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Abstract

Roman-Parthian Relations in the time of Augustus with reference to Augustus' Foreign Policy

A thesis for the degree of Master of Arts
by James Lander

The Parthians, heirs to the Seleucid empire, yet hardly touched by Hellenism, had a tough, nomadic background which enabled them to resist any imposition of the traditional client-patron relationship of Roman foreign policy. Though socially and politically decentralized, the Parthians were yet able to defeat Crassus, twice invade Syria, and later turn back an invasion by Antonius.

Augustus, neither a pacific consolidator nor a world-conqueror, maintained a flexible policy toward Parthia. Conquest was not a prudent aim, yet the stability of the eastern possessions of the Roman empire required that Rome be in a position superior to Parthia. For a time Augustus carried on a policy (begun, in fact, by Antonius) of supporting a rival to the Parthian throne, but this brought no long-term success. The return of Crassus' captured standards, which would symbolize Parthia's submission, was effected in 20 B.C., but only after Augustus seriously threatened war and seized Armenia. Maintaining an effective suzerainty in Armenia, whose strategic and prestige value was great,

became the crux of Augustus' policy.

This policy was adhered to by Tiberius, allowed to lapse by Caligula, and then was revived by Claudius. But in Nero's reign, amid altered circumstances in both East and West, a Parthian nominee was allowed to sit on the Armentian throne. Peace followed, but Vespasian felt the need to fortify the frontier, and, in effect, made the preparations for Trajan's solution to the re-awakened feud: conquest and annexation. Despite his military successes, Trajan could not stabilize the situation: Hadrian felt compelled to withdraw. The violence continued on this frontier even long after the Parthians had been replaced by the Persians in the third century.

The virtue of Augustus' policy was that it attempted no absolute remedies, but instead, through constant effort, intervention and re-adjustment, Roman predominance was maintained west of the Euphrates, the Parthians were kept off balance, and Augustus avoided a strenuous eastern war which the young empire could ill-afford.

Roman-Parthian Relations in the time of Augustus

with reference to

Augustus' Foreign Policy

**A thesis
submitted for the Degree
of Master of Arts
at the University of Durham**

by

James Lander

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from it should be acknowledged.

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I am also grateful to Professor G.B. Townend, head of the Department of Classics, and Edna Jenkinson, senior lecturer in that department, for their warm interest in my progress, and for their kindness, which was an encouragement needed and appreciated.

For reading this work through and catching my typing errors, I have Bruce Robinson to thank.

It may be inappropriate to dedicate such a work, written for a degree; but the 'thing' is tinged by my personality, which, in turn, has been coloured by the personalities of others, to whom I would like to make this dedication: to my parents, who have had a knowledge to give beside which all other knowledge pales; and to Harry Blagg and Alan MacLachlan, mis amigos.

Durham,

June, 1975

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Abbreviations

- CAH Cambridge Ancient History. 12 vol. Cambridge, 1923-39.
- CIL Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum. Berlin, 1863-.
- ILS H. Dessau. Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae. 3 vols in 5 parts. Berlin, 1892-1916.
- JRS Journal of Roman Studies, 1911-.
- Magle, RRIAM D. Magle. Roman Rule in Asia Minor. Princeton, 1950.
- OCD Oxford Classical Dictionary. Ed. N.G.L. Hammond and H.H. Scullard. 2nd ed. Oxford, 1970.
- PIR Prosopographia Imperii Romani. Ed. E. Klebs, H. Dessau, and P. de Rohden. 1st ed. 3 parts. Berlin, 1897-8.
- P-W A. Pauly, G. Wissowa, and W. Kroll. Real-Encyclopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft. Stuttgart, 1893-.
- Syme, RR R. Syme. The Roman Revolution. Oxford, 1939.

Introduction

The Topic, the Approach and Questions, and the Problem of Augustus

We study Roman history by starting with the City and expanding as the empire expanded. The centre of all motivation and action is Rome; the results radiate to regions whose own events are like ripples spread out across the splashed pool. Parthia was on the periphery of the Roman world and is on the periphery of Roman history.

Parthia itself was an empire for over four centuries, and for over three centuries was in contact with the Romans. One period of this contact is relatively well-documented because it coincides with one of the greatest epochs in ancient history--the reign of Augustus.

It was a transitional period for the ancient world. Augustus' rule is engrossing and important for the traditions followed or discarded and the precedents established. His policy toward Parthia borrows much of its fascination from the continuing themes of the East confronting the West, the barbarian facing the civilized world, the need to consolidate and fortify an empire--and the desire to expand.

Therefore I would like to examine Augustus' policy toward Parthia with the intent of understanding not only

the details, but also the broader lines. This will not be a simple study of events, for two reasons. First, no policy--reflecting desires and intended goals--can be studied outside its historical context. So my thesis will begin with a look at relevant events of Parthian and Roman history, and a discussion of Roman imperialism up to the time of Augustus. Secondly, I discovered early in my research that the foreign policy of a great power cannot be understood by studying only one of its facets, and the individual parts have little meaning away from the whole.¹ But, in trying to characterize the overall foreign policy of Augustus, one immediately finds a traditional view which is undergoing needed overhaul, and a new, 'heretical'² theory which has not yet been fully developed on an absolutely sound basis. So, more preliminary work is called for.

At the very beginning of his Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Edward Gibbon declared:

'It was reserved for Augustus to relinquish the ambitious design of subduing the whole earth, and to introduce a spirit of moderation into the public councils. Inclined to peace by his temper and situation, it was easy for him to discover that Rome, in her present exalted situation, had much less to hope than to fear from the chance of arms; and that, in the prosecution of remote wars, the undertaking

¹On this, see the interesting criticism by Mark Hassall in his review of C.M. Wells, The German Policy of Augustus (Oxford, 1972): JRS 64, 1974, p. 257.

²As the author, P.A. Brunt, himself describes it: P.A. Brunt and J.M. Moore, Res Gestae Divi Augusti (Oxford, 1967), p. 69.

became every day more difficult, the event more doubtful, and the possession more precarious and less beneficial.'³

This passage is followed in the same paragraph by an example which Gibbon apparently felt would suffice to illustrate the truth of his characterization of Augustus' foreign policy.

'The experience of Augustus added weight to these salutary reflections, and effectually convinced him that, by the prudent vigour of his counsels, it would be easy to secure every concession which the safety or the dignity of Rome might require from the most formidable barbarian. Instead of exposing his person and his legions to the arrows of the Parthians, he obtained by an honourable treaty, the restitution of the standards and prisoners which had been taken in the defeat of Crassus.'⁴

Here Gibbon adds, in one of his deadlier footnotes, that among the pieces of information which 'Roman vanity has left upon the subject,' there is Augustus' own assertion that 'he compelled' (and Gibbon italicizes these two words) the Parthians to restore the standards of Crassus.⁵

I have quoted Gibbon at such length because of the influence he has had on subsequent writers. As if these words were chiselled in stone, later historians have seemed almost universally inclined not only to agree, but to obey. One very good reason for this is that

³Edward Gibbon, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, ed. J.B. Bury (London, 1869), I, pp. 1-2.

⁴Ibid., p. 2.

⁵He is quoting from Res Gestae 29.

Gibbon's statements do not lack support from some of our favourite ancient authorities. Tacitus relates how Augustus, in a document of instructions to his successors, urged that the empire not be extended beyond its present frontiers.⁶ Suetonius asserts that Augustus preferred calm relations abroad peacefully negotiated, disdaining all wars merely to increase the empire or for military glory.⁷ Dio reports that as early as 27 B.C. Augustus advised the senate not to seek what was not theirs, and that he later praised Tiberius for refusing to subdue additional territory when to do so would have risked what Rome already possessed.⁸

Of course, these remarks are out of context, and, of the authors, none was a contemporary of Augustus; even the earliest, Tacitus, was writing over half a century after Augustus' death, and in an empire much changed. Among writers contemporary to Augustus, a different tone is often found. Velleius Paterculus was awestruck at the thought of recording all the wars waged under Augustus' command, and the pacification of the world through his victories ('pacatusque victoriis terrarum orbis').⁹ Vitruvius marks Actium as the point when Caesar gained the empire of the whole world.¹⁰

⁶Tac. Ann. 1, 11.

⁷Suet. Aug. 21-22.

⁸Dio 53, 10; and 56, 41.

⁹Vell. Pater. 2, 89, 6.

¹⁰Vitruvius, De architectura 1, 1; written presumably before 27 B.C.: Octavian is not yet called Augustus, but Caesar.

Nicolaus of Damascus declares that Augustus ruled over the greatest number of people within the memory of men and established the furthest boundaries for the Roman empire; and then Nicolaus adds, revealingly, that Augustus did all this at first with arms but afterward even without arms.¹¹ That Augustus was 'inclined to peace by his temper,' as Gibbon would have it, is not supported by the tone of the Res Gestae, nor by the coinage issued in Augustus' name. The Augustan poets speak of Peace, but by then it may have become an official cult.¹² In any case, the Roman notion of peace is not opposed to the notion of conquest, as we have just seen from the statement of Velleius Paterculus.¹³

Despite these disturbing factors, Gibbon's view of Augustus has become the tradition, and has never lacked defenders.¹⁴ But P.A. Brunt has taken these factors, added a controversial view of the propaganda aspects of Augustan poetry and also a stimulating hypothesis about Augustus' knowledge of the world's geography, and has ended up with the startling theory that Augustus was thoroughly intent on conquering the entire world,

¹¹Nic. Dam. 1.

¹²Sefan Weinstock, 'Pax and the "Ara Pacis",' JRS 50, 1960, p. 47.

¹³Note 9; Weinstock, p. 45; Ronald Syme, The Roman Revolution (Oxford, 1939), p. 304; C.H.V. Sutherland, Coinage in Roman Imperial Policy 31 B.C.-A.D. 68 (London, 1951), p. 29: pax and victoria had 'become strictly complementary terms.'

¹⁴The most recent and competent re-statement of the traditional view is by Hans D. Meyer, Die Aussenpolitik des Augustus und die augusteische Dichtung (Cologne, 1961).

literally,¹⁵ Brunt thus destroys Gibbon's picture and then replaces it with its exact opposite; naturally, the perspective on Augustus' policy with Parthia is drastically altered. Augustus sought settlement, not out of a desire for peace, or even out of fear, but for expediency--a temporary measure until more urgent conquests were completed first.¹⁶

Where the truth lies between these two views I will seek to determine through a critical examination of Brunt's theories, which, being well organized and argued, provide a sound format for discussing Augustus' overall foreign policy. Only then can we approach the basic questions: how did Augustus perceive Rome's position vis-à-vis the Parthian empire? What goals did he have? To what extent were long-term goals sacrificed for short-term gains? How did Augustus' policy alter throughout his reign? How far (and by what criteria) did he succeed? And how enduring was that success?

It should be no surprise if Augustus' policy reflects his personality, which has remained an enigma. Few fail to realize some aptness in Augustus' choice of a personal signet, the sphinx.¹⁷

He has been awarded so many extreme and even contradictory attributes that he seems hardly human, or perhaps superhuman. Augustus was a most ambitious man;

¹⁵P.A. Brunt, a review of Meyer (note 14), JRS 53, 1963, pp. 170-6.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 175.

¹⁷Suet. Aug. 50.

yet he could be so moderate that he left his opponents no place to stand. He commanded the largest armies seen by the ancient world and brought the greatest increases to the empire; and yet he was rightfully called the bringer of peace by nations (including Italy itself) which had previously known only Rome's violent hand. He was the revolutionary, and the restorer; the creator, but also the product of his times; a modern, and yet the traditional Roman. These contrasts are explained by the fact that Augustus was a pragmatic politician and administrator whose vision was rarely blurred by selfish vanity, who perceived the difference between Imago and res, who foresaw more mistakes than he made, and who could change course without changing direction.

Augustus as an ideal--the lover of peace or the world-conqueror--is difficult to reconcile with the evidence. The answer to the riddle of Augustus may resemble the answer to the riddle of the sphinx--he was a man. If we make him a myth, any conclusions we reach about his policy will flit, whether or not they resemble the truth.

When general histories of Rome refer to Augustus' policy with Parthia, the event most often mentioned is the return of the captured standards of Crassus in 20 B.C. Attached are inferences that Augustus scrupulously avoided war and employed instead diplomacy, which was completely successful. The traditional view of Augustus' policy is supposedly justified by the 'restitution' of 20 B.C. But on a closer look questions arise. How important was it to have the standards returned? Why

20 B.C. and not a decade earlier, immediately after Actium? What was Augustus' policy in those years? How much of a 'success' were the diplomatic efforts from which the 'restitution' resulted? And what happened after 20 B.C.?

When the evidence has been examined and these questions answered, I believe the impression given by the general histories will be shattered: the return of the standards was only a small part of Augustus' policy toward Parthia. There was a long-term policy, though the methods of its application varied. It was a continuous effort, begun even before Actium and lasting beyond Augustus' death. There were no easy successes, and some determined attempts simply failed. The Parthians surrendered nothing voluntarily: but Augustus was not timid about the use of pressure, even when it risked war on various occasions.

It was a policy of opportunism, pursued by a gambler who entrusted as little as possible to fate, preferring instead to calculate the risks finely, and succeeding. Errors and setbacks would occur, but they could be minimized through foresight and dissimulation. And the smallest success could be magnified into greatness.

This is not the policy of a visionary. Gibbon's traditional and Brunt's heretical views of Augustus' policy are idealizations, which, I hope to prove, misrepresent the true policy of Augustus as it can be pieced together in a careful study of the evidence.

Chapter One

Parthia

'Greater Iran' is probably the most comprehensive name for the land mass between Mesopotamia and India and between the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf: Parthia and Persia, or Persis, can refer as easily to a particular satrapy as to the general empire. The centre of this area is the Iranian plateau, made up largely of two vast salt deserts. There are mountains on the perimeter: the Zagros to the west, the Elburz to the north, the mountains of the Caucasus in the far northwest, and the Hindu Kush in the east. The rainfall on the plateau is not great; the fertile soil is all to the west of it, along the great rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates. The settled agricultural civilisations began here in Mesopotamia, and, from the earliest times, they were threatened by various nomadic peoples who were attracted by the surplus of food. Such peoples had various points of origin and different destinations: in search of, or fleeing to, a better land. Those migrating from east of the Caspian Sea were forced on reaching the salt deserts to turn either west into Iran or south and east into India. The route through Iran, defined by the desert, the Elburz and the Zagros, led naturally northwest to fertile Atropatene and to

Armenia. This track is part of what was later known as the Silk trade route.¹

As early as the sixth century B.C., much of Greater Iran was under a unified control, that of Cyrus the Great. In the northeast was a region called Parthava. Its Iranian inhabitants are referred to in early Greek sources as Parthians, but they are not the same people as those we are studying.² Our Parthians do not make their appearance until after the death of Alexander.

The Seleucid empire was generally more occupied with the west and neglected the east. In the middle of the third century B.C. the eastern satraps of the king were able, through the weakness of Seleucid power, to assert their own independent rule. In 245 B.C. the satrap of Parthia, Andragoras, revolted while civil wars were raging in the west. About 239 B.C. the satrap of Bactria, Diodotus, followed Andragoras' example. When the reigning monarch, Seleucus II, was defeated by Celtic invaders in Asia Minor about 238 B.C., the way was open for the ejection of Andragoras and the occupation of Parthia by a semi-nomadic tribe, the Parthi.³

¹M. Colledge, The Parthians (London, 1968), pp. 15-6.

²N. Debevoise, The Political History of Parthia (Chicago, 1938), p. 2.

³Justin 41, 4-5; R. Ghirshman, Iran from the Ancient Times to the Islamic Conquest (Harmondsworth, 1954), p. 243; R. Frye, The Heritage of Persia (London, 1962), pp. 172-3; and Debevoise, pp. 7-11.

The Parni, said to be one of three tribes in the Dahae confederation,⁴ had apparently migrated into the satrapies of Parthia and Bactria after the death of Alexander, following disturbances in their homeland region east of the Caspian.⁵

They were led by Arsaces, who, after successfully establishing his tribe in Parthia, then attacked and annexed Hyrcania, Parthia's neighbour to the northwest. Arsaces died in subsequent fighting, however, and his brother Tiridates took control; and the name 'Arsaces' (which thus became a title comparable to 'Caesar'). The nascent Parthian state was spared the immediate attention of Seleucus II, still occupied with the west, and an alliance was arranged with the Greco-Bactrians. So Tiridates had time to prepare his kingdom and his army before Seleucus attacked in 228 B.C.⁶ Henceforth the Parni are referred to as Parthians.

Whether by necessity or strategy, Tiridates retreated to his native steppe in the face of Seleucus' attack.⁷ But Seleucus soon had to return west to deal with rebellion there. Tiridates could claim a victory of sorts, and he set about increasing his army, building forts, strengthening and establishing cities⁸ (for the

⁴Strabo 11, 9, 2; and Justin 41, 1.

⁵Colledge, p. 25.

⁶Ibid., pp. 25-7; and Justin 41, 4, 8.

⁷Colledge, p. 27 and Debevoise, pp. 12-3 refer to it as a forced retreat; Ghirshman, p. 244, calls it 'tactical.'

⁸Justin 41, 5, 1-4.

Parthians were nomads no longer), until his death in 211 B.C. ended a reign of thirty-seven years.⁹

Antiochus III perhaps saw Tiridates' death as the perfect opportunity for his own eastward sweep. The new Parthian king, Artabanus I, retreated while his horsemen were sent out to destroy the water holes and canals on which Antiochus' army would depend. But Seleucid cavalry pushed ahead and drove off the Parthian horsemen. Antiochus defeated the Parthians in a pitched battle and forced Artabanus into some condition of vassalage.¹⁰

Artabanus died in 191 B.C. and was succeeded by Priapattus, whose fifteen-year reign was made easier by the defeat Antiochus suffered at the hands of the Romans in 189 B.C. The Seleucid empire was disintegrating; Media Atropatene, Elymais, Persis, Characene,¹¹ and the two kingdoms of Armenia¹² all broke away. Priapattus' successor and eldest son, Phraates I, made war on the Mardians, people of the Elburz mountains, and he thus brought the Caspian Gates under Parthian control.¹³ About 171 B.C. Phraates died, leaving the throne not to one of his eligible sons, but to his much-valued brother, Mithradates.¹⁴

⁹Debevoise, p. 16.

¹⁰Justin 41, 5, 7.

¹¹Ghirshman, p. 245.

¹²Colledge, p. 28.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Justin 41, 5, 9-10.

Between 160 and 140 B.C. the conquests of Mithradates I extended Parthian control from India to the Tigris. Then, briefly, while Mithradates was in the east fighting off a Bactrian invasion, the Seleucid king, Demetrius Nicator, struck back and won several victories. Contingents from Bactria, Elymals, and Persis joined the Seleucid force. But eventually Demetrius was defeated and captured, and those principalities which had aided him were punished.¹⁵

When Mithradates I died, about 138 B.C., he left to his son and successor, Phraates II, a Parthia no longer obscure, but now an empire. However, by 130 B.C., Parthia was again struggling against Seleucid forces, now led by Antiochus VII Sidetes. Once more supported by local monarchs who had only recently become Parthian tributaries, Antiochus won three victories which gained him even more support. However, billeting his troops for the winter in native towns around Ecbatana cost him in good-will, and Phraates was able to incite the population against the scattered garrisons of the Seleucid army. Antiochus himself was killed in an engagement with the Parthians: thus ending the last conflict between Parthians and Seleucids.¹⁶ As a ruling power, Hellenism no longer reached officially beyond the Tigris.

To look for a moment at what the Parthians had done, it must be understood that they were truly alien to the

¹⁵Justin 36, 1, 2-6.

¹⁶Ibid., 38, 10, 6f.

old Persian, settled Iran which, since Alexander, had been controlled and superficially touched by Hellenistic power. The various kingdoms of Iran had only just become independent of the decaying Seleucid empire. when the Parthians charged in; they were not viewed as liberators. Whenever the opportunity arose, these kingdoms would turn against the Parthians, whether in aid of their old Seleucid masters, or in alliance with Rome. The cultural gulf was too wide. For loyal help, the Parthians always had to return to the steppes east of the Caspian.¹⁷

The nomadic background of the Parthians constantly revealed itself in Parthian institutions. Monarchical succession was influenced by the traditions of the nomadic clan and tribal organisation. The head family were the Arsacidae, the descendants of the first Arsaces. Any male of this family, from any branch of it, provided he was physically unblemished, was a possible candidate for the monarchy; brother-succession was very common. This system left a great deal of room for dispute as to which of the qualified individuals would actually be made king.¹⁸ This weakness of the central monarchy was matched by another: the lack of a royal military force. The kings were dependent on the heads of the great clans for the provision of an army; this will be discussed

¹⁷Ghirshman, pp. 246 and 262-3. The most notable examples of Parthians finding succour among the steppe-people are Phraates IV about 31 B.C. (see p. 74) and Artabanus III about A.D. 36 (see p.173). The Hyrcanians were much involved in the civil war of A.D. 35-42 (see pp.176-7).

¹⁸Collidge, p. 60.

later in more detail.¹⁹ These two factors, the ambiguous succession and the decentralized army, created weakness at the best of times, and, at the worst, civil war.

'Feudal' systems--decentralized social, political and military administrative systems--were not new to Iran. The Achaemenids before and the Sassanians later had such systems. But they were sedentary, based on agriculture, and the Seleucids had introduced a large element of urbanization. The conflict, or fusion, of nomadic Parthian traditions with sedentary Iranian and urbanized Seleucid institutions is vital in Parthian history.²⁰

The Parthians inherited the Seleucid conglomeration of Iranian vassal-kingdoms and principalities, the administrative divisions of satrapies, eparchies and hyparchies, and the Greek cities. The Seleucids had finally failed in their attempt to enforce obedience from their Iranian vassals, and the Parthians made little improvement on Seleucid methods. The connexion was loose: the Parthians were content to receive acknowledgement of their suzerainty and to exact tribute; the vassals took every opportunity to revolt. The old Achaemenid satrapies, taken over and sub-divided by the Seleucids, had evolved into inherited estates little different from vassal kingdoms. The Parthians treated them as such.²¹ Many

¹⁹ See p. 18f.

²⁰ Colledge, p. 64; and Frye, p. 182.

²¹ Ghirshman, p. 263.

satrapies were administered by heads of the great Parthian families, and a few of the larger vassal kingdoms were at various times ruled by members of the Arsacid family.²²

The Parthians favoured the Greek cities with autonomy. When Mithradates I reached Seleucia on the Tigris (about 141 B.C.), he did not garrison the town, and to show his good-will he struck coins bearing, with his own hellenized image, the title 'Philhellene.'²³

Mithradates' great conquests naturally bolstered the prestige and influence of the monarch. Vestiges of Seleucid governmental structure may have helped the monarch to obtain a more dominating position in the Parthian hierarchy. But this was inconsistent with nomadic traditions, and since the ever-present strength of the nobility and the volatile nature of the royal succession were against this, the trend continued to be toward decentralisation.²⁴

After Phraates II had ended the Parthian struggle with the Seleucids (about 130 B.C.), Syria was left unprotected. Phraates did not attack it, perhaps because Parthia was herself under attack in the east. The Sacae invaders were near relations, yet the Parthians fought them as they would fight them for centuries to come, thus

²²Ghirshman, p. 263; and Colledge, p. 60.

²³Frye, p. 183; Colledge, p. 58; Ghirshman, p. 246; and W. Wroth, Catalogue of the Coins of Parthia (London, 1903), pp. xxvi and 12.

²⁴Frye, p. 182; and Colledge, pp. 59-60 and 75-6.

protecting Western Asia.²⁵ It was a huge struggle. The Greco-Bactrian kingdom disappeared about 120-100 B.C. The Parthians suffered heavily, losing Phraates II in a massacre in 128 B.C. and four years later his successor and uncle, Artabanus II.²⁶ Meanwhile much of Babylonia was lost to the Persian Gulf kingdom of Characene, or Mesene.²⁷ So Parthia was in a greatly weakened state when Mithradates II, son of Artabanus II, ascended the throne in 123 B.C.

Known as the second founder of Parthia, Mithradates defeated first the Characenean king, Hyspaosines, and regained possession of Babylonia.²⁸ Next he won back a number of provinces in the east,²⁹ and by 113 B.C. had shifted to the west to overrun Mesopotamia and enter Dura-Europus.³⁰

To achieve these victories, Mithradates II apparently re-organized the Parthian military. The original Parni nomads depended on numerous horse-archers supporting mail-clad knights who fought at close quarters. However, the first Mithradates owed much of his success against the Seleucids to the fact that he adopted many Seleucid tactics, and employed mercenaries so that he would have an adequate number of light- and heavy-armed cavalry.

²⁵Ghirshman, p. 149.

²⁶Justin 42, 1-2.

²⁷Debevoise, p. 38-9; and Colledge, p. 32.

²⁸Debevoise, p. 40 cites coin evidence.

²⁹Justin 42, 2, 4-5.

³⁰Colledge, p. 32.

But in the fighting with the Sacae, these tactics fared poorly, and the mercenaries caused trouble for Phraates II. A revolution in Parthian arms along traditional Iranian lines now took place, probably in the time of Mithradates II. Infantry was maintained for fighting in difficult territory and to act as garrisons, but the main arm of the Parthian military was now cavalry. The heavy cavalrymen, the cataphracti, were armoured in mail from head to foot except at the inside of the legs, for, having no stirrups, they could stay mounted only by gripping with their knees. The lighter cavalry, the horse-archers, could hit-and-run, with the 'Parthian shot' fired over the back of the horse--and thus avoid enemy charges. They used the composite bow, made up of layers of horn and wood, the standard weapon of the East, which underwent no changes between 700 B.C. and A.D. 700. No bow had a greater range, and at short distances the penetrating power was great. The horse-archers were deadly until they ran out of arrows.³¹

However formidable such an army sounds, the fact was that, especially after the wars of expansion ended about 100 B.C., there was no standing Parthian army, except for the king's personal bodyguard.³² The real

³¹ Colledge, pp. 65-6; *Amm. Marc.* 22, 8, 37; W. MacLeod, 'The Range of the Ancient Bow,' *Phoenix* 19, 1965, pp. 1-14; P. Medinger, 'L'Arc turquois et les Arches parthes à la Bataille de Carrhes,' *Rev. Arch.*, 1933, pp. 227-34; M. Rostovtzeff, 'The Parthian Shot,' *AJA* 47, 1943, pp. 174-87.

³² For the size of the Parthian king's bodyguard, we have no direct information or good comparison: the Achaemenids' 10,000 man elite--the 'Immortals'--were a genuine standing army (Herodotus 7, 83).

forces were inextricably bound to the feudal system of the Parthian empire. When war was declared, the king had to call on his vassals and the heads of the major clans, who in turn called on their vassals, the great land-owners, and their dependents. The upper echelons of society (who could afford horse and armour) were represented by the heavy-armed cavalry, the lower echelons supplied horse-archers and infantry. Essentially there was not one army, but several: by itself, the army of the Suren family defeated Crassus. It was difficult for the king or his commander to keep such a force together. With the coming of winter, or a long siege, the Parthian army would generally disintegrate. Social rivalries caused unwarranted changes in tactics.³³

The unification of Greater Iran under Mithradates II was a catalyst to the overland trade. The Parthians were not producers, but middlemen in the lucrative luxury trade between the Mediterranean world and Asia. The trade and trade routes were ancient, but commerce benefited from the fact that the Parthians now uniformly controlled such a large section of it. Firm ties were established with the Chinese.³⁴ The duties, taxes and tariffs filled the Parthian coffers and helped pay for Mithradates' victories.³⁵

For his achievements, Mithradates earned the title

³³ Colledge, pp. 65-6; and Tarn, CAH, IX, pp. 606-11.

³⁴ See F. Hirth, China and the Roman Orient (Leipzig, 1885), pp. 27ff.

³⁵ Colledge, pp. 77-9; and Debevoise, pp. 42-3.

'the Great.' But he also initiated the use of the Achaemenid title 'King of Kings.' This was part of a concerted effort to connect the Arsacid dynasty with the Achaemenids.³⁶ Partly this was meant to legitimize the rule of the Parthians over the whole of Iran and much of Mesopotamia. But also the title 'King of Kings' described the compromised status to which even the greatest conqueror had to be resigned: he could not hope to be the sole governing king, but must be content to be the first among many. With power so decentralized, the risk of rebellion was great. During the reign of Mithradates II there was in Babylonia an important satrap named Gotarzes, known, in fact, as 'Satrap of Satraps,' who rebelliously established himself as an independent ruler. He remained uncrushed even until Mithradates died in 87 B.C., when Gotarzes assumed the title 'Arsaces,'³⁷ Such was Parthia's instability at the height of her power.

So, it is evident that much of Parthia's character and her position in Western Asia were determined by her nomadic origins. A governmental organisation which functioned in the steppes proved internally unstable and weak when applied to a large land mass and its settled, heterogeneous population. Moreover, the Parthians were aliens in their own empire, and could never fully depend on their vassals' loyalty.

Perhaps, if circumstances had permitted, the Parthians would have settled down and been assimilated.

³⁶ Colledge, p. 33.

³⁷ Debevoise, pp. 48-52.

They were not totally uncivilized. They built towns and a succession of capitals.³⁸ Their architecture, like their pictorial art, was innovative, further developing Iranian motifs and not simply begging from the Greeks. The Parthians laid the groundwork for styles which would flourish under the Sassanians.³⁹ The Parthians were benevolent toward the Greeks and their culture, and most Parthian kings could speak Greek. But mainly the Parthians remained on the outside looking in: there was no urgency in their attitude for or against Hellenism. Iran benefited: oriental traditions were kept alive and the Sassanian 'revival' was made possible.⁴⁰

However, if the Parthians quickly changed their ways, assimilated and settled down completely, they risked being swept away by some hardier breed from the wastes of Asia. The pressure from the east was a constant factor in Parthian life; it stifled the civilizing and softening effects of the west. Parthian manners remained rough, and no Parthian raised in the West and then returning to his countrymen was likely to survive the transition, or be allowed to.⁴¹

The subject of Parthian expansionism must be viewed amid historic and changing circumstances. The power vacuum created by the Seleucid decay left the various

³⁸ Colledge, p. 67.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 115-62; and M. Rostovtzeff, 'Dura and the Problem of Parthian Art,' Yale Classical Studies 5, 1935, pp. 294-6.

⁴⁰ Ghirshman, pp. 267-8.

⁴¹ See pp. 161, 171-3, and 176.

independent kingdoms and principalities of Iran altogether vulnerable to whatever dominant power should come along. If it had not been Parthia, it might have been Persis, in a revival, or Bactria, or some horde from the east, which, though modified, is what the Parni were. Once Parthia had opted not to be dominated, there was no hope of co-existence with the Seleucids. Ultimate victory or defeat would determine survival. After so much struggling, and after all of Iran had been brought under Parthian rule, would the Parthians stop, or would expansion continue?

Mithradates II desired to connect the Arsacids with the Achaemenids. Perhaps he also desired to make his empire as vast as that of Darius. On the other hand, having dealt with eastern invaders and disloyal vassals, Mithradates may have decided that Parthia had enough to handle already. One might read into the re-organisation of Parthian arms and tactics an emphasis not on offence, but on the defence of Parthia, especially against the east, where no expansion would have been contemplated. Expansion into Syria would have brought little agricultural benefit, and by the time Syria's commercial value in the transit trade was fully appreciated, Syria was no longer to be easily taken.

Parthia was not lacking in external contacts. Early in the first century B.C., commercial and diplomatic ties were being formed with China. Silk, iron, apricots and peaches were being imported from China, while Syrian textiles, Arabian camels, Babylonian ostriches and Nesaeen chargers--'heavenly horses,' as the Chinese called them--

were sent eastwards across Parthia. Coins of Mithradates II found their way to Turkestan.⁴² And it was during this king's reign that Parthia made her first formal contact with Rome (92 B.C.).

⁴²See the notes by Tarn on page 598 of CAH, IX; and Hirth, *passim*.

Chapter Two

Roman Imperialism and Contacts with Parthia: 92-44 B.C.

In 92 B.C. the Roman general, Sulla, received a Parthian embassy on the banks of the Euphrates. At one point Sulla ceremonially sat between the Parthian envoy and the newly installed king of Cappadocia, Ariobarzanes-- one of Sulla's clientes. The meaning behind the seating arrangement was not lost on the Parthian king, Mithradates II. The Parthian envoy, on his return to the royal court, was reportedly executed.¹

This was the first formal contact between Parthians and Romans. Their meeting place, the Euphrates valley, was also to become their border, their prize and their battleground. First it must be asked what the Romans were doing so far from Rome.

The expansion of the Roman empire is never an uncontroversial subject, but certain tendencies and traditions must here be explained, however simplified, and a review must be made of the events of Roman involvement in the East up to the time of Caesar.

Economic determinism, which pervades modern conceptions of imperialism, is based largely on the functions of economic structures which simply did not exist on any

¹Plutarch, Sulla 5.

comparable scale in the ancient world. It is more important to understand the social and political power structures of the different states--in the case of Rome, its oligarchy.

Prowess in war was not only a virtue among Roman senators, it was also a necessity for the survival of the state. According to Badian (on whose view of Roman imperialism I am most dependent), the early struggles of Rome, hard but triumphant, inculcated two principles which remained prominent throughout most of the history of Roman expansion.² The first was a kind of paranoia, reflected in an inability to accept even a balance of powers--the traditional international formula for the Hellenistic East. The Hellenistic states had been too evenly matched for one to destroy the others, but Rome was able to break the pattern.³ A second principle grew out of the realization that the Roman oligarchic city-state could not adequately govern an empire: this was the principle of non-annexation,⁴ the desire for the profits and power of empire, but not the expense and risk of direct rule. If any other means could be found to avoid annexation of a defeated country, short of allowing the danger to be renewed, the senate embraced it. But, in the chaos of the Hellenistic world especially, this was often impossible. Old fears and over-confident kings

²E. Badian, Roman Imperialism in the Late Republic (Oxford, 1968), pp. 4ff.

³Ibid., p. 5.

