king of kings would not put on the diadem himself but was crowned by his »Surenas« (minister). »Suren« or »Surenas« was both the designation of an office and the family name of the office holders. It was this family which, from generation to generation, maintained the privilege of crowning the Parthian king with a diadem<sup>74</sup>. Such »coronation« ceremonies are recorded by a number of Roman authors<sup>75</sup>. We read e. g. that Tiridates, the grandson of Phraates IV, was crowned at Ctesiphon by the head of the Surenas family in Seleucia in A.D. 36, as an official confirmation of his kingship and an affront to his rival Artabanos II<sup>76</sup>.

**65** Ritter 1965, 31–78; Smith 1988, 34–38; Chaniotis 2005, 57; Eckstein 2009, 249. See now the contributions in Lichtenberger et al. 2012.

**66** Esp. in the accounts of the »Year of the Kings« 306/305 B.C.; see Ritter 1965, 79–124; Haake 2012, 299–302; Mileta 2012 with translations and exhaustive discussions of the literary sources.

**67** Much of Ritter's monograph 1965 is devoted to rituals and ceremonies around royal diadems. However, Smith 1988, 36 f. is rightly sceptical about the existence of a coronation ritual. On medieval coronation rituals, see the excellent collection of articles in Kramp 2000.

**68** Chaniotis 2005, 44.

**69** Haake 2012, 302 argues that neither the diadem itself nor its use in royal accessions held any legal power. Chaniotis 2005, 57–59 however includes the tying of the diadem as essential part of the »Ritualdynamik« of royal accessions.

**70** Strootman 2007, 270–276, at 272 f.

**71** One notable exception appears to be Antigonos Monophthalmos. According to Pluy. Ant. 18, it was his philoi who crowned him; see Ritter 1965, 83 f.; Chaniotis 2005, 57 f.; Strootman 2007, 279–283; Mileta 2012, 330. There is as yet no convincing explanation for this exception to the rule.

**72** Strootman 2007, 272 n. 64 presents evidence to show that »when ancient

authors write that someone else ties a diadem around a king's head, this indicates that (illegal) kingmakers or rivals are putting a pretender on the throne«.

**73** On Roman emperors, Tantillo 2011, 16 emphasises that »bisognerà aspettare il V secolo perché l'incoronazione divenga un rituale stabile«. He also points out that rituals and ceremonies around emblems of power go hand in hand with hereditary monarchy.

**74** Olbrycht 1997, 53.

**75** Plut. Crass 22; Tac. ann. 6, 42.

**76** Tac. ann. 6, 42, 4; Olbrycht 1997, 53; Ehrhardt 1998, 299.



Fig. 6 Nemrud Daği, east terrace, fragmentary relief stele showing a scene of investiture of a Kommagenian king. A diadem at the centre is being grasped by two rulers with their right hands

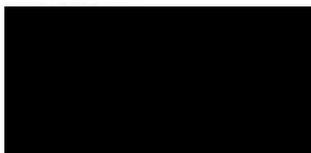
As a consequence of the absence of coronation or investiture ceremonies, Hellenistic art provides virtually no images at all to celebrate the accessions of new kings. Court artists had a repertoire of visual tropes to depict kings engaged in royal activities, such as hunting and warfare, but none for accessions. But there is one rare exception from Nemrud Daği in Kommagene. The eastern and western terraces of the mountain top tumulus of Antiochos I (69 to late 30s B.C.) have not only yielded the well-known colossal seated statues and the relief slabs depicting the ancestry of the royal house and scenes of dexiosis, but also the fragments of two identical relief stelae depicting a ceremony akin to a coronation, a royal investiture (fig. 6)<sup>77</sup>. Like in the dexiosis reliefs, the figures are depicted facing each other, heads in profile, bodies turned towards the viewer; each king has one foot in profile, the other head-on. But the plot and the protagonists are different. Instead of a handshake between god and king, it is two mortals both holding the same diadem at the centre of the image. They all seem to be wearing Armenian tiaras and elaborate Persian-looking garments. Over a long-sleeved tunic they wear a chlamys fastened on the right shoulder by a fibula. The tunic is held between the knees by a vertical gird attached to the belt. In the left hand they grasp long sceptres. The diadem that is being grasped by both men at the centre of both reliefs is clearly marked as such by its two loose ends. The figure on the right has been identified as Antiochos I. The left figure whose facial features look somewhat younger is interpreted as Antiochos' successor Mithridates II. As the slabs are unfinished in details, and rather squeezed to the edges of the east and west terraces, it is plausible to assume that they were add-ons set up by the latter king to complement the colossal building programme of Antioch I with his own contribution<sup>78</sup>. The ceremony depicted in the Nemrud Daği reliefs does not necessarily prove that coronations were regular occurrences at these royal accessions. Antiochos I himself provides a narrative of events that echoes what has been said above of Hellenistic accessions: In his verbose inscriptions, he speaks of »my assumption of the diadem«<sup>79</sup> and thus implies that he put it on by himself. However, whether or not the reliefs document historical events, what they do show is that to visualize the transfer of authority and the accession of a new king, the diadem was still the most familiar and universally recognized symbol of royal power.

