

## RETHINKING THE HELLENISTIC GULF: THE NEW GREEK INSCRIPTION FROM BAHRAIN

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**Abstract:** The recent discovery in Bahrain of a Greek inscription, dating to the 120s BC, transforms our understanding of the Arab-Persian Gulf in the Hellenistic period. The inscription, recording the dedication of a shrine to the Dioskouroi on behalf of the first independent king of Characene, indicates that Bahrain was a garrisoned node within the Seleucid Empire and the centre of the previously unknown archipelagic administrative district ‘Tylos (Bahrain) and the Islands’. Seleucid and Characenean control of Bahrain is placed within the *longue durée* political history of relations between southern Mesopotamia and Dilmun. The cultic dedication to the Dioskouroi traces the consciously Hellenizing modalities of Characenean emancipation from the Seleucid Empire and the development of a coherent maritime religious network in the Gulf.

**Keywords:** Seleucid Empire, Kingdom of Characene, Hellenization, Arab-Persian Gulf, Dioskouroi

The absence of substantial epigraphic or literary attestation for the Seleucid Empire in the Arab-Persian Gulf has led to conservative estimates of the geographical extent of Seleucid and early Characenean dominance, the scale of Seleucid colonizing activities, the existence of a Gulf trade policy and the depth of cultural interpenetration. Over 20 years ago Jean-François Salles categorically asserted, in political terms, ‘nothing suggests that the region was under the direct control of the Seleucid kings, nor is there any clear evidence that it formed part of their area of influence’<sup>1</sup> and, in cultural terms, ‘il n’y a pas d’inscription grecque, pas d’expression artistique “occidentalisée”, pas de manifestation religieuse qui témoignent de contacts étroits avec le monde méditerranéen ou mésopotamien’.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, in his masterful analysis of the ancient Gulf, Daniel Potts argues that, with the exception of Failaka island (lying just off the Mesopotamian coastline), the region lay outside the boundaries of the Seleucid Empire and was never deeply impacted by Hellenism.<sup>3</sup> Dominance over the Arab-Persian Gulf, and Bahrain in particular, by the southern Mesopotamian Kingdom of Characene was understood as a later, Common Era development, attested by a bilingual caravan-inscription from Palmyra.<sup>4</sup>

While opinions were already changing, the discovery in 1997 and publication in 2002<sup>5</sup> of a dedicatory inscription, in Greek, from the Shakhoura necropolis in northern Bahrain has overturned many of these heretofore reasonable assumptions and exposed as too cautious

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<sup>1</sup> Salles (1987) 75.

<sup>2</sup> In relation to Bahrain (i.e. *not* the northern Gulf), Salles (1984) 161; note that the proposal of Salles (1987) 102–05 of the existence of a Seleucid naval base on Bahrain was somewhat withdrawn in his later publications: Salles (1993) 251 (‘La conclusion qui paraît s’imposer est qu’il n’y a jamais eu de présence grecque et/ou “hellénisée” à Bahrain ... aucune trace de soldats grecs n’y existe’); (1999) 147–48.

<sup>3</sup> Potts (1990) 2.22. The same opinion is held by Boucharlat (1986) and Teixidor (1993) 291–93.

<sup>4</sup> *IK Estremo Oriente* 153; see Seyrig (1941) 253–55; Schuol (2000) 56–57; Yon (2002) 104–05. This inscription, dated AD 131, honours the Palmyrenian Yarhai, σατρά[π]ην Θιλουάνων Μεερεδατου βασιλέως Σπασίνου Χάρακος. Yarhai’s title in the Aramaic version (lines 2–3) is lost. Thilouanōn is derived from Tylos (Bahrain). Potts (1988) 144 writes, ‘This text provides us with the first unequivocal confirmation of Characene political domination in the region. When and how Thiloua/os came under Characene control we do not know’.

<sup>5</sup> Gatier et al. (2002).

previous interpretations of the Hellenistic Gulf. The inscribed limestone slab (49 × 98 × 10cm) had been reused as the covering lid of a tomb, possibly several centuries after it was carved. The letters are very shallow. I reproduce here the inscription, without emendation:

ὕπερ βασιλέως Ὑσπασίνου  
καὶ βασιλίσσης Θαλασσίας,  
τὸν ναὸν Διοσκόροις σωτήρσι  
Κη[φισό]δωρος στρατηγὸς  
Τύλου καὶ τῶν νήσων  
εὐχὴν.

As the editors acknowledge, this inscription is extremely important. In demonstrating the existence of a Characene administrative district of ‘Tylos and the Islands’, it establishes Mesenian royal control of Bahrain from the reign of Hyspaosines (Seleucid satrap from the 160s; independent king from at least the early 120s),<sup>6</sup> i.e. the earliest days of the independent Kingdom of Characene. The *strategos* has a Greek name and dedicates a temple of Greek deities on behalf of the royal couple. The inscription itself demonstrates a Greek-speaking community on the island. This article will examine how the inscription allows us to re-evaluate three aspects of the political and cultural history of the Hellenistic Gulf: the nature of Seleucid power in the Gulf; the modalities of Hyspaosines’ emancipation from the Seleucid Empire; and the Gulf’s religious landscape.

### I. The Seleucid Gulf

The editors of the inscription state, without argument, that ‘it seems obvious that Characene sovereignty on Bahrain and other islands of the Gulf was simply a continuation of the Seleucid domination of these same regions’.<sup>7</sup> Let us accept this for the moment (although the suggestion will be defended in the course of the paper). Accordingly, this first section will interpret the inscription in the context of Seleucid policies in the Gulf as attested archaeologically and in classical historiography. I will then examine Seleucid dominance in the *longue durée* of regional imperial practices.

The Kephisodoros of this inscription is titled ‘*strategos* of Tylos and the Islands’. This is the only attestation of such an administrative district and title before the somewhat similar case of Yarhai, σατρά[π]ην Θιλουάνων, in the second-century AD Palmyrene inscription mentioned above. The terminology – *strategos* + geographical unit in the genitive case – belongs to the Seleucid Empire, where the office of *strategos* was a position of great, though subordinate, authority over a delimited territory. Epigraphic dossiers illustrate the wide-ranging power and highly varied obligations of *strategoí*, including the management of the king’s land, redistribution of royal documents and, above all, responsibility for the defense of the Empire.<sup>8</sup> The use of this title for Ptolemaios in Koile Syria, Olympichos in Karia and Jonathan in Judea alike underlines that the office was neither uniform throughout the Empire nor unchanging over the duration of the dynasty. In Babylonia, most relevantly, cuneiform evidence suggests that the office was a fragmentation of an overarching satrapal command. In 270, the *strategos* first appears beside the satrap of Akkad as the head of the royal army.<sup>9</sup> In 235, the *strategos* appears in a tablet fighting an officer of the palace who had revolted against the authority of Seleukos II.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> For the dates of Hyspaosines’ satrapal and monarchic rule, see section II below. For the most recent discussion of the Characene kingdom, see Schuol (2000).

<sup>7</sup> Gatier et al. (2002) 225.

<sup>8</sup> Capdetrey (2007).

<sup>9</sup> Capdetrey (2007) 288–89.

<sup>10</sup> Capdetrey (2007) 289.