⁴Ibid., pp. 2-5.

brought Rome step by step into a position of dominance in the East. Macedonia, like Carthage, was only annexed after other settlements proved unworkable. A country which had to be defeated more than once was annexed almost automatically: this became something of a mos maiorum. Pergamum was especially noted for making the most of Rome's paranoia.⁵

Aside from a policy of non-annexation, however, Rome certainly cannot be considered anti-imperialist. The basic patron-client relationship of Roman society made itself felt in Rome's foreign policy. 'The obedience of the weak to the strong was, to the Roman aristocrat, nothing less than an eternal moral law.'⁶ This, combined with the dread of being ruled and the dread of directly ruling, created a policy of continual intervention without the acceptance of administrative responsibility. This is 'hegemonial' imperialism.⁷

Changes occurred, however, during that development called the Gracchan revolution. By financing land distribution from the bequest of Pergamum, Tiberius Gracchus brought the material benefits of empire to wider classes of Romans. The empire now financed the Gracchan reforms; Italian equites began flooding into the East; and, later, conquered land would provide colonies for the veterans

⁵W.W. Tarn, Hellenistic Civilisation (London, 1952), pp. 29ff.

⁶Badian, p. 15.

⁷Ibid., p. 4, acknowledging M. Rostovtzeff, Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World (Oxford, 1941), I, p. 70.

of the new legions. It was the new province of Asia which began all this, changing the attitudes of Romans toward their own empire.⁸ It was profitable--and even vital, to judge by Cicero's statement that the slightest threat to Asia caused a collapse of credit in Rome.⁹ Yet even this did not greatly damage the tradition of non-annexation, for the Roman ruling classes found it simple enough to 'intervene' politically and economically in other areas without the need of annexation.¹⁰ The Romans certainly made their presence felt, and were not loved: when the Pontic king Mithradates called for the slaughter of Romans in the East, 80,000 Italians died in one day.¹¹ Mithradates was eventually crushed, and more Italians flooded eastward.¹²

By now, however, a new development had occurred. Sulla's military coup made a political impact on Rome which even Sulla could not control.¹³ The road to power was laid bare, and it ran through and beyond the foreign territory controlled by Rome. A training ground for troops, a source of clientes and a mine of wealth in the form of booty, tribute, bribes and taxes--the extremities

⁸Badian, p. 48.

⁹Cicero, imp. Cn. Pomp. 18f.

¹⁰Badian, p. 54.

¹¹Memnon, fr. 22 (Fragmenta historicorum Graecorum, ed. C. Müller (Paris, 1848-74), III, 434).

¹²Badian, p. 67.

¹³Syme, RR, p. 17: 'Sulla could not abolish his own example and preclude a successor to his domination.'

of the empire, the East especially, offered all these.

The opportunities for eastern conquests seemed vast. Long ago, at Magnesia and Apamea, Rome had dispensed with the dread of an equal and threatening power; and Mithradates of Pontus was a threat to Roman interests, but not to Rome herself. As far as the Romans knew, there were no equals left, only victims. But Rome had, as yet, made only the slightest contact with the Parthian empire.

* * * * *

In protecting the province of Asia, the Roman senate had to keep careful watch on the growing power of Mithradates of Pontus. In 96 B.C. Marius met Mithradates in Cappadocia and delivered a stinging warning: be stronger than Rome, or submit to her commands.¹⁴ Mithradates decided that words were cheap, and, with the help of Nicomedes of Bithynia, he occupied Paphlagonia, Galatia and Cappadocia. But just as suddenly, the alliance broke down, and Mithradates was forced to obey a stern order from the senate to withdraw. Forming a new alliance, this time with Tigranes of Armenia, Mithradates again invaded Cappadocia, expelling Ariobarzanes and installing the puppet, Gordius. The senate finally had to act. The task of restoring Ariobarzanes was assigned to the propraetor of Cilicia, for 92 B.C., L. Cornelius Sulla. Sulla apparently was more or less on his own, and employed the forces of Roman allies to accomplish his assignment.¹⁵

¹⁴Plut. Marius 31.

¹⁵Plut. Sulla 5.

It was at this time that the noted first encounter with the Parthians took place.

Parthia's position was strong. The present king of Armenia, Tigranes, had at one time been a hostage of the Parthians, and was only released at the cost of 'seventy valleys' of Atropatene.¹⁶ Tigranes remained a friend and ally of the Parthian king, Mithradates II, while also forming an alliance with Mithradates of Pontus. The general interplay of these three eastern powers did not preclude for Parthia fears concerning the growing power of Pontus--fears shared by Rome. Parthia had no desire to ally in any way against Rome, and the request made by the Parthian envoy who met Sulla was for 'friendship and alliance' with Rome,¹⁷ and perhaps for an alliance both offensive and defensive.¹⁸ Sulla, on his own authority yet totally consistent with Roman foreign policy, chose to interpret 'friendship' in the Roman way. To ask Rome's friendship was to submit to clientship.

Though they had filled a portion of the vacuum left by the decay of the Seleucid empire, the Parthians were not at this time a dominating force in the East, as was Mithradates of Pontus. However, there was no reason yet clear why the Parthians should have to scrape before the Romans. Sulla's arrogance (and ignorance) caused Mithradates of Parthia to form an alliance with Mithradates

¹⁶Strabo 11, 14, 15.

¹⁷Plut. Sulla 5.

¹⁸Debevoise, p. 46.

of Pontus,¹⁹ and perhaps a marriage tie with Armenia.²⁰

Twenty years passed before the Parthians again had direct contacts with Rome. In the meantime Rome continued its policy of opposition to any 'aggression' by Mithradates of Pontus. He was driven out of Greece by Sulla, who enriched himself and his loyal troops in the process. Bithynia was backed in a war against Mithradates. When Nicomedes, the king of Bithynia, died, the country was annexed by Rome, but invaded by Mithradates. The senate sent out L. Lucullus and Aurelius Cotta, the consuls of 74 B.C., to correct the situation.

Meanwhile, Parthia was having difficulties. The Armentian king, Tigranes, had been a friend and ally of the Parthian king, Mithradates II; but when the latter died, Tigranes proceeded against the new king, Gotarzes, taking back the 'seventy valleys' as well as a great deal of Parthia's north and west vassal regions.

Lucullus won victory after victory against the kingdoms of Pontus and Armenia.²¹ In the winter of 72/71, Mithradates of Pontus appealed to the reigning king of

¹⁹ Appian, Mith. 15.

²⁰ This depends on the dating of Avroman Parchment I: the present information results from dating according to E.H. Minns, 'Parchments of the Parthian Period from Avroman in Kurdistan,' JHS 35, 1915, pp. 22-65. But a different dating is argued by M. Rostovtzeff and C.B. Welles, 'A Parchment Contract of Loan from Dura-Europus on the Euphrates,' Yale Classical Studies 2, 1931, pp. 1-78. The problem involves correlations of Seleucid and Parthian methods of dating documents and coins, and I feel unqualified to judge. But Tarn, CAH, IX, p. 586, n. 2, wishes to retain Minns' dating until further evidence comes to light, and Debevoise, p. 47, n. 70, accepts Minns.

²¹ David Magie, Roman Rule in Asia Minor (Princeton, 1950), pp. 323-46.

Parthia, Sinatruces, for aid against the Romans. The aged Sinatruces refused.²² Whether it was merely the caution of an old man, or a genuine desire on the part of the Parthians to remain uninvolved, it is impossible to determine. Three years later, in 69 B.C., a new Parthian king, Phraates III was still trying to keep Parthia out of the fighting, or at least hoping not to annoy any potential victor. Phraates negotiated with both sides, seeking amity and offering nothing.²³ Mithradates and Tigranes offered to return the 'seventy valleys' and other lands in exchange for a Parthian assault against the Romans.²⁴ Lucullus, who had already received a Parthian embassy, now learned of these double negotiations. Through his allies, Lucullus made threats and promises to Phraates, who sent back envoys to establish friendship and alliance with Lucullus.²⁵ But Phraates soon felt betrayed, for Lucullus' legate and representative, Sextilius, seemed more like a spy.²⁶ Negotiations apparently broke down, and Lucullus considered it time to attack Parthia.²⁷

The question here is, to what extent does Lucullus' action reflect an official Roman policy? Parthia had refused to act the vassal after the encounter with

²²Memnon, fr. 43. 2 (FHG, III, 549).

²³Plut. Luc. 30.

²⁴Memnon, fr. 58. 2 (FHG, III, 556f.).

²⁵Dio 36, 3.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Plut. Luc. 30.

Sulla, and had in fact formed closer ties with Pontus and perhaps Armenia, enemies of Rome. However, Parthia had so far remained quite neutral during Rome's long struggle with Mithradates. Most likely, Lucullus acted on his own authority for his own aggrandizement: there was much hostility in Rome against Lucullus' piling war upon war to extend his proconsular command.²⁸ Having already subdued two Eastern kings, Lucullus perhaps thought a third would not be difficult to defeat. But he did not have a chance to test the Parthians in battle, for his own Roman troops refused to go further.²⁹ This probably reflected no soldierly fear of the Parthians, but simple exhaustion.

Lucullus was very shortly superseded by Cn. Pompeius Magnus, who had been highly successful against the Cilician pirates; he also had the support of economic interests at Rome, who were anxious for a swift settlement against the tenacious Mithradates.³⁰

Pompeius, Mithradates and Tigranes all seemed to value highly the support of the Parthians. The two kings renewed their offer of the territory which Tigranes had seized a few years before.³¹ Pompeius made the same offer, though the land was not yet his to give.³² Phraates

²⁸Plut. Luc. 30; and Badian, p. 38.

²⁹Plut. Ibid.

³⁰Cic. Imp. Cn. Pomp. 6 and 7: Cicero, speaking for Pompeius' appointment, immediately appeals to his listeners' sense of revenue.

³¹M. Cary, CAH, IX, p. 377.

³²Ibid.

chose a side at last, and attacked Armenia,³³ though a further and perhaps greater motivation was provided by a refugee son of the king of Armenia. Tigranes the Younger had fled to the Parthian court and requested aid in overthrowing his father.³⁴

It was a very sensitive situation, and our understanding of it must largely be hypothetical. Tigranes the Younger apparently preferred the aid of Parthia to that of Rome: vassalage under the disorganized Parthians offered a prospect of less severity or permanence. Phraates had a great deal to gain, or regain, from Armenia, but there is good reason to believe that a treaty had been made by Pompeius and Phraates to establish Parthian neutrality.³⁵ Perhaps Phraates felt that Pompeius would be soothed by the fact that the Parthians would now be the enemies of the enemies of Rome.

The effect of the alliance, if we can call it that, was that while Phraates held down Tigranes, Pompeius had a chance to hammer Mithradates. The Parthians drove the Elder Tigranes back into his capital, Artaxata, and then displayed one of the characteristic weaknesses of Parthian arms, the inability to lay siege. Phraates withdrew most of his forces, leaving a detachment under the Younger Tigranes to press the siege. But the Elder Tigranes broke out and scattered his son's forces. The younger Tigranes sought help. His first intention was

³³ Dlo 36, 45.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 51.

to join Mithradates, but, realizing that the Pontic king was even worse off than himself, Tigranes fled to Pompeius instead. Using the refugee as a guide, Pompeius marched into Armenia. The Elder Tigranes made an abject surrender without a fight.³⁶

In Pompeius' settlement, Tigranes the Elder retained Armenia proper, his son received Sophene and Gorduene, which meant that the Parthians gained nothing. Tigranes the Younger was not not satisfied with his share, and was placed under close arrest by Pompeius.³⁷ Sophene and Gorduene were then given to Ariobarzanes I of Cappadocia.³⁸ Phraates occupied Gorduene, a borderland on the upper Tigris, which was actually still in the possession of Tigranes the Elder. Phraates sent an embassy to Pompeius asking that the Younger Tigranes be handed over and also requesting an agreement which would make the Euphrates a border.³⁹ Pompeius refused to return Tigranes, and said that boundaries would be determined by right and justice.⁴⁰ Pompeius then wrote a letter to Phraates, addressing him as 'king' rather than his accepted title 'King of Kings,' a definite insult.⁴¹ The letter concerned Gorduene, but without waiting for an answer Pompeius sent his lieutenant, L. Afranius, to

³⁶ Magie, RRIAM, pp. 351-7.

³⁷ Plut. Pomp. 33.

³⁸ Appian, Mith. 105.

³⁹ Plut. Pomp. 34.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Dio 37, 6.

occupy the territory. Whether this was done without fighting is unclear in the sources.⁴²

Phraates obviously felt that he had a claim to the territory. He probably felt betrayed at being driven out, and began to wonder if he had any rights at all as far as the Romans were concerned. The answer was No. Pompeius, like Sulla, wanted the Parthians as vassals. The Roman was perhaps shocked that they were so zealous about making demands when little zeal had been displayed by the Parthian military in its siege of Artaxata. They had not fought like vassals; they would receive no spoils. By this time the Parthian and Armenian kings began to realize that they must not damage each other in the presence of this common enemy.⁴³

Except when he wanted them for military allies, Pompeius was consistently arrogant and even rude to the Parthians. Quite naturally for the Roman, it rankled that the Parthians refused to act like vassals. But was it worth a campaign to make them submissive? The Parthians had shown no desire to threaten areas west of the Euphrates, nor had they manifested any threatening military capability.⁴⁴ Perhaps Pompeius had the military acumen to foresee the difficulties of such a campaign: and Pompeius, unlike Lucullus,

⁴²Debevoise, p. 75, n. 18.

⁴³Dio 37, 7.

⁴⁴J. Dobláš, 'Les Premiers Rapports des Romains avec les Parthes et l'Occupation de la Syrie,' Archiv Orientalni 3, 2, 1931, pp. 244 and 254-6.

knew when to stop pushing his men. Pompeius had gained so much; perhaps Parthian submission did not seem worth the effort at the time.

* * * * *

A few years later, in 55 B.C., another incident occurred which illustrates the confusion of Roman-Parthian relations at this time. About 57 B.C. Phraates III had been murdered by his sons Orodes and Mithradates, who immediately quarrelled over the throne.⁴⁵ The Parthian nobility eventually expelled Mithradates and accepted Orodes as king.⁴⁶ Mithradates immediately went to the proconsul of Syria, A. Gabinius, who had been a legate of Pompeius, and requested assistance in his restoration.⁴⁷ Gabinius agreed, and marched a detachment across the Euphrates; but he stopped short when he received a lucrative offer from Ptolemy Auletes of Egypt, who was also in need of restoration. Abandoning the less profitable Parthian enterprise, Gabinius turned back across the Euphrates.

The two most interesting points to be noted in this adventure concern Mithradates' eagerness to receive help from a Roman, and Gabinius' confidence in his own ability to impose a settlement.

In view of the previous forty years of experience with the Roman, no eastern prince could have been so

⁴⁵Dio 39, 56.

⁴⁶Justin 42, 4, 1; that Surenas was a key figure in Orodes' success: Plut. Crass. 21.

⁴⁷Dio 39, 56.

naive about the implications of asking Roman 'help' that he could hope to escape genuine vassalage subsequently. If Mithradates did aspire to such hope, perhaps he was relying on Gabinus to act on his own, motivated only by greed and not policy. Of equal interest is Gabinus' self-confidence. Mithradates must have spoken convincingly of the possibilities of a successful takeover, perhaps arguing that a genuine state of civil war existed. Indeed, after Gabinus reneged, Mithradates on his own won over the important cities of Babylon and Seleucia, where he even struck coins of victory.⁴⁸ Moreover, Gabinus had no reason to doubt the ability of Roman arms. All in all, there seemed nothing to lose and money to gain: and, if the Roman were interested, this was an opportunity to put paid to Parthian 'insolence.' But, with Gabinus sidetracked for more money, the opportunity had to wait.

Mithradates' civil war proved short-lived. By the end of 55 B.C. Orodes had retaken Babylon and Seleucia, and captured and executed his brother. The civil war, while still in progress, was known to M. Licinius Crassus in Italy,⁴⁹ who with Pompeius was consul in Rome for that year.

A few months before, at the critical Luca conference, arrangements had apparently been made whereby Caesar could remain in Gaul and Pompeius and Crassus become

⁴⁸ Justin 42, 4, 2; Wroth, p. 65; and Dr. Sellwood, An Introduction to the Coinage of Parthia (London, 1971), p. 115: Nike is depicted holding wreath and palm branch.

⁴⁹ Dio 40, 12.

consuls. It was perhaps already agreed that Crassus, receiving Syria as his province, should attack Parthia.⁵⁰

This is not 'Roman foreign policy,' but the lack of it. After Sulla had shown the way, the restraints were gone. As Badian writes: 'Naturally, there are now no limits except convenience to calculated aggression by Rome's representatives.'⁵¹

Marcus Crassus was now to be Rome's 'representative' to the Parthians. Under the circumstances, there was nothing unusual about his wanting war with Parthia: it seemed prime ground for questing after military glory and riches--the sine qua non of any Roman dynast. Crassus had served well under Sulla, carrying the day at the battle of the Colline gate, and later he commanded the army which defeated Spartacus; but he was in no way an eminent general.⁵² Crassus' wealth was proverbial and yet dwarfed by the riches of Pompeius, who literally owned a great portion of the Near East.⁵³ Parthia was still awaiting exploitation: the transit trade was an attractive feature.⁵⁴

And it seemed so easy. Lucullus and Pompeius had made swift work of peoples whom Crassus perhaps equated

⁵⁰Tarn, CAH, IX, p. 605.

⁵¹Badian, p. 87.

⁵²F.E. Adcock, Marcus Crassus, Millionaire (Cambridge, 1966), pp. 9, 27, and 50-4.

⁵³Badian, p. 84.

⁵⁴That this was Crassus' main aim, see P. Giles, Proc. Camb. Philol. Soc. 144, 1929, p. 1f. Refuting Giles, see Adcock, p. 49.

with the Parthians.⁵⁵ Besides, there was civil war in Parthia, which made everything seem perfect, and Crassus was visibly eager.⁵⁶

Almost immediately, however, there was opposition within Rome. Caesar and Pompeius already possessed the best troops, so Crassus had to levy the dregs; such levies, for a useless war, angered the plebs, and Crassus had to be protected by the popular Pompeius.⁵⁷ The tribune C. Atelius Capito led the anti-war sentiment, and, with elaborate ritual, he laid a curse on Crassus as he marched out of the City in November, 55 B.C.⁵⁸

The details of this campaign have been discussed in many places, and need not be rewritten here: but a number of interesting points should be noticed.

Adding the levies he brought with him to the Syrian garrison taken over from Gabinus, Crassus now had a force of seven legions, with extra cavalry supplied by his allies Abgarus of Osrhoene, Alchaudonius, an Arab chief, and Artavasdes, who had recently succeeded to the throne of Armenia.⁵⁹

The first year (54) was spent in minor operations in Mesopotamia. Crassus crossed the Euphrates, chased out the Parthian satrap, and garrisoned towns in Osrhoene along the river Belik, a tributary of the Euphrates. This

⁵⁵Tarn, CAH, IX, p. 605.

⁵⁶Plut. Crass. 16.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid.; and see Cicero, ad Att. 4, 13.

⁵⁹Plut. Crass. 20.

established a bridgehead extending some fifty miles into Parthian territory, and gave his raw troops a taste of action, though perhaps giving them and himself a false impression of the Parthians. While the garrisons held the bridgehead during the winter, Crassus went back to Syria to train his troops further and to plunder temples.⁶⁰

When Crassus finally set out again, the Armenian king Artavasdes urged him to go by way of the Armenian hills, which would provide cover against Parthian cavalry. But Crassus insisted on going by way of Mesopotamia, where he had left his garrisons. At this point, Artavasdes took his forces home.⁶¹

These delays had given Parthia time to prepare. The civil war was over, and Orodes planned his strategy with his general, the head of the Suren clan, Surenas.⁶² The main attack would very likely come through Armenia, where Orodes now took the main Parthian army.

Crassus' strategy was very conventional. The Roman legion had long ago superseded the Macedonian phalanx as the highest expression of ancient warfare. By modern standards, such warfare was still very narrow: a stylized and organized version of Neanderthal clubbing, hand to

⁶⁰Plut. Crass. 17; Dio 40, 13; Josephus BJ 1, 179 and AJ 14, 105; and Tarn, CAH, IX, pp. 606-7.

⁶¹Plut. Crass. 17; details of the battle are drawn from Plutarch's account.

⁶²The name Surenas is not a personal, but a family or clan, name. It is somewhat official, and many historians write 'the Surenas.' Since the name, for us, is not very descriptive, I prefer to use a personal form.

hand. The idea, for a general like Crassus, was to guide the legions up to the enemy, and let the legions handle the problem from there.⁶³ Crassus had no intention of avoiding the enemy.

There is no mention of siege equipment.⁶⁴ Crassus probably expected the Greeks of Seleucia to greet him with a revolt against the Parthians. Once in the city and resupplied, the Romans could welcome the inevitable battle with Orodes' main force. Then on to the East.

An envoy sent by Orodes to Crassus announced that if this were an official war of the Roman people, then it would be without quarter; but if Crassus invaded Parthia for his own profit and against the consent of his country (as Orodes understood the case to be), then the Parthians would take into account Crassus' old age and have pity. Crassus retorted that he would give his answer in Seleucia. He would never get that far, said the Parthian, pointing at his open palm: 'Hair will grow here, Crassus, before you look upon Seleucia.'⁶⁵

Between Crassus and Seleucia was Surenas. A romantic figure in history, much contrasted with Crassus: half his age, born for battle, a king-maker, Surenas was the head of the second greatest family of Parthia. He had been left behind by Orodes, not contemptuously in any sense, but entrusted with the real strength of the Parthian military forces--Surenas' personal army of cavalry.⁶⁶

⁶³Tarn, CAH, IX, p. 606.

⁶⁴Noted by Adcock, p. 53.

⁶⁵Plut. Crass. 17-18; and Dio 40, 16.

⁶⁶Plut. ibid.

The heavy-armed cataphracts acted as shock-troops; the lighter cavalry possessed unique skills with the short composite bow. The tactics in which Surenas had trained his men were suited perfectly to the open terrain of Mesopotamia. There was no way Crassus could reach Selucia without somewhere crossing open territory, and Surenas would be ready.

Crassus was the victim of a great deal of treachery, especially concerning intelligence.⁶⁷ But he was easily deceived exactly because he probably would have acted the same even if his intelligence reports had been perfect. Admittedly, archers and slingers and cavalry all had their separate and relative importance--even in the Roman army. But it was absurd to expect them to stand up to a Roman legion. A decade before, while campaigning in Iberia, Pompeius had fought oriental archers: like the Athenians at Marathon, his legionaries simply rushed them.⁶⁸ Besides, everyone knew that quivers are soon emptied. So, when Crassus finally did make contact with the Parthians--when the kettle-drums sounded, and the arrows clouded the sky and then rained down on the locked shields of the Romans--it was some time before the Romans began to worry. The long string of camels, laden with the surplus of arrows, was a great part of Surenas' contribution to military science. The division of archers, some shooting low, frontal trajectory and some high, exploited the least vulnerability of the legionaries, and the Parthian

⁶⁷Dio 40, 21.

⁶⁸M. Cary, CAH, IX, p. 379.

cataphracts and pikemen dismantled the shaken 'tortoise' formations of the Romans. When a rushing counter-attack was launched, the Parthians retired: fresh supplies of horses made them swift and untouchable, and the 'Parthian shot' made them deadly. Carrhae, not Crécy or Agincourt, first proved the full potential of archery and mobile tactics.

* * * * *

The Romans began a painful retreat; though discipline and morale were low, the hopeless terrain discouraged a rout. Surenas pursued them to within a few miles of the Armenian hills, where he realized that they might yet escape surrender, or destruction. We cannot know which fate Surenas wished for the Romans. Plutarch and Dio give an account of treachery: Surenas shouting (loudly, for the soldiers' benefit)⁶⁹ that the Parthians had made their point and were now ready to let the Romans leave, if Crassus would come and discuss a truce⁷⁰ or make a treaty by which Rome abandoned all claim to territory east of the Euphrates.⁷¹ Dio's Crassus is trusting, Plutarch's is not. In either source the Roman soldiers were adamant for a truce. Crassus had no choice but to go with the Parthians, who insisted that a document be signed, 'for you Romans have not good memories for conditions.'⁷² But when the Parthians seemed to force

⁶⁹No doubt in Greek, which many of Crassus' officers would know and could quickly translate for the anxious troops.

⁷⁰Plut. Crass. 30.

⁷¹Dio 40, 26.

⁷²Plut. Crass. 31.

Crassus onto a Parthian horse, a scuffle ensued, and Crassus and a few others were killed.

Was there really a treaty waiting to be signed, or was it a ruse, as implied by Plutarch and Dio? The truth cannot easily be distinguished from the ironic elements of the story--the mention of the Euphrates as a border and the reference to Roman lack of faith--which reflect previous Roman-Parthian relations. And even if, for the present narrative, these elements are apocryphal, still they were meaningful to our ancient sources.

After Crassus was slain, the Parthians did not proceed to slaughter the Romans, but took 10,000 prisoners, while another 10,000 escaped to Syria. 24,000 had perished.⁷³ The last casualty was Surenas; Orodes now feared him too much to let him live.

The Parthians, possessing the Roman eagles, were in their glory. The territory east of the Euphrates was now definitely Parthian,⁷⁴ and king Orodes came to terms with Artavasdes of Armenia, whose sister now married Orodes' son, Pacorus.

The Parthians did not follow up their victory with any major attack, possibly because the personal army of Surenas was without its leader.⁷⁵ Pacorus led a few raids into Syria in 51 B.C., but was driven off by C. Cassius Longinus, a survivor of Carrhae.⁷⁶ But, that a

⁷³Plut. Crass. 31; and Tarn, CAH, IX, p. 611.

⁷⁴Debevoise, p. 93.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 92.

⁷⁶Dio 40, 28.

huge invasion was feared in 51 B.C. can be seen from the letters of Cicero, who had just been appointed proconsular governor of Cilicia. There were uprisings in Syria, and many districts, sick of Roman rule, welcomed the prospect of Parthian control.⁷⁷ Roman forces in the East were insufficient even to keep order:⁷⁸ Pompeius and Caesar, in mutual distrust, jealously kept their legions in Spain and Gaul.

The Parthian invasion was never any such thing. The Romans did not comprehend that the Parthians were attacking with swift cavalry, not for conquest, but for booty, destruction of property, and for the shock value and prestige.⁷⁹ Although the Parthians were cut up badly on one occasion by the able Cassius (who adopted Parthian tactics),⁸⁰ Pacorus was not driven off; but, when the looting was done, he withdrew to winter quarters in Cyrrhestica, the area between Zeugma and Antioch.⁸¹

The danger for the coming year still seemed great. There was talk that Caesar or Pompeius should be sent out to take command.⁸² When it was decided that Pompeius should go, Caesar turned over to him a legion for the expedition.⁸³

⁷⁷Dio 40, 28.

⁷⁸Cic. ad Fam. 15, 1, 3-5.

⁷⁹Debevoise, p. 100.

⁸⁰Dio 40, 29.

⁸¹Cic. ad Att. 5, 21, 2.

⁸²Caellius in Cic. ad Fam. 8, 10, 2; ad Att. 6, 1, 3.

⁸³Plut. Pomp. 56 calls it a 'pretence,' and in Ant. 35, Antonius tries to insure that the troops will actually go to Syria.

M. Calpurnius Bibulus, the governor of Syria, tried a diplomatic scheme to forestall any Parthian invasion. He persuaded a disaffected Parthian satrap to join in on a plan to place Pacorus on the throne.⁸⁴ That result was not achieved, for Orodes heard of the plan and recalled Pacorus:⁸⁵ which perhaps was all that was hoped for. The invasion panic died down.

For the next nine years the Parthians made no aggressive moves across the Euphrates. They may have been distracted by activity on their own eastern frontier.⁸⁶ Yet Parthia became slightly involved in the Roman civil wars.

Pompeius sent L. Hirrus and perhaps other ambassadors to Orodes.⁸⁷ As a condition for alliance, the Parthian king demanded Syria. Pompeius refused, perhaps because Hirrus had been imprisoned,⁸⁸ or because Pompeius had married the widow of Publius Crassus, dead with his father at Carrhae. More simply, the price was impossible. Syria was a vital part of the empire for which Pompeius was fighting; it was through his eastern campaigns that Syria had been annexed into the empire, and the province was filled with Pompeius' clientes.

⁸⁴Dio 40, 30.

⁸⁵Justin 42, 4, 5.

⁸⁶Debevoise, p. 104, arguing from the fact that no tetradrachms were struck between 52 and 40 B.C.: see R.H. McDowell, Coins from Seleucia on the Tigris (Ann Arbor, 1935), pp. 184 and 221.

⁸⁷Dio 41, 55; and Caesar BC 3, 82.

⁸⁸Dio 42, 2.

Later, after Pharsalus, Pompeius considered Parthia as a possible refuge and base for renewed resistance to Caesar, but he was persuaded by an argument that the Parthians were treacherous, and went instead to Egypt.⁸⁹ That Parthia, having no reason to love Pompeius, should be considered as a possible ally shows Pompeius' desperation and hints at how much Crassus' war had truly been Crassus' and not Rome's. The Parthians did in fact aid the Pompeian general Q. Caecilius Bassus, whose legions were besieged in Apamea by the Caesarian C. Antistius Vetus in 45 B.C. Vetus was driven off with losses,⁹⁰ but the Parthian force (led by Pacorus, who was again in favour) did not linger, perhaps because of the lateness of the season.⁹¹

It was not because of the aid given Pompeian forces or for any other immediate reason of security that the Dictator Caesar began elaborate plans for an attack on Parthia.⁹² The shame of Crassus' lost standards probably affected Caesar as little as it had Pompeius. External motivations were lacking; the Roman state could, and did, survive without a campaign against Parthia. Perhaps Caesar felt he could collect wider support as the victor of a great foreign war than as the survivor

⁸⁹Plut. Pomp. 76. Of course, in Egypt Pompeius was promptly slain.

⁹⁰Cic. ad Att. 14, 9, 3.

⁹¹Dio 47, 27; and Appian BC 4, 58ff.

⁹²Possibly planning began as early as 47 B.C., but there is no certainty: M. Gelzer, Caesar, Politician and Statesman, trans. Peter Needham (Oxford, 1969), p. 305.

of a civil war,⁹³ or perhaps he found war less frightening than the civil task ahead of him.⁹⁴ Cicero did not reckon Caesar would ever return alive.⁹⁵ Perhaps Caesar agreed.⁹⁶ In any case, the obvious target was Parthia. No longer just an insolent vassal, Parthia, since Carrhae, had interfered in Roman affairs and had acquired a great reputation: Caesarian propaganda reported a Sibylline prophecy that only when led by a king could the Romans be victorious over the Parthians.⁹⁷ The independent existence of another empire was unpalatable to Rome. But, after defeating Roman arms and demonstrating an ability to strike deeply into Roman territory, the Parthians had become intolerable.

Caesar's preparations were massive--another indication of Rome's altered opinion of Parthia. Sixteen legions and ten thousand cavalry were collected.⁹⁸ Gold was transferred to Asia Minor,⁹⁹ and arms were fabricated and stockpiled in Thessaly.¹⁰⁰ One legion was sent immediately to Syria,¹⁰¹ six others to winter

⁹³Adcock, CAH, IX, p. 713.

⁹⁴That Caesar was running from responsibility, see Syme, RR, p. 53.

⁹⁵Cic. ad Att. 15, 4, 3: 'ille numquam revertisset.'

⁹⁶Suet. Caes. 87; and Plut. Caes. 63. The ominous statements he made before his assassination may have actually referred to the coming Parthian campaign: Gelzer, pp. 325-6.

⁹⁷Plut. Caes. 60.

⁹⁸Appian BC 2, 110.

⁹⁹Nicolaus of Damascus 18.

¹⁰⁰Plut. Brut. 25.

¹⁰¹Appian BC 4, 58.

In Apollonia, together with light-armed troops and cavalry.¹⁰² Also in Apollonia was Caesar's nephew Octavian, supposedly there to study philosophy, but instead learning military tactics.¹⁰³

When Caesar was slain, the campaign was scrapped. Yet the magnitude of the plans left its mark: the sense that a clash between Rome and Parthia was inevitable.

¹⁰²Apptan BC 3, 24; and Dio 14, 9.

¹⁰³Suet. Aug. 8; Apptan BC 3, 9; Plut. Brut. 22; Cic. 43; and Ant. 16.

Chapter Three

Antonius and Roman Affairs in the East

The association of Augustus and 'the Parthian Question' began very early indeed. While still a youth, he was expected to accompany his adoptive father on the proposed expedition against the Parthians. Julius Caesar sent the boy to Apollonia to train with the army being organized there.¹ But with the death of Caesar, the expedition was cancelled. Octavian was advised by friends to take over the expeditionary force in Macedonia and march on Rome.² Octavian chose to leave the army where it was, but sent immediately to Asia for the money that Caesar had transferred earlier for the Parthian war.³

In Rome, a strong hand had taken charge after Caesar's assassination. Marcus Antonius immediately gained consular command of Macedonia.⁴ But the arrangement was made palatable to the senate through the assumption that the Macedonian legions would indeed still be used against Parthia: Antonius enticed the ambitious P. Cornelius Dolabella with the prospect of executing Caesar's war against Parthia. Dolabella accepted the

¹Vell. Pater. 2, 59, 4; Appian BC 3, 2, 9; and Suet. Aug. 8.

²Nic. Dam. 18.

³Ibid. 18.

⁴Cic. ad Att. 14, 9, 3 (Apr. 18th).

governorship of Syria, assuming he would receive the Macedonian legions.⁵ But then Antonius began manoeuvring to keep the legions. He started a rumour of an invasion of Macedonia by the Getae. The senate investigated and found no truth in it, though the danger was admitted. Antonius made the statement that everything was quiet on the Parthian frontier.⁶ Next he moved to exchange his province for that of Gaul. To avoid opposition in the senate, a plebiscite was passed; Antonius received Gaul and was expressly allowed to transfer the six Macedonian legions to his new command.⁷ With this, Caesar's expeditionary force was dismantled.

