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THE LAST ENEMY OF THE REPUBLIC:

Political Legitimacy, Messianism, and the Origins of Mithridates VI's Hatred for Rome.

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Nous avons aujourd'hui des soins plus importants.
Mithridate revient, peut-être inexorable.
Plus il est malheureux, plus il est redoutable.
- Jean Racine

ABSTRACT

Mithridates VI Eupator Dionysus ruled the kingdom of Pontus in northern Anatolia for almost 60 years, and the wars he waged against the Roman Republic from 88 to 63 BCE granted him everlasting infamy among Roman historians. At the zenith of his power, Mithridates extended his power through a vast Empire that included the Black Sea region, all of Asia Minor and mainland Greece. In addition to his impressive empire-building skills and to the actual threat Pontus represented to Roman expansion in the East under his rule, Mithridates is commonly portrayed in Roman historiography as the perfect archetypical enemy, a vicious barbarian who hated Rome above all other things. And such a portrayal is not totally unjustifiable. On one day in 88 BCE tens of thousands of Romans and other Italians were brutally assassinated in different parts of Asia Minor. That date would become notoriously known in history as the Asiatic Vespers. The main objective of this dissertation is to analyze the first decades of Mithridates reign, from his coronation in 120 to the outbreak of the First Mithridatic War in 88 BCE, with a view to identifying the possible origins of Mithridates' infamous enmity against the Romans that led to almost 25 years of war. In this context, it challenges both hypotheses of a supposedly innate rivalry against the presence of Rome in Asia and of the king's unlimited desire for territorial expansion, in favor of a broader interpretation of how conflicting and irreconcilable worldviews fueled by messianic traditions resulted in a conflict that would seal the fate of all Anatolian Hellenistic kingdoms.

Keywords: Kingdom of Pontus; Mithridates VI; Mithridatic Wars; Messianism; Propaganda.

RESUMO

Mitrídates VI Eupator Dionísio governou o reino de Ponto no norte da Anatólia por quase 60 anos e as guerras que travou contra a República Romana de 88 a 63 AEC garantiram-lhe infâmia eterna entre os historiadores romanos. No ápice de seu poder, Mitrídates formou um vasto Império que incluía a região do Mar Negro, toda a Ásia Menor e a Grécia continental. Além de suas impressionantes habilidades de construção de impérios e da ameaça real que o Ponto sob seu governo representava para a expansão romana no Oriente, Mitrídates é comumente retratado na historiografia romana como o inimigo arquetípico perfeito, um bárbaro cruel que odiava Roma acima de todas as outras coisas. E tal representação não é totalmente injustificável. Em um dia de 88 AEC, dezenas de milhares de romanos e outros italianos foram brutalmente assassinados em diferentes partes da Ásia Menor. Essa data se tornaria notoriamente conhecida na história como as Vésperas Asiáticas. O objetivo principal desta dissertação é analisar as primeiras décadas do reinado de Mitrídates, desde sua coroação em 120 AEC até a eclosão da Primeira Guerra Mitridática, em 88 AEC, com vistas a identificar as possíveis origens de seu notório ódio pelos romanos, que causou quase 25 anos de guerra. Nesse contexto, desafiam-se ambas as hipóteses de uma rivalidade supostamente inata contra a presença de Roma na Ásia e de um desejo ilimitado do rei de expandir seu território, em favor de uma interpretação mais ampla que buscar analisar como visões de mundo conflitantes e irreconciliáveis alimentadas por tradições messiânicas resultaram em um conflito que selaria o destino de todos os reinos helenísticos da Anatólia.

Palavras-chave: Reino do Ponto; Mitrídates VI; Messianismo; Sincretismo; Propaganda.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

App. *Civ*.	Appian. *The Civil Wars*.
App. *Mac*.	Appian. *The Macedonian Wars.*
App. *Mit*.	Appian. *The Mithridatic Wars.*
App. *Syr.*	Appian. *The Syrian Wars*.
Aris. *Pol*.	Aristotle. *Politics*.
Arr. *Ana*.	Arrian. *The Anabasis of Alexander*.
Arr. *Per*.	Arrian. *Periplus of the Euxine Sea*.
Athe.	Athenaeus of Naucratis. *The Deipnosophists*.
CAH	*Cambridge Ancient History*.
Cic. *Agr*.	Cicero. *De lege Agraria*.
Cic. *Man.*	Cicero. *Pro lege Manilia*.
Cic. *Rep*.	Cicero. *On the Republic*.
Dio	Cassius Dio. *Roman History*.
Diod.	Diodorus Siculus. *Bibliotheca Historica*.
Diog.	Diogenes Laërtius. *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*.
Eutr.	Eutropius. *Abridgement of Roman History*.
Flor.	Florus. *The Epitome of Roman History*.
Gen.	The Bible. *Genesis*.
Hdt.	Herodotus. *Histories*.
Hom.	Homer. *Iliad*.
Hor. *Epi*.	Horace. *Epistles*.
IDelos.	*Inscriptions de Délos*.
IOSPE.	*Inscriptiones antiquae Orae Septentrionalis Ponti Euxini graecae et latinae.*
IGCyr.	*Inscriptions from Greek Cyrenaica*.
Just.	Justin. *Epitome of Pompeius Trogus' Philippic histories*.
JC.	Julius Caesar. *Commentarii de Bello Gallico*.
Lact. *Inst*.	Lactantius. *Divine Institutes*.
Lact. *Epit*.	Lactantius. *Epitome*.
Liv. *Urb.*	Livy. *Ab Urbe Condita*.
Liv. *Per.*	Livy. *Periochae*.
1 Macc.	The Bible. 1 Maccabeans

Macr.	Macrobius. *Saturnalia*.
Mem.	Memnon. *History of Heraclea*.
OGIS.	*Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae*.
Oro.	Orosius. *Historiae Adversum Paganos*.
P-Ap.	Pseudo-Apollodorus. *Bibliotheca*.
Paus.	Pausanias. *Description of Greece.*
Plin.	Pliny the Elder. *Natural History*.
Plut. *Alex*.	Plutarch. *Alexander*.
Plut. *GG*.	Plutarch. *Gaius Gracchus*.
Plut. *Dem*.	Plutarch. *Demetrius*.
Plut. *Eum*.	Plutarch. *Eumenes*.
Plut. *Flam*.	Plutarch. *Flaminius.*
Plut. *Luc*.	Plutarch. *Lucullus*.
Plut. *Mar*.	Plutarch. *Marius*.
Plut. *Mar*.	Plutarch. *Moralia*.
Plut. *Mul*.	Plutarch. *Mulierum Virtutes*.
Plut. *Pomp*.	Plutarch. *Pompey*.
Plut. *Sert*.	Plutarch. *Sertorius*.
Plut. *Sula*.	Plutarch. *Sulla*.
Plut. *TG*.	Plutarch. *Tiberius Gracchus*.
Pol.	Polybius. *Histories*.
Pos.	Poseidonius. *The Histories*.
Ps-Scy.	Pseudo-Scylax. *Periplous*.
Rhet. Her	*Rhetorica ad Herennium.*
Sal. *Ep. Mit.*	Sallust. *Epistula Mithridatis*.
Str.	Strabo. *Geography*.
Sud. *Basi*.	The Suda s.v. *Basileia*.
Suet. *JC.*	Suetonius. *Life of Julius Cesar*.
Suet. *Ner.*	Suetonius. *Life of Nero*.
Syll.	*Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum.*
Tac.	Tacitus. *Annals*.
Val. Max.	Valerius Maximus. *Factorum ac dictorum memorabilium*.
Vel.	Velleius Paterculus. *History of Rome.*

Vir.	Virgil. *Aeneid*.
Xen. *Ana*.	Xenophon. *Anabasis*.
Xen. *Hell*.	Xenophon. *Hellenica*.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation intends to discuss the reasons why the backwater, distant and politically irrelevant kingdom of Pontus, in northern Anatolia, achieved the status of a major enemy of the Roman Republic in the first century[1], and managed to resist to the Roman military prowess for over two decades.

When compared to the relatively easy triumphs Rome conquered in its conflicts against the Antigonids or the Seleucids, the Mithridatic Wars offer a distinct example not only of a fierce disposition to resist Roman expansion in the East, but also of a deliberate policy to assemble a diverse military coalition of Eastern peoples based on shared cultural traditions.

The specificity of Pontic resistance is even more noteworthy when contrasted to the decisions taken by other minor Hellenistic Anatolian kingdoms. The Attalid dynasty of Pergamum, the most powerful and well-known kingdom in the region, gave up their independence and surrendered their territory to the Republic. Bithynia would soon emulate the decision of their southern neighbor during the wars against Pontus. In central Anatolia, Cappadocia numbly accepted Roman interference and degraded itself to the status of client-kingdom. Meanwhile, Pontus resisted.

The wars between Pontus and the Roman Republic cannot be understood if not by the study of the last king of the Pontic dynasty: Mithridates VI Eupator.

Pontus emerged in the first half of the third century in the northern region of the former Achaemenid satrapy of Cappadocia[2] (Katpatuka) that the Greeks called "Pontus", given its proximity to the sea. It was founded by a Persian nobleman called Mithridates from the city of Cius, who allegedly descended from the Achaemenid royal house.

From Mithridates I – called "Ctistes" for his role in the foundation of the new kingdom – on, his dynasty would rule Pontus and expand its sovereignty over other parts of Asia Minor for nearly two centuries. Despite the impressive achievements of his forebearers, no other Pontic monarch would deserve so much historic attention as the last king of the line: Mithridates VI Eupator Dionysus.

Eupator was born in Sinope, the main city of the kingdom and one of the most important seaports around the Euxine. He was king Mithridates V Euergetes' firstborn and heir to the

[1] All dates referred to in this thesis are to be considered Before the Common Era (BCE), unless expressly indicated as belonging to the Common Era (CE). For considerations on this particular year, see Chapter II.
[2] Str. 12.1-2.

Pontic throne. His birth was augured by a comet that cut through the skies of Anatolia in the year 135. Through a succession of marriages with Seleucid princesses, the Mithridatic kings could claim descend not only from Cyrus and Darius, the great kings of kings of the Achaemenid Empire, but also from Seleucus Nicator and the greatest conqueror of all time, Alexander the Great.

From a tender age, Mithridates exhibited uncanny skills in horse riding and committed himself with equal tenacity to physical exercises and philosophy. The years spent in one of the most bustling ports in Asia Minor had a definitive impact in the young prince education and certainly influenced in his alleged capacity to speak more than twenty different languages.[3]

In effect, not only Sinope but all of Asia Minor was characterized by a constant flow of traders, travelers, migrants and invaders, resulting in a rich amalgam of coexisting peoples, religions, and traditions, "a bridge between the East and the West".[4]

Eupator's father, king Mithridates V Euergetes, inherited from his predecessor, his uncle Mithridates IV Philopator Philadelphus, a policy of reconciliation with the other kingdoms in Anatolia and friendship with the Roman Republic, after the wars caused by Pharnakes I, Euergetes' father. Euergetes took this policy one step further and granted military support to Rome during the Third Punic War.

When Rome – to the astonishment of all – was bequeathed the Pergamene kingdom upon the death of its last king, Attalus III, a self-proclaimed usurper named Aristonicus led a popular revolt against Roman annexation. Euergetes, together with other Anatolian kings, once again offered his armies to protect Roman interests.[5]

By strengthening his friendship with Rome, Euergetes was probably aiming at ensuring his own domestic and regional political stability. His efforts proved to be futile. The king was poisoned to death by internal conspirators, some of his closest allies, around 120.[6]

The same conspirators, as it seems, also planned to get rid of prince Mithridates VI Eupator, who survived many attempts against his life.[7] The young king, however, would not wait for his adversaries to finally accomplish their wicked plots and left Sinope. After gathering enough support in the countryside, Eupator returned to the court and took power. His mother

[3] Plin. 7.24.
[4] Christian Marek. *In the Land of a Thousand Gods: a History of Asia Minor in the Ancient World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016. p. 3.
[5] App. *Mit*. 10.
[6] Str. 10.4.10. Adrienne Mayor. *The Poison King: The life and legend of Mithradates, Rome's deadliest enemy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 68.
[7] Just. 37.2.

and younger brother were accused of being involved in the assassination attempts on the king and would die shortly afterwards in prison. Mithridates also decided to marry his own sister, a princess called Laodike, a practice not uncommon among Eastern Hellenistic monarchies.

When Mithridates was finally in full control of his kingdom, he launched his plan to expand its territory. The king sent his troops to help the Greek poleis on the Crimean Peninsula that were being assailed by the Scythians and defeated the barbarians who had driven both Darius in 512[8] and the Macedonians in 331[9] out of their land. The Pontic king then claimed Chersonesus and the other Greek cities and the Bosporus kingdom as his prize.

After extending his control over almost the entire northern and eastern shores of the Black Sea, Mithridates turned his attention to Asia Minor. He left for a new journey into the wild, this time into neighboring Bithynia and Pergamum, only recently annexed by the Roman Republic as a province. Upon his return, the king invaded the lands of the Galatians and allied himself with the Bithynian king Nicomedes III with whom he divided the territory of Paphlagonia after a combined invasion.[10] Soon after that, he started plotting to put the cuffs on Cappadocia.

To Rome, the Pontic expansion seemed as a potential threat to the stability of Asia Minor, the region where its most profitable province was located. Faithfully following its doctrine of divide and conquer, the Senate increasingly intervened diplomatically into the region's international affairs, with a view to maintaining the Anatolian kingdoms' relative independence, while fomenting regional competition and, thus, preventing the emergence of any potential rivals.

However, in 91, the dispute over the extension of citizenship and voting rights to Italian allies intensified and the ensuing internal conflict swept the Italian peninsula for three years. At the same time, the province of Asia and the neighboring allied states in Anatolia were falling into the unscrupulous hands of rapacious private money-lenders and tax-farmers who – at least theoretically – acted in the name of the Republic.

In 89, the king of Bithynia, Nicomedes IV, instigated by Roman advisers, invaded Pontus, eager for its wealth. Mithridates took advantage of the situation in Rome and the pretext offered by their legates' involvement in the Bithynian aggression to launch a military campaign that would subjugate all of Anatolia, including the Roman province of Asia.

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[8] Hdt. 4.142.
[9] Just. 12.2. The Scythians defeated a Macedonian army composed of about thirty thousand men, led by Zopyrion, who was left by Alexander as governor of the Pontus.
[10] Just. 37.4.2.

But Mithridates would not be satisfied with his triumph over Rome and the conquest of all the region. Following his orders, on one day in 88, thousands of Romans were slaughtered in a perfectly-coordinated macabre plan carried out in many different locations throughout Asia Minor. The massacre would become notoriously known as the Asiatic Vespers. In cities like Ephesus, Pergamum, Adramyttium, Kaunos, Tralles, Nisa, and on the island of Chios, men, women and children of Roman and Latin origin were killed in cold blood, an unequivocal demonstration of the growing animosity towards Roman presence and its extortionate tax-harvesting policies.

The two decades after the Vespers were characterized by intermittent conflicts between Mithridates' troops and the legions of the Republic. Even during his last years, when his power over Asia Minor was waning, Mithridates was seen as an enemy to be vanquished once and for all, and none other than Cicero would vehemently call for his elimination.[11]

Academic interest in the Mithridates' saga has endured ever since. During the Late Antiquity and the Middle Age most of the attention devoted to the last king of Pontus was directed to eccentric aspects of his personality, such as his alleged immunity to poison and his mythical universal antidote.

In the fourteenth century CE, Giovanni Boccaccio wrote the *De casibus virorum illustrium*, in which he recounts the fall of famous men in Antiquity. In this work, the author included Mithridates among the great characters of Roman history, together with Pompey, Julius Cesar and Marc Anthony. The book was widely circulated and translated into several languages.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries CE, Mithridates became a recurring character in European literature, theatre and opera. Gautier de Costes de la Calprenède published, in 1637, *La mort de Mithridate* and the success of this work inspired Jean Racine, to write a play called *Mitridate*, in 1673, considered to be his masterpiece and a favorite of King Louis XIV's.[12]

About thirty years after its first performance, Racine's tragedy was translated into Italian by Parini and set to music by Alessandro Scarlatti. The first performance of the opera was

[11] Cic. *Agr*. 2.52.
[12] Lâtife Summerer. "The Search for Mithridates. Reception of Mithridates VI between the 15h and the 20th Centuries". In: Jakob M. Højte (ed). *Mithridates VI and the Pontic Kingdom*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2009. p. 19.

staged in 1707. In the following years, several librettos were written and composed for other operas with titles such as *Mitridate*, *Mitridate, rè di Ponto* and *Mitridate Eupator*.[13]

In modern historiography, the first work to deal with Mithridates is volume VIII of Charles Rollin's *Histoire Romaine*, published in the 1730s. Rollin's *Histoire* was quite widespread in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries CE and served as an inspiration for visual interpretations of several neoclassical artists.

When German historiography emerged, Mithridates' life and the historical events associated with him were brought under the scrutiny of the historiographical method. One chapter of Theodor Mommsen's *Römische Geschichte* was dedicated to the Mithridatic Wars, inaugurating nineteenth century scientific research on the subject.

A perfect illustration of the prejudices of European historiography in its initial moments, Mommsen's work portrays Mithridates as a capricious, violent oriental ruler. The historian compares the Pontic king to Ottoman rulers like Mehmed II and Suleiman, and accuses him of being a false Philhellene, who pretended to be fond of Hellenistic culture just to lure the Greek population of Asia Minor.[14]

The same Eurocentric perspective that sought to create an image of the Orient and of Orientals in opposition to a supposedly virtuous European moral rigidity, inherited from Greek-Roman ancestors[15] inspired the first historiographical work entirely dedicated to Mithridates – *Mithridate Eupator, roi de Pont* – published in 1890 by French historian and numismatist Theodore Reinach. Reinach's biography conveys a depreciative view of the oriental features of the kings of Pontus and suggests that Mithridates was "not an enemy of Rome alone, but of all European culture.[16]

This bigoted approach could still be heard in the first decades of the twentieth century when William Tarn published his influential *Hellenistic Civilization*. In that work, the author refers to Mithridates as a "remarkable barbarian" and suggests that the Mithridatic Wars were an omen of the ruin of Hellenism.[17] Other twentieth-century historians would also mention Mithridates, almost exclusively in isolated references or chapters in larger works dedicated to the crises of the Roman Republic.

[13] *Ibid*. p. 20.
[14] Theodor Mommsen. *Römische Geschichte*. Book IV. Leipzig, 1856. pp. 280-281.
[15] See: Edward Said. *Orientalism*. Nova York: Pantheon, 1978.
[16] Theodore Reinach. *Mithridate Eupator, roi du Pont*. Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1890. p. 295.
[17] William Tarn. *Hellenistic Civilisation*. 3rd Ed. Nova York: Meridian Books, 1964 (1st ed in 1927). p. 42.

The most important exception to the decline of academic interest on the life of the last king of Pontus experimented in the following decades of the last century is certainly the work of historical-novelist Alfred Duggan, published in 1958, with the title *He died old: Mithridates Eupator, King of Pontus*. Influenced by nascent anti-colonialism, the Argentine-British author offers a very different approach to mainstream historiography on Mithridates up until the second half of the twentieth century. The author claims that the Roman expansion collided with people with a culture older than their own, superior in everything except military expertise, to whom Rome could offer nothing but the "grasping hand of the tax-farmer and the blood-drinking sword of the legionary". In the introduction to his biography, Duggan concludes: "in Asia Minor the Romans were resisted by civilized men who regarded them as savages. This is a study of the greatest hero of that resistance".[18]

In the 1980s a novel stream of academic research emerged based on the wide use of material sources – especially numismatic and epigraphic – with a view to establishing a more critical reading of the available literary sources as well as to striving to assess an autonomous Pontic version of the events relating to the rise, climax and fall of its Hellenistic kingdom. Brian McGing's extremely influential *The Foreign Policy of Mithridates VI Eupator, King of Pontus*, published in 1986, is the work that best expresses this new analytical spirit.

Present-day academic production on Mithridates VI of Pontus has known a reinvigorated enthusiasm. More than a dozen new works of compelling historiographic relevance exclusively dedicated to the study of Mithridates VI, the Pontic dynasty, and/or the Mithridatic Wars from a non-Roman perspective have been published in the last two decades, in addition to a vast number of scientific articles, papers and symposia. A significant part of this impressive academic production is referred to in this dissertation.

Unlike the Parthian and later the Sassanid Empires – who would eventually become Rome's main rivals in the East – Mithridates did not have, upon ascending to the throne, a geographically vast, extraordinarily rich or politically cohesive empire. Nor did he have a particularly effective bureaucratic and military structure capable of challenging the greatest power the world had ever known.

On the contrary, Asia Minor had been the main stage for the confrontations between the most powerful Hellenistic kingdoms formed after the death of Alexander and the Wars of the Diadochi: Antigonid Macedonia, Lagid Egypt and Seleucid Asia. At least since Alexandre's

[18] Alfred Duggan. *He Died Old: Mithridates Eupator, King of Pontus*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. p. 9.

invasion, the region had experienced profound political instability aggravated by its ethnic-cultural heterogeneity.

Alexander's empire was built on the battlefield over the remains of the defeated Achaemenid Empire. War was not only the backdrop for his early conquests, but also the general rule for the first forty years that followed his death. Alexander's generation would preside over the transition from military conquest to the creation of a relatively more stable world which emerged with the independent Hellenistic kingdoms. Alexander's life, behavior and achievements, however, would forge a model that would be emulated by all Hellenistic kings who sought for power.[19]

The continuous competition between the main successors created the conditions for the emergence of small and medium-sized monarchies in Anatolia, the kingdom of Pontus was one of those monarchies. However, the sudden decline of one of the main contenders in the Hellenistic world resulted in a serious blow to the whole system and culminated in the Roman final conquest of the region.

Although the Roman Republic lacked a clear foreign policy towards the East[20], the growing interests of their internal political groups kept pushing the legions deeper and deeper into the East and Eastern disputes. Even without a clear policy to the region, political instability in Asia Minor should have provided Rome with the perfect opportunity for a rapid process of annexation.

In Pontus, however, they would find an indomitable rival.

Mithridates managed to establish himself as the champion of Asia Minor against the excesses of Roman imperialism and to bind the peoples of the region to his goals of fighting Rome through alliances and political propaganda for nearly a quarter of a century.

Why did Mithridates choose to fight? Why not simply comply with Roman demands and try to find a way to preserve some form of local autonomy even when the very presence of Roman agents was a test to the king's exercise of power? And, more importantly, having decided for rivalry, why should he demonstrate such incommensurable hatred by massacring thousands and thousands of Romans and making any future settlement with the world's greatest power virtually impossible?

Inspired by contemporary Roman accounts and late Roman historians, the main hypothesis offered by XIX and early-XX century CE works suggests that the Mithridates VI'

[19] Edward M. Anson. *Alexander's Heirs: The Age of the Successors*. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014. p. 2.
[20] Fergus Millar. The Roman Near East, 31 B.C.-A.D. 337. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993. p. 80.

incommensurable greed and barbaric behavior were the main causes of the wars even before the king ascended to the throne. This evidently biased explanation fails to analyze the evident effects of the increased presence of Rome in the region and to demonstrate Mithridates' supposedly innate hostility to Rome.

Motivated by anti-colonialism, later works emphasized Rome's avarice and the role of its private contractors avid for Eastern riches. Again, such a perspective seems to be unable to explain why Mithridatic Pontus – and only Pontus – decided to resist Roman presence in Asia Minor. Furthermore, this interpretation tends to oversimplify the complex political developments of the Late Republic as well as to neglect Eastern monarchs' interests and political decisions.

The main objective of this dissertation therefore is to offer an alternative perspective on the reasons why Mithridates VI of Pontus decided to oppose the expansion of Roman presence in Asia Minor.

To that end, it is necessary first to consider why Rome got involved in the East and how this expansion affected its own political system, so as to better understand what were the interests involved in Roman expansion and how did they play out in Roman relations with the Hellenistic kingdoms in Anatolia. These subjects will be discussed in the first Chapter of this dissertation.

In the second Chapter, we shall investigate Mithridates' own motivations during the initial phase of his long reign in search of any possible effects Roman presence in Asia Minor might have played in the king's earlier policies.[21] Influenced by the available literary sources – all of which produced from a Roman perspective, even when written in Greek – modern specialized historiography seems to be compelled by a hindsight bias according to which Mithridates VI would have harbored an almost instinctive hatred for Rome since the very first years of his life.[22] In this sense, his intention to resist Roman expansion would be nothing but

[21] This section greatly benefits from my undergraduate thesis submitted as a requirement for the completion of the Bachelor's Degree in History at the University of Brasilia, cf. Fabio Farias. *Before the Vespers: Political Propaganda and the Struggle for Legitimacy in the First Decades of Mithridates VI Eupator's Reign*. Thesis (Undergratuate) – Human Sciences Institute, University of Brasilia. Brasília. 2021.

[22] For example: Mayor. *op. cit.* pp. 69, 105-107; Philip Matyszak. *Mithridates the Great: Rome's Indomitable Enemy*. South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Books, 2008. pp. 67-68; and Brian McGing. "Mithridates VI Eupator: Victim or Aggressor?". In: Jakob Højte (ed). *Mithridates VI and the Pontic Kingdom*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2009. p. 204. Roller recognizes that "the ancient sources give the impression that Mithridates had planned a war against Rome for many years" and that such a point of view was a "mixture of hindsight and the tendency to demonize one's enemies". However, based on Sulla's comments – based on his own memoirs – the author admits the possibility of a previous Mithridatic desire for world conquest that would eventually lead to a confrontation against Rome (see: Duane W. Roller. *Empire of the Black Sea: The Rise and Fall of the Mithridatic World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. pp.324-325)

the accomplishment of a meticulously concocted plan carefully implemented since his accession to the throne for three long decades until the outbreak of the wars against Rome.

Our research, however, has indicated that other elements played a more decisive role in the king's initial years in power, and Rome does not seem to be an important variable in his political calculations during this period. Quite the opposite. The challenges faced by the king during his formative years on the throne seem to have influenced some of his later decisions when the war against Rome became inevitable.

Finally, in Chapter Three, we analyze Mithridates' reign during the 90s with a view to understanding how his relationship with Rome deteriorated so much as to convince him that war was inescapable and how he prepared for it, both in military and propagandistic terms. This is the main contribution this dissertation intends to offer.

Despite his impressive achievements throughout a notably long reign, upon rising to power, Mithridates faced political instability, regicide, assassination attempts, usurpation of his succession rights, family betrayals and palace plots. The first enemies he had to overcome were among his father's closest advisers, who were responsible for his murder, as well as his own mother and younger brother.

Amid this politically troubled environment, Mithridates began his early royal life struggling to strengthen his grasp on *de facto* political power, while disseminating an image of reinforced legitimacy coated with a metaphysical sense of mission.

Rome's arrival in the East imposed a rearrangement of forces in Asia Minor. Initially, the small and medium kingdoms sought to align themselves with the Republic in the hope of taking advantage of the collapse of the most powerful Hellenistic kingdoms on which they previously depended. It soon became clear, however, that the change in the hegemonic power would bring along with it a profound disturbance to previously accepted traditions, customs and legal parameters that were the basis of Eastern Hellenistic politics and society.

The Roman Senate would increasingly intervene in internal successions and regional alliances according to its own interests and based on a completely different set of cultural values. The Hellenistic kingdoms of Asia Minor would soon learn that the Roman legions were invariably followed by armies of unscrupulous private money-lenders and tax-farmers, vested with public power, eager to exploit their resources, regardless of their nominal political status or friendly relations towards Rome.

When facing Roman power, the late Hellenistic Anatolian kings tried enticing, negotiating, and even submitting to Roman politicians only to find out that sudden power shifts

in Rome would make all their efforts pointless and their treaties void of meaning. Some of these kingdoms, such as Paphlagonia, that did not even exist as a centralized state easily succumbed. Others, like Pergamum and Bithynia, preferred to hand over their own government and territory to Rome as a means to avoid potential social unrest. Cappadocia, Galatia, Rhodes and Armenia submitted to Roman power and resigned themselves to the condition of client-kingdoms.

The kingdom of Pontus, led by Mithridates VI Eupator, decided to fight.

CHAPTER 1

ROME AND THE HELLENISTIC EAST

1.1 ROMAN EXPANSION IN THE THIRD AND SECOND CENTURIES

In the introduction to his *Histories,* Polybius puts forward the famous question that defines his object of study, and, at the same time, ensures its enormous relevance to posterity: "who among men would be so useless or indolent as to not want to know how and under what system of government the entire inhabited world (*oikoumené*) in less than fifty-three years fell under the exclusive control of the Romans, something unprecedented in history?"[23]

In the period referred to by Polybius (from 220 to 167), from an emerging power in the center of the Italian peninsula, Rome became the undisputed hegemonic power in the Mediterranean. According to Polybius, historical events occurred in distant parts of the known world had been, until that moment, unrelated to each other. From then on, however, history would have become an organic whole (*somatoidé*), creating an interconnection (s*ymploké*) between events that transpired, on the one hand, in Italy and Africa, and, on the other, in Greece and Asia.[24]

The extraordinarily rapid Roman expansion created an almost immediate need to understand and explain it, such was the perplexity it caused, above all, to the Greek-speaking world. The Greeks – who considered themselves superior to all other peoples at least since Alexander and his conquests of Egypt and Asia – were astonished by the emergence of the Roman Mediterranean empire.

One can trace the impressive Roman rise over the Mediterranean world back to the victories over its rivals in the Italian peninsula, in a series of wars against the Samnites, from 343 to 290, and the Greek poleis in the south, from 280 to 275, to whom Rome extended its rule through imposed military alliance treaties. Rome then defeated the Greeks and

[23] Pol. 1.1.5 ("τίς γὰρ οὕτως ὑπάρχει φαῦλος ἢ ῥᾴθυμος ἀνθρώπων ὃς οὐκ ἂν βούλοιτο γνῶναι πῶς καὶ τίνι γένει πολιτείας ἐπικρατηθέντα σχεδὸν ἅπαντα τὰ κατὰ τὴν οἰκουμένην οὐχ ὅλοις πεντήκοντα καὶ τρισὶν ἔτεσιν ὑπὸ μίαν ἀρχὴν ἔπεσε τὴν Ῥωμαίων, ὃ πρότερον οὐχ εὑρίσκεται γεγονός"). Unless indicated otherwise, all translations from original texts in Greek and Latin were made by the author, after consulting, by way of comparison, the translations available at the *Loeb Classical Library* and at the *Perseus Digital Library*.
[24] Pol. 1.3.3-5

Carthaginians in Sicily and expanded its government to the island, making it its first overseas province throughout the second half of the third century.

After securing control over the entire Italian peninsula and the Tyrrhenian Sea, Rome turned to the East coast, where pirates supported by the Illyrian kingdom threatened maritime trade across the Adriatic. After two successful military campaigns against Queen Teuta, in 229/228, and later against Demetrius of Pharos, in 220/219, Rome put an end to piracy in the region and installed a protectorate over the Greek cities previously subjected to Illyrian supremacy.

However, according to Polybius, the real rise of the Republic to a hegemonic position in the *oikoumené* began with the Second Punic War (218-202), whose first years mark the grimmest period in Roman history up to that point in time. A Carthaginian army led by Hannibal inflicted on the Romans the worst military defeats they had suffered so far and, still worse, on their own territory.[25]

While Hannibal caused destruction and awe in Italy, Philip V, the king of Macedonia, was persuaded by Demetrius of Pharos – who had taken refuge in his court after being expelled from Illyria by the Romans – to take advantage of the situation, attack Rome and claim a universal empire.[26]

Polybius reports that in 215 Macedonian ambassadors met Hannibal and a treaty of mutual assistance was signed. However, Philip's emissaries were captured by the commander of the Roman fleet Publius Valerius Flaccus, and the terms of the alliance were made public.[27]

In order to prevent Philip from coming to Italy to help Hannibal's invasion, Rome sought for allies in Greece and found them in the Aetolians. Exhausted by the war it had waged against Philip, the Aetolian League made peace with the Macedonian in Naupactus, in 217.[28] Five years later, however, the warmongering faction was on the rise and the Aetolians were once again considering taking up arms against their traditional enemy: the Antigonid empire.[29]

The Roman-Aetolian coalition was strengthened by the adhesion of the cities of Sparta, Elis and Messenia, and by the kingdom of Pergamum. Attalus I received the honor of being

[25] The battles of the Ticinus and of the Trebia (218), of Lake Trasimene (217), and especially of Cannae (216).
[26] Pol. 5.101.10.
[27] Liv. *Urb*. 23.34.
[28] Polybius (5.104) reports a speech given by the Aetolian Agelaus during the peace conference in Naupactus that ended the previous conflict against Philip V, which can be understood as evidence of the *symploké* between East and West. Cf. Craighe Champion. "The Nature of Authoritative Evidence in Polybius and Agelaus' Speech at Naupactus". In: *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, Vol. 127 (1997). pp 111-112.
[29] Liv. *Urb*. 26.24.

elected as one of the two supreme commanders of the Aetolians and was preparing to cross the Aegean with his armies.[30]

Although the Allied forces were unable to defeat Macedonia, the Roman objective was achieved: the conflicts in Greece made it impossible for any ambition Philip might have nurtured to attack Italy or to offer Hannibal any other effective assistance. This strategy contributed to Rome's final victory over Carthage in 202 at the Battle of Zama, in Africa, which ended the Second Punic War.

While Rome concluded its second war against Carthage, in the East, Ptolemaic Egypt was collapsing. After the death of Ptolemy Philopator in 204, the throne was handed over to his son, a five-year-old child. A series of unpopular regents and the outbreak of a serious rebellion in Upper Egypt weakened the kingdom both internally and externally. The Antigonids and Seleucids, their main rivals in the Hellenistic world, would not miss that opportunity.

In 203, Philip V and Antiochus III made a pact to divide the Ptolemaic possessions in Asia Minor and in the Aegean among themselves.[31] Antiochus, who had been defeated by Ptolemy IV in 217, wasted no time in avenging himself: in 202, he invaded Coele-Syria and took Damascus. The following year, he conquered Palestine and Gaza, all former Ptolemaic possessions. With no one to turn to, the Egyptian regent Tlepolemus sent an embassy to Rome begging for its support.[32]

Philip, for his part, crossed the Aegean and seized Samos and Caria. He then invaded Pergamum. Unable to take over its capital, however, the king was overcome with an “insane wrath and committed all kinds of injuries and sacrilege”.[33] Like Egypt, Attalus I also had no choice but to turn to Rome. Together with the Republic of Rhodes, which was also under the threat of a Macedonian attack, Attalus sent emissaries to the Roman Senate to inform of the Antigonid-Seleucid agreement, underlining the risks it would represent to Rome itself.

As soon as the traumatic Second Punic War ended, the envoys from Pergamum and Rhodes arrived in Rome with the information that Philip was trying to conquer all of Asia Minor. The Romans were furious with the Macedonian for the attack on their allies. Moreover, they had not yet forgiven or forgotten Philip’s alliance with Hannibal during Rome’s direst hour.[34]

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[30] Liv. *Urb*. 27.29.
[31] Pol. 15.20; Just. 30.2.8; Liv. *Urb*. 30.2.8; Api. *Mac*. 5.
[32] Just. 30.2.8.
[33] Pol. 16.1.
[34] Liv. *Urb.* 31-2.