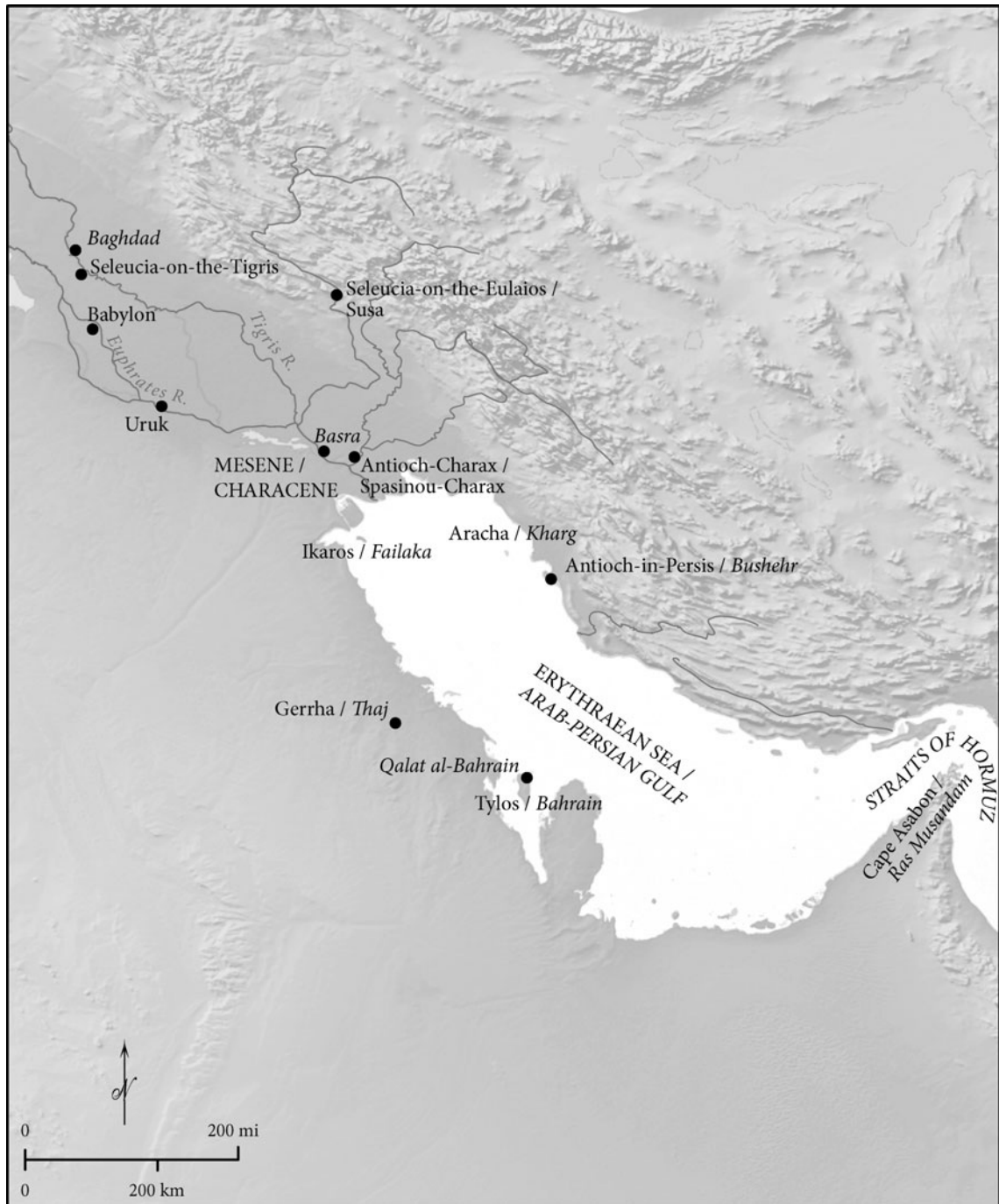


Fig. 1: Map of the Gulf with locations referred to in the article. Map produced by C. Scott Walker, Digital Cartography Specialist, Harvard Map Collection.

Although our sources do not support Bengtson's suggestion of a deliberate and global standardization of the office of *strategos* during Antiochos III's *anabasis* (212–205),<sup>11</sup> it does seem likely that the Great King's reign witnessed the subdivision of existing territorial blocs and the denser appointment of *strategoï*. It is important to recognize that, while the reorganization of provincial administration or bureaucratic flexibility could result in the renaming of Seleucid *hyparchoi* or *eparchoi* as *strategoï*, the geographical units over which they governed tended to remain the same.<sup>12</sup> For example, Polybius tells us that, after his defeat of the rebel Molon in 220, Antiochos III replaced Pythiades, 'eparchos of the Erythraean Sea'<sup>13</sup> with Tychon, 'strategos of the region of the Erythraean Sea'.<sup>14</sup>

Accordingly, 'Tylos and the Islands' is likely to have been an administrative unit headed by an important Seleucid and early Characene royal official charged above all with military responsibilities. The new inscription requires, therefore, the existence of at least a small Greek-speaking garrison settlement of soldiers, administrators and support staff on Bahrain alongside Kephisodoros, perhaps accompanied by a specialized infrastructure of dockyards and anchorages to support the *cursus maritimi*.<sup>15</sup> The inscription by itself demands for its physical creation and social meaning the existence of a Greek-speaking, trained mason, a *naos* of the Dioskouroi and a community to honour these gods. Hellenistic Tylos would thus resemble, albeit on a smaller scale, the Seleucid military and religious complex on Failaka island (known as Ikaros to the Greeks), unearthed by Danish and French archaeologists at the mouth of the Mesopotamian alluvium.<sup>16</sup> Before the discovery of the Bahrain inscription, the administrative position of the untitled Anaxarchos, subordinate of Ikadion and responsible for the administration of Ikaros in the third-century royal letter to the inhabitants of Failaka, had been unclear;<sup>17</sup> it is now probable that he was the Seleucid official in charge of the newly identified imperial district 'Tylos and the Islands'.<sup>18</sup>

Our inscription allows a reinterpretation of scattered material evidence, uncovered in the north of Bahrain, that already had pointed to the presence of a small, non-indigenous population in the Hellenistic period.<sup>19</sup> Dressed stones from a built tomb in Barbar village were inscribed with single Greek letters, implying a Greek-speaking mason and his patron. No excavation records have been published, but it is believed that the tomb contained a Parthian-period gold ring.<sup>20</sup> A

<sup>11</sup> Bengtson (1944) 143–58.

<sup>12</sup> See below, section II, for more detailed discussion.

<sup>13</sup> Polyb. 5.46.7.

<sup>14</sup> Polyb. 5.54.12; see discussion of Le Rider (1965) 36–38. No Seleucid *eparchos* appears outside of Polybius; as Capdetrey (2007) 230 suggests, *eparchos* may simply be a generic term for governor of an administrative district here.

<sup>15</sup> Given the similar maritime technology, it may be instructive to note that Constantakopoulou (2007) 87 emphasizes the importance of island networks or chains for Aegean navigation, particularly for warships, which required almost daily harbours; see also Morton (2001) 266–83.

<sup>16</sup> For the Failaka complex, see the Danish and French excavation reports (Mathiesen (1982); Hannestad (1983); Calvet and Salles (1986); Jeppesen (1989); Calvet and Gachet (1990); Calvet and Pic (2008)) along with the general discussions of Roueché and Sherwin-White (1985); Potts (1990) 2.154–96; Gachet and Salles (1993).

<sup>17</sup> *IK Estremo Oriente* 421/422; *SEG* 56.1844. Several dates have been proposed for the letter, based on the difficult-to-read Greek numbers on line 44. Piejko

(1988) 114–16 and Jeppesen (1989) 83–92 date the letter to Seleukos II's reign, Roueché and Sherwin-White (1985) 17–19 to Antiochos III's. Note that an Ikadion is known as an important Syrian official from the reign of Seleukos II (*Jer. in Dan.* 11.6). This Anaxarchos is unattested elsewhere. On Anaxarchos' position, Roueché and Sherwin-White (1985) 30–31 observe, quite correctly, that 'Anaxarchos, as a subordinate of Ikadion, is identifiable as a Seleucid official in charge of one of the regional subdivisions into which Seleucid satrapies were subdivided. The content of the document makes it appear unlikely that he was resident at Ikaros'; indeed, if he headed 'Tylos and the Islands', Bahrain would make a more likely base. Note, also, that Anaxarchos wrote his letter on 27th Artemision, ten days after Ikadion's one – too long for the journey from Characene to Failaka, about right for the journey from Bahrain.

<sup>18</sup> Ikadion has already been identified as governor of the Erythraean Sea satrapy by Roueché and Sherwin-White (1985) 30 and Piejko (1988) 99.

<sup>19</sup> On the archaeology of Hellenistic Bahrain, see Boucharlat (1986); Højlund and Andersen (1994); Kervran et al. (2005); Andersen (2007).

<sup>20</sup> Salles (1986) 450.

similarly-constructed prominent military burial, dating to the Hellenistic period, has been found at the Janussan necropolis.<sup>21</sup> Just as the Seleucid complex on Failaka produced Aramaic alongside Greek epigraphy, suggesting the presence of Babylonians in the military settlement,<sup>22</sup> so at Bahrain a Greek-inscribed tombstone of, probably, the second half of the second century BC honours a *kybernetes* bearing the Babylonian name *Abidistaras* ('servant of Ištar').<sup>23</sup> An Aramaic inscription on a Hellenistic jar mentions the Babylonian deity Nabû,<sup>24</sup> honoured by Antiochos I at Borsippa and on Hellenistic Failaka.<sup>25</sup> Another Greek funerary inscription, for a citizen of an unspecified Alexandria, is dated by the Seleucid Era to 118/117 BC (195 SE).<sup>26</sup> More pertinently, Hellenistic remains were uncovered at the archaeological site of Qalat al-Bahrain. Although the excavated coastal fortress itself has now been identified as a Sasanian or Islamic-period construction,<sup>27</sup> the discovery of Hellenistic ceramics, including diagnostic sherds of black-glazed Attic pottery, fish-plate, eggshell ware, *lagynos* and *terra sigillata*, demonstrates the existence of a relatively extensive third- and second-century BC settlement.<sup>28</sup> A mid-third-century coin hoard (mostly east Arabian Alexander imitations) and two Seleucid bronzes give confirmation.<sup>29</sup> Importantly, the ceramic profile of the Hellenistic Qala is much closer to Seleucid Failaka than to contemporary sites on the east Arabian mainland.<sup>30</sup>

Although this material evidence is by no means spectacular,<sup>31</sup> when combined with the new inscription it suggests the existence of a small Seleucid station, perhaps based at Qalat al-Bahrain at the north of the island, headed by an imperial official and staffed by a colonial population of Greeks, Babylonians and perhaps native Tylians. The Greek-style ceramics, the epigraphic habit (including the use of Greek writing and the Seleucid calendar) and the *naos* of the Dioskouroi point to a limited degree of Hellenization. Like Failaka-Ikaros, Bahrain-Tylos was a military and cultural node within the broader system of the Seleucid Gulf.

