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### Challenging Roman Domination: The End of Hellenistic Rule and the Rise of the Parthian State from the Third to the First Centuries BCE

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CHALLENGING ROMAN DOMINATION:  
THE END OF HELLENISTIC RULE AND THE RISE OF THE PARTHIAN  
STATE FROM THE THIRD TO THE FIRST CENTURIES BCE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of History

by  
Nikolaus Leo Overtoom  
B.A., University of North Texas, 2008  
M.A., University of Maryland, 2011  
May 2016

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For my wife, Stacey K. Overtoom.

Quos amor verus tenuit, tenebit.

“Whom true love has bound, it will bind (forever).”

Seneca, *Thyestes* 551

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possible without his pioneering efforts to incorporate international relations theory into the study of ancient geopolitics. His kind and unfaltering guidance was fundamental to my development as a young scholar. I owe him a debt for his role in helping shape my published articles on the image of Alexander the Great in the writings of Polybius and on the Roman tradition of Alexander the Great counterfactual history in *Classical World* and *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*. From my time at the University of North Texas, I would like to thank Christopher Fuhrmann for his unrivaled influence on my love for the study and teaching of ancient history. His many years of guidance and friendship have been fundamentally important to my success as a student, teacher, and scholar.

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My wife, Stacey Overtoom, has been my greatest supporter and companion. Her efforts to help me complete this project have been invaluable. I gratefully dedicate this dissertation to her as a small token of my enduring love and affection.

## Prologue: The Drums of Carrhae

On a warm, dry day in early May of 53 BCE about 45,000 Roman soldiers and auxiliaries faced a force of 10,000 battle-hardened Parthian cavalymen across the rolling fields of Carrhae. The Roman commander, Marcus Licinius Crassus, who was the triumviral partner of Julius Caesar and Pompey Magnus, had been allotted an eastern command that included the responsibility of concluding the first ever open conflict between Rome and Parthia. Crassus was trying to bring a swift end to a conflict that had begun when his proconsular predecessor had used the pretext of a Parthian civil conflict to involve himself in the eastern kingdom's affairs.

Crassus found himself facing the Parthian king Orodes II's most accomplished general, Surenas, near the small town of Carrhae in northern Mesopotamia, not far from the source of the Balikh River. This was the first time Roman and Parthian soldiers had met in a major conflict, and neither side knew what to expect. Suddenly a low and distant rumbling became an increasingly terrifying cacophony of drums and war cries as the Parthian army emerged from its well-placed concealed positions. Almost immediately the surprised Romans formed a defensive formation and lost the initiative in the battle. The more maneuverable and flexible Parthian cavalry relentlessly harassed the stationary Roman infantry huddled in easily fixed targets for the Parthian horse archers, and any Roman breakout attempts were met by the thunderous charge of the heavily armored Parthian cataphracts. Finally, in desperation Crassus ordered his son, Publius, with the majority of the available Roman cavalry to attack the Parthian force to drive it from the field.

At first Publius' charge appeared to have accomplished its goal as the Parthian cavalry turned and fled; however, the Romans were unaware that this "rout" was in reality a calculated feigned retreat meant to draw Publius' force away from the main Roman army so that it could be

destroyed in detail. Publius unknowingly fell directly into this trap and did not recognize his vulnerable position until it was too late. The Parthians quickly surrounded and massacred Publius and about 5,000 men.

Crassus, who was busy trying to reorganize his army, had no idea that his son had committed suicide as his men were slaughtered around him until the Parthian army reappeared brandishing Publius' severed head as a war trophy. The morale of Crassus and his men plummeted as the relentless Parthian assault resumed. Completely isolated, immobile, and outgunned, the Roman army found itself corralled by the crushing charges of the Parthian cataphracts and picked apart by an endless storm of arrows. Only nightfall saved the Roman army from complete annihilation on that day.

In the battle and the subsequent retreat to Syria, Crassus lost about 30,000 men, a third of whom the Parthians captured and sent to the eastern frontier of their empire. Crassus too was a casualty of his failed expedition. In a meeting with Surenas, where the two men hoped to discuss terms for a truce, a struggle erupted and Crassus was killed. Similar to his son, Crassus' head was removed and used as a victory marker. The Parthians had demonstrated emphatically that they were a military rival of Rome.

The disaster at Carrhae scarred the Roman psyche and severely damaged the Roman ego. The memory of Crassus' defeat and the frustration it elicited hung over the Roman consciousness for centuries, affecting much, if not all, of what the Roman tradition said about the Parthians as an eastern power and rival. Further, the Romans never forgave the embarrassing failure of Crassus against the Parthians. Roman writers universally placed all blame on Crassus for the defeat at Carrhae in an attempt to exonerate the Roman state from this catastrophe. This tradition



was so successful that the stain of Carrhae haunts Crassus' legacy to this day. As Pliny the Elder wrote, "*Carrhas, Crassi clade nobile* (Carrhae, notorious for the disaster of Crassus)."

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## Abstract

This dissertation examines the influences of systemic pressures and spatial perspectives on state decision-making through a multi-layered study of the rise of the Parthian state within the Hellenistic Middle East (3<sup>rd</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BCE) and of the military conflicts within the Hellenistic Near East (1<sup>st</sup> century BCE) in two parts. By examining domestic policy and international relations in this period through this theoretical and methodological approach, this study clarifies the process by which the Parthians and Romans became the two remaining powers of the ancient world and eventual rivals. It uses two major research strategies: (1) a reevaluation of the available literary, epigraphical, and numismatic evidence, for instance Babylonian colophons and Parthian coin sequences, to challenge Graeco-Roman perceptions and literary traditions of these events and (2) an introduction of modern international relations theory to reevaluate the composition and impact of the international environment in this period.

This project bridges gaps in Roman and Parthian studies and challenges the generally Roman-centric viewpoint of modern scholarship toward these events. Further, it rejects the popular argument that the Romans were belligerent aggressors against weak and passive eastern polities, including the Parthians. Instead, it contends that Parthia and other ancient states in the Near East exercised considerable agency in their domestic and foreign policies and possessed the will to pursue aggressive policies against one another and against Rome but ultimately lacked the Roman capability to do so on such a large and sustained scale.

This dissertation reevaluates the actions not only of Rome and Parthia, but also of numerous Greek and Eastern states, especially the Seleucid Empire, Bactria, Armenia, and Pontus. It concludes that, prior to the middle 50s BCE, the Romans and Parthians, despite their eventual mutual interest in dominating the Near East, had separate, isolated geopolitical

perspectives that rarely concerned one another. As their geopolitical interests began to overlap in the Near East in the 90s-60s BCE, a new interstate system suddenly emerged as an indirect result of the military ambitions of Mithridatic Pontus and the Kingdom of Armenia and as a direct result of Crassus' disastrous invasion of Mesopotamia in 53 BCE.

## Introduction

This study at its core is a re-evaluation of the military and political conflicts that made the longstanding rivalry of the Romans and Parthians (or Arsacids) possible.<sup>1</sup> It examines how the Romans and Parthians established themselves as the last two major powers of the ancient world and how they came into contact and conflict in the first half of the first century BCE. It begins by investigating the creation and development of the Parthian state from its humble origins in the eastern Iranian plateau to its domination of the Hellenistic world of the Middle East in order to reinterpret the relations and eventual conflict between Rome and Parthia as both powers looked to dominate the Near East in the first century BCE.<sup>2</sup> The central argument of this project is that Rome and Parthia developed within and came to dominate separate interstate systems of the ancient world (namely the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern spheres) in the third and second

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<sup>1</sup> There has been a recent scholarly trend to abandon the term “Parthian” in favor of the dynastic eponym “Arsacid” because it better represents the ruling class of the state during this period. It also fits more appropriately within the tradition of labelling Middle Eastern empires by dynastic names (for example, the Achaemenids, the Seleucids, and the Sassanids). See esp. Wolski 1993; Hauser 2005; Hauser 2013: 729. Although I generally agree with this new emphasis and utilize the terms “Arsacid” and “Arsacids” where appropriate, I have chosen to favor the terms “Parthia” and “Parthian” in this work for the sake of clarity and familiarity for the general reader.

<sup>2</sup> In this work, the term “the Near East” incorporates Anatolia in the west, Armenia and the lands below the Caucasus Mountains in the north, the lands of western Mesopotamia (Assyria) in the east, and Syria, Palestine, northwestern Arabia, and Egypt in the south. The term “the Mid East” incorporates the eastern lands of Mesopotamia (Babylonia) in the west, Media in the north, Persis in the east, and northern Arabia in the south. The term “the Farther East” incorporates Hyrcania and Parthia in the west, the southern lands of the Central Asian steppe in the north, Sogdia, Bactria, and Arachosia in the east, and Gedrosia in the south. The term “the Far East” simply refers to all Asian lands, except India, east of the Farther East region. The term “the Middle East” simply refers to the combination of the lands of the Mid East and Farther East. These terms (“Near” and “Middle” and “Farther” east) admittedly preserve a Roman, or at least a Mediterranean, perspective; however, the fact that these terms are natural ways to denote these regions betrays the Graeco-Roman legacy that dominates not only scholarship, but also many of our ways of thinking about things. For the physical and political geography of the later Parthian Empire, note Kennedy 1996a: 70-4.

centuries BCE. Because of their isolated development from one another and their successful domination of their separate interstate systems, Rome and Parthia developed immensely different spatial and geopolitical perspectives of their own hegemony and of the increasingly tense situation in the Near East. Their own military and political success, paired with the momentous efforts of Mithridates VI of Pontus and Tigranes II of Armenia to challenge their domination from the 80s to the 60s BCE, inadvertently caused the Roman-dominated Mediterranean and the Parthian-dominated Eastern systems to overlap extensively in the Near East with colossal, yet unanticipated geopolitical consequences.<sup>3</sup> In the first half of the first century BCE, diplomatic relations between Rome and Parthia were infrequent, unofficial, awkward, and confused largely because of their different perspectives and their unwillingness to recognize one another's regional claims to power. For almost forty years, miscommunication and misunderstanding dominated the relationship of these two states as neither power appeared interested in open conflict against the other, instead preferring isolation. Thus, the Romans and Parthians eventually found themselves locked in a major hegemonic struggle to dominate the Near East through the force of coincidence, not design. The First Romano-Parthian War (56 BCE – 1 CE) caused the violent merger of the hitherto separate Mediterranean and Eastern systems and established the longstanding rivalry of the Roman and Parthian empires. This enduring

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<sup>3</sup> Kallet-Marx views the Mithridatic Wars as “the decisive event for the consolidations of a concrete and intrusive Roman empire in the Hellenistic East.” Kallet-Marx 1995: 7. Yet this study aims to demonstrate that the Mithridatic Wars and their consequences also were fundamentally important to shaping the international environment in which the Romans and Parthians came into challenge one another's hegemonies in the 50s BCE and beyond. In the terms of international relations theory, the Mithridatic Wars classifies as a “general or hegemonic war,” which are “the most destructive in history.” For the concept of general war and its qualifications, see Levy 1985: 344, 365. For a recent survey of the Hellenistic Near East, note van der Spek 2007.



hegemonic struggle heavily influenced the geopolitical developments of Europe and the Middle East for almost three centuries.

This work emphasizes the agency of eastern peoples in their interactions with one another and with the Romans to distance our understanding of the geopolitical developments of this period further from the common Roman-centric perspective of modern scholarship.<sup>4</sup> This allows us to offer a more inclusive and better representative account of the motivations and methods of eastern states in this period. The picture that emerges is one of eastern states often acting aggressively and proactively in their international relations, rather than passively and reactively. Therefore, this study challenges the widely held belief that Rome was pathologically more bellicose than other ancient states and that Rome victimized the relatively passive polities of the East.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, it challenges the common portrayal of Parthia as a victim of Roman aggression.<sup>6</sup> Instead, it argues that Parthia and other ancient states in the East possessed the *will* to pursue aggressive policies against one another and Rome but ultimately lacked the Roman

---

<sup>4</sup> Note esp. the efforts of Kennedy 1996a; Lerouge 2007; Olbrycht 2009. Note also Brunt 1988: 83.

<sup>5</sup> See esp. Mommsen 1903: iv 3, 6; Thiel 1954: 129-34; Mitchell 1971: 334-44; Jones 1972: 27-9; Veyne 1975: 838-9; Harris 1979; North 1981; Rowland 1983: 759-60; Chahin 1987: 225, 241, 245; Mandell 1989; Derow 1989; Raaflaub et al. 1992: 25-9; Isaac 1992: 52; Oakley 1993: 11, 31; Whittaker 1994: 213; Cornell 1995: 353-4; Raaflaub 1996: 277-8; Lazenby 1996: 39-48; Ampela 1998: 74, 77; Derow 2003: 58-60; Manandyan 2007: 4-5, 33; Mattingly 2011: 274; Sheldon 2010: 2, 6, 10, 21-3, 61, 177; Mayor 2010: 108, 110, 113, 119, 141, 161-2, 202, 277; Bang 2012. Contra esp. Eckstein 2006; Eckstein 2012; Sampson 2015: xvi. For the limited effectiveness of recent studies to change this prevalent opinion, see Quillin 2009; Wheeler 2011: 86; Ramsey 2013. Note also Sartre 2007; Culham 2008; Erskine 2008; Champion 2009; Frechette 2009.

<sup>6</sup> See esp. Rawlinson 1885 (2002): 110, 118; Mommsen 1903: iii, 289-90; Anderson 1934: 257; Rostovtzeff 1935: 163; Lozinski 1959; Ziegler 1964; Keaveney 1981; id. 1982; Yarshater 1983: xlix-l; Campbell 1984: 114-15, 332, 356-7, 390-3; Chahin 1987: 242; Isaac 1992: 14-57; Campbell 1993; Cornell 1993: 143-5; Whittaker 1994: 54-9; Kennedy 1996a; Sheldon 2010; Edwell 2013: 191, 194, 199, 206; Poirot 2014: 19. Contra Sampson 2015: 94, 98. For the pitfalls of victimology in the reconstruction of history, see Wolski 1976a: 197, 212; id. 1993: 122; Wheeler 1993: 30-6; Kennedy 1996a: 76, 79-80; Arnaud 1998: 13-14; Wheeler 2002: 287.

*capability* to do so on such a large and sustained scale. The argument involves new interpretations of literary, epigraphical, and numismatic evidence and the investigation of the different spatial perspectives of ancient states. This methodological approach allows us to establish a more accurate reconstruction of early Parthian history and the events leading up to the clash between Rome and Parthia.

This study is interdisciplinary in that it also utilizes modern international relations theory, specifically “Realist” theory, to offer a system-level analysis of the harsh international environment of the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern worlds from the third to first centuries BCE and of the causative power of that harsh system on the behavior of ancient states. By introducing modern international relations theory into the investigation of the geopolitical developments of this period, this study challenges the current conceptualization of the international environment and of international relations in the ancient world. This is a worthwhile theoretical approach because it allows us to avoid mistakenly focusing solely upon Roman behaviors and perspectives to determine causality in the international relations of the ancient world. In terms of international relations theory, a narrow focus on the actions of one unit (for example Rome) without a similar examination of the other units within a system of units (that is, the other states in the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern worlds) leads to faulty “unit-attribute” theory explanations for geopolitical developments, such as the incorrect modern theory that the Romans conquered the Mediterranean world because they were uniquely bellicose, militarized, and pathologically more brutal.<sup>7</sup> To be clear, the pressures of the interstate system

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<sup>7</sup> Note esp. Harris 1979. Contra esp. Eckstein 2006. Note also Potter 2006: 74. For the pervasiveness of unit-attribute theory in the study of imperialism, see esp. Waltz 1979: 18-37, 61-7. For the problematic application of unit-attribute theory to ancient studies, especially Roman History, see Eckstein 2006: 3-4, 27-8, 33, 67, 73, 77 87-93, 182-216, 229-32, 277, 307.

and the paradigms of Realist theory only provide incentives for action and a larger context for those actions. That is, it is always left to individual actors, usually powerful political leaders in the ancient world, to interpret the needs of the state, dynasty, or even tribe and to react to those needs accordingly; however, we should also recognize that these decisions were not made in a vacuum. Therefore, to understand the motivations and decisions of ancient states and statesmen better, we can utilize modern international relations theory to investigate the causative power of the international system of states on the actions of all ancient polities, instead of focusing solely upon the behavior of one society.

### The Historiography and Its Challenges

The eastern expansion of Rome and its interaction with the Hellenized Eastern Mediterranean and Near Eastern worlds has been a subject of considerable scholarly attention and fiery debate for over a century.<sup>8</sup> However, most of this debate has focused on the Roman wars of conquest in the third and second centuries BCE. The few studies that continue into the first century BCE generally end in the first half of that century, around the conclusion of the Third Mithridatic War in the 60s BCE.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the prevailing scholarly trend has been to detach the hegemonic struggle between Rome and Parthia from the important conflicts that immediately preceded it and made it possible. One important exception to this trend for Roman studies is *Roman Foreign Policy in the East 168 B.C. to A.D. 1*, the last major work of the noted British scholar, A. N. Sherwin-White. Yet it has been more than thirty years since this insightful but

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<sup>8</sup> See e.g., Fustel de Coulanges 1893; Mommsen 1903; Colin 1905; Frank 1914; de Sanctis 1923; Holleaux 1935; Badian 1971; Errington 1972; Harris 1979; Bulin 1983; Gruen 1984; Sherwin-White 1984; Ferrary 1988; Derow 1989 and 2003; Kallet-Marx 1995; Eckstein 2006 and 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Note Harris 1979; Bulin 1983; Kallet-Marx 1995. Badian carries his analysis down to Caesar. Badian 1971. Tarn offers a brief article on Parthia during the late Republic that ends with the assassination of Caesar. Tarn 1932.

underappreciated study was published, and it is now out of print and becoming increasingly difficult to obtain.<sup>10</sup> This makes a new attempt to consider the geopolitical developments of not just the Roman west but also of the Parthian east in the first half of the first century BCE and the eventual merger of their previously separate worlds of the utmost importance to a more complete understanding of the motives for Roman and Parthian expansion and the reasons for the success of these two powers.

This study rejects the recently resurrected scholarly opinion that the Parthians were relatively pacific and non-expansionistic once they began to interact with Rome and that the Romans victimized them.<sup>11</sup> For instance, in a recent study of Romano-Parthian relations, Rose Mary Sheldon unfairly portrays the Romans as vicious, arrogant predators who relentlessly and aggressively attacked the reactive and passive Parthians.<sup>12</sup> M. R. Shayegan describes the Parthians under Orodes II as replacing Pontus “as the most formidable bulwark against Roman expansion,” and argues that “the empire’s impetus came to a halt, and its focus shifted from expansion to the recovery of lost regions.”<sup>13</sup> Peter Edwell describes the Parthians as desperate to

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<sup>10</sup> Sherwin-White 1984.

<sup>11</sup> The tradition of viewing the Parthians as passive victims of Roman aggression has a long history. For example, although Rawlinson maintained that the Parthians began as a “consistently aggressive” people, he argued that in the later first century BCE Parthia “became, comparatively speaking, pacific. She was content for the most part, to maintain her limits. She sought no new foe.” Rawlinson 1885 (2002): 35, 110, 118. Some other scholars recognize that the Parthians could be aggressive and even predatory. See Debevoise 1938: 28; Luttwak 1976: 19; Wachter 1987: 18; Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993: 89; Kennedy 1996a; Poirot 2014: 17 n.33. Note that A. D. H. Bivar rejects the notion that Crassus’ invasion of Parthia was “wanton aggression against an inoffensive ally.” Bivar 1983: 50. For Roman and Parthian relations, see esp. Dobiáš 1931; Debevoise 1938; Dilleman 1962; Ziegler 1964; Will 1967; Wolski 1976a; Keaveney 1981; Keaveney 1982; Campbell 1993; Kennedy 1996a; Rose 2005; Lerouge 2007; Sheldon 2010; Shayegan 2011; Edwell 2013; Sampson 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Sheldon 2010: 1-2, 6, 10, 21-3, 61, 177.

<sup>13</sup> Shayegan 2011: 247, 328.

gain the Euphrates River as a border in order to “check Roman expansion.”<sup>14</sup> Ehsan Yarshater views the Parthians as non-aggressive, non-expansionistic, and defensive in their interactions with Rome.<sup>15</sup> Robin Seager claims that after the Battle of Carrhae in 53 BCE “the threat to the Eastern provinces was far less than was feared in the initial panic, as the Parthians showed no inclination to follow up their success with any vigor.”<sup>16</sup> Karl Ziegler views the Parthians as content with the boundaries of their empire in the first century BCE and as victims of Roman greed.<sup>17</sup> Benjamin Isaac concludes, “To sum up, Rome had long-standing ambitions to acquire parts of the Persian empire and frequently made attempts to realize them. On the other hand, it is not clear that either the Parthians or Sassanians actively desired or attempted to conquer permanently regions west of the Euphrates.”<sup>18</sup> Moreover, many scholars have tried to minimize or discount the threat that Parthia posed to the Romans.<sup>19</sup>

This study also rejects the Roman-centric scholarly tradition that the Romans, rather than the Parthians, were responsible for the “irreversible weakening of the Seleucid Kingdom.”<sup>20</sup> These traditions stem largely from the biased and misinformed perspectives of our surviving Roman and Greek sources. Only recently have scholars begun to place Parthia within a broader Eurasian perspective and to appreciate the considerable geopolitical concerns that the Parthians

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<sup>14</sup> Edwell 2013: 191, 194, 206.

<sup>15</sup> Yarshater 1983: xlix-l.

<sup>16</sup> Seager 2002: 131.

<sup>17</sup> Ziegler 1964.

<sup>18</sup> Isaac 1992: 52, 265, 372, 420, 425.

<sup>19</sup> Note Vogt 1955: 74; Syme 1958: 47, 493-7; Campbell 1993; Whittaker 1994: 59; Cornell 1993: 145; Sheldon 2010; contra Barzanò 1985: 211-22; Wheeler 1996: 235-6; Wheeler 2002.

<sup>20</sup> Gabelko 2009: 52. Scholars commonly exaggerate the long-term repercussions of the Battle of Magnesia on the Seleucid state. Note also Matyszak 2008: xvii-xx; Howarth 2013: 30; Sampson 2015: 22, 27-8, 44-5.

had to confront on their western and eastern frontiers and what role these concerns played in Parthia's ambitions and limitations in the West.<sup>21</sup>

Our sources for Parthian history discussed below are few, scattered, and almost all from a Graeco-Roman perspective.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, compared to scholarly attention paid to the other major pre-Islamic empires of the Middle East — the Achaemenids and Sassanids — the Parthians or Arsacids receive little appreciation. This led one scholar to describe the Arsacid era as “among the least known in Oriental history and archaeology.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, this study hopes to help bring the Parthian Empire further out of the shadows of history and to shed new light on the Parthians' important contributions to the geopolitical developments of the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern worlds.<sup>24</sup>

Because of the sometimes-severe limitations of our available sources, the potential insights that the theoretical framework of modern international relations theory offers to the study of Parthian political history are quite exciting. In fact, this study is the first comprehensive attempt to apply modern international relations theory to the interpretation of Parthian expansionism and interaction with neighboring states.<sup>25</sup> The application of international relations theory helps provide a fuller appreciation of the geopolitical development of the Parthian state and may help us overcome some of the limitations of our sources; however, it must be said that it is not a panacea and must be utilized carefully within the parameters of our surviving literary and

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<sup>21</sup> See esp. Dąbrowa 1983; Wolski 1993; Wiesehöfer 1998; Olbrycht 1998a; id. 1998b; id. 1998c; Wheeler 2002: 287.

<sup>22</sup> Lerouge 2007: 21-39.

<sup>23</sup> See Hauser 2013: 728-30. Note also Gregoratti 2015a: 203-4; Sampson 2015: xvi, 32.

<sup>24</sup> Malcolm Colledge in his important but outdated political and social history of the Parthians refers to the Arsacids as “mostly shadowy figures.” Colledge 1967: 176.

<sup>25</sup> For the first example of applying modern international relations history to Parthian history, see Overtom 2016.

physical evidence. Therefore, recent work in archeology and numismatics is invaluable to the historical reconstruction of the Hellenistic Middle East, and this study is in line with other recent efforts to reevaluate the growth of the Parthian state through the investigation of new evidence, such as cuneiform records, archaeological evidence, and numismatics.<sup>26</sup>

There have been relatively few comprehensive studies of the formation, growth, and international relations of the Parthian state. Most studies of this sort are either woefully outdated, cursory, or, in the case of numerous recent attempts, of limited or of questionable academic merit.<sup>27</sup> Archaeological research on the Parthian era only began to elicit comprehensive attention in the past half century, severely handicapping Parthian studies prior to the 1970s.<sup>28</sup> Yet scholars still generally consider Neilson C. Debevoise's 1938 study of the Parthians to be the best available summary of Parthian political history, despite the acknowledgement that his history

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<sup>26</sup> See esp. Lerner 1999; Assar 2000; id. 2001a; id. 2001b; id. 2004; id. 2005a; id. 2006c; id. 2006d; Olbrycht 2010a; id. 2010b; Shayegan 2011; Ellerbrock and Winkelmann 2012; Hauser 2013. Further, in a recent study Wolfram Grajetzki has challenged the narrow view of Parthian history and culture as an afterthought or degeneration of Roman or Greek examples. Through an archaeological survey of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, Babylon, Uruk, Susa, Charax Spasinou, Ikaros, and Tylos he demonstrates that the major cultural transformations of the East occurred under the Parthians, not their Hellenistic predecessors or Sassanian successors. Grajetzki 2011. Note also Gregoratti 2015b: 14-15. For an evaluation of the biases of the Graeco-Roman sources, see esp. Lerouge 2007. A few recent studies, including Lerouge's, have tried to reevaluate Roman and Parthian relations. Note esp. Kennedy 1996a; Wheeler 2002; Ferguson 2005.

<sup>27</sup> See esp. Lewis 1728; Rawlinson 1885 (2002); Tarn 1932; Rostovzoeff 1936; Cameron 1936; Debevoise 1938; Ziegler 1964; Colledge 1967; Stark 1967; Schippmann 1980; Bivar 1983; Frye 1984; Wolski 1993; Campbell 1993; Sheldon 2010; Grainger 2013a; Graham 2013; Rea 2013; Rea 2014. Gareth Sampson has made a recent effort to reconstruct early Parthian history up to the clash with Rome; however, he overlooks most of the recent and considerable scholarly efforts to trace the history of this period. The oversight was so problematic that Sampson released a second edition of his work with an improved bibliography; however, he admits that he made no changes to the text. Sampson 2015: xvii.

<sup>28</sup> See Callieri and Chaverdi 2013: 690; Hauser 2013: 728-30. See also Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993: 88.

“begs for revision.”<sup>29</sup> Moreover, scholarly attention has been lacking or inadequate in deciphering Parthian motives for expansion and reasons for Parthian success within the larger contexts of the international environment of the Hellenistic Middle East. Thus, the potential difficulties of myopic “unit-attribute” theory are not unique to Roman studies.

A good example of misguided “unit-attribute” theory in Parthian studies is the notion that Parthian success stemmed from a “nationalistic” Iranian backlash against the Hellenistic Seleucids. George Rawlinson described the Parthian rebellion as a barbarian, nationalistic slave uprising against Greek masters in an attempt to reclaim Asia for the Asians.<sup>30</sup> Theodor Mommsen described the Parthian rebellion and war against the Seleucids as a nationalistic crusade against Hellenism.<sup>31</sup> Eshan Yarshater argues that an ethnic nationalism emerged under the Parthians as a reaction to Hellenism.<sup>32</sup> Alireza Shahbazi describes the Parthians as having a

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<sup>29</sup> Wheeler 2002: 291; Hauser 2013: 744. Yet recent books by Graham and Rea were published independently without the process of academic peer-review, making them of dubious usefulness to scholars. Graham 2013; Rea 2013; Rea 2014. Meanwhile, Sheldon’s recent work not only misrepresents the Parthians as passive victims of belligerent Roman predatory attacks, but also often shows a lack of understanding of the geopolitical realities of the ancient world. She continually makes specious criticisms of Rome’s aggressive policy toward Parthia based upon modern conceptions of adequate intelligence gathering and diplomacy. Inaccuracies and anachronisms litter her portrayal of Roman and Parthian relations. Sheldon 2010. For a far more realistic interpretation of Roman military and political intelligence, see esp. Austin and Rankov 1995. Note also Mattern 1999: 34-41, 66-80. Finally, Grainger and Sampson’s recent books are short accounts that often lack detail and barely incorporate or address important modern scholarship. Grainger 2013a; Sampson 2015. Unfortunately, these recent and inadequate works, paired with Rawlinson’s comprehensive but outdated and prejudiced study from the nineteenth century CE, are the most readily available and widely read assessments of the growth of the Parthian state and its interaction with Rome. Rawlinson 1885 (2002). Meanwhile, Charlotte Lerouge’s impressive recent study of the image of the Parthians in the Graeco-Roman world is only available in French. There is a desperate need for a new comprehensive, scholarly approach to this subject matter in English.

<sup>30</sup> Rawlinson 1885 (2002): 21, 24, 41, 97-8, 105, 118-9.

<sup>31</sup> Mommsen 1903: iii 286-90, iv 421, 433; v 157. Note Manandyan, who argues against Mommsen and Reinach’s depictions of “national reactions” against Rome. Manandyan 2007: 4.

<sup>32</sup> Yarshater 1983: xxix, xxxviii.



“strong national identity” and argues that Arsaces I wanted “to emphasize his nationalistic and royal aspirations.”<sup>33</sup> Moreover, Elias Bickerman argues that with the openness of Greek civilization, the Seleucids “decapitated the native nationalism” of the Iranians.<sup>34</sup> Yet the success of the Parthians was not the result of an eastern reaction against and rejection of Hellenism. In fact, the early Parthian rulers often were philhellenes, and many incorporated this designation into their titlature.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the “nationalism” theory is inaccurate and inappropriate.<sup>36</sup>

Another good example of “unit-attribute” theory in Parthian studies is Joseph Wolski’s argument that Parthian success stemmed from the eager “restoration” of the image of the Achaemenid Persian Empire.<sup>37</sup> Although the Parthians came to embrace much of Persian culture as they occupied the Middle East, they also adopted Hellenistic aspects and maintained a unique identity of their own.<sup>38</sup> Thus, the “restoration” theory is dismissive and inadequate.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Shahbazi 1986a; id. 1990.

<sup>34</sup> Bickerman 1983: 17-18. Bickerman’s belief that “the Greeks were no racists, and everybody was free to choose the Greek way of life” is simplistic and mistaken. Note esp. Isaac 2006: Ch. 4.

<sup>35</sup> Note esp. Wiesehöfer 1994b; Dąbrowa 1998; Frye 2000: 18; Curtis 2000: 25; Dąbrowa 2010; id 2011.

<sup>36</sup> Note also Neusner 1963; Wolski 1976a; Schippmann 1986. A modern concept such as nationalism is incompatible with the realities of ancient societies, and we should reject any nationalistic unit-attribute explanation for the formation and success of the Parthian state. Note Overtoom 2016: 6. In fact, although he exaggerates the “feudal” aspects of Parthian society, Colledge states that one of the major weaknesses of the Parthian Empire in comparison to the Roman Empire was that “the people were bound together by no ties of elaborately graded citizenship.” Colledge 1967: 75-6.

<sup>37</sup> See esp. Wolski 1966; id. 1976a; id. 1983; id. 1985; id. 1993. M. Chahin views the Parthian king Mithridates I as the man who reclaimed the kingdom of his Persian ancestors from the Macedonians. Chahin 1987: 225. For Parthian use of Persian titlature, note Sellwood 1983: 285. For the argument that that the Parthians, not the Sassanid Persians, reintroduced Iranian elements into post-Hellenistic Persia, see Curtis 2000: 34. Arnaud argues that the Parthians desired to emulate the Achaemenids. Arnaud 1998: 31.

<sup>38</sup> The Parthians were willing to mimic Seleucid administrative precedents, while including Greek communities and statesmen in the administration of local government; however, they did so unsystematically with an openness to altering their administrative or military functions. Note Shayegan 2011: 210-25.

<sup>39</sup> Note Overtoom 2016: 6.

Furthermore, there are other problematic “unit-attribute” explanations worth considering briefly. There is a misguided tradition that describes the Parthians as feeble and passive, blaming the incompetence or weakness of Parthia’s enemies to explain Parthian successes; however, this theory unjustifiably robs the Parthians of their agency and accomplishment.<sup>40</sup> Additionally, John Curtis tries to argue that a desire to control the lucrative trade routes between the East and West was a primary motivation for Parthian expansion; however, this theory fails to appreciate that the financial growth of the Parthian state was a result of Parthian expansion, not a motivation for it.<sup>41</sup> Finally, the arguments of Susan Sherwin-White and Amélie Kuhrt that the Parthians’ expansionism and aggression toward neighbors was endemic and stemmed from their cavalry-based army and their need to find more land for their cavalry-based aristocracy makes Parthian belligerence appear unique and ignores the considerable outside dangers that the Parthians faced from highly militarized and aggressive neighbors.<sup>42</sup> John Poirrot’s recent conclusion that Parthian desires to remain independent motivated early Parthian imperialism, rather than explanations of Parthian land hunger or imperial envy, is a step in the right direction.<sup>43</sup> Yet none of these theories considers Parthian motivations and exceptionalism within the larger context of the universally applicable systemic pressures of the international system of states in the ancient world.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Rawlinson 1885 (2002): 24, 33-4, 41, 97-8, 105, 118-9; Mommsen 1903: iii 288; Wolski 1956-7; Ward 1977: 287, 289; Sheldon 2010: 36-40; Grainger 2014: 199, 210; Sampson 2015: 44-5.

<sup>41</sup> Curtis 2000: 24-5. Note also Colledge 1967: 80-1. As discussed in this study, in establishing Parthian power, political and military concerns in fact trumped economic concerns.

<sup>42</sup> Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993: 89. For example, the Seleucid army went on campaign every year to maintain power relations with neighboring states. In fact, the long reign of Antiochus III only experienced at most four years of peace. See Grainger 2015: 82.

<sup>43</sup> Poirrot 2014: 18 n.37.

<sup>44</sup> Debevoise in his strictly political history of Parthia surprisingly does not offer an opinion on Parthian motives or reasons for success. Debevoise 1938. Neither does Colledge in his history of Parthia. Colledge 1967.

Ultimately, the great benefit of applying international relations theory to an evaluation of geopolitical developments in the ancient world is that it allows us to gain perspective and avoid myopic conclusions. Thus, this project will, it is hoped, fill the above-mentioned gaps in Roman, Hellenistic, and Parthian studies through a new approach to the development of the Parthian state in the Hellenistic Middle East and to the early interactions of Rome and Parthia in the Near East.<sup>45</sup>

### The Sources and Their Challenges

This study covers a wide range of peoples, places, and events, and therefore, it utilizes a considerable array of surviving literary sources on Roman, Hellenistic, and Parthian history.<sup>46</sup> Yet epigraphical and numismatic sources also are of particular importance because so little of the historical record of the Parthian state has survived. In reconstructing Parthian history, we must maneuver through Greek and Roman literary sources that often treat the Parthians hostilely or cursorily and always from a foreign perspective.<sup>47</sup> Meanwhile, we must supplement the historical record of the Parthians with material evidence to help recreate acceptable and plausible reconstructions of Parthian history. Therefore, although Gareth Sampson recently has offered an adequate account of the sources for Parthian history, it is appropriate here to discuss briefly the

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<sup>45</sup> A study of international relations in the Near East and Middle East and a re-evaluation of the initial stages of the rivalry between Rome and Parthia is timely in a world where radical developments in the modern Middle East have proved to be interrelated so dramatically and unremittingly in the geopolitical decisions of western states.

<sup>46</sup> For more information on the various Graeco-Roman sources and translations utilized in this study, see Appendix 1. The English translations of Greek and Latin provided in this study are generally not my own; however, I have consulted the original Greek and Latin, and therefore, my analysis is based upon an understanding of the original languages. When I utilized someone else's translation, I listed them in Appendix 1 alongside the appropriate source. When the translation is my own, I have noted it. My understanding of material in other ancient languages or in cuneiform depends entirely upon the cited translator.

<sup>47</sup> For the image of the Parthians in Chinese sources, see Tao 2007.

usefulness and restrictiveness of our major literary sources, epigraphic records, and numismatic evidence on the rise of the Parthian state and the geopolitical developments in the Near East in the first century BCE as they relate specifically to this study.<sup>48</sup>

Unfortunately, no account of their history survives from the Parthians' perspective. The succeeding Sassanid Persians viewed the Parthians as unworthy interlopers and the Muslims viewed them as contemptible infidels, and therefore, whatever Parthian documents survived in the Middle East into the third century CE were ignored or suppressed in the following centuries.<sup>49</sup> Thus, we only have two major native sources of information: Babylonian astronomical diaries and Parthian coinage.<sup>50</sup>

The *Astronomical Diaries* are a collection of cuneiform tablets that record a long series of astronomical observations and important events and weather. They provide invaluable evidence of Parthian rule in Mesopotamia from the 140s to the 60s BCE; however, their small geographical focus and restricted detail limits their overall usefulness on their own.<sup>51</sup> Meanwhile, much Parthian coinage has survived and helps us reconstruct the structure of the Arsacid

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<sup>48</sup> Sampson 2015: 186-99. Note also Widengren 1983: 1261-9; Boyce 1983; Hauser 2013: 729-30. For Parthian art and architecture, see Colledge 1967: 115-65; id. 1977; Schlumberger 1983; Curtis and Stewart 2007.

<sup>49</sup> Note Colledge 1967: 174; Hauser 2013: 729-30; Gregoratti 2015b: 14. Justin following Trogus stresses the reserved and taciturn nature of the Parthians and argues that they were "more ready to act than speak, and consequently shrouding both their successes and failures in silence." Justin 41.3.8. Justin's account of Trogus, who was attempting to write a history of the Parthians under Augustus, indicates that Trogus appeared frustrated at this "silence" of the Parthians. The Parthians tended to rely on oral traditions for legends and stories, and therefore, many of these were lost or drastically altered before being written down. Curtis and Stewart 2007: 2. It is likely that the Parthians had not created a thorough and readily available historical record of their rise to power in the East by the Augustan Age at least.

<sup>50</sup> Sampson 2015: 194. For an introduction to Arsacid coinage, see Alram 1986b. Note also Meadows 2014.

<sup>51</sup> For the *Astronomical Diaries*, see Sachs 1955; Neugebauer 1955a; id. 1955b; Sachs and Hunger 1988; id. 1989; id. 1996; van der Spek 1997-1998; Hunger and Sachs 2001; Potts 2002.

dynasty. Moreover, the quality, abundance, and features of these coins provide important insights into periods of internal strife and external conflict and help identify the objectives of Parthian imperial propaganda. Much like the *Astronomical Diaries*, the usefulness of Parthian coinage in reconstructing Parthian history on its own is quite limited.<sup>52</sup> These native sources are important supplements to literary evidence; however, their ambiguity makes definitive conclusions based upon them difficult. Finally, archaeology remains an important source of new information on the Parthians; however, interest in the field is relatively new and the important sites are difficult to access because of the instability of the modern Middle East.<sup>53</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the Greeks and the Romans, who came to view the Parthians as rivals, found the Parthians and Parthian history of interest.<sup>54</sup> Parthian history was a vibrant and popular literary genre, especially at times of conflict between Rome and Parthia. It is not a coincidence that Livy, Pompeius Trogus, Strabo, Nicolas of Damascus, Quintus Dellius, and Apollonius wrote their accounts on Parthian history after the defeats of Crassus (54-53 BCE) and Antony (36-35 BCE) and during Augustus' rivalry with the Parthians.<sup>55</sup> Nor is it a coincidence that

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<sup>52</sup> For Parthian coinage, see esp. Gardner 1877; Scott 1854; Wroth 1903; Sellwood 1962; Simonetta 1966; Sellwood 1971; id. 1972; id. 1976; Simonetta and Sellwood 1978; Simonetta 1979; Sellwood 1980; Mørkholm 1980; Sellwood 1983; Dilmagnani 1986; Shore 1993; Loginov and Nikitin 1996; Nikitin 1998; Simonetta 2001; Assar 2004; id. 2005a; id 2009b; Rezakhani 2013.

<sup>53</sup> Sampson 2015: 194. See also See Callieri and Chaverdi 2013: 690; Hauser 2013: 728-30. Note Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993: 88.

<sup>54</sup> For instance, Cassius Dio, writing in the early third century CE, states, "Now about their [the Parthians'] race and their country and their peculiar customs many have written, and I have no intention of describing them." Dio 40.15.1. Polybius provides our earliest surviving account of Parthian history. He briefly chronicles the anabasis of Antiochus III against the Parthians and Bactrians (211-205 BCE) from unknown Hellenistic sources. Polyb. 10.27-31. Apollodorus and Posidonius, whose works are lost, and Diodorus Siculus and Isidore of Charax were other Greeks who chronicled aspects of early Parthian society and history. Note Yarrow 2006; Lerouge 2007: 26-9. For Apollodoros, note Nikonorov 1998a. See also Strabo 2.5.12, 11.7.3, 15.1.3

<sup>55</sup> Lerouge 2007: 29-32; Sampson 2015: 195-8.

Plutarch, Appian, and Arrian wrote their accounts on the Parthians during and after Trajan's Parthian war (114-117 CE), nor that Lucian made mention of new works on the Parthians written after Verus' Parthian war (161-166 CE), nor that Cassius Dio, Justin, and Asinius Quadratus wrote their accounts on Parthian history under the Severans, whose invasions of Parthia (195, 197-198, 216-217 CE) severely damaged the Parthian state, nor, finally, that Ammianus Marcellinus found the Parthians of interest after Julian's failed invasion of Mesopotamia (363 CE).<sup>56</sup> Unfortunately, the destruction of the Parthian Empire by the Sassanid Persians in the early 220s CE meant that many later Greek and Roman writers found the Parthians less interesting and important and, as the European and Middle Eastern worlds drifted apart once more in late antiquity, no Graeco-Roman history of the Parthians survived the Middle Ages remotely intact.<sup>57</sup> What remains is a limited and often random collection of references to Parthian history based upon various known and unknown lost works of antiquity, which provides a broken and often cursory account of the Parthians through the eyes of their rivals.<sup>58</sup>

The most important and well-rounded of the surviving accounts of early Parthian history is Justin's third century CE epitome of Pompeius Trogus' *Historiae Philippicae*, which was a universal history of the East from the ancient Assyrians to the Parthians into the reign of Augustus in 44 books and which was written during Augustus' reign. Nothing of Trogus' original work survives; however, Justin appears to provide a reliable summary of Trogus' entire work. This means that we must cite Justin but acknowledge that the sentiments of the work likely

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<sup>56</sup> Lerouge 2007: 32-9. Note Lucian *Hist.* 15, 16. For Arrian, note Lepper and DeVoto 1985. For Asinius Quadratus, note Cornell 2013: 615-16.

<sup>57</sup> Sampson 2015: 188-91, 197-8.

<sup>58</sup> Note Kennedy 1996a: 69.

were those of Trogus.<sup>59</sup> Trogus' emphasis on eastern developments and peoples makes his work unique and invaluable. Although Justin only provides us with a summary of the entire work, it is clear that the original contained great detail otherwise overlooked by our other surviving sources on the formation and rise of the Parthian state to dominance over the ancient Middle East.<sup>60</sup>

Trogus viewed the Parthians as a powerful people, who had benefitted from great leadership, and he considered the Parthians the rivals of Rome. When compared side by side, Justin's epitome of Trogus is more detailed than the epitome of Livy, and it is instrumental to our knowledge of this period; however, it remains a summary and suffers from its condensed narrative. Therefore, Strabo, who also wrote during Augustus' reign and whose more extensive accounts of Parthian history regrettably are now lost, offers information on the background of the Parthians and on their later struggle with Tigranes II of Armenia that is an important supplement to Justin and our other literary sources.<sup>61</sup>

The other three main literary sources of information on the Parthians are Appian (ca. middle second century CE), Plutarch (ca. early second century CE), and Cassius Dio (ca. early third century CE). Appian's separate history of Rome's wars against the Parthians unfortunately has not survived. This means that his histories, the *Syrian Wars* and the *Mithridatic Wars*, only mention the Parthians in passing.<sup>62</sup> Memnon of Heraclea (ca. first or second century CE) and Sallust in his *Histories* (ca. middle first century BCE) similarly offer only a few passing

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<sup>59</sup> For Trogus and Justin, note esp. Watson 1853b; Syme 1988; Heckel 1997; Yardley 2003; Yarrow 2006; Wheatley and Heckel 2012; Ballesteros-Pastor 2013; Borgna 2015.

<sup>60</sup> Sampson 2015: 198.

<sup>61</sup> For Strabo's summary of the origin of the Parthians, see Strabo 11.9.2-3. For Strabo, see esp. Jones, 1917-1932; Diller 1975; Dueck 2000.

<sup>62</sup> For Appian, note esp. White 1899; id. 1912-1913; Carsana 2007.

references to the Parthians in their accounts of the Mithridatic wars.<sup>63</sup> Although Appian's accounts rarely offer any detail on Parthian events, his generally straightforward, matter-of-fact style makes his accounts usually more reliable than the more rhetorical accounts of Plutarch, and his focus on eastern kings allowed him to discuss how the Arsacids became major players in the East.

Plutarch offers some of our most detailed accounts of certain Parthian events during the Mithridatic Wars and Crassus' invasion of Mesopotamia in his lives on Lucullus, Pompey, and Crassus.<sup>64</sup> For instance, his detailed account of the Battle of Carrhae is unrivaled.<sup>65</sup> However, Plutarch only was interested in the Parthians as they related to his Roman subjects. Moreover, his moralistic rhetoric encouraged him to portray some Roman figures as heroes and others as fools. Thus, for example, Plutarch exaggerated the accomplishments and aims of Lucullus and Pompey and heavily criticized the perceived shortcomings of Crassus.<sup>66</sup> Plutarch emphasized moral character in his biographies to help structure his parallel lives, and therefore, reliable history was a secondary concern to his moralistic rhetorical objectives. Finally, since Plutarch lived through the second phase of the long Romano-Parthian "cold war" and then through the seemingly triumphant Parthian war of Trajan, this different geopolitical environment and international perspective encouraged Plutarch to project the realities of Romano-Parthian relations in his time back upon the early interactions of the Romans and Parthians. Therefore, it is unsurprising that Plutarch's accounts on the Parthians, although important, can be anachronistic and misleading.

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<sup>63</sup> For Memnon, note Smith 2004, Yarrow 2006. For Sallust, note Rolfe 1921; McGushin 1992; Ramsey 2015.

<sup>64</sup> For Plutarch, note esp. Perrin 1914; id. 1916a; id. 1917; Lamberton 2001; Duff 2002; Pelling 2011; Stadter 2011; Beck 2014; Stadter 2015.

<sup>65</sup> For a detailed discussion of the Battle of Carrhae and Plutarch's narrative of the battle, see Chapter 2. Note also Sampson 2015: 186.

<sup>66</sup> For the damaged legacy of Crassus in the sources, see Appendix 2.



Cassius Dio wrote a monumental work, *Roman History*, which in 80 books covered the entire history of Rome from Aeneas to the Severans.<sup>67</sup> He too offers valuable and relatively detailed accounts of Parthian events in his books on the Mithridatic Wars and Crassus' invasion, namely books 30-37 and 40, often with more of a reliable historical focus than does Plutarch; however, again the Parthians were only important to Dio as they relate to the concerns of Rome. Moreover, Dio was even more removed than was Plutarch from these events. The military conflicts between Rome and Parthia of the Severan period also influenced Dio's perception and portrayal of early Romano-Parthian relations.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, he too is guilty of projecting an anachronistic outlook back upon the Roman and Parthian interactions of the first century BCE.

Other minor sources worth brief consideration are Cicero's letters and speeches from the middle first century BCE, especially his speech *For the Manilian Law*, that offer limited but contemporary insight into the Mithridatic Wars and Crassus' invasion; however, one should always be mindful of Cicero's rhetorical goals when utilizing him as evidence.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, Velleius Paterculus, writing in the early first century CE, offers a firsthand account of the momentous meeting on the Euphrates between Gaius Caesar and Phraates V that officially ended the First Romano-Parthian War in 1 CE; however, his highly rhetorical history otherwise barely addresses the Parthians.<sup>70</sup> Meanwhile, Pliny the Elder, who wrote in the late 70s CE, like Strabo, inserted snippets of Parthian history and culture into his *Natural History* when he found them

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<sup>67</sup> For Dio, note esp. Cary 1914-1927; Millar 1964; Murison 1999; Lange and Madsen 2016.

<sup>68</sup> Dio also treats Trajan's efforts against the Parthians favorably and portrays Trajan as a great Roman leader. Dio 68.17-33. Interestingly, Dio is quite critical of Septimius Severus' efforts against the Parthians. Id. 75.2.4, 3.2-3, 9.4-13.1. See also id. 78.26.1.

<sup>69</sup> For Cicero, note esp. Yonge 1856; Habicht 1990; Fuhrmann 1992; Powell 1995; Everitt 2001; Goldenhard 2011.

<sup>70</sup> Vell. Pat. 2.101. For Velleius Paterculus, note esp. Shipley 1924; Cowan 2011; Yardley and Barrett 2011.

interesting and relevant.<sup>71</sup> Finally, Josephus, writing in the late first century CE, offers a unique Jewish perspective of the rapidly changing geopolitical situation in the Near East in the first century BCE in his works *Antiquities of the Jews* and *The Jewish Wars*.<sup>72</sup> Again, his references to the Parthians are in passing; however, Josephus' sources would have included writers, presumably including Jewish ones, who had a different and more intimate knowledge of geopolitics in the Near East and of Parthian rule since a large Jewish community remained in Mesopotamia.<sup>73</sup>

Thus, the source difficulties facing scholars of Parthian history are considerable. It is vital to utilize all available literary, epigraphical, and numismatic evidence in concert to establish the most probable reconstruction of events; however, reasonable speculation grounded in the available evidence is necessary and unavoidable. Meanwhile, most scholars focus on the Romans' personal and political qualities and on Roman perspectives not just because the vast majority of our sources are part of the Graeco-Roman corpus, but also because the personalities and morality of the people involved happens to be a big concern of those sources. Plutarch is the obvious example, but Plutarch is not unique. What this study hopes to accomplish is to shed new light on the reconstruction of early Parthian history, Parthia's early interaction with Rome, and the rivalries of the Near East by approaching this evidence with a critical eye toward its Graeco-Roman perspective. An analysis that endeavors to incorporate the agency of major polities in the

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<sup>71</sup> For Pliny the Elder, note esp. Bostock and Riley 1855; Murphy 2004; Carey 2006; Gibson and Morello 2011.

<sup>72</sup> For Josephus, note esp. Whiston 1895; Cohen 1979; Mason 2000; Pastor, Stern, and Mor 2011.

<sup>73</sup> Note Neusner 1965; id. 1983. Josephus states that he translated several works into Hebrew and sent them to Jewish communities within the Parthian Empire. *Jos. Bell.* 1.1-7. For the Jewish communities in Mesopotamia and their relationship with the Parthians, see id. *Ant.* 15.14, 21, 18.310-79, 20.34-7.

Near East and Middle East into the discussion and considers their outlooks on equal footing with that of Rome should help balance our mostly Roman-centric perception of these events and challenge considerably our current conceptualization of the international environment in the Near East in the first century BCE.

### The Roman and Parthian Rivalry in the Sources

By no later than the 160s BCE, Rome had subdued its major rivals in the Mediterranean world.<sup>74</sup> Although Rome had yet to establish direct imperial control throughout much of the Eastern Mediterranean and would not do so until the middle and end of the first century BCE, it had established military and political dominance (or hegemony) over its Mediterranean neighbors. Rome had become the unipolar hegemon of an international system of states based around the Mediterranean Sea, which we may call the “Mediterranean system.”<sup>75</sup> Meanwhile, in the East, over the course of the second century BCE, the small principality of Parthia expanded its authority throughout much of the Middle East at the expense of its Greek, Persian, and nomadic neighbors. The Parthians ruled these new lands through direct imperial control and vassal kingdoms, and by no later than the early 80s BCE, Parthia had become the unipolar

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<sup>74</sup> Arthur Eckstein argues that Roman hegemony over the Mediterranean occurred as early as the 180s BCE. Yet even by stricter standards of unipolarity, where the dominant power can act alone without any collection of states being able to stop it, Eckstein determines that Rome had achieved this level of dominance by the 160s at the latest. Eckstein 2006: 1-2. Note that, for example, Livy records an Illyrian nobleman, Theodotus, in the 160s describing the Romans as sovereigns of the Mediterranean world. Livy 45.26.7-8. Meanwhile, Tacitus argues that the Romans had subjugated the Mediterranean world by the end of the second century BCE. Tac. *Hist.* 2.38. For stricter standards of hegemonic dominance, see Huntington 1999: 35. Contra Brooks and Wohlforth 2002.

<sup>75</sup> Unipolarity in international relations theory terminology is the domination of an interstate system by one unrivaled unit or state. A modern example would be the United States in the post-Cold War era. Note Huntington 1993; Mastanduno 1997; Wilkinson 1999; Wohlforth 1999; Waltz 2000; Wohlforth 2002.

hegemon of an international system of states based upon Mesopotamia and the Iranian plateau, which we may call the “Eastern system.”<sup>76</sup>

The interstate systems in which the Romans and Parthians participated developed outside of the prior arrangement of the international environment under the Achaemenid Persians and the early Macedonian Successor kingdoms, and they existed in almost complete geopolitical isolation from one another until the middle of the first century BCE.<sup>77</sup> Yet the continued encroachment of the Parthians into the former Near Eastern holdings of the waning Seleucid state and the hard-fought victory of the Romans in the Mithridatic Wars caused the Roman-dominated Mediterranean and Parthian-dominated Eastern systems to overlap considerably in the Near East at this time.<sup>78</sup> By the end of 56 BCE, the Romans had accepted a Parthian invitation to intervene in a Parthian civil war, which initiated the First Romano-Parthian War.<sup>79</sup> At first the scope of this conflict was unclear; however, when the Roman general, Marcus Licinius Crassus, and the Parthian king, Orodes II, committed to a major conflict in 54 BCE, it became a hegemonic war: a large-scale military conflict that reorders or creates a new interstate structure that better reflects the realities of power distribution and balance of power within the system.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> There are two manifestations of the Eastern system worth considering for this study: the “old Eastern system,” which the Achaemenid Persians came to dominate, and the “new Eastern system,” which the Parthians came to dominate. See Overtoom 2016: 2-5. Both are discussed in more detail below; however, to avoid unnecessary confusion, I shall refer to the Parthian-dominated system simply as the “Eastern system” unless a distinction is necessary.

<sup>77</sup> See esp. id. 2016. The arrangement of the international environment prior to the formation of the Parthian state is discussed in more detail in Chapter 1.

<sup>78</sup> Note Appian *Mithr.* 17.119, 121

<sup>79</sup> Id. *Syr.* 8.51; Dio 39.56.2. See also Justin 42.4.1-4

<sup>80</sup> The fundamental concept behind the theory of hegemonic war is “that the uneven growth of power among states is the driving force of international relations.” Gilpin 1988: 591-606. Note also Levy 1985. Not all ancient wars were “hegemonic” wars; however, the vast majority of the wars discussed in this study fit this categorization. The three main criteria for hegemonic war are, first, that the leading power of the interstate system is involved in the conflict, second, that other major powers are involved in the conflict, and third, that it must be an intense and decisive

Both powers maneuvered to establish their own hegemony over the Near East at the direct expense of one another. Crassus' invasion of Mesopotamia caused the Mediterranean and Eastern systems to merge suddenly and violently into what we may call the new and expansive "Med-Eastern system."<sup>81</sup>

The failure of Crassus' invasion initially encouraged the Parthians and the Romans to mount subsequent retaliatory campaigns in an attempt to dominate the Near East and establish their superiority. Yet a growing appreciation of one another's military capabilities began to shift the strategic focus of the conflict away from an emphasis on major military campaigns. Moreover, a continued cycle of dynastic turmoil in the latter half of the first century BCE sapped the strength of the Parthian Empire and made further invasions of Roman territory increasingly difficult. Meanwhile, Augustus, who faced the difficulties of stabilizing the Roman state after a series of Roman civil wars, favored a diplomatic solution to the conflict. Therefore, although the open conflict between the Romans and Parthians endured, for three decades the two powers generally avoided aggressive military policies. However, when Augustus' less forceful policy proved incapable of compelling the Parthians to submit to Roman hegemony and when major violence threatened to erupt once more, the Romans and Parthians decided finally to end the First Romano-Parthian War.<sup>82</sup>

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conflict. Note Levy 1985: 365-6. Therefore, the term "hegemonic war" will appear frequently in this work.

<sup>81</sup> The term "Med-Eastern," as it is utilized throughout this work, serves to emphasize the incorporation of the lands of the Roman and Parthian spheres of influence in Europe and the Middle East into one interactive interstate system. The separate Mediterranean and Eastern interstate systems had merged to become one. Note Overtom 2016: 17. For the political science evaluation of system expansion and merger, see Aron 1973: 87-8; Wilkinson 1987; Buzan et al. 1993: 66-80; Mercer 1993: 163.

<sup>82</sup> For more discussion, see Chapter 6.

Instead of viewing the various conflicts between the Romans and Parthians in the latter half of the first century BCE as individual wars, it is far more accurate to view them as an interconnected series of conflicts within the same overarching war as the Romans and Parthians did. The First Romano-Parthian War (56 BCE - 1 CE) was begun by Gabinius and Mithridates IV in 56 BCE, first executed by Crassus in 54-53 BCE, perpetuated by Orodes II and Antony in 51, 40, 38, and 36-35 BCE, stabilized by Augustus and Phraates IV in 20 BCE, and finally ended by Augustus and Phraates V in 1 CE. Although there were long periods of inaction during the First Romano-Parthian War, there was no official cessation of the conflict or recognition of Rome and Parthia's new relationship as world rivals until the meeting of Gaius Caesar and Phraates V in 1 CE. Much like the later Hundred Year's War between England and France, the First Romano-Parthian war was a series of separate, yet interconnected conflicts within one overall military contest between rival powers.

In 1 CE for the first time ever the Romans and Parthians negotiated and confirmed an official treaty that also for the first time recognized the Euphrates as a border between their two empires.<sup>83</sup> That is, even though Crassus' invasion had caused the separate Roman-dominated Mediterranean and Parthian-dominated Eastern systems to merge into the expansive, shared Med-Eastern system, the Romans and Parthians after decades of indecisive bloodshed and diplomatic maneuvering finally accepted the new bipolar arrangement of the vastly expanded new interstate system in the ancient world for the first time in 1 CE.<sup>84</sup> The First Romano-Parthian War gave way to the Romano-Parthian "cold war" period and the sporadic major

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<sup>83</sup> Vell. Pat. 2.101

<sup>84</sup> Bipolarity in international relations theory terminology is the domination of an interstate system by two units or states that generally share a balance of power. A modern example would be the bipolar relationship of the United States and the USSR during the American-Soviet Cold War. Note Waltz 1988; id. 1993.

conflicts of the Roman imperial period. The Romans and Parthians had come to accept for the time being that they shared the ancient world as hegemonic rivals but never abandoned the desire to dominate the other and to act aggressively.<sup>85</sup>

Several ancient authors recognized and accepted this new world order. The later Roman historian Justin records that the Augustan Age historian Pompeius Trogus emphasized the emergence of this bipolar world rivalry between Rome and Parthia in his time and used it to open his two-book history on the rise of the Parthians. Justin relates that Trogus recorded, “The Parthians, in whose hands the empire of the east now is, having divided the world, as it were, with the Romans, were originally exiles from Scythia.”<sup>86</sup> Trogus likely viewed this statement as a reflection of the geopolitical realities of the recent past, namely the consequences of the Battle of Carrhae and the subsequent escalation of the conflict between Rome and Parthia within his lifetime.<sup>87</sup>

Yet some scholars contend that Trogus and/or Justin, following Augustan propaganda, here meant to portray the Parthians as belonging to a realm outside of the inhabited world or *oikoumene*.<sup>88</sup> Although some Roman writers attempted to portray the Parthians as otherworldly

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<sup>85</sup> Note recent frontier studies of the Roman Empire in the East, which argue that Roman policy never relied upon defensive grand strategy goals. Rather, as Susan Mattern argues, “frontiers were not chosen for strategic reasons but congealed as a result of failure or nonmilitary factors.” Mann 1974; id. 1979; Millar 1982; Hopwood 1986; Isaac 1992; Millar 1993: xiii, 2, 22; Whittaker 1994; id. 1996; Braund 1996; Potter 1996; Mattern 1999: 21, 208-10. Note also Phang 2011: 108-9. The *pax Romana* “was anything but naturally peaceful.” Fuhrmann 2012: 4, 99-100. Note also Woolf 1993: 185-6; Isaac 1992: 1.

<sup>86</sup> “*Parthi, penes quos velut divisione orbis cum Romanis facta nunc Orientis imperium est, Scytharum exules fuere.*” Justin 41.1.1

<sup>87</sup> Wolski 1993: 133-4. See also Syme 1988; Brunt 1990: 458; Wheeler 2002: 287; Lerouge 2007: 119-23.

<sup>88</sup> Sonnabend 1986: 198-203, 209-21; Schneider 2007: 60; Shayegan 2011: 334-40. See also Arnaud 1993; Mattern 1999: 66, 107; Wiesehöfer 2002b; Wheeler 2002. Shayegan argues that because Augustus wanted to avoid hegemonic war against the Parthians he preferred imperial ideology that connected the Romans to the Classical Greeks and the Persian Wars and distanced

at times for rhetorical effect, as discussed in detail below, the Romans never abandoned the idea and hope of forcing the Parthians to accept Roman hegemony.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, this concept of otherworldliness does not necessarily exclude a corresponding Roman understanding of the Parthians as new hegemonic rivals. Further, this speculative argument attempts to ignore that Justin clearly records that the Romans and Parthians had come to divide one world.<sup>90</sup>

Although the Romans could attempt to portray the Parthians as otherworldly and sometimes did, it seems unconvincing that this was the focus of Augustan propaganda. Augustus and his supporters would have preferred not to attempt to redefine the *oikoumene*, which was a Greek concept that included Asia within the inhabited world, along these lines if it were avoidable.<sup>91</sup> This is because to do so meant that Augustus had to try to shrink the Roman concept of *oikoumene* to exclude the Parthians' extensive rival empire in Asia. This was difficult for two main reasons. First, it placed him in a challenging and awkward position politically since it potentially made him appear weak in the post-Carrhae world. Second, contemporary Greeks and Romans in reality understood that this arbitrary division of Mediterranean Europe and Middle

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itself from the Alexander the Great symbolism of the Late Republican period. Shayegan 2011: 337-40. Note also Schneider 2007: 74; Højte 2009c: 122. Yet Benjamin Isaac points out that, although the Romans projected some Persian stereotypes upon the Parthians, most notably despotism, the Romans did not apply most of the anti-Persian stereotypes developed by the Greeks to the Parthians. The more neutral attitude of the Romans toward the Parthians had to do with Rome's inability to conquer them. See Isaac 2006: 371-80. See also Mattern 1999: 70-1; Gregoratti 2011a; id. 2015c.

<sup>89</sup> Manil. 4.674-5. For example, see also Vell. Pat. 2.53.3; Tac. *Ann.* 2.2, 6.20, 15.13; id. *Hist.* 4.3, 5.25; id. *Agr.* 17; Dio 37.21.2, 43.14.6, 21.2, 44.2.4, 48.22.2, 50.11.5, 24.3, 56.33.6, 62.14.4, 22.6, 74.5.7, 75.4, 76.15.4, 78.26.1; Ruf. Fest. 21.1, 26.1, 28.1; Florus 2.14.8. Note also Isaac 2006: 371-2.

<sup>90</sup> The Greeks and Romans of the Augustan Age understood that the inhabited world was only part of the larger earth; however, they considered Asia an important part of the inhabited world, which stretched from Spain to India. Note esp. Strabo 1.1.3, 8, 13, 15, 16, 2.38, 3.3, 4.6-7, 2.1.1, 31, 3.4, 5.4-5, 10, 13. See also Arist. *Meteor.* 2.5.13

<sup>91</sup> For a recent investigation of the concepts of ancient geography and cartography, note Podossinov 2014; Cameron 2014.



Eastern Asia into two separate inhabited (civilized) and uninhabited (barbarian) worlds was at its core inaccurate and irrelevant. For example, Strabo highlights Eratosthenes censuring Greek geographers in his lost work *Geographika*, who “divide the whole multitude of mankind into two groups, namely, Greeks and Barbarians,” and records, “Eratosthenes goes on to say that it would be better to make such divisions according to good qualities and bad qualities; for not only are many of the Greeks bad, but many of the Barbarians are refined — Indians and Arians, for example, and, further, Romans and Carthaginians, who carry on their governments so admirably.”<sup>92</sup> Moreover, Strabo in his major work on the geography of the world during Augustus’ reign followed well-established Greek ideas of the *oikoumene*, which included Asia within the inhabited world but divided it into “three continents,” Europe, Asia, and Africa.<sup>93</sup> At the beginning of his work, Strabo states,

We may learn both from the evidence of our senses and from experience that the inhabited world is an island; for wherever it has been possible for man to reach the limits of the earth, sea has been found, and this sea we call ‘Oceanus.’ And wherever we have not been able to learn by the evidence of our sense, there reason points the way. For example, as to the eastern (Indian) side of the inhabited earth, and the western (Iberian and Maurusian) side, one may sail wholly around them and continue the voyage for a considerable distance along the northern and southern regions.<sup>94</sup>

Thus, Strabo emphasizes that the lands surrounded by the ocean were the inhabited world, which is why he considered Ireland and Britain to be savage regions on the periphery of the inhabited world.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Strabo 1.4.9

<sup>93</sup> Id. 12.3.27, 16.3.24. See also Vell. Pat. 2.40.4; Plut. *Pomp.* 45.5, 53.7; id. *Cato Min.* 45.2; Orosius 6.17.

<sup>94</sup> Strabo 1.1.8. See also Plut. *Pomp.* 38.2; id. *Caes.* 58.6-7.

<sup>95</sup> Strabo 2.5.8, 4.5.4

Strabo also included extensive sections on the geography of the Middle East in books 11, 15, and 16. In fact, Strabo emphasized that he considered the lands south of the northern reaches of the Caspian Sea, which included the lands of the Parthian Empire, within the borders of the inhabited world.<sup>96</sup> Finally, Strabo ends his extensive geographical study with a brief conclusion on the position of the Romans within the inhabited world. He begins by stating, “This, then, is the lay of the different parts of our inhabited world; but since the Romans occupy the best and the best known portions of it, having surpassed all former rulers of whom we have record, it is worthwhile, even though briefly, to add the following account of them.”<sup>97</sup> He then establishes that the Romans had dominated Europe and Africa, which left him to consider the situation in Asia. Strabo concludes,

In like manner, of Asia also, the whole of the coast on Our Sea [that is, the Mediterranean Sea] is subject to them [the Romans], unless one takes into account the regions of the Achaei, the Zygi, and the Heniochi, who live a piratical and nomadic life in narrow and sterile districts; and of the interior and the country deep inland [that is, of the lands within the Near East and Middle East], one part is held by the Romans themselves and another by the Parthians and the barbarians beyond them; and on the east and north live Indians and Bactrians and Scythians, and then Arabians and Ethiopians. The same further portion [of the Near East] is constantly being taken from these peoples and added to the possessions of the Romans.<sup>98</sup>

It is interesting that Strabo here follows the lead of Eratosthenes and does not label the Parthians as barbarians and thus simply divide the world between the civilized *oikoumene* of the Romans and the barbarized world of the outsider. Instead, Strabo describes a world where the Parthians

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<sup>96</sup> Id. 2.5.31-2, 11.1.4, 6.1, 4. See also id. 1.1.2-16, 2.1, 10, 20, 28, 32, 40, 3.2-3, 4.2-8, 2.1.1, 13-14, 17, 22, 30-3, 40, 3.5-7, 4.3, 7, 5.1, 3-11, 13-16, 18, 34-5, 3.1.1, 4, 6, 2.11, 5.5, 4.5.5, 6.4.2; 9.3.6, 11.1.1, 11.7, 15.1.12, 17.1.13, 2.1, 3.1, 10, 24.

<sup>97</sup> Id. 16.3.24.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

were the rivals of the Romans in Asia but inferior to the Romans within the larger *oikoumene* of the Augustan Age, which many other ancient writers accepted as well.<sup>99</sup>

Therefore, the focus of Augustan propaganda was not the exclusion of the Parthians from the inhabited world; rather, as discussed below as well, Augustan propaganda in fact generally maintained the complete opposite outlook!<sup>100</sup> That is, Augustus and many Roman writers who supported his imperial propaganda claimed that Augustus had in fact come to dominate the entire world, which included the domination of the Parthians, albeit in an unconventional, nonviolent way. Augustan Age writers, such as Strabo and Trogus, accepted that the Parthians were the last

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<sup>99</sup> In fact, Strabo emphasizes Augustus' arrangement of the Roman world in the next and final section of his work. Id. 16.3.25. Meanwhile, when Pliny the Elder, writing in the 70s CE, describes the arrangement of the world in books 3-6 of his encyclopedia on the aspects of the natural world, he also includes Europe, Africa, and Asia within the scope of the inhabited world. Pliny in fact later states, "If a person were carefully to enumerate the peoples of Ethiopia, Egypt, Arabia, India, Scythia, Bactria, and Sarmatia, together with all the numerous peoples of the East, and the vast realms of the Parthians, he would find that fully one-half of mankind throughout the whole world live under a dominion imposed by the agency of the arrow." Pliny *NH* 16.65.160. Thus, Pliny also in his work views the Parthians as the major power in Asia but sets up the Parthian dominion to appear inferior to that of the Romans in Europe and Africa. See Mattern 1999: 59-60. Note also Josephus' account of a speech by King Agrippa II in 66 CE, where, although Agrippa incorrectly portrays the Parthians as submissive under Roman hegemony, the king tries to dissuade the Jews from going to war with the Romans because they cannot hope for support from any of the peoples within the inhabited world, including the Jewish communities of Mesopotamia under the rule of the Parthians. *Jos. Bell.* 2.345-401. Josephus also states that Strabo of Cappadocia noted that the Jews had communities throughout the inhabited world in the west and east. Id. *Ant.* 14.110-19. Immediately following his discussion of Crassus' failure in Parthia, at the end of his first book Florus states, "They [the Romans] carried their arms over the whole world." Florus 1.47.1. Further, at the end of his second book Florus concludes, "The Parthians too, as though they repented of their victory, voluntarily returned the standards which they had won at the time of Crassus' defeat. *Thus everywhere throughout the inhabited world there was firmly-established and uninterrupted peace or truce*, and Caesar Augustus ventured at last, in the seven hundredth year since the foundation of the city, to close the double doors of the temple of Janus, which had previously been shut on two occasions only, in the reign of Numa and after the first defeat of Carthage." Id. 2.34.61-4. The italics are mine. See also Dio 64.4.3; Plut. *Eum. and Sert.* 1.2

<sup>100</sup> For the representation of the Parthians in Augustan Rome and the Roman imperial propagandistic emphasis on the domestication of the Parthians within the Roman world, see Rose 2005; Lerouge 2007.

rivals of the Romans but were inclined to present the Romans as superior. This more optimistic portrayal of Roman imperialism within the expanded Med-Eastern world allowed Augustus' imperial ideology to influence the people of Rome through strength and initiative since Augustus could still claim to maintain traditional Roman dominance while implementing his nontraditional new eastern policy. The far more common use of this propagandistic tradition illustrates its favorability and superiority.

Justin records that Trogus concluded his two-book Parthian history by praising Augustus for regaining the prisoners and lost standards of Crassus and Antony and for obtaining Parthian princes as "hostages" without violence. Justin relates, "[Augustus] Caesar effected more by the magnitude (*magnitudine*) of his name, than any other general could have done by his [military] arms."<sup>101</sup> Trogus and Justin here clearly support Augustus' imperial propaganda, which overlooked Augustus' potentially embarrassing unwillingness to contest the Parthians in battle, misrepresented Phraates IV's return of the captured Roman prisoners and standards as an acknowledgment by the Parthians of their submission to Rome, and ignored that the Parthian princes were not in fact hostages but instead royal guests, eagerly sent away by Phraates IV, who did not want them in Parthia as potential rivals.<sup>102</sup> Trogus' biased opinion at the end of Book 42 may appear at odds with his statement at the beginning of Book 41 that the Romans and Parthians had split the world as rivals; however, note that Trogus did not claim that Parthia actually had submitted to Roman hegemony, which indeed it had not. He merely presents the Romans as gaining the upper hand against the Parthians diplomatically because of Augustus' shrewdness and ends his history on the Parthians two decades before the peace negotiations of 1

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<sup>101</sup> Justin 42.5.10-12. See also Vell. Pat. 2.94.4

<sup>102</sup> Strabo 16.1.28; Tac. *Ann.* 2.1. Later Parthian kings also removed potential rivals by sending them off to Rome. Id. 13.9. Note Wheeler 2002: 289; Wiesehöfer 2002b: 293; Gregoratti 2015c.

CE. Once again, we see a Roman writer accepting that the Parthians were the rivals of the Romans, as the great power in the East, but portraying the Romans as superior in their relationship with the Parthians.

Yet there are two other examples of Trogus' support of Augustus that we must consider briefly. If we can rely on Justin's summary, Trogus claimed at the start of Book 43 that Rome "is now the mistress of the world" and argued at the end of Book 44 that Augustus had "subdued the rest of the world."<sup>103</sup> At first these statements might appear even more at odds with Trogus' statement at the beginning of Book 41 that the Romans and Parthians had split the world as rivals; however, there are good explanations for why they are not.

Trogus in the last two books of his history quickly tried to summarize the early history of Rome and then the entire history of Spain up to Augustus' final conquests of the region so that he would not be marked as "an ungrateful citizen."<sup>104</sup> Books 43 and 44 read like an awkward but perhaps unavoidable addendum to Trogus' larger history. Trogus was only a third generation Roman citizen from Gallic stock, whose grandfather and uncle had fought for Pompey and whose father had attended Caesar as a secretary.<sup>105</sup> Because of Trogus' family background, which he makes a point to champion and legitimize at the end of Book 43, and because of the overwhelming emphasis on foreign events in the rest of his history, Trogus felt obligated to stress two main issues in his final two books. First, he felt the need to address "his native country," Rome, quickly at the end of his work. Second, he felt the need to flatter Augustus in these last two books since Augustus was the adopted son of his father's former patron and easily

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<sup>103</sup> Justin 43.1.2, 44.5.8

<sup>104</sup> Id. 43.1.1.

<sup>105</sup> Id. 43.5.11-12.

could have been Trogus' patron.<sup>106</sup> Thus, since their content and tone were at odds with his approach to the other 42 books in his history, Trogus clearly meant for his last two books to be inherently patriotic and biased standalone accounts. With this in mind, Trogus perhaps detached his more transparent and enthusiastic Augustan propaganda in his final two books from the rest of his history. Therefore, in the context of his prior two books on Parthian history—which actually mark the natural end of his focused narrative on the history of the Eastern world—although Trogus argued that Augustus had established the Romans as slightly superior diplomatically through the *magnitudo* of his name, Trogus in fact understood that the Parthians remained independent of Roman hegemony, recognized that the Parthians were the last rivals of the Romans, and accepted that Rome and Parthia had divided what had become one expansive shared world into two *imperia*.

Meanwhile, in books 43 and 44 Trogus perhaps also simply meant that Rome under Augustus had finally completely dominated the traditional Roman world of the Mediterranean with the submission of the Spanish tribes to Augustus, which was after all the focus of these last two books, without consideration of the expanded new world order between Rome and Parthia. In fact, since Augustus' campaign in Spain ended in 25 BCE five years before Phraates IV returned the captured Roman prisoners and standards to Augustus, which Trogus used to mark the end of his history of the East in Book 42, it would be immensely difficult to argue that Trogus' comments in books 43 and 44 contradict his opening statement in Book 41 that the Romans and Parthians had split the world as rivals. Ultimately, Trogus' extensive history of the Eastern world, especially the sections on the ancient Middle East, served to educate his western,

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<sup>106</sup> Id. 43.1.1.

Roman audience and familiarize them with the historical background and geographical expanse of the other half of the enlarged interstate system within this new world order.<sup>107</sup>

In Book 41 Trogus not only emphasized that the Parthians had come to divide the world with the Romans, but also he stressed that the Parthians were the military rivals of the Romans.<sup>108</sup> Justin recounts, “Being assailed by the Romans, also, in three wars, under the conduct of the greatest generals [that is, Crassus, Ventidius, and Antony], and at the most flourishing period of the republic, they [the Parthians] alone, of all nations, were not only a match for them [the Romans], but came off victorious.”<sup>109</sup> Justin later records that Orodes II, having heard of his forces’ successful invasions of Syria and Asia Minor, boasted “of his son Pacorus as the conqueror of the Romans.”<sup>110</sup> The Parthians certainly suffered setbacks in the First Romano-Parthian War; however, they came out of the first phase of the conflict with a well-earned military reputation and confidence in their ability to continue the struggle.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Pliny the Elder tells us that Augustus sent Dionysius of Charax [perhaps Isidore of Charax] “to gather all necessary information in the East, when his eldest adopted son was about to set out for Armenia to take the command against the Parthians and Arabians.” Dionysius (or Isidore) wrote a description of the world that included Parthia. Pliny *NH* 6.31.141. Isidore of Charax also wrote a work known as *The Parthian Stations*, which chronicled the trade networks within the Parthian Empire. Note Colledge 1967: 47. Note also that Aelius Aristides, writing after Lucius Verus’ successful Romano-Parthian war, viewed Roman power as boundless and argued, “We do not need geographers anymore.” Aristides 26.10, 102. Roman knowledge of the geographical extent of the Parthian Empire was minimal during Augustus’ reign. Note Mattern 1999: 34-5, 58-9.

<sup>108</sup> Note Lerouge 2007: 273-321.

<sup>109</sup> Justin 41.1.7. It is clear from Trogus’ Book 42 that he here meant Crassus’ failed invasion in the middle 50s BCE, the initially very successful campaign of Pacorus against Ventidius in the late 40s BCE, and Antony’s failed invasion of Media in the middle 30s BCE. Id. 42.4.4-7, 5.3. Some contemporaries of these events, including Trogus, viewed Crassus as a skilled commander. Note also Dion. Hal. 2.6.4

<sup>110</sup> Justin 42.4.11

<sup>111</sup> For instance, Josephus has Agrippa II describe the Parthians as “that most warlike body of men, and lords of so many nations, and encompassed with such mighty forces.” Jos. *Bell.* 2.379

Numerous other Greek and Roman writers from the Augustan Age to late antiquity recognized the Parthians as the rivals of the Romans, emphasizing their military success and power.<sup>112</sup> Strabo, whose Augustan Age work also aimed to familiarize a Roman audience with the historical background and geographical scope of the recently important Parthian-dominated East, records,

Indeed, the spread of the empires of the Romans and of the Parthians has presented to geographers of today a considerable addition to our empirical knowledge of geography, just as did the campaign of Alexander [the Great] to geographers of earlier times, as Eratosthenes points out. ... And, again, the Parthians have increased our knowledge in regard to Hyrcania and Bactriana, and in regard to the Scythians who live north of Hyrcania and Bactriana, all of which countries were but imperfectly known to the earlier geographers. I therefore may have something more to say than my predecessors. This will become particularly apparent in what I shall have to say in criticism of my predecessors.<sup>113</sup>

Strabo here associates the empires of the Romans and Parthians and praises the Parthians for opening up the lands of the Farther East to Graeco-Roman inquiry. Thus, Strabo at the beginning of his work emphasizes the new interconnectedness of the world with the dual successes of the Romans and Parthians, and stresses how this new understanding of the world required his attention.<sup>114</sup> Strabo writes something quite similar later in his work, stating,

Neither is it easy to believe most of those who have written the history of Alexander [the Great]; for these toy with facts, both because of the glory of Alexander and because his expedition reached the ends of Asia, far away from us; and statements about things that are far away are hard to refute. But the supremacy of the Romans and that of the Parthians has disclosed considerably more knowledge than that which had previously come down to us by tradition. For those who write about those distant regions tell a more trustworthy story than

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<sup>112</sup> Note esp. Vell. Pat. 2.40.1, 101.1-2; Lucan *Phar.* 1.100-14, 8.211-430; Pliny *NH* 5.21.88; Jos. *Ant.* 18.46; Curt. 6.2.12; Tac. *Ann.* 2.56.1, 60.4, 4.5.2, 12.10.2; Dio 40.14-15; Herodian 4.10.1-4; Amm. Mar. 23.6.1-9; Florus 2.20.1, 21.2; Ruf. Fest. 14-30; Fronto *Prin. Hist.* 3; Julian *Or.* 1.17-18

<sup>113</sup> Strabo 1.2.1

<sup>114</sup> Note also id. 2.5.12. Strabo pinpoints Crassus' invasion of Mesopotamia as the beginning of the conflict between Rome and Parthia. Id. 16.1.28.



their predecessors, both of the places and of the tribes among which the activities took place, for they have looked into the matter more closely.<sup>115</sup>

Here Strabo again compares the supremacy of Rome and Parthia side-by-side and even praises it favorably in comparison to the accomplishments of Alexander the Great. Strabo soon after continues, “At the present time [the Augustan Age] they [the Parthians] rule over so much land and so many tribes that in the size of their empire they have become, in a way, rivals of the Romans.”<sup>116</sup> Finally, Strabo later states, “The Euphrates and the land beyond it constitute the boundary of the Parthian Empire. But the parts this side of the river are held by the Romans.”<sup>117</sup> Thus, Strabo too emphasizes the rivalry of Rome and Parthia and their division of the world along the Euphrates in the Augustan Age.

Photius tells us that Arrian, in his lost history on the Parthians, related that, after the Parthians had seized northeastern Iran, “they drove out the Macedonians [that is, the Seleucids], set up a government of their own, and became so powerful that they were a match for the Romans in war, and sometimes even were victorious over them.”<sup>118</sup> Moreover, Appian recounts a story of Antony, Octavian, and Lepidus trying to raise money for their war against Brutus and Cassius. The triumvirs attempted to tax the wealthy women of Rome, and the representative of these women, Hortensia, criticized the triumvirs in a public speech. In the speech she associates the Parthians with two other great hegemonic rivals of the Romans, the Carthaginians and the Gauls.<sup>119</sup> Further, Tacitus records Roman officers, who were serving in Armenia during the Romano-Parthian war of 58-63 CE, stating, “‘Nor, indeed,’ they argued, ‘had the Samnites, a

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<sup>115</sup> Id. 11.6.4.

<sup>116</sup> Id. 11.9.2. Livy alone criticized his peers for presenting the Parthians as a rival of Rome. Livy 9.18.6. He appears frustrated to be in the minority.

<sup>117</sup> Strabo 16.1.28. See also id. 14.5.2.

<sup>118</sup> See Photius *Bib.* 58. See also Dio 40.14.3-4

<sup>119</sup> Appian *BC* 4.32-3. See also August. *Civ. Dei* 4.29; Jos. *Bell.* 2.379-80

tribe of provincial Italy, the strength of the Parthians who rivaled imperial Rome.”<sup>120</sup>

Meanwhile, Velleius Paterculus describes the official recognition of the new world order by Rome and Parthia with his firsthand eyewitness account of the meeting between Gaius Caesar and Phraates V on the Euphrates in 1 CE. He records,

On an island in the Euphrates, with an equal retinue on each side, Gaius had a meeting with the king of the Parthians, a young man of distinguished presence. This spectacle of the Roman army arrayed on one side, the Parthian [army] on the other, while these two eminent leaders not only of the empires they represented but also of mankind thus met in conference—truly a notable and a memorable sight—was my fortunate lot to see early in my career as a soldier, when I held the rank of tribune... As for the meeting, first the Parthian [king Phraates V] dined with Gaius [Caesar] upon the Roman bank, and later Gaius supped with the [Parthian] king on the soil of the enemy.<sup>121</sup>

Thus, the Romans and Parthians met as equals in 1 CE and, as Strabo indicated, finally recognized the Euphrates as an official common boundary between their empires. This meeting not only marked the end of the First Romano-Parthian War and the beginning of the first period of “cold war” between the two powers, but it also illustrates that the Romans and Parthians officially acknowledged their bipolar world rivalry at this time.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 15.13. See also id. 15.15

<sup>121</sup> Vell. Pat. 2.101

<sup>122</sup> Tacitus records that Artabanus II and Germanicus renewed the treaty in 19 CE with similar emphasis on the Euphrates as an official common boundary. Tac. *Ann.* 2.58. See also id. 12.10, 13.7, 37, 15.1. Artabanus and Lucius Vitellius later renewed the treaty again in the middle of a bridge across the Euphrates in 37 CE. Jos. *Ant.* 18.101-2; Dio 59.27.2-3. Note that this study is in line with several efforts to abandon the incorrect association of Arsaces II (ca. 211-185 BCE) with the name Artabanus I. See Chapter 2 of this study. Note also Wolski 1962: 138ff.; Schmitt 1964: 62 n.2, 63; Le Rider 1965: 313ff.; Bengston 1969: 417; Altheim and Stiehl 1970: 445ff.; Volkmann 1972: 533-4; Lerner 1999: 26-8; Assar 2005a. Thus, the Artabanus who reigned in the early first century CE was Artabanus II, not Artabanus III. Meanwhile, Tacitus also records that Vologases I and Corbulo made a similar arrangement in 62 CE. Tac. *Ann.* 15.17. Rufus Festus and Eutropius record that Hadrian sought out the Euphrates as a boundary. Ruf. Fest. 20.3; Eutrop. 8.6. Moreover, Josephus considers the Euphrates the limit of the Roman Empire in the East and the limit of the Parthian Empire in the West. Jos. *Bell.* 3.102-7; id. *Ant.* 20.87. Further, Appian states that the boundaries of the Romans’ dominion stretched “from the setting of the sun to the river Euphrates.” Appian *Mithr.* 17.119. See also id. 17.121. Meanwhile, in late antiquity

The Romans and Parthians' concepts of the world in which they directly acted expanded drastically in the latter half of the first century BCE in large part because of Crassus' failed invasion of Mesopotamia in 53 BCE.<sup>123</sup> For example, Plutarch states, "For had they [the Romans during the civil war between Caesar and Pompey] now been willing quietly to govern and enjoy what they had conquered, the greatest and best part of earth and sea was subject to them, and if they still desired to gratify their thirst for trophies and triumphs, they might have had their fill of wars with Parthians or Germans."<sup>124</sup> Thus, Plutarch is another writer who considered the Parthians as rivals of the Romans and included them within the expanded Roman world but, at the same time, emphasized the territorial superiority of Rome. Moreover, with the start of the First Romano-Parthian War, both powers began to commit to intervening in the military concerns of the other in the Mediterranean *and* Middle East for the first time. For instance, Lucan argues that Pompey tried to use Parthian soldiers to fight Caesar.<sup>125</sup> In fact, Pompey likely

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Emperor Julian looked back upon Augustus' settlement in the East favorably and emphasized that Augustus set the Euphrates border with the Parthians. Julian *Caes.* 326B-D-327A. Note that Wheeler argues that the Romans truly did not recognize the Parthians as equals or the Euphrates as a border until 218 CE. Wheeler 2002: 289-91.

<sup>123</sup> Plutarch compared the ambitions of Crassus to those of Alexander the Great in the East, arguing that he planned to incorporate the lands from Mesopotamia to Bactria and India within the empire of the Romans. Plut. *Crass.* 16.2, 19.7, 35.7, 37.2-3; id. *Nic. and Crass.* 4.2, 4-5. Undoubtedly, Plutarch exaggerates the goals of Crassus; however, his remarks indicate that by the reign of Trajan his Roman audience considered the Roman conquest of the entire Parthian Empire plausible because of the expanded interstate system and wartime atmosphere in which they lived. Note also Orosius, who states, "The Parthians acted as if the eyes of the entire world, both conquered and pacified, were focused upon them, and as if the entire strength of the Roman Empire were to be directed against them alone." Orosius 6.21. For a new account of Orosius and his universal history, see Fear 2010.

<sup>124</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 70.2

<sup>125</sup> Lucan *Phar.* 8.229-38, 320-5, 334-62, 414-22. Because the Roman and Parthian worlds had become integrated, the Romans began to use Parthian soldiers for the first time in the latter half of the first century BCE. See Appian *BC* 4.59, 88, 99, 133. For example, Parthian forces aided the Pompeian general Caecilius Bassus against Caesarian forces in Syria. Dio 47.27.3-5

had sent his cousin Hirus to the Parthians to ask for military support.<sup>126</sup> Dio even argues that Orodes II offered Pompey a military alliance and soldiers in exchange for control over Syria.<sup>127</sup> Lucan also includes the Parthians in the list of peoples who would feel the devastation of the war between Caesar and Pompey, concluding “Here [in Greece] the war was predestinate to flow in all the parts of earth.”<sup>128</sup> Meanwhile, Plutarch and Appian relate a story of Pompey planning to flee to the Parthian king before his advisors convinced him to abandon the plan because of the military threat and overconfidence of the Parthians.<sup>129</sup> Plutarch adds that Pompey argued, “The Parthian [that is, Orodes II] was best able for the present to receive and protect them in their weak condition, and later on to strengthen them and send them forth with a large force.”<sup>130</sup> Interestingly, Dio rejects this report because the Romans and Parthians hated one another and had such a strong rivalry because of Crassus expedition.<sup>131</sup> Yet Pompey’s son Sextus also later tried to flee to Parthia and to offer the Parthian king his services.<sup>132</sup> Moreover, Orodes II sent men to aid Brutus and Cassius in the Roman civil war against Antony and Octavian, and

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<sup>126</sup> Caes. *BC*. 3.82.4; Dio 41.55.3; 42.2.5-6. Seager argues that Pompey sent Hirus to secure Parthian neutrality. Seager 2002: 167-8.

<sup>127</sup> Dio 41.55.4

<sup>128</sup> Lucan *Phar.* 6.49-63. See also Petron. *Satry.* 120; Dio 44.28.3, 45.27.4-5

<sup>129</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 76.3-6; Appian *BC* 2.83. See also Vell. Pat. 2.53.1; Lucan 8.276; Florus 2.13.51. If such a scenario was possible, clearly the geopolitical developments of the Mediterranean and East had become intertwined.

<sup>130</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 76.4

<sup>131</sup> Dio states, “I have heard, indeed, that Pompey even thought of fleeing to the Parthians, but I cannot credit the report. For that race so hated the Romans as a people ever since Crassus had made his expedition against them, and Pompey especially, because he was related to Crassus, that they had even imprisoned his envoy who came with a request for aid, though he was a senator. And Pompey would never have endured in his misfortune to become a suppliant of his bitterest foe for what he had failed to obtain while enjoying success.” Dio 42.2.5-6. See also Justin 42.4.6

<sup>132</sup> Appian *BC* 5.133, 136; Dio 49.18.1. Other Roman statesmen, such as Rubius Fabatus, attempted to flee to the Parthians as well. Tac. *Ann.* 6.14

Brutus and Cassius sent their ally, Labienus, back to the Parthians to gain more soldiers.<sup>133</sup> Further, Josephus and Tacitus describe how civil war in Parthia encouraged Parthian factions to request the return of the Parthian princes in exile in Rome in order to serve as new royal candidates, and then they describe how Augustus complied but how the Parthians ultimately rejected these candidates.<sup>134</sup> These examples help demonstrate that events in Europe, the Near East, and the Middle East had come to affect both superpowers directly as never before because they had come to share an extensive international environment by the late 50s BCE.<sup>135</sup>

Julius Caesar's abortive grand campaign in 44 BCE also demonstrates the new eastern military emphasis of the Romans. He had planned to connect a quick expedition in Europe against the Getae directly to a major expedition of vengeance against the Parthians.<sup>136</sup> In fact, Plutarch states,

For he [Caesar] planned and prepared to make an expedition against the Parthians; and after subduing these and marching around the Euxine [that is, the Black Sea] by way of Hyrcania, the Caspian sea, and the Caucasus, to invade Scythia; and after overrunning the countries bordering on Germany and Germany itself, to come back by way of Gaul to Italy, and so to complete this circuit of his empire, which would then be bounded on all sides by the ocean.<sup>137</sup>

Clearly, Plutarch here exaggerates the goals of Caesar's campaign; however, his account emphasizes the inhabited world "bounded on all sides by the ocean" and the desire of the

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<sup>133</sup> Appian *BC* 4.63; Justin 42.4.7, 5.3; Dio 48.24-6, 39-40; Strabo 12.8.9, 14.2.24

<sup>134</sup> Jos. *Ant.* 18.39-52; Tac. *Ann.* 2.1-3. See also id. 2.58, 6.31-2, 12.10-14; Justin 42.5.4-9

<sup>135</sup> For more examples from the post-Augustan world, see the Epilogue.

<sup>136</sup> Note Appian *BC* 2.110, 3.77; Plut. *Caes.* 58; id. *Brut.* 22.2, 25.2; Dio 43.51.1-2, 44.1.1, 46.3, 45.3.1, 29.4; Vell. Pat. 2.59.4; Suet. *Caes.* 44.3, *Aug.* 8.2. See also Nicol. Frag. 130; Florus 2.13.94. Caesar had approved of Crassus' war against the Parthians and had encouraged him to action. Plut. *Crass.* 16.3

<sup>137</sup> Plut. *Caes.* 58.6-7. Elsewhere, Plutarch argues that Caesar's name "robbed the kings of Parthia and India of their sleep." Id. *Dion and Brut.* 4.3.

Romans to dominate this world. Thus, he demonstrates the new military importance of the Parthians and their inclusion within the Roman concept of the world.

Unlike Gabinius and Crassus, who in reality had quite limited military goals in Mesopotamia and comparatively modest sized armies, Caesar, like Mark Antony after him, organized one of the largest Roman armies in history to subdue the Parthians permanently with unrivaled force in order to create a Roman World Empire.<sup>138</sup> The inability of the Romans to accomplish this goal was something later Roman writers consistently lamented. For instance, Plutarch, writing during the belligerent reign of Trajan, bemoans the lost opportunity Lucullus had to defeat the Parthians and to conquer all of Asia in the early 60s BCE.<sup>139</sup> Plutarch also regrets that Pompey or Caesar did not conquer the Parthians.<sup>140</sup> Moreover, Eutropius states that the Romans would “easily have subdued the whole world” had Pompey and Caesar not fought a civil war.<sup>141</sup>

Dio, writing during the bellicose reigns of the Severans, states that the Romans “felt some hope of subjugating the Parthians then [under Caesar], if ever.”<sup>142</sup> Meanwhile, Lucan, writing

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<sup>138</sup> In fact, Antony planned to undertake a second massive invasion of the Parthian Empire before the conflict with Octavian interfered. *Id. Ant.* 52-3. For Antony, see Weigall 1931; Chaumont 1986b; Roberts 1988; Southern 1998; Preston 2008; Southern 2009; Goldsworthy 2010; de Ruggiero 2014.

<sup>139</sup> Plutarch states, “Had this power of gaining the affection of his soldiers been added to his other gifts, which were so many and so great,—courage, diligence, wisdom, and justice,—the Roman Empire would not have been bounded by the Euphrates, but by the outer confines of Asia, and the Hyrcanian sea [that is, the Caspian Sea]; for all the other nations had already been subdued by Tigranes, and in the time of Lucullus the Parthian power was not so great as it proved to be in the time of Crassus, nor was it so well united, nay rather, owing to intestine and neighboring wars, it had not even strength enough to repel the wanton attacks of the Armenians.” *Id. Luc.* 36.5-6. Plutarch of course conveniently ignores that the Parthians were fighting another civil war when Crassus gained his Syrian command in 55 BCE.

<sup>140</sup> *Id. Pomp.* 70.3-4.

<sup>141</sup> Eutrop. 6.21

<sup>142</sup> Dio 43.51

during Nero's indecisive war against the Parthians, argues that Rome lost its chance to conquer the Parthian-dominated East and to rule the "furthest Earth beyond the Tigris' stream" because of Caesar and Pompey's civil war.<sup>143</sup> Interestingly, Lucan finds it shameful that "eastern nations dreaded more the sarissa [of Macedon] than now the pila [of Rome]," and he associates the Arsacids with the Achaemenids and chastises Rome for failing to become the true successor of Alexander the Great.<sup>144</sup> Yet later Roman writers, including Emperor Julian, in fact did view Rome as the true successor of Alexander's empire and wanted Rome to fulfill Alexander's dream of becoming the "master of the whole earth and sea."<sup>145</sup> Meanwhile, Suetonius records that a Roman prophecy stated, "Lucius Cotta would announce as the decision of Fifteen, that inasmuch as it was written in the books of fate that the Parthians could be conquered only by a king, Caesar should be given that title."<sup>146</sup> Moreover, Nicolaus of Damascus, who was a friend of Augustus and wrote a eulogistic biography of the emperor, bewailed Caesar's death, stating, "The body of Caesar lay just where it fell, ignominiously stained with blood—a man who had advanced westward as far as Britain and the Ocean, and who had intended to advance eastward against the realms of the Parthians and Indians, so that, with them also subdued, an empire of all land and sea might be brought under the power of a single head."<sup>147</sup> Finally, in the fourth century CE, Julian in his work entitled *The Caesars*, wrote about a feast of the gods, where the gods passed judgment on Alexander the Great and the Roman emperors. Julius Caesar is among the most

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<sup>143</sup> Lucan *Phar.* 7.433, 8.407-26

<sup>144</sup> *Id.* 10.46-52. I altered this translation to reflect the Latin more accurately.

<sup>145</sup> Julian *Or.* 3.107C. See also Cic. *Cat.* 3.26; Aristides 26.10, 102; Diod. 18.4.4; Livy 9.16.16-19; Lucian *Dial.* 25; Curt. 10.1.17-18; Plut. *Pyrrh.* 19.1-2; *id. De fort. Rom.* 13; Arr. *Anab.* 7.1.3, 19.3-6; Herodian 3.4.3; Julian. *Epist.* 47.433C; Amm. Marc. 30.8.5; Oros. 3.15.10; Jo. Lyd. *Mag.* 1.38; *Alex. Rom.* 1.27 (supplement C), 3.35 (supplement K). Note Overtoom 2012.

<sup>146</sup> Suet. *Caes.* 79.3. See also Plut. *Caes.* 60.1-3; Dio 44.15.3-4

<sup>147</sup> Nicol. Frag. 130

revered guests at the dinner, but when Trajan enters, he is praised for his military prowess as he carries on his shoulders trophies for “his wars with the Getae and the Parthians.”<sup>148</sup> Julian’s emphasis here is that Trajan had capitalized where his predecessors had not because he had won an aggressive war against the Parthians.<sup>149</sup> In Julian’s writings, we see that the geopolitical interconnectedness of Europe and Asia occupied the minds of emperors for centuries. In fact, later in the work Julian again emphasizes the interconnectedness of the post-Crassus world when Julian has Caesar argue that he surpassed Alexander the Great in war because, where Alexander only conquered Asia, Caesar, despite dying before his planned Parthian expedition, had captured countless cities in Europe *and* Asia.<sup>150</sup> Thus, we find a tradition of Roman writers assuming that Caesar could have created a world empire at the expense of the Parthians, and we find that Caesar was only one of many Romans who felt the need to avenge Crassus’ failure and strove to subdue the new Parthian world rival in the East.<sup>151</sup>

Even Augustus, who was pivotal in establishing the first “cold war” era between Rome and Parthia, threatened war with the Parthians and appears to have considered the prospect of

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<sup>148</sup> Julian *Caes.* 311C, 327B

<sup>149</sup> Rufus Festus praises Trajan for being the first emperor since Augustus to utilize “the muscle of the Roman state” to defeat enemies of the state, especially the Parthians, and criticizes Hadrian for surrendering Trajan’s gains. Ruf. Fest. 20

<sup>150</sup> Julian *Caes.* 320-322A

<sup>151</sup> Note esp. Appian *BC* 2.110, 3.25, 77, 4.58, 5.65. See also Vell. Pat. 2.91.1; Aug. *RG* 29, 32-3; Lucan *Phar.* 7.431, 8.91, 325, 414-55; Philo *Gaius* 34.256; Dio 54.8.1-3; *HA Sev. Alex.* 56.5-7; *HA Gord.* 26; *HA Gall.* 10.1-3; Julian *Or.* 1.17D; Eutrop. 7.9; Florus 2.34.61-4; Orosius 6.21. See also *V Maccabees* 41.16-17, 48.34, 52.1-2, which erroneously argues, first, that, after the defeat of Crassus, Cassius invaded Mesopotamia and brought the Parthians “back to their subjection to the Romans” and “reduced under obedience to the Romans everything in the countries of the east,” and second, that Antony defeated and subdued the Parthians.



universal empire or at least wanted others to believe that he had considered it.<sup>152</sup> An Augustan Age poet, Propertius, boasts,

War is divine Caesar [Augustus] planning against rich India, and to cleave with his navy the waters of the pearl-bearing ocean. Great is the reward O citizenry of Rome: the most distant of lands is preparing triumphs for you; Tigris and Euphrates will flow under your dominion; late though it be, it shall pass as a province beneath the rule of Italy, and Parthian trophies will grow accustomed to Latin Jupiter.<sup>153</sup>

Although Propertius here exaggerates the military plans of Augustus, many Roman writers viewed war with the Parthian rival as imminent during Augustus' reign and emphasized Augustan imperial propaganda that highlighted Parthian political submission to Rome.<sup>154</sup> For instance, Strabo describes Italy "as a base of operations for the universal hegemony [of the Romans]," and after briefly listing all the regions of the world under Rome's hegemony, Strabo concludes that only the inconsequential "Nomads" remained outside of Rome's control since the "very powerful" Parthians "have nevertheless yielded so far to the preeminence of the Romans and of the rulers of our time [that is, Augustus]" by surrendering Rome's lost military standards

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<sup>152</sup> When Augustus was in Syria with an army, he apparently contemplated a military solution in the East; however, the threat of war encouraged Phraates IV to negotiate with the Romans. Justin 42.5.10; Dio 51.18; 54.8.1-3. Livy apparently wrote that the Romans and Parthians made peace at this time. Livy *Epit.* 141.4. Note also Orosius 6.21. However, this too appears to have been an informal agreement that did not officially establish territorial limitations or a mutual recognition of their hegemonies.

<sup>153</sup> Prop. 3.4. See also id. 2.10.13-18, 2.13.1-2, 2.14.21-3, 3.12, 4.3, 4.6.83

<sup>154</sup> Horace and Ovid especially emphasized these themes. See Hor. *Od.* 1.2.51f., 12.53-6, 19.9-12, 26.5, 2.13.17, 16.6-8, 3.8.16-24, 4.5.25-8, 14.41-4, 15.14-15; id. *Carm.* 1.26.5, 1.29.1-6, 2.9.21-3, 2.16.6-8, 3.3.53-6, 3.8.16-24, 4.5.25-8, 4.14.41-4, 4.15.6, 5.24; Ovid *Ars Am.* 1.177-227; id. *Fasti* 5.580-91. Velleius Paterculus portrayed the Roman state of Augustus as the empire of the world, which had brought peace to the world. Vell. Pat. 2.89.5, 92.2, 126.3, 131.2. See also Justin 43.1.2, 44.5.8; Virg. *Aen.* 1.279; Tac. *Ann.* 1.1, 11; Aristides 26.10, 102; Orosius 6.20-2. Note also the later Roman tradition that the Parthians had in fact submitted to Augustus. See esp. Vell. Pat. 2.91.1, 94.4; Jos. *Bell.* 2.345-401; Tac. *Ann.* 2.1, 6.31, 12.10-11; Aristides 26.10, 102; Dio 51.20.1, 54.8.1-3; Herodian 6.2.4; Florus 2.24.14, 34.61-4; Ruf. Fest. 19; Aur. Vic. *Epit. Caes.* 1.8; Eutrop. 7.8-9; Sid. *Carm.* 7.98-100; Orosius 6.21

and political hostages.<sup>155</sup> Additionally, Augustus utilized his own imperial propaganda to portray himself as a new world leader, who was superior to the submissive Parthians, even though he states plainly in his *Res Gestae* that the Parthians were not in fact defeated in war.<sup>156</sup>

Even after the Romans and Parthians ended the First Romano-Parthian War, a literary tradition emerged that emphasized that both sides had not abandoned their hegemonic aspirations in the Near East and continued to contemplate the possibility of world empire.<sup>157</sup> Roman writers urged that the Parthians desired to reclaim the former lands of Cyrus and Alexander.<sup>158</sup> It is possible that these Roman writers related real Roman fears of potential Parthian aggression in order to justify Roman aggression against the Parthians.<sup>159</sup> Yet Appian states that the Romans feared open conflict with the Parthians “lest this barbarous and hostile race should become accustomed to encounters with the Romans.”<sup>160</sup> Lucan, although initially critical of Parthian strength, viewed the Parthians as the masters of the East and “in mad contention with the

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<sup>155</sup> Strabo 6.4.2. Note that in passage 16.1.28 Strabo does not emphasize Augustan propaganda to explain the actions of the Parthians. Since also, as discussed above, Strabo elsewhere praises the Parthians and portrays them as rivals to the Romans, we should discredit Strabo’s blatantly bias portrayal of the Romans and Parthians here. Book 6 section 4 was Strabo’s conclusion to his patriotic account of Roman expansion in Italy, and therefore, his opinion of the Parthians in it is less reliable.

<sup>156</sup> Aug. *RG* 29, 32-3. See also Suet. *Aug.* 21.2-3; Dio 52.8.4, 34.2, 37.6, 53.6.2, 56.3.7. Note also Mattern 1999: 171-4; Wheeler 2002: 289; Lerouge 2007: 99-127.

<sup>157</sup> For the Romans’ hegemonic aspiration during the imperial period, see the Epilogue.

<sup>158</sup> “At the same time, he [Artabanus II] referred in boastful and menacing terms to the old boundaries of the Persian and Macedonian empires, and to his intention of seizing the territories held first by Cyrus and afterwards by Alexander.” Tac. *Ann.* 6.31. See also Dio 80.4.1; Herodian 4.14.6, 6.2.2, 4.5. Arnaud argues that the Parthians in the latter half of the first century BCE had ambitions to emulate the Achaemenids and reclaim the lands of the Eastern Mediterranean. Arnaud 1998: 31-2.

<sup>159</sup> See Gregoratti 2015b: 15.

<sup>160</sup> Appian *BC* 4.133

Western world.”<sup>161</sup> In fact, Orodes II and his son, Pacorus, with the aid of Labienus had already attempted to conquer much of the Near East in 40 BCE.<sup>162</sup>

With the formation of the Med-Eastern system following the failed invasion of Mesopotamia by Crassus, for the first time in history, the geopolitical developments of Western Europe, the Mediterranean, the Near East, and the Middle East became interconnected, and our sources reflect this new reality of the international environment. For example, Suetonius relates that for the first time Parthian envoys travelled to Italy and Germany during Augustus’ reign.<sup>163</sup> Moreover, Strabo records that the Roman emperors and the Parthian kings began a consistent correspondence after the negotiations of Augustus and Phraates IV.<sup>164</sup> Additionally, Augustus became the first Roman to receive envoys from India and the nomads of the Central Asian steppe.<sup>165</sup> Note that Florus records that a generation before Augustus’ reign, that is, prior to the merger of the Mediterranean and Eastern systems, the Indians knew nothing of Rome.<sup>166</sup> Meanwhile, the Romans knew very little about the Middle East at this time, which encouraged Augustus to send geographers to gather information and made Trogus’ and Strabo’s works on the Eastern world timely.<sup>167</sup> In fact, Strabo blames the failures of Crassus and Antony against the

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<sup>161</sup> Lucan *Phar.* 8.345

<sup>162</sup> Parthian conquests included Syria, Anatolia, and Judea. Justin 42.4.7; Appian *BC* 5.65; id. *Syr.* 11.51; Vell. Pat. 2.78.1; Plut. *Ant.* 28.1, 30.1, 34.1; Dio 48.26.1-2; Jos. *Ant.* 14.330-85, 403, 15.11-13, 92, 181, 17.257, 20.245, 248; id. *Bell.* 1.246-73, 284, 2.45-6; Tac. *Ann.* 3.62; id. *Hist.* 5.9; Ruf. Fest. 18; Florus 2.19.3-5; Livy *Epit.* 127.1; Strabo 14.2.24. Shayegan calls this invasion “undoubtedly the most ambitious offensive campaign ever attempted by the Arsacids” but cautions against associating it with a Parthian desire to rival the Achaemenids. Instead, Shayegan views this conflict within the contexts of the Romano-Parthian rivalry. Shayegan 2011: 293-5.

<sup>163</sup> Suet. *Tib.* 16.1

<sup>164</sup> Strabo 16.1.28

<sup>165</sup> Id. 15.1.4; Dio 54.9.8-10; Eutrop. 7.10; Ruf. Fest. 19; Aur. Vic. *Epit. Caes.* 1.9; Florus 2.34.62; Orosius 6.21

<sup>166</sup> Florus 1.40.31

<sup>167</sup> See Pliny *NH* 6.31.141. In fact, Strabo harshly criticizes the available history on the East and its peoples. Strabo 11.6.2-4. See also id. 1.2.1.

Parthians in part on a prior Roman lack of emphasis on “the utility of geography... in great undertakings” in the East.<sup>168</sup> Thus, once we consider all of these examples together, it is undeniable that a major consequence of Crassus’ failed invasion of the Parthian Empire was that the ancient world became larger and more integrated, which had an enduring legacy even into late antiquity. Although this expansion and redistribution of the international environment was unplanned and at first poorly understood, future generations of Romans and Parthians acknowledged their mutual roles in their ongoing rivalry, continued to seek an advantage within the new bounds of the Med-Eastern system, and never abandoned the will to establish imperial domination for centuries.<sup>169</sup>

### Summary of Structure

Let us now briefly introduce the structure of this work. The next chapter will introduce the arguments and applicability of the theoretical framework of Realism to the study of ancient international relations and geopolitical developments. Part I of this study then introduces the separate paths Rome and Parthia took toward accomplishing system hegemony. In particular, it focuses upon a comprehensive re-evaluation of early Parthian political history. It emphasizes how the Parthians balanced security threats and geopolitical concerns on their eastern and western frontiers to become a new regional power. It investigates the formation of the Arsacids’ imperial identity and motivations. Finally, it aims to demonstrate that the adaptability and distinctiveness of the Parthians’ social, political, and military makeup allowed them to excel against stronger, often better-situated competitors.

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<sup>168</sup> Strabo 1.1.17

<sup>169</sup> For more examples of the Roman and Parthian rivalry, see the Epilogue.

Chapter 1 presents the development of the Roman state from an insignificant Italian city-state to the hegemon of the Mediterranean. It also introduces the establishment of the Parthian state in the middle of the third century BCE. The unexpected decline of the power of the Seleucid Empire in the 240s BCE because of the dynastic turmoil that followed the sudden death of Antiochus II in 246 BCE caused a power-transition crisis in the East. This crisis encouraged eastern satraps to rebel and the nomadic Parni tribe (known afterwards as the Parthians) to invade northeastern Iran. The successful invasion of the Parni to seize Parthia and establish a new kingdom, paired with the sudden rise of their regional power and the failure of the Seleucids to eliminate this new threat helped create a new interstate system in the Farther East. Seleucid imperial dominion over the region gave way to a new system of tripolarity between the Seleucids, Parthians, and Bactrians based upon the Iranian plateau.<sup>170</sup> The sweeping success of the first Parthian king, Arsaces I, established Parthia as a regional power in the Farther East; however, its existence for several decades was precarious.<sup>171</sup>

Chapter 2 continues the reinvestigation of the growth and development of the Parthian state from its early existence as a minor power in the Farther East to its emergence as the unrivaled hegemonic power of the ancient Middle East. The sudden decline of Seleucid power in the 240s-230s BCE was momentous but momentary because of the military determination and

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<sup>170</sup> Several years of political and military instability weakened the prestige and perception of Seleucid power. The failure of the central government to fend off invasions in the West and to provide help against nomadic aggression in the East led local officials to declare independence. A similar process occurred in northern Mexico in the 1830s under the pressure of serious steppe-nomad (Comanche and Kiowa) raids. The situation of a hapless central government led six provinces to rebel, of which Texas was only one. See esp. Delay 2008. The parallel between the geopolitical situation facing the Seleucid Empire in the 240s BCE and the situation facing the Mexican Empire in the 1830s CE adds to the claim of the universalism of International Relations theory.

<sup>171</sup> For the crisis of the 240s-230s BCE and the formation of the Parthian state, see Overtom 2016.

skill of Antiochus III. Under Antiochus, the Seleucids conducted a successful retaliatory hegemonic war against the Parthians and Bactrians in the 200s BCE, which briefly established loose Seleucid hegemony over the new interstate system in the Farther East and crippled the Parthian state for decades. Yet the Seleucids never again established direct imperial dominion over these eastern lands and the new interstate system in the Farther East endured. Moreover, with the rapid expansion of the Parthian state under Mithridates I (165-132 BCE), following another sudden decline of Seleucid power, the Parthians became the perceived hegemonic rivals of the Seleucids. With their decisive victory over Demetrius II in the early 130s BCE, the Parthians firmly established themselves as the hegemonic rivals and geopolitical equals of the Seleucids. For the first time bipolarity between Parthia and the Seleucid Empire emerged in the expanding Eastern system.

Chapter 3 discusses the various challenges the Parthians faced to maintain their new position of power. It reinvestigates the major eastern invasion of Antiochus VII and nomadic wars that the Parthians had to fight on their eastern frontier. It emphasizes the important reign of Mithridates II and his efforts to establish Parthia as the only major power in the East. It concludes that, in part because of exceptional leadership and in part because of exceptional qualities, such as the versatility of Parthian society, the inclusiveness of Parthian imperial administration, and the innovations of the Parthian military, Parthia eventually emerged in the late 90s BCE as the unrivaled hegemon of the Eastern system, which came to stretch from Syria to Afghanistan.

Part II reexamines the hegemonic conflicts of the first century BCE that eventually brought Rome and Parthia into contact and conflict in the Near East. It investigates the different spatial and geographical perspectives of the Romans and Parthians in the Near East, and it

discusses the overlap of the Roman-dominated Mediterranean and Parthian-dominated Eastern systems in the region and their eventual merger. It aims to demonstrate the separateness of the interstate systems dominated by Rome and Parthia, up to and throughout the period of “overlap” until the outbreak of the First Romano-Parthian War. It challenges the modern claim that the Romans and Parthians were destined to clash and sought out this confrontation almost from the beginning of their interactions in the late 90s BCE. It also rejects the modern claim that the Parthians became passive, defensive, and content with the bounds of their hegemony once they began to interact with the allegedly more aggressive Romans. Finally, it rejects the erroneous ancient and modern tradition that the Romans and Parthians agreed to formal treaties that attempted to define and limit their separate hegemonies, including the establishment of a Euphrates River border prior to the beginning of the first century CE.

Chapter 4 investigates the hegemonic ambitions of Pontus (an Irano-Hellenistic kingdom in northern Asia Minor) under Mithridates VI and Armenia under Tigranes II and the important roles these ambitions played in bringing together the separate Roman and Parthian worlds in the Near East. Therefore, it also re-evaluates the first diplomatic exchange of the Romans and Parthians in the late 90s BCE. Finally, it reconsiders the causes, goals, and outcomes of the Mithridatic Wars as Pontus struggled to challenge Roman dominance in the Mediterranean system.

Chapter 5 discusses that an important aspect of the hegemonic struggle between Rome and Mithridatic Pontus was the actions of the distant Kingdom of Armenia as the challenger to Parthian hegemony within the separate Eastern system. Tigranes of Armenia had tremendous ambitions for himself and his kingdom, like Mithridates of Pontus; however, Tigranes eventually found himself unexpectedly drawn into Mithridates’ conflict with Rome. The initial success of

Lucullus' invasion of Armenia in 69-68 BCE once again brought the Romans and the Parthians into diplomatic contact.

Chapter 6 reassesses the final defeat of Mithridatic Pontus and the submission of Armenia to Rome and the increasingly tense interactions between Rome and Parthia. With victory in one of the greatest struggles Rome had to overcome, the Romans looked to stabilize this potentially volatile, dangerous region through a more forceful direct occupation of the Near East in the form of Pompey's reorganization of the East. Pompey's settlements established Armenia as a Roman client state and brought the empires of Rome and Parthia into direct contact for the first time. This encouraged further friction between the two powers because neither state had considered or recognized the hegemonic claims of the other within the region. Finally, it reinterprets the start of the First Romano-Parthian War and Crassus' role within the conflict. With the merger of the Mediterranean and Eastern systems following Crassus' failed invasion of Mesopotamia in 53 BCE, the two remaining titans of the ancient world came to share the same international system of states as longstanding rivals, and the geopolitical developments of the ancient Mediterranean and Middle Eastern worlds became intertwined as never before.



## The Theoretical Framework of Realism and Its Application to the Ancient World

Realism emphasizes the unforgiving and competitive nature of interactions between states within an international system of states that lacks enforceable international law and/or central authority, known as anarchy.<sup>1</sup> In Realist theory, under the conditions of international anarchy, war always remains a threat to the survival of states. Further, short-term self-preservation, through the acquisition of power at the expense of one's neighbors, is the primary goal of states. An emphasis on power acquisition provides states with security, and this emphasis is fundamentally important because states can rely only upon themselves to acquire that security. Thus, in an effort to survive states often turn to grim self-help policies in an ongoing competition for limited resources.<sup>2</sup> Hence, for instance, Thucydides, who many consider the founder of Realist thought, argues Sparta declared war on Athens out of fear of growing Athenian power.<sup>3</sup> The systemic pressures of an international system of states, especially in times of interstate anarchy, impose these harsh realities upon all states. Therefore, all states tend to pursue power-maximizing conduct in their own self-interest, *de facto* making all successful states (those that survive within a system of violent international anarchy) aggressive and militaristic.

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<sup>1</sup> The following synopsis of the Realist approach to international relations theory and its applicability to the study of ancient history would not have been possible without the recent efforts of Arthur Eckstein. His two most recent works have shown the great benefits of this interdisciplinary approach to the understanding of geopolitical developments in the ancient Mediterranean world. See esp. Eckstein 2006: Ch. 1-2; id. 2012: Ch. 1. For anarchy, see esp. Waltz 1979: 76, 102, 127; See also Waltz 1959: 159-60; Hobbes 1959: 65; Wight 1978: 101; Schelling 2000: 182; Aron 1973: 6; Schuman 1969: 485; Gilpin 1981: 7.

<sup>2</sup> For the characteristics of self-preservation and of "self-help" as a realist concept, see Aron 1973: 64-5, 130; Taylor 1978: 130; Liska 1978: 4-6; Waltz 1979: 104; id. 1988: 616; Mearsheimer 1995: 11-12; Sheehan 1996: 8; Eckstein 2006: 14-23. Contra Wendt 1992. Geographical location also is an important factor in the potential vulnerability of states to systemic pressures. Note Gourevitch 1978: 896. For the local application of self-help policies in the Roman Empire, see Fuhrmann 2012: Ch. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Thuc. 1.23.6. Thucydidean Realism discussed in more detail in next section.

Consequently, since all states must become militarized and warlike to survive, especially in the ancient world, the main difference between states within this type of an interstate system is their capability to pursue power-maximizing policy, not their desire to do so.<sup>4</sup> This is a crucial distinction.<sup>5</sup>

Realist theory maintains that the need for states to maximize their security and strength at the expense of their competitive neighbors through self-interested, self-help policies is a byproduct of the systemic pressures of international anarchy, and in this sense, all states tend to become similar in their drive for security and power or else they do not survive. Thucydides' Melian Dialogue is a good example of this difficult reality.<sup>6</sup> Since all successful states ultimately follow a selfish, self-help regime, the vital variable in state success is the distribution of capabilities in power across units within a system of states. In a competitive interstate system,

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<sup>4</sup> For the importance of power-maximizing policy to state survival, see Huntington 1993: 68-83; Mearsheimer 1994-1995: 11-12; Zakaria 1998: 29; Taliafero 2000: 128-9. Note also van Evera 1998: 13-14. For power-maximizing behavior in the ancient world, see esp. Eckstein, *Mediterranean Anarchy*, 12, 15, 18, 49-50, 52, 118, 143-4, 149, 162-3, 174, 176, 179, 234, 241-2, 268, 315; id., *Rome Enters the East*, 7. Hans van Wees makes a similar point when he argues that archaic Greek states had the will to besiege and conquer surrounding enemy cities but lacked the material, financial, and technological capabilities. van Wees 2004: 145, 150. See also Seaman 2013: 644, 652.

<sup>5</sup> Few scholars have made this distinction for the Romans and even fewer have made it for the Parthians. Parthia and Rome clashed in a nearly three century long hegemonic struggle. Most scholars view the numerous invasions by the Romans of Parthian territory and assume that the Romans were aggressive predators and the Parthians were passive victims. For this view, see above. Yet few scholars have recognized that the Parthians shared the desires of the Romans to act aggressively and to expand their territory at the expense of their main rival. See Wheeler 2002: 287-8. That is, the Romans only appear to be the aggressors because they had unique logistical and military capabilities that allowed them to pursue offensive war more consistently. Meanwhile, the Parthians had every desire to expand further West but lacked the logistical and military capabilities of the Roman state, which limited their ability to do so. When discussing the geopolitical developments of ancient states, this study hopes to focus further attention on the study of state capabilities and their unrivaled impact on state actions, while further disproving the dubious notion that some ancient states lacked the desire to acquire and expand state security.

<sup>6</sup> Thuc. 5.84-116

such as all the interstate systems in antiquity, superiority of power, not balance of power is the ultimate goal for states. Hence, states look to dominate vulnerable or potentially dangerous neighbors to expand their power and to ensure their survival.<sup>7</sup> Balance of power within an interstate system is unstable and the geopolitical stakes for polities could not be higher, which helps explain the numerous hegemonic conflicts found throughout history, particularly in the ancient world.

Realist theorists argue that interactions between states become increasingly tense because the understanding of power capabilities between states is opaque. In a system of international anarchy, warfare is the only way to determine actual state power and its relation to the power capabilities of other states.<sup>8</sup> The dilemma, known as the uncertainty principle, forces states to work continually to identify and counteract potential or perceived threats to their security through efforts to maximize power at the expense of the security of neighbors.<sup>9</sup> Further, this opaque awareness of power capabilities throughout an interstate system forces states to consider and prepare for worst-case scenarios.<sup>10</sup> Thus, tensions are high, and stakes are higher as competing states maneuver for opportunity and advantage within interstate systems.

The crudeness and infrequency of diplomatic interaction amongst ancient polities added to their opaque awareness of one another's power capabilities and intentions, which led to mounting tension between states and oftentimes war. There were no permanent ambassadors in

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<sup>7</sup> Eckstein 2006: 16. See also Morgenthau 1973: 208; Sheehan 1996: 14.

<sup>8</sup> For opacity of awareness and the potential for conflict, see Morgenthau 1973: 208; Gilpin 1981: 9; Levy 1983: 24; Blainey 1988: 114; Thompson 1988: 41; Waltz 1993: 73; Wohlforth 1994/1995: 104-5, 123, 127; Jervis 2001: 282 and n.2; Eckstein 2006: 17.

<sup>9</sup> For the consequences of the uncertainty principle, see Jervis 1976: 58-113; Taylor 1978: 130; Waltz 1988: 619; Sheehan 1996: 8; Glaser 1997: 184; Eckstein 2006: 17.

<sup>10</sup> For worst-case scenario preparation, see Morgenthau 1973: 208; van Evera 1998: 13-14; Eckstein 2006: 17.

the ancient world, and when ambassadors were utilized, it was only on an *ad hoc* basis.<sup>11</sup> The primary purpose of modern diplomatic representation and dialogue is the alleviation of tension and ambiguity between nations before the escalation of potential conflicts of interest. However, no such system was in place to aid ancient states.<sup>12</sup> In fact, diplomatic missions in the ancient world rarely were utilized until after a conflict of interest had escalated to the threshold of armed conflict. Hence, as seen in the Melian dialogue there was little chance for ancient diplomacy to succeed in defusing situations since perceived power and reputation were at stake.

This lack of diplomatic access in the ancient world went hand-in-hand with the reliance of ancient states on crisis diplomacy, what modern political scientists call “compellence diplomacy.”<sup>13</sup> Compellence diplomacy often took the form of ultimatums. In situations where the power balance between states is drastically in favor of one state over another, the weaker state might submit to compellence diplomacy. Yet the objective of the lesser state in this scenario is self-preservation, not the preservation of peace. Thus, ancient states tried to use compellence diplomacy as “a less directly violent means of interstate coercion.”<sup>14</sup> However, this process created further tension and resentment between ancient states, and it made interstate violence more likely. In fact, since compellence diplomacy was intertwined with power relations and reputation amongst states, the coercive, arrogant demands of states could not in fact be a bluff. States that delivered an ultimatum of war, such as Athens at Melos, had to be and were ready to

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<sup>11</sup> Grant 1962: 262; Eckstein 2006: 58-9; Eckstein 2012: 12-13.

<sup>12</sup> For modern surprise at this lack of diplomacy, see Aron 1973: 15; Lebow 1991: 144-5; Kauppi 1991: 119.

<sup>13</sup> Eckstein 2006: 60; id. 2012: 14. For its modern impact, see Ferrar 1981: 194-200; Stevenson 1997 134-5; Questor 1988: 704-6; Mercer 1993: 166-7.

<sup>14</sup> Eckstein 2006: 60. See also Strauss 1991: 203; Lebow 1991: 144-5. The prevalence of compellence diplomacy is not limited to the ancient world. For the applicability of compellence diplomacy to Confucian China under the Song Dynasty (960-1279 CE) and the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 CE), see Wang 2011: 162.

go to war. Compellence diplomacy reflects the brutal realities of power relations within ancient interstate systems of anarchy, and its use was yet another motivation for states to maximize their power.<sup>15</sup>

Realist theory maintains that in times of international anarchy, the competitiveness of the interstate system drives all states toward self-interested, power-maximizing policies in order to expand state strength in the face of genuine threats of destruction. Moreover, in systems of militarized international anarchy, which were common in the ancient world, there is no international or central authority available to mediate or compel peaceful resolutions of conflicts. Thucydides tells us that Sparta and Athens experienced this prior to the war.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, pressures to seek power are high, and conflict is inevitable and frequent.<sup>17</sup>

Friction between states is made worse by what political scientists call “the security dilemma.” The security dilemma is a process whereby one state that successfully increases its security does so at the cost of the security of its neighbors. This in turn pushes those neighboring states toward further efforts to maximize their own power and to expand state security. Within a system of international anarchy, power is a zero-sum game and resources are finite, which encourages states to act aggressively or face the threat of destruction. Hence, as Thucydides relates, even though the Spartans threatened war the Athenians refused to give up their empire.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Eckstein 2006: 61; id. 2012: 15.

<sup>16</sup> Thuc. 1.72, 75-6

<sup>17</sup> For the pressures states feel to seek power under a system of interstate anarchy, see Brecher and Wilkenfeld 1982: 380-417; Holsti 1991: 20; Geller and Singer 1998: 99; Keeley 1999: 160-1; Eckstein 2006: 1, 12, 20-2, 32, 39. For the impact of growing tension on eventual conflict, see Midlarsky 1988: 6, 20-44; Thompson 1999: 3-28.

<sup>18</sup> See Thuc. 1.72, 75-6

Unfortunately, this pursuit of security makes conflict amongst states increasingly unavoidable.<sup>19</sup> These various defects of the international system of states make war a normal aspect of state interactions, especially in the ancient world.<sup>20</sup>

In international relations theory, the balance of power within an interstate system often heavily determines the frequency of war. Modern studies suggest that a system of multipolarity, where several states of relatively equivalent power capabilities interact in a precarious competition for security, is the most war-prone system.<sup>21</sup> The Italian peninsular system of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE and much of the geopolitical history of Classical Greece are good examples of multipolarity.<sup>22</sup> A system of bipolarity, where two major states dominate all others, although vulnerable to the threat of system-wide hegemonic war between the two polar powers, generally is more stable than multipolarity.<sup>23</sup> We find good examples of bipolarity in the ancient world in the conflict between Sparta and Athens in the Peloponnesian War, in the struggle between Rome and Carthage in the Punic Wars, and in the rivalry that emerged between Rome and Parthia after the invasion of Crassus in 53 BCE.<sup>24</sup> Finally, a system of unipolarity, wherein one state dominates the entire system, generally is the least war-prone; however, unipolarity is

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<sup>19</sup> For the uncertainty principle and security dilemma, see Herz 1950: 157-80; Jervis 1978: 167-214; Waltz 1988: 619; Glaser 1997: 177 and n.29. For its impact, see Liska 1990: 482; Copeland 2000: 12, 17, 145-7, 165-8; Eckstein 2006: 21-2, 242 n.217.

<sup>20</sup> For the argument that war is a normal aspect of state interaction under these pressures, see Waltz 1959: 160; Wight 1978: 137; Waltz 1979: 102; Waltz 1988: 620-1; Waltz 2000: 8. This was true in the ancient world as well. See Eckstein 2005: 484-5; Rawlings 2013: 5; Millett 2013: 51.

<sup>21</sup> Gochman and Maoz 1984: 592-3; Geller and Singer 1998: 128; Keeley 1999: 118-21; Eckstein 2006: 20, 23, 67.

<sup>22</sup> Note Strauss 1991: 198-201; Eckstein 2006: Ch. 3 and 118-58.

<sup>23</sup> Waltz 1979: 161-70; Geller and Singer 1998: 115-17; Eckstein 2006: 23, 67. Contra Copeland 1996.

<sup>24</sup> For the Western Mediterranean interstate system, see Eckstein 2006: 158-80.

difficult to obtain and often unstable.<sup>25</sup> This study discusses two examples of unipolarity: the Roman-dominated Mediterranean and the Parthian-dominated Eastern systems. Both powers found the maintenance of unipolarity difficult and faced major hegemonic threats to their standings within their separate interstate systems in the first half of the first century BCE.

International relations theory maintains that dramatic shifts in the power balance of an interstate system, namely the sudden rise or decline of a state within that system, destabilize the system of states and usually result in hegemonic war that creates a new or updated configuration of state power relations, which better reflects the actual balance of power within that system. For example, there is the destruction of the Carthaginian Empire in the Second Punic War and the domination of the Western Mediterranean by the Romans. The sudden and dramatic fluctuation of a state's power within a system causes what political scientists call a "power-transition crisis." Although a power-transition crisis does not in and of itself cause war, it makes hegemonic war more likely, as in the case of the power-transition crisis in the Middle East caused by the sudden decline of Seleucid power in the 240s-230s BCE.<sup>26</sup> The pressures created by a power-transition crisis narrow the choices of action available to states, a process known as cognitive closure. States acting under the pressures of cognitive closure feel more impelled by circumstance to act forcefully.<sup>27</sup>

Political theorists argue that in the process of power-transition, polities are considered either status-quo states, those that wish to maintain the current distribution of power within the

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<sup>25</sup> Geller and Singer 1998: 115-17.

<sup>26</sup> Overtom 2016. For power-transition theory, see Lemke and Kugler 1996: 3-33; Geller and Singer 1998: 72-5. For power-transition crisis because of a deteriorating state, see Organski and Kugler 1980. For power-transition crisis because of an ascending state, see Gilpin 1981; Gilpin 1988: 602. For examples of power-transition crisis in antiquity, see Eckstein 2006: 23-4, 105, 114, 269; id. 2012: 4 *et passim*.

<sup>27</sup> For cognitive closure, see Levy 1991: 261; Kauppi 1991: 115-16; Eckstein 2006: 25.

interstate system, or revisionist states, those that wish to redress the distribution of power within the system in their favor.<sup>28</sup> There are varying degrees of status quo and revisionist states, and the position of a state can be variable from situation to situation. Yet due to the systemic pressures of the interstate anarchy, namely the drive of polities to maximize power for state security, few polities are status quo states. In fact, almost every polity in a system of interstate anarchy is at least a limited revisionist state.<sup>29</sup> In certain, rare instances, a polity presented with favorable circumstances may become an unlimited revisionist state, known also as a revolutionary state. Unlimited revisionist states or revolutionary states desire the complete overthrow of the distribution of power within the current system in favor of their own hegemony or empire.<sup>30</sup> Persia under Cyrus the Great and Macedon under Alexander the Great are perhaps the best examples of unlimited revisionist states in antiquity.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, Parthia under King Mithridates I, Pontus under Mithridates VI, and Armenia under Tigranes II are good examples of unlimited revisionist states discussed in this study.

Apart from providing a useful and rewarding theoretical framework for the study of geopolitical history in the ancient world, especially in the third to first centuries BCE, the structural Realist approach to international relations helps minimize our unfortunate and pervasive reliance upon faulty unit-attribute theories in modern studies on Roman and Parthian imperialism and places unit-attribute explanations within the context of system-level analysis.

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<sup>28</sup> For status quo and revisionist states, see Carr 1939; Glaser 1992: 501 n.4; Schweller 1994: 72-107; Schweller 1996: 90-121; Schweller 1998: 19-26; Geller and Singer 1998: 65-7; Eckstein 2006: 25-6, 108-10. Note also Jervis 1978.

<sup>29</sup> Note Wolfers 1962: 84-6, 125; Aron 1973: 75; Glaser 1992: 501 and n.4; Taliaferro 2000: 129; Eckstein 2006: 26. For interstate anarchy, see esp. Waltz 1979: 76, 102, 127.

<sup>30</sup> For unlimited revisionist states, see Kissinger 1957. Unlimited revisionist states are quite rare in world history (although they seem to occur in antiquity with more frequency). Eckstein 2006: 26.

<sup>31</sup> Note Overtoom 2016: 2, 4.



Explanations that only rely on unit-attribute theory, which is the belief that the internal forces of a single state determine external outcomes, ultimately ignore half of the picture. It is not that internal characteristics of states and statesmen are unimportant; certainly they are since the answers to unit success lie within them, but on their own they lack scope.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, for example the study of the geopolitical developments of the first century BCE primarily from a Roman-centric perspective is incomplete. Instead, we should filter explanations drawn from the unit-level through an understanding of the shared systemic pressures and geopolitical realities of the international system of states. What becomes increasingly apparent from this process is that unit-level variables have more to do with the unique *capabilities* of states rather than with the *will* of states since all successful states within a harsh, grim system of interstate anarchy develop similar ruthless motives in order to survive and prosper, namely the brutal pursuit of state security and strength through aggressive, self-interested power-maximizing policies.<sup>33</sup>

In recent years there has been growing interest in the application of modern international relations theory to the geopolitical developments of the ancient world. Arthur Eckstein in his pioneering study, *Mediterranean Anarchy, Interstate War, and the Rise of Rome*, used the theoretical framework of Realism to challenge W. V. Harris' popular unit-attribute theory that Rome came to dominate the Mediterranean world because Rome was exceptionally and pathologically more aggressive and warlike than its neighbors. Eckstein demonstrates through a system-level analysis of the interactions of states within the Mediterranean world from the fifth to the early second centuries BCE that Rome was in fact not unique in its bellicosity and

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<sup>32</sup> Geller and Singer 1998: 47, 50-1, 67; Eckstein 2006: 27-8.

<sup>33</sup> For the emphasis on different capabilities but not motives, see Waltz 1979: 96-7. For expansionist tendencies in the pursuit of security, see Wolfers 1962: 84-6, 125; Glaser 1992: 501 and n.4; Waltz 2000: 33; Labs 1997: 1-49; Hobbes 1959: 67; Niebuhr 1932: 42.

aggression. Rather, all major, middling, and minor states in the ancient Mediterranean world displayed harsh, militarized characteristics. This was because they all had existed within an exceptionally cruel interstate anarchy, the systemic pressures of which had shaped their outlooks on and approaches to the international environment. Hence, Eckstein demonstrates that Rome certainly was a highly militarized and belligerent power, but so were all of its neighbors.

Instead, Eckstein emphasized unique Roman capabilities to pursue self-interested, power-maximizing policies in order to explain Roman success. Ultimately, there was nothing unique about Roman violence and aggression; their success did not develop from something pathological in Roman society.<sup>34</sup> Rather, Rome's success in the hegemonic struggle to dominate the Mediterranean world primarily was due to its willingness and ability to assimilate non-Romans into the Roman polity and thus to create a state that had greater military resources and was better socially integrated than were its competitors.<sup>35</sup> The ability of the Romans to assimilate and integrate non-Romans into the Roman state structure meant that Rome came to possess an exceptional competitive advantage over neighboring states in the struggle for security and power in the ancient Mediterranean world. The emphasis here is that Rome's intentions were not unique; its capabilities were.<sup>36</sup>

Such an understanding of Roman expansion and consolidation of power during the Middle Republic was only possible through a system-level analysis that utilizes the theoretical framework of Realism. Therefore, this study applies the same theoretical framework to the early development of the Parthian state and to the geopolitical developments in the Near East in the first century BCE in order to gain a similarly fresh and more well-rounded understanding of the

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<sup>34</sup> Eckstein 2006: 2-4.

<sup>35</sup> This was something that Mommsen argued long ago. Mommsen 1903; Eckstein 2012: 20 n.60.

<sup>36</sup> Note Eckstein 2006: 33-5.

expansion and interactions of Rome and Parthia in this period. Through this theoretical framework we can better understand not only the actions of the Romans and the reasons for their success within the context of a larger system explanation, but also we can investigate the motives and actions of Rome's challengers in the East.

### The Roots of Realism in Classical Antiquity

Before we discuss the theoretical framework of Realist theory further and how it applies to an investigation of ancient geopolitics, it is worthwhile to discuss briefly the roots of Realism in Classical Antiquity. Political theorists and historians, who utilize international relations theory in their analysis of ancient geopolitics, consider Thucydides, who wrote the history of the destructive Peloponnesian War, the founder of the realist school of thought about international relations.<sup>37</sup> Arthur Eckstein recently offered an in depth account of Thucydidean Realism, and therefore, we shall touch upon only a few of the most poignant examples of ancient realism from Thucydides here.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, a vast number of examples from numerous other ancient authors are discussed throughout this study as they appear.

In the *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides emphasizes continually the grim realities that ancient states and statesmen faced in their struggle to survive in a dangerous and unforgiving international environment. In particular, his history underscores the brutal self-interest of ancient states in a highly militarized interstate system, the importance of fear and the perception of power in state decision-making, and the influence of harsh systemic pressures on

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<sup>37</sup> See esp. Waltz 1979: 66, 127, 186-7; Gilpin 1981: 93, 226-7; id. 1988: 592-606; Doyle 1991: 181-2; Kauppi 1991: 102; Lebow 1991: 125; Crane 1998: Ch. 2; Eckstein 2003; id. 2006: 37. For recent studies on Thucydides, see esp. Connor 1987; Allison 1989; Price 2001; Shanske 2006; Kagan 2010; Mynott 2013; Thauer and Wendt 2016.

<sup>38</sup> See Eckstein 2006: 48-58.

the conduct of states and statesmen within an interstate system. Therefore, his observations and explanations complement modern Realist paradigms and give such paradigms a solid foundation in antiquity. A few well-known examples will serve to demonstrate these main principles of Thucydides' work.

When Thucydides discusses the various possible causes of the Peloponnesian War at the beginning of his work, he states,

And the war began when the Athenians and Peloponnesians broke the thirty years' truce, concluded between them after the capture of Euboea. The reasons why they broke it and the grounds of their quarrel I have first set forth, that no one may ever have to inquire for what cause the Hellenes became involved in so great a war. The truest explanation, although it has been the least often advanced, I believe to have been the growth of the Athenians to greatness, which brought fear to the Lacedaemonians [that is, the Spartans] and forced them to war. But the reasons publicly alleged on either side which led them to break the truce and involved them in the war were as follows.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, for Thucydides the truest cause of the Peloponnesian War was the growth of Athenian power and the fear this caused in the Spartans. Thucydides later continues, "And the vote of the Lacedaemonians that the treaty had been broken and that they must go to war was determined, not so much by the influence of the speeches of their allies, as by fear of the Athenians, lest they become too powerful, seeing that the greater part of Hellas was already subject to them."<sup>40</sup> In both passages Thucydides emphasizes the primary role that fear of shifting power relations played in the cause of the war and in state decision-making. The successful efforts of the Athenians to maximize their power came as a direct threat to the Spartans, whose standing within the Aegean world became diminished. Therefore, uncertainty of Athens' true power capabilities and fear of Athens' intentions encouraged Sparta to react to the situation with force. The roles of

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<sup>39</sup> Thuc. 1.23.6

<sup>40</sup> Id. 1.88.

power and fear in international relations are fundamental to Thucydides' history. In fact, he emphasizes the critical role of fear in the decision-making of ancient states throughout his history.<sup>41</sup>

In Book I, Thucydides also writes that an Athenian embassy spoke to the Spartans just before the beginning of the conflict to remind them "how great was the power of their own city, reminding the older men of what they already knew, and recounting to the younger [men] things of which they were ignorant, in the belief that under the influence of their arguments the Lacedaemonians would be inclined to peace rather than war."<sup>42</sup> Here the Athenians projected strength to try to intimidate the Spartans. Thucydides then records the Athenian envoy stating,

‘Considering, then, Lacedaemonians, the zeal and sagacity of judgment which we displayed at that time [that is, during the Persian Wars], do we deserve to be regarded with this excessive jealousy by the Hellenes just on account of the empire we possess? And indeed we did not acquire this empire by force, but only after you had refused to continue to oppose what was left of the barbarian forces, and the allies came to us and of their own accord asked us to assume the leadership. It was under the compulsion of circumstances that we were driven at first to advance our empire to its present state, influenced chiefly by fear, then by honor also, and lastly by self-interest as well; and after we had once incurred the hatred of most of our allies, and several of them had already revolted and been reduced to subjection, and when you were no longer friendly as before but suspicious and at variance with us, it no longer seemed safe to risk relaxing our hold. For all seceders would have gone over to you. And no man is to be blamed for making the most of his advantages when it is a question of the gravest dangers.<sup>43</sup>

The Athenians here again emphasize the important role of fear in state decision-making. They discuss also the importance of power maximization, self-interest, and the maintenance of power.

The Athenians argue that they gained their power by circumstance but now had to maintain it by

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<sup>41</sup> Note id. 1.2.2, 1.3.2, 1.9.2-3, 1.23.6, 1.31.2, 1.44.2, 1.75.3, 1.76.2, 1.77.6, 1.88, 1.140.5, 1.143.5, 2.8.5, 3.16.1, 3.83.3-4, 5.29.1, 5.41.2, 6.10.2, 6.10.4, 6.11.4, 6.75.3, 6.82-7, 8.1.2.

<sup>42</sup> Id. 1.72.

<sup>43</sup> Id. 1.75.

force. Thus, the most striking aspect of this passage is that the Athenians indicate to the Spartans that they were driven to create and maintain their empire not by choice but by necessity. Here Thucydides has the Athenians emphasize how systemic pressures and the unforgiving realities of the interstate system encouraged the Athenians to act a certain, violent way. The Athenian envoy continues,

‘At any rate you, Lacedaemonians, in the exercise of your leadership over the Peloponnesian states regulate their politics according to your own advantage; and if in the Persian war you had held out to the end in the hegemony and had become unpopular in its exercise, as we did, you would certainly have become not less obnoxious to the allies than we are, and would have been compelled either to rule them with a strong hand or risk losing the hegemony. Thus there is nothing remarkable or inconsistent with human nature in what we also have done, just because we accepted an empire when it was offered us, and then, yielding to the strongest motives—honor, fear, and self-interest—declined to give it up. Nor, again, are we the first who have entered upon such a course, but it has ever been an established rule that the weaker is kept down by the stronger . And at the same time we thought we were worthy to rule, and used to be so regarded by you also, until you fell to calculating what your interests were and resorted, as you do now, to the plea of justice — which no one, when opportunity offered of securing something by main strength, ever yet put before force and abstained from taking advantage. And they are to be commended who, yielding to the instinct of human nature to rule over others, have been more observant of justice than they might have been, considering their power. At least, if others should seize our power, they would, we think, exhibit the best proof that we show some moderation; but in our case the result of our very reasonableness is, perversely enough, obloquy rather than commendation.’<sup>44</sup>

Here the Athenians stress that the Spartans also dominated their allies, and they emphasize that Sparta would have faced similar systemic pressures to maintain and expand its power had it created its own empire. Again, the envoy underlines the importance of the use of strength and force, the motivations of fear and self-interest, and the harsh realities of a merciless, highly militarized interstate system. Thucydides uses this speech to introduce the fundamental and

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<sup>44</sup> Id. 1.76.

universal Realist concepts of the importance of state security, the rule of the powerful, and the constraints of the system of states and their consequences on state actions.

Thucydides later considers the evils of civil strife in his discussion of the violent conflict in Corcyra and explains how in times of war fear of destruction and desire for strength led competing factions across the Greek world to seek outside interference and support in their vicious quarrels. He also discusses how the war between the Athenians and Spartans and their rivalry facilitated this violence. Thucydides then emphasizes that in “dire necessity” people act brutally and in self-interest. He continues, “But war, which robs men of the easy supply of their daily wants, is a rough schoolmaster and creates in most people a temper that matches their condition.”<sup>45</sup> Thus, Thucydides acknowledges the savagery of man and man’s proclivity toward violence and power when opportunity presents itself.<sup>46</sup> Thucydides records,

And so the cities began to be disturbed by revolutions, and those that fell into this state later, on hearing of what had been done before, carried to still more extravagant lengths the invention of new devices, both by the extreme ingenuity of their attacks and the monstrousness of their revenges. The ordinary acceptance of words in their relation to things was changed as men thought fit. Reckless audacity came to be regarded as courageous loyalty to party, prudent hesitation as specious cowardice, moderation as a cloak for unmanly weakness, and to be clever in everything was to do naught in anything. Frantic impulse in this was accounted a true man’s part, but caution and deliberation a specious pretext for shirking. The hot-headed man was always trusted, his opponent suspected. He who succeeded in a plot was clever, and he who had detected one was still shrewder; on the one hand, he who made it his aim to have no need of such things was a disruptor of party and scared of his opponents. In a word, both he that got ahead of another who intended to do something evil and he that prompted to evil one who had never thought of it were alike commended.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Id. 3.82.1-2.

<sup>46</sup> Plutarch wrote something similar when he discusses the proscriptions of Octavian, Antony, and Lepidus, stating, “So far did anger and fury lead them to renounce their human sentiments, or rather, they showed that no wild beast is more savage than man when his passion is supplemented by power.” Plut. *Cic.* 46.6. See also Tac. *Ann.* 15.25

<sup>47</sup> Thuc. 3.82.3-5

Thucydides in this passage explains that without the benefits of enforceable international law or ameliorative institutions there were no brakes on the destructive competition for survival and power in the ancient world.<sup>48</sup> He underscores how bonds of blood and ancient laws were unable to restrict conflicts, especially major ones, because they were too weak and difficult to enforce. Therefore, warring factions and states escalated the violence and brutality of the conflict in an attempt to gain an advantage. Thucydides also emphasizes that in such a destructive and insecure environment people favor leaders who act aggressively, selfishly, and viciously, which of course perpetuates the cycle of mistrust and violence.<sup>49</sup> Here Thucydides stresses that the personalities of citizens and leaders also play an important role in the decision-making of states under the pressures of interstate anarchy. He continues by underscoring the importance of power perceptions and retaliation.<sup>50</sup> He then blames these evils on “the desire to rule which greed and ambition inspire.”<sup>51</sup> Thucydides concludes,

So it was that every form of depravity showed itself in Hellas in consequence of its revolutions, and that simplicity, which is the chief element of a noble nature, was laughed to scorn and disappeared, while mutual antagonism of feeling, combined with mistrust, prevailed far and wide. For there was no assurance

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<sup>48</sup> This study also emphasizes the lack of enforceable international law, the complex and fluid balance of power, and the compelling pressures of the interstate system, and competitive interstate environment that ancient states had to endure. Yet it expands the picture from a focus on the Mediterranean to a consideration of the Mediterranean *and* the East. Legally trained scholars, such as Karl-Heinz Ziegler, have exaggerated the force of international law in the ancient world. See esp. Wheeler 2002: 287-8. Ziegler’s legalistic approach to Roman and Parthian relations is anachronistic and misleading. Ziegler 1964. For the absence of international law in the ancient world, see Eckstein 2006: 1, 12, 20-2, 32, 39. Note also Aron 1973: 98-9. Contra Sartre 2007: 619-20, 624. Wheeler is correct to emphasize the distinction that norms of international conduct in fact existed in the ancient world; however, ancient states simply ignored them when it was convenient. Wheeler 2011: 86. Thus, although we should not completely deny the existence of international law in the ancient world, there were no enforceable international laws that in reality could curtail aggression between determined ancient states.

<sup>49</sup> Dio claims that, although a leader with “a warlike nature usually ends up by being harsh,” a leader with a peaceful nature usually ends up “cowardly.” Dio 74.5.6

<sup>50</sup> Thuc. 3.82.6-7

<sup>51</sup> Id. 3.82.8.



binding enough, no oath terrible enough, to reconcile men; but always, if they were stronger, since they accounted all security hopeless, they were rather disposed to take precautions against being wronged than able to trust others. And it was generally those of meaner intellect who won the day; for being afraid of their own defects and other opponents' sagacity, in order that they might not be worsted in words, and, by reason of their opponents' intellectual versatility find themselves unawares victims of their plots, they boldly resorted to deeds. Their opponents, on the other hand, contemptuously assuming that they would be aware in time and that there was no need to secure by deeds what they might have by wit, were taken off their guard and perished in greater numbers.<sup>52</sup>

Although Thucydides' focus here is on civic factionalism, his thoughts are applicable to state interactions as well. He again underlines the considerable dangers ancient peoples and states felt from a lack of security, the perception of weakness, uncertainty, fear, and abusive power. He illustrates that there were in fact rules that were supposed to contain conflicts within each polity and between factions; however, Thucydides' point is that in times of war, even those rules were basically ignored or received lip service at best because of the high stakes at play. Therefore, since no institutions or customs could alleviate the conflict, violence became the only reliable path to survival. Those who attempted to act with moderation and relied upon sensible words found themselves outmaneuvered and destroyed by those who, out of fear, embraced aggression and violent action because in situations of life or death people and states generally prefer to secure their protection through the exercise of power and control over others. This troubling reality of human nature and especially of pre-modern geopolitics is in large part a consequence of the cruel, unforgiving environments of interstate systems, specifically ancient ones.

Finally, let us discuss perhaps Thucydides' most well-known passage and a foundational case study of Realism, the Melian Dialogue.<sup>53</sup> In 416 BCE the Athenians arrived on the island of Melos with an army and demanded that the Melians submit or be destroyed. The Athenians

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<sup>52</sup> Id. 3.83.

<sup>53</sup> Id. 5.84-116.

advised the Melians to be reasonable and pragmatic. Yet despite facing overwhelming odds, the Melians chastised the Athenians for indecency and impiety and refused to submit. In this dialogue Thucydides captures all of the Realist themes addressed in this section and discussed in greater detail throughout this study. It is unnecessary to examine the entire dialogue in order to underscore Thucydidean Realism, and therefore, we shall only highlight a few important examples.

Early in the dialogue, the Athenian envoy explains to the Melians in straightforward, resolute terms that Athens and Melos were not equals in power or influence, and therefore, the Melians should not expect to be treated as such. Instead, they should submit to the stronger Athenians regardless of their perceived righteousness because “the powerful exact what they can, while the weak yield what they must.”<sup>54</sup> Thucydides here again has the Athenians advocate Realist concepts, such as “the right of the strong to rule” and such as “where Might rules, Right is irrelevant.” These harsh yet pragmatic concepts of power relations were a geopolitical reality that most ancient writers recognized and accepted.<sup>55</sup> The Athenian envoy after some debate with the reluctant Melians continues,

‘For of the gods we hold the belief, and of men we know, that by the necessity of their nature wherever they have power they always rule. And so in our case since we neither enacted this law nor when it was enacted were the first to use it, but found it in existence and expect to leave it in existence for all time, so we make use of it, well aware that both you and others, if clothed with the same power as

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<sup>54</sup> Id. 5.89.

<sup>55</sup> Livy offers perhaps the other most notable instance of this ancient concept of power when he states, “This humiliation [that is, the 1,000 pounds of gold that the Romans had to pay as a ransom to save their city] was great enough as it was, but it was aggravated by the despicable meanness of the Gauls, who produced unjust weights, and when the tribune protested, the insolent Gaul [Brennus] threw his sword into the scale, with an exclamation intolerable to Roman ears, ‘Woe to the vanquished (*vae victis*)!’” Livy 5.48.9. Note also, for instance, Livy 27.44, 42.50, 45.26.7-8; Caes. *BG* 1.36; Dion. Hal. 6.6.2; Jos. *Bell.* 2.345-401, Tac. *Hist.* 4.17; id. *Ann.* 12.12.1, 15.1.4-5, 14.1, 25; id. *Agr.* 30; Dio 37.6.1; Strabo 16.1.26; Plaut. *Truc.* 4.3.30; Phaed. 1.5, 30, 4.6; Aesop 12, 14, 31, 32, 53, 455 in Gibbs 2002.

we are, would do the same thing... Do you not think, then, that self-interest goes hand-in-hand with security, while justice and honor are practiced with danger—a danger the Lacedaemonians are in general the least disposed to risk?’<sup>56</sup>

Thus, Thucydides has the Athenians reinforce the argument that the fundamental and natural law of power to which all men and states adhere throughout time is that the strong rule and the weak endure or perish. This passage strengthens the Realist argument that all states act similarly within an interstate system because of universally felt concerns and pressures or face destruction. The Athenians argue that self-interest and security concerns should trump less tangible concepts like justice and honor when survival is at risk.

Finally, after the Melians refused to give in to reason and continued to deny the realities of power relations and their consequences within a system of states, especially in times of war, the Athenian envoy concludes the dialogue, stating,

‘Then, as it seems to us, judging by the results of these deliberations of yours, you are the only men who regard future events as more certain than what lies before your eyes, and who look upon that which is out of sight, merely because you wish it, as already realized. You have staked your all, putting your trust in the Lacedaemonians, in fortune and in fond hopes; and with your all you will come to ruin.’<sup>57</sup>

The Athenians here emphasize the foolishness of the Melians and the absurdity of their resistance. The Athenians then ruthlessly conquered the island, slaughtered the Melian defenders, and enslaved the rest of the population, placing a violent and brutal exclamation point on the *Realpolitik* arguments of the Athenian envoy. Although Thucydides had strong moral reservations about the actions of the Athenians on Melos, as a well-informed Athenian and pragmatist, “he had arrived at an empirical conclusion as to how states in general actually act.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Thuc. 5.105.2, 107

<sup>57</sup> Id. 5.113.

<sup>58</sup> Eckstein 2006: 49. Note also Cohen 1984: 37; Doyle 1991: 172-3; Johnson Bagby 1994: 133-4; Rahe 1996: 106-41; Crane 1998: 64.

His grim but pragmatic understanding of state interactions and power dynamics supports the theoretical framework of Realism thoroughly. As we shall see throughout this study, the Romans and their eastern competitors accepted, adapted, and employed these same realist concepts into their understanding of competition between states in the belligerent, violent, and unforgiving ancient world.

### The Applicability of Realist Theory to the Study of the Rise of Parthia and the Geopolitical Developments of the First Century BCE

With the above methodological and theoretical approaches in mind, an essential aspect of this new evaluation of the growth of the Parthian state and its eventual hegemonic struggle with Rome is the introduction of modern international relations theory to the study of the decisions and interactions of various states within the ancient Mediterranean and Middle Eastern worlds. This study follows a Neorealist or “structural” approach to international relations, which is the study of how system structures affect international behaviors and outcomes.<sup>59</sup> Accordingly, this study closely follows the groundbreaking efforts of Arthur Eckstein in his recent reevaluations of the rise of the Roman state.<sup>60</sup> We should emphasize again that system-level analysis does not attempt to replace unit-level explanations of state actions, such as cultural or economic factors or the individual personalities of state leaders; rather, it utilizes the explanatory power of structural pressures and opportunities to enhance our understanding of geopolitical developments and the motivations of states and statesmen.<sup>61</sup> Thus, in this study unit-level variables, such as cultural

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<sup>59</sup> Kenneth Waltz was the most influential advocate of Neorealism. See esp. Kenneth Waltz 1979: Ch. 5-6. See also Evans and Newnham 1998: 364-5.

<sup>60</sup> Eckstein 2006. See also Eckstein 2005; Eckstein 2012; Eckstein 2013.

<sup>61</sup> Eckstein described this process well, stating, “Realists argue that the nature of the system within which states exist imposes strong constraints upon leaders and states, pushing them all in certain directions and discouraging them from taking action in other directions – but system-

peculiarities or even the personalities of unique state leaders, are factors that can have a significant impact on international developments. However, this study acknowledges that states exist under similar systemic pressures that we cannot fully appreciate without a system-level analysis of the international environment.

This project is a major effort to combine the study of modern international relations theory, and more specifically the family of theories broadly known as the “Realist” approach to international relations, to the study of ancient history.<sup>62</sup> It is a reexamination of how the Parthian state first emerged and eventually succeeded in becoming the hegemonic power of the ancient Middle East. Moreover, it is a reevaluation of the major Roman conflicts in the ancient Near East along similar methodological and theoretical lines. Finally, this work reinvestigates the phenomenon of Roman and Parthian geopolitical success and the interaction of these two titans of the ancient world in the first half of the first century BCE.

The Mediterranean world over the course of the fourth, third, and second centuries BCE had consolidated from a collection of regional international systems of states to one, expansive Mediterranean system dominated by Rome.<sup>63</sup> Before the dominance of Rome, no power had

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level factors do not determine human action. And there is room for other causal factors – what Realists call ‘nonstructural supplementary variables.’” Eckstein 2006: 67-8.

<sup>62</sup> Not only is Realism a family of related and yet competing theories, there are significant criticisms of Realist theory from a wide range of other interstate theories (e.g. Neoliberal international institutionalism or radical Constructivism). Note id. 6 n.9, 29-33; id 2012: 10-11. Note also Keohane and Nye 1987: 745-9; Kegley 1993: 133-5; Lynn-Jones 1998; Viotti and Kauppi 2011: 39-76. I share Eckstein’s preference for the sub-school of Realist theory called “offensive” Realism, because of the comparatively primitive and violent characteristics of international environments in the ancient world. Id. 2006: 6. n.9, 10 n.18. For offensive Realism, see esp. Labs 1997; Mearsheimer 2001: Ch. 2. Note also Rose 1998. For an overview of “offensive” vs “defensive” realism, note Taliaferro 2000-2001. For the applicability of offensive Realism to China in the 10<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, see Wang 2011: 21-3, 21 n.55-6.

<sup>63</sup> For example, previously there had existed the regional systems of the Italian Peninsula and of the Aegean and then of the Western and Eastern Mediterranean. See Eckstein 2006: 4-5.

established hegemony over the entire Mediterranean basin. Alexander the Great had created an expansive empire from Macedonia to India by the middle 320s BCE, and indeed, Alexander had dreamed of connecting the Eastern and Mediterranean worlds long before the Romans and Parthians unexpectedly achieved this end in the middle of the first century BCE.<sup>64</sup> However, his sudden death in 323 BCE resulted in the splintering of his empire amongst his ambitious companions. These men or “Successors” built powerful Hellenistic kingdoms that focused their power, influence, and numerous conflicts in and around the Eastern Mediterranean. The Antigonids of Macedonia, the Attalids of Asia Minor, and the Ptolemies of Egypt withdrew from the geopolitical developments of the Middle East.<sup>65</sup> Only the Seleucid Empire, with its tentative, but extensive, eastern holdings from modern day Turkey to Afghanistan, maintained any significant connection to the world east of the Zagros Mountains.<sup>66</sup> Yet the Seleucid Empire maintained its base of power and administration in the Greek cities of the Near East, especially in Syria. The primary focus of the Seleucids was their rivalry with the other Successor states around the Eastern Mediterranean, principally with Ptolemaic Egypt.<sup>67</sup> Thus, although the central power of the Seleucid Empire in Syria was an important link to the lands of the Middle East, it

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<sup>64</sup> For the literary tradition surrounding Alexander’s western plans of conquest, see Overtoom 2012: 203-12. For Roman desires to become the true successors of Alexander’s concept of world empire. Note Overtoom 2013. For Hellenistic imperialism and the concept of world unity, see Strootman 2008. Note Dio connecting the Romans to the concept of world empire through a remark of Pyrrhus of Epirus. Dio 9.19

<sup>65</sup> Although Ptolemy III invaded Mesopotamia and even seized Babylon temporarily in 245 BCE, he quickly abandoned his gains in this region and focused his attention on gaining territory around the Eastern Mediterranean coast. Note “Ptolemy III Chronicle,” BCHP 11 (BM 34428). See also Appian Syr. 11.65; Justin 27.1.1-3.12, 41.4.4-5; Polyæn. 8.50; Hieron. Daniel 11: 7-9; Cat. 66.12, 36; Cosmas Indicop. (OGIS 54).

<sup>66</sup> For the unique role of the Seleucid Empire within the international environment and the interstate system in place prior to the power-transition of the 240s BCE caused by sudden Seleucid decline, see Overtoom 2016.

<sup>67</sup> For the two-century long conflict between the Seleucids and the Ptolemies, see Grainger 2011.

did not integrate these lands into the international environment of the Eastern Mediterranean world comprehensively.<sup>68</sup> Instead, after the consequences of the sudden decline of Seleucid power in the 240s BCE, the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern worlds divided into three separate interstate systems: one that developed around the Western Mediterranean, one that developed around the Eastern Mediterranean and Near East, and another that developed in the Middle East around the Iranian Plateau.<sup>69</sup> Rome eventually consolidated the Western Mediterranean and Eastern Mediterranean systems into one, large interstate system as hegemon. Meanwhile, Parthia dominated the new Eastern interstate system and expanded it into the Near East as hegemon. The Roman-dominated Mediterranean and the Parthian-dominated Eastern systems, although they increasingly came to overlap in the Near East from the 90s-50s BCE, remained separate from one another until Crassus' invasion of Mesopotamia in 53 BCE caused them to merge violently into what I call the new and expanded Med-Eastern system. The Roman state remained the dominant power in the West for centuries, but it came to share with its

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<sup>68</sup> For an influential study on the Seleucid Empire's impact on the ancient Middle East and the argument that the Seleucid state should be understood as an heir to the Achaemenid Persian Empire, see Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993.

<sup>69</sup> Overtoom 2016: 14-15. Although his work was flavored by racial and nationalistic misconceptions, Mommsen recognized the attachment of the Seleucids to the geopolitical developments of the Eastern Mediterranean world and their general separation from those of the Middle Eastern world. Mommsen 1903: v. iii, 288-9. Meanwhile, although he argues for an interconnected world from India to North Africa in the 140s BCE, John Grainger admits that, despite his thesis, not one of the ancient sources recognizes interconnectedness between Seleucid events in Syria and Babylon during the reigns of Demetrius II and Antiochus VII, who both went on major eastern campaigns. Instead, the sources always separate events between the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Grainger 2013a: 179. Grainger's study is helpful in that it attempts to put Roman expansion in the Mediterranean within wider contexts; however, Grainger's attempts to demonstrate Mediterranean and Middle Eastern interconnectedness as early as the 140s are mistaken and unconvincing. The sources make a distinction between Syrian and Babylonian events because they were part of separate international systems at this time. The interconnectedness that Grainger champions in fact did not begin to occur until the late 50s BCE.

Parthian rival in the East an expanded international system of states that no longer was centered on the middle of the Mediterranean.<sup>70</sup>

Eckstein recognized the applicability of Barry Buzan's political science terminology to the expansion and merger of interstate systems in the ancient world, specifically to the merger of the Western and Eastern Mediterranean systems in the late third century BCE. Eckstein used Polybius' observations of the changing Mediterranean world to emphasize the new interconnectedness between the eastern and western halves of the Mediterranean at this time.<sup>71</sup> In this scenario, two regional subsystems (the Western Mediterranean and Eastern Mediterranean systems) merged into a single large system (the Mediterranean system) because of a process Buzan called "the increased interaction capacity" between the two regions. Buzan determined that the enlargement and merger of interstate systems occurred periodically in international political history, and Eckstein demonstrates that this process reflects geopolitical realities in antiquity.<sup>72</sup> This study argues that the next and last great system merger of the ancient world occurred as an unintended consequence of Crassus' failed invasion of Parthia in 53 BCE.

With the defeat of the Seleucid Empire and the dismantling of the Kingdom of Macedon in the first half of the second century BCE, Rome had fought its way to Mediterranean

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<sup>70</sup> Thus, this study challenges Eckstein's assumption that Rome established a system of unipolarity over the Mediterranean system that lasted six hundred years. Eckstein 2006: 2. Like Eckstein's argument that the merger of the Western and Eastern Mediterranean systems occurred following King Philip V of Macedon's involvement in the Second Punic War in 217 BCE, the failed invasion of Crassus in 53 BCE caused another, larger system merger. Bipolarity became the new norm of this expanded Med-Eastern system until the rapid decline of the Western Roman Empire in the fifth century BCE. For the merger of the Western and Eastern Mediterranean systems, see Eckstein 2006: 115-16; See also Little 1993: 149.

<sup>71</sup> "Indeed, Polybius asserts at the beginning of his *Histories* that the great phenomenon of the period he is covering (264 – 146 B.C.) was the development of 'interconnection' (*symplokē*) between the eastern and western halves of the Mediterranean – the creation of a Mediterranean geopolitical whole." Eckstein 2006: 114. See also Polyb. 1.3.3, 1.4.11

<sup>72</sup> Buzan et al. 1993: 66-80; Eckstein 2006: 116. Note also Aron 1973 87-8.



dominance at the latest by the 160s BCE. In *Rome Enters the Greek East*, Eckstein emphasizes that Roman hegemony in the Mediterranean transformed the interstate system from a state of anarchy to a state of hierarchy, with Rome as the hierarchical leader of a system of lesser, dependent states.<sup>73</sup> Yet Eckstein stresses that Rome's hegemony atop this new hierarchy of states within the Mediterranean system did not yet constitute "rule" or "empire."<sup>74</sup> He identifies that direct Roman imperial rule throughout the Mediterranean world was a process that did not take place until the first century BCE, and we should add that this process, which was not complete by the end of that century, took place slowly and haphazardly.<sup>75</sup> Meanwhile, Eckstein's other important conclusion is that, although Rome had become perhaps the most dominant power in all of antiquity, Rome's hegemony in the second and first centuries BCE was not irreversible.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, there was nothing guaranteeing Roman superiority, and in fact, as this study demonstrates eastern rivals tested Roman power considerably in the first century BCE.

Yet where Eckstein's conclusions fall short is that, although Rome eventually introduced pockets of direct imperial control in the Near East in the 130s, 100s, and 60s BCE, true Roman

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<sup>73</sup> Eckstein argues, "States were beginning to become functionally differentiated instead of functionally similar (i.e., militarized); hence from 188 not all polities in European Greece were obsessively focused, as they traditionally had been, on the military, while Rome itself was becoming somewhat functionally focused on mediating (from a distance) the conflicts between Greek polities, a process that itself reinforced the evolution of hierarchy." Eckstein 2012: 342-3. For hierarchy see, Waltz 1979: 81, 114-16; Tammen *et al.* 2000: 3-82. Donnelly argues that hierarchy and anarchy are not opposed and that hierarchy exists within a system of anarchy. Donnelly 2006.

<sup>74</sup> See Eckstein 2013.

<sup>75</sup> Eckstein 2012: 381. See also Sherwin-White 1984; Kallet-Marx 1995. Note that Justin in a confused account of the Jewish war of Demetrius I (161-160 BCE) claims that the Jews solicited and gained the Romans' support in gaining their freedom. He interestingly argues that the Romans were "readily affecting to bestow what it was not in their power to give." Justin 36.3.9

<sup>76</sup> Eckstein 2012: 343. Note also Mattingly 2011: 24; Lovano 2013: 77. Randall Howarth's argument that after the defeat of Antiochus III, Roman hegemony was unbreakable is far too optimistic. Howarth 2013: 30.

“empire” did not fully replace the system of hierarchy in the Mediterranean before the merger of the Roman-dominated Mediterranean and Parthian-dominated Eastern systems occurred in the late 50s BCE.<sup>77</sup> Thus, Roman unipolar hierarchy transitioned once more into bipolar anarchy as the longstanding rivalry of the Romans and Parthians emerged. This new conclusion underscores that a Mediterranean-centric evaluation of the geopolitical developments of the ancient world in the first century BCE has its limitations and, therefore, also requires reevaluation. This study argues that the theoretical framework of Realist theory, again, can widen our historical perspective even beyond the Mediterranean world to include the crucially important role played by the Parthian Empire in the international environment to provide us with a fuller understanding of the geopolitical developments of this period. This study hopes to demonstrate clearly that Roman unipolarity over the Mediterranean system was temporary and turbulent before the system merger with the Parthian East. The failure of Roman efforts to subdue the Parthians eliminated unipolarity altogether and established a much longer lasting bipolarity.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Eckstein admits that the developments of the first century BCE are outside of the scope of his studies so the oversight is understandable. Eckstein 2012: 381.

<sup>78</sup> In fact, Eckstein and Realist theorists emphasize the instability of unipolarity and the tendency for it to collapse since states look to balance against the hegemon. Mithridatic Pontus attempted to do this against Rome and Armenia attempted to do this against Parthia, but Parthia’s ability to establish a lasting rivalry with Rome succeeded. These instances of unipolar collapse in fact further reinforce Realist arguments. Id. 356-7. See also Waltz 1979; id. 1993; Layne 1993; Posen and Ross 1996: 123-4, 132; Wilkinson 1999; Layne 2006: 143, 264 n.1. For arguments that consider unipolarity stable and easy to maintain, see Wohlforth 1999; Wohlforth 2002; Kapstein and Mastanduno 1999; Mastanduno and Kapstein 1999: 5, 9-10. For the debate regarding the status of American hegemony, see Mastanduno 1997: 88; Layne 1993: 7; Lieber and Alexander 2005. Poirot briefly makes the connection of the conflict between Rome and Parthia to bipolar anarchy. See Poirot 2014: 18 n.35. See also Lerouge 2007: 317-21. For a similar depiction of a bipolar world between Rome and the Sassanid Persians in late antiquity, see Bullough 1963. Sheldon’s belief that a bipolar view of the Roman and Parthian world is “flawed” is based upon the major misconception that Parthia was not a considerable rival to Roman power and a threat to Roman hegemony and, therefore, should be rejected. Sheldon’s incorrect unit-attribute explanation of Roman and Parthian interaction (namely brutal Roman predatory aggression against the victimized Parthians) again falls short. Not only does her opinion run contrary to the

The motives behind the Romans' expansion and their success in the Near East are central to modern evaluations of the geopolitical developments of the first century BCE. Moreover, the argument that the Romans were exceptionally successful because of their exceptionally aggressive and bellicose society and culture remains equally relevant but incomplete and misguided to our understanding of the geopolitical developments of the first century BCE. Since W. V. Harris' influential work, *War and Imperialism in Republican Rome: 327-70 BC*, includes the early first century BCE within its scope, its misconceptions also are relevant to this study. Harris' work portrays Rome as an insatiable predator that sought every opportunity to dominate its neighbors, whom Harris portrays as victims of Roman hyper-brutality, aggression, and violence. Therefore, Harris and his followers advocate the mistaken unit-attribute conclusion that Rome came to dominate the Mediterranean because it was simply more militaristic and warlike.<sup>79</sup> Harris also applied this critical opinion of Rome to his understanding of the Mithridatic Wars. Harris again portrays Rome as an unbridled aggressor against a passive, weak victim.<sup>80</sup> Unfortunately, Harris' conclusions on Roman imperialism in the Mediterranean have influenced recent evaluations of Rome's relationship with Parthia as well.<sup>81</sup>

Yet this study offers a different approach to the study of geopolitics in this period by applying Harris' conclusions about Rome universally to other ancient states, especially the Seleucid Empire and the kingdoms of Pontus, Armenia, and Parthia.<sup>82</sup> In so doing, it finds that

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sentiments of our sources, but also it illustrates the potential pitfalls of evaluating state actions and policies in a vacuum. System-level analysis provides important perspective to our understanding of the geopolitical decisions of states.

<sup>79</sup> See Harris 1979: Ch. 1-3, 5.

<sup>80</sup> Id. 252, 273.

<sup>81</sup> Sheldon 2010: 2, 6, 10, 21-3, 61, 177; Edwell 2013: 191, 194, 206. See also Keaveney 1981: 199. For a recent survey of Roman imperialism, note Woolf 2015.

<sup>82</sup> For Eckstein's similar argument, see Eckstein 2006: 3-4.

there was no lack of brutality, violence, and aggression in the actions of a wide range of ancient states. Certainly, Rome embodied all of these aggressive qualities and was highly militarized and expansionistic; however, this did not make it unique, and there was nothing pathological about its brutality. For example, although he exaggerates Roman domination in the speech, Josephus has Agrippa II describe the Parthians as “that most warlike body of men, and lords of so many nations, and encompassed with such mighty forces.”<sup>83</sup> Further, both Justin and Arrian argue that the Parthians were more than a military match for the Romans, and Justin claims that they favored rough and tough men, believing gentleness was only suitable for women.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, Ammianus Marcellinus, who in the late fourth century CE benefitted from over four centuries of hindsight in Rome’s interactions with eastern rivals, states that the Romans considered the Parthians the most feared of all eastern peoples, and later he states, “There [in the East] the inhabitants of all the districts are savage and warlike, and take such pleasure in war and conflict, that one who loses his life in battle is regarded as happy beyond all others. For those who depart from this life by a natural death they assail with insults, as degenerate and cowardly.”<sup>85</sup> The Romans did not have a unique monopoly on brutality, aggression, and violence in the ancient world. Instead, the Seleucid Empire, Parthia, Bactria, Armenia, Pontus, Ptolemaic Egypt, and even middling and many minor states, including Elymais, Characene, Persis, Media Atropatene, Judea, Commagene, and numerous others, also exhibited these violent, self-interested characteristics because all of these states developed within an exceptionally cruel, unfair, and

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<sup>83</sup> *Jos. Bell.* 2.379

<sup>84</sup> Justin 41.1.7, 3.7; Photius *Bib.* 58. See also Dio 40.14.3-4

<sup>85</sup> *Amm. Mar.* 23.6.27-8, 44. See also *id.* 31.2.17-20.

threatening interstate environment that encouraged them to act similarly in order to survive and thrive.<sup>86</sup>

The scholarly disconnect between historians and political scientists remains pervasive and unfortunate.<sup>87</sup> Historians overlook rewarding new perspectives on geopolitical developments and a deeper, more significant understanding of “episodes of revolutionary change,” while political scientists generally remain unaware of helpful case studies found in the ancient world, which offer new opportunities for political scientists to examine systemic transformations and the effects of anarchy upon states and can help confirm the viability of Realist paradigms.<sup>88</sup> For example, the bipolar system that emerged in the middle of the first century BCE between Rome and Parthia is perhaps the

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<sup>86</sup> Eckstein summarizes it well when he argues, “the cruel characteristics of the interstate system exerted significant pressures, over time, both upon the internal cultures and upon the interstate behavior of both Rome and all other states within the system.” Eckstein 2006: 3.

<sup>87</sup> Because of this disconnect, few notable efforts have been made by political scientists to utilize ancient examples. Id. 7. For good efforts, see Lebow and Strauss 1991; Fliess 1966. For cursory or error prone efforts, see Liska 1978: 11-14; Gilpin 1981: 99-100, 146-7; Doyle 1986: 82-91; Little 1993: 144-50. Unfortunately, Eckstein’s work has not yet had the intended impact on the fields of history or political science. Eckstein 2006: 7-8; id. 2012: 23-4, 27-8. Few historians prove willing to engage Eckstein’s use of modern international relations theory and his system-level analysis directly. Meanwhile, even fewer political scientists appear to be aware of Eckstein’s work. See esp. Ramsey 2013. Gera praises Eckstein’s work for its interdisciplinary efforts but calls it “a very challenging read.” Gera 2010. Meanwhile, Hölkeskamp expresses discomfort at Eckstein’s “political-science jargon” and “American hidden agenda” in his use of Realist theory. Hölkeskamp 2009. For those who claim that Eckstein’s work demands interdisciplinary attention, see Sheidel 2008; Dixon 2009.

<sup>88</sup> For the lack of attention from political scientists and their complaints about the paucity of testable cases, see Eckstein 2006: 8, esp. n.13. For the Realist claim that their paradigms about the anarchic character of international politics are enduring, timeless, and unchanging, see esp. Waltz 1979: 66; Doyle 1991: 175; Glaser 1997: 171; Elman and Elman 1997: 9 and n.11, 13-14; Keeley 1999: 16-17; Copeland 2000: Ch. 8; Eckstein 2006: 9-10. For a brief but recent investigation of international relations in the Hellenistic world and the Roman Republic, see Billows 2007.

most complete example of bipolarity in history, and yet it has gone unnoticed.<sup>89</sup> Political scientists most commonly associate bipolarity with the Cold War period between the United States and the USSR; however, there was a great range of influential and powerful secondary states within that system.<sup>90</sup> Yet in the example of bipolarity between Rome and Parthia, both powers dominated the other states within the consolidated Med-Eastern system completely for centuries. Therefore, this study hopes to help bridge the scholarly gap between the study of history and political science; however, it does not claim to offer a complete explanation of the revolutionary events of the third to first centuries BCE simply through structural analysis.<sup>91</sup> The human element within state decision-making and the personalities of state leaders remain fundamentally important to our understanding of geopolitical developments in this period.<sup>92</sup> The great statesmen of Rome

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<sup>89</sup> In fact, some political scientists completely disregard the Parthians and assume incorrectly that the Romans enjoyed universal empire from 20 BCE-235 CE. Wilkinson 1987: 54; Copeland 1996: 49, 56 n.80.

<sup>90</sup> For the association of bipolarity with the American-Soviet Cold War and the association of unipolarity with the American victory in the Cold War, see Waltz 1993; Wohlforth: 1994-1995: 91-129; Mastanduno 1997; Evans and Newnham 1998: 52; Waltz 1998; Wilkinson 1999; Westad 2000; Wohlforth 2000: 126-45; Waltz 2000: 5-41. See also Copeland 1996; Lynn-Jones 1998: 157-182; Desch 1998: 145-8; Brooks and Wohlforth 2002: 20-33; Wohlforth 2001: 213-35. When scholars associate bipolarity with the ancient world, they focus on Sparta/Athens, Rome/Carthage, Rome/Seleucid Empire. Note, Fliess 1966; Eckstein 2006: 48, 66-7, 174, 294, 299, 304, 314, 315. See also Lebow 1991: 147-9; Kauppi 1991: 110.

<sup>91</sup> Schroeder analyzes the study of history and political science, the challenges that both disciplines face, and advocates a working relationship between the two disciplines to the benefit of both. Schroeder 1997. Note also Elman and Elman 1997; Levy 1988.

<sup>92</sup> “No theorist of international relations argues that the nature of the system within which states exist, or pressure from the structure and characteristics of that system, provides by itself a full explanation of specific interstate behavior. Human decisions are still made by individual human beings (those who constitute, in one form or another, the decision-making elite); more broadly, the political cultures within which human beings make those decisions are quite specific and hugely influential on those decisions, and those cultures vary one from another. Theorists do argue, however, that the nature of the interstate system offers an important part of the story, for structural pressures encourage certain types of state actions while discouraging other types.” Eckstein 2006: 8-9. See also Waltz 2000: 24.

and the Hellenistic East were not robotic; their emotions and desires affected state policy and sometimes had severe geopolitical consequences. However, again we should also recognize that their actions and policies were not made in a vacuum, which is a further crucial distinction. The systemic pressures of the international environment encouraged these men toward making certain decisions. Thus, with a better understanding of systemic pressures in the ancient world through the application of Realist theory to the study of the rise of Parthia and the geopolitical developments of the first century BCE, we can hope to understand better the decision-making of state leaders in the ancient world as well.

### Final Thoughts

This study combines traditional historical approaches, such as source criticism and the integration of material evidence, with the theoretical framework of Realism to better reconstruct Roman and Parthian history and appreciate different spatial and geographical perspectives in the ancient world. It is a major effort to synthesize a wide array of especially recent scholarship across numerous fields of study in order to present the reader with the most cogent, well rounded, and up-to-date account of the intersections of Roman, Hellenistic, and Parthian political history possible. Its primary focus is the geopolitical developments of the Romans and Parthians; however, a good deal of effort has been put forth to reinvestigate the geopolitical developments of the Seleucid Empire and Hellenistic Bactria, Pontus, and Armenia. Thus, this project is not just about the looming “bipolarity” between Rome and Parthia. The idea of “challenging Roman domination” also refers to the way this study’s reevaluation of this material *challenges* the Roman-centric focus of most scholarship to date.

PART I – TWO TITANS OF THE ANCIENT WORLD EMERGE



## Chapter 1 – Roman Hegemony over the Mediterranean System and the Emergence of the Parthian State in the East

There was no guarantee that Rome and Parthia would become the hegemonies of their respective interstate systems. Both states eventually achieved this impressive feat through long, costly processes of continual conflict with neighboring states. The purpose of the next three chapters is to illustrate the challenges faced by both states during their struggles for system dominance in the third and second centuries BCE and to introduce the reader to the polities that Rome and Parthia confronted during this process. We can accomplish this succinctly for Rome since a thorough survey of the rise of Rome to Mediterranean dominance within the context of the theoretical framework of Realism already exists.<sup>1</sup> Yet this approach has never been applied to the rise of the Parthian state and its consolidation of power. Rome's dominance of the Mediterranean and the emergence of Parthia in the East is the emphasis of this chapter.

The theme of this chapter, as in subsequent chapters, is that all ancient states were highly militarized, bellicose, and diplomatically aggressive in their struggle for power, security, and limited resources. Rome and Parthia were warlike, militaristic, and aggressive; however, so were all of their competitors. We cannot explain Roman or Parthian success by emphasizing their unilateral aggression. Rome faced belligerent Italian, Etruscan, Greek, and Gallic peoples in Italy and powerful, expansionistic states like Carthage and the Hellenistic kingdoms throughout the Mediterranean. Meanwhile, Parthia contended with warlike nomadic tribes from the Central Asian steppe and the Arabian Peninsula, other upstart expansionist states such as the kingdoms of Bactria, Elymais, Persis, and Characene, and finally, the powerful Seleucid Empire. All of these states had to cope with the pressures of harshly anarchic interstate systems. Ancient states

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<sup>1</sup> See Eckstein 2006, 2012, 2013. This outline generally follows Eckstein's construction of the rise of Rome to Mediterranean hegemony.

universally faced the prospect of the grim realities of these systems (massacre, mass enslavement, or even total destruction were fairly common) and lived with the systemic pressures that these realities posed. This is true as much in the East as it is in the West.

It is necessary to confront Roman and Parthian militarism, aggression, and their expansionistic success within the long-term context of the war-prone interstate systems of the ancient Mediterranean and Middle East. What becomes apparent is that Rome and Parthia were not unique in their security-conscious, diplomatically aggressive, and confrontational policies. The interstate anarchy of the Mediterranean and Eastern systems encouraged all ancient states to act thusly to avoid annihilation. In such an environment, conflict between polities was common and warfare was normal.

### Rome Becomes the Hegemon in the West

Over the course of the fourth, third, and second centuries BCE, Rome existed within an expanding series of war-prone interstate systems.<sup>2</sup> Rome, either through direct participation or invitation, became a part of larger preexisting interstate systems throughout the Mediterranean.<sup>3</sup> The Roman Republic existed within an environment of warlike, aggressive neighbors and serious threats to state survival. Yet Rome was not a uniquely bellicose aggressor. Roman expansion

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<sup>2</sup> Arthur Eckstein identifies these various regional systems as Latin, Etruscan, central Italian, Italian, Western Mediterranean, and pan-Mediterranean. Eckstein 2006: 119. This study takes this process one step further, emphasizing a final and ultimate system expansion in the late 50s BCE called the Med-Eastern system. The result of this was the elimination of hegemony for Rome and Parthia in separate interstate systems and the creation of a new system of bipolar anarchy between Rome and Parthia.

<sup>3</sup> For the concept of “empire by invitation,” see Lundestad 1986: 263-77; Lundestad 1990: Ch. 1; Doyle 1986: 192-7. For its application in the ancient world, see Eckstein 2006: 113, 119, 142, 155, 179, 303.

well into the first century BCE was slow, reluctant, haphazard, and inconsistent. Roman success in this period derived primarily from superior manpower, not unique military belligerence.<sup>4</sup>

### Rome Dominates Italy

The power of the Roman state from the eighth to the fifth centuries BCE was quite limited. Rome was a small city-state among numerous other city-states in Latium. For much of its early history, Rome controlled only its immediate hinterland and found itself continually at war with neighboring Latin and Etruscan communities. The Tiber River valley in central Italy is not an ideal defensive location and is vulnerable to outside attacks.<sup>5</sup> In ca. 390/386 BCE the Gauls sacked the city of Rome. Part of the Roman price for survival was to pay the Gauls a large fine in gold. Livy recounted the scene and captured the grim reality of the anarchic interstate system when he recorded the Gallic chieftain, Brennus, responding to Roman complaints with the quip, “woe to the vanquished (*vae victis*).”<sup>6</sup> Yet the Gauls were not the only threat to the young Roman state. Roman expansion was minimal in the early years, as Rome faced enemies on all sides and found survival quite challenging.

The destructive military pressure that Rome felt from its many warlike neighbors in the fifth and fourth centuries encouraged the militarization of Roman society and culture. Continual threats to Roman security helped create a Roman attitude of suspicion and aggression to the

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<sup>4</sup> See esp. Eckstein 2006: 245-57.

<sup>5</sup> In fact, by the fourth century CE, Roman emperors had made Milan the new imperial headquarters in Italy because it offered better access to the western frontiers of the empire. In 402 CE, facing the pressures of the Gothic invasion of Italy, Emperor Honorius transferred the imperial court to the isolated, well-defended city of Ravenna. Ravenna became the new working capital of the Western Roman Empire, and Rome fell victim to Gothic and Vandalic sacks. For the role of Milan, see Violante; 1974; Krautheimer 1983: 68-92; Ruggini 1990; Monfrin 1991. For Ravenna, see Hutton 1926; Deichmann 1958-1989; Hodgkin 1967.

<sup>6</sup> Livy 5.48

outside world.<sup>7</sup> A result of this fear and insecurity in Roman society was frequent conflict with the other city-states and tribes of Italy as the Romans followed power-maximizing policies in an attempt to obtain state security. However, Rome was not alone in these fears and insecurities. The pressures of the multipolar interstate anarchy of the Italian Peninsula (no enforceable international law, compellence diplomacy, opaque awareness of state capabilities, unstable power relations, etc.) encouraged all ancient states within the Italian system to militarize extensively, act aggressively, and think pessimistically when it came to foreign policy and state security.

The Etruscan city-states to the north of Rome were violent, war-prone, and aggressive against one another and Rome.<sup>8</sup> To the north were the Gallic communities, which were no less belligerent and expansionistic. Their sack of Rome psychologically scarred the Romans, as Livy's account 400 years later illustrates. Roman fears of Gallic aggression were well founded and devastating raids into central Italy continued for 200 years. Rome's wars against the Gallic communities of northern Italy were costly and often defensive. The Roman state absorbed great losses in their defense of northern Italian communities. In fact, the Gauls presented such an endemic threat to the Roman state that they made the Roman occupation of the entire Po Valley in the second century BCE a necessity for stability in Italy.<sup>9</sup>

By the end of the fourth century, Rome was fighting multiple-front wars. This helps demonstrate the many threats that the Roman state faced; however, the ability of the Roman state to conduct multiple military campaigns simultaneously exemplifies the fundamental Roman

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<sup>7</sup> See Eckstein 2006: 120-2. See also Raaflaub et al. 1992: 28; Raaflaub 1996: 276-86; Rosenstein 1999: 196-200.

<sup>8</sup> For the militaristic nature of Etruscan society, see Eckstein 2006: 122-31.

<sup>9</sup> For the fierce warrior culture of the Gauls and their threat to Rome, see id. 131-8; also note Eckstein 1995: 120-1.

advantage in the interstate competition: Rome's ability to mobilize superior manpower.

Ultimately, the Romans succeeded in their numerous costly wars in Italy because they developed a unique ability to man and supply armies by incorporating defeated and allied communities into the Roman political and military system.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, it was not Rome's willingness to dominate the Italian Peninsula that was unique; rather, it was the military and logistical capabilities of the Roman state that were unique.<sup>11</sup>

Another Italian people who proved equally warlike, violent, and expansionistic in confrontation with the Romans were the Samnites of central southern Italy. The Samnites posed a greater immediate threat to the Romans than the Etruscans and Gauls because they worked together in a confederation to expand their power. After Rome extended its influence into Campania by accepting the total surrender of Capua in exchange for Roman protection against the growing Samnite threat to the region, Roman and Samnite imperialism brought the two powers into direct conflict.<sup>12</sup> The submission of Capua to Roman hegemony through aggressive diplomacy provoked a Samnite reaction and war. Campania had become a region of system overlap between Rome in its central Italian interstate system and the Samnites in their southern

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<sup>10</sup> Eckstein concludes, "Rome, then, was by far the largest, most successful, and least fragile of these political entities [the various states competing in the Mediterranean system], the only alliance system in antiquity founded on the domination of a single city-state that was also successful over the long term. Importantly, it was also the most integrative in character." Eckstein 2006: 246. For a complete investigation of Roman "exceptionalism" in this fashion, see id. 245-57.

<sup>11</sup> Polybius claims that the Roman state in the late third century BCE had military reserves of over 750,000 soldiers. He compares this to the less than 20,000 men that Hannibal could command in Italy. Polyb. 2.24. Note that Livy set the total at 800,000 men. Livy *Ep.* 20. These figures likely are exaggerations, but they speak to the enormous reservoir of soldiers that the Roman state had developed by the time of the Second Punic War. The Romans more realistically deployed between 150,000 and 200,000 soldiers. Ligt 2010: 114, 117. For the debate over Roman manpower resources and military capabilities, see id. 114-131, esp. 117 n.14; See also Ropp 1979: 96; Baronowski 1993; Erdkamp 2008; Erdkamp 2009; Erdkamp 2011: 58-76.

<sup>12</sup> Livy 7.31.4-5

Italian system. Both Italian powers had considerable military capabilities and imperialistic ambitions.<sup>13</sup> Control of the region and the establishment of a power relationship that reflected the actual distribution of power capabilities within the interstate system was only possible through armed conflict between Rome and the Samnites.<sup>14</sup> The result was three long, costly wars in which superior Roman resources ultimately triumphed.

Yet even with the defeat of the Etruscans and Samnites, threats to Roman power in Italy remained. The Greek city-states of southern Italy had a long tradition of militarism, and the powerful Greek city of Tarentum in the heel of Italy had become highly militarized because of its ongoing conflicts with neighboring city-states and tribes.<sup>15</sup> The Tarentines had the ambition to dominate all of southern Italy; however, they lacked the resources and manpower to make these ambitions a lasting reality. Unlike Rome, Tarentum was limited to the citizen body of the city for soldiers. Yet the Tarentine military was not minuscule, and Tarentum had become the aggressive, oppressive power in the region by the end of the fourth century BCE.<sup>16</sup> When Rome entered the sphere of southern Italy, the communities competing with Tarentum looked to Rome for protection against Tarentum because of Rome's reputation for leniency toward its allies. This

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<sup>13</sup> We should reject the interpretations of the Roman/Samnite conflict that view it solely as Roman aggression against passive Samnite victims. For this view, see Harris 1979: 177; Rowland 1983: 759-60; Raaflaub et al. 1992: 25-9; Oakley 1993: 11, 31; Cornell 1995: 353-4; Raaflaub 1996: 277-8. For a convincing reinterpretation of the Roman/Samnite conflict, see Eckstein 2006: 138-47.

<sup>14</sup> This pattern reemerges continually in the reconstruction of the expansion of the Roman state. The last major example of system overlap in classical antiquity that resulted in system merger, hegemonic war, and a new balance within an expanded interstate system is the merger of the Mediterranean and Eastern systems because of the interaction between Rome and Parthia from the late 90s to the late 50s BCE.

<sup>15</sup> See Eckstein 2006: 147-9. Note also Carter 1973: 7 n.4; Brauer 1986: 13-14, 25, 29-30.

<sup>16</sup> The Tarentine army numbered around 22,000 men. For the size and strength of the city and the military capabilities of the Tarentines, see Eckstein 2006: 151; See also Willeumier 1939: 70-5, 186-8, 192-3, 213-17; Brauer 1986: 45-6, 61, 88, 149.

direct threat to Tarentine hegemony in southern Italy caused Tarentum to search for military support against Rome.<sup>17</sup> This support came in the form of King Pyrrhus of Epirus, who invaded Italy with a sizable, professional army. Although Rome eventually emerged from the Pyrrhic War victorious, largely due to the immense military reserves of the Roman state, the bloody campaign of King Pyrrhus scarred Roman memory and brought the potential threat of invasions of Italy, especially from the East, to Rome's attention.<sup>18</sup> With its victories in the hegemonic struggles against the Etruscans, Samnites, and Tarentines, Rome came to dominate the entire expanded interstate system of the Italian Peninsula.

### Rome Dominates the Western Mediterranean

With the Roman domination of the Italian Peninsula, the separate interstate systems of Italy under Rome and that of North Africa under Carthage threatened to merge. System overlap in western Sicily created mounting tension between these two powerful polities. Before discussing the eventual hegemonic struggle between Rome and Carthage, we must dismiss the belief that Carthage was a peaceful merchant community victimized by the brutally aggressive Romans.<sup>19</sup> By the middle of the third century BCE, Carthage had spent the better part of two and a half centuries trying to conquer the island of Sicily, especially against the aggressive ambitions

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<sup>17</sup> For the militarism of Tarentum and its rivalry with Rome, see Eckstein 2006: 147-158.

<sup>18</sup> For a recent account of Rome's conflict with King Pyrrhus, see Champion 2009. For the damage to Rome's psyche after the war and its impact on Roman policy, see Eckstein 2006: 156; See also Seibert 1995: 237-8. To this point, the Roman statesman P. Sulpicius Galba pleaded with the Roman Army Assembly (the *comitia centuriata*) right before the outbreak of the Second Macedonian War in 200 BCE, asking the soldiers to fight in Macedonia before they were forced to defend Italy from another invasion. Livy 31.7.2-3, 13-14

<sup>19</sup> For this argument, see Thiel 1954: 129-34; Mitchell 1971: 334-44; Jones 1972: 27-9; Harris 1979: 182-94, 200-5, 234-40; Oakley 1993: 33; Lazenby 1996: 39-48.

of Syracuse. The Carthaginian and Syracusan inability to dominate Sicily completely stemmed from a lack of sufficient power, not a lack of will or effort.<sup>20</sup>

Carthage had developed into a highly bellicose, militaristic society in response to violent conflicts with neighboring African communities and Syracusan aggression. The North African interstate system shared the same grim characteristics of the other regional systems of the ancient world: no enforceable international law or constructive diplomacy to alleviate conflicts; a multitude of militarized and aggressive polities struggling for limited resources and power; a lack of state security; opacity in state interactions; and unstable power relations. These systemic pressures and the imperialistic ambitions of the wealthy Carthaginian state led the Carthaginians to amass a considerable maritime empire across the western Mediterranean.<sup>21</sup>

The rising power of Carthage in the Western Mediterranean and that of Rome in the Italian Peninsula, and the overlap of their respective interstate systems in Sicily, led inadvertently to an outbreak of hostilities over the control of the island in the form of the First Punic War.<sup>22</sup> The previously separate Italian and North African interstate systems violently merged to form the larger Western Mediterranean system because of this hegemonic conflict.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Eckstein 2006: 160.

<sup>21</sup> Id.162-4; See also Whittaker 1978: 60, 88-90. Although Carthage was not a passive victim, it too was not an exceptionally militaristic or aggressive state. Carthage acted as all ancient polities acted, aggressively in its own interests. The Carthaginians' success in the western Mediterranean was a result of their capabilities, not simply of will. See also Ameling 1993: 180-1.

<sup>22</sup> We can reject, as Eckstein does, Harris' conclusion that Rome attacked the rebel Mamertines at Messana in 256 BCE in order to fight a larger war against Carthage to seize control of Sicily. Rather, Rome initially only sought strategic advantage in Sicily. The harsh, yet warranted, responses of Carthage and Syracuse to Roman direct involvement in Sicily made further conflict likely. See Harris 1979: 182-9; Eckstein 2006: 165-6.

<sup>23</sup> The violent merger of interstate systems in the ancient world was common until the final merger between the Mediterranean and Eastern systems in the late 50s BCE. All ancient interstate systems began as small, regional collections of neighboring polities. As certain states began to dominate these regional systems and expand their power outward, the various small, regional systems came into contact and conflict. Violent system mergers, usually a result of



Rome utilized its unique stockpile of resources to outlast Carthage in a twenty-three year long struggle.<sup>24</sup> Yet, although Rome had won the war, Carthage was not subdued completely. A system of unstable bipolarity between Rome and Carthage emerged. Carthage felt threatened by Rome, and Rome still had reason to fear the potential power and ambitions of Carthage. The seizure of Sardinia and Corsica by the Romans in 238/237 BCE to eliminate potential naval bases for the Carthaginian fleet illustrates this fear.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, Carthage demonstrated its potential power by rebuilding its empire in the mineral rich Iberian Peninsula. With the resurgence of Carthaginian power in Spain and the renewal of Gallic pressures in northern Italy, by the 220s BCE the distribution of power across the new Western Mediterranean system had altered to Rome's detriment.<sup>26</sup>

With the recent advances of Carthage, the power relationship between Rome and Carthage once again became uncertain, and tension between the two powers continually mounted. Only armed conflict could reestablish the proper balance of power within the Western Mediterranean system. This tension finally boiled over at the city of Saguntum. The new Carthaginian commander, Hannibal, was carrying out the imperialistic ambitions of his state when he besieged Saguntum, a small town in northeastern Spain under Roman protection. Ambiguity about the actual power relationship between Rome and Carthage by 219 BCE meant that Hannibal refused Roman demands to end the siege and to uphold the status quo because the recent success of the Carthaginians in Spain gave Hannibal every reason to believe that the

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hegemonic conflict, created fewer and fewer, yet larger and larger interstate systems until the Med-Eastern system emerged as the largest, most developed interstate system in the Western World until the early modern era.

<sup>24</sup> For a recent account of the First Punic War, see Miles 2012; Ch. 7; See also Lazenby 1996; Goldsworthy 2007: Ch. 2-5.

<sup>25</sup> Eckstein 2006: 168-9. See also Polyb. 1.88.8-12, 3.30.4

<sup>26</sup> Eckstein 2006: 169-70.

geopolitical situation in the Western Mediterranean had changed in Carthage's favor. The new power of Carthage meant that it no longer needed to submit to Roman control without a fight.<sup>27</sup>

The Second Punic War was more devastating and more hotly contested than the first. Hannibal boldly invaded Italy through the Alps and won a series of resounding victories on the battlefield. Yet the seemingly unlimited resources of the Roman state proved too daunting for even Hannibal to overcome. Rome not only absorbed over 100,000 casualties in a two-year period from 218-216 BCE, but it carried out major military expeditions in Italy, Spain, and off the coast of Africa simultaneously. Rome could afford to bottle up Hannibal in Italy while other Roman armies destroyed the Carthaginian Empire in Spain and invaded North Africa. Despite the bitterness of the seventeen-year war, the terms of peace were relatively moderate. Rome did not demand the total destruction of Carthage. Yet Rome had established itself as the hegemon of the Western Mediterranean system.<sup>28</sup> Arthur Eckstein observes that the experience of Hannibal's invasion and the Second Punic War in general further scarred the Roman psyche. Rome learned the necessity of responding to outside threats with determination and the importance of answering the pleas of its allies with offensive force. He concludes that this experience had a profound influence on Roman actions in the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>29</sup>

### Rome Dominates the Entire Mediterranean

In the Eastern Mediterranean since the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE, there had been a state of almost constant conflict between the various Successor kingdoms and Greek polities. The vast conquests of Alexander and his sudden death created a multitude of powerful,

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<sup>27</sup> Id. 171-2, 174. See also Vollmer 1990: 134-5; Hoyos 1998: 201.

<sup>28</sup> For a recent account of the Second Punic War, see Miles 2012: Ch. 10-12; See also Lazenby 1998; Goldsworthy 2002; Goldsworthy 2007: Ch. 6-13.

<sup>29</sup> Eckstein 2006: 176.

bellicose, and expansionistic Hellenistic states that existed within a violent, destructive, and war prone anarchical interstate system similar to that of the preceding Classical Age.<sup>30</sup> However, in the Hellenistic Age states were larger with better resources, and therefore, the scale of warfare increased drastically.<sup>31</sup> As made evident by Arthur Eckstein's recent reevaluations of the Hellenistic East, the long held scholarly tradition that this was a period of relatively peaceful coexistence between states is wildly misguided.<sup>32</sup> This was a period of endemic warfare fueled by the warlike and aggressive military ethos of the Macedonian ruling class. Hellenistic leaders sought glory through military expansion, and their military ambitions were unlimited. Meanwhile, lesser Greek polities continued to pursue self-help, power-maximizing policies in pursuit of regional power and security. The source of universal bellicosity in this period remained the pressures of the anarchic interstate system.<sup>33</sup>

Until the late third century BCE, Rome had remained almost completely detached from the geopolitical developments of the Eastern Mediterranean. The invasion of Italy by King Pyrrhus had created resentment and tension between Rome and the Greek East; however, the conflict did not force a violent merger between the Roman-dominated Italian system and the much larger Eastern Mediterranean system.<sup>34</sup> After the failure of Pyrrhus' invasion, the Romans

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<sup>30</sup> For violent interstate relations in Classical Greece, see *id.* Ch. 3.

<sup>31</sup> See Austin: 1986; Hanson 1989: 35, 58; Bugh 2006; Serrati 2013.

<sup>32</sup> Eckstein 2006: Ch. 4; Eckstein 2012. See also Lévêque 1968. John Serrati agrees with Eckstein's conclusions. See Serrati 2013: 179-80. For the predominant, yet outdated depiction of the Hellenistic period as relatively peaceful, see Droysen 1878: 182; Tarn 1912: 1; Rostovtzeff 1957: 23-4, 552-3, 1026-9; Wilcken 1962: 275; Braunert 1964: 80-1; Welles 1965: 220-1; Badian 1968: 5-6; Treves 1970: 56; Veyne 1975: 795, 800, 823, 837-8; Klose 1982: 80-8; Mastrocinque 1983: 91-5; Will 1984: 61; Walbank 1984: 63, 66; Bederman 2001: 43 and n.63; Hölbl 2001: 131.

<sup>33</sup> See Eckstein 2006: 82-6, 99.

<sup>34</sup> The two systems had converged and perhaps experienced some overlap, but the integrity of the separate systems remained.

turned their attention to Sicily and the Western Mediterranean in order to face the more immediate threat of Carthage. For sixty years the Romans, although aware of the Greek East and the potential threat that it posed, continued to focus on the geopolitical developments of Italy and the expanded Western Mediterranean system.<sup>35</sup> Two events were fundamental to the merger of the western and eastern systems in the Mediterranean: the decision of King Philip V of Macedon to become involved in the Second Punic War and the First Macedonian War.

In 217 BCE Rome and Carthage were locked in the hegemonic struggle of the Second Punic War. Hannibal recently had invaded northern Italy and decisively defeated the Romans at the River Trebia and Lake Trasimene. Meanwhile in Greece, the young, energetic, and ambitious king of Macedon, Philip V, heard of Hannibal's success and decided to pursue an aggressive policy of western expansion. After subduing Greece and Illyria, Philip planned an expedition to Italy to aid Hannibal against Rome.<sup>36</sup> It was this decision and its repercussions that finally merged the western and eastern systems in the Mediterranean. Contact between the East and West had been sporadic and brief prior to 217 BCE; however, after Philip's decision to expand Macedonian power west and to aid Hannibal in Italy, Greek interaction with Rome and Roman involvement in the Greek East gradually became more frequent and permanent.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> The Romans later followed a similar policy when confronted with Parthia and the Eastern system. Although the two powers met officially in the 90s BCE, creating mounting tension between the two powers as their separate systems continued to overlap in Mesopotamia, Syria, and Armenia, Rome and Parthia remained focused on their own systems and detached from one another until the late 50s BCE.

<sup>36</sup> Polyb. 5.101-8

<sup>37</sup> Eckstein 2006: 114. Note also Walbank 1985. It is important to understand that this does not mean that Rome eagerly sought to dominate the Greek East. Greek communities continually drew a reluctant Rome into Greek conflicts. The eventual Roman domination of the Greek East was not quick, consistent, or determined.

The alliance of Carthage and Macedon against Rome was a serious threat to Roman survival. After the devastating Battle of Cannae in 216 BCE, where Rome lost 60,000 soldiers in one day, the last thing the Romans could afford was another Hellenistic king, who fancied himself a rival to Alexander the Great, invading Italy.<sup>38</sup> By the summer of 215 BCE, Philip had built and trained a transport fleet and had moved his army to the western coast of Greece to prepare for the invasion of Italy. Had it not been for Philip losing his nerve in the face of the threat of an advancing Roman fleet and abandoning his Italian campaign, the result of the Second Punic War might have been quite different.<sup>39</sup> The advantage that the alliance of Carthage and Macedon provided for the two states was negligible; however, the immediate result of the alliance was the first Roman military involvement in Greece, known as the First Macedonian War (214-205 BCE).

Although Philip's aggression against Rome's friends and allies in Illyria and his planned invasion of Italy initiated the violent merger of the Western and Eastern Mediterranean systems, the immediate military response by Rome and its physical involvement in mainland Greece for the first time was crucial to the solidification of that merger. Rome recently had fought two brief wars in Illyria against pirate communities (229/8 and 219 BCE); however, Rome left at most a weak sphere of influence in the region. Rome made no official treaties and left no garrisons. After the wars, Rome returned to its western concerns and did not expand its eastern connections. There was no push by the senate for permanent strategic involvement in the Greek

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<sup>38</sup> Polybius tells us that Philip's eagerness and ambitions sprung from a house (the Macedonian royal house), which coveted universal dominion. Polyb. 5.102.1. See also *Anth. Pal.* 9.518. For the ambitions of Philip, see Walbank 1993; Eckstein 2006: 111; See also Klose 1982; Derow 2003: 54. The other Hellenistic king was Pyrrhus of Epirus.

<sup>39</sup> Polyb. 5.109-10

East after these conflicts.<sup>40</sup> Eckstein is likely correct to view the Roman involvement in Illyria as shortsighted and detached. Rome had not established a launching off point with the grand strategic plan to dominate all of Greece eventually. Yet, the “sphere of influence” that Eckstein acknowledges appears to be a good example of the concept of system overlap.

Although Rome had no intentions to become involved in the Greek East and the western and eastern Mediterranean systems remained separate, the two systems came to further overlap in Illyria because of these wars. This created heightened tension and increased the likelihood of later conflict. A good example of this overlap and the resulting tension is the catalyst behind Philip V’s western aggression in 217 BCE. Demetrius of Pharos had lost his position of power in Illyria because of Roman actions against him in the Second Illyrian War. He then fled to Macedon and became an adviser of Philip V. Polybius tells us that Philip confided in Demetrius solely and completely about the possible alliance with Hannibal against Rome.<sup>41</sup> Polybius later records that Demetrius had advised Philip to go to war against Rome for selfish reasons, stating, “For Demetrius continued to fire these hopes and ambitions of the king with such assiduity that Philip in his sleep dreamt of nothing else than this, and was full of his new projects. Demetrius did not do this out of consideration for Philip, whose cause was, I should say, only of third-rate importance to him in this matter, but actuated rather by his hostility to Rome and most of all for the sake of himself and his own prospects, as he was convinced that this was the only way by which he could recover his principality of Pharos.”<sup>42</sup> Thus, the mounting friction caused by system overlap in this case is clear. Rome had no direct ties to Illyria; however, its successful wars and informal influence there had expanded the Western Mediterranean system to include

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<sup>40</sup> See esp. Eckstein 2012: Ch. 2.

<sup>41</sup> Polyb. 5.101.7-8

<sup>42</sup> Id. 5.108.5-7.

the Illyrian coast, which to this point had been a part of the Eastern Mediterranean system only. The First Macedonian War was a direct result of the growing tension caused by this system overlap.

Unlike the example of Pyrrhus invading Italy, which easily could have led to violent system merger between the Italian and Eastern Mediterranean systems, the Romans first decided actively to take part in the geopolitical developments of the Eastern Mediterranean system after Philip's western aggression.<sup>43</sup> That is, unlike the example of Pyrrhus' invasion, the western and eastern systems of the Mediterranean finally began to merge because of active aggression by both sides.<sup>44</sup> Thus, we should keep in mind that system merger is a process. The Second Macedonian War certainly illustrates a more developed and final phase of the merger between the western and eastern Mediterranean systems; however, the first war had already sufficiently solidified the merger to the point that there could be no returning to separate interstate systems. The first war had forced Rome to become militarily involved in Greece for the first time; it introduced the Greeks to the potential usefulness of the Romans in their regional rivalries; and its conclusion did not satisfy the Roman desire to avenge Philip's aggression toward them. There is no reason to assume that the Greek polities threatened by Philip V and Antiochus III after the

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<sup>43</sup> This also reflects the later geopolitical situation between Rome and Parthia in the Near East. The indirect aggression of Lucullus and Pompey against the Parthians had the opportunity to create violent system merger between the Mediterranean and Eastern systems but did not. Rather, the direct aggression of Crassus in his failed invasion of Parthia began the merger and the Parthian immediate military reaction to invade Roman Syria solidified it.

