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THE ARROGANT ARMENIAN – TIRIDATES (BAGRATUNI) IN CASSIUS DIO AND MOVSES KHORENATS'I*

KAI JUNTUNEN

There are a few individuals who have left their mark on history only because of their questionable character. One such person seems to have been the Armenian Tiridates, who, according to Cassius Dio, caused disturbances in Armenia during the reign of Marcus Aurelius and who behaved violently towards the Roman legate Martius Verus when the latter reproached him for his conduct. Although Dio mentions this man only *en passant* in relation to a minor incident, the early medieval Armenian historian Movses Khorenats'i records in his work *History of the Armenians* a local folklore tradition of another Tiridates, who also seems to have been a contemporary of Marcus Aurelius and whose arrogance matched that of the Tiridates mentioned by Dio.

A closer examination of the details in these two stories would seem to suggest that both Cassius Dio and Movses are talking about one and the same individual. The combined details of these two stories help us to understand the incident recorded by Cassius Dio in its proper context. It also enables us to see the incident as another example of the challenges the Roman Empire faced in its more remote frontiers. Furthermore, the folklore tradition recorded by Movses would seem to provide us with valuable clues for our understanding of the situation in Armenia on the eve of the Parthian war of Lucius Verus, as well as the causes of this conflict and possibly the identities of some of its key players.

* I would like to express my gratitude for Ms. Maija Holappa for providing the maps of this article.

Cassius Dio: The Incident with Tiridates and the Heniochi

The incident that Cassius Dio recorded has not survived in its original context, but instead as an excerpt in the tenth century Byzantine encyclopaedia *Excerpta Constantiniana*.¹ This encyclopaedia originally contained excerpts of several classical historians divided under fifty-three topics, each providing examples of historical incidents of a specific nature.² The excerpt of Dio that mentions the altercation between Tiridates and Martius Verus was added in the collection *de Virtutibus et Vitiis*, as it mainly dealt with the lenient nature of Marcus Aurelius. It begins by describing the bitterness of the emperor towards Ariogaesus, whom the Quadi – a Germanic tribe on the Danubian frontier – had made their king against the objections of the Roman Empire.³ The anger of the emperor is emphasised to have gone even so far that Marcus declared a price on Ariogaesus' head, payable either on his capture or death.

Cassius Dio tempered this stern depiction of Marcus Aurelius by noting that even though the emperor had at the time been infuriated by Ariogaesus, he did him no harm when the German king was eventually captured, but instead merely exiled him to Alexandria. In an attempt to make sure that his readers would see Marcus Aurelius as a lenient ruler, Dio added a similar incident to his anecdote that occurred roughly at the same time in Armenia. In this episode, another man had behaved insolently towards the representative of the emperor, but instead of being sentenced to death, the man was instead exiled to the opposite end of the Empire:

"... Yet in general the emperor was always accustomed to treat even his most stubborn foes humanely; thus, when Tiridates, a satrap, stirred up trouble in Armenia and slew the king of the Heniochi, and then thrust his sword in [Martius] Verus' face when the latter rebuked him for it, he did not put him to death, but merely sent him to Britain." (tr. E. Cary 1927)

¹ Dio 71,14,2 = Exc. *de virt.* (ed. Büttner-Wobst – Roos) V. 304 (pp. 370–71).

² Roberto 2009, 73–4.

³ Cf. Dio 71,13,3–4 = Exc. *de leg.* (ed. de Boor) U^G 58 (p. 432). One should note that there is a numerical difference between de Boor's edition of *Excerpta de Legionibus* and earlier editions. In de Boor's edition, the fragments U^G 2 and U^G 3 have been combined, which causes the quotation number to be one lower after the second fragment than what has been used in the other editions.

The precise date of the Armenian incident is uncertain, but the excerpt associates it with the feud between Marcus Aurelius and Ariogaesus. The elevation of Ariogaesus seems to have occurred when the relations between the Roman Empire and the Quadi deteriorated c. 172/173 CE over the issue of the Iazyges (to whom the Quadi gave assistance), while his later capture and exile into Alexandria most likely occurred in 174 CE, when Marcus Aurelius adopted his seventh imperial salutation after his victory over the Quadi.⁴ The preceding excerpts in the collection deal with the praetorian prefect M. Bassaeus Rufus, who assumed the post around 169 CE, while the following excerpt describes the grief of Marcus Aurelius at the death of Avidius Cassius in 175 CE.⁵ As Martius Verus continued to serve as the legate of Cappadocia until 175 CE, none of these facts will help us narrow down the time of the incident more closely.

The Tribal Territory of the Heniochi

The location of the incident on the other hand can be defined slightly more accurately. The Heniochi, whose king Tiridates had killed, were Roman clients who dwelled along the south-east corner of the Pontic coast. Originally, the name Heniochi seems to have been associated with a number of interrelated tribes who occupied much of the eastern Pontic coast from the foot of the Caucasus to the borders of Armenia, but by the mid-second century the name seems to have been used to refer to a single (although still significant) tribe.⁶ In Arrian's day in the