The new Bahrain inscription allows a re-evaluation of the important literary evidence for Seleucid activities in the Gulf. Although Bahrain is described in detail by Androsthene of Thasos, who headed an exploratory voyage under Alexander,<sup>32</sup> the island is only mentioned once in relation to the Seleucid Empire, in Polybius' famous account of the naval expedition of Antiochos III.

Antiochos III's presence in the Gulf region in 205 is attested from an inscription of Antioch-in-Persis<sup>33</sup> and in a brief, condensed account of a naval expedition in Polybius (13.9.5). Having reasserted his ancestral claims over the Upper Satrapies, the Great King embarked on a voyage heading south (from Antioch-in-Persis?) to Gerrha, now identified with the Thaj Oasis,<sup>34</sup> where he granted the inhabitants their freedom and received enormous amounts of silver, incense and

<sup>21</sup> Lombard and Salles (1984) 29–37, 140–41; Salles (1986) 449. The tomb in question, T1, is unlike the contemporary ones that surrounded it: the dressed-stone construction recalls types found in the Hellenized east; moreover, the chain-mail cuirass found in the tomb chamber is similar to specimens from Aī Khanoum and Dura-Europos (Lombard and Salles (1984) 36). On the Hellenistic cemeteries of Bahrain, see Herling and Salles (1993).

<sup>22</sup> Naveh (1995).

<sup>23</sup> Αβιδισταρας / Αβδαιου / κυβερνήτης / ..ΚΡΑ[ ]ΕΙΙ / χάρει. Gatier et al. (2002) 229; Marcillet-Jaubert (1990b).

<sup>24</sup> Salles (1987) 81.

<sup>25</sup> Teixidor (1989); Naveh (1995).

<sup>26</sup> Gatier et al. (2002) 226–29.

<sup>27</sup> Sasanian period: Lombard and Kervran (1993); Islamic period: Højlund and Andersen (1994) 293; Højlund (2006).

<sup>28</sup> Boucharlat and Salles (1987) 287–91; Lombard and Kervran (1993); Andersen (2002).

<sup>29</sup> Callot (1994). One of the bronzes was struck under Seleukos II, the other under the same king or Seleukos IV. The Seleucid bronzes were surface finds. It is a well-known principle in numismatic studies that, in contrast to precious metal types, bronze coins are systematically overvalued and so rarely found outside the frontiers of the state in whose name they have been struck and entered into circulation. On Alexander- and Seleucid-imitations, see Potts (1991); (1994).

<sup>30</sup> Salles (1987) 102–05; Boucharlat (1986) 439–42; Herling (2003) 32–33.

<sup>31</sup> It must be remembered that only a tiny fraction of Qalat al-Bahrain has been excavated; see Herling (2003) 30.

<sup>32</sup> *BNJ* 711; Bowersock (1986).

<sup>33</sup> *IMagn* 18; *RC* 31; *OGIS* 231.

<sup>34</sup> Potts (1990) 2.85–93; (1993).



spices as gifts. From there ‘he sailed to the island of Tylos (ἐποίει τὸν πλοῦν ἐπὶ Τύλον τὴν νῆσον) and then sailed back for Seleucia’. Unfortunately this compressed account gives few details concerning the expedition’s objectives or achievements for Gerrha, and none for Tylos. As Salles observes, Antiochos III is not said to have received either tribute or gifts at Tylos.<sup>35</sup> The thinness and uniqueness of Polybius’ narrative suggests that, like Seleucid imperial praxis at its most distant margins, in the Gulf political subordination, tribute-collection and acts of obeisance were infrequent, unstructured and dependent on the physical presence of the monarch fashioning his empire in ceaseless wanderings. The *eleutheria*-for-treasure exchange at Gerrha gives the impression of an informal and at most intermittent relation between the Seleucid monarchs and eastern Arabia; Polybius notes that the Gerrhaeans’ letter required translation. The Arabian naval expedition would thus seem to parallel Antiochos’ land encounter with Sophagasenos ‘king of the Indians’ in Polybius 11.34.11. Both would be examples of a particular form of peripheral interaction between the Seleucid monarch and external powers, imposing weak suzerainty rather than clear sovereignty, in a single and specific act of domination beyond the workable horizon of regular imperial control.

However, the Polybius passage can now be reinterpreted in the light of the new Bahrain inscription and with an eye to the narrative’s rhetorical tropes and intertextuality. The characterization of the Gerrhaeans as peaceful and free responds to an established Greek ethnographic and historiographic tradition of desert liberty and peripheral ‘Golden Age’ peace.<sup>36</sup> It seems that Polybius, or rather the Seleucid court historian lying behind his account,<sup>37</sup> engages closely with the account of Antigonos Monophthalmos’ interactions with the Nabataean nomads in Diodorus Siculus, deriving from the early Hellenistic historian and eye-witness participant Hieronymos of Kardia.<sup>38</sup> Diodorus describes Antigonos’ two failed attempts to gain control of the Arabian incense trade and deprive the Nabataeans of their freedom in 312. Having defeated the first aggression, the Nabataeans ‘wrote a letter to Antigonos in Syrian characters’ in which they vindicated themselves.<sup>39</sup> Following the Macedonians’ second defeat, the Nabataeans made peace with Antigonos’ son Demetrios, justified their free and peaceful lifestyle, and ‘persuaded him to receive as gifts their most precious products’ (presumably, spices, silver and incense).<sup>40</sup> The wealthy and free Gerrhaeans of Polybius’ account behave very similarly to the Nabataeans, their Arabian trading brothers. Like the Nabataeans, the Gerrhaeans respond to an aggressive Hellenistic monarchic expedition by writing a letter to the king in a foreign language, requiring translation. The emphasis on the act of translation underscores the remoteness, liberty and externality of these two Arabian peoples. Although Antiochos has one expedition, not two, both stages of Diodorus’ account are present. Antiochos, like Demetrios, recognizes the independence and freedom of the Gerrhaeans and receives in exchange gifts of the highest value. The difference between the two accounts lies in Antiochos’ avoidance of error: the Seleucid forces, unlike the Antigonid ones, face no defeat because the Great King accepts the liberty of the Gerrhaeans from

<sup>35</sup> Salles (1987) 103.

<sup>36</sup> In general, see Romm (1992). We should recall that Euhemerus frames his theological arguments as a royal-sponsored naval expedition down the coast of Arabia to the off-lying island-paradise of Panchaea. It is worth noting the striking similarities between Euhemerus’ utopian description of a fertile, sacred archipelago off the Arabian coast (Diod. Sic. 5.41–46) and much earlier Mesopotamian mythic traditions concerning Dilmun; see Alster (1983).

<sup>37</sup> Polybius’ account of Antiochos III’s *anabasis* shows unmistakable traces of encomiastic court historiography, emphasizing the king’s personal bravery, noble

clemency and successful leadership; see Primo (2009) 132–35.

<sup>38</sup> Diod. Sic. 19.94–100; for discussion, see Hornblower (1981) 144–50; Bosworth (2002) 187–209. Kuhrt and Sherwin-White (1993) 97 compare the Polybius and Hieronymus passages, as well as Megasthenes’ account of the Mauryans (*BNJ* 715), sweepingly concluding that such ‘respect for “freedom” was a convenient diplomatic formulation masking the perception of the huge problems facing any plans of conquest of these peoples’.

<sup>39</sup> Diod. Sic. 19.96.1.

<sup>40</sup> Diod. Sic. 19.97.6.

the first. Moreover, it is likely that the Gerrhaeans' payout was included in Antiochos III's dedications to the gods of Babylon after the completion of his naval expedition.<sup>41</sup> The 'gifts' of the Gerrhaeans were, therefore, implicated in a performance of traditional Near Eastern monarchic behaviour, in which the representation of enforced tribute payments as voluntary gifts was quite standard (as the nearby Persepolitan reliefs demonstrate).

