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THE POLITICAL-MILITARY STRATEGY OF ARTABANOS/ARDAWĀN II IN AD 34–37¹

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Introduction

Artabanos (in Parthian Ardawān) II, king of Parthia (ca. AD 8/9–39/40), has had quite a number of studies devoted to him, but in spite of this his achievements and assessment still arouse controversy.² In this paper I intend to analyse the policies Artabanos II pursued circa AD 34–37. Germanicus' intervention in Armenia in AD 18 led to the conclusion of a compromise settlement between Rome and the Parthians that secured over a decade of peace between the two empires. According to the settlement, Zeno/Artaxias III, elevated to the throne of Armenia by Artabanos II in 15, was confirmed by Germanicus in 18. Moreover Rome revoked its support of Vonones' claim to the throne of Parthia and Germanicus even had him interned. Thereby the Roman Empire recognised Artabanos as ruler of Parthia.³ Artabanos now obtained an opportunity to consolidate his authority in Parthia, in which several political factions were struggling for power.⁴ One of the factions

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² On Artabanos II's reign, see: Kahrstedt 1950; Koshelenko 1963; Dąbrowa 1983; 1989; Schottky 1991; Olbrycht 1998, 138–156; 2013b.

³ On the settlement between Germanicus and Artabanos, see Ziegler 1964, 58; Olbrycht 2013b (with new assessment).

⁴ These factions are defined in Olbrycht 1997, 81–82, 96–98; 1998, 138–145; 2013b (with new insights).

(which may be termed the "Phraatids") comprised the Sūrēn and the Kārin clans, who for a long time after the death of Orodes III endeavoured to restore Phraates IV's elder offspring (Vonones I, Phraates, Tiridates II) to the throne of Parthia, and for this cause went so far as connivance with Rome. The second faction (the Hyrcanian-Dahaeans) consisted of grandes who were adherents of the Arsacid line presumably descended from Mithradates II (122–87 BC). Its chief centers were located in Hyrcania, Parthia proper, and Dahestan. Another group was linked to Media Atropatene.

In view of the strength of some of the regional rulers and clans Artabanos' task was not easy. His success in this respect was incomplete, as evidenced by the emergence of an effectively independent Jewish dominion in Babylonia under the brothers Asinaios and Anilaios (Ios. *ant.* 18.311–370).⁵ They rebelled against the Arsacid rule, rallied a bunch of desperadoes to their cause, raised a stronghold, and exacted tribute from the inhabitants of Babylonia. In view of the difficulties in crushing separatism and the hostility of some of his vassals and clans, Artabanos decided to reinforce his position not so much by removing his rivals in Parthia itself, for which he did not have sufficient resources, but rather by scoring victories in wars with neighboring enemies. Foreign wars were means whereby he could engage even those factions which were not enthusiastic supporters of his rule in Parthia – conquest and spoils were a common interest.

Following the treaty with Germanicus (AD 18–19) Artabanos was free to focus his attention on the eastern and north-eastern marches of the Parthian Empire. Tacitus' account leaves no doubt as to his doings – Artabanos was victorious in wars with neighbouring peoples.⁶ Unfortunately the Roman sources provide no concrete data, but on the basis of a few hints we may draw some conclusions about his actions. One of the objects of Artabanos' interests appears to have been Chorasmia/Khwarezm. Artabanos was most probably active in Bactria as well, at least in its western part, which had been in the Parthian sphere of influence and power for at least two centuries. An important factor were the changes in eastern Iran and Afghanistan, where the opportunity created by the domestic squabbles in Parthia after the death of Phraates IV was seized to obtain independence. It is certainly no co-incidence that in about 20 a ruler called Gondophares emerged there and set up a strong Indo-Parthian state with its nerve centre in Sakastan and Arachosia, lands which had belonged to the Parthian Empire still in the reign of Phraates IV (38/7 – 3 BC).⁷ Most probably Artabanos and Gondophares reached a compromise whereby the Indo-Parthians promised not to interfere in the affairs of western Parthia; from

⁵ Goodblatt 1987; Fowler 2008.

⁶ Tac. *ann.* 6.31.1: *fretus bellis, quae secunda adversum circumiectas nationes exercuerat* (...).

⁷ As confirmed by Isidoros of Charax in his *Stathmoi Parthikoi*.

the outset their area of interest had been the territories of southern Afghanistan, Kabulistan and the Valley of the Indus.⁸

Artabanos' demands on Rome

On the death of Artaxias III, king of Armenia (ca. 34), Artabanos sent an army into Transcaucasia and set his son Arsakes on the Armenian throne (Tac. *ann.* 6.31.1).⁹ The Romans were quick to respond and there was a drastic deterioration in relations between the two powers.¹⁰

On conquering Armenia Artabanos sent an embassy to Rome to represent Parthia's demands to Tiberius. The Parthians wanted the return of Vonones' treasury, which was in Syria and Cilicia.¹¹ Perhaps Artabanos thought that the elderly Tiberius was not fit enough to conduct a war (Tac. *ann.* 6.31.1):

[sc. Artabanus] metu Germanici fidus Romanis, aequabilis in suos, mox superbiam in nos, saevitiam in popularis sumpsit, fretus bellis quae secunda adversum circumiectas nationes exercuerat, et senectutem Tiberii ut inermem despiciens avidusque Armeniae, cui defuncto rege Artaxia Arsacen liberorum suorum veterrimum imposuit, addita contumelia et missis qui gazam a Vonone relictam in Syria Ciliciaque reposcerent; simul veteres Persarum ac Macedonum terminos seque invasurum possessa Cyro et post Alexandro per vaniloquentiam ac minas iaciebat.

Artabanos' threats of attack on Roman territories were exceptionally aggressive. The grounds for his claims went back to Alexander and the Achaemenids. Artabanos' strategic goal was offensive in character, since according to Dio (58.26.1) after invading Armenia he intended to attack Roman Cappadocia. Many historians have overlooked this aspect. There is nothing in Artabanos' embassy about a demand the Romans return specific territories. What he was threatening them with was an attack on lands controlled by Rome to the west of the Euphrates. Having a strong army at the time, Artabanos could expect to come out victorious

⁸ On Artabanos' activities in Chorasmia, Bactria and eastern Iran, see Olbrycht 1998, 144–145; 212–220; 2000. On Parthian-Bactrian relations, see Rtveladze 1995; 2000. On Parthian-Chorasmian cultural links, see Kidd/Betts 2010, 637–686; Kidd 2011.

⁹ To that Arsakes may relate a note in Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* 2.2. The installation of Arsakes must have been implemented shortly before the arrival of Parthian envoys to Rome, placed by Dio 58.26.1–2 in the year 35. Artaxias III probably died a year or so earlier. Tacitus' account of Artabanos' offensive in Armenia, the Parthian delegation in Rome and Roman actions supporting Phraates and Tiridates (*ann.* 6.31–37) belongs to the year 35 (Martin 2001, 20), but reports the events of two years (*ann.* 6.38.1).