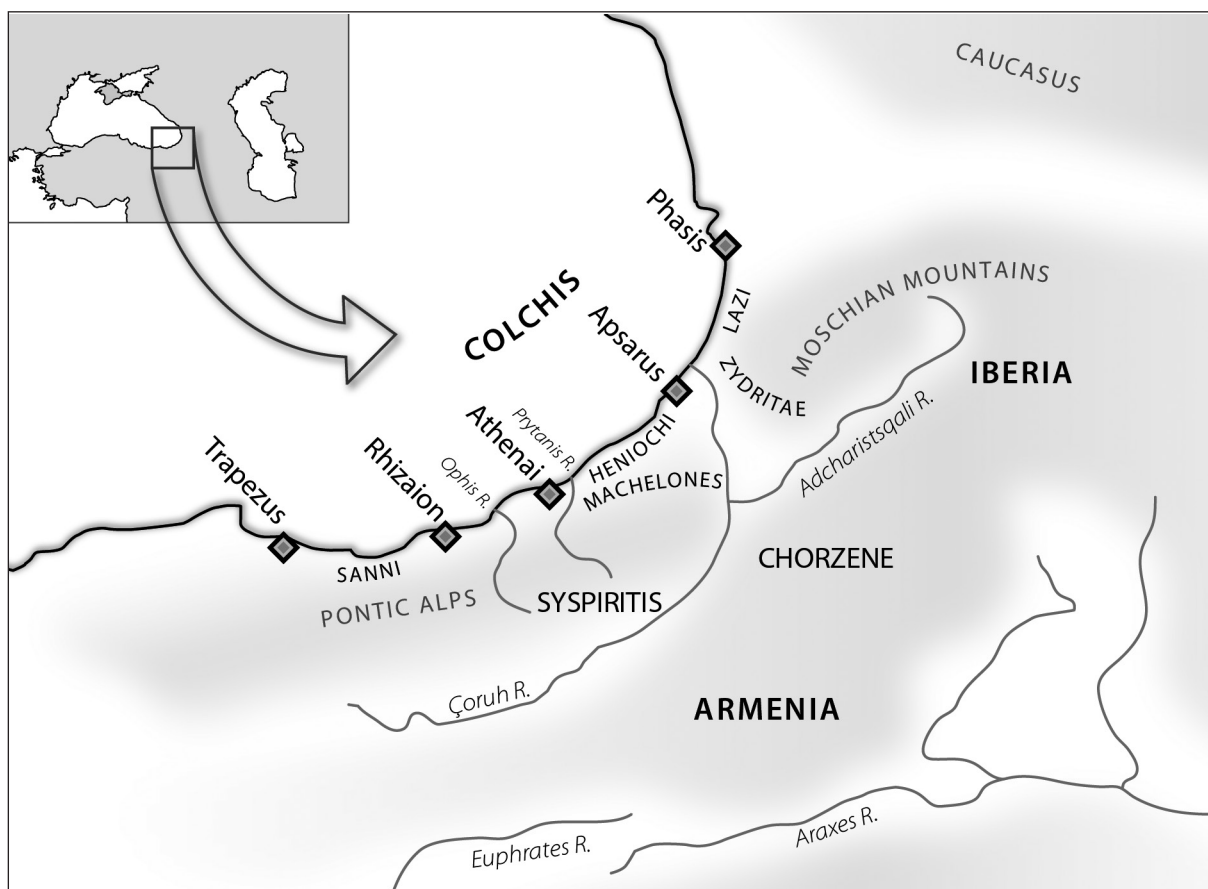
⁴ Birley 1987, 176–78; Dodd 1913, 282–91; Kienast 1990, 139.

⁵ Exc. *de virt.* (ed. Büttner-Wobst – Roos) V. 302–303 (p. 370); V. 305 (p. 371). M. Bassaeus Rufus (*PIR*² B 69): Jördens 2009: 535; Thomasson 1984, 351 (no. 37: 66); Thomasson 2009, 147 (no. 37: 66).

⁶ According to Strabo (*geogr.* 11,2,1; 11,2,12–14), the Heniochi lived north of Phasis next to the Zygi and the Achaei during the final days of Mithridates Eupator (63 BCE), while the hinterland of their territory is said (*geogr.* 11,5,6) to have reached the southern Caucasus mountains (Moschian mountains). Pliny on the other hand identifies several tribes named Heniochi: one living on the southern Colchis between Trapezus and Apsarus (*nat.* 6,iv,12) either named Sanni Heniochi or more probably two tribes named the Sanni and the Heniochi; another on the coastline near Apsarus (*nat.* 6,iv,12) that possibly refers to the same tribe (if the previous entry meant two distinct tribes); and numerous unnamed subtribes belonging to the Heniochi on the coast north of Sebastopolis (*nat.* 6,iv,14). Arrian, who had visited these regions, states (*peripl.* 11,1–2) that after Trapezus the tribes occupying the southern section of the coast were the Sanni, Machelones, Heniochi and the Zydritae. To Arrian no other tribe along the Pontic coast seems to have been associated with the Heniochi at that time.

first half of the second century, the Heniochi were ruled by one king together with their neighbours – the Machelones – a practice that may have continued even into the later second century.⁷

The domains of these tribes would seem to have been limited to between the rivers Ophis (modern Of) and Apsarus (modern Çoruh) on the Pontic coast.⁸ Arrian's association of the Zydritae – the next tribe along the coast line after the Heniochi – with the Iberian kingdom also suggests that Apsarus was the eastern extremity of the tribal territory belonging to the Heniochi, as otherwise the communications between Iberia and the Zydritae would have been severely



Map 1. Pontic coast and the Çoruh Valley.

⁷ Under Trajan and Hadrian they were ruled by a king named Anchialos, cf. Dio 68,19,2; Arr. *peripl.* 11,2.

⁸ Arrian (*peripl.* 7,1) defines the river Ophis as the boundary between Thiannike and Colchis, which thus most likely functioned also as the western border of the Heniochi (and the Machelones) separating them from the Sanni. Pliny's (*nat.* 6,iv,12) association of the Heniochi being near Apsarus most likely means that they occupied the coastal line up to that point, cf. Braund 1994, 185.

hampered.⁹ This could mean that the extraordinarily large five-cohort garrison at Apsarus served both as a buffer between the Heniochi and the Zydratae, while simultaneously being strategically located near the entrance of the Goderdzi Pass (i.e., the Adcharistsqali river valley, a tributary of the Çoruh) that provided passageway across the Moschian mountains into Iberia.¹⁰

In the hinterland the tribal territory was undoubtedly limited by the Pontic Alps in the south and the Moschian mountains in the east, but if Pliny's Machelones who lived further upstream on the Apsarus River were the same Machelones mentioned by Arrian then the territory of these two tribes would seem to have reached further up the Çoruh Valley.¹¹ This is most likely the same region that the trilingual Persian inscription set up by Shapur I around 262 at Naqsh-e Rostam refers to as Machelonia.¹² The royal residence mentioned by Arrian at the mouth of the Prytanis River (modern Büyük Dere), would have been located conveniently in the middle of the tribal lands.¹³ The limitation of the tribal territory of the Heniochi and Machelones to the Pontic coast and the Çoruh River valley makes it unlikely that these tribes would have wandered far from their traditional domains and thus the conflict seems to have occurred along the border zone between Armenia and the territory of the Heniochi, most likely somewhere upstream in the Çoruh River valley.

