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BEFORE THE VESPERS:
Political Propaganda and the Struggle for Legitimacy in the First Decades of Mithridates VI Eupator's Reign.

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Vivons ou périssons dignes de Mithridate,
Et songeons bien plutôt, quelque amour qui nous flatte,
À défendre du joug et nous et nos États,
Qu'à contraindre des coeurs, qui ne se donnent pas.
- Jean Racine

ABSTRACT

Mithridates VI Eupator is considered as one of the most feared and voracious enemies of Rome. During the three wars he waged against the Roman Republic, he transformed his small kingdom in northern Anatolia into an empire that stretched from the Black Sea to mainland Greece, including all of Asia Minor. In addition to the bloody battles and the threat to Roman expansion in the East, Greek and Roman sources granted Mithridates undying infamy for his hatred against Rome and the massacre he plotted. In 88 BCE tens of thousands of Italians were cruelly murdered on the same day in Asia Minor, in an episode notoriously known as the Asiatic Vespers. This study analyzes the first two decades of his reign, from 120 to 100 BCE, especially in what concerns the conditions in which the king ascended to the throne of Pontus and his main political motivations. In this context, it challenges the hypothesis supported by mainstream historiography, according to which rivalry and the struggle against Rome would have been Mithridates' greatest political objective since he took power.

Keywords: Hellenism. Kingdom of Pontus. Mithridates VI. First decades of reign.

RESUMO

Mitrídates VI Eupátor é tido como um dos mais temidos e vorazes inimigos de Roma. Durante as três guerras que travou contra a República Romana, fez de seu pequeno reino no norte da Anatólia um império que se estendia do Mar Negro à Grécia continental, incluindo toda a Ásia Menor. Além das sangrentas batalhas e da ameaça à expansão romana pelo Oriente, a historiografia greco-latina atribuiu a Mitrídates infâmia imortal por conta de seu ódio contra Roma e pelo massacre por ele arquitetado. Em 88 AEC, dezenas de milhares de italianos foram cruelmente assassinados no mesmo dia na Ásia Menor, num episódio notoriamente conhecido como as Vésperas Asiáticas. Este estudo visa a analisar as duas primeiras décadas do reinado de Mitrídates VI, de 120 a 100 AEC, especialmente quanto às condições em que o rei ascendeu ao trono do Ponto e a suas principais motivações políticas. Nesse contexto, contesta-se a hipótese sustentada pela corrente majoritária da historiografia, de acordo com a qual a rivalidade e os embates contra Roma teriam sido o maior objetivo político de Mitrídates desde que assumiu o poder.

Palavras-chave: Helenismo. Reino do Ponto. Mitrídates VI. Primeiras Décadas de Reinado.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

App. *Mit*.	Appian. *Mithridatic Wars.*
Cic. *Agr*.	Cicero. *De lege Agraria*.
Diod.	Diodorus Siculus. *Bibliotheca Historica*.
Gen.	The Bible. *Genesis*.
Hom.	Homer. *Iliad*.
Hdt.	Herodotus. *Histories*.
IDelos.	*Inscriptions de Délos*.
IOSPE.	*Inscriptiones antiquae Orae Septentrionalis Ponti Euxini graecae et latinae.*
Just.	Justin. *Epitome of Pompeius Trogus' Philippic histories*.
Liv. *Urb.*	Livy. *Ab Urbe Condita*.
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. *Dem*.	Plutarch. *Demetrius*.
Plut. *Eum*.	Plutarch. *Eumenes*.
Pol.	Polybius. *Histories*.
Str.	Strabo. *Geography*.
Suet. *Ner.*	Suetonius. *Life of Nero*.
Xen. *Ana*.	Xenophon. *Anabasis*.

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INTRODUCTION

In 135[1] a comet cut through the skies of Anatolia. A year later, in Sinop, the main city of the Hellenistic kingdom of Pontus, the firstborn son of King Mithridates V Euergetes was born. The Mithridatic dynasty stood out among the other ruling families in Asia Minor for its unique ancestry: the Mithridates were proud to descend from the Persian kings Cyrus and Darius, founders of the Achaemenid Empire, and, through various marriages with Seleucid princesses, from Seleucus Nicator and the greatest conqueror of all time, Alexander the Great.

Like his Persian ancestors, from a very young age, Mithridates demonstrated unmatched horsemanship skills. He devoted himself with equal dedication to physical exercises and philosophy, certainly influenced by his Hellenic lineage. His first years were spent in a region marked by miscegenation, religious syncretism and the constant flow of traders and travelers from different parts of the world, a bridge between East and West.[2] This environment contributed to a versatile education: according to Pliny, the future king of Pontus was fluent in more than twenty different languages.[3]

However, in the future king's childhood years the growing wealth of Pontus – a mandatory trade route post between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean – and the placidity of its capital, Sinop, by the sea, contrasted with political instability both inside and outside its borders.

Mithridates V Euergetes continued the foreign policy of loyalty and friendliness to Rome adopted by his uncle and predecessor Mithridates IV Philopator Philadelphus. Euergetes captivated Rome's friendship with the military support granted during the Third Punic War and later in the fight against the usurper Aristonicus, the self-proclaimed heir to the Pergamene throne. On his death Attalus III bequeathed the Kingdom of Pergamum to the People of Rome and the territory would eventually be converted into the Roman province of "Asia".[4]

The strategy of befriending the growing hegemonic power was seen as a way to ensure internal and regional political stability, and it was adopted by several eastern Hellenistic monarchs in the last decades of the second century, especially after the Roman victories over

[1] All dates referred to in this thesis are to be considered Before the Common Era (AEC), unless expressly indicated as belonging to the Common Era (EC). For considerations on this particular year, see Chapter II.
[2] 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.
[3] Plin. 7.24.
[4] App. *Mit*. 10.

the Macedonian and Seleucid empires. Nevertheless, Mithridates V Euergetes fell victim to a domestic conspiracy and was murdered, probably by poisoning, around 120.[5]

Although we do not know with certainty who were the ones responsible for the plot nor the reasons that would have led them to commit regicide, it is possible to infer that the conspirators favored Laodike VI, the Seleucid princess who had married Euergetes and to whom the regency in Pontus was handed over, on behalf of the two young princes: Mithridates Eupator and his younger brother, Mithridates Chrestus.

Apparently, the plotters also wanted to get rid of Euergetes' firstborn, Mithridates VI, who had his life threatened by several assassination attempts. Once, his guardians made him mount on a restive horse and hurl the javelin at the same time, hoping he would suffer a fatal accident. When the boy's command over the horse frustrated their plans, they tried instead to poison him.[6]

Fearing for his life, Mithridates sneaked away on the pretext of hunting and wandered the lands and mountains of northern Asia Minor. During his journey, he met not only with fellow countrymen from Pontus, but also with neighboring Paphlagonians, Bithynians, Armenians, and Cappadocians, all miscegenated people, descendants from the original Anatolians as well as from Scythian, Persian, Greek and Macedonian invaders.

Mithridates visited extraordinary places and got to know different customs and traditions. He passed by sites dedicated to the Olympic deities and to the Anatolian goddess Ma, in Pontic Comana. He also went to the temple dedicated to the Persian deities Anaitis, Omanus and Anadatus, where the annual festival known as *Sacae* was held that the inhabitants of Zela would continue to celebrate until Roman times.[7]

Having gathered considerable political and military support, Mithridates returned to Sinop and was acclaimed by the people. Upon acceding to power, he immediately had his own mother and brother arrested. He blamed them not only for his father's poisoning but also for the various attempts against his own life. Queen Laodike VI and Prince Mithridates Chrestus would die shortly afterwards in prison. In order to reinforce the legitimacy of his claim to the throne and prevent further usurpation attempts, the new king married his own sister, also called Laodike, a practice not uncommon among Eastern Hellenistic monarchs.

[5] 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.
[6] Just. 37.2.
[7] Str. 11.8.

After consolidating his power grab over Pontus, Mithridates began his plan to expand his territory. In response to a plea from the Greek poleis on the Crimean Peninsula, the king sent his troops to the northern coast of the Black Sea and defeated the assailing Scythians, who had driven both Darius in 512[8] and the Macedonians in 331[9] out of their land. As a result, Mithridates annexed Chersonesus and the other Greek cities, as well as the Bosphorus kingdom. He then moved to conquer Colchis.

As soon as he extended his control over almost the entire northern and eastern shores of the Black Sea, Mithridates turned his attention to Asia Minor. To the Romans, the Pontic expansion seemed as a potential threat to the stability of Asia Minor, the region where its most important and profitable province was located. 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.

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. However, the king of Pontus needed to make sure that his allies would not switch sides once Rome resolved its internal conflict and returned, with all its strength, to the East. A pact was needed. A blood pact.

In the first half of 88, thousands of Romans were slaughtered on the same day in different locations in Asia Minor, in a notorious genocide known as the Asiatic Vespers. In the cities of Ephesus, Pergamum, Adramyttium, Kaunos, Trales, Nisa, and on the island of Chios – all of them formally independent and only recently occupied by the forces of Mithridates – men, women and children of Roman and Latin origin were murdered by both soldiers and the local population, in a bloody demonstration of the growing repudiation of the Roman presence and its extortionate tax harvesting policy. Mithridates VI was the mastermind behind the massacre and its main articulator.

Over the 26 years of conflicts that followed the Asiatic Vespers, Mithridates managed to win unexpected victories and, even after the several defeats that were imposed on him, showed admirable resilience even to Roman standards, always surprising his rivals with his ability to retake the battlefield with new alliances and reinforced armies. The risks to the

[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.

stability of the Republic and its interests in Asia fomented by the Mithridatic Wars motivated an exhortation by none other than Cicero, who vehemently defended the need to defeat, once and for all, the king of Pontus, even after he "lost his army and was expelled from his kingdom".[10]

Academic interest in Mithridates' saga has endured ever since the time of Cicero and other contemporary writers. In Late Antiquity and in the Middle Age some peculiarities associated with the king of Pontus were especially highlighted, including his capacity to speak several languages, his alleged immunity to poisons and his mythical universal antidote.