¹⁰ On the 34–37 struggles on Armenia, see: Chaumont 1976, 88–91; 1987, 423; Dąbrowa 1983, 108–109; 1989, 316–317; Ash 1999.

¹¹ Tacitus uses for a treasury the Iranian term *gaza* (see also *ann.* 6.37.3 and Suet. *Tib.* 49.2), a fact attesting his good knowledge of the realia. For *gaza* / *gazan-*, see Boyce 2000. The term *gaza* is also used by Curt. 3.13.5.

from a confrontation with Rome. The reference to the borders in the times of Cyrus and Alexander was a propaganda ploy and it was obvious that their restoration was not what he had on his mind, but rather to show that the Arsacids had a better right than Rome to rule in Asia. Perhaps Tacitus mentions Syria and Cilicia, and Dio adds Cappadocia, for a good reason. These regions had been in the Parthian sphere of interest and expansion ever since Mithradates II.¹² Significantly, in 37 Artabanos threatened to attack Syria, and the Romans took his threat as a real danger. Perhaps, then, in 34–36 Artabanos' strategic aim was to take the borderlands along the Euphrates, pushing the Romans away from the river and therefore also out of Armenia and Mesopotamia, in order to secure a good bargaining position for subsequent negotiations. His main objective was Armenia and what he sought was Rome's recognition of Parthian power in that country.

Most historians who discuss Tac. *ann.* 6.31.1 concentrate on the reference to the Achaemenid tradition, which indeed the Parthians used on many occasions.¹³ However, it should be observed that alongside the Persians Tacitus also enumerates Alexander and the Macedonians. Perhaps this double declaration may be attributed especially to the political tradition of Media Atropatene, which Artabanos ruled before he won the throne of Parthia. He was a relative, or at least a kinsman, of the Atropatids, the reigning dynasty in Atropatene for three centuries until the times of Phraates IV.¹⁴ This house owed its origin to Atropates, a loyal satrap of Darius III (336–330 BC), later Alexander's faithful governor and general. Atropates' daughter married Perdikkas, who became regent on Alexander's death. Thus already Atropates, the founder of the dynasty, combined both the Iranian and Macedonian political and cultural traditions.¹⁵ This episode shows that Alexander's image in Parthian Iran was not simply negative, but that there were also groups who saw him as one of the great rulers of Iran who could be referred to in situations of conflict with Rome – a foreign power.¹⁶

Artabanos' claim to the throne of Parthia was disputed, and this challenge is reflected in the Roman sources, largely on the inspiration of the sons and grandsons of Phraates IV. They had been living in Rome since 10 BC¹⁷ and since the times of Vonones I, with the support of Rome, endeavoured to regain the Parthian throne.¹⁸ Characteristically, in his claims against Rome and the pro-Roman Parthian usurpers Artabanos never referred to the legitimacy of his reign, since presumably for him there was no doubt that he was a member of the Arsacid

¹² Olbrycht 2009; 2011.

¹³ Cf. Wolski 1976, 204–205; Wiesehöfer 1986, 177–185; Olbrycht 1997a, 42–44.

¹⁴ On Media Atropatene, see Pani 1972; Schottky 1989; Aliev 1989.

¹⁵ Heckel 2006, s.v. Atropates; Olbrycht 2013, 160–161, 171.

¹⁶ Olbrycht 2010, 368.

¹⁷ Dąbrowa 1987.

¹⁸ Details in Olbrycht 2013a.

family. It is probably no coincidence that his eldest son was named Arsakes, after the founder of the dynasty. On the other hand he did make reference to the Achaemenids and to Alexander, familiar figures in Rome and associated with the power and wealth of Asia. At any rate the image of Alexander served as a model for Roman generals like Pompey and emperors like Caligula.¹⁹

Writing about Artabanos' letter to Tiberius, Suetonius (*Tib.* 66) uses loftier language than Tacitus and relates that Artabanos apparently reminded Tiberius of his crimes and suggested he commit suicide.

Quin et Artabani Parthorum regis laceratus est litteris parricidia et caedes et ignaviam et luxuriam obicientis monentisque, ut voluntaria morte maximo iustissimoque civium odio quam primum satis faceret.

Many historians have cast doubt on the letter's authenticity.²⁰ Actually Suetonius' account confirms that Artabanos did not mince words with Tiberius. The charge Suetonius brings against Tiberius is specific: *parricidia et caedes*. *Parricidium*, parricide, need not only have meant the killing of one's parents, but also of other members of one's family. *Caedes* meant "crime" or "atrocities" in general. Applied to Tiberius, the accusation of murdering his relatives seems self-evident: his reign entailed a long series of murders of dignitaries and his close relatives. In view of the special respect the King of Parthia had for Germanicus it would be quite natural to conjecture that he made his accusation chiefly in connection with one of the biggest scandals of Tiberius' reign – the mysterious death of Germanicus and the slaughter of his sons Nero Iulius Caesar and Drusus. Tiberius was notorious for his cruelty and crimes. A distinctly political purpose may be detected in Artabanos II's accusations: he wanted to blacken Tiberius' name in Roman eyes, and at the same time to express his support for Germanicus' sole surviving son, Caligula, who was still in jeopardy of oppressive measures from Tiberius. Artabanos II did not mince his words, and they could well have been read by Tiberius' enemies in Rome as a signal that the time had come to assassinate the old Emperor. This interpretation is to some extent speculative, but fairly realistic in view of the situation in Rome at the time. Although Tiberius' political and military counter-offensive of the years 35–36 was successful initially, Artabanos recovered Armenia still in 36 and was soon threatening Rome with war again.

The Sūrēn clan and Phraates the Pretender

Artabanos overestimated his chances of resolving the domestic conflicts in the Parthian Empire on the strength of his military victories in 20–34. The old

¹⁹ Malloch 2001; Kühnen 2008.

²⁰ Ziegler 1964, 60, n. 109.

conflicts revived with their full force and with Roman connivance. The chief agency in the attempts to weaken his position was the Sūrēn clan. When tension again flared up between Parthia and Rome, the supporters of the Phraatids, who had been debilitated for some time and with no chance of success, again lifted up their heads, sensing an opportunity for a successful rebellion backed by Rome.

A delegation of the Parthian Sūrēn clan arrived in secret in Rome to fetch prince Phraates, son of Phraates IV, thereby once more making the Phraatid party a hostage to Roman policy. Adherents of Phraates' line preferred to precipitate a foreign intervention rather than acknowledge Artabanos as monarch (Tac. *ann.* 6.31.1–2; Dio 58.26.1–2). The leaders of this faction were Sinnakes, a member of the wealthy Sūrēn clan, and a eunuch named Abdus. Their envoys made telling representations. They claimed that Artabanos was not the legitimate king, that he had killed many of the Arsacids, while others were still too young. Two expressions denoting lawful descent from the Arsacids occur in Tacitus' account: *gens Arsacidarum* and *genus Arsacis*. What the Phraatid envoys really meant was a descendant of Phraates IV. In his assessment Tacitus is explicit about the humiliation of the Parthians and the prevalence of Rome: the Phraatid envoys said that all they wanted from Rome was "only a name (...) and an authority; only, in fact, that, with Caesar's consent, a scion of the house of Arsaces should show himself on the banks of the Euphrates" (*nomine tantum et auctore opus, sponte Caesaris ut genus Arsacis ripam apud Euphratis cerneretur* – *ann.* 6.31.2).

