

# **The First Meeting of the Roman and Parthian Empires—Geopolitical Context and Consequences**

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# Declaration

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# Abstract

This thesis focuses upon the first meeting between the Roman and Parthian Empires in the first decade of the First Century BC. It places that meeting within its wider geopolitical context and considers its consequences for Romano-Parthian relations over the following decade.

Near Eastern history of this period is confused, relying upon sparse textual evidence; as a consequence it is known as the Parthian Dark Age. This study addresses this shortfall in our evidence by reassessing the translations of Classical sources, employing Babylonian cuneiform texts, interpreting archaeological research and reinterpreting numismatic evidence.

This thesis argues that the early development of Romano-Parthian relations was a product of wider geopolitical forces to an extent that has not been considered by previous scholarship. It argues that Parthia's passivity towards Rome's increasingly aggressive incursions into the Near East was a consequence of profound political and social upheaval within the Parthian Empire, hinted at in our primary sources. It argues further that Parthia's preoccupation with this internal discord, which included attempts at secession by various constituent kingdoms, allowed first King Tigranes of Armenia and then Rome to cement a foothold in the Near East south of the Taurus Mountains, at the expense of the Seleucid dynasties and Parthia's interests.

This thesis employs a broader understanding of Near and Far Eastern sources than has been seen in previous studies and therefore addresses a gap in scholarship concerning the overall geopolitical picture of the Near East in the early First Century BC, and the roles Rome and Parthia played in shaping it. It closely examines the crucial preliminary period in Romano-Parthian relations in the vicinity of the Euphrates River—a landmark that formed their frontier for three hundred years. Current scholarship has tended to focus on the later phase of Romano-Parthian interaction, particularly after Rome's annexation of Syria, and the more extensively documented Imperial period. This thesis aims to redress this imbalance.

This study concludes that a broader examination of the relevant primary sources is required in order to illuminate the history of the Parthian Dark Age, and to make the Parthian Empire's interactions with Rome and its western neighbours more comprehensible. In addition it concludes that Parthia's crisis in the East explains its passivity towards Roman expansion into Asia Minor and the Near East in the first decades of the First Century BC.

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# Abbreviations

<i>AE</i>	Arsacid Era
<i>AJA</i>	American Journal of Archaeology
<i>AJAH</i>	American Journal of Ancient History
<i>AJP</i>	American Journal of Philology
<i>ANRW</i>	Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt
<i>Arch. Orient</i>	Archiv Orientalní
<i>AUC</i>	Anno Urbis Condita
<i>BAR IS</i>	British Archaeological Report International Series
<i>BCT</i>	Astronomical Diaries and Related Texts from Babylonia
<i>BM</i>	British Museum Catalogue
<i>BMCR</i>	Coins of the Roman Republic in the British Museum
<i>CAH</i>	Cambridge Ancient History
<i>CBS</i>	Catalogue of the Babylonian Section
<i>CHC</i>	Cambridge History of China
<i>CHI</i>	Cambridge History of Iran
<i>CIL</i>	Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum
<i>CQ</i>	Classical Quarterly
<i>FGrH</i>	Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker
<i>GNS</i>	Schweizer Münzblätter = Gazette numismatique suisse
<i>HS</i>	Han shu
<i>IGL</i>	Inscriptiones Graecae et Latinae
<i>ILS</i>	Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae
<i>JHS</i>	Journal of Hellenic Studies

<i>JRA</i>	Journal of Roman Archaeology
<i>JRAS</i>	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland
<i>JRS</i>	Journal of Roman Studies
<i>LCL</i>	Loeb Classical Library
<i>LBAT</i>	Late Babylonian Astronomical and Related Texts
<i>LEC</i>	Les etudes classiques
<i>MedArch</i>	Mediterranean Archaeology
<i>MH</i>	Museum Helveticum: schweizerische Zeitschrift für klassische Altertumswissenschaft
<i>MRR</i>	Magistrates of the Roman Republic
<i>NC</i>	Numismatic Chronicle
<i>OGIS</i>	Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae
<i>PW</i>	Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft
<i>RCC</i>	Roman Civic Calendar
<i>RE</i>	Pauly's Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft
<i>REA</i>	Revue des études arméniennes
<i>RN</i>	Revue Numismatique
<i>RRAM</i>	Roman Rule in Asia Minor
<i>S</i>	Sellwood Type
<i>SC</i>	Shih-chi
<i>SEB</i>	Seleucid Era Babylonian Calendar
<i>SEG</i>	Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum
<i>SEM</i>	Seleucid Era Macedonian Calendar
<i>SHA</i>	Scriptores Historiae Augustae
<i>SIG<sup>3</sup></i>	Sylloge inscriptionum graecum
<i>VATh</i>	Vorderasiatische Abteilung Tontafeln

*ZAG* Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und verwandte Gebiete

*ZPE* Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik

# Introduction

This thesis focuses upon the first contact between the Empires of Rome and Parthia in 95 BC and the short term consequences of that meeting. It seeks to understand the relationship between these two powers and, in turn, their relationship with the other powers and minor kingdoms that formed the ‘buffer zone’ that separated them. This study also composes a chronology that synchronises events across the stretch of the geopolitical limits of Roman and Parthian interests in the east—from Anatolia to the Iranian plateau and far beyond to the borders of Han China—around the period of this meeting and the following 10 to 15 years. In doing so it reconstructs the first years of the Parthian Dark Age (a term applied to period of Parthian history stretching from 95 to 55 BC because of its lack of literary sources), providing an understanding of what state of affairs the Parthian Empire was in at the outset of its relations with Rome. This leads to an understanding of the geopolitical forces that defined the limits of Roman and Parthian influences along the line of the Euphrates River and what role minor kingdoms played in this process. It forms the basis for understanding the mechanisms that brought Parthia and Rome into conflict from the 60s BC onwards; an antagonism that was not resolved until Augustus came to a formal and relatively lasting treaty with Parthia in 20 BC.

The Battle of Carrhae in 53 BC marked the end of this formative phase of Romano-Parthian relations.<sup>1</sup> This study concentrates on the earliest steps that led Rome and Parthia along the path to that defining engagement. It is these first tentative moments of diplomatic contact and the geo-political milieu within which they occurred that is dealt with herein. As argued in the first half of this study, this phase began in 95 BC with the first recorded meeting between the two Empires on the Euphrates River. This meeting occurred within the

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<sup>1</sup> The Battle of Carrhae had a profound impact upon the Roman psyche as evidenced by repeated allusion to and direct reference to it in subsequent Roman literature up to the fourth-century AD; Cic. *Div.* 2.9.22; Ov. *Fast.* 5.580-594; Val. Max. 1.6.11; Prop. 4.6.69; Hor. *Carm.* 4.15.6-7, 3.5; Luc. 9.65 and 8.356-8; SHA *Car.* 6; Amm. Marc. 23.3.1; K. Regling, “Crassus’ Partherkreig,” *Klio* 7 (1907) 357-94; D. Tempe, “Die Bedeutung der Schlacht von Carrhae,” *MH* 19 (1962) 127, n. 127; 129, n. 156; M. Wisseman, *Die Parther in der augusteischen Dichtung* (Frankfurt am Main 1982). For works discussing the nature of Romano-Parthian relations throughout their coexistence see, H. Sonnabend, *Fremdenbild und Politik. Vorstellungen der Römer von Ägypten und dem Partherreich in der späten Republic und frühen Kaiserzeit* (Frankfurt 1986); K.-H. Ziegler, *Die Beziehungen zwischen Rom und dem Partherreich: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Völkerrechts* (Weisbaden 1964); D. Frendo, “Roman Expansion and the Greco-Iranian World: Carrhae, Its Explanation and Aftermath in Plutarch,” *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 17 (2003) 71-81; A. D. H. Bivar, *CHI* 3/1 (1983) 48-58; S. P. Mattern-Parkes, “The Defeat of Crassus and the Just War,” *The Classical World* 96 (2003) 387-396.

broad context of Anatolian-wide upheaval, which explains the immediate circumstances that brought this event about.<sup>2</sup> At that meeting P. Cornelius Sulla set the precedent for Rome's future relations with Parthia and demarcated the geographical extents of their respective zones of influence, defining the character and limits of the next three hundred years of Romano-Parthian relations.<sup>3</sup>

The second half of this study deals in detail with the state of the Parthian Empire at and around this time, specifically the first phase of the herein entitled Parthian Wars of Succession. The state of the Roman Republic throughout this period is largely well documented, as are its interactions with the East dominated by the three Mithridatic Wars, therefore this is not the focus of this thesis. Rather the state of the Parthian Empire is its central concern in an endeavour to explain its significant absence from crucial and defining geo-political concerns west of the Euphrates and north of the Taurus Mountains. It argues that the Parthian Empire was so overwhelmed by internal discord that it was unable to interfere with any military or political outcomes in Syria, Northern Mesopotamia or Anatolia. This gave Tigranes of Armenia free rein to carve out an empire and proclaim him "King of Kings"; a title previously reserved for Parthian kings as heirs to Achaemenid hegemony.<sup>4</sup> As a consequence of Tigranes' support for Mithridates Eupator of Pontus, Rome would eventually absorb Tigranes' empire and bring Roman interests to the borders of the Parthian Empire. This thesis therefore argues that the process of Rome's imperialistic compulsion which drew it east, and the relative ease with which it was achieved, was a direct consequence of Parthia's preoccupation with its internal dynastic crisis. This situation was not fully resolved until the reign of Orodes II beginning in 58 BC and the defeat of his rival brother, Mithridates IV, in 55/4 BC. It was only then that Parthia could bring its full military might to bear against Roman incursions which led to the defeat of Crassus in 53 BC.

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<sup>2</sup> Scholars have too often focused on the immediate details of Sulla's mission without considering its wider context. See, E. Badian, *Studies in Greek and Roman History* (Oxford 1964) 157-178; P.A. Cagniard, 'L. Cornelius Sulla in the Nineties: a Reassessment', *Latomus* 50 (1991) 295-303; A. Keveaney, "Roman Treaties with Parthia circa 95–circa 64 BC," *AJP* 102 (1981), 195-9; *Ibid*, "Deux Dates Contestée de la Carrière de Sylla" *Les Études Classiques* 48 (1980) 149-57; G. V. Sumner, "Sulla's career in the nineties," *Athenaeum* 56 (1978) 395-6; J. Dobais, "Les premiers rapports des Roma avec les Parthes," *Arch. Orient* 3 (1931), 218-21; Sherwin-White, *Roman Foreign Policy in the East* (London 1984) 110f.; T. Liebmann-Frankfort, *Le Frontière Orient dans la Politique extérieure de la République romaine* (Brussels 1969); P. Arnaud, "Les Guerres des Parthes et de l'Arménie dans la première moitié du premier siècle av. n. è: problèmes de chronologie et d'extension territoriale (95-70 BC)," *Mesopotamia* 22 (1987).

<sup>3</sup> D. Maggie, *RRAM* (Princeton 1950) 284-5, n. 14-16; A. N. Sherwin-White, 'Roman Involvement in Anatolia', *JRS* 67 (1977) 64-8; P. de Souza, *Piracy in the Graeco-Roman World* (Cambridge 1999), 104, 115.

<sup>4</sup> R. D. Sullivan, *Near Eastern royalty and Rome, 100-30 BC* (Toronto 1990) 100-101; E. J. Keall, "How Many Kings did the Parthian King of Kings Rule", *Iranica Antiqua* 29 (1994) 253-272; For the dating of the first use of the title by Mithridates II see, D. Sellwood, "Parthian Coins", *CHI* (1983) 279-298.

This thesis argues that Rome seems to have had only a vague understanding of the magnitude and importance of the Parthian Empire at the time of its first contact. Furthermore it argues that there seems to have been no formal, Senate-ratified, agreement had been reached between the powers beyond a localised and temporary understanding between Sulla and the Parthian King's envoy, Orobazus.<sup>5</sup> This may also be said for the second meeting between the powers and the agreement between Lucullus' legate, Sextilius, and Phraates III in the winter of 69/8 BC.<sup>6</sup> Despite the Senate's ratification of Pompey's eastern settlements en bloc in 59 BC, there is little suggestion that any formal agreement made by Pompey with Phraates III, son of Sinatruces, was included and this was implicit in the actions of Pompey himself and his legates during his campaigns in the East and subsequent occupation of Syria.<sup>7</sup> This situation persisted until a formal treaty was made by Augustus on 12 May 20 BC.<sup>8</sup>

This thesis argues that the Parthian kings likely had a cogent and realistic understanding of the threat that Rome's generals represented. The Parthians initiated both meetings in a posture of conciliation verging on, it would seem, submissiveness. While the second meeting between Sextilius and Phraates III was undertaken with a keen awareness of Parthia's dire internal circumstances at that time, the first meeting was undertaken when Parthia was at the height of its imperial stability under Mithridates II; yet there too the envoy took a submissive role. The envoy was later executed for this humiliation—but it does suggest a general attitude of respect and an awareness of Rome's military and imperialistic reputation.

This thesis argues that Parthia was excluded from this crucial formative period of the kingdoms west of the Euphrates River proceeding the collapse of the Hellenistic dynasties—in particular Armenia, which was sensitive to Parthian interests and fundamental to its security—by massive internal upheaval, and that is herein known as the Parthian Wars of Succession.<sup>9</sup> This upheaval saw its Empire split in half by two different, though arguably

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<sup>5</sup> In particular see A. Keveney (1981) 195-9 and R. D. Sullivan (1990). For arguments in agreement with this study's views see, Ziegler (1964) and Sonnabend (1986); Plut. *Luc.* 36.5-6 suggests Lucullus never felt bound by the limits of the Euphrates River.

<sup>6</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 25.4 and 6; App. *Mith.* 84-5; Dio. 36.3.2-3.

<sup>7</sup> Dio. 37.5.2-7.4; Plut. *Pomp.* 33.6; G. Downey, "The Occupation of Syria by the Romans", *Transactions of the Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 82 (1951) 149-163; R. E. Wheeler, "The Roman Frontier in Mesopotamia", in E. Birley (ed.) *The Congress of Roman Frontier Studies* (Durham 1952) 114f.; Sherwin-White (1984) 222.

<sup>8</sup> Suet. *Aug.* 21.3; *Tib.* 9.1; Jus. 42.5.11f.; Liv. *Epit.* 141; Vell. Pat. 2.91.1; Flor. 2.34.63; Eutr. *Brev.* 7.9; Oro. 6.21.29; Hor. *Od.* 4.15.6-8; *Epist.* 1.12.27f. and 18.56f.; Ovid, *Trist.* 2.227f. and *Fast.* 5.545-579f. and 6.465-68; Strab. 6.4.2 and 16.1.28; Verg. *Aen.* 7.605f.; Prop. 4.6.79-82; *Orac. Sibyl.* 5.47ff.; *CIL*, I (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) 229 and 318.

<sup>9</sup> This is the first use of this term to denote the internal struggle that wracked the Parthian Empire from 95 to 55 BC.

equally legitimate, royal houses. This, it is argued, opened a window of opportunity for Rome (or to be more accurate, its ambitious elite) to assert its interests in the region and to fill the power vacuum left by the disintegration of the Hellenistic dynasties.

If fratricidal war was not enough, the Parthians had to contend with the secession of some of its richest client states. The Parthian Empire was a loose conglomeration of long standing independent kingdoms and satrapies first united under Parthian rule by Mithridates I in the 140s and 130s BC. Many maintained semi-independence, such as Characene, Elymais, Adiabene, Oshroene, Gordyene, Commagene, Media, Media Atropatene, Armenia and Persis.<sup>10</sup> These were on the periphery of Parthian power centred, at this early stage, at the capital of Hecatompylos in Northern Iran before it was moved further west to Babylonia where eventually the new capital of Ctesiphon was founded a short distance from the old Seleucid seat of power, Seleucia-on-the-Tigris.<sup>11</sup> There is evidence to suggest that Elymais made a bid for independence at the height of the Parthian Wars of Succession in the mid to late 80s BC under the resurgent dynasty of Kamnaskires III and his Queen Coregent, Anzaze.<sup>12</sup> Others, such as Media siding with the usurper Sinatruces, perhaps in the hope of gaining better concessions under his rule. Armenia pursued its own imperial aspirations under Tigranes the Great; absorbing Sophene, Commagene, Oshroene, Media Atropatene and Gordyene amongst others.

As the Parthians' hold on their Empire weakened Mesopotamia became a bastion for the house of Mithridates II as the Babylonian sources testify.<sup>13</sup> The Parthian Empire was divided between the agnatic houses of Mithridates II and Sinatruces along the boundary of the Tigris River from 94/3 to 88/7 BC. Even after Sinatruces and his Sacaraucae allies were ejected from Iran first by Gotarzes I and then later by Gotarzes' brother, Mithridates III, they remained a significant threat that occupied the Southern Eurasian Steppe, down through

<sup>10</sup> Sullivan (1990) 96-120; Keall (1994) 253-272.

<sup>11</sup> Plin. 6.44; For the identification of Hecatompylos with Shahr-I Qūmis see J. Hansman, D. Stronach, H. Bailey, "Excavations at Shahr-I Qūmis, 1967", *JRAS* (1970) 29-62; J. Hansman, "The Problems of Qūmis", *JRAS* (1968) 111-139; *Ibid*, "The Measure of Hecatompylos", *JRAS* (1981) 3-9; contra P. A. Brunt (ed.), *Arrian, Anabasis Alexandri* (London 1976) Appendix 8, 495-7; *CHI* 3, 39-40.

<sup>12</sup> P. A. van't Haaff, *Catalogue of Elymaean Coinage, Ca. 147 BC—AD 228* (Lancaster 2007) 7-18; T. Fischer, "ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΚΑΜΝΙΣΚ(Ε)ΙΡΟΤ" *Chiron* 1 (München 1971) 169-175; B. R. Bell, "A New Model for Elymaean Royal Chronology," *The Celator* (2002) 34-59; R. J. Wenke, "Elymeans, Parthians, and the Evolution of Empires in Southwestern Iran", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 101 (1981) 303-315; J. Hansman, "Seleucia and the Three Dauraks", *Iran* 16 (1978) 154-161; *Ibid*, "Coins and Mints of Ancient Elymais", *Iran* 28 (1990) 1-11; G. J. P. McEwen, "A Parthian Campaign against Elymais in 77 BC", *Iran* 24 (1986) 91-4; E. Dobbins, "Hoard Evidence Aids Attribution and Chronology of Arsacid Bronze Drachms of Elymais", *The Celator* 6 (1992) 42-5; B. R. Bell, "New Inscription Alters Elymais Type Chronology", *The Celator* 16 (2002) 38-39, 50.

<sup>13</sup> A. Sachs and H. Hüniger, *Astronomical Diaries and Related Texts from Babylonia, 3, Diaries from 164 BC to 61 BC* (Wien 1996) hereafter cited as BCT, No. -90 in particular.



modern Afghanistan and into south-eastern Iran, known today as the Sistan Province. Sinatruces would reappear in western Iran in 78/7 BC to reclaim the throne at the head of the Sacaraucae Saka/Scythian tribe.

This study places the birth of Romano-Parthian relations within a wider geo-political setting. It re-examines the motivations and circumstances that formed Roman and Parthian foreign policy and caused them to act in the ways that they did at this crucial moment in history. Several scholars have touched upon isolated aspects of these issues without considering the wider geo-politics.<sup>14</sup> It is the purpose of this study to address this gap in the scholarship. In particular it combines the latest research into Parthian history with the well documented Roman East. A large part of this new understanding has proceeded from Babylonian cuneiform scholarship as published by Sachs and Hüniger,<sup>15</sup> and the revised understanding of Parthian numismatics that has emerged as a consequence.<sup>16</sup> This thesis brings that recent scholarship into a broader Romano-Eastern geo-political setting.

## Previous Research

Much previous work has preferred to concentrate on the Roman presence in the East from Pompey's settlement onwards—with the greater part of this research focused upon the well documented Imperial period. Studies by Sonnabend and Ziegler have addressed the issue of Romano-Parthian relations, but have given only cursory attention to this formative phase.<sup>17</sup> Keaveney, over two articles, has broadly addressed the issues of Romano-Parthian relations down to the Battle of Carrhae.<sup>18</sup> This study is unique in that it focuses in much greater detail on a discrete period of a decade in order to understand the formative forces at work in defining the character of Romano-Parthian relations during their long-term coexistence.

Expansive studies of Roman Imperialism and the East have given scant attention to this frontier's early development. Extant archaeological remains of any Roman occupation or military activity are virtually non-existent until well into the Imperial period and any idea of scientific defensive frontier, or *limes* system, are concepts that have minimal relevance to

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<sup>14</sup> Keaveney (1981) 195-9; Sullivan (1990).

<sup>15</sup> BCT No. -90.

<sup>16</sup> G. F. Assar, "A Revised Parthian Chronology of the Period 165-91 BC", *Electrum* 11 (2006a) 87-158; *Ibid*, "A Revised Parthian Chronology of the Period 91-55 BC", *Parthica* (2006b) 55-104.

<sup>17</sup> *Op. cit.* n. 4.

<sup>18</sup> Keaveney (1981) 195-212; *Ibid*, "The King and the War-Lords: Romano-Parthian Relations circa 64–53 BC," *AJP* 103 (1982) 412-28; also Dobais (1931) 218-21.

Romano-Parthian relations of this period.<sup>19</sup> Of particular note are Butcher and Millar's ethnographic work, whilst both are expansive and provide detailed cultural background for this study, they are primarily concerned with the Principate. Ball's work also provides excellent archaeological, architectural and cultural settings to the current study. These studies place this work in a defined cultural context.<sup>20</sup>

Noteworthy to this study is the recent work of Gholamreza F. Assar, which has provided an invaluable collation of Parthian numismatic research up till 2010. He has worked closely with Babylonian cuneiform texts and ostraca to help reconstruct the numismatic evidence and he has re-identified a significant selection of coins. This has led to a more comprehensive understanding of the Parthian dynasties, the Parthian Dark Age and the Parthian Wars of Succession. This work will form a large basis for this study's understanding of the Parthian chronology.<sup>21</sup> Edwell has also provided a much needed recent addition to Romano-Parthian scholarship—albeit from Pompey's entrance into Syria in 65 BC onwards.<sup>22</sup>

This study has addressed the omission left by these approaches to Romano-Parthian relations and has concentrated upon a specific and detailed study of the earliest contact between these powers and the political milieu within which it was initiated and the direct consequences of it.

## Overall Method

This work lays down a defined chronological foundation for the first meeting of the Roman and Parthian Empires. It assesses the importance of this event within its wider geo-political context, providing an explanation for its occurrence and its ramifications for the immediate and future events. By coming to a full understanding of this first meeting and the reasons why it came about we may better understand how Romano-Parthian relations subsequently developed.

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<sup>19</sup> D. H. French and C. S. Lightfoot (eds.), *The Eastern Frontier of the Roman Empire: Proceedings of a Colloquium held at Ankara in September 1988*, 2 Vols. (Oxford 1989); B. Isaac, *The Limits of Empire: the Roman Army in the East* (Oxford, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1992); D. L. Kennedy (ed.), "The Roman army in the east", *JRA* (1996); P. Edwell, *Between Rome and Persia: The Middle Euphrates, Mesopotamia and Palmyra under Roman Control* (London 2007); F. Stark, *Rome on the Euphrates. The Story of a Frontier* (London 1966); M. Sartre, *L'Orient Romain* (Paris 1991); N. Pollard, *Soldiers, Cities and Civilians in Roman Syria* (2000); D. L. Kennedy and D. Riley, *Rome 's Desert Frontier from the Air* (London 1990); A. Poidebard, *La Trace de Rome dans le Désert de Syrie*, 2 Vols. (Paris 1934); S. Gregory, *Roman Military Architecture on the Eastern Frontier*, 3 Vols. (Amsterdam 1995-7).

<sup>20</sup> F. Millar, *The Roman Near East, 31 BC-AD 337* (Cambridge 1993); W. Ball, *Rome in the East* (London 2002); K. Butcher, *Roman Syria and the Near East*, (London 2003).

<sup>21</sup> G. R. F. Assar, "A Revised Parthian Chronology of the Period, 165-91 BC" *Electrum* 11 (2006a) 87-158; *Ibid.*, "A Revised Parthian Chronology of the Period, 91-55 BC" *Parthica* 8 (2006b) 55-104.

<sup>22</sup> Edwell (2007) 7-30.

This reconstruction begins with the proposition that Sulla's praetorship dates to 97 BC and his prorogation to the following year 96 BC. It proposes that Sulla's involvement in the affairs of Anatolia, specifically Cappadocia and Armenia, was far longer and more extensive than previously acknowledged.<sup>23</sup> This brought him into contact with the Parthian envoy in 95 BC within the context of Parthian support of Tigranes II's claim to the Armenian throne following the recent death of his father, King Tigranes I. An amicable agreement was reached, after initial hostilities, whereby each recognized the sovereignty of the other's claimant, Ariobarzanes of Cappadocia for Rome and Tigranes of Armenia for Parthia, and the Euphrates River was recognized as the line of demarcation of their respective spheres of influence. Sulla continued to "linger" in Cappadocia in support of Ariobarzanes till his departure for Rome in 93 BC—a far longer involvement than previously recognized that explains the gap in his *cursus honorum*.

Meanwhile the upheaval that would engulf the Parthian Empire for the next 40 years was making its first appearance in the East in the form of a new claimant to the Parthian throne, Sinatruces, son of Mithridates I, supported by the Saka/Scythian tribes of the Central Asian Steppe. There is little historical detail about this event, but the numismatic, cuneiform, and archaeological evidence are unequivocal in their indication of extensive and profound disruption to Parthian rule throughout Iran. This study uses this variety of primary sources to reconstruct a chronology of events and explains why Tigranes of Armenia was able to wrest control of much of the Near East without Parthian interference.

This study incorporates the disciplines of geography, numismatics, archaeology and literary analysis. Parthian culture lacked a literary historical tradition. Its memory was preserved by an oral practice perpetuated by a minstrel class known as the *gosān*. When the Parthian Empire fell to the Sassanians in 224 AD, their culture and history were suppressed as the Sassanian dynasty sought to resurrect their Persian Achaemenid legacy at the expense of what was considered non-Iranian influences.<sup>24</sup> Thus most of the historical record has been lost. Certainly the disappearance of significant western Roman works such as Arrian's *Pathica* has been sorely felt. As a consequence greater emphasis has to be given to these

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<sup>23</sup> The long and complicated debate was set off by Badian in 1959 and continues with this study's interpretation based on geo-political circumstances, see E. Badian, "Sulla's Cilician Command", *Athenaeum* 37 (1959) 279ff., reprinted in *Studies in Greek and Roman History* (Oxford 1964) 157 ff.; D. Magie, *RRAM* 203ff.; 1098-9, nn. 11-19; A. N. Sherwin-White, "Ariobarzanes, Mithridates and Sulla", *The Classical Quarterly* 27 (1977) 173-183; P. F. Cagniat, "L. Cornelius Sulla in the Nineties", *Latomus* 50 (1991) 285-303; T. C. Brennan "Sulla's Career in the Nineties: Some Reconsiderations", *Chiron* 22 (1992) 103-158.

<sup>24</sup> R. N. Frye, "The political history of Iran under the Sasanians", *The Cambridge History of Iran* 3 (Cambridge University Press 1983); S. A. Shapur, "Sassanian Dynasty", *Encyclopedia Iranica* (Columbia University Press 2005).

other primary sources, led by numismatics and supplemented primarily with Babylonian cuneiform texts, ostraca, a few inscriptions, two parchments and relatively limited archaeological evidence. The archaeology of Parthia has suffered in particular due to its long perceived inferior status to the other Iranian cultures of Persia and its Bronze Age ancestors. Thus its archaeology in the recent past has been ignored, misinterpreted or, worse still, destroyed in the attempt to delve beneath those strata to the earlier levels. This study brings these disciplines together to build an understanding of the first decade or so of the Parthian Dark Age in relation to Rome's first tentative push towards the Euphrates frontier. The methods employed in each of these have been dealt with respectively below.

## Geographical Method

The geographical considerations in this study are only limited by its strategic and cultural concerns. As a consequence this study spans references from Rome to Han China. Geography is the constant that dominated and defined the extent and nature of Romano-Parthian relations throughout the period of this study and beyond. The geographical features that most defines geo-political relationships are the barriers that delineate distinct political and cultural entities and that restrict the movements and interactions of these entities, and it is these types of geographical features that have formed the focus of this study. Rivers, aridity and mountain ranges define movement both perpendicular and parallel to their axis. Throughout Romano-Parthian geo-political history, relations were defined by four such geographical boundaries that dominate the landscape of the Near East:

1. The Taurus Mountain range which separates the Anatolian littoral from the Syrian plains. This feature was recognised as such by Rome from its first major involvement in the East.<sup>25</sup>
2. The 200 millimetre isohyets that forms the extent of the fertile-crescent separating the heavily populated and arable regions from the sparsely populated and arid desert interior of Syria.<sup>26</sup>
3. The Euphrates River and its associated Valley forms a barrier between East and West—Mesopotamia and Syria—and it would remain the major

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<sup>25</sup> Herod. 3. 1. 4; French and Lightfoot (eds.) (1989), in particular, T. B. Mitford Petersfield, "High and Low Level Routes across the Taurus and Antitaurus" 329-333.

<sup>26</sup> Kennedy and Riley (1990) 24-6; D. L. Kennedy (ed.), *The Roman Army in the East*, JRA SS 18 (Oxford 1996) 9-24.

delineation of Roman and Parthian zones of influence for three hundred years.<sup>27</sup>

4. The Araxes River valley, or the “One Hundred Valleys” as it was known in antiquity, was the main thoroughfare between Armenia and the Iranian heartland of Media Atropatene. Its strategic importance to the security of both Parthia and Rome’s Anatolian holdings ensured that Armenia would remain the fundamental strategic concern of Romano-Parthian relations for the entire period of the coexistence.<sup>28</sup>

Geography is the overbearing constant that shapes historical events. The topography and climate of the near East has changed little since antiquity. These are fundamental premises for this study. Where appropriate this research has employed Google Earth to gain a more detailed comprehension of the topographical complexities that govern the movement of men and *materiel* and the empires that utilised them. Often features that appear minor in a top down view of the mapped topography can stand out starkly as features of central importance to an historical analysis when viewed at an angle to the perpendicular and revolved in three dimensions. Many such features of Google Earth are excellent tools in obtaining a clearer picture of the topographical difficulties that faced the protagonists of this study.

## Numismatic Method

By far the most valuable primary source for the Parthian Wars of Succession is the numismatic evidence. Coins depict a regime’s public face succinctly (to their ancient audience if not strictly to their modern interpreters). Low denominations were for local circulation and therefore their iconography was designed for local consumption. With provenance intact these coins can provide hints to the character of a local population and what allegiances they harboured or had imposed upon them. The minting of larger

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<sup>27</sup> Rivers were the highways of the ancient world, providing relatively effortless and speedy travel when moving with their currents. Movement up-stream proved more difficult. Travel was then largely confined to roads that intermittently followed the river’s course where navigable. The river valley can often be more of a hindrance to movement than an aid. The heavy vegetation that clings to the banks of the river often intervened and so occasional breaks in the river valley allowed for shorter and easier travel across the desert, also short cutting the bends. The river’s primary functions for its inhabitants were trade, transport and agriculture. These same qualities also facilitated the means of war along and about it and armies have invariably followed their courses throughout the region’s history. A. Musil, *The Middle Euphrates*, (New York 1927); R. Dussaud, *Topographie Historique de la Syrie Antique et Médiévale* (Paris 1927) 413-501.

<sup>28</sup> Much work has been done on the historical geography of this area by C. and A. Sagona in relation to Xenophon’s *Anabasis*. Their work, in many respects, is equally applicable to Romano-Parthian relations of our era, see C. Sagona and A. Sagona, “Eastern Anatolia during the Time of Xenophon,” *The Australian Archaeological Institute of Athens Bulletin* 1 (Sydney 2003) 23-32. In general this feature has received little acknowledgement as the crucial feature that made Armenia such an important strategic concern for Rome and Parthia throughout their coexistence in Anatolia.

denominations, especially tetradrachms, was tightly and centrally controlled and saw wider circulation as part of an Empire's macro commercial interests. Consequently the depictions and titulatures on these coins represent the regime as they would want a wider, "international", audience to perceive them. Nomenclature is important here, which suggests the target audience. *ΦΙΛΕΛΛΗΝΟΣ* for instance mostly appears on large denomination coins, drachms and above, minted in cities with significant, educated and wealthy mercantile elite of Hellenistic ancestry. They therefore provide this study with important clues into the nature of Parthian rule and their subject peoples.

Numismatics has provided this study with a chronological framework to reconstruct the Parthian Dark Age. Epithets employed at different times provide a developmental sequence that suggests important landmark events in their reign. *ΝΙΚΑΤΟΠΟΣ* for instance proclaims a great victory and with provenance and sequence such issues can hint at the time and location of a previously unknown event of significance to its dynastic history.

Mint or minter's marks are also of importance particularly in pinning down cities of origin and what rulers were associated with control of those mints at any particular time.

For forty years, Sellwood's categorisation of Parthian coinage has dominated our understanding of the Parthian Empire and its dynastic history.<sup>29</sup> The period covered by this study is particularly fraught with uncertainty as dating on Parthian coinage is rare, apart from tetradrachms produced at the Seleucia-on-the-Tigris mint, and even then dates do not appear regularly until the reign of Phraates IV (c. 38–2 BC). As a consequence categorisation and dating must rely heavily upon stylistic criteria and sequencing of epithets. Coins provide this study with the best, though admittedly somewhat flawed, primary sources for this period and form an important role in the reconstruction of the Parthian Dark Age.

The value of Sellwood's work is undeniable and continues with the imminent publication of a third edition. This thesis builds upon this scholarship and re-examines some of its reconstructions of dynastic succession and the coins ascribed to those kings. As originally categorised by Sellwood, from the end of the reign of Mithridates II to the establishment of the sole rule of Orodes II in 55 BC, the coinage testifies to eight Parthian rulers, some with overlapping reigns—Mithridates II (c. 123–87 BC), Gotarzes I (c. 95–90 BC), Orodes I (c. 90–80 BC), Unknown King (I) c. 80 BC, Unknown King (II) (c. 80–70 BC), Sinatruces (c. 77–70 BC), Phraates III (70–57 BC) and Darius of Media Atropatene (c. 70 BC). This evidence suggests a period of competing dynasties within the Parthian Empire

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<sup>29</sup> D. Sellwood, *An Introduction to the Coinage of Parthia* (London 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1980).

lasting for 40 years.<sup>30</sup> As this study demonstrates Sellwood's reconstruction needs re-evaluation in light of subsequent ostraca and Babylonian cuneiform evidence and follows closely G. R. A. Assar's latest research in this field.<sup>31</sup>

Of particular importance are coin types such as mules, countermarks and overstrikes. Such coins can be interpreted as signs of sudden changes in regimes—either legitimate or rebellious—and in concert with other primary evidence greatly enlighten our understanding of the 'Parthian Dark Age'.<sup>32</sup> In particular there is a S28/S31 (Sellwood Type) mule that shows without question that the reigns of Mithridates II and the usurper Sinatruces closely coincided.<sup>33</sup> As it is now known thanks to the BCT that Mithridates II most likely died in September of 91 BC<sup>34</sup> then we have *terminus antequem* for Sinatruces' arrival in Rhagae, where the coin was minted, and it helps to trace the progress and extent of his conquests.



Parthian tetradrachms were exclusively minted at Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, so a monarch minting there would suggest his control over Mesopotamia. There are no Sinatruces tetradrachms, i.e. S33 types, so it is certain that he never controlled the Parthian holdings

<sup>30</sup> For controversies and speculations see, D. Sellwood, "The drachms of the Parthian Dark Age" *JRAS* (1976) 2-25; O. Mörkholm, *Greece to India* (1979) 92; Houghton, *Syria and the East* (1986) 194; M. Weiskopf, *The Kuh Dasht Hoard and the Parthian 'Dark Age'* (1981); A. Simonetta "Notes on the Parthian and Indo-Parthian Issues of the 1st Century B.C." In: *Actes du Congrès international de numismatique* (Paris 1953) 2, Paris: *Commission internationale de numismatique* (1957) 111-121; *Ibid*, "Some remarks on the Arsacid coinage of the period 90-57 B.C." (1966) *Numismatic Chronicle* 7 (1966) 15-40; *Ibid*, "A proposed revision of the attributions of the Parthian coins struck during the so-called 'Dark Age' and its historical significance" (2001) *East and West* 51 (2001) 69-108; A. M. Simonetta and D. Sellwood, "Again on the Parthian coins from Mithridates II to Orodes II", *QT* 7 (1978) 95-119; B. Simonetta, "Osservazioni sulla monetazione Partica in bronzo da Mithridates I a Phraates IV" in *Schweizerische numismatische Rundschau* 61 (1982) 43-57.

<sup>31</sup> See Assar (2006a) 87-158; *Ibid* (2006b) 55-104 for a general overview of his recent research.

<sup>32</sup> Sellwood (1980) 293; *Ibid*, "A Parthian over strike," *Journal of Numismatic Fine Arts* 1 (1972) 128-129; A. M. Simonetta, "Overstrikes, mules, modified dies and retouched coins in the Arsacid coinage : a discussion of their significance " *Parthica* 8 (2006) 41-54.

<sup>33</sup> Assar (2006b) 60-1; Sellwood (1976) 4; S33/S28 'mule' silver drachm (Sellwood Collection).

<sup>34</sup> BCT No. -90 Obv. line 31.

west of the Tigris River for any significant period of time and indeed what we have of the BCT (Babylonian Calendar Texts) confirms this conclusion.<sup>35</sup>

It is clear that without the numismatic evidence little of the Parthian history of the First Century BC could be understood. It has provided this thesis with a starting basis upon which the Parthian Wars of Succession can be reconstructed. Particularly it has provided, through the mapping of mint control, a framework to reconstruct the movements of Sinatruces the Usurper and the events of the first ten years or so of the Parthian Wars of Succession. Of crucial understanding of this is the sequencing of the issues of the Susan mint which produced annual minting that can be reliably dated.<sup>36</sup>

## Archaeological Method

While the archaeology of Parthian civilisation is still in its infancy, the little that has been done has proven to be of great value to this current study. Such is the poor state of our understanding of even the most basic aspects of Parthian history that virtually the smallest find can completely change that understanding. Such has been the case with the discovery of the Nisa ostraca nos. 1760, 307 and 306 that have led to a rearrangement of the stemma of the usurper Sinatruces and a fuller understanding of his origins and the causes for the Parthian Wars of Succession.<sup>37</sup> Italian and Russian teams have excavated literally thousands of ostraca written in Pahlavi from Old Nisa-Mithridakirt detailing requisitions for this important royal cult centre that have given great insight into the economic workings of the Parthian Empire.<sup>38</sup> These finds have helped to identify Sinatruces and his relationship to the Arsacid dynasty and the reasons for the outbreak of the Parthian Wars of Succession. This evidence also identifies who was in control of Nisa and at what times, providing this study with invaluable tools to reconstruct the Parthian Dark Age.

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<sup>35</sup> BCT No. -90 Obv. lines 32-3 in particular.

<sup>36</sup> During the course of this study access was made available to the Museum of Old and New Art's extensive Parthian coin collection in Hobart, Tasmania and this proved an invaluable resource for firsthand understanding of the coinage. Some coins were also made available by the John Elliot Classics Museum at the University of Tasmania and this also proved useful to this study. The cooperation of both these institutions was humbly and greatly appreciated.

<sup>37</sup> M.-L. Chaumont, "Études d'histoire parthe I. Documents royaux a Nisa", *Syria* 48 (1971) 143-164; G. F. Assar, "Geneology and Coinage of the Early Parthian Rulers", *Parthica* 6 (2004) 74-7.

<sup>38</sup> M.-L. Chaumont, "Les ostraca de Nisa. Nouvelle contribution à l'histoire des Arsacides", *Journal Asiatique* (1968) 14-19.



Artefacts, particularly a remarkable discovery of forty ivory rhytons,<sup>39</sup> and architecture from Nisa testify to a culture that freely syncretises western and eastern influences to create their own unique style of artistic expression. Intertwined into this syncretism of Mesopotamian, Iranian and Greek are elements of their nomadic steppe roots—a characteristically Scythian iconography features in their jewellery, pottery and coinage.<sup>40</sup> This evidence demonstrates, above all else, that Parthian culture was intimately familiar with and appreciated Hellenistic culture long before it became a world power. By the time of its first contact with Rome, the Parthians had at least 200 years of contact with Hellenistic culture; that is, since Alexander's conquests and the subsequent annexation of the far north-east, which included the Persian satrapies of Sogdiana and Bactria. By contrast Rome showed little understanding of, and indeed contempt for, eastern powers in general. This study recognises this disparity in Roman and Parthian world perceptions and acknowledges it as a factor in the first meeting between the two powers and its outcome.

On the western side most of the extant remains of this period in the Near East are Hellenistic. As Rome filled the vacuum left by the disintegrating Seleucid Empire, Roman forces occupied their towns and garrisons—utilizing an infrastructure already well developed after two-and-a-half centuries of Hellenistic occupation. As a result the Roman presence in the East was absorbed into this dominant cultural background and so left little physical impact and this would remain the case until well into the First Century AD.<sup>41</sup> So Rome's forays into the Near East throughout the period investigated by this study have left us with virtually no physical remains whatsoever and so, apart from a few scattered inscriptions, archaeology plays no role in the reconstruction of that aspect of this study.

Other archaeological sites of importance to this study are: Jebel Khalid, Seleucia/Apamea (Zeugma), Artaxata, and Seleucia on the Tigris. Some of these have only recently given up valuable artefacts. Their interpretation has gone some way to filling the gaps in our primary sources. Of particular importance is the work at Jebel Khalid, undertaken over the past twenty years by an Australian team headed by Professor G. W. Clarke. This significant fortification located at an important strategic point on the right bank of the

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<sup>39</sup> V. M. Masson, "The Discovery of the Parthian Rhytons in the Royal Treasury at Old Nisa", *Parthica* 10 (2008) 19-24; E. Pappalardo, "The Rhyton No. 52 from Old Nisa. An Interpretive Proposal", *Parthica* 10 (2008) 63-80.

<sup>40</sup> F. K. Nadooshan, F. Arkan, A. R. Arkan, M. Saffari, "Scythian in Eastern Border of Parthia: A Numismatic Evidence", *Parthica* 8 (2006) 195-7; A. Invernizzi, "Thoughts on Parthian Nisa", *Parthica* 6 (2004) 133-142; *Ibid*, "Parthian Nisa: New Line of Research", *Iran and the Caucasus* 1 (1997) 107-119; V. N. Pilipko, "The Central Ensemble of the Fortress Mihrdatkirt. Layout and Chronology", *Parthica* 10 (2008) 33-51.

<sup>41</sup> For general comment on the extant remains in the East over this period see, Isaac (Oxford 1990); Millar (1993); Ball, (2002); S. Mitchell, *Anatolia : Land, Men, and Gods in Asia Minor*, (Oxford 1993).

Euphrates River, holds crucial clues to the development of the Euphrates frontier during the period in question. Its permanent abandonment in the 70s BC, despite its obvious strategic value, is a conundrum that this study will address within its wider geo-political context.<sup>42</sup>

Dura Europus has been a site of profound interest since its discovery in the 1920s. Nevertheless the Hellenistic phase of this city has proved elusive, but recent excavations have shed some light on its Parthian occupation period.<sup>43</sup> Of particular interest is its links with Antioch and Jebel Khalid. Antioch continued issues of coinage for Dura well into the Roman occupation of the former. Khalid shares many structural and strategic links with Dura that prove of interest to this current study. This said Dura itself remains outside the purview of this study. Despite its absorption into the Parthian Empire some when around the middle of Mithridates II's reign, approximately 111 BC onwards, it remains outside the geographical focus of this work.

On the Parthian side, the ongoing Italian mission (University of Turin) in Nisa has revealed Parthia's urban culture. Traditionally founded by Arsaces I, it is thought to be both a royal necropolis and residency. The site has so far revealed substantial buildings, mausoleums and shrines. This study takes particular interest in the ostraca from the site, of which thousands have been recovered, that provides a wealth of the detail concerning the site's commercial transactions.

Recent rescue excavations at Seleucia/Apamea in lieu of its lower inundation have deepened our understanding of the Kingdom of Commagene and the role it played as an intermediary in Romano/Parthian relations. In the period covered by this thesis Seleucia/Apamea, known by its colloquial name Zeugma ("The Crossing"), had not been absorbed by Commagene and remained a part of Seleucid Syria. In the 80s the entire region was overrun by Tigranes of Armenia and when his kingdom was in turn conquered by Rome it seemed a natural step for Pompey to extend Commagenian territory to the Euphrates crossing. King Tigranes I Theos, the newly crowned king of Commagene after the demise of his father Mithridates I Kallinikos following the Battle of Tigranocerta in 69 BC, became Rome's ally and protector of this strategically important town. From then on Zeugma lay at

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<sup>42</sup> P. Conner in (Ed.) A.M. Tamis, *Macedonian Hellenism* (Melbourne 1990) 12-26; G. Clarke, *MedArch* 7 (1994) 69-75; P. Conner and G. Clarke, *MedArch* 9/10 (1996/7) 151-83; G. Clarke, B. Rowney et al., *MedArch* 12 (1999) 156-71; G. Clarke, P. Conner, and J. Littleton, *Chronique archéologique en Syrie* 2 (1998) 47-53; G. Clarke in *Upper Syrian Euphrates*, 227-36; G. Clarke et al., *Jebel Khalid on the Euphrates* 1 (Sydney 2002). For postulated terminus date see, D. Harrison and C. E. V. Nixon (eds.), "Recent Australian and New Zealand Field Work in the Mediterranean Region", *MedArch* 12 (1999) 159 and Clarke, *Jebel Khalid* 1:291-335.

<sup>43</sup> Edwell (2007) 93-148.

the crossroads between the two powers of Rome and Parthia.<sup>44</sup> This study recognises the importance of Zeugma as a strategic crossing point of the Euphrates River that was vital to the interests of all the protagonists involved in the region in the 90s and 80s BC.

Both surface surveys and excavation of the defensive wall on the Gurgan Plain, otherwise known as the “Alexander Wall”, have dated these impressive remains and confirmed them to be of Parthian origin and more specifically dated to the reign of Mithridates II.<sup>45</sup> This identification has a profound impact on the understanding of the engineering capabilities and general nature of the Parthian Empire. It at once presents a picture of a more sedentary and sophisticated society than the one from which the Parthians emerged 150 years before under Arsaces I. It also begs the question, in response to what threat was such an extensive defensive system employed. This study concludes that that threat could not have been anything other than the Scythian tribes of the Central Asian Steppe and may have been specifically directed against the usurper, Sinatruces. The understanding of the nature of these defences has helped this study reconstruct the first steps of Sinatruces invasion of Iran and the first phase of the Parthian Wars of Succession.

Archaeology is of most value when discoveries can be placed within their historical context. With a period of such limited literary resources archaeology must play an important role in its comprehension and this study has been of no exception.

## **Literary, Prosopographical, and Philological Methods**

As already stated, Parthia’s literary tradition is scant and we have a few inscriptions. The extensive Parthian texts we do have deal almost exclusively with Manichaeism and were written long after the fall of the Parthian state and provide little information for this period in question.<sup>46</sup>

Of the many western sources, of particular value on the history of Parthia are the works of Pompeius Trogus in the epitome of Justin, the geographies of Strabo and Ptolemy, the fragments of Arrian’s *Parthica*, Moses of Chorene and Orosius. Unfortunately, for the first phase of Romano-Parthian contact as covered in this thesis there are few references. Roman sources make mention of the remarkable first contact made by Sulla with the Parthian

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<sup>44</sup> D. L. Kennedy, “The Twin Towns of Zeugma on the Euphrates. Rescue Work and Historical Studies”, *JRA Supplementary Series* 27 (1998); J. Wagner, *Seleukia am Euphrat/Zeugma* (Weisbaden 1976) 132-146; *Ibid*, “Die Römer an Euphrat und Tigris”, *Antike Welt, Sondernummer* 16 (1985).

<sup>45</sup> M. Y. Kiani, “Parthian Sites in Hyrcania”, in *Archaeologische Mitteilungen aus Iran* 9 (Berlin 1982); *Ibid*, “Excavations on the Defensive Wall; of the Gurgan Plain: Preliminary Report”, *Iran* 20 (1982) 73-9; M. Charlesworth, “Preliminary Report on a Newly-Discovered Extension of ‘Alexander’s Wall’”, *Iran* 25 (1987) 160-5.

<sup>46</sup> R. N. Frye, *The Heritage of Persia* (California 1962) 142-188.

Empire and do so in isolation of the wider Near Eastern context about which they seem to have known little. These accounts were written after the turning point of the Battle of Carrhae in 53 BC, when the Parthian Empire was eventually and finally recognised as the martial and imperial rival of Rome that it was. But in the 90s and 80s BC Rome's eastern concerns were limited primarily to the sovereignty of Cappadocia as the linchpin to the security of their eastern holdings in the western half of Anatolia in the face of the emerging threat of Mithridates of Pontus as its principle provocateur. Parthia remained essentially outside Rome's immediate concerns and would remain so for the next 30 years until Syria was annexed and even then they were not considered a serious threat until the Crassus disaster. As a result this early period of contact has received little attention from the western primary literary sources and so this study must dig deeper and look wider for material.

Dura Europus has revealed much graffiti and other important inscriptions, as well as parchments providing a picture of the cultural history of the area; the recently published economic documents of Nisa are invaluable and the parchments in Arsacid Pahlavi and Greek found at Avroman in Kurdistan are also of enormous value. This material will be used in close association with the other primary resources and together should produce an increasingly complete picture of early Romano-Parthian relations.

One of the most important Near Eastern publications in recent times has been the translations of the Babylonian Calendar Texts (BCT) by Sachs and Hüniger. These documents catalogue the regular movement of astronomical bodies, atmospheric conditions, river levels and commodity prices over a period from 652 to 61 BC. Importantly for this study they include at the end of each month a diary entry of significant events such as the movement of armies, disease outbreaks, famine and the arrival and departure of kings in the vicinity of Babylon. What makes these records of particular value is the extreme accuracy and meticulous detail with which they record astronomical time. While their ultimate purpose was religious and divinatory, their method is scientific and have been described as '*...the foremost science of antiquity in both quantity and sophistication*' and one of the greatest scientific achievements in the history of science.<sup>47</sup> They provide this study with a chronological accuracy for events that is almost unheard of in most other areas of the Classical discipline. This has allowed this study to date with some accuracy the, for instance, departure of Tigranes II of Armenia from Babylon for his kingdom and sets the wider circumstances of Sulla's meeting with the Parthian envoy. Also it gives some insight into the state of the

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<sup>47</sup> N. M. Swerdlow, *The Babylonian Theory of the Planets* (Princeton 1998) 15ff.