The legate Valerius Laevinus was sent to Greece to investigate the situation and his account to the Senate confirmed the charges against Philip. Spirits were roused even further when an Athenian embassy arrived in Rome with the news of the Macedonian invasion of Attica. By order of the Senate, the consuls elected for the year made sacrifices and auguries favorable to the confrontation against the Macedonians were obtained. Still, the declaration of war was almost unanimously rejected in the first section of the Assembly.[35] The toil and suffering caused by the conflict against Hannibal had exhausted the people to the point of refusing any new military enterprise.[36]

The plebeians accused the patricians of always conspiring for new wars, while the Senate condemned the Assembly's lack of courage and blamed the people for the losses and misfortunes that a possible postponement of the war would cause. It was necessary to convene a new section of the Assembly and for the consul Sulpicius Galba to make an impassioned speech, urging citizens to decide whether they would prefer to take the war to Macedonia or wait for Philip's invasion of the Italian peninsula, for the proposal to be finally accepted and war declared.[37]

At the end of the third century, the Senate had no intention, nor had it devised any plan, to conquer and administer Greek and Macedonian territories. Its initial tactical objective for the region had been to keep Philip V as far away from Hannibal as possible. After achieving that goal, thanks to the support of the Aetolians, Rome completely withdrew its forces from the region. When Philip broke the peace agreement and showed his ambition, the Romans reluctantly decided to send their legions to the East once again.[38]

The intervention against Philip V ended with a peace agreement. Despite consul Claudius Marcellus' insistence on continuing the war in 196, all thirty-five tribes of the Assembly voted for peace.[39] According to the treaty, Philip would remain in power but would have to withdraw his garrisons from Greece and Asia, where the cities should be free.[40] By

[35] Liv. *Urb*. 31.5-6.
[36] Liv. *Urb*. 31.6.3 ("id cum fessi diuturnitate et gravitate belli sua sponte homines taedio periculorum laborumque fecerant").
[37] Liv. *Urb*. 31.7-8.
[38] Mike Duncan. *The Storm before the Storm: The Beginning of the End of the Roman Republic*. Nova York: PublicAffairs, 2017. l. 22.
[39] Liv. *Urb*. 33.25.
[40] Liv. *Urb*. 33.30. The proclamation of freedom for the Greeks in 196 was both the result of a strong Hellenistic influence and a well-designed propaganda action. The choice of Corinth for the announcement was intended to reinforce the city's symbolism in the constitution of the Hellenic League against the invasion of Xerxes in 480 and of the League of Corinth under Philip II, in 338/337. For the Greek world, declarations of freedom were nothing new. Antigonus had declared Greek cities free in 315, hoping to enlist their support in the confrontation against Cassander. A similar proclamation for the same purposes was made by Ptolemy I shortly thereafter. For

Senate decision, Quintus Flaminius, the general responsible for the victory against Philip, was to bring the legions back to Rome and demobilize them.[41]

Shortly thereafter, Rome would once again be reluctantly swept away by conflicts in the East. The Macedonian withdrawal from Asia Minor inflamed Antiochus III's ambition, invigorated by his early victories over Egypt.[42] Hannibal had taken refuge in the court of the Seleucid king and his advice instigated the king's hostility towards Rome.[43] The Romans, despite speaking of Antiochus as an enemy, still did not make preparations for war.[44]

Rome's hand was forced once again by the arrival of Pergamene emissaries. Attalus II Philadelphus, the brother of king Eumenes II Soter, informed the Romans that Antiochus had crossed the Hellespont and was *en route* to Greece, where his Aetolian allies awaited him with weapons at the ready.[45] The Seleucid army's invasion of Greece and the promise of a new liberation of the Greeks – translated into attacks against Roman allies and clients – compelled Rome to declare a new war.[46]

The ensuing conflict was disastrous for the Seleucid Empire. By the Treaty of Apamea, Antiochus was forced to leave Asia Minor and to renounce to all lands north of the Taurus. Still, the Romans were reluctant to take direct control over the region. They granted the territories previously controlled by the Seleucids to Pergamum and Rhodes and gave freedom to the cities that had supported them.[47]

After the Macedonian and Seleucids defeats, the other Hellenistic states, including Egypt, Pergamum, Rhodes, and the Aechean League, began to treat Rome as the new hegemonic power, but not as their sovereign. More and more embassies were sent to Rome carrying demands and complaints, mainly against other Hellenistic states; while, the Senate increasingly sent legates to Greece and Asia Minor to investigate, listen to demands, and, sometimes, act as judges.[48]

Rome, however, the 196 proclamation was an important turning point in its policy towards the East, since Flaminius tried, through it, to reconcile the principle of freedom, so dear to the Greeks, with the reality of the imposition of a new hegemonic external power. This hegemony found its justification precisely in the mission that the Romans granted themselves to guarantee the freedom of the Greeks, without confusing it with an authorization for the Greeks to be neutral in their own foreign affairs. (cf. Ferrary. *op. cit*. pp. 83-100).

[41] Liv. *Urb*. 34.43.

[42] The Seleucids first took control of the Lagid possessions in Cilicia, Lycia and Caria (cf. Liv. 33.19).

[43] Liv. *Urb*. 35.19.

[44] Liv. *Urb*. 35.20.

[45] Liv. *Urb*. 35.23.

[46] Liv. *Urb*. 35.50-51; Api. *Syr*. 15.

[47] Liv. *Urb*. 38.38; Pol; 21.42,45; Api. *Syr*. 38-39.

[48] Dexter Hoyos. *Rome Victorious: The Irresistible Rise of the Roman Empire*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2019. l. 557.

When Perseus came to power in Macedonia and started to pursue a new assertive foreign policy to the region, the relations with Rome soured again.[49] The Republic of Rhodes, judging itself free and independent, opted for neutrality and, twice, sent ambassadors to the Romans to try to dissuade the Senate from waging a new war against the Antigonids. The gesture was ill received in Rome, where some started questioning the loyalty of that client state.[50] Some even considered declaring war on Rhodes, but in the end, the punishment chosen was declaring the island of Delos a free port, a severe blow to Rhodian economic interests in the Aegean.

In mainland Greece, the Achaean League rebelled against Roman hegemony, believing it was free to conduct its own foreign policy. In retaliation, Corinth was razed in 146, in the same way and in the same year as Roman arch-rival Carthage.[51] It is startling to note how deep and dreadful the relations with the Greeks became in fifty years, when the now razed Corinth had been chosen as the stage for the declaration of Greek freedom. Back then, during the Isthmian Games, "the whole audience stood up and no attention was paid to the competing athletes, as everyone was eager to move forward to greet the savior and champion of Greece": Titus Quinctius Flamininus.[52] Now, the city was utterly destroyed, all of its male population killed and the surviving women and children captured and sold into slavery.

Just over a decade after the destruction of Corinth, Pergamum, Rome's oldest and most devoted ally in the region, would be the first kingdom in Asia Minor to be annexed to the Republic's administrative machinery.

King Attalus III Philometor never showed any interest or aptitude to exercise governmental functions. Most of his time was devoted to the study of medicine, botany, and philosophy. Since he had no children, the king decided to leave, upon his death, his kingdom as a bequest for the Roman people, determining, however, that Pergamum and the other Greek cities should be free.[53]

The practice of bequeathing one's kingdom to the Roman Republic had been inaugurated in 155 by Ptolemy VIII, who ruled over Cyrenaica, thanks to the support given him by the Senate after the conflict he waged against his older brother, Ptolemy VI.[54] Insecure

[49] Liv. *Urb*. 39.23.
[50] Liv. *Urb*. 42.14; 42.26; 44.15; 44.35; 45.3; 45.20; 45.21; Pol. 30.31.
[51] Dio. 21.31.
[52] Plut. *Flam*. 10.5 ("ὀρθὸν δὲ ἀνειστήκει τὸ θέατρον, οὐδεὶς δὲ λόγος ἦν τῶν ἀγωνιζομένων, ἔσπευδον δὲ πάντες ἀναπηδῆσαι καὶ δεξιώσασθαι καὶ προσειπεῖν τὸν σωτῆρα τῆς Ἑλλάδος καὶ πρόμαχον").
[53] OGIS 338.
[54] SEG 9.7; IGCyr 011200.

on his throne, Ptolemy VIII might have decided to use the bequeath as a guarantee against possible assassination attempts sponsored by Ptolemy VI, who planned to reunite Cyrenaica to the Ptolemaic throne in Alexandria.[55]

There is no consensus on the reasons that would have led Attalus III to appoint Rome as his heir. The king, evidently inept to hold office, may have tried to prevent social unrest or to deny the rise of a usurper to the Pergamene throne. It is also possible that, just like it had been the case with Ptolemy VIII, Attalus III thought he needed a guarantee against potential murders by making sure the will would be openly known. He might as well have been simply bluffing to strengthen his alliance with Rome.[56] In any case, his premature death had dramatic consequences for the whole of Asia Minor.

With the eventual annexation of Pergamum, the growing presence of Rome unmistakably threatened the Anatolian kingdoms' independence and incited different reactions from different dynasties. The only one that opted for military resistance was Pontus, under the leadership of Mithridates VI, and the Mithridatic Wars had an inescapable weight in the strategies adopted by the rival dynasties in Asia Minor.

The kingdoms located further from Rome and which had a more markedly Persian cultural tradition, such as Cappadocia and Armenia, managed to retain some level of self-government, but had to submit to the condition of semi-independent clients.

In Cappadocia, Ariarathes V was brought back to the throne by the Romans around 158 after a suitor had been imposed by the Seleucids.[57] In 154, the kingdom was already fully aligned with Rome and Pergamum[58] in the conflicts against Prusias II of Bithynia and in the war against Aristonicus, which ended up costing King Ariarathes V his life, in 130.[59] From 116 on, the dynasty would suffer with Mithridates' attempts to seize power in Cappadocia. In 95, after the death of Ariarathes VIII who had been driven out of the kingdom by Mithridates VI, his own maternal uncle, the Cappadocian elite decided to remain a monarchy and appointed a new king, called Ariobarzanes. During the Mithridatic Wars, Ariobarzanes was removed from power three times by Mithridates, only to be reinstated by the Romans once they regained the upper hand. After the end of the conflict, Pompey recognized the services rendered by the

[55] Pol. 3.11.2.; John D. Grainger. *Kings and Kingship in the Hellenistic World 350-30 BC*. Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Books, 2017. l. 4834.
[56] Michel Austin (2006). *op. cit.* p. 430.
[57] App. *Syr*. 47.
[58] Diod. 31.19.
[59] Just. 38.2

dynast in support of Rome and rewarded him.[60] Cappadocia would remain a Roman client-kingdom until Tiberius finally decided to annex it, in 17 CE.[61]

Armenia experienced a period of growth under the reign of Tigranes II, the Great, Mithridates VI's ally and son-in-law. In the last Mithridatic War, however, the Armenian king suffered severe defeats against the Romans and watched his brand-new capital Tigranocerta being sacked in 67 by Lucullus' victorious forces.[62] After that, Pompey encouraged the Parthians and one of Tigranes II's own sons to overthrow the Armenian king. Tigranes surrendered and obtained permission from Pompey to remain in power, transforming Armenia into a buffer client-kingdom between Rome and the growing Arsacid power.

The fragile Paphlagonia would disappear as a result of the expansion of Pontus under Mithridates VI.[63] The Galatians, on their turn, suffered a punitive Roman campaign for having supported Antiochus III and their leaders were later massacred by Mithridates, on charges of treason at the end of the First Mithridatic War.[64] Acephalous and impoverished, the Galatians were organized by the Romans under a short-lived single client-kingdom that Octavius eventually converted into a province.

The history of Bithynia from mid-second century to mid-first century offers perhaps the best example of the change in the nature of Roman expansionism in the East and of how local dynasties were forced to transform its aspirations for independence and accept absolute submission.

In 171, king Prusias II decided to remain neutral in the conflict between the Romans and Perseus of Macedonia. It was the last independent act of his dynasty. When the Macedonian king was taken prisoner, Prusias went to meet the Romans with his head shaved bold, wearing a *pileus*[65] and said: "I am the freeman of the Romans". The generals laughed and sent him to Rome. There, his comical appearance granted him Roman mercy.[66] From that pathetic gesture of submission to complete annexation, three generations would elapse.

The Romans plotted a coup against Prusias and installed his son on the throne.[67] Nicomedes II supported the Romans in the war against Aristonicus and become a first-order

[60] "Ariobarzanes". In: *Encyclopædia Britannica*. (11ª Ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911. pp. 491–492.
[61] Tac. 2.42.
[62] Plin. 2.235; Mem. 38.3-6; Plut. *Luc*. 26-29; App. *Mit*. 84-86
[63] Str. 12.3.1-11; Oro. 6.2; Just. 37.4.2.
[64] Paus. 10.15.3; Str. 13.4.2; Liv. *Urb*. 38.12, 38.19-27; Just. 38.4; Plut. *Mul*. 23.
[65] A felt cap worn by emancipated slaves during their manumission ceremony.
[66] App. *Mit*. 1.2. ("Ῥωμαίων εἰμὶ λίβερτος")
[67] App. *Mit*. 1.4-7.

ally of the Republic. When Marius requested his son, Nicomedes III, to contribute with more troops to his war efforts, the king of Bithynia famously replied that he was unable to respond to that demand because "most of the Bithynians had already been taken as slaves by tax collectors and were dispersed throughout Roman provinces".[68]

Nicomedes IV was instigated by Roman legates to invade Pontus and by so doing started the First Mithridatic War. After being removed from power by Mithridates VI himself, Nicomedes IV was returned to the throne thanks to Roman intervention.[69] As one of his last acts, Nicomedes IV followed on Attalus III's footsteps and bequeathed his kingdom to the Roman people. This time, the Senate quickly voted for the annexation, initiating the Third Mithridatic War.[70]

The Roman saga analyzed by Polybius and that would culminate in the domination of the whole Mediterranean and the Near East raises questions that, since Antiquity, have intrigued historians. Although anachronistic, the term "imperialism" has been widely used to describe the Roman impetus for conquest and expansion. It is necessary, therefore, to establish what is meant by "empire" and "imperialism" in the context of Roman domination during the Republic. In this sense, the definition adopted by Paul Veyne seems to be especially useful:

> *Nous prendrons ici empire au sens d'hégémonie, et impérialisme au sens de désir ou de besoin d'exercer une hégémonie: la questions sera de savoir si les Romains sont proprement impérialistes, s'ils ont conquis le monde par désir ou besoin de dominer des nations étrangères, ou si l'explication de leur conduite n'est pas plus inattendue et paradoxale*.[71]

Polybius, once again, is the first to offer answers to the question on what the motives behind Roman expansion were. For the Greek historian forced into captivity by the Romans, the military victories obtained by the Republic were not an accident nor were they

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[68] Diod. 36.3.1-2. ("[...] ὁ δὲ ἀπόκρισιν ἔδωκε τοὺς πλείους τῶν Βιθυνῶν ὑπὸ τῶν δημοσιωνῶν διαρπαγέντας δουλεύειν ἐν ταῖς ἐπαρχίαις").
[69] Liv. *Per*. 74; Mem. 22.5; Api. *Mit*. 11,17-18; Just. 38.3-4.
[70] Cic. *Agr*. 2.40; Liv. *Per*. 93; Vel. 2.4.1, 39.2; App. *Mit*. 71, *Civ*. 1.111;
[71] Paul Veyne. "Y a-t-il eu un impérialisme romain?". In: *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome. Antiquité*. Tome 87, n. 2. 1975. pp. 795-796.

involuntary.[72] On the contrary, when it defeated Carthage, Rome would have consciously launched itself towards the conquest of a world empire.[73]

However, many modern historians, such as Holleaux and Walbank (1963), did not agree with Polybius's explanation and opted for emphasizing defensive thinking as the engine of imperialism. For them, Rome was motivated by the need to guarantee its safety, and its wars were fought to defend both the Republic and its allies. The main sources used to subsidize this thesis are the works of Cicero and Julius Caesar, both Roman politicians who have acted in favor of Roman expansion and who benefitted directly from it.[74]

This extremely influential interpretation was first elaborated by German historian Theodor Mommsen, in the middle of the 19th century CE. Subsequently, it was perfected by Holleaux and Tenney Frank, both of whom interested in providing a positive perspective ethically justified to French and American imperialisms in the beginning of the twentieth century CE.

With the rise of anti-colonial movements in the second half of the last century, defensive imperialism started to be questioned. In its place, historians like Harris and Finley, in the 1970s CE, began to underline the warmongering *ethos* of Roman society and to explore the economic benefits of the expansion.[75]

In that same decade, Paul Veyne defended the idea that Roman militarism was "une méthode devenue routine"[76] by the practices of its political elite. Rome's ultimate goal was to achieve a primitive type of isolationism, in which its orders would not meet any obstacles abroad: "non pas rechercher une extension territorial pour elle meme, mais rechercher une liberté d'action unilatérale".[77]

When the Cold War ended the emergence of a new multipolar international system stimulated scholars like Eckstein to challenge the premise of an exclusive Roman militarism, based on the analytical tools developed by the realistic school of international relations theory. According to Eckstein, all political entities contemporary to the Roman Republic – Carthage, Numidia, the Hellenistic kingdoms, etc. – were equally bellicose and, therefore, concerned with their own security. That reality intensified the anarchic nature of the Mediterranean system in

[72] Pol. 1.63.9.
[73] Pol. 15.9.1-2; 15.10.1-2.
[74] For example: Cic. *Rep*. 3.35 ("Noster autem populus sociis defendendis terrarum iam omnium potitus est"); JC. 1.31; 1.36.
[75] Andrew Erskine. *Roman Imperialism*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010. p.37
[76] Veyne. *op. cit*. p. 824.
[77] *Ibid*. p. 795.

the third and second centuries. It was the return of the thesis of defensive imperialism in a new guise.

When looking for an explanation for the reasons of Roman imperialism, it must be borne in mind that the Republic's territorial expansion developed at least over two centuries. The decisions that led to the creation of a universal empire responded to different needs and were subject to different circumstances. Rome itself was not a static state, neither in the way it interacted with other states, nor in the internal structures of power that conditioned and encouraged offensive and defensive actions.

In this sense, despite accepting the thesis of an innate propensity to conquer – either because it had an exacerbated militaristic culture or because of the need to obtain security – it is difficult to believe that Roman imperialism was, from the beginning, a carefully crafted plan with long-term objectives. In Hoyos' words, the empire of the Republic was not the work of a well-designed stratagem; neither was there a pre-determined policy for the treatment to be given to vanquished peoples and territories.[78]

In reality, despite the successive victorious campaigns and the increasing Roman engagement in the East during the last decades of the Republic, only under Emperor Vespasian, would Rome finally decide on which form of imperial administration system to put in place in the territories acquired in the region.[79] In that regard, Fergus Millar argues that: "it was at this moment, in the 70s [CE], that after nearly a century and a half the Roman presence in the Near East ceased to be a bridgehead and came to resemble an integrated provincial and military system".[80]

It is necessary, therefore, to search for the essential elements to explain not only what political mechanisms stimulated new conquests abroad, but also how they were made possible by Roman politics. In this context, it is worth stressing that the militaristic *ethos* that permeated Roman social and institutional structures was fundamental to the almost constant state of warfare in its history, but it operated in conjunction with a competitive aristocracy and a prompt supply of allied troops.[81]

[78] Hoyos. *op. cit*. l. 794.
[79] Philip Parker. *The Empire Stops Here: A Journey Along the Frontiers of the Roman World*. London: Pimlico, 2010. p. 267.
[80] Millar (1993). p. 80.
[81] Erskine. *op. cit*. p. 48.

1.1.1 ROME AND THE GREEK-SPEAKING WORLD

Since this dissertation's main subject relates to the consequences of Roman expansion in the East, it is fitting to explore both the circumstances in which Rome got in contact with the Greek-speaking world and the overall effects of that encounter to both societies. Despite the crucial role played by the Romans in deterring Macedonian and Seleucid expansionism as well as in guaranteeing the freedom of the Greek poleis for a certain period of time, relations between Rome and the Greek-speaking world throughout the second century were marked by misunderstandings and frustrations on both sides.

Hellenistic dynasts and the leaders of the independent poleis had become accustomed to exercising absolute sovereignty. However, centuries of almost continuous warfare imposed the recognition of other sovereign states as a matter of fact. International relations in the Hellenistic world were based, therefore, on the assumption of conceptual equality between monarchs, who were all-powerful in what concerns their own subjects, but whose authority was hindered by the existence of other equally sovereign states.

The history of Roman expansion, as we have argued, led the Republic to develop a different perspective on foreign relations. Rome never saw other states as equals. Their neighbors in the Italian peninsula, the Celts or even the Carthaginians were never their match militarily, legally or even conceptually. Roman worldview was forged on its victories on the battlefield, and the treaties imposed on the vanquished peoples established an unquestionably asymmetric relationship.

Furthermore, for the Romans, military victories established a type of relationship close to that of clientele. That means that, in addition to the terms stipulated by the peace treaties, the defeated side had moral obligations that should be translated into respect and subordination to Rome's authority.

This notion was unconceivable to the Greeks. From 274 to 168, the Seleucid Empire and the Ptolemaic Kingdom of Egypt waged six different wars over the region known as Coele-Syria. All of them were ended with some sort of diplomatic agreement, sometimes involving marriages or exchanges of territory. However, never did the victorious part demand moral superiority and enduring obligation from the defeated side, not would the later ever have accepted it. Wars would establish a temporary advantage, but they did not undermine the vanquished monarch right or ability to rule.

When the Greeks of Pergamum and Rhodes invited the Romans to take part in the wars in the East, they assumed that another piece was being added to their very well-known game. A powerful piece, but an equal piece, nonetheless. They were probably ready to accept Roman hegemony, as they had previously accepted the Ptolemaic, Seleucid and Antigonid hegemonies, but they had no reason to believe that their very existence as independent states would be at stake.

In this context, by mid-second century, most Hellenistic monarchies of Asia Minor had already included Rome in their political calculations and had adopted the practice of sending embassies to the Senate whenever they considered expanding their territories, needed to restrain the action of debt collectors or sought support during succession crises.

In the East, Rome was seen as a powerful ally, whose intervention could prove decisive for any internal or external conflict, nothing more. In the inscription in which Mithridates IV celebrated his friendship with the Romans,[82] fifteen other monarchs, dynasties and peoples recorded similar messages, with the aim of captivating Roman power and ensuring its solidarity.[83] They were not, however, an acknowledgment of their subordination to Rome. At least not for the Greek states that had them carved.

When Rome was convinced to intervene against Philip, it is possible that some in the Republic still suffered from a sense of cultural inferiority in relation to the Greek world and, therefore, felt the need to justify its imperialism also to the conquered Greek peoples.[84] Even so, Roman superiority proven on the battlefields over Macedonians and Seleucids emboldened Roman attitude with an improved sense of superiority and conceit.

By the second half of the second century, Roman military supremacy had become absolute and its political system was beginning to feel the deleterious effects of the abrupt enrichment made possible by the influx of Eastern wealth from the East. The political elite of the Roman Republic could no longer depend on the perks and sudden political changes caused by the whim of the next monarch on the throne. The stakes had become too high.

And at that point, the misunderstandings became irreconcilable.

During the First Mithridatic War, when Rome was already assertively exercising its empire over the East, an anecdote narrated by Plutarch in the Life of Sulla offers another revealing example of the differences in values, expectations and worldviews between Romans and Greeks.

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[82] See: Chapter 1.3.
[83] Brian McGing. *The Foreign Policy of Mithridates VI Eupator, King of Pontus*. Leiden: Brill, 1986. p 34.
[84] Ferrary. *op. cit*. p. XII.

After having insulted the Romans who were besieging their city, the Athenian leaders who had joined Mithridates VI's cause sent messengers to the Roman camp to negotiate peace. On hearing the Athenian ambassadors presumptuously speak about Theseus, Eumolpus and the Greek-Persian Wars, Sulla interrupted them and said: "leave, gentlemen, and take these speeches with you, for I was not sent to Athens by the Romans to learn about its history, but to subdue its rebels".[85]

In the episode reported by Plutarch, one can perceive, on the one hand, the use of history and mythology as devices of legitimacy frequently employed by Greek diplomacy and, on the other, the martial pragmatism of the Romans in the exercise of their military supremacy.[86] In order to have a clearer notion of this cultural abyss, the same Plutarch narrates, in the Life of Alexander, that, after forgiving Athens for having risen up against him, even after destroying Thebes for the same reason, the young Macedonian king stated that "If something were to happen to him, [Athens] would rule Greece", a clear deference to its historical importance.[87]

According to some authors, Rome may have felt culturally inferior to the Greek-speaking world,[88] but its victories on the battlefield had clothed the Republic with a sense of absolute superiority over all the other peoples of the Mediterranean, even though they often had used Greek ideas to express that feeling. Military triumphs convinced the Romans that their superior qualities legitimized their dominance over other peoples, an exercise similar to the Aristotelian justification for Greeks to own slaves.[89]

In this context, Greek culture was instrumentalized as an integral element of Roman civilization. This amalgamated vision came to influence both historiography[90] and literature[91],

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[85] Plut. *Sul*. 13.4. ('ἄπιτε,' εἶπεν, 'ὦ μακάριοι, τοὺς λόγους τούτους ἀναλαβόντες: ἐγὼ γὰρ οὐ φιλομαθήσων εἰς Ἀθήνας ὑπὸ Ῥωμαίων ἐπέμφθην, ἀλλὰ τοὺς ἀφισταμένους καταστρεψόμενος').

[86] Angelos Chaniotis. *War in the Hellenistic World: A Social and Cultural History*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005. pp. 215-6.

[87] Plut. Alex. 13.2. ("εἴ τι συμβαίη περὶ αὐτὸν, ἄρξουσαν τῆς Ἑλλάδος")

[88] The existence of a supposed Greek cultural superiority over Rome is a commonly accepted concept in classical historiography. This concept finds its roots even in contemporary Roman and Greek writers, such as Cato, the Elder, who was as familiar with Greek culture as any of his Roman contemporaries. In fact, at least part of his fervor could be attributed to the influence that the Greeks and Greek ideas had gained in Roman culture, which the old censor considered harmful to Roman customs and traditions. (cf. Albert Henrichs. "Graecia Capta: Roman Views of Greek Culture". In: *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology.* Vol. 97, Greece in Rome: Influence, Integration, Resistance (1995), pp. 243-261). However, a more thorough approach on the complex situation of a Roman-controlled Greece as a "purely external, European construction of Hellenic history written by outsiders in order to define their own modern and western identity" is offered in Susan E. Alcock. *Graecia Capta: The landscapes of Roman Greece*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

[89] Aris. *Pol*. 1.1254b; Hoyos. *op. cit*. l. 2873.

[90] In the third century, Fabius Pictor wrote a Roman history in Greek, something unthinkable for the generation of Livy, for whom the Greeks were "a more vigorous people in speeches than in acts", see Liv. *Urb*. 8.22.8. ("gente lingua magis strenua quam factis").

[91] The fusion of ideas of Greek cultural supremacy under Roman military supremacy is at the heart of Horace's famous quote "Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit" (Hor. *Epi.* II.1.156). In contrast to the destiny reserved for

and aimed at reaffirming some sort of Roman manifest destiny, especially after the collapse of the Republic and the emergence of the Empire.

In the face of this more assertive imperialism whose eagerness increasingly reflected the growing greed of politicians in Rome and of their agents in the provinces, most of the small and middle-sized kingdoms in Asia Minor simply succumbed. Their dynasties did not know how or were unable to deal with Roman supremacy and, little by little, watched inertly as their formerly independent states became client-kingdoms. In cases where annexation was more interesting and profitable, these dynasties would be easily deposed, and their domains converted into Roman provinces.

As we will see in the next section, even before Attalus bequest, Roman economic interests were increasingly present in Asia Minor and they were already causing such discontent that they would ultimately lead to an important social movement led by a self-proclaimed illegitimate brother of Attalus III.

Paralyzed by a deep internal political crisis and without knowing how to proceed with the unexpected bequeath, Rome would take more than ten years before finally annexing the territories of Pergamum as a province. Asia would soon become the most profitable domain of the entire empire[92] and the presence of Rome bound together the interests and destinies of the Republic to those of the Hellenistic monarchies of the region once and for all.

other peoples (meaning the Greeks), whose destiny was limited to aesthetic and scientific production, Virgil, a contemporary of Horace, would thus announce Roman divine mission of extending its government to the whole world: "excudent alii spirantia mollius aera / (credo equidem), uiuos ducent de marmore uultus, / orabunt causas melius, caelique meatus / describent radio et surgentia sidera dicent: / tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento / (hae tibi erunt artes), pacique imponere morem, /parcere subiectis et debellare superbos" (Vir. *Ene*. 6.847-853).

[92] Cic. *Man.* 14.

1.2 THE ROMAN REPUBLIC BETWEEN INTERNAL EXPANSION AND ITS DOMESTIC CRISIS

The history of Rome between the end of the Second Punic War and the end of the last Civil War was characterized by the contradiction between, on the one hand, a successful territorial expansion that would result in the conquest of the whole Mediterranean world and, on the other, an increasingly alarming institutional crisis that would eventually consume the Republican system.

The victory over Carthage in the First Punic War presented for the first time the question on what to do to non-contiguous territory after a victorious war. Until then, the wars won by Rome had expanded its power over the Italian peninsula through a series of unequal treaties imposed on the defeated peoples who did not gain the right to Roman citizenship but were compelled to participate in Rome's military efforts.

Originally, the word *provincia* was used to indicate a magistrate's task or set of responsibilities. Livy uses the word in reference to the fight against rival Italian tribes, the navy and the war against Hannibal.[93] As the wars of the Republic advanced into non-contiguous territories, like Sicily, magistrates and pro-magistrates started to be assigned as military commanders, whose *provincia* was the control of the regions recently conquered.[94] With time, the term would come to designate the power – or *imperium* - exercised in places like Sicily, Sardinia, Spain, Africa, Macedonia and, finally, in the East.[95]

It should be noted, therefore, that, during the first decades of Roman expansion, the citation of a region as a *provincia* did not necessarily mean its immediate annexation. Nor did it imply the establishment of a provincial administration or the bureaucratic organization of the communities living in it. The few instances in which examples of tax collection and legal jurisdiction are attested were purely *ad hoc* and emerged from the immediate needs of the army stationed in some strategically relevant area.[96]

Sicily became the first Roman experiment of overseas annexation in a provincial system. Despite having conferred a certain degree of autonomous management for the poleis that had supported its efforts against Carthage from 264 to 241, Rome started to appoint magistrates who were entitled to administer the affairs of Sicily on behalf of the Senate,

[93] Liv. *Urb*. 3.25.9; 6.30.3; 27.22.2; 44.1.3.
[94] CAH. IX. p. 565.
[95] Hoyos. *op. cit.* l. 461.
[96] CAH. IX. p. 567.

especially through the collection of taxes and the maintenance of public order. Sicily was thus organized as the first Roman province in 241, but only in 228 did it receive a governor and until 210 it did not collect regular taxes.[97]

Therefore, it should be noted that the provincial system resulted from a long process that responded to the evolving needs of the Senate regarding the administration of remote territories, to which the treaties imposed on the neighboring peoples of the peninsula would simply not have worked. This system would eventually be perfected and replicated in Spain, during the Second Punic War, and in Africa, after the Third Punic War.

Motivated by the profits collected with the new provincial system, the recalcitrant position of Roman foreign policy began to change by mid-second century. After the Third Punic War and the Fourth Macedonian War, Rome first subjected its rivals to its direct control and then organized Africa and Macedonia into provinces in 146.

In Sicily, the conditions of the slaves had become so unbearable[98] that a revolt broke out in 135. The rebelled slaves chose as their king a Syrian slave from the city of Apamea called Eunus, known as a magician and diviner. Eunus was chosen "not because of his courage or military ability, but because of his tricks".[99] His name was also seen as an auspicious portent.[100]

Eunus became a messianic king, led one of the most impressive slave revolts in Antiquity, and defied Roman power for three years, until he was finally captured and killed. Perhaps he was the most successful historical character to embody the role of the "King who came from the Sun",[101] a discussion that will be resumed in greater detail in Chapter 3.2.

Despite the risks inherent to the provincial exploitation model, the provinces yielded an extraordinary influx of resources to the Roman economy. Those directly involved in the provincial administration system began to accumulate unprecedented wealth in the form of booty, provincial taxes, and profits from commerce, investments, and slave traffic. They also adopted a lavish consumption style.[102] Their prodigality reached such a level that it began to worry some in the moralist Roman elite. Laws were enacted to limit the possession of gold and

[97] Hoyos. *op. cit*. l. 794.
[98] Diod. 34.2.
[99] Diod. 34.14. ("ἐκεῖθεν αἱρεῖται βασιλεὺς ὁ Εὔνους οὔτε δι' ἀνδρείαν οὔτε διὰ στρατηγίαν, διὰ δὲ μόνην τερατείαν").
[100] For its resemblance to the word "εὔνοια" (goodwill, favor). See: Diod. 34.14.
[101] Vicente Dobroruka. "Eunus: royal obverse, messianic preacher, firebreather and avenger of Syria". In: *Revista Diálogos Mediterrânicos*. n. 11, p. 81-104, dezembro, 2019. p. 89.
[102] Liv. *Per*. 14; Hoyos. *op. cit*. l. 1216.

luxury goods[103], the number of guests[104] in a dinner and how much could be spent on these events[105], proving both that excesses and ostentation had become common among those who profited the most from provincial exploitation and that the political system was unable to deal with that new reality.

In the early centuries of their expansion, Romans considered their wars and conquests as opportunities for booty, profit, and career advancement.[106] It was becoming increasingly clear, however, that maintaining access to these resources fundamentally depended on political decisions taken by republican institutions, and that the uncertainties inherent to the nature of that political system were becoming an undesirable hindrance.[107]

Rome had abolished the monarchical regime and installed a republican government whose main institutions were either created or took their established form and functions during the early-middle Republic era (390-218).[108] The new political arrangement allowed for the maintenance of an institution with powers similar to those of the kings in terms of conducting warfare while ensuring the participation of Roman citizens both in the establishment of laws and in the dispensation of justice.

In his famous assessment of the main characteristics of the "Roman constitution", Polybius concluded that "it is not possible to find a better political system".[109] The qualities of the Republican system were revealed especially in two moments: "when there is a common threat from abroad, which compels [the Romans] to agree and cooperate with each other, the power of the state is so great and so strong that nothing can be neglected";[110] and "when, however, free from foreign danger, living in prosperity and abundance resulting from their virtuous actions, (…) they turn to excess and arrogance, it is primarily then that one can understand that the state provides itself with remedies needed. For whenever one of the parties commits excesses, causes conflict and prevails more than necessary, it is clear that, since none

[103] The *lex oppia* of 215, see: Liv. *Ubi*. 34.1.
[104] The *lex orchia* of 181, see: Macr. 3.17.3.
[105] The *lex fannia* of 143 and the *lex didia* of 143, see: Macr. 3.17.5-6.
[106] Hoyos. *op. cit*. l. 2840.
[107] Polybius (6.17) states that a large number of public contracts were distributed by the censors for the construction or exploitation of navigable rivers, ports, gardens, mines, land, etc., and that in all these matters the Senate decision was supreme: "there are many ways in which the Senate can benefit or nominate those who manage public property" ("καὶ πολλὰ δή τιν᾽ ἐστίν, ἐν οἷς καὶ βλάπτει μεγάλα καὶ πάλιν ὠφελεῖ τοὺς τὰ δημόσια χειρίζοντας ἡ σύγκλητος: ἡ γὰρ ἀναφορὰ τῶν προειρημένων γίνεται πρὸς ταύτην").
[108] Fergus Millar. *Rome, the Greek World, and the East. Vol 1. The Roman Republic and the Augustan Revolution*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002. p.89
[109] Pol. 6.18.1. ("ὥστε μὴ οἷόν τ᾽ εἶναι ταύτης εὑρεῖν ἀμείνω πολιτείας σύστασιν").
[110] Pol. 6.18.2. ("ὅταν μὲν γάρ τις ἔξωθεν κοινὸς φόβος ἐπιστὰς ἀναγκάσῃ σφᾶς συμφρονεῖν καὶ συνεργεῖν ἀλλήλοις, τηλικαύτην καὶ τοιαύτην συμβαίνει γίνεσθαι τὴν δύναμιν τοῦ πολι) τεύματος ὥστε μήτε παραλείπεσθαι τῶν δεόντων μηδέν").

of them is self-sufficient, and each one can prevent the intention of the others, none of the parties goes beyond nor does it become superb".[111]

The decision-making processes for engaging in the Second Macedonian War and the Roman-Seleucid War offer very revealing examples of the efficient functioning of the political machinery described by Polybius. Even when the Senate and the consuls agreed on the decision to declare war or to continue a conflict, it was necessary to convince the Assembly of its urgency and need.

Roman expansion from the second half of the second century on and the conquest of the East, however, would prove the limits of the efficiency of this political system.

As Rome immersed itself in the intricacies of Hellenistic politics, the internal competition of its elite intensified. Personal economic and political interests overlapped those of the Republic and the institutions, instead of containing the excesses, were corrupted by them.

The institutional balance so revered by Polybius was based on a set of rules and customs built over the first three centuries of the Republic. Roman culture and morals attributed to their ancestors a set of idealized values – known as *mos maiorum* – that the future generations should follow and emulate.[112] When the political fabric of the Republic began to rot, it was not the letters of the laws that lost their value, but general respect for the mutually accepted limits enshrined in the *mos maiorum*.[113]

The electoral system for the main magistracies was conditioned to a pre-established order of political offices that every citizen should observe if he wanted to achieve the highest positions in the Republic. This order was known as the *cursus honorum*. Annually, after having served in the military for a ten-year period, politicians were able to run as candidates for the office of *quaestor* (financial administrator). If successful, they could then consider campaigning for *aedil* (supervisor of public works), then *praetor* (responsible for judicial and military matters, especially in the absence of a *consul*) and, eventually, *consul*.[114] No citizen could run for an office without having been elected to the position right below it in the *cursus*

[111] Pol. 6.18.5-7. ("ὅταν γε μὴν πάλιν ἀπολυθέντες τῶν ἐκτὸς φόβων ἐνδιατρίβωσι ταῖς εὐτυχίαις καὶ περιουσίαις ταῖς ἐκ τῶν κατορθωμάτων, ἀπολαύοντες τῆς εὐδαιμονίας, καὶ ὑποκολακευόμενοι καὶ ῥᾳθυμοῦντες τρέπωνται πρὸς ὕβριν καὶ πρὸς ὑπερηφανίαν, ὃ δὴ φιλεῖ γίνεσθαι, τότε καὶ μάλιστα συνιδεῖν ἔστιν αὐτὸ παρ᾽ αὑτοῦ πoριζόμενον τὸ πολίτευμα τὴν βοήθειαν. ἐπειδὰν γὰρ ἐξοιδοῦν τι τῶν μερῶν φιλονεικῇ καὶ πλέον τοῦ δέοντος ἐπικρατῇ, δῆλον ὡς οὐδενὸς αὐτοτελοῦς ὄντος κατὰ τὸν ἄρτι λόγον, ἀντισπᾶσθαι δὲ καὶ παραποδίζεσθαι δυναμένης τῆς ἑκάστου προθέσεως ὑπ᾽ ἀλλήλων, οὐδὲν ἐξοιδεῖ τῶν μερῶν οὐδ᾽ ὑπερφρονεῖ").
[112] Joanna Kenty. "Mos Maiorum in Cicero's Orations". In: *The Classical Journal*, Vol. 111, No. 4 (Apr-May 2016), pp. 429-462.
[113] Duncan. *op.cit*. p. 42.
[114] Idem. p. 27.

or before completing the minimum age required for that specific magistracy. In addition, no one could run for the same office before completing a ten-year period after his last mandate.