Rome's counteraction and Artabanos' retreat

Tiberius turned out to be a more formidable adversary than Artabanos had expected. At the outset the situation for Rome was difficult, but Tiberius made skilful use of the domestic tensions in Parthia. He appointed Lucius Vitellius governor of Syria.²¹ His real mission was to conduct the principal actions against Artabanos while at the same time leading negotiations with him. Tiberius ordered Vitellius to take hostages from Artabanos, in particular his son. The Romans induced the Iberians, Albanians and Sarmatians to join the campaign in Armenia against Artabanos and Arsakes.²² Rome's trump card in this game was the Phraatid faction, led by the Sūrēn, whose activities were a major obstacle on Artabanos' path. The extent of his debility and helplessness with respect to the Sūrēn is evidenced by his reaction to news of the conspiracy. Artabanos managed

²¹ Dabrowa 1998, 39–40; Seager 2005, 203.

²² On the situation in Transcaucasia, see Gagoshidze 2008, 14.

to have the eunuch Abdus poisoned, but all he could do about Sinnakes was to “delay him with deception and gifts” and “keep him occupied”.²³

Tiberius provided Phraates with money and sent him out to Syria.²⁴ The usurper tried to acquire Parthian manners but probably sustained an accident while riding or during a hunt; Tacitus writes that he was carried off by a disease (*ann.* 6.32.1–3; Dio 58.26.2 does not give the cause of Phraates’ death). Thereupon Tiberius ordered Tiridates, a grandson of Phraates IV, to set out for Syria (*Tac. ann.* 6.37.3; Dio 58.26.2). The date of Phraates’ death was probably 35, while Tiridates’ expedition was launched in late 35 or in 36.²⁵

The general picture was as follows: Tiberius gave his support successively to two candidates to the throne of Parthia: Phraates and Tiridates. The Alans, Iberians, and Albanians defeated the Parthians in Transcaucasia. The opposition party to Artabanos raised its head and the king had to retreat to Hyrcania, Dahestan, and Khorasan. Thus the war was waged on a vast territory, from Syria and Transcaucasia to the Transcaspian steppes, and from the Caucasus to Babylonia.

Parthian defeat in Transcaucasia

The key role in the Roman plan was ascribed to Iberia, where the reigning monarch was Pharasmanes, who was in conflict with his brother Mithridates. Tiberius sent a letter to Pharasmanes, reconciled the brothers, and ordered Mithridates to seize control of Armenia.²⁶ Large amounts of money induced not only the Iberians, but also the Albanians to join in the fighting against Parthia. In addition the Iberians brought nomadic troops into Armenia (*Tac. ann.* 6.32.3–4; *Ios. ant.* 18.96–97; Dio 58.26.2–4). Whereas the Iberians were pro-Roman on a fairly regular basis, the Albanians, who were often at odds with the Iberians (see *Tac. ann.* 12.45.1), frequently sided with Parthia. However, sometimes under pressure from Rome and the Iberians they could be compelled to turn against the Arsacids.²⁷

²³ *Tac. ann.* 6.32.1–2: *Valuit tamen utilitas, ut Abdum specie amicitiae vocatum ad epulas lento veneno inligaret, Sinnacen dissimulatione ac donis, simul per negotia moraretur.* It is worth pointing out that Tacitus (*ann.* 6.32.4) praises Vitellius’ conduct as legate of Syria. It reflects well on Tiberius’ handling of policy as well. *Ios. ant.* 18.96–100 gives an account of Tiberius’ counter-strike, but does not mention the usurpers sponsored by Rome.

²⁴ *Tac. ann.* 6.32.3; Dio 58.26.2. Cf. Ziegler 1964, 60.

²⁵ Olbrycht 2013b.

²⁶ *Tac. ann.* 6.32; Dio 58.26.4. Cf. Braund 1994, 219.

²⁷ *Tac. ann.* 4.5.2 lists Albania and Iberia as lands in the Roman sphere. On Albania, see Aliev 1992; Bais 2001.

Arsakes was not to rule for long in Armenia. Mithridates and Pharasmanes managed to bribe some people from his court who had him poisoned. Thereupon Iberian forces invaded Armenia and took Artaxata.²⁸ These events probably occurred in 36. Artabanos sent another of his sons, Orodes, into Armenia with Parthian troops, and he also despatched envoys to hire mercenary troops (*auxilia mercede facerent*). Tacitus does not make it clear who the addressees were, but the subsequent events make it quite plain that Parthian ambassadors were sent to the Sarmatian tribes north of the Caucasus, most probably to the Aorsoi and Sirakoi.²⁹ Pharasmanes of Iberia also took the trouble to engage the services of Sarmatians. Tacitus gives an apposite description of the situation: the Sarmatian chiefs, referred to as *sceptuchi* in compliance with the reality, backed both sides (Tac. *ann.* 6.33.2: *quorum sceptuchi (...) more gentico diversa induere*). In other words, the steppe peoples were divided over the issue. Tacitus applies the name *Sarmatae*, which was a label for specific peoples, to the Alans, Aorsoi, and Sirakoi as well. Josephus (*ant.* 18.97–98) stresses the crucial role played by the Alans, who were the ones that defeated the Parthians.³⁰

Both the Parthians and the Iberians acquired Sarmatian allies, but what turned out to be the key factor now was control of the passes across the Caucasus from the steppes into Transcaucasia. Pharasmanes of Iberia, who controlled the main routes through the Central Caucasus, allowed only his allies into Armenia, along a route called the *Via Caspia* in Tacitus, and the *Κάσπια θύρα* in Josephus. Most probably they mean the renowned route through the Darial Gorge. In addition Tacitus mentions a pass between the sea and the Albanian Mountains, which clearly refers to the Darband road (Derbent in modern Dagestan), leading into Albania. This route happened to be water-logged by the sea at the time: in summer the water level rose and fell in winter (Tac. *ann.* 6.33.3; Ios. *ant.* 18.97). The Sarmatian allies of the Parthians were prevented from entering Transcaucasia owing to the blockade of the pass into Iberia and the impassable Darband route.

Deprived of its Sarmatian allies, Orodes' army was far weaker than the combined Iberian, Albanian, and Alan forces. The two armies clashed in close combat, as described by Tacitus (6.34–35).³¹ Orodes was injured by a blow to his helmet (*galea*). A rumour that Orodes had been killed made the Parthians retreat. They incurred heavy losses. Perhaps Orodes died later of his injuries. Josephus

²⁸ Tac. *ann.* 6.33.1; Ios. *ant.* 18.97; Moses of Chorene 2.46 gives an account of these developments, emphasising the "treacherous" nature of the Iberians.