<sup>44</sup> Eckstein argues that the Greek embassies that convinced Rome to initiate the Second Macedonian War brought the merger into "full existence." See Eckstein 2006: 115, 275. For the collapse of Ptolemaic power and the geopolitical crisis it caused in the Greek East, see Eckstein 2012: Ch. 4.

collapse of Ptolemaic power at the end of the third century BCE would have turned so eagerly to Rome for aid without the previous intervention of Rome in Greece during the first war.<sup>45</sup>

It is important to clarify one more aspect of system merger before we continue. Although system merger is a seismic, often violent event, actors within the interstate systems do not recognize the process immediately. That is, the identification of system merger is a product of hindsight. Polybius, looking back at the expansion of Roman power in the late third and early second centuries BCE, was able to identify the interconnectedness (or *symplokē*) of the western and eastern Mediterranean after 217 BCE; however, this merger was not immediately apparent to Rome or the polities of the Greek East.<sup>46</sup> In fact, for Polybius the failures of Philip V, Antiochus III, and the other Greek polities in the Eastern Mediterranean to recognize this process of system merger and their disregard for Rome's new role in this expanded interstate system was fundamental to Rome's eventual domination of the entire Mediterranean system.<sup>47</sup>

By the end of the third century BCE, the tripolar interstate system of the Eastern Mediterranean between Macedon, the Seleucid Empire, and the Ptolemaic Kingdom had existed for about a century.<sup>48</sup> The conservative and self-absorbed polities of the Greek East within their well-established interstate system were much slower to accept the realities of the new and

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<sup>45</sup> For the collapse of Ptolemaic power and the geopolitical crisis it caused in the Greek East, see id. 2012: Ch. 4. Note also Fischer-Bovet 2014. For a recent study of Rome's conquest of Greece, note Waterfield 2014.

<sup>46</sup> Eckstein hints at this. Eckstein 2006: 115. Nor was system merger immediately apparent in any of the various examples found throughout the ancient West or East. This of course is directly relevant to our understanding of the later merger of the Mediterranean and Eastern systems into one, final expanded system, which I propose to call the Med-Eastern system. Neither Rome nor Parthia planned for this to happen through "grand strategy" or understood that it was happening as it happened. The process was opaque, shortsighted, haphazard, and often reactionary.

<sup>47</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> For the tripolarity of the Hellenistic world, see Eckstein 2012: 21, 25, 126, 128, 179, 181-3, 200, 209, 227, 267, 273-5, 337, 340, 355.



expanded international environment of the wider Mediterranean than the Romans. Meanwhile, Rome had experienced several recent system mergers within Italy and the Western Mediterranean. With the western aggression of Philip V against Rome and the Roman military response in the First Macedonian War, a new world order began to emerge in the wider Mediterranean. Rome proved to be more adaptive to this new international environment than the Greek polities in the East and soon found itself as the hegemon of the entire expanded Mediterranean system.

The violent merger of the Western and Eastern Mediterranean systems did not create a hegemonic conflict between Rome and Macedon instantaneously. The First Macedonian War was limited in scope and rarely featured direct Roman and Macedonian conflict. From 218-201 BCE Rome was too concerned with its hegemonic war against Carthage to make a major campaign against Macedon possible. In addition, Roman interest in the East, even during the First Macedonian War, was informal, inconsistent, and detached. At the end of the war in 205 BCE, Rome retained its loose influence in Illyria but retained only a handful of informal friendships with Greek communities and Pergamon. Rome was not eager to become involved in the conflicts of the Greek East.<sup>49</sup> In fact, it would be the warnings and requests of Greek polities threatened by the aggressive expansion of more immediate Hellenistic neighbors that would continually draw Rome into eastern conflicts.<sup>50</sup>

In a recent work on the rise of Rome to Mediterranean hegemony, Arthur Eckstein identifies the sudden and rapid decline of Ptolemaic power at the end of the third century BCE as

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<sup>49</sup> See *id.* 122-3.

<sup>50</sup> Roman reluctance, inconsistency, and detachment in its eastern policy and the eagerness of Greek and Hellenistic polities to draw in Rome to local conflicts was a process that continued well into the middle of the first century BCE. See esp. Gruen 1984; Sherwin-White 1984; Kallet-Marx 1995.

the watershed moment that eventually led to Rome dominating the Mediterranean. He argues that a large-scale rebellion of the indigenous population against the Ptolemies in Egypt ca. 207 BCE, the reign of a child king after the sudden death of Ptolemy IV in 204 BCE, and the increasing aggression of the Seleucid Empire against the Ptolemies under the powerful and militarily successful Antiochus III caused a “power-transition crisis” in the Greek East and “plunged the Hellenistic state-system into its worst geopolitical crisis in eighty years.”<sup>51</sup> In essence, the rapid collapse of the Ptolemaic state destabilized the traditional tripolar balance of power in the Eastern Mediterranean system. This gave Macedon and the Seleucid Empire the opportunity to fill the power void and establish a new balance of power in their favor. It also severely threatened the status quo in the Eastern Mediterranean and the security of the various lesser polities within that interstate system. Although power-transition crisis does not necessarily result in hegemonic conflict, the sweeping opportunity, uncertainty, and insecurity that such a process creates makes hegemonic war more likely, and in the case of the Eastern Mediterranean, this was the result.<sup>52</sup>

With Ptolemaic power in steep decline, Philip V and Antiochus III banded together under a “secret” agreement to split the Ptolemaic holdings between them.<sup>53</sup> Yet, such a drastic rise in the power of Macedon and the Seleucid Empire threatened the security and survival of the numerous lesser polities in the Eastern Mediterranean. These middling states, such as the Achaean and Aetolian leagues in Greece, Athens, the Republic of Rhodes, the kingdoms of

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<sup>51</sup> Eckstein 2012: 124-5. For power-transition crisis, see the introduction above.

<sup>52</sup> See id. 126.

<sup>53</sup> This highly controversial agreement, known as “the Pact between the Kings,” is recorded inconsistently in our sources and is subject to fierce scholarly debate. For an extensive account of the Pact and the controversy that surrounds it, see id. 129-50. Eckstein’s conclusion that the Pact was real and had wide-ranging designs, including the conquest of Egypt, has to be taken seriously. See id. 150-80.

Pergamon and Bithynia, etc., feared the aggression of Philip V and Antiochus III. They faced the unpleasant reality of having to submit to one of the two rising Hellenistic powers or to resist them militarily. They chose the latter but lacked the military strength on their own to resist the combined power of Macedon and the Seleucid Empire. Since Philip and Antiochus were collaborating, and since Ptolemaic Egypt could no longer act as a counterweight to their ambitions, the second-tier states of the Eastern Mediterranean had to look to a new major polity for aid, one that had recently entered the traditional Eastern Mediterranean system as a notable force, the Republic of Rome. In an attempt to secure their independence against the more immediate threats of Macedon and the Seleucid Empire, the lesser polities of the Greek East sent several envoys to Rome in 201/200 BCE to warn the Romans strongly of the wide-ranging threat of Philip and Antiochus' alliance and to solicit Roman aid in removing that threat.<sup>54</sup> Thus, it was the pleas of middling Greek states, threatened by the rising power of Macedon and the Seleucid Empire because of the power-transition crisis caused by the collapse of Ptolemaic power in the late third century BCE, which drew Rome permanently into the geopolitical developments of the Greek East.<sup>55</sup> The system merger between the western and eastern portions of the Mediterranean was complete, and Rome readied itself to intervene in the growing hegemonic conflict in the East.

None of the Hellenistic polities of the Eastern Mediterranean could have anticipated the speed and the totality of Rome's success in the Greek East. Rome decisively defeated Philip V in

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<sup>54</sup> Eckstein views these embassies as the final creation of full interconnectedness between the Western and Eastern Mediterranean systems. *Id.* 275. For the motives of the Greek states and their envoys to Rome, see *id.* 184-229.

<sup>55</sup> For the argument that Rome eagerly used the Greek envoys as a pretext to conquer the Greek East and to fuel its insatiable need for war, plunder, and military glory, see Veyne 1975: 838-9; Harris 1979: Ch. 1-3, 5; North 1981; Mandell 1989; Derow 1989; Ampela 1998: 74, 77; Derow 2003: 58-60. For the thorough dismissal of this argument, see Eckstein 2012: 233-70.

the Second Macedonian War (200-197 BCE) and crushed the western armies of Antiochus III in the Roman-Syrian War (192-188 BCE). Although Rome left no physical presence in the Greek East at this time and retained its limited, inconsistent, and distant interest in the geopolitical developments of the region, the defeat of Macedon and the Seleucid Empire in consecutive hegemonic wars established Rome as the hegemonic power in the expanded Mediterranean interstate system.<sup>56</sup>

Yet it is important to understand that the Roman state had no grand strategic plan to establish its hegemony throughout the Mediterranean, nor did the numerous states in the Eastern Mediterranean immediately recognize this hegemony. Rome found itself the dominant polity in the Mediterranean primarily through a slow process of trial and error and geopolitical happenstance. The collapse of Ptolemaic power and the aggression of Philip V and Antiochus III had frightened the lesser Greek polities into asking for Rome's aid. Additionally, Rome benefitted from the military missteps of Philip and Antiochus in the subsequent hegemonic wars and the inadequacies of their militaries.<sup>57</sup> The Mediterranean system, even under Roman hegemony, remained a world of independent states. Roman hegemony was fragile and ambiguous, and this fragility remained well into the first century BCE.<sup>58</sup> Rome had not yet

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<sup>56</sup> In this I agree with Eckstein, who views the Treaty of Apamea in 188 BCE as the event that first established Roman hegemony. Eckstein 2012: 275. Note that Diodorus Siculus considered the Romans to be the masters of Europe and Asia after defeating Antiochus. Diod. 37.1. For an account of the Second Macedonian War and the Roman-Syrian War from an international relations theory perspective, see id. 276-341.

<sup>57</sup> The major defeats at Cynoscephalae in 197 BCE and Magnesia 189 BCE crippled the ability of Philip and Antiochus to continue their wars with Rome. The Hellenistic kings never developed a recruitment system like the Romans that allowed them to absorb major military defeats.

<sup>58</sup> See id. 343-61. The continued vulnerability of Roman hegemony, especially in the first century BCE, is a focus of this study. However, this does not mean that Roman power declined because of the degeneration of Roman society as Mommsen argued. Mommsen 1903: iii 296, 387, 411, 529; iv 10, 320.

created direct imperial control over the Eastern Mediterranean, nor would it accomplish this convincingly until the end of the Roman Republic.<sup>59</sup> Constant warfare between the states of the Hellenistic East continued for several decades, and these states took little consideration of Roman opinions or interests.<sup>60</sup> In fact, even after the failures of the Seleucid Empire and Macedon against Rome in the first half of the second century BCE, Pontus, Armenia, and Parthia each would come to challenge Roman domination in the first century BCE.

### The Reemergence of Anarchy in the East

From the middle of the third to the end of the second centuries BCE, the Parthians (Arsacids) went from a minor nomadic tribe to a world power. This impressive transformation was the result of good leadership, the inclusiveness of Parthian rule, Parthian adaptability, and the declining strength of Parthia's neighbors. In order to appreciate the Parthian clash with Rome, one must first understand the Parthians' origins and their rise to power in the East. The sudden decline of the Seleucid state in the 240-230s BCE caused a power-transition crisis in the East that replaced Seleucid imperial dominion over the Middle East with a tripolar anarchy based on the Iranian plateau. What emerged was a new Eastern interstate system; one that Parthia eventually came to dominate.

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<sup>59</sup> It would be a great mistake to confuse Roman hegemony with direct Roman Empire. For the lack of Roman direct imperial control in this period and well into the first century BCE, see Kallet-Marx 1995. For scholars who make this mistake, see Harris 1979; Mandell 1989; Derow 1989, 1991, 2003. For scholars who use the ambiguous term "Roman control" without distinguishing its meaning, see Badian 1968: 11; Dahlheim 1977: 122; Harris 1979: 162; Will 1982: 421. For the modern theoretical debate over "informal empire" and "control," see Doyle 1986: 12, 30-47, 55-60; Watson 1992: 15-16, 27-8, 122-8; Motyl 2001: 20; Rosen 2003: 211; Donnelly 2006: 140, 254, 156-9; Eckstein 2012: 372-6. See also Robinson and Gallagher 1960: 9.

<sup>60</sup> Eckstein 2012: 377. See also Gruen 1984: Ch. 11-18.

The Eastern system paralleled those found in the West. There was no enforceable international law, a lack of ameliorative diplomacy, and no way to understand the realities of power relations between states short of open conflict. The Eastern system was a harsh international environment with multiple militarized, bellicose, and aggressive polities. Parthia faced threats to its security and survival from Hellenistic kings, native Iranian dynasties, and other nomadic tribes.

The chaotic international environment that developed in the middle of the third century BCE, which was a result of the power-transition crisis caused by the unexpected decline of Seleucid power in the 240s BCE, helped influence Parthian power-maximizing policy as Parthia struggled, first, to survive in the new Eastern system and, later, to expand and dominate that system as a unipolar hegemon.<sup>61</sup> The later Roman historian Justin indicates in his summary of Trogus' history on the Parthians that Trogus portrayed the Parthians as fearful of Seleucid power. He records, "He [Arsaces I], who was accustomed to live by plunder and depredations, hearing a report that Seleucus [II] was overcome by the Gauls in Asia, and being consequently freed from dread of that prince, invaded Parthia with a band of marauders, overthrew Andragoras the governor, and, after putting him to death, took upon himself the government of the country."<sup>62</sup> Justin here relates the importance of the perception of power and weakness in the environment of interstate anarchy and the difficult and precarious existence of ancient states.

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<sup>61</sup> Overtoom 2016.

<sup>62</sup> Justin 41.4.7. As long as Seleucus II appeared strong, Arsaces was afraid to invade Parthia, seemingly because of the threat of immediate Seleucid retaliation; however, after Seleucus' defeat, Arsaces was "freed from dread" and emboldened to invade the region.

Existence on the Central Asian steppe was dangerous and unstable.<sup>63</sup> At the time of the crisis, the Parni tribe had been moving southward and westward for decades in search of a secure and prosperous homeland.<sup>64</sup> Their attacks on the regions of Margiana and Parthia were not simply raids for status and loot. Their displacement on the steppe made them vulnerable, and therefore, they implemented a calculated strategy to create a protected and permanent kingdom within the wealthier, more secure lands of the Seleucid Empire. Under Arsaces, this plan came to fruition in large part because of the opportunities that the crisis provided. Therefore, we should not rely primarily or solely on a cultural or economic explanation for the creation of the Parthian state, as many previous historians have done. Instead, this study utilizes international relations theory to argue that the opportunity provided by the power-transition crisis of the 240s BCE and the determined leadership of Arsaces I were the key factors in the creation of the Parthian state. Ultimately, the Parni were not migrating toward the Seleucid Empire simply because they desired to raid the wealthy lands of Parthia and Bactria; rather, they were trying to gain access to the well-positioned, wealthy lands of the Farther East for protection from violent neighbors, for state security, for political opportunity, and for the ability to establish and cultivate a strong power base.

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<sup>63</sup> For a new investigation of interactions along the Eurasian steppe zone in antiquity, see Bemmann and Schmauder 2015.

<sup>64</sup> Justin records the precariousness and violence of life on the steppe for the Parni. He states, “The Parthians, being forced to quit Scythia by discord at home, gradually settled in the deserts betwixt Hyrcania, the Dahae, the Arei, the Sparni and Margiani. They then advanced their borders, though their neighbors, who at first made no opposition, at length endeavored to prevent them, to such an extent, that they not only got possession of the vast level plains, but also of steep hills, and heights of the mountains.” Justin 41.1.10-11

## Seleucid Decline, Power-Transition Crisis, and the Emergence of the Parthian State

In order to understand better the power-transition crisis of the 240s BCE and its consequences, it is important first to provide a concise account of the evolving international environment in the ancient Near East and Middle East prior to this crisis. Before the rise of Persian (or Achaemenid) power under Cyrus the Great in the middle sixth century BCE, there existed a multipolar interstate anarchy over the Near East and Middle East, which we may call the old Eastern system.<sup>65</sup> This interstate system stretched from Anatolia and Egypt in the West to the Iranian plateau in the East. Under Cyrus the Great, the Persian Kingdom became an unlimited revisionist state. That is, Persia under Cyrus came to desire the complete overthrow of the distribution of power within the current interstate system in favor of its own hegemony and empire. The sudden rise of Persian power began a power-transition crisis as Cyrus quickly conducted successful hegemonic war against the Median Empire, the Lydian Empire, and the Neo-Babylonian Empire.<sup>66</sup>

Cyrus created Persian unipolar hegemony over the old Eastern system and even expanded the geographical limitations of the system by bringing the lands of the Farther East, namely large portions of modern day Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan, into the system. He accomplished the latter exploit by attacking the nomadic tribes of the Central Asian steppe.<sup>67</sup> Thus began the precarious relationship between the settled powers of the Middle East and the nomadic tribes of the Central Asian steppe, in which the later Parni are included.<sup>68</sup> Cyrus'

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<sup>65</sup> See also Overtoom 2016: 2-4.

<sup>66</sup> For the rise of Persia, see Dandamaev 1989; Vogelsang 1992; Briant 2002; Allen 2005; Waters 2014.

<sup>67</sup> Herod. 1.214; Ctesias fr. 9.7-8. See also Xen. *Cyrop.* 8.7; Strabo 11.11.6

<sup>68</sup> The Persians were the first settled society to begin conflict with the nomadic tribes of the Central Asian steppe. This conflict lasted for over 2,000 years. See Baumer 2012: 198-203. Note also Dąbrowa 2015.



campaign against the nomadic tribes extended the spatial boundaries of the old Eastern system over the southern portion of the Central Asian steppe. However, Cyrus' sudden death in battle against the nomadic tribes ended the conflict abruptly and put a halt to Persian ambitions in the region.<sup>69</sup>

Even after Cyrus' death, the Persians consolidated and expanded their power over the East. Cyrus' son, Cambyses II, established Persian dominion over Egypt in the 520s BCE, and Darius I expanded eastward, incorporating much of modern day Pakistan into the empire. Darius' successful invasion of the Indus River Valley caused considerable system overlap with the separate Indian interstate system. However, the Persians chose not to pursue the conflict into the Indian subcontinent, and therefore, there was no violent system merger between the old Eastern and Indian systems.<sup>70</sup> Instead, the Persians established a strong eastern frontier with the nomadic tribes and Indian kingdoms that protected the wealthy lands of the Farther East.<sup>71</sup>

Unlike the Macedonians, the Persians ruled over the Farther East for almost two centuries without much difficulty and maintained close relations with the nomadic and Indian elements on their eastern periphery.<sup>72</sup> In fact, a major factor in the success of the Persian Empire in the Farther East was its support of local subject rulers in exchange for their recognition of Persian hegemony.<sup>73</sup> Another main advantage was that the Persian center of power was the royal cities of Persepolis, Susa, and Ecbatana in western Iran. That is, unlike Alexander, whose power base was

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<sup>69</sup> Cyrus likely died in battle against the nomads; however, the evidence is not definitive. See Dandamaev 1989: 66-7; Waters 2014: 52.

<sup>70</sup> Overtoom 2016: 3, 14.

<sup>71</sup> Note Lyonette 1990; Vogelsang 1990.

<sup>72</sup> The Persians faced only one major rebellion in the Farther East. For the insurrection of the Margians under Frada, see Dandamaev 1989: 125-6. For early Seleucid interaction with the Mauryan Empire in India and with the tribes in Central Asia, see Kosmin 2014: Chs. 1-2.

<sup>73</sup> Vogelsang 1992: 241-4. Note also Meadows 2005.

in Macedonia, or the Seleucids, whose power base was in Syria, the Persian monarchy, and later the Parthians, had easier and more direct access to the regions of the Farther East.<sup>74</sup> Bactria, Aria, Arachosia, and Drangiana remained important Achaemenid centers of power until the end of the empire.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, unlike the later Seleucid satraps in Bactria, who served mostly to protect the northern frontier of the empire and to keep the nomadic tribes at arm's length, the Persian satraps of Bactria were the key representatives of the Achaemenids to the nomadic tribes and maintained a close relationship with them.<sup>76</sup> This favorable relationship with the nomadic tribes helps explain the fierce resistance Alexander faced during his invasions of Bactria and Sogdia.<sup>77</sup> The increasingly western focus of the Seleucid dynasty was a main factor in the power-transition crisis of the 240s BCE.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Colburn recently has argued that there was good connectivity and communication in the Achaemenid Empire. Colburn 2013. Note that Athenaeus equates the Persian and Parthian kings because they maintained eastern palaces as their base of operations. "And in like manner the kings of the Parthians spend their spring in Rhagae, their winter in Babylon, and the rest of the year at Hecatompylus." Ath. 12.8. See also Strabo 11.13.1, 13.5, 15.3.3; Jos. *Ant.* 10.263-5. Alexander attempted to favor Babylon as an important administrative capital. Onesicritus and Strabo tell us that Alexander favored Babylon above all other eastern cities and that he intended to build it up still further. Strabo 15.3.8-10. Plutarch tells us that Alexander received advice on how to rule an empire from Calanus, a Brahman sage. Calanus "demonstrated to Alexander how important it was for him to concentrate his authority at the middle of his empire and not to travel far away from it." Plut. *Alex.* 65. Alexander's soldiers feared that "he would establish the permanent seat of his kingdom in Asia." Curt. 10.2.12. Alexander's decision to move the body of his best friend, Hephaestion, from Ecbatana to Babylon for a lavish state burial demonstrates that he favored the city. Arrian *Anab.* 7.14.8; Diod. 17.110.8. See also Plut. *Alex.* 72; Justin 12.12.11; Polyæn. 4.3.31. Finally, Alexander used Babylon as an important military base. Plut. *Alex.* 68.1-2; Curt. 10.1.19; Arrian *Anab.* 7.19.3-5. Later, the founder of the Seleucid Empire, Seleucus I, established an imperial capital, Seleucia, near Babylon; however, within a generation the Seleucid capital and court had shifted to Antioch on the coast of the Eastern Mediterranean. For the royal cities of the Seleucid Empire, see Kosmin 2014: Chs. 7-8.

<sup>75</sup> Vogelsang 1992: 221.

<sup>76</sup> Id. 234-5. Note also Lyonnet 1990.

<sup>77</sup> See esp. Holt 2005. See also Worthington 2014: Ch. 11.

<sup>78</sup> Antiochus II was the first Seleucid king who did not travel to the Farther East. In fact, no Seleucid king had visited the lands of the Farther East since 281 BCE. Grainger 2014: 196. The Seleucids never lost their Macedonian identity and, in fact, embraced it. However, they also

Another major obstacle obstructing the Macedonian attempts to occupy the East was that their incorporation of these lands and peoples was mostly superficial instead of careful and detailed.<sup>79</sup> The power of the Seleucid king was absolute; however, he relied on a limited and variable group of the king's Friends (*philoï*), a royal council, and governors to administer the empire. The comparatively small and limited Seleucid government was a deliberate reaction to the geopolitical and financial realities of ruling over such a disparate empire, rather than a result of the inability or incompetence of the Seleucid state; however, it made integration of subject peoples and leaders into the Seleucid state difficult.<sup>80</sup> The Successors as a whole did not share Alexander's openness to foreign cultures or his movement toward administrative inclusiveness.<sup>81</sup>

Although the Persians could have expanded their northern and eastern frontiers further, the East was relatively quiet and, therefore, geopolitical concerns in the West increasingly garnered their attention. Egypt was a hotbed of unrest and rebellion, while a Persian expansion into western Anatolia and Thrace had caused system overlap between the old Eastern system and the separate Aegean interstate system. With Darius I's successful expansion into Europe, the mounting tension between the Persians and the Greeks led to violent system merger in the form of the Persian Wars. The Persian invasions of Greece in the early fifth century BCE and the

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created a dynastic identity deeply embedded in northern Syria. See Kosmin 2014: Chs. 3-4. The economic focus of the Seleucid Empire also was the Mediterranean. See Manning 2015.

<sup>79</sup> Grainger 2007: 186-8; id. 2015: 80-1.

<sup>80</sup> "The lightness of the administration was therefore a necessary result of the size and difficulty of administering the kingdom, and of the priority of the army in the allocation of resources; but, of course, this also meant that the kingdom necessarily remained less than fully integrated since the provincial administrators were largely independent of the centre." See id. 2015: 81-5. Note also Sekunda 2010.

<sup>81</sup> Note that the openness of the Seleucids to foreign cultures is subject to debate. Sherwin-White and Kuhrt maintain that the Seleucids were an influential heir of the Achaemenids in the Middle East and were much more open to indigenous cultures than is commonly assumed by classical scholars. See Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993.

concerted Greek military response to the threat of Persia caused the Aegean and old Eastern systems to merge and created a new interstate system that incorporated all of the Greek lands of the Eastern Mediterranean and the regions of the East, which we may call the Greek-Eastern system.<sup>82</sup>

The Persian Wars damaged Persian prestige and the perception of Persian power and gave the Greeks an opportunity to expand their power extensively at the expense of Persia. Yet the Greek city-states squandered their opportunity and descended into the destructive Peloponnesian War. The Persians used the divisiveness of the Greek city-states to reestablish their holdings in Asia Minor and to interfere diplomatically and financially in Greek affairs for decades.<sup>83</sup> The Persian Empire remained the only major power in the new expanded Greek-Eastern interstate system as Athens, Sparta, and Thebes sapped their strength in the regional conflicts of Greece.

With the rise of Macedon under Philip II, the Macedonian defeat of the Greeks at Chaeronea, and the subsequent Macedonian invasion of Anatolia, Macedon became an emerging hegemonic threat to the Persian Empire. Macedon then became an unlimited revisionist state under Alexander the Great. Persia faced a power-transition crisis in 334 BCE when Alexander began to conduct successful hegemonic war against the Persians and eventually established Macedonian unipolarity over the Greek-Eastern system.<sup>84</sup> Yet Alexander's efforts to expand the limits of the Greek-Eastern system into the Indian subcontinent failed, and his sudden death cut short his plans to expand it into Arabia and the Western Mediterranean.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> See also Overtoom 2016: 4-5, 9, 12, 14-15.

<sup>83</sup> Most notably the Persians used threat of force to help end the Corinthian War and to implement the King's Peace in 387 BCE. See Xen. *Hell.* 5.1.29-31

<sup>84</sup> Overtoom 2016: 4.

<sup>85</sup> See id. 2012. See also id. 2013.

With Alexander's death multipolar anarchy emerged in the Greek-Eastern system as the Successors fought to control portions of Alexander's former empire.<sup>86</sup> One of his generals, Seleucus, was able to consolidate control over a large section of the Middle East, incorporating lands from Anatolia and Syria in the West to Afghanistan and Pakistan in the East under the Seleucid Empire.<sup>87</sup> Yet the Seleucids appear to have had a different outlook on their imperium in the East than their predecessors. The Persians and Alexander viewed their imperial space as limitless on the Central Asia steppe and in the Indian subcontinent; however, Paul Kosmin recently has argued that the Seleucids formed strict limitations on their imperial space, especially in the East, with "explicit and formal recognition of equal peer kingdoms."<sup>88</sup> Kosmin's arguments for the limitation of Seleucid imperium in the East, where the Seleucids actually restricted and shrank the limits of the Greek-Eastern system when they created an "ideological *limes*" along the frontier of the Central Asian steppe and ceded the Indus River Valley and Arachosia to the Mauryan Emperor, Chandragupta, in exchange for 500 war elephants, appear sound.<sup>89</sup> As discussed in this study, the Seleucids took an inconsistent and reactive interest in eastern geopolitical developments. They decided to establish Bactria as a bulwark to protect the eastern edge of their empire and turned their attention to the geopolitical developments of the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>90</sup> Meanwhile, in the West they took an active and aggressive interest in

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<sup>86</sup> See Bosworth 2005; Grainger 2007; Waterfield 2011; Romm 2012.

<sup>87</sup> For a recent evaluation of the formation of the Seleucid state, see Grainger 2014. Note also Capdetrey 2007.

<sup>88</sup> Kosmin 2014: 123.

<sup>89</sup> For the new Seleucid boundary with the steppe, see id. 59-61. For Seleucus I's arrangement with the Mauryans, see Appian *Syr.* 9.55; Strabo 15.2.9. Antiochus III later made a similar agreement with the new regional king, Sophagasenos. See Polyb. 11.34.11-12

<sup>90</sup> Holt 1988; id. 2012.

the tripolar rivalry that emerged with Antigonid Macedon and Ptolemaic Egypt.<sup>91</sup> These different western and eastern spatial perspectives of their imperium played a part in the formation of a new interstate system in the Farther East after the crisis.

The Seleucid satraps in the East found themselves increasingly isolated. The satraps of Parthia and Bactria had power and wealth; however, the neglect of the royal government in Syria meant that the eastern forces of the Seleucid Empire lost the ability to conduct preemptive campaigns against potential threats, making Seleucid military policy in the East more defensive and reactionary. Although the isolation of the eastern satraps encouraged greater military pressure from the nomadic tribes, as long as the Seleucid king was capable to respond to nomadic invasions in the East with convincing force, the integrity of the empire's frontiers remained intact. However, when the power of the monarchy faltered during the power-transition crisis of the 240s BCE and the Eastern satraps broke away from the empire, multipolar anarchy temporarily reemerged in the Greek-Eastern system and encouraged the Parni to invade northern Iran with the intention of establishing a new kingdom.<sup>92</sup>

The Seleucid Empire began as one of the three main Hellenistic "Successor" states that emerged out of the violent struggle that followed Alexander the Great's death in 323 BCE. One of Alexander's generals, Seleucus, became governor of Babylonia.<sup>93</sup> From 316-301 BCE Seleucus waged a series of wars against another general of Alexander, Antigonus

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<sup>91</sup> See esp. Ager 2003. The focus of Seleucid military operations was to contain Ptolemaic expansion and to dominate the coast of the Eastern Mediterranean. For a more detailed account of the recurring, destructive conflicts between the Seleucids and Ptolemies known as the Syrian Wars, see Grainger 2010.

<sup>92</sup> Overtom 2016: 5.

<sup>93</sup> For the most recent comprehensive study of the life and accomplishments of Seleucus, see Grainger 2013b; See also Bevan 1902; Bikerman 1938; Rostovtzeff 1951; Will 1967; Mehl 1986; Kuhrt and Sherwin-White 1987; Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993.

Monophthalmus, who had come to dominate much of the eastern portion of Alexander's old Macedonian Empire.<sup>94</sup> In 301 BCE at the Battle of Ipsus, Seleucus and his ally, another successor of Alexander, Lysimachus, decisively defeated Antigonus, killing him in the battle and dividing his lands.<sup>95</sup> Seleucus retained his possessions in the Farther East (lands encompassing what is modern day Iraq and Iran and portions of Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan) and gained control of Syria, while Lysimachus received Asia Minor. The alliance between the two ambitious men was short lived, and with the defeat of Lysimachus at the Battle of Corupedium in 281 BCE, Seleucus added Asia Minor and Thrace to his vast domain. Tripolarity between the Hellenistic power centers in Macedon, Egypt, and Syria emerged in the Greek-Eastern system.

At the tip of a spear, Seleucus had created the largest, wealthiest, and most diverse Hellenistic Successor state.<sup>96</sup> Appian describes Seleucus as a great and opportunistic conqueror, who was second only to Alexander the Great.<sup>97</sup> However, despite Seleucus' success in building a

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<sup>94</sup> For a new account of Antigonus' influential role in the Successor Wars, see Champion 2014; See also Briant 1973; Billows 1997.

<sup>95</sup> For the rule of Lysimachus in Thrace, see Lund 1992.

<sup>96</sup> Appian *Syr.* 9.55-10.64. Tax revenues and war spoils fueled the Seleucid economy; however, the silver revenue needed to administer the empire and pay the army was a constant source of concern for the Seleucid kings. For the structure of the Seleucid royal economy and the argument that the Seleucid state had similar economic priorities to modern states, see Aperghis 2004. Note also van der Spek 2000. Under the Seleucids production and distribution of commodities and coinage was mostly regional. Mesopotamia was another important economic center of the Seleucid Empire; however, inter-regional trade was quite limited. See id. 2011; van der Spek and van Leeuwen 2014; Grainger 2015: 56. Thus, the wealth of the Seleucid state was potentially vast, and regionally in places like Syria, Mesopotamia, Media, Parthia, and Bactria, there was considerable wealth that could be turned into state revenue. However, the Seleucid economy functioned mostly at a regional level. That is, the production and revenues of each region often went to support that region. This meant that the Seleucids had a financial incentive to protect these wealthy regions to protect their ability to rule and pay the army; however, the regional structure of the economy also created great potential wealth and power for usurpers and breakaway kingdoms.

<sup>97</sup> See Appian *Syr.* 9.55

mighty empire, such a vast domain would prove consistently and increasingly difficult to maintain for his successors.<sup>98</sup>

The Seleucid state was primarily western focused. That is, the geopolitical developments of the Eastern Mediterranean system were the main concern of the Seleucids and separate from the geopolitical developments in the Farther East. The Seleucid dynasty mostly ruled from Antioch, their imperial capital in Syria, and spent the next two and a half centuries fighting against the other Greek and Hellenistic polities of the Eastern Mediterranean. Western wars dominated the attention of the Seleucid kings and drained the Seleucid treasury. The lands of Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan became relatively neglected and marginalized, eventually allowing strong regional powers to exert more autonomy and regional influence.<sup>99</sup>

Communication and travel between Syria and the Farther East was too slow and difficult to manage effectively. Seleucid governors in the Farther East increasingly found themselves isolated and threatened by nomadic tribes from the Central Asian steppe. These men gained a great deal of local autonomy and began to think of themselves as independent rulers. Meanwhile, the western focus of the Seleucid state meant that eastern campaigns were costly, dangerous, and infrequent. A major disadvantage of the Seleucid Empire, and the later Parthian Empire, was that unlike the Roman Empire, they lacked a large body of water to facilitate movement and communication from one edge of their empires to the other. In fact, communication from Syria

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<sup>98</sup> For a recent study of the foundation and early rise of the Seleucid state, see Grainger 2013b; id. 2014.

<sup>99</sup> Strabo states, “The Macedonians did indeed rule over the country for a short time, but they were so occupied with wars that they could not attend to their remote possessions [in the East].” Strabo 11.7.2. For the relative neglect of the eastern lands of the Seleucid Empire, Kosmin 2013; Plischke 2014: 315-34; Grainger 2015: 56. Contra Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993: 73-4, 90, 108. Although I generally agree with Sherwin-White and Kuhrt that the Seleucids took interest in maintaining their eastern empire, there should be no doubt that western affairs took precedence over eastern affairs and that Syria was the center of the empire.



to the Farther East could take multiple months.<sup>100</sup> Eastern campaigns were massive investments of money, materials, men, and time. Moreover, Seleucid kings who conducted years of campaigning in the East left themselves vulnerable, first, to invasion by other Hellenistic states into the wealthy lands of Syria and Asia Minor and, second, to internal, dynastic rebellion in the form of usurpers to the throne. Only the strongest of kings at the best of times could hold such an extensive and diverse empire together.<sup>101</sup> Unfortunately for the Seleucids, such men were a rarity.

Seleucid control of the eastern satrapies declined suddenly in the middle third century BCE. A series of costly wars against Ptolemaic Egypt and dynastic disputes sapped Seleucid strength. In particular the sudden death of Antiochus II (246 BCE), the Seleucid defeat in the Third Syrian War (246-241 BCE), and the subsequent civil war for the throne (ca. 240-236 BCE) severely damaged the reputation and military might of the Seleucid Empire.<sup>102</sup> This unexpected decline of Seleucid power in the 240s BCE caused a power-transition crisis in the Greek-Eastern system, which temporarily dissolved Seleucid hegemony over the lands of the Farther East and allowed multipolar anarchy to reemerge. The breakaway satrapies of Parthia and Bactria suddenly emerged as regional powers and rivals to the Seleucid Empire.

Seleucus I's successor, Antiochus I, had lost large portions of southern Anatolia to Ptolemy II in the First Syrian War (274-271 BCE). Antiochus I's successor, Antiochus II, fought the mostly indecisive Second Syrian War (260-253 BCE) against Ptolemy II in an attempt to

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<sup>100</sup> Taylor 2013: 11, 14.

<sup>101</sup> John Grainger recognizes that without a strong king the Seleucid Empire could “collapse into component parts and vanish.” He then emphasizes that this “almost happened in the 240s” BCE. Grainger 2015: 66-7.

<sup>102</sup> Jeffery Lerner attributes the decline of Seleucid authority over eastern Iran directly to these two conflicts. Lerner 1999: 30.

reclaim these lost territories. Yet the greatest consequence of the war was the dynastic chaos that it indirectly created in the Seleucid state. To seal the peace agreement between Egypt and Syria after the second war, Antiochus II took a second wife. He sent his first wife, Laodice, who already had borne him two sons, aptly named Seleucus and Antiochus, to Ephesus, and he married Ptolemy's daughter, Berenice, who also would bear Antiochus II a son.<sup>103</sup> When Antiochus suddenly died in 246 BCE, Berenice tried to place her son on the throne with herself as regent. As a Ptolemaic princess, she called on her brother, Ptolemy III, the new king of Egypt to come to her aid. Unfortunately for her and her son, aid did not materialize swiftly enough. Laodice had them murdered and had her eldest son, Seleucus II, crowned as king. Ptolemy III sought revenge for the murder of his sister and nephew and initiated the Third Syrian War, which was a disaster for the Seleucid Empire. Ptolemy campaigned successfully in Syria and Mesopotamia, even seizing Babylon temporarily in early 245 BCE.<sup>104</sup> Meanwhile, Seleucus' younger brother and co-ruler in Asia Minor, Antiochus Hierax, declared independence. In order to concentrate on his rebellious brother, Seleucus had to agree to a humiliating peace treaty with Ptolemy that ceded important coastal towns in Asia Minor and Syria to Ptolemaic Egypt. These events devastated Seleucid prestige and the perception of Seleucid power.<sup>105</sup>

The civil war against Antiochus Hierax proved to be equally disastrous for Seleucid prestige and power.<sup>106</sup> At the Battle of Ancyra in ca. 239 BCE, Seleucus lost to Antiochus Hierax and had to relinquish his control of all Seleucid lands in Asia Minor, which Antiochus Hierax

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<sup>103</sup> For a recent attempt to reassess the reputation and role of Laodice in these events, see Martinez-Sève 2003. Note also Grainger 2014: 181-2, 186.

<sup>104</sup> See "Ptolemy III Chronicle," BCHP 11 (BM 34428). See also Appian *Syr.* 11.65; Justin 27.1.9; Polyæn. 8.50; Hieron. *Daniel* 11: 7-9; Cat. 66.12, 36; Cosmas Indicop. (OGIS 54).

<sup>105</sup> See Justin 27.1.1-3.12, 41.4.4-5; Appian *Syr.* 11.65. Note also Grainger 2014: 194.

<sup>106</sup> In ancient international relations, prestige was of the utmost importance. Wheeler 2002: 287.

ruled independently as a rival Seleucid king.<sup>107</sup> In the West growing Seleucid weakness caused by the devastating Third Syrian War and subsequent civil war allowed Attalus, the dynast of Pergamon, to declare himself king in western Asia Minor in 238 BCE.<sup>108</sup> The Attalid Kingdom would remain an important player in the geopolitical developments of the Eastern Mediterranean system until its absorption into the Roman state in 133 BCE.<sup>109</sup> However, in the East the sudden decline of the power of the Seleucid state in the 240s BCE caused a power-transition crisis that eventually led to the complete overthrow of Seleucid imperial dominion and the rise of Parthia and Bactria as regional powers in the new Eastern system.

The Parthians began as a nomadic tribe known as the Parni, who in the early third century BCE came to settle in what is today western Turkmenistan.<sup>110</sup> Traditional scholarship maintains that the foundation of the Parthian state occurred in 250 BCE, with the Arsacid (or Parthian) era beginning in ca. 248/247 BCE.<sup>111</sup> However, in a recent study Jeffery Lerner argues convincingly that these traditional dates are too early to represent actual geopolitical developments in the region. He rejects that the Arsacid era corresponds to the Parni's seizure of the Seleucid satrapy

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<sup>107</sup> For more detail on the civil war between Seleucus and Antiochus Hierax, see Tarn 1928: 717-20; Newell 1941: 392-5; Bickerman 1944: 76 n.23; Wolski 1947: 40; Frye 1984: 178-80; Brodersen 1986: 378-81.

<sup>108</sup> Lerner 1999: 30; See also Bevan 1902: i 194 n.5, 285 n.2, 288; Macdonald 1922: 440; Bickermann 1944: 76ff.

<sup>109</sup> For Attalus and the Attalid Kingdom, see Hansen 1971; Allen 1983.

<sup>110</sup> The Parni likely were a part of the larger Dahae confederacy on the southern Central Asian steppe. See Olbrycht 2003: 71-2. See also Lozinski 1959: 9; Jettmar 1967: 214; Gardiner-Garden 1987: 15-16. Recent work in archeology and numismatics is invaluable to the historical reconstruction of this region and period.

<sup>111</sup> For the traditional dating system, see Saint-Martin 1850: i-ii; Scott 1854: 131-9; Gardner 1877: 3; Cunningham 1888: 79; Tarn 1932: 576; Debevoise 1938: 9; Bickerman 1944: 80-3; Tolstov 1948: 232 ff.; Wolski 1956-7: 42-3; Narain 1957: 13-14; Schmitt 1964: 73ff. For the problems with this system, see esp. Bivar 1969: 9ff.; Frye 1984: 208. For a historiographical survey of the debate, see Lerner 1999: 14-16.

of Parthia.<sup>112</sup> Instead, he uses coinage and Justin's account of events to establish Andragoras' independent reign over Parthia from ca. 245-239/238 BCE, at which point the Parni invaded and claimed his lands.<sup>113</sup> Thus, Lerner argues that the coronation of Arsaces I as king of the Parni, ten years prior to their invasion of Parthia—not the invasion itself—established the so-called Arsacid or Parthian era.<sup>114</sup> With this new understanding, the expansion of the Parni into Parthia occurred after the Third Syrian War and during the subsequent civil war, and it corresponds directly with the power-transition crisis in the East.<sup>115</sup>

Lerner argues that, in the early third century BCE, the nomadic Parni unsuccessfully attempted to seize the satrapy of Margiana.<sup>116</sup> Incursions into Iran and Afghanistan by nomadic tribes from the Central Asian steppe were a continual threat to the stability and security of

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<sup>112</sup> Lerner 1999: 13-23. Unfortunately, some recent scholarship has overlooked or ignored Lerner's sound conclusions. See Garthwaite 2005: 67; Katouzian 2009; Grainger 2014: 196-8.

<sup>113</sup> Lerner 1999: 23-6. Note also Assar 2004: 77; Brosius 2006: 85; Curtis 2007: 7; Lerouge 2007: 12-13.

<sup>114</sup> For the argument that the coronation of Arsaces I began the Arsacid era, see Lerner 1999: 17, 29. Note also Wroth 1903: 273ff.; Debevoise 1938: 9. For opposing views, see Lerner 1999: 18-19. For Lerner's criticisms of Wolski's reconstruction, see id. 19-22. See also Wolski 1947: 13ff.; id. 1956-7: 35-9; id. 1959: 222-5; id. 1960: 110ff.; id. 1962: 136ff; id. 1974: 159ff.; id. 1976b: 439-44; id. 1982: 131ff.; id. 1991: 49-55; id. 1996. Note also Neusner 1963: 48-50; Schmitt 1964: 64ff.; Alheim and Stiehl 1970; Will 1979: i 301-8; Bivar 1983: 28-30; Frye 1984: 207-8; Musti 1984: 213-20; Brodersen 1986; A. S. Shahbazi 1986b; Gardiner-Garden 1987: 13. It appears that Arsaces was crowned in Asaak, which contained a guarded everlasting fire. Isod. 11

<sup>115</sup> Olbrycht contends that the Parni, and other Dahae tribes, were well aware of geopolitical developments within the Seleucid Empire and that "it is not surprising that in the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC when the state of the Seleucids suffered from internal and external conflicts, the nomads living on the northeastern border immediately took advantage of that situation." Olbrycht 2003: 72. The development that Olbrycht discusses here was the power-transition crisis of the 240s BCE in the Eastern system, and the reaction of the nomads was a predictable reaction under the pressures of interstate anarchy. An evaluation of the international environment and geopolitical developments of this time through international relations theory strengthens the hypothesis that the Parthian era began with Arsaces' coronation and not the occupation of Parthia.

<sup>116</sup> Lerner 1999: 13-14, 29.

polities in the Farther East, and the Parni were simply one of many aggressive, expansionistic tribes in the region.<sup>117</sup> The militarized and violent societies and lifestyles of Asiatic tribes were a product of the harsh systemic pressures of the international environment in the region. Life on the steppe was harsh and tribal warfare endemic.<sup>118</sup> The organization of various tribes into tribal confederations, like the Dahae confederacy, was an attempt to create greater strength and security against neighboring tribes on the steppe and the Persian and Hellenistic kingdoms on the Iranian plateau. In settling western Turkmenistan (“Northern Parthia”), the Parni came to live directly on the periphery of the Seleucid Empire. This close proximity, paired with a lack of diplomatic communication and restricted awareness of power capabilities, caused mounting tension along the frontier and made conflict between the Parni and the Seleucids increasingly

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<sup>117</sup> For background on the regions of the Central Asian steppe at this time, see Negmatov 1999; Boardman 2007. For the concept of Central Asia and its geographical characteristics, see Sinor 1990a; Taaffe 1990. For background information on the movement of peoples in this region over numerous centuries, see Abdullaev 2007; Stride 2007; Golden 2011: 9-20; Baumer 2012. For background on the various nomadic tribes in the area after Alexander’s conquests, see Zadneprovskiy 1999. The Seleucids fell victim to the Parni, and the Bactrians fell victim to the Yuezhi. Meanwhile, the Parthians fought a bitter series of wars along the eastern frontier of their empire in order to repulse the advances of the Sakae. See below.

<sup>118</sup> Note that Justin records the precariousness of life on the steppe and the long history of conflict that the Parni endured. He states, “The Parthians, in whose hands the empire of the east now is, having divided the world, as it were, with the Romans, were originally exiles from Scythia. This is apparent from their very name; for in the Scythian language exiles are called Parthi. During the time of the Assyrians and Medes, they were the most obscure of all the people of the east. Subsequently, too, when the empire of the east was transferred from the Medes to the Persians, they were but as a herd without a name, and fell under the power of the stronger. At last they became subject to the Macedonians, when they conquered the east; so that it must seem wonderful to every one, that they should have reached such a height of good fortune as to rule over those nations under whose sway they had been merely slaves.” Justin 41.1.1-6. He continues, “The Parthians, being forced to quit Scythia by discord at home, gradually settled in the deserts betwixt Hyrcania, the Dahae, the Arei, the Sparni and Margiani. They then advanced their borders, though their neighbors, who at first made no opposition, at length endeavored to prevent them, to such an extent, that they not only got possession of the vast level plains, but also of steep hills, and heights of the mountains.” Id. 41.1.10-11

likely. The invasion of Margiana to the east by the Parni soon after settling in the region was a result of this tension and systemic pressure.<sup>119</sup>

Margiana was a wealthy and relatively urbanized region of what is today eastern Turkmenistan. Alexander the Great had settled the region with Greek colonies and fortifications, including Alexandria-in-Margiana.<sup>120</sup> Moreover, there was the prosperous oasis city of Merv, which remained an important eastern city until the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century CE.<sup>121</sup> The addition of Margiana to the holdings of the Parni would have been a great boon to their regional power and security. Meanwhile, the loss of this region would have undermined Seleucid authority in the region severely and challenged the unipolar status of the Seleucids.

Because power relations within a system of states are linked directly to the perception of power and reputation, the Seleucids had to respond to the Parni invasion of Margiana with force to restore the perception of Seleucid strength in the region or else risk encouraging further aggression against them. Thus, one of the most noticeable difference between the 280s and the 240s BCE is the Seleucids' ability to respond to eastern threats to their hegemony with decisive force. Even after the Parni invasion had failed, Seleucus I sent his general, Demodamas, to campaign against the Parni in ca. 280 BCE.<sup>122</sup> This campaign appears to have been successful

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<sup>119</sup> Wolski argues that the Parni invaded Margiana on the way to settling Northern Parthia. Wolski 1947: 26-31; Wolski 1969: 253-4; Wolski 1974: 159ff.

<sup>120</sup> For Alexander's settlement of the region, see Fraser 1996: esp. 31, 91, 116-18. See also Zavyalov 2007. Note also, Pliny *NH* 6.18.47; Strabo 9.10.2; Curt. 7.10.15. For the development of Central Asia after Alexander and before the Islamic conquests, see Hermann and Cribb 2007.

<sup>121</sup> For archaeological surveys of the region, see Usmanova, Filanovich, and Koshelenko 1985: 226-42; Koshelenko, Giabov, and Bader 1996: 308-13, 316-17; Simpson 2014. For the regional importance of Merv, see Williams 2002; Brun 2005; Williams 2007. For the importance of Merv in the Sassanian and early Islamic periods, see Kennedy 2006: 6-9, 83-4, 86-96, 200; Kennedy 2008: 170, 185, 187-92, 211, 225, 227-8, 237-8, 241-2, 252, 255-7, 260, 263-4, 267, 269, 273, 289, 291, 293, 373.

<sup>122</sup> See Hennig 1944: 222-3; Robert 1984: 467-82; Lerner 1999: 11 n.3, 29.

enough to temper the expansionistic desires of the Parni for a couple of decades. However, domination of the tribes of the Central Asian steppe was not a strategic goal for the Seleucids. Once Demodamas had punished the Parni and restored the strength of the Seleucid frontier, it appears that he ended his campaign abruptly. He did not completely remove the threat of the Parni, and therefore, by 248/247 BCE a new king, Arsaces I, came to lead a resurgent Parni tribe, introducing the Arsacid Era.<sup>123</sup> Arsaces was determined to expand the power and security of his people, and it was under Arsaces that the Parni would become the Parthians.<sup>124</sup>

Within the first three years of his reign, Arsaces led a new Parni invasion of Margiana. He fought an unsuccessful campaign against the Seleucid satrap of Bactria, Diodotus.<sup>125</sup> At this time Diodotus' responsibilities as satrap appear potentially to have included administrative and military command over, not only Bactria but also Sogdiana, Margiana, and Aria.<sup>126</sup> This was an enormous command with wide ranging responsibilities. Threats to the eastern and northern frontiers of the Seleucid Empire were considerable; the recent invasions of the Parni make this evident. Diodotus' isolation and expanded role in the administration of the eastern and northern frontiers of the Seleucid Empire illustrates the neglect of the central government in Syria and its continued distraction with western wars. Although Diodotus was successful in repulsing Arsaces' invasion of Margiana, Seleucus II did not send an army to punish the Parni and quash their military ambitions as his great-grandfather had done. Seleucus II was too involved in the dynastic conflicts of the west. The Third Syrian War began because of these conflicts in 246

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<sup>123</sup> For a recent evaluation of Arsaces I's reign, see Assar 2005a: 32-5.

<sup>124</sup> The Parni assimilated to the Iranian Parthians in the middle of the third century BCE. Note Shahbazi 1986a.

<sup>125</sup> This is Lerner's reconstruction of Strabo and Justin's accounts. Lerner 1999: 13; See also Strabo 11.9.3; Justin 41.4.9. For a recent account of Diodotus I, see Holt 1999: 94-101. For a recent study of the Kingdom of Bactria through the Hellenistic age, see Omar 2009.

<sup>126</sup> See Schmitt 1964: 64-5, 68, 75.

BCE, initiating a power-transition crisis in the East. The subsequent civil war between Seleucus II and Antiochus Hierax perpetuated that crisis. The eastern satraps of the Seleucid Empire had already endured years of neglect and isolation. This lack of support from the central government, along with Seleucus II's contested succession to the throne, the destructive war against Ptolemy III, and the growing threat of Arsaces, led the two major satraps in the East, Diodotus and Andragoras, to rebel in 245 BCE.

Lerner put forward a similar reconstruction of events. He associates the Third Syrian War with the rebellion of Andragoras and Diodotus.<sup>127</sup> Yet his account does not fully appreciate why these events coincided from a system-level explanation. This is where the use of the theoretical framework of Realism is valuable to the further understanding of the geopolitical developments of this period. The power-transition crisis of the 240s BCE made their rebellions possible and understandable. Appian makes this connection when he records, "He [Ptolemy III] invaded Syria and advanced as far as Babylon. The Parthians [that is, the people of the satrapy of Parthia under Andragoras] now began their revolt, taking advantage of the confusion in the house of the Seleucids."<sup>128</sup> The rebellion Appian describes in reality was that of Andragoras, not of Arsaces as Sampson argues. Sampson confusingly conflates the actions of the people of Parthia prior to Arsaces' invasion with the actions of the Parni under Arsaces, which leads him to hypothesize incorrectly that Arsaces rebelled from the still loyal Andragoras, seized his satrapy, and declared independence.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Lerner 1999: 29.

<sup>128</sup> Appian *Syr.* 11.65. See also id. 8.48; Strabo 15.1.3

<sup>129</sup> Sampson 2015: 38-41. This mistaken tradition of associating the Parni with the Parthians prior to Arsaces' conquest of the region is a confusion some later ancient authors also made. Note Herodian 6.2.7



With the rebellion of Andragoras in Parthia and Diodotus in Bactria, Seleucid imperial dominion over the Farther East fractured and the Greek-Eastern system returned to a temporary state of multipolar anarchy. The decline of Seleucid power in the West in the middle 240s BCE left a power void in the East. Justin captures the consequences of the power-transition crisis, stating,

For their revolt [that is, the Parthians under Andragoras], the dispute between the two brothers, Seleucus [II] and Antiochus [Hierax], procured them impunity; for while the brothers sought to wrest the throne from one another, they neglected to suppress the rebellion. At the same period, also, Theodotus [Diodotus], governor of the thousand cities of Bactria, revolted, and assumed the title of king; and all the other people of the east, influenced by his example, fell away from the Macedonians [the Seleucids].<sup>130</sup>

Justin recognized that the dynastic chaos that followed the death of Antiochus II and the inability of the Seleucids to demonstrate their power in the East made the rebellions of Andragoras and Diodotus possible and created a power void in the East. The hegemony of the Seleucid Empire had shattered into multipolar anarchy.

With his extensive eastern command and resources, Diodotus perhaps seemed like the frontrunner to become the new regional power in the Farther East.<sup>131</sup> Meanwhile, Andragoras commanded a wealthy and geographically well-situated region in northeastern Iran.<sup>132</sup> However, the deterioration of Seleucid power, and the state's inability once again to subdue the Parni tribe, meant that this hereto insignificant nomadic tribe from the Central Asian steppe also had an

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<sup>130</sup> Justin 41.4.4-5. See also Strabo 15.1.3. Justin clearly indicates that the Parthians rebelled prior to Arsaces' invasion; however, he mistakenly places that rebellion in 256 BCE and was unaware of Arsaces' tribal affiliation and support prior to his invasion. Justin 41.2.1, 4.1-3, 6-7

<sup>131</sup> To this point, Strabo notes Diodotus' military success and expanding power. Strabo 11.9.3

<sup>132</sup> He controlled at least two mints and struck numerous official and personalized coins. See Diakonoff and Zeimal 1988: 4ff.

excellent opportunity to exploit the power void. By the early 230s BCE, Arsaces was ready to capitalize on Seleucid weakness by conducting war against Andragoras.

After the successful defense of his lands in the early to middle 240s BCE, Diodotus did not pursue the Parni as they retreated from Margiana. There are several possible reasons for his lack of action. First, he already possessed an extensive command. The Parni were not the only nomadic tribe that threatened his satrapies. Pursuit of the Parni would have made his extensive frontier vulnerable to other nomadic incursions. Second, before 245 BCE Diodotus still was acting as an administrator of the Seleucid state, albeit an isolated one. He likely received no official command from the central government to pursue a war outside of his territories, nor any supplies or money to pursue such a war. Third, it is unlikely that Diodotus decided to rebel against the Seleucid monarchy on a whim. He probably had made plans, taken precautions, or at least considered the idea of declaring his independence before acting upon open rebellion. He would have known that after rebelling an eventual military showdown with the Seleucid state was likely. An offensive campaign against the Parni was a risky endeavor, and one that was not worth pursuing while he prepared for rebellion. Fourth, although the Seleucid central state was strong enough to punish the Parni for raiding in the 280s BCE, in the 240s BCE the Bactrian governor was not strong enough to do so on his own. There clearly was a difference in power relations by the 240s BCE that encouraged the actions of the eastern satraps and the Parni. Diodotus and Andragoras were not the most important Seleucid officials, nor were they part of the central Seleucid regime. Moreover, they were not united or allied; rather, each fended for himself. The result was a decline in the retaliatory power of the Seleucid state against the steppe nomads. Finally and with the previous point in mind, once Diodotus had repulsed Arsaces' invasion, the Parni became someone else's problem, namely Andragoras' problem. Although

there is no reason to believe that Diodotus considered Andragoras an enemy, it is plausible that Diodotus viewed Andragoras, who commanded a large neighboring satrapy and who also was cultivating thoughts of rebellion, as a potential rival in the Farther East. Lerner questions recent interpretations of a series of gold coins produced by Andragoras that claim the coins illustrate an alliance between Andragoras and Diodotus against the Seleucids.<sup>133</sup> He concludes that, although an alliance between the two men was possible, nothing of note came of it, including a record of the alliance through coinage.<sup>134</sup> Ultimately, Diodotus had his own troubles and was glad to rid himself of the Parni menace. The deflection of that menace onto the lands of Andragoras, although not the design of Diodotus, could not have upset him.

Diodotus' unwillingness or inability to conduct an offensive campaign against the Parni, or his lack of interest in the prospect, paired with the inability of Seleucus II to avenge the Parni invasion with a royal expedition allowed Arsaces to recover quickly from his military setbacks in Margiana during the latter half of the 240s BCE. Arsaces was an ambitious man with a resilient army, pursuing aggressive power-maximizing policies. He was determined to expand his territory and began, seemingly for the first time, to expand southwestward into Iran in the early 230s BCE. This change of emphasis reflected the geopolitical realities of the Farther East at this time.

Seleucid authority in the region had collapsed with the rebellion of Diodotus and Andragoras. Moreover, the military might of Diodotus in defending Margiana had demonstrated that eastern expansions would be difficult for the Parni without greater resources. Yet the power of Andragoras was untested. From his rebellion in 245 BCE to his overthrow in 239/238 BCE,

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<sup>133</sup> Lerner 1999: 23-4. See also Diakonoff and Zeimal 1988: 16-18; Alram 1998: 370.

<sup>134</sup> Lerner 1999: 25.

Andragoras' position within Parthia and his influence over his subjects was precarious.<sup>135</sup> Additionally, the external threats to Parthia, namely Seleucid retaliation or nomadic invasion, were considerable.<sup>136</sup> Arsaces would have become aware of Andragoras' vulnerability. As Justin records, once Seleucus II was defeated in Asia Minor at Ancyra in 239 BCE, perpetuating the power-transition crisis in the East, Arsaces seized the opportunity to invade the isolated satrapy of Parthia, defeat and kill Andragoras, and establish his power in the region.<sup>137</sup>

Sampson recently has attempted to divide our remaining accounts of the formation of the Parthian state under Arsaces into two categories, a rebellion scenario and an invasion scenario, and to reconcile them with a new but vague reconstruction. He concludes rather confusingly, first, that only Diodotus rebelled in 245 BCE from the Seleucids, second, that Diodotus hired Arsaces as a mercenary to win his independence, third, that Diodotus had a falling out with

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<sup>135</sup> Lerner argues that Andragoras abandoned Greek coinage, the use of Greek names, and began associating himself with Iranian deities to win local favor since his position in Parthia had become weak. This was an act of political desperation that failed since Arsaces soon after invaded and won the war. *Id.* 25-6. Arsaces successfully gained the support of the indigenous population. Olbrycht 2003: 73.

<sup>136</sup> On several occasions this study examines the emphasis of ancient states on retaliatory campaigning and its importance to foreign policy and power relations in this period. Susan Mattern's investigation of the importance of the perception of strength and revenge in Roman imperial foreign policy can be applied to this earlier period and to other ancient states. See esp. Mattern 1999: 4, 22-3, 69, 108, 117, 119, 120-2, 171-202, 211-22. See also Fuhrmann 2012: 43, 83, 135, 158, 168-9, 176-7; Rawlings 2013: 5.

<sup>137</sup> "He [Arsaces], who was accustomed to live by plunder and depredations, hearing a report that Seleucus was overcome by the Gauls in Asia, and being consequently freed from dread of that prince, invaded Parthia with a band of marauders, overthrew Andragoras the governor, and, after putting him to death, took upon himself the government of the country." Justin 41.4.7. See also Zos. 1.13; Photius *Bib.* 58; Syncellus in Adler and Tuffin 2002: 412. It is possible that Arsaces had served with the Seleucids as a mercenary commander, and therefore, he likely had knowledge of the geopolitical situation in the Farther East and Andragoras' vulnerability. See Olbrycht 2003: 72-3; Sampson 2015: 40-1. We must reject Grainger's inventive, yet poorly supported conclusion that Arsaces conducted two invasions of Parthia, one in 247/246 BCE and the other in 237 BCE. His conclusion does not incorporate the considerable efforts of recent scholars to reevaluate and reconstruct the chronology of this period. Grainger 2014: 196-8.

Arsaces, which forced Arsaces to flee Bactria, fourth, that the Seleucid governor of Parthia then enlisted Arsaces as a mercenary to fight Diodotus, fifth, that Arsaces then had a falling out with the Seleucid governor and killed him, and sixth, Arsaces finally declared independence from the Seleucids in Parthia through a native rebellion.<sup>138</sup> Despite calling the reconstruction of the history of the early Parthian state “impossible” and criticizing other scholars for making “great leaps of logic that are not supported by the remaining evidence,” Sampson’s reconstruction contains surprising omissions, makes great leaps of logic, and distorts the remaining evidence.<sup>139</sup> He inexplicably ignores the rebellion of Andragoras in 245 BCE. He strangely insists on connecting Arsaces to Bactria even though, first, Strabo is our only evidence for his connection, second, Strabo finds this connection questionable, and third, all of our other evidence connects Arsaces and the Parni to a strictly nomadic origin.<sup>140</sup> Meanwhile, there is no conclusive evidence that Arsaces served as a mercenary for the Seleucids, Bactrians, or Parthians. Moreover, there is no evidence that Diodotus and Andragoras were at war. Finally, although Sampson cites Strabo, Appian, Dio, Herodian, and the often-unreliable fragments of Arrian found in Zosimus, Syncellus, and Photius as evidence for a “native rebellion theory,” none of these sources actually supports the weight of his conclusions, which do not refer to any scholarship from this century.<sup>141</sup> For example, Appian clearly refers to Andragoras’ rebellion in 245 BCE, not to the

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<sup>138</sup> Sampson 2015: 39-41. Chahin makes a similarly confused and unlikely reconstruction. Chahin 1987: 239.

<sup>139</sup> Sampson 2015: 39.

<sup>140</sup> “They say that the Dahae Parni were an emigrant tribe from the Dahae above the Maeotis, who are called Xandii and Parni. But it is not generally acknowledged that Dahae are to be found among the Scythians above the Meotis, yet from these Arsaces according to some was descended; according to others he was a Bactrian, and withdrawing himself from the increasing power of Diodotus, occasioned the revolt of Parthia.” Strabo 11.9.3. For the Roman association of the Parthians with the Scythians, see Isaac 2006: 373-5.

<sup>141</sup> Sampson 2015: 35-9. Note that Dio’s account actually says nothing of a rebellion. Dio 40.14.3

actions of Arsaces in 238 BCE, and the theatrical Arrian-based accounts in Zosimus, Syncellus, and Photius do not inspire confidence in this instance because of their factual inconsistency and their unbalanced emphasis on passionate emotion driving motive.<sup>142</sup> Ultimately, Sampson's reconstruction is too distorted and not inclusive enough of recent scholarship to alter the narrative. Arsaces took Parthia by force from the usurper, Andragoras, and convinced the native Parthians to support him in establishing a new, independent kingdom.

The sudden instability of the Greek-Eastern interstate system, the recent political and military failures of the Seleucids, and the new vulnerability of the independent eastern satraps inspired Arsaces to invade Parthia and establish a new kingdom. The emergence of the Parthian Kingdom further destabilized the international environment in the East and encouraged Diodotus to declare himself king of Bactria. With Arsaces' conquest of Parthia, the Parthians created a new base of power in northeastern Iran that was well situated geographically for further expansion in all directions. Arsaces' prompt conquest of Hyrcania to the west demonstrates this new access to neighboring lands as the Parthians looked to establish their regional power and state security.<sup>143</sup> Yet the recent Seleucid decline and Arsaces' sudden success created an unsettled and volatile international environment, heightening the pressures of the "uncertainty principle" between the states in the Farther East.

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<sup>142</sup> Appian *Syr.* 11.65; Zos. 1.13; Photius *Bib.* 58; Syncellus in Adler and Tuffin 2002: 412.

<sup>143</sup> Sherwin-White and Kuhrt contend that the Parthians did not settle much south of the Elburz Mountains and that Parthian power remained centered in Turkmenistan until the second century BCE. Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993: 88-9, 197. Note also Lerouge 2007: 228-9. However, this minimalist approach is in opposition to much of the surviving evidence. The Parni originally occupied the lands north of the Kopet Dagh mountain range, which is a continuation of the Elburz Mountains, and centered their power on Dara, Nisa, and Asaak; however, by the time of Seleucus II's invasion in the late 230s BCE, Arsaces had occupied the important region around Hecatompylos and Hyrcania. See Polyb. 10.28.6-7; Justin 41.4.8

Diodotus, who was a longstanding enemy of Arsaces, commanded great resources and influence in the region. Under his authority, Bactria was the principal power in the Farther East. However, Arsaces' conquest of Parthia and then his sudden expansion into Hyrcania made the Parthians a regional power and potential rival of Bactria. The successful efforts of Arsaces to maximize the power of his new kingdom increasingly made the Parthians a threat to the security of Diodotus' realm.<sup>144</sup> Meanwhile, the regional power of Diodotus and the looming threat of Seleucid retaliation encouraged the Parthians to increase their own security through aggressive military measures. Justin records, "Not long after, too, he [Arsaces] made himself master of Hyrcania, and thus, invested with authority over two nations, raised a large army, through fear of Seleucus [II] and Theodotus [Diodotus], king of the Bactrians."<sup>145</sup> The Parthians' fear under Arsaces of Seleucid or Bactrian aggression and their response to that fear was a function of the character of the international environment, which helps explain why the Parthians immediately implemented a self-help regime to maximize their power, including the conquest of Hyrcania and the expansion of their army.

Arsaces' successful invasion of Parthia during the crisis, his conquest of Hyrcania, and the expansion of the Parthian army, in turn threatened the exposed Seleucid Empire to the west and the newly formed Kingdom of Bactria to the east. The Parthians' efforts to mitigate their vulnerability and alleviate their security concerns through expansion intensified friction with neighboring states because increased Parthian strength and security came at the detriment of their neighbors. For the Seleucids, the crisis had destabilized the lands they still held in the East. For

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<sup>144</sup> Lerner too associates the growth of Parthian security with the increased concern of Diodotus. Lerner 1999: 30-1.

<sup>145</sup> Justin 41.4.8

instance, there were military disturbances in Babylonia in 238, 235, and 229 BCE.<sup>146</sup> It became increasingly urgent for Seleucus II to address the rising Parthian threat in the Farther East to protect Media and Mesopotamia.

Meanwhile for the Bactrians, Lerner convincingly argues that it was the growing threat of Parthia in the first half of the 230s BCE “that led Diodotus among others to assert his formal independence from the Seleucid kingdom.”<sup>147</sup> That is, the drastic rise of Parthian power in the region had undermined Diodotus’ position as the frontrunner to dominate the Farther East after the collapse of Seleucid authority in the 240s BCE. In response to this threat, Diodotus attempted to solidify his position and power by assuming the title of king in ca. 238 BCE, officially breaking all ties to the Seleucid Empire.<sup>148</sup> With the establishment of the Parthian and Bactrian kingdoms, tension between the Seleucid Empire, Bactria, and Parthia was at an all-time high in the middle 230s BCE, and because of the security dilemma, their efforts to increase the security of their own states made their competitors feel increasingly insecure.

In a system of interstate anarchy, such as the one in the East after the sudden decline of Seleucid power in the 240s BCE, war always is a threat to state security and thus states emphasize short-term policies to secure self-preservation. States must pursue power-maximizing policies, like expansion of territory or of the army, in the face of uncertain but serious security

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<sup>146</sup> The Babylonian *Astronomical Diaries* tell of fighting between two different factions within the Seleucid army. See Sachs and Hunger 1989: no. -237, no. -234, no. -229. It is possible that the disturbance in 238 BCE was a reaction to Seleucus’ setbacks in Anatolia. The one in 235 BCE could have been an unfavorable reaction to Seleucus’ efforts to invade Parthia. Finally, the one in 229 BCE could have been a reaction to his defeat and possible capture at the hands of Arsaces.

<sup>147</sup> Lerner 1999: 30, 33.

<sup>148</sup> In ca. 238 BCE Diodotus issued new coinage that replaced the portrait and title of the Seleucid king with his own, signaling his coronation and the creation of a completely independent kingdom. See Bopearachchi 1995.



threats. Hence, the best way to secure one's state is through the maximization of power and influence by dominating other states in the international system. Ammianus Marcellinus describes the militaristic spirit of the Bactrians and the threat they posed to the Parthians. He states, "The lands next to these the Bactriani possess, a nation formerly warlike and very powerful, and always at odds with the Persians [that is, the Parthians], until they reduced all the peoples about them to submission and incorporated them under their own name. In ancient times they were ruled by kings who were formidable even to Arsaces [the Parthian king]."<sup>149</sup> Thus, we see in Ammianus' much later account a glimpse of the anarchic conditions immediately and specifically facing the young Parthian state and the fluidity of ancient power relations.

The Parthians successfully founded and expanded their power through self-help regimes based upon selfish, short-term policies meant to maximize state power at the expense of neighboring states; however, their success further destabilized the new Eastern system. Justin records, "Not long after [the invasion of Parthia], too, he [Arsaces] made himself master of Hyrcania, and thus, invested with authority over two nations, raised a large army, through fear of Seleucus [II] and Theodotus [Diodotus], king of the Bactrians."<sup>150</sup> That is, the Parthians reacted to the threat of powerful neighbors by maximizing their own power; however, the expansion of Parthian power altered the power balance in the region and increasingly threatened the Seleucids and Bactrians. The swift expansion of Parthia's strength and perceived power in the Farther East drastically increased what political scientists call the "uncertainty principle" and the "security dilemma" in the Farther East.

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<sup>149</sup> Amm. Mar. 23.6.55

<sup>150</sup> Justin 41.4.8

The “uncertainty principle” encourages states to prepare for and anticipate the “worst-case scenario” in their international relations. That is, states determine that because of widespread uncertainty and opacity between states that the only true test of the realities of the balance of power within an interstate system is through war. Thus, following the power-transition crisis of the 240s BCE and the emergence of Parthia as a regional power in the 230s BCE, substantial uncertainty and fear of the potential power and ambitions of neighboring states permeated the new Eastern system.

The sudden expansion of Parthian power in the region also created what political scientists call a “security dilemma.” The Parthians’ efforts to mitigate their vulnerability and alleviate their security concerns in the new Eastern system through expansion in turn intensified friction with neighboring states because increased Parthian strength and security came at the detriment of their neighbors. This cycle of insecurity made conflict between states in this harsh international environment increasingly likely.<sup>151</sup> Thus, it is not surprising that the Seleucids, as soon as they were able, responded to the rising threat of the Parthians with two major retaliatory expeditions led by Seleucus II and Antiochus III. Justin tells us that Seleucus II “came to take vengeance on the rebels.”<sup>152</sup> Seleucus conducted hegemonic war to reestablish Seleucid hegemony over the Farther East. In response to this immense Seleucid threat, Diodotus II of Bactria abandoned his father’s hostility toward the Parthians, made peace with Arsaces, and

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<sup>151</sup> This cycle of insecurity is the “perpetual tragedy of relations between and among states” that Realist theoreticians emphasize. See Butterfield 1951: 19; Waltz 1959: 160; Arendt 1970: 5; Wight 1978: 101-2, 137; Waltz 1979: 102; Thompson 1988: xviii; Liska 1990: 482; Holsti 1991; Little 1993: 150; Spirtas 1996; Glaser 1997: 177; Geller and Singer 1998; Waltz 2000: 8; Copeland 2000: 12, 17, 145-7, 165-8, Ch. 8. Hence, “war is normal” under the international structure of militarized anarchy. Waltz 1988: 620-1.

<sup>152</sup> Justin 41.4.9

formed a military alliance against the Seleucids.<sup>153</sup> Ultimately, ancient states became highly militarized and followed power-maximizing policies to enhance state security and power but lacked the ability to understand the power capabilities of their neighbors accurately, further propagating feelings of insecurity, the need to power-maximize, and the propensity toward war.<sup>154</sup> The theoretical framework of Realism allows us to appreciate this universal reality.

Arsaces' successful invasion of Parthia, followed by his acquisition of Hyrcania and the mustering of a larger army, which had been short-term, power-maximizing, self-help policies for the Parthians, threatened the Seleucid Empire in the West and the newly formed Kingdom of Bactria in the East. The Parthians' efforts to mitigate their vulnerability and alleviate their security concerns through expansion in turn intensified friction with neighboring states because increased Parthian strength and security came at the detriment of their neighbors. Tension between Seleucus II, Diodotus I, and Arsaces I was high, and because of the security dilemma, their efforts to increase the security of their states made their competitors feel increasingly insecure. This cycle of insecurity made conflict between two or all of these actors increasingly likely. These structural defects are pertinent to the geopolitical developments within the multipolar Eastern system that emerged after the power-transition crisis of the 240s BCE and help explain security concerns, shifting relationships, and endemic warfare in the East over the

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid. Sampson mistakenly claims Seleucus II and Diodotus I formed an "anti-Parthian pact" without any evidence of such an agreement in part by confusing the role and motivations of Diodotus II. Sampson 2015: 42-3. Grainger incorrectly asserts that Diodotus II was a Seleucid "governor of Baktria" in 235 BCE before declaring himself king. Grainger 2014: 200; id. 2015: 65. His father, Diodotus I, already had declared himself king and Bactria independent in ca. 238 BCE. See Bopearachchi 1995: 422-423.

<sup>154</sup> Eckstein calls the ancient world one of the grimmest examples of international relations. Eckstein 2006: 36. See also id. 2005; id. 2012; id. 2013.

course of the next two centuries. With a new kingdom and an enlarged army, the Parthians had emerged as a potential power in this new system.

The rapid transformation of the international environment in the early 230s BCE allowed a new interstate system to emerge in the Farther East. The Parni originally operated within the limitations of the Central Asian steppe; however, as they migrated further south and began to come into contact and conflict with the Seleucid Empire, they entered the volatile area on the periphery of the Iranian plateau. Although the Persians and Macedonians had maintained a belief in the universality of their imperium and made efforts to subdue large portions of the Central Asian steppe, the Seleucids appear to have preferred to create more defined limitations to their empire in the East, with firmer spatial barriers among the boundaries of the Greek-Eastern system, the Indian system, and the Central Asian steppe.<sup>155</sup> As long as Andragoras and Diodotus simply remained rebellious satraps and potential usurpers to the Seleucid throne, the territorial integrity of the Seleucid Empire remained essentially intact, at least abstractly, and the lands of the Farther East remained directly connected to the geopolitical developments of the Eastern Mediterranean. That is, Andragoras and Diodotus in the 240s BCE were no different from a long line of other usurpers who entered civil wars against Seleucid monarchs, and therefore, their rebellions alone did not create a new interstate system in the Farther East. However, when Arsaces successfully penetrated the old Seleucid frontier, creating a new foreign kingdom in northeastern Iran, and when Diodotus declared himself king of Bactria, officially proclaiming separate sovereignty from the Seleucid Empire, the international environment in the Farther East changed drastically. Suddenly, two sovereign states had emerged to challenge Seleucid

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<sup>155</sup> For the spatial limitations of the Seleucids compared to their predecessors, see Kosmin 2014: 59-61, 123.

hegemony in the East. The geopolitical limitations and focus of these new polities shifted immediately eastward and separated from those of the Eastern Mediterranean. The Greek-Eastern system, which had been in place since the Persian Wars, abruptly split. Tripolarity between Antigonid Macedon, Ptolemaic Egypt, and the Seleucid Empire remained in place in the new Eastern Mediterranean interstate system. Yet a turbulent and rather ambiguous tripolarity between Parthia, Bactria, and the Seleucid Empire also emerged in the new Eastern interstate system.

Thus, in the 230s BCE the Seleucid Empire came to operate simultaneously in separate interstate systems, which is a geopolitical distinction shared by several other large, powerful empires throughout history.<sup>156</sup> The major difference between the participation of the Seleucids in the new Eastern Mediterranean system and the new Eastern system was the political, cultural, and economic focus of the Seleucids. Since the Seleucids had come to favor western geopolitical developments and rivalries, their participation in the Eastern Mediterranean system was active, aggressive, and frequent. Meanwhile, their participation in the Eastern system was reactive,

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<sup>156</sup> There are a handful of notable examples from the pre-modern world. The Achaemenids and Alexander had been active military and political participants in the separate Indian system. Tigranes II's Armenian Empire found itself squeezed between the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system and the Parthian-dominated Eastern system. The Umayyad Caliphate simultaneously was active in the Indian, Eastern, Mediterranean, and northern European systems. The Mongols were active in the separate East Asian, Central Asian, and European systems. There are far more examples from the modern world. Therefore, I will mention only a few. The Russian Empire simultaneously participated in the European and East Asian systems, especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries during the heated rivalry with the British Empire known commonly as "The Great Game." Another good example is the Russo-Japanese War. The British Empire participated in numerous separate interstate systems across the entire globe from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Other European colonial powers, such as Spain, Portugal, France, and the Netherlands were active military and political participants in separate interstate systems around the globe as well. Finally, the United States almost since its inception has been a sporadic intervener in the European, East Asian, and Latin American interstate systems.

inconsistent, and sporadic.<sup>157</sup> The Parthians and Bactrians continually took advantage of the Seleucids' western distractions to maximize their regional security and power, which added to their regional rivalry. Meanwhile, the Seleucid state remained an important third power in the East, which retained the potential strength to threaten the survival of Parthia and Bactria. Thus, the new Eastern system, which overlapped with the Central Asian steppe in modern Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan and with the new Eastern Mediterranean system in modern Iran, had a precarious early existence. It remained unseen if a Seleucid king could settle the affairs of the state in the West long enough to reclaim the lost lands of the East.

### Summary and Conclusion

Rome began as one of dozens of small polities in the Italian Peninsula struggling with one another over limited resources, security, and power. Although the Romans certainly were aggressive and warlike, there was nothing pathologically unique about their bellicosity or brutality. They were not exceptionally aggressive compared to their numerous bellicose neighbors, nor can an explanation of their success convincingly stem from this unit-attribute assumption. All successful ancient states were highly militarized and warlike because of similar systemic pressures over the various regional interstate systems of anarchy in antiquity. In these anarchical systems, war was normal and state existence fragile. States had to follow self-help, power-maximizing policies for survival in a world that lacked enforceable international law, where diplomatic interaction was crude and infrequent, and where state awareness of geopolitical developments and international relations was opaque. Thus, the militarized and aggressive

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<sup>157</sup> Even after this new threat to their Eastern lands, the Seleucids maintained a primarily western focus in their geopolitical activities. Military and political efforts against the Hellenistic and Greek states in the Eastern Mediterranean took precedence over eastern concerns. Kosmin, 2013; Plischke 2014: 315-34.

society of Rome was a result of these systemic pressures and not unique. This study argues that a similar conclusion also applies to the Parthians in the Eastern system.

Roman militarism and aggression were not the key to Rome's successful domination of the Mediterranean as hegemon. Rather, the unique ability and willingness of the Romans to assimilate outsiders into the Roman state was the source of their exceptionalism.<sup>158</sup> The Romans' inclusiveness provided them with strong alliance relationships, seemingly inexhaustible military resources, and better social integration. Ultimately, the Romans dominated their bellicose neighbors throughout the Mediterranean world because they could outlast their enemies logistically and militarily in hegemonic conflicts. Rome had a unique ability to absorb catastrophic military losses and continue a war until eventually victorious. This advantage allowed Rome to overcome disastrous military setbacks against the Gauls, the Samnites, the Epirotes, and the Carthaginians.

As Rome expanded outward against these various threats to state security and survival, it acquired new friends and allies and incorporated them into its growing alliance system. This increased Rome's military reserves but also expanded Rome's military commitments. A growing aspect of Rome's security and perceived power was its ability to protect its friends and allies from outside threats. This facilitated the further expansion of the Roman state and the enlargement of the interstate systems in which it was involved. Disputes with the Samnites over

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<sup>158</sup> See Eckstein 2006: Ch. 7. The unique ability of the Roman state to incorporate, recruit, organize, and support more men than its competitors continued into the late republican and imperial periods. Eventually the Roman state came to control unrivaled material wealth as well that allowed it to outstrip competitors further militarily. Note Mattingly 2011: 269; Bang 2012: 201. This study also offers an examination of the "exceptional" qualities of the Parthians in Chapter 3. I follow Eckstein's definition of exceptionalism, which he calls "the unique characteristics of this particular ancient state, which led it to exceptional interstate success in the ferocious interstate competition for security and power." Eckstein 2006: 11.

the city of Capua caused the violent merger of the central Italian system with the southern Italian system to form the Roman-dominated and expanded Italian system through the hegemonic struggle of the Samnite Wars. Clashes with Carthage over the city of Messana caused the violent merger of the Italian system with the North African system to form the Roman-dominated and expanded Western Mediterranean system through the hegemonic struggles of the first two Punic Wars. Finally, tensions with Macedon over Philip V's alliance with Hannibal and his westward expansion caused the violent merger of the Western Mediterranean system with the Eastern Mediterranean system to form the Roman-dominated and expanded Mediterranean system through the hegemonic struggles of the Macedonian and Syrian wars. Further, in the Greek East the positive reputation that the Romans earned for their leniency and inclusiveness toward allies made friendship with Rome an attractive alternative to the abusive rule of the Hellenistic kingdoms. When the power of the Ptolemaic state suddenly collapsed at the end of the third century BCE, it caused a power-transition crisis in the traditional Eastern Mediterranean system. The middling Greek states sought out Rome to be their champion against the extensive military ambitions of Philip V and Antiochus III. The unintended result was the Roman destruction of Philip and Antiochus' armies and the establishment of Roman hegemony throughout the expanded Mediterranean system by the early 180s BCE.

Meanwhile, the rapid decline of the power of the Seleucid state in the 240s BCE because of the dynastic turmoil that followed the sudden death of Antiochus II in 246 BCE caused a power-transition crisis in the East. The disastrous Third Syrian War encouraged powerful Seleucid satraps—Andragoras and Diodotus—to rebel against the Seleucid state. The equally disastrous civil war between Seleucus II and Antiochus Hierax perpetuated the power-transition crisis and encouraged the ambitious Parni king, Arsaces I, to invade northern Iran and establish



the independent Kingdom of Parthia. The sudden emergence of Parthia as a serious regional threat further destabilized the Farther East and encouraged Diodotus I to declare himself king of Bactria.

The power-transition crisis of the 240s-230s BCE, which encouraged eastern satraps to rebel and the nomadic Parni tribe to invade Parthia dissolved Seleucid direct imperial control over the Iranian plateau. The success of Arsaces in establishing a new kingdom in Parthia and Diodotus I's success in establishing a new kingdom in Bactria meant that a new interstate system of tripolarity emerged in the Farther East. The sweeping success of Arsaces established Parthia as a regional power in the new Eastern system; however, its existence was precarious. Surrounded by potential enemies Arsaces prepared his new kingdom for the fight that was sure to come, although whether the first blow would come from Bactria or the Seleucid Empire remained unseen.

## Chapter 2 – The Struggle of the Parthians to become the Rivals of the Seleucids in the Hellenistic Middle East

With the emergence of the Parthians as a rising power in the Farther East, the new system of multipolar anarchy became increasingly unstable. Although Arsaces I had defeated Andragoras and seized Hyrcania, there had not yet been a Bactrian or Seleucid military response to the new Parthian threat. Diodotus I was an enemy of Arsaces, and his new kingdom in Bactria was extensive. Bactria was a major player in the geopolitical developments of the Farther East until the middle of the second century BCE. Parthia eventually would have to contend with its rival to the east if it hoped to become a hegemonic power. However, despite the recent success of Diodotus and Arsaces in establishing new eastern kingdoms, the Seleucid Empire remained the primary power in the Eastern system at this time. The power-transition crisis of the 240s BCE and continued dynastic turmoil that followed had distracted the Seleucid kings and made the fracturing of the East possible. Yet the potential power of the Seleucid state was considerable. All that was needed was a strong leader to unify the kingdom and put an end to the civil wars and foreign invasions. If the Parthians wanted to dominate the Farther East, they first had to outlast Bactrian competition and survive Seleucid reprisals.

This chapter will investigate the military challenges that the Seleucid Empire experienced in trying to reassert and maintain its hegemony in the East, while examining the military challenges that Parthia and Bactria had to overcome to avoid annihilation and to obtain state security. The Seleucids exerted much energy, money, materials, and manpower to stake their claim to hegemony over the East. However, out of the wake of Seleucid retribution, the Parthians eventually would rise to challenge that hegemony. A second power-transition crisis in the 160s BCE allowed the Parthians to reclaim their regional power, and under the leadership of a new

charismatic, ambitious king, Mithridates I, Parthia would defeat the Seleucid Empire in a hegemonic war and create for the first time a system of bipolarity in the East.

### The Brief Reestablishment of Seleucid Hegemony in the East

After the emergence of the tripolar new Eastern system in the 230s BCE, Parthia and Bactria no longer concerned themselves directly with the geopolitical developments and rivalries of the Eastern Mediterranean, which remained the focus of the traditional Hellenistic Successor states until the rise of Roman unipolar hegemony over the entire Mediterranean from the 190s-160s BCE. The geopolitical developments of the new Eastern system were only intermittently and indirectly related to those of the Eastern Mediterranean system through sporadic Seleucid efforts to reclaim the Farther East in the 230s, 200s, 130s, and 120s BCE. The Seleucid approach to their imperium over the lands of the Farther East also changed as the policy of direct Seleucid imperialism gave way to a system of loose hegemony over vassal kingdoms.<sup>1</sup>

The power-transition crisis of the 240s BCE had been devastating to the prestige of the Seleucid king and the security of the Seleucid state. The Seleucid Empire was crumbling under the pressure of internal strife, aggressive neighbors in the Eastern Mediterranean, and the continued fracturing of the Farther East. The Seleucids needed a strong, capable leader to halt this decline and return the Seleucid state to power and glory. Antiochus III, later known as Antiochus the Great, was that leader.<sup>2</sup> Under Antiochus the Seleucids ended their series of civil

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<sup>1</sup> Overtoom 2016: 15. Seleucus II's failure in the 230s BCE made the danger of eastern expeditions apparent. Antiochus III altered Seleucid policy. His eastern campaign was meant to intimidate neighboring states and potential rivals through show of force and open conflict if necessary; however, his outlook on the new geopolitical situation in the Farther East was more flexible and forgiving. He chose not to pursue a policy of total dominance because he could not spare the time and materials needed to accomplish this goal and because he hoped a more moderate policy would cause less resistance to Seleucid hegemonic rule. See Grainger 2015: 57.

<sup>2</sup> Antiochus earned the title "the Great" because of his successful anabasis. Appian *Syr.* 1.1

wars, became the leading power in the Eastern Mediterranean, and established unipolarity over the Eastern system. His eastern expedition toward the end of the third century BCE severely threatened the survival of Parthia and Bactria. Although the results of Antiochus' campaign were not permanent, for a generation he successfully subdued the challengers to Seleucid hegemony in the Farther East, something his predecessors and successors failed at miserably. The geopolitical ambitions of Parthia and Bactria had to evolve drastically as they faced the full might of the Seleucid state under the guidance of Antiochus.

#### The Anabasis of Antiochus III: Surviving the Seleucid Backlash

In the early 230s BCE, with Seleucus II still embroiled in civil war against his brother in the West, it would seem that the newly crowned Diodotus I of Bactria was the more immediate threat to the young Parthian state. Diodotus and Arsaces had been longstanding enemies ever since Arsaces' failed invasion of Margiana. Meanwhile, Diodotus' kingdom was much larger than Arsaces' and his military had proved effective against the Parthian cavalry based army, at least on the defensive. Even with the addition of Hyrcania to the northwest, the Parthian Kingdom was vulnerable along much of its frontier. In fact, the geographical advantage of Parthia, which allowed the Parthians numerous avenues of expansion in all directions throughout the Iranian plateau, also presented the dangerous prospect of multiple front wars. A two front war against the Seleucids in the West and the Bactrians in the East likely would have proved fatal to the Parthian Kingdom. This was the fear Arsaces felt and the reason for his aggressive expansion and military recruitment.<sup>3</sup> Yet fate intervened for the Parthians. Civil war delayed the looming Seleucid retaliation, and before Diodotus could pursue a war against the Parthians, he

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<sup>3</sup> Justin 41.4.8

suddenly died. His son, Diodotus II, became the new king of Bactria sometime in the first half of the 230s BCE, and he quickly abandoned his father's hostility toward the Parthians.<sup>4</sup> He and Arsaces not only came to make peace but also declared themselves allies.<sup>5</sup>

An end to hostilities and a military alliance between Parthia and Bactria in the early to middle 230s BCE made sense for several reasons. First, as a new king, Diodotus II would have lacked the prestige and influence of his father to rule his new kingdom. His father had been a gifted administrator, working in relative isolation on the fringe of the Seleucid Empire for many years. Diodotus I had expanded his administrative control beyond his official satrapy in Bactria and had ruled so effectively that the indigenous population seems to have supported his bid for independence. Moreover, Diodotus I had a proven military record. He had successfully defended his extensive frontier and repulsed Arsaces' invasion. Yet Diodotus II had none of these accolades. A peace treaty and alliance with Parthia allowed Diodotus II to consolidate his political power and position. It relieved him of the dangerous prospect of hegemonic war with the rising Parthian state. Second, an alliance between Parthia and Bactria relieved some of the mounting tension between the two polities that had built up because of Arsaces' recent security driven expansions. The alliance served to alleviate some of the concerns of the growing security dilemma in the region. Third, for Parthia the alliance removed the immediate threat of a two front war, which had been a great concern of Arsaces. Fourth, it awarded Arsaces more time to settle his people and reorganize his new kingdom. It is impressive how quickly the Parthians

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<sup>4</sup> For a recent account of Diodotus II, see Holt 1999: 101-7.

<sup>5</sup> Justin 41.4.9. Sampson is mistaken to place Diodotus II's accession during Seleucus II's anabasis. Sampson confusingly argues that Diodotus I made an "anti-Parthian" pact but that Diodotus II abandoned the Seleucid alliance to join the Parthians. Sampson ignores that Seleucus would have been unwilling to acknowledge Diodotus I as a legitimate king and that Diodotus II abandoning this alleged alliance with the Seleucids during Seleucus' invasion is inexplicable. Sampson's reconstruction is untenable. Sampson 2015: 42-3.

transformed from a nomadic tribal organization to a monarchy with Iranian and Hellenistic influences.<sup>6</sup> Finally, the alliance served to counter an impending Seleucid retaliatory campaign. The Seleucid civil war could not last forever; and therefore, the Parthians and Bactrians could anticipate that whomever won the Seleucid civil war would likely look to reestablish his prestige and the power of the empire through an anabasis (a campaign into the interior of the East).

Arsaces' invasion and subsequent conquests had penetrated the Seleucid frontier and encouraged the further disintegration and fracturing of Seleucid power in the Farther East.<sup>7</sup> Much like Demodamas' retaliatory campaign ca. 280 BCE, the Parthians could expect a Seleucid campaign to reconquer the region and to punish them for their aggression. Moreover, Parthia shared a long western frontier along the central Iranian plateau with the Seleucid Empire. The full force of Seleucid retaliation would fall first on Parthia. However, Bactria also had every reason to fear Seleucid retaliation. The rebellion of Diodotus II's father and the formation of the Bactrian Kingdom had been a betrayal of the Seleucid king and a direct challenge to Seleucid hegemony. In an interstate system where power relations are fluid and state capabilities are uncertain, reputation is linked directly to perceived power. Damage to a state's perceived power, regardless of its actual power capabilities, encourages competitors within the anarchic system to challenge that state's position within the system. Thus, states must take challenges to their authority and slights to their reputation with the utmost seriousness and repay them in the utmost severity. Thus, Justin tells us that Seleucus II later "came to take vengeance on the rebels."<sup>8</sup> Diodotus II could expect that if the Seleucids were successful in reconquering Parthia, he would

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<sup>6</sup> See Keshelenko 1966: 12-47, 214-18; Olbrycht 1996: 167; Olbrycht 1998a: 31-4; Lerner 1999: 34.

<sup>7</sup> Justin 41.4.5

<sup>8</sup> Id. 41.4.9.

be left isolated against a Seleucid invasion of Bactria. Therefore, Arsaces and Diodotus II put aside their differences in an attempt to balance against the Seleucid threat.

All of these fears began to materialize when Seleucus II and Antiochus Hierax signed an uneasy truce ca. 236 BCE. With a temporary cessation of conflict in the western theater, Seleucus prepared an invasion of the East. Unfortunately, our understanding of Seleucus' anabasis is minimal. It likely occurred during the truce between Seleucus and Antiochus (236-229/228 BCE).<sup>9</sup> It appears that the initial stages of the eastern campaign went well for Seleucus. His invasion of Parthia temporarily forced Arsaces back to the Central Asian steppe.<sup>10</sup> There is no record of a battlefield victory by Seleucus. If there was a military engagement with the Parthians, it must have been minor. Yet Arsaces had been readying for a Seleucid invasion for years and had expanded his military to face this threat. It perhaps seems odd then that he would "flee" without a major engagement. However, if we view this war within the larger context of the long series of Parthian defensive wars against western invaders over the next two centuries, then we get a sense that Arsaces' withdrawal in the face of Seleucus' advance is a Parthian strategy. In fact, this appears to be the first surviving record of what I call the Parthians' "feigned retreat, defeat in detail" mode of warfare.

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<sup>9</sup> Lerner offers this timeframe. Lerner 1999: 33. See also Will 1979: 278-81, 308-11. For an argument for the dates 231-227 BCE, see Drijvers 1998: 285. Lerner's reconstruction seems more plausible since the truce between Seleucus and Antiochus Hierax ended in 229/228 BCE. It seems unlikely that Seleucus would have remained in the East campaigning against the Parthians once his brother openly threatened the security of his western lands.

<sup>10</sup> "Later Arsaces, when he fled from Seleucus Callinicus, withdrew into the country of the Apasiacae." Strabo 11.8.8. For background on the Apasiacae and the relationship of Parthia with other Central Asian tribes, see Lerner 1999: 34 n.6. Sampson incorrectly claims that Seleucus II obtained "the total defeat of Arsaces." Sampson 2015: 42. Arsaces' resources were quite limited; it is mistaken to argue that Arsaces' was decisively defeated but somehow raised a new army that allowed him to defeat Seleucus later in the campaign.

By at least the 230s BCE, the Parthians had developed a calculated military withdrawal strategy that incorporated their distinctive cavalry-based army and tactics into their wider strategic thinking, which allowed them throughout their recorded history to deceive and outmaneuver more traditional Hellenistic and Roman armies. Instead of the scholarly tradition that, first, attempts to portray Parthian tactics and strategy utilized during the Carrhae campaign in 54-53 BCE as somehow anomalous and that, second, portrays the Parthian general Surenas as an unrivaled Parthian military genius and reformer, this study argues that the Parthians' military actions during the Carrhae campaign were merely a variation and continuation of a longstanding unique mode of warfare.<sup>11</sup> The unique Parthian concept of warfare, which emphasized asymmetric warfare, was at the core of the Parthians' tactical and strategic thinking in part because of their unique military and tactical developments both on the Central Asian steppe and the Iranian plateau.<sup>12</sup> It was a variation and improvement of nomadic asymmetric warfare, which Herodotus called invincible and unapproachable.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> For the long-established scholarly tradition that the Carrhae campaign was an aberration, see for example, Mommsen 1903: v 157, 164; Sampson 2015: 111-13, 117-21, 147, Ch. 6, 166, 177. See also Lerouge 2007: 282-95.

<sup>12</sup> Note that Brunt argues, "The capacity of the Parthians almost to annihilate his [Crassus'] forces was the result of developments in Iran entirely extraneous to the factors that operated in Italy or the Roman empire." Brunt 1988: 83. Note also Olbrycht 2015.

<sup>13</sup> "But the Scythian race has made the cleverest discovery that we know in what is the most important of all human affairs; I do not praise the Scythians in all respects, but in this, the most important: that they have contrived that no one who attacks them can escape, and no one can catch them if they do not want to be found. For when men have no established cities or forts, but are all nomads and mounted archers, not living by tilling the soil but by raising cattle and carrying their dwellings on wagons, how can they not be invincible and unapproachable?" Herod. 4.46.2-3. Note Kosmin 2014: 43; Grainger 2015: 64-5. Although Rawlinson unfairly disparaged the Parthians' mode of warfare with biased racial criticism, he recognized that the Parthians' mode of warfare had an important strategic emphasis and that the use of this mode of warfare within a "civilized," i.e. a traditional, state was unique. Rawlinson 1885 (2002): 32.



The Parthian army primarily was a cavalry force with heavy influences from its nomadic roots.<sup>14</sup> Justin records, “Of engaging with the enemy in close fight, and of taking cities by siege, they [the Parthians] know nothing. They fight on horseback, either galloping forward or turning their backs. Often, too, they counterfeit flight, that they may throw their pursuers off their guard against being wounded by their arrows.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, after the Parthians had established a secure state in what is today northeastern Iran and had begun expanding that state at the expense of their neighbors, the Parthian army came to possess a marked advantage in mobility and flexibility over more traditionally armed and outfitted Hellenistic and Roman armies. Justin continues, “In general they [the Parthians] retire before the enemy in the very heat of the engagement, and, soon after their retreat, return to the battle afresh; so that, when you feel most certain that you have conquered them, you have still to meet the greatest danger from them.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, the Parthians utilized aggressive hit-and-run and deceptive feigned retreat tactics as the core of their innovative mode of warfare.

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<sup>14</sup> See esp. Coulston 1986; Kennedy 1996a: 83-4; Olbrycht 2003; id. 2015. Justin states, “The fashion of their arms is that of their own country and of Scythia.” Justin 41.2.4. Justin continues, “They have an army, not like other nations, of free men, but chiefly consisting of slaves, the numbers of whom daily increase, the power of manumission being allowed to none, and all their offspring, in consequence, being born slaves. These bondmen they bring up as carefully as their own children, and teach them, with great pains, the arts of riding and shooting with the bow. As any one is eminent in wealth, so he furnishes the king with a proportionate number of horsemen for war. Indeed when fifty thousand cavalry encountered Antonius, as he was making war upon Parthia, only four hundred of them were free men.” Id. 42.2.5-6. Justin here exaggerates the Parthians’ use of slaves in their army; however, Josephus corroborates this depiction of the Parthians utilizing freemen in their army. *Jos. Bell.* 1.255; id. *Ant.* 14.342. Justin also records, “They ride on horseback on all occasions; on horses they go to war, and to feasts; on horses they discharge public and private duties; on horses they go abroad, meet together, traffic, and converse. Indeed the difference between slaves and freemen is, that slaves go on foot, but freemen only on horseback.” Justin 41.3.4. Josephus indicates that the horse was so important to Parthian society that the “greatest reproach possible” for a Parthian noble was to be forced to ride a donkey in the nude. *Jos. Ant.* 18.356-9. Note also Dio 15.2-6

<sup>15</sup> Justin 41.2.7. See also Tac. *Ann.* 15.4, 7, 13, 16

<sup>16</sup> Justin 41.2.9. See also Herodian 6.3.7

The Parthians became famous for a military tactic commonly known as the “Parthian Shot.”<sup>17</sup> Parthian horse archers developed a highly effective system of delivering fire upon an enemy while advancing and withdrawing.<sup>18</sup> The Parthian Shot was the process by which a rider gripped and maneuvered his horse away from the enemy with his lower body, while turning his upper body back toward the enemy to deliver precise fire. It was one of the most effective military techniques developed in the ancient world.

The Parthians’ successfully developed the Parthian Shot technique into a battlefield tactic; however, the implementation of this tactic on its own in battle was not a reliable way for the Parthians to secure victory, especially against better-equipped and numerically superior enemies like the Seleucids and Romans. One of the fundamental flaws of the Parthian Shot tactic was that it relied on horse archers to be a decisive force in battle. Since the arms and armor (or the lack thereof) of horse archers were inadequate for close combat, this posed serious tactical and strategic problems for nomadic horse archer-based armies in the ancient warfare. We know from various images of Parthian archers in sculpture and coinage that they rode to battle in little to no armor.<sup>19</sup> Thus, horse archers were relatively useless in hand-to-hand combat on the battlefield as Justin emphasizes.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the bow itself is a problematic weapon because it

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<sup>17</sup> For the tactics of the Parthians, including the use of the “Parthian Shot,” see esp. Lerouge 2007: 285-313. See also Plut. *Crass.* 24.4-5, 25, 27.1-2; Tac. *Ann.* 6.35, 13.40.5-6, Ovid *Ars Am.* 1.201-12. For more on the Parthians’ mode of warfare and the makeup of their army, see Chapter 2 and Chapter 3; Lerouge 2007: Ch. 8.

<sup>18</sup> Added to this effectiveness, at least according to Ammianus Marcellinus, was the unique structure of the Parthian bow, giving the Parthians a technological advantage as well. Amm. Mar. 22.8.37. For the image of Parthian horse archers in Graeco-Roman sources, see Lerouge 2007: 296-300.

<sup>19</sup> They wore riding clothes similar to other nomadic peoples at the time. Olbycht 2003: 89-92.

<sup>20</sup> Note Justin 41.2.7. If the enemy could manage to engage the Parthian horse arches, the result was usually disastrous for the Parthians. Justin also relates a story where Seleucid soldiers destroyed an army of Parthian cavalry in melee. Id. 42.1.5. Meanwhile, Tacitus relates a much

requires good weather to fire correctly and relies on supplies of ammunition.<sup>21</sup> In theory, well-equipped and organized armies could hope simply to wait out a force of enemy horse archers until the riders had exhausted their limited supply of arrows and had to withdraw. These glaring combat deficiencies generally restricted the effectiveness and sustainability of nomadic forces in battle and on campaign. If the Parthians hoped to develop into a more effective military force that could contend with the superior size, equipment, and organization of the Hellenistic armies in the Near East and Middle East, then they had to develop logistical and military innovations to make their armies more competitive.<sup>22</sup>

First, the Parthians addressed the supply restrictions facing their horse archers. For example, Plutarch tells us that, at the Battle of Carrhae, Crassus had hoped to outlast the barrage of the Parthian horse archers until they had exhausted their supply of arrows; however, “when they [the Romans] perceived that many camels laden with arrows were at hand, from which the Parthians who first encircled them took a fresh supply, then Crassus, seeing no end to this, began to lose heart, and sent messengers to his son with orders to force an engagement with the enemy before he was surrounded.”<sup>23</sup> Scholars generally assume without good reason that this extra supply of arrows at the Battle of Carrhae was a unique and singular innovation of the Parthian

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later battle where an enemy army forced the Parthian horse archers to fight in close range and destroyed them. Tac. *Ann.* 6.35

<sup>21</sup> Dio notes that the Parthians at Carrhae finally had to retire because their “bowstrings snapped under the constant shooting, [and] the missiles were exhausted.” Dio 40.24.1

<sup>22</sup> We should reject Colledge’s unsubstantiated claim that the Parthians adopted Seleucid tactics and armaments once they settled in Iran and that this was the source of their early success but that the Parthians abandoned them after a tactical “revolution” under Mithridates II in the late second century BCE, at which point they developed their army “along traditional Iranian lines.” Colledge 1967: 65. Note that, although Rawlinson unfairly disparaged the Parthian mode of warfare as offensively ineffective and not adaptive, he argued that, despite minor improvements, the Parthians’ mode of warfare was “essentially the same system” for over four centuries. Rawlinson 1885 (2002): 109.

<sup>23</sup> Plut. *Crass.* 25.1

commander Surenas; however, such a scenario is highly unlikely, and no ancient writer makes such a claim.<sup>24</sup>

Plutarch's emphasis in this passage is not that the sudden logistical innovation of Surenas confounded the Romans; rather, his moralistic, rhetorical emphasis is to portray Crassus as an ill prepared and woefully out maneuvered foil to his wiser and more capable subordinate, Cassius.<sup>25</sup> By the middle 50s BCE, the Roman army had recent experience fighting the Scythian mercenaries of Mithridates VI and Tigranes II; however, the Pontic and Armenian armies had recruited and utilized horse archers sparingly. The Parthian army was quite different because it utilized horse archers as a fundamental portion of its military force and as a crucial factor in its tactics. Yet Crassus and his contemporaries, who had never fought against the Parthians before, made no clear distinction between the military forces of the Parthians and of other Hellenized eastern peoples because of Roman stereotypes and ignorance.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, at Carrhae the logistical capabilities of the Parthians surprised Crassus, not because they were a recent innovation of a unique military genius as Gareth Sampson recently has argued, but because the Romans were unfamiliar with the different composition and capabilities of the Parthian army. Instead of viewing the Parthian army at Carrhae atypically, we should instead consider that Surenas merely executed a variation of the Parthians' mode of warfare, which had been in place for almost two centuries.

It is highly unlikely that the Parthians, who experienced unrivaled military success against the Seleucids, Bactrians, other nomadic tribes, and the Romans, had not developed a

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<sup>24</sup> There is a longstanding tradition. For example, Colledge 1967: 66-7; Sampson 2015: 128-9.

<sup>25</sup> Please see the introductory chapter on the image of Crassus in ancient literature.

<sup>26</sup> Plut. *Crass.* 18.3-4, 20.1; id. *Luc.* 36.6-7. For the Graeco-Roman stereotypes of eastern peoples, see esp. Isaac 2006: Chs. 4-8.

logistical solution to the supply of their horse archers in battle prior to 53 BCE. The size of Surenas' baggage train was perhaps unusual because of his exceptional affluence and power; however, the concept of resupplying horse archers on the battlefield should hardly be considered unique to him, especially since even Plutarch does not make this claim.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, although Plutarch is the only ancient writer that mentions how the Parthian army supplied itself during battle, it is illogical to argue that Surenas implemented a sudden logistical innovation at Carrhae, which was crucial to the success of the Parthian army against the Romans, which the Parthians after Carrhae abandoned without thought. Rather, it is far more likely that the Parthians in fact had developed a mobile method to resupply their horse archers on the battlefield early on in their rise to supremacy within the Farther East that, because of the notable role it played in the battle and because of the unique detail of Plutarch's account, emerges only in Plutarch's depiction of the Battle of Carrhae. Thus, the Parthians likely developed and utilized a mobile supply system for their horse archers that they employed with unrivaled success for centuries.

Second, the Parthians developed heavily armored cavalymen, commonly known as cataphracts, to supplement their force of horse archers and to enhance the offensive capabilities of their army considerably.<sup>28</sup> The Parthian cataphract matched the armored cavalry of the nomadic tribes of the Central Asian steppe with the Macedonian style long lance, and because of the Parthians, this new form of "shock" cavalry became popular in the West.<sup>29</sup> The mixture of

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<sup>27</sup> Plut. *Crass.* 21.6

<sup>28</sup> Dio 40.15.1-2; Justin 41.2.10. The Parthians soon came to favor Iranian horses, which were known for their outstanding speed and strength. Strabo 3.4.15, 11.13.7

<sup>29</sup> The Massagetae and Dahae developed armored cavalry long before Arsaces invaded Parthia. When Alexander the Great campaigned in Bactria and Sogdiana against these tribes, they found the longer Macedonian spear more effective and adopted it. See Olbyricht 2003: 94-5. Note also Mielczarek 1998. Thus, other nomadic peoples had developed heavy cavalry similar to the cataphract and had used similar hit-and-run tactics as the Parthians in battle; however, the strategic capabilities of the Parthian state compared to the nomadic tribes and the Parthians'

horse archers and heavily armored shock cavalry in the Parthian army paired with the unique sustainability of the Parthian military tactically and strategically allowed the Parthians to perfect their mode of warfare and to implement it successfully on several occasions.<sup>30</sup>

The Parthians' mode of warfare had two fundamental tactical aspects: the Parthian Shot tactic and the feigned retreat tactic. In battle the Parthians tried to utilize the Parthian Shot tactic to harass the enemy into giving pursuit in the hope that once the enemy had broken formation the Parthian cataphracts could mount a devastating charge and overwhelm the enemy. However, if the enemy formation did not react to the horse archer assault, then the Parthians could implement the feigned retreat tactic, where the Parthians "feigned" becoming disorganized and routing in the face of the enemy in the hope that this would finally encourage the enemy to break formation and pursue them. Therefore, within our discussion of the Parthians' mode of warfare we should make a distinction between the Parthian Shot tactic, which was an aggressive and offensive tactic meant to force enemies into exposing gaps within their defensive formation for the Parthian army

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introduction of the cataphract to the West were unique. Sampson is mistaken that the Parthians did not become a "devastating fighting machine" until they "perfected" the use of cataphracts in the 130s BCE. Sampson 2015: 46. Note that this was a pre-stirrup period of cavalry warfare. Thus, the Parthians developed a saddle, which probably had Eurasian steppe origins, which allowed armored riders to use "shock" tactics in battle. Nikonorov 2002; James 2013: 113. For the image of Parthian cataphracts in Graeco-Roman sources, see Lerouge 2007: 300-3.

<sup>30</sup> Dio, writing in the early third century CE around the time of the fall of the Parthian Empire, succinctly illustrates the makeup and fighting style of the Parthians. He records, "The Parthians make no use of a shield, but their forces consist of mounted archers and pikemen, mostly in full armor. Their infantry is small, made up of the weaker men; but even these are all archers. They practice from boyhood, and the climate and the land combine to aid both horsemanship and archery. The land, being for the most part level, is excellent for raising horses and very suitable for riding about on horse-back; at any rate, even in war they lead about whole droves of horses, so that they can use different ones at different times, can ride up suddenly from a distance and also retire to a distance speedily." Dio 15.2-3. See also Tac. *Ann.* 6.35. Thus, the Parthians developed a method to re-outfit their cavalry in battle. Such attention to the sustainability of their cavalry makes it even less likely that the Parthians did not develop a logistical solution to resupplying their horse archers in battle prior to the Battle of Carrhae.

to exploit, and the Parthian feigned retreat tactic, which was a defensive tactic meant to trick enemies into breaking formation in mistaken pursuits so that the Parthian army could isolate and destroy separated enemy detachments.<sup>31</sup>

Before continuing in our narrative, let us examine the Battle of Carrhae, which provides us with the best extant account of the Parthian army in combat, as an example of the tactical application of the Parthian “feigned retreat, defeat in detail” mode of warfare. Plutarch, whose account of the battle is the most detailed and reliable, argues that before the momentous battle reports began to reach the Romans that the Parthian army was stronger and more deadly than expected.<sup>32</sup> Plutarch states,

But from the cities of Mesopotamia in which the Romans had garrisons, certain men made their escape at great hazard and brought tidings of serious import. They had been eyewitnesses both of the numbers of the enemy and of their mode of warfare when they attacked their cities, and, as is usual, they exaggerated all the terrors of their report. ‘When the men pursued,’ they declared, ‘there was no escaping them, and when they fled, there was no taking them; and strange missiles are the precursors of their appearance, which pierce through every obstacle before one sees who sent them; and as for the armor of their mail-clad horsemen, some of it is made to force its way through everything, and some of it to give way to nothing.’<sup>33</sup>

Plutarch here exaggerates the sudden timing of these events to portray Crassus as an incompetent fool, whose greed and lack of preparation led to the disaster at Carrhae. In reality, Crassus had been quite successful in securing northern Mesopotamia as an important bridgehead in 54 BCE, and the Parthian forces in the region had fled in disorder.<sup>34</sup> In fact, Plutarch records that, during

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<sup>31</sup> We can find evidence of this distinction in the Parthians’ tactics in Justin’s statements mentioned above as well. Note esp. Justin 41.2.7, 9. Note also Florus 2.20.3-10

<sup>32</sup> Dio provides our other surviving account of the battle; however, his summary suffers from a lack of detail, conflated events, and confusion. Note Sampson 2015: 186-7. Sampson’s recent depiction of the battle exaggerates the innovativeness of the Parthians’ battle plan and their military objectives, note id. 122-44.

<sup>33</sup> Plut. *Crass.* 18.2-3

<sup>34</sup> Dio 40.12.2. See Chapter 6 for more detail on the early stages of the campaign.

Crassus' advance into Mesopotamia in 53 BCE, "the country was destitute of [Parthian] men, but that they [the Roman scouts] had come upon the tracks of many horses which had apparently wheeled about and fled from pursuit. Wherefore Crassus himself was all the more confident, and his soldiers went so far as to despise the Parthians utterly, believing that they would not come to close quarters."<sup>35</sup> Again, Plutarch exaggerates Crassus' reaction to portray him negatively; however, here and in an earlier passage the Roman scouts describe the distinctive mode of warfare of the Parthians. Plutarch writes,

When the [Roman] soldiers heard this, their courage ebbed away. For they had been fully persuaded that the Parthians were not different at all from the Armenians or even the Cappadocians, whom Lucullus had robbed and plundered till he was weary of it, and they had thought that the most difficult part of the war would be the long journey and the pursuit of men who would not come to close quarters; but now, contrary to their hopes, they were led to expect a struggle and great peril. Therefore some of the officers thought that Crassus ought to call a halt and reconsider the whole undertaking.<sup>36</sup>

This passage particularly is of interest because it plainly states that the Parthian mode of warfare remained unique from that of other eastern states. It also demonstrates that the Romans had almost no knowledge of the Parthian military and that they associated the Parthians with their traditional eastern stereotypes. This further supports the argument that the Roman-dominated Mediterranean and Parthian-dominated Eastern systems had remained separate up to this time. The Romans had never fought the Parthians in a major engagement before, and therefore, despite access to eastern guides and the experience of eastern clients, the Romans had little appreciation of how the Parthian military actually operated. Plutarch in these passages, with the benefit of almost two centuries of hindsight, emphasizes the Parthian concepts of feigned retreat strategy and the tactical use of interchanging light missile cavalry and heavy armored cavalry to breakup

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<sup>35</sup> Plut. *Crass.* 20.1

<sup>36</sup> Id. 18.4.



and isolate enemy formations.<sup>37</sup> Despite Plutarch's claims, in 53 BCE the Romans realized that they were facing a well-coordinated and equipped force that had a unique fighting style only after engaging at Carrhae.<sup>38</sup> The military prowess of the Parthians understandably surprised the Roman soldiers, many of whom were inexperienced, and the Romans came to fear the unique Parthian mode of warfare.<sup>39</sup> Thus, the Romans were ill prepared to fight the Parthians in a campaign and battle that favored the Parthians' unique mode of warfare. Let us now consider Plutarch's account of the Battle of Carrhae.

Just prior to the battle Plutarch states that the Parthians utilized the hilly terrain to veil the size of their army and used deception to conceal the makeup of their forces, both of which were important aspects of the traditional Parthian mode of warfare.<sup>40</sup> Thus, we find that the Parthians especially emphasized psychological warfare in their tactics and strategy. Misdirection, deception, and confusion were fundamentally important to the Parthian mode of warfare. In fact, Plutarch remarks that the Parthians utilized topography and unique instruments to intimidate enemies. He states,

But when they [the Parthians] were near the Romans and the signal was raised by their commander, first of all they filled the plain with the sound of a deep and terrifying roar. For the Parthians do not incite themselves to battle with horns or trumpets, but they have hollow drums of distended hide, covered with bronze bells, and on these they beat all at once in many quarters, and the instruments give forth a low and dismal tone, a blend of wild beast's roar and harsh thunder peal. They had rightly judged that, of all the senses, hearing is the one most apt to confound the soul, soonest rouses its emotions, and most effectively unseats the judgment.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Note also *id.* 21.2.

<sup>38</sup> Note *id.* 25.1.

<sup>39</sup> Sampson 2015: 96.

<sup>40</sup> Plut. *Crass.* 23.6. Dio also states that the Parthians kept "most of their army hidden; for the ground was uneven in spots and wooded." Dio 40.21.2. Note also the depiction of similar Parthian tactics in the second century BCE. Diod. 34/35.16

<sup>41</sup> Plut. *Crass.* 23.6-7.

Plutarch here emphasizes that the Parthians had developed a drum that allowed them to create a unique and terrifying cacophony to unnerve the enemy.<sup>42</sup> Plutarch writes that the commotion had the desired effect and that it was at this moment that the Parthians revealed their military strength and position.<sup>43</sup> The psychological impact of the Parthian mode of warfare indeed was unique and considerable.<sup>44</sup>

Plutarch then emphasizes the flexibility of Parthian tactics at the start of the battle. One must remember that this conflict was the first time the Parthians had engaged the Romans in a major battle as well. They would have been equally uncertain of Roman tactics, equipment, and capabilities. Therefore, the Parthians and the Romans implemented their different modes of warfare at Carrhae and attempted to direct the battle in favor of their different combat styles. What emerged from the conflict was that, although the Roman military was superior in manpower, defensive combat, and organization, the Parthian military had two crucial advantages over the Roman military, which had allowed it to compete for centuries with rivals who possessed superior military capabilities: its superior flexibility and mobility.

At the start of the battle, the Parthian cataphracts, utilizing the momentum of the Parthians' psychological warfare, at first charged *en masse* against the Roman formation in an attempt to shatter the Roman army through the blunt force of heavy cavalry and pikes; however, the Parthians quickly recognized the strong defensive capabilities of the Roman infantry and

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<sup>42</sup> Justin stresses that the Parthians did not utilize trumpets but rather favored drums to signal battle. Justin 41.2.8. Note Nikonorov 2000b.

<sup>43</sup> Plut. *Crass.* 24.1

<sup>44</sup> A psychological element to ancient warfare was common. Most ancient militaries attempted to utilize weapons, armor, equipment, and animals on the battlefield to intimidate the enemy. For example, Mattern argues that the Romans had a "prominent psychological element" in their warfare. Mattern 1999: 119. Thus, the Parthians' distinctive approach to psychological warfare made it unique amongst its competitors.

their defensive square formation.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, the Parthians began to implement their feigned retreat tactics. Plutarch states,

They [the cataphracts] drew back, and while seeming to break their ranks and disperse, they surrounded the hollow square in which their enemy stood before he was aware of the maneuver. And when Crassus ordered his light-armed troops to make a charge, they did not advance far, but encountering a multitude of arrows, abandoned their undertaking and ran back for shelter among the men-at-arms, among whom they caused the beginning of disorder and fear, for these now saw the velocity and force of the arrows, which fractured armor, and tore their way through every covering alike, whether hard or soft. But the Parthians now stood at long intervals from one another and began to shoot their arrows from all sides at once, not with any accurate aim (for the dense formation of the Romans would not suffer an archer to miss even if he wished it), but making vigorous and powerful shots from bows which were large and mighty and curved so as to discharge their missiles with great force.<sup>46</sup>

Thus, Plutarch highlights the maneuverability of the Parthian army, which adjusted to the battle as it unfolded far quicker than the Romans. Moreover, the feigned retreat tactic fooled the Romans, who charged out of the protection of their defensive formation and found themselves isolated and overwhelmed. From the beginning of the battle, the Parthians had freedom of movement and gained the initiative, while the Romans became isolated and reactive. This meant that the Parthians could play to the strengths of their mode of warfare.

Lucullus had experienced the long-range effectiveness of the equipment of horse archers during cavalry skirmishes in Armenia; however, the dense formation of the Romans at Carrhae made the Parthians' horse archers all the more effective.<sup>47</sup> Plutarch continues,

At once, then, the plight of the Romans was a grievous one [as they were surrounded and showered with arrows]; for if they kept their ranks, they were wounded in great numbers, and if they tried to come to close quarters with the enemy, they were just as far from effecting anything and suffered just as much. For the Parthians shot as they fled, and next to the Scythians, they do this most

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<sup>45</sup> Id. 24.3. Justin states, "But they [the Parthian cavalry] would be irresistible, if their vigor and perseverance were equal to the fury of their onset." Justin 41.2.8

<sup>46</sup> Plut. *Crass.* 24.3-5

<sup>47</sup> See also Dio 36.5-6.1; Florus 1.46.8

effectively; and it is a very clever thing to seek safety while still fighting, and to take away the shame of flight.<sup>48</sup>

Here we have the first example of the Parthians implementing the Parthian Shot tactic in the battle. The horse archers peppered the Romans with arrows while advancing and withdrawing, hoping to force the Romans to break formation. The Romans who tried to attack took heavy losses and had to fall back. Plutarch even recognizes that the maneuvering of the horse archers was a traditional Parthian tactic and that it was focused on keeping up the fight against an enemy. Later in the conflict, Crassus feared that the Parthians might surround his army completely and decided to attempt to regain the initiative in the battle. Plutarch states,

Crassus, seeing no end to this [i.e. the Parthian Shot tactic], began to lose heart, and sent messengers to his son [Publius] with orders to force an engagement with the enemy before he was surrounded; for it was his wing especially which the enemy were attacking and surrounding with their cavalry, in the hope of getting in his rear. Accordingly, the young man took thirteen hundred horsemen, of whom a thousand had come from Caesar, five hundred archers, and eight cohorts of the men-at-arms who were nearest him, and led them all to the charge.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, the horse archers, utilizing the Parthian Shot tactic, harassed the Roman infantry, while attempting to outflank the Roman formation. The Parthians used their superior mobility to begin condensing and encircling the Roman army, which was a common tactic of the Parthian mode of warfare as well.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Plut. *Crass.* 24.6

<sup>49</sup> *Id.* 25.1-2.

<sup>50</sup> Note Ruf. *Fest.* 17.2. For example, in 36 BCE the Parthians surrounded and annihilated around 10,000 Roman soldiers along with Antony's legate, Oppius Stavianus, and the crucially important Roman siege engines. Vell. *Pat.* 2.82; Plut. *Ant.* 38.2-3; Dio 49.25-6; Florus 2.20.3; Livy *Epit.* 130. The Parthians outmaneuvered, isolated, and enveloped Roman detachments numerous times during Antony's advance and retreat as they implemented their unique mode of tactical and strategic warfare. Plut. *Ant.* 39.2-50.1; Florus 2.20.4-10. Antony, whose Parthian campaign lost more Roman lives than that of Crassus, mostly escaped the harsh censure endured by the legacy of Crassus because our accounts of Antony's expedition, particularly Strabo's and Plutarch's, are based upon the pro-Antony history written by Quintus Dellius. Note von Gutschmid 1888: 97 n.3; Bengtson 1974: 10-11; Chaumont 1986b.

Since the ultimate goal of the Parthian Shot tactic was to use aggressive pressure against an enemy until they broke formation, Crassus out of desperation fell into this trap when he instructed Publius to “force an engagement” with a sizable portion of the available Roman cavalry. Unfortunately for the Romans, this decision played directly into Parthian strengths, divided the Roman army, and left the Roman infantry dangerously isolated. The charge of Publius was the military opportunity on the battlefield that the Parthian Shot tactic was meant to create.

Initially, Publius’ charge appeared to have been a success. The Parthians withdrew, which gave the Roman infantry a much-needed respite. However, Plutarch captures that the Parthian withdrawal was a stratagem. Plutarch records,

The Parthians who were trying to envelop him [that is, Publius], either because, as some say, they encountered marshes, or because they were maneuvering to attack Publius as far as possible from his father, wheeled about and ran off. Then Publius, shouting that the men did not stand their ground, rode after them... The cavalry followed after Publius, and even the infantry kept pace with them in the zeal and joy which their hopes inspired; for they thought they were victorious and in pursuit of the enemy, until, after they had gone forward a long distance, they perceived the ruse. For the seeming fugitives wheeled about and were joined at the same time by others more numerous still.<sup>51</sup>

Publius’ initial counterattack appears to have been limited. The Romans already had experienced the challenges of breaking out of their defensive position. Yet the Parthians recognized an opportunity to destroy the majority of the Roman cavalry and wanted to draw Publius’ force out further to isolate it. The Parthians temporarily abandoned the Parthian Shot tactic and instead implemented the other major aspect of the Parthian mode of warfare, the feigned retreat tactic.

It is interesting how little the Greeks and Romans understood the feigned retreat tactic of the Parthians, which is a theme to which we shall return often in other examples discussed later

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<sup>51</sup> Plut. *Crass.* 25.2-3

in this study. Even Plutarch and his sources were unsure exactly why the Parthians suddenly “ran off,” offering two possible explanations. Although Plutarch suggest that the Parthians were maneuvering to attack Publius, there is no indication that he or his sources understood that the feigned retreat tactic was a standard and central aspect of the Parthian mode of warfare alongside the Parthian Shot tactic. Moreover, Plutarch clearly indicates that Publius did not recognize the Parthian stratagem and played directly into it by giving chase to the withdrawing Parthians.

Thus, in the first half of Plutarch’s depiction of the Battle of Carrhae we find evidence of the separation of the Parthian Shot tactic from the Parthian feigned retreat tactic in the Parthian approach to combat. At Carrhae the Parthian Shot tactic had successfully forced Crassus to make a dangerous calculated advance against the Parthian cavalry with Publius’ troops. This was an encouraging development for the Parthians; however, Publius’ initially limited advance had not isolated his detached force from the main Roman army. This meant that Publius’ troops were still too close to the main Roman army to make a charge by the Parthian cataphracts against him effective. Therefore, the Parthians needed to draw Publius further out in order to isolate him, and to accomplish this goal, they implemented the Parthian feigned retreat tactic. Publius confused the calculated Parthian withdrawal with an actual rout and, therefore, took the bait and eagerly committed to an all-out charge.<sup>52</sup>

The great strength of the Parthian feigned retreat tactic and why the Parthians continually implemented it on tactical and strategic levels is the overconfidence it encouraged in the enemy, which often led to the enemy making crucial mistakes and becoming vulnerable. The Battle of

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<sup>52</sup> Dio also records that Publius misjudged the strength and intentions of the Parthians so he “led out his cavalry against them, and when they turned purposely to flight, pursued them, thinking the victory was his; thus he was drawn far away from the main army, and was then surrounded and cut down.” Dio 40.21.3

Carrhae is a wonderful example of this. The Parthians conducted a well-orchestrated withdrawal to draw in the smaller Roman force. Meanwhile, the Romans viewed the Parthian withdrawal as a sign of actual weakness and, thus, made a miscalculated pursuit of an undefeated enemy. By the time Publius realized his mistake, it was too late.

Before we continue with our analysis of Publius' charge, we should note the affect that the sudden change in Parthian tactics had on Crassus' larger force. Plutarch records,

After ordering his son to charge the Parthians and receiving tidings that the enemy were routed to a great distance and hotly pursued, and after noticing also that his own immediate opponents were no longer pressing him so hard (since most of them had streamed away to where Publius was), he recovered a little courage, and drawing his troops together, posted them for safety on sloping ground, in immediate expectation that his son would return from the pursuit.<sup>53</sup>

Thus, Crassus also did not recognize that the Parthians were conducting a tactical maneuver to isolate Publius. Roman messengers observed the Parthians withdrawing and, therefore, reported that the Parthians had routed and that Publius was victorious. This false sense of accomplishment further lulled the main Roman army into making tactical mistakes. Instead of moving to aid Publius, Crassus reformed his forces and awaited his son's return. By breaking off their attacks on Crassus' main line and by streaming away to Publius' forward position, the Parthian trap was complete.

Thus, the Battle of Carrhae illustrates, first, how the Parthians used the Parthian Shot tactic as a preliminary tactic to draw the enemy into battle and, second, how they utilized it to facilitate the successful implementation of the Parthian feigned retreat tactic. The Parthians generally followed this approach to war on the tactical and strategic levels because the ultimate objective of the Parthians' mode of warfare was to breakup and isolate enemy formations so that

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<sup>53</sup> Plut. *Crass.* 26.1

they could defeat them in detail. The Parthians did not have the military resources or organization to overwhelm enemies by direct force, and therefore, they developed a mode of warfare that, in a nontraditional way, emphasized the splitting up of a superior enemy force in order to attack and destroy smaller enemy units in sequence by bringing overwhelming force to bear upon them. The feigned retreat tactic was ideal for this mode of warfare because it encouraged the enemy to over pursue and become vulnerable to counterattack. The Parthians' development of their unique mode of warfare by the 230s BCE allowed them to avoid disadvantageous climactic battles on numerous occasions over the next two centuries against the full force of enemy armies, of which the Battle of Carrhae is an ideal example.

Publius quickly realized that he had made a critical mistake once the Parthians began to wheel around and renew their attack. Plutarch states,

Then the Romans halted, supposing that the enemy would come to close quarters with them, since they were so few in number. But the Parthians stationed their mail-clad horsemen [that is. the cataphracts] in front of the Romans, and then with the rest of their cavalry in loose array rode round them, tearing up the surface of the ground, and raising from the depths great heaps of sand which fell in limitless showers of dust, so that the Romans could neither see clearly nor speak plainly, but, being crowded into a narrow compass and falling upon one another, were shot, and died no easy nor even speedy death... Thus many died, and the survivors also were incapacitated for fighting.<sup>54</sup>

Once again, the Parthians emphasized psychological warfare when they intentionally clouded the air with dust to blind the Romans.<sup>55</sup> In a short time, Publius found himself isolated and increasingly vulnerable as the Parthians who had feigned flight and the Parthians who had left Crassus' main force closed on Publius' men. In this passage we also begin to see how the

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<sup>54</sup> Id. 25.3-6.

<sup>55</sup> Dio records, "The heat and thirst (it was midsummer and this action took place at noon) and the dust, of which the barbarians raised as much as possible by all riding around them, told fearfully upon the survivors, and many succumbed from these causes, even though unwounded." Dio 40.23.4



Parthian cataphracts factored into the feigned retreat tactic, acting here as a pinning force to protect the horse archers and to keep Publius' cavalry in place so the horse archers could surround and confuse the Romans. If Publius tried to break out of this closing trap, the cataphracts could counterattack. Plutarch continues,

Publius himself, accordingly, cheered on his cavalry, made a vigorous charge with them, and closed with the enemy. But his struggle was an unequal one both offensively and defensively, for his thrusting was done with small and feeble spears against breastplates of raw hide and steel, whereas the thrusts of the enemy [cataphracts] were made with pikes against the lightly equipped and unprotected bodies of the Gauls.<sup>56</sup>

Thus, Publius' Gallic light cavalry, although swift and skilled, ultimately was no match for the heavily armed and armored Parthian cataphracts within the confined space of the Parthian trap.<sup>57</sup> Once again, the Romans had lost the initiative in the battle. While the horse archers harassed the enemy with missiles, the cataphracts used their shock force to devastate the disintegrating enemy formation with well-timed counter charges.

Moreover, once the Parthian feigned retreat tactic had accomplished the task of isolating Publius' smaller force, the Parthians were free to reapply their Parthian Shot tactic once the remaining Romans had formed a defensive position on a small hill.<sup>58</sup> Plutarch relates,

But here [on the small hill], where the inequality of the ground raised one man above another, and lifted every man who was behind another into greater prominence, there was no such thing as escape, but they were all alike hit with arrows, bewailing their inglorious and ineffectual death.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Plut. *Crass*

<sup>57</sup> Id. 25.7-9.

<sup>58</sup> Id. 25.9-10.

<sup>59</sup> Id. 25.10.

Unable to breakout against the Parthian heavy cavalry, the small Roman force again became the target of the horse archers and their aggressive maneuvering. Plutarch records that Publius refused to abandon his men but abandon hope of victory, stating,

Then he himself [Publius], being unable to use his hand, which had been pierced through with an arrow, presented his side to his shield-bearer and ordered him to strike home with his sword. In like manner also Censorinus is said to have died; but Megabacchus took his own life, and so did the other most notable men. The survivors fought on until the Parthians mounted the hill and transfixed them with their long spears, and they say that not more than five hundred were taken alive. Then the Parthians cut off the head of Publius, and rode off at once to attack Crassus.<sup>60</sup>

Thus, the Parthian Shot tactic weakened the enemy sufficiently to the point that the cataphracts moved in for the *coup de grâce*.<sup>61</sup> In the second phase of the battle, the Parthians had implemented their asymmetric mode of warfare to perfection.

Meanwhile, the Parthians returned to their emphasis on psychological warfare by taking the head of Crassus' son back to the main Roman force. In fact, the entire process of the Parthians' unique mode of warfare was meant to inflict severe psychological agony upon an

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<sup>60</sup> Id. 25.11-12.

<sup>61</sup> Dio describes a similar scene of the effect of Parthian psychological warfare and of the Parthians coordinating the assaults of their cataphracts and horse archers to control and devastate the Roman defensive formation. He records, "For if they [the Romans] decided to lock shields for the purpose of avoiding the arrows by the closeness of their array, the pikemen [that is, the cataphracts] were upon them with a rush, striking down some, and at least scattering the others; and if they extended their ranks to avoid this, they would be struck with the arrows. Hereupon many died from fright at the very charge of the pikemen, and many perished hemmed in by the horsemen. Others were knocked over by the pikes or were carried off transfixed. The missiles falling thick upon them from all sides at once struck down many by a mortal blow, rendered many useless for battle, and caused distress to all. They flew into their eyes and pierced their hands and all the other parts of their body and, penetrating their armor, deprived them of their protection and compelled them to expose themselves to each new missile. Thus, while a man was guarding against arrows or pulling out one that had stuck fast he received more wounds, one after another. Consequently it was impracticable for them to move, and impracticable to remain at rest. Neither course afforded them safety but each was fraught with destruction, the one because it was out of their power, and the other because they were then more easily wounded." Dio 40.22.2-5

enemy force through perceived reversals of fortune as a result of Parthian aerial superiority and ambushes.<sup>62</sup> Not only had the Parthians successfully destroyed a vital portion of the Roman army after seemingly routing, but also the death and disfigurement of Publius was an important factor in the battle.

With great difficulty a messenger warned Crassus of the deteriorating position of his son, and Plutarch states, “Crassus was a prey to many conflicting emotions, and no longer looked at anything with calm judgement. His fear for the whole army drove him to refuse, and at the same time his yearning love for his son impelled him to grant assistance; but at last he began to move his forces forward.”<sup>63</sup> Although Plutarch again likely exaggerates the situation to censure Crassus for giving into passion over reason, he hints at the toll that the Parthians’ psychological warfare was beginning to take on the Romans. Plutarch then records that the Parthian army suddenly returned “with clamor and battle cries which made them more fearful than ever, and again many of their drums began bellowing about the Romans, who awaited the beginning of a second battle.”<sup>64</sup> Thus, the Parthians immediately returned to their distinctive emphasis on surprise and sensory deprivation. Plutarch continues,

Besides, those of the enemy who carried the head of Publius fixed high upon a spear, rode close up and displayed it, scornfully asking after his parents and family, for surely, they said, it was not possible that Crassus, most base and cowardly of men, should be the father of a son so noble and of such splendid valor. This spectacle shattered and unstrung the spirits of the Romans more than all the rest of their terrible experiences, and they were all filled, not with a passion for revenge, as was to have been expected, but with shuddering and trembling.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Note the later situation of Antony and his army as the psychological warfare of the Parthians took its toll. Plut. *Ant.* 39.5-50.1

<sup>63</sup> Id. *Crass.* 26.2-3

<sup>64</sup> Id. 26.3.

<sup>65</sup> Id. 26.4.

Here again the emphasis on Crassus' cowardice indicates that Plutarch exaggerates this scene; however, he captures the serious consequences of Parthian psychological warfare. The destruction of Publius' force, the terrifying appearance and noise of the Parthians, and the dismemberment of Publius' body devastated Roman morale. The Romans went from thinking the battle was over and victory was assured to the visceral realization that, not only were the Parthians ready to renew the fight, but they had obliterated Publius and his men. Ultimately, the unique Parthian mode of warfare afforded this psychological advantage to the Parthians. Their feigned retreat tactic had inspired overconfidence, hubris, and a false sense of security in the Romans that shattered once the Parthians renewed their attacks with voracity.

In a rare example of Plutarch praising Crassus, he writes that Crassus "showed more brilliant qualities in that awful hour than ever before" as Crassus tried to encourage his men and accept blame for the unfolding disaster.<sup>66</sup> However, Plutarch continues, "Even as he spoke such words of encouragement, Crassus saw that not many of his men listened with any eagerness, but when he also bade them raise the battle cry, he discovered how despondent his army was, so weak, feeble, and uneven was the shout they made, while that which came from the Barbarians was clear and bold."<sup>67</sup> Thus, Crassus' efforts to accept blame for the defeat, to remind his soldiers of their need for revenge, and to encourage them with tales of Roman valor in battle all failed to overcome their fear and despair.<sup>68</sup> The Parthians had had the advantage of retaining the initiative for most of the battle, and their successful implementation of their mode of warfare bolstered their morale or fighting spirit. Meanwhile, various Parthian psychological tactics had nearly broken the spirit of the Roman army. By devastating the morale of enemy forces through

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<sup>66</sup> Id. 26.5-6.

<sup>67</sup> Id. 27.1.

<sup>68</sup> Id. 26.5-6.

their unique approach to warfare, the Parthians on numerous occasions were able to overcome larger, more professional armies.<sup>69</sup>

Plutarch concludes his depiction of the Battle of Carrhae with a description of how the Parthians renewed their attack on the Roman main line.<sup>70</sup> He states,

Then, as the enemy got to work, their light cavalry rode round on the flanks of the Romans and shot them with arrows, while the mail-clad horsemen in front, plying their long spears, kept driving them together into a narrow space, except those who, to escape death from the arrows, made bold to rush desperately upon their foes. These did little damage, but met with a speedy death from great and fatal wounds, since the spear that the Parthians thrust into the horses was heavy with steel, and often had impetus enough to pierce through two men at once. After fighting in this manner until night came on, the Parthians withdrew.<sup>71</sup>

With Crassus' larger force isolated and largely immobile, the Parthians returned to their Parthian Shot tactic. The vulnerability of the Roman formation meant the horse archers could deliver their fire continually with devastating effect. Moreover, since the Romans lacked a large cavalry force and since the Parthians used their cataphracts to protect their horse arches and to exploit Roman breakouts and gaps, Crassus' army became entirely pinned down.<sup>72</sup> Coordinated cataphract charges packed the Roman soldiers into dense formations that became ideal targets for the horse archers. Only darkness saved the Roman army from total destruction on that day.

The Battle of Carrhae is an exemplary example of the Parthian "feigned retreat, defeat in detail" mode of warfare on the battlefield. Plutarch records that Crassus lost 30,000 men and his

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<sup>69</sup> Dio argues that the Romans tried to avenge Publius' death but that the numbers and tactics of the Parthians overwhelmed them. Dio 40.22.1

<sup>70</sup> Dio includes an account of Abgarus of Osroene betraying Crassus and assaulting the rear of the Roman lines. Id. 40.23.1-2. Plutarch makes no mention of such an event. It is highly likely that Dio, writing a century later, here adds a fictional situation into the battle narrative. Sampson 2015: 136.

<sup>71</sup> Plut. *Crass.* 27.1-2

<sup>72</sup> Dio offers a similar conclusion. Dio 40.23.3-24.3

life over the course of the battle and the subsequent retreat back to Syria.<sup>73</sup> However, although Carrhae is the most well-known and best documented Parthian victory in their entire history, the Parthian tactics used at the battle of Carrhae were not atypical; rather, they were part of a mode of warfare, which had become a tried and true military tradition that the Parthians had developed and implemented for almost two centuries.

The depiction of the Battle of Carrhae in Plutarch and Dio is our most detailed illustration of the micro or tactical implementation of the unique Parthian mode of warfare; however, surviving depictions of the Parthian conflicts with the Seleucids indicate that the Parthians also applied this mode of warfare to the macro or strategic level of their military operations.<sup>74</sup> Consistently when the Parthians were faced with a superior force invading their lands, they would aggressively harass the enemy with asymmetric warfare in the hope of forcing the enemy to make mistakes during its advance that might create an opportunity for the Parthians to exploit. If that initial aggressive strategy did not work or was not applicable, the Parthians would turn to a feigned retreat strategy that saw them deceptively withdrawal deep into their territory in the

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<sup>73</sup> Plut. *Crass.* 27.2-31. See also Dio 40.25-7. Plutarch concludes his negative portrayal of Crassus by giving Crassus credit that he at least died with some dignity. Plut. *Nic. and Crass.* 5.2; id. *Pomp.* 76.6

<sup>74</sup> We shall discuss the macro or strategic level of the Parthian mode of warfare in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. Note that Florus provides a good example of the strategic level of the Parthian mode of warfare implemented against the Romans in his account of Mark Antony's failed invasion of Parthia. He states, "But such was the exceeding vanity of the man [Antony] that, in his desire for fresh titles of honor, he longed to have the Araxes and Euphrates inscribed beneath his statues, and, without any pretext or design and without even a pretended declaration of war, just as if it were part of the art of generalship to attack by stealth, he left Syria and made a sudden attack upon the Parthians. The Parthians, who were crafty as well as confident in their arms, pretended to be panic-stricken and to fly across the plains. Antonius immediately followed them, thinking that he had already won the day, when suddenly a not very large force of the enemy unexpectedly burst forth, like a storm of rain, upon his troops in the evening when they were weary of marching, and overwhelmed two legions with showers of arrows from all sides." Florus 2.20.2-3. See also Dio 49.24-9

hope of encouraging the enemy to make a dangerous blunder during a mistaken pursuit that also might create an opportunity for the Parthians to exploit.<sup>75</sup>

Thus, if we consider the anabasis of Seleucus II within the context of the Parthians' asymmetric mode of warfare, it becomes clear that Arsaces' withdrawal into the Central Asian steppe was a calculated, strategic maneuver to trick Seleucus into thinking the Parthians were defeated and to force Seleucus into an ill-advised, overaggressive advance and possible military blunder, rather than an unorganized rout. When Arsaces' early efforts failed to produce an opportunity to exploit a weakness in Seleucus' army, the Parthians implemented a strategic feigned retreat in order to attempt to divide the strength and objectives of Seleucus II's superior army. This is the first but certainly not the last example of the Parthians utilizing calculated,

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<sup>75</sup> Some might wonder if Parthian "feigned retreats" at the macro or strategic level could simple be *real* retreats. A real retreat is not a surrender or a defeat; it can be part of a policy of strategic withdrawal, the main intent of which is to preserve one's forces and to reengage later under circumstances that are more favorable. However, first, the Parthian style of retreat is unique in western warfare during this period. Ancient armies traditionally sought out climactic decisive battles with face-to-face strength of arms; however, the Parthians did not. This helps explain the confusion and frustration of Seleucid and Roman armies in their conflicts with the Parthians. The calculated patience of the Parthians does not lend itself well to the category of real retreat in comparison to contemporary militaries. Second, it is clear from the source material that the Parthians wanted their enemies to assume that they were not only retreating but also fleeing. The Parthians went through great difficulties to implement a system of organized chaos. They wanted to give off the impression of disorder and weakness while maintaining strict discipline and awareness to capitalize on opportunities. That is, the Parthians feigned weakness outside of the micro (tactical) level to gain similar results at the macro (strategic) level. The Parthians were feigning to abandon important territory; they were not *really* abandoning it. They ultimately wanted to lure their enemy into a trap. Three, as this study hopes to demonstrate, there is enough evidence to suggest that Parthian retreats were not random. They all seem to follow a similar formula. I believe this stems from the unique Parthian mode of warfare. As discussed above, the Parthians separated their Parthian Shot tactic from their feigned retreat tactic on the battlefield. They did the same on campaign except at the macro level this mode of warfare could be implemented over many months and over hundreds of miles. The distinction between the Parthian execution of feigned retreat strategy instead of the Parthians simply retreating may seem minor but it remains important.

strategic feigned retreats to mislead enemies into assuming Parthian weakness and to encourage overconfident invaders into strategic mistakes.

The Parthian army had the mobility and the flexibility to avoid enemy armies until those armies became vulnerable after underestimating the actual military capabilities of the Parthians. The strategic feigned retreat was vital to this plan and created valuable military opportunities, at which point the Parthians finally struck at their enemies with an overwhelming counterattack. Thus, the unique Parthian mode of warfare was equally deceptive and effective on tactical and strategic levels. In fact, the rapid growth of the Parthian state in the 230s and beyond allowed the Parthians to make the strategic level of their mode of warfare generally more effective because they had more territory in which to operate and deceive the enemy.

Arsaces knew that Seleucus could not maintain a static campaign in the Farther East for an extended period. Tensions with his brother, Antiochus Hierax, remained considerable and a renewal of the civil war was looming.<sup>76</sup> Meanwhile, Seleucus also wanted to campaign against Diodotus II while he was in the East. Thus, Arsaces could afford to be cautious and wait for Seleucus to leave Parthia or make a military mistake.

Arsaces' use of the Parthian strategic feigned retreat proved successful. Although the details are unknown and results much debated, after the initial withdrawal of the Parthians, they defeated the Seleucids in battle and perhaps even captured Seleucus II sometime in the latter half of the 230s BCE.<sup>77</sup> The primary evidence supporting the conclusion that Arsaces also captured Seleucus after his victory is a brief account in Athenaeus. He states, "And in his [Poseidonius'] eleventh book [perhaps sixteenth book], speaking of Seleucus [II] the king, and relating how he

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<sup>76</sup> In fact, Justin states that Seleucus abandoned his eastern campaign to counter new disturbances in the West. Id. 41.5.1. Antiochus Hierax ruled from Asia Minor.

<sup>77</sup> Justin 41.4.9-10



came against Media, and warred against Arsaces [I], but was taken prisoner by the barbarian, and how he remained a long time in captivity to Arsaces, being treated like a king by him.”<sup>78</sup> Some scholars discount this passage by arguing that Athenaeus and Posidonius here mistake Seleucus II for Demetrius II, whom the Parthians later captured, or for *a Seleucus*, son of Antiochus VII.<sup>79</sup> However, it is highly unlikely that Seleucus II conducted two expeditions against the Parthians as some scholars maintain, and it is clear that Seleucus, after initial success, suffered a considerable defeat in the East. Thus, we should reject arguments that Seleucus II launched two eastern expeditions, one that succeeded and another that failed.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, Seleucus’ adopted personal image and coinage perhaps also supports the conclusion that the Parthians held him in captivity, at least briefly. Seleucus adopted the epithet, *Pogon* (“bearded”), and he and Demetrius II produced coinage portraying themselves with a full beard in the Parthian manner.<sup>81</sup> Therefore, it is possible that Seleucus and Demetrius adopted this custom because of their captivities rather than as a mark of major victory over the Parthians, which they did not gain, or as an attempt to associate themselves with Zeus, as Antiochus IV later did. Note that Seleucus also adopted the epithet, *Callinicus* (“gloriously triumphant”); however, this title celebrated his victory over his

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<sup>78</sup> Ath. 4.153a-b; Posid. 16 (F. H. G. III.258). Note also Ammianus Marcellinus and John Malalas, who mistakenly confuse Seleucus II with Seleucus I, Amm. Mar. 23.6.3; Jo. Mal. 8.198. Ammianus records, “After many glorious and valiant deeds, and after he [Arsaces I] had conquered Seleucus [I] Nicator [in reality, Seleucus II], successor of the said Alexander, on whom his many victories had conferred that surname, and had driven out the Macedonian garrisons [that is, the Seleucid garrisons remaining in the region], he passed his life in quiet peace, and was a mild ruler and judge of his subjects.”

<sup>79</sup> For Demetrius’ capture, which admittedly bears several similarities, see Diod. 33-5; Appian Syr. 11.67. Note also Kidd 1988: 303.

<sup>80</sup> See Schippman 1980: 22ff.; Wolski 1996: 182-3; Lerner 1999: 36-7.

<sup>81</sup> For Seleucus adopting the epithet, *Pogon*, see Polyb. 2.71.4. For Seleucus’ bearded coinage, see Newell 1938: 135, 200-3; id. 1941: 64.

brother, not the Parthians.<sup>82</sup> Although the capture of Seleucus by the Parthians is possible and should not be rejected out of hand, it is undeniable that the Parthians under Arsaces' guidance gained a significant military victory over the Seleucids.

The sudden reversal of Seleucus' fortune and the swiftness of his defeat makes it likely that he made a military or logistical error and left his army vulnerable. Perhaps he found himself too spread out over the vast Iranian plateau or too isolated on his way to Bactria.<sup>83</sup> The distinctive Parthian mode of warfare hinged upon exploiting self-inflicted enemy weaknesses, and therefore, we can posit that Seleucus had made himself vulnerable enough to allow the Parthians to counterattack.

Seleucus II's defeat and possible capture had enormous geopolitical ramifications.<sup>84</sup> The reputation of the already reeling Seleucid state was damaged considerably and the prestige of the Seleucid king significantly diminished. The military defeat against the Parthians paired with the possible shameful capture of the Seleucid king severely threatened Seleucid stability in the West and further weakened Seleucid authority, encouraging other regions like Persis, Elymais, and Media Atropatene to challenge Seleucid hegemony and helping cause another cycle of civil wars.<sup>85</sup> Further, Seleucus' failures in the East left Mesopotamia and Syria vulnerable. Power relations within the Eastern Mediterranean interstate system established by the 236 BCE truce with Antiochus no longer reflected the realities of power distribution across that system of states.

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<sup>82</sup> Lerner 1999: 37. For those who argue that Seleucus was a Parthian captive, see Froelich 1744: 30-1, 66; Clinton 1881: 311-13; Cunningham 1884: 113-14; Eckhel 1888: 218; Head 1911: 639; Lerner 1999: 35. For those who attempt to reject this argument, see Visconti 1808: 298-9; Babelon 1890: lxx; Newell 1938: 135, 200-3; Newell 1941: 64; Will 1979: 311-13; Kidd 1988: 304.

<sup>83</sup> Wolski and Lerner argue that Diodotus II sent troops to aid Arsaces in the battle. Wolski 1996: 182-3; Lerner 1999: 36.

<sup>84</sup> Lerouge unfairly belittles the Parthian struggle against Seleucus. Lerouge 2007: 274.

<sup>85</sup> Grainger 2015: 20, 56. For Elymais under the Seleucids, note Dąbrowa 2004 [2005].

As mentioned above, according to Realist theory, power relations are continually fluid, and the defeat and capture of Seleucus drastically reduced the perceived power of the Seleucid Empire. This helps explain from a system-level analysis why Antiochus Hierax renewed the war against Seleucus II in 229/228 BCE with the invasion of Syria and Mesopotamia.<sup>86</sup>

Meanwhile, in the East it reassured and reinforced the tripolar structure of the new Eastern system.<sup>87</sup> It also helped solidify Parthian power and Arsaces' regional influence.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, it allowed Arsaces to establish a solid economic and military foundation that his successors continued to develop over the next century.<sup>89</sup>

The defeat and possible capture of Seleucus appears to have led to the establishment of formal and recognized independence for Parthia and Bactria.<sup>90</sup> Justin records, "The Parthians observe the day on which it [victory over Seleucus II] was gained with great solemnity, as the date of the commencement of their liberty."<sup>91</sup> By defeating Seleucus the Parthians and Bactrians had reassured their independence in direct opposition to the Seleucid state; however, they would have desired formal recognition of their independence by the Seleucids to enhance the legitimacy of their rule. The defeat and possible captivity of Seleucus gave them an ideal opportunity to request formal recognition.

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<sup>86</sup> Justin 41.5.1. See also Lerner 1999: 37.

<sup>87</sup> Overtoom 2016: 2, 4-5, 9, 15-16.

<sup>88</sup> In fact, Justin compares Arsaces' military success to Cyrus the Great and Alexander the Great, each of whom capitalized on hegemonic war during a power-transition crisis. Justin 41.5.1-6

<sup>89</sup> Note Olbrycht: 1998), 51-76; id. 2010a: 229. Arsaces expanded his army in part by creating new pasturelands for his cavalry and recruiting the sedentary, indigenous population into the Parthian ranks. Id. 2003: 74-5.

<sup>90</sup> In this I agree with Lerner's conclusions. Lerner 1999: 36-7. See also Schippmann 1980: 22ff.; Wolski 1996: 182.

<sup>91</sup> Justin 41.4.10

It appears that Seleucus conducted his anabasis over an extended period in the late 230s BCE, perhaps long enough to grow his iconic large beard in the Parthian style, and his long absence and eventual defeat encouraged his brother, Antiochus Hierax, to renew the civil war in the West and invade Mesopotamia.<sup>92</sup> This created a desperate situation for Seleucus in the Farther East. If he remained at war with the Parthians and Bactrians, he could lose the western portion of the empire to his aggressive brother. Thus, after his military defeat in the Farther East, Seleucus needed to come to terms with Arsaces and Diodotus. By recognizing the Parthians and Bactrians' rights to rule independently in the Farther East, Seleucus could avoid a two front war, deter further expansion by the Parthians and Bactrians against Seleucid lands, and pursue the war against his brother in the West. After his defeat against the Parthians, Seleucus had little choice, especially if he was a prisoner of war. To this point, Lerner argues, "There is also nothing to preclude the possibility that one of the conditions for Seleucus' release was his formal recognition of the sovereignty of Arsaces I and that of Diodotus II."<sup>93</sup> If Seleucus had in fact become a Parthian prisoner, it is hard to imagine that Arsaces would have released Seleucus without such reassurances. Yet Seleucus' defeat in the Farther East and the renewal of civil war in the West was enough on its own to make the recognition of Parthia and Bactria as independent kingdoms necessary, and it reflected the geopolitical realities of the Farther East. With Arsaces' victory and the renewed hostility of Antiochus Heirax, Seleucus had no hope of reestablishing Seleucid hegemony over the Farther East until he had stabilized the West once again. Seleucus did not abandon the possibility of future eastern campaigns, but the focus of the empire was in

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<sup>92</sup> For Seleucus adopting the epithet *Pogon* ("bearded"), see Polyb. 2.71.4. Justin states that "new disturbances" recalled Seleucus from his anabasis, which provided Arsaces with the opportunity to settle his government, strengthen his kingdom, and expand his army. Justin 41.5.1

<sup>93</sup> Lerner 1999: 36.

the West, and he renewed civil war against Antiochus took precedence.<sup>94</sup> It would fall to Seleucus' son to avenge Seleucus' failures in the East.

Yet even after forming an alliance with Bactria and defeating the Seleucids in battle, Arsaces still understood the dangers of the international environment and the potential strength of his neighbors. Once Seleucus returned to the West to fight his brother, Arsaces immediately set into motion power-maximizing policies. Justin records,

Respite being thus given to Arsaces, he settled the Parthian government, levied soldiers, built fortresses, and strengthened his towns. He founded a city also, called Dara, in Mount Zapaortenon, of which the situation is such, that no place can be more secure or more pleasant; for it is so encircled with steep rocks, that the strength of its position needs no defenders; and such is the fertility of the adjacent soil, that it is stored with its own produce. Such too is the plenty of springs and wood that it is amply supplied with streams of water, and abounds with all the pleasures of the hunt. Thus Arsaces, having at once acquired and established a kingdom, and having become no less memorable among the Parthians than Cyrus among the Persians, Alexander among the Macedonians, or Romulus among the Romans, died at a mature old age; and the Parthians paid this honor to his memory, that they called all their kings thenceforward by the name of Arsaces.<sup>95</sup>

These actions by Arsaces were a continuation of his earlier policy to strengthen the security of his state when he seized Hyrcania and enlarged his army.<sup>96</sup> Despite the recent victory against the

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<sup>94</sup> Justin states that Seleucus and Antiochus Hierax could not put aside their differences to face outside threats to the empire, but rather "leaving their foreign enemies unmolested, continued the war for the destruction of each other." Justin 27.3.6

<sup>95</sup> Justin 41.5.1-6. See also Strabo 15.1.36. It is significant that a Roman writer compared Arsaces to Cyrus the Great and, most importantly, Alexander the Great. With the rise of the Parthians, made possible in large part by the exploits of Arsaces, the Romans eventually found themselves locked in a longstanding hegemonic struggle with a rival state. Parthia became the recognized rival power of Rome by the end of the first century BCE. Justin's connection of Parthia to the great powers of Cyrus' Persian Empire and Alexander's Macedonian Empire was an indirect attempt to make the Roman inability to subjugate Parthia more palatable.

<sup>96</sup> Id. 41.4.8. Arsaces established the solid economic and military foundation that his successors continued to develop. Olbrycht 1998b: 51-76; Olbrycht 2010a: 229. He expanded his army in part by creating new pasture lands for his cavalry and recruiting the sedentary, indigenous population into the Parthian ranks. Olbrycht 2003: 74-5.

Seleucids, Parthian power in the Farther East was fragile.<sup>97</sup> The Seleucid threat had been defeated but not destroyed. Moreover, Bactria, although at present an ally, was a potential rival in the Farther East that could return to its former hostility. Meanwhile, the uncertainty and volatility of the Central Asian steppe meant that nomadic raids or invasions remained a constant threat. The pressures of the interstate anarchy in the new Eastern system made complacency dangerous, and therefore, Arsaces spent the rest of his reign securing his new kingdom. Thus, Arsaces spent the rest of his reign securing his new kingdom. Ammianus Marcellinus tells us,

[After Arsaces] had driven out the Macedonian [Seleucid] garrisons, he passed his life in quiet peace, and was a mild ruler and judge of his subjects. Finally, after all the neighboring lands had been brought under his rule, by force, by regard for justice, or by fear, and he had filled Persia with cities, with fortified camps, and with strongholds, and to all the neighboring peoples, which she [the Parthian state] had previously feared, he had made her a constant cause of dread, he died a peaceful death in middle life.<sup>98</sup>

Meanwhile, Photius in his summary of Arrian's *Parthica* records that Arsaces drove out the Seleucid garrisons, set up his government, and established a powerful state.<sup>99</sup> Again, we see the importance of the perception of power in ancient international relations and an emphasis on the creation of state stability and security. Arsaces had proved himself an adept military leader and founding ruler. Part of creating that security was driving out Seleucid garrisons, although perhaps this is a reference to Seleucus II removing the garrisons in agreement with his recognition of Parthian sovereignty after his anabasis had failed. The Parthians wanted to secure their future by making themselves a power to be dreaded.

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<sup>97</sup> Rawlinson's conclusion that after the Parthians defeated Seleucus II "they had nothing to fear" and were assured of their strength "to preserve their freedom" is incorrect. Rawlinson 1885 (2002): 28, 33.

<sup>98</sup> Amm. Mar. 23.6.3-4

<sup>99</sup> Photius *Bib.* 58. For Arsaces I's titulature and concept of government, note Olbrycht 2013.

Fear was an important aspect of ancient geopolitical interaction between states. The uncertainty of power relations and power capabilities in interstate politics meant that fear of neighboring states and the use of fear to project power was common in ancient interstate systems.<sup>100</sup> One of Arsaces' power-maximizing policies was to establish a fearful reputation for the Parthians. In so doing he enhanced the perceived power of Parthia in the region. Thus, because of the harsh realities of the Eastern system, it should not surprise us that Arsaces solidified his government, strengthened his army, and fortified his new kingdom with eagerness.

Within a generation the diligent efforts of Arsaces were put to the test against the largest threat the Parthian Kingdom had yet faced. Despite the crisis and the failure of Seleucus in the East, the Seleucid Empire remained a potentially powerful, aggressive, and wealthy state.<sup>101</sup> For example, the Seleucid army went on campaign every year, either fighting internal or external enemies or using show of force to maintain power relations with neighboring states.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, the Seleucid kings established an administration system to maximize the states' ability to collect tax revenues to run the government and pay the army.<sup>103</sup> Antiochus III came to the Seleucid throne after his father died suddenly in 226 BCE and soldiers assassinated his elder

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<sup>100</sup> For the prominent role of fear in the decision making of Greek states, see esp. Thuc. 1.23.6, 88. For more information, see the discussion of Thucydides and the roots of Realism in Classical Antiquity in the Introduction. For an example of the prominent role of fear and hatred in ancient warfare, see Vell. Pat. 1.12. For examples of the power of fear in antiquity, especially under a system of multipolar anarchy, see Eckstein 2006: 22 *et passim*; Eckstein 2012: 9 *et passim*. See also Wheeler 2002: 288.

<sup>101</sup> We should reject Grainger's bleak and unfair opinion that "the Seleukid kingdom appeared in 222 to be as complete a political failure as Alexander's." Grainger 2014: 213. Such a stance is far too dismissive of the considerable geopolitical accomplishments of Alexander and the early Seleucid kings.

<sup>102</sup> In fact, Antiochus III was the longest reigning Seleucid king and only experienced at most four years of peace. Id. 2015: 82.

<sup>103</sup> See esp. Aperghis 2004; id. 2011. Note also Houghton and Lorber 2002. It cost about 7,000-8,000 talents a year to support the Seleucid field army of 70,000-80,000 soldiers. Grainger 2015: 60-1.

brother, Seleucus III, in 223 BCE.<sup>104</sup> Antiochus used these considerable funds to raise an army of 70,000 men to subdue the Farther East.<sup>105</sup> He would restore Seleucid hegemony over the Eastern system briefly. Although the Seleucid Empire came to play an important role in the growth of the separate Mediterranean and Eastern systems during and after Antiochus III's reign, the systems continued to develop independently of one another.<sup>106</sup> Rome and Parthia ultimately came to divide the lands of the Seleucid Empire between them; however, in the late third century BCE Antiochus III brought Seleucid power to its pinnacle.<sup>107</sup> In the face of his attacks, Parthia confronted the real possibility of total destruction. The Parthians would have to try to survive the Seleucid backlash.

The sudden death of Antiochus' father and the murder of his brother drastically damaged the reputation of the Seleucid dynasty and the perceived power of the state. The Seleucids had lost control of the Farther East, and dynastic weakness threatened to create a further power-transition crisis. The perceived weakness of the Seleucid state led to two more satraps in the East revolting against Seleucid authority. Much like the earlier rebellions of Andragoras and

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<sup>104</sup> Appian *Syr.* 11.66. Assar has argued recently that the death of Seleucus II occurred in 225/4 BCE and the death of Seleucus III occurred in 222 BCE. Assar 2007.

<sup>105</sup> For the figures for Antiochus' army, see Taylor 2013: 72; Grainger 2015: 60-3. See also Bar Kochba 1979: 10; Justin 41.5.7.

<sup>106</sup> A good demonstration of this separation between the geopolitical developments in the West and those in the East is the fact that all of our surviving sources view events in Syria and Babylonia as separated from one another in this period. Note Grainger 2013a: 179. That is, the western focus of the Seleucid state in Syria, first, was part of the Eastern Mediterranean system and, second, became part of the larger Mediterranean system dominated by Rome. The geopolitical developments and state interactions in the East, especially those of Parthia, had no direct connection to the Mediterranean system. They belonged to a separate Eastern system that was only indirectly affected by western developments.

<sup>107</sup> At the height of his power, Antiochus III ruled over nearly 1.5 million square miles of territory. His army at its height was around 120,000 soldiers strong. He also collected roughly 600 tons of silver bullion in annual revenues. Aperghis 2004: 57, 201, 251. See also Strootman 2011; Taylor 2013: 1.



Diodotus, in 222 BCE the satrap Molon seized the opportunity to declare himself independent in Media, while his brother Alexander declared independence in Persia.<sup>108</sup> Media, located in western Iran, was one of the most important satrapies in the Seleucid Empire. Control of the region provided control of several of the important passes through the Zagros Mountains.<sup>109</sup> The region allowed direct access to the Farther East and was the last eastern defense of the vulnerable, yet valuable Mesopotamian valley. The Seleucid Empire could not hope to protect Mesopotamia or reclaim the Farther East without control of Media. In fact, the region was so important to the empire that its satraps often held the title of governor of the Upper Satrapies, which gave them wide-ranging administrative and military powers in the East and, in a military sense, made them second in command to the king.<sup>110</sup> The rebellion of Molon further illustrates the importance of perceived power and the fragility and fluidity of power relations in the ancient world. Polybius emphasizes the power that Molon wielded and the fear that he inspired. He records,

Molon therefore being master of the country, which might rank as a kingdom, was already, as I said sufficiently formidable owing to his superior power; but now that the royal generals, as it seemed, had retired from the field before him, and that his own troops were in high spirits, owing to their expectation of success having been so far fulfilled, he seemed absolutely terrible and irresistible to all the inhabitants of Asia.<sup>111</sup>

The dangers of the interstate anarchy were severe, and unlike Andragoras, Diodotus, or Arsaces, Molon aggressively conducted hegemonic war against the Seleucid state. His rebellion was not

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<sup>108</sup> For recent accounts of the revolt of Molon and the war against Antiochus, see Taylor 2013: Ch. 2; Grainger 2015: Ch. 1.

<sup>109</sup> There perhaps were two main routes into the Farther East. The first was in the north via Hyrcania, and the second looped south of Hyrcania. This has led some scholars to argue that the Parthian state did not cut off Seleucid access to the Farther East until the middle of the second century BCE. See Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993: 73, 79, 84-5, 89, 110, 223.

<sup>110</sup> For a recent survey of the Upper Satrapies, esp. under the Seleucids, see Plischke 2014: 22-172.

<sup>111</sup> Polyb. 5.45.1-2

aimed only at regional independence; rather, Molon also wanted to subdue the Seleucid Empire by defeating Antiochus III in battle. At the height of Molon's rebellion, his command included control over much of modern day Iraq and Iran. The seriousness of Molon's threat to the security of the Seleucid state and to the reputation of the king forced Antiochus to act against him with force. Fortunately for the Seleucid state, in 220 BCE Antiochus decisively defeated Molon in Mesopotamia. Antiochus' victory allowed him to recover the center of his empire.

It appears that eastern conquest interested Antiochus from the beginning of his reign. After he reclaimed Babylonia, Media, and Persia with the defeat of Molon, he invaded a small region in modern northwest Iran named Media Atropatene and forced its king to become his vassal.<sup>112</sup> Although Antiochus spent most of the 210s BCE fighting western wars of expansion, he seems never to have lost his desire to avenge his father's failed eastern campaign.<sup>113</sup> By fighting Ptolemy IV to a stalemate in the Fourth Syrian War (219-218 BCE) and reclaiming large sections of Asia Minor, Antiochus had secured his western lands and freed himself to take an army of around 70,000 men on an anabasis.<sup>114</sup> Antiochus had personal reasons for campaigning in the East, especially seeking glory and enhanced prestige; however, there were pressing geopolitical reasons as well. An anabasis was necessary to punish Parthia and Bactria for

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<sup>112</sup> Id. 5.55.1-10. Taylor notes that this created "an important precedent for future deals with breakaway kingdoms." Taylor 2013: 35.

<sup>113</sup> The Seleucids maintained a primarily western focus in their geopolitical activities. They were one of the three major powers in the Eastern Mediterranean system, and efforts against the Hellenistic and Greek states took precedence over eastern concerns. Kosmin 2013; Plischke 2014: 315-34. This disconnect between the Seleucids and eastern affairs helps explain the emergence of a separate Eastern system after the power-transition crisis of the 240s BCE.

<sup>114</sup> For Antiochus III in the Fourth Syrian War and in particular Asia Minor, see Ma 2000; Grainger 2015: Ch. 2-3, 5, 7, 10. For wide-ranging scholarly opinions on why Antiochus undertook the anabasis, see Rostovtzeff 1941: i 459; Schmitt 1964: 86-90; Will 1982: 51ff.; Bernard 1985: 85-95; Narain 1989: 397-8; Green 1990: 295; Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993: Ch. 7; Lerner 1999: 52; Taylor 2013: 72; Plischke 2014: 265-75; Grainger 2015: 56-7.

damaging the reputation of the Seleucid dynasty and the perceived power of the Seleucid state. Further, the power-maximizing policies of the Parthians and Bactrians made them an increasing threat to the Seleucid state.<sup>115</sup> In 212 BCE he forced Armenia to become a client kingdom of the Seleucid Empire and then readied his army to conduct a hegemonic war to reestablish Seleucid hegemony in the East.<sup>116</sup>

Unfortunately, we have almost no substantial evidence of the geopolitical developments in the Farther East between Seleucus II's humiliating defeat and Antiochus III's invasion; however, because of the pressures of the interstate anarchy and the tendency of all states to act similarly under those pressures, it is likely that Parthia and Bactria continued to pursue power-maximizing policies regionally. In fact, there is reason to believe that, after the immediate threat of the Seleucid invasion had dissipated with the defeat of Seleucus II, Parthia and Bactria returned to their previously hostile relationship. The two states had formed an alliance in the face of Seleucid aggression in the 230s BCE; however, no such military alliance remained when Antiochus III invaded the East. Lerner hypothesizes that over this twenty-year period diplomatic relations between the two states had deteriorated to the point that "political hostilities between Parthia and Bactria had reignited and that the situation was similar to what had existed between Arsaces I and Diodotus I."<sup>117</sup> If so, this is yet another example of the pressures of the interstate system pushing states to adopt and maintain a constantly bellicose posture.

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<sup>115</sup> Sherwin-White and Kuhrt contend that scholars have overrated Parthian power at this time and maintain that the Parthians recognized Seleucid suzerainty. Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993: 197. However, their minimalist portrayal of the Parthians and the perceived threat that they posed to the Seleucids is unconvincing. It is hard to imagine why Antiochus would conduct such an extensive anabasis if the regional powers that had emerged in the Farther East because of the power-transition crisis in the 240s BCE already recognized Seleucid suzerainty and posed no serious threat to the Seleucid state.

<sup>116</sup> Polyb. 8.23. Note Grainger 2015: 57-9.

<sup>117</sup> Lerner 1999: 42.

Parthia and Bactria had formed an alliance out of necessity to balance against Seleucid aggression. However, once the Parthians defeated the Seleucid army and forced Seleucus to abandon his anabasis, the Seleucids were no longer an immediate threat to either power. Moreover, Parthia became a major regional power and increasingly a potential rival to Bactria after the Parthians' victory gave a considerable boost to their military prestige and their perceived power. Thus, the rapid expansion of the Parthians, their success in war, and the efforts of Arsaces I to consolidate power were all reasons to make Bactria wary.<sup>118</sup> Conversely, Bactria remained at this time the leading regional power. Hence, the upstart Parthian state had every reason to fear its powerful neighbor. In fact, fear of Bactria and the further deterioration of the relationship with Bactria would have increased with the murder of Diodotus II and the usurpation of the Bactrian throne by the ambitious Euthydemus I.<sup>119</sup>

The alliance between Arsaces I and Diodotus II had been a relationship of necessity, and once the immediate Seleucid threat had passed, tensions between the two states would have quickly reemerged. Added to this were further difficulties like the absence of enforceable international law to mitigate disputes and the nonexistence of permanent embassies or modern diplomacy to facilitate communication and alleviate grievances. Further, treaties made by Hellenistic kings traditionally were agreements between two men, not binding agreements

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<sup>118</sup> Again, we can see the forces of the security dilemma at work. Since geopolitics in antiquity was a zero-sum game, where perceived or actual gains or losses came at the direct expense of neighboring polities, the efforts of one state to seek security through power-maximizing policies or the military successes of one state against a mutual enemy decreased the security of other states in the system.

<sup>119</sup> For the scholarly debate surrounding the usurpation by Euthydemus I and the conclusion that it occurred at the same time as Molon's rebellion, see *id.* 38-41. For a recent account of Euthydemus, see Holt 1999: 126-133. See also Plischke 2014: 276-8. Note also Polyb. 11.34

between two states.<sup>120</sup> Thus, the personalities of various kings could play an important role in diplomacy. In this case Arsaces I and Diodotus II formed an alliance. Once these men had died, the treaty would no longer have been valid without their successors renewing it, of which there is no evidence. Finally, the Parthians had been friendly with Diodotus II. Thus, when Euthydemus I had Diodotus murdered and seized the Bactrian throne at the end of the 220s BCE, the Parthians had good reason to dislike and distrust this usurper. Although the historical record is silent on the geopolitical developments of the next ten years, the failure of Parthia and Bactria to put aside their differences yet again in the face of a major Seleucid invasion speaks to the considerable friction that had developed between the two states in this period. Antiochus III would not face an allied resistance as his father had. He planned to take full advantage of the disunity of the eastern kings and isolate them one by one against his army.<sup>121</sup> The inability of Parthia and Bactria to cooperate gave Antiochus the opportunity he needed to reclaim the Farther East.

After a year of organizing his soldiers and supplies in Babylonia, Antiochus III began his eastern expedition by entering Media in 210 BCE.<sup>122</sup> His first objective was to secure the money he needed to fund his anabasis. Therefore, he looted about 4,000 talents gold and silver from the temple of Aene in Ecbatana.<sup>123</sup> With this money, Antiochus could direct his full attention against his first target, the reconquest of Hyrcania and Parthia.<sup>124</sup> Yet Antiochus remembered his father's failure and understood the potential danger of his anabasis. The health and ability of the king were indispensable for Hellenistic monarchies. The Seleucids especially relied on competent,

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<sup>120</sup> The Parthian kings appear to have followed a similar arrangement. See Dąbrowa 2010; Grainger 2013a: 65-7; id. 2015: 70, 78-81, 190, 193-5.

<sup>121</sup> Grainger 2015: 66.

<sup>122</sup> Id. 60-3.

<sup>123</sup> Id. 63-4.

<sup>124</sup> Holleaux 1930: 140; Walbank 1967: ii 231-2; Koshelenko 1976: 33-4; Lerner 1999: 45.

charismatic kings to hold together their disparate empire. When the king was weak or died suddenly, as occurred during the power-transition crisis of the 240-230s BCE, the empire suffered considerable losses. These risks worried Antiochus, and therefore, he secured the succession in 209 BCE just before invading Parthia by raising his son Antiochus the Younger to co-ruler so that he and his mother could help manage the court and empire in the West while he fought in the East.<sup>125</sup>

When Antiochus entered Parthia, almost immediately the Parthians implemented their unique mode of warfare. As they had done in the war against Seleucus II, the Parthians avoided a major confrontation with Antiochus by continually withdrawing into their realm.<sup>126</sup> Generally, the innovative Parthian mode of warfare was successful because the conventional armies of the Seleucids and Romans did not fully understand its strategic or tactical purpose.<sup>127</sup> For example, Polybius states,

Here [Hecatompylus] he [Antiochus] gave his army a rest, and now came to the conclusion that had Arsaces [II] been able to risk a battle he would not have withdrawn from his own country and could not have chosen a place more favorable to his army for the struggle than the neighborhood of Hecatompylus. It was evident then to anyone who gave proper consideration to the matter that as he was retreating he had other intentions. Antiochus therefore decided to advance into Hyrcania.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Grainger 2015: 66-7.

<sup>126</sup> They abandoned their new capital, Hecatompylus, and withdrew northwest into Hyrcania. Polyb. 10.28.6-7. See also Appian *Syr.* 9.57

<sup>127</sup> Justin had access to contemporary knowledge of Roman military disasters against the Parthians in the latter half of the first century BCE because he was summarizing the Augustan Age work of Pompeius Trogus. Thus, Justin relates the main characteristics of the Parthians' unique mode of warfare from a tactical standpoint. Justin 41.2.7-9. However, in his narrative he does not recognize the distinction between the Parthian Shot tactic and the feigned retreat tactic in battle. He also fails to recognize that the Parthians implement their distinctive mode of warfare at the strategic level.

<sup>128</sup> Polyb. 10.29.1-2

Thus, Antiochus expected the Parthians to fight in the traditional manner of defending their well-placed capital. He failed to recognize the purpose of the Parthian withdrawal. Further Polybius' account does not recognize that the Parthians were conducting a deliberate military strategy to draw the Seleucids into a trap. The ambiguity of Polybius' remark, "it was evident then to anyone who gave proper consideration to the matter that as he was retreating he had other intentions," illustrates that no Greek statesmen or leaders fully understood the true intentions of the Parthian strategic feigned retreat.

Therefore, because of its uniqueness and deception, the Parthian "feigned retreat, defeat in detail" mode of warfare, if executed correctly, was one of their greatest strategic weapons and military advantages. It allowed the Parthians to use their numerically inferior, lightly armed army to outmaneuver larger, better-equipped enemy forces. The Parthians did not have to risk climactic battles by traditional methods; rather, they could draw an overly enthusiastic enemy into poor terrain and wait until an advantageous moment arose to spring their trap. The Parthians had implemented the strategy to perfection against Seleucus II; however, the Parthian implementation of the strategy in the hegemonic conflict against Antiochus III had four key faults.

First, the Parthian strategic feigned retreat was politically and militarily risky since the Parthians willingly abandoned resources and positions of power. In essence, they abandoned the short-term security of their state for potential long-term results. The Parthians had spent years fortifying their kingdom but decided against siege defense, which could have worn down Antiochus' army like the later siege of Bactra-Zariaspa, in favor of the potential benefits of ambushing the Seleucid army using the strategic feigned retreat. Notice that in the above

Polybian passage Antiochus thought it was a military blunder that the Parthians had abandoned their well-positioned capital.

Second, a strategic feigned retreat could drastically diminish one's perceived power if not executed correctly. Notice also that in the above passage Polybius and Antiochus assume Parthian weakness because of their unwillingness to defend Hecatompylus. In the ancient world, perceived power and reputation were fundamental to deterring outside aggression. Hence, the Parthian feigned retreat at the macro level was a dangerous gamble because it could give the appearance of weakness to enemies and allies. Talented and decisive leadership was necessary to overcome these considerable geopolitical risks. The success of the Parthian mode of warfare hinged on the Parthian commander's ability to create military opportunity, to identify it, and to seize it. Moreover, the commander had to be able to hold together the loyalty and confidence of his soldiers in the face of abandoning territory and wealth to an enemy without a fight. Arsaces I had been a battle hardened, charismatic leader. Therefore, it is not surprising that he successfully implemented asymmetric Parthian warfare against Seleucus II; however, his son and successor Arsaces II proved to be militarily and politically inadequate against the more determined and capable Antiochus III.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> This portrayal of Arsaces II is at odds with Justin's, who describes him as a man who "fought with the greatest of bravery against Antiochus." Justin 41.5.7. However, Polybius' more thorough and more contemporary depiction of Arsaces II is generally negative and should be preferred. There is much confusion surrounding the identity and reigns of the early Parthian rulers. For example, in a new study about Antiochus III's war against Parthia, Grainger, despite citing a recent, well-argued work by Assar, states that Tiridates, the son of Arsaces I became the second Parthian king. Grainger 2015: 65. However, it is now fairly clear that Tiridates was Arsaces I's brother and never ruled. See Assar 2004; id. 2005a. Note Photius' summary of Arrian's *Parthica*, Photius *Bib.* 58. For the uncertainty surrounding the identity of Arsaces II and the conclusion that Justin's Artabanus in *Prologue* 41 is in fact Arsaces II, see Assar 2008; Assar 2009a. For the old numbering system that identified Arsaces II as Artabanus I and the later Artabanus as Artabanus II, see Foy-Vaillant 1725: 16; von Gutschmid 1888: 36 n.4, 81; Rawlinson 1873: 54; Debevoise 1938: 16. Kahrstedt 1950: 11 n.1; Bivar 1983: 31; Lukonin



After his father, Arsaces I, died of old age, Arsaces II became king in 211 BCE only one year before Antiochus' anabasis.<sup>130</sup> From the beginning of the campaign, Arsaces II made critical mistakes. He blundered in his efforts to cut off the water supply while Antiochus crossed the deserts of northern Iran with his massive army.<sup>131</sup> He miscalculated his efforts to obstruct and ambush the Seleucid army as it marched north.<sup>132</sup> He then allowed himself to be outflanked in the first major engagement of the campaign.<sup>133</sup> Finally, part of his army became trapped in a town called Sirynx and surrendered.<sup>134</sup> Arsaces II not only failed to mitigate the potential damage that the strategic feigned retreat did to his perceived power; he compounded it by continually making critical mistakes in his efforts to halt the Seleucid advance.

Third, the Parthians underestimated the determination and abilities of Antiochus III. Antiochus was a more competent and capable leader than his father. His focused aggression against the Parthians allowed him to gain the initiative in the campaign. He did not become distracted after his initial success in Parthia; instead, he pursued Arsaces II immediately into Hyrcania. Moreover, he avoided making his army vulnerable by keeping it well supplied and rested, and he expertly used his light infantry to screen his march to avoid Parthian traps.<sup>135</sup> Finally, Antiochus was careful not to rush his advance through difficult terrain.<sup>136</sup> Ultimately, he

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1983: 687f.; Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993: 198. For the more recent numbering system that correctly removes the association of Arsaces II with Artabanus I and therefore names Artabanus, Artabanus I, see Wolski 1962: 138ff.; Schmitt 1964: 62 n.2, 63; Le Rider 1965: 313ff.; Bengtson 1969: 417; Altheim and Stiehl 1970: 445ff.; Volkmann 1972: 533-4; Lerner 1999: 26-8; Assar 2005a.

<sup>130</sup> Assar 2005a: 29-35.

<sup>131</sup> Polyb. 10.28.5-6

<sup>132</sup> Id. 10.30.3-5.

<sup>133</sup> Id. 10.31.2-3.

<sup>134</sup> Id. 10.31.6-13.

<sup>135</sup> Id. 10.28.56; 29.1, 3-6.

<sup>136</sup> Id. 10.31.1.

never presented the Parthians with the opportunity they needed to counterattack against a vulnerable section of his army. Without recognizing it Antiochus nullified the Parthians' preferred mode of warfare in Hyrcania. The good leadership of Antiochus and the failures of Arsaces II meant that the Seleucids subdued the Parthians and kept them from continuing their strategic feigned retreat Farther East or north.

Fourth, the loss of Bactria and the nomadic tribes of Central Asia as allies was a considerable flaw in the Parthian strategy. In the war against Seleucus II, the alliance between Parthia and Bactria had served to balance Seleucid power. The two states fought the Seleucids as a unified front. It is possible that Diodotus II sent troops to aid Arsaces I in his battle against Seleucus II.<sup>137</sup> In the second war, Parthia and Bactria had to face Antiochus separately. This was a major advantage for the Seleucids since they could focus on subjugating Parthia without fear of Bactrian aggression. This allowed Antiochus to pursue Arsaces II immediately into Hyrcania after occupying Parthia. In the first war, Seleucus could not ignore Bactria. It is plausible that, misunderstanding the purpose of the Parthians' unique mode of warfare, Seleucus too viewed Arsaces I's withdrawal to the north as a sign of weakness. This could have led Seleucus to believe that the Parthians were no longer a threat. It is possible that he then turned his attention to his invasion of Bactria, and it would have been during his advance toward Bactria that Seleucus exposed the flanks of his army to Arsaces' decisive counterattack.<sup>138</sup> That is, the

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<sup>137</sup> See Lerner 1999: 35.

<sup>138</sup> If Diodotus II supplied troops for the attack on Seleucus II, then it is even more likely that the battle would have occurred near Diodotus' lands, perhaps in Aria. Sherwin-White and Kuhrt maintain that the Seleucids did not lose control of Aria, and therefore, Seleucus did not campaign there. Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993: 80. However, Seleucus did not have to campaign in Aria to be ambushed there. He could have been moving through Seleucid territory in Aria on his way to Bactria with the false sense that he had already defeated the Parthians, at which point a combined Parthian/Bactrian force descended upon him.

Parthian alliance with Bactria would have forced Seleucus to split his attention. We know that his anabasis ended in disaster sometime in between his invasions of Parthia and Bactria.

Therefore, it is plausible to argue that the threat of Bactrian forces as Parthian allies divided Seleucus' attention, which eventually created the crucial military mistake that lost him the war.

Further, in the first war Arsaces I withdrew northeast into the lands of his nomadic allies in the Central Asian steppe; however, Arsaces II withdrew northwest into Hyrcania. Lerner argues that the efforts of the Parthians to fortify their domain for decades had isolated them from their nomadic allies.<sup>139</sup> That is, the power-maximizing policies of the Parthians to strengthen the defenses of their kingdom had perpetuated the security dilemma in the region and had driven a wedge between Parthia and its nomadic allies. The diligent efforts of the Parthians to expand state security in turn threatened the security of their neighbors, alienating their former allies on the steppe. Thus, unlike Arsaces I, Arsaces II was unable to take advantage of the vast Central Asian steppe to bide his time, waiting for a Seleucid mistake. Without Bactrian allies to the east or nomadic allies to the north, Arsaces II chose to withdraw into Hyrcania. This move severely limited the range of movement of the Parthian army. Arsaces' army became confined in the mountainous region and eventually was forced to fight a conventional battle against the Seleucids to Antiochus' advantage.<sup>140</sup> It is possible that the Parthian retreat into Hyrcania was yet another military blunder by Arsaces; however, it also seems likely that the previous success of the Parthians and the threat they posed to neighboring states had left them isolated in this hegemonic conflict with the Seleucid Empire.

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<sup>139</sup> Id. 46.

<sup>140</sup> Polyb. 10.31.2-4

Unfortunately, the details of Antiochus' campaign against the Parthians after the capture of Sirynx have not survived. Arsaces II avoided total destruction at the cost of submitting to Seleucid suzerainty as a client ally.<sup>141</sup> Antiochus reclaimed much of Parthia and Hyrcania south of the Kopet Dagh mountain range for the empire and left Arsaces in command of the mountainous terrain that separated the empire from the Central Asian steppe.<sup>142</sup> The result of the war for the Parthians was a devastating reversal of fortune caused by the failures of their king. The Parthians had been humiliated, and they would remain a marginal power until the replacement of Arsaces II by his first cousin once removed, Phriapatius, who became Arsaces III.<sup>143</sup>

Meanwhile, the initial result of the war for the Seleucids was mostly positive. Antiochus did not have the time nor the resources to subdue the Parthians completely. He still had a war to fight against Bactria, and the security of the western portion of the empire was always in jeopardy. His defeat of the Parthians had avenged the failure of his father; he had regained the best portions of Parthia for the empire, which included the many improvements that Arsaces had made; and he had forced the Parthians to accept Seleucid hegemony. It is unrealistic to expect that Antiochus could have accomplished anything more. He had won his hegemonic war against

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<sup>141</sup> Justin 41.5.7. Note Grainger 2015: 69-70. It appears that the Seleucid army first employed the heavily armed Parthian cataphract under Antiochus III. These heavy cavalry became a staple of the Seleucid army in the West. Nikonorov 1994; id. 1995; id. 1998b; Mielczarek 1998; Olbrycht 2003: 94-6. Thus, it is likely that part of Arsaces II's peace settlement with Antiochus III included the Parthians supplying Antiochus with cataphracts, like the Bactrians later had to supply him with elephants. See Polyb. 11.34.10

<sup>142</sup> See Taylor 2013: 77; Grainger 2015: 68-9.

<sup>143</sup> For the recent argument that Arsaces II's reign lasted until 185 BCE, see Assar 2005a: 35-6. For the complicated and much debated reconstruction of the early Arsacid dynasty, see Lerner 1999: 26-8; Assar 2005a. See also esp. Koshelenko 1976: 33-4; Frye 1984: 209; Gardiner-Garden 1987: 15; Wolski 1993: 14, 62-5, 146; Wolski 1996: 170ff; Lerner 1999: 26-8, 42; Assar 2000; Assar 2004; Assar 2006c. On Phriapatius, see Karras-Klapproth 1988: 152-3; Assar 2004; id. 2005a.

Parthia and set the development of the Parthian state back a generation.<sup>144</sup> Yet the long-term results of the war were indecisive. The power of the Seleucid state revolved around the power of the central government, namely the king. Once Antiochus left the Farther East to return to Syria in 205/204 BCE, Seleucid power and authority in eastern Iran waned. Under Phriapatius and his sons, Parthia would reemerge to destroy Seleucid hegemony over the Eastern system and dominate the Farther East.

### The Kingdom of Bactria in the Eastern System

Although the geopolitical developments of Parthia are the focus of this chapter, the important role that the Kingdom of Bactria played in the Eastern system and its influential international relations in the region means that the geopolitical developments of Bactria in this period also deserve brief attention.<sup>145</sup> The Kingdom of Bactria under the Diodoti encompassed much of modern day Afghanistan. After the power-transition crisis of the 240s BCE, Bactria emerged as the most powerful state in the Farther East. The rapid expansion of the Parthians created an ongoing regional rivalry with Bactria. By 210 BCE that rivalry had escalated to the point that the Parthians and Bactrians failed to renew their alliance against the Seleucids. This left both regional powers vulnerable to the overwhelming force of Antiochus III's invasion.

The mounting tension between Bactria and Parthia was a consequence of the interstate system of anarchy in the East. The power-maximizing policies of the Parthians to expand and secure their new kingdom threatened the security and power of Bactria. The two sides had not fought a war against one another since the middle 240s BCE, when Diodotus I had repulsed

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<sup>144</sup> Taylor 2013: 78.

<sup>145</sup> For a superbly written recent account of the historiography of Hellenistic Bactria and the importance of numismatics to our evolving understanding of its history and archaeology, see Holt 2012.

Arsaces I's invasion of Margiana. Diodotus soon after declared independence from the Seleucid Empire, and his expansive territory became one of the leading powers in the new multipolar anarchy in the Eastern system. Diodotus' defeat of Arsaces meant that Bactria had established itself through open hostilities as superior in its power relationship with the Parni. However, Arsaces' subsequent conquests of Parthia and Hyrcania had established the Parthian Kingdom, and his continued efforts to strengthen his new realm increased Parthian power considerably. The power relation that Diodotus had forged with the Parni in the 240s BCE no longer reflected the geopolitical realities of Parthian power capabilities in the 230s BCE. Therefore, the true power balance in the Farther East was uncertain and tension began to mount between these two states.

Under a system of interstate anarchy, states view the expansion of the security of neighboring states as a potential threat and are forced to follow their own power-maximizing policies to counteract the advances of neighbors.<sup>146</sup> The result is increased tension between states in the interstate system, which makes hostility and war increasingly likely. A similar process occurred in the Eastern system in the second half of the third century BCE. The sudden rise of Parthian power under Arsaces I would have made Diodotus I uneasy. Parthia and Bactria began to compete for security and power in the Farther East. The sudden death of Diodotus I, paired with the imminent threat of Seleucus II's anabasis in the late 230s BCE, delayed a renewal of open hostilities between the Bactrians and Parthians and resulted in an alliance. Yet by 210 BCE the situation had deteriorated considerably, no alliance remained, and competition had renewed.

A factor in the inability of Parthia and Bactria to put aside their differences to counter the imminent threat of Antiochus III was the murder of Parthia's former ally Diodotus II and the

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<sup>146</sup> Thus, we see that Lerner's argument that Arsaces' success in Parthia pushed Diodotus further toward formal independence is based in the geopolitical realities of the interstate anarchy. Lerner 1999: 30.

usurpation of his throne by Euthydemus I. His successful rebellion and usurpation demonstrates the difficulties that the kings of Bactria faced in trying to hold together their disparate kingdom and the weakness of Diodotus II's regime. In fact, it appears that Diodotus lost control of the lands north of the Gissar Mountains south of the Jaxartes River to nomadic invaders.<sup>147</sup>

However, Euthydemus I was not weak. He was a charismatic, ambitious leader who gained the support of local aristocrats in Sogdiana, modern day northern Afghanistan, and seized the Bactrian throne in ca. 221 BCE.<sup>148</sup> Over the next decade, he consolidated his authority over his new kingdom, building a large army, and fortifying his frontiers.<sup>149</sup> Euthydemus amassed an impressive force of around 10,000 cavalry, many of whom were from the Bactrian aristocracy.<sup>150</sup> He had learned the value of a strong cavalry wing and strategic frontier fortresses during his efforts to repulse nomadic incursions in Sogdiana.<sup>151</sup> He also maintained an infantry force large enough and loyal enough to withstand a two-year siege during Antiochus III's invasion of his kingdom. It is a testament to the success of Euthydemus' policies and regime that he was able to retain the support of the local Bactrian aristocracy and his Greek troops during his intense conflict with Antiochus.<sup>152</sup> Thus, Euthydemus came to rule over an extensive and prosperous

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<sup>147</sup> Grainger 2015: 65.

<sup>148</sup> There is considerable controversy over the position that Euthydemus held under Diodotus II. See Lerner 1999: 83-4. See also Tod 1827: 321f.; Droysen 1878: ii 366; Cunningham 1884: 134; Grousset 1929: 53; Vallée-Poussin 1930: 233; Zabelina 1949: 101-2; Tarn 1951: 73-5; Masson 1955: 42-3; Narain 1957: 19; Smith 1979: 6-13; Holt 1999: 126-7. Lerner's conclusion that Euthydemus was the satrap of Sogdiana, who declared himself king of the country with the support of local aristocrats seems probable. Lerner 1999: 63-84.

<sup>149</sup> Holt is correct to reject the modern depiction of Euthydemus as an "impotent Seleucid loyalist." Holt 1999: 127.

<sup>150</sup> Lerner 1999: 50. See also Tarn 1951: 82, 102, 124-5; Simonetta 1960: 52-62; Grainger 2015: 70.

<sup>151</sup> Holt 1981: 34-5.

<sup>152</sup> Holt 1999: 128 n.7.

region, to command a sizable military, and to have the support of the local aristocracy.<sup>153</sup> In the 210s BCE Euthydemus again made Bactria the rival of Parthia in the Farther East.

By the end of the decade, open conflict between Parthia and Bactria was becoming increasingly likely; however, Antiochus' anabasis derailed any military confrontation. Arsaces II had his hands full with the Seleucid invasion. Before long, his army was defeated and his kingdom drastically reduced. The submission of Parthia under Seleucid suzerainty would not have upset the Bactrians. Lerner states, "Thus Antiochus III must have been perceived from the Bactrian point of view as a mixed blessing: while he diminished any possible threat from Parthia, he himself was considered an outsider and his expedition into Bactria was that of a foreign invader, rather than the country's legitimate sovereign."<sup>154</sup> That is, the tension and uncertainty between Bactria and Parthia had grown so great by 210 BCE that the Bactrians viewed the Parthians as a more immediate and dangerous threat. This was a result of the pressures of the interstate system and helps explain why the two polities did not reform their alliance. The suppression of Parthian power meant that Bactria no longer had a regional rival. If Bactria could defeat Antiochus, it stood to gain regional hegemony over the Farther East. Had Antiochus failed in Bactria, a system of bipolarity in the Eastern system, with the Seleucids dominating the West and the Bactrians dominating the East, could have emerged. Yet the submission of Parthia also left Bactria isolated against Antiochus' massive army. Bactria faced potential destruction, which would have firmly reinstated Seleucid hegemony. Hence, the stakes in this hegemonic war were

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<sup>153</sup> Justin tells us that there were a thousand cities in Bactria alone. Justin 41.4.5. The Bactrian Kingdom included Bactria, Sogdiana, Margiana, and possibly Aria at this time. See Lerner 1999: 48-50. For the vibrancy of civilization in Bactria for centuries, see Leriche 2007.

<sup>154</sup> Lerner 1999: 51.



high, and yet Euthydemus I appears initially to have been confident in the strength of his position. He did not back down from the challenge.

In 208 BCE Antiochus invaded Euthydemus' kingdom.<sup>155</sup> The two sides fought a bloody battle along the Arius River, where Antiochus was wounded severely in the mouth, but his superior tactics allowed him eventually to rout the Bactrian cavalry.<sup>156</sup> Euthydemus then fled with the remainder of his army to his fortress capital, Bactra-Zariaspa.<sup>157</sup> If we are to accept Polybius' account, Euthydemus was "terror-stricken" at the loss of his cavalry.<sup>158</sup> Whatever confidence he possessed of winning the war in the field at the beginning of the campaign, he had lost. Note that, although a large portion of his army was horsemen, he did not employ a tactical or strategic policy similar to the Parthians' FDRR mode of warfare. Indeed one of the major strengths of his kingdom was his nearly impregnable capital city, and so he decided to risk all in its defense.

For two years, Antiochus conducted a spectacular siege of Bactra-Zariaspa but was unable to take the city by force.<sup>159</sup> Finally, in 206 BCE Antiochus and Euthydemus came to terms and ended the war. In exchange for Antiochus officially recognizing Euthydemus as king

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<sup>155</sup> For Polybius' account of the expedition, see Polyb. 10.49, 11.34. See also Walbank 1967: ii 264-5, 312-16; Will 1979: 305ff.; Will 1982: 22, 51-4, 58-61. For a recent account of the campaign, see Taylor 2013: 79-86.

<sup>156</sup> Polyb. 10.49.1-14. For the debate over the location of the battle, see Lerner 1999: 47-8. See also Wilson 1841: 221; Cunningham 1884: 139-40; Tarn 1951: 89, 114-15; Walbank 1967: ii 265; Holt 1988: 23-4; Grainger 2015: 70.

<sup>157</sup> Polyb. 10.49.15. For Bactra-Zariaspa, see P'yankov 1982; Masson 1985: 250ff.; Holt 1988: 11ff.

<sup>158</sup> For the argument that the Bactrian cavalry was a mixture of Greek and native elements and that their tactics were more suited to nomadic warfare, see Lerner 1999: 50-1. See also Nikonorov 1992; Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993: 56; Nikonorov 1997; id. 2013.

<sup>159</sup> Polyb. 29.12.8

of Bactria, Euthydemus agreed to become the client ally of the Seleucid Empire.<sup>160</sup> There are several pressing geopolitical reasons for Antiochus and Euthydemus coming to this peace treaty.

First, for Antiochus it allowed him to resolve an ongoing and draining military endeavor. Ancient sieges were not only costly in materials and men, but the idleness of soldiers could lead to disease or unrest.<sup>161</sup> The siege of Bactra-Zariaspa had dragged along for two years, and Polybius tells us that Euthydemus still had enough excess grain to hand out generous rations to Antiochus' troops after the peace treaty.<sup>162</sup> With no end to the siege in sight, Antiochus needed to make a deal for the welfare of his army. Additionally, Antiochus' campaign was not finished once he subdued Bactria. He planned to invade modern day Pakistan as Alexander the Great once had.<sup>163</sup> The longer the war in Bactria took, the more difficult the rest of his campaign would become logistically. Moreover, Antiochus could not afford to be absent from geopolitical developments in the West for much longer. His anabasis had already spanned five years. Because of the political weakness of Ptolemy IV in Egypt and the military distractions of Philip V in Macedon, Antiochus' western lands remained relatively safe during this period. However, there was no guarantee that this security would last.<sup>164</sup> In fact, immediately following Antiochus' return to the West in 204 BCE, Ptolemaic power rapidly collapsed. Eckstein identifies this collapse as a power-transition crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean system that ultimately brought Rome into hegemonic conflict with Macedon and the Seleucid Empire, resulting in the formation

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<sup>160</sup> Euthydemus provided Antiochus with grain and elephants. Id. 11.34.8-10.

<sup>161</sup> For Greek siege warfare and its limitations, see esp. Kern 1999: Ch. 5-10, Campbell 2006: Ch. 2-5; Strauss 2007: 223-47; de Souza 2007: 434-60; Chaniotis 2013: 438-56. See also Martin 2013: 671-87; Engels 2013: 351-68.

<sup>162</sup> Polyb. 11.34.10

<sup>163</sup> Id. 11.34.11-13.

<sup>164</sup> Grainger argues that Antiochus received frequent reports of political and religious events in the West and maintained his western political and military focus while on campaign in the East. Grainger 2015: 66-7, 71-2, 74-5.

of the expanded Mediterranean interstate system and Roman hegemony.<sup>165</sup> Thus, for Antiochus the peace treaty with Bactria made great logistical, military, and political sense. The submission of Euthydemus as a client king of the Seleucid Empire satisfied Antiochus' desire to avenge the Bactrian revolt and subdue a potential rival to Seleucid power in the East. Antiochus' anabasis tenuously but successfully had established Seleucid hegemony throughout the Eastern system.<sup>166</sup>

Second, a peace treaty was attractive to Euthydemus as well. He received a highly favorable peace because of Antiochus' various needs to end the siege. Although Antiochus could claim ultimate victory, Euthydemus did well for himself in the war. In exchange for client status, which in reality meant little after Antiochus and his army returned to the West, Euthydemus gained the official title of king and the promise of a marriage alliance with Antiochus' family.<sup>167</sup> Euthydemus had been a usurper, and this peace treaty provided him and his budding dynasty with legitimacy in the Bactrian Kingdom.<sup>168</sup> Further, he was left in possession of most of his former lands and did not have to pay any tribute other than supplying Antiochus' army with grain and elephants.<sup>169</sup> Moreover, the peace treaty removed the threat of Antiochus' army from his lands and allowed him once again to focus on consolidating his power regionally. This last point is important since for two years he had been trapped in his capital without any means to exert influence or control over his lands. If Euthydemus had lost the siege, Antiochus might have reabsorbed the region into his empire or replaced Euthydemus as the regional leader. However,

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<sup>165</sup> See esp. Eckstein 2012.

<sup>166</sup> The system of unipolarity that Antiochus established was far less stable and dominant than the one that existed prior to the power-transition crisis in the 240s BCE. Antiochus annexed little territory in the East, and his hold over his new clients was minimal after his return to Syria.

<sup>167</sup> Polyb. 11.34.9

<sup>168</sup> Euthydemus was able to save face and gain political recognition of his kingship on equal terms. Grainger 2015: 71.

<sup>169</sup> Polyb. 11.34.10. It is possible that Antiochus reclaimed Aria and Margiana for the Seleucid Empire. See Grainger 2015: 72.

even if Euthydemus had prevailed in the siege after many years, the disparate Bactrian Kingdom always was vulnerable to internal and external pressures.

Internally, Euthydemus' isolation in his capital and his inability to end the war created opportunities for usurpers in other regions of the kingdom to arise. Euthydemus had been a usurper himself—another reason Antiochus' official recognition of him as king was attractive—and his legitimacy derived directly from his power as a leader and the support of the local aristocracy. His ability to resist the might of Antiochus' army and to secure a favorable treaty enhanced his prestige and allowed him to maintain his authority throughout his kingdom. Externally, the Kingdom of Bactria was a bastion against the warlike nomadic tribes of the Central Asian steppe. These tribes not only presented a considerable threat to the survival of Bactria but also to the security of the entire Iranian plateau. In fact, the only reason that Polybius provides for the peace treaty is the looming threat of nomadic invasions. Polybius states,

After speaking at some length in the same sense he [Euthydemus] begged Teleas to mediate between them [Euthydemus and Antiochus] in a friendly manner and bring about a reconciliation, entreating Antiochus not to grudge him the name and state of king, as if he did not yield to this request, neither of them would be safe. For considerable hordes of Nomads were approaching, and this was not only a grave danger to both of them, but if they consented to admit them, the country would certainly relapse into barbarism. After speaking thus he dispatched Teleas to Antiochus.<sup>170</sup>

Both Euthydemus and Antiochus recognized the vulnerability of Bactria's frontier and the imminent threat of nomadic invasion.<sup>171</sup> In fact, Antiochus had spent the first half of his anabasis suppressing a nomadic tribe that had penetrated the Iranian plateau, the Parthians.

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<sup>170</sup> Id. 11.34.3-6.

<sup>171</sup> The confederation of the Massagetae and the Sacaraucae was the major threat to Euthydemus' kingdom. Tarn 1951: 79-82, 116-17, 291-5; Simonetta 1960: 56-62; Holt 1981: 35ff.; Lerner 1999: 59.

The recent invasion of the Parni, their success in conquering Parthia and Hyrcania, and their ability to destabilize the East would have been on the minds of Antiochus and Euthydemus. Fear of the nomadic threat was enough to bring both men to peace talks. Euthydemus understood that unless he could break the siege of Bactra-Zariaspa his frontiers would be overrun, and he would lose his kingdom regardless of the result of the siege. In this sense he considered the nomadic tribes more of a threat to Bactrian state security than Antiochus. Meanwhile, impending nomadic attacks made the complete destruction of Euthydemus too risky for Antiochus.<sup>172</sup> If Antiochus destroyed the regional power of Bactria, he opened up the entire Iranian plateau to devastating nomadic raids. Antiochus did not want the lands that he had gained recently from the Parthians to be lost immediately to further nomadic invaders. Additionally, nomadic invasions would not have allowed Antiochus to carry on his anabasis and invade Pakistan because his army would have become cut off from the rest of the empire and his supply lines. Finally, the destruction of Bactria would have forced Antiochus to remain in the East even longer to nullify the looming nomadic threat and to stabilize the region. Antiochus could not afford to remain in Bactria fighting nomadic tribes in an extended campaign.<sup>173</sup> The grueling expedition of Alexander the Great to subdue Bactria and Sogdiana was not something that Antiochus wanted to repeat.<sup>174</sup> Therefore, the peace treaty between Antiochus and Euthydemus makes even more sense. Antiochus left a submissive, yet regionally strong client ally to bear the responsibility and

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<sup>172</sup> For a recent rejection of the modern criticisms of Antiochus for not annexing Bactria, see Taylor 2013: 81-2.

<sup>173</sup> Grainger puts forth the idea that, had Antiochus continued the siege, the nomadic tribes might have come to Euthydemus' aid out of fear that Seleucid control of Bactria would be a greater threat to them. Grainger 2015: 71. This makes sense since the Seleucids had been able to act offensively against the nomadic tribes in the 280s BCE, but Bactria without aid from the Seleucid king had been far more restricted militarily in the north.

<sup>174</sup> See esp. Holt 2005; Antela-Bernardez 2014.

cost of repulsing nomadic attacks. Additionally, by recognizing Euthydemus officially as king, Antiochus helped boost his internal authority in Bactria, which was in Antiochus' interest after the peace treaty.<sup>175</sup> Meanwhile, Antiochus had established his dominance over the region but left a Bactrian Kingdom strong enough to defend the eastern border of the Seleucid Empire. Antiochus now was free to finish his anabasis and return to the West without fearing the total collapse of the eastern portion of the empire under barbarian pressures.

Although temporary, Antiochus' actions established Seleucid hegemony over the new Eastern system in the Farther East and protected the directly controlled lands of the empire in Media and Mesopotamia for two generations.<sup>176</sup> Yet despite Antiochus' successful anabasis, the geopolitical developments of the Eastern Mediterranean and new Eastern systems remained separate.<sup>177</sup> He had diminished the power of Parthia and Bactria and forced their kings to become his clients; however, the length and difficulty of his campaign had made the total destruction of the rival kingdoms in the Farther East and the reestablishment of direct Seleucid imperial rule over the region an impossibility. Antiochus had to return to the West to fight further wars against the Ptolemies, Antigonids, and Romans. No Seleucid king returned to the Farther East for sixty

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<sup>175</sup> Grainger 2015: 72.

<sup>176</sup> These regions experienced one of the greatest periods of economic stability from ca. 220-140 BCE in part because of Antiochus' success. Note esp. Boiy 2004. For Hellenistic economies, see Andraeu, Briant, and Descat 1994; id. 1997; id. 2000; Chankowski and Duyrat 2004; Aperghis 2004; Davies 2011; Z. Archibald, J. Davies, and V. Gabrielsen 2011; van der Spek, van Leeuwen, and van Zanden 2014; van der Spek and van Leeuwen 2014. For an overview of the Persian economy, see Stolper 1985; M. Dandamaev and Lukonin 1989; Kuhrt 2010: Chs. 14-16; Waters 2014: Ch.6.

<sup>177</sup> Grainger notes that the Hellenistic world was more settled in 207/206 BCE than it had been following the crisis. Grainger 2015: 74-5. The Greek and Hellenistic states had become more comfortable with the tripolar interstate system around the Eastern Mediterranean.

years, in which time the Parthians and Bactrians recovered their strength and generally acted autonomously within the Farther East.<sup>178</sup>

Thus, Antiochus' anabasis was a hugely impressive military endeavor that won him great prestige, but its long-term effects were minimal.<sup>179</sup> Parthia and Bactria had been defeated but not destroyed. Although Arsaces II and Euthydemus I became the client allies of Antiochus, as soon as Antiochus returned to the West no Seleucid authority remained in the East to maintain this relationship. Parthia and Bactria, although damaged by the expedition, quickly returned to power-maximizing policies that were not in the interest of the Seleucid Empire. However, it would be misguided to blame Antiochus for these long-term shortcomings.<sup>180</sup> It is important to note that his contemporaries viewed Antiochus' anabasis as a resounding triumph. Polybius states, "In a word he put his kingdom in a position of safety, overawing all subject to him by his courage and industry. It was this expedition, in fact, which made him appear worthy of his throne not only to the inhabitants of Asia, but those of Europe likewise."<sup>181</sup> Notice Polybius' emphasis on safety. The primary goal of the expedition was to reestablish Seleucid hegemony in the East through the reduction of the threat that Parthia and Bactria posed to the Seleucid Empire. Antiochus unequivocally accomplished this primary goal, while also gaining glory, respect,

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<sup>178</sup> Sampson is incorrect that the Parthians lived in fear of the Seleucids and, therefore, "kept a deliberately low profile." There also is no evidence that Antiochus III left Seleucid garrisons in the Farther East that he had to remove after his defeat against Rome, allowing the Parthians "to rebuild their own forces and re-establish her independence from Seleucid interference." This reconstruction mistakenly empowers the Romans at the expense of the Parthians. It dubiously tries to connect and exaggerate Roman actions in the 180s BCE to the development of the Hellenistic Middle East and the eventual clash between Rome and Parthia. Sampson 2015: 44-5.

<sup>179</sup> The success of Antiochus' anabasis allowed him to take the royal title *Megas* ('the Great').

<sup>180</sup> For scholars who criticize Antiochus and blame him for the later troubles in the Farther East, see Rawlinson 1885 (2002): 33; Will 1982: 348-53; Green 1990: 295-6; Lerner 1999: 52. To a lesser extent, see Grainger 2015: 194-5.

<sup>181</sup> Polyb. 11.34.15-16

prestige, and revenge.<sup>182</sup> The anabasis was successful in restoring the perceived power of the Seleucid state, although temporarily. It was not until after Antiochus III's sudden death in 187 BCE that Seleucid hegemony in the East again declined.