The Armenian Satrapies and the Rule of King Sohaemus

The identity of the other participant in the conflict is given only as a satrap named Tiridates. The Iranian name of the satrap has caused some to believe that the Parthians or Parthian collaborators were behind the incident,¹⁴ but after centuries of cultural interaction and nearly a hundred years of direct Arsacid rule, many Iranian names had been adopted among the traditional Armenian nomenclature.¹⁵

⁹ Arr. *peripl.* 11,2. Braund (1994, 185) locates the Zydratae more on the hills behind Apsarus and ascribes the actual coastal strip north of Apsarus to the Lazi.

¹⁰ Apsarus: Bosworth 1977, 228; Braund 1991, 215–17; Kakhidze 2008, 313; Mitford 1980, 1202; Speidel 1986, 658. Adcharistsqali: Braund 1994, 184–85; Idem 2000, 1257.

¹¹ Plin. *nat.* 6,x,29, cf. Braund 1994, 241 n. 21.

¹² Braund 1994, 239–42.

¹³ Arr. *peripl.* 7,3.

¹⁴ Debevoise 1938, 254.

¹⁵ Lang 1983, 525–26.

Also, in Cassius Dio's work the title "satrap" is encountered only on four other occasions and each time it was used to define eastern administrative regions and their regents.¹⁶ The identification of this Tiridates as a satrap should thus be understood to mean the local aristocratic ruler of the region bordering the territory of the Heniochi.

The administration of ancient Armenia was organised along the lines of a pre-feudal society. The kingdom was divided into cantons, each held by one of the Armenian noble houses – the Nakharars – as hereditary fiefdoms, against which they were expected to provide military assistance when so required.¹⁷ According to Pliny, there were up to 120 such cantons, some of which were large enough to have existed as independent kingdoms in previous times.¹⁸ Although Pliny does not go into details, Strabo mentions twenty-four larger regions within Armenia, while Claudius Ptolemaeus catalogues only twenty that contained 85 populated settlements.¹⁹ Both Strabo and Ptolemaeus agree that the region south of the Moschian mountains, that lies on the east side of the Çoruh Valley was called Chorzene (or Cotarzene), while the upper Çoruh Valley running in an east-west direction along the southern slopes of the Pontic Alps corresponded with the ancient district of Syspirtis (also known in the Armenian sources as Sper).²⁰ It is with these two Armenian regions that the tribal territory of the Heniochi and the Machelones shares a common border, and thus, the Tiridates in question was likely the satrap of either one of these cantons.

Although the incident between Tiridates and the Heniochi is known only from the passing remark by Cassius Dio, it has still caused some speculation regarding its wider significance. Some scholars have seen in it the (direct or indirect) cause of the restoration of the Armenian king Sohaemus to his throne.²¹ The assumption that the Armenian king needed to be restored into his kingdom in the

¹⁶ Dio 40,12,2 (Silaces the satrap); 40,14,3 (satrapies of Mesopotamia); 40,30,2 (Ornodapates the satrap); 68,18,2 = Xiph. S. 235,20–24 (satraps of Armenia and the surrounding regions).

¹⁷ Adontz 1970, 235f. (territorial limits), 304f. (origin of the system); 327f. (under the Arsacids); Lang 1983, 529.

¹⁸ Plin. *nat.* 6,x,27.

¹⁹ Strab. *geogr.* 11,14,3–12; Claud. Ptol. *geogr.* 5,13,9–22.

²⁰ Chorzene: Strab. *geogr.* 11,14,4–5; Claud. Ptol. *Geogr.* 5,13,9. Syspirtis: Strab. *geogr.* 11,14,9; 11,14,12, cf. Adontz 1970, 22; Hewsen 1992, 152 n. 10.

²¹ Birley 1987, 175; Chaumont 1976, 150; Debevoise 1938, 253–54; Dodd 1911, 261–65, but see also Astarita (1983, 47 n. 121) who prefers to separate the restoration of Sohaemus and the incident involving Tiridates.

first place is based on an entry in the *Suda* attributed to Cassius Dio, which records that at one point Martius Verus was required to send his subordinate Thucydides to conduct Sohaemus into Armenia.²² The confusion seems to originate from the assumption that at the time when Martius Verus was responsible for arranging the conduct of Sohaemus into Armenia, he was the legate of Cappadocia, a position he acquired after the conclusion of the Parthian war in 166 CE, while the Roman coinage of 164 CE celebrating the installation of Sohaemus onto the throne of Armenia with the legend *rex Armeniis datus*, has been understood to signify the date when Sohaemus physically arrived into his kingdom and began his rule.²³

It is uncertain whether Sohaemus could have been sent immediately after his investiture into his new kingdom as after the campaign of 163 the old capital of Artaxata lay in ruins, while the new one at Eçmiadzin (named Kainepolis) probably remained under construction for some time.²⁴ Also, although the main theatre of war against the Parthians was transferred into Mesopotamia in late 164, it is doubtful that Armenia had become completely pacified, as there is evidence suggesting that the Roman army continued to campaign in the Caucasus at the Darial Pass and the final Roman offensive against Media (Atropatene) in 166 may have been launched from Armenia.²⁵ Under such conditions, the conduct of

²² *Suda*, s.v. Μάρτιος (edited between Dio 71,3,1¹ and 71,3,1²).

²³ Martius Verus (*PIR*² M 348): for the discussion regarding his military command in Armenia during the Parthian war of Lucius Verus, and the subsequent Cappadocian legateship, cf. Alföldy 1977, 221; Eck 1999, 966; Juntunen 2013, 479f.; Thomasson 1984, 270–71 (29:34). Coinage: *RIC* III (Lucius Verus) 511–13; 1370–75.

²⁴ Artaxata: Fronto, *ad Verum Imp.* 2,3; HA, *Marc.* 9,1. Kainepolis: Birley 1987, 131; Mitford 1980, 1205. During the Parthian war of Nero (58–63 CE), the Roman-appointed King Tigranes did not arrive into his kingdom until the cessation of hostilities with the Parthians and Corbulo's withdrawal into Syria (*Tac. ann.* 14,26). A similar process most likely occurred during the Parthian war of Lucius Verus.