²⁹ On the Sarmatians in Ciscaucasia, see Olbrycht 2001; 2001a.

³⁰ Olbrycht 1998, 147–148. Braund 1994, 219, n. 85, who calls Josephus' account "simplistic", incorrectly dates the appearance of the Alans in the Caucasus region at the end of the 1st century AD.

³¹ Ash 1999.

(*ant.* 18.98) speaks of his death along with “tens of thousands of soldiers.” Josephus’ account implies that the Alans made the major contribution to the victory.

Orodes’ defeat in Armenia was a heavy blow to Artabanos. But it did not make him give up: he entered Armenia with a new force to fight the Iberians. It was not Iberian resistance that made him withdraw, but a subterfuge employed by Vitellius, who now arrived at the Euphrates with a Roman army and threatened to attack Parthian Mesopotamia.³² Moreover, the Romans had supporters in Artabanos’ entourage, among his *philoī* and *syngeneis*. Josephus speaks of bribery (*ant.* 18.99), but what really proved fatal was not Roman gold but the treachery of turncoats among the Parthian officials. The principal Iranian clans openly rebelled against Artabanos and his arch-enemy Sinnakes won over his father Abdagases to his side (*Tac. ann.* 6.36.2).³³ Both were members of the Sūrēn clan. When Artabanos was forced to retreat from Transcaucasia and deal with the rebellion supported by Rome he was incapable of launching any kind of offensive action. He therefore chose to retreat to the eastern regions of Parthia, viz. Hyrcania and the Dahaeen territories. Meanwhile Tiridates entered Parthian Mesopotamia and Babylonia and was crowned by Abdagases (*Tac. ann.* 6.42.4).

Divisions in the Parthian elite

The rebellion of the aristocratic *philoī* and *syngeneis* in Artabanos’ entourage is a significant phenomenon, for it illustrates the degree to which the rulers of the Parthian Empire were dependent on the great clans,³⁴ and the deep divisions within the Parthian elite. They were divided on the succession issue, but there was no consistent line within individual clans, such as the Sūrēn, either. For a time the leaders of the Sūrēn stood by Artabanos and had their part in his successes, but when an occasion came to depose him they triggered a rebellion. Josephus writes of the vacillating attitude of the Parthian elite in his account of Anilaios and Asinaios. A conflict arose between the brothers, who led the Jewish rebellion in Babylonia, and Artabanos’ governor Abdagases, whose official title was στρατοπεδάρχης. Artabanos decided to put up with the military action sparked and protracted by the Jewish rebels in order to neutralise Abdagases’ power (*Ios. ant.* 18.332–339, especially 18.333). This Abdagases must have been

³² *Tac. ann.* 6.36.1: *Mox Artabanus tota mole regni ultum iit. peritia locorum ab Hiberis melius pugnatum; nec ideo abscedebat, ni contractis legionibus Vitellius et subdito rumore, tamquam Mesopotamiam invasurus, metum Romani belli fecisset.*

³³ His name in Tacitus is rendered as *Abdagases*, but on Indo-Parthian coins as ΑΒΔΑΓΑΣΟΥ (in gen.).

³⁴ On the Parthian grandees, see Wolski 1989; Olbrycht 2003. On the status of the King of Kings, see Fowler 2010.

the head of the Sūrēn clan, the same one who came out in open mutiny in 36. The satrapies of the Parthian empire tended to be governed by representatives of the principal clans. Artabanos intended to utilise the force of the rebellious Jews of Babylonia to secure the loyalty of his satrapies, for some of them were in a state of sedition while others were on the verge of mutiny. At the same time he was anxious that Asinaios and Anilaios should not become too powerful (*ant.* 18.330–331). Another example is his alliance with Izates of Adiabene, against a rebellion of satraps and aristocrats.³⁵ Thus Artabanos was obliged to adopt a strategy at home of sitting on the fence and pitting his vassals and their clans one against another.

Artabanos' safe haven and operating bases in the Transcaspiian area and northeast Iran

After Orodes' defeat and the loss of Armenia, and also due to the uprisings in western Parthia, Artabanos withdrew to north-eastern Iran and the Transcaspiian area, viz. Hyrcania, Parthiēne (Parthyaia) and Dahestan. Josephus (*ant.* 18.100) speaks of the Upper Satrapies; Tacitus says that the king "hastened his flight into the remote country on the borders of Scythia in the hope of aid, as he was connected by marriage alliances with the Hyrcanians and Carmanians" (*In longinqua et contermina Scythiae fugam maturavit, spe auxilii, quia Hyrcanis Carmaniisque per adfinitatem innexus erat* – Tac. *ann.* 6.36.4).

Tacitus' story of Artabanos' flight contains some romantic embellishments³⁶ like that in the statement that the king was "covered with filth and procuring sustenance with his bow" (*ann.* 6.43). Another phrase says that "wishing to attract popular sympathy" Artabanos "did not even cast off his miserable garb" (*ann.* 6.44). In reality it was probably a case of adopting the attire typical of some nomadic hunters, which the western Parthians had long since cast off. Tacitus' account is also replete with references to the situation in Rome. This is manifest in the description of Artabanos' bodyguard, which resembles the bodyguard of the Roman emperors.³⁷ Nevertheless, Tacitus' relation is essentially true to the course of events, the details to which are filled in by Josephus' and Dio's accounts. The *externi custodes*, drawn from many peoples, constituted the back-

³⁵ *Ios. ant.* 20.54–68. Cf. Marciak 2012, 19. On Parthian Adiabene, see also Marciak 2011.

³⁶ Koestermann 1965, 344.

³⁷ Koestermann 1965, 328 rightly emphasizes: "Wenn Tacitus sagt, der König habe sich nur noch auf seine fremden Leibwächter verlassen können, die, ihrer Heimat verlustig, sich um Gut oder Böse nicht kümmern, sondern gegen Lohn zu allen Freveltaten bereit waren, so dachte er an die Verhältnisse in Rom, wo die *externi custodes* auch die sicherste Stütze eines pessimus princeps waren". Cf. Bellen 1981.

bone of Artabanos' army. He enjoyed the support of the Dahae, Hyrcanians, Carmanians, and Sakas, which must have had strings tied to it in the shape of political concessions. A few years later the mighty figure of Gotarzes II, prince of Hyrcania, was to emerge on the political scene of Iran. Gotarzes must have been one of the chief allies of Artabanos, who adopted and elevated him to the status of his royal son.³⁸ The Dahae had played a key role in Artabanos' career. He had grown up among them, as Tacitus writes (2.3.1: *apud Dahas adultus*), elsewhere calling them "Scythians" (6.41.2: *Scythas inter eductum*). We hear of the Dahae serving right until the beginning of the reign of Vologases I (52) as the force of resistance applied by the Dahae and Hyrcanian party in the contention with the Atropatenian faction (*Ios. ant.* 20.87). The Dahae held the territory from the Caspian Sea to the Valley of the Amu-Darya and the borders of Chorasmia.³⁹ Generally speaking, the Upper Satrapies had a vast economic and military potential at their disposal. Artabanos had no trouble at all in recruiting a powerful army there. To do this he needed a large amount of money. No wonder the Iranian minting-houses were busy in his reign. In connection with the expenditure for the wars counterstriking predecessors' coins became widespread.⁴⁰ Artabanos' main reasons for withdrawing to eastern Parthia were his military plans and the region's potential for warfare. After his setbacks in the west what Artabanos needed most was a large army, and that he could muster in the eastern satrapies, where he enjoyed excellent relations.