Thus, the major shortcoming of Antiochus' more forgiving and less direct foreign policy in the Farther East was that once he died, all of his eastern arrangements had to be renewed by his successor by treaty or by force. The competence of the Seleucid king dictated the ability of the state to maintain its hegemony. Without a strong and determined king, the Seleucid Empire faltered, especially in the East. In essence, since the eastern kingdoms had little incentive to submit willingly to the Seleucids and since asking for treaty renewals without a strong position made the Seleucids appear weak, a new, successful anabasis was necessary about once a generation to maintain or reestablish Seleucid hegemony in the East.<sup>183</sup> Thus, it is no surprise that after the power-transition crisis of the 240s BCE there were six attempted anabases by five different Seleucid kings, Seleucus II, Antiochus III, Antiochus IV, Demetrius II, and Antiochus VII.<sup>184</sup>

Yet there was no way for Antiochus to anticipate the future troubles of the Seleucid state. He did not have the time or the resources to reoccupy the Farther East, while expanding Seleucid hegemony in the Eastern Mediterranean system. He needed to make compromises to establish

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<sup>182</sup> Taylor identifies the importance of the "physical exercise of coercive power over native people and their rulers." Taylor 2013: 85. Sherwin-White and Kuhrt contend that Antiochus' eastern expedition was substantive and important. Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993: 190, 200. Antiochus created state security in the East through power and fear; in this sense his hegemonic war was an immediate symbolic and physical success. Grainger criticizes Antiochus for the vulnerability of his treaties but admits that the new sub-kingdoms in the Farther East protected Seleucid lands as a buffer with the nomadic tribes to the north. Grainger 2015: 78.

<sup>183</sup> Grainger 2015: 80-1.

<sup>184</sup> Antiochus III possibly was preparing a second anabasis against Bactria when he died trying to loot the temple of Bel in Elymais in 187 BCE, as he had done previously to the temple of Aene in Ecbatana in 210 BCE. Id. 190-3.



Seleucid hegemony over the Farther East and to protect his Eastern frontier from neighboring states and nomadic tribes. He hoped Parthia and Bactria could still serve as bulwarks against the nomads of the Central Asian steppe with less cost to the Seleucid state. In fact, nomadic attacks became a major threat to the survival of the Kingdom of Bactria, eventually bringing the kingdom to its knees in the 140s BCE.<sup>185</sup> However, there were internal dynastic weaknesses and other external pressures, like a rejuvenated Parthia, that also sapped Bactrian strength.

After the peace treaty with Antiochus, Euthydemus would have had to reconsolidate his authority over his disparate kingdom and secure its frontiers. It is possible that during the siege of Bactra-Zariaspa Euthydemus lost control of Sogdiana and had to campaign to recover it.<sup>186</sup> Yet there is no evidence that he was able to expand his realm beyond its previous borders after Antiochus left.<sup>187</sup> Euthydemus likely spent the rest of his reign securing his frontier defenses against the nomadic tribes in the north and the Parthians in the West as a loyal client of the Seleucid Empire.<sup>188</sup> Despite the looming threat of warlike nomadic tribes, it is uncertain if Antiochus' siege of Bactra-Zariaspa directly encouraged nomadic invasions of Bactria. However, the perceived weakness of Bactria at the end of the third century BCE would have encouraged the militarized, warlike, and aggressive nomadic tribes to expand their security through the acquisition of new land and revenues at the expense of their regional rival. It was the responsibility of Euthydemus to check their advances through the consolidation of the strength of

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<sup>185</sup> See esp. id. 2013a: Ch. 5-6, 11. For the nomadic presence in Central Asia, see Sinor 1990a; Harmatta 1994; Olbrycht 1996; Olbrycht 1998a.

<sup>186</sup> Widemann 1989: 195-7; Bopearachchi 1991-1992: 1, 12-13; Grainger 2013a: 53-4. See also Mitchiner 1973: 26-9.

<sup>187</sup> Will 1962: 107.

<sup>188</sup> Lerner 1999: 59-61. Euthydemus built a wall to protect his northern border. Grainger 2013a: 56. See also Rapin 2007.

his kingdom and possibly open conflict to demonstrate that the power relationship between Bactria and the northern tribes had not changed.

### The Reign of Mithridates I and the Sudden Rise of Parthia

The anabasis of Antiochus III forced the Parthians and Bactrians to accept client status. The territorial losses of Arsaces II and his military blunders had left the Parthian state considerably diminished in power and prestige. Yet Seleucid distractions with western conflicts and a second power-transition crisis, which arose in the 160s BCE, provided Parthia with many opportunities to regain and expand its former strength.<sup>189</sup> Although Arsaces II had been a weak ruler, his successors were highly successful in making Parthia once again a regional power. It was under these men, following the scarring experience of Antiochus' invasion, that Parthia evolved into an unlimited revisionist state.<sup>190</sup> That is, Parthia became determined not only to gain state security but also to alter the international environment drastically by replacing Seleucid hegemony with its own.

The western distractions of the Seleucid Empire and the crumbling of the Bactrian Kingdom meant that Parthia came to dominate the Farther East under the charismatic, ambitious, and determined leadership of Mithridates I in the middle of the second century BCE. As Parthia consolidated its expanding kingdom in the East and became increasingly powerful in the middle of the second century BCE, the perceived power of the Seleucid Empire waned. After the Parthians conquered western Iran and penetrated southern Iraq in the 140s BCE, the Seleucid Empire committed to hegemonic war against the rising Parthian state in the form of Demetrius II's anabasis. However, Demetrius' decisive defeat reinforced Parthian authority, firmly

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<sup>189</sup> Note Dąbrowa 1999 [2000]: 9.

<sup>190</sup> Overtoom 2016: 17.

established a new balance of power between the Seleucids and Parthians, and firmly established bipolarity in the Eastern system.

### Parthia Dominates the Farther East

Unfortunately, after the anabasis of Antiochus III our knowledge of geopolitical developments in Parthia is quite limited until the ascension of Mithridates I to the Parthian throne in ca. 165 BCE.<sup>191</sup> Antiochus' defeat of the Parthians had been more thorough and devastating than his defeat of the Bactrians. Parthia had lost the majority of its land in northeastern Iran in the war, and the prestige of Arsaces II had been damaged severely.<sup>192</sup> For the remainder of his reign, he was a docile client ruler of a marginal kingdom. It took a generation for the Parthians to recover militarily from the war before they once again could expand their territory by force of arms.<sup>193</sup> Meanwhile, Antiochus' invasion had bloodied Bactria but left the kingdom mostly intact. Although Euthydemus had the difficult task of fending off the bellicose nomadic tribes to his north and securing his northern border, at the start of the second century BCE Bactria remained the strongest regional power with the most potential to dominate the Farther East. Yet despite their submission to Seleucid suzerainty, there was no effective way to manage the client kingdoms that Antiochus had created in the East without the physical presence

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<sup>191</sup> The traditional date for Mithridates I's ascension is 171 BCE; however, for recent reevaluations of early Parthian chronology based on new evidence that suggest that he did not become king until 165 BCE, see esp. Assar 2004; Assar 2005a; Assar 2006c. For the usefulness of Moses of Chorene in reconstructing early Parthian chronology, see Assar 2006b.

<sup>192</sup> Scholars Sherwin-White and Kuhrt have a minimalist view of Parthian territorial holdings before the second century BCE. They contend that the Parthian state did not comprise land outside of Turkmenistan until that time. Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993: 88. However, their conclusions have drawn strong criticism. See Olbrycht 2010a: 233.

<sup>193</sup> Phraates I defeated the neighboring Mardians in northern Iran below the Caspian Sea. Justin 41.5.9. See also Isid. 7; Herod. 1.125; Strabo 11.7.1, 8.1, 8.8; Pliny *NH* 6.18.48, .31.134; Curt. 6.5.11-21; Arr. *Anab.* 3.24.1-3

of the king. Therefore, Parthia and Bactria generally acted in their own best interests and with considerable autonomy.

In the middle to late 190s BCE, Euthydemus' son, Demetrius I, became the new king of Bactria.<sup>194</sup> This removed the treaty between the Seleucid Empire and Bactria and Demetrius saw no need to renew it. Like his father, Demetrius was a hugely ambitious man, adopting the titles "Glorious in Victory" and "Invincible."<sup>195</sup> He sought to expand the power of his kingdom through an invasion of modern day southern Afghanistan and northern Pakistan. In northern Afghanistan the efforts of his father to rebuke the nomadic incursions into Sogdiana appear to have been only moderately successful. Demetrius continued his father's efforts against the northern tribes in Sogdiana, but also turned south and occupied Arachosia.<sup>196</sup> The Bactrian occupation of Arachosia was a direct challenge to Seleucid hegemony and Antiochus' authority. It demanded Seleucid retaliation; however, Antiochus was fighting a war against Rome in the West. A campaign against Bactria had to wait until the geopolitical situation in the Mediterranean was settled.

The Roman defeat of Antiochus at Magnesia in 189 BCE was important to power relations within the Mediterranean system; however, scholars still exaggerate its consequences for the Seleucid state as a whole.<sup>197</sup> The losses of men and territory in the war hurt Seleucid strength; however, the potential power of the Seleucid state was considerable. In fact, Antiochus

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<sup>194</sup> The exact year of Euthydemus' death is uncertain, and it could range from 200-190 BCE. See Narain 1989: Appendix 1. Grainger favors the late 190s BCE for his death. See Grainger 2015: 190.

<sup>195</sup> Bernard 2004; Holt 2012: 124; Grainger 190.

<sup>196</sup> Demetrius' coins have been found throughout these regions. Narain 1989: Appendix 2. For Demetrius' occupation of Arachosia, see Holt 2012: 156-7; Grainger 2015: 190-1.

<sup>197</sup> For the battle, note Appian *Syr.* 6.30-6

IV had a standing army of 50,000 men only two decades later.<sup>198</sup> Moreover, Asia Minor had been a source of constant war for the Seleucids and was far less important strategically and financially to the state than Syria and Mesopotamia.<sup>199</sup> Rome had damaged Seleucid power; however, the Seleucid state remained a major player in the Eastern Mediterranean and East for several decades. As this study discusses in detail, it was the Parthians rather than the Romans who damaged Seleucid power irreparably.<sup>200</sup>

The Battle of Magnesia damaged Antiochus' reputation and the perceived strength of the Seleucid state; however, Antiochus remained the most formidable ruler in the East with a wide network of treaties still intact. Thus, Magnesia meant little in the East. Instead, it was Antiochus' sudden death two years later that threatened to unravel the Seleucid Empire.

With the treaty of Apamea between the Romans and Antiochus in 188 BCE, the Seleucids relinquished all territorial rights to the lands beyond the Taurus Mountains.<sup>201</sup> This meant that Antiochus no longer had to concern himself with the volatile geopolitical developments in this region. Instead, he could focus on his rivalry with Ptolemaic Egypt or the attacks of Bactria. His advantageous treaty with Ptolemy V was still in place following the Fifth

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<sup>198</sup> Polyb. 30.25.1-26.9

<sup>199</sup> Grainger 2015: 188-9.

<sup>200</sup> We should reject Matyszak's recent argument that after Magnesia "Seleucid power was irrevocably weakened by defeat" and that "after Magnesia there was little to limit the Parthian state's expansion." Matyszak 2008: xvii-xx. Meanwhile, Gabelko's recent argument that there was an "irreversible weakening of the Seleukid Kingdom after the defeat in the war with Rome" also is an inappropriate exaggeration. Gabelko 2009: 52. Note also Howarth 2013: 30; Sampson 2015: 22, 27-8, 44-5. Gruen was correct when he stated, "A decline in Seleucid fortunes set in rapidly from the middle of the second century, but not as Rome's doing. Rival Hellenic powers outmatched the Syrian kingdom, a succession of ineffective rulers reduced its authority, Jewish rebellion and Parthian resurgence strained its resources, and dynastic strife tore the fabric of the state." Gruen concludes that Antiochus III's defeat against Rome was a setback but "did not erase ambition." Gruen 1984: 671.

<sup>201</sup> Note Appian *Syr.* 7.37-9

Syrian War; however, his treaty with Euthydemus was gone and Demetrius I had acted aggressively against the Seleucid state in recent years. The decision was simple; Antiochus began preparing for a second anabasis.<sup>202</sup>

As he had done before, he left his son and co-ruler, Seleucus, in Antioch to preside over the court and the western territories while he was in the East. He then prepared for his anabasis in Babylonia in 187 BCE, making elaborate ceremonial rituals and sacrifices to emphasize his continued authority at Babylon, Borisippa, and Seleucia.<sup>203</sup> However, unlike his previous anabasis, Antiochus chose to march through Elymais instead of through the more direct route Media. He likely did this for two main reasons. One, the objective of his anabasis was to retaliate against the Bactrian invasion of Arachosia and force Demetrius I to submit to Seleucid hegemony. The path through Elymais allowed a more southerly route with access to Arachosia and Bactria from the south. Two, much like in his first anabasis Antiochus needed a large amount of money to fund the expedition. The path through Media in 210 BCE allowed him to loot the temple of Aene in Ecbatana; however, he could not hope that this temple had restored its treasures in such a short amount of time. Instead, he located a large deposit of gold and silver at the temple of Bel in Elymais and decided to loot this location before continuing on to Arachosia. Antiochus' ill-fated attempt to sack the temple of Bel in Elymais in 187 BCE resulted in his death.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> I support Grainger's conclusion that Demetrius I's seizure of the province of Arachosia, which Antiochus III had probably seized in 206 BCE, was the motivation a second anabasis that ended prematurely with the failed sack of the temple of Bel in Elymais. Grainger 2013a: 67; id. 2015: 190-3.

<sup>203</sup> See Sachs and Hunger 1989: no. -187A. Note also Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993: 216; Grainger 2015: 192.

<sup>204</sup> Diod. 28.3.1, 29.15.1; Strabo 16.1.18; Justin 32.2.1

This more than anything threatened the stability of the Seleucid Empire. With his death, all of Antiochus' hard won treaties disappeared.<sup>205</sup> Seleucus IV back in Syria had to cancel his father's plans to attack Bactria immediately to protect his western lands against Ptolemy V, who was now free to start yet another Syrian war.<sup>206</sup> Thus, the Seleucids never punished Demetrius, encouraging him to continue his campaigns of expansion in the Farther East. Furthermore, Armenia and perhaps Elymais and Persis declared their independence at this time.<sup>207</sup> Finally, the Parthians, who had suffered the most at Antiochus' hands, do not appear to have taken this opportunity to rebel. They apparently were not yet ready politically, financially, and militarily. However, the death of Antiochus allowed them to reassert more of their former autonomy. After losing their right to issue independent coinage after submitting to Antiochus, they resumed the minting of autonomous coinage at this time.<sup>208</sup> Thus, the fragile hegemony of the Seleucid

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<sup>205</sup> In addition, as far as Seleucus IV was concerned, Antiochus' unfavorable treaty with Rome ended, and he stopped making payments of silver to Rome. Grainger 2015: 194.

<sup>206</sup> *Id.* 193.

<sup>207</sup> For Armenia, see *id.* 189-90, 193-4. See also Strabo 11.14.5. For Elymais and Persis, see Rezakhani 2013: 773, 775. Grainger and Rezakhani put forward the suggestion that these rebellions could have occurred after Magnesia; however, Antiochus' lack of determination to invade and subjugate these rebelling regions while he was marching east suggests otherwise. It is highly unlikely that Antiochus would have ignored a rebellion in Armenia before marching east since the conquest of Armenia was the first focus of his first anabasis. Moreover, his movement into the temple of Bel in Elymais with only a handful of soldiers indicates that Elymais was not in open rebellion.

<sup>208</sup> Assar and Bagloo too suggest that the S7 silver and bronze coinage emerged as a direct result of Magnesia. Yet their argument that the new coinage was meant to reinforce Arsaces II's rule and to assure "the Parthians of no further Seleucid assault on their kingdom" works much better if we accept that the Parthians struck the coinage after hearing news of Antiochus' death. Assar and Bagloo place the minting of the coin somewhere in 189-187 BCE. Thus, the death of Antiochus works within that timeframe. Additionally, the coinage more likely was an act of defiance against the new Seleucid king Seleucus IV after the treaty with Antiochus expired with his death. Had Parthia been in open rebellion against Antiochus in 187 BCE, his choice to ignore this and to take the southern route through Elymais rather than the more direct northern route through Media is puzzling. See Assar and Bagloo 2006: 25, 33.

Empire that Antiochus had established in the Farther East began to disintegrate, and multipolar anarchy emerged.

The sudden death of Antiochus and the weakening of Seleucid power in the East helped drive Parthia and Bactria toward expansion. In the 190s and 180s BCE, the geopolitical focus of the Bactrian Kingdom slowly shifted as a great opportunity for expansion in the south presented itself during Demetrius' reign. For decades the Seleucid Empire and then the Kingdom of Bactria after its independence shared their eastern frontier with the powerful Mauryan Empire based in the Indian subcontinent.<sup>209</sup> However, by the mid-180s BCE the Mauryan Empire had crumbled under the pressure of internal chaos and civil war.<sup>210</sup> This left the empire's former western provinces isolated and vulnerable. The province of Arachosia in southern Afghanistan and the Indus River Valley had been an area of contention between the Macedonian and Indian kings since the invasion of Alexander in 326 BCE.

The interstate system dominated by the Macedonian and then Seleucid empires based on the Iranian plateau was a separate international system from the interstate system of India dominated by the Mauryan and then Sunga empires.<sup>211</sup> Yet these two systems overlapped in southern Afghanistan and Pakistan after the conquest of Alexander. Despite the efforts of Alexander to conquer India in the 320s BCE, no hegemonic conflict ever developed between him, or the Seleucid state, and the Mauryan Empire to cause these two systems to merge

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<sup>209</sup> In 305 BCE Seleucus I invaded Pakistan; however, his campaign appears not to have gone well, and he came to terms with the Mauryan Emperor, Chandragupta Maurya. In exchange for a marriage alliance and 500 war elephants, Seleucus ceded control of the lands in Pakistan and southern Afghanistan to Chandragupta. See Appian *Syr.* 9.55; Strabo 15.2.9

<sup>210</sup> For background on the Mauryan Empire, see Salomon 1998; Mookerji 1999; Singh 2011; Olivelle, Leoshko, and Ray 2012; Thapar 2012; Allen 2012.

<sup>211</sup> For background on the Sunga Empire, see Olivelle 2006; Singh and Shrivatava 2011.



permanently.<sup>212</sup> Therefore, the Eastern and Indian systems remained separate, and tension over the contested lands continued.

However, the rapid decline of the Mauryan Empire after the death of Asoka in the late 230s BCE allowed the reemergence of multipolar anarchy within the Indian system. Antiochus III was able to take advantage of the disintegration of Mauryan power by forcing the regional king of the Paropamisadai to accept Seleucid hegemony and by reclaiming Arachosia for the Seleucid Empire in 207 BCE.<sup>213</sup> By the 180s BCE the power void in these lands had grown larger. Demetrius I seized an excellent opportunity to maximize state power through conquest in the south and occupied Arachosia.<sup>214</sup> Although Demetrius died soon after, the success of his expedition encouraged other Bactrian kings to campaign in the Indus River Valley. Yet Demetrius' campaign in the south also destabilized the Bactrian Kingdom and allowed a Graeco-Bactrian nobleman, Antimachus, to usurp the throne of Bactria.<sup>215</sup> Preoccupation with Indian expeditions and a series of devastating civil wars over the next few decades became the legacy of Demetrius I's reign. The civil wars sapped the strength of Bactria and the authority of its kings so greatly that by ca. 180 BCE the newly conquered lands in the south broke away under another

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<sup>212</sup> Mutinous soldiers halted Alexander the Great's campaign just before he carried his war into what is today modern India. Plut. *Alex.* 62.1-3. See also Arr. *Anab.* 5.25. Seleucus gave up his Indian expedition in exchange for an alliance and war elephants. Strabo 15.2.9. Antiochus III also gave up his Indian expedition in exchange for a renewed alliance and war elephants. Polyb. 11.34.11-12

<sup>213</sup> Polyb. 11.34.11-12. Note also Grainger 2015: 65-6, 72-3, who argues that Antiochus knew he could occupy Arachosia with impunity because of the Mauryan collapse. He perhaps made the regional Indian king, Sophagasenos, hand over Arachosia as part of the treaty with him. This would be in line with the territories the Parthians and Bactrians had to cede to Antiochus in recognition of Seleucid hegemony.

<sup>214</sup> Demetrius even celebrated his victory with new coins that depicted him wearing an elephant head cap. Grainger 2013a: 56; id. 2015: 190-1.

<sup>215</sup> Id. See also Narain 1989: 399-400.

usurper, Apollodotus I, to form a rival state known as the Indo-Greek Kingdom.<sup>216</sup> This new kingdom initially had wide-ranging success in India, conquering the Indus River Valley and raiding deep into central and eastern India; however, its kings also remained longstanding rivals of the kings of Bactria, and debilitating war between them became common.<sup>217</sup> Although the military efforts of the Bactrian and Indo-Greek kings in India temporarily expanded the eastern limits of the Eastern system, continual dynastic conflicts and an ongoing rivalry with the Indo-Greek Kingdom increasingly turned the attention of the Bactrian kings away from their northern and western borders. It was into this tense, bellicose, and anarchic environment that the looming nomadic threat to the survival of the Bactrian Kingdom descended.

Life for the nomadic tribes on the Central Asian steppe was harsh, uncertain, and fluid. Cataclysmic events like plague, famine, and war periodically destabilized the region and caused large movements of peoples. These movements could have devastating effects on the kingdoms in the Iranian plateau. For instance, the Parni had been one tribe in a long series of movements by nomadic tribes that migrated to the lands that bordered the Iranian plateau. The success of the Parni in conquering Parthia illustrates the potential danger that these migrations posed to the kingdoms of the East. In the 170s and 160s BCE a nomadic tribal confederation from modern day Xinjiang in northwestern China known as the Yuezhi lost a series of conflicts with a neighboring tribe, the Hsiung-nu, and were forced to migrate to the southwest.<sup>218</sup> In so doing

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<sup>216</sup> For a brief account of the numerous usurpers and civil wars following the death of Demetrius I, see Grainger 2013a: 56-9, 70. There also was a later Indo-Parthian kingdom. Note Bivar 2007.

<sup>217</sup> For the successes of the Indo-Greek kings in India and their rivalry with the Bactrian kings, see *id.* 71-6.

<sup>218</sup> See Mair 2014: 8-15, 23-6, 29, 90, 144, 161-3. For the culture of Xinjiang, see Yong and Binghua 1999. For the Hsiung-nu, see Yü 1990; Ishjamts 1999; Yong and Yutang: 1999. For recent reconstructions of Yuezhi history, see Enoki, Koshelenko, and Haidary 1999; Benjamin 2007. The Han emperor Wudi later tried to make an alliance with the Yuezhi to defeat the Hsiung-nu. See Tao 2007: 91-2.

they displaced another tribal confederation known as the Sakae, who also chose to migrate to the southwest, descending into Sogdiana.<sup>219</sup> The Sakae, seeking security, began to put increasing pressure on the northern frontier of the Bactrian Kingdom. Dynastic turmoil, civil war, southern distractions, and the perceived weakness of the Bactrian Kingdom encouraged continual and increasing incursions by the Sakae.<sup>220</sup> By the end of the 130s BCE, the Sakae and Yuezhi had overrun modern day Afghanistan, thus ending the Kingdom of Bactria.<sup>221</sup>

The rapid decline of the Bactrian state and its total destruction demonstrates the inherent dangers and harsh realities of the international environment of the ancient world.<sup>222</sup> With the decline of the Seleucid state, especially after Antiochus III's death, multipolar anarchy reemerged in the Eastern system. Although at times strong and powerful, the Bactrian Kingdom was incapable of maintaining its place as the leading state in the Farther East because of mounting internal weakness and external pressures. Let us now discuss how Parthia succeeded in dominating the Farther East.

The Parthians took note of the deterioration of Bactrian power to their east. Yet the invasion of Antiochus III had severely curtailed Parthian strength in northeastern Iran. It took over three decades for the Parthians to recover from their defeat at the hands of the Seleucids.

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<sup>219</sup> See Mair 2014: 17-18, 20, 144. For the Sakae, see esp. Puri 1999; Harmatta 1999.

<sup>220</sup> Grainger 2013a: 58-9.

<sup>221</sup> Mukherjee 1969a. Some scholars point to the sudden abandonment of the prosperous town, Ai Khanum, in this period as an indication of Bactrian collapse in the face of growing nomadic incursions. For the debate, see esp. Holt 2012: 97, 99-112, 124-30, 132-3, 136, 138-43, 148, 154, 156, 164-7, 176-81, 183, 185-93, 195-6, 200, 206, 217, 219. Note also Grainger 2013a: 59-62. For a recent reconstruction of life at Ai Khanum, see Lecuyot 2007.

<sup>222</sup> Examples like the fall of Bactria make the ancient world an ideal period to test even the most hardline hypotheses of Realist theory. Eckstein captures this in his reevaluations of ancient Greece, the Hellenistic age, and the early Roman Republic. Eckstein 2006; Eckstein 2012. For the recent application of Realism to the power politics of Confucian China under the Song Dynasty (960-1279 CE) and the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 CE), see Wang 2011.

Although almost nothing is known about the fifteen-year reign of Phriapatius, it seems likely that he spent his long reign consolidating the authority of the Parthian king after the disgraceful defeat and uninspiring rule of Arsaces II.<sup>223</sup> Phriapatius would have looked to restore the prestige of the Arsacid dynasty and to rebuild the Parthian army. Arsaces I had placed great emphasis on expanding the Parthian army, making Parthia a regional power.<sup>224</sup> Yet it appears that Arsaces II lost the majority of the Parthian army fighting Antiochus.<sup>225</sup> The uneventfulness of Phriapatius' long reign suggests that Parthia must have remained relatively weak under Arsaces II. Unlike Demetrius I in Bactria, who inherited a strong kingdom from his father Euthydemus I, Phriapatius did not attempt to expand Parthian territory; instead, this task fell to his sons. Had Arsaces II rebuilt the Parthian army, the quietness of Phriapatius' reign would be peculiar. Meanwhile, soon after the sudden death of Antiochus III, Demetrius I invaded Arachosia to expand his kingdom. The aggression and growing power of Bactria and the looming threat of nomadic invasions from the Central Asian steppe, paired with the vulnerability of Parthia after losing the most prosperous and well-defended portions of its former kingdom, would have encouraged the Parthians to seek security through their own expansion as soon as possible.

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<sup>223</sup> Arsaces II appears to have implemented few power-maximizing policies. For the argument that Arsaces II revoked his treaty with Antiochus after Antiochus' defeat at Magnesia in 189 BCE by issuing autonomous coinage, most notably a victory coin celebrating the second independence of Parthia from the Seleucids, see Assar and Bagloo 2006. Phriapatius was the first Parthian king to adopt the epithet "Great King" on his coinage. If we are to trust the traditional chronology of the Parthian kings, the renewed minting of coins also occurred under Phriapatius. Rezakhani 2013: 768. For the suggestion that Elymais and Persis also threw off Seleucid suzerainty after Magnesia, see id. 773, 775.

<sup>224</sup> Justin 41.4.8

<sup>225</sup> The Parthians decisively lost a desperate battle against the Macedonian phalanx near Mount Labus. Most of the remaining Parthian army retreated into the town Sirynx, where after a series of bloody assaults and a failed sortie the survivors surrendered. Polyb. 10.31

The pressures of the interstate system and the threats surrounding the diminished Parthian state made Parthian inaction under Phriapatius highly dangerous and potentially ruinous. The Parthians understood the potential consequences of perceived weakness. They had faced the grim realities of interstate anarchy in the Eastern system since the formation of the Parthian state by Arsaces I. Strabo states,

Now at the outset Arsaces [I] was weak, being continually at war with those who had been deprived by him of their territory, both he himself and his successors, but later they grew so strong, always taking the neighboring territory, through successes in warfare, that finally they established themselves as lords of the whole country inside the Euphrates.<sup>226</sup>

Thus, Strabo captures the humble beginnings of the Parthians and the continued efforts of the Parthians to expand their state at the expense of neighbors. In the Eastern system war was common, as was the desire to expand state security.

Unfortunately the available literary and material records do not provide us with a conclusive picture of Phriapatius' reign. However, the uneventfulness of his fifteen-year reign could suggest that the Parthians still lacked the capability to expand under his rule. Perhaps Phriapatius was building up that capability. We know that the Parthians did not lose the will to expand because of the abrupt and successful military expansion of Phriapatius' son, Phraates I, over the strong Mardian tribe in the Elburz range during his short reign (ca. 168-165 BCE).<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Strabo 11.9.2

<sup>227</sup> Justin 41.5.9. See also Isid. 7; Herod. 1.125; Strabo 11.7.1, .8.1, .8.8; Pliny *NH* 6.18.48, .31.134; Curt. 6.5.11-21; Arr. *Anab.* 3.24.1-3. Assar argues that new evidence from Nisa suggests that a previously unknown Parthian king, known as Arsaces IV, who was the great-grandson of Arsaces I, reigned briefly for two years after the death of Phriapatius in 170 BCE. Arsaces IV's reign was short and uneventful. He appears to have died without an heir and the Parthian throne passed to Phriapatius' son, Phraates I, in 168 BCE. See Assar 2005a: 38-41; Assar 2006-2007. If Assar's reconstruction is correct, this makes the above argument about the power-maximizing efforts of Phriapatius to reestablish Parthian strength even more likely because it shortens Phraates reign from the traditional 176-171 BCE to 168-165 BCE. Thus,

The success of Phraates I in such a short amount of time further is perhaps another indication that Phriapatius spent much of his fifteen-year reign reestablishing the authority of the Parthian government and the strength of the Parthian army.<sup>228</sup> Phraates I wasted no time in expanding the state and securing dynastic stability by choosing his brother, Mithridates I, as a strong successor.<sup>229</sup> The successful policies of his father and brother meant that Mithridates, during his long reign (ca. 165-132 BCE), could raise the Parthian state to new heights of power.<sup>230</sup> In fact, it was under the leadership of Mithridates I that Parthia transitioned from a limited revisionist states in the Eastern system, looking to maximize its security regionally, to an unlimited revisionist state, looking to replace the current system of tripolarity with its own hegemony.<sup>231</sup>

Antiochus III's anabasis had scarred the Parthian psyche. The aggression of the Seleucid state, the failures of the Parthian military, and the drastic reversal of Parthian fortunes at the end of the third century BCE served as a warning to the Parthians about the potential threat of neighbors and the need to maximize state power. Although Arsaces II was docile and complacent, his successors pushed the Parthian state in the direction of aggressive expansion. By

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Phraates would have had even less time to consolidate his power and strengthen the Parthian military before his conquest of the Mardians.

<sup>228</sup> For the recent argument that convincingly shifts Phriapatius' reign to 185-170 BCE, see Assar 2005a: 36-8. On Phraates I, see Karras-Klapproth 1988: 131-2.

<sup>229</sup> Phraates favored his experienced and loyal brother over his numerous sons. Justin 41.5.10. This choice likely saved the Parthian state from descending into dynastic chaos like the situation in Bactria.

<sup>230</sup> Olbrycht 2010a: 230. For a compelling recent argument that shifts Mithridates' reign to 165-132 BCE, see Assar 2005a: 41-5. See also Assar 2006c: 88-98; Grainger 2013a: 72. Note that the shifting of the reigns of Arsaces II, Phriapatius, Phraates, and Mithridates forward from their more traditional dates does not negatively affect the above argument.

<sup>231</sup> Unlimited revisionist states, although more common in antiquity, are rare in world history. For limited and unlimited revisionist states, see the Introduction above. Sherwin-White and Kuhrt recognize a new "Parthian policy of conquest and expansion" that began to form in the 170s BCE (i.e. the transition of Parthia into an unlimited revisionist state). Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993: 197.

the reign of Mithridates I, his father and brother had restored Parthian strength. Parthia looked to restore the frontiers of its previous kingdom; however, under Mithridates the Parthians were no longer content to gain a sizeable kingdom within the Farther East and then fortify the region for added state security. Instead, the Parthians looked to dominate the Farther East, eliminating the heightened threats of multipolar anarchy.<sup>232</sup> Moreover, under Mithridates, the Parthians for the first time would execute aggressive hegemonic war against the Seleucid Empire. Parthia transitioned from a middling regional power that sought state security within the system of states to an state that sought to completely alter and dominate the system of states.

By the 160s BCE Parthian power was once again on the rise and Bactrian power was declining steadily. Yet Bactria remained the dominant state regionally. Only open hostilities between Parthia and Bactria could alter this perception and create a power balance favorable to Parthia. To this point, Justin records,

Almost at the same time that Mithridates [I] ascended the throne among the Parthians, Eucratides began to reign among the Bactrians; both of them being great men. However, the fortune of the Parthians, being the more successful, raised them, under this prince [Mithridates], to the highest degree of power; while the Bactrians, harassed with various wars, lost not only their dominions, but also their liberty. For having suffered from contentions with the Sogdians, the Arachosians, the Drancae, the Arei and the Indians, they were at last overcome, as if exhausted, by the weaker Parthians.<sup>233</sup>

Thus, it seems that Justin recognized that the Bactrians had a greater perceived strength than the Parthians in the 160s BCE and that the Parthians eventually took advantage of Bactrian weakness to conduct hegemonic war against them.

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<sup>232</sup> Mithridates' conquests in the Farther East have gained only limited scholarly attention, see Tarn 1951: 222-3; Masson 1951; Daffinà 1967: 40-82; Mukherjee 1969b; Wolski 1980b; Schippmann 1980: 24; Olbrycht 1998b: 82-105; Dąbrowa 2006; Olbrycht 2010a.

<sup>233</sup> Justin 41.6.1-3. See also Strabo 15.1.3

After the usurper Eucratides I seized the contested throne of Bactria, the western frontier of the kingdom came under attack.<sup>234</sup> Under his tumultuous reign, the destabilization of the Bactrian monarchy and the division of the Bactrian Kingdom provided Mithridates with a great opportunity to expand his kingdom at the expense of his main regional rival. Mithridates conducted a short but successful war against Bactria perhaps in the late 160s or early 150s BCE.<sup>235</sup> The Parthians conquered the western portions of Aria and Margiana, significantly expanding their previously held territory and firmly establishing Parthia as the premier power in the Farther East.<sup>236</sup>

#### Bipolarity in the Eastern System Emerges

The renewed emphasis on the expansion of Parthian territory under Phraates I and Mithridates I allowed Parthia to become the dominant power in the Farther East. Eucratides I appears to have reached a peace agreement with the Parthians after losing to Mithridates and perhaps became a Parthian vassal.<sup>237</sup> A renewal of peace between Parthia and Bactria at this time

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<sup>234</sup> For Eucratides I see esp. Holt 2012. For a recent reinterpretation of the ascensions of Mithridates and Eucratides and their proximity, see Wilson and Assar 2007.

<sup>235</sup> For the controversy surrounding the dates of this war, see Olbrycht 2010a: 237. I believe the geopolitical realities of the period make the late 160s the most likely time for the war.

<sup>236</sup> Mithridates annexed the Bactrian satrapies of Turiva and Aspionus. Strabo 11.9.2, 11.2. Tarn identified these districts as Tapuria and Traxiana. Tarn 1930: 122-6. See also Olbrycht 2010a: 234-6. For the uncertain date and scope of this campaign, see Tarn 1932: 579; Debevoise 1938: 19-20; Junge 1949: 1975-9; Jenkins 1951: 15-17; Bivar 1983: 33; Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993: 84; Torday 1997: 350-1; Dąbrowa 2006: 38; Assar 2006a: 2; Olbrycht 2010a: 232, 234, 236-8. It would be difficult to argue that Mithridates' occupation of Margiana did not have sentimental and propagandistic value. Despite Arsaces I's later success in Parthia, the founder of the Arsacid dynasty had failed to conquer Margiana from the Bactrians twice. Mithridates' success avenged those defeats and established Mithridates as one of the great warrior kings of the Parthians. In fact, Justin makes this comparison, stating, "Being then taken ill, he [Mithridates] died in an honorable old age, and not inferior in merit to his great-grandfather Arsaces." Justin 41.6.9

<sup>237</sup> Olbrycht 2010a: 236-7; Grainger 2013a: 72.



makes sense for several reasons. First, Eucratides faced the threat of civil war against the other Bactrian factions vying for the Bactrian throne.<sup>238</sup> He could not afford to engage Parthia in a hegemonic conflict for fear of losing ground to other usurpers. Second, the continued Bactrian interest in the Indus River Valley compounded Bactrian dynastic problems. Eucratides wanted to conduct his own Indian expeditions to gain legitimacy and to bolster his authority. Bactrian kings hoped to enhance their prestige and to restore the power of the state through successful campaigns in India. In fact, after conceding the western lands of his kingdom to Parthia and signing a treaty with Mithridates, Eucratides invaded India, where he proved successful in a series of battles until his son assassinated him on the return trip home.<sup>239</sup> Third, both states had considerable security concerns along their extensive frontiers. Both kingdoms were vulnerable to invasion on three fronts; however, the peace treaty eliminated any immediate threat to one of the fronts. With Bactria and Parthia at peace, Bactria could focus on geopolitical developments in India, and Parthia could turn its attention to the threat of the Seleucid Empire. Both must have remained wary about the looming threat of nomadic incursions, but at the beginning of the 150s BCE, major nomadic pressure along the northern frontier had not yet materialized.

For Parthia, the peace settlement with Bactria allowed Mithridates to expand his kingdom to the Arius River with little cost to the Parthian state. The growing struggles of Bactria to repulse nomadic aggression would have also made Mithridates aware of the growing nomadic threat on the Central Asian steppe, and therefore the prospect of conquering and absorbing Bactria could not have been an attractive one. First, the political chaos of Bactria would have been difficult to control without a determined occupation. Second, the peace with Eucratides left

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<sup>238</sup> In addition to internal threats, sections of the Bactrian Kingdom, most notably Aria, rebelled against Eucratides' rule. See Olbrycht 2010a: 234.

<sup>239</sup> Justin 41.6.4-5; Strabo 15.1.3. See also Olbrycht 2010a: 231-2.

the Kingdom of Bactria responsible for defending the most vulnerable section of the northern boundary with the steppe. Third, the humiliating peace that Mithridates forced upon Eucratides afforded Parthia revenge for previous defeats at the hands of the Bactrians and was enough to establish a new power balance in the Farther East in Parthia's favor. Finally, with the defeat of Bactria, Parthia could focus on its most serious threat to state ambitions, security, and survival, the Seleucid Empire. It was important for the Parthians to avoid a two front war. Therefore, establishing dominance over Bactria and securing peace along Parthia's eastern frontier was crucial to Mithridates' western ambitions.<sup>240</sup>

Seleucid influence in the Mediterranean had declined steadily since the defeat of Antiochus III at the hands of the Romans in 189 BCE. The decisive victory at Magnesia helped establish Rome as the hegemon in the expanded Mediterranean system and diminished the Seleucid role in the geopolitical developments of the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>241</sup> However, in the Eastern system the Seleucid Empire remained the major power for decades, and the Seleucid Empire was intent on maintaining this favorable balance of power. Although Parthia and Bactria could exercise relative autonomy in the Farther East, they still had much to fear from potential Seleucid aggression.

It is possible that in 187 BCE when Antiochus III died he was preparing for a second anabasis, perhaps to finish what he had started twenty-three years prior by reestablishing direct Seleucid control over the Farther East. In 165 BCE, Antiochus' younger son, Antiochus IV, conducted his own abortive anabasis.<sup>242</sup> Although he was in the middle of suppressing the

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<sup>240</sup> See Olbrycht 2010a: 232. See also Wolski 1980; Lerouge 2007: 215-23.

<sup>241</sup> For the Roman conflict with Antiochus and the establishment of Roman hegemony in the Mediterranean, see Eckstein 2012: Ch. 8, 9. Note also Grainger 2015: Chs. 8-10.

<sup>242</sup> For background on Antiochus IV, see Hoffmann 1873; Mørkholm 1966; Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993: 218f. For Antiochus' planned anabasis, see Habicht 1989: 351; Grainger 1997: 24-

Maccabean Revolt, Parthian disturbances in the East diverted Antiochus IV's attention.<sup>243</sup>

Tacitus states, "King Antiochus [IV] endeavored to abolish Jewish superstition and to introduce Greek civilization; the war with the Parthians, however, prevented his improving this basest of peoples; for it was exactly at that time that Arsaces had revolted."<sup>244</sup> Thus, we know that

Antiochus left Palestine hastily to pursue a war against the Parthians.<sup>245</sup> However, the context of Antiochus' anabasis is uncertain. It is unclear to which Arsaces Tacitus refers. The consensus has been to reject Tacitus' comment as a misunderstanding. The scholarly commentary on this passage accuses Tacitus of not knowing that Arsaces I revolted in the middle of the third century BCE and of confusing the revolt of Arsaces I here with the Maccabean Revolt.<sup>246</sup> Yet there is good reason to reject such criticisms. Nothing about Tacitus' comment definitively implies that the Arsaces to which he refers was Arsaces I. All Parthian kings regardless of their original name took the name Arsaces upon their ascension as a royal title, much like the Roman use of the titles Caesar and Augustus.<sup>247</sup> Therefore, it is far more likely that Tacitus here simply refers to the

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5; Olbrycht 2010a: 231; Coloru 2014; Martinez-Sève 2014; Plischke 2014: 291-95. Note *I Maccabees* 3.31-2, 6.1-5; *II Maccabees* 1.12-16, 9.1-4; *IV Maccabees* 18.5; *V Maccabees* 3.3, 7.18, 8.1

<sup>243</sup> See *I Maccabees* 1-6; *V Maccabees* 7.10-13. For a recent study of the Maccabean Revolt, see Grainger 2012.

<sup>244</sup> Tac. *Hist.* 5.8.

<sup>245</sup> "And it was told to king Antiochus [IV] what Mattathias and his son Judas had done. News of this came also to the king of the Persians [i.e. Phraates, king of Parthia]; so that he played false with Antiochus, departing from his friendship, following the example of Judas. Which giving Antiochus a great deal of uneasiness, he called to him one of his household officers named Lysias, a stout and brave man, and said to him, 'I have now determined to go into the land of Persia to make war; and I wish to leave behind me my son in my stead; and to take with me the half of my army, and to leave the remainder with my son.'" *V Maccabees* 7.10-13

<sup>246</sup> See Moore 1931 (2005): 188-9; Wellesley 1964 (1995): 284; Chilver and Townend 1985: 94.

<sup>247</sup> Justin 41.5.8. See also Amm. Mar. 23.6.5-6. This helps highlight the ongoing difficulties of using our scattered literary references and numismatics to reconstruct Parthian history and the chronology of the Arsacid dynasty.

Parthian king at this time by his regal name, Arsaces.<sup>248</sup> Thus, we must determine, first, who was the Parthian king ca. 165 BCE and, second, what had he done to gain the full attention of Antiochus IV.

The traditional date for the accession of Mithridates I is ca. 171 BCE. Thus, if we accept this date, Antiochus set out to diminish Parthian power after Mithridates' successful war against Bactria. From an international relations theory standpoint, this would make sense. The sudden resurgence of the Parthian military and the successful expansion of the Parthian state at the expense of the only major check to Parthian dominance of the Farther East would have caused Antiochus IV considerable anxiety. Mithridates' successful campaign against Bactria made Parthia the chief rival to the Seleucid Empire in the Eastern system. Meanwhile, Mithridates' military expansion and aggression was a direct threat to Seleucid hegemony and demanded immediate retaliation. Therefore, if Mithridates became king ca. 171 BCE, it is possible that Tacitus refers to him as Arsaces in this passage.

However, Tacitus' use of "revolted" is awkward if he indeed refers to Mithridates I in this passage.<sup>249</sup> Therefore, Mithridates' older brother, Phraates I, is a more likely candidate. Gholamreza Assar has argued convincingly that the traditional chronology of the early Arsacid dynasty is misguided and should be adjusted.<sup>250</sup> Instead of Mithridates I becoming king in 171 BCE, Assar shifts the beginning of his reign forward to ca. 165 BCE and alters Phraates' reign to

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<sup>248</sup> Justin 41.5.1-6; Strabo 15.1.36. Tacitus continues, "Later on, since the power of Macedon [that is, the Seleucid Empire] had waned, the Parthians were not yet come to their strength, and the Romans were far away, the Jews selected their own kings [that is, the Hasmonean kings]." Tac. *Hist.* 5.8. Tacitus here refers to the period after the death of Antiochus VII, before the supremacy of Mithridates II, and during the reign of John Hyrcanus in Judea (early 120s – late 90s BCE). For Hyrcanus' expansion of his kingdom at the expense of the Seleucids, see Jos. *Ant.* 13.254-8

<sup>249</sup> Tacitus uses "desciverat" from *descisco*, meaning to desert, withdraw, defect, or revolt.

<sup>250</sup> See esp. Assar 2004; Assar 2005a.

ca. 168-165 BCE.<sup>251</sup> The western expansion of Phraates into Hyrcania against the Mardians, which was the first expansion of the Parthian state since the treaty with Antiochus III, was a forceful violation of the previous treaty.<sup>252</sup> Thus, it is most likely that Tacitus' Arsaces is in fact Phraates I, and the revolt that Tacitus mentions was not a mistaken reference to Arsaces I but an intentional reference to Phraates I's open aggression against the Seleucid Empire in Hyrcania.<sup>253</sup> The treachery and success of Phraates demanded a rapid Seleucid response. Thus, Antiochus IV's anabasis was a retaliatory campaign aimed to mitigate the growing Parthian threat to Seleucid hegemony in the East.<sup>254</sup>

Although Antiochus IV's anabasis failed to reach Parthia, largely because of Antiochus' sudden death in 164/163 BCE, the fledgling Parthian Kingdom fully appreciated the potential threat that the Seleucid Empire posed to its survival.<sup>255</sup> It is possible that in 165 BCE Phraates I, in addition to wanting to avoid the dynastic turmoil that was ravaging Bactria, chose his experienced brother, Mithridates, to succeed him over his numerous sons because of the imminent threat that Antiochus IV posed to Parthia.<sup>256</sup> Justin records, "[Phraates] died not long after [conquering the Mardians], leaving several sons, whom he set aside, and left the throne, in preference, to his brother Mithridates, a man of extraordinary ability, thinking that more was due

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<sup>251</sup> Assar 2005a: 38-45. See also Assar 2006c.

<sup>252</sup> Justin 41.5.9. For the argument that the attack on the Mardians was part of a larger Parthian strategy to conquer Media, see Olbrycht 2010a: 230.

<sup>253</sup> Assar 2005a: 40; Assar 2006c: 89

<sup>254</sup> Antiochus IV had considerable economic and military resources at his disposal that he used to strengthen the Seleucid Empire. See Olbrycht 2010a: 231. See also Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993: 57; Mittag 2006. For the argument that Antiochus also took it as an opportunity to subdue Armenia, Media, and Persis, see Shayegan 2011: 161-5.

<sup>255</sup> For Antiochus IV's failed anabasis and his sudden death, see Jos. *Ant.* 12.295-7, 354f.; Appian *Syr.* 8.45, 11.66; Diod. 31.17a; *II Maccabees* 9.1-3; Polyb. 31.9. Note also Dąbrowa 1999 [2000]: 9; Assar 2005a: 42 n.80-4.

<sup>256</sup> Assar 2005a: 41.

to the name of king than to that of father, and that he ought to consult the interests of his country rather than those of his children.”<sup>257</sup> That is, Phraates understood the high stakes of being king and did not want to make the Parthian Kingdom vulnerable by leaving one of his sons on the throne. Parthia had mounting friction with its rival Bactria to the east; there continued to be a constant nomadic threat to the north; and Antiochus IV’s anabasis was bearing down on Parthia from the west. The state security and power of Parthia depended on the maintenance of dynastic stability and strong leadership. Parthia could not afford to put forth another inexperienced commander like Arsaces II to fight the Seleucids. Thus, it appears Phraates avoided his untested sons in favor of his more seasoned, talented, and ambitious brother, Mithridates I.

Yet after Mithridates’ succession, the geopolitical situation in the Middle East drastically changed. Antiochus IV’s abortive anabasis failed to punish Parthia, and this freed Mithridates to direct his military resources elsewhere, namely against Bactria. Meanwhile, in the West the sudden death of the last great Seleucid king, Antiochus IV, in 164/163 BCE and the sudden deterioration of Seleucid power that followed his death caused a second power-transition crisis in the Eastern system.

Antiochus IV left his young son, Antiochus V, on the throne; however, in 161 BCE Antiochus V’s older half-brother, Demetrius I, usurped the throne.<sup>258</sup> The sudden death of Antiochus IV and the chaos that followed his death fractured the empire. Much like the power-transition crisis that followed the failures of Antiochus II’s reign in the 240s BCE, the power-transition crisis of the late 160s BCE severely damaged Seleucid prestige and power. As in the

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<sup>257</sup> Justin 41.5.9-10

<sup>258</sup> Demetrius had been a hostage at Rome when his uncle, Antiochus VI, died. He pleaded with the senate to release him. When the senate refused, he escaped to the East, executed Antiochus V and his advisors, and claimed the Seleucid throne. See Appian *Syr.* 8.46-7; Polyb. 31.11-15. Polybius, who also was a Roman hostage at the time, aided Demetrius in his escape from Rome.

case of the breakaway states of Andragoras and Diodotus I after the first power-transition crisis in the East, the second power-transition crisis afforded Timarchus, the powerful satrap of Media, the opportunity to breakaway.<sup>259</sup>

In an attempt to check growing instability in the East caused by the successful power-maximizing policies of the Parthians, Antiochus IV had appointed Timarchus just prior to his failed anabasis to the major command of viceroy over the Upper Satrapies. Yet Antiochus' death left Timarchus isolated against the renewed Parthian threat. Like Andragoras and Diodotus before him, without strong central authority in the Seleucid Empire and with mounting threats to the security of his lands, Timarchus decided to declare independence. Also like Andragoras and Diodotus, Timarchus understood that the Parthians were a more immediate threat than retaliation from the Seleucid king in Syria. War between Media and Parthia soon followed.

In the terms of international relations theory, the rapid decline of Seleucid power the rapid decline of Seleucid power in the late 160s BCE caused a power-transition crisis that severely destabilized the Eastern system. The previous power balance in the East evaporated with the breakaway of Timarchus and the expansions of Parthia. These geopolitical developments heightened “the uncertainty principle” in the East, meaning opacity between states increased. Without a clear understanding of power relations and state capabilities, eastern states engaged in self-help, power-maximizing policies to increase state security and to prepare for the greatest anticipated threat, known as “the worst-case scenario.”<sup>260</sup> Thus, open conflict to eliminate potential threats and establish a new power balance in the East became increasingly

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<sup>259</sup> Appian *Syr.* 8.45, 47.

<sup>260</sup> See above discussions of “the uncertainty principle” and “the worst-case scenario” in the Introduction. See also Jervis 1976: 58-113; Taylor 1978: 130; Waltz 1988: 61; Sheehan 1996: 8; Glaser 1997: 184; Eckstein 2006: 17; Eckstein 2012: 242-3.

likely. The pressures of the harsh international environment in the Eastern system forced states in this direction. To do otherwise risked annihilation.<sup>261</sup>

With his eastern frontier secure after the defeat of Bactria, Mithridates I turned his attention to the west. Unlike the challenging and minimal prospects of eastern or northern expansion, western expansion into Media, Persia, and Mesopotamia offered major political and financial incentives. Mithridates decided to pursue vast western expansion. At this point Parthia completed its transition from a limited revisionist state that wanted to create a more favorable balance within the Eastern system to an unlimited revisionist state that wanted to dominate the entire system. The successful power-maximizing policies of Phriapatius and Phraates I, Mithridates' successful war against Bactria, and the power-transition crisis of the late 160s BCE made this transition of the Parthian state possible. For the first time Parthia prepared to conduct aggressive hegemonic war against the Seleucid Empire.<sup>262</sup> The first step was the conquest of Media.

It is unclear if Mithridates attacked Timarchus directly.<sup>263</sup> Justin states, "During the course of these proceedings among the Bactrians [the wars of Eucratides I], a war arose between the Parthians and Medes, and after fortune on each side had been some time fluctuating, victory

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<sup>261</sup> In this connection, Timarchus made an alliance with the king of Armenia, Artaxias, against Demetrius I. He also possibly made war against Elymais and Media Atropatene. The aggressive military actions of Media and Armenia in this period further demonstrate the bellicosity of the lesser states in the Eastern system and their importance to the geopolitical developments of this region. See Olbrycht 2010a: 232.

<sup>262</sup> Notice that Arsaces I, after the power-transition crisis of the 240s BCE, conquered Parthia and Hyrcania. He then decisively defeated Seleucus II's anabasis. Yet he did not follow up these successes with further western expeditions. He remained content to consolidate his power and strengthen his kingdom in the Farther East. Justin 41.4.6-9, 5.1-5

<sup>263</sup> Taylor claims that Timarchus "scored a major victory over the Parthians and used this victory to proclaim himself king." Taylor 2013: 155. However, this seems unsubstantiated since he cites no evidence for this bold claim.



at length fell to the Parthians. Mithridates, enforced with this addition to his power, appointed Bacasis over Media, while he himself marched into Hyrcania.”<sup>264</sup> Thus, we know there was a long struggle for Media, but it is unclear exactly when this conflict began or ended and who fought it. Although Justin’s use of “Medes” might indicate that they were fighting against Parthia autonomously, Appian tells us that Timarchus’ reign was abusive and short.<sup>265</sup> Demetrius appears to have restored Seleucid control over Media early in his reign. Grainger argues that Timarchus and Mithridates made an agreement that limited Parthian expansion westward.<sup>266</sup> However, there is no evidence of an agreement between these men and no good reason for Mithridates to have limited his power without testing Timarchus’ strength in open conflict. Since Mithridates’ war against Bactria likely took place in the late 160s BCE, it is probable that Mithridates did not have time to conduct major operations against Timarchus before his defeat at the hands of Demetrius I in 160 BCE. Therefore, the swiftness of Timarchus’ defeat, not an unattested treaty between Parthia and Media, kept Mithridates from conducting hegemonic war against the abortive Kingdom of Media.

Warfare between Parthia and the Seleucid Empire to determine the new balance of power in the Eastern system was all but inevitable. There is no reason to believe that after Timarchus’ defeat, Mithridates waited ten years to attack Media because “the Seleucid state under Demetrius

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<sup>264</sup> Justin 41.6.6-7. For the convincing argument that Bacasis was Mithridates’ brother, see Del Monte 1997: 55-7; Assar 2005a: 48; Assar 2006c: 89; Olbrycht 2010a: 239; Shayegan 2011: 72-3.

<sup>265</sup> Demetrius I was able to kill Timarchus in Babylon and gained the title “Soter” (savior) from the happy Babylonians. Appian *Syr.* 8.47

<sup>266</sup> Grainger 2013a: 129-30. His argument that Timarchus would not have been able to rebel if Mithridates was free to attack him from the East is unconvincing. The collapse of Seleucid authority and the growing power of Parthia were the exact reasons for his rebellion. Isolation and outside threats had encouraged Andragoras and Diodotus to rebel previously.

I was strong enough to deter any adventure by the Parthian King.”<sup>267</sup> Justin tells us that Mithridates’ conquest of Media was a long affair with multiple setbacks. It is also likely that Moses of Chorene refers to Mithridates fighting the generals of Demetrius I in Media.<sup>268</sup> Demetrius spent his entire reign suppressing revolts, fighting rivals to his throne, and trying to reconsolidate the power of the empire. He had every reason and desire to conduct an anabasis to reclaim the East; however, he lacked the capability. Demetrius was never strong enough to “deter” Parthia from attacking Media. By 152 BCE Alexander Balas openly challenged Demetrius for the Seleucid throne and gained the support of the Jews and eventually that of Ptolemaic Egypt.<sup>269</sup> Because of the weakness of Demetrius’ position, it is possible that the Parthians began their conquest of Media in the early 150s BCE after their successful war against Bactria. Further, it is almost certain that the Parthians had begun their conquest of Media by the late 150s BCE when the Seleucid Empire again descended into civil war.

Meanwhile, a Greek inscription on a carving of Heracles Triumphant at the Bisitun Pass in what is western Iran today, dated 148 BCE, gives us a good indication of the back and forth Seleucid and Parthian contest during the conquest of Media.<sup>270</sup> The inscription asks for the safety of Cleomenes, the Seleucid viceroy of the Upper Satrapies in Media at the time.<sup>271</sup> The association of the inscription with Heracles Triumphant perhaps indicates that Cleomenes won a victory against the Parthians as late as 148 BCE.<sup>272</sup> This could be evidence of one of the reversals of Parthian fortune mentioned by Justin. However, it at least indicates that the Seleucid

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<sup>267</sup> Id. 130.

<sup>268</sup> Moses 2.2. See also Assar 2005a: 42.

<sup>269</sup> *I Maccabees* 10.1, 46-7, 51-8

<sup>270</sup> For a recent evaluation of the political and propagandistic value of this carving and several other ancient Iranian rock reliefs, see Canepa 2014; id. 2015..

<sup>271</sup> Robert 1963: 76; Robert 1967: 283, 291; Bivar 1983: 33.

<sup>272</sup> See Grainger 2013a: 130; Callieri and Chaverdi 2013: 693.

Empire still occupied parts of Media in 148 BCE and that the permanent Parthian conquest of the region was not complete until after this date.<sup>273</sup> Mithridates marked his final annexation of Media by making his brother the new satrap of the region in ca. 145 BCE.<sup>274</sup>

The civil war between Demetrius I and Alexander Balas perpetuated the power-transition crisis in the Eastern system. Although Alexander was able to kill Demetrius in battle, his rule was weak.<sup>275</sup> Alexander had been a usurper of questionable lineage, and his efforts to gain legitimacy through a marriage alliance with Ptolemaic Egypt ultimately failed.<sup>276</sup> Further, his regime, although able to slow Parthian advances in Media, was unable to eliminate the Parthians as a threat.<sup>277</sup> By 147 BCE, Demetrius I's son, Demetrius II, had arrived in Syria to contest Alexander's throne, and soon after Alexander lost Ptolemy VI's support.<sup>278</sup> The Seleucid Empire again descended into civil war.<sup>279</sup> In 145 BCE, Demetrius II and Ptolemy defeated Alexander decisively in battle and secured Alexander's assassination.<sup>280</sup> Mithridates I took advantage of Seleucid weakness and finalized his conquest of Media in this period.

Yet Parthia was not the only concern of the Seleucid Empire in 145 BCE. The recent series of civil wars had perpetuated the power-transition crisis of the late 160s BCE in the

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<sup>273</sup> Assar 2005a: 42. For the argument that the Seleucids had lost eastern Media to the Parthians by 148 BCE, see Le Rider 1965: 338ff; Schippman 1980: 24; Frye 1984: 210; Olbrycht 2010a 238. See also Ehling 2008: 182-3.

<sup>274</sup> Justin 41.6.7; See also Moses 1.8, 2.68. For this argument, see Assar 2005a: 42-3. For an introduction to the cultural developments in Media under the Seleucids and Parthians, see Callieri and Chaverdi 2013: 691-5.

<sup>275</sup> *I Maccabees* 10.48-50; Justin 35.2.2

<sup>276</sup> *I Maccabees* 10.51-8; Diod. 32.9c

<sup>277</sup> Cleomenes, the Seleucid general who left an inscription of Heracles Triumphant at the Bisitun Pass, would have been a trusted general of Alexander.

<sup>278</sup> *I Maccabees* 10.67-8, 11.1-12; Diod. 32.9d, 10.1

<sup>279</sup> For a recent account of the civil war, see Grainger 2013a: Ch. 7.

<sup>280</sup> *I Maccabees* 11.14-17; Diod. 32.9c; Justin 35.2.2-4

Eastern system. Arab raids began to penetrate the southern frontier.<sup>281</sup> Moreover, Elymais and Persis in southeastern Iran appear to have followed the examples of Parthia, Bactria, and Media. They took advantage of the power-transition crisis to assert local autonomy and briefly break away from the Seleucid Empire in the 160s BCE.<sup>282</sup> By the 140s BCE the mounting troubles of the Seleucid state allowed Elymais and Persis to assert their independence once again.<sup>283</sup> Thus, the power-transition crisis caused by the rapid decline of Seleucid power following the sudden death of Antiochus IV in 164/163 BCE again drastically transformed the international environment of the Eastern system. The system of Seleucid hegemony that Antiochus III established had collapsed under the pressure of dynastic disputes and a resurgent Parthia. The Eastern system continued to fracture into multipolar anarchy as minor eastern states such as Elymais, Persis, Characene, and the Arab tribes became involved actively in the geopolitical developments of the system.<sup>284</sup> Furthermore, successful Parthian power-maximizing policies under Phriapatius and his sons, paired with the recent and scarring memory of Antiochus III's devastating anabasis, helped transform Parthia from a limited revisionist state to an unlimited

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<sup>281</sup> For the beginning of the Arab raids, see Grainger 2013a: 80; See also Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -145.

<sup>282</sup> See Grainger 2013a: 130-1, 136-7. See also Le Rider 1965: 347; Harmatta 1981: 189-217. It is possible that Persis ruled itself autonomously throughout much of the first half of the second century BCE. See Callieri 1998; Wiesehöfer 2001; Callieri 2003; Wiesehöfer 2007a; Callieri 2007: 115-46; Curtis 2010; Wiesehöfer 2011; Shayegan 2011: 155-65, 168-87; Callieri and Chaverdi 2013: 691; Wiesehöfer 2013; Rezakhani 2013: 775; Grainger 2015: 76.

<sup>283</sup> For recent accounts of the history of Elymais in this period, see Assar 2004-2005: 27-91; Shayegan 2011: 62, 65-7, 77-83, 85, 88-104, 107-8, 114, 116-18, 122, 131, 156, 164, 183-7, 204-5, 207, 324-5; Rezakhani 2013: 772-4; Plischke 2014: 287-90. For Persis, see Shayegan 2011: 155-9, 161, 168-82; Rezakhani 2013: 775-7.

<sup>284</sup> For Characene, see Shayegan 2011: 82-5, 101, 110-16, 114, 120, 152, 156-7, 160-1, 165-8, 171, 176-7, 183-6. For the Arabs, see id. 120, 205-6.

revisionist state. Under Mithridates Parthia for the first time conducted a hegemonic war against the Seleucid Empire for control over Media.<sup>285</sup>

The conquest of Media and control over the passes of the Zagros Mountains was crucial to further Parthian expansion west. Wealthy and urbanized Mesopotamia, which had always been vulnerable to invaders, was the next logical objective. Although Demetrius II had defeated Alexander Balas in battle, dynastic strife, ineffective administration, and poor military leadership also plagued his reign.<sup>286</sup> Immediately, the general Diodotus Tryphon made a bid for power as the guardian of Alexander Balas' young son, Antiochus VI.<sup>287</sup> The Seleucid Empire again descended into civil war, further perpetuating the power-transition crisis that had begun twenty years prior. The new civil war in Syria provided Mithridates I with the ideal opportunity to exploit Seleucid weakness in Mesopotamia.

Unfortunately, our sources for the next few years of Mithridates' reign are vague and at odds in the reconstruction of events. Justin tells us that, after the conquest of Media, Mithridates immediately returned to Hyrcania, but that on his later return to the West, he conquered Elymais

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<sup>285</sup> It is also likely that Mithridates subjugated Media Atropatene as a vassal kingdom at this time. See Marquart 1901: 109; Koshelenko 1966: 56; Olbrycht 2010a: 239-40. Grainger's argument that Mithridates I justified his conquest of Media to defeat the usurper Alexander Balas in order to revive Achaemenid legitimacy under his Arsacid dynasty is not an adequate explanation for what happened in this interstate conflict and why. See Grainger 2013a: 136. This is an example of unit-attribute theory without considering systemic pressures. If it helped Mithridates to motivate his people, and to justify his actions in the diplomatic environment, it could be a successful part of "power-maximizing," and it could go hand-in-hand with the bigger "system" motivations. However, we should not attempt to recreate Parthian motivations for attacking Media, without considering the role of the entire system of units on those actions.

<sup>286</sup> Justin calls Demetrius spoiled and lazy. Justin 36.1.1

<sup>287</sup> In 142 BCE Tryphon had Antiochus VI murdered and proclaimed himself king. See *I Maccabees* 11.39-40, 54-6, 12.39, 13.31; Diod. 33.4a; Appian *Syr.* 11.68; Justin 36.1.7; Orosius 5.4.18. For another tradition that maintains that Antiochus VI died of illness due to surgery, see *Jos. Ant.* 13.218; *Livy Epit.* 55.11. This likely was propaganda from Tryphon's camp to remove the taint of regicide.

and Mesopotamia.<sup>288</sup> Yet a fragment of a Babylonian Astronomical Diary states that Mithridates conquered Mesopotamia and then returned to Hyrcania before returning to conquer Elymais.<sup>289</sup> It is possible that in 145 BCE Mithridates returned to Hyrcania after conquering Media in response to the final fall of Bactria to the Sakae and Yuezhi.<sup>290</sup> The northern frontier of the Parthian Kingdom was vulnerable to invasions from the Central Asian steppe, as the Parni's own invasion of Parthia in the middle third century BCE had demonstrated. Bactria had always been a key bulwark against the nomadic tribes of this region. In fact, one of the likely reasons that Mithridates did not pursue Farther Eastern conquest after his initial success against Eucratides I was because he wanted to leave Bactria responsible for a large portion of the northern frontier. However, as Bactria sapped its strength with dynastic conflicts and wars in India and as the displacement of the Yuezhi initiated a migratory period for them and the Sakae toward Sogdiana, the Bactrian Kingdom increasingly was unable to defend its northern and eastern frontiers. The deterioration of Bactria under the pressures of internal chaos and external nomadic invasions would have been of great concern to Parthia since the full responsibility of maintaining the northern and eastern frontiers was a daunting prospect. In fact, the Parthians would suffer severely against nomadic incursions after the final fall of Bactria in the 120s BCE.<sup>291</sup> Therefore, it is possible that as early as 145 BCE Mithridates had to return to Hyrcania to shore up his northern defenses.<sup>292</sup> Moreover, we can argue that the relative inactivity of the Parthians from

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<sup>288</sup> Justin 41.6.7-8

<sup>289</sup> See Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -140A, no. -140C. For an introduction to cultural development in Elymais under the Seleucids and Parthians, see Callieri and Chaverdi 2013: 695-8. See also Potts 1999.

<sup>290</sup> Grainger 2013a: 137, 170.

<sup>291</sup> The Parthian struggle against the nomads in the East is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

<sup>292</sup> If we believe Orosius, Mithridates also subdued the tribes in southern Iran and southern Pakistan while he was in the East. Orosius 5.4.18. See also Diod. 33.18; Strabo 15.2.11

145-141 BCE was a consequence of Mithridates diligently consolidating Parthian power in the East against the growing nomadic threat and in the West over the newly won territory of Media.<sup>293</sup>

By the summer of 141 BCE, Mithridates seems to have returned from the East. Quickly he occupied Babylonia, which the Seleucids had mostly abandoned during the ongoing civil war between Demetrius II and Tryphon.<sup>294</sup> It is also likely that Persis fell under Parthian control at this time.<sup>295</sup> This was a significant step in the growth of Parthian power within the Eastern system. Control of Mesopotamia made Parthia more than a regional power in the Farther East and provided the state with great wealth. With the conquest of Babylonia, the Parthians could claim to be the hegemonic rival of the Seleucids. The perceived power of the Parthians was on the rise, while the perceived power of the Seleucids continued to dwindle. Yet the Parthian occupation of Mesopotamia occurred without Seleucid resistance. Therefore, it was unclear if the new perceived balance of power accurately reflected the geopolitical realities of the Eastern system and the actual power capabilities of Parthia and the Seleucid Empire. The uncertainty principle in the Eastern system was high, and this made conflict between the various states of the multipolar anarchy, especially further hegemonic war between the Seleucids and Parthians, increasingly likely. Yet recurrent civil wars delayed the Seleucid response to Parthian advances.

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<sup>293</sup> The Sakae began to impinge on the Parthian frontier in the early 130s BCE. Bivar 1983: 36. Shayegan argues that Mithridates' brother, Bacasis, who became the governor of Media, was active in pacifying the region until Demetrius' invasion of Mesopotamia demanded his attention. Shayegan 2011: 74.

<sup>294</sup> Sartre 2005: 25. Shayegan argues that Tryphon tried to take advantage of the Parthian conflict with Elymais in Babylon to reestablish Seleucid control in the region in 140 BCE. Shayegan 2011: 67. See also Dąbrowa 2006.

<sup>295</sup> See Alram 1986a: 162-3; Alram 1987: 128; Wiesehöfer 1994a: 113, 118, 129; Wiesehöfer 2007a: 44-5; Shayegan 2011: 169; Wiesehöfer 2013. Note Pliny *NH* 6.28.111; Strabo 15.3.3, 24. For an introduction to cultural developments in Persis under the Seleucids and Parthians, see Callieri and Chaverdi 2013: 698-709.

It would be another three years before the Seleucids were able to retaliate and attempt to reassert their hegemony.

The Babylonian *Astronomical Diaries* tell us that Mithridates again suddenly returned to Hyrcania after successful western expansion.<sup>296</sup> It is possible that Justin was mistaken and that this was Mithridates' first trip to the East since his conquest of Media; however, it is also possible that dealing with the heightened nomadic threat to the northern frontier of the kingdom required multiple trips. If we accept that this was Mithridates' second trip to the Farther East in five years, it seems likely that the situation along the northern frontier had continued to deteriorate.<sup>297</sup> By 140 BCE Bactria was nearing its final collapse, and the full weight of the nomadic migrations was about to fall on the Parthian frontier.<sup>298</sup> We have no evidence of military encounters between Parthia and the nomadic tribes of the Central Asian steppe at this time, but it is likely that Mithridates' sudden departure from his successful conquest in Mesopotamia denotes a considerable perceived threat to Parthian strength in the East from these tribes.

The Parthian frontier in the East and Parthia's relationship with the nomadic tribes of the Central Asian steppe remained a major concern for decades; however, the same diary fragment records that early in 140 BCE Mithridates abruptly returned from Hyrcania to Mesopotamia. The newly formed Kingdom of Elymais in what is southwestern Iran today had taken advantage of the recent turmoil in Mesopotamia and invaded the region. Elymaean aggression was a

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<sup>296</sup> See Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -140C.

<sup>297</sup> Although he is right to reject Tarn's argument that Mithridates returned to Hyrcania to invade Bactria, Jenkins' assumption that Mithridates was doing nothing more than returning to his royal headquarters in Hyrcania is unconvincing. Jenkins 1951: 15-16.

<sup>298</sup> Grainger's conclusion that Parthian western expansion was not possible without the collapse of Bactria is mistaken. Grainger 2013a: 183-4. Parthia established its superiority over Bactria with Mithridates' successful war against Eucratides. The results of that war secured Parthia's eastern frontier. In fact, the collapse of Bactria made Parthia's eastern frontier more vulnerable because of the heighten nomadic threat that came with it.



significant danger to Parthian rule in the region and necessitated Mithridates' swift return.

Although Mithridates was perhaps initially successful in defeating Elymais, M. Rahim Shayegan recently has demonstrated that Elymais and Parthia had an ongoing conflict over Mesopotamia and Susiana until the Parthians finally forced Elymais to recognize Parthian suzerainty in 132 BCE and accept Parthian direct rule in 124 BCE.<sup>299</sup>

For several years prior to the conflict with Parthia, Elymais had acted independently of the Seleucid Empire. In 147 BCE, in reaction to the destructive civil war between Demetrius II and Alexander Balas, the rulers of Elymais declared themselves kings and began raiding Babylonia for the next fifteen years.<sup>300</sup> Thus, Elymais was one of many states in the Eastern system taking advantage of waning Seleucid power after the power-transition crisis of the 160s BCE to pursue power-maximizing policies to increase state security and authority. Elymais and the other minor states in the Eastern system such as Media Atropatene, Persis, Characene, and Armenia chafed under Seleucid suzerainty. They desired to rule themselves autonomously; however, until the rapid deterioration of Seleucid power, beginning in the 160s BCE and continuing into the 140s BCE, they did not have the capabilities to resist Seleucid retribution. The independence of these minor states in this period and their aggressive efforts to secure their own power and safety in the region served to destabilize the Eastern system further. In a system of interstate anarchy like the Eastern system, minor states also had to be highly militarized and bellicose to survive. Thus, it is not surprising that smaller powers, like the Hasmonean Kingdom,

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<sup>299</sup> For the argument that Parthia conquered Elymais in 140 BCE and Shayegan's rejection of this argument, see Shayegan 2011: 96-8. For the expansionistic aggression of Elymais, see id. 62-5, 67, 77-98. For the beginning of the raids, see, Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -144. For the Kamnaskiri dynasty and their rule over Elymais in this period, see Shayegan 2011: 88-101, 103, 105-10, 183-7, 325. Note also Strabo 15.3.12, 16.1.18

<sup>300</sup> Le Rider 1965: 340, 351.

Commagene, Cappadocia, Armenia, Elymais, Characene, Persis, Media Atropatene, the Arab tribes, the nomadic confederations, etc., used their armies aggressively against each other and their much stronger neighbors, like the Seleucid Empire, Bactria, and Parthia. Hence, we find that warfare was almost constant in the Eastern system throughout its existence and most endemic under the added pressures of multipolarity. The further fracturing of the multipolar Eastern system also caused additional threats to the major states within the system. By the late 140s BCE, the Seleucids and Parthians not only had to reckon with each other but also had to contend with militarized, expansionistic minor states, like the kingdoms of Elymais and Persis.<sup>301</sup>

It was in this uncertain, fluid, and harsh international environment that Demetrius II determined to strike back in the hegemonic struggle against Parthia to salvage the deteriorating prestige of the Seleucid state and restore it to its former glory.<sup>302</sup> Although recent civil wars, rebellions, and losses to Parthia had severely damaged Seleucid authority and perceived power, the Seleucid state remained the preeminent military power in the Eastern system. The Parthians had annexed Media and Babylonia; however, none of these recent successes had come at the expense of the main Seleucid royal army. Moreover, the Parthian conquest of Media against limited Seleucid forces had taken years to accomplish, and the recent Elymaean raids into Mesopotamia illustrated the fragility of the Parthian occupation of this region. The newly acquired power of Parthia remained fragile in 140 BCE. A determined, well-executed anabasis like that of Antiochus III could have reversed recent Parthian gains and reestablished Seleucid

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<sup>301</sup> Persis had been fighting for its independence since the late third century BCE. This included power-maximizing policies and aggressive bellicosity evidenced by its intermittently dominating the Persian Gulf, briefly occupying Characene, and conducting a mass killing of 3,000 Greeks. See esp. Shayegan 2011: 155-76. See also Olbrycht 2010a: 229-30.

<sup>302</sup> Other scholars have noted the apparently lofty goals of Demetrius for his anabasis. See McDowell 1935: 56; Jenkins 1951: 19. However, Jenkins opinion that Demetrius' invasion was a "forlorn hope" is unfair.

hegemony over the Eastern system. In fact, this appears to have been one of Demetrius' goals. Josephus states, "Yet Demetrius passed over [the Euphrates], and came into Mesopotamia, as desirous to retain that country still, as well as Babylon; and when he should have obtained the dominion of the upper provinces, to lay a foundation for recovering his entire kingdom."<sup>303</sup> That is, Demetrius hoped that the defeat of Parthia and the reconquest of Mesopotamia and Media would allow him then to subdue the Farther East as Antiochus III had once done. Further, the major eastern expeditions of Demetrius II and his brother, Antiochus VII, provide the most striking evidence of the considerable potential power that the Seleucid Empire retained in the 130s BCE even after a generation of debilitating internal chaos and external pressures.

As early as 140 BCE, Demetrius II prepared to retaliate against Parthia and to conduct a hegemonic war to reclaim the East.<sup>304</sup> Justin argues that Demetrius undertook this task to salvage his reputation.<sup>305</sup> Meanwhile, the explanations found in Josephus and *I Maccabees* claim that Demetrius wanted to defeat Parthia to gain military support for his civil war against Tryphon.<sup>306</sup> These explanations are not mutually exclusive, and both can stand as accurate reflections of part of Demetrius' motives. As seen previously in this study, in a world of militarized anarchy the maintenance of reputation and prestige is fundamental to perceived power and therefore the stability of power relations within the system. Threats to a state's security increase when its

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<sup>303</sup> Jos. *Ant.* 13.184-5

<sup>304</sup> For a recent reevaluation of Demetrius' Anabasis and the consequences of his failure, see Shayegan 2003 [2007]: 83-103.

<sup>305</sup> "As the cities, in consequence, began everywhere to revolt from his government, he resolved, in order to wipe off the stain of effeminacy from his character, to make war upon the Parthians." Justin 36.1.2

<sup>306</sup> "So he was elevated with these hopes, and came hastily to them, as having resolved, that if he had once overthrown the Parthians, and gotten an army of his own, he would make war against Trypho, and eject him out of Syria" Jos. *Ant.* 13.186. "Demetrius the king assembled his forces and marched into Media to secure help, so that he could make war against Trypho." *I Maccabees* 14.1

perceived power diminishes. Justin tells us that some perceived Demetrius as spoiled, lazy, and weak. Therefore, it became imperative for him to bolster his reputation and prestige in a period of turmoil to help secure the integrity of the state and his position as king.<sup>307</sup> Successful warfare was the best way to accomplish this, and Parthia presented an ideal target.

The Parthians were the greatest potential rival to the Seleucids, and their successful aggression in Media and Mesopotamia demanded Seleucid retaliation. Further, the Parthians also had demonstrated recent vulnerability. The destabilization of Parthia's occupation of Mesopotamia by Elymaean raids in 140 BCE severely damaged the perceived strength of Parthia in the region. For the Seleucids, the failure of Parthia to maintain order in Mesopotamia signified weakness that could be exploited. The Seleucids had mostly abandoned Babylonia because of their ongoing civil war, and it is reasonable to argue that they believed they could reoccupy the region swiftly and successfully.<sup>308</sup> Thus, it is also reasonable to argue that Demetrius, because of recent Parthian setbacks, conducted his anabasis under the belief that the defeat of Parthia and the reoccupation of Mesopotamia and Media was a relatively quick and straightforward way to increase his military reputation and the integrity of the empire drastically.<sup>309</sup>

Of course, a byproduct of Demetrius' successful anabasis would have been a new military powerbase in the East and the heightened prestige and legitimacy that military victory afforded Hellenistic kings.<sup>310</sup> Both of these were crucial to Demetrius' ongoing conflict with the

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<sup>307</sup> This is in line with Ehling's argument. See Ehling 1998a: 228; Ehling 2008: 183.

<sup>308</sup> Josephus tells us that the Greeks and Macedonians in Mesopotamia asked Demetrius to reclaim the territory and offered their aid in the fight against the Parthians. *Jos. Ant.* 13.185

<sup>309</sup> Josephus hints at this by saying that Demetrius believed he could gain military support in the East and therefore hastily decided to attack Parthia. *Id.* 13.186.

<sup>310</sup> For the characteristics of Hellenistic kingship and its primary emphasis on militarism and military reputation, see Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993: Ch. 5.

usurper Tryphon.<sup>311</sup> Demetrius could hope that swift victory in the East would provide him with superior prestige against Tryphon and encourage Tryphon's Seleucid soldiers to accept Demetrius' legitimacy as king. Moreover, in addition to the Greek and Macedonian levies that Demetrius hoped to gain from the Greek communities in Mesopotamia and Media, the defeat of the Parthians and their potential submission to Seleucid suzerainty could have gained for him effective Parthian cavalry to supplement his army in the West. Thus, we can accept the explanations found in Josephus and *I Maccabees* that Demetrius wanted to defeat Parthia and reclaim Mesopotamia and Media to establish a new powerbase for his struggle against Tryphon. If Demetrius could defeat the Parthians, he could hope finally to crush Tryphon and end the cycle of debilitating civil wars that had been sapping Seleucid power and authority for decades.

Unfortunately for the Seleucid Empire, Demetrius' anabasis was a catastrophic failure. Although he seems to have had grand ambitions of reconquering Mesopotamia, Media, and subjugating the Farther East, Demetrius and his army never made it out of Babylonia.<sup>312</sup> Mithridates I was not in Mesopotamia at the beginning of Demetrius' invasion.<sup>313</sup> Therefore, Mithridates sent his trusted brother, whom he had made governor of Media with authority over the supreme command of Babylonia, to defend Mesopotamia.<sup>314</sup>

The details of the campaign are negligible and contradictory. However, in the summer of 138 BCE, the Parthians crushed Demetrius' army in Babylonia and took him captive.<sup>315</sup> It is

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<sup>311</sup> See Dąbrowa 1999 [2000]: 9-17; Shayegan 2011: 70-1.

<sup>312</sup> See Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -137B. For Shayegan's rejection of Dąbrowa's argument that Demetrius invaded Media, see Shayegan 2011: 71-2. 74; See also Dąbrowa 1999 [2000]: 13-16.

<sup>313</sup> Perhaps Mithridates yet again had returned to the East to consolidate the strength of the kingdom in the East and to confront the looming nomadic threat to the region.

<sup>314</sup> See Shayegan 2011: 72-4.

<sup>315</sup> For varying scholarly opinions on the dates and course of Demetrius' expedition, see van der Spek 1997-1998: 172-3; Ehling 1998a: 227-9; Dąbrowa 1998: 37-42; Dąbrowa 1999 [2000]: 12-16; Potts 2002: 356-7; Shayegan 2003 [2007]: 87; Shayegan 2011: 71-2.

perhaps possible to reconstruct an outline of the course of Demetrius' failed anabasis. Elymaean raids into Babylonia in 140 BCE forced Mithridates suddenly to put aside his continuing efforts to strengthen his eastern frontier in the face of the disintegration of the Kingdom of Bactria under the mounting pressure of nomadic incursions from the Central Asian steppe.<sup>316</sup> By late 140 BCE he returned to Mesopotamia and successfully repulsed the Elymaean raids, possibly defeating Elymais significantly enough to limit its military activity considerably for the next couple of years.<sup>317</sup> With the Elymaean threat neutralized and the Parthian occupation of Babylonia restored, Mithridates returned to the East in 140/139 BCE to renew his efforts to strengthen his eastern frontier. Diodorus praises his efforts, stating,

Arsaces king of the Parthians, being a mild and gracious prince, was exceedingly prosperous and successful, and greatly enlarged the bounds of his empire. He conquered all before him, as far as to India, where Porus reigned formerly, with a great deal of ease; and though he had achieved that degree of power and authority, yet he inclined not in the least to pride and luxury, as is common with princes in such cases. He was kind to his subjects, and valiant in warfare against his enemies; and having subdued many nations, he collected the best of their customs, and imparted them to the Parthians.<sup>318</sup>

Although Diodorus does not specify the Parthian king, this short passage on the Parthians falls between a discussion of Pompey's attack on the Numantines in Spain in 141 BCE and the consulship of Marcus Popillius Laenas in 139 BCE. Moreover, Diodorus' description of a prosperous and successful Parthian military leader makes the association with Mithridates I clear. Mithridates during his reign greatly expanded to power and limits of the Parthian state, which came to include the lands in the Farther East that overlapped with the Indian interstate

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<sup>316</sup> See Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -140C; Justin 41.6.7-8

<sup>317</sup> Justin tells us that Mithridates made war on Elymais and conquered the region. Justin 41.6.8. However, any hegemony that Mithridates had gained over Elymais quickly dissolved. In 138 BCE Elymaean troops were serving in Demetrius' army in Babylon, and Elymais raided Babylon later that year. See id. 36.1.4; Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -137A.

<sup>318</sup> Diod. 33.18. See also Strabo 15.2.11

system. Diodorus also emphasizes the inclusiveness of Parthian society, which internalized “the best” of foreign customs.

While Mithridates was in the Farther East expanding the frontiers of his kingdom, the Elymaean raids to the west that briefly had destabilized the Parthian occupation of Babylonia earlier that year made Demetrius aware of Parthian vulnerability in the region. Moreover, he received embassies from Greek and Macedonian supporters in the East asking for his return.<sup>319</sup> Demetrius became convinced that Parthian control in the East was weak and that he could expect local support for his anabasis. Therefore, Demetrius sought to seize this opportunity to regain Mesopotamia swiftly, to earn military glory, to bolster his prestige, and to amass new military strength by reestablishing an eastern powerbase for the Seleucid Empire.

In early 138 BCE Demetrius began his eastern expedition. Mithridates was still in the Farther East at this time. Therefore, he ordered his brother, Bacasis, to march from Media, where he had been consolidating Parthian power since his appointment as governor over the region in 145 BCE, south to prepare the defenses of Babylonia and to raise troops.<sup>320</sup> Consequently, Demetrius initially fought Mithridates’ brother in Babylonia. Justin records, “Being assisted, accordingly, by auxiliary troops from the Persians, Elymaeans, and Bactrians, he [Demetrius] routed the Parthians in several pitched battles.”<sup>321</sup> Thus, the early stages of Demetrius’ anabasis

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<sup>319</sup> See *Jos. Ant.* 13.185; *I Maccabees* 14.1. For Greek colonization and imperialism in the East under the Seleucids, see Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993: Ch. 6; Strootman 2011-2012. See also Kuhrt and Sherwin-White 1987.

<sup>320</sup> See Justin 41.6.7; See also Moses 1.8, 2.68; Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -137A.

<sup>321</sup> Justin 36.1.4. Recently, Shayegan has challenged Justin’s claim that the Persians, Elymaeans, and Bactrians came to the aid of Demetrius. He contends that there is no evidence of Parthia’s enemies coordinating their attacks and that Parthia retained its control of Babylonia. Shayegan 2011: 81-2. Yet, although it is unlikely that the Bactrians actively coordinated their attacks with the Seleucids against the Parthians, it is possible that Justin refers to Bactrian pressures on Parthia’s eastern frontier that inadvertently coincided with Demetrius’ invasion. If indeed Bactria

appear to have been highly successful. In fact, Demetrius' principle objective appears to have been the reoccupation of Mesopotamia and Media in part because he could hope to reincorporate their Greek populations into the Seleucid state with relative ease.<sup>322</sup> However, Justin goes on to state, "After making war, as has been said above, upon the Parthians, and gaining victory in several battles, he [Demetrius] was suddenly surprised by an ambush, and, having lost his army, was taken prisoner."<sup>323</sup> Note that this account differs slightly from Justin's earlier explanation of how the Parthians ended Demetrius' invasion. There he states, "At length, however, being deceived by a pretended offer of peace, he [Demetrius] was made prisoner, and being led from city to city, was shown as a spectacle to the people that had revolted, in mockery of the favor that they had shown him."<sup>324</sup> In both of these accounts, Justin emphasizes that the Parthians only defeated the previously successful Demetrius through deception and trickery. Perhaps this is a literary trope underscoring the common Roman and Greek prejudice that Easterners were dishonest and deceptive.<sup>325</sup> However, it appears that Justin unknowingly describes the successful execution of the Parthians' "feigned retreat, defeat in detail" mode of warfare.

To begin, Mithridates sent his experienced brother to fight a delaying action against Demetrius in Mesopotamia. Thus, Bacasis was to skirmish with the Seleucids, and if that did not force Demetrius into a dangerous calculated advance, Bacasis was to employ the Parthian strategic feigned retreat to encourage the Seleucids to make a mistaken pursuit. Additionally,

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was threatening Parthia's eastern frontier, this would be another reason for Mithridates' sudden return to the East after occupying Babylonia and defeating Elymais.

<sup>322</sup> Dąbrowa 1999 [2000]: 15.

<sup>323</sup> Justin 38.9.2. See also id. 36.1.5-6. Note also Appian *Syr.* 11.67

<sup>324</sup> Justin 36.1.5

<sup>325</sup> See especially Isaac 2006: Ch. 4, 5, 8.



Bacasis' delaying actions would allow Mithridates to return from the East with more soldiers. The emphasis of the distinctive Parthian mode of warfare was to delay a decisive battle until the enemy made a military blunder and to draw in one's enemy into an unfavorable position, at which point the Parthians were supposed to execute their opportunistic counterassault. Demetrius' initial invasion of Mesopotamia seemingly met with great success. Yet the "several victories" that Demetrius earned against Bacasis must have been minor. Bacasis had spent the early part of the year preparing the defenses of Babylonia. Therefore, it is probable that Demetrius' victories came against the Parthian strongholds in the region and against delaying actions by Parthian skirmishers. That is, Bacasis withdrew into Mesopotamia, skirmishing with the Seleucid army but avoiding climatic battles, to encourage overconfidence in the Seleucid army and to buy time for Mithridates' return.

We can tell from Justin's account that he, and his source, Trogus, like many Greeks and Romans, misunderstood Parthian strategy. They expected Parthia to fight in the conventional manner of large set piece battles. Thus, Justin viewed the Parthian defense of Babylonia as a resounding failure and exaggerated the military successes of Demetrius. Yet if we look at his account carefully with an appreciation for the uniqueness of Parthian strategy and tactics, we can recognize that the Parthians slowly drew Demetrius deeper into Babylonia and delayed him long enough to allow Mithridates and his army to arrive from the East. Although the Parthians lost several battles, Demetrius never forced Bacasis out of the field. Therefore, from the Parthian perspective Bacasis had conducted a well-planned and well-executed delaying campaign. In the latter half of 138 BCE, Mithridates marched through Media into Babylonia.<sup>326</sup> With the arrival of Mithridates and his army, the Parthians were ready to spring their trap. We know that the

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<sup>326</sup> Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -137A.

Parthians' unique mode of warfare was a resounding success because soon after Mithridates' arrival the Parthians destroyed Demetrius' army and took him prisoner.<sup>327</sup>

We may also reconcile the two accounts of Justin in passages 36.1.5 and 38.9.2. The Parthians utilized the feigned retreat at the tactical and strategic level because it encouraged the enemy to assume Parthian weakness and then to make a military blunder because of their overconfidence or arrogance. Bacasis' feigning action and skirmishing against Demetrius in early 138 BCE gave Demetrius the impression that the Parthian army was weak and no match for the Seleucid army. This easily could have made Demetrius, who was already a proud man, overconfident.<sup>328</sup> Moreover, by the end of the year, the Seleucid reoccupation of Mesopotamia was dragging along. Despite several minor victories, the Seleucids lacked the ability to remove Parthian forces from the region completely. It is reasonable to argue then that Demetrius' overconfidence in his perceived weakness of the Parthians, paired with his frustrations at not being able to force the Parthians into a decisive battle, led him to over pursue Bacasis' forces and ultimately to make his army vulnerable once Mithridates arrived in Babylonia. To this point, Demetrius appears to have had no idea that Mithridates had returned from the East with his army.<sup>329</sup>

Demetrius went from seemingly winning the war to total destruction in quick order. Therefore, the quick reversal of Demetrius' military fortunes and our understanding of the important aspects of the Parthians' distinctive mode of warfare allow us to argue that Demetrius' initial success likely made him overconfident, at which point he over pursued Bacasis and made

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<sup>327</sup> Justin 36.1.5, 38.9.2; Appian *Syr.* 11.67; Jos. *Ant.* 13.186, 219; *I Maccabees* 14.2-3

<sup>328</sup> See Justin 36.1.1

<sup>329</sup> In fact, Justin does not mention Mithridates in his account. He too appears to have been unaware of Mithridates' arrival in Babylonia. This is unsurprising since Justin's emphasis was on Parthian trickery and not on their successful execution of a difficult strategy.

his army vulnerable once Mithridates arrived from the East. This then provided the Parthians with the military opportunity they needed to counterattack, at which point the Parthians ambushed and destroyed the Seleucid army. Thus, Justin's accounts unintentionally demonstrate that Mithridates and his brother executed the asymmetric approach of Parthian warfare to perfection; by delaying and withdrawing, they later successfully ambushed and obliterated the Seleucid royal army.<sup>330</sup>

Let us now reconcile the apparent disparity in Justin's account of Demetrius' defeat. In late 138 BCE, the Parthians ambushed and destroyed the Seleucid army.<sup>331</sup> However, it is possible that the Parthians did not immediately capture Demetrius in the battle. Justin makes no such implication in 38.9.2.<sup>332</sup> Instead, perhaps after his disastrous defeat Demetrius attempted to strike a deal with the Parthians. This would explain Justin's insistence in 36.1.5 that the Parthians captured Demetrius after deceiving him into dubious peace talks.<sup>333</sup> Thus, after the battle Demetrius began negotiations with the Parthians; however, the Parthians had all of the leverage in the negotiations and decided to take Demetrius as a valuable prisoner of war rather than make peace with him. The immediate reason for this decision was to use the captured Seleucid king as a warning to the potentially rebellious Greek and Macedonian residents of Babylonia.<sup>334</sup> That is, Demetrius acted as a high profile and affective example of the consequences of resistance to

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<sup>330</sup> Id. 38.9.2. It seems undeniable that Mithridates left Hyrcania and was present at the climactic battle. See Shayegan 2011: 75-6. Compare Wolski 1993: 81-2; van der Spek 1997-1998: 173.

<sup>331</sup> Most likely in August of that year. See Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -137A; Assar 2005a: 43.

<sup>332</sup> Justin states, "After making war, as has been said above, upon the Parthians, and gaining the victory in several battles, he was suddenly surprised by an ambuscade, and, having lost his army, was taken prisoner."

<sup>333</sup> Justin records, "At length, however, being deceived by a pretended offer of peace, he was made prisoner, and being led from city to city, was shown as a spectacle to the people that had revolted, in mockery of the favour that they had shown him."

<sup>334</sup> See Justin 36.1.5; Jos. *Ant.* 13.185

Parthian rule.<sup>335</sup> The capture of Demetrius was a devastating blow to the prestige of the Seleucid king and the perceived power of the Seleucid state in the East. Additionally, it was a great boon to that of Mithridates and Parthia. Thus, Mithridates used the captured Demetrius to help avoid further Greek and Macedonian resistance in Mesopotamia and to help stabilize what had been a turbulent region for several years. Demetrius remained an honored captive of the Parthians for the remainder of the decade. In fact, Mithridates and Demetrius gained a mutual respect for one another, and Demetrius married one of Mithridates' daughters.<sup>336</sup>

With the capture of Demetrius and the destruction of his army, Parthia could once again focus on strengthening its eastern frontier and consolidating its power over its newly won territories in the West. The Parthian Kingdom was at its largest extent to this point and the Parthians had demonstrated that they were the hegemonic rivals of the Seleucids.<sup>337</sup> A system of bipolar anarchy, where Parthia and the Seleucid Empire were the two leading states, replaced the system of multipolar anarchy that had existed since the power-transition crisis of the 160s BCE. Yet Parthian hegemony in the East was not unwavering or uncontested. The important task of securing Mesopotamia from numerous internal and external threats remained. The kingdoms of Elymais and Characene made this process difficult, as they challenged Parthia's newly won hegemony over the region.

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<sup>335</sup> Grainger 2013a: 181.

<sup>336</sup> See Justin 36.1.6, 38.9.3; Appian *Syr.* 11.67

<sup>337</sup> Orosius claims that Mithridates' kingdom stretched from the Hydaspes River in Media to the Indus River. Orosius 5.4.18. The Hydaspes River that Orosius mentions is the river identified by Virgil in Media. See Virg. *Geog.* 4.211. See also Bivar 1983: 35. For the argument that the Parthian kingdom reached the mouth of the Indus River in Sind, see Daffinà 1967: 41-3.

Although the Parthians had won the hegemonic war against Demetrius, Mesopotamia was in a state of chaos.<sup>338</sup> Moreover, immediately following his victory Mithridates almost disappears from our historical record. It now appears that Mithridates did not die suddenly in 138 BCE, as was the traditional argument; instead, he seems to have suffered a debilitating illness that did not claim his life until ca. 132 BCE.<sup>339</sup> Yet all of these factors, the Seleucid invasion of Mesopotamia, the recent chaos in Babylonia, and the illness of Mithridates, created an opportunity for Elymais to shake off Parthian hegemony and retaliate for the Parthian defeat of its raids in 140 BCE.<sup>340</sup>

Late in 138 BCE Elymaean forces again raided Babylonia.<sup>341</sup> The immediate aggression of the Elymais Kingdom following the war between Mithridates and Demetrius demonstrates the militarized, bellicose, and violent nature of all states, even minor ones, under the interstate anarchy of the Eastern system. The Elymaeans sought to expand their power and security at the expense of their neighbors despite the considerable power disparity between Elymais and Parthia. The Elymaeans would have been aware of the chaotic environment in Babylonia. This paired with the consequences of a famine in the region encouraged the Elymaeans to test Parthian strength in the region.<sup>342</sup> Yet their aggression was a miscalculation by the Elymaeans. The Parthians responded to the raid with determination and drove off the attackers, and although

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<sup>338</sup> Again, this explains why the Parthians wanted to use Demetrius as a warning to rebellious communities. Justin 36.1.5

<sup>339</sup> See esp. Assar 2005a: 43-5. For the argument that he died between 135-133 BCE, see Shayegan 2011: 76. For the traditional date of 138 BCE, see esp. Wroth 1903: xxi; McDowell 1935: 201; Debevoise 1938: 26; Bivar 1983: 36; Assar 2001a: 21.

<sup>340</sup> Justin tells us that Elymaean forces aided Demetrius against the Parthians. Justin 36.1.4 Clearly, Elymais was eager to renew its conflict with Parthia.

<sup>341</sup> For the raid, see Shayegan 2011: 79-80.

<sup>342</sup> Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -137A.

great fear of further Elymaean incursions into the region remained for the Parthians, they demonstrated that their power in the region was superior.<sup>343</sup>

The failure of the Elymaean raids had disastrous effects for their kingdom that help to illustrate the grim realities of the interstate anarchy further. Parthia's defeat of Elymais drastically damaged the perceived power of the small kingdom amongst the other minor states in the region. Another former Seleucid satrap, Hyspaosines, had taken advantage of the ongoing power-transition crisis in the 140s BCE to act independent of the Seleucid state in his region of Characene, roughly modern day Kuwait.<sup>344</sup> Hyspaosines decided to take advantage of the recent Elymaean defeat to expand his control over the regions of southern Mesopotamia held by Elymais.<sup>345</sup> The Characene attacks on the vulnerable Elymaean state further emphasize the war prone, insecure, and dangerous international environment of the Eastern system of multipolar anarchy that drove all ancient states to become highly militarized and to follow power-maximizing policies wherever possible. However, despite their bad blood, the biggest threat to the survival of Elymais and Characene after Demetrius' defeat was Parthia. The two states would come to grips with this later in the decade.

Meanwhile, despite much turbulence caused by numerous outside threats to the security of the state, the Parthians successfully maintained control over Mesopotamia, Media, and their eastern regions under the ill Mithridates. Mithridates' brother, Bacasis, retained his expansive

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<sup>343</sup> Id. no. -137C, no. -137D.

<sup>344</sup> For Characene, see Gregoratti 2011b. For a recent account of Hyspaosines, see Schuol 2000: 291-300.

<sup>345</sup> It is possible that Hyspaosines acted here as an ally of Parthia. As a Seleucid rebel facing the threat of the anabasis of Demetrius, it is plausible to argue that Hyspaosines sought out a friendship with Parthia to help secure his position in Characene. For the campaign, see Shayegan 2011: 80-1. For the failures of Elymais, giving rise to Characene power in the region, see id. 101, 103.

command over the western regions of the kingdom and ruled confidently and competently in his brother's name for many years. In fact, Bacasis' efforts in Babylonia allowed him to defeat a combined Elymaean and Characene invasion of the region in 133 BCE that seriously threatened regional stability.<sup>346</sup> Once again the Parthians had to defend their hegemony over the region.

In the middle 130s BCE, Elymais and Characene put aside their differences and formed an alliance to balance against the growing Parthian threat to their mutual security and survival.<sup>347</sup> Their joint invasion devastated Babylonia but ultimately failed to replace Parthian authority over the region. The result of the invasion was that Parthia reinforced its hegemony over Mesopotamia. Another attempt by Elymais to power-maximize against Parthia had failed. However, the devastation of the recent invasion and the potential threat of the alliance of Characene and Elymais demanded a major response from Parthia.

The invasion had been a direct challenge to Parthian prestige and authority in Mesopotamia by aggressive regional powers. However, it is worth briefly discussing the reasons behind the invasion and its results. Years of Parthian inactivity following the defeat of the Elymaean raids in 138 BCE, the continued deterioration of the Parthian king's health, and the recent expansions of Characene created uncertainty about the true balance of power in the region. Further, Elymais' sudden change of heart and alliance with the rising power of Characene lent itself to open conflict between these states and Parthia because their alliance was a heightened threat to Parthia and because the alliance of Characene and Elymais wanted to adjust its power relation with Parthia in its favor. The best way to secure a new balance of power in the ancient world was through open conflict. Therefore, Characene and Elymais invaded Babylonia.

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<sup>346</sup> For the campaign, see id. 82-8.

<sup>347</sup> Shayegan emphasizes that fear of Parthian power motivated this alliance, see id. 82, 103.

Yet Parthia demonstrated that it remained the preeminent power in the region by defeating the joint invasion. The victory had been costly, and the Parthians appreciated the threat that Characene and Elymais posed to their hegemony in Mesopotamia. Thus, later that year Parthia determined to avenge these recent invasions of its territory with severity and set out on a campaign to eliminate the Elymaean threat to its western lands. Such a harsh response was necessary in 133 BCE because of the potential threat that the alliance between Elymais and Characene posed to the regional authority of Parthia and because their devastating invasion of Babylonia had damaged the perceived power of the Parthian state. Major slights to state reputation and perceived power demanded decisive responses in the interstate anarchy of the Eastern system. Parthia's decisive response was to replace Elymaean independence with Parthian suzerainty.

Recently, Shayegan has argued convincingly that after a decisive victory near Susa, the Parthians installed a pro-Parthian candidate on the throne of Elymais in 133/132 BCE, known as Kamnaskiri the Younger.<sup>348</sup> This pro-Parthian king fought on behalf of the Parthians in the region and turned Elymais into a Parthian client kingdom. The practice of the Parthians to install vassal kings over peripheral regions of their growing empire to solidify their control over those regions at the smallest possible cost to the Parthian state became a common aspect of the political and administrative organization of the Parthian Empire.<sup>349</sup> The Parthian campaign against Elymais in 133 BCE was so successful that Babylonian scribes began to refer to the

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<sup>348</sup> Id. 88-91, 93-4, 98, 104, 110. See also Potts 2002: 358. Note also Lucian *Macr.* 16

<sup>349</sup> For the brief examples of Demetrius II, Tigranes II, Artabazos I, and Himerus, see Shayegan 2011: 91-3. For the arguments that the *Xong-e Nōrūzī* relief depicts Mithridates I or Phraates II investing a local vassal, possibly Kamnaskiri the Younger, see Vanden Berghe 1983: 46; Shayegan 2011: 105-9. See also Mathiesen 1992: ii 119-21; Invernizzi 1998: 224-5. For other Arsacid period rock reliefs, see Kawami 2013.



Parthian king for the first time as “king of the lands.”<sup>350</sup> It was also at this time that the Parthians likely installed a vassal king in Persis.<sup>351</sup> Albeit briefly, the defeat of the alliance of Characene and Elymais and the suppression of the Elymaean threat successfully restored and boosted Parthian prestige in Mesopotamia. Parthia further solidified its status as the bipolar rival of the Seleucid Empire in the West.

### Summary and Conclusion

Between the 240s and the 130s BCE, Parthia had gone from a minor kingdom seized from a rebellious Seleucid satrap to the only major power in the Farther East and the hegemonic rival of the Seleucid Empire to the west. The diligent efforts of Arsaces I to expand the frontiers of his kingdom and strengthen its defenses had made Parthia a regional power that garnered the attention of the Bactrians to the east and the Seleucids to the west. These power-maximizing efforts, paired with shrewd diplomacy and the successful implementation of the innovative Parthian mode of warfare, allowed the Parthians to retain their independence by decisively defeating Seleucus II. The anabasis of Seleucus was a military disaster and political fiasco that further diminished the perceived power of the Seleucid state. It was left to Seleucus’ son, Antiochus III, to renew Seleucid strength through successful wars against usurpers and foreign kings. Moreover, it was left to Antiochus to avenge the shameful defeat of his father in the Farther East by conducting his own anabasis. Through his military acumen, charisma, and determination, Antiochus took advantage of the political isolation and military ineptitude of his

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<sup>350</sup> See Shayegan 2011: 104. Strabo records that the Parthians significantly weakened the power of Persis but acknowledged a local vassal king. Strabo 15.3.3, 24

<sup>351</sup> Shayegan 2011: 178.

enemies in the Farther East to establish loose Seleucid hegemony over the Eastern system for a generation.

Although Antiochus was able to force Parthia and Bactria to accept Seleucid hegemony as client states, Antiochus' reestablishment of Seleucid unipolarity in the Farther East was fleeting. Soon after he returned to the Eastern Mediterranean, Parthia and Bactria once again began to act autonomously and to follow power-maximizing policies that were not in the interest of the Seleucid state. Although Antiochus' anabasis had damaged Parthian power and prestige severely for a generation, the relatively steady decline of the Seleucid Empire after Antiochus' death and the rapid collapse of the Bactrian Kingdom afforded Arsaces II's successors many opportunities to recover and expand the Parthian Kingdom.

The efforts of Phriapatius and Phraates I to strengthen and then expand the Parthian Kingdom made the drastic rise of Parthian power under Mithridates I possible. It was also under Mithridates I that the Parthian state transitioned from a limited to an unlimited revisionist state. The scarring memory of Antiochus' anabasis pushed the Parthians toward a more radical geopolitical outlook. The Parthians were no longer content to acquire and strengthen a regionally powerful kingdom within the Eastern system. Instead, they looked to alter and dominate that system of states as the new hegemon.

However, before the Parthians could become hegemons, they first had to establish their dominance in the Farther East against Bactria and to challenge Seleucid superiority to the west. The rapid deterioration of the Bactrian Kingdom from external pressures and internal dissention meant that Mithridates' successful invasion of Bactria and the concessions of Eucratides I firmly established Parthia as the leading power in the Farther East by the beginning of the 150s BCE. Meanwhile, the further power-transition crisis of the 160s BCE in the Middle East caused by the

sudden death of Antiochus IV and the civil wars that followed his death encouraged Mithridates to pursue his ambitions of western expansion. The Parthians conquered Media after a long campaign, and although the growing threat of nomadic incursions in the East gained Mithridates' attention, the Parthians took advantage of Seleucid weakness and occupied Mesopotamia for the first time.

With the rapid expansion of the Parthian state under Mithridates, the Parthians became the perceived hegemonic rivals of the Seleucids. Yet Seleucid distractions with recurrent civil wars, which had perpetuated the power-transition crisis of the 160s BCE into the 140s BCE, meant that a decisive military clash between the Parthians and Seleucids had not yet occurred. Therefore, despite the Parthians' recent military success and rapidly expanding territory, they had not yet had the opportunity to establish their new status as the legitimate hegemonic rivals of the Seleucids definitively. The Parthians had succeeded at taking advantage of the vulnerable Seleucid Empire to expand their kingdom; however, the Parthians had yet to fight the Seleucid royal army under the command of the Seleucid king since Antiochus III's invasion. Direct open conflict with the Seleucid king was necessary if the Parthians hoped to demonstrate unequivocally their new position of power in the Middle East.

By 140 BCE the Seleucid king, Demetrius II, believed he had enough support and sufficient reason to conduct an eastern expedition against Parthia. Although he hoped to gain military glory and prestige and to reestablish Seleucid power and authority, the ultimate goal of Demetrius' anabasis was to retaliate against recent Parthian aggression by forcing the Parthians to submit once again to Seleucid rule and to reestablish Seleucid hegemony over the Eastern system. Yet Demetrius' campaign was a disaster as he and his army fell victim to the successfully executed "feigned retreat, defeat in detail" mode of warfare of the Parthians. After

what seemed to be initial success, Demetrius quickly found himself outmaneuvered and overwhelmed. Mithridates took Demetrius as an honored captive and claimed victory in the hegemonic war against the Seleucid Empire. With this decisive victory, the Parthians firmly established themselves as the hegemonic rivals and geopolitical equals of the Seleucids. For the first time bipolarity between Parthia and the Seleucid Empire had emerged in the Eastern system.<sup>352</sup>

By the late 130s BCE, the diminished Seleucid Empire and the rising Parthian Kingdom were the last two major states within the Eastern system. The fall of Bactria and the submission of Elymais to Parthia made the Parthians the leading power in the Middle East. Yet, although weakened by civil war and Parthian attacks, the Seleucid Empire remained the major power in the Near East and continued to threaten the new holdings of the Parthians in Mesopotamia and Media.

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<sup>352</sup> Overtoom 2016: 17. Thus, we should reject Grainger's assumption that Parthia was the dominant power in the East, in essence the unipolar power, as early as 140 BCE and his conclusion that Rome and Parthia shared a binary world in the second century BCE. Grainger concludes, "By 140, after ten years of upheaval from Spain to India, events which were obviously interconnected, Rome was clearly the dominant power in the Mediterranean and Parthia the dominant power in the Middle East. For the next century these two nibbled away at the fragmented political region between them, until they bumped into each other in the Euphrates Valley. Their advances were slow because each had its own problems, internal and frontier. The collapse of the Seleucid kingdom between 150-140 meant that neither needed to bother much about the lands between them. It was therefore the collapse of that state, not the Roman advance, not even the Parthian conquests, which was the crucial geopolitical development of the decade." Grainger 2013a: 185-6. Such a conclusion misinterprets the geopolitical realities between Parthia and the Seleucid Empire in the latter half of the second century BCE. It inappropriately represents the Seleucid state as a benign victim and fails to appreciate the geopolitical struggles of Parthia after 140 BCE. This will become even more apparent in the following chapter. Further, this conclusion incorrectly discounts the monumental geopolitical developments between Parthia and Rome in the first century BCE. Despite Grainger's assertion, it is far from "obvious" that events from Spain to India were interconnected in the 140s BCE. Simply because events happened contemporaneously in disparate regions does not *de facto* make them interconnected. Rome and Parthia did not share a binary world in the 140s BCE. In fact, the two states did not even make official contact or "bump into" each other for another fifty years.

The Parthians and Seleucids had become intense rivals, and neither power was content with the new bipolar arrangement in the Eastern system. The Parthians did not intend to end their conquests in Babylonia. Rather, they looked to dismantle the threat of the Seleucid state through further western expeditions. Meanwhile, the Seleucid Empire rejected the notion that the Parthian Kingdom had come to rival its power in the Eastern system. The Seleucids once again had been embarrassed militarily by the Parthians; however, the memory of Antiochus III's success in the Farther East gave the Seleucids hope of regaining their primary place in the East. The Seleucids were even less willing to accept the new bipolar balance of power in the Eastern system. Thus, the mounting tension between the Seleucids and Parthians and the instability of the new system of bipolarity in the East meant that the hegemonic struggle between the Seleucid Empire and Parthia would continue.

### Chapter 3 – The Defeat of the Seleucids and the Emergence of Parthian Hegemony over the Eastern System

In international relations terms, the success of Mithridates I and the failure of Demetrius II left the Eastern system in a condition of bipolarity between Parthia and the Seleucid Empire by 138 BCE.<sup>1</sup> Yet neither state was content with this new geopolitical arrangement. The Seleucid Empire in the 130s BCE remained a powerful polity with great wealth and military resources. Parthia's recent victory had been devastating; however, it was not total. There is no good reason to assume that the Seleucid state could not recover fully from Demetrius' defeat and reclaim the Farther East.<sup>2</sup> The Seleucids had the means and motive to conduct further hegemonic war against the Parthians. Meanwhile, Parthia had evolved into an unlimited revisionist state that wanted to dominate not only the Farther East but also the entire Eastern system. The Seleucids the main opponents of the Parthians within the Eastern system, and the Parthians appreciated the threat that the Seleucids posed to their state security and continued growth. The wide-ranging ambitions of both these states led to further open conflict and the continuation of the hegemonic struggle between the Parthians and the Seleucids for another half century.

Yet the Seleucid Empire was not the only concern of the Parthians. The recent and total disintegration of the Bactrian Kingdom left the northern and eastern frontiers of Parthia vulnerable. Large migrations and conflict on the Central Asian steppe were putting an increasingly dangerous amount of pressure on these frontiers. With the Kingdom of Bactria gone, it became Parthia's responsibility to rebuff the various nomadic tribes mounting on the

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<sup>1</sup> Sampson is incorrect that "the Parthian Empire was the unquestioned dominant power in the region." Sampson 2015: 46.

<sup>2</sup> Dąbrowa appears too pessimistic about the irreversible decline of the Seleucid state after Demetrius' defeat. Dąbrowa 1999 [2000]: 16.

frontier and to protect the Iranian plateau. The full weight of the “nomadic problem” fell at the feet of the Parthian kings.<sup>3</sup> Desperate conflicts with the nomadic tribes of the Central Asian steppe in the 120s and 110s BCE tested the power and authority of the Parthian state. Not since the anabasis of Antiochus III had the survival of Parthia been so in doubt. The rapid fluctuation of Parthian power from the 160s-100s BCE illustrates the fragile existence of ancient states under the pressures of interstate anarchy within the international environment of the Eastern system. It took no small amount of Parthian diligence and persistence to overcome the geopolitical challenges they faced in the West and the East.

In times of great challenge, states, especially ancient ones, benefit greatly from strong-willed, talented, and ambitious leadership. It is important to keep in mind what was discussed at the beginning of this study, namely that the pressures of the interstate system and the paradigms of Realist theory only provide incentives for action and a larger context for those actions. Ultimately, it is always left to individual actors, usually powerful political leaders in the ancient world, to interpret the needs of the state, dynasty, or even tribe and to react to those needs accordingly. For the Parthians at the height of the nomadic conflict, this man was Mithridates II. Mithridates, in thirty years, took the once powerful Parthian state from the brink of destruction to an unrivaled position of power. Successful campaigns in the East and West drastically expanded the geopolitical reach of the Parthian state. By the time of his death in 91 BCE, Parthia had emerged as the hegemon of the Eastern system.

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<sup>3</sup> For a recent evaluation of Parthian conflicts and interactions with the nomads of the Central Asian steppe, note Olbrycht 2015.

## The Renewed Effort of the Seleucids to Destroy their Parthian Rival

Since the height of Seleucid power under Antiochus III in the late third and early second centuries BCE, dynastic strife, endemic civil war, and failed foreign expeditions tempered the strength and authority of the empire. Yet great potential rested just beneath the surface of all these hardships. If the right Seleucid king emerged, he could hope to consolidate the still considerable wealth and resources of the empire and turn them successfully against the enemies of the state. In the 130s BCE, even after the disaster of Demetrius II's anabasis, there remained realistic hope that the Seleucid Empire could overcome the upstart Parthians in the East and reinstate Seleucid hegemony over the Eastern system.<sup>4</sup> Demetrius's brother, Antiochus VII, looked to live up to the reputation of his namesake, avenge the damage done to his family, restore the strength and security of his state, and destroy the newly established bipolarity in the East through an anabasis of his own.<sup>5</sup>

### The Anabasis of Antiochus VII: The Last Great Gasp of the Seleucid Empire

With the defeat and capture of Demetrius II, civil war in Syria escalated. The usurper Tryphon seized this opportunity to gain the Seleucid throne through treachery and bribery in 138 BCE; however, he quickly abused his power and lost the support of his soldiers in Syria.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, Demetrius' brother, Antiochus VII, decided to return to Syria and challenge

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<sup>4</sup> Sherwin-White and Kuhrt correctly recognize that, in the conflict between the Seleucids under Antiochus VII and the Parthians, both powers were matched evenly and the outcome "hung in the balance." Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993: 224. Chahin unfairly overlooks Antiochus VII, arguing that Antiochus VIII was "the last of the Seleucids with any credence." Chahin 1987: 227.

<sup>5</sup> "Now when Antiochus had come into his own country, he determined to go and fight with the king of Persia [that is, the Parthian king], for he had revolted from the time of the first Antiochus [in reality, after the death of Antiochus II]." *V Maccabees* 21.19

<sup>6</sup> Jos. *AJ.* 13.218-21



Tryphon for the throne.<sup>7</sup> After a brief campaign, Antiochus defeated Tryphon and became the sole ruler of the Seleucid Empire.<sup>8</sup> Yet Antiochus' new position was precarious. A series of civil wars had demonstrated the volatility of the Seleucid throne. The civil wars and the defeat and capture of Demetrius II severely damaged the reputation and perceived power of the Seleucid state and the authority of the king.<sup>9</sup> Further, although Demetrius was in Parthian captivity and Antiochus had returned to fight the usurper Tryphon, Antiochus VII decided to marry his brother's wife and proclaimed himself king.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, Antiochus technically was a usurper to his brother's throne.<sup>11</sup> For these reasons Antiochus needed to consolidate his power, expand his authority, build his reputation as a strong leader, and secure his kingdom. The best way to accomplish these goals in the ancient world was through successful military conquest. Thus, Antiochus' decisions to break his alliance with the Jews once Tryphon no longer was a threat, to invade Judea, to besiege Jerusalem, and to force Judea to submit to Seleucid hegemony are not surprising.<sup>12</sup>

The sudden, violent change in the geopolitical relationship between the Jews and the Seleucids in the 130s BCE is another example of the uncertainty and instability of state interaction in the ancient world under the pressures of the interstate anarchy. Note that Antiochus

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<sup>7</sup> Id. 13.222-3; Appian *Syr.* 11.68. For more information on Antiochus VII, see Will 1982: ii 410f.; Shayegan 2003 [2007]: 87-92.

<sup>8</sup> *I Maccabees* 15.10-14, 25-6, 37, 39; Jos. *AJ.* 13.223-4; Appian *Syr.* 11.68; Strabo 14.5.2; Syncellus 553.

<sup>9</sup> Dąbrowa 1999 [2000]: 16.

<sup>10</sup> *I Maccabees* 15.1-4; Jos. *AJ.* 13.220-3; Appian *Syr.* 11.68.

<sup>11</sup> Bouché-Leclercq 1913-1914: i 378; Shayegan 2011: 124.

<sup>12</sup> For Antiochus VII's Jewish Wars, see Bevan 1902: ii 239-41; Bouché-Leclercq 1913-1914: i 374-7; Abel 1952: i 200-9; Ehling 1998a: 234-41; Ehling 2008: 193-9. See also *I Maccabees* 15.25-40, 16.1-10; Diod. 34/35.1

eagerly sought out Jewish help in his war against Tryphon and offered the Jews several concessions for their aid. As recorded in *I Maccabees*,

Antiochus [VII], the son of Demetrius [I] the king, sent a letter from the islands of the [Aegean] sea to Simon, the priest and ethnarch of the Jews, and to all the nation; its contents were as follows: ‘King Antiochus to Simon the high priest and ethnarch and to the nation of the Jews, greetings. Whereas certain pestilent men have gained control of the kingdom of our fathers [that is, Tryphon and his supporters], and I intend to lay claim to the kingdom so that I may restore it as it formerly was, and have recruited a host of mercenary troops and have equipped warships, and intend to make a landing in the region so that I may proceed against those who have destroyed our country and those who have devastated many cities in my kingdom, now therefore I confirm to you all the tax remissions that the kings before me have granted you, and release from all the other payments from which they have released you. I permit you to mint your own coinage as money for your country, and I grant freedom to Jerusalem and the sanctuary. All the weapons which you have prepared and the strongholds which you have built and now hold shall remain yours. Every debt you owe to the royal treasury and any such future debts shall be canceled for you from henceforth and for all time. When we gain control of our kingdom, we will bestow great honor upon you and your nation and the temple, so that your glory will become manifest in all the earth.’<sup>13</sup>

The letter illustrates the destruction that the series of civil wars had brought to the Seleucid state. Years of war had ravaged the Syrian countryside. Syria was the heart of the Seleucid state and a vital breadbasket. One can see the concern that Antiochus shows at the destruction of this region. Antiochus was hugely ambitious and he understood that he could not restore the Seleucid Empire to its former strength without first restoring the productivity of Syria. It is clear from Antiochus’ emphasis on restoring the former power of the kingdom that he had grand hopes of campaigning against the Parthians and restoring Seleucid hegemony in the East from the beginning of his bid for power. Yet the passage also demonstrates Antiochus’ vulnerability in 138 BCE and his need

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<sup>13</sup> *I Maccabees* 15.1-4. I have made slight alterations to Lendering’s translation. Although it is difficult to say whether this letter is genuine, *I Maccabees* is a relatively contemporary historical account of these events and generally reliable. For the composition and content of *I Maccabees*, see Mittmann-Richert 2000.

for military support. Before the royal army deserted Tryphon in favor of Antiochus, he was relying on mercenaries to fight his war. Thus, it made sense for Antiochus to secure a military alliance with the heavily militarized Jewish state. To gain this alliance, he offered the Jews autonomous rule. The Jews stood to gain political, financial, military, and territorial freedom and, thus, agreed to the alliance. The alliance promised regional security and enhanced the prestige of the Jewish state. Notice that Antiochus emphasized that the alliance would bring world-renowned glory to Judea. This was attractive to the middling Jewish state because state reputation was linked directly to perceived power and state security. With an enhanced military and political reputation, the Jews could hope to bolster state security in a highly volatile region.

Yet, as soon as Antiochus no longer needed Jewish aid, he reneged on his agreement. There was no enforceable international law in the ancient world, and therefore, there was nothing, short of the threat or use of military force, to hold Antiochus to his promises. After he landed in Syria, Antiochus gained the support of the Seleucid royal army. He not only no longer needed the support of the Jews to win his war against Tryphon, but he also had a strong enough army to make war on Judea. The Jews had lost their leverage and could do nothing to force Antiochus to honor their agreement. Moreover, Judea was a strategically important region and the Jews traditionally were a longstanding antagonist of the Seleucid state. Thus, with the power relationship between Antiochus and the Jewish state drastically altered, Antiochus sought a military solution to reestablish Seleucid hegemony over Judea masked in the abrasive rhetoric of ancient diplomacy.<sup>14</sup> To this point, we find the following account in *I Maccabees*.

He [Antiochus] sent to him [that is, Simon] Athenobius, one of his friends, to confer with him, saying, ‘You hold control of Joppa and Gazara and the citadel in Jerusalem; they are cities of my kingdom. You have devastated their territory, you have done great damage in the land, and you have taken possession of many

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<sup>14</sup> *I Maccabees* 15.26-7

places in my kingdom. Now then, hand over the cities which you have seized and the tribute money of the places which you have conquered outside the borders of Judah; or else give me for them five hundred talents of silver, and for the destruction that you have caused and the tribute money of the cities, five hundred talents more. Otherwise we will come and conquer you.’<sup>15</sup>

This is an excellent example of the aggressive, harsh, yet familiar rhetoric found in ancient diplomacy. This type of aggressive diplomatic exchange, known as “compellence diplomacy,” was common throughout the ancient world.<sup>16</sup> Antiochus’ envoy demanded the return of land and taxes or a substantial ransom. If Simon refused, Antiochus promised open conflict. Note also that Athenobius did not offer Simon any option to negotiate these terms. Simon was to submit to Antiochus’ demands or prepare for war. In fact, when Simon claimed that the cities he held were the rightful property of the Jewish state and attempted to negotiate a lower payment, Athenobius promptly broke off communication and reported to Antiochus, who became “violently angry.”<sup>17</sup>

In the absence of permanent embassies, ancient states had no way to communicate with one another consistently, and because of the infrequency of diplomatic state interaction, ancient states lacked the ability to defuse potential points of contention between polities before conflict became unavoidable. Thus, compellence diplomacy, like the example above, was the normal diplomatic exchange between two estranged states in the ancient world. Antiochus no longer needed Jewish aid in his war and, therefore, had no reason to honor his substantial concessions to the Jewish state. Antiochus had offered these concessions from a place of weakness and desperation; however, he had become strong and was winning his war. There was no enforceable international law to encourage Antiochus to maintain his treaty. Hence, he decided to use his new strength to subdue the strategically important region of Judea.

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<sup>15</sup> Id. 15.28-31.

<sup>16</sup> For compellence diplomacy, see the Introduction above.

<sup>17</sup> Id. 15.32-6.

The successful conquest of Judea was important to Antiochus for several reasons. First, it offered him the opportunity to enhance his military prestige. The Jews in Judea were a highly militarized, warlike, and violent people, who had destabilized the southern frontier of the Seleucid Empire for decades. With the submission of Judea by force, Antiochus could, first, claim victory over a traditional enemy of the Seleucid state, and second, publicize a victory over a foreign enemy, rather than a usurper. The defeat of a foreign enemy, especially the Jews who had continually challenged Seleucid dominion, would lend legitimacy to Antiochus' rule and garner support for him within the army. Second, the submission of Judea secured the southern frontier of Antiochus' realm. He could hope that a strong show of force in Judea would discourage further resistance by the Jews and outside interference in the region by Ptolemaic Egypt. Third, Antiochus wanted to regain control of the strategically important cities and fortifications in Judea to secure his western lands, making an eastern expedition possible. Finally, a successful campaign also allowed Antiochus to raise the necessary revenues to conduct his anabasis. The submission of the Jewish state to Seleucid hegemony was an important step in Antiochus' larger geopolitical plans and power-maximizing policies. Antiochus' campaign temporarily stabilized a volatile region, helped him consolidate his power over Syria, and allowed him to begin planning the restoration of Seleucid power in the East.

Josephus tells us that Antiochus invaded Judea in ca. 134 BCE, ravaged the countryside, surrounded Jerusalem with encampments, and assaulted the north wall with "a hundred towers of three stories high"<sup>18</sup> The Jewish commander, Hyrcanus, after stout but costly defense, agreed to come to terms with Antiochus in ca. 132 BCE.<sup>19</sup> Antiochus rejected the advice of his counselors,

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<sup>18</sup> *Jos. Ant.* 13.236-9

<sup>19</sup> The siege lasted about a year, which forced Hyrcanus to remove all noncombatants from the city to conserve supplies. Much like Caesar at Alesia, Antiochus did not let the civilians past his

who wanted to “utterly destroy the [Jewish] nation,” and instead demanded that the Jews hand over their arms, pull down the walls of Jerusalem, deliver up hostages, pay 500 talents of silver in tribute, surrender control over Joppa and the surrounding cities, and accept Seleucid hegemony.<sup>20</sup> Finally, Antiochus forced Hyrcanus to spend another 2,500 talents to raise a mercenary force and to accompany him with this army on his invasion of Parthia.<sup>21</sup> Antiochus’ Judean expedition had been a major success that prepared him and his army for his anabasis.

Therefore, it is worth also considering several reasons why Antiochus desired to conduct a large-scale hegemonic war against the Parthians. First, Antiochus’ anabasis was a retaliatory campaign. The Parthians had betrayed the Seleucid state by occupying Media and Mesopotamia and had shamed the Seleucid dynasty by defeating and capturing Demetrius II. Demetrius was a high profile prisoner of war and Antiochus’ elder brother. Thus, Antiochus wanted to gain vengeance against the Parthians by defeating them in battle and freeing his brother from Parthian captivity. It is possible that Antiochus planned to restore his elder brother to the throne.<sup>22</sup> However, we should be cautious in assuming any brotherly love between Antiochus and Demetrius. Relationships within the Seleucid dynasty were tumultuous. Royal brothers had often fought over the throne, including Antiochus and Demetrius’ father and half uncle. Yet, it is undeniable that the captivity of Antiochus’ brother and the stain of Demetrius’ defeat were embarrassments that Antiochus wished to reverse.

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siege lines, and many died in the no man’s land in between the armies until Hyrcanus readmitted them to the city. *Id.* 13.240-5. Note *Caes. BG* 7.78

<sup>20</sup> *Jos. Ant.* 13.245-8; *Diod.* 34/35.1

<sup>21</sup> The Hyrcanus and his troops accompanied Antiochus into northern Mesopotamia and help remove the Parthians from this region. *Jos. Ant.* 13.249-50

<sup>22</sup> Shayegan uses Appian’s brief account of the campaign to state that the release of Demetrius was the official reason for the campaign. Shayegan 2011: 124. For the argument that there is little reason to assume hostility between the two brothers, see Mittag 2002: 377-80.

Second, a successful military campaign against the Parthians would have drastically increased Antiochus' prestige and legitimacy. Antiochus had broken his alliance with the Jewish state to create an opportunity to enhance his military prestige, but the suppression of the Jews was a minor victory.<sup>23</sup> However, a successful anabasis against the Parthians would have linked Antiochus directly to the greatest of the Seleucid dynasts, Antiochus III. The best way for Antiochus VII to consolidate authority over his army and kingdom was through a successful military venture against the main rival to Seleucid hegemony in the Eastern system. Further, the Parthians threatened Antiochus' prestige and legitimacy at home by holding Demetrius as a prisoner of war. It is probable that one of the main motivations behind Antiochus' anabasis was his desire to "free" his brother Demetrius so that Antiochus could in turn control Demetrius.<sup>24</sup> Antiochus had just won a civil war and did not want to have to fight another. It was politically dangerous for Antiochus to allow the Parthians to maintain their control over his brother. Arguably, Demetrius was the rightful Seleucid king, and it is not hard to imagine that Demetrius, and the prospect of his return to the Seleucid throne, could have been a rallying point for the enemies of Antiochus. Antiochus' position and legitimacy as king could never be secure as long as his elder brother was capable of challenging Antiochus' position. Moreover, the Parthians were first among Antiochus' enemies and hoped to use Demetrius as a pawn to destabilize the Seleucid Empire further. In this connection, Justin records, "But it was not compassion, or respect for ties of blood, that was the cause of this extraordinary clemency of the Parthians toward Demetrius; the reason was, that they had some designs on the kingdom of Syria, and intended to make use of Demetrius against his brother Antiochus, as circumstances, the course of

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<sup>23</sup> For the argument that Antiochus struck a celebratory gold coinage for his success against the Jews, see Assar 2005a: 46.

<sup>24</sup> This is what Shayegan argues. Shayegan 2011: 124-5.

time, or the fortune of war, might require.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, the looming Parthian threat to deploy Demetrius as a puppet rival against Antiochus was a serious danger. For Antiochus it did not matter that Demetrius lived reluctantly under the thumb of the Parthian king or that he seemingly garnered no ill will toward his younger brother.<sup>26</sup> Parthian control of Demetrius was dangerous. Antiochus could not allow Demetrius to remain in Parthian captivity if he hoped to solidify his authority.

Third, in addition to the prospects of revenge and enhanced prestige, Antiochus’ anabasis was a hegemonic war aimed at the destruction of the newly established bipolar rivalry between the Seleucid Empire and Parthia. The ultimate goal of Antiochus’ campaign was to force the Parthians to resubmit to Seleucid authority. Like Antiochus III before him, Antiochus VII wanted to reestablish hegemony in the Eastern system.<sup>27</sup> In a short span of time, the unlimited revisionist Parthian state had seized the key regions of Media and Mesopotamia; Parthia had supplanted the Seleucid Empire as the authority over the various eastern dynasts; and the Parthians appeared to have every intention to expand their power and influence into Syria. Geopolitical tensions between Parthia and the Seleucid state were high, and Parthia was not satisfied with the international environment of bipolarity. It was only a matter of time before the Parthians made hegemonic war against the Seleucid state in an attempt to replace the system of bipolarity with Parthian hegemony. Therefore, Antiochus’ anabasis was an effort to take the

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<sup>25</sup> Justin 38.9.10

<sup>26</sup> Demetrius apparently tried to escape his captivity twice, despite his marriage to the Parthian king’s daughter and his life of luxury in the East. Id. 38.9.3-9. See also id. 36.1.6. Appian states that Demetrius married Phraates’ sister, Rhodogyne. Appian *Syr.* 11.67

<sup>27</sup> Antiochus wanted to restore the Parthians to tributary status within the confines of their ancestral realm. Diod. 34/35.15. See also *I Maccabees* 15.3, *V Maccabees* 21.19



initiative and to carry hegemonic war into the Parthian realm.<sup>28</sup> Parthia's presence in Media and Mesopotamia remained precarious in the late 130s BCE. Moreover, there was mounting pressure on the Parthian eastern frontier as the threat of nomadic incursions increasingly garnered the attention of the Parthian kings. Furthermore, Antiochus had unified his realm and commanded a strong, loyal army.<sup>29</sup> Finally, the declining health of Mithridates I, his death in 132 BCE, and the ascension of the young Phraates II damaged the perceived power of Parthia. Although details of Phraates' reign are scarce, he apparently came to the throne as a young man since he initially shared a co-regency with his mother, Rīnnu.<sup>30</sup> Thus, in the late 130s BCE the Seleucid bogeyman, Mithridates I, was dead and the young, untested Phraates II was left to hold together a wide-ranging, newly won kingdom that faced internal unrest and severe external pressures. Antiochus had every reason to be optimistic about his chances of success in his upcoming eastern campaign.

The intentions of Antiochus to campaign in the East were not a secret, and in 131 BCE the Parthians enacted extensive preparations in Mesopotamia. The threat that Antiochus posed to Babylonia was considerable, and it was necessary for the new Parthian king to ensure the loyalty and security of this region. The Greek population in Mesopotamia was the most potentially volatile and disloyal group in the region. Thus, in an attempt to secure their support in the

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<sup>28</sup> "Antiochus, having heard of their designs, and thinking it proper to be first in the field, led forth an army, which he had inured to service by many wars with his neighbors, against the Parthians." Justin 38.10.1

<sup>29</sup> Although an exaggeration, *Maccabees* records that Antiochus commanded 120,000 well-trained soldiers and 8,000 cavalry. *I Maccabees* 15.13. Meanwhile, Justin claims that Antiochus took 80,000 soldiers with him on his anabasis. Justin 38.10.2. Antiochus mustered a sizable army. This speaks directly to the potential power of the Seleucid state and the threat it could pose to Parthia.

<sup>30</sup> Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -131D. For a brief account of Phraates' reign, see Assar 2005a 45-7.

looming conflict, Phraates met with representatives from the Greek communities and appointed a Greek as governor of Babylon.<sup>31</sup> Parthian royal support of local Greek leaders was a wise policy decision. It tried to secure the loyalty of Babylonian Greek communities in the face of Seleucid advances, and it appears to have been mostly successful during the course of the war. We may reject the belief that Hellenic fervor led Greek communities to abandon Parthian rule. Rather, these communities continued to work with Phraates enthusiastically before Antiochus' invasion of the region.<sup>32</sup> However, Phraates had less success in keeping the loyalties of the various eastern dynasts in the region under his authority.

Antiochus invaded Mesopotamia in 130 BCE and occupied the region until late in 129 BCE.<sup>33</sup> Justin states, "Many kings of the east met Antiochus on his march, offering him themselves and their kingdoms, and expressing the greatest detestation of Parthian pride."<sup>34</sup> It is unclear who these men were, but this appears to illustrate an effort made by certain eastern dynasts to shake off Parthian hegemony. Since Parthia had replaced the Seleucid state in the region as the main source of authority and power, these eastern dynasts viewed Parthia as more of an immediate threat to state security than the Seleucid Empire. For example, the Parthians recently had defeated the military alliance of Elymais and Characene and forced Elymais to

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<sup>31</sup> Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -129A. See also Shayegan 2011: 125-7. It appears Antiochus IV had introduced a large Greek community to Babylon. Van der Spek 2005.

<sup>32</sup> Shayegan argues that the Greek communities in Mesopotamia supported Parthian rule and resented Antiochus' occupation. He concludes that these communities endured Seleucid rule reluctantly until the Parthian counter attack in 129 BCE. He emphasizes that Justin's and Diodorus' accounts of Antiochus' occupation of Mesopotamia are confused or concealing. See Shayegan 2011: 136.

<sup>33</sup> I support the argument that Antiochus' anabasis consisted of two phases. The first was the invasion of Mesopotamia, and the second was the invasion of Media. See esp. Fischer 1970: 39-48; Shayegan 2003 [2007]: 90-2; Ehling 2008: 201-5; Shayegan 2011: 125 n.341, 128-37.

<sup>34</sup> Justin 38.10.5

become a client kingdom.<sup>35</sup> Thus, nobles from various minor eastern states, who had lost power to pro-Parthian candidates, viewed Antiochus' invasion as an opportunity to remove political enemies, counter Parthian regional hegemony, and expand their own power and authority regionally.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, by joining Antiochus' cause these dynasts could hope to benefit from his new settlement of the East. That is, these states conducted a process known to political scientists as "balancing behavior" against Parthia.<sup>37</sup> They joined the Seleucids to balance against the strength of the Parthians and did so with hope of geopolitical gain if Antiochus won. A major reason for balancing against Parthia was that the eastern dynasts understood that Antiochus, even if completely successful against the Parthians, eventually would have to return to Syria and concern himself with the geopolitical developments of the Eastern Mediterranean. Unlike the Parthians, who were making Media and Mesopotamia the new focus of their growing kingdom, the Seleucids had western concerns that limited their activity in the East and provided these eastern dynasts with the prospect of greater autonomy. Moreover, minor eastern states, such as Media Atropatene, Elymais, Persis, and Characene, had thrown off Seleucid hegemony in recent years. By forging a new alliance with Antiochus VII against the Parthians, these eastern dynasts could hope to win Seleucid favor and official recognition of their independent client status.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Note that Antiochus had to conquer Elymais to remove the pro-Parthian candidate there. See Shayegan 2011: 131 n.375. Characene stayed aloof from the conflict but used the chaos that followed Antiochus' death to invade Babylonia. Id. 110-11.

<sup>36</sup> For the argument that the eastern dynasts offered their support to Antiochus after his conquest of Mesopotamia, see Fischer 1970: 42. See also Ehling 2008: 203.

<sup>37</sup> Balancing behavior was particularly common in the multipolar international environment of the ancient Greek world. See Eckstein 2006: 65-7. See also Strauss 1991. For the political science concept of balancing, see Waltz 1979: 168; Walt 1987; Waltz 1988: 625; Sheehan 1996; Mastanduno 1997; Beck 1997: 231-2; Wohlforth 1999; Wohlforth 2002.

<sup>38</sup> Euthydemus I received similar recognition from Antiochus III in 206 BCE.

Initially, Antiochus' anabasis was greatly successful. In 130 BCE he won three victories against the Parthians and seized Babylon.<sup>39</sup> However, it was too late in the year to continue the campaign Farther East. Therefore, Antiochus decided to enter winter quarters in Mesopotamia by dividing his large army into garrisons throughout several captured cities in the region; however, this decision had disastrous results. Justin records,

On account of the number of his forces, Antiochus had distributed his army, in winter quarters, through several cities; and this dispersion was the cause of his ruin; for the cities, finding themselves harassed by having to furnish supplies, and by the depredations of the soldiers, revolted to the Parthians, and, on an appointed day, conspired to fall upon the army divided among them, so that the several divisions might not be able to assist each other.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, with the support of the communities in Mesopotamia, the Parthians isolated Antiochus in Media. Phraates II then sprung into action and destroyed the Seleucid army in battle, leaving Antiochus VII among the slain.<sup>41</sup>

Once again, we find evidence of the Parthians implementing and executing their "feigned retreat, defeat in detail" mode of warfare. Phraates II likely was in Seleucia when Antiochus VII began his invasion of Mesopotamia.<sup>42</sup> The Parthians then fought three minor battles against Antiochus in an attempt to protect Babylonia. Antiochus won each of these battles; however, none of them was decisive. The Parthian army remained intact and firmly under Phraates' leadership, at which point Justin states, "In the meantime, since he [Phraates] could not overthrow Antiochus by open force, he made attempts upon him everywhere by stratagem (*insidiis*)."<sup>43</sup> What Justin here identifies as Parthian "stratagem" is in fact the successful results

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<sup>39</sup> Justin 38.10.6; Jos. *Ant.* 13.251

<sup>40</sup> Id. 38.10.8.

<sup>41</sup> Id. 38.10.9-10; Diod. 34/35.16

<sup>42</sup> Shayegan 2011: 128.

<sup>43</sup> Justin 38.10.7

of a Parthian strategic feigned retreat.<sup>44</sup> The Parthians drew in their stronger, more traditionally armed and deployed enemies and baited them until they made a mistake or became vulnerable, at which point the Parthians closed their trap. Arguably, the entire campaign up to this point also was a part of this larger strategy. Phraates' forces fought a series of limited engagements with the Seleucid army as it moved southeast toward Babylon.<sup>45</sup> Phraates likely was hoping that Antiochus would make a military blunder in Babylonia that he could exploit in order to defeat the Seleucid army before it completely occupied Mesopotamia and threatened Media. However, Antiochus commanded a large, well trained, and enthusiastic royal army. In 130 BCE he did not provide Phraates with an opportunity to spring his trap successfully. Thus, Phraates abandoned Mesopotamia and withdrew into Media, at which point Justin finally recognizes that the Parthians were trying to deceive and trap Antiochus.

It was Antiochus' ill-advised decision to divide and garrison his army throughout Mesopotamia that finally provided Phraates with the ideal military opportunity, for which he had been waiting. Over the winter of 130/129 BCE, Antiochus' forces had been an abusive burden to the captured cities of Mesopotamia. Through his agents, Phraates was able to communicate with these disgruntled communities over the next several months and enlist them in a well-planned and coordinated uprising against their Seleucid garrisons in late 129 BCE.<sup>46</sup> It is astonishing that

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<sup>44</sup> Shayegan recognizes that Phraates II was avoiding the Seleucid army to draw it into an ambush; however, he does not make the connection to the Parthians conducting their unique mode of warfare. Shayegan 2011: 135.

<sup>45</sup> Josephus states that Antiochus erected a battle trophy on the river Lycus (in northern Iraq) after defeating a Parthian general, *Indates*. *Jos. Ant.* 13.251. See also *V Maccabees* 21.19-22

<sup>46</sup> Note Justin 38.10.8; Diod. 34/35.15. If we determine that Antiochus left garrisons in the important cities of Mesopotamia to maintain his control over the region, including protecting the region from potential raids from Characene or Arab tribes, while he campaigned in Media, we further resolve the disparities in our sources about the end of Antiochus' anabasis. More on this below. Dąbrowa argues that Antiochus and his brother Demetrius II viewed the reoccupation of

such an extensive and complex plan was kept secret for so long. Further, the eagerness of the communities to aid Phraates and their ability to execute the uprising successfully without any knowledge of it coming to Seleucid officials speaks to the support that these communities retained for Parthian rule. The mild rule of the Parthians and the efforts of Phraates to gain the loyalties of Greek communities before the war by supporting and electing Greek officials appear to have paid dividends. He found these communities to be ready allies in his efforts to isolate Antiochus.<sup>47</sup>

By the spring of 129 BCE, Antiochus stood ready to invade Media. It was at this time that Phraates entered into negotiations with Antiochus to delay the Seleucid invasion of Media, to gain authorized access to Mesopotamia for his agents, and to provide the Parthians with more time to confirm and organize the uprising in Mesopotamia. Diodorus records,

The warm spring heat had begun to melt the snow; the crops, after the long cold of winter, were showing their first buds; and men were going to the work of agriculture; when Arsaces [that is, Phraates II], to probe the enemy, sent envoys to negotiate peace. Antiochus [VII] replied that he would grant peace on these conditions: that his brother Demetrius [II] was freed from captivity and released, that Arsaces evacuated the territory which he had occupied, and that, content with his ancestral realm, he paid tribute to Antiochus. Provoked by the harshness of this response, Arsaces marched against Antiochus.<sup>48</sup>

Here we have another ideal example of compellence diplomacy in the ancient world. The coming of spring and the melting of the snows indicated to the Parthians that the military campaign

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the Greek communities of Mesopotamia and Media as important and potentially advantageous. Dąbrowa 1999 [2000]: 15-16.

<sup>47</sup> Shayegan argues that the Parthians not only retained the loyalty of Greek leaders in Babylonia but also the native population. He argues that the *Dynastic Prophecy* links Phraates II to Darius III as the successful successor of the Persian Empire, who finally defeated the Macedonian invaders. He concludes that this prophecy was propaganda to encourage pro-Parthian rebellion against Antiochus VII in Mesopotamia and that it demonstrates local support of the Parthians as the second coming of the Achaemenid Persians. Shayegan 2011: 137-9.

<sup>48</sup> Diod. 34/35.15

season was about to commence. Therefore, Phraates expected Antiochus to follow up on his victories in Mesopotamia with an invasion of Media. Phraates knew that if he could use his negotiations with Antiochus to delay the Seleucid invasion and further organize his uprising plot in Mesopotamia, then he stood a better chance of later isolating Antiochus in Media and destroying him. Thus, Phraates decided to test Antiochus' temperament with an offer of peace.<sup>49</sup> However, Antiochus' response contains the standard, abrasive rhetoric of diplomatic exchange in the ancient world. He demanded his brother's release into his custody, the return of all Seleucid territory occupied by Parthia, and the payment of tribute. In essence, he wanted Parthia once again to recognize Seleucid hegemony.

Although Antiochus experienced some success in Mesopotamia in 130 BCE, he had not decisively defeated the Parthians. Antiochus' demands were severe, nonnegotiable, and unrealistic. There was no way that Phraates could or would accept Antiochus' harsh terms while he still had the ability to carry on the war. Had Phraates accepted Antiochus' terms without a decisive battle, he would have lost all legitimacy and authority as king. Moreover, his submission without a decisive battle would have annihilated the perception of Parthian power. From Phraates' point of view, Antiochus' demands were so high and the consequences were so damaging that he might as well risk further open conflict.

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<sup>49</sup> The only direct evidence that we have of a large conspiracy against Seleucid rule in this region is Justin's brief account, where he states, "[the cities] revolted to the Parthians, and, on an appointed day, conspired to fall upon the [Seleucid] army divided among them, so that the several divisions might not be able to assist each other." Justin 38.10.8. Although Phraates' involvement in this conspiracy is not mentioned, it seems highly unlikely that such a complex synchronization of military and political efforts could have been accomplished without his knowledge and aid. The fact that these communities revolted over to the Parthians and did not simply declare independence also lends itself to the opinion that Phraates was involved in organizing this uprising. Thus, it seems likely that Phraates would have utilized the opportune diplomatic cover of negotiations with Antiochus to send his agents into Mesopotamia to continue discussions with the disgruntled communities in the region.

Before Phraates could spring his trap, he enacted one further ploy to force Antiochus into a vulnerable situation by finally releasing Demetrius II from captivity.<sup>50</sup> It will be recalled that one of the reasons Antiochus wanted to conduct hegemonic war against Parthia was to recover his brother from Parthian captivity because Antiochus feared that the Parthians might use Demetrius to undermine his authority.<sup>51</sup> In fact, one of Antiochus' demands to Phraates was the release of his brother.<sup>52</sup> Yet Phraates refused to turn Demetrius over to Antiochus. Instead, Phraates understood that Demetrius was a valuable asset, and it appears that he finally released Demetrius under escort to destabilize the Seleucid state after discussions with Antiochus had broken off.<sup>53</sup> Justin records, "It was then that Phraates sent Demetrius into Syria, with a body of Parthians, to seize the throne, so that Antiochus might be recalled from Parthia to secure his own dominions."<sup>54</sup> It is unclear exactly when Phraates released Demetrius after the unsuccessful negotiations with Antiochus; however, it seems probable that it occurred during the height of Antiochus' subsequent conquest of Media as he threatened to invade the Parthian homeland.<sup>55</sup>

It is likely that Antiochus did not invade Media until the spring of 129 BCE and that he planned to conquer Media and Parthia.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, by the fall of 129 BCE Antiochus must have

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<sup>50</sup> For the traditional argument that Phraates released Demetrius as a last resort to destabilize the Seleucid Empire, a decision he later came to regret, see Saint-Martin 1850: ii 50-2; Bevan 1902: 247; Bouché-Leclercq 1913-1914: i 382-4; Bellinger 1949: 58-9; Will 1982: 414, 432-4; Dąbrowa 1992: 46-8; Ehling 1998b: 142.

<sup>51</sup> Justin 38.9.10

<sup>52</sup> Diod. 34/35.15

<sup>53</sup> Mittag rejects that Phraates released Demetrius as part of his strategy to win the war. Instead, he argues that Demetrius escaped Parthian captivity. Mittag 2002. For a thorough rejection of this theory, see Shayegan 2011: 140-5. Parthian intentions behind releasing Demetrius will be discussed in more detail below.

<sup>54</sup> Justin 38.10.7

<sup>55</sup> See Shayegan 2011: 129-30.

<sup>56</sup> Id. 132-3. See also Ael. *NA* 10.34; Ael. *VH* 2.41; Livy *Obseq.* AUC 624; Diod. 34/35.15



conquered much of Media and begun his push into Parthia proper.<sup>57</sup> Antiochus appears to have occupied a large portion of Media without much resistance. What appears to be a lack of Parthian resistance in Media can be explained if Phraates continued to pursue the Parthians' unique mode of warfare.

Phraates had maneuvered and delayed throughout the spring and summer of 129 BCE, withdrawing farther and farther into the Parthian realm, to buy time to organize the synchronized uprising of Mesopotamia that would allow him the opportunity to isolate and destroy the Seleucid army. Unfortunately for Phraates, by the fall of 129 BCE the uprising in Mesopotamia was not ready. The coordination of such a massive, complex design in the ancient world would have been extremely difficult because of the limitations of diplomacy, communication, and travel. To this point, only Phraates II and Mithridates VI of Pontus were able to execute such wide ranging, synchronized uprisings against their foes.<sup>58</sup> The continued delay of the Mesopotamian uprising, paired with the swift success of Antiochus in occupying much of Media and threatening Parthia directly, forced Phraates to utilize one of his most valuable assets, Demetrius. Thus, Phraates' release of Demetrius under a Parthian escort to seize the Seleucid throne in Syria was a shortsighted, short-term effort necessitated by the continued delay of the Mesopotamian uprising and the successful advances of Antiochus. It was a desperate effort to force Antiochus to return west before his invasion of Parthia drastically damaged Parthian

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<sup>57</sup> "And his brother Demetrius succeeded in the kingdom of Syria, by the permission of Arsaces [Phraates II], who freed him from his captivity at the same time that Antiochus attacked Parthyene [the Parthian homeland, i.e. Parthia], as we have formerly related elsewhere." *Jos. Ant.* 13.253. Moreover, Plutarch mentions in passing that Antiochus "twice made an inroad into Parthia." *Plut. Reg. Imp. Apophtheg.* 184d

<sup>58</sup> Mithridates VI's uprising in Anatolia killed 80,000-150,000 Roman citizens. For a recent account of the massacre, see Mayor 2010: 13-26.

prestige and perceived power in Mesopotamia.<sup>59</sup> Phraates would have understood that the communities of Mesopotamia were only likely to revolt if they could rely on Parthian aid in defeating Antiochus. If Phraates had allowed Antiochus to strike deep into the heart of Parthia without a decisive battle, his cause in Mesopotamia would have been severely undermined. Yet he could not afford a climactic confrontation with the Seleucid army while Antiochus' full attention remained on eastern expansion and the destruction of Phraates' army. Thus, Phraates chose to send out Demetrius, his prized prisoner and political weapon, as a claimant to the Seleucid throne in the final hope of dividing the attention of his enemy, buying more time for his Mesopotamian uprising, and perhaps creating the decisive opportunity that Phraates needed to counterattack.

Whether it was fear of Demetrius travelling to Syria under the influence of a Parthian guard to usurp his throne, increased grumblings in the cities of Mesopotamia coming to his attention, or the lateness of the campaign season, Antiochus decided against a full-fledged expedition into Parthia in the fall of 129 BCE. Instead, he decided to return to Media, perhaps in the initial hopes of wintering in Media and continuing his anabasis in the spring of 128 BCE.<sup>60</sup> However, as Antiochus was settling into winter quarters, perhaps in southern Media, news arrived that the uprising in Mesopotamia finally had commenced. Justin records,

News of the attack being brought to Antiochus, he hastened with that body of troops, which he had in winter quarters with him, to succor the others that lay nearest. On his way he was met by the king of the Parthians, with whom he himself fought more bravely than his troops; but at last, as the enemy had the

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<sup>59</sup> The desperation of this move and Phraates' temporary commitment to it would explain why Justin later records that Phraates regretted the decision after his defeat of Antiochus and, thus, tried to recapture Demetrius. Justin 38.10.11

<sup>60</sup> For this argument, see Saint-Martin 1850: ii 38; Fischer 1970: 44-8. Note that Shayegan argues that Antiochus returned to Mesopotamia in the winter because his invasion of Media and Parthia had been indecisive. Shayegan 2011: 135.

superiority in valor, he was deserted, through fear on the part of his men, and killed.<sup>61</sup>

That is, Phraates' trap began to close. Antiochus had to move with a restricted force south into Mesopotamia to quell the rebellion. This caused the distraction that Phraates needed to set his ambush. On the march south, Antiochus' vulnerability gave the Parthians an ideal military opportunity to destroy a section of the Seleucid army commanded by the king. Therefore, Phraates sprang into action and successfully brought the innovative Parthian strategy to its conclusion when he attacked and annihilated the Seleucid army, killing Antiochus in the process.<sup>62</sup>

Justin's account illustrates the macro level aspects of the Parthian strategic feigned retreat. Meanwhile, Diodorus Siculus describes the difficulties that western armies faced when trying to combat the Parthians' unique mode of warfare in battle. Diodorus states,

The friends of Antiochus urged him not to engage in combat against the Parthians, who were so superior in numbers; for they could retreat to the nearby mountains, where the difficult ground would protect them from the danger of the enemy cavalry. Antiochus paid no heed to this advice, saying it was shameful that the victors should fear the audacity of those they had already conquered. So he urged his friends to face the dangers and boldly withstand the attack of the barbarians.<sup>63</sup>

If we deconstruct this passage, we find many familiar aspects of the Parthians' asymmetric approach to warfare and of systemic pressures. First, we find that Antiochus, who previously had been at the head of a large army, was greatly outnumbered.<sup>64</sup> Antiochus had made two blunders: dividing his army into spread out winter quarters and making a forced march with a division of his army without first consolidating all of his local forces. Diodorus indicates that Antiochus'

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<sup>61</sup> Justin 38.10.9-10

<sup>62</sup> See also *Jos. Ant.* 13.253; *Appian Syr.* 11.68; *Diod.* 34/35.16-17; *V Maccabees* 21.23-4

<sup>63</sup> *Diod.* 34/35.16

<sup>64</sup> Moses of Chorene offers the exaggerated figure of 130,000 Parthian soldiers. See Thomson 1978: 364.

arrogance led him to make the latter mistake. Although he had not defeated the Parthians in a decisive battle, Antiochus thought that he had conquered a weak enemy. This again demonstrates the military incompetence and lack of understanding with which the Greeks and Romans continually struggled while fighting the Parthians. It also demonstrates the importance of perceived power in the ancient world. Despite the examples of Seleucus II, Antiochus III, and Demetrius II, Antiochus VII did not understand that the continued withdrawal of the Parthians into their kingdom was a tried and true method of war to create military opportunities out of the mistakes and vulnerability of one's enemy.<sup>65</sup> Instead, the perception was that the cowardly Parthians were defeated and on the run, which was precisely the Parthians' objective. The perceived unwillingness of the Parthians to fight a traditional climactic battle diminished Antiochus' respect for Parthian power and military reputation. This is abundantly clear in Antiochus' eagerness to engage a vastly superior Parthian force on unfavorable terrain. Notice also that this account emphasizes how refusing to give battle against a perceived defeated enemy was shameful and cowardly. Antiochus' own military prestige, his authority as king, and the perceived power of the Seleucid state was on the line as well. Therefore, Antiochus was encouraged to risk battle against a superior enemy to save face. Not to attack the Parthians, after seemingly so much success in the East, would have been an admission of defeat and a huge blow to Antiochus' reputation and the perceived power of his kingdom. In the ancient world of interstate anarchy, it was better to risk open conflict than admit weakness. Thus, what seems like

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<sup>65</sup> Note that much later, near the end of the Parthian Empire, the Parthians continued to utilize similar tactics. Yet the Romans too, after centuries of fighting the Parthians, including numerous campaigns within the recent memory of Roman writers and their sources, fail to grasp the larger objectives of Parthian strategy and tactics. See for example Herodian's description of the last major battle fought between Rome and Parthia. Herodian 4.15. See also id. 6.3.7. Further, even in the wake of Crassus' disaster, Caesar wished to proceed slowly against the Parthians because he was unfamiliar with Parthian tactics. Suet. *Caes.* 44.3

a foolish military decision to us makes sense under the grim realities of the ancient interstate system.

In his account of the battle, Diodorus describes the Parthians' implementing their distinctive mode of warfare successfully. His account suggests that the Parthians utilized the Parthian Shot tactic successfully. The vulnerability of the Seleucid army meant that the feigned retreat tactic was unnecessary in this encounter. Antiochus' army was isolated on poor terrain. The Parthians advanced upon the Seleucid army and inflicted damage at will. When the Seleucids made calculated advances to drive off the Parthian horse archers, the Parthians could use the nearby mountainous terrain to withdraw, regroup, set ambushes with their cataphracts, and renew the attack. The more traditionally equipped and organized Seleucid army was handicapped severely in the open terrain against the mobile Parthian army.

The battle was a total disaster for the Seleucids. The details of the conflict are lost; however, the totality of the Parthian victory makes it likely that the Seleucid army quickly became overwhelmed and completely reactionary on the battlefield. As Antiochus' generals warned, anytime the Seleucid cavalry gave chase, the Parthian horse archers could give ground toward the mountains or force the Seleucid army into tactical mistakes during their calculated advances, at which point the Parthian cataphracts could deliver devastating charges against isolated enemy formations. Antiochus' rashness and aggression played directly into Parthian tactics. The unfavorable position of the Seleucid army, their difficulties against the more mobile Parthians, and their destruction on the battlefield has numerous parallels with the much later Roman disaster at Carrhae.<sup>66</sup> This is not coincidental. The Parthians utilized their "feigned

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<sup>66</sup> The main difference between these two battles is that Crassus had the majority of his army at Carrhae. Thus, the Parthians had to utilize their feigned retreat tactic to breakup and isolate

retreat, defeat in detail” mode of warfare throughout their history to devastating effect, and the more traditional armies of the Seleucids and Romans never seem to have learned their lesson because, to them, the Parthians mode of warfare portrayed weakness, and in the harsh international environment of the ancient world, perceived weakness encouraged aggression.

There is considerable debate over the details of Antiochus’ anabasis, especially its end. Therefore, I propose the following summary of my reconstruction above as a possible alternative to help mitigate the major points of contention in previous reconstructions. Our sources place Antiochus’ death in the early winter of 129 BCE.<sup>67</sup> In the previous year Antiochus had invaded and occupied Mesopotamia after a series of minor victories.<sup>68</sup> Several eastern dynasts decided to balance against the Parthians by joining the Seleucids. Meanwhile, the Parthians implemented a strategic feigned retreat and withdrew deeper into Mesopotamia and finally into Media as they waited for a military opportunity to spring their trap. With the swift and seemingly conclusive conquest of Mesopotamia and the continued retreat of the Parthians, numerous communities viewed the perceived shift in the balance of power and reluctantly came over to Antiochus.

This study offers a fuller interpretation of the course of Antiochus’ anabasis than Shayegan’s reconstruction by using system analysis. I agree with Shayegan that these communities joined Antiochus reluctantly and without enthusiasm. Shayegan argues that the cities of Mesopotamia joined Antiochus in 130 BCE by “dint of conquest” and lacked Hellenic “fervor.”<sup>69</sup> However, a systemic evaluation of the geopolitical developments in the region adds

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Crassus’ forces. Antiochus’ smaller force was already highly vulnerable and isolated, making the Parthian Shot tactic far more successful on its own.

<sup>67</sup> For a brief discussion of the corroborating accounts of the Babylonian *Astronomical Diaries*, the Armenian version of Eusebius’ chronicle, and Moses of Chorene, see Shayegan 2011: 134.

<sup>68</sup> This follows the argument that Antiochus’ anabasis had two phases. See Fischer 1970: 39-48; Shayegan 2003 [2007]: 90-2; Ehling 2008: 201-5; Shayegan 2011: 125 n.341, 128-37.

<sup>69</sup> Shayegan 2011: 136.

the understanding that the cities in Mesopotamia sided with Antiochus initially because of geopolitical realities. Seleucid success and the withdrawal of Phraates had shifted the perceived power balance. Resistance to Antiochus without Parthian support would not have been a wise decision. Thus, for security reasons these cities “defected” (*deficientibus*) to Antiochus. I also agree with Shayegan that these cities worked diligently with the Parthians to overthrow Seleucid rule. It would be inappropriate to assume that they defected to Antiochus with enthusiasm. In fact, the later eagerness of these cities to betray Antiochus and their devoted collaboration with the Parthians makes it even more likely that geopolitical realities and systemic pressures necessitated their temporary defection.<sup>70</sup> Further, we should avoid placing too much emphasis on the economic pressures that Antiochus’ occupation caused.<sup>71</sup> Granted, the abuses of Antiochus’ soldiers and the economic damages that they caused were motivational factors in pushing these communities toward action. However, it was the indecisiveness of Antiochus’ invasion of Media and the diligent efforts of Phraates to frustrate Antiochus’ expedition that ultimately damaged the perceived power of the Seleucids enough to shift the balance of power back in Parthia’s favor, thus encouraging the Mesopotamian communities finally to act.

Satisfied with his accomplishments in 130 BCE, Antiochus divided his army into winter quarters throughout Mesopotamia.<sup>72</sup> Unfortunately for Antiochus, his soldiers abused the cities in which they were billeted and turned the reluctant support of those cities, which had been the byproduct of the geopolitical realities of the previous year, into hatred of Seleucid rule and longing for the return of the more lenient, inclusive aspects of Parthian rule. As the winter of

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<sup>70</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> See *id.* 130-1, 136.

<sup>72</sup> This study supports Shayegan’s conclusion that Justin and Diodorus’ accounts corroborate each other to indicate that this was the end of the first phase of the anabasis. *Id.* 129.

130/129 BCE progressed, it is probable that Phraates' agents made the king aware of the unrest in Mesopotamia and the king began to implement discussions of organizing an uprising within the cities in the region.<sup>73</sup>

Yet in the spring of 129 BCE, Antiochus was ready to begin his invasion of Media, at which point Phraates sent envoys to open negotiations with Antiochus.<sup>74</sup> Because Antiochus offered harsh, unrealistic terms, nothing came of the negotiations, and he began his conquest of Media.<sup>75</sup> It is difficult to believe that Antiochus consolidated his entire army for the invasion of Media and left Mesopotamia without a military garrison. Mesopotamia was an important recently occupied region that was vulnerable to internal dissent and outside raids. Therefore, it is highly likely that Antiochus left garrisons in the cities of Mesopotamia to maintain Seleucid authority and state security. Thus, while Antiochus campaigned in Media, the abusive presence of his soldiers in Mesopotamia would have continued. The continued unrest of these

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<sup>73</sup> Shayegan's suggestion that the Mesopotamian communities might have joined Antiochus as part of Phraates' stratagem seems unrealistic. Id. 136. These communities had legitimate security concerns that made their "defection" understandable without assuming that it was part of a grand stratagem. Further, it is hard to believe that Phraates would risk willingly turning over the cities of Mesopotamia to Antiochus in the future hope of organizing a complex, synchronized uprising. In fact, Diodorus indicates that the city of Seleucia begged forgiveness from Phraates after the war for its cruel treatment of a Parthian general after the city had deserted to Antiochus. Diod. 34/35.19. However, this study agrees with Shayegan that these cities generally resented Seleucid occupation from the beginning and that their rebellion was a culmination of their frustration. Therefore, it is more likely that the cities of Mesopotamia reluctantly went over to Antiochus because of immediate security concerns, after which Seleucid abuses quickly became increasingly intolerable. These cities reached out to Phraates' agents in an effort to gain his support, and at this time, Phraates began to hatch his plan to organize a coordinated uprising.

<sup>74</sup> The second phase of the anabasis occurred between early March and November 129 BCE. Shayegan 2011: 133.

<sup>75</sup> Scholars have taken notice of the harshness of Antiochus' demands but have not associated such harsh demands to the concept of compellence diplomacy. See Shayegan 2003 [2007]: 91; Ehling 2008: 203; Shayegan 2011: 129.



communities offered the Parthians an opportunity to carry on in their efforts to organize a coordinated mass uprising.

By the fall of 129 BCE, Antiochus had occupied much of Media and was threatening to invade Parthia proper.<sup>76</sup> It was at this time that Phraates, out of desperation, sent Demetrius under guard to Syria in the hope of destabilizing the Seleucid state.<sup>77</sup> Organization of a complex and synchronized uprising in Mesopotamia would have taken diligent effort and considerable time. Therefore, it is not surprising that arranging the plot dragged out over the summer and into fall. Further, it is probable that Phraates had not anticipated the speed of Antiochus' occupation of Media. By the latter half of the year, Phraates knew that he was running out of time to distract Antiochus and to spring his trap. He also understood that a Seleucid invasion of Parthia would have been potentially devastating to his perceived power and likely would have forced him into an unfavorable climactic battle against the bulk of Antiochus' army. Therefore, Phraates finally decided to utilize his prized political prisoner and weapon in an effort to divide Antiochus' attention and buy more time for the Mesopotamian uprising.<sup>78</sup> Whether it was the impending winter, the threat of Demetrius' release, or word of growing unrest in Mesopotamia, Antiochus decided not to launch his invasion of Parthia in the fall of 129 BCE. Instead, he withdrew southwest into Media, perhaps in the initial hope of setting up winter quarters in the region as a

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<sup>76</sup> Thus, this study supports Fischer's conclusion that Antiochus had not conquered either region prior to 129 BCE. Fischer 1970: 42.

<sup>77</sup> Here this study supports the traditional interpretation of Justin's account. See Saint-Martin 1850: ii 50-2; Bevan 1902: 247; Bouché-Leclercq 1913-1914: i 382-4; Bellinger 1949: 58-9; Will 1982: 414, 432-4; Dąbrowa 1992: 46-8; Ehling 1998b: 142.

<sup>78</sup> In this, this study agrees with Shayegan that Demetrius' release occurred during the second phase of the anabasis. Shayegan 2011: 129-30. See also Fischer 1970: 39-40; Bivar 1983: 37.

base to keep an eye on the developments of Mesopotamia but also as a base to stage his planned invasion of Parthia in 128 BCE.<sup>79</sup>

Contrary to Shayegan's argument, it is not necessary to reject Justin's account of Antiochus' winter quarters in 129 BCE, nor to accept that Moses of Chorene's account indicates Antiochus' demise in Babylonia.<sup>80</sup> Justin explicitly states that Antiochus was in winter quarters when he heard news of widespread rebellion. Yet Justin does not mention the location of these winter quarters or how long they had been in place.<sup>81</sup> Meanwhile, Moses records, "Arshak [Phraates II] released Demetrius after ten years and sent him to his brother to tell him what he would do to him. Demetrius did not go to his brother in Babylon but moved on to Asiastan. Then Arshak marched on Babylon with one hundred thirty thousand [troops]."<sup>82</sup> Moses does not mention winter quarters; however, he tells us that Phraates was on his way to Babylon with his army. I generally agree with Shayegan's criticisms of the shortcomings of Justin's account of the end of the war. Regrettably, Justin compresses the two phases of Antiochus' anabasis into one. Thus, Justin's account appears to claim that Antiochus conquered Mesopotamia and Media in

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<sup>79</sup> Disparity in our sources has led scholars to disagree widely on the reconstruction of the end of Antiochus' anabasis. For the argument that Antiochus went into winter quarters twice during his anabasis and that it was the cities of Media, not the cities of Mesopotamia, that rebelled against the Seleucids, see Saint-Martin 1850: ii 38; Fischer 1970: 44-8; Ehling 2008: 204. Shayegan rejects this approach and concludes that Antiochus did not winter in Media. In this, he rejects Justin's account, arguing that Justin confused the winter of 129 BCE with the realities of 130 BCE. Instead, Shayegan uses the equally confused account of Moses of Chorene to argue that the indecisiveness of Antiochus' expedition in Media forced him to return to Babylonia, where he was ambushed and killed. Further, Shayegan uses the Babylonian *Astronomical Diaries* and the *Dynastic Prophecy*, which is a series of ancient Akkadian predications about Mesopotamian history from the Neo-Assyrian to the Greek period, to conclude that it was the cities of Mesopotamia, not Media, which rose up against Antiochus. Shayegan 2011: 134-40. For the *Dynastic Prophecy*, note Neujahr 2005. This study uses arguments from both camps to create a more comprehensive reconstruction.

<sup>80</sup> Shayegan 2011: 134-5.

<sup>81</sup> Justin 38.10.9

<sup>82</sup> For Moses here, see Thomson 1978: 364.

one season before settling into unspecified winter quarters.<sup>83</sup> However, we can conclude from our other available sources that Antiochus' anabasis had two sections and that after conquering Mesopotamia, but before invading Media, Antiochus wintered in Babylonia. Justin's account, paired with the understanding that Antiochus' expedition took two years, has led scholars, like Thomas Fischer, to assume that Antiochus established winter quarters in Media in 129 BCE and that the newly conquered cities of Media revolted, not the cities of Mesopotamia.<sup>84</sup> Shayegan rejects this notion and argues instead that Justin projected the events of the winter of 130 BCE onto the winter of 129 BCE.<sup>85</sup> He then uses the incomplete and generally cursory accounts of Moses of Chorene, the Babylonian *Astronomical Diaries*, and the *Dynastic Prophecy* to argue that Antiochus withdrew into Babylonia in 129 BCE and there met his demise. However, Shayegan never adequately explains why Antiochus would abandon his gains in Media without a fight. Antiochus VII was a proud, arrogant man, who had modelled himself and his expedition on the example of Antiochus III.<sup>86</sup> It is hard to image that he would not at least garrison the captured cities of Media before returning to Mesopotamia. Shayegan is right that the Median campaign was inconclusive because the Parthians refused to engage in a decisive battle; however, that does not mean that Antiochus would willingly abandon all his gains from that year. To do so would have been a disaster for the perceived power of the Seleucid state and a devastating blow to his personal reputation and prestige. The frustrating campaign of 129 BCE already had damaged Seleucid perceived power and Antiochus' prestige. It seems highly unlikely that Antiochus

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<sup>83</sup> Justin 38.10.5-8. Note that Justin's incorrect compression of events still adversely affects modern studies. Taylor assumes that Antiochus' anabasis took one year and began in 129 BCE. Taylor 2013: 156-7.

<sup>84</sup> Fischer 1970: 44-8.

<sup>85</sup> Shayegan 2011: 134-5.

<sup>86</sup> Certainly, Antiochus relished being called "Great" after his initial success in Mesopotamia. Justin 38.10.6

would willingly compound these setbacks by abandoning his gains in Media completely. Further, Antiochus had every intention of conquering Parthia and forcing the Parthians into submission.<sup>87</sup> Thus, it is improbable that he would abandon Media and allow the Parthians easily to regain the region before the next spring. Antiochus had toyed with an expedition into Parthia toward the end of 129 BCE.<sup>88</sup> Thus, the conquest of Parthia would have been the military objective in 128 BCE. Antiochus would not have wanted to reconquer Media beforehand. Therefore, it is likely that the “several cities” mentioned by Justin included important cities in Media.<sup>89</sup> Finally, we cannot assume that Antiochus returned to Babylonia because Moses records that Phraates “marched on Babylon.” By Shayegan’s own admission, Moses’ account is suspect because it does not mention any Seleucid expedition beyond Babylon.<sup>90</sup> First, this passage says nothing of Antiochus’ location and should not be used to indicate anything other than the likelihood that Antiochus was somewhere in between Babylon and Phraates’ position. Second, the indication that Phraates was marching on Babylon does not mean that he was actually anywhere near Babylon at the time. In fact, we know that Phraates had withdrawn into Parthia proper as Antiochus surged forward late in 129 BCE. We may only assume that Phraates began his march to Babylonia after he was ready to spring his trap and counterattack against the vulnerable

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<sup>87</sup> See Diod. 34/35.15

<sup>88</sup> *Jos. Ant.* 13.253

<sup>89</sup> The suggestion that Antiochus also wintered soldiers in Media is made even more likely when we consider that Justin’s condensed account of Antiochus’ anabasis does not differentiate between the cities of Mesopotamia and Media. Justin seemingly takes for granted that Antiochus occupied both regions. There is no reason to assume that Antiochus entered winter quarters in one region or the other.

<sup>90</sup> Shayegan 2011: 135.

Seleucid army. Thus, Justin's account can indicate that Antiochus wintered his soldiers in Mesopotamia and Media.<sup>91</sup>

Unfortunately for Antiochus, right after he dispersed his main forces into winter quarters throughout southern Media and Mesopotamia, news reached him of the massive, coordinated uprising in Babylonia. Antiochus did not realize the severity of the uprising nor the precariousness of his position. Moreover, he did not appreciate that the Parthians, despite their continued withdrawals and military setbacks in 130/129 BCE, were unbeaten and ready to spring into action at the first sign of Seleucid weakness. Because of poor military intelligence and arrogance, Antiochus did not hesitate to move south to quell the rebellion in Mesopotamia. Antiochus also did not muster his entire force. First, he did not anticipate the severity of the rebellion nor anticipate a Parthian counterattack. Second, the portion of his army that he had sent

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<sup>91</sup> Justin 38.10.8-9. There is no reason to reject one for the other and numerous good reasons to suppose that Antiochus had garrisoned both regions by the early winter of 129 BCE. Moreover, there is no reason to assume that Antiochus had returned to Babylonia for the winter. Instead, it is more likely that he had planned to winter in southern Media. This location allowed him to maintain his gains in Media, to combat any Parthian penetration into the region quickly, to keep an eye on developments in Mesopotamia, and to minimize the burden of maintaining his army throughout the winter by pushing costs onto the maximum amount of cities available. That is, even though Antiochus and perhaps a large portion of his army remained in southern Media, he had the ability to send the rest of his troops back to the prosperous cities of Babylonia in late 129 BCE. Media was less urbanized than Mesopotamia and had just endured a long campaign. Meanwhile, Mesopotamia had not experienced any open conflict and had been a lucrative, well-supplied depot the previous year. It is clear that, although Antiochus may have been aware of grumblings in the occupied cities, he had no idea that the region was ripe for mass rebellion. Perhaps he was too focused on the foreign objectives of his anabasis to concentrate on domestic policy concerns. Thus, it would have made logistical sense to take advantage of winter quarters in both Media and Mesopotamia at the end of 129 BCE. Yet part of dividing his army and sending them into winter quarters in both regions included the prospect of overburdening the cities of Mesopotamia once again. This was the final motivation that the communities needed to rebel. Hence, there is no reason to reject Justin's account that Antiochus was in winter quarters when he heard news of the uprising since he was likely wintering in southern Media. Therefore, on the one hand this study agrees with Shayegan's conclusion that the mutinous *civitates* mentioned by Justin were the cities in Babylonia; however, on the other it does not reject the simultaneous Seleucid occupation of Media. See Shayegan 2011: 135-6.

to Babylonia recently had become trapped. Finally, he did not want to abandon Media completely. As discussed above, Antiochus had every reason to maintain his territorial gains in Media and to believe that the Parthians were only a threat in the sense that they could reoccupy Media if he abandoned it. Therefore, he only took the readily available soldiers that he had with him in southern Media toward Babylonia.<sup>92</sup>

Phraates finally saw his opportunity to counterattack and defeat a crucial portion of the Seleucid army. His mobile army outmaneuvered the Seleucids and Phraates staged an ambush in favorable terrain somewhere in southern Media or northern Babylonia.<sup>93</sup> With a reduced force and in a precarious position, Antiochus was at a great disadvantage. However, because of his own arrogance and the considerable interstate pressures that encouraged him to save face by

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<sup>92</sup> See Justin 38.10.9. It is likely that he was marching on the main passage through the Zagros Mountains connecting Media to Babylon, known today as the Baghdad-Khorasan Road. Kawami 2013: 752.

<sup>93</sup> We have almost no indication of the location of the final battle. Moses' account is perhaps our best guide. He tells us that Phraates was marching on Babylon. For Moses here, see Thomas 1978: 364. This only allows us a few insights. Moses does not implicitly state that Phraates was around or near Babylon when he began his march so perhaps this indicates that Phraates was well north of Babylon in Media or Parthia proper. However, another section of Moses' account allows us to draw further conclusions. Moses records, "But his [Demetrius II's] brother Antiochus Sidetes, learning of Arshak's [Phraates'] departure, came and occupied Syria. Then Arshak returned with one hundred and twenty thousand men. Antiochus, discomfited by the severe winter season confronted him in a narrow spot and perished with his army." For Moses here, see id. 132. Eusebius' account confirms the terrain and events of the battle. He states, "Arsaces attacked him with an army of 120,000 men, and schemed against him by sending his brother Demetrius, who had been kept as a prisoner, back to Syria. But at the onset of winter Antiochus met the barbarians in a confined space; bravely attacking them, he was injured and killed, in the 35th year of his life." Eus. *Chron.* 1.40.18. See also Moses 2.2. Although the number of Phraates' soldiers is greatly exaggerated, these passages confirm the notion that Antiochus fell into a trap against a superior force in the winter. Thus, we find further evidence for the Parthians utilizing their distinctive mode of warfare. Moreover, the description of the battlefield as a "narrow spot" in severe winter weather also lends itself to the conclusion that Antiochus met his end somewhere in the Zagros Mountain range as he was travelling south from Media into Babylonia to quash the rebellion in that region. Josephus simply states that Antiochus died in Parthia. Jos. *Ant.* 13.271

making a military stand, he decided it was shameful not to fight. The outnumbered and overwhelmed Seleucid army could not resist Parthian tactics. Although Antiochus fought bravely, his men despaired and abandoned their king, at which point Antiochus died sometime in the winter of 129 BCE.<sup>94</sup>

### Bipolar Rivalry in the Aftermath of Antiochus VII's Failure: Missed Opportunities

Antiochus VII's anabasis was a total disaster for the Seleucid Empire. Already reeling from decades of corruption, political intrigue, poor administration, and recurrent civil war, the Seleucid state would never recover from Antiochus' defeat.<sup>95</sup> The Seleucid state had lost major wars against the Parthians before and recovered; however, none of the previous campaigns had been quite as decisive or costly. Unlike the failures of Seleucus II and Demetrius II, the fallout of Antiochus VII's campaign proved to be fatal.

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<sup>94</sup> For the argument that Antiochus died in the winter of 129 BCE, specifically in late November or December, see Shayegan 2011: 134. For the argument that he died shortly after September, see Assar 2005a: 47. Kosmin maintains that Antiochus VII committed suicide in Media in 129 BCE. Kosmin 2013: 686. Note Appian *Syr.* 11.68. Eusebius (in Jerome's surviving translation of Book 2) marks Antiochus' death at the hands of the Parthians at the beginning of the 163<sup>rd</sup> Olympiad (ca. 128/127 BCE); however, in Book 1 Eusebius records that Antiochus died in battle in the winter of the fourth year of the 162<sup>nd</sup> Olympiad (129 BCE). Eus. *Chron.* Posidonius and Athenaeus record that Antiochus VII was a drunk and blame his defeat partially on his drinking. "And his namesake, the Antiochus [VII] who carried on war in Media against Arsaces, was very fond of drinking; as Posidonius of Apamea relates in the sixteenth book of his History. Accordingly, when he was slain, he says that Arsaces, when he buried him, said, 'Your courage and your drunkenness have ruined you, O Antiochus; for you hoped that, in your great cups, you would be able to drink up the kingdom of Arsaces.'" Ath. 439d-e. See also id. 540b-c. John Malalas erroneously records that Antiochus forced the Parthians to accept a truce and married his son to the daughter of the Parthian king. Jo. Mal. 8.208

<sup>95</sup> One scholar views Antiochus' defeat as the worst military disaster in Seleucid history and as far more consequential than Magnesia. He argues that this was the last statement of Seleucid power and that after this the Seleucid state became a petty kingdom full of turmoil. Taylor 2013: 157. The Chinese envoy, Zhang Qian, who was travelling among the tribes of the Central Asian steppe in the aftermath of Antiochus VII's defeat, believed the Parthians had subjugated the Seleucids. Mair 2014: 26-8, 87, 154. Thus, we see what a monumental blow Antiochus' failed anabasis was to the perceived strength and prestige of the Seleucid state.

Antiochus was the first Seleucid king to fall in battle against the Parthians.<sup>96</sup> The Parthians had decapitated the Seleucid state. Seleucus and Demetrius had become prisoners; however, they both eventually gained their freedom and returned to rule their kingdom. The damage that their capture did to the prestige of the Seleucid king and the perceived power of the state was extensive but recoverable. Yet the defeat and death of Antiochus not only guaranteed another civil war in Syria but also was a major statement of Parthian power. The prestige and authority of the Seleucid king as a world leader was gone and no leader strong enough to restore the state to its former glory would ever again emerge.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, unlike after earlier Seleucid failures, the power of the Seleucid state rapidly declined after Antiochus' defeat. Simply put, years of turmoil had ravaged the empire to the point that it could not recover sufficiently from two military disasters in a ten-year period. Antiochus had gambled by putting maximum state effort into his anabasis; and when he lost his army and his life, there were no more grand Seleucid royal armies to recruit.<sup>98</sup> Instead of making concerted efforts to rebuild the diminished Seleucid kingdom, no less than a dozen Seleucid claimants struggled for control over Syria for the next sixty-five years.

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<sup>96</sup> The Parthians later killed Antiochus X in battle. *Jos. Ant.* 13.371

<sup>97</sup> For instance, when he received news of Antiochus' death, Hyrcanus immediately began expanding the Hasmonean Kingdom at the expense of the Seleucid state in Judea and Syria. *Id.* 13.254-8.

<sup>98</sup> Diodorus states that every family in Antioch lost a family member in this expedition. He records, "When the death of Antiochus became known at Antioch, the whole city mourned, and every house was full of wailing, especially from women, who bemoaned this great loss. Three hundred thousand men had been lost, including those who did not serve in the ranks. Every family had some loss to grieve: among the women, some had to mourn the death of a brother, others that of a husband or a son; and many girls and boys, left as orphans, lamented that they were bereaved of their fathers." *Diod.* 34/35.17. This is probably not much of an exaggeration. The losses of Antiochus' campaign were considerable. After Antiochus, the Syro-Macedonian recruitment pool was tapped and needed time to recover. Seleucid kings had to rely increasingly on mercenaries. See Hoover and Iossif 2009: 48.



Most importantly, Antiochus' defeat coincided with one of the early heights of Parthian strength. Seleucus II had campaigned against a fledgling Parthian kingdom. Although the Parthians decisively defeated him, the Parthian state did not yet possess the ability to challenge the Seleucid Empire aggressively. Meanwhile, Demetrius II had campaigned against a much stronger Parthian state than the one faced by Seleucus; however, in the 140s and early 130s BCE the Parthians had not yet consolidated their authority over their new western lands. By the time of Antiochus' expedition, the Parthians were more prepared and better situated. They had become the hegemonic rivals of the Seleucids. When Phraates destroyed Antiochus and his army, the balance in power between the Seleucids and Parthians began to shift dramatically in Parthia's favor. Ultimately, the Parthians became increasingly able to exploit Seleucid weakness and the Seleucids became increasingly unable to recover from internal and external pressures. Although ultimate Parthian victory would take another four decades, the major consequence of Antiochus' failed anabasis was that the Seleucids never again regained the initiative in their ongoing hegemonic struggle with the Parthians.

With Antiochus dead and his army annihilated, Phraates II was in a favorable position to expand Parthian power and influence.<sup>99</sup> He might have chosen at this time to follow up on his resounding victory over Antiochus with a military campaign further west to subjugate the weakened, rudderless Seleucid state under Parthian hegemony, thus replacing the system of bipolarity in the Eastern system with Parthian hegemony. In fact, Justin's account makes Phraates' desire to do so clear. He records, "After the death of Mithridates [I], king of the

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<sup>99</sup> In fact, Phraates II married Demetrius II's daughter, whom the Parthians captured after defeating Antiochus. Justin 38.10.10. This marriage further tied the Arsacid dynasty to the Seleucid dynasty. Remember, Demetrius had married Phraates' daughter (or sister) and had had children with her. Id. 36.1.6, 38.9.3; Appian *Syr.* 11.67

Parthians, Phraates [II] his son was made king, who, having proceeded to make war upon Syria, in revenge for the attempts of Antiochus [VII] on the Parthian dominions, was recalled, by hostilities on the part of the Scythians [the Sakae and Yuezhi], to defend his own country.”<sup>100</sup> Diodorus adds, “Arsaces, king of the Parthians, after defeating Antiochus [VII] expected to invade Syria and easily make himself master of the country, but he was not able to make this expedition, since fate had placed him in grave danger and many perils.”<sup>101</sup> Thus, we know that the Parthians wanted to avenge Seleucid aggression with a retaliatory hegemonic war to conquer Syria; however, they were unable to end the hegemonic struggle with the Seleucids in the 120s BCE. Although Justin highlights only the invasion of the “Scythians” as a deterrent to further Parthian expansion west, Diodorus was correct that the Parthians faced “many perils.” There are three main reasons that the Parthians did not advance further west at this time.

First, like the consequences of Demetrius’ anabasis ten years prior, Antiochus’ invasion ravaged and destabilized Mesopotamia. Before invading Syria Phraates would have needed time to repair damages and to reconsolidate Parthian authority over Media and Babylonia.<sup>102</sup> Further, to undertake a western expedition Phraates needed money and supplies. Mesopotamia and Media would have been the primary bases of operation for an invasion of Syria. Therefore, with the recent damage to the fiscal and agricultural well-being of these regions, an immediate western push by the Parthians was not realistic. Second, the vulnerability of the eastern frontier of the Parthian Kingdom was a major concern. This brings us to Justin’s point of emphasis. Mounting nomadic pressures along Parthia’s eastern frontier made an invasion of Syria risky. With the fall

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<sup>100</sup> Justin 42.1.1

<sup>101</sup> Diod. 34/35.18

<sup>102</sup> Seleucid conquests usually were marked by severe brutality and destruction. Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993: 58-9. Babylonia seemingly suffered terribly from the 140s-120s BCE. See Fischer 1970; Oelsner 1975; Oelsner 1986: 274-6; Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993: 225.

of the Kingdom of Bactria, the Parthians became well aware of the increased power and heightened threat of the incoming Sakae and Yuezhi tribes. If Phraates had taken the Parthian army to Syria, he would have left his eastern frontier completely open to attacks, to which he would not have been able to respond.<sup>103</sup> Third, Phraates' desperate decision to release Demetrius II from captivity at the height of Antiochus' invasion in 129 BCE was an unresolved, potentially dangerous situation that demanded Phraates' immediate attention.

It is possible that the release of Demetrius successfully distracted Antiochus and encouraged him to withdraw toward Mesopotamia. The Parthians soon after destroyed the Seleucid invasion. With the immediate threat of Antiochus gone, Phraates regretted releasing Demetrius and sent soldiers to cut off Demetrius' advance and return him to Parthian captivity. Justin states, "He [Phraates] then began to regret having sent away Demetrius, and hastily dispatched some troops of horse to fetch him back; but they found that prince, who had been in fear of pursuit, already seated on his throne, and, after doing all they could to no purpose, returned to their king."<sup>104</sup> Generally, scholars accept Justin's account; however, two scholars recently have reconstructed Demetrius' release differently.<sup>105</sup>

Peter Franz Mittag rejects that Phraates released Demetrius as part of a strategy. Instead, he argues that Demetrius' "release" was in fact a successful escape.<sup>106</sup> However, Shayegan has countered Mittag's arguments. Shayegan dismisses Mittag's emphasis that the release of Demetrius and the rebellion of the cities against Antiochus were counterproductive. Instead, he

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<sup>103</sup> This will be discussed in detail in the next section.

<sup>104</sup> Id. 38.10.11.

<sup>105</sup> For the traditional view, see Saint-Martin 1850: ii 50-2; Rawlinson 1885 (2002): 59; Bevan 1902: 247; Bouché-Leclercq 1913-1914: i 382-4; Bellinger 1949: 58-9; Will 1982: 414, 432-4; Dąbrowa 1992: 46-8; Ehling 1998b: 142.

<sup>106</sup> See Mittag 2002.

argues that they were two parts of a larger strategy.<sup>107</sup> He concludes that Phraates released Demetrius because of a farsighted policy to place him on the Seleucid throne as a Parthian vassal.<sup>108</sup>

Mittag's conclusion that Parthian carelessness allowed Demetrius finally to escape Parthian captivity and his efforts to discredit the argument that Demetrius' release had strategic merit are untenable. Shayegan is correct to emphasize that the Parthians used Demetrius for strategic ends. However, it seems that Shayegan's conclusion that Demetrius' release was "the important component of an elaborate stratagem aimed at establishing Arsacid authority over Syria, once Antiochus Sidetes' campaign was thwarted" is misplaced as well.<sup>109</sup> A reexamination of the evidence suggests that, although Demetrius' release was an intentional aspect of the Parthian strategy to win the war against Antiochus, the strategy was shortsighted and the consequences were haphazard.

The theoretical framework of Realism reinforces Shayegan's argument that "the Arsacids were not merely content with halting Antiochus Sidetes' invasion but, having suffered two Seleucid campaigns in less than a decade, were rather intent on ascertaining that no future enterprise against the Arsacid empire would be undertaken."<sup>110</sup> Even in its diminished state, the Seleucid kingdom remained a potential threat to the security and survival of the Parthian Kingdom.<sup>111</sup> Although the Parthians had emerged victorious from two hegemonic wars in ten

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<sup>107</sup> Shayegan 2011: 143.

<sup>108</sup> Shayegan attempts to reinforce his argument by emphasizing the Parthian practice of holding political hostages to use as client rulers of pro-Parthian regimes. Id. 144-5. For a recent account that assumes Phraates released Demetrius to rule as his vassal in Syria, see Taylor 2013: 157. Note Jos. *Ant.* 13.253

<sup>109</sup> Shayegan 2011: 145.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> This is something that few scholars have recognized or admitted. In fact, some scholars incorrectly maintain that the Seleucid state was in decline almost from the beginning of its

years, there was no guarantee that the Seleucid Empire would not return for a third contest. In the early 120s BCE, there was no way for the Parthians to know that Seleucid power would decline sharply after Antiochus' death. To the contrary, the Parthians only knew that the Seleucids diligently had attempted to reverse Parthian growth and to reestablish Seleucid hegemony over the Eastern system for over one hundred years. Therefore, the Parthians had every reason to fear further Seleucid retaliation. Further, since the reign of Mithridates I the Parthians had sought to dominate the Eastern system. The establishment of bipolarity between Parthia and the Seleucid Empire was an important step toward that goal but not the goal itself. Therefore, Parthia was not content with repulsing Antiochus' invasion. Rather, the Parthians wanted to dominate the diminished Seleucid state to establish their own hegemony over the Eastern system. However, we must be careful ascertaining how the Parthians went about trying to obtain unipolarity in the immediate aftermath of Antiochus' failed anabasis.

As discussed above, although the opportunity for Parthia to create unipolarity was available, there were military, political, and logistical reasons why the Parthians could not immediately follow up on Antiochus' failure with an invasion of Syria. Let us discuss the problem of Demetrius' freedom in more detail. Unfortunately, Shayegan's portrayal of Demetrius as a Parthian pawn does not accurately reflect the geopolitical developments of this period and is too dismissive of our evidence.

It would be foolish to assume that Demetrius had pro-Parthian inclinations. Despite lenient treatment, access to luxury, and marital and familial ties to the Parthian royal line,

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inception. See Will 1979: 264ff.; Walbank 1981: 123ff.; Musti 1984; contra Sherwin-White 1987: 2-3; Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993: 217. For the rejection of the argument that the Seleucids collapsed under the forces of corruption and decadence, see Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993: 228-9. See also Briant 1987: 42-52; Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1987.

Demetrius attempted to escape his captivity twice.<sup>112</sup> This does not imply that Demetrius was anti-Parthian either. He appears to have been mostly cooperative with his Parthian captors during his ten-year captivity, and he never made war against the Parthians after returning to the Seleucid throne.<sup>113</sup> However, Demetrius' military decisions after he regained his throne should not indicate that he had pro-Parthian leanings and certainly cannot support the argument that he was a Parthian vassal.

Demetrius did not avoid war with Parthia out of responsibility, nor did he make war on Ptolemaic Egypt because of a "tacit entente with Frahād II that limited the sphere of Demetrius II's operations to the west."<sup>114</sup> Demetrius reclaimed his throne at the end of 129 BCE after the sudden death of his brother and immediately went to war with Ptolemaic Egypt. Justin records,

After Antiochus and his army were cut off in Persia, his brother Demetrius, being delivered from confinement among the Parthians, and restored to his throne, resolved, while all Syria was mourning for the loss of the army, to make war upon Egypt, (just as if his and his brother's wars with the Parthians, in which one was taken prisoner and the other killed, had had a fortunate termination). Cleopatra his mother-in-law promised him the kingdom of Egypt, as a recompense for the assistance that he should afford her against her brother.<sup>115</sup>

Thus, Justin tells us that Demetrius went to war with Ptolemy because his mother-in-law, Cleopatra II, promised him control over the Kingdom of Egypt. There are several reasons why Demetrius favored a war against Egypt over another war against Parthia.

There was greater opportunity for success and reward if Demetrius attacked Egypt. Cleopatra II had been feuding with her brother, Ptolemy VIII, and asked Demetrius, who had

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<sup>112</sup> Justin 36.1.6, 38.9.3-9; Appian *Syr.* 11.67

<sup>113</sup> He also grew a beard in the Parthian manner, which was absent from the coinage from his first reign but featured heavily on the coinage from his second reign. For coin collections from Demetrius' two reigns, see Leake 1856: 30, 32; Gardner 1878: 58-62, 76-8; Houghton 1983.

<sup>114</sup> Shayegan 2011: 145.

<sup>115</sup> Justin 39.1.1-2. See also *id.* 38.9.1

remarried her daughter Cleopatra Thea after regaining the throne, for his military support. To fund the war Cleopatra II brought with her from Egypt a large war chest, and to entice Demetrius, she offered him the Egyptian throne as a reward for victory.<sup>116</sup> Demetrius saw an opportunity to expand his diminished kingdom immediately and accepted the offer.

Moreover, Ptolemaic Egypt was the traditional rival of the Seleucid Empire. Thus, another war against the Ptolemies was a comfortable decision for Demetrius to make. The Seleucid state, even at this late stage, remained western focused in its policy and attention. The conflicts of the Eastern Mediterranean, especially conflicts with Ptolemaic Egypt, were the primary concern of the Seleucid kings.<sup>117</sup> Therefore, the traditional geopolitical concerns of the Seleucid kings also influenced Demetrius' decision to engage in further conflict with Egypt before Parthia.

Family ties between the Seleucid and Ptolemaic dynasties also were at the root of this conflict. The traditional western focus of the Seleucid kings and their blood ties to the Ptolemaic family were more important and more legitimate than recent family ties between the Seleucid and Arsacid dynasties. To this point, Demetrius' children by his Ptolemaic wife succeeded him, not his children by his Parthian wife. Thus, Demetrius had a vested interest in the conflict within the Ptolemaic dynasty. No such conflict existed in the Arsacid dynasty to exploit.

More importantly Demetrius needed a military victory to bolster his prestige. The last time Demetrius was king his reign ended in a humiliating disaster. Then for ten years he was a

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<sup>116</sup> "Ptolemaeus [Ptolemy VIII], king of Egypt, too, who was threatened with a war by him [Demetrius], having learned that his sister Cleopatra [II] had put much of the wealth of Egypt on ship-board, and fled into Syria to her daughter [Cleopatra Thea] and son-in-law Demetrius, sent an Egyptian youth [Alexander II Zabinas], the son of a merchant named Protarchus, to claim the throne of Syria by force of arms." Id. 39.1.4

<sup>117</sup> Josephus states that Demetrius also wanted to renew war against the Jews in Judea but could not because of the conflict with Ptolemaic Egypt. *Jos. Ant.* 13.267-9

Parthian captive, and finally he came back to the Seleucid throne a fugitive, not a conqueror. His prestige and authority in 129 BCE would have been minimal, and his fear of a usurper challenging his reign must have been considerable.<sup>118</sup> Demetrius desperately needed to bolster his prestige and military reputation to retain his throne. In fact, Justin's account tells us that Demetrius' concerns were justified since the kingdom soon rebelled against him. He states,

Yet, as is often the case, while he [Demetrius] was grasping at what belonged to others [Egypt], he lost his own [kingdom] by a rebellion in Syria. For the people of Antioch, in the first place, under the leadership of Trypho, and from detestation of the pride of their king (which, from his intercourse with the unfeeling Parthians, had become intolerable), and afterwards the Apamenians and other people, following their example, revolted from Demetrius in his absence.<sup>119</sup>

Thus, we see the vulnerability of Demetrius' reign. He understood that the successful pursuit of war was the quickest, most effective way to alleviate his many weaknesses; however, Justin makes it clear that from the perspective of his subjects Demetrius chose to pursue the wrong war.

Before we continue discussing why Demetrius decided to go to war against Ptolemaic Egypt instead of against Parthia, there are three important points to take away from the above passage that speak to the weakness of Demetrius' reign and Justin's critical opinion of Demetrius. One, Demetrius' lack of authority was detrimental to his ability to rule. His past failures and humiliating captivity meant that his people did not respect him. Hence, it was easy for them to criticize his judgment and rebel against his rule. Two, the people of Syria detested Demetrius' pride, which had become perceptibly worse during his captivity. That is, another thing undercutting his second reign was the taint of his Parthian captivity; the feeling that the hated Parthians had corrupted Demetrius. This brings us to the third and most important point.

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<sup>118</sup> Josephus maintains that the Seleucid people and army disliked Demetrius and asked Ptolemy to send a man to replace him on the throne. Id. 13.267-8. See also Justin 39.1.5

<sup>119</sup> Justin 39.1.3



Both Justin and the people of Syria judged Demetrius negatively because of his failure to punish Parthia and avenge the Seleucid state. Justin's snipe that "while all Syria was mourning for the loss of the army, [Demetrius decided] to make war upon Egypt, (just as if his and his brother's wars with the Parthians, in which one was taken prisoner and the other killed, had had a fortunate termination)" plainly criticizes Demetrius for not attacking Parthia.<sup>120</sup> Justin emphasizes the mourning of Syria at the recent disaster and clearly indicates that Demetrius had unfinished business in the East. He underlines the shame the recent defeats to Parthia had brought to the kingdom, Demetrius' family, and Demetrius personally. Justin adds to this sentiment when he then criticizes Demetrius for "grasping at what belongs to others."<sup>121</sup> That is, Justin condemns Demetrius for attacking Egypt when the success of the Parthians against the Seleucids demanded his full attention. It is important to understand that Justin does not criticize Demetrius' decision to pursue war. Rather, he criticizes Demetrius' decision to attack Ptolemaic Egypt when the recent defeats against Parthia demanded Seleucid retaliation. Justin wanted Demetrius to retake Seleucid lands in the East and avenge the recent embarrassing losses to Parthia, not to try to seize Egypt in another Hellenistic dynastic feud. One gets the sense that the mourning Syrians, who later rebelled against Demetrius during his war against Ptolemy, shared in Justin's frustrations.

Thus, we see that Justin and the Seleucid people disapproved of Demetrius' war against Ptolemy and instead desired revenge against Parthia. However, we must finish our discussion of why Demetrius chose war with Egypt over war with Parthia. Although Justin and perhaps the people of Syria wanted Demetrius to conduct another anabasis, this was impossible logistically and politically in the early 120s BCE. Logistically, Demetrius had no money and only a small

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<sup>120</sup> Id. 39.1.1-2.

<sup>121</sup> Id. 39.1.3.

army of questionable loyalty.<sup>122</sup> Two ruinous eastern expeditions had exhausted the Seleucid state. The Seleucid Empire was not the Roman Republic, with its seemingly inexhaustible recruitment pool and unique ability to absorb catastrophic defeats. The Seleucid army relied on the recruitment of emigrated Greeks and Macedonians, and once these men were lost in battle, it was difficult to replace them.<sup>123</sup> Remember that Demetrius had conducted his anabasis partially in the hope of gaining more soldiers.<sup>124</sup> In fact, it is quite astonishing that the Seleucid state was able to rebound from Demetrius' disaster so quickly. Antiochus VII's ability to mount a second major eastern expedition is a testament to his capabilities as a leader and the potential strength of the Seleucid state in the 130s BCE.<sup>125</sup> Even after Antiochus' defeat, there is no good reason to assume that the Seleucid state could not eventually recover its wealth, military resources, and power with time and good leadership. However, time and good leadership were in short supply.

Simply put, there was no way that Demetrius, who was disliked and had a poor military record, could hope to conduct a third major eastern expedition against Parthia without first consolidating his power in the West. Seleucus II, Antiochus III, Antiochus IV, and Antiochus VII each had conducted successful military expeditions in the west to consolidate their power there before invading the East. Therefore, Demetrius needed to focus on building a western power base, and the war against Ptolemy was his best option. In addition, Demetrius desperately needed money. If he agreed to fight Ptolemy, he stood to gain the considerable wealth brought to

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<sup>122</sup> *Jos. Ant.* 13.267

<sup>123</sup> See Bar-Kochva 1987: 19-48; Grainger 2010: 40, 83, 205-7, 233, 257, 261.

<sup>124</sup> *Jos. Ant.* 13.186; *I Maccabees* 14.1

<sup>125</sup> Grainger is mistaken to argue that Demetrius' anabasis was the last real chance for the Seleucid Empire to recover the East. It is inappropriate to overlook the initial success and potential of Antiochus' anabasis. Grainger 2013a: 182.

him by Cleopatra II.<sup>126</sup> Finally, if victorious, Demetrius could secure his western frontier and stood to gain access to the wealth and resources of Egypt. Thus, a successful war against Ptolemaic Egypt was the only way that Demetrius could hope to gain the money, materials, and men needed to conduct hegemonic war against Parthia once again.

Meanwhile, Demetrius lacked the political clout to rule confidently over his subjects and to lead his army on a major eastern expedition in 129 BCE. He could not afford to be away from Antioch too long for fear of rebellion.<sup>127</sup> Further, his family ties to the Ptolemaic dynasty meant that he could not ignore the pleas of his mother-in-law. To do so would have immediately strained his already precarious relationship with his wife. In order to rule again, Demetrius needed legitimacy, and his remarriage to the calculating and opportunistic royal woman, Cleopatra Thea, gave him legitimacy because it reconnected him to his sons, thus reinstating his line of the Seleucid dynasty.<sup>128</sup> Cleopatra was a hugely influential royal woman with direct blood ties to the ruling family of Egypt and the half-brother princes of the Seleucid kingdom. Demetrius' remarriage to her was a political strategy to gain political supporters and bolster his reputation. Yet their relationship hinged on Demetrius' ability to acquire and maintain power.

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<sup>126</sup> Although even with Cleopatra II's war chest, Demetrius appears to have struggled to pay his mercenary army. See Hoover and Iossif 2009: 48.

<sup>127</sup> The rebellion of Antioch and several other cities later in Demetrius' reign make this apparent. Justin 39.1.3

<sup>128</sup> Cleopatra Thea was well versed in political intrigue and strategy. As a young girl she married the usurper, Alexander I Balas, and gave him a son, Antiochus VI. She then married Demetrius after Alexander's death and gave him two sons, Seleucus V and Antiochus VIII. She then married Demetrius' brother, Antiochus VII, after Demetrius' capture and gave him at least one son, Antiochus IX, and perhaps a second son, Seleucus. She then remarried Demetrius upon his return to power. She later betrayed Demetrius after he lost a battle against the usurper Alexander II Zabinas. She then killed her eldest son, Seleucus V, for attempting to seize the throne. Finally, she ruled as co-regent with her son, Antiochus VIII, until he had her poisoned. *I Maccabees* 10.51-8, 11.12, 15.10; Diod. 32.9c; Jos. *Ant.* 13.80, 109, 116, 270, 365; Appian *Syr.* 11.68; Justin 36.1, 39.1.2, 7, 9, 2.7, 2.8. For the argument that Seleucus, son of Antiochus VII, became a Parthian hostage and pawn, see Shayegan 2011: 146-8. See also Bivar 1983: 38.

When Cleopatra Thea's mother asked Demetrius for military support, he did not have the option to refuse for fear of losing the support of his wife. The only politically sound thing for Demetrius to do was to make war on Ptolemaic Egypt.

That brings us to the possibility that Demetrius avoided war with Parthia because he was a Parthian vassal or that he attacked Egypt because he had some sort of secret understanding with Phraates II that the Seleucid state could only operate in the West.<sup>129</sup> To be clear there is no evidence of a working relationship between Demetrius and Phraates after Demetrius' release. Further, the suggestion that Demetrius had Parthian support in his conflict with Ptolemaic Egypt is completely unfounded.<sup>130</sup> In fact, the evidence points to a quick break in their relationship. If Phraates released Demetrius in the hope of setting up a client kingdom in Syria, the plan was shortsighted and failed immediately. There are many explanations for why Demetrius went to war with Ptolemaic Egypt instead of Parthia. Perhaps the least convincing explanation is that Demetrius was a pro-Parthian vassal.

Justin clearly states that Phraates regretted releasing Demetrius and tried to recapture him. He also clearly states that Demetrius feared being recaptured and therefore secured himself on the Seleucid throne.<sup>131</sup> It is plausible that Phraates released Demetrius under a Parthian guard in the hope that he might have influence over Demetrius' regime. Demetrius had been an honored captive and had married into Phraates' family. However, Demetrius' escape attempts, his eagerness to avoid recapture, and the lack of evidence that he called on his Parthian familial

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<sup>129</sup> These are Shayegan's suggestions. Shayegan 2011: 145.

<sup>130</sup> See Ehling 1998b: 144; Ehling 2008: 208; Shayegan 2011: 145. Although active in the Eastern Mediterranean and Near East, the Ptolemies remained interested in their rivalry with the Seleucids and interactions with the Romans. Ptolemaic Egypt remained on the distant periphery of the expanding Eastern system at this time. The Parthians were not concerned with the geopolitical designs of Ptolemaic Egypt until the 50s-30s BCE.

<sup>131</sup> Justin 38.10.11

ties to aid him in his losing effort to retain his throne suggest that Demetrius was not committed to the Arsacids. Phraates released Demetrius out of desperation in 129 BCE, and he knew that the decision was risky and unlikely to succeed. This explains his later regret. Parthia certainly would have wanted a pro-Parthian king on the Seleucid throne; however, Demetrius was not necessarily the right man for the job. It was risky to release the most important political hostage in Parthian custody, a man who had once been a vehement enemy of the Parthian state. Phraates only released Demetrius under guard because he needed to divide Antiochus VII's attention and soon after wanted to return Demetrius to captivity, where he once again could serve as a valuable political hostage to threaten the stability of the Seleucid state.

Further, if Demetrius was a pro-Parthian vassal, it is difficult to explain the complete lack of Parthian interest in keeping him on the Seleucid throne. Demetrius' war against Ptolemy was a disaster, as his unpopularity with the people of Syria and the army led to widespread rebellion.<sup>132</sup> Yet there is no evidence that Phraates sent his vassal money or men, two things that Demetrius desperately needed, to put down the rebellion. If Demetrius was a Parthian vassal, the lack of Parthian support for his regime seems odd. Shayegan, arguing that Demetrius was a Parthian vassal, ignores this glaring problem and instead creates a speculative scenario, where Phraates chose to replace his failed vassal, Demetrius, with a new pro-Parthian candidate, Seleucus, son of Antiochus VII.<sup>133</sup> There is no need to assume, as Shayegan does, that the Parthians "chose this time to return the body [of Antiochus VII], because they wanted to promote the recognition of

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<sup>132</sup> For the failure of Demetrius' second reign, see Bevan 1902: 247-50; Bouché-Leclercq 1913-1914: i 388-94; Bellinger 1949: 58-65; Will 1982: 432-6; Ehling 1998b: 144-7; Ehling 2008: 208-9; Hoover and Iossif 2009: 48-9; Shayegan 2011: 148.

<sup>133</sup> He uses the jumbled and confused account of John of Antioch to suggest that Seleucus accompanied the return of his father's body to Syria in the hope of becoming the new Parthian backed Seleucid king. Shayegan 2011: 149-50.

Alexander Zabinas, Ptolemaios' pawn in Antioch, against the interests of their own protégé Demetrios II."<sup>134</sup> Justin's account does not imply this, and it means that we have to assume that Demetrius was a Parthian vassal that the Parthians took no interest in supporting.<sup>135</sup> It seems just as likely that the Parthians, who had their hands full with nomadic incursions in the East at the time, hoped that returning Antiochus' body to Syria would prolong the civil war and further destabilize the region, thus diminishing any possible Seleucid threat to the Parthian western frontier. In the Seleucid civil war, whoever could control Antiochus' body would gain a considerable boost to their prestige, as the usurper Alexander discovered. However, just because Alexander seized the opportunity and came to control Antiochus' body, it does not mean that this was the objective of the Parthians. Demetrius just as easily could have been the intended target. In fact, this would make more sense since Antiochus was Demetrius' brother and Demetrius was in need of something to help rally his cause and extend the war. That is, the Parthians sent the body of Antiochus back to Syria to inflame the civil war. Moreover, if the Parthians intended to use Antiochus' captured son, Seleucus, as a pro-Parthian replacement for Demetrius, we would have to assume that the Parthians intentionally undercut their current vassal on the Seleucid throne in the middle of a civil war in the vague hope of supplanting him with Seleucus and that the Parthians hoped to accomplish this in the small window of time between Demetrius' defeat in

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<sup>134</sup> *Id.* 149.

<sup>135</sup> "Meanwhile the body of Antiochus, who had been killed by the king of the Parthians, arrived in Syria, being sent back in a silver coffin for burial, and was received with great respect by the different cities as well as by the new king, Alexander, in order to secure credit to the fiction. This show of affection procured him extraordinary regard from the people, every one supposing his tears not counterfeit but real." Justin 39.1.6. There is no implication that the Parthians sent Antiochus' body directly to Alexander. Instead, Justin clearly states that the body had been en route to Syria during the civil war between Demetrius and Alexander. There was no expedited shipping in the ancient world. The movement of a funeral procession from Babylonia to Syria would have taken a considerable amount of time.

battle and Alexander's seizure of the kingdom, all without giving Seleucus any Parthian military aid.<sup>136</sup> Such a complex, ill-prepared, and shortsighted strategy seems highly unlikely but at the very least demonstrates that, although the Parthians liked the idea of indirectly influencing the geopolitical developments of the Seleucid state, Parthian commitment to establishing a client kingdom in Syria was minimal at this time.