By the time the leading assassins, M. Junius Brutus and C. Cassius Longinus, realized that their position was deteriorating, Macedonia had been stripped of its troops. Still, Brutus seized it, while Cassius travelled to Syria, outstripping the governor-to-be, Dolabella. Cassius was still well known in the East. He had been Crassus' quaestor in 53 B.C., and had led back the survivors of Carrhae.⁸ During the cavalry raids of Pacorus in 52 B.C., Cassius kept his forces in Antioch, but eventually ventured out to harass the retreating Parthian forces.⁹ Now in 43 B.C. Cassius went east and discovered a remnant of Pompeius' forces, one legion commanded by

⁵Appian BC 3, 1, 7-8 and 3, 5, 1.

⁶Ibid., 3, 3, 25.

⁷Cic. ad Att. 14, 14, 4.

⁸Plut. Brut. 43.

⁹Cic. ad Att. 5, 21, 2; and Frontinus Strat. 2, 5, 35.

Q. Caecilius Bassus, besieged in the town of Apamea by six Caesarian legions. All seven legions came over to Cassius. Among Bassus' force was found a contingent of Parthian horse-archers. They had been left by Pacorus, who had answered an appeal from Bassus, but later withdrew most of his forces because of the lateness of the season.¹⁰ The Parthian bowmen now became part of Cassius' force. They helped him in defeating Dolabella late in 43 B.C.¹¹ But then, in preparation for the struggle against Antonius and Octavian, Cassius sent the Parthian contingent back to Orodes, along with presents and ambassadors seeking a larger force.¹² Orodes hesitated,¹³ but apparently did send a Parthian force, which did not arrive in time to fight in the battle of Philippi.¹⁴

If the Parthians were to be punished for this new crime, that of siding with the losers, the punishment would not come from Caesar's heir, for Octavian was allotted the West, and the arduous task of settling veterans on confiscated Italian soil. The prestige of Philippi went to Antonius, and he chose to stay in the East to regulate affairs and squeeze out funds.¹⁵

Antonius may already have been contemplating a

¹⁰Dio 47, 27; and Appian BC 4, 58f. See p. 47.

¹¹Dio 47, 30.

¹²Appian BC 4, 63f.

¹³Dio 48, 24, 5.

¹⁴Appian BC 4, chs. 63, 88 and 99; and Justin 42, 4, 7.

¹⁵Syme, RR, p. 206.

war against Parthia.¹⁶ If so, there seemed to be no rush about it: there were minor scores to be settled and money to be raised.¹⁷ These activities, including a raid by one of Antonius' lieutenants on the wealthy trading centre of Palmyra, caused bad feeling, which may have contributed to the success of the Parthian assault of 40 B.C.¹⁸

When Cassius had been negotiating with Orodes for Parthian auxiliaries, one of his envoys was Q. Labienus,¹⁹ son of Caesar's legate, T. Labienus, who had deserted to Pompeius.²⁰ Stranded after Phillippi and rightly afraid to return to Italy, Labienus joined in a Parthian invasion of Roman territory in the spring of 40 B.C.

It is impossible to estimate to what extent the Parthians required incitement from Labienus to spur them to the attack. It would prove to be more than a mere repetition of the raid-in-force conducted by Pacorus a decade earlier. There were indications that Orodes was interested in expansion westward, especially for economic reasons: to control more of the transit trade.²¹ Increased issues of coinage indicated an expansion in commercial activity.²² And the Palmyrene traders who

¹⁶Plut. Ant. 25, 1.

¹⁷Appian BC 5, 4, 15ff.

¹⁸Ibid., 5, 9f.

¹⁹Livy Epit. 2, 78; Dio 48, 24, 4; Ruf. Fest. 18; and Florus 2, 19.

²⁰Caesar BG 8, 52, 1.

²¹McDowell, pp. 219-20.

²²Ibid., p. 170.

had fled to the Parthian court may have uttered provocative encouragements.²³ This may help explain why the invasion was not begun immediately after Philippi. The Parthians had to watch for the possibility of an early attack from Antonius; meanwhile the evils of Roman rule were building support for the Parthians among the peoples west of the Euphrates.²⁴ Also, it was probably known to the Parthians that Antonius had gone to Egypt.²⁵

The Parthian force, led jointly by Labienus and Pacorus, swept through Syria, defeating its governor, L. Decidius Saxa, in a pitched battle.²⁶ Roman soldiers deserted to Labienus; Apamea was taken without resistance. The Parthian force was then divided, Labienus driving successfully into Asia Minor, Pacorus going south along the coast.²⁷ Labienus drew much support from local kings and tyrants who proved that their loyalty was not so much to Rome as to their former patron Pompeius, with whom Labienus could be closely identified.²⁸ While Labienus was ironically styling himself 'Parthicus Imperator,'²⁹ Pacorus was being welcomed at

²³ Appian BC 5, 9f.

²⁴ Dio 48, 24, 8.

²⁵ Ibid., 7; Appian BC 5, 6, 52.

²⁶ Livy Epit. 127.

²⁷ Justin 42, 4, 7; Dio 48, 25; and Plut. Ant. 28.

²⁸ Syme, RR, p. 259.

²⁹ H.A. Grueber, Coins of the Roman Republic in the British Museum (London, 1910), II, p. 500. Issued in both gold and silver, apparently from Antioch, the coin

Sidon and Ptolemais,³⁰ where he established the first Jewish king to rule in five hundred years.³¹ Even the Nabataean Arabs were obedient to the Parthians.³²

Working to the Parthians' advantage was the coincidence of their invasion with the outbreak of the Perusine war in Italy. Antonius received first news of both at the same time,³³ and he started out against the Parthians, but on the way received from his wife Fulvia further information on the situation in the west, and chose to sail with his fleet to Italy.³⁴

Several months passed before Antonius was certain that the situation in Italy would not require the abilities of his best general, P. Ventidius. Ventidius was now sent ahead to confront the Parthians, while Antonius remained in Italy until the winter of 39 B.C.³⁵ He then

was for use among Labienus' Roman troops. Dio (48, 26, 5) notes the irony of the title, usually taken by a general from the name of a conquered people, here being used by Labienus, who is helping the Parthians in their conquests. Grueber believes that, in the legend Q. LABIENUS PARTHICUS IMP, the PARTHICUS is not necessarily qualifying the IMP, but could simply be a name Labienus has taken for himself. But Strabo (14, 2, 24) describes how Hybreas of Mylasa, one of the few local rulers to oppose Labienus, sent the Roman a taunting message that he intended to call himself the 'Carian Imperator.'

³⁰ Josephus AJ 14, 330ff.; 20, 245, and BJ 1, 248ff.; and Dio 48, 26, 5.

³¹ Jos. AJ 14, 379 and 384ff.

³² Jos. BJ 1, 276.

³³ Plut. Ant. 30.

³⁴ Ibid.; and Appian BC 5, 6, 52.

³⁵ Livy Epit. 127; Front. 2, 5, 36; Plut. Ant. 33; Dio 48, 39f.

moved to Athens, where he could survey the actions of Ventidius as well as those of his friend C. Asinius Pollio, who was fighting in the Balkans.³⁶

Ventidius, who had served Caesar and had displayed similar speed and flexibility, effectively dealt with the Parthians by respecting their peculiar tactics.³⁷ As it turned out, Ventidius did not encounter the mounted archers he had expected (and perhaps dreaded). The Parthian military had changed in the last few years. The victory of Surenas against Crassus had slighted the rest of Parthia's nobility. The ageing Orodes could not forestall the nobles' desire to replace the mounted archers with formations of heavy cavalry.³⁸ These Ventidius found easy to defeat, and in Cilicia he conquered and killed Labienus.³⁹ Next he vanquished the Parthian noble Pharnapates at the Amanus Gates, the entrance to Syria.⁴⁰ Pacorus, who had not been with the army which now withdrew from Syria, reorganized it and invaded Syria again in the spring of 38 B.C. Ventidius finally crushed the Parthians at Gindarus, where Pacorus himself was slain. This was given tremendous significance by the Romans, as if avenging Crassus' death.⁴¹

³⁶Plut. Ant. 33.

³⁷Front. 1, 1, 6 and 2, 5, 36; Appian BC 5, chs. 65, 75, and 132f.; and Dio 48, 39-41 and 49, 19-22.

³⁸Tarn, CAH, X p. 49.

³⁹Dio 48, 26 and 39-40.

⁴⁰Ibid. 48, 41, 1.

⁴¹Plut. Ant. 34; and Florus 2, 19, 9.

Next Ventidius assaulted those Syrian cities which had supported the Parthians. Parthian administration had apparently been popular among the cities; but a display of Pacorus' head was a successful inducement to surrender.⁴²

Ventidius' only reported reason for not following up his victories with an invasion of Parthia was his fear of Antonius' jealousy: well-founded fears, according to Plutarch, who reports that Antonius soon rushed in during Ventidius' mopping-up operations and took over command, lest all glory fall to Ventidius alone.⁴³ But there were other reports that Ventidius had accepted a bribe in return for sparing a city, so Antonius was forced to take command.⁴⁴ Ventidius returned to Rome, and was the first Roman to celebrate a triumph over the Parthians.⁴⁵

Ventidius' success was followed quickly by the successes of two other Antonian lieutenants. C. Sosius, who replaced Ventidius as governor of Syria, proceeded to pacify Judaea; and P. Canidius Crassus secured Armenia by force and began campaigns toward the Caucasus.⁴⁶ Antonius, who had thus re-asserted Roman control in the East, began a re-organization of the East's political

⁴²Dio 49, 20, 4.

⁴³Plut. Ant. 34; and Dio 49, 21, 2.

⁴⁴Jos. AJ 14, 439-47; Dio 49, 20f.; accepted by Tarn, CAH, X, 53.

⁴⁵Plut. Ant. 34; and Dio 49, 21, 3.

⁴⁶Plut. Ant. 37; and Dio 49, 22, 3f.

structure, which had proven itself unreliable.

There were only three Roman provinces in the area, Asia, Bithynia and Syria. A chain of kingdoms was now formed, which ran from Pontus to Egypt, and most of the territory was consigned to four kings: Polemo, Herod, Archelaus and Amyntas. Chosen by Antonius, these men were new leaders who did not belong to any dynastic lines, but had proven their loyalty to Rome, or, rather, to Antonius.⁴⁷ Armenia was only loosely attached to this group. Though the Armenian king, Artavasdes, had deserted Crassus in 53 B.C., Canidius had brought Armenia under control in 37 B.C., so that Antonius was confident of using it as a base of operations in the near future.

Antonius reconstructed the East as he wanted it; all his measures had been ratified by the senate in advance.⁴⁸ The arrangements gave Rome a more secure eastern frontier; but, more importantly, Antonius now had a powerful body of clientes who were loyal to him personally. There would be support at his back whether he marched eastward against the Parthians, or west.

It seems clear that Antonius had long intended to attack Parthia. After the re-organization of the East following Ventidius' victories, Antonius was delayed by the need to aid his fellow-triumvir, Octavian, against

⁴⁷Tarn, CAH, X, p. 52; Syme, RR, pp. 260-2; and Magie, RRIAM, pp. 433-7. That the method of governing indirectly was not new, but that Antonius' particular contribution was in his outstanding choice of men: see, Hans Buchheim, Die Orientpolitik des Triumvirn M. Antonius (Heidelberg, 1960), p. 93.

⁴⁸Apptian BC 5; 75.

the pirate-dynast Sextus Pompeius, son of Pompeius Magnus.⁴⁹ In return for his aid, Antonius had expected Octavian to give him 20,000 troops for his war against the Parthians.⁵⁰ Understandably, Octavian could never bring himself to pay up. In the next year, 36 B.C., when Sextus had been defeated and Lepidus had been eliminated, a sense of balance was felt, which seemed to mean the end of civil dissension.⁵¹ Octavian promised to restore the constitution when Antonius should return from the Parthian war: he was sure Antonius would be willing.⁵²

There were a number of reasons for Antonius' attack on Parthia in 36 B.C. Though Ventidius may have somewhat avenged Crassus' defeat, the captured standards and prisoners were still in Parthia, whose territory remained inviolate. The East, newly re-organized, had to be made secure. The Parthians had shown again in 40-38 B.C. not only the ability to attack Syria, but also, this time, the desire to hold it.⁵³ Rome's new vassal kings--Antonius' clientes--would be more reliable if the oriental competitor were removed, and an extension of the sphere of vassal kingdoms could even be hoped for.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Appian BC 5, 93.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 95; and Dio 48, 54, 1-3.

⁵¹ Appian BC 5, 132.

⁵² Ibid.: as an indication of Octavian's views on the Parthian war, this remark eludes interpretation.

⁵³ Tarn, CAH, X, p. 48; and McDowell, pp. 219-20.

⁵⁴ Syme, RR, p. 263.

Then there was the rivalry with Octavian. Far from being mired down by the awesome task of settling the veterans, Octavian had emerged as the soldiers' friend. And in 36 B.C., as Antonius must have realized, Octavian was at last achieving a military victory (over Sextus) which would justify the military aura of his recently adopted praenomen, Imperator.⁵⁵ Antonius' monopoly of military glory would be broken; yet the conquest of Parthia could re-assert his predominance. It might also cast Antonius as the truer heir of Caesar, something to outweigh the prestige of Octavian's inherited name.⁵⁶ Moreover, it seemed a good time to attack. Now, as in the time of Gabinus and again of Crassus, there was unrest in Parthia.

King Orodes was unbalanced by the death of his eldest son, Pacorus, in 38 B.C.; a new heir was designated, Phraates, the eldest of Orodes' thirty sons.⁵⁷ Before the year was ended, the impatient Phraates did away with his father and, for safety's sake, killed all his brothers as well.⁵⁸ Many Parthian nobles, whose power had increased in the last years of Orodes' reign, were now forced to flee, some seeking refuge with Antonius.⁵⁹ At this point a very curious figure makes his

⁵⁵This praenomen is first seen on coins struck in 38 B.C.: Grueber, Coins R. Rep., II, 411ff.

⁵⁶Tarn, CAH, X, p. 66; Cic. Phil. 13, 24 quotes Antonius: 'et te, o puer, qui omnia nomini debes.'

⁵⁷Justin 42, 4, 11-16; and Dio 49, 23, 3.

⁵⁸Plut. Ant. 37; and Dio ibid., 4.

⁵⁹Plut. ibid.; and Dio ibid., 5.

appearance, a Parthian notable named Monaeses.

Our sources report that Monaeses approached Antonius and offered his services for any attack against Phraates.⁶⁰ Antonius welcomed him, and, likening his case to that of the exiled Themistocles,⁶¹ gave him three Syrian cities to rule,⁶² and promised him the Parthian kingship as well.⁶³ But then Phraates desired Monaeses to return: perhaps because of the furor among the Parthians caused by Monaeses' flight.⁶⁴ Phraates offered promises of safety, and Monaeses was content to go; and Antonius content to let him, though he did request the return of the lost standards of Crassus and the captives. This request, not surprisingly, went unfulfilled.

The whole episode is odd. Monaeses was probably the Warden of the Western Marches,⁶⁵ a very important part of the Parthian military-political hierarchy, so it is extraordinary that he should flee a new king in first place. That the fugitive should then suddenly trust in the promises of such a man as Phraates seems dubious enough, but when the same Monaeses ends up commanding the Parthian forces against Antonius--a hoax of

⁶⁰Dio 49, 24, 2.

⁶¹Plut. Themis. 29. Antonius is following the example of the Persian king who gave Themistocles three cities to rule.

⁶²Plut. Ant. 37; and Dio 49, 24, 2.

⁶³Dio ibid., 2.

⁶⁴ibid.

⁶⁵Rostovtzeff and Welles, 'Parchment Contract,' pp. 45-8. See p. 71.

some sort may be suspected.⁶⁶ It may have been an intelligence mission, and Antonius may have suspected so.⁶⁷ Perhaps Phraates recalled Monaeses when the mission was completed, or given up⁶⁸--or when the risk of truly losing Monaeses became too great. Antonius may have been happy to return Monaeses with whatever information Antonius chose to divulge.⁶⁹ Or perhaps Antonius feared that by detaining Monaeses he would lose the support of other Parthians.⁷⁰ In any case, Antonius was himself preparing a ruse: by returning Monaeses along with envoys requesting Crassus' standards and captives, he would give the impression of continuing negotiations, thus lulling Phraates into a false sense of security.⁷¹

The information we have on this matter of Monaeses demands further explanation, for which we lack evidence. The mystery of Monaeses does not end here; and from later events it appears that the loyalty which Monaeses felt most keenly, from the very start, was to himself.

Another important occurrence which can be connected with Phraates' opposition to the Parthian nobility is the re-institution of the mounted archer as the basis of

⁶⁶Tarn, CAH, X, pp. 71-2: assumes a hoax, but Debevoise, pp. 121-3, sees none. That Monaeses was in command is gathered from Plut. Ant. 44 and Horace Od. 3, 6, 9.

⁶⁷Tarn, Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Dio 49, 24, 4.

⁷¹Plut. Ant. 37; and Dio 49, 24, 6.

Parthian military tactics.⁷² The nobility's heavy cavalry had failed completely against Ventidius. The horse-archers, who had slaughtered Crassus, had since been beaten only once, and then but slightly--by Cassius, through such un-Roman tactics as an ambush and feigned retreat.⁷³

Antonius was not unaware of the risk of meeting Parthian horse-archers. Rejecting Crassus' strategy of driving east across Mesopotamia in order to make contact with the enemy, Antonius' strategic plan was for an advance up through Armenia and then southeast through Media Atropatene--mostly terrain unsuited to cavalry fighting. Parthia's Median allies would be knocked out first, then a drive could be made on Seleucia.

It was late in the spring before Antonius joined his forces with those of Canidius in Armenia. He now had a force of 10,000 cavalry, Gallic and Spanish, along with 60,000 legionaries. Another 30,000 troops were supplied by other nations, notably, 16,000 cavalry from Armenia.⁷⁴ These were led by Artavasdes, the very king who had remained an ally of Parthia since the time he withdrew his forces at the last moment from Crassus' army; in fact, the late Pacorus had been his brother-in-law.⁷⁵ Canidius had only recently conquered

⁷²Tarn, CAH, X, p. 71.

⁷³Dio 40, 29; and Front. 2, 5, 35.

⁷⁴Plut. Ant. 37.

⁷⁵Plut. Crass. 66.

the Armenians, as well as the tribes of the Caucasus.⁷⁶ But now Antonius, perhaps relying on Artavasdes' hatred of the Median king (also named Artavasdes),⁷⁷ depended on the Armenian as an ally: a risky thing.

Antonius tried to do too much too quickly. No proper base was established where his men could rest after their march to Armenia. Antonius immediately started out, though it was late in the year. We cannot know whether this was strategy or mere impatience. Since the land ahead would provide no materials, Antonius had to bring siege equipment with him. This slowed his march, so he divided his force: two legions and the Armenians were to bring along the equipment as fast as possible, while Antonius took the cavalry and the best infantry and hurried to the capital of Media Atropatene, Phraaspa.⁷⁸ He besieged this well-garrisoned town, working with mounds until his siege train could catch up. It never did, for the Parthian horse-archers slipped around and destroyed it, just as Crassus had been destroyed. Artavasdes the Armenian had again found it wise to desert.⁷⁹

Antonius' position was untenable, though pride made him linger. Eventually he began the hurried retreat. A repetition of Carrhae was prevented by Antonius' personal leadership⁸⁰ and by a strange event. A Parthian named

⁷⁶Plut. Ant. 37.

⁷⁷Dio 49, 25, 1.

⁷⁸Ibid., 3; and Plut. Ant. 38.

⁷⁹Plut. ibid.

⁸⁰Front. 2, 13, 7.

Mithradates entered the Roman camp and, expressly stating that he spoke on behalf of his cousin Monaeses, advised Antonius on which route would save him from disaster.⁸¹ So it did, but Monaeses' motives need explanation.

Surenas, after Carrhae, had been executed by the envious Orodes, and Phraates was no less ruthless than his father. Monaeses may well have considered this, and decided to keep other channels open. The message of advice to Antonius may have been Monaeses' way of establishing, or perhaps re-establishing, an amicable tie.

Thus spared from destruction, Antonius' forces limped back to Armenia, the nearest haven. Circumstances compelled Antonius to curb his anger with Artavasdes, and revenge would have to wait.⁸² Antonius travelled, in advance of his army, to Syria, and at the coastal village of Leuke Come he waited for Cleopatra, who brought clothes and supplies for his men.⁸³ That Antonius chose to rendezvous at Leuke Come rather than Tyre or Sidon may indicate that he feared the Parthians had already swept through Syria, with its cities rising in revolt.⁸⁴ But, on the contrary, the Parthians had fallen out with their Median allies over the booty.⁸⁵

⁸¹Plut. Ant. 47.

⁸²Dio 49, 31, 3.

⁸³Plut. Ant. 51

⁸⁴Tarn, CAH, X, p. 75.

⁸⁵Dio 49, 33, 1.

The Median king offered his services to Antonius for war against Parthia, and particularly to join in on Antonius' revenge against Armenia.

Another assault on Parthia was out of the question. First of all Antonius had already claimed victory,⁸⁶ despite the fact that he had lost a third of his men, and those left were not likely to favour another try. Antonius' right to enlist troops in Italy was a dead letter.⁸⁷ Octavian was the obstacle. He explained neatly that Antonius had no claim to Italy since he was in sole possession of Media and Parthia, acquired by the brave deeds of Antonius' soldiers.⁸⁸ Cleopatra now forced Antonius to realize who his real enemy was: anything else, even Parthia, could be his, but only after he had done away with Octavian.⁸⁹

But first he had to re-establish his position in the East. A ceremony, full of symbolism meant only for Eastern consumption, was held in Alexandria, at which time Antonius made the famous 'Donations,' parcelling all of the Orient among his and Cleopatra's children. Cleopatra herself, now to be called 'Queen of kings,' was given Egypt and Cyprus. Caesarion, to be called 'King of kings,' received Syria and all the region west of the Euphrates as far as the Hellespont.

⁸⁶Dio 49, 32, 1.

⁸⁷Syme, RR, p. 225.

⁸⁸Plut. Ant. 44.

⁸⁹Tarn, CAH, X, pp. 76-7. Buchheim, pp. 87-8, agrees that at this time the coming conflict with the West was affecting Antonius' activities in the East.

His brother, Alexander, was given the yet unconquered areas east of the Euphrates as far as India. And their sister Cleopatra received Libya.⁹⁰ One of the boys was dressed for the ceremony in Macedonian garb, the other in Median, and they were accompanied by bodyguards of the appropriate nationality. Their mother, Cleopatra, adorned herself in a robe sacred to Isis.⁹¹

The more mundane matter of Armenia was more politically important: Armenia must be punished. However, a year was lost in dealing with the troublesome Sextus Pompeius, who was seeking refuge in the East and who at one time even made overtures to Phraates behind Antonius' back.⁹² Antonius at last was free to invade Armenia early in 34 B.C. He seized Artavasdes, with whom Octavian may have been in secret negotiation,⁹³ but Artavasdes' eldest son Artaxés escaped to Parthia. The Median king was rewarded with Lesser Armenia.

Antonius himself made no move against Parthia at this time, and Plutarch notes that there were rumours of internal strife among the Parthians.⁹⁴ Antonius strengthened the alliance with Media: a mutual aid pact was formed, whether against Parthia or Octavian.

⁹⁰Dio 49, 41, 1-4.

⁹¹Plut. Ant. 54.

⁹²Dio 49, 17-20.

⁹³Ibid., 39 and 41.

⁹⁴Plut. Ant. 53. Buchhelm, p. 87, says that Antonius specifically abandoned a 'second invasion' of Parthia in order to face the challenge from the West with unimpaired resources. I question that any second invasion had been planned for the near future.

Troops were exchanged, and a force of Romans aided the Median king in defeating the Parthians when they tried to recover Armenia for Artaxes. But when Antonius withdrew his Roman troops and yet kept his Median auxiliaries, Phraates was able to sweep in and place Artaxes on the Armentian throne, keeping Media for himself (30 B.C.).⁹⁵

Such, it would seem, were the dismal results of all of Antonius' military efforts in the East. However, as we shall see, there is evidence that Antonius took part in, or perhaps instigated, an endeavour to humble Parthia through means other than the traditional methods of outright military conquest. The new approach was the plan to replace Phraates with a king friendly to Rome: in other words, a vast extension of Antonius' eastern client-kingdoms. This effort was pushed, not always strenuously, for nearly ten years, even long after Antonius had been replaced in the East by Octavian.

⁹⁵Dio 49, 44, 4; and Plut. Ant. 53.

Chapter Four

The Parthian Civil War, 35-29 B.C.

Simultaneous with the conflict between Antonius and Octavian, a civil war was raging in Parthia. Why and when this war began cannot be determined exactly, but a close estimate can be made.

Phraates IV was not an endearing ruler, and his long reign of thirty-six years may be attributed to a calculated, and probably necessary, ruthlessness aimed at extirpating all opposition. Justin reports that after Antonius was defeated in 36 B.C., the returning Phraates was insolentior.¹ Justin here also uses the word redditus, but we know in fact that Phraates was never on the battlefield, though he had sent his personal bodyguard to join the other Parthian cavalry forces.² The Parthians were commanded by that very Monaeses who had earlier fled to Antonius.³

Whether the civil war was the result of Phraates' generally increased insolence, or due to something more particular, the date for the beginning of the strife may be brought very close to the time of Antonius' defeat. As we have seen, the retreating Antonius feared that the

¹ Justin 42, 5, 4.

² Plut. Ant. 44.

³ Ibid., 37, 46, and 48; and Horace Od. 3, 6, 9.

Parthians would swiftly invade Syria, but they did not. There were reports as early as 35 B.C. that the Parthians were having civil dissensions.⁴ Phraates' dated tetradrachms fall from 36 to April, 34 B.C.⁵ The Parthians had quickly fallen out with the Medes over the booty, and the Median king formed ties with Antonius. The Parthian civil war may have begun at the same time.⁶ The man leading the opposition to Phraates is named by Justin and Dio, in similar wording, as 'a certain Tiridates.'⁷

Who was he? The 'certain' may indicate that he was from outside the Arsacid family, but, for the sake of the tradition, had assumed 'Tiridates' as a throne-name.⁸ Certainly, Phraates had seen to it that there was a dearth of proper alternative candidates to his throne.⁹ And if, as Justin states, it was 'the people' who dethroned the cruel Phraates,¹⁰ then it might have been forced to look for a candidate who was not an Arsacid.

Of course, 'Tiridates' may have had a more active role in directing his own destiny. A Greek inscription

⁴Plut. Ant. 53.

⁵Tarn, CAH, X, p. 78; and Wroth, p. xxxix.

⁶The coin evidence does not, of course, record a revolt in its incipient stages, i.e., before mints are captured and coins issued, especially from Seleucia.

⁷Justin 42, 5, 6: 'Tiridatem quendam;' and Dio 51, 18, 2: 'τινος τριδάτου.' Both must come from the same source, possibly Pompeius Trogus.

⁸Tarn, 'Tiridates II and the Young Phraates,' Melanges Glotz (Paris, 1932), p. 835.

⁹Justin 42, 5, 1-3.

¹⁰Ibid., 4-6.

from Susa, dated by Cumont to the reign of Phraates IV, refers to a Tiridates as a general and possibly governor of Susa,¹¹ perhaps a commander who gained fame in the victory over Antonius.¹² From a parchment of A.D. 121 found in Dura-Europus we know the name of the contemporary Warden of the Western Marches, one of the four great march-wardens guarding the Parthian empire--it was Monaeses.¹³ The position was hereditary,¹⁴ and the Monaeses of 36 B.C., holding the same post, was the natural choice for the command against Antonius.¹⁵ (Indeed, nearly a century later yet another Monaeses, a 'nobleman,' was entrusted by king Vologases with the task of installing by force a Parthian candidate to the Armentian throne.)¹⁶

So, it is very likely that 'Tiridates' was actually Monaeses. His relations with Phraates were precarious; perhaps for this reason he had ingratiated himself with Antonius. He must have been haunted by the spectre of Surenas, slain by Orodes (Phraates' father) after the defeat of Crassus. While Phraates was coming to blows with the Median king over the booty, Monaeses may have decided it was advisable to revolt while he could. Common

¹¹F. Cumont, 'Nouvelles inscriptions grecques de Suse,' Comptes rendus de L'Academie des Inscriptions, 1930, pp. 208-20.

¹²Debevoise, p. 136; and Tarn, 'Tiridates,' p. 833.

¹³Rostovtzeff and Welles, 'Parchment Contract,' pp. 19-30.

¹⁴Tarn, CAH, IX, pp. 588-9.

¹⁵Tarn, 'Tiridates,' p. 836.

¹⁶Tac. Ann. 15, 2.

interest connected him with the Median king Artavasdes, from whom he could seek aid. Artavasdes had quickly allied himself with Antonius, who was thus in contact with Monaeses.¹⁷

Dio says that in 34 B.C. Antonius marched as far as the Araxes, ostensibly to conduct a campaign against the Parthians, but was satisfied with arranging terms with the Median king.¹⁸ Probably, Antonius was investigating the situation at first hand, to measure Artavasdes' strength as an ally and the effects of the civil war in Parthia. On the first point, certainly, Antonius was satisfied: Artavasdes was given part of Armenia, his daughter was betrothed to Antonius' son, and troops were exchanged as part of a mutual pact. Antonius may have decided that he could accomplish a great deal against Phraates without the need of himself invading Parthia again.

This, I think, marks the beginning of Antonius' support of Tiridates directly, or perhaps indirectly through Artavasdes. In effect, a triple alliance against Phraates now existed. Assuming (with Tarn) that Tiridates is actually Monaeses, then by helping to place him on the throne of Parthia, Antonius is only fulfilling the promise he made to Monaeses two years earlier.¹⁹

¹⁷H. Ten Cate Fennema, Quaestiones Parthicae (Neomagi, 1882), pp. 48ff. Even before the evidence from Susa and Dura was brought to light, Cate Fennema had suggested that Antonius, Artavasdes and Tiridates were all working together.

¹⁸Dio 49, 44, 1.

¹⁹Plut. Ant. 37.

With Armenia a province, Media in alliance, and civil war in Parthia, the East could be considered fairly secure.²⁰ Antonius could concentrate on the crisis in the West. In 33 B.C. he ordered Canidius to bring sixteen legions down to the sea-coast.²¹ This was most of his force in Asia,²² but some troops were still in Armenia, where they were slaughtered three years later.²³

The course of the Parthian civil war is confusing. As mentioned in the last chapter, Phraates at some time between 34 and 31 B.C. took a beating from Artavasdes the Mede when the Parthians first attempted to recover Armenia for Artaxes.²⁴ The date may have been before 33 B.C., if we assume that the Roman troops which Dio says Artavasdes employed²⁵ were those withdrawn to the coast in that year, though perhaps Dio is referring to the troops Canidius left behind.

During or after this engagement, Artavasdes may have been instrumental in what appears to be Tiridates' eventual success in capturing for a time Phraates' throne. Phraates' tetradrachms fail again for 30 B.C., and we have only one, in June, for the year before.²⁶

²⁰Syme, RR, p. 266.

²¹Plut. Ant. 56.

²²Tarn, CAH, X, p. 77.

²³Dio 51, 36, 2.

²⁴Ibid., 49, 44, 4.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Wroth, pp. xxxviii-xxxix and 135. A. Gutschmid, in his Geschichte Irans und seiner Nachbarländer (Tübingen, 1888), pp. 102f, maintains that for some period before June of 31 B.C. a rival king was issuing coins: not Tiridates, but perhaps a son of Phraates. Percy Gardner, The Coinage of Parthia (London, 1877), p. 44 attributes these coins to Tiridates.

Phraates fled east in search of aid, and eventually found it among the 'Scythians.'²⁷

In September of 31 B.C., about the time when Phraates fled eastward, the battle of Actium was fought.²⁸ Antonius was no longer in a position to support Artavasdes and Tiridates; in fact, Cleopatra attempted to enlist help from Artavasdes.²⁹ But Artavasdes, considering that Antonius already had Median contingents in his possession,³⁰ probably felt that he could spare no more, since Phraates was certain to try to regain his throne with the help of his Scythian allies.

At some time in the year which elapsed between the battle of Actium and the deaths of Antonius and Cleopatra,³¹ Phraates with his Scythians came west and began putting pressure on Tiridates. Both Parthian contenders sent envoys to Octavian, who refused to help either side, saying he was busy with Egypt.³² Undoubtedly this was true. Now was not the time to assess policy and decide on an active role. If he knew about Tiridates, Octavian may yet have been wary of him as being Antonius' man. Besides, it was so obviously a good thing that Parthians

²⁷Justin 42, 5, 5.

²⁸Dio 51, 1, 1.

²⁹Ibid., 5, 5.

³⁰Dio 49, 44, 4.

³¹Dio 51, 18, 2: after Actium, while Octavian could still say he was occupied with his war against Antonius and Cleopatra, who were both dead by August, 30 B.C.

³²Justin 42, 5, 5: specifically, busy with annexation and re-organization.

were fighting each other.

By late 30 or early 29 B.C., Phraates had won substantial control of Parthia. His tetradrachms begin in March of 29 B.C.³³ Tiridates and Artavasdes both fled to Octavian, who was now in Syria.³⁴ The victorious Phraates overstruck the coins both of Tiridates and of Antonius.³⁵

Octavian, now at the head of the Roman empire, presently found himself involved in the turmoil in Parthia, for Phraates' arch-enemies, Tiridates and Artavasdes, were in his possession. Clearly, it was Octavian's move.

However, before proceeding with a detailed examination of Octavian's policy toward Parthia, the following two chapters (one concerning Augustan poetry and the second concerning the geographical information current in the age of the soon-to-be-Augustus) are offered for the insights we might gain into that policy.

³³Tarn, 'Tiridates,' p. 832.

³⁴Dio 51, 16, 3. Octavian was in Syria between the summers of 30 and 29 B.C.: Dio 51, 18, 1. Artavasdes' son, Ariobarzanes, apparently accompanied his father and Tiridates at this time: Dio 55, 10a, 5.

³⁵Sellwood, p. 146.