In the century that precedes the civil wars that put an end to the Republic, we can trace the escalating disregard for the *mos maiorum* back to the election of Scipio Aemilianus as consul in 147, before he had reached the minimum age or served as *aedil* or *praetor*. The delay in striking progress in the last war against Carthage acted as a catalyst for those most interested in eliminating Rome's historic rival to architect the elevation of the young charismatic general against the rules and customs.

Aemilianus' meteoric rise was not the first time the *mos maiorum* had to be circumvented in order to allow for extraordinary measures since Brutus toppled Tarquinius Superbus and was elected as one of the two first consuls of the newly installed Republic in 509.[115] However, unlike the previous moments that led to those desperate measures, the domestic conditions were changing dramatically fast with the conquest of the Mediterranean, up to a point where the ancient constitutional and moral rules started to be seen as an unnecessary nuisance rather than the guiding principle of political institutions.

A decade later, another ambitious young man, Scipio Aemilianus' cousin, shook the foundations of Roman politics both with his actions and the manner of his death. Tiberius Gracchus was elected tribune of the plebs and embraced the revolutionary agenda of the controversial *lex agraria*. The bill had the broad support of citizens who were destitute of land but were in full use of their suffrage rights.

Tiberius decided to present the bill to the Assembly, even after it was rejected by the Senate, in complete disagreement with the standing legislative rules of the Republican system. The Senate then convinced another tribune, Marcus Octavius, to veto the reading of the bill. In reaction, Tiberius put forward a motion to depose Octavius. Tiberius was perfectly aware of the dire implications of the possible deposition of a tribune of the plebs and begged Octavius to veto his own motion. Despite his colleague's insistence, Octavius refused to veto Tiberius' motion and was eventually deposed. The *lex agraria* was then approved.

The senators, however, did not go along with Tiberius' ruse and devised a way to prevent the reform from actually being implemented. Since the Senate was historically responsible for financial affairs and foreign policy,[116] it managed to restrict the funding of the commission in charge of managing the land distribution process.

[115] Liv. *Urb*. 1.59-60.
[116] Pol. 6.13.

While the main political institutions sank in that strenuous dreadlock, news of the death of Attalus III arrived in Rome. Even more unexpected than the death of the allied king of Pergamum, was the announcement that he had bequeathed his kingdom to Rome. The Senate did not know how to react to the donation and remained inert. Tiberius took advantage of the Senate's immobility and submitted a proposal directly to the Assembly with a view to annexing the kingdom and reverting its wealth to the *lex agraria* commission.

As if the infringement of the Senate's prerogatives was not enough, Tiberius announced his intention to run for immediate re-election as tribune. On election day, the city was filled with turmoil. A group of exalted senators and their supporters, invested with a *senatus consultum*, invaded the Capitol, where citizens were prohibited to carry weapons, and clubbed Tiberius to death.[117] Since 439 a Roman had not been killed for political reasons.[118] From Tiberius onwards, political assassination became common practice.

In the years that followed Tiberius' murder, social differences sharpened, and new political forces emerged. Greedy private tax collectors, poor landless farmers, hungry urban artisans, Italian allies frustrated by continued political exclusion, and slaves ready to revolt gained the streets and fora in Rome and made their voices heard. The next generation of Roman politicians would be defined by men who managed to use these emerging forces to promote their own interests.

Ten years after the death of his brother, Gaius Gracchus launched his own campaign for the office of tribune of the plebs. Coincidentally, that was the same year when the terms of the annexation of Pergamum were finally presented to the Assembly. After being elected, Gaius proposed an ambitious reform package that included the founding of new colonies, public works, the purchase and storage of grain funded by the state, funding for the expenses of conscript and indebted legionaries, and the sale of tax-collection rights (tax-harvesting) in the provinces to citizens of the equestrian order in Rome,[119] the so-called *publicani*.[120]

The collection of taxes by private agents had become the second most profitable business in the Republic, second only to mining.[121] Gaius proposed a ban on the participation of senators in the Extortion Court, designed to try cases of abuse in tax collection. As a result,

[117] Plut. *TG*. 19.5-6.
[118] Spurius Maelius, cf. Liv. *Urb*. 4.13.
[119] Plut. *GG*. 5
[120] CAH. IX. pp. 584-585.
[121] Duncan. *op.cit*. p. 64.

the Court was left in the hands of the equestrians, the only ones who were allowed in the activities for which they could be tried.[122]

The sale of tax-collection rights to wealthy agents extended to Asia Rome's most voracious political interests.[123] Asia Minor entered Roman internal politics once and for all as an almost inexhaustible source of wealth and slaves and became a key piece in the political game of the Republic.

As early as 195, Cato the Elder had warned his countrymen after the successes in Greece and Asia, "places filled with all the attractions of vice" and feared that they would be captured by the treasures of the kings instead of the other way around.[124] Centuries later, Justin would thus conclude the effects of Rome's conquest of the East: "Asia, thus becoming the domain of the Romans, brought its vices to Rome together with its wealth".[125]

Unlike Tiberius, Gaius managed to be re-elected once. When trying to be re-elected for a second time, new conflicts broke out during the elections that forced him to commit suicide.[126] Some of his reforms endured, but the commission of the *lex agraria* remained inert, asphyxiated by the lack of resources and by the political limitations imposed by the Senate. After a few years, the sale of the land that had been redistributed by the Commission was allowed and, in 111, a new law transferred public land to private entities, completing the long path towards land concentration.

The political upheaval caused by the Gracchi brothers and the ensuing institutional crisis have been treated by the mainstream historiography as the final phase of the process of erosion of the control exercised by the political "elite" over the people.

It seems, however, that the argumentative line presented by Millar (2002) offers a better interpretation of how the political conflicts that led to the end of the Republic took place and how these conflicts could be related to the Roman territorial expansion, especially after the Second Punic War.

Millar disputes the commonly accepted assertion that attributes to the Senate the role of "central governing body of the *res publica*" and emphasizes the importance of assemblies, and especially of the tribunes of the plebs, for the establishment of laws and the execution of the daily tasks of public administration.[127]

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[122] Plut. *GG*. 6.
[123] Diod. 32.5.
[124] Liv. *Urb*. 34.4.
[125] Just. 36.4. ("Sic Asia Romanorum facta cum opibus suis uitia quoque Romam transmisit").
[126] Plut. *GG*. 16-17.
[127] Millar (2002). *op. cit*. pp. 95-98.

More importantly, by seeing the whole political structure from the point of view of the assemblies instead of the Senate, Millar argues that the period reveals "the assertion of sovereignty by the people: that is, the use of legislation (…), whether to ensure the protection of the rights of citizens or to restrict within limits the actions which could be taken by office-holders, or the terms under which office could be held."[128]

But how does Millar's perspective reconcile with Polybius' interpretation of the Roman *politeia*, especially in what concerns the Senate's prerogatives (particularly in 6.13)?

In fact, there is no contradiction between the two analyses. Quite the opposite. A careful reading of Millar's work in combination with Polybius helps to shed light on how Roman political institutions responded to and were at the same time affected by the conquest of the *oikoumené*.

Polybius argues that the Senate had complete control over the treasury[129] as well as in all issues related to foreign policy, including conducing inspections by request of Italian communities or individuals and dispatching and receiving embassies.[130] That is why, Polybius says that, to anyone who is in Rome in the absence of the consuls, the Roman "constitution appears to be absolutely aristocratic".[131]

When addressing the functions of the people (*δῆμος*), however, Polybius makes it clear that it is the assemblies' prerogative to pass and reject laws, ratify international treaties, and declare war and peace.[132] The historian concludes: "one could then say that the people's share is the most important and that the government is democratic".[133] It should be noted here that by democratic Polybius probably meant not-aristocratic, in the sense that the assemblies held more power than the Senate and the consulate. The choice of verbs used to characterize the impression of an aristocratic state (*φαίνω*) versus the materiality of the relative superiority of the power of the people (*εἰμί)* reinforces this understanding.

After the Second Punic War, Rome progressively extended the reach of its *imperium* – more importantly than its geographic borders or its formal administrative capacity – to communities that were previously considered foreign. In terms of the functioning of its principal institutions, that means that the scope of action of the Assembly was gradually taking

[128] *Ibid*. 98.
[129] Pol. 6.13.1.
[130] Pol. 6.13.5-7.
[131] Pol. 6.13.8 ("τελείως ἀριστοκρατικὴ φαίνεθ' ἡ πολιτεία").
[132] Pol. 6. 14.9-11.
[133] Pol. 6.14.12. ("ὥστε πάλιν ἐκ τούτων εἰκότως ἄν τιν' εἰπεῖν ὅτι μεγίστην ὁ δῆμος ἔχει μερίδα καὶ δημοκρατικόν ἐστι τὸ πολίτευμα").

over that of the Senate, since Roman imperialism shattered the borders between domestic and foreign policy and placed under the tutelage of the people not only the authorization of wars and the ratification of treaties but also other decisions that became fundamental to the day-to-day life of communities living as far as Spain, Macedon, Numidia and finally Asia.

With the annihilation of rival states, the assemblies became aware of their power to enact laws on issues such as the creation of provinces, the annexation of foreign territories, the appointment of magistrates, the concession of rights to collect taxes and the trial of public officials invested with Roman i*mperium* in those new provinces.

The increase in the relative importance of the people – that is to say of the assemblies – resulted in new opportunities for ambitious and charismatic politicians to appeal to the desires and prejudices of ordinary citizens in order to gather enough political support to subvert the republican system. In Millar's words: "we could read the history of the middle Republic as recording the imposition on office-holders of public rules and obligations, coupled with an ever-accelerating need for individuals to advertise themselves to the People and to compete for their favor".[134]

Roman expansion towards the East – which would eventually cause the collapse of the Hellenistic monarchies – must be understood in the context of these internal political disputes. Asia Minor became the top prize, coveted by all, as the most effective means of obtaining the resources and glory necessary to beat the main rivals in the power struggles of the Republic.[135] In this context, three Roman leaders whose lives were somehow impacted by Mithridates VI stand out: Marius, Sulla and Pompey.

Gaius Marius, a *novus homo* born in Lazio, served with distinction in Scipio Aemilianus' army, and was later elected Tribune of the Plebs, in 120, and then *praetor,* in 116. In Spain, he gathered a small fortune that earned him a marriage with Julia, of the influential, but impoverished, patrician family of the Julii. In 107, he was elected consul thanks to the promise of an easy victory over Jugurtha and to charges of bribery he directed against some senators. After the election, the Senate refused to hand him the conduct of the war in Numidia. In response, Marius had the Assembly override the Senate's prerogatives and grant him the military command.[136]

After defeating Jugurtha, Marius used the threat of a possible invasion of the Cimbri, an immense horde of barbarians of Germanic origins north of the Alps, to subvert the most

[134] Millar (2002). *op. cit.* 105.
[135] Asia was the richest province, cf. Cic. *Man.* 14.
[136] Plut. *Mar*. 3-9.

basic rules of the *mos maiorum* and was re-elected as consul, in 104. He would later be re-elected for the same office four times in a row, up to 100.

In addition to his impressive military victories, Marius revolutionized Roman history with the reforms he promoted in the legions. When confronted with the rising demand for troops in Africa and in the Alps, Marius tried to intensify the recruitment of soldiers among Roman allies, including the Hellenistic kingdoms of Asia Minor. It was to this call that Nicomedes III replied that the majority of his subjects had already been enslaved and taken to the provinces. Fearing for the reliability of a much-needed steady recruitment of auxiliary troops, the Senate prohibited the enslavement by debt of free men from allied kingdoms and ordered their release.[137]

As a result, about 800 men were released in Sicily. The decision was not welcomed by landowners and generated a new revolt among the slaves of other nationalities that would not be benefited by the Senate's decision. Amid the growing tension, the *propraetor* Publius Licinius Nerva revoked the decision and, contrary to his original intent, initiated a second slave revolt that consumed the island-province from 104 to 100. Once again, the rebels chose a prophet slave from the East as their king.[138]

Until that moment in Roman history, the legions were but a levy of conscript male citizens who satisfied rigorous property and census requirements. Military service was considered a duty of every capable citizen. Soldiers were paid poorly – if at all – and were disbanded as soon as the war that caused the recruitment was over. The conscript citizens also had to provide their own weapons, armor and equipment.

The concentration of land and income and the growing indebtedness not only produced a mass of impoverished citizens, but also limited the universe of citizens able to serve in the military. In view of this situation, Marius requested the elimination of the minimum property requirements even before deploying his army in Numidia. Soon, this exceptional measure would become the rule.

At first glance, the elimination of the minimum property requirement seemed to be an extraordinary remedy for the challenges posed by the increasing needs of constant military recruitment. However, military service itself was converted from a patriotic duty into a job opportunity for the destitute masses. Those who instantly became capable of joining the army would soon realize that their survival and their chances of enrichment depended on the success

[137] Diod. 36.3.1-2.
[138] Diod. 36.5-7.

of their commanders. The loyalty of the armies would therefore shift from the abstract idea of the People and the Senate of Rome to the very material fortune of a handful of generals. Marius was just the first of them.

Despite his political success, Marius was always seen by the Senate as an ambitious *novus homo*. After defeating the Cimbri, Marius left for Asia, allegedly to fulfill a promise made to the goddess *Bona Dea*.[139] On that trip, Marius met with Mithridates VI and instigated him: "O king, you should either strive to be stronger than the Romans, or accept silently whatever they order".[140]

Meanwhile, the worsening economic situation, the constant pressure of military recruitment and the frustrations caused by the *lex agraria* were too demanding for the Italian allies who had so far long fought alongside Rome and were still deprived of the right to citizenship.[141] A significant number of cities and tribes in Italy rebelled in 91 and the internal conflict that erupted lasted for four years.[142] The Republic's attention turned to the peninsula and Mithridates VI finally had the perfect opportunity to follow Marius' advice.

Once the rebellion was controlled both on the battlefield and by granting citizenship to practically all Italians, Rome was forced to deal with the new Eastern threat. In 88, Cornelius Sulla and Pompeius Rufus, heroes of the Social Wars, were elected as consuls, frustrating Marius' dream to serve for a seventh term.[143] Sulla was given the command of the war in Asia.

Once again, Marius' supporters tried to reverse the Senate's decision in the Assembly. In response, Sulla delivered the first ever political speech in history to a legion. With the troops assembled, Sulla announced his intention to take Rome by force. In the face of this obvious sacrilege, the officers deserted, but the legionaries had already placed their bets with the general.[144]

With Sulla's soldiers on the streets of Rome, Marius was quickly declared a public enemy and took refuge with his allies in Africa. Sulla then proposed a set of measures with a view to reestablishing the previous order: laws should be accepted by the Senate before being submitted to the Assembly; voting would be done on the basis of land tenure; the Senate would

[139] Plut. *Mar*. 31.1.
[140] Plut. *Mar*. 31.3. ("ἢ μεῖζον, ὦ βασιλεῦ, πειρῶ δύνασθαι Ῥωμαίων, ἢ ποίει σιωπῇ τὸ προστασσόμενον"). Marius' recommendation was probably motivated by his intentions to instigate a new war in the East and by his hope that Rome would once again turn to him to lead the legions.
[141] Hoyos. *op. cit*. p. 1317.
[142] App. *Civ*. 34.
[143] Plut. *Sul*. 6.
[144] App. *Civ*. 57.

be expanded; and the dispersion of the Italians among the 31 original rural tribes would be revoked, weakening their political weight.[145]

Sulla presided over the consular elections for 87 which resulted in the victories of Cornelius Cinna, a Marian supporter, and of Gnaeus Octavius, a conservative contrary to the recent invasion of Sulla's legions. The result was used to reinforce the image of neutrality Sulla wanted to promote. He, however, forced everyone to swear not to undo his reforms before leaving for Asia.[146]

While Sulla faced the Pontic army in Greece, pro-Marian forces seized power in Rome. The Assembly revoked Marius' declaration as an enemy of the state and approved another one, of similar content, against Sulla. Members of the pro-Sulla faction were murdered and, for five days, Rome suffered a purge. With power firm in their hands, Marius and Cinna were elected consuls for the year 86. The septuagenarian general died 17 days after taking office for the seventh time. In his place, Valerius Flaccus was elected and sent to Asia to take command of the war against Mithridates, a conflict that Sulla had practically already won.[147]

Even though he was declared an enemy of the state, stripped of his consular functions, and watched as new legions sent by an antagonistic regime approached his own army, the respect of his own men never faltered. Sulla defeated the Pontic forces in battle, besieged and sacked Athens and expelled Mithridates VI's troops from mainland Greece. With that, he was able to celebrate a very lenient peace-treaty with Mithridates and turn his attention back to Rome.[148]

The civil war that followed seemed more like a military parade than a sequence of battles. Without Marius' leadership, many of the legionaries recruited by the new regime simply switched sides as Sulla marched from Greece to Rome. Those who had been purged by Marius and Cinna joined Sulla's march enthusiastically. Among them, a young man named Pompey.[149]

Back in power, Sulla was declared, by unanimous vote of the Assembly, *dictator legibus faciendis et republicae constitienae*, with absolute power. Unlike the previous times when dictators had been appointed, Sulla's mandate had no fixed term. No man had ever gathered so much power in Roman history since Tarquinius Superbus.

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[145] App. *Civ*. 59, 73; Liv. *Per*. 77.
[146] App. *Civ*. 63; Plut. *Sul*. 10.
[147] App. *Civ*. 70, 75; Diod. 37.29; Plut. *Mar*. 42, 45; Liv. *Per*. 80.
[148] App. *Mit*. 59-60; Plut. *Sul*. 25; Liv. *Per*. 83.
[149] App. *Civ*. 79; Plut. *Sul*. 27; Liv. *Per*. 85.

Sulla sought to use his unlimited power to, once again, institute conservative reforms that would, in his eyes, revitalize the Republic's political rules: the Senate would return to the center of the political system; tribunes would lose their veto power; the *cursus honorum* would be formalized by law.[150] His proposals having been approved, Sulla surprisingly resigned from the dictatorship in 81, to everyone's astonishment, and never again held any political office.[151]

His constitutional reform would soon be abandoned. The examples of Sulla's biography overcame the importance of his political reforms and the leaders who followed him paid more attention to what he could have done rather than what he had actually achieved. Power relations had suffered a severe blow, new political groups were being organized and the stakes had become too high for a system characterized by the unpredictability of its results. In 70, Pompey and Licinius Crassus, elected consuls, reestablished the tribunes' prerogatives and the courts were reopened to the equestrian order. In a generation, veterans would sell the land they had received as payment for their services and returned to the condition of soldiers hungry again for wealth and glory.[152]

For the new generation of Romans, Sulla's reforms were overshadowed by his career and the undisputed power he assumed and which, inexplicably, he abdicated. The first of these new politicians was Pompey. In his youth, Pompey became a celebrity for combining his personal charisma with impressive military success fighting the last pockets of the pro-Marian resistance. He took advantage of the general disrespect to the *mos maiorum* to celebrate two triumphs even before he was elected *praetor*, and became consul at 35 years, younger than the minimum required age, without ever having occupied any other magistracy.[153]

When the third war against Mithridates broke out, Pompey was in Cilicia with a mission to end piracy in the Mediterranean. His campaigns in Asia Minor, Syria and Judea earned him even more laurels and unparalleled wealth.

Rome would applaud Pompey's victories, without realizing that its fortune had been cast in a series of internal conflicts that would eventually consume the Republic.

[150] App. *Civ*. 100; Liv. *Per*. 89; Vel. 2.30.
[151] Plut. *Sul*. 35-36; App. *Civ*. 103-104;
[152] Liv. *Per.* 97; Vel. 2.32; Plut. *Pomp*. 22; Cic. *Agr*. 2.35.
[153] Plut. *Pomp*. 9-12; Liv. *Per.* 97.

1.3 THE HELLENISTIC KINGDOMS OF ANATOLIA

Mithridatic Pontus is one of the Hellenistic kingdoms that flourished in the wake of the Wars of Alexander's Successors. The former Achaemenid satrapies in Northern and Central Anatolia – including the regions that would later become Bithynia, Cappadocia, Pontus and Paphlagonia – had only partially been conquered or simply ignored by Alexander in his way to Babylon and to the Persian heartland.[154] After Alexander's death, Asia Minor was divided by his generals along with the rest of the conquered territories. Given its strategic position, the region would become one of the main stages of the many battles known as the Wars of the Diadochi.[155]

When Antigonus Monophthalmus was defeated and killed in the Battle of Ipsus in 301 in the Fourth and last War of the Diadochi the destiny of Asia Minor was sealed. Neither of the two main victors – Lysimachus and Seleucus – managed to impose complete control over the whole region, giving local potentates the opportunity to gradually establish themselves as rulers in different districts. Some of the Anatolian satraps and other local bureaucrats who had enjoyed a considerable amount of autonomous power under the Achaemenid Empire[156] thrived amid the instability caused by the Macedonian invasions and were able to reorganize their power structures into local dynasties. These new political units would gain their independence[157] in different ways,[158] while the three main heirs of Alexander's empire – Ptolemaic Egypt, Antigonid Macedonia, and Seleucid Asia – struggled for supremacy.

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[154] Tarn. *op. cit*. p. 129. The author claims that there were three independent kingdoms between the Seleucid Empire and the Black Sea: Pontus, Cappadocia (including Paphlagonia) and Bithynia, in addition to the city of Heraclea.

[155] The lists of satraps invested by the Partition of Babylon in 323 (cf. Diod. 18.5.4), and later by the Partition of Triparadisus in 321 (cf. Diod. 18.39.5), attest to the maintenance – in broader lines – of the Empire's organization in satrapies, even after Alexander's death. In Asia Minor, the following satrapies are listed: Armenia, Lycaonia and Cappadocia, Phrygia Major, Hellespontic Phrygia, Lydia, Caria, Pisidia and Lycia, while the Greek cities on the Mediterranean coast are understood as autonomous areas.

[156] Elspeth Dusinberre. *Empire, Authority, and Autonomy in Achaemenid Anatolia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 4-5; Hamid B. Shourkaei. "La Satrapie de Phrygie hellespontique (Daskyleion): des origines à la chute de l'Empire perse achéménide". In: *Digital Archive of Brief notes & Iran Review*. n. 5, p. 1-16, 2018. p. 15.

[157] Unlike the modern definition of "independence", the diverse nature of the relations between Hellenistic cities and kings, and between Hellenistic kingship and the Roman interpretation of freedom (cf. Ferrary. *op. cit*. pp. 179; 211) allow for different definitions of free or independent government. Throughout this thesis, the term will be used to describe political units that enjoy self-government, tax freedom and autonomous foreign policy.

[158] There was no single way of declaring political independence in the Hellenistic period. Sometimes even when the fundamental elements could be attested, the declaration of independence or its recognition by royal peers would only come one or more generations later, through marriages with members of the main Hellenistic dynasties, treaties, exchange of official correspondence or by the unilateral use of the title βασιλεύς in coins or inscriptions.

The Seleucids retained – at least nominal – control over important territories in Anatolia but its overstretched empire and the many threats it faced especially from the East and the South resulted in a profound change in its political strategy to Asia Minor. The empire soon resorted to maintaining good relations with local dynasties and exerting limited power through treaties and marriages with members of the Seleucid house.[159] Mithridates II, Mithridates III, Pharnakes, and Mithridates V, for instance, were all married to Seleucid princesses.

As a result, the third century consented to the rise of multiple independent or semi-independent political unities in Asia Minor. The prevalence of small and medium-sized kingdoms in the region is a phenomenon unmatched in any other area conquered by the Macedonian invasions. Nowhere else where Hellenistic culture could be felt has experienced such a degree of political fragmentation or witnessed the emergence of so many long-lived independent minor dynasties.

The uniqueness of Anatolia's politically fragmented landscape can be explained by both its geographical circumstances and specific historical and cultural factors. From the geographical point of view, Asia Minor was located at the crossroads between Macedonia, Egypt and Syria-Babylon, and it was in the interest of the three main Hellenistic empires to prevent the region from falling into their rivals' sphere of influence.

The Achaemenids bestowed upon Anatolia a long-lived tradition of autonomy that greatly facilitated the emergence of the minor Hellenistic kingdoms in the region. These kingdoms would later gradually develop a set of political practices and customs that reinforced local culture, highlighting the mixed traditions and religions they inherited from Greeks, Persians, the Anatolian original peoples, and others.

As a general rule, especially in those areas where the better part of the population was not of Greek or Macedonian descent, Hellenistic kings relied heavily on the control of their army. As Grainger points out:

> *Kings were made by self-proclamation, by coups d'état, by usurpation, or by hereditary right, and to maintain their claims they needed clear military support. In that sense, they were 'military monarchies', though they soon shed that image, if not the reality. One of the aims of these kings was to cultivate their legitimacy as royal*

[159] Tarn. *op. cit.* p. 130; Grainger. *op. cit*. l. 871.

rulers, which required presenting themselves as kings by right, rather than to obviously relying on force. [160]

At the heart of the Hellenistic monarchical mentality was the idea that the king's ruling was nearly absolute inside his domains. However, as the crude reality of the Wars of the Diadochi made clear, as long as one dynast could muster armies and deploy them in battle, kings were equal among themselves, "with none among the rulers capable of stopping or preventing the impetus of those who intended to commit an injustice".[161]

Despite the overt bellicosity of Hellenistic kings – which the history of Anatolia in the third and second centuries made abundantly clear – dynastic families begun to recognize themselves as equals, married their children to one another, negotiated freely, declared war and celebrated peace.

During these years, Pontus was but one more example of such a kingdom. Mithridates I Ctistes, the founder of the dynasty, was Persian nobleman from the city of Cius, allegedly related to the Achaemenids of old. His descendants extended the rule of the Mithridatic line to all of Pontus in northern Cappadocia and parts of Paphlagonia and Galatia, even before Eupator rose to power.

Nevertheless, the sources that we dispose of today indicate that the first Mithridatic king who pursued an openly expansionist policy at the expanse of the neighboring kingdoms was Pharnakes, the fourth king of Pontus and Mithridates Eupator's grandfather. His aggressive military campaigns in the 180s motivated an alliance between Pergamum, Cappadocia and Bithynia, with at least some form of political support from Rhodes and Rome, that – according to the terms of the peace imposed on Pontus – must have conquered an unqualified victory over the Mithridatic armies around 179.[162]

When Pharnakes died, the Mithridatic crown passed on to his brother, Mithridates IV Philopator Philadelphus, probably because his son, Mithridates V Euergetes, was too young to rule. Euergetes would eventually ascend to the throne with no internal commotion or any other succession crisis that we are aware of. In addition to being a notably loyal brother and uncle,

[160] Grainger. *op. cit*. l. 15.
[161] Pol. 5.67.11. ("μεταξὺ δὲ μηδενὸς ὑπάρχοντος τοῦ δυνησομένου παρακατασχεῖν καὶ κωλῦσαι τὴν τοῦ δοκοῦντος ἀδικεῖν ὁρμήν").
[162] Pol. 24.1, 5, 8, 9; Liv. 40.2,20; Diod. 29. The treaty that ended the hostilities initiated by Pharnakes against his neighbors forced both him and his brother to keep the peace with the kings of Pergamum, Eumenes II, of Bithynia, Prusias II, and of Cappadocia, Ariarathes IV. Although we are not sure about exactly how long was Pharnakes' rule, Polybius mentions Mithridates IV, his brother and successor, as the sole king in 154 (33.12).

Philopator Philadelphus would become the first Mithridatic ruler to adopt a foreign policy of rapprochement towards Rome and its allies in Asia Minor, a strategy that would become increasingly common among the Hellenistic monarchies in the middle of the second century.

In order to celebrate the realignment of Pontic foreign policy and muster the benevolence of the Roman Republic, Mithridates IV had an extremely important dedication inscribed in both Greek and Latin in a monument on the Roman Capital, that read:

> *King Mithridates Philopator Philadelphus, son of King Mithridates, [dedicates this statue] to the people of Rome because of the friendship and the military alliance that exists between him and the Romans. Nemanes, son of Nemanes, and Mahes, son of Mahes, were sent as ambassadors.*[163]

With this bilingual inscription, Mithridates IV put an end to the isolationist, aggressive policy that had been conducted by his predecessors, especially his own brother Pharnakes, on the Pontic throne since the foundation of the kingdom.[164] This new foreign policy would be preserved and intensified by his nephew and successor, Mithridates V, until his death in 120.[165]

As we have already indicated, Pontus was not alone in Asia Minor. The region was home to a uniquely fragmented political scenario, where kingdoms, semi-autonomous cities and districts boomed. To anyone crossing the Hellespont from Greece into Asia, the first of these political unities to emerge was Bithynia, a kingdom that rose from the ancient Persian satrapy of Hellespontic Phrygia. A local dynasty ruled the region since the fifth century and

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[163] OGIS 375. ("[rex Metradates Pilopator et Pil]adelpus regus Metradati f[ilius] [populum Romanum amicitiai e]t societatis ergo quae iam [inter ipsum et Romanos optin]et legati coiraverunt [Nemanes Nemanei f[ilius] Ma]hes Mahei f[ilius]"; "[βασιλεὺς Μιθραδάτης Φιλ]οπάτωρ καὶ Φιλάδελφος [βασιλέως Μιθραδάτ]ου τὸν δῆμον τὸν [Ῥωμαίων φίλον καὶ] σύμμαχον αὐτοῦ [γενόμενον εὐνοίας] ἕνεκεν τῆς εἰς αὐτὸν [πρεσβευσάντων Ναιμά]νους τοῦ Ναιμάνους [Μάου τοῦ Μάου]"). This inscription was part of a single group of dedications inscribed in a large monument located near the Capitoline temple. Since the fifth century, clients and allies had honored the Roman temple by placing crowns and dedications in Jupiter's precinct on the Capitol. The god was the guarantor of treaties and the good faith of the Romans, with many treaties with Greek cities mentioning that a copy was to be placed in that temple. Since some of the inscriptions of that particular group were found to have been made in travertine blocks, the group is generally dated at the age of Sulla. However, the name of Mithridates IV, whose reign ended around 150, brought up confusion and heated academic debate on the timing of the dedication. Mellor convincingly argues that the dedication must have been reinscribed after the fire of 83 that consumed the Temple of Jupiter and all of its surroundings, explaining both the late date of inscription and the synchronicity of different dedications by different peoples. For more details, see: Ronald Mellor. "The Dedications on the Capitoline Hill". In: *Chiron* 8 (1978). pp. 319-320; 328-330.

[164] Brian McGing. *The Foreign Policy of Mithridates VI Eupator, King of Pontus*. Leiden: Brill, 1986. p. 34.

[165] According to Api. *Mit*. 2.10., Mithridates V was the first Pontic king to become a Roman friend.

resisted both the Macedonian invasion and the later conquest attempts led by Lysimachus and Seleucus.[166] In 278 King Nicomedes I made a pact with the Celts who were besieging Byzantium and provided them with the means to cross the Hellespont in exchange for military aid against his rebellious brother Zipoetes II.[167]

The Celts brought to Asia Minor plundered and looted the region until settling in the territory east of Phrygia, in the heartland of Anatolia, where they would come to be known as the Greek Celts or Galatians.[168] Although Galatia became a common name to refer to this region, it was home to various Celtic communities with no centralized power until after the Mithridatic Wars, in the late first century.

The coastline that stretched from northern Bithynia to western Pontus was known as Paphlagonia. Homer mentions a Paphlagonian ruler among the main supporters of Troy[169] and Xenophon suggests that the region had already enjoyed some degree of autonomy within the Achaemenid Empire.[170] In the Hellenistic period, however, Paphlagonian independence was a mere shade of its glorious past. The Paphlagonian territory was repeatedly assailed by its neighbors from Pontus and Bithynia until it was eventually split between the two in the second century, during the reign of Mithridates VI.[171]

To the south of Bithynia and Paphlagonia lied the territories of Phrygia and Mysia, whose history extended to a mythical archaic past known in Greek poetry. In the early third century, Philetaerus, a bureaucrat who was the son of a Greek man and a Paphlagonian woman, took advantage of the rivalry between Lysimachus and Seleucus, established himself as the ruler of the city of Pergamum, and founded a new dynasty.[172] One of his descendants, Attalus I Soter, defeated the Galatians, claimed the titles of champion of the Greeks against the barbarians and defender of the poleis of Asia, and raised Pergamum to a position of prestige throughout the Hellenistic world.[173] It was the same Attalus I, who, in 201, was forced to turn to the Romans to stop the expansionist policy carried out by Philip V of Macedonia.[174] The alliance with Rome would become the main axis of Pergamene foreign policy and eventually had serious consequences for Asia Minor.

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[166] Mem. 12.
[167] Mem. 11.2.; Just. 25.2.
[168] Str. 12.5.; Just. 25.2.; Liv. *Urb*. 31.16.; Mem. 11.2; Paus. 1.8.1.; Pol 18.41.
[169] Hom. 2.850-851.
[170] Xen. *Ana*. 8.7. suggests that Paphlagonia was not subject to any other neighboring satrapy.
[171] Oro. 6.2.; Just. 37.4.2.
[172] Str. 12.3.8.; 13.4.1; Paus. 1.10.3-4; Esther V. Hansen. *The Attalids of Pergamon*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971. pp. 15, 18-19.
[173] Str. 13.4.2.; Paus. 1.8.1.; Pol. 4.48; 18.41.
[174] Liv. *Urb*. 31.2; Pol. 16.1.

To the east of Galatia and south of Pontus, the ancient kingdom of Cappadocia flourished from the Achaemenid satrapy of the same name, governed by the very descendants of the local Persian nobles who had faced Alexander and the Macedonians and resisted their invasion.[175] Like the Mithridatids, the Ariarathids claimed descent from Cyrus and from one of the conspirators who supported Darius. For that reason, Diodorus affirms both dynasties were related.[176] Despite these deep Persian roots,[177] Hellenistic influences were already been felt in the kingdom since the beginning of the third century, as it is evidenced by the adoption of Greek inscriptions in the minting of Cappadocian coins.[178]

Further east, from Cappadocia and Pontus, another ancient civilization rose on the border between Asia Minor and the Caucasus. Under the rule of the Orontid dynasty almost uninterruptedly since the Achaemenid Empire[179], Armenia was divided, during the Hellenistic era, by domestic succession struggles and Seleucid intervention, resulting in the creation of the smaller, buffer kingdoms of Sophene, Commagene and Armenia Minor, in addition to Armenia proper.

Even after the Orontids were replaced by the Artaxiads due to the machinations of Antiochus III,[180] the kingdom remained distant from most disputes between the Anatolian monarchies. This situation changed drastically with the ascension of Tigranes II, who reunited the Armenian kingdoms and conquered territories in the Tigris, Mesopotamia, Syria and Phoenicia.[181] The constant assailment by the Seleucid Empire achieved its climax in 201/200, when Orontes IV was overthrown and a Seleucid commander named Artashes I, himself presumably related to the Orontids, was crowned king and initiated the Artaxiad dynasty.

As it can be noted, the main kingdoms of Hellenistic Asia Minor shared the same region, had their histories affected by the same major events (such as the subjugation to Achaemenid rule, the Macedonian invasion, the tumultuous period of the intestine wars of the Diadochi, Celtic incursions), and faced similar challenges in terms of constituting legitimate dynasties that ideally would not rely solely on the power of their armies to survive.

In spite of these similarities, only one Anatolian Hellenistic dynasty developed a foundational myth shrouded with mystical elements, with the goal to ascertain its legitimacy

[175] Diod. 31.1.
[176] Diod. 31.19.
[177] Str. 15.3.15.
[178] Diod. 31.19.
[179] Plut. *Eum*. 4.1-7.7; Diod. 18.29-31; Just. 13.8.
[180] Str. 11.14.5.
[181] Str. 11.14.15-16.

in a metaphysical manner: the kingdom of Pontus. Diodorus, the oldest source to cite Mithridates I, describes the dynast as the descendant of one of the seven Persians who, according to Herodotus,[182] killed the *magus* Smerdis, the same origin attributed to the Ariarathids of Cappadocia. Mithridates Ctistes is portrayed as a "man noted for his courage, trained as a soldier since childhood".[183]

In the second half of the first century, Strabo mentioned Mithridates I Ctistes in his *Geography* only in passing and merely indicated that the nobleman settled in the fortress of Cimiata and that his descendants ruled Pontus until Mithridates VI Eupator.[184] As we will argue later on, Strabo was himself born in the city of Amaseia, in Pontus, and one of his ancestors had fought alongside Mithridates VI. This personal relationship to the Republic's last great enemy certainly had consequences in his accounts of the dynasty.

As we turn the millennium and the trauma of the Asian Vespers and the threat that the Mithridatic Wars imposed to Roman rule in Asia begin to fade other accounts by historians such as Plutarch and Appian begin to include a much richer version of the foundational story of the kingdom of Pontus. One much more detailed and brimming with myth.

According to the newer, mythical version, Antigonus I Monophthalmus woke up one night after having a disturbing nightmare. He had dreamed that he was sowing a field with gold dust, from which a golden crop sprung. That rich crop was then harvested by one of his followers, a young Persian nobleman named Mithridates.