Though there is no established iconography of accessions of Hellenistic kings, there are coin images, which do show a »coronation« of sorts of a

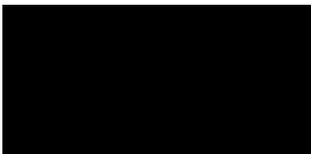
77 Sanders 1996, 230 f. 249 f. figs. 266. 315.

78 Sanders 1996, 448 f.

79 See ll. 84 f. of the so-called hieròs nomos of Nemrud Daği, the long inscription carved on the back of the colossal enthroned statues of gods on the east and west terraces; OGIS 383; Sanders 1996, 212–217 figs. 212. 222.



7



8

Fig. 7 Rome, Denarius of M. Aemilius Lepidus in 61 B.C. M. Aemilius Lepidus togate standing, crowning young Ptolemy V with a diadem. 18 mm, 3.99 g (scale 1 : 1)

Fig. 8 Rome, Denarius of M. Aemilius Scaurus and P. Hypsaeus c. 58 B.C. Reverse: Male figure kneeling beside dromedary, holding olive branch; REX ARETAS in exergue. 18 mm, 3.98 g (scale 1 : 1)

Hellenistic king, albeit from a Roman angle. M. Aemilius Lepidus minted a remarkable denarius type in 61 B.C. (fig. 7). The obverse shows a female head, identified by inscription as a personification of Alexandria. The reverse has two figures in almost frontal position. To the right a tall togatus, Lepidus, head turned left and holding out a diadem with his right. To the left, a smaller figure in a Greek himation holding a sceptre, being crowned. Despite its small size, the die-cutter took pains to emphasise that the attribute in question really is a diadem rather than a wreath by depicting a smooth knotted headband with two loose ends. Lepidus is clearly performing the symbolic appointment of a new king at Alexandria. The scene refers to the alleged exploits of the moneyer's ancestor M. Aemilius Lepidus in around 200 B.C. as a member of a Roman delegation to Egypt<sup>80</sup>. The inscription on the left specifies TVTOR REG[I]. This ›coronation‹ at the Ptolemaic court never took place. There are no literary sources suggesting that Lepidus was the guardian of Ptolemy V<sup>81</sup>. During his stay in Alexandria, Lepidus would have been too junior a member of the Senate to serve as the king's tutor, let alone as kingmaker. By all accounts, the young king had his own circle of court advisors. This embellished version of events was evidently a fabricated family tradition among the descendants of Lepidus. This is to my knowledge the only image of a Hellenistic king being crowned, and one that deserves attention. The image is, once again, not meant as a representation of actual proceedings. What matters is not its veracity, but the ritual use of the diadem as synonymous with royal power, in this case power being conferred by a Roman official. The suggestion that the young king did not bind himself with the diadem, but had someone else do it for him, is a statement of undisputed and permanent superiority over this monarch. Lepidus' coin type marks the start of a successful visual type that in the following centuries became a familiar visual shorthand for the bestowal of royal power by Roman hands.