Chapter Five

Augustan Poets as Evidence for Augustan Policy

It is clear that Parthia received an unusual amount of notice in Augustan poetry, references sometimes casual sometimes grave, often linking Parthia with Britain.¹ Why should satirists and love poets write so much about an area which had a negligible effect on their lives and which, in any case, should have been the sole concern of Augustus? But one quickly senses that the concerns of Augustus do become the concerns of the Augustan poets.

When the poets' views on Parthia, or anything, seem to mirror the interests of Augustus, questions of patronage, poetic integrity and propaganda are raised. Such questions are inherently unanswerable: it is the very evidence itself which is being questioned. And it is the nature of propaganda to hide itself. Still, some general trends in that controversial poetry can be outlined and some theories about that poetry can be deflated.

There is no strong traditional viewpoint among scholars: only a vaguely accepted feeling that Augustus was something more than a protector of belles-lettres; that some direction was indicated; that there was some

¹See Appendix A.

enthusiasm from below and some pressure from above; that some refusals were made; and that Maecenas' patronage could be somewhat compromising.²

The uniformity and mediocrity one expects of real propaganda is altogether lacking in the major Augustan poets.³ Whether one depicts Augustus as lord of peace or lord of war, there is bound to be something in the poetry which goes blasphemously in the opposite direction. This variance is, for us, the proof of independence,⁴ but it can also be termed inconsistency in the poets' beliefs--a sign of tampering.

An avenue did exist by which the poets could come to know Augustus' views--or, at least, what he wanted them to know--through Maecenas. A certain amount of immediate agreement was natural: the poets spoke as artists and citizens who had lived through the civil wars

²E. Fraenkel, Horace (Oxford, 1957), pp. 220ff, 434-8; H. Bardon, Les Empereurs et les latines litteraires d'Hadrien (Paris, 1968), pp. 1-203; G. Williams, Traditions and Originality in Roman Poetry (Oxford, 1968), pp. 44-50; and H. Meyer, *passim*.

³They are major not simply because they have survived; they were prominent among the ancients: see Suetonius' De viris illustribus. Panegyrists certainly existed, but, creating less art and being less universal, they were no doubt less read and have not survived in great numbers. Also, they would have been of less interest to Augustus, who was discriminating: 'componi tamen aliquid de se nisi et serio et a praestantissimis offendeatur, admonebatque praetores ne paterentur nomen suum commissionibus obsolefieri.' (Suet. Aug. 89).

⁴Bardon, pp. 76-7 and 89, n. 4; G. Williams, p. 46; see also Schanz-Hosius, Geschichte der römischen Literatur (Munich, 1935), II, p. 5; Paul van de Woestijne, 'Mécène et Virgile,' Musée Belge, 1930, p. 261f.; E. Gardthausen, Augustus und seine Zeit (Leipzig, 1891), I, 2, p. 781; Fraenkel, pp. 221, 434, and 438; and E.T. Salmon, 'The Political Views of Horace,' Phoenix I, no. 2, 1946-7, p. 10.

and into the world of the restored republic.⁵ But if there was disagreement or lack of interest, could the patron's views be ignored? The economic and social dependence was not absolute: Virgil and Horace had been materially aided, but little is known of Virgil's dependence, and Horace is characteristically exaggerated concerning his. In Horace's case, the friendship of poet and patron was genuine and historically attested.⁶ Economically and socially, Propertius was the most self-sufficient; politically, the most outspoken.⁷

Were the poets approached to speak for the Prin-
ceps?⁸ The evidence is the recusatio--the refusal to write an epic in praise of Augustus.⁹ The excuses offered--'inability' and 'my Muse forbids'--are fabricated.¹⁰ They could; they didn't want to; and, until the Aeneid was produced,¹¹ they didn't. Yet their

⁵R. Syme, RR, p. 464.

⁶G. Williams, p. 44; see Horace Epist. 1, 7; Suet. vita Verg. 12, 31, and vita Horat.

⁷Propert. 2, 7, 14; Syme, RR, p. 466; R. Nethercut, 'Ille parum cauti pectoris egit opus,' Trans. Amer. Philol. Assn. 92, 1961, p. 402; and Meyer, p. 68.

⁸I mean the type of serious approach which would not come to light as does Augustus' playful request made to Horace, in Suetonius, vita Horat.

⁹G. Williams, p. 46; and Fraenkel, pp. 220-1.

¹⁰Syme, RR, p. 462. Of Horace, Fraenkel writes (pp. 434-5): 'It is also possible that he was sometimes perfectly sincere in pleading incompetence. He may have felt that his production was slow and that, if he was to say anything worth saying, he had to make a sustained effort.' But E.T. Salmon counters (p. 11): '[Horace's] claim that he lacks the ability to do so simply will not hold water; the man who wrote the Regulus ode need make no apologies for his skill.'

¹¹And the Aeneid is hardly a mere panegyric; in

poetry is filled with laudatory passages, especially within the recusationes. This may be only to mitigate the effects of the refusal,¹² and as a means of maintaining a larger independence.¹³ Gordon Williams believes the recusatio is merely a device, modelled after a poetic invention of Callimachus, by which the poet pretends to refuse a pretended request, and, with pretended humility, verbosely lists the achievements which he says he could not possibly treat.¹⁴ Yet Williams admits that their utilitarian approach to the recusatio gives it 'a twist which would have disgusted Callimachus.'¹⁵ Nor does Williams deny the probability that Maecenas and Augustus actually approached the poets with requests.¹⁶

The role of Augustus must now be examined. Promoting good literature was certainly a worthwhile task, but it was not done with disinterest.¹⁷ The audience was certainly greater than mere aristocratic literary

fact, one scholar goes so far (too far!) as to describe the Aeneid as a pamphlet directed against Augustus (F. Sforza, 'The Problem of Virgil,' Classical Review 49, 1935, pp. 99ff.). For an excellent discussion of these puzzling aspects and views of the Aeneid, see R.D. Williams, 'Virgil,' Greece and Rome, new surveys in the classics, no. 1 (Oxford, 1967), pp. 23-31.

¹²Fraenkel, p. 434.

¹³Bardon, pp. 76-7.

¹⁴G. Williams, p. 47.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 46.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 87-8.

¹⁷Bardon, p. 102; Schanz-Hosius, p. 4; and Syme, RR, ch. 30: 'The Organisation of Opinion,' especially p. 460.

circles: it contained classes of people whose opinions mattered, and posterity.¹⁸ Augustus would know this. Art which does not praise may become art which criticizes. It must also be remembered that Augustus had always valued propaganda and the influencing of opinion: this was the man who had defeated Antonius largely by convincing all Italy that she must pledge herself to a holy war against the East.¹⁹

Augustus' personal contact with the poets was occasional.²⁰ It was Maecenas who befriended Horace and Virgil, and through Maecenas Augustus could make his likes and dislikes known. There is no reason to doubt his tolerance: he was broadminded enough to allow contrary views.²¹ And even more than Augustus, it was Maecenas who had the soft touch.²² To push too hard would mean vitiating the art: the propaganda value would be lost in becoming too obvious. Probably Maecenas, a true patron, refined Augustus' request--too much, perhaps,

¹⁸Syme, RR, p. 468; and G. Williams, p. 50.

¹⁹Syme, RR, pp. 287-93; and M.P. Charlesworth, 'The Fear of the Orient in the Roman Empire,' Cambridge Historical Journal 2, 1926, p. 9.

²⁰Bardon, p. 89, n. 4; Suet. vita Verg. and vita Horat.; Tac. Ann. 4, 34, 4; and Macrobius, Saturnalia 1, 24, 10-11. None of the evidence indicates a close relationship between Augustus and the writers of the day: the epistolary and stilted nature of those contacts proves their infrequency.

²¹Bardon, pp. 102-3; and Schanz-Hosius, p. 5. The exception, Ovid, simply pushed too far and in the worst direction: he was lucky to keep his life.

Livy's 'Pompeian' views were rather easily tolerated by the restorer of the republic (Tac. Ann. 4, 34, 4).

²²Syme, RR, p. 253; Bardon, pp. 102-3; and G. Williams, pp. 44-6.

for Maecenas was not indispensable.²³ Yet his absence was felt; the literature languished beneath the pressure, and relations between the Principes and the poets stagnated.²⁴ The principate eventually created an atmosphere conducive only to the work of flatterers.²⁵

However, for years Augustus had the means of gently expressing himself to the poets. And the poets were not unwilling to sing well-earned praises, though they refused to step down to the level of the panegyrist.

But what about all the forecasting and chatter about conquering Parthia, and Britain as well? The poets' interest must have had an external source. The view that they were, in this matter, speaking for 'republican tradition' or 'public opinion' has little evidence on its side.²⁶ In those references to Parthia and Britain we find the most obvious indications of the influence of Augustus.

This view would be rejected out of hand by those who idealize Augustus as the peacemaker extraordinaire, who would have no use for such propaganda.²⁷ Yet he certainly did nothing to discourage the talk.²⁸ Those

²³Syme, RR, p. 409; and G. Williams, p. 87.

²⁴Syme, RR, p. 412; G. Williams, pp. 87-8; and Bar-
don, pp. 102-3.

²⁵Tac. Ann. 1, 1.

²⁶Meyer, pp. 3 and 104; Schanz-Hosius, p. 4. These views are attacked, successfully, I think, by Brunt in his review of Meyer.

²⁷Meyer is a good representative of this. See also J. Buchan, Augustus (London, 1937), pp. 173-5 and 189-92, and T.R. Glover, CAH, X, p. 512.

²⁸R.G. Collingwood, Roman Britain and the English

who view Augustus as a world-conqueror will use these references to Parthia and Britain as evidence.²⁹ Yet why do they receive so much attention, when Spain, the Balkans and Germany yielded the actual military achievements and annexations?³⁰

Settlements (Oxford, 1937), p. 72, writes that 'the intention of conquering and annexing Britain was generally attributed to Augustus, and...he never disavowed it. Whether he entertained it is quite another question.'

Augustus could disavow and discourage things: it is known from Suet. Aug. 53 that he discouraged the use of the word 'dominus' in reference to himself; and some pall seems to have been thrown over the whole subject of Augustus' most important acquisition--Egypt, which, because of its peculiar status, received little contemporary notice.

²⁹ Brunt's review of Meyer, pp. 170, 173-6; and Wells, The German Policy of Augustus, introduction.

³⁰ Meyer, p. 57: 'Eine wesentliche Rolle spielt in diesem Rahmen der Zeitsituation entsprechend die Nordpolitik des Kaisers. Ihr gegenüber treten die beiden Hauptthemen der vorangehenden Zeit, Britannien und die Parther, stark zurück, und wo sie erwähnt werden, da geschieht es ⁱⁿ einem bezeichnenden, veränderten Sinne.'

Virgil died in 19 B.C., before the great northern campaigns began. Horace lived until 8 B.C., when those campaigns were at their height. About 12 B.C. Horace wrote two odes celebrating victories in the north by Drusus and Tiberius. Wars in Spain fought by Augustus or Agrippa are mentioned in odes 2,6; 3,8; 4, 14; and epistle 1, 12. But, for the numerous references to Parthia, see Appendix A. Propertius, who lived at least to 16 B.C. and perhaps longer, makes several references to Parthia and a couple to Britain, but never mentions Spain or Germany. Ovid has a few words about the West and repeats the formulas about Parthia, but he is not of the same generation as the other Augustan poets.

By contrast, Velleius Paterculus, who served in the East for at least three years and in Germany and Pannonia under Tiberius for eight, devotes twenty chapters to operations in Europe and six to eastern affairs during the reign of Augustus.

In regard to coins, there is nothing to compare with the size of the issues concerning Parthia and Armenia. Discussing Augustus' coinage, Mattingly says: 'He writes large the tale of his Parthian and Armenian successes, has less to say of the German wars and, not surprisingly, nothing at all of the revolt of Pannonia and the disaster of Varus.' (Roman Imperial Civilisation

The question may contain its own answer, if we consider that propaganda is, essentially, not the praise of achievements, but the preparation for them, or the compensation for their lack. Little propaganda, before or after, is found concerning Augustus' real military activities: if a campaign is a success, it will speak for itself or can be magnified later; if a campaign is a failure, the less said before and after, the better.

But if efforts are being made to achieve something by means which are not inherently glorious³¹--through clandestine diplomatic bargaining, for example--then a great deal of propaganda is called for to squeeze out the last ounce of prestige value. It was thus with Parthia, as with Britain.³² Both were distant and

(New York, 1959), p. 48). The only reference to wars in Europe is found on a coin of 8 B.C. depicting a German hostage (H. Mattingly, Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum (London, 1923) I, no. 492.

³¹Augustus' achievement in Britain was that, even though he did nothing, he managed to create the quite false impression that Britain was 'almost a Roman country' (καὶ οἰκίαν σχεδόν τι παρεσκεύασαν τοῖς Ῥωμαίοις ὅλην τὴν νῆσον Strabo 4, 5, 3). Also see RG 32.

³²For this view of Augustus' use of propaganda, I am indebted to R.G. Collingwood's article on Augustan policy toward Britain, in CAH, X, pp. 793-4: '...Augustus, who always had plenty to do nearer home, was inclined to shirk remote frontier problems. It was more characteristic of him to advertise an intention which he did not really entertain, than to abandon an enterprise once undertaken.... [It is uncertain] whether he actually planned the conquest of Britain, only to be diverted from it by other tasks, or whether, recognizing from the first whether these tasks had a prior claim, he only allowed others to think he was planning it....'

C.E. Stevens (in O.G.S. Crawford, Aspects of Archaeology in Britain and Beyond (London, 1951), p. 332) disagrees on the ground that what Collingwood proposes is simply bad propaganda technique. But I think there was wider scope in the ancient world for this type of

causing no immediate peril, so failure to measure up to one's own propaganda--though failure is advisably to be kept quiet--is not as serious as failure in nearer and more vital regions. Concerning Spain, the failures had to be hushed.³³ Failure in the Balkans caused panic in Rome.³⁴ And in Germany, a minor setback required that a scapegoat be found--M. Lollius,³⁵ and a major setback gave rise to stories of Augustus beating his head on a door.³⁶

To conclude, the Augustan poets' references to Parthia are a reflexion of what Augustus wanted people to think: only this, but this very clearly. The point is not that the poets misunderstood Augustus,³⁷ but that they understood only what he wanted them to. Augustus' heartfelt intentions he kept to himself, and we

propaganda. Factual information was not swiftly or widely disseminated. There was no active, truth-seeking press. Distant achievements did not have to measure up to previous propaganda: the propaganda could make small events great.

³³Vell. Pater. 2, 90, 4 asserts that there was no trouble in Spain after Augustus left--a lie: see Syme, RR, pp. 332-3 and 333, n. 2.

³⁴Vell. Pater. 2, 110, 7; Dio 55, 31, 1; and Suet. Aug. 25 and Tib. 16.

³⁵Vell. Pater. 2, 97, 1; Dio 54, 2, 4ff.; and Syme, RR, p. 429, n. 5.

³⁶Suet. Aug. 23.

³⁷Meyer, pp. 105-8; Dietmer Kienast, 'Augustus und Alexander,' Gymnasium 76, 1969, p. 452; D. Magie, 'Augustus' War in Spain,' Classical Philology 15, 1920, p. 339; Tenny Frank, Roman Imperialism (New York, 1921), p. 346. That the poets surely must have understood Augustus, see W. Schmitthenner, review of Meyer's book, in Gnomon 37, 1965, p. 161.

will not discover his foreign policy by accepting at
face value the words of the poets.

Chapter Six

Augustus' Geographical Knowledge and a Policy of World Conquest

Views of Augustus' policy toward Parthia have generally been shaded by the image of the Princeps as the pacific consolidator and administrator of a Mediterranean-based empire. If the image is altered, the policy may be brought into new perspective; and, happily, P.A. Brunt has rendered this great service by laying bare some of the vulnerable points in this traditional view of Augustus.¹ Obvious difficulties arise as soon as an examination is made of the invasions of Arabia and Ethiopia² and the German campaigns,³ all of which may seem to trespass the requirements of frontier defence. The martial tone of the Res Gestae Divi Augusti and of Augustan literature in general, and the numismatic celebrations of conquest also challenge the notions of the traditionalists. Brunt concludes with a radical view: Augustus was intent on conquering the world, literally; he would start in the north, after affairs with Parthia had been successfully settled and shelved; then,

¹Brunt, review of Meyer, pp. 170-6.

²S. Jameson, 'Chronology of the campaigns of Aelius Gallus and C. Petronius,' JRS 58, 1968, pp. 79ff.

³Wells, The German Policy of Augustus, passim.

had not the impossibilities of the North exhausted his hopes, Augustus would have turned his full force against the East, until there was nothing left to conquer.

Brunt's well-argued opinion is based most heavily on two hypotheses. One is that the Augustan poets were instigated by the Princeps to advertize his intention of conquering the world: so we need only believe what we read. I have tried in the last chapter to cast doubt on the view that the intentions which Augustus advertized and those which he actually entertained were necessarily the same. I shall also call into question the notion that the poets of that age, in speaking of world-conquest, meant it as literally as Brunt seems to think.

The other pillar of Brunt's argument is that, in the first century B.C., the world was much more 'conquerable' as far as Augustus' knowledge of it could extend. It is a question of misunderstanding geography. This view I would like to examine now.

Briefly, Brunt's argument runs: In less than ten years and with less than ten legions, Julius Caesar conquered the Gauls, who were regarded as being similar to the peoples living beyond them to the north and east--the Germans. According to 'Agrippa's Map,' Augustus must have thought that the distance from the Rhine to the 'eastern ocean'--the furthest extent of the world eastwards--was only three and a half times the east-west distance of Gaul; and the world's north-south distance was half that total. The world was an island surrounded

by Ocean, the only truly secure frontier. 'Agrippa himself evidently had no notion of the size of the land-mass east of the Rhine. We are not then justified in saying a priori that conquest beyond the Rhine was unthinkable.'⁴

While Brunt is quite properly offering new and important possibilities, he is also presenting a misleading picture of the state of geographical knowledge in the time of Augustus. And this point is crucial to Brunt's argument.

Long before Columbus, the earth was regarded as a globe.⁵ A third century B.C. Greek geographer, Eratosthenes, reckoned the globe's circumference as 200,000 stades--an amazingly close guess.⁶ But the 'earth' was only an island on the globe, surrounded by the all-en-circling Ocean. The length of this land-mass was 78,000 stades, and its breadth 38,000.

Seneca, writing forty years after the death of Augustus, mentions how Alexander the Great brought himself unhappiness by the study of geometry, because he then learned how puny was that earth of which he had seized only a fraction.⁸ A contemporary of Alexander, Pytheas

⁴Brunt, review of Meyer, p. 175.

⁵The Pythagorean doctrine of a sphere dates back to 400 B.C.: J.J. Tierney, 'The Map of Agrippa,' Proc. Royal Irish Acad. 63, 1962-4, p. 160.

⁶J. Oliver Thomson, The History of Ancient Geography (Cambridge, 1948), p. 166: eight stades were normally reckoned to equal a Roman mile.

⁷Ibid., pp. 164-6.

⁸Seneca, ad Lucillum 91, 17: '...quam pusilla terra esset, ex qua minimum occupaverat.'

of Marseilles, was said to have sailed the Atlantic and North Sea as far as the Elbe,⁹ but there were also tales of a Seleucid admiral, Patrocles, who voyaged around India and into the Caspian Sea, which was considered a 'gulf' of the outer ocean.¹⁰ There were also rumours of Spanish ships wrecked on the Arabian coast after passing below Africa,¹¹ and of an Indian vessel blown off course and ending up in Germany.¹²

In the second century B.C. Eratosthenes' views were questioned by Hipparchus of Rhodes, who doubted the Ocean assumed to be in the north, and who rightly denied that the Caspian was a gulf. As for the 'all-encircling Ocean,' Hipparchus felt no answer was possible on the available evidence.¹³ A generation later, another Greek geographer, Artemidorus, accepted Eratosthenes as the standard, though he reduced his measurements of the earth's land-mass even further.¹⁴ Posidonius (135-59 B.C.) was another Greek geographer who, in fact, wrote a work about the Ocean; he also repeated the views of Eratosthenes.¹⁵ The next Greek geographer we know well is Strabo, a contemporary of Augustus. Strabo was another follower of Eratosthenes and a muddled representative

⁹Tierney, p. 160.

¹⁰Pliny NH 6, 58.

¹¹Ibid., 1, 67.

¹²Ibid.; and Pomponius Mela 1, 2 and 3, 5.

¹³Thomson, p. 209.

¹⁴Pliny NH 2, 242 and 246; 4, 102.

¹⁵Thomson, pp. 211 and 213.

of the stagnation of Greek geography at this time.¹⁶ Strabo perhaps sensed this, but he doubted whether the gaps in Greek geography could ever be filled by any geographer with a Roman mentality.¹⁷ Roman traditions of geography were based on roads and itineraries-- poor stuff for map-making, unless combined with astronomy.¹⁸ Manilius, a poet and contemporary of Augustus, was more enthusiastic about astrology. Most of the little he wrote about the world's geography was repetition of Posidonius.¹⁹

Educated Romans knew about Greek geography,²⁰ but they were not keenly interested, or inquisitive;²¹ and some talked as if nothing had been learnt since the days of Alexander.²² Cicero is a good example of an intelligent Roman who found safety in obscurity when discussing geography. He accepted that the world is a globe,²³ but spoke obscurely of 'the globe of earth rising from the sea.'²⁴ And he believed there was another continent on

¹⁶Tierney, p. 161; and Thomson, p. 321f.

¹⁷Strabo 3, 166.

¹⁸Tierney, p. 161. The Peutinger Map, perhaps originally a work of the fourth century A.D., makes no pretences of being proportional and is concerned only with roads and stations. See Thomson, p. 379 and the bibliography he provides in the footnote on that page.

¹⁹Manilius 4, 585-817; and Thomson, p. 328.

²⁰Cic. Tusc. Disp. 1, 16, 40; 1, 28, 68; 5, 24, 64; ND 2, 66; Caesar mentions Eratosthenes, BG 6, 24.

²¹Thomson, p. 199.

²²Ibid., p. 319

²³ND 2, 66: 'iucundum mundum cognoscimus esse rotundum.'

²⁴Tusc. Disp. 1, 68: 'globus terrae eminentem e mari.'

X the other side of the world, what the Greeks called αντιχθονα--which was uninhabitable.²⁵

The Romans were very confused in their terminology. The phrase orbis terrarum became closely identified with 'the inhabited earth'--as opposed to the earth as a globe (for which no term was invented),²⁶ and also, perhaps, as opposed to 'the uninhabited earth,' both sea and land.²⁷ The globe was used as a symbol of the cosmic power of a monarch, a Hellenistic bequest.²⁸ In his own lifetime, a statue of Caesar was 'mounted on a likeness of the inhabited world.'²⁹ On a coin of Augustus issued shortly after Actium, Neptune is depicted with one foot on a globe--symbolic of the power which the naval victory brought Augustus.³⁰ Virgil speaks of the

²⁵Cic. Tusc. Disp. 1, 68

²⁶Thomson, p. 201.

²⁷Ovid, in a rare display of qualified hyperbole, limits the extent of Augustus' future conquests to that part of the world ('orbis,' line 435) which is habitable (Metam. 15, 830-1):

'Quodcunque habitabile tellus
sustinet, huius erit: pontus quoque serviet illi.'

²⁸p. Lambrechts, 'Note sur un buste en bronze de Mercure au Musée de Namur,' L'Ant. Classique, 1938, pp. 218-20. On the confusion over whether the globe symbolizes celestial or earthly power, see S.A. Strong, JRS 6, 1916, p. 42.

²⁹Dio 43, 14: ἡ οἰκουμένη.

³⁰G.F. Hill, Historical Roman Coins (London, 1909), p. 134. Republican coinage from the time of Sulla used the globe as a symbol of world-rule: A. Schlachter, Der Globus. Seine Entstehung und Verwendung in der Antike (1927), pp. 64ff. The earliest example I found of a globe on Republican coinage was for the year 76 B.C.: Grueber, Coins R. Rep., II, p. 358.

'world pacified by his father's virtues'³¹ and Velleius Paterculus echoes with the 'world pacified by his conquests'³² both phrases are typical of the extravagant way Roman writers described Rome's conquests, as if they embraced all peoples and lands, although the same writers must have realized that a large part of the globe's surface was quite unknown.³³

It seems apparent that the Romans were far too baffled by the science of geography to be able to formulate and accept even misconceptions. Contradictions were allowed to persist, because the whole subject seemed so remote, and was better left to the Greeks.³⁴

However, with the reign of Augustus, geography took on a new importance, and its study seemed appealingly pragmatic. Whether Augustus intended to conquer the world or not, it cannot be denied that, by any standard or extent of knowledge, Augustus indeed ruled a large chunk of it. Augustus had a vested and active interest in the geography of the world.³⁵ The famous 'Map of

³¹Virgil Ecl. 4, 17: 'pacatumque reget patriis virtutibus orbem.'

³²Vell. Pater. 2, 89, 3: 'pacatumque victoriis terrarum orbis.'

³³Thomson, p. 220. Ovid is exceedingly loose with the word 'orbis' and with the whole notion of world conquest: Metam. 15, 435; Fasti 1, 85, 282, 599, 711ff.; 2, 130, 136, 683; 4, 858-62; but so is Tibullus 3, 4, 145-50; Vitruvius, De arch. 1, 1; and, later, Lucan Phars. 1, 369; Florus 2, 34, 6 and Orosius 1, 1, 6 and 3, 8, 5.

³⁴Cic. ad Att. 2, 4 and 6-8.

³⁵a) Augustus' contacts with India (RG 31 and Strabo 15, 1, 4) and the need for geographical knowledge of the

Agrippa' certainly was approved, and perhaps instigated, by Augustus.³⁶ Modern reconstructions of Agrippa's map form the basis of Brunt's view that Augustus imagined the world to be easily conquerable.³⁷ However, the reconstructions are very confused,³⁸ and the conclusions and assumptions we draw out of Agrippa's map must take into consideration the intent and purposes which went into it.

That there were any scientific aims involved is very much to be doubted.³⁹ The approach, judging from the results, did not amount to an official geographic survey.⁴⁰ Eratosthenes' map, as revised by such men

routes to and from India may have been an added incentive to Aelius Gallus' campaign in Arabia; certainly, the lack of geographical knowledge contributed to Gallus' failure: Thomson, p. 295.

b) Before Gaius Caesar's expedition east (2 B.C.), it is probable that Augustus commissioned Isidorus of Charax to chart certain areas: Pliny NH 6, 141. Isidorus' one extant work is Parthian Stations.

c) In RG 26, Augustus boasts that his fleet sailed along the German coast (probably in A.D. 5) further than any Roman had gone before; also noted by Tac. Ger. 34; Pliny NH 2, 167; Vell. Pater. 2, 106; and Suet. Claud. 1. See also R. Dion, 'Un passage des Res Gestae Divi Augusti,' Mélanges Carcopino, 1966, pp. 249ff.

³⁶Pliny NH 3, 17; and Thomson, p. 333.

³⁷Brunt cites A. Klotz, Klio 24, 1931, pp. 386ff., but adds, 'there are some uncertainties.' (p. 175).

³⁸See Appendix B. Thomson writes: 'The evidence is slight and obscure, and after a vast discussion (mostly German) the map remains ghostly.' (p. 334).

³⁹Tierney, p. 164, following Klotz, p. 464. In agreement is R. Heinze, Die Augusteische Kultur (Darmstadt, 1960), p. 80: 'Politisch, wenn man will national, nicht wissenschaftlich, war auch die Tendenz von Agrippa's Weltkarte.'

⁴⁰Thomson, p. 333.

as Polybius, Posidonius and Artemidorus, was taken over by Agrippa, whose chief pride was the exactness of his measurements, for which Pliny praised him.⁴¹ But these measurements were drawn from roads and itineraries; for areas which were not much travelled, his measurements lacked foundation. Strabo refers to Agrippa's map only in connection with the geography of Italy.⁴²

This map, which lacked not only scientific vision to look beyond the Greeks and into the unknown, but which also lacked practical accuracy outside the reach of much-travelled roads, was yet considered worth displaying before the Roman people. It was painted on the portico of the Campus Agrippae; but the building was not even begun before Agrippa's death in 12 B.C.,⁴³ and was still unfinished in 7 B.C.⁴⁴ The entire project was completed by Augustus.⁴⁵ One may reasonably wonder whose character and purposes were reflected most in the finished product.

Tierney discusses the possibility that the map may actually be emphasizing a moment in a historical development and a Roman's pride in that development.⁴⁶ From his reconstruction of the measurements, Tierney divides

⁴¹Regarding the measurements for Baetica, Pliny NH 3, 17; Tierney, p. 164; and Klotz, pp. 463-4.

⁴²Thomson, p. 332.

⁴³Pliny NH 3, 17.

⁴⁴Dio 55, 8, 4.

⁴⁵Pliny NH 3, 17.

⁴⁶Tierney, p. 165.

the described areas into three groups. In the first, 'where this process is complete, we have ready-made provinces': eight in Europe, three in Africa and three in Asia. In the second group the process is still going on, and here are 'the raw materials of provinces-to-be, which are still parts of large and scarcely known areas!': Germany, Dacia, Sarmatia, Mauretania and Armenia. The third class, where no Roman arms have conquered, consists of India, Media, Mesopotamia and Arabia, which Tierney describes as 'enormous, amorphous masses lumped together as geographical units.'⁴⁷

Tierney conjectures that the map was painted onto the portico wall by separate regions and one at a time, and only after the whole work had been completed was Agrippa's name chiselled or painted above it. This would explain why Strabo refers to it only as 'our chorographic map' and to its maker as 'the chorographer':⁴⁸ perhaps Strabo saw an uncompleted map, for he uses its information on Italy and nothing else; and it would be logical that Italy should be represented first, as being of most interest and accuracy. Strabo comments that the map, or rather the part he saw of it, was full of decorative features--depictions of natural topography, and names of tribes and famous cities.⁴⁹ This would be easily done

⁴⁷Tierney, p. 165. The depictions of less known regions need not have been 'enormous,' but simply obscure. Ptolemy complained about certain world maps which gave most of the room to Europe and squeezed diminished versions of Africa and Asia into the space that was left. (Ptol. 8, 1, 2; and Thomson, p. 333).

⁴⁸Strabo 2, 5, 7.

⁴⁹Ibid.

in the case of Italy; but other regions, by comparison, would certainly seem dull--as well as 'amorphous.'

Again conjecturing with Tierney, perhaps this contrast was purposeful. At this late date, the last decade before our era, Augustus was nearing his sixties, and was probably interested not so much in boasting what he could do as in explaining what he had, or had not, done.⁵⁰ So here is the reason why these areas of the world had not been absorbed into the empire: they were not worth the effort.

This last bit of conjecture proposes alternatives to Brunt's assumptions which are equally possible; but my real hope is that I have demonstrated some of the weaknesses in Brunt's theories about Augustus' knowledge and use of geography.

As a reflexion of official interest in the geography of the world, Agrippa's map serves poorly. It was more for popular consumption. If Augustus were planning the conquest of the world, it is unlikely he would entrust the outcome of such a dangerous task to the ancient theories of Greek geographers, who were discordant among themselves and altogether confusing to even the most intelligent Romans. The evidence is that Augustus was all too aware of his own ignorance.⁵¹ If the Princeps commissioned a map to be made as usefully

⁵⁰The Res Gestae is written in this spirit: '...to represent his actions in the best possible light for posterity.' (Brunt and Moore, Res Gestae Divi Augusti, p. 3, in a discussion of the Res Gestae's literary genre, the elogia).

⁵¹See note 35.

definitive as possible, this was not it.

According to Brunt, Augustus advanced no further in his plan for world conquest than Germany. However, this crucial campaign should not be considered the result of a geographical miscalculation, but rather the probing for geographical certainty. It seemed possible that an advance of the frontier might shorten the line, a desired aim and a proper sequel to the achievements in the Balkans. In this, I am going back to the views presented by Ronald Syme in CAH, X, chapter 12, in his discussion of the campaigns in Germany.

'Imperfect geographical knowledge may well have encouraged undue hopes both of the ease with which such a conquest could be made and of the advantages which would accrue from it: but it was worth the attempt, and only invasion and exploration could give a final answer.' (p. 353).

We must yet discover whether this policy of probing for a more secure frontier, as opposed to a policy of world conquest (which I cannot accept), will shed light on Augustus' relations with Parthia.

Chapter Seven

Octavian in 29 B.C.

With Antonius dead, Octavian became the sole ruler of the Roman world. Attaining this glory had not been easy: holding on to it would prove no lighter task. The sole ruler had yet a multitude of enemies opposing him within Rome. His power was supreme, but not unlimited: the empire could not be run without the help of an oligarchy.¹ Octavian was at the pinnacle of prestige, but it was a precarious position. His task now was to make permanent a situation which could so easily become ephemeral.

Octavian was a Roman magistrate; in 29 B.C. he entered upon his fifth consulship. But his real source of power lay in the support he derived from his grip on the army and the people. He now commanded some sixty legions,² of which most were less than full strength: the heirlooms of the defunct dynasts, Pompeius, Caesar, Lepidus, Sextus and Antonius. These legions, he decided, were twice what he needed or dared maintain. Octavian had very few generals he could dare tempt with the command of a dozen or so legions. In the end he

¹Syme, RR, p. 307.

²H.M.D. Parker, The Roman Legions (Oxford, 1928), p. 78; Syme, RR, p. 304 estimates nearly seventy legions.

chose to discharge about half the legions, distributing the remaining twenty-eight or so³ over various parts of the empire.

Octavian's pre-eminence over all other Roman magistrates, generals and consular colleagues (for all twenty-four lictors followed him) had been legitimized, as it were, through the oath taken by the people of Italy in 32 B.C., swearing allegiance to Octavian.⁴ By his own account, the oath was directly connected with the war which he would win at Actium.⁵ It was to be a war, not against the Roman Antonius, but against the oriental Cleopatra. Octavian carefully cultivated Italy's already existent distaste for the East.⁶

It was a determined effort by Octavian. Antonius' Donations to Cleopatra and her children gave Octavian an excuse for not allowing the celebration of Antonius' conquest of Armenia. Antonius' rejection of the gentle Octavia was played to the hilt. Octavian made public Antonius' will, in which the legacies to Cleopatra's children and Antonius' stipulation that he be buried next to the Egyptian queen in Alexandria started wild rumours in Rome that the City would be surrendered and Alexandria made the capital.⁷

³Syme, 'Some Notes on the Legions under Augustus,' JRS 23, 1933, pp. 14ff.