Antigonus was so disturbed by this premonitory dream that he decided to kill his henchman for the treason he would presumably commit. He then confided his plan to his son Demetrius who was a close friend of Mithridates'. Perturbed by his father's intentions, Demetrius asked Mithridates to join him and his other companions and, after gradually drawing him away from the others, used the butt of his lance to write "Fly, Mithridates!" on the sand, so that he himself would not utter the words and thus break the oath of silence on this matter he had made to his father. Mithridates understood the warning and ran away, accompanied by six other horsemen. Mithridates left Antigonus' lands and took refuge in Cappadocia, where he ruled for 36 years and founded a new dynasty.[185]

Given the chronology of the historical accounts we have inherited, it is reasonable to assume that this new version began to circulate in Asia Minor sometime before the turn of the

[182] Hdt. 3.67.
[183] Diod. 19.40.2. ("ἀνὴρ ἀνδρείᾳ διαφέρων καὶ τεθραμμένος ἐκ παιδὸς στρατιωτικῶς").
[184] Str. 12.3.41.
[185] Plut. *Dem*. 3-4; App. *Mit*. 2.9.

millennium and was later incorporated in the works of historians during Imperial times. The fantastic elements added to the narrative fit perfectly into recurring themes in Middle Eastern and Greek mythical stories and may reveal the first clues of a wide propaganda campaign of Messianic legitimation carried out by Mithridates VI Eupator during the wars he waged against Rome in the first half of the first century.

Premonitory dreams are certainly one of the most frequently employed elements in the building up of mystical heroes' narratives. These dreams commonly serve as a means to inform powerful rulers, through metaphors and symbolism, about the emergence of a hero who would replace them in the future. All of their efforts to undo those prophesies would end up paving the way to their fulfillment.[186]

In the case of the revised foundational narrative of the Mithridatic dynasty, it was revealed to Antigonus, the most powerful ruler in his time in Asia Minor, that Ctistes would flee to the area of the Black Sea, a godly appointed safe place where his divinely predetermined mission would be realized. He and his progeny would then reap the harvest of glory and the wealth sown by the Macedonians and restore to the Eastern peoples the riches that Asia Minor produced.[187]

Another common element in Eastern hero narratives is the imposed flight to remote lands in order to save the hero's life in his earlier years.[188] Furthermore, Mithridates I Ctistes was accompanied by seven horsemen, the same number of Darius' companions when the king of kings defeated an usurper enemy and restored the legitimacy of the Persian empire.[189]

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[186] For example: Sargon of Acadia (cf. "The Sargon Legend." In: *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature.* Segment B. Oxford University, 2006); Joseph (cf. Gen. 37:5-11); Cyrus (cf. Hdt.1.107-121) and Paris (P-Ap. 3.12.5). For these and other myths related to the birth of heroes, see: Otto Rank. *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*. New York: Vintage Books, 1932.

[187] Luis Ballesteros-Pastor. "Nullis Umquam Nisi Domesticis Regibus. Cappadocia, Pontus and the resistance to the Diadochi in Asia Minor". In: Victor Troncoso e Edward Anson. *After Alexander: The Time of the Diadochi (323-281 BC)*. Oxford: Oxford Books, 2013. 183 – 198. p. 186.

[188] Samuel Eddy. *The King is Dead: Studies in the Near Eastern Resistance to Hellenism*. Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 1961. p. 179.

[189] Hdt. 3.69-71.

CHAPTER 2

POLITICAL CRISIS AND MITHRIDATES VI'S RISE TO POWER

2.1 PONTUS AT THE TIME OF MITHRIDATES VI'S ASCENSION

By the second century, the city of Sinope, situated on the northernmost edge of the Anatolian Black Sea coast, had become the "the most notable city" in northern Asia Minor[190] and the most important in the kingdom of Pontus. The city was originally founded by Milesian settlers and prospered thanks to the intense maritime trade routes it commanded. For that reason, it attracted the greed of the Mithridatids since the establishment of their dynasty. Mithridates II, the third Mithridatic king, tried to conquer it in 220, but failed, due to the decisive military assistance rendered by Rhodes.[191] The city was eventually captured by Pharnakes, fifth king of the dynasty, in 183.

Before Eupator was born, the Mithridatic dynasty had managed to extend their power to most of the Greek poleis of the southern coast of the Euxine. The Mithridates of Pontus ruled over the entire land strip from Amastris in the west to Trapezus in the east, including the cities of Cotyora and Cerasus-Pharnakeia, all of which were themselves former Sinopean colonies.

Amisus was considered the second most important city in the kingdom at the time of Eupator's rise. The city was also a former Greek coastal colony that had probably been annexed by Mithridates II. To Amisus converged all the land trading routes that connected Cappadocia and the Pontic countryside to the ocean. Upon rising to power, Mithridates Eupator adorned the city with temples and public buildings and added to it a suburb named Eupatoria, in his own honor, to serve as his royal residence.[192]

While the rich coastal Greek cities of the Black Sea were greatly influenced by Hellenic ideas and values, the Pontic countryside had practically no major urban centers and could be considered, together with neighboring Cappadocia, the region least touched by Hellenism.[193]

[190] Str. 12.3.11
[191] Pol. 4.56.
[192] Str. 12.3.30.; App. *Mit*. 78.
[193] David Magie. *Roman Rule in Asia Minor*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950. p. 179.

In that area, the presence of Anatolian and Persian costumes and traditions was still very strong.[194]

The territory of Pontus was divided by a wide mountain range known as the Pontian Alps, that run from the east to the west, parallel to the Black Sea coast. That geographical barrier accentuated the cultural division between the coastal cities and the countryside. The only exception to that was the city of Amaseia, Strabo's hometown, which was located to the south of the Alps and had served as a capital to the Mithridatic kingdom before Sinope. Despite its relative loss of political relevance, it was still in Amaseia where the burial places of the Mithridatic kings were found.

It was also in the southern part of the kingdom where the most important sanctuaries were located. These sites were dedicated to the multiple deities that were revered in the kingdom, a testament to the degree of syncretism that had been achieved over the years after many different invasions. Like in Cappadocia, the temple at Comana was dedicated to the Anatolian deity Ma. Its high-priest commanded some six thousand temple servants and was considered the second most powerful man in the kingdom after only the king himself. In Zela, another temple was dedicated to the Persian deities Anaitis, Omanus and Anadatus. It was at this site that the people of Pontus habitually made their vows concerning the most important issues of their lives. The temple in Zela also had a sacred territory at the disposal of its priests.[195] The shrine of Zeus Stratios was also located in that same region.

This was the kingdom of Pontus when Mithridates Eupator was born sometime around the year 134.[196] Mithridates was probably the first king of the dynasty to be born in Sinope, and, according to Strabo, he would become so attached to the city that he granted it special honors and made it his capital.[197]

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[194] Andreas Petratos et al. "Art used for Political Propaganda: The Case of Mithridates". In: *Ancient Art in the Black Sea*. Tessalônica: International Hellenic University, 2014.

[195] Str. 11.8.4; 12.2.3, 32-36; 12

[196] Mithridates Eupator's year of birth has instigated a heated academic debate, thanks to the account by Pompeius Trogus, preserved in Justin's epitome (37.2.1-2), about the occurrence of a comet in the year of his birth (or conception). The prevailing interpretation in specialized literature, inspired by John K. Fotheringham ("The New Star of Hipparchus and the Dates of Birth and Accession of Mithridates". In: *Monthly Notics of the Royal Astronomical Society*. Vol. 79. (1919). pp. 162-167), identifies the phenomenon cited by Pompeius Trogus as the comet observed and recorded in contemporary Chinese sources in the year 134, attributing to that date Mithridates' conception and 133 to his birth. However, John Ramsey ("Mithridates, the Banner of Ch'ih-Yu, and the Comet Coin". In: *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*. Vol. 99, (1999). pp. 197-253) has convincingly argued that another comet whose description better resembles the one described by Trogus (long tail, luminosity, shape) was registered in Chinese sources in 135, suggesting that Mithridates VI was actually born in 134.

[197] Str. 12.3.11. Rostovtzeff claims that Pharnakes transferred the capital of the kingdom to Sinope shortly after conquering it, but the conclusion does not derive from any literary source. See: Michael Rostovtzeff. "Pontus and its Neighbours: the first Mithridatic War". In: Stanley A. Cook, Frank Adcock & Martin Charlesworth. *Cambridge Ancient History*. Vol. 9. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932. pp 217-8.

Despite the references made to Mithridates Eupator in countless different Greek and Latin literary sources, no ancient biography exclusively dedicated to the king of Pontus survived the test of time. As it could be expected, Roman historians demonstrated special interest in the events that led to the Mithridatic Wars and to the deeds attributed to the Pontic king during the conflict. The emphasis on the later part of Mithridates reign, from the 90's to his death in 63, also influenced most modern historiographic works, especially those aimed at analyzing the Roman expansion process in the East and the resulting crises that led to the end of the Republic.

There is, therefore, an abundant academic production emphasizing the Mithridatic Wars and the king's last attempts to put an end to the Roman presence in Asia Minor. Consequently, the study of Mithridates' political propaganda tends to stress its aspects related to his plan to incite hatred against the Romans and to claim the title of the savior-king of the Hellenistic East.

This overemphasis on the later part of Mithridates' reign inherited from Roman accounts led to a tendency to analyze his earlier years with a hindsight bias. The actions, decisions, and events related to his formative years, his relationship with other members of the royal family and the circumstances in which he ascended to power are normally associated with the conflicts he would eventually wage against the Republic and tend to be justified by an irrational hatred he supposedly nurtured towards Rome.

However, a chronological rearrangement of events and interpretations based on the pieces of information we can gather from literary and material sources may shed some light on the different objectives the king might have pursued as well as the challenges he may have faced in his earlier life. This new perspective can also help to advance our knowledge about the political propaganda widely implemented by Mithridates, and that has attracted so much attention from modern historiography.

With that goal in mind, it is necessary, however, to recognize that the literary sources themselves, as previously suggested, also suffer from a certain degree of revisionism, aimed at highlighting early examples of the virulence and the exoticism of the enemy Rome would eventually defeat. The few references that have survived the test of time highlight anecdotal events or picturesque passages that, by themselves, do not reveal much of his formative years. We believe, nonetheless, that a more careful interpretation of these narratives and their analysis in the light of material sources that have recently become available allow us to draw a revealing picture about Mithridates' early life.

The best literary source on Mithridates' earlier years is Justin's *Epitome of Pompeius Trogus' Philippic Histories*. Despite the fact that it contains much more information related to the last king of Pontus' childhood, adolescence and initial years on the throne than any other literary source available, some of its passages are excessively compressed and it is necessary to use other sources to better establish the succession of events and identify patterns and possible causes and effects.

One of the most important elements we can conclude from Pompeius Trogus' report – through Justin's words – is that, since childhood, Mithridates' life was threatened by many plots. In one occasion, the young man was forced by his guardians to ride an untamed horse and hurl a javelin, in the hopes that an accident would cost him his life. But his horsemanship proved far beyond what his tender age might have suggested. Frustrated, the conspirators tried to poison him, but the prince resisted, thanks to the deliberate ingestion of antidotes as a precautionary method. This practice would be responsible for an almost supernatural physical resistance that would make Mithridates supposedly immune to poison.[198]

McGing suggests that these narratives could have derived from a misunderstanding on the part of the Roman sources, to whom the traditional Persian education that attached great importance to riding horses could have been missed. The author points out that such an early exposure to horse-riding, even under the most dangerous circumstances, could have actually been part of the training system common to Persian nobility.[199]

The account of the episode does not derive from Trogus' personal witnessing the episode, but from oral traditions that reached Trogus' sources, among them his own uncle, a veteran of the last Mithridatic War, already in the late 60s.[200] We are of the view, therefore, that it is unlikely that ordinary daily trainings would have been transmitted for decades if there were no intentions of conveying the idea of a more serious element to the story, such as a murderous plot. The mention of poisoning attempts right after that narrative, we believe, corroborates with this argument.

This episode may also reflect the prolonged effects of the propaganda later disseminated by Mithridates himself to extol his qualities as a Persian nobleman in the face of the threats he had suffered at the court before consolidating power. Other examples of his supposed horsemanship skills can also be found in echoes of later works, such as in *The Life of Nero*. According to Suetonius, the Roman emperor attempted to emulate the impressive

[198] Just. 37.2.
[199] McGing. *op. cit*. pp. 44-45.
[200] Just. 43.5.12.

ability of the Pontic king and drive a ten-horse chariot, without success.[201] Appian, for his part, claims that Eupator was capable of driving a sixteen-horse chariot and that, in his last years, he could ride a thousand stadiums (185 km) on one single day.[202] The same goes for his legendary immunity to poison. According to Appian, Mithridates was unable to commit suicide by poisoning himself, such was the resistance he had acquired over the years by ingesting an elixir that would later be known as "φάρμακα Μιθριδάτεια".[203]

We are not sure if the alleged assassination attempts against Eupator's life occurred during Mithridates Euergetes' reign or after his father's death. Neither do we have any reliable information on the kind of relationship the crown prince might have had with his father. What we know, thanks to Strabo, whose testimony is given credit to both by his nationality and by his family ties to the Pontic dynastic house, is that Euergetes was murdered in a treacherous manner by his closest allies in Sinope, and that power was passed on to his wife, Laodike, on behalf of their two young sons, Mithridates Eupator and Mithridates Chrestus.[204]

The reasons for the assassination of king Mithridates Euergetes remain unknown.[205] Since queen Laodike was kept on the throne and there seems to be no accounts of any threats against her life, we can infer that the conspirators, whatever causes the might have had to kill Euergetes, were at the very least confident that the queen regent would not persecute them nor disturb their plans.

Laodike VI was a Seleucid princess, granddaughter of Antiochus III, the Great, and the sister of Antiochus V Eupator and Alexander Balas.[206] She had seven children with Mithridates V: Laodike (later known as "Laodike of Cappadocia"), Mithridates VI, Mithridates Chrestus, another Laodike, Nissa, Roxana and Statira.

According to Strabo, Eupator was eleven years old when Euergetes was assassinated and he ascended to the throne of Pontus, together with his younger brother, whose age is

[201] Suet. *Ner*. 24.
[202] App. *Mit*. 112.
[203] App. *Mit*. 111. Justin also tells a less detailed version of the same story (37.2.6): "Quod metuens antidota saepius bibit et ita se aduersus insidias, exquisitis tutioribus remediis, stagnauit ut ne uolens quidem senex ueneno mori potuerit".
[204] Str. 10.4.10. In that passage, the geographer claims to be the great-grandson of Dorylaus, the general sent by Euergetes to Crete to hire mercenaries where he learned of the plot that killed the king. Eupator had been raised with Dorylaus' nephew, also called Dorylaus, and was so fond of him that, after his death, Mithridates sent for his children who were living in Crete, called Lagetas e Stratarchas. Strabo's maternal grandmother was Lagetas' sister. For more information on the influence his family ties may have in his accounts of Mithridates Eupator and the Mithridatic Wars, see: Inger N. Kuin. "Rewriting Family History: Strabo and the Mithridatic Wars". In: *Phoenix*. Vol. 71, n. 1/2 (Spring-Summer 2017). pp. 102-118.
[205] Reinach. (*op. cit.*) pp. 50-51, 53.
[206] Frank Walbank et al (ed). *Cambridge Ancient History: The Hellenistic world*, Vol. 7. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 491.

unknown.[207] Eupator's age when elevated to the throne, however, is a matter of historiographic controversy. The reference to the passage of comets both in the year of his birth (or conception) and in the year of his assumption of the title of king in Justin's Epitome, has been examined in the light of the information available in contemporary Chinese astronomical records to deduce that his reign might actually have started in 119, when the prince was fourteen years old.[208]

In any case, all sources agree that Mithridates Eupator came to power at a very young age and under extremely adverse circumstances. His father's assassins were on the loose, his life was under constant threat, and his legitimacy was put in question by a power sharing arrangement with his younger brother, under the regency of their mother. It should be highlighted that, according to Hellenistic practices, there was no reason why the prince, despite his youth, should not have assumed power himself, even if some temporary arrangement were to be adopted with his mother as an interim regent. The simultaneous elevation of his younger brother allows us to believe that the conspirators who had murdered his father – his own mother possibly among them– had other plans for the succession of the kingdom.

Despite the plausible speculations about Laodike's involvement in her husband's assassination as well as in drawing the power arrangement that resulted in her own elevation to the center of the political machinery in the kingdom, there is no way to be completely sure about her reasons to disregard Eupator's succession rights.

Matyszak (2008) suggests that Laodike VI could have seen in Mithridates an obstacle to the continuity of the policy of rapprochement with Rome, as it had been pursued by the two last Pontic kings. The author speculates that the young prince alleged resistance to the continued friendship with the Roman Republic was a result of the "spirited character of Mithridates and his later determination to expand the kingdom at every opportunity".[209]

Mayor agrees with that line of argument suggesting that "Laodice's love of luxury made her a compliant client of Rome (...) she accepted their bribes, and her extravagance pushed Pontus into debt".[210] It must be noted, however, that no sources are cited to back this supposition.

As argued in the previous sections, by the time Mithridates ascended to power, the alliance with Rome had already become the norm in Pontic foreign policy. The rapprochement

[207] Str. 10.4.10. Memnon (22.2) affirms that Mithridates ascended to the throne when he was thirteen, while Appian says eleven or twelve (*Mit*. 112).
[208] Just. (37.2.1-2); Ramsey. *op cit*. p. 200.
[209] Matyszak. *op. cit.* p. 67-68.
[210] Mayor. *op cit*. p. 69.

with the Republic and the easement of the political tension with neighboring Anatolian kingdoms was an imperative for Mithridates IV after the conflicts caused by his brother Pharnakes' aggressive expansionism. Mithridates V Euergetes, Pharnakes' son, not only maintained the policy carried out by his uncle but reinforced it by sending ships and a small auxiliary force in support of the Republic during the Third Punic War. Furthermore, Mithridates V Euergetes would play a central role, in alliance with other Anatolian kings, in the war against the usurper Aristonicus that resulted in the confirmation of the annexation of Pergamum by the Roman Republic.[211]

Bearing these considerations in mind, it seems at least unrealistic to suppose that the plot that resulted in the assassination of Mithridates Euergetes was motivated by interests in the court to preserve a policy that the king himself promoted and enhanced. Similarly, it is also unlikely that Mithridates VI Eupator, by any account just a teenager at the time of his father's murder, could have been seen as an obstacle to the preservation of that same policy.

Matyszak's (2008) argument, therefore, serves as an example of the hindsight bias we have already mentioned, according to which past events are explained by future developments. In this case, Eupator's future rivalry with Rome is used as an *ex post facto* argument to explain Euergetes assassination and the Pontic court's contempt for the young king.

We may conjecture that a presumed preference for Chrestus both in the court's and the queen's eyes could be explained by the relatively easier control that could be exerted on a younger child. Alternatively, a better inclination towards Chrestus could also have resulted from mere personal predilection. In any case, there is no reason to suppose that Eupator, when assuming the co-regency of the kingdom, had any strong foreign policy dispositions that could have harmed the interests of the court's conspirators.

Two inscriptions located in Delos confirm the existence of the diarchal regime established after the death of Euergetes, and help us to elucidate the first propaganda efforts carried out by Mithridates Eupator. The first, dated 115/114, inscribed on statues "of King Mithridates Eupator I ... and his brother Mithridates Crestos dedicated by Dionysus of Athens, son of Neon, who had been gymnasiarch"; the second, dated around the same time, is a simple dedication, made to Zeus Ourios (of the favorable wind), by both Mithridates Eupator and his brother Mithridates Chrestus.[212]

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[211] Just. 37.1.2.

[212] Respectively IDelos 1560 (OGIS 369) and IDelos 1561. Given the close relationship between Delos and Athens, the dedications made in the sanctuaries in the island had a relevance beyond simple religious aspects: they conveyed the recognition by Athens and the Hellenic world of its benefactors. Despite Roman dominance,

Both inscriptions confirm Strabo's account of the co-regency arrangement, although Laodike's name is not mentioned. The omission of the queen regent, however, may be intentional, as a way to reinforce the succession of Euergetes' male offspring or – less likely – could indicate that the inscriptions were made at a time when Laodike no longer exercised the regency in the name of the young kings.

The inscriptions also attest to the fact that from an early age, Mithridates VI adopted the epithet Eupator, which means "of a noble father". The choice for such a rare epithet among Hellenistic kings offers some hints to the overall objectives Mithridates pursued at the beginning of his reign. Only two other dynasts had adopted "Eupator" as their epithet: Ptolemy Eupator and Antiochus V Eupator.

Ptolemy Eupator was the son of Ptolemy VI Philometor and Cleopatra II born in 165/164. For just a few months in 152, Eupator reigned together with his father over Cyprus before he died at twelve or thirteen years old.[213] Ptolemy VI Philometor was Ptolemy V Epiphanes' eldest son and ascended to the Lagid throne in 180. He reigned undisputedly until sometime around 170, when a power-sharing arrangement was imposed on him in order to make room for his younger brother Ptolemy VIII Euergetes. The brothers struggled for the control of Alexandria for years, until Philometor was finally able to secure his grasp over the kingdom. Euergetes had to accept becoming a lesser king in Cyrenaica but was unhappy with that settlement. The younger king then turned to the Roman Senate and asked for its support to annex the island of Cyprus that belonged to his older brother's domain. The Roman Senate agreed to the transfer but did nothing in military terms to enforce that decision.[214]

Athens still enjoyed significant cultural influence over the Greek-speaking world in the late Hellenistic era. To the Pontic kingdom, dedications in Delos had an even more accentuated relevance, since they portrayed their monarchs' devotion to Greek deities and, therefore, its acceptance by the Hellenistic world. Both Pharnakes and Mithridates V had made donations to Delos to express their generosity towards the island. The statues of IDelos 1560 have lamentably been lost. The dedication to Zeus Ourios, however, deserves closer attention. In addition to the more general association with the wind that blows at the stern of the boat, Zeus Ourios had a special meaning to the Black Sea, since a sanctuary was dedicated to him at the straits of the Thracian Bosporus, a commonplace for travelers to embark on voyages through the region and a reference to measuring distances (Ps-Scy 67, 92; Arr. *Per*. 37). For that reason, Ballesteros-Pastor suggests that Ourios may have been a deity that represented the whole Black Sea region and that, although the dedications were made before Eupator centralized the government of Pontus, they attest to the interests of Pontic Greek traders in maintaining good relations with both Athens and the Black Sea. See: Luis Ballesteros-Pastor. "Los Cultos de Mitrídates Eupátor en Delos: una propuesta de interpretación". In: *HABIS* 37 (2006). pp. 211-212.). Manchado and Borja also highlight the close association of the dedication to Zeus Ourios in Delos with commercial intentions. (Javier V. Manchado and Antela-Bernárdez Borja. "Pro-Mithridatic and Pro-Roman Tendencies in Delos in the Early First Century BC: the Case of Dikaios of Ionidai ID 2039 and 2040". In: *Dialogues d'histoire ancienne*. vol. 41. n. 1, 2015. pp. 124-125).

[213] OGIS 126, OGIS 127. See: Theodoros Mavrogiannis. "The Mausoleum of Ptolemy Eupator and the 'Tombs of the Kings' at Nea Paphos in the Light of the Portraiture of the Ptolemaic Strategoi from Voni – Kythrea". In: *Ostraka*. XXV, 2016. pp. 119-162.

[214] Pol. 31.10, 17-20, 33.11.4-7

Despite securing his control over Cyprus, Philometor feared new political or military ventures from his brother against his territories. He then decided to elevate his teenage son Eupator to the rank of co-regent and heir. Eupator's premature death, however, was a serious blow to Philometor's plan to secure his power over most of the Ptolemaic territories and aggravated the disputes over Egyptian succession.

After the death of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, in Persia, the Roman Senate appointed Antiochus V Eupator, his nine-year old son, as king of the Seleucids in 164, and designated a Greek general named Lysias as his regent.[215] By the time, Rome was holding Demetrius, the son of Seleucus IV and the legitimate heir to the throne, as a hostage, and refused to let him go back to Syria and claim his throne. When Demetrius finally escaped Rome, his arrival in Syria was acclaimed by the local population and Antiochus Eupator was soon murdered.

Ptolemy Eupator and Antiochus V Eupator faced impressively similar adverse circumstances: they were both elevated to kingship at a very young age, with a desperate need to reaffirm their internal legitimacy and under the constant threat of being overthrown by other postulants to power. We can infer that the envisaged reaffirmation of legitimate rights to rule they craved for was crystallized in the epithets they both used with a view to stressing their relationship with their fathers, the source of their succession rights, as well as to claiming their father's nobility. These were the same needs Mithridates VI had when he ascended to power in Sinope in 119. And he too chose Eupator as his main epithet.

The second Delian inscription mentioned above indicates that, in addition to "Eupator", Mithridates may have used a second epithet in the earlier years of his reign and that would be later abandoned in favor of a much more expressive one: "Dionysus". Unfortunately, the inscription only preserves the Greek letters "EY", sparking a rich academic debate about what would the lost second epithet be.

The titles Εὐτυχής (fortunate) and Εὐεργέτης (benefactor, the same epithet used by his father) have both been considered. However, Ballesteros-Pastor (2014) convincingly argues that a much more plausible alternative would be Εὐσεβής (pious, righteous).[216] Although no other member of the Mithridatic bloodline used this epithet, Eusebes was quite common among the Cappadocian Ariarathids (used by Ariarathes IV and Ariarathes V). It was also this epithet that Mithridates VI would give his own son, Ariarathes IX, when the king elevated the boy to the Cappadocian throne during the Mithridatic Wars. Ballesteros-Pastor also argues that the

[215] App. *Syr*. 8.46; 1 Macc. 6:16-17; 7:1.
[216] Luis Ballesteros-Pastor. "A neglected Epithet of Mithridates Eupator (IDelos 1560)". In. *Epigraphica*. LXXVI, 1-2, 2014. pp. 81-86.

epithet was so common and respected among the Cappadocian elite that two important cities in the kingdom, Mazaca and Tiana, were renamed Eusebeia on the Argeius and Eusebia on the Taurus. According to the author, choosing the epithet may be related to Eupator's future ambitions in Cappadocia.[217]

We believe that there could be additional reasons for the supposed adoption of the second epithet. By adopting "Eusebes" as an epithet in addition to Eupator, Mithridates might have aspired to reinforce his legitimate image – this time on more religious grounds – as a reaffirmation of his divine anointment against the very worldly challenges he faced. This strategy would be abundantly used later on during his confrontations against Rome.

Despite the diarchal arrangement under Laodike's regency, it is reasonable to suppose that the plots against Mithridates' life did not come to an end. Justin affirms that the dangers faced by the young king were so serious that he had to flee Sinope. The historian claims that Mithridates remained "seven years without sheltering under a roof, neither in cities nor in the countryside". Wandering through forests and mountains, Eupator would have become accustomed to escaping beasts as well as to pursuing them, and thus, while avoiding conspiracies against his life, he strengthened his body to an absolute level of excellence.[218]

Evidently, it is very hard to conceive of Mithridates leaving the court for such a prolonged period without leaving any other records. Pontic coinage, for instance, displays Eupator's portrait uninterruptedly since the beginning of his reign.[219] Furthermore, his absence "ignaris omnibus" from the court for a long period would have presented his adversaries the perfect opportunity to enthrone Chrestus as the sole king and ensure Laodike's regency for good, but no sources reflect any such attempts.

Therefore, the accounts on Mithridates' long journey through the Pontic countryside seem to be yet another example of the extensive propaganda he carried out that somehow found its way into Pompeius Trogus' accounts. McGing, quoting Widengren, suggests that the narrative may be associated with a frequent royal Persian *topos* according to which it was common and even desirable for a king to spend part of his youth wandering in the wild, developing the abilities associated with noble Persian qualities, such as horse-riding and archery.[220]

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[217] *Idem*.
[218] Just. 37.2.7-9.
[219] Hasso Pfeiler. "Die frühesten Porträts des Mithridates Eupator und die Bronzeprägung seiner Vorgänger". In: *Schweizer Münzblätter*. 18, 1968. pp 75-6.
[220] McGing. *op cit*. pp. 44-46.

Mayor considers the duration of Mithridates' journey "suspiciously mythic" and argues that the king may have wandered in the wild for some years ("four or five years is a reasonable interval"). She suggests that during that time, the king may have strengthened his contacts with local potentates, visited well-known temples and important cities in the kingdom and, thus, obtained political and military support.[221]

Justin continues his account affirming that, after being absent from the court, Mithridates returned to Sinope and conquered his own kingdom. The phrase used by the epitomist – "ad regni deinde administrationem cum accessisset" – implies that from that moment on, Eupator was the sole ruler, putting an end to the power-sharing arrangement he had with his brother and mother.[222]

The end of the co-regency could hardly have been a "bloodless coup", as suggested by Mayor.[223] Appian claims that Mithridates murdered his mother and brother,[224] while Memnon offers a slightly more detailed narrative: "since childhood, Mithridates was the greatest murderer [after becoming king] he arrested his mother (...) and then put an end to her life; he also killed his brother." [225]

In all likelihood, the deaths, or imprisonment followed by death, of both Queen Regent Laodike VI and Prince Mithridates Chrestus must bot have been easily accepted by the conspirators who had killed Mithridates V Euergetes, potentially the same one who were now plotting against Eupator's life. It is plausible to assume that a purge may have happened and that some of the conspirators were forced to leave the court or to pledge their wholehearted allegiance to Mithridates Eupator.

If we are to accept Mithridates' journey to the countryside at least as partially true, meaning that he did leave the court but that his absence did not last time enough to produce any noticeable political consequences, there are still more reasons to believe that the court in Sinope was deeply affected by the young king's return. Despite having a significant number of supporters, including Strabo's maternal great-grandfather Dorylaus, the political change in the capital certainly fueled the ire of a faction of nobles and courtiers that watched their power diminish as the young king rode back to his capital.

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[221] Mayor. *op. cit*. pp. 76-95.
[222] Just. 37.3.1
[223] Mayor. *op. cit*. p. 97.
[224] Api. *Mit*. 112.
[225] Mem. 22.2. ("Φονικώτατος δ΄ ἐκ παιδὸς ὁ Μιθριδάτης ἦν· [...], μετ΄ οὐ πολὺ τὴν μητέρα, [...], δεσμωτηρίῳ κατασχὼν βίᾳ καὶ χρόνῳ ἐξανάλωσε, καὶ τὸν ἀδελφὸν ἀπέκτεινε")

It was under this extremely inhospitable political circumstances that Mithridates Eupator finally assumed real power in Pontus, sometime around the year 116.[226] Long before worrying about the growing power of Rome in Asia Minor and instigating the hatred of Greeks and Asians against Roman excesses in Anatolia, Mithridates VI was obsessed with securing his own domestic legitimacy as king of Pontus.

Against that backdrop, it can be argued that the political propaganda – for which the king has been widely recognized – began not as the consequence of a supposedly innate hatred for the Romans, but rather as a strategy aimed at reinforcing his legitimacy claims in the first years of his reign. This seems to be the central goal that motivated all his actions and political decisions long before the events of the 90s and the start of the Mithridatic Wars.

This insightful approach invites us to consider new interpretations to some of the most relevant episodes in Mithridates' early reign, whose analysis has so far suffered from a considerable degree of hindsight bias

This is the case, for instance, of Mithridates' decision to marry his younger sister, Laodike, upon returning to Sinope and consolidating his power.[227] When evaluating this episode, some authors highlight the fact that incestuous marriages were not an uncommon practice among some Hellenistic royal families, especially in the East. Others speculate over the possibility that Eupator's decision was motivated by his desire to ensure the purest possible bloodline of his successors.[228]

Another possible explanation for incestuous marriages that should be considered is related to the reinforcement of the dynast's own legitimacy. The most important example and certainly one that might have influenced Eupator's decision, was that of the marriage between Mithridates IV and Laodike, his grandfather Pharnake's siblings.

After annexing Sinope, Pharnakes started an aggressive expansionist campaign that culminated in the invasion of Galatia and parts of Pergamum and Cappadocia. Eumenes II and Ariarathes IV sent embassies to Rome to complain about the Pontic aggression, but the Senate envoys did not succeed in ending the conflict.[229] When hostilities resumed, Pharnakes found himself unable to face the combined forces of his opponents and had to accept a peace agreement that deprived him of all the territories conquered, except for Sinope. This treaty,

[226] See McGing, *op. cit*. p. 74.
[227] Just. 37.3.6.
[228] Matyszak. *op.cit*. p. 63; and Mayor. *op. cit*. 100.
[229] Pol. 23.9, 24.1, 24.14-15; Str. 12.3; Liv. *Urb*. 40.2.

signed in 179, is the first stance where reference is made to Mithridates IV, Pharnakes' younger brother and future successor.[230]

In 154 Mithridates IV is mentioned by Polybius as the sole ruler of Pontus.[231] Pressed by his brother's adverse legacy, the new king decided to implement a profound inflection in Pontic foreign policy, to which we have already made reference in the previous sections. It is sensible to speculate that the defeats suffered by Pharnakes on the battlefield and the humiliation imposed by the treaty of 179 raised at least some resistance among the Pontic nobility. It was probably to appease these dissident voices that Mithridates IV decided to adopt a completely different orientation in foreign policy and to pursue a more friendly relationship not only with his neighbors but also with the rising power of Rome.

In addition to the changes promoted in Pontic foreign policy, Mithridates IV adopted the suggestive epithets of "Philopator" (father-loving) and "Philadelphus" (brother-loving). Both had a clear intention to reinforce his familiar relationship with the kings who immediately preceded him: his father Mithridates III and his brother Pharnakes. Moreover, upon ascending to the throne, Mithridates Philopator Philadelphus decided to marry his own sister, another princess Laodike.

Mithridates IV minted several coins to celebrate his reign and his royal marriage to his sister-consort. Some of these coins display a double, realistic portrait on the obverse, following the pattern of previous coinage. The reverse shows Zeus and Hera standing, each holding a scepter, with the following inscription in five vertical lines "of King Mithridates and Queen Laodike Philadelphoi" (Figure 3b). [232]

Two other series minted by Mithridates IV deserve attention. The first depicts a portrait of Mithridates wearing a laurel wreath on the obverse and, on the reverse, the same figure of Hera from the joint Mithridates and Laodike's edition (Figure 3c).[233] The second portrays, on

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[230] Pol. 25.2. McGing (1986) agrees that it is likely that the Mithridates cited is Pharnakes' brother, but speculates that, in addition to this interpretation, it is also possible that Polybius was referencing Mithridates, the satrap of Armenia (*op cit*. pp. 28-29).
[231] Pol. 33.12.
[232] François de Callataÿ. "The First Royal Coinages of Pontus". In: Jakob M. Højte (ed). *Mithridates VI and the Pontic Kingdom*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2009). p.64. The coins issued by the kings of Pontus before Mithridates VI that will be used in this dissertation can be found in Callataÿ's catalogue, a revised and amplified version of earlier catalogues such as: Warwick Wroth. *Catalogue of Greek Coins in the British Museum. Pontus, Paphlagonia, Bithynia, and the Kingdom of Bosporus*. London: Longmans & Co, 1889. There is a limited number of issues available from the reigns of Mithridates III, Pharnakes, Mithridates IV and Mithridates V, and the most representative specimens were chosen, bearing in mind iconographic elements that would later be used in Eupator's own coinage. All coins mentioned and portrayed belong to the British Museum, the Numismatic Collection of the Berlin State Museums, and to private collections catalogued by both authors.
[233] *Ibid*. p. 74.

the obverse, Laodike, covered with a veil, and again the very same Hera on the reverse, with the inscription "of Queen Laodike" (Figure 3d). The evident similarities between the portraits in the two strikes and the repetition of the reference to Hera make it possible to conclude that it is the same Laodike and to confirm the political co-regency arrangement, at least in terms of the imagery purposely promoted.

Grainger claims that incestuous marriages in the Hellenistic Era were an occasional practice or an "emergency measure". The author argues that they should be understood, first and foremost, as a political act: "The essential element in the use of sibling marriage was that the daughter of a king carried with her, so to speak latently, the ability to make the man she married king".[234]

By marrying his own sister, Mithridates IV was not necessarily concerned with the purity of his line of succession. In fact, there are no records that the couple even had any children. Also, we know that the transmission of power to their nephew Mithridates V, Pharnakes' son, was smooth and uneventful. What Philopator needed most and which only his sister Laodike could have offered him was the capacity to reinforce his own claim to the legitimate succession to the Pontic throne. At the same time, by marring his sister, he was also denying access to the Mithridatic line of succession to any other foreign dynast.

The cultural, familiar proximity and the similarities of internal political circumstances impose a direct comparison between Mithridates VI's and Mithridates V 's marriage choices. Contrary to the hypothetical scenario posed by Mayor – in which Mithridates observed "the beauty and composure of his sister, Laodice the Younger" while she was "fawning over her older brother Mithradates, so handsome and strong and bold"[235] – Eupator's decision was more likely inspired by the close example of his uncle's marriage and by the clear political advantages that only such an arrangement would grant him in terms of reinforcing his status as the sole legitimate king of Pontus.

After eliminating his main internal rivals and closing the door to potential coups that could use his sister's dynastic claims as a legitimizing tool, Mithridates VI Eupator was finally in a position to launch a political campaign aimed at strengthening his image as an ideal monarch, coated with both political and supernatural legitimacy.