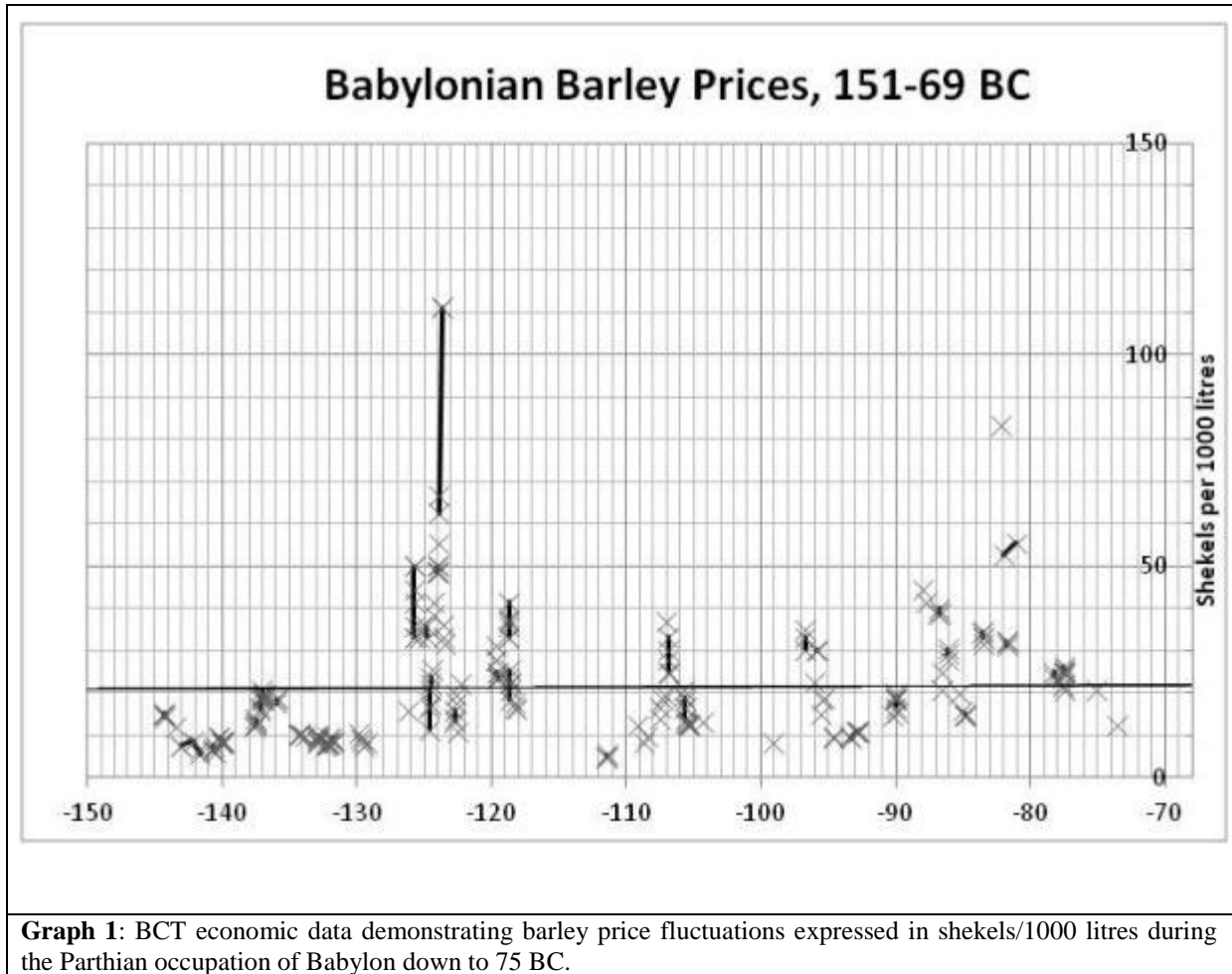
Parthian Empire that was preoccupied with the first phase of the Parthian Wars of Succession and included some troop movements. This has allowed this study to reconstruct the progress of the war with chronological accuracy.

Of further value is the economic data that they provide. It has been conclusively shown that the values of the six commodities—barley, dates, mustard(?), cress(?), sesame and wool—that are recorded three times a month (where extant) are true market prices susceptible to environmental and political forces just as are modern market prices.<sup>48</sup> When this price data is mapped over time trends become evident that closely reflect dramatic historical events such as the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC and the Parthian conquest of Mesopotamia by Mithridates I in 141 BC.<sup>49</sup> At the micro level such trends can reflect short term crises and are used to support this study's reconstruction of the Parthian Dark Age and the first phase of the Parthian Wars of Succession. Of particular interest is the crisis reflected in the commodity data of the late 80s in relation to the Elymaean revolt dealt with in Part Two of this thesis.

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<sup>48</sup> P. Temin, "Price Behaviour in Ancient Babylon", *Explorations in Economic History* 39 (2002) 46-60; A. L. Slotsky, *The Bourse of Babylon: Market Quotations in the Astronomical Diaries of Babylonia* (Bethesda 1997).

<sup>49</sup> R. J. Van der Spek, *Commodity Prices in Babylonia 385-61 BC* (<http://www.iisg.nl/hpw/babylon.php> accessed 24/07/2010); *Ibid*, "The Effect of War on the Prices of Barley and Agricultural Land in Hellenistic Babylonia", in: J. Andreau et. al. (eds.), *Économie Antique. La guerre dans les économies antiques. Entretiens d'Archéologie et d'Histoire* (Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges 2000) 293-313.



## Temporal and Spatial Method

Within the Parthian Empire three different eras were employed to mark the yearly passing of time. Their primary bureaucratic dating system referenced the Seleucid Era according to Macedonian reckoning (SEM) which began in October 312 BC (Julian calendar reckoning). For instance most of the dated coinage, which are largely tetradrachms minted at Seleucia-on-the Tigris, are dated from the beginning of this era. Occasionally The Seleucid Era according to Babylonian reckoning was used (SEB) where year one begins on 2/3 April 311 BC. Finally, the Parthians had their own dating system, the epoch of the Arsacid Era (AE), which began on 14/15 April 247 BC—the fictitious accession date of Arsaces I.<sup>50</sup> . This study recognises these eastern methods of dating and attempts to reconcile and synchronise them with western methods—Olympiad, Rome’s foundation date and civic calendars.

<sup>50</sup> For a complete overview of the complexities of the Parthian calendar see G. R. F Assar, “Parthian Calendars at Babylon and Seleucia”, *Iran* 41 (2003) 171-191.

Rome's primary means of tracking time was the Roman Civic Calendar (RCC).<sup>51</sup> This identified years by the names of the two consuls elected in that year. That year began on the day that they took office; 1 January after the reforms of 153 BC. Prior to the reforms of Julius Caesar in 46/5 BC the major problem with the Roman dating system was its haphazard approach to intercalation, which had resulted in a 90 day lag with the astronomical/seasonal year by the time of his reforms.<sup>52</sup> Evidence suggests that this discrepancy was a long term and endemic problem dating back to the early Republic and this study acknowledges, where appropriate, that this could have had a significant effect upon interpretation of the chronology of some events prior to 45 BC.<sup>53</sup> This leaves this study with a significant problem of how to synchronise events across the span of the geo-political theatre with which it is concerned. Often the immediate context of an event must be taken into account when dating events with exclusively western sources with the awareness that any dates given cannot be trusted per se and could be as much as three months out of synchronisation with the Julian/seasonal calendar. This study takes awareness of this problem into account when dating and synchronising events between western and eastern sources.

Distances and movement rates are important factors in reconstructing the chronology of events. This study makes reference to the travels of M. Tullius Cicero from Rome to his Cilician *provincia* as the benchmark for ancient travel rates for significant personages being 25 Roman miles per day (i.e. 1479 m x 25 Roman miles = 36975 m  $\approx$  40 km/day).<sup>54</sup> Travel times are significant in the ancient world with communications between Rome and its eastern

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<sup>51</sup> Dating from the foundation of Rome (*Anno Urbis Condita*, AUC) was rarely used and there was no firm consensus as to the exact year of its foundation in any case, which varied between a number of years between 758 and 728 BC although April 21 was the agreed day. See A. K. Michels, *The Calendar of the Roman Republic* (New Jersey 1967); R. Hannah, 'Greek and Roman Calendars—Construction of Time in the Classical World' (London 2005); A. E. Samuel, *Greek and Roman Chronology—Calendars and Years in Classical Antiquity* (München 1972).

<sup>52</sup> A. K. Michels (1967) 171-2; lists the following years where intercalations are mostly certain: 260, 236, 189, 177, 170, 167, 166, 164(?), 83, 52, 46 BC; References that demonstrate the haphazard and negligent way in which intercalations were undertaken are as follows, Cic. *Pro Quinc.* 79; Cic. *De leg.* 2.29; Suet. *Caes.* 40; Sol. 1.43; Cens. *De die nat.* 20.7; Cic. *Ad. Att.* 5.9.2; 5.13.3; 5.21.14.

<sup>53</sup> R. Hannah has stated that, 'For the period from about 150 to the 60s BC reasonable synchronisms between the calendar and the seasons seem to exist. (2005) 112; A. E. Samuel sites two references that seem to suggest some degree of seasonal synchronisation—Plutarch (*Pomp.* 34) associates the Saturnalia with Pompey's winter campaign in Albania in 66 BC and the Battle of Vercellae in the sixth month of 101 BC is associated with the summer solstice (*Mar.* 26). (1972) 162-3 n. 5; but ultimately Samuel concludes, 'I propose to leave the matter of the accord between seasons and the calendar completely open. The date of any event must be argued from the evidence bearing on the event itself, not from any solution of the calendar problems...When, as we have seen, the year may be as much as four months at variance with the seasons (190) and that almost two of these months can be eliminated within about 20 years (168), and when 90 days of error could accumulate between 66 and 46 BC, it is not safe to give a Julian date to any date in the Roman republican calendar unless there is a fixed point in the Roman calendar very near to that date, and even then the Julian date can be only approximate.' 163-4; also Michels (1967) 171-2.

<sup>54</sup> L. W. Hunter, "Cicero's Journey to his Province of Cilicia in 51 BC", *JRS* 3 (1913) 73-97.

interests taking as long as two months one way. This is an important factor when understanding the chronology of events and, specifically, will play an important role in this study when understanding the movements of Sulla within the expanded near eastern geopolitical milieu being investigated here.

Army movement rates vary with the size of the force, the quality of the roads and the main mode of logistical support. None of these factors would have changed significantly since the better documented campaigns of Alexander the Great, not until the major Roman reorganization of the eastern provinces under Vespasian at least. So the work done on Alexander's march rates serve as the benchmark for this study.<sup>55</sup> This again is important for the reconstruction of Sulla's movements to and throughout the Near East.

## Summation

The main argument of this thesis is that throughout this early stage of Romano-Parthian relations, in the 90s and 80s BC, Parthia's focus was exclusively eastwards and inwards. This indirectly facilitated Rome's entrance into the Near East south of the Taurus Mountains. Immense internal dynastic and schismatic struggles occupied Parthia's energies to the exclusion of all other distractions west of the Euphrates River. This preoccupation allowed Tigranes the Great of Armenia to rule the entire Near East and portions of Parthia's north-western client kingdoms without interference for eighteen years. This situation persisted at the time of Lucullus' arrival and defeat of the combined forces of Tigranes and Mithridates of Pontus at Tigranocerta and prevented Parthia from playing a potentially decisive role in keeping Rome north of the Taurus Range. This submissive stance, forced upon it by the dire state of its Empire, would eventually bring Rome to the Euphrates River where its legions would remain for the next three hundred years as a persistent threat to Parthian stability and security.

In support of this argument this study focuses upon reconstructing the first phase of these Parthian Wars of Succession and their consequences in respect to its dealings with Rome and its allies and client kingdoms in between. To this end a heavy reliance upon non-literary sources is unavoidable given the scant literary evidence available. With the aid of the BCT, coinage, archaeology and a few prosopographic pieces there is now sufficient evidence

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<sup>55</sup> See D. W. Engel, *Alexander the Great and the Logistics of the Macedonian Army* (Berkeley 1992).



to reconstruct the Parthian Wars of Succession with some certainty. This is the primary aim of this study.

This work is foremost an exploration of the birth and early evolution of Rome's Euphrates frontier. It is a frontier that would remain largely static for three hundred years. By understanding its early evolution, in this case concentrating upon the geo-political circumstances of Rome and Parthia's first two encounters, this study sheds some light on why this frontier remained this way for so long, despite the many efforts by Rome to force its way beyond that limitation. It is essentially a study in the mechanisms of imperialism and the forces that draw powers into cycles of conflict and compromise and the geo-political dynamics that that entails.

The following first half of this thesis explores in detail the setting and circumstances of Sulla's mission to establish Ariobarzanes on the throne of Cappadocia in opposition to the machinations of Mithridates of Pontus and his attempt to have his illegitimate claimant, Ariarathes IX, recognised as the rightful successor to Ariarathes VIII. It then examines the state of the Parthian Empire at this time and the circumstances that brought its envoy, Orobazus, to the Euphrates River to seek an audience with what was understood by them to be a representative of the Roman state and its foreign policy—a false assumption as it was to turn out and which is investigated in detail below. This thesis seeks to explain why this envoy's approach to Rome was so obsequious and conciliatory, for which the envoy later paid with his life, and what pressures the Parthian Empire was experiencing behind the scenes that could have influenced the outcome of this meeting. Unique to this study is the exploration of the eastern perspective of this event and the circumstances that brought it about. It now offers a redating of the Sullan mission to Cappadocia, the likely circumstances of that meeting and both the immediate and long term consequences of that momentous occasion.

# Part One

## Rome's First Contact with Parthia—Geopolitical Context and Consequences

### Introduction

It is the aim of this first section to bring together the events of the mid-to-late 90s and early 80s BC into an explanation of the geopolitical context of the meeting between Sulla and the Parthians and its immediate consequences. This chapter narrows down the time and place of that meeting and, following from this, the reasons why it came about. Textual, cuneiform and numismatic evidence, not previously considered in relation to this event, are employed to support the conclusion that the meeting took place in the campaigning season of 95 BC at the Melitene/Tomisa crossing on the Euphrates River and that it came about as a consequence of Sulla asserting Ariobarzanes claim to the Cappadocian throne over the false claimant of Ariarathes and his Pontic/Armenian faction. This brought Sulla into direct conflict with the newly crowned king of Armenia—Tigranes II, later the Great—a Parthian proxy, directly supported by Parthian forces sent by their King, Mithridates II. The consequences of this meeting are worth considering, as it sets the mood for the relations between Parthia and Rome. Understanding the exact state and nature of the geopolitical milieu in which this meeting occurred progresses greatly the understanding of their future interactions. This chapter argues that the years 95 to 85 BC were a period of profound upheaval and change throughout the Near East. Within a short space of time in or around 95 BC, no less than five kingdoms underwent dynastic change—Bithynia, Cappadocia, Armenia, Commagene, and Syria—and within two years the Parthian Empire was itself in upheaval with the appearance of a pretender to that throne, Sinatruces. Sinatruces, a son of Mithridates I, perhaps in his sixties, reappeared on the Parthian Empire's Central Asian frontier supported by a Scythian army after more than 30 years exiled amongst them and began a methodical conquest of the Parthian homelands of Northern Iran, as well as Media, Hyrcania and Media Atropatene. The

death of Mithridates II in September 91 BC brought his son, Gotarzes, to the throne. This war of competing blood-lines, referred to in this work as the Parthian Wars of Succession, paused with the temporary defeat of Sinatruces in 87 BC, but the death of Gotarzes soon followed and he was succeeded by his brother, Mithridates III Philopatoros, in that same year.<sup>56</sup>

Out of this instability two powerful contenders emerged in the Near East—Mithridates of Pontus and Tigranes of Armenia. Mithridates took on Rome's interests in the East and suffered the consequences of prolonged war and eventual defeat despite Rome herself undergoing profound upheaval from internal political forces and external threats. But Tigranes, played his position well—offering distant support to Pontus without attracting unwelcome Roman attention, meanwhile the simultaneous demise in fortunes of the Seleucids in Syria and the Parthians in Northern Mesopotamia, provided opportunity for Tigranes' imperial aspiration. Throughout much of the 80s he set upon an expansionist policy and for eighteen years, from 83 BC, he ruled, virtually unchallenged,<sup>57</sup> a kingdom that stretched across the greater part of the Near East until his fateful decision in 71/70 BC to face directly Roman advances beyond the Euphrates frontier. This study explains why Tigranes was able to effect this remarkable achievement and why he was able to bring stability to a region that for so long had known only internecine strife.<sup>58</sup>

Having explored the milieu of this ten year period, which ends with the Peace of Dardanus in 85 BC, the next ten years sees Roman interaction with the Parthians enter into a hiatus while the Parthian Wars of Succession continue and the Roman Republic is beset by a myriad of internal unrest and external threats. Part Two pieces the Parthian struggle together while paying only cursory attention to Rome's problems and sets the scene for Lucullus' entrance into the East.

This first part of this thesis argues that Sulla's meeting with the Parthian envoy, Orobazus, occurred in the campaigning season of 95 BC, perhaps August at the latest, at the Melitene/Tomisa crossing on the Euphrates River frontier with Sophene/Armenia. It occurred within the context of Sulla's expulsion of Pontic and Armenian forces from Cappadocia in support of Ariobarzanes' claim to the throne over his rival Ariarathes IX. It asserts that the Parthian presence there was a direct consequence of their support of the newly crowned king of Armenia, Tigranes, who had been held captive in the Parthian court at Babylon for some years. Furthermore this thesis proposes that the conciliatory stance and obsequious attitude

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<sup>56</sup> Evidence for this reconstruction is set out in detail below.

<sup>57</sup> Jus. 40.1.

<sup>58</sup> See below for a detailed treatment of the sources.

taken by Orobazus at this meeting, for which he was later executed by King Mithridates II, was a consequence of the precarious internal state of affairs in the wider, particularly eastern, Parthian Empire that was just beginning to manifest as the beginnings of the Parthian Wars of Succession which is dealt with in more detail in Part Two of this study. It also asserts that Sulla's involvement in the support of Ariobarzanes and the security of Cappadocia against the ongoing threats of Mithridates VI of Pontus and Tigranes II of Armenia was more extensive than previously recognised by the majority of modern scholarship and that this explains the apparent retardation in his *cursus honorum* in the 90s BC.

### The First Meeting



**Plate 2:** [Roman Moneyer Issues] **Faustus Cornelius Sulla.** 56 BC. AR Denarius (3.80 g, 5h). Rome mint. FAVSTVS before, diademed and draped bust of Diana right, wearing cruciform earring and double necklace of pearls and pendants, and jewels in hair pulled into a knot; crescent above, lituus behind / FELIX at upper right, Sulla seated left on a raised seat; before him kneels Bocchus, offering an olive-branch; behind, Jugurtha kneeling left, wearing beard, hands tied behind his back. Crawford 426/1; Sydenham 879; Kestner 3455; BMCRR Rome 3824; Cornelia 59.  
<http://www.cngcoins.com/Coin.aspx?CoinID=76530>.

Referring to the King Bocchus' surrender of Jugurtha to Sulla in 105 BC the scene depicted on the reverse of the coin shown above issued by Sulla's son, Faustus Cornelius Sulla,<sup>59</sup> bears an interesting resemblance to Sulla's first meeting with the Parthians. Although the circumstances are vastly different; the depiction of Sulla upon a raised throne, crowned with victory and seated between two foreign dignitaries must recall the similar scene upon the banks of the Euphrates River. Although this coin was minted some 50 years after the events of the Jugurthine War, the scene was well known and, according to Plutarch, Sulla had its

<sup>59</sup> Sal. *Jug.* 113; Plut. *Sull.* 3.1-4; Sydenham (1952) no. 879; *RRC* no. 426/1, pl. LI; *BMCRR* I, 471, no. 3824.

representation inscribed into a signet ring.<sup>60</sup> It is likely Faustus was familiar with this ring, if it was not actually in his possession.

The meeting with Parthia as presented by our sources has Sulla presiding between Ariobarzanes and Orobazus, the Parthian envoy. His handling of this sensitive meeting may have been a conscious re-enactment of this previous milestone in Sulla's career and thus in his selfish pride he paid little heed to the diplomatic fallout that his treatment of the Parthian would excite.

## The First Meeting and its Consequences

This section sets the circumstances that brought about the meeting between Sulla and the Parthians. It is argued that this meeting was coincidental, dependent upon Rome and Parthia's self-interests in the region and independent of the other's presence. The Parthian envoy, Orobazus, initiated the meeting to ensure Sulla's non-interference in their affairs across the Euphrates pertaining to their support of their new proxy on the Armenian throne, Tigranes II.<sup>61</sup> It is made clear that Parthia had far more to fear from Roman interference than the reverse. Sulla's behaviour at the meeting towards Orobazus indicated an attitude of ignorance towards Parthia and its Empire—an attitude that would predominate Roman thinking for the next three hundred years and fuel a succession of ill-conceived military adventures east of the Euphrates River.<sup>62</sup> It is argued that no formal treaty between the two powers was closed beyond Sulla's personal assurance that he would limit Cappadocia's, and therefore Rome's, interests to west of the Euphrates River.<sup>63</sup> This casual assurance and the dismissive way in which the Parthian envoy Orobazus had allowed himself to be treated were unsatisfactory to Mithridates II of Parthia and he was later executed.<sup>64</sup> This episode reveals the first disjunction in Romano-Parthian relations underpinned by their socio-cultural differences.

This study asserts that at the basis of this misunderstanding was the nature of Sulla's authority as perceived by Orobazus. The envoy may have assumed Sulla was acting as a proxy for official Roman foreign policy as invested in him by the rulers of the Roman Empire. On the contrary, Sulla was in fact making up policy as he went along, the Senate

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<sup>60</sup> Plut. *Sull.* 3.4.

<sup>61</sup> Plut. *Sull.* 5; App. *Mith.* 10.57; Jus. 38.3.3; Liv. *Per.* 70; Vel. Pat. 2.24.

<sup>62</sup> Plut. *Sull.* 5.4-5; "ὅτε καὶ λέγεται τρεῖς δίφρους προθέμενος, τὸν μὲν Ἀριοβαρζάνην, τὸν δὲ Ὀροβάζω, τὸν δὲ αὐτῷ, μέσος ἀμφοῖν καθεζόμενος χρηματίζειν."

<sup>63</sup> Contra A. Keveaney, "Roman Treaties with Parthia circa 95–circa 64 BC", *AJP* 102 (1981) 195-9.

<sup>64</sup> Plut. *Sull.* 5.5; "ἐφ' ᾧ τὸν μὲν Ὀροβάζον ὕστερον ὁ τῶν Πάρθων βασιλεὺς ἀπέκτεινε, τὸν δὲ Σύλλαν οἱ μὲν ἐπῆνεσαν ἐντρύφησαντα τοῖς βαρβάροις, οἱ δὲ ὡς φορτικὸν ἠτιάσαντο καὶ ἀκαίρως φιλότιμον."

could not have foreseen this meeting and no contingent mandata could have been formulated. Furthermore none of Sulla's assurances to the Parthian representative could have been binding without the formal ratification of the Senate upon his return or a message to that effect. As explored below there is no evidence of such happening. Orobazus could not have understood what little direct authority Sulla had in determining policy and would have assumed that any agreements made on the Euphrates were binding and long term. This approach to formulating foreign policy by Roman generals becomes more apparent in the 60s and 50s BC when Roman penetration of Parthian holdings, beginning with Lucullus in the aftermath of the Battle of Tigranocerta, was undertaken with little regard for any previous agreements.

On the other hand Sulla was ignorant of the extent and importance of the Parthian Empire and treated its representatives at this meeting accordingly. It was only in retrospect that our sources understood the significance and long-term ramifications of this occurrence. This attitude immediately set Romano-Parthian relations upon a wrong footing. This misunderstanding was only rectified when Augustus, as representative of Roman imperial foreign policy, came to conciliation with Parthia and had the standards of Crassus and Marcus Antonius returned in 20 BC. These issues of cultural dissonance and the supporting evidence are dealt with below.

This study asserts that in 95 BC<sup>65</sup> Lucius Cornelius Sulla, whose ostensible *imperium* at the time was the proconsular governorship of the provincia of Cilicia<sup>66</sup>—made the first contact by a Roman with the kingdom of Parthia. It occurred somewhere upon the banks of the Euphrates River, most probably at the crossing at Melitene, which marked the boundary

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<sup>65</sup> See below for discussion of this critical chronological problem and my argument for 95 BC contras 96 BC or 92 BC as many other scholars have propounded.

<sup>66</sup> For doubts as to the exact nature of this command and the actual status of Cilicia as a province at this time see Maggie, *RRAM* 284-5, n. 14-16. Compare the claim of Publius Servilius Vatia's that he was the first Roman to lead an army across the Taurus during his campaigns against the pirates between 78 BC and 74 BC; see Eutr. 6.3. and Or. 5.23.22. Indeed there is no mention by Sulla, via Plutarch, of his involvement with the pirates (for his use of Sulla's memoirs see *Sull.* 6.5; 14.2; 16.1; 17.1; 19.4; 23.3; 27.3; 37.10; 5.3. These inconsistencies leave some doubt about Sulla's involvement in Cilicia. As I have outlined below the most probable course of events involves Sulla receiving a command against the pirates but either just prior to his leaving or en-route, he was diverted from his original command and ordered by the Senate to deal with the more pressing problem of Cappadocia. A passage in Plutarch's *Lucullus* (5.4.1-2) clearly shows that the governorship of Cilicia was considered an important step towards gaining military commands within the interior of Asia Minor. Prior to Syria's annexation in 63 BC, Cilicia's proximity to Cappadocia gave it strategic importance in the maintenance of Roman interests there. "*Of Cilicia itself Lucullus made little account, but in the belief that, if he should get this province, which was near Cappadocia, no one else would be sent to conduct the war against Mithridates...*" (Loeb trans. 1968).

between the kingdoms of Cappadocia and Sophene.<sup>67</sup> This river was to remain the meeting point for these two empires and the focal point for their struggles for the next three centuries.

This episode and the circumstances that brought it about are of great importance in understanding the nature and development of the limits of Roman power in the Near East. As the first encounter between the two powers, it helped define their future relations and the boundaries of it. A clear understanding of the order of events and the state of affairs surrounding the encounter will further the comprehension of the nature of this frontier and the relationship of the powers it divided. Unfortunately the chronology of the first decade of the First Century BC that surrounds this episode is confused, especially in relation to Sulla's career and the state of Anatolia's many kingdoms. The date of his involvement in the East is crucial to understanding the circumstances that brought this meeting about. Since Badian's redating of Sulla's praetorship to 97 BC in an article published in 1959,<sup>68</sup> the consensus amongst scholars has moved to this conclusion, or thereabouts, from the traditional dating of 93 BC. This thesis accepts Badian's dating, but extends Sulla's involvement in the East well into 95 BC and beyond to potentially 93 BC; the reasoning for this is expanded upon below.<sup>69</sup> If this dating is correct then this has implications for our understanding of the situation in the East at the time of Sulla's involvement and the early development of Romano-Parthian relations and the river frontier that separated their respective spheres of influence. The year 96/5 BC seems to have been a significant year in the development of the Near East, with several important and dramatic changes in ruling dynasties. Our sources are silent as to the reasons why this period saw such widespread political disruption. It is possible that Parthian expansion into Northern Mesopotamia under the guidance of their aggressive ruler, Mithridates II, was the principle cause. Our records of Parthian movements in this period

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<sup>67</sup>Plut. *Sull.* 5.4; Vel. Pat. 11.24; Livy, *Sum.* 70; App. *Mith.* 8.57; Jus. 38.3f.

<sup>68</sup> E. Badian, "Sulla's Cilician Command", in *Studies in Greek and Roman History* (Oxford 1964) 157-178 [orig. in: *Athenaeum* 37 (1959) 276-303].

<sup>69</sup> For a complete overview of the controversy and the significant amount of literature it has spawned up until 1992 see C. R. Hatscher, "Sullas Karriere in den neunziger Jahren: Ansätze der Forschung (1830-1992)", *Hermes* 129 (2001) 208-224; specifically, Badian (1959) 276-303; T. C. Brennan, "Sulla's Career in the 90s: Some Reconsiderations", *Chiron* 22 (1992) 103-158; P. A. Cagniat, "L. Cornelius Sulla in the 90s: a Reassessment", *Latomus* 50 (1991) 295-303; A. Keaveney, (1981) 195-9; *Ibid.*, "Deux Dates Contestées de la Carrière de Sylla" *Les Études Classiques* 48 (1980) 149-57; G. V. Sumner, "Sulla's career in the 90s," *Athenaeum* 56 (1978) 395-6; J. Dobais, "Les premiers rapports des Romains avec les Parthes," *Arch. Orient* 3 (1931), 218-21; Sherwin-White, *Roman Foreign Policy in the East* (1984) 110f.; T. Liebmann-Frankfort, *Le Frontière Orient dans la Politique extérieure de la République romaine* (Brussels 1969); P. Arnaud, "Les Guerres des Parthes et de l'Arménie dans la première moitié du premier siècle av. n. è: problèmes de chronologie et d'extension territoriale (95-70 BC)", *Mesopotamia* 22 (1987). Arnaud has brought our attention to references to Sulla's career in Sidonius Apollinaris that further supports an earlier dating for Sulla's involvement in the East, *Ibid.*, "Sylla, Tigrane et les Parthes. Un nouveau document pour la datation de la propreture de Sylla: Sidoine Apollinaire, Paneg. Aviti., v 79-82", *REA* 93 (1991) 55-64; and further discussion, A. Keaveney, "Sulla's Cilician Command: The Evidence of Apollinaris Sidonius", *Historia* 44 (1995) 29-36.

from 95 to 85 BC are scant, as is the case with much of the so called Parthian “Dark Age” down to the victory of Orodes II in 55 BC, but through the interpretation of recently considered Babylonian, numismatic and epigraphic records it is possible to piece together an interpretation of the sequence of events in this ten year period—this receives more thorough consideration in Chapter Two.

The immediate pretext for Sulla’s presence on the banks of the Euphrates River, so far from his original *provincia* of Cilicia was Rome’s struggle with Mithridates of Pontus over the suzerainty of Cappadocia.<sup>70</sup> Both Mithridates and his former ally, Nicomedes of Bithynia, had recently put forward two rival claimants, both young boys, to the vacated throne of Cappadocia and each had presented them to the Roman Senate.<sup>71</sup> Both falsely asserted that they were the legitimate heirs of the former king of Cappadocia, Ariarathes VI, who had been assassinated some years before, circa 115 BC, by a fellow Cappadocian nobleman and associate of Mithridates, Gordius.<sup>72</sup> Both this Gordius and the wife of Nicomedes, Laodice, pleaded on behalf of their respective fraudulent claimants (Laodice was the former wife of King Ariarathes and now, due to her marriage to Nicomedes, the estranged sister to Mithridates). The Senate was probably suspicious and ruled in favour of neither, giving Cappadocia its independence.<sup>73</sup> The Cappadocians could not accept such a situation and asked the Senate for a king. The Senate saw a justifiable excuse to assert their own interests in the region by supporting a pro-Roman Cappadocian exile called Ariobarzanes, later entitled Primus and *ΦΙΛΟΠΟΜΑΝΟΣ*.<sup>74</sup> In this way Rome could maintain a stake in the region with the minimum of interference and commitment of resources. It seems that this was the Senate’s standard foreign policy procedure in its dealings with the East at this stage.<sup>75</sup> This study asserts that Armenia, and indeed Parthia, were not in the Senate’s calculations when these arrangements were made. Sulla would have to make policy “on the run” when presented with the recent and dramatic changes in Armenia and their impact on Rome’s

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<sup>70</sup> App. *Mith.* 57.231; Plut. *De vir. ill.* 75.4; *Ibid.* Sull. 5.3.

<sup>71</sup> Jus. 38.2.4-5.

<sup>72</sup> Jus. 37.1.5; 38.1.1.

<sup>73</sup> Jus. 38.2.7; “*Ac ne contumelia regum foret ademptum illis, quod daretur aliis, uterque populus libertate donatus est*”.

<sup>74</sup> Jus. 38.2. Justin is the only source to relate this episode in any detail and it must pertain to Ariobarzanes’ first instalment on the throne prior to his ousting by Tigranes, on behalf of Mithridates, and his subsequent attempted reinstalment by Manius Aquilius and Mallius Malthinus which had directly precipitated the First Mithridatic War.

<sup>75</sup> E. Badian, *Foreign Clientelae* (Oxford 1958) 110-115; A. N. SherwinWhite, “Roman Involvement in Anatolia”, *JRS* 67 (1977) 64-8; S. Mitchell, *Anatolia: Land, Men, and Gods in Asia Minor* (Oxford 1993) 29f. Rome was extremely reluctant to become directly involved in the affairs of Asia Minor by committing Roman troops. Since Magnesia and the subsequent campaigns under Manlius Vulso in 189, direct Roman military intervention in Asia Minor had occurred only twice prior to Sulla’s campaign against Mithridates in 87 BC.



interests in Cappadocia. The dating of Armenia's dynastic change, Parthia's involvement and its impact on Sulla's mission are dealt with in fuller detail below.

These embassies may have come at an inconvenient time for the Senate, well into the year of 96 BC and well after the delegation of provinces to those prorogued. However the situation called for immediate action and the Senate saw the instability in Cappadocia as a threat to what had previously been a loyal client state.<sup>76</sup> Sulla was the obvious and most convenient choice for the task, as it is likely that he was on the way to his command in Cilicia when Ariobarzanes and his revised *mandata* were sent to him.

The original purpose of Sulla's commission was the curbing of piracy from the southern coast of Asia Minor, which had been a significant problem since 102 BC when the praetor Marcus Antonius was commissioned to take action against them.<sup>77</sup> But there is evidence to suggest that Sulla never made it to Cilicia. Plutarch, with access to Sulla's diaries, does not mention any involvement with the pirates, only his commission to help Ariobarzanes,<sup>78</sup> nor is there any mention of them in Appian in relation to Sulla's *Κιλικίας ἄρχων*, only that he was ordered by the Senate to restore Ariobarzanes to his country.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore Plutarch does not mention the significant feat of crossing the Taurus from south

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<sup>76</sup> Cappadocia, under their king Ariarathes IV Eusebes (220-164 BC), had received the friendship of Rome after having been defeated by the Romans at Magnesia as an ally of Antiochus III (App. *Syr.* 11.7.32; 42; Liv. 37.32.40; for his marriage alliance with Antiochus see Diod. 31.19.7). This friendship was continued with great devotion by his son Ariarathes V Eusebes Philopator, costing him his life in supporting their efforts against Aristonicus (Liv. *Per.* 46; 42.19.3-6; 29.4; Poly. 31.3, 7; 32.1; Diod. 31.19.7-8). As reward, his son, Ariarathes VI Epiphanes Philopator, was presented Lycaonia by the Roman Manius Aquilius. It was upon this Ariarathes that Mithridates of Pontus enforced his will through the marriage of his sister, Laodice, and later had him assassinated when he judged a greater rein on that throne was required. It is at this point that we see the beginning of the conflict of interests between Rome and Mithridates over Cappadocia. The Senate must have seen Cappadocia as an important counterbalance to the possibility of any one of the other major players in Asia Minor; Bithynia, Pontus and Armenia, becoming too powerful in the region. The factional struggles within Cappadocia after the murder of Ariarathes VI and the subsequent delegations to Rome, gave it the opportunity to re-stabilize the situation and reassert its influence.

<sup>77</sup> Liv. *Per.* 68 and *Obs.* 44; Cic. *de Or.* 1.82; *Brut.* 168; Plut. *Pomp.* 26. It seems that this Marcus Antonius, the grandfather of the *triumvir*, scored a great victory over these pirates and celebrated a triumph in 100 BC (Plut. *Pomp.* 24, 6). But the inscription concerning the *Lex de Provinciis Praetoriis*, dated to the same year, suggests that the pirate problem was still far from resolved (*Fouilles de Delphes* III 4, no. 37=SEG III 378=M. Crawford (ed.) *Roman Statutes* (London 1996) 231-270; see Magie, *RRAM* 284, n. 13) and indeed it was not until Pompey's commission in 67 BC that the pirate scourge was taken under some control. Sulla's commission implies that the pirate menace had resurfaced in the interim but there is no explicit evidence to suggest that that was the specific reason for the commission; see Magie, *RRAM* 284, n. 13; *CAH* 9 (1994) 3f.; the law of 100 BC not only shows an increased concern by the Senate for the pirate problem, but a growing sphere of Roman influence in southern Asia Minor. It states that in order to ensure the safety of the seas, Cilicia was to be made a praetorian province; Columns II. 11 10-11 and III 11. 34-35. Sulla's commission suggests this was an ongoing status into the 90s BC; de Souza, (1999) 104-115; See Strab. *Geo.* 14.5.2 for nature and causes of this piracy.

<sup>78</sup> Plut. *Sull.* 5.3.

<sup>79</sup> App. *Mith.* 8.57

to north, which he would have had to achieve in order to enter Cappadocia from Cilicia.<sup>80</sup> It is therefore reasonable to surmise that Sulla's entire prorogation involved this one task in Cappadocia.<sup>81</sup>

Given this conclusion, it is likely that Sulla took the direct land route through Asia Minor, landing at Ephesus he would have moved east through Phrygia via Apamea, and Lycaonia via Iconium, as Cicero did over forty years later, towards the capitol of Cappadocia, Mazaca (approx. 540 Roman miles).<sup>82</sup> As was usual in their dealings with Asia Minor at this time, the Senate did not allocate forces to him, and a journey through these kingdoms would have facilitated the recruitment of the allies (οἱ συμμάχοι) mentioned by Plutarch.<sup>83</sup> The *Lex De Provinciis Praetoriis* makes it clear that Lycaonia was already a Roman possession and that Sulla could be guaranteed of support there.<sup>84</sup> Galatian allies may have also been involved as Cicero praises their loyal service to Sulla under King Deiotarus.<sup>85</sup> A recent souring of relations between Mithridates and the Galatian nobility in 96 BC, which had involved the murder of a good many of them, had led to the surviving nobility throwing their support largely behind the Roman cause in Anatolia.<sup>86</sup> The service provided by the Galatians has been more commonly assigned to Sulla's later struggle against Mithridates in 88, but the events of 96 BC make it likely Galatians were amongst his allies.<sup>87</sup>

Upon his arrival in Cappadocia he was faced with a significant anti-Roman faction led by Gordius who had recently returned from his unsuccessful mission to Rome and had decided force was necessary where diplomacy had failed. Sulla decisively defeated him along with a sizable Armenian contingent, killing many and driving Gordius from the country, thus restoring (καταγαγεῖν) Ariobarzanes to his homeland and appointing (ἀπέδειξε) him to the

<sup>80</sup> Traditionally it was P. Servilius Vatia that led a Roman army for the first time across the Taurus while campaigning against the pirates between 78 and 74 BC; Eutr. 6.3 and Oros. 5.23.22.

<sup>81</sup> For a parallel case we may look to Lucullus' Cilician command of 73 BC during which time, a period of seven years, he never once entered Cilicia and was wholly preoccupied with the campaign against Mithridates of Pontus in Asia Minor. See Magie, *RRMA*, 294 and 1176 for comments and references; Sherwin-White, "Rome, Pamphylia and Cilicia", *JRS* 66 (1976) 1ff. and (1984) 98-101 for an alternate view.

<sup>82</sup> Lycaonia had recently returned to Roman control. Most probably this occurred upon the assassination of Ariarathes VI at the instigation of Mithridates, which cannot be dated before 115 BC and according to Reinach is most probably dated to 111 BC (Magie, *RRAM* 1098 n. 11). Its status is made clear in the *Lex de Provinciis Praetoriis* (Cnidos Copy, Column III; II. 22-7) which has been reliably dated to late 101 BC, Crawford (ed.) (1996) 236. A precedence can be found in the reclamation of Phrygia, which had been a gift to Mithridates V Euergetes of Pontus for his aid against Aristonicus in 129 BC, into the province of Asia upon his assassination in 120 BC (Jus. 37.1.2; 38.5.3; App. *Mith.* 57). For a discussion of his likely march routes see Sherwin-White (1976) 8-9; and for a commentary on Cicero's travels see L. W. Hunter, "Cicero's Journey to his Province of Cilicia in 51 BC", *JRS* 3 (1913) 73-97.

<sup>83</sup> Plut. *Sull.* 5.3; For an overview of Rome's eastern foreign policy at this time see note 7 above.

<sup>84</sup> Cnidos Copy, Column III; 11.22-27. See corresponding notes in Crawford (ed.) (1996) 234-7.

<sup>85</sup> Cic. *Philo.* II. 33-4; cf. *Deiot.* 26.

<sup>86</sup> App. *Mith.* 7.46; 8.58; Plut. *De mul. virt.* 259 a-d.

<sup>87</sup> See Mitchell (1993) 27-34.

throne, fulfilling his commission.<sup>88</sup>

Several translations of this episode suggest that Sulla was restoring Ariobarzanes, who is clearly a Cappadocian nobleman in exile, to the throne.<sup>89</sup> To the contrary, the texts clearly states that Ariobarzanes was restored (κατήγαγον) to his country and appointed (ἀπέδειξε) to the throne. This misconception has developed from an unfounded tradition that places Sulla's praetorship in 93 BC and his assignment in Cappadocia in 92 BC. If 92 BC is the correct dating then Ariobarzanes has already been driven from the throne once by Tigranes of Armenia in collusion with Mithridates and that this is his second accession.<sup>90</sup> If we take Badian's conclusion as correct, as discussed below, and indeed the arguments appear sound, that Sulla's praetorship should be dated to 97 BC; then his involvement in the East and the appointment of Ariobarzanes to the throne must date to either mid-96 BC or mid-95 BC and that this is the first instance of Ariobarzanes taking the throne. A thorough interpretation of the sources supports this understanding, it ties in with contemporaneous events, and it makes better sense of the developments as related in the various sources.<sup>91</sup>

## The Chronological Problem: Sulla and the Cappadocian Regency

Clarifying the date and length of Sulla's involvement in Cappadocia is crucial to the

<sup>88</sup> Plut. *Sull.* 5.3; It is made clear in the *Lex de Provinciis Praetorii* (Cnidos Copy, Column III; II.1-15) that the recently passed *Lex Portia* had forbidden magistrates or promagistrates to stray outside of their designated *provincia* except in transit or reasons of state. It seems appropriate to conclude that Sulla's *provincia* had either been changed altogether or extended to include Asia and Cappadocia. He is described in Plutarch (*Sull.* 5.4) as *lingering* on the banks of the Euphrates having expelled an Armenian force. This would imply perhaps that the limits of his *provincia* had been set at the borders of Cappadocia, being the Euphrates River. Sherwin-White wishes to see the offices of governorship of Cilicia and Asia as becoming synonymous, but this seems to take the implications too far "Rome, Pamphylia and Cilicia", *JRS* 66 (1976) 7-9. It is clear that Cilicia is in fact a separate praetorian province; see Cnidos Copy, Column III; II. 28-41 and comments in Crawford (1996) 234-7.

<sup>89</sup> See the Loeb translation of Plutarch, *Sulla* 5.3 by B. Perrin (1916) where "...καὶ πολλοὺς μὲν αὐτῶν Καππαδοκῶν, πλείονας δ' αὖθις Ἀρμενίων προσβοηθοῦντας ἀποκτείνας, Γόρδιον μὲν ἐξήλασεν, Ἀριοβαρζάνην δὲ ἀπέδειξε βασιλέα." is translated as "...and after slaying many of the Cappadocians themselves and yet more of the Armenians who came to their aid, he drove out Gordius, and made Ariobarzanes king <again>." when it is clear that the adverb αὖθις must apply to the verb προσβοηθοῦντας. In the Loeb App. *Mith.* 8.57 by Horace White (1912) "...ἐς μὲν Καππαδοκίαν ἐγὼ κατήγαγον Ἀριοβαρζάνην Κιλικίας ἄρχων, ὅδε Ῥωμαίων ψηφισαμένων..." is translated as "I restored Ariobarzanes to the <throne> of Cappadocia by decree of the Senate when I was governor of Cilicia, and you obeyed the decree", when in fact the Greek clearly states that he was simply restored to the <country> of Cappadocia. Compare Strab. *Geo.* 12.2.11; Jus. 38.2.8; 5.9; Livy, *Per.* 70; Plut. *de vir. ill.* 75.4.

<sup>90</sup> Take for instance the interpretation by Sherwin-White (1977) 173-4.

<sup>91</sup> For Sherwin-White's opposition to this reconstruction see (1984) 110f.; "This version neglects some of the evidence, such as the claim of Mithridates that he met the Roman decision by withdrawing Ariarathes, and Senate's attempt to appease Mithridates by requiring the withdrawal of Nicomedes from Paphlagonia." But the account outlined need not contradict this evidence. For Plutarch clearly states that Sulla fought against Cappadocians and Armenians in restoring Ariobarzanes to Cappadocia (*Sull.* 5.3) which supports the claim that Mithridates withdrew his claim on Cappadocia (App. *Mith.* 8.57). The fighting can be quite easily accounted for as internal factional conflict. This may well have had covert Pontic support, as clearly Gordius is working in Mithridates' interests against any Roman intervention in Cappadocian domestic affairs (Jus. 38.2.5 and 3.2). He was later forced to flee by Sulla, most probably back to Mithridates (Plut. *Mith.* 5.3).

understanding of the timing and therefore reasons for the meeting between Sulla and the Parthian envoy. Despite the sizable scholarship that surrounds the chronological problem of Sulla's career in the 90s, only a few have made some attempt to place the circumstances of Sulla's meeting within its wider geopolitical context.<sup>92</sup> This study contends that understanding the geopolitical circumstance of the Anatolian kingdoms at this time strengthens this study's dating of Sulla's involvement in Near Eastern affairs in the 90s. Furthermore this section demonstrates that Sulla may well have been engaged in a protracted involvement in Anatolia beyond the traditional prorogation limit of one year and that this may explain the apparent suspension of Sulla's career in the 90s.

The previous consensus, as stated above, has Sulla praetor in 93 BC and then prorogued to Cilicia in the following year. The reason for this is simply that since his return from Germany in 101/100 BC,<sup>93</sup> the only date in which we can have some certainty of his whereabouts is back at Rome in the turmoils of 91 BC which would lead to the Social War of the following year.<sup>94</sup> It has been assumed that he had just returned from his eastern campaigns in the previous year of 92 BC and therefore this dates his praetorship to 93 BC. Badian has seriously questioned these assumptions, placing his praetorship in 97 BC and his eastern foray in 96 BC.<sup>95</sup> This has far reaching implications for our understanding of the overall eastern situation at this time which are explored below.

Since the publication of Badian's hypothesis a number of scholars have entered into the debate surrounding Sulla's apparent indolence for much of the 90s. Cagniard has gone as far as to say that he fell into political obscurity following his aborted trial for extortion upon his return from Asia Minor, in 95 BC by his reckoning, and that it was only thanks to the extraordinary circumstances of the Social War that he was able to resurrect his political career in 89/8 BC.<sup>96</sup> His reputation for overindulgence and a profligate lifestyle strengthens the argument for a long hiatus—eight years between praetorship and consulship, a period of

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<sup>92</sup> Brennan (1992) 103-158; Cagniard (1991) 295-303; Keveaney (1981) 195-9; Dobais (1931) 218-21; Arnaud (1987); *Ibid* (1991).

<sup>93</sup> Val. Max. 7.5.5; Plut. *Sull.* 5.1-4 is quite clear that Sulla was keen to further his political ambitions on the back of his military successes against the Germans. In this light, a delay of six years till he ran for the *praetorship* makes little sense.

<sup>94</sup> Two recorded events surrounding Sulla take place during this interim period between his return from the East and the Social War—the aborted trial for extortion in relation to his settlement of Ariobarzanes brought by C. Marcius Censorinus and Firmicus Maternus (Plut., *Sull.* 5.12; Firm. Mat. *Math.* 1.7.28) and the dedication of a group of statues by Bocchus, king of Mauretania that depicted his handing over of Jugurtha to Sulla (Plut. *Sull.* 6.1-2).

<sup>95</sup> Badian (1964) 157-178.

<sup>96</sup> Cagniard (1991) 301-3.

time unmatched by any other known career from 179 to 88 BC.<sup>97</sup> But Brennan has argued that Sulla's mission to the East took far longer than has been traditionally acknowledged. He cites many examples of prorogation extending beyond the requisite one year and, with the increased administrative demands placed upon the magistracies with the rapid expansion of the empire in the previous fifty years, extended prorogations became not uncommon.<sup>98</sup> This hypothesis that Sulla spent several years in Anatolia, cementing Ariobarzanes' position in Cappadocia against the designs of Mithridates, Tigranes and Nicomedes, ties in with the crucial and delicate nature of the geopolitical situation in the Near East towards the end of the 90s and also explains Sulla's absence from Rome's political scene for most of the latter half of the 90s. Furthermore a reference in Sidonius Appollinaris works suggests that Sulla prosecuted a war against Tigranes—the first Roman to do so.<sup>99</sup>

*Vae mihi! qualis eram, cum per mea iussa iuberent*

*Sulla, Asiatogenes, Curius, Paulus, Pompeius*

*Tigrani, Antiocho, Pyrrho, Persae. Mithridati*

*pacem ac regna, fugam vectigal, vincla, vebenum.*

(Sid. App. Carm. 7.79-82)

*Armenias Pontumque dedi, quo Marte petitum*

*dicat Sulla tibi, forsitan non creditor uni:*

*consule Lucillum.*

(*Ibid.*, 2.458-460)

Following Keaveney and Arnaud's argument, it would seem that in the first passage

<sup>97</sup> Cagniard (1991) 298-303; for Sulla's infamous lifestyle see, Plut. *Sull.* 2.3-4; 36.1; *Comp. Lys. et Sull.* 41. (3).2; Val. Max. 6.9.6; Sall. *BJ* 95.3; *Hist.* 1.58-61; Firm. Mat. *Math.* 1.28; 34-5. Sulla's once proud patrician family had long fallen into obscurity and so, says Cagniard, we may not be surprised at Sulla's somewhat retarded political career, *op. cit.* 298; Sall. *BJ* 95.3.

<sup>98</sup> Brennan (1992) 137-144; "Though there are only a few cases in the second half of the second century (and beginning of the first) where we know the approximate length of an overseas praetorian command, it appears that a three-year tenure was entirely possible." *Ibid.*, 139-140; specific examples are: M. Cosconius, Macedonia 135-133 BC; Q. Servilius Caepio, Hispania Ulterior 109-7 BC; T. Albucius, Sardinia 108-6 BC; and of particular interest to Sulla's appointment, M. Antonius, Cilicia 102-100 BC; see *Ibid.* 140, n. 107 for detailed references.

<sup>99</sup> Sid Ap. Carm. 7.79-82; P. Arnaud, "Sylla, Tigrane et les Parthes. Un nouveau document pour la datation de la propreture de Sylla: Sidoine Apollinaire, Paneg. Aviti, v 79-82," *REA* 93 (1991) 55-64; A. Keaveney, "Sulla's Cilician Command: The Evidence of Apollinaris Sidonius," *Historia* 44 (1995) 29-36; W. B. Anderson, "Notes on The Carmina of Apollinaris Sidonius," *CQ* 28 (1978) 17-23.

conquerors are coupled with conquered in respective order; therefore Sulla is matched with Tigranes. In the second passage both Lucullus and Sulla are credited with wars against Pontus and Armenia. One caveat must stand forth—Sidonius was a 5<sup>th</sup> Century AD personage from Lyon far removed from the events of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century BC. Carmen 7 is a panegyric to Emperor Avitus, his father-in-law, and Carmen 2 is a panegyric to Emperor Anthemius. This said Sidonius had access to works such as Sallust's *Histories* that are no longer extant in full and they are likely the source of the many historical allusions in these panegyrics. In general, Sidonius' historical commentary is accurate with a few glaring exceptions where he has bent the facts to suit his oratory.<sup>100</sup> If Sidonius' sources are correct then it further supports the hypothesis that Sulla's involvement in Anatolia was more extensive than previously recognised. The further implications are investigated below.

To further support a year of 95 BC as Ariobarzanes' year of accession, and hence by association Sulla's involvement, we have the evidence of a number of Cappadocian coins and this is expanded upon in the section: *The Cappadocian Regency and the Numismatic Question*. Theodore Reinach first organized Cappadocian coinage by type and regnal year—indicated by the exergual lettering on the reverse. His work laid the foundation for the studies and criticisms of Otto Mørkholm and Bono Simonetta. More recently Simonetta's son, Alberto, has provided us with an extensive re-evaluation of their work, and it is this that will contribute to the basis for this study.<sup>101</sup>

Velleius Paterculus is the only authority which gives us a firm dating for Sulla's praetorship, but it is so widely at variance with the known facts that it cannot be accepted.<sup>102</sup> It is clear in the *Periochae* of Livy that Sulla's mission followed the proconsulship of Titus Didius and Rome's inheritance of Cyrene and is before the prosecution of Publius Rutilius. This order of events must place Sulla's presence in Cappadocia on or between 96 and 93 BC and therefore his praetorship anywhere from 97 to 94 BC. Badian has shown that the most logical dating for Sulla's praetorship is 97 BC and so he was prorogued and sent to his

<sup>100</sup> See Sid. Ap. *Carm.* 2.510-512; 9.233-4; 15.94, 102-3; 23.13; *Epist.* 5.3.4; Keaveney (1995) 31.