It is fair to argue that the Parthians took a heightened interest in the geopolitical developments of the Seleucid state after the defeat of Antiochus.<sup>137</sup> Parthia had emerged as the hegemonic rival of the Seleucid Empire in a bipolar Eastern system. Further, Parthia was not content to uphold the new status quo. Parthia eventually wanted to replace bipolarity with their own unipolar hegemony. Hegemonic war was the most decisive way to accomplish this end; however, as discussed above there were numerous reasons why a western expedition was not possible in the 120s BCE. Instead, the establishment of a client kingdom in Syria under the control of a pro-Parthian king was an attractive alternative.<sup>138</sup> However, although the Parthians had the idea, they were not able to execute that idea at this time. We cannot consider Demetrius a vassal of the Parthian state. There simply is too much contrary evidence, and

Phraates was not able to influence the Seleucid state through Demetrius' release, nor, despite his desire to do so, was he capable of seizing Syria by force at this time.<sup>139</sup> Antiochus' anabasis once again had destabilized Mesopotamia severely and called Parthian authority in the

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<sup>136</sup> This is Shayegan's improbable reconstruction. Shayegan 2011: 149.

<sup>137</sup> This study does not deny Shayegan's argument that Parthia possibly wanted to establish Demetrius and Antiochus' captured son, Seleucus, as pro-Parthian candidates on the Seleucid throne. See Id. 145-50. However, these Parthian efforts never succeeded, and it is misguided to argue that they were anything more than shortsighted, reactionary efforts.

<sup>138</sup> For later possible Parthian political interventions in Syria, see Bellinger 1948: 65-7; Bellinger 1949: 67; Ehling 2008: 228; Shayegan 2011: 150 n.449.

<sup>139</sup> Justin 42.1.1; Diod. 34/35.18

region into question. Added to this was the explosion of violence along Parthia's eastern frontier as bands of nomadic warriors penetrated the Iranian plateau.<sup>140</sup> In the spring of 127 BCE Characene took advantage of the chaos by invading and occupying Babylonia until the Parthians were able to reclaim the region by force in November.<sup>141</sup> This is another example of a minor state pursuing aggressive power-maximizing policies under the harsh pressures of the interstate system. Characene seized an opportunity to attack Parthia when Parthian control of Mesopotamia was vulnerable. Unfortunately for Characene, the gamble did not pay off as Parthia reasserted its hegemony over the region with overwhelming force. There is evidence that by 125 BCE Characene was offering tribute to Parthia and that the king, Hypaosines, accepted Parthian suzerainty.<sup>142</sup> The following year Parthia installed its own governor of Characene.<sup>143</sup> Moreover, the perceived vulnerability of Parthia in Mesopotamia following Antiochus' anabasis encouraged Elymais to once again rebel. Therefore, the Parthians conducted a major expedition into Elymais and captured the capital city, Susa, in 124 BCE.<sup>144</sup> With its decisive victories against the Seleucid Empire and its thorough suppression of Characene and Elymais, Parthia successfully demonstrated its superiority in the region and stabilized its western frontier. Yet the process was slow and difficult, made more so by the calamities befalling the eastern frontier.

### The Parthians Emerge as System Hegemons in the East

Parthia's defeat of Demetrius II and its ability to subdue the minor states in Mesopotamia and Persia in the 130s BCE solidified its unrivaled power in the East and firmly established a

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<sup>140</sup> Justin 42.1.2

<sup>141</sup> See Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -126A; Potts 2002: 359; Shayegan 2011: 110-11, 151, 157.

<sup>142</sup> See Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -124B; Shayegan 2011: 112-14.

<sup>143</sup> Shayegan 2011: 168.

<sup>144</sup> Id. 116-19. Note also Strabo 16.1.18



system of bipolarity between Parthia and the Seleucid Empire in the Eastern system. Further, Parthia's defeat of Antiochus VII a decade later gave Parthia the opportunity to establish its own unipolar rule if it could manage to subdue Syria. However, Parthia had too many concerns at home and abroad in the early 120s BCE to take advantage of this opportunity. The inability of the Parthians to press their advantage and subjugate the weakened Seleucid state under their hegemony meant that bipolarity remained intact in the Eastern system. If the Parthians hoped to confront the Seleucids in Syria and firmly establish their hegemony, then they first had to secure their frontiers. Parthia's forceful submission of Characene and Elymais under its direct authority in the middle 120s BCE secured the western frontier; however, a far larger threat to the security and even the survival of the Parthian state lay to the east.

#### The Nomadic Problem

The major obstacle in the way of the Parthians pursuing further western expansion in the 130s and 120s BCE was the increasing instability of their eastern frontier. The collapse of Bactria and the efforts of Mithridates I to secure this much expanded frontier foreshadowed a major crisis for the Parthian state. Perhaps by the early 130s BCE, the nomadic Sakae confederation had pushed into modern day Turkmenistan and began to impinge upon Parthia's northeastern frontier.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Bivar 1983: 36. We can dismiss Debevoise's opinion that "the Saka mercenaries hired for the war against Antiochus were probably an advanced group of this eastern horde." Debevoise 1938: 35. With the rapid decline of Bactria and the aggressive advances of the Yuezhi tribe into the Oxus River valley by the 130s BCE, it is impossible to think that the Saka, whom the Yuezhi were driving before them, would not have been well established in the region and well known to the Parthians by the 120s BCE. See Bernard 1999: 103. Koshelenko and Pilipko 1999: 132; Mair 2014: 29.

After Phraates II's decisive victory over Antiochus VII, he wanted to make a retaliatory campaign into Syria.<sup>146</sup> However, it was at this time that the Sakae finally went to war with the Parthians. Justin tells us that the Parthians had hired a band of "Scythian" mercenaries, that is a warband of the Sakae, to aid them in their hegemonic war against the Seleucids; however, once the Parthians defeated Antiochus, the nomadic mercenaries, who arrived too late to take part in the campaign, became incensed when the Parthians refused to compensate them and began to ravage Parthian territory.<sup>147</sup> The betrayal of the Sakae mercenaries and their raids across the Parthian Kingdom encouraged a series of devastating nomadic invasions of the Parthian Kingdom over the next few years.

The nomadic tribes of the Central Asian steppe were highly militarized, violent, aggressive, and war prone.<sup>148</sup> Life on the steppe was harsh and in flux. For nearly four decades the Sakae and Yuezhi tribes had been continually on the move and in conflict with neighboring tribes and the Bactrian Kingdom. Because of the migrations of the Sakae and Yuezhi into lands bordering Parthia, there must have been a surplus of skilled warriors in these borderlands, and the Parthians had the difficult responsibility of keeping these warrior bands from attacking their territory. One way to accomplish this task was to employ them as mercenaries. The Parthian

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<sup>146</sup> Justin 42.1.1; Diod. 34/35.18. We should reject Sampson's unfair portrayal of Phraates II as a weak leader who failed to capitalize on Mithridates I's conquests. Sampson 2015: 47-9.

<sup>147</sup> Id. 42.1.2. See also Debevoise 1938: 36; Bivar 1983: 38; Assar 2005a: 47.

<sup>148</sup> Although likely exaggerated, contemporary Chinese sources put the military strength of various nomadic tribes between 80,000-200,000 trained bowmen. See Mair 2014: 22-3, 159, 161, 168, 170, 178, 646. The military forces of the various nomadic tribes on the Central Asian steppe would have matched and perhaps overshadowed the forces of the Parthian state. In fact, the Chinese envoy Zhang Qian viewed the Yuezhi as far more powerful than the Parthians and recommended that the Han dynasty should try to gain the loyalty of the Yuezhi through bribes. See id. 31. For the longstanding concerns that the Chinese had for their northern and western frontiers against the threat of nomadic incursions, see Barfield 1989, Tao 2007.

army was quite limited in size, perhaps 50,000 men at its largest extent.<sup>149</sup> Therefore, they became increasingly reliant on mercenaries to bolster their numbers in times of war and to maintain control of their expanding empire.<sup>150</sup> It is appropriate to suggest that part of the eastern policy of Mithridates and Phraates was to create a working relationship with the Sakae as they migrated into Afghanistan and Turkmenistan to create a pipeline for hiring skilled mercenaries to fight in Parthia's western wars. This would help to explain how Phraates II hired a sizable body of Saka warriors for his war against Antiochus VII. Phraates likely reached out to his nomadic contacts after he had withdrawn into Parthia proper at the height of Antiochus' invasion, at which point Phraates was desperate to repulse Antiochus and had a close proximity to the steppe. This also would help explain why the Sakae were still en route across Parthia when Phraates ambushed the withdrawing Seleucid forces under Antiochus.<sup>151</sup>

The rampaging mercenaries used their mobility to ravage huge swaths of the Parthian Kingdom without much resistance, raiding perhaps as far west as Mesopotamia.<sup>152</sup> Their success was embarrassing to Parthia and damaged its perceived power. Thus, the uprising demanded swift and determined retribution by the Parthians. Plans of attacking Syria had to be put on hold, as the Farther East descended into chaos. Therefore, Phraates placed a certain Himerus in charge

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<sup>149</sup> Sheldon's assumption that "when the Parthian feudal system was at its height, its military power was immense" is an exaggeration. Yet she is completely incorrect when she continues, "Militarily the two sides [Parthia and Rome] were probably evenly matched." Sheldon 2010: 3. Compared to the massive armies of the Achaemenids, Hellenistic Successors, and the Romans, the Parthian army was quite small.

<sup>150</sup> Phraates' hiring of the Sakae and his efforts to force Antiochus' captured soldiers to fight in the Parthian army are good examples of the start of this trend. See Justin 42.1.4

<sup>151</sup> The argument that Phraates II was absent from Babylonia when Antiochus VII attacked because the Sakae invaded in 130 BCE is dubious and unsupported by evidence. Tarn 1932: 581ff.; Debevoise 1938: 35-6. In fact, there is new evidence that suggests that Phraates was in Seleucia at the time. See Shayegan 2011: 128.

<sup>152</sup> See Jo. Antioch. in Mariev 2008: Frag. 97, pg. 108-9. See also Bivar 1983: 38; Koshelenko and Pilipko 1999: 132. Note that Debevoise finds this doubtful. Debevoise 1938: 36.

of the western territories and marched east to repulse the Sakae.<sup>153</sup> Unfortunately for the Parthians, Phraates' eastern expedition was a disaster. His efforts to enlist nomadic mercenaries indicate that Phraates wanted to expand Parthian power through further war. However, his efforts to utilize the Central Asian mercenary pipeline to Parthia's advantage failed miserably. The Parthians had to fight the very people they had hoped to enlist as fighters. Hence, Phraates had to look to a new source for recruits.

Antiochus VII had brought a large, well-trained army with him to the East.<sup>154</sup> When Antiochus met his end, a large portion of his army became trapped in cities and winter quarters.<sup>155</sup> Meanwhile, most of the men that Antiochus had with him at the final battle deserted him.<sup>156</sup> There is no evidence of mass executions or the release of prisoners; and therefore, a large portion of Antiochus' army became prisoners of the Parthians in Mesopotamia and Media. Since these were experienced, able-bodied soldiers, Phraates readily enlisted them into his army.<sup>157</sup> It may seem odd that Phraates would trust captured Seleucid soldiers to fight in his army; however, Justin tells us that many of these men had "deserted (*desertus*)" to his side. Further, Diodorus mentions that Antiochus' friends urged him not to fight. These friends would have been his close companions and officers.<sup>158</sup> If some of these officers, who did not want to fight the Parthians, were among the soldiers who deserted to Phraates, then we can argue that, in addition to Seleucid

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<sup>153</sup> Justin 42.1.3. It is plausible that Phraates gave Himerus the same wide-ranging command in the West that Mithridates had given to Bacasis because, although Justin emphasizes that Himerus abused Babylon, Justin states that Phraates left the care of the kingdom in Himerus' hands. Naturally, this would denote the western portion of the kingdom since Phraates was returning to the East. The instability of Mesopotamia made such a command necessary. For the Parthian division of their kingdom into upper and lower regions, see Pliny *NH* 6.29

<sup>154</sup> Justin 38.10.2

<sup>155</sup> Id. 38.10.8.

<sup>156</sup> Id. 38.10.10.

<sup>157</sup> Id. 42.1.4.

<sup>158</sup> Diod. 34/35.16

soldiers, who had voluntarily switched sides, Phraates could expect the support of high ranking officers among those who defected. That is, there was reason for Phraates to believe that these men would fight for him.<sup>159</sup> However, Phraates severely mismanaged the situation. He quickly squandered whatever chances he had of gaining the permanent loyal service of these men by insulting and abusing them.<sup>160</sup> Thus, he marched east to face the rampaging Sakae with a disgruntled and divided army.

Despite the questionable loyalty and unhappiness of the Seleucid soldiers in his army, Phraates' campaign against the Sakae appears to have been successful initially. Phraates was able to drive the Sakae back, possibly as far as Margiana.<sup>161</sup> It is not hard to imagine that the Saka mercenaries, laden with loot from their raids, wanted to avoid a major confrontation with the larger Parthian army until they had returned closer to the Central Asian steppe.<sup>162</sup> Once there, they could hope to call on reinforcements from the other warrior bands in the region and counterattack.

The details of the climactic battle between Phraates and the Sakae mostly are lost. It is probable that the battle took place near the northeastern frontier of the Parthian Kingdom in 126 BCE.<sup>163</sup> It was a complete disaster for the Parthians, as Phraates II and much of his army

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<sup>159</sup> Debevoise suggests that perhaps Phraates hoped that fighting in the Farther East for their lives against an unfamiliar foe would force the Seleucid troops to remain loyal. Debevoise 1938: 37. See also Bivar 1983: 38.

<sup>160</sup> "Phraates himself, meanwhile, took with him to the war a body of Greeks, who had been made prisoners in the war against Antiochus, and whom he had treated with great pride and severity, not reflecting that captivity had not lessened their hostile feelings, and that the indignity of the outrages which they had suffered must have exasperated them." Justin 42.1.4

<sup>161</sup> See Assar 2005a: 47; See also Sellwood 1995: 98-101; Dąbrowa 2006: 38.

<sup>162</sup> The decision of the Sakae to return "home" "content" with their gains from raiding makes this more likely. See Justin 42.2.1

<sup>163</sup> New evidence suggest that Phraates died in early 126 BCE and not in 128 BCE as previously thought. See Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -125A; Assar 2005a: 47. See also Debevoise 1938: 37; Bivar 1983: 38.

perished. Justin records, “As soon therefore as they [the disgruntled Seleucid soldiers] saw the Parthians giving ground, they went over to the enemy, and executed that revenge for their captivity, which they had long desired, by a sanguinary destruction of the Parthian army and of king Phraates himself.”<sup>164</sup> Here again we find possible evidence of the Parthians utilizing the feigned retreat tactic in battle, of western misunderstanding of it, and of the potential dangers of it to the Parthians if not properly executed.

A main feature of the Parthians’ mode of warfare was to give ground before an enemy to create the illusion of a withdrawal or rout, at which point the Parthians hoped to draw in an overly aggressive enemy. Once the enemy committed to the offensive, they could become disorganized and divided. When the enemy became vulnerable, the Parthians would counterattack often with devastating results. Phraates had a large army that hereto had had resounding success against the Seleucids and the Sakae. It is hard to believe Justin’s account that Phraates’ veteran Parthian troops would flee so easily. Therefore, I propose that the perceived rout of the Parthian cavalry in this battle was in fact part of Phraates’ tactical approach to the battle.

In passage 42.1.5, Justin records that Phraates’ army in this battle was a mixture of Parthian light and heavy cavalry and the remaining well-trained, well-equipped Seleucid troops from Antiochus’ defeated army. He then records that, once the Parthians began to give ground, the captive Seleucid soldiers defected and slaughtered the Parthians. I offer the following recreation of the battle as a possible alternative to Justin’s vague and simplistic account based upon our observations of the Parthian mode of warfare.

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<sup>164</sup> Justin 42.1.5

The composition of the Parthian army on this campaign and in this battle was unusual. The Parthian cavalry had a large body of high-quality Greek infantry to protect while coordinating its attacks. Further, the enemy the Parthians faced in the East was vastly different from the Hellenistic armies they had faced for over a century. The Parthians did not have the advantage of maneuverability or flexibility against these nomadic armies. Therefore, it is possible that, after the Parthian Shot tactic had proved inadequate against an equally mobile enemy force, Phraates hoped to trick the Sakae into committing to battle by executing the feigned retreat tactic. By breaking off his Parthian cavalry from the Sakae attack in the guise of a rout, Phraates could hope that the Sakae then would assume the Parthian cavalry was defeated and concentrate their attack on the Seleucid infantry. After the Sakae committed to attacking the infantry, Phraates could wheel his cavalry around and attack the Sakae in the rear and flanks. In fact, the ability of the Seleucid soldiers in Justin's description to engage and destroy the Parthian cavalry after their defection lends itself well to the argument that Phraates had hoped to work in concert with his Seleucid troops. If the Parthian cavalry simply chose to flee the battle and leave the infantry based Seleucid force isolated against the Sakae, it seems highly unlikely that the Seleucids would have been able to catch the Parthians and conduct mass slaughter upon them. Thus, it seems more likely that Justin again unknowingly highlights the Parthians trying to implement their feigned retreat tactic.

However, the successful execution of the feigned retreat tactic required discipline and expertise. As discussed above, one of the fundamental weaknesses of the feigned retreat at the micro (tactical) and macro (strategic) levels is that it involves willingly giving ground to the enemy. Thus, it easily creates the perception of weakness and vulnerability. Although the Parthians were accustomed to this maneuver and relied on it to create this perceived weakness to

encourage aggression and overconfidence in the enemy, if the Parthians failed to take advantage of military opportunities or if, as in the case of the Seleucid troops serving under Phraates, their army was not cohesive and confident, then the feigned retreat could fail disastrously, as this oft overlooked battle indicates. Therefore, it is possible that what Justin and the Seleucid troops perceived as the Parthians beginning to flee the battlefield was in reality Phraates trying to execute the feigned retreat tactic. Ultimately, Phraates' Partho-Seleucid army lacked the cohesion, discipline, and loyalty to execute traditional Parthian "feigned retreat, defeat in detail" warfare successfully. Phraates had insulted and abused his Seleucid troops, and once they perceived Parthian weakness, they turned on their captors with merciless violence.<sup>165</sup>

The death of Phraates and the destruction of his army severely damaged the perceived strength of the Parthian state and threatened the stability of the entire Eastern system. The successful raids and military victory of the Sakae encouraged other nomadic tribes to invade the Parthian Kingdom. Moreover, Parthian losses in the East encouraged Characene and Elymais to challenge Parthian hegemony in their western lands. Despite the past successes and respected

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<sup>165</sup> It is unclear what happened to the Seleucid troops after the battle; however, Rawlinson's unsubstantiated claim that they "fought their way across Asia, and rejoined their own countrymen" appears dubious. Rawlinson 1885 (2002): 61. It is far more likely that they either dissolved into the various Greek settlements throughout the Farther East or supported the Sakae in their war against the Parthians until the Parthians regained control of the Farther East. Additionally, the disastrous experiment of incorporating captive soldiers into the Parthian field army might help explain the later handling of 10,000 Roman prisoners of war after the Battle of Carrhae in 53 BCE. Plut. *Crass.* 31.7. Instead of enlisting these men directly into the Parthian field army, the Parthians transferred them to Margiana on the extreme edge of their Empire. Pliny *NH* 6.18.47; Solinus 48.3; See also Justin 42.4.4; Dio 40.27.4. These Roman soldiers apparently married native women and perhaps served to protect Parthia's eastern frontier. Hor. *Od.* 3.5.5-8; See also Vell. Pat. 2.82.5; Florus 2.20.4. See also Plinval 1948: 491-5; Pigulevskaja 1963; Wolski 1965: 103-15; Frumkin 1970: 146. For the argument that some of these Romans fled Farther East and became soldiers, see Dubs 1975; Ferguson 1978: 599-601; Dauge 1981.



military reputation of Parthia, the catastrophic loss of Phraates and his army against the Sakae brought the perceived strength of Parthia into question and invited further war.

Although the victorious Sakae returned to the steppe, their victory threatened the stability of bipolarity in the Eastern system.<sup>166</sup> For the first time the Parthians had lost a king in battle. Moreover, the destruction of the cavalry in Phraates' army must have been a considerable blow to the military capabilities of the Parthians. Finally, the Parthians began to face military pressures on two fronts. With the Parthian royal army in shambles, the Iranian plateau was vulnerable to further invading nomadic warrior bands. The Parni tribe had once taken advantage of an unstable system of states to establish a new eastern kingdom in Parthia. There is no reason to believe that such a scenario was not capable of repeating itself in the 120s BCE as migrating nomads put increased pressure on a weakened Parthian state. Multipolar anarchy threatened to reemerge in the Eastern system.

The Parthian state was reeling and needed to stabilize its geopolitical situation quickly. Justin tells us that Phraates' uncle, Artabanus I, became the next king and immediately went to war with the nomads in the East.<sup>167</sup> However, Assar recently has used Babylonian cuneiform

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<sup>166</sup> Justin 42.2.1. Assar is mistaken when he states that the Sakae ravaged Parthia and advanced as far as Mesopotamia after Phraates' death. Assar 2005a: 48. Although John of Antiochus' account is ambiguous, Justin clearly states that the Sakae returned home after the battle. John states, "While the Scythians were overrunning Mesopotamia at this time and devastating the kingdom of Arsaces, the Parthian [king] himself fell in the war and his successor had to pay tribute to the Scythians." See Mariev 2008: Frag. 97, pg. 108-9. There should be no doubt that the Sakae raids came before the climactic battle.

<sup>167</sup> Justin 42.2.1. Scholars therefore tend to associate Artabanus with the S19-22 coinage, placing his reign in 128-124 BCE. See Wroth 1903: xxiv 20-1, pl. v, nos 1-8; Sellwood 1980: 56-62; Sellwood 1983: 283; Shore 1993: 97-9, nos. 57-65. See also Assar 2005a: 47. In this study I use Sellwood's standard catalogue numbering (S) of Parthian coinage.

records and numismatic evidence to suggest that between the reigns of Phraates and Artabanus, another of Phraates' uncles, Bacasis, reigned briefly in 126 as Arsaces VIII.<sup>168</sup>

In the West, Antiochus' anabasis and the success of the Sakae raids that followed in 129/128 BCE had encouraged Elymais to rebel under a new leader, Pittit, and the king of Characene, Hyspaosines, to invade and occupy Babylonia in 128/127 BCE.<sup>169</sup> It seems that Phraates II ordered his general Timarchus to reclaim Babylonia and then, once Timarchus accomplished this, Phraates placed Himerus in overall command in the West, while Phraates marched his army east to try to put an end to the Sakae raids.<sup>170</sup> However, with the death of Phraates and the destruction of his army, Characene ravaged Babylonia once again in 126 BCE.<sup>171</sup> If we accept Assar's reconstruction, with the king dead and Babylonia under attack by Characene, the succession of Bacasis would make sense for geopolitical reasons as well. The coins from the reign of Arsaces VIII indicate that his military focus was Babylonia and that he

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<sup>168</sup> We know that Artabanus reigned for a few years so he cannot be the short-lived Arsaces VIII. Assar 2005a: 47. See also Assar 2001a: 20, 25-6, 41; Assar 2001b: 17-22. Although Justin states earlier that Phriapatius left behind two sons, Phraates I and Mithridates I, this passage clearly indicates that Phriapatius had other younger sons. Justin 41.5.9. In fact, he likely had three younger sons, Bacasis, Artabanus I, and Mithridates II. Justin only refers to Phraates and Mithridates I at the time of Phriapatius' death because they were the only two sons of age to replace him. See Assar 2005a: 48 no.118, 52; Assar 2006c: 140. The Babylonian *Astronomical Diaries* also perhaps indicate that Artabanus was Mithridates II's brother. Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -118A. See also van der Spek 2001: 453-4; Olbrycht 2010b: 150-1. Shayegan's conclusion that the evidence is contradictory is unconvincing. Shayegan 2011: 114 n.309.

<sup>169</sup> See Shayegan 2011: 111, 118.

<sup>170</sup> Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -126A; Justin 42.1.3. Shayegan places Timarchus' success in Artabanus I's reign. Shayegan 2011: 114. However, this incorrectly assumes that Phraates had already conducted his eastern campaign and died. It is highly unlikely that Characene would have risked another invasion of Babylonia without the failure of Phraates' expedition in early 126 BCE. If Artabanus had been king since 128 BCE, he would have been in a position of relative strength after the success of Timarchus in 127 BCE and before his own doomed eastern expedition.

<sup>171</sup> Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -125A; Shayegan 2011: 111-12.

defeated the Characenean invasion in 126 BCE.<sup>172</sup> Bacasis was a militarily experienced man, whom Mithridates I had trusted with command over the western lands of the kingdom.<sup>173</sup>

Mithridates had given Bacasis the responsibility of preparing Babylonia's defenses as Demetrius II prepared to invade, and Bacasis had been vital to the successful execution of the Parthians' "feigned retreat, defeat in detail" mode of warfare against the Seleucids in this war. Thus, Bacasis' firsthand knowledge of governing Babylonia and his firsthand experience in defending it were unmatched. He would have been an ideal candidate to become king at this pressing time.

Let us also briefly consider the account of John of Antioch. He states that the successor of Phraates had to pay tribute to the Sakae.<sup>174</sup> It is possible that John overlooked Bacasis and therefore meant that Artabanus made a treaty with the Sakae to protect his eastern lands in 126 BCE and then focused on stabilizing his kingdom in the West until further nomadic invasions forced him to fight in the East.<sup>175</sup> However, it is also possible that Bacasis, who had been elected to regain Babylonia and who had his hands full with the Characenean invasion, decided to make a treaty with the Sakae to pay tribute to alleviate his eastern frontier.<sup>176</sup> Arsaces VIII disappears from the record in late 126 BCE. Therefore, Bacasis would have suddenly died after regaining Babylonia, perhaps of old age, at which point Artabanus became the new king in late 126 BCE and either made or renewed the treaty to pay tribute to the Sakae.

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<sup>172</sup> They were minted at Seleucia and one example is overstruck on a tetradrachm of the Characenean ruler, Hyspaosines. See Assar 2005a 47-8. For the mint-towns of Parthia, see Sellwood 1972; Rezakhani 2013.

<sup>173</sup> Justin 41.6.6-7. See Assar 2005a: 48; Shayegan 2011: 72-3.

<sup>174</sup> For John here, see Mariev 2008: Frag. 97, pg. 108-9.

<sup>175</sup> Justin 42.2.1-2

<sup>176</sup> Assar mistakenly suggests that the Parthians only had a tenuous hold on Media and that they had lost their eastern lands to the Sakae. Assar 2005a: 48. He misrepresents John of Antioch's account and ignores Justin's. See Justin 42.2.1

The treaty with the Sakae bought the Parthians some time to reconsolidate their control over their western lands and to rebuild their army. Bacasis' successful reconquest of Babylonia in 126 BCE was an important step in the Parthians' attempt to reestablish their hegemony over the region and to avoid the reemergence of multipolar anarchy. Yet Bacasis' sudden death again could have jeopardized the stability of the region. As the new king, Artabanus I needed to make a determined response to the recent rebellions of Characene and Elymais in the West. In 125 BCE he prepared a major invasion of Elymais.<sup>177</sup> The next year Artabanus captured Susa and defeated the Elymaean forces under the rebel leader, Pittit, decisively.<sup>178</sup> It was at this time that Artabanus sacked the wealthy Elymaean temples in retribution for their rebellion. Strabo records,

In later times the king of Parthia, though warned by what had happened to Antiochus [III], hearing that the temples in that country contained great wealth, and seeing that the inhabitants were disobedient subjects, made an invasion with a great force, and took both the temple of Athena and that of Artemis, the latter called Azara, and carried off treasures valued at ten thousand talents. And Seleuceia near the Hedyphon River [that is, Susa], a large city, was also taken.<sup>179</sup>

Thus, Artabanus' victory was decisive and lucrative. At this time Parthia appears to have annexed Elymais and ruled over it directly for a generation until a vassal king reemerged around the beginning of the tumultuous Parthian "Dark Age."<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> It is possible that the threat of this invasion encouraged Characene to offer tribute to Parthia. By 124 BCE Parthia had reestablished its hegemony over Characene. Hypaosines likely submitted to Parthian suzerainty to save his rule and protect his land. See Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. 124B; Shayegan 2011: 112-14. It is also possible that the victorious Bacasis established the tribute treaty with Characene.

<sup>178</sup> See Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. 124B. Pittit likely is the Pitthides mentioned by Diodorus. Diod. 34/25.19.1; See also Assar 2006c: 124.

<sup>179</sup> Strabo 16.1.18

<sup>180</sup> Shayegan 2011: 118. Note also Alram 1986a: 143-4. For the argument that Mithridates II established Elymais as a tributary client kingdom toward the end of his reign, see Assar 2006c: 141. For the Parthian "Dark Age" and the debate over its chronology and coinage, see esp. Assar 2009b; See also Simonetta 1953-1957: 111-21; Simonetta 1966: 15-40; Sellwood 1976: 2-25; Mørkholm 1980: 33-47; Simonetta 2001: 69-108.; Assar 2006d: 55-96.

Shayegan, following the arguments of Le Rider, maintains that Mithridates II, not Artabanus I, was king in 125 BCE and conducted the campaign against Pittit.<sup>181</sup> However, his argument that Artabanus could not have been fighting in Elymais because a cuneiform record says he was fighting the Gutians in the east is unconvincing for the following reasons.<sup>182</sup> It is unclear if Artabanus I in fact fought the Gutians, and if he did, this campaign would have been fought in 122 BCE.<sup>183</sup> Shayegan admits that the ascension date of Mithridates II is unknown. In fact, the Babylonian *Astronomical Diaries* for the second half of the 120s BCE do not directly name Artabanus or Mithridates.<sup>184</sup> Therefore, scholars must look to numismatic evidence for the answer. Le Rider contended that Mithridates became king between 125/124 BCE and 122/121 BCE.<sup>185</sup> Shayegan argues that two undated issues of tetradrachms by Mithridates II belong to his early reign, sometime around 125/124 BCE, and assumes that Artabanus died after he issued his tetradrachms at Seleucia in 125/124 BCE.<sup>186</sup> However, it appears that Artabanus issued coins at Susa commemorating his victory there and in the East at Ecbatana, Rhagae, and Margiane during his later campaign against the nomads.<sup>187</sup> Therefore, it is probable that Artabanus, not

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<sup>181</sup> Shayegan 2011: 114 n.309; See also Le Rider 1965: 386

<sup>182</sup> See Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -118A.

<sup>183</sup> For questions about whether or not Artabanus fought the Gutians, see Olbrycht 2010b: 150-1. For the argument that this campaign took place in 122 BCE, see Assar 2005a: 49; Assar 2006c: 128-9.

<sup>184</sup> The cuneiform records simply refer to the Parthian king as Arsaces.

<sup>185</sup> He used a tetradrachms of Artabanus from Seleucia (S21.1-4) and a *dichalkoi* of Mithridates (S23.4) to establish the 125-221 BCE window of time. Le Rider 1965: 386.

<sup>186</sup> He argues that a younger looking Mithridates on the undated coins (S23.1-2) means that these coins should precede the *dichalkoi* of Mithridates (S23.4). Shayegan 2011: 114 n.309. However, we should not assume that these coins depict Mithridates II. Assar argues that “the sudden and pronounced facial disparity between the obverse portraits of the S23.1-2 large silver on the one hand and those of S23.4 bronze and S24 coinage on the other is unparalleled in the Parthian series.” He concludes that these disparities indicate that “a prince other than Mithridates II issued the S23.1-2 tetradrachms. He may well have been son of Artabanus I.” Assar 2005a: 50.

<sup>187</sup> Specifically, S18.2, S20.3, S20.4-5, S22.4. See Assar 2005a: 49.

Mithridates II conquered Elymais, subdued Characene, and kept Arab raids into the region in check in 125/124 BCE.<sup>188</sup>

Although the Parthians had reestablished control over their western lands, their eastern lands remained vulnerable. The Sakae successfully had raided throughout much of the Iranian plateau and destroyed Phraates II and his army. Although the Sakae had returned to the steppe after forcing the Parthians to pay them tribute, other nomadic tribes were migrating southwest and starting to impinge on Parthia's eastern frontier. One of these tribes, the Tochari, who perhaps were a branch of the Yuezhi, had occupied parts of Bactria and then invaded Parthia.<sup>189</sup> Artabanus had spent much of 126/125 BCE securing Media and preparing for an eastern expedition against the nomads.<sup>190</sup> Yet the rebellion in Elymais forced Artabanus to turn west in 125/124 BCE. Although he successfully subdued Elymais and Characene, the absence of a strong Parthian presence in the East encouraged nomadic tribes, like the Tochari, to act aggressively toward Parthia. The recent success of the Sakae and the lack of Parthian retaliation meant that the Tochari sought to take advantage of perceived Parthian weakness in the East by raiding and perhaps seizing portions of the Iranian plateau.

With the western portion of the kingdom temporarily under control, Artabanus immediately conducted an initially successful eastern campaign. Like Phraates II, Artabanus minted coins in the east to mark his early victories. It appears that Artabanus reversed the

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<sup>188</sup> Id. 48; Assar 2006c: 118-27; Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -124B; See also van der Spek 2001: 451-3.

<sup>189</sup> Strabo 11.8.2; Justin 42.2.2. Tarn rejected that the Tochari had reached Parthia by this point. Tarn 1930: 115-16. However, Tarn's conclusion are unconvincing. See Debevoise 1938: 37-8; Bivar 1983: 39. For the Tochari, see Enoki, Koshelenko, Haidary 1994; Piankov 2010; Mair 2014: 17, 19.

<sup>190</sup> Assar 2006c: 122.

penetration of the Tochari and restored the northeastern frontier of the kingdom in Margiana.<sup>191</sup> Unfortunately, our records are mostly silent on Artabanus' demise. Justin simply records, "Artabanus, making war upon the Tocharii, received a wound in the arm, of which he immediately died."<sup>192</sup> It is possible that as Artabanus pushed east he became increasingly isolated and vulnerable to attack. Once he reached Margiana, he would have been almost completely surrounded by hostile nomadic tribes in Bactria, Sogdiana, and the wider steppe to the northwest. In Margiana the Tochari could hope for military support from other nomadic warrior bands and could risk more aggressive attacks since they easily could fall back into Bactria. In fact, the Babylonian *Astronomical Diaries* record that a certain Artaban fell fighting the Gutians, which were another tribe coming out of the central Asian steppe at this time and descending on the Parthian frontier.<sup>193</sup> It is possible that Artabanus found himself assaulted by a combined Tocharian and Gutian force, during which he was mortally wounded. At the very least Artabanus had to split his attention between the pursuit of the Tochari and the settlement and protection of the eastern frontier against other nomadic threats. The Parthians found themselves in a disadvantageous position.

The scale of the battle and the severity of the Parthian defeat is unknown; however, the sudden absence of Parthian issued drachms from Iranian mints over the next few years indicates

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<sup>191</sup> Most notably he minted a series of silver drachms in Rhagae and Margiane (S20.4, S20.5-6, S22.4). See esp. id. 127. Assar suggests that these coins included the epithet *philhellene* because Artabanus wanted to ensure the support of Greek settlers in the region, especially the Seleucid soldiers that had defected from Phraates' army and settled in the region. Id. 127 n.123; See also Loginov and Nikitin 1996: 40; Nikitin 1998: 14-15.

<sup>192</sup> Justin 42.2.2

<sup>193</sup> Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -118A. For the Gutians, see Zadok 1985: 143-4; Del Monte 1997: 4 n.12, 150 n.12. It is possible that this Artaban was Artabanus I. See Assar 2006c: 129-134; See also van der Spek 2001: 453-4; Assar 2005a: 49-51. Note that Olbrycht rejects that Artaban here refers to Artabanus I and associates the Gutians directly with the Tochari. Olbrycht 2010b: 150-1.

that Parthian authority in the Farther East nearly evaporated following the defeat.<sup>194</sup> The death of Artabanus in ca. 122 BCE was ruinous to Parthian prestige and perceived strength.<sup>195</sup> Unlike the previous Sakae invasion, the Tochari and Gutians did not seek tribute from the Parthians before returning to their previous homeland. Instead, nomadic tribes appear to have occupied Parthian lands in the Farther East, filling the power void left by the decisive defeats of Phraates and Artabanus.

One scholar recently has argued that a son of Artabanus, known simply as Arsaces X, and who reigned for only six months, succeeded him in 122 BCE.<sup>196</sup> If we can accept the plausibility of the existence of this formerly unknown king, it is unclear how Arsaces X died.<sup>197</sup> Yet turmoil

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<sup>194</sup> See Assar 2005a: 50.

<sup>195</sup> The exact date of Artabanus' death is unclear. Babylonian cuneiform indicates that Babylonia was in chaos again by late 123 BCE. Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -122D. This perhaps indicates that news of Artabanus' defeat and death had reached the region. Assar 2005a: 49. However, the Arab raids that destabilized Babylonia in 123 BCE did not necessarily have to have stem from news of Parthia's defeat. The absence of Artabanus in the Farther East could have been incentive enough for the Arabs to raid Babylonia. Instead, the solution to the final year of Artabanus' reign likely lies in the numismatic record. Assar recently has argued that the coin, S21.9, indicates that Artabanus' reign ended in Oct./Nov. 122 BCE. Assar 2006c: 128-9.

<sup>196</sup> Assar 2006c: 129. This conflicts with Justin's statement that "He [Artabanus] was succeeded by his son Mithridates, to whom his achievements procured the surname of Great; for, being fired with a desire to emulate the merit of his ancestors, he was enabled by the vast powers of his mind to surpass their renown." Justin 42.2.3. However, it is possible that Artabanus and Mithridates were brothers, not father and son. Moreover, there is no definitive evidence that Mithridates ascended to the throne before April 121 BCE. Further, tetradrachms S23.1-2, although previously ascribed to Mithridates, depict a youthful Parthian prince that does not compare to other portraits of Mithridates. Finally, it appears from the numismatic record that Arsaces X also took the epithet, the Great. For a compelling summary of the evidence in favor of adding the reign of Arsaces X in between that of Artabanus and Mithridates II, see Assar 2006c: 129-134. See also van der Spek 2001: 453-4; Assar 2005a: 49-51; Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -118A. For a recent argument against including Arsaces X and against making Artabanus the brother of Mithridates II, see Olbrycht 2010b: 144-6, 150-1.

<sup>197</sup> Although Olbrycht rejects Assar's reconstruction of Mithridates II's early coinage to establish the existence of Arsaces X, his alternative that the inconsistencies found in the early coinage stems from "the fact that this king [Mithridates], in the difficult moments immediately following Artabanos I's sudden death, had not yet had time to define his own iconography" seems equally speculative. See Olbrycht 2010b: 144-5, 149 n.21.



in Babylonia and nomadic incursions in the East would have dominated his short reign. In fact, the brevity of his reign immediately following the military disaster of his father has led Assar to suggest that Arsaces X also died fighting nomads in an attempt to halt their westward expansion.<sup>198</sup>

Whether or not Arsaces X was the third Parthian king to die at the hands of nomadic warriors in the East in five years, the Parthian state was in crisis. Pressure from Arab tribes in the southwest and nomadic tribes in the northeast devastated Parthian power. With the successive Parthian defeats against the nomads in the Farther East and the loss of much of the Iranian plateau to these tribes, bipolarity in the Eastern system gave way temporarily to multipolarity. The survival of the Parthian state was at stake once again, and once again a great leader was needed to restore Parthian strength and authority.

#### The Success of Mithridates II and the Creation of a New Unipolarity

Mithridates II came to the throne in ca. 121 BCE at a time of great peril for his kingdom.<sup>199</sup> Recent military setbacks and devastating raids had severely diminished the strength of the Parthian state and allowed multipolarity to reemerge in the Eastern system. The Parthians were not yet an unrivaled, dominant power in the East as one scholar recently has contended.<sup>200</sup> Previous Parthian kings through great diligence and determination had established the Parthian state as the hegemonic rival of the Seleucid Empire; however, eastern dynasts and nomadic tribes had contested Parthian hegemony in modern day Iraq and Iran for nearly a decade since the

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<sup>198</sup> Assar 2005a: 51; Assar 2006c: 138.

<sup>199</sup> This date corresponds with dated coins and cuneiform material. Le Rider 1965: 86-8; Sellwood 1980: 66, 71; Assar 2005a: 49; Assar 2006c: 134. For more on Mithridates, see esp. Daffinà 1967: 69-75; Wolski 1980a; Wolski 1993: 88-96; Olbrycht 1998b: 96-104; Olbrycht 2009; Olbrycht 2010a; Olbrycht 2010b.

<sup>200</sup> Grainger 2013a: 185-6

resounding victory over Antiochus VII. Maintenance of the Parthian Kingdom and its expanded hegemony was a difficult, unrelenting task. In the 120s BCE the Parthian kings faced violent instability in Mesopotamia and aggressive nomadic incursions into the Farther East with limited success, and the deaths of two, possibly three, of them in battle had been a severe blow to Parthian prestige and power. Perceived Parthian weakness encouraged further aggression against the Parthian state by neighbors. In 121 BCE the Parthian state had not been more in danger or weaker since Antiochus III's anabasis and the humiliating settlement of Arsaces II. It is not an exaggeration to claim that the Parthian state might have been annihilated in the second century BCE without the resolute and effective leadership of Mithridates II. The heights of power and authority to which he was able to take Parthia from the depths that he inherited are astounding. In a reign of thirty years, Mithridates not only reversed the reemergence of multipolarity in the Eastern system but also established Parthia as a unipolar empire.<sup>201</sup>

It appears that Mithridates understood the precariousness of his position and lost no time in aggressively seeking a military solution to his problems. Like his immediate predecessors, Mithridates needed to pacify his western lands if he hoped to campaign in the East. Overstruck Characenean bronze coinage (S23.4) suggests that in 121 BCE Mithridates campaigned in Mesene and suppressed an uprising there.<sup>202</sup> The extent of Mithridates' success was minimal; however, the Parthian show of force seems to have been enough to allow Mithridates to strike quickly against nomadic warriors in northern Parthia. Later that year Mithridates issued a drachm

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<sup>201</sup> The Parthians had become unipolar hegemon in the East by the late 90s BCE. Overtoom 2016: 17.

<sup>202</sup> It is possible that at this time Mithridates installed a Parthian client ruler in Characene; however, it is unclear if Mithridates successfully pacified the region. See Assar 2006c: 135.

(S23.3) in Margiana, which suggests that he successfully campaigned against the nomadic tribes in the region.<sup>203</sup>

Despite the initial success of Mithridates' policies to reestablish Parthian power, he faced the same problems as his predecessors in fighting a two front war. The swiftness of his campaign in Mesopotamia and his immediate departure for the East meant that Parthian strength in the region was uncertain. Years of Parthian weakness led to Characene and Arab tribes challenging Parthian hegemony in Mesopotamia. Mithridates' campaign in 121 BCE was not enough to deter incursions into this region by aggressive neighbors permanently. When he pulled troops out of Babylonia to campaign further in the East in 120 BCE, Arabs plundered the region and Characene possibly yet again rebelled.<sup>204</sup>

The potential power of Parthia was the greatest threat to the security and survival of the Arab tribes and Characene. Thus, with the recent military setbacks of the Parthian state, the reemergence of multipolarity, and the uncertainty of the new balance of power in the Eastern system, challenging Parthian regional strength in Mesopotamia through open conflict was a predictable reaction by the middling states in the region.<sup>205</sup> The perceived weakness of the Parthian state encouraged aggressive power-maximizing policies by middling states that wanted to remove the threat of Parthian hegemony to state security and expand their own power through

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<sup>203</sup> Id. 136. See also Loginov and Nikitin 1996: 40-4; Nikitin 1998: 14-15. Like Artabanus before him, Mithridates used the epithet "*philhellene*" on his issues in Margiana because he hoped to gain the support of the local Greek citizens and the Seleucid soldiers that remained in the region. See Olbrycht 2010b: 146-7.

<sup>204</sup> Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -119A2+B1. Assar suggests that Mithridates brought troops from Babylonia to Media for a campaign against the nomads and that Characene rebelled once they perceived the weakness of the remaining Parthian garrison in Babylonia. Assar 2006c: 137.

<sup>205</sup> Justin clearly illustrates the threat posed by Parthia to its neighbors and that war was normal and endemic in this period. He states, "He [Mithridates] carried on many wars, with great bravery, against his neighbors, and added many provinces to the Parthian kingdom." Justin 42.2.4

the devastation of Mesopotamia. Despite Mithridates' continued success in the East against nomadic tribes in 119 BCE, Arab raiders unrelentingly plundered Babylonia.<sup>206</sup>

Although the instability of Mesopotamia was a major concern of Mithridates, he became determined to remove the nomadic threat to his eastern lands.<sup>207</sup> Certainly, his initial success in restoring Parthian control in northeastern Parthia in 121 BCE encouraged Mithridates to push his advantage in the East. However, the Babylonian *Astronomical Diaries* tell us that in 119 BCE Mithridates' main motivation for another determined campaign against the nomads was revenge.

They record:

A18: ... .. That [month], the 15<sup>th</sup>, a leather document of King Arsaces,

A19: [which] was written to the governor of Babylon and the (Greek) citizens who were in Babylon, was read in the House of Observation; accordingly, many troops assembled and went to fight against the son of the king and his troops of the [remote] cities

A20: [of the G]utian (country) who killed my brother Artaban, and I set up (troops) opposite them, and fought them; a great killing I performed among them; except two men [...]

A21: [...] were not killed; and the king's son and his troops fled from the fight and withdrew to the difficult mountains. That month, the general who is above the four generals for damming [?]

A22: [...] .... departed. That month, the Arabs (*Ar-ba-a-a*) became hostile, as before, and plundered. That month, King Arsaces [went] to the remote cities of the Gutian country in order to fight.<sup>208</sup>

Thus, Mithridates conducted a retaliatory campaign against the nomadic invaders and gained a decisive victory. The goal of his numerous campaigns in the East was to restore the prestige and

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<sup>206</sup> Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -118A. It is possible that Mithridates returned to Mesopotamia in early 119 BCE and celebrated his success in temporarily halting Arab raids by issuing his S24 tetradrachms at Seleucia. See Assar 2006c: 139. See also Newell 1938: 479-80; Simonetta 1979: 363.

<sup>207</sup> Olbrycht is probably right that the Arab raids were not meant to occupy Babylonia, and therefore Mithridates could commit the majority of his army to his campaigns in the East. Olbrycht 2010b: 148.

<sup>208</sup> Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -118A. The Gutians likely were a part of the larger Sakae confederation. Assar 2006c: 139.

reputation of the Arsacid dynasty through avenging the losses of his family and to reestablish Parthian hegemony through the destruction of the nomadic threat. It is possible that Artaban here refers to Artabanus I.<sup>209</sup> No less than two Parthian kings had died fighting nomadic tribes in the East. According to Realist theory, reputation is linked directly to perceived power in a system of interstate anarchy. Thus, it was imperative for Mithridates to restore his family prestige through a retaliatory campaign against the nomads.<sup>210</sup> In this connection, Justin states, “He [Mithridates] fought successfully, too, several times, against the Scythians, and avenged the injuries received from them by his forefathers.”<sup>211</sup> Much like the Seleucid kings who had made war upon Parthia in the past, Mithridates was emulating his ancestors in order to avenge them.<sup>212</sup> Further, the Parthian state could not restore a system of bipolarity between itself and the Seleucid Empire or hope to challenge the Seleucids for hegemony over the entire Eastern system through an invasion of Syria if Parthia’s eastern frontier was not secure.<sup>213</sup> The Sakae and Yuezhi were the greatest immediate threat to the survival of the Parthian state, and the Parthians understood that they must protect the Iranian plateau if they hoped to become a world power. Thus, Mithridates utilized nearly all of the military strength of the Parthians to eliminate this threat.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> See Assar 2005a: 48 no.118, 52; Assar 2006c: 140. See also van der Spek 2001: 453-4. Recently, Olbrycht maintains that Mithridates II was Artabanus I’s son and that the Artaban in the text was a senior Parthian official. Olbrycht 2010b: 150-1.

<sup>210</sup> Shayegan 2011: 242.

<sup>211</sup> Justin 42.2.5

<sup>212</sup> Justin also records, “[Mithridates] being fired with a desire to emulate the merit of his ancestors, he was enabled by the vast powers of his mind to surpass their renown.” Id. 42.2.3. Mithridates II especially emulated Mithridates I, see Olbrycht 2010a; Olbrycht 2010b: 146, 151-2.

<sup>213</sup> Phraates II had wanted to invade Syria before the nomadic incursions began in the East. Justin 42.1.1; Diod. 34/35.18

<sup>214</sup> Notice that the cuneiform record states that Mithridates assembled the troops of Babylonia and marched them east to fight in his wars against the nomads. It should not be surprising that the Arabs then took advantage of Parthian perceived weakness in the region to raid once again.

Our evidence indicates that Mithridates made several campaigns into difficult terrain and against remote cities. It appears that the Parthians moved eastward from Margiana into Bactria and then pushed the nomadic tribes back into the mountains of Sogdiana.<sup>215</sup> Mithridates was undefeated and unrelenting; he decisively defeated the nomadic tribes in the region. One scholar states that Mithridates' campaigns "led to the liquidation of the Sacae and saved the empire from disintegration."<sup>216</sup> The Parthians also successfully pacified the nomadic peoples that remained in Iran under their rule, settling them in south Parthia.<sup>217</sup> Mithridates crushed the nomadic threat, secured the eastern and northern frontiers of his kingdom, and restored Parthian hegemony throughout the Farther East. Once again Media became a center of Parthian wealth, policy, and cultural evolution.<sup>218</sup> Olbrycht uses numismatic evidence and a passage of Strabo to suggest that at this time Parthia occupied Bactria.<sup>219</sup> Geopolitically this would have made perfect sense since the fall of the Kingdom of Bactria had severely destabilized the Farther East. Parthia could not hope to protect the Iranian plateau without controlling the strategically important valleys and mountain passes in Bactria. Bactria once again became a bulwark against the tribes of the Central Asian steppe; however, this time the Parthians were directly responsible for the maintenance of this stronghold. It appears that the Parthians utilized their eastern bases at Rhagae, Nisa, Merv, and in southern Bactria to prevent nomadic threats and occasionally penetrate the Central Asian

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<sup>215</sup> Olbrycht 2010b: 150.

<sup>216</sup> Assar 2005a: 52.

<sup>217</sup> This region became known as Sakastan, modern Sistan. See Olbrycht 1998b: 96-100; Olbrycht 2010b: 152-3; Rezakhani 2013: 769. See also Senior 2001.

<sup>218</sup> See Nikitin 1983; Olbrycht 1997; Olbrycht 2010a: 238-9; Olbrycht 2010b: 155.

<sup>219</sup> "And they [the Parthians] also took a part of Bactriana, having forced the Scythians [the Sakae], and still earlier Eucratides and his followers, to yield to them." Strabo 11.9.2. Olbrycht also suggest that the Parthians occupied Arachosia. See Olbrycht 2010b: 151-3. See also Pilipko 1976; Koshelenko and Sarianidi 1992; Rtveladze 1992: 33; Rtveladze 1994: 87; Zeymal 1997; Rtveladze 2000; Biriukov 2010; Litvinskii 2010; Gorin 2010.

steppe.<sup>220</sup> No major nomadic threat materialized against Parthia's eastern frontier in almost two centuries.<sup>221</sup>

Mithridates' wars against the Sakae to restore Parthian hegemony in the Farther East were a sweeping success and firmly restored the system of bipolarity between the Parthians and Seleucids in the Eastern system. In celebration of his victory in the East and the restoration of Parthian hegemony there, Mithridates issued a series of drachms in Ecbatana and Rhagae (S25) with the epithet "Savior (ΣΩΤΗΡΟΣ)."<sup>222</sup> Certainly, this was propaganda to emphasize Mithridates' role against the nomadic menace; however, the new title accurately reflected the astounding accomplishments of Mithridates in a few short years. Mithridates brought the Parthian state back from the brink of ruin and reestablished it as the undisputed power in the Farther East. With the nomadic problem solved and the eastern frontier secure, the unlimited revisionist state of Parthia finally could hope to realize its ambitions of dominating the western portion of the Eastern system.

Unfortunately, our understanding of the rest of Mithridates' long reign is minimal. Justin simply records that Mithridates fought many wars, conquered many regions, and for the first

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<sup>220</sup> See Watson 1961: 268; Rtveldze 1992: 34; Vainberg 1992: 37; Olbrycht 1998b: 101-2, 122-3; Nokandeh, et al. 2006; Olbrycht 2010b: 152, 154-5; James 2013: 108. Nisa perhaps served as the first capital of Parthia. Sampson 2015: 41. For the restoration of Nisa and its importance under Mithridates as a mint, see Pilipko 1976; Pilipko and Loginov 1980; Bader 1996; Olbrycht 2010b: 154. For Merv, see Herrmann, Kurbansakhatov, et al. 1994: 62; Smirnova 2007: 382-3; Olbrycht 2010b: 154-5.

<sup>221</sup> Olbrycht 2010b: 152-3. Note Tac. *Ann.* 11.10; Jos. *Ant.* 20.91

<sup>222</sup> Previously his eastern coinage had featured war emblems like the horse and gorytos in preparation for his eastern campaigns. See id. 153-4. See also Nikitin 1983; Assar 2005a: 52; Assar 2006c: 140. In fact, war iconography, especially the archer, featured heavily on Parthian coinage. See Sellwood 1980; Rezakhani 2013: 767, 769-71. Iconography such as this on Parthian coinage helps emphasize the militarization of their society. For information on Parthian coinage practices and styles, see Rezakhani 2013: 766-72. According to Plutarch the Arsacids took pride in their archery. Plut. *Demet.* 20.2

time in Parthian history made war on Armenia.<sup>223</sup> However, there are enough clues to reconstruct his reign approximately. The destructive incursions of nomadic tribes into the Iranian plateau would have taken their toll on the region. Not only was Mithridates establishing Parthian power bases in Hyrcania, Margiana, and Bactria to combat further nomadic aggression, he was rejuvenating the eastern mints and settling Parthians, Medes, Persians, Greeks, and nomadic peoples into his newly pacified and expanded eastern lands. The occupation and fortification of Bactria and Arachosia alone could have taken years.<sup>224</sup> Further, the several campaigns against the nomads that Justin emphasizes could indicate that Mithridates had to mop up other nomadic warrior bands in the region. The threat of the nomads had been severe, and Mithridates had every reason to protect his kingdom diligently against the potential threat of further nomadic aggression. Therefore, it is probable that Mithridates spent the next few years of his reign securing and strengthening the eastern and northern frontiers.<sup>225</sup>

Meanwhile, we know from the Babylonian *Astronomical Diaries* that for over a decade Mesopotamia was a hotbed of civil unrest, uprisings, raids, and full-scale invasions. As long as the Parthians were distracted by the nomadic problem in the East, the middling states in and around Mesopotamia seized the opportunity to plunder the region and challenge Parthian regional hegemony. Cuneiform records indicate that as late as 112 BCE Arabs were raiding Babylonia, at which point the Parthians defeated the Arab raiders and stabilized the region.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Justin 42.2.4-6

<sup>224</sup> Olbrycht 2010b: 151-3. It is possible that the Parthians at this time began making inroads into the Punjab as well. Bivar 1983: 41.

<sup>225</sup> To this point, in 116/115 BCE the Chinese envoy Zhang Qian made first contact with the Parthians while Mithridates still was campaigning in the Farther East against the nomads. Mithridates sent 20,000 cavalry to greet Qian and sent envoys of his own to China. See Mair 2014: 158. See also Olbrycht 1998b: 102. For the political and economic relationship of the Parthians and the Chinese, note Tao 2007.

<sup>226</sup> Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -111B.



Thus, it is also likely that Mithridates spent a few years rebuilding Parthian power and authority in Media and Mesopotamia. In fact, contemporary numismatic evidence indicates that vassal kings ruled over the kingdoms of Elymais and Characene under Mithridates.<sup>227</sup> Mithridates' subjugation of a previously untenable region was successful, and Mesopotamia became the new administrative and military center of the empire with the new Parthian capital, Ctesiphon.<sup>228</sup>

After repelling the nomads, settling the East, expanding the kingdom, ending Arab raids, and establishing a network of subordinate local rulers, Mithridates II adopted the old Achaemenid Persian title King of Kings.<sup>229</sup> He was the first Arsacid king to do so, and he began a tradition that most Arsacid kings continued. He subsequently issued several series of coins (S27.1-28) across his newly formed empire from Susa in the west to Margiana in the East to

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<sup>227</sup> The client kings Apodakos, Kamnaskires, and Tiraios all struck drachms between 109-94 BCE. See Le Rider 1959: 251; Le Rider 1969: 22-4; Dilmaghani 1986: 217 and pl. 24.2; Assar 2006c: 141. See also Schuol 2000: 299.

<sup>228</sup> Strabo 16.1.16; Jos. *Ant.* 18.374-9. Sampson argues that Mithridates established Ctesiphon as the new Parthian capital to provide better protection for the royal court, to secure better access to the lands of the Near East, and to mimic the Achaemenids. Sampson 2015: 51.

<sup>229</sup> For the argument that the revival of the old Achaemenid title was of Babylonian origin and followed Mithridates' success first invasion of Armenia, see Shayegan 2011: 45-59, 241, 244, 247, 292. For indices on Arsacid knowledge of the Achaemenids, see Wiesehöfer 2002a: 112-3; Wiesehöfer 2005: 120; Fowler 2005: 125-55. For the argument that the Arsacids revived Achaemenid traditions, see esp. Wolski 1964a: 156-7; id. 1966: 74; id. 1977; Dąbrowa 1983: 103-17; Wolski 1984: 373-9; Wiesehöfer 1986: 177-81; Panitschek 1990: 459-61; Wolski 1990a: 8-9; id. 1990b: 15; id. 1990c: 108-9; id. 1991: 53-5; id. 1993: 152-60; Wiesehöfer 1994b: 39; Olbrycht 1997; Wiesehöfer 2000: 714; Wheeler 2002: 288-9; Wiesehöfer 2002b: 296; id. 2007b: 128; Shayegan 2011: 41-60; Gregoratti 2015b: 14-15. See also Strootman 2016. For the argument that Mithridates II adopted the title in 111 BCE as an indication of his great power and not as an Achaemenid revival, see Shayegan 2011: 244. Shayegan argues instead that the Parthians did not adopt the Achaemenid legacy into its political ideology until their conflict with Rome and, at that time, embraced the imperial propaganda Mithridates VI of Pontus had developed. Id. 330-1. Contra Olbrycht 2012.

advertise his new imperial title, and meanwhile, Babylonian scribes began using the title for Mithridates in Mesopotamia in ca. 111 BCE.<sup>230</sup>

Thus, in the 100s BCE Mithridates II had firm control over Mesopotamia, Media, and the lands of the Farther East. It is unfortunate that the details of the remainder of his reign are so cursory. However, there is enough surviving evidence to demonstrate that, after restoring the strength of the Parthian state and reestablishing it as the only rival to the continually waning Seleucid kingdom, Mithridates focused his attention on westward expansion into the Near East, causing the first phase of system overlap between the Mediterranean and Eastern systems. The Parthians had desired to conduct hegemonic war against the Seleucids and to establish their hegemony for a generation.<sup>231</sup> However, the nomadic problem had demanded Parthian attention and sapped Parthian strength in the 120s-110s BCE. The important point to understand is that the Parthians did not lack the will to expand further westward during this period; they lacked the ability. However, once Mithridates restored Parthian power, the Parthians regained the ability finally to act upon their previous geopolitical desires. Mithridates' immediate goal was to force Armenia and Syria to submit to Parthian hegemony.

Justin records that Mithridates made war against the Armenian king Artavasdes, who reigned ca. 160-115 BCE.<sup>232</sup> Because of Mithridates' considerable military efforts in the Farther East and Mesopotamia in the 120-110s BCE, it is likely that the war against Armenia did not begin until near the end of Artavasdes' reign after the Parthians had subdued Media

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<sup>230</sup> Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -110. Note Shayegan 2011: 43-4 n.22, 241. The latest Mithridates could have adopted the King of Kings title was in 109 BCE. Assar 2006c: 141. Note Sachs and Hunger 1996: -108B.

<sup>231</sup> See Justin 42.1.1; Diod. 34/35.18

<sup>232</sup> Id. 42.2.6.

Atropatene.<sup>233</sup> However, Justin simply states that Mithridates made war upon Artavasdes and does not indicate that he defeated Artavasdes.<sup>234</sup> Artavasdes died without children and his brother, Tigranes I, became king of Armenia ca. 115-96 BCE.<sup>235</sup> Since Parthia took Tigranes I's son, Tigranes II, as a political hostage, it is likely that Parthia did not defeat Armenia in a war until sometime during Tigranes I's reign.<sup>236</sup> In fact, in 111/110 BCE cuneiform records possibly suggest that Mithridates concluded a successful campaign against the "land of Habigalbat."<sup>237</sup> Shayegan argues that Habigalbat here refers to Armenia and that this victory marked the end of Mithridates' first campaign against Armenia.<sup>238</sup> Cuneiform records later indicate that the Armenian king, Tigranes I, died in 96 BCE and suggest that his successor, Tigranes II, left from Babylon, where he had sojourned at the Parthian court, with the military support of the Parthians to become the pro-Parthian candidate on the Armenian throne.<sup>239</sup> Thus, the evidence suggests

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<sup>233</sup> Note Manandyan 2007: 18-19. Shayegan places the earliest date for the first Parthian campaign against Armenia in 118 BCE. Shayegan 2011: 243.

<sup>234</sup> We should reject Schottky's and Olbrycht's argument that Parthia subjugated Armenia in 120 BCE, at which point Artavasdes offered the Parthians his son, Tigranes, as a hostage. This argument mistakenly overlooks the reign of Tigranes I, whose son was Tigranes II (the Parthian hostage). Further, from a geopolitical standpoint it made no sense for Mithridates II, who had his hands full fighting the nomads in the East, to open up a second front in Armenia in the late 120s BCE. Schottky 1989: 219; Olbrycht 2009: 165.

<sup>235</sup> Appian *Syr.* 11.48; Moses 2.61. See also Manandyan 2007: 19-20.

<sup>236</sup> There is no good evidence to suggest, as Olbrycht does, that Parthia established hegemony over Armenia in 120 BCE. In fact, this seems highly unlikely since Parthia was embroiled at this point in its nomadic wars. A second front against Armenia would have been undesirable. See Olbrycht 2009: 168.

<sup>237</sup> Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -110.

<sup>238</sup> Shayegan 2011: 244. For further identification of Habigalbat with Armenia, note Sachs and Hunger 1989: no. -164B; Del Monte 1997: 80-1, 153-4. Assar argues that there is "nothing to justify a military expedition" here. Assar 2006c: 141. However, Shayegan makes a compelling argument for Mithridates' adoption of the "King of Kings" title to coincide with a victory in Armenia. Shayegan 2011: 241.

<sup>239</sup> Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -95C, no. -95D. See also Strabo 11.14.15; Justin 38.3.1; Appian *Syr.* 8.48. For the argument that the unnamed dead king in the cuneiform records is Tigranes I and that Justin's use of the name Artoadistes (Artavasdes) is confused, see Assar 2006c: 142. See also Mousheghian and Depeyrot 1999: 31. Yet, as discussed above, Justin's use of Artavasdes is

that Mithridates conducted a hegemonic war against Armenia that culminated in a partial victory in 111 BCE and a total Parthian victory after the death of Tigranes I in 96 BCE and the appointment of the vassal king, Tigranes II, in 95 BCE.<sup>240</sup> Control of Armenia was important to the security of the Parthian state and to the ongoing progress of Parthia becoming the hegemon of the Eastern system for several reasons.

First, Parthian control of Armenia protected northern Mesopotamia and Media against potential invasions. Much as control of Media was important to Parthia because it provided control of the passes through the Zagros Mountains and access to the vulnerable urban centers of Mesopotamia, control of the numerous mountain passes in Armenia was necessary to remove the threat of a surprise invasion from the north.<sup>241</sup> One, there was the threat of Armenia itself. Armenia was a highly militarized middling state in the Near East that had long battled the aggression of larger neighboring states.<sup>242</sup> Armenian kings soon came to utilize their

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not necessarily confused. His account simply could indicate that the war with Parthia began under Artavasdes and continued under his successor Tigranes I.

<sup>240</sup> For the year of Tigranes II's ascension, note Plut. *Luc.* 21.1. For Tigranes II's alliance with Parthia, see Justin 40.1.3. It is likely that Tigranes I lost a previous war against the Parthians that forced him to provide Mithridates with his son Tigranes II as a political prisoner. See Chaumont 1985-8: 23; Chahin 1987: 225-6; Redgate 1998: 69; Manandyan 2007: 19-20. See also Strabo 11.14.15. However, Chahin incorrectly accepts that Artavasdes was Tigranes II's father. Note also Debevoise 1938: 41-2, 45; Bivar 1983: 40-1. Some scholars incorrectly maintain that Artavasdes was Tigranes II's brother and preceded him on the throne. See Seyrig 1955; Bedoukian 1968; Lang 1983: 513. We can reject utterly Redgate's suggestion that Tigranes was never a Parthian vassal and that the Romans favored him because they wanted a buffer state between them and the Parthians. Redgate 1998: 69. Contra Sullivan 1990: 116-17; Olbrycht 2009: 167. Strabo's opinion that the Parthians never ruled over the Armenians is mistaken. Strabo 16.1.19. Finally, we should reject Olbrycht's conclusion that Mithridates II installed Tigranes as his vassal "to meet Mithridates Eupator's wishes." Olbrycht 2009: 169. Olbrycht assumes far too much in his assessment of Ponto-Parthian relations in order to portray Pontus and Parthia as well-coordinated strategic allies.

<sup>241</sup> Note Manandyan 2007: 164; Olbrycht 2009: 165. For the geopolitically advantageous position of Armenia in the Near East, see Strabo 11.14.15

<sup>242</sup> See Chaumont 1986a; Chahin 1987; Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993: 190-2; Garsoian 2004.

geographical advantage to harass and devastate the heartland of the Parthian Empire.<sup>243</sup> Parthia had much to fear from Armenian aggression. To this point, the Parthians tried to mitigate the potential threat of Armenia to their northwestern frontier by confiscating seventy valleys from the kingdom when they supported Tigranes II as the new king.<sup>244</sup> Two, if the Parthians did not gain and maintain control over Armenia, other states could potentially threaten Mesopotamia and Media from the north. For generations Seleucid kings had attempted to dominate Armenia for similar reasons that the Parthian kings always wanted to dominate Armenia. The Seleucids understood that control of Armenia allowed them greater access to the Farther East, and that is why Antiochus III and IV established Seleucid hegemony over the region before their eastern expeditions. Moreover, the Romans later used the Armenian passage as a weapon in their hegemonic struggle with Parthia.<sup>245</sup> Although by the 90s BCE the Seleucid Empire was little more than a petty kingdom and conflict with the Romans was far off, the Parthians had no way of knowing what threats might emerge in the West. Control of Armenia was necessary for Parthian peace of mind. Three, control of the mountain passes in Armenia, especially those over the Caucasus Mountains, were crucial to mitigating the threat of nomadic incursions from the

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<sup>243</sup> Tigranes II eventually conquered large sections of northern Mesopotamia and Media. See Strabo 11.14.15. Much more on this in Chapter 5.

<sup>244</sup> Strabo 11.14.15. Certainly, these seventy valleys would have been some of the most prosperous and well positioned valleys in the Armenian Kingdom, perhaps located in northwestern Media Atropatene or eastern Gordyene. See Marquart 1901: 109; Sherwin-White 1984: 223; Manandyan 2007: 20.

<sup>245</sup> In fact, Armenia was critical to the two major Roman invasions of the Parthian Empire covered in this study. The Armenian king, Artavasdes II, offered Crassus extensive military support if Crassus agreed to invade Parthia through Armenia. See Plut. *Crass.* 19.1-3. Meanwhile, the Parthian king, Orodes II, believed the possibility of a Roman invasion through Armenia was a greater threat to the state, and therefore, he marched his army into the region and left a subordinate to fight in Mesopotamia. Id. 21.5. Years later Mark Antony took Artavasdes' advice and invaded Parthia through Armenia. Plutarch emphasizes the vulnerability of the heartland of the Parthian Empire without control of Armenia. See Plut. *Ant.* 37.3, 38.1. See also Dio 49.24-9

wide-ranging Western Steppe.<sup>246</sup> The Parthians recently had fought a devastating series of wars with the nomadic tribes in the East. Thus, it is likely that protection from further nomadic incursions was foremost in their minds. Much as Bactria was a bulwark against the aggression of nomadic tribes in the East, Armenia was a similar stronghold against the nomadic tribes of the north. Control of the various mountain passes and valleys in Armenia was fundamental to the protection of the northern frontier of the Parthian Empire.<sup>247</sup>

Second, Parthian control of Armenia not only helped block access to the heartland of their new Empire, it also provided access to Asia Minor. There is no reason to believe that the Parthians were satisfied with Armenia and the Euphrates River as the western limit of their empire. Parthia had hopes of dominating Asia Minor.<sup>248</sup> Control of Armenia was an important step to the expansion of Parthian hegemony westward.

Third, Parthian control of Armenia was a direct challenge to Seleucid prestige and a threat to the Seleucid state. For two centuries Armenia recognized the Seleucid state as the hegemonic power in the Near East.<sup>249</sup> However, the submission of Armenia to Parthia in 95 BCE signified a passing of the torch of power in the Near East. The prestige that once belonged to the

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<sup>246</sup> For centuries the nomadic tribes of the Western Steppe, known collectively as Scythians, had harassed the states of the ancient Near East and Middle East by crossing the Caucasus Mountains. See Cernenko 1983. The nomadic Alans crossed the Caucasus Mountains in the 70s CE and terrorized the Parthian Empire. See Jos. *Bell.* 7.244-51; Suet. *Dom.* 2. Later steppe tribes, like the Goths, Huns, and Turks, also used the passes over the Caucasus Mountains to bring widespread destruction to the Near East and Middle East for centuries. See e.g. Heather 1998; Thompson 1999; Findley 2004.

<sup>247</sup> Pliny the Elder described the Parthian Kingdom as “shut up by doors,” meaning the important mountain ranges and passes. Pliny *NH* 6.17

<sup>248</sup> In fact, the Parthians, with the help of a Roman defector named Labienus, invaded Asia Minor and briefly occupied much of the region. Plut. *Ant.* 30.1. The Parthians eventually desired to control all the lands once held by the Achaemenids and Alexander the Great. Tac. *Ann.* 6.31; See also Amm. Mar. 23.6.5-7, 25.4.23-4

<sup>249</sup> Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993: 190-2.

Seleucid king passed to the kings of Parthia. It was a public display of Parthian power and Seleucid weakness. In the zero-sum struggle for power between the Seleucids and Parthians, the new Parthian hegemony in Armenia was an effective display of the growing imbalance of power in the bipolar Eastern system. Additionally, the submission of Armenia was a direct threat to Syria. For the first time, Parthia had the ability to threaten the Seleucid state on multiple fronts. Control of the north made an invasion of Syria more likely and easier.

Further, we must discuss Mithridates' decision to establish Armenia as a client kingdom. Although the Parthians had supported client kings in the past, Mithridates eagerly expanded the practice. To the list of Media Atropatene, Persis, Elymais, and Characene, he now added Armenia as a subkingdom of his new Parthian Empire. The major advantages of creating vassal kingdoms for the Parthians were threefold.

First, client states allowed the Parthians to consolidate their authority over wide-ranging, peripheral regions swiftly. This meant that the Parthians could conduct quick, successful campaigns with their limited military and yet maintain their territorial gains without the need of a costly, drawn out occupation. This was ideal for Mithridates, who rapidly expanded the Parthian state over numerous disparate regions.

Second, by establishing client kingdoms in the peripheral regions of the Parthian Empire, the Parthians delegated the majority of the responsibilities and costs of maintaining these regions to their vassals. That is, the Parthians afforded themselves all the physical benefits of controlling these regions, such as military resources and tax revenue, while avoiding the difficult tasks of provincial administration, military occupation of major urban centers, and frontier defense.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Shayegan argues that the Parthians maintained a consistent strategy for western expansion, especially in the first half of the first century, through a network of vassal kingdoms and marriage alliances. He concludes, "Arsacid indirect rule was therefore not necessarily a sign of

The Parthian army was never large enough to maintain an empire of this size on its own. The Parthians never developed a professional standing army like the Romans.<sup>251</sup> However, the Parthians used their system of subkingdoms to raise necessary levies and to share the military burden of controlling such a large territory. This also was ideal for Mithridates, who had spent his entire reign fighting serious threats to state security in numerous regions around the Middle East. He had kept his army primarily based in Mesopotamia and Media because he understood that a centralized base for the army was necessary to combat potential threats on either edge of his empire. Mithridates was pleased to install a puppet king on the Armenian throne. The annexation and occupation of all of Armenia was not a realistic goal for Mithridates.

Third, the creation of vassal kings drastically enhanced the reputation, prestige, and perceived power of the Parthians, and especially their king. For example, we already discussed how the prestige that Mithridates gained from the submission of Armenia had an inverse effect on the prestige of the Seleucid king. Further, Mithridates wasted little time in adding a new decorative tiara to his coinage to accompany his new title of King of Kings.<sup>252</sup> Thus, Mithridates created an image of himself as the supreme ruler of the supreme power in the Eastern system.

With the success of Mithridates in the East and West, the perceived power of Parthia was at an all-time high. Meanwhile, an unbroken series of civil wars between the numerous cousins

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the empire's inability to impose its political will, but a major tenet of its strategy – including the *hostage* and *matrimonial policies* – which perceived expansionism not merely in terms of conquest, but as the projection of Arsacid influence by dint of clientage and alliances.” Shayegan 2011: 328. Note also Wiesehöfer 2007a; Gregoratti 2011b. See Tac. *Ann.* 13.34; Strabo 11.13.1; Jos. *Ant.* 20.54-92

<sup>251</sup> Even at the end of Arsacid rule, after centuries of conflict with Rome, Parthian armies were made up of annual levies. Herodian views the Sassanid Persian army as a continuation of the Parthian army. See Herodian 3.1.2, 6.5.3-4, 6.7.1

<sup>252</sup> See esp. S28.1. Mithridates adopted this imagery on his coinage from 96/95 to 91 BCE. Note Assar 2006c: 143.



of the Seleucid royal line had severely damaged the strength of the Seleucid state.<sup>253</sup> However, for the Parthians to establish themselves unequivocally as the unrivaled power in the Eastern system, they needed to assert their hegemony over what remained of the Seleucid state through open conflict. Unfortunately, the end of Mithridates' reign and his death are shrouded in mystery. However, enough evidence has survived to suggest that Mithridates pursued hegemonic war against the Seleucids before dynastic rivalry plunged the Parthian Empire into a series of debilitating civil wars.

The traditional belief of scholars has been that Mithridates II died shortly after capturing the Seleucid king, Demetrius III, in 88/87 BCE.<sup>254</sup> In this connection, Josephus records,

But when Demetrius [III] was departed out of Judea, he went to Berea, and besieged his brother Philip [I], having with him ten thousand footmen, and a thousand horsemen. However Strato, the tyrant of Berea, the confederate of Philip, called in Azizus, the chief (φύλαρχον) of the Arabian tribes, and Mithridates Sinaces, the lieutenant (ὑπαρχον) of the Parthians, who coming with a great number of forces, and besieging Demetrius in his encampment, into which they had driven them with their arrows, they compelled those that were with him by thirst to deliver up themselves. So they took a great many spoils out of that country, and Demetrius himself, whom they sent to Mithridates, who was then king of the Parthians; but as to those whom they took captives of the people of Antioch, they restored them to the Antiochenes without any reward. Now Mithridates, the king of the Parthians, had Demetrius in great honor, until Demetrius ended his life by sickness. So Philip, presently after the fight was over, came to Antioch, and took it, and reigned over Syria.<sup>255</sup>

Thus, we know that by the 80s BCE the Parthians were militarily involved in Syria and had firmly established their hegemony over the Seleucids, retaining yet another Seleucid king as a

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<sup>253</sup> For a recent reevaluation of the convoluted and confusing chronology of the late Seleucids, see Hoover 2007.

<sup>254</sup> This conclusion is an assumption that derives from a Josephus passage, where a Mithridates captured Demetrius III, and from numismatic evidence that indicates that the last coins of Demetrius are dated 88/87 BCE. See Gardner 1877: 7; Debevoise 1938: 48-50; Simonetta 1953-1957: 115; Sellwood 1962: 73; Le Rider 1965: 391; Simonetta 1966: 20, n.1; Sellwood 1976: 6; Bivar 1983: 42-4. See also Newell 1939: 82, nos. 130-131; Houghton and Spaer 1998: 378-82.

<sup>255</sup> Jos. *Ant.* 13.384-6. I altered this translation to reflect the Greek more accurately.

political prisoner. However, Josephus does not indicate that the King Mithridates in this passage was Mithridates II King of Kings. Instead, a long tradition of scholars has assumed this last point erroneously. The King Mithridates mentioned here by Josephus is actually Mithridates III (87-80 BCE).<sup>256</sup> In fact, numismatic and cuneiform evidence now illustrates that Mithridates II died in 91 BCE, not 87 BCE as previously thought.<sup>257</sup> Therefore, if Josephus' passage refers to Mithridates III and not Mithridates II, can we be certain that Mithridates II conducted hegemonic war against the Seleucids? To this point, Assar contends, "Unfortunately, owing to the confused and conflicting reports in the extant sources, the history of the last few decades of the Seleucid rule in Syria is rife with uncertainty. It is, therefore, difficult to gauge the extent of the Parthian triumph and Mithradates' penetration, if any, into the Seleucid territory."<sup>258</sup> Although we should share in Assar's caution when approaching the scattered and unreliable sources for this period, I would argue that we should be more optimistic about assigning a successful hegemonic war against the Seleucids to Mithridates II.

In 95 BCE Parthia established its direct hegemony over Armenia when the pro-Parthian candidate, Tigranes II, seized the Armenian throne with Parthian aid. The only notable polity in the Eastern system that remained outside of Parthian hegemony was the longstanding rival of Parthia, the Seleucid Kingdom. Since the death of Antiochus VII in 129 BCE at the hands of the Parthians, the diminished Seleucid Kingdom suffered from chronic dynastic intrigue and civil strife. Yet the size of Antiochus VII's army and his ambitions of wide-ranging conquest demonstrate the potential strength of the Seleucid state, even in the 120s BCE. Meanwhile,

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<sup>256</sup> In this, I agree with the evidence of Assar's revised chronology. Assar 2006d: 69-75. See also Newell 1918: 117; Bellinger 1949: 75-7.

<sup>257</sup> Assar 2005a: 51-2; id. 2006c: 145-9; id. 2006d: 70.

<sup>258</sup> Id. 2006c: 145.

Antiochus' disastrous invasion of Parthia had only reinforced the system of bipolarity between the Seleucid and Parthian states. That is, the Parthians needed to conduct aggressive hegemonic war against the Seleucids if they wanted to establish their own hegemony, and in fact, Phraates II had wanted to conduct hegemonic war to establish Parthian unipolarity through an invasion of Syria in the early 120s BCE; however, the nomadic problem derailed such hopes.<sup>259</sup>

We must be mindful not to project the weakness of the Seleucid Kingdom and the ineptitude of Seleucid leadership after the middle 90s BCE onto the situation that preceded it. Although after Antiochus VII the Seleucids never again conducted offensive war against the Parthians, it does not mean that the Seleucids lacked the desire or potential strength to do so.<sup>260</sup> Even greatly diminished the Seleucid state was relatively wealthy, well situated, and potentially dangerous. It is reasonable to argue that had another charismatic Seleucid king emerged, who could have ended the debilitating civil wars, the diminished Seleucid Kingdom could have resisted Parthian incursions and maintained bipolarity in the Eastern system. Certainly, the Parthians appreciated the potential threat of the Seleucids and wanted to force Syria to acknowledge Parthian hegemony. With Armenia subdued, Mithridates turned to face the last obstacle in the way of Parthian hegemony in the Eastern system.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Justin 42.1.1; Diod. 34/35.18

<sup>260</sup> Even during a three-sided civil war, Antiochus X pursued a war against the Parthians. *Jos. Ant.* 13.371. In fact, much like the great leaps in coinage production before the anabasis of Antiochus III and the anabasis of Antiochus IV, there was a similar leap in production under Antiochus X at this time. Aperghis 2004: 240-2; Hoover 2007: 292-3; Aperghis 2011: 94. Hoover is right to point out that the campaign of Antiochus X did not come near matching previous Seleucid efforts to conduct hegemonic war against the Parthians; however, the effort in and of itself is significant.

<sup>261</sup> I agree with Sherwin-White and Kuhrt that the loss of the Seleucid power-bases in Iran and Armenia paired with the recent successes of the Parthians and the damage of recurrent civil wars in Syria caused the final decline of the Seleucid state. Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993: 218.

Unfortunately for the Seleucids, although there were numerous candidates, no great king emerged to reestablish Seleucid power. Antiochus VIII and Antiochus IX had the potential and pedigree to reinvigorate the Seleucids and to fight the Parthians; however, the half-brothers were evenly matched in a back and forth battle over Antioch that severely undercut the prestige of the Seleucid crown.<sup>262</sup> Although Antiochus IX outlived Antiochus VIII, he barely held the throne for a year before his nephew, Seleucus VI, overthrew him in ca. 96 BCE.<sup>263</sup> At this point the Seleucid state descended into chaos as six men fought to gain the throne.<sup>264</sup> Yet it is in this chaotic time that we find evidence that Mithridates II conducted successful hegemonic war against the Seleucids. Josephus states,

But when Antiochus [X], the son of Cyzicenus, was king of Syria, Antiochus [XI], the brother of Seleucus [VI], made war upon him, and was overcome, and destroyed, he and his army. After him, his brother Philip [I] put on the diadem, and reigned over some part of Syria; but Ptolemy [IX] Lathyrus sent for his [Antiochus XI's] fourth brother Demetrius [III], who was called Eucerus, from Cnidus, and made him king of Damascus. Both these brothers did Antiochus [X] vehemently oppose, but swiftly died (*ταχέως ἀπέθανεν*); for when he came to the military aid (*σύμμαχος*) of Laodice, queen of the Samenians (*Σαμηνῶν*), when she was making war against the Parthians, and he was fighting courageously, he fell, and so Demetrius and Philip governed Syria, as hath been elsewhere related.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Josephus states that the half-brothers fought long war in Syria and describes them as evenly matched wrestlers. *Jos. Ant.* 13.270-2, 327. Antiochus VIII was the son of Demetrius II and Antiochus IX was the son of Antiochus VII. Both men's fathers had made hegemonic war against the Parthians and had every reason to want to conduct a retaliatory campaign against the Parthians after the struggle for the throne was settled. Control of Antioch changed hands between the two claimants as many as seven times in less than twenty years. See Hoover 2007: 284-8

<sup>263</sup> An assassin killed Antiochus VIII likely in 97/96 BCE. See *Id.* 285 n.19. See also Houghton 1993: 93; Hoover 2006: 28-9.

<sup>264</sup> Note Hoover 2007: 288-99.

<sup>265</sup> *Jos. Ant.* 13.369-71. I altered this translation to reflect the Greek more accurately. Ptolemy IX Lathyrus was expelled from the throne by his mother Cleopatra III in favor of his younger brother Ptolemy X. Ptolemy IX fled to Cyprus where he reigned from 106/105 BCE until his return to Egypt to reclaim the throne in 88 BCE. He seemingly aided Demetrius while in exile. See Mitford 1959: 104; Bennett 2002: 147. See also Paus. 1.9.1; Justin 39.4.1-2

Thus, Josephus records that Parthian forces attacked and killed Antiochus X; however, we need to address a couple of issues within this passage.

First, the identity of Queen Laodice and the location of the Samenians in this context is unclear. Yet the Samenians appear to have been an Arab tribe from the Syrian Desert.<sup>266</sup> If the Parthians were attacking her realm and if she received aid from Antiochus X from Antioch that means that the Parthians had penetrated Seleucid territory or at least the Seleucid sphere of influence in and around Syria south of the Euphrates.<sup>267</sup> Thus, this was a continuation of the Parthian strategy to surround and isolate the Seleucids in Syria.

Second, Josephus records that Antiochus X swiftly died after engaging the Parthians, which is exceedingly difficult to date with precision. The scholarly consensus

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<sup>266</sup> See Dobiáš 1931: 221-3; Hoover 2007: 295. Ralph Marcus in his Loeb translation notes the various translations used for Σαμηνῶν. Marcus 1943: 411. For the misguided argument that the Samenians were the inhabitants of Samosata in Commagene, see Bouche-Leclercq 1913-1914: i 421 n.1; Shayegan 2011: 314. Laodice VII had married King Mithridates I Callinicus of Commagene; however, despite Olbrycht's arguments to the contrary, she could not have been the Laodice mentioned by Josephus. See Olbrycht 2009: 166. To begin, her father was Antiochus VIII, who was the bitter rival of Antiochus IX. Further, her brothers were Seleucus VI, Antiochus XI, Philip I, and Demetrius III, all of whom were the enemies of Antiochus IX's son, Antiochus X. Thus, it makes little sense that Antiochus X would come to the aid of the daughter and sister of the sworn enemies of him and his father. Moreover, Laodice surely would have asked her brothers Philip or Demetrius for aid before turning to Antiochus X. In fact, one of her epithets was "brother-loving." Further, Laodice VII was a high profile Seleucid princess. She was the daughter of Antiochus VIII, the granddaughter of Ptolemy VIII, wife of Mithridates I, and mother of Antiochus I Theos of Commagene. Thus, it is unlikely that Josephus would be so vague when referring to her.

<sup>267</sup> The eighteenth century historian, William Whiston, in his translation labels the Σαμηνῶν as the Gileadites, a tribe from Gilead (what is modern day northern Jordan). This surely has to be a mistake since it would indicate that the Parthians had moved through Syria past Damascus without conflict with the Seleucids and were sustaining a campaign south of the Wadi Yarmuk. Further, Antiochus X's rival, Demetrius III, was based out of Damascus. It seems impossible that Antiochus X could have abandoned his position in Syria, bypassing Demetrius in Damascus, to attack the Parthians in Gilead. Whiston 1737.

has been to assume that Antiochus died in 92 BCE, in which case Antiochus X perished at the hands of Mithridates II's men.<sup>268</sup> However, we must address a few issues with this reconstruction before continuing. One, Appian's account of Antiochus X's end makes no mention of Parthian attacks and, instead, insists that Tigranes II of Armenia drove him out of Syria.<sup>269</sup> However, there is no epigraphic or numismatic evidence to suggest that Antiochus X lived into the late 80s BCE. Thus, it is highly likely that Appian here confuses Antiochus XIII with his father Antiochus X and, therefore, should be disregarded in favor of Josephus.<sup>270</sup> Two, a recent reevaluation of Seleucid coinage from the late 90s and early 80s BCE has led one scholar to suggest that Antiochus X did not die until ca. 89/88 BCE, at which point he answered the call of the Samenian Arabs and died fighting the Parthians.<sup>271</sup> Hoover then posits that the Parthians defeated and captured Demetrius III in 87 BCE in a continuation of the Arab-Parthian war.<sup>272</sup> He states, "The involvement of Arabs and Parthians in both cases is notable, making it tempting to suggest that the apparent close proximity of Aziz and Mithridates during the conflict between Philip and Demetrius may have been caused by the same Arab-Parthian war that claimed the life of Antiochus X."<sup>273</sup> Thus, if we accept Hoover's reconstruction, the Parthians had conducted successful hegemonic war against the Seleucids and established

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<sup>268</sup> Bouche-Leclercq 1913-1914: i 420; Newell 1918: 117; Will 1967: ii 380; See also Assar 2006c: 144; Hoover 2007: 290.

<sup>269</sup> Appian *Syr.* 8.48, 11.69

<sup>270</sup> For this convincing argument, see Bellinger 1949: 75; Brodersen 1989: 229-30; Hoover 2007: 291-2. A third account, shared by Eusebius and Jerome, where Antiochus X fled the advances of Philip I to the Parthians before returning to beg Pompey to return his kingdom, is even more confused and should be disregarded. See Hoover 2007: 292.

<sup>271</sup> Hoover 2007: 294-6.

<sup>272</sup> *Jos. Ant.* 13.384-6

<sup>273</sup> Hoover 2007: 295.

a system of unipolarity in the Eastern system, where the Parthian Empire stood as the unrivaled and unopposed power, by 87 BCE at the latest.<sup>274</sup> However, there are a few other items worth considering that perhaps suggest that Mithridates II had already conducted successful hegemonic war against the Seleucid state before his death in 91 BCE.

Even if the Parthians did not fight Antiochus X until the early 80s BCE, the Arab-Parthian war could have begun in the late 90s BCE. Josephus simply states that Laodice was fighting a war with the Parthians and called for aid. There are several reasons to believe that, after dominating Armenia, Mithridates expanded Parthian territory westward to the detriment of the waning Seleucid Kingdom.

Let us first consider a curious passage from Justin. When talking about the accomplishments of Mithridates I, Justin states, “[He] extended the Parthian empire, by reducing many other tribes under his yoke, from Mount Caucasus to the river Euphrates.”<sup>275</sup> Although the conquests of Mithridates I were fundamental to the rapid growth of the Parthian state and the establishment of bipolarity in the Eastern system, there is no evidence that he campaigned against Armenia and his control of Mesopotamia was tentative. Therefore, Justin’s claim that Mithridates I brought all the tribes from Mount Caucasus to the Euphrates under Parthian hegemony seems misplaced. Yet such a statement would not be out of place for Mithridates II.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> For the argument that Philip was a Parthian nominee to the Seleucid throne starting in 87 BCE, see Olbrycht 2009: 165. 87 BCE also was the year that Mithridates II’s successor, Gotarzes I, defeated the usurper Sinatruces and forced him into exile. Assar 2005a: 53; id. 2006d: 60, 68.

<sup>275</sup> Justin 41.6.8

<sup>276</sup> At most Justin’s passage can be used to argue that Mithridates I, by seizing Babylonia, extended the Parthian state to the reaches of the southern portion of the Euphrates. To assume

Justin's account covers seventy crucial years of Parthian history from the rise of Mithridates I to the death of Mithridates II in three short sections. His account of Parthian history is often vague and at times confused. Thus, it is possible that Justin made an error and transposed events from the life of Mithridates II onto Mithridates I. To this point, let us first consider Justin's own words. He records that Mithridates II added many regions to the Parthian state and made war against the Armenians.<sup>277</sup> He also maintains that Mithridates II "surpassed" the renown of his ancestors.<sup>278</sup> Meanwhile, Justin mentions several conquests of Mithridates I but makes no mention of Armenia. Further, he states that Mithridates I "was not inferior in merit to his great-grandfather Arsaces" and, therefore, of equal merit.<sup>279</sup> That is, Justin records that Mithridates II attacked Armenia, something that allowed his influence to reach the Caucasus Mountains, and that his accomplishments were superior to those of Mithridates I, who could not have subdued the tribes from the Caucasus Mountains to the Euphrates near Syria without conflict with Armenia.<sup>280</sup> Therefore, it was Mithridates II, not Mithridates I, who established Parthian hegemony from the Caucasus Mountains to the Euphrates.<sup>281</sup>

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that the Seleucid state retreated behind the western edge of the Euphrates before the conquests of Mithridates II would be misguided.

<sup>277</sup> Justin 42.2.4-6

<sup>278</sup> Id. 42.2.3.

<sup>279</sup> Id. 41.6.9.

<sup>280</sup> For the argument that Mithridates II made Iberia and Albania Parthian vassals, see Olbrycht 2009: 170-1. Note also Chaumont 1985.

<sup>281</sup> I disagree with Olbrycht's conclusion that Mithridates II only changed the borders of the Parthian state a little after the conquests of Mithridates I. Olbrycht 2010a: 240. The gains made by Mithridates II were significant and important, and arguably some of the conquests credited to Mithridates I belong to Mithridates II. For the importance of the Caucasus as a frontier region, see Gregoratti 2013a.



## Parthian involvement in Cappadocia and Cilicia under Mithridates II

demonstrates further the extent of Parthia's westward expansion.<sup>282</sup> Note especially

Strabo, who states,

And at the same time the [Cilician] pirates, pretending to be slave-dealers, carried on their evil business unchecked. Neither were the Romans concerning themselves as yet so much about the peoples outside the Taurus [i.e. Cilicia]; but they sent Scipio Aemilianus, and again certain others, to inspect the tribes and the cities; and they decided that the above mentioned piracy was due to the incompetence of the [Seleucid] rulers, although they were ashamed, since they themselves had ratified the hereditary succession from Seleucus Nicator, to deprive them of it. *And this is what made the Parthians masters of the country, who got possession of the region on the far edge of the Euphrates*; and at last made also the Armenians masters, who not only seized the country outside the Taurus even as far as Phoenicia, but also, so far as they could, overthrew the kings and the whole royal stock; the sea, however, they gave over to the Cilicians. Then, after these people had grown in power, the Romans were forced to destroy them by war and with an army, although they had not hindered their growing power.<sup>283</sup>

Therefore, we know that the Parthians expanded their territory to the northern and western reaches of the Euphrates.<sup>284</sup> Their actions in Cappadocia and Cilicia further indicate that they had access to these regions through Armenia and northern Syria. Prior to Mithridates II, Parthian power in Mesopotamia had been limited mostly to Babylonia; however, by the late 90s BCE he extended Parthian hegemony over Armenia, Gordyene, Adiabene, Sophene, Osrhoene, Commagene, and Cilicia, all of which had been subject territories of the Seleucid state.<sup>285</sup> There should be no doubt that Mithridates expanded

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<sup>282</sup> See Plut. *Sul.* 5; Livy *Epit.* 70; Ruf. *Fest.* 15; Vell. *Pat.* 2.24.3; Justin 38.9.3, 10.7, 11, 42.1.1; Diod. 34/35.18; Jos. *Ant.* 13.365-71, 384-6. Note Bouché-Leclercq 1913-1914: i 421. Shayegan incorrectly assumes the Parthians gained influence over Cilicia through their vassal, Tigranes II. Shayegan 2011: 317-18.

<sup>283</sup> Strabo 14.5.2 (The italics are mine.)

<sup>284</sup> The Parthians annexed the important city Dura Europos on the Euphrates from the Seleucids in 114/113 BCE. Olbrycht 2009: 165. See also Millar 1993: 445-52; Sartre 2005: 26; Shayegan 2011: 313.

<sup>285</sup> Note Sartre 2005: 26-7.

Parthian hegemony over the Near East by threat or force of arms, causing the first phase of system overlap between the Mediterranean and Eastern systems.<sup>286</sup> Finally, Josephus indicates that the Parthians began pressing upon the Arab tribes of the Syrian Desert, and there is no good reason to believe that this process did not begin under Mithridates II.<sup>287</sup>

The continual encroachment of Parthian forces on the Seleucid state in Syria under Mithridates, his territorial expansion to the Euphrates, and his domination of the territories that once made up the heartland of the Seleucid Empire were all part of an ongoing hegemonic struggle to eliminate the potential threat of the Seleucids, to undercut their prestige, to diminish their strength, and to ensure that no state could rival the Parthian Empire in the Eastern system. Although in the century and a half long Seleucid-Parthian hegemonic struggle the final hammer blows of killing Antiochus X in battle and capturing Demetrius III might not have occurred until right after Mithridates II's death, these victories merely reinforced geopolitical realities that were already well in place by

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<sup>286</sup> It is possible that some of these regions willingly submitted to Parthian hegemony without conflict, thus joining the Parthian Empire, in the hope of gaining geopolitical advantage and security. This is a process known to political scientists as “bandwagoning.” Because of the perceived greater threat of a rising hegemonic power, bandwagoning by weaker states is less common than attempts to balance against the growing power of a potential hegemon. However, in the case of the Eastern system in the 90s BCE, the deterioration of the Seleucid state was so widespread and damaging that the lesser states in the region did not view balancing against the Parthians as a viable option. That is, the Parthians had passed what political scientists call the “threshold point” in the growth of their power. The power of Parthia had surpassed a level that was acceptable for minor states to pursue balancing against the Parthians with confidence. For bandwagoning in the ancient world, see Strauss 1991; Eckstein 2006: 65-66, 68; Eckstein 2012: 23, 219-220, 229, 268. For bandwagoning as a political science term, see Kaufman 1992: 417-47; Schweller 1994: 72-107. For threshold point as a political science concept, see Wohlforth 2002: 103-6. For balancing, see Waltz 1979: 168; Walt 1987; Waltz 1988: 625; Sheehan 1996; Beck 1997: 231-2; Wohlforth 1999; Wohlforth 2002. One might even argue that some of these minor states were “jackal bandwagoning” or seeking to gain advantage and a share in the spoils from a new systemic configuration. See Schweller 1994: 93-5; Eckstein 2012: 23.

<sup>287</sup> Note also Strabo 16.1.28

the late 90s BCE. Mithridates took a Parthian state that was facing the real possibility of annihilation in the early 120s BCE and led it to unrivaled power in the ancient Middle East. Justin captures the immense accomplishment of the Parthians in their quest to overcome such powerful, militarized, warlike, bellicose, and aggressive neighbors within such a harsh, grim international environment when he states,

Though it may have been a greater glory to them [the Parthians], indeed, to have been able to rise amidst the Assyrian, Median, and Persian empires, so celebrated of old, and the most powerful dominion of Bactria, peopled with a thousand cities, than to have been victorious in war against a people that came from a distance [i.e. Rome]; especially when they were continually harassed by severe wars with the Scythians and other neighboring nations, and pressed with various other formidable contests.<sup>288</sup>

Thus, Justin places the Parthians as the successors and equals of the greatest eastern empires. He also champions the significance of Parthia's rise to power and domination of the East over their later contest with Rome. With the vast conquests of Mithridates II, Parthia became the hegemon of the Eastern system. Thus, it was the Parthians, not the Romans, who were responsible for the irreversible weakening of the Seleucids in their longstanding efforts to dominate the East.<sup>289</sup> Yet Justin also teases the clash of titans that was to come between Parthia and Rome. While Parthia established unipolarity in the Eastern system, Rome had to fight a great hegemonic war against Mithridatic Pontus to retain its hegemony over the Mediterranean system.

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<sup>288</sup> Justin 41.1.8-9

<sup>289</sup> Taylor and Grainger recently have made a similar point. See Taylor 2013: 157; Grainger 2015: 188.

## Parthian “Exceptionalism” and “Nonexceptionalism”

It would be a mistake to view the Parthians as weak or pacific.<sup>290</sup> Rather, they were a militarized, warlike, and aggressive people, who found considerable success in warfare for centuries. Justin states,

The disposition of the people [the Parthians] is proud, quarrelsome (*seditiona*), faithless, and insolent (*procacia*); for a certain roughness of behavior (*violentiam*) they think becoming to men, and gentleness (*mansuetudinem*) only to women. They are always restless (*inquieta*), and ready for any commotion (*dicendum*), at home or abroad; taciturn by nature; more ready to act than speak, and consequently shrouding both their successes and failures in silence. They obey their princes, not from humility, but from fear (*metu*).<sup>291</sup>

Meanwhile, Ammianus describes the Parthians as the most fearsome warriors in the East.<sup>292</sup> Yet, despite their military innovations, their warrior ethos, their aggressive expansion, and their overall success in arms, the Parthians were not exceptional in the ancient world for these qualities.<sup>293</sup> In fact, Ammianus soon after comments, “There [in the Farther East] the inhabitants of all the districts are savage and warlike, and take such pleasure in war and conflict, that one who loses his life in battle is regarded as happy beyond all others. For those who depart from this life by a natural death they assail with insults, as degenerate and cowardly.”<sup>294</sup> However, the

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<sup>290</sup> Vogt 1955: 74; Syme 1958: 47, 493-7; Yarshater 1983: xlix-l; Campbell 1993; Sheldon 2010: 1-2, 6, 10, 21-3, 61, 177; Edwell 2013: 191, 194, 206.

<sup>291</sup> Justin 41.3.7-9. Justin’s passage is full of ancient stereotypes that mask the true characteristics of Parthian society and culture; however, the passage is unique because it does not adhere to the standard pattern of environmental theory. To the Romans, the Parthians were not typical easterners and shared respectable qualities with the Gauls and Germans. “The reason for this, presumably, is the persistent ability by the Parthian Empire to remain independent of Roman power. This made it impossible to describe them as effeminate, fickle, weak, and subject to debilitating practices.” Isaac 2006: 377-8.

<sup>292</sup> Amm. Mar. 23.6.28. Other ancient writers shared Ammianus’ opinion. See Lucan *Phar.* 8.211-455; Dio 40.15; Plut. *Crass.* 24-8; Pliny *NH* 16.159-62

<sup>293</sup> Clearly, Ammianus respected the military capabilities of the Parthians; however, centuries of Roman conflict with the resilient Parthians and Roman stereotypes about the violent nature of nomadic cultures influenced his depiction of the Parthians. See esp. Isaac 2006: Ch. 8.

<sup>294</sup> Amm. Mar. 23.6.44

militarized nature of Parthian society is not enough to explain their exceptional rise to power.<sup>295</sup> The Romans, the Hellenistic Successor states, the eastern kingdoms, the nomadic tribes of the Arabian Peninsula and the Eurasian Steppe, and the kingdoms of northern India endured similar interstate pressures and shared these martial characteristics.<sup>296</sup> Thus, if hyper-militarism or bellicosity is not the reason for Parthian success, it is necessary to discuss how the Parthians proved to be unique in their struggle to dominate the Eastern system and in their eventual hegemonic conflict with Rome.

We do not find Parthian “exceptionalism” in their belligerence or brutality but rather in their social versatility, their inclusive administrative system, and their innovative military emphasis. Although not a “restoration” of the Achaemenid Persian Empire nor an Iranian “nationalistic” movement, the Parthians embraced much of Persian culture and society as they occupied the Middle East.<sup>297</sup> The Arsacids also conceived of their dynastic rule within

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<sup>295</sup> Unfortunately, Sampson, who has tried to incorporate the Parthians more into the discussion of larger geopolitical developments in the third to first centuries BCE, portrays them as a rival of unique Roman bellicosity. He recently has compared their conquests in the East to “Rome’s relentless push across the Hellenistic world.” Sampson 2015: 32. In reality, although the Romans and Parthians were warlike and aggressive, they were not uniquely so when we consider their competitors; rather, we should consider that other political and social factors lent themselves to their separate military successes.

<sup>296</sup> Eckstein demonstrates in comparison to the ancient Mediterranean world that the states of ancient China and India were highly militarized and warlike as well and that they too existed in a harsh system of multipolar anarchy. Eckstein 2005: 481-497. It is unfortunate that he overlooks the similarities found in the ancient Middle East and the same processes/realities of the Parthian state. For a brief overview of the extensive bellicosity and militarism of the nomadic tribes of the Central Asian steppe, see Golden 2011: 21-34.

<sup>297</sup> See esp. Wolski 1966; id. 1976a; id. 1983; id. 1985; id. 1993. See also Pliny *NH* 6.16.41. For Parthian use of Persian titulature, see Sellwood 1983: 285; Shayegan 2011: 334-49; Strootman 2016. For the argument that that Parthians, not the Sassanid Persians, reintroduced Iranian elements into post-Hellenistic Persia, see Curtis 2000: 34; Shayegan 2011: 332, 369-70. It is interesting to note that the Sassanid Persians, who replaced Parthian power in the East in the 220s CE, saw themselves as the true Persian revivalists and viewed the Parthians as imposters. Note Colledge 1967: 103-4; Dignas and Winter 2007: 56-62.

Hellenistic parameters, creating a new calendrical era beginning in 247 BCE.<sup>298</sup> Like that of many migratory, tribal groups, the cultural identity of the Parthians after they settled in the Iranian plateau was quite flexible. They incorporated aspects of the surrounding Persian and Greek communities into their society, while in many ways maintaining the roots of their nomadic past, for instance their horse culture.<sup>299</sup> Their successful melding of nomadic traditions and sedentary, indigenous precedents within their society, administration, and military was a considerable strength in their struggle to survive within the Eastern system and then dominate

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<sup>298</sup> Grainger 2015: 65.

<sup>299</sup> The Parthians after all had a nomadic origin, and they maintained a working relationship with the nomadic tribes on the Central Asian steppe, especially the nobles in the Farther East. Gregoratti 2013b. Note also Tao 2007: 95; Dąbrowa 2011; Olbrycht 2013; id. 2015. Some scholars reject the impact of nomadic components on the development of the Parthian state. Wolski 1964b: 380; Schippmann 1987a: 532; Boyce 1994: 249; Hauser 2013. Meanwhile, others argue that the Parthians had lost their nomadic lifestyle by the middle of the third century BCE. Grajetzki 2011: 9-10. See also Lerner 1999: 13-19. Yet the fundamental importance of the horse to Parthian society and warfare demonstrates that they did not abandon all of their nomadic roots in favor of Persian or Greek customs, and in fact, in recent years the importance of nomadic roots to the Parthians has found many advocates. Koshelenko 1980: 193-5; Koshelenko 1985a: 344; Nikonorov 1987a; id. 1987b; id. 1994; id. 1995; Olbrycht 1996; id. 1998a; id. 1998b; Nikonorov 1998b; Zadneprovskiy 1999; Koshelenko and Pilipko 1999; Olbrycht 1999; id. 2000a; id. 2000b; Nikonorov 2000a; Olbrycht 2003; Lerouge 2007: 15-21; Nikonorov 2010; Grainger 2015: 64-5. See also Justin 41.2.2, .3.4, 42.2.5-6; Plut. *Crass.* 21.7, 27.2; Jos. *Bell.* 1.255; Jos. *Ant.* 14.342. The association of the Parthians primarily with “Scythian,” nomadic, barbarian characteristics is inaccurate. For this portrayal, see Rawlinson 1885 (2002): 11, 24, 29; Lozinski 1959: 36-7; Poirot 2014: 17 n.33; contra Hauser 2013. The direct association of the Parthians with the Scythians comes from surviving sources. Strabo 7.3.12, 11.7.1, .8.2-3, .9.2-3; Justin 2.1.3, 2.3.6, 41.1.1f., 10, 41.2.3-4; Pliny *NH* 6.19.50, .29.112; Arr. *Parth.* Fr. 1.2a, 3; Curt. 4.12.11, 6.2.13f.; Pomp. Mela 3.4, 33; Lucan *Phar.* 2.50, 553, 8.178, 216, 302, 353, 432. However, although elements of their steppe origin were important to the development of Parthian society, in actuality the Parthians also quickly and enthusiastically adopted aspects of Iranian and Hellenistic customs and culture, especially in their coinage, art, and language. Note, Curtis 2000: 25, 34; Olbrycht 2003; Hauser 2013: 739-43. The Parthians were successful in melding nomadic, Hellenistic, and Persian aspects together to create a unique society that gave them certain exceptional advantages in the interstate competition between states. The flexible use of language under the Arsacids (Greek, Aramaic, Parthian, and Middle Persian) is a good indicator of this melding process. See Olbrycht 2003: 74; Haruta 2013: 781-5, 788; Rougemont 2013: 798-800. The uniqueness of Parthian society is discussed in more detail below.

it.<sup>300</sup> The nomadic traditions of Parthian society and of the Parthian military made them unique in the Eastern system compared to strictly Hellenistic or Iranian competitors.<sup>301</sup> Meanwhile, the ability of the Parthians to absorb sedentary communities and customs successfully into a lasting empire through the consolidation of power under the Arsacids made the Parthians unique compared to other nomadic competitors in the Eastern system. This openness to other cultures and ideas and the Parthians' success in implementing them into their own society helped make the Parthians a uniquely versatile Eastern power. It gave them a competitive advantage over their Greek, Iranian, and nomadic competitors in the Eastern system when it came to organizing and maintaining control over such a diverse and disparate empire and, therefore, must be considered an exceptional quality of the Parthian state.<sup>302</sup>

Further, the Parthians came to represent the interests of eastern communities better than their Hellenistic or Roman neighbors. The flexibility of the Parthians and the willingness of indigenous communities to support the Arsacids helped the Parthians to occupy large sections of the old Achaemenid Persian Empire quickly without much native resistance under Arsaces I, Mithridates I, and Mithridates II.<sup>303</sup> The Parthian king was not elected by the aristocracy;

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<sup>300</sup> See esp. Olbrycht 2003; id. 2015.

<sup>301</sup> Sampson 2015: 32.

<sup>302</sup> To this point, scholars have viewed the Parthians as "Scythian" nomads, Persian "revivalists," and Hellenistic successors. See Lozinski 1959: 36-7 and Paratore 1966: 526-7; Wolski 1966; Colledge 1967: 57-76; Wolski 1976a; id. 1983; id. 1985; id. 1993; Olbrycht 1998b; Koshelenko and Pilipko 1999; Hauser 2013. Yet the Parthians blended all of these aspects into their culture. See Curtis 2000: 25; Olbrycht 2003: 98-9. Although Hauser in a recent article makes good arguments for the Parthians extensively embracing sedentary life in the East, his insistence that this somehow negates a nomadic heritage for the Parthians is unconvincing. Hauser 2013. The Parthians were no longer nomads; however, nomadic tradition remained influential in the development of the Parthian state, especially in the development of the Parthian military.

<sup>303</sup> See Frye 2000: 18; Grajetzki 2011: 14. In fact, the more firm-handed Seleucid and Roman occupations of Parthian territory met with disaster after communities revolted in favor of Parthian rule. Note especially the expeditions of Antiochus VII and Emperor Trajan. Note Debevoise 1938: 32-5; Bivar 1983: 37; Sheldon 2010: 139-41. See also Justin 38.10.

however, a senate playing an important advisory role.<sup>304</sup> In fact, the Parthian aristocracy could exercise considerable power, influence, and autonomy under the Arsacids.<sup>305</sup> Thus, the Arsacids created a more acceptable ruling dynasty in the East that allowed regional nobles greater access to power and influence, which in turn encouraged them to support the Arsacid dynasty.

The Arsacids found success in part by embracing Persian society and connecting the Parthian Arsacid royal line to the Persian Achaemenid royal line.<sup>306</sup> However, the Parthians also were willing to mimic Seleucid administrative precedents, while including Greek communities and statesmen in the administration of local government. The Arsacids employed administrators who initially functioned similarly to a satrap, regional strategos, garrison commander (φρούραρχος), citadel commander (ἀκροφύλαξ), or viceroy. Yet they did so unsystematically with an openness to altering their administrative or military functions.<sup>307</sup>

Another exceptional quality of the Parthian state was its heightened inclusiveness of local leaders. Partly because of the limitations of their military capabilities and partly for reasons of expediency, the Parthians created a more extensive vassalage system of empire, which generally

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<sup>304</sup> Note Lerouge 2007: 245-55.

<sup>305</sup> The expanding power of the Parthian aristocracy played an important role in the long cycle of civil wars that sapped the strength of the Arsacids for much of the first century BCE. Note Dąbrowa 2013.

<sup>306</sup> See Colledge 1967: 33; Dąbrowa 1983: 103-17; Wolski 1984: 373-9; Wiesehöfer 1986: 177-81; Panitschek 1990: 459-61; Wolski 1990a: 8-9; id. 1990b: 15; id. 1990c: 108-9; id. 1991: 53-5; id. 1993: 152-60; Wiesehöfer 1994a: 39; id. 1994b: 55-66; id. 2000: 714; Wheeler 2002: 288-9; Wiesehöfer 2002a: 112-3; id. 2002b: 296; id. 2005: 120; Fowler 2005: 125-55; Assar 2006c: 143-4; Wiesehöfer 2007b: 128; Shayegan 2011: 41-60.

<sup>307</sup> Shayegan argues that the supreme commander in Babylonia in the early Arsacid period was similar to the Seleucid viceroy in Asia Minor and the Achaemenid *karanoi*. He presided over the general of Babylonia, the governor of Babylonia, the mayor of Babylon, and the guard commander of Babylon. The second in command to the Parthian king, who became known as the satrap of satraps, was the governor of Media, and he presided over the supreme commander in Babylonia. He concludes also that these offices within the Arsacid power structure were not limited to Babylonia. Shayegan 2011: 210-25. Note also Colledge 1967: 57-60.



allowed greater local autonomy and political representation in subject regions in exchange for royal support.<sup>308</sup> Although the power of the Parthian kings was absolute, the Parthians implemented a system of vassal sub-kingdoms under their suzerainty.<sup>309</sup> Further, although the Parthian kings could place family members on the thrones of these vassal kingdoms, often they allowed local dynasts to rule over these regions and cemented a relationship with local dynasts through marriage alliances. Thus, compared to the Seleucid occupation of the East, indigenous aristocrats had heightened regional autonomy and power under the Parthians with greater access to authority and participation within the Parthian system.<sup>310</sup> When the Parthian king was a

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<sup>308</sup> Grajetzki recognizes the uniqueness of this deliberate Parthian administrative strategy and advocates that it was a reason for the longevity of the Parthian Empire. Grajetzki 2011: 11. See also Olbrycht 2003: 98-9. Hauser rejects that the Arsacid regime was weak and contends that the Parthians maintained strong central authority over their empire. Hauser 2013: 734-9. Note Tacitus' exaggerated description of the relative autonomy of Seleucia under the Parthians. Tac. *Ann.* 6.42, 11.9. Strabo's account is more acceptable. Strabo 16.1.16. Note also Plut. *Crass.* 32.3-5

<sup>309</sup> Because of this, some scholars have referred to the Parthians as feudal warlords. See Debevoise 1938: xxxviii; Colledge 1967: 63-4, 66, 86, 175; id. 1986: 3; Assar 2006c: 143; Sheldon 2010: 2-3; Sampson 2015: 32, 118. We should be careful about using terms like "feudal state" or "system of feudalism" when we refer to the Parthians. Such terms create the inappropriate desire to associate the Parthian state with the states of medieval Europe and, since the term "feudalism" carries with it such negative baggage, a tendency to view the Parthians as a barbarous, backward people in comparison to Rome. For the numerous problems surrounding the use of the term "feudalism," see Brown 1998: 148-69. For the barbarous and backward reputation of medieval Europe in comparison to Rome, see Bull 2005. The Parthian Empire was quite unlike the Christian kingdoms of Medieval Europe. Grajetzki describes the Parthian Empire as a "kind of federal state." Grajetzki 2011: 11. Although this term also carries with it problems of modern perception, the terminology of a "federal system" appears to be an acceptable substitute for the language of a "feudal system."

<sup>310</sup> See Grajetzki 2011: 11, 15; id. 2016: 5. For instance, the kings of Elymais dedicated many large rock reliefs to their rule alongside Parthian examples. Kawami 2013. See also Mehrkiyan 1997. Meanwhile, vassal kingdoms like Elymais, Persis, and Characene minted their own coinage under the Parthians. Rezakhani 2013. The Arsacids also allowed the freedom of throne inheritance to their vassal kings through the functioning of the Parthian power structure. For example, note the actions of Queen Helena of Adiabene. Shayegan 2011: 222. The Parthians also allowed a measure of freedom to the communities of Mesopotamia. Tao 2007: 91. For Parthian officials in Lower Mesopotamia, note Teixidor 1987. Meanwhile, the Seleucids failed to

commanding figure, this system allowed the Parthians to gain territory quickly and maintain a massive empire with a small, limited military.<sup>311</sup> Unfortunately, when the Parthian king was weak or the throne was contested, something that occurred far too frequently after the Parthians attained hegemony, this more inclusive administrative system also helped encourage a cycle of debilitating civil wars as strong, aristocratic families vied for influence and power through the support of various members of the Arsacid dynasty, hamstringing potential Parthian authority and geopolitical aggression.<sup>312</sup> The relationship between the Parthians and their vassal kingdoms was innovative but not without conflict. However, this political and administrative arrangement allowed the Parthians to dominate the East for a longer period than their Persian and Hellenistic predecessors.

Thus, the Parthians' social versatility and their more inclusive administrative system were fundamental to their success; however, the third main quality of Parthian exceptionalism was the innovations of the Parthian army.<sup>313</sup> After the Parthians settled on the Iranian plateau and came into continued conflict with their various neighbors, they did not adopt Persian or Hellenistic tactics or formations as the core of their military. Instead, they continued to emphasize the

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persuade sufficiently "indigenous elites to identify imperial interest with their own." Kosmin 2013: 686.

<sup>311</sup> The Parthian military often relied on its vassalage system to raise large forces; there was no regular, professional army. See Wilcox 1994: 6. Since the Parthian king generally depended on the military support of his vassals to field large armies, some scholars assume that this meant that the Arsacids often had weak control over the army. Note Colledge 1967: 66, 75. Rose Mary Sheldon describes the Parthian army as a militia. Sheldon 2010: 175. However, recent efforts to reject this assumption have been convincing. See Hauser 2013: 734-9.

<sup>312</sup> The careers of Tigranes the Great of Armenia and Artavasdes I of Media Atropatene are good examples of times when the local autonomy of vassal kings allowed by the Parthian system subverted Parthian rule.

<sup>313</sup> See esp. Olbrycht 2003. Although Olbrycht is correct to emphasize the nomadic roots of the Parthian military and the important innovation of the cataphract, he does not fully appreciate the importance of the development and execution of the Parthians' asymmetric approach to warfare on the tactical and strategic levels, something this study discusses thoroughly.

cavalry tactics and organization of their nomadic roots. Although they eventually supplemented their cavalry wing with Persian style infantry trained to fight in hillside combat, the Parthian emphasis remained on their cavalry.<sup>314</sup> The Parthians were the first major world power to introduce and maintain nomadic cavalry based hit-and-run tactics into a successful, long-term empire.<sup>315</sup> They were able to do this in part because of their successful development of an innovative mode of warfare, which transferred the tactical success of nomadic asymmetric warfare, such as the Parthian Shot tactic and feigned retreat tactic, to the strategic level.<sup>316</sup> The Parthians' emphasis on cavalry as the backbone of their army and their strategic innovations meant that smaller, more logistically limited, and lighter armed Parthian armies could resist and annihilate the more professionalized and stronger armies of the Seleucids and Romans. The Parthians' mixture of cavalry based warfare and lasting imperial power indeed was exceptional.<sup>317</sup> This coupled with the versatility of Parthian society and their innovations of imperial administration explains the true "exceptionalism" of Parthian success.

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<sup>314</sup> There were three branches in the Parthian army: the infantry, the light cavalry, and the heavy cavalry. The Parthians had exceptional cavalry as the backbone of their military and used them to deadly purpose. The Parthian army mostly committed itself to fast-moving, raid-like campaigns for this reason. Much like the Hellenistic Successor empires, the Parthians recruited their cavalry largely from settler-soldiers, who offered service in exchange for land, but also from the steppe tribes. The Parthian cavalry based army was of steppe origin, and the social structure of the Parthian state remained closely connected to its military organization. See esp. Colledge 1967: 65; Nikonorov 1987c; id. 1995; Goldsworthy 1998: 74; Nikonorov 1998b; id. 2000a; id. 2000b; Olbrycht 2001; Nikonorov 2002; Olbrycht 2003; Nikonorov 2004; Roth 2009: 114; Nikonorov 2010; id. 2014.

<sup>315</sup> Tactically, although their introduction of the Parthian Shot tactic into western conflicts was unique, other nomads practiced similar hit-and-run tactics for millennia. Yet the Parthians used their cavalry based society and military to create an empire unmatched in size, complexity, and longevity by any other nomadically influenced people until the Mongol expansions in the thirteenth century CE. For the Mongols, see May 2007.

<sup>316</sup> For a more in depth discussion of the Parthians' mode of warfare, see the Prologue and Chapter 2.

<sup>317</sup> Strabo acknowledges this when he states, "The cause of this [Parthian success at empire building and their rivalry with Rome] is their mode of life, and also their customs, which contain

## Summary and Conclusion

A volatile system of bipolarity between Parthia and the Seleucid Empire existed in the 130s BCE, and neither state was satisfied with the new geopolitical arrangement. Although civil wars, Parthian attacks, and failed foreign expeditions had severely damaged the Seleucid state, it remained wealthy and potentially dangerous militarily. The failure of Demetrius II shamed the Seleucids and the territorial advances of Parthia deeply concerned them. The Seleucids had every reason to pursue further hegemonic war against the Parthians to restore their domination over the Eastern system. Further, if the right Seleucid leader had emerged, there is no good reason to accept that the Seleucid state was doomed or that the temporary reestablishment of eastern hegemony by the Seleucids was an unattainable goal. Thus, with great anticipation and expectations, the Seleucids looked to restore their former greatness in the Middle East under the ambitious leadership of Antiochus VII. Meanwhile, the unlimited revisionist state of Parthia under the leadership of Mithridates I was no longer satisfied with simply obtaining state security in the Farther East. Instead, the Parthians became determined, first, to dominate the Farther East and, second, to conduct aggressive hegemonic war against the Seleucids to the west. The establishment of bipolarity in the Eastern system with the Seleucids was a byproduct of the Parthians' new determination; however, they had every reason to fear further Seleucid reprisals and every desire to expand their own hegemony. The far-reaching ambitions of both states meant that their hegemonic struggle continued for another half century.

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much that is barbarian and Scythian in character, though more that is conducive to hegemony and success in war (πλέον μέντοι τὸ χρήσιμον πρὸς ἡγεμονίαν καὶ τὴν ἐν τοῖς πολέμοις κατορθῶσιν).” Strabo 11.9.2. Sherwin-White and Kuhrt pinpoint Parthian military organization, social institutions, and military leadership as the keys to their success. Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993: 85.

Antiochus VII came to power in 138 BCE and demonstrated from the beginning of his reign that he had lofty designs to restore the prestige and power of the Seleucid state through an expedition against the Parthians. After eliminating the usurper, Tryphon, and subduing Judea, Antiochus began planning an anabasis to reclaim the Middle East for the empire. He wanted to conduct hegemonic war against the Parthians to restore Seleucid power and prestige, to exact vengeance, and to gain control of his captured brother. The initial stages of his anabasis were a success; however, he too eventually fell victim to the well-executed “feigned retreat, defeat in detail” mode of warfare of the Parthians.

Antiochus foolishly divided his army amongst unhappy, newly recaptured communities. These communities had submitted to Antiochus reluctantly because of immediate security concerns; however, they almost immediately entered into discussions with the Parthians to organize an uprising. In 129 BCE Antiochus occupied much of Media and threatened to invade Parthia proper. In desperation Phraates II released Demetrius II under guard to contest the Seleucid throne in Syria. The hope was to divide Antiochus’ attention in order to avoid a Seleucid invasion of Parthia proper, to buy more time to organize the uprising in Mesopotamia, and to create an opportunity for Phraates to ambush the Seleucid army. Instead of invading Parthia, Antiochus decided to enter winter quarters in Media and Mesopotamia, at which point the cities of Mesopotamia rebelled against the Seleucids. Antiochus drastically underestimated the severity of the uprising and the ability of the Parthians to counterattack. The Parthians had successfully lulled Antiochus into a false sense of security, and he elected to utilize speed over caution and marched with a limited force toward Babylonia. Phraates finally had his opportunity to strike a decisive blow, and he moved with determination to bring his campaign strategy of utilizing traditional Parthian asymmetric warfare to outmaneuver and overwhelm the Seleucids

to its successful conclusion. The Parthians isolated and destroyed Antiochus and his detached force in the mountain passes between Media and Mesopotamia.

The death of Antiochus and the destruction of his army was a disaster from which the Seleucid state never was able to recover. Although the Seleucids and Parthians continued their hegemonic struggle for another four decades, the Parthians never again had to suffer a Seleucid invasion of their lands. Any hope of Seleucid recovery in the Middle East died under the ravages of unending civil war in Syria and Parthian attacks. Thus, the Parthians, not the Romans, were responsible for dismantling the Seleucid Empire.

With the defeat of Antiochus VII, Parthia was at the height of its power to this point in its history. The Parthians appeared poised to push their advantage into the lands of the Near East for the first time. Yet the need to repair the damages done to the western lands of their kingdom, considerable threats to their eastern frontier, and the headache of being unable to recapture Demetrius II kept the Parthians from acting upon their immediate desires to expand further west.

Demetrius regained the Seleucid throne free of Parthian vassalage, but his reputation was in shambles. His efforts to consolidate Seleucid power in the hope of restoring the wealth and military resources of the kingdom were a disaster. Once again, the Seleucid state descended into civil war. Parthia could do little to intervene in the chaotic geopolitics of the Seleucid state in the 120s BCE because nomadic tribes began to terrorize the Farther East. The nomadic problem that the Parthians faced in the 120s BCE was the greatest threat to the survival of the Parthian state since the anabasis of Antiochus III. Phraates determined to campaign in the East to avenge these nomadic attacks. Yet in 126 BCE, a warrior band of Sakae, aided by Seleucid troops, who had been serving in the Parthian army, but who defected at the height of battle, destroyed Phraates and his army. The death of Phraates and the loss of his army severely damaged the power and

perception of the Parthian state, encouraging Elymais and Characene to challenge Parthian hegemony in Mesopotamia and encouraging further nomadic incursions into the Iranian plateau. The Parthians had to pay the Sakae tribute to gain the time necessary to reassert their control over Mesopotamia and to rebuild their army. Yet the vulnerability of the Iranian plateau provided too much of an opportunity to the various nomadic peoples along the Parthians' extensive eastern frontier. Artabanus I needed to restore Parthian prestige and power, and once he secured his western lands, he led an expedition against the Tochari, who were ravaging the lands of the Farther East. Although initially successful in repulsing the invaders, nomadic warriors isolated Artabanus and his army in 122 BCE and destroyed them. With the death of two Parthian kings and the destruction of two Parthian armies in less than five years, Parthian authority in the Farther East temporarily collapsed. Nomadic tribes occupied much of the Iranian plateau and multipolarity briefly reemerged in the Eastern system.

Mithridates II became king at a time of great peril for the Parthian state. The survival of the kingdom was in jeopardy, as the deaths of kings in battle, the destruction of armies, and the loss of the Iranian plateau had severely damaged Parthian strength and the perception of Parthian power and prestige. It is a testament to Mithridates' leadership that he was able to save the Parthian state from possible ruin and, instead, establish it as the unrivaled hegemon of the Eastern system.

He first conducted a series of successful wars against the various nomadic tribes that had come to occupy the Iranian plateau and reestablished Parthian hegemony over the Farther East. In fact, his wars against the nomadic tribes and his efforts to strengthen the northern and eastern frontiers of his kingdom were so successful that no major nomadic threat materialized in the East

for two centuries. By solidifying Parthian power in the East, Mithridates then could pursue his military ambitions to the west.

By the 100s BCE, Mithridates had stabilized the volatile situation in Mesopotamia, and then he expanded the network of vassal kings under his authority in the Near East and Mid East. In fact, Mithridates' wide-ranging military and political success led him and the Babylonian scribes to resurrect the old Achaemenid title of King of Kings in ca. 111 BCE.<sup>318</sup> He soon began portraying himself as the supreme ruler of the greatest power in the eastern world.<sup>319</sup> The stability of Mesopotamia, Media, and the Farther East allowed the unlimited revisionist state of Parthia finally to pursue its desire of westward expansion. Mithridates conducted a long war against Armenia to establish Parthian hegemony over the region for the first time. He was finally successful in 95 BCE when the pro-Parthian candidate, Tigranes II, seized the Armenian throne with Parthian support. The Parthians then turned their sights to the diminished Seleucid Kingdom.

Under Mithridates II the Parthians extended their territory to the western reaches of the Euphrates and began involving themselves in the geopolitical developments of Cappadocia, Commagene, Cilicia, and the Syrian Desert. Extensive western expansion such as this came at the direct expense of the strength and influence of the Seleucid state. Thus, the final war began under Mithridates. The defeat and death of Antiochus X at the hands of the Parthians (perhaps as late as 88 BCE), the defeat and capture of Demetrius III by the Parthians in 88/87 BCE, and the appointment of Philip I to the Seleucid throne in Antioch with Parthian aid under Mithridates'

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<sup>318</sup> The use of the title was not meant to be anti-Seleucid; rather it helped connect the Arsacids to the previous ruling dynasties in the East, including the Seleucids. See Strootman 2016.

<sup>319</sup> Mithridates was responsible for a "breakthrough" in Parthia royal ideology. He emphasized Achaemenid tradition in his name, dress, and coins. Olbrycht 2009: 165.



immediate successors marked the successful culmination of the century and a half long hegemonic struggle between the Parthians and Seleucids. In part because of exceptional leadership and in part because of exceptional qualities, such as the versatility of Parthian society, the inclusiveness of Parthian imperial administration, and the innovations of the Parthian military, Parthia became the unrivaled hegemon of the Eastern system, which now stretched from Syria to Afghanistan. The success of the westward advances of the Parthians and their new relationship with Armenia for the first time brought Parthia to the attention of the other great titan of the ancient world, Rome. Although it would take forty years of confused, awkward, and infrequent interaction, the Romans eventually emerged as the last great rivals of the Parthians.

## PART II – TWO TITANS OF THE ANCIENT WORLD CLASH

## Chapter 4 – The Shifting Situation in the Near East and the Hegemonic Ambitions of Pontus in the Mediterranean

At the beginning of the first century BCE, Parthia was drawing near to total dominance over the Eastern system. Mithridates II had created a strong eastern frontier, had reestablished stability within his borders, and was expanding Parthian hegemony westward into the Near East, causing the first phase of system overlap between the Mediterranean and Eastern systems. Yet, to this point in time, Parthia and Rome had remained completely isolated from one another. While Parthia was struggling to dominate the Eastern system, Rome already had dominated the Mediterranean system. By the 160s BCE, after the final defeat of Macedon under King Perseus, no state, nor coalition of states, in the Mediterranean remained with the strength to resist Rome.<sup>1</sup> However, this does not mean that Rome had established direct imperial rule over the entire Mediterranean. In fact, throughout the second century Rome remained reluctant to become involved in the political and military squabbles of the Eastern Mediterranean and to annex eastern lands.<sup>2</sup> The Roman Republic lacked the will and the means to occupy the Greek world and Near East; instead, its emphasis was on the maintenance of Roman hegemony over eastern communities.<sup>3</sup> The eventual addition of provinces to the Roman state in Macedon, Greece, and

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<sup>1</sup> See Eckstein 2006: 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> See esp. Kallet-Marx 1995: Ch. 1-8.

<sup>3</sup> To this point, Kallet-Marx states, “Down to 148 B.C. – the age of the great wars that extended Roman supremacy over the East – the guiding principle of Roman hegemonial behavior had been the extension and maintenance of the imperium *populi Romani*, seen essentially as the power of the Roman people to command obedience from foreign kings and nations. The essence of the imperium lay not in legal forms such as treaty obligations, or in financial exploitation such as continual payment of tribute, or in military occupation—all these things might or might not accompany it—but simply in the capacity of the ‘metropole’ to enforce its will upon the ‘periphery,’ to use modern terms. This concept of empire did not presume or demand active peacetime exploitation of those subject to this power but aimed simply at the preservation and reinforcement of power itself, upon which Roman security was ultimately based. Naturally,

Asia did not change Roman behavior. Roman policy in the East remained detached and inconsistent, and Greek and Eastern states continued to seek to draw Rome into their local disputes.<sup>4</sup> Generally, Roman intrusiveness remained minimal as the Romans allowed eastern communities to function with relative autonomy in exchange for supporting Roman hegemony.<sup>5</sup>

Yet Rome's cautious and detached stance toward the geopolitical developments in the Greek East posed a potentially serious threat to the stability of the region. Rome's indirect authority over much of the Eastern Mediterranean in the second century BCE was necessary because of military limitations. The Roman Republican army drew upon Roman citizens who met property qualifications and upon allied communities for soldiers. This system worked extremely well when the Romans were fighting in and around Italy and produced an exceptional pool of potential recruits.<sup>6</sup> However, after decades of long, costly wars in far-off regions like Spain, the Roman state found it increasingly difficult to raise the necessary forces to maintain its expanding empire and to combat its many enemies. Finally, in the 110s BCE, facing a protracted war in Numidia against Jugurtha and the northern invasions of the Cimbri and Teutones tribes, Gaius Marius implemented his famed "Marian reforms," where by Roman soldiers then could be

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imperium of this type was not 'abdicated' by Rome every time it withdrew from Greece in the first half of the second century... Before Cynoscephalae, Hellenistic kings had not been accustomed to obeying orders, and such conspicuous acts of submission to the imperium *populi Romani*, when performed by scions of the houses of Antigonos and Seleucus, had a symbolic power to which we must not be blind. Such public acts of submission were demanded precisely because they symbolically affirmed and reinforced the imperium, which would otherwise be quite abstract in the absence of any concrete and regular apparatus of domination such as military occupation or tribute payment— hence their extraordinary importance in the history of Roman intervention in the early second century." Id. 337-8.

<sup>4</sup> Id. 5, 114-18, 122, 161, 180-3, 229, 239, 338-40. Note also Gruen 1984: 96-131, Chs. 15-16; Eckstein 1988; Gruen 2006: 261-6.

<sup>5</sup> For the extensive non-compliance of Greek states with Roman wishes during the period of Roman hegemony from the fall of Macedon to the Mithridatic Wars, see McGing 2003: 71-89; McGing 2009a: 206-7.

<sup>6</sup> See Eckstein 2006: Ch. 7; Eckstein 2012: 20 n.60.

drawn from the poorest of Roman citizens, the *capite censi*.<sup>7</sup> Since these new soldiers had no avenue toward property or wealth other than through the support of their generals, talented and ambitious Roman statesmen began creating large armies that were often more loyal to themselves than to the Roman state. These reforms helped fix the shortfall in Roman recruitment; however, Roman politics became increasingly violent and divided. Over the course of sixty years (90s-30s BCE), the Romans fought as many as a dozen civil wars. The crisis of the late Roman Republic severely damaged the strength and perceived power of the Roman state and encouraged neighboring states to threaten Roman hegemony. Meanwhile, after the death of Mithridates II, the Parthian Kingdom descended into decades of political and military instability known as the Parthian Dark Age, causing a similar crisis in the East.

Two men in particular attempted to take advantage of Roman and Parthian weakness to create rival kingdoms in this period: Mithridates VI of Pontus and Tigranes II of Armenia. Mithridates fought three costly wars against the Roman state over the course of three decades. He was a continual threat to Roman hegemony over the Eastern Mediterranean. Roman neglect and inconsistency in the East aided in his rise to power. The threat of Mithridates to Roman hegemony in the eastern Mediterranean was the primary impetus for the “important changes in the nature of Rome’s eastern imperium” in the first century BCE.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, the former

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<sup>7</sup> For Marius and his reforms, see Matthew 2010. See also Carney 1974; Evans 1994. Note also Sall. *Jug.* 46.7, 49.6, 86.2; Plut. *Mar.* 20.5-6, 25; Sex. Pomp. Fest. 149M; Front. *Strat.* 4.1.7; Pliny *NH* 10.5.16; Livy 1.43.8; Polyb. 6.19.2; Cic. *Rep.* 2.40. For the Roman army of this period see Keppie 1998: Ch. 1-2; Roth 2009: Ch. 1-6. See also Smith 1958; Keaveney 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Kallet-Marx 1995: 341. I generally agree that the “age of Sulla” represents “a turning point in the history of Rome’s relations with the foreign people of its imperium.” Id. 335. However, I find Kallet-Marx’s argument overstated when he concludes that this “represents a landmark in the development of the relationship between Rome and its allies.” Id. 336. Since his study is almost entirely from the Roman perspective, it fails to appreciate fully the agency of other states, specifically Mithridatic Pontus, and the important consequences of Mithridates’ actions on Roman policy. As we shall see, Roman policy in the East remained largely inconsistent and

Parthian vassal, Tigranes II, created an extensive rival empire in the Near East that threatened to undo permanently more than fifty years of Parthian geopolitical gains in the West.<sup>9</sup> Ultimately, it was the ambitions of Mithridates VI and Tigranes II that unintentionally brought Rome and Parthia into contact.

We should not view the clash between the Roman and Parthian empires as inevitable. Many important contingent geopolitical developments stood between Parthia's domination of Armenia in 95 BCE and Rome's invasion of Parthia in 53 BCE that drastically altered the interstate environment in the Mediterranean and East from the realities that Crassus faced in the middle 50s BCE. The emphasis of the following chapters is a reevaluation of the importance of the ambitions of Mithridates of Pontus and Tigranes of Armenia in bringing the Roman and Parthian worlds into contact and eventual conflict. The story of the first half of the first century BCE is not simply one of Roman or Parthian predatory aggression. Rather, it is a story of the hegemonies of the Mediterranean and Eastern worlds reacting to the considerable threats of rising hegemonic rivals within their separate interstate systems and of the immediate, wide-ranging geopolitical consequences of the rapidly evolving international environment in the Near East.

Part two of this study analyzes how a system of bipolarity between Rome and Parthia in the expanded Med-Eastern system eventually replaced the previous international environment of the Roman-dominated Mediterranean and the Parthian-dominated Eastern systems. It

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cautious in the first century BCE, despite the increased military emphasis that Rome placed on the geopolitical developments in the East. The considerable threat of Mithridates forced the Romans to take a more direct and hardline approach to their hegemony in the East. Kallet-Marx's insistence that Sulla was the primary impetus for this change is a good example of unit-attribute theory. Through system-level analysis we can demonstrate that Sulla was reacting to systemic disruptions caused by the actions of Mithridates and his allies to challenge Roman hegemony.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of the early historiography for the reign of Tigranes II, which relied almost exclusively on the accounts of Mommsen or Reinach, see Manandyan 2007: 1-5.

demonstrates how the haphazard geopolitical developments of these separate interstate systems in the first half of the first century BCE gradually led to an untenable interstate atmosphere. The struggles of Parthia and the successes of Rome from the 90s-50s BCE led to extensive system overlap in three phases over the Near East and to the increasing likelihood of hegemonic war and violent system merger.<sup>10</sup> After Crassus' invasion and Parthian retaliation forced this merger in the middle of the century, Rome and Parthia began a long-standing hegemonic struggle that lasted for centuries but saw its greatest burst of violence in this period as both powers looked to dominate the new, expanded interstate system through determined force. It was not until the Augustan Age that Rome and Parthia found an acceptable compromise and officially recognized their bipolar world rivalry.

#### Rome and Parthia Enter the Near East

In the first century BCE, Rome and Parthia separately became militarily involved in the lands of the Near East. Rome struggled desperately to overcome the advances of Pontus to reestablish Roman hegemony over the Mediterranean system. Meanwhile, Parthia found itself challenged by the rising power of Armenia and the ever-approaching Romans. The ongoing hegemonic struggle against Mithridates VI eventually led the Romans to make war against his military ally, Tigranes, while Parthia was fighting its own separate hegemonic war against Armenia. This meant that both Rome and Parthia came to seek separate hegemonic control over a wide swathe of territory in the Near East. What began in the 90s BCE and carried on through to the 50s BCE was an uncomfortable, confused, and detached geopolitical interaction between

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<sup>10</sup> Overtoom 2016: 17.

Rome and Parthia over these semi-peripheral territories.<sup>11</sup> In the first half of the first century BCE, the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system and the Parthian-dominated Eastern system increasingly came to overlap with one another in the Near East.<sup>12</sup> Until Crassus' invasion, both powers emphasized isolation and looked to the geopolitical developments in their separate interstate systems. For four decades Rome and Parthia were cautious and detached in their interactions as uncertainty of power relations and geopolitical tensions gradually mounted.

The wars against Mithridates and Tigranes were fundamental to bringing together the separate Roman and Parthian worlds. Although no cataclysmic event yet had occurred to merge the Mediterranean and Eastern systems, the eventual wide-ranging success of the Romans against Pontus and Armenia caused the Mediterranean and Eastern systems to overlap extensively by the middle of the century. This made open conflict between Rome and Parthia and the violent merger of these two separate interstate systems increasingly likely.

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<sup>11</sup> I simply use the term "semi-peripheral" to distinguish regions on the periphery but within the limits of an interstate system from regions on the periphery but outside of those limits. Which states we consider semi-peripheral or peripheral of course depends on the interstate system discussed and can fluctuate. For example, for Rome, Pontus and Cappadocia became semi-peripheral regions on the edge but within the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system, while Armenia was a peripheral region on the outside of that system until the 60s BCE. Meanwhile, for Parthia Armenia and Cappadocia became semi-peripheral regions on the edge but within the Parthian-dominated Eastern system, while Pontus remained a peripheral region on the outside of that system. The expansion of an interstate system to change a peripheral region to a semi-peripheral region depends on the actions of the metropole; usually such a process required aggressive and determined military intervention. For the use of the term "semi-peripheral" in a modern context, see esp. Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997.

<sup>12</sup> This process of system overlap is similar to other examples from antiquity. For example, the increasing overlap of the Roman-dominated Italian system and the Carthaginian dominated North African system in Sicily, which resulted in the hegemonic Punic Wars. In addition, the increasing overlap of the Roman-dominated Western Mediterranean system and the tripolar system of the Eastern Mediterranean, which resulted in the hegemonic Macedonian and Syrian wars.



## The Geopolitical Relationship of Pontus, Armenia, and Parthia at the Beginning of the First Century BCE

In 95 BCE Tigranes II took the Armenian throne as a Parthian vassal, placing Armenia under full Parthian hegemony and ending Mithridates II's efforts to subdue the region. With Armenia under Parthian control and with his northern frontier secured, Mithridates spent the rest of his reign expanding Parthian influence into northern Mesopotamia, Syria, and eastern Anatolia. The focus of these late conquests was the defeat of the Seleucid state and the submission of its satellite territories to Parthian rule. Mithridates' western military efforts established successfully for the first time Parthian hegemony over the Eastern system.<sup>13</sup> His successes in Syria and Cilicia meant that also for the first time the Parthian-dominated Eastern system began to overlap with the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system. To this point in time, the Romans were the undisputed system hegemon in the Eastern Mediterranean over the various Greek communities and Hellenistic kings in the region, including the heartland of the Seleucid state in Syria. However, Parthian success against the waning Seleucid state in Mesopotamia and Mithridates' penetrations into the lands west of the Euphrates River changed the interstate dynamics of the region. Although the larger consequences of this remained unknown to the various polities in the Mediterranean and Eastern systems at the time, the geopolitical balance of power in the Near East rapidly began to shift in the 90s BCE.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Overtom 2016: 17.

<sup>14</sup> A passage from Strabo helps illustrate the general lack of interest that the Romans had in Eastern affairs. He states, "And at the same time the [Cilician] pirates, pretending to be slave-dealers, carried on their evil business unchecked. Neither were the Romans concerning themselves as yet so much about the peoples outside the Taurus [i.e. Cilicia]; but they sent Scipio Aemilianus, and *again certain others*, to inspect the tribes and the cities [in that region]." Strabo 14.5.2 (the italics are mine). The Romans ignored the growing piracy problem because of their lack of willingness to become further involved in the affairs of the Eastern Mediterranean. Kallet-Marx 1995: 227-36. Moreover, despite sending several officials to the Near East, Rome took little note of Parthia's continued success in the Middle East and did nothing to aid the

Fundamentally important to understand is that, although the Romans and Parthians became increasingly aware of one another from the 90s to the 50s BCE and on numerous occasions almost came to blows, they remained detached and concentrated on the geopolitical concerns of their own separate interstate systems. This led to considerable confusion and misunderstanding on the part of the Romans and Parthians in their infrequent interactions. Their power relation to one another was uncertain, and the geographical limitations of their hegemony were unclear. Since the Mediterranean and Eastern systems overlapped in the Near East, both powers on various occasions presented themselves as and acted as though they were hegemony over the region. The rise of Pontus and Armenia as regional powers only complicated the geopolitical realities of the region further. With this understanding of the complexities of the international environment in the Near East in the 90s BCE, it is unsurprising that the first official meeting between Rome and Parthia shared all of the aforementioned frustrations, uncertainties, and impediments.

Marek Jan Olbrycht recently wrote an article that attempts to shift the Roman-centric view of the rise of Mithridates VI of Pontus and his conflict with Rome to include an appreciation of Parthia's active role in the Near East, especially under Mithridates II.<sup>15</sup> Although Olbrycht exaggerates the connectedness of Parthia to the geopolitical developments in the

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Seleucids. There is almost no evidence of communication or interaction between Rome and Parthia until the meeting of Sulla and Orobazus in the middle 90s BCE. Note that *I Maccabees* 15.15-24, states that Rome renewed its treaty with the Jews (perhaps ca. 142 BCE) and addressed letters to numerous kings and polities, including "Arsaces [i.e. Mithridates I]." However, it is highly doubtful that the Romans began a diplomatic correspondence with the Parthians this early. For the suspect nature of this passage, see Gruen 1984: 749-50. Note also that Josephus records that the High Priest of Jerusalem, Hyrcanus, renewed "a league of friendship" with the Romans in the 120s BCE. *Jos. Ant.* 13.259-66. Moreover, note Justin's peculiar and confused statement about the Jews soliciting and apparently receiving Roman support in their rebellion in the late 160s BCE. Justin 36.3.9

<sup>15</sup> Olbrycht 2009.

region, he successfully demonstrates that a discussion of the Mithridatic Wars without an appreciation of Parthia is incomplete and recognizes that the Roman conflict with Pontus was a gateway to Roman tensions with Parthia.<sup>16</sup>

Mithridates VI came to the Pontic throne as a teenager after the assassination of his father, Mithridates V, in 120 BCE, and by the 90s BCE he had consolidated his position as king and had pursued about a decade and a half of aggressive, successful power-maximizing policies in and around the Black Sea and Pontus in northeastern Anatolia.<sup>17</sup> He had conquered Colchis and the Bosphorus and subdued the tribes of the Pontic steppe to create a Black Sea Kingdom that drastically improved his wealth and military resources.<sup>18</sup> He then incorporated much of central Anatolia into this new kingdom when he annexed Paphlagonia and Galatia.<sup>19</sup> Mithridates' success extended his kingdom to the borders of Cappadocia, which was an important region for him to control if he hoped to secure his southern frontier. Mithridates spent much of the decade trying to establish his hegemony over this strategically important region.<sup>20</sup>

To this point in time, Mithridates VI had expanded his kingdom into regions outside the sphere of the Eastern system; however, the recent western successes of Mithridates II meant that the Parthian sphere of influence and the territory of Parthia's vassals came to share an extensive border with Cappadocia and Pontus. Mithridates VI, who had acted aggressively against all of his neighbors to date, could have decided to use his newly won power to expand eastward. In

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<sup>16</sup> Id. 163-4.

<sup>17</sup> Mithridates showed early on in his reign his willingness to act boldly with steady escalation of his ambitions. Kallet-Marx 1995: 240-51; McGing 2009a: 208, 213. Note Justin 37.3.1-5, 4.2-3

<sup>18</sup> See Heinen 1991; Callataÿ 1997: 245-64; Olbrycht 2004; Mayor 2010: 116-20, 127-63, 187, 193. For the important role of the Bosphorus within the Pontic Kingdom, see Molev 2009.

Mithridates believed he had a birthright to these lands. See Polyb. 5.43.2

<sup>19</sup> Sherwin-White 1977b: 71-2; Madsen 2009: 194; Mayor 2010: 127-9.

<sup>20</sup> See Mayor 2010: 129-38.

fact, there are several reasons why this might have been an attractive option. First, Mithridates VI already had conquered Lesser Armenia, which gave him access to Greater Armenia.<sup>21</sup> Lesser and Greater Armenia long had been a part of the Orontid Kingdom and then of the Achaemenid Empire.<sup>22</sup> They were closely linked geographical and cultural regions. Hence, Pontic control of Greater Armenia, apart from providing all of the geopolitical benefits of location and frontier protection that the Romans and Parthians sought in the region, could have been a promising extension of Pontic control in Lesser Armenia. Second, at the beginning of the first century BCE, the war with Parthia had left the Kingdom of Armenia weak and vulnerable. Mithridates VI's advances into Paphlagonia, Galatia, Cappadocia, and Bithynia demonstrate his eagerness to expand his power at the expense of weak neighbors. Therefore, Armenia seemingly was an attractive possible target. Finally, had Mithridates chosen to invade Armenia instead of Cappadocia and Bithynia he would have again expanded his power away from Roman concerns. Much like his sweeping successes in the Black Sea region, Mithridates could have hoped to add Armenia to his kingdom without Roman interference since Armenia remained a peripheral region outside the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system. Thus, there were viable and potentially rewarding reasons for Mithridates to expand eastward in the 90s BCE.

However, Mithridates did not expand eastward, and it is worth discussing why because it reinforces the concept of the separation of the Mediterranean and Eastern interstate systems at this time. Mithridates portrayed himself as the ideal of a Hellenistic king and successor of

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<sup>21</sup> Mithridates seized the territory from its king, Antipater. Strabo 12.3.28. Chahin is incorrect that later Tigranes II "let" Mithridates retain Lesser Armenia as part of their alliance. Chahin 1987: 226. Pontus had well established control of the region by the middle 90s BCE.

<sup>22</sup> For background on this period of Armenian history, see Chaumont 1986a; Chahin 1987: Ch. 21, Garsoian 2004.

Alexander the Great, especially in his coinage.<sup>23</sup> Although he also claimed descent from Cyrus the Great, he emphasized his Hellenistic persona in his propaganda and patronized the growth of Hellenistic culture in his kingdom.<sup>24</sup> By the first century BCE, Pontus was a Hellenistic kingdom deeply attached to the Hellenistic world of the Eastern Mediterranean world dominated by Rome.<sup>25</sup> Thus, it is not surprising that Mithridates' policies, much like those of the other Hellenistic kingdoms, were primarily western focused and centered around the desire to maintain and expand power.<sup>26</sup> Although Pontus previously had been a friend and ally of Rome, Mithridates ultimately came to view Rome as the major threat to Pontic state security and as the potential rival to his ambitions in the Greek East.<sup>27</sup> That is, Mithridates considered himself and his kingdom to be an active player in the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system. His extensive efforts to connect himself to the Greek East, his aggression in Anatolia against Roman interests, and his disinterest in the potential opportunities of eastern expansion help demonstrate this point.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See esp. Manandyan 2007: 46; Kreuz 2009; Højte 2009b; Madsen 2009; McGing 2009a: 210-11; Mayor 2010: 26, 44, 65, 68, 121, 148, 153, 216, 232, 253, 325, 341-2, 359. See also Ballesteros-Pastor 2009; Gabelko 2009. Mithridates was not a despotic "sultan" who used a Hellenistic façade to cover up his corrupt and debase "orientalism." Mommsen 1903: iv 8-9, 24-5, 32.

<sup>24</sup> See Manandyan 2007: 44-7; Marek 2009; Mayor 2010: 250.

<sup>25</sup> See Bosworth and Wheatley 1998; McGing 1998; Marek 2009. See also Ballesteros-Pastor 2009. For the Hellenistic aspects of Pontic religion and cult, see Saprykin 2009.

<sup>26</sup> The maintenance and expansion of power was the focus of *all* Hellenistic kings. Mithridates proved uniquely skilled in pursuing his imperialistic policies. See Gabrielsen 2005: 35-8. The emphasis of Hellenistic kings on the pursuit of war and the gaining of power through war remained strong even in late antiquity. For example, Emperor Julian, who often associated with a Greek cultural identity and emulated Alexander the Great, wrote to Euthymeles the Tribune: "A king delights in war." Julian *Frag. Brev.* 10

<sup>27</sup> Mayor 2010: 51-2.

<sup>28</sup> Thus, I agree with Madsen that Mithridates was not a victim of Roman aggression; however, in his effort to defend Mithridates' actions, he goes too far in trying to reject Mithridates' aggressive policies and ambitions. He portrays Mithridates as "not simply a victim of Roman imperialism" but "not the aggressor that modern scholars have believed and believe him to be."

Mithridatic Pontus remained on the periphery of the expanded Parthian-dominated Eastern system. In fact, the only reason Pontus and Parthia interacted geopolitically was because of the successes of Mithridates II's western wars. Parthia's ongoing hegemonic war with Armenia in the 100s and early 90s BCE meant that, had Mithridates VI invaded the vulnerable Kingdom of Armenia, war with Parthia surely would have followed. Mithridates VI, who challenged Roman military power with great success for several years, certainly was capable of conducting a determined and destructive hegemonic war against the Parthians. After all, Mithridates VI, who claimed descent from Seleucus I and Cyrus the Great, could have legitimized an eastern war of Seleucid *and* Achaemenid "reconquest" against the foreign Parthians, who had illegally seized the former lands of the Seleucid and Achaemenid empires and who had usurped the Achaemenid title of King of Kings.<sup>29</sup> Rather, the answer to why Mithridates VI challenged Rome instead of Parthia lies in the realities of the international environment at this time. Pontus was a well-integrated part of the Mediterranean system and, therefore, primarily focused on western policy against other Hellenistic rivals and eventually Roman interests.<sup>30</sup>

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Madsen 2009: 200. Madsen fails to appreciate the greater geopolitical ambitions that Mithridates eventually developed, and he overlooks that both Rome *and* Pontus acted aggressively against one another in the 80s BCE.

<sup>29</sup> For a brief account of Mithridates' Greek and Persian identities and their effect on his policy, see McGing 2009a: 205. Gabelko points out that, for the monarchs in Asia Minor, association with the great Hellenistic empires was more important than association with the distant Achaemenid legacy. Gabelko 2009: 52-3. Note also Strootman 2016. Shayegan argues that Mithridates VI later utilized the "King of Kings" title as a reflection of his expanded dominions. Mithridates political ideology connected him to Achaemenid and Hellenistic legacies. Shayegan 2011: 228, 241, 244-5, 308-11, 327-8.

<sup>30</sup> This helps explain why Mithridates conquered the Black Sea regions as his birthright but remained detached from the geopolitics of the Persian "homeland." See Polyb. 5.43.2. Mithridates ruled over numerous Greek cities within his original kingdom and was an active member in the geopolitics of the Greek world. He had a longstanding relationship with these

The successes of Mithridates II in Armenia and Syria complicated the international environment of the Near East as the Mediterranean and Eastern systems for the first time began to overlap. With the coronation of Tigranes II as the Parthian vassal king of Armenia in 95 BCE, the northern frontier of the Parthian Empire was secure. Mithridates II then set his sights on finally subduing the diminished Seleucid state. It was at this time that Parthia subdued Commagene, temporarily occupied Cilicia, and invaded Syria. Cappadocia became a semi-peripheral region of interest as the Parthian-dominated Eastern system continued to expand westward under Mithridates II's advances. Through its network of vassals and client kingdoms, Parthia suddenly emerged as a major power in the Near East. Mithridates VI's actions in the middle 90s BCE reflect this new but tentative geopolitical reality. If Mithridates VI hoped to pursue his ambitions in Anatolia and the Greek East, he had to secure his eastern and southern frontiers. This meant either conquering or allying with Armenia and Cappadocia. It is not surprising that Mithridates VI chose to ally with Tigranes, the Parthian vassal, and tried on numerous occasions to seize Roman backed Cappadocia. Mithridates VI had established his hegemony over the Black Sea and now moved to establish his hegemony in Anatolia. Although he was unwilling to challenge Rome directly, he soon realized that his hegemonic desires in the region meant that Rome was his primary threat and rival.

Meanwhile, Mithridates VI did not desire hegemonic war in the East. He understood that war against Armenia would have brought with it war against Parthia, something Mithridates VI chose to avoid.<sup>31</sup> The systemic pressures of the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system

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various Greek communities, and he used his familiarity with these communities and his Hellenic connections to gain many Greek allies in the later conflict against Rome.

<sup>31</sup> Olbrycht points out that Mithridates VI conquered Lesser Armenia and Colchis but did not attack Iberia. He suggests this is because Parthia already had established a vassal ruler in the region that supported Pontus. Olbrycht 2009: 170-1. I agree that Mithridates VI chose not to

encouraged him to act within that system and forego active participation in the geopolitical developments of the Eastern system. Mithridates VI could not ignore his southern and eastern frontiers if he hoped to pursue his hegemonic desires in western Anatolia, and therefore, he forged an alliance with Tigranes II. The two kings looked to expand their power by subduing the neighboring kingdom of Cappadocia.<sup>32</sup>

While Rome and Pontus diplomatically tried to outmaneuver one another in Anatolia, Parthia remained focused on the geopolitical developments of the Eastern system. Ever since the defeat of Antiochus VII's invasion of Mesopotamia and Media, the Parthians had desired to conduct aggressive hegemonic war against the Seleucids. The submission of the Seleucid state to Parthian hegemony was the primary objective of Mithridates II's western expeditions. Parthian advances into Commagene and Cilicia were aimed at surrounding and isolating Syria and had no intention of challenging Rome or threatening Pontus.<sup>33</sup> Cappadocia became a semi-peripheral area of interest to the Parthians; however, Mithridates II had a war to fight in and around Syria that garnered his full attention. Parthia as of yet had no plans to occupy Cappadocia directly. However, much like Mithridates VI, it is likely that Mithridates II eventually would have wanted to secure the strategically important region of Cappadocia. Stability in Cappadocia was

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attack Iberia, much as he chose not to attack Greater Armenia, because of Parthian military involvement in the region. However, Olbrycht's conclusion that Mithridates VI did not attack Iberia because he was already an ally of Parthia at the end of the second century BCE is mistaken and based off a vague reference in Memnon 22.3-4. Such a view is untenable as discussed below. In fact, Memnon tells us elsewhere that the Iberians became Pontic allies separate of Parthia, much like Pontus and Armenia. Id. 22.4. Ultimately, Mithridates chose not to attack Iberia because it was friendly and because his ambitions were focused on Anatolia. He did not want to risk war with Parthia and become embroiled in the geopolitical developments of the East. His alliances with Armenia, Iberia, and Parthia came later than the late second century BCE under different circumstances.

<sup>32</sup> Justin 38.3.2-3

<sup>33</sup> I disagree with Olbrycht's speculative suggestion that Parthia invaded Cilicia to support the Armenian invasion of Cappadocia. Olbrycht 2009: 166-7.



important to protecting Parthian gains to the south and east, and it assured that Parthian forces could concentrate on the campaign against the Seleucids in Syria.

There is little evidence of correspondence between Mithridates II and Mithridates VI. Olbrycht in a recent article has argued that Parthia and Pontus initiated “close relations” prior to 102/101 BCE.<sup>34</sup> However, his only evidence for this close relationship is a *heroon* dedicated to Mithridates VI on Delos. On this shrine there are two figures, whom Olbrycht identifies as Parthian envoys.<sup>35</sup> He concludes,

The *heroon* was erected by a private individual, but Helianax can hardly have acted without agreement from Mithridates Eupator. The building was in fact intended as a propaganda monument for the Pontic king demonstrating his magnanimity and power documented by international links. The presence of the Parthian envoys at the court of Mithridates and the reverence shown them in the Delos *heroon* imply that Mithridates Eupator and the Parthian king cooperated already by 102/101 BC (as they did in the 90’s), and that Mithridates Eupator had special relations to Parthia.<sup>36</sup>

The *heroon* perhaps illustrates that Parthia and Pontus were exchanging diplomatic correspondence at the end of the second century BCE. In ca. 103/102 BCE Mithridates VI invaded Cappadocia, defeating King Nicomedes III of Bithynia and placing a puppet ruler on the throne. It is possible that during these events Mithridates II, who was fighting Armenia and expanding Parthian territory to the Euphrates, sent the envoys to Mithridates VI, who soon after appeared on the *heroon* at Delos.<sup>37</sup> Yet this circumstantial evidence hardly can support the conclusion that these kings formed a “close” and “special” relationship. Certainly, as Mithridates II pursued his western wars against Armenia and Syria, he would have become aware of the

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<sup>34</sup> Id. 167-8.

<sup>35</sup> See also McGing 1986: 90-1.

<sup>36</sup> Olbrycht 2009: 168.

<sup>37</sup> Olbrycht argues that Parthian aggression in the Near East might have caused Mithridates VI to reach out to Parthia for friendly relations in 102/101 BCE. Ibid. Yet this does not mean that the two sides ratified a treaty.

growing power of Pontus in peripheral Anatolia. With Mithridates VI expanding into Cappadocia, Mithridates II would have wanted to understand Mithridates VI's eastern intentions because, as discussed above, Mithridates of Pontus possessed the opportunity and legitimacy to pursue hegemonic war in the East had he so chosen.

Thus, in this rapidly changing and uncertain international environment, it is not surprising that Parthian envoys approached Mithridates VI at the end of the second century BCE. Yet nothing of significance came of these meetings. There is no evidence that Parthia and Pontus became allies, and their geopolitical concerns remained detached. Perhaps the two kings left the diplomatic discussions on friendly terms; neither side showed aggression toward the other. However, Olbrycht's opinion that Mithridates VI and Mithridates II had a close and special relationship is unsubstantiated. For instance, his conclusion that Mithridates II installed Tigranes on the Armenian throne "to meet Mithridates Eupator's wishes" is unreasonable.<sup>38</sup> Mithridates II helped install Tigranes on the throne because it solidified Parthian hegemony over the region, not because he wanted to make Pontus happy. The appearance of Parthian envoys on the Delos *heroon* was propaganda to emphasize Mithridates VI's international standing and power, which Olbrycht states; however, it indicates nothing further about the relationship between Pontus and Parthia.

Further, Olbrycht's conclusion that Parthia had a "strong" interest in Anatolia and that Mithridates VI and Tigranes II were acting in concert with and sometimes at the behest of Mithridates II is overstated.<sup>39</sup> In his commendable efforts to shift the dialogue about the geopolitical developments of this period away from the Roman-centric view of most scholars,

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<sup>38</sup> Id. 169.

<sup>39</sup> Id. 168-70

Olbrycht has gone too far in his Parthian-centric view. Unfortunately, too often Olbrycht assumes far too much about the grand cooperative efforts of Pontus, Armenia, and Parthia and disregards the independent ambitions and agency of Mithridates VI and Tigranes II.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, we must search for a more moderate interpretation of the important events of the 90s BCE in the Near East.

Tigranes was an ambitious, intelligent, and resilient man and never a passive vassal ruler. Immediately after gaining the Armenian throne, he pursued aggressive policies in the Near East to increase his military prestige and to maximize the power of his kingdom. He invaded the strategically important kingdom of Sophene to the southwest, defeated the ruler Artanes, and annexed the region.<sup>41</sup> Strabo states,

Now Tigranes was a descendant of Artaxias and held what is properly called Armenia, which lay adjacent to Media and Albania and Iberia, extending as far as Colchis and Cappadocia on the Euxine, whereas the Sophenian Artanes, who held the southern parts and those that lay more to the west than these, was a descendant of Zariadris. However, he was overcome by Tigranes, who established himself as lord of all.<sup>42</sup>

The conquest of Sophene greatly expanded Tigranes' kingdom, which then shared a border with Cappadocia. It is important to understand that Tigranes' annexation of Sophene was not an anti-Parthian act.<sup>43</sup> Tigranes had just gained the Armenian throne with Parthian aid, and the Parthian

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<sup>40</sup> Olbrycht's portrayal of Tigranes II as an unambitious Parthian stooge in the 90s and 80s BCE is troubling. Although he is right to emphasize the client relationship that Tigranes had with Parthia, his insistence that everything Tigranes accomplished in this period was at the bidding of Parthia and that Tigranes had no "anti-Parthian" policy until after 80 BCE is unconvincing. Id. 168-9.

<sup>41</sup> Artanes perhaps became an Armenian vassal. Id. 169. For the historical geography of Sophene, see Marciak 2012a.

<sup>42</sup> Strabo 11.14.15

<sup>43</sup> For a discussion of the mistaken argument that this was anti-Parthian policy, see Manaserjan 1985: 109. Much as the early resentment and eagerness of Mithridates VI to fight Rome has been overstated by scholars, so too has Tigranes' resentment and eagerness to fight Parthia. See Armen 1940: 35-6; Sullivan 1990: 116; Redgate 1998: 69; Lerouge 2007: 45.

Empire was at its height in power under Mithridates II. However, Tigranes also was not acting in some sort of grand coordinated strategy under the orders of Mithridates II either.<sup>44</sup> Tigranes' attack on Sophene was opportunistic and aimed at expanding the security of his vulnerable kingdom. Strong, militarized, and potentially hostile neighbors surrounded Armenia, including Parthia, which had fought several years to subdue and weaken the kingdom. If Tigranes had any hope of someday asserting himself and his kingdom as a regional power with which to reckon, then he had to act shrewdly and successfully upon opportunities. Tigranes knew that Sophene was vulnerable and that Armenian control of this region was indispensable if he wished to become a relevant actor in the wider geopolitical developments of the Near East. By controlling Sophene, Tigranes gained potential access to Cappadocia, Syria, and northern Mesopotamia. He correctly calculated that an attack on the weakest of his neighbors would be successful and unlikely to upset his Parthian allies since their attention had shifted south and west toward the Seleucids.

In fact, Tigranes' rapid success in Sophene gained the attention of Mithridates VI, not Mithridates II. For a decade Mithridates VI had been trying to subdue Cappadocia and secure his southern frontier. With Tigranes' conquest of Sophene, which had been an ally of Cappadocia, Armenia became an enemy of Cappadocia and a natural ally of Pontus.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, Mithridates VI offered his first daughter, Cleopatra, to Tigranes to form a military alliance against Cappadocia. It is fundamentally important to understand that this treaty in ca. 95 BCE was not a military alliance against Rome, as Justin mistakenly claims.<sup>46</sup> Justin records,

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<sup>44</sup> Olbrycht 2009: 169; Shayegan 2011: 312-15.

<sup>45</sup> Note Manandyan 2007: 20-3.

<sup>46</sup> For scholars who maintain this viewpoint, see Id. 23. Note also Olbrycht 2009: 172-3; Mayor 2010: 137, 147. Memnon clearly states that Pontus and Armenia did not have a military alliance against Rome until the third war, something Olbrycht and Mayor overlook. Memnon 29.6. When

The king of Armenia, at this time, was Tigranes, who had long before been committed as a hostage to the Parthians, but had subsequently been sent back to take possession of his father's throne. This prince Mithridates [VI] was extremely desirous to engage as an ally in the war, which he had long meditated, against the Romans. By the agency of Gordius, accordingly, he prevailed upon him to make war, having not the least thought of offending the Romans by the act, on Ariobarzanes [I], a prince of inactive disposition; and, that no deceit might seem to be intended, gave him his daughter Cleopatra in marriage. On the first approach of Tigranes, Ariobarzanes packed up his baggage and went off to Rome. Thus, through the instrumentality of Tigranes, Cappadocia was destined to fall again under the power of Mithridates. Nicomedes [III], too, dying at the same time, his son, who was also named Nicomedes [IV], was driven from his dominions by Mithridates, and, having gone as a suppliant to Rome, it was decreed by the senate that 'both the kings should be restored to their thrones;' and Aquilius and Manlius Maltinus were commissioned to see the decree executed. On being informed of this proceeding, Mithridates formed an alliance with Tigranes, with a resolution at once to go to war with the Romans; and they agreed that the cities and territory that should be taken from the enemy should be the share of Mithridates, and that the prisoners, and all booty that could be carried off, should belong to Tigranes.<sup>47</sup>

Justin here is guilty, as are the modern historians who accept Justin's condensed and confused account, of projecting the sentiments and conflicts of the 80s, 70s, and 60s BCE back upon the events of the 90s BCE.<sup>48</sup> To begin with, it is anachronistic to claim that Mithridates had long meditated war against Rome.<sup>49</sup> Justin takes part in a common literary trope where Roman writers

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Memnon records, "Mithridates obeyed this order reasonably, but gathered as his allies the Parthians, the Medes, Tigranes the Armenian, the kings of the Phrygians and [the king of] the Iberians," it does not mean that these arrangements were military alliances against Rome. Id. 22.4. The Armenians and the Medes did not aid Mithridates against Rome until the 60s BCE and the Parthians never did.

<sup>47</sup> Justin 38.3.1-5

<sup>48</sup> Justin fails to mention Sulla's expedition, and he neglects another invasion of Cappadocia by the generals, Mithraas and Bagoas. See Appian *Mithr.* 2.10. He gives the false impression that Nicomedes III and Ariobarzanes I fled to Rome at the same time. Moreover, he incorrectly argues that Mithridates VI and Tigranes did not form an alliance until 88 BCE, ignoring their previous coordinated efforts in Cappadocia. Note Manandyan 2007: 25. For Kallet-Marx's mistaken efforts to conflate the accounts of Appian and Justin into one Armenian invasion of Cappadocia and his efforts to reject Sherwin-White's two-invasion model, see Kallet-Marx 1995: 356-8.

<sup>49</sup> In this, I agree with McGing, who argues that our sources retrospectively filled in the details of Mithridates' early reign to portray him as a world conqueror. McGing 2009a: 204, 213.

presented Mithridates as a masterful, Hannibal-like enemy of Rome, bent on the destruction of Rome from a young age.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, Justin contradicts himself when he states that Tigranes, on the one hand, agreed to ally with Mithridates against Cappadocia “having not the least thought of offending the Romans by the act,” but on the other hand, resolved “to go to war with the Romans.” Justin’s first conclusion that Tigranes did not consider war against Rome is correct and demonstrates how Armenia remained a peripheral state on the outside edge of the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system at this time. Tigranes had spent several years at the Parthian court as a hostage. Like the Parthians, Tigranes had yet to have any contact with Rome. Roman hegemonic concerns were far from his mind in 95/94 BCE. He approached the situation in Cappadocia from the perspective of the expanded Parthian-dominated Eastern system, in which Armenia was included.

Cappadocia was a hostile rival state on the inside edge of this expanding interstate system, whose independence destabilized Tigranes’ western frontier. As a new ally of Pontus, Tigranes hoped to help Mithridates VI remove the potential threat of Cappadocia to Pontus’ southern frontier and Armenia’s new territorial gains in Sophene.<sup>51</sup> Justin’s passage helps illustrate the growing confusion of the international environment in the Near East in this period. Rome considered Cappadocia to be under its Mediterranean hegemony. Hence, any aggression against Cappadocia was a challenge to Roman prestige and perceived strength, making Roman retaliation likely. However, Tigranes did not appreciate or even anticipate these potential consequences because from his perspective, as well as the later Parthian perspective, the

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<sup>50</sup> Justin 37.1.7, 3.1, 4.2-6, 38.3.6-7; Appian *Mithr.* 2.13, 15.102, 16.107-9; Cic. *Flac.* 25; Cic. *Agr.* 2.19.52; Florus 1.40; Dio 37.11; Plut. *Pomp.* 41; Vell. Pat. 2.18, 40.1. This tradition affects the scholarly portrayal of Mithridates even today. Note Matyszak 2013: 136.

<sup>51</sup> We should reject the suggestion that Mithridates perhaps considered Tigranes a Pontic vassal. Mayor 2010: 153. The alliance of Pontus and Armenia was an alliance of equals.

geopolitical developments in the Near East in this period were disconnected from those of the Roman-dominated Mediterranean. To them Cappadocia was a hostile outlier in the East that could potentially destabilize the western frontier. From the Armenian or Parthian perspective, control of Cappadocia would protect their newly acquired territories in the region. It was not a coordinated strategic plan to challenge Roman dominance in Anatolia.<sup>52</sup>

Recently, Olbrycht has made a Parthian-centric argument that places Mithridates II at the center of these events. He states, “Tigranes’ activities in Sophene, then in Kappadokia, and his close cooperation with Mithridates Eupator must have been undertaken on Parthian initiative; the Arsakid king, a politician of broader horizons, was surely aware of Roman dominance in Anatolia and the Roman appetite for conquest.”<sup>53</sup> Olbrycht is correct to emphasize Tigranes’ vassal status. Armenia was a client of the Parthian Empire and, therefore, we should not consider the early aggressive actions of Tigranes as “anti-Parthian.” However, there are three fundamental flaws in Olbrycht’s interpretation of these events.

One, Olbrycht’s attempts to portray Mithridates II as the puppet-master behind Tigranes and Mithridates VI’s actions in the latter half of the 90s BCE is unrealistic. Mithridates II was busy fighting the Seleucids to the south. He perhaps supported the decision to control Cappadocia; however, we cannot assume, as Olbrycht does, that he gave the order. Additionally, Olbrycht erroneously assumes that Pontus and Parthia had formed an alliance by the late second century BCE.<sup>54</sup> Although there is evidence that Pontus and Parthia eventually became allies, this alliance did not materialize until after this invasion of Cappadocia.<sup>55</sup> Parthia never controlled

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<sup>52</sup> For this mistaken view, see Olbrycht 2009: 168-79.

<sup>53</sup> Id. 169.

<sup>54</sup> Id. 170-1.

<sup>55</sup> The alliance between Parthia and Pontus occurred sometime after this invasion of Cappadocia and before the fallout of the later invasion of Cappadocia in ca. 92 BCE. See Appian *Mithr.* 3.15.

Mithridates VI's actions. The relationship between Parthia and Pontus in the middle 90s BCE might have been friendly, but it was not cooperative. Further, if we accept that Mithridates II, King of Kings, and the greatest conqueror in Parthian history was the mastermind behind the annexation of Sophene and Cappadocia, he would not have allowed two potential rivals to gain these regions and the glory that came with it. Perception of strength was hugely important and military conquest was the best way to bolster that perception. Tigranes was a Parthian vassal; however, the Parthians did not encourage their other foreign vassals to expand their territory in the name of the Arsacids. Armenia was a recently conquered territory and Tigranes was not an Arsacid. It was dangerous to allow Tigranes to seek and acquire power. Ultimately, his conquest of Sophene was not upsetting enough to Mithridates II to require intervention or retaliation; however, Mithridates only could have perceived the growth of Tigranes' power and prestige as a potential threat and not as an asset.<sup>56</sup> Meanwhile, the potential benefits of encouraging Mithridates VI to expand his ever-growing power into Cappadocia for the Parthians are even smaller and more unlikely. Parthia did not oppose the operations of Tigranes and Mithridates in

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See also Memnon 22; Athen. 213a. We must be careful not to read too much into Appian's claim of a Ponto-Parthian alliance that threatened Rome. Appian was trying to demonstrate that Mithridates VI had long been preparing a hegemonic war against Rome. Appian used the speech of Mithridates' envoy to Rome, Pelopidas, to emphasize the growing power of Pontus. This is another example of compellence diplomacy. Pelopidas on Mithridates' behalf demands Roman compliance, blames Rome for Pontus' wars in Anatolia, and threatens Rome with the extent of Pontic power. Although Appian has Pelopidas claim that Mithridates II was Mithridates VI's ally, this does not mean that Parthia and Pontus had formed a military alliance against Rome. Memnon and Athenaeus' accounts contain similar problems. They each seek to portray Mithridates VI as the greatest power in the East; however, their evidence of Pontic alliances, despite possible Roman fears, does not mean that those alliances were directed against Rome.<sup>56</sup> Mithridates II would have preferred to annex Sophene and Cappadocia himself to secure his northwestern frontier directly; however, his primary objective was the submission of the longstanding major rival of the Parthian state, the Seleucids. He needed to secure Syria before pursuing aggressive policy in Anatolia.



Sophene and Cappadocia; however, the operations were ultimately not in Parthia's favor and certainly not at its bidding.

Two, Olbrycht's argument incorrectly assumes that Parthia, despite never before having contact with Rome, was well aware of the Roman position in Anatolia and the Roman "appetite for conquest." In the middle 90s BCE we cannot assume that Mithridates II had a clear understanding of Roman strength and intentions. It is likely that the two powers had at least heard of one another; however, this does not mean that they were well aware of each other's status and military exploits. In fact, the next forty years of confused, awkward, and inconsistent communication between the two powers is strong evidence that neither side had much of an awareness of the other's true intentions or power capabilities.<sup>57</sup> The inconsistency and difficulty of Roman and Parthian interactions from the 90s to the 50s BCE is not surprising once we consider that both powers dominated separate interstate systems during this period. It is anachronistic to claim that Parthia was developing a possible coalition of eastern powers to challenge Roman dominance in the 90s BCE.

Finally, Olbrycht overstates the presence of Rome in Anatolia in the 90s BCE. Although Rome had established the province of Asia in 133 BCE and created a network of friends and allies throughout Anatolia, before the Mithridatic Wars Roman intrusiveness in the region and its military presence was minimal.<sup>58</sup> Between the 130s and 90s BCE, Rome had no army in the East

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<sup>57</sup> Kennedy 1996a: 74-5. Note that in Appian's description of Crassus' invasion, he states, "Crassus took Syria and the adjacent country because he wanted a war with the Parthians, which he thought would be easy as well as glorious and profitable." Appian BC 2.18. Parthia's failed retaliatory invasion of Syria also demonstrates a lack of appreciation for Roman military capabilities. See Vell. Pat. 2.46. If Rome and Parthia did not appreciate one another's power capabilities in the 50s BCE, they certainly did not do so in the 90s BCE.

<sup>58</sup> It is peculiar that Olbrycht overlooks this point since in the same article he notes, "An essential observation is that Sulla's action was the first instance since the peace of Apameia in 188 BC of a Roman army intervening in Anatolia." Olbrycht 2009: 173. See also Sherwin-White 1977b: 72.

large enough to enforce the will of Rome through physical oppression. Rather, the Roman state relied on its military reputation and perceived strength to encourage the cooperation of the various Greek communities and Hellenistic kingdoms in the Greek and Near East.<sup>59</sup> Generally, the Roman application of soft power in the East was effective; however, the ongoing dynastic conflicts between Bithynia, Pontus, and Cappadocia and the explosion of rampant piracy in the region demonstrate its considerable shortcomings. Until the Mithridatic Wars, forms of Roman hard power and Rome's enthusiasm for conquest had considerable limits in the East. Mithridates VI spent decades testing the limits of Roman hegemony in Asia Minor and eventually concluded that he could challenge Roman domination in the region.<sup>60</sup> However, even Mithridates often seemed shocked at Roman responses of anger to his efforts to expand his kingdom in Anatolia. If Pontus and Armenia did not fully appreciate or understand Roman power capabilities and ambitions in the Near East, it is highly unlikely that Parthia did. Mithridates II perhaps had a vague understanding of the Roman state but little more. Parthia and Rome had negligible previous contact, and Mithridates' immediate geopolitical focus was on Seleucid Syria, not Roman Anatolia.

Thus, we should view the events of 95-94 BCE less as a Parthian driven scheme and more as an important step in the growing ambition and agency of Mithridates VI and Tigranes II. Both kings saw an opportunity to expand their power and prestige against the greater interests of

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It is impossible to conclude that Parthia had a clear understanding of Roman power and military reputation in Anatolia if Rome had been militarily absent in the region for nearly a century.

<sup>59</sup> Kallet-Marx 1996: 339-41.

<sup>60</sup> McGing also recognizes that Mithridates was trying to gauge how far he could advance his ambitions without challenging Rome outright. See McGing 2009a: 207. See also Madsen 2009: 194-6.

their respective system hegemon.<sup>61</sup> These kings formed an exclusive marriage alliance against Cappadocia for mutually beneficial but separate reasons.<sup>62</sup> Through this new alliance, Mithridates VI could secure his eastern and southern borders and focus on further expanding his holdings in Anatolia. Meanwhile, Tigranes could secure his western frontier and capitalize on his initial success in Sophene by adding to his military reputation. We should reject efforts to portray Tigranes as a passive Pontic or Parthian pawn.<sup>63</sup> He reacted predictably under the same pressures of the anarchic interstate system that motivate all states to pursue self-help regimes to maximize state power and security at the expense of neighbors. Parthia could not have anticipated the swiftness of Tigranes' expansion, nor ignored the potential threat of an exclusive Armeno-Pontic military alliance. However, Mithridates II chose not to react adversely against Tigranes' aggressive expansion and new military alliance while he had greater geopolitical concerns to the south. Thus, we should view Parthia's position in the middle 90s BCE as indifferent because of more pressing concerns or at most as reluctantly tolerant. There is no conclusive evidence that Parthia was supportive or encouraging.

Tigranes successfully invaded Cappadocia, expelled Ariobarzanes, and installed Mithridates VI's puppet on the Cappadocian throne.<sup>64</sup> Neither Mithridates VI nor Tigranes

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<sup>61</sup> Again, this does not make Tigranes' policy anti-Parthian. Yet it also was not pro-Parthian. It simply was pro-Armenian.

<sup>62</sup> Both kings formed separate large networks of marriage alliances with numerous other kings and communities for a wide variety of reasons. There was nothing unique about this marriage alliance. See for example Plut. *Luc.* 18; Dio 36.14.2. In fact, Mithridates had no less than eighteen children and six siblings. Højte 2009: 126.

<sup>63</sup> For the portrayal of Tigranes as a pawn of Mithridates VI, see Reinach 1890: 105; Dolens and Khatch 1907; Eckhardt 1909: 403-4. For the rejection of this portrayal, see Manandyan 2007: 25-6. For the portrayal of Tigranes as a pawn of Mithridates II, see Olbrycht 2009: 169; Shayegan 2011: 312-13, 315, 328. Mayor portrays Tigranes as highly ambitious but overstates the long-term "grand strategies" of Tigranes to fight Parthia and Rome. Mayor 2010: 136-9.

<sup>64</sup> See Plut. *Sul.* 5.3; Justin 38.3.2-3; Appian *Mithr.* 2.10

anticipated Rome finally taking a direct interest in the recent invasion and annexation of Cappadocia. Mithridates' previous efforts to control Cappadocia through his nephew, Ariarathes VII, and then through his son, Ariarathes IX, and the nobleman, Gordius, had gained the attention of Rome because the rival king of Bithynia, Nicomedes III, desired to control the region himself and, therefore, petitioned Rome in ca. 96 BCE to intervene.<sup>65</sup> Previously in the back and forth conflict between Nicomedes and Mithridates over Cappadocia, the Roman Senate had proceeded cautiously, emphasizing stability and a balance of power in Anatolia but refusing to commit troops to the region. Gaius Marius travelled to the Near East without an army in 99/98 BCE to ascertain the potential dangers of Mithridates to the region. He met with Mithridates and left him with a blunt statement on power relations that perfectly reflects the systemic pressures of the ancient interstate system. Plutarch records, "He [Marius] would not bend or yield, but said: 'O King, either strive to be stronger than Rome, or do her bidding without a word.' This speech startled the king, who had often heard of Roman speech, but then for the first time in all its boldness."<sup>66</sup> If we can accept the validity of Plutarch's account, Marius' message here is clear; back down or be prepared to defeat Rome.<sup>67</sup> Marius was engaging in compellence diplomacy with Mithridates. He was following previous Roman policy in the Near East to use the threat of force and the perceived strength of Rome's military reputation to maintain Roman hegemony in the region. Marius' bold words directly reflect the sentiments of Thucydides in his Melian

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<sup>65</sup> Justin 38.1-2; Memnon 22. Note also McGing 1986: 75-7; Mayor 2010: 129-36.

<sup>66</sup> Plut. *Mar.* 31.3. See also Cic. *Brut.* 1.5.3

<sup>67</sup> Kallet-Marx argues that Marius was in Anatolia only to inform the senate of the recent dynastic conflict. Kallet-Marx cautions not to read too much into Marius' meeting with Mithridates since "Marius's intent was to ward off further adventurism with a blunt reminder to him [that is, Mithridates] of the meaning of Rome's imperium." Kallet-Marx 1995: 247.

Dialogue, where strong rule and the weak endure.<sup>68</sup> Mithridates chose to abandon his gains in Cappadocia temporarily to avoid open conflict with Rome; however, Roman efforts to secure an election in the kingdom were a farce, and Mithridates quickly looked to reassert his power in the region.<sup>69</sup> In his renewed efforts, Mithridates secured his alliance with Tigranes. This source of added strength and security has led scholars to argue that the Armeno-Pontic alliance emboldened Mithridates to adopt a more aggressive anti-Roman foreign policy.<sup>70</sup> Although this may be true, it does not mean that Pontus and Armenia formed an anti-Roman alliance. This was a military alliance against the mutual enemy of Cappadocia, not Rome.

Despite Olbrycht's success in shifting the discussion of these events away from the predominant Roman-centric point of view, he is too confident in Parthian involvement in the operations against Cappadocia and too quick to dismiss the agency of Pontus and Armenia. Parthia offered no "direct aid" to Mithridates or Tigranes, and Parthia was not a military ally of Pontus in 95/94 BCE.<sup>71</sup> We should reject Olbrycht's conclusion that Pontus, Armenia, and

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<sup>68</sup> "Since you [Melians] know as well as we [Athenians] do that right, as the world goes, is only in question between equals in power, while the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must." Thuc. 5.89

<sup>69</sup> Justin 38.2.6-8, 5.9. Diodorus states that Mithridates sent envoys to Rome around this time to bribe the senate. Diod. 36.15. McGing correctly assesses Mithridates' cautious and calculated policy in Anatolia at this time. He states, "This was a clear decision to back off, but there is nothing about it that requires the conclusion that it was based on an understanding of his [Mithridates'] position as a compliant Hellenistic king, who respected Roman dominance: it was simply a pragmatic decision, just like that of Antiochos IV in 167 BC, not to confront Rome on this particular occasion. He had pushed and found that he had come close to the limits of what was possible without war." McGing 2009a: 208-9. In a recent article, Ballesteros-Pastor argues that Marius' meeting with Mithridates was in defense of Roman interests and helped alter Mithridates' policy in Cappadocia and the international relations between Rome and Pontus. He concludes, "Eupator seemed to have learned his lesson, and decided, in effect, not to defy Rome until he had enough strength to guarantee a successful result." Ballesteros-Pastor 2014.

<sup>70</sup> McGing 1986: 84; Olbrycht 2009: 172-3. See also Sherwin-White 1977a: 175; Mayor 2010: 138; Sampson 2015: 23, 85-7. Contra Manandyan 2007: 26-9.

<sup>71</sup> Olbrycht 2009: 173.

Parthia acted in cooperation against Roman interests in Cappadocia. Tigranes had no anticipation of conflict with Rome, and Mithridates II took no part in the invasion of the region. Mithridates VI perhaps saw a new opportunity to control Cappadocia indirectly and challenge Roman hegemony now that his eastern frontier was secure. However, despite the prevailing belief that Mithridates' policy radically changed in the middle 90s BCE, he appears to have approached interference in Cappadocia with his familiar ingenuity and caution. He did not use his sizable army to conquer the region.<sup>72</sup> He instead encouraged his new ally Tigranes to invade the region and reestablish his indirect rule over the kingdom. That is, this was yet another scheme in a long line of abortive policies to secure Pontus' indirect control of Cappadocia without forcing a hegemonic war with Rome. The alliance with Armenia allowed Mithridates to concentrate fully on possible western expansion and, therefore, encouraged him to take more risks and act more boldly. Yet he remained unwilling to challenge Rome directly for several more years.

#### Rome and Parthia Finally Meet: Cappadocia, Sulla, and Mithridates II

Unfortunately, the chronology of the crucial events of the middle and late 90s BCE in Anatolia is as one scholar puts it “hopelessly confused.”<sup>73</sup> There is little scholarly consensus on the course of the Pontic and Armenian operations in Cappadocia, the roles and reactions of Rome and Parthia, and the immediate fallout of these events. This study proposes the following reconstruction of events based upon the close consideration of various scholarly accounts and the geopolitical realities of this period. To create a fuller appreciation of these events, I follow a system-level analysis, avoiding a strictly Roman or Parthian viewpoint. The picture that emerges

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<sup>72</sup> Although an exaggeration, Justin records that Mithridates had used “eighty thousand foot, ten thousand horse, and six hundred chariots armed with scythes” to threaten Cappadocia previously. Justin 38.1.8

<sup>73</sup> Mayor 2010: 138.

reflects the shortsighted, confused geopolitical interactions of these states as the process of system overlap complicated the international environment and as the actions of Pontus and Armenia brought Rome and Parthia together for the first time.

In 96/95 BCE Tigranes II seized the Armenian throne as a Parthian vassal. In early 95 BCE Tigranes annexed Sophene, without the direction of Mithridates II, and soon after formed a separate military alliance with Mithridates VI against Cappadocia once he married Mithridates VI's daughter. Later that year Tigranes, acting under his own self-interest and in accord with his alliance with Pontus, invaded Cappadocia and expelled the pro-Roman candidate, Ariobarzanes I. The military alliance of Tigranes and Mithridates had specific parameters that Tigranes followed.<sup>74</sup> He handed the region over to Mithridates' son, Ariarathes, and the boy's guardian, Gordius; he left a small force in Cappadocia; and he returned to Armenia with his spoils. We might wonder why Tigranes, who did all the hard work and took all the risk in the conquest, might agree to a treaty under which he was to hand the region over to Pontus. The answer lies in part in Tigranes' vassal status to Parthia. Instead of invading Cappadocia at the bidding of Mithridates II, as put forward by Olbrycht, Tigranes was carefully acting in his own self-interest.<sup>75</sup> The invasion of Cappadocia was an opportunity to gain military prestige, expand his strength, and enhance the perception of his power. Yet Tigranes also had to be mindful of his vulnerable position as a Parthian vassal. Although Tigranes actively sought opportunities to expand his power and the security of his kingdom, he was in no position to challenge Parthia openly. He had already annexed Sophene and the further annexation of Cappadocia would have been a bold and risky decision. This rapid expansion of the Armenian state would have made

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<sup>74</sup> Both sides agreed that Mithridates would gain control of the region and that Tigranes would have his pick of the spoils. Justin 38.3.5

<sup>75</sup> Olbrycht 2009: 173. Note also Lerouge 2007: 43.

Mithridates II increasingly concerned about the potential threat of Tigranes and brought Tigranes' actions under increased Parthian scrutiny. However, from Tigranes' point of view, the pact he made independently with Mithridates VI was an ideal solution to these concerns. The invasion of Cappadocia gave him glory, status, and wealth, which he took back to Armenia to help build his powerbase there. Meanwhile, handing the region over to Pontus passed the responsibility of controlling the kingdom to someone else and made the expansion of Mithridates VI, rather than himself, the greater concern of the Parthians. That is, Tigranes' primary concern was to maximize his power capabilities without encouraging Parthia to intervene further in his affairs. In Cappadocia Tigranes acted boldly out of self-interest and not as a Parthian or Pontic pawn. As discussed above, although Tigranes had carefully considered the possible ramifications of his actions in the Eastern system, he did not anticipate a Roman response to his invasion, and therefore, did not plan for this contingency. This reflects the fact that Armenia remained outside the limits of the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system. Since Cappadocia had become a semi-peripheral region of both these interstate systems, the surprise, uncertainty, and confusion that followed the events of 95/94 BCE was a result of the first phase of system overlap between the Mediterranean and Eastern systems. The actions of Tigranes and Mithridates VI in Cappadocia concerned Parthia and Rome but for separate reasons. That Mithridates II had no hand in Tigranes' invasion of Cappadocia and no anti-Roman intent will become evident below.

In 95 BCE, after Tigranes' successful invasion, Cappadocia was once again under Mithridates VI's authority.<sup>76</sup> The main point of scholarly contention arises out of the Roman reaction to these events. Plutarch records,

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<sup>76</sup> McGing views Mithridates VI's alliance with Tigranes and his renewed interest in Cappadocia as an "intentional provocation." McGing 2009a: 209. However, it seems more likely that Mithridates still did not completely associate his meddling in Cappadocia with aggression



After his praetorship, he [Cornelius Sulla] was sent out to Cappadocia, ostensibly to reinstate Ariobarzanes, but really to check the restless activities of Mithridates, who was adding to his dominion and power fully as much as he had inherited. Accordingly, he took out with him no large force of his own, but made use of the allies, whom he found eager to serve him, and, after slaying many of the Cappadocians themselves, and yet more of the Armenians who came to their aid, he drove out Gordius, and restored Ariobarzanes as king.<sup>77</sup>

Thus, Plutarch indicates that Tigranes' careful geopolitical maneuvering had in part worked, although in an unexpected way. The Romans did not hold Tigranes, who invaded and conquered the region, accountable. Instead, the Roman Senate sent Sulla to check Mithridates VI's expanding dominion, specifically in Cappadocia.<sup>78</sup> Plutarch's passage also demonstrates that Tigranes left a force behind in Cappadocia, likely to help stabilize the region and to support the pro-Pontic regime as it took root. Unfortunately, Plutarch does not indicate when Sulla reclaimed Cappadocia for Ariobarzanes. Scholars have put forth numerous arguments variously placing the event in each of the years between 96-91 BCE.<sup>79</sup> I share Olbrycht's conclusion that to reconstruct

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against Rome. Rather, Mithridates' alliance with Tigranes was a new Pontic strategy to attempt to control Cappadocia. Mithridates must have hoped that, since his attempts to install a vassal in Cappadocia directly had failed, an ally from outside of the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system could install a vassal indirectly for him. That is, once again Mithridates was looking for a new way to test Roman authority and commitment without open conflict. Madsen 2009: 194-6.

<sup>77</sup> Plut. *Sull.* 5.3. I altered this translation to reflect the Greek more accurately.

<sup>78</sup> Mithridates later complained to his soldiers during his conflict with Rome that the Romans had unfairly attributed the actions of Tigranes to him. Justin 38.5.8

<sup>79</sup> For Sulla in Cappadocia, see Plut. *Sull.* 5; Livy *Epit.* 70; Ruf. *Fest.* 15; Vell. *Pat.* 2.24.3. For 96 BCE, see Badian 1959; Badian 1964: 157-78; Keaveney 1978: 395-6; Keaveney 1980: 149-57; Keaveney 1981: 195; Badian 1984; Cagniard 1991: 295-303; Brennan 1992; Keaveney 1995; Kallet-Marx 1995: 355-61; Kennedy 1996a: 74-5; Wolski 2003: 76; Sheldon 2010: 13; Shayegan 2011: 311; Sampson 2015: 23. For 95 BCE, see Mayor 2010: 136. For 94 BCE, see Sherwin-White 1977a: 173-83; Sumner 1978: 396 n.6; Sullivan 1980: 1127-36; McGing 1986: 78-9; Callataÿ 1997: 205; Olbrycht 2009: 173. For 92 BCE (or even 91 BCE), see Rawlinson 1885 (2002): 75; Reinach 1890; Debevoise 1938: 46; Ziegler 1964: 20; Sherwin-White 1977b: 72; Bulin 1983: 35-44; Sherwin-White 1984: 109-11; Chahin 1987: 225; Arnaud 1991: 55-64; Manandyan 2007: 24; Lerouge 2007: 43; Shayegan 2011: 311; Sampson 2015: 52, 86-7. See also Dmitriev 2006: 296-7. For the detailed argument that supports Badian's readjustment but argues that Sulla remained in Cappadocia until 93/92 BCE, see Brennan 1992.

the events of this period in the Near East successfully we must consider the role of Tigranes. He states, “In the attempt to establish the disputed date one circumstance has been neglected so far; in all likelihood, Sulla’s expedition was conducted in answer to Tigranes’ intervention in Kappadokia.”<sup>80</sup> Thus, if we accept that Tigranes invaded Cappadocia in 95 BCE after subduing Sophene, then Sulla could not have reconquered Cappadocia before 95 BCE. Further, because it would have taken time for Rome to react to this news, 94 BCE realistically is the earliest possible year for Sulla’s reconquest of Cappadocia.<sup>81</sup>

For scholars who accept the later dates of 94-91 BCE, the participation of Tigranes in the invasion of Cappadocia is not an issue. However, for those who accept the year 96 BCE, the possible involvement of Tigranes is a major obstacle. For instance, this has led Kallet-Marx to conclude that the invasion of Tigranes found in Justin and the invasion of Mithraas and Bagoas found in Appian are the same invasion, occurring in ca. 91 BCE. His unconvincing reasoning for this is that “the assumption that one or the other is leaving out further expulsions and restorations of Ariobarzanes seems arbitrary and most dubious.”<sup>82</sup> However, Kallet-Marx puts too much stock in the incomplete summaries of Justin and Appian. Both writers had to condense events that spanned several years into small passages. This inevitably led to conflation and misrepresentation of events. For example, Appian records that Mithridates V invaded Cappadocia and then immediately states,

He was succeeded by his son, Mithridates [VI], surnamed Dionysus, and also Eupator. The Romans ordered him to restore Cappadocia to Ariobarzanes [I], who had fled to them and who seemed to have a better title to the government of that country than Mithridates; or perhaps they distrusted the growing power of that

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<sup>80</sup> Olbrycht 2009: 173. Note that, although he believed the event took place in 92 BCE, Manandyan associated Sulla’s expedition with the actions of Tigranes. Manandyan 2007: 24.

<sup>81</sup> Olbrycht admits that 93 BCE also remains an option. Olbrycht 2009: 173 n.95a.

<sup>82</sup> Kallet-Marx 1995: 357.

great monarchy and thought it would be better to have it divided into several parts.<sup>83</sup>

That is, Appian ignores over two decades of events and makes it seem as though as soon as Mithridates VI assumed the throne, the Romans demanded the restoration of Ariobarzanes. Yet Ariobarzanes did not become king of Cappadocia until after the Roman appointment of him in the middle 90s BCE.<sup>84</sup> In fact, Appian conflates all of Mithridates' attempts to control Cappadocia into a single event. Justin's account has similar oversights discussed above. It is not "arbitrary" and "dubious" to argue that there were two invasions of Cappadocia in this period. The poor chronological integrity of Appian and Justin's narratives does not lend itself to such confidence.

Plutarch's passage on Sulla's intervention in Cappadocia adds to the complexity of the reconstruction of this period. Kallet-Marx admits that his one-invasion model "cannot have led to Sulla's intervention: it was too late, and in any case it was M. Aquilius, not Sulla, who was given the job of restoring him [Ariobarzanes] on that occasion."<sup>85</sup> However, he has to go out of his way to deny Plutarch's statement that Sulla had "restored" Ariobarzanes to the throne (Ἀριοβαρζανην δὲ ἀπέδειξε βασιλέα) and to deny the summary of Livy's account that states, "Ariobarzanes was restored to the kingdom of Cappadocia by Lucius Cornelius Sulla (*Ariobarzanes in regnum Cappadociae a L. Cornelio Sulla reductus est*)."<sup>86</sup> The denial of such evidence and the efforts to conflate Appian and Justin's accounts are unnecessary. The surviving

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<sup>83</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 2.10

<sup>84</sup> Justin 38.2.8

<sup>85</sup> Kallet-Marx 1995: 357.

<sup>86</sup> Id. 357-8. Note Livy *Epit.* 70.6. I altered this translation to reflect the Latin more accurately.

historical record makes it seem more likely that a prior invasion had already forced Ariobarzanes out of his kingdom.<sup>87</sup>

Meanwhile, Kallet-Marx's evidence against Tigranes leading the invasion of 95 BCE is even more circumstantial. He argues that, since Sulla relied mostly on allied troops to retake Cappadocia, it is "highly unlikely" that Tigranes had expelled Ariobarzanes, implying that Tigranes had large armies that he was willing to use against Rome in 94 BCE.<sup>88</sup> However, Kallet-Marx's conclusion demonstrates his lack of appreciation of the realities of the geopolitical situation in the Near East at this time. Just as Tigranes and Mithridates II had little understanding of Roman power capabilities in the middle 90s BCE, we cannot assume that Sulla would have had much, if any, understanding of Armenian power capabilities or the Armeno-Pontic alliance. It is reasonable to argue that all Sulla would have known about the situation in Cappadocia after arriving to Roman Cilicia was that pro-Pontic forces had forced Ariobarzanes to flee, that the majority of these forces had subsequently left the region, and that the newly appointed pro-Pontic regime of Ariarathes was vulnerable. Kallet-Marx inflates Tigranes' military strength at this time, which was minimal, and his willingness to fight the Romans, which was negligible. Further, Sulla did not bring a large Roman force to Cappadocia for the following reasons. First, he was acting as the governor of Roman Cilicia and could not abandon the region with its rampant piracy problems.<sup>89</sup> Second, Sulla decided the threat in Cappadocia did not warrant a full-scale Roman invasion (which proved to be true).<sup>90</sup> Third, a local force allowed him to utilize

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<sup>87</sup> See Sherwin-White 1977a: 175; Keaveney 1980: 155.

<sup>88</sup> Kallet-Marx 1995: 358.

<sup>89</sup> For the province of Cilicia and its origins, note Freeman 1986.

<sup>90</sup> We must be mindful that Sulla's expedition was relatively minor. It was the first Roman military action in the region in decades; however, this was a long overdue reaction to decades of Pontic meddling in Cappadocia. A couple of years earlier Marius had travelled to Asia Minor to curb Mithridates VI's ambitions in the region. Marius' threats did not work, and Mithridates

greater speed in organizing his Cappadocian campaign. Plutarch states that he “made use of the allies, whom he found eager to serve him.”<sup>91</sup> Thus, he could raise a highly motivated, large allied force to strike quickly at Ariarathes’ vulnerable regime. Finally, Plutarch records that Sulla travelled to Asia Minor to “check the restless activities of Mithridates.”<sup>92</sup> That is, Sulla’s concern in the region was the actions of Pontus, not of Armenia. This is not surprising since Sulla’s concerns were those of the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system.

Once Sulla had gathered his allies, he killed “many of the Cappadocians themselves, and yet more of the Armenians who came to their aid” in battle before restoring Ariobarzanes to the throne.<sup>93</sup> Although scholars widely accept that these Armenians were Tigranes’ men, Kallet-Marx argues that the Armenians Sulla defeated were Pontic mercenaries or allies from the vassal lands of Lesser Armenia.<sup>94</sup> He is correct that Plutarch’s words are ambiguous here and that Pontus had access to Armenian troops that had no affiliation to Tigranes. Therefore, this passage on its own does not prove that Sulla invaded Cappadocia after Tigranes had become king.

However, if these Armenians were Gordius’ men, it seems odd that Plutarch would distinguish

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renewed his interests in Cappadocia. Sulla’s small expedition of local forces was an unsurprising and reserved escalation of Roman force to reassert its regional hegemony and maintain the balance of power in the region. We should not minimize its intentions, as does Kallet-Marx; however, we also should not read too much into it, as does Olbrycht. Olbrycht argues that the Roman reaction “was due to the emergence of a new alliance that must have been perceived as extremely dangerous for Roman interests in Anatolia.” Olbrycht 2009: 173-4. Olbrycht incorrectly assumes that Pontus, Armenia, and Parthia had formed an anti-Roman coalition. Note also Dobbins 1974: 70. The alliance between Mithridates VI and Tigranes surely was troubling to the Romans, who already were anxious over the potential threat of Pontus to regional stability. In fact, the invasion of Cappadocia by Tigranes demonstrated that the alliance was dangerous. However, as discussed above, we should be cautious when assuming the expanse of Roman knowledge of the rapidly evolving geopolitical atmosphere in the Near East, and we should reject notions of Armenia or Parthia acting in this period directly against Roman interests.

<sup>91</sup> Plut. *Sul.* 5.3

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> Kallet-Marx 1995: 358-9. Note also Keaveney 1980: 156-7. Contra Arnaud 1991.

between two forces. Kallet-Marx seems to suggest that Gordius had an army of loyal Cappadocians and a separate army of Armenian “friends.” Yet if these men were all a part of Gordius’ army, why does Plutarch make a specific distinction between the two forces, and why, if faced with Sulla’s imminent invasion would Gordius divide his forces, allowing Sulla to destroy his divided army in pieces? It seems far more likely that Plutarch distinguishes between the Cappadocian and Armenian forces because they belonged to different armies. Thus, when Gordius and his Cappadocian army were attacked, the force left behind by Tigranes in the region tried to come to his aid. Kallet-Marx’s conclusions are unconvincing. When we take Plutarch, Appian, Justin, and Livy’s accounts collectively into consideration, there is more evidence to support an argument for Tigranes’ invasion of Cappadocia in ca. 95 BCE than there is against it.<sup>95</sup> Therefore, Sulla’s reconquest of the region likely occurred in 94 BCE after he had had time to arrive in Roman Cilicia and organize his swift expedition. There is one more piece of evidence in favor of this reconstruction highlighted by Olbrycht and otherwise ignored by scholars. We must consider the Parthian reaction to these events.

After defeating Gordius and Tigranes’ separate forces and restoring Ariobarzanes to the Cappadocian throne, Sulla marched to the easternmost region of Cappadocia along the Euphrates.<sup>96</sup> Once he was there, for the first time in their histories Rome and Parthia interacted. Plutarch records,

As he [Sulla] lingered on the banks of the Euphrates, he received a visit from Orobazus, a Parthian, who came as an ambassador from king Arsaces [Mithridates II], although up to this time the two nations had held no intercourse with one another. This also is thought to have been part of Sulla's great good fortune, that he should be the first Roman with whom the Parthians held

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<sup>95</sup> Note also Sid. *Carm.* 2.458-60, 7.79-82, which asserts that Sulla fought Tigranes. See also Arnaud 1991; Keaveney 1995.

<sup>96</sup> Most likely he was in the area of Melitene since it bordered Parthian controlled Commagene and Armenian controlled Sophene. Strabo 12.1.2. See also Olbrycht 2009: 174.

conference when they wanted alliance and friendship (συμμαχίας καὶ φιλίας). On this occasion, too, it is said that he ordered three chairs to be set, one for Ariobarzanes, one for Orobazus, and one for himself, and that he sat between them both and gave them audience. For this the king of Parthia afterwards put Orobazus to death; and while some people commended Sulla for the airs that he assumed with the Barbarians, others accused him of vulgarity and ill-timed arrogance.<sup>97</sup>

There have been numerous efforts to analyze this first negotiation between Rome and Parthia, and most scholars maintain that Sulla, acting out of ignorance or arrogance, humiliated the Parthian ambassador, whom Mithridates II later executed for submitting to Rome.<sup>98</sup> However, Olbrycht's Parthian-centric approach has offered a new and convincing conclusion. Olbrycht states,

While focusing on Plutarch's ambiguous wording, scholars have overlooked an essential circumstance – the presence of Ariobarzanes, who had been deposed from the throne by Tigranes acting according to Parthian demands. Sulla had reinstalled him in Kappadokia. Orobazes' fault was thus his participation in negotiations with Ariobarzanes, who was a usurper in the eyes of the Parthian King of Kings. This is why the envoy was executed on the orders of his sovereign.<sup>99</sup>

Although Olbrycht overemphasizes Parthian involvement in the Cappadocian invasion of Tigranes, his emphasis on the ramifications of the vassalage of Tigranes to Parthia on the Parthian negotiations with Sulla is innovative.

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<sup>97</sup> Plut. *Sul.* 5.4-5. Note also Livy. *Epit.* 70.6, which states, "Envoys of the Parthians, sent by the Arsacid king, came to Sulla to ask for the friendship of the Roman people (*ut amicitiam populi Romani peterent*).” See also Ruf. *Fest.* 15.2; Vell. *Pat.* 2.24.3; Ampelius 31

<sup>98</sup> Rawlinson 1885 (2002): 75-6; Dobiáš, 1931: 218-21; Debevoise 1938: 46-7; Sykes 1951: 338; Ziegler 1964: 20-3; Colledge 1967: 34; Wolski 1980a: 257; Keaveney 1981: 195-9; Sherwin-White 1984: 220; Sullivan 1990: 118-19; Wolski 1993: 92-3; Campbell 1993: 214; Kennedy 1996a: 75; Wolski 2003: 76; Brosius 2006: 94; Lerouge 2007: 48-9; Sheldon 2010: 15. Generally, the mistaken argument is that Orobazus insulted Mithridates II by treating the Romans as equals.

<sup>99</sup> Olbrycht 2009: 174.

Parthia had not actively participated in the Cappadocian affair. However, the rapid invasion by Tigranes and the counter invasion by Sulla had destabilized the region and inadvertently brought Rome into military conflict with a Parthian vassal for the first time. In 94 BCE Mithridates II's focus remained on the defeat of the Seleucids in Syria. Yet Cappadocia and Armenia were the key to stabilizing the northern frontier of the Parthian Empire. Mithridates II could not hope to expand his influence south into Syria and Palestine without a secure northern border. One must appreciate the confusion that would have surrounded the Cappadocian affair because of the growing overlap of the Mediterranean and Eastern systems. Tigranes and Mithridates VI had initiated a war with limited intentions, the submission of Cappadocia, but with seemingly immense ramifications, the first Roman invasion of the region and the first meeting of Rome and Parthia.<sup>100</sup> Tigranes had not anticipated a Roman military reaction, as considerations for Roman concerns were far from his mind. He apparently had no knowledge of Roman intentions to keep Cappadocia free of Pontic influence. Mithridates II's understanding of the situation would have been equally unclear. Parthia was content to focus on the geopolitical developments of the Eastern system. It is significant that, although Parthia had expanded into eastern Anatolia and had the ability to send envoys to Roman Cilicia or Asia, there were no efforts made until the expedition of Sulla. This is because Mithridates was not yet concerned with Roman intentions in Anatolia, his primary focus being the longstanding hegemonic rivalry with the Seleucids. However, Tigranes' shortsighted invasion of Cappadocia and Sulla's determined counterattack against a Parthian vassal alarmed Mithridates and forced a Parthian response.

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<sup>100</sup> For a recent evaluation of the generalized imagery of the Parthians in Rome from Sulla to Crassus, see Lerouge 2007: 43-81.



The clash between the pro-Roman forces of Sulla and Tigranes' men in Cappadocia was a new, potentially dangerous geopolitical development that demanded Mithridates II's attention. With Sulla reaching the Euphrates with an army, Mithridates would have had concerns about Roman military intentions in the East, which he considered under his hegemony, and the security of Parthia's northern frontier. The control of a strategically important region like Cappadocia by a potentially hostile, mysterious western power would have been troubling. Further, Mithridates had to consider the possibility of further conflict between Rome and Armenia. There was no way for Mithridates to know Sulla's eastern intentions or lack thereof, and since Sulla had just defeated part of Tigranes' army and stood with his soldiers at the border of Tigranes' lands, a Roman invasion of Armenia was a considerable threat. It is for these reasons that Mithridates sent his envoy, Orobazus, to meet with Sulla. Mithridates was too concerned with his war to the south to meet with Sulla himself; however, the Roman defeat of a Parthian vassal in Cappadocia, the return of the region to a hostile regime, and Sulla's threatening presence on the Euphrates meant that Mithridates needed to gauge Rome's intentions and, if possible, to secure the stability of his northern frontier.<sup>101</sup>

Despite the confused later Roman tradition about the meeting and the erroneous acceptance of this tradition by numerous modern scholars, nothing notable came of the first negotiations between Rome and Parthia.<sup>102</sup> Before we continue, it is important to clarify that

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<sup>101</sup> Keaveney makes the point that the Parthians might have sent an envoy to Sulla to discover his intentions toward Tigranes. Keaveney 1981: 196. Although this is a likely possibility if Sulla invaded in 94 BCE, Keaveney maintains that Sulla invaded Cappadocia in 96 BCE (that is before Tigranes was king), and therefore, his point is nonsensical within the year 96 BCE reconstruction.