As to how the power of Nabataean kings was seen through a Roman lens, one can compare Lepidus' image to a similarly hyperbolic coin type of M. Scaurus in 58 B.C. (fig. 8). Rather than delving in the remote past, it alludes to Pompey's recent exploits in the east. It shows king Aretas III kneeling, wearing trousers and a long cloak, extending an olive branch in his right and holding the reins of a dromedary in his left<sup>82</sup>. The Nabataean king is presented as a defeated and humbled enemy, pleading with the victor for mercy. Like Lepidus' coin image, this bold narrative is fictional. Rather than subduing and conquering the Nabataean kingdom, Scaurus, on behalf of Pompey, had not joined battle against Aretas III and instead contented himself with a gift of 300 talents of silver. Using the well-known visual formula of the defeated enemy kneeling, the image of the Oriental king suing for peace was a tool for Pompey to advance his domestic politics through his successes abroad. The coin image may well be a miniature reproduction of a much larger version of the same motif, to be carried as a placard in Pompey's lavish triumph<sup>83</sup>. The remote Nabataean kingdom only entered the imagination of the Roman public as an exotic faraway realm subdued by the irresistible forces of Rome.

### Kingship by the Grace of Rome

In order to grasp how the significance of the royal diadem was transformed under Roman rule and what this insignia meant for a Roman client king, one needs to examine the prevailing cultural attitudes towards kingship and its principal symbols. Roman views of the royal diadem were as ambivalent as

<sup>80</sup> Iust. 30, 2, 8–30, 3, 4; 31, 1, 1 f.; Tac. ann. 2, 67, 2; Val. Max. 6, 6, 1; see Gera 1998, 69 f.

<sup>81</sup> Gera 1998, 69 f.

<sup>82</sup> Crawford 1974, no. 422. Keller 2003 convincingly interprets Aretas' pose as the typical gesture of a *rex amicus et socius* seeking peace with the Roman Senate and people. The dromedary also appears on Nabataean coins, on a unique newly identified quarter shekel by Obodas II in year 3 (28/27 B.C.), Barkay 2006 no. 3; Hoover – Barkay 2010, no. 21.

<sup>83</sup> Wenning 1993, 32 n. 55.

their attitudes towards kingship. Primarily, it was a despised symbol of monarchy. Accusing someone of reaching out for the diadem was a routine denunciation of would-be tyrants<sup>84</sup>. Ti. Gracchus was even made to pay with his life for his alleged intention to put on the diadem<sup>85</sup>. But the sources also suggest that from at least the Late Republic, the picture was more nuanced. Beside the fact that even the venerated Roman kings of old were depicted wearing a diadem, and hence without negative connotations, the sources attest paradoxical feelings towards Hellenistic kingship<sup>86</sup>. Tradition demanded that Hellenistic kings be rejected as despots and ridiculed as weak, soft and corrupted, inevitably succumbing to the onslaught of Roman power. At the same time, the Senate maintained long-standing close alliances with kingdoms such as Pergamon, and Rome welcomed individual eastern monarchs as »grand, exotic and sophisticated creatures«<sup>87</sup>. These views changed as the balance of power shifted further in Rome's favour. Under Rome's undisputed supremacy, kings en masse were at Rome's disposal, as a cheap and efficient means to administer peripheral regions. Caesar »bestowed the title on Rome's vassals as he willed – for example on those who wrote to thank Cicero for supporting a decree of the Senate which had never existed«<sup>88</sup>. Such inflationary use diminished the value of the title and the office. The kingship which such client rulers enjoyed is described in no uncertain terms as a *donum populi Romani*<sup>89</sup>. The basic assumption, often expressed with surprising candour, was that allied kingdoms were part and parcel of the empire and Rome, viz. the emperor, was *dominus regum*<sup>90</sup>. To Tacitus allied kings were *reges servientes* and *instrumenta servitutis*<sup>91</sup>. Augustus made sure that these kings sought his friendship and were accountable to him<sup>92</sup>. Suetonius lays out Augustus' patriarchal principles: »Kingdoms, of which he had made himself master by right of conquest, he either restored, apart from a few, to their former possessors, or conferred them on others ... he treated them all with the same consideration (*cura*) as members and parts of the empire«<sup>93</sup>. Strabo writes in the concluding sentence of his monumental work: »Kings also, and dynasts and tetrarchies are now, and have always been, in Caesar's portion«<sup>94</sup>. The title of »king« in the Roman orbit implied neither freedom nor autonomy, but dependence and subordination. Cicero employs it in this sense as a backhanded compliment: »It was by many successive steps of dutiful service towards our republic that he [Deiotarus] arrived at this title of king«<sup>95</sup>. In other words, in the mind of Cicero, »king« was a title and an office conferred by Rome and earned through acts of loyalty.