[234] Grainger. *op. cit*. pp. 179-180; 203-204.
[235] Mayor. *op. cit*. p. 100.

2.2 THE BOSPORUS CAMPAIGN AND THE ORIGINS OF MESSIANIC CLAIMS OF LEGITIMACY

After having consolidated his grasp on the Pontic throne, eliminated at least the two most dangerous challengers to his kingship (his brother and mother), and taken some initial steps to reaffirm his legitimacy, Mithridates was finally in a position to "turn his thoughts to the enlargement of his domains", as Justin suggests.[236] This aspiration, however, should not be perceived as an evidence of the king's exceptional aggressiveness.

The Byzantine encyclopedia of the tenth century C.E. known as the "Suda" preserved a heading on "monarchy" based on ancient sources that reads:

> *Monarchy. It is neither nature nor justice which gives monarchy to men, but the capacity to lead an army and to handle affairs wisely. That was the case with Philip and the Successors of Alexander. For Alexander's natural son was in no way helped by his kinship with him, because of his incapable spirit. At the same time, those who had no connection with Alexander became kings of almost the whole inhabited world.*[237]

From Macedonia to Bactria, from Egypt to Babylon, Hellenistic monarchs sought to emulate – in their behavior, actions and even appearance – one specific example: Alexander the Great. With that goal in mind, every king was at least tempted to conduct some form of imperialism, not only with a view to expanding their original territories but also, and most importantly, to prove their valor as worthy of Alexander's legacy.

As Chaniotis points out, the fact that the title basileus was not accompanied by an ethnic name can also indicate that the Hellenistic monarchs were the kings of whichever land they could conquer: "this intentional vagueness was an invitation to conquest". [238]

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[236] Just. 37.3.1 ("augendo regno cogitauit").

[237] Sud. *Basi.* ("ουτε φυσις ουτε το δικαιον αποδιδουσι τοις ανθροποις τας βασιλειας, αλλα τοις δυναμενοις ηγεισθαι στρατοπεδου, και χειριζειν πραγματα νουνεχως. οιος εν Φιλιππος και οι διαδοχοι Αλεξανδρου. τον γαρ υιον κατα φυσιν ουδεν ωφελησεν η συνγενεια δια την της ψυχης αδυναμιαν. τους δε μηδεν προσηκοντας βασιλεις γενεσθαι σχεδον απασης της οικουμενης").

[238] Chaniotis. *op. cit.* p. 57.

In addition to claiming to be Alexander's direct descendent, Mithridates also represented the leader idealized by the Macedonian conqueror: a Hellenized noble with mixed Persian and Hellenic blood upon whose shoulders a new world should be erected. To Mithridates, Alexander was above all a model for policy and behavior, since the Macedonian's achievements not only established new foundations for legitimate power, but also provided an action plan for the dynasties that followed.

Once he centralized power and subdued his rivals, Mithridates only needed an opportunity to demonstrate his worth and to reinforce the comparison with Alexander he so much aspired to promote. This opportunity presented itself around 115 in the form of a plea for help from the Greeks of Chersonesus.[239]

In the beginning of the sixth century, Milesian colonists settled on the Crimean coast and founded cities such as Panticapeu, in the Strait of Kerch, and Theodosia, on the southeast coast. In the fifth century, Dorians from Pontic Heraclea, also migrated to the region and established the city of Chersonesus, at the western end of the peninsula.

The Greeks soon came into contact with the local peoples from the north of the peninsula, especially the Tauri and the Scythians. In spite of the constant harassment they suffered from these communities, the Greek polies in the Crimea prospered, as a result of the extremely dynamic trade in the Black Sea, which was responsible for transporting the grains, ceramics and wine produced on the peninsula to mainland Greece.

Literary sources rarely make any reference to the Greek poleis in Crimea during the Hellenistic era. Nevertheless, there is a considerable number of epigraphic sources we can rely on in order to trace some of the most important aspects of those cities. We can deduce, for instance, that the pressure exerted by the Scythians and other local peoples gravely intensified over the centuries and reached a daring level at the end of the second century.

The famous "Civic Oath of the Chersonesites",[240] dated from the beginning of the third century, clearly demonstrates that, following the example of many poleis in mainland Greece, the city of Chersonesus imposed a mandatory civic oath to all of its young men at the time of their initiation as citizens and as a condition for the enjoyment of full civic rights. The Chersonesites were compelled to maintain internal harmony and thus preserve the city and its

[239] Str. 7.4.3. Reinach (*op.cit*. p. 58) suggests that the campaign began in 110, based on Justin's narrative, including the seven-year journey in the wild. For this reason, McGing's hypothesis (*op.cit*. p. 47) that the expedition was launched after the inscriptions IDelos 1561 e 1560 seems more reasonable.
[240] IOSPE I^2 402.

freedom (lines 5-7), to defend it from external dangers, both of Greek and barbaric origin (line 7), and to preserve its existing democratic system (lines 13-14).

Although some authors consider that the oath may give the impression of an imminent danger hanging over the city,[241] the text does not mention any specific threats, does not individualize barbaric neighbors, nor does it make any reference to territorial losses. Unfortunately, one cannot be completely sure of what motivated the adoption of the civic oath and its inscription in the beginning of the third century, but it must be borne in mind that the practice was quite common among Greek poleis.

In this context, Makarov considers that the main reason why the city decided to publish its civil oath at in the beginning of the third century was a substantial growth of its population, thanks to the arrival of new waves of *epoikoi* (colonists). With new settlers flocking to the city the citizens probably felt it necessary to guarantee the rectitude of their new peers, especially in the exercise of the main magistracies.[242]

If we accept Makarov's postulation, we can infer that the growth in the number of citizens entailed the need to expand the city's territory, undoubtedly provoking the reaction of the native Tauri and Scythians. That demographic pressure must have been an important element in sparkling renewed conflict. Another inscription dated a few decades later informs of a great danger and reports that attacks by barbarian neighbors forced the inhabitants to leave with their children and women.[243]

The situation rapidly escalated in the first half of the second century. Fearing for their lives and property, the Chersonesites were compelled to look for a military alliance with the kingdom of Pontus located directly south through the Black Sea. Pontus was then ruled by Pharnakes, who, as we have already noted, pursued an aggressive expansionist policy in Asia Minor.

By the time the Chersonesites reached out to Pharnakes he probably had already annexed Sinope, bringing his armies dangerously close to Heraclea Pontica, and the the next most important city on the coast to the west of Sinope had reasons to fear for its independence. It so happens that Heraclea was Chersonesus' mother city and both poleis maintained excellent relations.

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[241] See McGing. *op. cit*. p. 47.
[242] Igor A. Makarov. "Towards an Interpretation of the Civic Oath of the Chersonesites (IOSPE I^2 401)". In: Ancient Civilizations from Scythia to Siberia. n. 20. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2014. pp. 1-38.
[243] IOSPE I^2 343.

Despite Heraclean reservations towards the aggressive Pontic king, however, Chersonesus was so desperate that it went ahead and signed the treaty with Pharnakes. Mithridates' grandfather pledged to come to the aid of the city, should the "neighboring barbarians" attack it or harm its citizens (line 14).[244] Moreover, Pharnakes agreed to protect the city's democracy to the best of his abilities (lines 23-24), a cautionary measure probably inspired by the concerns raised by the Heracleans.

Interestingly enough, the validity of the treaty was conditioned to the maintenance of the friendship between Chersonesus and Pharnakes as well as between both and the Roman Republic (line 26).[245] Since the alliance between the Chersonesites and Pharnakes took place after the Pontic defeat that culminated in the treaty of 179,[246] we can deduce that this clause must have been the product of justified doubts on Pontic imperialist ambitions.

Pharnakes, on his part, must have welcomed the opportunity to seal an allegiance with the Greeks in Crimea after being defeated by his Anatolian neighbors. The treaty with the Chersonesites offered both an alternative to the isolation imposed by the military debacle in Asia Minor and a possible new path to territorial expansion in the future.

Almost half a century later, the situation in the North Black Sea poleis greatly worsened. The Scythians, under king Scilurus, conquered the city of Olbia, located in the north of the peninsula, and built three fortifications menacingly close to the Chersonesite defensive line, already in the peninsula.[247]

The advancing hordes of Scythian warriors provoked panic in Chersonesus, and its citizens had no alternative other than to resort to the treaty they had cut with Pharnakes two generations before. After watching their city being plundered, the Chersonesites begged the young king Mithridates VI to intervene on their behalf, urging him to make good on his grandfather's word. Their survival at stake, they were no longer able to worry over the potentially negative effects that the arrival of a foreign army in their lands could have on their own independence.[248]

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[244] IOSPE I^2 402; Jakob M. Højte. "The Date of the Alliance between Chersonesos and Pharnakes (IOSPE I^2 402) and its Implications". In: Vladimir F. Stolba e Lise Hannestad. *Chronologies of The Black Sea Area in the Period c. 400-100 BC*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2005.
[245] *Idem*.
[246] See notes 154 and 229.
[247] Str. 7.4.7.
[248] Str. 7.4.3.

Mithridates received the plea as the opportunity he so much craved for. A chance to put his military ability to test and, at the same time, to ward off any internal threats to his hold on Pontic power once and for all.

The Pontic military intervention in the Bosporus was nothing short of a resounding military success. Mithridates' army, supported by local militia, defeated Scilurus and his many sons and pushed them back to the lands beyond the isthmus, out of the Crimea.[249] After that, Chersonesus too would easily succumb to the extensive Pontic military presence. The same fate would be shared by the eastern Crimean Greek cities, which had organized themselves in the kingdom of Bosporus.[250]

Around 107, the territories of the Greek poleis in the Crimea and of the kingdom of Bosporus had been completely annexed to the Pontic throne, and a governor-general was appointed to administer them. Mithridates' sons would rule the region on his behalf from the 90s on.[251]

We know from later accounts that Mithridates also annexed Colchis, although we do not know exactly when or how. As the country is mentioned as one of his dominions already in the beginning of the war, together with the Greek cities in the Euxine,[252] we can infer that the process of annexation happened sometime after the Bosporus campaign. Furthermore, Strabo points out that the country was only moderately prosperous, but when Mithridates grew powerful, he would send "one of his closer companions as governor and administrator of the land". One of these men was Moaphernes, Strabo's mother's uncle, and he indicates that most of the equipment for the king's navy came from Colchis.[253]

No available source makes reference to any attempt against Mithridates' life after the king expanded his territories to encompass most of the Black Sea shores. In addition to eliminating any possible internal resistance to his reign, the young king's successful military campaign in the northern Black Sea offered him the first opportunity to assume the position of champion of the Hellenic world against its barbaric enemies. As McGing notes, "a stance he was to adopt later in Asia Minor and Greece, in his struggle against Rome".[254]

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[249] *Idem*.
[250] Str. 7.4.4.
[251] Eugenij Molev. "Bosporos under the Rule of Mithridates VI Epator". In: Jakob M. Højte (ed). *Mithridates VI and the Pontic Kingdom*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2009. pp. 321-323.
[252] App. *Mit*. 15. In addition, Poseidonius (Ath. 6.266e-f) affirms that Mithridates captured the Chians after their rebellion (around 86/85) and sent them as slaves to Cochis.
[253] Str. 11.2.18. ("τις τῶν φίλων ὕπαρχος καὶ διοικητὴς τῆς χώρας")
[254] McGing. *op. cit*. p. 64.

By reevaluating the most important decisions taken by Mithridates since the assassination of Euergetes up to his conquest of the northern Black Sea, it becomes unlikely that the Bosporus campaign was a prescient "preparation for the wars against Rome", as Strabo suggests.[255] The geographer's delicate condition as a Greek Roman citizen with close family ties to the last great enemy of the Republic must have had some influence in this judgement. It reveals a hindsight bias aimed at Once again, the assessment of political actions and decisions taken by Mithridates at fomenting the image of the capricious eastern king who nurtured an irrational hatred for Rome, thus alleviating Roman responsibility for the coming wars against the peoples of Asia Minor under Mithridates' command.

As his armies were conquering victories over the Scythians in the Crimea, Mithridates launched an impressive propaganda campaign so far unmatched in the history of Pontus. Part of this unprecedented campaign can be found in the willful use of specific iconographic elements, especially in royal coinage, some of which had been previously employed by his predecessors.

The previous kings of Pontus had issued a very limited number of coins, especially when compared to their Anatolian neighbors. Furthermore, bronze coins were practically non-existent in Pontus before Eupator's reign.[256] Callataÿ suggests that the production of coins during the period from Mithridates III to Mithridates V (roughly from 220 to 150) was twenty times inferior to that of the kings of Bithynia (from 128/127 to 74/73). For the historian, the difference and the absence of bronze coins are strong indications of the low degree of monetization in the kingdom of Pontus until Mithridates VI's reign, and that the emissions were intended for specific purposes, such as paying for mercenary troops. For this reason, its propaganda value should not be overestimated.[257]

It should be noted that late Hellenistic Pontic coins are found in hoards spread across the Mediterranean together with coins of other Hellenistic kingdoms, especially in those discovered in the Near East and in south-eastern Anatolia. This is a clear indication that, around

[255] Str. 7.4.3.
[256] François de Callataÿ. "Coins and Archaeology: the (Mis)use of Mithridatic Coins for Chronological Purposes in the Bosporan Area". In: Vladimir Stolba et Lise Hannestad (Ed.), *Chronologies of the Black Sea Area in the period c. 400-c. 100 BC*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2005. p. 122. According to the historian, "Not a single bronze coin can be attributed safely to this area prior to the last quarter of the 2nd century BC. (…) The vast majority of the coins they struck were heavy silver ones, thus very awkward to daily transactions."
[257] Callataÿ (2009). *op.cit*. pp. 63-94.

the time Mithridates Eupator reigned in Sinope, Pontic coins gained wide acceptance in the eastern Mediterranean world.[258]

Since the Macedonian invasions, the legitimacy that Alexander's successors would strive to claim by emulating the conqueror as well as the unprecedented amount of coins suddenly dumped in the Near East and mainland Greece after the downfall of the Achaemenid empire made the pattern of coins minted by Alexander a universal model in the Hellenistic world. Most coins issued in the period show, on the obverse, the figure of a lone monarch looking to the right, while the reverse pictures an Olympic god – or, later on, of a Greek god syncretized with Asiatic deities – with a vertical legend. [259]

The Pontic dynasty had always cultivated and advertised its Persian heritage as well as its affiliation to eastern pictographic traditions. Although the coins minted in Pontus do follow the Alexandrian pattern, the portraits of the kings of the dynasty on the obverse show realistic eastern features, while on the reverses images of Olympic gods syncretized with Asiatic traditions are represented (Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4).[260]

The most intriguing iconographic element present in all Pontic coinage since Mithridates III – the first Mithridatic king to issue royal coins – is undoubtedly the image of a crescent moon under an eight-pointed star on the reverse. The symbol (Figure 1b) became a distinctive element, particular to the Mithridatic dynasty.[261]

Many scholars have speculated on the meaning of the star and crescent composition.[262] Newell claims that it appears to serve as some sort of royal badge to the Pontic royal family and that it “doubtlessly represented the sun and moon, and was symbolic of the Persian royal descent claimed by a family which continued to profess the old Iranian religion”.[263] Pollak agrees with Newell and adds that the composition "symbolizes the Persian ancestry of the family and signifies its religious leanings".[264]

Price is of the view that the image actually belongs to the Anatolian iconographic tradition and affirms that “the astral symbols, star and crescent, which accompany the reverse

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[258] Deniz B. Erciyas. *Wealth, Aristocracy and Royal Propaganda Under the Hellenistic Kingdom of the Mithradatids in the Central Black Sea Region of Turkey*. Leiden: Brill, 2005. p. 7.
[259] For Alexander-style coinage, see: Peter Thonemann. *The Hellenistic World: Using Coins as Sources*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. pp. 17-18.
[260] Thonemann. *op. cit*. pp. 163-165; Edward Newell. *Royal Greek Portrait Coins*. Nova York: Wayte Raymonf, 1937. p. 40.
[261] Callataÿ (2009) *op. cit*. p. 63-64; McGing. *op. cit*. p. 24; Newell. *op. cit*. p. 40.
[262] McGing. *op. cit*. p. 24.
[263] Newell. *op. cit*. p. 40.
[264] Phyllis Pollak. "A Bithynian Hoard of the First Century B.C." In: *Museum Notes (American Numismatic Society)* Vol. 16, 1970. Pp. 46-47.

types, are found on earlier Pontic coins, and probably derive from the worship of Ma, one of the main cults of the region".[265]

According to Saprykin, the iconographic origins of the composition cannot be traced back to only one cultural tradition. It is a result of the syncretized cults, typical of the Pontic region, synthetizing deities such as Men, Mithras, and Ahura-Mazda. It also reflected the victory over darkness and evil, the main religious aspects of Persian Zoroastrianism. The author speculates that, by disseminating those symbols, the kings of Pontus intended to promote the cult of deities closely associated with the militant themes of rebirth and victory over death.[266]

None of the aforementioned scholars offer any details on how the star and crescent composition relate to the religious or cultural traditions they suggest are associated with the image. We believe that the iconographic roots of the composition are to be found in an ancient eastern Oriental tradition that can be traced back to Sumerian-Akkadian representations of divinely ordained political power.

Margaret Cool Root argues that Darius resorted to a powerful symbolic mechanism, in the form of a "visual program", right after conquering power as the result of a successful rebellion. The new king of kings needed to create and promote a hegemonic order based on the idea of a continued legitimate rule in the heart of the Achaemenid empire. Therefore he put in place a specific series of visual elements designed with the aim of communicating persuasively and convincingly with a vast range of recipients.[267] A comprehensive iconographic messaging system was created and disseminated by the Achaemenids to propagate a certain notion of royalty, not necessarily equivalent to that conveyed through their official written messages.

The new imagery system put in place by Darius benefited from ancient rock reliefs in regions that had fell to the Persian conquest. The first of those is the inscription of Anubanini, a ruler of the tribal kingdom of Lullubi around 2,300. The relief is located at Sar-i Pul, in modern Iran, and it depicts the Summerian-Akkadian goddess of war and love, Ishtar (or Inanna), delivering a line of captives as some sort of divinely granted gift (Figure 6).

Shamash, the solar Summerian-Akkadian god protector of justice and kingship is represented by an eight-pointed star shining in the field. Root affirms that the Anubanini

[265] M. Jessop Price. "Mithridates VI Eupator, Dionysus, and the Coinages of the Black Sea". In: *The Numismatic Chronicle, Seventh Series*. Vol. 8, 1968. p. 3.
[266] Sergej J. Saprykin. "The Religion and Cults of the Pontic Kingdom: Political Aspects". In: Jakob M. Højte (ed). *Mithridates VI and the Pontic Kingdom*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2009. p. 263.
[267] Margaret C. Root. "Defining the Divine in Achaemenid Persian Kingship: The view from Bisitun". In: Lynnete Mitchell e Charles Melville. *Every Inch a King: Comparative Studies on Kings and Kingship in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*. Leiden: Brill, 2013. pp. 27-8.

inscription was used as a model for the later Behistum inscription (Figure 7a), carved in honor of Darius. Both inscriptions share similar elements such as the line of captives, the position the king is depicted in, stepping on a vanquished enemy, and the representation of the godly gift of defeated opponents. It is interesting to note that the image of Shamash's eight-pointed star is also reproduced at Behistun, both on Ahura Mazda's headdress and on Dario's crown (Figures 7b and 7c).[268] That imagery, widely known and used for centuries in the region as a representation of divinely sanctioned kingship was now at the service of Darius' campaign to reinforce his claims of metaphysical legitimacy.

Although the Behistun inscription only makes reference to the Persian Zoroastrian god Ahura Mazda, the eight-pointed star is an explicit intentional link to the sun god of Mesopotamia. The diadem wore by the king portrays battlements that symbolize mountain peaks that, in their turn, evoke proximity to the heavens and the optimum place for meeting and communicating with the divine. By extension, the mountains were perceived as places of law and justice, power, protection, passage (literal and transcendental) and coveted natural resources (wealth) in the cosmic-social discourses of ancient Near East.[269]

In Naqsh-I Rustam, also located in modern Iran, Darius' tomb portrays the king standing alone on a three-step podium in front of an altar of blazing fire. Ahuramazda hangs overhead, facing Darius. A crescent moon hangs behind them. Root ponders that the meaning of that element is still opened for debate. She speculates that it may symbolize the solar and lunar powers in the form of a disk with an inscribed crescent.[270]

Like his predecessors, Mithridates made use of the star and crescent composition in practically all of his issues. Other elements present in their predecessors' coinage were also used by the king upon ascending to the throne. Pharnakes, for instance, adopted the figure of a male deity wearing Hermes' petasos, carrying a vine branch and Dionysus' cornucopia, along with Hermes' caduceus, accompanied by a deer.

Mithridates IV, Pharnakes' successor, substituted the male deity on the reverse for the representation of the hero Perseus holding the Gorgon's head and a sword (Figure 3a). Although clearly recognizable as Greek cultural expressions, both Dionysus and Perseus were characters with strong Eastern origins, just like the Mithridatic dynasty. Both iconographic elements would later be used by Eupator.

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[268] *Ibid*. pp. 34-37.
[269] *Ibid*. pp. 40.
[270] Margaret Cool Root. *The King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art: Essays on the Creation of an Iconography of Empire.* Leiden: Brill, 1979. pp. 73; 177.

The Mithridatic kings handed down a rich repertoire of imagery and messaging in the form of their royal issues that set the dynasty apart and reinforced some of its most distinctive features and claims. This repertoire would prove to be extremely useful for Mithridates VI's later intentions. Throughout his long reign, Mithridates VI Eupator would tap into the elements used by his predecessors to strike an unprecedented amount and variety of royal issues[271], especially in preparation for the wars against Rome in the 90s.

When analyzing Mithridates Eupator's royal coinage, one should begin by looking into some of his earlier tetradrachms, not yet dated.[272] In all likelihood, these coins started to be minted sometime after the young king removed his mother and brother from power. On the obverse, the portrait of the king displays a high-spirited young man with a thin beard. On the reverse, a winged Pegasus lowers its head to drink water from a stream. The official star and crescent composition is also represented. The entire image is surrounded by a crown of leaves and ivy flowers (Figure 5a).

Compared to Mithridates' portraits in later issues (see Figure 5c, for example), this earlier version exhibits features that are much more realistic, in complete accordance with the pattern established by his predecessors. The wreath that surrounds the entire reverse is a clear allusion to Dionysus, a mythical character with whom Mithridates VI would increasingly associate himself, following the example of Alexander. At the beginning of his reign, it could also indicate an intention to reinforce iconographically his personal relationship with his grandfather, the king Pharnakes.

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[271] In 1997, Callataÿ offered a detailed catalogue of coins minted by Mithridates VI Eupator throughout his long reign consisting of a total of 54 staters, 549 tetradrachms, and 10 drachms, amounting to 13 different coinages (François de Callataÿ. *L'histoire des Guerres Mithridatiques vue par les Monnaies*. Louvain: Louvain-la-Neuve, 1997). The author revisited his earlier study in 2013, based on coins that were made available in auctions during the period 1990-2012, and found "new" 103 coins, 99 of which tetradrachms, that were added to his initial corpus. Those "new" additions had remained un-illustrated in private hands and do not derive from newly discovered hoards or isolated finds. (François de Callataÿ. "Revisiting a numismatic corpus: the case of Eupator, last king of Pontus". In: K. Dörtlük, O. Tekin and R. Boyraz Seyhan (eds.). *Proceedings of the First International Congress of the Anatolian Monetary History and Numismatics*, 25-28 February 2013 Antalya, Antalya, 2014. p. 117-137). The updated corpus presents a total of 648 tetradrachms, with 166 numbers of obverses. The majority of the catalogued series are dated in the period during the Mithridatic Wars, what could be easily deduced given the volume of minting in the years after 88 (see Figure 8). The examples provided in Figures 5a and 5c are representative of a well-documented change in the representation of the king from a realistic portrait to a more idealized one and the analysis of the obverses confirm that that change occurred in the 90s, more or less at the same time Mithridates adopted the practice of dating his coinage (see below). Similar conclusions had already been drawn in earlier works such as: Wroth. *op. cit*.

[272] From the 90's on, Mithridates would adopt the practice of dating his coins, indicating month and year (and sometimes place) of minting. That practice would prove very helpful for the study of iconography and political propaganda during his wars against Rome. See: Thonemann. *op. cit*. p. 166., Newell. *op. cit*. p. 41; Callataÿ (2005). *op. cit.* p. 120.

The Pegasus on the reverse suggests a strong connection with the mythical hero Perseus, as claimed by the entire Mithridatic dynasty. It should be noted that the mention to Perseus in Mithridatic royal coinage was an iconographic element initially introduced by Mithridates IV. As we have already argued, the king also sought to reaffirm the legitimacy of his claim to power, giving the circumstances of his enthronement. According to Højte, the choice for the Pegasus as the image on the reverse clearly refers to Mithridates' dual heritage, from both Darius and Alexander the Great.[273]

There is, however, another coin from the same earlier period that attracts even more attention to those who are interested in studying Mithridates' propagandistic objectives. First of all, this series was minted in bronze, a metal practically ignored by all previous Mithridatic kings' coinage. On the obverse, the coin depicts the head and neck of a horse, with an eight-pointed star on its neck, surrounded by dots. On the reverse, another eight-pointed star, from which a ray is projected in the shape of a comet's tail (Figure 5b).

Several aspects of this series are noteworthy. First, there seems to be no definitive catalogue of this specific coin. In effect, although it has been widely known at least since Imhoff-Blumer indicated a possible connection between it and the comets related to Mithridates VI[274], it remained absent from most standard works dedicated to Pontic Coinage[275], until Molnar's article in 1997,[276] presumably because its main characteristics do not fit into the more common issues by all Pontic kings, since it was struck in bronze, had no portrait of the king on the obverse, no image of a deity or hero on the reverse, and no star and crescent composition.

Molnar points out to the fact that the coin was identified in the SNG British Museum as an uncertain AE issue of Bosporus and Pontus (a.k.a. Pontic *nummi incerti*), ca. 130-100 Coin Hoards (Vol. I, RNS, 1975, #107). A small find of these coins on the north coast of Turkey in 1973 was reported and they were dated in the first century. The author then concludes that both the dating and the location suggest a connection with Mithridates VI of Pontus. A conviction strengthened even more by the interpretation provided by its iconography.[277]

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[273] Jakob Munk Højte. "Portraits and Statues of Mithridates VI". In: Jakob M. Højte. (ed). *Mithridates VI and the Pontic Kingdom*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2009. p. 148.
[274] Friedrich Imhoof-Blumer "Die Kupferprigung des mithradatischen Reiches und andere Miinzen des Pontos und Paphlagoniens". In: *Numistmatische Zeitschrift.* vol. 45 (1912) 169-192, plates I-II.
[275] It is not included, for instance, in the works mentioned in note 271.
[276] Michael Molnar. "Mithradates Used Comets on Coins as a Propaganda Device". In: *The Celator*. vol. 11. n. 6 (1997).
[277] *Idem*. p. 7. On the similarities of the *incerti* coins and how they relate to Mithridates (some specimens depicting a crescent moon, other with a helmeted figure resembling issues by Sinope and Amisus associated with

Furthermore, the series is the first to be issued in bronze and in great quantities. As seen, until the reign of Mithridates VI, bronze coins were practically nonexistent, which indicates a low degree of monetization of the local economy. The option for minting in a less noble metal, used daily in commerce and in small transactions, suggests both an advance in marketing practices as well as the intention that the coins would be widely disseminated especially among the common Pontic population.

It is widely accepted that the comet coins were struck in royal mints, reinforcing the hypothesis that it would primarily be intended for the use of the common people and not for the large Greek cities, where civic currency was minted. As we have argued, common folk in rural areas were mainly of Anatolian or Persian-Anatolian origins, although it is clear that by the time of Mithridates VI miscegenation and syncretism have already achieved a considerable degree even in the Pontic countryside.

It is impossible to know exactly when the comet issue started to be minted in Pontus. Lamentably, Mithridates would only adopt the practice of dating his coinage in the context of the substantial monetary expansion undertaken throughout the 90's. However, exactly for that reason, we can deduce that it belongs to the earlier period of his reign.

In all of the Ancient Greco-Roman numismatic production known to us today, there are only three coins that portray a comet with a tail.[278] Mithridates' comet coin was the first of them. Ramsey attributes this rarity to the fact that comets were interpreted by ancient Greeks and Romans as bad omens, harbingers of doom and disaster and that ancient coins always avoided such associations.[279]

Persian apocalyptic traditions, however, associated celestial bodies with the announcement of the arrival of a messianic king, invested with cosmic legitimacy and military invincibility, whose eschatological mission was to restore Asiatic world supremacy. As we shall see in the next Chapter, Samuel Eddy traces this tradition widely disseminated in the Near East back to the fall of the Achaemenid Empire. Its far-reaching effects can be identified in a number of different apocalyptic texts such as the *Bahman Yasht*, the Sibyline Oracles

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Mithridates, weight on the same scale as the "autonomous" coinage in both cities and possible inscriptions related to governors appointed by the king), see Ramsey. *op. cit*. 215-218.

[278] Ramsey (*op. cit*. p. 200) mentions, in addition to the issues coined by Mithridates, the *aureii* and *denarii* issued by Julius Caesar to celebrate the comet of the year 44. We should also add the coins minted by Tigranes II, the Great, in which a comet is portrayed – possibly the comet Halley – on the tiara worn by the king on the obverse. See: Vahe Gurzadyan e Ruben Vardanyan. "Halley's Comet on the Coins of Armenian King Tigranes?" In: *Astronomy and Geophysics*, 45, 2004.

[279] Ramsey (*op. cit*. p. 200-201).

(especially in Book III), the Oracle of the Potter, the Gospel of Matthew, and especially in the Oracle of Hystaspes.[280]

Humphreys offers the following synthesis of the meaning of comets for ancient civilizations: “they were interpreted as portents of gloom and death for the established order, but they were equally regarded as heralds of victory in war and the birth of new kings who would change the existing order”.[281] Justin’s account of how "[Mithridates’] future greatness was predicted even by celestial signs" corroborates that interpretation.[282]

Coming back to the Mithridatic comet coin, it must be highlighted that the comet’s nucleus portrayed on the reverse of the coin is depicted with an eight-pointed star, just like the composition common to all Pontic kings. By resorting to this iconographic tradition, Mithridates was claiming to be not only the divinely foretold king prophesied in ancient Persian apocalyptic tradition but also, and at the same time, the legitimate and rightful heir to the Mithridatic throne. The horse portrayed on the obverse, has been widely accepted as a reference to Perseus’ mythical winged horse: the Pegasus. As previously argued, the Pegasus was also present on a tetradrachm struck by Mithridates VI in the earlier years of his reign.[283]

Both the Pegasus tetradrachm and the comet bronze coin should be perceived as evidence of the early stages of Mithridatic propaganda. The elements they depict are intentionally used as a means to transmit a very specific message with a view to reinforcing the king’s domestic legitimacy at a time of critical need. This campaign made use of distinct iconographic elements and materials so as to reach out to the two major constituent groups of the Pontic population: the Greeks and Hellenized peoples of the coast and the Anatolian-Persians in the countryside.[284]

Nevertheless, the core message was invariably the same: Mithridates VI Eupator was the rightful king. To the Greek poleis – where the tetradrachms would be more commonly used – Mithridates was the rightful successor of a long dynasty that had ruled the country for the last two centuries. He was a perfect Hellenistic king, with affiliation not only to his bloodline but also to Perseus and, through him the heroes of the Iliad and Zeus himself.

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[280] Eddy. *op cit*. pp. 16-18.
[281] Colin J Humphreys. “The Star of Bethlehem – a Comet in 5 BC – and the Date of the Birth of Christ”. In: *Quarterly Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society*. 32 (nov), 1991. pp. 395-6.
[282] Just. 37.2.1. (“Huius futuram magnitudinem etiam caelestia ostenta praedixerant”).
[283] Price. *op. cit*. p. 3. Ramsey (*op. cit.* pp. 218-220) argues that the reference to Pegasus could also reflect the intention to reinforce the relationship between Mithridates and the comet reported by Justin. Based on Chinese sources cited by the author, the constellation of Pegasus would have been especially prominent in the sky during the month of September in 135, the same period in which the comet was seen in Anatolia.
[284] Erciyas. *op. cit.* p. 10.

To the Asiatic people of the countryside – where more modest commercial transactions just recently monetized would be the norm – the iconographic elements built on latent, deeply rooted traditions associated with divinely anointed kings, whose coming had been foretold by celestial signs. Mithridates was also that king, and his legitimacy derived from ancient mythical and messianic elements in such a way that it would be impossible to contest him.

CHAPTER 3

THE MAKING OF ROME'S FORMIDABLE ENEMY

3.1 PRUDENT EXPANSIONISM, MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND THE INEVITABLE CONFLICT

Having consolidated his grip on domestic power, Mithridates was finally in position to pursue every Hellenistic king's dream: territorial expansion. Gabrielsen argues that the essential aim of the Hellenistic kings was to maintain and enlarge their kingdoms, as a means to preserve their own domestic grip on power. To him, Mithridates' policy was notoriously imperialistic and would eventually make the king a significant power in the East. [285]

Mithridates gathered a small group of companions and travelled unannounced to Asia[286] and Bithynia, in a reconnaissance mission to collect every useful piece of information that could be exploited in future confrontations against those neighboring countries.[287] As McGing points out, this journey must have taken place before the Bithynian-Pontic combined invasion of Paphlagonia in 108/7. Therefore, the author suggests it must have happened in 109 or 108.[288]

His journey through the neighboring countries must have made at least two facts very clear to Mithridates: the growing presence of Rome and of Roman agents in Asia and Bithynia, and the increasing resentment it caused among the local Asian population. Mithridates visited the region ten years after Gaius Gracchus' reforms made tax farming available to private investors in Rome, and five years before Nicomedes III replied to Marius that he was unable to raise an army because of the number of his subjects that had been enslaved by the Romans because of debt.

Upon returning to Sinope, Mithridates received the news that his sister-consort had given birth to a son. During his absence, however, queen Laodike was unfaithful to him and had affairs with members of the court. Now, with his brother's return, she feared for her life and concluded that her only hope was to eliminate her husband. Mithridates learned about

[285] Vicent Gabrielsen. "Mithridates VI og de græske byer". In: J. Højte (ed.) *Mithridates VI af Pontos. Roms perfekte fjiende*. Århus: Århus University Press, 2005. pp. 35-38.
[286] Justin meant the Roman province formerly known as the kingdom of Pergamum.
[287] Just. 37.3.4.
[288] McGing (1986). *op. cit*. p. 66.

Laodike's plans to poison him from a female servant and had all those involved in the plot executed.[289]

Unlike what had happened at the time of his political ascension, Mithridates had now gathered enough power to no longer need the legitimacy that the marriage to his sister had granted him. This new attempt against his life – once again plotted by a group of courtesans and a member of his close family – nurtured in Mithridates a strong sense of suspiciousness that would later translate into full-fledged paranoia, especially during the most adverse moments in the future.

According to Justin's account, Mithridates' first military action in Asia Minor was targeted at the conquest of Paphlagonia. It was a carefully designed plan that combined shrewd diplomacy and military prowess, and not the act of a reckless, capricious ruler.[290]

We know from other sources that the king annexed Lesser Armenia to the east probably sometime between the Bosporus campaign (115/114) and the alliance with Tigranes II, the king of Armenia, in 95.[291] Strabo affirms that the country was "ceded to him by Antipater, the son of Sisis", giving us the impression that the expansion towards the east was not military in nature. He also states that Mithridates "cared so much for these places that he built seventy-five strongholds in them and deposited therein most of his treasures".[292]

Although we do not dispose of any other detail of that enterprise, we can reasonably assume that Mithridates obtained through some form of diplomatic effort a much-needed inland route from Pontus to his new domains in Colchis and the Crimea. Also, the number of fortifications in the region may indicate that he feared a possible rebuke from his Eastern neighbors in Greater Armenia and the Parthian Empire and that, once this front had been dealt with by treaties and alliances, those strongholds proved useful for storing his treasure away from his rivals to the west.

Coming back to the better known campaign is Paphlagonia, it is worth bearing in mind that, before the profound foreign policy changes carried out by Mithridates IV in favor of a rapprochement with Rome, Pharnakes had devised a plan to extend his power in Asia Minor, first by seizing lands in Paphlagonia and then in Galatia and Cappadocia. Pharnakes'

[289] Just. 37.3.6-8; 38.1.1.
[290] Just. 37.4.1-4.
[291] Str. 12.3.1; 12.3.23.
[292] Str. 12.3.28.("Ἀντιπάτρου τοῦ Σίσιδος παραχωρήσαντος αὐτῷ"; "ἐπεμελήθη δὲ οὕτω τῶν τόπων τούτων ὥστε πέντε καὶ ἑβδομήκοντα φρούρια ἐν αὐτοῖς κατεσκευάσατο, οἷσπερ τὴν πλείστην γάζαν ἐνεχείρισε")

aggressiveness resulted in a coalition of forces that resisted his expansionism and imposed on him the humiliating treaty of 179.[293]

Some seventy years after Pharnakes' military campaigns, the situation had not improved in Paphlagonia. Despite some references to Paphlagonian kings such as Morzius and Pylaemenes in different sources,[294] Strabo affirms that the country was ruled by many potentates.[295] It can be inferred, therefore, that it was not a unified kingdom and an easy prey for its neighbors.