<sup>102</sup> See Florus 1.46.4; Orosius 6.13.2; Ruf. Fest. 15. See also Julian *Caes.* 326C. Note also Dobiáš, 1931: 219; Debevoise 1938: 47; Ziegler 1964: 22; Keaveney 1981: 197-8, 209; Sherwin-White 1984: 222-3; Sullivan 1990: 118; Keaveney 2005: 33; Sheldon 2010: 16.

there is a distinct difference between unofficial verbal agreements and formal treaties in the dealings of the Romans and Hellenistic and Eastern polities. Unfortunately, many scholars fail to appreciate this crucial difference in the relations of Rome and Parthia. I support Kallet-Marx's distinction when he states, "I accept the view that mere reference to 'alliance and friendship' implies only a verbal act, a Hellenistic diplomatic courtesy that had no necessary connection with a formal treaty. The existence of a treaty can be presumed only where it is unambiguously indicated in the evidence."<sup>103</sup> The confused, vague, and varied tradition of later Graeco-Roman writers, who recorded that Rome and Parthia exchanged several treaties from the 90s to the 60s BCE, is immensely ambiguous and likely anachronistic. We have no unambiguous evidence of the existence of a formal treaty between Rome and Parthia until the start of the first century CE. Instead we have a tradition of later Graeco-Roman writers attempting to help explain the Romano-Parthian rivalry and the geopolitical realities of their times through the invention of a long and formal diplomatic exchange between the two powers. Most modern scholars accept this distorted Roman-centric perspective without much consideration. In reality, the Romans and Parthians in the first half of the first century BCE preferred to remain mostly isolated from one another and relied on nonbinding, infrequent verbal acts as a diplomatic courtesy.

Although the issue of modern scholars incorrectly assuming that the Romans and Parthians made several formal treaties in this period will reemerge multiple times in this study, as concerns the interactions of Sulla and Mithridates' envoy, Olbrycht is correct to reject completely the tradition that Rome and Parthia signed a treaty marking the Euphrates as the common boundary between the two powers.<sup>104</sup> Parthia at this time was at the height of its

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<sup>103</sup> Kallet-Marx 1995: 185.

<sup>104</sup> Olbrycht 2009: 174. Note also Sherwin-White 1984: 219-20; Kennedy 1996a: 75. There is a misguided scholarly tradition that argues that this meeting produced the formal recognition of

supremacy and an unrivaled power in the Eastern system.<sup>105</sup> Mithridates II had successfully and aggressively expanded the western reaches of his empire for several years, and there were no signs of him stopping his western ambitions. We should abandon the opinion that the Parthians were acting passively in the hope of gaining peaceful friendship with all of their neighbors.<sup>106</sup> In fact, Mithridates' primary focus in the late 90s BCE was the submission of Syria, which according to this supposed treaty was on the "Roman" side of the Euphrates. Over the next few years, Parthian armies crossed the Euphrates on numerous occasions as Parthian forces

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*amicitia* between Rome and Parthia. See esp. Dobiáš 1931: 231f.; Debevoise 1938: 47; Ziegler 1964: 20f.; Poirot 2014: 22-8. See also Kallet-Marx 1995: 249. I also agree with Sherwin-White that, although talk of friendly relations perhaps took place, "the famous incident had no practical issue." Sherwin-White 1984: 219-20. Ultimately, Sulla did not have the authority to conclude formal agreements without the senate's approval, and none of our sources mentions a formal recognition of Roman and Parthian *amicitia* at this time. The passing reference in the Epitome of Livy that Parthia "sought the friendship of the Roman people," which also was picked up by much later writers who followed Livy's history, at most speaks of a Parthian desire for a friendly relationship with the foreign power of Rome and is likely anachronistic. See Livy *Epit.* 70.7; Ruf. Fest. 15; Florus 1.46.4; Ampelius 31; Orosius 6.13.2

<sup>105</sup> The Roman-centric perspective of modern scholarship distorts the early relations of Rome and Parthia. For instance, Keaveney dubiously argues that Mithridates II "was, above else, anxious to be on friendly terms with Rome in order to secure his own territories which of course at this time included Armenia as a satellite." Further, Keaveney portrays the Parthians as eager to secure friendly relations with any power that presented a potential threat and afraid of Roman strength. He assumes incorrectly that the primary policy of the Parthians from the 90s to the 60s BCE was the maintenance of friendship with Rome. Keaveney 1981: 209-11. Such an opinion unfairly robs the Parthians of their agency and power and ignores the separate perspective of the Parthians.

<sup>106</sup> This is the inaccurate depiction of Sheldon. She states, "Parthia's policy throughout this period seems pacific. Whatever agreements they made with the Romans, they also tried to maintain peaceful alliances with Tigranes of Armenia and Mithridates of Pontus. Parthia generally wanted to be friends with all of its neighbours and they showed a marked reluctance to get involved in quarrels between their allies. Quite simply, Parthia wished to be independent. The Parthians were governed, quite naturally, by self interest. To protect themselves and their territory, they felt it was best to be on good terms with their powerful and boisterous neighbors." Sheldon 2010: 16. Sheldon completely misrepresents the military ambitions of the Parthians, especially under Mithridates II, and misunderstands the geopolitical realities of the Near East in this period. The Parthians certainly followed policies of self-interest in pursuit of state security; however, they did so aggressively and intentionally to establish, maintain, and expand their hegemony at the expense of their neighbors.

campaigns in Syria, Commagene, and Cilicia. Olbrycht states, “The fate of Syria, Kommagene and eastern Anatolia including Kappadokia was in the decades of the 90’s-80’s not yet decided in favour of Rome. Recognition of the Euphrates frontier would have been a unilateral gesture of acceptance of Roman supremacy in western Asia by Mithridates II.”<sup>107</sup> Further Rome had no incentive to curb its own potential expansion eastward. Although the Euphrates was on the periphery of the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system in the 90s BCE, it is impossible that Sulla and the Roman state agreed that the Euphrates was the furthest possible extent of Roman imperium. Rome considered itself an unrivaled hegemonic power, and Sulla’s expedition had successfully reestablished Roman hegemony in the Near East. Much like the situation of Mithridates, for Sulla to accept the Euphrates as a limit to Roman power would have been a recognition of weakness and self-defeating. A Euphrates treaty between Rome and Parthia in the 90s BCE is utterly anachronistic.<sup>108</sup> Such a view incorrectly assumes that Rome and Parthia

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<sup>107</sup> Olbrycht 2009: 174-5. Note also Lerouge 2007: 46 n.14. Historians who follow this specious tradition tend to belittle Parthian power in favor of Rome, Pontus, or Armenia. See Keaveney 1981: 199, 209; Manaserjan 1985: 115; Sullivan 1990: 118-9; Keaveney 2005: 33; Wolski 2003: 76.

<sup>108</sup> In the late Republican and imperial periods, the imperial ambitions of Rome were in theory boundless. For example, Cicero maintains, “It will be remembered that there existed in this city at the same time two citizens, one of whom limited the boundaries of your empire only by the regions of heaven, not by those of the earth, while the other preserved the abode and home of that same empire.” Cic. *Cat.* 3.26. Virgil writes of no “boundary of empire” for the Romans. Virg. *Aen.* 1.279. Meanwhile, Horace states, “Grant to our nation power and praise, and large increase!” Hor. *Od.* 4.15.14-15. Velleius Paterculus praises the gods “who have exalted this great empire of Rome to the highest point yet reached on earth!” and calls Rome the “empire of the world.” Vell. Pat. 2.126.3, 131.2. Aelius Aristides remarks, “The course of the sun and your possessions are equal and the sun’s course is always in your land. No marine rocks and no Chelidonean and Cyanean islands define your empire, nor the day’s ride of a horse to the sea, nor do you rule within fixed boundaries, nor does another prescribe the limit of your power... We do not need geographers anymore.” Aristides 26.10, 102. It is interesting that Herodian named the Taurus Mountains as the dividing line between East and West, not the Euphrates River. Herodian 3.1.4. See also Livy 38.8, 45, 59. Even in late antiquity while the Western portion of the empire crumbled under the weight of civil wars and barbarian invasions, a strong pagan tradition of the invincibility and stability of Roman imperialism existed. Augustine of Hippo rejected the role

already had settled into a bipolar rivalry, something that was highly unlikely without major open conflict between the two powers and something that would not occur for nearly a century.

In the debate over whether or not Tigranes invaded Cappadocia in 95 BCE, only Olbrycht has noted the significance of the fact that Sulla never entered into negotiations with Armenia. He states, “The conclusion must be that Sulla saw no need to talk to the vassal ruler of Armenia because the real power behind him was Parthia.”<sup>109</sup> Sulla’s decision to treat with Parthia, which had taken no part in the Cappadocian affair, and to neglect Armenia, which had invaded the region and fought him in battle, is telling because it reinforces the argument that Tigranes had invaded Cappadocia. The Parthian vassal Tigranes had removed Ariobarzanes from power. Sulla could have mediated a meeting between Ariobarzanes and Tigranes or between Ariobarzanes and the Pontic vassal, Ariarathes, or between Ariobarzanes and Mithridates VI.<sup>110</sup> Instead, he mediated a meeting between the envoy of the Parthian king and Ariobarzanes because Tigranes had invaded the region and because he was a Parthian vassal. However, we should not go too far in this innovative reconstruction. Sulla’s decision to negotiate only with Parthia does not mean that he viewed Parthia as responsible for Tigranes’ actions in Cappadocia. He did not blame Parthia for the invasion of Cappadocia because the Parthians had not participated in the invasion. Meanwhile, Mithridates sent Orobasus to negotiate with Sulla not because the Cappadocian invasion had been his idea, as Olbrycht argues, but because the self-interested actions of

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that the pagan gods played in Roman imperialism vehemently and used the examples of the Gallic sack of Rome, Hannibal’s invasion of Italy, Hadrian’s abandonment of Trajan’s eastern conquests, the failure of Julian in Mesopotamia, and Jovian’s humiliating peace treaty with the Sassanids, to attack the longstanding pagan tradition. August. *Civ. Dei* 4.28-9. Note also the Epilogue of this work.

<sup>109</sup> Olbrycht 2009: 174.

<sup>110</sup> In fact, it makes little sense that Sulla would mediate a meeting between Ariobarzanes and Orobasus instead of Mithridates VI and his representative if, as Kallet-Marx maintains, Pontic forces using Armenian mercenaries had invaded Cappadocia instead of Tigranes.

Tigranes and his ultimate failure in Cappadocia reflected poorly on Mithridates' reputation and on the perception of Parthian power. The aggressive Roman reaction in Cappadocia destabilized the region and heightened the uncertainty principle. Again, the situation demanded a Parthian response to save face and stave off signs of weakness.<sup>111</sup>

In fact, it is possible that Mithridates, acting as the system hegemon in the East, initially sent Orobazus to help mediate the conflict in Cappadocia between Ariobarzanes and Tigranes. If he gave Orobazus instructions to gain friendly relations with Rome, this does not mean that Parthia sought a Roman alliance and certainly does not mean that Parthia sought Roman arbitration of what it considered an Eastern concern. That is, Mithridates II wanted to control the negotiations between Cappadocia and Armenia himself, which were within the expanded Parthian-dominated Eastern system.<sup>112</sup> He likely sent Orobazus to secure friendly relations with Rome to encourage Sulla to leave the Euphrates and to leave the situation in Cappadocia to Parthia, where it belonged. It is clear from the meeting between Sulla and Orobazus that the Parthians had not anticipated Rome taking the initiative in mediating the Cappadocian affair. This demonstrates a severe Parthian misunderstanding of the extent of Roman Mediterranean

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<sup>111</sup> We must reject utterly Rawlinson's peculiar conclusion that the Cappadocian affair inspired "a common fear" in the Romans and Parthians of the growing power of Pontus, which drew them "together" and gave "them a common enemy in Tigranes of Armenia, who was equally obnoxious to both." Rawlinson mistakenly assumes that Tigranes went to war with Parthia around the time of the meeting with Sulla. Rawlinson 1885 (2002): 75-6. The Cappadocian affair did not bring Rome and Parthia together, nor did it make Parthia hostile to Pontus or Armenia. Tigranes likely had acted in his own self-interest without Parthian support in Cappadocia; however, Armenia remained a loyal vassal kingdom of the Parthians for several more years.

<sup>112</sup> Although Shayegan incorrectly assumes that Mithridates sanctioned Tigranes' invasion of Cappadocia and argues that the Parthians conceded Cappadocia to the Romans in exchange for the right to interfere in Syria, which Sulla then agreed to in order to protect Cappadocia, he recognizes that Mithridates had become interested in Cappadocia because it suddenly had become part of "the Iranian sphere of interest." Shayegan 2011: 315.

hegemony and the evolving geopolitical realities of the first phase of system overlap in the Near East.

Meanwhile, the Romans considered Cappadocia to be within the limits of the Mediterranean system and under their hegemony. Sulla had no intentions to relinquish the privileges of arbitration to Parthia. Sulla believed Orobazus acted on behalf of Mithridates II and his vassal, Tigranes. His efforts to mediate the meeting between Ariobarzanes and Orobazus were not meant to offend Parthia or bully the Parthians into an unfavorable diplomatic relationship with Rome.<sup>113</sup> Such conclusions for this first meeting between Rome and Parthia are completely anachronistic. Rather, Sulla too was uncertain about the evolving geopolitical realities of the Near East at this time. His primary goal was to assure that Roman supported Cappadocia was protected.<sup>114</sup> Since the Parthian vassal Tigranes had invaded the region, it was proper procedure for Sulla to sit down with Rome's client, Ariobarzanes, and the representative of Tigranes' superior to express Roman concerns regarding Cappadocia. Thus, Rome and Parthia approached the situation in Cappadocia as the hegemon of separate interstate systems, and the confusion that arose out of this encounter is a reflection of the complications of the first phase of system overlap between the Mediterranean and Eastern systems.

Sulla oversaw the meeting between Ariobarzanes and Orobazus, who he believed represented Tigranes and Mithridates, because Rome considered the Cappadocian affair a purely

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<sup>113</sup> This rejects Keaveney's reconstruction of Romano-Parthian relations at this time. Keaveney 1981. We should also reject recent efforts to project the later conflict between Rome and Parthia and the system merger between the Mediterranean and Eastern systems onto this period. Sulla was not bullying Parthia in an effort to gain a Roman advantage against Parthia in the East. See Sheldon 2010: 15-16; Sampson 2015: 86. See also Mommsen 1903: iv 23. Meanwhile, Mithridates II did not spearhead intensified anti-Roman actions because of this meeting. Olbrycht 2009: 175.

<sup>114</sup> Kallet-Marx 1995: 249.

Roman concern. He was not acting out of arrogance in an attempt to gain a diplomatic upper hand over Parthia in some unplanned future conflict, nor was he acting out of complete ignorance of Parthian power. Rather, Sulla was pursuing shortsighted policy, the objective of which was to reinforce Roman hegemony in the Mediterranean system against Mithridates VI and to secure the stability of the region from further outside interference by Armenia or Parthia. Meanwhile, Mithridates II did not execute Orobazus because he had submitted to Rome in his meeting with Sulla. Rather, he executed Orobazus because, instead of mediating the dispute between Ariobarzanes and Tigranes from a position of unipolar power, Orobazus negotiated with Ariobarzanes as an equal.<sup>115</sup> In the Eastern system Mithridates II King of Kings, ruler of the Parthian Empire, had no equal. Mithridates had sent Orobazus to reestablish Parthian authority along the northern frontier of the empire in Cappadocia *and* Armenia; however, Orobazus' meeting with Sulla had the opposite effect. Therefore, the diplomatic blunder of Orobazus further damaged the perceived reputation of his king and was inexcusable. Orobazus paid for his failure with his life. Thus, the immediate geopolitical concerns of the Eastern system and not future ambitions to challenge Rome explain Mithridates' anger at Orobazus' failure. Both Rome and Parthia had approached the Cappadocian affair with shortsighted, isolated policy in mind.

This same shortsighted, isolated approach to foreign policy continued in the late 90s BCE.<sup>116</sup> Despite the insistence of some scholars to the contrary, the actions of Mithridates II and

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<sup>115</sup> Kennedy makes a slightly similar argument, stating that Mithridates had Orobazus executed "for engaging in discussions beyond the competence of both himself and Sulla." Kennedy 1996a: 75.

<sup>116</sup> Note that much like the first official meeting between the Parthians and the Chinese in the 110s BCE, this did not mean that Parthia and China suddenly shared the same interstate system. The geopolitical developments in the Middle East and China remained separate for several more centuries. The same theoretical framework applies in this instance of the first Parthian and Roman contact. The Mediterranean and Eastern systems did not merge because of this meeting. They remained separate for four more decades.



Tigranes were not coordinated anti-Roman strategies.<sup>117</sup> Mithridates II's advances into Commagene, Cilicia, and Syria were against the Seleucids, not the Romans.<sup>118</sup> It appears that Pontus and Parthia finally formed an alliance in this period; however, this was not an anti-Roman alliance.<sup>119</sup> The Parthians never once supported Mithridates VI militarily against Rome. Rather, the alliance must have been similar to the alliance between Pontus and Armenia. That is, after their frustrating encounter with Ariobarzanes, the Parthians joined Mithridates in an alliance against Cappadocia, which had become their mutual enemy. After Tigranes and Mithridates VI had formed a marriage alliance and coordinated an assault on Cappadocia, and after this assault had failed and caused great confusion over the geopolitical situation in Cappadocia, drawing Parthia into the conflict, an alliance with Pontus against Cappadocia made sense for Parthia. Mithridates II still desired a friendly and stable northwestern frontier while he fought the Seleucids in the south. For Parthia it was better for the friendly Mithridates VI to control the region than the unfriendly Ariobarzanes. The fact that Ariobarzanes was a pro-Roman candidate

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<sup>117</sup> Olbrycht states, "Sulla's intervention in Kappadokia in about 94 BC caused a counterattack of the Arsakid king conducted by his Armenian vassal and coordinated with Mithridates Eupator's operations." Further, he claims that the Parthians used Pontus and Armenia to counter Roman advances in Anatolia. Olbrycht 2009: 175-6, 179. This misrepresents geopolitical realities and exaggerates Roman and Parthian tensions. Mithridates II did not feel the need to retaliate against Sulla and was not yet concerned with the geopolitical developments of Anatolia. The situation with Rome remained quite confused and detached for decades. Olbrycht's argument for an anti-Roman coalition is anachronistic and far too speculative. Rather, Mithridates II's main concern in the late 90s BCE was the submission of Syria. He only became interested in punishing Ariobarzanes because Orobazus had mistakenly recognized the Cappadocian as an equal. Note that Sampson also dubiously argues that the First Mithridatic War was a "proxy war" between Rome and Parthia and that Parthia had set up an anti-Roman power block in Asia Minor to keep Rome busy so that it could seize the Near East. Sampson 2015: 87-8.

<sup>118</sup> Keaveney confusingly refers to the Romans as the "successors of the Seleucids" and argues that this somehow made the Parthians "anxious" to "establish diplomatic ties" with Rome. Keaveney 1981: 196. In no way can one consider the Romans the successors of the Seleucids in the 90s BCE since the Seleucids remained in power in Syria at the time and since the Parthians were at war with them.

<sup>119</sup> See Appian *Mithr.* 3.15. See also Memnon 22

on the Cappadocian throne would have meant little to Mithridates II or Tigranes. They did not view a conflict with Cappadocia as a conflict with Rome. As we shall see, even Mithridates VI, who had a much greater appreciation of Roman power capabilities and ambitions, did not consider his ongoing involvement in Cappadocia as necessarily anti-Roman.

In ca. 92 BCE Tigranes sent two of his generals, Bagoas and Mithraas, to invade Cappadocia for a second time. Again, the invasion was initially successful, and the Armenian troops drove off Ariobarzanes and reinstated Ariarathes.<sup>120</sup> This was a retaliatory campaign against Ariobarzanes, whom Tigranes would have blamed for Sulla's counterattack. That is, this war was a localized affair between two eastern dynasts. It did not carry with it implications of large-scale hegemonic war against Rome. For Tigranes, Sulla had been fighting in the name of Ariobarzanes, and his army had been primarily Cappadocian in makeup. Therefore, Tigranes sought vengeance against Ariobarzanes and his Cappadocian supporters to reestablish his previous settlement of Cappadocia in 95 BCE. Although Mithridates II was not involved in the first invasion of Cappadocia, by 92 BCE he had joined the Armeno-Pontic alliance against this kingdom. Moreover, the diplomatic blunder of Orobazus meant that Mithridates too wanted to save face and establish dominance over Ariobarzanes. Several scholars associate the names of Tigranes' generals with Iranian origin.<sup>121</sup> It is possible that Mithridates II had sent Parthian officials to aid Tigranes in this second invasion of Cappadocia.<sup>122</sup> The second invasion of

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<sup>120</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 2.10.

<sup>121</sup> Reinach 1890; Desideri 1973; Manaserjan 1985.

<sup>122</sup> Olbyrcht 2009: 176. However, we should not overestimate the amount of Parthia's military support. It must have been minimal. By 92 BCE Mithridates was fighting a civil war against an eastern usurper. It is unlikely that, with a war in Syria and in southern Iran, Mithridates would have committed a significant Parthian force to Cappadocia. See Assar 2005a: 52-3; id. 2006c 145.

Cappadocia subdued the region, securing the northwestern frontier once again, and gave Tigranes and Mithridates II the satisfaction they sought.

The aid Tigranes offered Mithridates VI during the second invasion of Cappadocia was limited strictly to the geopolitical developments within the expanded Eastern system. From Tigranes' perspective this was not a coordinated assault on Rome and Rome's allies in Anatolia. Parthia and Armenia did not take part in Mithridates VI's annexation of Bithynia, and Tigranes did not leave an occupying force in Cappadocia. The condensed accounts of Appian and Justin make it seem as though these events were connected; however, this is a Roman-centric view colored by the events of the later Mithridatic Wars.<sup>123</sup> Tigranes had sought and obtained vengeance against Ariobarzanes; he then upheld the terms of the alliance with Pontus and turned the region over to Mithridates VI's son. Conflict with Rome was not an objective, and the mere fact that the invasions of Cappadocia and Bithynia happened around the same time does not mean that they were connected in a grand anti-Roman strategy.<sup>124</sup>

Notice that once again the Romans did not hold Tigranes accountable for the displacement of Ariobarzanes. As much as Tigranes' actions had been limited to the Eastern system, the Roman response continued to address the concerns of the Mediterranean system. Appian records,

The Romans decided to restore Nicomedes [IV] and Ariobarzanes [I] at the same time, each to his own kingdom, and sent thither for this purpose an embassy, of which Manius Aquilius was the chief, and ordered Lucius Cassius, who was in charge of the Asiatic country around Pergamon and had a small army under his command, to cooperate in their mission. Similar orders were sent to Mithridates Eupator himself. But the latter, being angry with the Romans on account of their interference in Cappadocia, and having been recently despoiled of Phrygia by them (as narrated in my Hellenic history), did not cooperate. Nevertheless Cassius and Manius, with the army of the former, and a large force collected from the

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<sup>123</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 2.10, 3.11; Justin 38.3.3-4

<sup>124</sup> See Olbrycht 2009: 175-6.

Galatians and Phrygians, restored Nicomedes to Bithynia and Ariobarzanes to Cappadocia. They urged them at the same time, as they were neighbors of Mithridates, to make incursions into his territory and stir up a war, promising them the assistance of the Romans. Both of them hesitated to begin so important a war on their own border, because they feared the power of Mithridates.<sup>125</sup>

There are several items of interest in this passage. First, clearly Mithridates VI here does not associate his hostility against Cappadocia with hostility against Rome.<sup>126</sup> In fact, Mithridates argues that Rome was unfairly interfering in his Cappadocian affairs.<sup>127</sup> Appian here perhaps presents a biased rhetorical case for Mithridates; however, it is interesting that Appian portrays Mithridates in a favorable light since he certainly did not have to do so. Mithridates' efforts to distance himself publicly from conflict with Rome demonstrate his cautious approach to his imperial policy in Anatolia, the varied understanding of geopolitical relations in the region, and the difficult relations he had to navigate with the Romans. Mithridates did not necessarily view his meddling in Cappadocia as anti-Roman and had good reason to maintain this point of view publicly. This further discredits any notion of Tigranes or Mithridates II following their own anti-Roman policy in Cappadocia.<sup>128</sup> Second, the Romans responded only to the threat of

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<sup>125</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 2.11

<sup>126</sup> In this I disagree with McGing. McGing 2009a: 209. However, in part I agree with Madsen, who states, "The expansion of the Pontic Kingdom in Anatolia need not have been part of a strategy aimed at eliminating Roman influence in Asia Minor. Closely analysed, Mithridates' imperial policy, between his accession and the outbreak of the First Mithridatic War, was not aimed at a final encounter meant to end Roman rule in Asia Minor. Instead, Mithridates oriented his expansions towards areas where Rome potentially would have few interests or limited reasons for objecting." Madsen 2009: 194.

<sup>127</sup> Note also Appian *Mithr.* 2.15, where Mithridates' envoys again criticize Roman involvement in Cappadocia.

<sup>128</sup> Olbrycht, following a long held scholarly tradition based upon Justin 38.3.5, mistakenly assumes that Tigranes formed a second alliance with Mithridates VI, this time against Rome. Reinach 1890: 311; Mommsen 1903: iv, 18, 27; Briusov 1918; Morgan 1965: 88-9; Olbrycht 2009: 175. Chahin even claims dubiously that Tigranes helped Mithridates defeat "the Romans under Manlius Maltinus and Aquilius." Chahin 1987: 226. However, as discussed above, Justin's passage drastically compresses events and often misrepresents them. For example, Justin states that, in reaction to Rome reinstating Nicomedes and Ariobarzanes, "Mithridates formed an

Mithridates VI. Tigranes' involvement nowhere is mentioned because Armenia remained outside of Roman concerns and outside the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system. Third, Rome reinstated Nicomedes IV and Ariobarzanes in ca. 90/89 BCE to check Mithridates' ambitions and to curb his potential power. That is, their actions were an effort to reaffirm Roman hegemony over the region by reestablishing a balance of power in Rome's favor. Finally, we find that Rome still was relying heavily upon local forces to obtain its geopolitical objectives. Rome continued to refuse to commit a large army to the Near East. Instead, the Romans relied on their allies and Rome's perceived strength and military reputation. For a decade this policy had worked well enough, as Mithridates VI continued to cautiously test Roman strength without committing to open conflict. However, the inconsistency of Roman policy and the unwillingness of the Romans to commit a large force to the Near East continually increased uncertainty about the true power capabilities of the Roman state in the region. Both Nicomedes and Ariobarzanes hesitated to attack Mithridates because they did not trust Roman promises of assistance and feared the power of Mithridates.

Over decades of careful power-maximizing policies, where Mithridates had expanded his kingdom around the Black Sea and within Anatolia and where Mithridates cautiously had been testing Roman strength in the region and bringing it into question, the perceived power balance

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alliance with Tigranes, with a resolution at once to go to war with the Romans; and they agreed that the cities and territory that should be taken from the enemy should be the share of Mithridates, and that the prisoners, and all booty that could be carried off, should belong to Tigranes." Yet Justin's account fails to recognize that the stipulations of this agreement were already long in place by 89 BCE. Tigranes' previous invasions of Cappadocia demonstrate that he received the plunder of the expeditions but handed over Cappadocia to Mithridates' vassals. Justin's passage also adds an anti-Roman aspect to this earlier agreement because his aim was to blame Mithridates and Tigranes for the approaching war with Rome. Yet, as discussed throughout this section, Tigranes did not seek conflict with Rome in the 90s BCE. Moreover, Tigranes took no part in the First Mithridatic War. See Manandyan 2007: 25-6.

in the region had shifted in Pontus' favor. Regionally, the strength and perceived power of Pontus was at an all-time high, and Rome appeared unwilling or unable to answer Mithridates' numerous threats with overwhelming force.<sup>129</sup> With a large, wealthy kingdom, extensive resources, and a secure eastern frontier, Mithridates could finally consider open conflict with Rome. What began as a quest to become the hegemonic power in Anatolia quickly evolved into a challenge to Roman dominion over the Eastern Mediterranean.

### The Threat of Mithridates of Pontus to Roman Hegemony

Although Mithridates VI had not harbored thoughts of war with Rome from his childhood as the Romans later came to believe, by the late 90s BCE he finally was in a position to consider such thoughts. Mithridates' ambitions proved to be boundless; however, they only became so gradually. His success in establishing his hegemony over the regions of the Black Sea allowed him to consider the prospects of Anatolian hegemony. For over a decade he pursued cautious and calculated aggressive policies in Anatolia. He slowly tested Rome's strength and commitment to its allies in the region. Originally, he did not do this in the hope of open conflict with Rome. Rather, he hoped that the Romans' inconsistency, detachment, and sluggishness in their Eastern affairs would provide him with the opportunity to establish Anatolian hegemony without hegemonic war.<sup>130</sup> Yet the stronger and more determined reactions of Rome to protect its allies in the middle and late 90s BCE made it clear to Mithridates that any hope he had of Anatolian hegemony could not be accomplished without open conflict with Rome.

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<sup>129</sup> Mithridates had created an extensive network of allies, and, although the numbers are exaggerated, the size of his army was considerable. Memnon records 190,000 infantry and 10,000 cavalry. Memnon 22.6. Appian records 250,000 infantry, 50,000 cavalry, 400 ships, and 130 chariots. Appian *Mithr.* 17

<sup>130</sup> Madsen 2009: 194. Madsen and I disagree only in that it seems undeniable that Mithridates eventually developed hegemonic desires against Rome.

Mithridates understood the potential might of Rome; however, he also understood that his efforts to maximize his power regionally had been fruitful. He commanded a large army and navy with extensive military and financial resources. Furthermore, his efforts to undermine Roman authority and standing in the Greek and Near East had begun to bear fruit. The neighboring Greek communities and Hellenistic kings grew ever aware of Pontus' rising power. There was a great deal of uncertainty regarding the actual power capabilities of Rome and Pontus and the true balance of power in the region. Mithridates knew that war against Rome was a serious undertaking with potentially catastrophic consequences; however, by the end of the decade, opportunities began to arise to challenge Roman domination. Mithridates waited for the perfect cause and justification for hegemonic war, and once he obtained these motivations, he unleashed a fury upon the Roman world unseen since the time of Hannibal, Philip V, and Antiochus the Great. After years of diplomatic, political, and military maneuvering suddenly in 89/88 BCE Mithridates burst onto the geopolitical scene of the Mediterranean and into Roman consciousness with the epic violence of the Asiatic Vespers. He forever more loomed large in the Roman psyche. At the height of its power, Mithridatic Pontus became the hegemonic rival of Rome and threatened to reestablish bipolarity in the Mediterranean system.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Plutarch mentions that some considered Mithridates the most powerful king in the world and the next Pyrrhus. Thus, Mithridates was meant to challenge and perhaps defeat Rome. Plut. *Sert.* 23. Justin describes Mithridates as a “match for the power of the Romans.” Justin 37.4.5. Note also the interesting passage from the *Historia Augusta* that describes Mithridates as the master of Asia and compares him to other hegemonic rivals of Rome like the Gauls and Carthaginians. “Consider what mighty nations the Romans have made their subjects instead of their enemies after they had often suffered defeat at their hands. We have heard, in fact, how the Gauls conquered them and burned that great city of theirs; it is a fact that the Gauls are now servants to the Romans. What of the Africans? Did they not conquer the Romans? It is a fact that they serve them now. Examples more remote and perhaps less important I will not cite. Mithradates of Pontus held all of Asia; it is a fact that he was vanquished and Asia now belongs to the Romans.” *HA Valer.* 1.3-5. The passage alludes to the Gallic sack of Rome and Hannibal's terrorizing of Italy and threatening of Rome. The association of Mithridates with these dangerous rivals of

## The Height of Pontic Hegemony

The great military cultures of the Persians and Greeks intertwined in Pontus. For centuries Pontus had fought relentlessly against other violent, aggressive, and highly militarized states. Mithridates VI inherited a country surrounded by enemies and spent his entire reign fighting his neighbors. His actions were not mindless warmongering or the cruel acts of a decadent “oriental sultan.”<sup>132</sup> Instead, they were the calculated policy of a hugely talented and ambitious Hellenistic ruler. These policies certainly were violent, belligerent, and aggressive; however, Mithridates’ bellicosity did not make him unique. The kings of Bithynia, Cappadocia, Colchis, Armenia, Parthia, the nomadic tribes on the Pontic-Caspian steppe, and the Republic of Rome followed a strong military ethos through acts of violence and aggression against their international competitors. Mithridates’ power-maximizing policies in and around the Black Sea sought to increase state security.<sup>133</sup> What made Mithridates unique was his charismatic leadership, his capability to endure crippling hardships, and his endurance in the face of adversity. He was not alone in using violence to obtain and increase state security and power; however, he had a unique ability to rule over a large territory with disparate peoples and

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Rome also associates him with their serious threats to Italy and Rome itself. Then there is Florus, who states, “Then came Mithridates, by far the greatest of their rulers; for, while four years sufficed to defeat Pyrrhus and thirteen to defeat Hannibal, Mithridates resisted for forty years, until, defeated in three great wars, he was brought to naught by the good fortune of Sulla, the valor of Lucullus and the might of Pompeius.” Florus 1.40.2. The implication here is that Mithridates rivaled and perhaps surpassed in reputation the famous enemies of Rome, the Gauls, Pyrrhus, and Hannibal in the minds of later Romans. See also Lucan *Phar.* 2.582

<sup>132</sup> Scholars such as Reinach, Mommsen, and Bengtson popularized this negative portrayal. For a brief discussion of the evolving view of Mithridates in scholarship and literature, see Mayor 2010: 6-9. For more background on Mithridatic historiography, see Summerer 2009. For the portrayal of Mithridates as a savage warmonger, see Matyszak 2008: 152.

<sup>133</sup> Mithridates’ early conquests were aimed at regions away from Roman interests in the hope of maximizing Pontic power under the smallest threat of Roman intervention. Madsen 2009: 194-5. See also Hind 1994: 139-40.



cultures.<sup>134</sup> This reevaluation looks to avoid adopting too easily theories that place too much emphasis on the motives and actions of one party. It rejects the notion that Mithridatic Pontus was a passive victim of exceptional Roman aggression.<sup>135</sup> Nor was Mithridates a social revolutionary motivated by a charitable urge to become the savior of the Greek world and to free it from Roman abusive dominion.<sup>136</sup> Instead, Mithridatic Pontus came to attempt to replace Roman hegemony in the Eastern Mediterranean with its own.<sup>137</sup> Moreover, Mithridates at the height of his power contemplated ruling over the entire Mediterranean world as a conqueror. Mithridatic Pontus was unique in its regional success and greater ambitions because under Mithridates' exemplary leadership it developed into an unlimited revisionist state.<sup>138</sup> That is, Mithridatic Pontus began to seek power, not simply for state security, but as a means of overthrowing the distribution of power within the current interstate system in favor of its own hegemony. By early 80s BCE, the limited revisionist goals of Black Sea and Anatolian

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<sup>134</sup> Mithridates' court, army, and kingdom were a wide mixture of Greek, Eastern, and "barbarian" cultures, languages, and peoples. The ancients praised him as a man of extreme intelligence and diligence in his studies. Additionally, he was a polyglot. He spoke in full or in part as many as 35 languages (perhaps as much as 50 languages). See Mayor 2010: 253-5. See also Aulus Gell. 17.17; Pliny *NH* 7.24.88-90, 25.3.6-7; Val. Max. 8.7; Quint. 11.2; Aur. Vic. *De Viris* 77.2

<sup>135</sup> Harris 1979: 252, 273; Strobel 1996: 55-94; Marek 2009: 36. Mayor in a recent work continuously refers to the Romans as "rapacious" predators and insatiable beasts. Mayor 2010: 108, 110, 113, 119, 141, 161-2, 202, 277. Nor was Rome a victim of Mithridates' aggression. See Madsen 2009: 191-2, 197-8.

<sup>136</sup> For the recent prevailing view of Mithridates VI as a savior or liberator, see Mayor 2010: 2, 26, 36, 40, 52, 64, 69, 97, 136-7, 158, 162, 343, 369, 387 n.15. See also Duggan 1958: 9; Antonelli 1992: 7; Manandyan 2007: 10, 30-2; Højte 2009a: 7; Summerer 2009; Madsen 2009: 192; McGing 2009a: 206.

<sup>137</sup> For a recent account of Mithridates' aggressive policy, see McGing 2009a.

<sup>138</sup> Mithridatic Pontus is a rare example of an unlimited revisionist state. Thus far, it has gone unnoticed by Realist theoreticians.

hegemony gave way to the desire for hegemony over the Eastern Mediterranean, and may have included the submission of Rome to Pontic power.<sup>139</sup>

Throughout much of the first half of his reign, Mithridates respected and feared Rome; however, as his regional power grew, his ambitions widened.<sup>140</sup> In order to dominate Anatolia, Mithridates eventually had to challenge Rome. For over a decade, Mithridates tested Roman commitment in the region, hoping to gain standing without fighting Rome. He cautiously interfered in Paphlagonia, Galatia, Bithynia, and Cappadocia to gauge Rome's reaction, its strength, and its devotion to its allies. His continual advances and withdrawals during the 100s and 90s BCE were calculated attempts to understand Roman intentions, to encourage regional doubt in Roman strength, and to create military or diplomatic opportunity.<sup>141</sup> In the 90s BCE

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<sup>139</sup> In the first war, Mithridates sought to replace Roman hegemony in the Mediterranean system with a system of bipolarity, where Pontus would dominate the Eastern Mediterranean. Had he been successful in consolidating his power in the East, further western expansion would have been likely. Velleius Paterculus argued that the Romans regarded Mithridates as a “formidable menace to Italy herself” in the early 80s BCE. Vell. Pat. 2.18.3. Moreover, by the end of the third war, Mithridates allegedly had returned to his bold plans to invade Italy. See Plut. *Pomp.* 41; Appian *Mithr.* 15.101-2, 16.109; Dio 37.11.1; Florus 1.40.25. For scholars who reject the validity of Mithridates' plan to invade Italy, see Sherwin-White 1984: 203-6 and n.46; id. 1994; McGing 1986: 122-3, 165 and n.95; Ballesteros-Pastor 1996: Ch. 13. For scholars who accept its plausibility, see Reinach 1890; Duggan 1959: 186-7; Sherwin-White 1984: 204 n.46; Ford 2004: 344-6; Manandyan 2007: 159; Mayor 2010: 341-4. For us the validity of the plan is less important than the reality of the Roman fear that such a massive threat to their hegemony was plausible at such a late stage in the third war. For further discussion of the last plans of Mithridates and the criticism of Pompey for not giving chase into the Bosphorus, see Appian *Mithr.* 15.101, 102, 16.107, 108; Dio 36.50.2, 37.3.2-3; Plut. *Pomp.* 38.1-2, 39.1, 41.2, 4-7; Cic. *Mur.* 16.34; id.. *Agr.* 2.19.52; Jos. *Bell.* 1.122-55

<sup>140</sup> I disagree with Mayor, who follows in a long tradition of scholars who misrepresent Mithridates' reign as a “lifelong struggle against Rome.” Mayor 2010: 162. See also Magie 1950: i. 195-6; Will 1982: ii. 397.

<sup>141</sup> I generally agree with McGing and Olbrycht that the seeming compliance of Mithridates to Rome before the war was a “tactical preparation for war” to lull Rome into a “false sense of security.” McGing 1986: 87. “Mithridates Eupator tried to mislead Rome about his intentions.” Olbrycht 2009: 176. However, Olbrycht is mistaken when he makes the unsubstantiated claim, “It was decisive support from the Parthians that prompted Mithridates Eupator to wage an open war on Rome in 89 BC.” Id. 179. Further, I disagree with Madsen that by the late 90s BCE

Mithridates was not yet willing to risk open conflict with Rome. However, by the start of the next decade he was searching for the opportunity and sufficient cause for war.<sup>142</sup> His own success in the 100s and 90s BCE and the perceived weakness of Rome in the early 80s BCE finally afforded Mithridates the opportunity to pursue a hegemonic conflict against the hegemon of the Mediterranean system, Rome.<sup>143</sup>

When Rome restored Nicomedes IV and Ariobarzanes and then urged them to invade Pontus, Mithridates finally abandoned his hopes of occupying Bithynia and Cappadocia without open conflict with Rome. In a series of embassies to the Romans, which are perfect examples of the abrasiveness and ineffectiveness of compellence diplomacy, Mithridates criticized Roman

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Mithridates still had no desire to challenge Roman domination in Anatolia. Madsen fails to appreciate Mithridates' diplomatic cunning and desire to create just cause for war. He mistakenly argues that if Mithridates wanted war with Rome, then his withdrawal from Bithynia was strategically "unfocused" and "can only be judged as a serious lack of military judgment." Madsen 2009: 197. He does not recognize that Mithridates carefully and calculatingly was testing Roman commitment to the region and gaining justification for a larger, more ambitious war. Despite Madsen's arguments to the contrary, *this* is the "rational explanation" for Mithridates' decisions.

<sup>142</sup> Again, I agree with McGing and Olbrycht. McGing 1986: 82-4; McGing 2009a: 209-10; Olbrycht 2009: 176. Although he is too dismissive of the larger ambitions of Mithridates and the Romans, note also Kallet-Marx, who attempts to restore the tarnished reputation of Aquilius and argues that the Romans did not want or expect war with Pontus. Kallet-Marx 1995: 251-60. Appian states, "Although Mithridates had his forces in readiness he retreated, because he wanted to have good and sufficient cause for war." Appian *Mithr.* 2.11. Appian continues, "He [Mithridates] was not ignorant that they [the Romans] wanted to bring on a war, and that they had incited this attack upon him, but he dissembled in order to procure more and clearer causes for the coming war, for which reason he reminded them of his own and his father's friendship and alliance, in return for which Pelopidas said that Phrygia and Cappadocia had been wrested from him, of which Cappadocia had always belonged to his ancestors and had been left to him by his own father." Id. 2.12.

<sup>143</sup> Gruen 2006: 262-3. In fact, Florus states, "Our weaknesses gave him [Mithridates] hope and confidence; for a tempting opportunity was offered while we were preoccupied by civil wars, and the activities of Marius, Sulla and Sertorius made it known far and wide that the flank of the empire was unprotected. While the State was thus wounded and distracted, suddenly, as though it had chosen the opportune moment, the tempest of the Pontic war broke forth from the furthest outpost of the North against a people who were both weary and preoccupied." Florus 1.40.4-5

actions, demanded Roman compliance with his wishes, and even offered to aid Rome in its military struggle against its allies in Italy.<sup>144</sup> The idea of Mithridates demanding Roman compliance and shaming the Romans by offering them aid in Italy was so offensive that the Romans called the demands “insolent (φορτικώτερον),” expelled the envoy under guard, and prepared to repay Mithridates’ insolence by joining in Nicomedes’ invasion of Pontus.<sup>145</sup> Unfortunately for Rome, years of cautious policy and careful planning meant that Mithridates had a solid understanding of the power capabilities of Rome and its allies in Anatolia. With Rome actively supporting Nicomedes’ invasion of his kingdom, he finally had the sufficient cause for war that he had been seeking.<sup>146</sup> Mithridates finally could pursue a justified war against Rome. Further, years of reluctant and inconsistent Roman policy in Anatolia and the debilitating Social War that began in 90 BCE in Italy encouraged Mithridates finally to act against Rome.<sup>147</sup> The perception of Roman strength had faded considerably in recent years. The geopolitical opportunity to challenge Roman domination had arrived.

Meanwhile, the Romans completely misjudged their own immediate military capabilities and the capabilities of Mithridates, which is clear from the actions of the Roman generals in

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<sup>144</sup> See Appian *Mithr.* 2.12-3.16. See also Dio 30-5.99. Note also that before the war both sides used compellence diplomacy as well. “For Mithridates, who was king of Pontus, and possessed Armenia Minor and the entire circuit of the Pontic sea with the Bosphorus, first attempted to expel Nicomedes, an ally of the Romans, from Bithynia; sending word to the senate, that he was going to make war upon him on account of the injuries which he had received. Answer was returned by the senate to Mithridates, that if he did so he himself should feel the weight of a war from the Romans. Incensed at this reply, he immediately invaded Cappadocia, and expelled from thence Ariobarzanes the king, an ally of the Roman people.” Eutrop. 5.5. Both sides used threats of force to obtain diplomatic objectives, and the result unsurprisingly was open warfare.

<sup>145</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 3.16-17

<sup>146</sup> Mayor argues that Mithridates tried to bait Rome into starting a war by insulting and threatening Rome. Mayor 2010: 141, 144-5. See also McGing 2009a: 210. Contra Madsen, who mistakenly blames Rome for baiting Mithridates into war. Madsen 2009: 197.

<sup>147</sup> Gruen 2006: 262.

Anatolia. Aquillius and Cassius eagerly pursued aggressive war against Pontus without consulting the senate, and they maintained Sulla's policy of relying mostly on allied levies.<sup>148</sup> Mithridates abandoned his efforts to control Cappadocia indirectly. He sent a new force to annex Cappadocia, to knock Ariobarzanes out of the war, and to secure his southern border.<sup>149</sup> He then decisively defeated the three-prong advance of the Roman generals and Nicomedes, allowing him to occupy Paphlagonia, Bithynia, and the Roman province of Asia. Numerous Greek communities rallied to Mithridates' cause, and the Roman allied fleet deserted to his side.<sup>150</sup> In less than a year, Mithridatic Pontus had become the undisputed hegemonic power in Anatolia and controlled the Black and Aegean seas. Mithridates had established himself as a rival to Roman hegemony, and the states of the Mediterranean system took notice.

What occurred in the Eastern Mediterranean in 89/88 BCE was a process of international relations known to political scientists as "bandwagoning." The meteoric rise of the unlimited revisionist state of Mithridatic Pontus as a rival to Roman hegemony in the region forced states in the region to choose sides. The vast majority of Rome's Greek allies not only viewed Pontus as the more immediate threat to their survival, but also recognized the potential of Pontus to challenge Rome successfully.<sup>151</sup> They also understood the potential opportunities this success would afford Pontic allies. That is, the perceived balance of power in the Eastern Mediterranean

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<sup>148</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 3.17

<sup>149</sup> Olbrycht argues that Tigranes likely aided once again in seizing Cappadocia. Olbrycht 2009: 176. Although we should not rule out this possibility, there is no evidence of Tigranes aiding Mithridates in this invasion. We cannot assume, as Olbrycht does, that Tigranes was pursuing anti-Roman policy alongside Mithridates.

<sup>150</sup> See Appian *Mithr.* 3.18-20; Memnon 22.7-8

<sup>151</sup> Kallet-Marx emphasizes the threat Mithridates posed to these communities. Kallet-Marx 1995: 154.

had shifted considerably in Pontus' favor.<sup>152</sup> The middling and small powers in the region could choose to bandwagon with the ascending power of Pontus or balance against Pontus by remaining loyal to Rome.<sup>153</sup> Most communities were turning to Pontus. Athenaeus records a speech by Athenion to the Athenian assembly, stating,

‘And every city honoring him [Mithridates] with more than human honors, calls the king a god; and oracles everywhere promise him the dominion over the whole world, on which account he is now sending large armies against Thrace and Macedonia, and every part of Europe is coming over bodily to his side. For ambassadors are coming to him, not only from the Italian tribes, but also from the Carthaginians, begging him to enter into alliance with them for the destruction of the Romans.’<sup>154</sup>

There certainly were cultural and economic factors that helped determine the decisions of the various Greek communities in this region; however, the geopolitical realities of the contested Mediterranean system loomed the largest.<sup>155</sup> The smaller states of the Mediterranean began to view Mithridates favorably as a hegemonic rival of Rome.

In world history the existence of unipolarity, such as the Romans had held for several decades, is rare and fleeting since maintenance of such a system requires constant vigilance and since other states within an interstate system often seek to better their geopolitical situation at the

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<sup>152</sup> The balance of power in Anatolia had been shifting in Pontus' favor for several years. Madsen 2009: 196.

<sup>153</sup> A glimpse from the summary of Livy's history helps illustrate the difficulty of such decisions since they carried with them potentially severe consequences. See Livy *Epit.* 78.4

<sup>154</sup> Ath. 5.213

<sup>155</sup> For the cultural attraction of the Hellenistic Mithridates to Greek communities and their eagerness to cast off the financial burdens of Roman rule, see Mayor 2010: 157-63. Again, we add to our understanding of events with an emphasis on the causative power of the international environment on geopolitical developments. Such a methodology does not take the place of cultural explanations; rather, it enhances them with a more layered approach. To this point, Eckstein argues, “To gain understanding by going below the system level in order to engage with the cultures of the units that make up a system is not to deny explanatory power to structural pressures and opportunities; there is no reason why we cannot have both.” Eckstein 2006: 67.

expense of the hegemon.<sup>156</sup> When the rise of Mithridatic Pontus provided Greek communities with the opportunity to cast off Roman hegemony, share in the spoils of Pontus' ascendancy, and avoid immediate destruction, almost all of them chose to bandwagon with Pontus.<sup>157</sup> The one major exception was Rhodes, which resisted Mithridates' advances with great determination because of its longstanding friendship with Rome and its capacity to do so.<sup>158</sup>

Greek communities were not the only ones to perceive the shifting balance of power in the Mediterranean and attempt to bandwagon with Pontus.<sup>159</sup> As Florus states, "The dread of the

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<sup>156</sup> See Eckstein 2006: 16, 26.

<sup>157</sup> Diodorus Siculus states, "Mithridates' party swept all before them in Asia, and as there was nothing to stop them, all the cities revolted from the Romans." Diod. 37.27. Moreover, Florus records, "The first assault immediately won Bithynia; whereupon Asia was seized by a general panic, and without delay our cities and peoples revolted to the king." Florus 1.40.6. Florus continues, "The alarm thus inspired in Asia also opened to the king the gates of Europe." Id. 1.40.8.

<sup>158</sup> Rhodes was a well-defended city protected by the sea. It later held its defeat of Demetrius "the Besieger" and Mithridates in the highest esteem. See Appian *BC* 4.68. Note also Florus 1.40.8

<sup>159</sup> It is interesting that Greek states in the Classical and Hellenistic periods heavily favored intense balancing behavior against rising local hegemonies over the process of bandwagoning. See esp. Eckstein 2006: 65-6. Herodian, writing much later in the third century CE, still recognizes this seemingly Greek quality. He states, "This is an ancient failing of the Greeks; the constant organizing of factions against each other and their eagerness to bring about the downfall of those who seem superior to them have ruined Greece. Their ancient quarrels and internal feuds had made them easy prey to the Macedonians and slaves to the Romans, and this curse of jealousy and envy has been handed down to the flourishing Greek cities of our own day." Herodian 3.2.8. Herodian here views the Greeks, even of his day, through the lens of the Classical and Hellenistic periods. Yet clearly something had changed in the behavior of Greek polities by the first century BCE. I believe the drastic change in behavior seen in the 80s BCE from the phenomenon of the Classical era is the consequence of over seventy years of successful Roman unipolar hierarchy. To this point, Eckstein states, "Severity of competition is inherent in [interstate] anarchy. By contrast, where the ordering principle is hierarchy (tending toward unipolarity or universal empire), the functions of the states may vary (as some become peaceful out of choice or necessity), competition decreases, and the distribution of power across the units tends to stabilize in favor of one unit." Eckstein 2006: 16. That is, the sweeping success of Roman hegemony in the Eastern Mediterranean had marginalized most of the traditionally heavily militarized Greek communities by the first century BCE. Especially after the Achaean War (146 BCE) and Aristonicus' Rebellion (133-129 BCE), few Greek polities had the ability or opportunity to remain militarily competitive. Rhodes with its fleet and well-defended city was

king now spread to Italy and Rome itself.”<sup>160</sup> The Social War (90-88 BCE) was a devastating conflict in Italy between Rome and many of its disgruntled Italian allies.<sup>161</sup> Envoys from the Italian allies came to Mithridates seeking friendship and aid. Diodorus records,

And now the Romans prevailed every day more and more against their enemies; so that the Italians sent envoys to Mithridates king of Pontus, who had then an excellent and well appointed army, to entreat him to march into Italy with his army, to oppose the Romans; by which means, they told him, the Roman power could easily be broken. Mithridates answered, that he would march into Italy as soon as he had subdued Asia, the task in which he was currently engaged.<sup>162</sup>

Unfortunately for the Italian allies, Mithridates was still too far away to come to their immediate aid.<sup>163</sup> Rome was able to defeat its enemies in Italy before Mithridates’ arrival. However, although Mithridates was unable to invade Italy, it is significant that he said he would do so after subduing Asia. This at least helps demonstrate the potential height of his ambitions and the high geopolitical stakes of this war.<sup>164</sup> This certainly was a hegemonic conflict, where Mithridates had expanded his ambitions beyond the simple domination of Anatolia. It is reasonable to argue that Mithridates at least considered challenging the very survival of Rome at the height of his power.<sup>165</sup> Domination of the Eastern Mediterranean was his major objective; however, if

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one of the few exceptions. Thus, the vast majority of Greek communities chose to bandwagon with Mithridatic Pontus because their military capabilities and the geopolitical reality had transformed dramatically under Roman unipolarity. Meanwhile, Rhodes resisted Pontus because it still had the means and the competitive drive to obstruct a rising local hegemon.

<sup>160</sup> Florus 1.40.9

<sup>161</sup> For a recent studies of the Social War, see Dart 2014; Matyszak 2015.

<sup>162</sup> Diod. 37.11. Note also Appian *Mithr.* 17.119; Posid. (Jacoby no. 87) F. 41. See also Front. *Strat.* 2.3.17

<sup>163</sup> Yet archaeological records indicate that Mithridates was actively involved in communication with his Italian allies. See Mayor 2010: 158. Note Brunt 1988: 110 n.50.

<sup>164</sup> Orosius in his account of the struggle between Rome and Mithridates uses a quote from Lucan to describe the magnitude of the conflict, stating, “The city [Rome] was almost consumed by barbaric poison.” Orosius 6.1

<sup>165</sup> In fact, Mithridates appears to have long embraced the idea of invading Italy after the early 80s BCE. See esp. Plut. *Pomp.* 41; Appian *Mithr.* 16.109. See also Cic. *Agr.* 2.19.52; Jos. *Bell.* 1.122-55



possible, Mithridates gladly would have replaced Rome as the system hegemon of the entire Mediterranean system.<sup>166</sup> His friendship with the Italian allies and his promises of military aid were premature but part of this new unlimited revisionist policy.<sup>167</sup>

Mithridates' next military actions also clearly illustrate his desire to replace Roman hegemony with his own. He moved his capital to the more centrally located city of Pergamon and delivered a rousing speech to his soldiers and allies. Justin in his historical summary tells us that he specifically preserved a reliable account of Mithridates' speech because previous Roman historians, such as Livy and Sallust, had manipulated the speech to display their own

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<sup>166</sup> Florus records that Mithridates had a “burning desire to possess himself of all Asia and, if he could, of Europe also.” Florus 1.40.3 He continues, “The alarm thus inspired in Asia also opened to the king the gates of Europe. He, therefore, sent his generals, Archelaus and Neoptolemus, and (except Rhodes, which supported us more loyally than ever) all the Cyclades, Delos, Euboea and Athens itself, the glory of Greece, were occupied. The dread of the king now spread to Italy and Rome itself.” Id. 1.40.8-9. He then states, “For the king, lured on as it were by the bait of Asia and Europe, now sought to recover them by right of arms, as though they did not belong to others but had been snatched from him, because he had failed to retain his conquests.” Id. 1.40.13. We must be careful not to overstate Mithridates' plans to invade Italy. Later Roman writers, such as Florus, perhaps exaggerated Mithridates' role as Rome's bogeyman. Note also Appian *Mithr.* 17.119. Clearly, logistical preparations to invade Italy never materialize because the war drastically turned in Rome's favor. However, the tradition did not simply arise out of whole cloth. Mithridates at least considered the prospect of invading Italy and dominating Rome, and his negotiations with the Italian allies was a tangible step in that direction.

<sup>167</sup> Madsen's account of Mithridates' correspondence with the Italian allies is confused and mistaken. He argues that the reason for the correspondence is “obscure” and wonders why Mithridates was not contacted earlier. Madsen 2009: 199. His confusion stems from a surprising lack of understanding of the geopolitical situation during these years. The reason for the correspondence is clear. The Italian allies needed aid in their war against Rome by 89/88 BCE. Once Mithridates had conquered Anatolia and mainland Greece, he was an obvious potential ally. The Italian allies did not contact Mithridates earlier for two reasons. First, they were winning the war against Rome at the beginning of the conflict, and second, Mithridates was not yet an open enemy of Rome. Madsen's argument that the Italian allies should have gained Mithridates as an ally in 90 BCE before Mithridates was at war with Rome is unfair. Further, his conclusion that “Mithridates never joined the Italian cause” is unconvincing. Although in reality Mithridates was not near ready for an invasion of Italy, clearly, as Diodorus Siculus demonstrates, Mithridates joined the Italian cause in spirit and through a pledge of support at least. Diod. 37.11. Unfortunately for both parties, the Italian allies lost their war before Mithridates could send his armies to their aid, and Mithridates conquest of Greece fell apart.

eloquence.<sup>168</sup> Although the speech is unlikely verbatim, it is reliable enough to display Mithridates' foreign policy and ambitions against Rome accurately.<sup>169</sup> Justin records,

‘It were to be wished,’ he [Mithridates] said, ‘that it were still in his power to deliberate whether he should choose peace or war with the Romans; but that resistance should be offered against aggressors, not even those doubted who were without hope of victory; for all men draw the sword against robbers, if not to save their lives, at least to take revenge. But since it was not now a question, when they had come to hostilities (not merely in intention but in the field of battle), they must consider in what manner, and with what hopes, they could continue the contest which they had commenced. That he felt certain of victory, if they had but courage; and that the Romans might be conquered, was known, not more to himself than to his soldiers, who had routed both Aquilius in Bithynia and Maltinus in Cappadocia.’<sup>170</sup>

Thus, at the beginning of his speech Mithridates portrayed the Romans as unjust aggressors and viewed his war as a retaliatory campaign against the many slights of Rome. Mithridates then told his troops of his plans to conquer the Romans and of his confidence in the prospect. Next in the speech, he listed the many enemies of Rome and their successes in war against the Romans, especially in Italy.<sup>171</sup> He finished the first portion of his speech confidently arguing that Rome had too many enemies to stop his attack on Italy.<sup>172</sup> Justin continues,

‘That they [Mithridates and his allies] ought therefore to take advantage of the present circumstances, and seize the opportunity of increasing their power, lest, if they remained inactive while the Romans were occupied, they should hereafter find greater difficulty in contending with them, when they were quiet and unmolested. For it was not a question whether they should take up arms or not, but whether they should do so at a time favorable to themselves or to their enemies.’<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Justin 38.3.10-11

<sup>169</sup> See McGing 1986: 106-8; Mayor 2010: 159-163.

<sup>170</sup> Justin 38.4.1-4

<sup>171</sup> Id. 38.4.5-15.

<sup>172</sup> Id. 38.4.16.

<sup>173</sup> Id. 38.5.1-2.

This section of the speech demonstrates well the geopolitical realities of the international environment. Mithridates emphasized seizing opportunity to increase power. He discussed concepts of power balance and the need to attack Rome when the balance was in the favor of Pontus. He also touched on the Realist concepts of systemic violence and the propensity of war in systems of interstate anarchy. In fact, Mithridates viewed war as inevitable and unavoidable. He urged his soldiers and allies to carry the war to their enemies before Rome seized the initiative. Mithridates understood the potential gains and consequences of hegemonic war with Rome. He recognized his opportunity to replace Roman hegemony in the Mediterranean. He finished the second portion of his speech listing the many wrongs he had suffered at the hands of the Romans and spent the third portion of his speech listing the many wrongs other kings and peoples around the Mediterranean had suffered at the hands of the Romans.<sup>174</sup> In the final section of the speech, Mithridates portrayed himself as the perfect rival of Rome, as the Hellenistic champion of unrivaled pedigree, for which the Greek world and Near East had been waiting.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Id. 38.5.3-10; 38.6. In the third portion of the speech, Mithridates connected himself to the suffering of all other kings and states in the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system.

<sup>175</sup> Id. 38.7. Mithridates does four things of particular interest in this final portion of his speech. First, Mithridates portrayed himself as the perfect world leader by emphasizing his ancestors Cyrus, Darius I, Alexander, and Seleucus I. Second, he associated himself with the greatness of Alexander the Great through his blood connection. Yet he then portrayed himself as superior to Alexander because he unified Pontus and Scythia (something Alexander and his successors had failed to do). Third, as Polybius did before him, Mithridates portrayed the Macedonians as militarily superior to the Romans (“if their people [the Romans] were compared with his own, he was at the head of nations, which were not merely a match for the power of Rome, but had withstood even that of Macedonia”). Finally, Mithridates indicated, as Polybius did before him, that his tough Pontic soldiers (who he argued were superior to the Romans and even the Macedonians) would go to war in the West as though going to a festival (“but that he was now entering upon a different sort of war [i.e. an easier war than his conquest of Scythia]; for there was no climate more temperate than that of Asia, nor any country more fertile or more attractive from the number of its cities; and that they [his soldiers] would spend a great part of their time, not as in military service, but as at a festival, in a war of which it was hard to say whether it would be more easy or more gainful”). See Polyb. 5.2.6. Note Eckstein 2006: 202-3. See also Overtom 2013.

Mithridates immediately set out, following his passionate speech at Pergamon, to eradicate all potential Roman resistance in Anatolia. In early 88 BCE he and his new Greek allies organized and executed a region-wide massacre of between 80,000-150,000 Roman and other Italian civilians.<sup>176</sup> There have been several modern interpretations of why Mithridates executed the “Asiatic Vespers;” however, the four most likely reasons from a geopolitical perspective are as follows: first, the massacre of the Romans in Anatolia removed the potential of their resistance to Mithridates’ rule and their threat to the stability of the region; second, stabilizing Anatolia through the massacre, allowed Mithridates to concentrate all of his forces on further conquests, such as the invasions of Rhodes and Greece; third, the massacre provided Mithridates and his Greek allies with the vengeance they sought for Rome’s many perceived slights; and finally, the massacre served to unify Mithridates and his new Greek allies in a blood feud against Rome.<sup>177</sup> With the massacre of the Romans in Anatolia, Mithridates seemingly committed himself fully to an all-out hegemonic conflict with Rome. The struggle to overcome Mithridates took center stage in the consciousness and psyche of the Romans. His brutal actions and perceived grand ambitions understandably led the Romans to view him as a major threat to their very survival. Further, Mithridates’ massacre created a new powerbase of devoted Greek communities, whose loyalty was sealed in Roman blood and who could no longer realistically hope to abandon Pontus in favor of Rome.<sup>178</sup> With his power in Anatolia firmly secured, Mithridates could hope to

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<sup>176</sup> Memnon 22.9; Appian *Mithr.* 4.22-3; Plut. *Sul.* 24.4; Dio 30-5.101

<sup>177</sup> Mayor provides a good summary of the various arguments. See Mayor 2010: 171-5. Kallet-Marx argues that, although Roman abuses in Asia Minor at times had been harsh, the Romans had not been any more harsh than the previous Hellenistic kings. He concludes that the sources overstress the abuses of the Romans on the eve of the conflict with Mithridates and that the massacre was an initiative of Mithridates. See Kallet-Marx 1995: 153-60. Yet Kallet-Marx is too dismissive of Mithridates’ chances for success in the conflict, calling his defeat inevitable.

<sup>178</sup> Kallet-Marx 1995: 157-8. The massacre had not been “a mere meaningless act of brutally blind rage.” Mommsen 1903: iv 32.

expand his growing empire further by dominating the Eastern Mediterranean and establishing bipolarity between Pontus and Rome.

In 89/88 BCE, word of Mithridates' success had spread across the Mediterranean to Greece and Italy. In addition to the Italian allies requesting Mithridates' friendship and aid, the once great city of Athens perceived a shift in the balance of power in the region and decided to bandwagon with Pontus.<sup>179</sup> Athenaeus records that the Athenians appointed Athenion as an ambassador "when the chief power in all that district was lodged in the hands of Mithridates" and that "the Athenians, boasted of all these promises which were made to them, felt sure that the supremacy of the Romans would be put to an end [by Mithridates]."<sup>180</sup> Greece too was ready to fall under Mithridates' influence.

After his swift success in Anatolia, Mithridates looked to the occupation of Greece as a strategically important second objective. Control of Greece would allow him to gain more allies, to protect Anatolia, and potentially to strike at Italy.<sup>181</sup> Meanwhile, Athens had suffered hardships under Roman rule, and the city chafed under Roman restrictions.<sup>182</sup> The Athenian

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<sup>179</sup> Although Kallet-Marx should give the Athenians more responsibility in their decision to join Mithridates and resist Rome, note his account of the affair. Kallet-Marx 1995: 200-20.

<sup>180</sup> Ath. 5.212

<sup>181</sup> Recently, McGing has argued that Mithridates sought to conquer Greece to supersede his Persian ancestors, Darius and Xerxes. McGing 2009a: 206. However, there is no evidence that Mithridates or his enemies portrayed him as a Persian conqueror. Therefore, such an interpretation is highly speculative. The silence of our sources is notable since the Romans would have relished the idea of saving Greece from a Persian conqueror like the Athenians and Spartans before them. Roman reverence for the history of Athens remained strong even during the Mithridatic War. Florus records, "He [Sulla] nevertheless (to use his own words) 'spared them [the Athenians] because of their shrines and past glory, as an act of respect towards their dead forefathers.'" Florus 1.40.10. Note also Amm. Mar. 30.8.8. Mithridates emphasized his Hellenism in the Greek East, not his Persian heritage.

<sup>182</sup> Athenion in a speech to the Athenians stated, "Tolerate no more the anarchical state of things which the Roman Senate has caused to be extended until such time as it shall decide what form of government we are to have. And let us not permit our holy places to be kept locked against us, our gymnasia in squalid decay, our theatre deserted by the Assembly, our courts voiceless, and

philosopher and statesman, Athenion, saw in Mithridates an opportunity to restore some of Athens' former power and autonomy, while Mithridates saw in Athenion an important ally in mainland Greece that could help him establish Pontic power in the region.<sup>183</sup> Mithridates sent Athenion back to Athens with his support, and Athenion easily rallied the Athenians to Mithridates' cause.<sup>184</sup> The Athenian pro-Pontic regime under Athenion and Aristion executed many Roman supporters in and around Athens, perhaps in line with the Asiatic Vespers in 88 BCE.<sup>185</sup> Again, Mithridates had found a motivated and loyal ally against Rome, and with Rome trying to end the Social War in Italy, Greece was ready for the taking.

While Mithridates' siege of Rhodes dragged on, in the summer of 88 BCE he sent two of his best generals, Archelaus and Metrophanes, to seize the islands of the Aegean and much of mainland Greece. With some difficulty they slaughtered 20,000 Romans at Delos and then sent 2,000 men to help garrison Athens and control Attica.<sup>186</sup> The arrival of Archelaus with the main

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the Pnyx, once consecrated to sacred uses by divine oracles, taken away from the people. Nor let us, men of Athens, permit the sacred voice of Iacchus to remain sealed in silence, the august temple of the two Divinities to remain closed, and the schools of the philosophers to stand voiceless."Ath. 5.213. Vellius Paternulus tries to defend Rome, arguing that the Athenians remained faithful to the Romans and that they fought Rome only because of the coercion of Pontic forces. Vell. Pat. 2.23.4-5

<sup>183</sup> We should reject Mayor's idealized portrait of Mithridates. She argues, "Greeks in Anatolia, the Aegean islands, and mainland Greece saw Mithridates Eupator as a heroic freedom fighter who could restore democracy to democracy's homeland." Mayor 2010: 175. Although Athenion and the Athenians wanted self-rule, they did not join Mithridates' cause out of euphoric joy for Mithridates' heroism and fairness. The major concern of Athenion and Athens was the reestablishment of Athenian autonomy and power through the opportunity provided by Mithridates' success.

<sup>184</sup> Athenaeus' sensationalized and negative portrayal of Athenion is full of Roman imperial rhetoric and bias. See id. 176. Athenaeus argues that Athenion deceived the Athenians, who hoped for peace. Ath. 5.212. However, the aggressive actions of Athens in cooperation with Mithridates' forces and their determined resistance to Sulla discredit Athenaeus' slander.

<sup>185</sup> See Ath. 5.214-15; Appian *Mithr.* 5.28; Strabo 13.1.66

<sup>186</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 5.28, 110; Memnon 22.7; Paus. 3.23.2-6. The destruction of Delos demonstrates the dangers ancient communities faced and the terrible cost of poor geopolitical decisions. Delos decided to balance against Pontus, perhaps because of the strong Roman

Pontic army inspired the Greek communities in the Peloponnese and Boeotia to bandwagon with Pontus as well. A second Pontic army occupied Euboea, and a third Pontic army annexed large portions of Thrace and Macedonia. The Roman commander in Macedonia, Bruttius, did his best to slow the Pontic advance and, considering his limited military resources, impressively held off the Pontic forces at Chaeronea, leaving Larissa in Roman hands.<sup>187</sup> Despite this slight setback, in the summer of 87 BCE Mithridates was at the height of his power. His armies stood on the doorstep of the Adriatic Sea.<sup>188</sup> No foreign king or state had challenged Roman domination of the Mediterranean to this extent since Antiochus III's invasion of Greece in 192/191 BCE. In fact, it was in 88 BCE that Mithridates appears to have first adopted the title "King of Kings" as his own.<sup>189</sup>

Mithridates had created an empire that stretched from Greece and Macedonia in the west to Cappadocia in the East, from Lycia in the south to the Pontic steppe in the north. He had friends as far as Italy and North Africa in the west and as far as Ptolemaic Egypt in the south,

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presence in the city, and paid the ultimate price for this miscalculation. Moreover, the Athenians' need of 2,000 men to help garrison the city and control Attica speaks directly to the demilitarization of many Greek communities under the new structural realities of the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system in the latter half of the second century BCE. The Athenian army, which had numbered 14,000 men at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War, about 11,000 men at Chaeronea in 338 BCE, and had repelled multiple Macedonian assaults on Athens during the Cretan War at the end of the third century BCE, was minimal by the 80s BCE. Although Rome was only indirectly responsible for this drastic change in the militarization of these communities, I believe this lack of military strength helps explain why Athens chose to bandwagon with Pontus instead of balance against Pontus. Pontus was the more immediate threat to state security in the early 80s BCE. Meanwhile, Athens' decision to fight alongside Pontus is also a testament to the bellicosity of ancient states and the pressures they felt to seek power through military conflict. Because of these considerable pressures Athens, despite being wildly unprepared for war, joined Pontus in its hegemonic war against Rome.

<sup>187</sup> For these events in Greece, see Appian *Mithr.* 28; Vell. Pat. 2.18; Plut. *Sul.* 11

<sup>188</sup> Mithridates' Thracian allies had overrun Epirus. Dio 30-5.101

<sup>189</sup> Shayegan argues that Mithridates used the title as a propagandistic tool at the height of his power and that Mithridates in fact had no plans to recover the lands of the Achaemenid Empire. Shayegan 2011: 244-5.

while he had secured his eastern frontier along the borders of Armenia and Parthia.<sup>190</sup> Had the Romans been forced to sue for peace at this moment, a new system of bipolarity between Rome and Pontus would have emerged in the Mediterranean system.<sup>191</sup>

#### Pontic Decline and Uncertainty in the Near East

Despite the seemingly dire straits of the Roman cause, as was so common in Rome's many hegemonic struggles throughout its history, the Romans did not seek peace in 88/87 BCE but instead pursued further war. In fact, Rome had won enough battles and made enough concessions to end the Social War in 88 BCE. In spite of considerable political tension and violence between rival factions in Rome, the Romans were determined to send a retaliatory campaign to Greece and Anatolia to punish Mithridates and his allies for their crimes.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Ath. 5.213; Appian *Mithr.* 2.13; Plut. *Luc.* 3.1

<sup>191</sup> Although I reject her portrait of Mithridates as a "savior," I agree with Mayor that Mithridates at the height of his power, "represented a genuine alternative to Roman imperialism in the turbulent last days of the Republic." Mayor 2010: 369. Appian stresses that at the height of his power Mithridates' "remarkable exploits" had made him ruler of the Mediterranean "from Cilicia to the Adriatic." Appian *Mithr.* 16.112. Appian later concludes, "Many times he [Mithridates] had over 400 ships of his own, 50,000 cavalry, and 250,000 infantry, with engines and arms in proportion. For allies he had the king of Armenia and the princes of the Scythian tribes around the Euxine and the sea of Azov and beyond, as far as the Thracian Bosphorus. He held communications with the leaders of the Roman civil wars, which were then fiercely raging, and with those who were inciting insurrection in Spain. He established friendly relations with the Gauls for the purpose of invading Italy. From Cilicia to the Pillars of Hercules he filled the sea with pirates, who stopped all commerce and navigation between cities and caused severe famine for a long time. In short, he left nothing within the power of man undone or untried to start the greatest possible movement, extending from the Orient to the Occident, to vex, so to speak, the whole world, which was warred upon, tangled in alliances, harassed by pirates, or vexed by the neighborhood of the warfare. Such and so diversified was this one war." Id. 17.119. Appian here surely exaggerates the military capabilities of Mithridates; however, Mithridates was one of the greatest threats to the hegemony of the Roman state, and he would have subdued the Romans had he had the opportunity. Kallet-Marx calls the first conflict "an epochal moment in the history of Rome's Eastern imperium. The Romans came very close to being expelled from the Greek East altogether." Kallet-Marx 1995: 289.

<sup>192</sup> Gruen 2006: 263.



Command of the war fell to Sulla, who sailed to Greece in 87 BCE after marching on Rome and ousting his political rivals from power, especially Marius.<sup>193</sup>

Almost as quickly as Mithridates had risen to rival Rome in the Mediterranean, his new empire began to collapse. His costly siege of Rhodes failed to take the city.<sup>194</sup> Meanwhile, Sulla arrived in Greece with five battle-hardened legions. His campaign in Greece was swift and successful. He brutally sacked Athens after a short siege and then destroyed the Pontic armies at Chaeronea and Orchomenus. Mithridates' losses in Greece were catastrophic, and Sulla set about ravaging the region as retribution for its disloyalty.<sup>195</sup>

Mithridates' failures at Rhodes and in Greece began to shift the balance of power back in Rome's favor. Several mainland Greek communities, notably Thebes, which had bandwagoned with Pontus out of necessity in 88 BCE began to defect back to Rome.<sup>196</sup> Once Rhodes had shown that Mithridates was not invincible and once Sulla began to reassert Roman influence in Greece, these communities made another difficult choice based on the shifting balance of power in the region.

As Roman forces approached Anatolia, Greek communities there began considering defection as well. Mithridates made the situation worse as the shifting of his fortunes encouraged him to turn to coercion and violence to maintain control over his allies. Mithridates understood

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<sup>193</sup> See esp. Plut. *Sul.* 6-10; *Mar.* 35

<sup>194</sup> For the battle at Rhodes, see Appian *Mithr.* 4.24-7; Diod. 37.28; Memnon 22.8. See also Mayor 2010: 179-83.

<sup>195</sup> Mithridates lost perhaps up to 200,000 men. For the campaign in Greece, see Appian *Mithr.* 5.30-7, 6.38-45, 7.46, 49-50, 8.51-3; Plut. *Sul.* 12-22; Memnon 22.10-13; Vell. Pat. 2.23.3; Aulus Gell. 15.1; Polyb. 35.52; Front. 1.11; Val. Max. 1.2.3; Strabo 13.1.54; Paus. 1.20, 9.6.2, 9.40, 9.7. See also Mayor 2010: 197-213.

<sup>196</sup> "As he was passing through the country, all Boeotia joined him except a few, and among others the great city of Thebes which had rather lightly taken sides with the Mithridateans against the Romans, but now even more [politically] nimbly changed from Archelaus to Sulla before coming to a trial of strength." Appian *Mithr.* 5.30

that he could not allow his allies in Anatolia to abandon him in favor of Rome if he had any hope of stopping Sulla's advance. Quite often the maintenance of power is more difficult than its acquisition, and Mithridates began to realize this. He knew that the survival of his kingdom was on the line and made the difficult decision to uphold his regional power through oppression. Unfortunately for him, his new policy made the ramifications of his recent significant losses worse. Galatia, Cos, Cnidus, Chios, Ephesus, Tralles, Hypaepa, Mesopolis, Smyrna, Colophon, Sardis, and several other communities perceived Pontic weakness and resented Mithridates' brutal actions. They too defected back to Rome. Mithridates spent the rest of the war repressing plots against his life and conducting retaliatory campaigns against rebels in Anatolia.<sup>197</sup>

By 85 BCE, although Mithridates still ruled over an extensive kingdom with great wealth and military capabilities, his campaign in Greece had been a disaster and the situation in western Anatolia was deteriorating.<sup>198</sup> Mithridates recognized that he could not defeat the combined strength of Sulla, Lucullus, and Flaccus' armies. Yet he understood that political tension and violence back in Italy had reemerged, as the Marian faction murdered many of Sulla's supporters.<sup>199</sup> Mithridates seems to have hoped to secure a truce that would buy him time to recover his military strength and might allow him to retain his hegemonic power in Anatolia. He sent his trusted general, Archelaus, to negotiate peace terms with Sulla. Unsurprisingly, both men engaged in compellence diplomacy. Archelaus blamed Rome for the war and demanded fair terms, and Sulla demanded that Mithridates give up all his western gains or face a Roman

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<sup>197</sup> See Appian *Mithr.* 7.46-8; Plut. *Sul.* 20, *Luc.* 3; Memnon 23; Ath. 6.266; Orosius 6.2. See also Mayor 2010: 214-21.

<sup>198</sup> Despite his considerable losses in Greece and Rhodes, Mithridates raised another army in Anatolia (perhaps 80,000 men). Appian *Mithr.* 7.49

<sup>199</sup> See id. 8.51; Plut. *Sul.* 22, *Mar.* 41-4; Diod. 37

invasion of Anatolia.<sup>200</sup> Mithridates was unhappy with Sulla's conditions and decided to meet Sulla face to face at Dardanus. Again, Mithridates blamed Rome for the war and demanded better terms, and again Sulla demanded that Mithridates return to Pontus and pay an indemnity. He even criticized Mithridates for trying to "rule the whole world," referring to Mithridates as a butcher, a murderer, a slaver, and a traitor.<sup>201</sup> Sulla's rebuttal highlights the importance of threats and fear based motivation in ancient diplomacy. Appian records,

'I [Sulla] am astonished that you should now seek to justify the acts for which you asked pardon through Archelaus. If you feared me at a distance, do you think that I have come into your neighborhood to have a debate with you? The time for that passed when you took up arms against us, and we vigorously repelled your assaults and repelled them to the end.' While Sulla was still speaking with vehemence, the king yielded to his fears and consented to the terms that had been offered through Archelaus. He delivered up the ships and everything else that had been required, and went back to his paternal kingdom of Pontus as his sole possession. And thus the first war between Mithridates and the Romans came to an end.<sup>202</sup>

The goal of compellence diplomacy is to reinforce power relations and to threaten adversaries into complicity based on fear of harsh consequences. Sulla aimed to reestablish Roman hegemony over Pontus, and he used threats of force to accomplish this goal.

Notwithstanding the considerable friction between the two sides, both Sulla and Mithridates needed to end the war. The Marian faction in Rome had declared Sulla an enemy of the state, and the Marian general Fimbria, who had murdered his superior officer Flaccus and seized his army, was invading Anatolia to steal Sulla's glory.<sup>203</sup> Sulla desperately needed to

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<sup>200</sup> See Appian *Mithr.* 8.54-56; Plut. *Sul.* 22-3; Memnon 25

<sup>201</sup> "You had meditated war a long time, because you hoped to rule the whole world if you could conquer the Romans, and the reasons you tell of were mere pretexts to cover your real intent. The proof of this is that you, although not yet at war with any nation, sought the alliance of the Thracians, Sarmatians, and Scythians, sought aid from the neighboring kings, built a navy, and enlisted pilots and helmsmen." Appian *Mithr.* 8.56-8, 9.59. Note also Plut. *Sul.* 24, *Luc.* 3

<sup>202</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 8.58

<sup>203</sup> Id. 8.56; Plut. *Sul.* 22-4; Diod. 38/39.8; Dio 30-5.104

secure his gains in the East and return to Italy to fight a civil war.<sup>204</sup> His proposed peace with Mithridates would restore Anatolia to antebellum conditions with Rome as the regional hegemon. Meanwhile, Mithridates tried to bolster his the perception of his remaining power by bringing a large force with him to his meeting with Sulla; however, in reality he needed to recoup his losses. Western Anatolia was on the edge of rebellion and the invasion of Fimbria made the situation much worse. Sulla's demands were not lenient; Mithridates had to abandon his territorial gains in Anatolia. However, because of Sulla's need to end the war quickly the terms were not debilitating. Mithridates was ordered, in addition to abandoning his gains in Anatolia, to release his prisoners, give seventy ships to Rome, and pay a small fine.<sup>205</sup> Yet this allowed Mithridates to distance himself from the troubles facing Western Anatolia and made the invasion of Fimbria Sulla's problem. Moreover, Mithridates retained the core of his Black Sea kingdom, which had not suffered any devastation during the war. Behind Rome, Mithridatic Pontus remained the strongest power in the Eastern Mediterranean. Thus, the peace at Dardanus was a verbal agreement of convenience between Sulla and Mithridates.<sup>206</sup> This truce was neither satisfying nor unreasonable.<sup>207</sup> Mithridates was neither victorious nor totally defeated. Roman hegemony was neither diminished nor firmly secured. There remained great uncertainty about

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<sup>204</sup> Note Diod. 38/39.6-7

<sup>205</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 8.54-5; Plut. *Sul.* 22; Memnon 25; Eutrop. 5.7

<sup>206</sup> For more on the peace at Dardanus, see Mayor 2010: 225-7.

<sup>207</sup> Sulla's soldiers were especially unhappy that their commander had come to terms with Mithridates. Plut. *Sul.* 24.4. Meanwhile, Mithridates lost all confidence in Archelaus for yielding "more than was necessary to Sulla in his negotiations in Greece." Appian *Mithr.* 9.64. Note that Sidonius Apollinaris' account from the fifth century CE demonstrates the long tradition of Roman authors criticizing Sulla's peace terms. See Keaveney 1995: 35. Florus blames Sulla's desire for a "speedy rather than a thorough triumph over Mithridates" for the later continuation of hegemonic war, stating, "This condition of affairs, so far from breaking the spirit of the people of Pontus, only inflamed them [to try to retake Asia and Europe]." Florus 1.40.11-14. Note also Cicero, who states, "But Mithridates employed all the time which he had left to him, not in forgetting the old war, but in preparing for a new one." Cic. *Man.* 4.9

the actual power balance in the region and the remaining power capabilities of Pontus because no climactic showdown of arms in Anatolia occurred. The hegemonic war between Rome and Pontus, known as the First Mithridatic War, had ended prematurely because of Roman distractions in Italy.<sup>208</sup> As a result, the hegemonic struggle between Rome and Pontus would continue.

For all of these reasons, neither side took the verbal terms of the peace at Dardanus very seriously. Sulla broke the agreement almost immediately when he punished Mithridates' supporters in Anatolia with great severity.<sup>209</sup> In addition, the contentious Roman Senate failed to ratify the treaty and, therefore, peace between Pontus and Rome was not officially recognized.<sup>210</sup> Meanwhile, Mithridates refused to abandon all of Cappadocia and began rebuilding and reforming his military.<sup>211</sup> It is not surprising that open conflict between Rome and Pontus soon resumed.

Sulla had had practical geopolitical reasons for ending his war prematurely against Mithridates. Even after the substantial losses in Greece, Mithridatic Pontus remained a strong, well-defended kingdom. With civil war reemerging in Italy, Sulla could not afford to be bogged down in a long campaign to completely conquer Pontus, as Lucullus found himself a decade later. Yet the rest of Rome did not share in Sulla's desire to end the war, as the protests of Sulla's

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<sup>208</sup> Sulla understood this when he said, "Instead of treating for peace we ought to be absolutely implacable toward him [Mithridates], but for your sake I will undertake to obtain his pardon from Rome if he actually repents." Appian *Mithr.* 8.55. Although again he is too dismissive of Mithridates' agency in the affair, note Kallet-Marx 1995: 261-4.

<sup>209</sup> Id. 9.61-3; Plut. *Sul.* 25; Memnon 25; Vell. Pat. 2.23.6

<sup>210</sup> The Roman commanders in Anatolia after Sulla did not recognize the treaty between Rome and Pontus because no such treaty existed officially. See Appian *Mithr.* 9.64; Memnon 26.1. Kallet-Marx 1995: 265-73.

<sup>211</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 9.64

soldiers, the obstruction of the senate, and the actions of Sulla's replacement in Anatolia, Lucius Licinius Murena, demonstrate.

The geopolitical environment of Anatolia in the middle 80s BCE was tense. Mithridates initially had enjoyed sweeping success in the Eastern Mediterranean and emerged as a rival of Rome. However, poorly coordinated and executed campaigns at Rhodes and in Greece quickly had dashed his initial hopes of dominating the region and challenging Rome. The massive losses of the first war had damaged Mithridates' prestige and reputation, while diminishing his strength and the perception of his power. This encouraged other polities to challenge Pontic rule. In the latter years of the war, numerous Greek communities had rebelled against Mithridates in response to the drastically shifting balance of power in the region. The peace at Dardanus further damaged Pontus' standing within the interstate system. Mithridates, although not destroyed, had submitted to Rome. Colchis and the Bosphorus too took advantage of Pontic weakness and challenged Pontic hegemony over the Black Sea region by rebelling. In 84 BCE Mithridates was eager to recoup, not only his strength, but also his reputation after his recent geopolitical setbacks and raised a large army and navy to subdue Colchis and the Bosphorus.<sup>212</sup> Through the defeat of Colchis and the Bosphorus, Mithridates reestablished firm control of his Black Sea kingdom and began to recover his military prestige.

Meanwhile, much of Rome rejected the peace talks with Pontus and wanted to punish Mithridates further by forcing his unconditional surrender. Mithridates had challenged Roman hegemony, allied with Rome's enemies, and massacred tens of thousands of Roman citizens and Italians. He had brought the reputation, prestige, and strength of Rome into serious question. Sulla's campaign was supposed to have been a retaliatory campaign to reestablish Roman

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

supremacy and to take vengeance against Mithridates' actions. Sulla's campaign accomplished the first goal, although tentatively; however, Sulla did not satisfy the Roman desire for revenge. Mithridates remained in control of his vast territories around the Black Sea and remained a potential threat to regional stability and Roman hegemony. Sulla seems to have understood the need to satisfy Rome's desire for vengeance. Thus, he broke the peace terms he made with Mithridates and punished the Greek communities loyal to Pontus severely.<sup>213</sup> However, despite Sulla's insistence that "the instigators of these crimes paid some penalty to us also," most Romans did not accept Mithridates' small fines as satisfactory.<sup>214</sup>

Thus, the resurgence of Mithridates' military power and reputation in 84 BCE and the considerable dissatisfaction of the Romans with the results of the first war increased regional tensions and amplified the "uncertainty principle" in the region. Rome became increasingly paranoid about Pontic intentions to dominate the Greek East once again.<sup>215</sup> The power capabilities of Pontus were unclear and seemingly on the rise. The Roman official in Anatolia, Murena, knew that Mithridates had submitted to Sulla's terms willingly and was busy fighting

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<sup>213</sup> Sulla told the Greeks, "Most infamous of all, you obeyed the order he gave to kill all the Italians in your communities, including women and children, in one day. You did not even spare those who fled to the temples dedicated to your own gods. You have received some punishment for this crime from Mithridates himself, who broke faith with you and gave you your fill of rapine and slaughter, redistributed your lands, canceled debts, freed your slaves, appointed tyrants over some of you, and committed robberies everywhere by land and sea; so that you learned immediately by experiment and comparison what kind of defender you chose instead of your former ones. The instigators of these crimes paid some penalty to us also. It is necessary, too, that some penalty should be inflicted upon you in common, as you have been guilty in common, and something corresponding to your deserts." Id. 9.62. For the precarious situation of numerous Greek communities after the first conflict, see Kallet-Marx 1995: 274-86.

<sup>214</sup> Sulla himself understood that he was letting Mithridates off lightly. He insisted that Mithridates' punishments did not match his crimes. See id. 8.58; Plut. *Sul.* 24.2-3

<sup>215</sup> The Romans thought Mithridates' new army and navy to secure the Black Sea was in reality built to fight them. In addition, Archelaus defected to Rome and easily convinced Murena that Mithridates had plans to reinvade Anatolia. Finally, Mithridates' refusal to abandon all of Cappadocia worried Rome about his intentions. See Appian *Mithr.* 9.64

rebels in the north. However, he knew that Mithridates was quickly rebuilding his military strength and securing his kingdom. One can imagine that Murena viewed further military operations against Pontus as preemptive. As Mithridates had preached years before in Pergamon, before Mithridates could recover his strength and take the initiative, Rome needed to act. Once one adds these fears to the remaining Roman desire to seek revenge against Mithridates and to Mithridates' refusal to abandon all of Cappadocia, there was plenty of motivation and pretext for war in the late 80s BCE.<sup>216</sup>

In all of this Mithridates was a not a blameless victim of Roman aggression. We should not think of the "Second Mithridatic War" in black and white terms.<sup>217</sup> The entire conflict was a grey area. Neither side was fully in the right or wrong. The peace at Dardanus was neither upheld, nor irrelevant.<sup>218</sup> Both Rome and Pontus had broken the terms of the agreement before

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<sup>216</sup> Appian's accusation that "Murena, who had been left by Sulla with Fimbria's two legions to settle affairs of the rest of Asia, sought trifling pretexts for war, being ambitious of a triumph" is unfair. Ibid. Certainly, it is possible that Murena was an ambitious man, who sought military glory. However, Murena's embarrassing failure against Mithridates influenced Appian's opinion. Much like Crassus, whom the sources universally condemned for attacking Parthia, praise or condemnation of Roman military operations was results based, especially against perceived eastern rivals. Note also Aquillius' and, to a lesser extent, Lucullus' unfavorable depictions in the sources after their struggles against Mithridates. For the portrayal of the failures of all three men in the East and of several others, see below. Despite Appian's objections, the systemic pressures of the interstate system made further conflict between Rome and Pontus likely, and Mithridates' actions, especially his continued occupation of Cappadocia, made conflict legitimate. Therefore, I disagree that the second war between Rome and Pontus was merely a war of plunder and glory seeking by the Romans. Madsen 2009: 198. It was no more a war of plunder than the first conflict (nor any other Roman conflict for that matter). Note Appian *BC* 1.57

<sup>217</sup> For example, Mayor's recent portrayal of these events favors an interpretation of Mithridates as a restrained victim. Meanwhile, she depicts the Romans (especially Murena) as self-serving fools, who attacked Mithridates illegally and without justified cause. She calls Mithridates "the people's savior-king against rampaging Romans," continuing, "he was still the 'Good Father' who drove off the ravaging wolves." Mayor 2010: 230-2. We should avoid such a polemical interpretation.

<sup>218</sup> Sulla and the senate had not made a comprehensive settlement of Anatolia nor firmly reestablished Roman hegemony. Once again the process was slow and inconsistent, and it was



83 BCE, and the senate never officially recognized the peace. Thus, it seems inappropriate to call the conflict between Mithridates and Murena a second war. In reality it was a continuation of the first conflict with a short truce in the middle. The justification for Roman aggression against Mithridates was his refusal to abandon Cappadocia. In the summer of 83 BCE, Murena invaded Pontic held Cappadocia and attacked a Pontic garrison at Comana.<sup>219</sup> That is, like so many Roman officials before him, Murena used force to remove Mithridates' forces from Cappadocia and to restore Ariobarzanes' kingdom. Murena did not officially declare war, but he did not need to because war had never officially ended between Rome and Pontus and because Mithridates was occupying Cappadocia illegally.

Meanwhile, the main reason that Mithridates did not escalate the fight over Cappadocia in 83 BCE was his desire once again to gain sufficient cause and opportunity for conflict with Rome. That is, Mithridates returned to his cautious and calculated policy of testing Roman strength and intentions. Mithridates' losses in the previous conflict had been considerable.<sup>220</sup> He could not hope to renew a hegemonic war against Rome so quickly. However, he could hope to win local, limited conflicts to better his regional standing and recover his strength. Mithridates knew that when Sulla had returned to Italy he had taken the majority of Rome's army with him. This left Murena with only two legions to maintain stability in Anatolia. Further, the Romans returned to their harsh occupation of the region. If Mithridates could play once again on the regional hatred of Rome and bring Rome's regional power into question, he could hope someday

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left to later Romans "to revive Roman power in the East and face down all challengers." Kallet-Marx 1995: 289, 291-2.

<sup>219</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 9.64

<sup>220</sup> Appian summarizes Mithridates' losses, which included perhaps as many as 160,000 men, in his account of Sulla's return to Italy. Id. *BC* 1.76.

to challenge Roman domination once more when he had fully recovered his strength.<sup>221</sup> There is no doubt that Mithridates desired to maximize his power at the expense of Rome if the opportunity presented itself in the late 80s BCE. The war with Sulla had injured his personal pride and public reputation. He needed to save face by recovering his standing as a regional power and potential rival of Rome. Part of his plan was to gain local support by *playing* the victim once again, even though he had not truly abandoned his aggressive policies and hegemonic desires.

Mithridates had experienced the factionalism of Rome firsthand with his diplomatic discussions with the Italian allies and his interactions with Sulla and Fimbria. He understood that Rome no longer always fought as one. This helps explain why he appealed to Murena, the senate, and Sulla in turn.<sup>222</sup> Certainly, he was covering his bases; however, he also was testing Roman solidarity. Murena rejected the peace talks at Dardanus because they were invalid. As far as he and his soldiers were concerned, the war with Mithridates had never ended officially, and Mithridates had violated the truce anyway.<sup>223</sup> Thus, in 82 BCE Murena raided and pillaged southern Pontus.<sup>224</sup> Yet Mithridates still could not act openly against Rome because he needed to know if the senate and Sulla shared Murena's aggressive stance. He needed to know if Murena's actions had wider support.

Mithridates had refused to engage Murena in Cappadocia because his illegal occupation of the region meant that he would not have been justified in pursuing war. Instead, he had appealed to Rome claiming the protection of the terms of the treaty at Dardanus. He did this to

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<sup>221</sup> We see this process gaining momentum as Heraclea refused to join Rome in the conflict against Pontus. Memnon 26.2

<sup>222</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 9.64-5

<sup>223</sup> Marcus Cotta felt the same way before the third conflict with Mithridates. Plut. *Luc.* 5

<sup>224</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 9.65

play the victim in the eyes of Rome, but more importantly in the eyes of the polities in and around the Eastern Mediterranean, even though he had already broken the treaty prior to his appeals by staying in Cappadocia. When it became apparent that the Roman Senate was unwilling to recognize peace officially but cautious about renewing war, Mithridates realized that his diplomatic strategy of playing the victim had run its course. The senate's indecisiveness and Murena's aggression meant that by 82/81 BCE further open conflict with Rome was likely. However, Mithridates' diplomatic strategy had worked in his favor. Murena's seemingly unprovoked invasion of Pontus made it seem as though Pontus was a victim of unwarranted Roman aggression. Mithridates obtained the sufficient cause he needed to retaliate. Appian, in a rather puzzling account, states,

There he [Murena] met Calidius, who had been sent from Rome because of the complaints of Mithridates. Calidius did not bring a decree of the Senate, but he declared in the hearing of all that the Senate ordered Murena not to molest the king, as he had not broken the treaty. After he had thus spoken, he was seen talking to Murena alone. Murena abated nothing of his violence, but again invaded the territory of Mithridates. The latter, thinking that open war had been ordered by the Romans, directed his general, Gordius, to retaliate on their villages.<sup>225</sup>

Appian's passage should give us some pause because it portrays Mithridates as a victim of unjust Roman molestation and portrays Murena in the common literary trope of the greedy, violent, or irreligious Roman, weak of character, who eventually fails in the East.<sup>226</sup> Note that Memnon's account portrays Murena as a representative of the senate, who restored Ariobarzanes to his

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Note especially the accounts of the failures and deaths of Manius Aquillius and Crassus. See id. 3.21; Pliny *NH* 2.57, 15.21.83; 33.14.48; 47.134; Athen. 5.50; Diod. 37.26-7; Vell. Pat. 2.18; Cic. *Man.* 4.11; Cic. *Tusc.* 5.5, 14; Dio 40.12, 17.3, 18, 27; *HA Clod.* 13.6; Appian *BC* 2.18; Florus 1.46; Orosius 6.13; Lucan *Phar.* 3.126; Plut. *Crass.* For more on this subject, see the introduction.

kingdom and fought an indecisive war against Mithridates.<sup>227</sup> Memnon does not indicate that Murena attacked Pontus out of greed, violence, or against the will of the senate. Moreover, Appian fails to mention Murena's offensive push towards the Pontic capital, Sinope, and instead, portrays Murena fleeing after a humiliating loss. We may also call into question Appian's conclusion that Mithridates believed Rome secretly declared war on Pontus. It is possible that Mithridates allowed his paranoia to convince him that Rome in secret had ordered an "all-out war" against him.<sup>228</sup> However, the course of the conflict and the immediate aftermath make it unlikely. It is more probable that Mithridates finally reacted militarily because the perfect opportunity had presented itself.

Calidius' visit, without an official decree of the senate, proved that Rome would not officially recognize the treaty at Dardanus. Thus, Mithridates could count on the public perception of this conflict to be in his favor. It also proved that, at least in public, the Romans did not agree upon a unified policy. Murena and the senate were at odds. Additionally, Murena's subsequent invasion of Pontus further damaged the public perception of Roman trustworthiness and unity. Through cunning diplomatic maneuvering, Mithridates created a perception that he had tried to be honorable and restrained, while Rome had acted boorishly. Two ill-conceived Roman invasions of Pontus had overshadowed his refusal to abandon Cappadocia. Continued Roman aggression justified Pontic retaliation. Meanwhile, Roman indifference to the violation of the treaty at Dardanus gave Mithridates the sufficient cause he desired. Finally, Mithridates knew, by successfully testing the Romans with his cautious and calculated policy, that Rome continued to lack political uniformity. Murena was isolated and vulnerable in Anatolia with two

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<sup>227</sup> Memnon 26

<sup>228</sup> This is Mayor's conclusion. Mayor 2010: 232.

legions, while Mithridates had a sizable new army and fleet. The opportunity to strike swiftly and successfully against Murena had presented itself. Mithridates could hope to gain a quick victory against Rome that would drastically improve his military reputation and the perception of Pontic power. Moreover, the observed disunity and sluggishness of the Roman state meant that he could hope to secure more favorable peace terms after his quick victory with whatever Roman faction wanted to cooperate.

Consequently, Mithridates attacked and defeated Murena in battle. Although the result likely was not the crushing Roman defeat described in Appian, it was more decisive than Memnon would like to admit. Appian records, “The news of this brilliant and decisive victory spread quickly and *caused many to change sides to Mithridates*. The latter drove all of Murena's garrisons out of Cappadocia and offered sacrifice to Zeus Stratios [that is, Zeus of Armies] on a lofty pile of wood on a high hill.”<sup>229</sup> Appian describes in this passage the various polities of the interstate system once again reacting to the realities of the shifting balance of power in the region. Mithridates’ policy and quick victory had successfully brought Roman power into question. It also had successfully restored the perception of Pontic power. Communities began to bandwagon with Pontus once more. Moreover, not only had Mithridates defeated a Roman army and pushed it out of Pontus, he then reclaimed Cappadocia and sacrificed to a war god in great ceremony. He was making an emphatic statement that he remained a great warrior king and a potential rival of Roman hegemony.

In Mithridates’ previous attempts to gain recognition of the treaty at Dardanus, he had appealed to Murena, the senate, and Sulla. Murena had rejected the terms, and the senate had refused to acknowledge them officially. Finally, with the situation in Anatolia quickly

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<sup>229</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 9.66 (the italics are mine)

deteriorating and Mithridates threatening to plunge the region once more into chaos, Sulla decided to step in personally and put an end to the renewed conflict in Anatolia. Appian states,

Sulla thought that it was not right to make war against Mithridates when he had not violated the treaty. Accordingly, Aulus Gabinius was sent to tell Murena that the former order, that he should not fight Mithridates, was to be taken seriously, and to reconcile Mithridates and Ariobarzanes with each other. At a conference between them Mithridates betrothed his little daughter, four years old, to Ariobarzanes, and improved the occasion to stipulate that he should not only retain that part of Cappadocia which he then held, but have another part in addition.<sup>230</sup>

Despite Appian's claim, by not abandoning Cappadocia in the first place and then by reoccupying it by force, Mithridates clearly had violated the terms of the treaty. However, so had Sulla and Murena. Although Sulla had cause for war, that is Mithridates' meddling in Cappadocia, and reason to pursue war, that is Mithridates' defeat of a Roman army, Sulla lacked the motivation to fight Mithridates in 81 BCE. He had recently claimed the title of Dictator with unprecedented power and authority over the Roman state, and he used this power to extort and murder his political enemies.<sup>231</sup> Sulla was a practical man, and he did not want to fight another multiple front war. He needed to concentrate on solidifying his power in Rome, reorganizing the Roman government, and combating the rebellious Sertorius in Spain and North Africa. Simultaneous war in the Near East against the clever and ambitious Mithridates was too risky. Moreover, Mithridates had demonstrated that he was open to peace talks if the terms were amenable. Sulla had no such opportunity for peace with his other enemies. Thus, he told the defeated Murena, who no longer had recourse to disobey, to renew the truce between Rome and Pontus.

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Plut. *Sul.* 31-3. See also Dio 30-5.108-9

Mithridates' successful policy and campaigning had provided him with a great opportunity to negotiate with Rome on better, more equitable terms. He had defeated Murena's army but with difficulty. He knew that he needed more time to recoup his losses and retrain his army if he wanted to challenge Roman domination seriously once more. He had gambled that disunity in Rome and a quick military victory would drastically elevate his standing and encourage Rome to seek a more favorable peace. He gladly accepted the renewal of the truce with Rome; however, he used his elevated position to secure a large portion of Cappadocia and a legitimate dynastic right to the land. This was an impressive concession by Rome and Ariobarzanes considering the decades of conflict the three sides had had over the region. It speaks to Ariobarzanes' desperation, Rome's regional vulnerability, and Mithridates' political and military savvy. Unlike the treaty at Dardanus, Mithridates was able to dictate some of the terms of the second truce between Rome and Pontus. His victory over Murena had been a great boon for his personal prestige and reputation. Many polities in Anatolia had taken notice of the rising perception of Pontic power, and they began once again to join Mithridates.

The second outbreak of open conflict between Rome and Pontus and the second truce did not fix any of the underlying problems of the treaty at Dardanus. In fact, the geopolitical situation had become potentially much worse as a result. Roman hegemony was more vulnerable; neither Mithridates' ambitions, nor Rome's desire for vengeance were satisfied; and the "uncertainty principle" remained high.<sup>232</sup> The power balance between Rome and Pontus

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<sup>232</sup> Appian touches on Mithridates' awareness of Roman discontent with the treaty, stating, "He [Mithridates] accused them [the Romans] of bad faith respecting the last and still existing treaty, saying that they were not willing to sign it because they were watching for an opportunity to violate it again." Appian *Mithr.* 10.70. For Appian this was a convenient cause for renewing the war against Rome in the 70s BC, despite Mithridates' reoccupation of much of Anatolia, which was in direct violation of the treaty he here defends.

continued to fluctuate and the true power capabilities of both states in the region remained unclear. Since Mithridates had retained his Black Sea kingdom and had defied Rome in Cappadocia successfully, he spent the next decade rebuilding his military resources. He had been wise not to challenge the full might of Sullan Rome in 81 BCE; however, his victories against Murena and Ariobarzanes gave him confidence in further possible success in Anatolia and the Eastern Mediterranean. He could hope to renew the hegemonic conflict with Rome after he had recovered his strength and when the ideal opportunity presented itself. For Rome the Mediterranean system was not secure, and the problem of Mithridates would reemerge.

### Summary and Conclusion

Early in the first century BCE, both Rome and Parthia became militarily involved in the Near East. The rising ambitions of Pontus and Armenia drew Rome and Parthia into their first contact. The Kingdom of Cappadocia became an important semi-peripheral realm in both the Mediterranean and Eastern systems. The military success of Mithridates II against the Armenians and Seleucids meant that Parthian lands and allied territories came to share an extensive frontier with Cappadocia and Pontus. One cannot discuss Mithridates VI and Tigranes II's mutual desire to subjugate Cappadocia without considering the place of Parthia in the new and ever-changing international environment in the Near East. However, one should not overestimate the involvement or cooperation of Parthia in the increasingly tense political atmosphere surrounding Cappadocia. Parthia's primary concern remained the defeat and submission of the Seleucid state in Syria.

It is impossible to accept that Parthia was acting as a puppet-master leader of an anti-Roman coalition in the 90s BCE. Tigranes was an ambitious king, who saw an opportunity to expand his prestige and the security of his kingdom quickly in 95 BCE. His invasions of



Sophene and Cappadocia and his alliance with Pontus were calculated, limited policies of his own making and in his own self-interest. He did not act as the pawn of Parthia or Pontus, and he did not anticipate a Roman response to his actions. Tigranes had no plans of fighting Rome because his considerations and actions were limited to the confines of the Eastern system. Meanwhile, when the Roman Senate sent Sulla to reinstall Ariobarzanes to his kingdom in 94 BCE, the Romans were acting within the confines of the Mediterranean system. In fact, despite Tigranes' invasion of Cappadocia, the Romans viewed Mithridates VI as the real threat to the region. Rome did not intend to become involved in the geopolitical developments of the Eastern system. Sulla's meeting with the Parthian official, Orobazus, on the Euphrates was not a Roman effort to bully or trick Parthia into an unequal diplomatic position, nor was it an effort by Rome or Parthia to limit their hegemonies to a Euphrates border agreement. Rather, both Rome and Parthia approached the Cappadocian affair as hegemonies of separate interstate systems.

For Parthia, Mithridates II's vassal, Tigranes II, had successfully ravaged Cappadocia but had failed to secure the region for Pontus because of Sulla's counterattack. Even though the Parthians had not participated in this endeavor, the miscalculation of Tigranes reflected poorly upon Mithridates' reputation as well. The military setback of Tigranes in Cappadocia threatened to damage the perception of Parthian power in the region if Mithridates did not control the potential fallout of the situation. Moreover, Roman intentions in the region were unknown, and therefore, Mithridates needed to investigate the Cappadocian affair and attempt to save face. Thus, Mithridates sent an envoy to establish informal friendly relations with the Romans and hopefully to arbitrate a settlement between Ariobarzanes and his vassal Tigranes.

Yet the Parthians' perspective of this event was much different from that of the Romans. Rome considered Cappadocia to be under its own hegemony and did not consider the concerns

of Parthia. Sulla did not intend to allow Parthia to arbitrate the settlement of this region. Instead, he assumed that Orobazus represented Mithridates II and his vassal, Tigranes, in the matter and proceeded to mediate a meeting between Orobazus and Ariobarzanes. Contrary to our biased Graeco-Roman sources and the opinion of most scholars, the unforgivable insult that forced Mithridates to execute Orobazus after this meeting was not the idea that Sulla had tricked Orobazus into submitting to Rome. Rather, the unforgivable insult was that Orobazus had treated Ariobarzanes as an equal. That is, for Mithridates the problem was that of the perception of his position within the Eastern system, not concern for Rome. Mithridates, King of Kings, was the undisputed hegemonic leader of the Eastern system and for one of his officials to treat a hostile petty king as an equal in a public diplomatic exchange was shameful because it directly challenged the reputation, prestige, and power of Mithridates and the Parthian state. Thus, we achieve a new appreciation of the Cappadocian affair once we abandon a solely Roman-centric interpretation.

The fallout of the Cappadocian affair was that military and diplomatic embarrassments on the part of Armenia and Parthia meant that Tigranes and Mithridates demanded satisfaction against the slights of Cappadocia. Sulla, who had no interest in involving Rome permanently in the affairs of the Near East, returned to Rome, leaving Cappadocia once again isolated and vulnerable. It was at this time that Parthia joined the Armeno-Pontic alliance against this kingdom and this kingdom alone. There continued to be no anti-Roman coalition. The Parthians remained focused on their fight against the Seleucids; however, they for the first time perhaps provided Armenia with support when Tigranes once again invaded Cappadocia in 92 BCE, removed Ariobarzanes a second time, and reestablished the pro-Pontic regime of Ariarathes. Neither Armenia nor Parthia viewed these actions against Cappadocia in the latter half of the 90s

BCE as anti-Roman. In fact, not even Mithridates VI considered his meddling in Cappadocia in these terms. Instead, the efforts of Tigranes with the possible support of Parthia in 92 BCE were designed to secure the northwestern frontier, to avenge previous slights by Ariobarzanes, and to reaffirm Parthian hegemony on the periphery of the Eastern system.

Meanwhile, although Rome was the hegemonic power of the Mediterranean system at the beginning of the first century BCE, it faced a serious threat to its hegemony in the 80s BCE. Mithridates VI had successfully created a strong military and financial powerbase around the Black Sea by the 90s BCE. Further, in the 90s he attempted unsuccessfully to assert Pontic hegemony over Anatolia without causing open conflict with Rome. Yet by the beginning of the 80s BCE, the perceived balance of power in the region had shifted in Pontus' favor, and Mithridates began searching for a cause and justification for war with Rome. The ill-conceived actions of Aquillius and Rome's ally, Nicomedes IV, provided Mithridates with his opportunity to pursue a hegemonic war against Rome. Under Mithridates' leadership, Pontus transitioned from a limited to an unlimited revisionist state and sought to dominate the Eastern Mediterranean at the direct expense of Rome. Through a combination of crafty leadership and clever diplomacy, Mithridates quickly defeated the Roman forces in Anatolia and established himself as the regional hegemon. The balance of power had shifted drastically in Pontus' favor, and numerous Greek communities in Anatolia and Greece chose to bandwagon with Pontus against Rome instead of balance with Rome against Pontus.

Mithridates' sweeping success, paired with Roman distractions and internal chaos, meant that Pontus for a brief time became master of much of the Eastern Mediterranean and a serious hegemonic rival of Rome. Had he fared better in Greece, Mithridates likely would have invaded Italy itself and challenged Roman domination of the Mediterranean system directly. Mithridates'

ambitions had expanded drastically with his success. He entertained aspirations of making Pontus the hegemon of the entire Mediterranean system. Mithridates' empire stretched from the regions around the Black Sea to Anatolia to Greece and Macedon and his thoughts of invading Italy never faded. He was the greatest single threat to Roman hegemony in the Mediterranean system since the great wars against Macedon and the Seleucid Empire.

Unfortunately for Pontus, Mithridates' plans of Mediterranean conquest did not succeed. Rome was determined to defeat this new rival and punish it for its crimes. Pontus suffered heavy losses at Rhodes and in Greece, severely damaging the power of Pontus and drastically altering the balance of power back in Rome's favor. This encouraged several communities to defect back to the Roman cause. With the situation in Greece hopeless and the situation in western Anatolia quickly deteriorating, Mithridates decided to try to come to terms with Rome while he could still hope to negotiate from a strong position. The terms he received demanded that Anatolia return to antebellum conditions and that Pontus pay a minor fine. Sulla offered these rather lenient terms because civil war once again had engulfed Italy. He needed to secure his gains in the East quickly so that he could return to Rome. Political expediency allowed Mithridates to live to fight another day.

Sulla had restored Roman hegemony over the Eastern Mediterranean; however, he had not secured it firmly. Mithridates retained the core of his kingdom and began rebuilding his power almost immediately. Moreover, few at Rome supported the peace Sulla offered to Mithridates. Since the treaty satisfied neither side, both Rome and Pontus quickly broke the terms of the agreement, and the senate refused to ratify the peace treaty. Rome had defeated Mithridates but not destroyed him. Nor had Rome sufficiently avenged Mithridates' slaughter of

tens of thousands of Roman citizens and Italians in Anatolia. The failure of the treaty at Dardanus to satisfy either side made renewed conflict between Rome and Pontus likely.

Mithridates consolidated his strength and retained control of a large portion of Cappadocia after the end of the first conflict. The Roman official left in command in Anatolia, Murena, viewed this as a justification for action. Like his predecessors, he removed Mithridates' forces from Cappadocia by force and restored the kingdom to Ariobarzanes. With Murena's rash actions, Mithridates saw an opportunity to revamp his reputation and public relations. Through cunning diplomacy Mithridates created the public perception that he was an innocent victim of continued Roman aggression; however, in reality he was once again setting a trap for Rome.<sup>233</sup> In the late 80s BCE, Mithridates wanted to restore the perception of Pontic strength in Anatolia and to gain more favorable peace terms with Rome. He correctly calculated that Rome remained politically fractured and reluctant to fight in the East. He patiently watched for the ideal opportunity to strike, knowing that a quick victory in Anatolia would allow him to negotiate with Rome from a position of greater strength. Murena's ill-conceived invasions of Pontus gave Mithridates cause and justification for renewing his conflict with Rome. He quickly defeated Murena, and as he had anticipated, Sullan Rome desired to renew the truce on terms that were more favorable.

The results of the second conflict between Rome and Pontus amplified the failures of the treaty at Dardanus. The Romans not only again had failed to punish Mithridates and eliminate Pontus as a potential rival, but they had allowed Mithridates to humiliate Rome and expand Pontic power. Mithridates had defeated a Roman army and his reward was seizing a large portion

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<sup>233</sup> I disagree fundamentally with Madsen, who portrays Mithridates as passive and reluctant to fight and who argues that the Romans "provoked Mithridates into beginning the war." Madsen 2009: 197-8.

of Cappadocia legitimately. For the time being, Mithridates was satisfied with his swift reversal of fortune, and Rome was unwilling to intervene further militarily. Rome had far too many internal problems to conduct a major war in the East in the late 80s BCE, while Mithridates needed more time to rebuild his strength in order to battle the full might of Rome. Therefore, the uneasy truce remained in place, and Mithridates looked to the future for another opportunity to challenge Roman domination.

## Chapter 5 – The Successes and Failures of Tigranes II and Mithridates VI and the Consequences in the Near East

Fundamentally important to the greater geopolitical consequences of the hegemonic struggle between Rome and Mithridatic Pontus were the actions of the Kingdom of Armenia as the eventual challenger to Parthian hegemony within the Eastern system and as Pontus' reluctant ally against Rome. The Armenian king, Tigranes II, later known as Tigranes the Great, developed tremendous personal ambitions and aspirations for his kingdom. Like the development of Mithridates' ambitions against Rome in the Mediterranean system, after years of careful and opportunistic power-maximizing policies, Tigranes wished to erase his secondary status and make a bid to contest Parthian hegemony over the Eastern system. An important step in establishing the security of Armenia and its potential strength was Tigranes' aggressive policies in the middle and late 90s BCE. His territorial expansion, military aggression, and alliance with Mithridates VI secured his western border and allowed him to focus on the rapidly evolving geopolitical developments in the Eastern system.

The Kingdom of Armenia in the early first century BCE remained a peripheral state on the outside of the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system and therefore had little contact or conflict with Rome in the West. However, the successful western advances of the Parthians under Mithridates II had brought Armenia under direct Parthian hegemony and had placed Tigranes atop the Armenian throne as a Parthian vassal. For over a decade, Tigranes remained a vassal of Parthia as he slowly enhanced his reputation and expanded the power of his kingdom. However, by the end of the 80s BCE Armenia, too, had developed into an unlimited revisionist state with aspirations of hegemonic war against Parthia. Tigranes sought to replace Parthian hegemony in the Near East with his own. He was tremendously successful, adding expansive

territories to his kingdom. Moreover, had western events not interfered he may have attempted to dominate the Eastern system completely. Unfortunately for Tigranes, while he conquered the Near East, the hegemonic war between Mithridatic Pontus and Rome went poorly for Pontus, and, even though Tigranes had not taken an active part in the war, his conquests along the Eastern Mediterranean coast and the longstanding Armeno-Pontic alliance made eventual conflict with Rome a distinct possibility.

Two key events facilitated the eastward expansion of the limits of the Mediterranean system and the inclusion of the Kingdom of Armenia within those limits. First, there was the expansion of the Armenian state into the coastal regions of the Eastern Mediterranean. For Rome, these lands, especially Syria, had been a part of the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system since at least the 160s BCE, when Rome restrained the western ambitions of Antiochus IV.<sup>1</sup> From a Roman perspective, the Armenian occupation of Syria and Tigranes' further expansions throughout the region constituted an indirect threat to Roman hegemony in the Mediterranean system and helped bring the potential threat of Armenia to Roman attention.<sup>2</sup> Second, the local military alliance between Armenia and Pontus eventually drew Armenia into direct conflict with Rome after the Roman conquest of Pontus in the late 70s BCE forced Mithridates to flee to the side of Tigranes. Thus, for the Romans the cause of Mithridates became

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<sup>1</sup> See Polyb. 29.27.1-8; Livy 45.12.1-8

<sup>2</sup> Note Nersessian 1970: 27. We should reject Sartre's mistaken and dismissive opinion that "by occupying Syria, Tigranes in no way harmed Rome's interests, and Rome, having little sympathy for the last remnants of the Seleucids, was all the more willing to look the other way." Further, Sartre's argument that Tigranes' inability to control pirates and bandits was instead a "major" cause of the war against Rome is unsubstantiated and dubious. Sartre 2005: 29.



linked with that of Tigranes, and therefore, the war between Rome and Pontus eventually came to consume Armenia as well.<sup>3</sup>

### Parthian Decline and the Rise of Armenia as a Hegemonic Rival

While Rome battled with Mithridates VI in the West, geopolitical developments became increasingly complex in the East as the decline of Parthian power after the death of Mithridates II and the growing power capabilities of Armenia created a tense international environment. In a century and a half the Parthian state had risen from a small kingdom in northeastern Iran to the hegemon of the Eastern system. Mithridates II's reign had been fundamental to Parthia's eastern supremacy. His western wars had pushed Parthian influence into the lands of Armenia, Anatolia, and Syria. Yet Mithridates' long absence from the Farther East gave rise to the usurper Sinatruces, and his sudden death in ca. 91 BCE left his untested son, Gotarzes, with a civil war to fight.

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<sup>3</sup> Note that Cicero in early 56 BCE expresses that the Romans had viewed Tigranes as a threat to their hegemony in the early 60s BCE. He states, "With Tigranes, king of the Armenians, we waged a serious war of very long duration; he having, I may almost say, challenged us, by inflicting wanton injuries on our allies. He was not truly a vigorous enemy on his own power and on his own account, but he also defended with all his resources and protected in his territory, that most active enemy of this empire, Mithridates, after he had been driven from Pontus; and after he had been defeated by Lucullus that most excellent man and most consummate general, he still remained in his former mind, and kept up a hostile feeling against us with the remainder of his army. And yet this man did Gnaeus Pompeius—after he had seen him in his camp as a suppliant and in an abject condition—raise up and placed on his head again the royal crown which he himself had taken off, and, having imposed certain conditions on him, ordered to continue king. And he thought it no less glorious for himself and for this empire, that the king should be known to be restored by him, than if he had kept him in bonds. Therefore, Tigranes—who was himself an enemy of the Roman people, and who received our most active enemy in his territories, who struggled against us, who fought pitched battles with us, and who compelled us to combat almost for our very existence and supremacy—is a king to this day, and has obtained by his entreaties the name of a friend and ally, which he had previously forfeited by his hostile and warlike conduct." Cic. *Sest.* 27.58-9

As the Parthian Empire descended into political instability and civil war, Tigranes II continued to consolidate his power in Armenia. He had shown himself to be a capable and ambitious ruler in the middle and late 90s BCE. His annexation of Sophene, marriage alliance with Pontus, and multiple invasions of Cappadocia had increased his military reputation and the potential strength of his kingdom. These aggressive policies were not “anti-Parthian;” rather, they were actions of self-interest carefully calculated to maximize Armenian power without upsetting the Parthians. Much like Mithridates VI, Tigranes did not burn with a passion to challenge the system hegemon from the beginning of his reign. Instead, as a vassal of the Parthians for over a decade, he sought to maximize state security and power without risking a war. Only after the decline of Parthian power in the 80s BCE and the continued success of his power maximizing policies did Tigranes finally entertain the idea of challenging Parthian domination in the East.

#### Parthian Civil War and Armenian Opportunity

The death of Mithridates II in ca. 91 BCE marked the beginning of what scholars call the Parthian “Dark Age,” which continued down to 55 BCE. Reconstructions of the events of Arsacid history in this period suffer from a lack of literary evidence and, therefore, rely almost solely on the classification of Parthian coinage.<sup>4</sup> Although we lack details, the numismatic evidence, which illustrates a hectic series of claimants to the throne, makes it clear that the

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<sup>4</sup> Our major source of literary evidence is the incomplete Babylonian *Astronomical Diaries*. For the heated scholarly debates over the reconstruction of Parthian history in this period based upon numismatics, see esp. Assar 2009b; Shayegan 2011: 188 n.563. In this study, I follow closely the revised chronology of Arsacid rulers put forward by G. F. Assar, who based his work upon the considerable efforts of D. Sellwood and O. Mørkholm and new interpretations of the Babylonian *Astronomical Diaries*. See esp. Sellwood 1976: 2-25; Mørkholm 1980: 33-47; Assar 2005a; id. 2006d; id. 2009. In this, I avoid Simonetta’s less reliable reconstruction. See esp. Simonetta 1953-1957: 111-21; id. 1966: 15-40; id. 2001 69-108.

Parthian Dark Age also was a period of political upheaval and civil war that sapped Parthian strength and undermined Parthian prestige.<sup>5</sup> Under Mithridates II the Parthians had subdued the nomadic tribes and secured the eastern frontier; they had forced Armenia to submit to Parthian hegemony and installed a vassal king over the region; and they had annexed northern Mesopotamia from the Seleucids and were spreading their influence into Syria and Anatolia. Yet Mithridates' long absence from the Farther East was not without consequence, as a rival named Sinatruces attempted to usurp the throne, likely with the support of the eastern Parthian aristocracy.<sup>6</sup> He quickly overran Parthia proper and Media and then seized Susiana in southern Iran in 93/92 BCE.<sup>7</sup> In ca. 92/91 BCE Sinatruces decisively defeated an army that Mithridates II had sent to put down his rebellion, and Mithridates seems to have lost control of most of the eastern half of the empire by 91 BCE.<sup>8</sup>

What directly caused this rebellion is unknown; however, it seems likely that two factors played a significant role, one of which no scholar has yet put forward. First, Mithridates II's war

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<sup>5</sup> Note Assar 2006d: 56 n.3-4. Assar finds in the dynastic disputes of this period the beginning of Parthia's chronic "internecine conflicts" that "eventually led to the collapse of Arsacid power in about AD 224." Id. 58.

<sup>6</sup> Dąbrowa demonstrates in a recent article that there were separate groups within the Parthian aristocracy, one in the East and the other in the West. He concludes that the Parthian aristocracy finally split into separate warring factions during the civil war between Mithridates IV and Orodes II; however, it seems more likely that this split began in the late 90s BCE when the eastern nobles supported Sinatruces against Mithridates II and his Mesopotamian supporters. Note Dąbrowa 2013; Gregoratti 2013b.

<sup>7</sup> Assar 2006d: 61-2.

<sup>8</sup> Sinatruces had a claim to the throne as the nephew of Mithridates II, the brother of Phraates II, and the son of Mithridates I. It is possible that he spent much of his youth as a captive or exile among the Sakae and that he used nomadic warriors to defeat Mithridates II's army. After the victory, he minted coins in Ecbatana that heralded his triumph (S33.1-2 ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΘΕΟΠΙΑΤΟΡΟΣ ΝΙΚΑΤΟΡΟΣ). He also began minting coins at Rhagae and Margiane and probably in Mithradatkart and Nisa. See id. 2005: 53; id. 2006c: 145; id. 2006d: 56-60. For a recent reevaluation of the life and genealogy of Sinatruces, see Assar 2005b.

on Syria provided Sinatruces with an ideal military opportunity to challenge Mithridates II because the armies of Parthia were occupied in the far west of the empire. It allowed him to garner the support of eastern nobles and to strike at the relatively unprotected lands of the Farther East.<sup>9</sup> Second, the embarrassing diplomatic exchange of Mithridates' envoy, Orobazus, with Ariobarzanes in 94 BCE had damaged Mithridates' prestige and provided Sinatruces with the ideal opportunity to challenge Mithridates' position as king.<sup>10</sup> Perception of reputation, prestige, and power was all-important to ancient kings since from it they derived their legitimacy and support. Orobazus' shameful recognition of Ariobarzanes as a king of equal standing in the meeting with Sulla humiliated Mithridates, King of Kings. This humiliation was not a trifling event, as the later execution of Orobazus demonstrates.<sup>11</sup> Mithridates understood that the perception of his power was linked directly to the perception of his prestige as the undisputed master of the Eastern world. Therefore, I offer a new interpretation of these events. When word of Mithridates' humiliation reached Sinatruces in the Farther East, this paired with Mithridates' long absence from his eastern lands finally provided Sinatruces and his supports the opportunity they needed to contest the position of Mithridates. Thus, we should not view Sinatruces' rebellion and invasion of Parthia in ca. 93 BCE as a coincidence.

For a great warrior, who had enjoyed such sweeping success for the majority of his reign, Mithridates II died a frustrated man in the early autumn of 91 BCE and left his son Gotarzes I

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<sup>9</sup> I believe we can be more definitive than Assar suggests. Although the defeat of Antiochus X appears to have occurred in ca. 89/88 BCE instead of 92 BCE, Mithridates' operations in and around Syria would have taken years. The Arab-Parthian war, in which Antiochus X and Demetrius III fought, lasted from the late 90s to the early 80s BCE. See Hoover 2007: 294-6.

<sup>10</sup> For the discussion of the meeting between Sulla and Orobazus, its difficulties, and its consequences, see Chapter 4 of this study.

<sup>11</sup> Plut. *Sul.* 5.4-5. In fact, it seems likely that word of Sinatruces' rebellion also encouraged Mithridates to execute Orobazus.

with a war to finish in Syria and a major civil war to fight in the East.<sup>12</sup> Gotarzes took his father's title of King of Kings to distinguish his authority against the usurper Sinatruces; however, the title was not hollow or "vainglorious."<sup>13</sup> Gotarzes' short reign was highly successful. He spent it restoring the eastern frontier of the empire and expanding the western frontier further into Syria. An indication of Gotarzes' military success and ability to maintain the perception of Parthian power is Tigranes II's decision to marry his daughter, Aryazate, to him.<sup>14</sup> Parthian strength and reputation had wavered since the meeting with Sulla and the rebellion of Sinatruces; however, Gotarzes accomplished everything within his power to maintain Parthian hegemony.

Although the evidence is fragmentary and mostly circumstantial, it appears that Gotarzes and Sinatruces fought a back and forth war over Babylonia and Susiana from 91-87 BCE until Gotarzes finally defeated Sinatruces in battle, regained the eastern portions of the Parthian

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<sup>12</sup> Assar argues that Mithridates perhaps died in a second expedition against Sinatruces. Assar 2006c: 147-9; id. 2006d: 62. The *Astronomical Diaries* speak of a calamity that forced the people of Babylonia to flee to the protection of Babylon. Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -90. Gotarzes held the rank of Satrap of Satraps under his father and assumed the throne immediately after his father's death. For Gotarzes' lineage and his role under his father, see Assar 2006d: 62-6; Shayegan 2011: 196-7, 225-6.

<sup>13</sup> Assar 2006d: 65. Most scholars have overlooked Gotarzes use of the "King of Kings" title and, therefore, have attributed his coins to other "greater" kings. See Gardner 1877: 30 no. 28; Wroth 1903, 35-6 nos. 117-20; von Petrowicz 1904: 31 nos. 77-9; Newell 1938: 480, pl. 141.L; Sellwood 1971: 75; id. 1976: 6; Simonetta and Sellwood 1978: 116; Sellwood 1980: 84; id. 1983: 285; Simonetta 2001: 95; Shayegan 2011: 228, 233, 235. Shayegan argues that Gotarzes commissioned the famous Bisitun relief at the beginning of his reign to associate himself with his father's regime. Gotarzes likely had been the "satrap of satraps" for his father over the Upper Satrapies and the legitimate heir to the throne in the later portion of Mithridates II's reign. Shayegan 2011: 226.

<sup>14</sup> The *Avroman I* sale contract states, "In the reign of the King of Kings, Arsaces, the Beneficent, the Just, the Manifest, and the Philhellene, and of the Queens, Siake, his compaternal sister and wife, and Aryazate surnamed Automa, daughter of the Great King Tigranes, and his wife, and of Azate, his compaternal sister and wife, in the year 225, in the month Apellaios, ...". Note Assar 2006d: 67.

Empire, and forced Sinatruces into exile on the Central Asian steppe.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, the war between the Parthians and Antiochus X in Syria, as described by Josephus, likely occurred in 89/88 BCE during Gotarzes' reign.<sup>16</sup> This war culminated in the decisive defeat of the Seleucids and the death of Antiochus on the battlefield.

Gotarzes, who sought to live up to his father's lofty accomplishments, first decided to fight the Samenian Arabs and Seleucids in Syria, while his chief of troops, Mitratu (Mithrates), moved against Sinatruces to secure Babylonia and threaten Susa.<sup>17</sup> Gotarzes understood that bringing the war of his father against the Seleucids and their allies to a favorable conclusion would drastically enhance his prestige and hurt the rival claim of Sinatruces. Further, if he could stabilize his western frontier, he could concentrate the full weight of his army against the usurper. His strategy paid off, and with the defeat of Antiochus in early 88 BCE, Gotarzes marched against Sinatruces and crushed his army in 87 BCE.<sup>18</sup>

Yet Gotarzes' success was short-lived because he suddenly died after expelling Sinatruces from the empire. Further, it appears that the succession of his son, Orodes I, was poorly planned, and Gotarzes' brother Mithridates III took this opportunity to seize the throne.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> For a convincing reconstruction of Gotarzes' military exploits, see *id.* 60-1, 66-8. Note also Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -87C.

<sup>16</sup> *Jos. Ant.* 13.369-71. See Hoover 2007: 294-6.

<sup>17</sup> For the possible campaign of Mitratu in Babylonia, see Assar 2006d: 66. Note Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -90.

<sup>18</sup> The battle seems to have been an ambush and Gotarzes perhaps defeated Sinatruces in single combat. Assar 2006d: 68. Note Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -87C. See also Colledge 1977: 90-1; Bivar 1983: 41-4.

<sup>19</sup> Mithridates III used the specific and rare epithet of "Autocrat (AYTOKPATOPOΣ)," which suggests that he was not Gotarzes' natural successor. See Simonetta and Sellwood 1978: 108; Assar 2006d: 70-1. For the rearrangement of Parthian coinage securely attributed to Mithridates III, see Sellwood 1976: 4-9; Mørkholm 1980: 35; Assar 2006d: 71 n.103. Shayegan argues that Gotarzes tried to secure and legitimize Orodes' claim to the throne by including him in the Bisitun relief. Shayegan 2011: 226.

At the beginning of his reign, Mithridates III controlled the extent of the massive Parthian Empire, and he tried with diligence to enhance his military reputation and right to rule.

The death of Antiochus X in battle against the Parthians in 88 BCE did not end the Seleucid civil war in Syria.<sup>20</sup> Demetrius III and Philip I carried on the conflict until one of Philip's supporters, Strato, called for Parthian aid. Demetrius, although he had fought a costly campaign in Judea, had marched back into Syria and besieged his brother at Beroea (modern Aleppo).<sup>21</sup> Mithridates III needed to prove himself the equal of his father, who had humbled and isolated the Seleucids, and his brother, who had killed a Seleucid king in battle, in order to help legitimize his usurpation of his nephew's throne and his regime. Therefore, Mithridates III viewed the ongoing conflict in Syria as an ideal opportunity to gain a military victory that would help him secure his throne. When Philip's supporters pled for Parthian aid, Mithridates III sent his top general, Mithridates Sinaces, with a large force to fight Demetrius III.<sup>22</sup>

Demetrius had lost well over half of his army in Judea, and more importantly, he only retained 1,000 cavalry.<sup>23</sup> When the large force of Parthian cavalry arrived at Beroea, Demetrius' troops were no match for their arrows and speed. Demetrius fortified the remnants of his 11,000 man army in his camp, and the besiegers became the besieged. Eventually, Demetrius' men

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<sup>20</sup> *Jos. Ant.* 13.369-71

<sup>21</sup> *Id.* 13.377-8, 384-6. This passage demonstrates that the Seleucids, even at this late date, could muster a sizable army and wanted to use it aggressively against neighboring states.

<sup>22</sup> Mithridates Sinaces (or Mitradata in the cuneiform records) replaced Mitratu, who was Gotarzes' man, as the supreme commander in Mesopotamia under the new title of "commander-in-chief of troops." Note Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -111, no. -107, no. -99, no. -95. Note also that Shayegan suggests that the Parthians defeated Demetrius III under Gotarzes and his general Mitratu. He then argues that Josephus mistakenly ascribed the victory to Mithridates II. Shayegan 2011: 203-4. However, Josephus merely calls the Parthian king, Mithridates. In this instance, Josephus meant the new Parthian king, Mithridates III.

<sup>23</sup> According to Josephus, Demetrius had 40,000 infantry and 3,000 cavalry in Judea. *Id.* 13.377-8.

surrendered from lack of water, and Demetrius himself was sent to Mithridates III to be a prized Parthian hostage as Seleucus II and Demetrius II had been before him. Thus, in 87 BCE at the beginning of his reign, Mithridates III won a great victory over the Seleucids, which rivaled those of Gotarzes I, Phraates II, Mithridates I, and even Arsaces I.<sup>24</sup> He reinforced Parthian hegemony over the weakening Seleucid state and regained a Seleucid king as his prisoner.

There is one further aspect of this campaign worth considering. Josephus mentions, “So Philip, presently after the fight was over, came to Antioch, and took it, and reigned over Syria (κατασχών αὐτὴν ἐβασίλευσεν τῆς Συρίας).”<sup>25</sup> It is probable that Philip had to pay a considerable price to secure Parthian aid against Demetrius. Perhaps the Parthian reward simply was the spoils of battle; however, Philip’s weak position in 87 BCE lends itself to another conclusion. It is possible that Philip offered to become a vassal of Parthia in exchange for Parthian military aid.<sup>26</sup> Philip had few military forces at his disposal; hence his conundrum at Beroea. Moreover, Josephus mentions that, after defeating Demetrius’ army, the Parthians took the spoils of the country and Demetrius as a prisoner; however, he makes no mention of the Parthians executing Demetrius’ soldiers or taking them prisoner. The Parthians under Phraates II had learned the hard way that captured Seleucid soldiers could not be trusted under Parthian command.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, it is likely that the Parthians turned the 11,000 or so soldiers left in Beroea over to Philip’s command. He then used his new army to take Antioch, to seize Damascus for a time, and to rule

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<sup>24</sup> We know Demetrius was defeated in 87 BCE because this year marks the end of his coin issues. See Newell 1939: 82 nos. 130-1; Houghton and Spaer 1998: 478-82.

<sup>25</sup> *Jos. Ant.* 13.386

<sup>26</sup> Olbrycht maintains that Philip was a Parthian nominee to the Seleucid throne. Olbrycht 2009: 165. See also Sampson 2015: 87. Note that Tigranes II had struck a similar deal eight years previously. See Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -95C, no. -95D. See also Strabo 11.14.15

<sup>27</sup> Justin 42.1.5



over Syria as a Parthian vassal.<sup>28</sup> Thus, in 87 BCE Parthian hegemony over the Eastern system reached its apex.<sup>29</sup>

However, despite Mithridates III's sweeping success against the Seleucids, his victory did not erase the stain of usurpation from his reign. Much like Sinatruces' earlier attempt to seize the Parthian throne, Mithridates' rule was met with violent opposition. Yet the source of this violent opposition is of great interest because it came initially from the vassal king of Armenia, Tigranes II, rather than an Arsacid challenger.

By 87 BCE Tigranes had been king of Armenia for nearly a decade, and he had spent that entire time pursuing aggressive policies against his neighbors and building the strength and security of his kingdom. He had annexed Sophene, had made a military alliance with Mithridates VI of Pontus by marrying Mithridates' daughter in order to secure his western border, had invaded Cappadocia twice, and recently had married his family into the Arsacid dynasty by marrying his own daughter to Gotarzes. His military expeditions in Sophene and Cappadocia illustrate his eagerness to expand the size and power of his kingdom. Meanwhile, in line with the alliance he had forged with Mithridates VI, Tigranes had gained great spoils in men, materials, and money through his invasions of Cappadocia, and he used these spoils to help build a large, well-equipped army.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Philip's youngest brother, Antiochus XII, challenged his rule and the two fought an indecisive civil war that ended prematurely with the death of Antiochus in a battle against the Nabataean Arabs in 84/83 BCE. *Jos. Ant.* 13.387-91. See also Hoover 2007: 294, 296, 298-9.

<sup>29</sup> Note Strabo, who argues that Seleucid weakness allowed the Parthians finally to dominate Syria. He states, "And this is what made the Parthians masters of the country, who got possession of the region on the far edge of the Euphrates." Strabo 14.5.2

<sup>30</sup> Josephus records Tigranes' army at 300,000-500,000 men prior to the Roman invasion in 69 BCE. *Jos. Ant.* 13.419. Although these numbers are exaggerated and come from a later period, Tigranes' sweeping success against the Parthians demonstrates that he had a sizable force under his command by the early 80s BCE.

Once Pontus seized Cappadocia directly in 89/88 BCE, Tigranes, who had no desire to fight a western war against Rome, had a completely secure western frontier and looked to enhance his standing in the Eastern system. Since Sinatruces' rebellion in 93/92 BCE, the Parthians had been fighting a difficult civil war. With the death of Mithridates II in 91 BCE, his son Gotarzes found himself in a precarious situation. He needed to conduct a campaign in the East to defeat Sinatruces, and to do this he needed Armenia to remain loyal and to protect the northern and western frontier. A marriage alliance between Gotarzes and Tigranes' family was the most expedient way for the new Parthian king to secure the loyalty of Armenia. The *Avroman I* sale contract tells us that by November 88 BCE Gotarzes was married to Tigranes' daughter.<sup>31</sup> With Mithridates VI's conquest of Cappadocia and Gotarzes' defeat of Antiochus X in early 88 BCE, it seems likely that this marriage took place soon after. This would have been a timely and beneficial marriage alliance between Parthia and Armenia.

Although Gotarzes had just killed Antiochus X in battle and defeated his army in 89/88 BCE, Parthia's alliance with Armenia was more important than ever because of the Parthian civil war in the East. Tigranes had demonstrated that he was an ambitious and resourceful leader, and the marriage alliance allowed Gotarzes to gain a capable and loyal ally to help stabilize the western portions of his empire while he fought a war in the East. Meanwhile, the marriage alliance drastically enhanced the prestige and reputation of Tigranes and his dynasty by attaching

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<sup>31</sup> The *Avroman I* parchment found in Kurdistan, Iran in 1909 mentions the marriage of the Parthian king to his two sisters and to Tigranes' daughter. For the correct dating of this contract to November 88 BCE, see Assar 2006d: 67. Although there is no definitive way to know when this marriage took place, early to middle 88 BCE is a likely period for both Gotarzes and Tigranes to make this match. Additionally, the emphasis placed on Aryazate's marriage to the "King of Kings" and her connection to her father, the "Great King Tigranes," is the sort of imperial propaganda that would make sense in a military alliance against the usurper Sinatruces. Shayegan 2011: 196. Note also that by marrying his sisters Gotarzes was following the Achaemenid practice of "khvaetvadatha" or next-of-kin marriage. See Boyce 2002: 97.

it directly to the Arsacids. With the defeat of the Seleucids, Tigranes viewed Gotarzes as a capable and worthy successor of Mithridates II. By gaining Gotarzes as a son-in-law, he could hope to be the grandfather by law or by blood of the next Parthian king and reap all of the potential benefits that such a relationship could provide. Thus, Tigranes had enhanced the military capabilities and reputation of his kingdom successfully through his recent expeditions, but now he elevated the position of the king of Armenia in relation to the Arsacid dynasty. The balance of power between the two monarchs had become far less tilted in Parthia's favor.

### Bipolarity Reemerges in the Eastern System

Scholars have argued endlessly about the reconstruction of Tigranes' reign from 88-69 BCE.<sup>32</sup> This is due in large part to the confused, incomplete, and inaccurate surviving historical record of this period of Armenian history. Much like our understanding of the Parthian Dark Age, the chronology of Tigranes' reign before his war with Rome is open to considerable interpretation and relies heavily upon fragmentary literary and material evidence. Through a careful consideration of the numerous modern interpretations of these events and the disparate surviving evidence, this study proposes a new reconstruction of the years between the death of Gotarzes I in 87 BCE and the war between Rome and Armenia in 69 BCE. It utilizes system-level analysis to interpret geopolitical conditions and concerns to create a fuller appreciation of the events of this period, and to demonstrate that, before the sudden intervention of Rome, Armenia actively sought to challenge and perhaps replace Parthian hegemony over the Eastern system.

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<sup>32</sup> See esp. Marquart 1901: 109; Mommsen 1903: vi 315-17; Armen 1940; Morgan 1965; Nersessian 1970: 25-6; Sherwin-White 1984: 193-6, 223-4; Chaumont 1986a; Chahin 1987: Ch. 22; Chaumont 1985-88; Redgate 1998; Assar 2006d: 72-5; Manaseryan 2007; Manandyan 2007: Ch 6; Olbrycht 2009; Shayegan 2011: 312-22.

There is little consensus on when Tigranes first challenged Parthian hegemony through aggressive open conflict. Scholars have argued for dates ranging from immediately following the death of Mithridates II to not until after 80 BCE, and their convictions usually are shaped mostly by their opinion of Tigranes' relationship with Parthia.<sup>33</sup> Yet a more moderate interpretation of Tigranes as a leader, which takes into consideration geopolitical realities and does not portray him as a national hero or Parthian stooge, produces a more reliable account of Tigranes' rebellion.

Clearly, Tigranes was a talented and ambitious leader. The pressures of the interstate anarchy encouraged him to expand the security and strength of his kingdom at the expense of his neighbors, even against the better interests of Parthia. Therefore, he served the Parthians mostly out of necessity, not loyalty. Yet he did not harbor hatred toward or an unshaken desire to destroy the Parthians. Much like Mithridates of Pontus, for years Tigranes sought regional advancement through limited policies. He was willing to work with the Parthians when it suited him and was not completely beholden to them. He demonstrated great agency in the pursuit of self-interest and opportunity during his early reign. As his reputation and power grew, the scope of his ambitions expanded as well.<sup>34</sup> His successful efforts to connect his family to that of the

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<sup>33</sup> Those who view Tigranes as a longstanding Parthian enemy, who sought the first opportunity to challenge Parthian hegemony, prefer the former date. See esp. Manandyan 2007: 36. Those who view Tigranes as a loyal pawn of Parthia prefer the latter date. See Esp. Olbrycht 2009: 169. We should not consider the Kingdom of Armenia a helpless pawn of Roman or Parthian power. There is a long-standing tradition of this opinion, see Rawlinson 1885 (2002): 120; Sheldon 2010: 84, 86-7. For the other extreme of this argument (that is, a vehement defense of the Armenians), where the Armenians were not submissive clients of the Seleucids, Parthians, or Romans but a proud, unyielding people, see Chahin 1987: 230-9.

<sup>34</sup> For the rise of Tigranes, see esp. Will 1967: ii 383f.; Wolski 1980a: 252ff; Manaseryan 2007: Ch. 6. For him becoming king of Armenia, see Strabo 11.14.15; Justin 38.3.1; Plut. *Luc.* 21.6. For his conquests, see Justin 40.1.1-4; Plut. *Luc.* 21.2, 27.7, 29.7, 30.1, 31.8; Dio 36.14.2, 37.5.3-5; Memnon 38; Isid. 6.

Arsacids is a good example of this and demonstrates that he was not opposed to working with the Parthians to obtain his larger regional ambitions. Thus, his abrupt change of policy against the Parthians in the middle 80s BCE was not the result of long-term planning; rather, it was the result of Tigranes correctly interpreting geopolitical realities in the Near East and seizing a sudden opportunity and cause for war. His continued success throughout the late 90s and early 80s BCE built his confidence and ability to challenge Parthian hegemony; however, such a conflict was not inevitable even in the early 80s BCE. That is, much like Mithridatic Pontus, the transition of Armenia under Tigranes from a limited to an unlimited revisionist state occurred suddenly, unexpectedly, and because of systemic pressures and geopolitical opportunity.

In the late summer of 87 BCE, Gotarzes suddenly died and left the throne vacant. Seemingly, the kingship was supposed to pass to Gotarzes' young son, Orodes I; however, his brother Mithridates III seized the throne for himself. Mithridates' reign began with considerable success as his forces achieved a great victory in Syria against Demetrius III; however, as a usurper to the Parthian throne, he had to worry about confrontations with Arsacid rivals, such as Sinatruces or Orodes, but also the new important political player on the scene, Tigranes. Tigranes' recent marriage alliance with Gotarzes meant that he had a stake in the continuation and consolidation of power under Gotarzes' line of the Arsacid dynasty. This made the usurper, Mithridates, a threat to Tigranes' growing regional prestige and a direct enemy of his immediate and extended family.

Mithridates' seizure of the Parthian throne from Orodes provided Tigranes with a unique opportunity to contest Parthian hegemony. The civil war between Mithridates II and Sinatruces had damaged Parthian prestige and power. The Parthian Empire had been split in two. If Tigranes simply had been looking for *any* reason to take advantage of Parthian vulnerability, he

had many opportunities during the Parthian civil war to challenge Parthian hegemony. Yet, as the marriage alliance between Tigranes and Gotarzes illustrates, Tigranes remained supportive and loyal at the end of 88 BCE.

Perhaps Gotarzes' decisive defeat of Antiochus X encouraged Tigranes to respect Parthian power and seek advancement through nonviolent channels; however, there is a more likely explanation for Tigranes' inaction against the Parthians during their civil war. Tigranes knew that starting an unprovoked war against the Parthians was foolish and dangerous. Like Mithridates of Pontus he needed a legitimate cause for war as well as an opportunity. The perception of justified action in ancient warfare, regardless of what the real motivations were, was fundamentally important because it helped determine validation and support for one's efforts.<sup>35</sup> This is why Rome, Parthia, the Seleucid Empire, Pontus, and indeed every militarized state in the ancient world spent such concerted efforts to secure justifiable cause for military actions. Under the systemic pressures of interstate anarchy, a polity that pursues a perceivably justified war appears less aggressive and, therefore, less threatening to other states within the interstate system. In theory, this means that other polities are less likely to oppose a state with "right" on its side, thus minimizing the potential of balancing behavior against a rising hegemonic threat. In practice, Mithridatic Pontus had been able to accomplish this goal in the Eastern Mediterranean as the majority of Greek states accepted Mithridates' cause for war and did not side with Rome.

However, Mithridates' concerns and efforts were not unique, and Tigranes was well aware of the potential strength of the Parthian Empire and its allies. He could not run the risk of challenging Parthian hegemony in an unjust war that would galvanize Parthia's many vassal

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<sup>35</sup> Note Mattern 1999: 214-15.

kings and allies to come to its aid. Therefore, Tigranes did not act against Gotarzes and, instead, married his daughter to him. Yet, Gotarzes' sudden death and the usurpation of Mithridates III afforded Tigranes the opportunity *and* the justified cause he needed to act.<sup>36</sup>

Unfortunately, the exact timeline of the various eastern conquests of Tigranes is uncertain; however, there is enough surviving evidence and new interpretations of that evidence to make a compelling new reconstruction of these events. First, let us consider the literary evidence. Strabo records,

He [Tigranes] had experienced many vicissitudes of fortune. At first he had served as a hostage among the Parthians; then by their means he returned to his country, in compensation for which service they obtained seventy valleys in Armenia. When he acquired power, he recovered these valleys, and devastated the country of the Parthians, the territory about Ninus, and that about Arbela [that is, in Adiabene]. He subjected to his authority the Atropatenians and the Gordyaeans; by force of arms he obtained possession also of the rest of Mesopotamia [namely Mygdonia and Osrhoene], and, after crossing the Euphrates, of Syria and Phoenicia.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, we see the extensive campaigns of Tigranes during his hegemonic war against Parthia. Tigranes began by reclaiming the land that represented his vassalage to Parthia and then conducted an ambitious conquest of the western lands of the Parthian Empire. It is within this process of expansive hegemonic aggression that we find the transition of Armenia from a limited to an unlimited revisionist state. Strabo continues that this was Tigranes' "height of prosperity" but simply concludes that it ended swiftly when Lucullus "drove Tigranes both out of Syria and Phoenicia."<sup>38</sup> Although he offers little sense of when these various campaigns occurred, he

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<sup>36</sup> In this, I share Assar's opinion. See Assar 2006d: 74.

<sup>37</sup> Strabo 11.14.15. Strabo indicates that after subduing Commagene Tigranes captured the fortress city Seleucia at Zeugma on the Euphrates. Id. 16.2.3.

<sup>38</sup> Id. 11.14.15. Plutarch states that Tigranes was "still engaged in subduing some cities of Phoenicia" when the Romans arrived. Plut. *Luc.* 21.2.

illustrates the wide-ranging success of Tigranes against the Parthians and Tigranes' determination to create a rival state in the East.

Similarly, Josephus records that Tigranes was pushing south along the Mediterranean coast with a large army when Lucullus arrived on his border in 69 BCE. He states,

About this time, news was brought that Tigranes, the king of Armenia, had made an irruption into Syria with five [or three] hundred thousand soldiers, and was coming against Judea. This news, as may well be supposed, terrified the queen [Salome Alexandra] and the nation. Accordingly, they [the Jews] sent him many and very valuable presents, as well as ambassadors, while he was besieging Ptolemais [modern Acre]. For Selene, the [Seleucid] queen, the same who was also called Cleopatra, ruled then over Syria, had persuaded the inhabitants [of Ptolemais] to exclude Tigranes. So the Jewish ambassadors interceded with him, and entreated him that he would determine nothing that was severe about their queen or nation. He commended them for the respects they paid him at so great a distance, and gave them good hopes of his favor. But as soon as Ptolemais was taken, news came to Tigranes, that Lucullus, in his pursuit of Mithridates, could not light upon him, who was fled into Iberia, but was laying waste Armenia, and besieging its cities. Now when Tigranes knew this, he returned home.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, the Jews recognized the considerable threat that Tigranes posed to their kingdom in the late 70s BCE and feared his power. The passage illustrates that Tigranes subdued all of Phoenicia and accepted the Jews as suppliants by 69 BCE. That is, at the height of Tigranes' power, the Hasmonean Kingdom temporarily accepted Armenian suzerainty to avoid Tigranes' invasion.<sup>40</sup>

Note that several years before the Parthians had sent envoys to Jerusalem in ca. 85 BCE to ask for Jewish aid in the war against Armenia.<sup>41</sup> The Hasmonean Kingdom was a middling regional power, and therefore, the Parthian envoy to the Jews speaks to the considerable threat

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<sup>39</sup> *Jos. Ant.* 13.419. Although the figure of Tigranes' army is greatly exaggerated, he clearly had a sizable force under his command in Phoenicia. See also *Jos. Bell.* 1.116. For the reign of Salome Alexandra, see Hoover 2007: 296; Atkinson 2012. Note *Eus. Chron.* (Karst ed.): 208 and *Hieron. Chron.* (Helm ed.): 152-153 (234 F-235 F).

<sup>40</sup> Manandyan 2007: 42.

<sup>41</sup> See Neusner 1965: 25; Assar 2006d: 73.



that Tigranes had come to pose to the western lands of the Parthians. There is no evidence that the Jews came to the aid of Parthia; however, they did not side with Tigranes until he was at their doorstep. Much as the Greek polities had done with Pontus during the First Mithridatic War, the Jews, in hope of saving their kingdom and securing Tigranes' favor, eventually decided to bandwagon with the rising power of Armenia within the Eastern system instead of balance with Parthia against Armenia. This was a reluctant decision based upon the shifting perception of the balance of power in the region. The Jews seemingly tried to stay neutral as long as possible in the Armeno-Parthian conflict and focused instead on regional conflicts with the Ptolemies, Seleucids, and their own civil war. However, by 70 BCE Tigranes had enjoyed sweeping military and diplomatic success against the Parthians and Seleucids and was looking to solidify his control over the Levant. Armenia was new regional hegemon, and therefore, the Jews made the difficult, but wise decision to submit to Tigranes.

As Strabo records above, Tigranes' primary focus was the domination of the Near East. The Kingdom of Armenia did not once interfere in Roman or Pontic developments in Anatolia. The Armenians continued to operate within the confines of the Parthian-dominated Eastern system. Thus, the Parthians were the major rival and target for Armenian expansion. The vulnerability of Mithridates III's regime meant that Tigranes could exploit a justified war to challenge Parthian domination. The sudden rise of Armenian power under Tigranes and the wavering of Parthian power under the strain of civil war caused a power-transition crisis in the Eastern system. Accordingly, Tigranes annexed large sections of modern Georgia, Azerbaijan, northern Iraq, southwestern Turkey, and western Syria from the Parthian Empire.<sup>42</sup> Additionally,

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<sup>42</sup> At some point during his reign, Tigranes subdued the Iberians and Albanians under Armenian suzerainty. These peoples fought with Tigranes against the Romans. See Plut. Luc. 26.4

Strabo indicates elsewhere that the Armenians occupied a large section of Media Atropatene until forced out by the Romans.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, Isidore of Charax records that Tigranes destroyed the royal residence of Adrapana in northern Media.<sup>44</sup> Tigranes moved quickly to establish Armenia as the hegemonic rival of Parthia in the Eastern system.

Part of challenging Parthian domination in the East was expanding Armenian influence over the remnants of the Seleucid state. Appian, whose history focused on the Seleucid Empire, emphasized Tigranes' triumph over the Seleucids. In his somewhat confused account, he states,

Tigranes [II], the son of Tigranes [I], king of Armenia, who had annexed many neighboring principalities, and from these exploits had acquired the title of 'king of kings,' attacked the Seleucids because they would not acknowledge his supremacy. Antiochus [X Eusebes] Pius [but in reality Antiochus XIII] was not able to withstand him. Tigranes conquered all of the Syrian peoples this side of the Euphrates as far as Egypt [that is, Commagene, Syria, Phoenicia, much of Coele Syria, and parts of Palestine]. He took Cilicia at the same time (for this was also subject to the Seleucids) and put his general, Magadates [or perhaps Bagarat], in command of all these conquests for fourteen years.<sup>45</sup>

Again, we find evidence of Tigranes' wide-ranging ambitions and conquests after he had humbled the Parthians. Appian states that Tigranes even seized the title "King of Kings" from the Arsacid rulers after his eastern conquests, meaning Appian associated Tigranes' defeat of Parthia and his humiliation of the Arsacid king with eastern hegemony.<sup>46</sup> When we pair this

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<sup>43</sup> Strabo 11.13.2. Strabo refers specifically to an unknown region called "Symbace;" however, some scholars have preferred to change the text to read "Aghbak," modern Başkale. See Manandyan 2007: 36.

<sup>44</sup> Isid. 6. Orosius indicates that Armenian territory stretched into Media. Orosius 6.4.9

<sup>45</sup> Appian *Syr.* 8.48. Note that Justin records that Tigranes took Syria peacefully. Justin 40.1-2. For the argument that Appian's Magadates was actually Bagarat, a noble of the Armenian Bagratid family, see Chahin 1987: 228; Manandyan 2007: 39.

<sup>46</sup> When exactly Tigranes adopted the title "King of Kings" is unclear. Most scholars accept that Tigranes adopted the title after besting the Parthians and before invading Syria; however, recently a scholar has argued that there is no good evidence to suggest that Tigranes adopted the title before 66 BCE. That is, well after the successful wars against Parthia and in the middle of the wars against Rome. See Shayegan 2011: 196, 327-8.

observation with Appian's emphasis on Tigranes' conquest of the Seleucids, which was something the Parthians had actively pursued for decades, it is clear that Appian considered Armenia the hegemonic rival of Parthia and perhaps even the new power in the East. Although Appian's condensed account fails to appreciate the nuances of the Armeno-Parthian conflict, his conclusion about the shifting power balance in the East reflects the geopolitical realities at this time.

Plutarch also captures the expansiveness of Tigranes' conquests. He relates a speech of Lucullus, stating, "And it is only a few days' journey from Cabira into Armenia and over Armenia there sits enthroned Tigranes, King of Kings, with forces which enable him to cut the Parthians off from Asia [Minor], transplant Greek cities into Media, sway Syria and Palestine, put to death the successors of Seleucus, and carry off their wives and daughters into captivity."<sup>47</sup> Plutarch too portrays Tigranes as the hegemonic rival of Parthia. He emphasizes Tigranes' ability to take the western gains of the Parthian Empire away from the Parthians by force and to replace the Parthians as the greatest threat to the Seleucids.

Strabo, Plutarch, and Appian's accounts describe the emergence of what political scientists call a system of bipolarity in the Eastern system. Through successful hegemonic war, Tigranes established Armenia as the hegemonic rival of Parthia in the East. Plutarch also records,

For though he [Tigranes] had started on his career with small and insignificant expectations, he had subdued many nations, humbled the Parthian power as no man before him had done, and filled Mesopotamia with Greeks whom he removed in great numbers from Cilicia and from Cappadocia, and settled anew. He also removed from their wonted haunts the nomadic Arabians, and brought them to an adjacent settlement, that he might employ them in trade and commerce.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 14.5

<sup>48</sup> Id. 21.4. After conquering Cilicia, Tigranes depopulated many of the cities in the region. Id. *Pomp.* 28.4. See also Dio 36.37.6. Note also Pliny the Elder who states that Tigranes removed many Arabian tribes from the Syrian Desert to Cilicia and Commagene. Pliny *NH* 6.32

He later continues,

Thus successful in his campaign, Lucullus struck camp and proceeded to Tigranocerta, which city he invested and began to besiege. There were in the city many Greeks who had been transplanted, like others, from Cilicia, and many Barbarians who had suffered the same fate as the Greeks, — Adiabeni, Assyrians, Gordyeni and Cappadocians, whose native cities Tigranes had demolished, and brought their inhabitants to dwell there under compulsion.<sup>49</sup>

Lastly, he argues,

Had this power of gaining the affection of his soldiers been added to his [Lucullus'] other gifts, which were so many and so great, - courage, diligence, wisdom, and justice, - the Roman Empire would not have been bounded by the Euphrates, but by the outer confines of Asia, and the Hyrcanian sea; for all the other nations had already been subdued by Tigranes, and in the time of Lucullus the Parthian power was not so great as it proved to be in the time of Crassus, nor was it so well united, nay rather, owing to intestine and neighboring wars, it had not even strength enough to repel the wanton attacks of the Armenians.<sup>50</sup>

In these passages Plutarch describes the expansive conquests of Tigranes, his ambitious designs to move various peoples around his new empire to strengthen it, and the wide-ranging success of his war against the Parthians. More importantly, in the first passage Plutarch emphasizes the severity of the Armenian threat to the Parthians when he argues that Tigranes had humbled the Parthians more so than had any other enemy, including the Seleucids, Bactrians, or the nomadic tribes of the Central Asian steppe.

Meanwhile, in the last passage Plutarch laments Lucullus' inability to conduct Rome's own hegemonic war against the Parthians in the early 60s BCE. He describes the Parthians as vulnerable because of how destructive Tigranes' war and the civil wars had been to Parthian power. Moreover, he dreamt of a Roman world empire. His emphasis on the Romans' missed

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<sup>49</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 26.1. Appian records that Tigranes invaded Cappadocia in 78 BCE and brought 300,000 captives back to his kingdom. Appian *Mithr.* 10.67. Note also Strabo 12.2.9

<sup>50</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 36.5-6

opportunity and his acknowledgement of the Euphrates as the future limit to Roman rule, reflect the geopolitical realities of his time.<sup>51</sup> That is, he acknowledges that a system of bipolarity between Rome and Parthia emerged over a much expanded interstate system after the failure of Crassus, which remained in place for centuries. However, he also emphasizes that this was not the geopolitical reality in the 60s BCE; hence the Euphrates was not yet the limit of Roman rule, but Rome was not yet motivated to conduct hegemonic war against the Parthians.<sup>52</sup> Lastly, he recognizes that the Romans' unwillingness to conquer the Parthians in the early 60s BCE and their destruction of Tigranes' empire was advantageous to Parthia. It allowed the Parthians to recover their strength and reassert their hegemony over the Eastern system. Hence, when Crassus finally invaded in 53 BCE, the Parthians were able to defeat Rome, the Mediterranean and Eastern systems merged, and bipolarity between Rome and Parthia over what I am proposing to call the expanded Med-Eastern system became the new norm. We find in Plutarch's accounts of Tigranes' exploits an appreciation of Tigranes' ability to create a rival power in the East and his frustration with the Romans' inability to become involved in the geopolitical developments of the Eastern system sooner.

Finally, Eutropius underlines Tigranes' successful hegemonic war against the Parthians when he states, "Mithridates [VI] was, however, received after his flight by Tigranes, the king of Armenia, who at that time reigned in great glory; for he had frequently defeated the Persians [that is, the Parthians], and had made himself master of Mesopotamia, Syria, and part of

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<sup>51</sup> Plutarch lived from the middle first through the early second century CE. He experienced the ongoing cold war struggle between Rome and Parthia and the hegemonic efforts of Trajan.

<sup>52</sup> As discussed below, there is good reason to reject Plutarch's depiction of Lucullus' desire for war against Parthia. Instead, he clearly wanted to secure Parthian neutrality so that he could fight Tigranes and Mithridates in isolation. That is, he remained focused on removing the threats posed to the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system.

Phoenicia.”<sup>53</sup> Here we get a sense that the conflict between Armenia and Parthia was long and contained several major engagements. Eutropius’ emphasis is upon the eastern struggle between Armenia and Parthia. Once again, Tigranes’ efforts are detached from those of Mithridates VI, and Eutropius makes no mention of the role of the Seleucids. He portrays Parthia on the losing end of a debilitating hegemonic war.<sup>54</sup>

With all of this evidence, it is undeniable that Tigranes eventually pursued successful hegemonic war against Parthia and, at the height of his power, established Armenia as the hegemonic rival of Parthia within the Eastern system.<sup>55</sup> Bipolarity emerged in the Eastern system, temporarily replacing the short-lived unipolarity of Parthia.<sup>56</sup> At no time during Mithridates VI’s long conflict with Rome did Tigranes aid him militarily against the Romans until the invasion of Lucullus. Nor did Tigranes at the height of his power threaten any lands outside the existing boundaries of the Eastern system. He viewed himself as a rival of Parthia, not of Rome, which his actions reflect. There can be little doubt that without Roman interference in Syria in 69 BCE and the fallout of Lucullus’ campaign, Tigranes eventually would have pursued further eastern conquest against the Parthians to establish Armenian unipolarity over the Eastern system.

However, Tigranes never got this chance because the Roman invasion indeed came, and it is important to reevaluate why this happened. Tigranes did not intend for his pillaging of

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<sup>53</sup> Eutrop. 6.8

<sup>54</sup> Note also that the Babylonian *Astronomical Diaries* indicate that Babylonia was in chaos from 84-82 BCE. See Sachs and Hunger 1996: -no. 83, -no. 82A, -no. 82B. Assar argues that these entries might refer to the Armeno-Parthian war. Assar 2006d: 73-4.

<sup>55</sup> Tigranes’ possible adoption of the title “King of Kings” around this time also reflects this new, rapidly changing bipolar international environment. See Appian *Syr.* 8.48

<sup>56</sup> Here is another example of the potential instability of unipolarity. For this Realist argument, see Waltz 1979; id. 1993; Layne 1993; Posen and Ross 1996: 123-4, 132; Wilkinson 1999; Layne 2006: 143, 264 n.1; Eckstein 2012: 356-7.

Cappadocia and his annexation of Cilicia, Commagene, Syria, and the lands to the south to threaten or abuse Rome. This point is clear from the total unpreparedness of Tigranes to fight Rome in 69 BCE and his utter shock at Lucullus' invasion. Tigranes would not have marched toward Palestine and besieged Ptolemais if he had anticipated an imminent Roman attack on Syria. He clearly was not ignorant of Mithridates VI's disastrous war against Rome; in fact, he was harboring Mithridates in his kingdom at the time. Rather, Tigranes' actions prior to Lucullus' invasion support the theory that there continued to be separate interstate systems around the Mediterranean and in the East that helped dictate the geopolitical concerns of states within those separate systems, just as the unintended consequences of system overlap between the Mediterranean and Eastern systems help explain the intense, yet confused geopolitical developments in the Near East at this time.

With an understanding of the scope and purpose of Tigranes' conquests, let us now consider a reconstruction of the chronology of these events. Gotarzes I died suddenly in late summer 87 BCE after defeating and exiling Sinatruces to the Central Asian steppe, at which point his brother, Mithridates III, seized the Parthian throne from Gotarzes' son Orodes I. As a usurper, Mithridates understood the vulnerability of his position. He hoped his successful military intervention in Syria would secure his position as the new great king of Parthia. Although his generals successfully defeated Demetrius III, captured him, and helped place Philip I on the Seleucid throne in Antioch, the victory was not enough to overshadow Mithridates' illegal seizure of the crown.

Tigranes' decision to marry his daughter to Gotarzes meant that someday he could hope to be the grandfather by law or by blood of the Parthian king. The alliance also meant that Tigranes had a stake in the survival and advancement of Gotarzes' branch of the Arsacid

dynasty. When Mithridates usurped the throne in 87 BCE, he threatened to undo all of Tigranes' recent diplomatic accomplishments. If we pair this cause for war with the rising military strength of Armenia and the growing ambitions of Tigranes, we find an environment that provided Tigranes with a sudden and compelling opportunity to challenge Parthian domination.

One scholar recently has argued that Orodes “was probably the son and heir of Gotarzes I from his Armenian queen Aryazate, daughter of Tigranes and so an ally of his Armenian grandfather.”<sup>57</sup> Although Tigranes had maintained a good relationship with the Parthians for almost a decade, I agree that Tigranes used the usurpation of Mithridates III as his initial cause to pursue a justified war against the Parthians. In this endeavor Tigranes was protecting his daughter and her possible children, who found themselves in considerable danger with the usurpation of Mithridates; however, it seems unlikely that Orodes was Tigranes' grandson by blood.<sup>58</sup> Orodes eventually deposed his uncle in 80 BCE, which means that he likely was of military age to fight the civil war and rule as king. If Aryazate was his mother, then he would have only been seven, maybe eight years old at the time of his coronation in 80 BCE. Even if we move Aryazates' wedding to its earliest possible date, that is the coronation of Tigranes in 96/95 BCE, Orodes still only would have been about fifteen years old. Moreover, there is no evidence in the surviving cuneiform records that indicates that Orodes was a boy king or that he was a blood relative of Tigranes, and Orodes' coinage distinctly illustrates an adult man with a full

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<sup>57</sup> Assar 2006d: 74, 77, 81.

<sup>58</sup> Sudden transitions of power in monarchical systems of government by rival factions have led to violent eliminations of potential familial rivals in numerous instances throughout history. The most notorious example from Parthian history was Phraates IV's murder of his father, Orodes II, his step grandfather-in-law, Antiochus I of Commagene, twenty-nine of his brothers, one of his sons, and many Parthian nobles upon his ascension to the throne. Dio 49.23.2-5; Justin 42.4.14-5.2; Plut. *Crass.* 33.5; id. *Ant.* 37.1.



beard.<sup>59</sup> It is impossible that Orodes' coinage represents a boy or young teenage man, and therefore, it is impossible that Aryazates was his mother.<sup>60</sup> Orodes must have been the son of one of Gotarzes' other wives, perhaps his principle queen, Ashiabatâr, which seems likely because of her seniority, or one of his sister-wives, Siake or Azate.

Yet Orodes does not need to be Tigranes' grandson by blood to make the above explanation of Tigranes' initial open aggression against Parthia credible. Tigranes had formed a military marriage alliance with Gotarzes to support him in the Parthian civil war, which made Orodes and Aryazates part of the same poly-family. Aryazates became one of Orodes' stepmothers (or poly-parents), and since Tigranes became Gotarzes' father-in-law, he technically became one of Orodes' step grandfathers-in-law. Moreover, since Tigranes had been the ally of Orodes' father, Tigranes also could choose to support Orodes because of his familial connection to Orodes' father through marriage. Thus, Tigranes marriage alliance to Gotarzes provided him

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<sup>59</sup> These are the S34 drachms. For Orodes' coinage see *id.* 77-80. Note that the S30 drachms associated with the early reign of an unnamed Parthian king known as Arsaces XVI, who reigned ca. 78-61 BCE, depict an older teenager with minimal facial hair. *Id.* 82-3. Thus, the use of a fully bearded figure on Orodes' coinage was not some sort of stylistic choice to depict himself as older. Arsaces XVI's coinage demonstrates that young kings portrayed themselves as young men. Therefore, Orodes appears older on his coinage because he *was* older, perhaps in his early twenties.

<sup>60</sup> In fact, there is further evidence that suggests that Tigranes was not Orodes' grandfather by blood. It appears that Orodes, whose reign (80-75 BCE) was turbulent and marred by civil unrest and war, received no military support from Tigranes in his times of need. Assar tries to explain Tigranes' lack of support of Orodes by arguing that he became "preoccupied in Syria from about 79 BC on and then gradually but surely drawn into the Mithridatic wars against Rome." *Id.* 81. As discussed below, Assar places Tigranes' occupation of Syria too early, and therefore, preoccupation with Syria cannot be the reason for Tigranes' lack of support. Yet also Tigranes' war with Rome is irrelevant for Orodes' reign because it occurred over five years after Orodes' death. It is more likely that Tigranes did not militarily aid Orodes because their treaty had no military stipulation. Tigranes, although not yet involved in Syria, was consolidating his power over the Near East at the expense of Parthian power. It was advantageous to have his step grandson-in-law, Orodes, on the Parthian throne; however, Tigranes did not feel particularly responsible for Orodes' protection once he had become king.

with a possible and legitimate pretense for war against Mithridates III, namely championing Orodes' right to rule in honor of Tigranes' alliance with Gotarzes and his familial relationship by law with Orodes. To be sure, Tigranes was not acting simply out of loyalty or familial love, and in fact, it is possible that Tigranes' daughter and her possible children had a rivalry with the other wives of Gotarzes and with Orodes.<sup>61</sup> Rather, Tigranes used the deteriorating political stability of the Parthian Empire to pursue his own self-help policies in his own self-interest to enhance further his prestige and the power of his kingdom. Regardless of Orodes' feelings toward Tigranes' daughter, his candidacy was more favorable to Tigranes, who could secure Orodes' loyalty through political and military support against a usurper. Tigranes' familial ties by law to Gotarzes' family and the usurpation of Mithridates provided Tigranes with an ideal opportunity to act openly against the Parthian state and, in the eyes of the international community, to act justly.

Again, because of the regrettably poor quality and quantity of the surviving literary and material evidence for the actions of Tigranes in this period, a precise reconstruction of the rapid growth of the Armenian state is challenging but not impossible. Mithridates III usurped the Parthian throne in late summer 87 BCE and then sent his soldiers into Syria to fight Demetrius III. The most likely timeframe for Tigranes' rebellion is between the ascension of Mithridates III and the Parthian embassy sent to the Jews to ask for military aid against Armenia in 85 BCE.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> The Arsacids and the nobles of the Parthian state often had large harems. Justin records how the numerous wives and concubines of Orodes II "were perpetually working on the old man's feelings, each anxious for her own offspring [to rule]." Justin 42.4.15. There was much competition within the Arsacid dynasty to rule and often no shortage of candidates. This encouraged the Parthian princes, as Justin puts it, to be "assassins of their kindred." Id. 42.4.16. Note also Jos. *Ant.* 18.39-42; Plut. *Crass.* 21.6, 32.4-5

<sup>62</sup> Assar also argues that hostilities between Armenia and Parthia began in this period. Id. 73. Note also Arnaud 1987. Manandyan argues that Tigranes rebelled immediately following the death of Mithridates II; however, his marriage alliance with Gotarzes makes this conclusion

With this timeframe in mind, we should prefer an earlier date for Tigranes' attack on Parthia since Mithridates' campaign in Syria is an important event to consider in our reconstruction. There is little reason to argue that Tigranes waited until after Mithridates had triumphed in Syria to attack the Parthians. Parthian success in Syria only added to the reputation, prestige, and perceived power of Mithridates' regime. Additionally, the idea that Tigranes would allow Mithridates' army to isolate and defeat the Seleucids before beginning his own war makes little strategic sense. Therefore, it is far more likely that Tigranes viewed the renewed war between the Seleucids and Parthians as a further opportunity to start his own war.

We know from Strabo that Tigranes' first order of business was to reclaim the seventy valleys that he had ceded to Parthia.<sup>63</sup> By reclaiming these lands, which he had offered to Parthia as a form of submission, Tigranes publicly renounced his vassalage to the Parthian state. Strategically this expedition was important because, first, control of these valleys in northwestern Media Atropatene blocked Parthian access to the heartland of the Armenian Kingdom, the Ararat plain, and second, Armenia gained access to the vulnerable northern frontier of the Parthian Empire. There is no indication from any of the sources that the Parthians were able to retaliate against Armenia for this initial attack. Therefore, I would argue that Tigranes seized the seventy valleys in northwestern Media Atropatene in the fall of 87 BCE while the bulk of the Parthian army was deployed in Syria fighting Demetrius.

Much like the initial success of Mithridates VI in seizing much of western Anatolia and the inability of the Romans to respond to his early advances, the swift success of Tigranes in

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highly unlikely. Manandyan 2007: 36. I find Shayegan's conclusion that Tigranes did not go to war against the Parthians until 70/69 BCE unconvincing and at odds with the available evidence. Shayegan 2011: 319-320.

<sup>63</sup> Strabo 11.14.15

reclaiming the seventy valleys and the Parthians' inability to respond militarily because of the war in Syria bolstered Tigranes' confidence and allowed him to pursue greater ambitions. Because of their recent military victory, in the winter of 87/86 BCE, Tigranes and his generals recognized Parthian vulnerability along the northern border of the Parthian Empire and anticipated Parthian military ineffectiveness the following year. It was around this time that Armenia transitioned from a limited to an unlimited revisionist state as Tigranes concluded that Armenia could pursue successful hegemonic war against Parthia. That is, the far more ambitious goal of establishing Armenia as a hegemonic rival of Parthia replaced the more limited goal of Armenian independence and regional security.

In 86 BCE Tigranes had a secure western border with Mithridatic Pontus. Meanwhile, Sophene protected Armenia from possible Parthian attacks through Commagene. Although his seizure of the seventy valleys provided Tigranes with access to the northern lands of the Parthian Empire, his southern frontier was vulnerable to Parthian attack. The Parthian army, fresh off its victory in Syria, would have returned to northern Mesopotamia perhaps near the city of Sinnaca by the spring of 86 BCE.<sup>64</sup> With the Seleucids defeated and the Parthian civil wars temporarily restrained, Mithridates III could concentrate the full force of the Parthian military on the Armenian rebellion. The two most direct routes to Armenia were through Commagene or through Gordyene. Armenian troops and strongholds in Sophene made the first option challenging; however, the underbelly of Armenia through Gordyene was vulnerable to

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<sup>64</sup> For the argument that Sinnaca was where the Parthian army was stationed before the invasion of Syria in 87 BCE, see Assar 2006d: 70 n.92. Note Jos. *Ant.* 13.384-6; Strabo 16.1.23

invasion.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, it seems that in 86 BCE Tigranes decided first to secure his southern border by conquering Greater Aghbak just north of Gordyene around modern Başkale.<sup>66</sup>

Strabo indicates that, perhaps in 85 BCE, Tigranes followed up his successful annexation of this region by invading Adiabene.<sup>67</sup> In order to do so successfully, he must have already at least secured the portions of Gordyene on the eastern bank of the Tigris.<sup>68</sup> Then Tigranes would have followed the eastern bank of the Tigris and crossed the Little Khabur to devastate the region around Nineveh before continuing south, crossing the Upper Zab and devastating the region around Arbela.<sup>69</sup>

The details of Tigranes' invasions of Gordyene and Adiabene are lost; however, Eutropius hints at the possibility that he defeated Parthian armies in these regions.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, the location of large Parthian forces in neighboring Osrhoene, Tigranes' successful annexation of Gordyene, his devastating raid of Adiabene, and his subsequent invasion of Media Atropatene make a substantial military engagement between Armenia and Parthia likely in 86/85 BCE. When Mithridates III heard of Tigranes' seizure of the seventy valleys in late 87 BCE, he would have begun preparations to retaliate against Armenia. He also would have understood that the

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<sup>65</sup> Lucullus' invasion of the heartland of Armenia followed this central route. See Manandyan 2007: 112-13. For the historical geography of Gordyene, see Marciak 2012b; id. 2013.

<sup>66</sup> Manandyan 2007: 36. Note Strabo 11.13.2

<sup>67</sup> Strabo 11.14.15. Strabo describes Adiabene as a war-torn region, which often found itself at the mercy of stronger neighboring powers. Id. 16.1.19. Josephus provides a detailed account of the reign of King Izates of Adiabene as a Jewish convert and important Parthian vassal. See *Jos. Ant.* 20.34-92. For Adiabene, see Marciak 2011; id. 2015.

<sup>68</sup> Strabo and Plutarch record that Tigranes subdued Gordyene. *Ibid.*; *Plut. Luc.* 26.1. Although they both list the Gordyeni as subjects of Armenia after the Adiabeni, geographically and logistically it is impossible that Tigranes invaded Adiabene without first securing Gordyene. Note that Artabanus II appears to have given the king of Adiabene, Izates, control of Gordyene as a reward for his loyalty and support. *Jos. Ant.* 20.66-8

<sup>69</sup> For the Parthians and Romans at Nineveh, see Eiland 1998.

<sup>70</sup> *Eutrop.* 6.8

loss of these valleys made Media vulnerable to Armenian attacks. Accordingly, he seems to have sent forces to protect Media; however, he could not simply abandon northern Mesopotamia and his recent gains in Syria.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, Mithridates had to maintain a sizable force in Mesopotamia, not only to protect the western lands of the Parthian Empire, but also hopefully to conduct offensive operations against Armenia. Perhaps he even hoped to use the troops in Media to attack Armenia on two fronts. If so, this larger strategy and the time it would have taken to implement it correctly might account for the apparent sluggishness and lack of enthusiasm of the Parthian army against Tigranes when it had just shown great swiftness and initiative against Demetrius III in Syria. Regardless of Mithridates' plans to counter the Armenian rebellion, when Tigranes seized the initiative in 86/85 BCE and invaded Greater Aghbak, Gordyene, and Adiabene, he almost isolated Parthian forces in Media from those in Mesopotamia.

It is highly unlikely that Mithridates III did not react to the aggressive advances of Tigranes in 86/85 BCE with military force. The integrity of his kingdom and of his regime were at stake. Whatever happened in the clash between Tigranes' forces and the Parthian forces in Gordyene and Adiabene, the Armenians came out the victors. Parthian territorial and military losses in 85 BCE help explain why the Parthians sought aid from the Jews against Tigranes in that year, something which would not have been necessary without a recent military defeat. Tigranes' continued expeditions illustrate that Mithridates temporarily lost the ability to use his troops in Mesopotamia offensively and failed to reclaim his lost territories. In fact, Tigranes was

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<sup>71</sup> We know that the Parthians had an army in Media because Tigranes fought multiple battles in this region. *Ibid.*; Orosius 6.4.9; *Isid.* 6

so successful that he followed up on his victories in Greater Aghbak, Gordyene, and Adiabene with an invasion of Media Atropatene, perhaps in 84 BCE.<sup>72</sup>

At the end of 85 BCE, Tigranes had secured his southern frontier successfully, pushing the border of his kingdom as far as the Lower Zab. He could have pressed his advantage by continuing into the rich lands of Babylonia or by attempting a climactic showdown between himself and Mithridates in northern Mesopotamia. However, he chose to invade Media Atropatene. I propose that he did so for the following two reasons. First, Tigranes' kingdom was relatively secure to the west and south but remained vulnerable along a wide expanse to the east. Therefore, the conquest of Media Atropatene would establish the security of his kingdom to the east. Second, with the recent defeat of the Parthian forces in Gordyene and Adiabene, the Parthian army in Media was the largest threat facing Tigranes at this time. He could not realistically hope to invade northern Mesopotamia or ravage Babylonia without first addressing the Parthian threat in Media.

Tigranes seemingly spent the next few years (ca. 84-81 BCE) conquering Parthia's other vassal states to the north and east of his kingdom.<sup>73</sup> At some point he brought Iberia and Albania under his suzerainty and firmly secured his northern frontier.<sup>74</sup> He also campaigned extensively in Media Atropatene, making it a vassal state after he married one of his daughters to the new

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<sup>72</sup> Some scholars attach Tigranes' invasion of Media Atropatene directly to his invasion of Adiabene. See esp. Manandyan 2007: 36-7. Despite the condensed summary of these events by our surviving sources, which make the various eastern conquests of Tigranes appear simultaneous, it seems more likely that Tigranes did not conquer all of his eastern lands in one year. This would have been remarkable. For example, the Parthians had spent many years conquering and occupying Media and the lands to the north along the Caspian Sea and Caucasus Mountains.

<sup>73</sup> Although he places Tigranes' eastern conquest earlier, Garsoian argues that the campaign took 3-4 years. Garsoian 2005.

<sup>74</sup> See Plut. Luc. 26.4. Note Chahin 1987: 222.

king of this region also named Mithridates.<sup>75</sup> His expedition in Media Atropatene likely followed a route similar to the one Mark Antony later used to invade Media.<sup>76</sup> It would have begun in the north as Tigranes' armies pressed south from the Araxes River, through the region of the seventy valleys, and finally down into Media proper. At the height of Tigranes' campaign, he defeated the Parthian army, advanced the border of his kingdom to the vicinity of Ecbatana, and destroyed the royal palace and fortress of Adrapana.<sup>77</sup>

Tigranes' eastern conquests were hugely successful and added extensively to the size and strength of his kingdom. More importantly, Tigranes' recent and continued success against the Parthians crippled Mithridates III's armies, which had lost major battles in northern Mesopotamia and Media. The Parthians never seized the initiative in the war and were unable to strike offensively. Moreover, Tigranes' success severely damaged the perception of Parthian power and Mithridates' authority. Since the rebellion of Sinatruces, other polities within the Eastern system increasingly viewed Parthian power as sporadic and vulnerable. Arab raids once again began to ravage Mesopotamia from the south.<sup>78</sup> From 84-82 BCE, while Tigranes was

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<sup>75</sup> Dio 36.14.2. For the debate surrounding the identity of this Mithridates, see Schippmann 1987b. We must reject Schippmann's suggestion that this Mithridates might in fact be the later Parthian king, Mithridates IV. In fact, this Mithridates later came to the military aid of Tigranes, something that seems highly unlikely for the Parthians to do after decades of political and military friction with Armenia. Additionally, this Mithridates fought the Romans, something surely the ancient historians would have emphasized if Mithridates was in fact a Parthian prince. The Parthians did not become involved in the war against Rome in the 60s BCE. Rather, the Parthians went to war against Tigranes at this time.

<sup>76</sup> For Mark Antony's invasion, see Goldsworthy 2010: 309-11. Note also Plut. *Ant.* 38

<sup>77</sup> Eutrop. 6.8; Orosius 6.4.9; Isid. 6. Parthian coinage from Ecbatana indicates that the Parthians never lost the city to Tigranes. Assar 2006d: 72 n.115.

<sup>78</sup> A man named Mithratu, whom Gotarzes likely appointed, commanded Parthian forces in the region. He was only the fifth recorded man to hold the supreme command over Mesopotamia. The more frequent and permanent use of supreme commanders in this region by the Parthian kings was a response to more frequent foreign invasions from hostile neighbors, such as the Arab tribes, Characene, and Elymais, during periods of political or military turmoil. Parthian kings appointed these men out of desperation to combat serious military threats to the state. Their



conquering Media Atropatene and invading Media, the Babylonian *Astronomical Diaries*, portray an especially turbulent and violent time in Babylonia. Arab raids also likely caused these various disturbances; however, as Assar has argued the increased instability in Babylonia was an indirect result of Tigranes' conquests and recent Parthian military failures.<sup>79</sup> That is, Tigranes' advances were shifting the balance of power in the Eastern system in Armenia's favor at the direct expense of Parthia. The growing perception of Parthian weakness encouraged further attacks by Armenia and renewed attacks from peoples like the Arabian tribes. A fundamental reason for Parthia's inability to attack Armenia while Tigranes was campaigning in the north and east was the increased disturbances in Babylonia and elsewhere, which were an indirect consequence of Tigranes' military successes. Parthian forces had to keep the peace in Mesopotamia, Babylonia, and Media instead of combating Tigranes' advances. Thus, Tigranes spent several years consolidating his authority and power in the East against the isolated Parthian forces in Media before returning his attention to the West.

Tigranes continued his hegemonic war against Parthia with a full-scale invasion of Northern Mesopotamia in ca. 81/80 BCE. With the offensive capabilities of the Parthian forces in Media removed and with his northern and eastern frontiers secure, Tigranes finally could pursue an offensive war against Mithridates III directly. The Parthian forces in northern Mesopotamia already were overextended and struggling to protect what remained of the western lands of the empire. It appears that Tigranes decisively defeated the Parthian army and conquered Mygdonia and Osrhoene.<sup>80</sup> Parthia lost all access to its previous gains in Commagene,

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appointment was a gamble for the king since their power made them potential rivals. In fact, the general, Tiridates, in Babylon briefly usurped the throne of Phraates IV in 32/31 BCE. See Shayegan 2011: 199-202, 204-9. See also Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -90, no. -87C.

<sup>79</sup> Assar 2006d: 73-4. See also Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -83, no. -82A, no. -82B.

<sup>80</sup> Strabo 11.14.15; Eutrop. 6.8

Cilicia, and Syria.<sup>81</sup> Tigranes once again had humiliated Mithridates and drastically weakened the position of Parthia within the Eastern system.

Outside forces were not the only ones who observed Mithridates' disastrous defeats at the hands of Tigranes and decided to take advantage of Mithridates' vulnerability. In early 80 BCE as Tigranes was putting his finishing touches on his conquest of northern Mesopotamia, which included establishing Armenian hegemony over the Arab tribes of the north Syrian Desert, Orodes I finally rose up to challenge Mithridates for the throne.<sup>82</sup> It is unclear why it took Orodes so long to gain enough support to rise up against the usurper Mithridates. It is possible that, at the time of his father's sudden death, Orodes was a young teenager, which allowed the older and more experienced Mithridates to seize the Parthian throne and gain the support of the Parthian nobles. Therefore, perhaps Orodes rose up against Mithridates when he was an older and more favorable candidate at the height of Tigranes' conquests.<sup>83</sup> It is also uncertain if Tigranes offered Orodes any direct support in his rebellion; however, since Tigranes had justified his war against Parthia in part because of Mithridates' usurpation of the throne, he must have viewed Orodes' rebellion favorably.

The weakness of Mithridates' position allowed Orodes to seize much of Babylonia in the spring of 80 BCE. The two men appear to have fought over Babylonia for several months before

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<sup>81</sup> Note Plut. *Luc.* 14.5

<sup>82</sup> Tigranes forcefully moved Arabians from their homeland to Osroene to protect the new trade routes he controlled and to act as border guards. Id. 21.4. Note Manandyan 2007: 37. For the importance and vibrancy of the trade networks in the Middle East under the Parthians, see Gregoratti 2012c; id. 2014. Note that it is possible that Sinatruces came out of exile in 80 BCE and began a civil war in the Farther East. See Assar 2006d: 71-2, 77, 84-5.

<sup>83</sup> Orodes' early coinage (S34.1) depicts a young man with a full but short beard, perhaps in his early twenties. Conversely, Mithridates' coinage (S31.6 and S31.7) depicts a slightly older man with a longer beard.

Mithridates fled to the East and died.<sup>84</sup> I propose that it was during the civil war between Orodes and Mithridates III that Orodes and Tigranes signed a peace treaty and alliance. This treaty would have acknowledged Tigranes' territorial gains and temporarily ceded Parthia's claims to the lands west of Babylonia and north of Media in exchange for a cessation of violence between Armenia and Parthia. Justin records that the people of Syria asked Tigranes to rule over them because of his strength, his alliance (*societate*) with Parthia, and his relationship through marriage to Mithridates VI of Pontus.<sup>85</sup> Justin's statement has led some scholars erroneously to conclude that Tigranes did not act openly against the Parthians until after the occupation of Syria, perhaps as late as the 70s BCE.<sup>86</sup> Rather, Tigranes threw off his vassal status and pursued years of aggressive hegemonic war against Parthia by the 70s BCE. Yet Justin's account

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<sup>84</sup> See id. 75-7. Note also Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -79. Assar argues that Justin probably refers to this civil war when he states, "Mithridates king of the Parthians, after his war with Armenia, was banished from his kingdom for his cruelty by the Parthian senate." Justin 42.4.1. However, this conclusion seems unlikely since Justin goes on to state that this Mithridates was executed by his brother Orodes, who then fought the Romans. Id. 42.4.2-4. More on this below.

<sup>85</sup> "All agreed upon Tigranes, king of Armenia, who, in addition to the strength of his home, was supported by an alliance (*societate*) with Parthia and a relationship by marriage (*adfinitate*) with Mithridates [VI]." Justin 40.1.3. Despite Assar's suggestion that this Mithridates could be Mithridates II of Parthia instead of Mithridates VI of Pontus because Tigranes had married his daughter to Mithridates II's son, Gotarzes, such a conclusion is improbable. See Assar 2006d: 67. First, Justin mentions Mithridates VI two other times earlier in this passage, making it unlikely that he switched to another man named Mithridates without making a note. Second, it makes more sense that the Syrians would have liked Tigranes as a candidate to become their king for three separate reasons, his strength, his alliance with Parthia, *and* his close association with Pontus. In fact, many Syrians had already considered Mithridates VI a possible candidate, and therefore, Tigranes' marriage to his daughter made him an attractive alternative for them. Finally, Justin records that this Mithridates was at war with the Romans, eliminating Mithridates II as a possibility.

<sup>86</sup> Asturean 1912: 39; Bellinger 1949: 80; Olbrycht 2009: 169, 177-8. See also Sullivan 1990: 373 n.8. The timing of Tigranes' occupation of Syria traditionally falls in 84/83 BCE; however, new interpretations of material evidence cast serious doubts on this conclusion. The occupation of Syria should be moved to the latter half of the 70s BCE. See Hoover 2007. This is discussed in detail below.

demonstrates that Tigranes also became an ally on equal terms with the Parthian king in 80 BCE, while the Parthian civil war continued. Several other factors support this reconstruction.

First, if we accept that Tigranes and Orodes signed a peace treaty in 80 BCE after Tigranes had fought Mithridates for seven years, we rectify two blocks of otherwise incompatible evidence. First, there is undeniable evidence of widespread military conflict between Armenia and Parthia prior to Tigranes' occupation of Syria. Second, there is evidence that Tigranes was a Parthian ally when he occupied Syria. Scholars have tried to sidestep the incompatibility of this evidence in other, less convincing ways. For example, Olbrycht's conclusion that "the annexation of Syria was the decisive step made by Tigranes, who thereafter built a huge empire" is nonsensical. It completely ignores the impossibility of Tigranes occupying Syria without first occupying Commagene or northern Mesopotamia, lands Olbrycht believes Parthia still held.<sup>87</sup> It also completely fails to explain why Parthia, which in Olbrycht's reconstruction remained the hegemonic master of the East, would allow Tigranes, who in this scenario still would have been a vassal, to occupy a region that the Parthians considered under their hegemony.<sup>88</sup> Finally, Justin's claim that Armenia was a strong kingdom that was considered

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<sup>87</sup> For the impossibility of Tigranes occupying Syria without direct access, see von Gutschmid 1887: 20 n.4; Manandyan 2007: 38; Hoover 2007: 296-7.

<sup>88</sup> Olbrycht argues that the people of Syria replaced the pro-Parthian Seleucid king, Philip I, with Tigranes. Olbrycht 2009: 177. It is reasonable to argue that Philip's Seleucid faction desired a new candidate who shared its friendly diplomatic relationship with the Parthians. However, it is unreasonable to argue that the Parthians would have desired Tigranes to seize the Seleucid throne. Such a reconstruction is untenable because it completely ignores that Parthia, prior to a war against Tigranes, would have considered Syria directly under Parthian hegemony. Therefore, the Parthians willingly would not have allowed the Syrians to choose Tigranes as their new king without Parthian consent. Yet the Parthians never would have willingly offered the rich lands of Syria and the prestige of ruling over them to a foreign vassal, who had no direct access to the region and who already ruled over the strong Kingdom of Armenia. The Parthians clearly had no hand in Tigranes' occupation of Syria, which means that he was no longer a Parthian vassal at the time.

a rival of the other regional powers, such as Mithridatic Pontus, Ptolemaic Egypt, and indeed Parthia itself, further supports the reconstruction that Tigranes had won his hegemonic war against Parthia prior to entering Syria.

The evidence for Tigranes' alliance with Parthia is perhaps "unambiguous," as Olbrycht claims. Yet one must admit that Justin's account suffers often from mistakes, confusions, and inconsistencies, making such a finite view problematic.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, in order for us to accept Justin's account of an Armeno-Parthian alliance, it is also unambiguously true that Armenia must have first shaken off its vassal status by force of arms against Parthia and then signed a new peace agreement prior to the Syrians seeking out Tigranes' aid.

Second, the Parthian civil wars made such a treaty between Tigranes and Orodes necessary for the Parthians. Orodes' position in 80 BCE, even after gaining control of Babylonia was precarious.<sup>90</sup> After years of sweeping military success and the occupation of northern Mesopotamia, Tigranes could have invaded and probably conquered Babylonia. For Orodes securing the Parthian throne was his primary objective. He first had to defeat Mithridates III before concerning himself with foreign wars. Usurpation and civil war had become an acceptable path to the Parthian throne. Thus, Orodes spent the rest of his turbulent reign fighting other usurpers.<sup>91</sup> Orodes simply did not have the resources nor ability to continue a losing hegemonic war against Armenia. This helps explain the large territorial concessions that the Parthians must

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<sup>89</sup> It is worth mentioning that the term *societas* had separate social, commercial, and political connotations. Although Justin likely used this term here in its political sense, it is possible that the Syrians considered Tigranes and the Parthians peaceful associates instead of allies in the more traditional sense of the word.

<sup>90</sup> On his coinage (S34), Orodes adopted practically the same royal titlature as Gotarzes but also adopted a unique tiara design, which had been unused by any of his predecessors. See Assar 2006d: 77. It would seem that Orodes was trying to establish his legitimacy through his titlature, while trying to stand out as a candidate for the throne by adopting a new tiara.

<sup>91</sup> See id. 71-2, 82-3.

have made in the west and north to secure a peace treaty with Armenia. Finally, Orodes seemingly had good relations with his step grandfather-in-law, Tigranes. Unlike Mithridates, Orodes could hope to call upon previous familial alliances to end the foreign war so that he could focus on his enemies at home. Thus, Orodes' treaty with Tigranes was a necessary arrangement that reflected geopolitical realities at the time.

Third, the treaty was advantageous to Tigranes as well. Originally, Tigranes had used Mithridates' usurpation of Orodes' crown as a legitimate cause for pursuing open conflict against Parthia. Although it would be an exaggeration to claim that Tigranes was fighting Mithridates on behalf of Orodes (clearly Tigranes was acting out of self-interest) it would be foolish to overlook Tigranes' familial connection by law to Orodes' branch of the Arsacid dynasty. It was to Tigranes' benefit to secure the Parthian throne for this branch of the Arsacid dynasty. A favorable relationship with Orodes would have helped protect his daughter and any of her possible children. Moreover, just as Orodes needed a peace treaty so that he could consolidate his power in Parthia, Tigranes benefited from a favorable peace treaty with Parthia because it legitimized his new power and allowed him to consolidate his recent gains. Additionally, as a powerful ally of Orodes, Tigranes could hope to exercise indirect soft power over his vulnerable step grandson-in-law. Finally, since Tigranes had used Mithridates' usurpation of Orodes' crown to help legitimize his expansions and since Orodes was in open rebellion against Mithridates and winning that conflict, Tigranes could not continue his war against Parthia without making war upon the son of his former ally and his own step grandson-in-law, which would have damaged

his reputation.<sup>92</sup> Thus, the treaty with Orodes was another diplomatic opportunity that the politically savvy Armenian king embraced.

Finally, a treaty between Armenia and Parthia in 80 BCE helps better explain the geopolitical developments of the 70s BCE. Without an Armeno-Parthian peace treaty, Justin's passage about the Syrians asking Tigranes to become their king makes little sense. Additionally, without a treaty Tigranes' decision not to take advantage of the Parthian civil war by invading Babylonia and indeed perhaps the Farther East makes even less sense. Tigranes had waged a hugely successful war against Parthia for years; however, he suddenly stopped attacking Parthian lands. He certainly could have pursued further hegemonic war in the Middle and Farther East; however, he did not do so because he signed a peace treaty that allowed him to focus on gaining hegemony over the lands of the Near East. Moreover, this treaty, which must have ceded Parthian hegemonic claims to the lands west of Babylonia, helps explain how Tigranes could interfere in Cappadocia, Commagene, Cilicia, Syria, and Phoenicia without Parthian retaliation or even disapproval. The Parthians had brought these lands under their hegemony with difficulty and force. They would not have idly sat by and allowed Tigranes to expand his already powerful kingdom further if a peace treaty was not in place in the 70s BCE. The explosion of conflict between Armenia and Parthia in the 80s BCE and the complete lack of conflict between these two powers in the 70s BCE supports this conclusion. A treaty between Tigranes and Orodes, which ceded Parthian claims to the lands west of Babylonia and to the north of Media in 80 BCE in exchange for a non-military alliance, is the most likely explanation for the geopolitical

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<sup>92</sup> Tigranes cared a great deal about his reputation, the integrity of his marriage alliances, and his in-laws. It is for all of these reasons that he later sheltered Mithridates VI and gave him asylum in Armenia. See Appian *Mithr.* 12.82; Memnon 31.1

developments of the 70s BCE. With this treaty, Tigranes formed a *societas* (a union, partnership, association, or alliance) with Orodes, and bipolarity in the Eastern system reemerged.

This treaty likely saved Orodes' reign. With the Armenian threat to Babylonia temporarily negated, Orodes focused all his military resources against Mithridates III and by the end of the year forced him to flee to the Farther East, where he soon after died. Orodes' coinage from Ecbatana (S34.2), Rhagae (S34.3-4), and Margiane (S34.5) suggests that Orodes campaigned in the Farther East with some success against Mithridates and perhaps against Sinatruces as well. However, since Babylonian scribes had to refer continually to either Orodes or his wife Ispubarza by name, instead of simply calling him Arsaces as was normal in times of internal peace, it is highly likely that Orodes had to combat various usurpers during his entire reign.<sup>93</sup>

The continued instability of the Parthian Empire and the weakened authority of the Parthian king not only had encouraged Tigranes to challenge Parthian domination in the 80s BCE, but also perpetuated the cycle of civil war, increased the frequency of Arab raids on Parthian lands, and emboldened other former vassals to attempt to throw off Parthian hegemony. The king of Media Atropatene abandoned the Parthians and married into Tigranes' family.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, it is possible that the vassal king of Elymais, Kamnaskires II, declared his own independence in the late 80s BCE and perhaps even seized Seleucia in Babylonia for a time.<sup>95</sup> After Orodes had defeated Mithridates and forced him to flee into the Farther East, the incomplete Babylonian *Astronomical Diaries* identify a Parthian invasion of Elymais in 78 BCE

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<sup>93</sup> In this, I agree with Assar's conclusions. Assar also suggests that the amount of overstriking and alteration that we find on Orodes' coinage indicates a reign marred by civil war. Id. 77, 79-80, 84.

<sup>94</sup> Dio 36.14.2

<sup>95</sup> Hansman 1998; Shayegan 2011: 325. Note Le Rider 1965: 426.



led by Orodes, which allowed him to conquer the region early in 77 BCE and expel Kamnaskires temporarily.<sup>96</sup> Orodes then was able to secure the eastern reaches of the empire from the threat of Sinatruces.

Yet by September of 77 BCE a new usurper, simply known as Arsaces XVI and who appears to have been a young son of Mithridates II, had seized Susa in rebellion against Orodes.<sup>97</sup> Kamnaskires was restored to his kingdom in Elymais in 76 BCE, and it is probable that he and Arsaces XVI had formed an alliance against Orodes.<sup>98</sup> The two kings were mutual enemies of Orodes and could combine their local strength against his armies. This alliance proved successful as, in the spring of 75 BCE, Arsaces XVI appears to have defeated and killed Orodes in Babylonia.<sup>99</sup> Arsaces XVI's coinage from Ecbatana, Rhagae, Nisa, and Margiane illustrates that, despite the harassment of Sinatruces' raids from the Central Asian steppe, he maintained control over much of the central and eastern lands of the empire throughout most of his remaining reign (75-67 BCE).<sup>100</sup>

Tigranes II was aware of the ongoing cycle of civil war within the Parthian Empire; however, he proved unwilling to intervene. Several diplomatic and military factors worth

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<sup>96</sup> See Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -77B. Note also Del Monte 1997: 180; McEwan 1986: 91-2; Assar 2006d: 77-9.

<sup>97</sup> Arsaces XVI's coinage portrays a young, partially bearded man, perhaps in his middle to late teens. His use of the epithet "ΘΕΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ (Divinely Fathered)" connects him to Mithridates II. Additionally, although all Parthian kings accepted the name, Arsaces, in honor of Arsaces I, it is possible that Mithridates II named his youngest son Arsaces in honor of the dynasty's founder as well. See Assar 2006d: 81-4, 87.

<sup>98</sup> Id. 79, 82.

<sup>99</sup> Orodes makes his last appearance in the *Astronomical Diaries* at this time and is replaced by a new "King Arsaces." Additionally, Orodes' coinage abruptly stopped and Arsaces XVI's first tetradrachms at Seleucia (S30.12 and S 30.13) appeared. See id. 80-1. Note also McEwan 1986: 93; Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -75; Del Monte 1997: 181.

<sup>100</sup> Note S30.14-17, 20, 23, 26-7. Assar 2006d: 80, 84-5. For our new understanding of Arsaces XVI's coinage and the previous traditions that ascribed his coinage to various other Parthian kings, see id. 83 n.150.

reconsideration influenced Tigranes' geopolitical decisions in the years between his alliance with Orodes in 80 BCE and the invasion of Lucullus in 69 BCE. One might wonder why Tigranes did not come to the military aid of his step grandson-in-law, Orodes, in 77-75 BCE. Recently, Assar has argued that Tigranes did not come to Orodes' aid because he was occupied in Syria from 79 BCE on.<sup>101</sup> However, as this study demonstrates below, we should reject the common misconception that Tigranes occupied Syria in the late 80s BCE or even the early 70s BCE.<sup>102</sup> Rather, Tigranes more likely invaded Syria in ca. 74/73 BCE.<sup>103</sup> Yet Assar's conclusion is at least partially correct in that Tigranes had other military concerns during the 70s BCE that encouraged him to avoid becoming involved in a Parthian civil war.

As discussed above, Tigranes could not hope to invade or occupy Syria successfully without first securing the regions that surrounded Syria. Tigranes spent the first couple of years of the peace with Parthia consolidating his new empire and reorganizing its peoples, especially in northern Mesopotamia.<sup>104</sup> In ca. 78/77 BCE, Appian tells us that he once again invaded Cappadocia, subdued Ariobarzanes I, and brought as many as 300,000 captives back to Armenia to help found a new imperial capital, Tigranocerta.<sup>105</sup> The invasion and occupation of Commagene likely followed sometime between 77-75 BCE, providing Tigranes with direct access to Syria and Cilicia.<sup>106</sup> Thus, Tigranes was busy expanding his hegemony throughout the

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<sup>101</sup> Id. 74, 81.

<sup>102</sup> For the early 80s BCE, see Nersessian 1970: 26. For the late 80s, see esp. von Gutschmid 1887: 20; Reinach 1890: 312; Mommsen 1903: vi 317; Asturean 1912: 39; Sherwin-White 1984: 220; Chahin 1987: 227-8; Weiskopf 1992; Garsoian 2005; Manandyan 2007: 38; Olbrycht 2009: 169. For the early 70s, see Assar 2006d: 74, 81.

<sup>103</sup> Hoover 2007: 297. See below for more detail.

<sup>104</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 21.4

<sup>105</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 10.67

<sup>106</sup> Although he is mistaken about the date, Weiskopf makes this point. Weiskopf 1992.

Near East, campaigning in Cappadocia and Commagene, while Orodes was fighting his civil wars against Sinatruces and Arsaces XVI in the East.

Tigranes had little incentive to risk a two front war by involving himself in the dynastic struggles of Parthia. Moreover, Tigranes seemingly had no obligation to provide Orodes with military aid in 77-75 BCE since he likely did not provide Orodes with military aid during his previous civil war against Mithridates III. The treaty signed between Tigranes and Orodes apparently did not involve military stipulations.<sup>107</sup> Although Tigranes was on friendly terms with Orodes, he did not feel responsible for him.<sup>108</sup> When Arsaces XVI rebelled in 77 BCE, Tigranes viewed this as Orodes' and not his problem. Further, Orodes' defeat and death in 75 BCE appears to have happened suddenly, not allowing Tigranes the time he needed to react. We may assume that Tigranes would have preferred to keep the pro-Armenian regime of Orodes in power. In fact, one can argue that Arsaces XVI possibly rebelled against Orodes in part because he had the support of Parthian nobles who disliked Orodes' connection to Armenia and his concessions to Tigranes. It appears that Arsaces abandoned the traditional Parthian tiara of his predecessors on his coinage "because it had then become emblematic of Tigranes' tyranny."<sup>109</sup> Therefore, Tigranes' inability to come to Orodes' defense perhaps simply was a consequence of the swiftness of his defeat. Tigranes did not want to interfere in a Parthian civil war because he had other, more advantageous wars to fight in the Near East and because Arsaces defeated Orodes before he fully appreciated Orodes' plight.

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<sup>107</sup> This also helps explain why Parthia did not come to Tigranes' aid in 69 BCE when the Romans attacked Armenia and why Tigranes asked to sign a new agreement with the Parthian king in 68 BCE that would secure Parthian military aid. See Appian *Mithr.* 13.87; Memnon 38.8

<sup>108</sup> Tigranes' friendly but detached relationship with Orodes further suggests that, despite Assar's assumptions, Orodes was not his grandson by blood. Assar 2006d: 81.

<sup>109</sup> Id. 81-2, 84.

Tigranes' unwillingness to intervene in Parthia to avenge Orodes also reinforces the argument that Orodes had no brothers nor male children to succeed him. Orodes' death abruptly ended Gotarzes' branch of the Arsacid dynasty, and therefore, Tigranes lost his familial connection by law to the ruling Arsacids. Since his immediate concern was establishing Armenian hegemony over the Near East, he decided against renewing the war with Parthia and, instead, looked favorably upon the opportunity to renew the peace treaty between Armenia and Parthia with Arsaces XVI. Meanwhile, Arsaces XVI had established himself as the new king of Parthia; however, he was a young ruler, likely an older teenager, who had an empire to reorder, other usurpers to fear, and a powerful rival state as a neighbor.<sup>110</sup> It is not surprising that he agreed to renew the peace treaty with Tigranes while he looked to overcome his internal geopolitical concerns. He and his aristocratic supporters could hope to punish Tigranes for his humiliations of Parthia at a later date; immediate internal threats made renewing the peace treaty with Armenia a temporary necessity.<sup>111</sup>

Thus, in 75 BCE Orodes I died in battle, Arsaces XVI became the new Parthian king, and Armenia and Parthia renewed their peace; however, a new interpretation of our numismatic evidence suggests one more important event occurred at this time in the Eastern system, the death of the pro-Parthian Seleucid king, Philip I.<sup>112</sup> Little evidence remains of Philip I's reign and what survives is confused. The last literary evidence we have of his reign is Josephus' brief

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<sup>110</sup> The immediate threat to Arsaces XVI's throne was his cousin, Sinatruces, who appears to have harassed the Farther East intermittently from 77-69 BCE. However, Babylonian colophons and numismatic evidence illustrate that Sinatruces never penetrated Media and that he remained mostly a minor threat during this period. Id. 62, 85. Arsaces XVI's early coinage (S30.12, S30.13, S 30.16) depicts a teenage man with a scruffy half beard.