<sup>101</sup> T. Reinach, "Essai sur la numismatique des rois de Cappadoce", *RN* (1886) 301-355 and 452-482; reprinted in: *Trois royaumes de l'Asie Mineure* (Paris 1888); Ø. Mørkholm, "The Cappadocians Again", *NC* (1979) 244-5; B. Simonetta, *The Coins of the Cappadocian Kings* (Fribourg 1977); *Ibid.*, "Sulla prima monetazione di Ariarathes VI di Cappadocia", *GNS* 25 (1975) 4-7; *Ibid.*, "Monete inedite dei re di Cappadocia", *GNS* 29 (1979) 55-8; C. Rodewald's review of Simonetta, "Coins of the Cappadocian Kings", *CQ* 29 (1979) 340-1; A.M. Simonetta, "The Coinage of the Cappadocian Kings: A Revision and a Catalogue of the Simonetta Collection", *Parthica* 9 (2007) 11-152.

<sup>102</sup> Vel. Pat. 2.15.3; see Badian (1959) 280-1 for the argument against this inaccuracy.

elected province of Cilicia in 96 BC.<sup>103</sup>

The time it would have taken Sulla to reach his province affects the chronology. It took three months for Cicero to reach Cilicia from Rome in 51 BC. He was eager to get to his province so as to end his year of governorship and be back in Rome with the minimum of delay.<sup>104</sup> He travelled by the quickest route, which was largely by sea, and left Italy when the sailing conditions were at their best—perhaps June 10<sup>th</sup> as he arrived in Actium on June 14<sup>th</sup>.<sup>105</sup> He eventually arrived in Ephesus on the July 22<sup>nd</sup> after a stay of ten days in Athens—so one month without delays would be a reasonable estimation for a journey from Rome to Ephesus.<sup>106</sup> In addition to this transit time, we may assume that Sulla's change in mission may have required some delay, as time was needed for Ariobarzanes' arrival and the collection of allied forces along the way. There is also the additional time of travelling overland to Cappadocia, which would have required at least a month.<sup>107</sup> So it is unlikely then, at a conservative estimate, that Sulla's entire journey to reach his newly designated provincia could have taken less than two months and was more likely three or four.<sup>108</sup> Assuming he had left Italy at the time of the best sailing conditions, from June/July onwards, he would have reached Cappadocia late in the campaigning season of 96 BC. Given the severity of winters upon an inland plateau that averages an altitude of 1000 meters above sea level, it is not unreasonable to see Sulla achieving little in that year and wintering with his forces until the campaign season of the following year.<sup>109</sup>

There is a possibility Sulla left Rome in late autumn of 97 BC. Given the likely lagging of the Roman Civic Calendar behind the seasonal/solar year due to inconsistent

<sup>103</sup> For arguments against Badian's redating see, Keaveney (1995) 29-36; M. Sordi, "La Legatio in Cappadocia di C. Marionell 99-98 BC", *Rend. Ist. Lombard.* (Milano 1973) 370-378; A.N. Sherwin-White, "Ariobarzanes, Mithridates and Sulla," *CQ* 27 (1977) 175-183; G.V. Sumner, "Sulla's career in the 90s", *Athenaeum* 56 (1978) 395-6; A. Keaveney, "Deux dates contestées de la carrière de Sylla", *LEC* 48 (1980) 149-159; *Ibid*, "Roman Treaties with Parthia circa 95-circa 64B.C.", *AJP* 102 (1981) 195 n.3; Brennan (1992) 103-158; Arnaud (1991) 55-64.

<sup>104</sup> Hunter (1913) 73-97; for the best and safest times to travel by sea in the Mediterranean see Veg. 4.39.

<sup>105</sup> Cic. *Fam.* 3.4 was written just before he left Brundisium and is dated around the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> of June; O. E. Schmidt, *Der Briefwechsel des M. T. Cicero* (Leipzig 1893) 74.

<sup>106</sup> See Cic. *Att.* 5.9.1 for his arrival.

<sup>107</sup> From Ephesus to Mazaca is an approximate distance of 540 Roman miles, not taking into account elevation changes. Cicero's average daily travel rate was 25 Roman miles per day; Hunter (1913) 79. This rate drops significantly, proportional to the size of the force and its logistical capabilities. Given these factors it is estimated that it took one month for Sulla to reach Mazaca given ideal conditions.

<sup>108</sup> Luttwak states that an army took 124 days plus two days at sea to march from Rome to Antioch at a rate of 15 Roman miles per day (13.8 statute miles or 22 kilometres), but it must be remembered that Sulla was travelling without an army, only his entourage, until his arrival in Asia Minor. This would have increased his movement rate somewhat, more akin to Cicero's rate of travel. See E. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire—From the First Century AD to the Third* (London 1976) 80-4; Map 2.2.

<sup>109</sup> Given the harshness of the winter in this region which makes campaigning at any other time of the year near impossible. See Cic. *Att.* 5.21.14 for the difficulties of crossing the Taurus after late April. See Tac. *Ann.* 13.35 for Corbulo's army's suffering in an Anatolian winter in the First Century AD.

intercalations, this makes an early seasonal start for Sulla's mission more likely, in which case Sulla could have been ready to take an active role in Cappadocian affairs in the campaigning season of 96 BC. Within the sources there is no indication of the seasonal timing of these operations or their length and they likely could have taken all of 96 BC and into the campaigning season of 95 BC to complete. Either way, an early or late start to Sulla's mission does not significantly impinge upon the argument that geopolitical circumstances support the campaigning season of 95 BC as the timing for the first meeting with the Parthian envoy. If we look closely at the state of the surrounding kingdoms at this time we find a period of wide-spread political upheaval, of which Sulla's mission was one, albeit significant, element within a much larger picture. In the next section Sulla's mission to Cappadocia is explored within the wider context of Asia Minor and the Near East's geopolitics.

### **The Cappadocian Regency and the Numismatic Question**

Numismatic evidence strengthens the argument for 95 BC as the year of Ariobarzanes' accession and therefore the timing of Sulla's involvement in Cappadocia. This section explores this evidence.

Ariarathes V Eusebes was succeeded by Ariarathes VI Epiphanes in the year 130/129 BC. Ariarathes V died in the service of Rome against the pretender Aristonicus. His widow, Nysa, had five of her six sons murdered so the youngest, Ariarathes VI, could rule in proxy with herself holding the effective reins of power for as long as possible. When this Ariarathes came to rule independently is unknown, but he was probably in his puberty by 120 BC. He was murdered by Mithridates VI of Pontus and Ariarathes VII came into power sometime after 115 BC.<sup>110</sup> His last attestation is upon a Delian inscription dated to 102/101 BC.<sup>111</sup> Shortly after we have the curtailed reign of Ariarathes IX and the accession of the Roman pretender Ariobarzanes for whose regnal dating we must rely almost exclusively upon the numismatic evidence. His son Ariobarzanes II received the kingdom from Pompey some when during his eastern commission between 66-2 BC.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Pol. 31.3.1; Jus. 37.1.2, 4, 5.

<sup>111</sup> *OGIS* I 353, with incorrect date = *Inscriptions de Délos* 1576, correctly dated.

<sup>112</sup> Simonetta and Mørkholm series: Ariarathes VII: 1-2, 7-12, 16; Ariarathes VIII: no coins (Simonetta), 1-2 (Mørkholm); Ariarathes IX: 2, 4-5, 12-13, 15 (Simonetta), 1-5, 12-13, 15 (Mørkholm); Ariobarzanes I: 1-3, 5-6, 11 (added by Mørkholm), 13-16, 18, 21-32; Ariobarzanes II: 7-8 (Simonetta only). For discussion of Ariobarzanes I's abdication see Brennan (1992) 128-132.





It is of interest to note that the regnal years of Ariarathes IX, as indicated by his coinage if their identification and regnal numbering are correct, continue to 15. If we place his accession at its earliest possible date as the Delian inscription would suggest, of 101/100 BC, then we have his reign ending in 86/5 BC. As this impinges upon Ariobarzanes I's reign, clearly there is a problem. It has been claimed that Cappadocia was jointly ruled throughout this period and an internecine struggle ensued with both kings producing competing coinage.<sup>113</sup>

No satisfactory solution has as yet been presented. The exergual lettering as regnal dating is far too consistent in other respects to be ignored in the case of Ariarathes IX. This suggests a Cappadocia in a state of continual civil war for sometime after the initial stage of Sulla's mission, with Ariarathes IX remained in power at least in some part of Cappadocia with the support of Mithridates of Pontus—more than likely the eastern regions that borders Pontus and Armenia. A situation that may have contributed to Sulla's extended prorogation.

This study proposes that Sulla's involvement in Cappadocia was indeed longer and more extensive than has previously been acknowledged. Several reconstructions have Sulla spending the standard one year in his prorogation and then returning to Rome. These scholars then have to explain the apparent retardation of Sulla's career after his return. The sources only begin to mention Sulla's involvement in civic matters again in 91 BC leaving a virtually unprecedented gap of 4 years out of the political scene since his return. If it is acknowledged that Sulla could have spent the years 96 through to 93 BC in the East, a not unlikely scenario given the ever increasing administrative demands placed upon the Roman state at this time, then this neatly explains why Sulla was out of the political scene at Rome for so long. This is

<sup>113</sup> Brennan (1992) 128. In the aftermath of the First Mithridatic War in 84/3 BC, Mithridates of Pontus still maintained control of a part of Cappadocia. That part may very well have been that which was controlled by Ariarathes IX prior to his death in 86/5 BC; App. *Mith.* 9.64.

further expanded upon below and the evidence examined.



What is better understood is the terminus date of Ariobarzanes I's reign. His highest regnal year is 32 and we know that he was forced to abdicate by Pompey in deference to his son some when from 66 to 62 BC.<sup>114</sup> If our dating of Sulla's intervention in the Cappadocia is correct, 95 BC, then we have a terminus date of 63 BC—assuming Ariobarzanes officially ascended the throne within the same year as his meeting with the Parthian envoy. Brennan has suggested that 63 BC cannot be the year as Pompey was solely occupied with matters in Syria and Judaea during that entire time.<sup>115</sup> He concludes that the most probable abdication dates are 65/4 or 64/3 BC, particularly in light of a recently discovered coin with the regnal year 11 that can be dated no earlier than 85/4 BC when C. Scribonius Curio re-established Ariobarzanes to the Cappadocian throne that “... *virtually rules out the possibility that Ariobarzanes counted 97/96 BC as his <year 1>*”.<sup>116</sup>

Of the two years postulated above Brennan prefers 95/94 BC as Ariobarzanes I's year 1. This dating is supported by a coin hoard found in Sophene that contained Cappadocian coins with a terminus regnal year of 31. As Sophene was not added to Cappadocia by Pompey prior to 65, we may be confident in equating Ariobarzanes' regnal year 31 with 65 BC, thus further cementing our dating of Sulla's intervention in Cappadocia to 95 BC.<sup>117</sup> To conclude Brennan places Pompey in Cappadocia in the spring of 64 BC to receive Ariobarzanes abdication and so he counts his first regnal year as 95/4 BC.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>114</sup> Val. Max. 5.7. ext. 2; App. *Mith.* 15.105.

<sup>115</sup> Brennan (1992) 129.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>117</sup> App. *Mith.* 15.105; H. B., Mattingly, “Julius Caesar, Governor of Macedonia”, *Chiron* 9 (1979) 166; Thompson, Mørkholm, and Kraay, *An Inventory of Greek Coin Hoards*, (New York 1973) no. 1741; contra T. Frankfort, “La Sophène et Rome”, *Latomus* 22 (1963) 186f.

<sup>118</sup> Brennan (1992) 131.

**Table 1:** Chronology of the Cappadocian Regnal Years According to the Numismatic Evidence

Year	Regnal year of Ariarathes IX	Regnal year of Ariobarzanes I	Events according to Simonetta's interpretation of the historians	Events according to this study's reinterpretation
101/100	1		Murder of Ariarathes VII, advent of Ariarathes IX.	
100/99	2			
99/8	3		Possible invasion by Ariarathes VIII.	
98/7	4			
97/6	5			
96/5	6		Ariarathes IX abandons Cappadocia.	Ariarathes IX/Gordius driven from Cappadocia by Sulla.
95/4		1	Late in the year advent of Ariobarzanes.	Sulla appoints Ariobarzanes to the throne of Cappadocia. Armenia and Parthia are made to recognize his sovereignty.
94/3		2	Again late in the year, Ariobarzanes expelled by Gordius and promptly restored by Sulla.	
93/2		3		Sulla leaves Cappadocia for Rome.
92/1			Ariobarzanes newly expelled.	Ariobarzanes newly expelled.
91/0	11	5	Ariobarzanes restored by Aquilius, then Ariobarzanes is expelled by Mithridates who re-establishes Ariarathes IX, First Mithridatic War.	Ariobarzanes restored by Aquilius.
90/89	12			Ariobarzanes is expelled by Mithridates who re-establishes Ariarathes IX.
89/8	13			Diplomatic and military posturing by both sides.
88/7	14			Year 1, 173 <sup>rd</sup> Olympiad, First Mithridatic War begins Aug./Sept.
87/6	15			Year 2, 173 <sup>rd</sup> Olympiad
86/5			Death of Ariarathes IX.	Year 3, 173 <sup>rd</sup> Olympiad. Death of Ariarathes IX.
85/4		11	Peace of Dardanus, Curio re-establishes Ariobarzanes.	Year 4, 173 <sup>rd</sup> Olympiad. Peace of Dardanus, Curio re-establishes Ariobarzanes.
84/3				
83/2		13		
82/1		14	Ariobarzanes expelled again.	
81/0		15	Ariobarzanes restored by Murena.	
80/79		16		
79/8				
78/7				
77/6				
76/5				
75/4		21		
74/3		22		
73/2			Mithridates expels Ariobarzanes.	
72/1		24	Ariobarzanes re-established by Lucullus.	
71/0		25		
70/69				
69/8		27		
68/7		28		

67/6		29	Mithridates and Tigranes expel Ariobarzanes.	
66/5		30	Ariobarzanes re-established by Pompey.	
65/4		31		
64/3		32		
63			Abdication of Ariobarzanes.	
Table 1: From A. M. Simonetta, 'Revision and Catalogue of the Cappadocian Kings Coinage in the Simonetta Collection', Parthica (2007) 86-7.				

As regards to Sulla's postulated departure from Cappadocia in 93/2 BC and Ariarathes' resurgence, Table 1 clearly shows an uninterrupted coin issue by Ariobarzanes down to that year. The following year, 92/1 BC, shows no issue by either claimants, and Simonetta rightly ascribes this year to when Ariobarzanes is ejected by Mithridates' generals, Mithraas and Bagoas and Ariarathes is reappointed.<sup>119</sup> Unlike Simonetta, for the reasons outlined above, this study ascribes this ejection as the first such incidence, whereas Simonetta has him first ejected and restored by Sulla in 94/3 BC. As already outlined this study has Ariobarzanes was appointed to the throne for the first time by Sulla in 95 BC, where he remains with Sulla's direct support down to 93 BC. As Table 1 demonstrates, the coinage clearly supports this reconstruction.

The year 91/0 sees issues by both claimants and corresponds to the uncertain time of M. Aquilius and L. Cassius' intervention on Ariobarzanes' behalf and would have seen both claimants upon that throne within that one year.<sup>120</sup> Having restored that regent and Nicomedes of Bithynia they encourage them to go onto the offensive against Mithridates. This eventually precipitates the First Mithridatic War, which according to Appian began about (ἀμφὶ) the 173<sup>rd</sup> Olympiad.<sup>121</sup>

The year 90/89 marks the year when Ariobarzanes was ejected again by a force led by Ariarathes himself.<sup>122</sup> The intervening period down to the beginning of open hostilities in the campaigning season of 88 BC was taken up with first diplomatic then military manoeuvrings and the mustering of forces described in Appian 3.15-6. Ariobarzanes remains in the wilderness until the death of Ariarathes in 86/5 and the First Mithridatic War is brought to a

<sup>119</sup> App. *Mith.* 3.10.

<sup>120</sup> App. *Mith.* 3.11.

<sup>121</sup> App. *Mith.* 3.17; the beginning of the 173<sup>rd</sup> Olympiad corresponds to the full moon in August of 88 BC. This is according to F. K. Ginzel, *Handbuch der mathematischen und technischen Chronologie* 2 (Leipzig 1904-14) 354ff. and ZPE 1 (1967) 107-9, who places this yearly timing in odd Olympiads and the full moon in September in even Olympiads. Therefore the precise date for the beginning of the 173<sup>rd</sup> Olympiad is 28/8/-89.

<sup>122</sup> App. *Mith.* 3.15.

premature close by Sulla in 85/4 BC with the Peace of Dardanus—the date of Ariobarzanes’ year 11 issue.<sup>123</sup>

This study has now provided a firm chronology of events surrounding the accession of Ariobarzanes, Cappadocia and Sulla’s career in the 90s. This establishes 95 BC as the first year of Ariobarzanes’ reign and the year of Sulla’s involvement with the Parthian ambassadorial mission on the banks of the Euphrates River. It is now possible for this study to place these events within their wider context and therefore come to a more in depth understanding of why this meeting came about and what are its implications. This chronology can now be synchronised with events across the breadth of the Near East. With this in mind it is now appropriate to investigate the geopolitical circumstances of the kingdoms east of the Euphrates River at and around the time of this meeting. This study argues that with a wider appreciation of the circumstances that surrounded the meeting we can better understand the outcome of that meeting and the earliest evolutionary steps of Romano-Parthian relations that would lead to their worsening in the 60s BC onwards.

## Armenia

With the year of accession of Ariobarzanes now established as 95 BC it is now necessary to investigate the geopolitical circumstances that brought the Parthian delegation to the Euphrates frontier in that year. To that end the accession date of Tigranes II has to be narrowed down and thanks to the BCT this can now be accomplished with some confidence.

The traditional dating of Tigranes’ accession to the Armenian throne is 95 BC. This dating is based upon a statement in Plutarch that Tigranes had been on the throne of Armenia for twenty five years when Lucullus’ envoy, Appius Claudius Pulcher, interviewed him requesting the surrender of Mithridates,<sup>124</sup> but there is a lack of certainty in the chronology of Lucullus activities in Asia Minor which may place this meeting anywhere within the years 71 to 70 BC and thereby push the date of Tigranes’ accession back to 96 BC.<sup>125</sup> There is now

<sup>123</sup> App. *Mith.* 8.52-9.63; Fimbria is said to have ravaged Illium in retribution for their apparent support of Mithridates just at the close (*ληγούσης ἄρτι*) of the 173<sup>rd</sup> Olympiad, so July/August 85 BC (App. *Mith.* 8.53). The events proceeding (App. *Mith.* 8.54-9.63), including Sulla’s march from Greece to Asia, must firmly place the Treaty of Dardanus to the campaigning season of the following year, 84 BC.

<sup>124</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 21.6; “...φωνῆς σχεδὸν ἐλευθέρας ἀκούοντα διὰ πέντε καὶ εἴκοσιν ἐτῶν τοσαῦτα γὰρ ἐβασίλευσε, μᾶλλον δὲ ὑβρίσεν.” Strab. *Geo.* 2.14.15; App. *Mith.* 12.83; Plut. *Dec.* 19. 1; Magie, *RRMA*, 205, n. 16; 338f. For Tigranes’ involvement in Phoenicia at the time of Appius Claudius’ arrival in Antioch see Jos. *AJ* 13.16.4.419f. and *BJ* 1.5.3.116; P. Z. Bedoukian, “Artaxiad Dynasty of Armenia” in *Selected Numismatic Studies of Paul Z. Bedoukian* (Los Angeles 1981) 45; R. D Sullivan, *Near Eastern Royalty and Rome, 100-30 BC* (Toronto 1990) 97-9; F. Geyer, “Tigranes”, no. 1, *RE* 6A (1937) 970-8.

<sup>125</sup> See Magic, *RRMA*, 339-40, 1213, n. 34 and 1214, n. 38, who suggests the early summer of 70 BC and Broughton (1952) 106-9, who places the meeting in the spring of 70 BC, for the authorities on this debate.

sufficient evidence to place Tigranes' ascent to the throne in the second half of 96 BC. As a consequence, his initial consolidation of Armenia and the absorption of Sophene can now be confidently dated to about the time of Sulla's first involvement in Cappadocian affairs, towards the end of 96 BC and into the campaigning season of 95 BC.<sup>126</sup>

As regards to A. Claudius Pulcher's mission to Tigranes as related by Plutarch,<sup>127</sup> this study errs towards an earlier date rather than the later. This hinges upon a 74 BC dating for the outbreak of the Third Mithridatic War rather than 73 BC as has been argued by Magie and others which would push the whole chronology of events one year forward and as a consequence Tigranes' accession year to 95 BC.<sup>128</sup>

The argument for a later dating stems from the problem of how to fit a long series of events, as presented by our sources, into the short period between the beginning of Lucullus' consulship on the Kalends of January 74 BC and the outbreak of the war at the beginning of spring of that same year with the news of Nicomedes IV's death and the bequest that sparked the war reaching Rome in the interim.<sup>129</sup>

In this time period of, at best, two to three months from January to March, it is argued, the proconsul L. Octavius has had to travel to his province of Cilicia, die there or en route, word of this has to travel back to Rome,<sup>130</sup> Nicomedes then dies and news of his bequest has also to reach Rome, then Mithridates has to invade Bithynia. In the meantime Lucullus has to raise a legion in Italy and march it to the Bosphorus, then on into Phrygia. Alternatively he has to sail it to the west coast of Asia Minor then march it inland to Phrygia—both journeys are undertakings of one to two months at best. He then has to take

<sup>126</sup> Appian states that Tigranes founded his city of Tigranocerta in a part of Armenia where he first assumed the crown; *Mith.* 67. This cannot be correct as the vast consensus places the city in either the kingdoms of Sophanene or Arzanene, just south of the Taurus Mountains. This may indicate he assumed the crown the moment he crossed into Armenia rather than waiting till he got to his seat of power at Artaxata and if so, further supports an earlier date for his ascent to the throne (96 BC) rather than a later (95 BC).

<sup>127</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 21.6.

<sup>128</sup> Magie, *RRAM* 320, 1200-1, n. 49, 324f.; For the most recent discussion and bibliographies see, B. C. McGing, "The Date of the Outbreak of the Third Mithridatic War", *Phoenix* 38 (1984) 12-18; *Ibid.*, "The Ephesian Customs Law and the Third Mithridatic War", *ZPE* 109 (1995) 283-8; W. H. Bennett, "The Death of Sertorius and the Coin", *ZAG* 10 (1961) 459-472; A. M. Ward, "Caesar and the Pirates II—The Elusive M. Iunius Iuncus and the Year 75/4", *AJAH* 2 (1977) 26-36; R. Merkelbach, "Hat der Bithynische erbfolgekrieg im Jahr 74 oder 73 begonnen?", *ZPE* 81 (1990) 97-100.

<sup>129</sup> Eutr. 6; Liv. *Epit.* 93 and 94; App. *Mith.* 72; Plut. *Luc.* 6.5; Cic. *Pro Mur.* 33; Eutropius dates Lucullus and Cotta's consulships to year 676 after the foundation of Rome which corresponds for the most part to 74 BC.

<sup>130</sup> Broughton, *MRR II* 104; Sall. *Hist.* 2.98M; Plut. *Luc.* 6; McGing (1984) 15-16 emphasises travel and communication times. It took Cicero 57 days to travel from Brundisium to Laodicea in Asia Minor and the fastest letter to reach Cicero from Rome took 46 days, which he remarks upon as swift indeed (*Att.* 5.19). A round trip for travel out and communications back is then 103 days at best. From the Kalends of January this places the first communications back from the East on April 12 (or March 22/23 in an intercalated year) near the middle of spring assuming the civic and seasonal calendars are in synch; see L. W. Hunter, 'Cicero's Journey to his Province of Cilicia in 51 BC', *JRS* 3 (1913) 73-97 for more detailed discussion.

Fimbria's mutinous troops under his authority, come to the aid of Cotta at Chalcedon, then be outflanked by Mithridates with his attack on Cyzicus, which Lucullus then has had to counter and besiege Mithridates at that same place by the winter of 74/3 BC.

Understandably there is too little time for these events to have taken place in 74 BC. As a consequence the "Magie group"<sup>131</sup> has argued that, contrary to the specific sense of the majority of our sources, these events took place during Lucullus' proconsulship in 73 BC. In doing so they have had to compress the events of the two subsequent winters, at Amisus and Cabira, into one, i.e. 73/2 and 72/1 BC into just 72/1 BC.<sup>132</sup>

This study argues that the earlier dating does not have to necessarily conflict with the original sense of the primary sources. By understanding that Lucullus' mission could have begun late in 75 BC after the October death of Nicomedes,<sup>133</sup> it is possible to see the preliminary events of the Third Mithridatic War easily accommodated within the timeframe up till the start of the campaigning season of 74 BC. A detailed argument follows in Chapter Three, when the events of the Third Mithridatic War are dealt with as a precursor to Rome's second encounter with the Parthian Empire in 69/8 BC. For now it is sufficient to acknowledge that there is strong evidence to support a 71 BC dating for the Pulcher/Tigranes interview and therefore a 96 BC accession for Tigranes as there is now other evidence that supports this dating.

More recently, two important pieces of evidence have come to light in the form of two Babylonian cuneiform calendar texts that dates the time of Tigranes I's death just prior to the month I (Nisanau) of 216 SEB<sup>134</sup> (26/27.3.96 BC).<sup>135</sup> This must place his death some when within the winter of 97/6 BC or early autumn 96 BC, most probably February or early March of that year. The text goes on to affirm Tigranes II's presence in Babylon at that time. The next text states that Tigranes took the road to a city—its name now lost—in the following month of 216 SEB (24/25.4.-23/24.5.96 BC).<sup>136</sup> It is highly likely that this is a record of Tigranes embarkation for Artaxata to take over the reins of power with his Parthian minders/contingent in train to ensure his successful transition to the throne and that Mithridates II's interests were upheld.

<sup>131</sup> See notes 2 and 3 for references.

<sup>132</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 14.2 f; 15.1 f; App. *Mith.* 11.78; Sall. *Hist.* III 58 Maur; McGing (1984) 13; 15-16; Magie *RRAM* 1210 n. 24; T. Reinach, *Mithridates Eupator: König von Pontos* (Leipzig 1895) 334 n. 1.

<sup>133</sup> For a complete argument outlining the problems with the Roman Civic Calendar (RCC) and reconciling it with events in the East and eastern calendars see Chapter Three.

<sup>134</sup> SEB = Seleucid Era Babylonian Calendar, beginning 1 Nisānu (2/3 April) 311 BC.

<sup>135</sup> G. F. Assar, "A Revised Parthian Chronology of the Period 165-91 BC", *Electrum* 11 (2006a) 142-3; Sachs and Hunger, (1996) Vol. 3, 418-419, No. -95C.

<sup>136</sup> BCT 422-423, No. -95D.

Although it would seem that Tigranes could not wait to travel such a long distance to his native capital to assume the diadem. Appian states that Tigranocerta was founded at the place where he was first crowned.<sup>137</sup> This implies that the feet of the Taurus Mountain Range was the recognised limit of Tigranes' kingdom, even in 96 BC before his conquests of the 80s BC. It is approximately 1600 to 1700 km following the Tigris River valley north from Babylon to Tigranocerta (as it would later be called) to Artaxata, the Armenian royal capital. This distance does not take into account elevation changes (Armenia's altitude varies from 2400 to 6000 feet or 730 to 1830 meters)<sup>138</sup>. At a rate of 25 Roman miles (37 km) per day (an exceptional rate sustained by Cicero in his travels in Asia Minor)<sup>139</sup> Tigranes would have made it to his soon to be new capital of Tigranocerta ( $\approx 1100$  km) in one month at best, likely longer. Given his date of departure as late as the end of May 96 BC and his likely haste to assume power, he reached his capital of Artaxata ( $\approx 600$  km from Tigranocerta) no faster than two months later in late summer early autumn. It is unlikely Tigranes sustained such a rate of march for so long. The political and ceremonial significance of his arrival would have occasioned much celebration and entertainment by his various subjects and so it is likely that this journey took far longer than this baseline conjectural and minimal figure. He would have spent what little would have remained of that year consolidating his position. The absorption of Sophene into his kingdom could have been affected during this journey as this kingdom and its Euphrates River border with Cappadocia is within 200 km of Tigranocerta. Alternatively Sophene could have been absorbed in the spring of 95 BC and this would have immediately preceded the Armenian incursion into Cappadocia in support of the bid for its throne by the Ariarathes IX/Mithridatic faction, precipitating the war with the Ariobarzanes/Sulla faction. It was this conflict that eventually brought Sulla to the Euphrates River where the meeting with the Parthians in the summer of that year took place.<sup>140</sup> These Babylonian cuneiform texts now make a strong argument for Tigranes' accession to the Armenian throne in mid 96 BC and that Parthian forces were involved in his accession to the Armenian throne at this crucial time. Furthermore this study offers an explanation for the presence of a Parthian envoy on the Cappadocian/Armenia border at this time—circumstances that have previously been little explored by scholarship.

It is now possible to place, with some confidence, Sulla at the river border of Cappadocia and Sophene/Armenia within this transitional year of Armenian history. This

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<sup>137</sup> App. *Mith.* 67

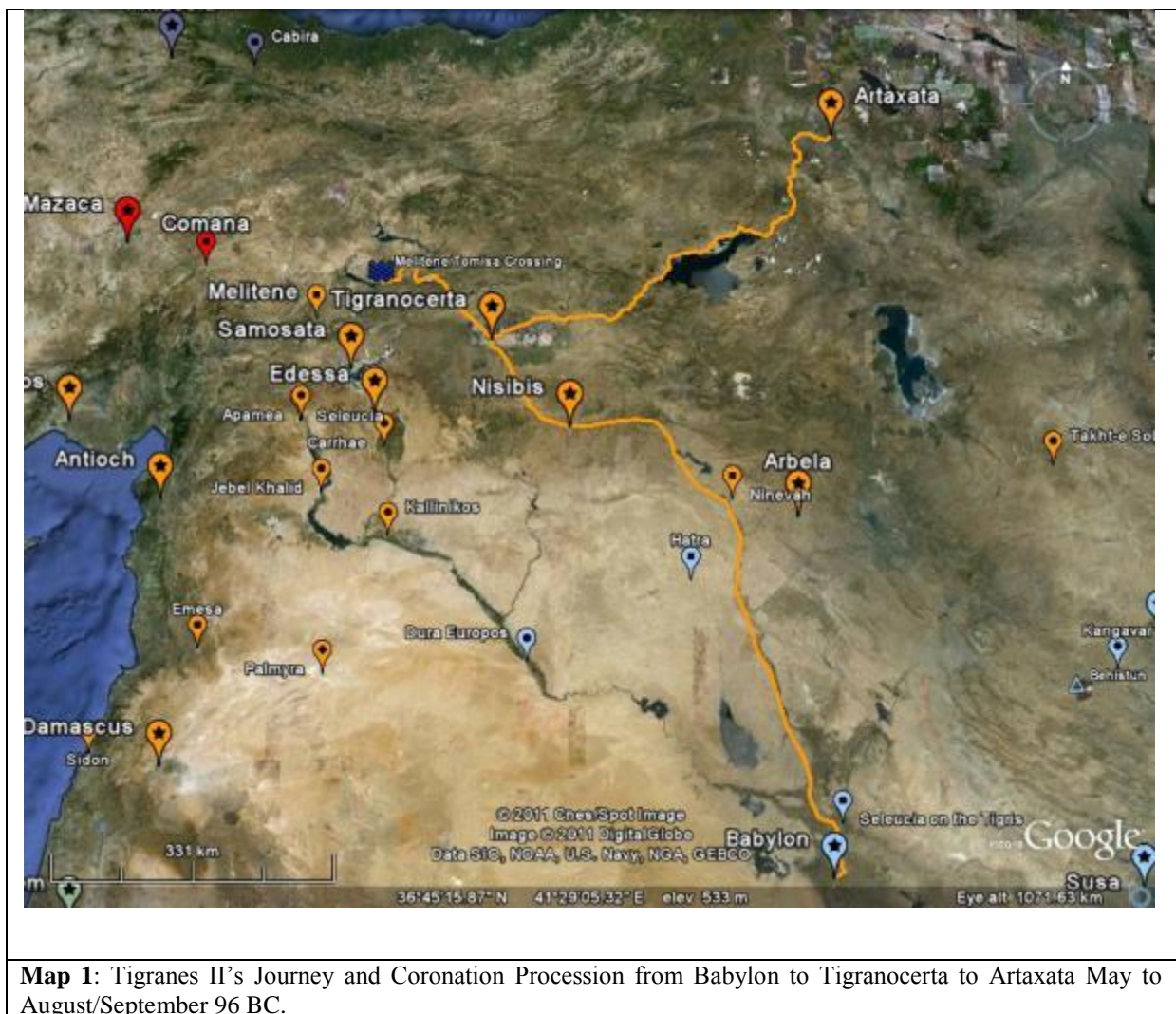
<sup>138</sup> Sullivan (1990) 96.

<sup>139</sup> Hunter (1913) 73-97.

<sup>140</sup> Th. Frankfort, "La Sophène et Rom", *Latomus* 22 (1963) 181-190; Strab. 11.14.5-6.528-9; 15.532.



helps to explain the involvement of Armenian forces in the opposition to Ariobarzanes within Cappadocia. These events would naturally follow the absorption of Sophene by Tigranes. It is likely Sulla drove out these forces from Cappadocia back into Sophene and it was these circumstances that brought him to the border with, what was then, part of Tigranes' greater Armenia.<sup>141</sup> This study has thus placed Sulla's meeting with the Parthian envoy within a established and coherent reconstruction of the political climate at that time between Cappadocia and its neighbours.



If not for these circumstances it would be curious that a Parthian envoy should be in the vicinity of the Sophene/Cappadocian border while Sulla is found 'lingering' (διατρίβοντι) there.<sup>142</sup> The circumstances surrounding this meeting have attracted only marginal attention,

<sup>141</sup> Plut. *Sull.* 5.3-4.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.* 5.4.

yet they cannot be separated from the Sulla's mission or its timing. Sulla, it seems, is biding his time here either because he is expecting the Parthian delegation or he was considering carrying the campaign beyond his delegated provincia into Armenia proper, in retaliation for the Armenians' support of Gordius and in defence of Ariobarzanes' claim to the Cappadocian throne. As the evidence suggests, the Parthian delegation was a pre-emptive move by the Parthians, who were already in Armenia in support of Tigranes' recent, within the last year, enthronement, to meliorate the situation on behalf of Tigranes and to set out the extents of their power. It is made clear in Strabo that it was with direct Parthian support that Tigranes II obtained his father's throne and that the reward of the "seventy valleys" was in return for that support.<sup>143</sup> It is now conceivable that a significant Parthian presence was in Armenia at this time in order to ensure the safe transference of power to their nominal ally. Without these circumstances it is difficult to understand why there is the presence of a Parthian delegation within, what would have been, as will be explored below, the independent territory of the kingdom of Sophene, as would have been the case if Tigranes accession is placed too far beyond the Sullan episode in 95/4 BC.

This study has now established late 96 BC as the year of accession for Tigranes II. This places Tigranes and the Parthian delegation supporting his claim within the temporal context of Sulla's mission to establish Ariobarzanes upon the throne of Cappadocia for the first time and the subsequent struggle to expel pro-Mithridatic/Ariarathes forces. It explains the circumstances of that meeting and its implications upon a wider Anatolian/Near Eastern geopolitical stage to an extent that has not been achieved before. Previously these events were considered in the isolation of Rome's involvement in Anatolia and its subsequent trilogy of struggles with Mithridates of Pontus. This study ties these events into Parthia's internal situation and proffers them as a possible explanation for its passive and conciliatory stance towards Roman intervention into Near Eastern affairs—at the doorstep of what was traditionally its central foreign policy concerns. This increasingly inward looking, isolationist policy, if it could be called as such, would eventually let Tigranes build an empire at Parthia's expense which, in turn, would drag Rome to the Euphrates River.

Sophene's absorption into Armenia is an important aspect to the initial phase of Tigranes' consolidation of his position and his access to the Melitene/Tomisa crossing where the meeting with Sulla took place. So to further understand the geopolitical circumstances of the Parthian/Sulla meeting the state of Sophene at this time must be investigated as well as its

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<sup>143</sup> Strab. *Geo.* 11.14.15; "...ἔπειτα δι' ἐκείνων ἔτυχε καθόδου, λαβόντων μισθὸν ἐβδομήκοντα αὐλῶνας τῆς Ἀρμενίας."

relationship with Armenia and Cappadocia. The small kingdoms that form the buffer zones between the major protagonists of the Near East are important elements to this study's understanding of the geopolitical dynamics of the region. These kingdoms whose names end in -ene, such as Sophene, Commagene, Adiabene, Oshroene, Media Atropatene etc., have their origin in the fragmentation of Alexander the Great's Empire. Periods of independence for these kingdoms were rare and short lived—invariably becoming vassals to their more powerful neighbours. Sophene's importance to Cappadocia and Armenia is explored below. Exploring Sophene's role in their relationship brings a deeper understanding of the circumstances that brought Rome and Parthia to the Euphrates River in late summer early autumn of 95 BC.

## Sophene

Sophene was caught between the struggles of its two neighbours, Cappadocia and Armenia. It commanded one of the few river crossings in the region, between Melitene and Tomisa, and so was of prime strategic importance. The kingdom lies within the lowlands between the Taurus and the Anti-Taurus with the Euphrates River bordering to the west.<sup>144</sup> Ostensibly a kingdom of Greater Armenia it was ruled distinctly from that nation by the former general of Antiochus the Great, Artaxias while the remainder of Armenia was ruled by a colleague, Zariadris. Both were given their autonomy and the titles of King by the Romans after Antiochus III's defeat in 189/8 BC.<sup>145</sup> These token expressions of friendship were to have little meaning when Artaxias was first attacked by Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 165 BC.<sup>146</sup> Then his successor, Artavasdes, the father of Tigranes I, was attacked by Mithridates II in which Armenia was made subject to Parthian rule and his grandson, Tigranes II, was taken hostage. The dating of this later event is uncertain, but Parthian expansion into northern Mesopotamia and then Armenia may post date the capture of Dura Europos in 113 BC.<sup>147</sup> This was the first instance of Armenia entering into Parthian sphere.<sup>148</sup>

At the time of Tigranes' return, Sophene was ruled by a descendant of Zariadris, Artanes. Strabo states that one of Tigranes' first actions was to absorb (κατελυθῆναι) Sophene.<sup>149</sup> The fate of Artanes is unknown. Given Tigranes' had a rightful dynastic claim to this throne

<sup>144</sup> R. Syme, *Anatolica* (Oxford 1995) 48-57.

<sup>145</sup> Debevoise (1968) 42; Colledge (1967) 32; *CHI* (1983) 505-516; Frankfort (1963) 181-2; Sullivan (1990) 105-6.

<sup>146</sup> *Jos. Ant.* 12.295-7.

<sup>147</sup> F. G. B. Millar, "Dura Europos under Parthian Rule", in J. Wiesehöfer (ed.), *Das Partherreich und seine Zeugnisse/The Arsacid Empire: Sources and Documentation, Historia Einzelschriften* (Stuttgart 1998) 75-6.

<sup>148</sup> Strab. *Geo.* 11.14.5 and 15; "...προσθήμενοι Ῥωμαίοις καὶ αὐτοὺς ἐτάττοντο βασιλεῖς προσαγορευθέντες."

<sup>149</sup> Strab. 11.14.15.

through his grandfather Artaxias; this absorption can be seen as a natural first step and may have met little opposition. A principle aim of this acquisition would have been access to the important strategic river crossing into Cappadocia, at Tomisa. In the past Tomisa had been the object of some contention between the two kingdoms. It seems that it once belonged to Cappadocia, though it is implied that it was on the Sophene side of the river, but was later sold to the Sophenians for 100 talents, only to be returned back to Cappadocia by Lucullus as reward for their aid against Mithridates.<sup>150</sup>

The fact that Sulla was dealing with the Parthians on the border between Cappadocia and Sophene may imply that, at this moment, Sophene had already lost its independent rulership under Artanes.<sup>151</sup> This could well have happened during Mithridates of Parthia's first expedition into Armenia against Tigranes' father, Artavasdes, during which the son was taken hostage. But we know that Artanes was still ruling Sophene as a separate kingdom when Tigranes absorbed it as part of his first phase of conquests. In fact both Strabo and Justin state that neither the Parthians, nor any other foreign power, had ever ruled over the Armenians, which by definition includes Sophene.<sup>152</sup> With this in mind, it may not be too bold too assert that the Parthians were there on behalf of Tigranes, whom they were supporting in his bid to succeed his father and who was in the process of bringing his kingdom up to the banks of the Euphrates River and was pressing beyond into Cappadocia.<sup>153</sup>

As well as taking this opportunity to assert a presence in the region in the face of an increasingly interventionist Roman policy in Asia Minor, Mithridates II of Parthia backed up Tigranes. Mithridates may have feared Roman intervention in Armenia in retaliation for Armenia's support of Gordius in Cappadocia as he may have been ignorant of the constitutional limitations placed upon Roman magistrates abroad that restrained Sulla from crossing the Euphrates River. At any rate, Mithridates had ensured that Rome's interference would remain west of the Euphrates River, at least for the time being. From this point onwards there is a sense that the Euphrates River had become the demarcation line between these two powers' zones of influence—whether consciously or not.

It is now necessary for this study to turn to the immediate state of the Parthian Empire

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<sup>150</sup> Strab. 12.2.1.

<sup>151</sup> Strab. 11.14.15.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.* 16.1.19; “τῶν μὲν οὖν Μήδων καὶ τῶν Βαβυλωνίων ἐπάρχουσι Παρθυαῖοι, τῶν δ’ Ἀρμενίων οὐδ’ ἅπαξ: ἀλλ’ ἔφοδοι μὲν γέγονασι πολλάκις, ἀνὰ κράτος δ’ οὐχ ἐάλωσαν, ἀλλ’ ὁ γε Τιγράνης καὶ ἐρρωμένως ἀντεπεκράτησεν, ὡς ἐν τοῖς Ἀρμενιοῖς εἴρηται.”; Jus. 38.7.2.

<sup>153</sup> Plut. *Sull.* 5.3 refers to Armenian aid in Cappadocia. Sid. Ap. *Carm.* 7.79-82 refers to a Sullan campaign against Tigranes that must refer to this intervention. Tigranes' designs on Cappadocia were to emerge again, a few years later during the Social Wars in Italy and in Sulla's absence, at the behest of Mithridates of Pontus and, no doubt, for his own interests.

from the mid-to-late 90s to the early 80s BC. As usual the evidence is scant, but there are sufficient circumstantial elements to piece together a picture of Parthian geopolitics at this time. This study demonstrates that Parthia was upon a cusp of profound upheaval at this time that would see it excluded from geopolitical affairs west of the Euphrates River for the next forty years or so.

## **Parthia and the Decline of the Seleucid Threat**

Mithridates I's conquest of Mesopotamia in 141 BC brought Parthian holdings directly adjacent to Seleucid Syria and the heartland of Seleucid power. This conquest brought the demarcation line between the Romano-Hellenistic West and the Iranian East to the Euphrates River where it would more or less remain for almost three hundred and forty years. This section investigates Mithridates II's interactions with Syria, particularly his attempt to assert some influence, maybe even expand into that domain in the mid to late 90s BC. This study places that short and evidently unsuccessful campaign within Mithridates II's broader expansionist policy that was cut short by the appearance of Sinatruces who advanced right up to the eastern bank of the Tigris River in or just before 93 BC.

In 130 BC the Seleucids had posed a major threat to Parthia's survival. While facing serious threats from displaced Saka/Scythian tribes on their north-eastern frontier the Parthians had to deal with a major invasion from the west led by Antiochus VII Sidetes. Despite having to deal with a revolt within the Empire, Phraate II's fortunes took a turn for the better and Antiochus was slain in battle with the result of utter defeat for the invading Seleucid army. This good fortune was short lived, when in the following year he died fighting the Scythians/Saka in 128 BC.<sup>154</sup> This episode ended the last serious threat posed to Parthian sovereignty in Mesopotamia by the Seleucids. Internal dynastic problems within Syria, fuelled by occasional Parthian interference, made sure that they remained out of Parthian affairs east of the Euphrates River until their final demise as a serious power in the region at the hands of Tigranes the Great in 83 BC.<sup>155</sup> As is argued below, it was not until the 90s that Parthia could again turn its attention to Syria, but then, as before, internal and external problems elsewhere foiled its designs.

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<sup>154</sup> Jus. 42.1; *CHI* 36-8.

<sup>155</sup> Parthia's strategy of capturing its neighbour's dynastic members, keeping them as hostages, then releasing them back to their kingdoms to further the interests of their former captors was not only employed in Armenia. It was also employed against the Seleucids. Demetrius II was used in this way, as was the son of Antiochus Sidetes, Seleucus. With some success they were employed to sow seeds of discontent and civil war in Syria while Parthia had to deal with the more pressing problems of the eastern nomadic migrations. Jus. 38.3.1; 9.3; 9.10; for Demetrius II, *Ibid*, 36.1.1-7; App. Syr. 67, 68; *CAH* 3, 262.

Syria in the 90s had been unstable for some time and had been further weakened by its incessant and ultimately futile involvement in Jewish affairs.<sup>156</sup> Syria was ruled in peace by Antiochus VIII Grypus from 122 BC until his defeat by his half-brother, Antiochus Cyzinecus in 113 BC.<sup>157</sup> In 111 BC Grypus returned and ejected Cyzinecus into Coele-Syria. Josephus describes this conflict as continuous, with neither side ultimately able to gain the upper hand. This provided an opportunity for John Hyrcanus, the leader of the Jewish nation from 129 to 104 BC, to claim Jewish independence from the rapidly fracturing and weakening Seleucid Empire.<sup>158</sup> Grypus maintained control of Syria until his murder in 96 BC. His son, Seleucus VI Eusebes Eupator, continued the war with Cyzicenus, finally defeating and killing him in the following year in 95 BC. Seleucus was in turn defeated by Cyzicenus' son, Antiochus X Eusebes Philopator. Whilst in conflict with the other contenders for the Syrian throne, the brothers Demetrius III Eucerus and Ptolemy VIII Lathyrus, Antiochus X was supposedly killed in battle with the Parthians in support of a certain Laodice, Queen of the *Γαλινηος* in or about 92 BC. The text of Josephus makes it clear that this Queen was the aggressor, perhaps in retaliation for Parthian incursions into Northern Syria.<sup>159</sup> Appian states that Parthia did engage in an offensive campaign to seize Northern Mesopotamia sometime prior to Tigranes' invasion of Syria.<sup>160</sup> This Queen's offensive may have been in reaction to Parthian incursions west of the Euphrates River.

It has been asserted that this obscure reference to the mysterious Queen Laodice may be a reference to Queen Laodice Thea Philadelphos of Commagene who was married to Mithridates I Kallinikos, being the daughter of Antiochus VIII Grypos of Syria and sister of Antiochus X Eusebes.<sup>161</sup> This may hint at some conflict between Commagene and Parthia and the evidence for this is investigated below.

This study acknowledges that this movement by Mithridates II of Parthia into Syria was a concerted effort to assert Parthian interests west of the Euphrates River in a bid to secure its western frontier from Syrian interference in Mesopotamia. There is no firm

<sup>156</sup> App. Syr. 8.48; Jos. AJ 8.254-266, 275-279; Jus. 36.1.10.

<sup>157</sup> Jus. 39.9-10.

<sup>158</sup> Jos. AJ 13.272-4; Jus. 36.10.

<sup>159</sup> Jos. AJ 13.371, "*Πάρθους πολεμοῦσῃ*"; see Debevoise (1968) 46; who follows Dobias, "Les premiers rapports des Romains avec les Parthes", *Arch. or.* 3 (1931) 221-3; A. R. Bellinger, "The End of the Seleucids", *Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences* 38 (1949) 75, n. 73. Not only is there confusion over the identity of this Queen and her people but also over the facts of the actual fate of Antiochus Eusebes. Appian (Syr. 49, 70) states that he was driven out of Syria by Tigranes of Armenia some ten years later and in Eusebius (*Chron.* 1.40.25) he is said to have fled to the Parthian court. Eusebius and Justin (and perhaps Appian) here confuse Antiochus X Eusebes with his son, Antiochus XIII Eusebes Asiaticus, and their respective fates. Therefore there is no necessity to doubt the fate of Antiochus X as related by Josephus.

<sup>160</sup> App. Syr. 8.48, 11.69.

<sup>161</sup> R. D. Sullivan, "The Dynasty of Commagene", *ANRW* 2.8 (1977) 758-9.

evidence to suggest that Mithridates II, or indeed any of his successors, were interested in the direct conquest and annexation of Syria. Rather two outcomes would have been of benefit to the Parthian Empire's security—either a divided and therefore weakened Seleucid House or a dominant faction sympathetic to its interests. It seems that some desperation had crept into Parthian foreign policy interests west of the Euphrates towards the end of 90s and into the 80s. This thesis asserts that this was due, in large part, to the weakening of Parthian Mesopotamia's hold east of the Tigris River upon the arrival of Sinatruces the usurper from 95/4 BC onwards. The Mithridatic House could not be beset on two fronts with a dominant power in Syria taking advantage of its misfortune in the East. That said the Seleucid Empire was long past any capability of exerting itself effectively beyond its own borders. It would take a new power, in Tigranes II of Armenia, to do that at the expense of the Seleucid Houses. Tigranes' success further underlines the weakened state of Parthia at this time and this and the evidence is investigated more fully in the second part of this thesis.

## **Commagene**

So far a new picture is beginning to emerge out of the confusion that is the 90s in Asia Minor and the Near East. It is one of widespread political change where Rome, Parthia, Pontus, and increasingly, Armenia were simultaneously asserting their interests in this crucial region, north and south of the Taurus Mountains and east of the Euphrates River. The strategic key to this was Cappadocia and it was the control of this kingdom that eventually precipitated Rome's direct conflict with Mithridates VI of Pontus and Tigranes II of Armenia. As Rome's grip on Cappadocia strengthened the centre of gravity for Romano-Parthian antagonism shifted eastwards across the Euphrates into Armenia where it would remain for the remainder of their coexistence.

Commagene's strategic importance to the region was little less than that of Cappadocia and Armenia. Commagene lies at a nexus amidst the kingdoms of Cilicia, Cappadocia, Sophene, Osroene, Syria and what was, in the late 90s, Parthian controlled Northern Mesopotamia. Its geographical location placed it firmly on the border between East and West, but its heritage was eastern through the Persian Orontid line that once ruled Armenia and Commagene. Its position skirts north of the Syrian Desert and provides a fertile and temperate east-west passage over the crucial bridge or *zeugma* at the twin towns of Seleucia/Apamea.<sup>162</sup> Its situation provided much power, influence and wealth—a fact

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<sup>162</sup> See Kennedy (1998) 11-60; 139-162 for an analysis of the sources and history of this important site.

commented upon in the First Century AD.<sup>163</sup> This gave it a degree of independence despite being surrounded by the region's strongest powers. This was a double edged sword. While providing great wealth and influence, this situation placed it in a precarious position should tensions between any two of Commagene's neighbours break out into hostilities. The sources suggest that such a scenario occurred in 93/2 BC when hostilities broke out between Syria and Parthia. It is likely that the wife of the King, Queen Laodice, the daughter of Antiochus VIII Grypos and with Seleucid sympathies, influenced her husband's involvement in facing a Parthian invasion in that year.

In 96/5 BC Commagene received a new king to its throne, Mithridates I Kallinikos. There is no extant evidence concerning the circumstance surrounding the death of Commagene's former king, Samos, and the throne's bequest to his rightful son and heir. This was the fifth succession to take place in the kingdoms that surround Northern Mesopotamia within a space of not much more than one year. Here too, the 90s proved to be a period of transition and perhaps struggle for Commagene.

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<sup>163</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 2.81.1; Jos. *BJ* 5.461













**Map 2:** Map of the Empire of Tigranes the Great c. 80 BC showing geopolitical affiliations.



**Map 3:** The Empire of Tigranes the Great c. 80 BC showing topography.

	Empire of Tigranes the Great		Capital or Major City
	Parthian Empire		Mid-sized Centre
	Roman Ally		Small Centre
	Empire of Mithridates VI of Pontus		
	Independent		

The origins of Commagene's dynasty lie in the Orontids of Armenia—this region being once a canton of that kingdom in the Fourth and Third Centuries BC. By the reign of Antiochus III Commagene was a part of the Seleucid Empire.<sup>164</sup> There is evidence to suggest that it revolted from its Seleucid governor, Ptolemaios, in 163 BC.<sup>165</sup> Nevertheless its political sympathies, at least down to the late Second Century, remained with Syria.