Similarly, although Polybius' tiny mention of Antiochos' voyage to Tylos appears as an isolated literary instance of Seleucid presence there, the new Bahrain inscription suggests otherwise. It raises the possibility that Antiochos was visiting and consolidating a Greek military outpost on the island,<sup>42</sup> headed by an unknown predecessor of Kephisodoros.<sup>43</sup> Although it is possible that Antiochos III himself established the garrison, it should be noted that his *anabasis* was predicated on the ideological claim of 'ancestral lands', that is, the re-establishment of Seleucid imperial control over formerly subordinated regions. A possible comparison for Antiochos III's activities on Bahrain would be his powerful reassertion of Seleucid control over Failaka-Ikaros, known only from archaeological evidence, where the king expanded and better defended the fortress and restored its garrison following, it seems, a brief period of indigenous rule.<sup>44</sup>

A passage from Pliny the Elder (*HN* 6.28.152) further suggests that the encoding of both Hellenic ethnographic trope and Near Eastern monarchic ideology in Polybius' narrative has resulted in an underestimation of the significance of Antiochos III's naval expedition in particular and Seleucid Gulf dominance in general. Here, a certain Numenius, *ab Antiocho rege Mesenae praepositum*, won a naval and land victory on the same day *contra Persas* at Cape Asabon (Ras Musandam, northern Oman). The military importance of this peninsula lies in its control of the Straits of Hormuz and, consequently, the shipping lanes between India and Mesopotamia. There is no general agreement whether this expedition dates to the reign of Antiochos III or IV,<sup>45</sup> although Antiochos IV Epiphanes has just been mentioned by Pliny (*HN* 6.28.147) in reference to his exploratory activities in the Gulf, and his interest in the region is well-known from his refoundation of Alexandria as Antioch-Charax. In either case, the passage demonstrates that the governor (satrap/*strategos*) of the province of Mesene, equivalent to the district of the Erythraean Sea, led an amphibious expedition in defence of Seleucid dominance at the distant mouth of the Gulf. The offensive required the extension of Seleucid maritime control from the Mesopotamian coastline to the Straits of Hormuz. The Omani peninsula during the Hellenistic period was sparsely populated and does not seem to have had commercial importance in itself (the military outpost on Ras Musandam dates to the Sasanian period):<sup>46</sup> so it seems highly improbable that such an offensive could have been accomplished without the use of Bahrain-Tylos as a naval base; perhaps a Seleucid garrison stationed there constituted part of the armed forces. Moreover, since the expedition was headed by Numenius (*Mesenae praepositum*), we can assume that the administrative district 'Tylos and the Islands' fell under the jurisdiction of the satrapy of the Erythraean Sea. In other words, just as Bahrain and other Gulf islands were part of the Characene Kingdom, so they were part of its predecessor Seleucid satrapy; and just as Kephisodoros was subordinate to King Hyspaosines of Spasinou-Charax so, in all probability, was his predecessor to governor Numenius of Antioch-Charax.

The narrative technique of our Classical sources and the monarchic ideology of the Seleucid Empire mean that the spotlight falls on the provincial landscape of the kingdom almost solely during the king's presence there. Consequently, our understanding of the Seleucid dominion in

<sup>41</sup> AD -204 C Rev. 16.

<sup>42</sup> Before the discovery or publication of the Bahrain inscription, Salles (1987) 103 suggested that Antiochos was inspecting a garrison, a port of call for the Seleucid fleet or a surveillance-point for the neighbouring mainland. See also Herling (2003) 29.

<sup>43</sup> Perhaps Anaxarchos, if the Failaka inscription is to be dated to Antiochos III's reign; see above.

<sup>44</sup> Callot (1990); Gachet (1990).

<sup>45</sup> See Salles (1987) 97, n.27.

<sup>46</sup> de Cardi (1972).

the Gulf (as elsewhere) is restricted to unusual episodes of armed conflict or concentrations of monarchic power, producing a correlative image of a weak or barely existent imperial order during the king's absence. The new Bahrain inscription points to a more regular and structured *basso continuo* of provincial administration. The continuation, without interruption, of Gulf trade in the third century and its increase in the second century point to regional stability.<sup>47</sup> The expeditions of Antiochos III and Numenius suggest a permanent Seleucid flotilla in the Arab-Persian Gulf:<sup>48</sup> the new inscription should provide confirmation. Such an interpretation of the epigraphic, archaeological and literary records is supported by cuneiform evidence. Antiochos IV's presence in the Gulf is attested in the fragmentary Astronomical Diary for 164 BC: *um-ma 'an-ti-'u-uk-su* [ugal xx] ta uru<sup>mes</sup> š[á / ] šá ugu *ma-rat gin<sup>mes</sup>* ('saying, Antiochos the k[ing...] from the cities o[f...] who went along the sea shore').<sup>49</sup> An otherwise unknown expedition of a King Demetrios into Arabia is mentioned in an undated Diary.<sup>50</sup>

The new inscription normalizes Seleucid rule within the macrohistorical imperial dynamics in the region. The Arab-Persian Gulf, much like the Mediterranean, should be regarded as an environmental and (consequently) geopolitical entity. The research of Daniel Potts above all has demonstrated that, similarly to the 'Upper Sea', the Gulf possessed both regional fragmentation and global unity, deriving from the isolating and linking modalities of the sea. From the Omani peninsula to Kuwait, the coast, the off-shore islands and the adjacent hinterland formed an integrated and connected geographical system<sup>51</sup> in which trade constituted a major pursuit of the primary settlements, both within internal, Arabian systems of exchange and as entrepôts in a wider network linking Mesopotamia, the Gulf, eastern Iran and the Indus Valley.<sup>52</sup> It is clear that, throughout antiquity, ships followed the Arabian rather than the Persian coast, as only there were found sheltered, deep-water harbours and suitable fresh-water sources.<sup>53</sup> In fact, the absence of nucleated coastal settlements on the Arabian mainland and the persistent landward threat from nomadic Bedouin of the interior meant that the principal nodes of trade and travel were the off-shore islands of Failaka, Tārūt and Bahrain.<sup>54</sup>

Upon this geographical framework, from the second millennium,<sup>55</sup> a fluctuating pattern of northern, Mesopotamian political domination and provincial administration emerged.<sup>56</sup> Tablets of the First Dynasty of Sealand, published in 2009, indicate a possible control over the Dilmun archipelago (Bahrain and other islands, probably including Failaka) in the 16th century.<sup>57</sup> The islands certainly fell under Kassite political control, governed by a Babylonian *šakkanakku* (governor), for at least a century and a half from *ca.* 1450.<sup>58</sup> After the fall of the Kassites in the 12th century BC, it is likely that the so-called Second Dynasty of Sealand projected its power into the Gulf.<sup>59</sup> Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon and Aššurbanipal all received tribute from Dilmun.<sup>60</sup> A strong Neo-Babylonian presence is attested, with epigraphic references to a palace

<sup>47</sup> Salles (1987) 91–98; (1996) 260–63.

<sup>48</sup> Walbank (1967) 422; Salles (1987) 97.

<sup>49</sup> Diary -164 C 13–14. See Gera and Horowitz (1997) 243–49. This confirms Pliny *HN* 6.28.147: *Nunc a Charace dicemus oram, Epiphani primum exquisitam.*

<sup>50</sup> 'Demetrius and Arabia fragment' (BM 34433); van der Spek and Finkel (no date).

<sup>51</sup> Potts (1978) 29.

<sup>52</sup> Potts (1978) 31.

<sup>53</sup> Potts (1978) 31.

<sup>54</sup> Potts (1978) 29–32.

<sup>55</sup> In the third millennium, Mesopotamian engagement with the Gulf was dominated by a mercantile relationship with the revered 'Dilmun' entity (Bahrain, Failaka and possibly more), which marketed goods of Makkan and Meluhha to Sumer and Akkad; on Bronze

Age Failaka, see Calvet (2005).

<sup>56</sup> For a general discussion, see Reade (1986); Potts (2009).

<sup>57</sup> Dalley (2009) 3–4. On the Dilmun archipelago: for textual evidence of Failaka as a constituent part of Dilmun, see Glassner (2008) 171. Archaeologically, the foundation of a settlement on Failaka by Dilmun apparently dates to the early second millennium, soon after the island rose up from the waters of the Gulf. From the mid-second millennium, the material culture on Failaka is markedly Kassite, and remains so until the end of the second millennium; see Potts (2009) 34–35.

<sup>58</sup> Brinkman (1993); Potts (2006) 115–16.

<sup>59</sup> Brinkman (1968) 149–51; Potts (2009) 35.