²⁵ Darial Pass: *CIL* XIII 8213, cf. Mitford 1980, 1204. At the end of the war, both Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus temporarily adopted the triumphal title *Medicus*. This was not a result of Roman armies campaigning in Media proper (a region deep in the Iranian plateau), but instead in Media Atropatene. Some scholars (Birley 1987, 144–45; Dodd 1911, 259) have assigned this campaign to Avidius Cassius, assuming that he invaded the Iranian plateau from northern Mesopotamia, but that route would have taken the Roman armies first through Adiabene and then the difficult climb over the Zagros mountain range. A much easier route into Media Atropatene went through Armenia, which is part of the same Iranian plateau. Also, those Roman emperors – such as Septimius Severus and Diocletian – who actually did conduct campaigns from northern Mesopotamia across the Tigris eventually adopted the triumphal title *Adiabenicus*, thus indicating the region that is accessible from Mesopotamia. It is thus more likely that the Median campaign was conducted by Martius Verus, whom Fronto (*ad Verum*

Sohaemus into Armenia may have been delayed until 165 or 166 at the latest, by which time Martius Verus seems to have been in supreme military command of Armenia. Thus, there is the possibility that the fragment in the *Suda* may actually record the original arrival of Sohaemus into his kingdom.

Our sources do not tell us when or how Sohaemus was originally driven away from Armenia, which leaves open the possibility that the restoration could mean his return to his native land after years of exile among the Romans. Iamblichus refers to Sohaemus as being of both Arsacid and Achaemenid lineage, which could mean that he belonged to one of the most powerful Armenian noble houses who had intermarried with the Arsacid dynasty.²⁶ As the Armenian Arsacids seemingly followed the Iranian dynastic custom of having multiple wives, there would have been relatively large number of offspring, who were most likely married to the most important Armenian noble families, thus tying them to the royal house with bonds of blood. Iamblichus also refers to Sohaemus as a Roman senator and a consul, which, if he was a descendant of an Armenian noble house, means that his family had fled the country a relatively long time ago, possibly even before his birth.²⁷ In addition, if the disturbances caused by Tiridates were the cause of Sohaemus' exile, one must wonder why he did not remain in Kainepolis under the protection of the Roman garrison posted there.

The fact remains that our sources are too fragmentary to make any direct association between the two incidents and it is thus best to deal with them as separate events. The location of the tribal lands of the Heniochi along the Pontic coast with only the Çoruh Valley connecting them to Armenia proper would seem to indicate that the whole incident occurred in the mid/upper river valley at the outer reaches of the Armenian kingdom. As clients of the Roman Empire, any violation against the Heniochi would have also been an offense against the Roman Empire, but since the investiture of Sohaemus, Armenia too with its upper class would have been Roman clients. The incident between the Heniochi and Tiridates may thus have been nothing more than a border dispute between two neighbours. After all, the fragment of Dio states that Tiridates was originally only reproached for his conduct, not that the Romans needed to intervene by force.

Imp. 2,3) associates with equal experience during the war, probably taking the same northern route via Armenia used by Mark Antony in 36 BCE.

²⁶ Phot. *bibl.* 94.

²⁷ Similar event can be found in Dio 54,9,4 where Dio states that Augustus restored Tigranes (III) to Armenia (in 20 BCE), but that would have been the first occasion when he entered Armenia in 15 years, as he had first been a captive in Egypt with his father the Armenian king Artavasdes II (54–34 BCE), and afterwards a hostage in Rome.

Movses Khorenats'i: The Ill-tempered Suitor

The second episode involving a person named Tiridates, or Trdat if one follows the Armenian form of spelling, at the roughly same period of time is recorded in the *Patmut'iwn Hayots'* (i.e. *History of the Armenians*), written by Movses Khorenats'i (i.e., Moses of Chorene). This work examines the history of Armenia from its mythical past down to the mid-fifth century. It is the first known attempt at writing a universal history of Armenia and for this reason the Armenian literary tradition tends to refer to Movses as "Father of [Armenian] History", in emulation of Herodotus.²⁸ Movses himself states that he wrote the book at the behest of the prince Sahak Bagratuni, whom the later Armenian sources identify as the man who died at the Battle of Charmana in 482, but not much actual information is known about the historical author of the work.²⁹ In recent studies there have been some doubts regarding the authenticity of the date, mainly due to some name forms and institutes that seem to be more relevant much later than mid-fifth century, and so the majority of scholars now favour a much later date of compilation.³⁰

Movses' fashion of writing history is at times challenging to interpret. This is especially true when he writes about the mythical past of Armenia, but also when he deals with historical events during the Artaxiad and Arsacid dynasties. Although he states that he has used proper classical sources – and he often refers to these by name – some of his facts are distorted for the benefit of the Armenian people (for example, when he attributes the Parthian victory over Crassus at Carrahae to Tigranes II and the Armenians), his chronology of events is inconsistent and the deeds of the people with identical dynastic names are occasionally attributed to the wrong person. In addition, the material that Movses had been able to find from proper historical sources is constantly mixed with the tales recorded by the Armenian oral tradition or collected from the more obscure written sources (such as the *Alexander Romance*), which results on occasion in a highly colourful history.³¹ But even with all the handicaps and quirks, the account of Movses con-

²⁸ Thomson 1978, 1–5; Idem 2004, 215.

²⁹ Movses 1,1 (transl. by Thomson 1978, 65–6). For the identification of Sahak Bagratuni by Thomas Artsruni, cf. Thomson 1978, 4.

³⁰ For the debate regarding the date of composition, cf. Thomson 1978, 1–8; Toumanoff 1961, 467–76.