⁴RG 25; Suet. Aug. 17; and Syme, RR, pp. 284-5.

⁵RG 25.

⁶M.P. Charlesworth, 'The Fear of the Orient in the Roman Empire,' The Cambridge Historical Journal II, 1926, p. 9.

⁷Dio 50, 3, 5; 4, 1-2. Similar rumours of

There was now a cause, the preservation of Italian manners and institutions. The war would be a crusade--bellum iustum piunque--and archaic rituals were performed.⁸

After Actium, though he had freed himself of Antonius, was Octavian a prisoner of his own propaganda?⁹ The battle itself had been a shabby affair, an anti-climax: so it was duly glorified to equal the earlier drama.¹⁰ The coins proclaimed AEGYPTO CAPTA:¹¹ no allusions anywhere to Antonius. But these were words and phrases: Octavian could toy with them. In the more important matter of deeds, Octavian was not bound by his own propaganda against Antonius' actions in the East.¹² He was free to keep or change.

It is safe to reject any notion that Octavian intended to become a new Alexander.¹³ No expedition of conquest would give him more power or solve the empire's

transferring the capital to the East were spread about Julius Caesar (Nic. Dam. 20), though Nicolaus may be fabling a bit here, for he was a contemporary of Augustus, about whom similar rumours were raised and quelled. See Horace Od. 3, 3, 57f.; Virgil Aen. 12, 828; and Livy 5, 51ff., who tells an edifying story about Camillus.

⁸Dio 50, 4, 5; and Syme, 'Livy and Augustus,' Harvard Studies in Classical Philology 64, 1959, p. 56

⁹Kienast, p. 452 and Charlesworth, 'Fear of the Orient,' p. 9 are both affirmative.

¹⁰Syme, RR, p. 297; and Virgil Aen. 8, 678ff.

¹¹Sutherland, Coinage, p. 28.

¹²Syme, RR, p. 300.

¹³See chapters 5 and 6.

administrative problems, which he was not attempting to escape. Stability was his dedicated goal; the means could vary. The force of sixty legions, which might have been used for further imperial conquests, Octavian cut by half.

In Syria Octavian left only a garrison of about four legions,¹⁴ and two more in Egypt.¹⁵ This was no invasion force; and even with auxiliaries, there would still be too few troops to prevent the Parthians crossing into Syria. Indeed, it appears that the legions were stationed well back from the Euphrates.¹⁶ This indicates a great deal about Octavian's intentions, which showed respect for geographic and strategic realities.

The Euphrates river and the Syrian desert are a strong barrier to invading forces, east or west. But the frontier suffers from a salient at Osrhoene, where the river makes a westerly bend which points straight at Syria, Antioch, and routes to the coast and Cilicia. Pacorus exploited this salient in 52 B.C. and again with Labienus in 41 B.C. Carrhae is only fifty miles to the east of the river. Crassus' legions were destroyed here because it was good terrain for Parthian

¹⁴Parker, p. 126; and J.G.C. Anderson, CAH, X, p. 255. See also Syme, 'Notes on Legions,' p. 31.

¹⁵Parker, ibid. Parker feels that the main concern was perhaps the protection of Egypt.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 128. In the reign of Tiberius three legions of the Syrian garrison can be located: one each at Apamea on the Orontes (Tac. Ann. 2, 79, 3), in Cyrrhus, on the road from Antioch to Zeugma (ibid., 2, 57, 2) and one at Raphanae (Jos. BJ 7, 1, 3).

horse-archers. To the north is the more mountainous region, southern Armenia, through which Caesar had planned to march and Antonius eventually did. Armenia provided cover and was needed as a place to which the Roman forces could withdraw or retreat.

The result is that Armenia was of no special strategic value to an attacking Parthian force, whereas it was essential to a Roman invasion force. If the Romans were not planning to invade, Armenia had no immediate importance,¹⁷ aside from the prestige of detaching from Parthia one of her vassals. And the Parthians knew that losing Armenia made them vulnerable. Eventually, for this reason, Armenia took on value in Roman eyes: it enabled them to punish any incursion the Parthians might make into Syria, whose frontier could not easily be secured by linear defences. This is defence by the deterring threat of punitive offence.¹⁸

Armenia had been lost by the Romans when, during the war of Actium, Phraates was able to regain his own throne and place Artaxes on the Armenian throne. Since Octavian was planning no invasion of Parthia, Armenia was of no great importance to him. Moreover, Octavian had no reason to believe that Parthia was in a position to make trouble worth punishing. Phraates had only just recovered his throne, and there were other means by which the Parthians could be kept in check.

¹⁷For a discussion of the economic importance of this area, see pp. .

¹⁸D. Oates, Studies in the Ancient History of Northern Iraq (London, 1968), pp. 68-9.

Octavian's priority was to maintain the loyalty of the East as far as the Euphrates. Antonius had done this by entrusting most of the area (except for three actual provinces) to the control of local kings, who were not of dynastic families, but were able men and loyal to Antonius.¹⁹ This halted Pompeius' premature attempts at urbanization,²⁰ cut down on the need for Roman administration, and formed a system of armed buffer states as an obstacle to the Parthians.

These acts by Antonius had at the time been associated by Octavian with Antonius' overall moral and political surrender to orientalism. But that was unimportant now: Octavian was Pharaoh of Egypt, and worshipped throughout the East. Octavian not only saw the wisdom of Antonius' policy in its general lines, but even confirmed in their positions the very men whom Antonius had selected and who had been loyal to him.²¹ The Donations to Cleopatra's children were, of course, cancelled;²² but they had only been symbolic anyway. Of Antonius' client-kings, most had not been die-hards, but had come over to Octavian in time. Amyntas, king of Galatia, had aided Octavian, and his kingdom was now increased by the addition of Isauria and Cilicia Tracheia, which had at one time been Roman provincial territory.²³ Archelaus

¹⁹ See p. 58.

²⁰ Buchheim, chs. 1 and 2.

²¹ Tarn, CAH, X, pp. 113ff.; Syme, RR, pp. 300ff.; and Magle, RRIAM, pp. 440-5.

²² RG 31 and 32.

²³ Dio 51, 2, 1; and Strabo 12, 5, 1 and 14, 5, 6.

of Cappadocia was allowed to remain as he was, though later his territory was increased.²⁴ Herod of Judaea laid his diadem before Octavian, who replaced it and also gave Herod most of Palestine to rule.²⁵ Polemo, king of Pontus, was retained and given permission to expand to the northeast; however, for a special reason, Lesser Armenia was taken from him.²⁶

Artaxes, who hated the Romans, now ruled Greater Armenia. But Octavian had in his possession two of Artaxes' brothers,²⁷ who might be used as pretenders to his throne. Artaxes knew this, and demanded the return of his brothers; Octavian refused.²⁸

Artavasdes the Mede, driven out by Phraates and Artaxes, was received by Octavian, even though the Mede had been a friend of Antonius. Octavian took faith in his hatred of Artaxes and placed him on the throne of Lesser Armenia, a useful position.²⁹

By refusing to return Artaxes' brothers and supporting the client-kings, including Artavasdes the Mede, Octavian was continuing Antonius' policies in the East. And, like Antonius, Octavian now possessed Tiridates.

²⁴Dio 51, 2, 1.

²⁵Jos. AJ 15, 5-7.

²⁶Dio 53, 25, 1.

²⁷These had been taken along with their father, Artavasdes of Armenia, to Alexandria by Antonius. In 30 B.C. Cleopatra had Artavasdes killed, but the brothers fell into Octavian's hands.

²⁸Dio 51, 16, 2.

²⁹Dio 54, 9, 3.

Chapter Eight

Octavian and Tiridates, 30-25 B.C.

After Tiridates fled to Octavian in Syria in the winter of 30/29 B.C., the victorious Phraates IV sent envoys to Octavian.¹ Dio says that Octavian negotiated with them in a friendly way--φιλικῶς ἐχρημάτισε. This must be qualified, for there could be no friendship with Phraates at this stage. As the verb implies, it was a business transaction. Octavian, as Dio specifies, had not promised Tiridates any aid, yet permitted him to live in Syria.² Octavian was thus making Parthia an offer and a threat at the same time. The object of both was the humbling of Phraates, which could only be sufficiently demonstrated through the restitution of the standards of Crassus. The prestige associated with the return of these standards was great: Octavian did not need to seek more, for this would symbolize submission. But from Phraates' point of view, the shame of surrendering the standards was equally great, and neither the value of Octavian's threat of using Tiridates nor the value of his promise not to could make up for the loss of prestige Phraates would suffer if he returned the standards won in battle.

On January 1, 29 B.C. Octavian entered into his fifth consulship while he was still in Syria. On that

¹Dio 51, 18, 3.

²Ibid.

day in Rome the senate ratified all his acts. A few weeks later a letter arrived from Octavian about the Parthians.³ Probably it contained the first information the Romans had heard of the fact that a pretender to the Parthian throne was in Octavian's possession and that Phraates had sent envoys to him. Possibly more was said, reflecting Octavian's expectation of recovering Crassus' standards and the prisoners. Whatever was in the letter, it was enough to incite the senate into decreeing an unprecedented number of honours and tributes to Octavian: his name was to be included in the sacred hymns; a tribe would be called 'Julian' after him; the day he entered the City would be held sacred for evermore, and so on. Octavian accepted nearly all the honours, and the one which pleased him most was the closing of the gates of Janus, implying that all Rome's wars had ceased.⁴ It was the sort of antiquarian formula Octavian relished, but was never bound by. It did not mean there would be no further military efforts: indeed, at that very moment Rome's forces were fighting the Treveri in Gaul and the Cantabri and Astures in Spain.⁵ But as Octavian was preparing to celebrate his triple triumph--for Illyricum, Actium and Alexandria, all 'foreign' wars⁶--he had a

³Dio 51, 20, 1.

⁴Ibid., 2-4. By Dio's account, these seem to be additional honours which the senate 'further appointed' (προσκατεστήσαντο) after the arrival of the letter concerning Parthia (ἐπειδὴ καὶ τὰ περὶ τῶν Πάρθων γράμματα ἦλθεν). Honours decreed solely because of Actium are listed in 51, 19, 6-7.

⁵Ibid., 5.

⁶Syme, RR, p. 303.

right to feel that there would be no need to fight the Parthians. His arrangements in the East were an improvement even on Antonius' sound policy. Though Rome had lost control of Armenia, Octavian not only possessed pretenders to its throne, but also had Artavasdes the Mede stationed in Lesser Armenia. And the acquisition of Egypt compensated for a great deal.

The recovery of Crassus' standards would have no such strategic or practical importance, but the tremendous prestige value would nicely cap off Octavian's arrangements, not only in the East, but in Rome. Consequently, Octavian must have felt some disappointment when he realized that Phraates was not going to surrender the standards, but was instead calling Octavian's bluff.

* * * * *

There are Parthian tetradrachms found in Seleucia which are dated May, 26 B.C. and March, 25 B.C. They bear the unusual legend ΦΙΛΟΡΩΜΑΙΩΝ.⁷ These dates are in the middle of the thirty-six year reign of Phraates IV, but it is inconceivable that Phraates would employ such a legend. The coins are commonly attributed to Tiridates. That Tiridates made a second attempt for the Parthian throne is evidenced in statements by Isidore of Charax and Dio Cassius.

Isidore says that Tiridates, while an exile, made an invasion of Parthia.⁸ From the coin evidence, the

⁷McDowell, pp. 185 and 222.

⁸Isidore of Charax, Parthian Stations, 1.

invasion appears to have begun not later than the summer of 27 B.C., and perhaps in 28.⁹ Phraates was caught completely by surprise: retreating, he was forced to kill his harem when there was danger that these politically important women would fall into the hands of the invader.¹⁰

Octavian must have been behind the attack. Such an important possession as Tiridates would not be allowed to roam about and organize invasions, unless Octavian approved.¹¹ The attack was well launched, perhaps from the borders of Lesser Armenia, where the watch-dog Artavasdes waited by the Euphrates, or, more likely, from Roman Syria, which in early 27 B.C. became officially part of Octavian's military province.¹² Yet Phraates organized his resistance, and it was the spring of 26 B.C. before Tiridates reached Seleucia, where he minted those coins which duly acknowledged

⁹Tarn, 'Tiridates,' p. 833; and Wroth, p. 135.

¹⁰Isid. Char. 1: the slaughter took place on an island in the Euphrates, at Belesl Biblada. On the importance of the harem, see Colledge, p. 60. Note that when Phraates II defeated Antiochus VII Sidetes (c. 129 B.C.), a niece of the Seleucid king was taken into the Parthian king's harem (Justin 38, 10, 10); Surenas took his harem with him wherever he went, even Carrhae, and his concubines filled two hundred wagons (Plut. Crass. 21 and 32); and in A.D. 34 Tiridates III, after forcing Artabanus III to retreat eastward, immediately besieged a fortress in which Artabanus had left behind his treasure and harem (Tac. Ann. 6, 44).

¹¹Karl-Heinz Ziegler, Die Beziehungen zwischen Rom und dem Partherreich: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Völkerrechts (Wiesbaden, 1964) is contradictory in saying that Octavian sided with Phraates against Tiridates (p. 45), but then 'allowed' Tiridates to return to Parthia: 'wurde gestattet, in das Partherreich zurückzukehren' (p. 46).

¹²Dio 53, 12; 7.

his debt to Rome.

But the battle front wavered. For a time Phraates regained Babylonia, only to lose it again. Possibly this may indicate two spring offensives by Tiridates.¹³ But by the summer of 25, Phraates had won decisively, and he overstruck Tiridates' coins.¹⁴

Tiridates fled, this time taking with him one of Phraates' sons, whom he had captured.¹⁵ Not surprisingly, Tiridates went straight to Octavian, who was then in Spain.¹⁶

The boy was Phraates' youngest son, also named Phraates.¹⁷ Tiridates may have used the boy as a throne figure,¹⁸ since he himself may not have been an Arsacid. But now, in bringing the boy to Octavian, Tiridates may have thought to redeem his own failure by providing Octavian with another card to play.

¹³ McDowell, p. 222.

¹⁴ Allotte de la Fuye, Rev. Num., 1904, p. 187: the overstruck coin is dated about August, 25 B.C.

¹⁵ Justin 42, 5, 6; Dio 53, 33, 2; and RG 32: note the word 'postea.'

¹⁶ Justin, ibid. To journey from Parthia to Spain safely would indicate a reliance on Roman travel facilities: perhaps evidence of 'official' interest.

¹⁷ Ibid., and 12; RG 32; Tac. Ann. 6, 32; Strabo 16, 1, 28 and Debevoise, p. 144.

¹⁸ Tarn, 'Tiridates,' p. 834-6: relying on a strict interpretation of the word 'reges' in RG 32 and on a Parthian coin of a beardless king which Tarn would like to attribute to this boy and to the year 26 B.C. Wroth, pp. 97ff., assigns it to Orodes' son, Pacorus.

Chapter Nine

Octavian and Rome, 29-23 B.C.

In Rome, the aristocracy no longer had to divide its distrust: Octavian was the last of the dynasts. The Ides of March had taught that blatant despotism could be fatal, and there would be no permanent government for Rome without the participation of the 'ruling' classes. Octavian strove to make his regime as palatable to the aristocracy as he could without actually surrendering too much power. The republic, which had deserved its end, must seem to be restored: actual restoration would mean a return to chaos. The decade after Actium witnessed a turbulent evolution in the external forms of Octavian's authority. The core of his power was left intact.

Octavian had triumphantly returned to Italy in 29 B.C., and he immediately set about the business of settling his veterans. He paid for everything in cash, eventually covered by the spoils of Egypt.¹ To show that an era had come to an end, Octavian no longer kept all twenty-four lictors as he had since the 'oath of allegiance' sworn by all the western provinces in 32 B.C., but now he shared half the lictors with his various consular colleagues.² Octavian was offered the

¹RG 16; and Dio 51, 4, 8.

²Dio 53, 1, 1.

tribunicia potestas and, under the lex Saenia, was given the right to create patricians.³ However, there were occurrences which demonstrated an inconsistency between Octavian's authority as a consul and the power he was exercising. He prevented a tribune-elect from taking office;⁴ he delayed and diminished the triumph earned by a proconsul;⁵ and he revoked all amicitia with the prefect of Egypt, whom the senate recalled to stand trial for treason, but who instead committed suicide.⁶

Octavian had to redefine his position. In 27 B.C. he dramatically 'restored the republic' by handing the commonwealth over to the senate and people.⁷ A motion was immediately made that Octavian should rule the empire. He protested against so much responsibility, and asked only the charge of three areas which most needed military attention: Spain, Gaul and Syria. These became his provincia; the rest of the empire was in the senate's care. Egypt was not mentioned. It was simply Octavian's.

³Dio 51, 19, 6 and 7. On the confusion over whether Octavian actually received the tribunicia potestas and did not use it, or gave it back in 27 B.C., or did not receive it until 23 B.C.; see Brunt and Moore, Res Gestae Divi Augusti, pp. 10f.

⁴Dio 52, 23, 7: Q. Statilius.

⁵Dio 51, 25, 2: M. Licinius Crassus.

⁶Suet. Aug. 66; and Dio 53, 23, 7. C. Gallus committed suicide in 27 B.C. according to Jerome Chronica, p. 164c, in Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte, ed. R. Helm, vol. 7, part 1 (Leipzig, 1913).

⁷RG 34; and Dio 53, 12.

Most of the legions were in Octavian's provincia, though five or six were in the 'public' provinces.⁸ Yet Octavian's authority was increased by the right to appoint praetorian legates, including ex-consuls, and the right to make treaties and declare war. In essence, Octavian had lost nothing of his power: it was simply renamed. He, too, had a new, rather superhuman, appellation voted him by the senate, 'Augustus.'⁹

But there were further disappointments in store for Augustus. When he left for Spain in mid-27 B.C., Augustus appointed M. Valerius Messalla Corvinus to the post of praefectus urbi. Once a republican, but now an adherent of Augustus, Messalla however served only six days before he resigned, calling the office 'unconstitutional.'¹⁰

In Spain, Augustus' health was undermined. Then Tiridates arrived, a failure. Word came that king Amyntas of Galatia had died.¹¹ Amyntas, loyal and forceful, had been the only man in the East capable of putting an army, organized on Roman models, in the field.¹² Also, an expedition into Arabia led by Aelius Gallus was bungled.¹³ Its purpose may have been to

⁸ Syme, RR, p. 314.

⁹ Dio 53, 16, 8.

¹⁰ Tac. Ann. 6, 2.

¹¹ Dio 53, 26, 3.

¹² G. Ferrero, Greatness and Decline of Rome, English trans. (London, 1909), vol. 4, p. 228.

¹³ Dio 53, 29f.; Strabo 16, 4, 24; and Pliny NH 6, 162 and 12, 84.

seize some of the spice traders' riches, or, more likely, to investigate and establish more direct trading links with India.¹⁴ While Gallus, the prefect of Egypt, was absent, the Ethiopians attacked Egypt, but were beaten back by C. Petronius.¹⁵ Augustus felt the need to magnify both events beyond their true proportions.¹⁶

Augustus was still in poor health when he left Spain in 24 B.C.¹⁷ The senate voted rejoicings at his return, and the gates of Janus were closed again.¹⁸ But Augustus soon heard, perhaps even before he reached Rome, that the tribes of Spain were already in revolt once more.¹⁹

In late 24 or early 23 B.C., a proconsul of Macedonia, M. Primus, was tried for making war against the kingdom of Thrace without authority. The defendant claimed at one moment that he had had instructions from Augustus, and later said that they came from Marcellus, Augustus' son-in-law. Augustus simply denied it all,²⁰ which condemned Primus. Worse than the mere ordering about of proconsuls was the implication that Marcellus had some extraordinary authority simply because he was a relation of Augustus: that he was, in fact, the next in a line of dynastic succession. Primus was condemned, but there had been some votes for acquittal:²¹ opposition

¹⁴See E.H. Warmington, The Commerce between the Roman Empire and India (Cambridge, 1928), chs. 1 and 2.

¹⁵Dio 54, 5; Strabo 17, 820; and Pliny NH 6, 181.

¹⁶RG 26. ¹⁷Dio 53, 28, 1. ¹⁸Ibid., 27, 1.

¹⁹Ibid., 29, 1. ²⁰Dio 54, 3, 2. ²¹Ibid., 4.

was hardening. Augustus suddenly uncovered a plot against his life: Fannius Caepio and A. Terentius Varro Murena, the latter a consul, were accused, condemned in absence, and, when found, executed while resisting arrest.²²

The execution of a consul was a very serious matter, whether or not there was an actual conspiracy. Yet Augustus was still able to find a sturdy republican who would agree to take Murena's place as consul. Soon after Cn. Calpurnius Piso took office, Augustus' health finally broke down. Near death, he handed over certain papers to Piso, but his signet ring he gave to Agrippa.²³ Suddenly, he recovered; but this experience, combined with the continuing recalcitrance of the nobiles, forced Augustus to alter again his position. He resigned his

²²It is much disputed whether Murena the conspirator is the same man as A. Terentius Varro Murena, listed as consul ordinarius of 23 B.C. on only one of the consular fasti, and whether the conspiracy occurred in 23, or, as Dio relates it, in 22 B.C. Syme, RR, p. 333-4 accepts 23. K.M.T. Atkinson, 'Constitutional and Legal Aspects of the Trials of Marcus Primus and Varro Murena,' Historia 9 (1960), p. 440ff., retains Dio's dating, but questions the identification. P. Sattler, Augustus und der Senat (Göttingen, 1960), pp. 62-3, assumes 23 B.C. But Mrs. Atkinson's views have been accepted by J.P.V.D. Balsdon, Gnomon 33 (1961), p. 395 and P.A. Brunt, JRS 51 (1961), p. 234f. W. Schmitthenner, 'Augustus' spanischer Feldzug und der Kampf um den Prinzipat,' Historia 11 (1962), p. 78, n. 87, maintains 23. F. Millar, A Study of Cassius Dio (Oxford, 1964), p. 89-90 believes 'the date must be left open.' The arguments for 23 are to be found again in D. Stockton, 'Primus and Murena,' Historia 14 (1965), p. 18-40. An examination of the consular fasti tries to uphold Dio's dating: M. Swan, 'The Consular Fasti of 23 B.C.,' Harvard Studies in Classical Philology 71 (1966), pp. 235-47.

The matter appears to turn on prosopographical points with which I am generally unfamiliar. For my arguments, this is no crux, so I employ the more generally accepted dating, 23 B.C.

²³Dio 53, 30, 2.

consulship for 23 B.C. in the middle of the year,²⁴ so that both annual consulships were now open to the nobil-
es.

Augustus was now only a proconsul of part of the empire. But it was voted by the senate that he be allowed not to lose his imperium when he entered the City's limits, and he was given a maius imperium over other proconsuls. He was also granted tribune's powers for life with priority in convening the senate.²⁵ He asked that imperium be given also to Agrippa for a period of ten years.²⁶ The intention behind this may have been to show that he did not mind sharing his power with a colleague;²⁷ or to ensure that Agrippa would be in a position to take control of the empire if Augustus should die; or to provide Agrippa with authority over proconsuls in the East, where he was presently sent.

Hostility, and even conspiracy, were easily dealt with in Rome. But in the military provinces, any reflection of the recent unrest could be fatally serious.²⁸

²⁴Dio 53, 32, 4.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Josephus says Agrippa administered the provinces beyond the Ionian Sea as Augustus' deputy (AJ 15, 350) and did so for ten years (AJ 16, 86). Of course, Agrippa was in the west in 21-19 B.C. (Dio 54, 11, 1f.), as Josephus no doubt knew. The conclusion is that he was referring to Agrippa's imperium. For all the arguments, see: T. Mommsen, Römisches Staatsrecht (Leipzig, 1877), II, p. 859ff.; H.S. Jones, CAH, X, pp. 142-3; Syme, RR, p. 337, n. 1; M. Reinhold, Marcus Agrippa (Geneva, N.Y.), p. 167ff.; and Rudolf Daniel, M. Vipsantus Agrippa (Breslau, 1933), p. 57.

²⁷As he boasts of asking the senate on five occasions for a colleague to share his tribunicia potestas (RG 6).

²⁸Syme, RR, p. 338.

The late king Amyntas' territory, Galatia, had been made into a province in 25 B.C. M. Lollius had been sent out to organize it. Agrippa was perhaps to supervise and keep an eye on all the proconsuls at this dangerous time. But in addition, Agrippa's mission may have had a different purpose, one which concerned the Parthians.

Chapter Ten

The Mission of Agrippa

During the years following Actium, the Parthians were an ever-present subject in Roman poetry, in casual references and in serious themes. As a topic for daily conversation, the Parthians could hardly have ranked so high or received as much attention as they did in the poetry.

The Parthians figured in short, meaningful metaphors; they were archetypes for treachery.¹ There were moral lessons of how civil strife made Rome vulnerable to barbarian attack² and wasted the energy which should be used against the Parthians.³ Avenging Crassus was to be part of the moral regeneration of Rome.⁴ Current affairs were followed with interest⁵--including news of Tiridates' and Phraates' struggles.⁶ The predominant expectation was that Augustus would inevitably have to

¹Examples of this category are too numerous and too trivial to list exhaustively, but see Appendix A.

²Horace Epod. 7, 4-10; Od. 2, 1, 31-2; and 3, 6, 7-12.

³Hor. Od. 1, 2, 21-24; 1, 21, 13-16; and 1, 35, 29-33.

⁴Hor. Od. 1, 2, 49-52; 1, 12, 53-7; and Propertius 3, 4; and 3, 5.

⁵Hor. Od. 3, 6, 7-12; 3, 29, 25-9; and Propert. 2, 10.

⁶Hor. Od. 1, 26, 3-5; 2, 2, 17-21; 3, 8, 19-20; and possibly 3, 9, 4.

thrash the Parthians.⁷

Augustus never made the unrelenting campaign to conquer Parthia, and never intended to. The Parthians did not present the sort of threat which had to be treated preventively, and the risks were not worth the possible gain: that would be fishing with the golden hook.⁸ Augustus learned from Antonius' mistakes.

Yet if Augustus really intended to do nothing, then the chatter of the poets would have been most embarrassing. Augustus would discourage them, and could. But the evidence is that he encouraged their expectations.⁹ He had his reasons.

Augustus knew that public opinion would be easily satisfied with the return of Crassus' standards and the prisoners. He sought these from Phraates in 30 B.C., while threatening him with Tiridates. When Phraates refused, Augustus adopted Antonius' scheme and launched Tiridates into Parthia in 28 or 27 B.C. For a while there was a chance of realizing the dream of having a client-king on the throne of Parthia; however temporary, it would still be a coup. That plan failed, but Augustus gained possession of Phraates' son, and it remained to be seen what this could yield.

At any moment Augustus might have succeeded, and might yet. Perhaps he had not expected Phraates to be

⁷Hor. Sat. 2, 5, 61-5; 2, 1, 12-5; Od. i, 29, 1-4; 2, 9, 18-24; 2, 13, 17-8; 3, 2, 1-6; 3, 3, 42-54, 3, 5, 1-12; Virgil Georg. 1, 498-514.

⁸Suet. Aug. 25.

⁹See chapter 5, on propaganda.

tenacious, or fortunate. But whenever the moment should come when Phraates would make a sign of submission--no matter how suddenly or through what coercion--the propaganda preparation would make the result glorious.

* * * * *

Rome was aware that Phraates had won his war against Tiridates.

'redditum Cyri solio Phraaten
dissidens plebi numero beatorum
eximit Virtus....'¹⁰

In Od. 1, 26 there is mild empathy for Tiridates' point of view, so perhaps Augustus' support for Tiridates was known to Rome, or at least to Horace.¹¹

From the time that Tiridates had reached him in Spain, Augustus had been intensely occupied with other matters, including completion of the war, his own ill health (which brought him near death), the trial of Pri-mus, the conspiracy of Caepio and Murena, and the political settlement of 23 B.C., which resulted in his resigning the consulship in July of that year,¹² 'a year that might well have been the last, and was certainly the most critical, in all the long Principate of Augustus.'¹³ A new involvement in Parthian affairs, with a

¹⁰Hor. Od. 2, 2, 17-20.

¹¹Ibid., 1, 26, 1-6:

'Musis amicus tristitiam et metus
tradam protervis in mare Creticum
portare ventis, quis sub Arcto
rex gelidae metuatur orae,
quid Tiridatem terreat unice
securus.'

¹²Mommsen, Röm. Staatsr., III, p. 797, n. 3.

¹³Syme, RR, p. 333.

successful result, would possibly redirect energies away from political strife: to reforge the blunted swords and turn them against the barbarians.¹⁴

Crassus' standards were waiting. But, still, Augustus required nothing more. It was senseless to make a conquest of Parthia. Success would no doubt be costly, and the only thing Augustus could do with Parthia once he had conquered it was to make it into a client-kingdom, too distant to keep under control. The Parthians were no great threat to his well-organized East. And once a Roman expedition crossed the Euphrates, could it be sure to escape defeat? Ventidius had shown that the Parthians were not invincible, but east of the Euphrates they had not been beaten. Augustus' resources were vast, but why waste them? He knew only too well how Antonius had been weakened by his failed venture, and what the consequences had been.

Besides, Augustus still had Tiridates, and Phraates son as well. The opportunity for peacefully negotiating the return of the standards was yet too great to let pass.

Sometime very soon after the settlement of 23 B.C. Agrippa left Rome and took up residence on the island of Lesbos. Dio writes that Augustus had sent him away from Rome so that there would be no wrangling between him and Marcellus over the fact that Augustus had entrusted his

¹⁴Horace *Od.* 1, 35, 38-40. The Parthians are not specifically mentioned. Horace's thoughts may have been directed toward the proposed campaigns against Britain and Arabia, which are mentioned.

signet ring to Agrippa and not to Marcellus, whom everyone assumed to be heir-apparent.¹⁵ Velleius Paterculus says that assignments from Augustus were but a pretext for Agrippa's withdrawal: the gossip current in Rome was that Agrippa felt a secret animosity for Marcellus.¹⁶ Suetonius has Agrippa in a fit of pique because Augustus favoured Marcellus,¹⁷ or says that he desired not to stand in the young man's way.¹⁸ Pliny the Elder calls the move the 'pudenda Agrippae ablegatio.'¹⁹ Tacitus says Augustus allowed Agrippa to withdraw when he requested it.²⁰ Interestingly, it is an Easterner, Josephus, who says that Agrippa was sent east as Caesar's deputy, with no mention of any scandal.²¹

Agrippa spent nearly two years in the East, and of his activities during that period nothing is recorded: only that at one point he received a visit from Herod.²² There is not even the sort of gossip which later surrounded Tiberius' exile on Rhodes.²³

That some scandal lay behind Agrippa's departure

¹⁵Dio 53, 31-2.

¹⁶Vell. Pater. 2, 92, 2.

¹⁷Suet. Aug. 66.

¹⁸Ibid., Tib. 10.

¹⁹Pliny NH 7, 149

²⁰Tac. Ann. 14, 53: the words are put in Seneca's mouth as he speaks with Nero.

²¹Jos. AJ 15, 10, 2.

²²Ibid., 3.

²³Suet. Tib. 11.

has been seriously brought into question.²⁴ Agrippa was Augustus' most loyal friend. They had known each other for half their lives. Agrippa had served Augustus tirelessly, and Augustus had shown him every honour, culminating with the guardianship of the signet ring, and therefore the empire. Now, immediately after Augustus gave Agrippa a maius imperium which made him second in power only to Augustus himself, we are asked to believe that Agrippa went into retirement to avoid any embarrassing tête-à-têtes with a nineteen year-old boy who was holding his first public office.²⁵ It is more incredible still that Augustus, barely surviving the opposition in Rome during the preceding twelve months, would let the loyal and strong Agrippa walk out. Finally, we must discard the rumours reported in our sources, when we consider that Agrippa returned to Rome ~~and~~ year and a half later--and no sooner, though Marcellus had by then been dead for a year--and took up the management of the West while Augustus was in the East; he also married Julia, Augustus' daughter and Marcellus' widow, and accepted further important military commands in Augustus' service.

Magie believes that Agrippa was sent East to negotiate secretly with the Parthians for the return of

²⁴David Magie, 'The Mission of Agrippa in the Orient in 23 B.C.,' Classical Philology 3, 1908, pp. 145ff. Also see Syme, RR, p. 342: '...a political suspect is not placed in charge of provinces and armies.'

²⁵Propertius 3, 18, 15: Marcellus died in the next year, aged twenty.

Crassus' standards.²⁶ There was good reason for secrecy. Augustus, ever conscious of appearances, knew that an arrangement had to be made which would give him material for glorification of Rome and humiliation for Parthia. Crassus would not be avenged by a public offer to exchange a kidnapped boy for the standards lost in battle. Agrippa, capable, discreet, and empowered for any contingency, was to be the negotiator. Lesbos was the headquarters. It was near enough the mainland, yet no city in Asia would be as secure, especially for keeping things secret. Also, the island was a renowned place of exile,²⁷ so it suited thoroughly accepted rumours of Agrippa's melodramatic withdrawal. So Agrippa dutifully proceeded to Lesbos, and must naturally have made quick contact with the Parthians.²⁸

But what bargaining strength did the Romans have? Phraates had never known a defeat at the hands of the Romans, and by this time he must have come to the conclusion that Augustus was not overly anxious to invade Parthia. Tiridates had failed Augustus even worse than he had failed Antonius. Augustus' trump, the possession of Phraates' youngest son, may not have been such an obvious boon. Phraates never displayed much interest in

²⁶Magie, 'Mission of Agrippa,' p. 150.

²⁷Cic. Pro Rab. Post. 10, 27.