<sup>111</sup> Dio's account of the later negotiations between the Parthian king and Lucullus' envoys demonstrates that the Parthians continued to harbor a great deal of resentment toward Tigranes and thought of him as their greatest rival. Dio 36.3

<sup>112</sup> See Hoover 2007: 298.

account of Philip's war against Antiochus XII in ca. 84 BCE.<sup>113</sup> Although there is no evidence that confirms Philip's death soon after this fight, scholars generally have assumed that Philip died in 84/83 BCE in order to justify Appian and Justin's accounts of the length of Tigranes' reign in Syria.<sup>114</sup> However, recently scholars have brought the accuracy of Appian and Justin's accounts of the length of Tigranes' reign in Syria into question, and one scholar has argued convincingly in an article that revises the chronology of the late Seleucids that such an interpretation of Philip's death is mistaken.<sup>115</sup>

The problems found in Appian and Justin's accounts of Tigranes' occupation of Syria are considerable, as they often contradict one another. Justin records that the people of Syria, tired of civil war, asked Tigranes to occupy Syria, after which he reigned over the region peacefully for eighteen years.<sup>116</sup> Meanwhile, Appian records that Tigranes aggressively conquered Syria and the surrounding territories and ruled over these areas only fourteen years.<sup>117</sup> Moreover, neither Appian nor Justin has an understanding of the late Seleucid dynasty. Both authors confuse Antiochus XIII with Antiochus X.<sup>118</sup> Further, Justin discusses a possible alliance between Armenia and Parthia not mentioned by Appian.<sup>119</sup> Thus, because of the highly problematic narrative of Appian and Justin's accounts of these events, I agree with Hoover's conclusion that we may disregard Appian and Justin's confused statements on the length of Tigranes' reign in Syria in favor of more reliable numismatic evidence. With this new understanding, we can

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<sup>113</sup> *Jos. Ant.* 13.387-91. See also Hoover 2007: 294, 296, 298-9.

<sup>114</sup> Note that Appian and Justin are not the only ancient authors whose accounts are confused. Eusebius and Hieronymus' accounts confuse Philip I with Philip II. See *Eus. Chron.* (Karst ed.): 123-124, 207; *Hieron. Chron.* (Helm ed.): 150 (232 F).

<sup>115</sup> Assar 2006d: 74; Hoover 2007: 296.

<sup>116</sup> Justin 40.1.4

<sup>117</sup> Appian *Syr.* 8.48, 11.70. See also White 1999: 236-7.

<sup>118</sup> Appian *Syr.* 8.48; Justin 40.2.2

<sup>119</sup> Justin 40.1.3

conclude with relative confidence that “Tigranes only added Syria to his dominions some years later [74/73 BCE].”<sup>120</sup>

Scholars generally try to rectify Appian and Justin’s jumbled accounts two ways. First, for Justin they count eighteen years back from the appointment of Antiochus XIII by Lucullus in 66/65 BCE. Second, for Appian they count fourteen years back from Lucullus’ invasion of the Armenian Empire in 69 BCE. They do so in order to reach the mostly arbitrary year of 84/83 BCE to mark Tigranes’ occupation of Syria. However, such a reconstruction is unnecessary due to the unreliability of Justin and Appian’s accounts of these events and untenable because of the geopolitical realities of the time. Recently, noticing these various inconsistencies, Assar argued that we must disregard Justin’s claim of Tigranes reigning eighteen peaceful years over Syria and, instead, count back Appian’s fourteen years from 65 BCE.<sup>121</sup> For Assar, this placed Tigranes’ invasion of Syria in 79 BCE during the reign of the friendly Orodes in Parthia, who Assar mistakenly claims was Tigranes’ grandson by blood. Such a reconstruction rectifies the consequences of the Armeno-Parthian war with Justin’s claim of an Armenian and Parthian alliance at the time of Tigranes’ invasion of Syria; however, it still fails to explain how and why Tigranes occupied Syria before his invasions of Cappadocia and Cilicia.<sup>122</sup> Nor does it incorporate the numismatic evidence brought forth by Hoover. Additionally, it ignores that Justin

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<sup>120</sup> See Hoover 2007: 296-7.

<sup>121</sup> Assar 2006d: 74.

<sup>122</sup> In this, I agree with Hoover that Tigranes’ occupation of Syria and Cilicia was unlikely before he was able to subdue Cappadocia and Commagene. Hoover 2007: 297. Manandyan, using the untenable 84/83 BCE date, mistakenly assumes that, when Appian describes Tigranes’ invasion of Cappadocia as a net, he meant that Tigranes had already occupied Syria and, therefore, conducted a multipronged invasion of Cappadocia from Sophene, Commagene, and Cilicia. Manandyan 2007: 40. Meanwhile, Shayegan, using the untenable 84/83 BCE date, incorrectly assumes that Tigranes occupied Syria and the surrounding regions as a vassal of Parthia. Shayegan 2011: 316-18, 328. Note also Sartre 2005: 27-8.

states that Mithridates VI was at war with Rome at the time of Tigranes' occupation of Syria.<sup>123</sup> Finally, Assar's alternative reconstruction still holds to the erroneous assumption that Appian's claim that Tigranes ruled over Syria for fourteen years is factual.

Let us first offer the geopolitical impossibilities of the 84/83 BCE reconstruction. Justin insists that Armenia was a Parthian ally at the time of Tigranes' peaceful occupation of Syria. Yet in 84/83 BCE, as discussed in detail above, Tigranes was waging a successful hegemonic war against Parthia at this time. Meanwhile, Josephus, who is perhaps our most reliable source for the events of this period in the Near East, makes no mention of an Armenian occupation of Syria at this time. Instead, he states that it was not until the reign of the Hasmonaean queen, Salome Alexandra (76/75-67/66 BCE), that the Jews became aware of Tigranes' success in Syria and began to fear his plans to invade Palestine.<sup>124</sup> Thus, Josephus provides us with a timeframe, in which Tigranes' invasion was "irrupting (ἐμβεβληκῶς)" into Syria and making the Jews "terrified (ἐφόβησε)" of his advance.<sup>125</sup> Tigranes' conquests occurred between Salome making her elder son Hyrcanus the high priest in 76 BCE and sending her younger son Aristobulus to attack Ptolemy Menneus in ca. 70 BCE.<sup>126</sup> As Assar and Hoover have argued convincingly, since Tigranes was aggressively conquering Phoenicia and looking to expand further into Palestine in the late 70s BCE, it is impossible for scholars to continue to argue that this process took over a decade and that the Jews did not bother to negotiate with Tigranes until over a decade after he had first conquered Syria.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Justin 40.1.2

<sup>124</sup> Jos. *Ant.* 13.419

<sup>125</sup> Id. 13.419-20.

<sup>126</sup> Id. 13.408-18.

<sup>127</sup> Assar 2006d: 74 n.126; Hoover 2007: 296. Note also Bellinger 1949: 81.

From 87-80 BCE Tigranes had expanded his kingdom immensely at the expense of the Parthians. His campaigns had been aggressive, extensive, and ambitious. Josephus describes a similar campaign down the coast of the Eastern Mediterranean. Clearly, Tigranes did not enter Syria peacefully and diddle around indecisively for over a decade. Such a reconstruction ignores our more reliable evidence of these events and overlooks the geopolitical realities of the Eastern system in the 90s, 80s, and 70s BCE.<sup>128</sup>

Further, Josephus also tells us that the Seleucid queen, Cleopatra Selene, “ruled or possessed (κατέχειν)” portions of Syria in the late 70s BCE. In fact, as Hoover argues, Cleopatra, who was the mother and co-ruler of Antiochus XIII, still controlled Syria in ca. 75 BCE.<sup>129</sup> In 80 BCE Cleopatra’s son from an early marriage, Ptolemy XI Alexander II, gained the throne of Egypt with Roman aid; however, his abusive rule cost him his life after only a few days on the throne.<sup>130</sup> Cleopatra then claimed the throne of Egypt for her sons from her most recent husband, Antiochus X; however, the illegitimate Ptolemy XII seized the kingdom.<sup>131</sup> As Cicero relates, Cleopatra sent her boys, Antiochus and Seleucus, to Rome to seek Roman aid in taking the Egyptian throne away from Ptolemy XII. Cicero writes,

For you know that the kings of Syria [Antiochus XIII and Seleucus], the boyish sons of King Antiochus [X], have lately been at Rome [ca. 75/74 BCE]. *And they came not on account of the kingdom of Syria; for that they had obtained possession of without dispute, as they had received it from their father and their ancestors; but they thought that the kingdom of Egypt belonged to them and to Selene their mother. When they, being hindered by the critical state of the republic at that time, were not able to obtain the discussion of the subject as they wished before the senate, they departed for Syria [in 73 BCE], their paternal kingdom. One of them—the one whose name is Antiochus [XIII]—wished to*

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<sup>128</sup> We must reject utterly Chahin’s mistaken opinion that Tigranes had no ambitions south of the Taurus Mountains and that “there was no need to crave for the deserts of Syria or the marshlands of Mesopotamia.” Chahin 1987: 228.

<sup>129</sup> Hoover 2007: 297. See also Bevan 1927: 350.

<sup>130</sup> Appian *BC* 1.102. Ptolemy XI Alexander II was the son of Ptolemy X Alexander I.

<sup>131</sup> Cic. *Ver.* 4.61. Note also Dio 39.12-14



make his journey through Sicily. And so, while Verres was praetor [73-71 BCE], he came to Syracuse.<sup>132</sup>

Thus, Cicero states that the boys possessed the kingdom of Syria at the time of their visit to Rome in 75-73 BCE.<sup>133</sup> I agree entirely with Hoover's conclusion that this "strongly indicates that at that time Tigranes had not yet embarked upon his assault on Syria. Otherwise, it is unbelievable that the young Seleucid monarchs should have made no attempt to assert their rights to the kingdom against those of Tigranes, a king linked by marriage alliance to Rome's great enemy, Mithradates VI Eupator of Pontus."<sup>134</sup> Cicero's more reliable literary evidence supports the numismatic record as well. Tigranes used a total of 56-67 dies to produce his Antiochene coinage, which is an abnormally small amount if he ruled over Syria from 84/83-66/65 BCE. However, it is a far more plausible number if he occupied the region after 74/73 BCE.<sup>135</sup> Therefore, the more reliable literary evidence and the numismatic evidence suggest that Philip I did not die in 84/83 BCE, but rather reigned until ca. 76/75 BCE, possibly as a Parthian vassal. Then, because Philip and his faction had no appropriate candidate to succeed him, in early 75 BCE Cleopatra and her sons, who were the longstanding rivals of Philip, became the new rulers of Syria.<sup>136</sup>

This new reconstruction extends the civil war fought between Philip in the north and Cleopatra in the south for several years and helps explain Justin's depiction of the people of

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<sup>132</sup> Cic. *Ver.* 4.61 (The italics are mine). For the name and identity of the second son of Cleopatra, see Kritz 2002.

<sup>133</sup> Antiochus XIII would have put forth his request in 75/74 BCE before Tigranes entered Syria. Cicero said that he decided to return home out of frustration with the chaotic scene at Rome; however, Tigranes' invasion in 74/73 BCE certainly would have been an additional motivating factor. Antiochus' abuses at the hands of the senate and particularly at the hands of Verres would have convinced him that he could not hope for Roman aid in the East. See Cic. *Ver.* 4.62-8

<sup>134</sup> Hoover 2007: 297.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> Philip's son Philip II was still a child and, therefore, unfit to rule at this time.

Syria as exhausted by dynastic quarrels and willing to look to foreign rulers for leadership.<sup>137</sup> Moreover, Justin's account of the Syrians preferring Tigranes as a new candidate for king because of his Parthian alliance suggests further that Philip was indeed a Parthian vassal. The Syrians preferred a leader who was friendly with Parthia.

Justin relates that the majority of the people of Syria, most importantly the aristocracy of Antioch, chose Tigranes to intervene in the region over Mithridates VI of Pontus and Ptolemy of Egypt because the former was at war with Rome and the latter was a longstanding rival against Seleucid power.<sup>138</sup> Generally, scholars have assumed that, first, Mithridates VI was fighting Rome in the Second Mithridatic War and that, second, Justin here refers to Ptolemy IX. However, if we incorporate the recent findings of Hoover and account for the geopolitical realities of this period, we find a new, far more compelling answer.

As Cleopatra consolidated her power over Syria from the south, her enemies in the north called upon Tigranes to champion their cause in Syria. In 74/73 BCE Tigranes invaded Syria with their support to remove Cleopatra and her children from power and establish Armenian hegemony over the region. That is, when Tigranes invaded Syria, as described by Justin, Mithridates VI had just begun fighting the Third Mithridatic War and Ptolemy XII was the king of Egypt.<sup>139</sup> Cleopatra's Seleucid rivals hoped that Tigranes, who ruled over the rising

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<sup>137</sup> Justin 40.1.1-3

<sup>138</sup> Philip had seized Antioch with Parthian aid, and he had ruled in the north of Syria for years. Thus, the people of Antioch supported Philip and were the enemies of Cleopatra. Note that an Antiochene faction later supported Philip's son, Philip II, against Cleopatra's son, Antiochus XIII. Diod. 40.1a. Note also Hoover 2007: 299.

<sup>139</sup> Some members of the Seleucid faction who invited Tigranes to enter Syria contemplated asking Ptolemy. They ultimately rejected this idea; however, Ptolemy XII makes far more sense than Ptolemy IX in this instance because Ptolemy XII was the enemy of Cleopatra Selene. That is, the anti-Cleopatra Seleucid faction could count on Ptolemy XII to fight Cleopatra for control of southern Syria. Meanwhile, Ptolemy IX was the elder brother and former husband of Cleopatra. Although the two siblings had a rocky relationship, the brother of Cleopatra would not

hegemonic power in the Eastern system, and who at this time shared their diplomatic relationship toward Parthia, would bring an end to the attacks of Cleopatra against their faction through the military campaigns described by Appian. Thus, our new reconstruction encompasses and reconciles Appian and Justin's jumbled accounts of Tigranes' occupation of Syria once we discard their uncertain, confused timelines in favor of more compelling literary and numismatic evidence.

Let us reconsider Appian and Justin's accounts more closely within our new reconstruction of the geopolitical developments of the 70s BCE in the Near East. Appian records,

Tigranes [II], the son of Tigranes [I], king of Armenia, who had annexed many neighboring principalities, and from these exploits had acquired the title of 'king of kings,' attacked the Seleucids because they would not acknowledge his supremacy. Antiochus Pius [X] was not able to withstand him. Tigranes conquered all of the Syrian peoples this side of the Euphrates as far as Egypt. He took Cilicia at the same time (for this was also subject to the Seleucids) and put his general, Magadates, in command of all these conquests for fourteen years.<sup>140</sup>

Meanwhile, Justin states,

After the kings and kingdom of Syria had been exhausted by continual wars, occasioned by the mutual animosities of brothers, and by sons succeeding to the quarrels of their fathers, the people began to look for relief from foreign parts, and to think of choosing a king from among the sovereigns of other nations. Some therefore advised that they should take Mithridates of Pontus, others Ptolemaeus of Egypt, but it being considered that Mithridates was engaged in war with the Romans, and that Ptolemaeus had always been an enemy to Syria, all agreed upon Tigranes, king of Armenia, who, in addition to the strength of his home, was supported by an alliance (*societate*) with Parthia and a relationship by marriage (*adfinitate*) with Mithridates [VI of Pontus]. Tigranes, accordingly, being invited to the throne of Syria, enjoyed a most tranquil reign over it for eighteen years, without having occasion to go to war either to attack others or to defend himself.<sup>141</sup>

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have been an acceptable candidate to put forward on the Seleucid throne. For Ptolemy IX, see *Jos. Ant.* 13.285-7, 328-47, 353-9, 370; *id. Bell.* 1.86; Justin 39.4-5; Paus. 1.9.1-3. Note also Bevan 1927: Ch. 11.

<sup>140</sup> Appian *Syr.* 8.48

<sup>141</sup> Justin 40.1.1-4. I altered this translation to reflect the Latin more accurately.

Both accounts are incomplete on their own; however, taken together with our interpretation of more reliable literary and numismatic evidence they help illuminate the geopolitical situation in the Near East at this time.

Appian begins by briefly describing the successful hegemonic war of Tigranes against the Parthians, associating his victory over Parthia with his adoption of the title, “King of Kings.” He portrays Tigranes as the greatest regional power. Justin also acknowledges the strength of Tigranes and his advantageous diplomatic relationships. Meanwhile, Justin begins by arguing that the dynastic wars of the Seleucids had taken their toll on Syria and that the Syrians were searching for a foreign leader to rule over them. This implies that the Seleucid king had died and that there was opposition to a successor. Philip I had fought a civil war against Demetrius III, Antiochus XII, and Cleopatra Selene. With the death of Philip in 75 BCE, his supporters in northern Syria rejected Antiochus XIII and Cleopatra’s regency over him and looked for a new champion to combat Cleopatra and her supporters in southern Syria. Therefore, Justin tells us that, after some deliberation, “all” of the Seleucids who opposed Cleopatra’s faction invited Tigranes to take the throne because of his perceived power and likeminded diplomatic connections.

Thus, when Justin then states that, once the anti-Cleopatra Seleucid faction invited Tigranes to enter northern Syria, he ruled peacefully for the remainder of his reign over the region, this simply means that the Seleucid faction of northern Syria give him its unwavering support. That is, although Tigranes had to fight Cleopatra and her supporters in the south, with whom he already was at war after accepting the invitation of the anti-Cleopatra faction to invade Syria, in these contexts Justin’s account means that Tigranes reigned over northern Syria as the head of the anti-Cleopatra faction without issue for as long as he reigned. Meanwhile, in

Appian's account the Seleucids who refused to "acknowledge his supremacy" were Cleopatra, her sons, and their supporters in the south. In fact, Appian mistakes Antiochus XIII for his father; however, this mistake is understandable since Tigranes was fighting the Seleucid faction that supported Antiochus X and his family.<sup>142</sup> Moreover, Appian elsewhere argues that Pompey later deposed Antiochus XIII because "it was unseemly for the Seleucids, whom Tigranes had dethroned, to govern Syria, rather than the Romans who had conquered Tigranes."<sup>143</sup> By accepting the invitation of the anti-Cleopatra faction and occupying northern Syria, Tigranes had to either reconcile Cleopatra and her faction to his cause or make war against them. Cleopatra's defiance threatened Tigranes' reputation, prestige, and the perception of his power and, therefore, required an aggressive response.

Appian next emphasizes that Tigranes conquered Cilicia and the Seleucid lands to the south. Cleopatra and her supporters held both of these areas. In fact, after he returned from Italy in 73/72 BCE, Antiochus XIII perhaps led military operations for his faction in Cilicia. This would explain how he was able to lay "hid in a corner of Cilicia" until Lucullus forced Tigranes to abandon the region in 69 BCE.<sup>144</sup> This is even more evidence that Tigranes' conquest of the Seleucid state came in the latter half of the 70s BCE. It is impossible to think that, if Tigranes conquered Syria and Cilicia in the middle 80s BCE, Antiochus XIII would have been able to hide in Cilicia for a decade and a half without being captured or forced to flee. However, if the conquest of Cilicia came much later, it is plausible that Antiochus XIII, after failing in the defense of the region, could have held out in a secluded stronghold in the Taurus Mountains for a

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<sup>142</sup> Note also Appian *Syr.* 11.69. Justin makes the same mistake in his account of Lucullus' defeat of Tigranes. Justin 40.2.2

<sup>143</sup> Appian *Syr.* 8.49, 11.70

<sup>144</sup> Justin 40.2.3

couple of years against Tigranes' general, Magadates, while Tigranes moved to attack his mother and her power base in the south.<sup>145</sup>

Thus, Tigranes used the support of the anti-Cleopatra faction to make a base of operations in northern Syria in 73 BCE. He then used that base to strike against Cilicia in ca. 72 BCE, against southern Syria in ca. 71-70 BCE, and against Phoenicia in 70-69 BCE.<sup>146</sup> With his success, Tigranes absorbed these regions into his expanding empire, gained the submission of the Hasmonean Kingdom, and appointed a trusted Armenian noble, Magadates (or Bagarat), as governor of this new territory.<sup>147</sup> Tigranes seized the stronghold of Ptolemais in early 69 BCE, captured Cleopatra, and had her executed at Zeugma soon after, just before the surprise invasion of Lucullus.<sup>148</sup>

This new analysis of the sources and new interpretation of the geopolitical developments of this period in the Near East drastically alters our previous understanding of the rise of Armenia, the struggles of Parthia, and the further decline of the Seleucid state from 88-69 BCE. Scholars must abandon the 84/83 BCE model for Tigranes' invasion of Syria. Tigranes was too busy fighting the Parthians in the latter half of the 80s BCE and too isolated from Syria to become involved in the region at that time. Moreover, his need to secure the lands in between Armenia and Syria and his alliance with the Parthians, which encouraged him to respect the Parthian client king, Philip I, kept him from invading Syria in the early 70s BCE. However, once he had subdued Cappadocia in 78 BCE and conquered Commagene soon after and once Philip

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<sup>145</sup> See *Jos. Ant.* 13.419-21

<sup>146</sup> Tigranes also transported peoples from Cilicia to his capital, Tigranocerta. *Plut. Pomp.* 28.4; *Dio* 36.37.6

<sup>147</sup> See Manandyan 2007: 39. See also *Jos. Ant.* 13.420

<sup>148</sup> *Strabo* 16.2.3; *Jos. Ant.* 13.419-21; *Plut. Luc.* 21.2. Mommsen incorrectly indicated that Tigranes took Ptolemais in 74 BCE. Mommsen 1903: iv 316.

had died and the unpopular regency of Cleopatra had begun, Tigranes found the opportunity and justification he needed to expand further south and incorporate the wealthy lands of Syria and Phoenicia into his ever expanding empire. Tigranes acted aggressively, imperialistically, and predictably as the rising system hegemon in the East, as Appian describes. Yet he did so with political and diplomatic tact. He could claim that his actions in Syria were justified and carry the favorable perception that he was a peace-loving savior of the Syrians, as Justin describes. Tigranes' invasion and occupation of Syria and the surrounding territories in the second half of the 70s BCE is a brilliant example of ancient international relations under the systemic pressures of interstate anarchy.

The most notable consequences of Armenia's rise to power for the international environment in the Near East were, first, that Tigranes' successful hegemonic war against Parthia caused bipolarity in the Eastern system to reemerge and, second, that his conquest of the lands along the coast of the Eastern Mediterranean in the late 70s BCE caused his empire to overlap with the hegemonic sphere of Rome. The reemergence of bipolarity in the Eastern system carried with it major geopolitical consequences. Armenia became the hegemonic rival of Parthia. Middling states in the Near East began to look to Armenia, rather than Parthia, for leadership and protection in the 70s BCE. Moreover, the drastic rise of Armenian power left Parthia on unsure footing in the Eastern system. The peace with Tigranes was not permanent. There was no guarantee that Tigranes would not pursue further hegemonic war against the Parthians in a quest to dominate the Eastern system completely. Further, the disastrous war with Armenia had embarrassed and disgraced Parthia. Parthian power, reputation, and prestige had all taken a mighty blow. If Parthia could recover from its internal chaos, the Arsacids would have to

attempt to regain their international standing as the hegemon of the Eastern system. The relationship between Parthia and Armenia remained tense and potentially volatile.

Meanwhile, the first phase of system overlap between the Mediterranean and Eastern systems, which was the result of Mithridates II's successful western advances in the 90s BCE and culminated in Tigranes' successful conquests along the Eastern Mediterranean coast in the late 70s BCE, meant that Tigranes' aggression against Cappadocia, Syria, Cilicia, and Phoenicia, which had no intention of challenging the Romans, made him appear to be a rival of Rome. The Romans took this threat to their hegemony seriously, launching two major expeditions against Tigranes in the first half of the 60s BCE. Since the Armenian Empire dominated, not only the area of overlap between the Mediterranean and Eastern systems, but also large sections of the Eastern system, the results of the Armeno-Parthian war had enormous geopolitical consequences once the Romans went to war against Tigranes in 69 BCE. Rome's successful war against Armenia not only restored Roman hegemony over the Eastern Mediterranean coast, but also allowed the Romans to advance the bounds of the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system further east. The pressures of system overlap magnified over the course of the 60s and the first half of the 50s BCE as the separate geopolitical spheres of the Romans and the Parthians became increasingly intertwined.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Although Armenia ultimately found itself in a precarious position between the two major polities that dominated the expanded Med-Eastern system, a system-level analysis of Tigranes' hegemonic wars against Parthia and Rome provides a new appreciation of the development of Armenia into an unlimited revisionist state in the 80s and 70s BCE. These conflicts are another example of unknown test cases for political scientists. For the long-standing, precarious position of Armenia between the two super powers of Rome and Parthia during the imperial period, see Chaumont 1979; Gregoratti 2012b.



## Rome Dominates the Near East

Up to the 60s BCE, Roman and Parthian contact or concern for one another had been negligible. Neither state had much of an understanding of the extent of the other's power. Although Rome and Parthia had established first contact in the late 90s BCE, little was accomplished at the meeting and both powers remained isolated from one another for another two and a half decades. In the 80s and 70s BCE, despite the major wars in the Near East and the rapidly shifting power dynamics in the region, Rome and Parthia had no cause to interact within their separate interstate systems. Rome's struggles against Pontus were of little concern to Parthia and Parthia's struggles with Armenia were of little concern to Rome. Rather, Tigranes' conquests of Syria and the Eastern Mediterranean coast, while he was at peace with Parthia, concerned Rome. Meanwhile, Rome's subsequent war against Tigranes and its penetration into Mesopotamia and Armenia concerned Parthia. That is, both powers finally began to appreciate one another's strength and potential threat as Roman success against Tigranes expanded the overlap of the Mediterranean and Eastern systems in the Near East. Tension between Rome and Parthia began to mount. Neither power recognized or took account of the fact that the other one viewed regional domination as a geopolitical goal.

Since Antiochus IV's acknowledgement of Roman hegemony over the Mediterranean a century before, Rome had considered Syria and Phoenicia under its indirect domination. However, Parthia's longstanding hegemonic struggle with the Seleucids meant that the Parthians also desired to dominate Syria.<sup>150</sup> When Mithridates II and his immediate successors advanced

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<sup>150</sup> The Parthians had ambitions toward the control of Syria since the early 130s BCE and, by the late 90s BCE, had extended their influence (and thus the Eastern system) over at least Commagene, Syria, and Cilicia. See Justin 38.9.3, 10.7, 11, 42.1.1; Diod. 34/35.18; Jos. *Ant.* 13.365-71, 384-6; Strabo 14.5.2. For scholars who refuse to acknowledge Parthian designs on Syria, see esp. Dobiáš 1931: 221, 224; Tarn 1932: 580f.; Will 1967: 11 425-6. For scholars who

successfully into Syria and its surrounding territories, initiating the first phase of system overlap between the Mediterranean and Eastern systems, tension and confusion between the two powers began to build for the first time, manifesting in Tigranes' raid on Cappadocia, Sulla's reoccupation of the region, and the indecisive meeting between Sulla and Mithridates' envoy, Orobazus. Neither power was willing nor able to clarify their international relationship or settle their conflicting concerns in the Near East. Since both powers only maintained loose hegemony over the region in the 90s-80s BCE, there was little incentive to revert to open conflict to settle who actually controlled the Near East at this time.

Yet the rise of Pontus and Armenia as major powers in the Near East and their separate conflicts with system hegemonies had drastic consequences for the future of the Mediterranean and Eastern systems. Armenia, prior to the 60s BCE, became the bipolar rival of Parthia in the Eastern system but remained only a peripheral state on the outside edge of the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system. While Armenia waged its successful hegemonic war against Parthia, the Romans took no immediate notice because it was outside of their geopolitical concerns. However, when Armenia followed the example of Parthia and established its hegemony over the regions along the Eastern Mediterranean, the conquests of Tigranes suddenly and increasingly became a Roman concern.<sup>151</sup> Moreover, Tigranes took his conquests a step further than the Parthians had by completely annexing these regions directly into his new empire.<sup>152</sup> That is, by

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recognize these designs, see esp. Debevoise 1938: 25, 30-1, 33; Wolski 1980a: 252ff.; Sherwin-White 1984: 218-20.

<sup>151</sup> Our accounts of Tigranes' rise to power, most of which were written during the later Roman and Parthian stalemate, discuss Tigranes' humbling of the Parthians; however, their emphasis is that Lucullus drove Tigranes out of Syria and Phoenicia. Strabo 11.14.15; Appian *Syr.* 8.48; Plut. *Luc.* 14.5, 21.4, 36.5-6

<sup>152</sup> Strabo makes this distinction. He states, "And this is what made the Parthians masters of the country, who got possession of the region on the far edge of the Euphrates; and at last made also the Armenians masters, who not only seized the country outside the Taurus even as far as

the end of the 70s BCE Tigranes presented Rome with a direct threat to Roman hegemony over the Mediterranean that necessitated an eventual military response. Thus, it is unsurprising that once the Romans felt that they had defeated Mithridatic Pontus, they then turned their attention to the new threat of Armenia. If we also consider Tigranes' attachment to the feared Roman rival, Mithridates VI, we find the primary motivations for Lucullus' invasion in 69 BCE. Tigranes' direct involvement in the regions along the Eastern Mediterranean coast and his continued indirect support of Mithridates VI forced Rome to act aggressively against Armenia. The immediate result was the defeat of Tigranes and the incorporation of northern Mesopotamia and Armenia into the expanded Roman-dominated Mediterranean system as semi-peripheral regions.

None of this was the intention of Tigranes. When he once again interfered in Cappadocia in 78 BCE, he still was not doing so to provoke Rome.<sup>153</sup> Instead, he approached Cappadocia as he had multiple times before. To him Cappadocia was a semi-peripheral region within the bounds of the Eastern system that was hostile to Tigranes' regime, and therefore, he believed he was acting well within his rights to force Cappadocia to accept his hegemony. Further, Tigranes also considered the lands of Syria and Phoenicia to be a part of the expanded Eastern system since the Parthians and Seleucids previously had claimed hegemony over these regions, which helps explain why he never considered Roman concerns during his conquest of the Eastern Mediterranean coast. That is, Tigranes approached his conquests from an eastern perspective that did not appreciate the geopolitical concerns of Rome's western perspective. In raiding

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Phoenicia, but also, so far as they could, overthrew the kings and the whole royal stock; the sea, however, they gave over to the Cilicians." Strabo 14.5.2

<sup>153</sup> I agree with Manandyan that Tigranes still had no intention to fight the Romans. Manandyan 2007: 42.

Cappadocia and occupying Syria, Tigranes did not anticipate Roman retaliation, as his total surprise at Lucullus' invasion clearly demonstrates.<sup>154</sup> Thus, Tigranes' lack of perspective and Rome's harsh response was in part a lingering consequence of the first phase of system overlap between the Mediterranean and Eastern systems. Tigranes' actions unintentionally discredited Roman prestige and challenged Roman Mediterranean hegemony. The immediate result was the invasions of Lucullus and Pompey to reestablish Roman domination.

Rome's aggressive actions against Armenia were unsettling as well to the Parthians, who on the one hand were happy to see the power of Tigranes fall, but who on the other hand were displeased that Rome was interfering in what Parthia considered the concerns of its own sphere of influence. After the devastation of the Armeno-Parthian war, Parthia eventually had to gain military retribution against Armenia to restore its international standing as system hegemon. Thus, with the decline of Armenian power after the war with Rome, Parthia eventually began to challenge Armenia to reestablish Parthian domination in the East.

Armenia increasingly became squeezed between Roman and Parthian efforts to dominate the region. However, until the violent system merger between the Mediterranean and Eastern systems in the latter half of the 50s BCE, Rome and Parthia wanted to dominate Armenia for separate reasons. Unlike the later Roman and Parthian struggles to control Armenia to gain a hegemonic advantage over one another, in the 60s and early 50s BCE Rome wanted to dominate Armenia to symbolize its undisputed hegemony over the Mediterranean and to stabilize the Near East. Meanwhile, Parthia also wanted to dominate Armenia in order to avenge its previous humiliation at the hands of Tigranes and to reestablish its undisputed hegemony over the East.

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<sup>154</sup> Jos. *Ant.* 13.419-21; Plut. *Luc.* 21.2

Neither Rome nor Parthia comprehended the realities or magnitude of the drastically shifting international environment of the Near East at this time and its potentially immense geopolitical consequences. Both powers believed they were acting within the bounds of their separate interstate systems; however, those systems came to overlap so extensively that conflict between Rome and Parthia became increasingly likely. Although Lucullus' war against Tigranes caused the second phase of system overlap between the Mediterranean and Eastern systems, more immediate concerns in their respective interstate systems and the tradition of isolation between Rome and Parthia still overshadowed the growing need to resolve the untenable international environment developing over the Near East. It would not be until the latter half of the 50s BCE that tensions finally would boil over and Rome and Parthia would commit to hegemonic war to determine their true power relationship.

#### Surrounded by Enemies: Rome's Last Struggle to Maintain Its Hegemony over the Mediterranean System

The war between Rome and Armenia was an unintended consequence of the final hegemonic conflict between Rome and Mithridatic Pontus, known commonly as the Third Mithridatic war (74-63 BCE). While Tigranes fought his successful hegemonic war against Parthia in the Eastern system and expanded his empire in the Near East, Mithridates VI rebuilt his financial, logistical, and military capabilities in Anatolia. Additionally, while Parthian internal chaos and civil war provided Tigranes with an opportunity to challenge Parthian hegemony in the East, Rome's political and social upheavals in the 70s BCE gave Mithridates another chance to challenge Roman hegemony in the West.

With the end of the so-called Second Mithridatic War, Mithridates' recent military victory against Murena compounded the shortcomings of the still unratified Treaty of

Dardanus.<sup>155</sup> Mithridates had suffered severe military losses in the first conflict with Rome; however, political instability in Rome had forced Sulla to end the war before total Roman victory. The core of Mithridates' Black Sea Kingdom remained untouched by the ravages of war.<sup>156</sup> Further, the ill-conceived actions of Murena allowed Mithridates once again to gain the upper hand in the battle for the hearts and minds of the peoples of Anatolia. Even though Mithridates continued to look for an opportunity to regain his reputation, prestige, and power at Rome's expense, he successfully acted as though he was a victim of Roman aggression. When he quickly defeated Murena, he used his elevated military and political position to negotiate a more favorable peace with Rome. Nothing more of the conflict between Rome and Pontus emerged for several years because of the continued deterioration of the political scene at Rome and because of Mithridates' need to recuperate his losses. Yet the polities of Anatolia took notice of Mithridates' recent propaganda and military victories against Rome. Many ancient authors

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<sup>155</sup> Cicero captures the frustrated and embarrassed sentiments of Rome after the first two conflicts with Pontus. He states, "And since you have at all times been covetous of glory and greedy of praise beyond all other nations, you have to wipe out that stain, received in the former Mithridates War, which has now fixed itself deeply and eaten its way into the Roman name, the stain arising from the fact that he, who in one day marked down by one order, and one single letter, all the Roman citizens in all Asia, scattered as they were over so many cities, for slaughter and butchery, has not only never yet suffered any chastisement worthy of his wickedness, but now, twenty-three years after that time, is still a king, and a king in such a way that he is not content to hide himself in Pontus, or in the recesses of Cappadocia, but he seeks to emerge from his hereditary kingdom, and to range among your revenues, in the broad light of Asia. Indeed up to this time your generals have been, contending with the king so as to carry off tokens of victory rather than actual victory. Lucius Sulla has triumphed, Lucius Murena has triumphed over Mithridates, two most gallant men, and most consummate generals; but yet they have triumphed in such a way that he, though routed and defeated, was still king. Not but what praise is to be given to those generals for what they did. Pardon must be conceded to them for what they left undone; because the republic recalled Sulla from that war into Italy, and Sulla recalled Murena." *Cic. Man.* 3.7-8

<sup>156</sup> Mithridates never lost the ability to pursue aggressive, power-maximizing policies against neighboring states, as his expeditions around the Black Sea and in Anatolia clearly demonstrate.

record Mithridates' remarkable ability to rise like a phoenix from the ashes of defeat.<sup>157</sup> He once again was winning the public relations battle in the region, gaining new allies and reforming his army along Roman standards to make it more competitive.<sup>158</sup> Recently, a scholar even compared Mithridates' swift recovery in the early 70s BCE to the Tet Offensive in the Vietnam War.<sup>159</sup> That is, Mithridates overcame heavy losses through determined effort in the previous conflicts against Rome, which demoralized his enemies and encouraged further support of his seemingly righteous cause. Yet unlike the Tet Offensive, Mithridates' determination to continue resisting Roman hegemony ultimately led to the destruction of his kingdom and the downfall of Armenia.

After renewing the truce with Rome in 81 BCE, Mithridates VI turned to rebuilding and consolidating his kingdom. In 80 BCE, he regained control of the tribes and towns of the Cimmerian Bosphorus and placed his son, Machares, on the throne of the Bosporan Kingdom.<sup>160</sup> The following year he endured a difficult campaign north of Colchis against the Achaian tribes, which cost him two divisions of his army partially in battle and partially due to the elements.<sup>161</sup> Thus, Mithridates' recovery was not without setbacks, and neighboring rivals, who feared Pontus' potential power, attacked any sign of Pontic weakness.

Rome's failure to defeat Mithridates in the late 80s BCE had allowed him to occupy large sections of Cappadocia. In exchange for a promise that Mithridates would return the lands he had occupied illegally in Cappadocia, Mithridates forced Ariobarzanes to marry one of his daughters

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<sup>157</sup> Plut. *Ser.* 23; Appian *Mithr.* 9.66; Justin 37.1.6-9; Cic. *Man.* 3.8-4.10

<sup>158</sup> Appian tells us that "many" once again sided with Pontus. Appian *Mithr.* 9.66. For Mithridates' military reforms and use of Roman military advisors, see Plut. *Luc.* 7; *Ser.* 24

<sup>159</sup> Mayor equates Mithridates' losses to the 'Tet effect,' which "describes a disastrous major military campaign against a more powerful enemy, which nevertheless becomes a public relations victory, with renewed support for what is seen as a righteous cause." Mayor 2010: 236.

<sup>160</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 10.67

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

and to cede a sizable portion of his kingdom to Pontus for Mithridates to hold legally.<sup>162</sup> However, Ariobarzanes chafed under the restrictions of this new arrangement, which Mithridates made far worse by refusing to abandon his other gains in Cappadocia. Thus, when Ariobarzanes heard that Mithridates had suffered considerable losses against the Achaians, he saw an opportunity to reclaim his kingdom from his suddenly vulnerable rival.<sup>163</sup> He sent envoys to gain Roman support, and Sulla demanded that Mithridates abandon the lands in Cappadocia that belonged to Ariobarzanes.<sup>164</sup> After his military setback north of Colchis, Mithridates could not hope to refuse Sulla's demand and risk war with Rome. Therefore, he temporarily pulled his forces back to the portions of Cappadocia that he had secured through his unofficial peace treaty with Murena and Ariobarzanes.

Rome and Pontus were observing a truce, even though Rome had not ratified the Treaty of Dardanus or the treaty with Murena. This made the relations of Rome and Pontus tense and potentially volatile. On two occasions, once in 79 BCE and once in 78 BCE, Mithridates tried to ratify the second, more favorable treaty with the Romans. Yet neither attempt was successful because of Ariobarzanes' complaints and then because of the death of Sulla.<sup>165</sup> With the death of Sulla, Rome quickly descended into greater political chaos and Ariobarzanes lost his greatest supporter. Cappadocia's sudden vulnerability made it an immediate target, and Mithridates no

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<sup>162</sup> Id. 9.66.

<sup>163</sup> Here we find another example of how shifting balance of power and the perception of power relations have a direct effect on international policy. Ariobarzanes had lived with Mithridates' abuses for two years because of the perception of Pontic power and the direct threat that Pontic power imposed upon the security of Ariobarzanes' regime. Yet when Pontic forces suffered considerable losses in Colchis, Ariobarzanes seized the opportunity to contest Mithridates' illegal occupation of his lands.

<sup>164</sup> Id. 10.67.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.



longer continued to hide his anger at Ariobarzanes' scheming and Rome's diplomatic inconsistency.

Yet Mithridates had much to accomplish before he could hope to challenge Rome directly once more. His losses against the Achaian tribes proved that his military was not yet strong enough or well-trained enough to fight Rome. Moreover, the Roman consul for 79 BCE, P. Servilius Vatia, received Roman Cilicia as his province in 78 BCE, making any direct Pontic action against Cappadocia impossible without facing immediate Roman military retaliation.<sup>166</sup> Thus, Mithridates once again looked for an indirect way to humble Ariobarzanes. Pontus and Armenia still had a military alliance against Cappadocia, and therefore, Mithridates encouraged Tigranes, who had already forged a large empire in the East, to attack Ariobarzanes in 78 BCE. Tigranes devastated Cappadocia and upheld the terms of his treaty with Mithridates, taking the spoils of his campaign back home and leaving Mithridates with the opportunity to seize the undefended territory of Cappadocia from the helpless Ariobarzanes when the time was right.<sup>167</sup>

The cooperation of Pontus and Armenia against Cappadocia in 78 BCE was similar to the previous invasions in 95 and 92 BCE. This was a return to the cautious and calculated international policy of Mithridates designed to test Rome's strength in Anatolia and its commitment to its allies in the region. Meanwhile, for Tigranes the invasion bolstered his power and prestige in the Eastern system, while severely damaging a longtime rival and potential threat to the security of his western frontier. With the defeat of Ariobarzanes, Mithridates exacted his

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<sup>166</sup> McGing 2009b.

<sup>167</sup> Tigranes carried off 300,000 Cappadocian prisoners to Armenia. Appian *Mithr.* 10.67. See also Plut. *Luc.* 21.3-5; Strabo 12.2.9. Recently, Mayor has argued that Mithridates took possession of Cappadocia at this time. Mayor 2010: 258. However, this seems unlikely because of the strong Roman presence in Cilicia in 78 BCE and the lack of Roman retaliation. Plutarch tells us that Mithridates did not seize Cappadocia until after he secured his alliance with Sertorius in 75 BCE. Plut. *Ser.* 24. This is a much more likely conclusion.

revenge without incurring the wrath of Roman arms, and Tigranes gained great wealth, protected Sophene, and isolated Commagene. Tigranes did not advance any further west, nor did he challenge the Roman garrison in Cilicia. In his invasion of Cappadocia as before, he did not consider the response of Rome to his actions because, in his mind, he was not acting against the interests of Rome. Meanwhile, Mithridates again utilized his alliance with Tigranes to destroy the potential power of Cappadocia, while securing deniability for himself if Rome should protest. Although Mithridates and Tigranes had a military alliance against Cappadocia and both desired the suppression of Ariobarzanes' regime, they approached the situation in Cappadocia quite differently because of their different perspectives within their separate interstate systems. Tigranes remained uninterested in war with Rome and still was not acting in an anti-Roman coalition with Pontus, while Mithridates again happily solicited the aid of Armenia against Cappadocia to maximize his power and influence in Anatolia at the lowest possible cost.

Rome's immediate reaction to the invasion also is familiar. Appian states that Mithridates' scheme did not deceive the Romans, probably because they had seen this strategy before, and therefore, once again they held Mithridates ultimately accountable for the violation of Cappadocia, not Tigranes.<sup>168</sup> That is, only the threat posed by Pontus concerned the Romans. Despite Tigranes' massive gains in the East and his ravaging of Cappadocia, the Romans had no interest in Armenia at this time. Moreover, the consular army in Roman Cilicia did not respond to Tigranes' invasion of Cappadocia either. Since Mithridates had not invaded Cappadocia and since Tigranes had ravaged the region but left the territory in Ariobarzanes' weakened hands, the Romans chose not to occupy Cappadocia, as Sulla and Murena had done before. Roman inactivity in 78 BCE illustrates that Tigranes did not help establish a pro-Pontic regime at this

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<sup>168</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 10.67

time in Cappadocia. Ariobarzanes had little power, and therefore, Mithridates could wait for a more favorable opportunity to secure the region.

The devastation of Cappadocia was a massive geopolitical win for Tigranes and Mithridates, while it was an embarrassing loss for Ariobarzanes and Rome. Tigranes' invasion humiliated Ariobarzanes, who lost all ability to defend his ever more vulnerable kingdom. Further, Rome's unwillingness to protect its client was a severe blow to the standing of the Romans in the region. Rome once again appeared distracted, inconsistent, and weak. Rome's unwillingness or inability to retaliate with force in 78 BCE allowed Mithridates once more to damage the perception of Roman strength in Anatolia. Roman inaction ultimately encouraged Mithridates to continue testing Roman resolve and to seek more aggressively the restoration of his power so that he could renew his hegemonic struggle against Rome.

Although the Romans were suspicious of Mithridates' ambitions in the early 70s BCE, their main concern was the fragile political atmosphere at Rome and the ongoing rebellion of Sertorius in Spain. Sertorius was a capable military leader, a skilled politician, and an enemy of Sulla and his supporters, who had taken command of Roman forces in Spain and North Africa in the late 80s BCE and subsequently had unified many of the Spanish tribes under his command.<sup>169</sup> Sertorius' rebellion and successful resistance in Spain further threatened Roman hegemony over the Mediterranean. The Roman state did not want to risk fighting a two front war at the height of Sertorius' rebellion in 78/77 BCE. This obstacle also prevented Roman retaliation for the invasion of Cappadocia in 78 BCE. While the Romans fought a civil war, Mithridates could fill his war chest, expand and train his armies, and seek allies at odds with the Roman government.

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<sup>169</sup> For a recent study of Sertorius and his civil war, see Matyszak 2013.

By the 70s BCE, tens of thousands of pirates roamed the Mediterranean, raiding shipping lanes, capturing slaves and hostages, and sacking coastal cities.<sup>170</sup> From the beginning of his reign, Mithridates had had a mostly friendly relationship with this network of pirates.<sup>171</sup> He had been their ally before the first conflict with Rome and had subsidized their harassment of Rome during that conflict.<sup>172</sup> After Mithridates' defeat these pirates continued to harass Rome without their alliance to Pontus. They were so successful that their ships sailed unopposed from Syria to Spain.<sup>173</sup> The Mediterranean pirates were one of the biggest threats facing Rome. Therefore, prior to 75 BCE, Mithridates renewed his alliance with the network of pirates in the Mediterranean and then used the protection they offered to begin a diplomatic correspondence with Sertorius across the Mediterranean in that year.<sup>174</sup>

Sertorius also had formed an alliance with the network of pirates across the Mediterranean and had used them to injure his Roman enemies.<sup>175</sup> Sertorius' strategy was to hold Spain until a favorable political change occurred in Rome.<sup>176</sup> He saw the advantage of forcing his Roman enemies to fight a war on two fronts, and therefore, he looked to an alliance with Mithridates with eagerness. Meanwhile, Mithridates, who already had been offering Roman

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<sup>170</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 14.92

<sup>171</sup> Although there was not a central leader of the Mediterranean pirates, the pirate strongholds of Cilicia and Crete had consolidated and organized well-connected networks that shared common military and political objectives. These pirate communities worked together to create bases of operation throughout the Mediterranean to disrupt shipping and raid coastal communities. For decades they were a formidable enemy of Rome, and during Mithridates' conflict with Rome, they were an important ally. Note de Souza 2002: Chapter 4. For the close relationship between Mithridates and the Cilician pirates, see McGing 1986: 139; Mayor 2010: 116.

<sup>172</sup> See Matyszak 2013: 58. See also Appian *Mithr.* 14.92

<sup>173</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 14.92-3. Appian argues that Mithridates helped fill the Mediterranean with pirates through his support of them. *Id.* 17.119. Note also Florus 1.41.2

<sup>174</sup> See Mayor 2010: 258; Matyszak 2013: 114.

<sup>175</sup> Matyszak 2013: 113.

<sup>176</sup> *Id.* 115.

enemies of Sulla asylum in Anatolia, recognized a superb opportunity to gain a powerful Roman ally and to expand his kingdom in the East with Roman support.<sup>177</sup> It is not surprising that these two men saw the mutual benefits that their alliance could offer; nor is it surprising that the government at Rome took the threat of an alliance between Sertorius and Mithridates seriously.

Sallust offers the impassioned speech of Lucius Marcius Philippus in the senate in 77 BCE, recording,

‘The most vicious characters of every class flock to his [Marcus Aemilius Lepidus] standard, inflamed by poverty and greed, driven on by the consciousness of their crimes, men who find repose in discord, disquiet in time of peace. These are the men who rouse rebellion after rebellion, war after war, followers now of Saturninus, then of Sulpicius, next of Marius and Damasippus, and now of Lepidus. Moreover, Etruria is aroused, as well as all the other smoldering fires of war; the Spanish provinces are stirred to revolt [because of Sertorius], Mithridates, who is close beside those of our [eastern] tributaries from whom we still receive support, is watching for an opportunity for war; in short, for the overthrow of our empire nothing is lacking save a competent leader.’<sup>178</sup>

Sallust here chronicles Philippus describing the dangers and uncertainties states had to face under the pressures of interstate anarchy in the ancient world. Philippus’ depiction of the Roman Mediterranean system is indeed grim and violent. Even though Rome was the greatest power in the Mediterranean, ancient observers understood that power was vulnerable and fleeting. They describe a world where Rome was surrounded by enemies. Although Philippus primary concern was ending further rebellion and civil war in Italy, he took note of the looming threat of Mithridates in the East years before open conflict with Pontus reemerged. He argues

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<sup>177</sup> Lucius Magius and Lucius Fannius fled to Mithridates in the late 80s BCE and became his advisors. Appian *Mithr.* 10.68; Orosius 6.2

<sup>178</sup> Sall. *Hist.* 1.67.7-8. For a new commentary on Sallust’s *Historiae*, see La Penna and Funari 2015. See also Maurenbrecher 1891; Reynolds 1991; McGushin 1992; id. 1994; Funari 1996; Ramsey 2015.

emphatically that the Roman state could not survive simultaneous wars at home, in Spain, and in the East.

In fact, Appian paints an even bleaker picture of Rome's geopolitical situation in the Mediterranean a couple of years later. He states, "There were wars and wars; the Sertorian [war] was raging in Spain, the Mithridatic [war] in the East, that of the pirates on the entire sea, and another around Crete against the Cretans themselves, besides the gladiatorial war [that is, the rebellion of Spartacus] in Italy, which started suddenly and became very serious."<sup>179</sup> Clearly, Romans believed and had good reason to believe that they were facing a considerable crisis that threatened the survival of the Roman state in the 70s BCE. Mithridatic Pontus became a major player in this crisis.

Sallust later offers a speech by Gaius Aurelius Cotta to the people of Rome in 75 BCE, recording,

'You have elected us [Cotta and Lucius Octavius] to the consulship, Romans, at a time when our country, is in dire straits at home and abroad; for our generals in Spain are calling for money, men, arms, and supplies - and they are forced to do so by circumstances, since the defection of our allies and the retreat of Sertorius over the mountains prevent them from either contending in battle or providing for their necessities. Armies are maintained in Asia and in Cilicia because of the excessive power of Mithridates; Macedonia is full of foes, as is also the sea-coast of Italy and of the provinces. In the meantime our revenues, made scanty and uncertain by war, barely suffice for a part of our expenditures; hence the fleet which we keep upon the sea is much smaller than the one which formerly safeguarded our supplies.'<sup>180</sup>

In Philippus' speech, Sallust conveys the vulnerability of Rome's tributaries in the East in 77 BCE. Philippus understood the importance of protecting them to maintain Rome's standing in the region. Philippus also argued that Mithridates was readying to renew war and recognized that

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<sup>179</sup> Appian *BC* 1.111. Note also *id. Mithr.* 17.119.

<sup>180</sup> Sall. *Hist.* 2.44.6-7

Roman hegemony in the 70s BCE was fragile. Mithridates' recent meddling in Cappadocia, his alliance with the network of pirates, and his discussions with Sertorius were efforts to ready his country for war with Rome. Meanwhile, Sallust demonstrates that Cotta in 75 BCE understood that Mithridates had reestablished "excessive power" and eventually would seek another hegemonic war against Rome that, because of the widespread challenges facing the Republic, could prove successful.

Sallust purposefully included these speeches in his history. Although their primary emphasis is the ruination of the Roman state by civil war, both speeches emphasize the considerable outside threat of Mithridates. Sallust too was alive during these events and shared contemporary Roman sentiments that the Roman state was in danger in the 70s BCE from internal and external enemies. The leaders of the Roman state in the 70s BCE knew Mithridates was politically shrewd and ambitious. There is an understanding in these speeches that Mithridates had recovered his strength while Rome was vulnerable and that he was waiting for the ideal opportunity to justify a new war against the Romans.

Cicero, during the height of the Third Mithridatic War, offered a similar warning of the power and ambitions of Mithridates and the vulnerability of Roman hegemony, stating,

But Mithridates employed all the time which he had left to him [after his defeat of Murena], not in forgetting the old war, but in preparing for a new one. And, after he had built and equipped very large fleets, and had got together mighty armies from every nation he could, and had pretended to be preparing war against the tribes of the Bosphorus, his neighbors, he sent ambassadors and letters as far as Spain to those chiefs with whom we were at war at the time [that is, Sertorius and his supporters], in order that, as you would by that means have war waged against you in the two parts of the world, the furthest separated and most remote of all from one another, by two separate enemies warring against you with one uniform plan, you, hampered by the double enmity, might find that you were fighting for the empire itself.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Cic. *Man.* 4.9. Note also Orosius 6.1

Here Cicero captures the extent of Mithridates' efforts to maximize Pontic power and his determination to shift the balance of power in the Mediterranean in his favor. Again, we find Roman fear of fighting a two front war against single-minded and capable forces, and again, we find a contemporary Roman advocating that this was a serious hegemonic conflict with state survival at risk. Moreover, Cicero, who delivered his speech in 66 BCE, emphasizes that Rome faced enemies in the two most remote and separated regions of the world. Cicero here means the Roman-dominated Mediterranean world. Thus, Cicero's arguments identify the limitations of the Mediterranean system in the 70s BCE and demonstrate that the Eastern system remained outside the concerns of Rome.

Much like Philippos, Cotta, Sallust, Cicero, and Appian, Mithridates' and Sertorius' supporters believed an alliance between these two men would prove too powerful for the government in Italy to overcome, going so far as to compare Sertorius to Hannibal and Mithridates to Pyrrhus.<sup>182</sup> The implication of this flattery was that these two hegemonic rivals of the Roman state could subdue Italy together where Hannibal and Pyrrhus had failed separately. Plutarch tells us that Mithridates offered money and naval support to Sertorius in exchange for Roman soldiers to bolster his army and acknowledgement of Pontic hegemony over all of Anatolia. Mithridates wanted to reestablish himself as the leading power in the Eastern Mediterranean and to legitimize his claim to power through a Roman alliance. Yet, although the Roman state considered Sertorius a rebel, he still considered himself a legitimate representative of the Republic. Therefore, the prospect of ceding Roman hegemony over the Eastern Mediterranean to Mithridates was a difficult choice to make. Plutarch tells us that against the

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<sup>182</sup> Plutarch emphasizes the determination and resiliency of Mithridates and the magnanimity and fame of Sertorius; however, he finds the excessive flattery of these men by their supporters foolish. *Plut. Ser.* 23.1-2



advice of his advisors, Sertorius gave Mithridates the right to rule over most of Anatolia but refused to abandon the province of Asia, at which point the offended Mithridates reluctantly accepted his terms of alliance.<sup>183</sup> Yet Appian states that Sertorius eagerly accepted Mithridates' proposal and acknowledged Pontic hegemony over all of Anatolia.<sup>184</sup>

The moralizing nature of Plutarch's biographies often led him to exaggerate the heroic qualities of his Roman subjects, and therefore, some scholars prefer the more pragmatic approach of Appian.<sup>185</sup> Plutarch's portrayal of Sertorius is that of a tragic hero, who faced and overcame seemingly insurmountable odds and carried himself as a traditional Roman statesman.<sup>186</sup> For example, according to Plutarch, Sertorius' council advised him to give Mithridates dominion over all of Anatolia because it was "an empty title to a territory which they did not possess."<sup>187</sup> They saw no need to protect the territory of their political enemies if it could gain them an important ally; however, in Plutarch's account, Sertorius makes the strong and honorable decision not to cede any Roman territory to a foreign king. He records, "for the Roman state must be increased by his exercise of power, and he must not exercise power at the

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<sup>183</sup> "He [Sertorius] said he had no objection to Mithridates taking Bithynia and Cappadocia, countries used to kings and of no concern whatever to the Romans; but a province which Mithridates had taken away and held when it belonged in the most just manner to the Romans, from which he had been driven by Fimbria in war, and which he had renounced by treaty with Sulla, — this province Sertorius said he would not suffer to become the king's again." Id. 23.3-24.2.

<sup>184</sup> "Mithridates fell in with this suggestion and sent ambassadors to Sertorius. The latter introduced them to his senate and felicitated himself that his fame had extended to Pontus, and that he could now besiege the Roman power in both the Orient and the Occident. So he made a treaty with Mithridates to give him Asia, Bithynia, Paphlagonia, Cappadocia, and Galatia, and sent Marcus Varius to him as a general and the two Luciuses, Magius and Fannius, as counselors." Appian *Mithr.* 10.68. See also Florus 2.10.4; Orosius 6.2

<sup>185</sup> Manandyan argues convincingly that Appian had less motivation to be biased and that his sources from Asia Minor were more reliable. For example, see Manandyan 2007: 80-3

<sup>186</sup> Plutarch describes him as a great, righteous, and sober leader, whom the cowardly Perpenna and his fellow conspirators murdered savagely. Plut. *Ser.* 25-7

<sup>187</sup> Id. 23.4-5.

expense of the state. For to a man of noble spirit victory is to be desired if it comes with honor, but with shame not even life itself.”<sup>188</sup> Plutarch emphasizes the common characteristics of ancient power politics. Although Sertorius needed the money and ships that Mithridates could provide, he was not willing to damage the power or prestige of Rome to do so. Instead, even though Sertorius’ response highly offended Mithridates, Plutarch has him submit to Sertorius’ decision. Thus, Plutarch wanted to emphasize Roman strength over foreign leaders. In fact, Plutarch soon after portrays Mithridates as submissive to the actions of his Roman advisor Marius in Anatolia.<sup>189</sup> Meanwhile, Appian’s account has Sertorius welcoming Mithridates’ envoys and congratulating himself for his fame, which had stretched all the way across the Mediterranean. For Appian, Sertorius was so excited about a two front war that he gave Mithridates what he wanted without hesitation.

Although the two accounts are quite different in tone, it is possible to reconcile them. Appian claims that Sertorius “gave” Mithridates Asia even though Plutarch contradicts this claim. However, Plutarch records that Mithridates used his Roman advisors to capture “certain cities in Asia.”<sup>190</sup> Therefore, Sertorius sent a trusted general to help Mithridates install pro-Sertorian and pro-Mithridatic factions within the cities of Asia. Mithridates, who was not yet officially at war with Rome, would not “rule” over these cities; however, he could use Marius to gain allies within the Roman province. Plutarch continues that these actions encouraged the oppressed peoples of Asia to join Mithridates’ and Sertorius’ cause. He states, “Asia, which was once more harassed by the revenue-farmers and oppressed by the rapacity and arrogance of the soldiers quartered there, was all of a flutter with new hopes and yearned for the expected change

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<sup>188</sup> Id. 23.5.

<sup>189</sup> Id. 24.

<sup>190</sup> Id. 24.3.

of supremacy.”<sup>191</sup> Thus, Mithridates gained hegemony over much of Asia using this cautious and calculated approach toward Roman possessions in Anatolia.

The alliance between Mithridates and Sertorius illustrates further the connectivity of the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system and the vulnerability of the Roman state at this time.<sup>192</sup> Although Mithridates formed an alliance with the network of pirates and with Sertorius, he did not convince Tigranes to join his war against Rome until after Lucullus’ invasion of Armenia, and he never convinced the Parthians to join his cause.<sup>193</sup> This is in part because of the separation of the Mediterranean and Eastern systems. Appian emphasizes the destruction of Pontus and the death of Sertorius in his initial description of the consequences of the Third Mithridatic War. He then states that under the leadership of Lucullus and Pompey “the whole of his [Mithridates’] dominions, and the adjoining territory as far as the river Euphrates, under the pretext and impetus of the Mithridatic war, were brought under Roman sway.”<sup>194</sup> Appian here does not mention the war against Tigranes or Roman dominion over Armenia. Instead, he emphasizes that Rome established its dominance over Spain, Pontus, and Syria. That is, by the late 60s BCE the

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<sup>191</sup> Id. 24.4.

<sup>192</sup> For the military aid they offered one another, see Callataÿ 1997: 341; Mayor 2010: 260; Matyszak 2013: 140.

<sup>193</sup> When Appian records that Mithridates assembled men from “the Chalybes, Armenians, Scythians, Taurians, Achaeans, Heniochi, Leucosyrians, and those who occupy the territory about the river Thermodon, called the country of the Amazons,” these Armenians were not Tigranes’ troops. Rather they were recruits from Lesser Armenia, which Mithridates controlled. Appian *Mithr.* 10.69. Moreover, Plutarch records that Mithridates requested aid against Rome through his envoy, Metrodorus; however, Tigranes declined the offer. Plut. *Luc.* 22.2-3. Meanwhile, Memnon argues that one of Mithridates’ generals invented false reports that Tigranes had given Mithridates aid in the late 70s BCE. Memnon 35.3. Finally, Sallust’s account of a letter Mithridates wrote to the Parthians asking for their military aid after Lucullus’ success states, “Although Tigranes refused to join with me (he now admits the truth of my prediction when it is too late), though you were far away, and all the rest had submitted, I nevertheless renewed the war and routed Marcus Cotta, the Roman general, on land at Chalcedon, while on the sea I stripped him of a fine fleet.” Sall. *Hist.* 4.67.13

<sup>194</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 10.68

Romans had survived their last hegemonic struggle to control the Mediterranean system and had emerged from domestic and foreign wars as the undisputed rulers of the *entire* Mediterranean world.

Mithridates understood the colossal risks he was taking as he prepared for another fight with Rome. The stakes were the highest that they had ever been in the approaching hegemonic war, and therefore, Mithridates did not put all his hopes for victory in the hands of Sertorius.<sup>195</sup> He also sent an envoy to Pompey, while the general was campaigning against Sertorius in Spain, in an attempt to obtain his support as well.<sup>196</sup> Mithridates hoped to convince Pompey, who was having a difficult time in Spain, to switch sides and march with Sertorius on Italy from the west while Mithridates attacked from the east; however, Pompey refused the offer.<sup>197</sup>

Despite his failed negotiation with Pompey, the alliance with Sertorius and his recognition of Pontic hegemony in Anatolia was a dramatic step in reestablishing Mithridates' unrivaled power and prestige in the region. With Roman support Mithridates prepared to act more aggressively in Anatolia. From 76-74 BCE, there was a spike in the minting of Pontic coinage in anticipation of war.<sup>198</sup> Meanwhile, communities in Anatolia took note of the shifting balance of power and began to bandwagon once more with the rising power of Pontus.<sup>199</sup> Moreover, Mithridates rebuilt his navy, made arms surpluses, stockpiled huge amounts of grain,

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<sup>195</sup> Appian states, "Mithridates had been in collision with the Romans so often that he knew that this war, so inexcusably and hastily begun, would be an implacable one. He made every preparation with the thought that all was at stake." Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Cic. *Man.* 16.46

<sup>197</sup> Note Matyszak 2013: 137-8.

<sup>198</sup> Callataÿ 1997: 46; Mayor 2010: 260.

<sup>199</sup> The towns that sided with Mithridates and his allies in Asia likely were former allies of Mithridates, who had suffered severely under Sulla. Plut. *Luc.* 20. Once again, by cancelling debts and offering civic autonomy in exchange for a recognition of Pontic hegemony, Mithridates was winning the battle for hearts and minds. Mayor 2010: 260.

and assembled an army that included tens of thousands of troops from no less than fifteen allied peoples throughout his Black Sea Kingdom.<sup>200</sup> He performed military exercises and made war sacrifices to Zeus Stratios [that is, Zeus of Armies] and to Poseidon.<sup>201</sup> Finally, it likely was at this time that Mithridates reoccupied Cappadocia, Paphlagonia, and Galatia.<sup>202</sup>

Although the Roman state was not officially at war with Pontus at the beginning of 74 BCE, Mithridates' alliances with the network of pirates and Sertorius and his territorial acquisitions in Anatolia must have seemed like a declaration of war.<sup>203</sup> Although most scholars want to blame either Roman military belligerence or the aggression of Mithridates for the third conflict, both sides were equally justified and equally to blame for the continuation of a hegemonic struggle that by the middle 70s BCE was inescapable.<sup>204</sup> A system level analysis of this conflict helps us appreciate that the continued conflict between Rome and Pontus was necessary and justified for both sides.

Mithridates had refused to pursue further war against Rome in the late 80s BCE after his defeat of Murena because the opportunity at that time was not right. Roman power was strong under the leadership of Sulla, and Mithridates was not prepared for another major war. He needed to recruit new soldiers, resupply, and reestablish control over the Black Sea. Yet while he was accomplishing all of these things in the early 70s BCE, he was testing Rome's presence in

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<sup>200</sup> Appian puts his army strength at 140,000 foot and 16,000 horse. Appian *Mithr.* 10.69. Note also Mayor 2010: 261.

<sup>201</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 10.70

<sup>202</sup> Id. 10.68; Plut. *Ser.* 23.4; Memnon 27; Cic. *Man.* 2.5. In order to gain access to Asia in early 74 BCE, Mithridates must have recently occupied Galatia and perhaps portions of Phrygia. Since Sertorius states that he did not mind if Mithridates took control of Bithynia and Cappadocia, then Mithridates must have finally occupied Cappadocia, which Tigranes had left for him undefended, in early 74 BCE as well. Finally, in order for Mithridates to claim a military right to Bithynia, he had to have access to it through Paphlagonia. See Appian *Mithr.* 10.70

<sup>203</sup> Seager 2002: 174; McGing 2009.

<sup>204</sup> For the former, see Harris 1979: 2, 97, 252. For the latter, see Madsen 2009: 198.

Anatolia and looking for new opportunities to expand the security and power of his kingdom. By 74 BCE, Mithridates' opportunities to pursue another hegemonic war against Rome were numerous.

The seemingly unending cycle of civil war at Rome continued to weaken the Roman army and political system. As Sallust and Cicero stated above, Rome feared a two front war and its consequences. Therefore, the Roman state concentrated its forces against Sertorius in Spain and hoped to avoid open conflict with Mithridates in the East as long as possible. This meant that the Roman presence in Anatolia appeared weak and indecisive. Mithridates took full advantage of Rome's distraction to weaken his neighbors, gain local support, and expand his influence in Anatolia. As he rebuilt his powerbase around the Black Sea, Mithridates looked to other major powers in the Mediterranean that were at odds with the Roman state for support. Once he allied himself with the network of pirates, which gave him access to the entire Mediterranean Sea, and Sertorius, which gave him soldiers and legitimacy, his odds of pursuing successful hegemonic war against Rome increased dramatically. Sallust and Cicero's warnings about the possible destruction of Rome if it faced a two front war reflected real and justified geopolitical concerns.

With the support of Sertorius, Mithridates could present his occupation of much of Anatolia and his meddling in Asia as justified by his Roman treaty. Since Sertorius and Mithridates refused to recognize the legitimacy of the government in place at Rome, to them all of Mithridates' actions, as long as they conformed to the treaty with Sertorius, were justified. As the polities in Anatolia became aware of the shifting balance of power in the region, they began once again to look to Pontus for guidance.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Memnon relates the tough decisions and vulnerable positions of communities in Anatolia at this time. He describes how Mithridates' navy forced Heraclea to provide ships to fight the Romans, at which point "the people of Heraclea were regarded as enemies by the Romans."

Although Mithridates was more direct and aggressive in the third conflict and although our Roman sources relate that he took a share in the responsibility for the renewal of war, he remained a smart politician with a keen awareness of public relations.<sup>206</sup> Even though he had the men, money, and resources to declare war on Rome by 75 BCE, he bided his time and waited to capitalize on the right moment for war. Throughout the first half of the 70s BCE, Mithridates tested the determination and resiliency of the Roman state as he had done before, searching for a justifiable cause for war. As before, Mithridates wanted to fight Rome on both military and diplomatic terms. It was important to him and his cause that his renewal of power in the Greek East seemed just and necessary.<sup>207</sup>

The causes of the renewal of war between Pontus and Rome in 74/73 BCE were complicated and numerous. Rome was in a difficult spot because of the ongoing internal disturbances. The Romans avoided war with Pontus as long as possible because they were fighting many fires already and did not want the fire to spread to the East. They wished to defeat Sertorius and his supporters first and then concentrate on Mithridates. Yet Rome still had the capability to fight multiple front wars if necessary. If it came to war, Rome too desired a justified cause for the renewal of conflict in the East and had plenty of options from which to choose.

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Memnon 27.5-6. The people of Heraclea hesitantly sided with Pontus because of the perception of Pontic power in the region and immediate security concerns. The Heracleians later fought determinedly and desperately against multiple Roman assaults before the city fell to betrayal. The consequences of Heraclea's decision to side with Pontus were monumental. The Romans sacked the city and massacred the Heracleians. Id. 34-5. The Roman Senate later regretted the violent destruction of Heraclea. Id. 39.

<sup>206</sup> Unlike in the previous two conflicts Mithridates did not expend considerable energy attempting to appear as a victim of Roman aggression. In the third conflict, he appears to have been more confident in protecting what he deemed his rightful expansion of power. This likely is a result of his alliance with Sertorius and the legitimacy that this alliance seemingly offered his cause.

<sup>207</sup> Both Appian and Sallust touch on Mithridates' idea of a just war against Rome. See Appian *Mithr.* 10.70; Sall. *Hist.* 4.67

The Romans had never officially recognized any peace treaty with Mithridates. The Treaty of Dardanus was an unofficial arrangement between Mithridates and a dead dictator, and the treaty with Murena was an embarrassing concession. Additionally, Mithridates' rebuilding of his navy, his meddling in Cappadocia, and his efforts to expand his influence in Anatolia had rendered the previous treaties obsolete. Rome had a truce with Pontus, not a peace treaty. Plutarch records that after the death of Sulla "many were now trying to stir up anew the Mithridatic war, which Marcus [Cotta] said had not come to an end, but merely to a pause."<sup>208</sup> Therefore, Rome could legally renew the war with Mithridates when needed without diplomatic or religious consequence, something Mithridates criticized heavily.<sup>209</sup>

Rome never ratified the previous treaties because, in the first case, it was unsatisfying, and, in the second case, it was shameful. The Romans did not feel that Mithridates had been punished sufficiently for his aggression against Rome or his crimes against Roman citizens. In fact, the first reason Cicero gave for fighting Mithridates was to avenge the "so many thousand Roman citizens [that] have been put to death by one order and at one time."<sup>210</sup> He then listed Mithridates' execution of Aquilius, his trampling of Roman freedoms, his violation of embassies, and his abuse of Roman allies.<sup>211</sup> Previously in this speech, Cicero chastised the senate for not punishing Mithridates' crimes. He states,

And since you have at all times been covetous of glory and greedy of praise beyond all other nations, you have to wipe out that stain, received in the former Mithridatic War, which has now fixed itself deeply and eaten its way into the Roman name, the stain arising from the fact that he, who in one day marked down by one order, and one single letter, all the Roman citizens in all Asia, scattered as they were over so many cities, for slaughter and butchery, has not only never yet

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<sup>208</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 5.1. Note that the later writer Eutropius dubiously maintains that Mithridates broke the peace. Eutrop. 6.6

<sup>209</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 10.70

<sup>210</sup> Cic. *Man.* 5.11

<sup>211</sup> Id. 5.11-12.



suffered any chastisement worthy of his wickedness, but now, twenty-three years after that time, is still a king, and a king in such a way that he is not content to hide himself in Pontus, or in the recesses of Cappadocia, but he seeks to emerge from his hereditary kingdom, and to range among your revenues, in the broad light of Asia.<sup>212</sup>

Cicero emphasizes the shame that Roman inaction and indecisiveness had incurred. He notes that Rome's inability to avenge itself and its unwillingness to defeat Mithridates totally had hurt its reputation and emboldened Mithridates' actions. As far as many Romans were concerned, Rome still had a blood debt with Mithridates to repay, and therefore, this justified further conflict in Cicero's opinion. Meanwhile, Mithridates' defeat of Murena was an embarrassment that damaged Rome's reputation and the perception of Roman power further, and therefore, it too necessitated justified retribution.<sup>213</sup>

As mentioned above, news of Mithridates' alliance with the pirate communities and especially Sertorius must have felt like a declaration of war in Rome. The Roman state faced a rebellion in the West, pillage upon the sea, and the growing threat and aggression of Mithridates in the East. Pontus' alliance with Sertorius allowed Mithridates to challenge the hegemony of the Roman state in Anatolia with a semblance of legality. Communities began to bandwagon once more with Pontus and the power of Rome appeared to be in decline. Once Mithridates began occupying regions in Anatolia and meddling in Asia, the Roman state had to respond to protect what was left of Roman interests in the region, not only to save face and protect its hegemony, but also to stop the momentum of Pontus in Asia before it spilled into Greece again. Thus, there were numerous justifications for Roman action against Pontus in the middle 70s BCE. Yet in an

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<sup>212</sup> Id. 3.7.

<sup>213</sup> Brunt notes Roman fear of Mithridates and the "hope of vengeance" in 74 BCE. Brunt 1988: 187.

effort to avoid a major two front war, Rome delayed taking action, hoping for a more auspicious opportunity.

Meanwhile, Mithridates' justifications for a renewal of open conflict with Rome also were numerous. Mithridates' attempts to ratify the Treaty of Dardanus had failed, and Pontus had to suffer the aggression of Murena. His attempts to ratify the more favorable treaty with Murena also failed because the Roman state chafed at the idea of recognizing concessions to a foreign king, who had been defeated previously after slaughtering tens of thousands of Romans. As far as Mithridates was concerned, the latter treaty with Rome should have stood, and he criticized the "avarice," "lust of power," and "bad faith" of Rome for not recognizing it officially.<sup>214</sup> Sallust too emphasizes Rome's "deep-seated desire for domination and for riches."<sup>215</sup> In fact, Appian argues that Rome's ill treatment of Pontus and its unwillingness to recognize the treaty were the cause of the war.<sup>216</sup> Yet these moralistic criticisms of the Romans by the Romans should give us pause because of their rhetorical usage. We should not conclude as Manandyan did that "in reality, the purpose of these wars, which the generals of the Roman Republic waged in the East, was primarily pillage and financial gain."<sup>217</sup> This is an unconvincing explanation, and there are other far more acceptable alternatives.

After the initial widespread success of Mithridates' conquest in the first conflict, he had suffered humiliating defeats that drastically lowered his standing in Anatolia. After the first conflict, Mithridates desired the opportunity to avenge these losses and rebuild his image as a

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<sup>214</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 10.70

<sup>215</sup> Sall. *Hist.* 4.67.5

<sup>216</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 10.70. Mayor emphasizes this cause. Mayor 2010: 264.

<sup>217</sup> Manandyan 2007: 4.

great conqueror and hegemonic rival of Rome.<sup>218</sup> His success against Murena in the second conflict had been a step in the right direction; however, he had not been powerful enough at the time to pursue further war. Yet years of Roman negligence in Anatolia, the ongoing cycle of Roman civil wars, and Mithridates' new alliances meant that Mithridates finally was powerful enough to challenge Rome once more. Moreover, his new alliances in essence demanded that he fight Rome at least indirectly. His alliance with Sertorius and the concessions that Sertorius made to him in Anatolia justified his military actions against the Roman state in this region.

The perception of Roman abuses in Anatolia also was a major cause of the renewal of war.<sup>219</sup> Mithridates complained of Rome abusing its relationships with eastern kings and accused the Romans of seizing kingdoms in Anatolia illegally.<sup>220</sup> Moreover, the communities of Anatolia had suffered dreadfully at the hands of the Romans after the first conflict. Therefore, they once again began to look eagerly upon the return of Pontic hegemony.<sup>221</sup>

When Nicomedes IV of Bithynia died in 74 BCE, he apparently left his kingdom to Rome in his will.<sup>222</sup> Other vassal kings of Rome had bequeathed their kingdoms to Rome after their deaths; however, Rome mostly had been cautious about annexing eastern kingdoms.<sup>223</sup> I agree with Sherwin-White that these kings were not simply weak Roman puppets, acknowledging Rome's right to rule; rather they utilized their wills and the threat of Roman interference as a tool to discourage usurpers and neighboring states from challenging their

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<sup>218</sup> "We [Pontus] are suspected of being rivals of the Romans and future avengers." Sall. *Hist.* 4.67.18

<sup>219</sup> McGing emphasizes this cause. McGing 2009.

<sup>220</sup> Sall. *Hist.* 4.67.5-9

<sup>221</sup> Plut. *Ser.* 24.3-4

<sup>222</sup> Eutrop. 6.6; Ruf. Fest. 11; Jo. Mal. 9.221; Photius *Bib.* 93

<sup>223</sup> Kallet-Marx 1995: 105.

rule.<sup>224</sup> Nicomedes, whom Rome had reinstated twice, faced intimidating Pontic and Thracian neighbors and ruled over hostile citizens. He needed all the help he could get to rule his kingdom, and he appears to have utilized Rome as a political weapon in this case. Like Attalus III before him, Nicomedes IV died suddenly without a son; and therefore, the bequest to Rome in his will stood. Yet there appears to have been a potential successor to Nicomedes, the son of his sister Nysa.<sup>225</sup> Mithridates insisted that Rome, by seizing Bithynia, stole the birthright of Nysa's son. This was a hypocritical claim since Mithridates recently had negotiated with Sertorius to seize Bithynia himself; however, since Rome had acted first, he gained new justifications for war.<sup>226</sup>

First, as per the agreement with Sertorius, Mithridates considered control of Bithynia his legal right. Thus, Mithridates and Sertorius did not recognize the will of Nicomedes IV. The occupation of the kingdom by the Roman state, from their perspective, was an illegal and direct challenge to their authority. Second, Nicomedes' mother, who also was named Nysa, and his brother, Socrates Chrestus, had been political rivals of Nicomedes and allies of Mithridates.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Ptolemy Euergetes and Attalus III also used this political weapon. These kings had viable kingdoms that were highly militarized. They did not expect to die young or suddenly, and an acceptable heir nullified the arrangement with Rome. These kings used Rome as a political weapon. See Sherwin-White 1984: 80-2. Note also Kallet-Marx 1995: 104.

<sup>225</sup> Sall. *Hist.* 4.67.9. Sallust's account is ambiguous. Nicomedes IV's mother was Nysa, daughter of Ariarathes VI of Cappadocia. Yet he also had a sister named Nysa. Suet. *Caes.* 49. Sallust states, "They [the Romans] took possession of Asia, and finally, on the death of Nicomedes, they seized upon all Bithynia, although Nysa, whom Nicomedes had called queen, unquestionably had a son." Although Sallust states that a certain Nicomedes had called Nysa queen, which might indicate that this refers to Nicomedes III and Nysa the mother, the son here could not be Nicomedes IV's only brother, Socrates Chrestus, since Mithridates put him to death in the early 80s BCE. Rather, Sallust must refer to Nysa the sister and her son. It appears then that Nicomedes IV recognized his sister as a co-ruler, and therefore, her son could claim to be a legitimate heir.

<sup>226</sup> Brunt 1988: 187.

<sup>227</sup> Memnon 22.5; Granius 35

Mithridates' relationship with Nicomedes' sister, Nysa, is unknown; however, Sallust portrays Mithridates trying to champion the rights of her son. The propagandistic value of this is obvious. Mithridates wanted to demonstrate that the Roman occupation of Bithynia was illegal and that his subsequent invasion of the region was justified by his support of Nicomedes' political rivals and Nysa's son. Finally, in 74 BCE Rome moved the consular provinces of Lucullus and Cotta to the East.<sup>228</sup> This paired with Rome's occupation of Bithynia was a response to Mithridates' growing power and aggression in Anatolia and his recent alliances. Yet, as much as Rome viewed Mithridates' actions as a *de facto* declaration of war, Mithridates viewed Rome's occupation of Bithynia and the movement of two consular armies against him in the same light. Both sides understood that war was imminent, and they maneuvered militarily, politically, and diplomatically to gain the initial advantage. With Mithridates' ambitions in Bithynia temporarily frustrated and with two consular armies heading to Anatolia, Rome had its best opportunity to nip the resurgence of Pontic power in the bud before Mithridates had a chance to repeat his previous success.

Thus, both sides had plenty of motivation, justification, and opportunity for the renewal of war. In international relations theory terms, the rapid fluctuation of Pontic power since the 90s BCE and Rome's inability either to defeat Mithridates completely or to force his permanent submission to Roman hegemony made the international environment in and around Anatolia unsettled and unreliable. Since the 90s BCE the perception of Roman and Pontic power in Anatolia had shifted dramatically back and forth without a definitive resolution. Therefore, neither side was satisfied with the results of the previous conflicts, nor were they able to resolve the geopolitical tensions between the various polities in the region. Opacity about power

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<sup>228</sup> Memnon 27.1. Note McGing 2009.

capabilities and state objectives raised the uncertainty principle within the region ever higher, causing security concerns and encouraging militarization.

The Romans' inconsistent use of force in the region and their neglect of allied communities and kings allowed Pontus to act defiantly and recover its strength. The perceived balance of power in Anatolia began to shift in Pontus' favor once more. By the middle 70s BCE, after rebuilding his army and navy, reconsolidating his power around the Black Sea, expanding into Anatolia, and forging powerful trans-Mediterranean alliances, Mithridates once again appeared to be the rising hegemonic rival of a vulnerable Roman state.<sup>229</sup> That is, the perceived weakness of Rome not only encouraged Mithridates to act more boldly, it encouraged other polities in Anatolia and beyond to favor Pontus in the approaching conflict. Appian records a speech of Mithridates to his soldiers, stating, ““They [the Romans] have allowed the sea to be overrun by pirates a long time, and have not a single ally, nor any subjects who still obey them willingly. Do you not see,’ he added, ‘some of their noblest citizens (pointing to Varius and the two Luciuses) at war with their own country and allied with us?’”<sup>230</sup> Appian likely embellishes the vulnerable isolation of the Roman state in Mithridates' speech; however, the basic implication here is that Roman weakness, both perceived and real, had encouraged more resistance to Rome. Such a conclusion mirrors the tenets of Realist theory.

By the middle 70s BCE, the international environment in the Eastern Mediterranean was such that another major conflict between Rome and Pontus was necessary to determine the true power relationship between them. Systemic pressures encouraged Mithridates to maximize the security and power of his state at the expense of the system hegemon, Rome, and encouraged

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<sup>229</sup> Rome anticipated a renewal of war and started to strengthen its position. Note Kallet-Marx 1995: 294-5

<sup>230</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 10.70

him to challenge Roman dominance once more. Moreover, systemic pressures demanded that Rome make a show of force against Mithridates if the Roman state did not want to be perceived as weak and vulnerable, encouraging further challenges to its dominion over the Mediterranean. Cicero warns, “Take care lest, as it was a most glorious thing for them [the great statesmen of Rome’s past], to leave you such wide renown and such a powerful empire, it should be a most discreditable thing for you, not to be able to defend and preserve that which you have received.”<sup>231</sup> That is, Mithridates’ actions and the pressures of the interstate anarchy meant that Rome’s reputation, prestige, and right to rule over the Mediterranean system were at stake. Cicero knew Rome had to act to preserve its honor and hegemony.

The so-called Third Mithridatic War was not a separate conflict from the previous two; rather, it was a continuation of the initial conflict. A system-level analysis of the geopolitical developments of the late 80s and early 70s BCE in the Mediterranean world provides a fuller understanding of the complex motivations for and causes of the final clash between Mithridatic Pontus and Rome. Sulla’s distractions, Murena’s failure, and Mithridates’ resilience made the power relations and international environment of Anatolia nebulous and therefore dangerous and unstable. The events of 74 BCE provided both Rome and Pontus with suitable justification and opportunity to renew war. When news of Mithridates’ alliance with Sertorius and its conditions reached Rome, the Romans wasted no time in annexing Bithynia and sending two consular armies to Anatolia in preparation for war. Meanwhile, after such a bold move by the Romans, Mithridates knew the time had come to either fight or back down. If he cowered before the Romans without a fight, he not only ran a high risk of losing his allies and losing his momentum, but also he could not be certain of Roman leniency. He was ready to roll the dice once more, and

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<sup>231</sup> Cic. *Man.* 5.12

before Rome could completely organize its defense of the region, Mithridates overran Bithynia in 73 BCE and invaded Asia.<sup>232</sup>

The third conflict began with sweeping military success for Mithridates similar to the overwhelming surge of Pontic forces at the beginning of the first conflict. Mithridates' army from Paphlagonia and his navy from Thrace caught the Roman consul Cotta and his army in a pincer movement around Chalcedon.<sup>233</sup> Mithridates' casualties were minimal while Rome and its auxiliary troops lost over 12,000 soldiers.<sup>234</sup> In a lightning fast assault, Mithridates had knocked one of Rome's consular armies out of the war, and he had total control of Bithynia. His Pontic Empire stretched from the Pontic-Caspian steppe in the north to Phrygia and Galatia in the south, from Cappadocia and Colchis in the east to Bithynia and Thrace in the west. Moreover his military forces were well trained, battle tested, and massive.<sup>235</sup> Meanwhile, Lucullus' army was outnumbered and of questionable loyalty.<sup>236</sup> It appeared that Mithridates was poised to rush into southwestern Anatolia once more, overrun the Roman forces in the area, and sweep back across the Aegean.<sup>237</sup> Had he been able to defeat Lucullus quickly, he could have reoccupied mainland

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<sup>232</sup> Many cities in both regions immediately joined Mithridates' cause. Plut. *Luc.* 7

<sup>233</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 10.71; Memnon 27. Note Reinach 1890: 321; Munro 1901: 56.

<sup>234</sup> For the early campaign around Chalcedon, see Mayor 2010: 264-5. Memnon argues that the Romans lost 17,800 men to Mithridates' 730 men. Memnon 27.7

<sup>235</sup> Memnon records that Mithridates commanded hundreds of ships, 150,000 infantry, 12,000 cavalry, and 120 scythed chariots. Memnon 27.3. Appian states that Mithridates' army contained 300,000 men, including camp followers. Appian *Mithr.* 11.72. These numbers are no doubt exaggerated; however, the scarcity of supplies that Mithridates almost immediately suffered suggests that his force was indeed impressive.

<sup>236</sup> Lucullus had around 30,000 infantry and 2,500 cavalry; however, a large portion of his force was the men of the mutinous Fimbrian legions. Appian *Mithr.* 11.72; Plut. *Luc.* 5.5, 7, 8.5

<sup>237</sup> Cicero argues that every city throughout Greece felt threatened by Mithridates. Cic. *Man.*



Greece and prepared an invasion of Italy.<sup>238</sup> Roman forces were stretched thin, especially after the defeat of Cotta, and Mithridates could sense victory.

He followed up his success at Chalcedon with an invasion of Asia from the north. He began besieging Cyzicus. The Roman occupation of this region of Anatolia had been harsh after the first conflict, and many communities devastated by crippling taxes were eager to embrace Mithridates' cause.<sup>239</sup> Although his advisors counselled him to strike directly at Pontus while Mithridates' main forces were away, Lucullus understood that he could not abandon the vulnerable province of Asia and the Aegean to Mithridates.<sup>240</sup> Yet he also understood that he was at a military disadvantage and could not risk defeat as Cotta had. Instead, he decided, in the manner of Fabius Maximus, to avoid major battles and instead to harass Mithridates' supply lines in the hope of evening the odds.

Unfortunately for Mithridates, much like his siege of Rhodes, his siege of Cyzicus (73-72 BCE) was a costly disaster.<sup>241</sup> Not only did news arrive during the siege that Sertorius had been assassinated in Spain, effectively ending the two front war against Rome and costing Mithridates his strongest ally, but Lucullus successfully maneuvered to cut off Mithridates' supply lines. Mithridates tried desperately to take the city but failed. Had he been able to take Cyzicus, he could have supplied his army by sea and penetrated farther into Asia. In fact, news of the Spartacus rebellion in Italy and of his general Eumachus' successful campaign against the

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<sup>238</sup> The Romans feared a Pontic attack on Italy, see Keaveney 1992: 85-6.

<sup>239</sup> See Plut. *Ser.* 24.3-4; id. *Luc.* 20. Lucullus recognized the rebellious state of western Anatolia and worked quickly to alleviate the financial burdens of these communities to retain their loyalty.

<sup>240</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 8.3-4

<sup>241</sup> Cyzicus, like Rhodes, had decided to balance with Rome against the rising hegemonic power of Pontus and had "resolved to sustain every hardship for the sake of the Romans." Id. 9.3-4. Florus argues that Mithridates threw his entire force at Cyzicus "as though it were a second Rome." Florus 1.40.15

Romans in southern Anatolia gave Mithridates the opportunity to find a new western ally against Rome and to dominate Anatolia if he could escape the trap he had fallen into at Cyzicus.<sup>242</sup> Yet Mithridates was unable to break the defense of Cyzicus and unable to break out of Lucullus' defenses. He lost his entire army almost to a man either killed or captured and barely escaped on pirate ships back to Pontus.<sup>243</sup>

As the Romans prepared to invade Pontus, Mithridates frantically attempted to maintain his influence and rebuild his army. The power of Pontus had ascended like a rocket from 75-73 BCE; however, 72 BCE had been a complete disaster for Mithridates. Lucullus' cautious and well-timed campaign around Cyzicus had destroyed Mithridates' new army and navy with alarming quickness. It became increasingly clear to the polities in and around Anatolia that Roman power had not faltered and that belief in Pontus' ability to challenge Rome as a hegemonic rival had been premature. Lucullus' success and Mithridates' failure had eliminated much of the uncertainty about the power relationship between Rome and Pontus that had shrouded international relations in Anatolia since the Treaty of Dardanus. In the fallout after the Cyzicus campaign, once more we find the actions of statesmen and states conforming to the evolving international environment. The balance of power, which for years appeared to have been shifting in Pontus' favor, suddenly and drastically corrected itself. Roman weakness had been a misconception and Pontic momentum an illusion.

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<sup>242</sup> For the rebellion of Spartacus, see Plut. *Crass.* 8-11; Appian *BC* 116-20. See also Shaw 2001; Strauss 2010. Eumachus seized all of Phrygia and Roman Cilicia for a time before a Roman ally, Deiotarus, forced him to retreat. Appian *Mithr.* 11.75; Livy *Epit.* 94.2

<sup>243</sup> For the siege of Cyzicus and its immediate aftermath, see Appian *Mithr.* 11.72-8; Plut. *Luc.* 8-12; Strabo 12.8.11; Memnon 27-9; Front. *Strat.* 3.13.6; Diod. 38/9.22b; Florus 1.40.15-19; Cic. *Man.* 8.20-1. See also McGing 1986: 146-53; Matyszak 2008: 108-13; Mayor 2010: 270-7.

The first major blow to Mithridates' cause had been the assassination of Sertorius. Without a major ally in the West to threaten Rome on a second front, Mithridates could no longer hope to fight an isolated portion of Rome's forces.<sup>244</sup> Although Rome still had battles to fight in Italy against Spartacus and in the Mediterranean against the pirates, Mithridates and his supporters knew that it was only a matter of time before they faced the full military might of Rome.<sup>245</sup> As Mithridates' prospects of ultimate victory began to waver, so did his support. At the news of Sertorius' death, the Roman military advisor Lucius Magius betrayed Mithridates and defected to Lucullus.<sup>246</sup> After the debacle at Cyzicus, a trusted subordinate of Mithridates, Diocles, stole a treasure trove of gold and luxurious gifts that Mithridates had given him to secure Scythian mercenaries for the war effort and defected to Lucullus because he too perceived the tides turning in Rome's favor.<sup>247</sup> As Mithridates' situation deteriorated, other Pontic commanders, such as Connacorex, Leonippus, Cleochares, and Seleucus, betrayed and deserted their king as well.<sup>248</sup>

Mithridates' subjects and allies also perceived this drastic shift in the balance of power. Before the third conflict began, Mithridates gathered forces from no less than fifteen different subject and allied peoples.<sup>249</sup> Yet in 72/71 BCE, he was left scrambling for military support. The loss of Bithynia cut him off from the friendly Thracian and Sarmatian tribes along the western

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<sup>244</sup> Plutarch tells us that Sertorius had considerable support in Italy urging him to invade. *Plut. Ser. 27*

<sup>245</sup> Eutropius emphasizes Mithridates' isolation when he states, "there were but two wars of any importance throughout the Roman empire, the Mithridatic and the Macedonian." *Eutrop. 6.8*

<sup>246</sup> *Appian Mithr. 11.72*

<sup>247</sup> *Id. 11.78.*

<sup>248</sup> *Memnon 35, 37*

<sup>249</sup> *Appian Mithr. 10.69*

coast of the Black Sea.<sup>250</sup> None of these tribes made any effort to attack Macedonia or Anatolia on Mithridates' behalf, even though such a strategic move would have forced Lucullus to fight a two front war. Moreover, Mithridates had to resort to bribing the Scythian tribes for military assistance, but the defection of Diocles ended any chance of retaining Scythian support.<sup>251</sup>

As had happened after the first conflict, Mithridates' defeats encouraged the subject peoples of his empire to challenge Pontic hegemony. Apameia, Prusa, Prusias, and Nicaea all quickly deserted to the Romans.<sup>252</sup> Once again, without an army and navy to enforce Mithridates' will, the Black Sea Kingdom began to fracture. He appealed to his son Machares, the vassal king of the Cimmerian Bosphorus, for supplies and troops; however, Machares was an ambitious young ruler, who had the security and power of his own kingdom first in mind. If he provided aid to his father in 72/71 BCE, the contribution was minimal; rather, Machares dragged his feet, waiting for Rome or his father to take a definitive advantage. Once Lucullus had subdued much of Pontus proper by 70 BCE, Machares betrayed his father and defected to Lucullus. Memnon, a later Greek historian who wrote a history about Heraclea in Anatolia, records, "Machares the son of Mithridates sent envoys to Lucullus, asking for friendship and an alliance. Lucullus readily agreed, saying that he would regard the alliance as confirmed, if Machares did not send any supplies to the inhabitants of Sinope. Machares not only complied with this, but even sent to Lucullus the supplies which had been prepared for Mithridates' forces."<sup>253</sup> Despite Mayor's attempt to argue that Machares eagerly supported his father

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<sup>250</sup> The Romans put forth a major effort to subdue the various Thracian tribes to neutralize them in the third conflict with Mithridates. This effort also helped stabilize and secure Macedon and Greece. Note Kallet-Marx 1995: 297-9.

<sup>251</sup> Memnon states that none of the Scythian kings aided him. Memnon 29.6

<sup>252</sup> Id. 28.5-8. Cabeira, Tius, and Amastris later followed. Id. 30.2, 35.7, 36.

<sup>253</sup> Id. 37.6.

militarily and logistically, the evidence is clear that Machares and Mithridates did not have a good relationship, that he held up supplies, and that he in fact eagerly deserted when the opportunity presented itself.<sup>254</sup>

Mithridates also found no military support at this time from the powers in the East. He sent envoys to Armenia and Parthia pleading for aid.<sup>255</sup> Parthia had not had an active alliance with Pontus since the reign of Mithridates II in the late 90s BCE, and this alliance had been against Cappadocia, not Rome. Parthia had no desire to become involved in a military conflict with Rome under Mithridates II nor in 72 BCE. Further, Arsaces XVI was not in a position to send military aid to Pontus since he faced growing tensions with the ever-expanding Armenian Empire and a civil war against Sinatruces in the Farther East in 72 BCE.<sup>256</sup> It is unsurprising that he rejected Mithradates' call for aid.<sup>257</sup> Meanwhile, Tigranes II had maintained a closer alliance with Mithridates against Cappadocia; the two had coordinated a devastating invasion of the region in 78 BCE. Tigranes and Mithridates also had a familial connection through the marriage of Mithridates' daughter to Tigranes. Yet he too, despite the recent arguments of Olbrycht and Mayor, sent no troops to Mithridates to help fight Rome at this time.<sup>258</sup> Most scholars correctly

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<sup>254</sup> Mayor 2010: 278. Appian tells us that later in the war Mithridates planned to get retribution on Machares, "his ungrateful son," and seize his kingdom. Appian *Mithr.* 15.101. Later, as Mithridates approached, Machares fled because of his father's "inexorable temper" and killed himself. Id. 15.102. Dio records that he terrified his son and paid his companions to murder him. Dio 36.50.2

<sup>255</sup> Memnon 29.6; Appian *Mithr.* 11.78

<sup>256</sup> The traditional view held that Sinatruces rejected Mithridates' call for aid. See Debevoise 1938: 52-3. Yet new numismatic and archaeological evidence suggests that Arsaces XVI held the western lands of the empire at this time and, therefore, received Mithridates' envoy in 72 BCE. See Assar 2006d: 85.

<sup>257</sup> Olbrycht incorrectly blames Parthian unwillingness to join Mithridates' cause on the greater passiveness of later Parthian kings. Olbrycht 2009: 179.

<sup>258</sup> Id. 178; Mayor 2010: 278. Note Sallust 4.67.13, where Mithridates states plainly that Tigranes foolishly never sent him aid against the Romans.

maintain that Tigranes did not militarily aid Mithridates until after Lucullus' invasion of Armenia; however, Olbrycht and Mayor use a passage from Memnon to argue the opposite point. Memnon states, "The others [the Scythian kings and Arsaces XVI] gave him [Mithridates] no help, but Tigranes, after ignoring many annoyances (πολλάκις ἐνοχληθεὶς) from Mithridates' daughter, nonetheless agreed to an alliance with him."<sup>259</sup> Memnon is our only evidence for such a treaty in 72 BCE, and the optics of it are not convincing.

Memnon indicates that Mithridates and Tigranes had to form an alliance. Since the two clearly had a longstanding military alliance against Cappadocia, Memnon here refers to a military alliance against Rome, which the context of the passage bears out. Memnon, by discussing Tigranes' marriage to Mithridates' daughter, illustrates that Pontus and Armenia had a previous alliance that had nothing to do with Rome; hence, Mithridates needed to petition Tigranes for a separate alliance against Rome. This flies directly in the face of Olbrycht's conclusions, which put forward the hypothesis that Mithridates and Tigranes had formed an anti-Roman coalition back in the middle 90s BCE when they first formed their marriage alliance.<sup>260</sup> Olbrycht's argument that Memnon describes a renewal of the same treaty is completely unconvincing. There is no reason a military treaty against Rome would have lapsed, and Tigranes was never involved in the conflict. Mithridates had to ask Tigranes for an alliance against Rome because no such arrangement previously existed.

Tigranes' lack of support of Mithridates until the early 60s BCE and his initially unenthusiastic treatment of Mithridates in the late 70s BCE do not support the notion that there

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<sup>259</sup> Memnon 29.6. I altered this translation to reflect the Greek more accurately.

<sup>260</sup> See Olbrycht 2009: 168-74.

was an Armeno-Pontic military alliance against Rome at this time.<sup>261</sup> Memnon's narrative places Mithridates' correspondence with Tigranes before his defeat in Pontus and flight to Armenia; however, there is no need to assume that they completed their correspondence and formed an alliance against Rome before Mithridates fled to Armenia.<sup>262</sup> Memnon simply connects Mithridates' correspondence with Tigranes to his other efforts to solicit aid. He also states that Tigranes "ignored many annoyances" before he agreed eventually to join Mithridates' cause. There is no firm indication of how long this process took. Even in Memnon's account, Tigranes' final decision could have come when he finally agreed to meet with Mithridates in 69 BCE.<sup>263</sup> In fact, the evidence overwhelmingly points toward Mithridates and Tigranes only forming an alliance against Rome in the early 60s BCE.

Finally, Mayor assumes that, because Mithridates was able to raise 40,000 infantry and 4,000-8,000 cavalry by the spring of 71 BCE, he must have received military aid from Tigranes.<sup>264</sup> Yet such a conclusion is unnecessary. After the total destruction of his armies in the first conflict, Mithridates had raised another army in Anatolia of 80,000 men.<sup>265</sup> Even in 72/71 BCE, after Mithridates had lost his army at Cyzicus, after his Scythian mercenaries had abandoned him, and after Machares had delayed sending him aid, the war had not touched the well-supplied, rich lands of Pontus.<sup>266</sup> Mithridates did not need military aid from "Scythia and

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<sup>261</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 12.82; Memnon 31; Plut. *Luc.* 22. For a more thorough discussion, see the next section.

<sup>262</sup> Florus too maintains that Mithridates gained Armenia as an ally after Lucullus had defeated him and associates the alliance more with Pompey's war. Florus 1.40.21

<sup>263</sup> See Memnon 31.1, 38.1

<sup>264</sup> For the army figures, see Appian *Mithr.* 11.78; Memnon 29.8; Plut. *Luc.* 15.1

<sup>265</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 7.49

<sup>266</sup> Plutarch describes the enormous, untouched wealth of Pontus. Plut. *Luc.* 14.1, 18.1. Athenaeus records Nicolaus the Peripatetic describing the "unbound extravagance" of the spoils Lucullus brought back to Rome after his defeat of Mithridates. Ath. 12.543

Armenia” to raise half the number of troops he had been able to raise on short notice before. Certainly, *some* Scythian and Armenian troops fought in Mithridates’ army in 71 BCE; however, as argued previously, any Armenian troops in Mithridates’ army before the 60s BCE came from Pontic held Lesser Armenia, not from Tigranes.<sup>267</sup>

Ultimately, Parthia and Armenia did not join Mithridates’ war against Rome in the late 70s BCE because it was not in their interests and outside of their concerns. Both powers remained focused on the geopolitical developments of the Eastern system in the late 70s BCE and found Mithridates’ problems in the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system unappealing. Parthia’s main concerns were the rising power of Armenia as a system rival and the continuation of civil wars. Meanwhile, Armenia’s main concerns were the maintenance of its rivalry with Parthia and the total conquest of Syria, Cilicia, and Phoenicia.

Although Mithridates was able to assemble a sizable force on short notice in Pontus, the veteran legions of Lucullus outmatched the raw recruits. In a string of battles, the Romans routed and slaughtered Pontic forces. Mithridates put forth a determined resistance with limited forces and fell back upon his numerous fortresses to slow down Lucullus’ advance; however, the Romans pillaged much of Pontus.<sup>268</sup> With his many defeats at the hands of Lucullus, with little to no aid coming from the Black Sea regions, and with the resources of Pontus severely damaged, Mithridates had few recourses to continue the war. Seemingly, Pontus was defeated and Roman hegemony over Anatolia restored, which explains Lucullus’ message of victory to the senate.<sup>269</sup> Mithridates only had two options left to him, surrender or abandon Pontus and continue the war.

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<sup>267</sup> Thus, Orosius calls Mithridates the king of Pontus and Armenia in his description of the beginning of the Mithridatic wars. Orosius 6.2

<sup>268</sup> For the invasion of Pontus, see Appian *Mithr.* 12.79-83; Plut. *Luc.* 14-20; Memnon 29-30. See also Mayor 2010: 279-90.

<sup>269</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 24.1



Mithridates, although deeply frustrated by his missed opportunities and military setbacks, appears to have never considered surrender as a viable option, for which there are understandable reasons. Mithridates' experience told him that, with the constantly changing political atmosphere at Rome, Lucullus might seek an acceptable peace deal. Despite Lucullus' optimism, many of Mithridates' fortresses and treasure strongholds remained in Pontic hands. Lucullus might prefer to return to Rome and celebrate his glorious victory instead of pursuing a difficult campaign of occupation. If Lucullus chose to continue the war in Pontus, he could hope that the process of subjugating all of Pontus would be time consuming for the Romans. Perhaps Lucullus would make a mistake like Murena and allow Mithridates to gain the upper hand once more. Thus, Mithridates could hope to see his fortunes rise once again; however, he needed new soldiers to mount a comeback. Therefore, while Lucullus was bogged down in Pontus, Mithridates chose to escape to Armenia and hoped to convince his greatest remaining ally finally to aid him against Rome.<sup>270</sup>

#### Armenia Becomes Part of the Roman-Dominated Mediterranean System

From the middle 90s to the late 70s BCE, the Romans had cared little about the actions of Armenia. Armenia's alliance with Pontus against their vassal state Cappadocia did not please them; however, Tigranes successfully invaded Cappadocia and forced Ariobarzanes to flee to Rome three times without Rome holding Armenia responsible. Instead, Rome always viewed Pontus as the real threat to Roman hegemony in the region and Mithridates as the true villain. Even if we argue that in the 90s BCE Rome viewed Armenia as a weak puppet principality of the Parthians and, therefore, did not pay it much attention, when Tigranes ravaged Cappadocia in 78

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<sup>270</sup> For Lucullus' difficult campaign to subjugate Pontus, see esp. Memnon 31-7

BCE, he had already shaken off Parthian hegemony and created a massive empire in the East. Roman neglect of Tigranes did not stem from ignorance of his military abilities and the rising power of Armenia. In fact, Tigranes' reputation as a great and powerful conqueror was well known throughout Anatolia.<sup>271</sup> Instead, a fundamental reason why the Romans continued to overlook Armenia until the late 70s BCE lies in the limitation of Roman concerns within the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system.

Armenia was a peripheral region on the outside of that system until the early 60s BCE. Thus, despite knowledge of the Armeno-Parthian war and the extent of Tigranes' achievements, Rome was mostly unconcerned about the rapidly rising power of Tigranes in the 80s BCE and never interfered in the hegemonic war between Armenia and Parthia.<sup>272</sup> In the late 90s and early 70s BCE, when Tigranes was raiding Cappadocia, the Romans blamed Mithridates for all of Tigranes' aggression against Roman interests. Tigranes, who did not intend to fight Rome, did not press his advantage in Cappadocia to invade the interior of Anatolia. Rome and Armenia remained mostly outside of each other's concerns. However, in the latter half of the 70s BCE the international environment in the Near East changed, as did Rome's opinion of Tigranes.

In 74/73 BCE Mithridates went to war with Rome in Anatolia and Tigranes invaded Syria. Tigranes' invasions, occupations, and annexations of Syria, Cilicia, and Phoenicia, regions that Rome considered firmly under its own hegemony, made Tigranes a threat to Roman interests in the Mediterranean and a potential hegemonic rival. The consequences of the first phase of

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<sup>271</sup> Even though Tigranes never sent Mithridates soldiers or penetrated Anatolia beyond Cappadocia, Mithridates was able to terrify the defenders of Cyzicus by arguing that an army of Tigranes had arrived to help him take the city. Plut. *Luc.* 9.3-4. Moreover, the Pontic general Connacorex later was able to desert to the Romans and betray Heraclea by claiming falsely that Tigranes was sending men to save the city. Memnon 35.3-4

<sup>272</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 14.5

overlap between the Mediterranean and Eastern systems meant that Tigranes conquered these regions without considering the potential reaction of Rome. Thus, Tigranes occupied the coast of the Eastern Mediterranean to establish his hegemony over the Near East and to expand further his standing within the Eastern system at the expense of the Parthians and Seleucids, while Rome viewed Tigranes' annexation of these regions as a direct challenge to Roman hegemony over the Mediterranean.<sup>273</sup>

Added to this considerable misunderstanding between Armenia and Rome was Tigranes' ongoing association with Mithridates of Pontus. For the Romans, these two kings had worked together in the past against Roman interests, and therefore, the chances of them working together again in the future seemed high. Once Tigranes began dominating the coast of the Eastern Mediterranean and once the third conflict with Mithridates began, Tigranes' long running association with Mithridates no longer seemed like a minor issue to the Romans. Moreover, once Mithridates threatened to flee to Armenia and extend the war and once Tigranes refused to hand over Mithridates to Roman demands, Tigranes' acquired power, occupation of the coast of the Eastern Mediterranean, and longstanding association with Mithridates seemed like an immediate and major threat.

Plutarch's recreation of one of Lucullus' speeches is worth consideration in its totality.

He records,

He [Lucullus] was, however, more ready to defend himself against those who denounced his slowness in lingering there [in Pontus] a long while, subduing worthless little villages and cities, and allowing Mithridates to recruit himself. 'That,' he said, 'is the very thing I want, and I am sitting here to get it. I want the man to become powerful again, and to get together a force with which it is worth our while to fight, in order that he may stand his ground, and not fly when we approach. Do you not see that he has a vast and trackless desert behind him? The Caucasus, too, is near, with its many hills and dells, which are sufficient to hide

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<sup>273</sup> Mommsen made this connection. Mommsen 1903: iv 334-5.

away in safety ten thousand kings who decline to fight. And it is only a few days' journey from Cabira into Armenia and over Armenia there sits enthroned Tigranes, King of Kings, with forces which enable him to cut the Parthians off from Asia, transplant Greek cities into Media, sway Syria and Palestine, put to death the successors of Seleucus, and carry off their wives and daughters into captivity. This king is a kinsman of Mithridates, his son-in-law. He will not be content to receive him as a suppliant, but will make war against us. If we strive, therefore, to eject Mithridates from his kingdom, we shall run the risk of drawing Tigranes down upon us. He has long wanted an excuse for coming against us, and could not get a better one than that of being compelled to aid a man who is his kinsman and a king. Why, then, should we bring this to pass, and teach Mithridates, when he does not know it, with what allies he must carry on war against us? Why help to drive him, against his wish and as a last resource, into the arms of Tigranes, instead of giving him time to equip himself from his own resources and get fresh courage? Then we shall fight with Colchians and Tibareni and Cappadocians, whom we have often overcome, rather than with Medes and Armenians.'<sup>274</sup>

Lucullus' warnings about Tigranes' long held ambitions to attack Rome and Tigranes' desire to use Mithridates as an excuse to invade Anatolia are artistic exaggerations that Plutarch created to justify Lucullus' actions against Armenia, to create foreboding about the next phase of the war, and to provide heightened drama to Plutarch's narrative.<sup>275</sup> They do not reflect the geopolitical realities of the 90s-70s BCE in the Eastern system or the realities of Tigranes' motivations and ambitions in the Near East.<sup>276</sup> Yet the emotion of Plutarch's account can reflect accurately Roman fears in the late 70s BCE. Plutarch's Armenian perspective is pure fantasy; however, his Roman perspective touches upon all of the concerns that the Romans had come to hold toward Tigranes at this time.

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<sup>274</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 14.4-6

<sup>275</sup> Although his depiction of Lucullus is overly critical, Manandyan argues that Plutarch exaggerated the threat of Tigranes to Rome because he wanted to distract readers from the questionable intentions and legality of Lucullus' invasion. Manandyan 2007: 69-73.

<sup>276</sup> Plutarch later erroneously argues that Tigranes and Mithridates planned to attack Asia "before war was actually declared" and criticizes Tigranes for not helping Mithridates earlier since "he cherished the design of attacking the Romans." Plut. *Luc.* 23.7.

Tigranes' conquest of Syria and Palestine, paired with his perceived support of Mithridates and his huge eastern powerbase, made Tigranes an increasingly troubling potential threat to the Romans by the late 70s BCE. Although Tigranes had no plans to fight Rome in support of Mithridates, the Romans did not know that. Thus, Lucullus preferred to fight Mithridates while he was isolated in Anatolia, and the prospect of fighting him by the side of Tigranes in the East gave him pause. This crucial misunderstanding between Rome and Armenia was in part a side effect of the system overlap between the Mediterranean and Eastern systems in the Near East. Plutarch's passage exaggerates the ambitions of Tigranes against Rome; however, it reflects Roman concerns in the struggle against this new King of Kings in the East in order to champion the supposedly downtrodden rights of the Greeks, restore Roman hegemony over the lands of the Seleucids, and protect the interests of Rome in the Mediterranean.<sup>277</sup>

Lucullus did not get his wish, and Mithridates fled into Armenia. Yet Tigranes did not eagerly welcome Mithridates and immediately support his cause against Rome as Lucullus, as portrayed by Plutarch, vehemently warned. In fact, Tigranes held Mithridates in isolation far away from his military operations in the south.<sup>278</sup> As Mithridates' son-in-law and friend, Tigranes felt a responsibility to give asylum to the defeated king; however, his cold reception of Mithridates demonstrates that Tigranes had no desire to embrace Mithridates' war. Further,

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<sup>277</sup> Plutarch touches once more on this idea of Rome championing the downtrodden rights of Greeks under Armenian rule in id. 21.3-5. Shayegan argues that the Romans emphasized Tigranes' identity as the King of Kings to make the imperial title "a tool in the hegemonic duel between Parthia and Rome." Shayegan 2011: 245. Although I agree that this could be the rhetorical motivation of later Roman writers, such as Plutarch, I would caution against assuming that Lucullus, Pompey, and their contemporaries considered the "King of Kings" title within the contexts of a Romano-Parthian hegemonic rivalry, which did not begin until the latter half of the 50s BCE.

<sup>278</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 12.82; Memnon 31.1

Tigranes' cautious handling of Mithridates and his lack of aggression toward Lucullus in 71/70 BCE illustrates that Pontus and Armenia had not yet signed a military alliance against Rome.

Lucullus spent 71/70 BCE subduing Pontus and putting the affairs of Anatolia in order, which included a campaign to win over the hearts and minds of the local communities with favors and tax breaks.<sup>279</sup> In the meantime, Lucullus hoped he might convince Tigranes to betray Mithridates as so many of his generals recently had done. He sent an envoy, Appius Claudius, to meet with Tigranes to secure Mithridates as a prisoner; however, Lucullus' message to Tigranes conformed to the normal parameters of ancient compellence diplomacy, as did Tigranes' response.<sup>280</sup> Appius demanded the surrender of Mithridates and threatened war if Tigranes did not comply.<sup>281</sup> Tigranes refused such a bold request and promised to punish Rome with force of arms if the Romans declared war.<sup>282</sup> Thus, the diplomatic exchange between Rome and Armenia did nothing to alleviate the growing tension between the two powers and, in fact, made open conflict more likely. Wrapped up in the meeting between Appius and Tigranes was personal ego and the perception of state strength. When Appius arrived, Tigranes was campaigning successfully in Phoenicia.<sup>283</sup> He made Appius wait for an audience in Syria, and when he finally met with Appius, he did so in splendor surrounded by soldiers and vassal rulers. The idea was to overawe the Roman envoy with the power and prestige of Tigranes to gain the upper hand in the first diplomatic exchange with Rome. However, Appius, who must have been a confident and

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<sup>279</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 12.83; Plut. *Luc.* 20

<sup>280</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 19.1; Memnon 31.2; Appian *Mithr.* 12.83

<sup>281</sup> Appius "was not frightened or astonished at all this pomp and show [of Tigranes' presentation], but as soon as he obtained an audience, told the king plainly that he was come to take back Mithridates, as an ornament due to the triumph of Lucullus, or else to declare war against Tigranes." Plut. *Luc.* 21.6

<sup>282</sup> *Id.* 21.7.

<sup>283</sup> *Id.* 21.2.

disciplined man, was unfazed by Tigranes' display of power. Appius coolly delivered Lucullus' demands and threat of force, which even did not acknowledge Tigranes as "King of Kings."<sup>284</sup> Lucullus hoped to intimidate Tigranes into surrendering Mithridates; however, he was prepared for war against Armenia if necessary so his message to Tigranes could be harsh and unwavering.<sup>285</sup> Therefore, he delivered an ultimatum to Tigranes. Armenia had to submit to the will of Rome either willingly or unwillingly.

Although Lucullus' actions here were hostile and antagonistic, they were not uniquely predatory or aggressive. Although the structure and tone of Roman diplomacy was more rigid than its Hellenistic counterpart was, as seen throughout this study, compellence diplomacy was common and normal in the ancient world.<sup>286</sup> Thus, Appius was not "arrogant" and Lucullus had not acted "rash" or "irrational."<sup>287</sup> Rather, Appius delivered his message with the usual Roman authority and bluntness that Murena, Sulla, and Gaius Popilius Laenas had used toward Hellenistic monarchs before him. Lucullus did nothing unusual in his demand to secure the fugitive Mithridates.<sup>288</sup> Mithridates was an enemy of the Roman state, who found asylum in

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<sup>284</sup> Id. 21.7.

<sup>285</sup> Lucullus was acting within a well-established Roman diplomatic tradition. In 168 BCE, the envoy Gaius Popilius Laenas used compellence diplomacy to intimidate Antiochus IV, who was on the verge of capturing Alexandria in Egypt. Popilius informed Antiochus that he had to retreat immediately or prepare for war against Rome. Antiochus chose to obey the demands of Rome. Polyb. 29.27; Livy 45.12

<sup>286</sup> See Ager 2009.

<sup>287</sup> Mayor 2010: 293, 297. Note also Chahin 1987: 230. Certainly, Lucullus' invasion was aggressive and risky; however, it was not irrational. Tigranes was a major threat in the Near East and had defied Roman demands by harboring the renegade, Mithridates. Lucullus had easily defensible reasons for invading Armenia.

<sup>288</sup> Lucullus' letter and Appius' delivery reflect the Roman tradition of *rerum repetitio* (demand for satisfaction) delivered to an offending community by the chief fetial. The *rerum repetitio* was a predetermined guilty verdict that "represents no call to negotiation, no invitation to debate or discussion, only a set of demands premised on the conviction that Rome has been wronged." Ager 2009: 21.

Armenia. Previous lenient treatment of Mithridates had damaged Roman prestige and led to further conflict in Anatolia. Allowing Mithridates to remain in Armenia was not a realistic option for Lucullus. The Romans justifiably felt wronged by Tigranes for harboring Mithridates in 70 BCE and acted accordingly.

This was the first time that Tigranes had exchanged diplomatic correspondence with the Romans, and, as with Orobazus' difficult negotiations with Sulla, Mithridates' frustrating exchanges with the Roman Senate, and Antiochus IV's astonishment at Popilius' demands, Tigranes was confused and uncomfortable in this meeting with Appius.<sup>289</sup> He felt that his familial ties to Mithridates justified his protection of his father-in-law and understood that "he would incur universal censure if he betrayed the father of his wife."<sup>290</sup> He went through a great deal of trouble to put his power and influence on display for Appius. He could not simply submit to Lucullus' demands and overt threat without losing the respect and fear of subject rulers and communities.<sup>291</sup> He needed to appear strong in order to maintain his standing as the regional hegemon so he acted unfazed by Appius' boldness and responded with his own show of strength and superiority, even refusing to acknowledge Lucullus as "General."<sup>292</sup> Ultimately, Tigranes

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<sup>289</sup> "Although Tigranes made every effort to listen to this speech with a cheerful countenance and a forced smile, he could not hide from the bystanders his discomfiture at the bold words of the young man." Plut. *Luc.* 21.6

<sup>290</sup> Memnon 31.2. Moreover, Mithridates was Tigranes' guest. It would have been scandalous and shameful if Tigranes had handed Mithridates over to Lucullus. Note that, after the Syrian War with Rome, Antiochus III refused to hand over enemies of the state, such as Hannibal and Thoas, to the Romans for similar reasons. See Grainger 2015: 186. Although Antiochus acted defiantly, the Romans decided against further war in the early 180s BCE. Tigranes too did not expect his refusal to encourage the Romans to make war upon him.

<sup>291</sup> In fact, many communities and vassal kings, most notably King Zarbienus of Gordyene, who had resented Tigranes' advances in the Near East, approached Appius in the hope of gaining Roman favor. Plut. *Luc.* 21.1-5. If Tigranes suddenly appeared weak, his hold over his subjects could become precarious.

<sup>292</sup> Memnon 31.3



had two choices in his meeting with Appius, lose face or exhibit strength; he predictably chose the latter.

Although open conflict between Rome and Armenia seemed more likely than ever after Appius' meeting with Tigranes, it is unlikely that Lucullus had predetermined to go to war with Armenia while he was fighting Mithridates.<sup>293</sup> If Lucullus simply had been waiting for any excuse to attack Tigranes, his actions in 71/70 BCE are peculiar. Lucullus spread out the placement of his troops across all of Anatolia; he moved away from the frontier with Armenia back to Asia; and he patiently waited for the return of Appius. There is no need to assume that Lucullus had determined "to settle a score with Tigranes."<sup>294</sup> Rather, it is reasonable to argue that Lucullus thought Tigranes would not risk war with Rome, would submit to his demands, and would hand over Mithridates. Even after threatening Tigranes with war, Lucullus' actions in Anatolia suggest that he did not view war against Armenia as unavoidable and immediate. If Tigranes surrendered Mithridates to Lucullus, Lucullus could return to Rome a war hero, parade Mithridates in his triumph, and leave the growing threat of Armenia to Roman hegemony to someone else. However, when Tigranes refused Lucullus' demand and then insulted Lucullus, Lucullus' reputation and the prestige of Rome came into question. The Romans could not afford to leave Mithridates on the loose, especially under the protection of another defiant king. It was only after Appius returned with news of Tigranes' refusal and response that Lucullus settled on war.<sup>295</sup> Thus, Tigranes became guilty in the eyes of the Romans by his association with Mithridates and by his refusal to submit to Rome's will. As long as Tigranes harbored

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<sup>293</sup> Manandyan 2007: 64-5.

<sup>294</sup> Sheldon 2010: 17.

<sup>295</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 23.2

Mithridates and challenged Roman hegemony in the Near East, there was a justifiable cause for the war to shift further east.<sup>296</sup>

Even after Lucullus' threat of war and Tigranes' threat to respond forcefully, Tigranes did little to prepare for a potential Roman invasion of his lands. Plutarch portrays Tigranes as a cruel, delusional, and foolish despot, who, despite Plutarch's previous claims that he desired war with Rome and planned an invasion of Asia, was completely unaware of Lucullus' attack and refused to accept news about it.<sup>297</sup> Lucullus' invasion did not surprise Tigranes because he was a delusional fool; rather, it surprised him because war with Rome remained mostly outside of his concerns and considerations, even after his meeting with Appius. Tigranes was a great warrior and statesman, who had created a mighty empire in the Near East. This reality does not match up well with Plutarch's portrayal of a bumbling, indecisive dupe. In 70/69 BCE, Tigranes' primary concern remained the developments of the Eastern system, namely the siege of Ptolemais and the subjugation of Phoenicia and Palestine.<sup>298</sup> Tigranes refused Lucullus' demands to protect his image in the East, not to provoke war with Rome. In hindsight it is easy to argue that Tigranes should have aided Mithridates or invaded Anatolia; however, Tigranes' lack of interest in doing

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<sup>296</sup> We must reject Mayor's portrayal of Lucullus as a man "following his own irrational agenda" aggressively victimizing the pacific Tigranes. Mayor 2010: 297. Such an explanation for the war ignores the geopolitical realities facing Lucullus that encouraged him to pursue war against Armenia and the defiant, aggressive actions of Tigranes in the Near East. Meanwhile, Manandyan unfortunately concludes his history of Tigranes II by claiming that Armenia "became the eternal victim of the great rival Western and Eastern empires." Manandyan 2007: 162-5. This conclusion completely disregards the considerable agency of Armenia in the conflict between Rome and Parthia.

<sup>297</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 25.1-2. Manandyan rejects this portrayal and favors Appian and Memnon's accounts instead. Manandyan 2007: 77-83.

<sup>298</sup> Jos. *Ant.* 13.419-22. For Seleucid rule in Phoenicia, note Iossif 2014.

either in 69 BCE reinforces the concept of separate Mediterranean and Eastern systems.<sup>299</sup> He was content to continue his consolidation of power in the Near East as a rival of Parthia.

Tigranes seems to have considered Lucullus' threat of war a bluff and thought that by keeping Mithridates in isolation he could ultimately satisfy Roman concerns.<sup>300</sup> His hope no doubt was to demonstrate that he had no designs to aid Mithridates and, therefore, to encourage Rome to mind its own business in the West. Such a conclusion was reasonable. A war against Armenia was a risky prospect for Lucullus. Moreover, the objections of some Romans to Lucullus' expedition against Armenia in part speak to Roman discomfort with expanding Roman hegemony, and thus the limits of the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system, further east by attacking Tigranes' massive empire. Plutarch records,

He [Lucullus] seemed to be making a reckless attack, and one which admitted of no saving calculation, upon warlike nations, countless thousands of horsemen, and a boundless region surrounded by deep rivers and mountains covered with perpetual snow. His soldiers, therefore, who were none too well disciplined in any case, followed him reluctantly and rebelliously, while the popular tribunes at Rome raised an outcry against him, and accused him of seeking one war after another, although the city had no need of them, that he might be in perpetual command and never lay down his arms or cease enriching himself from the public dangers.<sup>301</sup>

Thus, the desire of Lucullus' soldiers to return home and factional rivalry at Rome were the overt sources of objection to a war against Tigranes. Yet the argument made against Lucullus for

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<sup>299</sup> Manandyan 2007: 61-3.

<sup>300</sup> Id. 72. McGing argues that Tigranes rightly assumed Lucullus did not have the authority to attack him. McGing 1986: 153 n67. We should be careful in assuming that Tigranes had a solid understanding of the complex political atmosphere at Rome. We can be certain only that Tigranes knew that Lucullus had threatened war. Therefore, his lack of preparation for a possible Roman invasion seems to have been a reaction to his continued concentration on the geopolitical developments of the Eastern system and not necessarily a response to his faith in the legal functioning of politics at Rome. I agree with Mayor that Tigranes had "little understanding of the Roman threat." Mayor 2010: 296.

<sup>301</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 24.2-3

pursuing a war against a distant and foreign people in a difficult outer territory resides at its core in an understanding of the limitations of Roman imperium in the Near East at this time and a desire not to expand Roman commitments beyond those territorial limitations.

Eventually, Lucullus' soldiers and political enemies got the better of him; however, this came too late to help Tigranes. Once Appius returned from his unsuccessful meeting with Tigranes, Lucullus felt he had the duty and just cause to punish Tigranes for harboring Mithridates and to remove Armenia from the disputed lands of the Near East.<sup>302</sup> It is untenable to argue that Lucullus predetermined to subdue Tigranes prior to 70 BCE and even ultimately hoped to make war on Parthia.<sup>303</sup> Lucullus' campaign against Tigranes ran into several complications because he did not fully appreciate the difficulty of expanding the bounds of the Mediterranean system to incorporate the massive Armenian Empire. Yet the conflict between Rome and Armenia in the 60s BCE was, first, an indirect consequence of the first phase of system overlap and the actions of Tigranes in the late 70s BCE and, second, a direct consequence of his confused and unsuccessful meeting with Appius. Tigranes miscalculated the situation in 69 BCE because he failed to appreciate that, by annexing the coast of the Eastern Mediterranean and harboring Mithridates, he was in fact, from a Roman perspective, interfering directly in the geopolitical developments of the Mediterranean.<sup>304</sup> Against Tigranes' wishes, Mithridates' hegemonic struggle against Roman domination became his own.

Lucullus' invasion of Sophene in early 69 BCE caught Tigranes completely off-guard. Lucullus knew that he would be outnumbered during this campaign, especially in cavalry, so he

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<sup>302</sup> Cicero shared these sentiments in his defense of Pompey's later command. See Cic. *Man.*

<sup>303</sup> See Lerouge 2007: 52-8; Sheldon 2010: 18.

<sup>304</sup> Cic. *Sest.* 27.58-9. Note Garsoian 2005; Manandyan 2007: 72.

used the mountains and rivers of Sophene and Armenia to help protect his troops.<sup>305</sup> The first major objective of his invasion was the capture of the new imperial Armenian capital, Tigranocerta. By besieging the imperial capital of Armenia, which was a prized project of Tigranes and bore his name, Lucullus could hope to split the Armenian Empire and force Tigranes into brash action.<sup>306</sup> The strategy worked. Tigranes, who had been in Phoenicia at the time of Lucullus' invasion, had to order his generals to fight delaying actions and raiding skirmishes while he gathered his army in a central location over the spring and summer.<sup>307</sup> By the fall Tigranes had assembled a massive army that ultimately found itself outmaneuvered and destroyed outside of Tigranocerta.<sup>308</sup> Tigranes had to flee into northern Armenia, abandoning his imperial capital, which soon after fell to Lucullus.<sup>309</sup>

The decisive military defeats in and around Tigranocerta severely damaged Tigranes' reputation and the perception of Armenian power in the Near East. Already before Lucullus' invasion there was discontent amongst some of the vassal kings in the Near East, who disapproved of Tigranes' recent conquests and abuses. When Appian entered Syria, "he gained over many of the princes who paid but a hollow obedience to the Armenian. One of these was

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<sup>305</sup> For the invasion route of Lucullus, see Manandyan 2007: 73-9. Chahin's alternate reconstruction of Lucullus' invasion attempts to reject that Lucullus ever attacked Tigranocerta; however, it suffers from Chahin's overt bias toward the Romans and an overreliance on Cicero's speech in favor of the Manilian Law. Chahin 1987: 231-34.

<sup>306</sup> For the important role of Tigranocerta in Tigranes' new empire, see id. 48-51.

<sup>307</sup> Although Manandyan goes too far in his efforts to establish the "treacherous nature of Lucullus," he correctly questions scholars' preference for the more biased and distorted account of Plutarch. He rejects Plutarch's portrayal of Tigranes as a helpless fool. He instead emphasizes Appian and Memnon's accounts to demonstrate that Tigranes put together a decent defense of Tigranocerta. See id. 72-107.

<sup>308</sup> Numbers for Tigranes' army range from 70,000-700,000 men. Plut. *Luc.* 26; id. *Apophtheg. Rom.* 203; Appian *Mithr.* 12.85; Eutropius 6.9; Phlegon frag. 12, in Hansen 1996: 62. See also Matyszak 2008: 128-9; Mayor 2010: 298.

<sup>309</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 29; Appian, *Mithr.* 12.86; Strabo 11.15, 12.2.9

Zarbienus, king of Gordyene. He also promised many of the enslaved cities, when they sent to confer with him secretly, the assistance of Lucullus, although for the present he bade them keep quiet.”<sup>310</sup> The rise of Armenian hegemony over the Near East was relatively new, and several vassal kings and communities, which had once looked to the Seleucids or Arsacids for support, began to view the Romans as a possible major player in the geopolitical developments of the Near East. Undeniably, the Greek communities in Syria and Cilicia that came to Appius for aid included the remnants of Cleopatra’s Seleucid faction, which desperately needed Roman favor in its losing efforts.

Tigranes had created a massive empire at the tip of a spear, and he ruled over the Near East by force. He had defeated the Parthians and seized these areas, many of which submitted to Armenian hegemony out of necessity. With the Parthians still weakened by civil wars, these kings and communities viewed the introduction of Rome into the geopolitical picture of the Near East as an opportunity to exert more autonomy. Rulers, such as Zarbienus and the Seleucids who still opposed Tigranes, hoped to expand their power, autonomy, and state security by bandwagoning with Rome against Armenia.

Tigranes understood the danger that the rebellion of his vassal states posed to his rule, and therefore, he took the threat seriously. He had Zarbienus captured and executed to reassert his control over Gordyene.<sup>311</sup> While Tigranes maintained his fierce military reputation and while the perception of Armenian power remained high, the subject peoples of Tigranes’ empire supported him and joined his army to fight Lucullus.<sup>312</sup> However, once Lucullus had routed

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<sup>310</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 21.2. Plutarch asserts that the Greek communities especially found Armenian hegemony intolerable. Id. 21.3.

<sup>311</sup> Id. 29.6.

<sup>312</sup> Tigranes’ huge, polyglot force included Armenians, Gordyeni, Medes, Adiabeni, Arabs, Albanians, Iberians, and several other tribes. Id. 26.4

Tigranes and taken his capital city, shattering the image of Armenian invincibility, the minor and middling powers of the Near East began to embrace their opportunity to shake off Armenian hegemony and offered their support to Rome.<sup>313</sup>

With Lucullus' military and diplomatic success, he restored Roman hegemony over the Eastern Mediterranean coast and extended it into southern Armenia and northern Mesopotamia. Rome suddenly became the dominant power in the Near East as the advances of Lucullus pushed the bounds of the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system further east, causing the second phase of system overlap.<sup>314</sup> His bold invasion strategy had worked; in less than a year, he had cut the Armenian Empire nearly in two. His attack on Tigranocerta had forced Tigranes to abandon Phoenicia, Cilicia, and Syria and to retreat into the interior of Armenia.<sup>315</sup> Lucullus then supported or installed pro-Roman vassal kings and extended Roman hegemony for the first time over much of Sophene, Commagene, Osrhoene, and Gordyene.<sup>316</sup>

From 87-70 BCE Tigranes had experienced a string of successes unrivaled in Armenian history. For a brief moment, Armenia was one of the greatest powers on earth. However, Tigranes drastically underestimated Lucullus and mismanaged his defense of Tigranocerta. In 69 BCE he lost control of half of his empire. Yet the potential power of Armenia remained considerable in 68 BCE, and Lucullus with his modest army remained vulnerable to

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<sup>313</sup> Plutarch states, "Without appeal to arms, [Lucullus] subdued the Barbarians." The Arabs, Sopheni, and Gordyeni all decided to join the Romans against Armenia. Id. 29. Note also Orosius 6.3

<sup>314</sup> Plutarch underscores Lucullus' important role in expanding the Roman sphere of influence in the Near East. Plut. *Cim. and Luc.* 3.1-2

<sup>315</sup> Kallet-Marx likely is mistaken that Tigranes remained in control of Cilicia until late in 66 BCE. Kallet-Marx 1995: 318.

<sup>316</sup> Lucullus installed or supported pro-Roman vassal kings in Syria (Antiochus XIII), Commagene (Antiochus I), and over the Arabian tribes (Alchaudonius). Appian *Syr.* 8.49; Justin 40.2.2; Dio 36.2.5. See also Strabo 16.2.10

counterattack. It was left to Tigranes to recover quickly from his losses and to exploit Lucullus' weakness.

Tigranes, although he protected Mithridates and remained friendly with him, had kept Mithridates isolated and distant for twenty months after his arrival in Armenia.<sup>317</sup> It is possible that Mithridates utilized this time to reform his strategic and tactical approach to fighting the Romans, emphasizing a lighter, faster, and more "asymmetrical" style of warfare. Mayor argues that Mithridates read battle scenes from Herodotus and Xenophon and studied Alexander the Great's cavalry innovations in Afghanistan during his isolation in Armenia and that this inspired his total change of military direction.<sup>318</sup> However, there is another explanation worth considering.

The fighting style that Mithridates began to utilize in the latter half of the third conflict against Rome changed from an emphasis on traditional set battles of heavy infantry to hit-and-run cavalry tactics and strategy. Plutarch states,

Mithridates, indeed, both by messengers and letters, strongly urged the king [that is, Tigranes] not to join battle, but to cut off the enemy's supplies with his cavalry. Taxiles also, who came from Mithridates and joined the forces of Tigranes, earnestly begged the king to remain on the defensive and avoid the invincible arms of the Romans. And at first Tigranes gave considerate hearing to this advice.<sup>319</sup>

Meanwhile, Appian records, "Mithridates, who was now for the first time admitted to his [Tigranes'] presence, advised him not to come to close quarters with the Romans, but to circle around them with his horse only, to devastate the country, and reduce them by famine if possible, in the same way that he had been served by Lucullus at Cyzicus, where he lost his army without

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<sup>317</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 22; Appian *Mithr.* 12.82; Memnon 38.

<sup>318</sup> Mayor 2010: 295.

<sup>319</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 26.3



fighting.”<sup>320</sup> Thus, Appian argues that Mithridates in fact learned from his defeats against Lucullus; however, Appian earlier relates that Lucullus had had minimal cavalry and had used his infantry, navy, and the terrain to isolate Mithridates’ army at Cyzicus.<sup>321</sup> Moreover, Mithridates’ new military emphasis clearly was based on cavalry warfare. Mithridates continued to reform his military along Roman organizational and equipment lines with limited success.<sup>322</sup> However, his new tactics and strategy moved further away from the Roman and Greek emphasis on conventional heavy infantry warfare to the hit-and-run cavalry tactics and strategy of the Parthians and nomadic tribes.

It is unconvincing that Mithridates, who certainly had read Herodotus and Xenophon and studied Alexander prior to 71-69 BCE, suddenly had an epiphany that led him to alter his tactics and strategy so significantly.<sup>323</sup> In fact, Mithridates began utilizing cavalry based hit-and-run tactics in 72 BCE against Lucullus in Pontus.<sup>324</sup> We know that Mithridates was in contact with the Parthians from 72-68 BCE in an attempt to gain their military support against Rome. Therefore, it is possible that Mithridates acquired or hired Parthian military advisors, who helped him drastically alter the strategic and tactical emphasis of his army at this time.<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Appian 12.85

<sup>321</sup> Id. 11.72-7. It would have been impossible for Tigranes to isolate Lucullus at Tigranocerta as Lucullus had isolated Mithridates at Cyzicus. Unlike Cyzicus, which was isolated between the sea and mountains, Tigranocerta was on the large plain of Arzanene south of the southeastern Taurus Mountains, known as the Güneydoğu Toroslar.

<sup>322</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 7, *Ser.* 24; Appian *Mithr.* 13.87; Phlegon Frag. 3

<sup>323</sup> For Mithridates’ extensive education in Greek and Roman literature and history, see Mayor 2010: Ch. 3.

<sup>324</sup> See Appian *Mithr.* 12.79-82

<sup>325</sup> Mithridates had advisors from the nomadic tribes north of the Black Sea. Initially, the new tactical and strategic emphasis could have come from them. However, the Parthians utilized a similar nomadic style of warfare that Mithridates appears partially to have adopted only after reopening communications with Parthia in 72 BCE. Thus, it is worth considering a Parthian influence.

It is interesting that Mithridates warned Tigranes not to attack the Romans with conventional tactics in 69 BCE, something Mithridates had done countless times before and something Tigranes ultimately ignored.<sup>326</sup> Clearly, the Armenians, who had incorporated Parthian style cataphracts and horse archers into their armies, were not utilizing Parthian strategy and tactics.<sup>327</sup> Against the advice of Mithridates, Tigranes approached the war against Lucullus as a traditional Hellenistic king and risked all in a decisive set piece battle. The Parthian approach to warfare remained unique in the Eastern system.<sup>328</sup> Yet it is possible that Mithridates turned to a variation of it out of necessity and desperation late in the war.

Tigranes did not benefit from Mithridates' military revelations in 69 BCE. However, before this time there had been little need for Tigranes to alter his military approach. He had incorporated Parthian weaponry into a conventional approach to warfare with great success. He had been able to use the speed and mobility of a strong cavalry wing to defeat Parthian and Hellenistic armies; however, he also had been highly successful in siege warfare. His decisive defeat at the hands of Lucullus was more a factor of bad luck than poor generalship. He had never before fought a Roman army, and this inexperience cost him dearly. The biggest tragedy of all for Armenia is perhaps that Tigranes could have utilized Mithridates as an advisor to help him avoid disaster against the Romans. Yet Tigranes had kept Mithridates in isolation for almost two

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<sup>326</sup> See Plut. *Luc.* 26.3-5; Appian 12.85

<sup>327</sup> The majority of Tigranes' force was infantry. Therefore, instead of relying on his cavalry to move fluidly across the battlefield to draw Lucullus into a trap, Tigranes had to commit his cavalry more traditionally to protecting his infantry. Although Plutarch and Appian's accounts of the battle differ, they both agree that Tigranes' cavalry quickly became disorganized and a general rout of his army soon followed. See Plut. *Luc.* 28; Appian 12.85. It is interesting that Plutarch describes Lucullus successfully using his lighter Thracian and Gallic horsemen to drive off Tigranes' cataphracts, while Crassus utilized a similar strategy to disastrous results at Carrhae against the Parthians. See Plut. *Crass.* 25

<sup>328</sup> Plutarch states clearly that the Parthians' mode of warfare remained unique in the 50s BCE. Id. 18.3-4

years while he campaigned in the south. It was not until after Lucullus' invasion in the spring of 69 BCE that Tigranes finally gave in to the pleas of his wife, met with Mithridates, and signed a military alliance against Rome. By this time, it was too late to reform Tigranes' army and his military approach. Lucullus wisely struck at the heart of Tigranes' empire and the physical symbol of his imperialist rule, Tigranocerta. This forced Tigranes to respond immediately and forcefully. Despite the last minute warnings of Mithridates, Tigranes was confident in his military record and had little choice but to force Lucullus into a decisive showdown.

Generally, scholars have unfortunately favored Plutarch's pro-Roman reconstruction of events in 69 BCE and have mistakenly argued that Tigranes met with Mithridates before Lucullus' invasion.<sup>329</sup> However, we should favor Appian and Memnon's more balanced and inclusive accounts, which indicate that Tigranes met with Mithridates after Lucullus' invasion.

Let us first consider the failings of Plutarch's account. He writes,

Up to this time [that is, the departure of Appius], Tigranes had not deigned to see Mithridates, nor speak to him, though the man was allied to him by marriage, and had been expelled from such a great kingdom. Instead, he had kept him at the farthest remove possible, in disgrace and harsh treatment, and had suffered him to be held a sort of prisoner in marshy and sickly regions. Now, however, he summoned him to his palace with marks of esteem and friendship. There, in secret conference, they strove to allay their mutual suspicions at the expense of their friends, by laying the blame upon them.<sup>330</sup>

Both Appian and Memnon, who follow less pro-Roman sources from Asia Minor, contradict Plutarch's account of Mithridates' isolation.<sup>331</sup> In their accounts, although Tigranes kept

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<sup>329</sup> Plutarch distorts his of Tigranes and Lucullus to make the former look weak and the latter look strong. Unlike Appian and Memnon, Plutarch also leaves out some evidence of Roman failures during Lucullus' invasion to portray Rome more favorably. See Manandyan 2007: 80-3. The mistaken scholarly tradition that Tigranes met with Mithridates prior to Lucullus' invasion remains the favored position. See Mayor 2010: 296-7.

<sup>330</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 22.1-2

<sup>331</sup> Manandyan 2007: 82.

Mithridates at a distance, he treated his father-in-law with grace and dignity.<sup>332</sup> Moreover, the details of Plutarch's secret meeting between the two kings appear fictitious. Plutarch depicts the kings as suspicious, cruel, and devious in order to discredit and defame the enemies of Rome.<sup>333</sup> He criticizes Mithridates for executing his envoy Metrodorus because of this meeting; however, Strabo demonstrates that Metrodorus died in 71 BCE, not 69 BCE.<sup>334</sup> Plutarch's account tries to denigrate the kings, who he claims desired to attack the Romans "before war was actually declared."<sup>335</sup> Plutarch again protects the reputation of Lucullus by portraying Mithridates and Tigranes as war hungry despots.

Appian and Memnon's accounts lack this bias. In fact, Appian says nothing of a secret meeting. Appian records,

With the rest of his army, Tigranes marched against Lucullus [near Tigranocerta]. Mithridates, who was now for the first time admitted to his presence, advised him not to come to close quarters with the Romans, but to circle around them with his horse only, to devastate the country, and reduce them by famine if possible, in the same way that he had been served by Lucullus at Cyzicus, where he lost his army without fighting.<sup>336</sup>

Appian's account is clear. Mithridates did not meet with Tigranes until after Lucullus neared Tigranocerta. Meanwhile, Memnon states,

Mithridates had stayed in the region of Armenia for a year and eight months, and still had not come into the presence of Tigranes. Then Tigranes felt obliged to grant him an audience; he met him in a splendid parade and gave him a royal welcome. After they had spent three days in secret talks, Tigranes entertained Mithridates at a magnificent banquet, and sent him back to Pontus with 10,000 cavalymen. Advancing through Cappadocia, whose ruler Ariobarzanes was his ally, Lucullus unexpectedly crossed the river Euphrates and brought his army up to the city in which he had heard that Tigranes kept his concubines, along with many valuable possessions. Lucullus also sent a detachment of his men to besiege

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<sup>332</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 12.82; Memnon 31

<sup>333</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 22.2-5

<sup>334</sup> Strabo 13.1.55

<sup>335</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 23.7

<sup>336</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 12.85

Tigranocerta, and another force to attack the other important settlements. When in this way Armenia was under siege from many sides, Tigranes sent word summoning Mithridates (Οὕτω δὲ τῆς Ἀρμενίας κατὰ πολλὰ μέρη πολιορκουμένης ἔπεμπε Τιγράνης ἀνακαλῶν Μιθριδάτην). He also sent an army to the city in which his concubines were kept. When this army arrived at the city, the archers prevented the Romans from leaving their camp and they sent away the concubines and the most valuable items during the night. But at daybreak the Romans and Thracians attacked bravely, and there was a widespread slaughter of the Armenians. The number of Armenians captured was no less than the number killed; but the convoy which they had sent ahead reached Tigranes safely. Tigranes collected an army of 80,000 men and went down to Tigranocerta, in order to lift the siege and drive away the enemy.<sup>337</sup>

Memnon's account is more ambiguous than Appian's because it shares some elements of Plutarch's account. Memnon too records that the kings met secretly for three days. Yet, while Plutarch makes it seem as though the meeting was a small affair aimed at creating a secret combined invasion of Anatolia, Memnon records that the meeting was a large public spectacle that allowed Mithridates to begin marching north to Pontus with 10,000 cavalry. Plutarch's account of a small and secretive meeting fits a pre-war environment far more than Memnon's account of a large public display of friendship and military aid.

Although Memnon's narrative seems to support the argument that Mithridates and Tigranes met before Lucullus' invasion because his discussion of the meeting proceeds his discussion of the invasion in the passage, Memnon states the timetable plainly in the first sentence. We know that Mithridates fled to Armenia in summer/fall of 71 BCE, and therefore, twenty months later he finally met with Tigranes in late spring/summer 69 BCE: that is, right after Lucullus had begun his invasion of Sophene.<sup>338</sup> The timing of the meeting in late

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<sup>337</sup> Memnon 38.1-4. I altered this translation to reflect the Greek more accurately.

<sup>338</sup> Reinach 1890: 348; Manandyan 2007: 83. Unfortunately, scholars still appear to prefer Plutarch's less reliable account of this meeting. Thus, Mayor speculates that Appian's insults "spurred Tigranes to meet personally with his father-in-law" in a secret three day meeting. Mayor 2010: 296.

spring/summer 69 BCE after Lucullus' invasion makes the large public display of friendship between Tigranes and Mithridates more appropriate and explains why Tigranes suddenly gave Mithridates a large force of cavalry.

In the early spring of 69 BCE, Lucullus marched through Cappadocia and crossed the Euphrates into Sophene on his way to Tigranocerta.<sup>339</sup> At this same time, Tigranes was continuing his campaign in southern Phoenicia. When he heard of Lucullus' advance upon Armenia, Tigranes sent Mithrobarzanes with 2,000 cavalry to slow Lucullus' advance and "returned home."<sup>340</sup> It was during his return to Armenia that he finally summoned Mithridates and agreed to a military alliance against Rome. It is highly unlikely that Mithridates met with Tigranes in Phoenicia in 70/69 BCE and then returned to Armenia with an army. Plutarch insists that Tigranes and Mithridates together planned to invade Roman Cilicia and Lyconia, which was only possible to accomplish through Syria since a more northerly route had to advance through Roman held Cappadocia. However, Memnon clearly states that Mithridates took command of a large cavalry force and returned to Armenia in order to invade Pontus in the north.

Since Plutarch, Appian, and Memnon agree, first, that Mithridates was not present at Tigranocerta, second, that Mithridates came to Tigranes' rescue from the north, and, third, that the two kings retreated into northern Armenia, Plutarch's claim that Mithridates and Tigranes met before Lucullus' invasion to plan a secret invasion of Roman Cilicia is even more nonsensical.<sup>341</sup> Instead, after Lucullus invaded in early 69 BCE, Tigranes sent a force of cavalry to delay the Roman advance and travelled north to consolidate his army. At this time, Tigranes abandoned his failed policy of keeping Mithridates at a distance and, instead, invited him to a

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<sup>339</sup> Sall. *Hist.* 4.60; Memnon 38.2

<sup>340</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 12.84; Jos. *Ant.* 13.421

<sup>341</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 28-9; Appian *Mithr.* 12.85-6, 13.87; Memnon 38

meeting. At this meeting the two kings forged their first military alliance against Rome with a public display of friendship. They then met in private for three days to discuss a strategy to defeat Lucullus. After the meeting Tigranes gave Mithridates a large cavalry force, illustrating to everyone the new military alliance Armenia had with Pontus against Rome, and Mithridates headed north.<sup>342</sup>

The composition of Mithridates' force and his movement north suggests that a fundamental aspect of their strategy was to open a second front against Lucullus by means of Mithridates quickly invading Pontus in the north, something Mithridates later accomplished successfully.<sup>343</sup> Perhaps the two kings initially hoped that, faced with Tigranes in the south and Mithridates' northern expedition, Lucullus would realize his vulnerability and retreat back to Cappadocia. However, when Lucullus refused to retreat and settled into the siege of Tigranocerta, Tigranes settled on forcing a climactic battle for control of his imperial capital. He then recalled Mithridates to consolidate his forces for the decisive battle.

It is possible that Tigranes initially hoped to use Mithridates' cavalry to harass Lucullus' supply lines during the siege as Mithridates advised. After all, if we use Appian and Memnon's military figures as a model, Tigranes sent almost half of his cavalry north with Mithridates.<sup>344</sup> Yet without a clear understanding of Mithridates' whereabouts and without this significant

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<sup>342</sup> Note that this was not "a national and religious struggle of a united East against the West" as Mommsen and Reinach argued. Such a conclusion is unrealistic and anachronistic. Most eastern peoples did not join Tigranes and Mithridates and ancient religion was too diverse to become a unifying motivation for war. See Manandyan 2007: 111-12.

<sup>343</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 13.88

<sup>344</sup> Appian argues that 1/6<sup>th</sup> of Tigranes' army was cavalry. Appian *Mithr.* 12.85. Memnon argues that he had 80,000 men at the battle. Memnon 38.4. Therefore, Tigranes had around 13,000 cavalry at the battle, making the 10,000 cavalry he sent with Mithridates a significant portion of his total available cavalry forces (42.9%).

portion of his cavalry at hand, Tigranes settled on a conventional military engagement to force Lucullus away from his imperial capital and out of his country.

Unfortunately for Tigranes, the Battle of Tigranocerta was a total disaster that lost him his army, his capital, and the southern half of his empire. Tigranes, although in despair about his sudden reversal of fortune, found strength in his ally Mithridates, who arrived to the battle too late to come to his aid, and the two kings retreated into Armenia to raise a new army and continue the war.<sup>345</sup> Meanwhile, with the fall of Tigranocerta after a five-month siege, Lucullus wintered in Gordyene in 69/68 BCE.<sup>346</sup> With the rapid decline of Armenian power and the sudden emergence of Rome as the dominant force in the Near East in 69 BCE, the middling and minor states in the region began to bandwagon with the Romans against Armenia and accepted Roman hegemony. Moreover, Lucullus' successful invasion introduced the second phase of system overlap between the Mediterranean and Eastern systems. For only the second time, the territory of Roman vassal kings neighbored the lands of the Parthian Empire. Tension between Rome and Parthia began once more to mount almost immediately as the expansion of the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system and its extensive overlap with the Eastern system made the international environment of the Near East even more complicated and confused. Rome and Parthia for the first time in two and a half decades engaged in diplomatic relations with similarly difficult and muddled results. The major difference in their interaction this time was the reversal in the circumstances and roles of Rome and Parthia. Parthia now had to react to the expansion of Rome into territories it considered off-limits to foreign meddling.

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<sup>345</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 29; Appian *Mithr.* 13.87; Memnon 38

<sup>346</sup> See Manandyan 2007: 101-5.



In the middle 90s BCE, Parthia had been the rapidly expanding power pushing the limits of its interstate system westward. After one of Parthia's vassal kings, Tigranes, had interfered in Cappadocia, a region the Romans considered under their hegemony, Rome reacted by sending Sulla to stabilize the region. Parthia and Armenia had not realized the geopolitical implications of Tigranes' actions in Cappadocia, and therefore, Mithridates II sent an envoy to negotiate with Ariobarzanes and establish the first diplomatic contact with the Romans. As discussed in detail in this study, the meeting was an awkward and confused mess as Sulla attempted unsuccessfully to mediate a meeting between Mithridates II's representative and the client king of Rome, Ariobarzanes. This certainly in part was a result of the unfamiliarity present between the two powers; however, a completely different understanding of the realities of the international environment in the Near East at this time was a major factor. Both Rome and Parthia considered themselves system hegemonies, and they had come to share hegemonic interests over a section of the Near East because of Mithridates' successful westward advances. Thus, the first phase of system overlap between the Mediterranean and Eastern systems created tension and misunderstanding in the first diplomatic exchanges between Rome and Parthia.

Yet the rise of Pontus within the Mediterranean system and Armenia within the Eastern system as potential hegemonic powers garnered the attention of Rome and Parthia in the 80s and 70s BCE. Therefore, there was no contact between these two powers during this time. However, once Rome defeated Mithridates and went to war with Tigranes, the Romans found themselves in a position similar to the one in which the Parthians found themselves twenty-five years before. Not only had Lucullus' successful expedition brought the coast of the Eastern Mediterranean back under Roman hegemony, it also expanded the limits of the Mediterranean system to include southern Armenia and northern Mesopotamia. The second phase of system overlap renewed and

inflamed the tension and misunderstanding found in Rome and Parthia's relations. Further, not only had Lucullus' invasion expanded the limits of the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system and extended the tensions of system overlap over a much larger area, it had unknowingly helped dismantle the system of bipolarity in the East between Armenia and Parthia. With the sudden decline of the Armenian Empire, Parthia became the *de facto* leading power in the Eastern system. The diplomatic exchanges between Parthia and Rome, Armenia, and Pontus in the 60s BCE reflect the new geopolitical realities of the second phase of system overlap and the sudden dismantling of bipolarity in the Eastern system by an outside power.

After the defeat at Tigranocerta, Tigranes and Mithridates desperately worked to replenish their resources and rebuild their strength. Although much of Armenia had not felt the ravages of war, allowing the kings to recruit another large army quickly, they sent envoys to Parthia in early 68 BCE asking for aid and a military alliance against the Romans.<sup>347</sup> Meanwhile, fresh off his victory at Tigranocerta, Lucullus, as he had done in Pontus previously, looked to subdue the remaining fortresses in the area loyal to Tigranes.<sup>348</sup> He too decided to send envoys to Parthia in early to middle 68 BCE.<sup>349</sup>

Let us consider the various accounts of these envoys from Tigranes, Mithridates, and Lucullus to Parthia in 68 BCE. Memnon states, "Tigranes himself sent an embassy to the

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<sup>347</sup> Appian records that the kings recruited over 100,000 men. Appian *Mithr.* 13.87

<sup>348</sup> Lucullus ravaged the countryside and besieged Samosata and Nisibis. Dio 36.4-8; Plut. *Luc.* 30.2-4, 32.3-5; Eutrop. 6.9; Ruf. Fest. 14.1, 15.3; Orosius 6.3. Note Munro 1901: 62; Mayor 2010: 302-3. It is unclear whether Lucullus threatened Adiabene in early or late 68 BCE. Late in 68 BCE after the fall of Nisibis seems more plausible. I agree with Sherwin-White's conclusion that Lucullus' aggression against Adiabene was meant as a direct threat to Armenia, since the region was a part of Tigranes' empire, and at most an indirect threat to Parthia. Sherwin-White 1984: 181-3.

<sup>349</sup> Dio records that a harsh winter forced Lucullus to begin his campaign at the "height" of summer, before which time he would have sent his envoy to Parthia. Dio 36.4. For a recent evaluation of Lucullus' interaction with the Parthians, note Lerouge 2007: 51-8.

Parthian Phradates (Φραδάτην), offering to yield Mesopotamia, Adiabene, and the Great Valleys (Μεγάλους Αὐλῶνας) to him. At the same time envoys from Lucullus approached the Parthian [king], who privately pretended to the Romans that he was their friend and ally (σύμμαχος), and privately entered into a similar agreement with the Armenians.”<sup>350</sup> Memnon is the only writer who offers the details of Tigranes’ letter to Parthia. In 68 BCE, Armenia and Parthia remained at peace according to the treaty signed between Tigranes and Orodes I in 80 BCE and renewed by Arsaces XVI in 75 BCE. However, this was an alliance of convenience between two former foes and carried with it no military stipulations.<sup>351</sup> Orodes and Arsaces XVI had been willing to put aside their rivalry with Armenia to concentrate on the civil wars in Parthia. They needed to consolidate Parthian power before hoping to challenge Tigranes. The Parthians understood that eventually they would need to reclaim their lost lands at the expense of Armenia to reestablish unipolarity in the Eastern system. Yet they were not ready to do so in the early 60s BCE. When Lucullus invaded Tigranes’ empire and defeated him decisively, this created a complex and delicate political and diplomatic situation for the Parthians.

When we last left Parthia, Arsaces XVI was fighting an on again, off again civil war in the Farther East against his cousin, Sinatruces. In ca. 77 BCE Sinatruces had renewed his war for the Parthian throne with the help of Sakae nomadic allies.<sup>352</sup> Although Arsaces XVI retained

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<sup>350</sup> Memnon 38.8. I altered this translation to reflect the Greek more accurately.

<sup>351</sup> That is, this was an alliance only in name. Tigranes never sent Orodes or Arsaces XVI military aid, even though the two kings needed support in 80, 77, 75, and 70 BCE. Meanwhile, Arsaces XVI did nothing to aid Tigranes militarily or even to intervene on his behalf when Lucullus invaded. More on this below.

<sup>352</sup> “Sinatruces, king of Parthia, was restored to his country in his eightieth year by the Sacauracian Scyths, assumed the throne and held it seven years.” Lucian *Macr.* 15. Note the Babylonian cuneiform record that makes a vague passing reference in 73 BCE to the movement of nomads, namely the Guti, in the Farther East. Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -72; Assar 2006d: 84.

control of the mints in Babylonia and Susiana and effectively curbed the intermittent raiding of Sinatruces into the eastern lands of the empire until Sinatruces' death in 69/68 BCE, Sinatruces' son, Phraates III, took on his father's cause with greater vigor and success.<sup>353</sup> For the first time since 75 BCE, the Babylonian colophons made a distinction between two rival Parthian candidates in 68 BCE, as Phraates began a successful invasion of Parthia proper and Media.<sup>354</sup> Until recently, scholars maintained that the envoys from Pontus, Armenia, and Rome addressed Phraates; however, a new interpretation of the surviving material record contends that Phraates remained in the Farther East in 68 BCE and did not take control of the western territories of the Parthian Empire until 67/66 BCE.<sup>355</sup> Therefore, it is likely that the envoys addressed Arsaces XVI at the height of another civil war instead of Phraates III.<sup>356</sup>

Yet this conclusion makes Memnon's confused insistence that Tigranes' envoys met with the Parthian "Phradates" a bit awkward.<sup>357</sup> All of our other accounts simply refer to the Parthian king as Arsaces, as was normal. Meanwhile, scholars have associated this Phradates with

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<sup>353</sup> There was no break in the Seleucia tetradrachms or Susian bronzes at this time, nor is there any indication that the Babylonian records referred to Arsaces XVI or his queen by specific name until 69/68 BCE. See Assar 2006d: 85. For the role of the mint at Seleucia under the Parthians, especially during the early first century CE, see Gregoratti 2012a.

<sup>354</sup> See Neugebauer 1955a: pl. 225, pl. 239; id. 1955b: pl. 225, pl. 239; Walker 1972: pl. 31, no. 93; McEwan 1986: 93; Del Monte 1997: 256; Assar 2006d: 85.

<sup>355</sup> Assar, like many before him, originally assigned the tablets mentioning Queen Piruztana to Phraates III. Assar 2000: 18-20. However, Phraates now should be associated with Queen Ishtar, his mother, in Parthia in 68/67 BCE, and therefore, he did not enter Babylonia until 67/66 BCE. Id. 2006d: 85-8.

<sup>356</sup> Dio records that Phraates III became the new Parthian king in 66 BCE. Dio 36.45.3. This is further evidence that Arsaces XVI received the Armenian and Roman envoys in Mesopotamia. Although Dio supports the above reconstruction of Arsaces and Phraates' reigns, he understandably misrepresents Phraates' successful occupation of Mesopotamia with the death of Arsaces. Numismatic evidence illustrates that Arsaces fled to the East, where he continued the war until 62/61 BCE. See Assar 2006d: 87, 91-3. Yet scholars still assume that Phraates III accepted these embassies. Shayegan 2011: 320-1.

<sup>357</sup> Assar mentions all of the accounts of the envoys to Parthia except Memnon's, which is the greatest evidence against his conclusion. Assar 2006d: Id. 85.

Phraates III, and there is little reason to doubt that this was whom Memnon meant. Therefore, it is possible that Memnon simply was mistaken about who was the Parthian king at this time. Moreover, it is possible that the dynastic struggle between Arsaces XVI and Phraates confused Memnon and led him to mix up the kings. Finally, it is also possible that Memnon offers evidence of a separate Armenian embassy to Phraates while he was fighting Arsaces XVI's forces in the East.

In 68 BCE Tigranes would have been aware of the civil war between Arsaces XVI and Phraates III and of Phraates' recent occupation of Parthia proper. Tigranes was reeling after Lucullus' invasion and in need of new allies. Moreover, he still had access to Parthia proper through the lands he controlled in Media Atropatene. It is possible that Tigranes, who did not know which Parthian candidate would secure the throne, simply decided to double his chances by negotiating with both men. If he in fact negotiated with both Parthian candidates, it is likely that his terms were similar. In exchange for a military alliance against Rome, Tigranes was willing to return the lands he had annexed from the Parthian Empire during the hegemonic war in the 80s BCE. That is, he offered to surrender Osrhoene, Mygdonia, Gordyene, Adiabene, and the "Great Valleys," which likely were the seventy valleys he had once given to Parthia as a sign of submission.<sup>358</sup> Thus, although he was not offering to become a Parthian vassal once more, Tigranes was willing to submit to Parthia and to acknowledge it as the superior power in the Eastern system. By returning the lands he had seized from the Parthians, Tigranes was hoping to smooth over relations with them and satisfy their desires for revenge. Tigranes, backed by Mithridates, was willing to make these considerable concessions because he needed military aid and, more importantly, his vulnerability made a Parthian attack against his reduced kingdom a

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<sup>358</sup> See Debevoise 1938: 70; Manandyan 2007: 108.

major threat. Above all he needed to avoid a simultaneous war against Parthia while he fought Rome.<sup>359</sup>

Appian records a similar version of the diplomatic negotiations, stating, “They [Tigranes and Mithridates] also sent messengers to Parthia to solicit aid from that quarter. Lucullus sent opposing legates requesting (ἀξιούντος) that the Parthians should either become allies (συμμαχῆσαι) or remain neutral. Their king made secret agreements with both, but was in no haste to help either of them.”<sup>360</sup> Appian’s account mentions nothing of the terms of Tigranes’ envoy; however, he adds some details to the diplomatic exchange. He illustrates that Mithridates too was involved in seeking Parthian aid on behalf of Armenia. Further, he records the terms of Lucullus’ envoy. Yet there are troubling similarities between Memnon and Appian’s accounts that cast doubt on the validity of their conclusions and that do not reflect geopolitical realities at this time.

Despite Memnon and Appian’s claims, there is no evidence that either Parthian candidate accepted Tigranes’ terms of alliance. In fact, the Parthians had numerous reasons for ignoring Tigranes’ call to arms against Rome. First, the primary focus of Arsaces XVI and Phraates III was the Parthian civil war. Neither man could risk fighting in a foreign war before securing the throne. Second, because of recent geopolitical developments in the Eastern system the Parthians considered Armenia a more immediate threat to state security than Rome. It is probable that the Parthians believed Lucullus would accomplish his immediate military and diplomatic objectives and then return to Rome as Sulla had done. The destruction of Armenian power at no cost to

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<sup>359</sup> Manandyan argues that Tigranes was surprised that the Parthians did not side with Rome and that Tigranes viewed Parthian neutrality with “great satisfaction.” Manandyan 2007: 108-10.

<sup>360</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 13.87. I altered this translation to reflect the Greek more accurately.

Parthia was beneficial to the Parthians.<sup>361</sup> Since there was little concern about the Romans remaining in the region, the Parthians viewed a military alliance against Rome unfavorably. Third, as Dio observed, the Parthians anticipated that the powers of Rome and Armenia would balance against one another and hoped that by remaining neutral they could consolidate their strength while Rome and Armenia became weaker.<sup>362</sup> Fourth, in addition to the more immediate threat that Armenia posed to Parthia, Tigranes was a high-profile rival of the Parthian king. Tigranes had defeated Parthian armies, seized Parthian lands, and usurped the Parthian title of “King of Kings.” The recent treaties between Parthia and Armenia had been agreements of convenience, and now that Armenia was weakened, a military alliance with Tigranes was unappealing. Finally, although Tigranes offered to hand over the lands he had taken from the Parthians, such a proposal was dishonorable to the Parthians. Tigranes had seized these lands by force in a successful hegemonic war against Parthia. His rebellion and subsequent conquests demanded Parthian retaliation. It was not enough that Tigranes would return conquered lands; Tigranes had to be punished by the force of Parthian arms. The Parthians did not want to accept Tigranes as a Parthian military ally; they wanted to return him to the role of a submissive Parthian vassal. Although Tigranes was vulnerable and desperate in 68 BCE, he did not offer to return to his vassal status and still attempted to dictate terms to the Parthians. Neither Arsaces XVI nor Phraates III could accept Tigranes’ terms of alliance because it would have been a final recognition of Armenian legitimacy as an independent rival state and would have forgiven Tigranes’ past transgressions against Parthia. In order to reclaim the power and prestige of the

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<sup>361</sup> Note Shayegan 2011: 328-9.

<sup>362</sup> Dio 36.3.3. Discussed more below. Plutarch also discusses how the conflict between Rome and Armenia allowed the Parthians to recover their strength and later to defeat Rome. See Plut. *Luc.* 36.5-6

Parthian state as the hegemon of the East, the Parthians had to recover their lost lands and establish their superiority over Armenia by force.

Yet despite the impossibility of there being a Parthian military alliance with Armenia in 68 BCE, both Memnon and Appian erroneously maintain that the Parthians entered into separate duplicitous agreements with Armenia and Rome. This is a result, first, of Memnon and Appian misrepresenting the Parthians' decision to stay on "friendly" terms with both powers, while remaining neutral in the conflict, as new "alliances" and, second, of ancient Graeco-Roman prejudice against eastern peoples. As Dio emphasizes, the Parthians chose to remain neutral. Since neither the Armenians nor the Romans could afford to have the Parthians commit militarily one way or the other and since neither Tigranes nor Lucullus trusted one another or the Parthian king, it is reasonable to assume that the Parthians made separate agreements with both sides confirming their neutrality. Moreover, Memnon and Appian's portrayal of the Parthians as dishonest and corrupt actors follows in a long tradition of ancient Greeks and Romans using literary stereotypes and tropes to describe easterners as secretive and deceitful.<sup>363</sup> Therefore, we must reject Memnon and Appian's claims that a "new" military arrangement with Armenia emerged in 68 BCE. Memnon and Appian here misunderstand the negotiations of 68 BCE and the peace treaty already in place between Armenia and Parthia. That is, the Parthians declined Tigranes' gestures for a military alliance against Rome and, instead, maintained the previous agreement of peace between Parthia and Armenia, while agreeing to stay neutral in the Mithridatic War.

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<sup>363</sup> The Greeks and Romans viewed the Parthians as a mixture between the Scythians and Persians. Thus, they were fiercer than the Persians were but suffered from eastern duplicity. See esp. Isaac 2006: Chs. 4-5, 8. Note also Gregoratti 2015: 203-4. Note also the depiction of Crassus' encounter with the Parthian general, Surena. Plut. *Crass.* 30-3; Polyæn. 7.41



Meanwhile, the tradition that Parthia and Rome agreed upon an alliance or even an official treaty at this time is equally erroneous.<sup>364</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, no treaty or territorial agreement between Rome and Parthia emerged out of the discussions between Sulla and Orobasus. We must apply similar scrutiny to the position that Lucullus and the Parthian king formed a formal treaty and possible alliance between Rome and Parthia in 68 BCE.

Memnon and Appian's accounts of a vague agreement between Lucullus and the Parthian king do not inspire confidence. Plutarch's less reliable account also lacks detail. He states, "Here he [Lucullus] received an embassy from the king of the Parthians also, inviting him into friendship (φιλίαν) and alliance (συμμαχίαν). This was agreeable to Lucullus, and in his turn he sent ambassadors to the Parthian, but they discovered that he was playing a double game, and secretly asking for Mesopotamia as reward for an alliance with Tigranes."<sup>365</sup> Plutarch, whose prime literary goal was to portray Lucullus heroically, here distorts the accounts of Memnon and Appian even further by suggesting that the Parthians actively sought a Roman alliance from Lucullus and Mesopotamia from Tigranes. Unlike Memnon and Appian, Plutarch portrays the Parthians in a position of weakness. We should reject Plutarch's unrealistic and biased account of the diplomatic exchanges in 68 BCE; however, he too touches on the idea of Rome and Parthia becoming allies at this time.

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<sup>364</sup> For example, Keaveney incorrectly argues that Lucullus renewed Sulla's treaty with Phraates III. Keaveney 1981: 200-2. Note also Shayegan 2011: 320-1 n.947. Meanwhile, in a recent study of Roman and Parthian relations, Sheldon accepts without hesitation the now highly controversial and unlikely stance that Lucullus renewed the alleged agreement that Sulla had made with Parthia. She then oddly maintains that Lucullus and Phraates made an unspecified second treaty in 68 BCE. Sheldon 2010: 17. This scholarly tradition based upon the dubious anachronistic tradition of later ancient writers heavily distorts our understanding of Roman and Parthian relations in the first century BCE. It ignores that there is no convincing evidence that Sulla or Lucullus secured an official treaty with Parthia and overlooks that Lucullus never interacted with Phraates III.

<sup>365</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 30.1

Despite Memnon, Appian, and Plutarch's much later distorted accounts, there is no real evidence that Lucullus and Arsaces XVI recognized an official treaty or alliance between Rome and Parthia that established the Euphrates as a boundary between their spheres of influence. The Roman Senate ratified no such treaty, and the contexts of the diplomatic discussions in 68 BCE make a treaty highly improbable. The Parthians had no desire to become involved in a war against Rome and only wished to placate the Romans until they once again left the East.

Ultimately, the Roman tradition of a Roman and Parthian alliance at this time is confused and anachronistic.<sup>366</sup> Each of these authors wrote around the early second century CE, when Trajan's aggressive war against the Parthians drastically altered the cold war atmosphere that had been in place between Rome and Parthia for several decades. Their concept of the international environment was quite different from the realities of the international environment in the first half of the first century BCE. Their understanding of Roman and Parthian relations was that of a longstanding rivalry between Rome and Parthia focused on the regions of the Near East. There was no hesitation on their part to project the conflicts between Rome and Parthia during the late Republic and early Principate back upon the early and middle first century BCE. The tentative cold war geopolitical arrangements between Augustan Rome and Parthia became a false reality through which later Roman writers viewed the early contact and conflict between these two super powers. Therefore, a dubious tradition about Sulla, Lucullus, and later Pompey establishing official treaties and territorial boundaries with Parthia slowly emerged and was

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<sup>366</sup> For example, Florus ignores the tradition that Lucullus signed a treaty with Parthia in favor of the tradition that Sulla and Pompey formed treaties. He records, "When Crassus had pitched his camp at Nicephorium, ambassadors arrived from King Orodes with a message bidding him remember the treaties made with Pompeius and Sulla." Florus 1.46.4. Meanwhile, Festus implies that only one treaty "was initiated with the Parthians" under Pompey. Ruf. Fest. 3. Finally, Eusebius only records a treaty between the Romans and the Parthians during Augustus' reign. Eus. *Chron.* Book 2

perpetuated for centuries.<sup>367</sup> For example, Orosius writing in the early fifth century CE disseminated this anachronistic tradition further when he connected Crassus' invasion of Parthia directly to the alleged treaties of Lucullus and Pompey.<sup>368</sup> The inability to conceptualize the existence of an international environment prior to the invasion of Crassus where Rome and Parthia acted within separate interstate systems is a failing of our later sources and of many modern historians. We cannot fully appreciate the early diplomatic relations of Rome and Parthia without recognizing the separate approach these two powers maintained toward the geopolitical developments in the Near East in the first half of the first century BCE. Neither Rome nor Parthia agreed to territorial limitations of their hegemony in 94 or 68 BCE. No official treaty emerged in 68 BCE, and Lucullus and Arsaces XVI did not forge a military alliance at this time.

Although they are untrustworthy on their own, Memnon, Appian, and Plutarch's accounts together provide clues to the actual diplomatic interaction between Lucullus and the Parthian king. Tigranes and Mithridates tried to satisfy Parthian anger toward Armenia by offering to return the lands Tigranes had conquered to the Parthians in exchange for a military alliance. After Lucullus received word that Tigranes and Mithridates were attempting to gain Parthian support against him, he quickly sent an envoy to secure Parthian friendship and neutrality. Although Tigranes offered large concessions to the Parthians, the Parthian civil war made Parthian participation in an outside conflict extremely difficult. The vulnerable Parthian king, likely Arsaces XVI, decided that he could not afford a western war while he was fighting

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<sup>367</sup> Arthur Keaveney especially champions this unreliable tradition and accepts the tradition without question. Keaveney 1981. Keaveney's confidence in the reliability of the confused tradition stems in part from his total Roman-centric perspective of these events. He views the Parthians as passive bystanders instead of active participants with separate geopolitical concerns.

<sup>368</sup> Orosius 6.13.2. Dio also mistakenly infers that Lucullus agreed to the Euphrates as the border between the two empires. Dio 37.5-6

Phraates III in the East. Therefore, he chose to maintain the peace treaty with Armenia and to establish friendly, yet distant relations with Rome.

However, before Lucullus and the Parthian king ultimately agreed to an informal relationship between Rome and Parthia of friendly neutrality during the war against Tigranes, Lucullus, who could not simply ignore the potential threat that Parthia posed to his invasion of northern Mesopotamia and Armenia, prepared to fight the Parthians. Plutarch states,

Accordingly, when Lucullus was apprised of this [that is, Parthian negotiations with Armenia], he determined to ignore Tigranes and Mithridates as exhausted antagonists, and to make trial of the Parthian power by marching against them, thinking it a glorious thing, in a single impetuous onset of war, to throw, like an athlete, three kings in succession, and to make his way, unvanquished and victorious, through three of the greatest empires under the sun. Accordingly he sent orders to Sornatius and his fellow commanders in Pontus to bring the army there to him, as he intended to proceed eastward from Gordyene. These officers had already found their soldiers unmanageable and disobedient, but now they discovered that they were utterly beyond control, being unable to move them by any manner of persuasion or compulsion. Nay, they roundly swore that they would not even stay where they were, but would go off and leave Pontus undefended. When news of this was brought to Lucullus, it demoralized his soldiers there also. Their wealth and luxurious life had already made them averse to military service and desirous of leisure, and when they heard of the bold words of their comrades in Pontus, they called them brave men, and said their example must be followed in Gordyene, for their many achievements entitled them to respite from toil and freedom from danger. Such speeches, and even worse than these, coming to the ears of Lucullus, he gave up his expedition against the Parthians, and marched once more against Tigranes, it being now the height of summer.<sup>369</sup>

Our other main sources for this period are silent on Lucullus' military preparations against Parthia.<sup>370</sup> Although it is too bold to claim that this account is "obviously an invention" of Plutarch to glorify Lucullus yet again, it is extremely doubtful that Lucullus actually desired an

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<sup>369</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 30.2-31.1

<sup>370</sup> Only the much later and less reliable works of Eutropius and Rufus Festus briefly support Plutarch. Eutrop. 6.9; Ruf. Fest. 15

invasion of Parthia.<sup>371</sup> Rather, Plutarch in his usual flowery and exaggerated style hints at a reality facing Lucullus in 68 BCE. With news of Tigranes negotiating with Parthia, Lucullus had to prepare for a possible Parthian attack. If Parthia signed a treaty, regained Mesopotamia, and joined the war against him, he would face hostile forces to his north, south, and east. This was a serious threat that required immediate action, and therefore, he called upon his reserves in Pontus to march with haste to his aid. His mutinous troops in Pontus refused, not because they thought Lucullus was starting another unnecessary war for glory in the East, but because they had no desire to go fight and die defending Mesopotamia against such a dangerous potential coalition of eastern kings. However, once the Parthians showed no interest in involving themselves in the conflict and agreed to neutrality, Lucullus and his men quickly shifted their concern back to Tigranes and Mithridates in Armenia.<sup>372</sup>

Rome and Parthia had separate geopolitical concerns in 68 BCE, and therefore, the Parthians conducted separate negotiations with Armenia and Rome. Although the later Roman sources interpreted this as Parthian duplicity, the Parthians were not trying to conduct secret negotiations to be deceitful or to challenge Rome. Rather, they saw no issue in maintaining their peace with Armenia and establishing a friendly but distant relationship with Rome. The considerable confusion we find in the sources and in their accounts of Parthian relations with Rome and Armenia at this time stem in part from the consequences of Lucullus' military success against Armenia, which caused the second phase of system overlap between the Mediterranean and Eastern systems. That is, the bounds of the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system expanded eastward and indirectly caused another awkward diplomatic exchange between Rome

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<sup>371</sup> Manandan 2007: 106.

<sup>372</sup> Unfortunately, scholars still give credence to Plutarch's exaggerations. Mayor 2010: 302-3, 306.

and Parthia. Again, in terms of Rome's relationship with Parthia, nothing of significance came of this exchange. When Lucullus was satisfied that the Parthians were not going to aid Tigranes militarily, he gladly accepted friendly relations with the Parthians, ended his communication with them, and focused on invading Armenia.

Two other ancient historians, Dio and Sallust, provide further details about diplomatic negotiations in 68 BCE worth discussing. Dio writes,

These two rulers [Tigranes and Mithridates], accordingly, not only set about making preparations themselves, as if they were then for the first time beginning the war, but also sent embassies to their various neighbors, including Arsaces the Parthian, although he was hostile to Tigranes on account of some disputed territory. This they offered to yield to him, and they also went maligning the Romans, declaring that the latter, in case they conquered their present antagonists [that is, Tigranes and Mithridates] while these were left to fight single-handed, would immediately make a campaign against him. For every victorious force was inherently insatiate of success and set no bound to its greed; and the Romans, who had won the mastery over many, would not choose to leave him alone.<sup>373</sup>

Dio provides evidence that the Parthian king was still hostile toward Tigranes in 68 BCE because of the Armeno-Parthian war. He proves that the peace was an arrangement of temporary necessity for the Parthians and that the Parthian king viewed Tigranes as a hostile rival. Even when Tigranes offered to yield the disputed territories, the Parthians were uninterested because punishing Tigranes and subduing Armenia remained important. Additionally, Dio emphasizes the realities of fluctuating power relations and endemic conflict in the ancient world. Tigranes and Mithridates underlined the importance of balance of power; they warned the Parthians that a victorious Rome would be a threat to Parthia; and they reminded the Parthians that the expansion of power and military victory encourages further conflict with neighboring states.

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<sup>373</sup> Dio 36.1

Sallust's reproduction of the letter Mithridates sent to the Parthian king in 68 BCE is uniquely important because of its close proximity to these events and because of its similar emphasis on the same realities of interstate anarchy.<sup>374</sup> Sallust records,

King Mithridates, to King Arsaces, Greetings. All those who in the time of their prosperity are asked to form an offensive alliance ought to consider, first, whether it is possible for them to keep peace at that time; and secondly, whether what is asked of them is wholly right and safe, honorable or dishonorable. If it were possible for you to enjoy lasting peace, if no treacherous foes were near your borders, if to crush the Roman power would not bring you glorious fame, I should not venture to sue for your alliance, and it would be vain for me to hope to unite my misfortunes with your prosperity.<sup>375</sup>

Mithridates began his letter discussing concerns of state security and the importance of a leader's reputation to international relations. He then explained that states in theory love perpetual peace; however, the reality is that uncertainty, aggression, and treachery make war necessary. He then stressed the fluidity of power dynamics in the ancient world by attaching his misfortunes to Roman power and Parthian prosperity. Mithridates' letter continues,

But the considerations which might seem to give you pause, such as the anger against Tigranes inspired in you by the recent war, and my lack of success, if you but consent to regard them in the right light, will be special incentives. For Tigranes is at your mercy and will accept an alliance on any terms which you may desire, while so far as I am concerned, although Fortune has deprived me of much, she has bestowed upon me the experience necessary for giving good advice; and since I am no longer at the height of my power, I shall serve as an example of how you may conduct your own affairs with more prudence, a lesson highly advantageous to the prosperous.<sup>376</sup>

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<sup>374</sup> For the debate over the authenticity of the letter and its composition, see Sanford 1937: 439-40; Raditsa 1969; McGing 1986: 84, 105, 154-62; Ahlheid 1988; Erciyas 2006: 27-8; Olbrycht 2009: 178; Baumgarten 2010: 93-5. Generally, scholars accept that the letter is at least based on the original. Pompey captured much of Mithridates' correspondence and official records and sent them back to Rome. Plut. *Pomp.* 37

<sup>375</sup> Sall. *Hist.* 4.67.1-2

<sup>376</sup> Id. 4.67.3-4.

Here Mithridates highlighted the ongoing tension between Tigranes and the Parthian king because of the hegemonic war in the 80s BCE. He understood the Parthians' anger but advised them to take advantage of Tigranes' current weakness. He again emphasized the fragility of power dynamics in the ancient world in his discussion of his failings and Tigranes' desperation. He urged the Parthians to capitalize on his experience, not only as a warrior against Rome, but also as a statesman to navigate the systemic pressures of the interstate system. The letter then states,

In fact, the Romans have one inveterate motive for making war upon all nations, peoples and kings; namely, a deep-seated desire for dominion and for riches. Therefore, they first began a war with Philippus [V], king of Macedonia, having pretended to be his friends as long as they were hard pressed by the Carthaginians. When Antiochus [III] came to his aid, they craftily diverted him from his purpose by the surrender of Asia, and then, after Philippus' power had been broken, Antiochus was robbed of all the territory this side of the Taurus, and of ten thousand talents. Next Perseus, the son of Philippus, after many battles with varying results, was formally taken under their protection before the gods of Samothrace; and then those masters of craft and artists in treachery caused his death from want of sleep, since they had made a compact not to kill him. Eumenes [II], whose friendship they boastfully parade, they first betrayed to Antiochus as the price of peace; later, having made him the guardian of a captured territory, they transformed him by means of imposts and insults from a king into the most wretched of slaves. Then, having forged an unnatural will, they led his [illegitimate] son Aristonicus [who took the royal name Eumenes III] in triumph like an enemy, because he had tried to recover his father's realm. They took possession of Asia, and finally, on the death of Nicomedes [IV], they seized upon all Bithynia, although Nysa, whom Nicomedes had called queen, unquestionably had a son.<sup>377</sup>

In this section, Mithridates listed the successful hegemonic wars of the Romans against Hellenistic kings and the spread of their imperium into the Near East. He filled his account with the vitriol and criticism of his anti-Roman propaganda; however, the underlying theme that the powerful do as they please and the weak suffer what they must

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<sup>377</sup> Id. 4.67.5-9.



is similar to messages found in Thucydides, Livy, and Dio.<sup>378</sup> He here emphasized the importance of state power and the delicate line between freedom and slavery in the ancient world. He provided a cautionary tale about the potential abuses found within a system of unipolarity. The letter continues,

Why should I mention my own case? Although I was separated from their empire on every side by kingdoms and tetrarchies, yet because it was reported that I was rich and that I would not be a slave, they provoked me to war through Nicomedes [IV]. And I was not unaware of their design, but I had previously given warning of what afterwards happened, both to the Cretans, who alone retained their freedom at that time, and to king Ptolemaeus [X]. But I took vengeance for the wrongs inflicted upon me; I drove Nicomedes from Bithynia, recovered Asia, the spoil taken from king Antiochus [III], and delivered Greece from cruel servitude. Further progress was frustrated by Archelaus, basest of slaves, who betrayed my army; and those whom cowardice or misplaced cunning kept from taking up arms, since they hoped to find safety in my misfortunes, are suffering most cruel punishment. For Ptolemaeus [XII] is averting hostilities from day to day by the payment of money, while the Cretans have already been attacked once and will find no respite from war until they are destroyed.<sup>379</sup>

Here Mithridates laid out his reasoning for pursuing hegemonic war against the Romans. He stressed how the Romans and neighboring states perceived his strength and prestige as a threat. He expressed frustration that the other free states of the Eastern Mediterranean would not bandwagon with him against Rome. He used the examples of Crete and Ptolemaic Egypt to warn the Parthians about ignoring his call to arms and the threat of Rome.<sup>380</sup> He also blamed his failings in the first conflict on the treachery of his

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<sup>378</sup> This is a common theme in ancient historical narratives and helps explain why political scientists find the roots of Realist theory in the literature of antiquity. See esp. Thuc. 5.89; Livy 5.48; Tac. *Hist.* 4.17; Dio 37.6.1

<sup>379</sup> Sall. *Hist.* 4.67.10-12

<sup>380</sup> Note however that Plutarch records that “Ptolemy abandoned his alliance with Rome, out of fear for the outcome of the war.” Plut. *Luc.* 3.1. Thus, although Ptolemy felt neutrality was his best option, he ended his alliance with Rome because he thought Mithridates might win the war. Moreover, Florus argues that the Romans attacked the Cretans because they were “thought to have supported Mithridates, an offence which we resolved to punish by force of arms.” Florus 1.42.1

general and the cowardice of the other middling powers of the Mediterranean, who preferred neutrality because they feared the rising power of Pontus. His hope was to persuade the Parthian king, who did not view the current war as his concern, that he should escape the mistakes of the Cretans and Ptolemies to avoid finding himself isolated against Roman power. Mithridates in the letter then relates,

As for me, I soon learned that the peace afforded by civil dissensions at Rome was really only a postponement of the struggle, and although Tigranes refused to join with me (he now admits the truth of my prediction when it is too late), though you were far away, and all the rest had submitted, I nevertheless renewed the war and routed Marcus Cotta, the Roman general, on land at Chalcedon, while on the sea I stripped him of a fine fleet. During the delay caused by my siege of Cyzicus with a great army, provisions failed me, since no one in the neighborhood rendered me aid and at the same time winter kept me off the sea. When I, therefore, without compulsion from the enemy, attempted to return into my kingdom, I lost the best of my soldiers and my fleets by shipwrecks at Parium and at Heracleia. Then when I had raised a new army at Cabeira and engaged with Lucullus with varying success, scarcity once more attacked us both. He had at his command the kingdom of Ariobarzanes, unravaged by war, while I, since all the country about me had been devastated, withdrew into Armenia. Thereupon the Romans followed me, or rather followed their custom of overthrowing all monarchies, and because they were able to keep from action a huge force hemmed in by narrow defiles, boasted of the results of Tigranes' imprudence as if they had won a victory.<sup>381</sup>

Mithridates here first acknowledged that there was no peace between Pontus and Rome after the first conflict, only an uneasy truce. He then emphasized that Tigranes never aided him against the Romans until Lucullus' invasion got the better of him. Thus, his

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<sup>381</sup> Id. 4.67.13-15. Debevoise mistakenly places Mithridates' embassy to Parthia before the Battle of Tigranocerta. Debevoise 1938: 70 n.3. See also Sampson 2015: 88. However, the evidence overwhelmingly indicates that he and Tigranes sent their envoys to Parthia in 68 BCE after they had fled to Armenia and after Lucullus had sacked Tigranocerta. Mithridates' discussion of Tigranes' defeat in a defile does not mean that we must assume the envoys left before the fall of Tigranocerta. Nor does Mithridates' reference to Tigranes' kingdom as "untouched" in the next section demand that we place the envoy before the fall of Tigranocerta. Even before the sack of Tigranocerta the Romans had occupied large sections of Tigranes' empire. Mithridates clearly meant the Kingdom of Armenia, into which he and Tigranes had fled, was still untouched. Lucullus did not invade Armenia until after the diplomatic exchanges with Parthia.

letter reinforces the argument that Mithridates and Tigranes did not have a military alliance against Rome until 69 BCE. He also expressed frustration that in the third conflict with Rome, although he had opportunity to challenge Roman hegemony, no Eastern kings came to his aid. Again, Mithridates wanted to convince the Parthian king that conflict with Rome was winnable but inevitable. He hoped to change the Parthian king's mind by criticizing the Cretans, Ptolemies, and Tigranes for not coming to his aid. Outnumbered, undersupplied, and in need of allies, he had to abandon his kingdom and flee to Armenia. His discussion of the sudden reversals of his and Tigranes' fortunes stressed the fluctuation of power relations in the ancient world and the vulnerability of ancient kingdoms. He lamented Tigranes' poor fortune against the Romans and stressed Rome's unwillingness to share power. Mithridates in the letter then pleads,

I pray you, then, to consider whether you believe that when we have been crushed you will be better able to resist the Romans, or that there will be an end to the war. I know well that you have great numbers of men and large amounts of arms and gold, and it is for that reason that I seek your alliance and the Romans your spoils. Yet my advice is, while the kingdom of Tigranes is untouched (*integro*), and while I still have soldiers who have been trained in warfare with the Romans, to finish far from your homes and with little labor, at the expense of our bodies, a war in which we cannot conquer or be conquered without danger to you.<sup>382</sup>

As we also saw in Dio's account previously, Mithridates perceived an eventual clash between Rome and Parthia as inevitable. Mithridates' argument was that the Romans viewed themselves as the hegemon of the world, and therefore, they eventually would perceive Parthia as a threat to their power and make war upon them. Later Roman authors adopted a similar distorted perception of Roman and Parthian relations and of the international environment in the middle first century BCE. Although the future conflict

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<sup>382</sup> Sall. *Hist.* 4.67.16. I altered this translation to reflect the Latin more accurately.

between Rome and Parthia was in large part a result of the consequences of system overlap between the Mediterranean and Eastern systems and the realities of endemic warfare under the pressures of interstate anarchy, the Romans and Parthians in 68 BCE did not share the opinion of Mithridates and later Roman authors. In fact, Mithridates' continued use of exaggerated fear tactics to persuade the Parthians that war with Rome was inevitable demonstrates that the Parthians likely were not inclined to agree.

Mithridates' letter here also illustrates that other states perceived the Parthians as powerful and wealthy, even after years of destructive civil wars. Mithridates recognized that, with the recent losses of Tigranes, the Parthians once again had become the greatest power in the East. Thus, he urged the Parthians to balance with them against the rising threat of Rome while he and Tigranes still had strength to resist. He believed that, if the Parthians took the initiative, they could defeat Rome and regain their empires at little cost.

He ended this section with a chilling warning about the realities of ancient power relations and a veiled threat. Mithridates thought he was offering the Parthians an ideal opportunity to end their rivalry with Tigranes and to remove the threat of Rome from their borders. He argued that this was the best way for them to restore their hegemony and security. However, if the Parthians chose not to act, then he maintained that Parthia would have to face one of two realities. If the Romans won the war, the Parthians would be left alone to face the Roman juggernaut. Yet if he and Tigranes somehow won the war, the Parthians would be equally in danger because they would be facing the resurgent and hostile power of their hegemonic rival in the eastern system, Armenia. The letter continues,

Do you not know that the Romans turned their arms in this direction only after Ocean had blocked their westward progress? That they have possessed nothing since the beginning of their existence except what they have stolen: their home, their wives, their lands, their empire? Once vagabonds without fatherland, without parents, created to be the scourge of the whole world, no laws, human or divine, prevent them from seizing and destroying allies and friends, those near them and those afar off, weak or powerful, and from considering every government which does not serve them, especially monarchies, as their enemies.<sup>383</sup>

Mithridates displayed his familiarity with Roman history in this section again in an attempt to scare the Parthians into action and to demonstrate his qualifications as an advisor. His sentiments reflect the competition and violence of ancient interstate anarchy. Rome had to be strong, vicious, and determined to survive and thrive in an international environment that rewarded strength and punished weakness. He emphasized the success of the Romans in dominating their neighbors, illustrating that no enforceable international laws existed to curb their expansion.

Although Mithridates focused on anti-Roman propaganda in his letter, we know from the aspects discussed in this study that he, Tigranes, and the Parthians acted no differently during their separate rises to hegemonic power. Although Mithridates' biased criticism makes it seem as though Rome was uniquely bellicose and predatory, in reality the kings of the Greek world and the East used violence, coercion, and aggression to maximize their power. Mithridates' insistence that the Romans especially wanted to subdue monarchs, such as himself and Tigranes, highlights the rhetorical slant of the letter. Mithridates then records,

Of a truth, few men desire freedom, the greater part are content with just masters; we [Mithridates and Tigranes] are suspected of being rivals of the Romans and future avengers. But you, who possess Seleuceia, greatest of cities, and the realm

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<sup>383</sup> Id. 4.67.17. Note that Justin claims to relate a full speech of Mithridates delivered before the first conflict with Rome. In this speech Mithridates also discusses Roman history and chastises the Romans for their unrelenting desire to make war against all kings. Justin 38.6

of Persis famed for its riches, what can you expect from them other than guile in the present and war in the future? The Romans have weapons against all men, the sharpest where victory yields the greatest spoils; it is by audacity, by deceit, and by joining war to war that they have grown great.<sup>384</sup>

Thus, Mithridates returned to his fear tactics to make a war with Rome seem unavoidable for the Parthians. Mithridates rightly stressed that the Romans had come to view him and Tigranes as hegemonic rivals. He also focused on the importance of vengeance in ancient international relations. The Romans viewed Mithridates and Tigranes as serious threats to their hegemony because of their actions but also because of their motivation to pursue retaliatory wars. Importantly, Mithridates acknowledged that Rome did not yet view Parthia as a rival in 68 BCE. However, he once again played on Parthian fear and uncertainty, arguing that the power and wealth of the Parthian Empire would make Parthia a rival and enemy of Rome in the near future. The letter concludes,

Following their usual custom, they will destroy everything or perish in the attempt . . . and this is not difficult if you on the side of Mesopotamia and we on that of Armenia surround their army, which is without supplies and without allies, and has been saved so far only by its good fortune or by our own errors. You will gain the glory of having rendered aid to great kings and of having crushed the plunderers of all the nations. This is my advice and this course I urge you to follow; do not prefer by our ruin to put off your own for a time rather than by our alliance to conquer.<sup>385</sup>

Mithridates' first statement in this section about the determined will of the Romans to "destroy everything or perish in the attempt" shares the later sentiments of Tacitus when he had the Caledonian chieftain, Calgacus, exclaim, "To robbery, slaughter, plunder, they [the Romans] give the lying name of empire; they make a solitude and call it peace."<sup>386</sup> Both accounts stress the savage and total nature of ancient warfare but share an unfair, myopic criticism of Roman

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<sup>384</sup> Id. 4.67.18-20.

<sup>385</sup> Id. 4.67.21-3.

<sup>386</sup> Tac. *Agr.* 30

imperialism. Note that nowhere in his letter did Mithridates mention his transgressions against Ariobarzanes, his betrayal of allies, or his slaughter of 80,000 Romans in Anatolia. Thus, Mithridates' criticisms of Roman imperialism reflect the realities of the violent nature of ancient international relations; however, his criticisms are heavily biased and propagandistic. We cannot assume that only the Romans acted in this way and cannot maintain that Roman success stemmed from a unique desire to exercise brutal force.<sup>387</sup>

In this section Mithridates also offered a glimpse into his proposed strategy to defeat Lucullus. He again emphasized the vulnerability of the Roman army. He wanted to use Parthian forces to surround and isolate Lucullus with a pincer movement. The Parthians would attack from the south, and he and Tigranes would attack from the north, cutting Lucullus off from supplies and reinforcements. He knew that Lucullus could not invade Armenia if Parthia entered the war. Lucullus also understood this, which explains his preparations for war and his efforts to secure Parthian neutrality. Moreover, Mithridates stressed the importance of military reputation in international relations. He tried to tempt the Parthian king to attack Rome because a victory over Rome instantly would make the Parthian king a universally respected world leader. Finally, he ended his letter by pleading with the Parthians to overlook their immediate geopolitical concerns in the Eastern system, namely the destruction of Armenian power, in favor of his Mediterranean based understanding of the international environment, in which Rome was the major rival and threat.

The message of Mithridates' letter to the Parthian king was straightforward, fight Rome with allies now or fight Rome alone later. Mithridates' hope was to play upon Parthian fear of

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<sup>387</sup> In his letter, Mithridates engaged in the same misconceived unit-attribute explanation for the success of Roman imperialism later championed by W. V. Harris. Harris 1979. Contra Eckstein 2006; id. 2012.

and uncertainty about Roman power and intentions. With the sudden decline of Armenian power and the sudden emergence of Roman power in the East, true power relations and power capabilities throughout the Near East became increasingly opaque, adding to the uncertainty principle and security dilemma in the region. Mithridates was determined to use his anti-Roman propaganda to intimidate the Parthians into action in 68 BCE. Yet he carried with him fifty years of Mediterranean bias that distorted his understanding of the international environment in the Near East at this time. He viewed the Romans as the enemy of the world because of the contexts of his international relations with Rome. He had spent his entire reign working within the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system. Therefore, he did not appreciate or anticipate the separate outlook of the Parthians on the international environment.

The Parthians did not view Rome as a major rival or threat in 68 BCE, much as the Armenians had been slow to come to the same realization. The geopolitical development and international outlook of the Armenians and Parthians was vastly different because it had developed within a separate interstate system in the East. For this reason Tigranes had refused to offer aid to Mithridates against Rome until after the invasion of Lucullus in 69 BCE, and for this reason the Parthians were extremely hesitant to involve themselves in a conflict with Rome that remained outside of their immediate concerns the following year.

The envoy Mithridates sent to the Parthians in 72 BCE likely made many of the same points of argument to try to gain Parthian support against Rome.<sup>388</sup> Yet from 72-68 BCE, few geopolitical circumstances had changed for the Parthians. The Parthians still had a civil war to fight, and Armenia remained the main rival of Parthia. The successful campaign of Lucullus meant that the Romans reentered the geopolitical picture for the Parthians; however, they viewed

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<sup>388</sup> Memnon 29.6; Appian *Mithr.* 11.78



the Romans as an unwelcome but temporary nuisance in the Near East. Since Tigranes and Mithridates' envoys reached Parthia first, the Parthians still had not interacted with the Romans in two and a half decades at the time of their arrival. Thus, the power of Rome and its potential threat in the future did not carry the weight with the Parthian king that Mithridates had hoped. He misjudged his audience and misinterpreted the geopolitical concerns of the Parthians within the Eastern system.

The only major geopolitical factor that had changed significantly from 72-68 BCE was the rapid decline of Armenian power. Since Tigranes was the greatest rival and threat to Parthian power in the Eastern system, he remained the focus of Parthian anger and policy. Dio illustrates the different interstate reality of the Parthians, stating,

Learning now from them [that is, Rome's new vassal kings, Antiochus of Commagene and Alchaudonius the Arab] of the embassy sent by Tigranes and Mithridates to Arsaces, he [Lucullus] in his turn sent to him [the Parthian king] some of the allies with threats, in case he should aid the foe, and promises, if he should choose the Roman side instead. Arsaces at that time, since *he was still angry with Tigranes and felt no suspicion toward the Romans*, sent back envoys to Lucullus, and established friendship and alliance. Later, when he saw Secilius [Sextilius], who had come to him, he began to suspect that he was there to spy out the country and his power; it was for this cause, he thought, and not on account of the compact which had already been made that a man distinguished in warfare had been sent. Hence he no longer gave him [Lucullus] any aid. On the other hand, *he offered no opposition, but stood aloof from both parties, naturally wishing to make neither side strong; for he thought that an evenly-balanced struggle between them would insure him the greatest safety.*<sup>389</sup>

Dio demonstrates that Lucullus engaged in compellence diplomacy, using threats to secure Parthia's neutrality. Although he incorrectly propagates the erroneous Roman tradition that Parthia and Rome established a formal alliance at this time, he also captures the separate interstate perspective of the Parthians. For the Parthians, the Romans were unimportant. In fact,

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<sup>389</sup> Dio 36.3. The italics are mine.

they more than likely saw Lucullus' destruction of Tigranes' power initially as good fortune and a great opportunity to reclaim hegemony over the Eastern system. Dio's account stresses the confused and awkward interactions of the Romans and Parthians, which was in part a result of the consequences of the second phase of system overlap; however, the tension and mistrust between Rome and Parthia had not yet built to a point of major concern. Dio illustrates that the Romans and the Parthians were happy to continue minding their own separate business. Lucullus wanted to secure Parthian neutrality so that he could isolate and invade Armenia, and the Parthian king wanted the Romans to weaken Tigranes further while he finished his civil war. By remaining neutral for a time, the Parthians insulated themselves from outside threats and assured that the conflict between Rome and Armenia would continue to the detriment of both sides and to their immediate advantage.

In his letter, Mithridates complained that the Cretans and Ptolemies had made a major mistake by ignoring his warnings and refusing to join his cause against Rome. Mithridates tried to use this example to encourage the Parthians not to make the same mistake against Rome; however, he failed to appreciate that the Armenians and Parthians did not want to fight Rome for separate reasons from the Cretans and Ptolemies. First, the Cretans and Ptolemies participated within the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system, making them more conscious of Roman intentions and power capabilities and making the threat of Rome far more immediate. Second, the Cretans and Ptolemies participated in the same interstate system as Mithridatic Pontus, making Pontus' rise to power in the Eastern Mediterranean a direct threat to their security. Mithridates noted that the Cretans and Ptolemies remained neutral "since they hoped to find safety in my misfortunes." He expressed his frustration at their cowardice and reveled in their current misfortunes. Yet because he saw Rome as the great enemy of the world, he failed to

appreciate that the Cretans and Ptolemies rejected his offers of alliance in large part because they did not wish to replace Roman hegemony with Pontic hegemony. That is, the power dynamics of the Mediterranean system were at the forefront of their geopolitical decisions and international perspective.

Meanwhile, Armenia and Parthia had extremely different outlooks. Tigranes, although on great terms with Mithridates, had no desire to fight the Romans and did not consider Roman concerns while he dominated Cappadocia, Commagene, Syria, Cilicia, Phoenicia, and Palestine. Tigranes did not ally with Mithridates and send him military aid in 72-70 BCE, not because he feared Roman retaliation or the threat of Pontic hegemony, but because his rivalry with Parthia and his domination of the Seleucids were his geopolitical focus. He finally became Mithridates' military ally against the Romans only as a reaction to Roman aggression.

The Parthians had a cordial but distant relationship with Pontus; however, they did not share Mithridates' fear or hatred of the Romans. Instead, they feared and hated Tigranes and hoped to use the Romans to weaken their greatest interstate rival and, therefore, indirectly to help them create greater state security. Arsaces XVI's relationship with Tigranes had been tense and vulnerable since his usurpation of Orodes I's throne in 75 BCE. His decision to renew the peace treaty with Armenia was a temporary but necessary political move. For seven years he fought usurpers and, therefore, lacked the power to challenge Armenia directly and to punish Tigranes, but clearly he retained the will to do so.

The Parthians and the Romans did not yet view war between them as inevitable and the Mediterranean and Eastern systems remained separate.<sup>390</sup> In 68 BCE the Romans could hope that

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<sup>390</sup> Contra Shayegan 2011: 329-30, who argues that Parthia needed to subdue Armenia so that it could focus on its "inevitable confrontation with Rome."

Parthia would respect the expansion of their hegemony in the Near East, and the Parthians could hope that the Romans would once again return to the concerns of the Mediterranean once Tigranes had been humbled, leaving them free to reestablish Parthian hegemony over the Near East. Although Lucullus' invasion initiated the second stage of overlap between the Mediterranean and Eastern systems, which led to mounting friction and intensifying interactions between the two powers over the next decade, for the time being these interstate systems and their hegemons remained separate.

### Summary and Conclusion

The formation of Parthian hegemony over the Eastern system under Mithridates II was not without consequences. His long absence from the Farther East and his embarrassing diplomatic setback in Cappadocia gave rise to the usurper, Sinatruces, who forcefully seized the eastern lands of the empire from Mithridates. With Mithridates' death in 91 BCE, it looked as though Parthian power might wither under the strain of civil war; however, Mithridates' son, Gotarzes I, temporarily restored Parthian strength by decisively defeating Antiochus X in Syria in 88 BCE and Sinatruces in the Farther East in early 87 BCE. Unfortunately for Parthia, Gotarzes suddenly died soon after, leaving the throne to his young son, Orodes. The young man's uncle, Mithridates III, took this opportunity to seize the crown for himself. Mithridates III understood the vulnerability of his position and decided to fight another war in Syria against the Seleucids to help bolster his claim to the throne and solidify his regime. Although his forces defeated and captured Demetrius III and helped place Philip I on the Seleucid throne at Antioch as a vassal of the Parthian Empire, Mithridates III's usurpation of the throne led to conflict with Armenia and a major crisis in the Eastern system.

To help secure the western lands of the Parthian Empire, Gotarzes had married the daughter of Tigranes II of Armenia, Aryazate. This alliance secured the western and northern frontiers of the Parthian Empire and allowed Gotarzes to fight Sinatruces in the East, forcing the usurper to retreat into the Central Asian steppe. Meanwhile, by marrying his family into the Arsacid dynasty, Tigranes drastically improved the prestige of his own house. However, when Gotarzes died suddenly and Mithridates III usurped the throne from Orodes, Tigranes lost an important ally, and Mithridates became an enemy of Tigranes and his family.

For years Tigranes had been expanding the power of his kingdom through conquest, military recruitment, and wise diplomatic maneuvering. By the end of the 90s BCE he possessed the strength to challenge the Parthians openly, and he even had an opportunity to cast off Parthian hegemony during Sinatruces' rebellion. Yet until the usurpation of Mithridates III, he lacked a legitimate cause for war. After Gotarzes defeated and killed Antiochus X in battle, establishing his military reputation, Tigranes seized the chance to elevate his family through a marriage alliance with a promising new Parthian king. However, when Gotarzes suddenly died and Mithridates III seized the throne from the son of Tigranes' important ally, Tigranes had a clear motive, cause, and justification to pursue war and decided to challenge Parthian domination.

Tigranes wasted little time and, while Mithridates' army was busy fighting Demetrius III in Syria in late 87 BCE, Tigranes reoccupied the seventy valleys that he had surrendered to Parthia as a sign of his submission in 95 BCE. With this swift military success and the lack of a Parthian military response, Tigranes recognized the vulnerability of the Parthian state. Quickly, his immediate military objective changed from simply gaining independence from Parthia to replacing Parthian hegemony in the Near East with the power of Armenia. It was at this point

that Armenia transitioned from a limited to an unlimited revisionist state in the Eastern system. By 86 BCE Tigranes desired to establish his kingdom as the hegemonic rival of the Parthian Empire. To accomplish this goal, he needed to annex the various border regions and vassal kingdoms of the western Parthian Empire, including the feeble but still prestigious Seleucid state.

From 86-80 BCE Tigranes conducted several successful campaigns against the Parthian Empire and its allies. He subdued Greater Aghbak, Gordyene, Adiabene, Iberia, Albania, Media Atropatene, Mygdonia, Osrhoene, and successfully raided Media and the north Syrian dessert. He was able to isolate and defeat numerous Parthian forces, which damaged Parthian power and prestige severely. Meanwhile, for Mithridates III the war against Armenia was ruinous. By 80 BCE Orodes I had gained enough support to rebel and seize Babylonia by force. This new Parthian civil war, the proximity of Tigranes' forces in Mesopotamia, and Orodes' familial connection to Tigranes by law encouraged Orodes and Tigranes to sign a peace treaty in 80 BCE that ceded Parthian territorial claims west of Babylonia and north of Media to Armenia in exchange for a cessation of violence. Both kings looked to consolidate their kingdoms. Tigranes moved to establish Armenian hegemony over the Near East, and Orodes fought a series of civil wars and rebellions in the East to retain his throne.

Tigranes spent the first half of the 70s BCE raiding Cappadocia and conquering Commagene. Meanwhile, Orodes defeated Mithridates, put down Kamnaskires II's rebellion, and pushed back the advances of Sinatruces; however, a new usurper, Arsaces XVI seized Susa in 77 BCE and in 75 BCE killed Orodes in battle in Babylonia. Tigranes was either unwilling or unable to come to Orodes' aid or to avenge his death. Armenia had more immediate concerns in the Near East and a renewal of the war with Parthia at this time was unfavorable. Tigranes

decided to renew the peace treaty between Armenia and Parthia with Arsaces XVI, who because of his vulnerable position accepted. Again, Tigranes returned to his exploits in the Near East and the Parthian king moved to consolidate his kingdom against usurpers in the East.

While Tigranes expanded his empire and the Parthians fought debilitating civil wars, Philip I ruled over northern Syria as a Parthian vassal from 87-75 BCE. In that time he fought two more civil wars against Antiochus XII and Cleopatra Selene. When he died in 75 BCE, his faction in northern Syria did not have a candidate capable of resisting Cleopatra and her faction in the south. The Seleucid crown fell to Cleopatra's son, Antiochus XIII, who immediately travelled to Rome with his brother in an attempt to gain the throne of Egypt as well with Roman aid. The anti-Cleopatra faction in the north of Syria turned to Tigranes to champion their cause. With their support, Tigranes invaded Syria in 74/73 BCE and conducted a war against Cleopatra and her supporters. Tigranes was so successful that by 70 BCE he had conquered Syria, Cilicia, and most of Phoenicia and had accepted the submission of the Hasmonean Kingdom. In 69 BCE he took Cleopatra's last stronghold, Ptolemais, and captured her, ending his war to dominate the Seleucids and extending his hegemony over a large strip of the Eastern Mediterranean coast.

Armenia was at the height of its hegemonic power in 69 BCE when Rome suddenly and surprisingly involved itself in Armenian affairs. Tigranes had refused to become involved in the war between Rome and Pontus in Anatolia. Since his coronation, he had acted within the bounds of the expanding Eastern system; however, because of the western conquests of Mithridates II and his immediate successors, which had expanded the Eastern system to encompass Syria and its surrounding territories, and because of Tigranes' own military efforts along the Eastern Mediterranean coast, Tigranes' conquests in the 70s BCE caused his empire to overlap with the hegemonic sphere of Rome extensively. Thus, the misunderstandings and miscommunications

between Rome and Armenia in the late 70s and early 60s BCE were in part a result of the culmination of the first phase of system overlap between the Mediterranean and Eastern systems and its consequences.