Coronation of the usurper Tiridates (36)

Meanwhile the usurper Tiridates, supported by Vitellius, arrived at the Euphrates. The Romans built a bridge over the river and Tiridates' troops crossed. They received assistance from Ornospades, satrap of Mesopotamia, who had earlier been in the service of Tiberius and earned a reputation during the Dalmatian war.⁴¹ He was even rewarded with Roman citizenship for his achievements. Later Ornospades won the confidence of Artabanos, eventually to betray his king. He commanded an army of "many thousands of cavalrymen." Other units were under the leadership of Sinnakes, whose father Abdagases offered Tiridates the royal treasury and insignia (*Tac. ann.* 6.37.1–4). The cities of Mesopotamia, both Greek and Parthian, sided with the usurper; here Tacitus cites Artabanos'

³⁸ Gotarzes II: Olbrycht 1997; Boyce 2000.

³⁹ Olbrycht 1998, 154.

⁴⁰ This is attested in Sellwood 1980, type 63 issues. A detailed analysis offers Nikitin 1988, 82–87. Later Gotarzes II and Vardanes continued the practice.

⁴¹ Koestermann 1965, 330; Karras-Klapproth 1988, 99–100.

alleged cruelty (*saevitia* – 6.38.2). Seleukeia on the Tigris, the metropolis of Babylonia and one of the largest cities in the world at the time, also came out in support of Tiridates as it rose up against Artabanos.⁴² The revolt started in 35 when the people (*populus*) of the city decided to support the pro-Roman Phraatids (Tac. *ann.* 6.42). According to Tacitus (*ann.* 11.9.4) the rebellion went on for 7 years, therefore it ended in 41, when the city surrendered to Vardanes, whose first tetradrachms were issued in Seleukeia in the autumn of 41.⁴³

Having taken Ktesiphon Tiridates II planned a crowning ceremony. However, Phraates and Hiero, two of the principal satraps (*qui validissimas praefecturas obtinebant*: Tac. *ann.* 6.42.4), while formally supporting Tiridates, delayed their arrival. Most probably Phraates governed Susa⁴⁴ and Hiero ruled in Carmania. This is indicated by the fact that it was Hiero who went on an embassy to Artabanos in Hyrcania, summoning him to launch an offensive against the usurper, which suggests that he could not have had far to travel. Carmania neighboured on Parthia proper (Parthyaia) and the distance to Hyrcania was fairly short. Hiero's mission reached Artabanos in Hyrcania. The satrap drew Artabanos' attention to Tiridates' frail position and the might of the Sūrēn (Tac. *ann.* 6.43.1–3).

Tiridates was crowned by the head of the Sūrēn clan, as Tacitus aptly relates: *Surena patrio more Tiridaten insigni regio evinxit* (*ann.* 6.42.4). The temporary reinforcement of the Sūrēn might have been due to support from the Indo-Parthians, who in the reign of Gondophares (ca. 20–50 AD) were increasing their status in Sakastan, Arachosia, and parts of India. Tiridates' troops laid siege to the fortress (*castellum*) in which Artabanos had stowed his treasury and his harem (Tac. *ann.* 6.43.1).

Artabanos' counteroffensive (36)

Artabanos did not tarry for long in the east: his withdrawal into Hyrcania and Dahestan as well as his victorious counteroffensive all occurred within the space of AD 36, which is the dating inferred on the basis of the chronology in Book VI of Tacitus' *Annals*.⁴⁵

Artabanos and the best units of his army were at the gates of Seleukeia on the Tigris in no time at all. Tiridates' forces evaded battle, while Abdagases, their real commander, recommended withdrawing into Mesopotamia, counting

⁴² Seleukeia's rebellion: Dąbrowa 1983, 81–86.

⁴³ Type 64.1 (according to Sellwood 1980), month Dios (October), year 353 of the Seleucid era (Macedonian style).

⁴⁴ Cumont 1932, 249–250; Debevoise 1938, 161.

⁴⁵ Cassius Dio (58.26.1–4) presses the events of the years 34–36 under the year 35.

on the assistance of Armenia, the Elymaians, Arabs, and other peoples, not forgetting the Roman legions. Tiridates' retreat turned into a rout. His Arab allies deserted him and many of his people went over to Artabanos. Stripped of their support, the usurper fled to Syria (Tac. *ann.* 6.44). Unfortunately the details of the rest of the story are unknown, as Book VII of Tacitus' *Annals* has not survived. Tiridates' army did not venture on open confrontation with Artabanos' forces.

It is worthwhile taking a look at the kind of forces Artabanos had at his disposal. The records make it absolutely plain: the overwhelming part of his army was composed of nomads, described either as Scythians (*Scytharum auxilia* – Tac. *ann.* 6.44.1; *Skythai* – Dio 58.26.3), or more accurately elsewhere as Dahae and Sakas.⁴⁶ Apart from nomads, Artabanos appears to have had Hyrcanians in his army, for of course he had lived in their country; probably he also had contingents from Carmania and Media Atropatene. In addition some of the satraps, such as Phraates, and vassals like Adiabene came out in support of their king.

After expelling Tiridates Artabanos occupied Armenia without encountering much resistance. The Parthian occupation of Armenia is attested to by Dio 59.27.3 who maintains that the Roman governor of Syria Vitellius forestalled Artabanos, who was planning an attack on Syria, "since he had suffered no punishment for his invasion of Armenia".⁴⁷

The events of Artabanos' campaign show that his withdrawal from Armenia into Hyrcania and Dahestan had not been a panic-driven stampede, but a well-planned manoeuvre, a kind of dodge out of the enemy's range. It was a strategic recoil, which handed the initiative to his adversary, but afforded him the opportunity to gather his strength and embark on a counter-attack. Artabanos carried out the offensive with mastery and recouped the western territories of Parthia.⁴⁸ But not everything could be settled in one fell swoop.

Artabanos II's treaty with Vitellius

The turbulent events of 36 concluded with Artabanos' triumph and the restoration of his control over the Parthian Empire. In the spring of 37 he reached a compromise settlement with Rome, the power which had tried to depose him. Artabanos decided on a personal meeting with Lucius Vitellius, Roman governor

⁴⁶ Ios. *ant.* 18.100: καὶ πολλὴν μετὰ ταῦτα στρατιᾶν ἄθροίσας Δαῶν τε καὶ Σακῶν καὶ πολεμήσας τοὺς ἀνθεστηκότας κατέσχε τὴν ἀρχήν.