However, it was only with the emergence of nineteenth century German historiography that the life of Mithridates and the historical events associated with him began to be analyzed as an academic object of study. Theodor Mommsen, one of the pioneers in that new academic field, dedicated one chapter of his *Römische Geschichte* to the Mithridatic Wars. His judgement of Mithridates Eupator is probably the most negative that the king of Pontus received since Cicero and the other contemporaries of the Asiatic Vespers.[11]

Mommsen describes Mithridates as a voluptuous, indolent, violent oriental ruler. He often compared Eupator to Ottoman rulers like Mehmed II and Suleiman the Magnificent, calling him a sultan.[12] The German historian accuses Mithridates of being an incompetent ruler and a false Philhellene, who pretended to be fond of Hellenistic culture just to lure the Greek population of Asia Minor.

Mommsen's work is a clear reflection of the prejudices of his time. The portrait of Mithridates described by the historian fits perfectly into the Eurocentric worldview that inspired nineteenth century social sciences 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.[13]

That same Eurocentric perspective can also be perceived in the first historiographical biography entirely dedicated to Mithridates – *Mithridate Eupator, roi de Pont* – published in 1890 by French historian and numismatist Theodore Reinach. Despite the methodological advances made possible by a profound knowledge of the use of material sources – especially

[10] Cic. *Agr*. 2.52. ("cum rex Mithridates amisso exercitu regno expulsus tamen in ultimis terris aliquid"). 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*.
[11] Theodor Mommsen. *Römische Geschichte*. Book IV. Leipzig, 1856.
[12] *Ibid*. pp. 280-281.
[13] See: Edward Said. *Orientalism*. Nova York: Pantheon, 1978.

numismatics – Reinach's biography suffers from the same prejudices as Mommsen's *Geshichte*: it depreciates the oriental features of the kings of Pontus and suggests that Mithridates was "not an enemy of Rome alone, but of all European culture".[14]

Echoes of exacerbated Eurocentrism could still be heard in the first decades of the twentieth century. In his *Hellenistic Civilization*, William Tarn calls Mithridates a "remarkable barbarian" and suggests that the Mithridatic Wars were an omen of the ruin of Hellenism.[15] In addition to Tarn, other historians in the first decades of the last century also mentioned Mithridates in their works, but almost exclusively in the form of isolated references or chapters in larger works dedicated to the crises of the Roman Republic.

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". [16]

The overall tendency to fading academic interest was definitely reversed in the 1980s, when scholars began to investigate and revise traditional concepts, in order to look for a more coherent and objective image of Mithridates. These new works began to make wide use of new material sources – numismatic and epigraphic – not only as a basis for a more critical reading of references in the available literary sources, but also as a way to get as close as possible to an autonomous Pontic version of the events relating to the rise, climax and fall of its Hellenistic kingdom. The main work published in that decade and certainly the one that best expresses this new analytical spirit is the influential *The Foreign Policy of Mithridates VI Eupator, King of Pontus*, by Brian McGing, published in 1986.

Since then, academic production related to Mithridates VI of Pontus has known a revitalized effervescence. More than a dozen new works of compelling historiographic

[14] Theodore Reinach. *Mithridate Eupator, roi du Pont*. Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1890. p. 295.
[15] William Tarn. *Hellenistic Civilisation*. 3rd Ed. Nova York: Meridian Books, 1964 (1ed 1927). p. 42.
[16] Alfred Duggan. *He Died Old: Mithridates Eupator, King of Pontus*. Londres: Faber & Faber, 1958. p. 9.

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 amount of scientific articles, papers and symposia. A significant part of this impressive academic production is referred to in this dissertation.

The main objective of this thesis is to answer the following question: what was Mithridates VI's main political motivation in the first decades of his reign, many years before the open confrontation against Rome was even envisaged?

Influenced by the available literary sources – all of them produced from a Roman perspective, even when written in Greek – specialized historiography seems to be compelled by a considerably teleological approach. According to this assertion, Mithridates VI would have harbored an almost instinctive hatred for Rome since the very first years of his life. In this sense, his intention to resist Roman expansion would be nothing but the accomplishment of a meticulously concocted plan carefully implemented since his accession to the throne for three long decades until the outbreak of the First Mithridatic War.

This thesis aims at questioning the aforementioned assertion in search of an alternative hypothesis that would take into account elements that have up until now been overlooked. These elements would include the circumstances under which Mithridates VI came to power, the decisions actually taken in the first decades of his reign, and the repertoire of foreign and domestic policies at his disposal, with a view to challenging the mainstream ex post facto explanation for his initial motivations in power.

A more critical analysis of Mithridates' initial motivations paves the way to a much-needed new approach to the study of his reign, of his political propaganda and even of his combativeness to the growing power of Rome in Asia Minor. This is the main contribution that this thesis intends to offer.

Despite the impressive achievements he made, upon rising to power, Mithridates faced political instability, regicide, assassination attempts, usurpation of his succession rights, family betrayals and palace plots. The first enemies that 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.

In his early years, the obsession with reaffirming his dynastic claims and inheritance rights can be perceived, for example, in the choice of his first epithet, "Eupator", in his decision to marry his own sister, in his campaign in defense of the Greeks of Crimea, and in the political propaganda deliberately promoted through royal iconography.

The rivalry with Rome, the bloody Mithridatic Wars, its most atrocious battles and the massacres that would assure Mithridates of everlasting infamy were all events that would take place many years along the way. And there is absolutely no evidence that they have played any part in the main political decisions that were taken in the two first decades of his reign nor that they were in any sense relevant to the events that would unfold in that period.

CHAPTER 1

THE ANATOLIAN KINGDOMS IN THE THIRD CENTURY

In 154[17] Mithridates IV was the king of Pontus, a land forged in miscegenation, ethnic and religious diversity, a perfect example of the tenuous balance of forces that constituted the Hellenistic world. Despite reigning for only a short period, Mithridates IV left as a legacy to his dynasty an important foreign policy realignment, eternalized in the words he had inscribed on a monument on the Roman Capitol:

> *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.*[18]

With this bilingual inscription in both Latin and Greek, Mithridates IV celebrated a new era of rapprochement with Rome and its allies in Asia Minor, putting an end to the isolationist, aggressive policy that had been conducted by his predecessors in the Pontic throne since the foundation of the kingdom.[19] This new foreign policy would be preserved and intensified by his nephew and successor, Mithridates V, until his death in 120.[20]

Pontus was one of the Hellenistic kingdoms that flourished in Asia Minor after the Wars of Alexander's Successors. The region had been only partially conquered by Alexander, as the Achaemenid satrapies of North and Central Anatolia, including Bithynia, Cappadocia, Pontus

[17] Although we do not know with certainty the date of Mithridates IV's accession to the Pontic throne, Polybius suggests that there is some powr sharing arrangement between him and his brother, King Pharnakes, already in 179 (25.2). 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. The same Polybius mentions Mithridates IV as the sole king in 154 (33.12).

[18] 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]").

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

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

and Paphlagonia, resisted the Macedonian invasion or were simply ignored by Alexander on his way to Babylon and to the heart of the Persian Empire.[21] After Alexander's death, Asia Minor was partitioned by his successors along with the rest of the conquered territories and became one of the main stages of the many battles known as the Wars of the Diadochi.[22]

The defeat and death of Antigonus Monophthalmus in the Battle of Ipsus in 301 put an end to the Fourth and last War of the Diadochi and sealed the destiny of Asia Minor. Neither Lysimachus nor Seleucus – the major beneficiaries of the victory – managed to impose their control on the whole region.

Amid the instability caused by the Macedonian invasions, the satrapies in Asia Minor, that had enjoyed a certain degree of administrative autonomy under the Achaemenid Empire,[23] were able to reorganize themselves into local dynasties, some of which under the rule of the direct descendants of ancient Persian governors. These new political units would gain their independence[24] in different ways,[25] while the three main heirs of Alexander's empire – Ptolemaic Egypt, Antigonid Macedonia, and Seleucid Asia – struggled for supremacy.

Despite retaining important territories in Asia Minor, the Seleucids soon realized that their attempts to maintain direct control over the region's dynasties would be pointless. They resorted to maintaining good relations with the lesser kingdoms, especially through treaties and marriages.[26] Mithridates IV himself was married to Laodike, a Seleucid princess, just like his grandfather, father and brother, all of whom preceded him on the throne, had been.

At the beginning of the third century, Asia Minor was divided into several political units, the kingdom of Pontus among them, where local dynasties thrived. The existence of

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[21] 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.
[22] 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.
[23] 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.
[24] 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.
[25] There was no single way of declaring political independence in the Hellenistic period. Sometimes although 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.
[26] Tarn. *op. cit.* p. 130; John D. Grainger. *Kings and Kingship in the Hellenistic World 350-30 BC*. Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Books, 2017. l. 871.

independent small and medium-sized kingdoms in Asia Minor is a unique phenomenon in the Hellenistic world. No other region touched by Macedonian armies or Greek-Macedonian culture has experienced such a degree of political fragmentation or witnessed the emergence of so many long-lived minor dynasties.

This phenomenon can be associated both with the geographical position of Anatolia and to historical and cultural factors. From a geographical point of view, Asia Minor was located at the crossroads between Macedonia, Egypt and Syria-Babylon. As a result, it was in the interest of each one of the three main Hellenistic empires to prevent the region from falling into their rivals' sphere of influence.

As previously suggested, the tradition of autonomous government granted to the region by the Achaemenids contributed to the formation of the Hellenistic monarchies, many of which stretched their roots deep into the Persian satrapies that existed before the Alexandrian invasions. Later on, they gradually developed a set of political practices and customs that reinforced local cultural traditions, based on the historical condition of Asia Minor as the bridge between East and West.[27]

Kings came to power through self-proclamation, coups d'état, usurpation or the observance of hereditary succession law. One of the main goals of all Hellenistic kings, therefore, was to cultivate their legitimacy as royal rulers, which required them to present themselves as kings by right, rather than depending solely on the use of force.[28]

Once established in power, the exercise of a king's sovereignty was almost unlimited inside the borders of his kingdom, as long as he maintained at least some support in the army and demonstrated his ability to defend the kingdom against foreign menaces. There were no formal representative institutions, or any individual rights guarantees, except for the privileges bestowed by the king himself on his favorites.