²⁸At this point I diverge from the opinions of Magie, who believes that Agrippa's mission was a total success and that Augustus' tour of the East was meant to accomplish, among other things, the 'recovery' of the standards in a way which would appear to be militant and forceful, though secretly pre-arranged.

his relatives, except when he murdered his father and brothers,²⁹ slaughtered his harem,³⁰ and later (as we shall see) sent away his own legitimate sons as hostages. Still, the boy was an Arsacid and a legitimate candidate to Phraates' throne. Before the year 23 B.C. had ended, Phraates sent envoys to Augustus in Rome.³¹ Phraates demanded that his son be returned and that his 'slave' Tiridates be handed over.³² Augustus took the matter before the senate, which promptly surrendered the last of its authority over foreign policy by requesting that Augustus make the decision.³³

Augustus refused to hand over Tiridates, who, despite his tendency to failure, might yet be of service. However, Phraates' son was returned: sine pretio, says Justin, but Dio states that the condition was the return of the standards of Crassus. Both are probably true.

²⁹ Justin 42, 5, 1.

³⁰ Isid. Char. 1.

³¹ Dio 53, 33, 1-2. This passage, which concerns the Parthian envoys who were brought before the senate by Augustus, is an important crux for our chronological order. Dio is describing the episode as an illustration of Augustus' habit of showing respect to the senate. The passage may be looking back to a much earlier incident, only now being described, out of place, as an example. But it seems to me that the description of such an incident would not be held in abeyance until it could serve as an illustration. On the contrary, Augustus' habit of deference has been brought to Dio's mind by this incident. Also, it is the only example here given. I therefore take Dio's order of narration on this and related points to be the chronological order of events as he knew them.

³² Dio, ibid.; Justin 42, 5, 7: 'servum suum Tiridatem et filium'--another indication that Tiridates was not an Arsacid.

³³ Dio, ibid. On the significance of the senate's act, see Ferrero, Greatness and Decline, IV, p. 264.

Naturally, the condition could not be made public: it was a mercenary way of redeeming Rome's honour, and Phraates might openly refuse his part of the bargain. However, Dio is probably justified in assuming that some price was implicit in the all-too-generous act.

It can only be guessed whether Augustus was hoping Phraates would reciprocate the gesture in some servile fashion, or whether some pre-arrangements had been made explicit at Lesbos. In any case, while Agrippa remained on his island for months,³⁴ ready to arrange anything, Phraates dauntlessly did nothing.

³⁴As noted by Syme, RR, p. 338, the island was well situated for Agrippa to watch over not only the East, but also the Balkans. That Josephus, who is concerned mainly with Jewish history, mentions only Herod's visit with Agrippa does not preclude the possibility that other client-kings also visited the island on official business.

Chapter Eleven

Augustus' Tour of the East

Late in 22 B.C. Augustus set out from Rome on a projected tour of the eastern provinces.¹ Augustus had not been in the East for seven years, and it was a good time to make an appearance before his subjects, soldiers and governors. There was undoubtedly much administrative work to be seen to personally. Also, it was a good time to be out of Rome; he could demonstrate to the nobiles his own necessity, for he probably foresaw the near chaos which followed his departure from the City.² Also, there was the matter of the Parthians.

It was naturally assumed by Rome that this was the expedition to defeat the Parthians.³ Augustus, even had he so desired, could do nothing to prevent that assumption. But there was probably no advertisement of a grand campaign, no marching out of the City, and the expedition, or entourage, did not proceed directly against the enemy. On the contrary, it was well over a year before Augustus reached Syria, after making several stops and detours on the way. He went about his imperial business, leaving Phraates to wonder what he was up to.

¹Dio 54, 6, 1.

²Syme, RR, p. 371.

³Propertius 4, 3.

But something was up: we will find that, when Augustus needed them, there stood close by not only Artaxes' brother Tigranes, who had lived in Rome for a decade, but also Ariobarzanes, the son of Rome's ally, Artavasdes the Mede, now ruling Lesser Armenia. Tiridates may have been brought along as well.⁴

In the winter of 22/21 B.C., Agrippa was summoned by Augustus, then in Sicily, to return to Rome and govern the West in his absence.⁵ Seemingly all the scandal which had supposedly caused his departure was now forgiven, though, as likely, Agrippa may have been spending the last few months making arrangements for Augustus' tour.⁶ In the spring of 21 B.C., Augustus sailed from Sicily to Greece, where he tarried until the winter, which was spent on the island of Samos.⁷ There he held court, giving audience to the recently defeated queen of the Ethiopians.⁸

About this time the situation intensified. It is reported that an embassy arrived from Armenia representing not king Artaxes, but a pro-Roman faction which wanted Artaxes to be replaced by his brother Tigranes, who was in Augustus' hands (indeed, apparently within

⁴Though, for strict history, we have heard the last of Tiridates. An inscription from Spoleto may refer to a son of Tiridates who became a Roman citizen and commanded some Parthian auxiliaries serving in the Roman army (CIL, III, 8746).

⁵Dio 54, 6, 4.

⁶Magie, 'Mission,' p. 151.

⁷Dio 54, 7.

⁸Strabo 17, 1, 54.

reach).⁹ Without hesitation Augustus complied, and summoned Tiberius to bring an army from Macedonia and effect the change.¹⁰ Before Tiberius' force arrived, Artaxes was killed, conveniently enough, by the Armenians themselves.¹¹ With no lack of pomp, Tiberius crowned Tigranes II, presumably in Artaxata.¹²

Artaxes' death meant that not only Greater Armenia, but also Media Atropatene lost its ruler. Its previous king, the loyal Artavasdes, who had been exiled from Media since 30 B.C. and had since been ruling Lesser Armenia, unfortunately had died recently.¹³ Lesser Armenia went to Archelaus of Cappadocia, but Artavasdes' son, Artobarzanes, was installed in Media Atropatene.¹⁴

Suddenly, without a battle, Augustus had extended the sphere of Roman client-kingdoms to the shore of the Caspian Sea, and Roman troops were breathing down Phraates' neck. And what was the reaction of the king who had never known a defeat at Roman hands, had twice beaten back the puppet Tiridates, and had never shown the least sign of submission? He meekly handed over the precious standards and whatever prisoners still survived.¹⁵

⁹Dio 54, 9, 4f.

¹⁰Ibid.; Suet. Tib. 14.

¹¹Dio 54, 9, 5.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., 2.

¹⁴RG 33.

¹⁵Vell. Pater. 2, 91, 1; Livy Epit. 141; Suet. Aug. 21; Tib. 9; and Dio 54, 8, 1.

It is time to call into question Gibbon's pronouncement that it was vanity on Augustus' part to assert that he compelled the Parthians to restore the standards into Roman hands.¹⁶ Gibbon declares that they were gained 'by an honourable treaty' which Augustus preferred to 'exposing his person and his legions to the arrows of the Parthians.'

Quite the opposite: Augustus was threatening to recover the lost standards by violent means, and perhaps even to replace Phraates with Tiridates, or someone else. Augustus threatened battle. Undoubtedly, war was not what he wanted, but the genuine threat of it was his weapon.

Many historians have reconciled the events of 20 B.C. with their image of Augustus as the supreme diplomat by calling his activity a show of force.¹⁷ But it is questionable whether a 'show of force' could have any effectiveness against a king as tough and experienced as Phraates. This was no show; it was a serious threat of war. The difference between being threateningly prepared for war and actually going to war is very fine, and exists only for leaders, such as Augustus, who can distinguish war as an end and war as a means. As Phraates knew, Augustus was prepared.

There is no record of the strength of Tiberius'

¹⁶See pp. 2-4 of the Introduction.

¹⁷Buchan, Augustus, pp. 173-4; Ferrero, Greatness and Decline of Rome, IV, p. 255; Mattingly, Roman Imperial Civilisation, p. 114; M. Rostovtzeff, Rome (Oxford, 1960), pp. 181-2; and A.H.M. Jones, Augustus (London, 1970), p. 58.

force, but it is probable that it consisted of the Illyrican and Macedonian legions.¹⁸ This meant a total force of eight or nine legions.¹⁹ Tiberius was only twenty-two years old, but had already served in Spain,²⁰ and would, for years to come, continually prove his worth as a military leader.

There is no direct record of the commander of the Syrian force in 20 B.C. Around the year 23 B.C. the legate of Syria bore the name Varro:²¹ he may have been a relative of the conspirator Murena, and may have fallen from grace as a result.²² For when Agrippa went East in 23 B.C., though keeping himself at Lesbos, he sent subordinates to Syria.²³ One of these may well have been M. Titius with the rank of legate of Syria.²⁴ A very cold-blooded soldier,²⁵ Titius was unusually well

¹⁸Parker, p. 91. Since no extensive Eastern campaign was planned, Augustus would only temporarily be denuding Macedonia and Illyricum of their legions. Still, there would be auxilia, as well as the protection provided by the vassal kingdom of Thrace (G.H. Stevenson, CAH, X, pp. 228-32).

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 89-92: five legions from Illyricum, three or four from Macedonia.

²⁰Suet. Tib. 9.

²¹Jos. BJ 1, 398; and AJ 15, 345.

²²Syme, RR, pp. 330, n. 2, 334 and 338.

²³Dio 53, 32, 1.

²⁴For the complex but convincing arguments concerning M. Titius, see L.R. Taylor, 'M. Titius as the Syrian Command,' JRS 26, 1936, pp. 116ff. Syme, RR, p. 398, n. 1 considers it possible that Titius was twice legate.

²⁵He himself executed Sextus Pompeius, who had once spared his life: Dio 48, 30.

qualified for this active post: he had fought the Parthians with distinction in 36 B.C., when he served as Antonius' quaestor.²⁶ After becoming disgusted with affairs in Alexandria, he deserted in 32 B.C. to Octavian, along with his uncle, Munatius Plancus,²⁷ who at one time had been governor of Syria.²⁸ As legate of Syria, Titius would now be in command of three or four legions, of which one, and possibly two, had been with Antonius on his Parthian campaign.²⁹ To these legions, perhaps yet containing a few survivors of Antonius' expedition, Titius' reputation would have been known. Possibly, it would even be known to Phraates.

Tiberius led his large force across the Hellespont and probably followed the route of Alexander through Galatia and Cappadocia.³⁰ In Galatia, there was an excellent native legion which Tiberius could have added to his force.³¹ Certainly, Archelaus of Cappadocia must have brought some troops with him when he joined Tiberius on the march.³² A rendezvous between Titius

²⁶Plut. Ant. 42.

²⁷Vell. Pater. 2, 93; Plut. Ant. 58; and Dio 50, 3, 1.

²⁸Appian BC 5, 144, 598.

²⁹Ritterling, P-W, s.v. 'Legio,' col. 1517ff. and 1587ff.

³⁰Taylor, p. 170.

³¹Later known as the Legio XXII Deiotariana, this Galatian force was organized on Roman models and had fought on Rome's side since the time of Caesar. Galatia had become a Roman province in 25 B.C., and, at some time after that, the Deiotarian became a Roman legion. By 8 B.C. it was stationed in Alexandria: Magie, RRIAM, pp. 460-1 and 1321.

³²Jos. AJ 15, 105.

and Tiberius may have been arranged at some strategic point, such as Melitene.³³ Perhaps Titius delivered Tigranes for installation by Tiberius, which was made simple by Artaxes' murder at the hands of his fellow Armenians.

Apparently, Roman troop movements had already begun when Augustus heard the news of Artaxes' death, and again he reacted quickly.³⁴ With the throne of Media Atropatene also made vacant, Augustus installed Ariobarzanes, son of the recently deceased Artavasdes the Mede.³⁵ There is no record as to when or how Ariobarzanes was installed, but Mommsen argues for 20 B.C.,³⁶ which, of course, makes sense, with Artaxes having just been killed. An armed escort at least, and more likely a potent military force, would be needed to perform the task, which would require marching even as far as Antonius had managed to advance in 36 B.C., and back again. Tiberius was undoubtedly too inexperienced and too valuable to risk. Probably the job was given to Titius, who certainly knew the route.³⁷

³³Taylor, p. 170. Antonius' line of march had run through here: Tarn, CAH, X, p. 73.

³⁴One may boldly suspect that he knew of Artaxes' death before it happened.

³⁵RG 33.

³⁶Mommsen, Res Gestae Divi Augusti (Berlin, 1865), p. 96.

³⁷Taylor, p. 171.; this may explain why the sources pass over the event--the imperial chroniclers were not interested in the achievements of non-members of the imperial house. Similarly, after Tiberius refused, we do not know who installed Artavasdes II in Armenia in 6/5 B.C., nor do we know who led the force which installed

With Armenia lost, Parthia was extremely vulnerable. A Roman army was marching through the valleys toward the Median capital, Phraaspa. Phraates had the option of unleashing his mounted archers, who could demonstrate again how they had destroyed Crassus and crippled Antonius, and thus deny the Romans the possession of Media. But Phraates chose to submit. He no doubt saw that Augustus was well prepared: the Roman would not have tarried all these years, only to come now and fail. Phraates did not have to ask Augustus, as Crassus had been asked, what he was doing here. Phraates knew all too well what Augustus had come for, and how he might yet be bought off. Suddenly the standards were not worth keeping. The loss in prestige, like the loss of Armenia, was serious but not fatal, and might later be recovered.

At this time Phraates surrendered not only the standards, but hostages as well--four sons, two of their wives and four grandchildren. This giving of hostages is usually dated to c. 10 B.C., in view of Strabo's statement that the hostages were given into the hands of the legate of Syria, Titius,³⁸ described as legate of Syria by Josephus at a date between 13 and 8 B.C.³⁹ But, as noted before, it is extremely likely that Titius was also in command in Syria in

'Tigranes' about A.D. 7. For further cases in which publicity is denied non-members of the imperial house, see Syme, RR, pp. 332 and 390.

³⁸ Strabo 16, 1, 28.

³⁹ Jos. AJ 16, 270.

20 B.C.,⁴⁰ and, more importantly, the return of the standards and the surrender of hostages are directly linked by Strabo⁴¹ (an Augustan), Justin⁴² and Orosius⁴³ (who depend on lost works of the Augustans Trogus and Livy), Velleius Paterculus⁴⁴ (a late Augustan) and Suetonius⁴⁵ (apparently relying on Velleius). Velleius says that the hostages were given in Armenia to Tiberius, not Titius; and Suetonius states that Tiberius was sent to the Parthian court to collect the standards. If a Roman prince had gone to the Parthian court, there would surely be contemporary notice of it: Suetonius is obviously building on Velleius' statement about the hostages, which is refuted by Strabo's words naming Titius as the recipient of the hostages. In Velleius mendacious eulogizing is no surprise, and his bias may also reflect hostility between Tiberius and Titius.⁴⁶

It may be objected that in the Res Gestae Augustus

⁴⁰See p. 130.

⁴¹Strabo 16, 1, 28.

⁴²Justin 42, 5, 10-12.

⁴³Orosius 6, 21, 29.

⁴⁴Vell. Pater. 2, 94.

⁴⁵Suet. Aug. 21 and Tib. 9.

⁴⁶The princely general in conflict with the veteran soldier. But also the interests of Archelaus of Cappadocia may have been involved: he may have sided with one or the other. He marched in 20 B.C. with Tiberius and was later defended in a Roman court by him (Dio 57, 17; and Suet. Tib. 8). We are ignorant of the disagreement, but Archelaus and Titius were reconciled through Herod (Jos. AJ 16, 270), and Archelaus snubbed Tiberius when the latter was exiled at Rhodes (Tac. Ann. 2, 42). Tiberius, when he became emperor, had his revenge (Suet. Tib. 37).

does not mention the recovery of the standards and the surrender of hostages in the same section, but, of course, the Res Gestae is not organized entirely chronologically, but more thematically.⁴⁷ It is a most interesting fact that while Justin, Velleius, Suetonius, Tacitus⁴⁸ and Orosius all use the word obsides to describe the children sent by Phraates, Augustus himself uses the word pignora, which meant not so much hostages as pledges or sureties. We may discover the reason for this in the statements by our two Greek-writing sources. Strabo says that Phraates did not want his sons around because he feared sedition in which one of his sons could be substituted for him.⁴⁹ Josephus says Phraates was persuaded to this course of action by an Italian slave-girl named Musa, who was a gift from Augustus. After gaining Phraates' love and bearing him a son, she then manoeuvred to secure for her child the succession to the throne ahead of his older and legitimate brothers.⁵⁰

Strabo's statement is very credible, and Phraates' fears understandable: parricide was a family tradition already going back two generations. Josephus' story need not be doubted, for it harmonizes with subsequent Parthian history.⁵¹

⁴⁷The standards are mentioned among victories (29) and the hostages are listed among foreigners suppliantly coming to Rome (32).

⁴⁸Tac. Ann. 2, 1.

⁴⁹Strabo 16, 1, 28.

⁵⁰Josephus AJ 18, 40.

⁵¹A controversy arises here. Aside from why, we do not even know when Augustus gave Musa to Phraates. The traditional assumption has been 20 B.C., during or immediately after the events described in this chapter. There are three bases for this assumption. 1) From the

Augustus, by using the word pignora, may be quietly verifying the fact (patriotically misrepresented by the unknowing) that Phraates was doing himself a favour by unloading his children on Augustus. It may have been a bid by Phraates to demonstrate some form of submission, perhaps even before he surrendered the standards---perhaps, hopefully, in lieu of them. Whatever the circumstances, hostages could not satisfy Augustus' requirement: the standards were the important thing. Their loss had been Rome's shame; their return had been Rome's demand; and their recovery would be celebrated by Rome.⁵²

information in Josephus' statement, Musa had had time to have a son old enough to be a viable candidate for the throne and she had had time to gain a strong influence over Phraates. 2) The notion that Phraates' sons were given about 10 B.C. 3) The fact that Musa's son, Phraataces, is called iuvenis excelsissimus by Velleius in his eyewitness account of events in A.D. 1 (2, 101, 2).

As for point 1), the period of time required need not be more than a couple years, and this statement in itself gives no clue to the date of Musa's presentation. In point 2), the notion has already been rejected (see pp.133-6). In point 3), the word iuvenis is relative and cannot be pushed too far. Besides, by the accepted view of Phraataces' age, he would have been the same age as Velleius: clearly Velleius is writing not from the standpoint of the time in which the events occurred, but thirty years later, with the sentiments of a man of fifty, to whom even a man much older than thirty would still be considered a iuvenis.

* Another piece of interesting but not conclusive evidence is a coin of Phraataces dated for 2 B.C. which pictures him with a substantial beard. The Simonettas would put back the gift of Musa to 29 B.C. (B. and A. Simonetta, 'Le Vicende di Fraate IV, Re dei Parti,' Numismatica, 1949, pp. 36-46), and even as late as 23 B.C. would be acceptable to the other evidence.

As to whether a seventeen year-old can grow a beard, it is a matter of chance and opinion: at least it was in my case.

⁵²The fact that no Roman coin issued immediately after this date celebrates the surrendering of hostages, while one coin dated 8 B.C. does depict a man surrendering a hostage, has been used by Mommsen to support the view that the Parthian hostages were surrendered around

Phraates' sons were sent to Rome. Two eventually died there;⁵³ the other two, and one of Phraates' grandsons, were the pawns of later policy. At some time the hostages were shown off by Augustus at the Games: they followed him down the middle of the arena and sat two rows behind him.⁵⁴

10 B.C. (RGDA, p. 94); but Mattingly is sure the hostage depicted on that coin is Germanic. (H. Mattingly, Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum (London), I: Augustus to Vitellius, 1923, No. 492, and see p. cxvi).

⁵³CIL, VI, 1799; one of the Parthians apparently built a temple: CIL, XIV, 2216.

⁵⁴Suet. Aug. 43.

Chapter Twelve

A New East after 20 B.C.

Augustus, after a leisurely journey home, entered the City on October 12, a day voted by the senate to become an annual public holiday, the Augustalia.¹ To honour Augustus the senate decreed a triumph, which he refused,² and a triumphal arch. An altar of Fortuna Redux was consecrated,³ and Augustus made plans for constructing a temple for Mars Ultor, in which the recovered standards would be enshrined; temporarily they were resting on the Capitol near the temple of Jupiter Feretrius.⁴

Horace was unrestrained. 'Who fears the Parthian... while Caesar lives?'⁵ The poet was in tune with what appears to have been a dominant theme: Phraates on bended knees, ready to obey:

'Ius imperiumque Phraates
Caesaris accepit genibus minor....'⁶

There is an excellent statue of Augustus in military dress, and on his cuirass is depicted a Parthian in

¹RG 11; and Dio 54, 10, 3.

²RG 4.

³RG 11.

⁴G. F. Hill, Historical Roman Coins (London, 1909), pp. 142-3; and J.G.C. Anderson, CAH, X, p. 263.

⁵Hor. Od. 4, 5, 25.

⁶Hor. Epist. 1, 12, 27-8.

the act of surrendering the standards.⁷ For the next couple of years, the coinage from various mints⁸ concentrated on the theme of Augustus' eastern successes,⁹ depicting a Parthian on bended knee,¹⁰ as well as other images of victory, such as the recovered standards,¹¹ the triumphal arch,¹² Augustus' triumphal chariot, riderless,¹³ and the temple of Mars Ultor.¹⁴ A simple capricorn could be depicted, for it was Augustus' sign, and beneath it the legend SIGNIS PARTHICUS RECEPTIS.¹⁵ Legends were important, and varied but little: CIVIB ET SIGN MILIT A PART RECUP;¹⁶ CAESAR AUGUSTUS SIGN RECE;¹⁷ SIGNIS RECEPTIS;¹⁸ MARTIS ULTORIS.¹⁹

Concerning Armenia, Augustus' coins at first read ARMENIA CAPTA,²⁰ probably reviving memories of AEGYPTO

⁷ See CAH, vol. IV of plates, 148, a.

⁸ On the concordance of the mints of eastern cities see C.H.V. Sutherland, The Cistophori of Augustus (London, 1970), pp. 34-7 and 102-4.

⁹ Sutherland, Coinage, p. 28.

¹⁰ Mattingly, Coins R. Emp., vol. I, no. 10, 18, 40, 43, and 56.

¹¹ Ibid., 704.

¹² Ibid., 7, 52, and 77.

¹³ Ibid., 427, and 703.

¹⁴ Ibid., 315, 332, and 366.

¹⁵ Ibid., 679.

¹⁶ Ibid., 427.

¹⁷ Ibid., 10, 40, and 56.

¹⁸ Ibid., 332.

¹⁹ Ibid., 315 and 366.

²⁰ Ibid., 18, 43, 44, and 671.

CAPTA.²¹ But soon this legend was replaced with ARMENIA RECEPTA²²--less flattering to Tiberius, but more satisfying to Roman pride,²³ for some claim to Armenia could be traced back to Lucullus; also, Augustus argues that he could have made Armenia a province, but preferred to install Tigranes--maiorum nostrorum exemplo.²⁴ No untruth here, though, of course, he does not mention that the keenest exponent of the policy had been Marcus Antonius.

Augustus had greatly altered the East in 20 B.C. Armenia, and even Media Atropatene, were now Roman client-kingdoms. Lesser Armenia was placed in the firm hands of Archelaus of Cappadocia. Commagene's king Mithradates II, who had been recognised as king by Augustus, either died or was deposed in 20 B.C. A new king, also named Mithradates, was recognised as ruler by Augustus.²⁵ Tarcondimotus was restored to his ancestral kingdom of Cilicia,²⁶ and someone named Iamblichus, son of Iamblichus, was allowed to succeed to some dominion over the Arabians.²⁷ At some time, a certain king Artaxares had fled to Augustus:²⁸ his kingdom, Adiabene, may

²¹Mattingly, Coins R. Emp., vol. I, no. 650.

²²Ibid., 675.

²³Ibid., p. cxxv, n. 1; and Sutherland, Coinage, p. 44.

²⁴RG 27.

²⁵Dio 54, 9, 3.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Dio 54, 9, 2.

²⁸RG 32.

at this time have come within Augustus' gift.

The principle was firmly established. The East was half Roman, half Parthian.²⁹ Every oriental king who was not already a vassal of Parthia owed his throne to Augustus. Succession had to be approved.

Parthia had been properly humbled, and Augustus could be at ease with the situation in the East. In 16 B.C. Agrippa was sent again to the East: this time without any rumours of scandal, or any urgency. Agrippa took his wife Julia and Augustus' two grandsons along, and they were fêted wherever they went, receiving a warm welcome from Herod.³⁰ As vicegerent, Agrippa was indispensable to Augustus, for he could be wherever it happened that the princeps could not; also, the separation of the two leaders perhaps made life more bearable for the nobles, and each other.³¹

Agrippa was in the East for three years, and the only serious activity which disturbed his leisure and administrative activity was the regulation of affairs in the Bosporan kingdom on the northern shore of the Black Sea. Agrippa's mere threat of force cooled the situation; the area was given into the care of Polemo of Pontus.³²

The area had economic importance: its grain fed

²⁹For this contemporary view, see Strabo 16, 1, 28.

³⁰Jos. AJ 16, 12; and Dio 54, 19, 6; and see Magie, RRIAM, pp. 476-7 and 1339, n. 26.

³¹Syme, RR, p. 389.

³²Dio 54, 24, 5.

Roman soldiers and a great deal of commercial activity was carried on in the Black Sea region.³³ It would be worthwhile to discuss for a moment the economic considerations which may have affected Augustus' policy in the East.

Augustus gave every indication of his interest in economic affairs in the East. In acquiring Egypt after the battle of Alexandria, Augustus inherited the Ptolemies' rich monopolies: in grain, of which a surplus could be exported; in minerals, manufactured goods and textiles, and the luxury trade with Arabia and India.³⁴ Augustus' interest in the latter manifested itself in Aelius Gallus' expedition down the coast of Arabia in 25 B.C. More was involved than merely robbing the Sabaeans of their wealth. Direct trade links were being sought which would cut out middlemen and costs: the Nabataeans knew this, and helped Gallus bungle his expedition.³⁵ Yet commerce to India did flourish, and there was a Roman naval base established at Myos Hormos, an Egyptian port on the Red Sea.³⁶

This sea-route was only one of four trade routes connecting the Roman world with India and the Far East. Two other routes led overland from Syria by diverse

³³J.G.C. Anderson, CAH, X, p. 266.

³⁴M.P. Charlesworth, Trade Routes and Commerce of the Roman Empire (Cambridge, 1924), pp. 18-32.

³⁵J. Thorley, 'The Development of Trade between the Roman Empire and the East under Augustus,' Greece and Rome 16, 1969, p. 21.

³⁶Strabo 2, 5, 12.

paths until they met up again at Seleucia on the Tigris; then they split once more, one heading across the Iranian plateau and the other leading to the Persian Gulf, where vessels would arrive from India.³⁷ These two routes were studded with wealthy towns--caravan stops, river crossings, trading centres, and terminals. The fourth route was far to the north, following the Cyrus valley to the Caspian, which was then crossed, and after which the route continued south-eastward along the Oxus valley to Samarkand, from which one road led south to India and another east toward China.³⁸

This route never entered Parthian territory. Some scholars maintain that this explains the importance of Armenia, Iberia and the Caucasus in Roman policy, particularly Augustus'. It is argued that since no Parthian force ever attacked through Armenia, there was no strategic reason for the Romans to hold it, unless to prevent this trade route falling into Parthian hands.³⁹ Likewise it is argued that the Parthians continually tried to regain Armenia whenever they feared that the Romans were succeeding at diverting the Central Asian trade away from more southerly routes.⁴⁰

Augustus may have had some interest in maintaining

³⁷ Charlesworth, 'Trade Routes,' pp. 100-2.

³⁸ Warmington, pp. 22-3; and Charlesworth, *ibid.*, pp. 106-7.

³⁹ Warmington, pp. 32-4; and Charlesworth, *ibid.*, pp. 104-8.

⁴⁰ F.J. Teggart, Rome and China: a study of correlations in historical events (Berkeley, California, 1939), pp. 240-1.

this northerly route, at least as an alternative, so that the Parthians could never seal off all trade routes to Syria. But there is no reason to think that the Parthians would ever do such a thing, which would cripple their own revenues. On the other hand, the Parthians did like to control as much of the trade, and thus customs revenue, as possible: they hindered the Chinese from ever making direct contact with the Romans.⁴¹

In a larger sense, these trade routes were in no way vital: the trade was mostly in luxuries, not necessities. Of course, the luxuries of incense, perfumes, spices, gems and dyes all had a greater value in the ancient economy, and the trade in the East provided a fat tax-base for the Empire.⁴² But Rome had no easily transportable items of comparable value, so imperial bullion had to make up the balance.⁴³ Moreover, Augustus was probably as interested in trade within the empire--Italian manufactures and Egyptian foodstuffs.⁴⁴

The main argument against these economic explanations of policy in Armenia is that there were other very strong reasons for Rome and Parthia to struggle over Armenia, reasons of strategy,⁴⁵ and, more importantly, of prestige.

⁴¹Hirth, pp. 27ff.

⁴²Thorley, p. 209.

⁴³Ibid., p. 223; and R.E.M. Wheeler, Rome beyond the Imperial Frontiers (London, 1954), p. 164ff. See Pliny NH 12, 84 on the drain of specie eastward.

⁴⁴Rostovtzeff, Rome, p. 263.

⁴⁵The discussion of frontier defence is on p. 101f.

Chapter Thirteen

Events East and West, 16-2 B.C.

While Agrippa was sojourning in the East, Augustus' stepsons, Tiberius and Drusus, were beginning the systematic conquest on the northern frontier. It was a necessary task involving first the reduction of Alpine tribes which even at this late date were still raiding Northern Italy and hampering communications with Gaul; secondly, the completion of the conquest of the Balkans-- a logical conclusion to the efforts of Augustus in that area nearly twenty years before; and, finally, the drive for a shorter line of defence in Germany, linking the Elbe with the Danube.¹

Augustus may have been planning this for a long time, but he could not begin until Spain had been pacified and the East made secure, with Parthia properly humbled. Also, the evidence is that Augustus had been building up a new army, a better one--not the left-overs of civil war.²

Agrippa was summoned back to Rome in 13 B.C. His nearly expired maius imperium was renewed, after which he was sent to Illyricum to lead the campaign there. But the winter shattered his health, and he died in

¹Syme, CAH, X, pp. 347-63.

²Syme, 'Some Notes on Legions,' p. 19-20.

February of 12 B.C., soon after returning to Italy.³

The wars in the north were carried on by Tiberius and Drusus, and, after Drusus died, by Tiberius alone.

Augustus surely had never expected to survive his friend Agrippa. Had Augustus died first, the empire would in fact have been in Agrippa's hands. The Claudians could lead the armies satisfactorily, but they were nobiles (a class which, in Augustus' view, could help run, but not rule, the empire), and they were not of Augustus' blood: at least Agrippa was the father of Augustus' grandsons, on whom the princeps now placed his hopes for the succession. However, Augustus forced Tiberius to divorce his beloved wife Vipsania, Agrippa's daughter, and to marry Agrippa's widow, Julia.⁴ This brought Tiberius into the core of the imperial family, but he no doubt perceived that he was virtually guardian of Julia and her sons, Gaius, Lucius and Agrippa Postumus. When they should come of age, there would be no thought of Tiberius succeeding to Augustus' throne. His only privilege was to serve. And in the East, events suddenly took a turn which would require Tiberius' services.

Shortly before 6 B.C.⁵ Tigranes II, Augustus' client-king on the Armenian throne, died and was succeeded by his son, also named Tigranes. The new king ruled

³Dio 54, 28, 1-2.

⁴Suet. Tib. 7,2; and Dio 54, 35, 4.

⁵Tac. Ann. 2, 3, 5 makes it sound as if it were a short time later that Tiberius retired.

jointly with his sister, Erato, as man and wife, but because they had not waited to receive their diadems by Augustus' command, Roman authority might seem to be lapsing. It would have to be restored. Tiberius was the man for the job. He had crowned the late Tigranes II fourteen years before. He was Rome's foremost soldier. After campaigning for eight hard years on the northern frontier, Tiberius returned to Rome and was at last allowed to celebrate a triumph in 7 B.C., in which year he also held the consulship.⁶ But when Augustus gave him a special imperium and commissioned him to handle Armenia, Tiberius asked permission to retire from public life, and 'exiled' himself to Rhodes.⁷ The gossip pointed to Julia,⁸ but she was only a symptom of Tiberius' malaise. He was tired of being used and used, knowing that in the end he would only be put aside, at best.

Syme maintains that Augustus only gave Tiberius this commission in order to remove him again from Rome, where Gaius and Lucius were being groomed for the

⁶F.B. Marsh, The Reign of Tiberius (Oxford, 1931), p. 36.

⁷Dio 55, 9, 4-8.

⁸Suet. Tib. 10. Suetonius, in fact, offers four reasons for Tiberius' withdrawal; in the last given, and emphasized as being Tiberius' own post facto explanation, a comparison is made with Agrippa's withdrawal to Lesbos in 23 B.C.: that Tiberius' desire was to leave the field open for Augustus' chosen successor, in this case, Gaius. If so, one would hardly expect so much protest over Tiberius' retirement to be made by Augustus. The comparison with Agrippa is shrewd: Tiberius would have known that the stated motive for that withdrawal was also dissembling.

succession; Syme writes: 'There was no urgent need for him in the East.'⁹ Without denying the other motives Syme attributes to Augustus, it seems clear that the situation in the East was very serious, certainly something Augustus would not toy with. For sound strategic reasons, Armenia should be held. If Armenia were allowed to slip back into the Parthian sphere, it would be harder to keep hold of the other client-kingdoms. Prestige was a vital factor, and the commercial considerations could also have entered into it.

Eventually Augustus ordered that Artavasdes II, probably the third son of Artavasdes I, and therefore brother to the late Tigranes II, be installed as king in Armenia.¹⁰ As with Ariobarzanes' installation in 20 B.C., we have no record of who commanded the force which dethroned Tigranes III and Erato and placed Artavasdes II in their stead, presumably because the mission was not performed by a member of the imperial house. The governorship of Syria changed hands in 6 B.C.: C. Sentius Saturninus was replaced by P. Quinctilius Varus, but this provides no clue.¹¹ Artavasdes issued coins with the portraits of Augustus and

⁹Syme, RR, p. 417.