<sup>164</sup> *Mem. FGrHist III B, no. 434, fr. 18.5; 18.9.*

<sup>165</sup> Diod. 31.19a.

While maintaining its independence Commagene pursued a policy of marital alliance with volatile, but still powerful, Syria despite its declining fortunes. At the same time, there is some suggestion that the Commageneans were concerned with Parthia and took steps to remain on friendly terms with them—a sensible policy given its position as the way-point between two antagonistic empires and its reliance on secure trade between east and west.<sup>166</sup>

A marriage alliance was formed between Mithridates I, son of Samos, and Laodice, the daughter of Antiochus VIII Grypos, King of Syria. The marriage likely occurred while Mithridates was still a prince and thus a significant policy move by his father in continuing to strengthen relations with Syria despite its internecine troubles. Towards the end of the Second Century Grypos had somewhat forestalled his nation's self destructive decline and brought peace and stability to the Seleucid Empire for a relatively significant period of eight years<sup>167</sup>—the first years of his reign that lasted twenty-nine (125-96 BC)—the first four jointly with his mother Cleopatra Thea. Matters did not continue this way for long and Grypos was exiled to Coele-Syria from 113 to 111 BC when his half-brother, Antiochus Cyzicenus, ejected him from the throne. He regained his throne in 111 BC, but hostilities with Cyzicenus continued until his death in 96 BC. To his credit, he refrained from the same mistake of his predecessors by not becoming embroiled in Judaea, preferring to consolidate his own position in Syria.<sup>168</sup>

There is evidence to suggest that Samos was also concerned with cultivating relations with Parthia. His titulature reads *ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΣΑΜΟΥ ΘΕΟΣΕΒΟΥΣ ΚΑΙ ΔΙΚΑΙΟΥ* and on some of his coins he wears an Iranian headdress.<sup>169</sup> The name of his son, Mithridates suggests an Iranian emphasis in the Commagene dynasty—there is no precedence for this name in the Orontid line. It may suggest that Samos wanted to forge closer ties with the newly emerging Parthian power that was increasingly dominating Northern Mesopotamia and Anatolia towards the end of the Second Century and into the 90s—the final years of his reign. The worship of the god Mithras features prominently in Commagenean iconography as evidenced by its feature on the funeral hill of Antiochus I (69-34 BC) at Nimrūd Dāgh.<sup>170</sup>

<sup>166</sup> For Commagenes' later well attested duplicitous relations with Rome see, Caes. *BC* 3.4.5; App. *BC* 2.49.202; Plut. *Ant.* 34; Dio. 36.2.5; App. *Mith.* 106, 117; Kennedy (ed.) (1996) 11-60; J. Wagner, *Seleukia am Euphrat Zeugma* (Weisbaden 1976) 1ff; Syme (1995) 109.

<sup>167</sup> *Jus.* 39.2.9.

<sup>168</sup> *Jos.* *AJ* 13.270.

<sup>169</sup> Sullivan, *ANRW* 2.8 (1977) 748f. W. Wroth, *Catalogue of the Greek coins of Galatia, Cappadocia, and Syria* (Bologna 1964) 43.

<sup>170</sup> *CHI* 3, 535



**Plate 5:** Nimrūd Dāgh East Terrace (seen from the northeast). From left to right: Apollo-Mithras, Tyche of Commagene, Zeus-Oromazdes, Antiochus, Heracles-Antagnes.<sup>171</sup>

Despite Commagene's desire to maintain peace, it seems that the expansionist policies of Mithridates II may have soured the relationship by the beginning of the reign of Mithridates I Kallinikos, who came to power upon the death of his father in 96 BC. There is evidence to suggest that Mithridates II made a bid to take Syria at about the time of the Commagene succession. This evidence is referenced and explored more fully below.

Parthian designs on Syria began with Mithridates I. Initially that was through indirect support of the pretender to the Syrian throne, Demetrius II Nicator, and after the defeat of Antiochus VII Sidetes, his captured son, Seleucus, was also preened as a future proxy to Parthian interests in Syria.<sup>172</sup> On the western side, the Seleucids had never fully come to terms with the loss of their former holdings across the Euphrates and a series of campaigns in the latter half of the Second Century BC attempted to reclaim their former seat of power. On one occasion they nearly succeeded. Neutralizing this incessant threat must have been a

<sup>171</sup> T. Goell, "The Excavation of the 'Hierotherasion' of Antiochus I of Commagene on Nemrud Dagh (1953-6)", *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 147 (1957) 11.

<sup>172</sup> *CHI* 38; Jus. 38.10.1-11.

priority for Mithridates II—whether by direct or diplomatic means.<sup>173</sup>

It was not until Mithridates II's conquest of Northern Mesopotamia, at some point after 113 BC, that Parthia was able to directly threaten the Seleucid's seat of power. It is likely Mithridates II made at least one foray across the Euphrates River into Syria. In the sources there is one reference that points to a campaign in the 90s BC. Appian states that a certain Queen Laodice of the Syrian Galilei waged war against the Parthians and that King Antiochus X Eusebes was killed in the process of aiding in its struggle.<sup>174</sup> There are some doubts as to the identity of this Queen and her people, but they may have been one of the many Arab tribes that populated Northern Syria in semi-independence. What can be ascertained is that Antiochus Eusebes died in fighting the Parthians and that this occurred in Syria during the mid to late 90s BC.<sup>175</sup>

We may now postulate that this Parthian incursion into Syria took place in the early part of Mithridates I of Commagene's reign and that his kingdom was in some way involved in repulsing these Parthian forces. A small piece of evidence is Mithridates I's titulature—*ΚΑΛΛΙΝΙΚΟΣ*—"gloriously victorious" or "triumphant". At some stage in his reign Mithridates I celebrated a significant victory in order to receive this title, but against whom it is not directly attested. His coinage continues the victory theme with the iconographic detail of Nike personified appearing regularly.<sup>176</sup> It is possible that Commagene was involved in some way with a Parthian campaign against a certain Queen Laodice that resulted in Antiochus X Eusebes' death. This Queen may well be Mithridates I's wife supporting her brother against Parthian aggression, though why she is mentioned acting alone in the guise of an Arab Queen is unknown. Corruption of the text is possible. Either way there is no evidence of any other opportunity to receive such an appellation during the remainder of Mithridates' reign. Commagene was absorbed without resistance into Tigranes II of Armenia's Empire in or prior to 83 BC and the only attested military operation he was involved in after that was the defeat at Tigranocerta and his reign ended that year.

Commagene commanded the major crossing points over the Euphrates River between

<sup>173</sup> Antiochus VII Sidetes invaded Babylonia in 130 BC with an army 80,000 strong and defeated the Parthians in three battles then occupying Babylon. Antiochus was eventually defeated and killed the following year and Phraates II reclaimed Babylonia; Jus. 38.10; 42.1; App. Syr. 11.68.

<sup>174</sup> Jos. AJ 13.371; "τούτοις δὲ τοῖς δυσὶν ἀδελφοῖς καρτερῶς ἀνθιστάμενος Ἀντίοχος ταχέως ἀπέθανεν: Λαοδίκη γὰρ ἑλθὼν σύμμαχος τῇ τῶν Σαμηνῶν βασιλίᾳ Πάρδου πολέμουσιν μαχόμενος ἀνδρείως ἔπεσεν. τὴν δὲ Συρίαν οἱ δύο κατεῖχον ἀδελφοὶ Δημήτριος καὶ Φίλιππος, καθὼς ἐν ἄλλοις δεδήλωται." See previous note 96 for further discussion of the confusion in the sources.

<sup>175</sup> CAH 9, 262; Debevoise (1963) 46; J. Dobias, "Les Premiers rapports des Romains avec les Parthes", *Archiv. or.* 3 (1931) 221-3.

<sup>176</sup> Wroth, W. W., *Catalogue of the Greek coins of Galatia, Cappadocia, and Syria* (Bologna 1964) 104; Pl. 30.2.

Samosata and Northern Syria. This control later extended to Seleucia/Apamea, although this region may have been nominally under Commagene's control at this time. Such a geopolitical position may have involved the kingdom in some way in the antagonisms of the Parthians and the declining Seleucid Empire.<sup>177</sup> The power vacuum caused by the Seleucid Civil Wars that drew Parthia westwards could have impacted on the Commagene kingdom in some way during the 90s. Their reliance upon peaceful trade necessitated a generally neutral stance and indeed was a crucial matter of their independence and self-preservation<sup>178</sup>—independence they would largely maintain until their final annexation under Claudius in the first half of the First Century AD.

This thesis has argued that Parthia suffered a reversal in Syria in the late 90s BC and that Mithridates I and his Queen Laodice were involved. This defeat was due in large part to the syphoning of resources to the East to meet the encroaching threat of Sinatruces the usurper discussed below. Reprisal action against Syria and Commagene was likewise suspended due to the ongoing struggle with the Scythian invasion. A further blow would come in September of 91 BC with the death of the Great King, Mithridates II. Despite a smooth succession to his son Gotarzes I, the next few years saw his house desperately struggle for its survival and its territories restricted to between the two great rivers of Mesopotamia. It would not be until April 87 BC before Gotarzes prevailed; then and only then could Parthia afford another foray into Syria which would see the capture of the Seleucid claimant Demetrius in support of his brother Philip. These events were indicative of the widespread turmoil that wracked the region and which gave Tigranes II of Armenia the opportunity to assert his imperialistic intentions upon a large swathe of the Near East. Tigranes support of his father-in-law Mithridates VI of Pontus would eventually bring Rome to the doorstep of the Parthia Empire in 69 BC and set the scene for the next three hundred years of uneasy and often violent coexistence along the Euphrates River valley south of the Taurus Mountains. This study argues that the Parthian Wars of Succession were partly responsible for drawing Rome eastwards to the Euphrates River. The study of that war's early evolution is important to the understanding of the broader geopolitical factors involved in that process.

What follows is a summation of the state of the Parthian Empire in the mid to late 90s and early 80s BC, which this study contends was the initial period of the Parthian Wars of Succession. A more thorough investigation of the causes of this war is dealt with in Part Two.

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<sup>177</sup> Cic. *Ad Fam.* 8.10.1; Strab. 16.746, 749; App. *Syr.* 48; Dio Cas. 49.13; Pliny, *NH* 5.86.

<sup>178</sup> Strab. 16.749; cf. 12.535; Plut. *Ant.* 34; Tac. *Ann.* 2.81.

## Parthia

Despite the dearth of evidence it is doubtless that all was not well with the Parthian Empire in the late 90s and early 80s BC.<sup>179</sup> The original suspect was Gotarzes I—thought to be a senior satrap of Mithridates who had rebelled and ruled contemporaneously with Mithridates II until his death in 87 BC. It has since been confirmed that Gotarzes was the legitimate heir and son to Mithridates II, and rightfully took over the reins of power in September 91 BC upon his father's death.<sup>180</sup> The evidence has now swung towards a new suspect, the usurper Sinatruces. This evidence suggests he swept down from the north and/or the east capturing vast swaths of the Parthian Empire with the aid of Saka/Scythian tribes—beginning his bid for power perhaps as early as early to mid 94 BC.<sup>181</sup> By the following year, 93/92 BC, Sinatruces had captured the Susa mint and issued his first triumphal coinage.<sup>182</sup>

As has already been explored, at about the time of Sinatruces' occupation of Susa, Mithridates II's forces were involved in the dynastic struggles of Syria. His occupation with western events could only have facilitated Sinatruces' move into Elymais—the traditional “bread-basket” of Iranian Empires and a prize that Mithridates could not relinquish for long.<sup>183</sup>

The fate of Mithridates II is unknown, but it is most likely he died of old age having ruled since April 121 BC when he had succeeded his brother, the enigmatic Arsaces X who ruled no more than six months.<sup>184</sup> Gotarzes reign was cut short in July/August 87 BC by causes unknown and he was succeeded by his brother Mithridates III.<sup>185</sup> It is the aim of this section to briefly explore the likely series of events that immediately preceded Mithridates II's death and those down until the death of his son almost four years later.

The Parthian mission to meet Sulla upon the banks of the Euphrates River in 95 BC

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<sup>179</sup> K. W. Dobbins, “Mithridates II and his Successors: A Study of the Parthian Crisis 90-70 BC.” *Antichthon* 8 (1974) 63-79; particularly 68 n. 9 for a summary of the evidence considered up till that point of publication.

<sup>180</sup> Gortazes is referred to as “Satrap of Satraps” on a rock sculptures at Bīsitūn where he is standing before “the Great King” Mithridates, see E. Herzfeld, *Am Tor von Asien*, (Berlin 1920) 36f.; BCT 436-437, No. -90A.

<sup>181</sup> A Babylonian text dated month V 218 SEB (30/31.7-28/29.8.94 BC) states that Mithridates II departed Babylon for Media and initiated major works around Seleucia on the Euphrates, perhaps in response to the Sinatruces threat. BCT 430-431, No. -93A ; Assar (2006a) 145.

<sup>182</sup> Sellwood Type 33.1-7; see Assar (2006b) 57, n. 8, for a detailed list of references concerning the identification of Susa issues.

<sup>183</sup> For the economic importance of Elymais see R. J. Wenke, “Elymeans, Parthians and the Evolution of Empires in Southwestern Iran”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 101 (1981) 303-315.

<sup>184</sup> For speculations on this Arsaces X and the beginning of Mithridates II's reign see Assar (2006a) 131-2. The last date we have for Arsaces X is a colophon-title dated in the month Nisanū 191 SEB (31.3/1.4.121 BC), see A. J. Sachs, *Late Babylonian Astronomical and Related Texts* (Providence 1955) 197, LBAT 1283.

<sup>185</sup> The last reference to Gortazes and his Queen, Ashiabatār is on a Babylonian colophon dated 1 Nisanū 225 SEB (15/16.4.87 BC) in Sachs (1955) 26, LBAT 1295 = CBS 17 and the first reference to his successor is likely dated to July/August 87 BC, see Assar (2006b) 69.



must be seen within the wider milieu of Parthian geopolitics. Not only were there events upon their western front that may have mitigated their interaction with Rome—but there may also have been wider issues involved, far on their eastern frontier, that may have indirectly dictated their policies in Anatolia. It is therefore important to understand the state of the wider Parthian Empire at or around the time of Sulla's meeting and its proceeding decade.

In the past most of our understanding of Parthian dynastic history has come from our interpretation of the numismatic evidence. In the recent decade or so there has been an increased understanding of this evidence through the supplementation of archaeological finds found in Ctesiphon, Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, Babylon and, in particular, Nisa, in the form of ostraca, rhytons and Babylonian cuneiform tablets. Led by G. F. Assar in a number of recent publications, this scholarship has shed renewed light on the Parthian "Dark Age". Firstly an overview of recent Parthian history would be appropriate at this point within the framework of what has been explored thus far.

Previously Parthia had been on the receiving end of Seleucid aggression for some significant time, but the Seleucid fortunes were on the way to decline towards the end of the second century BC. Under the effective leadership of Mithridates II Megas,<sup>186</sup> Parthia began to exploit the continued instability of the Seleucid dynasty and saw its opportunity to arrest control of the remainder of Mesopotamia up to the banks of the Euphrates. The instalment of Tigranes II upon the Armenian throne along with his reward of the "seventy valleys", which secured the Armenian approaches into northern Mesopotamia, could be seen as a stepping stone for the Parthian King's designs for this region. Through Tigranes' conquest, at some time in the late 90s, a friendly Cappadocia would have secured a northern flank for a Parthian push west through Commagene, then Syria. Mithridates of Pontus also had designs on Cappadocia and it is unknown whether he had entered into the Parthian's calculations, but at least it would have been hoped that a strong and friendly Armenia could keep Pontus out of the equation. But its hopes for Armenia took a turn for the worse when Tigranes began to show increasing tendencies towards pursuing a policy more in keeping with the interests of Armenia rather than those of Parthia's. His marriage alliance with Mithridates of Pontus did not bode well for Parthia's interests.

And so it was within this environment of an increasingly hostile and unified eastern alliance that Sulla found himself upon the banks of the Euphrates River having secured the

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<sup>186</sup> *CHI* 42, 285; Dobbins (1974) 67; Assar (2006a) 141; he did not adopt the epithet *ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΝ*, King of Kings, until 109 BC i.e. month VIII 203 SEB (10/11.11—9/10.12.109 BC); BCT 360-1, No. -108B and maybe as early as 1 Dios 204 SEM = month VII 203 SEB (12/13.10—9/10.11.109 BC) according to the Susian bronze *drachm* sequence; see Assar (2006a) Table 1, 150-1.



kingdom of Cappadocia for Roman interests and perhaps wondering what steps to take next. He is described by Plutarch as lingering (*δilatριβοντι*). The verb implies time wasting but he may simply have been biding it. The issue perhaps at the back of his mind was whether to carry the campaign into Armenia itself or at least to force out a lasting diplomatic solution to the Cappadocian issue by the threat of one. The Parthians pre-empted any need for action on Sulla's part and an embassy was sent. So the pretext for the first encounter between the two great powers was set.

It is interesting to note Parthia's attitude to Roman power at this point. Sulla was acting far beyond the reaches of Roman authority. At this point in time in Republican history the Roman Senate's general interests in the east beyond Cappadocia were of small import. Yet the Parthian envoy at this historic meeting treats Sulla and the authority he represents with some degree of respect and caution.<sup>187</sup>

The evidence we have seen thus far seems to imply a systematic and methodical strategy by Mithridates II, the King of kings, to secure the northern-western reaches of his empire, bounding it to the north by the Taurus and to the west by the Euphrates with the vassal states of Commagene, under the rule of Mithridates Kallinikos, and Armenia, under the rule of Tigranes, guarding the north-western passages through Anatolia into Media Atropatene, which leads into the heart of Parthia's seat of power. This study conjectures Mithridates II had similar intentions for Syria in order to properly secure the Parthian Empire's Euphrates frontier, but reverses west of the Euphrates and the arrival of a usurper to the throne from the east curtailed his plans.<sup>188</sup>

Evidence suggests that in the mid 90s BC Mithridates II had a rival to his throne active east of the Tigris River which undermined his hold on Northern Mesopotamia. This disruption allowed his vassal, Tigranes, to wrest Armenia, Northern Mesopotamia and North-western Iran from Parthian control over the following decade of the 80s BC. There are few details about this Parthian rival and the conflict that ensued and it is only by way of inference that we know that the two rulers reigned simultaneously for at least three years in the late 90s BC. It is this internal conflict which drained Mithridates' resources in the northwest of his Empire and allowed Tigranes to overrun extensive areas of Northern Mesopotamia with little opposition. It was only Roman intervention under Lucullus, and not by any means of Parthian

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<sup>187</sup> Florus, writing in the second century AD, states that Sulla made a treaty with the Parthians or at least that is what the ambassadors of King Orodes would like Crassus to believe; 1.46.4-5.

<sup>188</sup> An ostrakon as translated by Dyakonov and Livshits may suggest that he was of direct royal lineage; *Dokumenty iz Nisy*, p 20; Ostrakon No. 1760. See *CHI* 41-4 and Assar (2006b) 62-9 for discussion and evidence for Gotarze's reign.

force, that Tigranes' finally released his grip on this region. This suggests that there had been some significant decline in Parthia's ability to deal with outside aggression from the west during this period. The identity of the culprit for this decline is Parthian prestige in the west of their Empire is discussed in detail below.

## Parthia Withdraws from Northern Mesopotamia

By the end of his reign in mid to late 91 BC, Mithridates II of Parthia's position was firmly consolidated in Mesopotamia and further strengthened with his son's, Gotarzes, marriage to Aryazates, the daughter of Tigranes of Armenia and an alliance with Mithridates of Pontus.<sup>189</sup> All that remained for this phase of expansion was the conquest or, at least, acquiescence of Commagene and in turn Syria.

As argued above Parthia took some form of offensive action in Northern Syria c. 93/2 BC that led to the death of Antiochus X Eusebes Philopator or his possible exile to the Parthians, the sources are confused on this point, but likely the former.<sup>190</sup> During this conflict, as I have argued, Mithridates of Commagene won for himself the title *ΚΑΛΑΙΝΙΚΟΣ* and that the Parthians were beaten back remaining east of the Euphrates and largely out of direct military interference in Syrian affairs until the aftermath of the Battle of Carrhae forty years later.

Parthian intervention in the affairs of Syria was called for in 88/7 BC, at about the time of the transition of power from Gotarzes to his brother Mithridates III. Demetrius III Eucerus Philopator besieged his brother, Philip I Philadelphus, at Beroea, which is today Aleppo. The tyrant of that city, Strato, called for aid from the Arab phylarch, Azizus, and a Parthian governor (*ὑπαρχον*) called Mithridates Sinaces, although the latter could be a corruption of Mithridates who is King Arsaces, i.e. the Third, but the text is quite clear in identifying him as hyparchon. Demetrius was captured and brought before Mithridates III who treated him with honour, but kept him in exile until his death from sickness a few years later.<sup>191</sup>

<sup>189</sup> E. H. Minns, "Parchments of the Parthian Period from Avroman in Kurdistan", *JHS* 35 (1915) 22-65; Assar (2006b) 67; see also Debevoise's arguments for the dating of this marriage to 87 BC (1968) 47, n. 70. A few years previously, Tigranes married Cleopatra, the daughter of Mithridates of Pontus, thus completing a three way web of alliances that, as described above, must have had the growing threat of Rome's increasingly threatening presence in the East as its *raison d'être*.

<sup>190</sup> App. *Syr.* 8.49, 11.69; Eusebius says he fled to the Parthians and later surrendered to Pompey, *Chron.* 1.40.25; *Jus.* 40.2.2-4 states that Lucullus summoned him to the throne of Syria; Antiochus X's last confidently verifiable coin issue dates to 92 BC; E. T. Newell, *The Seleucid Mint of Antioch* (New York 1918) 113-4; J. D. Grainger, *A Seleucid Prosopography and Gazetteer* (1997) 33-4.

<sup>191</sup> Jos. *AJ* 13.384-6; "Δημήτριος δ' ἐκ τῆς Ἰουδαίας ἀπελθὼν εἰς Βέροϊαν ἐπολιόρκει τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ Φίλιππον ὄντων αὐτῷ πεζῶν μὲν μυρίων, χιλίων δὲ ἰππέων. Στράτων δ' ὁ τῆς Βερούϊας τύραννος Φιλίππῳ συμμαχῶν Ἄξιζον τὸν

This episode suggests several important aspects of the geopolitical situation in the early 80s BC. Firstly Parthia had access to a crossing along the upper Euphrates and therefore the cooperation of Mithridates I Kallinikos of Commagene. A new king to the Parthian throne may have brought relations with Commagene into a new and friendlier light. Queen Laodice VII Thea Philadelphus was a half-sister to both brothers, but she may have sided with Philip for reasons now lost and convinced her husband to allow Parthian aid through to Borocea. Secondly, despite faced with the imminent threat of Sinatruces, the Parthian King could afford to expend resources in Syria to shore up a sympathetic monarch on that throne. The capture and kind treatment of Demetrius could be seen as an insurance policy in case relations with Syria sour once again, either through dynastic change or Philip's change of heart. Thirdly, this event suggests that the Sinatruces threat had somewhat dissipated and is confirmed by the numismatic evidence that demonstrates the reestablishment of the Mithridatic line's control of the Susian mint in 88/7 BC.<sup>192</sup>

This is the last show of Parthian strength in the north of their realm, as recorded by our sources, for the remainder of this study, which ends in 69/8 BC. The sources for the three to four year period between 88/7 and 84/3 BC are silent, but the ease with which Tigranes of Armenia absorbs these realms just prior to his arrival at Antioch in 83 BC must suggest a severe weakening in Parthian resolve in this region up till that date.<sup>193</sup> That stated, according to Justinus a Syrian faction favoured Tigranes because of his good relations with Parthia which does suggest Parthia still maintained some influence amongst some members of the Syrian community.<sup>194</sup> It is now appropriate to investigate the geopolitical stage that forms the backdrop for the rise of Tigranes and, in particular, the role Parthia's fortunes had in it.

## The Ascendancy of Tigranes the Great

Tigranes had been a loyal ally of Mithridates II of Parthia since his rise to the

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Ἀράβων φύλαρχον ἐπεκαλεῖτο καὶ Μιθριδάτην τὸν Σινάκην τὸν Παρθυαίων ὑπαρχον. ὣν ἀφικομένων μετὰ πολλῆς δυνάμεως καὶ πολιορκούντων Δημήτριον ἐντὸς τοῦ χαρακώματος, εἰσω τοῖς τε τοξεύμασι καὶ τῇ δίφῃ συνέχοντες αὐτὸν ἠνάγκασαν τοὺς σὺν αὐτῷ σφᾶς παραδοῦναι. λαφυραγωγῆσαντες δὲ τὰ ἐν τῇ χώρᾳ καὶ τὸν Δημήτριον παραλαβόντες τὸν μὲν τῷ Μιθριδάτῃ τῷ τότε βασιλεύοντι Πάρθων ἔπεμψαν, τῶν δ' αἰχμαλώτων οὓς Ἀντιοχέων εἶναι πολίτας συνέβαινε τούτους προῖκα τοῖς Ἀντιοχεῦσιν ἀπέδωκαν." Demetrius' last mint in Damascus is dated to 225 SEM (88/7 BC) where he was succeeded by Antiochus XII Dionysus Epiphanes Philopator Callinicus, see E. T. Newell, *Late Seleucid Mints in Ake-Ptolemais and Damascus* (New York 1939) 82 and Philip's first mint in Antioch was in the same year, G. Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria—from Seleucus to the Arab Conquest*, (Princeton 1961) 135; Newell (1918) 119-124.

<sup>192</sup> Assar (2006b) 59.

<sup>193</sup> Jus. 40.1.2-2.1; App. Syr. 48; Strab. 11.14.15 and 16.2.8; Eutr. 6.14.2; Jos. AJ 13.419; Downey (1961) 138; G. Macdonald, "The Coinage of Tigranes I", *NC* 2 (1902) 193-201.

<sup>194</sup> Jus. 40.1.1-4; confirmed by his marriage alliance with Gotarzes as mentioned in the Avroman parchment dated Apellaios 225 SEM = 19/20.10-17/18.11.88 BC; Minns (1915) 22-65.

Armenian throne through Parthian support in 96/5 BC. Perhaps not long after his ascent to the throne in 96 BC he gave his daughter's hand in marriage to the Parthian king's son, Mithridates III. Tigranes was acutely aware of his powerful neighbour to the north and strengthened his ties with Mithridates of Pontus by marrying his daughter, Cleopatra. Perhaps as a condition of this alliance, Mithridates enticed Tigranes to help him to invade Cappadocia once again.<sup>195</sup> This was the second occasion of Tigranes' interference in Cappadocian affairs and by the best reckoning this incursion took place around 91 BC while Rome was preoccupied with its Italian allies. The first, in 95 BC, was foiled by the intervention of Sulla. However the Social War would keep concerted Roman interference out of Asian affairs for the next three years.

With the help of Mithridates' generals, Mithraas and Bagoas, Tigranes successfully drove Ariobarzanes out of Cappadocia and back to Rome. In his place, Mithridates placed his son, Ariarathes, who was no more than thirteen years old, on the Cappadocian throne for the second time under the guidance of his henchman, Gordius. It was this action that precipitated the First Mithridatic War.<sup>196</sup>

This three-way alliance of Pontus, Armenia and Parthia during the late 90s and early 80s BC deserves comment. Its focus was undoubtedly the Rome's growing interference in Asia Minor and in particular in Cappadocian affairs. With the installation of their puppet in Cappadocia, Rome's influence was brought up to the banks of the Euphrates River in Anatolia and this must have caused great consternation amongst the three eastern powers and they feared that it may eventually cross that boundary. It seems a fair deduction that this tripartite arrangement was directly precipitated by Sulla's meeting with the Parthian envoy and his un-diplomatic handling of the occasion. Parthia had initiated the meeting and this alone suggests their concern for the growing extent of Roman power and its possible infringement into Parthian affairs beyond the Euphrates River.<sup>197</sup> This river, no doubt, was to be the designated limit of that power, yet there must have been no illusions amongst the Parthian elite, or for that matter Mithridates of Pontus and Tigranes, that Rome would respect that understanding in the long-term. This new three-way alliance was a manifestation of that distrust and it marks the beginning of the East/West polarization about the Euphrates River Frontier.

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<sup>195</sup> Jus. 38.3.5.

<sup>196</sup> Jus. 38.3-38.8.1; App. *Mith.* 12.10. Unlike Justin, Appian overlooks Tigranes' involvement.

<sup>197</sup> Appian articulates these concerns through the ambassador of Nicomedes of Bithynia's when describing Mithridates of Pontus' pretext for starting a war with Rome as a fear of its growing power in the region: "...δέδιως δ' αὐξομένους ἡμᾶς..." *Mith.* 2.13.

Mithridates of Pontus had received a warning from Marius a few years before in 99/8 BC that he should acquiesce to Roman might or make himself stronger and this was a likely motivation for his alliances with Armenia and Parthia.<sup>198</sup> Cappadocia was the sticking point and the desire to re-forge those traditional ties that lay between Pontus and its inland neighbour was strong.<sup>199</sup> The interference of Rome, into what Pontus would have perceived as its domestic interests, was not tolerated for long. So when Sulla left the province in 93 BC, Mithridates and Tigranes took the opportunity to eject Ariobarzanes for the first, but certainly not the last time. In a pronouncement by Mithridates of Pontus' envoy, Pelopidas (that Appian places at the penultimate moment before Pontus embarks upon its first war with Rome) the envoy boasts of his king's alliance with Armenia and Parthia. This is further evidence that the Pontic king heeded Marius' caveat.<sup>200</sup> They gave him confidence to assert his own interests in the region and the Roman preoccupation with the Social War strengthened his resolve—a war considered to be one of the gravest Rome faced in its history.<sup>201</sup>

Mithridates' confidence in his alliances eventually proved unfounded when first Tigranes, and then Parthia displayed a lack of resolve in aiding his struggles against Rome. Parthia became too preoccupied with its own internal and eastern security and Tigranes was too intent on pursuing his own self-aggrandisement exploiting the distraction that Mithridates provided. Upon Ariobarzanes' request for aid, although initially beset by the trials of the Social War, the Senate commissioned Manius Aquilius and Mallius Malthinus in 89 BC to restore him and Nicomedes IV, son of Nicomedes III of Bithynia, who had also been driven from his throne by Pontic aggression.<sup>202</sup> His younger brother, Socrates Chrestus, was placed upon the Bithynian throne as a pretender by Mithridates.<sup>203</sup>

By 88 BC Mithridates was beset by Roman led Asiatic forces (Galatians, Paphlagonians, Cappadocians and Phrygians are mentioned)<sup>204</sup> and he was forced to relinquish Cappadocia once again. Undoubtedly Mithridates had timed the retaking of Cappadocia to coincide with Rome's preoccupation with the Social War, but by 88 BC the Italians were in a desperate situation. As Diodorus states the Italians requested in that year aid

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<sup>198</sup> Plut. *Mar.* 31.3.

<sup>199</sup> App. *Mith.* 2.12.

<sup>200</sup> App. *Mith.* 3.15; Mem. *FGrHist.* 434 F 22.4.

<sup>201</sup> E. T. Salmon, "The Cause of the Social War", *Phoenix* 16 (1962) 107ff.

<sup>202</sup> Jus. 38.3.4; App. *Mith.* 12.11. The proconsul of Asia, Lucius Cassius, mentioned here and in 12.24, whose *praenomen* is actually Gaius, held this position in 89/8. See Broughton *MRR* 2, 34 and 38 n. 6; Magie, *RRAM* 1100, n. 22 for further discussion.

<sup>203</sup> App. *Mith.* 12.2.13.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.11; 3.17.

from Mithridates, but by then he was too preoccupied with his own survival to be of any assistance.<sup>205</sup>

Over the period of the first two Mithridatic Wars and beyond the sources are silent on Tigranes Anatolian involvement for at least fifteen years. In 73/2 BC Mithridates appealed for his aid, but none was forthcoming.<sup>206</sup> The threat of an Armenian and Mede army sent by Tigranes was employed as a ruse at the siege of Cyzicus in 74 BC. It is implicit in the fact that the likelihood of such aid was not forthcoming that the ploy was an act of desperation and a vain hope for Mithridates' desperate troops.<sup>207</sup> It was not until Tigranes found the time and situation conducive to his self interests that he once again invades Cappadocia, ostensibly under Mithridates' instigation in 82/1 BC. By this stage Tigranes had become an independent and powerful ruler, whereas Mithridates' fortunes were in steep decline. It was an excuse to pillage for his own gain, with the primary objective of acquiring more forced repatriations to populate his newly built grand capital of Tigranocerta.<sup>208</sup>

In Justin the terms of the alliance are stated and they clearly do not impose upon Tigranes the onus of defending the territory of Cappadocia. Tigranes could retire back to Armenia with his booty, having fulfilled his obligation to Mithridates and, at the same time, keeping judiciously out of any direct conflict with Rome while he husbanded his strength. Although Justin implies that it is Mithridates who manipulated Tigranes to his best advantage, clearly it is Tigranes who has most cunningly exploited the alliance.<sup>209</sup> These gains strengthened his power base back in Armenia, whilst his military energies were directed south and south-westwards, avoiding the unwanted attention of the Romans. The establishment of his new capital, Tigranocerta, in Northern Mesopotamia at the foot of the Taurus Mountains was an indication of the shift in his Empire's centre of gravity and his future aspirations for further expansion. Clearly his focus was east of the Tigris River and south of the Taurus Mountains.<sup>210</sup> Not until 71 BC was Tigranes confident enough to challenge the might of Rome north of the Taurus Range when he relented to give Mithridates a place of exile following his defeat at Cabiera in 72/1 BC. Until then we see Tigranes judiciously biding his time, building up his power base and avoiding entanglements in Roman

<sup>205</sup> Diod. 37.2.11; this request is also mentioned in Poseidonius, see Jacoby, *FGH* no. 87, fr. 36, 246.9f.

<sup>206</sup> App. *Mith.* 11.78.

<sup>207</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 9.4

<sup>208</sup> App. *Mith.* 67; Strab. 12.2.9; 11.14.15.

<sup>209</sup> Jus. 38.3.5.

<sup>210</sup> Strab. 522.11.12.4; 747.16.1.23; Plut. *Luc.* 24; Ptol. 5.12.9; Pliny, *NH* 6.26; 129; Tac. *Ann.* 14.24ff.; 15.4-5; Eutr. 6.9.1; 10.16.1; Faus. 5.37; See Syme (1995) 58ff., for discussion of the primary and secondary sources on the location of this city.

interests.

The establishment of his new capital in a position so central to Parthia's interests and security in Northern Mesopotamia demonstrates a profound shift in the play of power throughout the Near East. It is indicative of Parthia's waning influence and military strength in the region for all the reasons explored thus far and that are dealt with in detail in the following chapter. For now it is appropriate to make some speculations as to the overall Parthian strategy for this period down to the resurgence of Sinatruces' bid for the Empire in 78/7 BC.

### **A Postulation of Parthian Strategy in the 90s and 80s BC**

As argued the 90s were a period of consolidation east of the Euphrates for Mithridates II of Parthia. He secured his frontier to the north by placing what he hoped to be a faithful suppliant king on the throne of Armenia. As a proxy to Parthian policy, Tigranes brought Sophene into Parthia's sphere of influence. There Mithridates II attempted to negotiate a treaty with Rome—with the aim of having the Euphrates River recognised as the limits of their respective spheres of influence. In this, it is argued, he was unsuccessful in gaining an acceptable response from Sulla. This drove Mithridates II of Parthia, and his Armenian proxy, to seek alliance with Mithridates of Pontus. It is likely that Parthia fully, though tacitly, supported Armenia and Pontus' drive to rest nominal control of Cappadocia from Rome through their pretender Ariarathes IX, and that this struggle lasted well into the 80s BC. All that remained for Mithridates II was the subjugation of Syria whose rulers were a perpetual threat to Parthia's western frontier.

Syria's fratricidal wars had reached a new level of intensity upon the deaths of Antiochus VIII Grypos in 96 BC and his brother Antiochus IX Cyzicenus in 95 BC, with no less than six claimants to that throne down to its annexation by Tigranes of Armenia in 83 BC. Justin states that the people of Syria turned to foreign kings to find a resolution. Tigranes was the most favoured because of his ties to Parthia.<sup>211</sup> In this atmosphere Parthia found factional support within Syria and justification for an invasion in 89/8 BC. A significant Parthian force penetrated deep inside Syrian territory in aid of Antiochus VIII's son, Philip Epiphanes Philadelphus against his brother Demetrius III Akairos.<sup>212</sup> Demetrius was defeated at the siege of Beroea and taken into captivity by Mithridates where he was treated well—possibly in the hope of preening another pro-Parthian ruler in case Syria should

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<sup>211</sup> Jus. 40.1.

<sup>212</sup> Jos. *AJ.* 13.384-6.

become a problem in the future.<sup>213</sup> In the meantime Mithridates III was content with Philip holding the upper hand in Syria. Sinatruces still threatened in the East and any further commitment in Syrian affairs would have been unwise.

The mountainous canton of Armenia had been subjugated earlier in Mithridates of Parthia's reign, but exactly when and in what form, is now hard to determine. The Taurus Mountains made communications between its highlands and the Mesopotamian plains difficult. This was recognized by Tigranes the Great when, after conquering Northern Mesopotamia and Syria, he resituated his capitol from Artaxata to a more accessible new foundation in the hill country between the Taurus and the Upper Tigris, in Tigranocerta.<sup>214</sup>

The easiest line of communication between Armenia and Parthia proper was via the circuitous route of the Araxes River valley—otherwise known as the “Seventy Valleys”—that led from the heartland of Armenia to Parthian seat of power in Media Atropatene. Parthia initially maintained control over Armenia and this sensitive path through the use of hostages, including one Tigranes. With Tigranes as hostage, Mithridates was able to encourage his father's, Artavasdes', loyalty and later provide a readymade successor with, it was hoped, Parthian sympathies.

The most accessible part of Armenia was Sophene as discussed above as it controlled a major crossing point over the Euphrates River, at Tomisa; it was of great concern to both Armenian, and by association, Parthian interests. It lay within a great valley between the Taurus and Anti-Taurus mountain ranges.<sup>215</sup> As we have dealt with above, Sophene was conquered by Tigranes, we may conjecture with Parthian aid, shortly after his accession to the throne. Through Tigranes, Mithridates hoped Sophene's allegiance would be assured.

As a result of Tigranes' subjugation of Sophene and, not for the last time, subsequent interest in Cappadocia affairs, the reality of a Roman threat was brought starkly to the Parthian's attentions. Sulla, through Plutarch, makes it clear that it was the Parthians that initiated the meeting and it was them that entreated alliance and friendship.<sup>216</sup> Mithridates of Parthia must have been concerned about the threat posed by a Roman led incursion into Armenian territory. It is possible that Sulla was contemplating such action in the aftermath of ejecting an Armenian force that fought in support of the anti-Roman/Ariobarzanes faction, led by Gordius—the creature of Mithridates of Pontus. It cannot be ascertained with certainty if Tigranes had full control of Armenia at the time of Ariobarzanes' first accession in 95 BC,

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<sup>213</sup> Jos. *AJ.* 13.384-6.

<sup>214</sup> App. *Mith.* 84; Plut. *Luc.* 22.5 and 29.4.

<sup>215</sup> Strab. 11.12.4; 14.2.

<sup>216</sup> Plut. *Sull.* 5.4.



but the sources state that one of Tigranes' first actions as king of Armenia was the annexation of Sophene. Importantly, it is difficult to explain the presence of a Parthian envoy, who must have been attended by a significant Parthian force, at the Melitene/Tomisa crossing, deep in the heart of a supposedly independent Sophene, unless within the context of a Parthian supported annexation of Sophene and general regional rise in power of Tigranes.

It is doubtful any formal agreement was reached between Sulla and the Parthian envoy.<sup>217</sup> First and foremost, there is no evidence to suggest that the Senate formally ratified a treaty. There is no mention that any agreement had ever been reached or, if one had been, that it was ever brought before the Senate for formal ratification. Certainly, there is a much later tradition that credits Sulla with such a treaty, but there is no contemporary evidence to support such a claim.<sup>218</sup> It is easy to understand how such a tradition may have come about given the later significance accorded to this first meeting between the two powers in respect to their later monumental struggles, a significance it is doubtful Sulla appreciated at the time.

By seating himself between Ariobarzanes and Orobazus, the Parthian envoy, Sulla was asserting Rome's authority and prioritising its interests over and those of two kingdoms.<sup>219</sup> Tradition has it that for allowing himself to be treated this way, and by implication the Parthian state, Mithridates had Orobazus executed. Sulla's, and therefore Rome's, implied geopolitical superiority in these negotiations was obviously not lost on the Parthian King. It reflected a continuing and endemic ignorance by Roman commanders about the Parthians, their geopolitical significance and their military power that would not sober until the disaster at Carrhae forty-two years later.

In 91 BC, as best we can reckon, while Mithridates II of Parthia was still preoccupied with his expansionist policies in the north, a new rival to the Parthian Empire appeared in the North-East—one Sinatruces. Little is known of this new rival except for a few meagre pieces of evidence presented to us in coins, rhytons and ostraca. At a similar time Mithridates II's son Gotarzes I seem to have asserted his own claim, most likely at the death of his father in 87 BC.

Gotarzes first appears to us as Satrap of Satraps on a rock relief found at Behistun that depicts Mithridates with four of his subordinates/sons. It was erected somewhere between 120 and 110 BC. Gotarzes later appears in Babylon as king in a hymn dated as 221 SEB, i.e.

<sup>217</sup> Contra in particular A. Keaveney, "Roman Treaties with Parthia Circa 95—Circa 64 BC", *AJP* 102 (1981) 198-201.

<sup>218</sup> Flor. 1.46.4; "...mihi ab Orode rege legati nuntiavere, percussorum cum Pompeio foederum Sullaque meminisset."

<sup>219</sup> Plut. *Sull.* 5.4; "...ὅτε καὶ λέγεται τρεῖς δῖφρους προδόμενος, τὸν μὲν Ἀριοβαρζάνην, τὸν δὲ Ὀροβάζω, τὸν δὲ αὐτῷ, μέσος ἀμφοῖν καθεζόμενος χρηματίζειν."

91/90 BC, with a Queen Ashi'abatun. This would seem to suggest that Gotarzes had rebelled against his father and claimed the Babylonian throne for his own. The tablet could not have been inscribed too long after he first seizes control of Babylonia as there is inscriptional evidence that suggests Mithridates II still maintained control of that region as late as 92/1 BC.<sup>220</sup>

What direct effect this had on Mithridates II cannot be determined, but if he had plans for further expansion west of the Euphrates River, they were severely curtailed. The only case of Parthian interference in Syrian affairs in the early 80s is that concerning the relief of the siege of Beroea and its subsequent capture of Demetrius III Eucærus.<sup>221</sup> This is a significant episode in a number of ways. Firstly, it is the first explicit reference we have of direct Parthian interference in the Seleucid's fratricidal wars. Secondly, it occurred deep within Syrian territory, only 96 kilometres east of Antioch, and with a large force (*πολλῆς δυνάμεως*) that included an Arab contingent led by the sheikh Azizus. Thirdly, it was in aid of the Seleucid claimant, Philip Epiphanes Philadelphus, at the request of the independent ruler (*τύραννος*) of Beroea, who was an ally of Philip's, and directed against Philip's brother Demetrius. The outcome was that Phillip became the sole ruler of Syria and Demetrius was held in captivity until his death of natural causes in 87 BC. This episode took place in 88 BC after Demetrius' return from his ultimately frustrated interference in the Jewish insurrection against Alexander Jannæus.<sup>222</sup>

It would seem that despite the undoubted presence of two pretenders to the Parthian throne, one in Babylonia and the other in the far north-east, Mithridates II still had sufficient forces, and was sufficiently concerned, to make a large commitment to interference in the internal politics of Syria. These actions need not preclude a concerted campaign against Sinatruces—as a relatively secure and friendly Syria would have been important in stabilizing the Euphrates River frontier while he dealt with these internal matters. Despite the evidence that clearly shows that these two kings were co-regents in Parthia over a period of around two years, there is no direct evidence to suggest that they came into direct conflict. It would seem that Sinatruces overran the greater part of the eastern, central and southern regions of Parthia with relative ease. By 93/2 BC he controlled Susa and minted a coin celebrating this triumph

<sup>220</sup> For the relief see E. Herzfeld, *Am Tor von Asien* (Berlin 1920) 35ff.; Debevoise (1968) 44-5; Colledge (1967) 32-3. For the hymn tablet see Reisner, *Hymnen* no. 51; Debevois (1968) 48-9; Colledge (1967) 34-5. For evidence that dates Mithridates II's control of Babylonia see Minns, "Avroman Parchments", *JHS* 35 (1915) 34f.; Debevois (1968) 48.

<sup>221</sup> Jos. *AJ* 13.384-6.

<sup>222</sup> Jos. *BJ* 1.92-5 = *AJ* 13.376-9.

over Mithridates. The titulature reads—*ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΠΣΑΚΟΥ ΘΕΟΠΙΑΤΟΡΟΣ*.<sup>223</sup> The title ‘the Great’ was a blatant challenge to Mithridates’ much deserved epithet, and ‘Victorious’ celebrated his dramatically widespread and swift conquests.

Mithradates II’s death can be pinpointed to within a seven month window. The last extant reference to him is on a colophon dated to 3.III.221 SEB (30/31.5.91 BC).<sup>224</sup> The first record of the reign of Gotarzes I is dated IX.221 SEB (22/23.11-20/21.12.91 BC).<sup>225</sup> Assar has argued that the date of Mithridates’ death can be narrowed down to within one month—25.8-24.9.91.<sup>226</sup>

But the ease with which Tigranes of Armenia overran Northern Mesopotamia may suggest a severely weakened Parthian presence there. This may also suggest that Parthia was embroiled in its own internal affairs in the early 80s, drawing its resources away from Northern Mesopotamia, into Babylonia and maybe north-east as well. Thus Tigranes found an easy conquest in 87 BC after the death of Mithridates II. He maintained control of this region with no evidence of Parthian interference for the next twenty-four years and this urges us to find some explanation.

A. D. H. Bivar has shown that there may be some evidence that suggests Gotarzes was, at that time, more concerned with events in the eastern half of his empire, including Sinatruces. A not uncommon preoccupation for Parthian kings. Bivar has married numismatic evidence collated by Sellwood concerning certain “campaign coins” with a section of the Shah-nama, or the Persian Epic of the Kings, which details exploits of a certain Godarz, father of Gev. Bivar asserts that these entries may refer to our Gotarzes and that he carried out extensive campaigns in the East in the 80s BC, but the evidence remains conjectural.<sup>227</sup> It is certainly attractive to consider that this may be a reason why Tigranes was able to maintain hegemony over Northern Mesopotamia, relatively unmolested by Parthian interference for the period of Gotarzes’ reign. Indeed, this is a view that is supported by Plutarch in which he cites internal discord as a reason for Parthia’s weakness during this period.<sup>228</sup>

<sup>223</sup> Le Rider No. 148 = Sellwood No. 28.33.

<sup>224</sup> G. Reisner, *Sumerisch-babylonisch Hymnen nach Thontafeln Griechischer Zeit* (Berlin 1896) viii, No. 46 (VATh 245+426+1729+1792+ 4 Fragments), and 82 (copy).

<sup>225</sup> BCT 436-437, No. -90.

<sup>226</sup> Assar (2006a) 147-9.

<sup>227</sup> *CHI* 43-4.

<sup>228</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 36.6; “τῆς δὲ Πάρθων δυνάμεως οὐχ ὅση κατὰ Κράσσον ἐξεφάνη τοσαύτης καὶ κατὰ Λούκουλλον οὔσης οὐδ’ ὁμοίως συνεστῶσης, ἀλλ’ ὑπ’ ἐμφυλίων καὶ προσοίκων πολέμων οὐδ’ Ἀρμενίους ὑβρίζοντας ἐρρωμένης ἀμύνεσθαι.” Translation: “...in the time of Lucullus the Parthian power was not so great as it proved to be in the time of

In summation, we can now come to some understanding as to the circumstances and significance of the first momentous meeting between Rome and Parthia and its immediate and short term future consequences.

Given what we have discussed thus far we may infer that the foremost issue in Sulla's mind, given his *mandata* and irrespective of the Parthian envoy's agenda, was the clarification of the state of relations between Cappadocia and Parthia—much rather than the state of relations between Rome and Parthia. The Roman Empire, as it was then, along with its central interests, was still far removed from the Cappadocian/Sophene border. As far as Asian military intervention was concerned the pirate problem in Phrygia and Cilicia remained Rome's number one foreign policy concern in the Near East—after all it was the security of Rome's *vectigalia* that was central to its eastern interests and governed its policy there. Roman foreign policy in Cappadocia was aimed at largely maintaining a balance of power within Asia Minor sympathetic to Roman interests. Prior to Tigranes' later moves towards overt imperialism in the East, Armenia lay beyond those central Roman concerns and Parthia, of course, lay much beyond that. Parthia could not have represented the same threat in Sulla's mind that it would under Pompey's command, or even Lucullus'. This is implicit in his behaviour towards the Parthian envoy. His one and only priority would have been the achievement of recognition by Parthia of the sovereignty of this new Cappadocian dynasty, now ratified by Rome. The Parthian request for friendship and alliance would have received perfunctory assurances and would have held little significance for Rome, and Sulla, at this point in time.

Direct Romano-Parthian relations now reach a hiatus period, with any manoeuvres by either perpetrated through proxies. Direct contact is not instigated again until General Lucullus' eastern command of the 70s BC and it is to that period that we now draw our attention in the following Part Two.

## Summation

Having firmly dated Sulla's meeting with the Parthian envoy, Orobazus, to the summer campaigning season of 95 BC this chapter placed that meeting within its wider geopolitical stage. A picture emerged of a moment of profound geopolitical upheaval which saw dynastic changes not only in Cappadocia, but in Bithynia, Armenia, Commagene, and Syria within a space of not much more than one year. In addition a new pretender to the

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*Crassus, nor was it so well united, nay rather, owing to internecine and neighboring wars, it had not even have the strength to repel the wanton attacks of the Armenians."*

throne of Parthia appears in its eastern regions at the head of a Saka invasion. He quickly made inroads into the heart of the Parthian Empire and by 93 BC he was minting coins at Susa, at the door of Mesopotamia, now the last bastion of Mithridates II's power. Mithridates II's exterior satrapies began to show alarming signs of independence. First Spasinu Charax, Persis, and then Elymais seceded, either in sympathy with the new pretender or as solitary bids to free themselves from Parthian overlordship, perhaps also encouraged by the death of the Great King himself in September 91 BC.

Within this climate of the imminent disintegration of the Parthian and Seleucid Empires, Pontus and Armenia made their bids for wider geopolitical power—Mithridates westwards and Tigranes south and eastwards. They were also encouraged by Rome's own series of military and constitutional crisis that began in 92/1 BC. Thus both potentates were convinced their times had come to wrest the East for themselves.

Such was the geopolitical climate covered by Part One of this thesis. In the following second part, this study focuses upon reconstructing the events within the Parthian Empire and their impact, whether direct or indirect, upon the struggles of Rome, Pontus and Armenia in the intervening years down to the outbreak of the Third Mithridatic War in the spring of 74 BC. The origins of Sinatruces and his lineage are investigated as well as the nature and progress of the Parthian Wars of Succession as best as can be reconstructed with the scarce extant evidence. This sets the scene for, and places within its geopolitical context, the second meeting between Rome and Parthia in 69/8 BC.