At the heart of this system was the idea that, despite exercising absolute power in their own territories, the 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".[29] Therefore, despite the constant conflicts they waged, the Hellenistic monarchs of Asia Minor recognized each other as their equals, married their children to one another, negotiated freely, declared war and celebrated peace.

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[27] Marek. *op. cit*. p. 3.
[28] Grainger. *op. cit*. l. 130.
[29] Pol. 5.67.11. ("μεταξὺ δὲ μηδενὸς ὑπάρχοντος τοῦ δυνησομένου παρακατασχεῖν καὶ κωλῦσαι τὴν τοῦ δοκοῦντος ἀδικεῖν ὁρμήν").

Founded by Mithridates I Ctistes, a Persian nobleman who had ruled the city of Cius, in Bithynia, the kingdom of Pontus would eventually extend its dominion over the territory of the ancient Achaemenid satrapy of the same name to the north of Cappadocia, in addition to territories that previously belonged to Paphlagonia, especially Sinop, which would become its main city. As already mentioned, Mithridates IV Philopator Philadelphus was the first Mithridatic ruler who adopted a foreign policy of rapprochement towards Rome and its allies in Asia Minor. This strategy would become increasingly common among Hellenistic monarchies in the middle of the second century.

To the west of Pontus, the kingdom of Paphlagonia agonized. Homer mentions a Paphlagonian ruler among the main supporters of Troy[30] and Xenophon suggests that the region had already enjoyed some degree of autonomy within the Achaemenid Empire[31]. However Paphlagonian territory had been repeatedly assailed by its neighbors from Pontus and Bithynia until it was eventually split between the two of them in the second century.[32]

In the Asiatic territory adjacent to the Hellespont, the kingdom of Bithynia would emerge from the ancient Persian satrapy of Hellespontic Phrygia. A local dynasty had ruled the region since the fifth century and resisted both the Macedonian invasion as well as latter conquest attempts led by Lysimachus and Seleucus.[33] In 278 King Nicomedes I made a pact with the Celts who were besieging Byzantium and provided them the means to cross the Hellespont in exchange for military aid against his rebellious brother Zipoetes II.[34] The Celts brought to Asia Minor plundered and looted the region until settling in the territory of Phrygia, where they would come to be known as the Greek Celts or Galatians.[35]

To the south, in the territory of Mysia, 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 found a new dynasty.[36] 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.[37] It was the same Attalus I, who, in

[30] Hom. 2.850-851.
[31] Xen. *Ana*. 8.7. suggests that Paphlagonia was not subject to any other neighboring satrapy.
[32] Oro. 6.2.; Just. 37.4.2.
[33] Mem. 12.
[34] Mem. 11.2.; Just. 25.2.
[35] Str. 12.5.; Just. 25.2.; Liv. *Urb*. 31.16.; Mem. 11.2; Paus. 1.8.1.; Pol 18.41.
[36] 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.
[37] Str. 13.4.2.; Paus. 1.8.1.; Pol. 4.48; 18.41.

201, was forced to turn to the Romans to stop the expansionist policy carried out by Philip V of Macedonia.[38] The alliance with Rome would become the main axis of Pergamene foreign policy and have serious consequences for the future of Asia Minor.

On the central Anatolian plateau, south of Pontus, the kingdom of Cappadocia would flourish from the ancient Achaemenid satrapy of the same name, and was governed by very descendants of the local Persian nobles who faced Alexander and resisted his invasion.[39] Like the Mithridates, the Ariarathids claimed descent from Cyrus and from one of the conspirators who supported Darius. For that reason, Diodorus affirms both dynasties were related.[40] Despite deep Persian roots,[41] Hellenistic influences were already been felt since the beginning of the third century, as is evidenced by the adoption of Greek in the minting of coins.[42]

East of Pontus, the kingdom of Armenia had been ruled by the Orontid dynasty almost uninterruptedly since the Achaemenid Empire.[43] Throughout the Hellenistic period, Armenia was divided by domestic succession struggles and Seleucid intervention, giving rise to the smaller kingdoms of Sophene, Commagene and Armenia Minor. Even after the Orontids were replaced by Artaxiads due to the machinations of Antiochus III,[44] 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.[45]

Despite similar historical and geographical conditions shared by all Hellenistic kingdoms in Asia Minor, only one of them developed a foundational myth shrouded with mystical elements: 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,[46] 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".[47]

Strabo, whose work dates from the second half of the first century, mentions Mithridates I Ctistes only in passing, stating that the dynast had settled in the fortress of Cimiata

[38] Liv. *Urb*. 31.2; Pol. 16.1.
[39] Diod. 31.1.
[40] Diod. 31.19.
[41] Str. 15.3.15.
[42] Diod. 31.19.
[43] Plut. *Eum*. 4.1-7.7; Diod. 18.29-31; Just. 13.8.
[44] Str. 11.14.5.
[45] Str. 11.14.15-16.
[46] Hdt. 3.67.
[47] Diod. 19.40.2. (ἀνὴρ ἀνδρείᾳ διαφέρων καὶ τεθραμμένος ἐκ παιδὸς στρατιωτικῶς).

and that his descendants ruled Pontus until Mithridates VI Eupator.[48] As it will be discussed later in this thesis, Strabo was himself born in the city of Amaseia, in Pontus, and one of his ancestors had fought alongside Mithridates VI. This personal relationship certainly had consequences in his reports about the dynasty.

At the turn of the millennium, however, as the trauma of the Asia Vespers and the shadow of the Mithridatic Wars became a distant memory, historians such as Plutarch and Appian began to include in their works a new version of the foundation of the kingdom of Pontus. One much more detailed and brimming with myth.

According to this revised version, Antigonus I Monophthalmus woke one night after having a disturbing nightmare. He had dreamed that he sowed a vast field with gold dust. From it there sprung up a golden crop that was harvested by one of his followers, a young Persian nobleman named Mithridates. Disturbed by the dream he deemed premonitory, Antigonus confided to his son Demetrius his intention to kill the thief. Upon hearing of his father's intentions Demetrius was deeply distressed for Mithridates was a close friend of his. Demetrius then asked Mithridates to join him and, after gradually drawing him away from their other friends, used the butt of his lance to write "Fly, Mithridates!" on the sand, so that he himself would not utter the words and break his oath 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.[49]

It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that this new narrative enriched with the mystical origin story of the Mithridatic dynasty began to circulate over the last century before the turn of the millennium and was incorporated in later works. The additional elements fit perfectly into traditional common themes quite frequent in Middle Eastern and Greek cultures 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.

One of the most frequently employed elements in the building up of mystical heroes' narratives is the recourse to premonitory dreams, through which metaphysical forces alert a powerful character, through metaphors and symbolism, about the emergence of a hero who would replace them in power. Usually, the efforts made to undo the prediction end up bringing about its outcome.[50]

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[48] Str. 12.3.41.
[49] Plut. *Dem*. 3-4; App. *Mit*. 2.9.
[50] For example: Sargon of Acadia (cf. "The Sargon Legend." In: *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature.* Segmento B. Oxford University, 2006); Joseph (cf. Gen. 37:5-11); Cyrus (cf. Hdt.1.107-121) and Paris

In the case of Mithridates I Ctistes' revised narrative, Antigonus' dream would have revealed the Black Sea as the place appointed by the gods for the fulfillment of his divinely predetermined mission, as if it were his destiny to reap the harvest of glory sown by the Macedonians and to restore to the Eastern peoples the riches that Asia Minor produced.[51]

Another common theme in Easter hero narratives is the flight to remote lands.[52] In the case of Mithridates I Ctistes, the number of knights leaving for Cappadocia – seven – also reinforces the mystical connection of the dynasty with Darius and his companions, on their way to defeat an usurper enemy and restore the legitimate Persian empire, the same mission as Mithridates VI Eupator would chart for himself.[53]

In order to understand the reason that motivated these narratives and the use of symbolic elements to reinforce with mystical legitimacy the foundation of the Mithridatic dynasty, it is essential to analyze the circumstances under which Mithridates VI came to power and the need to ascertain his claim to the throne of Pontus.

(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.

[51] 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.

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

[53] Hdt. 3.69-71.

CHAPTER 2

THE KINGDOM OF PONTUS IN THE LAST DECADES OF THE SECOND CENTURY AND THE RISE OF MITHRIDATES EUPATOR

Mithridates Eupator was born in Sinop around 134,[54] "the most notable city" in northern Asia Minor.[55] Founded by settlers from Miletus, Sinop prospered due to intense maritime trade and, since very early on, attracted the greed of the growing kingdom of Pontus in the East. Mithridates II, the third king of the Mithridatic dynasty, tried to conquer the city in 220, but it resisted, thanks to Rhodian aid.[56] The city would eventually be captured by Pharnakes, fifth king of the dynasty, in 183. According to Strabo, Mithridates Eupator would grant it special honors and make it his capital.[57]

All Pontic kings leading up to Mithridates Eupator extended the dynasty's control over the Greek poleis of the southern coast of the Euxine. The kings of Pontus ruled over the entire land strip from Amastris in the west to Trapezus, including the cities of Cotyora and Cerasus-Pharnakeia, all of which former Sinopean colonies.

The second most important city in the kingdom at the time of Eupator's rise was undoubtedly Amisus, another Greek coastal colony probably annexed by Mithridates II, to which converged all land trading routes connecting 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 royal residence.[58]

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[54] 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 Mitrhidates' 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) argues 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.

[55] Str. 12.3.11

[56] Pol. 4.56.

[57] Str. 12.3.11. Rostovtzeff claims that Pharnakes transferred the capital of the kingdom to Sinop 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.

[58] Str. 12.3.30.; Api. *Mit*. 78.

Mithridatic Pontus was a realm marked by profound contrasts. On the one hand, the Greek cities on the coast of the Euxine were numerous and rich; on the other, the interior of the country was, together with Cappadocia, the region least influenced by the West in Asia Minor. [59]

The division between coastal and inland areas also reflected a strong cultural divide. On the coast, where the Greek poleis predominated, Hellenic culture flourished. Inland, there were more populations of Anatolian origin – especially Cappadocians and Paphlagonians – and Persian Achaemenid influence was still very strong. [60]

The Pontic interior was separated from the rest of the Anatolian plateau by a wide mountain range known as the Pontian Alps, which run east-west parallel to the coast of the Black Sea. The countryside had practically no cities, with the exception of Amaseia, Strabo's hometown. Amaseia was the Pontic former capital and the burial place of the kings of the Mithridatic dynasty.