The importance of the diadem as chief insignia of royalty continued to be acknowledged by all parties. Its ritual use articulated the new hierarchies of power. On many occasions, kings received their diadem literally from the hands of Roman emperors or their surrogates (fig. 9). The symbolic value of conferring the diadem was such that if, say, the Armenian king received his diadem not from the emperor, but from the Parthian king, it was a *casus belli*<sup>96</sup>, regardless of how pliable or loyal the candidate promised to be.

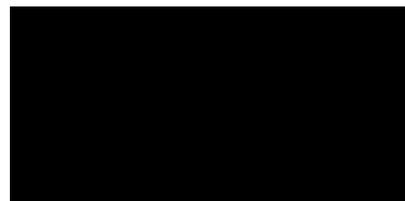


Fig. 9 Rome, Caesarea in Cappadocia, silver didrachm minted under Caligula (or Claudius) to commemorate Germanicus' mission in Armenia in AD 18. Reverse: GERMANICVS ARTAXIAS Germanicus standing, placing diademed tiara on head of Artaxias, king of Armenia. 24 mm, 7.66 g (scale 1 : 1)

84 Sources in Saglio 1892; Alföldi 1980, 263–266; Biedermann 2012, 434 f.

85 Plut. Ti. Gracch. 14, 19; Plut. Caes. 61; Cic. Phil. 34, 85; Phil. 3, 5, 12; Amm. 17, 11, 4.

86 Rawson 1975; Braund 1984, 56; Biedermann 2012, 434 f.

87 Rawson 1975, 152.

88 Rawson 1975, 158 with ref. to Cic. fam. 9, 15, 4.

89 Tac. ann. 4, 5.

90 Dom. 90.

91 Agr. 14, 2; cf. hist. 2, 81. According to Suet. Aug. 60, they acted more clientium (commenting on client kings accompanying Augustus on a visit, just like clients accompany their patrons).

92 Kienast 2009, 500–502; Braund 1988, 84: »Augustus had turned client kings into an arm of government which

was connected especially closely to himself and his family«.

93 Suet. Aug. 48.

94 Cf. Strab. 17, 840. Millar's reading of *tetrárchai* (Millar 1996, 159 f.) is more convincing than the alternative *dekarchíai*.

95 Pro rege Deiotaro 26.

96 Cass. Dio 68, 17, 1; cf. Tac. ann. 15, 2.

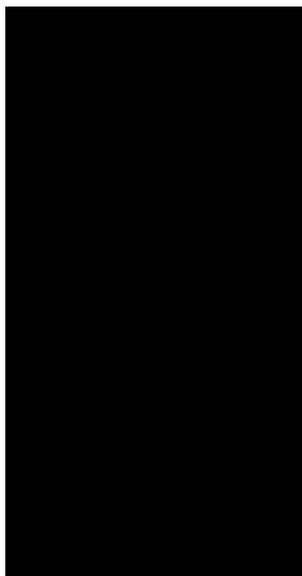


Fig. 10 Rome, Sestertius of Antoninus Pius, AD 140–143. Reverse: REX ARMENIIS – DATVS A. Pius standing, placing tiara on head of appointee king of Armenia; in exercise SC. 33 mm, 25.84 g (scale 1 : 1)