¹⁰Tac. Ann. 2, 3.

¹¹Varus was simply moving upward through various posts, aided by the favour of Augustus and his marriage in 7 B.C. to Claudia Pulchra, Augustus' grandniece. Saturninus was the better man, though, at this point in time, he might have suffered for his friendship with Tiberius. See: PIR¹, no. 27 and 293; OCD, pp. 955 and 1108-9; Vell. Pater. 2, 105, 1; and Syme, RR, pp. 424 and 434.

himself. ¹²

But about 2 B.C. Artavasdes was driven out of Armenia, as well as the supporting Roman, 'not without disaster,' by the Parthians under a new and reckless king. ¹³

¹²Percy Gardner, 'On an unpublished coin of Artavasdes II, king of Armenia,' Num. Chron., n.s., 12, 1872, pp. 9-15.

¹³Tac. Ann. 2, 4: 'non sine clade nostra delectus;' and Dio 55, 10, 18.

Chapter Fourteen

The Mission of Gaius, 2 B.C.-4 A.D.

Phraataces ascended the Parthian throne in 2 B.C., eighteen years after the return of the standards and the surrender of his half-brothers as hostages by Phraates IV. For those eighteen years, because relations with Rome were tranquil, our sources have little to say about affairs in Parthia. There are hints of internal troubles. Josephus mentions that Herod was falsely accused of making a pact of friendship with a Parthian king named Mithradates who was in power sometime between 12 and 9 B.C.¹ The accuser (if not Josephus or his source) may have simply erred about the king's name;² or this king may represent some opposition to Phraates IV for which no other record has survived.³ Sometime before 6 B.C. a Jewish nobleman and five hundred of his archer-cavalrymen fled from his estates in Babylonia and sought refuge with the Syrian legate C. Sentius Saturninus.⁴ This must indicate some crisis in the kingship of the ageing Phraates. In 2 B.C. his cares came to an end, for Phraataces, his son by Musa, had grown up and found it tedious waiting for the old man to die, and so he poisoned him, with his mother's

¹ Jos. AJ 16, 253.

² Anderson, CAH, X, p. 264, n. 3.

³ Debevoise, p. 144.

⁴ Jos. AJ 17, 23-24.

help.⁵ Phraataces ruled with his mother as man and wife.⁶ Perhaps to prove himself in the eyes of the nobles, Phraates boldly embarked on a collision course with Roman policy over Armenia.

Artavasdes II, placed in Armenia by the Romans about 6 B.C., had probably been living in Rome for about twenty-four years preceding his installation. By now he had little in common with his subjects, and no doubt there was a large group anxious to depose him. Armenia was always torn: culturally akin to the Parthians, there nevertheless always seemed to exist a strong pro-Roman faction in Armenia. Probably the Armenians' greatest wish was for independence from both Rome and Parthia. Phraataces no doubt found support when he drove out the Romans and toppled Artavasdes II.⁷

When Augustus learned that Tigranes III and Erato had been brought back to power through Parthian intervention, he realized that again armed force would be required to restore Roman suzerainty.

Circumstances had changed since 6 B.C. when Tiberius had refused to lead the force which would assert Roman authority over the succession to the Armenian throne. This time the Parthians were definitely involved,

⁵Jos. AJ 18, 43. The earliest coins of Phraataces (bearded--see ch. 11, n. 51) are from 2 B.C.: McDowell, p. 222; Wroth, p. 136.

⁶Coin evidence: Gardner, pp. 45ff.; and B. and A. Simonetta, pp. 36ff. The incestuous marriage, which horrified Romans and Greeks, was not viewed favourably even by the Parthians themselves: Lucan Phars 8, 401-10; and Jos. AJ 18, 42f.

⁷Dio 55, 10, 18.

and would have to be humbled if Roman prestige were to be maintained.

Tiberius was still away at Rhodes, and, under the present circumstances, no mere general or legate would suffice. Fortunately, Augustus' grandson Gaius had come of age. He was still not yet twenty, but

'...Caesaribus virtus contigit ante diem.'⁸

As in 20 B.C., Augustus was ultimately prepared to use brute force, but only after every attempt had been made to achieve his ends through the mere threat of force. As in 20 B.C., there would be no direct attack, but again a lengthy 'tour' during which Phraataces could tremble and other errands could be performed by Gaius.

First, Gaius himself was built up. Already apparently destined to succeed Augustus, Gaius had been showered with honours while yet a boy. Now he was given the same proconsular authority Agrippa and Tiberius had received, and a wife--to demonstrate a dignified maturity.⁹ He had already been designated for the consulship of A.D. 1, which he would assume during his journey.¹⁰

To prevent an inexperienced youth from starting a Parthian war needlessly,¹¹ a military adviser was appointed--the experienced M. Lollius.¹² And a geographical

⁸Ovid Ars am. 1, 8.

⁹Dio 55, 10, 18-21.

¹⁰Ibid., 9, 2-4.

¹¹Syme, RR, p. 428.

¹²Vell. Pater. 2, 101f.; and Suet. Tib. 12. Velleius has nothing good to say of Lollius, but Horace praises his integrity (Od. 4, 9, 33ff.). He was a novus homo, entrusted with the organisation of Galatia in 25 B.C.; he was in Rome as consul in 21; as early as 20 B.C. he

study of at least Parthia may have been commissioned by Augustus.¹³

Sometime in 1 B.C. Gaius set out on his journey. He travelled through Greece and across the Aegean to Asia Minor, where various cities, knowing who he was and who he would become, enthusiastically showed their affection.¹⁴ Tiberius travelled to Samos (or Chios) to pay his respects to Caesar's heir.¹⁵ Instead of heading straight for Syria, Gaius sailed to Egypt,¹⁶ where he entered his consulship and apparently engaged in military operations in Arabia.¹⁷

may have been Macedonia's proconsul--a critical position at that time (Groag, P-W, s.v. 'Lollius,' col. 1381). He then suffered a 'trifling defeat' magnified by his detractors (Syme, RR, p. 429), especially Velleius, who reflects the hostility between Lollius and Tiberius. The origins of this hostility are obscure: beginning perhaps in 17 B.C. in Gaul, or even in 20 B.C. in Macedonia, where personalities and duties might have clashed. By the time of Tiberius' exile on Rhodes, the enmity was flagrant. It may have contributed to Lollius' curious downfall in A.D. 2 (Syme, RR, p. 428-9).

¹³Pliny NH 6, 141. The geographer was Isidore of Charax, whose Parthian Stations is datable from internal evidence to the reign of Augustus, close to the Christian era: W.H. Schoff, Parthian Stations by Isidore of Charax (Philadelphia, 1914), p. 17.

¹⁴See Magie, RRIAM, p. 1343, n. 41.

¹⁵Suet. Tib. 12; and Dio 55, 10, 19.

¹⁶Orosius 7, 3, 5-6.

¹⁷See G.W. Bowersock, 'A Report on Arabia Provincia,' JRS 61, 1971, p. 227 and T.D. Barnes, 'The Victories of Augustus,' JRS 64, 1974, p. 21-6, who agree on an interpretation of ILS 140 which is different and, I think, better, than that of Ferrero, Greatness and Decline, IV, p. 213, or Anderson, CAH, X, p. 276, n. 3. These operations may have been a revival of Gallus' expedition (Gardthausen, Augustus und seine Zeit (Leipzig, 1891), I, 3, pp. 1132-3),

Finally Gaius reached Syria, and his approach alarmed Phraataces, who dispatched envoys to Augustus to explain what he had done and to establish peace on the condition that Augustus return Phraates' four legitimate sons, who were a threat to Phraataces' position. Augustus wrote a letter to Phraataces, addressed simply to 'Phraataces,' commanding him to lay aside his royal name and withdraw from Armenia. But Phraataces, signing himself as 'King of Kings,' wrote back a refusal to Augustus, addressing him simply as 'Caesar.'

Tigranes in Armenia showed a great deal more sense. The deposed Roman nominee Artavasdes II, the brother and rival of Tigranes, had recently died of illness (in Syria?). Tigranes sent gifts to Augustus and a letter in which he never used his own title 'king' but instead petitioned the kingship from Augustus. Augustus accepted the gifts and told him to go with good hopes to Gaius in Syria.¹⁸

Tigranes had seen that he could not keep his throne if Augustus did not will it. Also, the Armenian was no doubt disillusioned with his ally Phraataces, who, in turn, was now so disheartened by the submission of Tigranes and by rumblings of disloyalty within Parthia that he came to terms with Augustus: there would be peace if Phraataces renounced his claim to Armenia, and Augustus could keep the four brothers in Rome.¹⁹

or a campaign to help the Nabataeans, who were turning to agriculture, to fight off nomadic invaders (Bowersock, p. 227).

¹⁸Dio 55, 10, 20-21.

¹⁹Ibid., 10a, 4.

It had all been a grand performance, a repeat of 20 B.C., made all the easier by the fact that the audience knew what was coming. Meanwhile, in the background, negotiations had brought a settlement. Phraataces, in fact, was allowed more than his mere survival. Parthia was now to be recognized as a power, not equal, but with a right to exist beside Rome; the Euphrates was to be the agreed border. All this was demonstrated by a spectacular ceremony--the culmination of an operation which from beginning to end had revealed Augustus' touch. The two armies drew up on either side of the Euphrates and on an island in the middle the two young men, the king of Parthia and the heir to Rome, agreed to terms already set, and then dined with one another on either bank.²⁰

This would have signalled that it was time for Gaius to return to a cheering Rome. But soon after the conference on the Euphrates, Tigranes' in Armenia was killed by barbarians and Erato resigned her sovereignty, so Gaius' advisers had to search for a new candidate, since with Tigranes' death the royal line of Armenia died out.²¹ Artobarzanes of Media Atropatene

²⁰Vell. Pater. 2, 101, 1-4.

²¹Dio 55, 10a, 5. The exact dating of these events--Gaius' entry into Syria, the conference, the death of Tigranes, and the fighting in Armenia--is impossible. We do not know where Gaius was when his consulship began in A.D. 1; the conference and the fighting had not yet occurred in September, A.D. 1 (see Gellius NA 15, 7 for a letter from Augustus to Gaius written on Augustus' sixty-third birthday, September 24, A.D. 1); Dio places the outbreak of war in Armenia in A.D. 2, and Velleius (cited above) had Gaius going to Armenia after the conference.

was chosen. Armenian and Median royal lines were linked by marriage;²² both countries had been under the same ruler from 30 to 20 B.C.; and Ariobarzanes was apparently a pleasing and acceptable character.²³ Still, a faction in Armenia took the opportunity to revolt against any Roman imposition.²⁴ Gaius marched to Armenia to install the Mede and subdue the rebels, but was himself mortally wounded. He lingered, the revolt was crushed, and Ariobarzanes was installed. But finally Gaius died in February, A.D. 4.²⁵

²²Strabo 11, 13, 1.

²³Tac. Ann. 2, 3.

²⁴Dio 55, 10a, 6.

²⁵Ibid., 7-10; Tac. Ann. 1, 3; and ILS 140.

Chapter Fifteen

A.D. 4 to Augustus' Death

Before Gaius succumbed to his wounds in A.D. 4, the results of his mission must have seemed satisfactory to the mentor of it all, Augustus. He had granted that Parthia be recognized as a sovereign power, a gesture which in no way affected the situation. And the situation was good. The Euphrates may have become the agreed border, but Roman influence stretched, along the north, all the way to the Caspian. And now Armenia and Media were under the control of one trusted king, Ariobarzanes. As for Parthia, its king had been decisively embarrassed: Phraataces would not soon try Rome's patience again. By all appearances the eastern frontier offered the hope of a few years quiet.

Tiberius had been allowed back to Rome in A.D. 2, arriving shortly after the death of Lucius Caesar.¹ Two years later, when word came that Gaius too had died, Augustus, at last and without joy, adopted Tiberius as his son and therefore successor.² Tiberius immediately took up command in Germany, and for the next seven years he commanded the armies along the northern frontier, shifting from one critical point to another, from Germany

¹Suet. Tib. 13; and Dio 55, 10a, 10.

²Suet. Tib. 23, quotes Augustus: 'quoniam atrox fortuna Gaium et Lucium filios mihi eripuit.'

and Maroboduus to Illyricum and the Pannonian revolt, and back to Germany after the defeat of Varus.³ The energies of the empire were spent on the North and the limits of power were being discovered.

By the time Tiberius returned to Rome in A.D. 11 to celebrate his triumph, it was seen that Augustus could not live many more years; and because of the political trauma which could be caused by the succession, it was clear that Tiberius could not travel far from Rome or the legions of the West, and the Eastern posts were thoughtfully assigned to adherents of Tiberius' 'party.'⁴

The combination of the years of exertions on the northern frontiers and the breathless period of waiting for Augustus to die meant that less attention could be paid to the East, which, against expectations, needed a great deal of attention.

It had been an expensive struggle to crown Ariobarzanes; Gaius had perished. But Ariobarzanes himself died soon after, apparently from that rare disease, a natural death.⁵ He was succeeded by a son, Artavasdes, probably

³Syme, CAH, X, pp. 364-81.

⁴Syme, RR, p. 435. The governors of Syria between A.D. 4 and Augustus' death were L. Volusius Saturninus (4-5), P. Sulpicius Quirinius (6-12?), and Q. Caecilius Metellus Creticus Silanus (12-17): Honigmann, P-W, 'Syria,' col. 1629. Saturninus was a family friend of Tiberius (Syme, RR, pp. 424 and 435). Quirinius paid court to Tiberius at Rhodes (Tac. Ann. 3, 48); the length of his governorship is unknown. Silanus' infant daughter was betrothed to the son of Tiberius' nephew, Germanicus (Tac. Ann. 2, 43).

⁵Tac. Ann. 2, 4, 3; and RG 27.

approved by Rome but not accepted by the Armenians, who killed him around A.D. 6.⁶ After this, another Roman nominee was placed on the throne by Augustus' order. Augustus states that this 'Tigranes' was a scion of the Armenian royal house,⁷ but Mommsen's view is generally accepted that his parents were Alexander, a son of Herod the Great, and Glaphyra, the daughter of Archelaus of Cappadocia by an Armenian princess.⁸ So his connexion with the Armenian house was rather distant, and perhaps this caused his reign to be brief, for the Armenians overthrew him and then tried to bring back the sister-wife-queen of Tigranes III, Erato. But she soon lost power, and the Armenians, without a ruler, were in a state of chaos.⁹ This was sometime before A.D. 11.

Despite all this turmoil in Armenia, a country which had become the prize eagerly contested by Rome and Parthia, we find that, far from becoming involved, the former was making little effort and the latter none at all. Rome was simply too occupied. Augustus had not abandoned the policy of maintaining Roman suzerainty over Armenia by means of properly invested kings. But lacking was the force needed to keep any Roman nominee on his throne, not so much in fear of the Parthians, but to protect the puppet from his own subjects. Some military contingent must

⁶Tac. Ann. 2, 4, 3; and RG 27.

⁷RG 27: 'Quo interfecto Tigranem, qui erat ex regio genere Armeniorum oriundus, in id regnum misi.'

⁸Mommsen, RGDA, p. 80.

⁹Tac. Ann. 2, 4, 3.

have been used to place 'Tigranes' on the throne,¹⁰ but it probably had neither the authority nor the power to keep him there. The northern frontier was consuming Rome's finest efforts; no legions could be spared, nor any of the capable princes, Tiberius, his son Drusus, or his adopted son Germanicus.

But the situation could have been worse, and the Romans no doubt were aware of this. For the Parthians were having almost as much trouble as the Armenians in finding for themselves an agreeable king.

Since the death of Phraates IV in 2 B.C., the Parthian nobles had been regaining the power which that king had forbidden them, and Phraataces as king had meanwhile done nothing to prove himself worthy even of being his father's murderer. He was an incestuous half-breed, the son and husband of an Italian slave, and all his bravado against the Romans had gained nothing. In A.D. 4 he was either killed or forced to flee, perhaps to Syria.¹¹ The nobles selected Orodes (III), a prince from some line of the Arsacid family, to be king, but his violence and cruelty drove the nobles until they finally assassinated him around the

¹⁰Again, we have no record of it because no member of the imperial family was involved.

¹¹Gardner, p. 46: the last coins of Musa and Phraataces are dated A.D. 4. Jos. AJ 18, 42f.; and RG 32-- the 'Phraates, son of Phraates' mentioned by Augustus may be Phraataces, according to Gardthausen, Augustus, I, 3, p. 1141, Debevoise, p. 151, and Ziegler, p. 56, n. 72. Disagreeing are Mommsen, RGDA, p. 91 and Tarn, 'Tiridates,' *passim*. The arguments, much involved with the wording of RG 32, are very long and delicate, and they are best stated by Tarn.

year A.D. 6.¹² Looking for a new king, the nobles now sought the return of one of the Parthian princes held in Rome:¹³ an unprecedented step, but perhaps not surprising. The nobles may have expected a son of Phraates to have kingship in his blood, and yet to be subserviently grateful to the nobles for his redemption: someone to rule and be ruled.

Significantly, the Parthian embassy to Rome may have been forwarded to Germany and Tiberius.¹⁴ The reason is not obvious, but Augustus may have been seeking outside advice. It was decided to send Vonones, the eldest of Phraates' sons who had been in Rome for over twenty-six years. He was welcomed warmly, but before long the nobles found Vonones to be intolerably well-bred: Romanized and unmanly.¹⁵ Perhaps Augustus had at last managed to place a client-king on the Parthian throne. To replace Vonones, some of the nobles called in Artabanus, king of Atropatene and connected on one side of his family with the Dahae, as well as the Arsacids.¹⁶ But Vonones proved tougher than expected, evading assassination and actually beating back

¹² Jos. AJ 18, 44f.; Gardner, p. 46: a coin for A.D. 6/7 may be his.

¹³ Jos. AJ 18, 46f.; Tac. Ann. 2, 1; and RG 33.

¹⁴ Suet. Tib. 16. It is not certain that this is the same embassy as cited in the note above, but certain dates fit; see Anderson, CAH, X, p. 278.

¹⁵ Jos. AJ 18, 46f.; and Tac. Ann. 2, 1. See p. 21.

¹⁶ See U. Kahrstedt, Artabanos III. und seine Erben (Bern, 1950), pp. 13-14; Anderson, CAH, X, p. 278, n. 3; and Debevoise, p. 152, n. 40.

Artabanus temporarily. This was A.D. 9 or 10, and Vonones tried to sound decisive by striking coins with the legend BASIAEYC ONOWNHS NEIKACAC ARTABANON.¹⁷ The appearance of personal names rather than simply 'Arsakes' is rare:¹⁸ this was a score-card to let everyone know who to support. But in A.D. 11 Artabanus attacked again, this time driving Vonones out of the country.¹⁹

Vonones fled to Armenia, which at the moment was in need of a king. The Armenians accepted Vonones, who sensibly sought approval from Rome. But his request was refused. He was a coward and a disappointment:²⁰ Rome had hoped for a client on the Parthian throne, not a Parthian on the Armenian throne. Nor did Artabanus want his rival to be enthroned next door. He turned the Armenian nobles against Vonones, who fled to Syria in A.D. 15 or 16.²¹ But by this time Rome had a new emperor.

The embassy from Vonones had in fact gone to Tiberius, though presumably it was sent soon after Vonones' arrival in Armenia, around 12 A.D., when Augustus was yet alive. Tiberius must have acted with full authority, but there was little he could do about the East at such a time. Augustus would die soon. The succession had

¹⁷Wroth, pp. xliii and 143f.

¹⁸Mithradates III (57-55 B.C.) also made a departure from the usual 'Arsakes', though this issue is very confused. See Wroth, pp. xxxiv-xxxv and 66.

¹⁹Tac. Ann. 2, 3; and Jos. AJ 18, 48-50.

²⁰Jos. AJ 18, 52.

²¹Tac. Ann. 2, 4.

been regulated as far as possible:²² after A.D. 13 Tiberius was virtually co-regent.²³ Still, it was a delicate situation. Tiberius could not go marching east; and he could entrust a large military force to no one: no princes, no legates, no one.

²²Syme, RR, pp. 433-9.

²³Vell. Pater, 2, 121, 3; and Suet. Tib. 21.

Chapter Sixteen

A Summary of Augustus' Policy

Augustus' policy toward Parthia was largely consistent with Rome's traditional policies in the East, but was innovative with a regard for the changed circumstances of the new empire.

The Republic was heir to the Hellenistic East, whose internecine wars were brought to an end by Rome. But in administrating and protecting the East, the Romans signally failed. Provincial administration under the Republic had tended to impoverish its subjects. The Romans governed through cities, which were scarce in many areas; and provincial governors were a potential threat to whoever ruled in Rome. As for protecting the East, the Romans were not able to prevent the Parthians from twice invading Syria.

The alternative policy, which Augustus took over from Antonius, was to rule through client-kings. They could be controlled individually; as local rulers they could more easily administer in rural areas; and they were valuable allies, whose kingdoms could provide armies and act as buffer states.

The threat came from the Parthians. Though they lacked any formidable unity, they had demonstrated an ability to occupy and a desire to hold large parts of the East which Rome claimed. They had also twice defeated Roman armies, which in itself, by Roman tradition,

justified the Parthians' destruction. Their prestige and their threat left the East in an unstable condition.

But Augustus could see that the 'conquest of Parthia' was time, money and men wasted. It would be a difficult task once undertaken, and in the end it was not desirable to annex areas which even the Seleucids had found exhausting to control.

The situation had to be re-ordered, but Augustus sought alternative means. Parthia had to be humbled and Roman supremacy had to be asserted. Antonius had tried to replace Phraates with Tiridates. Augustus threatened to try again. The condition was the return of the standards: this would show the Parthians to be submissive. Augustus might have been satisfied with this, though we cannot know. Phraates refused, and then learned that Augustus did not make empty threats. But Phraates was tough, and Tiridates failed. Agrippa's mission, and the hope of ransoming the standards with Phraates' kidnapped son, also failed. Augustus at last threatened war, and, before it was too late, Phraates saw that he meant it, and so surrendered the standards and his four legitimate sons as well.

Augustus took the opportunity to re-claim Roman suzerainty over Armenia and also over Media Atropatene. We cannot tell how early Augustus had come to this decision: but for the rest of his reign, this would be the basis of his policy toward Parthia. Aside from further frightening and shaming Phraates, the acquisition of Armenia and Media Atropatene extended Roman control to the Caspian and left the Parthians extremely vulnerable to

attack. The possession of Armenia became a point of tremendous prestige.

Yet Augustus maintained Armenia as a client-kingdom, not a province of the empire. Armenia and Media were distant and unsuited for Roman administration, and garrisoning them against Parthian attack would have been costly in Roman manpower which would be needed on the northern frontier of the empire. It is debatable whether Augustus would be inviting an attack more by not garrisoning than by doing so, but the main consideration was this: if the Parthians seized a client-kingdom and killed its ruler, Augustus had wider options than if the Parthians had seized a province and slaughtered Roman citizens. In the end, Augustus' control and influence were as great in a client-kingdom as in a province.

The Parthians would still find opportunities ^{to} assert their influence, and Roman client-kings would fall, and the Armenians would never be very pleased with the replacements, but, all in all, it seemed a good policy, because it made no pretence of creating a static situation in the turbulent East.

Would it continue to seem a good policy to future emperors, or would changing conditions in the empire call for a new policy?

Chapter Seventeen

The Policy of Tiberius

Augustus, no longer an administrator, but now a god, had left behind for his successors a warning that it would be ill-advised to extend the boundaries of the empire:¹ this, from the man who was proud to have increased the empire on every frontier.² But Tiberius would understand that there was no hypocrisy here. He had been with the Princeps in the East, where Augustus had obeyed his own doubts; and Tiberius himself had led the exhausted armies in the North, where the ageing Augustus' hopes were cut. Tiberius would therefore follow Augustus' last advice, and by thus turning attention away from expansion, he would prepare the empire for a great and slow transformation: the incorporation into the empire of areas presently ruled by local kings.³ Augustus had in fact led the way when he made Galatia a province in 25 B.C. Tiberius now did the same with Cappadocia in A.D. 17, after revenging himself upon its king, the elderly Archelaus.⁴

But this incorporation would be a long and gradual

¹Tac. Ann. 1, 2, 7; and Dio 56, 33, 2f.

²RG 26; and Nic. Dam. 1.

³Magie, RRIAM, p. 496.

⁴Tac. Ann. 2, 41/2. See p. 134, n. 46.

process, which in no way meant that the client-kingdoms had become unimportant. And the most important one, Armenia, was presently in great danger.

Until Augustus' death, Tiberius had not been free to deal with the crisis in Armenia. Had the situation been otherwise, Tiberius would still have given no support to Vonones. He was an Arsacid and could not be permitted to remain on the Armenian throne. Tiberius had not yet had time to organize Vonones' replacement before Artabanus succeeded in pressuring Vonones into flight from Armenia in A.D. 15 or 16.⁵ Vonones fled to Syria, where the Romans allowed him to keep rank as a king⁶--of Parthia, not Armenia. Armenia was given by Artabanus to one of his sons, Orodes, as a gift.

Tiberius was now confronted with the same situation Augustus had faced on several occasions. Tiberius chose to follow Augustus' policy-formula, to the letter. Germanicus, as soon as he could successfully terminate a campaign in Germany and celebrate his triumph in Rome, was sent in A.D. 18 on an expedition to restore order in Armenia. The emperor's adopted son was given the same imperium as Agrippa, Tiberius himself, and Gaius had possessed; he was also given an adviser, Cn. Calpurnius Piso,⁸ to restrain any excesses of zeal on the

⁵Tac. Ann. 2, 4-5; and McDowell, p. 223.

⁶Tac. Ann. 2, 4.

⁷Ibid., 43.

⁸Ibid. Piso, though Tiberius' choice, was hardly a subordinate. From one of the most ancient families in Rome, he had been consul with Tiberius in 7 B.C. and

part of the martial Germanicus.

The expedition proceeded slowly to Armenia, while a suitable candidate for the throne was found. The Armenian royal family had long since died out, but Tiberius (or Germanicus, or his advisers) chose a Pontic prince named Zeno. Son of the faithful client-king Polemo and his wife Pythodoris, Zeno was the scion of two Hellenistic families, yet he had for some reason cultivated, reportedly since childhood, a love of Armenian habits and customs, and was himself admired by the Armenians. He adopted the national name 'Artaxes' when Germanicus placed him on the throne, where he remained for an astounding fifteen years.⁹

Artabanus had presented no obstacle, and his son was probably withdrawn without a fight. In the face of a determined and prepared Roman force, there was little Artabanus could do since he had not yet had time to reassert a strong central authority in Parthia, which had become very decentralized since the reign of Phraates IV.¹⁰ For the moment, Artabanus sought an amicable relationship with the Romans. He invited Germanicus to meet with him on the Euphrates to renew old pledges, and he specifically requested that Vonones be kept farther away than Syria, for his agents were inciting

had served in Spain and Africa. The problems between Piso and Germanicus cannot be explained easily as resulting either from Tiberius' machinations or Piso's insubordinate pride.

⁹Tac. Ann. 2, 56; and Strabo 12, 3, 29.

¹⁰Debevoise, pp. 154-7.

disloyalty among certain Parthian vassals. Germanicus apparently did not attend any meeting on the Euphrates, but he did transfer Vonones farther west, though Tacitus thinks this was done mainly to spite Piso, Germanicus' military adviser, with whom Vonones had insinuated himself through various gifts.¹¹ It is not unthinkable that Piso was involved in the activities at which Artabanus was protesting.

Vonones had a strange fate. Tacitus reports that, about A.D. 19, Vonones tried to escape north, through Armenia, to the lands of the Albani and Heniochi where he had a kinsman among the Scythian tribal leaders. He was caught by the Romans and shortly afterwards was stabbed by a certain Remmius, who had been Vonones' chief guard. Remmius was suspected of having connived at the escape, and then, of murdering Vonones to avoid detection.¹² The reasoning is neat and sounds official, but other interpretations, in which Vonones may have been a tool of policy, are impossible to substantiate.

With regard to Armenia, we have seen how Tiberius employed Augustus' policy with greater success than Augustus had ever known. Artaxes (Zeno) happened to be a fortunate choice, and Artabanus was too weak to advance Parthia's claim. However, like Gaius, Germanicus did not return from the East, but died of an illness contracted in Egypt.¹³

¹¹Tac. Ann. 2, 58.

¹²Ibid., 68. Suetonius' remark (Tib. 49) that Tiberius had Vonones murdered for his money is absurd.

¹³Tac. Ann. 2, 72.

Artabanus, over the years, centralized the power in Parthia, through minor wars with neighbours, the murder of rival Arsacids, and the general diminution of the power of the nobles. This, of course, earned him the enmity of the nobles, but Artabanus must have felt confident, for when Artaxes died about A.D. 34, and left no heir, Artabanus installed his eldest son on the throne. Not only that, he also wrote to Tiberius and made menacing remarks about the size of the empire of Cyrus.¹⁴

Artabanus probably expected no active response from the elderly Tiberius, aged about seventy-six and a recluse on Capreae. But when a secret Parthian embassy arrived in Italy, representing disgruntled nobles opposing Artabanus, Tiberius was alert. All that was needed, said the embassy, was Tiberius' authorization and a prince of the Arsacid name: if a suitable rival would show himself on the banks of the Euphrates, Artabanus could be toppled. Tiberius subsidized and equipped the prince named Phraates, the youngest and last surviving son of Phraates IV. He must have been quite old, for he had been resident in Rome for over half a century. These facts may explain his death soon after arriving in Syria, from either the fatigue of the journey or the sudden adoption of Parthian ways of living.¹⁵ Or Artabanus may have had a hand in it.¹⁶

¹⁴Tac. Ann. 6, 31f.; and Dio 58, 26.

¹⁵Tac. Ann. 6, 33; Dio ibid.; and Jos. AJ 18, 97.

¹⁶Debevoise, p. 158; and Magie, RRIAM, p. 508.

Tiberius persevered and sent another prince, a grandson of Phraates IV, Tiridates (III); but this time a Roman escort was attached to insure a successful outcome. There was no member of the imperial family to send. Germanicus was dead; his brother Claudius was considered stupid; Tiberius' son Drusus was dead, as were two of Germanicus' three sons. The third, Gaius (Caligula), was of age, alive and well, but faulty and unbeloved by the emperor.¹⁷ Tiberius appointed L. Vitellius (cos. 34) governor of Syria with authority to regulate affairs, which meant regaining Armenia and, if possible, placing Tiridates on the Parthian throne.

As for Armenia, Tiberius facilitated matters by writing to Pharasmanes, king of Iberia, requesting that he invade Armenia, install his own brother Mithradates, and thus draw in Artabanus who would try to keep his son on the throne. Pharasmanes was happy to comply, for in this way he could remove his brother, a possible rival, from his own realm.¹⁸ Pharasmanes actually took the Armenian capital, Artaxata, without a fight, for Artabanus' son was murdered by bribed attendants. Immediately Artabanus dispatched another son, Orodes, to recover Armenia, but he was defeated by the Iberians. Artabanus then mobilized Parthian forces for retaliation. But agents of Vitellius incited the Alani, who flooded down into Parthian territory, while Vitellius

¹⁷Tac. Ann. 6, 46.

¹⁸Tac. ibid., 33; Dio 58, 26; Jos. AJ 18, 97; and Pliny NH 15, 83.

himself spread rumours that he was about to invade Mesopotamia. Artabanus retired, while Vitellius artfully fomented disaffection among leading Parthian nobles, who presently forced Artabanus to flee to Hyrcania.¹⁹

Vitellius now entrusted Tiridates to the care of the Parthian nobles, who escorted him in triumph to Ctesiphon. But before long, and for various reasons, many of the nobles turned against Tiridates, and with surprising suddenness they came to regret the loss of Artabanus. In fact, it was so sudden that Artabanus himself was surprised, for when an embassy found him living by his bow in the Hyrcanian forests, Artabanus suspected a trap. Finally convinced of the nobles' support (however reluctant), Artabanus marched west with his Scythians, and, still dressed in rags, he compelled Tiridates to make a shameful flight to Syria.²⁰

Both Vitellius and Artabanus were satisfied to make terms. Artabanus had seen what Rome could do through an intelligent agent such as Vitellius, and the Parthian said no more of Armenia, but sent one of his sons to Rome as a hostage.²¹

¹⁹Tac. Ann. 6, 33-6; and Jos. AJ 18, 96-8.

²⁰Tac. ibid., 44; and Jos. ibid., 99-100.

²¹Jos. ibid., 101-3. See Dio ^{14,3} 59, 17, 5 and 27, 2; Suet. Vitellius 2, 4, and Gaius 19: all of whom either give no date for the parley and the hostage-giving, or place it in the reign of Gaius. J.P.V.D. Balsdon, The Emperor Gaius (Caligula) (Oxford, 1934), p. 198 maintains that these took place in the reign of Gaius. E. Täubler, Die Parthernachrichten bei Josephus (Berlin, 1904), pp. 33ff. believes that the sources, except for Josephus, are all hostile to Tiberius, and deny him the honours he

Tiberius died a few months later, in March A.D.

37. A Roman client-king was ruling in Armenia and a boastful Parthian king had been humbled, and even temporarily replaced by a contender who had lived most of his life in Rome.

The means had varied: either the opportunistic use of neighbouring client-kings, or the exploitation of Parthian internal disorders, or the employment of pretenders, or, if necessary, the threat and use of force. War was not sought, but risked. Parthia was always given a way out--Rome's way. Parthia would not be invaded, but Armenia would be held.

Twenty-five years after his death, Augustus' Parthian policy was as yet unchanged.

merited. Certainly Josephus is the more contemporary. Tacitus' omission cannot be argued either way: he was biased against Tiberius, and his account of Caligula's reign is lost.

Chapter Eighteen

The Policies of Gaius and Claudius

Under the new emperor Gaius, Roman policy toward Parthia was changed. The question is whether it was a deliberate change, or just a lack of policy. Gaius summoned Mithradates, the Roman client-king of Armenia, to Rome, and then imprisoned him.¹ Judging by later actions, Mithradates may well have been a cruel king, but so was Herod; and there is no record of the reason for Mithradates' recall. Gaius then, however, apparently sent no one to take the Armenian throne, thus relinquishing Roman suzerainty.