The interior of the country was also home to the most important sanctuaries in Pontus that account for the multiplicity of beliefs and the syncretic nature of the kingdom's religious tradition. The shrine dedicated to Zeus-Stratios and the temple of the Anatolian goddess Ma in Comana were located in that area as were the temples of Zela, dedicated to Iranian deities.

Despite countless references in ancient literary sources, there is no structured biography that offers a full account of the life of Mithridates Eupator that has endured the test of time. As it could be expected, the Roman historians who were most interested in the last king of Pontus devoted special attention to his deeds in the immediate pre-war period or during the conflicts he waged against the Roman Republic during the first half of the first century.

The abundance of literary sources for the period of the Mithridatic Wars and the relevance of the subject for the political crisis that led to the fall of the Roman Republic certainly influenced most modern scholars who have dedicated themselves to studying the period. For that reason, there is an abundance of academic production emphasizing the wars and Mithridates' staunch opposition 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.

The role played by Mithridates as the last enemy of the Roman Republic was so significant and with so far-reaching consequences for Roman history that it seems to have

[59] David Magie. *Roman Rule in Asia Minor*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950. p.179.
[60] 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.

clouded academic research on the king's first decades in power, in a time when the coming conflicts against the ominous Roman power were beyond anyone's direst dreams.

The emphasis on the latter part of Mithridates reign has led to a teleological bias according to which the king's sole objective was confronting Rome even before he ascended to the Pontic throne. Hence, there has been almost no research on Mithridates early life, his relationship with Mithridates V and the other members of the royal family, and the circumstances in which he assumed power.

By means of rearranging events and interpretations chronologically, we hope to be able to identify different objectives related to different challenges faced by Eupator throughout his long, troubled reign. From this perspective, new interpretations will become possible and we can advance the knowledge about the political propaganda widely used by Mithridates that has attracted so much attention from contemporary historiography.

Bearing that goal in mind, it is necessary, however, to recognize that the literary sources available on Mithridates Eupator's early years, 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 defeated. 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.

Nevertheless, 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.

Long before worrying about the growing power of Rome in Asia Minor and instigating the hatred of Greeks and Asians against Rome and the excesses of its imperialism in Anatolia, Mithridates VI was obsessed with securing his own domestic legitimacy as king of Pontus.

Pompeius Trogus reports – again through Justin's words – that, since childhood, Mithridates' life was attempted 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 age would suggest. 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. [61]

[61] Just. 37.2.

McGing suggests that Justin's account may derive from a misunderstanding on the part of the Romans about the importance attached by Persian traditional education to riding horses. According to the author, early exposure to horse riding dangerous situations could be part of the common training system of Persian nobility.[62]

However, it should be noted that the story does not derive from Trogus' personal witnessing the episode, but from oral traditions about Eupator's achievements that reached Trogus' sources, among them his grandfather, a veteran of the last Mithridatic War, already in the 60s. Thus, it is difficult to assume that ordinary daily training would have been transmitted if there were no intentions of conveying the idea of a murderous plot. The mention of poisoning attempts right after that narrative reinforces this argument.

This episode may also reflect the prolonged effects of propaganda later disseminated by Mithridates himself to extol his qualities as a Persian nobleman in the face of the threats he had suffered at court before taking 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 ability of the Pontic king and drive a ten-horse chariot, without success.[63] 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) in a single day.[64]

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".[65]

Unfortunately, not much is known about Mithridates Eupator's relationship with his father, King Mithridates V Euergetes. There is no certainty, even, as to whether the alleged assassination attempts occurred during Euergetes' reign or after his death. What is known, however, thanks to Strabo, whose testimony is given credit to by his nationality and family proximity to the Pontic dynasty, is that Euergetes was murdered in a treacherous manner by his closest allies in Sinop and that power was passed on to his wife, Laodike, on behalf of his two young sons.[66]

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[62] McGing. *op. cit*. pp. 44-45.
[63] Suet. *Ner*. 24.
[64] Api. *Mit*. 112.
[65] Api. *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".
[66] Str. 10.4.10. In the same passage, the geographer claims to be the great-grandson of Dorylaus, the general sent by Euergetes to Crete to hire mercenaries when he learned of the plot that killed the king. Eupator had been raised

The reasons for the regicide are uncertain.[67] It can be inferred, however, that the conspirators either favored Laodike or at the very least were confident that she would not persecute them nor would she disturb their plans, for they were happy to see the power handed over to her. Laodike VI was a Seleucid princess, granddaughter of Antiochus III, the Great, and the sister of Antiochus V Eupator and Alexander Balas.[68] 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 he assumed the throne of Pontus, together with his younger brother, whose age is unknown.[69] However, the reference to the passage of a new comet in the year of his assumption, mentioned by Justin, and, as will be seen, celebrated by the king himself in coins minted in his honor, indicates that the reign of Mithridates VI would have started in 119, when the prince was actually fourteen years old.[70]

From the analysis of the aforementioned sources, it can be assumed that Mithridates came to power amid an extremely hostile environment, in which his life was threatened and his legitimacy under question. There is no reason why the prince, despite his youth, should not assume power himself, even if some temporary arrangement was to be adopted with his mother as an interim regent. The simultaneous elevation of his younger brother is an evident demonstration that the conspirators who had murdered his father – his own mother possibly among them– had other plans for the succession of the kingdom.

There are absolutely no clues to explain why Laodike and the most important members of the court would have preferred the young Chrestus over Eupator. Matyszak (2008) suggests that Laodike VI could have seen in Mithridates an obstacle to the continuity of the policy of rapprochement with Rome, due to the "spirited character of Mithridates and his later determination to expand the kingdom at every opportunity".[71] Mayor follows the same line of argument and suggests that "Laodice's love of luxury made her a compliant client of Rome (...) she accepted their bribes, and her extravagance pushed Pontus into debt".[72]

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with Dorylaus's 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.

[67] Reinach. (*op. cit*.) pp. 50-51, 53.

[68] Frank Walbank et al (ed). *Cambridge Ancient History: The hellenistic world*, Vol. 7. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 491.

[69] 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).

[70] Just. (37.2.1-2); Ramsey. *op cit*.

[71] Philip Matyszak. *Mithridates the Great: Rome's Indomitable Enemy*. South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Books, 2008. pp. 67-68.

[72] Mayor. *op cit*. p. 69.

It should be noted, nevertheless, that, as seen in the previous chapter, the alliance with Rome had already become the norm in Pontic foreign policy since Mithridates IV. Mithridates V Euergetes, his nephew and successor, not only maintained this policy but reinforced it, by sending ships and a small auxiliary force in support of the Republic during the Third Punic War and, in a subsequent period, Pontic arms played a central role in the war against the usurper Aristonicus for the annexation of Pergamum in defense of Roman interests.[73]

In this sense, it seems 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. Similarly, it is unlikely that Mithridates Eupator, by any account just a teenager at the time, could have been seen as an obstacle to the preservation of that policy.

Thus, Matyszak's (2008) argument seems to reveal the teleological perspective we have already described, according to which past events are explained by future development: in this case, the future rivalry between Eupator and Rome is seen as a possible driving element to Euergetes assassination.

A potential better disposition from Laodike and the court towards Chrestus could thus be explained either by the relatively easier control that could be exerted on a younger child or by simple personal affection. In any case, there is no reason to suppose that Eupator, in assuming the co-regency of the kingdom, had any foreign policy inclinations that could have harmed the interests of the court's conspirators.

With regard to the diarchal regime established with the death of Euergetes, two inscriptions in Delos confirm its existence and allow to elucidate the first propaganda efforts carried out by Mithridates Eupator. The first, dated between 120 and 111, is a simple dedication, made to Zeus Ourios (of the favorable wind), by both Mithridates Eupator and his brother Mithridates Chrestos. The second, 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".[74]

The inscriptions confirm Strabo's account of Eupator and Chrestos' co-regency, although they do not mention Queen Laodike's name. The omission of the queen regent, however, may be intentional, as a way to reinforce the succession of Euergetes' male offspring

[73] Just. 37.1.2.
[74] IDelos 1560; OGIS 369.

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.

It should also be noted that, from an early age, Mithridates VI adopted the epithet Eupator, which means "of a noble father". Only two other Hellenistic dynasts had adopted this same epithet before Mithridates: Ptolemy Eupator and Antiochus V Eupator.

Ptolemy Eupator reigned together with his father, Ptolemy VI Philometor, in Cyprus, for just a few months in the year 152, and died when he was twelve or thirteen years old.[75] Ptolemy VI Philometor was the eldest son of Ptolemy V Epiphanes and reigned in Egypt from 180 to 164 and from 163 to 145. From 170, Ptolemy V had to share power with his younger brother Ptolemy VIII Euergetes, and they struggled for supreme power in Alexandria for years. When Philometor finally secured his grasp over the kingdom, he entered into an agreement with his brother, granting him the rule of Cyrenaica. Unhappy, Euergetes obtained political support from the Roman Senate to annex Cyprus, but without actual military aid, the island remained under Philometor's control.[76] As a result, Philometor promoted his eldest son, Ptolemy Eupator, to co-regent and heir; however, Eupator's premature death would eventually frustrate his father's plans and complicate the disputes over Egyptian succession.

Antiochus V was only nine years old when he ascended to the throne, after the death of his father, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, in Persia. The Roman Senate held Demetrius, son of Seleucus IV and legitimate heir to the throne, as a hostage, refusing to release him. When Demetrius finally managed to escape from Rome, his arrival in Syria was acclaimed by the local population and Antiochus Eupator was soon murdered.

As it can be seen, the epithet Eupator was chosen by two dynasts who faced adverse circumstances, usually associated with the need to reaffirm their legitimacy claims as postulants to power, both for domestic and foreign policy purposes. The envisaged reaffirmation of legitimate rights to rule would be stated both by stressing their relationship with their fathers as well as by claiming their father's nobility.