# Part Two

## The First Phase of the Parthian Wars of Succession and the Coming of Tigranes of Armenia

### Introduction

*“...τῆς δὲ Πάρθων δυνάμεως οὐχ ὅση κατὰ Κράσσον ἐξεφάνη τοσαύτης καὶ κατὰ Λούκουλλον οὔσης οὐδ’ ὁμοίως συνεστῶσης, ἀλλ’ ὑπ’ ἐμφυλίων καὶ προσοίκων πολέμων οὐδ’ Ἀρμενίους ὑβρίζοντας ἐρρωμένης ἀμύνεσθαι.”*

“...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 neighbouring wars, it had not even strength enough to repel the wanton attacks of the Armenians.”<sup>229</sup>

Part Two traces the causes and course of the first 10 years or so of The Parthian Wars of Succession (95/4-55/4 BC) from the late 90s and into the 80s BC. In doing so it sets the broad geopolitical context for the first meeting between representatives of the Roman and Parthian Empires. It argues that for most of this period Parthia was in widespread crisis that forced it to take a passive and conciliatory role in political and military affairs west of the Euphrates River and north of the Taurus Mountains. This allowed Tigranes of Armenia and ultimately Roman hegemony to penetrate into traditional Parthian domains of influence south of the Taurus Mountain range into Northern Mesopotamia and west of the Euphrates River into Syria. The House of the Seleucid’s devolution aided and abetted by various foreign influences such as Egypt, Judaea and Parthia created a power vacuum that drew first Armenia and then Rome into Syria. Parthia also felt this pull, but its two forays, one in 93/2 BC by Mithridates II and the other in 87 BC by his son, Mithridates III, proved ultimately fruitless,

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<sup>229</sup> Plut. *Luc.* 36.6.

undermined by its ongoing inter-dynastic struggles. This chapter explains why Parthia was unable to succeed in pushing west of the Euphrates River and why ultimately it was unable to maintain geopolitical dominance in Northern Mesopotamia and Armenia at a crucial time when Rome was itself advancing inexorably eastwards.

This study argues that Rome, as represented by the constitutional entity of the Senate, never made any formal agreements with the Arsacid ruler at the first meeting between these powers. Little was achieved other than perfunctory and verbal assurances by the commander on the ground, P. Cornelius Sulla, to remain outside direct intervention in Parthian geopolitical affairs as far as his immediate strategic situation dictated.<sup>230</sup> It further argues that Sulla was ignorant of the extent and military power of the Parthian Empire.<sup>231</sup> On the counter side it is argued that Parthia was keenly aware of Roman military prowess and imperialistic ambitions. This coupled with its desperate internal state forced it to remain passive in the face of Roman aggression. It was not until Orodes II finally united the Empire and brought the Parthian Wars of Succession to a close in 55 BC that it was able to mount a coordinated military effort, backed by the entire resources of its Empire, to defeat a first-rate Roman army in open battle two years later at Carrhae.

The chapter begins by outlining the causes for The Parthian Wars of Succession. It argues that the initial spark for this war was the arrival of a pretender to the throne, Sinatruces, at the head of a Saka/Scythian invasion. This thesis identifies these peoples, their origins and what relationship they had with Sinatruces. Of Primary importance to these findings is the iconographic evidence provided by a unique series of coinage. This thesis then traces the first phase of the The Parthian Wars of Succession's progress as best can be reconstructed from the available evidence. Finally it gives a brief outline of the events that precipitated Rome's increased involvement in the affairs of the Near East through the 80s BC that would ultimately lead to the beginning of the Third Mithridatic War in 74 BC. That war and its consequences brought the Roman Empire to the doorstep of the Parthian Empire, the only centralised foreign empire Rome would have to deal with directly until the Third Century AD.

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<sup>230</sup> Even the so-called Treaty of Dardanus made between Sulla and Mithridates of Pontus in the aftermath of the First Mithridatic War in 84 BC was actually based on verbal assurances without Senatorial ratification. This fact was used by L. Licinius Murena in justification for his unprovoked assault on Pontus within a year of the "treaty's" consummation and in response to Mithridates' ambassador's appeals to it. App. *Mith.* 9.64; "...καὶ πρῆσβεσιν αὐτοῦ τὰς συνθήκας προτείνουσιν οὐκ ἔφη συνθήκας ὄραν. οὐ γὰρ συνεγέγραπτο Σύλλας, ἀλλ' ἔργῳ τὰ λεχθέντα βεβαιώσας ἀπήλλακτο."

<sup>231</sup> R. M. Sheldon, *Rome's Wars in Parthia: Blood in the Sand* (Portland 2010) 5ff. Sheldon sees Rome's lack of overall military success east of the Euphrates River, in this period and throughout their coexistence with Parthia, was due to a lack of reliable intelligence and general ignorance of their enemy.

## Sinatruces the Usurper, *Cervus elaphus*, the Sacaraucae and the Significance of the Parthian Stag Tiara Drachms

The identification and iconographic analysis of the S33 series of coins is essential to this study's reconstruction of Sinatruces' reign and his movements.<sup>232</sup> The salient feature of these coins is the unique tiara surmounted by eight recumbent stags. This symbology is the key to understanding the identification of this king with Sinatruces and the circumstances of his successful bid for power. From prehistory the stag and its accompanying crown of antlers has been a dominant motif—a symbol of regal power, tutelage, and courage, magical and sexual potency. This section explores the meaning of this iconography - its mythological origins and cultural significance, particularly in relation to the Scythian, or more correctly Saka, peoples of the Central Asian Steppe. It concludes that these issues do indeed belong to Sinatruces the usurper and that the recumbent stags are an acknowledgement of the role the Sacaraucae or Saka Rawaka, the Royal Scythian, tribe had played in bringing him twice to the Parthian throne. The first time, briefly in 93/2 to 88/7 BC as contestant and then, as uncontested ruler in 77/6 BC until his death in 70/69 BC, following the defeat of Mithridates II's sons, Mithridates III followed by the conjectured Artabanus II,. Furthermore the iconography hints at the unique relationship Sinatruces had with these particular peoples that formed the basis for his ruling power.

Curiously the deer on these coins are depicted both with and without antlers on separate issues. This study addresses the question whether this is simply a die cutter's error, a depiction of stags at different stages of their seasonal cycle or simply stags as distinct from does. It investigates some possibilities as to why this king should wear two different crowns at different times and what this may have symbolized.

Lucian states that Sinatruces was brought to power with the support of the Sacaraucae.<sup>233</sup> The Sacaraucae were one of many Saka/Scythian tribes. Their name means literally Saka Lords/Kings—*Saka Murunda* in Prakrit, *Sai-wang* in Ancient Chinese.<sup>234</sup> At the time of the Achaemenid Empire, Sixth to Fourth Centuries BC, the Persians recognized four divisions of the Scythians: the *Saka paradraya*, "Scythians beyond the sea" of Sarmatia; the *Saka tigraxauda*, "Scythians with pointy hats"; the *Saka haumavarga*, "haoma-worshipping Scythians" (Amyrgians) of the Pamirand and the *Saka para Sugudam*,

<sup>232</sup> Sellwood (1980) 85-8; 101-4.

<sup>233</sup> Luc. *Macr.* 15; "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."

<sup>234</sup> W. W. Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria and India* (Cambridge 1951) 276, 278, 307; R. C. Senior, *Indo-Scythian Coins and History* 1 (London 2001) 7f.



"Scythians beyond Sogdia" at the Jaxartes River. Of these the *Saka tigraxauda* were to the Persians the Saka proper.<sup>235</sup> The other three were distant. Scythians to the far north of Assyria were also called the *Saka suni* or "Saka sons". The Sacaraucae were, as far as our sources state, unknown to Iran until their invasion in the Second Century BC. The Scythians called themselves *Saka*. The Chinese called them *Sai*. The name by which the West knows them, "Scythian" comes from the Greeks, who initially came into contact with these people when they settled north of the Black Sea in the Sixth Century BC and named them after their founder king in that region, Skulatai.<sup>236</sup>

The known origin of the Sacaraucae was the region about Lake Issik-Kul and the plain north of the Alexandrovski Range, south of Lake Balqash, within the shadows of the Altai Mountains. The region is generally known as the Altaic Complex. It is located half way between the Urals and the Pacific Ocean and straddles Eastern Kazakhstan, China, Siberia, Mongolia and Tibet; around the watersheds of the I-li, Irtysh, Tom' and Ob' rivers. The lands of the Sacaraucae lay directly in the corridor that joined China with the West, between the Hindu Kush and the Altai, known as the Silk Road. Relatively fertile and flat, this region was of great strategic importance and much contested. In the Second Century BC pressures from the Hsiung-nu and Yüeh-shih tribes (known as the Tochari by western sources)<sup>237</sup> from the northeast, eventually forced these people westwards and southwards.

This migration was the eventual stimulus for the Saka exodus into modern Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India in the late Second and early First Centuries BC.<sup>238</sup> The initial cause of thi migration began more than 60 years before their arrival into Parthian affairs. It is

<sup>235</sup> Such are named on the trilingual gold tablet of Darius I; S. Smith, "Assyriological Notes", *JRAS* (1926) 433-446; E. Herzfeld, *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India* 34 (1928) 1. A. Tremayne, *Records from Erech, Time of Cyrus and Cambyzes*, Yale Oriental Series, Babylonian Texts 7 (New Haven 1925). Darius the Great's, Behistun Inscription, 5.20-33; Darius, Persepolis H. (DPh). Trilingual on gold and silver plates. (3-10); The Inscriptions of Naqsh-e Rostam, Inscriptions on south face of steep ridge north of Persepolis (15-30); Xerxes, Persepolis H. (XPh). The Daiva Inscription: Trilingual, on stone tablets, 2 copies (13-28); Arr. *Anab.* 3.8.3, 11.4, 13.4; 5.12.2.

<sup>236</sup> Herod. *Hist.* 4.101. According to Herodotus Scythia was square with sides twenty day's journey long (4000 stades or approx. 700 km = 490000 km<sup>2</sup>). For a description see, Herod. *Hist.* 4.28, 31, 47, 82. Also see *Corpus Hippocraticum*; *De Aere, aquis, locis* 17-22; *Ov. Tris.* 3.10.5; 3.11.9-10; 3.14.37-40; 5.10.35-36; 5.10.37-38; 3.10.53-70; 5.10.21-26; 3.8.27-32; 5.2.63-66; *Ep.* 1.2.23-26; 1.3.45-50; 1.2.13-14; Dio Chr. *Bory.* 36; Aris. *Gen. An.* 748a25, *Hist. An.* 576a21; Strab. *Geo.* 7.4.8; Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 8.165; Fron. 2.4.20; Athen. *Deipn.* 11.499f.; Herod. 4.84; Anacr. 356.6-11; Luc. *Amic.* 1; Aris. 4.13; Jus. 2.1-3; Cic. *Tusc.* 5.90; Strab. 11.8.2 states; "οἱ μὲν δὴ πλείους τῶν Σκυθῶν ἀπὸ τῆς Κασπίας θαλάττης ἀρξάμενοι Δᾶαι προσαγορεύονται, τοὺς δὲ προσέφους τούτων μᾶλλον Μασσαγέτας καὶ Σάκας ὀνομάζουσι, τοὺς δ' ἄλλους κοινῶς μὲν Σκύθας ὀνομάζουσιν ἰδίᾳ δ' ὡς ἐκάστους: ἅπαντες δ' ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ νομάδες. μάλιστα δὲ γνώριμοι γέγονασι τῶν νομάδων οἱ τοὺς Ἕλληνας ἀφελόμενοι τὴν Βακτριανήν, Ἄσιοι καὶ Πασιανοὶ καὶ Τόχαροι καὶ Σακάραυλοι, ὁμηθέντες ἀπὸ τῆς περσείας τοῦ Ἰαξάρτου τῆς κατὰ Σάκας καὶ Σογδιανούς, ἣν κατεῖχον Σάκαι." This typifies the profusion and confusion of names within the western sources. Here Strabo identifies the Saka (Σάκαι) as a distinct tribe of the Scythians (Σκύθας).

<sup>237</sup> Tarn (1951) 515-19; discusses the etymology of the title.

<sup>238</sup> In particular see M. J. Olbrycht, *Parthia et ultiores gentes: Die politischen Beziehungen zwischen dem arsakidischen Iran und den Nomaden der eurasischen Steppen* (München 1998) 78ff.

conjectured that around 208 to 206 BC a massive volcanic event temporarily changed the climate in the far northern hemisphere forcing tribes from Siberia southwards.<sup>239</sup> Others conjecture the natural climactic cycle of the region brought drought and famine to the northern regions and this, combined with overpopulation, forced them south. Still another explanation looks no further than opportunistic imperialist expansionism.<sup>240</sup> This forced the Hsiung-nu onto the Ordo Plateau just outside and north of the Great Wall and into conflict with Emperor Kao-tsu of the Chinese Han dynasty.

The great king of the Hsiung-nu, Mao-tun, united his nation with twenty-six other steppe peoples such as the Wu-sun and Hu chieh against the Chinese Han Empire.<sup>241</sup> Another great tribal nation, the Ta Yüeh-shih, occupied an area west of the much contested Ordos Plateau in a region called the Kansu. These refused to join Mao-tun's confederation. Sometime after 174 BC the Ta Yüeh-shih were decisively defeated by Mao-tun's successor, his son Chi-Chu or "Old Shan-yü" (174-160 BC).<sup>242</sup> The Yüeh-shih king was slain and his skull turned into a drinking cup (a practice also mentioned by Herodotus). The survivors, numbering perhaps a million, fled west.<sup>243</sup> These collided with the Saka who occupied the region south of Lake Balkhash. In 160 BC the Wu-sun pushed some elements of the Yüeh-shih and Saka further south onto the Graeco-Bactrian border.<sup>244</sup> The Han Chinese sent a delegation to the Yüeh-shih in 138 BC that upon its return to China, after much tribulation, in 126 BC reported them still comfortably settled around the Jaxartes River in 129 BC.<sup>245</sup> Their exodus south must postdate this encounter.

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<sup>239</sup> Shih-chi (SC), translated by B. Watson in *Records of the Grand Historian, vol. Han Dynasty I* (New York 1993) 110; Han-shu (HS), translated by H. H. Dubs, *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, 3 vols. (Baltimore 1938-55) 94A.

<sup>240</sup> See Senior (2001) 7-8 and Tarn (1951) 274-5 for references and arguments for the various theories as to why these great movements of peoples occurred when they did. Of course this is outside the concern of this study.

<sup>241</sup> SC 110; HS 94A.

<sup>242</sup> CHC 1, 388; 384 n. 15; *Shan-yü* is the Chinese translation for the Hsiung-nu term for their tribal leader and *Hsiung-nu* is the Chinese term for these people meaning a "fierce slave".

<sup>243</sup> Senior (2001) 8; T. J. Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier—Nomadic Empires and China* (Oxford 1989) 49; the Hsiung-nu state numbered in the order of one million and the Ta Yüeh-shih must have at least equalled this number.

<sup>244</sup> Strab. 11.511.

<sup>245</sup> SC 123; HS 61.



**Map 4:** Nomadic migrations 206-130/29 BC. Red line Hsiung-nu. Blue line Yueh-shih. Yellow line Saka.

According to Pompeius Trogus and Appollodorus (handed down to us through Strabo) the Asii or Asiani, Pasiani, Tochari (Yüeh-shih) and Sacaraucae moved south from the Jaxartes River and took Bactria from the Greeks.<sup>246</sup> Strabo goes on to say that the Asiani became kings of the Tochari and the Sacaraucae were destroyed, but this must refer to later events. The Asiani went on to become the rulers of much of India, known as the Great Kushān Empire.<sup>247</sup> As Tarn states:

“Apollodorus’ mention of the Parsii links up, as is common sense, this invasion of Parthia with the conquest of Bactria; it was one and the same upheaval of the steppes, set in motion by the advent of the Yueh-chi, and therefore, as between the limits of 141 and 128 for that conquest, it must fall about 130; the date usually taken, c. 135, arrived at by splitting the difference between 141 and 128, is too early.”<sup>248</sup>

These population pressures caused the Sacaraucae to move south into Parthian domains and Tarn places these incursions between 141 and 129 BC with the bulk of the

<sup>246</sup> Tarn (1951) 270ff.; Olbrycht (1998) 91ff.; App. 9; Jus. 41-2; Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 6.16.46-8; Strab. 11.8.2.; Jus. 42.; *SC* 123; Tarn (284 nn. 6-8 and 285 n.5-287) identifies the Asiani or Asii with the Yüeh-shih, or at least their dominant constituent, but as this study is solely concerned with the identification of the Sacaraucae, it does not address this debate any further.

<sup>247</sup> Tarn states, “The idea occasionally put forward that the Asii conquered the Tocharii *after* the conquest of Bactria may be summarily dismissed.” (1951) 286f.

<sup>248</sup> Tarn (1951) 294.

invasion coming in 130/129 BC.<sup>249</sup> The Sacaraucae's path took them through the Parachoathras (*Παραχοάθρας*) Mountains, as Strabo knew them,<sup>250</sup> at Herāt, then Drangiana, the Helmand Bend and onto Sakastān or Sīstān Province as it is known today.<sup>251</sup> Other movements would have taken some of them northeast to Arachosia then on east to the plains of India via the Sulaimān range and the northwest frontier to Gandhara. At about the same time a broader invasion path was followed by another Saka confederacy, the Massagetae, through Hyrcania as discussed in more detail below. This study asserts that these incursions were the impetus for Mithridates II's construction of the so-called "Alexander's Wall" along the northern bank of the Gurgan River.<sup>252</sup>

Thus during the reign of Phraates II (139/8-128 BC), the successor of the great Mithridates I, the Sacaraucae first impinged upon the Parthian Empire.<sup>253</sup> The initial contact was not hostile and indeed conceived as beneficial and timely by the Arsacid Ruler. It was at this time that Antiochus VII Sidetes (138-129 BC) took up his brother's cause (Demetrius II Nicator, now captive to the Parthians in Hyrcania)<sup>254</sup> and launched his foray to regain the lost Seleucid power centre of Mesopotamia.<sup>255</sup> The Sacaraucae, although they are referred to by their generic name of Scythians by Trogus this people are the most likely culprits,<sup>256</sup> were called forth by Phraates to aid in repulsing Antiochus' vast and experienced invasion force. But the Sacaraucae arrived too late.<sup>257</sup> Antiochus' ponderous army proved its own undoing when Demetrius was released from Hyrcania to intrigue and undermine Antiochus' rearward lines of communication back in Syria.<sup>258</sup> Phraates foolishly reneged on any promise of compensation to the Sacaraucae. His kingdom was further ravished by these nomads, bent on exacting dispensation for their inconvenience. Phraates was killed in battle with them when his Greek contingent, the dregs of Antiochus' invasion force, turned against him. The

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<sup>249</sup> Tarn (1951) 274ff., 294; *CAH* 9, 281ff.; Jus. 42.1-2.

<sup>250</sup> Strab. 11.8.1.

<sup>251</sup> *CAH* 9, 583-5.

<sup>252</sup> Strab. 11.8.1-9 catalogues previous invasions by the Sakas against the Persians and these are the likely lines of advance for their later attacks on the Parthians. Strab. 11.8.3; specifically talks about these raids into Parthian territory that were tolerated for a time as a form of tributary agreement, but then relations soured and war began.

<sup>253</sup> Jus. 42.1.1-2.

<sup>254</sup> Jus. 38.9.1-3; 10; Trogus states that the reason for Demetrius' good treatment was as an insurance policy against Antiochus' potential aggression and ultimately to further Parthian interests in Syria and western security.

<sup>255</sup> Jus. 38.10.1-11 Diod. 34.5.15ff.

<sup>256</sup> Jus. 42.1.1-2.

<sup>257</sup> The distance from Merv to Babylon is at least 2200 km via Rhagae, Ecbatana and the Bihistun pass and would have taken one to two months on horseback at a conservative pace.

<sup>258</sup> Jus. 38.10.7-11.

Sacaraucæ returned “home”, back beyond the Kopet Mountains to the northeast, satisfied with their vengeance.<sup>259</sup>



**Map 5:** Conjectured invasion route of the Saka, c.130/29-c.115 BC.

Phraates' brother, Artabanus I (Sep/Oct 126-Oct/Nov 122 BC) launched a campaign against the Tocharii in 122 BC—as this is the year of his death and Trogus states that he died as a result of a wound received in this campaign.<sup>260</sup> This suggests that since their arrival in Parthia's eastern territories in 130/29 BC relations with the nomads had deteriorated. With the demise of Antiochus VII, Syria had now come into the hands of Parthia's former captive, Demetrius II. His subsequent campaign to seize the throne of Egypt was followed by a revolt by his people. He died in 125 BC and the internecine struggle for the throne that followed put paid to any further Seleucid interference in Parthian affairs throughout the 120s BC.<sup>261</sup> This gave Artabanus the breathing space to deal with the Saka issue in the east.

It is likely that by 122 BC the Tocharii had settled around the Helmand River. Raids onto the Iranian Plateau could be launched from there and must have posed an ongoing threat to the security of the Parthian Empire. Revenge for the death of his brother, Phraates, and the ravages of the Sacaraucae upon Mesopotamia back in 129/8 BC, were a further impetus for military action. As mentioned Artabanus I lost his life in this campaign and his immediate successor and son, Artabanus II (c.Nov. 122-c.Apr. 121 BC), succumbed to the

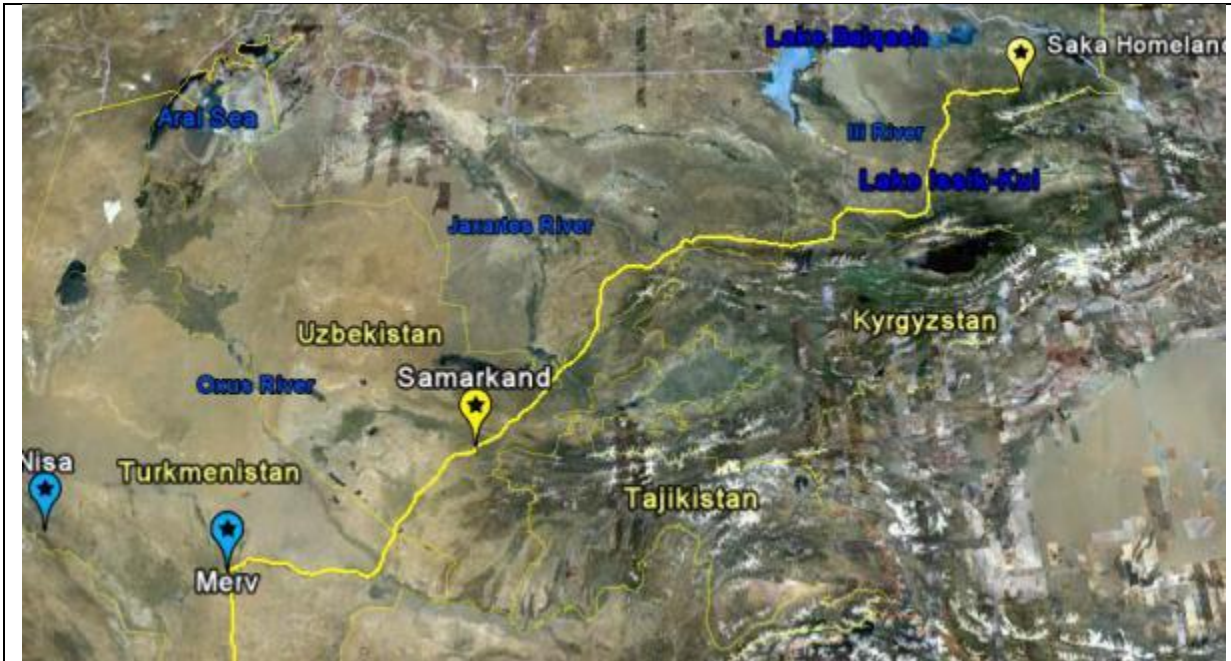
<sup>259</sup> Jus. 42.2.1; this episode pre-dates the Sacaraucae's settlement in Sīstān, but not their occupation of Bokhara, Merv and the surrounds of the Oxus River.

<sup>260</sup> Jus. 42.2.2.

<sup>261</sup> Jus. 39.1-2.



Saka/Scythian in the following year. It is possible to conjecture that Sinatruces, brother of Phraates and Artabanus, was captured by the Sacaraucae in the midst of these unsuccessful campaigns against the nomads only to emerge later at their head as a contender to the throne. This scenario is explored in further detail below.



**Map 6:** First stage of the Sacaraucae migrations.

There is little doubt that the Parthian Empire could have succumbed to the nomadic threat at this point, just as the Bactrian and Indo-Greeks had done and the greater part of India would do in the First Century BC. But an able leader emerged in Mithridates II, son to Artabanus I, who “fought a number of successful campaigns against the Scythians, and avenged the injury inflicted on his ancestors”.<sup>262</sup> It is likely that at the conclusion of these campaigns, in c.115 BC, the Sacaraucae were allowed to settle in the Sistan Province of southwest Iran.<sup>263</sup> It took another generation before they recovered from the ignomy of that subjugation and then rose again in 95/4 BC with Sinatruces the usurper in their lead and this study reconstructs the details of that uprising below. But firstly it must explore the wider geopolitical context of the emergence of Sinatruces in the decade or so leading to this event.

In the late Second and early First Centuries BC Han China was making its furthest penetrations west beyond the Tarim Basin into Ferghana (*Ta-yüan*, modern eastern Kazakhstan). These extensive military adventures began in 108 BC and, under the capable

<sup>262</sup> Jus. 42.2.4-5. “Multa igitur bella cum finitimis magna uirtute gessit multosque populos Parthico regno addidit. Sed et cum Scythis prospere aliquoties dimicauit ultorque iniuriae parentum fuit.”

<sup>263</sup> For a detailed analysis of these conjectured campaigns by Mithridates II against the Saka and their subsequent confinement to Sistan see Olbrycht (1998) 96-100.

generalship of Li Kuang-li, by 101 BC Ferghana had been conquered.<sup>264</sup> Their objectives were primarily the subjugation of the Central Asian Steppe tribes by severing “the right arm of the Hsiung-nu”, i.e. the Ch’iang peoples of the Tibetan Hinterland, demonstrating Han military supremacy, and securing access to Ferghana and its famous horses.<sup>265</sup> An important strategic linchpin to these operations was the population centre of Turfan (*Chü-shih*) on the north-eastern edge of the Tarim Basin, which finally came under the formal control of the Han Chinese in 90 BC.<sup>266</sup> This marked the beginning of the end for Hsiung-nu influence in the western regions. Han China now controlled an important stretch of the Silk Route into the west.

These significant Chinese movements into Eastern Kazakhstan had a profound impact on the Central Asian Steppe tribes of the Altaic Complex and the Jaxarta and Oxus Rivers. These events are contemporaneous with the beginnings of the Parthian Wars of Succession. Saka tribes had important roles to play in those wars particularly in their support of the usurper Sinatruces. The 90s also sees the emergence of the first Indo-Scythian ruler, Maues, “King of kings”.<sup>267</sup> The final coin issues from Hermaios, the last Indo-Greek ruler in the Kabul valley, also date to this time.<sup>268</sup> This marks the end of the Indo-Greek Era.

This study argues that these events far to the northeast on the borders of Han China caused further massive movements of people, as had occurred in 130/29 BC, that cascaded domino-like down into Iran and had a important impact upon the stability of the Parthian Empire. These turmoils brought Mithridates II’s focus eastwards at a crucial moment in history when Rome was just beginning its own march towards the Euphrates River. As a consequence this thesis argues that China indirectly caused a weakening of the Parthian Empire at an important moment in Roman and Near East history. The ease with which Rome surged towards the Euphrates River in the first half of the First Century BC can in some sense be explained by the consequences of Chinese actions in the Far East, the impact they had on the nomadic populations of the Central Asian Steppe and the subsequent impact this had on the state of the Parthian Empire at that crucial time.

This portion of the thesis has demonstrated that the Saka were present and active in Parthian affairs in the first decades of the First Century BC contemporaneous to the issuance of the S33 coinage. At that time they were penetrating into Afghanistan, Pakistan and India

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<sup>264</sup> HS 96A; 96B.

<sup>265</sup> HS 61:4b; Barfield (1989) 54.

<sup>266</sup> HS 96B.

<sup>267</sup> Senior (2001) 25ff.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

and had already been settled in south-eastern Iran by Mithridates II after their temporary subjugation around 115 BC. They had a long history of aggressively interfering in Iranian and Parthian affairs. The following sections draw a connection between the iconography on the obverse of these coins and the Sacaraucae and their support for the Parthian king depicted on their obverse. Firstly, it is necessary to understand which king these coins portray.



**Map 7:** Second stage of the Sacaraucae migration.

## The Immediate Cause of the Parthian Wars of Succession

The obverse of the S33 coin depicts an aged, bearded man, left facing, sporting a characteristically Parthian hooked nose. His tiara is of the “tea-cosy” style as described by Sellwood—a flattened lozenge, semicircular.<sup>269</sup> Three rows of beading line either side of the summit, following its rather bulged curve. A bull’s horn dominates the centre of its flanks, while eight recumbent stags, two groups of four facing in opposition, line its crest. The general shape of the tiara, its origins and meaning, and the symbolism of the bull’s horns (often replaced by six and eight pointed stars on other representations) are not central to this

<sup>269</sup> Sellwood (1980) 64.



thesis so are not explored in depth here.<sup>270</sup> But of central concern is the meaning and origins of the stag representation as this may help to identify the wearer of this tiara, the historical context and its significance.

This style of tiara makes its first appearance under Mithridates II in the closing decade of the Second Century BC. The reason for its adoption is still a matter of conjecture. A paper by M. J. Olbrycht stands as the most indepth investigation into the origin and meaning of the Parthian tiara and it covers the entire Parthian Era. This study, in contrast, focuses on the development of the tiara particular to this first phase of the Parthian Wars of Succession.<sup>271</sup> It may be associated with Mithridates' new epithet "King of kings", first appearing around 110/9 BC.<sup>272</sup> It is noteworthy that this style of tiara only remains in circulation for 40 to 50 years, ceases to be depicted on the coinage after the issues of Phraates III, son of Sinatruces (70/69-58/7 BC), and does not appear again until the mid-First Century AD.<sup>273</sup> It was this king that brought the struggle with the Mithridatic line to a close with the elimination of Artabanus III shortly prior to 67/6 BC. It was his son, Orodes II, that finally brought unity and stability to the Parthian Empire after he assassinated his brother, Mithridates IV, in 55/4 BC. The disappearance of this style of tiara and a reversion back to the traditional Hellenistic style banded diadem upon an otherwise bare head, first worn by Mithridates I (c. 171-138 BC),<sup>274</sup> tends to suggest an acknowledgement that the struggle between the two houses of Mithridates II and Sinatruces had ended with the elimination of the former. This mitigated the need to continue the charade, or propaganda war, which asserted Sinatruces and his lineage as legitimate heirs to Mithridates II's legacy. They had adopted the basic model of his tiara, which had come to be associated with ultimate rulership and his title of "King of kings", in competition with the Mithridatic House's employment of the same style—as such, by the 50s BC, the symbolism of the "tea-cosy" tiara had become superfluous.

Previous scholarship has associated the S33 with the Parthian kings Gotarzes I, and that it was he who usurped the throne from Mithridates II, the King of Kings in 88/7 BC, or Phraates III, or Orodes I.<sup>275</sup> Gotarzes is depicted as Satrap of Satraps on a rock relief with

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<sup>270</sup> For an analysis of these other elements of the Parthian Tiara see M. J. Olbrycht, "Parthian King's Tiara—Numismatic Evidence and Some Aspects of Arsacid Political Ideology", *Notae Numismaticae* 2 (1997) 46-8.

<sup>271</sup> Olbrycht (1997) 27ff; in particular 46-8.

<sup>272</sup> Olbrycht (1998) 103-4.

<sup>273</sup> Sellwood (1980) 119f.; Sellwood Type 39; Olbrycht (1997) 32.

<sup>274</sup> Sellwood (1980) 36f.; Sellwood Type 11.

<sup>275</sup> Sellwood (1980) 87-8; see Assar (2006b) 57 n. 8 for a detailed treatment of the long list of identifications that have been associated with this coin type by various authors since Sellwood's first prescription in, "The Parthian Coins of Gotarzes I, Orodes I, and Sinatruces", *NC* (1962) 81-2.

Mithridates at Behistūn for instance. But a close examination of the Babylonian cuneiform evidence demonstrates that he was actually a legitimate heir to the Parthian throne, which he appropriately assumed upon Mithridates' death in September of 91 BC. The argument and evidence for this identification has been dealt with in Part One.



**Plate 6:** S33.5 Obverse.

The Susian sequence, a sequence of distinct annual bronze issues from the Elamite capital of Susa, demonstrate that coins with the reverse legend of these drachms were in circulation in 93/2 BC.<sup>276</sup> A mule depicting a Mithridates II obverse and this drachm's reverse from Rhagae, discussed in more detail below, further supports an issuing contemporaneous with Mithridates II's reign.

Thus, at around the time when Sulla was securing the Cappadocian throne for Ariobarzanes, ejecting Pontic/Armenian forces out of that kingdom and meeting with the Parthian envoy, Orobazos, on the banks of the Euphrates River at the Melitene/Tomisa crossing, Parthia was sensing the first stirrings of the troubles that would besiege its stability for the next 40 years. The initial threat came from a familiar quarter—the Saka/Scythian tribes of the Central Asian Steppe. As already discussed, at various times these tribes had invaded Parthian holdings, even as far as Mesopotamia itself, but they were a transient nuisance rather than an army of conquest and Mithridates II had effectively neutralized them for most of his reign.<sup>277</sup> This time the threat was different. The Scythians came with a

<sup>276</sup> Assar (2006b) 59.

<sup>277</sup> Jus. 42.2.1. Justin also states that Mithridates waged several successful campaigns against the Scythians, effectively pacifying them for the majority of his reign; 42.2.5.

pretender to the throne at their head, Sinatruces, son of Mithridates I. This incursion would transform into a long 40 year struggle for the succession of the Arsacid throne.

Sinatruces must have been at least 62 years of age at the time of his first bid for the Parthian throne in 95 BC.<sup>278</sup> Thanks to an ostrakon found at Old Nisa during the 1950s dated to 157 of the Arsacid Era (157 AE = 91/0 BC)<sup>279</sup> it is now possible to piece together Sinatruces' lineage, the basis of his title *Theopatoros* and the reasoning and legitimacy behind his title of *Autokratoros*. He was one of three sons of Mithridates I (165-132 BC) to rule and the grandson of Phriapatius (185-170 BC), who was the grandnephew of the progenitor of the Parthian ruling line, Arsaces I (247-211 BC). His brothers Phraates II (spring 132-autumn 127 BC) and Artabanus I (c. Sep/Oct 126-Oct/Nov 122 BC) ruled before him and both died at the hands of the Tocharii/Scythians during the tumult of Parthia's decade of crisis in the 120s BC as described above.<sup>280</sup> Sinatruces was nurtured by the Saka/Scythians to one day become a rival to the kings of Parthia and representative of Scythian interests in the Parthian Empire. Sinatruces must have presented a lingering threat to Mithridates II throughout his reign. Thanks to an aggressive foreign policy which included walling off the Gurgan River valley from the Eurasian Steppe to the North, Mithridates II kept Sinatruces out of Iran and Parthian affairs for most of his reign. In the 90s Mithridates II became preoccupied with affairs in Asia Minor and Syria, perhaps to the detriment of his eastern fiefdoms. This may have given Sinatruces impetus to make his bid for power at that time.

Sinatruces was a legitimate heir to the Parthian throne. By Parthian agnatic tradition brothers of the monarch held precedence over the King's direct offspring, subject to a final decision of a council of elders and religious leaders.<sup>281</sup> Therefore Sinatruces could be said to have had a greater right to the throne than Mithridates II. Mithridates II was the second son of Artabanus I. Mithridates' elder brother, the conjectured Artabanus II (c. Nov. 122-c. Apr. 121 BC), ruled but a few months before his death—he may well have died opposing the

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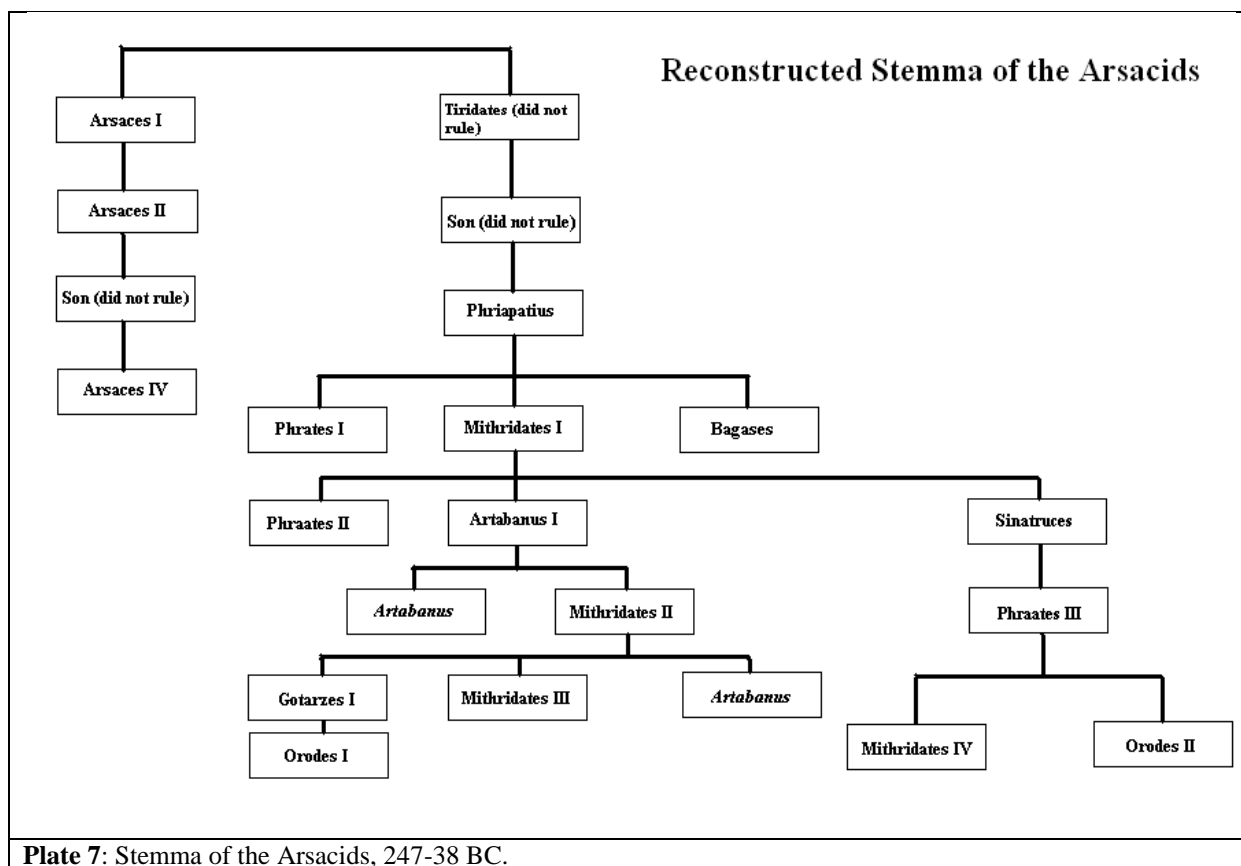
<sup>278</sup> Luc. *Macr.* 15 states that Sinatruces was 80 years of age at the time of his accession to the throne and held it for seven years. Phleg. Tr. *Fr.* 12.7 states that he died in the third year of Olympiad 177=summer 70 to summer 69 BC. Therefore he took up the throne in 77/6 BC and was born in 157/6 BC.

<sup>279</sup> Nisa Ostrakon 2638 (1760); Assar (2000) 14; (2003a) 41-47; (2004) 74; *CHI* 687f.

<sup>280</sup> Jus. 42.2.2.

<sup>281</sup> Strab. 11.9.3; *CHI* 3, 641-6; 689f.; Assar (2005a) 19-29; *Ibid* (2006a) 98. For instance it is stated by Pompeius Trogus that Phraates I passed over his several legitimate sons and left his kingdom to his brother, Mithridates I because "He thought his obligations he had as king outweighed those he had as a father, and that his country's interests should take precedence over his children's." Jus. 41.5.9-10.

Saka/Scythian invasion of the late 120s BC.<sup>282</sup> It is possible that Artabanus II was the son of the King's principle consort and therefore, despite his junior years, took precedence over Sinatruces' claim. How Sinatruces came to be exiled amongst the Scythians is unknown. He may have willingly sought refuge there having fled the fratricidal carnage that so usually followed a succession to the Arsacid throne—as was the case when Phraates IV bloodily acceded in 38 BC.<sup>283</sup> Alternatively he may have been captured during the many and bloody campaigns of the 120s BC to eject the Scythians from Iran. These engagements saw kings themselves in the thick of battle and their retinue would equally have been involved and susceptible to capture. Whatever the case with Sinatruces captured out of the way amongst the Saka/Scythians, Mithridates II acceded to the throne in 121 BC without opposition.<sup>284</sup>



This reconstruction of the Parthian regal stemma fits the extant evidence and explains the titulature adopted by Sinatruces on his coinage. *Autokratoros* implies that he was

<sup>282</sup> For the arguments and conjectured reign of Arsaces X, also referred to as Artabanus II, son of Artabanus I see Assar (2006a) 129-134.

<sup>283</sup> Jus. 42.5.1.

<sup>284</sup> Mithridates II's inception date lies somewhere between 31.3-25.9.121 BC; Assar (2006a) 131-2.

claiming the kingship by his own right and *Theopatoros* is a reference to his legitimacy to rule as son of his divine father Mithridates I.<sup>285</sup>

These two hereditary lines, one descending from Mithridates I, traced through his son, Artabanus I (Mithridates II) and the other through Sinatruces; were the basis for the dynastic wars that would plague the Parthian Empire from 96/5 BC down to the eve of the Battle of Carrhae in 55/4 BC. Essentially the Parthian agnatic system of inheritance, a traditional and legal custom, which lay at the basis of Parthian social structure, was to prove a persistent threat to its internal order, the smooth running of state and peaceful accessions.<sup>286</sup>

### *Cervus elaphus*

Some general comments on the deer that appear on Sinatruces' crown are now required. This is the first step to understanding the importance of these animals to the Sacaraucae and therefore why a potential leader of these people would feel it appropriate to wear their representations as a dominant feature on his tiara.

The specific subspecies of deer that was most familiar to the Sacaraucae was the *Cervus elaphus bactrianus* or Bactrian Red Deer. This deer still occupies much of the habitat it did in antiquity. Cervids generally migrate between wooded lowlands in winter to grassy highlands in summer, but the *bactrianus* subspecies also keeps to a lowland riparian habitat confined by arid steppe or desert—characteristic of the Jaxartes and Oxus River regions occupied by the Sacaraucae towards the end of the Second Century BC.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> Assar (2006b) 56-8.

<sup>286</sup> *CHI* 641-6

<sup>287</sup> "It is in the near and Middle East in Turkey, N Iran, and Iraq, but extinct in Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. In central Asia, it is found in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan (extinct), Uzbekistan, N Afghanistan, N India (Kashmir Valley), N Pakistan (vagrant), east to Siberia, Mongolia, and W and N China. It is found regionally in Mongolia in Hövsgöl, Hangai, Hentii, Ikh Hyangan, Mongol-Altai and Gobi Altai mountain ranges; it was reintroduced into open hills in south-eastern parts of its range. In China, specifically, it is found in Gansu, Inner Mongolia, Jilin, Liaoning, Manchuria, Ninxia, Shaanxi, Shanxi, Sichuan, and E Tibet including Qinghai. It also inhabits Korea and the Ussuri region of Russia." S. Lovari, J. Herrero, J. Conroy, T. Maran, G. Giannatos, M. Stubbe, S. Aulagnier, T. Jdeidi, M. Masseti, I. Nader, K. de Smet and F. Cuzin, (2008). *Cervus elaphus*. In: IUCN 2011. IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 2011.1. <www.iucnredlist.org>. Accessed 01 September 2011.

### *Cervus elaphus bactrianus* Distribution



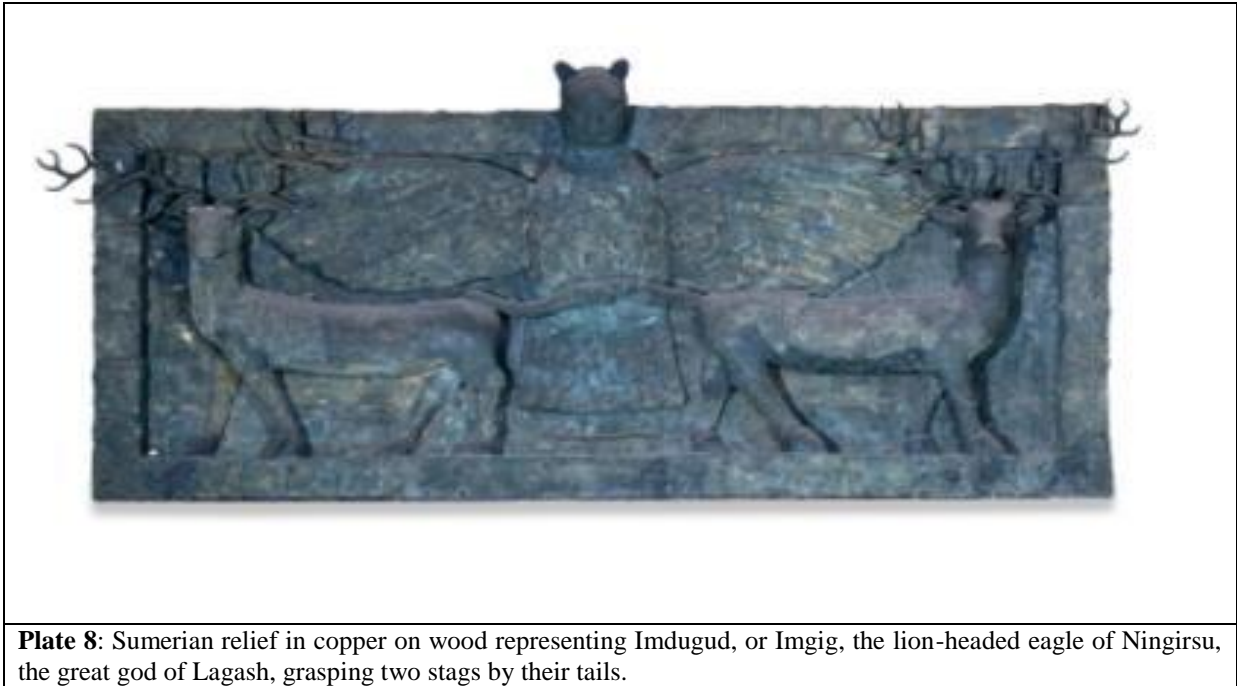
**Map 8:** Distribution of *Cervus elaphus bactrianus*, 2<sup>nd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> Centuries BC.

The most distinctive feature of these creatures is their antlers, which appear only on the males with the exception of reindeer and caribou. They begin growing in spring at a rate of up to 25 mm per day. The production of antlers is testosterone driven demanding incredible nutritional expenditure. In autumn they stop growing and calcify and testosterone courses back into the animal in preparation for the rut. In winter the antlers are shed and the process repeated in the coming spring.

As young bucks they herd together, until ready to challenge the dominant males for their harem of females. The number of does in these harems can number in the dozens. Many challenges are mere bravado and an actual clash of antlers is avoided, but occasionally, when a challenge does come to blows, they can be ferocious and serious injuries do occur.<sup>288</sup>

It is little wonder that antlers became associated by the ancient peoples with sexual and regal power. It is possible to see their natural habits as a metaphor for the dynastic struggles that so harried the Parthian Empire in this period. Their regenerative qualities reflect a cycle of renewal that is easily associated with rebirth and life after death and thence the World Tree of shamanic origin; an association that is explored in greater depth below and which has relevance to the perceived status of Sinatruces.

<sup>288</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cervidae>. Accessed 01/09/2010.



**Plate 8:** Sumerian relief in copper on wood representing Imdugud, or Imgig, the lion-headed eagle of Ningirsu, the great god of Lagash, grasping two stags by their tails.

Firstly the question must be explored whether or not this motif has anything to do with the Saka peoples or their involvement in Parthian affairs. This King may simply be referencing an Indo-Iranian iconography already endemic to his empire in Iran and Mesopotamia.

### The Stag Motif in Iran and the Near East

The motif of the stag was known in Near Eastern iconography more than two millennia before the arrival of the Saka/Scythians. The Indo-European Hittites for example worshipped a stag god in the Third Millennium BC. The stag was revered alongside the bull at Alaca Höyük and continued in the Hittite mythology as the protective deity, <sup>d</sup>KAL. Other Hittite gods were often depicted standing on the backs of stags.<sup>289</sup>

A particularly striking example of the stag image in Bronze Age Mesopotamia is that of Sumerian God Imdugud, the divine storm-bird, depicted below. This is a copper casting from a temple frontispiece from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> Millennia BC. The god here represents the coming of the life giving autumn rains after the long hot and dry Mesopotamian summer. The stags here represent the fertile land rejuvenated.<sup>290</sup>

<sup>289</sup> J. V. Canby, "Hittite Art", *The Biblical Archaeologist* 52 (1989) 117 and 120; B. J. Collins, *A History of the Animal World in the Ancient Near East* (Leiden 2002); H. A. Hoffner, Jr. "Daily Life among the Hittites," in R. Averbeck, M. W. Chavalas, and D. B. Weisberg, *Life and Culture in the Ancient Near East* (Maryland 2003) 95–120; T. R. Bryce, *Life and Society in the Hittite World*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford 2005); B. J. Collins, *The Hittites and Their World* (Atlanta 2007) 126–39.

<sup>290</sup> Sumerian relief in copper on wood representing Imdugud, or Imgig, the lion-headed eagle of Ningirsu, the great god of Lagash, grasping two stags by their tails. It is probable that it was originally placed over the door of the temple of Nin-khursag or Damgalnun at the head of the stairway leading on to the temple platform. This



Some scholars, such as Max Loehr, André Godard and R. Ghirshman, have gone as far as to say that the stag motif has Indo-Iranian roots; a Near Eastern invention of Mannean art with Assyrian admixtures.<sup>291</sup> The large treasure hoard found at Ziwiye in Persian Kurdistan is used as a case in point. It has the oldest representation of the stag in the classic recumbent Eurasian animal-style.<sup>292</sup> Scythians made contact with these cultures in the late 8<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC after their Transcaucasus invasion and apparently, according to Herodotus, ruled the Near East for 28 years.<sup>293</sup> King Cyaxares of the Medes drove many of these Scythians back across the Caucasus in the late 7<sup>th</sup> century. But the authenticity and value of the Ziwiye finds have been seriously called into question. It is now understood that they can no longer be relied upon as proof that the Eurasian animal-style originated in Anatolia.<sup>294</sup> Furthermore, an excavation in Tuvla, Russia in the north-east of the Altai Complex has confirmed that “the ‘animal style’ in Central Asia was already formed prior to its first appearance in the Black Sea area. The finds from Ziwiye, which are still judged by some to be the oldest Scythic representative objects, are at least 300 years younger.”<sup>295</sup>

The research of Esther Jacobson and others demonstrates a far older genesis, in Palaeolithic Siberia.<sup>296</sup> The large number of petroglyphs demonstrates a long tradition of cervid religio-social imagery all across the northern reaches of Eurasia as far west as Scandinavia.<sup>297</sup> Jacobson concludes that the motif originates in a Great Mother-elk goddess cult.<sup>298</sup> This cult evolved, as contact with the Hellenistic and Achaemenid worlds’ increased and sedentary agriculture took hold, into a Scytho-Siberian Eurasian animal-style. It is from this origin that the recumbent stag motif evolved. While the feminine derivation for the motif

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remarkable monument was made about 3100 B.C., and was discovered by Dr. H. R. Hall in 1919 at Tall al-`Ubêd, a sanctuary at “Ur of the Chaldees” in Lower Babylonia. It is now in the British Museum (No. 114308); [http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/bct/bct\\_pl00.htm](http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/bct/bct_pl00.htm). Accessed 01/09/2011. S. Lloyd, *The Art of the Ancient Near East* (London 1961) 82-3; Image AN32493001 from the British Museum free image service. Accessed 02/09/11.

<sup>291</sup> See Y. A. Sher’s summary of the debate and sources, “On the Sources of the Scythic Animal Style”, *Arctic Anthropology* 25 (1988) 49f.; M. Loehr, “The Stag Image in Scythia and the Far East”, *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America* 9 (1955) 63ff; R. Ghirshman, “Notes Iraniennes, IV: Le trésor de Sakkez, les origins del’art mède, et les bronzes du Luristan”, *Artibus Asiae* 13 (1950) 181-206; A. Godard, *Le Trésor de Ziwiyé (Kurdistan)* (Haarlem 1950) 57.