It has been argued that this was a deliberate and imaginative policy which would remove the bone of contention between Parthia and Rome, end the bloodshed, and yet cost Rome nothing.²

For the moment the alteration seemed small. The Parthians did not rush in and place an Arsacid on the Armenian throne. But the reason for this is that Parthia was weakened by civil war. When the time came, it is absurd to think they would not have seized control of Armenia. The strategic importance was large, and the

¹Tac. Ann. 11, 8, 1; Dio 60, 8, 1; and Seneca, De tranquillitate animi 11, 12.

²H. Willrich, 'Caligula,' Klio 3, 1903, pp. 297-304. But see Balsdon, Gaius, pp. 199f.

prestige to be accrued was even greater.

While Rome was strong and Parthia weak, Gaius' act seemed proper; but in the end Rome could incur losses which would weaken her hold on other client-kingdoms and provinces.

Gaius reigned for less than four years. He was succeeded in 41 by Claudius, who released Mithradates from prison and arranged to have him re-installed in Armenia through the efforts of his brother, the Iberian king Pharasmanes, supported by Roman troops. The Armenians were not anxious for a return of Roman suzerainty, and, under a Parthian satrap named Demonax, they offered battle, but lost.³

In June, 42, a seven-year civil war in Parthia came to an end. After his meeting with Vitellius in 36, Artabanus found it prudent, in the face of discontent among the nobles, to remove himself from the throne and seek refuge with a former vassal, Izates II of Adiabene. A protégé of Artabanus named Cinnamus was selected to rule. However, Artabanus was soon allowed back into power, though he died shortly after, in 38.⁴ He was followed by Gotarzes II, a Hyrcanian,⁵ who had two brothers whom he tried to dispose of. One was murdered;

³Tac. Ann. 9, 9; and Dio 60, 8, 1. Tacitus calls Demonax a praefectus. There was no Parthian vassal-king in Armenia, but Demonax' exact status is unclear, which means that Armenia's relation to Parthia is also unclear.

Magie, RRIAM, p. 551 believes Demonax is Armenian.

⁴Jos. AJ 20, 54-68.

⁵Tac. Ann. 11, 8; and Wroth, p. xlvff.

the other, Vardanes, fled. A year later he was called in by the nobles to drive out Gotarzes, which he did. However, while Vardanes was busy besieging Seleucia, which was in revolt, Gotarzes returned with the aid of the Dahae and Hyrcanians. During the ensuing struggles, the brothers became aware of a plan by the nobles to deprive them both of the throne. So the two were drawn together and agreed that Vardanes should occupy the throne of Parthia and Gotarzes should rule in Hyrcania. It was June, 42, before Vardanes settled his kingdom and ended the revolt in Seleucia.⁶

It was Vardanes who received the Armenians' plea for relief from Mithradates. He tried to enlist the aid of one of his stronger vassals, Izates II (who had sheltered Artabanus in Adiabene), but the vassal refused to enter any conflict with the Romans: five of his sons were living in Rome. Angered, Vardanes attacked Izates. Possibly to distract Vardanes from this or an attack on Armenia, Vibius Marsus, governor of Syria, made a threat of war.⁷ But at about the same time (43), Vardanes was again attacked from Hyrcania by Gotarzes. Vardanes drove him back, but in 45 Gotarzes again began a struggle, which ended two years later with

⁶All this is very much condensed from Tac. Ann. 11, 8-10 and Jos. AJ 20, 69-74; see also Philostratus, Life of Apollonius of Tyana 1, 19-40: Apollonius travelled through Parthia in the spring of 42. See also: McDowell, pp. 141ff., on the factions in Seleucia; and Debevoise, pp. 165-9, for a slightly larger description of these events.

⁷Tac. Ann. 11, 10; and Debevoise, p. 170.

Vardanes' death.⁸

There was division over accepting Gotarzes as king. Some nobles wanted to summon one of the Arsacids from Rome. Gotarzes did not wait to be asked, but took the kingship. However, excesses of cruelty (i.e. the usual attempts at centralization of power) convinced the nobles that they should send to Rome.⁹

Claudius received the appeal in 47,¹⁰ and sent Meherdates, son of Vonones I and grandson of Phraates IV.¹¹ C. Cassius Longinus, governor of Syria, was commanded to escort Meherdates to the Euphrates. But support for Meherdates melted as he proceeded along a cautious route through Osrhoene, Armenia and Adiabene, and Gotarzes defeated him in battle. Meherdates' life was spared, but his ears were sliced off, which disqualified him from ever ruling Parthia.¹²

Gotarzes died in 51, a year which also saw the succession of two other kings from the Median line, Vonones II and his son or brother, Vologases I.¹³

⁸Tac. Ann. 11, 10; and McDowell, p. 190.

⁹Tac., ibid.

¹⁰Tac., ibid., 10 and 11, provides an interesting example of the Roman view, in the time of Trajan, of Rome's historical relations with Parthia.

¹¹Tacitus calls him a iuvenis, but his father had been dead nearly thirty years. He may have been born in the East, after his father was released from Rome, and was only sent back to Rome later as a boy; otherwise, he would now be over forty.

¹²Tac. Ann. 12, 12-14.

¹³Ibid., and Jos AJ 20, 72-4; the details of both are few and conflicting. See McDowell, p. 191.

In the next year Armenia was attacked, but not by Parthia or Rome. For the last nine years the Armenians had been living peacefully though painfully under Mithradates. Presently his brother Pharasmanes, king of Iberia, discovered that his own son, Rhadamistus, was old enough to be king of something, preferably not Iberia. Pharasmanes sent the young man against his uncle--who was also his father-in-law and brother-in-law--and Rhadamistus made a successful invasion. Mithradates sought refuge with the Roman garrison at Gorneae, which was more or less besieged. The venality of the Roman prefect, who was bribed by Rhadamistus, resulted in Mithradates' surrender and consequent death.¹⁴

C. Ummidius Quadratus, governor of Syria, and his staff were not sure how Rome would react, so they themselves took no action, but sent a note to Pharasmanes requesting that he withdraw his son and troops. However, then Quadratus learned that a Roman procurator had, under ignominious circumstances, lent his presence to Rhadamistus' coronation, thus giving a shameful semblance of official sanction. Quadratus ordered a legion to be sent into Armenia. The commander, Helvidius Priscus, had discretionary powers to sort things out as best he could. Apparently, he accepted the situation: Rome's basic interests in Armenia (the continuance of Roman suzerainty and the maintenance of a king not friendly with Parthia) had not essentially been damaged by the change

¹⁴Tac. Ann. 12, 43-47.

of rulers. But, suddenly, Priscus was recalled to Syria.¹⁵

Vologases I, though he had been king in Parthia for only a year, had already shown himself to be a wise ruler. Instead of murdering his two brothers, Pacorus and Tiridates, Vologases found important positions for them to occupy. Media Atropatene was to be ruled by Pacorus, and Tiridates would sit on the throne of Armenia.¹⁶

No doubt Vologases had reached the conclusion that Rome would not come to the aid of Rhadamistus. In 52 Vologases began an advance into Armenia and quickly reached Artaxata, by which time the Romans had withdrawn: there was little Priscus could do with one legion. It was, in fact, the harshness of the winter and the lack of provision which forced Vologases to withdraw his forces and Tiridates. Rhadamistus, who had fled to Iberia, returned and used harsh means in an attempt to make his position more secure. The reverse happened; the Armenians revolted and Rhadamistus again took flight. Tiridates returned to Armenia in 54.¹⁷

Before the news of this reached Rome, Claudius was dead. Claudius had re-asserted Augustan policies in the East. He recovered Armenia and was eager to meddle in Parthian affairs, sending out yet another Parthian prince who had been living in Rome. But in the latter years of his reign, Claudius let the guidance of policy slip into

¹⁵Tac. Ann. 12, 47-50; and Magie, RRIAM, p. 552.

¹⁶Tac. ibid., 44; and Jos. AJ 20, 74.

¹⁷Tac. ibid., 48; and Jos. ibid., 81-91; and B.W. Henderson, 'Chronology of the Wars in Armenia,' Classical Review 15, 1901, pp. 159ff.

the hands of his freedmen, who acted as stewards of the empire.¹⁸ Administration in the East stagnated for lack of leadership. And worse than no policy was the appearance given by a weak policy, through which Rome lost control of Armenia and saw her own prestige wilt while that of Parthia grew.

¹⁸M.P. Charlesworth, CAH, X, p. 701.

Chapter Nineteen

Corbulo's Campaigns and the Neronian Settlement

Nero was not quite seventeen when he became emperor in October, 54. In December news reached Rome of events in Armenia, and immediately preparations were made for war--which was to last for over ten years and involve critical decisions of policy in regard to the 'Armenian Question.' It is a matter of much dispute whether Nero, his advisers Seneca and Burrus, the senate, or Corbulo formulated and directed the policy of Rome.¹

For our purposes little need be said of the campaigning itself. Roman preparations were massive, for Vologases was recognized as being a formidable opponent. Yet, at this time, the king was contending with a revolt by one of his sons as well as a war with the Hyrcanians. There were a number of unsuccessful attempts to negotiate a settlement between Rome and Parthia, but by the spring of 58 Corbulo had rejuvenated the eastern legions,

¹B.W. Henderson, The Life and Principate of the Emperor Nero (London, 1903) emphasizes Nero's direction, with the help of his advisers. W. Schur, 'Die Orientpolitik des Kaisers Nero,' Klio, Beiheft 15 (Leipzig, 1923) allows for Nero's energy and capability, but stresses that his advisers provided a consistent policy. A. Momigliano, 'Corbulone e la politica verso i Parti,' Atti del II Congresso Nazionale di Studi Romani (Rome, 1931) finds the source of policy in the senate. And M. Hammond, 'Corbulo and Nero's Eastern Policy,' HSCP 45, 1934, pp. 81-104, attributes the formulation of policy to Corbulo.

enlisted the forces of Antiochus of Commagene and Pharasmanes the Iberian, and had entered Armenia. Knowing that Vologases was occupied with the Hyrcanians, Corbulo urged Tiridates to petition the emperor.²

What Corbulo was suggesting was that an Arsacid be allowed to sit on the Armenian throne, but only if he received it from Nero. This would mean the end of effective, and the beginning of nominal, suzerainty. This was not a simple rejection of Augustan policy as wrong; Corbulo perceived that circumstances had changed. Short of annexing Armenia, Rome's suzerainty would grow less 'effective' as Parthia displayed more muscle. Vologases revealed the danger for Rome in being too reliant on Parthian disunity. And the change in policy, if executed in the manner Corbulo was proposing, could only raise Roman prestige which had sunk so low, while the Arsacids would seem to be petitioners. Which is why Tiridates refused. He had not yet been beaten and would not accept such terms.

In two more years of fighting, Corbulo captured Artaxata and Tigranocerta, forcing Tiridates to flee to Parthia. Rome sent out a Romanized prince to occupy the Armenian throne. This was Tigranes, a great-grandson of both Herod the Great and Archelaus of Cappadocia,³ and his installation represented a return to Augustan policy. It has been argued that Corbulo disfavoured this approach, and more or less left Tigranes to his own precarious fate.⁴

²Tac. Ann. 13, 34-7.

³Jos. AJ 18, 140.

⁴Hammond, pp. 92ff.

For the new king of an Armenia which had been diminished in size⁵ soon attacked Adiabene, a vassal of Parthia, thus inciting Vologases to retaliate. Corbulo prevented the Parthians from taking Armenia, and arranged a truce under which both sides withdrew from Armenia. Nothing more is heard of Tigranes.⁶

Corbulo occupied himself with protecting Syria, and requested that a commander be sent out for the forces in Armenia. L. Caesennius Paetus arrived, and declared that he would annex Armenia, but then failed in the attempt and was forced by the Parthians to make a hasty retreat from Armenia. Vologases sent a message to the emperor: though the Parthians had demonstrated their power, Tiridates was prepared to receive his crown from Roman authority--he would even do homage to the emperor's standards and assume his kingship in front of the Roman army--and he would have come to Rome were he not hindered by taboos connected with his Magian priesthood. Rome's reaction was that it would be a humiliation to accept these terms, offered after Paetus' defeat. The bearers of Vologases' message were dismissed, but took with them gifts--and hints that it would be well for Tiridates to come to Rome in person.⁷

Corbulo now received a maius imperium and made a devastating invasion of Armenia; Vologases and Tiridates asked to meet with Corbulo. And arrangements were made for Tiridates' journey to Rome.⁸

⁵Tac. Ann. 14, 26.

⁷Ibid., 6-25.

⁶Ibid., 15, 5.

⁸Ibid., 26-30.

The meeting of Tiridates and Nero in Rome gleamed with ceremonial pomp. Both parties endeavoured to appear triumphant. Tiridates, as promised, knelt before Nero, but he refused to lay aside his dagger, which he had nailed into its scabbard. Nero crowned Tiridates, who in turn did reverence to Nero as Mithras.⁹ In Rome Nero was able to steal the show. In Parthia, years after Nero's death, a pseudo-Nero appeared and was revered by the Parthians as the man who had returned Armenia to Parthian control.¹⁰

⁹Dio 62, 2-5; and see F. Cumont, 'L'iniziazione di Nerone da parte di Tiridate d'Armenia,' Rivista di Filologia 61, 1933, pp. 145-54.

¹⁰Dio 66, 19, 3b.

Chapter Twenty

Conclusion: A Rejection Rejected

An effective suzerainty over Armenia was the core of Augustus' policy toward Parthia. He would not invade Parthia, but could do so, and most easily through Armenia, which became the bone of contention and quickly acquired a prestige value far beyond its strategic worth. Now, from the reign of Nero, Rome no longer had an effective suzerainty, and there followed fifty years during which Rome and Parthia did not fight. It is tempting, but wrong, to conclude from this that Augustus' policy was a failure.¹ Certain changes in conditions and attitudes had made an alteration of policy advisable, and yet even further changes would be needed to make the new policy work.

By the time of Nero's accession in 54, nearly a century had passed since the Parthians had attacked the Roman provinces in the East. The Parthians, who were continually debilitated by civil strife, were given new leadership under Vologases. But even he was occupied with the rebellious Hyrcanians, while Nero, as Corbulo reportedly said, governed peaceful provinces: the fight

¹As do both Magie, RRIAM, pp. 485-6, 496, 553 and 561; and J.G.C. Anderson, CAH, X, pp. 257, 273, and 773-4.

with the Parthians was his only war.² This could not have been said of Augustus, who had important wars to fight in the North and who, for a number of reasons, was justifiably cautious about increasing too rapidly the number of provinces in the East.³ However, the century which followed the last invasion by Pacorus and Labienus in 40 B.C. saw the East being slowly incorporated into the imperial administration as more provinces were created: Galatia (25 B.C.), to which was added Paphlagonia (6 B.C.); Cappadocia and Commagene (A.D. 17); Lycia (43) and Judaea (44); and Pontus was later incorporated into Galatia (64).

There was a simultaneous and by no means unrelated evolution taking place on the other side of the Euphrates. While Rome was cementing her hold on the East, the Parthians were shaking off the influences of the West. A 'neo-Iranian renaissance' began under Vologases I.⁴ Tiridates, sent to Rome to meet Nero, may have journeyed for over a year because of Zoroastrian taboos against defiling water.⁵ Magian funerary customs were spreading throughout Parthia;⁶ and the scattered

²Tac. Ann. 15, 27, 2: 'contra imperatori suo immotam ubique pacem et unum id bellum esse.'

³Magie, RRIAM, p. 496.

⁴Ghirshman, p. 256; and Debevoise, p. 196.

⁵Pliny NH 30, 16f.; Tac. Ann. 15, 24; and Debevoise, p. 196; but Ghirshman, p. 268, argues that this was a traditional taboo in Iranian religions and did not indicate any new development.

⁶Ghirshman, p. 271: from excavations at Susa concerning the end of the first century A.D.

traditions of the Avesta, oral and manuscript, were collected by order of Vologases.⁷ On coins struck by Vologases priests are depicted sacrificing before a fire altar; and most interesting is the appearance of Pahlavi lettering along with the usual legends in Greek characters, which have become hopelessly corrupt.⁸ Vologases also founded a city, Vologasia or Vologesocerta, between Babylon and Seleucia, perhaps intending to displace the latter, which was Parthia's largest commercial centre, but also Greek and troublesome.⁹ Cities on the westernmost outskirts of the Parthian empire, such as Dura-Europus and Palmyra, were, in the first century A.D., becoming predominantly oriental in their art and buildings, even where the foundations were laid by Greeks.¹⁰

With this hardening of attitudes of both East and West, it is difficult to believe that fifty years of peace were bought with Rome's surrender of Armenia. For the Parthians those years were to a great extent spent fighting off barbarian tribes from the Caucasus (perhaps incited by Rome) and suffering another civil war.¹¹ The Romans, meanwhile, wasted no time. Vespasian, a veteran of the East, recognized that the situation there was still unsatisfactory in regard to its

⁷ Debevoise, p. 196; but Ghirshman, pp. 271-2 argues a later date for the collection.

⁸ Wroth, pp. 182ff., xlixff.; and McDowell, p. 192.

⁹ McDowell, pp. 229-36; and Ghirshman, pp. 256-7.

¹⁰ M. Rostovtzeff, 'Dura,' pp. 294-6.

¹¹ Debevoise: Rome involved, pp. 201-2; civil war, pp. 213-18.

security.¹² He raised the number of legions in the East,¹³ built strategic roads,¹⁴ appointed a consular instead of a knight to govern in Cappadocia,¹⁵ and annexed Commagene, placing two legions at that very strategic position, Melitene.¹⁶

It has been argued that these arrangements led inevitably toward, or were preparations for, Trajan's Parthian War of 113-117, during which Armenia and Mesopotamia were made into Roman provinces.¹⁷ As a matter of policy, Vespasian's actions did not necessarily lead to Trajan's. Vespasian was in effect acknowledging the superficiality of the Neronian settlement, and, like Augustus, Vespasian wanted to be in a position where he could react with force if the Parthians broke the rules. In that sense--as a matter of fact, not policy--Vespasian's efforts did serve as preparation for Trajan's invasion.

¹²R.P. Longden, 'Notes on the Parthian Campaigns of Trajan,' JRS 21. 1931. p. 24.

¹³P-W, 'Legio,' XII, col. 1363-6.

¹⁴A milestone found near Palmyra dates to A.D. 75 (Ann. Epig., 1933, no. 205).

¹⁵Suet. Vesp. 8, 4.

¹⁶Jos. BJ 7, 1.

¹⁷F. Cumont in Anatolian Studies presented to Sir W.M. Ramsay (Manchester, 1923), p. 114f.; 'il n'est pas douteux que l'annexion de ces deux 'etats-tampons' Vespasian's annexation of Commagene and Lesser Armenia ait eu pour but de permettre la réalisation d'une oeuvre qui devait assurer la suprématie de Rome sur la Grande Arménie.... Cette conquête préparée par les ingénieurs des Flaviens fut obtenue sans peine par les légions de Trajan.' See also Longden, p. 24 and F.A. Lepper, Trajan's Parthian War (London, 1948), p. 172f.

No great crime was needed to make the Neronian settlement crumble. About 110, the Parthian king, Osroes, deposed from the Armenian throne a certain Tirdates, who had apparently been appointed by Osroes' predecessor and approved by Rome. Now the throne was given to a certain Axidares, while the Romans stood by unconsulted.¹⁸ The emperor Trajan had before him all the old choices: a) let the Parthians do as they please with Armenia; b) renew the Neronian settlement of nominal suzerainty; c) revert to the Augustan system of effective suzerainty; or d) annex Armenia. Trajan felt that the empire's strength was such that Rome need not settle for anything less than annexation. It would require more than the mere threat of war, but Trajan would not have had it any other way.

Trajan conquered as no one had since Alexander. Armenia and Mesopotamia were immediately made provinces. Inside Parthia, Trajan found the Arsacids quarreling as usual, so he crowned one and thus, at least superficially, made the Parthian Empire a client-kingdom of Rome.¹⁹ The Parthian forces had not been destroyed, but it is questionable if they could have soon dislodged a Roman force determined to hold on. There were revolts throughout the East, but they were controlled. The cost was very high, and Trajan drew back temporarily; yet, despite illness, he planned a further campaign to secure Rome's

¹⁸Dio 68, 17 and 19.

¹⁹Ibid., 30.

holdings.²⁰ But he succumbed to his illness, and Hadrian had to pull back to the ante bellum position. Yet we cannot know if this was a reflexion of foreign policy or part of the necessary moves to secure his position as the new emperor.²¹

The dream of conquering Parthia once and for all might have been realized. More importantly, the state of affairs might have endured under the form of a client-kingship. But it would have been very difficult to maintain: it was unnatural. The strain on the empire would have been tremendous. It was a good thing that Hadrian withdrew.

The Parthians were replaced by the Persians in the middle of the third century, and wars would recur on Rome's eastern frontier as long as the empire lasted. In the largest sense, neither side could hope truly to defeat the other. Nor could they expect to live in absolute peace: great empires make poor neighbours--it is no less true today.

For that reason, it is difficult to find fault with Augustus' policy toward Parthia--a policy which held no plan of conquest (Trajan's solution) and no expectation of peace (as required in the Neronian Settlement). The tension was always present, and the risk of war. Augustus measured Parthia's weaknesses against Rome's, and managed to keep Rome in a position of dominance in those

²⁰Longden, p. 28: discusses Trajan's efforts as successes, not failures.

²¹Ibid., p. 29; and Lepper, pp. 212-3.

areas which mattered to Rome. The price he paid was constant effort: it was a permanent problem which could not be wiped away, but only minimized. Augustus gave the Parthians a great deal of unsettling trouble without ever committing Roman troops to battle: instead he sent a pretender to the Parthian throne who could foment civil war. There would be no settlement between Rome and Parthia, but only a continual need for re-adjustment. However, through this policy in the East, Augustus avoided the sort of great and pointless wars which would ruin a number of future emperors just as Crassus, and even Antonius, had been ruined.

Appendix A

References to Parthia in Augustan Poetry

The following is a list of references to Parthia or the Parthians found in the poetry of Virgil, Horace, Propertius, Ovid, Grattius and Manilius. The references are divided among a number of subjects. The list is not exhaustive, and a number of extremely casual references are excluded. It should also be mentioned that in all the poets there are numerous vague references to eastern lands, among which, certainly, Parthia would often be included.

1. The Parthians seen as a threat:

- a) Virgil Ecl. 1, 62; 10, 59; Georg. 1, 509; 2, 121-3, 126, 134-9; 3, 313f.; Aen. 8, 685-8; 12, 857f.
- b) Horace Epod. 7, 9; Od. 1, 2, 21 and 52.

2. The Parthians considered treacherous:

- a) Hor. Epist. 2, 1, 112.
- b) Ovid Ars am. 3, 248.

3. Parthia linked with Britain:

- a) Hor. Epod. 7, 7; Od. 1, 21, 15; 35, 30; 3, 5, 4; 4, 14, 48.
- b) Ovid Amores 2, 16, 39.

4. That Parthia will be, or ought to be, conquered:

- a) Vir. Georg. 3, 26ff.; 3, 313f.
- b) Hor. Sat. 2, 1, 15; Od. 1, 2, 21; 12, 53ff.; 21, 15; 29, 1-5; 35, 40; 2, 13, 17f.; 3, 2, 3; 3, 5, 4.
- c) Propertius 3, 4, 5; 3, 5, 46f.; 3, 12, 6-12; 4, 3, 35-40 and 65-9; 4, 6, 79f.
- d) Ovid Ars am. 1, 177, 199, 201f., 223ff.; 2, 175; Fasti 3, 719f.

5. The Parthians seen as being humbled, defeated or inferior:

- a) Vir. Aen. 8, 726.
- b) Hor. Od. 1, 35, 9; 2, 9, 17f.; 3, 3, 44; 4, 14, 42; 15, 23; Carm. Saec. 53ff.; Epist. 2, 1, 256.
- c) Prop. 2, 10.
- d) Ovid Rem. am. 155ff.; 224.

6. Parthian politics and civil war:

- a) Vir. Georg. 4, 210f.
- b) Hor. Od. 1, 26, 5; 2, 2, 17; 3, 8, 19; 3, 29, 27f.

7. Respected, especially for military skill:

- a) Hor. Od. 2, 13, 17f.
- b) Prop. 3, 9, 53ff.; 4, 3, 35-40.
- c) Ovid Ars am. 1, 199; 3, 786.
- d) Grattius 508.

8. The Remoteness of Parthia:

- a) Manilius 4, 674 and 803.

Appendix B

Sources for Reconstructing Agrippa's Map

The best works on the subject of Agrippa's map are Geographi Latini Minores, edited by A. Riese (first published in 1878, but reprinted in Hildesheim in 1964); A. Klotz, 'Die geographischen commentarii des Agrippa und ihre Ueberreste,' Klio 24, 1931, pp. 38-58 and 386-466; and J.J. Tierney, 'The Map of Agrippa,' Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy 63, 1962-4, pp. 151-66.

We have five sources for the measurements from Agrippa's map (and it is much disputed exactly how these measurements were originally indicated on the map itself). The fragments come from Strabo, Orosius, Pliny and the Divisio orbis terrarum and the Demensuratio provinciarum.

Strabo mentions the map only in reference to Italy. There are occasional confirmations in Orosius' chapter on geography (I, 2). Pliny is our best ancient source. Of the later works, the Divisio comes from a thirteenth century manuscript, but had already been reproduced in the first five chapters of the De Mensura Orbis Terrae written by an Irish scholar, Dicuil, in A.D. 825. He worked from a map of the fifth century which probably used as its source some copy of the map of Agrippa. The Demensuratio is existent in a number of fifteenth and sixteenth century manuscripts, which all derive from a ninth century codex in the library of Merton

College, Oxford. The internal evidence points to a common source of information for both the Divisio and Demensuratio. But there are still differences in the arrangement of each.

The discrepancies between these five sources are numerous, as are the divergences of opinion between Klotz and Tierney in their separate reconstructions. The most basic source of confusion is the use by our sources of the terms latitudo and longitudo, which are not comparable to the modern technical terms, but often meant simply breadth and length.

To demonstrate the relative proportions of Agrippa's map, and yet not to plunge into controversy, figures will be used which have been organized mostly by Tierney. As Tierney points out, the figures we are given allow us to create nothing more than a series of rectangles which provide only the vaguest idea of the shape of the country, the positioning of its length-breadth axes in relation to compass directions, and the relative congruity of the separate rectangles.

First, the world is divided into three parts, Europe, Africa and Asia. Among the areas listed for Europe, Italy is 1,020 miles long and 410 miles wide on a line through the north. (Pliny 3, 43). Gaul has an east-west measurement of 920 miles and is 318 miles 'wide' (Dicuil 1, 6 and Pliny 4, 105). The rectangle for Germany is much smaller: 636 by 248 miles (Pliny 4, 96), as is the rectangle for Illyricum-Pannonia: 540 by 325 miles (Pliny 3, 150). Britain is a rather large 800 by 300 miles, while Ireland (Hibernia) is hardly smaller:

800 by 200 miles (Pliny 4, 102).

North Africa is four territories in a row 3,000 miles long (Pliny 5, 40) whose southern boundary is unknown. The Mediterranean, from Gades to Alexandria, is reckoned as 2,600 miles (Pliny 6, 207).

Asia Minor is 1,155 by 325 miles (Pliny 5, 102), and Armenia is 480 by 280 miles (Pliny 6, 47).

Beyond these areas the measurements are more extreme. In Europe, Dacia is 1,200 miles by 400 (Pliny 4, 81). Further east, Sarmatia is 980 by 715 miles (Pliny 4, 91), Media is 1,320 by 840 (Pliny 6, 137), Arabia is 2,170 by 1,296 (Pliny 6, 196), and India and the Far East are 3,300 by 1,300 (Pliny 6, 57). 'India alone, therefore, has a longitude as great as the whole Mediterranean, while its latitude is comparable to that of Europe and Africa combined.' (Tierney, p. 164).

These measurements are the basis of Tierney's remarks about the 'enormous' and 'amorphous' appearance of lands beyond the reach of the Romans.¹

The boundaries to the north, east and south are defined by the phrase qua cognita est. But Dacia, Sarmatia and Armenia all trail off into the northern ocean, while Armenia is also bounded on the east by the Chinese ocean. Beneath Africa Agrippa mentions an 'Aethiopic sea.' So there is no departure from the general notion of an all-encircling ocean.

¹See pp. 95-6.

Appendix C
The Kings of Parthia

B.C.

Arsaces	(c. 250-248)
Tiridates I	(c. 248-211)
Artabanus I	(c. 211-191)
Priapatius	(c. 191-176)
Phraates I	(c. 176-171)
Mithradates I	(c. 171-137)
Phraates II	(c. 137-128)
Artabanus II	(c. 128-123)
Mithradates II	(c. 123-87)
Gotarzes I	(91-80)
Orodes I	(80-75)
Sinatruces	(75-69)
Phraates III	(69-57)
Mithradates III	(57-55)
Orodes II	(c. 57-36)
	(Pacorus, for ruling jointly with his father, Orodes, counts as 'Pacorus I'; he died in 38 B.C.)
Phraates IV	(c. 38-2)
Tiridates II	(31-30; 26-25)
Phraataces	(2-A.D. 4)

A.D.

Orodes III	(4-7)
Vonones I	(7-12)
	(Vonones, one of the hostage-sons of Phraates IV, was sent by Augustus.)
Artabanus III	(12-38)
	(Phraates, son of Phraates IV, was sent by Tiberius in 35, but died before reaching Parthia.)
	(Tiridates III (c. 36), a grandson of Phraates IV, was sent by Tiberius, and was crowned, but was soon ejected by Artabanus.)

(Cinnamus (c. 37) is briefly seated on Artabanus' throne by the Parthian nobles.)

Gotarzes II (38-51)

(Meherdates, another grandson of Phraates IV, was sent by Claudius, but defeated by Gotarzes (50).)

Vardanes (c. 39-48)

Vonones II (c. 51)

Vologases I (51-80)

Pacorus II (78-116)

Artabanus IV (80-81)

Osroes (c. 109-129)

Vologases II (105-147)

Parthamasiris (c. 117)

Mithradates IV (128-147)

Vologases III (148-192)

Vologases IV (191-207)

Vologases V (207-223)

Artabanus V (213-227)

Artavasdes (227-229)

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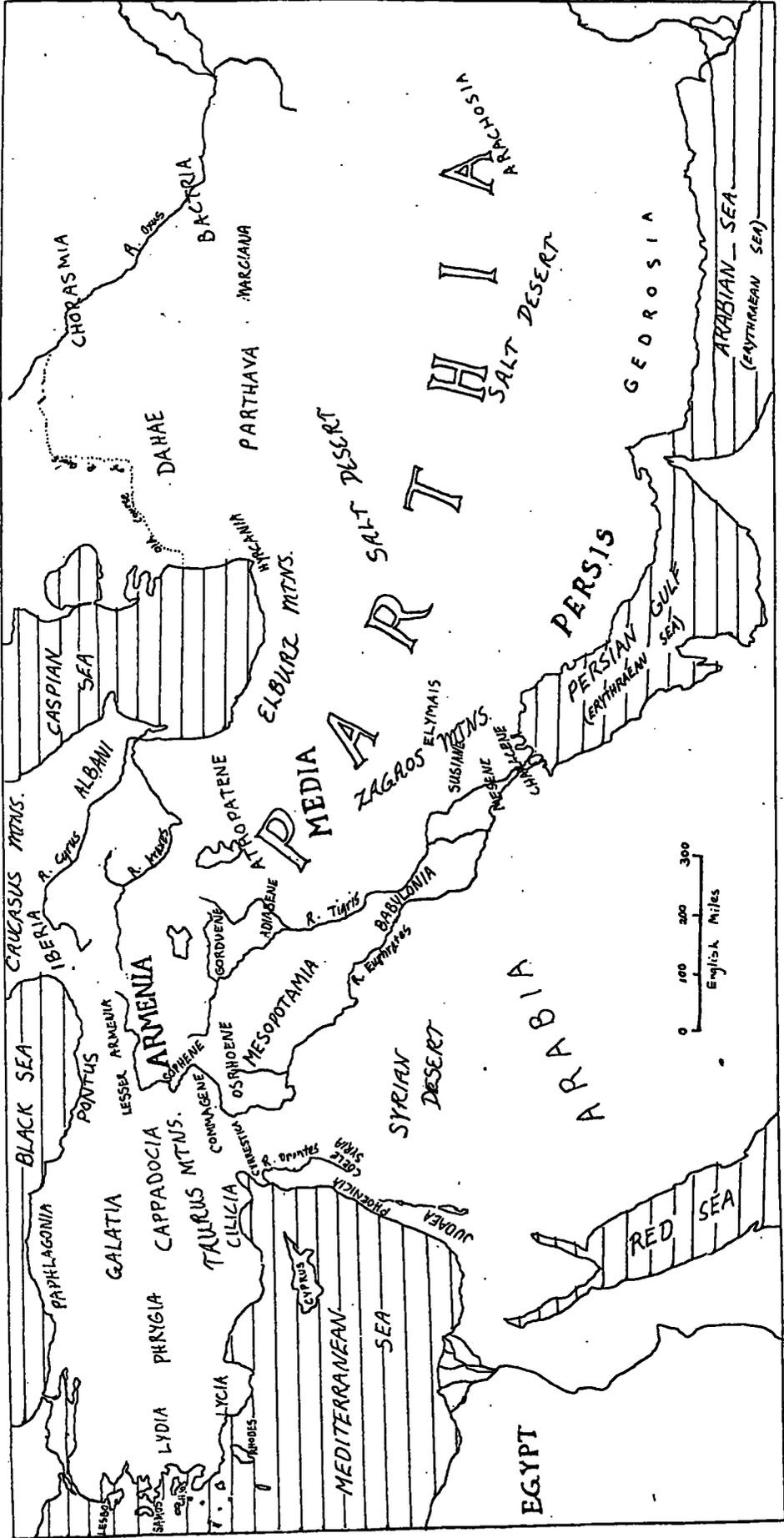
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