In regard to the second inscription, it is worth noting that Mithridates started to use a second epithet. Unfortunately, only the Greek letters "EY" are legible, which sparked an interesting academic debate about a possible lost epithet. The titles Εὐτυχής (fortunate) and Εὐεργέτης (benefactor, the same epithet used by his father) have both been proposed. However,

[75] OGIS 126, OGIS 127 e 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.
[76] Pol. 31.10, 17-20, 33.11.4-7

the arguments presented by Ballesteros-Pastor (2014) to defend Εὐσεβής (pious, righteous) make this the most convincing hypothesis.[77] Although not found in any other member of the Mithridatic dynasty, the epithet Eusebes is quite common among the Cappadocian Ariarathids (used by Ariarathes IV and Ariarathes V) and was also adopted by Ariarathes IX, Eupator's own son, elevated to the Cappadocian throne during the Mithridatic Wars, as well as among other local dynasties. Ballesteros-Pastor also argues that two important cities in Cappadocia, 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 ambitions in Cappadocia.[78]

In addition, the title adopted in the early years of the reign and later abandoned in favor of "Dionysus" may also have been chosen for the same purpose as the epithet "Eupator", that is, to reinforce his image – this time on more religious grounds – in contrast with the worldly challenges he faced. This strategy would be abundantly used later on during his confrontations against Rome.

According to another episode narrated by Justin, Mithridates would have fled from Sinop with the intention of avoiding new plots against his life. The young king would have 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.[79]

Although anyone could conceive of Mithridates physically escaping the court for a while to avoid assassination attempts, it is unlikely that his absence would have lasted for seven years "ignaris omnibus". A disappearance for such a long period would have been a perfect opportunity to reaffirm Chrestus' sole rule or to ascertain Laodike's regency for good, but there are no records in any literary or material source that indicate any such attempt. In addition, Pontic coinage seems to disseminate the portrait of Eupator since the beginning of his reign uninterruptedly.[80]

Mithridates' alleged journey through the interior of his country seems, therefore, to be another example of Eupator's extensive propaganda about the early years of his reign, which

[77] Luis Ballesteros-Pastor. "A neglected Epithet of Mithridates Eupator (IDelos 1560)". In. *Epigraphica*. LXXVI, 1-2, 2014. pp. 81-86.
[78] *Idem*.
[79] Just. 37.2.7-9.
[80] Hasso Pfeiler. "Die frühesten Porträts des Mithridates Eupator und die Bronzeprägung seiner Vorgänger". In: *Schweizer Münzblätter*. 18, 1968. pp 75-6.

found a way into Pompeius Trogus' work. McGing, quoting Widengren, suggests that the account may be associated with a frequent royal Persian *topos* according to which it was commonplace for a king to spend part of his youth wandering, in addition to reinforcing the idea of training in horse riding and archery, essential elements of traditional Achaemenid education.[81]

Mayor agrees with the "suspiciously mythic" duration of Mithridates' journey through the wild, but she argues in favor of the king wandering for years ("four or five years is a reasonable interval"), during which time he would have strengthened contacts with local potentates, visited well-known temples and important cities of the kingdom and, thus, obtained political and military support to his claim.[82]

According to Justin, after being absent from the court, Mithridates came back to Sinop and took over the kingdom. The formula used - "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.[83]

The end of the co-regency would hardly have been a "bloodless coup", as suggested by Mayor.[84] Appian claims that Mithridates murdered his mother and brother,[85] 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 and end to her life; he also killed his brother." [86]

Queen Mother Laodike VI and Prince Regent Crestus' murder – or imprisonment followed by death – would hardly have been smoothly accepted by the plotters who had tried to kill Mithridates and who were likely responsible for the death of his father. Although Eupator was the only Euergetes' living (or free) son, there were certainly alternatives for succession if the conspirators decided regicide was the right option again.

If we accept Mithridates' journey as a partially true story, there would be still more reasons to believe that the court in Sinop would have been the most affected by the young king's return and his subsequent coup, ending the regency established after Euergetes' death. Despite having a significant number of supporters, including Strabo's maternal great-

[81] McGing. *op cit*. pp. 44-46.
[82] Mayor. *op. cit*. pp. 76-95.
[83] Just. 37.3.1
[84] Mayor. *op. cit*. p. 97.
[85] Api. *Mit*. 112.
[86] 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")

grandfather Dorylaus, the political change in the capital certainly fueled the ire of a faction of nobles and courtiers removed from power.

It is in this context of open hostility and constant intrigue that Eupator assumed real power in Pontus. [87] In this sense, Mithridatic political propaganda – for which the king has been widely recognized throughout history – 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 is 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 novel analytical perspective allows us to offer new approaches to different episodes in the Mithridates' life which have so far been limited to anachronistic explanations related to an allegedly instinctive anti-Romanism.

This is the case, for example, of Mithridates' decision to marry his younger sister, Laodike.[88] There seems to be no questions about the veracity of that event, which has so far not received due attention from specialized historiography.

Some authors have highlighted the fact that incestuous marriage was not an uncommon practice among some Hellenistic royal families, especially in the East. These scholars also point to the possibility of Eupator being interested in guaranteeing the purest possible bloodline for his successors.[89]

However, a more detailed analysis of other cases of incestuous marriages may indicate another purpose: to reinforce the dynast's own legitimacy. The most important case, the one closer to Eupator himself, was that of the marriage between his great-uncles Mithridates IV and Laodike, Pharnakes' siblings.

Around 183, after annexing the city of Sinop, Pharnakes started an aggressive expansionist campaign, culminating in the invasion of Galatia and in attacks against Pergamum and Cappadocia. Eumenes II and Ariarathes IV sent embassies to Rome to complain about Pontic aggression, but the Senate envoys did not succeed in ending the conflict.[90]

When hostilities resumed, Pharnakes found himself unable to face the combined forces of his opponents and had to accept a peace agreement by which he was deprived of all the

[87] Around 116. See McGing, *op. cit*. p. 74.
[88] Just. 37.3.6.
[89] Matyszak. *op.cit*. p. 63; and Mayor. *op. cit*. 100.
[90] Pol. 23.9, 24.1, 24.14-15; Str. 12.3; Liv. *Urb*. 40.2.

territories he had conquered, except for Sinop. This treaty, signed in 179, is the first stance where reference is made to Mithridates IV, Pharnakes' younger brother and future successor.[91]

Although scholars speculate that the mention to Mithridates IV may indicate some sort of co-regency arrangement, the winners of the conflict may also only have wished to be assured of the continued validity of the terms of the treaty, since international treaties were only valid until the king who signed them was alive and in power and Pharnakes' son, Mithridates V, was a mere child (or had hot even been born) at the time the war ended.[92]

In 154 Mithridates IV is mentioned by Polybius as the sole ruler of Pontus.[93] The new king would be responsible for the important inflection of Pontic foreign policy, mentioned in the previous chapter, that would make Pontus a friend of Rome and of its allied kingdoms in Asia Minor.

Despite the conquest of much-coveted Sinop, Pharnakes' reign was marked by prolonged and useless conflicts. It is fair to suppose that the defeats suffered on the battlefield and the humiliation of the Treaty of 179 aroused resistance of some in Pontic nobility and people. That political instability may be perceived both in the decision to adopt a completely different orientation in foreign policy and in the actions taken by Mithridates IV to reinforce his control over the kingdom.

Mithridates IV adopted the suggestive epithets of "Φιλοπάτωρ" (father-loving) and "Φιλάδελφος" (brother-loving). Both to reinforce his family relationship with the kings who immediately preceded him (Mithridates III and Pharnakes). In addition, Philopator Philadelphus married his sister, another Laodike.

In addition, Mithridates IV minted several coins to celebrate not only his reign, but also his union with his sister. The coins of this joint reign 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 Filadelfoi" (Figure 3b). [94]

Two other series minted by Mithridates IV deserve attention. The first one shows a portrait of Mithridates wearing a laurel wreath on the obverse and, on the reverse, the same

[91] Pol. 25.2. McGing 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 (McGing. *op cit*. pp. 28-29).
[92] On the validity of international treaties during the Hellenistic Era, see: Grainger (2017). *op.cit.* p. 419.
[93] Pol. 33.12.
[94] 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.

figure of Hera from the joint Mithridates and Laodike's edition (Figure 3c).[95] The second depicts, on 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 similarity between the portraits in the two currencies and the repetition of the reference to Hera makes 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 intended to be promoted.

In regards to incestuous marriages during Hellenistic Era, Grainger claims that they were an occasional practice or an "emergency measure", and argues that it 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 ".[96]

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 had any children and we know that the transmission of power to their nephew Mithridates V, Pharnakes' son, seems to have been pretty smooth. What Philopator needed most and which only his sister Laodike could offer him was the reinforcement of his own legitimate claim to the throne of Pontus, while, at the same time, denying access of any other foreign dynast to the Mithridatic line of succession.

The cultural, dynastic proximity and the similar internal political circumstances impose a direct comparison with Mithridates VI's marriage choice. Contrary to the hypothetical scenario posed by Mayor – Mithridates observing "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"[97] – Eupator's decision was likely inspired by the close example of his uncle and aunt's marriage and by the clear political goal he himself shared of reinforcing his own status as king of Pontus.

After eliminating his main internal rivals and making it impossible for another suitor to contest his claim through marring his sister, Mithridates finally launched a political campaign aimed at strengthening his image as an ideal monarch, coated with both political and supernatural legitimacy.

[95] *Ibid*. p. 74.
[96] Grainger (2017). *op. cit*. pp. 179-180; 203-204.
[97] Mayor. *op. cit*. p. 100.

CHAPTER 3

THE IMITATION OF ALEXANDER – THE BOSPHORUS CAMPAIGN AND THE REAFFIRMATION OF POLITICAL LEGITIMACY

In one of the only two available literary sources indirectly attributed to Mithridates, the king of Pontus claims to be a descended of both Alexander, the Great, and Seleucus I, on the maternal side, and of Cyrus and Darius, founders of the Achaemenid Empire, on the paternal side.[98] Although that speech was supposedly given at the start of the first Mithridatic War, the political use of that claim has an obvious legitimizing power and it was probably used by Mithridates since the beginning of his reign.