⁴⁷ καὶ τὸν Ἀρτάβανον καὶ ἐκείνη ἐπιβουλεύοντα, ἐπειδὴ μηδεμίαν τιμωρίαν ἐπὶ τῇ Ἀρμενίᾳ ἐδεδώκει, κατέπληξέ τε ἀπαντήσας αὐτῷ ἑξαπιναιῶς περὶ τὸν Εὐφράτην ἤδη ὄντι (...).

⁴⁸ Olbrycht 1998a.

of Syria.⁴⁹ How did developments lead up to this conference, and what was its importance for both parties?

According to Josephus' account the meeting between Artabanos and Vitellius was a Roman initiative: "it was Tiberius who took steps to make friends with Artabanos. When the offer was made, the Parthian was delighted to discuss the matter. Artabanos and Vitellius met on the Euphrates" (*ant.* 18.101).⁵⁰

Dio 59.27.3 maintains that Vitellius "terrified the Parthian by coming upon him suddenly when he was already close to the Euphrates, and then induced him to come to a conference, compelled him to sacrifice to the images of Augustus and Gaius, and made a peace with him that was advantageous to the Romans, even securing his sons as hostages."⁵¹ He does not record any of the points of the agreement that was reached and concentrates on the ceremonials, but even he admits that the meeting was the initiative of Rome. A similar passage offers Suet. *Vit.* 2.4 but no emperor is named there. Suetonius claims that Vitellius "not only induced Artabanos, king of the Parthians, to hold a conference with him, but even to do obeisance to the standards of the legion". Flavius Josephus' version (*ant.* 18.101–103) implies that the Romans were the ones who felt threatened and wanted to reach a compromise. His relation contains interesting details: the conference was organised by the tetrarch Herod Antipas, and only one hostage, Artabanos' son Darius,⁵² is named. But Josephus does not give the conditions of the treaty, either.

Scholars disagree whether Vitellius' meeting with Artabanos occurred during the reign of Tiberius or at the start of Caligula's.⁵³ The ancient accounts give different dates. We have to bear in mind that Tiberius died on 16th March 37, and two days later at Misenum Caligula was declared emperor, taking control of Rome on 28th March.⁵⁴

In the winter of 36/37 Vitellius took part in Herod Antipas' expedition against the Nabataeans leading two legions and *auxilia*.⁵⁵ He was in Palestine

⁴⁹ *Ios. ant.* 18.101–103; Suet. *Vitellius* 2.4; *Caligula* 14.3; Dio 59.27.3.

⁵⁰ Ταῦτα ἀκούσας ὁ Τιβερίσιος ἤξιον φιλιάν αὐτῷ γενέσθαι πρὸς τὸν Ἀρτάβανον, ἐπεὶ δὲ κἀκεῖνος προκληθεὶς ἄσμενος ἐδέχετο τὸν περὶ αὐτῶν λόγον, ἐπὶ τὸν Εὐφράτην παρήσαν ὁ τε Ἀρτάβανος καὶ Οὐιτέλλιος.

⁵¹ [sc. Οὐιτέλλιος ὁ Λούκιος] τὸν Ἀρτάβανον καὶ ἐκείνην ἐπιβουλεύοντα, ἐπειδὴ μηδεμίαν τιμωρίαν ἐπὶ τῇ Ἀρμενίᾳ ἐδεδώκει, κατέπληξέ τε ἀπαντήσας αὐτῷ ἑξαπιναιῶς περὶ τὸν Εὐφράτην ἦδη ὄντι, καὶ ἔς τε λόγους αὐτὸν ὑπηγάγετο καὶ θῦσαι ταῖς τοῦ Αὐγούστου τοῦ τε Γαίου εἰκόσιν ἠνάγκασε, σπονδὰς τε αὐτῷ πρὸς τὸ τῶν Ῥωμαίων σύμφορον δούς καὶ προσ ἐτι καὶ παῖδας αὐτοῦ ὀμήρους λαβῶν.

⁵² Darius appears during Caligula's stunt at Baiae, see Malloch 2001.

⁵³ Täubler 1904, 39ff., Garzetti 1956, Ziegler 1964, 62, and Schottky 1991, 83 date the meeting at Tiberius' reign. Caligula's period prefers Dąbrowa 1983, 111–112; 1998, 39.

⁵⁴ Winterling 2003, 49–50.

⁵⁵ *Ios. ant.* 18.120–126. The wintertime for the Nabataean campaign of Vitellius is mentioned in *ant.* 18.124.

when news of Tiberius' death (16th March 37) reached him (*Ios. ant.* 18.124). This must have been around the beginning of April. If in the winter of 36/37 Vitellius decided to set out on a war against the Nabataeans, he must have considered the border along the Euphrates sufficiently secured.⁵⁶ Therefore his meeting with Artabanos must have occurred after he cut short the expedition against Aretas of Nabataea, that is, definitely in the reign of Caligula. Meanwhile the preparations for the meeting, including the building of a bridge over the Euphrates, must have taken several weeks at least.

It is not very likely that the conference took place in Tiberius' reign, as given by Josephus (*ant.* 18.101–103), in view of Artabanos' well-known aversion to Tiberius. However, we may assume that Tiberius initiated the negotiations to avoid open war with the Parthians. The actual meeting was held in the reign of Caligula (*Suet. Cal.* 14.3; *Dio* 59.27.3), whose accession to the throne was of paramount importance for the reaching of the compromise.⁵⁷ To Tiberius some negotiations with Artabanos following the Parthian counter-offensive in 36 were forced steps to avoid a large-scale military confrontation in Syria and to cause Artabanos to relax his vigilance with respect to Armenia; Caligula, on the contrary, was eager to conclude a treaty on conditions strategically advantageous to Parthia. The meeting on the Euphrates including Artabanos and Vitellius is being focalised differently through the participants and the agendas of the sources. It will be instructive to quote Suetonius (*Caligula* 14.3), who underscores that Artabanos, who "was always outspoken in his hatred and contempt for Tiberius, voluntarily sought Caligula's friendship and came to a conference with the consular governor; then crossing the Euphrates, he paid homage to the Roman eagles and standards and to the statues of the Caesars."

Namque Artabanus Parthorum rex, odium semper contemptumque Tiberi prae se ferens, amicitiam huius ultro petiit venitque ad colloquium legati consularis et transgressus Euphraten aquilas et signa Romana Caesarumque imagines adoravit.

It is strange that none of the sources give the particulars of the decisions reached at the conference. The very fact suggests that the Roman authors could not have found the agreement very laudable, and that is why they focused on the honorifics, which concealed the nitty-gritty of the decisions, very likely to the advantage of Parthia.⁵⁸ However, the majority of scholars think that Artabanos

⁵⁶ It seems clear that Vitellius did not expect a rapid and successful counteroffensive of Artabanos within the year 36 and this is why he took part in the Nabataean expedition in the winter of 36/37. Parthia was to be controlled by the pro-Roman usurper Tiridates. Artabanos' invasion of Armenia and the pressure on Roman Syria were unexpected developments which forced Vitellius to institute negotiations with Parthia in the name of Tiberius.