³¹ Sources: Thomson 1978, 10–56; Topchyen 2006, 1–15; Method of writing: Thomson 1978, 8–10, 56–61.

tains detailed information about Armenian society and history that is otherwise unknown. One such peculiar episode concerns the son-in-law of the Armenian king, who after dishonouring his wife in a fit of rage, went into voluntary exile to the southern parts of Armenia, only to dishonour his host who had received him in spite of his feud with the king:³²

"King Tiran married his daughter Eraneak to a certain Trdat of the Bagratuni family, the son of Smbatuhi, daughter of the valiant Smbat, a spirited and powerful man, short in stature and ugly in appearance. She hated her husband Trdat and was continuously grumbling and complaining, lamenting that she, a beautiful woman, lived with an ugly man, and that being of noble family she lived with a man of ignoble origin. At this Trdat was angry, and one day he beat her severely. He clipped her blond hair, pulled off her thick locks, and ordered her to be dragged outside and thrown from the room. He himself went in rebellion to the secure regions of Media. After he had arrived in the land of Siunik', the news of Tiran's death reached him; on hearing it he stopped there. It happened one day that Bakur, the prince of Siunik', invited him to a banquet. When they had become merry with wine, Trdat saw a woman who was very beautiful and was playing; her name was Nazinik. He was enamored of her and said to Bakur: 'Give me this singer.' He replied: 'No, for she is my concubine.' But Trdat seized the woman by force, drew her to himself on the couch, and passionately worked his lust like an incontinent and ardent young man. Bakur, mad with jealousy, rose to pull him from her. But Trdat stood up, took a vase of flowers as a weapon, and drove the guests out from the feast. There one could see a new Odysseus slaughtering the suitors of Penelope, or the struggle of the Lapiths and the Centaurs at the marriage of Perithous. And thus, coming to his own house, he immediately mounted his horse and went to Sper with the concubine. It is superfluous for us to say more about the prowess of this lascivious man." (tr. R. W. Thomson 1978)

Movses places this story between the reigns of kings Tiran and Tigran (i.e., Tiranés and Tigranes). Neither of the names corresponds with the Greco-Roman sources dealing with the Arsacid dynasty, and would instead seem to originate

³² Movses 2,63 (transl. by Thomson 1978, 206–8).

from the Armenian historiographical tradition concerning the Arsacid dynasty of the second century.³³ The date of these two kings' reigns is revealed by Movses' comparative references, as he states that King Tiran ruled a few years after the death of Hadrian, while the rule of King Tigran occurred at the time when Lucius Verus arrived in the East.³⁴ It is the latter fact that identifies the king called Tigran in the Armenian tradition with Sohaemus, whom Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus made a king of Armenia in 164 CE.³⁵ This means that the incident concerning Tiridates seems to have occurred roughly around 162, when the Armenian throne became vacant and a prize of contest between the Parthians and the Romans. Interestingly, although Movses does not have much to say about the reign of King Tiran, he states that he ruled for 21 years and that he was loyal to the Romans. This would suggest his reign began in 141 CE (counting backwards from 162), which seems to be confirmed by the Roman coinage of 140/144 CE that proclaim *Rex Armeniis Datus* (thus explaining the odd reference to King Tiran's loyalty).³⁶ Also, the dynastic chronology of Movses is missing two years after the death of King Tiran, which would correspond with the *interregnum* of 162–164 CE.³⁷ These odd chronological coincidences would seem to give some credence to the accuracy of Movses or at least to some of his sources.

Movses does not specify where he picked up this particular tale, but he states that he found the core of the history covering the reigns of the Arsacid kings from Artavasdes to Khosroes (associated with the universal events from

³³ In Movses and the *Primary History* (cf. Thomson 1978, 357f.), the early Arsacid rulers are referred to with Artaxiad ruler names such as Artashes (Artaxias); Tigran (Tigranes) and Artavazd (Artavasdes). Although these names were also of Iranian origin, none of them are known to have been used by the Parthian Arsacids either in Parthia proper or in Armenia.

³⁴ Tiran: Movses 2,60–62 (Thomson 1978, 201–4); Tigran: Movses 2,64 (Thomson 1978, 208–10).

³⁵ Thomson 1978, 208 n. 1; Toumanoff 1963, 213 n. 241.

³⁶ The Roman coinage: *RIC* III (Antoninus Pius) 619.

³⁷ The rather peculiar comparative chronology of Movses states (Movses 2,62 [Thomson 1978, 204–6]) that king Tiran began to rule in the second year of Peroz (i.e., the Parthian king, Vologaesius IV, cf. Thomson 1978, 208 n. 2), which makes the date of his death the twenty-second year of Peroz. In the following chapter (Movses 2,64 [Movses 1978, 208]), Movses informs us that King Tigran began to rule in the twenty-fourth year of Peroz, which thus leaves two calendar years missing from the chronology. It should also be noted that neither the comparative chronology of Movses, the local legends related to individual kings, nor the material from the written sources, fit together chronologically, which makes the history of Movses occasionally hard to interpret as some of the described events occur outside the given comparative chronology.

the death of Hadrian to the end of the Arsacid rule in Parthia) from a history written by Bardaisan of Edessa.³⁸ It is unknown whether Bardaisan ever wrote such a history as Movses describes, but whatever the work Movses consulted, it would seem that it provided only rough dates and summaries of individual reigns. Instead, in most cases when Movses provides lengthy anecdotes or historical episodes concerning the Arsacid dynasty, he tends to state that he found them among the fables and songs of the bards of Golt'n.³⁹ This would also make perfect sense with the anecdote concerning Tiridates, as the canton of Golt'n or Golthene was located in the southern parts of Siunik' (i.e., Siwnik) and the tale in question concerns an insult made against the lord of Siunik'.⁴⁰ Also, as the whole history of Movses was written at the behest of the Bagratuni family – and consequently they appear prominently in its pages – it is rather odd that in this one anecdote a principal member of that family is presented in an unfavourable light. This would be understandable if the anecdote originated from a hostile source, such as the songs of Golt'n, as they were sung by the minstrels of a rival Nakharar house, and not from a relatively neutral source such as a work written in Edessa.