Mithridates' efforts to reaffirm his legitimacy domestically, however, were not limited to the choice of epithets, the elimination of family rivals and the decision to marry his sister. From Macedonia to Bactria, from Egypt to Babylon, Hellenistic monarchs sought to emulate – in their behavior, actions and even their appearance – one specific example: Alexander the Great. And Mithridates VI Eupator would take this emulation very seriously.

His claims of a special relationship with Alexander would go way beyond his bloodline. Alexander was above all a model for policy and behavior, and his achievements not only established new foundations for legitimate power, but also provided an action plan for the dynasties that followed. Having finally managed to centralize power and subdue his rivals, Mithridates needed an opportunity to demonstrate his worth and to reinforce the comparison with Alexander he so much aspired to promote.

And around 115 this opportunity presented itself in the form of a plea for help from the Greeks of Chersonesus. [99]

Since the beginning of the sixth century, Greek colonists from the city of Miletus 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 founded the city of Chersonesus, at the western end of the peninsula.

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[98] Just. 38.7.1.

[99] 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 deployed after the inscriptions IDelos 1561 e 1560 seems more reasonable.

The Greeks soon came into contact with the Tauri and the Scythians who inhabited the mountains to the north of the peninsula. Despite the constant harassment they suffered from the neighboring peoples, the Crimean poleis prospered, thanks to the dynamic Black Sea trade that transported grains, ceramics and wine produced on the peninsula to mainland Greece.

Although references to Greek poleis in Crimea are scarce in the literary sources of the Hellenistic era, epigraphic sources allow us to ascertain that the pressure exerted by the Scythians intensified during the period.

The famous inscription known as "the Civic Oath of the Chersonesites",[100] dated from the beginning of the third century, indicates that, similarly to other poleis, a mandatory civic oath was taken by all young people at the time of their initiation as citizens and as a condition for the enjoyment of full civic rights. The citizens of Chersonesus were obliged to maintain internal harmony and thus preserve the city and its 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 McGing considers that the oath gives the clear impression of an imminent danger,[101] the text does not mention any specific threats, does not individualize barbaric neighbors, nor does it make any references to territorial losses. Unfortunately, one cannot be sure what motivated the adoption of the oath or 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 precondition for the publication of the oath in the end of the forth century or beginning of the third century was the increase in the civilian population as a result of the arrival of new *epoikoi* (colonists), as well as the growing need to guarantee the rectitude and the commitment of these citizens, especially in the exercise of the main magistracies in the city.[102]

It can be inferred, therefore, that the expansion of the Greek poleis provoked the resistance of the native populations and that the resulting demographic pressure caused an increase in conflict episodes. These effects can already be perceived a few decades later in another inscription, dated from the second half of the third century, in which a great danger is

[100] IOSPE I^2 402.
[101] McGing. *op. cit*. p. 47.
[102] Igor A. Makarov. "Towards an Interpretation of the Civic Oath of the Chersonesites (IOSPE 1^2 401)". In: Ancient Civilizations from Scythia to Siberia. n. 20. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2014. pp. 1-38.

reported that would have caused the inhabitants to leave with their children and women, probably fleeing an unexpected attack of the neighboring barbarians.[103]

In the first half of the second century, the situation became so serious that Chersonesus was forced to sign a mutual military assistance treaty with Pharnakes of Pontus. It is worth remembering that Pharnakes pursued an aggressive expansionist policy in Asia Minor that, after the annexation of Sinop, jeopardized the independence of Heraclea, the mother city of Chersonesus and with which the Crimean polis maintained excellent relations. Even so, for lack of alternatives or in recognition of the growing power of Pontus, Chersonesus appealed to Mithridates' grandfather, who pledged to come to the aid of the city, should the "neighboring barbarians" attack it or harm its citizens (line 14).[104]

Under the terms of the treaty, Pharnakes was also obliged to protect the city's democracy to the best of his abilities (lines 23-24). Interestingly enough, the validity of the treaty was conditioned to the maintenance of the friendship between Chersonesus and Pharnakes as well as between them and Rome (line 26).[105]

As the alliance with Chersonesus was signed after the defeat imposed by Roman-backed Anatolian allies, culminating in the treaty of 179,[106] this clause is likely to have been included as a way of deterring the more than justified fears of Pontic neighbors in Asia Minor.

Frustrated in his expansionist dreams in Anatolia, Pharnakes probably felt that an agreement with the Greeks in Crimea could open a new path for his territorial expansion. The citizens of Chersonesus, as much as they felt threatened by their neighbors, would have understood the wishes of the king of Pontus and, therefore, forced him to agree to the maintenance of their political regime.

However, about half a century later, the situation in the North Black Sea poleis appears to have greatly worsened. The Scythians, ruled by King Scilurus, conquered the city of Olbia, north of the peninsula and built three forts, close to the defensive line of Chersonesus, already in the Crimea.[107]

The dread caused by the advance of the Scythian hordes forced the inhabitants of Chersonesus to enforce the agreement that they had concluded with Pharnakes two generations

[103] IOSPE I^2 343.
[104] 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.
[105] *Idem*.
[106] Cf. Nota 226.
[107] Str. 7.4.7.

before. After being plundered, the city begged the young king Mithridates VI to intervene on their behalf, no longer able to worry over the potentially negative effects that the arrival of a foreign army in their lands could have on their independence.[108] The Chersonesites offered Mithridates the opportunity to put his military ability to test and, at the same time, to ward off internal threats to his hold on Pontic power for good.

The Bosphorus campaign was a resounding military success. Pontic forces, supported by local militia, defeated Scilurus and his many sons, pushing them back to the lands beyond the isthmus.[109] After that, Chersonesus too would 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 Bosphorus.[110]

The kingdom of Bosphorus and the other Greek cities in Crimea were eventually annexed by the Pontus around 107/6 and would be administered by a governor-general appointed by Mithridates. Later on, already in the 90s, Mithridates' sons would rule the region on his behalf.[111]

After dominating the whole of Crimea and the Kingdom of Bosphorus, there are no more references to plots or conspiracies against Eupator in Pontus. The young king had matched his ancestors – real or propagated – through military conquest. Like the greatest Hellenistic monarchs, Mithridates had proven his right to rule through conquest "by the spear".

In addition, the military success of the campaign in the northern Black Sea offered Mithridates the first opportunity to assume the position of defender 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".[112]

Justin suggests that Mithridates' first achievement after centralizing power was the Bosphorus expedition that would result in impressive – and so far unmatched – victories over the Scythians.[113] These victories would be widely used by the Mithridates' propaganda in his future confrontations against the Romans.

Finally, after retracing all the major decisions taken by Mithridates since the death of his father up to his first successful military campaign, it seems that there is no reasonable

[108] Str. 7.4.3.
[109] *Idem*.
[110] Str. 7.4.4.
[111] 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.
[112] McGing. *op. cit*. p. 64.
[113] Just. 37.3.2.

justification for Strabo's comment on the Bosphorus campaign. Bearing in mind the geographer's delicate condition of Greek Roman citizen with family ties to the last great enemy of the Republic, it becomes clearer why he considered the expedition a "preparation for the wars against Rome". [114]

Once again, the assessment of political actions and decisions taken by Mithridates at the beginning of his government were impregnated with a revisionist agenda that tried to impute an irrational hatred for Rome and thus alleviate Roman responsibility for the coming wars against the peoples of Asia Minor under Mithridates' command.

[114] Str. 7.4.3.

CHAPTER 4

BUILDING THE KING'S MESSIANIC IMAGE – THE LEGEND OF THE COMET AND THE REAFFIRMATION OF SUPERNATURAL LEGITIMACY

In parallel to the reaffirmation of his legitimacy through military conquests, Mithridates launched a political propaganda campaign unrivaled in the history of Pontus. Although the initial phase of this campaign made wide use of iconographic elements previously employed by the royal Mithridatic house, it was taken to unprecedented levels both in terms of reach and of novel imagery and messaging.

Eupator's predecessors on the Pontic throne issued a very limited number of coins, especially when compared to their Anatolian neighbors. In addition, the minting of bronze coins was practically non-existent. Callataÿ speculates 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.[115]

However, some conclusions can still be drawn from the iconography of the issues by former Pontic kings. Since its founding, the Mithridatic dynasty cultivated its Persian noble characteristics and its affiliation with oriental pictographic traditions. Although the coins minted in Pontus do follow the Alexandrian pattern,[116] the portraits on the obverse show kings with realistic eastern features, while the reverses feature images of Olympic gods syncretized with Asiatic traditions (Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4).[117]

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[115] Callataÿ. *op.cit*. pp. 63-94.

[116] Since the Macedonian invasions, the legitimacy that Alexander's successors would try to reaffirm based on emulating the conqueror, and the unprecedented amount of coins dumped in Greece and in the Near East after the domination 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. See: Peter Thonemann. The Helenistic World: Using Coins as Sources. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. pp. 17-18.

[117] Thonemann. *op. cit*. pp. 163-165; Edward Newell. *Royal Greek Portrait Coins*. Nova York: Wayte Raymonf, 1937. p. 40.

Undoubtedly, the main specific iconographic element present in all issues minted by the Mithridatic kings is the image of a crescent moon under an eight-pointed star on the reverse, present in practically all real currencies.[118] The symbol (Figure 1b) has become a distinctive element since the reign of Mithridates III, the first monarch to mint coins in Pontus in the last decades of the third century.[119]

The significance of the star-crescent composition has motivated a wide academic debate.[120] Newell claims that it appears as a kind of badge of 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".[121] Pollak agrees with this assessment and suggests that the composition "symbolizes the Persian ancestry of the family and signifies its religious leanings".[122]

Price, in turn, seeks the symbolism of the image in another cultural tradition, originating in Anatolia: "the astral symbols, star and crescent, which accompany the reverse types, are found on earlier Pontic coins, and probably derive from the worship of Ma, one of the main cults of the region".[123]

According to Saprykin, the symbols synthesized a series of syncretized cults, typical of the Pontic region, related to Men, Mithras, Ahura-Mazda, and reflected the victory over darkness and evil, the main religious aspects of Persian Zoroastrianism. He also adds that the policy of the kings of Pontus was to make official the cults to these deities associated with militant themes of rebirth and victory over death.[124]

Unfortunately, none of the aforementioned works offers details on the relationships that they infer from the star and crescent composition. A more detailed analysis of oriental iconographic traditions points to Sumerian-Akkadian roots related to the power exercised by the king in the name of – or legitimized by – the gods.