<sup>60</sup> Oates (1986); Potts (2009) 36–37.



of Nebuchadnezzar II on Failaka<sup>61</sup> and to a *bēl pīhāti Dilmun*, the ‘administrator of the province of Dilmun’, during Nabonidus’ sojourn at the Teima Oasis (550s to 540s BC).<sup>62</sup> Herodotus 3.93 indicates not only a limited Achaemenid control of the Gulf islands, which are collectively grouped into the 14th satrapy, but also a royal-sponsored colonizing policy.<sup>63</sup> The Achaemenid-influenced art from Qalat al-Bahrain has led Potts to suggest the presence of a governor or full satrap on the island.<sup>64</sup> Alexander does not seem to have directly controlled the Gulf islands. In the Common Era, as we have seen, the Kingdom of Characene appointed a satrap over the Thilouanoi.<sup>65</sup> A Sasanid presence is well attested from the time of Ardašīr I’s vigorous efforts to establish control of the Gulf through colonial and military foundations.<sup>66</sup>

In the *longue durée*, therefore, the islands of the Arab-Persian Gulf were governed for long periods by officials of the landed power dominant in southern Mesopotamia. Naturally, there had been compressions and expansions of state power, abatements and intensifications of imperial reach. Accordingly, the new Bahrain inscription confirms that Seleucid and early Characene activities in the Gulf followed a logic that had been observed for centuries. Kephisodoros was fulfilling a role functionally equivalent to the Kassite, Neo-Babylonian and perhaps Achaemenid governors. Moreover, the district over which Kephisodoros was appointed, ‘Tylos and the Islands’, forms not only a logical and natural administrative unit<sup>67</sup> but also the key to maintaining domination of Gulf navigation and trade. I would suggest that Kephisodoros’ administrative archipelago included the main body of islands of the Gulf’s Arabian side (Bahrain, Failaka and perhaps Tārūt), which, for the most part, share a numismatic and ceramic profile in this period. In broad outline, then, ‘Tylos and the Islands’ would be a Seleucid equivalent, historically and linguistically, to the storied Bronze Age archipelago of Dilmun.<sup>68</sup>

This is important for an understanding of the space of the Seleucid Empire. Various sources represent Seleucid power as co-terminous with the continental land-mass. For example, the marriage alliance of Seleukos Nikator and Demetrios Poliorketes at Rhosos in the Bay of Issos, where Demetrios was entertained on land in camp and Seleukos was hosted on Demetrios’ ship, established the Asian continent as the domain of Seleukos and the eastern Mediterranean as the pond of Demetrios.<sup>69</sup> A later Seleucid-Antigonid marriage alliance confirmed this, when Rhodian intermediaries carried Laodike V to Perseus.<sup>70</sup> The *periplous* of Patrokles, in which he claimed that one could sail from the Caspian ‘Gulf’ to India, bounded the Seleucid Empire with ocean.<sup>71</sup> The Seleucids showed no major or sustained interest in the islands of the Aegean. Moreover, it appears that in a co-evolutionary process, the Ptolemaic monarchy developed a maritime identity in counterpoint to its landed neighbour.<sup>72</sup> As befits a continental power, all known Seleucid administrative units were landed, bounded and contiguous. Although the

<sup>61</sup> Ferrara (1975).

<sup>62</sup> Potts (2009) 37.

<sup>63</sup> Briant (2002) 758, 1028–29. On the trading patterns of the Achaemenid-period Gulf, see Salles (1996) 255–57.

<sup>64</sup> Potts (2009) 38.

<sup>65</sup> See n.4.

<sup>66</sup> Whitehouse and Williamson (1973); Kervran et al. (2005) 246–52.

<sup>67</sup> For an examination of the dynamics of the archipelagic units of a large island and its smaller neighbours in the Aegean, see Constantakopoulou (2007) 176–227.

<sup>68</sup> On the geography and toponymy of Dilmun, see Howard-Carter (1987) 114–15; Glassner (1996). For the likely derivation of Greek *Tylos* from Babylonian *TLMN* (Dilmun), see Salles (1999) 146. As the

bilingual Graeco-Babyloniaca tablets attest, Late Akkadian –m– was pronounced –w–.

<sup>69</sup> Plut. *Demetr.* 32.2.

<sup>70</sup> Polyb. 25.4.9–10.

<sup>71</sup> *BNJ* 712; for discussion of Patrokles’ voyage and geographical claims, see Neumann (1884).

<sup>72</sup> For example, the Gurob Papyrus of the Third Syrian War (*BNJ* 160); Theocritus 17. The anthropologist Gregory Bateson (1935) calls such processes ‘complementary schismogenesis’: a competition by contradiction, in which each side organizes itself as the inverse of the other (for example class struggle). Ancient Athens and Sparta or modern Tel Aviv and Jerusalem would be other examples of interdependent and complimentary opposition; see Sahlins (2004) 69–82.

Seleucids held brief control of certain Mediterranean islands – Lemnos, gifted to Athens following its capture by Seleukos I,<sup>73</sup> Cyprus, returned by Antiochos IV soon after its betrayal by Ptolemy Makron;<sup>74</sup> Arados, granted autonomy in the mid-third century and fully integrated into a coastal peraea;<sup>75</sup> Antioch-in-the-Propontis, of which nothing is known besides its name<sup>76</sup> – they made no pretensions to maritime sovereignty. ‘Tylos and the Islands’ would, therefore, be a unique example of Seleucid nesiotic space. Distance, of course, works differently at sea, where a constellation of ‘isolated’ points can be more closely integrated by naval means than contiguous continental districts.<sup>77</sup> Numenius of Mesene could make his power felt in Oman. The islands of the Gulf were not a resource, an adjunct to the more accessible mainland landscape, a place into which expansion could take place at peculiarly felicitous moments; the extended archipelago formed the interconnected hub of a system of trade, enterprise and control. Moreover, the interpenetration of nesiotic and land spaces is witnessed in the importance of the coastal wetlands of Mesene and the navigable Tigris river: Antiochos III sailed from Tylos to Seleucia-on-the-Tigris. No island is an island.<sup>78</sup> At the Gulf, Seleucid sovereignty spilled out into the sea.

## II. Hypsaosines and Characene

The new inscription from Bahrain is most directly evidence for Characenian not Seleucid control of Tylos and the islands, during the reign of Hypsaosines. It provides unique information on the administrative organization of the newly independent kingdom and on the cultural forms by which this was expressed. I hope to demonstrate in this section that the inscription traces the transformation of a powerful, vassal satrap into an independent monarch.

The career of King Hypsaosines, honoured by Kephisodoros in/with the inscription, is known in broad outline thanks to the work of Alfred Bellinger, Sheldon Nodelman and most recently Monika Schuol.<sup>79</sup> Pliny the Elder preserves (only to contradict) Juba’s statement that *Spaosines Sagdodonaci filius* had been appointed satrap of Characene by Antiochos IV (presumably in the early 160s).<sup>80</sup> Hypsaosines was appointed over the province of the Erythraean Sea<sup>81</sup> and was thus a successor to the Numenius we have already encountered. It is not clear when this administrative district was established.<sup>82</sup> The *terminus ante quem* is 221, when the region, under the control of the *eparchos* Pythiades, is mentioned during Molon’s revolt.<sup>83</sup> After his defeat of Molon in the following year, Antiochos III set up Tychon as στρατηγὸν ἐπὶ τοὺς κατὰ τὴν Ἐρυθρὰν θάλατταν τόπους.<sup>84</sup> The change in administrative title may indicate the promotion of the region out of former subordination to another *strategia*. In any case, this ‘region of the

<sup>73</sup> Phylarchus *FGrH* 81 F11 = Ath. 6.251c.

<sup>74</sup> Polyb. 27.13, 29.27.9–10; 2 *Macc.* 10.12–13. Note that Demetrios I tried to buy the island from its Ptolemaic governor Archias for 500 talents, but the plot was detected (Polyb. 33.5).

<sup>75</sup> Arados extracted concessions, among them the striking of its own coinage in 243/242, when Seleukos II needed their fleet at the height of the Third Syrian War. Arados and the Aradian peraea used a local chronological era, beginning in 259. See Seyrig (1951) 206–20; Grainger (1990) 144–48; Duyrat (2005) 223–65.

<sup>76</sup> Pliny *HN* 5.32.151; *Tab. Peut.* 11.1. Cohen (1995) 131 proposes as founder either Antiochos I or Antiochos II.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Marx (1977) 33 on Bedouin space in the southern Sinai peninsula: ‘The tribe claims not so much to control a clearly bounded territory, but defined points in it and paths leading through it. When asked to

describe their tribal territory, Bedouin present one with a list of salient points, such as oases, wells and pastures, but there is much disagreement between their statements about boundaries and considerable overlap between tribes’.

<sup>78</sup> Ginzburg (2000).

<sup>79</sup> Bellinger (1942); Nodelman (1960); Schuol (2000).

<sup>80</sup> Pliny *HN* 6.27.139. Bellinger (1942) 55 suggests that Pliny’s difficulty with Juba’s statement came from his knowledge that Hypsaosines had been an independent king.

<sup>81</sup> Ps.-Lucian *Longaevi* 16: Ὑσπανσίης δὲ ὁ Χάρηκος καὶ τῶν κατ’ Ἐρυθρὰν θάλασσαν τόπων βασιλεὺς πέντε καὶ ὀγδοήκοντα ἐτῶν νοσήσας ἐτελεύτησεν.