The Bagratuni and the Lords of Siunik'

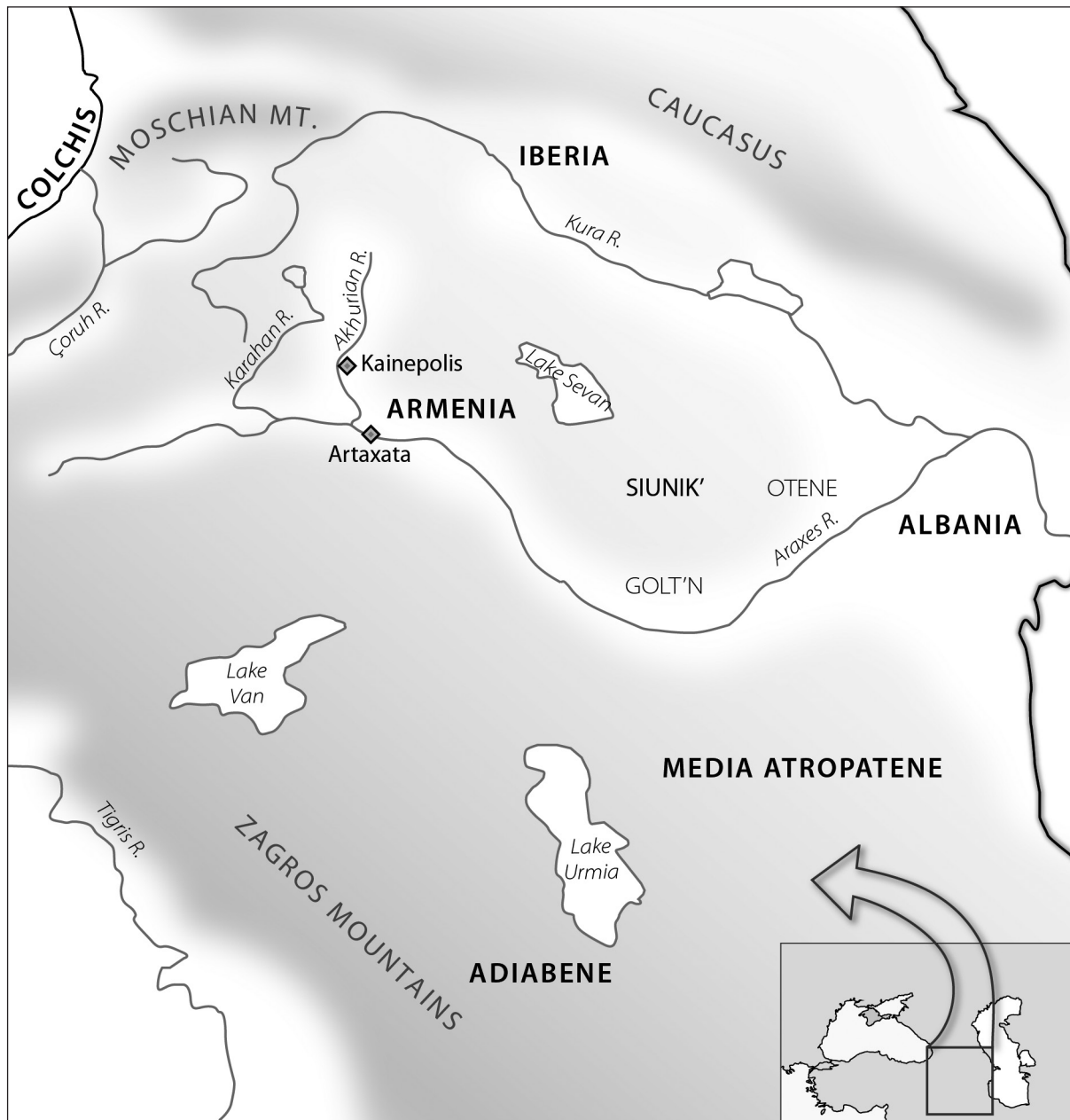
The episode that Movses describes contains several people that provide an interesting setting not for the incident alone, but also for the larger political framework of the Armenian society on the eve of the Parthian war of Lucius Verus. The first one of these is the political union between the Bagratuni clan and the Arsacid dynasty. As seen from the episode this alliance had been cemented with a marriage between the daughter of King Tiran and Trdat, who thus seems to have been the head of the Bagratuni clan. The close connection between the Bagratuni and the royal house has also been emphasised by Movses on previous occasions where he states that the Bagratuni hold the hereditary positions of coronant and *aspēt* (i.e., honorary second-in-command of the Armenian army), in addition to being in command of the western regional army of the Armenian kingdom, thus indicating that the clan held one of the highest ranks in Armenian society.⁴¹ Also

³⁸ Movses 2,66 (Thomson 1978, 212–13), cf. Drijvers 1966, 207–9.

³⁹ Cf. Thomson 1978, 10–1.

⁴⁰ Hewsen 1992, 180 n. 144; Hübschmann 1904, 346; Thomson 1978, 120 n. 5.

⁴¹ Movses 2,3 (Thomson 1978, 132–33); 2,7 (Thomson 1978, 136–37). For the meanings of these ranks cf. Thomson 1978, 137 n. 1 (*aspēt*); Toumanoff 1963, 326 (coronants).



Map 2. The province of Siunik' in the Greater Armenia.

Smbat, the maternal grand-father of Trdat, had, according to Movses, personally saved and raised King Artashes, son of Sanatruk, from whom the dynastic lineage of the Arsacids in Armenia continued after a break during the reign of Trajan.⁴²

⁴² Movses 2,37–38, 43–46 (Thomson 1978, 178–81, 184–87). The patronym of king Artashes reveals him to be identical with the Arsacid Vologaesius, son of Sanatruces, who according to Cassius Dio (75,9,6 = Exc. *de leg.* [ed. de Boor] U^G 16 [p. 88]) appeared in Armenia in 117 CE with an army to claim his ancestral throne. In Movses' version the period of his exile, when Armenia was ruled by other Parthian dynasties (i.e., the sons of the Parthian king, Pacorus II) and then by the Romans, is covered by the imaginary reign of King Eruand (Orontes), but both

The second aspect of interest is the injured party of the altercation. The episode informs us that Bakur had offered his hospitality to the son-in-law of the king, even though the latter was in voluntary exile after offending the king. This tells something not only about the rules of courtesy in Armenian society, but also about the standing of the lords of Siunik' in the society in general. The early medieval Armenian documents show that the house of Siunik' was the most influential of the Nakharar houses during that period of time. In the *Gahmanak* or *Throne List* the princes of Siunik' are placed in first place out of seventy Nakharar houses, followed by the *aspet* (i.e., Bagratuni), who held the second place.⁴³ Also, the so-called *Military List*, which records the individual contingents that each of the eighty-six Nakharar houses contributed to the four regional armies of the Armenian kingdom, states that the largest contingent – nearly a quarter of all the troops – was provided by the house of Siunik', while they were also almost single-handedly responsible for the defences of the eastern border.⁴⁴ The situation presented in these documents is reinforced by the literary descriptions of the events preceding the Armenian rebellion against the Sassanid Persia in 450 CE, in which Vahak of Siunik', who at the time was the *marzpan* (i.e., governor) of the Persian-dominated part of Armenia, is ranked first among the Armenian lords.⁴⁵ Even though the lords of Siunik' were probably not as overwhelmingly strong among the Nakharar houses in the mid-second century as they would be in the fifth century, they undoubtedly were one of the most powerful houses of the time.