However, Mithridates learned from his grandfather's mistakes and was not willing to undergo a vicious expansionist campaign that would inevitably bring about the same anti-Pontic coalition that defeated the Pontic arms two generations earlier. Mithridates then negotiated a treaty with Nicomedes III and both kings agreed to invade Paphlagonia and divide its territory between themselves.

There is no evidence to suggest that Mithridates' plan to engage Bithynia before invading Paphlagonia had anything to do with the Roman presence in the province of Asia. It is more likely to assume that up to this point, in Mithridates' mind, Rome had probably only occupied the place left by the Attalids of Pergamum. As such, everything he needed was to avoid the kind of coalitions that commonly rose against expansionist campaigns in Hellenistic times.

When the Senate learned of the Pontic-Bithynian invasion of Paphlagonia, ambassadors were sent to both kings urging them to return the country to its "pristinum statum".[296] Nicomedes recognized that he had no legitimate claim to that territory, but instead of restoring it to its former rulers, he altered his own son's name to Pylaemenes and continued to occupy his part of the invaded country.[297] Nicomedes' reaction reveals he feared a potential Roman intervention and that he was willing to display some deference to the Senate, even when actually pursuing his original objective through such a petty ruse.

As for Mithridates, he did not feel compelled to accept the Senate's orders nor did he see any reasons to dissimulate his plan to occupy Paphlagonia. The king of Pontus replied that

[293] See notes 154, 229, and 244.
[294] King Morzius supported the Gauls against Manlius Vulso in 189 (Liv 38.26). According to Polybius (25.2), he then received indemnity payments from Pharnakes after his failed attempt to conquer the region. The Pylaemenes were the rulers of Paphlagonia cited by Homer (2.850-851) and recognized as the dynastic name of the kingdom by Justin (37.4.8). According to Eutropius (4.20.1) and Orosius (5.10.2), a Pylaemenes from Paphlagonia assisted the Roman forces in the war against Aristonicus.
[295] Str. 12.3.4.
[296] Just. 37.4.4.
[297] Just. 37.4.7-8.

the country was his by right of inheritance, since it belonged to his father before him.[298] There are, however, no references in the sources to support Mithridates' claim, since he in fact invaded the country after the pact with Nicomedes. In addition to that, Nicomedes promise to the Romans that he would return Paphlagonia to its legitimate king and his subsequent decision to change his son's name clearly indicates that he regarded the Pylaemenids as Paphlagonia's rightful rulers, as McGing points out.[299]

As it seems, the Senate did not care or was unable to react to the way the Roman legates were mocked by Mithridates' disobedience and Nicomedes' sham. It has been argued that Rome's prolonged conflict against Jugurtha may have motivated Mithridates and Nicomedes to invade Paphlagonia.[300] We believe, however, that it is more plausible to assume that Rome's potential reaction to the invasion was not an element of particular concern to the kings of Pontus and Bithynia, when the invasion was planned.

The history of Asia Minor would have suggested that military threats were dealt with by a coalition of local powers, with Rome playing a supportive but limited role. That was the case in the wars waged to deter Pharnakes' expansionism and to remove Aristonicus from Pergamum. The Pontic-Bithynian alliance made it impossible for such a coalition to be formed and Rome's unwillingness to enforce its demand confirmed that initial assumption.

In fact, Mithridates felt so emboldened by the success of his first military venture in Anatolia that he subsequently invaded at least parts of Galatia, that, just like Paphlagonia, lacked a unified government.[301] Although the Galatians still had a fearsome reputation as warriors, their country had been ravaged by Roman troops in 189, using as a pretext their engagement in favor of Antiochus the Great in the Battle of Magnesia.[302]

Even more than eight decades later, resentment against Rome was still very strong among the Asiatic Gauls and there are no indications that Mithridates' invasion faced any form of organized resistance. Quite the opposite, the Pontic king would later boast to have a large contingent of Gauls in his own army when the war against Rome begun.[303]

Mithridates careful expansionist campaign had been successful once again. He knew, however, that Rome would not sit idly and watch his next bold move and now he felt the need

[298] Just. 37.4.5.
[299] McGing (1986). *op. cit*. p. 37.
[300] McGing (1986). *op. cit*. p. 68-69; Dennis Glew. "Mithridates Eupator and Rome. A Study of the Background of the First Mithridatic War," Athenaeum 55 (1977) 380-405. p. 387.
[301] Just. 37.4.6.
[302] Liv. 38.12.
[303] Just. 38.

to act to prevent any potentially dangerous Roman reaction. And he knew from his father the best way to deal with Roman politicians: bribery.

As we have seen, Mithridates V Euergetes was a steadfast ally of the Romans and supplied auxiliary forces for the Third Punic War and had a decisive participation in the wars against Aristonicus. As it seems, he was rewarded with Phrygia for his services, but not without granting the consul Manius Aquillius some gifts of his own. The acts of the consul, however, were rescinded by the Roman Senate on the grounds of bribery, but the Pontic king retained possession of the province until the time of his death.[304]

At some point in the early years of Mithridates' reign, Phrygia was taken away from Pontus by the Romans, on the grounds that the concession had been made because of the illegal bribes received by Aquillius.[305] Although we have no clear indication in the sources of when and why the decision to remove Phrygia from Pontus' control was taken, Glew suggests that the Senate just took advantage of a kingdom controlled by Euergetes' widow and his two young sons.[306] As we have argued,[307] this was also a period marked by internal disputes that certainly hampered the Pontic capacity to offer any resistance.

Mithridates VI must have learned from his father's dealings with Manius Aquilius and later with the Senate's decision to deprive him of Phrygia that Roman politicians were up for sale but that it was necessary to show strength to prevent any throwbacks.[308]

With that in mind, in 101, Mithridates sent ambassadors to Rome "with a large amount of money with the intention of bribing the Senate".[309] The tribune Lucius Appuleius Saturninus, who had used his unparalleled influence with the people to help Marius be reelected as consul in 103,[310] saw there an opportunity to attack his political opponents in the Senate and insulted the Pontic ambassadors.

Outraged by the assault on the sacrosanct inviolability of embassies, the Senate assisted Mithridates' ambassadors to present charges against Saturninus' abuses, and the tribune was brought to trial in public. Saturninus, however, begged for the peoples' mercy and convinced

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[304] App. 12.
[305] App. 56, 67.
[306] Glew. *op. cit*. pp. 385-6.
[307] See Chapter 2.1.
[308] According to Appian (*Mit*. 56), this lesson was so deeply carved into Mithridates' soul that even after his first war against Rome, he reportedly complained to Sulla about a series of injustices, including having been deprived of Phrygia, "everything was done for money, [having the Romans] taken it from me and from others by turns; for there is nothing of which most of you are so liable to accusation, o Romans, as the love of profit" ("πάντα ἔπραξαν ἐπὶ χρήμασι, παραλλὰξ παρ᾽ ἐμοῦ τε καὶ παρ᾽ ἐκείνων λαμβάνοντες: ὃ γὰρ δὴ μάλιστ᾽ ἄν τις ὑμῶν, ὦ Ῥωμαῖοι, τοῖς πλείοσιν ἐπικαλέσειεν, ἔστιν ἡ φιλοκερδία").
[309] Diod. 36.15.1. ("κομίζοντες μεθ' αὑτῶν χρημάτων πλῆθος πρὸς τὴν τῆς συγκλήτου δωροδοκίαν")
[310] Plut. *Mar*. 14.7.

them that he was a victim of senatorial political persecution. The masses were deceived by his entreaties and marched on the tribunal. Saturninus was then released from charges and once again elected tribune.[311]

This incident is yet another evidence of the growing interest of the assembly in matters related to foreign policy, previously considered under the purview of the Senate, as we have previously discussed.[312] To Mithridates, however, the intricacies of a growing domestic political upheaval must have been lost in what certainly looked like yet another example of Roman mischievousness and overall lack of respect for kingship.

Be that as it may, Mithridates' bribes were eventually accepted and may have played a role in the initial leniency with which the Senate dealt with Mithridates' next foreign adventure: his involvement in Cappadocia.

According to Appian, the dynastic houses of Pontus and Cappadocia were closely related, and they may have shared the rule of both countries for some period.[313] Diodorus argues that the Ariarathids claimed descend from Cyrus and from one of the conspirators who supported Darius,[314] just like the Mithridatids from Pontus.

Ballesteros-Pastor indicates that the linkage between the two dynastic houses was made even stronger by the fact that Mithridates V' wife and Eupator's mother Laodike was in fact a Cappadocian princess. As evidence for this assertion, he argues that when Mithridates VI sent his young son Ariarathes to Rome to defend the prince's rights to the Cappadocian throne, the Pontic delegation alleged that the child belonged to the lineage of Ariarathes V, who died fighting alongside with Rome against Aristonicus. According to the author, the argument presented could be understood as indicating that Eupator's son belonged to the same lineage (*genitus*) as Ariarathes V.[315]

We don't see this as proof enough to challenge the most common understanding of Laodike VI as a Seleucid princess, the daughter of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Nor is it necessary to understand Eupator's legitimacy in claiming his son's (and his own) rights over Cappadocia. In addition to the Achaemenid linkages between the two bloodlines, the various marriages in the previous century between, on the one hand, the Mithridatids and the Seleucids, and on the

[311] Diod. 36.15.2-3.
[312] See Chapter 1.2.
[313] App. *Mit*. 9.
[314] Diod. 31.19.
[315] Ballesteros-Pastor (2014). *op. cit*. pp. 83-84.

other, the Ariarathids and the Seleucids, made both houses close enough for any such claim to be not only conceivable but also enforceable.[316]

More importantly, however, after being defeated by the coalition of neighboring states, Pharnakes married his only daughter, Nyssa (nerve-rackingly called Laodike, by Justin), to one of his former rival's son, Ariarathes V, the future king of Cappadocia, possibly as a token of his commitment to enduring peace between the two closely related dynasties. Nyssa then allegedly killed by poison five of the six sons she had had with Ariarathes V, as a means to perpetuate her regency. Some relatives rescued the youngest heir who would become Ariarathes VI after the people had Nyssa killed for her atrocious crimes.[317]

Around 126, Mithridates V then took advantage of the situation and "invaded Cappadocia as a foreign enemy",[318] possibly using the assassination of his sister as a pretext. As McGing suggests, Euergetes probably feared a strong military reaction as the one his father had faced and took a step back, leaving his young nephew Ariarathes VI in power, and marrying his older daughter Laodike to him.[319]

Once again, Eupator would profit from the experience of his predecessors and decided he would exert control over Cappadocia indirectly through his family connections, especially in the light of the right of conquest he inherited from his father. In 112 or 111,[320] right after Mithridates' successful campaign in the Bosporus, Ariarathes VI, the king of Cappadocia and Eupator's cousin and brother in law was killed by a Cappadocian noble called Gordius, allegedly at the instigation of the king of Pontus.[321]

Mithridates VI was then able to exert indirect control over neighboring Cappadocia by the agency of the regency of his older sister, the queen Laodike of Cappadocia, on behalf of her young son Ariarathes VIII for quite a few years, apparently without any complaints either from the other Anatolian dynasties or from Rome. He had obtained another victory through cold blooded action and able diplomacy that probably emboldened him to move into Paphlagonia in 108.

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[316] The Seleucid princess Antiochis, for instance, was married to Ariarathes IV, Ariarathes V's father, and was the paternal aunt of both princess Nyssa, Pharnakes' wife, and princess Laodike VI, Eupator's mother. In addition to that, Antiochus III the Great, grandfather of both Nyssa and Laodike VI, was himself the nephew of Stratonice, Ariarathes III's wife and first queen of Cappadocia.
[317] Just. 37.1.3-5.
[318] App. Mit. 10. ("ὡς ἀλλοτρίαν τὴν Καππαδοκίαν ἐπέδραμεν").
[319] McGing (1986). *op. cit*. 37-38.
[320] Otto Mørkholm. "The Classification of Cappadocian Coins". In: *The Numismatic Chronicle*. Seventh Series. Vol. 9. (1969). p. 28.
[321] Just. 38.1.1.

After having consolidated his grasp in Cappadocian rule for over a decade, Mithridates was probably taken by surprise by the sudden invasion of Cappadocia by his Bithynian ally, king Nicomedes III. Nicomedes was married to (another) princess Nyssa,[322] the daughter of the late Ariarathes VI and had, therefore, claims of his own on the Cappadocian throne.[323]

When he learned of the treacherous move by his former associate, Mithridates rushed to help his sister Laodike, only to find out that she had married Nicomedes.[324] Laodike's quick settlement with Nicomedes allows us to suppose that she had probably reached an agreement with Nicomedes before his invasion, possibly even having herself invited him to take control of Cappadocia for fear that she might lose any relevance to her brother now that her son, Ariarathes VII, had come to age.[325]

Mithridates VI would not tolerate this double betrayal and had both Nicomedes and Laodike expelled from Cappadocia and secured his nephew Ariarathes VII on the throne.[326] This new arrangement did not last long, however. Mithridates had once again been betrayed by his own blood and could not trust the government of Cappadocia to his nephew alone. He then moved his closest supporter in Cappadocian nobility, Gordius, back to the country.

Nevertheless, Ariarathes VII, now a grown man, could not stand having the murder of his father brought back to his own court. The faction of the Cappadocian nobility who was contrary to the continued Pontic intervention in the country most likely acted in support of Ariarathes assuming full control of the kingdom and incited the young king to resist his uncle.[327]

In 99, Ariarathes VII assembled a great army and faced Mithridates. With both forces aligned and ready to battle, Mithridates invited his nephew to a conference and killed him, in clear sight of both armies.[328]

Mithridates' extreme reaction to the last attempt for Cappadocian independence is a testament to what degree the king was ready to go to reaffirm his rights over that country. He had been content to exert indirect influence over Cappadocia for over a decade, but Ariarathes VII's revolt forced his hand.

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[322] Mem. 22.5.
[323] Just. 38.1.2. Justin's excessively compressed account of the matter leaves the impression that Nicomedes' invasion happened right after the assassination of father-in-law, Ariarathes VI, which is highly unlikely since Ariarathes VIII elevation to the throne happened before the alliance with Mithridates VI that resulted in the division of Paphlagonia.
[324] Just. 38.1.3-4.
[325] See McGing (1986). *op. cit*. p. 75; Glew. *op. cit*. pp. 388.
[326] Just. 38.1.5.
[327] Just. 38.1.7-8.
[328] Just. 38.1.8-10.

Mithridates was not willing to run the risk of losing Cappadocia and decided to bestow the kingdom on his own son, an eight-year old boy, renaming him Ariarathes IX Eusebes Philopator, appointing Gordius as his guardian.[329] The part of the local nobility that resisted Mithridates' take over, brought Ariarathes VI' second son, Ariarathes VIII, back from Asia, where he was being educated, and tried to install him on the throne, but Mithridates acted quickly and drove him out of the country. Ariarathes VIII would die not long after of a disease caused by anxiety.[330]

From the time when he first consolidated his power in Sinope, around 115, to the murder of Ariarathes VII, Rome had completely neglected Mithridates VI's activities, except for the embassy that ineffectively demanded the restoration of Paphlagonian independence around 107. Roman laxity was brought to an end in 99.

After concluding his sixth term as consul, Marius travelled to Cappadocia and Galatia with the pretext of making the sacrifices he had vowed to offer to the Mother of Gods. Plutarch affirms that he was unable to endure the sight of his rival Metellus returning to the city, despite his strong opposition, and that he was eager to stir Mithridates and incite him to declare war on Rome, in the hope that he would be chosen to lead the Roman armies once again.[331]

Unfortunately, the sources we have about the encounter between Marius and Mithridates are extremely limited.[332] We know very little besides the fact that it happened around 98 and Marius' famous warning: "O King, either endeavor to be mightier than Rome, or do in silence what you are commanded to do".[333]

Nevertheless, both McGing and Ballesteros-Pastor argue that Marius was sent to the East as an official legate of the Republic in a mission to investigate Mithridates' expansion in Asia Minor.[334] This hypothesis seems very logical, especially when we consider that Rome had put an end to the war against Jugurtha, in 106, averted the threat of the Cimbri, in 101, and was finally in a position to turn its attention to a possible new threat in the East.

In addition, Rome experienced an increasingly rare peaceful moment in its domestic politics after the Senate had declared the popular agitators Saturninus and Glaucia enemies of the state for their involvement in the killing of Gaius Memmius, a consular candidate, during

[329] Just. 38.1.10.
[330] Just. 38.2.1-2.
[331] Plut. Mar. 31.1-3.
[332] Plut. *Mar*. 31; App. *Mit*. 56 (indirect reference); and *Rhet. Her*. 54-55 (confirms Marius' mission to Asia).
[333] Plut. *Mar*. 31.3. ("ἢ μεῖζον, ὦ βασιλεῦ, πειρῶ δύνασθαι Ῥωμαίων, ἢ ποίει σιωπῇ τὸ προστασσόμενον")
[334] McGing (1986). *op. cit*. p. 76; Luis Ballesteros-Pastor. The Meeting Between Marius and Mithridates and the Pontic Policy in Cappadoica. In: Cedrus. II (2014b). pp. 225-239. p. 228.

the elections in late 100. Marius, still a consul in the last days of 100, was called upon to defend the Senate and had no alternative than to turn his back on his former political allies and defeat them in a pitched battle in the Roman Forum. Saturninus and Glaucia were eventually killed and it is absolutely plausible to suppose that Marius received the mission to Asia as a reward for his involvement in favor of the Senate after his consulship came to an end in 99.

We can only speculate on the possible effects that the encounter had on Mithridates VI and his overall policy to Asia Minor and to Rome. We know for a fact that despite putting an end to the Ariarathid dynasty in the early 90s, having a strong claim for the throne of Cappadocia, having indirectly ruled at least part of the country for over a decade and actually occupying it with his own army, Mithridates did not proclaim himself king of Cappadocia.

Ballesteros-Pastor offers a convincing hypothesis according to which the reasons for Mithridates' option to establish his eight-year old son on the throne rather than assuming the government himself was "to be found primarily on the pressure of the Roman Republic, which at this very moment was particularly exerted through Caius Marius".[335]

Indeed, the meeting with Marius, the champion of the last two great wars won by Rome, would certainly have had a strong effect on the Pontic king. Mithridates was perfectly aware of how powerful Marius was in Rome and had heard first-hand accounts from the ambassadors he had sent to the Senate around 101 on his military prowess. The very presence of the six-time consul was itself a clear demonstration that Rome was now paying close attention to Asia Minor and was willing to send its full force to the East, if needed.

That was probably the first time the thought of a major war with the Romans crossed Mithridates' mind. It was necessary to take every precaution and start building up preparations.

The tenuous balance Mithridates tried to achieve between his expansionist policy and the appeasement of Rome was broken in 96 by none other than Nicomedes of Bithynia, his ally-turned-rival and brother-in-law. Nicomedes put forward a false pretender to the throne of Cappadocia and sent him to Rome, claiming that Ariarathes VI had had not two, but three sons. Together with the impostor, Nicomedes sent Laodike to testify in support of that claim.[336]

According to Justin, Nicomedes feared that, after adding Cappadocia to his dominions, Mithridates would subsequently seize Bithynia.[337] Indeed, from Nicomedes' perspective, Mithridates had accomplished – in the first years of the 90s – more than his grandfather had probably dreamed of. Mithridates conquered the Bosporus and the eastern shores of the Euxine,

[335] Ballesteros-Pastor (2014b). op. cit. p. 228.
[336] Just. 38.2.3-4.
[337] Just. 38.2.3.

he had stationed garrisons in Galatia and was mustering the Celts to his cause, his agents controlled Cappadocian politics and his armies were facing Nicomedes' own forces across their shared border in Paphlagonia. There would be no coalition of forces simply because there were no other independent kings left in Anatolia. He concluded that Cappadocia needed to be free once again and only Rome could make it so.

Upon hearing of his sister mission to Rome, Mithridates rushed to send his own emissaries to the Senate in order to advocate in favor of his son's legitimacy to the throne of Cappadocia. Mithridates chose to send Gordius, not only his most trustworthy ally in the kingdom, but also a member of the Cappadocian nobility. That is the occasion when Mithridates claimed that his son, renamed Ariarathes IX, was "ex eo Ariarathe gentium, qui bello Aristonici auxilia Romanis ferens cecidisset".[338]

When both embassies arrived in Rome, the Senate had already heard Marius' report. According to McGing, Marius' account of the Pontic expansion in Anatolia "may have been at least partly responsible for the strengthening of Roman resolve in relation to Mithridates that becomes clear during Sulla's Asian intervention a few years later".[339] The Senate had finally drawn the line around Cappadocia and decided that Mithridates would not be allowed to control that kingdom at the risk of becoming a true menace to Roman interests in Asia Minor.

Justin affirms that the Senate decided to take "Cappadocia from Mithridates, and, as a compensation to him, Paphlagonia from Nicomedes".[340] This Solomonic ruling reveals that, by the mid-90s, despite its decision to weaken Mithridates, the Senate still favored a policy of conciliation, instead of open confrontation.

Furthermore, it seems that the Senate considered transforming Paphlagonia and Cappadocia into Republics ("uterque populus libertate donatus est"), probably as a means to ensure their allegiance as Roman clients and to reinforce their new role as buffer-states. The Cappadocian elite, however, would not accept such a radical political change and preferred to elevate one of their own, a certain Ariobarzanes, to the rank of king.[341] The Senate authorization to the enthronement of Ariobarzanes is an indication that the Cappadocian political regime was in fact not as important as its independence to Roman foreign policy, which runs counter to later claims Mithridates would make about a Roman hatred for monarchies.

[338] See note 315.
[339] McGing (1986). *op. cit*. 76.
[340] Just. 38.2.6. ("Mithridati Cappadociam et Nicomedi ad solacia eius Paphlagoniam ademit")
[341] Just. 38.2.7-8.

Mithridates was certainly enraged by Roman intrusion in Anatolian political affairs and felt that, just like what had happened with Phrygia almost two decades before, he had once again been robbed of his rights. This time, however, he was not a young king struggling to ascertain his claim to his own throne.

The king of Pontus was not yet militarily prepared or politically convinced of the need to attract Roman hostility. For that reason, he again devised a mastermind strategy combining his military and diplomatic abilities to test Roman resolution to go to war for Cappadocian independence without risking Pontic open engagement.

Different sources indicate that Mithridates sought for an alliance with the Parthians, probably from a very early stage of his reign.[342] Around 120, the same year Mithridates VI was formally enthroned in Pontus, Mithridates II, king of Parthia, invaded Armenia and forced its king Artavasdes I to recognize Parthian suzerainty and to send his son Tigranes as a hostage to Ctesiphon.[343] Justin reports that, in 95, Tigranes was "sent back by them [the Parthians]" to assume the throne of his father, clearly indicating that the young king was actually an agent of the Parthians.[344]

In 95, Mithridates found in the young king Tigranes II the Great of Armenia a steadfast ally. Right after assuming power, Tigranes reunited parts of Armenia, including the smaller satellite kingdom of Sophene, which bordered the easternmost districts of Cappadocia. Through Gordius' agency, Mithridates convinced Tigranes to invade the kingdom and remove Ariobarzanes from the throne. The treaty with Tigranes was confirmed by his marriage to Cleopatra, one of Mithridates' daughter, and its terms were that the lands conquered would go to Mithridates, while the prisoners and all booty that could be carried off, should belong to Tigranes.[345]

As Olbrycht convincingly argues, "it is a commonplace that scholars overestimate Tigranes' position at the beginning of his rule", instead of recognizing his condition as a vassal of the Parthian king, Mithridates II. Bearing the nature of that relationship in mind and the many references to a previous Pontic-Parthian alliance, the author concludes that Tigranes'

[342] As it will be discussed in more details in Chapter 3.2, a *heroon* erected in Delos in honor of the Mithridatic court in 101, in which emissaries of the Parthian Empire were represented. Although the monument was not directly made by Mithridates, we can conclude that at least in Athens and Delos it was believed that there existed some sort of alliance between him and the Parthians way before the outbreak of the war. For the literary sources that mention an alliance between Pontus and Parthia, see: Mem 22.4; App. *Mit*. 15; Pos. Ath. 213a;
[343] Just. 38.3.1; Marek Jan Olbrycht. "Mithridates VI Eupator and Iran". In: Jakob Høtje (ed). *Mithridates VI and the Pontic Kingdom*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2009. p. 165.
[344] Just. 38.3.1 ("ab eisdem… remissus")
[345] Just. 38.3.1-2.

action in support of Mithridates VI in Cappadocia were actually the result of a "specific strategic planning on the part of the Arsakid King of Kings and his Pontic partner".[346]

With the Armenian-led invasion of Cappadocia and the expulsion of Ariobarzanes from the throne, Mithridates was able to reinstall his indirect rule over Cappadocia, while demonstrating to all that he could now count on the powerful Armenian (and Parthian) army to reinforce his position.

Nevertheless, if it were Mithridates' intention to put Roman resolve to the test, his answer came in the form of Roman legions led by Roman future star-general: Sulla. In 95, Sulla was elected a praetor and assigned Cilicia as his *provincia* to fight its pirates. On his way to the East, the future dictator was commanded to go to Cappadocia, check the activities of Mithridates and restore Ariobarzanes to the throne, what he accomplished without difficulty.[347]

Sulla's expedition was the first Roman military intervention in Asia Minor since the Peace of Apamea in 188. Rome had lost its strategic patience and drawn the line around Cappadocia to counter Mithridatic defiance.[348] Mithridates had his answer. If he wanted to claim Cappadocia, he would have to face Rome's military might.

Mithridates' initial conquests, from his accession to the outbreak of the first war against the Romans, was not aimed at a confrontation to put an end to Roman presence in Asia. In fact, his first military campaigns in the Bosporus and the Eastern coast of the Euxine did not raise any serious objections from Rome. Rome's lax intervention after the invasion of Paphlagonia was perceived as lack of interest or ability to act, as long as its province of Asia was not directly affected.

The fact that both Mithridates and Nicomedes were willing to take their claims on the Cappadocian throne to the Senate meant, however, that Rome was still regarded as the hegemonic power in the region and the later use of Socrates and Tigranes to intervene in Bithynia and Cappadocia corroborates the understanding that Mithridates did not want to be directly associated to those acts.

As Madsen points out, Mithridates' original goal to expand the Kingdom of Pontus as far as possible was not necessarily "a challenge to Rome and Roman interests to the point of

[346] Olbrycht. *op. cit*. p. 169. The author clearly states that Tigranes' close cooperation with Mithridates VI must have been undertaken on Parthian initiative and that the Arsakid king was surely aware of the Roman dominance in Anatolia and the Roman appetite for conquest, and was willing to eliminate Roman influence in Cappadocia, a region of vital importance for Mithridates VI, Parthia and Rome.
[347] Plut. *Sul*. 5.3.
[348] McGing (2009). *op. cit*. p. 209.

war". His strategy, therefore, "depended on the political situation in Rome and her willingness or ability, at any given moment, to wage war on Pontos".[349]

Mithridates was clearly aware of that as his attempts to bribe the Roman political elite demonstrate. Nevertheless, it must have become clear for him that there would be never enough gold to satisfy every faction and every politician in Rome. Rome's unwillingness to accept even his indirect rule over Cappadocia was a clear indication of the limitation of his non-confrontational expansionist policies.

He was finally convinced that war was inevitable.

The second half of the 90s was spent in intense preparations. After making political overtures and sending extravagant gifts to the Cimbri, the Greek Celts, the Sarmatians, and the Bastarnians, Mithridates sent ambassadors to those peoples requesting their aid in the coming war. He also sent for Scythia and mustered an army from his earliest enemies in support of his cause. Mithridates reportedly reached out even to the Egyptians, the Syrians and the Phoenicians.[350]

From 96/5 onwards, Mithridates started striking coins at a level unmatched in all of Pontic history. He also adopted the practice of dating the reverse with year and month of coinage, allowing us to chart with considerable certainty the rhythm of minting (Figure 8), as well as the evolution of the imagery used in those series.[351] The increasing quantities of silver and gold coins can be perceived as indicative of accelerated preparations for war.[352]

The opportunity for action eventually presented itself when the Social War erupted, and Rome was caught in a bloody struggle in the heart of the Italian peninsula, in 91. Mithridates hired an assassin named Alexander to get rid of Nicomedes IV, who had inherited his father's throne in 94, but the plot failed. He then incited Nicomedes III's younger son, Socrates Chrestus, to rebel against his older brother and take control of Bithynia.[353]

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[349] Jesper Madsen. The Ambitions of Mithridates VI: Hellenistic Kingship and Modern Interpretations. In: Jakob M. Højte (ed). *Mithridates VI and the Pontic Kingdom*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2009. p. 194-196.
[350] Just. 38.3.6; App. *Mit*. 13.
[351] See note 272.
[352] François de Callataÿ. "Guerres et monnayages à l'époque hellénistique. Essai de mise en perspective suivi d'une anexe sur le monnayage de Mithridate VI Eupator". In: *Economie antique. La guerre dans les économies antiques*. Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges: Musée archéologique départemental, 2000. pp. 344-359; Price. *op. cit*. p. 4; Newell. *op. cit*. p. 41. However, McGing (2009) questions the connection between military activity and minting. He ascertains, for instance, that the coins produced by the royal mints were not sufficient to pay the number of soldiers reported in the sources; that Mithridatic troops were paid in a variety of currencies, and that whenever the need presented itself, intensive minting could be ordered and rapidly achieved. No alternative explanation is offered, though, for the sudden increase in the production of coins from 95 onwards. (*op. cit*. p. 212).
[353] App. *Mit*. 10, 57; Just. 38.3.4.

At the same time, Mithridates convinced Tigranes to invade Cappadocia once again and restore Ariarathes IX.[354] It took Ariobarzanes one hard look at Tigranes' approaching army for him to pack up his baggage and run away to Rome.[355]

While still facing the hardships of civil war in Italy, the Senate issued a decree stating that both Nicomedes IV and Ariobarzanes should be restored to their thrones. The former consul of 101, Manius Aquillius, was assigned the task of returning both kings to Asia Minor. Lucius Cassius, who was in charge of the province of Asia, was ordered to cooperate in the mission, since the legions were fully deployed in Italy. With Cassius' army and the support of a large force collected from the Galatians and Phrygians, Aquillius restored Nicomedes to Bithynia and Ariobarzanes to Cappadocia in late 90 or early 89.[356]

Nevertheless, Aquillius, acting without the consent of the Senate,[357] instigated Nicomedes and Ariobarzanes to invade Pontus to provoke a war with Mithridates. Ariobarzanes refused, but Nicomedes, who was highly indebted to the legates, agreed, marched into Pontus, and plundered the country.[358]

At this stage, Mithridates had his forces ready for war, but he decided not to respond.[359] The minting of Pontic coins had reached a historic peak in the same period (Figure 8), clearly indicating the acceleration of his mobilization.[360] Even so, Mithridates sent Pelopidas to the Roman generals and Bithynian representatives. The Pontic ambassador listed the grievances suffered by Mithridates, chief among them the illegitimate theft of Phrygia and Cappadocia, even after the large amount of money paid by the Pontic kings for those territories. And then he brought the accusation against Nicomedes IV invasion of Pontus and the crimes committed against Mithridates.

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[354] Once again, Justin excessively compressed narrative (38.3.2-3) gives the impression of a sole invasion of Cappadocia at the same time as Nicomedes IV was removed from the throne of Bithynia by Socrates Chrestus. Based on Plutarch's account of Sulla's involvement in the restoration of Ariobarzanes, in 95 (see note 347), Appian's (*Mit*. 10) assertion that Mithraas and Bagoas (both generals with clear Persian names) drove out Ariobarzanes, whom the Romans had confirmed as king of Cappadocia, and installed Ariarathes in his place, and Justin's narrative about how both Ariobarzanes and Nicomedes IV were removed from power in 91/90, it must be inferred that the chosen king of Cappadocia lost his crown twice after Parthian-Armenian invasions (up to that point in time, since he would be removed from the throne again later during the Mithridatic Wars).
[355] Just. 38.3.3.
[356] Just. 38.3.4,8. App. *Mit*. 11.
[357] App. *Mit*. 17.
[358] App. *Mit.* 11, 56-57.
[359] App. *Mit*. 11.
[360] Callataÿ (2000). *op. cit*. pp. 355-356.

As the Romans refused Mithridates' pleas for justice, the Pontic king finally moved, sending his son Ariarathes IX with a large force to seize Cappadocia to drive out Ariobarzanes from the throne once more.[361]

After reclaiming Cappadocia, Mithridates sent Pelopidas again to the Romans. Only this time the ambassador was much more assertive. He said that Mithridates was ruling his ancestral domain, and that he had acquired many allies, including the Colchians, the Greeks bordering on the Euxine, and the barbarian tribes beyond them, the Scythians, Taurians, Bastarnae, Thracians, Sarmatians, and all those who dwell in the region of the Don and Danube and the Sea of Azov. Tigranes of Armenia was his son-in-law, and the Arsacid king of Parthia, his ally. He had a large number of ships, some in readiness and others building, and apparatus of all kinds in abundance.[362]

Pelopidas made clear that Mithridates was not helpless. The king wanted to make sure the Romans would punish Nicomedes and revert all their wrongdoings. At this late stage, it is evident that Mithridates did not expect the Romans would back away from their previous offenses. He had already engaged in a different kind of war, a war for the hearts and minds of the Asiatic peoples. And he wanted to make it clear that not only he was morally right, but that he was also in a position to defeat the Romans and expel them from Asia.

The Roman legates did not wait to hear from the Senate and began preparations for the war, mustering allied forces from Bithynia, Cappadocia, Paphlagonia and Galatia. Cassius positioned his army on the boundary of Bithynia and Galatia, while Aquillius moved to Bithynia and Oppius, a third Roman general, took the mountains of Cappadocia. Roman armies and allied forces amounted to some 180,000 men.[363]

At the helm of an army of almost 300,000 men, Mithridates moved into Bithynia and defeated Nicomedes. His generals overtook Manius on his retreat, while Nicomedes was moving to join Cassius. New victories forced the allied troops to retreat: Cassius fled to Apamea, Nicomedes to Pergamum, and Aquilius to Rhodes. When those who were guarding the Hellespont learned of these facts, they scattered and delivered the straits and all the ships they had to Mithridates.[364]

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[361] App. *Mit*. 15. Both Orosius (6.2.2) and Eutropius (5.5) affirm that Mithridates also drove Philaemenes out of Paphlagonia, but it is very unlikely that any such monarch still ruled in what was left of the unoccupied parts of that country.
[362] *Ibidem*.
[363] App. *Mit*. 17.
[364] App. *Mit*. 17-19.

Mithridates marched south and took over Phrygia, Mysia and parts of the Roman province of Asia. He then conquered Pergamum and was gladly received by the peoples of Magnesia, Ephesus, and Mytilene. He appointed satraps over the peoples he conquered and directed his generals to dismantle pockets of resistance in Lycia and Paphlagonia. The king even married a virgin called Monima, the daughter of Philopoemen of Stratonicea.[365]

Nevertheless, Mithridates' initial triumph over Asia would not be remembered by its ceremonies and weddings. Having secured his control over Anatolia, the king sent letters to his satraps and to the magistrates of the Greek cities instructing them that, on the thirtieth day thereafter, they should kill all the Romans and Italians, their wives, their children and their servants from Italian origin, and leave their bodies unburied. Those who buried the dead or concealed the survivors would be punished. The king offered rewards to those who denunciated deserters, freedom to slaves who betrayed their masters, and release of half of their obligation to debtors who killer their Roman money-lenders.[366]

When the appointed day arrived, the Ephesians hunted even those who sought refuge in the temple of Artemis, while the Pergameses shot arrows at supplicants clinging to the statues of Asclepius in his temple. In Kaunos, after tearing their victims from the shrine of Vesta, the citizens killed all the children and their mothers in front of the Roman men, before killing them.[367]

In Adramyttium, the Romans and Italians who tried to flee to the ocean were followed by the mob and drowned to death, as were their children. The citizens of Tralles, not willing to be directly involved in the massacre, hired a Pahlagonian mercenary called Teophilus, who conducted all the victims to the temple of Concord where he executed all of them, chopping off the hands of those who embraced the sacred statues.[368]

Even if considered imprecise or exaggerated – as so commonly happens with numbers offered by ancient sources – the massacre was a horrendous episode. Estimates of the number of men, women and children killed on the same day varies from 80,000[369] to 150,000[370]. All Romans and Italians in Asia were exterminated at once and mourning took over most of the

[365] App. *Mit*. 21.
[366] App. *Mit*. 22; Oro. 6.2.2; Eutr. 5.5. Mem. 22.9.
[367] App. *Mit*. 22. Oro. 6.2.3. Cic. *Man*. 3.7.
[368] App. *Mit*. 22.
[369] Mem. 22.9; Val. Max. 9.2.3 (Valerius' account mentions only "citizens", so the overall death toll must have been bigger according to the author).
[370] Plut. *Sul*. 24.4.

provinces, a stain that "thoroughly sunk into and became permanent in the name of the Roman people".[371]

After parading the Roman general throughout Asia, Mithridates finally executed him too. Manius Aquilius was killed in public with molten gold poured down his throat.[372]

For Mithridates, Roman intervention in Asia could only be perceived as the consequence of the greed of its political leaders. The very same leaders Mithridates believed he had bought in 101, as his father had before him in 129. As a Hellenistic king, it must have been very difficult to understand the intricacies of Roman domestic disputes, the emerging political forces and the profound effects that an unplanned expansion was causing in the fabric of Republican institutions.