More importantly in this context, these appointment ceremonies were apparently performed with something akin to a coronation ritual. Coin images with crowning scenes in the manner of Lepidus' coins were perpetuated and re-interpreted under the emperors. Figure 9 shows a very rare coin type (only five specimens known) minted in Caesarea in Cappadocia, probably in the reign of Caligula<sup>97</sup>. The reverse commemorates the exploits of Germanicus, the emperor's father, in A.D. 18. At the time, Germanicus was Tiberius' envoy sent to the east to settle affairs with Parthia and other players in the region<sup>98</sup>. His remit explicitly included the »kingdoms of that region«<sup>99</sup>. He deposed Vonones from the Armenian throne and crowned Zenon, the son of Polemo of Pontos (37–38 B.C.) as new king. This ceremony took place in Artaxata, the Armenian capital, and Zenon took on the name of Artaxias (A.D. 18–34)<sup>100</sup>. As it happens, Aretas IV travelled all the way up to Cyrrhus to pay his respects to Germanicus; he hosted a dinner and gave a lavish gift, again a heavy gold crown<sup>101</sup>. The coin image shows Artaxias and Germanicus in muscle cuirass side by side in frontal position, each identified by a label. Germanicus is standing on the right, his head turned left and holding a spear in the left hand. With the right hand he is crowning Artaxias with a tiara with a diadem tied around it, holding it unrealistically by the loose ends. Artaxias is holding the tiara in place with his right hand. The figures are not depicted as equals. Germanicus is taller than Artaxias, and the gesture in this case leaves no question about who is in charge. It symbolises the bestowal of power on a client king by the Roman authorities.

The image is a precursor to later series of Roman coin types, the well-known »Rex Datus« coins, starting in the second century, where the hierarchy is more accentuated through variations in size: They were minted under Trajan, Antoninus Pius and Lucius Verus to celebrate the accession of Parthian and Armenian contenders (fig. 10)<sup>102</sup>. One usually sees to the left the diminutive king, to the right the tall emperor, either seated on a platform or towering over his appointee, extending a literal upper hand and placing the diadem (viz. tiara) on the new king's head.

There is no reason to doubt the veracity of these narrative scenes. Such »coronations« were actually part of the diplomatic proceedings following bilateral negotiations. Time and again one reads of the investiture of a new appointee concluding with formulas such as »he [the emperor] put a diadem on his head and appointed him king«<sup>103</sup>. The insignia and the procedure were so imbued with symbolism that its realistic representation, enhanced by the scaling of the protagonists, made for striking images of imperial power.

To the Roman audience, monarchs like Parthamaspates of Parthia, appointed by Trajan in A.D. 116, were no doubt paltry, obscure and insignificant rulers much like Aretas III kneeling beside his camel. But the investiture of a client king must have been considered sufficiently weighty and beneficial to the emperor's self-image to be worth advertising as a major achievement. Such political events are not only celebrated in Roman imperial coinage, but also in large-scale sculpture: State reliefs such as the panels of Marcus Aurelius, now on the Arch of Constantine, depict variations of »Rex Datus« scenes<sup>104</sup>. These images are more than creative interpretations or visual shorthands to express complex political relations. They manifest the emperor's key virtues. The »giving of kings to kingdoms and vice-versa was adjudged a significant expression of the emperor's power and beneficence«<sup>105</sup>. Beyond manly *virtus*, the exercise of raw power and prowess, these scenes express the emperor's sense of justice and moderation in honouring and rewarding deserving barbarians, and his prudence and foresight in strengthening Rome-friendly rulers and

97 RIC I, no. 59 pl. 15; BMCRE cxlviii no. 104 pl. 28, 1; RPC 1 no. 3629.

98 Paltiel 1991, 126–137; Dabrowa 2002, 277 f.

99 As stated in the Tabula Siarensis, see lit. in Millar 1993, 53 n. 40.

100 Tac. ann. 2, 56.

101 Tac. ann. 2, 57.

102 Trajan: RIC II 239–240 nos. 667–669 pl. 11, 194; Weiser 2002, 161; Antoninus Pius: RIC III 8 no. 619 pl. 5, 106; Lucius Verus: RIC III 198 f. nos. 511–513. 1370–1375 pls. 10, 198, 13, 356.