However, before Rome came into conflict with Armenia, it had to establish its dominion firmly over Anatolia. Mithridates VI had escaped from the jaws of defeat in the first conflict against Sulla and scored a quick victory over Rome in the second conflict against Murena. He used this momentum to negotiate a more favorable peace treaty with Rome and to force Cappadocia under his hegemony. When Ariobarzanes I complained to Rome of Mithridates' abuses, Mithridates had to back down temporarily because he lacked the resources and manpower to contest Rome immediately. However, in 78 BCE he capitalized once more on the military alliance he had with Tigranes against Cappadocia. Tigranes invaded and brutally devastated the region. He had no interest in fighting Rome in Anatolia and, therefore, returned to Armenia, taking with him great wealth and hundreds of thousands of prisoners. Yet Tigranes' invasion of Cappadocia was a victory for Mithridates in Anatolia as well. Ariobarzanes' regime became helpless and Roman indecisiveness made the Romans appear weak in the region. Although Tigranes had attacked Cappadocia, Rome once again blamed Mithridates. Rome's only major concern in the East at this time was the potential threat of Pontus; however, the Romans' inability or unwillingness to respond to the devastation of Cappadocia hurt their local standing and encouraged Mithridates to maximize his power in the region further.

A sizable factor in the Romans' hesitation in Anatolia was the political division Sulla's dictatorship and death had caused in Rome. A champion of the anti-Sullan faction, Sertorius, was leading a ferocious rebellion in Spain and North Africa. While the Romans fought another civil war, Mithridates was busy restoring his strength in order to capitalize on Roman weakness. He



forged an alliance with a network of pirate communities, which had come to dominate shipping within the Mediterranean, and this allowed him to open up talks with Sertorius. The two men became natural allies as Mithridates sent money and ships to Spain and Sertorius sent Roman soldiers to Anatolia to help Mithridates bring the region under his hegemony. The government at Rome faced the prospect of a two front war that threatened its survival.

The renewal of hostilities between Rome and Pontus appeared inevitable by the middle 70s BCE. Both sides were unsatisfied with the results of the previous two conflicts and the uneasy truce. Relations between the two powers remained tense and power capabilities and intentions remained uncertain. Roman senators such as Cicero called for Rome to avenge itself against the many aggressions of Mithridates. Meanwhile, Mithridates chastised the Romans for shameful diplomacy and rapacious imperialism. Rome's occupation of Bithynia in 74 BCE after the sudden death of Nicomedes IV, a region Mithridates considered under his hegemony, forced Mithridates to action. Mithridates used the royal claim of a young boy, Nicomedes' nephew, to justify his invasion of Bithynia in 73 BCE, starting the third and final conflict between Pontus and Rome.

Mithridates enjoyed great success at the beginning of the war. He decisively defeated a Roman army at Chalcedon, invaded the Roman province of Asia, and placed Cyzicus under siege. However, his fortunes soon plummeted. He received news of Sertorius' assassination, effectively isolating him against the full military might of Rome, and he allowed Lucullus to outmaneuver him and cut off his supplies. The siege of Cyzicus ended in total failure, costing Mithridates his entire army and navy. He barely escaped back to Pontus.

Mithridates' staggering losses in so short a time drastically corrected the perception of the power relationship between Pontus and Rome. It became clear to the peoples and polities in

and around Anatolia that Rome's power had not diminished and that Pontus' power had been exaggerated. As the balance of power rapidly swung back in Rome's favor, Mithridates' allies, subjects, and even some of his most trusted generals deserted over to the Romans. Mithridates had held his disparate Black Sea Empire together through force of arms and the force of his authority as a successful leader. With his army and navy destroyed and his military reputation in tatters, Mithridates found it increasingly hard to maintain his power and influence.

In 72 BCE Mithridates was unable to convince the Thracian or nomadic tribes to come to his rescue so he turned to the powers of the East. He pleaded with Armenia and Parthia to send him military aid. The Parthians, who had to worry about the threat of Armenia and civil war, had no desire to fight the Romans and declined Mithridates' advances. Meanwhile, Tigranes too had no desire to become involved in Mithridates' war against Rome. Both Parthia and Armenia considered the war between Rome and Pontus outside of their concerns as they continued to focus on the geopolitical developments of the Eastern system.

Although it was not Tigranes' intention, Armenia's occupation of the coast of the Eastern Mediterranean and its ongoing friendly association with Mithridatic Pontus made Armenia a threat to Roman Mediterranean hegemony by the late 70s BCE. Before this time Rome had taken little notice of Armenia. Although Tigranes had ravaged Cappadocia three times, Rome blamed Mithridates for violating Roman interests in Anatolia. This is in part because the Romans viewed Pontus as a potential rival within the Mediterranean, while Armenia remained a peripheral state outside of their immediate concerns. However, when Tigranes began his conquest of Syria and the surrounding territories in 74/73 BCE and when Tigranes gave Mithridates asylum in Armenia, the Romans increasingly viewed Armenia as a threat to Mediterranean hegemony.

Moreover, when Tigranes refused to surrender Mithridates to Lucullus in 70 BCE, he unknowingly associated himself directly with Mithridates' cause.

The increased concern of the Romans about Tigranes' power and his intentions in the Mediterranean, paired with Tigranes' confusion over Roman demands and aggression, stemmed in part from the consequences of the first phase of system overlap between the Mediterranean and Eastern systems. The Romans did not grasp that Tigranes dominated the Seleucid lands along the Eastern Mediterranean coast not as a challenge to Roman hegemony but as a further challenge to Parthian hegemony. Tigranes was solidifying his supremacy over the Near East to increase his standing within the Eastern system as the rising hegemonic power and rival of Parthia. By dominating the Seleucid state, which the Parthians had fought hard to make a vassal, Tigranes shifted the balance of power in the East further in his favor. Yet from a Roman perspective, the Seleucids remained under their own Mediterranean hegemony. Therefore, Tigranes' annexation of Syria, Cilicia, and Phoenicia was a direct challenge to the Romans' standing within the Mediterranean. When we pair this with Tigranes' refusal of Roman demands and his protection of Mithridates, we find the motivation and justification for Lucullus' invasion of Armenia in 69 BCE.

Lucullus' invasion of Sophene in 69 BCE caught Tigranes completely off-guard. He abandoned his southern campaign, sent a cavalry force to delay Lucullus' approach, and travelled north to consolidate his forces. It was at this time that Tigranes finally invited Mithridates to meet with him. The two made a public display of friendship and finally forged a military alliance against Rome. After a private three day meeting, where the kings discussed their strategy to defeat Lucullus, Tigranes provided Mithridates with a force of 10,000 cavalry to illustrate their new military arrangement, and Mithridates headed north to invade Pontus.

However, when it became clear that Lucullus planned to capture Tigranes' imperial capital, Tigranocerta, Tigranes settled on preparing to defeat Lucullus in a decisive battle. Tigranes recalled Mithridates to help him defeat Lucullus. Despite Mithridates' warnings to avoid conventional warfare against the Romans, Lucullus' siege of Tigranocerta forced Tigranes, who felt confident in his battle record, to action. In a disorganized affair, Lucullus obliterated Tigranes' army and forced him to flee with Mithridates into Armenia.

With his resounding victory at Tigranocerta and subsequent sack of the city, Lucullus cut the Armenian Empire in two. Armenian power and prestige plummeted, and Rome emerged as the new regional power. The minor and middling polities in the region increasingly turned to Rome for guidance and bandwagoned with Rome against Armenia. Lucullus reestablished Roman hegemony over the Eastern Mediterranean coast by installing pro-Roman vassal kings in the region. He also expanded the bounds of the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system eastward by bringing northern Mesopotamia and southern Armenia under Roman hegemony, initiating the second phase of system overlap between the Mediterranean and Eastern systems. For the first time in twenty-five years, this reopened the confused and increasingly tense relations between Rome and Parthia.

The Parthians found themselves in a peculiar geopolitical position in 68 BCE. Years of internal conflict and the Armeno-Parthian war had damaged Parthian power and prestige considerably. The relationship of the Parthian king with Tigranes was stable yet hostile. Moreover, the Parthians resented the concessions they had been forced to make to Armenia and maintained the desire to avenge themselves against Tigranes. Yet since the rebellion of Sinatruces in the late 90s BCE, there had been a recurrent cycle of debilitating civil wars that had sapped Parthian strength. Therefore, the Parthians had mixed feelings about Lucullus' invasion

of the Armenian Empire. On the one hand, the destruction of Armenian power by the Romans eliminated the immediate threat of Armenia to Parthia and made Parthia the *de facto* greatest power in the East once more. Moreover, the Parthians could hope that, once Lucullus had defeated Tigranes, he would return to Rome, leaving the Parthians to mop up the remnants of Tigranes' army and reestablish Parthian hegemony over the Eastern system. On the other hand, the penetration of the Romans into northern Mesopotamia and Armenia, regions the Parthians considered theirs by right of conquest, was disturbing. Tigranes had forced the Parthians temporarily to cede their claims to the lands of the Near East; however, the Parthians had no such arrangement with the Romans. With the sudden decline of Armenian power in the region, the Parthians expected to reassert their dominance over the Near East. Thus, the Parthians viewed Tigranes' decline with aloof pleasure but viewed the Romans' involvement in the region with reserved cautiousness.

In 68 BCE Tigranes and Lucullus sent envoys to the Parthians to secure their military support or to assure their neutrality in the conflict. Tigranes and Mithridates, who were desperate after the Battle of Tigranocerta, offered to return the lands Tigranes had conquered from the Parthians to the Parthian king. They did this in an attempt to open up a second front against Lucullus and to satisfy Parthian anger toward Armenia. Mithridates employed anti-Roman propaganda to convince the Parthian king that war with Rome was inevitable and imminent. Yet the Parthians were fighting a civil war and in no position to join the conflict against Rome. Moreover, Mithridates failed to appreciate that the Parthians did not yet view Rome as a threat to their eastern hegemony; however, they still considered Armenia as their greatest threat and rival. The Parthians maintained their desire eventually to exact revenge against Armenia for the

Armeno-Parthian war and to punish Tigranes by force. Therefore, they declined Tigranes and Mithridates' terms of alliance and continued to observe the conflict from a distance.

Meanwhile, news that Tigranes and Mithridates were trying to draw Parthia into the war concerned Lucullus. He prepared his forces for a possible two front war and sent an envoy to the Parthian king. This envoy was the first interaction between Rome and Parthia in two and a half decades. Their discussions were confused and awkward as both powers approached each other with caution and respect. Although Lucullus secured Parthian neutrality, no alliance or agreement about the geographical limitation of either state's imperium emerged out of the talks. Rome and Parthia decided to stay out of each other's way, and Lucullus turned his focus to his invasion of Armenia. The Mediterranean and Eastern systems, although overlapping considerably in the Near East, remained separate. The Romans and Parthians' primary concerns remained the power dynamics and geopolitical outlooks of their respective interstate systems.

## Chapter 6 – The Making of the Hegemonic Rivalry between Rome and Parthia

The greatest indirect consequence of Mithridates VI's third conflict with Rome was the incorporation of Armenia into the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system and the renewal of tense relations between Rome and Parthia. The Romans had come to view Mithridates and Tigranes II as hegemonic rivals in the West and sought to reestablish Roman hegemony over the Mediterranean system definitively in the late 70s to middle 60s BCE through the complete defeat of these two kings. Meanwhile, the Parthians still viewed Tigranes as their greatest hegemonic rival in the East and began to consolidate their power to reestablish Parthian hegemony over the Eastern system definitively in the middle 60s to late 50s BCE through the submission of northern Mesopotamia and Armenia. Both powers still considered themselves system hegemons and neither power yet fully considered the hegemonic claims of the other. As restricted political and diplomatic avenues failed to mitigate grievances between Rome and Parthia, open conflict increasingly became the only possible solution to the geopolitical impasse in which the Romans and Parthians found themselves in the Near East by the middle 50s BCE.

With the setbacks of Lucullus' continued campaign against Tigranes and Mithridates, which led to the unprecedented military command of Pompey in the East, system overlap between the Mediterranean and Eastern systems reached its height and relations between Rome and Parthia became increasingly discordant.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, with the total defeat of Mithridatic

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<sup>1</sup> Appian recognized the expansion of the Roman-dominated system in this period, which he identified as a direct result of the war against Mithridates and Tigranes. He states, "Such and so diversified was this one war, but in the end it brought the greatest gains to the Romans, for it pushed the boundaries of their dominion from the setting of the sun to the river Euphrates." Appian *Mithr.* 17.119. Appian concludes, "Thus, since their dominion had been advanced in consequence of the Mithridatic war, from Spain and the Pillars of Hercules to the Euxine sea, and the sands which border Egypt, and the river Euphrates, it was fitting that this victory should

Pontus and the submission of Armenia, Rome obtained total victory in its hegemonic struggle to retain dominance over the Mediterranean system. Rome then looked to stabilize these potentially volatile and dangerous regions through a more forceful direct occupation of the Near East in the form of Pompey's reorganization of the East. For the first time Roman and Parthian occupied territory shared a border; however, neither power was yet prepared to recognize this border officially, adding to the atmosphere of anger and mistrust. The success of Rome and the recovery of Parthia in this period would squeeze Armenia and the polities of the Near East between a rock and a hard place until friction between the two super powers boiled over and the two interstate systems merged violently in the latter half of the 50s BCE.

Internal dissent continued to sap the power of the Parthian state in the 60s-50s BCE, curbing the ability of the Parthians to act aggressively against Armenia and to pursue western hegemonic ambitions. Moreover, the reintroduction of Rome into the sphere of Parthian politics and foreign policy served to bring the two powers closer to open conflict as Parthian factions and kings occasionally came to utilize Roman support as a new political weapon against rivals. The First Romano-Parthian War initiated by the Roman governor of Syria, Gabinius, but carried out by his successor, Crassus, was a direct response to the consequences of system overlap and the fallout of another Parthian civil war. Crassus' failed invasion and the Parthian military response drastically changed the makeup of the international environment of the ancient world for centuries.

From the 50s-30s BCE, Rome and Parthia traded hammer blows in an inconclusive hegemonic conflict that consumed the Near East and Mid East in shifting alliances and violence.

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be called the great one, and that Pompey, who commanded the army, should be styled the Great.” Id. 17.121.



Each power initially was determined to establish its dominance over the other to rule the new and expanded Med-Eastern interstate system as world hegemon. It was not until the 20s BCE, when Augustus had come to dominate the Roman world, that a gradual shift in Roman foreign policy initiated an evolution in Roman and Parthian relations. As Rome shifted its focus away from disastrous military campaigns against Parthia to an emphasis on diplomatic and propagandistic victories, and as Parthia continued to weather debilitating internal conflicts and increased Roman meddling in Parthian politics, the two powers began to accept their hegemonic limitations and budding rivalry. This chapter details the events leading up to the final merger of the Roman-dominated Mediterranean and Parthian-dominated Eastern systems, including the last efforts of Mithridates VI to regain his prominence in the Near East, the Romans' and Parthians' continued concerns for Armenian affairs, the last phase of system overlap between the Roman and Parthian spheres, and the internal conflicts of the Arsacids, which eventually led to Roman intervention and the start of the First Romano-Parthian War.

#### The Height of Overlap: The Growing Conflict between Rome and Parthia in the Near East

With his invasion of Armenia in 69 BCE, Lucullus had destroyed Tigranes' rising eastern empire. Lucullus had utilized swiftness, bold leadership, and military cunning to outmaneuver and outmatch a much larger enemy force. He reestablished Roman suzerainty over the Hellenistic kingdoms of the Near East and successfully secured Parthian neutrality in the conflict with Armenia. Yet political forces at Rome and within his own army worked against Lucullus and undermined his accomplishments. Lucullus' inability to deliver the deathblow to Mithridates and Tigranes' resistance opened the door for his political rivals to transfer his command to one of Rome's most accomplished generals, Pompey. Mithridates and Tigranes might have hoped that Roman internal dissension offered them a chance to turn the tide of the war; however, Pompey's

swift and determined advance into the Near East dashed all hopes of a revival of their former power and influence.

Pompey not only brought the hegemonic struggle with Mithridatic Pontus and Armenia to an end, he made extensive alterations to the geopolitical makeup of the Near East in an attempt to stabilize the region. In 66/65 BCE his settlement of Armenia and his subjugation of modern day Georgia and Azerbaijan further expanded the limits of the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system, marking the third and final phase of system overlap between the Mediterranean and Eastern systems. Moreover, Pompey drastically expanded Roman direct imperial rule in the Near East with his new settlements of Cilicia, Bithynia and Pontus, and Syria. For the first time, Roman soldiers in large numbers became stationed in the Near East permanently. Finally, in the Near East he established numerous peoples and polities, including Armenia, as Roman clients. Each of these accomplishments altered the relationship between Rome and Parthia for the worse as the establishment of Rome as a permanent power in the Near East threatened Parthia's standing in the region and encouraged Roman intervention in Parthian conflicts.

Pompey's expansive conquests and his new settlement of the Near East took little notice of Parthian concerns and increased the friction between the two powers considerably. Rome's domination of the Seleucid state and of Armenia was necessary to establish Roman hegemony in the region unequivocally; however, Pompey's settlement of the Near East was a major obstacle to Parthian imperial aspirations. Tensions between Rome and Parthia were high and war narrowly avoided as both powers continued to operate without a full appreciation and understanding of the hegemonic objectives of the other. Since Parthia had not formally ceded any claims to these regions to Rome and since the Romans had not seized these regions directly from the Parthians, there remained considerable ambiguity in the minds of the Romans and

Parthians as to their relationship and the realities of the international environment in the Near East. Their drastically different perspectives fueled regional tensions, facilitated the beginning of the First Romano-Parthian War, and caused the violent merger of the Mediterranean and Eastern systems.

### Pompey Pursues the War in the Near East: Different Roman and Parthian International Perspectives

With Parthian neutrality in the Armeno-Roman war secured and northern Mesopotamia and southern Armenia temporarily subdued, in the late summer of 68 BCE Lucullus decided to strike at the remaining center of Armenian resistance, Artaxata.<sup>2</sup> His hope was to force a final showdown with Tigranes and Mithridates and to repeat the successes he had enjoyed near Tigranocerta.<sup>3</sup> Yet Mithridates was in charge of most of the Armenian soldiers and implemented hit-and-run tactics to harass the Roman army and deny Lucullus his decisive victory.<sup>4</sup> Although Lucullus won skirmishes and advanced on Artaxata, he found the terrain difficult, supplies scarce, the weather atrocious, and the hit-and-run tactics of his enemy frustrating. Once he arrived at Artaxata, Plutarch in his usual apologetic tone portrays Lucullus winning a decisive battle, where he routs Tigranes' large, poorly disciplined eastern army and forces Mithridates to flee "most disgracefully."<sup>5</sup> Yet Appian and Dio describe a far different encounter. Appian

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<sup>2</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 31.1-2

<sup>3</sup> For Lucullus' route, see Manandyan 2007: 112-15, 120-1.

<sup>4</sup> Our accounts of Lucullus' Armenian campaign tend to exaggerate his military success and unfairly denigrate the new tactics of Mithridates and Tigranes as cowardly. Plut. *Luc.* 31; Appian *Mithr.* 13.87; Dio 36.4-5. Some modern historians have accepted this biased view; however, other historians have shown correctly that Mithridates and Tigranes' new direction in tactics was wise and successful. See esp. Manandyan 2007: 112-21; Mayor 2010: 306-9.

<sup>5</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 31.4-8

records that the battle around Artaxata was indecisive with the harsh winter and lack of provisions forcing both sides to disengage.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, Dio states,

In this engagement the opposing cavalry gave the Roman cavalry hard work, but none of the foe approached the infantry; indeed, whenever the foot-soldiers of Lucullus assisted the horse, the enemy would turn to flight. Far from suffering any injury, however, they kept shooting back at those pursuing them, killing some instantly and wounding great numbers. Now these wounds were dangerous and hard to heal; for they used double arrow-points and moreover poisoned them, so that the missiles, whether they stuck fast anywhere in the body or even if they were drawn out, would very quickly destroy it, since the second iron point, not being firmly attached, would be left in the wound. Since many, then, were getting wounded, of whom some died, and the others were in any case maimed, and since provisions at the same time were failing them, Lucullus retired from that place and marched against Nisibis.<sup>7</sup>

Dio interestingly here describes military operations that resemble Parthian tactics and strategies discussed in Chapter 2 of this study. Although Mayor argues that Mithridates incorporated or mimicked Macedonian, Numidian, Scordisci, and Scythian examples of hit-and-run mobile cavalry tactics, she does not acknowledge the possible influence of Parthian advisors or the obvious similarity of Parthian tactics and strategy.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, Manadyan recognizes the close similarity of Parthian style warfare and the new tactics of Mithridates and Tigranes.<sup>9</sup> Yet Manadyan wrongly assumes that this was a “characteristic Eastern style of warfare” at this time. In fact, Plutarch tells us that on the eve of Crassus’ invasion of Mesopotamia in 53 BCE the mode of warfare of the Parthians remained unique.<sup>10</sup> Prior eastern powers, such as the Achaemenids, had not fought in the manner described by Dio. Moreover, Tigranes prior to this campaign had fought traditional Hellenistic style set piece battles, and Mithridates had never

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<sup>6</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 13.87-8

<sup>7</sup> Dio 36.5-6.1

<sup>8</sup> Mayor 2010: 308.

<sup>9</sup> Manadyan 2007: 118.

<sup>10</sup> Plut. *Crass.* 18.2-4

before utilized horse archers. If we are to believe Dio's reproduction of the battle, then we have to accept that Tigranes and Mithridates suddenly incorporated new Scythian and/or Parthian military influences and utilized them. However, we must be careful not to draw too strong a conclusion from Dio's account alone. Note that neither Appian nor Plutarch describes the Armenian army utilizing such tactics. Moreover, Tigranes and Mithridates never again appear to have relied on these tactics, nor to have ever again utilized horse archers as a primary weapon to win a campaign. Therefore, it is possible that Dio here simply projected Parthian style tactics and strategy onto Tigranes' eastern army as a stereotype of how the Romans, especially of his time, had come to perceive all eastern warfare. Unfortunately, we do not have Dio's account of the Battle of Tigranocerta to compare. Ultimately, it is possible that, out of desperation, Mithridates and Tigranes utilized Parthian style tactics and strategy in 68 BCE to combat Lucullus' invasion; however, it appears to have been a temporary solution and not a permanent military fixture of their armies as it was for the Parthians.

According to Dio the battle was a costly tactical defeat for the Romans. We should be suspicious of Plutarch's biased account of the battle. It makes little sense that Lucullus would crush the Armenian army near Artaxata but not besiege the city, which was the primary objective of his campaign. Further, a decisive military victory would have endeared Lucullus to his men instead of driving them to mutiny. Finally, Tigranes and Mithridates could not have continued the war if they had lost another army in a major defeat.<sup>11</sup> Plutarch's attempts to blame the

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<sup>11</sup> Manandyan illustrates that many scholars accept Plutarch's unreliable account of this campaign despite its obvious shortcomings. He offers a much harsher description of Lucullus' Armenian campaign and prefers Dio's account of the battle. See Manandyan 2007: 114-21.

weather and Lucullus' mutinous soldiers, freeing Lucullus from shame, cast further doubts on the reliability of his account of the battle.<sup>12</sup>

Although it may be wise to accept Appian's emphasis on the weather and lack of supplies forcing an end to the campaign, we should acknowledge that casualties and harassment played a significant role. Thus, Lucullus' men did not mutiny after a great victory because of a sudden blizzard or homesickness; rather, much like Alexander the Great's army at the Hyphasis River, Lucullus' men, after months of harsh conditions and frustrating skirmishes, refused to advance past the Arsanius River and demanded that Lucullus return them to friendly territory.<sup>13</sup> The mutiny was serious enough to force Lucullus' hand; however, he did not have the supplies or the manpower to besiege Artaxata while Tigranes' army harassed him and, therefore, had little choice anyway. Although I would not describe Lucullus' campaign as a total disaster as does Manandyan, he clearly but understandably misjudged the situation in Armenia after his sweeping success against Tigranes in 69 BCE.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, Lucullus showed strong leadership qualities by conducting a disciplined and well-organized retreat, which easily could have turned into a disaster on par with the misfortunes of Crassus or Antony. Despite his soldiers' displeasure with the Armenian campaign and their refusal to continue it, Lucullus was able to encourage them on

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<sup>12</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 32.1-3. Note that Cicero also blames Lucullus' soldiers, who apparently were too homesick to advance further. Cic. *Man.* 9.23-4

<sup>13</sup> For the mutiny of Alexander's soldiers, see Plut. *Alex.* 62; Arr. *Anab.* 5.25-8; Curt. 9.2-3.19; Diod. 2.37.3, 17.93-4. Chahin incorrectly concludes that Lucullus never sacked Tigranocerta because he argues, "Its enormous wealth, including at least part of the king's personal treasure, would have made his army the most loyal in the world." Chahin 1987: 234. Chahin fails to appreciate that loot and military success alone do not secure the loyalty of soldiers as Alexander's example demonstrates. Lucullus' extravagant triumph in Rome clearly illustrates that he captured unprecedented wealth during his campaigns. Plut. *Luc.* 36.7. Lucullus' soldiers had no desire to continue pushing eastward and waging a seemingly endless war; rather, they wanted to enjoy their spoils.

<sup>14</sup> Manandyan, following Eckhardt, argues that Lucullus' army "suffered major losses" and far too many casualties. See Manandyan 2007: 114, 119.

their return to northern Mesopotamia to assault and capture the important city of Nisibis successfully from Tigranes' brother, Gouras, in late 68 BCE.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, Lucullus' campaign had faltered in 68 BCE, but the operation was not yet in shambles. He still controlled much of Tigranes' former empire and maintained the initiative in the war against Armenia. However, his inability to conquer Armenia created opportunity for Tigranes and Mithridates. The two kings returned to their initial strategy to force Lucullus to abandon his invasion. With a force of around 8,000 men, Mithridates reoccupied Lesser Armenia and then invaded Pontus with great success while Tigranes regained control of southern Armenia.<sup>16</sup> The strategy worked and Lucullus had to return with haste to Pontus in early 67 BCE, abandoning his gains in Armenia and Mesopotamia; however, he arrived too late. Mithridates killed 24 tribunes, 150 centurions, and 7,000 Roman soldiers at the Battle of Zela and destroyed the resolve of the Roman army.<sup>17</sup> The recent and considerable setbacks of Lucullus' campaign pushed his soldiers to mutiny once again, and Lucullus lost what remained of his political support at Rome.<sup>18</sup>

Lucullus sat helpless in Galatia as Mithridates reoccupied much of Pontus and raided Bithynia. Meanwhile, Tigranes reoccupied Sophene and invaded Cappadocia. Once again,

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<sup>15</sup> Dio 36.6-8; Plut. *Luc.* 30.2-4, 32.3-5; Eutrop. 6.9; Ruf. Fest. 14.1, 15.3; Orosius 6.3

<sup>16</sup> For Mithridates and Tigranes' counter-offenses, see Dio 36.9-17; Plut. *Luc.* 35; Appian *Mithr.* 13.88-90; Eutrop. 6.9. For the route of Mithridates, see Munro 1901: 58.

<sup>17</sup> Apparently, the disaster at Zela was devastating enough that the news reached Rome by word of mouth before messengers from the East arrived. Cic. *Man.* 9.25-6

<sup>18</sup> The senate had already withdrawn Lucullus' command of the province of Asia in 69 BCE and Cilicia in 68 BCE. Sall. *Hist.* 4.71; Dio 36.2.2. Moreover, in 67 BCE Lucullus lost his command of Bithynia and Pontus. Sall. *Hist.* 5.13; Cic. *Man.* 26. The various mutinies of his troops encouraged Lucullus' political enemies at Rome to campaign against his command, and Pompey appears to have begun to use political supporters, such as Gabinius, to undermine Lucullus' authority. Note Seager 2002: 42-3. See also Ward 1977: 16, 19, 26, 205-6; Kallet-Marx 1995: 312-15.

Tigranes held to the military alliance he had forged with Mithridates against Cappadocia almost thirty years prior. He ravaged the region, no doubt looking to regain as many Cappadocian refugees as possible after Lucullus had destroyed Tigranocerta and sent them all back to Cappadocia.<sup>19</sup> Tigranes' successful invasion satisfied his need for vengeance, and he returned to Armenia with his spoils, allowing Mithridates quickly to invade and occupy the region. Appian's account of these events is interesting. He states,

So it turned out that the Mithridatic war under Lucullus came to no fixed and definite conclusion. The Romans, torn by revolts in Italy and threatened with famine by pirates on the sea, considered it inopportune to undertake another war of this magnitude until their present troubles were ended. When Mithridates perceived this, he again invaded Cappadocia and fortified his own kingdom. The Romans overlooked these transactions while they were clearing the sea.<sup>20</sup>

With the sudden defeat of Lucullus' forces and the reoccupation of Pontus, Armenia, and Cappadocia, Mithridates and Tigranes reestablished their powerbases and could hope to reclaim their regional hegemony.<sup>21</sup> With Rome reeling from war and hesitant to attack Pontus, Mithridates immediately seized the opportunity to reclaim Cappadocia and secure his kingdom. Appian argues that Roman dominance of the Mediterranean remained precarious as the balance of power shifted in the East once more. Appian emphasizes Roman vulnerability and the importance of power perception in the ancient world. Meanwhile, Cicero states,

Now, too, after the disaster which befell us in Pontus, from the result of that battle, of which, sorely against my will, I just now reminded you, when our allies were in a state of alarm, when the power and spirits of our enemies had risen, and the province was in a very insufficient state of defense, you would have entirely lost Asia, O Romans, if the fortune of the Roman people had not, by some divine

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<sup>19</sup> Strabo 12.2.9

<sup>20</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 14.91

<sup>21</sup> Tigranes retained his control of Media Atropatene during the war and relied on his son-in-law, Mithridates, king of Media Atropatene, to help defeat Roman forces as he advanced toward Cappadocia. Dio 36.14.2. There is a scholarly tradition that mistakenly associates this Mithridates of Media Atropatene with Mithridates III or IV of Parthia. Note Schippmann 1987b; Assar 2006d: 94 n.195. Discussed more below.



interposition, brought Gnaeus Pompeius at that particular moment into those regions. His arrival both checked Mithridates, elated with his unusual victory, and delayed Tigranes, who was threatening Asia with a formidable army.<sup>22</sup>

Cicero too captures the swift recovery of Mithridates and Tigranes and the serious threat they still posed to Rome.

To make matters worse for the Romans, by the early 60s BCE the threat of piracy to the entire Mediterranean was massive. Not only were the pirates communities allies of Mithridates, they had dominated shipping throughout the Mediterranean so thoroughly that they were raiding temples, seizing political prisoners, and severely disrupting trade and the grain supply to Rome.<sup>23</sup> The Romans had to do something drastic to destroy the pirate stranglehold on the Mediterranean since they could not afford a resurgent Pontus and Armenia reoccupying the lands of the Near East and joining forces with the naval strength of the network of pirates. Moreover, the wide-ranging success of the pirates had damaged Rome's reputation and threatened its hegemony, making the Roman state more vulnerable.<sup>24</sup> The Roman response was the highly controversial *Lex Gabinia* of 67 BCE, which allowed Pompey to gain unprecedented proconsular powers over all lands east of the Pillars of Heracles within fifty miles of the Mediterranean Sea for three years with a command of up to 500 warships, 120,000 infantry, 5,000 cavalry, twenty-four legates, and two quaestors.<sup>25</sup> Although conservative members of the senate, who feared granting so much power to one man, opposed the proposal violently, it had the support of much of Rome and

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<sup>22</sup> Cic. *Man.* 15.45

<sup>23</sup> For the pirate menace in the Mediterranean and Pompey's campaign against it, see id. 11.31-12.35, 17.53-18.55; Plut. *Pomp.* 24; Dio 36.20-3; Appian *Mithr.* 10.70; 14.91-6; Livy *Epit.* 99.3

<sup>24</sup> Kallet-Marx states that the Romans made the pirate threat a priority because the success and aggression of the pirates meant that "the glory of the empire was now at stake." Kallet-Marx 1995: 316-20.

<sup>25</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 26. Appian records the strength of his command at 270 warships, 120,000 infantry, 4,000 cavalry, and twenty-five legates. Appian *Mithr.* 14.94

passed into law. With this extraordinary command, Pompey did the unthinkable. He rid the Mediterranean of the threat of the pirates in three months by assaulting and destroying their land bases around the Eastern Mediterranean. He then resettled the captured communities inland to help repopulate and stabilize Anatolia.<sup>26</sup>

In a small window of time, Pompey had removed the most immediate threat to Roman hegemony in the Mediterranean and dashed all hopes of Mithridates and Tigranes utilizing the pirates' fleets in their conflict with Rome. Yet we must appreciate Rome's vulnerability in 67 BCE. No one expected Pompey to succeed in his mission so quickly and thoroughly. The seriousness with which the Romans viewed the pirate threat is evident in the outrageous numbers of men and ships granted to Pompey's command. The same must be said about the resurgent threat of Mithridates and Tigranes. The Romans still viewed these kings as major threats to their hegemony in the East and took extraordinary steps once again to eliminate this threat once and for all.<sup>27</sup>

Pompey's success against the pirates left Mithridates and Tigranes isolated against Rome; however, from 67-66 BCE the two kings had been rebuilding their armies, expanding their territory, and consolidating the security of their kingdoms. With immense public support, the Romans passed the also unprecedented *Lex Manilia*, which transferred Lucullus' command to Pompey and granted Pompey even more military and political powers, including *imperium maius* and the right to make war and peace without immediate reference to the senate and people of

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<sup>26</sup> For Pompey's campaign against the pirates, note Seagar 2002: 43-9; de Souza 2002: Chapter 5.

<sup>27</sup> Cicero describes Mithridates and Tigranes as "the two most powerful kings," "who are not only most hostile to you [Romans], but also to your friends and allies" and argues that they would have occupied all of Asia, destroyed Rome's eastern revenue, and brought shame upon Rome had Pompey not stopped them. Cic. *Man.* 2.4, 3.7, 5.12, 7.19, 15.45

Rome.<sup>28</sup> Pompey would use these new powers to transform Rome's military and political presence in the Near East drastically.

Thus, in the middle 60s BCE the geopolitical situation in the Near East was tense and fluid. Mithridates, Tigranes, and then Rome had each experienced severe reversals of fortune. Many of Lucullus' men had deserted to Mithridates to escape punishment; however, Pontus had been ravaged by years of war, and therefore, a lack of supplies encouraged Mithridates' men to start deserting as well.<sup>29</sup> As Pompey neared Pontus with his army, Mithridates sent envoys to him to discuss terms of peace. Although it may seem outrageous that Mithridates thought Pompey would come to peace terms after gaining his unrivaled military command, in reality there are several reasons Mithridates initiated peace talks. First, Mithridates needed to buy all the time he could to reorganize his kingdom and army. Second, although his forces numbered in the tens of thousands, many of these men would have been new levies, and their loyalty was suspect. Third, Mithridates had few storehouses of supplies to conduct another long campaign. Fourth, his own experiences with the political infighting at Rome and inconsistent Roman foreign policy suggested that Pompey might be open to negotiation. He had been able to sign a truce with Sulla that allowed him to keep his kingdom because Sulla had to return to Rome to fight his political rivals. Moreover, when he had defeated Murena, he chose not to pursue further war because he was not prepared, but he secured another truce with Rome because of Roman political distractions. In fact, his defeat of Murena had allowed Mithridates to negotiate with Rome from a position of strength, and he had used this leverage to his advantage to expand his kingdom.

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<sup>28</sup> Cic. *ap. Ascon.* 65; id. *Mur.* 34; *Ascon.* 65; *Vell. Pat.* 2.33.1; *Plut. Pomp.* 30; id. *Luc.* 35; *Livy Epit.* 100.1-2; *Eutrop.* 6.12; *Orosius* 6.4. Note also Kallet-Marx 1995: 320-1; Seagar 2002: 49-52. Once Pompey returned to Rome, he had to submit all of his acts for ratification to the senate.

<sup>29</sup> *Appian Mithr.* 15.97-8; *Dio* 36.45.4

Thus, in 66 BCE Mithridates hoped to repeat his past diplomatic successes with the new face of Rome in the East, Pompey. He had decisively defeated Lucullus' forces and reclaimed his ancestral lands. His knowledge of the Roman political scene would have come from Roman deserters, who would have painted a picture of distrust, anger, and even violence between Rome's various commanders, and strains in their relationship with the senate. There was no way Mithridates could have known Pompey's determination to conquer the Near East. It was not unrealistic for Mithridates to assume that he could negotiate an acceptable peace that would allow him to retain his kingdom and allow Pompey to return to Rome to settle political scores. Out of necessity and hope based upon his experiences, Mithridates tried to end his third conflict with Rome. Our accounts of his negotiations are worth further discussion.

Appian and Dio offer slightly different versions of the talks between Mithridates and Pompey from slightly different perspectives. Appian records that Mithridates brought 33,000 men to the frontier of his kingdom as a show of force, but hunger and desertion began to affect his army, at which point he sent envoys to Pompey.<sup>30</sup> He states,

Mithridates sent envoys to Pompey asking on what terms he could obtain peace. Pompey replied, 'By delivering up our deserters [that is, Roman deserters] and surrendering at discretion.' When Mithridates was made acquainted with these terms he communicated them to the [Roman] deserters, and when he observed their consternation he swore that on account of the arrogance (*πλεονεξίαν*) of the Romans he would never make peace with them, nor would he give up anybody to them, nor would he ever do anything that was not for the common advantage of all. So spoke Mithridates.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, Appian portrays Mithridates trying to use military strength to increase the perception of his power and to deter Pompey from war. Yet his dire lack of supplies and the questionable loyalty of many of his soldiers meant that the longer Mithridates delayed the weaker his position

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<sup>30</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 15.97

<sup>31</sup> Id. 15.98. I altered this translation to reflect the Greek more accurately.

became. He could not risk his army dissolving in front of Pompey so he enacted harsh penalties on deserters, including crucifixion, blinding, and death by fire, and opened negotiations with Pompey to secure a peace. Unknown to Mithridates was that his show of strength had not fazed Pompey and that Pompey had already determined to win the war unconditionally. Pompey engaged in traditional compellence diplomacy and demanded harsh, unrealistic terms with the threat of force behind them. Pompey's harsh terms surprised and offended Mithridates.

Mithridates then related these terms to his Roman deserters, not because he was hoping that they would agree to them, but because he wanted to galvanize them to his cause. Desertion had been a major recent issue in his army, and now he could use Pompey's threat to ensure the unwavering loyalty of some of his best available troops. He portrayed himself as their protector and derided the arrogance of Pompey's demands. He and his men had defeated Lucullus and retaken his ancestral realm. The idea of unconditional surrender without a test of arms was shameful and intolerable. Mithridates had just restored his military prestige and power; he was not about to lay these down without a fight. His negotiations with Pompey had been a failure; however, Mithridates had a much better idea of the disposition of his new enemy. Moreover, he now knew a war against Pompey was unavoidable.

Meanwhile, Dio's account incorporates other details and larger geopolitical developments in the Near East. He records,

Pompey was at first making ready to sail to Crete against Metellus, and when he learned of the decree that had been passed, pretended to be annoyed as before, and charged the members of the opposite faction with always loading tasks upon him so that he might meet with some reverse. In reality he received the news with the greatest joy, and no longer regarding as of any importance Crete or the other maritime points where things had been left unsettled, he made preparations for the war with the barbarians. Meanwhile, wishing to test the intention (*δianoίας*) of Mithridates, he sent Metrophanes to him with friendly proposals. Now Mithridates at that time held him [Pompey] in contempt; for as Arsaces, king of the Parthians, had recently died, he expected to conciliate Phraates [III], his

successor. But Pompey anticipated him by quickly establishing friendship with Phraates on the same agreement and persuading the latter to invade promptly the part of Armenia belonging to Tigranes. When Mithridates ascertained this, he was alarmed and straightaway sent an embassy and tried to arrange a truce. But when Pompey demanded that he lay down his arms and deliver up the deserters, he had no opportunity to deliberate; for the large number of deserters who were in his camp, hearing of it and fearing they should be delivered up, and likewise the barbarians, fearing that they should be compelled to fight without them, raised an uproar. And they would have done some harm to the king, had he not by pretending that he had sent the envoys, not for a truce, but to spy out the Roman strength, with difficulty held them in check.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, Dio begins by illustrating the heated rivalry between Pompey and Metellus over the conflict in Crete and emphasizes Pompey's outward annoyance that his rivals in Rome gave him the command against Mithridates and his fear that he might suffer a reversal of fortune. Clearly, as Dio notes, Pompey truly desired the eastern command and only wished to criticize his political enemies at Rome; however, Dio's account supports the argument that Mithridates had good reason to think that he could negotiate another favorable peace with Rome. Again, Mithridates' knowledge of the intimate details of Roman politics and Pompey's ambitions were minimal. He only would have known what was public knowledge; and therefore, he knew that Pompey was feuding with other Roman commanders and politicians. To Mithridates, the plight of Pompey in 66 BCE would have appeared similar to that of Sulla in 85 BCE. It was easy for Mithridates to think that Pompey's enemies had forced the war against Pontus upon him to keep him away from Rome and to watch him fail. Since Mithridates assumed Pompey did not want to fight and risk hurting his reputation, he saw his opportunity to escape his conflict with Rome.

Dio then states that Pompey initiated peace talks with Mithridates through his agent, Metrophanes. Seager argues convincingly that it is highly unlikely that Pompey, who wanted the

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<sup>32</sup> Dio 36.45. I altered this translation to reflect the Greek more accurately.

command against Mithridates, desired friendship with Mithridates.<sup>33</sup> He instead argues that Dio records a fictitious event; however, it is more likely that Pompey sent Metrophanes as a spy to reconnoiter Mithridates' army.<sup>34</sup> Mithridates had over 30,000 men with him on the frontier of Pontus. It is likely that Pompey, under the guise of friendly talks, used an agent to gauge the status of Mithridates' army and his immediate intentions. Dio recounts in the same passage that Mithridates used a similar excuse during his negotiations with Pompey to calm his men.

We learn also that Pompey sent envoys to gauge the intentions of the Parthians at this time.<sup>35</sup> Dio's discussion of Pompey's correspondence with Parthia is important because scholars have used it for well over a hundred years to bolster the dubious tradition that there was a series of Roman and Parthian alliances officially recognized between the 90s-60s BCE, which set geographical boundaries to their respective hegemonies.<sup>36</sup> However, Dio's account, which is our only detailed depiction of these events, is not evidence of a Roman and Parthian treaty of alliance. In fact, Dio never mentions a treaty of alliance. Dio simply records that Pompey outmaneuvered Mithridates diplomatically by "*quickly establishing friendship with Phraates on the same agreement* (τὴν φιλίαν τῷ Φραάτῃ διὰ ταχέων ἐπὶ τοῖς αὐτοῖς προσυνέθετο) and persuading the latter to invade promptly the part of Armenia belonging to Tigranes."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Seager 2002: 53.

<sup>34</sup> Manandyan 2007: 131.

<sup>35</sup> For a recent evaluation of Pompey's interaction with the Parthians, note Lerouge 2007: 58-63.

<sup>36</sup> For example, Rawlinson 1885 (2002): 80; Reinach 1890: 382; Mommsen 1903: iv 268-9; Khalat'iants 1903: 208; Dobiáš 1931; Holleaux 1935: 49 n.2, 69 n.1; Sykes 1951: 345; van Ooteghem 1954: 205 n.7; Ziegler 1964: 28-30; Ward 1977: 280; Keaveney 1981: 202-3; Seager 2002: 53-4; Manandyan 2007: 131, 144, 158; Sheldon 2010: 18; Mayor 2010: 316; Shayegan 2011: 322 n.953 and 954. Contra Kennedy 1996a: 74-6.

<sup>37</sup> Dio 36.45.3. The italics are mine. I altered this translation to reflect the Greek more accurately. Note also that Dio stresses that Pompey had failed to gain Parthian military support prior to the Battle of Pharsalus in 48 BCE. He rejects that Pompey would have considered fleeing to Parthia after the battle, and he makes no mention of a former alliance between Pompey and the Parthians. Id. 42.2.5-6.

Unfortunately, Dio does not specify what he means by the “same agreement.” This led Sherwin-White to assume mistakenly that Pompey agreed to offer Phraates “the same terms as Tigranes and Mithridates, who were once again fishing for Parthian support. This should mean the restoration of the lands claimed previously: Gordyene, Mesopotamia and Adiabene.”<sup>38</sup>

Therefore, in Sherwin-White’s mind Phraates had to “earn his reward by attacking Tigranes in Armenia while Pompeius set about Mithridates in Pontus.”<sup>39</sup> However, we should reject Sherwin-White’s portrayal of Parthia as a Roman pawn against Armenia because it discounts Parthian agency and wrongly assumes that Pompey agreed to the same agreement that Mithridates and Tigranes offered to Parthia in 68 BCE.<sup>40</sup> Rather, we should prefer an approach that considers the separate hegemonic perspectives and geopolitical realities of Rome and Parthia at this time.

It is impossible to argue that Mithridates offered the Parthians the same terms of alliance in 66 BCE that he had offered in 68 BCE. First, Dio states that Mithridates only hoped to gain Parthia as an ally and that clearly Pompey anticipated this and offered terms to Parthia before Mithridates ever could. Pompey from his base in Cilicia had quicker and more direct access to Mesopotamia so it is unsurprising that he was able to begin a diplomatic correspondence with Phraates first in early 66 BCE. Pompey also needed to secure Parthia’s neutrality before he turned his back to Mesopotamia and traveled north to face Mithridates. Second, Mithridates was in no position to offer up Tigranes’ lands in 66 BCE. In 68 BCE Tigranes had turned to

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<sup>38</sup> Sherwin-White 1984: 221. Note Manandyan makes the same mistake. Manandyan 2007: 131.

<sup>39</sup> Sherwin-White 1984: 221.

<sup>40</sup> Seager too denigrates the independent will of the Parthians when he suggests that Phraates “might be happy to have the blessing of the Roman in his quarrel with Tigranes.” Seager 2002: 54. In reality, the Parthians did not want nor need Rome’s blessing to continue their rivalry with Tigranes. They were concerned with their own policy and security threats, not with the opinion of Rome in matters of state that the Parthians did not think concerned the Romans.



Mithridates as his primary advisor; however, since that time the two kings had parted and their foreign policies once again split. Third, Tigranes never would have agreed in 66 BCE to yield these lands to Parthia because the geopolitical situation of Armenia had changed drastically since 68 BCE. Mithridates and Tigranes from 67-66 BCE had capitalized on Roman mistakes, gaining a wave of military victories and restoring the strength and territorial integrity of their kingdoms. With Lucullus gone, Tigranes still would have considered Osrhoene, Mygdonia, Gordyene, and Adiabene to be Armenian territory and would have wanted to move to reoccupy these regions. Tigranes and Mithridates were not negotiating in 66 BCE from a position of desperation as they had been in 68 BCE. Therefore, it is undeniable that Dio here meant that Pompey offered the Parthians “the same agreement” that Lucullus had offered in 68 BCE, namely informal friendship and neutrality in the ongoing war.

Pompey wanted to renew this informal agreement in 66 BCE to isolate Mithridates politically and militarily before his invasion of Pontus; however, no scholar seems to have appreciated that Pompey *had* to do this because Phraates III had just come to power in Mesopotamia in 67/66 BCE.<sup>41</sup> Lucullus had made his informal agreement of neutrality and friendship with Phraates’ rival and predecessor in the western portion of the Parthian Empire, Arsaces XVI. Once Arsaces lost control of Mesopotamia and had to flee into the East, as discussed in more detail below, Phraates became the active and legitimate king in the western lands.<sup>42</sup> Phraates had not agreed to remain neutral in the Third Mithridatic War, and therefore, Dio tells us that Mithridates hoped he could convince Phraates to join the conflict on his side

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<sup>41</sup> Assar argues convincingly that Dio here points to Phraates coming to power in Mesopotamia; however, he does not address why Pompey made the new treaty with him. See Assar 2006d: 87, 89-90.

<sup>42</sup> Dio understandably mistook Arsaces XVI’s sudden disappearance from Mesopotamia in 66 BCE with his death. See id. 87.

where he had failed to convince Arsaces XVI.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, Arsaces had rejected Tigranes' and Mithridates' generous offer in 68 BCE because he had a civil war to fight, because Parthia viewed Armenia as a major rival, and because Parthia wanted to recover these lands by force to mend its damaged reputation and to punish Tigranes. None of these conditions had changed for Phraates III in 66 BCE.

Phraates did not want to attack Armenia because Rome gave its approval or because Rome told him to do it; rather, Phraates wanted to attack Armenia because he wished to obtain vengeance for his state and to reestablish Parthian hegemony over Armenia firmly.<sup>44</sup> Ultimately, neither Pompey nor Phraates was willing to share Armenia; both men continued to view the region as under the separate hegemonic sphere of their own states. The concept of a joint effort to subdue the Near East in 66 BCE is an invention by later ancient and modern authors. Finally, if Lucullus had made an alliance with Phraates III in 68 BCE, as most scholars argue, there would have been no reason for Pompey to renew this agreement in 66 BCE, unless one argues that Pompey in fact did not renew Lucullus' alleged alliance but instead forged a new military alliance with Parthia against Armenia at this time, which is an untenable argument.<sup>45</sup> All of these factors point to Lucullus forming an informal agreement of friendship and neutrality with Parthia in 68 BCE and Pompey renewing this agreement in 66 BCE with the new Parthian king.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Note Sall. *Hist.* 4.67

<sup>44</sup> Thus, I disagree also with Shayegan's recent Roman-centric reconstruction. Shayegan 2011: 246.

<sup>45</sup> Keaveney even attempts to argue that Lucullus had formed a military alliance with the Parthians against Armenia that Pompey simply renewed. Keaveney invents a scenario where a treaty between Phraates and Tigranes voided Lucullus' treaty and, therefore, forced Pompey to renew it. Keaveney's Roman-centric perspective aims to label the Parthians as diplomatically duplicitous. Keaveney 1981: 202-4. Dobias was correct that the Parthians had in fact remained neutral in the conflict. Dobias 1931: 232-3.

<sup>46</sup> Although Tarn and Debevoise did not have the advantage of understanding how the Parthian civil war between Arsaces XVI and Phraates III factored into these events, I agree with their

The major issue at hand is that scholars have been too quick to accept without question the anachronistic tradition of later Greek and Roman writers that Roman Republican generals made official alliances with Parthia in order to help explain later Roman military setbacks in the East and later Roman territorial limitations in the East.<sup>47</sup> Even though Pompey had the authority to make war and peace as he saw fit, there is no credible evidence that he made a formal military alliance with Parthia that designated geographical limitations to Roman or Parthian hegemonies; nor is there evidence that the senate ratified such an alliance after Pompey's return to Rome.

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original conclusions that Pompey simply renewed Lucullus' tentative and informal agreement of neutrality and friendship with Parthia in 66 BCE. Tarn 1932: 604 n.1; Debevoise 1938: 72. See also Sampson 2015: 89-90. In fact, the more contemporary evidence supports this less formal and less official reconstruction. The summary of Livy records, "To wage war against Mithridates [VI], Gnaeus Pompey renewed the friendship (*amicitiam*) with the king of the Parthians, Phraates [III]." Livy *Epit.* 100.4. Meanwhile, Justin in his summary of Trogus states, "Not long after these occurrences the civil war among the Romans, between Caesar and Pompeius, broke out, in which the Parthians took the side of Pompeius, both from the friendship (*amicitiam*) that they had formed with him in the Mithridatic war, and because of the death of Crassus, whose son they understood to be of Caesar's party, and supposed that, if Caesar were victorious, he would avenge his father's fate." Justin 42.4.6. Neither source claims that this friendship was a *foedus amicitiae*; rather, *amicitia* in these contexts meant an informal bond of friendship between Rome and Parthia or, as Justin argues, simply between Lucullus and Arsaces XVI and between Pompey and Phraates III. Even Sherwin-White acknowledges that the agreement between Pompey and Phraates was not formal, nor was it "couched in the traditional terms of a Graeco-Roman *foedus*." Sherwin-White 1984: 221. In fact, Plutarch reinforces the argument that no formal treaties existed between Rome and Parthia in his account of Crassus and Surena's meeting. He states, "And when Crassus answered that neither of them was at fault, since each was following the custom of his country in this meeting, Surena said that from that moment there was a truce and peace between King Hyrodes [Orodes II] and the Romans, but it was necessary to go forward to the river Euphrates and there have the contracts put in writing; 'for you Romans at least,' said he, 'are not very mindful of agreements (ὁμολογιῶν),' and he held out his right hand to Crassus." Plut. *Crass.* 31.3. Although no formal treaty actually emerged from this meeting, Plutarch has Surenas imply that no formal agreement existed before either since Surenas here emphasizes putting the peace in writing. Plutarch likely invented this dialogue. Surenas had no authority to conclude a peace treaty with Crassus. Thus, Plutarch's insistence that Rome and Parthia finally should write down a treaty is telling.

<sup>47</sup> Livy *Epit.* 70.7, 100.4; Ampelius 31; Memnon 38.8; Appian *Mithr.* 13.87; Plut. *Luc.* 30.1; Plut. *Pomp.* 33.6; Dio 36.3.2-3, 37.5-6; Florus 1.40.31, 46.4, 2.20.1; Ruf. *Fest.* 3, 15; *Reg. Imp. Apophtheg.* 8; Orosius 6.13.2.

Rather, the later actions of Phraates, Pompey, and Pompey's generals all indicate that no such military alliance or agreement existed. The dubious tradition stands on a handful of confused, contradictory, unreliable, and unspecific accounts of Roman and Parthian relations in this period from much later sources.

For example, Dio's own understanding of Roman and Parthian relations at this time and his account of Pompey and Phraates' negotiations is important but confused. In his earlier passage on Lucullus' negotiations with Parthia, Dio claims that the Parthians agreed to friendship and an alliance initially but became suspicious of the Romans so the Parthians ended their military aid and settled on aloof, self-interested neutrality instead.<sup>48</sup> He then seemingly claims that Pompey became friends with the Parthians on the same terms as Lucullus, meaning aloof, self-interested friendship, but he then implies that Pompey and Phraates also agreed to military action against Armenia. This has led most scholars to assume inaccurately that Pompey and Phraates formed some sort of military alliance.<sup>49</sup> Yet Dio soon after records, "While Pompey was thus engaged [with Mithridates], Tigranes, the son of Tigranes [II], fled to Phraates, taking with him some of the foremost men [of Armenia], because his father was not ruling to suit them; *and though Phraates, in view of the agreement (συνθήκας) made with Pompey, hesitated about what he ought to do, he was persuaded to invade Armenia.*"<sup>50</sup> Phraates here hesitated to become involved in the civil war in Armenia because he had recently agreed to friendship with Rome and neutrality in Rome's war along the same terms upon which Lucullus and Arsaces XVI had

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<sup>48</sup> Dio 36.3.2-3

<sup>49</sup> See the numerous scholars cited above. Note that Sherwin-White implies that Pompey did not renew Lucullus' agreement of neutrality and did not form a formal military alliance with Parthia but instead made a *de facto* military alliance against Armenia in Rome's favor. Sherwin-White 1984: 190, 221.

<sup>50</sup> Dio 36.51.1. The italics are mine. I altered this translation to reflect the Greek more accurately.

agreed. That is, Phraates knew that war against Tigranes II might violate his neutrality agreement with Rome, which gave him pause; however, he ultimately agreed with Tigranes' son that Parthian involvement in the Armenian civil war was not a violation of the agreement with Rome and was within his rights as the system hegemon in the East.<sup>51</sup> Sherwin-White's efforts to explain Phraates' hesitancy by blaming his "continuing reluctance to commit himself to either side" is unconvincing and unfair.<sup>52</sup> It mistakenly assigns the actions of Arsaces XVI to Phraates III, and it fails to appreciate Phraates' actual motivations.

Again, Rome and Parthia had different geopolitical perspectives in 66 BCE. Pompey considered Armenia to be under the Roman hegemonic sphere of influence, and he would not have wanted Parthia meddling in that sphere. He had the responsibility to finish what Lucullus had begun and to avenge Lucullus' recent setbacks. Therefore, he sought Parthian neutrality in the war to avoid further complications. Meanwhile, Phraates had a civil war to fight and faced the resurgent power of Armenia. In early 66 BCE, war with Rome or Armenia was not an attractive option, and therefore, he agreed to renew the policy of neutrality in the Third Mithridatic War, which had come to include the Roman war against Armenia. Yet he too continued to consider Armenia to be under the Parthian hegemonic sphere of influence, and he never surrendered his prerogative as the leading political and military figure in the Eastern system to become involved in geopolitical matters that concerned the makeup of the international environment and the balance of power within that sphere.

It is significant that Tigranes' son came to seek Parthian aid first because it speaks to the traditional rivalry and relationship that had emerged between Parthia and Armenia in the Eastern

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<sup>51</sup> For Tigranes the Younger, see Chaumont 2001-2002.

<sup>52</sup> Sherwin-White 1984: 221.

system and to the favorable perception of Parthian power and authority in the Near East at this time. Parthia was not seen as weak at this time; rather, recent Roman military setbacks and the recent military successes of Phraates made Parthia appear to be the leading regional power. Moreover, the Armenian civil war presented Phraates with a unique opportunity to restore Parthian hegemony over its major rival. Phraates was wise enough to understand that attacking Armenia might anger Pompey because of their recent informal agreement; however, Tigranes' son and Phraates' advisors persuaded him to seize the opportunity. It is possible that the self-interested concerns of the Parthian state simply trumped Phraates' personal concerns about his relationship with Rome in 66 BCE. Yet it is also possible that Phraates became convinced that the Armenian civil war was a separate matter from Tigranes II's war against Rome and, therefore, did not violate the informal agreement he had with Pompey. Either way, the war had the support of the Parthian nobles and presented Phraates with a monumental opportunity to advance his prestige, reputation, and the power of his state by restoring Parthian dominance over Armenia and finally punishing Tigranes. Had Phraates refused to champion Tigranes' son as the new vassal king of Armenia, he would have appeared weak and unresponsive to his supporters, which was unacceptable in a time of civil war, and he would have completely undercut the unrivaled standing of the Parthian king in the East at this time. Thus, Dio is mistaken in passage

36.45, but he corrects himself in passage 51.1.<sup>53</sup> The Parthians attacked Armenia in 66 BCE because they had the opportunity and cause to do so, not because Pompey told them to do so.<sup>54</sup>

Dio tells us that, once Mithridates learned that Phraates would not join the war against Rome, he decided, as Appian relates, to solicit peace terms from Pompey. Yet Pompey utilized compellence diplomacy to demand unconditional surrender and the return of the Roman deserters. Unlike Appian's version, in Dio's account Mithridates did not tell his soldiers of Pompey's harsh terms to galvanize them to his cause; rather, Dio portrays Mithridates as a victim of his men and as a liar.

In both accounts, we find the morale and discipline of Mithridates' army called into question. However, Appian portrays the king proactively trying to remedy this problem. Meanwhile, Dio portrays Mithridates nearly losing control of his army and having to act duplicitously to avoid physical harm. If Mithridates shared any quality with Hannibal, it was that he was a leader of men. He forged an immensely diverse kingdom and army that contained a broad spectrum of different customs, cultures, languages, and fighting styles. Clearly, Mithridates misjudged Pompey and was ill prepared for another war; however, his leadership and cunning allowed him to frustrate the Romans for three more years. Therefore, we should prefer Appian's less stereotyped and critical account of the end of the negotiations with Pompey.

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<sup>53</sup> Despite Sherwin-White's objections, if we accept that Rome and Parthia had different perspectives of the situation in Armenia, we may accept Debevoise's conclusion that Phraates' attack on Tigranes from Pompey's perspective was contrary to their agreement. Debevoise 1938: 72 n.8; Sherwin-White 1984: 221 n.90. Although Phraates from his eastern perspective became convinced that he was acting against Tigranes but not against Rome, Pompey could have viewed Phraates' invasion of Armenia as a violation of Parthia's informal agreement earlier that year to remain neutral toward Armenia.

<sup>54</sup> Shayegan correctly identifies Phraates' use of Tigranes the Younger "as grounded in the Arsacid strategy of expansion" and recognizes that the renewal of the Armeno-Parthian war "was not part of the Arsacid and Roman accord." However, Shayegan is incorrect when he assumes that Phraates expected Roman retaliation for his actions. Shayegan 2011: 326.

Mithridates understood that he was not ready to fight a conventional war against Pompey, and therefore, in the summer of 66 BCE he utilized the hit-and-run delaying tactics he had adopted in Armenia and withdrew into the rugged mountain country of Pontus.<sup>55</sup> Unfortunately for Mithridates, Pompey was able to execute a daring nocturnal attack on his position near Dasteira and annihilated most of his army; Mithridates barely evaded capture. Although Mithridates had escaped with only a small force under his command, perhaps fewer than 4,000 men, he still had massive quantities of precious metals in his treasure strongholds, with which he could hope to buy and train a new army in the East or North. Mithridates quickly gathered 6,000 talents of gold and silver (about 36 million drachmas) and moved his small force to the border of Armenia.<sup>56</sup> Mithridates once more hoped to find refuge in Armenia and to use the power of Tigranes to help him respond to Pompey's advance.

However, unlike in 71 BCE Tigranes was not in a position of strength and did not want to take on the responsibility of protecting Mithridates. Plutarch states, "From thence he [Mithridates] set out towards Armenia on his way to Tigranes; but that monarch forbade his coming and proclaimed a reward of a hundred talents for his person; he therefore passed by the sources of the Euphrates and continued his flight through Colchis."<sup>57</sup> Meanwhile Dio records,

The king then hastened toward Tigranes. But on sending courtiers to him he found no friendship awaiting him, because the young Tigranes had risen against his father, and the latter suspected that Mithridates, the youth's grandfather, had really been responsible for the quarrel. For this reason, far from receiving him,

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<sup>55</sup> For Pompey's campaign against Mithridates in Pontus, see Plut. *Pomp.* 32; Appian 15.97-101; Livy *Epit.* 101 Strabo. 12.3.28-41; Dio 36.47-50; Front. *Strat.* 1.1.7; Florus 1.40.23, 3.5.22-4; Ruf. *Fest.* 16; Eutrop. 6.12-14; Orosius 6.4. The sources portray Mithridates as indecisive and fearful; however, Mayor is correct to reject these biased portrayals. Clearly, Mithridates was utilizing his newly adopted hit-and-run tactics; he could not risk a conventional battle. Mayor 2010: 318.

<sup>56</sup> Soldiers at this time earned around a drachma a day. Therefore, Mithridates could afford an army of about 100,000 men for a year. Reinach 1890: 387-9; Mayor 2010: 325.

<sup>57</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 32.9



Tigranes even arrested and threw into prison the men sent ahead by him. Failing, therefore, of the expected refuge, he turned aside into Colchis.<sup>58</sup>

The relationship between Mithridates and Tigranes had deteriorated considerably by late 66 BCE. The cohesive military purpose that the two kings had shared in 68-67 BCE gave way to mistrust and frustration with the success of Pompey's advance and the civil war in Armenia.

From 87-69 BCE Tigranes had amassed unrivaled strength and authority in the Near East; however, his sudden and swift reversal of fortune devastated his power and prestige in the region. Subject communities and vassal kings chafed under Armenian domination and looked to Roman involvement in the region with eager anticipation; however, the nobility of Armenia also saw its opportunity to reassert its influence with the decline of Tigranes' reputation.<sup>59</sup> Tigranes had had three sons with Mithridates' daughter, Cleopatra, and all three of them tried to overthrow their father with the support of factions within the Armenian nobility.<sup>60</sup> The rebellion of his sons forced Tigranes to abandon his gains in Cappadocia and his efforts to reestablish Armenian hegemony regionally. He killed his eldest son in battle and executed his second son. He then defeated his third son, Tigranes the Younger, in battle but was unable to capture him. Tigranes the Younger fled to Parthia with his Armenian supporters to gain the military aid of Phraates III.

The deaths of two of his grandsons at the hands of Tigranes could not have pleased Mithridates. Moreover, the rebellion of all three of Mithridates' grandsons against Tigranes did not endear Mithridates to his longtime ally. Dio states that Tigranes blamed Mithridates in part for these rebellions. Thus, Tigranes refused to shelter Mithridates and, instead, put a price on his

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<sup>58</sup> Dio 36.50.1

<sup>59</sup> Note Plut. *Luc.* 21.2

<sup>60</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 15.104; Val. Max. 9.11; Dio 36.51

head. This was not simply paranoia on the part of Tigranes. He could not risk allowing Mithridates to enter his kingdom with an army to reinforce his enemies. Although it is unlikely that Mithridates had anything to do with the rebellions of his grandsons, it is hard to argue that Mithridates would not have preferred in 66 BCE to have his more amenable and controllable grandson on the throne of Armenia.<sup>61</sup> Yet there are several other geopolitical reasons for Tigranes refusing Mithridates in 66 BCE.

Tigranes could not have helped Mithridates in 66 BCE even if he had wanted to do so. The war with Lucullus had devastated his army and kingdom. Although he had some success in pushing out Lucullus' forces and reclaiming lost lands, the damage to his reputation was so considerable that it led to a series of civil wars. Moreover, his civil war against Tigranes the Younger turned into a new war against Parthia after Tigranes the Younger agreed to become a Parthian vassal in exchange for military support and a marriage to Phraates' daughter.<sup>62</sup> Further, Tigranes II must have known that the Romans would return to avenge the losses of Lucullus. Tigranes' only hope of survival was to try to arrange a truce with Pompey so that he could concentrate on his war against his son and the Parthians. Tigranes had firsthand experience of how the Romans would react to his protection of Mithridates. Regardless of how Tigranes felt about the loyalty of Mithridates, he simply could not commit to a war with Rome while simultaneously fighting a major war in the East. Mithridates quickly realized that Armenia would not aid him against Rome a second time and swiftly moved north in a last ditch attempt to restore his fortunes.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Note Manandyan 2007: 133, 142.

<sup>62</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 33.6. Shayegan 2011: 323, 326.

<sup>63</sup> For Mithridates' retreat toward Armenia and then his march to Colchis, see Manandyan 2007: 136-41. Note Strabo 11.2.13-19; Appian *Mithr.* 15.101

## The Height of Roman Hegemony: Pompey's Settlement of Armenia and the Caucasus

With an understanding of the geopolitical situations in Italy, Pontus, and Armenia by 66 BCE, it is important now to consider the situation in Parthia. When we last addressed the developments of Parthia, the envoys of Tigranes, Mithridates, and Lucullus had exchanged diplomatic correspondence with Arsaces XVI in Mesopotamia during his civil war against Phraates III in the Farther East, and the Parthians had decided to remain neutral in the Third Mithridatic War. Arsaces had an unfriendly relationship with Tigranes and was uninterested in a western war against the unfamiliar Romans. Meanwhile, he had fought a series of civil wars that threatened his standing as king and limited the ability of the Parthians to act aggressively in foreign wars.

After the death of Sinatruces in 69/68 BCE, his son Phraates III took up his father's cause and pursued a more aggressive war against Arsaces.<sup>64</sup> The Nisa ostrakon 2640 (Nova 307) illustrates that Phraates was well established in northern Parthia in 68/67 BCE.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, a Babylonian colophon from 68 BCE introduces a new date-formula, identifying Arsaces XVI for the first time by connecting him to his wife, Piruztana.<sup>66</sup> Such a change in the date-formula was necessary only in a period of intense civil war when multiple candidates claimed the throne. Thus, the Parthian civil war was intensifying at the time the Roman and Armenian envoys negotiated with Arsaces.

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<sup>64</sup> Phraates adopted the epithet ΦΙΛΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ on his S37 and S36 coinage to express devotion to his father and to his father's cause. Assar 2006d: 90-1.

<sup>65</sup> Diankonoff and Livshits 1966: 143-4, n.28, pls. X, X:a; Chaumont 1968: 16-18; id. 1971: 145-7; Lukonin 1983: 687-9; Bader 1996: 264; Diakonoff and Livshits 1999: pl.918; id. 2003: 174; Assar 2006d: 88.

<sup>66</sup> Assar argues convincingly that this colophon belongs to Arsaces instead of Phraates. See Assar 2006d: 85.

The details of this war are lost; however, it appears that Phraates quickly built his forces in the Farther East, and by 66 BCE, he had campaigned successfully to occupy Mesopotamia, at which point he accepted an envoy from Pompey.<sup>67</sup> Phraates established a strong powerbase in Babylonia and resurrected the title “King of Kings” to enhance his prestige and legitimacy both within the empire and throughout the Eastern system.<sup>68</sup> Meanwhile, Arsaces survived the clash in Mesopotamia and fled to the East, where he continued the war for several years and minted what are known as the Parthian “campaign coins.” This series of coins is notable for its poor artistic and metal qualities, which has led Assar to suggest that Arsaces minted these coins quickly to support his various eastern campaigns against Sinatruces and Phraates.<sup>69</sup> Arsaces’ ability to mint these coins from Rhagae, Nisa, Margiane, Traxiane, Areia, and Mithradatkart from ca. 66-61 BCE illustrates his continued control over sections of the central and eastern regions of the empire during the conflict.<sup>70</sup> Phraates’ simultaneous S36 coinage minted from 67/66-63/62 BCE, much of which came from eastern mints, such as Ecbatana, Rhagae, and Mithradatkart, illustrates the shifting control that these dynasts exercised over the eastern half of the empire during this period of civil war.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, Assar concludes that Phraates minted the unique S35

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<sup>67</sup> For the Babylonian cuneiform records establishing the *terminus ante quem* of Phraates’ accession to the throne in Babylon in 66 BCE, for his continued rule throughout 65-64 BCE, and for the argument that the S37 coinage was “the inaugural issue of Phraates III marking his capture of Babylonia in 67/66 BC,” see id. 88-90. Dio 36.45.3. Appian too notes that Phraates had just become king in 66 BCE. Appian *Mithr.* 15.104. Assar places Phraates’ assault on Babylon in the middle of 67 BCE. Assar 2006d: 88 n.171.

<sup>68</sup> Shayegan’s argument that Phraates adopted the “King of Kings” title in late 65 BCE instead of 66 BCE is unconvincing and relies upon the incorrect assumption that Phraates was acting as a pawn of Pompey in 66 BCE. Shayegan 2011: 228, 246. Manandyan mistakenly argues that the Romans gave the title to Phraates after their conquest of Tigranes. Manandyan 2007: 161.

<sup>69</sup> Assar 2006d: 83-4, 91-2.

<sup>70</sup> See esp. S30.18, S30.21-2, S30.24-5, and S30.28-30. Note Sellwood 1991: 24-5; Assar 2006d: 86-7.

<sup>71</sup> Assar’s conclusion that the S37 and S36 coinage belongs to Phraates III appears sound. Assar 2006d: 90-91.

coinage with its front facing busts, which all come from eastern mints, in response to Arsaces' campaign coins to differentiate Phraates from his rival in the East.<sup>72</sup> Thus, from ca. 66-61 BCE it is likely that Phraates and his generals went on various but limited eastern campaigns to marginalize Arsaces' influence and to reclaim the eastern lands of the empire that had fallen under Arsaces' control when the western frontier was stable enough. The war with Armenia and the growing threat of Rome during this period helps explain the length of this internal conflict.

After Tigranes II defeated the initial rebellion of his son, Tigranes the Younger fled to the newly crowned king of Parthia in Mesopotamia. He needed military support to become king of Armenia so he looked to exploit the twenty-year rivalry between Armenia and Parthia to his benefit. Phraates at first hesitated to join the war because he had just accepted an informal agreement with Pompey to remain neutral and because, although recently successful in Mesopotamia, he still had a civil war to win. However, the opportunity to reestablish Parthian hegemony over Armenia by setting up Tigranes the Younger as a new Parthian vassal king was too good to ignore. Armenia had brought destruction and shame upon the Parthian state, and Orodes I and Arsaces XVI had been forced to accept humiliating peace treaties. Yet Phraates had agreed to no such arrangement between Parthia and Armenia. In fact, Phraates made a public statement of power and authority that directly challenged the legitimacy of his Parthian predecessors and his Armenian rival when he reclaimed the title of "King of Kings."<sup>73</sup> This was

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<sup>72</sup> Phraates too adopted the epithet ΘΕΟΠΙΑΤΟΡΟΣ to enhance his prestige. Therefore, Assar argues that he might have adopted the frontal portrait temporarily to avoid confusion in the East. He then abandoned the style after winning the war and returning to Mesopotamia. Id. 84, 92.

<sup>73</sup> Phraates took the title after conquering Mesopotamia, which makes sense since he wanted to establish his legitimacy in the face of Arsaces and because he became the immediate rival of Tigranes in Armenia. His use of the title in Babylonian cuneiform separates him from his immediate predecessors. See Kugler 1924: 447, no. 31; Sachs 1955: xxxiii, LBAT \*1450, 177, LBAT 1183, LBAT 1184; McEwan 1986: 93; George 1992: 71, Tablet 1, pl. 4; Sachs and

a bold statement by Phraates, connecting him to the great reign of Mithridates II, who had subjugated Armenia. Phraates put the Eastern world on notice that he meant to restore Parthia to greatness and to end the opposition of Armenia.

Yet Phraates' position in 66 BCE, although improved, remained vulnerable. Before Tigranes the Younger fled to Parthia, Phraates agreed to renew Parthia's neutrality in the Roman war against Mithridates VI and Tigranes II because a protracted war of occupation in Armenia was unappealing and unrealistic during his conflict against Arsaces in the East.<sup>74</sup> Regardless of what Dio claims Pompey wanted Phraates to do against Tigranes in early 66 BCE, Phraates did not attack Armenia for Rome.<sup>75</sup> Rather, Phraates attacked Armenia when it suited him and when it was to his own advantage.

The arrival of Tigranes' son with a large band of Armenian aristocratic supporters made a quick overthrow of Tigranes' regime a sudden possibility in the middle of 66 BCE. Once Tigranes the Younger agreed to rule Armenia as a Parthian vassal and once Phraates determined that Parthian involvement in the Armenian civil war was not a violation of his informal agreement with Pompey to remain neutral in the Third Mithridatic War, Phraates committed to seeking revenge against Tigranes and restoring Parthia's unrivaled position atop the Eastern system. Phraates gathered his army and like Mithridates II moved to place a Tigranes on the throne of Armenia as a vassal king of Parthia.<sup>76</sup> Dio records,

So they came as far as Artaxata, subduing all the country before them, and even assailed that place too, for Tigranes the elder in fear of them had fled to the mountains. But when it appeared that time was required for the siege, Phraates

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Hunger 1996: 512-15, no. -62; Del Monte 1997: 182, 257; Hunger and Sachs 2001: 787-9, no.30; Assar 2006d: 88, 90 n.177.

<sup>74</sup> Phraates' short invasion of Armenia bears out the reality that he had to manage the limited availability of Parthian troops and the limited ability to campaign with them. See Dio 36.51.2

<sup>75</sup> Id. 36.45.3.

<sup>76</sup> Arnaud 1998: 32.

left a part of the force with the young Tigranes and retired to his own land. Thereupon the father took the field against his son, who was now left alone, and conquered him. The latter, in his flight, set out at first to go to Mithridates [VI], his grandfather; but when he learned that he [Mithridates] had been defeated and was in need of aid rather than was able to assist anyone, he [Tigranes the Younger] went over to the Romans. Pompey, employing him as a guide, made an expedition into Armenia against his father.<sup>77</sup>

Phraates' campaign against Armenia began successfully with sweeping territorial gains in the face of little resistance. Phraates could have attacked through either Gordyene, which was the route Lucullus used to gain access to Artaxata, or through Media Atropatene, which was the route used later by Mark Antony. Dio is unclear about which route the Parthians used; however, it seems likely that Phraates attacked through Media Atropatene, which was the more direct and accessible route in 66 BCE.

Tigranes II had subjugated this region in the late 80s BCE and retained control of it throughout Lucullus' invasion.<sup>78</sup> Yet it is clear that after Tigranes II later submitted to Pompey, the kings of Elymais and Media Atropatene came to Pompey to offer their friendship as independent monarchs.<sup>79</sup> Therefore, Tigranes undoubtedly had lost control of Media Atropatene after late 67 BCE but before his submission to Pompey in late 66 BCE.

It is possible that Media Atropatene simply rebelled from Armenia during the course of the Armenian civil wars and temporarily gained its independence. However, it seems more likely that the Parthians subdued this region in the summer of 66 BCE during their attack on Armenia for a few important reasons.<sup>80</sup> First, Pompey removed Tigranes' hegemonic claims to all his

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<sup>77</sup> Dio 36.51.2-3

<sup>78</sup> The king of Media Atropatene supported Tigranes' invasion of Cappadocia in 67 BCE. Id. 36.14.2.

<sup>79</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 36.2

<sup>80</sup> If Phraates seized Media Atropatene in the middle of 66 BCE, then in early 65 BCE when Parthian strength had faltered it appears the Parthian vassals from Elymais and Media Atropatene temporarily threw off Parthian suzerainty, at which point they negotiated friendly relations with

western lands but made no mention of Tigranes' eastern lands; rather, he eventually left Tigranes II in control of only Armenia, Sophene, and Gordyene.<sup>81</sup> This indicates that Tigranes had lost control of all of his eastern lands, including Media Atropatene, by the time of his negotiations with Pompey in late 66 BCE.<sup>82</sup> Second, unlike Gordyene, which Tigranes II summoned the Romans to protect according to their recent alliance, Tigranes never sought Roman aid to protect or recover Media Atropatene, Mygdonia, and Adiabene because it appears he had already lost control of them to Parthia by the time of Pompey's arrival in Armenia.<sup>83</sup> Finally and most importantly, it is clear from the later Parthian invasions of Gordyene in 65 and 64 BCE that Phraates had not yet regained control of this region in 66 BCE.<sup>84</sup> Therefore, Phraates' only access to Greater Armenia in 66 BCE was through Media Atropatene, which means Phraates declared war on Tigranes in the middle of 66 BCE and quickly subjugated Armenian held Media

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Pompey. Note that Assar puts forth the argument that Kamnaskires IV took advantage of the Parthian civil war to rebel in Elymais. Assar 2006d: 93.

<sup>81</sup> Dio 36.53.2-5; Plut. *Pomp.* 33.4-5, 36.2; Appian *Mithr.* 15.104-5. Appian's claim that Pompey gave Sophene and Gordyene to Ariobarzanes I is mistaken. In fact, his entire statement about Cappadocia becoming a Roman province under Augustus is highly confused; he meant Galatia. Cappadocia did not become a Roman province until the reign of Tiberius. Note Bennett 2002. Plutarch clearly demonstrates that Phraates attacked Tigranes' interests in Gordyene in 65 BCE. Moreover, Sophene was integral to the strength and stability of Armenia within the northern Near East. After Tigranes the Younger proved to be untrustworthy, Pompey was inclined to offer the region to Tigranes II, who had proved submissive and loyal. Note Liebmann-Frankfort 1963; Seager 2002: 56. Our accounts of Pompey's war against Tigranes and the peace agreement differ because they each appear to have been based on different sources (Dio using Livy, Plutarch using Theophanes of Mitylene, and Appian using Nicolaus of Damascus or Posidonius). See Reinach 1890: 452; Manandyan 2007: 147.

<sup>82</sup> Strabo tells us that the Medians reclaimed "Symbacê from the Armenians when the latter became subject to the Romans." Strabo 11.13.2. Symbacê (also perhaps known as Aluaka) appears to be the modern Turkish region, Albâq. Ptol. *Geog.* 6.2.10; Kuhrt and Sancisi-Weerdenburg 2006.

<sup>83</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 36.2, 39.3; Dio 37.5.2-4, 7.3; Appian *Mithr.* 16.106

<sup>84</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 36.2; Dio 37.5.2-4. Strabo describes Gordyene as a region continually threatened by Arab raids and invasions by the Armenians or the Parthians. Strabo 16.1.26



Atropatene as his army poured into Greater Armenia. It was at this time that Parthian forces also likely reoccupied Mygdonia and Adiabene.<sup>85</sup>

Thus, Phraates' campaign initially experienced great success, and it looked as though a regime change in Armenia would be swift. He regained many of the lands lost to Armenia in the 80s BCE, and Tigranes, who probably did not have enough soldiers to resist Phraates' army, withdrew into the mountains of Armenia. Phraates must have hoped that Tigranes the Younger with the support of his Armenian nobles would be able to induce Artaxata to surrender without a full siege. Once it became clear that Artaxata remained loyal to Tigranes' father, Phraates left only a portion of his army in Armenia and returned to Mesopotamia.

With the weak showing of Tigranes II, the perception of Armenian power was minimal at this time. Phraates seems to have thought the campaign was well in hand. He calculated that his entire force was no longer needed to subdue Armenia. Additionally, Phraates must have had confidence in Tigranes the Younger's assurances that Artaxata would fall to his command. The Parthian troops Phraates had left behind could then oversee the regime change. Finally, Phraates faced the geopolitical reality that he could not afford a long campaign in Armenia. Phraates initially had hesitated to become involved in Armenia in part because he was fighting a civil war. He eventually agreed to attack Armenia because his advisors convinced him that it would be a swift victory. When a full siege of Artaxata became a reality, Phraates understood that he could not remain bogged down in Armenia with his entire army while Arsaces XVI roamed freely in

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<sup>85</sup> Pompey did not list Adiabene as a conquered region in his triumph. His reference to protecting Mesopotamia on his celebratory inscription clearly refers to the region of northern Mesopotamia known as Osroene. See Appian *Mithr.* 17.117; Diod. 40.4. Plutarch and Dio record that Pompey's soldiers did not occupy Adiabene. Plut. *Pomp.* 36.2; Dio 37.5.2-4. Note also Shayegan 2011: 246. Strabo describes Adiabene as a war-torn region that had many conflicts with the Armenians until the rise of Parthian hegemony under Mithridates II. Strabo 16.1.19. It is likely that Adiabene eagerly returned to Parthian hegemony.

the East. Not only did Phraates need to try to reorganize Parthian control over Mygdonia, Adiabene, and Media Atropatene, but he also needed to contain Arsaces and protect his newly acquired western lands. Therefore, the continued threat of Arsaces more than anything likely encouraged Phraates to return to Mesopotamia at the height of his expedition in 66 BCE.<sup>86</sup>

Unfortunately for Phraates and Tigranes the Younger, they misjudged the situation in Armenia and the remaining capabilities of Tigranes II. When Phraates returned home with the majority of his army, Tigranes II immediately leapt at the opportunity to attack his now isolated son. Tigranes the Younger, who throughout his life proved to be ineffective, not only could not encourage Artaxata to switch its allegiance, but also witnessed the destruction of his army at the hands of his father. Tigranes II must have killed and captured many of his son's supporters, including the Parthian soldiers left behind by Phraates. Tigranes the Younger appears to have been one of the few to escape this disaster. Since he had just failed in his mission to subdue Artaxata and had been responsible for the deaths of many Parthian soldiers, Tigranes the Younger understood that fleeing back to Phraates for additional help was a fruitless and perhaps dangerous prospect. Therefore, he decided to seek the support of his grandfather, Mithridates, whom his father recently had treated with public hostility. However, it became clear that Mithridates was reeling from his fight against Pompey and was unable to offer any aid to anyone. Thus, low on options Tigranes the Younger decided to test the great unknown and seek the aid of Rome.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> We should reject Keaveney's confused and Roman-centric view that Phraates withdrew most of his army to avoid "a real possibility his troops would clash with the Romans." Keaveney 1981: 206.

<sup>87</sup> Appian is our only source that claims that Phraates approved of Tigranes the Younger's intentions to seek Pompey's aid and protection. Appian's reasoning is that "Phraates also desired Pompey's friendship." Appian *Mithr.* 15.104. Keaveney again simply accepts the Graeco-Roman sources without hesitation. Keaveney 1981: 205. It is hard to believe that Tigranes the Younger

Tigranes the Younger had no idea if Pompey would offer him aid against his father. He could only hope that, since Rome was at war with Armenia, he might be able to offer himself as a more satisfactory candidate as king. Much like Phraates before him, Pompey saw in Tigranes the Younger an important weapon to threaten Tigranes II's position, to undercut his authority, and to secure Armenian loyalty. Pompey welcomed Tigranes the Younger into his camp and employed him as a guide to strike at Artaxata.<sup>88</sup>

In joining with Pompey, Tigranes the Younger demonstrated his desperation to gain power. He remained defiant to his father; he fled his responsibilities in Parthia; he betrayed his grandfather by aiding the enemy of Pontus; and he sold himself to the Roman state for military and political support. Tigranes the Younger's ability to shift his loyalties from Parthia to Pontus to Rome in such fast succession underlines the radically shifting international environment in the Near East and the lead role that Parthia and Rome eventually would come to fight over in the region. Yet Tigranes the Younger did not anticipate that his father would act with similar desperation and shrewdness under the evolving geopolitical pressures of the expanding Roman-dominated Mediterranean system.

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during his sudden flight westward had time to exchange correspondence with Phraates about his plans to seek Pompey's support. There simply was not enough time and the line of communication would have been difficult. Rather, it is far more likely that Tigranes the Younger, after gaining the support of Pompey, continued a dialogue with his father-in-law in an attempt to explain his recent failures and decisions and to repair his relationship with Parthia. If Tigranes the Younger hoped to rule Armenia, he did not want Parthia as an enemy. Phraates had little choice but to support Tigranes the Younger's decision because he did not want conflict with Pompey. We should reject Shayegan's argument that Tigranes the Younger and Phraates III remained in league with one another and collectively designed to remove Tigranes II in 65 BCE after Pompey's settlement of Armenia as speculative and highly unlikely. Shayegan 2011: 323.

<sup>88</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 33.1; Dio 36.51.3; Appian *Mithr.* 15.104. For Pompey's route, see Manandyan 2007: 145-6. Chahin is incorrect that Pompey campaigned in the Caucasus prior to marching on Artaxata. Chahin 1987: 233.

It seems likely that Pompey and Tigranes II entered into a correspondence about a possible peace prior to Pompey's defeat of Mithridates VI in Pontus.<sup>89</sup> It would be odd if Pompey had exchanged envoys with Mithridates and Phraates but ignored Tigranes. With the rebellions of his sons and the attack of Parthia, Tigranes desperately needed to avoid another Roman invasion. Clearly, Pompey could negotiate from a stronger position and must have offered Tigranes the same harsh terms of unconditional surrender. This helps explain the length of their negotiations as Tigranes tried to secure better terms.<sup>90</sup> Tigranes, much like Mithridates, was unable to secure a favorable truce; however, Tigranes was not as invested in the war against Rome as Mithridates, and he appears to have been far more willing to cooperate.<sup>91</sup> His harsh rejection of Mithridates' call for asylum also supports the argument that Tigranes was doing all he could to obtain Roman favor in 66 BCE. Even though he beat back the Parthian invasion and destroyed his son's support network, he could not hope to resist Pompey's invasion and fight a two-front war. When his son joined Pompey as a suppliant, Tigranes understood that his survival was at stake. Pompey held all of the advantages, and Tigranes knew that he had only one move left to make. He accepted Pompey's terms of unconditional surrender and threw himself upon Rome's mercy.

Tigranes accepted a Roman garrison in Artaxata and, responding to a special invitation of Pompey, surrendered himself and his arms at Pompey's camp.<sup>92</sup> Despite Tigranes' total vulnerability, Pompey's terms were quite reasonable. Tigranes had to relinquish all hegemonic

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<sup>89</sup> The sources tend to portray Tigranes as overtly weak and submissive to exaggerate Pompey's benevolence; however, it seems likely that Pompey and Tigranes had come to "a preliminary accord" with assurances of his safety. Manandyan 2007: 142, 146.

<sup>90</sup> Dio 36.52.1

<sup>91</sup> A major difference between Tigranes and Mithridates is that Tigranes continued his communication with Pompey where Mithridates abruptly ended it.

<sup>92</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 33.2-5; Appian *Mithr.* 15.104; Dio 36.52.1-53.1; Cic. *Sest.* 27.58-9

claims to Sophene, Gordyene, Osrhoene, Commagene, Syria, Cilicia, and Phoenicia, terminating the Armenian Empire. The first two regions Pompey handed over to Tigranes' son, who instead of being grateful felt slighted and began to scheme against Rome. Tigranes the Younger did not want to share power with his father. Further, Tigranes II had to pay a large indemnity of 6,000 talents of gold and silver to Pompey, one talent to each Roman military tribune in Pompey's army, 1,000 drachmas to each centurion, and fifty drachmas to each of Pompey's soldiers. Yet Pompey allowed Tigranes to remain king of Greater Armenia.<sup>93</sup>

It is unfair to call Pompey's terms "very heavy" and to explain Pompey's actions by arguing that he was less "rash" and aggressive than Lucullus, seeking "less risky means" to "rob" Armenia of its wealth.<sup>94</sup> Pompey was highly aggressive in the East as his expansive campaigning in Pontus, in the Caucasus, and along the coast of the Eastern Mediterranean demonstrates. The geopolitical situation facing Pompey was drastically different from the one facing Lucullus. Lucullus did not have the option of forcing Tigranes to accept unconditional surrender. Pompey accepted the surrender of Tigranes because it was the wise thing to do politically and militarily, not because he was averse to a war or seeking the most loot. Unlike in Pontus and Syria, Pompey had no plans to annex Armenia, and therefore, he needed to establish client rulers over this region. He might have thought Tigranes the Younger was his best option; however, when Tigranes II acted humble, respectful, and cooperative, Pompey realized he had a better candidate with which to work. Moreover, the majority of the Armenian aristocracy remained loyal to Tigranes.<sup>95</sup> Armenia was a hugely important crossroads region that guarded the passage between

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<sup>93</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 33.3-4; Appian *Mithr.* 15.104-5; Dio 36.53.2; Vell. Pat. 2.37.4-5; Strabo 11.14.10

<sup>94</sup> Manandyan 2007: 151.

<sup>95</sup> For the important role of local lords in Armenia under Tigranes and his successors and for their importance to Roman or Parthian control of the region, see Gregoratti 2012.

the Near East, the Mid East, and the northern steppe. Pompey understood quickly that to protect and stabilize Roman interests in the northern Near East he had to establish Armenia as a capable and loyal Roman client. To do this, he left the accomplished and well-connected Tigranes II in command of his original kingdom, and he pacified by force the peoples of the Caucasus.<sup>96</sup>

With the expansion of the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system eastward during the second phase of system overlap, Armenia had become an important semi-peripheral region at the edge of Roman geopolitical interests. The annihilation of Tigranes' capable regime in 66 BCE by Pompey would have made Armenia a weak, destabilized zone as Cappadocia had been for decades, encouraging warlike neighbors, such as the Caucasus peoples, the nomadic tribes of the northern steppe, the Arab tribes of the south, and the Parthians to act aggressively against it. A defenseless Armenia did not allow Pompey to accomplish his objective of stabilizing the Near East under Roman hegemony. Therefore, Pompey's pragmatism in his approach to ancient geopolitics in the Near East and his recognition of the impracticality of destroying the independence of Armenia as opposed to Pontus and Syria was sound. Pompey's ability to secure and stabilize Armenia without annexing it made the rest of his eventual settlement of the Near East possible.

Originally, Pompey erred on the side of caution and split the Armenian kingdom between Tigranes and his son. Pompey wanted to find the perfect balance between an Armenia that was too weak to stabilize the region and an Armenia that remained a potential threat to Roman

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<sup>96</sup> Chahin is incorrect when he argues, "He [Tigranes II] was not a 'client of Rome' as it is sometimes averred. He had bought off Pompeius and was not in any sense a tribute-paying king." Chahin 1987: 236, 243. This is a biased distortion of Tigranes' surrender to Pompey and Pompey's Armenian settlement. Tigranes did not die the "absolute and independent monarch of his vast homelands." Id. 239. For the role of the Caucasus as a frontier zone for the Romans, see Braund 1986.

hegemony in the Near East because it remained too strong. Therefore, he initially gave the southern lands to Tigranes' hostile son to keep Tigranes in check in the northern lands.

Meanwhile, Tigranes the Younger had proved to be a difficult yet useful Roman client up to this point, and therefore, it was natural for Pompey to reward his services with rule over a territory. Pompey simply miscalculated how selfish, unrealistic, and untrustworthy Tigranes the Younger was.

Yet Pompey did not trust Tigranes the Younger totally, and he had good reason not to hand over command of all of Armenia to him. Tigranes the Younger was a stubborn and ambitious statesman with a poor reputation for loyalty and an even worse military record. Pompey would have understood that Tigranes the Younger was less capable than his father was, and therefore, Tigranes the Younger would have been less likely to restore the power of Armenia if he became king. This made him less potentially threatening to Rome; however, it brought into question his ability to stabilize the important region. Moreover and more importantly, Pompey knew that Tigranes the Younger had sworn oaths to the Parthians and married Phraates' daughter. Even though he had become a Roman suppliant, there was no guarantee that Tigranes the Younger would not return to his previous loyalties. Tension between Rome and Parthia over Armenia was beginning to mount as both powers looked to dominate the region without fully appreciating the hegemonic claims of the other. Pompey did not want to establish Tigranes the Younger as king over all of Armenia just to have him renew his bond with Phraates and transfer the region over to Parthian hegemony.<sup>97</sup> Meanwhile, Pompey knew that there was considerable bad blood between Tigranes II and the Parthians, and he knew that he could count on Tigranes II to hold fast to his Roman alliance. Thus, Pompey's initial solution was to split the kingdom

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<sup>97</sup> Shayegan 2011: 326, 329.

between father and son in the hope that they would balance each other's power but be strong enough individually to deter aggressive neighbors.

The glaring weakness of this solution presented itself to Pompey almost immediately. Tigranes the Younger had made a deal with Phraates to replace his father as king over all of Armenia. Whether or not Pompey agreed to similar terms, it is clear that Tigranes the Younger assumed that he had a similar arrangement with the Romans. When Pompey embraced Tigranes II as a friend and ally and only awarded Tigranes the Younger the southern lands, Tigranes the Younger with his usual lack of tact became publicly upset, refused to recognize his father, snubbed Pompey's hospitality, and refused to help pay Armenia's indemnity.<sup>98</sup> Not only had Tigranes the Younger demonstrated that Pompey could not trust him, the southern Armenian nobles refused to obey his commands.<sup>99</sup> Pompey quickly recognized that he could not leave Tigranes the Younger in command of the southern lands and, instead, imprisoned him for his hostile actions.<sup>100</sup> Pompey was in a difficult position because he understood that annexing these regions was not a realistic option for Rome. Perhaps he considered turning these regions over to Ariobarzanes I of Cappadocia; however, when Tigranes II demonstrated his statesmanship and loyalty by securing the indemnity with interest from the southern nobles and plentiful supplies for the Roman army, Pompey abandoned his previous reservations about the potential threat of

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<sup>98</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 33.5; Dio 36.53.1. It seems unlikely that Pompey would have promised Tigranes the Younger the Armenian throne without any of our sources mentioning Pompey's betrayal. Instead, the misunderstanding between Pompey and Tigranes the Younger appears to be another example of the confusion between the expectations of eastern kings in their negotiations with the Romans and the realities of Roman foreign policy.

<sup>99</sup> Dio 36.53.3-4

<sup>100</sup> Note that Appian records that Tigranes the Younger plotted to kill his father at this time. Appian *Mithr.* 15.105. Manandyan calls Pompey's arrest of Tigranes the Younger a "flagrant violation of customary law." Manandyan 2007: 152. However, Tigranes the Younger's betrayal of Pompey and of his father, who was a new Roman ally, nullified his previous agreement of protection with Pompey.



Tigranes and restored the southern lands to him.<sup>101</sup> This final decision of Pompey firmly reestablished Armenia as the most important middling power in the northern Near East with close political, military, and diplomatic ties to Rome. The welfare of Armenia under Roman hegemony became a direct concern of the Roman state for the first time. This directly but unintentionally clashed with Parthia's relationship with Armenia, which had been in place since the middle 90s BCE. It is unsurprising that the fallout of this new geopolitical arrangement increased the tension between Rome and Parthia as both powers adjusted to the evolving international environment.

The submission of Armenia to Rome had major geopolitical repercussions in the region. Armenian hegemony over the peoples of the Caucasus evaporated. These peoples had had no prior contact with Rome and the sudden arrival of Pompey's victorious army on their borders worried them. Dio states,

The quiet of his [Pompey's] winter quarters, however, was not unbroken. Oroeses, king of the Albanians dwelling beyond the Cynus, made an expedition against them [the Romans] just at the time of the Saturnalia. He was impelled partly by the desire to do a favor to Tigranes the Younger, who was a friend of his, but chiefly by the fear that the Romans would invade Albania; and he cherished the idea that if he should fall upon them in the winter, when they were not expecting hostilities and were not encamped in one body, he would surely achieve some success.<sup>102</sup>

For decades Tigranes II had exercised control over these peoples and kept the region stable after replacing Parthian hegemony over the Caucasus in the 80s BCE. Yet the Armenian civil war undermined his authority over the region, which Oroeses' friendship with Tigranes the Younger illustrates. These warlike peoples saw an opportunity to maximize their own security and power at the expense of Armenia and Armenia's new ally, Rome. Added to this tense atmosphere was a

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<sup>101</sup> For Tigranes' success in acquiring the treasures of the south, see Dio 36.53.5-6

<sup>102</sup> Id. 36.54.1.

complete unawareness and, therefore, fear of Roman intentions and capabilities.<sup>103</sup> With the sudden decline of Armenian power, the sudden rise in Albanian autonomy, and the sudden emergence of Rome in the region, the peoples of the Caucasus reacted predictably to the heightened systemic pressures of the security dilemma and uncertainty principle over the northern Near East. The kings of Albania and Iberia rejected the peace of Tigranes II and Pompey, pursued self-help regimes, and attacked the Roman army.<sup>104</sup>

The communities of the Caucasus clearly did not understand the strength of the Roman army nor the determination of its commander. His swift campaign in the spring and summer of 65 BCE defeated the Iberians and Albanians and forced their kings to become Roman clients.<sup>105</sup> Pompey's success established Roman hegemony over the Caucasus region for the first time. As Pompey finally subdued Armenia and extended the bounds of the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system to include the lands between the Black and Caspian seas south of the Caucasus Mountains, system overlap between the Mediterranean and Eastern systems entered its third and final phase.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Artoces, the king of the Iberians, also feared the Romans and tried to gain the upper hand militarily through deception. Id. 37.1.2.

<sup>104</sup> Perhaps Pompey's imprisonment of Tigranes the Younger was the justification for the attack of the Albanians; however, their motivations likely were more pragmatic and self-interested. Manandyan's suggestion that they attacked Pompey at "Mithridates' instigation" seems highly unlikely. Manandyan 2007: 154, 156. Mithridates had already fled north of Colchis and never exercised hegemony over these kings. For ancient Albania, note Chaumont 1985. Note also Alikberov and Gadjiev 2015.

<sup>105</sup> Dio 36.54, 37.1-5.1; Plut. *Pomp.* 34; Diod. 40.4; Appian *Mithr.* 15.103; Strabo 11.1.6, 3.5, 4.5; Vell. Pat. 2.40.1; Florus 1.40.28; Ruf. Fest. 16.3; Eutrop. 6.14.1. For Pompey's route during this campaign, see Manandyan 2007: 153-7.

<sup>106</sup> There is a confused tradition that Pompey successfully invaded Media Atropatene in 65 BCE. Appian and Diodorus Siculus record Pompey defeating a certain "Darius the Mede," Velleius Paterculus states that Pompey invaded Media, and Orosius records that Pompey "pushed on from Pontus into Parthia to Ecbatana, the capital of the Parthian kingdom, arriving there on the fifteenth day." Appian *Mithr.* 16.106, 17.117; Diod. 40.4; Vell. Pat. 2.40.1; Orosius 6.4. With this information many scholars have named Darius "the Mede" king of Media Atropatene and

It is likely that, even without Albanian aggression, Pompey had planned to subdue the peoples of the Caucasus before returning to Pontus. Ancient and modern historians have tended to view Pompey's Caucasus campaign as an expedition for glory or as a diversion from his war against Mithridates; however, Pompey's campaign had definite geopolitical objectives.<sup>107</sup> First, Pompey's reduction of Armenia made this a destabilized region. It was necessary to bring these communities under Roman control to assure the stability of the region and to help protect the Roman client state of Armenia. Moreover, with the surrender of Tigranes, Armenian hegemony over these regions evaporated. Pompey could not simply ignore the independence of these warlike small kingdoms, nor allow Mithridates or Phraates to establish authority over this important region. A strong show of Roman force in the region would quell the ambitions of the various local kings and discourage outside interference in the region.<sup>108</sup> Second, bringing this region under Rome's indirect control further isolated Mithridates and helped protect the newly

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have assumed this meant Pompey attacked the region. See Schippmann 1987b. The identity of Darius "the Mede" is discussed further below. However, it is highly improbable that Pompey invaded Media Atropatene in 65 BCE. Although he was marching in the direction of Media Atropatene during his Caucasus campaign, he never reached the Caspian Sea and quickly turned back to Lesser Armenia. Plut. *Pomp.* 36.1; Pliny *NH*, 6.51-2; Florus 1.40.27-8; Livy *Epit.* 101.4. Moreover, Plutarch states that the rulers of Elymais and Media Atropatene did not seek Pompey's friendship until he had returned to Lesser Armenia, making the conquest scenario untenable. Plut. *Pomp.* 36.2. Finally, Appian states that Pompey fought Darius after crossing into Commagene in 64 BCE. Orosius too seems to indicate that Pompey subdued Syria and then invaded Media Atropatene. Media Atropatene is a great distance from Commagene and Syria (around 800 miles). Pompey would have had to rush his army across difficult, unknown, and at times hostile terrain at a pace of about twenty miles a day to satisfy Orosius' account. There simply is no credible evidence that Pompey invaded Media Atropatene while he was in the Caucasus, and it is simply impossible that Pompey stopped his campaign along the Eastern Mediterranean coast to take a month long lightning march into Media Atropatene and back without our other major sources making mention of this peculiar event. Pompey accepted an envoy from Media Atropatene, nothing more.

<sup>107</sup> Note Magie 1950: 359; Seager 2002: 57; Højte 2009c: 122.

<sup>108</sup> In fact, Pompey's rapid success in the region worried the Parthians and made them concerned about the strength and intentions of the Romans. Dio 37.5.2

won lands in Pontus, which Pompey was planning to annex.<sup>109</sup> Thus, Pompey's Caucasus campaign was a calculated geopolitical move to maximize the presence and perception of Roman power and prestige in the region, to help protect the regional interests of Rome, and to establish Rome as the unrivaled hegemon of the expanded Mediterranean system. Diodorus Siculus, who provides a copy of Pompey's victory inscription in Rome, acknowledges this reality when he writes, "He [Pompey] extended the borders of the empire up to the borders of the world."<sup>110</sup> This also is further proof that in the late 60s BCE Pompey and the contemporary Diodorus continued to view the expanded Mediterranean system of Rome separately from the Eastern system of Parthia.

The military successes of Pompey against Mithridates and the peoples of the Caucasus, paired with the submission of Tigranes II to Rome, made the Parthians increasingly uneasy. Although the two powers had a verbal agreement of friendship and neutrality, Roman and Parthian relations remained informal and their understanding of each other's foreign policy goals remained opaque. The geopolitical situation in Armenia was becoming increasingly complex and divisive. The drastically different perspectives of Rome and Parthia of the international environment in the Near East and their self-interested hegemonic actions in 66-65 BCE compounded their confused interactions and heightened their tense relations. Armenia had emerged as the major point of contention between the two powers.

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<sup>109</sup> Liebmann-Frankfort 1969: 272; Seager 2002: 57. For the destruction of cultural heritage in Pontus and Commagene during the Roman conquest, see Polanski 2013.

<sup>110</sup> Diod. 40.4. See also Lucan *Phar.* 2.633

## The Complex Situation in Armenia: The Continuation of Different Roman and Parthian International Perspectives

Although there were larger, longer-term geopolitical tensions mounting between Rome and Parthia, which were making open conflict between the two powers increasingly likely, confusion, miscommunication, distrust, and tension between Pompey and Phraates began to escalate in the late spring of 66 BCE when Phraates received Tigranes the Younger as a suppliant. As discussed in detail above, Pompey and Phraates had renewed the informal agreement of friendship and neutrality between Rome and Parthia early in 66 BCE and did not form a new military alliance against Armenia. After he arrived in Mesopotamia with his supporters, Tigranes the Younger offered to rule Armenia as a Parthian vassal in exchange for Parthian military support and a marriage into the Arsacid dynasty. At first Phraates hesitated because he did not want to violate his recent agreement with Pompey; however, his advisors convinced him that the Armenian civil war was a separate conflict from the Third Mithridatic War, which it was, and that Parthian involvement in the Armenian civil war was his traditional right as system hegemon in the East, which it was as well. In the summer of 66 BCE, Phraates invaded Armenia, reoccupied Mygdonia, Adiabene, and Media Atropatene, and laid siege to Artaxata. Tigranes II's complete lack of energy in the defense of his kingdom and the ongoing civil war with Arsaces XVI in the East encouraged Phraates to return to Mesopotamia with the majority of his army, at which point Tigranes leaped to action, destroyed the army besieging Artaxata, and forced his son to flee to Pompey. Pompey then utilized Tigranes the Younger as a guide and forced Tigranes II to surrender unconditionally. Pompey recognized that Tigranes II was a more reliable client ruler and allowed him to retain his ancestral kingdom. This led the

disgruntled Tigranes the Younger to scheme against his father and Pompey, at which point Pompey imprisoned him.<sup>111</sup>

Although Pompey believed he had every right to imprison Tigranes the Younger for his dishonest actions, he failed to appreciate the valid concerns of Phraates. Tigranes the Younger was a former suppliant to the Parthians as well and the son-in-law of Phraates. Pompey's imprisonment of Tigranes the Younger without the acknowledgement of Parthian concerns was disrespectful to Phraates' family and damaging to Phraates' image as King of Kings. Phraates was obliged to intervene on behalf of his son-in-law in 66/65 BCE. Plutarch states,

Not long after this, Phraates the Parthian sent a demand (ἀπαιτῶν) for the young man, who was his son-in-law, and he expected to declare the Euphrates as the boundary between their hegemonies [or dominions] (ἀξιῶν δὲ τῶν ἡγεμονιῶν ὄρω χρήσθαι τῷ Εὐφράτῃ). Pompey replied that as for Tigranes, he belonged to his father more than to his father-in-law; and as for a boundary, the just one would be declared (χρήσεσθαι).<sup>112</sup>

Thus, we see that Phraates was not pleased with Pompey's imprisonment of Tigranes the Younger. This short passage illustrates the uncertain and uncomfortable relationship between Rome and Parthia at this time. Notice that, according to Plutarch, Phraates demanded the return of Tigranes the Younger and expected Rome to accept a limitation to its eastern hegemony. Instead of the Parthians acting timidly and passively in the face of Roman aggression, we see here that they negotiated aggressively and from an attitude of strength.<sup>113</sup> Pompey, who likely

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<sup>111</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 15.105; Plut. *Pomp.* 33.4-5; Dio 36.53.3-4

<sup>112</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 33.6. I altered this translation to reflect the Greek more accurately. See also Dio 37.6.3

<sup>113</sup> For example, Sherwin-White describes Phraates as "alarmed" and reacting to Roman aggression. Sherwin-White 1984: 222. Keaveney describes Sulla, Lucullus, and Pompey as arrogant bullies in their interactions with the Parthians and describes the Parthians as desperate to maintain their friendship with the Romans. Keaveney 1981: 211-12. Seager also describes Phraates as "alarmed" and has the Parthians acting "anxiously," while Pompey acted "with ruthless duplicity" and "ominously." Seager 2002: 55-7. Manandyan blames Pompey's perceived abuse of Phraates on the "insidious and treacherous foreign policy of Rome." Manandyan 2007:

had not meant to offend Phraates by imprisoning Tigranes the Younger, responded predictably utilizing force to exert and reinforce the powerful position of Rome.<sup>114</sup> Neither side was willing to submit to the other; and therefore, both sides chose to exhibit strength to avoid appearing weak.

This diplomatic exchange was a matter of power politics and of an unclear power relationship between Rome and Parthia rather than a display of arrogance or treachery.<sup>115</sup> The two powers had acted predictably with predictable results. Pompey had insulted the Parthians by arresting Tigranes the Younger and by denying Phraates' demands. Meanwhile, Phraates had insulted the Romans by meddling in the affairs of Rome and by making demands of the Roman state. These results had not been the intentions of either men since they only had considered the geopolitical concerns of their own states in the matter; however, this diplomatic exchange was an immediate result of Pompey's new settlement of Armenia and directly reflects how Armenia suddenly emerged as a point of direct contention between Rome and Parthia. After nearly thirty years of distant but mostly cordial relations between these two powers, this unsuccessful diplomatic exchange caused the relationship to take a temporarily unpleasant turn.<sup>116</sup>

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152. Sheldon has Phraates simply inquire about a boundary after several Roman abuses, despite Pompey's arrogance and ominousness. Sheldon 2010: 18.

<sup>114</sup> Pompey was not trying to provoke Phraates by arresting Tigranes the Younger. The decision had been made in Rome's and Pompey's best interests; concern for Parthia would have been a negligible issue. Moreover, once Phraates reacted aggressively, Pompey was not inclined to appease him by releasing Tigranes the Younger. Pompey was not purposefully insulting "the implacable enemy of Rome" as Chahin argues. Chahin 1987: 236.

<sup>115</sup> Colledge describes the Parthians as a victim of "Pompey's trickery." Colledge 1967: 36.

<sup>116</sup> Some scholars lump this exchange between Pompey and Phraates in with the later discussions between the Romans and Parthians after Pompey returned from the Caucasus. See esp. Debevoise 1938: 73-4; Sherwin-White 1984: 222. However, it is far more likely that this exchange came before Pompey's northern expedition in 65 BCE, as discussed below. See Seager 2002: 56-7; Manandyan 2007: 152.

Although most scholars accept Plutarch's statement that Phraates desired to establish the Euphrates as the boundary between the Parthian and Roman empires in 66/65 BCE, far too many have used this passage as spurious evidence to support the anachronistic tradition that Rome and Parthia had a formal treaty that officially established the Euphrates as a border.<sup>117</sup> Sherwin-White correctly rejected the notion that Sulla or Lucullus established such a treaty; however, Plutarch's account here helped lead Sherwin-White to conclude incorrectly that Phraates' expectation that the Euphrates would become the recognized border between Rome and Parthia confirmed his argument that Phraates and Pompey had agreed upon a military alliance with territorial stipulations in early 66 BCE against Armenia.<sup>118</sup> Yet there is a far more likely and acceptable conclusion if we acknowledge a Parthian-centric perspective and bring it into the discussion.

In the summer of 66 BCE, Phraates had successfully reoccupied Media Atropatene, Mygdonia, and Adiabene and had invaded Armenia. Although the campaign in Armenia fell apart after Phraates returned to Mesopotamia, Tigranes II did not counterattack to reclaim his lost lands in the East. The Parthian expedition to subdue Armenia had failed; however, Phraates' other territorial gains in the East meant that the war remained in his favor. He could hope to reoccupy Gordyene and Osrhoene, lands to which in his mind Rome had no claims after the defeat of Lucullus, to reunify the former core lands of the Parthian Empire and to isolate Armenia further as Mithridates II had done before him. Thus, the Parthians perceived and approached the geopolitical situation in the lands east of the Euphrates as they had since 87 BCE, namely as a struggle between Parthia and Armenia. The Parthians had never considered the

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<sup>117</sup> See esp. Sherwin-White 1984: 222 n.95; Manandyan 2007: 158. Contra Sartre 2005: 48; Shayegan 2011: 329.

<sup>118</sup> Note that Sherwin-White was only able to make such a conclusion tenable by moving Plutarch's account of the discussions to late 65 BCE after Rome and Parthia almost came to open conflict in Gordyene. Sherwin-White 1984: 222-3. See also Manandyan 2007: 158-9.



Euphrates a limit to their western hegemony; however, unlike the semi-peripheral territories of Syria, Commagene, and Armenia, they considered the lands of Mesopotamia well within their direct sphere of hegemony.

The Parthians were aware that pro-Roman regimes were in place in the kingdoms west of the Euphrates. This certainly could not have pleased them; however, conflict with Rome was not one of their goals at this time; and therefore, they were content to overlook the unfavorable geopolitical situation developing in the lands west of the Euphrates while they focused on their rivalry with Armenia and the ongoing Parthian civil war. As late as early 64 BCE there still was no indication from the perspective of the Parthians that the Romans suddenly would shift their foreign policy in the East, establishing multiple provinces with permanent garrisons. The submission of Armenia and the Caucasus to Rome was a troubling development in 66/65 BCE; however, Pompey had not yet annexed any territory and the commitment of Rome to its new allies was unclear. The Parthians still could hope that, after Pompey had gained enough military glory, the Romans would finally return to the West, leaving the Parthians with the opportunity and ability to exert their influence over the Near East once again. Therefore, the immediate focus of the Parthians, once they had entered the Armenian civil war on the side of Tigranes the Younger, was reclaiming the remaining southern lands of Armenia before subduing Tigranes II's kingdom once and for all.

Yet this plan had taken an unexpected turn when Pompey subdued the region. The Parthians suddenly found themselves in an immensely uncertain and awkward position. Phraates had not attacked Armenia at the bidding of Rome; however, he also had not attacked Armenia to upset Rome. The Parthians had considered the Armenian civil war to be a completely separate conflict from Rome's war against Mithridates and Tigranes. Yet the submission of Tigranes II

and the imprisonment of his son abruptly ended the Armenian civil war and Tigranes' resistance to Rome. Without the ability to support or control Tigranes the Younger as a friendly Parthian candidate on the Armenian throne, the Parthians lost their greatest justification for continuing the war against Tigranes II. Thus, Phraates demanded the return of his son-in-law in part to keep the civil war in Armenia a possible reality. Furthermore, because of the informal agreement of friendship and neutrality tentatively still in place between Parthia and Rome, the Parthians technically should have agreed to a truce with Tigranes II after he became a Roman client and should have ended their conflict with Armenia. However, Pompey in late 66 BCE took no steps to secure such a truce and Phraates had little incentive to agree to a truce while control of the important lands of northern Mesopotamia remained in the balance.

The recent failures of Tigranes to protect any of his former lands outside of his ancestral realm against Phraates meant that the Parthians still believed they had every right to reclaim northern Mesopotamia in 66/65 BCE by force, despite Tigranes' new friendship with Rome. From a Parthian perspective, Tigranes had abandoned these lands and Rome had no legitimate claim to them. Clearly, the Parthians did not fully appreciate the ramifications of Pompey's settlement of Armenia. They did not yet understand or care to recognize Rome's new claim to hegemony over the western lands of Tigranes' former empire. Meanwhile, the Romans clearly did not fully appreciate the geopolitical consequences of the ongoing rivalry between Armenia and Parthia and what that meant to their settlement of Armenia. Ultimately, the destruction of Tigranes' empire at the hands of the Romans had benefited Parthia; however, Tigranes II's submission to Rome was an unexpected complication that did not sit well with Phraates. Rome had no incentive or obligation to return the lands of the former Armenian Empire to Parthia; however, Parthia had no incentive or obligation to accept Pompey's new settlement of Armenia

without resistance. Thus, the regional rivalry between the Parthians and Armenians continued and the Romans as of yet were unwilling to attempt to mitigate the problem.

With the above argument in mind, Plutarch is perhaps correct only partially when he claims that Phraates made certain demands about the Euphrates. As the hegemonic leader of the East, Phraates recognized no one's right to dominate the lands of northern Mesopotamia except his own. With Tigranes II's submission to Pompey and Pompey's imprisonment of Tigranes the Younger, it is possible that Phraates aggressively demanded the return of his son-in-law and expressed his expectation that Pompey would declare the Euphrates as the limit of Rome's hegemony in the East.<sup>119</sup> This demand of course meant also abandoning Pompey's recent gains in Armenia in favor of Parthia's claims to hegemony over that region. This is an important distinction overlooked by Plutarch and modern scholars. Phraates was attempting to establish his sole prerogative to dominate Armenia and northern Mesopotamia, two regions he had immediate plans to subdue. From Phraates' perspective these lands were his by right of birth and conquest and remained within the bounds of the Parthian-dominated Eastern system. Moreover, it is impossible to argue convincingly that Phraates willingly would have offered to limit the scope of his western imperialism in 66 BCE since to do so at this time was unprovoked and nonsensical. Phraates was stronger than he had even been before, which helps explain his confidence in making such bold demands of Pompey. He understandably miscalculated Pompey's objectives

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<sup>119</sup> Dio too records that Phraates forbade Pompey to cross the Euphrates, but he places this demand in the winter of 65/64 BCE. Dio 37.6.3. Yet Dio's account of Phraates' actions and of his correspondence with Pompey is confused and condensed. For example, Dio conflates Phraates' invasion of Armenia in early 64 BCE with his invasion of Armenia in the middle of 66 BCE alongside Tigranes the Younger. Id. 37.6.4-5. Therefore, it is possible Dio also condensed the multiple exchanges of Pompey and Phraates between late 66 and early 64 BCE. Although Dio's biased account again generally tries to portray Phraates as indecisive, weak, and fearful, in reality Phraates only could have made such a forceful demand of Pompey from a position of strength and confidence.

and the unwillingness of the Romans to return to their antebellum foreign policy in the Near East. Just as Pompey failed to appreciate the Parthians' different perspective of the geopolitical situation in the Near East, Phraates failed to appreciate the new hegemonic bounds of the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system and its geopolitical consequences.

If we are to accept the sentiments of Plutarch's account of this diplomatic exchange, then Phraates here chose to state publicly and emphatically that, despite Pompey's recent success, hegemony over Mesopotamia and Armenia should belong to Parthia, nothing more.<sup>120</sup> Phraates wanted the return of Tigranes the Younger so that he could continue to influence the Armenian civil war, and he wanted Pompey, who had completed his objective of subduing Tigranes II, to return to the West. Again, in reality Phraates would have done this without making any guarantee that Parthia would not pursue its hegemonic interests in the kingdoms west of the Euphrates. Thus, this passage in Plutarch does not represent the desperate and passive attempt of the Parthians to halt the seemingly unstoppable advance of Rome; rather, it represents the aggressive imperialistic policy of the Parthians to compel the Romans to evacuate their inappropriate gains in the Near East.

Pompey understandably rejected such an offensive notion. From the Roman perspective, Pompey had every right to establish Roman hegemony over the lands of the northern Near East. He had no reason to accept Parthian hegemonic claims. Moreover, he too had no need or desire

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<sup>120</sup> The Parthians maintained their hegemonic claims to Mesopotamia and Armenia throughout this period. Orosius' much later assumption that the Parthians had made treaties with Lucullus and Pompey that established the Euphrates as a border is dubious. Orosius 6.13. It only indirectly reflects the reality that in the middle of the first century BCE the Parthians considered the presence of Roman soldiers in northern Mesopotamia to be a violation of their sovereignty. Dio records the Parthian general Surenas "inviting them [Crassus and his men] to agree to a truce on condition of their abandoning all territory east of the Euphrates." Dio 40.26.1. This would have included Roman claims to Armenia, which the Parthians recently had occupied.

to limit the hegemony of his state; hence, he responded that a “just” boundary would be determined. Again, this was not Roman arrogance or bullying; rather, this was an honest reaction to the geopolitical realities that faced the Romans in the region, based upon Pompey’s different perspective. By the middle 60s BCE, the Romans had decided to establish their presence in the Near East permanently without realistically considering how Parthia fit into that decision, and the Parthians had not yet accepted that the Romans were not leaving, nor realistically considered what that meant to their geopolitical standing in the region. Neither Phraates’ nor Pompey’s actions in 66/65 BCE aimed at open conflict or stemmed from hatred.<sup>121</sup> Scholars for too long have mistaken the separate geopolitical goals, spatial understandings, and international perspectives of the Parthians and Romans for actions of timidity or egotism.

The two major flaws in Phraates’ effort to secure concessions from the Romans and to project strength in his correspondence with Pompey in 66/65 BCE were his total miscalculation of Roman intentions in the Near East and his sudden reversal of fortune in the Parthian civil war. Pompey moved north to chase Mithridates and to subdue the peoples of the Caucasus in early 65 BCE, demonstrating that he did not view conflict with Parthia as imminent. Later that year

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<sup>121</sup> Manandyan argues that, after Pompey made Rome the protector of Armenia, Rome no longer could tolerate a strong and independent Parthian state. He claims that their “old friendship turned into an implacable hatred.” Manandyan 2007: 153. Manandyan here projects the later conflicts between the Romans and Parthians onto their early interactions. He exaggerates Roman aggression and the evolving relationship of these two powers. Meanwhile, Sampson argues that Rome and Parthia almost clashed on several occasions and that the roots of this clash went back to the middle of the second century BCE. He also assumes that the Romans had intimate knowledge of Parthian objectives and intentions from the 140s-50s BCE. He is convinced that Rome and Parthia would have fought over Syria in the 140s and 120s BCE; however, he oddly ignores the fact that the Parthians were militarily active in Syria in the 90s BCE when Rome and Parthia first made diplomatic contact and yet Sulla made no mention of Parthian activities in Syria. Sampson’s reconstruction is untenable. Sampson 2015: 83-6. Note also Colledge 1967: 36-7. In reality, the Romans and Parthians knew little and cared little about one another even in the early 50s BCE.

Phraates moved Parthian troops into Gordyene, demonstrating that Pompey's refusal of his terms had not intimidated the Parthians.<sup>122</sup> Yet Pompey had left two legates, Afranius and Gabinius, in Armenia to oversee the establishment of Tigranes II's new pro-Roman regime and client state. Afranius consolidated Roman authority in Greater Armenia, and Gabinius did the same in Sophene.<sup>123</sup> While the Romans solidified their control over Armenia and the Caucasus, the civil war in Parthia temporarily turned against Phraates, which the momentary rebellions of Media Atropatene and Elymais indicate. Meanwhile, the misunderstanding of the Romans and Parthians over the increasingly untenable situation in Gordyene nearly led to the first instance of open conflict between the two powers.

Plutarch offers a concise account of Parthian troubles and the reaction of the Romans at this time. He records,

After the battle, Pompey set out to march to the Hyrcanian and Caspian Sea, but was turned back by a multitude of deadly reptiles when he was only three days march distant, and withdrew into Lesser Armenia. Here the kings of the Elymaeans and the Medes sent ambassadors to him, and he wrote them a friendly answer; but against the Parthian king, who had burst into Gordyene and was plundering the subjects of Tigranes, he sent an armed force under Afranius, which drove him out of the country and pursued him as far as the district of Arbela.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> We should reject Keaveney's unconvincing claim that Phraates occupied Gordyene "at the behest of" Tigranes the Younger. Keaveney 1981: 207-8. Keaveney's proposal makes little sense since Tigranes the Younger was a Roman prisoner and since Keaveney previously describes the Parthians as desperate to avoid conflict with the Romans. It also unjustifiably robs Phraates of his agency in the matter.

<sup>123</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 34.1; Dio 37.5.2

<sup>124</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 36.1-2. Plutarch relates that Pompey's forces aggressively drove Parthian forces out of Gordyene in 65 BCE without bloodshed but ended their pursuit as they neared Arbela in Adiabene. Dio's account states that Afranius simply occupied Gordyene after Phraates' forces had withdrawn, and he makes no mention of Afranius entering Adiabene. Dio 37.5.2-4. Since Plutarch wanted to depict Pompey as a great and forceful Roman hero, his far more embellished account of these events should give us pause. Instead, we should favor Dio's more restrained and less colorful account. Clearly, Adiabene had once again become Parthian territory by 65 BCE, and therefore, if Afranius approached Arbela, he quickly realized his error and withdrew. He was not seeking a fight. Olbrycht is mistaken when he states that "some military encounters took place between Parthia and Rome" at this time. Olbrycht 2009: 179.

Thus, Plutarch confirms that Phraates sent Parthian troops to seize Gordyene in the middle of 65 BCE; however, at this time Media Atropatene and Elymais were in rebellion, sought friendly relations with Rome, and perhaps sought military aid against Parthia.<sup>125</sup>

There appear to be three main factors that could have encouraged Media Atropatene and Elymais to rebel at this time. First, Phraates' recent setback in Armenia hurt the perception of his power. It is likely that the Parthians had only reestablished control over Media Atropatene briefly in 66 BCE after almost two decades of Armenian rule, and therefore, their hold over the region would have been tentative. In the case of Media Atropatene, it is possible that the region was either unhappy with the new Parthian rule or simply rebelled because of Parthian neglect. The rulers of Media Atropatene and Elymais knew that Phraates had lost a portion of his army in Armenia and that he was busy occupying sections of northern Mesopotamia. Phraates' various distractions provided an opportunity to seek autonomy. Second, Pompey's growing military reputation and success in the Near East and Phraates' inability to curtail Pompey's eastward advances gave the rulers of Media Atropatene and Elymais hope of foreign support in their rebellions. Pompey's refusal of Phraates' demands also hurt the Parthian king's reputation. As the regional balance of power perceivably shifted further out of Parthia's favor, the smaller polities in the region took note of Pompey's success and Rome's growing regional authority. Hence, Media Atropatene and Elymais sought Rome's recognition and support. Third, Phraates' distractions against Armenia forced him to neglect the ongoing civil war in the East. The opportunity to reclaim large sections of the lands lost to Armenia in the 80s BCE was too good to ignore. It is possible that Phraates overestimated his conquest of Mesopotamia from Arsaces XVI

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<sup>125</sup> Shayegan 2011: 324.

and considered Arsaces' presence in the East to be weak. Therefore, the opportunity against Armenia trumped his internal concerns. However, Arsaces remained at large in the East for several years and from his expansive coin production in the East appears to have experienced varied success in resisting Phraates' forces. It is likely that the newly appointed kings of Media Atropatene and Elymais saw their opportunity to take advantage of the Parthian civil war for their own benefit.<sup>126</sup> Thus, the internal troubles facing Phraates in the middle of 65 BCE suddenly escalated considerably, which helps explain his swift change of attitude toward his gains in Gordyene.

Dio offers a more detailed account of the dispute in Gordyene and the deteriorating relations between Rome and Parthia. He states,

After accomplishing this and overrunning the country, Pompey granted peace to the Albanians, and on the arrival of heralds concluded a truce with some of the other tribes that dwell along the Caucasus as far as the Caspian Sea, where the mountains, which begin at Pontus, come to an end. Phraates likewise sent to him, desiring to renew the agreement (συνθήκας) with him. For the sight of Pompey's success, and the fact that his lieutenants were also subjugating the rest of Armenia and that part of Pontus, and that Gabinius had even advanced across the Euphrates as far as the Tigris, filled him with fear of them, and he was anxious to have the arrangement (σύμβασιν) confirmed.<sup>127</sup>

Dio continues,

He [Phraates] accomplished nothing, however; for Pompey, in view of the present situation and the hopes which it inspired, held him in contempt and replied haughtily to the ambassadors, among other things demanding back the territory of Corduene [that is, Gordyene], concerning which Phraates was quarrelling with Tigranes. When the envoys made no answer, inasmuch as they had received no instructions on this point, he wrote a few words to Phraates, but instead of waiting

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<sup>126</sup> Either a man named Ariobarzanes or Darius "the Mede" was king of Media Atropatene at this time. Discussed further below. Meanwhile, Kamnaskires IV had become king of Elymais. Note *Monumentum Ancyranum* VI, 11f.; Appian *Mithr.* 16.106, 17.117; Diod. 40.4; Schippmann 1987b; Assar 2006d: 93.

<sup>127</sup> Dio 37.5.1-2. I altered this translation to reflect the Greek more accurately.



for a reply Afranius into the territory at once, and having occupied it without a battle, gave it to Tigranes.<sup>128</sup>

Dio portrays Phraates as terror-struck by Roman military success and outmaneuvered by the arrogant and forceful Pompey. These stereotyped characterizations of the cowardly easterner and the haughty Roman diplomat make it seem as though the Parthians feared Roman aggression and Rome bullied Parthia into a disadvantageous position, which most scholars continue to accept as the motivation behind Phraates and Pompey's actions at this time.<sup>129</sup> However, we must consider alternate explanations for Phraates' sudden change of policy in 65 BCE and the motivations of the Romans.

Once Phraates realized that he had to confront growing troubles in the East, he looked for a diplomatic solution to stabilize his western front. Thus, after occupying Gordyene in the summer of 65 BCE, he requested to renew the agreement he had made with Pompey in early 66 BCE. As discussed previously, many scholars incorrectly assume that Dio in passage 36.45.3 refers to a new military alliance or formal agreement between Rome and Parthia against Armenia; however, it simply refers to the old informal agreement of friendship and Parthian neutrality. Although the Armenian civil war had ended, technically Parthia and Armenia remained at war since neither side had sought a truce. Moreover, although Phraates maintained that Gordyene was rightfully his, the actions of Pompey's legates indicated that the Romans planned to contest his claim in favor of Tigranes. Therefore, Phraates offered to end his war with Armenia, return to a position of neutrality, and reconfirm the informal friendship of Parthia and Rome if he secured a stable western front, which included Rome and Armenia's recognition of his territorial gains in Gordyene. Pompey, who again was in no need to make concessions to the

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<sup>128</sup> Id. 37.5.2-4.

<sup>129</sup> Note for example, Sampson 2015: 89-93.

Parthians, refused Phraates' terms. Pompey's second rejection of Phraates' terms would have upset the Parthian king, and he appears to have dragged his feet some concerning the situation in Gordyene, at which point Pompey decided to end the talks and sent his legate Afranius to secure Gordyene for Tigranes.

The deterioration of Phraates' internal situation in the East made his recent occupation of Gordyene untenable when it became clear that he would have to resist Roman forces to retain the region. Phraates remained unwilling to enter a war against Rome, and he quickly decided to abandon Gordyene in the face of Roman pressure. In reality, increased internal concerns worried Phraates in 65 BCE far more than the success of Pompey in the north, and there is no indication that Phraates expected a Roman invasion of his territory. Moreover, despite Dio's critical depiction of Pompey in this affair and Plutarch's exaggeration of Afranius' campaign, Pompey clearly remained uninterested in a Parthian war in 65 BCE. Thus, he did not seize his opportunity to provide Media Atropatene and Elymais with military aid against Parthia, and he did not join Tigranes II's war against Parthia, even though the aggression of Phraates against Gordyene provided him with a justifiable cause for war.

Nor did he act overly aggressive in his policy toward the protection of Armenia. Dio tells us that the Romans understood that Gordyene was a disputed territory between Armenia and Parthia, illustrating that the Romans were beginning to recognize the eastern rivalry between the two states. Pompey had left Afranius to secure Greater Armenia, and he had sent Gabinius to secure Sophene, at which time the Parthians opportunistically occupied Gordyene. Neither Afranius nor Gabinius had orders to act aggressively against the Parthians; however, Pompey was not inclined to recognize Phraates' claim to Gordyene at the expense of his new client. When it became clear that Phraates did not want to relinquish control of Gordyene, Pompey sent

Afranius to secure the region for Armenia, not specifically to attack the Parthians.<sup>130</sup> Pompey anticipated correctly that Phraates did not want to start a war with Rome over Gordyene.

However, Pompey's objective was not to force the Parthians into war but rather to restore the southern territories bordering Armenia to Tigranes to finish securing his kingdom according to the settlement of 66 BCE.<sup>131</sup> Ultimately, Pompey had no motivation to bolster the reputation of Phraates at the expense of his own and of that of his new client, Tigranes, by conceding Gordyene to the Parthians; nor did he want to encourage future Parthian aggression in the region by appearing weak or uninterested in the geopolitical developments of the Near East. Therefore, Pompey's best course of action was to make a limited show of strength in Gordyene to reinforce Rome's reputation in the region, to curb Parthian aggression, to maintain a favorable balance of power in the region, and to help stabilize what had become a volatile frontier.<sup>132</sup>

Thus, in late 65 BCE, although Pompey's new settlement of Armenia had suddenly increased tension between Rome and Parthia, neither side wanted war.<sup>133</sup> Instead, both powers

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<sup>130</sup> Note that even in Plutarch's more dramatic and less reliable account the Romans allowed the Parthians to withdraw into Adiabene and stopped their pursuit. Plut. *Pomp.* 36.2. See also Dio 37.5.2-4

<sup>131</sup> Pompey wanting to secure and stabilize Armenia is at odds with Sherwin-White's peculiar conclusion that Pompey "saw the advantage of encouraging friction between the two powers [that is, Armenia and Parthia]." Sherwin-White 1984: 222-3. Destabilizing the region by encouraging further conflict between Armenia and Parthia would have been the last thing Pompey wanted.

<sup>132</sup> Dio captures perfectly Pompey's use of power and force to exert his will and dictate the situation. Dio 37.6.1

<sup>133</sup> We should reject Manandyan's assumption that Phraates "decided not to go to war with the Romans" after Pompey allegedly violated their agreement because he was lacking in courage. Note also Rawlinson 1885 (2002): 81. This unfairly critical opinion of Phraates ignores that in 65 BCE Phraates had little justification for war and limited means to go to war. Phraates did not avoid war with Rome because he was cowardly; rather, he did not consider war with Rome wise or important. His concerns were the Armeno-Parthian war and the civil war in the East. Moreover, we should reject Manandyan's claim that Pompey did not attack Phraates in 65 BCE because he was "circumspect and did not possess Lucullus' audacity." Again Manandyan's anti-Roman rhetoric does not appreciate that, first, Lucullus had not wanted a war against the

had to address more pressing geopolitical concerns in their separate interstate systems. Once Phraates failed to secure a peace treaty with Armenia through his negotiations with Pompey, he withdrew from Gordyene and sent his army to fight in the East. Meanwhile, once Pompey's soldiers had secured control of Sophene and Gordyene for Tigranes, he moved his forces west to Syria to reinforce Roman control of the Eastern Mediterranean coast.

No truce between Parthia and Armenia emerged; however, for the time being their frontier was quiet. Afranius made no contact with the Parthians in Gordyene and soon returned to the west to meet up with Pompey. Yet Dio's account of these events again is controversial. Dio records that Afranius traveled to Syria across northern Mesopotamia with great difficulty "contrary to the agreement made (συγκείμενα) with the Parthian [that is, Phraates]."<sup>134</sup> Most scholars have used this passage as further evidence that a Euphrates border treaty existed by 65 BCE; however, as discussed in detail in this study, the idea of such an agreement at this time is illusory.<sup>135</sup>

Dio in passage 37.5.2-4 states that Phraates unsuccessfully attempted to renew his agreement with Pompey in 65 BCE, at which point Pompey moved to action before concluding his diplomatic exchange with Phraates. Therefore, Dio here engages in the anachronistic tradition of establishing the Euphrates as the formal boundary between Rome and Parthia by the 60s BCE. However, the sum of Plutarch and Dio's accounts of these events and the actions of Rome and

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Parthians, second, that Pompey had little justification for war, and third, that the Parthians remained a peripheral concern of Pompey, who wanted to go settle the unstable regions of the southern Near East. See Manandyan 2007: 158-9.

<sup>134</sup> Dio 37.5.5

<sup>135</sup> Keaveney incorrectly assumes that Gabinius *and* Afranius violated the "*foedus*" between Pompey and Phraates. Keaveney 1981: 207-8. Arnaud argues that a Euphrates border between Rome and Parthia at this time was not official and that at best it was an expression of the balance of power in the region between the ambitions of Pompey and Phraates III and was subject to change at any time. Arnaud 1998: 20-4, 32.

Parthia make it clear that Pompey and Phraates never agreed to restrict their hegemonic influences to the Euphrates.<sup>136</sup> There simply was no territorial agreement in place for Afranius to violate in late 65 BCE.

First, Dio's argument that Afranius violated an agreement by marching across northern Mesopotamia is irrational because he would have already violated such a treaty by occupying Gordyene. Second, the Parthians had not yet regained control of Osrhoene, which was the region through which Afranius travelled. Therefore, he did not violate Parthian territory. Third, Dio offers no indication that Afranius attempted to establish Roman hegemony in Osrhoene, which was the only condition Plutarch has Phraates emphasize.<sup>137</sup> Therefore, Afranius here did not even violate the proposed terms of Phraates' alleged unsuccessful settlement with Pompey in 66 BCE. Fourth, had a formal Euphrates boundary treaty existed Phraates would have been compelled to fight the Romans to protect his international standing and reputation, regardless of his internal challenges.

Even Dio's statement that Phraates "sent ambassadors, reproaching him [Pompey] with all the wrongs he had suffered, and forbidding him to cross the Euphrates" does not verify that such an agreement previously existed.<sup>138</sup> In fact, either Dio's confused passage 37.6.3 reflects Plutarch's suggestion that in late 66 BCE Phraates allegedly demanded unsuccessfully that Pompey accept the Euphrates as a limit to Roman hegemony in the East, or it demonstrates that Phraates allegedly made this demand to Pompey again in late 65 BCE after the Romans had intervened in Mesopotamia.<sup>139</sup> Either way it illustrates that Phraates was trying to project

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<sup>136</sup> Shayegan 2011: 329.

<sup>137</sup> Note Plut. *Pomp.* 33.6

<sup>138</sup> Dio 37.6.3

<sup>139</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 33.6

strength in his dealings with Pompey, but nothing official came of it. Pompey predictably and justifiably rejected such an unreasonable demand in late 66 BCE, making its existence in late 65 BCE for Afranius to violate impossible. Moreover, Pompey did not acknowledge Phraates' possible second effort to make this demand in late 65 BCE as his military operations in western Osrhoene in early 64 BCE clearly demonstrate.<sup>140</sup>

Ultimately, Phraates was not a coward, who refused to declare war upon Rome despite unquestionable justification, nor were the Romans arrogant bullies, who cared nothing for breaking religiously sanctioned treaties and dishonoring agreements. Instead, no Euphrates border treaty existed for Rome to violate and for Parthia to use as justification for war in 65 BCE. There simply is no reliable evidence that Rome and Parthia agreed to separate their power and influence along the Euphrates at this time or at any point prior.

Although Phraates could not claim in reality that Pompey and his soldiers had violated their arrangement with the Parthians, he certainly could argue that the Romans had acted in bad faith toward him and the Parthian state in recent events. Pompey had placed Phraates' rival back on the Armenian throne as a Roman client. He had imprisoned Phraates' son-in-law and refused to release him. He had refused to acknowledge Phraates' claim to Gordyene and the rest of northern Mesopotamia. He had blocked Phraates' efforts to gain a favorable truce with Armenia. He had allowed their informal agreement of friendship and neutrality to slide into limbo. Finally, he had insulted Phraates by referring to him simply as "King" instead of "King of Kings" in their correspondence.<sup>141</sup> All of this damaged the relationship between the Romans and Parthians.

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<sup>140</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 16.106; Plut. *Crass.* 21.1-4; Dio 40.20.1

<sup>141</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 38.2 Dio 37.6.1-2. Note that this was not simply arrogance on the part of Pompey. Lucullus also had refused to address Tigranes II as "King of Kings." Plut. *Luc.* 21.7. Lucullus in 70 BCE and Pompey in 64 BCE did not fully appreciate the usage of this title within the contexts of the Eastern system as a tool in the hegemonic rivalry between Armenia and

Moreover, it diminished the reputation of Phraates and made him more vulnerable. It helped fuel internal dissent in the East and caused the Parthian civil war to escalate. Yet it also encouraged Phraates to act aggressively once more in 64 BCE to save face, bolster his prestige, and strengthen his authority.

It appears that Phraates' armies were at least mildly successful in stabilizing the growing unrest and rebellion in the East late in 65 BCE. Elymais remained independent for the moment; however, it is possible the Parthians reclaimed Media Atropatene at this time. Briefly, let us discuss a new interpretation of the evidence that supports this reconstruction.

Appian and Diodorus Siculus record that Pompey claimed to have defeated a man named Darius "the Mede" in his triumph.<sup>142</sup> Despite the extreme unlikelihood that Pompey campaigned against Media Atropatene, some scholars use these accounts to label Darius "the Mede" as the king of Media Atropatene.<sup>143</sup> Yet it appears that a man named Ariobarzanes, father of the Artavasdes who fought Mark Antony, had come to the throne of Media Atropatene before 59

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Parthia. Instead, Pompey was following established Roman foreign policy procedures. The Romans felt no need to acknowledge eastern kings as somehow special unless it was to their benefit, and from the perspective of the Romans, the Parthian king did not appear particularly special in the East at this time. Moreover, Pompey wanted to use the title for his own propaganda, not as a direct challenge to Parthia hegemony. Within the expanded bounds of the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system, Pompey could claim to have triumphed over the "King of Kings." He had no motivation to acknowledge Phraates by that title, not because Pompey wanted to challenge Phraates' eastern hegemony, but because it was against his interests as a Roman politician. Therefore, I disagree with Shayegan's argument that Pompey wanted to use the title as a weapon against Phraates in a "hegemonic duel between Parthia and Rome" as anachronistic. Shayegan 2011: 245, 318, 327-8. Rather this was something the Roman emperors utilized in their correspondence with Parthian kings. Note the correspondence between Augustus and Phraates V toward the end of the First Romano-Parthian War. Dio 55.10.20-1. For Vespasian, see id. 65.11.3. Note also id. 58.26.1.

<sup>142</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 16.106, 17.117; Diod. 40.4. Velleius Paterculus claims, "Media, Albania, and Iberia were invaded with victorious arms." Vell. Pat. 2.40.1. Yet there is no reliable evidence that Pompey in fact ever even reached the borders of Media Atropatene.

<sup>143</sup> Note von Gutschmid 1888: 98; Herzfeld 1931-1932: 56; Debevoise 1938: 74.

BCE, which led Schippmann to reject that Darius “the Mede” was ever king of Media Atropatene.<sup>144</sup> However, Schippmann did not offer a solution to the circumstance of the mysterious Darius.

There appear to be two possible solutions. First, it is possible that the sources are mistaken and that Darius was not in fact a ruler of the Medes at all but rather a petty king or warlord in Osrhoene, which would help explain Darius’ proximity and alliance to Antiochus I of Commagene in 64 BCE.<sup>145</sup> Yet although speculative, there are good reasons to consider the second possible explanation.

A man named Mithridates was king of Media Atropatene in the early 60s BCE and came to the military aid of Tigranes II in Cappadocia in 67 BCE.<sup>146</sup> Nothing more is known of his reign; however, in the middle of 66 BCE Phraates likely invaded and occupied Media Atropatene on his way to attack Armenia.<sup>147</sup> Since Mithridates of Media Atropatene was a supportive ally of Tigranes, Phraates naturally would have been his enemy. Therefore, it appears likely that Phraates deposed Mithridates or perhaps killed him in battle in 66 BCE. Phraates could have then

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<sup>144</sup> See Schippmann 1987b.

<sup>145</sup> Pompey established Roman hegemony over western Osrhoene in early 64 BCE. Appian *Mithr.* 16.106; Plut. *Crass.* 21.1-4; Dio 40.20.1. Perhaps Darius was of Median descent, and therefore, people identified him as a Mede even though he ruled in western Mesopotamia. Pompey would have cared little about this distinction and would have been happy to claim his dominance over another people of the East, even if he had not actually attacked the Medes in Media.

<sup>146</sup> Dio 36.14. Most scholars accept that this Mithridates was king of Media Atropatene since Tigranes had not gained control of Media proper during his war against the Parthians. However, some scholars incorrectly identify this Mithridates as a Parthian prince, who later became Mithridates IV. Note Schippmann 1987b; Assar 2006d: 94 n.195. It is impossible that Tigranes commanded a Parthian prince to attack the Romans in 67 BCE for numerous reasons discussed throughout this study. Scholars make this dubious connection based upon Dio’s unreliable statement that Mithridates IV governed Media before his brother Orodes II expelled him. Dio 39.56.2. In 66 BCE, Phraates only had access to Greater Armenia through Media Atropatene.

<sup>147</sup> Dio tells us that Phraates and his army subdued “all the country before them” on their way to Artaxata. Id. 36.51.2



placed Darius on the throne of Media Atropatene as a Parthian vassal, at which point Darius would have seized the region of Symbacê from Tigranes.<sup>148</sup> However, when the Parthian invasion of Armenia stalled and then met with disaster, this would have weakened Phraates' influence over Media Atropatene and Darius. In the middle of 65 BCE, after Phraates had suffered embarrassing diplomatic exchanges with the Romans and Pompey successfully had expanded Roman hegemony over the northern lands bordering Darius' kingdom, Darius would have then declared his independence and sent the embassy to Pompey that sought Roman friendship and aid.<sup>149</sup> Pompey was willing to send a friendly reply to Darius, but he was unwilling to commit troops against Parthia. It is possible that this angered Darius, who needed military aid desperately, and quickly soured the relationship between the two men.

In late 65 BCE, Phraates moved his forces out of Gordyene and perhaps sent them against the rebellious Media Atropatene. Darius, without Roman military aid, could not withstand the Parthian onslaught so he fled to the west, much as Mithridates IV later did in late 56 BCE. At this point, with his position in Media Atropatene restored, Phraates could have installed Ariobarzanes as the new Parthian vassal king of Media Atropatene. Meanwhile, Darius needed to find asylum and a military ally. Appian tells us that Pompey possibly attacked him "because he helped Antiochus [I of Commagene]."<sup>150</sup> Therefore, in 65/64 BCE Darius seemingly formed an alliance with Antiochus I, who faced dangers from the Romans and the Parthians, and in the spring of 64 BCE helped Antiochus fight Pompey. Pompey defeated Antiochus, who wisely ended his resistance quickly and entered into friendly relations with Rome. Yet Darius, who had gathered a small military force, apparently was more stubborn, perhaps because of Pompey's

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<sup>148</sup> Strabo 11.13.2

<sup>149</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 36.2

<sup>150</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 16.106

refusal to support him in 65 BCE against Parthia. Pompey then attacked and defeated Darius. It appears that Darius died in battle since he was not forced to march in Pompey's triumph alongside many other captured kings and generals. If we accept this new interpretation of the available material, in late 65 BCE Phraates successfully reclaimed Media Atropatene from Darius the Mede.<sup>151</sup> This successful campaign would help explain how Phraates was able yet again to make a western expedition in early 64 BCE during the ongoing civil war in the East.

Phraates had suffered many recent setbacks against Tigranes II and many recent slights at the hands of the Romans. He had pulled out of Gordyene in the middle of 65 BCE because of growing internal chaos and unsuccessful diplomatic negotiations with Pompey; however, he had not ended his war against Tigranes nor officially conceded Gordyene to Armenia. Dio states that Phraates, tired of Pompey's abuses, complained to Pompey that "he had actually been deprived of his kingdom."<sup>152</sup> Yet this exchange does not refer to Phraates complaining about Pompey breaking their alleged Euphrates treaty from 66 BCE as Sherwin-White incorrectly assumed; rather, it speaks to the Parthian perspective that Gordyene belonged to the Parthians by right of past and recent conquests and that Roman meddling in the region was inappropriate.<sup>153</sup>

Despite Pompey's settlement of Armenia, which awarded Tigranes II with dominion over Gordyene, this region had not been an original portion of his kingdom. In fact, Tigranes' occupation of the region had been harsh, and Zarbienus, the king of Gordyene, had despised

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<sup>151</sup> It is evident from Tigranes II's surrender to Pompey in late 66 BCE and Ariobarzanes' pro-Parthian reign by the end of the decade that the Parthians regained control of Media Atropatene between 66-60 BCE. Unfortunately, there is no definitive way to reconstruct these events; however, the above scenario is a probable reconstruction based upon the available surviving evidence, which has not yet been proposed.

<sup>152</sup> Dio 37.6.3

<sup>153</sup> Sherwin-White 1984: 222.

Armenian rule and died because of his efforts to challenge Tigranes.<sup>154</sup> Yet Pompey had associated Gordyene with Armenia because Tigranes still had held the region when he had surrendered to Pompey in 66 BCE and because Tigranes petitioned continually to retain the region with Roman aid.<sup>155</sup> The conflict over Gordyene is a good example of the different territorial and spatial perspectives of the Parthians and Romans and of their misunderstanding of one another's perspectives. The Parthians had gained control of Gordyene under Mithridates II, and while they were at war with Tigranes II, this region was a natural military objective.

It is significant that Phraates invaded Gordyene again in early 64 BCE because it demonstrates that, even after the difficult and disappointing diplomatic exchanges with Pompey and Afranius' show of force, the Parthians still did not accept the Roman settlement of Armenia nor fear an imminent Roman invasion.<sup>156</sup> The conflict over Gordyene illustrates that Armenia and specifically the rivalry with Tigranes remained Phraates' first concern. To Phraates the role of Rome in the conflict remained peripheral. He still did not associate his war against Tigranes with a larger conflict against Rome. Yet he also did not want Roman soldiers to become involved once more in the territorial dispute over Gordyene. When Tigranes sent ambassadors to Pompey in Syria to gain Roman military support once again, Phraates sent his own embassy to Pompey. Dio records, "Phraates again sent ambassadors to the Roman commander, bringing many charges against Tigranes, and making many insinuations against the Romans, so that Pompey was both ashamed and alarmed. As a result he lent no aid to Tigranes and no longer took any hostile

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<sup>154</sup> Tigranes had destroyed many cities in Gordyene and enslaved its people. Plut. *Luc.* 21.2, 26.1, 29.6

<sup>155</sup> Note Dio 37.6.5

<sup>156</sup> Id. 37.6.4. Dio mistakenly conflates Phraates' attacks on Armenia and Gordyene in 66 and 64 BCE; however, it is clear that there were two separate invasions of Gordyene in 65 and 64 BCE. Appian *Mithr.* 16.106

measures against Phraates.”<sup>157</sup> It is unlikely that Pompey suddenly felt “ashamed and alarmed” at his previous policy toward the Parthians; rather, his involvement in Syria was more important from a Roman perspective than the petty squabble between Parthia and Armenia over Gordyene. Phraates’ envoys, seemingly for the first time, tried to explain to Pompey the longstanding rivalry between Parthia and Tigranes and the many just grievances the Parthians had against Armenia. It is possible that up to this point in time, Pompey had only considered Tigranes’ grievances and perspective. Apparently, the case of the Parthian envoys was persuasive enough to help alter Pompey’s previous policy of total support of Armenia. Pompey was busy in Syria and did not want to return to Armenia. Moreover, he did not intend to start a war against Parthia over a territorial dispute that interested him little. Therefore, he finally offered to arbitrate the dispute between Phraates and Tigranes.<sup>158</sup>

Tigranes submitted to Roman arbitration because, despite his anger at Pompey for not backing him again militarily, he had no choice.<sup>159</sup> Tigranes could not hope to resist Parthia on his own, and he could not afford to upset the Romans. However, the reasons Phraates accepted Roman arbitration are more complicated and not fully appreciated by modern scholars. Dio records,

As for the barbarian’s [that is, Phraates’] complaints, he [Pompey] made light of them, offering no answer, but asserting that the dispute which the prince [Phraates] had with Tigranes concerned some boundaries, and that three men should decide the case for them. These he actually sent, and they were enrolled as bona fide arbitrators by the two kings, who then settled all their mutual complaints. For Tigranes was angry at not having obtained the desired aid, and Phraates wishes the Armenian ruler to survive, so that in case of need he might someday have him as an ally against the Romans. For they both well understood that whichever of them should conquer the other would simply help along matters

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<sup>157</sup> Dio 37.6.5-7.1

<sup>158</sup> Id. 37.7.3; Appian *Mithr.* 16.106; Plut. *Pomp.* 39.3

<sup>159</sup> Dio 37.7.3

for the Romans and would himself become easier for them to subdue. For these reasons, then, they were reconciled.<sup>160</sup>

Dio indicates that Pompey still did not understand the details of the territorial dispute between Parthia and Armenia even after years of correspondence with Tigranes, the expeditions of his legates, and the recent efforts of Phraates' ambassadors. This is unsurprising since the affair, which was of critical importance to Tigranes and Phraates, was of little interest to Pompey. The Romans had tried to intimidate Parthia by supporting Armenia militarily in 65 BCE; however, Phraates' subsequent invasion in 64 BCE demonstrated that this policy had been unsuccessful. Pompey and his advisors, who allegedly encouraged him to attack the Parthians, knew that the Parthians would only respond to force unless an amenable peace emerged.<sup>161</sup> Pompey did not want the Armeno-Parthian war to disrupt his settlement of Armenia, but he was unwilling to commit to war against Parthia in Armenia's defense. Therefore, he finally appreciated that he had to help arbitrate the separate Armeno-Parthian conflict.

Yet Dio's explanation of the subsequent agreement between Tigranes and Phraates is peculiar. He argues that Tigranes' anger with Pompey encouraged him to end his rivalry with Parthia, and he argues that Phraates came to terms with Tigranes in the hope of gaining him as an ally against Rome in a future conflict. Although Dio touches on important ancient perceptions of endemic warfare, balance of power, power dynamics, and shifting international relations, his account is anachronistic. Phraates clearly did not want a war against Rome from 66-64 BCE, and there is no evidence that he was planning a future war against Rome. Nor was he ready simply to bury the hatchet with Tigranes and move forward as a friend and possible ally of the Armenians. Phraates had numerous good reasons to end the conflict with Tigranes; however, one of them

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<sup>160</sup> Id. 37.7.2-4.

<sup>161</sup> Id. 37.7.2.

was not to form an anti-Roman coalition in 64 BCE. Thus, Dio here projects the later conflicts between Rome and Parthia and the later cooperative relationships between the Parthians and Armenians against the Romans onto the motivations of Phraates at this time.

Appian's shorter account of these events comes closer to emphasizing an actual motivation of Phraates in 64 BCE. He states,

While he [Pompey] was settling these affairs [in Syria] ambassadors came to him from Phraates and Tigranes, who had gone to war with each other [over Gordyene]. Those of Tigranes asked the aid of Pompey as a dear ally, while those of the Parthian sought to secure for him the friendship (φιλίαν) of the Roman people. As Pompey did not think it best to fight the Parthians without a decree of the Senate, he sent mediators to compose their differences.<sup>162</sup>

In Appian's passage we have further evidence that the original informal arrangement of Pompey and Phraates made in early 66 BCE was no longer in place by 64 BCE. That arrangement clearly was not a military alliance against Armenia with territorial stipulations; rather, it was an informal agreement of friendship and neutrality. Without a renewal of this arrangement, the Armeno-Parthian war continued.

In 65 BCE Phraates had tried to renew this arrangement with Pompey without success because the Romans decided to support Tigranes militarily.<sup>163</sup> Yet in 64 BCE, when Pompey rejected Tigranes' call to arms and finally settled on arbitrating the conflict, Phraates decided that he could renew his informal friendship with Rome and end the war against Tigranes on favorable terms. Appian demonstrates that Phraates in fact had the opposite intention toward the Romans in 64 BCE that we find in Dio. Even after all of the difficult dealings with the Romans since 66 BCE, the Parthians still had no intention to start or prepare for a war against Rome. Phraates was not creating an anti-Roman coalition to accomplish his grand strategic goals of

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<sup>162</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 16.106

<sup>163</sup> Dio 37.5.1-2

someday defeating Rome; rather, Phraates desired an acceptable truce with Armenia and a renewal of friendly relations with Rome so that he could finally stabilize his western frontier and end the civil war in the East. Thus, Phraates' focus remained the concerns of the Eastern system.

It appears the Roman arbiters decided in Tigranes' favor concerning Gordyene; however, Pompey did not stop Phraates from recovering most of Osrhoene except the northern district around Edessa ruled by Abgarus, which had already pledged its allegiance to Rome.<sup>164</sup> Phraates agreed to the truce with Armenia in part because it allowed him to strengthen his position in northern Mesopotamia at the expense of Tigranes. Although Phraates' ultimate goal was to reconquer Armenia, after the failure of Tigranes the Younger, he knew this prospect would be difficult and time consuming. Moreover, after the Roman military response in 65 BCE to his occupation of Gordyene, Phraates recognized that he could not hope to subdue Greater Armenia without provoking Rome to war, which he wanted to avoid.<sup>165</sup> Meanwhile, Phraates could not afford to leave a hostile Tigranes in his rear while he went to fight in the Farther East against Arsaces XVI; however, without Roman arbitration, forcing Tigranes to accept a truce was unlikely because Tigranes thought he had the support of Rome. Therefore, Roman arbitration greatly benefited Phraates.

After the truce the Parthians not only gained much of Osrhoene, but also the peace settlement with Tigranes meant that Armenia had to formally recognize Parthian control over Media Atropatene, Adiabene, and Mygdonia. Scholars fail to appreciate that Phraates' war against Armenia, although not a total victory, was a considerable success. Phraates' temporary abandonment of Gordyene was a small price to pay for the peace Phraates needed along his

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<sup>164</sup> For the terms of the arbitration and the confusion of Strabo, see Sherwin-White 1984: 224-5, n.102.

<sup>165</sup> Seager 2002: 59.

western frontier. Ultimately, Phraates accepted Roman arbitration in 64 BCE and withdrew from Gordyene because he recognized that he could use the Romans to help get him out of a war with Tigranes that had no foreseeable end.<sup>166</sup> Additionally, Phraates' reoccupation of Gordyene in 64 BCE had encouraged Pompey to snub Tigranes publicly in favor of supporting the end of the Armeno-Parthian conflict. This change of policy hurt Pompey and Tigranes' standings in the region and drove an important political and diplomatic wedge between the Armenians and Romans. Tigranes realized that he could not rely on Rome to fight his battles, which encouraged him to repair his relationship with Parthia. Meanwhile, Phraates was able to frustrate his rival and end Roman meddling in his affairs for the rest of his reign. Despite modern evaluations that portray Phraates and Parthia unfavorably for accepting the terms of the arbitration, in fact Phraates came out of the negotiations the clear winner as Tigranes' considerable anger over the situation unmistakably illustrates.<sup>167</sup>

Finally, let us discuss briefly the generally unfair portrayal of Pompey by ancient and modern historians in this affair. Pompey's decision to insult Tigranes publicly, offer arbitration to an aggressive potential rival, and avoid a Parthian war damaged his reputation and prestige;

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<sup>166</sup> Note Shayegan 2011: 326.

<sup>167</sup> Note Mommsen 1903: iv 435; Dobiáš 1931: 241ff.; Manandyan 2007: 159. We should reject Keaveney's unjustified conclusion that "we must assume" that Pompey and Phraates agreed to yet another official treaty in 64 BCE. Keaveney uses the flimsy evidence of Florus and Orosius to claim dubiously that this treaty remained valid at the time of Crassus' invasion of Mesopotamia and even at the time of the civil war between Caesar and Pompey. Keaveney 1981: 209. Apart from accepting the biased and confused Graeco-Roman tradition without hesitation, Keaveney also completely ignores that Pompey's treaty with Phraates was no longer valid under his sons, Mithridates IV and Orodes II. Further, even if there had been an official alliance between the Romans and Parthians, which remained valid at the time of Crassus' invasion, Crassus' attack would have violated it, making its continued existence during Caesar and Pompey's civil war impossible.



however, Pompey's actions were calculated and easily defensible. Criticism of Pompey following these events simply goes too far.

Plutarch unsurprisingly offers a flattering depiction of Pompey's "virtue and clemency," which aligns with his moralistic veneration of Roman heroes.<sup>168</sup> Meanwhile, Appian simply states that Pompey, in point of fact, "did not think it best to fight the Parthians without a decree of the Senate."<sup>169</sup> However, Dio describes Pompey as dishonest, vain, cowardly, and fearful. He records,

As a result [of Phraates' envoy], he [Pompey] lent no aid to Tigranes and no longer took any hostile measures against Phraates, offering the excuse that no such expedition had been assigned to him and that Mithridates [VI] was still in arms. He declared himself satisfied with what had been accomplished and did not wish to undertake further risks, lest in striving for additional results he might impair the successes already won by some reverse, as Lucullus had done. Such was his philosophy, and he maintained that covetousness was a dangerous thing, and to aim at the possessions of others unjust, — now that he was no longer able to make use of them. For he feared the forces of the Parthian and dreaded the uncertain issue of events, and so did not undertake this war, although many urged him to do so.<sup>170</sup>

Thus, Dio has Pompey making excuses for why he could not fight the Parthians. Dio's conclusion is that Pompey feared the Parthians, questioned his ability to overcome them in war, and did not want to damage his military reputation. It is incredibly hard to accept that Pompey feared the Parthians in 64 BCE. He had moved against Phraates' occupation of Gordyene forcefully in 65 BCE, and as Sherwin-White points out, the Parthian military had hardly impressed the Romans from 66-64 BCE.<sup>171</sup> Yet, for example, Sherwin-White finds Pompey's reasoning for avoiding war perplexing; Seager questions Pompey's confidence; and Manandyan

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<sup>168</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 39.3-4

<sup>169</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 16.106

<sup>170</sup> Dio 37.7.1-2

<sup>171</sup> Sherwin-White 1984: 224.

finds Pompey and his actions to be circumspect.<sup>172</sup> If we accept that Plutarch's portrayal of Pompey is idealized, we should also accept that Dio was overly critical of Pompey. Appian's matter of fact reasoning is perfectly acceptable.<sup>173</sup> Pompey's command was against Mithridates of Pontus and Tigranes of Armenia. Although he technically could make war and peace in the Near East as he saw fit, he did not have the authority of the Senate to attack the still little known Parthians and doing so would have made him the subject of vehement political attacks at Rome.<sup>174</sup> Finally, there was no need for Pompey to start a war against the Parthians. Phraates had not attacked his army, and he had agreed to arbitration of his conflict with Armenia. Pompey understood that the goal of his command was to establish Roman hegemony over the lands of the Near East firmly, which came to include Armenia, northern Mesopotamia, and the Caucasus regions but did not yet incorporate the Parthian Empire. Thus, Pompey's focus remained the concerns of the Mediterranean system.

It is unsurprising that Pompey favored subduing the regions around the Eastern Mediterranean coast and consolidating Roman power over these regions over a major war against Parthia. By subduing Tigranes II, Pompey became responsible for stabilizing the former southern territories of Tigranes' empire. Lucullus' settlement of the Near East in 69/68 BCE had been haphazard and temporary. He had installed pro-Roman vassals in and around Syria; however, after his defeat in 67 BCE these kings had embraced their own autonomy. The geopolitical environment of the Eastern Mediterranean coast once again descended into chaos,

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<sup>172</sup> Id. 225; Seager 2002: 58; Manandyan 2007: 159. There is a longstanding tradition that accepts that Pompey feared fighting the Parthians. See for instance Rawlinson 1885 (2002): 82.

<sup>173</sup> Debevoise favored Appian's reasoning. Debevoise 1938: 75.

<sup>174</sup> Sherwin-White and Seager acknowledge Pompey's political vulnerability. Sherwin-White 1984: 225; Seager 2002: 59. Appian records that one possible reason Pompey avoided invading Egypt was that he "wished to guard against the envy of his enemies." Appian *Mithr.* 17.114

and Roman hegemony over the region began to fade. Once Pompey mitigated the threats of Mithridates VI and Tigranes II, reorganized their kingdoms, and subdued the northern Near East under Rome's hegemony, he quickly turned his attention to the disturbances in the southern Near East. The Eastern Mediterranean coast for too long had been in a state of dangerous anarchy.

In two years the relations between the Romans and Parthians had deteriorated suddenly because of regional Roman military success, miscommunication, uncertainty of intentions, and separate geopolitical goals and viewpoints. Pompey's plans to solidify Roman hegemony over the Near East caused increasing friction with the Parthians, who had their own ambitions to do the same. The conflicts of 66-64 BCE were in part the result of the geopolitical consequences of the three phases of system overlap in the Near East. To make things worse, neither side had come to a definitive understanding of its new role within the region or of their overlapping hegemonic desires. Conflict and confusion between Rome and Parthia over Armenia would continue; however, the successful negotiations of 64 BCE put a brake temporarily on the escalation of tension between the two powers. These negotiations were possible because more immediate concerns for the Romans and Parthians in their separate interstate systems continued to garner their attentions.

#### A New World Order Emerges: The Formation of the Med-Eastern System

With the recent setbacks of Lucullus and the renewal of regional hostilities in Anatolia, Armenia, Mesopotamia, and Syria, Pompey quickly realized that in order to stabilize Rome's control of the Near East the Romans had to take a more direct approach to their imperialism in the East. As the power of the Seleucid Empire wavered and eventually declined, power vacuums in the Near East and Middle East emerged. Parthia had benefitted directly from the deterioration of the Seleucid state the most and, in fact, had been instrumental in its final decline. Meanwhile,

Pontus and Armenia in the 90s-60s BCE had looked to dominate the former Seleucid lands of the Near East. However, the Romans had shown little interest in establishing direct rule in the Near East prior to the middle 60s BCE. The Romans' approach to eastern imperialism for nearly one and a half centuries was cautious, inconsistent, and mostly indirect. Instead, the Romans had relied upon a network of friends, allies, and clients in the East. Pompey mostly left this system in place; however, he bolstered it with new Roman provinces and sizable permanent Roman garrisons.<sup>175</sup>

The destruction of the Mithridatic wars had made this new approach to Roman imperialism in the East necessary. Decades of inconsistent Roman policy and neglect in the Near East had allowed Mithridates VI to create a powerful rival state in Anatolia and helped lead to the conflict with Tigranes II's expanding empire. The prior efforts of Sulla, Murena, and Lucullus to stabilize the Near East had failed to remove the threat of rivals to Roman hegemony in the region. Without establishing a strong Roman presence in the Near East in the late 60s BCE, the Romans once again opened the door to geopolitical chaos in the region. Hellenistic monarchs, Arab tribes, and the Jewish kingdom threatened the stability of the region and made Roman hegemony vulnerable. It became necessary for Pompey to address these immediate concerns in 64/63 BCE with a more permanent solution to fill the power void left by the dismantling of Mithridates and Tigranes' empires. Pompey wanted to avoid allowing another middling regional power to fill this void and potentially challenge Roman domination. Additionally, although the actions of the Parthians remained of secondary concern to Pompey, he had become aware of their military aggression and potential western ambitions. A more

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<sup>175</sup> For the Roman army in the East, note Isaac 1986; Keppie 1986; Isaac 1992; Kennedy 1996: 84-86; id. 1996b.

permanent Roman settlement of the Near East was the best assurance that Rome and not Parthia would dominate the region moving forward.

Pompey's settlement of the northern Near East already had damaged the relationship of Rome and Parthia and had threatened to create conflict between the two powers. His settlement of the southern Near East also had major consequences on the international environment in the East and the relations between Rome and Parthia. Pompey's annexation of Syria especially took no account of Parthian concerns and the possible geopolitical consequences of Roman and Parthian territory sharing a common, yet unofficial border along the middle Euphrates. With the subjugation of Armenia under Roman authority in 66 BCE and with the death of Mithridates VI in 63 BCE, Parthia became the last major power outside of the hegemonic influence of Rome. Although Rome still had no immediate plans to fight a war against Parthia, the Romans increasingly had to consider their world standing in relationship to that of the Parthians.

Thus, after almost a decade of sharing an unofficial border without the acknowledgement of strict dividing lines of hegemonic influence, friction between Rome and Parthia finally reached critical mass in the middle 50s BCE. Since their first contact in the late 90s BCE, both powers had remained focused on the geopolitical developments within their separate interstate systems; however, the internal struggles of the Parthians and the recent military success of the Romans in the Near East caused growing confusion and uncertainty in the policies and interactions of Parthia and Rome. The main area of contention came to be an extensive swathe of territory that included Syria, Armenia, and Mesopotamia, what we may call the "Near Eastern Triangle." Both powers believed they had a hegemonic right to dominate this region, and although hegemonic war still was not inevitable by the middle of the 50s BCE, with so much at stake geopolitically such an outcome became increasingly difficult to avoid because only open

conflict between Rome and Parthia could definitively determine the true makeup of the international environment, the power dynamics, and the balance of power in the Near East.

The immediate cause of the long and turbulent First Romano-Parthian War (56 BCE – 1 CE) was the desperate political actions of the Parthian king, Mithridates IV, not the avariciousness and bellicosity of Gabinius or Crassus. For too long scholars generally have overlooked or discounted the crucial part Parthia played in the emerging conflict with Rome. Yet in the latter half of the first century BCE, Parthia launched determined, wide-ranging, and aggressive invasions of Roman territory with the desire not simply to protect their lands against a belligerent Roman bully but to force Rome to accept Parthian superiority and Parthian hegemony over the Near East. The Parthians felt they had every right to rule over the Near Eastern Triangle and had just as much to gain from conflict over this region as the Romans. The aggressiveness of Crassus and Antony and their devastating military failures garner most of the publicity in this period; however, the First Romano-Parthian War was a back-and-forth contest between peer powers. We must remove the concept of Parthia acting as a passive, reluctant victim of Roman aggression and imperialism. In this period especially, the Parthians launched the same number of invasions as the Romans. Unique bellicosity was not the cause or motivation behind the larger, more sustained invasions of the Romans; rather, the unrivaled ability in the ancient world to recruit and maintain large armies that allowed the Romans to prepare and sustain major campaigns, often on multiple fronts. Similarly, the perceived failure of the Parthians to match the intensity of the Romans in these struggles and in the decades that followed did not stem from an innate passiveness or disinterest in western expansion; rather, it was a result of internal political weaknesses and manpower limitations. The First Romano-Parthian War demonstrates clearly the will of the Parthians to dominate the lands of the Near East and to subjugate their Roman rival.

For the Parthians the will to establish Parthian superiority over the Romans always remained but the realities of military and political limitations dictated how and when the Parthians could exercise that will.

The First Romano-Parthian War had two main phases. Traditional militarily focused foreign policy for both powers dominated the first phase. Rome and Parthia after forty years of confused and awkward relations threw everything they had at one another to conclude the conflict favorably and definitively. The emphasis was on the establishment of direct power through force. The devastating campaigns and unsuccessful efforts of Rome and Parthia in the 50s, 40s, and 30s BCE eventually encouraged both powers to reassess their military goals and to alter their foreign policies. Diplomatic maneuvering and a propaganda war dominated the second phase of the first war. Augustus, who had the military capability to continue the war against Parthia along the aggressive and direct policy goals of the first phase, elected to avoid direct confrontation with the Parthians if possible in favor of creating diplomatic influence and using soft power to weaken Rome's last rival. With the examples of Crassus and Antony in recent memory, Augustus came to view a major Parthian expedition as too risky to the Roman state and, more importantly, to himself. Although he continued to utilize force as a threat to coerce the Parthians, he came to prefer a non-violent solution to the rivalry with Parthia.

The evolution and revolution of Augustan foreign policy in the East eliminated the major Roman campaigns of the previous phase of the war; however, it could not end the war definitively.<sup>176</sup> Meanwhile, the renewal of internal political conflict once again drastically limited the offensive capabilities of the Parthians. With neither power able to force an end to the

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<sup>176</sup> For an important evaluation of the Augustan solution to the First Romano-Parthian War, see Sherwin-White 1984: Ch. 14.

conflict and with a renewal of open conflict emerging, Rome and Parthia finally decided to conclude the First Romano-Parthian War with the first formal treaty ever recognized by the two powers, which finally acknowledged the Euphrates officially as common border between their empires. The fateful meeting between Gaius Caesar and Phraates V across the Euphrates in 1 CE, documented by the eyewitness account of Velleius Paterculus, ended the Romano-Parthian “hot war” and ushered in the Romano-Parthian “cold war.”<sup>177</sup>

Thus, the biggest consequence of the First Romano-Parthian War was the violent merger of the Roman-dominated Mediterranean and the Parthian-dominated Eastern systems. This created the expansive Med-Eastern system, which was the largest interstate system in Antiquity and was unrivaled in size until the early modern period. Crassus’ failed invasion of Parthia and the Parthians’ retaliatory response destroyed the previous distinction of neighboring but separate Mediterranean and Eastern worlds, which had been in place since the middle of the third century BCE.<sup>178</sup> The geopolitical developments of the Mediterranean and East had become linked. Moreover, because of these events Rome and Parthia came to recognize that they shared a much-enlarged international environment. As both powers looked to dominate one another in the second half of the first century BCE, a hegemonic rivalry emerged, and when both powers came to accept that the total domination of the other was unrealistic, Rome and Parthia decided to end the First Romano-Parthian War and to recognize one another as system rivals. Their bipolar rivalry remained in place with few exceptions into the third century CE.

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<sup>177</sup> Vell. Pat. 2.101

<sup>178</sup> Overtoom 2016.



## Pompey's Southern Settlement of the Near East and the End of Mithridates VI

Pompey seems to have understood from the beginning of his Eastern campaign that Syria was the key to controlling the Near East and that Rome could not hope to maintain hegemonic dominance over the region without becoming the master of this key.<sup>179</sup> Additionally, the region had been a warzone for several decades. The weakness of the rulers of Syria had led to perpetual civil war and outside interference. As new major powers emerged, such as the Parthians and Armenians, they came to dominate the important lands of Syria. Lucullus' quick settlement of Syria in 69/68 BCE, which returned the region to Antiochus XIII, had netted predictable results. Antiochus struggled to maintain control over the region as another usurper, Philip II, Arabian tribes, and the Hasmonean Kingdom challenged his power.<sup>180</sup> Appian unfairly accuses Pompey of stealing Syria from Antiochus because "it was easy for Pompey, with an army under his command, to rob an unarmed king, but the pretense was that it was unseemly for the Seleucids, whom Tigranes had dethroned, to govern Syria, rather than the Romans who had conquered Tigranes."<sup>181</sup> Appian emphasizes themes such as right of conquest, the superiority of power, and the helplessness of the weak; however, his evaluation of the situation is simplistic. Justin touches on similar concerns, arguing that Pompey rejected Antiochus' candidacy to be king because

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<sup>179</sup> Seager 2002: 58.

<sup>180</sup> The same Seleucid faction that had supported Tigranes II against Cleopatra Selene in 74/73 BCE rejected Antiochus XIII as king once more and put forward Philip I's son, Philip II, as a challenger in ca. 67 BCE. The civil war lasted for the next few years, and both candidates for the Seleucid throne were at the mercy of foreign warlords. The Arab leader, Azizus, initially supported Philip II in the conflict. Meanwhile, another Arab leader, Sampsiceramus, pretended to support Antiochus but plotted to murder the two Seleucid kings. The disturbances in Syria were considerable and the resurgent Seleucid dynasty was utterly unstable and vulnerable. Diod. 40.1a-b. See also Dio 36.17. Justin tells us that Pompey was unwilling to "expose Syria to the depredations of the Jews and Arabians." Justin 40.2.4. There also remained pockets of independent pirate communities in Syria at this time. Seager 2002: 49; Sartre 2005: 32-5.

<sup>181</sup> Appian *Syr.* 8.49

Antiochus was weak, cowardly, and inept.<sup>182</sup> Yet Pompey had a far more logical and pressing reason to seize Syria and turn it into a Roman province, namely the threat of other regional powers to the stability of the region. Sherwin-White captured this point in part, stating, “If Pompeius left Syria without an effective government and a strong military presence, the Arsacids were likely to intervene in pursuit of their traditional policy of westward expansion. Though they had not yet shown themselves capable of challenging the might of Rome they were in an eastern context a considerable power.”<sup>183</sup> Yet Parthia was only one possible threat amongst many. For too long the Romans had left the Eastern Mediterranean coast in the hands of others without direct involvement in the region. Within the last generation, this had allowed the Parthians and the Armenians to dominate this region and challenge Roman hegemony. Pompey was unwilling to risk abandoning this region and allowing another Pontus or Armenia to emerge as a significant regional power in the Near East.<sup>184</sup> Moreover, he had come to appreciate that the Parthians were aggressive and imperialistic. Pompey had the foresight to understand that Rome no longer could rule the Near East from a distance. Therefore, he made the necessary decision to annex Antiochus’ kingdom and to make it into Rome’s most eastern province.<sup>185</sup>

Yet Pompey did not establish Syria as a military bulwark to act as a defensive bastion at the edge of the Roman world. He had no intention to make Syria the limit of Roman hegemony

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<sup>182</sup> Justin 40.2.2-5

<sup>183</sup> Sherwin-White 1984: 225. See also Sartre 2005: 39; Shayegan 2011: 329; Sampson 2015: 90.

<sup>184</sup> In fact, Tigranes apparently asked Pompey to return Syria and Phoenicia to his control. Dio 37.7a. Tigranes remained eager to maximize his power and regional strength.

<sup>185</sup> Sartre’s argument that the principal goal of Pompey was “a desire to break with Lucullus’ policy” is unconvincing. Sartre 2005: 38. This could have been a motivation of Pompey; however, it would have been secondary to immediate security concerns to his overall command and his recent Armenian settlement.

or the Euphrates a defensive barrier.<sup>186</sup> Therefore, he did not try to defend its frontiers or control its strategic sites, and he left client kings in charge of critical strategic avenues. Although Pompey's settlement of Syria was an important step in establishing Rome's presence in the Near East, he did not revolutionize Roman foreign policy in the East. In fact, his arrangement of a network of friends, allies, and client kingdoms was similar to the actions of the Roman Senate after the Battle of Magnesia in 189 BCE, and after Pompey returned to Rome in 62 BCE, the Romans largely neglected the diplomatic arrangements Pompey put into place to the detriment of his settlement.<sup>187</sup>

Pompey needed to secure the Eastern Mediterranean coast for Rome and to discourage the numerous militaristic and aggressive states in the region from interfering in Roman interests in the Near East. He therefore made Syria a Roman base of operations and used it to subdue or

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<sup>186</sup> In fact, the Romans did not consider the Euphrates a defensive barrier because it was not difficult to cross. Dio records that the Romans bridged rivers, such as the Euphrates, "with the greatest ease." Dio 71.3 Rather, the Euphrates, like the Rhine and Danube, became a useful line of communication, supply, and trade. Note esp. Mann 1974; id. 1979; Millar 1982; Isaac 1993; Whittaker 1994; Mattern 1999. Contra Luttwak 1976; Ferrill 1991; Wheeler 1993; Potter 1996.

<sup>187</sup> Note Sherwin-White 1984: 226-7; Seager 2002: 62; Gruen 2006: 265-6. Højte argues that Pompey had extended the war against Mithridates on purpose and that Mithridates' sudden death forced him to return to Rome. Højte 2009c: 121-2. Although Kallet-Marx is correct that Roman intrusiveness in the Near East increased after Sulla and in large part thanks to Pompey, this process does not appear to be as revolutionary or as revenue driven as Kallet-Marx suggests. Even after Pompey's settlement of the Near East, the Romans rarely appear to have sought out heightened intrusiveness and, instead, continued familiar patterns of reluctant, inconsistent, and slow policy in the East. Kallet-Marx's Roman-centric view of these events leads him to view the actions of Sulla as the decisive factor in the transition from a state of Roman hegemony to empire in the East. Yet too often pushed into the background in Kallet-Marx's important work is the primary importance of Mithridates' hegemonic conflict with Rome to the advances of Rome's "empire" in the east. Instead of actively pursuing more intrusive empire in the East, the consequences of the Mithridatic Wars forced the Romans to accept a more intrusive role in the East with a harsher form of hegemony. Thus, instead of being the cause of the development, Sulla and Pompey reacted to a situation that was already developing and that required a new approach by the Romans. Meanwhile, the role that the budding rivalry with Parthia played in Rome's transition from hegemony to empire in the East is missing altogether. See esp. Kallet-Marx 1995: 322-42.

coerce various minor and middling regional powers and to bring them under Rome's hegemony. Contrary to the claims of some scholars, Pompey did not attempt to create a protective wall of Roman clients and allies around his new provinces; rather, he wanted to occupy directly the smallest areas possible and leave the rest of the Near East to loyal clients in order to create a stable balance of power in Rome's favor.<sup>188</sup> Many of these minor polities quickly recognized that Rome had replaced Pontus and Armenia as the new regional power, and therefore, they desired to bandwagon with the rising hegemon.<sup>189</sup> Pompey's settlement of Syria allowed the Romans to act preemptively and offensively in the Near East as Pompey, Gabinius, and Crassus' commands in the region clearly demonstrate; it was not a defensive solution.

Pompey's settlement of Syria would have been a disturbing geopolitical development in the eyes of the Parthians. For the first time the directly controlled territory of the Romans and Parthians shared a common, yet unofficial border along the middle Euphrates.<sup>190</sup> Prior to this, the Romans had campaigned extensively in the Near East, had created client rulers, and had interfered in regional politics; however, from a Parthian perspective none of these developments appeared permanent until the annexation of Syria. The Parthians no longer could hope that the Romans would return to the West, leaving them to reassert their influence over the Near East. Meanwhile, the Parthians had not ceded their hegemonic claims to Syria and the surrounding territories to Rome, and therefore, they increasingly came to view the Romans as interlopers in the Near East. With Pompey's settlement of Syria, it became clear to the Parthians and all of the

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<sup>188</sup> Seager 2002: 61-2; Sampson 2015: 29. Note that the Roman settlement of Asia had many similarities. I mostly agree with Sherwin-White's analysis on this point. Sherwin-White 1984: 231.

<sup>189</sup> Plutarch tells us that, prior to invading Syria, "many leaders and princes and twelve barbarian kings had come to him [that is, to Pompey]." Plut. *Pomp.* 38.2

<sup>190</sup> For a recent reassessment of Roman and Parthian control along the Euphrates in the first century BCE, see Edwell 2013.

other states in the region that the Romans were there to stay. Yet despite the claims of some historians, conflict between Rome and Parthia, although increasingly likely, was not inevitable in the near future after Pompey's settlement of Syria.<sup>191</sup> Several more critical factors came into play before Crassus launched his major invasion against Parthia in 53 BCE.

Pompey's campaign along the coast of the Eastern Mediterranean was successful. Plutarch would have us believe that Pompey subdued the Eastern Mediterranean coast for vanity and personal glory; however, again this simplistic view of Pompey's character misses the mark.<sup>192</sup> He forced Antiochus I of Commagene to submit after a brief fight; he established an alliance with Abgarus of Edessa; he removed Antiochus XIII from the throne of Syria; he ended the Hasmonean civil war, sacking Jerusalem in the process; and he defeated the Nabataean king, Aretas.<sup>193</sup> For the first time the states along the Eastern Mediterranean coast had accepted Roman hegemony by direct force. Pompey was making an emphatic statement of Roman dominance over the entire Mediterranean world that he hoped would negate the need for the Romans to fight another major war in the Near East. Once he had accomplished his goals of firmly establishing

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<sup>191</sup> For example, see Manandyan 2007: 162; Shayegan 2011: 329-30. Sampson unfortunately views the Battle of Carrhae as the culmination of an almost 200 year relentless and inevitable process. Sampson 2015: xv, 17, 20-1, 53-5, 83-4, 88. Proximity between states makes conflict more likely but not inevitable. Tammen *et al.* 2000: 66.

<sup>192</sup> "Moreover, a great and eager passion possessed him [Pompey] to recover Syria, and march through Arabia to the Red Sea, in order that he might bring his victorious career into touch with the Ocean which surrounds the world on all sides; for in Africa he had been the first to carry his conquests as far as the Outer Sea, and again in Spain he had made the Atlantic Ocean the boundary of the Roman dominion, and thirdly, in his recent pursuit of the Albani, he had narrowly missed reaching the Hyrcanian Sea. In order, therefore, that he might connect the circuit of his military expeditions with the Red Sea, he put his army in motion. And, besides, he saw that it was difficult to hunt Mithridates down with an armed force, and that he was harder to deal with when he fled than when he gave battle." Plut. *Pomp.* 38.2-3

<sup>193</sup> Id. 39, 41; id. *Crass.* 21; Appian *Mithr.* 16.106, 17.114-15; id. *Syr.* 8.49-50, 11.70; Justin 40.2; Dio 37.7a, 11, 15.3, 16.1, 4, 40.20.1, 2.1; Jos. *Bell.* 1.127-53, 59; id. *Ant.* 14.29-58, 73, 79, 15.180, 20.244; Cic. *Flac.* 67; Strabo 16.2.3, 8, 18, 40, 46; Tac. *Hist.* 5.9, 12; Livy *Epit.* 102.4; Florus 1.40.29-30; Ruf. *Fest.* 14; Eutrop. 6.14.2; Orosius 6.5-6; Ps. Sol. 2, 8, 17

Roman hegemony over the lands of the northern and southern Near East, only the final submission of Mithridates of Pontus eluded him.

Mithridates had fled north along the coast of the Black Sea and over the Caucasus Mountains to the Bosporan Kingdom in the hope that his presence there would rally his former northern allies to his cause.<sup>194</sup> The bold plan initially worked as numerous nomadic chieftains pledged their military support to him, and in 65 BCE he was able to seize the Bosporan Kingdom from his treacherous son, Machares, who killed himself out of fear.<sup>195</sup> For the first time in a year, Mithridates had a growing army and ruled a kingdom. His new position of power and news of Pompey's lenient treatment of Tigranes II encouraged Mithridates to send an embassy to Pompey in 64 BCE asking for the return of his ancestral kingdom in exchange for tribute and peace. However, when Pompey demanded that Mithridates surrender unconditionally and appear in person as had Tigranes, Mithridates refused to cooperate.<sup>196</sup>

Mithridates' offer of peace is interesting because it illustrates that he still thought that he could negotiate an acceptable cessation of the war with Pompey as he had done previously with Sulla and Murena. Years of experience navigating Rome's indecisive, shortsighted, and inconsistent foreign policy convinced him that Pompey, who showed no interest in chasing Mithridates into the north, might still agree to a peace so that he could return to Rome triumphant. Mithridates waited to send an embassy until he had rebuilt his fortunes so that he could negotiate with the Romans from a position of strength. This helps explain why Mithridates attempted to dictate terms and refused to surrender in person. He understood that his losses had

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<sup>194</sup> For Mithridates' route and the difficult campaign he had to endure to reach his destination, see Mayor 2010: 326-40.

<sup>195</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 15.102, 16.107; Dio 37.12

<sup>196</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 16.107

been considerable; however, he had recovered from similar setbacks before. Moreover, he knew that Lucullus at the height of his power had experienced a major reversal of fortune after overextending his troops. He also knew that Pompey had soldiers spread out over Asia Minor, Syria, and Phoenicia. Mithridates had nothing to lose from negotiating with Pompey and a kingdom possibly to gain. Yet Mithridates was not sitting by idly, waiting for Pompey's response. Appian states, "Even while he [Mithridates] was saying these things he was levying an army of freedmen and slaves promiscuously, manufacturing arms, projectiles, and machines, helping himself to timber, and killing plough-oxen for the sake of their sinews. He levied tribute on all, even those of the slenderest means."<sup>197</sup> Mithridates planned to add these men and resources to a large body of allied soldiers, a new fleet, and numerous captured strongholds.<sup>198</sup> If Pompey refused to accept peace, Mithridates had every intention to continue challenging Roman domination from his new power base in the north.

It would be a mistake to assume that Mithridates had a "grand strategy" in 66/65 BCE as Mayor does following Appian's account.<sup>199</sup> In 66 BCE with no kingdom and few remaining forces and allies, Mithridates' only strategy was to survive to fight another day. Instead, we should interpret Mithridates' northern campaign in phases, where, as before, his ambitions began limited but quickly escalated as opportunity and indeed desperation began to influence his intentions. In the first phase of Mithridates' northern campaign, he planned to escape Pompey's grasp, gain northern allies, and punish those who had betrayed him in order to regain his seat of power in the Bosphorus. In the second phase, he used his momentum to consolidate his power in

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Appian places Mithridates' new army at over 36,000 men. Id. 16.108. Mayor puts the potential strength of Mithridates' polyglot army at 100,000 men. Mayor 2010: 342.

<sup>199</sup> Id. 327.

the Bosporean Kingdom, rebuild his fleet and army, and attempt to negotiate an acceptable peace with the Romans. It was not until the final phase that Mithridates settled on one final hegemonic war against Rome.<sup>200</sup>

In a short amount of time, Mithridates seemingly had reassembled a large portion of his Black Sea Kingdom. Much as after his campaign against Murena, Mithridates knew he needed time to recoup his material and financial losses. Thus, he hoped Pompey would return Pontus to him and end the war. It may seem amazing, but Mithridates considered these terms just and fair based upon his new position of strength and his experience negotiating with the Romans. However, once it became clear that Pompey still would only accept unconditional surrender, Mithridates, who was a proud, resilient, and innovative man, had every reason to use his newfound strength to continue the war to its finality. It was at this moment that Mithridates finally would have made his famed decision to take the war to Rome.

Although Mithridates died before he could act upon it, there is a tradition that he planned to march a large army toward Italy. Plutarch records,

For they [Pompey's soldiers] thought it an evasion of the pursuit of Mithridates, and demanded that he [Pompey] should rather turn against that inveterate enemy, who was again kindling the flames of war and preparing, as it was reported, to march an army through Scythia and Paeonia against Italy. Pompey, however, thinking it easier to crush the king's forces when he made war than to seize his person when he was in flight, was not willing to wear out his own strength in a vain pursuit, and therefore sought other employment in the interval of the war and thus protracted the time.<sup>201</sup>

Meanwhile, Appian states,

Mithridates here made no small plans, nor yet plans suitable for a fugitive, but conceived the idea of making the circuit of the whole Pontic coast, passing from Pontus to the Scythians around the Sea of Azov and thus arriving at the Bosphorus. He intended to take away the kingdom of Machares, his ungrateful

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<sup>200</sup> Note Manandyan 2007: 159.

<sup>201</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 41.2



son, and confront the Romans once more; wage war against them from the side of Europe while they were in Asia, and to put between them as a dividing line the strait which is believed to have been called the Bosphorus because Io swam across it when she was changed into a cow and fled from the jealousy of Hera.<sup>202</sup>

Appian later continues,

He [Mithridates] proposed to turn his course to the Gauls, whose friendship he had cultivated a long time for this purpose, and with them to invade Italy, hoping that many of the Italians themselves would join him on account of their hatred of the Romans; for he had heard that such had been Hannibal's policy after the Romans had waged war against him in Spain, and that he had become in this way an object of the greatest terror to them. He knew that almost all of Italy had lately revolted from the Romans by reason of their hatred and had waged war against them for a very long time, and had sustained Spartacus, the gladiator, against them, although he was a man of no repute. Filled with these ideas he was for hastening to the Gauls, but his soldiers, though the very bold enterprise might be attractive, were deterred chiefly by its magnitude, and by the long distance of the expedition in foreign territory, against men whom they could not overcome even in their own country. They thought also that Mithridates, in utter despair, wanted to end his life in a valiant and kingly way rather than in idleness. So they tolerated him and remained silent, for there was nothing mean or contemptible about him even in his misfortunes.<sup>203</sup>

To determine whether Mithridates' plan to invade Italy in 64 BCE was realistic is futile, although many historians have tried.<sup>204</sup> Theoretically, it was no more ridiculous a task than Alexander's conquest of Persia and India, or Hannibal's invasion of Italy from Spain, or the migrations of the Cimbri and Teutones, or the campaigns of Attila, or the migration of the Visigoths, which in fact followed a route roughly similar to what Mithridates might have taken and devastated Italy.

Although Mithridates' final bold plan could be a creation of Roman paranoia and propaganda,

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<sup>202</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 15.101

<sup>203</sup> Id. 16.109. See also id. 17.119.

<sup>204</sup> See esp. Reinach 1890; Mommsen 1903: iv 418; Magie 1950: i 364; Duggan 1959: 186-7; Sherwin-White 1984: 203-6, n.46; McGing 1986: 122-3, 165, n.95; Sherwin-White 1994; Ballesteros-Pastor 1996: Ch. 13; Ford 2004: 344-6; Manandyan 2007: 159; Mayor 2010: 341-4.

this task at its core was plausible, and there is solid evidence that Mithridates at least planned to take the war to Rome in Eastern Europe.<sup>205</sup>

Mithridates had considered invading Italy at the height of the first conflict with Rome after he had allied himself with Italian communities.<sup>206</sup> It certainly is possible that Mithridates out of determination and desperation to force an end to the conflict once and for all returned to the idea of trying to win the war in the West in 64 BCE.<sup>207</sup> He believed that he had enough men, materials, and money for one last great campaign, which is why he fled to the north and began rebuilding his forces. Moreover, he was aware that a victory over Pompey in the East did not assure him a total victory in the conflict because of his experience against Lucullus. Furthermore, the Roman Senate had cheated him out of peace treaties before on two occasions. He would have understood that only forcing the senate to capitulate would officially end the war in his favor. Thus, as the evidence plainly suggests, Mithridates could have devised a strategy to rebuild his powerbase quickly along the coast of the Black Sea, to make the Bosporan Kingdom an impregnable fortress against Pompey's forces, and then to use his new navy and his new army of

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<sup>205</sup> Sherwin-White argues that Mithridates' plans to attack Italy were a Roman creation; however, he goes too far dismissing "the absurdity of the whole invention." Sherwin-White 1984: 203-6. See also McGing 1986: 122-3, 165; Højte 2009c: 121. To be fair, the Romans enjoyed creating rhetorical scenarios where great warriors, such as Alexander the Great, challenged them for survival in Italy. See Overtoom 2012. See also Overtoom 2013. However, we must be careful not to disregard the likely possibility that the Romans viewed another invasion of Italy by a foreign army as inevitable and that they believed Mithridates, whom they considered more than capable of brilliant military exploits, planned such an invasion.

<sup>206</sup> Diod. 37.11. Note also Vell. Pat. 2.18.3; Appian *Mithr.* 17.119; Florus 1.40.9

<sup>207</sup> Florus states that the inability of the Romans to punish Mithridates sufficiently had encouraged him to seek the recovery of Asia and Europe "by right of arms" during the third conflict. Florus 1.40.13. Florus later concludes, "Like a snake, which, though its head is crushed, threatens to the last with its tail, he [Mithridates] tried every expedient. For, after escaping from the enemy to the Colchians, he formed a plan (though it remained only a plan) of bridging the Bosphorus and then crossing through Thrace, Macedonia and Greece and making a sudden inroad in Italy." Id. 1.40.24-5.

Bosporan Greek hoplites, Scythian horse archers, and Thracian and Gallic infantry to seize the Roman lands in Eastern Europe and then if possible to march on Italy.<sup>208</sup> The grand invasion never materialized but that does not necessarily make it an invention of the Roman mind.

The peoples of the Bosphorus betrayed Mithridates and forced him to commit suicide in 63 BCE because his extensive preparations had been too demanding and ruinous.<sup>209</sup> Mithridates' dogged actions in the north demonstrate that he was preparing for a major military campaign, and our only surviving evidence of Mithridates' strategy indicates that the goal of that campaign was the defeat of Rome in Europe. If we accept that Mithridates planned to face the Romans in a final showdown in Europe, which seems likely, then it is possible that, had he lived, he might have made an attempt to march on Italy or met disaster long before reaching his final goal. Yet the ambitiousness of this campaign and the unlikelihood of its success does not nullify the plausibility of the idea and the impact that the idea had on the Roman psyche.<sup>210</sup>

In the long conflict against Rome, Mithridates always had retained his will to expand his power at the expense of his rivals. The conflict had not been a matter of Roman aggression against a reluctant enemy. Mithridates had shown great initiative, viciousness, cruelty, and belligerence in the conflict. His violent, frustrating, and ambitious relationship with the Romans made him consider the destruction of Roman power in the Mediterranean and reinforced Roman

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<sup>208</sup> See Plut. *Pomp.* 41.2; Appian *Mithr.* 15.101-2, 16.109. Note that Cicero considered the Bosphorus impregnable. Cic. *Agr.* 2.19.52; id. *Mur.* 16.34

<sup>209</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 16.108-17.114; Plut. *Pomp.* 41; Dio 37.11-14; Livy *Epit.* 102.1-3; Val. Max. 9.2.3; Justin 37.1-2, 6; Aulus Gell. 17.16; Aur. Vic. *De Viris* 76.7-8; Orosius 6.5; Florus 1.40.26

<sup>210</sup> Mithridates had been the first king to threaten Italy since Antiochus III. The Romans did not take such threats lightly. In fact, Livy suggested that Antiochus III had prepared to invade Italy. Livy 33.39.7. See also Polyb. 50.8-9; Diod. 28.12; Appian *Syr.* 1.3. Harris goes too far in discounting legitimate Roman fears of a possible invasion of Italy. Harris 1979: 221-2.

fears of his abilities. Ultimately, unique Roman bellicosity was not the decisive factor in the struggle against Mithridates; rather, it was the superior military resources of the Roman state.<sup>211</sup>

With the death of Mithridates in 63 BCE, Rome overcame its greatest enemy and rival since Hannibal. Mithridates was the last man to challenge Roman domination of the Mediterranean system, and Rome rejoiced at the news.<sup>212</sup> For almost thirty years, Mithridates had defied Rome and had weathered incredible reversals of fortune. Moreover, his conflict with Rome indirectly but drastically changed the international environment in the Near East. The Mithridatic Wars demonstrated Rome's potential vulnerability in the East but also its unique military capabilities. The struggle dragged Armenia into its first military encounter with Rome and forced Rome to create a stronger presence in the East. Finally, the Mithridatic Wars were instrumental in helping bring the separate Roman and Parthian worlds together and eventually into conflict. Only Parthia remained independent of Roman domination. Velleius Paterculus states, "Mithridates was crushed, the last of the independent kings except the rulers of the Parthians."<sup>213</sup> Here we find a historian writing under the early Caesars foreshadowing Rome's next great rivalry. The unintentional consequences of Mithridates' attempts to rival the Roman state set the international stage for the longstanding conflict between the remaining two titans of the ancient world.

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<sup>211</sup> Sampson also recognizes that the fundamental difference between Mithridates and the Romans in the conflict was that "he did not have the resources to compete with Rome." Sampson 2015: 28.

<sup>212</sup> Cic. *Prov.* 11.27. We should reject utterly Olbrycht's conclusion that "an essential factor" in Mithridates' defeat "was that Mithridates Eupator was deprived of Parthian assistance in the 70's and 60's BC, and had to rely on his own and to some extent on Tigranes' resources." Olbrycht 2009: 179. This unsubstantiated conclusion incorrectly assumes that the Parthians had eagerly given Mithridates their support in the 90s and 80s BCE. In reality, the Parthians never showed any interest in becoming involved in the Mithridatic Wars or in any conflict with Rome to this point.

<sup>213</sup> Vell. Pat. 2.40.1

By 63/62 BCE Pompey had placed the Near East firmly under Roman hegemony with his successful campaigns and new eastern settlement. Meanwhile, the Parthians had recovered a considerable amount of land from Tigranes' crumbling empire, firmly securing control of the Middle East. Yet the Parthians had been unable to press their territorial claims in Armenia and west of the Euphrates. The ongoing civil war between Phraates and Arsaces XVI once again had sapped the strength of the Parthian state. Once Phraates secured his truce with Tigranes and confirmed his informal friendship and neutrality with Rome in 64 BCE, he focused all of his attention on ending the conflict in the East and stabilizing his empire.<sup>214</sup> Meanwhile, contrary to Mithridates' warnings and veiled threats in his letter to the Parthians in 68 BCE, the Romans did not view a war with Parthia as imminent and necessary by the late 60s BCE.<sup>215</sup> Pompey returned to Rome and celebrated the greatest triumph in the history of the Republic.<sup>216</sup> It would take several more years, yet another Parthian civil war, and the determination of another Roman commander to begin the First Romano-Parthian War.

#### The Origins and Events of the First Romano-Parthian War

From 64/63-62/61 BCE, it appears that Phraates III finally brought an end to the Parthian civil war against Arsaces XVI. Yet the campaign apparently started with some difficulty. In 63 BCE there appears to have been a major calamity in Babylon connected to the civil war.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Thus as Dio states, "Phraates remained quiet" at this time. Dio 37.15.1

<sup>215</sup> Sall. *Hist.* 4.67. Manandyan misunderstood the situation when he argued that Pompey's great failure was that he did not attack the Parthians when they were vulnerable. He also incorrectly viewed war between Rome and Parthia as inevitable in the middle of the first century BCE and argued that the Parthians had long-term plans to wage war against Rome. Manandyan 2007: 161.

<sup>216</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 17.116-17; Plut. *Pomp.* 44-5; Vell. Pat. 2.40.2-4; Diod. 40.4. Note also Seager 2002: 62 n.104, n.106. Pompey gained the title "the Great" for his victory in the East. Appian *Mithr.* 17.118; Livy *Epit.* 103.12

<sup>217</sup> McEwan 1986: 93; Sachs and Hunger 1988: 34; Sachs and Hunger 1996: no. -62; Del Monte 1997: 182, 257; Assar 2006d: 91.

Moreover, it is possible that Kamnaskires IV of Elymais, who had rebelled in 65 BCE, seized Susa in 63/62 BCE and held the city for two years.<sup>218</sup> This could have occurred while Phraates was in the Farther East fighting Arsaces XVI in 63 BCE. Arsaces' coinage appears to end in 62/61 BCE, marking Phraates' final triumph in the East.<sup>219</sup> Phraates then returned west, at which point he either defeated Kamnaskires IV in battle or forced him to submit willingly. It is unclear if Kamnaskires supported Arsaces XVI; however, after Arsaces' death, Kamnaskires found himself isolated against the full might of Phraates' regime. Seemingly, Kamnaskires remained king of Elymais after the war, and the Elymeans retained their semi-independent existence after the rebellion but lost control of Susa.<sup>220</sup> Therefore, it is likely that Kamnaskires, similar to Tigranes II in 66 BCE, surrendered himself without further fighting and earned lenient treatment for his tactful decision. A Babylonian colophon from 61/60 BCE makes no distinction between rival Parthian royal candidates, confirming the end of the civil war and Phraates' victory.<sup>221</sup>

Phraates spent the next two years in relative peace, trying to consolidate his authority and strength over his newly won empire.<sup>222</sup> Unfortunately for Phraates and the Parthians, the period of peace did not satisfy the ambitions of his two sons, Mithridates IV and Orodes II. The two sons murdered their father in 58/57 BCE, and Mithridates IV temporarily assumed control of the

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<sup>218</sup> There is no record of Arsacid coin issues from Susa at this time; however, Phraates minted his S39.14-16 and S38.15-16 drachms at Susa in 62/61 BCE. See Assar 2006d: 93-5. Shayegan puts forth the admittedly highly speculative argument that it was in fact Kamnaskires III who rebelled at this time and who sent the envoy to Pompey, and therefore, Phraates replaced him with his son, Kamnaskires IV in 62/61 BCE. Shayegan 2011: 325. Assar's reconstruction appears more likely.

<sup>219</sup> Assar 2006d: 95.

<sup>220</sup> Note Hansman 1998.

<sup>221</sup> The tablet refers to the "King of Kings." George 1992: 71, Tablet 1, pl. 4; Assar 2006d: 93.

<sup>222</sup> Dąbrowa 2013: 56.

empire.<sup>223</sup> However, Mithridates' brother was not satisfied with his secondary role and soon began a war to take the throne. Appian sheds some light on these developments, stating, "As he [the Roman governor of Syria, Gabinius] was in readiness to begin the war [against the Arabs], Mithridates [IV], king of the Parthians, who had been driven out of his kingdom by his brother, Orodes [II], persuaded Gabinius to turn his forces from the Arabs against the Parthians."<sup>224</sup> Meanwhile, Dio records, "Phraates [III], it seems, had been treacherously murdered by his sons, and Orodes [II] after succeeding to the kingdom had expelled Mithridates [IV], his brother, from Media, which he was governing. The latter took refuge with Gabinius and persuaded him to assist in his restoration."<sup>225</sup> Finally, Justin records,

Mithridates [IV] king of the Parthians, after his war with Armenia, was banished from his kingdom for his cruelty by the Parthian senate. His brother Orodes [II], who took possession of the vacant throne, besieged Babylon, whither Mithridates had fled, for some time, and reduced the people, under the influence of famine, to surrender. Mithridates, from confidence in his relationship to Orodes, voluntarily put himself into his hands; but Orodes, contemplating him rather as an enemy than a brother, ordered him to be put to death before his face.<sup>226</sup>

Thus, each of these accounts offers a slightly different perspective of similar events. Dio mistakenly makes it seem as though Orodes II took the throne of Parthia first and then turned on his elder brother; however, coinage confirms that Mithridates IV was the first brother to become king of Parthia.<sup>227</sup> Dio also mistakenly claims that Mithridates was governing Media at the time of the civil war.<sup>228</sup> This has led some scholars incorrectly to associate Mithridates IV with the

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<sup>223</sup> Dio 39.56.2. See also Cary 2001: 391. The last cuneiform record of Phraates' reign comes from late 58 BCE, and his last coin issue carried into 57 BCE. Sachs 1955: 177, LBAT 1184; Assar 2006d: 95-6.

<sup>224</sup> Appian *Syr.* 8.51

<sup>225</sup> Dio 39.56.2

<sup>226</sup> Justin 42.4.1-4

<sup>227</sup> Debevoise 1938: 76 n.23; Sellwood 1976: 4-5; Sellwood 1980: 122-31; Assar 2006d: 96.

<sup>228</sup> Dio 39.56.2. See also id. 36.14.2

King Mithridates of Media Atropatene who came to the military aid of Tigranes II in 67 BCE.<sup>229</sup>

Yet as Debevoise argued several decades ago, Dio here simply demonstrates that Mithridates IV's "chief center of power was in Iran."<sup>230</sup>

Mithridates IV issued coinage throughout the entire empire, and therefore, for a short time it is clear that he ruled the Parthian Empire unopposed.<sup>231</sup> Yet it is important at least to acknowledge Dio's territorial distinction because it means Mithridates likely had the support of the eastern Parthian nobles, which means Orodes usurped his brother's throne with the support of the western Parthian nobles. The rivalry between these factions had helped facilitate the destructive cycle of civil wars that had plagued the Parthian state since the late 90s BCE as both groups challenged each other and the king for power and influence over the state. By the 50s BCE, the power of the Parthian aristocracy was at its height and no Arsacid candidate could hope to rule without its support.<sup>232</sup>

Although all three passages illustrate that Mithridates IV and Orodes II fought a civil war, Dio and Appian conclude that the result of this conflict was that Mithridates out of desperation turned to the Romans for aid. Justin's passage focuses solely on the Parthian conflict, and he offers a more detailed account of an uprising of the Parthian aristocracy, which led to the overthrow of Mithridates. Justin's different perspective has led some scholars to argue that he here confuses Mithridates IV with Mithridates III or Mithridates II.<sup>233</sup> However, such arguments

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<sup>229</sup> Note Schippmann 1987b; Assar 2006d: 94 n.195.

<sup>230</sup> Debevoise mistakenly refers to Mithridates IV as Mithridates III because he was unaware of the earlier rule of Mithridates III (87-80 BCE). Debevoise 1938: 76.

<sup>231</sup> Assar 2006d: 96 n.200.

<sup>232</sup> For the oftentimes-destructive divide between the Parthian nobles in the East and the Parthian nobles in Mesopotamia, see Dąbrowa 2013; Gregoratti 2013b..

<sup>233</sup> For the former argument, see Assar 2006d: 75, 96 n.200. For the latter argument, see esp. Marshall 1976: 142f.; Sherwin-White 1984: 279 n.19; Manandyan 2007: 162 n.1.



are unnecessary and poorly supported by the available evidence; thus, let us discuss Justin's account in more detail.

Justin's brief survey of Trogus' narrative on Parthian history ends in passage 42.2.6 with Mithridates II's war against Armenia in the 100s-90s BCE. Justin then offers a short digression on the legendary origin of the Armenian Kingdom and the story of Jason, the leader of the Argonauts (42.2.7-3.9). Justin then renews the survey of Parthian history with the account of Mithridates and Orodes. Thus, the narrative structure of Justin's history is the only flimsy evidence that supports the Mithridates II reconstruction of the 42.4.1-4 passage. It mistakenly assumes that Justin renewed the narrative of Parthian history in passage 42.4.1-4 exactly where he had left off in passage 42.2.6. Meanwhile, the Mithridates III reconstruction rests on the even flimsier argument that Justin confused the civil war of Mithridates III and Orodes I with the civil war of Mithridates IV and Orodes II.

Neither of these conclusions is convincing for two main reasons. First, Justin makes it clear in passage 42.4.1-4 twice that Mithridates and Orodes were brothers, and Appian confirms this fraternal relationship. Neither Mithridates II nor Mithridates III had a brother named Orodes. Mithridates III fought his nephew, Orodes I, not his brother, who was Gotarzes I. Second, Justin emphasizes that, after killing his brother, Orodes fought Crassus.<sup>234</sup> Orodes II was the first Parthian king to fight Rome, and therefore, it is impossible that Justin and Trogus confused Orodes II with the obscure Orodes I. Moreover, it is impossible that Justin and Trogus thought Mithridates II had lived into the 50s BCE and fought Orodes II, which would have meant Mithridates II reigned for almost seventy years.

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<sup>234</sup> Justin 42.4.4

Instead of arguing that Justin and Trogus, to whom these events were almost contemporary, condensed fifty years of Parthian history (100s-50s BCE) into Mithridates II's reign out of ignorance, we should accept that Justin and Trogus simply overlooked or disregarded the confusing events of the Parthian Dark Age as unimportant. Trogus' history of Parthia revolved around the actions of momentous Parthian kings. Thus, Justin's summary demonstrates that Trogus emphasized the reigns of Arsaces I, Mithridates I, Phraates II, Mithridates II, and Orodes II. In passage 42.2.6 it is clear that Trogus ended his thoughts on Mithridates II, whom he acknowledged as "Great," with Mithridates' "last" campaign against Armenia. Justin illustrates that Trogus then returned to his history of the Parthians after his digression on Armenia when the next important Parthian king came to the throne, namely Orodes II. Thus, for Trogus an account of another, later Mithridates fighting another, later war against Armenia was the perfect segue into his account on the important reign of Orodes II. Finally, it would be strange for Justin to identify Mithridates II as "king of the Parthians" in passage 42.4.1 after identifying him as the "Great" king of the Parthians in passage 42.2.3.<sup>235</sup> The further connection of this Mithridates to a brother named Orodes makes the Mithridates II reconstruction untenable.

