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**‘The Dear Son of a Bull’:**

**Some Remarks on the Interpretation of the So-Called Phaennis’ Oracle (Paus. 10.15.3)**

This paper is concerned with the problem of interpretation of the so-called “Oracle of Phaennis”, cited by Pausanias in his *“Description of Greece”* (10.15.3):

“ἦ τότ᾽ ἀμειψάμενος στεινὸν πόρον Ἑλλησπόντου

αὐδήσει Γαλατῶν ὀλοὸς στρατός, οἵ ῥ᾽ ἀθεμίστως

Ἀσίδα πορθήσουσι: θεὸς δ᾽ ἔτι κύντερα θήσει

πάγχυ μάλ᾽, οἳ ναίουσι παρ᾽ ἠϊόνεσσι θαλάσσης –

εἰς ὀλίγον: τάχα γάρ σφιν ἀοσσητῆρα Κρονίων

ὁρμήσει, ταύροιο διοτρεφέος φίλον υἱόν,

ὃς πᾶσιν Γαλάτῃσιν ὀλέθριον ἦμαρ ἐφήσει.”

παῖδα δὲ εἶπε ταύρου τὸν ἐν Περγάμῳ βασιλεύσαντα Ἄτταλον: τὸν δὲ αὐτὸν τοῦτον καὶ ταυρόκερων προσείρηκε χρηστήριον.

This text may be related to a group of oracles associated with the Galatian invasion (e.g. Kallim. *Hymn*. 4; Plut. *De sera num. vind*. 7; Iust. 24.7.6f.; cf. Paus. 10.23.12; Diod. 22.9.5; Zosim. 2.36f. etc.). The prophecy ‘predicts’ the arrival of the Galatians in Asia and the disasters that it will bring ‘... to those who dwell by the shores of the sea …’. However, soon ‘the son of Chronos shall raise them a helper, the dear son of a bull reared by Zeus, who on all the Galatians shall bring a day of destruction’. Since the first part of the ‘prophecy’ refers to very specific historical events (the Galatian invasion of Asia), it seems to be important to ask: who is the historical prototype of the mysterious ‘dear son of a bull’ (ταύροιο … φίλον υἱόν)? Anticipating this, Pausanias gives his own explanation for these words: ‘By the son of a bull she (Phaennis – *E.B.*) meant Attalos, king of Pergamon, who was also styled bull-horned (ταυρόκερων) by an (another) oracle.’

The Galatians crossed over to Asia in the winter of 278/7 BC, but Attalos I defeated them only after his coming to power in Pergamon c. 241 BC or even later. A gap of almost 40 years is hardly compatible with the indication ‘soon’ (τάχα). Another ‘prophecy’ attributed to Phaennis (Zosim. 2.36f.) also refers to the early period of the Galatian invasion and their raids in Anatolia. It suggests that the oracle in Pausanias may be related to the same time and has nothing to do with Attalos. Moreover, ‘the son of a bull’ is not the same as bull-horned (ταυρόκερων). Finally, in another episode, Pausanias reports that ‘Phaennis was born when Antiochos was establishing his kingship immediately after the capture of Demetrios’ (10.12.10).

This reference to the reign of Antiochos (I) seems, at first sight, taken out of context, but is actually pointing to a solution for our problem with Paus. 10.15.3: this ‘prophecy’ most likely refers to the events of the 270s–260s BC, i.e. to the early stage of the struggle against the Galatians. Antiochos I seems to be the most suitable ‘dear son of the bull’, given the important victory over the Galatians attributed to this king. We know very little about the details of these campaigns, but it is certain that the ‘Galatian’ factor played an important role in the ideology of the early Seleukids, so that a Seleukid context is an obvious choice for Phaennis’ Oracle.

The images used by ‘the prophetess’ are very interesting. The phrase ‘… τάχα γάρ σφιν ἀοσσητῆρα Κρονίων ὁρμήσει …’ seems to be a paraphrase of a passage from the *Iliad* (15.254f.): ‘… θάρσει νῦν: τοῖόν τοι ἀοσσητῆρα Κρονίων ἐξ Ἴδης προέηκε παρεστάμεναι καὶ ἀμύνειν …’. The Iliad refers to Apollo, while the oracle refers to a certain person who will become a ‘helper’ to the Hellenes ‘who dwell by the shores of the sea’ and were suffering at the hands of the Galatians, just as Apollo came to the aid of the wounded Hector. The word ἀοσσητῆρ (‘helper’) is synonymous with Σωτήρ (‘savior’), and may allude to the epithet of Antiochos I who is usually associated precisely with the Galatian victory of this king. ‘The Dear Son’ is also styled in the language of Homer (cf. *Hymn* 3: Εἰς Ἀπόλλωνα [Δήλιον]).

But what role does the Bull (ταῦρος) play? Perhaps there can also be a logical continuation of the above quote from the Iliad: then Zeus sends Apollo from Mount Ida (ἐξ Ἴδης), now ‘the son of a bull’ reared by him (ταύροιο διοτρεφέος φίλον υἱόν) comes from behind the Taurus mountains. The same idea can be traced in the Ilion decree in honor of King Antiochos (*OGIS* 219, certainly Antiochos I, not III): ‘νῦν τε παραγενόμενος (βασιλεὺς Ἀντίοχος. – *E.B.*) ἐπὶ τοὺς τόπους τοὺς ἐπὶ τάδε τοῦ Ταύρου μετὰ πάσης σπουδῆς καὶ φιλοτιμίας ἅμα καὶ ταῖς πόλεσιν τὴν εἰρήνην κατεσκεύασεν …’. Some associations of Seleukos I with a bull could also be reflected here: parallels to this can be found in the so-called ‘Romance of Seleukos (e.g., App. *Syr*. 57). Some issues of Antiochos I (e.g., *SC* I 323) and early Hellenistic seal impressions from Seleukeia-on-the-Tigris with the bull-horned portrait of Seleukos I also suggest the early development of such an image. Maybe there was a play on words here.

Regarding the chronology of the oracle, it seems most likely that it was created in the 260s or early 250s BC, in the second half of the reign of Antiochos I or at the beginning of the reign of Antiochos II. Some success in the fight against the Galatians had already been achieved (cf. πᾶσιν Γαλάτῃσιν ὀλέθριον ἦμαρ ἐφήσει), and it was possible to adapt them to the ideological concept of royal *Soteria*. This does not necessarily contradict Pausanias’ information on the age of Phaennis, but it is possible that the idea of this prophecy, if not the verses themselves, were created at the Seleukid court and then attributed to Phaennis at a later stage.

The appearance of Attalos I in our text can also be explained. Pausanias may correlate the Oracle of Phaennis with a prophecy by the Pythia of Delphi referring to Attalos, where he is called ταυρόκερων (cf. Diod. 35.13 and Suida s.v. Ἄτταλος: ταυρόκερως). However, there is no hint of the Galatians in Diodoros. The oracle refers only to the accession of Attalos and the duration of his and his dynasty’s reign (i.e., two generations after him). It is difficult to say whether there is an interpretation of Pausanias himself or an adaptation of a Seleukid ideological pattern to the case of the Attalids.

If our interpretation of Phaennis’ Oracle is correct, her ‘prophecy’ can be considered one of the earliest examples of the inclusion of the ‘Galatian theme’ in the history of Seleukid ideology. The analogy between Apollo and the Savior King apparently draws on the early royal cult. Finally, the prophecy can also demonstrate the intention of the early Seleukids to strengthen their authority among the Greek *poleis* through the use of the ‘will of the deity’ as an instrument of legitimation.