103 Ios. Ant. Iud. 18, 237. See also Cass. Dio 63, 5, 4; 68, 17, 1; 68, 19, 3; 68, 30, 3; Mart. 6, 10; Tac. ann. 2, 56; Strab. 12, 556 and further ref. in Ritter 1965, 165–169.

104 On the »Rex Datus« panel, see Koeppl 1986, 65 f. no. 30 fig. 35.

105 Braund 1988, 86 with lit. sources.

providing long-term security at Rome's frontiers and even beyond provincial boundaries.

The bestowal of the diadem expresses that both parties accept the steep hierarchy between the crowning and the crowned, as well as the complete dependence of a client king on the emperor's mercy. In an ironic twist of cultural history, it was the Roman emperors who kept this much-maligned insignia alive long after the demise of the Hellenistic dynasties.

### »The Lover of His People« – an Unusual Client King

This assessment of the significance of the diadem under Roman rule helps explain the peculiar change of insignia by Aretas IV. It chimes with what is known about the character of the kingship of the self-styled »lover of his people« (RḤM 'MH). This is the programmatic title Aretas used on coins starting in year 1<sup>106</sup>. Modern scholarship translates it as equivalent to *philodemos*, but this seems hardly likely. Hellenistic kings never had such an epithet; their affections were usually directed to members of their dynasty, hence *philopatros*, *philadelphos* etc.<sup>107</sup>. Instead, Aretas' title »lover of his people« may well have been chosen to stand out from his royal colleagues, as an oblique rejection of their ostensibly subservient epithets such as *philorhomaïos* or *philokaisar*.

The evidence suggests that Nabataean kings, and in particular Aretas IV, were keen to evade the grip of Roman power. They refused to play by the rules and conventions of behaviour towards the emperor that had developed over the years. Other kings made every effort to strengthen their all-important personal relationships with Augustus, participating in an endless cycle of embassies, meetings with the emperor in Rome or on tour, of gift exchanges, bestowals of honour and demonstrations of loyalty. The utmost expression of this ostensive obsequiousness was the imperial cult, the worship of the emperor as a living god, which many of them promoted<sup>108</sup>. More important even, client kings often sent their sons to the imperial court in Rome for their »education«, thus laying the future of their dynasties in the emperor's hands. Nabataean kings seem to have abstained from all of this. Beside the short-time usurper Syllaëus, the sources speak of no king or envoy travelling to Rome; no son »educated« at the imperial court; no imperial cult, games or festivals in honour of the emperor. The Nabataeans would not concede even a symbolic gesture like yielding the obverses of their coins to the emperor's portrait, as others did. By contrast, the kings of Pontus and Colchis, Armenia, Olbia, Chalkis and Thrace all put Augustus' head on their coins<sup>109</sup>. Herod the Great was only prevented from doing so due to aniconic conventions, but this did not stop his son Herod Philip. In sum, Aretas kept interaction with the emperor to the bare minimum, and he limited himself to meeting contractual obligations such as providing troops.

The media of the »lover of his people« were primarily addressed to his own people, not the emperor or Roman officials. In the capital Petra that according to Strabo was also said to host »many Romans and other foreigners«<sup>110</sup>, recent research has begun to uncover the political significance of the architectural decoration of public monuments<sup>111</sup>. Several fragments of figured friezes have been found along the colonnaded street and in the area of the temenos gate over the years. The building(s) to which they belong is yet unidentified. They depict three different themes, a sea thiasos (Nereids and Tritons), Victories and Erotes. Schmid plausibly interprets them as veiled references to current world events. As these friezes are dated stylistically to the reigns of