<sup>292</sup> Loehr (1955) 63.

<sup>293</sup> Herod. *Hist.* 103-6.

<sup>294</sup> Muscarella first brought the true circumstances of the finding of the Ziwiye treasure to light, which seriously undermined its scientific value; O. Muscarella, “‘Ziwiye’ and Ziwiye: The Forgery of a Provenience”, *Journal of Field Archaeology* 4 (1977) 197-219.

<sup>295</sup> Sher (1988) 50.

<sup>296</sup> E. Jacobson, “Siberian Roots of the Scythian Stag Image”, *Journal of Asian History* 17 (Wiesbaden 1983) 68ff.; *The Deer Goddess of Ancient Siberia—A Study in the Ecology of Belief* (New York 1993) 214ff.; Sher (1988) 47-60.

<sup>297</sup> Petroglyphs are particularly important in tracing stylistic trends across time and geography because they are a static art form; unlike jewellery, statuary, weaponry, woven material and the like; Sher (1988) 55.

<sup>298</sup> Jacobson (1993) 214ff.



is somewhat controversial,<sup>299</sup> the general tenets of her thesis are sound. These nomadic peoples had a close, almost symbiotic, relationship with cervids in a way that was perhaps only distantly and briefly the case in the Near East, generally recognized as the cradle of sedentary agriculturalism. Their reliance on the cervid by the peoples of the far north for many of their everyday needs contributed to the dominance of the image in their religious and everyday life. While the image of the stag is prevalent in the Near East its veneration diminishes from the Bronze Age in a way that is not seen in the Eurasian animal-style of the First Millennium BC. The Near Eastern stag was most often depicted in mundane contexts, particularly in hunts, often standing; the Scytho/Siberian stag motif is largely depicted as recumbent in serene and reverential isolation. It is this pose that is rendered on the tiara of the S33 types.

The three qualities, known as the “Scythic triad”, that singly identify the Saka/Scythian culture across the entire range of their settlements from China to Eastern Europe were their horse accoutrements, weaponry and the characteristic “animal style” art form.<sup>300</sup> It is this particular style of animal representation that is important to this study as it connects the S33 coin with the Sacaraucae and the first appearance of Sinatruces the usurper and his progress across the Parthian Empire at the head of their invading army.

The stags depicted across the crest of the S33 tiara bear the hallmarks of the Scythian animal-style. It is less likely that this motif has any connection with Irano-Near Eastern symbology. Therefore this study asserts that the presence of these stags on this King’s tiara is a clear indication of his close association with the Saka/Scythian tribes, and more specifically the Sacaraucae tribe, that had then recently, in the late Second early First Centuries BC, arrived into south-western Iran and Afghanistan. Furthermore this supports the statement by Lucian that the Parthian pretender, Sinatruces, came to the throne with the Sacaraucae’s support in 77/6 BC.<sup>301</sup> As these coins with this specific tiara make their first appearance at Susa in 93/2 BC, this must indicate a far longer association with the Sacaraucae than our written sources attest and that an earlier bid for the Parthian Empire was undertaken as has been reconstructed by this thesis. What remains is to explore the nature of the relationship Sinatruces had with the Sacaraucae. This can be surmised with reference to the iconography

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<sup>299</sup> “Add to these doctrinaire assessments cocksure pronouncements that beliefs...that male gods appeared as creators much later than mother goddesses and you really receive a picture of old-fashioned evolution tempered by modern feminism.” Å. Hultkrantz, “Review of E. Jacobson, *The Deer Goddess of Ancient Siberia—A Study in the Ecology of Belief* (New York 1993)”, in *History of Religions* 35 (1996) 284.

<sup>300</sup> Sher (1988) 47.

<sup>301</sup> Luc. *Macr.* 15.

on the S33 coinage in combination with an understanding of the nature and structure of Saka/Scythian culture.

### **Sinatruces the Shaman-King**

Shamanism is one of the oldest forms of religious practice and the some of the oldest evidence of it comes from the Eurasian Steppe. It was fundamental to Scythian/Saka clan structure. Shamans occupied a revered position within the tribe, perhaps second only to the clan leader. Some of the most elaborate of the preserved Gurgans found in the Altaic Complex belong to shamans. Wild cats, birds and deer are the most dominant motifs found in these tombs. The deer, often represented in a contorted attitude of its death throes as victims of wild cats and predatory birds, was a motif for death itself. The victim's antlers, with their regenerative qualities and tree-like appearance, represent cycle and rebirth—life after death. Often the antlers were transformed into more elaborate tree forms with birds perched amongst their branches or the branches themselves becoming birds. Here the antlers took on the aspect of the World-Tree and the birds were the souls of those waiting to be returned to the world.<sup>302</sup>

Mummified remains of Saka/Scythian peoples and details of their tattoos found in the Pazyryk region of the Altai Mountains have provided an invaluable insight into the everyday life and culture of these peoples.<sup>303</sup> Some of these finds have been dated to the Second to First Centuries BC and are therefore contemporaneous with the great movements of nomadic peoples from the Eurasian Steppe into southern Asia. They were buried beneath massive tumuli or Kurgans, sometimes measuring hundreds of meters in diameter. These people were obviously of great stature within Pazyryk society and were lavishly furnished with funerary objects. Many horses were sacrificed as part of the funerary ritual and buried with the deceased and it is suspected that human sacrifice was also undertaken.

The mummies and their artefacts, many of them made from normally perishable material, are well preserved, having been flooded soon after burial and then frozen in the steppe's permafrost. Of particular interest are the tattoos found on these individuals. They are personal and totemic and represent the most intimate of symbolic representation.

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<sup>302</sup> Jacobson (1993) 240-1.

<sup>303</sup> The Pazyryk kurgans were first excavated in 1865 by W. W. Radloff. See the following for details of the excavations; M. Griaznov, *Pazyiskii Kurgan (The Pazyryk Kurgan)* (Leningrad 1937); reviewed by H. Field, *AJA* 42 (1938) 604-5; S. I. Rudenko, *Der zweite Kurgan von Pasyryk*, trans. by I. M. G6rner (Berlin 1951); reviewed by M. J. Mellink, *AJA* 59 (1955) 243-4; *Ibid*, *Kul'tura naseleniia Gornogo Altaia v Skifskoe vremia* (Moscow 1953); *Ibid*, *Frozen Tombs of Siberia: the Pazyryk Burials of Iron Age Horsemen*, trans. M. W. Thompson. (Berkeley 1970); *Ibid*, *Drevneishie v mire khudozhestvennye kovry i tkani iz oledenelykh kurganov Gornogo Altaia* (Moscow 1968).

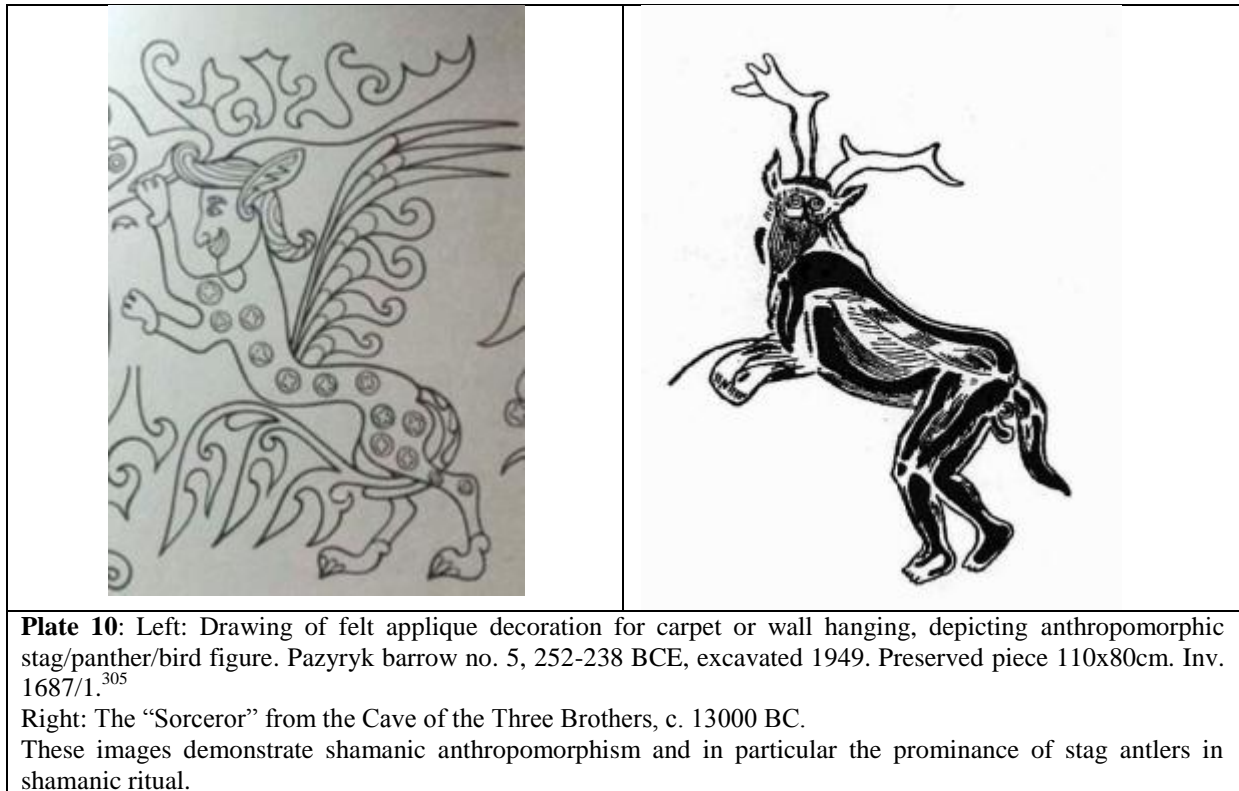


**Plate 9:** Detail of tattooed skin of man's right arm, showing "animal-style" stag. The stag is twisted as though suffering the impact of a predatory attack and thus represents death. The antlers, elaborately stylised, transform into bird's heads and evoke the concepts of World-Tree and the afterlife.

Pazyryk barrow no. 2, 300-290 BCE.<sup>304</sup>

It is now generally understood that these revered members of the tribes of the Altaic region were shamans. Shamanism is a specific characteristic of the Ural-Altaic peoples of central Russia and Siberia, the etymology of the word itself is rooted in Turkic/Altaic. They were priests, medicine men, spiritual intermediaries and perhaps the most important members of the tribes.

<sup>304</sup> Rudenko (1953) 139, 298-302, 309-315; *Ibid* (1970) 111, 251-3, 260-6; *Ibid* (1968) 24, fig. 10; *Scythian, Persian and Central Asian Art from the Hermitage Collection, Leningrad*. Exhibited in Japan under the auspices of The Tokyo National Museum, The Kyoto National Museum (Nihon Keizai Shimbun 1969) cat. no. 52.



As part of their ritual the wearing of stag antlers was an important aspect. They imbued the wearer with the spiritual and magical qualities that were so intimately associated with the stag motif. The wearing of various elements of sacred animals was central to shamanic practice, the skin and antlers in particular. These elements facilitated the shaman’s transformation into a vessel for the spirits of these beasts and linked the shaman with the spiritual world. The ideas of cyclical renewal, life after death, sexual exuberance, fearless courage and the recollection of the all dominant World-tree, were central to Nomadic Steppe cosmology.

“Indeed, the most obvious referents carried by the clothing and implements of the shaman were to animals, and within virtually all Siberian societies the most significant animals have been deer and elk, a variety of birds, and bear. In donning his cloak and headdress and in commencing the shamanic ritual, the shaman did not simply assume the powers of animal helpers; he also became that animal and was reborn into its body and knowledge. In so far as the cloak and headdress referred to totemic beings, it may be said that the

<sup>305</sup> Rudenko (1953) 321-3; pl. 94; Rudenko (1970) 274-6; pl. 173; Rudenko (1968) 66-8, 63 (fig. 51); J. Aruz et al. (eds.), *The Golden Deer of Eurasia: Scythian and Sarmatian Treasures from the Russian Steppes*. (New Haven 2000) cat. no. 196, 272-3.

shaman returned to the body and being of the tribal progenitor. This ritual re embodiment of the shaman becomes clear in the consideration of the shamanic costume of cloak, headdress, gloves, and footwear as the universal insignia of the Siberian shaman. Eliade has referred to the shaman's costume as representing "a religious microcosm" by which the shaman's immediate self and the space through which he or she moved became sacralized, in contrast to the surrounding profane space...references to deer, elk, bear, and birds would be fashioned into the shaman's headdress, gloves, and footwear. The metal images and objects which hung from the body of the shaman indicated both the shaman's animal-helpers and his animal double."<sup>306</sup>

These animal totems gradually become personified into a female deity as contact with the Hellenism increases and this is most evident in the north Pontic region. Herodotus provides us with important evidence of their religious practices from the Fifth Century BC.<sup>307</sup> These goddesses Herodotus identifies as Hestia/Tabiti and/or Aphrodite Urania/Argimpasa/Arippasa and, like the stag, were associated with fecundity and the earth. This female goddess becomes Anahita/Nana as it enters Iran and Indo-Scythia and becomes the principle deity for the Yueh-chi who settled in India and founded the Kushan dynasty. She is often represented with a sword or a staff with a protome of a horse or a stag on its end. This female goddess appears as protomes on "headgear and garments of high ranking members of the nomadic world".<sup>308</sup>

The importance of proteomic representations on the head gear of leading members of Scythian society is now clear. Of particular note is a felt hat found in an important female personage's frozen kurgan near the village of Syniavka in the Altaic Complex that was covered in recumbent stags. The totemic power that these motifs imbued the wearer reinforced the qualities that the wearer would have wished associated with his rank as shaman/clan leader within the nomadic community. Furthermore they were badges of authority and power within a community that did not distinguish between commands of the spiritual world with that of the physical. The S33 coin is evidence that Sinatruces was tapping into these important aspects of nomadic culture in order to seek legitimacy and acceptance among them.

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<sup>306</sup> Jacobson (1993) 174.

<sup>307</sup> Herod. 59f., 101; Jacobson (1993) 215-8

<sup>308</sup> Jacobson (1993) 217-8.





**Plate 11:** Reconstruction by L. S. Klochkop of a "Shaman's Hat" based on material from Mohyla Ternivka (kurgan 100), near the village of Syniavka, Kanivs'kyi Raion, Cherkas'ka C blast'. Excavated by Ie. O. Znos'ko-Borovs'kyi, 1898.<sup>309</sup> Comparison with Sinatruces' tiara on a S33 coin.

This study has demonstrated that the motif of the recumbent stag as depicted on the crest of this Parthian king has Scytho-Siberian heritage and is unlikely to be of Iranian origin. The depiction of these stags on the king's tiara signifies an intimate relationship with peoples of Saka/Scythian origin, more particularly the Sacaraucae. As is so often the case in the ancient world these coins would have seen initial circulation amongst military contingents; the usurper's acknowledgement of the basis for his legitimacy and power. The tiara depicted on the coins demonstrates a clear link to the Scytho-Siberian animal style, an iconography of profound and long standing significance to the peoples of the Altaic complex as most strikingly revealed in the preserved remains of the kurgans of the Pazyryk region.

<sup>309</sup> E. D., Reeder (ed.), *Scythian Gold—The Treasures from Ancient Ukraine* (New York 1999) pl. 43; Jacobson (1993) 238-240.



**Plate 12:** Various modern representations of shamans and their drums from the Altaic Complex.  
 Left: Altaic shaman photographed in 1908.  
 Right: Etching of Altaic shaman from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century.  
 Centre: Detail of shamanic drum with representation of the World-Tree, the Spiritual world and the Earth.

While the king personally may have seen little religious significance in the stags on his tiara, he at least recognised the reverence with which his subjects held the icon, more so given that these peoples had not, for at least a generation, occupied regions that were inhabited by the animal. By wearing it the king acknowledged these peoples' heritage and their cultural beliefs; that he identified with them and acknowledged their importance in his instatement to power. More importantly this study opines that this was a deliberate attempt by the king to key into the shamanic beliefs of these people and the power associated with the status of shaman within Scytho-Siberian tribes. This would imbue the king, in the eyes of his Saka subjects, with supernatural spiritual powers in a way immediately identifiable to those peoples—in a way that the Hellenistic idea of ruler cult and monarchic deification could not. We know that a strong form of ruler cult was practiced by the Parthians, directly and deliberately borrowed from the Hellenistic model, through the excavations of their principle cult site at Parthianisa. But perhaps these Sacaraucae, despite the Parthians themselves being

of similar Scytho/Siberian decent, were so recently arrived that such ideology was of little relevance to them and Sinatruces saw it necessary to invoke a more immediately recognisable iconography to ensure his acceptance and their fealty.

This study asserts that it is unlikely that the alternation between depictions of deer with and without antlers was one of gender. Rather it was reflecting the natural annual antler cycle of the male *Cervus elaphus*. By alternating the depiction of the cervids on the tiara with and without antlers, mimicking their seasonal cycle, then the Parthian king was more closely associating himself with the totem of the stag and the shamanic powers and fecund qualities that the antlers imbue the wearer. It is conjectured that the depiction of this on the coinage may denote a minting at different times of year. Sinatruces may have alternated his crown when he moved his court from his summer to winter palaces—winter without antlers, summer with.

The table below shows all known S33 issues grouped by mint from east to west. Issues without antlers only occur at Rhagae and Ecbatana. In both cases a tetrachalkoi issue matches a drachm in legend and tiara type, paired in both antlered (dark shading) and antlerless (light shading) forms; 33.10 with 33.3, 33.11 with 33.4 in Rhagae and 33.8 with 33.1, 33.9 with 33.2 in Ecbatana. The exception is issue 33.5 that has an unusual feature in that the antlerless stags all face right on the left facing portraiture (although it is possible to pair it with the dichalkoi issue, 33.12)—in all others there are two groups of four in apposition facing towards the peak of the tiara. These patterns across two mints strongly suggest a conscious policy in portraying antlered and antlerless stags on these tiaras and they are not incidental or merely die cutters errors or stylistic fancies. Furthermore it suggests that these two distinct tiaras existed, were worn and were recognisable and their meaning understood by certain important members of Sinatruces' subjects. This study asserts that these were the Sacaraucae.



**Table 2:** S33 Types: Patterns concerning coins with and without antlered deer.

Date: SEM-SEB-BC	Sellwood Type	Denomination	Legend Type	Mint	Antlers: (W)with; (WO) without (tiara type)
	33.7	AR	iv	Margiana	W
	33.3	AR	ii	Rhagae	WO(i)
	33.10	TETRA-AE	ii	Rhagae	WO(i)
	33.4	AR	ii	Rhagae	W
	33.11	TETRA-AE	ii	Rhagae	W
	33.5	AR	ii	Rhagae	WO(iii)
	33.12	DI-AE	ii	Rhagae	W
	33.6	AR	iii	Rhagae	W
	33.1	AR	i	Ecbatana	WO(i)
	33.8	TETRA-AE	i	Ecbatana	WO(i)
	33.2	AR	i	Ecbatana	W
	33.9	TETRA-AE	i	Ecbatana	W
220-219/0-93/2	33.13	DI-AE	i	Ecbatana(S) Susa(A)	?
221-220/1-92/1	33.16	AE	i	Susa	?
222-221/2-91/0	33.17	AE	i	Susa	?
223-222/3-90/89	33.18	AE	i	Susa	?
224-223/4-89/8	33.15	AE	ii	Rhagae(S) Susa(A)	?
225-224/5-88/7	33.19	AE	i	Susa	?

In conclusion this king was intimately associated with the Saka, these coins likely depict Sinatruces the usurper and it demonstrates that Lucian's statements that he came to power with the aid of the Sacaraucae, the "Royal Saka", has some validity.

### Sinatruces' Invasion

There is no direct mention of any internal disaffection or disruption in the normal workings of the Parthian state within the context of their support of Tigranes' accession to the Armenian throne in 96/5 BC.<sup>310</sup> The conciliatory way in which the Parthian envoy approached Sulla demonstrated a desire by the Parthians not to antagonise Rome. This study demonstrates that the Parthians were more concerned with events on their eastern borders at this time, specifically the ongoing nomadic invasions, than with pursuing any sort of aggressive policy west of the Euphrates River. Sinatruces was yet to begin his aggressive campaign to seize the empire, but must have posed a lingering threat to Mithridates II's legitimate rule. That stated, Orobazus took conciliation too far and was summarily executed

<sup>310</sup> There is firm numismatic evidence that shows both Elymais and Characene had some degree of autonomy late in Mithridates II's reign. King Apodakos ruled in Spasinu-Charax from 203 to 210 SEM (110/9-103/2 BC) and another, Tiraos I, ruled in 218 SEM (95/4 BC), while King Kamnaskires of Elymais was issuing independent drachms in 208 SEM (105/4 BC). See Assar (2006a) 141. This need not imply that there was a weakening of centralization. His epithet "King of kings" itself implies that some degree of autonomy was apportioned to individual rulers, even to the point of allowing them to issue their own coins.

by Mithridates II, but the fact remains that Parthia was made by Sulla to assume the position of a minor potentate in these negotiations—on an equal footing with Cappadocia and Armenia. Sulla sat and presided between Ariobarzanes and Orobazus implying Rome’s dominant position in these negotiations and not impassive interest in eastern affairs.<sup>311</sup> Parthia had a long and traditional interest in Armenia. This region held an important strategic position for Parthia as it controlled various secure routes into Media Atropatene, such as that which followed the Araxes River valley, and thence into Northern Iran—the Parthian seat of power. This was the route M. Antonius took on his ill-fated campaign of 36 BC in order to avoid the mistake M. Crassus had made when he ventured into terrain that was conducive to Parthia’s cavalry strength.<sup>312</sup>

This study argues that it was these internal issues within the Parthian state that drove its foreign policy in Asia Minor—issues that were outside the purview of our classical sources at this time. It is the aim of this study to bring these wider concerns into focus with respect to Rome’s formative dealings in the East and in that regard it expositis a greater understanding of the course and timing of the Parthian Wars of Succession which now follows.

## Initial Stages

This thesis now reconstructs the first phase of the Parthian Wars of Succession; from Sinatruces’ first appearance on the Parthian Empire’s north-eastern border in 95 BC, to the highpoint of his occupation of the Elymaean capital Susa in 93/2 BC, till his ejection from the Empire back into the Eurasian steppes by mid 87 BC by Mithridates II’s son and successor Gotarzes I. This reconstruction provides an essential backdrop to understanding why the Parthians adopted a posture of appeasement and passivity towards its western neighbours during this period and well into the 80s BC.

There is virtually no literary record of Sinatruces or his invasion of Iran other than brief references in Justinus and Lucian’s *Makrobioi*.<sup>313</sup> We must rely largely on the

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<sup>311</sup> Plut. *Sull.* 5.4-5; “ὅτε καὶ λέγεται τρεῖς δίφρους προθέμενος, τὸν μὲν Ἀριοβαρζάνην, τὸν δὲ Ὀροβάζω, τὸν δὲ αὐτῷ, μέσος ἀμφοῖν καθεζόμενος χρηματίζειν. ἐφ’ ᾧ τὸν μὲν Ὀροβάζον ὕστερον ὁ τῶν Πάρθων βασιλεὺς ἀπέκτεινε, τὸν δὲ Σύλλαν οἱ μὲν ἐπήνεσαν ἐντροπύσαντα τοῖς βαρβάροις, οἱ δὲ ὡς φορτικὸν ἠτιάσαντο καὶ ἀκαίρως φιλότιμον.” The image of the Arsacid King seated upon the omphalis features prominently on the coins of its Empire’s chief imperialist Mithridates I and his immediate successors (S7 to S25) and may, in addition to its association with Heracles and a Hellenistic model of a coin reverse, suggest the importance with which the Arsacids viewed themselves and their newly won Empire within the wider Ancient World.

<sup>312</sup> The main sources for Antoinius’ campaign are: Dio. 49.25-9; Vel. Pat. 2.82ff.; Flor. 2.20; Strab. 11.13.3; Plut. *Ant.* 39.

<sup>313</sup> Jus. 41.5.6; Luc. *Mak.* 15.

numismatic evidence to reconstruct the progress of his invasion and its outcomes. This study now combines this evidence with some archaeological, cuneiform and ostraca sources to frame a likely chronology. An understanding of the geography of the region can assist in this reconstruction and references to 19<sup>th</sup> Century military campaigns in the region are invaluable sources for this.

One route of invasion into the Parthian Empire was through Hyrcania and into northern Iran via the Caspian Gates. This was the route that the Masargatae took in or around 130/29 BC. If Sinatruces launched an invasion from the Oxus River/Merv region this was one possible line of attack that would have brought him directly into the heart of Parthia's seat of power.

The modern city of Gunbad-i Qabus (ancient Gurgan) marks the ancient crossroads for trade and administration at the transition between Eurasian steppe and Iranian highlands, on the border between ancient Hyrcania, “the land of wolves”, and the Parthian homelands and a major crossing point on the Gurgan River. The Gurgan Wall (also known as the Alexander Wall) defended this crucial strategic centre and its accompanying rich agricultural lands that hugged the river valley. This wall likely separates the lands of the nomadic steppe population from the settled farmland and cities of the south; and must delineate the northern limits of the Parthian Empire. In the 10<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> Centuries AD it was a meeting place for traders, west from the Euxine, north from the Volga, south from Central Asia and east from ultimately China—it is likely that this was also the case in ancient times. Gurgan had prospered when trade along the Oxus into the Caspian Sea at Khiva Bay (at a place known as Kohnah Baza, or “the Old Market”) had ceased along that river. The river naturally meanders through the Kara Kum Desert. During the Classical Period it no longer emptied into the Caspian Sea, but instead found its way into the Aral Sea (until the Monghuls diverted its course once again into its old bed by damming it during the siege of Urgenj, situated just south of the Aral Sea, in AD 1221).

The Gurgan wall, also known as “Alexander's Wall”, is a remarkable feature. Legend attributed its construction, as the name suggests, to Alexander the Great, but extensive archaeological surveys it is now generally understood to have been built by Mithridates II around 115/4 BC.<sup>314</sup> It stretched from the ancient shore of the Caspian Sea (now submerged

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<sup>314</sup> D. Huff, “Zur Datierung des Alexanderwalls”, *Investija Akademii nauk Turkmenskoj SSR. Serija obščestvennyh nauk* 16 (1981) 125ff; M. J. Olbrycht, “Some Remarks on Hellenistic Influence upon the Fortification of Northeastern Iran in the Arsacid Period”, *Folia Orientalia* 29 (1992/3) 131-151; J. Nokandeh et al., “Linear Barriers of Northern Iran: The Great Wall of Gorgan and the Wall of Tammishe”, *Iran* 44 (2006) 121-173.

due to the Caspian's raised level since antiquity) at Abuskun or Sokana, marked by the present mound of ruins known as Gumish Tepe or "Silver Hill" north of modern Gumisham, and followed the northern limits of the Gurgan River Valley until it reached the north-eastern arm of the Elberz range and the ridges that project back westwards, a distance of some 175 kilometres. Thirty-three forts were situated along its length at varying intervals, some a mere few hundred meters apart, others many kilometres—roughly every 5.3 km. A ditch outside its northern face followed its entire length.<sup>315</sup>

This wall, though little mentioned in popular sources, is equally as impressive as the comparable Imperial Roman walls in the north of England and southern Germany, although its construction, mostly from the characteristic 40x40x10 cm "Parthian" mud brick, unlike the Roman stone and mortar, has not helped its preservation.<sup>316</sup> The Gurgan Wall represents a remarkable achievement in fortification engineering and is evidently part of a scientific border defence system in place long before the Roman Empire had invented their own. Therefore, it is tempting to see its pedigree in the Chinese attempts to control the northern borders with their nomadic neighbours, the Tocharii and Hsiung-nu, begun in the midst of the Third Century BC. The monumental reality of this structure alone flies in the face of many preconceptions about Parthian civilisation that were evident even at that time. Pompeius Trogus, for instance, stated: "The Parthians know nothing of hand-to-hand combat or besieging and storming cities".<sup>317</sup>

The wall's relationship to its surrounding topography and the strategic methodology that this implies stands in stark contrast to the defence methodology of Imperial Rome on the

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<sup>315</sup> M. Y. Kiani, "Parthian Sites in Hyrcania—The Gurgan Plain", *Archaeologische Mitteilungen Aus Iran—Herausgegeben vom Deutschen Archäologischen Institut Abteilung Teheran, Ergänzungsband 9* (Berlin 1982) 11-16.

<sup>316</sup> Olbrycht (1992/3) 133f.

<sup>317</sup> Jus. 41.2.7. The three standard histories of ancient China, the *Shiji*, *Hanshu* and *Hou Hanshu* all mention contact with the west and the Parthian Empire. At the time of most of the events covered by this thesis, one of China's longest lived emperors, Wudi, reigned. His envoy, Zhang Qian reached the Parthians or *Tochari*, as they were known to the Chinese, twice, in 130/29 BC and 115 BC. His primary objective was to forge an alliance with the *Tochari* against China's ubiquitous enemies, the *Xiongnu*, a horse riding nomad race not unlike the Parthian's own implacable enemy, the Saka/Scythians. It is possible that during these diplomatic exchanges the idea of building a wall to control nomadic horseman to their north was transmitted to Mithridates II and that this was the inspiration for the Gurgan Wall. Charlesworth actually compares the fortification to the Great Wall of China; M. Charlesworth, "Preliminary Report on a Newly-Discovered Extension of 'Alexander's Wall'", *Iran* 25 (1987) 160; W. Tao, "Parthia in China: a Re-examination of the Historical Records" in V. S. Curtis and S. Stewart (eds.), *The Age of the Parthians* (New York 2007) 87-104; Olbrycht (1992/3) 133ff., sees a predominantly Hellenistic influence in Parthian fortification construction. For instance the size of the bricks reflects Greek brick dimensions. While there is certainly such influences in the detail of the wall, the overall size and strategic purpose of the wall bears some important resemblances to Chinese frontier management.

Rhine and Danube Rivers as postulated by Edward N. Luttwak.<sup>318</sup> In particular its position extending just beyond a defensible river that varies in breadth of between 50 and 100 metres and 20 to 30 metres in depth.<sup>319</sup> The Imperial Romans would have used the river itself as a linear defensive feature and utilised its southern rather than its northern bank as secure territory for manoeuvre and patrol. But the Parthians had different priorities and the topography in the area necessitated a different strategic methodology. The river and its irrigated surrounds were themselves of great importance to the Parthians, as was the defence of the sedentary farming population and the major trade route just south of the river that wends its way through Gurgan to the all important ports of the Caspian Sea and coastal Hyrcania. Beyond and north of this fertile region there lie intermittent strips of arid steppe until the River Atreck is met at least 40 km away or a day's travel on horseback or forced march on foot. Beyond this river there are hundreds of kilometres of desert, so controlling this resource was integral to the region's defence and its economic health.

The region beyond the Gurgan Wall was the original heartland of the Darhae/Parni—the forebears of the Parthian Arsacids and part of the greater Saka/Scythian conglomeration of Eurasian Steppe tribes. It seems that they forsook their traditional steppe lands for the more defensible southern reaches of the foothills of the Iranian Plateau as pressures from other tribes encroached further south from the Eurasian steppes.<sup>320</sup> It is likely that this exodus occurred around the time of Mithridates I's ascent to the Parthian throne and his foundation of Parthian-Nisa as the capital of his new hegemony in the mid-Second Century BC. This region north of the Gurgan plain, encompassed on its southern border by the Atreck River and to its north by the Balkhán Hills was verdant if properly irrigated, perfect for the rearing and grazing of horses and could have supported a large population if husbanded. The Oxus River once ran through its northern limits and brought with it the trade along the Silk Road to its Caspian outlet at Khiva Bay—it has since been rerouted to the Aral Seas, then back again in the thirteenth century and then back again in modern times. The region was dominated by an ancient emporium known as Mestorian and supported by extensive canal/irrigation systems, which siphoned the Atreck just as it leaves the Kippet Mountains to its south-east. To what age this major city dates is as yet uncertain—although it

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<sup>318</sup> E. N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire—From the First Century AD to the Third* (London 1976) 89, 92, 133, 146-7; Figs. 2.2; 3.1-3; Roman strategy would necessitate that the river be used as a defensive barrier, in itself; as a secure flank along which forces could deploy without impedance to areas in critical need. See also, B. Isaac, *The Limits of Empire—The Roman Army in the East* (Oxford 1990) 102f.; 147f.

<sup>319</sup> Charlesworth (1987) 162.

<sup>320</sup> Olbrycht (1998) 51ff.

may have flourished in Islamic times, its foundation must significantly predate that era. The canal/irrigation system is of immense and significant construction—stretching over 150 kilometres onwards through Kara-Defeh, to Mestorian's south-west, and then out to the Caspian Sea. Further investigation is needed to ascertain the exact date of its construction, but its foundation may well date back to the Achaemenid period when much of the irrigation systems of the more southern regions were also constructed.<sup>321</sup>



The Gurgan Wall, which faces any invasion via the Atreck River, may have been too formidable for a mobile and lightly armed force such as the Saka/Scythians. The trade route across the Khorassan Plateau from Parthian Nisa and the Middle Oxus via Bujnoord is the

<sup>321</sup> This entire area saw extensive surveying in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the Russian military as it was an important and contested frontier region with the Persian Empire, as well as always the ubiquitous British expeditions. Much of their discoveries are translated and summarised in H. C. Rawlinson, 'The Road to Merv', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography*, New Monthly Series1 (1879) 161-191.

most obvious. This is the route detailed by Isidore of Charax.<sup>322</sup> The main discouragement to an advance onto the Iranian Plateau from this direction is the narrow pass situated near Parthian-Nisa. This pass was defended by the fortress of Mithridakirt, or Old Nisa, as it is also known. Other passes dot the length of the Kippet Mountain chain, but access to these entrances into Iran is governed by other geostrategic difficulties. These passes are situated alongside a narrow region that borders the length of these mountains known as the “Atock” that a 19<sup>th</sup> Century British officer, Captain Napier, clearly described after his attachment to a Russian army that campaigned in the region against the Turcoman:

“The Turcoman ‘Obahs’ (encampments) lie scattered along the base of the hills wherever there is sufficient water and pasturage, and have a more permanent character than the settlements of the other tribes, there being in fact little room between the mountains and the desert for migrations...The position of the Akhal ‘Atock’ is exceedingly strong. To the North it is protected by an almost waterless desert (the Kara Kum Desert), the shortest line across which is twelve days’ march for a caravan, and is practicable for only small numbers. South of it extends a mass of lofty mountains, with few passes practicable even for mule carriage. West, 130 miles of barren desert intervene between it and the sea (Caspian)”.<sup>323</sup>

Remains of fortifications are dotted along the length of this “Atock”, both ancient and relatively modern, which further attest to the strategic importance of the region and the difficulties faced by Sinatruces and his Saka/Scythian army in forcing their way into Iran from this direction.

At the north-west extremity of the Kippet Range, over the Kuren Dagħ there is another pass, at Khoja Kileh, that eventually leads to the Sumba River and beyond down into the Atreck River valley. Following this river downstream does not lead past the Gurgan Wall and any attempt to turn upstream at its confluence with the Sumba, and thus circumvent the wall, leads to the same difficulties faced by a Russian army led by a General Llomakin in 1878, whereby it soon becomes impassable to pack animals, hence this could not have been Sinatruces’ line of march given his army’s reliance on horses.<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> Is. Char. *Parthian Stations* 6-12.

<sup>323</sup> G. C. Napier, and K. S. Ahmad, “Extracts from a Diary of a Tour in Khorassan, and Notes on the Eastern Alburz Tract; with Notes on the Yomut Tribe”, *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 46 (1876).

<sup>324</sup> Rawlinson, (1879) 174-5.

Having secured Merv, the eastern limit of the Parthian Empire, it is a natural progression to move on the Attock. Though it is possible he did make a foray against the ancient trading capital, it is highly unlikely. Merv was a considerable undertaking in itself—its extant fortifications and citadel of Erk Qala, which have received extensive archaeological investigation since 1950, are testimony to its independent power and wealth.<sup>325</sup> Apart from the difficulties entailed in a lengthy siege in waterless countryside, reaching Merv required an extended march across desert, at its shortest 160 kilometres from Serakhs and as much as 256 kilometres from the ancient capital of Abiverd (the sister capital of Nisa), six days for fully laden camels and mules. These obstacles are not in themselves insurmountable, especially with such a hardy and swift mounted force as the Saka/Scythian, but it is the crucial strategic issue of securing an extended line of communication in the face of potential counter attack from the Iranian plateau. Such a predicament faced the Russian forces in AD 1878/9.

As Sir H. C. Rawlinson relates in a contemporary paper to the Royal Geographical Society:

“It would be impossible for an army to pass from Akhal Attock to Merv without traversing Deregez, for the desert comes up close to the foot of the northern hills. It is, moreover, the natural base for any serious operations against Merv...the communication is easy with Kuchán and Shirwán, which are amongst the best corn-producing districts of Khorassán, so that every facility would exist if a Russian force were encamped here for filling up supplies before crossing the desert.”<sup>326</sup>

But this situation is only tenable if the hinterland of Khorassán is secure and friendly to such a force. No right minded commander would attempt the already ambitious assault on Merv without securing the heights that commanded his line of communications first, a situation equally applicable to the Russian campaign of 1878/9:

“...if Persia was friendly, the Russians would have no difficulty whatever in advancing by any of the roads which they chose; if Persia were indifferent,

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<sup>325</sup> Z. I. Usmanova, ‘New Material on Ancient Merv,’ *Iran* 30 (1992) 55-63; G. Herrmann, V. M. Masson, K. Kurbansakhatov, ‘The International Merv Project, Preliminary Report on the First Season (1992),’ *Iran* 31 (1993) 39-62; G. Herrmann, K. Kurbansakhatov, St J. Simpson ‘The International Merv Project, Preliminary Report on the First Season’ *Iran* 34 (1996) 1-22.

<sup>326</sup> Rawlinson, (1879) 185-6.



they might have difficulties; but if Persia were inimical, they would find it quite impossible to advance, on account of the mountainous nature of the country, which afforded excellent means of attack, and enabled very small bodies to harass the long convoys that would be requisite.”<sup>327</sup>

It is likely then Sinatruces ignored Merv for the time being. It had little strategic consequence and the time and effort involved would only have distracted from the more pressing issues of dealing with the main Parthian army before it closed the crucial passes onto the Iranian plateau.

With these strategic difficulties in mind and the archaeological and numismatic evidence here presented, another likely scenario for Sinatruces’ entrance into the Parthian Empire was a swift though decisive move south-east, down the “Atock”, with the strategic and symbolic objective of capturing the ancient seat of Parthian power, in Nisa and cutting the route to Merv and the lucrative caravan route. With the doorway open, he may have penetrated the Kippet Mountains at Duran, gained the Abzar Pass and taken the important caravan waypoint of Bujnoord. From there he could pass west through the province of Astabene directly towards Gurgan. Alternatively he could have taken the route from Deregez Atock that eventually led to Nishapoor. The more likely route takes him through the pass associated with Harrik Kileh, passing by the Garmáb Valley and preceded south to Kuchan.<sup>328</sup> From there all of the heartlands of Iranian Parthia were opened before him. A southward road to Nishapūr turns west towards Jājarm in the district of Arghiyān and from there Sinatruces could continue west to the district of Qūmis and Hecatompylos via Mayamāy and Shāhrūd. North from Jājarm there was a strategically important pass that gave access to the Gurgan plain. It is likely that the decisive engagement took place between here and Hecatompylos. Once the bulk of the King’s army had been defeated in this decisive confrontation, most likely in the spring of 93 BC, first Hecatompylos, and then Rhagae and then Ecbatana would have quickly succumbed to him.

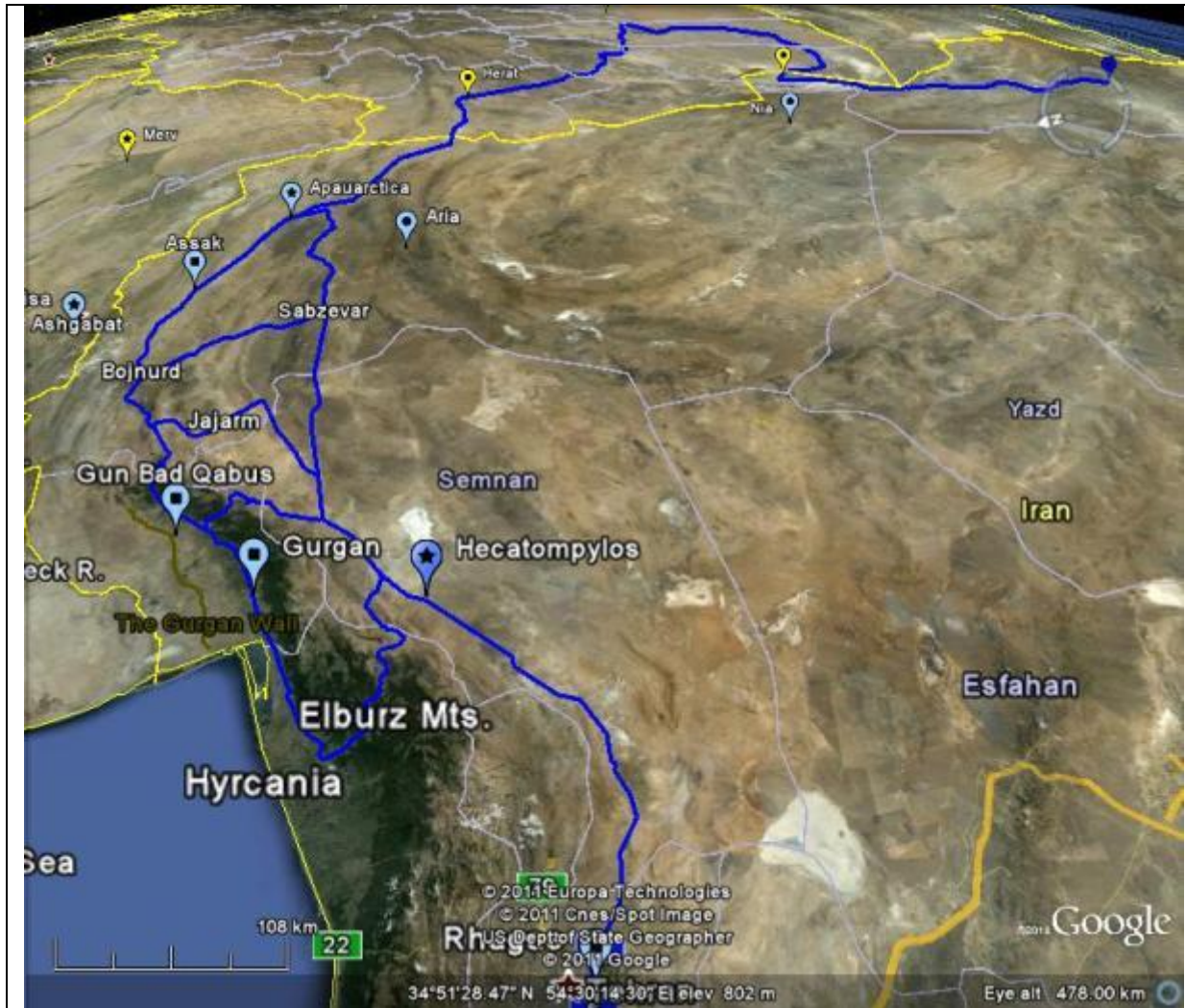
Control of the footlands of the Kippet Range provided a much prized resource for peoples wedded to the horse, for these were the Nissaeen Plains of the ancients and home to the famous Nissaeen horses, apparently considered the finest horses in the world. These were large horses by ancient standards, sixteen hands high and large boned. They were still present

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<sup>327</sup> Rawlinson, (1879) 190.

<sup>328</sup> Rawlinson, (1879) 184.

in the region in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>329</sup> These horses formed the backbone of the Parthia's formidable cavalry formations and must have provided mounts for their elite cataphract formations, being of the appropriate size and hardiness for this heavy cavalry. With this valuable resource in Sinatruces' hands, one more important step to the domination of Iran was completed.



**Map 9:** Conjectured routes of the first phase of Sinatruces' invasion (dark blue line) from the Sacaraucae capital of Sigal via Khorasan following portions of Isidore's "Parthian Stations".

In any case south-east Iran may have been the more likely origin of the invasion and a different route into the Partho/Iranian heartland that bypassed the Gorgan Plains altogether. As Isidore states, albeit from the early Christian Era—the Saca royal residence was located in the city of Sigal in the midst of Sakastan. Although Sigal is yet to be formally identified, it is likely to be situated in or near modern Īrānshahr. By 95 BC, perhaps twenty years after there

<sup>329</sup> Rawlinson, (1879) 184; 189.

final subjugation by Mithridates II,<sup>330</sup> this city was likely Sinatruces base of power and the rallying point for an invasion into the Parthian Empire.<sup>331</sup> If the “Parthian Stations” are followed in reverse order from Sigal, the conjectured path of Sinatruces invasion was: Min, Paraetacena, Zarangiana, Nia, Gari, Phra, Alexandria of the Arii, Artacauan, Aria, Asaak, modern Bojnurd, Astauena, and modern Sabzevār or alternatively via Jājarm,<sup>332</sup> Apamia, Choarena, from there the way is open to the major centres of Hecatompylos, then Rhagae and Ecbatana. Once the Medean capital had fallen the next step was Susa.<sup>333</sup> The Sellwood coin type 33, with its associated stag tiara, was minted at the following centres: Margiana (Merv), Rhagae, Ecbatana and Susa where the bronze sequence indicates its first appearance in 93/2 BC.<sup>334</sup> A period of around two years seems reasonable for a campaign of this length; a distance of at least 2600-2700 km. Alexander the Great’s campaign that followed a similar route from Susa to the Helmand Bend, which included detours to Persis and north to the Oxus, took over three and a half years and this after very hard campaigning with many battles, minor and major.<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> BCT -118A; provides details of the campaigns by Mithridates II against the Sacaraucae and catalogues a great victory over the invaders dated to 3/4.10.-1/2.11.119 BC.

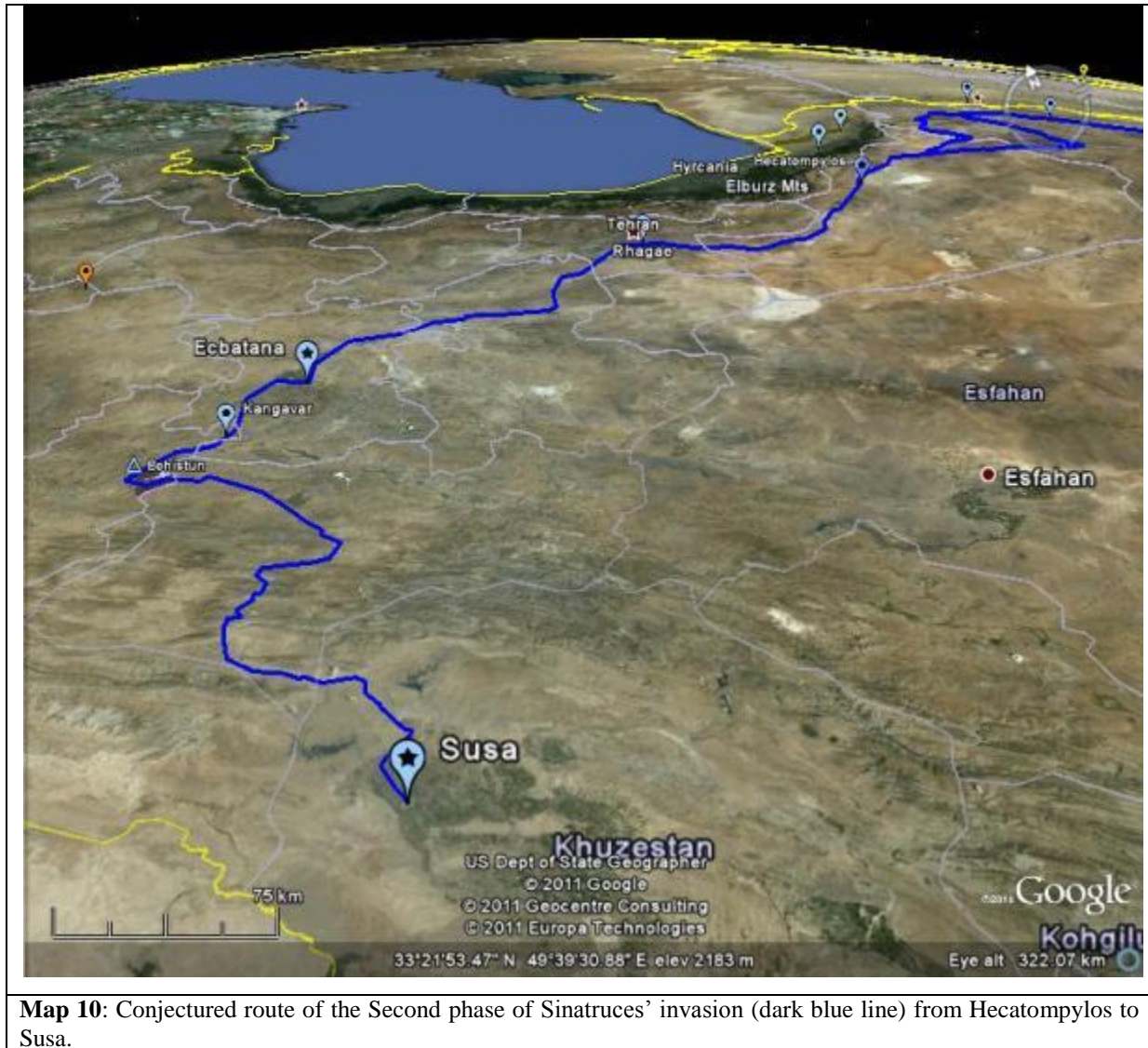
<sup>331</sup> Is. Char. 18. “Beyond is Sacastana of the Scythian Sacae, which is also Paraetacena, 63 schoeni. There are the city of Barda and the city of Min and the city of Palacenti and the city of Sigal; in that place is the royal residence of the Sacae; and nearby is the city of Alexandria (and nearby is the city of Alexandropolis), and 6 villages.”

<sup>332</sup> The main impediment to an army travelling through western Khorāsān is lack of water and for this reason there are no major population centres between Jājarm and Hecatompylos. See Spooner (1965) 98.

<sup>333</sup> Is. Char. 7-18; total distance according to Isidore, 506 Schoeni  $\cong$  20240 stadia  $\cong$  2700 km; Herod. I.66

<sup>334</sup> Sellwood (1980) 87-9.

<sup>335</sup> Arr. *Anab.* 3.16.7; Babylon to Susa was a journey of 20 days for Alexander’s army and he left Babylon towards the end of November 331 BC. He set out from Susa in the midst of winter, late December 331 BC. His preparations for the invasion of India after subjugating Sogdiana and Bactria dates to late spring to early summer 327 BC (Arr. 4.15.6). This is an approximate total of 3 years and 6 months of hard campaigning to cover this distance.



**Map 10:** Conjectured route of the Second phase of Sinatruces' invasion (dark blue line) from Hecatompylos to Susa.

With Medea now under his sway, it was time to turn south to consolidate and secure his position east of the Tigris River with an assault on the semi-independent kingdoms of Elymais. It is likely he met his first undoing in Elymais at the siege of Susa at the hands of Gotarzes I who retook the city in 88/7 BC. It is clear that although he threatened Babylon he failed to penetrate west of the Tigris River.