⁵⁷ Balsdon 1934, 198 rightly stresses that Artabanos eagerly concluded a treaty with Caligula.

⁵⁸ A similar approach in the Roman sources is observable in the accounts concerning the Roman failure in Armenia under Nero. see Wolski 1987; 1999.

assumed a humble attitude with respect to Rome. For example, K.-H. Ziegler claims that the Parthians backed out of their intervention in Armenia, that the borders were endorsed, and that Rome recognised Parthian sovereignty.⁵⁹ His first two conclusions are wrong. Armenia became Parthian and there is nothing to suggest that Artabanos withdrew. On the contrary, the Romans did not recover Armenia until the reign of Claudius. Thus Artabanos forced Rome to climb down on the most important issue. Mithridates was recalled from Iberia and imprisoned in Rome.⁶⁰ Rome recognised Artabanos, stopped supporting the Phraatids, while the border along the Euphrates was indisputable. We may therefore speak of a great success for Artabanos.

Some scholars maintain that the concession of Armenia was granted by Rome to Parthia.⁶¹ But Rome was not in the habit of making such gestures at the expense of its own interests. Mithridates' removal from Transcaucasia was probably a condition imposed by Artabanos.⁶² If we consider the situation in Armenia around 41–42, when Claudius decided to recover it, then according to Tacitus it was in Parthian hands at that time, and it was only thanks to the disunity of the Parthians that the Romans and Iberians managed to mount a successful intervention. Moreover, the Roman-Iberian forces defeated Demonax the satrap (Tac. *ann.* 11.8–9), probably appointed by the Parthians. Thus there can be no doubt at all that the whole of Armenia belonged to Parthia at the time. Later, in circa 42, Claudius restored Mithridates⁶³ who governed Armenia until 51, when he was murdered by his nephew Rhadamistos of Iberia (Tac. *ann.* 12.44–45).

⁵⁹ Ziegler 1964, 63. Likewise Marek 2010, 411 claims that Artabanos gave up Armenia ("Die Ambitionen auf Armenien indessen waren ihm vergangen").

⁶⁰ Sen. *Dial.* 9.11.12; Dio 60.8.1; Tac. *ann.* 6.32ff.; 11.8.1; Cf. Chaumont 1987, 423; Wardle 1992, 440–443..

⁶¹ Balsdon 1934, 199–200 rightly assumes that the Romans left Armenia in 38 or 39, and did not restore Mithridates until 43. However, he is wrong in his opinion that "the concession of Armenia was certainly granted by Rome, and not enforced by Parthia" (200).

⁶² Wardle 1992, 442 is against this view, but he puts forward a flimsy argument, that there is nothing in the sources on such a settlement. However, since Armenia was the main issue in the dispute between Rome and Parthia, and Caligula recalled Mithridates from Transcaucasia, then an inevitable conclusion may be drawn from these facts – Mithridates' removal must have been one of the points in Artabanos' arrangement with Vitellius. Seneca's comparison of what befell Mithridates with the fate of Ptolemy of Mauretania (in addition Jugurtha is thrown in in the same passage!) says nothing about the date of Mithridates' incarceration. The argument that this was a "punishment of Mithridates for not preserving the territorial integrity of Armenia, since Artabanos had been able to promise to Izates of Adiabene the territory of Nisibis" is not convincing. If this were so, Caligula would have been "punishing" himself and the empire, for he had lost Armenia. Wardle does not mention the Parthian satrap Demonax, whom the Romans had to oust from Armenia in the reign of Claudius.

⁶³ 'Who showed more cruelty than was wise in a new ruler' (Tac. *ann.* 11.9.1). It is a common topos that eastern rulers were savage.

Further evidence of the status of Armenia is provided by Josephus. Towards the end of his life, certainly after his pact with Rome in 37, Artabanos bestowed the city of Nisibis with its district on Izates of Adiabene. This territory was split off from the dominions of the king of Armenia (*ant.* 20.68).⁶⁴ If so, then Armenia must have belonged to Artabanos, otherwise he would not have been able to grant any part of it to a vassal. Here the expression “king of the Armenians” means either that the territory in question was part of the kingdom of Armenia, or refers to a Parthian appointee who was Artabanos’ vassal exercising power in Armenia.

Consequences of Artabanos’ success in the Imperium Parthicum and Rome

In conclusion we may outline the situation and the meeting itself in the following way: in 36 Artabanos vanquished Tiridates and regained control of Babylonia, Mesopotamia and Ktesiphon. As he had a large army, he attacked Armenia and occupied the country. In the spring of 37 Artabanos appeared on the banks of the Euphrates and was planning to invade Syria, with the intention of putting pressure on the Romans. Tiberius became anxious, and anticipating a large-scale military offensive started negotiations probably still in the winter of 36/37, following the Parthian attack on Armenia. Artabanos agreed to the talks, but the event which determined his personal participation in them was the accession of Caligula, son of Germanicus, whom Artabanos had respected. Other factors which might have prompted Artabanos to take part personally in the meeting with Vitellius could have been some of Caligula’s decisions, perhaps including his consent to have Mithridates officially recalled from Transcaucasia. That is when the meeting between Artabanos and Vitellius, now as Caligula’s representative, must have taken place. Their meeting in the reign of Caligula heralded a spell of good relations for both powers.⁶⁵

Tiberius suffered defeat in his Parthian policy, with a consequent loss of authority. Caligula ruthlessly took advantage of the old Emperor’s weak points and maybe instigated his assassination. Most Romans were pleased to learn of the death of Tiberius and openly displayed their satisfaction.⁶⁶ The Emperor Gaius now embarked on measures which were exceptionally amicable and auspicious for Artabanos. The first was to make Mithridates, the Iberian prince banished from Armenia, a prisoner in Rome. We can hardly fail to acknowledge this move as the new

⁶⁴ ἔδωκεν δὲ καὶ χρόαν πολλὴν αὐτῷ κάγαθην τοῦ τῶν Ἀρμενίων βασιλέως ἀποτεμόμενος, Νίσιβις δὲ ἔστιν ὄνομα τῆ γῆ.

⁶⁵ Wardle 1992, 441.

⁶⁶ See Seager 2005, 206–207.

Emperor's gesture of good will to Artabanos. It was also an expression of Caligula's gratitude for Artabanos' remembrance of Germanicus and support in the struggle against Tiberius. In Palestine Caligula expressed support for his favourite, Herod Agrippa, who could be regarded as an ally of Artabanos.⁶⁷ Significantly, towards the end of Tiberius' life Herod Agrippa had fallen out of favour with the old Emperor and in 36 was even imprisoned, after having voiced a death-wish for Tiberius.⁶⁸ This episode seems to be associated with the repercussions of Artabanos' embassy to Rome, which had expressed similar sentiments. There was also the question of the Nabataeans, whose prince had won Caligula's support. The Nabataeans appear to have enjoyed special relations with the Parthians. These facts show that Gaius was carefully following the situation along the Parthian border, and that he was taking Artabanos' position into consideration. Hence it is not at all surprising that Artabanos paid tribute to the portraits of Gaius and the Emperor Augustus during his meeting with Vitellius on the Euphrates. A period of very good relations ensued between Rome and Parthia.