106 Meshorer 1975, 44.

107 See the exhaustive catalogue in de Callatay 2011.

108 Kropp 2009.

109 Crawford 1985, 273–275.

110 Strab. 16, 779.

111 Schmid 2009, 325–337 for the following observations.

Obodas II (30 to 9 B.C.) or the early years of Aretas IV, one such event might be Octavian's naval victory at Actium in 31 B.C. The iconography shows a number of parallels to Augustan art and thus points to roughly the same period. While the precise date, location and meaning of these friezes are hard to establish from our lacunary evidence, what matters here is that this imagery uses the politically charged language of contemporary Roman public monuments. It is therefore evident that this audience was not only thoroughly familiar with current world events and their significance for the kingdom, but it could also decipher the symbolic language of images that was used to communicate and comment on these events with a heavy ideological spin.

Nabataean coinage too, as one important bearer of royal imagery, was tailored to a local audience: Only a tiny fraction of documented coins was found outside the kingdom's borders. This was a deliberate policy. Much of the silver coinage was in fact »purposely overvalued in order to retain the silver within the kingdom«<sup>112</sup>. The coins depict well-known symbolic imagery to convey ideals of kingship according to the Nabataean king and his court. Many citizens will have been familiar with images of the Roman emperor wearing a wreath, and they could draw a comparison with their king now wearing the same insignia. More importantly, they may well have been aware of the custom of Near Eastern kings wearing the diadem. For centuries, the Hellenistic royal diadem had been the principal attribute through which to identify a royal portrait (and still is for modern observers). The change of insignia would no doubt have been noticed, and many would have realized that this entails a political message.

Aretas' change of insignia should be seen in the historical context of his precarious first years in power. As outlined above, following his accession in 9 B.C., he was confirmed in ca. 8 B.C., but his rival Syllaeus, coming back from his first unsuccessful journey to Rome, was then still in Petra. During the first four years of his reign, Aretas minted silver coins in his own name, and bronze jointly with Syllaeus. Most coin obverses from this period depicted posthumous diademed portraits of Obodas II, for reasons of legitimacy<sup>113</sup>. It is probably no coincidence that the last of these posthumous portraits from year 4 coincides with the execution of Syllaeus, »indicating that this was the point in time when Aretas gained full control of his kingdom after having been freed from Syllaeus (6/5 B.C.)«<sup>114</sup>.

Alongside these coin images, Aretas' own portraits documented the evolution of his personalised self-image. In this period, Aretas did not merely change insignia, but had a complete visual makeover (figs. 2. 3). The diademed year 1 portraits show him like a regular client king with the same insignia and a similar short-cut hairstyle as his royal colleagues<sup>115</sup>. This adoption of »normal« client king image is in itself a departure from his predecessor Obodas II who wore the characteristic »dread« locks. But, still in year 1, the first issues with the laurel wreath show him with a different hairstyle<sup>116</sup>. The hair is now longer, especially in the nape of the neck, and all combed horizontally forward<sup>117</sup>. Both insignia and hairstyle hence signal Aretas' departure from the standards of »normal« client kings. This convergence of changes strengthens the idea that each stage of the re-designing was a deliberate and well-planned step. The laurel wreath and the long hair made him stand out from other client kings. Yet, he did not go back to Obodas' hairstyle either. While Obodas had worn thick »dread« locks, Aretas had thin, wavy strands falling down on his shoulders. Within a few years, Aretas established the hairstyle he would keep until the end of his long reign, and added a moustache to it<sup>118</sup>. In later years he even wore a banded diadem under the wreath. Aretas gradually built up a

112 Schmitt-Korte – Price 1994, 111.

113 Schmitt-Korte 1990, 128.

114 Schmitt-Korte – Price 1994, 102.

115 Meshorer 1975, nos. 46. 47.

See also some recently identified lead issues depicting Aretas short-haired and diademed, Hoover – Barkay 2010, nos. 72–74.

116 Meshorer 1975, nos. 48. 49. 51. 53; Hoover – Barkay 2010, no. 45; Barkay 2011, nos. 1–3; Meshorer et al. 2013, 227 nos. 35–38. He also wears the wreath on contemporary undated joint issues of Aretas and Syllaeus, nos. 44. 45. 116–118. For the attribution to Syllaeus, see Schmitt-Korte 1990, 128.