Roman ambiguous actions and tergiversation – caused by the inexistence of a clear strategy to its involvement in the East and by the very nature of its political system – was perceived as an innate lack of moral standing, evidence of its incommensurate greed, and a natural disposition to lying – one of the most abhorrent crimes to the eyes of a king of Persian descent.

For Mithridates, Rome became the embodiment of the forces he had already faced in the early years of his reign. By ordering him out of territories that were his by right, Rome was questioning his political authority and therefore his divinely-inspired legitimacy to rule.

His rivalry against Rome could not be limited to a political dispute, as it would have been the case of conflicts against Nicomedes or the Ariarathids.

It became a messianic fight to the end against the West for which Mithridates claimed the title of champion of the East.

[371] App. *Mit*. 23; Oro. 6.2.3; Cic. *Man*. ("illa macula Mithridatico bello superiore concepta quae penitus iam insedit ac nimis inveteravit in populi Romani nominee")
[372] App. *Mit*. 21 (this episode will be further discussed in Chapter 3.2)

3.2 MYTHS AND LEGENDS IN ANTI-ROMAN PROPAGANDA

In 101, the same year Mithridates sent emissaries to Rome with a large amount of money to buy the Senate's leniency towards his expansionist policies in Paphlagonia, a *heroon* was dedicated in Delos, honoring the Samothtacian gods, the Pontic king and his court. On the southern ravine of the hill where the Serapeion was located, a sanctuary was erected in honor of the Samothracian Kabeiroi, increasingly associated with the Dioscuri twins, in front of the reservoir of Inopos, that collected the waters which drained from a source on the slope of Mount Kynthos and flowed intermittently down to the Sacred Lake and the Bay of Skardana (Figure 9a).

The *heroon* was located right next to the sanctuary and concealed a substantial part of its façade, which was probably designed to attract the attention of the visitors who peregrinated to the Samothracean temple and to the Serapeion or simply stopped in front of the reservoir for some fresh water (Figures 9b). It consisted of a display of thirteen portrait-busts inserted in round shields: one of them in the *tympanon* of the façade (Figure 9c), and twelve along the inner walls of the building (Figure 9d).

The portrait-busts represented king Mithridates' closest advisors, generals and courtiers as well as his nephew, the king Ariarathes VII of Cappadocia, and two officials from the Arsacid court. There seems to have been at least two statues of Mithridates in the *heroon*: one free-standing probably located in front of the western wall (unfortunately lost), and another located close to the inner back wall,[373] to which is commonly connected a statue found out of the sanctuary complex, wearing leather breastplate, with a *paludamentum* attached to the shoulder, a ceinture, a tunic under the armor, and shoes formed of crossed straps, the perfect uniform of a Roman legionnaire (Figure 9e).[374]

The main inscription on the architrave (Figure 9c) clearly states that the *heroon* was erected by a certain Helianax, son of Asclepiodoros, priest of Poseidon Aisios, of his own volition (*ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων*), on behalf of the Athenian and Roman peoples to the sanctuary and to king Mithridates.[375]

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[373] IDelos 1563. The statue was dedicated by Helianax to Mithridates Eupator Dioniso, praising the king's ἀρετῆ and εὐνοία towards the Athenian people.

[374] The statue was sculpted in marble and can be found at the Museum in Delos. Fernand Chapouthier. *Le sanctuaire des Dieux de Samothrace. Exploration archéologique de Délos*. Vol 16. Paris: E. de Boccard, 1935. pp 38-39; Kreuz. *op. cit*. pp. 134-140.

[375] IDelos 1562. ("Ηλιάναξ Ἀσκληπιοδώρου Ἀθηναῖος ὁ διὰ βίου ἱερεὺς Πο[σειδῶνος Αἰσίου, γενόμενο]ς καὶ Θεῶν Με[γάλων Σαμ]οθράκων Διοσκούρων Καβείρων ὑπὲρ τοῦ δήμου τοῦ Ἀθηναίων κα[ὶ] τοῦ δήμου τοῦ Ῥωμαίων τὸν ναὸν [καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτῶι ἀγάλματα καὶ] τὰ ὅπλα θεοῖς οἷς ἱερά[τευσε καὶ βασιλ]εῖ Μιθραδάτηι

The monument was therefore related to different Greek deities. On the one hand, it was dedicated by a priest of Poseidon Aisios (auspicious, favorable), the protector of seafaring and traders; on the other, it was located in front of the temple of the Dioscuri-Kabeiroi, the twin gods associated with victory in battle and, for that reason, to the ideology of power in Hellenistic times. They also had a close connection with Pontus, since Jason and the Argonauts (among them Castor and Polux) sojourned in Sinope, a city that venerated one of Jason's companions as its founder.[376]

The Kabeiroi, syncretized with the Dioscuri, were broadly adored, especially thanks to the mysteries celebrated in their name in Samothrace, in which Philip II of Macedon himself had been initiated.[377] The veneration to the Kabeiroi-Dioscuri can also be associated with Alexander and Dionysus, two extremely important elements in Mithridatic propaganda.[378]

Although there were no Romans represented in the shrine, it has been suggested that it represents Mithridates' willingness to reinforce his friendship to Rome at a time when the relationship with the Republic had not yet fallen out, despite the king's initial expansionist campaign in Asia Minor.[379]

It has to be noted, however, that neither the sanctuary not the inscriptions therein should be interpreted as a deliberate formulation of official Mithridatic propaganda, since it was the work of an Athenian priest with unknown connections to the Pontic court. The monument is rather a testimony to the importance the Pontic Kingdom had achieved in the Hellenistic world at the end of the second century and may reflect the perceptible qualities and alliances of Mithridates VI' kingship in the Hellenic world.

In that regard, we can assume that Mithridates was seen as a powerful, rich king in Anatolia, with strong connections to Eastern powers such as Cappadocia and Parthia, and who maintained a good relationship with Rome. We can also conclude that his propaganda efforts generated some recognition of the acclaimed association Mithridates claimed to certain Hellenic deities and to Alexander.

Εὐπάτορι Διονύσωι ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων ἀνέθηκεν ἐπὶ [ἐπιμελητοῦ] τῆς νήσου Θεοδότου τοῦ Διοδώρου Σουνιέως"). See: Guy Sanders and Richard Catling. "From Delos to Melos: A New Fragment of I Delos 1562". In: *The Annual of the British School at Athens,* Vol. 85 (1990), pp. 327-332.

[376] Plut. *Luc*. 23; App. *Mit*. 83. The association with deities related to commerce and seafaring had already been claimed in earlier dedications by Mithridates on the same island of Delos. See: note 212.

[377] Plut. *Alex*. 2.2.

[378] Ballesteros-Pastor (2006). *op. cit*. pp. 212-213.

[379] McGing (1986). op. cit. p. 91; Luis Ballesteros-Pastor. "Cappadocia and Pontus, Client Kingdoms of the Roman Republic from the Peace of Apamea to the Beginning of the Mithridatic Wars (188-89 BC)". In: Altay Coskun (ed.). *Freundschaft und Gefolgschaft in den auswärtigen Beziehungen der Römer (2 Jh. v. Chr.-1 Jh. n. Chr.)*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2008. pp. 53-54.

In less than a decade, however, it would be inconceivable to represent the king as a close ally of the Romans or dressing in a legionnaire cuirass, due to the increasing tensions between Rome and Pontus and to the aggressively anti-Roman propaganda Mithridates VI would reinforce throughout the Greek-speaking world.

Glew suggests that, at the beginning of the first war against the Romans, Mithridates Eupator sought to do three things to influence the way in which people in Asia Minor looked upon him: i) establishing a reputation for liberality; ii) reinforcing his association with Alexander the Great; and iii) inducing the belief that he would cancel debts and redistribute Roman property.[380]

As we have already argued[381], the association with Alexander is not a uniquely Mithridatic policy in the Hellenistic world. Mithridates Eupator's claim, however, went beyond most of the other Hellenistic kings: he was not a mere imitator, he was the direct descendent of Alexander and therefore entitled to all of the conqueror's heirlooms.

In that sense, the three objectives identified by Glew could all be synthetized in the reaffirmation of Mithridates' legitimacy according to his allegedly direct relationship with Alexander. The Macedonian king displayed enormous liberality and prodigality during his campaigns, initially associated with the broad goal of liberating the Greeks from the Persian yoke. The author himself recognizes that "for centuries prior to 88 the Greeks had regarded φιλανθρωπία one of the highest virtues of a ruler and had admired it particularly in Alexander, whom they compared with Heracles, the type of the φιλάνθρωπος".[382]

Alexander provided Mithridates both a role model and a repository of policies and images to be used in order to achieve a successful expansionist military campaign. Mithridates' lenient treatment of some of his opponents, such as releasing the Bithynian troops that fell into his hands after the first battle of the war and giving them supplies for their journey back home[383] could therefore be perceived as indirectly influenced by Alexander's acts of clemency to the Athenians[384], Milesians[385] and Mardians[386]. The same could be suggested about Mithridates'

[380] Dennis Glew. "The Selling of the King: A Note on Mithridates Eupator's Propaganda in 88 B.C.". In: *Hermes*, 105. Bd., H. 2 (1977b), pp. 253-254.
[381] See Chapter 2.
[382] Glew (1977b). *op. cit*. 255.
[383] App. *Mit*. 18.
[384] Arr. *Ana.* 1.10.
[385] Arr. *Ana.* 1.19.
[386] Arr. *Ana.* 3.24.

merciful treatment of the 800 Nicomedian horsemen taken by his Sarmatian cavalry not long thereafter, as well as of the three hundred men he captured after the battle against Aquillius.[387]

The literary sources available make it clear that the king's generous (φιλανθρωπευσάμενός) acts "created a reputation of clemency among his enemies"[388] to such a degree that: "the cities came flocking over to him (…), inviting him by their public decrees to enter their territory, calling him their god and deliverer. (…) the people came in crowds out of the several cities, wearing bright garments to greet him, and received him with great joy and acclamation".[389]

Similarly, Mithridates announced that his triumph would mean the fulfillment of one of the Greeks' oldest dreams: the cancellation of their debts. Athenion, the Athenian ambassador to the Pontic court, sent letters to his fellow citizens even before the outbreak of the war, ensuring them that Mithridates would discharge them of all debts, reinstate their democratic constitution, and send them great presents both publicly and privately.[390]

Later on, as an inducement to persuade the peoples of Asia Minor to join him in the massacre of the Romans, the king invited them to partake in the sharing of their goods and properties and assured that those who killed money-lenders would have at least part of their debt cancelled.[391] Once again, a precedent can be found in Alexander's well attested prodigality[392] as well as in his declaration of remittance of all of his soldiers' debts after the Susa weddings.[393]

Nevertheless, Mithridates' propagated liberality towards the cancellation of debts and distribution of Roman property should not be seen as a careless emulation of Alexander's policy. It should be noted, as we have already pointed out[394], that Mithridates' early reconnaissance mission to Asia and Bithynia must have made it clear to the king how precarious the debt situation of many in Asia Minor had become, especially in the neighboring countries, where the presence of Roman tax-farmers and private moneylenders was more substantial.

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[387] App. *Mit*. 19.
[388] App. *Mit*. 18. ("δόξαν ἐμποιῶν τοῖς πολεμίοις φιλανθρωπίας");
[389] Diod. 37.26. ("διαβοηθείσης δὲ τῆς τοῦ Μιθριδάτου φιλανθρωπίας, ἐνέπεσεν εἰς τὰς πόλεις ὁρμὴ προστίθεσθαι τῷ βασιλεῖ, παρῆν δὲ ὁρᾶν ἀπὸ πασῶν τῶν πόλεων πρεσβευτὰς μετὰ ψηφισμάτων καλούντων αὐτὸν εἰς τὰς ἰδίας πατρίδας καὶ θεὸν καὶ σωτῆρα προσαγορευόντων. ἀκολούθως δὲ τούτοις καὶ κατὰ τὴν παρουσίαν τοῦ βασιλέως ἀπήντων αἱ πόλεις ἐκχεόμεναι πανδημεὶ μετ' ἐσθῆτος λαμπρᾶς καὶ πολλῆς χαρᾶς")
[390] Pos. Ath. 213a.
[391] App. *Mit*. 22.
[392] Arr. *Ana.* 1.5; 4.18.
[393] Arr. *Ana.* 7.5.
[394] See Chapter 3.1.

Moreover, Mithridates must have learned from local history about the possibilities offered by the use of promising debt cancellation and – more importantly – slave emancipation as a means to gathering military and political support. As Appian tells us, in preparation for the Vespers, Mithridates also promised freedom to slaves for betraying their masters.[395]

While Mithridates was just an infant, Aristonicus, the illegitimate son of Attalus III, led a revolt against Roman annexation of Pergamum. In spite of some initial victories that include the killing of Publius Licinius Crassus Mucianus, the consul of 131, and of the allied king Ariarathes V of Cappadocia, the tide soon turned against Aristonicus with a coalition of Anatolian kingdoms and cities flocking to the Roman cause. Forced to retreat to the interior by a combination of naval and land forces from Asia Minor, Aristonicus withdrew to the interior of the country and adopted a completely new character for his revolt. From a hill-country in Mysia, he made an appeal to slaves, offering their freedom, and to those who were destitute, with the promise of economic relief. This political program granted Aristonicus a large number of followers, although he was eventually defeated.[396] As we shall argue later on, this might not have been the only page in Aristonicus' history to have inspired Mithridates.

If the similarities between his policies and Alexander's were not obvious enough, Mithridates wore Alexander's own cloak[397] and sought to emulate the Macedonian conqueror with some other blatant gestures. After seizing Bithynia, the king invaded Phrygia and lodged at "Alexander's Inn, considering a good omen that, there where Alexander rested, Mithridates too shall have his quarters".[398] Later on, Mithridates would repeat Alexander and shoot an arrow from the corner of the roof of the temple of Artemis in Ephesus and, noticing it went a little farther than the one-stadium radius conceded by the Macedonian king, extended the right of asylum to that new reach.[399] Also, after an earthquake, Mithridates donated 100 talents for the rebuilding of Apamea, following an earthquake, just like Alexander had done before.[400]

As the outbreak of the war against the Romans approached and Mithridates relied more and more in successfully promoting his image of both the rightful king and a new Alexander, we note a transformation in his iconographic representation. The king leaves his more realistic

[395] App. *Mit*. 22.
[396] Str. 14.1.38; Flor. 1.35.4; Just. 36.4.6-11. See also: Magie. *op.cit*. pp. 147-158.
[397] App. *Mit*. 117.
[398] App. *Mit*. 20. ("εἰς τὸ τοῦ Ἀλεξάνδρου πανδοκεῖον κατέλυσεν, αἰσιούμενος ἄρα, ἔνθαπερ Ἀλέξανδρος ἀνεπαύσατο, καὶ Μιθριδάτην σταθμεῦσαι")
[399] Str. 14.1.23.
[400] Str. 12.8.18.

portraits of the earlier royal coins (Figure 5a) in favor of an increasingly idealized image (Figure 5c), with wild flying hair and a prominent Alexander-style *anastole*.[401]

In 89/88, as Mithridates advances through the Greek cities of Asia Minor, a new series of coins is issued and the Pegasus, common in the early strikes, is replaced on the reverse by a grazing stag (Figure 5c). Price suggests that the change was influenced by political motives and associates the stag with the cult of Artemis at Ephesus, a much more befitting symbol to the liberator of all Asia, in comparison with the overly Persian Pegasus.[402]

Another frequent theme in Mithridates' official propaganda that would bring him closer to Alexander was his association with the god Dionysus. As Alexander had been given the title of "Dionysus" by the Athenians[403], so would Mithridates be called by them as the "young Dionysus".[404]

Plutarch relates that while the king was an infant, a flash of lightning burnt his cradle, but did his body no harm. It left a little mark on his forehead, which his hair covered when he was grown a boy; and, after he became a grown man, another flash broke into his bedchambers, and burnt the arrows in a quiver that was hanging under him. From that episode, it is said, his soothsayers presaged, that archers and light-armed men should win him considerable victories in his wars; and he became widely known as Dionysus, because in those many dangers by lightning he bore some resemblance to the god.[405]

In effect, the relation with Dionysus claimed by Mithridates would go way beyond the mere emulation of Alexander. As numerous literary and epigraphical evidence[406] attest, the king of Pontus adopted "Dionysus" as his second epithet at some point after consolidating his power in Sinope.[407] As the epithet was never used in his official coinage[408], we are tempted to suppose that it was used as a cognomen, with extra-official, purely propagandistic ends, and it became so popular that it found its way to monuments erected in his honor and to the accounts later produced by Romans about his endeavors.

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[401] Thonemman. *op. cit.* p. 166; Høtje (2009). *op. cit*. p. 149.
[402] Price. *op. cit*. p. 3.
[403] Diog. 6.63.
[404] Pos. Ath. 213d.
[405] Plut. *Mor*. 624B. Semele, Dionysus' mother, is said to have been struck by lightning when she was pregnant with the god. Plutarch (*Alex*. 2.2) also relates that Olympias, Alexander's mother, had a dream she had been struck by lightning while pregnant with the future king of the Macedonians.
[406] App *Mit*. 10.
[407] As we have seen in Chapter 2.1, inscriptions dated 115/6 (IDelos 1560 e 1561) do not register the epithet "Dionysus". It is included, however, in IDelos 1562, dated 101.
[408] Høtje (2009). *op. cit*. p. 149.

It must also be noted, nevertheless, that some form of association with Dionysus had probably already been claimed by Mithridates VI's grandfather Pharnakes, hence the cornucopia reproduced on his coinage (Figure 2). Once again, we are instigated to draw comparisons between the expansionist campaigns of Pharnakes and Mithridates, and on how they both resorted to a specific repository of imagery and policies.

Ballesteros-Pastor suggests that Mithridates' propaganda had two major objectives: "mover las masas en favor de su causa y en contra de Roma y legitimar desde el punto de vista ideológico la expansión del reino del Ponto".[409] In that sense, the exploitation of his association with Dionysus:

> *habría tenido para éste una clara intencionalidad propagandística, reflejo de su programa de gobierno, empeñado en la expansión de sus domínios por todo el Mar Negro con el apoyo de los elementos griegos de su reino, que habrían constituído el principal soporte del poder de Mitrídates tras los turbulentos sucesos que acompañaron su ascenso al poder y sus primeros años de reinado, repleto de querelas intestinas*.[410]

Like Alexander before him, Mithridates saw the need to constitute a strong basis of support, ideologically unified, for the culturally and ethnically diverse empire he had just conquered. From his early reign, he had learned how problematic a politically divided kingdom was and he was determined to reassert his legitimacy in every possible way.

His relationship with Rome had fallen from an inherited friendship to cold mistrust and finally to open hatred. Roman internal fights and the consequent abrupt shifts in foreign policy were seen as proof of its deceptive nature; its actions in Asia, as clear proof of its rapaciousness. No traits could be more obnoxious to a king brought up in accordance with Persian values.

But on top of all that, Mithridates must have seen Roman presence in the East as absolutely illegitimate. And that is why Roman interference in what he considered as his legitimate rights to rule over places like Phrygia, Paphlagonia and especially Cappadocia, would not be tolerated. His fight was a fight for a dying world.

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[409] Luis Ballesteros-Pastor. Heracles y Dioniso, dos Modelos en la Propaganda de Mitrídates Eupátor. In Kolaios 4 (1995) 127-133. p. 127.
[410] *Idem*. p. 131.

Many – if not all – Hellenistic kings resorted to some form of propaganda. The association with Alexander or other Macedonian conquerors – such as Ptolemy and Seleucus – was very common, as was the use of tales and imagery of Greek and even non-Greek deities. What makes Mithridates Eupator's propaganda so unique and appealing is the apocalyptical component it embraced.

Through it, Mithridates portrayed the Romans as the ultimate evil that should be swept away from Asia. The Romans were cowards who paid for their deliverance instead of fighting for it; their government was corrupt and prone to infighting; they were insatiable in their hunger for blood and riches; and above all, Romans hated kings, for when they had their own, they were nothing but shepherds and soothsayers.[411]

When Alexander and the Macedonians conquered Persia and put an end to the Achaemenid Empire, the members of the deposed elite, especially those in key religious positions in the former Empire, put up a special resistance campaign that had far reaching consequences up until the Middle Ages. This campaign was based on a series of apocalyptical traditions centered on the idea of the expulsion of the illegitimate, unholy conquerors at the hands of a divinely anointed king from the East.[412]

The Oriental theology of kingship was therefore an essential element of that religious movement: as only the Persian kings were recognized as capable of ensuing laws divinely sanctioned, all Greek-Macedonian imperial acts were a direct attack on the ruling gods of the East.

Prophecies were then produced to promote the idea that the foreign invaders would soon be expelled from Asia by divine intervention and that the East would reclaim its former primacy. These ideas circulated clandestinely for several centuries and adapted versions of them can be found in numerous texts, such as the *Book of Daniel*; the *Sibylline Oracles* and the Medieval translation from Persian into Pahlevi of the *Bahman Yasht*.

All Persian religious literature of resistance, according to Eddy, is underlined by two main ideas: the displacement of the notables and the interruption of the divinely ordained state and kingship. One example of this narrative can be found in the Third Book of the *Sibylline Oracles*, commonly accepted as the work of a Jew who, in the second century, compiled pre-existing Hellenic and Oriental oracles as propaganda against the Seleucids.[413]

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[411] Just. 38.4-7.
[412] Eddy. *op. cit.* p. VII.
[413] Idem. p. 10.

In lines 388-400 of that book[414], it is prophesized that an unbelieving man wearing a purple cloak shall take over Asia, and he shall be killed at the hands of a king of the line of the successors of the Achaemenids. At least the initial part of that section can be traced back to earlier Persian propaganda associated with Alexander's conquests.

Since the principal element for Persian apocalyptic resistance was the loss of the Achaemenid Empire, the king played a central part in this messianic tradition. And invariably, he should be of royal blood, seem to be chosen by Ahura Mazda and be perceived as one who submitted to all Persian religious taboos.[415]

Another important piece of resistance literature tradition relevant to understand the messianic component of Mithridates' later propaganda is the *Oracle of Hystaspes*. Probably produced in the Hellenistic Near East, in Asia Minor, the Oracle reveals the deep anti-Roman sentiment that prevailed in the region in the first decades of the first century. Although its origins are still disputed, it has been convincingly argued that it is closely related to the sources of the *Bahman Yasht*, a well-known expansion of a lost text of the Persian *Avesta*.[416]

Since truly Zoroastrian apocalypses did not spread beyond the limits of the Zoroastrian community, given not only the cultural but more importantly the language barriers for their consumption elsewhere, the importance and reach achieved by the *Oracle of Hystaspes*, despite being officially banned, can be attributed to its emergence in a Hellenistic environment where Iranian traditions had a significant influence.[417]

Eddy suggests that as the Oracle was originally produced in an Oriental language and was targeted at the Macedonian conquerors, it was inaccessible to almost all Europeans until it was translated. Since it would not have been translated into the language of the enemy - Greek – a period of cultural syncretism in which not only Orientals but also Greeks sought for

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[414] Eddy (*op. cit*. p. 12) provides the following translation to Book 3, lines 388-400:

"One day shall come to Asia's wealthy land an unbelieving man,
Wearing on his shoulders a purple cloak,
Wild, despotic, fiery. He shall rise before himself
Flashing like lighting, and all Asia shall have an evil
Yoke, and the drenched earth shall drink in great slaughter
But even so shall Hades care for him completely overthrown.
He shall be utterly destroyed by the race of the
Family he wishes utterly to destroy.
After he has sent forth a root, whom the Enemy of men shall kill,
He shall leave another tree of ten branches. He shall slay
And he shall die by the hand of his own grandsons in Ares' way;
And then a parasite branch shall rule."

[415] Eddy. *op. cit*. p. 41.

[416] On the similarities between both texts, see. Eddy. *op. cit*. pp 18-19.

[417] Werner Sundermann. Oracles of Hystaspes. In: *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. *Online*. Available at: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/hystaspes-oracles-of >Access on 21.apr.2021.

supernatural deliverance against a common foreign oppressor had to exist before it could be translated into a Western language. These conditions would only be met after Asia's annexation by Rome in 133.[418]

Unfortunately, the text of the Oracle is not extant, but a number of references in both Greek and Latin can be related to it[419], since they mention the name of Hystaspes and contain prophetic material. The Oracle is attributed to a Zoroastrian king called Hystaspes and avails itself of Iranian apocalyptic motives.[420] It narrates a prophetic dream had by the king and interpreted by a boy[421] in which it was revealed that "the name of Rome, by which the world is presently ruled will be razed from the earth, power will return to Asia, and once again the East will dominate and the West will serve".[422]

The prophecy foretells that the just and pious are to be governed by a tyrant foreign power, deprived of law, justice, and mercy. And "when the last end shall begin to approach, wickedness will increase; all kinds of vices and frauds will become frequent…. If there shall be any good men, they will be esteemed as a prey and a laughing-stock (…) avarice and lust will corrupt all things[423]

Amid so much suffering, the righteous shall "cry to God with a loud voice and beg for help from heaven, and God will hear them and will send them a great king from heaven to rescue them and to free them, and to destroy all the impious with fire and sword".[424]

The time of the coming of the divinely appointed king will be marked by earthquakes and comets.[425] And "a sword will suddenly fall from the sky, so that the just may know that the leader of the holy army is about to descend".[426]

With the heavenly announced triumph of the king of the East, "the other princes and tyrants who have devastated the world will be made prisoners with him and will be brought

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[418] Eddy. *op. cit*. p. 35.
[419] Especially in Justin Martyr's *Apology*; Clement of Alexandria's *Stromata* VI; Lactantius' *Divinae Institutiones* and *Epitome*; and in the Theosophy attributed to Aristokritos, all of which produced after the 2nd century C.E.
[420] John Collins. *Seers, Sibyls & Sages in Hellenistic-Roman Judaism*. Leiden: Brill, 1997. pp. 63-64; 71-72.
[421] Lact. *Inst*. 7.15.19.
[422] Lact. *Inst*. 7.15.11. ("Romanum nomen, quo nunc regitur orbis, tolletur e terra et inperium in Asiam revertetur ac rursus Oriens dominabitur atque Occidens serviet").
[423] Lact. *Epit*. 71. ("Cum coeperit mundo finis ultimus propinquare, malitia invalescet, omnia vitiorum et fraudum genera crebescent [...] avaritia et libido universa corrumpet").
[424] Lact. *Inst*. 7.17.11.("exclamabunt ad deum voce magna et auxilium caeleste inplorabunt, et exaudiet eos deus et mittet regem magnum de caelo, qui eos eripiat ac liberet omnesque inpios ferro ignique disperdat").
[425] Lact. *Inst*. 7.16.4; Lact. *Epit*. 71.
[426] Lact. *Inst*. 7.19.5 ("Cadet repente gladius e caelo, ut sciant iusti ducem sanctae militia").

before the king, and the king will assail them and rebuke them, proving their own crimes against them, and he will condemn them and deliver them to well-earned punishment".[427]

Before installing the kingdom of the righteous that shall last for a thousand years, the wicked will be brought to justice. He shall judge over them with "eternal fire (…), pure and liquid, fluid like water (…) It is therefore the same divine fire, with one and the same power of effect, which will both burn the impious and remake them, and what it takes away from their bodies it will replace in full, and so keep itself supplied with constant sustenance. (…) Yet when God judges the pious, he will test them too with fire".[428]

Fire was an essential part of Zoroastrian religion and religious ceremonies. It was also used judicially, with those accused of lying or breaching contracts being required as an ultimate test to establish their innocence by submitting to a solemnly administered ordeal by fire. In such an ordeal, the accused had to pass through fire or had molten metal poured on his bare breast. Death would confirm the guilt.[429]

The Oracle embraces this ancient use of divine fire and foretells that "those whose sins are excessive in weight or number will be scorched and burnt by the fire, but those who are fully imbued with justice and are ripe in virtue will not feel it, since they have in them an element of God to repel the effect of the flame and to reject it. The power of innocence is so great that the fire retreats before it with no harm done because it has received its mission, of burning the impious and respecting the just, from God".[430]

Finally, the king would restore the god-mandated kingdom of the righteous that should last for a thousand years.[431]

Through his actions and political propaganda, Mithridates undertook to present himself as that divinely anointed king of the East and empower his messianic mission of delivering Asia from its unholy invaders, the Romans.

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[427] Lact. *Inst*. 7.19.7 ("Sed et caeteri principes et tyranni, qui contriverunt orbem, simul cum eo vincti aducentur ad regem, et increpabit eos et coarguet et exprobrabit iis facinora ipsorum et damnabit eos ac meritis cruciatibus tradet").

[428] Lact. Inst. 7.21.3-6. ("Ignis sempiterni.[…] sed est purus ac liquidus et in aquae modum fluidus. […] Idem igitur divinus ignis una eademque vi ac potentia et cremabit inpios et recreabit et quantum a corporibus absumet, tantum reponte ac sibi aeternum pabulum sumministrabit. [...] Sed et justos iudicaverit deus, etiam igni eos examinabit").

[429] Mary Boyce. "On Mithra, Lord of Fire". In *Monumentum H. S. Nyberg I (Acta Iranica 4)*. Louvain: Peeters Publishers, 1975, pp. 70-72.

[430] Lact. *Inst*. 7.21.6-7. ("tum quorum peccata vel pondere vel numero praevaruerint, perstringentur igni atque amburentur, quos autem plena iustitia et maturitas virtutis incoxerit, ignem illum non sentient: habent enim aliquid in se dei, quod vim flammae repellat ac respuat. Tanta est vis innocentiae, ut abe a ignis ille refugiat innoxius, quia acepit a deo hanc pontetiam ut inpios urat, iustis temperet").

[431] Lact. *Epit*. 72.

We have already discussed a possible fragment of an oracular tradition that found its way to later accounts of the foundation of the Mithridatic kingdom of Pontus by Mithridates I Ctistes and the prophetic dreams had by Antigonus Monophthalmus. We can suppose that the main goal of that story was to ascertain the divine nature of the legitimacy claimed by the dynasty over all of Asia Minor and, as we have already argued, it started circulating probably during Mithridates Eupator's reign.

Mithridates was certainly not the only one – or even the first – to claim the role of the King of the East. It has been argued that Eunus, the fire-breather slave from Apamea that led the First Servile War in Sicily from 135 to 132, was elevated to the position of king based on the promise of prophetic deliverance foretold by ancient Eastern apocalyptical tradition.[432]

According to Florus, Eunus "stimulated a fanatic furor, and waving his disheveled hair in honor of the Syrian goddess, incited the slaves to liberty and arms on the pretense of a command from the heavens". In addition, the historian provides interesting details on a trick used by the slave king to ascertain his divine inspiration: "he concealed in his mouth a nut which he had filled with sulphur and fire, and, by breathing gently, sent forth a flame as he spoke".[433] Fire was used to confirm his god-ordained mission.

A similar assertion could be made regarding the leader of the second servile rebellion, a fortune-teller slave from the East called Salvius, who was chosen as king by the slaves and received from them the name of Tryphon.[434]

More importantly, in the second phase of his rebellion against the annexation of Asia by the Romans, Aristonicus assembled a large number of resourceless people, and also of slaves, invited with a promise of freedom, whom he called Heliopolitae, "Citizens of the Sun".[435] It has been suggested that the inspiration for such a revolutionary state could be found both in Eastern Sun-cult traditions that promised freedom and a better world brought by messianic kings and in Hellenic philosophical teaching related to Stoicism and Cynicism.[436]

Mithridates, however, was no mere slave, nor was he an illegitimate prince of a kingdom that was no more.

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[432] Diod. 34.8-24. See also note 101.
[433] Flor. 2.7.19. ("fanatico furore simulato, dum Syriae deae comas iactat, ad libertatem et arma servos quasi numinum imperio concitavit"; "in ore abdita nuce quam sulphure et igne stipaverat, leniter inspirans flammam inter verba fundebat").
[434] Diod. 36.4-7.
[435] Str. 14.1.38.
[436] Donald R. Dudley. "Blossius of Cumae". In: *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 31 (1941), p. 99; Thomas W. Africa. "Aristonicus, Blossius, and the City of the Sun". In: *International Review of Social History*. Vol. 6, No. 1 (1961). pp. 116-117; 119-122; Eddy. op. cit. 177-178.

Mithridates was a king who traced his lineage back to the very founders of the Achaemenid Empire and a descendant of Alexander. The sovereign of a mighty, growing empire who had defeated the peoples unconquered by Darius and the Macedonians. His birth and his ascension were both confirmed by comets. He was in a unique position to boast the claim of the king of the East.

It should be noted, however, that it is not only the main elements of the narratives of the oracles or their presumed timing that led numerous scholars to suppose a clear connection between Mithridates and Persian apocalyptical traditions.[437] We have a clear testimony of how the Pontic king actually promoted the use of these oracles for his own political and propaganda purposes in Poseidonius. The historian, himself a contemporary of the Mithridatic Wars, recorded that Athenion, the Athenian ambassador to the Mithridatic court, reported to the Assembly that "oracles everywhere promise him [king Mithridates] the dominion over the whole world".[438]

It is now as impossible as it is pointless to speculate whether he was himself convinced that he was the divinely-appointed savior of Asia. We should, however, investigate how these long-held traditions may have influenced his political decisions, given that they were not only well-known in his time but also broadly used by him as a powerful propaganda tool.

First and foremost, he was (or at least had a strong claim of being) a member of the Achaemenid bloodline, an ancestry without which he could never be a credible postulant to the role. Mithridates' Achaemenid origins were a cause of pride and demanded honor and respectability.[439] Appian even affirms that he was the "sixteenth in direct descent from Darius, the son of Hystaspes, king of the Persians".[440]

As we have thoroughly argued, Mithridates made exhaustive use of his association with the comets that marked both his birth (or conception) and his ascension to the throne.[441] It should be emphasized now that this association was also the reaffirmation of a supernatural legitimacy that, in addition to reinforcing his grasp of domestic power in the early years of his reign, would later provide him with a messianic mission of establishing a God-ordained kingdom over the East.

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[437] Collins. *op. cit*. p. 63; Eddy. *op. cit*. p. 35; Herbert W. Parke. *Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity*. London: Routledge, 1988. p. 136; Hans Windisch. Die Orakel des Hystaspes. (Reprint des Originals von 1929). Paderborn: Salzwasser-Verlag, 2012. p. 55.
[438] Pos. Ath. 213b.
[439] Just. 38.7.1.
[440] App. *Mit*. 112.
[441] See Chapter 2.3.

In a similar manner, his determination to condemn Roman rapaciousness and inequity[442] can also be perceived as indicative of his efforts to promote his expansionist campaigns not only by portraying himself as the remedy for Rome's excesses, but also as a sign of the divinely appointed end of their enemy's domain.

There is yet another account in the literary sources that allows us to suspect of the use of elements in the Oracle of Hystaspes to reinforce the emergence of the time of the coming of the divinely anointed king: the occurrence of earthquakes in Asia Minor. Sometime in the 90s, the city of Apameia, in Phrygia, was heavily damaged by an earthquake. As we have seen, Strabo merely relates that Mithridates granted the city one hundred talents for its reconstruction.[443]

Nevertheless, a fragment of the *History* of Nikolaos of Damascus, preserved in Athenaeus of Naucratis' *Deipnosophists*, depicts a much more detailed version of the earthquake: lakes which previously had not existed appeared and new springs were opened, while others ceased to exist. The water became acrid and blue-gray and the region was filled with shellfish and other sea creatures, despite the fact that the city was located some 100km from the sea.[444] The description offered by Nikolaos is so apocalyptical in nature that it has been argued that it may be influenced by the Oracle of Hystaspes and reveal some of the extent of Mithridatic propaganda to associate the event with its prophesies.[445]

Justin also provides an account of the earthquake, somewhat chronological displaced as it so often happens in his extremely condensed Epitome. It is interesting to note, however, that it gives an idea of the magnitude of the tremor: one hundred and seventy thousand people are said to have died because of it and cities were completely destroyed. Furthermore, the historian affirms that "the portent was declared by soothsayers as a presage of a change in things".[446]

In addition to his ancestry and the fortuitous events that came about during his reign, Mithridates deliberately sought to reinforce the connections between his regime and his war against Rome with specific elements portrayed in the oracles.