The restoration of the kingdom of Kommagene might also have been connected with the change of orientation in Rome's policy on Parthia. It will be expedient here to consider the situation in Kommagene. Very early on in his reign, still in 37, Caligula gave the kingdom back to Antiochos IV who was the legitimate heir to the Kommagenian throne after his father's death in AD 17.⁶⁹ In addition Antiochos, who was a close friend of Caligula's, received 100 million sesterces, and his dominions were extended including Cilicia Trachaea and Lykaonia.⁷⁰ Kommagene controlled the strategic crossing over the Euphrates at Samosata and due to its location and culture came under Parthian influence. Caligula's restoration of the kingdom of Kommagene could have been effected about the same time that Mithridates was recalled from Transcaucasia. It may have also been connected with the arrangements for peace with the Parthians, albeit the sources say nothing about this. It cannot be ruled out that Antiochos, a generally loyal vassal of Rome, made efforts to secure a compromise between the Parthians and Rome. The ruler of a borderland country, he could not have failed to be aware of the situation in Parthia. For comparison, on the Parthian side we may consider Izates of Adiabene, who was a faithful vassal of the Arsacids (Artabanos and Gotarzes II), nonetheless he sent his brothers as hostages both to Artabanos and to the Roman emperor.⁷¹

⁶⁷ That is what Balsdon 1934, 197 calls him.

⁶⁸ Barrett 2001, 37.

⁶⁹ Facella 2006, 318–319.

⁷⁰ Suet. *Cal.* 16.3; Dio 59.8.2. In Nero's times Antiochos was regarded as the wealthiest client-king (Tac. *Hist.* 2.81).

⁷¹ Whom Josephus (*ant.* 20.37) identifies as Claudius, which is hard to reconcile with the time span of Artabanos II; it must have been either Tiberius or Caligula.

Artabanos' success brought salient consequences for the domestic situation in the Parthian Empire. In the context of his triumph a compromise with the traitor Abdagases was no longer on the cards. However, the Sūrēn clan was still very powerful and the fight against it was certainly not easy. After their débâcle of 36 the Sūrēn must have forfeited many of their privileges in Parthia. In 49, when uprisings sponsored by the Romans broke out afresh in Parthia, the clan that assumed the lead in the opposition forces were the Kārin; we do not hear of the Sūrēn again. This could not have been a coincidence. The Phraatids and their sympathisers were crushed in the reigns of Artabanos, Vardanes, and Gotarzes II; later, under Vologases I and Pakoros II (51 – 110) the Parthian Empire became more consolidated on the domestic scene.⁷² Perhaps some of the Sūrēn fled to their ancestral home in Sakastan and Arachosia, which were ruled by the Indo-Parthians, beyond the range of Artabanos' power. Two Indo-Parthian rulers bore the name Abdagases.⁷³ From about 50 the successor to the Indo-Parthian Gondophares in Paropamisadai and Jammu was a certain Abdagases I, viz. he carried the same name as the chief of the Sūrēn clan who had attempted to oust Artabanos. Monetary evidence shows that this Indo-Parthian prince was a fraternal nephew of Gondophares. Abdagases II reigned in Sistan and Arachosia towards AD 100 and is called "King of Kings, King's Sanabares son" (*'bdgšy MLKYN MLK' BRY S'nbry MLK'*)⁷⁴. The identical name does not mean that we are dealing with the same individual, of course, albeit no other person called Abdagases is recorded in the history of Parthia except for the leader of the Sūrēn; however, the name does suggest that the Indo-Parthian Abdagases was a member of the Sūrēn clan.

Conclusion

From his accession the legitimacy of Artabanos II's reign was challenged by the Phraatid faction, which was supported by Rome. Artabanos did not manage to eradicate all the deep divisions lacerating Parthia, but he did achieve a substantial degree of success, eliminating the opposition of the powerful Sūrēn clan. His greatest achievement was the conquest of Armenia.

The patent improvement in Parthia's relations with Rome during Caligula's reign may have to some extent been due to Artabanos' respect for the new emperor, the son of Germanicus. The gauge of Parthian-Roman relations was the situation in Armenia. Caligula recalled Mithridates, the pro-Roman ruler of Ar-

⁷² Olbrycht 1998b.

⁷³ NPIIN, nos. 1142, 1147.

⁷⁴ Grenet/Bopearachchi 1996, 219–31; Grenet 1999, 73–82.

menia, who was imprisoned in Rome. This must certainly have occurred at the beginning of Caligula's reign.

Nonetheless some scholars have misgivings as to how an allegedly feeble Parthia could have won such extensive concessions from Rome. There is a great deal of confusion on the balance of power in Parthia in the late phase of Artabanos' reign and the country's military potential. It should be borne in mind that when Parthia achieved stability under Vologases I (51–79) she was capable of mustering a mighty army and beating Rome in many years of fighting for Armenia, crushing the main Roman force at Rhandaia (62).⁷⁵ Ever since the great confrontation at Carrhae (53 BC), the invasions of Pakoros (40–38 BC) and Marcus Antonius (36 BC), Parthia and Rome had for a long time (about a hundred years) been avoiding a direct, large-scale clash. There were several invasions of Armenia by the forces of both powers, and their allies often engaged in skirmishes with each other, but the main armies steered clear of war on a large scale. The Parthians held Rome in respect, while the Romans did not underrate the power of the Parthians. This respect should be taken into consideration in the assessment of Roman policy. The Romans were wary of the potential of a stable Parthia, and that is why they endeavoured to debilitate their rival through intrigues, avoiding open confrontation. Against such a background Caligula's decision to relinquish Armenia to avoid an open war with Parthia is not at all surprising.

The last years of the reign of Artabanos II show that he was able to prevail in the face of great adversity. Furthermore, he managed to obtain considerable concessions from Rome. His dynastic line remained on the throne and ruled the Parthian Empire until the end of its existence.

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⁷⁵ For Parthian strategy, see some remarks in Olbrycht 1998a.

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Abstract

Artabanos (in Parthian Ardawān) II, king of Parthia, has had quite a number of studies devoted to him, but in spite of this his achievements and assessment still arouse controversy. Germanicus' intervention in Armenia in AD 18 led to the conclusion of a compromise settlement between Rome and the Parthians that secured over a decade of peace between the two empires. From his accession the legitimacy of Artabanos II's reign was challenged by the Phraetid faction, which was supported by Rome. Artabanos did not manage to eradicate all the deep divisions lacerating Parthia, but he did achieve a substantial degree of success, eliminating the opposition of the powerful Sūrēn clan. The patent improvement in Parthia's relations with Rome during Caligula's reign may have to some extent been due to Artabanos' respect for the new emperor, the son of Germanicus.