Mithridates II controlled Mesopotamia throughout the 90s BC, but there are indications that the region was not in good health at that time. "Unhappiness in the land" was mentioned in the BCT dated May/June 96 BC two lines after an observation that the river had receded far beyond its usual level.<sup>336</sup> The historical record show that major canal digging operations were undertaken in June/July 94 BC by the garrison commander of Babylon, Mithridates, near the town of Sippar, which is situated 60 km north of Babylon on the east

<sup>336</sup> BCT -107C, line 15 and -95C, lines 9 and 11.



bank of the Euphrates River and “above Seleucia which is on the Euphrates”. At this same time there were “many sick and dead in the land” and the River Euphrates had receded a further 1 cubit and 8 fingers ( $\approx 66$  cm). On July 7<sup>th</sup> 94 BC there was an earthquake, although the extent of the damage is not recorded.<sup>337</sup> The rivers of Mesopotamia peak at that time of the year, but it seems ongoing drought may have necessitated major new canal works to ensure supplies to the population centres. It seems natural disaster may have played a significant part in weakening the Parthian state at the time of their support for Tigranes’ accession to the Armenian throne. Perhaps this was one factor that enticed Sinatruces to make his bid for power at that time. Perhaps, also, these woes were foremost in Orobazus’ mind in the late summer of 95 BC when he met Sulla in an attitude of cautiousness and conciliation.<sup>338</sup>

The BCT mentions that Arsaces, King of Kings, (i.e. Mithridates II) left Meopotamia for Media on two occasions in July and August 94 BC.<sup>339</sup> This may indicate Sinatruces was threatening Rhagae and Ecbatana at this time, but it may simply record the King’s usual retreat to his summer residence.<sup>340</sup> If this more mundane explanation is the case then it seems unusual that he would return then embark again for Media within the short space of two midsummer months and indeed that the diaries should record such a regular and mundane occurrence at all. Sellwood has identified a common hoarder at Rhagae for coins attributed to Mithridates II, Gotarzes I, and Sinatruces and this demonstrates a strong contemporary relationship between these regents’ strikings.<sup>341</sup> Often coins are hoarded in response to upheaval and insecurity—perhaps further evidence of Media’s unstable circumstances during this period. The BCT suggests a date for Mithridates II’s death between June and December 91 BC, with September the most likely.<sup>342</sup> A mule struck from Rhagae has a Sinatruces obverse stamped on a Mithridates II reverse.<sup>343</sup> This clearly indicates that Sinatruces had control of the Rhagae mint during or very shortly after Mithridates II’s reign. S33 issues from Susa demonstrate his control of that mint by 93/2 BC. So the Wars of Succession had well

<sup>337</sup> BCT Rev. -93A, lines 1, 10, 12-13, 24; cuneiform tablet BM 35031.

<sup>338</sup> The economic data from the BCT indicates barley prices had hit a peak of 35 shekels per 1000 litres in early 98 BC, a price not seen since 109/8 BC which was the beginning of the year mentioned in the diaries as the year the “rains and floods kept off”; BCT -107C, line 15.

<sup>339</sup> BCT Rev. -93A, lines 11 and 23.

<sup>340</sup> Strab. 16.1.16; “εἰώδασι γὰρ ἐνταῦθα τοῦ χειμῶνος διάγειν οἱ βασιλεῖς διὰ τὸ εὐάερον· θέρους δὲ ἐν Ἐκβατάνοις καὶ τῇ Ὑρκανίᾳ διὰ τὴν ἐπικράτειαν τῆς παλαιᾶς δόξης.”

<sup>341</sup> The composition of several coin hoards have confirmed that the mints for Mithridates II (S28), Gotarzes I (S29) and Sinatruces (S33.3-6) were near contemporaneous; see D. Sellwood, “The Drachms of the ‘Parthian Dark Age’”, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1976) 4; Assar (2006b) 60.

<sup>342</sup> Assar (2006a) 148-9.

<sup>343</sup> S33/S28 “mule” silver drachm of Sinatruces/Mithridates II (Sellwood’s Collection), see Assar (2006b) 61, Fig. 4.

and truly begun by 94/3 BC and these movements by Mithridates II into Media in 94 BC fit the reconstruction of Sinatruces' advance shown in the maps above.

An ostrakon from Parthian-Nisa dated to 91/0 BC strikingly heralds a Parthian king's accession. It explains his hereditary right to rule and importantly it gives a date *ante quem* for his presence in Nisa which was one of the first centres of the Parthian Empire and later, likely during the reign of Mithridates I (171-138 BC), transformed into a sacred site for the Arsacid ruler cult.<sup>344</sup> Originally attributed to Sinatruces, Assar sees a problem in this as it postdates his Susian issue of 93/2 BC and he finds it improbable that Sinatruces would have secured Susa before he had secured Nisa. Furthermore Sinatruces' accession was first celebrated and recognised by the 93/2 BC Susian mint so the Nisan acknowledgement of his accession is one year later than would be expected. Assar would prefer (going against his previous scholarship) to ascribe the inauguration to Gotarzes I who succeeded his father in September/October 91 BC.<sup>345</sup> If this ostrakon does refer to Gotarzes I it demonstrates that he reclaimed Nisa at some point not long after his recapture of Susa in 88/7 BC and prior to his death in July/August 87 BC. This would be further evidence that Sinatruces had lost his entire gains in Iran by the end of the first half of 87 BC and that Gotarzes' successor, his brother Mithridates III, inherited an Empire in extent not that much changed from their father's.

This study sees no inconsistency with the dating of Susa's capture and this ostrakon. Firstly, as is evident in the second reconstruction of Sinatruces invasion path originating from Sigal, Sakastan, Nisa could be bypassed through Khorasan and south of the Kippet Mountains. The former capital would have had little strategic significance in this scenario. Hecatompylos and Rhagae were Sinatruces' initial objectives and with their control Nisa was isolated from the Parthian Iran. The usurper could then continue on to Ecbatana and Susa with the understanding that he could return to and subjugate Nisa at his leisure.

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<sup>344</sup> Nisa ostrakon 2638 (1760). *CHI* 241, 280, 438, 687-9, 691, 769, 844, 846, 866-7, 1231; A. Invernizzi, "Parthian Nisa: New Line of Research", *Iran and the Caucasus* 1 (1997) 107-119; V. N. Pilipko, "The Central Ensemble of the Fortress Mithradatkirt. Layout and Chronology", *Parthica* 10 (2008) 33-51; M-L. Chaumont, "Études d'histoire parthe I. Documents royaux a Nisa", *Syria* 48 (1971) 143-164; E. Pappalardo, "The Rhyton No. 52 from Old Nisa. An Interpretative Proposal", *Parthica* 10 (2008) 63-80; A. Invernizzi, "Thoughts on Parthian Nisa", *Parthica* 6 (2004) 133-143.

<sup>345</sup> Assar (2006b) 61-2.

		<p><b>Plate 12:</b> Mithridates II AR Drachm S28.2 96 BC Rhagae John Elliot Classic Museum Collection, University of Tasmania.</p>
		<p><b>Plate 13:</b> Darius II of Persis AR Drachm c. 90 BC</p>
		<p><b>Plate 14:</b> Sinatruces AR Drachm S33.2 issue 93 BC Ecbatana Museum of Old and New Art Collection, Berridale, Tasmania. Collection No. 2001.104. 3.79 gm. 20.5 mm.</p>
		<p><b>Plate 15:</b> Sinatruces AR Drachm S33.4 issue 93 BC Rhagae Museum of Old and New Art Collection, Berridale, Tasmania. Collection No. 2001.099. 4.15 gm. 21 mm.</p>

	<p><b>Plate 16:</b> Sinatruces AR Drachm S33.3 issue 93 BC Rhagae ? gm. ? mm.</p>
	<p><b>Plate 17:</b> Sinatruces AR Drachm S33/S28 Mule 93 BC Rhagae</p>
	<p><b>Plate 18:</b> Gotarzes I AR Drachm S29.1. 91-87 BC Ecbatana</p>

The Babylonian text references to Mithridates' death and his son's, Gotarzes I, accession mentioned above and the absence of any tetradrachm issues from Seleucia-on-the-Tigris demonstrate that despite Sinatruces' inroads into Elymais by 93/2 BC, he had failed to penetrate west beyond the Tigris by 91/90 BC. His early presence, or at least influence, in Persis may be implied by his immediate adoption of the Persis style "tea cosy" tiara, although this may be an attempt to usurp Mithridates' own adoption of this Persian/Iranian headdress and therefore his pretence as inheritor to the Archaemenid Empire.<sup>346</sup>

<sup>346</sup> The term "tea cosy" tiara was first coined by D. Sellwood (1980) 64. Three forms of tiara were employed by the Persis kings—the "royal" tiara, the *tiara apagās* or "satrap's tiara", and the *tiara orthē* or the "upright tiara". See Curtis and Stewart (2007) 43f.





Mithridates II adopted the “tea cosy” tiara in 96/5 BC, at least that is its first depiction on the coinage.<sup>347</sup> Whether this tiara was a Parthian invention adopted by the then king of Persis, Darius I, or the reverse is unclear, but such a tiara style has no extant precedence in our iconographic records from either source with one striking exception. A statue, Graeco-Persian in style, was discovered amongst the Oxus Treasures that depicts a naked youth wearing just such a tiara. This is evidence that the headdress was of Achaemenid Persian origin from the 5<sup>th</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> Century BC and of Persis provenance.<sup>348</sup> Persis lost the right to issue its own coinage when it was conquered by Mithridates I c.140 BC and even then there was a close association of styles between the bare headed, diademed portrait of Persis’ king, Autophradates II and Mithridates I’s portrait. The Persis sub-Parthian kings regained the right to issue their own coinage intermittently throughout the rest of the second century BC, perhaps waxing and waning with the fortunes of the Parthian state. In or about 90 BC Persis began to mint its own coinage once again—Darius I wearing the “tea cosy” tiara but instead of an eight or six pointed star in its centre as on Mithridates II’s design it featured a crescent adopted from the *kausia* of Darius I. This may be another indication of the weakening of the Parthian centralised power towards the end of the 90s BC by which time Sinatruces had a firm control of Susa and most of the Parthian Empire east of the Euphrates River.<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> The first appearance of this tiara style in the Susian bronze sequence was 96/5 BC, S28.20-3; Assar (2006a) 143, 150-1.

<sup>348</sup> *CHI* 299-306. While in Persis this style of tiara persisted in use well into the Second Century AD and leading into the Sassanian epoch, it ceases to be depicted on Parthian coins by the end of the Parthian Wars of Succession in the mid 50s BC (last issues Sellwood Types 39.1-22 associated with Phraates III, d. 57 BC). This fact strengthens the argument that the tiara was something more intimately associated with Persis and the Achaemenid Persian Empire rather than Parthian hegemonic iconography *per se*. A silver statue amongst the Oxus Treasure in the British Museum dating to the height of the Achaemenid Empire depicts just such a headdress, see figure below.

<sup>349</sup> Strab. 15.3.19-24; V. S. Curtis, S. Stewart (eds.), *The Age of the Parthians—The Idea of Iran 2* (London 2007) 40-7.

	<p><b>Plate 19:</b> Cast Silver Statue from the Oxus Treasure. Achaemenid Persian, 5<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> Century BC. From the region of Takht-i Kuwad, Tadjikistan. The figure wears a Persian head-dress, “tea-cosy” tiara, but his nakedness shows Greek influence. Height: 29.2 cm. British Museum Collection.</p>
	<p><b>Plate 20:</b> Detail of the cast Silver Statue’s headress from the Oxus Treasure. British Museum Collection.</p>

	<p><b>Plate 21:</b> Darev (Darius) II AR Drachm c.70 BC (?)Alram 564; Mitchiner ACW 744, SGCv2 6206 17 mm. 3.32 gm. Die position=3h Obverse: Bust of bearded king left, wearing Parthian-style (?) tiara, ornamented with crescent and diadem. Reverse: King standing left, holding sceptre before lighted altar. Aramaic legend.</p>
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Since Mithridates II assumed the title of “King of kings” by 12/13.10.-9/10.11.109 BC some Parthian sub-kingdoms obtained some degree of semi-independence as testified by their issuance of their own coinage. King Apodakos of Spasinu Charax issued a series of tetradrachms from 110/9 to 103/2 BC—perhaps a sign of the rising wealth and importance of this kingdom with the influx of trade into the Persian Gulf from the East.<sup>350</sup> Back in the Parthian/Saka crisis period of the 120s, the then king of Charax, Hyspaosines, took advantage of Phraates II’s preoccupation with the Saka threat from the east and expanded his domain into Mesopotamia, attacking the governor Himerus (also identified as the satrap identified as Bagasis) and taking Babylon briefly in 127 BC.<sup>351</sup> Hyspaosines issued a tetradrachm from Seleucia-on-the-Tigris dated 124/3 BC, but was ejected from there by Himerus/Bagasis in the following year, who then issued his own tetradrachm.<sup>352</sup> Spasinu Charax thus had a long history of chafing at Parthian overlordship and it is not beyond possibility that with the arrival of Sinatruces they took the opportunity to once again secede. In 95/4 BC (218 SEM) a new king, Tiraios I, began striking a new series of tetradrachms. Mithridates II’s policy may have been to allow more rein to his peripheral kingdoms and therefore economic independence. This may also be a sign that centralised control had weakened in the face of natural and political tribulation.<sup>353</sup>

It is now accepted that the ruins at Shahr-I Qūmis and its associated extensive qanat irrigation systems are the remains of ancient Hecatompylos—at this time the Parthian royal city mentioned by Strabo.<sup>354</sup> There is striking evidence of Sinatruces’ presence in Hecatompylos and his use of its mint. Within an undisturbed foundation context, several newly minted coins were found bearing his portrait that demonstrates his minting at the time of the building’s construction. An ostrocon of identical script to those found at Nisa and dated to the first half of the First Century BC was found in the same location. Burial evidence suggests practices related to Scythian customs and further associates the site with Sinatruces and his Saka/Scythian allies.<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>350</sup> Assar (2006a) 141.

<sup>351</sup> Assar (2006a) 113-6; Debevois (1968) 38-9.

<sup>352</sup> S18.1; Assar (2006a) 114-5.

<sup>353</sup> Le Rider (1969) 24.

<sup>354</sup> For the identification of Hecatompylos with Shahr-I Qūmis see P. A. Brunt (ed.) *Arrian, Anabasis Alexandri* (London 1976) 495-7; J. Hansman, “The Measure of Hecatompylos”, *JRAS* (1981) 3-9; *Ibid*, “The Problems of Qūmis”, *JRAS* (1968) 111-39; A. F. v. Stahl. “Notes on the March of Alexander the Great from Ecbatana to Hyrcania”, *The Geographical Journal* 64 (1924) 312-329; J. F. Standish, “The Caspian Gates”, *Greece and Rome* 17 (1970) 17-24; J. Hansman, D. Stronach, H. Bailey, ‘Excavations at Shahr-I Qūmis, 1967’, *JRAS* (1970) 29-62; Strab. 11.8.7, 11.9.1, 16.1.16; App. Syr. 9.57.

<sup>355</sup> J. Hansman, *et al* (1970) 47-8; for Scythian burial customs see T. Talbot Rice, *The Scythians* (London 1957) 70-2, 92, 109.

The victory that earned Sinatruces the title *Nikatoros* has left no historical trace. It is assumed that it was earned against Mithridates II and prior to his capture of Rhagae and Ecbatana as there are no extant issues by Sinatruces from these mints without this titulature.<sup>356</sup> We can therefore say that this decisive victory took place somewhere along the road between Parthian-Nisa and Rhagae in or prior to 93 BC. In that year, SEM 219/20, Sinatruces began minting bronze drachms at Susa and therefore, given this study's reconstruction of his invasion path, the conquests of Hecatompylos, Rhagae and Ecbatana must precede these issues.<sup>357</sup> The Babylonian texts state that in month VIII of SEM 221 (22/3.10-20/1.11.91 BC) troops left Babylon and advanced across the Tigris River. Moreover people in the surrounding towns had entered the city out of fear and this may indicate an imminent threat of invasion. It is likely that these events are associated with the Sinatruces/Sacacrauae presence in Susa and it is possible to surmise that he was preparing to launch an invasion of Mesopotamia using Susa as a base of operations by mid-November 91 BC.<sup>358</sup>

Military operations against Sinatruces continued from Mesopotamia in late 91 BC despite the approach of winter and the persistent inclement weather as reported in the BCT entries for months IX and X SEM 221 (21/2.11.91-18/19.1.90 BC).<sup>359</sup> According to these texts Mitratu, "the chief of the troops", had departed Babylon and crossed the Tigris River some time between 22/3.10-20/1.11.91 BC.<sup>360</sup> Mitratu was then forced to retreat, as it is implied in the BCT, back across the Tigris River in the following month, between 21/2.11-19/20.12.91 BC. The texts also talk of much fear in the surroundings of Babylon and Seleucia-on-the-Tigris. It is obvious that the war against Sinatruces had taken another turn for the worse.<sup>361</sup> Mitratu once again left Babylon despite inclement weather, signifying some urgency, crossed the Tigris River and engaged Sinatruces' forces between 20/21.12.91-18/9.1.90 BC.<sup>362</sup> As stated in the BCT this time Mitratu's aim was the strategically important objective of the Elymaean capital, Susa itself.<sup>363</sup> These operations continued for some time into February 90 BC. As the BCT states he mustered more troops and then he turned north towards the surroundings of "Kar-Aššur", which is situated 30 km north of the confluence of

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<sup>356</sup> S33 Sellwood type.

<sup>357</sup> For lists of Susian bronze issues see Assar (2006a) 151; *Ibid* (2006b) 59; *Ibid*, "Some Remarks on the Chronology and Coinage of the Parthian 'Dark Age'", *Electrum* 15 (2009) 231-2.

<sup>358</sup> BCT -90, lines 15-17.

<sup>359</sup> BCT -90, lines 19, 23-4, 26, 35-6, 40-1, 45.

<sup>360</sup> BCT -90, lines 15-17.

<sup>361</sup> BCT -90, lines 32-3.

<sup>362</sup> BCT -90, line 49.

<sup>363</sup> BCT Rev. -90, line 1.

the Zab and the Tigris Rivers on the western bank.<sup>364</sup> This suggests that the focus of military operations had moved to Northern Mesopotamia and across the Tigris River into the region of Adiabene. The Susian bronze issues show that Sinatruces did not lose Susa until 88/7 BC<sup>365</sup> so Mitratu cannot have had success there. Instead he may have moved north to counter a crossing of the Tigris River at Nineveh, perhaps in response to an offensive mounted from Ecbatana that came through Adiabene and its capital Arbela 100 km northeast of Aššur.

As was discussed in the introduction of this study, the economic data provided by the BCT are invaluable indicators of possible strife within Babylon and its immediate environs. They may even indicate more widespread, large scale upheaval that had an indirect effect on the city's markets. Of particular note in the data provided for October 91 BC to February 90 BC is the high price of dates—the highest since the terrible decade of the 120s BC—particularly noteworthy because those months were the principal harvest time for the fruit and low prices would be expected with the commodity's abundance.<sup>366</sup> Either the source from the southern arid regions of Characene and Elymais had been interrupted by military and/or political intervention or the needs of supplying Mitratu's troops took precedence over civilian needs creating a dearth in the markets. Ultimately the economic data reflects the state of crisis in Mesopotamia and supports the argument that 91/0 BC was a crucial moment in the struggle between Sinatruces and the forces of Gotarzes over the control of Mesopotamia and northern Elymais. Furthermore they suggest that Sinatruces had some control or at least influence in the southern kingdom of Characene that may have had an effect on date supply to Babylon.

As previously mentioned an ostrakon from Parthian-Nisa may suggest that by the time of Gotarzes I's death in July/August 87 BC Sinatruces had lost all his gains in Iran.<sup>367</sup> A manuscript found at Avroman, Kurdistān in 1909 dated Apellaios 225 SEM (19/20.10-17/18.11.88 BC) gives the title of the Parthian King as—*Βασιλεύοντος Βασιλέων Ἀρσάκου εὐεργέτου δικαίου ἐπιφανοῦς καί φιλέλληνης*.<sup>368</sup> The title “King of kings” may suggest that by this date Sinatruces had been bested and the subkingdoms of Persis and Elymais, at least, had returned to Gotarzes. Of note is the lack of such a title in the numismatic record post

<sup>364</sup> BCT Rev. -90, line 18. The ancient Assyrian city of Ancient Aššur is located approx. 100 km north of modern Tikrit on the west bank of the Tigris River near the town of Shirkat in the Salah al-Din Governorate of modern Iraq.

<sup>365</sup> For lists of Susian bronze issues see Assar (2006a) 151; *Ibid* (2006b) 59; *Ibid*, (2009) 231-2.

<sup>366</sup> Refer to Appendix Three. As noted above barley supplies naturally dwindled towards the end of the year as dates came into season and the two were interchangeable as the staple diet of the Babylonians.

<sup>367</sup> Nisa ostrakon 2638 (1760).

<sup>368</sup> Avroman I, lines 1-2.

Mithridates II and it does not reappear on the coinage until the reign of Mithridates IV in 58 BC; although it must be mentioned that the Indo-Scythian king Maues adopted the title some time after 95 BC.<sup>369</sup> The title of choice used by the competing claimants during this early phase of the Parthian Wars of Succession was *Βασιλέως Μεγάλου* or “Great King” and it does not revert back to Mithridates II’s nomenclature until Phraates III readopted it in, at the latest, 65 BC and is then subsumed by his sons, Mithridates IV and Orodes II, after they murdered him in or before September of 58 BC.<sup>370</sup> The BCT mentions the title “King of kings” in relation to Mithridates II’s death (month IX 221 SEM; 21/2.11-20/1.12.91 BC) and it was not mentioned again until its last appearance in the BCT dated month I 249 SEM (May/June 63 BC) in reference to Phraates III.<sup>371</sup>

In the following lines of the Avroman text King Arsaces’ three principle consorts are listed—in order: Siake, sister and wife, Aryazate Automna, daughter of Great King Tigranes, and Azate, sister and wife. The association of the title Arsaces with a coregent is usually an indication that a pretender, also entitled Arsaces, was still in circulation and that a further mark of distinction was needed—although this formula is more usual in the cuneiform evidence.<sup>372</sup> The names of these wives have not survived in the cuneiform evidence. The only wife of Gotarzes mentioned is one Ashiabatar “joyous daughter” dated 25/6.3.90 BC. In the interim two and a half years it seems she had been usurped, perhaps unable to bear a male heir, in favour of Siake as first wife. The other two are listed in order of seniority and are likely to have been wedded to Gotarzes, along with Siake, between 25/6.3.90 and 17/18.11.88 BC. Of particular note in the second position is a marriage of alliance with the daughter of Tigranes the Great of Armenia and it is to that regent that this study now turns.

<sup>369</sup> For an indepth discussion of Maues, his dating and the significance of the title see Senior (2001) 25-35.

<sup>370</sup> According to Plutarch Pompey was chastised by Phraates III for referring to him as “King” and not “King of Kings” in 65 BC; Plut. *Pomp.* 38.2. S41.2-17 drachms bearing the title—*ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΝ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΔΙΚΑΙΟΥ ΕΠΙΦΑΝΟΥΣ ΘΕΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ ΦΙΛΕΛΛΗΝΟΣ* are the earliest coins to bear this nomenclature after Mithridates II. Originally attributed by Sellwood to Mithridates III (1980) 127-130, now reattributed to Mithridates IV, grandson of Sinatruces; G. R. F. Assar, “Recent Studies in Parthian History, Part 1.” *The Celator* (2000) 20-2; Assar (2006b) 96-7.

<sup>371</sup> BCT 437, Rev. -90, line 31 and 514, -62, upper edge line 1 respectively. The extant BCT record becomes increasingly sparse after 77 BC. A colophon from a Babylonian Almanac dated month I of SEB 254 (25/6.3.-23/4.4.58 BC) also refers to him as “King of Kings” and is the last record of him; Sachs (1955) 177, LBAT 1184.

<sup>372</sup> Another indicator is the use of the king’s personal name rather than the generic patronymic. Avroman I, lines 2-5; Assar (2006b) 62-3. The first use of this formula is employed in reference to Gotarzes I in a prayer text (VATh 265+1728+ two fragments) mentioning his wife, Queen, Ashiabatar dated day 6 of the embolismos month 12 of SEB 221 (25/6.3.90 BC).

## The Status of Rome and Asia Minor, 91-80 BC

By the summer of 88 BC Tigranes was still consolidating his position in Asia Minor as the junior member of the Pontus/Parthia/Armenia tripartite alliance that undoubtedly had Rome as its *raison d'être*.<sup>373</sup> He had already cemented his ties with Mithridates of Pontus through a marriage alliance with his daughter, Cleopatra, not long after coming to the throne in 96/5 BC.<sup>374</sup> In 89/8 BC Rome was still struggling with the Samnites in the Social Wars and their leader, Silo, had appealed to Mithridates for aid.<sup>375</sup> In the months leading up to the summer of 88 BC diplomatic relations had broken down between Rome's representative in Asia, Lucius Cassius, and Mithridates over the suzerainty of Cappadocia and war soon broke out between Pontus and Bithynia. Asia Minor was quickly overrun by Mithridates and this eventually led to the murder of thousands of Roman and Italian citizens throughout Asia Minor on his orders. Sulla was eventually designated the province of Asia and the command of the war, but in the meantime his predecessor, Lucius Cassius, was soundly defeated and then besieged in Rhodes. Meanwhile Sulla was struggling with the rapidly deteriorating constitutional crisis and civil strife back at Rome.<sup>376</sup>

Despite Rome's internal discord, the threat of Mithridates could not be ignored. His armies had occupied Greece by 87 BC and an all out assault on Italy could not have been far from realisation.<sup>377</sup> Sulla carried the war into Greece and by 87/6 BC had besieged Athens and its port with Archelaus, Mithridates' principle general, within. A second army was sent by Mithridates led by his son, Arcathias, into Macedonia, which met with some success until his sudden death through illness at Tisaeum at the time that Sulla was preoccupied with the monumental siege of Athens and the Piraeus.<sup>378</sup>

Athens eventually succumbed, largely through famine rather than direct assault, and was sacked. Archelaus fled Piraeus and eventually rallied a force at Thermopylae consisting of newly acquired reinforcements and the deceased Arcathias' forces.<sup>379</sup> A massive set piece battle took place at Chaeronea, Greece's infamous place of decision, and Sulla summarily

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<sup>373</sup> Jus. 38.3.1 and 5.

<sup>374</sup> App. *Mith.* 3.15.

<sup>375</sup> App. *Mith.* 3.16.

<sup>376</sup> Liv. *Per.* 77, 78; App. *Mith.* 3.17, 19, 24; Plut. *Sull.* 6.10; 7.1-10.2; *Mar.* 34.1-35.4; App. *BC* 1.55-63; *Mith.* 3.22, 30; Cic. *Phil.* 8.7; Diod. 37.29; Val. Max. 3.8.5; 6.5.7; 8.6.2; 9.7,ext.1; Flor. 2.9.6-8; Eutr. 5.4; Auct. *Vir. Ill.* 75.7-8; Oros. 5.19.3-7. Appian dates the outbreak of hostilities to about the 173<sup>rd</sup> Olympiad, “ἀμφὶ τὰς ἑκατὸν καὶ ἐβδόμηκοντα τρεῖς ὀλυμπιάδας”, which translates to late spring/summer 88 BC.

<sup>377</sup> App. *Mith.* 5.28f.

<sup>378</sup> App. *Mith.* 5.35f.

<sup>379</sup> App. *Mith.* 6.40-1.

defeated Archelaus' army, a force three times his army's size.<sup>380</sup> A further battle took place at Orchomenus leading to final defeat for Archelaus in Greece. Sulla went into winter (86/5 BC) quarters in Thessaly by which time he had been declared a public enemy back at Rome and had the war against Mithridates taken from him and handed to L. Valerius Flaccus. Flaccus was eventually murdered by his legate C. Flavius Fimbria who then prosecuted a relatively successful campaign against Mithridates and took revenge against the towns of Asia that had sided with the Pontic King or Sulla—including, infamously, Ilium.<sup>381</sup>

By 84 BC Sulla had carried the war into Asia Minor and in the summer met with Mithridates sealing the Treaty of Dardanus. He then quickly dealt with Fimbria and brought Asia Minor back into line, imposing crippling restitution.<sup>382</sup> Satisfied that he had bested Mithridates' forces to the point where he could leave Asia Minor in relative security, he returned to Rome to deal finally with the ongoing constitutional crisis and factional discord.

The Second Mithridatic War (83-1 BC) was a comparative sideshow incited by Sulla's propraetor in Asia, L. Licinius Murena purely for rapine and self-aggrandisement.<sup>383</sup> He used the civil war back in Italy as a distraction from his illegal actions having moved out of his provincia and contravened the tenets of the Dardanus treaty. He was eventually restrained by Sulla in 81 BC, but only after Murena had suffered a severe defeat in Cappadocia at the hands of Mithridates and Gordius. Ariobarzanes was expelled from Cappadocia then reinstated when Sullas' legate A. Gabinius mediated a peace between Ariobarzanes and Mithridates, but it seems with the Pontic King still maintaining some significant control of Cappadocian territory. Interestingly a future marriage alliance was offered to Ariobarzanes, albeit with Mithridates' daughter of four years of age.<sup>384</sup>

Meanwhile Tigranes of Armenia had not been idle. He had managed to keep Mithridates' struggle with Rome at arm's length. Some Armenian forces, 10,000 horse from Lesser Armenia, had been involved in the first war under the command of one Nemanes who

<sup>380</sup> App. *Mith.* 6.42-5.

<sup>381</sup> Cic. *Flacc.* 61; Diod. 38.8.1-2; Strab. 13.1.27, 594c; Liv. *Per.* 82, 98; Vell. 2.24.1; Plut. *Sull.* 20.1; 23.6; *Luc.* 7.2; App. *BC* 1.75; *Mith.* 8.51-3; Memn. *FGrH* 3B.353, 34 and 356, 40; Dio 30-35, fr. 104.1-5; Auct. *Vir. Ill.* 70.1; Oros. 6.2.9; Sall. *Hist.* 3.33; 2.78M; 5.13M. The sack of Ilium occurred at the close of the 173<sup>rd</sup> Olympiad (early summer 85 BC), stated by Appian to be 1050 years after its sack by Agamemnon, which is interestingly close to modern archaeological interpretations of the site that associate the events of the Iliad with Troy VIIa, ca. 1200 BC; App. *Mith.* 8.53.

<sup>382</sup> App. *Mith.* 9.62-3.

<sup>383</sup> App. *Mith.* 9.64-6 and 112; Memn. 36, *FGrH* 3 B.354; Cic. *Mur.* 11, 15 and 32; *Leg. Man.* 8; *Acad.* 2.2; *Phil.* 11.33; *SIG*<sup>3</sup> 745; *I. v. Priene* 121, line 40f.

<sup>384</sup> Murena's excuse was that there was no treaty as it was made verbally and, by implication, without the ratification of the Roman Senate. Sulla was outlawed at the time and therefore could not have been a representative of the Senate in any case. App. *Mith.* 9.60; "...τῇ τε βουλῇ περὶ πάντων ἐπέστελλεν, οὐχ ὑποκρινόμενος ἐψηφίσθαι πολέμιος." *Ibid.* 9.64; "...καὶ πρέσβεσιν αὐτοῦ τὰς συνθήκας προτείνουσιν οὐκ ἔφη συνθήκας ὁρᾶν. οὐ γὰρ συνεγγεγραπτο Σύλλας, ἀλλ' ἔργῳ τὰ λεχθέντα βεβαιώσας ἀπήλλακτο."



was a sub-commander of Mithridates' son, Arcathias.<sup>385</sup> It is uncertain whether these were involved in Greece as they are not mentioned.<sup>386</sup> It is likely Tigranes was able to cushion the blow of Mithridates' defeat by virtue of his remoteness to the events.

## Armenia and the East in the 80s BC

The 80s were Tigrane's decade. Pontus was preoccupied with its expansion into the eastern Mediterranean and its subsequent struggle with Rome. Parthia's dynastic woes, as outlined above, kept it out of Armenian affairs. Syria was at the height of its own dynastic fracas. As Appian writes of this period, "During this time Syria had many kings, succeeding each other at short intervals, but all of royal lineage, and there were many changes and revolts from the dynasty."<sup>387</sup>

The chief Syrian claimants of the 80s were Demetrius III Theus Philopator Soter (96-88 BC), Antiochus XII Dionysus Epiphanes Philopator Callinicus (87-4 BC), who both reigned in Damascus; and Philip I Epiphanes Philadelphus (88-84/3 BC) who reigned in Antioch and was aided in his bid for the throne against Demetrius III by the Parthian satrap/general Mithridates Sinaces in 88/7 BC.<sup>388</sup> Relations with Parthia seem to have been good throughout Philip's reign. Philip minted abundant coins and they are found in Parthian territory as far as Dura Europos.<sup>389</sup> As this study has shown, the Parthian Wars of Succession had reached a hiatus by 87 BC as Susa had been returned to the control of Gotarzes and then his brother, Mithridates III, and Sinatruces had been ejected from the remainder of Parthian Iran. This undoubtedly allowed, however briefly, Parthian interest in Syria and the Seleucid dynastic struggles to flourish for the first time since Mithridates II's unsuccessful foray in 92 BC. Certainly the support of a sympathetic regent on the Seleucid throne in Antioch could only have alleviated Parthia's hard pressed foreign policy concerns at that time.

The exact process of Tigranes' expansion into Northern Mesopotamia, Commagene and Syria from 87 to 83 BC is not dealt with in any great detail by our sources. With the exception of some factions most kingdoms seemed to have acquiesced to his domination with little struggle.

It is likely that Commagene was the first kingdom to be absorbed by Tigranes. It was ruled by Mithridates I Kallinikos (c. 96-69 BC) who claimed direct descent from the

<sup>385</sup> App. *Mith.* 3.17 and 19.

<sup>386</sup> App. *Mith.* 6.41.

<sup>387</sup> App. *Syr.* 11.48; "...ἐν οἷς πολλὰ μὲν ἀρχαὶ Σύροις ἐκ τοῦ βασιλείου γένους ὀλιγοχρόνιοι πάμπα· ἐγένοντο, πολλὰ δὲ τροπαὶ καὶ ἐπαναστάσεις ἐπὶ τὰ βασιλεία."

<sup>388</sup> Jos. *Ant.* 13.387; Ptolemy IX Soter II held the Egyptian throne until 81 BC; App. *Syr.* 8.48f.

<sup>389</sup> A. R. Bellinger, *Excavations at Dura-Europos, Final Report, 6: The Coins* (New Haven 1949).

Armenian Orontid line through his grandfather Ptolemaios, his kingdom's first ruler, and so Tigranes' annexation may have engendered some sympathy.<sup>390</sup> His wife was the daughter of Antiochus VIII Gryphus, Laodice Thea Philadelphos, and she features prominently in the inscriptional evidence alongside her husband.<sup>391</sup> Philadelphos emphasised her relation with her five Seleucid brothers, key participants in Syria's wars of succession and intimately connecting Commagene with those struggles.

The deaths of Antiochus XII and Philip I in short succession in 84/3 BC ended Syria's short lived period of peace and prosperity and showed the way for more fratricidal upheaval. Three young claimants were used as pawns in various factions' bids for power such as that led by the widow of Antiochus X, Cleopatra Selene, who supported her son, Antiochus XIII Asiaticus.<sup>392</sup> It was in this climate that the Syrian people, having endured at least 40 years of this strife, turned to foreign kings to rule them and after some debate settled on Tigranes.<sup>393</sup> Tigranes' first coin issues from Antioch date to 83 BC and describe him as *ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ*. His usurpation of the title *ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΩΝ* from his former Parthian benefactors and its appearance on this coinage comes later. This supports a timeline which sees Tigranes turning his attention to absorbing the remainder of his Eastern Empire after this date.<sup>394</sup>

It was at this time that Justin (i.e. Trogus) specifically states that Tigranes was an ally of the Parthians, i.e. Mithridates III, as this was one of the positive qualities that attracted the Syrian people to him and they had undoubtedly wished to continue this prosperous relationship previously enjoyed under Philip I.<sup>395</sup> As has already been pointed out the Avroman I document confirms this alliance as one of marriage (then between Gotarzes I and Aryazate Automna, daughter of Great King Tigranes and undoubtedly reaffirmed by his brother, Mithridates III, upon his accession) and that this must have occurred between

<sup>390</sup> R. D. Sullivan, "The Dynasty of Commagene", *ANRW* II 8 (1977) 736, 745, 750; Dio. 31.19a. Commagenean coinage from King Samos, Mithridates' father, onwards feature Armenian headdress, further underlining the strong ongoing connection between this dynasty and the Orontids. Six copper coins minted at Somosata, capital of Commagene, during the reign of Mithridates' son, Antiochus I Theos, depict Tigranes of Armenia on the obverse. Not only does this reaffirm the ongoing close ties between these kingdoms, but the coins may indicate an earlier dynastic transition to Antiochus than has previously been recognised; see P. Bedoukian, "A Coin of Tigranes the Great of Armenia, Struck in Commagene", *Numismatic chronicle* 10 (1970) 19-22; Sullivan (1977) 763f.

<sup>391</sup> *IGLSyr.* nos. 1, 3, 5, 8, 14-18, 22, 26-8, 31-5, 46-7, 52.

<sup>392</sup> *Jos. Ant.* 13.391.

<sup>393</sup> *Jus.* 40.1; *Eutr.* 6.14.2; *Jos. Ant.* 13.419; *App. Syr.* 8.48; *Strab.* 11.14.15 and 16.2.8; Justin's rendition of events suggests a peaceful and amicable arrangement whereas Appian and Strabo paint rather a more violent picture of conquest. "...καὶ τοῖς Σελευκίδαις ἐπεστράτευσεν οὐκ ἐθέλουσιν ὑπακούειν." Both accounts could equally be true as it is quite possible factions of the populous supported Tigranes' usurpation while hardcore supporters of the Seleucids fought.

<sup>394</sup> G. Macdonald, "The Coinage of Tigranes I", *Numismatic Chronical* 2 (1902) 193-201.

<sup>395</sup> *Jus.* 40.1.3.

25/6.3.90 and 17/18.11.88 BC.<sup>396</sup> This alliance continued at least until the annexation of Syria by Tigranes, whereupon its administration was handed over to his general Magadates and the king was then free to turn his attention to expansion eastwards.<sup>397</sup> Thus Tigranes' invasion of Parthia's holdings in Northern Mesopotamia, and the associated souring of their relations, must post date these events of spring/summer 83 BC.<sup>398</sup>

Strabo states that Tigranes' first move in that direction was the re-absorption of the "Seventy Valleys" region (ἐβδομήκοντα ἀλῶνας) which was given as security to Mithridates II in return for his support of Tigranes' bid for the Armenian throne back in 96 BC. The identification of these "Seventy Valleys" is somewhat of a mystery, but it is possible that this refers to the complex valley systems that follow the length of the Araxes River or at least those mountainous cantons that run south and west of the river between the lakes of Urmia and Van.<sup>399</sup> This geography controls the caravan route from modern Erzurum to Tabriz. It was effectively the backdoor access to Armenia and Media Atropatene, which in turn led to the heartlands of the Parthian Empire and was the path that M. Antonius used in his invasion of 36 BC in order to avoid the fate of M. Crassus and the terrain conducive to the easterners' superior cavalry. It was this geography that made Armenia so strategically important to the Roman and Parthian Empires throughout their 300 year coexistence and fuelled many a struggle for the proxy control of Armenia's royal house.

With the "Seventy Valleys" back in his control, Tigranes invaded Armenia's long time protagonist, Atropatene. The kingdoms of Gordyene and Adiabene soon followed and Tigranes advanced as far down as the regions around Ninevah and Arbela.<sup>400</sup> In the southern foothills of the Taurus Mountains he began building a new capital for his fledgling empire, Tigranocerta. The location of this city has not yet been assuredly identified, but is likely associated with modern Diyarbakir and control of the passage between the kingdoms of Sophene and Gordyene—the new centre of gravity of the Armenian Empire.<sup>401</sup>

Tigranes' acquisitions were to the detriment of Parthia, yet there is no record of a decisive battle between them. It is possible that the dynastic conflict of the late 90s and early 80s had weakened Parthia's hold on these kingdoms. Sinatruces controlled Media for four to

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<sup>396</sup> Avroman I, lines 2-5.

<sup>397</sup> App. *Syr.* 8.48.

<sup>398</sup> Magadates is said by Appian to have governed Syria for 14 years until he was recalled by Tigranes to the defence of Tigranocerta in response to Lucullus' offensive in the summer of 69 BC; App. *Syr.* 8.48-9.

<sup>399</sup> Strab. 11.13.3; 11.14.3; 11.14.13 and 15; Plin. *NH* 6.42; Syme identifies the "Seventy Valleys" as within the tangled mountainous region between lakes Urmia and Van, south-west of the Araxes River; R. Syme, *Anatolica* (Oxford 1995) 79-80.

<sup>400</sup> Strab. 11.14.15.

<sup>401</sup> Syme (1995) 53; T. Rice Holmes, "Tigranocerta", *JRS* 7 (1917) 120-138.

five years and this would have weakened Mithridates II's, then his son Gotarzes I's, hold on his northern satrapies. BCT evidence suggests that Babylonian Parthia was preoccupied with retaking control of its more valuable and strategically crucial southern regions of Elymais and Characene at this time. Parthia's resources had been depleted and it simply could not fight on two fronts—leaving Tigranes to take its northern satrapies unopposed. This process and Parthia's predicament at this time is investigated in more detail below.

Of particular interest to this study's reconstruction of the events of the 80s BC and Tigranes' absorption of the greater part of the Near East is the site of Jebel Khalid. Since 1984 an Australian Archaeological team led by P. J. Conner and G. W. Clarke has surveyed and excavated the site and by 2002 some tentative conclusions could be made:

“It was beginning to appear that Jebel Khalid was a Greek foundation on a virgin site (no evidence whatsoever of any earlier occupation being found), a modest-sized settlement requiring perhaps a small garrison plus domestic quarters, a so-called ‘military colony’ in all likelihood, guarding a river crossing point and regulating river traffic. Its life as a settlement seemed to have terminated with the end of the Greek period or shortly thereafter, manifesting all the signs of systematic abandonment rather than destruction.”<sup>402</sup>

Located 30 km southeast of Hierapolis or Bambyke (modern Membij) and approximately 110 km downstream from Seleucia/Apamea and the Zeugma crossing, Jebel Khalid is situated on a major bend of the Euphrates River occupying 30 ha of a limestone outcrop that looks directly over the river on its right (western) bank. While removed from the major caravan route that leads from Antioch through Aleppo to the Zeugma—its impressive fortifications stand in testimony to its strategic importance in controlling river traffic and a nearby river crossing.<sup>403</sup>

The majority of the coins found at the site, over its 200 year or more Hellenistic habitation, were minted at Antioch.<sup>404</sup> These coins date from the reign of Seleucus I to the end of Antioch's independent municipal issues in 72 BC. This and the systematic deconstruction of the site at abandonment suggests a decline in its strategic importance right

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<sup>402</sup> G. W. Clarke, P. J. Conner, *et al*, “Jebel Khalid on the Euphrates—Report on Excavations 1986-1996”, 1, *Mediterranean Archaeology Supplement* 5 (Sydney 2002) ix.

<sup>403</sup> For assessments of the 3.4 km extent of the fortification and its quality see Clarke *et al*, (2002) 1-23.

<sup>404</sup> Clarke *et al*, (2002) 295.

at the time of Tigranes' absorption of Seleucid Syria in 83 BC and for the remainder of his occupation of the territory into the 70s.<sup>405</sup>

The circumstances of the abandonment of this unique site beg explanation and they should provide a clue as to the geopolitical state of the Euphrates frontier at the time of Tigranes' conquest of the region, both west and east of the river. The abandonment of such a strong strategic position at this time may suggest realignment in the overall geostrategic/political situation. Essentially Tigranes' absorption of Syria and Northern Mesopotamia, which effectively ended the Parthian threat opposite Jebel Khalid for most of his reign, rendered this fortification superfluous. Perhaps the added expense of running such a relatively remote outpost could not be justified. The caravan route ran much farther north, crossing at the Zeugma (Seleucia/Apamea), modern Birecik. With the entire region pacified, perhaps as far south as Nikephorion, Tigranes saw no justification in keeping the outpost, despite its 200 years of effective service, and ordered it abandoned.

The Romans also lacked interest in the site after the annexation of Syria in 64 BC and the subsequent reoccupation of Northern Mesopotamia by the Parthians after Tigranes had been ejected and Tigranocerta abandoned. Despite escalating tensions and the Euphrates River being increasingly seen as the frontier between the two empires, Jebel Khalid was never reoccupied—and this in a region where the occupation of fortified settlements as billets was standard practice for the Roman military, resorting to their traditional fortified encampments only where campaign requirements dictated.<sup>406</sup>

Jebel Khalid provides important pieces of evidence that explain the early evolution of the Euphrates frontier. Its abandonment in the 70s BC is evidence of the declining threat of the Parthians east of the Euphrates as a consequence of the Parthian Wars of Succession and the fundamental realignment of the geopolitical landscape. Such was the stability and imperial homogeneity of the region under Tigranes that a fort of such strategic importance could be abandoned. The Romans never reoccupied it, most likely because other sites had been developed in the interim, such as Zeugma and Nikephorion that superseded its original function and the expense to reoccupy and man it could no longer be justified.

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<sup>405</sup> C. E. V. Nixon writes, "...it is my strong impression that as a group the municipal coins of Antioch minted from 92/1 to 80/79 BC (and perhaps beyond) bear the least signs of circulation of them all." No coins representing any period after this appear for over 400 years. Clarke *et al* (2002) 297.

<sup>406</sup> D. Kennedy and D. Riley, *Rome's Desert Frontier from the Air* (London 1990) 111; 122ff.

## Summation

This chapter has reconstructed the first phase of the Parthian Wars of Succession and then placed these events within their wider geopolitical context. The reign of Mithridates II brought stability and many military successes, but towards its end he suffered a series of reversals in Syria, Media and Elymais which sundered the Empire into two, demarcated by the Tigris River.

His son, Gotarzes I, by 88/7 BC had reunified the Empire, but this would prove a temporary reprieve as Sinatruces appeared again at the head of his Sacaraucae allies and with their aid ruled the Parthian Empire unopposed from 77/6 to 70/69 BC.

Meanwhile the reversals that the Parthians had suffered, along with the secession of a number of its valuable satrapies, had opened the way for Tigranes of Armenia to expand his territory south and east. Buffered from Roman interference by his ally, Mithridates of Pontus, the ongoing succession wars in Syria opened the door for his dominance of that region for the next 14 years—Northern Mesopotamia and Media Atropatene soon followed.

This study has demonstrated that the Parthian Wars of Succession played a significant role in the restructuring of the geopolitical landscape west of the Euphrates River and North of the Taurus. The Parthian dynasty's preoccupation with its internal crisis allowed Tigranes to expand into their sphere of influence with virtually no opposition and then maintain that status unmolested until the arrival of Roman forces under Lucullus in 70/69 BC.

In 70/69 BC Phraates III succeeded his father to the Parthian throne. He was incapable or unwilling to aid Tigranes and Mithridates of Pontus and oppose this Roman interference south of the Taurus Mountains, perhaps due to its ongoing dynastic crisis, which had resurfaced again upon the death of Sinatruces. The details of this subsequent struggle are outside the purview of this study.

# Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated that at the time of Sulla's meeting with a Parthian envoy on the banks of the Euphrates River, late summer 95 BC, the Parthian Empire was on the verge of a long period of crisis, herein referred to as the Parthian Wars of Succession. Over the previous 35 years great movements of nomadic peoples, from the steppe regions north and northwest of Han China, had been moving south and southwest into Parthian territory, threatening the stability of its empire. These invasions had been mostly uncoordinated and bent on rapine rather than conquest. Until in 96/5 BC one of these tribes, the Sacaraucae, took as their leader a disaffected and disenfranchised member of the Parthian royal family and launched a concerted campaign to subjugate the Parthian Empire. The Bactrian and Indo-Greek dynasties had mostly succumbed to these same nomadic pressures by 95 BC. Parthia had fought off the initial waves in the 120s BC at the cost of two, maybe three, kings; but by 115 BC Mithridates II had deflected the threat down the Helmand Bend into south-eastern Iran. The year 95 BC saw their resurgence.

More specifically this thesis has explained why a Parthian envoy was present on the Euphrates River frontier in 95 BC and why he sought an audience with Rome's representative in Publius Cornelius Sulla. The circumstances of Sulla's own presence upon the banks of the Euphrates River at this time have also been explained. At the time of this meeting not only must the first stirrings of war have weighed heavily on the King of Parthia's mind, but natural disaster in drought had afflicted the Empire's most productive regions. This is evident in the BCT, specifically the invaluable economic data which it provides. Also a new wave of nomadic pressures were making themselves felt into Iran and Afghanistan as a consequence of Han Chinese offensives and annexations west into the Ferghana region in the last decade of the Second Century BC and into the first decade of the next. These circumstances perhaps explain the conciliatory posture of the Parthians at this first meeting combined with a healthy respect for Rome's martial renown, first cemented in the East with their victory at Magnesia in 190 BC. Despite these circumstances the envoy, Orobazus, took obeisance too far and was summarily executed by Mithridates II for bowing to Roman priorities.

This thesis has also constructed a timeline of Sulla's involvement in the East during a period where Roman literary sources are lacking. Additionally it has explained why there is a gap in Sulla's career in the late 90s, postulating a far longer involvement in the affairs of Cappadocia than previously recognised. This was necessary as pressures from Pontus,

Bithynia and Armenia upon the sovereignty of Cappadocia were ongoing amidst an Anatolia undergoing a series of disruptive dynastic changes during 95/4 BC.

An account of the state of the Parthian Empire at the time of the Sullan meeting has not been fully considered by previous scholarship. This thesis acknowledges the wider geopolitical forces that were at work across the far range of the East. In doing so this explains the conciliatory attitude of Parthia towards Rome at the first contact and throughout the initial stage of their interaction. This stage stretches from this first meeting down to the turning point of the Battle of Carrhae in 53 BC, some 42 years. By focusing on the first decade or so of this period, this thesis sets the context of Parthia's interactions with Rome and the wider agendas that affected its policies towards Roman interference west of the Euphrates River. It explains why Parthia was passive to Roman hegemonic ambition at this particular time, which allowed Roman annexation up to the Euphrates border in 64 BC.

This thesis has reconstructed the first phase of the Parthian Wars of Succession; from Sinatruces' first appearance amongst the Saka tribes, which had recently settled in Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and south-eastern Iran, to his conquest of Elymais and territories up to the eastern bank of the Tigris River. This sundered the Parthian Empire into two distinct factions for six years. For that period the House of Mithridates II was confined to southern Mesopotamia. Here it created a bastion and consolidated its strength in preparation for an eventual counteroffensive against the usurper and his nomadic allies. In this period it became isolated from its domains in Characene, Persis, Media, Media Atropatene, Bactria, Oshroene, Commagene, Sophene, and Adiabene and, importantly for Rome's future advances into the East, Armenia. Characene and Persis used the distraction of the Sacaraucae invasion to exercise independence. The heartland of the Parthian Empire of Northern Iran was for six years under the control of Sinatruces and his Sacaraucae allies. In 88/7 BC a turn of fortune saw the revival of the Mithridatic House under the son of Mithridates II, Gotarzes I, who recaptured Susa and expelled the usurper from Iran back into Saka territory, either the Eurasian Steppe or the south-western Iranian province of Sistan. This marks the end of the first phase of the Parthian Wars of Succession. Gotarzes I met his end under unknown circumstances at around this time, possibly in the struggles, but he was quickly succeeded by his brother Mithridates III.

While the threat of Sinatruces and the Sacaraucae diminished from 87/6 to 79/8 BC, a new threat emerged from within the Parthian Empire's satrapies. Tigranes of Armenia now made his bid for power. Faced with a weakened Parthian state and a divided and exhausted Seleucid House, Tigranes met with little opposition in his expansions south of the Taurus



Range. The majority of the subjugated peoples of both empires saw Tigranes, at least in that initial stage, as a liberator. He consolidated his power in these regions during the mid-80s BC while his western and northern borders were secured by his ally Mithridates of Pontus whose ongoing struggles with Rome had reached hiatus with the “Treaty of Dardanus” in 84 BC.

This study has acknowledged the underpinning strategic importance of Armenia and explains why that region became so crucial in the struggles between Rome and Parthia over the 300 years of their coexistence. Armenia provided a relatively safe passage into the seat of Parthian power in northern Iran for anyone that controlled the throne of Armenia, either directly or by proxy. Conquest was always a difficult prospect in this very mountainous and rugged canton and so, as Mithridates II attempted with the instalment of Tigranes II in 96/5 BC, other means were more expedient.