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[118] Royal issues distinguished themselves from those produced by mints in (at least theoretically) independent cities. In Pontus, permission to mint coins, especially under the government of Mithridates VI, would be conditioned to the observance of certain aesthetic standards that aligned the civic series to the royal one in terms of iconography and propaganda.
[119] Callataÿ. *op. cit*.; McGing. *op. cit*. p. 24; Newell. *op. cit*. p. 40.
[120] McGing. *op. cit*. p. 24.
[121] Newell. *op. cit*. p. 40.
[122] Phyllis Pollak. "A Bithynian Hoard of the First Century B.C." In: *Museum Notes (American Numismatic Society)* Vol. 16, 1970. Pp. 46-47.
[123] 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.
[124] 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.

This iconographic tradition was brought to Anatolia by the Achaemenid empire, since Darius I. For Margaret Cool Root, when ascending the throne in the midst of an internal upheaval, Darius employed a powerful symbolic mechanism, in the form of a "visual program", with a view to creating and promoting a hegemonic order. This Achaemenid art form was designed with the aim of communicating persuasively and convincingly with a vast range of recipients.[125] 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 official written messages.

The roots of that imagery system can be identified in rock reliefs spread over the regions that fell to Achaemenid conquest. The inscription of Anubanini – the ruler of the tribal kingdom of Lullubi around 2300 – in Sar-i Pul, Iran, depicts the goddess of war and love, Ishtar, handing the king a line of captives. An eight-pointed star of the solar god of justice, Shamash, shines in the field (Figure 6). According to Root, the Anubanini inscription served as a prototype for the Behistum inscription (Figure 7a), especially with regard to elements such as the line of captives, the pose of the king with one foot on an enemy defeated on the ground and the use of a deity who delivers defeated opponents to the king (visually implied, but verbally explained in Darius' inscription). In Behistum, the image of Shamash's eight-pointed star is also reproduced, both on Ahura Mazda's headdress and on Dario's crown (Figures 7b and 7c).[126]

The eight-pointed stars is an explicit intentional link to the sun god of Mesopotamia. Above that diadem there are battlements that symbolize mountain peaks that, in their turn, evoked the proximity to the heavens and the place for encounter and communication with the divine. By extension, they were 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.[127]

In the tomb of Darius, in Naqsh-i Rustam, the king is represented alone on a three-step podium before an altar of blazing fire. Ahuramazda hovers overhead, facing Darius, and behind them a crescent is inscribed. Root ponders that the meaning of the astral emblem represented

[125] 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.
[126] *Ibid*. pp. 34-37.
[127] *Ibid*. pp. 40.

in the tomb of Darius is still a point open to speculation. Her hypothesis is that the emblem symbolizes the solar and lunar powers in the form of a disk with an inscribed crescent.[128]

In addition to the royal badge common to the entire dynasty, two other images on the reverse of coins minted by Mithridates' predecessors deserve special attention. In the first, Pharnakes adopted a composite male deity wearing Hermes' petasos, carrying in his hand a vine branch and Dionysus' cornucopia, along with Hermes' caduceus, accompanied by a deer. In the second, his successor, Mithridates IV chose the standing figure of the hero Perseus as his reverse type, holding the Gorgon's head and his sword (FIGURE 3a). Although Greek cultural representations, both Dionysus and Perseus were legendary figures that reinforced the eastern origins of the Mithridatic dynasty. Both iconographic elements would later be used by Eupator.

As we can see, upon coming to power, Mithridates VI had a rich imagery repertoire with evident political relevance to tap into. The impressive amount and variety of coins that he would mint later in his reign for obvious propaganda purposes owes much to the initial experiences in minting during the first decades of his rule.

Some of his first tetradrachms, not yet dated,[129] were coined, probably shortly after the young king removed his mother and brother from power. On the obverse, a vivacious young man with a thin beard on his cheeks and chin is portrayed. On the reverse, a winged pegasus lowers its head to drink water. Beside it, the official composition of the crescent star and moon. The entire image is surrounded by a crown of leaves and ivy flowers (Figure 5a).

When compared to portraits in later issues (Figure 5c), this initial version exhibits features that are much more realistic, with hair that is a little tidier, following the model established by his Pontic predecessors. The wreath that surrounds the entire reverse alludes to Dionysus, a mythical figure with whom Mithridates VI would increasingly associate himself, following the example of Alexander. At that moment, however, it can also be understood within the scope of the relationship established with Pharnakes.

The Pegasus on the reverse refers to the dynastic claim of descent from the hero Perseus, claimed by the entire Mithridatic dynasty. Interestingly enough, the mention to Perseus was an

[128] 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.

[129] From the 90's on, Mithridates would adopt the practice to date 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.

element initially employed by Mithridates IV who, as we have already seen, also sought to reaffirm the legitimacy of his claim to power.

Another coin from that period, even more important for the purposes of this dissertation, and that has attracted much more academic interest is the comet bronze coin, that depicts, on its obverse, the head and neck of a horse, with an eight-pointed star on the neck, surrounded by dots, and, on the reverse, an 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, 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.

The fact that the coin was issued by royal mints reinforces the hypothesis according to which it would primarily be intended for the use of the common people and not for the large Greek cities that were able to mint their own currency. As we have argued, common folk in rural areas was mainly of Anatolian or Persian-Anatolian origin, although it is clear that by the time of Mithridates VI miscegenation and syncretism have already achieved a considerable degree in the Pontic countryside.

Unfortunately, the comet series does not contain a specific date or reference to the place of coinage. The practices of dating coins would be adopted by Mithridates only much later, in the context of the substantial monetary expansion undertaken throughout the 90's. However, precisely because it still does not obey this later pattern, we can affirm with a certain degree of conviction that this coinage belongs to the initial period of Eupator's government, that is to say, to the first two decades of his reign.

That royal issue would be the first – and one of only three – of all known Ancient Greco-Roman coinage to portray a comet with a tail.[130] Ramsey attributes this scarcity to the fact that comets were interpreted by ancient Greeks and Romans as harbingers of doom and disaster and that ancient coins never portrayed bad omens.[131]

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[130] 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. To these two another was added 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.

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

In the Iranian culture, however, a broadly disseminated tradition associated celestial bodies with the arrival of a messianic king, invested with cosmic legitimacy and military invincibility, whose eschatological mission would be to restore Asiatic world supremacy. Samuel Eddy traces this tradition from the *Bahman Yasht*, to the Sibyline Oracles, the Oracle of the Potter, the Oracle of Hystaspes and the Gospel of Matthew.[132]

Humphreys sums up the meaning of comets for ancient civilizations along the following lines: "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".[133] We can recognize this interpretation clearly in Justin's account stating that: "[Mithridates'] future greatness was predicted even by celestial signs".[134]

It should be noted that the nucleus of the comet portrayed on the coin has the same eight points as the star in the Pontic house composition. By resorting to this iconographic tradition, Mithridates was claiming to be not only the divinely foretold king prophesied in ancient Persian messianic tradition but also, and at the same time, the legitimate and rightful heir to the Mithridatic throne.

The image of the horse, portrayed on the obverse, has been interpreted as a reference to Pegasus, Perseus' mythical winged horse. As we have already seen, that symbol was also used on a tetradrachm coined by Mithridates VI during the first years of his reign.[135]

The two series cited can be understood as part of a propaganda campaign carried out by Mithridates VI in the initial years of his reign with the goal of reinforcing his domestic legitimacy for the reasons we have already argued.

Interestingly this campaign would be based on different messaging systems that appealed 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.[136]

The core message was essentially 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

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[132] Eddy. *op cit*. pp. 16-18.
[133] 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.
[134]Just. 37.2.1. ("Huius futuram magnitudinem etiam caelestia ostenta praedixerant").
[135] 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.
[136] 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. 10.

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.

To the common people of the countryside – where more modest commercial transactions just very recently monetized would be the norm – the iconographic elements build on latent, deeply rooted traditions associated with divinely anointed kings whose coming would be foretold by celestial phenomena. 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.

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 their relative scarcity 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 culture. Pyrrhus, Hannibal, Cleopatra and Mithridates were all personifications of the bewilderment 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 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 thesis, that line of reasoning has had such an influence in modern historical production that even the most recent biographical works on Mithridates VI either accept the alleged instinctive hatred for Rome as his main motivation or simply ignore the two-decade period from his ascension to the throne up to the open preparations to his future wars against Rome, when his animosity towards the Republic cannot be disputed.

By shedding light on this long and often neglected period, this thesis searched for other elements that could improve the knowledge and academic discussion not only on the first decades of Mithridates' reign, but also of all his immensely fascinating life.

We have concluded that there is enough evidence scattered among literary sources to speculate that Mithridates was not only victim to a series of failed assassination attempts but that conspirators in the court – including probably his own mother – wanted to shut him off the government. Epigraphic sources confirm this hypothesis by implying an imposed power-sharing arrangement with his younger brother Chrestus.

This unstable, unsafe political environment cemented in him an urgent sense of need to reinforce his own legitimate claim to power This would be the driving force behind his first actions as co-regent and then as sole king. With that goal in mind, Mithridates was able to prove himself politically worthy of the crown after a successful campaign against the Crimean barbarians while helping – and later annexing – the Greek poleis in the region.

Mithridates also made use of an existing repertoire of iconographic elements to reinforce his legitimacy with metaphysical, messianic traditions with which he deliberately associated himself. Once again, material, numismatic sources allow us to trace back the elements used to reinforce the metaphysical message of divinely sanctioned legitimacy as well as to conjecture about the different messaging systems employed to different sectors of the Pontic people.

When the Pontic troops returned from the successful campaign in the Bosphorus, the conspirators who resisted Mithridates VI Eupator and who had plotted against his life had already been defeated or succumbed to the growing power of the young king as well as to the effectiveness of his propaganda.