<sup>82</sup> See Le Rider (1965).

<sup>83</sup> Polyb. 5.46.7.

<sup>84</sup> Polyb. 5.54.12.

Erythraean Sea' is precisely the district over which Hypsaosines later reigned;<sup>85</sup> the same continuity of bureaucratic language can be detected in the Bahrain inscription. At some point during his exceptionally long life Hypsaosines declared his sovereign independence from the Seleucid house and adopted the royal title, no doubt taking advantage of the mid-second-century disintegration of the ties of regional command in the trans-Euphratene provinces of the Seleucid Empire. Presumably, the renaming of Antioch-Charax as Spasinou-Charax was a foundational act of independent monarchy. The most probable time is the aftermath of Antiochos VII's disastrous *anabasis* in 129, but the *terminus ante quem* is a couple of years later, in the dating formula of a cuneiform tablet of 127/126, where he appears as <sup>1</sup>*As-pa-si-né-e-* lugal, 'Hypsaosines the king'.<sup>86</sup> Dated silver coinage in his name first appeared in 125/124.<sup>87</sup> Hypsaosines himself died in June 124, having lived to the ripe old age of 85, according to Ps.-Lucian.<sup>88</sup> Since Hypsaosines has the *basileus* title in the inscription, it belongs to the short period of independent kingship at the end of his life.<sup>89</sup> To continue the macrohistorical comparisons of the previous section, the emergence of the Kingdom of Characene under a former Seleucid official and its dominance of the Gulf during a period of Seleucid decline from Parthian attack strongly parallels the establishment of the Second Dynasty of Sealand by the former Kassite military official Simbar-Šipak during Kassite decline from Elamite attack.<sup>90</sup> In both situations, the withdrawal of imperial reach from southern Mesopotamia encouraged the 'gateway' region of Mesene to extend itself into the administrative vacuum. Although the Hellenistic settlement at Failaka shows evidence of decline under the satrapal and then monarchic rule of Hypsaosines, early Characenean coinage and terracotta figurines found on the island indicate that it was still in use as a military post or waystation.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, Salles suggests that the so-called BI-ware, found on Failaka, Bahrain, ed-Dur and Tārūt from the mid-second century, forms a coherent ceramic group originating from the Spasinou-Charax kingdom:<sup>92</sup> this could well be the ceramic marker of the Characenean province of 'Tylos and the Islands'.

The strongly Hellenizing tendency of the new inscription has already been noted. The language, content, form of dedication, deities honoured and fact of the inscription are markedly and consciously Greek. The inscription shares this with early Characenean coinage. In all Hypsaosines' silver and bronze coinage he is represented in Greek-style portrait, bare-headed, diademed and clean-shaven.<sup>93</sup> The reverse types bear Hellenic deities, such as Artemis, Athena, Zeus' thunderbolt and Herakles, and the legend is written in Greek. Some coins bear the date according to the Seleucid Era. Even official Seleucid symbols, such as the anchor, are used.<sup>94</sup> The key point is that Hypsaosines represented himself on his coinage as a legitimate *Seleucid* monarch. Cuneiform evidence supports this interpretation. After the Parthian occupation of Babylon in 141, the Arsacid Era had joined the Seleucid Era in the standard dating formula for tablets. Under Hypsaosines' control, Babylon resumed dating by the Seleucid Era alone, not even using the new king's regnal year.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, an astronomical diary for 124 BC reports that Hypsaosines sent a parchment letter addressed 'to the *epistates* of Babylon and to the *politai* who

<sup>85</sup> See n.81.

<sup>86</sup> For full discussion of Hypsaosines' adoption of the royal title, see Schuol (2000) 291–96.

<sup>87</sup> Schuol (2000) 219–20; Gatier et al. (2002) 224, following Le Rider (1959) 231–33.

<sup>88</sup> Note that the cuneiform diary AD -123 A Obv. 18, like *Longaevi* 16, reports the king's death from illness; see n.81.

<sup>89</sup> Gatier et al. (2002) 225.

<sup>90</sup> Brinkman (1968) 150–51.

<sup>91</sup> Potts (1988) 138–40; Mathieson (1982) 36

proposes that Failaka formed part of Hypsaosines' kingdom; *pace* Boucharlat and Salles (1987) 297–99.

<sup>92</sup> Salles (1990).

<sup>93</sup> Le Rider (1959) 230–33.

<sup>94</sup> Le Rider (1959) 231.

<sup>95</sup> Nodelman (1960) 89. The degree of centralized direction of dating formulae is unclear. However, Hypsaosines' sponsorship of the Esagil temple and Marduk cult (as his Seleucid predecessors had done) points to a co-operative relationship between priesthood and king.

are in Babylon' (*ana muh-hi lúpa-hat e.ki u lúpu-li-te-e šá ina e.ki*).<sup>96</sup> This letter, reporting his victory over the Elamites, was read in the *bīt tāmartu* ('house of observation'), i.e. the theatre of Babylon, to the assembled Greek citizenry.<sup>97</sup> Clearly, the letter was written in Greek: it was on parchment, addressed to the governor and colonial population in a standard opening formula, and read in the theatre. The Astronomical Diary, therefore, records an Akkadian translation.<sup>98</sup> The letter demonstrates the close relationship between Hyspaosines and the formerly Seleucid colonial population of Babylon, Hyspaosines' adoption of an *epistolographeion* with its associated chancery style and the new king's aping of traditional Seleucid monarchy. It may also be significant that Hyspaosines gave one of his sons the good Greek name Timotheos.<sup>99</sup> Such fervent Hellenizing is all the more striking given Hyspaosines' east Iranian background.<sup>100</sup>

The new inscription from Bahrain is, therefore, entirely consistent with and constituent of early Characene royal ideology, characterized by a continuation of the forms, language and administration of Seleucid governance. As we have seen, it is almost certain that Kephisodoros' administrative district was a continuation of an earlier Seleucid command: Antiochos III visited the island; the Seleucid *strategos* Numenius campaigned far beyond it at the Straits of Hormuz; the title and terminology are typically Seleucid; Hyspaosines had functioned as a Seleucid governor for the greater part of his career, we hear nowhere of his expansion into the Gulf, and evidence abounds for his busy involvement against Parthian and Elamite forces on the mainland.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, it is likely that Hyspaosines' emancipation did not involve a change of administrative personnel and possible that Kephisodoros started his career as a Seleucid official.<sup>102</sup> The new inscription, together with the evidence assembled above, suggests that the legitimacy of the usurper monarch of Charax depended to some degree on the deliberate and manifest preservation of Seleucid provincial boundaries, governing structures and administrative personnel, and on close links with the Hellenic colonial population. Even the renaming of Charax was patterned on the onomastic practices of the Seleucids.<sup>103</sup> The on-the-ground difference between Hyspaosines-the-satrap and Hyspaosines-the-king may not have been major. The only possible transformation attested by the inscription was the general upgrading of administrative titles. The promotion of the Erythraean Sea district from a satrapy governed by *strategos* Hyspaosines to a kingdom ruled by *basileus* Hyspaosines may have raised with it a *hyparchos* or *eparchos* of 'Tylos and the Islands' to the level of *strategos*.<sup>104</sup> We see a similar process – the

<sup>96</sup> AD -124 B Rev. 17–19.

<sup>97</sup> On the relationship between the theatre at Babylon and the Greek colonial community, see Potts (2011). On the identification of the *bīt tāmartu* (Sumerian *é.igi.du<sup>mes</sup>*), see van der Spek (2001).

<sup>98</sup> The letter's word-order in the Diary, particularly the lowering of the first-person verb to the end of each sentence, points to the Greek original and perhaps the Hellenistic royal epistolary style.

<sup>99</sup> AD -124 B Obv. 5: <sup>1</sup>*Ti-i'-mu-ú-tu-su a šá<sup>1</sup>As-pa-si-né-e*. The Greek interpretation of the name was first proposed by Debevoise (1938) 39 and has been accepted subsequently.

<sup>100</sup> Hyspaosines was son of Sogdodonakos (perhaps implying a Sogdian connection). A Bactrian namesake dedicated a statue of a Hyrcanian hound and forepart of a lion on Delos: Ὑσπασίνου Μιθροάξου Βατρικανοῦ (*I Délos* 442). His name derives from Old Persian \**Vispa-čanah-* or *Aspa-čanah-*; see Schul (2000) 291, n.495.

<sup>101</sup> See Schul (2000) 291–300 for a reconstruction of Hyspaosines' rule.

<sup>102</sup> Kephisodoros is named after one of the Kephisos rivers of Attica, Phocis, Boeotia, Scyros or the Argolid (*RE s.v.* Kephisos). None is known from Asia. As Thonemann (2006) shows, such potamonyms, naturally enough, are used by inhabitants from near the river in question. So, the geographical specificity of the *strategos*' name shows that he belonged to a colonial family originally or recently from mainland Greece rather than to a Hellenized Near Eastern one. It is worth raising the possibility (it is nothing more) that, since the Seleucid officer Soteles attested in inscriptions from Failaka was an Athenian colonist (Gatier (2007)) and if the Kephisos of the potamonym was the Attic, then our *strategos* may well have descended from an Athenian diaspora settled in the Gulf under Seleukos I.