Appian, for instance, provides a detailed narrative of a religious sacrifice offered by the king to Zeus Stratius, "according to the ways of his country" (πάτριον): the king himself carried

[442] Just. 38.4.1; 38.6.8; App. *Mit*. 12, 15.
[443] Str. 12.8.18.
[444] Athe. 8.6.
[445] Eddy. *op. cit*. p. 176.
[446] Just. 40.2.1 ("Quod prodigium mutationem rerum portendere aruspices responderunt").

the wood and poured milk, honey, wine, oil, and incense, and set fire to the wood. A banquet was offered "such as it is made in the sacrifices in Pasargadae to the kings of the race of the Persians" (οἷόν τι καὶ ἐν Πασαργάδαις ἐστὶ τοῖς Περσῶν βασιλεῦσι θυσίας γένος). The historian closes his account affirming, once again, that "he conducted the sacrifice according to the custom of his country" (ὃ μὲν δὴ τὴν θυσίαν ἦγε πατρίῳ νόμῳ).[447]

This account is incredibly relevant to conclude that Mithridates was not only aware of the exceptional role played by the kings in Persian religious cult but also that he must have made it so ostentatiously that the details of such an astounding ceremony found their way to later Roman chronicles. It must be noted, therefore, that the king was the most important element in this cult. In ancient Achaemenid times, he himself performed sacrifices on the most important occasions[448] and the royal Persian fire cult was probably the cult of the state.[449]

Moreover, the decision taken at the very outbreak of the war to massacre all Romans in Asia Minor has been attributed to multiple reasons by different scholars. The Asiatic Vespers have been portrayed as a policy coldly adopted as a means to deliver on the promise of removing all Romans from the region[450], a demonstration of Mithridates' deadliness to Roman oppressors[451], and a pact to bind the Greek cities to the Pontic cause.[452]

All of those hypotheses offer relevant elements to be taken into account for the planning and execution of the macabre massacre that would inscribe Mithridates' name in blood in Roman history. However, one element that so far seems to remain absent in all historiographic production about the Vespers is the potential association envisaged with the oracles and other messianic traditions intentionally promoted by Mithridates as a means to reinforce his divinely-inspired legitimacy over Asia.

In effect, the image of clemency that Mithridates sought to promote emulating Alexander's own acts of benevolence to which we have already made reference is in absolute contrast to the meticulously planned extermination of all Roman citizens in 88. As we have seen, Alexander pardoned Greeks and Barbarians alike and even gave Darius a funeral befitting the King of Kings.[453]

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[447] App. *Mit*. 66.
[448] Hdt. 7.223.
[449] Eddy. *op. cit.* pp. 48-49.
[450] Magie. *op. cit*. 216
[451] McGing (1986). *op. cit.* p. 142.
[452] Duggan. *op. cit*. p. 61; Matyszak. *op cit*. p. 163; Mayor. *op. cit*. p. 21.
[453] Arr. *Ana.* 3.22.

Mithridates, on the other hand, was willing to pardon the Bithynians even after their reprehensible invasions under Nicomedes but would not be as forgiving when facing the Romans, regardless of their military status, gender or age. It is plausible to suppose, therefore, that the king wanted to be perceived both as the sacred king who would judge the wicked and the executioner responsible for delivering them to well-earned punishment.

One gruesome detail among the many atrocious executions carried out at the outbreak of the war that has survived in Roman accounts of the massacre is the manner Manius Aquillius was killed by the king. After being captured and led around as a prisoner, Mithridates finally had Aquillius murdered by pouring molten gold down his throat.[454]

The similarities between this method of execution and Zoroastrian ordeals has already been highlighted.[455] It is fitting to note, likewise, that this exact ritual was a crucial part of the prophesy, since it concluded the moment of the installation of the kingdom of the righteous, the legitimacy of the divine king of the East in handling the "eternal fire (…), pure and liquid, fluid like water" with which he, and only he, could separate the virtuous from the wicked, prove their crimes, and deliver punishment. And the stage chosen for this momentous event could not be other than Pergamum [456] itself, the capital of the new Eastern Empire and the place most desecrated by Roman illegitimate presence.

[454] App. *Mit*. 21.
[455] Vicente Dobroruka. "Zoroastrian Apocalyptic and Hellenistic Political Propaganda" In: *ARAM*, 26:1&2, 2014.
[456] App. *Mit*. 21.

CONCLUSION

Historical sources do not always provide direct answers to the questions we ask them.

Since they themselves are not completely free from biases or political agendas, they tend to convey specific interpretations and narratives that should never be accepted axiomatically. Given the relative scarcity of its sources when compared to other historical times, Ancient History is perhaps the historiographic field that demands the most cautious approach not to simply replicate the assumptions drawn by the partisan accounts we have inherited.

When it comes to the study of Rome's most dreadful and feared rivals, no amount of prudence is excessive. Roman historians tended to portray their enemies with a mix of awe and cruelty, eccentricity and immorality, always in contrast with the values praised by Roman morality. Pyrrhus, Hannibal, Cleopatra and Mithridates were all personifications of the vice and lack of rectitude Rome attributed to Eastern monarchs.

They all had an irrational hatred for Rome.

And they were all eventually vanquished.

These two last statements are perhaps the most influential driving forces behind most references to Rome's most infamous enemies in Classic history.

Sallust, Strabo, Cicero, Diodorus Siculus, Pompeius Trogus, Livy, Velleius Paterculus, Appian, Justin, Cassius Dio, Florus and others have all mentioned Mithridates VI in their works. Only two of them claim to have reproduced some of the king's own words and even they did not challenge the overarching theme of the disgruntled, capricious Eastern monarch whose innate hostility would cause the ultimate conflict against Rome.

As we have argued throughout this dissertation, that line of reasoning has had a profound influence in part of the modern historical production on Mithridates VI. Post-World War historiography, influenced by anti-colonialism as it was, points to Roman greedy imperialism as the ultimate cause of the conflicts that eventually resulted in the annexation of Asia Minor and the Near East into the Roman fold.

More recent studies produced after the Cold War and amid the emergence of a multipolar international system applied the analytical tools provided by the theory of international relations to assess how systemic forces in an anarchical regime might have

contributed to the wars between the Roman Republic and the Hellenistic kingdoms in the East, among them the confrontations against Mithridatic Pontus.

Biographers have also provided helpful insights on Mithridates Eupator's quirks and peculiarities and how they may have influenced his political decisions on the throne of Pontus during the better part of the first century.

All those arguments are immensely valid and have contributed to an extremely rich academic debate on the causes of the wars and its repercussions in terms of both the confirmation of the Roman dominance over the *oikomené* and the political crisis that would result in the emergence of the Roman Empire.

We believe, however, that most of the hypotheses put forward so far fall short of explaining why one of the monarchs of the lesser Hellenistic kingdoms of Anatolia decided to fight against Rome.

Following the victories over the main contenders in the Hellenistic world – the Macedonians, especially in 196, and the Seleucids, in 188 – Pergamum arguably became the most powerful kingdom in Asia Minor. Nevertheless, it would also become the first to be annexed – voluntarily, we must stress – by the Roman Republic.

Bithynia and Cappadocia were both probably in stronger military and economic conditions than Pontus in the beginning of the second half of the first century, but neither ever showed any disposition or intention to put up some form of resistance to Roman political intervention or economic imperialism.

One may even argue that, if Mithridates V had not been killed and had had a longer reign over Pontus, it would be unlikely to see a major revolt against Roman presence in Anatolia coming from that isolated part of the region.

Our research has indicated that a series of specific events and conditions may have played a central role in the political decisions taken by the main actors, especially Mithridates himself, and led not only to a rebellion against Roman presence in Asia Minor but to a massive confrontation that included at least one major massacre and bloody conflicts that lasted almost a quarter of a century.

First and foremost, Mithridates' formative years were spent amidst political instability, regicide, assassination attempts, usurpation, family betrayals and palace plots. That extremely challenging environment made the future king acutely sensitive to the need to reinforce his legitimacy as a means to protect not only his monarchical rights but also his own life.

Military prowess and political expansion were every Hellenistic king's goal, but for Mithridates it was also, from the very beginning of his reign, a matter of life or death.

Every Hellenistic king since Alexander the Great tried to expand his own kingdom when given the chance. Mithridates therefore can hardly be seen as an especially ambitious king compared to his forbearers or peers. However, we note that he coated his expansionist policies more and more with claims of legitimacy, giving him an absolute argument to exert the power he was entitled to have even before conquering those territories.

That was the case for Paphlagonia, Galatia, Phrygia and even Cappadocia, the fundamental piece that made war against Rome inevitable in the 90s.

His early successes in war were reinforced by an almost mythical ancestry and by the occurrence of fortuitous portents that could be associated with pre-existing prophetic traditions. We cannot say for sure if these traditions did convince the king himself of a divinely-granted messianic mission to free Asia of the yoke of a foreign power; however, we can undeniably affirm that this message was intentionally used as political propaganda to defend his alleged rights to rule over Anatolia.

But what about his nemesis, the Roman Republic?

As we have demonstrated, Roman expansion beyond the Italian peninsula provoked a series of profound changes in its social and political fabric. The growing interests in the imperial machinery pushed the *imperium* of the Republic to new regions and, once they were subjected to the legislative power of the assemblies, the balance of powers that defined the mixed constitution Polybius so much admired collapsed, with the assemblies raising to a much more preeminent position in comparison to the other major political institutions.

The people, aware of its material interests, were increasingly susceptible to a new generation of politicians who were not only willing to circumvent the internal rules of the political system but most importantly convinced of the need to accrue real, raw political power. Mithridates himself had the chance – or the misfortune – of meeting three of the most important politicians of that generation: Marius, Sulla and Pompey.

The internal struggles and the surprisingly rapid rhythm of territorial expansion prevented the Roman establishment to devise a clear strategy to the East. Its decisions, therefore, were taken *ad hoc*, in response to specific conditions, appeals or considerations, only to be changed once interests or the people who were behind them lost their ascendancy.

To most of the feeble surviving kings of the East, such sudden changes in policy that ultimately could cost them their subjects, their riches, their freedom and their lives were not

easily understood. Even though most of them simply succumbed and stepped aside as the legions and agents of the Republic disembarked in Asia.

To Mithridates, however, that inconsistency, coupled with boundless greed, convinced him that Roman presence in the region was not a simple undesirable nuisance, it was absolutely illegitimate. And Roman resistance to recognize his allegedly supernatural rights to rule an absolute evil.

Against such an evil, only total annihilation was admissible.

Mithridates was then captured by his own messianic message. No middle ground could be acceptable if the only way to prove his own legitimacy was utter victory over the wicked.

When his forces were defeated in Greece by Sulla, the divine aura he painted to his mission was entirely destroyed. Many cities and peoples abandoned his cause and he became a simple mundane monarch with a deep hatred for Rome, but nothing more. He was still a fierce enemy, as Cicero would point out, but he had become incapable of imposing any serious menace to Rome.

His cause was lost, as his was a dying world.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1: A CHRONOLOGY OF THE KINGDOM OF PONTUS.

323: Death of Alexander the Great.

281-266: Reign of Mithridates I Ctistes.

266-250: Reign of Ariobarzanes I.

250-210: Reign of Mithridates II.

220: Mithridates II tries to annex the city of Sinope, without success.

210-190: Reign of Mithridates III.

202: Hannibal defeated by Rome in the Second Punic War.

190: Antiochus the Great, defeated by Rome.

190-155: Reign of Pharnakes I.

183: Pharnakes conquers the city of Sinope.

181: Pontic troops attack Pergamum, Cappadocia and Galatia.

179: Victory of the Anatolian allies against Pharnakes. A peace treaty is signed and Pharnakes is forced to return all conquered territories, except for Sinope.

155-150: Reign of Mithridates IV Philopator Philadelphus.

150-120: Reign of Mithridates V Euergetes.

146: Roman conquest of continental Greece. End of the Third Punic War. Corinth and Carthage are destroyed.

135: Spectacular comet coincides with the conception/birth of Mithridates Eupator in Sinope.

134: Mithridates Eupator is born.

133: Attalus III of Pergamum dies and bequeaths his kingdom to Rome.

133–129: Aristonicus, Eumenes II's illegitimate son, leads a rebellion against the Roman annexation of Pergamum.

119: Mithridates V Euergetes is murdered in Pontus. A second comet appears in the Anatolian skies. Mithridates VI is crowned, but he is forced into a power-sharing arrangement with his younger brother under his mother's regency.

116: Mithridates Eupator returns to Pontus after spending some time in the countryside, has his mother and brother arrested and marries Princess Laodike, his sister.

115/114: In response to pleas of help from Chersonesus, Mithridates VI sends his troops to assist the Greek poleis and the Bosporus Kingdom in Crimea which were under the attack of the Scythians and other local barbarians.

112/111: Ariarathes VI of Cappadocia is killed by Gordius allegedly at the instigation of Mithridates VI.

109/8: Mithridates journeys through Asia and Bithynia.

108: Mithridates VI and Nicomedes III of Bithynia invade Paphlagonia and divide its territory among themselves.

108. Mithridates VI invades parts of Galatia.

107/6: Mithridates annexes the entire northern Black Sea coast, Colchis and western Armenia.

101: Mithridates intervenes in Cappadocia.

96/94: Mithridates enters into an alliance with his son-in-law, Tigranes III of Armenia.

91-89: Social War. Italian allies revolt against Rome.

89-85: First Mithridatic War.

89: Nicomedes VI attacks Pontus, instigated by Roman legates. Mithridates obtains quick military victories and conquers all of Anatolia, being hailed as a savior by the cities and peoples of Asia Minor. He marries Monime and makes Pergamum the capital of his empire.

88: Mithridates orders the massacre of about 80,000 Romans and Italians in Anatolia. The Roman legate Manius Aquilius, responsible for the start of the war, is executed.

88-85: The Pontic armies occupy continental Greece, with the support of several Greek poleis. Rhodes resists a Pontic invasion. Sulla arrives in Greece.

85: The First Mithridatic War ends with Roman victory and the imposition of a peace treaty.

83/81: Murena, Sulla's lieutenant, attacks and plunders Pontus, in violation of the terms of the treaty of Dardanus. Beginning of the Second Mithridatic War, a series of skirmishes between Roman and Pontic forces in Asia Minor. Mithridates VI is victorious.

75: Mithridates allies with the rebel Sertorius.

75/74: Nicomedes IV dies and bequeaths Bithynia to Rome. Mithridates invades Bithynia, initiating the Third Mithridatic War.

73–63: Third Mithridatic War.

73–70: Lucullus is sent to Asia Minor. Mithridates besieges Cyzicus, but the city resists. Lucullus defeats Pontic armies and conquers Kabeira. Mithridates takes refuge in Armenia.

69-68: Lucullus crosses the Euphrates and defeats Tigranes and Mithridates. The Roman legions mutiny against his command.

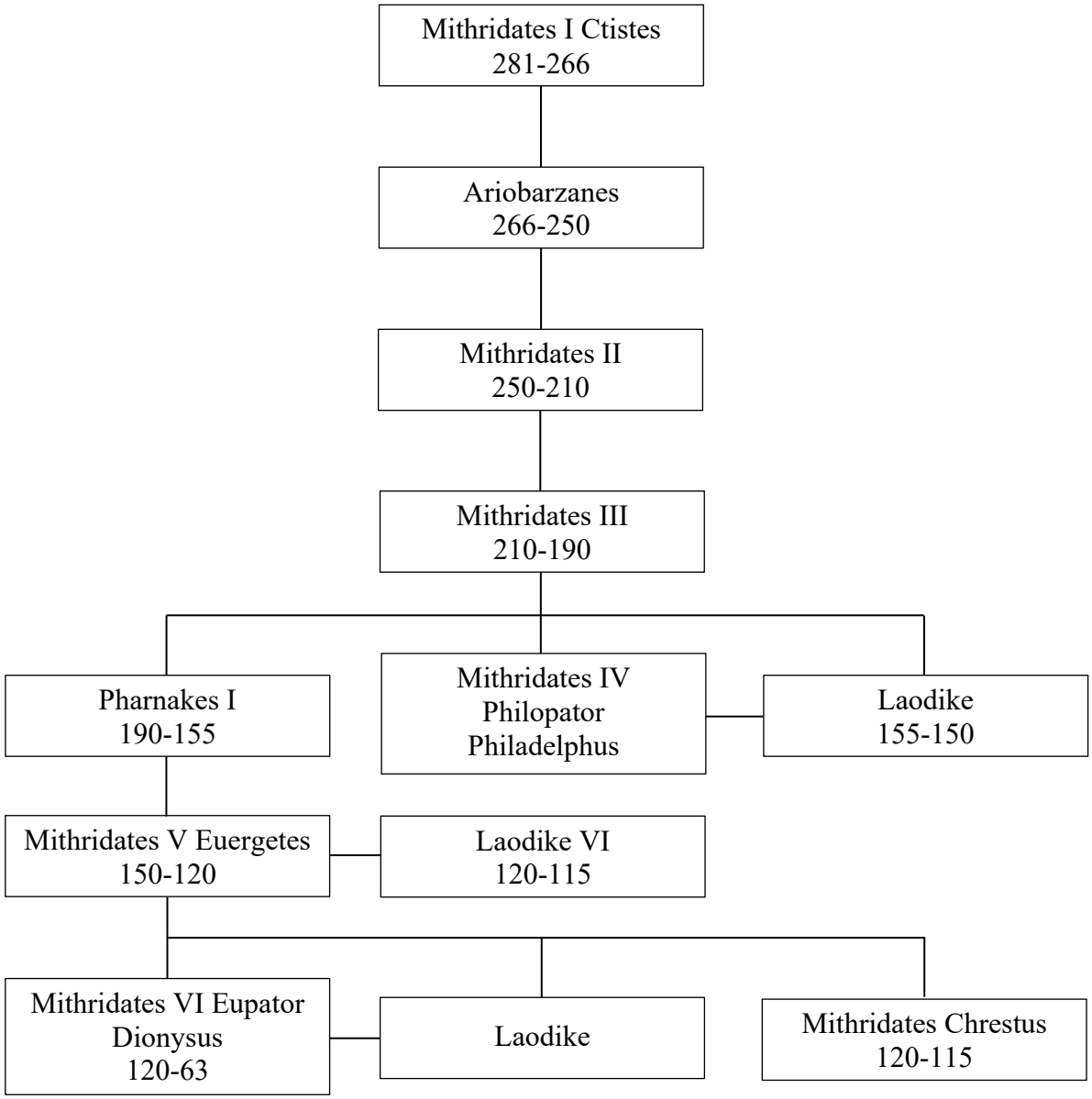
67: Mithridates VI retakes Pontus. Pompey fights off piracy in the Mediterranean.

66: Pompey replaces Lucullus. Defeated, Mithridates flees with a few followers to Colchis.

65/64: Mithridates reaches Bosporus escaping Roman forces.

63: Pharnakes, Mithridates son, plots a coup against his father. Mithridates commits suicide. Pompey declares victory, ending the Mithridatic wars.

APPENDIX 2: THE MITHRIDATIC DYNASTY.



APPENDIX 3: ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1:

(a) Tetradrachm of Mithridates III.

Silver, 17,03g; 29mm-12h. Obverse: king's head with thin beard and a diadem facing right. Reverse: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ (in outer r. field) - ΜΙΘΡΑΔΑΤΟΥ (in outer l. field). Seated Zeus to the left. He holds an eagle on his extended r. hand and a scepter in his l. hand; eight-pointed star and crescent in the inner l. field. *In:* Callataÿ (2009).

(b) Close-up on Mithridatic royal badge: eight-pointed star on crescent.

Figure 2:

Drachm of Pharnakes I.

Silver. 3,97g. Obverse: diademed head of the king to the right. Reverse: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ (outer r. field) - ΦΑΡΝΑΚΟΥ (outer l. left field). Male figure standing facing front with a flat hat and dress; he holds in his l. hand a cornucopia and a caduceus, and, in his r. hand, a vine branch, upon which a young deer feeds; eight-pointed star and crescent in the inner l. field; monogram in r. field. *In:* Callataÿ (2009).

Figure 3:

(a) Tetradrachm of Mithridates IV.

Silver, 17,08g; 33mm-11h. Obverse: Diademed head of the king to r. Reverse.: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΙΘΡΑΔΑΤΟΥ (outer r. field) – ΦΙΛΟΠΑΤΡΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΦΙΛΑΔΕΛΦΟΥ (outer l. field). Perseus standing facing front, wearing helmet, chlamys and winged sandals; he holds in his r. hand the head of Medusa and, in his l. hand, a harp. Eight-rayed star and crescent above his head. *In*: Callataÿ (2009).

(b) Tetradrachm of Mithridates IV and Laodike.

Silver, 17,05g; 33mm-12h. Obverse: Draped busts of the diademed heads of the king and the queen to r. Reverse: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΙΘΡΑΔΑΤΟΥ ΚΑΙ (outer r. field) – ΒΑΣΙΛΙΣΣΗΣ ΛΑΟΔΙΚΗΣ ΦΙΛΑΔΕΛΦΩΝ (outer l. field). Hera (l.) and Zeus (r.), standing facing front; Hera holds a scepter in her r. hand.; Zeus, laureate, holds a scepter in his r. hand and a thunderbolt in his l. hand. *In*: Callataÿ (2009).

(c) Stater of Mithridates IV.

Silver, 8,49g; 19,07mm. Obverse: Diademed head of the king to r. Reverse: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ (outer r. field) – ΜΙΘΡΑΔΑΤΟΥ (outer l. field). Hera standing facing; she wears a long dress and holds a scepter in her r.; crescent and eight-rayed star in the outer l. field. In: Callataÿ (2009).

(d) Tetradrachm of Laodike.

Silver, 14,63g; 33mm-12h. Obverse: Veiled head of the queen to r. Reverse: ΒΑΣΙΛΙΣΣΗΣ (outer r. field) – ΛΑΟΔΙΚΗΣ (outer l. field). Hera standing facing front; she wears a long dress and holds a scepter in her r. hand. *In*: Callataÿ (2009).

Figure 4:

Tetradrachm de Mithridates V.

Silver. 15,92g-29mm-12h. Obverse: Diademed head of the king to r. Reverse: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΙΘΡΑΔΑΤΟΥ (outer r. field) – ΕΥΕΡΓΕΤΟΥ (outer l. field). Apollo standing l., his r. leg ahead; he holds a bow in his l. hand and a little figurine in his r. hand. *In*: Callataÿ (2009).

Figure 5:

(a) Early Tetradrachm of Mithridates VI.

Silver, 16.33g. Obverse: Diademed head of the young king with whiskers to the right. Reverse: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ (outer top field) - ΜΙΘΡΑΔΑΤΟΥ ΕΥΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ (outer bottom field). Pegasus drinking water, looking to the left, eight-pointed star and crescent on the l. field, monogram on the r. field. All surrounded by ivy crown. ANS 1967.152.392.

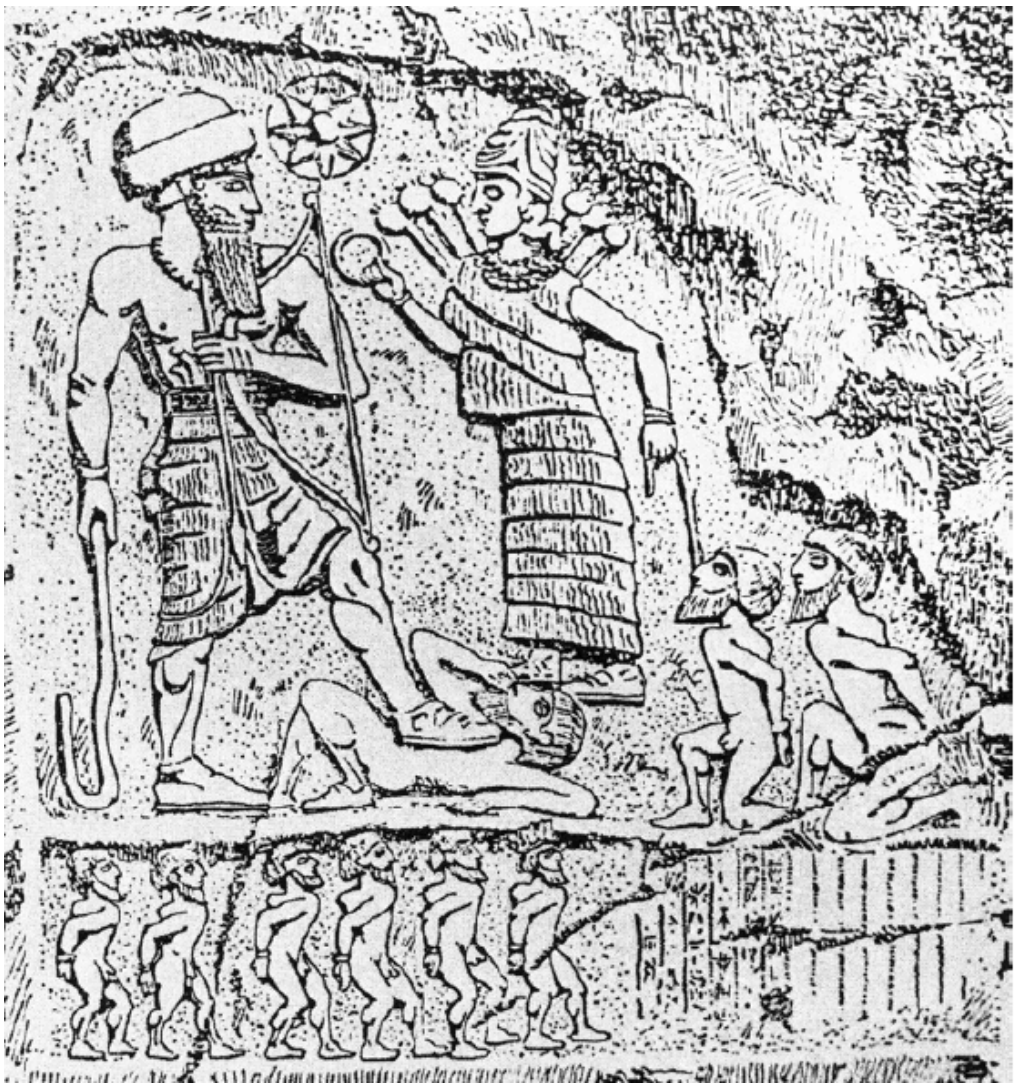
(b) Early Bronze Coin of Mithridates VI.

Bronze, 2.21g, 13mm. Obverse: horse head looking to the right with an eight-pointed star on neck. Reverse: Comet star with eight points with tail to the right. *In*. Classical Numismatic Group (CNG) January 29, 2014. Electronic Auction 319, Lot: 55. SNG BM Black Sea 984; SNG Stancomb 653 corr.; HGC 7, 317.

(c) Late Tetradrachm of Mithridates VI

Silver, 16.62g; 35,5mm. (September 74 BC) Obverse: Diademed head facing right. Revers3: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ (superior) – ΜΙΘΡΑΔΑΤΟΥ ΕΥΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ (inferior). stag grazing left; to left, star-in-crescent above; all within Dionysiac wreath of ivy and fruit. In: Michel-Max Bendenoun and François de Callataÿ (2009).

Figure 6:

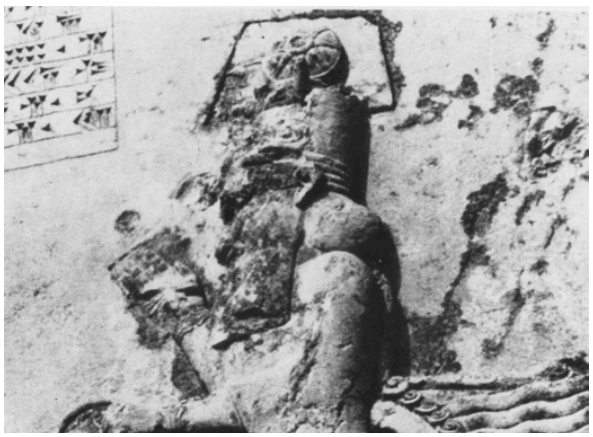


Drawing of the rock relief of Anubanini at Sar-i Pul, Iran, by E. Herzfeld. *In*: Root (2013).

Figure 7:

(a) The Behistun Inscription

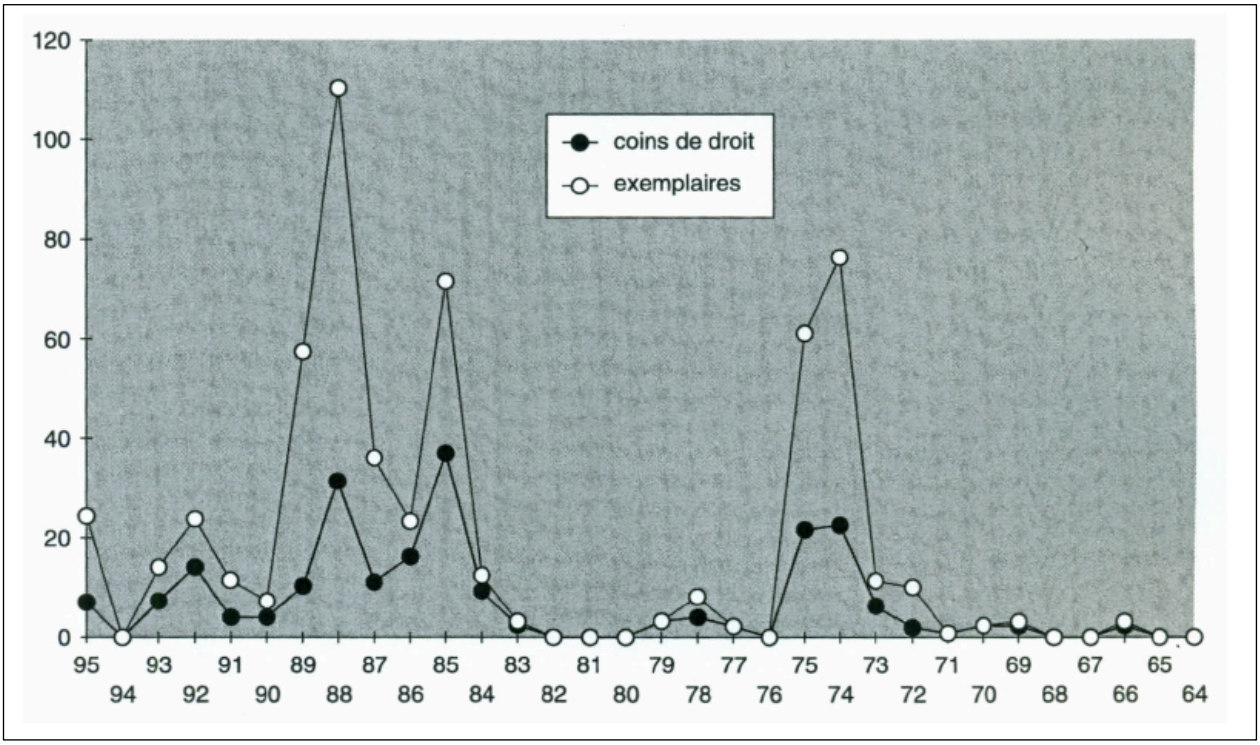
Source: Wikimedia Commons. Available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bisotun_Iran_Relief_Achamenid_Period.JPG]. Access on March, 7th 2021.



(b) Ahuramazda on the Behistun relief. Photo by G.G. Cameron. *In*: Root (2013)

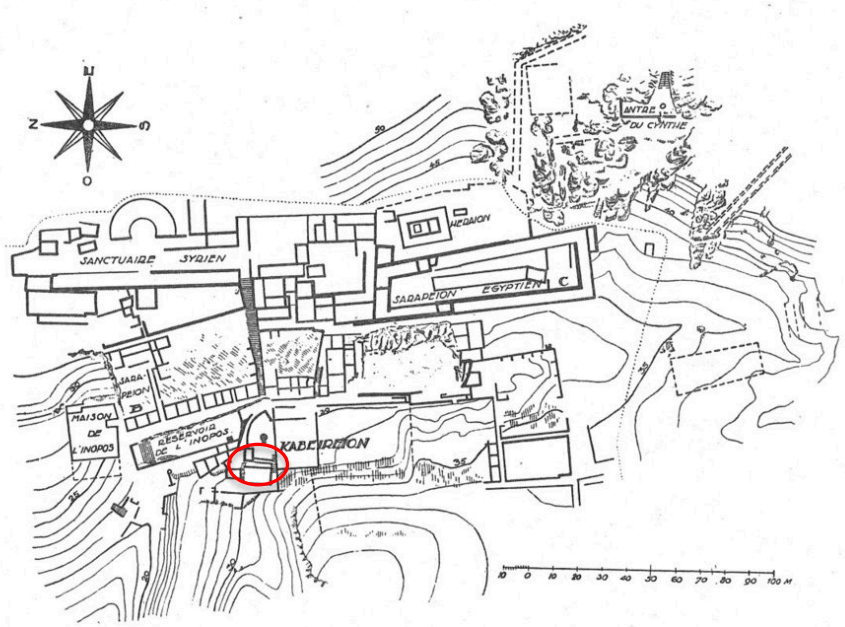
(c) Head and crown of Darius on the Behistun relief. Photo by G.G. Cameron. *In*: Root (2013)

Figure 8

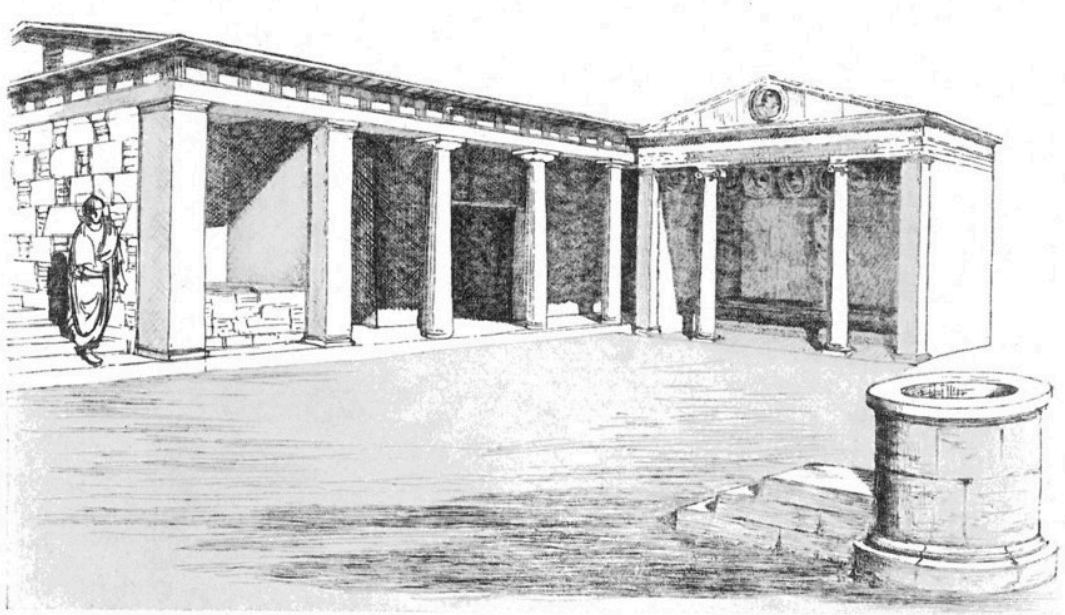


Annual evolution of Coin Production in Pontus. *In*: Callataÿ (2000).

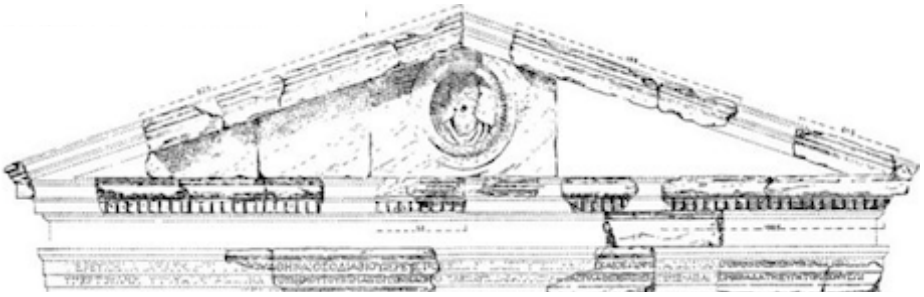
Figure 9:



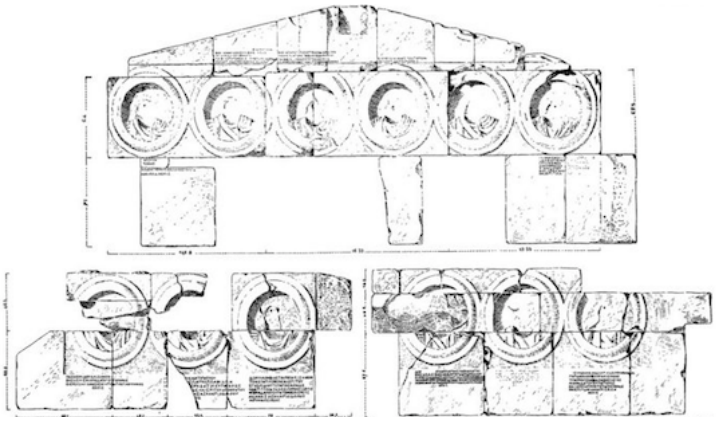
(a) Location of the Serapeoin and the Kabeiron, where a *heroon* was dedicated to Mithridates VI highlighted (in red) *In*: Chapouthier. p. 2 (adapted).



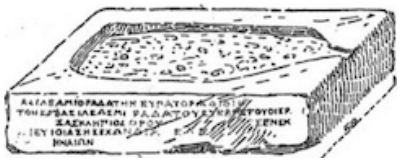
(b) The main entrance to the sanctuary with the *heroon* to Mithridates VI to the right (illustration in perspective) *In*: Chapouthier. p. 86.



(c) Architrave at the entrance to the heroon **dedicated to Mithridates VI.** *In*: Chapouthier. Fig 42.



(d) The portrait-busts (*ὅπλα*) in the inner walls of the *heroon* depicting Mithridates VI's court and allies. *In*: Chapouthier. Fig 36.



(e) Headless statue of Roman soldier attributed to Mithridates VI with basis (left) and basis of second statue found in the *heroon* **dedicated to the king.** *In*: Chapouthier. pp. 38-39.