After dozens of attempts against his life, an almost successful plot to disregard his rightful succession to the throne and decades of court and family conspiracies, Mithridates had finally conquered his own kingdom and was free to carry out new plans of territorial expansion. By doing so, he was not launching a novel aggressive policy, but rather following on the steps of practically all previous Hellenistic kings whose fundamental right to rule was established by Alexander and was to be proven on the battlefield.

Only then would his attention be directed to the neighboring districts of Asia Minor and ultimately lead to the final confrontation against his most famous nemesis.

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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 Sinop.

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 Sinop.

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 Sinop.

134: Mithridates Eupator is born.

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

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

120: 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.

115: 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 Bosphorus Kingdom in Crimea which were under the attack of the Scythiansand other local barbarians.

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

107/94: Mithridates VI and Nicomedes III of Bithynia invade Paphlagonia and divide its territory among themselves. Mithridates intervenes in Cappadocia and Galatia.

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 Mithtridatic 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 bequeathes 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.

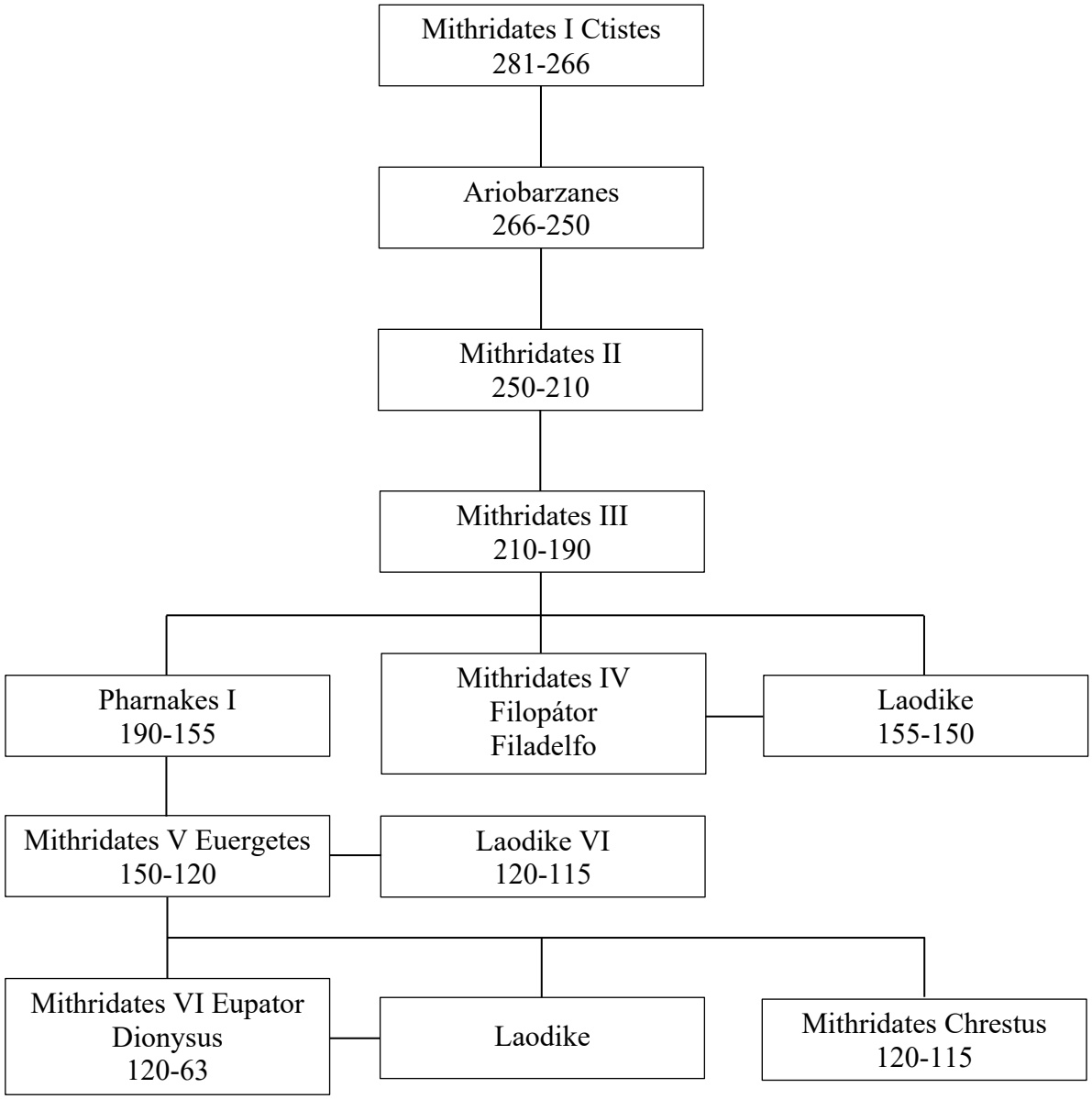
67: Mithridates VI retakes Pontus. Pompey fights off piracy in the Mediterranean.

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

65/64: Mithridates reaches Bosphorus escaping Roman forces.

63: Pharnakes, Mithridates's 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 sceptre 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 harpa. 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 sceptre in her r. hand.; Zeus, laureate, holds a sceptre 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 sceptre 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 sceptre in her r. hand. *In*: Callataÿ (2009).

Figure 4:

Tetradrachm de Mithridates V.

Prata. 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.

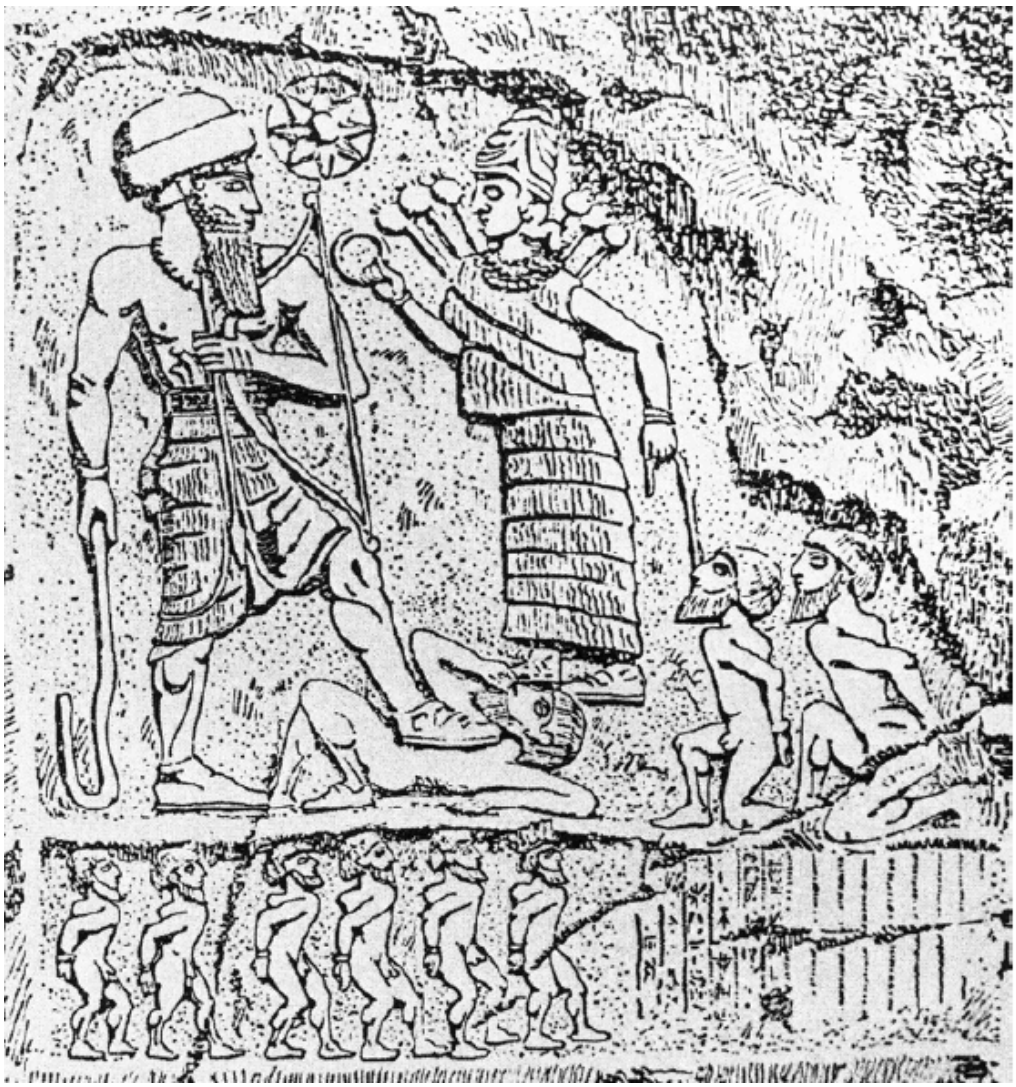
(b) Early Bronze Coin of Mithridates VI.

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) Later Tetradrachm of Mithridates VI

Prata, 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).

Figura 6:

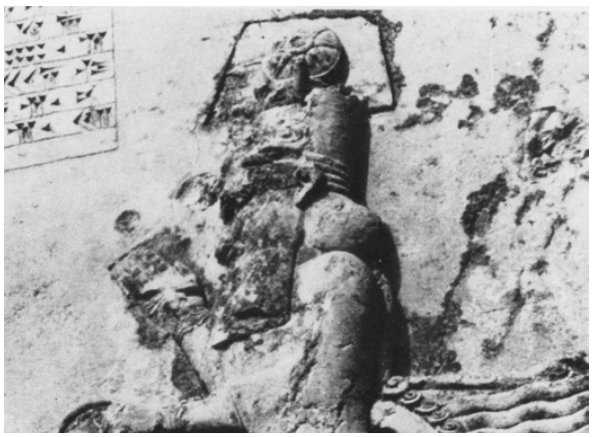


Drawing of the rock relief of Anubanini at Sar-i Pul, Iran, by E. Herzfeld. *In*: Root (2013).

Figura 7:

(a) The Behistun Inscription

Source: Wikimedia Commons. Available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bisotun_Iran_Relief_Achamenid_Period.JPG]. Acess 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 Bisitun relief. Photo by G.G. Cameron. *In*: Root (2013)