The most obvious connection between the story related by Movses and the fragment of Cassius Dio is the arrogant nature of Tiridates. The tendency to sudden bursts of rage that resulted in the beating of his wife and the abduction of his host's concubine sounds quite similar to the Tiridates who, in a fit of rage from being reprimanded for his actions, threw his sword against the Roman legate Martius Verus. Such behaviour is quite unheard of in the interaction between the Roman Empire and their minor client states or tribes. That is not to say that the

Dio and Movses state that King Artashes/Vologaesius reclaimed his ancestral kingdom with the backing of an army.

⁴³ *Gahmanak*: Adontz 1970, 191–93. For the analysis of all these documents and the literary sources dealing with the ranks of the Nakharar houses, cf. Adontz 1970, 195–234.

⁴⁴ *Military List*: Adontz 1970, 193–95. In the list the lords of Siunik' are said to have provided 19,400 troops out of 21,000 comprising the eastern army, while the total strength of all the four regional armies of Armenia is given as 84,000 troops.

⁴⁵ For the analysis of the descriptions by the Armenian historians Elishē, Lazar P'arpets'i, and Agathangelos of the most distinguished Nakharar houses in 450/451 CE, cf. Adontz 1970, 188–91, 227–32.

Roman history has not known its share of political meetings that have gone terribly wrong, but in the recorded cases when the opposing party either ambushed or violated the Roman embassies, the actions were always premeditated and performed by parties strong enough to consider themselves equal in strength to the Romans.⁴⁶

The episode in Cassius Dio would seem to suggest that the rash and violent action against the Roman legate was taken by Tiridates alone, and not by his fellow clansmen, as Dio does not mention any sanctions against them. This would seem to suggest that the punishment of exile was the result of the uniquely volatile nature of Tiridates himself. Nor does the fragment in Dio give any suggestions as to whether Tiridates (and his retinue) was required to appear in the presence of Martius Verus in Cappadocia, or whether the legate was obliged to seek out the offender in Armenia himself. In any case, as Tiridates was clearly allowed to approach the Roman legate while retaining his arms, the relations between the Romans and Tiridates seem to have been at least outwardly cordial (such as relations between a patron and client), which they would not have been if the representative of the Emperor had arrived to punish an offender of Roman prerogatives.⁴⁷

Another aspect that speaks on behalf of identification of the Trdat of Movses with the Tiridates of Cassius Dio is the location of the home canton of the Bagratuni clan. As Movses and other Armenian sources clearly specify, the Bagratuni had established themselves at Sper, an area that lies in the upper Çoruh Valley and was known to the Greco-Roman world as Syspiritis.⁴⁸ This would have made

⁴⁶ Such as the capture and execution of Crassus by the Parthians in 53 BCE or the capture of the legate Longinus by the Dacian king Decebalus in 105 CE.

⁴⁷ There is a strong possibility that the Bagratuni themselves were considered Roman clients or allies. In Arrian's description of his expedition against the Alans, the Roman allies (*symmachiarii*) in the marching column are described as being from Armenia Minor, Trapezus, Rhizaion, and Colchis (Arr. *acies* 7). The last contingent of these undoubtedly included the Heniochi, but it is significant that most of the allies dwell next to each other on the Pontic coast. This raises the interesting question of whether the Armenians under Vasakes and Arbelos who appear later in the description of the battle line (Arr. *acies* 12) belong to a clan living next to the allies coming from the Pontic coast, or to one living in the upper Euphrates valley bordering Armenia Minor? If the former is the case, then the Armenians of Arrian must have belonged to the Bagratuni clan, although if Movses' assignment of the command of the western regional army to the Bagratuni is correct, then all the clans bordering Roman Cappadocia would have been under the military jurisdiction of the Bagratuni clan.

⁴⁸ Adontz, 1970, 98, 242; Hübschmann 1904, 287; Thomson 1978, 179 n. 8; Toumanoff 1963,

the Bagratuni the immediate neighbours of the Heniochi and the Machelones. As the regions of Syspirtis and Chorzene systematically separate the Heniochi from the rest of Armenia, the conflict that led to the death of the king of the Heniochi would seem to have been a dispute between the Bagratuni clan and the Heniochi, who dwelled at the opposite ends of the same river valley. The issue could have been a simple border dispute over grazing land or, if the southern branch of the Heniochi were as keen raiders as Strabo⁴⁹ informs us their northern kin to have been, then the incident could also have been the result of escalated cattle rustling, a practice undoubtedly endemic in the more rugged regions of the ancient world. On the other hand, as the fragment from Dio does not clearly specify what kind of trouble Tiridates had stirred in Armenia, we cannot know whether there had been a physical confrontation between the Heniochi and the Bagratuni clansmen, or whether the impulsive Tiridates had once again experienced one of his amorous incidents of the kind described by Movses, which had ended badly for his host.

Armenia on the Eve of the Parthian War according to Movses

There are also other aspects in the episode of Movses that may very well have significant meaning for our understanding of the political situation in Armenia on the eve of the Parthian war of Lucius Verus. In the anecdote, Movses refers to the death of King Tiran, an event he had already elaborated on in a previous chapter. The death of the king is stated to have occurred accidentally: on a journey he was overtaken by the northern snow.⁵⁰ This statement has a very similar sense to what Strabo has to say about the sudden snowstorms in Chorzene and Cambysene, the two northernmost regions of Armenia.⁵¹ Strabo explains that the snowstorms in these regions are so sudden and violent that whole caravans are occasionally swallowed up by the snow. If Movses is referring to the same phenomenon as Strabo, then the sudden death of King Tiran seems to have occurred in the region of Chorzene, the district neighbouring the Bagratuni homeland of Syspirtis. Although one cannot say with absolute certainty why the Armenian king would have wandered into this remote region during the winter months, it could be speculated that the reason was the abuse his daughter received from her husband

321 n. 76.