117 Meshorer 1975, nos. 48. 49. The undated type Hoover – Barkay 2010, no. 48 should also belong here, judging by the portrait.

118 At a much later date, starting at the end of the first century A.D., the kings of Bosphorus are depicted with a similar hairstyle as well as a moustache (but with the traditional diadem). See Toynbee 1978, 119–123; Klose 1992, 66 f.

programmatic self-image to express his individuality and independence, both from Rome and to some extent from the hierarchies of power established by Rome in the Near East.

To conclude, Aretas' swap of insignia, abandoning the diadem and adopting the laurel wreath, was a deliberate, well-timed and well-calculated move. When these insignia are analysed in their proper cultural context, it becomes clear that rather than flattery through imitation, this swap was a bold statement of independence and indifference from the politics of self-representation pursued by his powerful neighbours. By laying down the diadem, which unlike his colleagues he had not received from Rome in the first place, he broke with the general appearance, and hence the monarchic ideals, of contemporary kings such as the Herods. Aretas thus rejected the symbols of subservience that both kings and emperors employed in Rome's discourse of power. This striking political gesture fits much better with what we know about the policy and culture of Nabataean kings, and of Aretas in particular. Together with the long hair and peculiar hairstyle, these changes in appearance converge into one consistent image of Aretas' ideology, signalling that this king was not willing to play the role of a Roman vassal.

## Abstract

Andreas J. M. Kropp, *Kings without Diadems – How the Laurel Wreath Became the Insignia of Nabataean Kings*

### Keywords

client kings • portraiture •  
numismatics • Nabataean dynasty •  
royal insignia

One aspect of Nabataean royal iconography that has long puzzled observers is the change of insignia from Hellenistic royal diadem to laurel wreath. This swap, which is well-illustrated and precisely dated on Nabataean coins, may at first seem a detail of little consequence, but seen in its proper cultural context, it offers a rare glimpse of Nabataean concepts of kingship and of the symbolic value of royal insignia in the Roman empire. While some would interpret the adoption of the laurel wreath, the emblem of a Roman imperator, as a nod towards Rome, an attempt by, say, Aretas IV to flatter and appease Augustus, the switch of insignia must be studied from the other end. What it evokes is another, more significant question that has not been considered so far: Why did Aretas abandon the diadem? How could the chief emblem of royalty worn by virtually every monarch at the Roman frontier, lose its appeal and validity for Aretas? By considering the significance of royal insignia in their proper cultural context, I argue that Aretas' extraordinary renunciation of the conventional insignia of power was a well-calculated repudiation of the contemporary symbolism to express loyalty and obedience. Beside Nabataean conceptions of kingship, the swap of insignia can therefore also elucidate an aspect of Roman imperialism hitherto neglected, namely the symbolic and ritual language employed by Roman imperial authority in its dealings with foreign subordinate rulers.

### Sources of illustrations

Figs. 1. 3. 4: A. J. M. Kropp • Fig. 2 (from left to right): Trustees of the British Museum, 1924,0303.1 (first from left); Bibliothèque Nationale de France, FRBNF 41762476; Trustees of the British Museum, RPK,p167B.7.Pho (third from left); Bibliothèque Nationale de France, FRBNF 41762450 • Fig. 5: de Barthélemy 1890, pl. 2 • Fig. 6: From the T. Goell family archives, reproduced in Sanders 1996, fig. 266. Courtesy of D. H. Sanders • Fig. 7: Trustees of the British Museum, R.8739. Drawing from Weisser 1885, pl. 38 • Fig. 8: Trustees of the British Museum, 1843,0116.118. Drawing from Weisser 1885, pl. 39 • Fig. 9: Courtesy of Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, 18200321. Drawing from Duruy 1883 IV, 431 • Fig. 10: Courtesy of Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, 18200259. Drawing from Duruy 1883 V, 444

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