<sup>103</sup> Pliny *HN* 6.27.139.

<sup>104</sup> Suggestion of anonymous reviewer. Each of these offices is attested from the Seleucid Empire, but the territorial and administrative subdivisions of Seleucid satrapies are not well known and do not seem to have been standardized; see Capdetrey (2007) 257–64.

subdivision of an emancipated province's territory according to the Seleucid model – in independent Graeco-Bactria, where sub-satrapal districts of Seleucid Bactria were elevated into satrapies of Diodotid and Euthydemid Bactria.<sup>105</sup>

Laurent Capdetrey has demonstrated the existence of satrapal courts, based on a form of *philia*, which allowed the satrap to establish an independent power-base when royal authority found itself weakened in a process of peaceful and gradual emancipation.<sup>106</sup> Just as Diodotos I and II in Baktria inscribed themselves plainly in a Seleucid tradition and progressively substituted themselves in the place of the figure of the king,<sup>107</sup> so at Charax the image of Seleucid monarchy was not effaced but adopted. Indeed, the use of Euthydemos' seated Herakles reverse type on Hyspaosines' tetradrachms<sup>108</sup> may mean, not that he was the king of Baktria's grandson,<sup>109</sup> but that he established, as an independent and recognized king, an anti-Parthian alliance with the legitimate Seleucid monarch, just as Antiochos III and Euthydemos had made against the nomadic threat.<sup>110</sup> The Hellenizing aspects of Hyspaosines' legitimacy are in marked contrast to the Iranianization of the power and image of, for example, the dynast-satrap of Parthia Andragoras<sup>111</sup> and the later Characene Kingdom. We need only contrast 'Kephisodoros, *strategos* of Tylos and the Islands' with the 'Yarhai, satrap of the Thilouanoi'<sup>112</sup> known from second-century AD Palmyra to observe the orientalizing of the language of power and personnel in the Kingdom of Characene in the two and a half centuries between Hyspaosines and Mithridates. As a more general point, if the emergence of Hyspaosines' personal power is evidence of the weakness of the Seleucid centre and its inability to respond to menacing threats on the frontiers of Mesopotamia, the modalities of separation underline the successful penetration of the Seleucid royal image and imperial discourse in this region.

### III. Religion

The dedication of a *naos* to the Dioskouroi Saviours 'on behalf of' King Hyspaosines and his wife Queen Thalassia was both a political declaration of loyalty and a pious act of devotion. The *naos* has not been located (the inscribed limestone block was reused), but the editors naturally suggest a location near the Shakhoura necropolis, perhaps Qalat al-Bahrain itself.<sup>113</sup> Nothing is known of its dimensions or architecture, but we should probably not imagine anything substantial. In this final section of the paper I will examine, first, the language of Kephisodoros' dedication and, second, the gods he decided to honour.

The new Bahrain inscription is a dedicatory text in six lines, short and balanced. The first two lines indicate on whose behalf the dedication is being made (ὕπερ βασιλέως Ὑσπασίνου | καὶ βασιλίσσης Θαλασσίας), the next line describes the actual dedication (τὸν ναὸν Διοσκόροισι σωτήρσι) and the following two lines identify by name and post the dedicator (Κη[φισό]δωρος στρατηγός | Τύλου καὶ τῶν νήσων). The order of this tripartite structure, foregrounding the royal recipients, is consistent throughout the Hellenistic world. Likewise, the formula ὑπερ βασιλέως X καὶ βασιλίσσης Y is standard in all Hellenistic kingdoms,<sup>114</sup> and reflects the ideological impor-

<sup>105</sup> Strabo 11.11.2; see Coloru (2009) 265–66.

<sup>106</sup> Capdetrey (2007) 286.

<sup>107</sup> For the emancipation of Diodotus, see Holt (1999) 48–66, 94–106; Capdetrey (2007) 124–26.

<sup>108</sup> Nodelman (1960) 90.

<sup>109</sup> A suggestion of Nodelman (1960) 86. There is no evidence for this beyond the numismatic borrowing.

<sup>110</sup> Polybius 11.34.

<sup>111</sup> Capdetrey (2007) 126–29.

<sup>112</sup> See n.4.

<sup>113</sup> Gatier et al. (2002) 226. It is certain that the *naos* was located on Tylos-Bahrain: Kephisodoros

headed the administrative district centred on Bahrain ('Tylos and the Islands'); the inscription was found on the island; and such dedications to deities were always located upon or beside the altar/sanctuary in question (for comparison, see the Lycian example below or the altar erected on behalf of Theocrydes at Failaka (*IK Estremo Oriente* 419)).

<sup>114</sup> For example Egypt: *SEG* 20.142; *Fayoum* 2.108; *Delta* 1.414.3; Macedon: *SEG* 41.54. For a discussion of the formula in the Ptolemaic Kingdom, see Iossif (2005), although the Pharaonic associations, of course, do not apply in the Gulf.



tance of perceiving the royal couple as a unit. In other cases, the king may be honoured with another member of his family, most frequently his son(s), to indicate the determined vertical succession of dynastic power.<sup>115</sup> Two other royal-couple dedications, both recording the emancipation of slaves, are known from the trans-Euphratene Hellenistic world, from Susa and Hyrkania. At Susa, the king and queen are unnamed, but can be identified as Demetrios II and Kleopatra Thea by the dating formula.<sup>116</sup> In Hyrkania, the slave Hermaios was emancipated and attached to a temple of Sarapis ὑπὲρ βασιλέως Ἀντιόχου καὶ βασιλίσσης Στρατονίκης καὶ ἐγγόνων.<sup>117</sup>

What is the cultural or religious force of the opening ὑπέρ? It emphasizes that the dedication (a temple, a slave, cultic utensils) is not directed to the monarch but on his behalf. The dedications are not examples of ruler cult or deification. Dedications by synagogue officials ὑπὲρ Ptolemaic monarchs<sup>118</sup> or the occasional inclusion of the dedicator's own family in the ὑπέρ clause<sup>119</sup> confirm this. Dedications to deified royals use the dative case. Rather, the ὑπέρ clause is an appeal for the physical well-being of the royal couple. Sometimes this is explicitly spelt out (for example ὑπὲρ βασιλέως Ἀντιγόνου καὶ βασιλίσσης Φίλας ὑγείας καὶ σωτηρίας,<sup>120</sup> ὑπὲρ βασιλέως καὶ βασιλίσσης σωτηρίας<sup>121</sup>), but the epithet of the Dioskouroi in our inscription makes this unnecessary. Exactly this kind of prayer was offered in the Jerusalem temple. In 1 *Maccabees*, the priests and elders of Jerusalem try to conciliate Nikanor by showing that they sacrificed in the temple ὑπὲρ βασιλέως.<sup>122</sup> Similar prayers had been offered on behalf of the Achaemenid kings.<sup>123</sup>

The construction and dedication of altars, sanctuaries, shrines or temples on behalf of Hellenistic royalty is not unusual. For example, in Lycia an altar and *naos* were dedicated to Artemis on behalf of Ptolemy Epiphanes, his son and his wife.<sup>124</sup> Geographically the closest parallel is not, in fact, a Greek inscription. A cuneiform foundation cylinder from Uruk records that the city's governor, the double-named Anu-uballit-Nikarchos, built and dedicated the enormous Rēš sanctuary 'to the lives' of Antiochos II and Seleukos II.<sup>125</sup> That many such dedicators held official posts in the royal administration (*oikonomos*, *strategos*, *šaknu*, *syngenes*, *hipparchos*, etc.) suggests that this dedicatory praxis was embedded in the economy of employment and patronage as an act of obeisance and demonstration of loyalty. This does not undercut the sincerity of the pious act.

The language and form of Kephisodoros' dedication is thus entirely standard for élite administrators' temple dedications on behalf of the spiritual and physical well-being of their royal employers. With respect to this inscription at least, Bahrain belongs firmly in the religious *koine* of the Hellenistic kingdoms.

Characene's wealth and prolonged political independence were founded on its status as a gateway community, a point of intersection between two arterial pyramids. Mesene, where the Shatt el-Arab debouches into the Gulf, served as the point of entry to the Fertile Crescent for Arabian and Indian goods. The coins of Hyspaosines' successor, Apodokos, bear a ship's prow on the reverse, underlining the recognized maritime identity of the state.<sup>126</sup> As *strategos* of the nesiotic district of a naval kingdom, Kephisodoros' honouring of the Dioskouroi makes good sense. Castor and Polydeukes were popular among sailors as rescuers from danger at sea,<sup>127</sup>

<sup>115</sup> For example brother: *I Délos* 1561; son: *TAM* 2.263; *Delta* I.749.13.