⁴⁹ Strab. *geogr.* 11,2,12.

⁵⁰ Movses 2,62 (Thomson 1978, 206).

⁵¹ Strab. *geogr.* 11,14,4.

Tiridates. Thus, the king may have been on his way to punish Tiridates (without knowing that the culprit had already fled the scene of the crime) and to retrieve his daughter, when the snowstorm apprehended his entourage in the mountain passes of Chorzene, which lied between Artaxata, the capital of Armenia, and the Bagratuni homeland of Sper.

If the account of Movses is correct, then the sudden death of the king would have left the throne unexpectedly vacant which would have naturally in turn have led to tensions between the rival branches of the Armenian Arsacid dynasty and the Nakharar houses supporting them. It is this sudden appearance of a power vacuum in Armenia that makes the Parthian interference in the kingdom in early 162 much more understandable than a premeditated confrontation with the Roman Empire as is occasionally claimed.⁵² The episode from Movses also raises questions regarding the identity of the pro-Parthian king Pacorus, who ruled Armenia in 162–163 CE.⁵³ Could he possibly be identified with Bakur (or Pacorus in Latin spelling), the lord of Siunik', whom Tiridates had insulted by making his advances on the concubine of his host and even possibly injuring him physically, if Movses' Homeric reference to a new Odysseus and the struggle of the Lapiths and the Centaurs alludes to similar violent behaviour?

All the accounts would seem to favour such an assumption. After all, Bakur bears the same name as the known pro-Parthian king, he was the head of one of the most powerful Nakharar houses, and he had a personal grievance with the son-in-law of the previous pro-Roman king. Some credence is also lent to this by a fragment of Asinius Quadratus' *Parthica*, which mentions that the pro-Parthian Pacorus spent time in the canton of Otene, a district bordering Siunik' in the east.⁵⁴ Also, the Parthian policy under Vologaesius IV that favoured local dynasts as satraps and subject kings in the outer rims of the Parthian State instead of full-blooded members of the Arsacid dynasty, who could always turn into rivals for the Parthian throne, adds further support to this possibility.⁵⁵ This would not have

⁵² Birley 1987, 121; Chaumont 1976, 147; Debevoise 1938, 246.

⁵³ This man is mentioned by Fronto (*ad Verum Imp.* II.16) and he was seemingly the same Aurelius Pacorus, who, in a dedication on a tombstone to his brother Aurelius Methridates (*CIG* 6559) in Rome, refers to himself as the king of Greater Armenia, cf. Braund 1984, 43; Chaumont 1976, 147; Van den Hout 1999, 302.

⁵⁴ Steph. *ethn.* s.v. Ὠτηνῆ: μοῖρα Ἀρμενίας. Κουάδρατος ἐν Παρθικῶν τρίτῳ· "Ὁ δὲ τῆς Ἀρμενίας βασιλεὺς Πάκορος ἐν τούτῳ περὶ Ἀρτάξατα καὶ τὴν Ὠτηνῆν τῆς Ἀρμενίας διάγων".

⁵⁵ After obtaining sole rule of the Parthian kingdom after decades of internal strife, Vologaesius IV seems to have begun a vigorous reunification policy. Regions that had splintered from the

been the only occasion when the lords of Siunik' decided to side with the Iranians against their Armenian brethren, as during the rebellion of 451 they supported Sassanid Persia against the other Nakharar families.⁵⁶ The close ties between Armenian Siunik' and Parthian (and later Sassanid) Iran may have been partly due to a shared (although only partially) ethnic background, as according to Strabo the region assumed to be Siunik' was taken from Media (Atropatane) by the early Armenian kings.⁵⁷

Conclusions

It would seem almost certain that the Tiridates, of whom Cassius Dio and Movses Khorenats'i both write, was actually one and the same individual. The similar volatile character and identical name makes the Trdat of Movses a prime suspect for the person in Dio, but it is the geographical setting of the Bagratuni and the Heniochi in the same river valley that would seem to confirm the issue. Thus, instead of being a larger disturbance as the episode in Dio has been so often interpreted, the matter seems more likely to have been a regional dispute between two neighbouring peoples.

In addition to bringing some light to the disturbances caused by Tiridates, the anecdote(s) of Movses Khorenats'i would seem to contain several details that would explain the political situation in Armenia on the eve of the Parthian war of Lucius Verus. If the Bakur of Siunik' in Movses' narrative is the same pro-Parthian king, Pacorus, known from the classical sources, then this would be a third example of the Parthian policy of installing client-kings who did not belong to the Arsacid royal family. It would thus seem that underneath all the confu-

central administration were reconquered and the existing dynasts that belonged either to a rival Arsacid branch or were hostile to the new King of Kings were replaced with more submissive local dynasts. In Mesene, this process led to the replacement of the king, Mithridates, son of Pacorus (i.e., Pacorus II of Parthia) with the otherwise unknown Orabzes II in 150/151 CE, while in Osrhoene, the pro-Roman king, Mannus, was (temporarily) replaced during the Parthian war of Lucius Verus with an equally unknown person bearing the obscure non-dynastic name of Wael son of Sahru. For Mesene, cf. Al-Salihi 1984, 225–29; idem. 1987, 164; Black 1984, 231–32; Nodelman 1960, 114; Potter 1991, 283–86. Osrhoene: Millar 1993, 112, 473; Ross 2001, 36–9.

⁵⁶ Garsoïan 2004, 100; Thomson 1982, 3–9.

⁵⁷ Strab. *Geogr.* 11,14,5. For the identity of Siunik' as the Phaunitis of Strabo, cf. Hewsen 1985, 57 n. 8; Idem 1992, 147.

sion resulting from combining very diverse material into a single historical work, Moses had been able to find some unique material that contained the essence of historical events, lost in our other surviving sources.

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