Furthermore, it is highly improbable that Justin or Trogus had intimate knowledge of the obscure Parthian Dark Age. For example, Justin's summary mentions none of the other Parthian kings or their various conflicts during this confused period of Parthian history. It is hard to accept that Trogus mistakenly associated the more obscure civil war of Mithridates III and Orodes I with that of the relatively well-known civil war of Mithridates IV and Orodes II

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<sup>235</sup> Justin only identifies Mithridates I a second time as "king of the Parthians" because he began a new book (Book 42). Id. 42.1.1.

especially because there simply is no good reason or need to project Mithridates IV and Orodes II's civil war onto earlier rulers. Trogus, who wrote during the reign of Augustus and lived through the First Romano-Parthian War, would have had considerable access to information on Orodes II's reign relative to the prior Parthian kings discussed in his work. His knowledge of the civil war between Mithridates IV and Orodes II, which eventually involved the Romans, and therefore made it of particular interest to his audience, makes the Mithridates II or Mithridates III reconstructions even less adequate.<sup>236</sup> For all of these reasons, we should accept Justin's summary of these events as a reliable account of the struggle between Mithridates IV and Orodes II and favor it over Appian's much shorter and Dio's more confused versions when we discuss the events of the civil war in Parthia in the first half of the 50s BCE. Yet the three accounts taken together with evaluations of Parthian coinage allow us also to assemble a good understanding of the continued cycle of civil wars that sapped Parthian strength, the renewed Parthian conflict with Armenia, and the approach of the conflict between Rome and Parthia at this time.

In early 57 BCE, Mithridates IV and Orodes II murdered their father, at which point Mithridates, who perhaps had been co-regent with his father for a few years, became the undisputed king of Parthia.<sup>237</sup> Then in early to middle 56 BCE, Tigranes II died of illness at the age of eighty-five, and his last remaining son, Artavasdes II, became king of Armenia.<sup>238</sup> The

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<sup>236</sup> Although Justin's account does not connect Mithridates to Gabinius, it immediately emphasizes the events of the First Romano-Parthian War. Id. 42.4.4-5.12. Justin and Trogus clearly considered the civil war of Mithridates IV and Orodes II connected to the subsequent conflict with Rome. See also Appian Syr. 8.51; Dio 39.56.2

<sup>237</sup> Coins of Mithridates IV's S40 issue are of a higher standard and appear to belong to the more stable later reign of Phraates III when Mithridates acted as a co-regent. See Dilmaghani 1986: 222-3.

<sup>238</sup> Lucian *Macr.* 15. Cicero mentions that the Romans believed Tigranes was still alive in early 56 BCE. Cic. *Sest.* 27.59. However, Tigranes died at this time or soon after. Cicero does not mention any renewal of the conflict between Tigranes and Parthia, which supports the argument that Mithridates IV did not attack Armenia until after Tigranes' death.

assassination of Phraates III nullified the peace treaty he had made with Tigranes in 64 BCE; however, it appears that Tigranes ruled Armenia from 64-56 BCE without rebellion or war. Therefore, it is possible that Mithridates IV, who might have been initially restrained as a new king and who was potentially vulnerable as a usurper, decided to renew his father's peace agreement with Tigranes out of caution or because of the guidance of his advisors.<sup>239</sup> Meanwhile, a renewal of the truce with Parthia would have been attractive to Tigranes, who after Pompey's public rejection in 64 BCE understood that he was mostly isolated against the Parthians. Yet it is also possible that the two kings simply ignored the issue before Tigranes' sudden death in 56 BCE.

With Tigranes' death the geopolitical situation shifted more in Parthia's favor. Both of the kings who had signed the peace treaty in 64 BCE were gone, including the great rival and menace of the Parthians since the 80s BCE. Moreover, the vulnerable and untested Artavasdes II sat on the Armenian throne. Finally, the informal agreement of friendship and neutrality between Pompey and Phraates had lapsed with the latter's murder. From the eastern perspective of Mithridates IV, Armenia was weak, and no active treaty or arrangement stood in his way of renewing the Armeno-Parthian war. Justin's account of the beginning of Mithridates IV's reign states that in ca. 56 BCE Mithridates, who had had a year to consolidate his military strength, attacked Armenia and won a quick war.<sup>240</sup> It is possible that Justin, who clearly refers to Mithridates IV in passage 42.4.1, mistakenly attributed to Mithridates IV an erroneous war

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<sup>239</sup> Mithridates and Orodes could not have assassinated their father without the support of the Parthian aristocracy. Therefore, it is likely that at the beginning of his reign Mithridates followed the advice of his aristocratic supporters. Justin tells us that the Parthian senate later banished Mithridates for his cruelty. Justin 42.4.1. Therefore, it seems likely that Mithridates quickly changed his cooperative disposition toward many of his aristocratic supporters as he became more confident in his power as king.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

against Armenia; however, there is no definitive evidence available that contradicts Justin here, and the conflict certainly is plausible.

Yet there is little scholarly consensus on the matter. Debevoise surprisingly ignored the issue completely.<sup>241</sup> Manandyan's efforts to discredit Justin's account rested on the faulty assumption that Justin's account refers to Mithridates II.<sup>242</sup> Moreover, Assar recently has tried to validate the passage by assigning the war to Mithridates III; however, it is highly unlikely that Justin refers to the obscure Mithridates III, and Mithridates III did not win his war against Armenia.<sup>243</sup> Meanwhile, Rawlinson accepts Justin's account and connects the war to Mithridates IV.<sup>244</sup> Finally, although he exaggerated its significance and misrepresented its implications, Mommsen also was one of the few scholars who accepted Justin's account. He states that Mithridates IV's attack on Armenia "was at the same time a declaration of war against Rome."<sup>245</sup> Although the Romans could have considered Parthian aggression against their client state a cause for war, they seemingly did not. Gabinius, who was a close supporter of Pompey, appears to have shared Pompey's detached and reserved policy toward the Armeno-Parthian conflict. He did not interfere, and he did not use this incident as an excuse for war. Rome still was not looking simply for any excuse to bait Parthia into open conflict, and more importantly, Mithridates still did not associate his war against Armenia with a declaration of war against

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<sup>241</sup> Debevoise 1938: 76. Sherwin-White ignored the issue as well because he incorrectly assumed Justin's account referred to Mithridates II. Sherwin-White 1984: 272, 279 n.19.

<sup>242</sup> Manandyan incorrectly claims that a war between Mithridates IV and Artavazdes II "is without foundation." Manandyan 2007: 162 n.1. See above for the argument against assigning this passage to Mithridates II.

<sup>243</sup> Assar 2006d: 75. See above for the argument against assigning this passage to Mithridates III.

<sup>244</sup> Rawlinson 1885 (2002): 82-3. Rawlinson calls the Parthian king, Mithridates III, instead of Mithridates IV; however, this is common mistake in older works since they were unaware of the reign of Mithridates III during the Parthian Dark Age. Debevoise and Mommsen also refer to Mithridates IV as Mithridates III. Rawlinson clearly associates these actions with Mithridates IV.

<sup>245</sup> Mommsen 1903: v 151.

Rome. Instead, Mithridates wanted to punish his eastern rival further while the opportunity presented itself, and therefore, there are good reasons to accept Justin's account that Mithridates IV won a quick war against Armenia in 56 BCE.<sup>246</sup>

The objective of the war likely was the capture of Gordyene, which was the prize Mithridates' father had failed to secure.<sup>247</sup> The conquest of Gordyene was militarily and politically important; however, it also was attractive to Mithridates symbolically. Around this time he adopted the titles "King of Kings" and "Founder" for propagandistic value, likely to celebrate his recent victory.<sup>248</sup> The conquest of Gordyene allowed Mithridates to forge an imperial identity.

Mithridates' forces quickly captured Gordyene but also appear to have begun to threaten Armenia with a full-scale invasion through Media Atropatene.<sup>249</sup> Artavasdes II made the difficult

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<sup>246</sup> I agree with Rawlinson that Mithridates IV was returning to the policy of Mithridates II. Rawlinson 1885 (2002): 82. This policy had nothing to do with Rome.

<sup>247</sup> Armenia lost control of Gordyene sometime after Tigranes' death but before Crassus' invasion. Mithridates IV's attack on Armenia in 56 BCE is the only appropriate point for that exchange of territory to have occurred. Thus, the permanent annexation of Gordyene was the military objective of the war for Mithridates, which explains Parthia's swift victory and peace settlement. I again mostly agree with Rawlinson on this matter. *Id.* 82-3.

<sup>248</sup> I agree with Assar that the S44.1 tetradrachms long attributed to either Phraates III, Orodes II, or Pacorus I appear now to belong to Mithridates IV. See Assar 2006d: 96-7. On this coinage, Mithridates called himself "Great King of Kings, Arsaces, and the Founder." Yet I would argue that the victory over Armenia provided Mithridates with an ideal opportunity to issue this coinage and, therefore, would disagree with Assar's opinion that Mithridates assumed these titles immediately upon his ascendancy to the throne. Sellwood, although he assigns S44.1 to Orodes II, recognizes that the coin was supposed to celebrate the reestablishment of Parthian power. Sellwood 1980: 131; *id.* 1983: 290. It also is possible that Mithridates adopted the King of Kings title at this time in response to Artavasdes' inappropriate use of the title. Note Chaumont 1986a. Finally, Sellwood argues that Mithridates perhaps took the title, King of Kings, as a response to his brother, Orodes, taking this title. Sellwood 1980: 122. Yet this argument seems unlikely since Mithridates lost control of the mints after Orodes' coup.

<sup>249</sup> If we are to accept Dio's otherwise confused comment that Orodes expelled Mithridates from Media in late 56 BCE, then Mithridates would have been present in Media at this time because he had made recent military preparations against Artavasdes in Media Atropatene. See Dio 39.56.2. The odd tradition that Orodes II ruled as king over Mithridates IV, who acted with

but necessary decision to surrender his claim to Gordyene in exchange for a truce. Armenia's hold over Gordyene always had been fragile and uneasy, and therefore, Artavasdes wisely chose to sacrifice a weak portion of his kingdom to save the whole.

Artavasdes was in no position to resist the full force of the Parthians without Roman support; however, there is no record of Artavasdes seeking Roman aid or interference in 56 BCE. This at first may appear odd since Armenia was a Roman client state; however, there are a few reasonable explanations. First, it is possible a record of the correspondence simply did not survive. Justin, who is our only surviving source for this event, covered the Armeno-Parthian conflict in three words. Therefore, he was not interested in the details of the conflict. Moreover, in Justin's summary of Trogus, Trogus ignored all examples of Roman and Parthian interaction prior to Crassus' invasion because he viewed this momentous event as the true meeting of the Roman and Parthian worlds. Hence, Trogus began his history of the Parthians by stating that the Parthians had come to divide the world with the Romans in his time.<sup>250</sup> Second, it is possible Artavasdes asked Gabinius for aid but Gabinius declined because he was more concerned with his activities in Syria against the threat of the Arab tribes.<sup>251</sup> Third, it is possible that Gabinius simply did not have the authority to offer Artavasdes aid since his eastern command appears not to have included Armenia.<sup>252</sup> Fourth, it is possible that Artavasdes did not seek Gabinius' aid because Pompey had shown that Roman aid was unreliable in 64 BCE. This had angered

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authority as governor of Media, makes little sense. Note Rawlinson 1885 (2002): 83; Sherwin-White 1984: 272; Sampson 2015: 92. Once Orodes had usurped the throne from Mithridates, neither brother would have been willing to share power, especially the victorious Orodes. It makes no sense that Orodes would have allow his brother to take control of one of the most important commands in the Parthian Empire as his potential rival. In fact, Orodes executed Mithridates as soon as he could. Justin 42.4.4

<sup>250</sup> Justin 41.1.1

<sup>251</sup> Appian *Syr.* 8.51

<sup>252</sup> See Cic. *De Dom.* 21.55, 23.60, 47.124.

Tigranes II and convinced him that he had to rely on himself to secure his kingdom.<sup>253</sup>

Artavasdes appears to have inherited his father's distrust and displeasure with the Romans and preferred neutrality and isolation when possible. Thus, Artavasdes could have decided to exercise his own agency to seek a new truce with Parthia without Roman interference. Finally, it is possible that Artavasdes simply did not have the opportunity to seek Gabinius' aid. Perhaps the Parthian attack came so quickly and unexpectedly that Artavasdes settled the matter before he had time to open a correspondence with Gabinius in Syria. As more Parthian forces collected on the southern and eastern borders of his kingdom, Artavasdes quickly and wisely came to acceptable terms with Mithridates IV. Thus ended the last conflict between Parthia and Armenia that was isolated to the concerns of the Eastern system.

Mithridates IV, who was satisfied with his quick military victory, territorial gains, and favorable power relationship with Artavasdes, accepted a truce between Parthia and Armenia. However, Mithridates' harsh policies toward the Parthian aristocracy and the ambitions of his younger brother threw the Parthian state into chaos once more. Dąbrowa argues that the civil war between Mithridates IV and Orodes II caused "a lasting split" in the Parthian aristocracy and set the dangerous precedent of the Parthians looking to Rome for aid in their political quarrels.<sup>254</sup> Perhaps it was Mithridates' arrogance in claiming himself a Parthian "Founder," or his adoption of his father's combative relationship with the Parthian aristocracy, or simply the successful scheming of Orodes II that caused the new Parthian civil war. Yet the result quickly undercut

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<sup>253</sup> Dio 37.7.2-4. Years later Artavasdes developed a friendly relationship with the Parthians and married his sister to the Parthian prince, Pacorus. Plut. *Crass.* 33.1-2. See also Dio 49.25.1-2; Plut. *Ant.* 37.3, 39.1, 50.4; Ruf. *Fest.* 19.1. The Armenian and Parthian royal families became increasingly interconnected, as did the relationship of the two regions. Florus 2.32.42. A branch of the Arsacid dynasty eventually ruled over Armenia into late antiquity. Note Procop. *Aedif.* 3.1.4-15; id. *Bello Per.* 1.2, 2.3

<sup>254</sup> Dąbrowa 2013: 57.



Mithridates' authority and cost him his military advantage. Orodes had earned the support of the most powerful and influential aristocratic Parthian family, the Suren clan.<sup>255</sup> Therefore, Orodes and his forces acted quickly and cut Mithridates off in Media before he could reach his supporters in the East.<sup>256</sup> Out of desperation, Mithridates fled westward to Syria and in the winter of 56 BCE solicited the military aid of Gabinius.

After Pompey's return to Rome in 62 BCE, the province of Syria suffered from continual Arab raids.<sup>257</sup> The raids became so serious that the senate decided it needed to appoint a proconsul to control the territory, levy troops, and wage war against aggressive neighboring powers. Gabinius, who acted as a consul in 58 BCE, successfully transferred his proconsular governorship of Cilicia to Syria in order to end the Arab raids in that region, and under one of the *Leges Clodiae*, Gabinius received a large army and grant of money, command of operations against the Arabs in all the lands surrounding Syria, and an office of at least three years.<sup>258</sup> Cicero in late 57 BCE tells us that the senate gave Gabinius "boundless authority" over the kingdoms of the Syrians, Arabians, and Persians, and Cicero states that the senate allowed Gabinius access to "Babylon, and the Persians [that is, the Parthians] those hitherto uninjured

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<sup>255</sup> Note Bivar 2007. The Suren clan by this time had earned the right to crown the Parthian kings. Surenas, who is famous for his destruction of Crassus' army in 53 BCE, came to the military aid of Orodes in 56 and 55 BCE. Plut. *Crass.* 21.6-7

<sup>256</sup> Mithridates IV undoubtedly was not acting as Orodes' governor of Media at this time. Dio in passage 39.56.2 at most illustrates that Mithridates retained control of Media during the initial stages of the civil war because of his presence there. He likely was trying to consolidate his remaining forces and seeking military aid from his supporters in the East.

<sup>257</sup> The considerable troubles Syria faced from warlike neighbors underlines Pompey's reasoning behind his removal of Antiochus XIII from power. Note Diod. 40.1a-b; Dio 36.17; Justin 40.2.4. Pompey left Aemilius Scaurus in charge of the campaign against the Nabatean Arabs in 63 BCE. Their king, Aretas, paid a small indemnity to stop the conflict, but the Arab raids continued against two successive praetorian governors. Jos. *Ant.* 14.77, 80; id. *Bell.* 1.159; Appian *Syr.* 8.51. For the continued threat of Arab tribes to Roman territory in the East, see Graf 2002.

<sup>258</sup> Note Cic. *Sest.* 10.24, 25.55; id. *De Dom.* 9.23-4, 21.55, 23.60; id. *Pis.* 21.49, 23.55, 89; id. *Prov.* 1.1-2.3, 4.9, 7.17; id. *Red. Pop.* 11; Plut. *Cic.* 30.1; Aur. *Vic.* 81.4

and peaceful nations, to plunder.”<sup>259</sup> Sherwin-White probably was correct when he argued that Cicero exaggerated the command of Gabinius, which in reality was meant to focus on the scourge of Arab raids in the region; however, over the course of his command Gabinius intervened militarily in Cappadocia, Judea, Arabia, Egypt, and Mesopotamia.<sup>260</sup> Even though the senate certainly had not specifically authorized Gabinius to make unprovoked, offensive war against Parthia, the wide range and vague limitations of Gabinius’ command to curb Arab raids throughout the region and to secure Syria technically allowed Gabinius to interfere in the geopolitical developments of a variety of regions, including the “Persian” lands of Mesopotamia. Cicero’s hyperbole simply embellishes this fact.<sup>261</sup>

Since the limitations of his command were ill defined and since many of the Arab tribes were in fact allies of the Parthians and operated throughout Syria and northern Mesopotamia, this left Gabinius in an awkward and potentially precarious position.<sup>262</sup> His decision to intervene in

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<sup>259</sup> Cic. *De Dom.* 21.55, 23.60, 47.124. Cicero’s claim that the Parthians remained peaceful in late 57 BCE further supports the argument that Mithridates did not immediately attack Armenia after he became king.

<sup>260</sup> Sherwin-White 1984: 272. Cicero was a political enemy of Clodius Pulcher, one of whose laws soon after forced Cicero into exile. Cic. *Sest.* 10.25; id. *Red. Sen.* 33-4; id. *De Dom.* 24.63-4, 35.95-37.98-9; id. *Har.* 45; id. *Vat.* 6; id. *Pis.* 9.19, 13.31-14.33; id. *Planc.* 73, 86-90; id. *Mil.* 36-7; Vell. Pat. 2.45.1-2; Appian *BC* 2.15; Dio 38.14.4-7, 17.4-5, 45.17.3; Plut. *Cic.* 30.4-5, 31.4-5; id. *Cato Min.* 35.1; Livy *Epit.* 103.9. Cicero also was a political enemy of Gabinius and portrayed him as a dishonest bandit as governor of Syria. For example, note Cic. *Prov.* 4.9. Therefore, Cicero was motivated to exaggerate the potential consequences of Gabinius’ command, which was the result of one of Clodius’ other laws; however, Cicero’s speech betrays the general parameters of Gabinius’ command. Interestingly, although Cicero censored Gabinius over his actions in Cappadocia and Egypt, he did not criticize Gabinius’ decision to intervene in the Parthian civil war, likely because Gabinius did not fully commit to the Mesopotamian expedition.

<sup>261</sup> Arnaud argues that most scholars exaggerate the flexibility that Gabinius and Crassus possessed to conduct diplomacy without senate approval. Arnaud 1998: 31.

<sup>262</sup> Note Strabo 16.1.28. The desert parts of northern Mesopotamia and southern Syria became a major zone of interaction and confrontation between the Romans and Parthians. Note Malcolm 1987; Leriche 1987; Isaac 1993: 140.

the Parthian civil war in Mesopotamia demonstrates that Gabinius, at least initially, believed such a decision fell within the vague limitations of his command because, at its core, its objective was to stabilize the region in Rome's favor and to secure Syria. Thus, Gabinius' decision was justifiably legal since he believed he was acting responsibly in Mesopotamia to the benefit of his province and the larger Roman state.<sup>263</sup> As discussed below, his actions were not premeditated or overtly predatory.

Gabinius' command also is further evidence that no prior Euphrates treaty existed between Rome and Parthia. Clearly, the Romans still had little regard for the hegemonic claims of the Parthians in the region, and they had not curbed the potential limits of their eastern hegemony. By at least the early 50s BCE, the Romans had come to include northern Mesopotamia firmly within their sphere of influence and the bounds of the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system. War with Parthia was not yet an objective of the Roman state in 57 BCE; however, Gabinius' command is significant because it illustrates that political intervention and military action within the traditionally "Persian" lands of the East was an important concern of the Romans years before the campaign of Crassus.

Gabinius spent 57-56 BCE organizing his command, securing the frontiers of his province against Arab raids, and suppressing disturbances in Judea.<sup>264</sup> When Mithridates IV arrived in Syria in the winter of 56 BCE, he solicited Roman military aid to restore him to the

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<sup>263</sup> Although I disagree strongly with Arnaud's conclusion that the Romans had committed to the idea of war against the Parthians by 58/57 BCE, I support the argument that Gabinius had serious political reasons to intervene in the Parthian civil war that outweighed simple Roman imperial inclinations and belief in an easy victory. Arnaud 1998: 31.

<sup>264</sup> For a brief account of Gabinius' campaign in Judea and his settlement of the region, see Sherwin-White 1984: 274-5.

throne of Parthia.<sup>265</sup> His actions were unprecedented and forever changed the relationship of Parthia and Rome. Although Gabinius later appeared completely uninterested in the task, he agreed to support Mithridates and began preparing for an expedition into Mesopotamia.<sup>266</sup> Thus began the epoch-shaping First Romano-Parthian War in an atmosphere of desperation and indifference, and as with so many “great” wars, neither side anticipated the monumental length, severity, and cost of the conflict.

Gabinius appears to have had little enthusiasm for a conflict with the Parthians. Nor did the momentous event make much of an impression on the Romans. Cicero, who took great issue with Gabinius’ later Egyptian campaign, did not mention Gabinius’ intentions to campaign against Parthia.<sup>267</sup> Trogus and Justin say nothing of Roman interference in the Parthian civil war.<sup>268</sup> Appian and Dio record that Gabinius abandoned the expedition against Parthia with great haste and eagerness when Ptolemy XII Auletes offered him a massive reward to restore him in Egypt.<sup>269</sup> Only Josephus records that Gabinius actually began his expedition against Parthia by crossing the Euphrates before quickly changing his mind in favor of the Egyptian expedition; however, we have no evidence that Gabinius’ soldiers encountered Parthian forces.<sup>270</sup> Thus, Gabinius’ campaign against the Parthians, although it eventually had enormous unintentional

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<sup>265</sup> It is unclear what Mithridates offered Gabinius to gain his support; however, Ptolemy XII offered Gabinius a massive financial award for his military aid, and therefore, Mithridates likely also had offered Gabinius a financial incentive, which turned out to be much smaller than Auletes’ offer. Note Debevoise 1938: 77. However, the most likely incentive that Mithridates offered Gabinius in the winter of 56 BCE was that, if Gabinius restored him to power in Mesopotamia, he would rule as an allied client king of Rome. Note that the Parthian candidate Tiridates later apparently offered to serve as Augustus’ client ruler in Parthia if Rome helped restore him to the throne, but Augustus refused to get involved militarily. Justin 42.5.6-9

<sup>266</sup> Note Strabo 12.3.34; 17.1.11

<sup>267</sup> For example, see Cic. *Pis.* 49

<sup>268</sup> Justin 42.4.1-4

<sup>269</sup> Appian *Syr.* 8.51; Dio 39.56.2-3

<sup>270</sup> Jos. *Ant.* 14.98; id. *Bell.* 1.175

consequences, was abortive. In fact, Gabinius likely crossed the Euphrates into friendly northwestern Osrhoene through the allied Kingdom of Commagene at the crossing at Zeugma.<sup>271</sup> Multiple Roman commanders had crossed the Euphrates by this point, including Lucullus, Pompey, Afranius, and Gabinius years before, without engaging the Parthians in open conflict. Crossing the Euphrates in and of itself did not commit Gabinius to a Parthian campaign, and Gabinius likely never reached Parthian territory before turning back to Syria and then marching on to Egypt.<sup>272</sup>

The ancient sources generally emphasize Gabinius' avariciousness to help explain his motivations in the East; however, we should look past this criticism to the realities of the geopolitical situation facing him in 56/55 BCE. The primary purpose of Gabinius' command in the East was to remove the threat of Arab raids to Syria. Hence, the senate sent him to correct a problem that threatened the stability of Pompey's recent settlement of the southern Near East. At its core, this was a mission to reinforce the Mediterranean hegemony of the Roman state. Since it appears Gabinius' command also could include counteracting threats to Roman interests in Mesopotamia, Gabinius seemingly felt he had a justification and perhaps a responsibility to

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<sup>271</sup> For Roman control of Commagene and northwestern Osrhoene, see Appian *Mithr.* 16.106, 17.114; Plut. *Crass.* 21.1-4; Dio 40.20.1. After he settled his eastern conquests, Pompey awarded Commagene with control of the strategic river crossing at Seleucia (more commonly known as Zeugma). Zeugma (the Greek word for "a yoking together" or "bridge") was the famous site of Alexander the Great's crossing into Mesopotamia. In the early third century BCE, Seleucus I Nicator built a bridge at this spot across the river. The crossing at Zeugma continued to be significant throughout the conflict between Rome and Parthia. Note Strabo 16.1.22, 2.1, 3, 8; Pliny *NH* 5.13.4, 21; Tac. *Ann.* 12.12; Dio 40.17.3, 49.19.3

<sup>272</sup> Although in *V Maccabees* 40.17-18, the author states, "Antipater went with a large army to Gabinius, and met him at Damascus, congratulating him on the victory which he had gained over the Persians [i.e. the Parthians]," this statement is dubious. There is no evidence that Gabinius fought any Parthian force in early 55 BCE. At most, this passage tries to equate Mithridates IV becoming a Roman suppliant in late 56 to a victory for Gabinius over the Parthians.

involve Rome in the Parthian civil war after his meeting with Mithridates IV.<sup>273</sup> However, we must recognize that the Parthians were the ones who called Rome into their quarrel. Rome was not acting as an aggressive bully in this instance; rather, Gabinius was drawn into a foreign conflict by the invitation of one of the warring factions. Thus, Gabinius had acted no differently in 56 BCE than countless other Roman statesmen since 200 BCE, who had responded to pleas for help from foreign factions and polities in the East.<sup>274</sup>

Gabinius' objective likely was to help reinstall Mithridates IV in Mesopotamia as a pro-Roman candidate on the Parthian throne. This would have achieved the objective of stabilizing the region, thus protecting his province, and would have established Roman hegemony over the last potential rival of Rome. However, he like Pompey before him recognized that a war against the Parthians was a risky venture in a peripheral region of the Roman world. Meanwhile, Ptolemaic Egypt had long been a part of the Roman-dominated Mediterranean system. The chaos of the Ptolemaic dynasty not only threatened the stability of the Eastern Mediterranean but also the grain supply to Rome. The question of what to do with Egypt caused considerable political hostility in Rome that resulted in Pompey nominally securing the task for his supporter, Gabinius. Thus, in early 55 BCE Ptolemy XII arrived with letters from Pompey, who was an active consul, instructing Gabinius to help restore Ptolemy to his throne.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Note Sartre 2005: 46-7. However, Sartre is mistaken that Gabinius had the authorization and backing of the senate to attack the Parthians from the beginning of his command in Syria. Although indeed Gabinius' decision to intervene in the Parthian civil war was not illegal, it had not been "planned with the Senate's approval." Sartre's conclusion that Gabinius' Mesopotamian expedition was an "official project" in 57 BCE but that Gabinius simply did not get around to the campaign until 55 BCE is dubious and totally ignores the role of Mithridates IV in the decision. Sartre 2005: 47-8.

<sup>274</sup> See esp. Eckstein 2006: 108, 112-13, 234, 269-87.

<sup>275</sup> For the complexity of Roman politics involved in the Egyptian affair, see Sherwin-White 1984: 273-4; Seager 2002: 112-16.

The disturbance in Egypt was of greater importance to the Romans in part because of the realities of their interstate system. The collapse of Ptolemaic power in Egypt threatened to destabilize the entire Eastern Mediterranean, which would have served to encourage middling powers in the region, such as the Jews, Arabs, and even the resurgent pirates, to increase their aggression.<sup>276</sup> The political attacks Gabinius later endured for his Egyptian expedition were a result of political envy and Roman factionalism, not a referendum against the necessity of the campaign itself. The Romans knew they had to settle the situation in Egypt; they simply did not want to agree upon who should carry out the task.

Thus, Gabinius' decision in early 55 BCE became quite simple. Although his command had justified his intervention in the Parthian civil war, he had received no support for such an expedition at Rome.<sup>277</sup> Instead, he had gained the support of the active consul, Pompey, to intervene in Egypt. Although Cicero portrayed Gabinius as a rapacious plunderer and mercenary for hire because of his Egyptian expedition, Gabinius also campaigned successfully against the Jews and Nabatean Arabs in 55 BCE.<sup>278</sup> Thus, Gabinius tied his Egyptian expedition to his original objective, the removal of the Arab threat to Syria and the stabilization of the region. His new expedition was necessary to reinforce Roman hegemony over the Eastern Mediterranean

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<sup>276</sup> Dio 39.56.1. Gabinius defended his Egyptian expedition in part by emphasizing the renewed threat of pirates. Cic. *Rab. Post.* 20. Note Williams 1985.

<sup>277</sup> Strabo records, "The Senate would not permit him." Strabo 12.3.34

<sup>278</sup> Jos. *Ant.* 14.98-103; id. *Bell.* 1.175. See also Dio 39.56.6; Plut. *Ant.* 3.2-3; *V Maccabees* 40.15-20. Note that Josephus portrayed Gabinius favorably and praised him for his efforts in the Near East. Jos. *Ant.* 14.103

coast.<sup>279</sup> These reasons more than Gabinius' ambition or greed encouraged him to abandon the Parthian expedition in favor of more pressing geopolitical concerns.<sup>280</sup>

Gabinius' change of focus frustrated Mithridates IV, who soon abandoned hope of immediate Roman military aid. Josephus tells us that he and his companion Orsanēs, who likely was one of his remaining aristocratic supporters, left Gabinius' camp after his successful campaign against the Nabatean Arabs in early 55 BCE.<sup>281</sup> Josephus offers a confused account of the event in his two versions. In *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus records that Gabinius sent the two Parthians "away in a friendly manner" but a "report went abroad that they had run away from him."<sup>282</sup> Meanwhile, in the *Jewish Wars* Josephus states that Gabinius "sent them away privately, but gave it out among the soldiers that they had run away."<sup>283</sup> It seems that Gabinius wished to maintain a friendly relationship with his Parthian ally; however, the secrecy and misdirection of the affair suggest two things. First, Mithridates likely had given up on securing Gabinius' military support after he saw the Roman army move further away from Mesopotamia. He would have understood that Gabinius had his hands full with affairs in Judea, Arabia, and Egypt. If Mithridates wanted to regain his throne before Orodes could completely consolidate his power, Mithridates knew he had to act on his own. Therefore, he left Gabinius' camp and

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<sup>279</sup> For example, in *V Maccabees* 40.16, the writer claims, "Ptolemy [XII] wrote to Gabinius that he should come and help him against the Egyptians, that he might bring them again into subjection to the Romans." Although this letter might be dubious, the sentiment behind this passage reflects real geopolitical concerns for the Romans at this time.

<sup>280</sup> I agree with Sherwin-White's favorable and balanced portrayal of Gabinius. Sherwin-White 1984: 276-7. Gabinius acted primarily out of a responsibility to maintain order and concerned himself with personal profit second. Moreover, he had pushed the questionable legality of his command no further than Lucullus and Caesar in recent years.

<sup>281</sup> *Jos. Ant.* 14.103; *id. Bell.* 1.175. For the evolution of the Roman frontier in Arabia, note Eadie 1986.

<sup>282</sup> *Jos. Ant.* 14.103

<sup>283</sup> *Id. Bell.* 1.175.



decided to return to Mesopotamia. Since Mithridates was a Roman suppliant, his sudden abandonment of Gabinius' camp did not reflect well upon Gabinius, and therefore, the rumor that the Parthians had run away allowed Gabinius to save face. Second, Gabinius clearly had lost interest in his pledge to attack Orodes in Mesopotamia in 55 BCE. Gabinius likely had entered the Parthian conflict expecting support at Rome but had received none. His political miscalculation perhaps embarrassed him, and therefore, he wanted to distance himself from Mithridates in the eyes of the senate and his soldiers. It seems the two men mutually decided to part ways on friendly terms; however, Gabinius either created or encouraged a story that portrayed Mithridates abandoning the Romans. This freed Gabinius publicly from the responsibility of carrying out the Mesopotamian expedition on behalf of Mithridates, and it freed his soldiers to concentrate on the Egyptian expedition. Most importantly, it freed the triumvirs and the senate to assign the Parthian war to someone else.<sup>284</sup>

Mithridates did not despair and returned to Mesopotamia in the summer of 55 BCE, where he raised a small army of supporters. Mithridates' boldness apparently surprised his brother, who temporarily had to flee eastward after his forces lost control of Babylonia. Mithridates seized the important cities of Babylon and Seleucia; however, Mithridates' success was short lived because Orodes' chief supporter and commander, Surenas, invaded Babylonia with ferocity. Surenas retook Seleucia by force, leading the charge to take the walls.<sup>285</sup> He then besieged Mithridates within Babylon. The town was ill equipped for a siege and surrendered

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<sup>284</sup> Note Lerouge 2007: 70-5.

<sup>285</sup> Plutarch records, "Moreover, he [Surenas] enjoyed the ancient and hereditary privilege of being first to set the crown upon the head of the Parthian king [which he did for Orodes late in 56 BCE]; and when this very Hyrodes [that is, Orodes II] was driven out of Parthia [in the middle of 55 BCE by Mithridates IV], he restored him to his throne, and captured for him Seleucia the Great [which Mithridates' forces had captured], having been the first to mount its walls, and having routed with his own hand his opponents." Plut. *Crass.* 21.7

because of famine. Instead of taking his own life, Mithridates chose to rely on the mercy of his brother, who had returned from the East during the course of the siege. Orodes understood that his brother was too dangerous and too untrustworthy to leave alive and had Mithridates executed in front of him in late 55 BCE.<sup>286</sup> Orodes had no love lost for his brother and tried to erase his memory by overstriking his coinage.<sup>287</sup> He also perhaps minted his S42 drachms, which feature Nike crowning Orodes in victory, at this time to celebrate the end of the civil war.<sup>288</sup>

Thus, another Parthian civil war had ended; however, this civil war was unlike any that had preceded it because of Mithridates' decision to invite outside interference. Since Gabinius had offered Mithridates the support of Rome, the Romans had entered the conflict against Orodes, and therefore, despite the death of Mithridates, the conflict between Rome and Orodes remained an open issue. The political situation at Rome was tense and complex with little consensus within the senate on the appropriate direction of foreign policy in the East.<sup>289</sup> Gabinius had begun the First Romano-Parthian War, and although he may not have pursued the war with enthusiasm, the Romans still had to decide how to end the conflict.

The First Romano-Parthian War was the result of short-term and shortsighted Roman policy. The Romans did not have a grand strategy to conquer Parthia, and Gabinius did not comprehend the repercussions of his decision. We should reject Sampson's recent speculative

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<sup>286</sup> See Justin 42.4.1-4 for the other details of the campaign.

<sup>287</sup> Orodes seized Mithridates' S41.1 tetradrachms, which uniquely bore his name, because they challenged his right to rule. Note Dressel 1922: 156-77; Sellwood 1971: 111; id. 1980: 123; Assar 2006d: 97.

<sup>288</sup> Therefore, Orodes' S43 drachms were his first official coinage, not S42 as Sellwood argued. Dilmaghani suggests that the celebratory S42 drachms were connected either to Orodes' victory in the civil war in 55 BCE or to his victory over Crassus in 53 BCE. Dilmaghani 1986: 223.

<sup>289</sup> For example, over the Egyptian affair Crassus flip-flopped in his political position toward Pompey, Gabinius, and Cicero; meanwhile, Cicero did the same in his attitude toward Crassus; and finally, Gabinius found himself exiled despite the support of Pompey. Note Sherwin-White 1984: 278; Seager 2002: 124-130.

claim that Gabinius and Pompey hatched a scheme in 58 BCE to draw Rome into a Parthian war, in part so that Pompey could remove Crassus as a rival.<sup>290</sup> Such a scenario is impossible because Pompey and Gabinius could not have anticipated the murder of Phraates III, the subsequent civil war between Mithridates IV and Orodes II, or Mithridates' request for Roman aid. In fact, Pompey was instrumental in dissuading Gabinius from his Mesopotamian expedition in favor of the Egyptian expedition. The Romans had not sought out war against the Parthians; rather, the Parthians had drawn them into their own war.

The senate in particular did not endorse the prospects of a war against the Parthians because it feared giving such a large command to one man.<sup>291</sup> By 55 BCE Caesar's command in Gaul already was making many senators in Rome uneasy, and Pompey had used his conquests in the East to help him become the leading man in Rome. When Crassus expressed interest in succeeding to Gabinius' command in Syria so that he could pursue the war against the Parthians, the senate suddenly had to worry about Crassus parlaying his success in the East into greater political clout at Rome. Thus, the Romans' perception of the war in Parthia was complex and

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<sup>290</sup> It is unconvincing to argue that Pompey was the mastermind behind a conspiracy to start a Parthian war in the 50s BCE, which he had avoided in 66, 65, and 64 BCE, to weaken the Parthians and to secure Crassus' military failure so that he could then be a savior in the East again. Sampson 2015: 92, 166-7. Lerouge argues that Gabinius joined the Parthian war to finish what Pompey had avoided. Lerouge 2007: 67. Similarly, Arnaud argues that Rome had decided to pursue a war against Parthia in 57 BCE but that events in Syria delayed the conflict until 54/53 BCE. Arnaud is convinced that Gabinius would have succeeded had he committed to a war against the Parthians in 57 BCE. Arnaud 1998: 24-32. I find Arnaud's conclusion here unconvincing and unsupported. The hesitant actions of Gabinius and the senate in fact demonstrate that the Romans were not eagerly seeking out a war against the Parthians. Note also Ward, who argues that Caesar might have later supported Crassus in the belief that Crassus would fail and provide Caesar with "an excuse for another great command." He too argues that Pompey sent Crassus off eagerly to fight a difficult war that Pompey believed was not in Crassus' favor. Ward 1977: 283.

<sup>291</sup> For the political tension and obstruction that Crassus and Pompey faced at Rome, note Ward 1977: Ch. 10.

their enthusiasm for it was mixed. However, where Sampson is correct is in his effort to demonstrate that the war against Parthia was already underway and “was not suddenly sprung on the Romans by a greedy and unscrupulous Crassus.”<sup>292</sup> The Romans task of concluding the open-ended conflict with the Parthians fell to Crassus.

In 55 BCE the scope of the conflict remained unclear and indeed it might have been resolved peacefully had cooler heads prevailed; however, decades of mounting uncertainty and tension over international relations in the Near East, caused in part by the three phases of system overlap between the Mediterranean and Eastern systems, meant that, once Rome and Parthia finally committed to war, it was highly unlikely that the conflict would end short of bloodshed. In 55 BCE the *Lex Trebonia* granted Crassus the proconsular governorship of Syria for five years with command over seven legions and the power to declare war against and make peace with neighboring peoples as he saw fit.<sup>293</sup> Since war was technically ongoing with Parthia, the purpose of Crassus’ command was to conclude this situation satisfactorily.<sup>294</sup> By 54 BCE Rome and Parthia became committed to determining their true power relationship in the Near East. Both sides proved unwilling to back down from their separate hegemonic claims in the region and each determined to force the other to acknowledge its supremacy.

Thus, Crassus’ task in the East was rather straightforward, and under the pressures of the interstate system, a military solution to the conflict was the likely and preferred choice. The sources universally pan Crassus as an unrealistic greedy fool and ignore that he inherited this

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<sup>292</sup> Sampson 2015: 92-3. Pompey, Gabinius, and Crassus respected the power of Parthia. Crassus did not take his campaign lightly.

<sup>293</sup> Dio 39.33.2; Plut. *Pomp.* 52.3-4; id. *Crass.* 15.7; Appian *BC* 2.18

<sup>294</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 52.3; Livy *Epit.* 105.3; Vell. Pat. 2.46.2; Eutrop. 6.18. Note Ward 1977: 275. Arnaud argues that both Gabinius and Crassus had the support of the senate in the First-Romano-Parthian War. Arnaud 1998: 15-20.

conflict when he gained Syria as his command in 55 BCE.<sup>295</sup> Crassus' expedition was not a surprise to the Romans or the Parthians, nor were the Parthians passively awaiting Roman aggression.<sup>296</sup> Orodes had just as much to gain from the conflict as Crassus, and he prepared his forces to reclaim Armenia. Crassus and Orodes had found themselves in a new, much larger conflict because of the prior action of Gabinius and Mithridates. Happenstance had finally brought Rome and Parthia into open conflict in 56/55 BCE; however, by 55/54 BCE the two sides had committed to settling their differences with hegemonic war.

With this more inclusive understanding of events, it is obvious why Crassus gained such an infamous reputation for his expedition against the Parthians. As Sampson has argued recently, "the sources are all hostile to the whole campaign based on its outcome."<sup>297</sup> That is, Roman anger and shame over the disaster of Crassus at Carrhae encouraged the Romans to ignore the legitimate causes and objectives of the war against Parthia in favor of passing full blame upon one disgraced and dead man. Unfortunately, the biased tradition of our sources has influenced the vast majority of scholars and, in many ways, dictates the memory of Crassus to this day. Centuries of anti-Crassus propaganda has led most scholars to discount or overlook the critical

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<sup>295</sup> Sampson 2015: 79-80, 83-4. Note also Arnaud 1998: 31-2. Most scholars assume that Crassus attended the infamous conference of Luca with Pompey and Caesar in late 56 BCE; however, the contemporary evidence strongly suggests that he was not at the meeting and allowed Caesar to represent his interests. Furthermore, it is quite possible that the provincial commands of Pompey and Crassus were not decided at Luca. Cic. *Fam.* 1.9.9; id. *Ad Att.* 4.9.1, 10.2. See Seager 2002: 117-18, 123. Note that Eutropius at least records that Crassus "was sent against the Parthians (*contra Parthos missus est*)." He appears to be one of the only Roman writers who makes this point. Eutrop. 6.18. See also Orosius 6.13, who records that Crassus "obtained by lot the command against the Parthians." Note also that tradition emerged that the senate planned to conquer Parthia before Crassus' appointment. Note *HA Clod.* 13.6

<sup>296</sup> Note Sartre 2005: 48-9; Sampson 2015: 94, 98. Sherwin-White incorrectly dismissed the conflict, arguing that the Parthians were not a threat to Rome and that they assumed they were at peace with Rome. Sherwin-White 1984: 279. Note also Colledge 1967: 37.

<sup>297</sup> Sampson 2015: 95.

agency of the Parthians in the conflict and the serious implications of Gabinius' actions.

Moreover, this tradition has encouraged scholars erroneously to accept that Rome and Parthia were at peace before the command of Crassus and, therefore, to blame Crassus for indefensible Roman aggression.<sup>298</sup> The propensity of modern scholarship to villainize and criticize Crassus follows ancient propaganda and stems in part from a lack of understanding of the geopolitical realities that Rome and Parthia faced in the middle 50s BCE.

As Crassus prepared his forces in Italy and considered his immediate military plans in the East, Mithridates IV had returned to Mesopotamia and seized Babylon and Seleucia. Although it is too speculative to argue that Gabinius, with instructions from the triumvirs, specifically sent Mithridates back to Mesopotamia in 55 BCE with plunder from Egypt to act as a Roman “stalking horse” to “inflare Parthia’s civil war to their own ends,” Mithridates’ success was a favorable development for the Romans.<sup>299</sup> Thus, when Crassus left Italy in late 55 BCE, he would have known that Mithridates’ sudden success had weakened Orodes’ position and that Mesopotamia was vulnerable to invasion.<sup>300</sup> Clearly, Crassus planned to use his army after he arrived in the East, and he seems to have committed to the war against the Parthians by the time he left Rome for Syria. The favorable circumstances in Mesopotamia had encouraged him to

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<sup>298</sup> For example, Sherwin-White argues, “The invasion of Parthian Mesopotamia by the proconsul Marcus Crassus was the first instance of Roman aggression in the eastern regions for which no ancient writer could find any vestige of justification. The agreement made by Pompeius with Phraates had never been repudiated, and the intrigues of Gabinius with the brother of king Orodes had no practical issues. The Parthians had every reason to believe that they were formally at peace with Rome when Crassus secured the province of Syria and an undefined military commission as his share of the political bargain made with Pompeius Magnus and Gaius Caesar at Luca.” Sherwin-White 1984: 279. Note also Debevoise 1938: 78 n.36; Ward 1977: 1-5; Schippmann 1987a.

<sup>299</sup> Sampson 2015: 95.

<sup>300</sup> In middle November 55 BCE, Cicero recorded that Crassus recently had left Rome. Cic. *Fam.* 1.9.20

commit to a major expedition against the Parthians early on in his command and made a possible peaceful resolution less likely.

The sources almost universally argue that a yearning for glory and riches motivated Crassus to attack Parthia.<sup>301</sup> Certainly, Crassus stood to gain great wealth and fame if he defeated Parthia; however, his primary motivation was political advancement at Rome.<sup>302</sup> A successful major military command had eluded Crassus. The military successes of Pompey in Spain and Lucullus in Anatolia had overshadowed Crassus' efforts against Spartacus in the late 70s BCE.<sup>303</sup> By 55 BCE Crassus wanted and needed to elevate his political standing in response to his growing rivalry with Pompey and the recent military successes of Pompey and Caesar. The war against Parthia provided him with this opportunity.<sup>304</sup> Therefore, the accumulation of military glory and wealth in the East was a means to an end, not the primary aim of Crassus' command itself.<sup>305</sup> If Crassus could have satisfied his political ambitions at Rome without a major war against Parthia, he likely would have done so since his lack of a military command in over fifteen years demonstrates that Crassus was not particularly interested in warfare; however, the prospects of a Parthian expedition were too favorable in 55/54 BCE to overlook. Since Crassus had inherited the war, he was justified to pursue it. Moreover, the Roman alliance with

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<sup>301</sup> Plut. *Crass.* 17.9, 35.4; id. *Luc.* 36.6-7; Dio 40.12.1; Vell. Pat. 2.46.2; Jos. *Ant.* 14.105; id. *Bell.* 1.179; Florus 1.46.2, 5; 2.13.10-11; Orosius 6.13

<sup>302</sup> Florus is the only source that argues that Crassus took up the command in Syria because he was "eager for power (*potentiae*)." Yet he still argues that the prospect of more riches was the main motivation for Crassus. Florus 2.13.10-12. Ward 1977: 281; Seager 2002: 118-19.

<sup>303</sup> Although Crassus served as consul alongside Pompey in 70 BCE, following the end of the Third Servile War, the people of Rome celebrated the military victories of Pompey. In fact, Crassus did not earn a triumph for his victory in the war; instead, he had to settle for a public ovation. Pompey became the leading man in Rome. Plut. *Crass.* 11.7-12.2; Appian *BC* 1.120-1

<sup>304</sup> Ward 1977: 281-2, 286-7, 293; Brunt 1988: 83; Lerouge 2007: 75.

<sup>305</sup> This concept of not confusing the rewards of conquest with its actual motives of course runs parallel with the larger societal attitudes and motives of the Romans in war. See esp. Gruen 1984: 314.

Mithridates IV against Orodes II provided Crassus with a clear cause for war and made Parthia appear vulnerable, which made Crassus confident, perhaps overly confident, that he could quickly achieve his military and political goals against the Parthians.<sup>306</sup>

There is good reason to accept Plutarch's claim that Crassus and his men expected the expedition into Mesopotamia to be quick and successful against ineffective Parthian forces.<sup>307</sup> Few of Parthia's military endeavors in the past three decades would have convinced him otherwise. The Parthian army had struggled against the Armenians since the 80s BCE, and a seemingly unending series of civil wars had sapped its unity and strength. Moreover, the Romans made the critical but understandable mistake of equating the military makeup and tactics of the Armenian army to that of the Parthian army. They failed to appreciate that the army composition and fighting style of the Parthians was unique in the Near East and Middle East because of its nomadic influences. This oversight would prove to be a critical factor in the Carrhae campaign.

Yet it would be unfair to blame Crassus solely for this oversight. Neither power fully appreciated the tactics and strategies of the other because they had yet to come to blows and had rarely interacted in forty years. Plutarch's account of the surprise and fear of the Romans once they realized that the Parthian mode of warfare was quite different from what they had expected

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<sup>306</sup> In fact, Plutarch tells us that Caesar "wrote to him from Gaul approving of his project, and inciting him on to the war." Plut. *Crass.* 16.3. Ward argues that Caesar hoped a victorious Crassus could help balance against Pompey's power at Rome. Ward 1977: 282.

<sup>307</sup> Plut. *Crass.* 18.3-4, 20.1; id. *Nic. and Crass.* 4.1; id. *Luc.* 36.6-7. In his book on Crassus, Plutarch argues that the Romans were shocked to encounter the Parthians' unique mode of warfare. They had wrongly assumed that the Parthians fought like other eastern peoples. The Parthians immediately gained the advantage because the Roman mode of warfare was more conventional and similar to the tactics and strategies of the Seleucids. In his book on Lucullus, Plutarch states that Crassus equated Lucullus' seemingly easy victory over the Armenians with an easy campaign against the Parthians. Although Plutarch suggests that the Romans in the middle 50s BCE did not recognize much of a differentiation between various eastern armies, by emphasizing "the Parthian arrows" that defeated Crassus, Plutarch accepts that the Parthians were a unique and challenging enemy.



further supports the argument that the Roman and Parthian worlds had remained separate up to this time. Nor is it fair to criticize Crassus for the lack of Roman military intelligence in 54/53 BCE.<sup>308</sup> The Romans did not have access to the intelligence networks of modern armies, nor did the Romans place an emphasis on military intelligence compared to modern armies. Moreover, the relatively primitive and unreliable realities of military intelligence in antiquity were not unique to the Romans, nor was Crassus unique for his lack of military intelligence preparation. For example, Lucullus had not scouted the Armenian army before his invasion in 69 BCE; Pompey had not scouted the communities of the Caucasus before his invasion of the region in 65 BCE; and Antony found himself completely surprised and outmaneuvered in 36-35 BCE, despite having living access to knowledge of Crassus' disaster.<sup>309</sup> Such modern criticism of Crassus is utterly anachronistic and based largely upon the failure of his campaign.

Thus, during his command in Syria, Crassus had every reason to believe that he could pursue the Parthian war begun by Gabinius successfully. However, the military objectives of his campaign are obscure. Sampson argues that Crassus' military goals were to defeat Parthia in order to eliminate Rome's regional rival, to annex Mesopotamia as a new province, and to place Mithridates IV or the defeated Orodes II on the throne of Parthia as a Roman client.<sup>310</sup> I too reject Plutarch's exaggerated insistence that Crassus planned to complete "the reduction of Asia which had been begun by Pompey and Lucullus" and to conquer all of Parthia, Bactria, and India

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<sup>308</sup> Sheldon 2010: 29-43. See also Sherwin-White 1984: 283-5.

<sup>309</sup> In fact, Florus records that Antony quickly fell into the Parthians' reigned retreat trap. He states, "No disaster had ever occurred comparable with that which threatened the Romans on the following day, if the gods in pity had not intervened. A survivor from the disaster of Crassus dressed in Parthian costume rode up to the camp, and having uttered a salutation in Latin and thus inspired trust by speaking their language, informed them of the danger that was threatening them." Florus 2.20.4

<sup>310</sup> Sampson 2015: 98.

as Roman provinces.<sup>311</sup> Plutarch compares Crassus to Alexander the Great and underscores Crassus' outlandish military goals to emphasize the foolishness and arrogance of Crassus.<sup>312</sup> Rather, in reality Crassus' military goals likely were even more limited than Sampson argues. It would be anachronistic to argue that the Romans and especially Crassus had a grand strategy to defeat and dominate the Parthians. Rather, Crassus likely approached the war in Parthia as Caesar had approached the war in Gaul, namely with limited, short-term objectives that could expand into larger strategies as the war developed.<sup>313</sup> We should not assume that Crassus planned to annex the entirety of Mesopotamia as a Roman province, which would have been costly in men, materials, and time. In fact, it is highly unlikely that Crassus, who was a longstanding political rival of Pompey but who had relied on Pompey to help him secure his command in Syria, planned to alter Pompey's settlement of the Near East as he left for Syria in late 55 BCE. Rather, Crassus clearly wanted to take advantage of the weakness and vulnerability of the Parthians by defeating Orodes II and capitalizing on the friendly Roman relationship with

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<sup>311</sup> Plut. *Crass.* 16.2, 19.7, 35.7, 37.2-3; id. *Nic. and Crass.* 4.2, 4-5

<sup>312</sup> Note also id. 17.3. Sherwin-White argues that Plutarch wanted to contrast "the vast projects of Crassus with the tiny scale of the Athenian Nicias, whose 'life' is twinned with that of Crassus in Plutarch's scheme." Sherwin-White 1984: 285. In fact, I would argue that the Romans, despite their access to Hellenistic literature on the lands of the ancient East, had almost no accurate concept of the space, scope, and geography of these regions at this time. This no doubt helped motivate Strabo to compose his monumental work, *Geographica*, during Augustus' reign. Note Strabo 1.1.1-23. Even the Hellenistic Greeks had difficulties understanding the geography and space of the East. For example, Polybius misjudged the scope of the East when he attempted to compare the conquests of the Romans favorably to those of Alexander the Great. Overtoom 2013: 588-592.

<sup>313</sup> Sherwin-White acknowledged that Crassus' command and resources limited his military objectives and called those objectives "reasonable;" however, he too assumes Crassus planned to annex Mesopotamia and Babylonia. Sherwin-White 1984: 284-6. Rawlinson stated that Crassus' expedition was more about terrifying the Parthians into accepting Roman hegemony than conquest and annexation; however, he demonstrates the longstanding tradition of blaming the defeat solely upon the alleged "incompetence," ignorance, and inexperience of Crassus. Rawlinson 1885 (2002): 97-8.

Mithridates IV. Therefore, Crassus' primary objective likely was the same as Gabinius' had been, namely the submission of Parthia to Roman hegemony through a successful Mesopotamian expedition and the establishment of a pro-Roman Parthian government, and Crassus believed he could accomplish this objective quickly.<sup>314</sup> The sudden death of Mithridates IV in late 55 BCE and the advice of Artavasdes II to attack Parthia through Armenia in early 53 BCE did little to change Crassus' strategy.<sup>315</sup>

Even after Mithridates' death, which ended the Parthian civil war, Crassus' cause for war against Orodes II remained valid and in place.<sup>316</sup> By siding with Mithridates in the conflict, the Romans had committed to war against his brother, and that war did not simply disappear because of Mithridates' execution. In fact, Orodes' execution of a Roman suppliant only served to justify Crassus' attack upon Orodes further. Moreover, there was no guarantee that the death of Mithridates would end the civil strife in Mesopotamia, and therefore, Orodes' reign and the position of the Parthians within Mesopotamia still appeared vulnerable and provided Crassus with an immense opportunity to exert Roman hegemony over the Parthians.<sup>317</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> Note Lerouge 2007: 74. If we can trust the much later accounts of Plutarch and Dio in this instance, Crassus' immediate military objective appears to have been the capture of the important city of Seleucia in Babylonia. Plut. *Crass.* 18.2; Dio 40.16.3. It is possible that later Roman imperial military objectives found their way into Plutarch and Dio's accounts of Crassus' invasion.

<sup>315</sup> Plut. *Crass.* 19.1-2. See also Strabo 11.13.4

<sup>316</sup> In fact, there is evidence that the politics within the Near East found the Parthians, whose invitation was the cause of the larger conflict with Rome, at fault in the war and believed Crassus' attack was justified. "When Gabinius had returned to Rome, the Persians [i.e. the Parthians] played false to the Romans; and Crassus marched with a large army into Syria." *V Maccabees* 41.1-2. Note also Ruf. Fest. 17, who states "Marcus Crassus, a consul, was dispatched against rebelling Parthians."

<sup>317</sup> Dio, who perpetuates the anti-Crassus tradition and blames Crassus for beginning an unjust war, argues that Orodes' vulnerability helped motivate Crassus. Dio 40.12.1

In the past fifteen years, Rome and Parthia had awkwardly maneuvered around one another in Armenia and Mesopotamia. Prior to 56 BCE both sides had remained generally content to ignore one another and to focus on their own concerns; however, once open conflict finally emerged between them in 56/55 BCE, it became highly unlikely that the two sides would settle the matter short of bloodshed because there was too much uncertainty about their power capabilities and the power balance in the region and because there simply was too much potentially to gain from victory in the conflict. That is, the pressures of the interstate system encouraged Rome and Parthia finally to commit to hegemonic war in order to determine the true nature of the international environment. The highly motivated and determined commanders, Crassus and Orodes, only added to the likelihood that systemic pressures would push Rome and Parthia toward total war.

In 54 BCE Crassus gathered supplies, prepared his men, and established a forward base of operations in western Osrhoene.<sup>318</sup> To do this Crassus occupied the towns of southwestern Osrhoene between the Euphrates and Balikh rivers with 7,000 infantry and 1,000 cavalry. The Parthians had reestablished their hegemony over this region in the 60s BCE, and in a small skirmish, the Romans forced the Parthian commander of northern Mesopotamia, Silaces, to abandon his fortress, Ichnae, and retreat eastward to inform Orodes of Crassus' movements.<sup>319</sup> Thus, the first military engagement between Rome and Parthia had been minor, but the result further encouraged Crassus to pursue the war. He had established a strong forward position while

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<sup>318</sup> Id. 40.12.1-13.4. See also Plut. *Crass.* 17.2-6

<sup>319</sup> Dio 40.12.2. Sampson's claim that the cities of western Mesopotamia "had been under Parthian control for ninety years" is incorrect. Sampson 2015: 103-4. It completely ignores the actions of Tigranes II, Lucullus, and Pompey in the region. For Parthian fortifications in Mesopotamia, note Bergamini 1987; Jakubiak 2008.

he awaited the arrival of his son Publius with his elite force of 1,000 Gallic cavalry.<sup>320</sup> Moreover, the inability of Silaces to defend his territory or field an army reinforced the Roman assumption that the Parthians were vulnerable.<sup>321</sup> Crassus had no reason to feel unconfident in his plans to strike at the heart of the Parthian Empire in Babylonia the following year.

While Crassus occupied western Osrhoene, Orodes prepared his forces to defend Mesopotamia and to invade Armenia.<sup>322</sup> Thus, both men had prepared for war by 54 BCE; however, Crassus' aggression against Parthian-held Osrhoene committed the two sides to the struggle, and more importantly, required Orodes to commit to a policy of aggressive retaliation against Roman interests in Armenia and Syria over the next few years. The military and political reputation and prestige of his regime and state were at stake. The confrontation with Rome was risky for Orodes; however, the aggression of the Romans demanded a strong response and, in the eyes of the Parthians, justified their cause. Orodes wisely sent envoys to Crassus in early 53 BCE to state the righteousness of the Parthian cause publicly and to illustrate his determination to fight. Plutarch records,

No sooner had he [Crassus] begun to assemble his forces from their winter quarters than envoys came to him from Arsaces [that is, Orodes] with a wonderfully brief message. They said that if the army had been sent out by the Roman people, it meant war without truce and without treaty; but if it was against the wishes of his country, as they were informed, and for his own private gain that Crassus had come up in arms against the Parthians and occupied their territory,

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<sup>320</sup> Plutarch provides this reasoning for Crassus' delay but criticizes Crassus heavily for not pushing his advantage in 54 BCE. Plutarch claims that Crassus spent his time in Syria ignoring military issues in order to cast Crassus as a fool. Plutarch's argument that Crassus should have immediately struck at Babylon and Seleucia in 54 BCE because of their hostility to the Parthians ignores that Orodes' forces recently had secured these cities. Plut. *Crass.* 17.4-6. Note id. 21.7; Justin 42.4.2-4. In reality, Crassus understood that, with Mithridates IV dead and the Parthian civil war over, he needed a larger cavalry force for his expedition against Orodes, especially when reinforcements from Armenia did not materialize, and to organize his forces. Therefore, Crassus' caution in 54 BCE is understandable. Id. 19.1-3. Note Sampson 2015: 101-3.

<sup>321</sup> Note Plut. *Crass.* 20.1

<sup>322</sup> Id. 21.5, 22.2; Dio 40.16.2

then Arsaces would act with moderation, would take pity on the old age of Crassus, and release to the Romans the men whom he had under watch and ward rather than watching over him. To this Crassus boastfully replied that he would give his answer in Seleucia, whereupon the eldest of the envoys, Vagises, burst out laughing and said, pointing to the palm of his upturned hand: ‘O Crassus, hair will grow there before thou shalt see Seleucia.’ The embassy, accordingly, rode away to King Hyrodes [that is, Orodes], to tell him there must be war.<sup>323</sup>

Although Plutarch’s account of this meeting suffers from his anti-Crassus rhetoric, which tried to place all blame upon Crassus for the disastrous conflict, it is an important piece of evidence because Plutarch demonstrates that Orodes was dictating terms to Crassus from a position of confidence and strength. This was not a negotiation. Indeed, Orodes’ message was unambiguous, forceful, and brief. Either Crassus could submit to Parthia by admitting fault for the conflict, ceding Rome’s claims to Mesopotamia, and retreating to Syria, or Orodes would pursue a hegemonic war against Rome “without truce and without treaty.” Thus, Orodes engaged in compellence diplomacy to force the Romans to back down or to accept their responsibility for the war and its consequences.<sup>324</sup> The sentiment behind Vagises’ humorous response to Crassus’

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<sup>323</sup> Plut. *Crass.* 18.1-2

<sup>324</sup> Moreover, the Parthians after the Battle of Carrhae again engaged in compellence diplomacy when they told Crassus to “consent to go to Arsaces [that is, Orodes] instead of being carried there.” Id. 27.2. Sampson’s opinion that Orodes’ decision to send envoys to Crassus was a desperate “last ditch attempt by Orodes to avert the war with Rome by bargaining, perhaps with the offer of a hefty bribe” completely misunderstands the purpose of compellence diplomacy and how Orodes was using it in this instance. Sampson is too dismissive of Orodes’ commitment to the conflict. He unnecessarily argues that Plutarch misrepresents the tone of the Parthian envoys. He refuses to accept that the Parthians would act so boldly and insult “one of the two most powerful men in the Roman Republic.” Sampson 2015: 106-7, 111. First, it is unadvisable to assume that the Parthians had any clear understanding of Crassus’ position within the Roman state. Second, although Plutarch’s bias against Crassus should give us pause about the envoys specifically insulting Crassus’ greed and age, there is no good reason to discount the forceful tone of the Parthian envoys because it in fact made Plutarch’s case against Crassus more difficult. If the Parthian envoys had been submissive and eager to avoid further conflict, then Crassus would have appeared more aggressive, unjustified, and egotistical; however, Plutarch does not portray the envoys thusly.

threat demonstrates unequivocally that Orodes had no intentions to make concessions himself before contesting the Romans in battle.

Dio offers a similar account of this meeting that emphasizes Orodes' proactive and calculated efforts. He states,

When Crassus had invaded Mesopotamia, as has been stated, Orodes sent envoys to him in Syria to censure him for the invasion and to ask the causes of the war; at the same time he sent Surenas with an army to the captured and revolted districts [in Osrhoene]. For he had it in mind to lead an expedition in person against that part of Armenia which had once belonged to Tigranes [II], in order that Artabazes [that is, Artavasdes], the son of Tigranes, the king of the land at that time, should send no assistance to the Romans through fear for his own land. Now Crassus said that he would tell him in Seleucia the causes of the war; this is a city in Mesopotamia, which even at the present day has a very large Greek population. And one of the Parthians, striking the palm of his left hand with the fingers of the other, exclaimed: 'Sooner will hair grow here than you shall reach Seleucia.'<sup>325</sup>

Thus, by censuring Crassus and demanding the causes for war, Orodes publicly shamed the Romans and made them take responsibility for the conflict. Moreover, in Dio's account Orodes did not even wait for Crassus' reply before he sent his greatest general, Surenas, to confront Crassus in Osrhoene. Orodes was not negotiating, nor was he meekly seeking a last minute truce. Instead, he had insulted and embarrassed the Romans because he believed they deserved such public condemnation. If he could not intimidate or shame the Romans into capitulation, then he was ready to conquer Armenia, to defend Mesopotamia, and to fight the Romans to the end.<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> Dio 40.16

<sup>326</sup> The less detailed and less reliable accounts of Florus and Orosius also discuss this meeting. Florus 1.46.4-6; Orosius 6.13. Florus offers traditional anti-Crassus propaganda, which blames Crassus' greed and impiety for his defeat. However, both accounts portray the jumbled anachronistic Roman tradition of Crassus breaking a Euphrates border treaty. In fact, the two accounts cannot even agree upon which Romans made these alleged treaties. Florus states Pompey and Sulla, and Orosius states Pompey and Lucullus. It is telling that neither Plutarch nor Dio advances this objection in their accounts when both had a desire to criticize Crassus. The objections of Florus and Orosius are erroneous and make the Euphrates treaty tradition appear even more dubious.

The Parthian envoys accomplished three important tasks for Orodes. First, they tested Crassus' character and his military position. Orodes had never before exchanged words with Crassus, and therefore, this meeting allowed him to understand his enemy better. Clearly, Crassus was determined to push his attack. Moreover, the trip of the envoys through Osrhoene to Crassus' camp allowed Orodes to gain a more detailed survey of Crassus' army.<sup>327</sup> Second, they damaged the reputation of the Romans and forced the Romans to accept responsibility for the war. This was a significant diplomatic victory for Orodes that helped justify his future military plans in Armenia, Mesopotamia, and Syria. Finally, they confirmed the target of Crassus' expedition. The aggression and defiance of the Parthian envoys had surprised Crassus. In order to save face, he was forced to respond with equal aggression and defiance. Therefore, he told the Parthians that he would conquer Seleucia and dictate his own terms. This confirmed Orodes' suspicions that the Romans planned to strike at Babylonia.<sup>328</sup> He finally knew that Armenia was isolated. Thus, he immediately sent Surenas with a well-trained, battle-hardened force of 10,000 cataphracts and horse archers toward Osrhoene to delay Crassus and, if possible, to destroy him.<sup>329</sup> Meanwhile, Orodes moved to invade Armenia and to conquer the longstanding rival of the Parthians, which would allow him to surpass the prestige of his brother and father and rival the accomplishment of the great Mithridates II. Once Orodes had neutralized the threat of

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<sup>327</sup> Although Sherwin-White portrayed Orodes too passively in his account of this meeting, he argued that Orodes sought to delay Crassus and to test Roman strength. Sherwin-White 1984: 287. Yet the timing and tone of Orodes' embassy makes it unlikely that he hoped to delay Crassus. Orodes sent the envoys before the spring campaigning season had begun and did not instruct them to negotiate.

<sup>328</sup> Dio later records that Crassus' original plan was to follow the Euphrates to Seleucia and then cross over to assault Ctesiphon. Dio 40.20.3. Note Vell. Pat. 2.46.4. Rufus Fest states that Crassus planned to seize Ctesiphon. Ruf. Fest. 17.1

<sup>329</sup> The Parthian general and governor of northern Mesopotamia, Silaces, also apparently aided in the battle. Florus 1.46.8; Ruf. Fes. 17.2; Orosius 6.13



Armenia, if Surenas had not yet defeated the Romans, then Crassus would be isolated in Mesopotamia between two Parthian armies. The Romans would have to abandon their invasion, or Orodes and Surenas would be free to close their trap.

Neither Orodes nor Surenas had anticipated the climactic clash at Carrhae and its immense geopolitical fallout. Although we must reject utterly Sampson's recent argument that Orodes wanted to sacrifice Surenas and his army in 53 BCE, Surenas' victory at Carrhae without the aid of Orodes was unexpected and helped lead to Surenas' execution as a potential rival to the Parthian throne soon after the battle.<sup>330</sup> The composition of Surenas' army undoubtedly demonstrates that this army was meant to be a delaying force to outmaneuver, harass, and weaken Crassus' army. Surenas was to utilize the traditional Parthian "feigned retreat, defeat in

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<sup>330</sup> For the execution of Surenas, see Plut. *Crass.* 33.5. Sampson confusingly equates Orodes' strategy in 53 BCE to the German "Schlieffen Plan" of pre-World War One Europe. Sampson 2015: 112-13, 144. Such an explanation is unconvincing and nonsensical at a strategic and tactical level. For example, strategically General Count Alfred von Schlieffen developed the so-called Schlieffen Plan as a response to the threat of a two front war. Orodes had no such concern since the Romans and Armenians both faced his western frontier. Tactically, if Germany found itself in a war against France and Russia, Schlieffen wanted to knock France out of the war quickly before Russia could threaten Germany's eastern frontier. This called for two smaller German forces to hold the German borders with France and Russia while a third, much larger force launched a quick and overwhelming attack through Belgium, which would isolate and encircle the French army. Thus, the Schlieffen Plan required a passive enemy, which Crassus was not. Moreover, if Orodes hoped to sacrifice Surenas as Sampson claims, he would not have had the ability to isolate and trap Crassus' army. For the Schlieffen Plan, see Zuber 2014; Ehlert (et al.) 2014. In reality, Orodes' strategy was more like the classic double envelopment or pincer movement. He wanted to isolate and trap Crassus between two aggressive forces by occupying Armenia and holding in Mesopotamia. Note Plut. *Crass.* 21.4-5. Orodes did not want to allow Crassus to destroy a large portion of the available Parthian army and eliminate his experienced heavy cavalry. Orodes also did not want to sacrifice his best general and leave Mesopotamia undefended. Orodes relied on Surenas heavily in 53 BCE and could not hope to defeat Crassus without him and his army. It was only after the unexpectedly quick destruction of Crassus' army had nullified the threat of Rome and bolstered the reputation of Surenas that Orodes decided to execute his most powerful supporter.

detail” mode of warfare and was not to risk the destruction of his force.<sup>331</sup> The swift and total annihilation of Crassus’ army in the summer of 53 BCE is a testament to the cunningness and ferocity of the unique Parthian mode of warfare; however, it was a result of Surenas’ generalship, Crassus’ mistakes, and the inexperience and incompatibility of the Roman army in fighting a well-equipped and trained mobile enemy on unfamiliar and unfavorable terrain.

More important than the tactical result of the battle were its enormous geopolitical implications. Contrary to arguments that the Battle of Carrhae did not cause “any decisive shift in the balance of power” between Rome and Parthia, the Battle of Carrhae in fact *established* the balance of power between Rome and Parthia.<sup>332</sup> Crassus of course did not understand, nor anticipate the immense geopolitical repercussions of his expedition in 53 BCE. This is not a criticism of Crassus’ character or military capability; rather, the conflict and its fallout was an understandable consequence of decades of geopolitical tension caused in part by systemic pressures and the process of system overlap between the separate Roman and Parthian focused worlds. Crassus’ invasion initiated a drastic change in the relations and policy between Rome and Parthia. The Parthians established a military reputation that concerned the Romans and made them take note of Parthia as a major player in the international environment.<sup>333</sup> Moreover, the

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<sup>331</sup> For a discussion of the unique mode of warfare of the Parthians, especially as it concerns the Battle of Carrhae, see Chapter 2.

<sup>332</sup> Timpe 1962; Schippman 1987a. Contra Shahbazi 1990.

<sup>333</sup> For example, note Appian’s account of Pompey’s immediate plan of action after his defeat at Pharsalus. Pompey wanted to flee to the Parthians for protection and military support; however, this decision shocked his advisors. Appian states, “He [Pompey] concealed his intention [to seek Orodes’ aid] until he arrived at Cilicia, where he revealed it hesitatingly to his friends; but they advised him to beware of the Parthian, against whom Crassus had lately led an expedition, and who was puffed up by his victory over the latter, and especially not to put in the power of these barbarians the beautiful Cornelia, who had formerly been the wife of Crassus.” Appian *BC* 2.83. Moreover, numismatic evidence illustrates that the Parthian victory against Crassus was a boon to the prestige and authority of Orodes, who began minting coinage with increasingly elaborate titles. Rezakhani 2013: 770.

failure of Crassus and the success of the Parthians did not tell “Rome that it could never occupy the lands beyond the Euphrates;” rather, it made further conflict between the two powers inevitable because it made Parthia a legitimate and direct threat to Roman hegemony.<sup>334</sup> The invasion encouraged the Parthians to retaliate against Rome, drawing Parthia further into Rome’s activities in the West, and the humiliating defeat of Rome at the hands of the Parthians encouraged the Romans to attempt to recover their reputation through further efforts to gain the submission of Parthia in the East.<sup>335</sup>

Thus, the Parthians began to meddle in Roman affairs and struck back against the Romans with invasions in 51, 40, and 38 BCE.<sup>336</sup> This encouraged Mark Antony’s disastrous counter invasion of the East in 36 BCE, which further entrenched the new Med-Eastern system of bipolarity.<sup>337</sup> After the disasters of Crassus and Antony, Augustus chose to avoid a major

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<sup>334</sup> Chahin 1987: 243.

<sup>335</sup> The people of Syria understandably feared Parthian retaliation after the death of Crassus. Caes. *BC* 3.31. There developed a Roman tradition, which lasted into late antiquity, that Rome had bought the land between the Euphrates and Tigris with blood after Crassus and that there was a need to avenge Rome’s initial failure to avoid shame. Note esp. Virg. *Aen.* 7.601-6; Lucan *Phar.* 7.431, 8.91, 327, 302, 327, 358, 394, 415, 422; Justin 42.4.6; Appian *BC* 2.110, 5.65; Julian *Or.* 1.17D; Sid. Carm. 2.452-6. The defeat at Carrhae scarred the Roman psyche, and a Roman literary tradition quickly emerged to cast all blame for the failure upon Crassus. See Appendix 2.

<sup>336</sup> The Parthians chose to support Pompey in his civil war against Caesar. Justin 42.4.6. They also supported Brutus and Cassius in the civil war against Antony and Octavian. They sent soldiers to fight at the Battle of Philippi in 42 BCE. Appian *BC* 4.59, 63, 88, 99; Justin 42.4.7; Lucan *Phar.* 8.229-38, 320-5, 334-62, 414-22

<sup>337</sup> For a recent evaluation of the Roman opinion of this period of the war, note Lerouge 2007: 83-98. Antony wanted to secure Syria as his command after Caesar died in part because he wanted to lead the grand army that Caesar had created to conquer Parthia and avenge Crassus against the Parthians. Appian *BC* 3.7, 24. See also Plut. *Brut.* 25.2; Dio 45.20.4, 49.24.5. Antony viewed Parthia as a major threat and made considerable efforts to expand his military force to invade Parthia. Appian *BC* 5.93, 95, 134-5. In fact, although Antony’s invasion in 36 BCE failed, had Octavian not defeated Antony in 31 BCE it is clear that Antony planned to campaign against Parthia once more in the hope of subduing the Parthians and placing them under his hegemony. For example, Antony told his men “he would make another campaign against the Parthians.” Dio 49.31.3. See also id. 49.33.3, 39.3, 40.2, 44.1-4; Plut. *Ant.* 52-3. Moreover, in the infamous

campaign against the Parthians.<sup>338</sup> Augustus had significant military, political, and personal reasons for avoiding a major invasion of Parthia in favor of diplomatic coercion. The recent examples of Crassus and Antony demonstrated to Augustus the considerable difficulty that a major Parthian campaign presented. Augustus had just ended the vicious cycle of civil wars that had ravaged the Roman state for nearly twenty years, and he had the monumental task of stabilizing the Roman state under his sole leadership. Politically, Augustus could not afford to be absent fighting the Parthians in the East for multiple years early in his reign or to risk his personal wellbeing while on campaign. Moreover, if he should fail in the East but survive, he not only would have severely damaged his legitimacy as leader of the Roman state and undermined his new government, but also he would have once again severely damaged the Roman military and its reputation. Additionally, Augustus' personality was not well suited for war. He often was ill; he did not excel in battle; and he relied heavily on his subordinates, particularly Agrippa, Drusus, Tiberius, and Germanicus, to fight his wars. Thus, these significant military, political,

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Donations of Alexandria in 34 BCE, Antony named his firstborn son by Cleopatra VII, Alexander Helios, "King of Kings" and king of Armenia, Media, and Parthia. It is no coincidence that Antony and Cleopatra named their firstborn son, Alexander. This was a direct homage to Alexander the Great and helps demonstrate Antony's keen interest in the Hellenistic world and the tradition of Hellenistic monarchy. Armenia, Media, and Parthia were the lands once conquered by Alexander the Great, and if Antony had anything to do with it, these would be the lands eventually ruled over by his son, Alexander. The inclusion of the foreign lands of Media and Parthia within the kingdom of his Hellenistic son, Alexander, King of Kings, demonstrates that Antony intended to conduct another hegemonic war against the Parthians. Note Dio 49.41.3; Plut. *Ant.* 54.4; Livy *Epit.* 131.3. Poirot makes the connection between Antony's expedition and the motivation of retaliation; however, he mistakenly dismisses it as only a "convenient pretext." Poirot 2014: 19 n.39.

<sup>338</sup> The contemporary writer, Velleius Paterculus, compared the disaster at Carrhae to the massacre in the Teutoburg Forest. Vell. Pat. 2.119.1. The defeat at Teutoburg Forest haunted Augustus. Suet. *Aug.* 23. It seems likely that the recent defeats against the Parthians, like the defeat against the Germans, were enough to dissuade Augustus, who was militarily cautious, from further major campaigning. In fact, Dio claims that Augustus feared war against the Parthians. Dio 55.10.20-1, 10a.3-7

and personal aspects made a major invasion of Parthia by Augustus difficult and undesirable. Furthermore, Augustus was not inclined to conduct this war through one of his generals either. Such a prospect still threatened to embarrass his regime and damage his reputation and prestige. Yet the possible success of one of his generals against the Parthians was equally undesirable. Augustus had become a *de facto* monarch, who had emerged from a ruthless cycle of civil wars. Therefore, he wanted to avoid creating potential rivals at all costs. This meant that Augustus did not want one of his generals to conquer the Parthian Empire and avenge Crassus and Antony. As the new ruler of Rome, Augustus needed to reserve such a high honor for himself and to dominate its potential political benefits. Ultimately, Augustus did not want to lead a major Parthian expedition because of the challenges he faced at home and the risks it presented abroad, and he could not afford politically to allow another to do so.<sup>339</sup> Finally, military victories over Crassus and Antony had legitimized the Parthians as a world power and rival in the eyes of the Greeks and Romans. Augustus had no desire to add potentially to this legacy by risking another military disaster in the East.

Thus, Augustus had several important reasons to alter Roman imperial and foreign policy in the East drastically to emphasize indirect means of acquiring power and influence over the Parthians, such as diplomatic maneuvering, political meddling, and propaganda.<sup>340</sup> Augustus

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<sup>339</sup> Emperors had every motivation to monopolize glory and safeguard their positions as the head of the army. Note Isaac 1993: 416; Keppie 1998: 154-5; Mattern 1999: 202; Fuhrmann 2012: 104, 129.

<sup>340</sup> Note Lerouge 2007: 99-127. As Suetonius relates, Augustus was more reserved and calculating in his military policy. He states, “He [Augustus] thought nothing less becoming in a well-trained leader than haste and rashness, and, accordingly, favorite sayings of his were: ‘More haste, less speed;’ ‘Better a safe commander than a bold;’ and ‘That is done quickly enough which is done well enough.’ He used to say that a war or a battle should not be begun under any circumstances, unless the hope of gain was clearly greater than the fear of loss; for he likened such as grasped at slight gains with no slight risk to those who fished with a golden hook, the loss of which, if it were carried off, could not be made good by any catch.” Suet Aug 25.4. Much

pursued his new policy, which remained aggressive and opportunistic, toward the Parthians, for more than thirty years with varied success and inopportune failures.<sup>341</sup> Finally, when major

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later Emperor Julian portrayed Augustus as a reserved, calculating, and humble leader. He writes, “But since I [Augustus] saw that more than once Rome had been brought to the verge of ruin by internal quarrels, I so administered her affairs as to make her strong as adamant for all time, unless indeed, O ye gods, you will otherwise. For I did not give way to boundless ambition and aim at enlarging her empire at all costs, but assigned for it two boundaries defined as it were by nature herself, the Danube and the Euphrates. Then after conquering the Scythians and Thracians I did not employ the long reign that you gods vouchsafed me in making projects for war after war, but devoted my leisure to legislation and to reforming the evils that war had caused. For in this I thought that I was no less well advised than my predecessors, or rather, if I may make bold to say so, I was better advised than any who have ever administered so great an empire. For some of these, when they might have remained quiet and not taken the field, kept making one war an excuse for the next, like quarrelsome people and their lawsuits; and so they perished in their campaigns. Others when they had a war on their hands gave themselves up to indulgence, and preferred such base indulgence not only to future glory but even to their personal safety. When I reflect on all this I do not think myself entitled to the lowest place. But whatever shall seem good to you gods, it surely becomes me to accept with a good grace.” Julian *Caes.* 326B-D-327A. Julian soon after continues by having Hermes asks each famous leader “what he considered the finest of all things.” Alexander the Great responds, “To conquer the world.” Caesar responds, “To hold the first place in my own country [including in war].” Augustus responds, “To govern well.” Trajan says that like Alexander he wanted to conquer the world. Julian *Caes.* 330-3. Augustus’ policy again contrasts sharply with the others. Note also Sherwin-White 1984: 322-41; Gruen 1985; Dąbrowa 2002; Wheeler 2002: 287; Kleiner 2005; Shayegan 2011: 332-40.

<sup>341</sup> Augustus recovered some of Rome’s lost military reputation when he recovered the lost standards and captives of Crassus and Antony without further open conflict. He also welcomed Parthian princes as political guests in Rome. Augustan propaganda portrayed these events as major victories that established Roman superiority over Parthia. See Aug. *RG* 29, 32-3; Justin 42.5.10-12; Prop. 2.27, 3.4-5, 4.6; Vell. Pat. 2.91.1, 94.4; Livy *Epit.* 141; Suet. *Aug.* 21.2-3, 41.4, 43.4; id. *Tib.* 9.1; Jos. *Ant.* 18.39-52; Dio 53.33.1-2, 54.8.1-3; Florus 2.34.63-4; Eutrop. 7.9; Orosius 6.21. See also Virg. *Aen.* 1.278-9, 6.852-3. Later emperors who had not campaigned in the East but needed to enhance their prestige followed Augustus’ example. For example, Caligula portrayed himself as a new Alexander the Great, displaying his Parthian hostage Darius in a procession. Suet. *Gaius* 19; Dio 59.17.5. For the argument that Augustus used propaganda in an attempt to separate the Parthians from the inhabited world (*oecumene*) “to reconcile Roman claims to world domination with a reality halted at the Euphrates,” see Wheeler 2002: 287-8, 291. Note also Shayegan 2011: 335-40.

campaigning again threatened to erupt in the Near East over the unsettled position of Armenia between Rome and Parthia, both powers preferred to settle the conflict peacefully.<sup>342</sup>

Augustus sent his adopted son, Gaius Caesar, to meet with the Parthian king, Phraates V. The two men met on a small island in the middle of the Euphrates and ended the First Romano-Parthian War in 1 CE.<sup>343</sup> For the first time in the history of the relations between Rome and Parthia, both powers officially recognized one another's hegemonic claims and rivalry.<sup>344</sup> It was at this time that Rome and Parthia finally established the first formal treaty between them, which also for the first time recognized the Euphrates as a border between their two empires.<sup>345</sup> Thus, although relations between Rome and Parthia remained tense during the subsequent Romano-Parthian "cold war" of the early Roman imperial period, the First Romano-Parthian War created

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<sup>342</sup> Dio claims Augustus was distressed and feared war with the Parthians, and meanwhile, Phraates V had political concerns at home that required his full attention. Dio 55.10.18, 20-1, 10a.4. For Armenia between Rome and Parthia, note Gregoratti 2012d.

<sup>343</sup> Vell. Pat. 2.101

<sup>344</sup> Note Kennedy 1996a: 82. Many Romans viewed Augustus's new policy toward the Parthians and the subsequent peace critically because they believed it made Rome appear weak. Tacitus is our best example of Roman criticism of Augustus' new policy toward the Parthians, which the Julio-Claudian successors generally followed. Tacitus preferred the traditional, direct approach of the Emperor Trajan in his aggressive war against Parthia. For a recent discussion of Tacitus' views on Roman policy in the East, see Poirot 2014: Ch. 5-10. For the relevant Tacitus passages, see Tac. *Ann.* 2.1-4, 56-58, 68, 6.14, 31-37, 41-44, 11.8-10, 12.5, 10-14, 44-51, 13.6-9, 34-41, 14.23-26, 15.1-17, 24-31, 16.28. See also Lucan *Phar.* 8.408-41; Suet. *Aug.* 8.2, id. *Tib.* 37.4, 41; Ruf. *Fest.* 20. For Tacitus' treatment of warfare in his writings, see Lovano 2013: 85-7. For the argument that Horace in *Od.* 3.3, 5 was criticizing Augustus' non-traditional, un-Roman approach to his interactions with Parthia, see Poirot 2014: 97-103.

<sup>345</sup> Note Julian who associates the Euphrates border directly with Augustus and his policy. Julian *Caes.* 326C. See also Justin 41.1.1; Strabo 16.1.28. Sampson makes a similar conclusion. Sampson 2015: Ch.8. Shayegan incorrectly argues these conditions occurred following a treaty in 20 BCE. Shayegan 2011: 339-40. Millar peculiarly argues that "the middle Euphrates became the accepted boundary of the Roman and Parthian Empires" in 31 BCE. Millar 1993: 29-30.

a new and enlarged interstate system in the ancient world that dominated the attention of the Romans and Parthians as hegemonic rivals for almost three centuries.<sup>346</sup>

### Summary and Conclusion

In 68 BCE Lucullus tried to bring an end to the Mithridatic Wars by invading Armenia and striking at Artaxata. He hoped once again to force Tigranes II and Mithridates VI to commit to an unfavorable battle to save the important capital of Armenia. Yet poor weather, a difficult campaign, and mounting casualties pushed Lucullus' men to mutiny and forced him to abandon his hopes of conquering Armenia. Tigranes and Mithridates seized this opportunity to restore their fortunes. Mithridates reclaimed Lesser Armenia and Pontus, which forced Lucullus to abandon northern Mesopotamia. Meanwhile, Tigranes reclaimed southern Armenia and invaded Cappadocia. Lucullus' military setbacks cost him the loyalty of his army and his military support at Rome. The Roman state faced with the devastating raids of pirates across the Mediterranean and the resurgent power of Mithridates and Tigranes in the Near East gave Pompey an unprecedented command to stabilize the East and reassert Rome's hegemony.

With shocking speed Pompey rid the Mediterranean of the pirate menace and moved against Mithridates in Anatolia. Mithridates needed time to resupply his army and prepare Pontus for another campaign. Therefore, he decided to seek a truce with Pompey based upon his past successes in negotiating with distracted Roman generals. However, Pompey was uninterested in peace, and he secured an informal agreement of friendship and neutrality with the new Parthian

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<sup>346</sup> For a recent attempt to define the concept of the Augustan "cold war," see Poirot 2014: Ch. 3-4. The concept of cold war has led several scholars in recent years to "misrepresent and oversimplify the 'cold war' atmosphere of Roman-Parthian affairs." Wheeler 2002: 287. Meanwhile, efforts to demonstrate the continued aggressive and opportunistic policy of the Romans toward the Parthians during the first period of cold war have found many supporters. See esp. Marek 1993; Luther 1999; Dąbrowa 2002; Wheeler 2002: 291.



king, Phraates III, in early 66 BCE to keep Parthia out of the war. This frustrated Mithridates' hopes of gaining another ally against Rome and left him isolated in Pontus. Pompey was able to outmaneuver Mithridates, defeat his army, and force him to flee to the East. Mithridates hoped once again to gain the support of Tigranes II in Armenia; however, Tigranes was in no position to lend Mithridates aid against Rome at this time. The sudden and drastic reversal of Tigranes' fortunes after 69 BCE had encouraged his sons to rebel against him. Although Tigranes had some success in defeating the rebellions of his children, one of his sons, Tigranes the Younger, fled to Parthia in the middle of 66 BCE and convinced Phraates III to join his war against his father. Tigranes the Younger also was the grandson of Mithridates. Therefore, with a major war on his hands in the East and the bonds of friendship between Tigranes II and Mithridates strained, Tigranes had no desire to give Mithridates asylum and to fight another campaign against the Romans in late 66 BCE. After Tigranes barred him from entering Armenia, Mithridates realized that his last remaining hope to continue the conflict against Rome was to seek aid amongst the kingdoms and tribes to the north of the Black Sea.

Meanwhile, in Parthia Phraates III had gained the upper hand in the civil war against Arsaces XVI by 66 BCE. Phraates decided to utilize his new position of power and influence in Mesopotamia to retaliate against Armenia. The invitation of Tigranes the Younger to become involved in the Armenian civil war and to support him as the new Parthian vassal king of Armenia allowed Phraates to seek military retribution against Tigranes II. Phraates' campaign against Armenia met with initial success as Parthian forces recaptured Mygdonia, Adiabene, and Media Atropatene. Yet an unexpected siege at Artaxata and the continued threat of Arsaces XVI in the East encouraged Phraates to return to Mesopotamia with the majority of his army. The smaller force that Tigranes the Younger commanded, which Phraates wrongly had been led to

believe could accomplish its mission in Armenia, found itself isolated and ambushed, and with this victory, Tigranes II was able to remove the immediate threat of Parthia to Greater Armenia. Tigranes the Younger's defeat forced him to look to a new source of military and political support. He eventually settled on offering his services to Rome and Pompey accepted.

Tigranes II lacked the ability and the will to fight another campaign against the Romans. He submitted himself unconditionally into the hands of Pompey, and for his tactful actions, Pompey left him as king of Greater Armenia and made him a Roman client. This decision displeased Tigranes the Younger, who began to act against the interests of Rome. Pompey quickly recognized that Tigranes II was the better option as client ruler of Armenia so he decided to imprison Tigranes the Younger and to expand Tigranes II's kingdom.

Pompey wanted to establish Armenia as a loyal Roman client state that possessed just enough power to stabilize the important region of the northern Near East, dissuading aggression from the numerous bellicose neighboring peoples and states against Roman interests in the region. Part of this policy was subduing the peoples of the Caucasus and bringing the entire northern reaches of the Near East under Roman hegemony. Pompey's settlement of Armenia and his conquest of the Caucasus region initiated the third and final phase of system overlap between the Roman-dominated Mediterranean and Parthian-dominated Eastern systems; the bounds of Roman hegemony reached their greatest extent north and east. The major result of Pompey's new settlement of the northern Near East was that for the first time Rome became directly involved in maintaining the welfare of Armenia for its own hegemonic purposes. This new geopolitical arrangement of the international environment in the Near East facilitated further confusion and friction between Rome and Parthia as both powers approached the complex situation in Armenia from different international perspectives.

In fact, relations between Rome and Parthia deteriorated suddenly and rapidly in late 66 BCE as a direct result of Pompey's settlement of Armenia. From Phraates III's perspective, Pompey had overstepped his bounds by making Tigranes II a client king of Rome and by imprisoning Phraates' son-in-law, Tigranes the Younger. Phraates sent an envoy to Pompey demanding, first, the return of Tigranes the Younger to Parthia and, second, Rome's recognition of Parthia's hegemonic claim to Armenia and northern Mesopotamia. Meanwhile, from Pompey's perspective he believed he had every right to establish Roman hegemony over the lands of the northern Near East by force. He immediately rejected Phraates' demands and refused to agree to a limit to Rome's hegemony. Thus, in 66 BCE neither power was willing to abandon its hegemonic claims to the Near East, nor had they realistically considered the role of the other in their immediate geopolitical plans.

As Pompey campaigned against the peoples of the Caucasus, Phraates occupied Gordyene in northern Mesopotamia. However, by the middle of 65 BCE the geopolitical situation in the East had deteriorated rapidly. Arsaces XVI remained at large and began gaining momentum, and the ongoing civil war, paired with Phraates' western distractions, provided Media Atropatene and Elymais with the opportunity they needed to rebel against Parthian rule and seek recognition from Rome. Although Pompey remained uninterested in a Romano-Parthian war and did not provide support to Media Atropatene and Elymais, he refused to accept Parthia's occupation of Gordyene and sent forces to secure the region. Phraates did not desire nor could he afford a war with Rome over Gordyene in 65 BCE. Therefore, he attempted to secure a favorable truce with Armenia through negotiations with Pompey; however, when these talks failed, he abandoned Gordyene without conflict.

Instead of committing to war in 65 BCE, the Romans and Parthians had chosen to delay the unsettled situation in Gordyene and concentrate on pressing internal issues within their separate interstate systems. Phraates responded to the growing disturbances in the East, and Pompey moved to reinforce Roman hegemony along the coast of the Eastern Mediterranean. Yet, although the Romans and Parthians had not violated any treaty between them, the recent actions of Phraates and Pompey had strained the relationship between the two powers. Moreover, Phraates' unsuccessful negotiations with Pompey and his recent military setbacks made him increasingly vulnerable. Once Pompey's forces had evacuated to Syria and once Phraates had temporarily stabilized the situation in the East, Phraates decided to press his claim to Gordyene once more in early 64 BCE.

Phraates' reoccupation of Gordyene in 64 BCE finally encouraged Pompey to mediate a conclusion to the Armeno-Parthian conflict. Pompey was busy with what he considered more important affairs in Syria, and he did not want Tigranes II to draw him into a major war against Parthia. Meanwhile, Phraates viewed Roman arbitration of his conflict with Tigranes as a great opportunity to stabilize his western frontier favorably so that he could fully concentrate on ending the Parthian civil war in the East. Pompey's decision to arbitrate the situation in Gordyene publicly spurned Tigranes, who expected Rome to come to his military aid. Moreover, although Tigranes was able to retain Gordyene, it forced Tigranes to acknowledge all of the other territorial gains of the Parthians during the conflict. Finally, it made Tigranes realize that he was far more isolated against Parthia than he had thought previously. Although Pompey made necessary and calculated concessions that helped stabilize the region for almost another decade, Phraates emerged from the negotiations as the clear winner. He had vastly expanded his

kingdom, frustrated his rival, removed the meddling of Rome from his affairs, and ended the threat of a war on two fronts.

From 66-64 BCE the unanticipated consequences of Pompey's new settlement of the northern Near East had amplified miscommunication and misunderstanding between Rome and Parthia; however, the successful negotiations of 64 BCE demonstrate that neither state yet wanted open conflict and that they were satisfied to return to their isolation from one another. Pompey immediately focused his attention on the situation in Syria and along the coast of the Eastern Mediterranean. He understood that Rome could not hope to stabilize this region and firmly establish its hegemony over the Near East without a stronger, more permanent presence. Although Lucullus had allowed the Seleucid king, Antiochus XIII, to reclaim his throne in Syria, the weakness of Antiochus' position encouraged another civil war and incursions into the region by the Arabs and Jews. Pompey wanted to put an end to the turmoil of this region and to create a powerful base of operations for the Romans, and therefore, he removed Antiochus from his throne, annexed his kingdom, and established the Roman province of Syria.

Pompey's settlement of Syria allowed him to force the neighboring Hellenistic kings, Arab tribes, and the Jewish kingdom to submit to Rome. Roman Syria was not a defensive bastion; rather, it allowed the Romans to act more preemptively and proactively against the numerous potential threats that faced the lands of the southern Near East. However, Pompey's settlement of Syria also was a disturbing geopolitical development in the eyes of the Parthians, who could no longer hope that the Romans would leave the Near East without open conflict. For the first time, Roman and Parthian territory shared an unofficial border along the middle Euphrates, and this eventually created greater contact and conflict between the two powers.

With Pompey's settlement of the southern Near East, only the ever-elusive Mithridates VI remained at large. Mithridates had fled north in 66/65 BCE to restore his strength and to once more rise from the ashes of defeat like a phoenix. In only a year's time, he rebuilt his alliance networks with the Scythian tribes, seized the Bosporan Kingdom from his rebellious son, and commissioned a new fleet and army. By restoring his power in the north, Mithridates hoped he could finally secure a favorable truce with Pompey in 64 BCE; however, Pompey refused anything less than unconditional surrender. At the head of a new kingdom and military force, Mithridates viewed surrender with contempt. It was at this time that he determined to fight the Romans to the last, and he began preparing a major invasion of the Roman lands in Eastern Europe with the final objective perhaps being an assault on Italy itself. Yet his demanding military preparations were so ruinous to the local nobles and populace that they rose up against him and forced him to commit suicide in 63 BCE. Thus, the great struggle of Rome's mightiest enemy since Hannibal ended, and only Parthia remained independent of Roman domination.

Meanwhile, Phraates III took advantage of his stable western frontier by attacking Arsaces XVI in the East, forcing Elymais to abandon its rebellion, and ending the Parthian civil war by 60 BCE. Yet the period of peace that followed did not satisfy his ambitious sons Mithridates IV and Orodes II, who murdered their father in 57 BCE. Mithridates gained the Parthian throne, and in 56 BCE he declared war upon the new king of Armenia, Artavasdes II. Mithridates IV planned to live up to the memory of the great Mithridates II, who had first subdued Armenia, and looked to surpass the recent efforts of his father. Although Mithridates IV appears to have annexed Gordyene and forced Armenia into an unfavorable truce by late 56 BCE, he was a megalomaniac who was abusive to the Parthian aristocracy. A strong faction of the Parthian nobles, which included the unrivaled Suren clan, rose up against Mithridates and put

forth his brother, Orodes II, as a rival to his throne. Mithridates became cut off from his eastern supporters in Media and, instead, fled westward to Syria. In an act of desperation, he solicited military aid from the Roman commander, Gabinius, in the winter of 56 BCE. Although unsure about his participation in the conflict, Gabinius like many Roman statesmen before him accepted the plea of a suppliant to intervene in a foreign affair. Mithridates' decision to seek Roman support in a Parthian conflict was unprecedented and forever changed Roman and Parthian relations. Through a Parthian invitation, Rome had begun the First Romano-Parthian War.

The uneventful start to the conflict masked the eventually massive consequences and costs of the struggle. Although Gabinius readied his army to march into the heart of Mesopotamia in early 55 BCE, a dynastic disturbance in Ptolemaic Egypt seized his attention. Ptolemy XII had gained the backing of Pompey to persuade Gabinius to restore him to the throne of Egypt. Gabinius, who realized he lacked support to attack Parthia, immediately abandoned the Mesopotamian expedition for the Egyptian expedition. Our sources generally attribute Gabinius' motivation to greed; however, he had more authority to intervene in Egypt than in Parthia. Moreover, even in 55 BCE the Romans continued to emphasize the stability of the Eastern Mediterranean under Rome's hegemony over concerns in Mesopotamia; however, Gabinius' change of policy left the war in Parthia unresolved.

After Gabinius began his campaign toward Egypt, Mithridates IV realized that he no longer could hope for immediate Roman military support. He did not want to allow Orodes to consolidate his power in Parthia, and therefore, he left Gabinius' camp and returned to Mesopotamia. Although Gabinius and Mithridates appear to have maintained a friendly relationship, Gabinius was glad to put political and military distance between himself and his

decision to interfere in the Parthian civil war. The conflict between Rome and Parthia remained; however, Gabinius would take no more part in it.

Mithridates' sudden return to Mesopotamia in the summer of 55 BCE initially found success. He forced his brother to flee eastward, gained control of Babylonia, and occupied Babylon and Seleucia. Yet Orodes' chief supporter, the talented general Surenas, counterattacked with determination. Surenas stormed Seleucia in a daring assault and besieged Mithridates in Babylon. After a few months of siege, the city succumbed to famine. Mithridates chose to rely on the mercy of his brother, who had returned from the East, rather than commit suicide; however, Orodes could not risk allowing his brother to rival his position and had him executed. This ended the Parthian civil war; however, it did not conclude the conflict with Rome.

By supporting Mithridates' cause, Gabinius had in fact committed Rome to a conflict with Orodes. The command of this conflict fell to Crassus while Mithridates continued to resist Orodes in Mesopotamia in late 55 BCE. Thus, Crassus inherited the war in Parthia, which is something later Roman writers chose to overlook. Yet political tension and rivalry at Rome meant that the Romans did not have a uniform opinion of the Parthian conflict, nor an agreement on how to conclude it. It remained possible that Rome and Parthia could avoid bloodshed in 55 BCE; however, the recent actions of both sides and the decades of friction that had accumulated between the two powers made the prospect of avoiding battle unlikely once the conflict had begun. Even after the sudden execution of Mithridates, the conflict between Rome and Orodes remained. Both sides had their reputations and geopolitical standings at stake, and both sides had a great deal potentially to gain from victory. Although Crassus and Orodes found themselves at war because of the actions of Gabinius and Mithridates, both men had committed to hegemonic war by 54 BCE and both men considered their actions to be justified with good reason. The



pressures of the interstate system had helped encourage both powers to commit to total war. Thus, Crassus prepared to invade Mesopotamia, and Orodes prepared to invade Armenia. It is no longer possible to consider the Parthians as passive in this conflict, nor is it possible to blame Crassus for the war.

Crassus is a much maligned historical figure and victim of character assassination by later Roman writers. The Romans could neither accept the humiliation of the defeat at Carrhae, nor admit that the Parthians had earned their victory through military superiority. Instead, a widely accepted tradition of anti-Crassus propaganda emerged that ignored the geopolitical realities that led to the conflict, blamed Crassus' greed for the disaster at Carrhae, and labeled him as an infamous example of unbridled Roman aggression and military foolishness. Unfortunately, this tradition still influences our impression of Crassus and the circumstances of the beginning of the First Romano-Parthian War heavily today; however, the motivations of Crassus and Orodes were more nuanced and the conflict between them was more complex with larger systemic implications than most scholars recognize.

The initial success of Mithridates IV in Mesopotamia in the middle of 55 BCE would have further encouraged Crassus to commit to a Mesopotamian expedition because it made the region and Orodes appear vulnerable. Although our sources blame Crassus' greed and glory-seeking for his defeat, Crassus' primary motivation for pursuing the Parthian conflict was his need to raise his political profile. Crassus could of course anticipate wealth and glory if he concluded a successful war against Parthia; however, wealth and glory were in fact a means to an end, not ends in and of themselves, which is an important distinction. Crassus' ongoing rivalry with Pompey and the recent military accomplishments of his fellow triumvirs threatened Crassus' political standing at Rome. The chaotic situation in Mesopotamia seemingly offered

Crassus an ideal opportunity to match the achievements of his political rivals and to solidify his position as one of the leading men at Rome.

It is highly unlikely that Crassus had a grand strategy to conquer the entire East at any time during his new command. Instead, it appears the military objectives of his approaching campaign in Mesopotamia, much like Gabinius' had been, were quite limited. In fact, it is difficult to accept that Crassus even had plans to annex Mesopotamia as a Roman province since his command in Syria, his working relationship with Pompey, and the logistics of such a scenario make the argument untenable. Rather, Crassus' initial strategy was to invade Babylonia, defeat Orodes' forces, and establish a pro-Roman Parthian regime in Mesopotamia. The sudden death of Mithridates in late 55 BCE and the advice of Artavasdes II in early 53 BCE changed this strategy little.

In 54 BCE Crassus occupied the Parthian lands of southwestern Osrhoene and, after a brief skirmish, forced the Parthian commander in the region, Silaces, to retreat eastward to report to Orodes. The ineffectiveness of Silaces in the region further encouraged Crassus to pursue his Mesopotamian expedition and reinforced his belief that the Parthians were vulnerable to attack. Therefore, he organized his new base of operations and awaited his remaining reinforcements.

In 53 BCE he planned to throw the full force of the Roman army against the reeling Parthian state. However, the Parthians were far more aggressive, capable, and prepared than they had appeared in 54 BCE. Orodes had readied his defense of Mesopotamia and organized an invasion of Armenia. Meanwhile, Crassus' forceful occupation of southwestern Osrhoene committed both sides to hegemonic war; there no longer could be peace short of considerable loss of life.

The defiance, forcefulness, and brevity of Orodes' embassy to Crassus early in 53 BCE surprised the Romans. In this dialogue Orodes was not capitulating, nor was he negotiating; rather, he engaged in compellence diplomacy and demanded that Crassus back down from the conflict or admit responsibility for it. Thus, the Parthian envoys did not seek a last ditch desperate peace; instead, they shamed the Romans publicly, further justified Orodes' cause, and demonstrated the will of the Parthians to fight. Moreover, the diplomatic exchange better familiarized Orodes with his new enemy, and it confirmed that Crassus' objective was an invasion of Babylonia, which meant Armenia was isolated. Therefore, Orodes took immediate steps to conquer Armenia, and he left his more than capable general, Surenas, to delay Crassus in Mesopotamia. With his domination of Armenia, Orodes could surpass his brother and father and rival the accomplishment of the great Mithridates II. Meanwhile, Surenas' force of 10,000 well-equipped, well-trained, battle-hardened cavalry could outmaneuver, harass, and weaken the Roman army. Thus, Orodes' strategy was to conquer Armenia quickly, while Surenas fought a delaying action in Mesopotamia, in order to isolate Crassus between two Parthian armies. Crassus would have to abandon his campaign or find himself trapped. The sudden and total destruction of Crassus' army at Carrhae by Surenas' outnumbered force was a fortunate but unexpected development.

Crassus' invasion of the Parthian Empire and its fallout had enormous geopolitical implications on the international environment in the ancient world. The Parthian state had begun as an ambitious emerging power in the unforgiving and brutal international environment of the Farther East in the 230s BCE, far from the thoughts of Rome and the geopolitical developments of the Mediterranean. The Parthians initially looked to create independence from the Seleucid Empire, then to establish their supremacy over the Farther East, and finally to extend their

hegemony over the larger Eastern system through the domination of the Seleucid state and the Kingdom of Armenia. Through good leadership, innovative military and political policy, and hard-fought success in a series of hegemonic wars, Parthia succeeded in becoming the new hegemon of the East. Meanwhile, Rome began as one of many states in the competitive and violent multipolar anarchy of the Italian Peninsula, in the shadow of great Hellenistic empires and completely detached from the geopolitical developments of the Near East and Middle East. After Rome came to dominate the Italian peninsula, the Romans won a series of hegemonic struggles against the Carthaginians, Macedonians, and Seleucids to emerge as the unrivaled hegemon of the Mediterranean world. Although the rising power of Pontus under Mithridates VI and of Armenia under Tigranes II threatened the hegemonic standings of Rome and Parthia in their separate interstate systems, the two powers endured and overcame these considerable threats. Yet these conflicts were fundamental to bringing the Roman and Parthian worlds into direct contact and eventual conflict. Crassus' invasion finally caused the violent merger of the Roman-dominated Mediterranean and Parthian-dominated Eastern systems into the expansive Med-Eastern system, which came to encompass most of Europe, the Near East, and the Middle East.

With the catastrophe of Crassus' invasion, Rome failed in its initial attempt to establish unrivaled world empire, and Parthia suddenly emerged as a direct and legitimate threat to Roman hegemony. Further hegemonic war between the last two great powers of the ancient world was unavoidable as, first, the failed invasion of Crassus encouraged the Parthians to retaliate against the Romans and to challenge their settlement of the Near East, drawing Parthia further into Rome's activities in the West, and as, second, it encouraged the Romans to commit to new military and propagandistic efforts to mitigate their shame and regain their lost military

reputation through the attempted submission of Parthia in the East. The costly but unsuccessful major military conflicts between the Romans and Parthians in the 40s-30s BCE helped solidify the new arrangement of the international environment. Meanwhile, the innovative foreign policy of Augustus in the 20s-10s BCE avoided disastrous bloodshed and allowed the Romans to reclaim some of their honor through political and diplomatic maneuvering but failed to break the stalemate. Finally, in 1 CE the Romans and Parthians ended the First Romano-Parthian War and implemented a new cold war atmosphere when both sides for the first time officially recognized their hegemonic rivalry and the Euphrates as the border between their two empires.

The creation of the bipolar rivalry between Rome and Parthia within the new Med-Eastern system in the latter half of the first century BCE drastically changed the scope and history of European and Middle Eastern international relations. The inability of Rome to dominate Parthia or vice versa helped create a legacy that further cemented a distinction between western and eastern powers as geopolitical competitors. In many ways the ongoing enmity of western and eastern powers in the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern worlds has its roots in the conflicts between the Classical Greeks and the Achaemenid Persians. Yet the longstanding competition of European and Middle Eastern powers to influence and dominate the regions of the Near East truly emerged with the struggle of the Romans and Parthians in the First Romano-Parthian War and the formation of a new, inclusive interstate system, stretching from the Atlantic to the Hindu Kush. Our concepts of “Western Civilization” and modern international relations in this part of the world in part owes itself to the Parthians successfully challenging Roman domination, a fact too often hidden in the shadows of history.

## Epilogue: The Ongoing Rivalry of Rome and Parthia in the Post-Augustan World

The cold war scenario of the post-Augustan bipolar rivalry between Rome and Parthia within the new Med-Eastern interstate system, despite periods of intense open conflict in the late 50s-early 60s, late 110s, middle 160s, late 190s, and late 210s CE, became the generally accepted norm.<sup>1</sup> With the merger of the Roman-dominated Mediterranean and the Parthian-dominated Eastern systems after Crassus' failed invasion of Mesopotamia in 53 BCE, Augustan Age writers generally recognized a new world order that involved the Romans and the Parthians dividing the world between them in an ongoing hegemonic rivalry. Their concepts of the geography and scope of the world in which the Romans and Parthians acted directly had expanded drastically by the first century CE. Roman writers of the later imperial period well into late antiquity accepted and expanded this new understanding of the ancient world and the place of the Romans and Parthians within it.

For instance, Josephus records that, in retaliation for Artabanus II's occupation of Armenia in 35 CE, a terrified Tiberius arranged for an army of Scythians from north of the Caucasus Mountains to invade the Parthian Empire while he supported the start of a new civil war within Parthia that forced Artabanus to raise a large army of nomadic mercenaries from the Central Asian steppe to reclaim his throne.<sup>2</sup> Thus, in this account we see vividly the new and potentially violent interconnectedness of the ancient world. Moreover, Tacitus records that military intelligence about a revolt in the Farther East against the Parthian king Vologases I helped shape the Roman general Corbulo's strategy against the Parthians and that the rebelling

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<sup>1</sup> For a recent evaluation of Roman opinions of the Parthians from Tiberius to Severus Alexander, note Lerouge 2007: 129-69.

<sup>2</sup> *Jos. Ant.* 18.96-100

Hyrceanians solicited an alliance from the Romans against the Parthians.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, Suetonius states that Nero apparently considered fleeing to Parthia in 68 CE during the Roman civil war and that Vologases, after negotiations with Vespasian, later offered Vespasian 40,000 Parthian bowmen to help him win the war.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, Vologases met with Vespasian's son, Titus, along the Euphrates and congratulated Titus for his victory over the Jews.<sup>5</sup> Further, during Vespasian's reign the Parthians asked the Romans for aid in a war against their northern and eastern neighbors, especially the Alans.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, note that Pliny the Younger in a letter to Emperor Trajan discusses an episode where the Dacian king, Decebalus, was in friendly communication with the king of Parthia and sent him a slave as a present.<sup>7</sup> Finally, Pescennius Niger, after losing his war against Septimius Severus, also attempted to flee to the Parthians in 194 BCE.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the aggressive military efforts of Trajan, Lucius Verus, and Septimius Severus to subdue Parthia, Roman statesmen during the Roman imperial period generally maintained that the Romans and Parthians shared the world as rivals, and many Romans acknowledged the privileged status of Parthia in its relationship with Rome. For instance, Plutarch refers to the Arsacids as the most powerful and magnificence monarchs in the world.<sup>9</sup> Velleius Paterculus argues that the "whole world" felt the self-exile of Tiberius to Rhodes in 6 BCE and records that

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<sup>3</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 13.37, 14.25, 15.1, 27

<sup>4</sup> Suet. *Nero* 47.2, *Ves.* 6.4; Tac. *Hist.* 2.81, 4.51

<sup>5</sup> Jos. *Bell.* 7.105

<sup>6</sup> Suet. *Dom.* 2.2; Dio 64.15.3

<sup>7</sup> Plin. 10.74

<sup>8</sup> Dio 74.8.3

<sup>9</sup> Plutarch determined that Cleopatra VII was the second greatest monarch. Plut. *Demet. and Ant.* 1.3. For Cleopatra, see Grant 1972; Hughes-Hallett 1990; Sothern 1999; Rice 1999; Chauveau 2000; Bradford 2001; Ashton 2003; Burstein 2004; Jones 2006a; id. 2006b; Ashton 2008; Fletcher 2008; Preston 2008; Tyldesley 2008; Southern 2009; Goldsworthy 2010; Roller 2011; Andronik 2015.

the Parthian king took this opportunity to seize Armenia because “the eyes of its conqueror were no longer upon it.”<sup>10</sup> Suetonius records that the Parthians mourned the death of Germanicus and celebrated the accession of Caligula, and he acknowledges the Parthian leader as the King of Kings.<sup>11</sup> Suetonius also records a poem that unfavorably compared Nero to Vologases I after Parthian forces had defeated his army in Armenia.<sup>12</sup> Suetonius then tells us that Vitellius dedicated a platter that contained items “from Parthia to the Spanish strait.”<sup>13</sup> Note also that Julian claims that the invasions of Franks and Saxons into Gaul and Italy in 351 CE terrified many peoples in the world, including the successors of the Parthians, the Sassanid Persians, who “began to get ready to oppose it in their country’s defense.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, again we see that later writers recognized the new interconnectedness of the world under the Romans and Parthians.

When Tacitus considers the “the elements of strength and weakness in the entire world” during the Roman civil war in 68-69 CE, he includes a brief consideration of how the conflict affected the Parthians as well.<sup>15</sup> Tacitus later compares the fall of Emperor Galba directly to the Roman rivalry with the Arsacids.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, Dio recounts that, when Vespasian’s physicians feared the meaning of a comet, Vespasian associated himself with the Parthian king.<sup>17</sup> Note also Herodian’s claim that Commodus trained as a Parthian bowman and imported exotic animals

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<sup>10</sup> Vell. Pat. 2.100.1

<sup>11</sup> Suet. *Gaius* 5, 13-4. See also Philo *Gaius* 2.8-11

<sup>12</sup> Suet. *Nero* 39.1-2. In fact, Nero, despite the terrible defeat of his forces in Armenia, implemented propaganda to portray the conflict in Armenia as a Roman victory over the Parthians. Tac. *Ann.* 15.18. Rufus Festus calls Nero “the vilest imperator the Roman state has endured” and blames him for the loss of Armenia. Ruf. Fest. 20.1. Note also Eutrop. 7.14; Orosius 7.7.

<sup>13</sup> Suet. *Vit.* 13.2.

<sup>14</sup> Julian *Or.* 1.35B-C

<sup>15</sup> Tac. *Hist.* 1.2-4

<sup>16</sup> Id. 1.40.

<sup>17</sup> Dio 64.17.1-3. See also Suet. *Ves.* 23.4; Juv. 6.407



from India to hunt.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, Rufus Festus emphasizes the military rivalry of the Romans and Parthians when he states,

But Hadrian, who succeeded Trajan, envying Trajan's glory, returned Armenia, Mesopotamia, and Assyria [to the Parthians] of his own volition and wanted the Euphrates to be a median between Persians [that is, the Parthians] and Romans. But afterward, under the two Antonines, Marcus and Verus, and under Severus, Pertinax, and other Roman principes who battled against the Parthians with varied result, Mesopotamia was four times lost and four times regained.<sup>19</sup>

Rufus Festus later, after praising Trajan's accomplishments and claiming erroneously that he rivaled Alexander the Great by reaching India, continues, "It is certain that Hadrian envied Trajan's glory. His successor in imperium, after the armies had been recalled, he surrendered Armenia, Mesopotamia, and Assyria on his own initiative and willed that the Euphrates be a median between Romans and Persians [that is, the Parthians]."<sup>20</sup> Rufus Festus goes on to praise Verus for the "immense glory" he gained in his war against the Parthians and claims that Septimius Severus "conquered the Parthians."<sup>21</sup>

Herodian records that Vologases V offered Pescennius Niger military aid in his war against Septimius Severus and gave refuge to Niger's defeated soldiers.<sup>22</sup> Further, Dio found the ongoing hegemonic rivalry of the Romans and Parthians exhausting and frustrating. He is critical of Septimius Severus' claims of victory over the Parthians and finds the conflict against the Parthians far from over and far too costly.<sup>23</sup> Yet, after losing to the Sassanid Persians in the 220s CE, many Parthians apparently defected to Rome and fought in Severus Alexander's army in

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<sup>18</sup> Herodian 1.15

<sup>19</sup> Ruf. Fest. 14.4-5

<sup>20</sup> Id. 20.3. Note also Eutrop. 8.3

<sup>21</sup> Ruf. Fest. 21.1-2. Note also Eutrop. 8.10, 18; Orosius 7.15, 17

<sup>22</sup> Herodian 2.8.8, 3.1.2, 3.4.7-9, 3.5.1

<sup>23</sup> Dio 75.2.4, 3.2-3, 9.4-13.1. See also id. 78.26.1.

Germany.<sup>24</sup> Finally, Ammianus Marcellinus, in his portrayal of the end of Gallus' rivalry with Constantius II, peculiarly associates Gallus with the king of the Parthians.<sup>25</sup>

Later Roman writers maintained that Rome and Parthia were in a hegemonic struggle and that both sides continued to look for an opportunity to gain the advantage in their rivalry. For instance, Tacitus states, "At the same time, he [Artabanus II] referred in boastful and menacing terms to the old boundaries of the Persian and Macedonian empires, and to his intention of seizing the territories held first by Cyrus and afterwards by Alexander."<sup>26</sup> Moreover, Suetonius, Tacitus, and Dio argue that Tiberius' military negligence encouraged Parthian aggression and allowed Parthia to overrun Armenia.<sup>27</sup> Suetonius also records that Vologases I temporarily conquered Armenia and parts of Syria.<sup>28</sup> Dio tells us that Vologases refused to submit to Nero, and then Dio criticizes the emperor for raising an army that should have "subdued both Parthians and all other nations" but instead sought frivolity and leisure.<sup>29</sup> Josephus relates an account of the Roman governor in Syria, Caesennius Paetus, warning Vespasian of a possible rebellion in the Near East and war with Parthia that "may cause a general disturbance in the Roman Empire."<sup>30</sup> Further, Artabanus III apparently made plans to make war against Rome to depose Titus and crown the "False Nero" perhaps as a Parthian vassal.<sup>31</sup> Finally, Herodian records Macrinus

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<sup>24</sup> Herodian 6.7.8, 7.2.1

<sup>25</sup> Amm. Mar. 15.2

<sup>26</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 6.31. Note Dąbrowa 1983.

<sup>27</sup> Suet. *Tib.* 41; Tac. *Ann.* 6.31; Dio 58.26.1. Note Mattern 1999: 175-6.

<sup>28</sup> Suet. *Nero* 39

<sup>29</sup> Dio 63.7.2-8.5

<sup>30</sup> Jos. *Bell.* 7.219-29. Josephus also relates earlier stories of false rumors that Herod and the Parthians had joined in friendship against the Romans. Id. *Ant.* 16.253; 18.250.

<sup>31</sup> Dio 66.19.3b-3c. See also Suet. *Nero* 57.2; id. *Dom.* 6; Tac. *Hist.* 1.2; Jo. Antioch. in Mariev 2008: Frag. 131, pg. 227. Note Colledge 1967: 52.

telling his soldiers that Artabanus IV had prepared for a hegemonic war against Rome in the late 210s CE, stating,

‘You see the barbarian with his whole Eastern horde already upon us, and Artabanus seems to have good reason for his enmity. We provoked him by breaking the treaty, and in a time of complete peace we started a war. *Now the whole Roman Empire depends upon our courage and loyalty. This is no quarrel about boundaries or river beds; everything is at stake in this dispute* in which we face a mighty king fighting for his children and kinsmen who, he believes, have been murdered in violation of solemn oaths.’<sup>32</sup>

Although there undoubtedly is exaggeration of the part of the Romans for rhetorical effect, there appears to be a direct correlation in the sources between events and consequences in the Mediterranean *and* Middle East with a particular emphasis on the potential aggression and hegemonic desires of the Parthians.

The Romans did not abandon their hegemonic desires and aggression either, which the major wars of Trajan, Verus, and Septimius Severus make clear. Plutarch, who wrote around the time of Trajan’s war against the Parthians, states,

Besides, a great task still remained in the subjugation of Scythia and India, and here their greed [that is, the imperial greed of the Romans] would have had no inglorious excuse in the civilization of barbarous peoples. And what Scythian horse or Parthian archery or Indian wealth could have checked seventy thousand Romans coming up in arms under the leadership of Pompey and Caesar, whose names those nations had heard of long before that of Rome, so remote and various and savage were the peoples which they had attacked and conquered.<sup>33</sup>

Plutarch clearly thought civil war was foolish while the East remained outside of Rome’s control. Meanwhile, Dio claims that Trajan, when he reached the Persian Gulf, hoped to continue on to India in emulation of Alexander the Great and states that Trajan pronounced that he had in fact surpassed the accomplishments of the great Macedonian conqueror.<sup>34</sup> Likewise, Julian

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<sup>32</sup> Herodian 4.14.6 (the italics are mine). See also id. 5.1.4.

<sup>33</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 70.3

<sup>34</sup> Dio 68.29.1-2, 30.1-3, 33.1-3

argues that Trajan had planned to extend his Parthian conquests into the Farther East before old age stopped him.<sup>35</sup> Yet Trajan was only one of numerous Roman emperors who Roman writers associated with Alexander the Great.<sup>36</sup> For instance, Caligula apparently portrayed himself as a new Alexander the Great in a procession, displaying a Parthian prince named Darius as a Roman hostage, and even wore the stolen breastplate of the Macedonian conqueror on several occasions.<sup>37</sup> Later Nero commissioned an elite legion called the “phalanx of Alexander the Great” for his planned campaign against the Parthians.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, Herodian portrays Septimius Severus as the equal of Alexander in his conquest of the East and chastises Caracalla for his failed emulation of both men.<sup>39</sup> Herodian then discusses Caracalla’s devious efforts to secure a Parthian princess as his bride. He states,

Not long after this, Caracalla, desirous of gaining the title Parthicus and of being able to report to the Romans that *he had conquered all the Eastern barbarians*, even though there was peace everywhere, devised the following plan. He wrote a letter to the king of Parthia (his name was Artabanus [IV]) and sent to him an embassy laden with gifts of expensive materials and fine workmanship. He wrote to the king that he wished to marry his daughter; that it was not fitting that he, emperor and son of an emperor, be the son-in-law of a lowly private citizen. His wish was to marry a princess, the daughter of a great king. *He pointed out that the Roman and the Parthian empires were the largest in the world; if they were united by marriage, one empire without a rival would result when they were no longer divided by a river.* The rest of the barbarian nations now not subject to their authority could easily be reduced, as they were governed by tribes and confederacies. Furthermore, the Roman infantry were invincible in close-quarter combat with spears, and the Parthians had a large force of highly skilled horse-archers. *The two forces, he said, complemented each other; by waging war*

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<sup>35</sup> Julian *Caes.* 327B

<sup>36</sup> The Romans generally found Alexander fascinating. The Romans, after all, were the ones who gave him the title “the Great.” Plaut. *Most.* 3.2.775. They desired to become the true successors of Alexander’s legacy and many Roman leaders emulated the great Macedonian conqueror. For the impact of Alexander’s legacy on the Romans, see esp. Treves 1953; Weippert 1972; Vermeule 1986; Spencer 2003; Overtoom 2011; id. 2012; id. 2013.

<sup>37</sup> Suet. *Gaius* 19, 52; Dio 59.17.5

<sup>38</sup> Suet. *Nero* 19.2; Pliny *NH* 6.15.40. See also Tac. *Ann.* 13.7. Dio records that Caracalla too prepared a “Macedonian phalanx” for his planned war to subdue the Parthians. Dio 77.18.1

<sup>39</sup> Herodian 3.4.3-4, 4.8.1-4.9.8

*together, they could easily unite the entire inhabited world under a single crown. Since the Parthians produced spices and excellent textiles and the Romans metals and manufactured articles, these products would no longer be scarce and smuggled by merchants; rather, when there was one world under one supreme authority, both peoples would enjoy these goods and share them in common.*<sup>40</sup>

Herodian certainly conceived of the world as a division between Roman and Parthian rivals.

Meanwhile, Dio offers a slightly different interpretation of these events, recording, “After this

Antoninus [that is, Caracalla] made a campaign against the Parthians, on the pretext that

Artabanus [IV] had refused to give him his daughter in marriage when he sued for her hand; for

the Parthian king had realized clearly enough that the emperor, while pretending to want to

marry her, was in reality eager to get the Parthian kingdom incidentally for himself.”<sup>41</sup> Thus,

Herodian and Dio argue that Caracalla, like many of his predecessors and successors, hoped to

unify the expanded Med-Eastern system in Rome’s favor through the submission of Parthia.<sup>42</sup>

Eventually, according to Herodian the Parthian king agreed to the marriage and had sincere plans

to unify the Roman and Parthian empires, which again appears significant.<sup>43</sup> Yet Caracalla’s

scheme was a trap, and he slaughtered most of the bridal party; Artabanus barely escaped with

his life.<sup>44</sup> Herodian records that Caracalla dubiously proclaimed to the senate that “the entire East

was subdued and that all the kingdoms in that region had submitted to him.”<sup>45</sup> Herodian later

states that Artabanus raised “a huge army, seeking a legitimate revenge for the Parthians whom

Caracalla had murdered under a truce and in time of peace.”<sup>46</sup> Meanwhile, Dio concludes that, at

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<sup>40</sup> Id. 4.10.1-4 (the italics are mine).

<sup>41</sup> Dio 78.1.1

<sup>42</sup> Dio later records Macrinus stating that Caracalla “attempted to destroy the whole world.” Id. 78.36.4.

<sup>43</sup> Herodian 4.11.1-4

<sup>44</sup> Id. 4.11.5-7.

<sup>45</sup> Id. 4.11.8-9. See also Dio 77.12.3, 13.3

<sup>46</sup> Herodian 4.14.1

the approach of the “large army” of the Parthians, Caracalla “fell into the greatest terror. For, though he was most bold with his threats and most reckless in his undertakings, he was the greatest coward in the face of danger and the greatest weakling in the presence of hardships.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, Herodian and Dio emphasize Caracalla’s lack of strength as a leader in the ongoing rivalry with the Parthians.

Even after the defeat of the Parthian Empire because of the internal rebellion of the Sassanid Persians in the 220s CE, the Romans maintained their hope of world empire and still believed the old rivalry with the Parthians was important.<sup>48</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus wrote a history of Rome from the reign of Nerva to the death of Valens at the Battle of Adrianople in 378 CE in the late fourth century CE. In passage 23.6.3-4, Ammianus discusses the accomplishments of the founder of the Parthian state, Arsaces I. This passage occurs in a chapter where Ammianus also describes the regions of the East and their strengths on the eve of Julian’s invasion of Mesopotamia against the Sassanid Persians in 363 CE. Even though the Parthian Empire had not existed for a century and a half, Ammianus viewed the Sassanid Empire as a continuation of the Parthian state and, therefore, a continuation of the old rivalry with Rome. Thus, Ammianus wanted to introduce the origins of the Parthians and to praise the accomplishments of Arsaces before he discussed Julian’s war against the Sassanids. In fact, Ammianus uses the terms Parthian and Persian interchangeably throughout his work. Julian also uses these terms interchangeably in his official letter to the king of Armenia.<sup>49</sup> Meanwhile, in 361 CE Julian

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<sup>47</sup> Dio 78.3.1

<sup>48</sup> Note that a branch of the Arsacid dynasty continued to rule in Armenia until the reign of Theodosius II. Note Toumanoff 1986. See Procop. *Aedif.* 3.1.4-15; id. *Bello Per.* 1.5.10-39, 2.3.32-5

<sup>49</sup> Julian *Epist.* 57

wrote a fictional account of an argument between Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar. In the argument Caesar attempts to denigrate Alexander's conquests, to which Alexander responds:

‘And if you think the conquest of Persia such a trifle and disparage an achievement so glorious, tell me why, *after a war of more than three hundred years*, you Romans have never conquered a small province beyond the Tigris which is still governed by the Parthians? Shall I tell you why? It was the arrows of the Persians [that is, the Parthians] that checked you. Ask [Marcus] Antonius to give you an account of them, since he was trained for war by you. I, on the other hand, in less than ten years conquered not only Persia but India too.’<sup>50</sup>

Thus, we see that Julian, who later conducted a hegemonic war in the East against the Sassanid Persians himself, viewed the hegemonic struggle between Rome and Parthia (and the eastern successors of the Parthians, the Sassanid Persians) as an ongoing four-centuries-long conflict, where Rome had so far met its match.<sup>51</sup> Ammianus and Julian were not confusing the Arsacid Parthians with the Sassanid Persians as Wilmer Wright suggests.<sup>52</sup> Even when Julian criticizes the Sassanids for pretending to be Persians “because they do not wish to be considered Parthians,” Julian in fact makes a distinction between them and then emphasizes that the Sassanids foolishly wish to pretend that they are the Achaemenids “to evade the truth and to make it appear that they have not revolted from Macedon, but are merely resuming the empire that was theirs of old.”<sup>53</sup> In fact, Julian here simply points out the ridiculousness of Sassanid imperial propaganda since the Sassanids undoubtedly had closer familial ties to the Arsacids than the Achaemenids. Thus, although Julian recognized that the Sassanids were a separate power at

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<sup>50</sup> Id. *Caes.* 324C-D (the italics are mine).

<sup>51</sup> Herodian recognized that the Sassanid Persians had replaced the Arsacids and had conquered the Parthian Empire; however, he saw the conflict between Rome and the Sassanians as a continuation of the conflict with the Parthians. Herodian records a speech of Severus Alexander, in which Severus reinforces the concepts of ongoing hegemonic war and system bipolarity. See Herodian 6.2-3

<sup>52</sup> Wright 1923 (2003): 197 n.4.

<sup>53</sup> Julian *Or.* 2.62-3

odds with the Arsacids, he ultimately considered them a continuation of the Parthians. Note also Rufus Festus' summary of Roman history to the reign of Valens, which emphasizes the military rivalry between "the arms of Babylonia and Rome." Rufus Festus continually uses the terms Parthian and Persian interchangeably.<sup>54</sup> He and many other later writers also viewed the Sassanid Persians as a continuation of the longstanding hegemonic struggle with Rome.<sup>55</sup> Finally, Eutropius and Aurelius Victor, who wrote in the late fourth century CE, also use the terms Parthian and Persian interchangeably. For example, they record that Julian made war upon the Parthians in both of their accounts.<sup>56</sup> This was not a mistake; rather, it was a purposeful rhetorical strategy to connect the conflicts between the Romans and the Sassanids to the famed and longstanding rivalry of Rome and Parthia.<sup>57</sup>

Therefore, it is unsurprising that later Roman writers discussed Roman efforts to end this rivalry and to establish world empire in similar terms to earlier writers. In an account of Severus Alexander's birth, a Roman writer linked the future emperor directly to Alexander the Great on several occasions and argued that he was not only "destined to conquer the Persians," but also to surpass the accomplishments of the Macedonian conqueror.<sup>58</sup> The author also claims that the senate hailed Severus Alexander and exclaimed, "The Parthians and the Persians let an Antoninus [meaning, Severus Alexander] vanquish."<sup>59</sup> Thus, this author also clearly did not

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<sup>54</sup> Ruf. Fest. 14-30

<sup>55</sup> Note Herodian 6.2; *HA Max.* 13.5; *HA Valer.* 4; *HA Gall.* 10; *HA Tac.* 15.2; *HA Prob.* 12.4, 17.4, 18.1; Eutrop. 6.8, 9, 18, 7.5, 6, 9, 8.3, 5, 9.2, 7, 8, 19, 10.8, 15-16; Sid. *Carm.* 2.75-81, 436-57; 5.601; 7.85-6; Orosius 6.18, 7.19, 22, 24, 29-30

<sup>56</sup> Eutrop. 10.16; Aur. Vic. *Epit. Caes.* 43.1-2. See also Arrian Fr. 31; Orosius 7.30

<sup>57</sup> For a recent evaluation of the association of the Parthians with the Achaemenid Persians by Romans during the Republic and Augustan Age, see Shayegan 2011: 332-40. Note also Isaac 2006: Ch. 8; Lerouge 2007.

<sup>58</sup> *HA Sev. Alex.* 5, 13, 25.9, 30.3, 31.5, 35.1-4, 39.1, 62.3, 64.3

<sup>59</sup> Id. 7.5.



confuse the Parthians and the Persians; rather, Severus Alexander was to conquer them both to fulfill his destiny as a Roman emperor and as the next coming of Alexander the Great.<sup>60</sup> Note also the biography of Gordian III, which claims erroneously that “the Roman power occupied the whole of the East” after Gordian’s invasion of Mesopotamia; however, it also mentions that the power of Rome’s eastern rival was “dreaded even in Italy.”<sup>61</sup> Moreover, Rufus Festus records that under Gordian “the rebelling Parthians [that is, the Sassanid Persians] were beaten in great battles.”<sup>62</sup> Further, some Romans exaggerated the success of Carus’ eastern expedition and maintained that the Romans had always been determined to subdue Persia and advance beyond it.<sup>63</sup> Meanwhile, Julian portrays Diocletian as the “ruler of the whole world” after he used all the “forces of the empire” to compel the Sassanid Persians to accept peace terms.<sup>64</sup> Julian also states that Magnentius had plans to conquer Persia and gain access to the wealth of India.<sup>65</sup> Rufus Festus states that Constantine thought it was his last duty to subdue Persia “since the [other] races throughout the world had been pacified.”<sup>66</sup> Moreover, in his early years Julian flattered Constantius II as the equal of Alexander the Great and Cyrus the Great because of Constantius’ war in the East, arguing that Constantius claimed his right to the “empire of the world.”<sup>67</sup> In fact,

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<sup>60</sup> Note also *id.* 50, 55-7, 59.3. Rufus Festus records, “Aurelius [Severus] Alexander, born as if by some destiny for the destruction of the Persian race, took the helm of the Roman imperium while still a youth. He gloriously conquered Xerxes [that is, Ardashir I], noblest king of the [Sassanid] Persians. He had Ulpian, the jurisconsult, as Master of the Secretariat. At Rome, he celebrated with remarkable pomp a triumph over the Persians.” *Ruf. Fest.* 22.1. Note also *Eutrop.* 8.23; *Orosius* 7.18. These accounts wildly exaggerate the successes of Severus Alexander’s Persian war.

<sup>61</sup> *HA Gord.* 26, 34

<sup>62</sup> *Ruf. Fest.* 22.2. Note also *Eutrop.* 9.2; *Orosius* 7.19

<sup>63</sup> *HA Carus* 8.1, 9.1-3. Note also *Ruf. Fest.* 24.2; *Eutrop.* 9.18; *Orosius* 7.24

<sup>64</sup> *Julian Or.* 1.18A-B. See also *Ruf. Fest.* 25; *Eutrop.* 9.25; *Orosius* 7.25

<sup>65</sup> *Julian Or.* 1.35C

<sup>66</sup> *Ruf. Fest.* 26. Note also *Eutrop.* 10.8; *Orosius* 7.28

<sup>67</sup> *Julian Or.* 1.41C-D. Rufus Festus and Eutropius record that Constantius’ war against the Persians was long and difficult. *Ruf. Fest.* 27; *Eutrop.* 10.10. Note also *Orosius* 7.29

Julian himself, as he made his way east to invade Mesopotamia, claimed to be the ruler of the world.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, in another letter, which is perhaps a forgery, Julian claims that he had plans to conquer Persia, India, and Arabia to create a world empire.<sup>69</sup> Finally, Orosius records that, during the reign of Theodosius I, not only did the Gothic tribes submit to Rome “on seeing the bravery and kindness of Theodosius,” but also he states,

At the same time the Persians voluntarily sent ambassadors to Theodosius at Constantinople and humbly begged for peace. These Persians previously had killed Julian and frequently defeated other emperors. Recently they had put Valens to flight and were now venting their satisfaction over this latest victory by offering foul insults. A treaty was then made, the fruits of which the entire East has enjoyed in great tranquility until the present day.<sup>70</sup>

Orosius here offers the sentiment that the Sassanid Persians’ apparent submission to Theodosius helped avenge a long line of Roman failures in the East and brought peace to the world.

Lastly, there are a few passages on the late Roman Empire from the works of Sidonius Apollinaris, who was a Catholic bishop writing in Gaul during the collapse of the Western Roman Empire in the late fourth century CE, worth mentioning. In his panegyric on Emperor Anthemius, Sidonius, first, remarks that Anthemius’ father, Procopius, caused the “Parthian” king and his supporters to tremble with fear in the face of Roman strength and, second, argues that “Babylon” felt more in danger at this time than at the time of Alexander the Great’s conquest of the East.<sup>71</sup> Later in his panegyric on Anthemius, Sidonius created a dialogue between the goddesses Aurora and Roma. After Aurora refers to Roma as the “head of the world” and asks for Roma’s commands, Sidonius has Roma state,

‘I come (cease to be thus perturbed, and be not grievously alarmed), not that the Araxes [River, in Armenia], mastered by me, may have to flow beneath a bridge

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<sup>68</sup> Julian *Epist.* 21.378

<sup>69</sup> *Id.* 81.

<sup>70</sup> Orosius 7.34

<sup>71</sup> Sid. *Carm.* 2.75-81

forced upon it, nor that in the ancient manner the Indian Ganges may be drunk from an Italian helmet, nor that a consul, ranging through the fields of the tiger-haunted Niphates [Mountains in Armenia], home of archers, may triumphantly despoil Artaxata [that is, the Armenian capital] by the Caspian Sea. I do not now beg for the realm of Porus [that is, India], nor that these arms may thrust a battering-ram to shatter Erythrae on the bank of the Hydaspes [River in India]. I am not hurling myself against Bactra, nor are the gates of Semiramis' town [that is, Babylon] laughing to hear our trumpets starting the fight. I crave not the palaces of the Arsacids, nor is word being passed in camp of mine to march on Ctesiphon. All this region we have yielded up to thee. Do I not even thus deserve that thou protect mine old age?'<sup>72</sup>

In this scenario Roma tells Aurora to relax because she has not returned to reclaim Armenia or to conquer the entire Parthian Empire. Although Roma here does not wish to emulate Alexander the Great's conquests, her anticipation of Aurora's fears and her assurances against those fears illustrate that for Sidonius and his audience the concept of the Romans conquering the East and dominating the world remained relevant. Moreover, Sidonius frames Roma's remarks within the context of the longstanding Romano-Parthian rivalry. Sidonius then has Roma end her discussion of various Roman conquests in the East with the plea that Anthemius come to reestablish the Roman Empire in the West.<sup>73</sup> Meanwhile, in his panegyric on Emperor Majorian, Sidonius states, "Grant my prayer: so may Byrsa [that is, the citadel in Carthage] draw breath again through thy victories [over the Vandals]; so may the Parthian flee in good earnest and the Moor go his way white with fear; so may Susa tremble and the Bactrians lay aside their quivers and stand disarmed around thy tribunal!"<sup>74</sup> Thus, here Sidonius returns to the idea of Rome dominating the Parthian Empire. Lastly, in his letter to Consentius, who was a powerful statesman and respected poet, Sidonius writes,

Thus if the world's treaties had been dissolved, your mediation would have made fierce peoples, the Hun, the Sarmatian, the Goth, the Gelonian, offer peace; safe

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<sup>72</sup> Id. 2.436-52.

<sup>73</sup> Id. 2.453-514.

<sup>74</sup> Id. 5.600-3.

in the midst of arms through your sheer goodness you would have penetrated even to the Tungrian and the Vachalis, the Visurgis, the Albis, and the remotest fens of the Franks, and the Sygambrians [all Germanic peoples] would have done you reverence; [meanwhile] the Maeotid sea, the Caspian gates, and Bactra, where the roving Parthians ride, you would have approached so resolute and fearless that the tyrant [that is, the Parthian or in reality Sassanid king] who sits enthroned above his satraps mouthing boasts of his kinship with demigods would have laid aside the arrogance of his pompous court and bowed his crescent tiara before you.<sup>75</sup>

Here again Sidonius returns to the idea of the Romans dominating the East. Thus, we see clearly that the Romans, even while the western portion of the empire disintegrated, believed in an enduring hegemonic rivalry with the Parthians and never abandoned the possibility of ending that rivalry through strength and force. The failure of Crassus and the rivalry that suddenly emerged with the Parthians deeply affected the Roman consciousness for centuries. The drums of Carrhae forever haunted the Romans.

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<sup>75</sup> Id. 23.241-54

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## Appendix 1: Graeco-Roman Literary Sources

Ael. <i>NA</i>	Claudius Aelianus (Roman rhetorician, ca. early third century CE), <i>On the Nature of Animals</i>
Ael. <i>VH</i>	Aelian, <i>Various History</i>
Aesop	Aesop (Greek fabulist, ca. early sixth century BCE). Trans. L. Gibbs, 2002.
Aristides	Publius Aelius Aristides Theodorus (Roman orator and writer of Greek origin, ca. middle to late second century CE). Trans. P. Kosmin, 2014.
<i>Alex. Rom.</i>	<i>The Greek Alexander Romance</i> (Collection of mythical legends, ca. third century CE for earliest version)
Amm. Mar.	Ammianus Marcellinus (Roman soldier and historian, ca. late fourth century CE). Trans. J. C. Rolfe, 1939-50.
Ampelius	Lucius Ampelius (Roman tutor, ca. unknown, perhaps late second or early third century CE)
<i>Anth. Pal.</i>	<i>Anthologia Palatina</i> (collection of Greek poetry, ca. unknown, perhaps tenth century CE)
Appian <i>BC</i>	Appian of Alexandria (Roman historian of Greek origin, ca. middle second century CE), <i>The Civil Wars</i> . Trans. H. White, 1912-1913.
Appian <i>Mithr.</i>	Appian, <i>The Mithridatic Wars</i> . Trans. H. White, 1899.
Appian <i>Syr.</i>	Appian, <i>The Syrian Wars</i> . Trans. H. White, 1899.
Arist. <i>Meteor.</i>	Aristotle (Greek philosopher, ca. middle to late fourth century BCE), <i>Meteorology</i>
Arr. <i>Anab.</i>	Arrian of Nicomedia (Roman general and historian of Greek origin, ca. middle second century CE), <i>Anabasis of Alexander</i>
Arr. <i>Parth.</i>	Arrian, <i>Parthica</i>
Ascon.	Quintus Asconius Pedianus
Ath.	Athenaeus of Naucratis (Roman rhetorician and grammarian of Greek origin, ca. late second century CE). Trans. C. D. Yonge, 1854.



Aug. <i>RG</i>	Augustus (Roman emperor, ca. early first century CE), <i>The Deeds of the Divine Augustus</i>
August. <i>Civ. Dei</i>	Augustine of Hippo (Christian bishop and theologian, ca. early fifth century CE), <i>City of God</i>
Aulus Gell.	Aulus Gellius (Roman grammarian, ca. middle to late second century CE)
Aur. Vic. <i>Caes.</i>	Sextus Aurelius Victor (Roman historian, ca. late fourth century CE), <i>On the Caesars</i>
Aur. Vic. <i>De Viris</i>	Aurelius Victor, <i>On Illustrious Men</i>
Aur. Vic. <i>Epit. Caes.</i>	Aurelius Victor, <i>Epitome of the Caesars</i> (*attributed). Trans. T. M. Banchich, 2009.
Caes. <i>BC</i>	Gaius Julius Caesar (Roman general and statesman, ca. middle first century BCE), <i>The Civil War</i> . Trans. A. G. Peskett, 1914.
Caes. <i>BG</i>	Caesar, <i>The Gallic War</i> . Trans. H. J. Edwards, 1917.
Cat.	Gaius Valerius Catullus (Roman poet, ca. middle first century BCE)
Cic. <i>Ad Att.</i>	Marcus Tullius Cicero (Roman politician and orator, ca. middle first century BCE), <i>Letters to Atticus</i>
Cic. <i>Agr.</i>	Cicero, <i>On the Agrarian Law against Rullus</i>
Cic. <i>ap. Ascon.</i>	Cicero, <i>In the Writings of Asconius</i>
Cic. <i>Brut.</i>	Cicero, <i>Letters to Brutus</i>
Cic. <i>Cat.</i>	Cicero, <i>Against Catiline</i> . Trans. C. D. Yonge, 1856.
Cic. <i>De Div.</i>	Cicero, <i>On Divination</i> . Trans. W. A. Falconer, 1923.
Cic. <i>De Dom.</i>	Cicero, <i>On His House</i> . Trans. C. D. Yonge, 1891.
Cic. <i>Fam.</i>	Cicero, <i>Letters to Friends</i>
Cic. <i>Flac.</i>	Cicero, <i>For Flaccus</i>
Cic. <i>Har.</i>	Cicero, <i>On the Responses of the Haruspices</i>
Cic. <i>Man.</i>	Cicero, <i>For the Manilian Law</i> . Trans. C. D. Yonge, 1856.

Cic. <i>Mil.</i>	Cicero, <i>For Milo</i>
Cic. <i>Mur.</i>	Cicero, <i>For Lucius Murena</i>
Cic. <i>Phil.</i>	Cicero, <i>Philippics</i>
Cic. <i>Pis.</i>	Cicero, <i>Against Piso</i>
Cic. <i>Planc.</i>	Cicero, <i>For Plancius</i>
Cic. <i>Prov.</i>	Cicero, <i>On the Consular Provinces</i>
Cic. <i>Rab. Post.</i>	Cicero, <i>For Rabirius Postumus</i>
Cic. <i>Red. Pop.</i>	Cicero, <i>To the Citizens after his Return</i>
Cic. <i>Red. Sen.</i>	Cicero, <i>In the Senate after his Return</i>
Cic. <i>Rep.</i>	Cicero, <i>On the Republic</i>
Cic. <i>Sest.</i>	Cicero, <i>For Sestius</i> . Trans. C. D. Yonge, 1891.
Cic. <i>Tusc.</i>	Cicero, <i>Tusculan Disputations</i>
Cic. <i>Vat.</i>	Cicero, <i>Against Vatinius</i>
Cic. <i>Ver.</i>	Cicero, <i>Against Verres</i> . Trans. C. D. Yonge, 1903.
Cosmas Indicop.	Cosmas Indicopleustes (Catholic monk and geographer, ca. middle fifth century CE)
Ctesias	Ctesias of Cnidus (Greek historian, ca. early fourth century BCE)
Curt.	Quintus Curtius Rufus (Roman historian, ca. middle first century CE). Trans. J. C. Rolfe, 1946.
Dio	Cassius Dio (Roman historian of Greek origin, ca. early third century CE). Trans. E. Cary, 1914-27.
Diod.	Diodorus Siculus (Greek historian, ca. late first century BCE). Trans. R. M. Geer, 1947; C. B. Welles, 1963; F. R. Walton, 1957-1967.
Dion. Hal.	Dionysius of Halicarnassus (Greek historian, ca. late first century BCE to early first century CE). Trans. E. Cary, 1937.

Eus. <i>Chron.</i>	Eusebius of Caesarea (Roman historian and Christian bishop of Greek origin, ca. early fourth century CE), <i>Chronicle</i> . Trans. A. Smith, 2008.
Eutrop.	Flavius Eutropius (Roman historian, ca. late fourth century CE). Trans. J. S. Watson, 1853a.
Sex. Pomp. Fest.	Sextus Pompeius Festus (Roman grammarian, ca. late second century CE)
Florus	Florus (Roman historian, ca. early second century CE). Trans. E. S. Forster, 1929.
Front. <i>Strat.</i>	Sextus Julius Frontinus (Roman statesman and general, ca. late first century CE), <i>Stratagems</i>
Fronto <i>Prin. Hist.</i>	Marcus Cornelius Fronto (Roman rhetorician, ca. middle second century CE), <i>Principia Historiae</i>
Granius	Granius Licinianus (Roman author, ca. early to middle second century CE)
Herod.	Herodotus (Greek historian, ca. middle fifth century BCE). Trans. A. D. Godley, 1920.
Herodian	Herodian (Roman historian, ca. early third century CE). Trans. E. C. Echols, 1961.
<i>HA Aurel.</i>	<i>Historia Augusta</i> (Roman imperial biography, ca. fourth century CE), <i>Aurelian</i>
<i>HA Carac.</i>	<i>Historia Augusta, Antoninus Caracalla</i>
<i>HA Carus</i>	<i>Historia Augusta, Carus, Carinus, and Numerian</i>
<i>HA Clod.</i>	<i>Historia Augusta, Clodius Albinus</i> . Trans. D. Magie, 1921.
<i>HA Gall.</i>	<i>Historia Augusta, The Two Gallieni</i> . Trans. D. Magie, 1932.
<i>HA Gord.</i>	<i>Historia Augusta, The Three Gordians</i> . Trans. D. Magie, 1924.
<i>HA Macr.</i>	<i>Historia Augusta, Opilius Macrinus</i>
<i>HA Max.</i>	<i>Historia Augusta, Maximus and Balbinus</i>
<i>HA Prob.</i>	<i>Historia Augusta, Probus</i>
<i>HA Sev. Alex.</i>	<i>Historia Augusta, Severus Alexander</i> . Trans. D. Magie, 1924.

<i>HA Tac.</i>	<i>Historia Augusta, Tacitus</i>
<i>HA Tyranni</i>	<i>Historia Augusta, The Thirty Tyrants</i>
<i>HA Valer.</i>	<i>Historia Augusta, The Two Valerians.</i> Trans. D. Magie, 1932.
Hieron. <i>Chron.</i>	Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus or St. Jerome (Roman theologian and historian, ca. early fifth century CE), <i>Chronicle</i>
Hieron. <i>Daniel</i>	Hieronymous or St. Jerome, <i>Commentary on Daniel</i>
Hor. <i>Od.</i>	Horace (Roman poet, ca. late first century BCE), <i>Odes.</i> Trans. J. Conington, 1865.
Isid.	Isidore of Charax (Greek geographer, ca. late first century BCE or early first century CE)
Jo. Antioch.	John of Antioch (Byzantine monk and chronicler, ca. early to middle seventh century CE). Trans. S. Mariev, 2008.
Jo. Lyd. <i>Mag.</i>	Joannes Lydus (Byzantine statesman and writer, ca. middle of the sixth century CE), <i>On the Magistrates of the Roman Commonwealth</i>
Jo. Mal.	John Malalas (Byzantine chronicler, ca. middle to late sixth century CE). Trans. E. Jeffreys, <i>et al.</i> , 1986.
Jos. <i>Ant.</i>	Titus Flavius Josephus (Roman historian of Jewish origin, ca. late first century CE), <i>Antiquities of the Jews.</i> Trans. W. Whiston, 1895.
Jos. <i>Ap.</i>	Josephus, <i>Against Apion.</i> Trans. W. Whiston, 1895.
Jos. <i>Bell.</i>	Josephus, <i>The Jewish Wars.</i> Trans. W. Whiston, 1895.
Julian <i>Caes.</i>	Flavius Claudius Julianus Augustus (Roman emperor and philosopher, ca. middle fourth century CE), <i>The Caesars.</i> Trans. W. C. Wright, 1913.
Julian <i>Epist.</i>	Julian, <i>Letters.</i> Trans. W. C. Wright, 1923.
Julian <i>Frag. Brev.</i>	Julian, <i>The Shorter Fragments.</i> Trans. W. C. Wright, 1923.
Julian <i>Or.</i>	Julian, <i>Orations.</i> Trans. W. C. Wright, 1913.
Justin	Justinus (Roman historian, ca. unknown, perhaps late second century to late fourth century CE), <i>Epitome (of Pompeius Trogus, ca. early first century CE).</i> Trans. J. S. Watson, 1853b.

Juv.	Decimus Junius Juvenalis (Roman poet, ca. late first and early second centuries CE), <i>Satires</i>
Livy <i>Epit.</i>	Titus Livius (Roman historian, ca. early first century CE), <i>Periochae Epitome</i> , ca. fourth century CE. Trans. J. Lendering and A. Smith, 2005.
Livy <i>Obseq.</i>	Livy, <i>Obsequens</i>
Livy	Livy, <i>Ab Urbe Condita</i> . Trans. C. Roberts, 1912.
Lucan <i>Phar.</i>	Marcus Annaeus Lucan (Roman poet, ca. middle first century CE), <i>Pharsalia</i> . Trans. E. Ridley, 1905.
Lucian <i>Dial.</i>	Lucian of Samosata (Roman rhetorician of Greek origin, ca. middle to late second century CE), <i>Dialogues of the Dead</i>
Lucian <i>Hist.</i>	Lucian, <i>How to Write History</i>
Lucian <i>Macr.</i>	Lucian, <i>Long Livers</i> . Trans. A. M. Harmon, 1913.
<i>I-V Maccabees</i>	(Deuterocanonical books of the Bible, ca. late second century BCE), <i>Books of the Maccabees</i> . Trans. H. Cotton, 1832; J. Lendering, 2006.
Manil.	Marcus Manilius (Roman poet, ca. early first century CE)
Memnon	Memnon of Heraclea (Roman historian of Greek origin, ca. unknown, perhaps first or second century CE). Trans. A. Smith, 2004.
Moses	Moses of Chorene (Armenian historian, ca. middle to late fifth century CE). Trans. R. W. Thomson, 1978.
Nicol.	Nicolaus of Damascus (Roman historian of Greek origin, ca. late first century BCE to early first century CE). Trans. C. M. Hall, 1923.
Orosius	Paulus Orosius (Christian historian, ca. early fifth century CE), <i>Seven Books of History against the Pagans</i> . Trans. I. W. Raymond 1936. Note also Defarrari, 1964; A. T. Fear, 2010.
Ovid <i>Ars Am.</i>	Publius Ovidius Naso (Roman poet, ca. early first century CE), <i>The Art of Love</i> . Trans. J. L. May, 1925.
Ovid <i>Fasti</i>	Ovid, <i>Book of Days</i>
Paus.	Pausanias (Roman geographer of Greek origin, ca. middle second century CE)

Petron. <i>Satry.</i>	Gaius Petronius Arbiter (Roman poet, ca. middle first century CE), <i>Satyricon</i>
Phaed.	Phaedrus (Roman fabulist, ca. early to middle first century CE)
Philo <i>Gaius</i>	Philo of Alexandria (Jewish philosopher, ca. early first century CE), <i>On the Embassy to Gaius</i>
Phlegon	Phlegon of Tralles (Roman author of Greek origin, ca. second century CE)
Photius <i>Bib.</i>	Photios of Constantinople (Byzantine church leader and chronicler, ca. middle to late ninth century CE), <i>The Library</i> . Trans. J. H. Freese, 1920.
Plaut. <i>Most.</i>	Plautus (Roman playwright, ca. early second century BCE), <i>Mostellaria</i>
Plaut. <i>Truc.</i>	Plautus, <i>Truculentus</i>
Pliny <i>NH</i>	Gaius Plinius Secundus (Roman writer and natural philosopher, ca. middle first century CE), <i>Natural History</i> . Trans. J. Bostock and H. T. Riley, 1855.
Plin.	Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus (Roman statesman, ca. late first and early second century CE), <i>Letters</i>
Plut. <i>Alex.</i>	Plutarch (Roman biographer and essayist of Greek origin, ca. early second century CE), <i>Life of Alexander</i> . Trans. B. Perrin, 1919a.
Plut. <i>Ant.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Life of Antony</i>
Plut. <i>Apophtheg. Rom.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Sayings of the Romans</i>
Plut. <i>Brut.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Life of Brutus</i>
Plut. <i>Caes.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Life of Caesar</i> . Trans. B. Perrin, 1919a.
Plut. <i>Cato Min.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Life of Cato the Younger</i>
Plut. <i>Cic.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Life of Cicero</i> . Trans. B. Perrin, 1919a.
Plut. <i>Crass.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Life of Crassus</i> . Trans. B. Perrin, 1916a.
Plut. <i>De fort. Rom.</i>	Plutarch, <i>On the Fortune of the Romans</i>
Plut. <i>Demet.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Life of Demetrius</i>

- Plut. *Demet. and Ant.* Plutarch, *Comparison of Demetrius and Antony*
- Plut. *Dion and Brut.* Plutarch, *Comparison of Dion and Brutus*. Trans. B. Perrin, 1918.
- Plut. *Eum. and Sert.* Plutarch, *Comparison of Eumenes and Sertorius*
- Plut. *Luc.* Plutarch, *Life of Lucullus*. Trans. B. Perrin, 1914.
- Plut. *Cim. and Luc.* Plutarch, *Comparison of Cimon and Lucullus*. Trans. B. Perrin, 1914.
- Plut. *Mar.* Plutarch, *Life of Marius*. Trans. B. Perrin, 1920.
- Plut. *Nic.* Plutarch, *Life of Nicias*
- Plut. *Nic. and Crass.* Plutarch, *Comparison of Nicias and Crassus*. Trans. B. Perrin, 1916a.
- Plut. *Pomp.* Plutarch, *Life of Pompey*. Trans. B. Perrin, 1917.
- Plut. *Pyrrh.* Plutarch, *Life of Pyrrhus*. Trans. B. Perrin, 1920.
- Plut. *Ser.* Plutarch, *Life of Sertorius*. Trans. B. Perrin, 1919b.
- Plut. *Sul.* Plutarch, *Life of Sulla*. Trans. B. Perrin, 1916b.
- Plut. *Reg. Imp. Apophtheg.* Plutarch (attributed), *Sayings of Kings and Commanders*. F. C. Babbitt, 1931.
- Polyaen. Polyaeus (Roman military strategist, ca. middle to late second century CE)
- Polyb. Polybius (Roman historian and Greek statesman, ca. middle second century BCE), *The Histories*. Trans. W. R. Paton, 1922-1927.
- Pomp. Mela Pomponius Mela (Roman geographer, ca. early to middle first century CE)
- Posid. Posidonius (Greek philosopher and historian, ca. early first century BCE)
- Procop. *Aedif.* Procopius of Caesarea (Greek historian, ca. middle sixth century CE), *The Buildings of Justinian*
- Procop. *Bello Per.* Procopius, *The Persian War*
- Prop. Sextus Propertius (Roman poet, ca. late first century BCE). Trans. B. Isaac, 2006.
- Ps. Sol. Psalms of Solomon

Ptol. <i>Geog.</i>	Claudius Ptolemy (Roman geographer, mathematician, and astrologer of Greek origin, ca. middle second century CE), <i>Geographical Guidance</i>
Quint.	Marcus Fabius Quintilianus (Roman rhetorician, ca. late first century CE)
Ruf. Fest.	Rufus Festus (Roman historian, ca. late fourth century CE). Trans. T. M. Banchich and J. A. Meka, 2001.
Sall. <i>Jug.</i>	Gaius Sallustius Crispus (Roman historian, ca. middle first century BCE), <i>Jugurthine War</i> . Trans. J. C. Wolfe, 1921.
Sall. <i>Hist.</i>	Sallust, <i>Histories</i> . Trans. P. McGushin, 1992.
Sen. <i>Suas.</i>	Seneca the Elder (Roman rhetorician, ca. early first century CE), <i>Suasoriae</i>
Sen. <i>Clem.</i>	Seneca the Younger (Roman philosopher, ca middle first century CE), <i>On Clemency</i>
Sid. <i>Carm.</i>	Sidonius Apollinaris (Roman bishop and poet, ca. middle to late fifth century CE), <i>Carmina</i> . Trans. W. B. Anderson, 1936.
Solinus	Gaius Julius Solinus (Roman grammarian, ca. early to middle third century CE)
Strabo	Strabo (Roman historian, geographer, and philosopher of Greek origin, ca. late first century BCE to early first century CE). Trans. H. L. Jones, 1917-1932. Note also D. W. Roller, 2014.
Suet. <i>Aug.</i>	Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus (Roman historian, ca. early second century CE), <i>Life of Augustus</i>
Suet. <i>Caes.</i>	Suetonius, <i>Life of Caesar</i> . Trans. J. C. Rolfe, 1914.
Suet. <i>Dom.</i>	Suetonius, <i>Life of Domitian</i>
Suet. <i>Gaius</i>	Suetonius, <i>Life of Gaius (Caligula)</i>
Suet. <i>Nero</i>	Suetonius, <i>Life of Nero</i> . Trans. J. C. Rolfe, 1914.
Suet. <i>Tib.</i>	Suetonius, <i>Life of Tiberius</i>
Suet. <i>Vit.</i>	Suetonius, <i>Life of Vitellius</i> . Trans. J. C. Rolfe, 1914.



Syncellus	George Syncellus (Byzantine chronicler and ecclesiastic, ca. early ninth century CE)
Tac. <i>Agr.</i>	Publius Cornelius Tacitus (Roman statesman and historian, ca. early second century CE), <i>Agricola</i> . A. J. Church and W. J. Brodribb, 1942a.
Tac. <i>Ann.</i>	Tacitus, <i>Annals</i> . Trans. C. H. Moore and J. Jackson, 1925-1937.
Tac. <i>Germ.</i>	Tacitus, <i>Germania</i> . Trans. A. J. Church and W. J. Brodribb, 1942b.
Tac. <i>Hist.</i>	Tacitus, <i>Histories</i> . Trans. C. H. Moore and J. Jackson, 1925-1937.
Thuc.	Thucydides (Greek historian, ca. late fifth century BCE). Trans. C. F. Smith, 1919-1923.
Val. Max.	Valerius Maximus (Roman rhetorician, ca. early first century CE)
Vell. Pat.	Marcus Velleius Paterculus (Roman soldier and historian, ca. early first century CE). Trans. F. W. Shipley, 1924.
Virg. <i>Aen.</i>	Publius Vergilius Maro (Roman poet, ca. late first century BCE), <i>Aeneid</i> . Trans. J. W. Mackail, 1885.
Virg. <i>Geog.</i>	Virgil, <i>Georgics</i>
Xen. <i>Cyrop.</i>	Xenophon (Greek general and historian, ca. middle fourth century BCE), <i>Cyropaedia</i>
Xen. <i>Hell.</i>	Xenophon, <i>Hellenica</i>
Zos.	Zosimus (Byzantine historian, ca. late fifth to early sixth centuries CE), <i>New History</i>

## Appendix 2: The Ancient Literary Trope of Roman Failure in the East: Propaganda and the Stain of Crassus

This study has utilized wide-ranging source analysis and the theoretical framework of Realism to argue that after 53 BCE Rome and Parthia found themselves fighting over a vastly expanded interstate system. It also has argued that it was not until 1 CE that the two sides agreed to recognize the division of this interstate system between their rival hegemonies officially. The consequences of Crassus' invasion were unanticipated and unintended; however, his failure shocked the Roman world and suddenly established the Parthians as a serious rival to Rome. Moreover, the shame the Romans felt after the Battle of Carrhae was considerable. The battle scarred the Roman psyche and severely damaged the Roman ego. Countless writers over numerous centuries used the dead and disgraced Crassus as a convenient scapegoat to help explain Rome's failure in the East. The legitimate causes for the First Romano-Parthian War that Crassus inherited were ignored, and the disaster at Carrhae became a popular moralizing lesson about the consequences of greed, impiety, and hubris.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, we must recognize that most ancient and modern criticism of Crassus for conducting a major campaign against the Parthians is misplaced and results-based.<sup>2</sup> In reality,

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<sup>1</sup> Plutarch finds Crassus' Carrhae campaign a suitable parallel to the disastrous Athenian invasion of Sicily by Nicias. Plut. *Nic.* 1.1 Plutarch refers to the Carrhae campaign as a great blunder. Id. *Crass.* 17.4.

<sup>2</sup> Gareth Sampson made a recent attempt to reevaluate and recover Crassus' reputation. He argues, "For too long, the Parthians have been seen as nothing more than a one dimensional enemy whom Crassus lost to through his own incompetence; and a defeat which had little wider effect. However, such a view is merely the legacy of wounded Roman pride." Sampson 2015: xvi, 56, 79-80, 83-5, 92, 95, 109-10, 169-75. Note also Marshall 1976: 143, 147-8; Ward 1977: 1-4, 290-5; Lerouge 2007: 71. For modern bias toward Crassus, note esp. Drumann 1908: 123; Heitland 1909: 238; Gelzer 1926: 296.7-14; Cary 1954: 366; Ferrero 1962: 91; Meier 1966: 274-5; Grant 1969: 44-5; Cary and Scullard 1975: 243; Keaveney 1982: 423, 428; Sherwin-White 1984: 280-1; Chahin 1987: 242-3; Goldsworthy 2010: 105-6. In a moment of outstanding literary

Crassus was hardly unique or controversial in his conduct during his command prior to his defeat in the East. Several Roman generals by this period had conducted self-fulfilling and self-aggrandizing foreign campaigns that were either in the technical sense illegal or at the very least a generous overstepping of their official commands.<sup>3</sup> The conquests of Pompey and Caesar, just to pick two corresponding examples, are remembered quite differently in our sources mainly because they were vastly successful. Yet in the case of Crassus, not only did he face contemporary opposition from the senate, which did not want another great Roman statesman to gain considerable influence at its further expense, he also earned the harsh criticism of centuries of Roman writers. After all, Roman propaganda had every motive to distance the reputation of Rome from the disaster at Carrhae.

In late 56 BCE, prior to the appointment of Crassus to his Syrian command in 55 BCE, the Romans committed to becoming involved in an ongoing Parthian civil war, which was taking place in Mesopotamia and Media. Aulus Gabinius, the Roman governor of Syria who preceded Crassus, accepted the plea of Mithridates IV—the ousted Parthian king—for support in his civil war against his brother Orodes II.<sup>4</sup> Although, Gabinius never attacked Orodes before Crassus replaced him as governor of Syria, Gabinius' decision officially began the First Romano-

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irony, Plutarch, who almost universally portrays Crassus negatively in the last few years of Crassus' life because of the Carrhae disaster, states in his brief comparison of Crassus to the Athenian general Nicias, "Those who have praise for Alexander's expedition, but blame for that of Crassus, unfairly judge of a beginning by its end." Plut. *Nic. and Crass.* 4.5. Plutarch then continues, "But Crassus made so many blunders that he gave fortune no chance to favor him. We may not therefore wonder that his imbecility succumbed to the power of the Parthians, but rather that it prevailed over the usual good fortune of the Romans." Id. 5.1.

<sup>3</sup> Gnaeus Manlius Vulso (189 BCE), Manius Aquillius (88 BCE), Lucius Licinius Murena (83 BCE), Lucius Licinius Lucullus (69 BCE), Gnaeus Pompey (65-62 BCE), Julius Caesar (58-49 BCE), and Aulus Gabinius (56-55 BCE) are all good examples.

<sup>4</sup> Note Appian *Syr.* 8.51; Dio 39.56.2; Jos. *Ant.* 14.98; id. *Bell.* 1.175; Justin 42.4.1-4. For the discussion of these events, see Chapter 6.

Parthian War. Yet the propagandistic literary tradition surrounding Crassus almost universally ignores the fact that Gabinius already had committed Rome to a Parthian war *before* Crassus' appointment to his Syrian command and disregards that Crassus actually had every reason to pursue this legitimate conflict and end it during his command in the East. Since in reality Crassus inherited an ongoing and legitimate conflict, it was Crassus' failure and particularly his death that made the anti-Crassus propagandistic tradition possible. Let us discuss some of the examples of this tradition in this section so that we may move past this biased and unrealistic depiction of Crassus and his campaign later in our study of the Near East in the 50s BCE.

The Romans in general found military defeat in the East unacceptable and blamed such setbacks on their unfortunate generals. The greedy, violent, or irreligious Roman commander, who was weak of character and who eventually failed in the East, was a common literary trope. For instance, there are the accounts of the failure and death of Manius Aquilius, who was a commander in Asia Minor during the First Mithridatic War, in 88 BCE.<sup>5</sup> Then there are the accounts of Lucius Licinius Lucullus, whom the sources criticize for his inability to end the conflict against Mithridates VI and Tigranes II in the early 60s BCE.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the sources criticize Gabinius for his actions in the East from 57-55 BCE.<sup>7</sup> Note also how the sources offer praise of Publius Ventidius Bassus for his defense of Syria against the Parthians in the early 30s BCE and contrast that praise with criticism of Mark Antony's envy and his military failures in the East only a couple of years later.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, there is the tradition of the ineptitude of the

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<sup>5</sup> Appian *Mithr.* 3.21, 16.112; Pliny 33.14.48, 47.134; Athen. 5.50; Diod. 37.26-7; Vell. Pat. 2.18; Cic. *Man.* 4.11; Cic. *Tusc.* 5.5, 14

<sup>6</sup> Dio 36.2.1-2, 14.4-15.1, 17.1, 46, 37.7.1; Appian *Mithr.* 13.90; Plut. *Luc.* 35-6

<sup>7</sup> Appian *Syr.* 8.51; Cic. *Prov.* 9-11; id. *Pis.* 41-3, 48-52; id. *Sest.* 93

<sup>8</sup> Plut. *Ant.* 30, 33-5, 38-50; Dio 49.19-21; Florus 2.19-20. Note Lerouge 2007: 310-13.

general Lucius Caesennius Paetus in Armenia, which led to the Roman disaster at Rhandeia in 62 CE.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, later Roman writers blamed Hadrian's envy of Trajan's success against the Parthians for his abandonment of Trajan's eastern gains and criticized Hadrian for this weak decision.<sup>10</sup> Later Roman writers also indirectly associated the inappropriate boasting and military shortcomings of Caracalla in the East against the Parthians with Crassus' disaster at Carrhae.<sup>11</sup> Emperor Macrinus, too, found censure for his failures in the East.<sup>12</sup> Further, Herodian considered Severus Alexander's policy in the East weak and unsuccessful, which led Herodian to compare Severus Alexander's missteps to the defeats of Crassus *and* Antony.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, there was criticism of Philip the Arab's arrogance in the East.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, Roman writers found the humiliating defeat of Valerian unacceptable.<sup>15</sup> Roman writers also juxtaposed the shameful actions of Gallienus in the East with the decisive actions of the king of Palmyra, Odaenathus.<sup>16</sup> Then there is Carus, whom Aurelius Victor describes as a successful leader until he became too reckless in the East and ignored divine warnings.<sup>17</sup> Further, there is a tradition of criticizing Julian, whose apparent violent desire for glory overwhelmed him and made him overlook the

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<sup>9</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 15.1-17, 24; Dio 62.21. See also Orosius 7.7

<sup>10</sup> Ruf. Fest. 14.4-5, 20.3; Eutrop. 8.3

<sup>11</sup> *HA Carac.* 6.4-6; Herodian 4.11, 13-14; Orosius 7.18. See also Dio 78.3-5; Ruf. Fest. 21.3; Eutrop. 8.20; Orosius 7.18. Note Hekster and Kaizer 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Dio 78.26.2-27.2; Herodian 4.15; *HA Macr.* 8

<sup>13</sup> Herodian 6.5-6, 8.3

<sup>14</sup> *HA Gord.* 29.1, 30.1

<sup>15</sup> Ruf. Fest. 23.1; Eutrop. 9.7, Aur. Vic. *Epit. Caes.* 32; Orosius 7.22

<sup>16</sup> *HA Gall.* 10.1-3, 12.1, 6, 13.4-5; id. *Tyrranni* 15, 30.6; Orosius 7.22

<sup>17</sup> Aur. Vic. *Caes.* 38. Rufus Festus records that the "Celestial Divinity" became jealous of Carus' success against the Persians and, therefore, struck him down with lightning. Ruf. Fest. 24.2. Note also Eutrop. 9.18-19

“numerous presages through which he was being forbidden to attack Persia.”<sup>18</sup> Finally, there is the almost universal criticism of Jovian’s humiliating eastern concessions to consider.<sup>19</sup> Thus, an important characteristic of the literary tradition of the longstanding Roman rivalry with the Arsacid Parthians and Sassanid Persians was the Romans’ inability to accept their own military and imperial limitations. In this tradition, failure in the East was the result of poor leadership and moral character, not a deficiency of the Roman army or state. Numerous Roman statesmen found their legacies marred by criticism of their shortcomings in the East; however, Crassus became the most popular example.

The initial problem that the image of Crassus faced was that both he and his well-respected son, Publius, died during the Carrhae campaign. Thus, Crassus died without an apologist to take up his cause; however, his subordinate, Cassius, who was highly critical of Crassus’ failure, survived the conflict. It is highly likely that Cassius wrote a report of the campaign that portrayed himself flatteringly and blamed the failure on Crassus.<sup>20</sup> This biased initial framing of the conversation about the Carrhae campaign heavily influenced the later anti-Crassus tradition. For example, Plutarch records,

But now, contrary to their hopes [of swift victory], they [the Roman soldiers] were led to expect a struggle and great peril. Therefore, some of the officers thought that Crassus ought to call a halt and reconsider the whole undertaking. Among these was Cassius, the quaestor. The seers, also, quietly let it become known that the omens for Crassus, which came from their sacrifices, were always bad and inauspicious. But Crassus paid no heed to them, nor to those who advised anything else except to press forward.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Id. *Epit. Caes.* 43.8. See also Amm. Mar. 23.2, 5.4; Ruf. Fest. 28; Eutrop. 10.16; Orosius 7.30. Orosius portrays Theodosius I as an avenger of Julian. Id. 7.34.

<sup>19</sup> Ruf. Fest. 29; Eutrop. 10.17; Amm. Mar. 25.7. Note also Orosius 7.31

<sup>20</sup> Ward 1977: 295 n.25; Sherwin-White 1984: 281.

<sup>21</sup> Plut. *Crass.* 18.4-5. See also id. 17.6, 19.3-6

Here we see that in this portrayal of events Cassius offered good advice, which the impious, careless, and brash Crassus ignored. Plutarch also argues that Cassius gave sound advice that Crassus ignored on several other occasions, and Plutarch portrays Cassius as brave and decisive in battle while Crassus appears mostly weak and hesitant.<sup>22</sup> Yet Plutarch is not the only offender. For example, Appian states, “Thus in a marvelous manner Cassius came into possession of twelve first-rate legions, to whom were added a certain number of Parthian mounted bowmen, who were attracted by the reputation he had acquired among them from the time when, as quaestor to Crassus, he had shown himself to be more skillful than that general.”<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, a simultaneous tradition developed that portrayed Cassius as a savior and avenger of Rome. For instance, Velleius Paterculus argues, “Remnants of the legions were saved by Gaius Cassius—(he was later the perpetrator of a most atrocious crime, but was at that time quaestor)—who not only retained Syria in its allegiance to the Roman people, but succeeded, by a fortunate issue of events, in defeating and putting to rout the Parthians when they crossed its borders.”<sup>24</sup> Moreover, previously in this section Velleius blames Crassus’ failure on his lustfulness for gold and glory and wishes that only Crassus had died in the East because Velleius peculiarly claims Crassus’ death in isolation would have been advantageous to the Roman state.<sup>25</sup>

As touched upon by Velleius, Roman writers especially emphasized the vices of greed and impiety to emphasize the apparent moral weakness of Crassus. Josephus connected Crassus’

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<sup>22</sup> Id. 20.2, 22.4, 23.3, 5, 27.5, 28.3-5. See also Dio 40.26-9. Plutarch also emphasized Crassus’ old age as a handicap. Plut. *Crass.* 17.1-2, 18.1, 19.6

<sup>23</sup> Appian BC 4.59. See also 47.30.3

<sup>24</sup> Vell. Pat. 2.46.4. Note also Cic. *Phil.* 11.14; Plut. *Brut.* 7.3, 43.7-8; Jos. *Ant.* 14.119; id. *Bell.* 1.180-2; Livy *Epit.* 108.2; Orosius 6.13. Justin’s account is slightly less flattering to Cassius. Justin 42.4.5

<sup>25</sup> Vell. Pat. 2.46.2-3

violation of the temple of Jerusalem and his looting of its wealth directly to the destruction of his army and his death.<sup>26</sup> Pliny the Elder writes,

M. Crassus, a member of the same family, used to say that no man was rich, who could not maintain a legion upon his yearly income. He possessed in land two hundred millions of sesterces, being the richest Roman citizen next to Sulla. Nor was even this enough for him, but he must want to possess all the gold of the Parthians too! And yet, although he was the first to become memorable for his opulence—so pleasant is the task of stigmatizing this insatiate cupidity—we have known of many manumitted slaves, since his time, much more wealthy than he ever was.<sup>27</sup>

Meanwhile, Dio records,

But Crassus, desiring for his part to accomplish something that involved glory and at the same time profit, and seeing that no such thing was possible in Syria, where the people themselves were quiet, and those who had formerly warred against the Romans were by reason of their powerlessness causing no disturbance, made a campaign against the Parthians. He had no complaint to bring against them nor had the war been assigned to him; but he heard that they were exceedingly wealthy and expected that Orodes would be easy to capture, because he was but newly established.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, Dio later offers a tale that the Parthians poured gold down Crassus' throat, stating, "And the Parthians, as some say, poured molten gold into his mouth in mockery; for though a man of vast wealth, he had set so great store by money as to pity those who could not support an enrolled legion from their own means, regarding them as poor men."<sup>29</sup> Florus too records this tale, declaring, "The head of Crassus was cut off and with his right hand was taken back to the [Parthian] king and treated with mockery which was not undeserved; for molten gold was poured into his gaping mouth, so that the dead and bloodless flesh of one whose heart had burned with lust for gold was itself burnt with gold."<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, Plutarch states,

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<sup>26</sup> Jos. *Bell.* 1.179; id. *Ant.* 14.105-9, 119.

<sup>27</sup> Pliny *NH* 33.47.134. See also Plut. *Crass.* 1.2, 2.1, 6.5-7, 14.4

<sup>28</sup> Dio 40.12.1

<sup>29</sup> Id. 40.27.3.

<sup>30</sup> Florus 1.46.10



Now my own opinion is that the harm Lucullus did his country through his influence upon others, was greater than the good he did her himself. For his trophies in Armenia, standing on the borders of Parthia, and Tigranocerta, and Nisibis, and the vast wealth brought to Rome from these cities, and the display in his triumph of the captured diadem of Tigranes, incited Crassus to his attack upon Asia; he thought that the Barbarians were spoil and booty, and nothing else. It was not long, however, before he encountered the Parthian arrows, and proved that Lucullus had won his victories, not through the folly and cowardice of his enemies, but through his own daring and ability.<sup>31</sup>

Plutarch here emphasizes Crassus' foolishness and greediness. He also on the one hand finds Lucullus' incomplete command in the East regrettable but on the other hand praises Lucullus' generalship at Crassus' expense, even though Lucullus never encountered the Parthians in combat.<sup>32</sup> By making Crassus blinded by greed, Roman writers could portray this moral failing as the motivation for Crassus' campaign and thus protect the image of Rome.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus emphasizes Crassus' impiety, stating, "But the most remarkable and the greatest instance [of impiety] happened in my time when Licinius Crassus, a man inferior to no commander of his age, led his army against the Parthian nation contrary to the will of Heaven and in contempt of the innumerable omens that opposed his expedition."<sup>33</sup> Florus in his summary of Crassus' Parthian expedition similarly records,

While in the north the Roman people by the hand of Caesar were conquering the Gauls, in the east they received a serious blow from the Parthians. Nor can we complain of fortune; for it was a disaster which admitted of no consolation. Both gods and men were defied by the avarice of the consul Crassus, in coveting the gold of Parthia, and its punishment was the slaughter of eleven legions and the loss of his own life. For Metellus, the tribune of the people, had called down

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<sup>31</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 36.6-7. See also id. *Crass.* 1.2, 2.1-2, 6.5-7, 14.4 For the wealth Lucullus brought back to Rome, note id. *Luc.* 37.3-4.

<sup>32</sup> Note id. 36.5-6. Here we find a good example of Plutarch's rhetorical agenda in his moralistic lives. Plutarch meant for Lucullus to be a hero and for Crassus to be a villain. At the end of his depiction of Lucullus, Plutarch exaggerates his victory over Mithridates VI and Tigranes II and concludes that the gods considered him "noble" and "god-like." Plut. *Cim. and Luc.* 3.3-6. This certainly contrasts with the depiction of Crassus as impious and cursed by the gods. Note id. *Nic. and Crass.* 5.2

<sup>33</sup> Dion. Hal. 2.6.4. See also Val. Max. 1.6.11

terrible curses on the general as he was leaving Rome; and after the army had passed Zeugma, the Euphrates swallowed up the standards, which were swept away by its swirling eddies; and when Crassus had pitched his camp at Nicephorium, ambassadors arrived from King Orodes with a message bidding him remember the treaties made with Pompeius and Sulla. Crassus, who coveted the royal treasures, answered not a word that had any semblance of justice, but merely said that he would give his reply at Seleucia. The gods, therefore, who punish those who violate treaties, did not fail to support either the craft or the valor of our enemies.<sup>34</sup>

Appian also blends the two vices of greed and impiety together in his account, arguing,

Crassus took Syria and the adjacent country because he wanted a war with the Parthians, which he thought would be easy as well as glorious and profitable. But when he took his departure from the city there were many unfavorable omens, and the tribunes forbade the war against the Parthians, who had done no wrong to the Romans. As he would not obey, they invoked public imprecations on him, which Crassus disregarded; wherefore he perished in Parthia, together with his son of the same name and his army, not quite 10,000 of whom, out of 100,000, escaped to Syria. The disaster of Crassus will be described in my Parthian history.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, the tradition blamed the cause of the war on Crassus' greed and blamed the result of the war on his impiety.

Unsurprisingly, Plutarch offers the most dramatic account of Crassus departing Rome on his way to Syria. Plutarch claims that, when the command of Syria fell to Crassus by lot, Crassus' personality suddenly changed as he began to fantasize eagerly about conquering the entire Parthian Empire.<sup>36</sup> Plutarch also claims that, because Crassus had no authority or cause for war against the Parthians, Gaius Ateius Capito planned to block his departure from Rome.<sup>37</sup>

Plutarch states,

But Ateius, on meeting Crassus, at first tried to stop him with words, and protested against his advance; then he bade his attendant seize the person of Crassus and detain him. And when the other tribunes would not permit this, the attendant released Crassus, but Ateius ran on ahead to the city gate, placed there a

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<sup>34</sup> Florus 1.46.1-6

<sup>35</sup> Appian *BC* 2.18

<sup>36</sup> Plut. *Crass.* 16.1-2

<sup>37</sup> *Id.* 16.3.

blazing brazier, and when Crassus came up, cast incense and libations upon it, and invoked curses which were dreadful and terrifying in themselves, and were reinforced by sundry strange and dreadful gods whom he summoned and called by name. The Romans say that these mysterious and ancient curses have such power that no one involved in them ever escapes, and misfortune falls also upon the one who utters them, wherefore they are not employed at random nor by many. And accordingly at this time they found fault with Ateius because it was for the city's sake that he was angered at Crassus, and yet he had involved the city in curses which awakened much superstitious terror.<sup>38</sup>

Plutarch's account is almost entirely theatrical fiction, which blames Crassus' delusions and desires for war and which has Crassus leave Rome under a cloud of ill foreboding. Meanwhile, Cicero, who was a contemporary of these events, offers a much less theatrical version. He records that his brother Quintus said,

'We see what happened to Marcus Crassus when he ignored the announcement of unfavorable omens. It was on the charge of having on this occasion falsified the auspices that Gaius Ateius, an honorable man and a distinguished citizen, was, on insufficient evidence, stigmatized by the then censor Appius, who was your associate in the augural college, and an able one too, as I have often heard you say. I grant you that in pursuing the course he did Appius was within his rights as a censor, if, in his judgement, Ateius had announced a fraudulent augury. But he showed no capacity whatever as an augur in holding Ateius responsible for that awful disaster which befell the Roman people [at Carrhae]. Had this been the cause then the fault would not have been with Ateius, who made the announcement that the augury was unfavorable, but with Crassus, who disobeyed it; for the issue proved that the announcement was true, as this same augur and censor admits. But even if the augury had been false it could not have been the cause of the disaster; for unfavorable auguries—and the same may be said of auspices, omens, and all other signs—are not the causes of what follows: they merely foretell what will occur unless precautions are taken. Therefore Ateius, by his announcement, did not create the cause of the disaster; but having observed the sign he simply advised Crassus what the result would be if the warning was ignored. It follows, then, that the announcement by Ateius of the unfavorable augury had no effect; or if it did, as Appius thinks, then the sin is not in him who gave the warning, but in him who disregarded it.'<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Id. 16.4-5. Plutarch found Crassus' role in death equally theatrical. Note id. 33; See also Polyæn. 7.41. Pliny also argues that Crassus ignored a terrible omen. Pliny 15.21

<sup>39</sup> Cic. *De Div.* 1.29-30

Quintus here still blames the disaster at Carrhae entirely upon Crassus for ignoring the “unfavorable augury;” however, there is no mention here or in Cicero’s letter that discusses Crassus’ departure from Rome of a public standoff between Ateius and Crassus at the gates of Rome. This led Sampson to conclude recently, “Again we see that the later ancient sources were all too eager to add dramatic elements to the story, especially one that made the defeat seem inevitable.”<sup>40</sup> Indeed, the anti-Crassus tradition is quite dramatic, even in its early stage soon after the battle.

Cicero’s recorded discussion with his brother in 44 BCE is our earliest surviving evidence that the Romans used Crassus’ alleged impiety to discredit Crassus and to explain his failure, and in fact, the Romans quickly accepted the inevitability of Crassus’ failure because of his moral failings. Cicero states, “Passing by men of earlier day, let us take Marcus Crassus. What advantage, pray, do you think it would have been to him, when he was at the very summit of power and wealth, to know that he was destined to perish beyond the Euphrates in shame and dishonor, after his son had been killed and his own army had been destroyed?”<sup>41</sup> Moreover, Dio claims much later that after Crassus ignored innumerable bad omens his soldiers despaired and

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<sup>40</sup> Sampson 2015: 97.

<sup>41</sup> Cic. *De Div.* 2.22. Soon after Cicero argues that Crassus surely would not have crossed the Euphrates if he knew the future. Id. 2.24. Later, Cicero remarks “When Marcus Crassus was embarking his army at Brundisium a man who was selling Caunian figs at the harbor, repeatedly cried out ‘Cauneas, Cauneas.’ Let us say, if you will, that this was a warning to Crassus to bid him ‘Beware of going,’ and that if he had obeyed the omen he would not have perished. But if we are going to accept chance utterances of this kind as omens, we had better look out when we stumble, or break a shoe-string, or sneeze!” Id. 2.84. Cicero concludes, “I recall a multitude of prophecies which the Chaldeans made to Pompey, to Crassus and even to Caesar himself (now lately deceased), to the effect that no one of them would die except in old age, at home and in great glory. Hence it would seem very strange to me should anyone, especially at this time, believe in men whose predictions he sees disproved every day by actual results.” Id. 2.99. Thus, Cicero casts serious doubts upon the reliability of divination; however, his arguments demonstrate that some Romans believed that Crassus had been warned by divinity and that by ignoring these warnings Crassus had sealed his fate.

feared certain death, concluding, “At any rate, in all else that they did also, as if predestined to ruin by some divinity, they were helpless in both mind and body.”<sup>42</sup> By focusing on Crassus’ impiety and placing the defeat in the hands of destiny, the Romans could try to rid themselves of responsibility for the inevitable disaster at Carrhae. Thus, we see how total censure of Crassus’ moral character helped free the Romans psychologically from his military failure.

Such brutal criticism of Crassus demonstrates the extremeness of the anti-Crassus propagandistic tradition, which remained popular into late antiquity and beyond.<sup>43</sup> For instance, Julian states, “I need not now remind you of ancient history, of Antony and Crassus, who were generals with the fullest powers, or tell how after long-continued dangers we succeeded in wiping out the disgrace they incurred, and how many a prudent general retrieved their blunders.”<sup>44</sup> Meanwhile, Eutropius remarks,

About the same time, in the six hundred and ninety-seventh year from the foundation of the city, Marcus Licinius Crassus, the colleague of Cnaeus Pompey the Great in his second consulship, was sent against the Parthians; and having engaged the enemy near Carrhae, contrary to the omens and auspices, was defeated by Surena, the general of king Orodes, and at last killed, together with his son, a most noble and excellent young man. The remains of the army were saved by Caius Cassius the quaestor, who, with singular courage, so ably retrieved the ruined fortune of the Romans, that, in his retreat over the Euphrates, he defeated the Persians [that is, the Parthians] in several battles.<sup>45</sup>

Although Eutropius appears to be one of the only Roman writers who acknowledges that Crassus “was sent against the Parthians (*contra Parthos missus est*),” he still blames Crassus’ impiety

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<sup>42</sup> Dio 40.17-19

<sup>43</sup> Note the Byzantine chronicler George Syncellus’ discussion of Crassus’ failure and Cassius’ bravery in his ninth century CE work, *The Chronography*. Note also Zos. 3.23.2; Hieron. *Chron.* 181

<sup>44</sup> Julian *Or.* 1.17D

<sup>45</sup> Eutrop. 6.18

and stubbornness for his failure and presents Cassius as an avenging savior.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, Rufus Festus records,

Crassus himself—when, after he had been enticed to a parlay, he was nearly captured alive—had escaped while his tribunes resisted, and, seeking flight, was killed. His severed head, with his right hand, were borne to the [Parthian] king and then maintained for sport, so that molten gold might be poured into his throat: to wit, in order that he who, burning with lust for plunder, after he had been asked by the king to grant peace, had declined, flames of gold might consume his remains even after he perished. Lucius Cassius, Crassus' quaestor, a vigorous man, gathered the remains of the scattered army. Against the Persians [that is, the Parthians], who were rushing toward Syria, he thrice contended in most admirable fashion and, after they had been repelled across the Euphrates, he ravaged them.<sup>47</sup>

Here Rufus Festus emphasizes Crassus perishing while trying to flee and stresses the punishment of Crassus even after death for his reckless aggression and avarice. Meanwhile, once again Cassius appears is an avenging savior. Finally, note Orosius, who in the early fifth century CE wrote,

In the six hundred and ninety-seventh year of the City, Crassus, who shared the consulship with Pompey, obtained by lot the command against the Parthians. He was a man of insatiable cupidity. When he heard of the riches of the Temple at Jerusalem that Pompey had left untouched, he turned aside to Palestine and came to Jerusalem, where he entered the Temple and plundered its treasures. Thence directing his course to Parthia he requisitioned auxiliaries from the allied states, wherever his march led, and exacted tribute. As soon as he had crossed the Euphrates, he met Vageses, who had been sent as an envoy by Orodes, the king of the Parthians. Vageses violently reproached the Roman for being led by avarice to cross the Euphrates contrary to the terms of the treaty of Lucullus and Pompey. He predicted that on account of this he would soon be burdened with Chinese iron instead of with Parthian gold.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Note also Vell. Pat. 2.46.2; Plut. *Pomp.* 52.3; Livy *Epit.* 105.3; Orosius 6.13. One Roman writer wrote, “The senate that gave laws to the tribes of the East, and the senate that dared to attack the Parthians—and would have conquered them, too, had not the fortune of Rome just then assigned our army so covetous a leader [Crassus].” *HA Clod.* 13.6. This Roman author here puts forth the argument that the Roman Senate planned to conquer the Parthians. Therefore, the war was not Crassus' idea; however, his covetousness turned the war into a disaster and ended Rome's ability to subdue the Parthians.

<sup>47</sup> Ruf. Fest. 17.2-4

<sup>48</sup> Orosius 6.13

Here again, according to Orosius, Crassus' lust for riches drove him to war and blinded him to danger. Orosius soon after concludes,

When this disaster of the Romans became known, many provinces of the East would have withdrawn from the alliance and protection of the Roman people, had not Cassius, after collecting a few of the soldiers who had fled, exercised exceptional spirit, courage, and moderation, and thus restrained Syria, which was then in revolt. Cassius killed Antiochus and defeated his mighty forces in a battle. He also fought the Parthians who had been dispatched by Orodes into Syria and who had recently entered Antioch. He drove them off and slew their leader, Osages.<sup>49</sup>

Orosius here exaggerates the dangers facing Cassius and his accomplishments to uphold the tradition of Cassius saving the Romans in the East and avenging Crassus' blunder. Thus, we find ample evidence of a dramatic and propagandistic literary tradition that developed quickly and had a lasting influence concerning the role of Cassius and Crassus in the Carrhae campaign, where, although they were both Romans fighting the Parthians, Cassius emerged as the protagonist and Crassus emerged as the antagonist.<sup>50</sup> The Roman writers made it abundantly clear with whom the Roman audience was supposed to empathize and support.

Augustan Age writers especially villainized Crassus in order to reinforce Augustan imperial propaganda concerning the new Roman relationship with the Parthians, which claimed that Augustus too was an avenger of Crassus. For example, although he is a much later writer, Dio illustrates well how Augustus put this propaganda into action during his reign. Dio records,

Meanwhile Phraates [IV], fearing that Augustus would lead an expedition against him because he had not yet performed any of his engagements, sent back to him the [Roman] standards and all the captives, with the exception of a few who in shame had destroyed themselves or, eluding detection, remained in the country. Augustus received them as if he had conquered the Parthian [king] in a war; for he took great pride in the achievement, declaring that he had recovered without a struggle what had formerly been lost in battle. Indeed, in honor of this success he

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Note also *V Maccabees* 41.16-17, which dubiously claims Cassius avenged Crassus' defeat by reclaiming Mesopotamia.

commanded that sacrifices be decreed and likewise a temple to Mars Ultor [that is, Mars the Avenger] on the Capitol, in imitation of that of Jupiter Feretrius [that is, Jupiter of Retribution], in which to dedicate the standards; and he himself carried out both decrees. Moreover, he rode into the city on horseback and was honored with a triumphal arch.<sup>51</sup>

Augustus was a masterful statesman, who used his imperial propaganda to manipulate the public perception of his nonviolent eastern policy against the Parthians. Augustus eagerly portrayed his diplomatic victory over Phraates IV as a military victory over the Parthians, and it is telling that Augustus associated the returned standards of Crassus with his new temple to Mars the Avenger. Further, Augustus' most famous surviving statue, the *Augustus of Prima Porta*, portrays a youthful Augustus as a victorious *imperator* or commander in armor and military clothing, holding a consular baton and raising his right hand to address his triumphant soldiers, while Cupid, who is riding a dolphin and attempting to tug at Augustus' toga, illustrates Augustus' alleged familial connection to Venus.<sup>52</sup> Augustus' breastplate contains personifications of various defeated peoples and of the gods of the sky and earth. Yet the centerpiece of his breastplate is an image of a bearded Parthian, perhaps Phraates IV, surrendering a Roman legionary eagle to a Roman commander, perhaps Tiberius, who received the standards, or the personification of Mars Ultor, whom Augustus favored, or the personification of Roma, flanked by an aggressive hound. Therefore, this statue was supposed to be a very public visual representation of Augustus' "triumph" in the East over the Parthians and the establishment of

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<sup>51</sup> Dio 54.8.1-3. Note also Strabo 6.4.2, 16.1.28; Vell. Pat. 2.91.1; Suet. *Tib.* 9.1; Eutrop. 7.9; Orosius 6.21

<sup>52</sup> Discovered in 1863 CE in the Villa of Livia at Prima Porta, most scholars believe the statue is a posthumous copy of a bronze original, ca. 20 BCE. Either Augustus' wife, Livia, or his successor, Tiberius, likely commissioned the copy after Augustus' death since, although he is portrayed in military dress, he has the bare feet of a god instead of military boots. It also is unclear if the details of the breastplate accompanied the bronze original or were a later addition. Note Woodford 1982: 85; Zanker 1988: 188; Kleiner 2010: 68-9.



Roman hegemony and the *pax Romana* throughout the entire world.<sup>53</sup> The *Augustus of Prima Porta* is an example of a wider artistic effort during the Augustan Age to utilize imperial propaganda to shape the imagery of the Parthians in order to mask Rome's lack of military success in the East and the limits of its hegemony.<sup>54</sup>

An important part of this propagandistic imperial message was the humiliating failure of Crassus. Augustan Age writers helped reinforce the image of Augustus' triumph by portraying Crassus negatively. Quintus Dellius, who had been a subordinate of Cassius and Mark Antony but who betrayed Antony before the Battle of Actium and forged a close relationship with Augustus, wrote a history on the Romano-Parthian conflict during Augustus' reign that became an important source for later writers, such as Strabo and Plutarch.<sup>55</sup> From Dellius' background and from the tone of Plutarch's narrative, it is highly likely that Dellius was critical of Crassus. Meanwhile, Ovid, Propertius, and Horace found Crassus' defeat disgraceful.<sup>56</sup> Virgil longed for the Romans "to reclaim their standards from the Parthian [king]."<sup>57</sup> Moreover, Ovid writes, "But lo, Caesar [Augustus] makes ready to complete the conquest of the world! Ye far-off countries of the East, to our laws shall ye submit; and you, ye arrogant Parthians, shall be punished as ye deserve. Rejoice, shades of Crassus, and you, ye Roman Eagles, ashamed at your long sojourn in barbarian hands, be of good cheer, your avenger is at hand."<sup>58</sup> Unsurprisingly, an emphasis of the Augustan Age poets is that Augustus would right the wrong of Crassus.

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<sup>53</sup> Note Fittschen 1991; Simon 1991; Boschung 1993: 179-81; Rose 2005, Squire 2013. For Augustus and the rhetoric of imperial peace, see Fuhrmann 2012: Ch. 4.

<sup>54</sup> Note Schneider 2007.

<sup>55</sup> Strabo 11.13.3; Plut. *Ant.* 25, 59; Dio 49.39, 50.13.8, 23; Jos. *Ant.* 14.394; id. *Bell.* 1.290; Sen. *Suas.* 1.7; Sen. *Clem.* 1.10.1. Note also Adcock 1966: 59; Sampson 2015: 189.

<sup>56</sup> Ovid *Fasti* 5.583-5; Prop. 2.10.13-14, 4.7.83-5; Hor. *Odes* 3.5.5-12

<sup>57</sup> Virg. *Aen.* 7.601-6

<sup>58</sup> Ovid *Ars Am.* 1.177-81

The Roman writers who followed shared similar feelings of embarrassment, frustration, and anger toward Crassus. Lucan, writing in the middle of the first century CE, blamed Crassus for seeking the Parthian war against the will of Rome.<sup>59</sup> He also blamed Crassus' death for the civil war between Caesar and Pompey.<sup>60</sup> He states,

Concord, on discord based, brief time endured, unwelcome to the rivals; and alone Crassus delayed the advent of the war. Like to the slender neck that separates the seas of Graecia: should it be engulfed then would the Ionian and Aegean mains break each on other: thus when Crassus fell, who held apart the chiefs [that is, Caesar and Pompey], in piteous death, and stained Assyria's plains with Latin blood, defeat in Parthia loosed the war in Rome. More in that victory than ye thought was won, ye sons of Arsaces [the Parthians]; your conquered foes took at your hands the rage of civil strife. The mighty realm that earth and sea contained, to which all peoples bowed, split by the sword, could not find space for two [leaders].<sup>61</sup>

Lucan was in fact so upset by the humiliation of Crassus' defeat and the unwillingness of the Romans to punish the Parthians that he criticized Caesar and Pompey for fighting each other instead of avenging the defeat at Carrhae.<sup>62</sup> Lucan writes with frustration,

And the fates may seem to smile on Parthia; for the spouse of [Publius] Crassus [that is, Cornelia, whom then married Pompey], captive, shall to him [Orodes II] be brought [by Pompey, who considered fleeing to Parthia after Pharsalus in 48 BCE] as spoil of former conquest. If the wound dealt in that fell defeat in eastern lands still stirs thy heart, then double is the shame first to have waged the war upon ourselves, then ask the foe for succor. For what blame can rest on thee or Caesar worse than this, that in the clash of conflict ye forgot for Crassus' slaughtered troops the vengeance due? First, united should Rome have poured her captains [Pompey and Caesar] upon the Mede [that is, Orodes II], and [been joined by] the [Roman] troops who guard the northern frontier from the Dacian hordes; and all her legions should have left the Rhine free to the Teutons [that is, the Germanic tribes], till the Parthian dead were piled in heaps upon the sands that hide our heroes slain; and haughty Babylon lay at her victor's feet. To this foul peace [of Augustus] we pray an end; and if Thessalia's day [that is, the Battle of Pharsalus] has closed our [civil] warfare, let the conqueror [Caesar] march straight on our Parthian foe. Then should this heart, [and] then only, leap at

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<sup>59</sup> Lucan *Phar.* 3.126

<sup>60</sup> Note also Plut. *Pomp.* 53.6-7; id. *Caes.* 28.1; Orosius 6.14

<sup>61</sup> Lucan *Phar.* 1.98-114. See also id. 3.265.

<sup>62</sup> Id. 1.11, 2.526-54, 7.431, 8.91, 302, 327, 358, 394.

Caesar's triumph won. Go thou and pass Araxes' chilly stream on this thine errand; and the mournful [Roman] ghost pierced by the Scythian shaft [that is, Parthian arrows] shall greet thee thus: 'Dost thou, to whom our wandering shades have looked for vengeance and for war, seek from the foe a treaty and a peace?' And there profuse shall meet thee sad memorials of the rout: Red is yon wall where passed their headless trunks; Euphrates here engulfed them, Tigris there cast up to perish. Gaze on such array, and thou canst supplicate at Caesar's feet in mid Thessalia seated.<sup>63</sup>

Thus, Lucan contended quite passionately that Rome should have avoided civil war and ignored all other enemies of the Roman state in order to strike at the Parthians with the full might of the Roman army and, through slaughter and conquest, regained Rome's dignity.<sup>64</sup> Lucan especially believed it had been Caesar's duty to punish the Parthians.<sup>65</sup> Lucan interestingly even chastises Augustus' peace with Parthia and demonstrates that some Romans found Augustus' nonviolent settlement with the Parthians unacceptable.

Clearly, later Romans wanted someone to avenge Carrhae and thought this mission was important; however, since Caesar died just before leaving Rome to fight the Parthians, since Antony's Parthian campaign also was a disaster, and since Augustus and his immediate successors avoided hegemonic war against Parthia, later Romans had to try to exaggerate the efforts of the Romans against the Parthians and to praise Roman "heroes" for punishing the

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<sup>63</sup> Id. 8.408-41. Note Plut. *Pomp.* 55.1-2, 74.3, 76.6

<sup>64</sup> Dio records that during Augustus' reign the conflict with Parthia overshadowed concerns with the Germanic tribes. Dio 55.10a.3. Tacitus, who had a clear rhetorical incentive to exaggerate the threat of the Germanic tribes to Rome, argues that the Germans were a more worrisome and fearsome enemy than the Parthians because "German independence truly is fiercer than the despotism of an Arsaces." Tac. *Germ.* 37. See also id. *Ann.* 13.54.

<sup>65</sup> Justin records that the Parthians believed Caesar planned to avenge Crassus. "Not long after these occurrences the civil war among the Romans, between Caesar and Pompeius, broke out, in which the Parthians took the side of Pompeius, both from the friendship that they had formed with him in the Mithridatic war, and because of the death of Crassus, whose son they understood to be of Caesar's party, and supposed that, if Caesar were victorious, he would avenge his father's fate." Justin 42.4.6

Parthians.<sup>66</sup> This helped create the tradition about Cassius becoming a savior hero, and it also made Ventidius a savior hero. In fact, Pliny the Elder claims, “Fortune was pleased that P. Ventidius alone should triumph over the Parthians,” and many other Romans agreed.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, late antique writers continued to praise emperors who avenged Roman military failures in the East. For example, a Roman biographer of Severus Alexander records that the emperor told the senate,

‘We have captured many of the Persians and have sold them into slavery, and we have re-conquered the lands which lie between the rivers [that is, the Euphrates and Tigris], those of Mesopotamia I mean, abandoned by that filthy monster [Elagabalus]. Artaxerxes [that is, Ardashir I], the most powerful of kings, in fact as well as in name, we have routed and driven from the field, so that the land of the Persians saw him in full flight, and *where once our ensigns were led away in triumph, there the king himself fled apace leaving his own standards.*’<sup>68</sup>

Although this is undeniably propaganda, here the Roman message was that Severus Alexander had redeemed Crassus’ failure.

Carrhae quickly became a Roman trigger that elicited the image of Crassus’ failure and the disgrace that it brought upon the Roman state. For instance, Pliny the Elder in his description of the cities near the Euphrates refers to the city as “Carrhae, notorious for the disaster of

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<sup>66</sup> “But while Caesar was thus engaged, a longing came over all the Romans alike to avenge Crassus and those who had perished with him, and they felt some hope of subjugating the Parthians then, if ever. They unanimously voted the command of the war to Caesar, and made ample provision for it.” Dio 43.51.1. “[Caesar] conceived the idea of a long campaign against the Getae and the Parthians. The Getae, a hardy, warlike, and neighboring nation, were to be attacked first. The Parthians were to be punished for their perfidy toward Crassus. He sent across the Adriatic in advance sixteen legions of foot and 10,000 horse.” Appian *BC* 2.110 Appian also argues that it was Antony’s duty to avenge Crassus. Id. 5.65. See also Dio 49.24.5. Antony tried to demand the lost standards and capture soldiers of Crassus back from the Parthians. Plut. *Ant.* 37.1-3. See also 46.3-4.

<sup>67</sup> Pliny *NH* 7.43.135; Justin 42.4.7-10; Vell. Pat. 2.78.1; Plut. *Ant.* 33.4, 34.1-5; Dio 43.4-5, 49.19-21; Tac. *Hist.* 5.9; id. *Germ.* 37; Strabo 16.2.8; Jos. *Bell.* 1.288-91, 309, 317; id. *Ant.* 14.392-5, 434; Florus 2.19.5-7; Livy *Epit.* 127.4, 128.2; Ruf. Fest. 18; Eutrop. 7.5; Sid. Carm. 2.453-7; Orosius 6.18; Juv. 7.199-200

<sup>68</sup> HA Sev. Alex. 56.5-7 (italics are mine).

Crassus.”<sup>69</sup> Pliny illustrates that later Romans associated Carrhae directly with Crassus’ defeat. Therefore, Roman writers understood well what image the mention of Carrhae would provoke in their reader. In fact, the embarrassing Roman defeat at Carrhae remained so iconic even in late antiquity that authors often associated the city with later Roman invasions of Mesopotamia. For instance, there is a propagandistic account of Emperor Gordian III winning repeated battles against the Sassanid Persians, taking Carrhae, and establishing Roman dominance in the East.<sup>70</sup> Another account states, “Now at once he [Saturninus Odaenathus, king of the Palmyrenes] proclaimed a war on the [Sassanid] Persians to exact for Valerian the vengeance neglected by Valerian’s son. He immediately occupied Nisibis and Carrhae, the people of which surrendered, reviling Gallienus.”<sup>71</sup> Here the author criticizes Gallienus for his failure to avenge his father and the reputation of Rome. Instead, in this passage an eastern rival of Gallienus brings further shame upon Gallienus by avenging the defeat of Valerian and indirectly, through the mention of the conquest of Carrhae, the defeat of Crassus.<sup>72</sup> Note also that immediately preceding this passage the author criticizes the ridiculousness of a triumph of Gallienus, which featured men dressed as Persian captives in order to fool the crowd. The author records,

One well-known instance of jesting, however, must not be omitted. As a band of Persians, supposed to be captives, was being led along in the procession (such an absurdity!), certain wits mingled with them and most carefully scrutinized all, examining with open-mouthed astonishment the features of every one; and when asked what they meant by that sagacious investigation, they replied, ‘We are searching for the Emperor’s father [Valerian].’<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Pliny *NH* 5.21.86. My translation.

<sup>70</sup> *HA Gord.* 26

<sup>71</sup> *HA Gall.* 10.1-3. See also id. 12-13. Aurelian also was praised for avenging the defeat of Valerian. *HA Aurel.* 41.9

<sup>72</sup> Rufus Festus also criticizes Gallienus for his inaction, calls it “shameful” that Odaenathus had to defeat the Persians, and labels Odaenathus an “avenger of Roman imperium” for his victories. *Ruf. Fest.* 23.2. Note also Eutrop. 9.10

<sup>73</sup> *HA Gall.* 7.4-9.8

The shameful defeat of Valerian, like the original disgrace of Crassus, grabbed the attention of Roman writers and audiences, who desired Rome's emperors to avenge these military embarrassments in the East by force of arms.<sup>74</sup> Finally, Sidonius Apollinaris offers an interesting late antique Roman perspective on the Crassus disaster and its implications for later Romans. In his dialogue between the goddesses Aurora and Roma in his panegyric on Anthemius, Sidonius has Roma assure Aurora that she has not returned to the East to conquer Armenia or the entire Parthian Empire.<sup>75</sup> Roma continues, "All that lies between the Euphrates and Tigris thou hast long possessed alone; yet that possession was bought by me with the blood of Crassus; at Carrhae I paid down the price; nor did I remain unavenged nor lose the land thus bought; if my word is not good, Sapor [that is, Pacorus, son of Orodes II] hath proved it, slain by Ventidius."<sup>76</sup> Sidonius here has the embodiment of Rome argue that Crassus' defeat purchased northern Mesopotamia for the Romans with blood and that his death required retaliation.

Thus, we find that the propagandistic literary tradition, which sought to destroy Crassus' reputation because of his humiliating destruction at the hands of the Parthians, captured the attention of the Romans for centuries. Although the Romans clearly had several good reasons to distance themselves from the disaster at Carrhae, the seemingly universal bias of the sources against Crassus unfortunately still in many ways dominates our understanding of Crassus' image and legacy. Undoubtedly, Crassus' campaign was a catastrophe, and Crassus had a part to play in this; however, we must give the Parthians their due and stop blaming the defeat entirely on the alleged ineptitude of Crassus. It was one of the goals of this study to demonstrate that Crassus

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<sup>74</sup> Rufus Festus calls Valerian's defeat "disgusting." Ruf. Fest. 23.1

<sup>75</sup> Sid. *Carm.* 2.436-52

<sup>76</sup> Id. 2.453-7; See also id. 9.250-2.

acted justifiably and predictably from 55-53 BCE and that Parthian military innovations and agency played the greatest role in their success against “western” opponents.

## Vita

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