<sup>116</sup> *IK Estremo Oriente* 197 = *CRAI* 1932.278.3.

<sup>117</sup> *IK Estremo Oriente* 280 = *SEG* 20.325.

<sup>118</sup> For example *Fayoum* 1.9; *Delta* I.414.3.

<sup>119</sup> For example *Fayoum* 2.203.

<sup>120</sup> *SEG* 41.54.

<sup>121</sup> *IK Estremo Oriente* 197 = *CRAI* 1932.278.3.

<sup>122</sup> 1 *Macc.* 7.33.

<sup>123</sup> *Ezra* 6.10.

<sup>124</sup> *TAM* II.263.

<sup>125</sup> *YOS* 1.52 (*a-na bul-ṭa ša ʿAn-ti-ʿi-ku-su u ʿSi-lu-ku lugal*<sup>mes</sup>).

<sup>126</sup> Le Rider (1959) 233. The ship is a military, not a trade, vessel, confirming the existence of a Characenean Gulf fleet.

<sup>127</sup> Burkert (1985) 213.

hence their epithet in this inscription (Διοσκόροις σωτήρησι). Their identification with St Elmo's fire is well known. The twins were also connected to military communities: they invented the war-dance and were associated with the corporate body of young men able to bear arms.<sup>128</sup> The Dioskouroi are, therefore, eminently suitable deities for veneration by the head of a garrison outpost of an island district. Moreover, the cultural associations of the Dioskouroi may make sense for Hypsaosines as well. The cult of the Dioskouroi had been diffused through the Orient under Seleucid patronage and to the end of the Hellenistic period, their cult retained 'un caractère officiel, royal, gréco-macédonien'.<sup>129</sup> Their worship in the east Iranian world, where they may have been syncretized with the Indo-Iranian Aśvin twins, may have made them an appealing choice to honour Hypsaosines, son of Sogdodonakos.<sup>130</sup>

In light of the strongly expressed maritime identity of both the Characene kingdom and Kephisodoros' religious expression, it is striking that King Hypsaosines is married to a Queen Thalassia. As the editors of the inscription observe, although numerous examples of the masculine names Thalassios or Thalassis are found, the feminine name is extremely rare, otherwise attested only during the Roman period for slaves.<sup>131</sup> In an Astronomical Diary, this queen, in conflict with the leading citizens of Babylon, appears as *Talasi'asu*.<sup>132</sup> It is tempting to attribute the unusual feminine name to the influence of Babylonian religion, in which the salt-water sea (the Gulf) was personified as the female deity Tiāmat,<sup>133</sup> although it is perhaps too far-fetched to imagine behind Hypsaosines-Thalassia a marriage of Characene to the sea of the Venetian type.

When the new inscription is combined with the epigraphic and archaeological evidence of cult practice from the Ikaros garrison, a distinctive religious world emerges for the Hellenistic Gulf, in terms of the deities worshipped and the cult landscape. Particular gods, and associated rites, were believed to reduce the notorious dangers of sea travel. Their propitiation in *embateria* and *apobateria* rituals is widely attested. Most famously, Thucydides 6.32 gives a detailed picture of the departure of the Athenian navy on the Sicilian expedition, including pious silence, vows, libations and a paean. Vases depict sailors tossing garlands into the sea as their ships depart.<sup>134</sup> The colonial population in the Hellenistic Gulf venerated a coherent set of deities closely associated with maritime safety. Our inscription honours the Dioskouroi on Tylos. Although the twins are not known to have been honoured on Ikaros, inscriptions record devotion to the triad Zeus Soter, Artemis Soteira and Poseidon at Tell Khazneh,<sup>135</sup> to Soteira and Soter in front of Temple A,<sup>136</sup> to Poseidon Asphaleios ('Securer') within the fortress<sup>137</sup> and to Artemis at the seaside sanctuary.<sup>138</sup> A stone dolphin has been found in a domestic context on Ikaros, perhaps to be associated with Poseidon.<sup>139</sup> Zeus was protector of travellers and Artemis was the patroness of sailors who navigate by the stars and moon.<sup>140</sup> The emphasis on divine salvation in these inscriptions echoes that characteristic of the Dioskouroi on Bahrain, and points to the populations' shared milieu of maritime concerns. Following his victory at the Straits of Hormuz, Numenius, governor of Mesene, dedicated a double-trophy to Zeus and Poseidon (Jupiter and Neptune).<sup>141</sup> According to Arrian, Alexander sacrificed for the safety of Nearchos' fleet to Zeus Soter, Herakles, Apollo, Poseidon and 'all the gods of the sea'.<sup>142</sup> We can add the mountain,

<sup>128</sup> Burkert (1985) 212.

<sup>129</sup> Augé and de Bellefonds (1986) 596.

<sup>130</sup> They appear most frequently on Seleucid coins struck in Iran and on the coins of the Baktrian kings: Augé and de Bellefonds (1986) 596.

<sup>131</sup> Gatier et al. (2002) 232, n.13.

<sup>132</sup> Gatier et al. (2002) 225.

<sup>133</sup> The Thalassa-Tiāmat identification had already been made by Berossos (*BNJ* 680 F1b = *Sync. Chron.* p. 49.6).

<sup>134</sup> Burkert (1985) 266.

<sup>135</sup> *IK Estremo Oriente* 416; Roueché and Sherwin-White (1985) 4.

<sup>136</sup> *IK Estremo Oriente* 422; Roueché and Sherwin-White (1985) 13–39.

<sup>137</sup> *IK Estremo Oriente* 418; Marcillet-Jaubert (1990a).

<sup>138</sup> *IK Estremo Oriente* 419; Potts (1990) 165.

<sup>139</sup> Gachet and Salles (1990).

<sup>140</sup> Connelly (1989) 158.

<sup>141</sup> Pliny *HN* 6.28.152.

<sup>142</sup> *Arr. Ind.* 36.3.

sacred to Poseidon, located by Pliny on Aracha (Kharg island), and its late Hellenistic temple.<sup>143</sup> It should be observed that the colonial communities honoured traditional Hellenic maritime deities.<sup>144</sup> The cult of the Dioskouroi attested in the new inscription easily concatenates with the Hellenistic Gulf's religion of the sea. The careful excavation of three temples on Failaka, two within the fortified enclosure and one at the water's edge, has underlined the religiosity of the colonial, garrisoning community. The modest scale and hybrid architecture of these temples perhaps gives some clue to Kephisodoros' *naos*.

Scholars of religion have long examined the way patterns of worship express and reproduce features of the landscape. P. Horden and N. Purcell have demonstrated the characteristic marking as sacred of particular features of the sea-voyage, 'especially those coastal havens, springs or landmarks that are most significant to the business of navigation'.<sup>145</sup> The religious geography of the Hellenistic Gulf seems mapped onto a network of communication and control. The *naos* of the Dioskouroi on Bahrain, the various temples on Failaka, the double-trophy at Ras Musandam and the sacred mountain on Kharg sacralize the nesiotic space. The new Bahrain inscription is a constituent point of the cultic topography, punctuating the landscape and articulating the network of *îles de navigateurs*.<sup>146</sup> Like Numenius' double-trophy and the Artemis temple, it is possible that Kephisodoros' *naos* was a fringe cult at the water's edge, expressing the difficult zone of transmission between land and sea.<sup>147</sup>

#### IV. Conclusion

These five-and-a-half lines of lightly incised Greek bring to light the imperial and religious worlds out of which such an inscription could emerge and in which it could be socially meaningful: specifically, the administrative organization of the Hellenistic Gulf, the presence of a Seleucid and Characenic garrison settlement on Bahrain and the establishment of Hellenic cult on the island; generally, the reach of Seleucid power in the region, the modalities of Characenic emancipation and the Hellenistic Gulf's religious network. Above all, the inscription attests the structural and cultural continuities both in the transition from Achaemenid to Seleucid to Characenic dominance and in the Gulf's wider history.

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<sup>143</sup> Pliny *HN* 6.25.111 speaks of the island of Aracha in the Persian Gulf, *cum monte praealto Neptuno sacra*. Steve (2003) 18–19 identifies this with the sanctuaries on Kharg island. See also Boucharlat and Salles (1981) 70–71.

<sup>144</sup> The dedications to Nabû on Bahrain and Failaka are in Aramaic; presumably they were offered by the Babylonian or non-Greek population.

<sup>145</sup> Horden and Purcell (2000) 440.

<sup>146</sup> The marine sanctuaries and sailors' dedications of the islands of Kasos, Saros, Kalche and Telos, near Rhodes, make an interesting comparison for navigational religion; see Susini (1963–1964).

<sup>147</sup> For cults of the 'perilous environment', see Horden and Purcell (2000) 411–14.

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