This thesis has argued that the Parthian Wars of Succession, despite almost no acknowledgement in western literary sources of the time, played a fundamental role in allowing first Tigranes and then, as a consequence of his support of Mithridates of Pontus in defiance of Lucullus, Rome to freely advance to the Euphrates River and south of the Taurus Mountains. Initially Mithridates II and his son, Mithridates III, wanted control of Syria, preferably by proxy, as their incursions in 93/2 and 87 BC demonstrated. They were foiled in any lasting interference in Syrian affairs by Sinatruces, which diverted their resources to the East. This internecine war between the House of Mithridates II and the House of Sinatruces would occupy the majority of Parthia’s assets until the eve of the Battle of Carrhae. This allowed Tigranes the Great to fill the power vacuum left by Seleucid dynasty’s self destruction and occupy Syria virtually unchallenged for 18 years until Pompey claimed it for Rome. Phraates III, successor of Sinatruces, was petitioned by Mithridates Eupator and Tigranes to help against the Roman threat in 70/69 BC prior to the Battle of Tigranocerta, but it seems Parthia was incapable of intervention. This battle disrupted Tigranes’ hold of the territories south of the Taurus Mountains and paved the way for Pompey’s triumphant subjugation of the East over the following five years. This thesis explains the state of the Parthian Empire in the lead up to this crucial time when Rome moved, compulsively it could be said, to the west bank of the Euphrates River where it would remain for 300 years despite various attempts by both sides to expand beyond its riparian restrictions.

This thesis has identified Sinatruces, the usurper of the Parthian throne, placed his genealogy and his claim to rule. It has identified the S33 coin with this ruler and explored the meaning of its iconography. It has shown that the stag imagery on these coin issues strongly and intimately links this ruler with the peoples of the Eurasian Steppe and supports the

meagre literary sources that state Sinatruces was supported in his bid for the Parthian throne by the Sacaraucae tribe of the Saka/Scythian nation. Furthermore the motif hints at the relationship of this ruler to the Sacaraucae. It suggests a shamanic element to his authority that had far greater influence over these peoples than any Hellenistic notion of kingship. It imbued Sinatruces with divine powers that were readily identifiable to the peoples of the Eurasian Steppe. Shamanism was an integral element in these people's belief systems and was an unambiguous symbol of authority and stature within those communities. That said, Sinatruces carried on the Hellenistic traditions of his predecessors and continued to perpetuate its iconography and titulatures. The S33 issue is evidence of the syncretism of these two distinct religious beliefs and a compromise of cultures that culminated in the embodiment of the ruler, which this thesis defines as a Shaman-King.

By following the path of the mints of these issues it has been possible to reconstruct the course of his campaign to conquer the Parthian Empire. These mints are likely to have followed the course of the invading Saka armies as they would have been the main target recipients for their distribution. This evidence supported by the snippets gleaned from the BCT and the occasional fortuitous archaeological find has helped to reconstruct the course of this campaign.

At its broadest implications this thesis has brought events as far afield as the steppes of northern China within the perspective of Rome's initial steps towards annexation of the Near East. It has proposed that the events that caused the massive movements of steppe peoples down into Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan distracted Parthia's resources east away from its western interests. As a result first Tigranes of Armenia, then Rome were able to advance south of the Taurus Mountains and up to the banks of the Euphrates River with virtually no interference from Parthia despite its long history of interest in those regions and they were crucial to its security. When finally the Parthian Empire had stabilized in the mid 50s BC, it was too late to dislodge Rome from the Euphrates River, although it made several aggressive forays against Roman occupation in the aftermath of the Battle of Carrhae. The Parthian Empire was forever burdened with a powerful and belligerent neighbour and its principal defensive question then turned away from the East towards the West.

This thesis has demonstrated that in order to obtain a thorough appreciation of the Romano-Parthian relations, a broader and more inclusive appreciation of the sources is required. This is especially true for reconstructing the Parthian Dark Age with its reliance on subjective forms of evidence such as stylistic developments on coins and archaeology. Just simply looking at the problem from the western Roman perspective, as some recent studies

on Romano-Parthian relations have done, is not sufficient to complete the full picture of why this relationship developed as it did—consideration of events and sources as far afield as China and the Eurasian Steppe are essential in completing this picture and this study has gone some way to addressing this imbalance and fulfilling that gap in the scholarship.

The consequences of this first meeting between Rome and Parthia were profound, even though at the time Sulla could not have fully comprehended its significance nor is it likely he could have known the state of the Parthian Empire or its extent. In the immediate microcosm of the event, both were asserting their authority over their respective claimants of the thrones of Cappadocia and Armenia, and ensuring their interests were met. In the macrocosm though, this was a meeting between two great empires, both on the verge of long periods of individual existential struggle. This thesis has brought this meeting into this wider perspective and placed it within its geopolitical context. In doing so it has underlined its momentous significance as setting the tone of their future relations, one dominated by conflict and mistrust. It would take 75 years, until 20 BC, for proper diplomatic relations to be cemented by the Princeps Augustus with Phraates IV. By which time both Empires had undergone profound transformation by their Near Eastern experiences after much bloodshed and strife, but it was only then that meaningful dialogue could occur. Sulla's meeting with the Parthian envoy, by contrast, was a Roman monologue that spoke of self-righteous might and that is all.

## Appendix One

### *Parthian and Related Coins in the Collection of the Museum of Old and New Art, Berridale, Tasmania*

During the course of this study the author was graciously permitted access to the coin collection of Mr. David Walsh held at his Museum of Old and New Art (MONA), now situated in Berridale, Tasmania. This is a significant collection with some pieces of exceptional rarity and quality. It is a great privilege to have such a collection accessible to antipodean scholars.

Although not all these coins are relevant to this work, access to this collection has allowed the author to familiarise himself with the physical traits of these coins and their developmental trends over the stretch of the Parthian Era. Some of the coins are of specific importance to this study and access to them has greatly enhanced its verisimilitude.

What follows is a table collating this collection's Parthian and other relevant coins. All weighing, measuring and photography were conducted by the author. Some of the coins were reclassified by the author in light of more recent research and the findings of this thesis.







# Appendix Two

## *Graphical Representations of the Economic Data from the Corpus of Babylonian Cuneiform Calendar Texts from the Parthian Period*

The graphs that follow are the author's adaptations of the economic data from the Babylonian cuneiform calendar texts as collated by R. J. Van der Spek.<sup>407</sup> As discussed within the body of this work this data represents the most significant and complete economic data of the ancient world, indeed up until relatively modern times. The records cover almost 700 years, but these graphs are solely concerned with the period of Parthian occupation of Babylon down to the end of our extant sources; 141/0 to 70/69 BC. They have provided this thesis with a wealth of raw data that can be extrapolated and, in combination with other sources, can assist our understanding of the geopolitical and socioeconomic state of Mesopotamia and its immediate environs within a reliable and defined chronology. Eventually this data will be incorporated into the preceding geopolitical table.

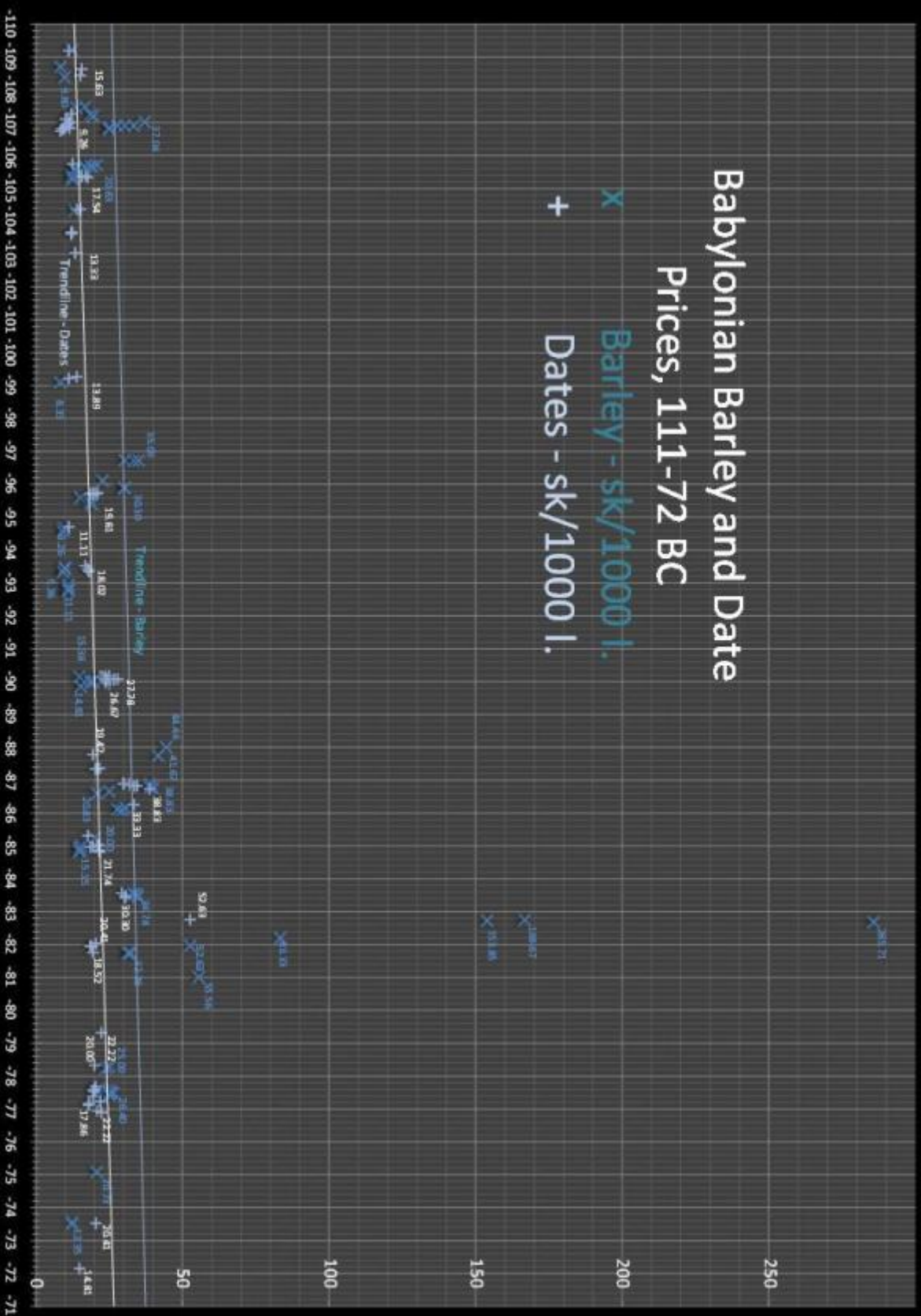
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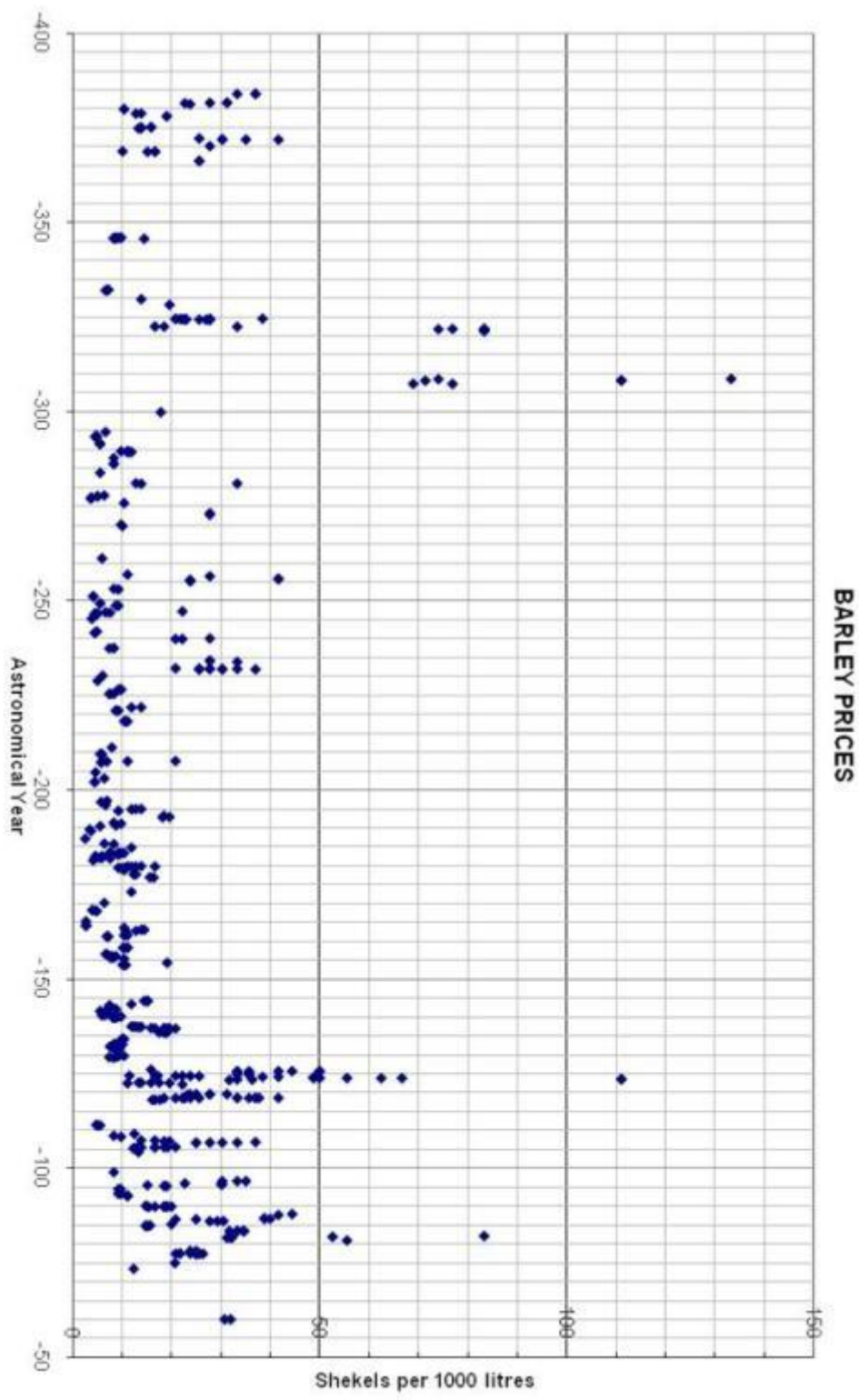
407 R. J. Van der Spek, "The Effect of War on the Prices of Barley and Agricultural Land in Hellenistic Babylonia", in: Andreau, J., e. a. (eds.), *Économie Antique. La guerre dans les économies antiques. Entretiens d'Archéologique et d'Histoire* (Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges 2000); *Ibid*, "Sense and Nonsense in the Statistical Approach of Babylonian Prices", *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 60 (Leiden 2003); *Ibid*, "Commodity Prices in Babylonia 385-61 BC" (<http://www.iisg.nl/hpw/babylon.php> accessed 24/07/2010); *Ibid*, "Arsacid Diary on Politai" ([http://www.livius.org/cg-cm/chronicles/bchp=arsacid-politai/arsacid\\_politai.html](http://www.livius.org/cg-cm/chronicles/bchp=arsacid-politai/arsacid_politai.html) accessed 24/07/2010); *Ibid*, "Euphrates Chronicle (BCHP 20)" ([http://www.livius.org/cg-cm/chronicles/bchp=euphrates/Euphrates\\_1.html](http://www.livius.org/cg-cm/chronicles/bchp=euphrates/Euphrates_1.html) and [http://www.livius.org/cg-cm/chronicles/bchp=euphrates/Euphrates\\_2.html](http://www.livius.org/cg-cm/chronicles/bchp=euphrates/Euphrates_2.html) accessed 24/07/2010); *Ibid*, "Arsacid King Chronicles" ([http://www.livius.org/cg-cm/chronicles/bchp=arsacid/arsacid\\_king\\_1.html](http://www.livius.org/cg-cm/chronicles/bchp=arsacid/arsacid_king_1.html) and [http://www.livius.org/cg-cm/chronicles/bchp=arsacid/arsacid\\_king\\_2.html](http://www.livius.org/cg-cm/chronicles/bchp=arsacid/arsacid_king_2.html) accessed 24/07/2010); *Ibid*, "Arsacid King Chronicles" ([http://www.livius.org/cg-cm/chronicles/bchp=arsacid/arsacid\\_king\\_1.html](http://www.livius.org/cg-cm/chronicles/bchp=arsacid/arsacid_king_1.html) and [http://www.livius.org/cg-cm/chronicles/bchp=arsacid/arsacid\\_king\\_2.html](http://www.livius.org/cg-cm/chronicles/bchp=arsacid/arsacid_king_2.html) accessed 24/07/2010).



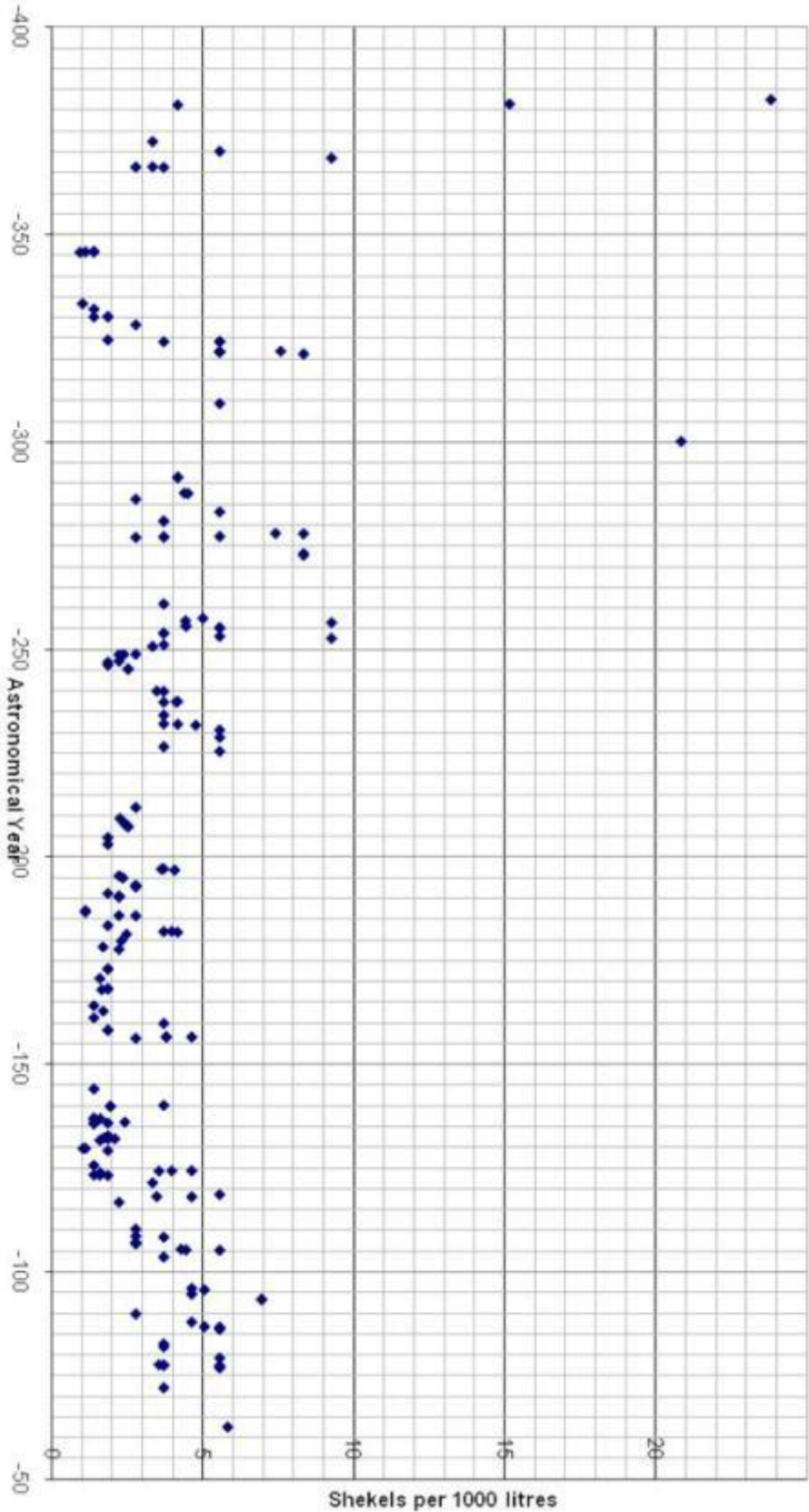
# Babylonian Barley and Date Prices, 111-72 BC

X Barley - sk/1000 l.  
+ Dates - sk/1000 l.

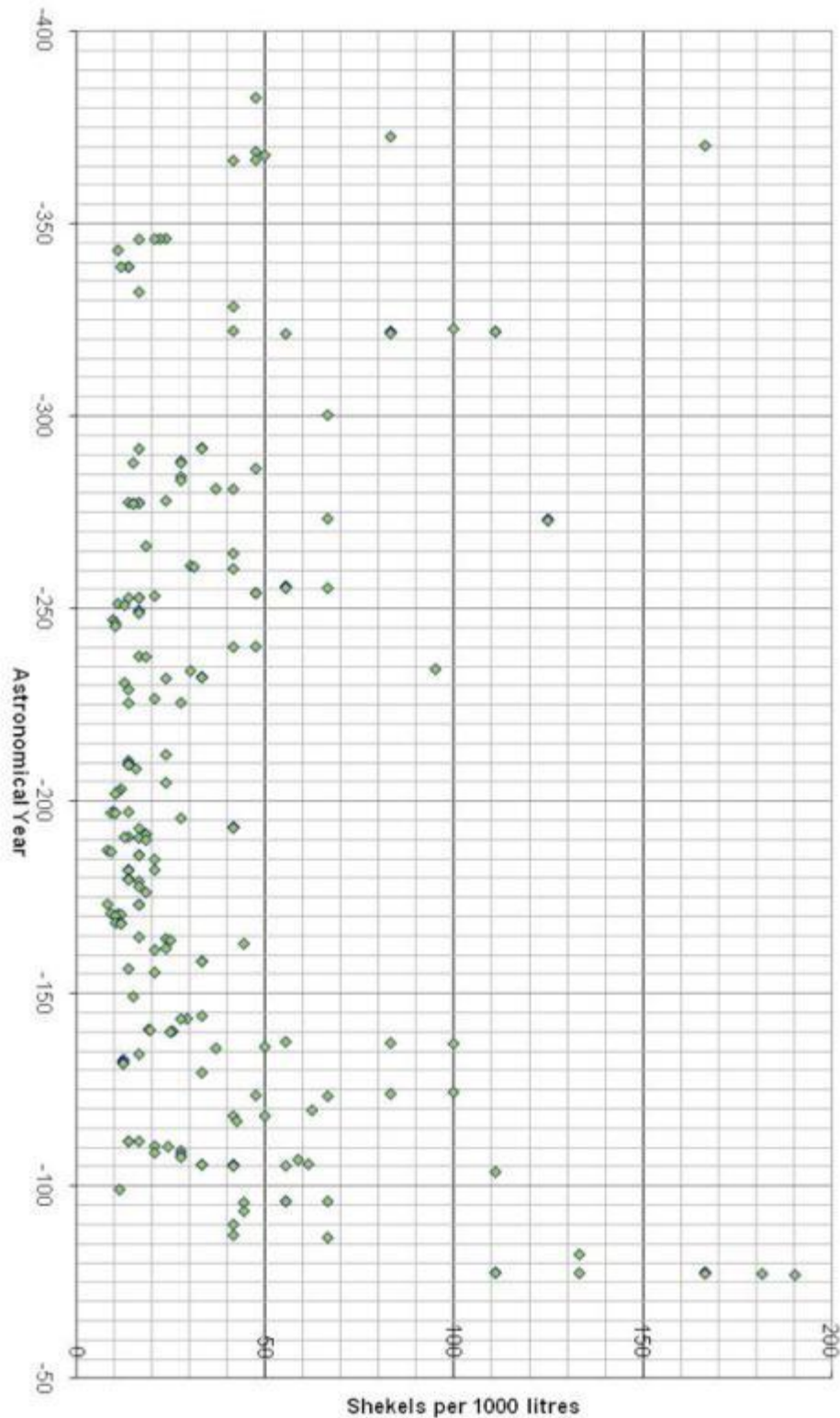




MUSTARD PRICES

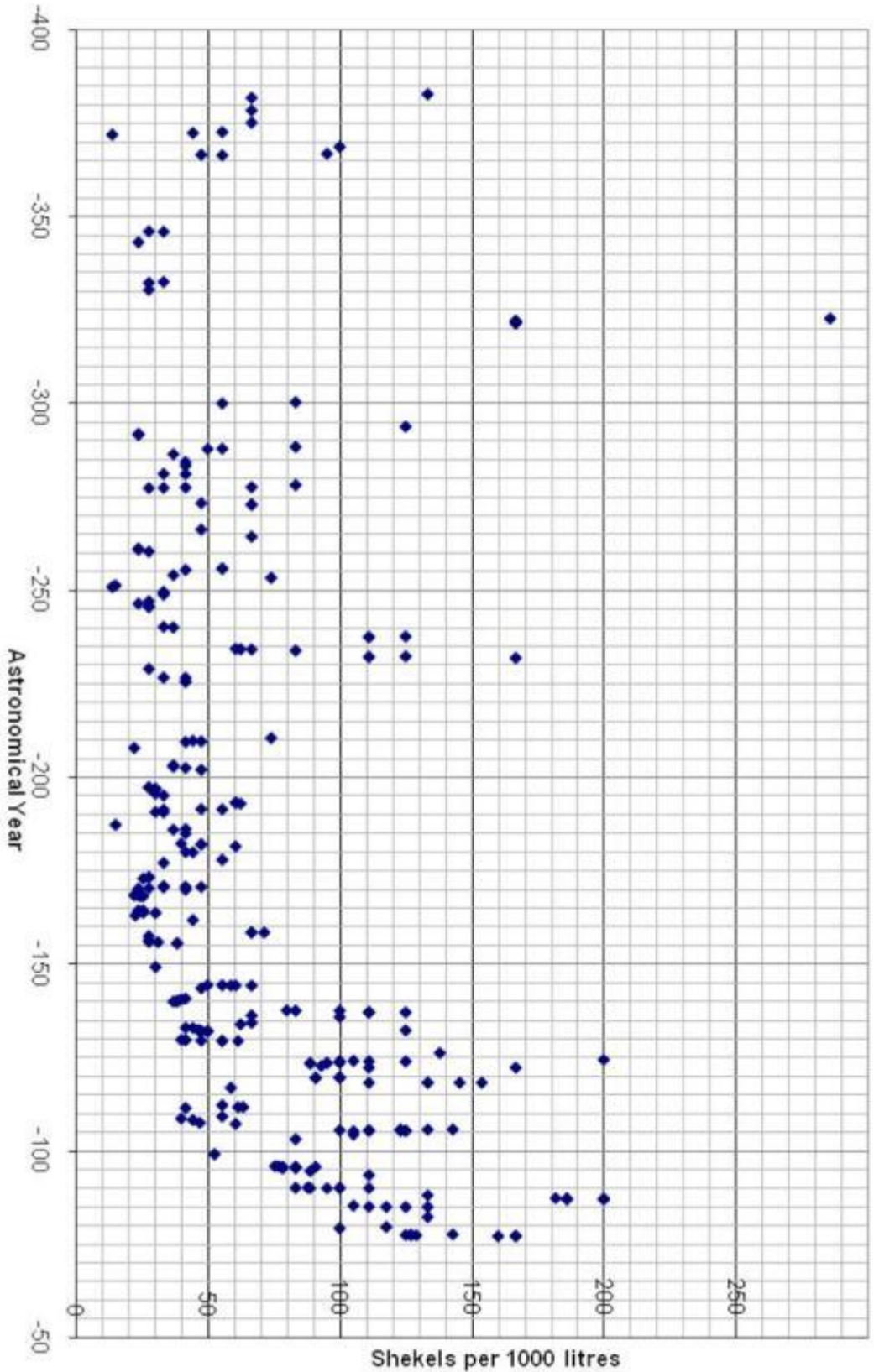


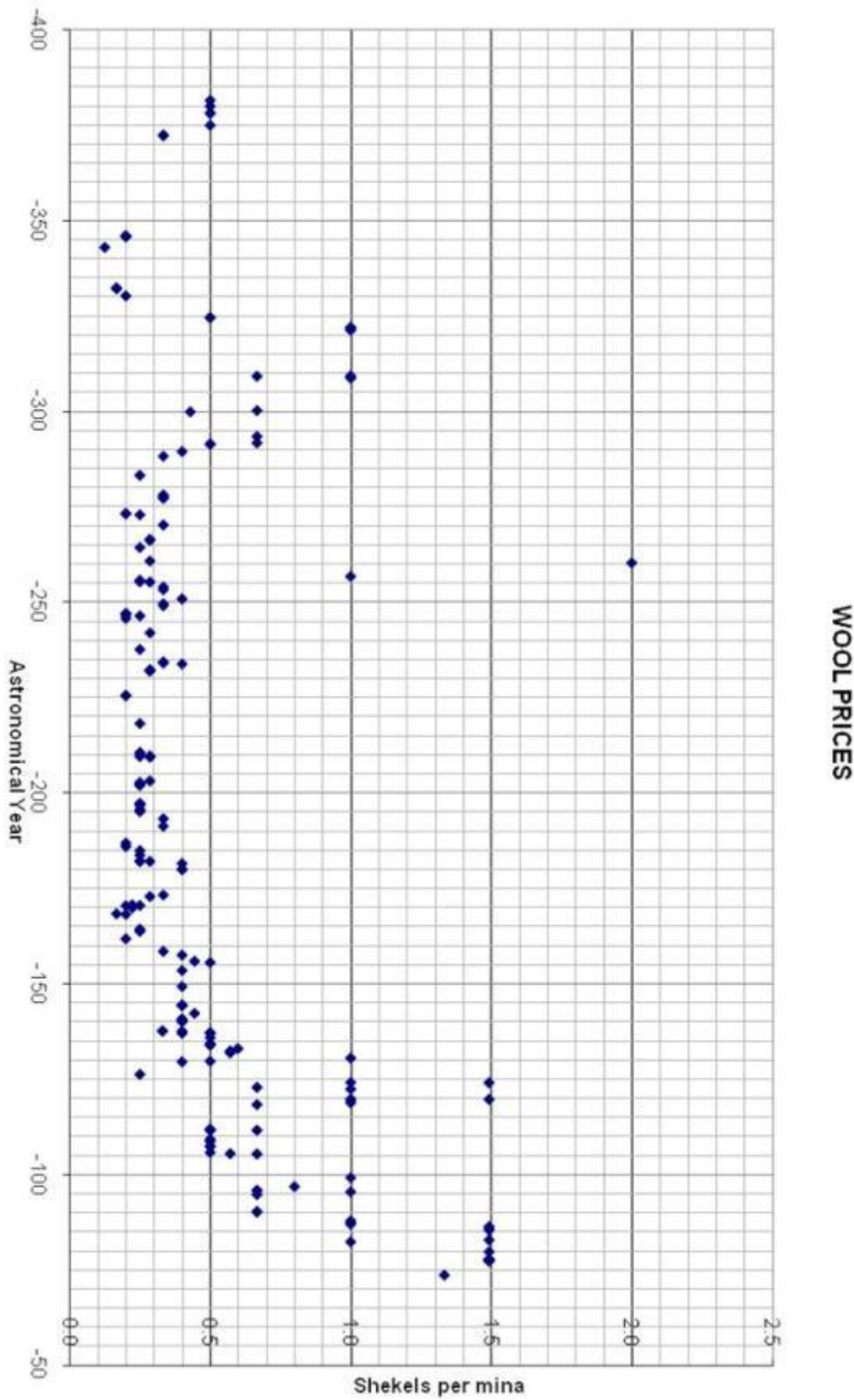
CRESS PRICES

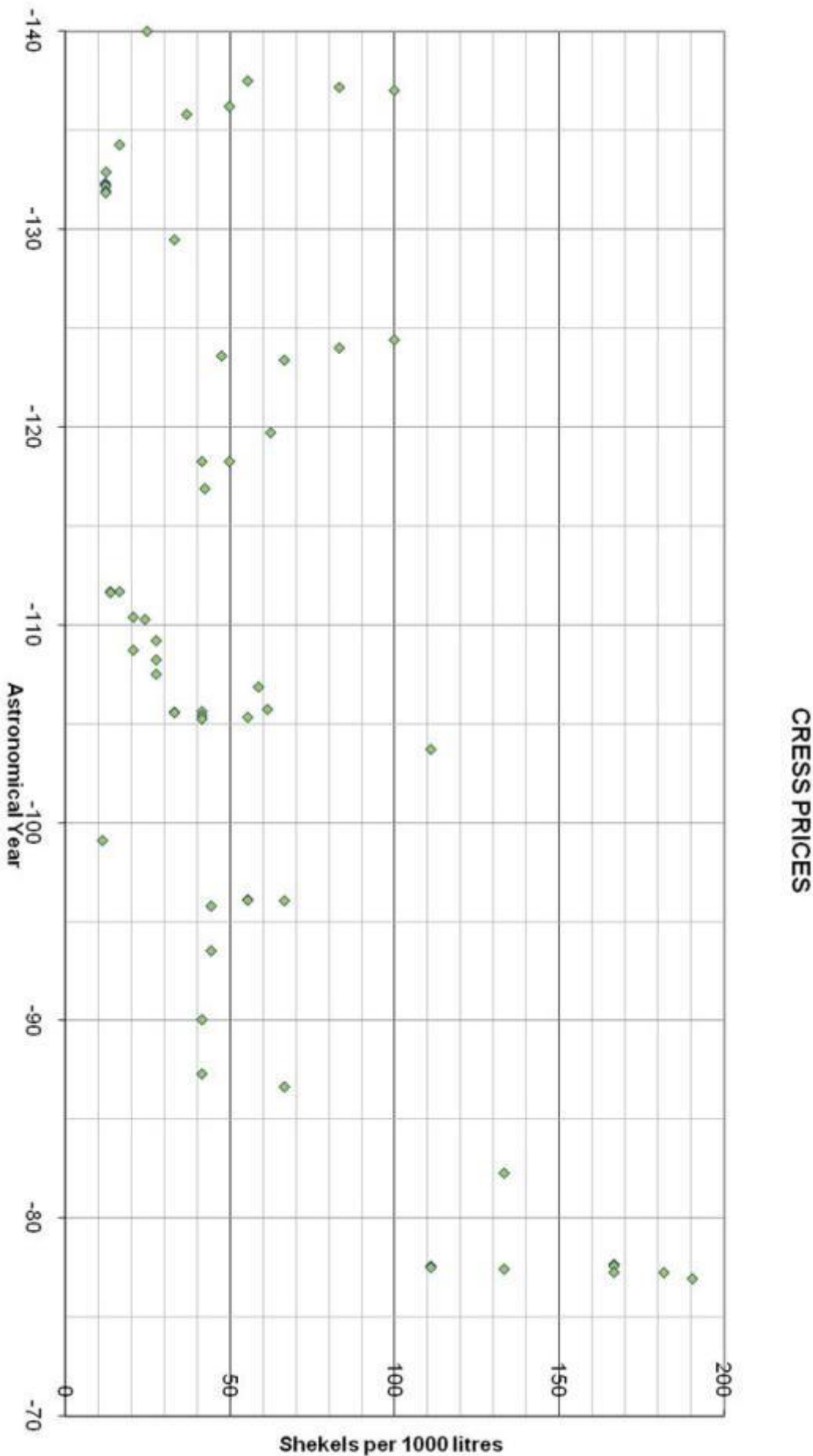


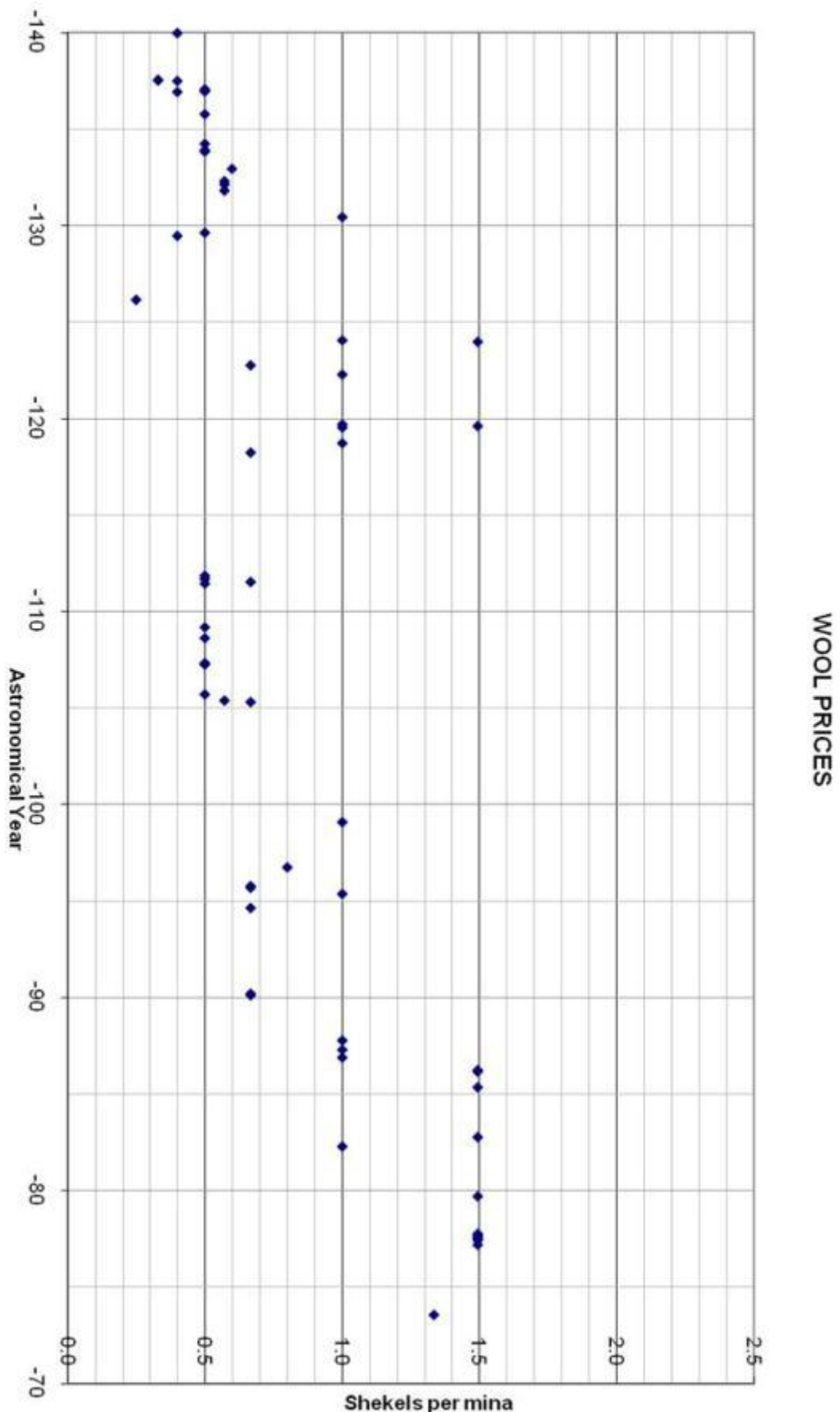


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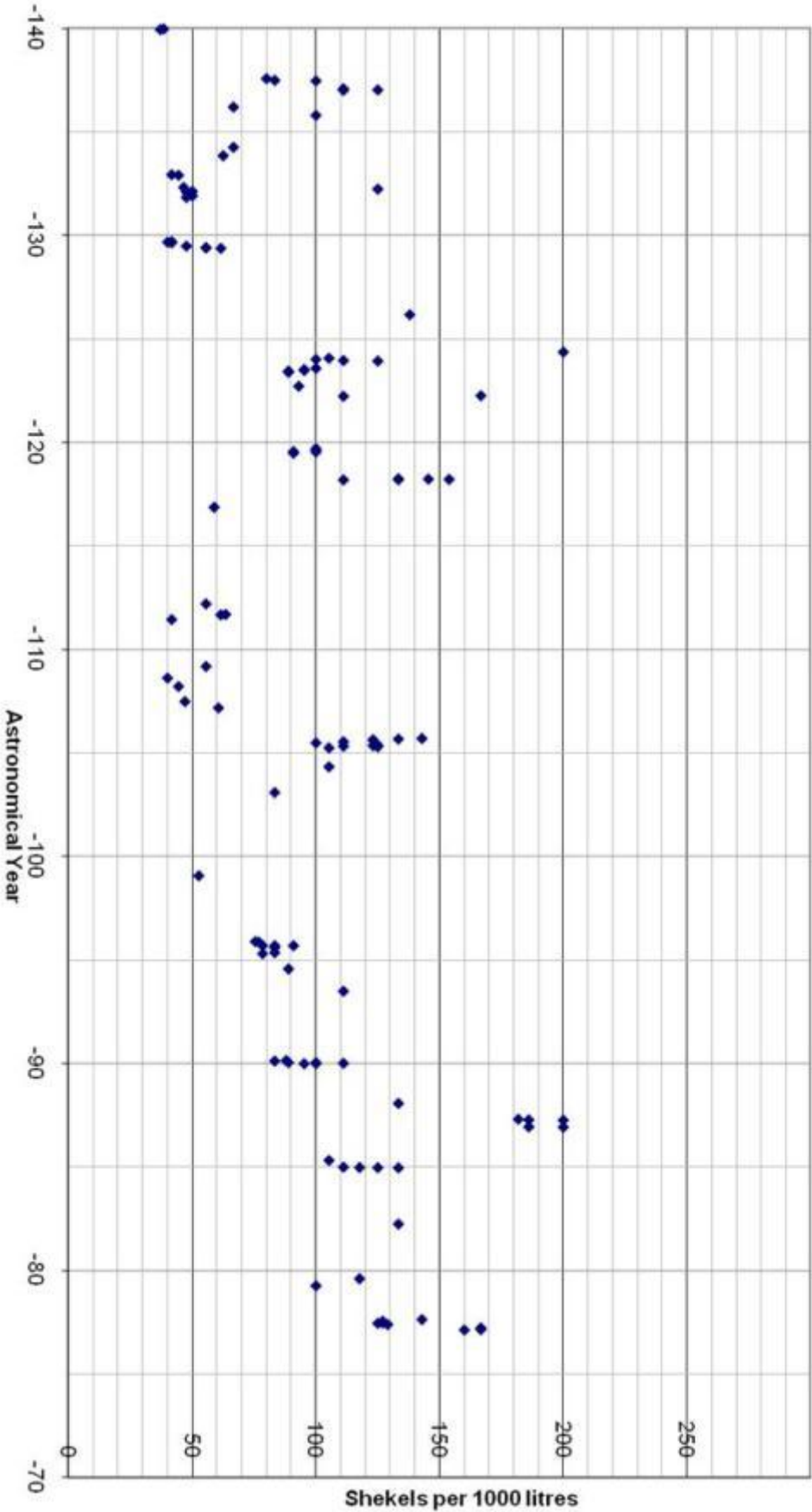


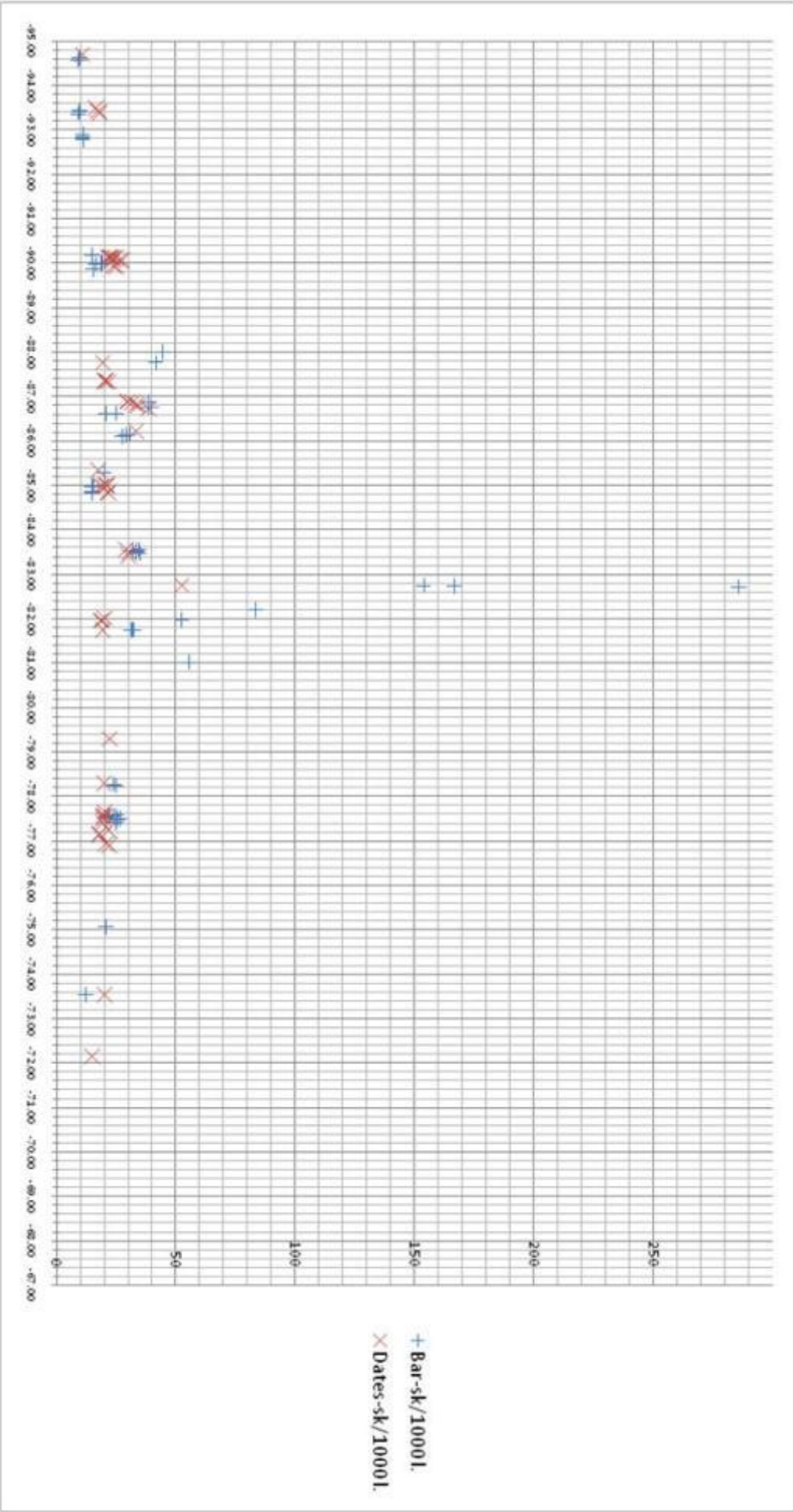






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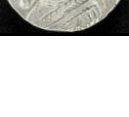

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**Museum of Old and New Art, Berridale,  
Tasmania - Parthian and Related Coins**

MONA Catalogue Number	Denomination	Ruler	Date	Mint	Sellwood Type No.	Image No. (Obv./Rev.)	Orientation	Weight (g.)	Diameter (mm)	Features of interest	Obverse Image	Reverse Image
2001.101	AR Drachm	Sinatrucos	93 BC +	Rhagae	33.3	1051/1055	↑	4.15	20.4	Antlered Red Deer Tiara		
2001.104	AR Drachm	Sinatrucos	93 BC +	Ecbatana	33.2	1671/1674	↑	3.79	20.5	Antlered Red Deer Tiara		
2001.099	AR Drachm	Sinatrucos	93 BC +	Rhagae	33.4	1682/1683	↖	4.15	21	Antlered Red Deer Tiara		
1998.065	AR Drachm	Sinatrucos	93 BC +	Rhagae	33.6	1688/1692	↑	3.71	19.04	Antlered Red Deer Tiara		
2001.102	AR Drachm	Phraates III	68-58 BC	Rhagae	30.16	1701/1705	↑	4.05	18.19	Eight pointed star on obv.		
2001.103	AR Drachm	Orodes I	80/79-74/3 BC	Rhagae (?)	31.6	1709/1712	↖	4.02	19.93	Tiara eight pointed star. Unique legend type.		
1998.061	AR Drachm	Orodes I	80/79-74/3 BC	Ecbatana	31.5	1718/1723	↗	3.9	19.6	Tiara six pointed star		
2001.098	AR Drachm	Mithridates II	121-97 BC	Ecbatana	27.2	1809/1812	↑	4.05	20.78	Flan widespread		
2001.107	AE Tetradrachm	Tiridates	May 28/7 BC = (ΕΠΙΣ ΔΑΙΣ) SE 285	Seleucia on Tigris	55.5 or 55.6	1925/1926	↗	15.04	29.32	Nike and sceptre		

2001.065	AE Tetradrachm	Gortazes II	Oct-May 50/1 AD = (BΞT) SE 362	Seleucia on Tigris	65.28-32	1927/1928	↗	14.48	27.14	Rev. King enthroned right. Tyche		
2001.112	AE Tetradrachm	Vologases I	Jan 53 AD = (ΔΞT ΠEΠI) SE 364	Seleucia on Tigris	68.9	1930/1931	↑	14.74	25.88	Tyche and sceptre		
2001.108	AE Tetradrachm	Kamnaskires IV or V	74/3-56/5 BC	Seleucia on Hedyphon	NA	3557/3558	↖	15.85	29.45	Star, crescent, anchor, reasonably legible Greek		
1998.068	AR Drachm	Phraates IV	38-2 BC	Ecbatana	52.10	3559/3560	↑	3.56	18.59	Obv. Eagle behind head with wreath		
1998.062	AR Drachm	Phraates IV	38-2 BC	Ecbatana	52.10	3561/3562	↑	3.53	19.42	Obv. Eagle behind head with wreath		
1998.063	AR Drachm	Phraates IV	38-2BC	Ecbatana	54.7	3563/3565	↗	3.75	18.07	Obv. Eagle behind head with wreath		
2001.105	AR Drachm	Phraates IV	38-2 BC	Laodicaea	52.16	3567/3569	↑	4.06	20.96	Obv. Eagle behind head with wreath		
2001.100	AR Drachm	Mithridates III	57-4 BC	Ecbatana	41.13	3570/3572	↖	3.88	19.57	NA		
2001.106	AE Tetradrachm	Vologases III	123 AD = (EAY) SE 435	Seleucia on Tigris	79.14	3573/3576	↑	12.25	27.95	B behind Obv. Head. Tyche and wreath		
2001.110	AE Tetradrachm	Orodes II	50-40 BC	Seleucia on Tigris	48.1	3577/3578	↖	15.25	28.53	Nike and sceptre		
2001.096	AE Tetradrachm	Gortazes II	June 44 AD = (ENT) SE 355	Seleucia on Tigris	65.2	3579/3580	↑	14.6	26.54	NA		

2001.111	AE Tetradrachm	Vardanes II	(ΓΟΡ) SE 173 (?)	Seleucia on Tigris	61.2	3582/3583	↑	14.59	25.9	Hair over ear		
2001.115	AE Tetradrachm	Vardanes II	Jan 58 AD = (ΘΞΤ ΠΕΡΙΤ) SE 369	Seleucia on Tigris	69.10	3584/3585	↑	14.3	26.49	NA		
2001.116	AE Tetradrachm	Phraates IV	April 23 BC = (ΘΠΣ ΑΡΤΕ) SE 289	Seleucia on Tigris	52.9	3586/3587	↑	14.1	30.2	NA		
2001.097	AR Drachm	Vologases III	AD 105-147	Ecbatana	78.1	3588/3589	↑	3.8				
1998.067	AR Drachm	Vologases IV	AD 147-191	Ecbatana	84.132	3590/3591	↑	3.65				
1998.069	AR Drachm	Vologases III	AD 105-147	Ecbatana	78.4	3594/3595	↗	3.82				
1998.060	AR Drachm	Vologases III	AD 105-147	Ecbatana	78.5	3596/3597	↑	3.78				
2001.162	AR Drachm	Osroes II	AD 190	Ecbatana	85.2	3598/3599	↑	3.84				
1998.064	AR Drachm	Vologases III	AD 105-147	?	78.4	3600/3601	↑	3.85				
1998.066	AR Drachm	Osroes II	AD 190	?	85.1	3602/3603	↑	3.52				
1998.030	AU Stater	Pharnaces II of Pontus	63 BC - 47 BC	?	NA	3607/3608	↗	8.2	20.5	Beautiful mint condition	